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TORONTO'S

#788 JAN 8-21, 2015

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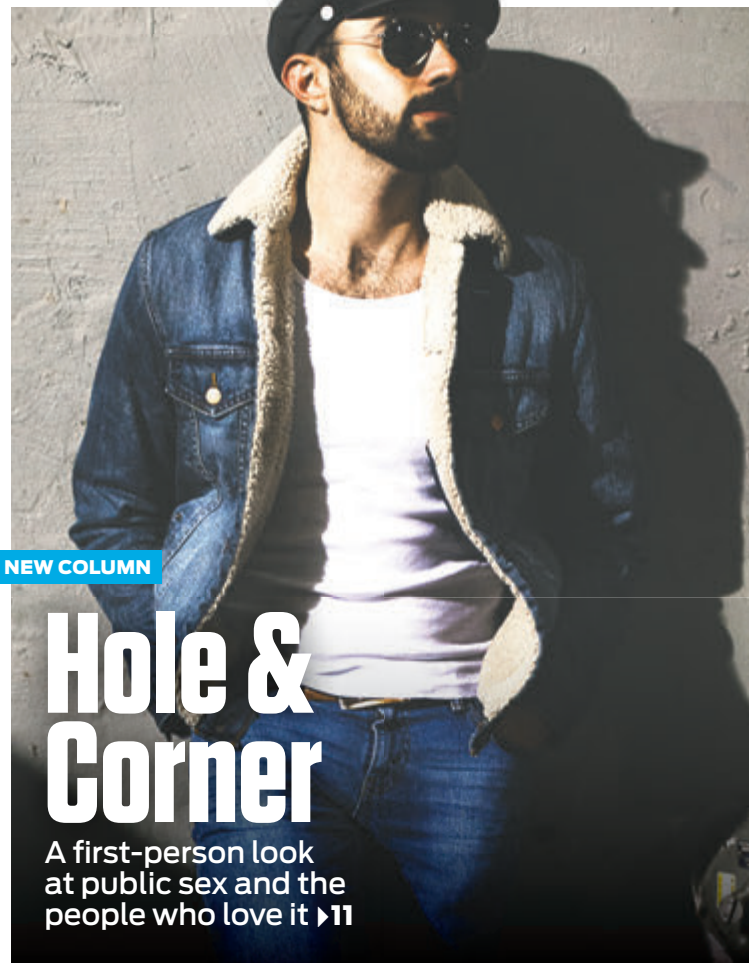


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Family matters



EDITORIAL
ANDREW JACOME

Not My Father's Son, Alan Cumming's new book, has been making the rounds through the *Xtra* office. In case our cover wasn't a dead giveaway, we love the book — and not just because we're all fans of Cumming. (Though frankly, with an IMDb catalogue that includes *Spice World* and *Sex and the City*, how could you not love the man?) His relationship with his father is heartbreaking, and it made me reflect on my own families.

Like many gay men from strict religious backgrounds, I got a less-than-thrilled reaction from my parents when I came out. My dad eventually softened in his disapproval. He passed away before we could ever come to a full understanding of each other, but it opened the door for my mom and I to have honest conversations about my life. I think my brother was only worried that I'd be unemployed and playing video games for the rest of my life.

But I say families, plural, because I can't just count my immediate family in the equation. Throughout the years, I've been lucky enough to meet people, exceptional people, whom I consider a part of my family. And like any good family, we craft our own traditions.

They might be a little less orthodox than what I'd share with my mother (as fun as she is, I don't think she'd appreciate spending Valentine's Day drunk off her ass in a bingo hall), but they're just as important to me. We celebrate our successes and mourn our losses. We don't always get to see each other as often as we'd like, and some of us may be living closer than others now, but our bonds are what keep us tied.

It's going to sound lame — corny, even — but the people I work with here at *Xtra* are just as much my family, too. We can be a little dysfunctional, like any group of strangers thrown together, but we have strong traditions of our own. Getting the paper out and keeping the *Daily Xtra* website running is a tradition, I suppose, but we make the time to bond with each other beyond our working tasks.

