

Xtra!

VANCOUVER'S GAY & LESBIAN NEWS

#518 JULY 4-17, 2013

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When courts judge comedy



EDITORIAL
ROBIN PERELLE

If I were to tell you that my human rights had been violated, what would you imagine?

That I'd been rounded up with other gay people, branded, then executed and dumped in a mass grave?

That I'd been evicted from my home? Fired from my job? Thrown off a bus just for being different?

What if I told you my human rights had been violated because a talentless comedian insulted me from the stage and called me nasty names?

Offensive and maybe even traumatic? Sure. Suggesting someone stick a cock in a lesbian's mouth to shut her up is repugnant. But I hardly think hurt feelings are on par with the denial of access to life, liberty, employment and basic accommodation.

Lorna Pardy disagrees with me.

She told the BC Human Rights Tribunal in 2010 that Guy Earle's insults stripped her of her power and violated her human rights. The tribunal agreed with her, absolving her of any responsibility in the ugly, protracted exchange and laying the blame squarely on Earle, with a \$15,000 penalty.

Astonishingly, the BC Supreme Court upheld the tribunal's decision on June 19.

Earle discriminated against Pardy, the court ruled, dismissing Earle's argument that as a performer onstage he is entitled to express himself freely.

Sure he is, the court agreed, but only until he steps on someone's toes.

If that limits someone like Earle's expression, it's a reasonable loss in pursuit of a discrimination-free society, Justice Sigurdson ruled.

Is it? What kind of society would we live in if performances were subject to judicial review at the end of the evening to ensure no one's feelings had been hurt?

What's next? Will I get hauled into court because this column offends someone's sense of worth?

Sigurdson found that Earle's act was not only abusive, but indistinguishable from the service provided by the restaurant he was performing in and therefore violated the Human Rights Code. If another judge finds that, like a restaurant, a newspaper offers a service customarily available to the public and therefore must welcome everyone equally without making anyone feel unwanted, will it limit what I'm allowed to express in my column?

That may be extreme, but when a judge gets to say which expressions warrant approval and which don't, I think we all have cause for concern.

"A comic cannot operate under a rule

that his expression is limited to that which may offend the most sensitive member of the audience," Earle told the court.

"Had I used the very same language with a party who suffered no loss of dignity or who didn't care what a comedian might say in a comedy club, recognizing the source and the circumstances, then there could be no claim," Earle noted. "Such an uncertain measure should be a source of the greatest concern for all artists, writers, entertainers and comedians who contribute to the cultural life of all Canadians."

I agree. We should all be concerned about the rulings in this case — and the willingness of some community members to run to the courts for validation whenever their feelings have been hurt.

Is it because our march toward equal rights has been led by the courts that we run back to them now whenever we feel picked upon? Are we no longer capable of discerning denial of service from disagreeable ideas contrary to our own?

We should be reaching for a society in which everyone feels welcome to exchange ideas freely. Not a society where the perspectives of the court's pets are protected, while those who dare challenge us are silenced and punished. For one thing, this leads to an increasingly stifled society where only a narrow range of views are tolerated. For another thing, we may not be the court's pets forever.

Robin Perelle is the managing editor of Xtra Vancouver.

FEEDBACK

Botox battles

I am 43 and more than happy with my lines and "imperfections" ["Battle Lines," *Xtra* #517, June 20]. They add character and show that I have lived. I don't want to look like a plastic Ken doll, thanks very much.

It's your body, your choice, but getting free Botox so you can peddle this crap onto young gay men who are, as the article states, more insecure than heterosexual men is selfish and damaging to the community. It's time we all accept ourselves for who we are. We look different because we are meant to be.

Why are we all trying to look the same? Gym five times a week to look like clones, instead of being someone who just has a normal active lifestyle. Hair dye, teeth bleaching, waxing, body grooming, trendy tattoos, anal bleaching... Where will it end?

If a pornstar started binding his feet and ads in magazines told us it was the new, hot thing, would we all do it?

If people worked more on their personalities and emotional well-being, they would be a lot more attractive than some boring, dime-a-dozen clone.

Again, it's your body, but maybe you need to do a little inner work at self-acceptance before you go under the knife or needle in the future.

GLENN CRAWFORD
OTTAWA, ON

I disagree with David Brennan's suggestion that having cosmetic surgery "buys into this notion that we are all supposed to look a certain way, to be young and pretty."

Men, gay or straight, are innately attracted to youth and beauty; they always have been and likely always will be. Gay men know this and therefore aim to enhance their own appearance to attract other gay men.

The unintended consequence of trying to blame these natural inclinations on social pressure is that we give ourselves yet another reason to feel guilty.

Although we shouldn't be slaves to our biology, we could be easier on ourselves by accepting that our attraction to youth and beauty, and our desire to look good, are simply part of our human nature. If we're always advocating self-acceptance, why can't we accept this part of ourselves, too?

EDDY ELMER
VANCOUVER, BC

What an absolute shame that someone as young as this guy would even consider any type of procedure(s).

If this guy feels at his current age (27) that he looks old, what the hell is he going to feel at 35, 40, 45, 50, 55 and beyond? Sad is the word that keeps coming to mind. Not the aging process, but rather the thinking process — or lack of thinking on the part of the weak and easily led astray.

The whole ageism thing in the gay world is truly one of the most disappointing things about being gay and living in the gay community.

On a health note, I'm sure most doctors would tell you that anything that metabolizes in the body over time probably isn't very healthy.

Having injections is easy, but the truth in life is that most things that are worth doing aren't usually easy.

EMBRACE YOUR AGE
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XCETERA



KATRINA AFONSO

AWARD

Prize-winning playwright

Vancouver playwright CE Gatchalian (left) was awarded this year's Dayne Ogilvie Prize for LGBT Emerging Writers June 26. Gatchalian's latest play, *Falling in Time*, described by the Ogilvie judges as "an unflinching look at war, masculinity, migration, intimacy and love," was also a 2013 finalist for the Lambda Literary Award for Best LGBT Drama. Congratulations, CE!



IN MEMORIAM

UPSTAIRSTHEMUSICAL.FILES.WORDPRESS.COM

40 YEARS AGO

The Upstairs Lounge fire in New Orleans, which occurred June 24, 1973, and claimed the lives of 32 people — most of them gay — is recognized as the largest massacre of gay people in American history.

The searing image of the body of Metropolitan Community Church Reverend Bill Larson, left fused to the bars of one of the lounge windows for hours, came to symbolize the callous disregard for the gay lives lost. Compounding the tragic loss of life was the dismissive reaction of the media organizations of the day, the reported foot-dragging of the police and the rebuke of an Episcopalian reverend who dared to hold a service for the victims.