We all look forward to the *RuPaul's Drag Race* premiere — we even have an office pool going — as feverishly as the most ardent Leafs' fans look toward a game. A surprising number of us are particularly gifted in the kitchen: treats and goodies often find their way into the office like dancing sugar plums, mysterious and delightful. The more cultured members of our little clan host wine-tasting events and cheese-platter afternoons in an effort to refine our beer-and-chips sensibilities; the

rest of us decorate the office walls with Madonna calendars and pictures of burly-chested men.

We even take turns being the drunken uncle during office parties. I've been guilty of that one more than I care to admit.

Our family extends beyond the four corners of the Toronto office: we have our Vancouver and Ottawa teams, freelance writers from around the world, and the people and groups in our community. We've celebrated Woody's 25th anniversary with readers, cheered on drag queens weekly at Crews and applauded the unveiling of Sky Gilbert Lane behind Buddies.

It can be easy to become insular when you're surrounded by a core group of people, but unlike Drake, we love new friends. Meeting the people who make our community as colourful and eventful as it is, whether they're fighting for social rights or throwing a fabulous party, is paramount to who we are. With New Year's Eve freshly behind us, we look forward with anticipation to what else our community creates.

Remember your chosen families this year — they define us just as much as our DNA does — and, if you're the touchy-feely type, remind them that they mean the world to you. And if you happen to see any of us from the *Xtra* team out on the town, feel free to stop us and say hello. We're not all huggers, but we don't bite. X

Andrew Jacome is *Xtra's* associate editor.

FEEDBACK

Trans TD customers

It would appear that TD Bank and other financial institutions need new policies, procedures and staff training to address not only the issues identified in the above article, but also other problems that transgender people encounter with financial institutions while transitioning ["Trans Customers Locked Out of TD Bank Accounts," *dailyxtra.com*, Dec 22].

ALEX S
DAILYXTRA.COM

Last June, I read in *Xtra* that Pride Toronto had entered into a sponsorship agreement with the company that makes Trojan condoms. The agreement provided that only Trojan condoms could be distributed during the Pride parade. I assume that Pride Toronto's sponsorship agreement with TD Bank provides that TD Bank can be the only financial institution promoted at Pride.

I wonder if the sponsorship agreement between Pride Toronto and TD Bank also prevents any "negative messaging" against TD Bank at Pride. For example, would trans activists be permitted to march in Pride with signs calling on TD Bank to change the way it treats transgender customers? Would trans activists be permitted to march in Pride with signs criticizing TD Bank, parodying TD Bank's green and white colours or parodying TD Bank's advertisements that target gay and lesbian couples seeking mortgages and lines of credit?

SHAWN H
DAILYXTRA.COM

I remember complaining about the call centre assuming I was straight. Training needs to be better. Mistakes happen,



but not compensating for bad service is unacceptable. These people should get a Plan 60 account, where all service fees are waived and cheque book orders are free. Service has gone downhill ever since Canada Trust got taken over by a bank, TD Bank. I've been thinking of switching.

ROGER VANDEVENTER
FACEBOOK

So let me get this correct: approximately three (maybe more) people had very bad customer-service experiences, out of possibly thousands of trans TD clients (including myself). And now approximately six people are calling for major changes in TD's policies, procedures and training.

So many trans people are hunting for any negative statements (intentional or not) against trans persons, as though there was a million-dollar prize associated with it. Cis people can't even make honest mistakes around us anymore without our community releasing all its pent-up rage against those persons. If we want patience and acceptance from cis people, we need to offer patience and acceptance to them.

DEIGH
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XCETERA

FROM THE ARCHIVES 35 YEARS AGO

THE BODY POLITIC #60, FEBRUARY 1980

A year after Toronto's 58th mayor, John Sewell, called on the provincial government to prohibit discrimination against gay and lesbian people, Sewell reflects on how his stance changed the conversation: "I sense there's a great loosening of the whole thing. Finally, people are saying, 'We can talk about it; we can relax about it.'"