No one was charged with the crime.

For more on this story, go to dailyxtra.com.

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THINKSTOCK

SCOTUS SAYS...

DOMA DOWN, PROP 8 OUT

Reaction to the Supreme Court's gay-marriage rulings was varied.

'DOMA and Prop 8 should get married.'
Comedian/actor Seth Meyers



'Fuck Prop 8'

Kate Kendall, National Center for Lesbian Rights

'No man, not even a Supreme Court, can undo what a holy God has instituted.'

Republican Michele Bachmann

'Who cares?'

Democrat Nancy Pelosi

'Two anti-gay laws passed in Russia today, two anti-gay laws invalidated by court in the United States. The gap is widening.'



Russian gay rights activist Nikolai Alexeyev

'I'm sending you both home. #DOMA and #Prop8, sashay away!'

Tweet, courtesy of RuPaul

'After Matt came out to me, he once asked me if I thought gay couples would ever be allowed to get married. I told him I didn't think it would happen in my lifetime, but it probably would in his. It's so sad and ironic that it turned out the other way.'

Judy Shepard, mother of Matthew Shepard, a gay University of Wyoming student murdered in October 1998

'DOMA-it-just-lost-O Mr Roboto!'

Actor Neil Patrick Harris



And the heart-stealer: Ernie and Bert taking in the good news, on the cover of *The New Yorker*.



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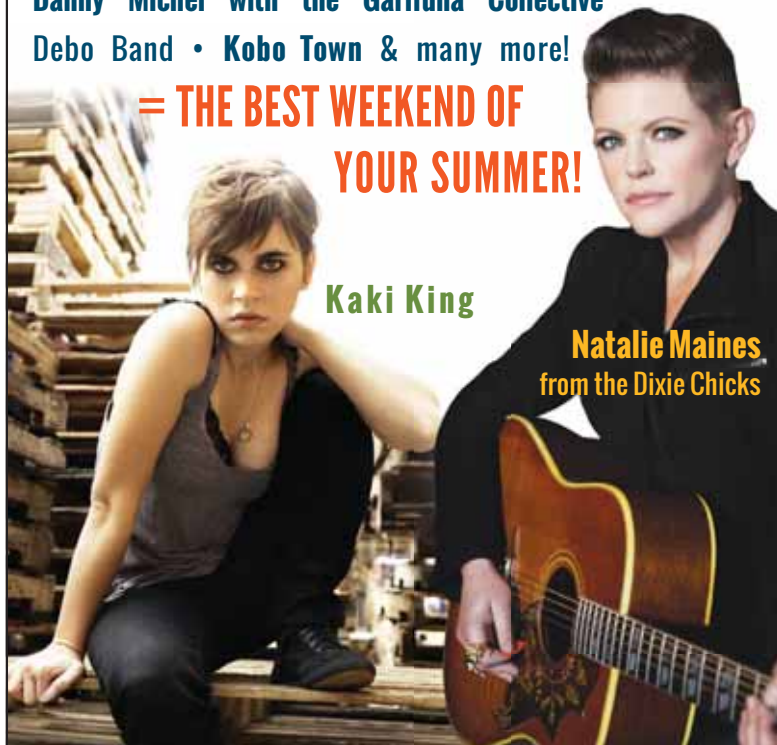
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How to revitalize Davie Street

Vancouver's LGBTQ advisory committee has 33 recommendations

GAY VILLAGE
SHAUNA LEWIS

The City of Vancouver's LGBTQ advisory committee has 33 recommendations to revitalize Davie Street and make the gay village safer, more accessible and more vibrant.

A subcommittee of the advisory committee has been gathering feedback from the community since November 2012 to contribute to the West End Community Plan, which city planners are expected to present to city council late this fall.

“Our focus was to ensure that the vibrant LGBTQ presence and voice in the Village remain an integral part of any future planning,” says Barb Snelgrove, who worked with Dean Malone and Ron Stipp on the subcommittee.

“With the work we have done, we seem to be getting the attention of the West End BIA and the West End planning committee,” Malone says.

Stipp says the people he consulted all offered similar suggestions. “People wanted to make sure that Davie Street remained a queer hub but [said] that it also needed some enhancement,” he says.

“When you enhance the neighbourhood and make it more vibrant, it becomes a safer neighbourhood,” Stipp says. “And people can hold hands walking down the street because it is safer.”

The committee's report focuses on the Davie Village's safety, cultural and social spaces, zoning, business needs and traffic concerns.

Recommendations include eliminating rush-hour parking restrictions on Davie Street, reducing Davie to two lanes, extending its sidewalks, installing more bike stands, improving the accessibility of the community policing centre, increasing police presence on the street during events and at peak times, and improving street lighting, including in the alleys.

Malone says the recommendations dovetail with the work done to date by the city's West End planners. “They did



“People wanted to make sure that Davie Street remained a queer hub but [said] that it also needed some enhancement.”

—RON STIPP

Barb Snelgrove, Dean Malone and Ron Stipp want to make Vancouver's gay village more vibrant. SHAUNA LEWIS

their work, we did ours, and not surprisingly we heard similar things.”

“We have received the report, and we're quite pleased with it,” says city planner Kevin McNaney. “It very much aligns with what we've heard from the community, and it aligns with the direction we're going with West End planning developments to build on the LGBTQ identity as the heart of the Davie Village.”

Malone says the advisory committee is also hoping to work more closely with the West End Business Improvement Association (WEBIA) so it can include input from the gay community regarding its business plans. “[WEBIA] reached out to us, we reached

out to them, and we are going to work together.”

“It's ideal if we're on the same page,” WEBIA executive director Stephen Regan says.

Malone recently expressed concern that WEBIA's retail consultant report lacked a gay perspective.

Regan now says he's open to holding focus groups and asking the advisory committee to “point us in the direction of what is needed in the Davie Village.”

But Regan maintains that the draft of the retail consultant report currently before the city included only businesses; community and consumers were not the focus, he says. “We didn't put any lens on it.

“It wasn't Davie Village-centric,” he adds. “It was about the West End commercial streets and where we see gaps.”

Malone maintains that WEBIA should include queer consumers and businesses in all its plans if it hopes to be successful.

Councillor Tim Stevenson agrees. “If we didn't have a queer lens, we wouldn't have the gay village,” he says.

“I've stressed to the BIA just how important it is to have gay businesses and to encourage gay tourism,” he says. “I think they're making a real effort, and we'll find ways of working with them to further encourage our input and ideas.”

“Above and beyond everything else I think it's crucial that the Davie Village be maintained,” he says. “That is absolutely key.”

Stevenson praises the subcommittee and its Davie revitalization report. “They took the process seriously and did their homework.”

“The West End community owes the committee a vote of gratitude,” he says. “The West End Plan is all that much better for the input from this report.”

One of the committee's recommendations will be put into effect immediately. The city has agreed to provide a temporary open-air celebration plaza in the heart of the gay village in time for Pride weekend.

“We heard this idea from many people,” Malone says. “In the absence of a queer community centre, that some are looking for, the Bute Street plaza can be a place where we can have a queer community presence and also a celebration place for the whole community.”

The plaza will offer people a place to socialize, eat lunch, do yoga and listen to live entertainment.

“We've been looking at sectioning off Bute Street near Davie, either seasonally or permanently,” McNaney says. “We want to talk to businesses and the community, but it seems like a great opportunity.”

“This idea has been in the works for a while, and I think the report just reinforced that,” Stevenson says. X



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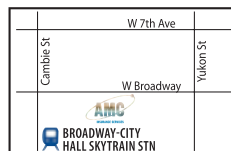


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Zesty's comedian loses appeal

Comedy not exempt from discrimination law, judge rules

FREE SPEECH
NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER

The BC Supreme Court has upheld a decision by the province's Human Rights Tribunal that found that Lorna Pardy's 2007 complaint against comedian Guy Earle and the owners of Zesty's restaurant was justified.

Pardy testified that Earle, during and after his performance, called her a "fucking dyke" and a "fucking cunt," suggested she take her girlfriend home and fuck her up the ass with a strap-on, and suggested somebody stick a dick in her mouth to shut her up.

She also testified that Salam Ismail, the owner of Zesty's (now Zawa's) "did not intervene to prevent the tirade or the harassment from continuing."

Earle and Ismail argued that Section 8 of the BC Human Rights Code, which prohibits discrimination by any service or facility customarily available to the public, should be declared unconstitutional because it is



Lorna Pardy leaves BC's Human Rights Tribunal after testifying in 2010.
NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER

"impermissibly vague, overbroad and an unjustified infringement of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed to all Canadians.

"The prohibition has the potential of a chilling effect on free expression,"

they told the BC Supreme Court.

Earle is disappointed with the court's June 19 decision against him and Ismail.

"So the bottom line is that in BC, a comedian must not make a remark that a human rights tribunal member later finds to be discriminatory," Earle says. "It's unbelievable."

In his 87-page decision, Justice JS Sigurdson finds the limits on freedom of expression in Section 8 are reasonable.

"I do not think that [Section 8] requires a provision that it does not apply to artistic performances or comedic performances in order for it to be minimally impairing," Sigurdson writes.

"And Mr Earle was not giving a comedy performance when he launched into his tirade of ugly words directed at Ms Pardy," Sigurdson adds.

"In the end, this is not a case about the scope of expression in a comedy performance or an artistic performance," Sigurdson rules. "It is about verbal and physical abuse that amounts to adverse treatment based on sex and sexual orientation."

"It is gob-smacking stuff," Earle says, "that an artist is not protected during an act."

For more on this story, go to dailyxtra.com.



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'Come as you are'

Queer Prom gives youth a place to connect and be themselves

YOUTH
ERIN FLEGG

The signs of a high school dance were all over Main Street June 28 as happy, rowdy teenagers admired each others' dresses, shared lipstick and cigarettes, and straightened each other's bow ties.

But this was no ordinary dance. This was the 18th annual Queer Prom, organized by BC's queer resource centre, Qmunity, to offer queer youth a space to express themselves free from the typical constraints of a traditional prom.

This year's theme — Total Eclipse of the Queer Prom — inspired sequins and glitter, more than a few pairs of Doc Martens and even a powder-blue tuxedo.

Tash Wolfe, a Gab Youth worker and prom co-organizer, attended the very first Queer Prom 18 years ago. She says it's no mystery why youth from all over the Lower Mainland and even Vancouver Island flock to this event.

"It's the only event that's around. Other organizations might throw dances, but it's maybe 30 people, and

“Other organizations might throw dances, but it's maybe 30 people, and we get 300.”

TASH WOLFE,
GAB YOUTH WORKER &
PROM CO-ORGANIZER

we get 300,” she says as a bus full of teens from the Fraser Valley arrives.

While Queer Prom isn't exempt from some of the hallmarks of teenaged culture, such as cliques, Wolfe says freedom from many of the usual pressures of high school dances makes for a much friendlier atmosphere.

Jasmine Addison, 15, and Roan Reimer, 16, met for the first time outside the Heritage Hall waiting

for the dance to start and bonded immediately. Both say they came to prom for the inclusive atmosphere.

"Everyone here is so supportive. People don't freak out if you're not wearing a really short black dress," Reimer says, adding that gender segregation is often par for the course at youth events. They appreciate that there's no prom king or queen. "It's not like, here are the boys and here are the girls," Reimer says. "It's like, here's the gender-variant royal court."

Reimer believes Gab Youth and events like Queer Prom are crucial for youth and need to continue.

Addison has been out for two years and lives with her grandparents because her parents have been less than supportive. She says the difference between events at her old public school and events like Queer Prom is huge.

She doesn't go to her high school dances, she says. "I don't feel safe there. Last time I went I got flushed in the toilet." Here, she says, she doesn't have to worry. "You can come as you are."

"Or as who you'd like to be," Reimer adds. X



For more on this story, go to dailyxtra.com.



Youth feel free to celebrate at Qmunity's Queer Prom, June 28.
ERIN FLEGG

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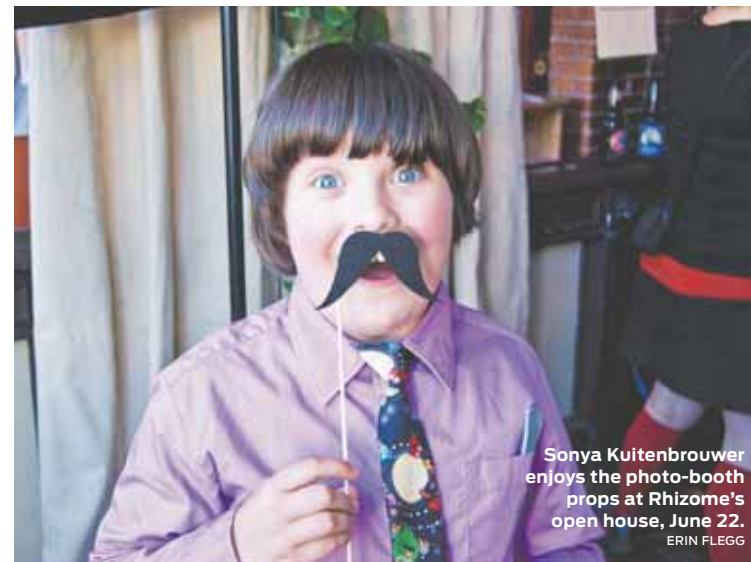


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Sonya Kuitenbrouwer enjoys the photo-booth props at Rhizome's open house, June 22.
ERIN FLEGG

A celebration and a goodbye

Rhizome holds its farewell open house

COMMUNITY
ERIN FLEGG

There is an old story, told by many people in many ways, about hungry travellers who come upon a village and ask for food. Turned away at every door, the travellers set about making stone soup.