OUT ON THE STREET BY KYLE BURTON

What's one bad thing you'd like to do in 2015?



Jamie
ENGINEER
Nothing that I should probably say.



Dio
PROPERTY MANAGER
Extreme sports, like mountain biking.



Krista
BARTENDER
Steal someone's heart.



Camilo
STUDENT
Have two boyfriends at the same time?

QUOTABLE

“The only reason I want a boyfriend is so that when I'm singing 'Fergalicious' and it's at the part where she says, 'I be up in the gym just workin' on my fitness/ he's my witness,' I can point to him and he'll do the little 'wooOOh.'”

Sam Smith discusses his relationship goals on Instagram



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Sushi

A BIWEEKLY HELPING OF POP CULTURE, SERVED À LA CARTE

41

Number of countries in which pre-orders of Madonna's **Rebel Heart** pushed the surprise new album to number one on iTunes.

Surprise wedding
Elton John and David Furnish were married nine years to the day after entering into a civil partnership.



Willow

The traditional gift on a couple's ninth anniversary.

Leather

The modern gift on a couple's ninth anniversary, according to hallmark.com.



Gay wedding gift
A **rainbow fortune cookie set**, recommended by gayweddings.com.

\$200,000

Amount Martín Fuentes, a retired mailman from Illinois, recently won in the lottery by playing numbers he found in a fortune cookie.

Martín Fuentes

A Mexican businessman known mostly for his marriage to Mexican actress Jacqueline Bracamontes.

Jacqueline Bracamontes

One of the female leads in *Sortilégio*, a telenovela featuring two bisexual male best friends who fall in love.

Bisexuality Day

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2015

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COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Learn to cook easy meals that are healthy and low cost! Meet new people, talk about food and health, and have fun. For details, dates and to sign up, contact Jessica at 416-324-4100 ext. 5250.

GENDER JOURNEYS

Gender Journeys is an 11-week group for anyone experiencing changes across the gender spectrum. To register, contact Kusha at ydadui@sherbourne.on.ca or at 416-324-5078.

MIND YOUR MIND: A CBT GROUP FOR ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Mind Your Mind is a 12-week group that uses CBT techniques to help with experiences of anxiety and depression. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) can help people understand the thoughts and feelings that influence behaviours.

To register, contact Peter at phall@sherbourne.on.ca or 416-324-4100 ext. 5058.

MEN'S TRAUMA RECOVERY AND EMPOWERMENT

A weekly, 75 minute, 24-session skill building (CBT) group for male-identified survivors of trauma. Open to gay, bi, queer, and trans men. Contact Peter for dates and further information: 416-324-5058 or phall@sherbourne.on.ca

TRANS PARTNER NETWORK

TPN is a free workshop series for partners, lovers, spouses or significant others of trans, genderqueer and gender-variant people who are looking for help, support, resources and information regarding their and/or their partner's transition. Meet other partners to share, explore, and reflect in a structured, supportive and creative environment.

Wednesdays, 6-9pm, January 21 to March 11, 2015. To register, contact LeeAndra at info@transpartnetwork.com or call Laura at 416-324-4100 x 5096.

TRANS MEN'S POST-SURGICAL SUPPORT GROUP

The Trans Men's Surgical Support Group is a biweekly group for trans men who have started the process of or have completed bottom surgery.

To sign up, contact Laura at 416-324-4100 x 5096 or lkrahn@sherbourne.on.ca.

TRANS WOMEN'S POST-SURGICAL SUPPORT GROUP

The Trans Women's Surgical Support Group is a biweekly group for trans women who are healing from or have completed bottom surgery.

To sign up, contact Laura at 416-324-4100 x 5096 or lkrahn@sherbourne.on.ca.