At Rhizome on June 22, Naomi Steinberg, executive director of the Vancouver Society of Storytelling, lit a small candle and began to tell of two women travellers who came upon a hungry village. It didn't take long for the packed-in crowd to see where this story was going.

It was through storytelling that Steinberg first came to Rhizome, and it was through this story that she offered her thanks at Rhizome's farewell open house. "What it has been for me is an extension of my living room, in the sense that I feel at home here, I feel safe here, I can be myself," she says.

She says the connections forged in this place will only grow as the community decides how to move forward in new ways and in new spaces.

The event kicked off with performances by 2poc (short for 2 pansies of colour) and all-butch choir Lead-

foot. Throughout the evening, the café served dinner by donation — black bean and squash stew with a side of cornbread — and in breaks between performances, attendees were invited to take pictures at the photo booth and make pages to go in the Rhizome community 'zine. DJ Salsomana closed out the day with a dance party.

The open house was a celebration and a goodbye, but not the official closing day. The café will remain open through July and possibly into August as owners Lisa Moore and Vinetta Lenavat tie up loose ends and search for the right people to take over the lease. The official closing day depends primarily on the lease transfer.

Lenavat says the event was a true representation of what Rhizome is all about. "Everybody here was here with such intention," she says. "It was full the whole time, yet people were coming in and out. I felt like it was totally seamless, like everyone was connected."

Susan Lee moved to Vancouver in 2007 and felt immediately at home at Rhizome. "It felt like a place I could bring my whole self," she says.

She moved to the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood that has been Rhizome's home for the last seven years so she would be closer to the café. "It's somewhere to go when things are hard, and it's somewhere to go when I have my best news."

For more on this story, go to dailyxtra.com.



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Body image shift?

New study suggests gay men less preoccupied with appearance

STUDY
NIKO BELL

New research on gay men and body image suggests that gay men may be less self-conscious than they once were.

Vancouver clinical counsellor Andrew Huber studied 144 gay men across Canada and found that immersion in gay culture had no measurable effect on the men's preoccupation with their own appearances, how they felt about their looks, or how they rated parts of their bodies.

The only significant result, in fact, was a slight link between gay culture and self-consciousness about weight.

That stands at odds with decade-old research suggesting gay men are much more self-conscious and appearance-focused than their straight counterparts.

"What surprised me is how little the immersion in gay culture correlated to any of the scales," says Huber, who conducted the study as his master's thesis at the Adler School of Professional Psychology. "The more immersed you would be, I thought, the more time you would spend on your appearance, wanting to fit in."

Huber asked his subjects to fill out an online questionnaire about their immersion in gay culture and feelings about their own bodies.

Research told him that gay men – like most people – engage in "upward social comparison," weighing themselves against the most attractive members of society. Among gay men, where lean, muscular bodies are celebrated, Huber expected to find more pressure to be attractive, more anxiety about looks and more focus on physical appearance.

He thinks the unexpected results may suggest a shift in gay culture and a community that is more supportive about body image.

"Given my findings, people may not be getting their sense of self-worth from the gay community," he says.

He credits the shift in mainstream culture over the last decade, where gay men are more visible and ac-

cepted. As a result, they worry less about appearances, he suggests.

While Huber is confident in the accuracy of his research, he says it is only a small part of the puzzle. His study did not ask participants about their actual weight, nor about muscularity, a body concern for many gay men. He says there is a lot more work to be done.

"The main conclusion of my study is that the gay community is complex," he says. "More complex than we may have originally thought, especially with the shifting times. The cultural standard of attractiveness within the gay community may not be what it once was." X

Andrew Huber's findings suggest gay men are less appearance-focused than they used to be.
NIKO BELL



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A gay Syrian's flight

As civil war rages and gay people hide, Danny Ramadan seeks a better life

FEATURE
NATASHA BARSOTTI

Hidden in his bedroom, home alone with the classmate he made out with for hours each day, 15-year-old Danny Ramadan believed he and his friend were the only two of their kind in Syria.

"I didn't even realize that there are other people who are gay in the world," Ramadan says now, somewhat pixelated over Skype.

"It was our little secret, and it was full of shame and full of sin, full of weird feelings... hard to describe."

His former classmate is now married to a woman and lives abroad. Ramadan lives quietly in Lebanon, hoping to come to Canada as a refugee.

He, too, left Syria, only to return two years ago after nearly a decade of nomadic self-discovery in which he immersed himself in all things gay.

"I studied it, I read about it, I learned to speak English, and I spent hours and hours reading about it just to understand," he says.

He speaks of the Damascus to which he returned in February 2011 in terms that approach culture shock.

"The gay community in Syria reminds me of the gay community in the States or in Canada back in the 1920s. Nobody wants to speak about it; nobody wants to be a part of it," he says.

"It was shocking to see how nobody knows who they are. They are just drifting through life trying to figure it out, or trying to ignore it, or trying to just pass time until they are pressured enough by their families to get married."

Ramadan felt like he was the only one who was out to his family and, in a limited way, at work.

He says he's never felt comfortable, even among other gay Syrians, who constantly question how open he is about his sexuality.

"Everybody was like, 'What does gay mean? Why do you want to be out, and why are you so proud of that? You shouldn't be proud of that.'"

Ramadan says it wasn't uncommon for the men he wanted to date to beat a hasty retreat because he was so open.

"It's actually an extremely negative thing. They are like, 'You are going to bring shame to me; you are going to bring *fadeiha*' — an Arabic word for scandal."

Ramadan says the percentage of gay people who end up in traditional marriages in Syria is high.

"It's something you are trained to do," he explains. "Religion says so, society says so, the family says so, the sheikh at the mosque says so, the priest at the church says so, the teachers say so, your older brother — every single person tells you as a man, you don't leave your family house for any reason other than to go to wife's house. For women, it's the same."

While he believes that the strong family structure in Syria is conducive to building community, he says it doesn't leave room for difference.

Ramadan holds out little hope for a politically active gay movement in Syria. Should one arise, he thinks lesbians would be at its forefront because of the particular challenges women face.