PUBLIC TALK: WORKPLACE TRANSITIONS - TRANS* PEOPLE'S STRUGGLES WITH UN(DER)EMPLOYMENT WITH DR. DAN IRVING

Friday, January 23, 2015 • 5:30-7:30pm • Everyone welcome

Dr. Dan Irving will present on trans* people's employment experiences within the corporate, public and non-profit sectors. This accessible talk is based on interviews conducted with un(der)employed trans* individuals residing in Ontario, British Columbia and Washington State between 2012 and 2014. Light refreshments provided. Please contact Rupert Raj for further accessibility and event information: (416) 324-4174 or rraj@sherbourne.on.ca.

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Trans customers locked out of TD bank accounts

‘It took me five attempts... to get any help,’ Toronto woman alleges

TRANS ISSUES
CHRISTIN SCARLETT MILLOY

A TD Bank Group employee blocked a Toronto trans woman from her bank accounts and credit card because he didn’t like the sound of her voice on the phone, the woman alleges.

“I got locked out of all my accounts because... my voice wasn’t completely perfect,” says Emily-Rose Kinsley, a self-employed business owner. “He was calling me ‘ma’am’ but then switched to ‘sir,’” she says. “[He] refused access [to my records] and then called me a man because of my voice and said that I was being locked out... [He] didn’t even ask me my security questions,” she claims.

Kinsley says TD’s customer service representatives refused to listen to her when she called back and appeared to have no awareness of trans issues. “I even told them I was transsexual, and they just hung up,” she explains. “I was shocked; it made me cry.”

Without access to her money, Kinsley was at a loss. “I couldn’t eat or smoke or anything for two days.” She says she used to trust TD with her money “but not anymore.”

“They made me cry; they made me scared to be me. They told me I was a guy. I can’t trust anyone who would treat me with such disrespect.”

Many trans women, depending on what age they were when they transitioned, have already experienced the testosterone-based puberty typically associated with boys growing into men. Whereas trans men (who were designated female at birth) can gain a deepened voice from testosterone treatments, estrogen cannot reverse or “heighten” a trans woman’s voice if it’s already become deep.

Although there are throat and larynx surgeries designed to alter the voices of trans women to make them sound more conventionally feminine, these surgeries are risky, they leave visible scars and they don’t guarantee good results. Also, like all surgical treatments related to gender identity,



TD Bank relies on voice authentication to confirm identity before accessing accounts, a practice that can present problems for trans customers. THINKSTOCK

they are difficult to access and can be prohibitively expensive.

Some trans women can adjust their natural speaking voices on their own, through practice or by guided speech therapy, but not all trans women are able to — or even want to.

“Why should I have to be in a constant state of panic over how my voice sounds?” says trans activist Christine Newman, who describes her voice as “low and throaty, like Lauren Bacall.” She says the need to “pass constantly,” for transgender people to fit into an expected set of standards based on how cisgender people look and sound, is unfair.

“It’s one more expectation put upon trans people instead of just being able to be yourself,” she says.

Eventually, Kinsley regained access to her money. “It took me five attempts and five hangups to get any help,” she says. She says someone from TD told her that her computer file has been annotated in a way that “outs” her without her consent: “All my accounts now say I’m a deep-

voiced transsexual,” she says. “That is not okay.”

Newman agrees. “I personally find it disturbing that you are forced to be outed as trans just so some call-centre rep doesn’t lock out all your banking because you don’t sound like your proper gender.”

Kinsley is not the only transgender customer who has had problems with TD. Sam (who asked that *Xtra* use only her first name) reports an almost identical experience. “I had forgotten my PIN number and been locked out of my bank account. So I called [TD customer service]. They asked me security questions, which I knew the answers to.” Despite passing the standard security test, Sam says, she was still refused phone service.

“They said I had to go in to the bank,” she says. Unlike Kinsley, Sam had a backup account at a different bank, so she had other options. When she did visit her branch, she says, she was told “there was a note on my account saying a guy called in pretending to be (me), and we locked the account.” Sam also reports that her bank

manager insisted on adding a notation to the file that says she is a transgender woman.