"While men in Syria might have their 'play time' for a while — as they might be able to postpone the wedding bells until they are late into their 30s — women who are not married by their mid-20s are considered spinsters and people might look down upon them," he says.

"Also, women are under constant lockdown in most Syrian families, who are traditionally more scared for their honour," he explains.

"Ridiculous as it may sound, the fact that women are under so much pressure due to the small details preventing them from being truly themselves — don't be late, don't befriend that person, don't wear this, don't do this, don't do that — is what is going to push them to revolt," he predicts.

Syrian women are strong, he says, and the women of the lesbian community have "by far" a more acute aware-



ness of their rights and their needs than the gay community.

"The fact that a feminist movement is overdue in Syria will add momentum to the lesbian movement in Syria as well," Ramadan says.

A possible catch is if an Islamic decree is introduced that bars women from basic education or prevents them from openly expressing their opinions, he notes. "Then we can say our farewells to a feminist movement, LGBT movement and any other social movement you might think of."

The ongoing political chaos in Syria makes nonsense of attempts to jump-start a social movement, regardless of the direction people may want to take it, Ramadan says.

"It ruins the possibility for the community to evolve beyond being just a sexual community into a cultural entity and a social entity."

He says the ruling regime invokes the negative perception of homosexuality to tarnish the reputation of opposition politicians, labelling them *louti*, Arabic for faggot.

"They would say it out loud on TV, how so-and-so from the opposition is *louti* and they are not calling for revolution because revolution is good; they are

calling for revolution so they can have gay sex in the streets."

Anyone caught having gay sex faces up to three years in prison and is subject to public shaming through the publication of their photos and warnings for people, especially children, to avoid them.

Compounding the challenges of being gay in Syria is the reality of being caught up in the intense violence that has pervaded the country for more than two years.

The area where Ramadan lived in Damascus was the scene of rocket attacks. At one point, a sniper took up residence in a back alley near his house.

The only safe room was the bathroom, where he and his partner, Aamer, played cards and backgammon to the background of crossfire on the streets.

Ramadan jokes it was his unholy meeting with Aamer in May 2012 that brought the crisis to Damascus.

Ramadan says his growing disillusionment with gay life in Syria, plus a longing for the routine of "normal" life, compelled him to find a way out.

"I wanted to be in a relationship that in 10 years, we would move to a different country and get married, and

in four or five more years, adopt children, and in 15 more years, regret adopting children. You know what I mean?"

Ramadan and Aamer (who is not out to his family and requested his full name not be published) now live in Lebanon, where Ramadan was hired as a reporter by the Beirut office of *The Washington Post*.

For Ramadan, gay life in Lebanon is "a bit more evolved" than in Syria. He points to the existence of a gay rights group, Helem, and greater access to information that creates self-awareness and acceptance.

Still, the community in Lebanon is not free from harassment and public humiliation.

About two months ago, the mayor of the suburban town of Dekwaneh ordered a raid on a gay-friendly club that led to the rounding up of patrons who were allegedly beaten, forced to undress and photographed naked, the Beirut-based *Al-Akhbar* reported.

According to the report, Antoine Shakhmoura ordered the shutdown of the club Ghost, claiming it promoted prostitution, drugs and homosexuality.

"I went inside... I saw people kissing, touching each other, and a man wearing a skirt. These homosexual acts

that are happening... are scandalous sexual acts," Shakhtoura reportedly told *Al-Akhbar*.

"Of course we made them take off their clothes. We saw a scandalous situation and we had to know what these people were. Is it a woman or a man?" Shakhtoura said.

Among those arrested were "people from the Syrian community and a Lebanese transsexual woman, who was harassed and forced to undress in the municipal headquarters," Helem founder Charbel Maydaa told *Al-Akhbar*.

The report notes that Helem had been checking up on the club, as police regularly target it.

Ramadan says he also leads an uneasy life in Beirut as a Syrian refugee who is opposed to Syria's ruling Assad regime, which is supported by the Lebanon-based Shiite group Hezbollah.

"I feel threatened all the time, especially as I am a journalist. My name is at least twice a week on the front page of *The Washington Post*, so that's scary," he says.

Syrians are also now subject to a curfew in certain parts of Beirut and can't be on the streets before 5am or after 7pm. If they are, they can be arrested and sent back to their civil-war-torn country.

A June 19 *New York Times* report says Lebanon "officially hosts" more than half a million Syrians who have fled the conflict, the majority in the last five months.

The report adds that the Lebanese government estimates there are an additional 500,000 Syrians who are not registered.

Ramadan says his meeting online three years ago with another gay Syrian, who now lives in Vancouver, prompted him to consider Canada as a potential new home.

"The way he spoke about his life there is something I want to have in my life as well. He spoke about being out, being in a relationship with his boyfriend," Ramadan says.

"He made me feel like it really made him feel like his home. That pushed me to read more about Canada."

Ramadan says he wants to be able to hold hands with Aamer in the street, to be proposed to, and to "make love without having to close all the doors and windows."

"I don't want to feel guilty about my love," he says.

Through his Syrian-Canadian friend, Ramadan met Vancouver registered nurse Carl Meadows, who decided to take up his bid to come to Canada.

"I was fairly impacted by the concept of having no status and the vulnerability someone has in that state," Meadows says.

Two years ago, Immigration Min-

ister Jason Kenney announced that Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) would partner with the Rainbow Refugee Committee (RRC) to provide up to \$100,000 over three years to help settle gay refugees in Canada.

According to CIC, the funds will go toward three months of income support for each refugee that RRC or its partner organizations sponsor. Sponsors have to provide refugees with orientation services, accommodation, basic household needs, basic food staples and clothing for the duration of the sponsorship period.

The cost to sponsor one refugee for a year works out to about \$11,800.

Meadows hopes to sponsor Ramadan and Aamer to bring them to Vancouver.

Last month he spearheaded the launch of the Danny and Aamer Foundation of Hope, with its own Facebook page and teams responsible for internet fundraising, local fundraising,

documentation and settlement.

"There's lots of resources in our community," Meadows says. "It's just a question of coordinating them."

Settlement is really the most important part of sponsorship, Meadows stresses.