“TD is a proud supporter of the LGBT community,” says Ron Puccini, senior manager of diversity at TD. TD Canada Trust is a major annual sponsor of Pride Toronto, including 2014’s WorldPride, and routinely runs pro-gay banking advertisements during the Pride season.

Despite the experiences reported by both Kinsley and Sam, Puccini says that “we do not practise putting personal information on customer profiles that ‘outs’ them.” However, he does not deny that TD judges callers on the quality of their voices: “In order to prevent fraud against our customers, TD uses a variety of best practices, including voice authentication.”

In 2011, a gay man in Vancouver told *Xtra* that he was denied access to his account after a call centre representative mistook his voice for a woman’s.

At that time, TD spokesperson Suzanna Cohen apologized for the “bad service.”

“We don’t want this type of situation to happen. People shouldn’t have to call and experience this type of frustration and bad service,” she said.

For TD, raising a red flag against uncommonly pitched voices is an effective way of protecting accounts, but Puccini acknowledges that TD doesn’t have a concrete solution for its trans customers.

“We are aware of the recent concerns, and we take them seriously. We also recognize that we don’t get it right every time,” he says. “We are continuously looking at ways to improve our customer service, and this includes looking at ways to improve the customer experience for customers in the transgender community.”

MP Randall Garrison, who is the federal NDP critic on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual issues, says that stories like these point to the need for increased protection for transgender people in Canada.

“Banks are regulated federally,” Garrison says. He introduced Bill C-279 in 2012 to add gender identity to the Human Rights Act, which would solidify the government’s position against anti-transgender discrimination. That bill hasn’t passed yet, but even without it, Garrison says, these women might have a case. “They could [make a complaint against TD] to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and a decision would be made,” he says. “But it would certainly be easier to find resolution after 279 passes.”

Scholarship for black LGBT youth turned down

Hamilton couple donating the funds is determined to go ahead with scholarship

COMMUNITY HG WATSON

When they got married in August, dateje green and Ruth Cameron decided to eschew traditional gifts and instead asked guests for something they hoped could make a difference in their community — money for a scholarship specifically for black LGBT youth.

The couple received \$2,900 from enthusiastic friends, co-workers and family members for an annual \$1,500 scholarship they named after black lesbian poet Audre Lorde. They decided they wanted to offer the scholarship through the Reverend John C Holland Awards, which celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of the African-Canadian community in Hamilton.

Cameron and green had attended the awards ceremony during Black History Month last February and found it to be a positive experience. They thought that creating an award specifically for black LGBT youth would promote inclusivity in the community.

But now Cameron and green are clashing with the committee that administers the awards over allegations that the committee wanted to expand the scholarship to allies and delay its induction until next year for the Holland Awards' 20th anniversary.

The idea for the scholarship was raised with Evelyn Myrie, co-chair of the Black History Month committee, earlier in the year, green says. At the time, Myrie expressed her support. Feeling that they had an organization showing interest, green and Cameron proceeded to ask for the funds and publicly talked about their plans.

For them, using infrastructure that was already in place made sense: the John C Holland Awards include a number of scholarships for youth aged 18 to 24.

"For young people who come out at such an early age as they are now, you are additionally marked and additionally at risk of falling through the cracks of the very things that you need to be very independent in life and to be safe



"For young people who come out at such an early age as they are now, you are additionally marked and additionally at risk of falling through the cracks of the very things that you need to be very independent in life and to be safe and healthy," dateje green says.

THINKSTOCK

and healthy," green says. They hoped the scholarship could address these issues.

In the fall, green and Cameron approached Myrie and the awards committee again. They say they faced repeated questions, including why the scholarship couldn't be extended to LGBT allies. The same questions were echoed when green and Cameron went in person to make the case for their scholarship at an awards committee meeting on Nov 16. Green later clarified in an email to *Xtra* that the committee

suggested making the award exclusively for allies.

That was not an acceptable change for green and Cameron. "We wanted to be very explicit that this scholarship was meant for those individuals who are vulnerable because of multiple types of oppression," Cameron says.

On Dec 10, Myrie emailed green and Cameron to tell them that the committee had decided not to create the award this year but would commit to considering it next year. In the email, provided to *Xtra* by both Myrie and green, Myrie writes that the "Nelson Mandela award is open to LGBTQ youth as it recognizes youth who are involved in human rights and social justice issues." She adds that the awards strive to include everyone.

Myrie tells *Xtra* that the committee members are very interested in creating

typically donate the funds and have some input into the terms but not total control. (There are several awards, not scholarships, handed out for specific sectors of the community according to the organization's website.)

According to Myrie, the deadline for the awards, Dec 19, also did not allow enough time to properly promote the award. Pushing it to next year would allow sufficient promotion time and give them a chance to tie it into the 20th-anniversary celebrations, she says. Myrie repeated this reasoning in a story in the *Hamilton Spectator*.

However, the nomination form on the John C Holland Awards website gives the deadline as Jan 10. The first time green became aware of a time issue, she says, was when she read the *Spectator* article.

"We wanted to be very explicit that this scholarship was meant for those individuals who are vulnerable because of multiple types of oppression."

RUTH CAMERON, SCHOLARSHIP DONOR

an LGBT-focused award but that they had questions about what the scholarship itself would focus on. "We talked about inclusion and what does that look like," Myrie says. "Does that look like someone who works in the LGBT community and someone who promotes equity and social justice to ensure that the LGBT community is respected and embraced and valued?"

Myrie says Cameron and green wanted to prescribe the terms of the award, while the committee wants to open up consultation to the LGBT community. "We're not saying no to the award," Myrie says. "We just want to determine the best way to establish this and to recognize the LGBT efforts — whether it's an award to an LGBT student or it's someone who is an ally. I don't know, but we need to sit down and talk this through."

Other award donors, Myrie says,

The turn of events has left the couple frustrated. The committee has "essentially refused an opportunity to really make an inclusive, affirming, welcoming gesture to a part of the community that is rarely discussed or acknowledged," Cameron says.

She and green continue to promote the scholarship; one way or another, they say, they will ensure that it is given to a deserving candidate for the 2015/16 school year. "We know that this is a needed scholarship," green says.

"However, we thought that a fantastic opportunity to make a very big statement that is inclusive and welcoming has been missed here," Cameron says. "If we go through other organizations, it won't be centred on the group we want it to be centred on — black youth. What more appropriate time than a Black History Month event to showcase some diversity within the black community?" X



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A sex worker's tale

Trading a blowjob for 20 bucks and a half pack of cigarettes had brought me to a new level of debauchery. Courtney Love would have been proud.



Adventures in gay parenting

It's not that I don't like Hot Wheels or Thomas the Tank Engine, but I can't quite figure out my son's predilection toward traditionally masculine pursuits.



History Boys

The Wonder Woman comics from the 1940s are rife with BDSM. On almost every page there's kidnap, slavery or bondage.



Hooking up in public

When I find myself exploring a dungeon party on a Sunday afternoon, I know why I'm there. I'm on a journey searching for those connections.

DAILY Xtra EVERYTHING GAY, EVERY DAY.

The making of Auntie Mame

The beloved protagonist of the 1955 novel was forged on the battlefield



HISTORY BOYS JEREMY WILLARD

From an early age, Edward Everett "Pat" Tanner III (1921–1976) enjoyed upsetting people's sensibilities. Each morning, he'd sit in front of the window and make a show of flipping casually through the pages of *Ballyhoo*, a 1920s *Playboy*-style magazine, so that his classmates would see as they passed by on their way to Dewey Elementary School, in the Chicago suburb of Evanston.