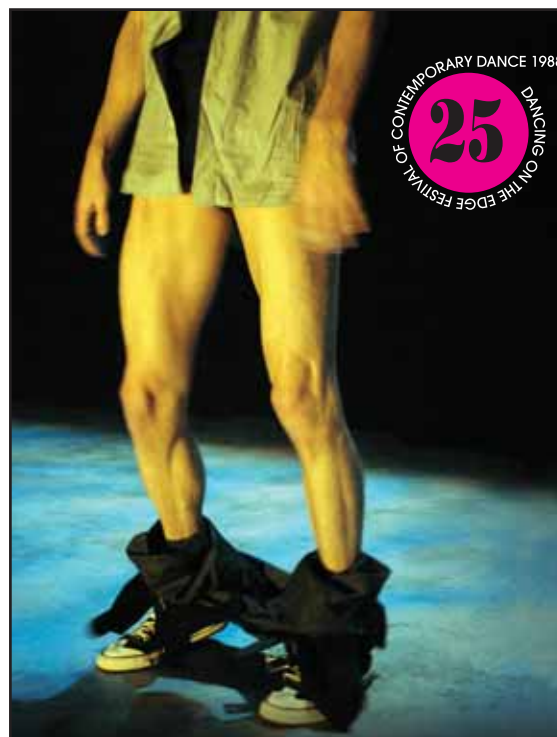
"It's what their community of hope looks like."

The process of bringing the two men here could take about two years.

"It sounds like a miracle to me," Ramadan says.

"We're ready for the next chapter of our book," Ramadan says, when asked how he feels about the prospect of having to wait for two more years. "I hope it happens. I want it to happen." X

To donate to the trust account for Danny and Aamer, go to vancity.com. Vancity Savings: Account 162776 Branch 28 Plan 24 Savings



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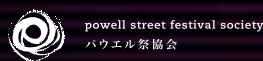
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8:30 pm - All In by Jan Derbyshire
Mon Jul 29



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Thu Aug 1 | 7:30 pm



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Fri Aug 9 | 9:00 pm



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A Memoir Writing Workshop for Transgressive Voices led by Amber Dawn

Fri Jul 26 | 6-8:30pm
Sat Jul 27 | 2-4:30 pm

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Dance Improvisation & Technique Workshop by Liklik Pik choreographer George Stamos.

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When the Sun Comes Out explores issues of homophobic violence and the search for safety, community, and home. QAF's workshops create opportunities for you to share your own queer migration stories.

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Mon | Aug 5 | 4-6 pm

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Sissy, sassy and successful

‘Everything I was ashamed of as a kid made me my fortune’: Leslie Jordan

COVER STORY
SERAFIN LARIVIERE
(WITH FILES FROM MARK ROBINS)

While his face is certainly recognizable, it’s Leslie Jordan’s voice that is unmistakable: a delicious, wry drawl that mixes good ol’ Southern-boy charm with naughty gay man to perfection.

From his early days on shows like *Newhart* to his hilarious scene-stealing antics on *Will & Grace*, Jordan has fulfilled that rarest of media roles — the effeminate, openly gay actor.

I was a frightened teenager when I first saw Jordan on TV. I could scarcely believe my eyes (and ears) when this tiny man flounced his way across the screen in a confident, unapologetic manner that made me realize, “Holy shit... I’m not the only one!”

To readers still in their teens and 20s, this may not seem a big deal — but let me tell you, to a closeted gay kid in the late 1980s who felt completely isolated and alone, it was the fucking Second Coming. Our tenuous foothold in the mainstream media is due entirely to trailblazing efforts by fearless fairies like Jordan. After all, the vast majority of gay actors stay firmly in the closet for the sake of their careers, hiding behind bachelor swordsman images or the occasional accommodating wife.

Jordan himself admits to early attempts at butching up his image to snag roles. Fortunately for us, these efforts were largely doomed to failure.

“I was never in the closet, even though there were certainly plenty of us in the business,” he says. “My agent would call me for auditions and say, ‘Okay, Leslie, keep your feet on the ground, your hands at your side and your voice in the lower register.’” The actor was sure his ruse had proved successful when he was cast as a straight guy on Ellen DeGeneres’s eponymous sitcom back in the 1990s.

“Oh, I butched it up and thought I completely



“I was never in the closet,” says actor Leslie Jordan. “My agent would call me for auditions and say, ‘Okay, Leslie, keep your feet on the ground, your hands at your side and your voice in the lower register.’”

REACTION PRODUCTIONS

pulled it off until my friend said, ‘Oh, honey, I was watching it with a bunch of people who didn’t know you, and the minute you opened your mouth, they said, “Get a load of her!” I guess I just couldn’t wash the sissy off.’”

Sissy or not, Jordan’s effervescence and flawless timing kept him in regular work in shows like *Dharma & Greg*, *Ally McBeal* and *Boston Legal*. But it was his note-perfect role as trophy husband Beverley Leslie on the groundbreaking

Will & Grace that cemented his career and won him an Emmy.

“I’ll tell you what,” Jordan begins, in his cozy Tennessee twang, “after all is said and done, I won that award for a television show that has done so much for our tribe. I always say, there are two ways to combat homophobia: through humour or by putting a face on the victims. That show did both.”

His new one-man stage show, *Fruit Fly*, was inspired by photos of his childhood in Chattanooga with his Southern-belle mother, Peggy Ann, still the most important person in his life.

“I’m happier now than I have ever been in my life,” he says. “I’ve done so much, but I’m nowhere near to the point of being put out to pasture.”

In addition to *Fruit Fly*, Jordan is also back on television in the comedy series *The Exes*, starring *Seinfeld*’s Wayne Knight and *3rd Rock from the Sun*’s Kristen Johnston, and is in talks for a web series that will air as five-minute online webisodes.

“I don’t even know what a web series is! And they want to do it in five minutes? What can I possibly do in five minutes? We’re making comedy for no one to watch,” he blurts out unedited.

At 58 years of age, Jordan has lived through many of the political and health crises that have faced our community and has emerged grateful for having survived the experiences.

“I buried an entire telephone directory to AIDS in the ‘80s,” he says. “Honey, I was right there in the alleys and the dirty bookstores, and there’s no reason for me to be here now. Then the ‘90s came and we all discovered crystal meth until it turned on us like a mother-in-law. So when they call me to come and help out, I come.”

Proceeds from *Fruit Fly*’s two-night stop in Vancouver, produced by the non-profit Fillmore Family Foundation, will benefit Out in Schools, A Loving Spoonful and the McLaren Housing Society.

“I am of the first generation of gay men who have anything to pass on to the younger generation,” Jordan says. “Hell, I remember Stonewall! But will they listen? I don’t know. They’re so busy

twittering each other, but we need to pass our stories on and to let kids know that things change.

“I mean, look at me: everything I was ashamed of as a kid — being short [he’s four-foot-11], being gay — it’s made me my fortune. I just want to go back to tough guys in high school who’d yell ‘smear the queer’ at me during dodgeball and say, “Hey, kiss my rich gay ass!”

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LESLIE JORDAN**
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Melissa Ferrick settles down

Singer gets a new job, a new relationship and a full band

MUSIC
SONDI BRUNER

Melissa Ferrick has played nearly a dozen gigs in Vancouver. She always flies into Seattle first, then climbs into a rental car to relish the scenic, solitary drive north.

When she arrives here this month to play at the WISE Hall in support of her latest CD, *The Truth Is*, she'll be a little less solitary, with a full band, a stable teaching job and a healthy new relationship in tow.

"There's something to be said for being seen and allowing people to know you. And being a traveling musician is a really good way to not let anybody know you," she says. "It's been great to have a group of people around me. I've been touring alone for so long, this is a breath of fresh air for me."

The Truth Is chronicles the devastating end of Ferrick's last relationship, the discovery of hope and renewal, and the joy of unearthing love again. After many years of releasing music under her own label, she produced this album under MPress Records and collaborated with musician friends



"I've been touring alone for so long, this is a breath of fresh air for me," Melissa Ferrick says.
 JOEL BENJAMIN



who had fallen by the wayside during her former relationship.

While the singer-songwriter has been lumped into the category of folk or alt-rock in the past, she says she's finally settled into her true style, which she describes as Americana.

The new songs reflect her newfound stability in her personal and professional life, too. No longer a transient performer, Ferrick mentors young artists as a professor in the songwriting department at Boston's Berklee College of Music and is enjoying the rewards of a new relationship with a composed, self-sufficient woman.

"Now that I have some community at Berklee, I'm noticing how much my body and soul have been depleted of that," Ferrick says. "I'm laughing a lot and smiling a lot these days. I feel really connected to the work I'm doing and how I'm living my life, and I think my long-time fans will be happy to see that."

Ferrick is looking forward to playing for her Vancouver audience. "It's a relief to have so many people be so considerate, polite, responsive and respectful of your music," she says. "It really feels like a night out for the community. People get dressed up; they're psyched to be there. They're just out to have a great evening, and it makes me really happy that I can be a catalyst for that." X

MELISSA FERRICK

Fri, July 19
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The great gay divide

Gays are from Venus, lesbians are from Mars



**BLITZ & SHITZ
RAZIEL**

I was having pre-drinks at this lesbian hairstylist's apartment in Kitsilano, and I spilled a glass of wine on her couch during a lively conversation about Amanda Bynes's mental health/genius. We've all been there, right?

The host didn't react well. She was bossing me around and micromanaging how I cleaned the spill and kept shooting her girlfriend looks, which made me feel sufficiently uncomfortable.

Perhaps it was because my cleaning method consisted of making the couch reek of vinegar, but I felt a real divide between the three lesbians in attendance (actually, I think one of the girls was straight and just liked the attention) and me and my two gay friends.

They could've just been impatient because while all they needed to do was adjust their baseball caps and slip on their ridiculously expensive shoes to be party-ready, the boys were consumed with makeup, pasties and hairspray — not to mention all the time I spent poking my gay friends' collagen-pumped lips, which they recently had inflated at a Botox party. Yes, gay 20-year-olds of today get drunk and hire people to poke them... with needles. And I still can't decide whether to be insulted or flattered that I wasn't invited.

When we left the apartment, the girls huddled together and decided to share a cab, leaving the boys on their own. It brought me back to the sixth grade. I still have nightmares about PE when the boys' team and the girls' team would fight over which side I should play on during a game of touch football. I think I ended up not playing at all and stood on the sidelines as a cheerleader, which might explain my love of crop tops (and general sluttishness).

But I digress!

I couldn't help but think there was something weird about this particular male/female divide, because I swear, red wine gives me a sixsixsix sense, and I could tell by the lesbian trio's whispered conversation and occasional eye-rolls that their general consensus was that we were flaky faggots who probably couldn't even pay for a



Razielle is flanked by Peach Cobblah and Wendy "Bitch, I Stole Yo Purse" Ho (right), who flew in from LA to perform at Hustla on June 22. DANNY GRAY

taxi because we wouldn't want to dip into our drag-queen tip fund (isn't that what everyone calls their drug money?).

I would've been insulted if the taxi-ride conversation to Oasis hadn't consisted of my friends debating who is the best drag queen/drug dealer in town, followed by an awkward moment of silence when we arrived at the club and the cabbie asked for his fare...

I was about to accept that even though we're six queers who share the same extremely rare and outrageously superior glitter blood, three of us are from Venus, and three of us are from Mars. We are basically aliens (and thanks to my friends' lips, some of us even look like them).

But then something happened to make me reconsider. Lady Jem stepped on Oasis's stage to perform a number as Madonna, and as she began twitching to the beat of "Nothing Really Matters" in full kimono drag, our planets didn't seem so distant after all. The girls danced and sang along to every word, and so did the boys. We were connected. Birthed by Mamadonna.

And nothing else mattered.

After leaving Oasis, I headed over to The Cobalt to see Wendy Ho, who flew in from LA to perform at Hustla.

Wendy's "Bitch, I Stole Yo Purse" is a ratchet-queen anthem. She has just enough busted-yet-fierce-white-female-rapper fabulousness to share the stage with Vancouver's resident homo hip-hop diva, Peach Cobblah.

I managed to sneak into the Ho's dressing room while she was de-wigging. She's adorable and seemed genuinely excited to be in Vancouver for the first time. And for those of us who didn't let our purses out of our sight all night, we were glad to have her!

I ended the night (or started the next day?) in the basement of Electric Owl for WiG, the first time the underground party has been hosted at a bar. Electric Owl couldn't let anyone in or out after 2am, so you had no choice but to descend the stairs into the hot, sweaty dance den and burn. X

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Wed, July 3

Fruit Camp Workouts for gay guys at all levels of fitness. Monday through Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. Until Thurs, Aug 15 in areas around the West End. Free. Sign up at register@checkhimout.ca or call 604-488-1001. checkhimout.ca

Living with HIV A drop-in discussion group every Wednesday, 7-9pm. Positive Living Society, 1107 Seymour St, 2nd floor. Free. Contact Glen 604-646-5317.

Trans and Gender-Variant Working Group The Vancouver park board's working group on trans and gender-variant inclusion will make recommendations in April 2014 on parks and recreation facilities, programming, training and policy in order to create safe, welcoming spaces for all users. To join the group, send your resumé and a cover letter describing your experience, skills and qualifications to pbcommittee@vancouver.ca. Deadline to apply is Mon, July 15, 4pm.

Vic & Jack A live performance about two gay women sharing an apartment in Vancouver. Written by Jacqueline Korb. Runs until Sat, July 6. 8pm. Havana Theatre, 1212 Commercial Dr. \$15 door, cash only. littlebaskettheatre.com

Thurs, July 4

Timberline Join Vancouver's queer country-western dance group every Thursday, whether you're a seasoned pro or a newbie. 7pm. St Paul's Anglican Church, 1140 Jervis St. \$10, sliding scale. timberlinedance.org

P-Can Nude Life Drawing Men's drawing group where all are nude. No skills required, but bring drawing materials and a towel to sit on. 6:30-9pm. Near Oakridge Canada Line Station. Yearly membership \$50. RSVP to funvan@shaw.ca p-can.org/site.

Dancing on the Edge 25th Anniversary Featuring local gay dancers Wen Wei Wang, Alvin Tolentino and Noam Gagnon. Festival runs until

Sat, July 13. Various venues and prices. dancingontheedge.org

The End of San Francisco Radical queer author Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore reads at Little Sister's Bookstore, 1238 Davie St. 7pm. No cover. littlesisters.ca

Taking It Deep A group for gay, bi, queer and two-spirit men to explore identity, intimacy and other life issues in later recovery. Trans guys are welcome. 5:30-7pm.



Dancing on the Edge — until Sat, July 13. COURTESY OF ALVIN ERASGA TOLENTINO

Three Bridges Addiction Services, 1290 Hornby St, room 310. Free. Call Al to register: 604-714-3480.

Gay Poz & 30-Something A discussion group for 30-something, HIV-positive gay men that meets on the first and third Thursday of each month. 6:30-8pm. Positive Living Society, 1107 Seymour St. Free. Call Glen at 604-646-5314 to register.

Fri, July 5

Friday Yoga Drop-In The Health Initiative for Men has teamed up with yoga instructors to offer sessions every Friday night. Bring your own mat and a towel. 7-8:15pm. Scotiabank Dance Centre, 677 Davie St. By donation. checkhimout.ca

Friends & Company July Mingler 1181 and French Connection host a mingler and fashion show to benefit Out in Schools. Ticket includes VIP entry to the bar. 7-9pm. 1181, 1181 Davie St. Tickets \$40 at friendsandcompany.ca.

Sat, July 6

Pride Whitecaps Watch the Whitecaps soccer team take on the Seattle Sounders. \$40-65; partial proceeds to Pride. 8pm.

BC Place Stadium, 777 Pacific Blvd. vancouverpride.ca

Monroe The launch of a new weekly night from TFD. DJs Del Stamp, Robyn Graves and Dom Top. Doors 10pm. Oasis Ultra Lounge, 1240 Thurlow St. \$5. oasisondavie.com

Van-Pah Vancouver pups and handlers host a mosh for pups (the two-legged kind) and handlers to get together and socialize. Puppy gear is admired but not required. 2-4:30pm. PumpJack Pub, 1167 Davie St. No cover. pumpjackpub.com

Jungal Australian queer female roots-rock trio is touring BC and Alberta in support of their new CD, *Leave My Head*. Doors 6:30pm, show 7pm. The Railway Club, 579 Dunsmuir St. \$7. jungalmusic.com

Sun, July 7

Surrey Pride Hosted by Mz Adrien and Cory Cassel, with The Bobbers, the Rainbow Concert Band, Matthew Presidente and more. Noon-5pm. Holland Park, Old Yale Rd and King George Hwy, Surrey. Free admission to festival. surreypride.webs.com

Mon, July 8

Tops & Bottoms Queer improv comedy troupe. 7pm. The Improv Centre, 1502 Duranleau, Granville Island. \$9; tickets available at the door, or reserve online at queerartssociety@gmail.com.

Fri, July 12

Out for Kicks The first California-kickball friendly. The ladies of OFK face off against the Mabel League and Queer Van Soccer in a sport that blends soccer and softball skills. Food, music and contests. Noon-4pm. Strathcona Park, 857 Malkin Ave, at Hawkes St. Free.

Vancouver Men in Leather Get your gear on and join the VML at their Friday-night social. 9pm-midnight. PumpJack Pub, 1167 Davie St. No cover. meninleather.ca

Sat, July 13

Gay Day at Playland Wear a pink shirt. Noon-8pm. Hastings Park (PNE), 188 N Renfrew St. \$32.50 at vancouverpride.ca.

Sun, July 14

Sister Act Sing-Along Vancouver's Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence celebrate the classic film *Sister Act* with a sing-along. All proceeds help print the Sisters' sex-positive outreach packages. 8:30-11pm. The Junction, 1138 Davie St. \$5 suggested donation. yvrsisters.ca

Mon, July 15

Genderqueer Vancouver Social and support space for folks who identify outside the male/female binary. 6-7:30pm; first and third Monday of each month. Qmunity, 1170 Bute St (not wheelchair accessible). qmunity.ca

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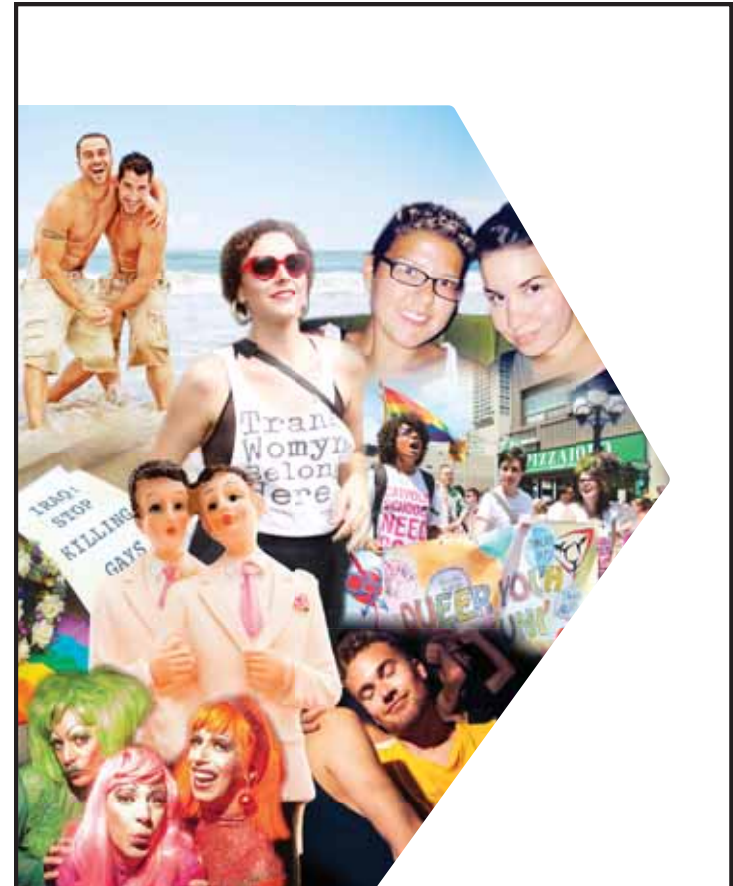
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