Tanner eventually authored 16 novels, including the best-selling *Auntie Mame*, which he wrote under the name Patrick Dennis. Published in 1955, it's a comic novel in the style of Evelyn Waugh. It was made into a play, film, stage musical and film musical — all within his lifetime — but people are probably most familiar with the 1958 film version starring Rosalind Russell.

Like a literary version of reading a dirty magazine in a window, the novel is all about challenging the status quo. Those of you who didn't watch the film as a gay rite of passage may require a primer of the tale: when the young Patrick Dennis (a character in the novel as well as Pat's *nom de plume*) is orphaned, he comes into the care of his Aunt Mame, an eccentric New Yorker whose motto is "Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving to death." She wants to give him as liberal an upbringing as possible. Unfortunately, Patrick has a trustee, Mr Babcock, who wants him raised conservatively. When Babcock and Mame clash, the comic outcome is delicious.

It's often thought that Patrick-the-character's upbringing is based on that of Pat-the-author, but this isn't so. Pat had a conventional upper-middle-class upbringing. However, Pat was always a bit like Mame — eloquent, theatrical, whimsical, worldly, living in a kind of fantasy world — much to the chagrin of his father, a champion swimmer who often called him a pansy (Pat was bisexual but probably didn't know it yet).

I'd guess that Pat's father's attitude helped to foster Pat's Mame-like qualities and caused them to become more deeply entrenched. Making life a bit more glamorous and fantastical helped Pat cope both with his difficult home life and, eventually, the Second



Author Pat Tanner was always a bit like Mame — eloquent, theatrical, whimsical, worldly, living in a kind of fantasy world — much to the chagrin of his father, a champion swimmer who often called Tanner a pansy.
SISSYDUDE

World War.

To avoid being drafted to fight, Pat volunteered as a combat ambulance driver with the American Field Service (AFS) in 1942. To alleviate the boredom of the three-and-a-half-week voyage to Africa, where he initially served, Pat got up to various hijinks, including organizing a talent show. He also, according to a weekly newsletter put together by other volunteers, employed his experience having once trimmed a poodle to start cutting his chums' hair (with varying degrees of success).

The leader of the AFS volunteers instituted 15 minutes of calisthenics each morning, including running on the spot. On the first morning, Pat started humming loudly and doing high kicks. When his peers followed suit, the leader gave in and on subsequent mornings would resignedly say, "Okay, kids — can-can!"

Pat used his imagination to cope with violence as well as boredom. When he was later assigned to serve in Italy, he faced about as much danger as any soldier and sustained several wounds. He started to pretend he

was elsewhere entirely, in a suburban house, and assigned his friends roles in a make-believe suburban family. The fantasy helped him and his friends deal with the horrors around them. And then one day, Pat's fantasy didn't end. He wouldn't come out of it. He had a nervous breakdown and was honourably discharged and sent back to the United States, where he spent a few months in psychiatric care.

He didn't take long to recover, and in 1945 he moved to New York City, which, after holding its breath during the war, was a magnet for cash and talent. It was there that he became a successful novelist. He created his most famous character, Mame, a woman imbued with many of Pat's qualities — qualities that had become more pronounced to help him deal with his homophobic father and, to an even greater extent, a devastating war. The whacky, grand lady that so many of us love was to some degree fashioned on the battlefields of the Second World War. X

History Boy appears in every issue of Xtra.

Eating out on Yonge Street

Surprises await at Toronto's Loft 18+ Cinemas



MIKE MIKSCHÉ
HOLE AND
CORNER

I enter the Loft 18+ Cinemas (also known as the Yonge) from Yonge Street, just south of Gerrard, and climb the stairs, mesmerized by the LED lights along the mirrored walls.

I insert seven dollars in change into the machine and push through the turnstile, leaving the ordinary world behind. There are five cinemas in the space: two straight ones on the second floor, three gay on the third and a series of private booths. I automatically head for the gay cinemas but find them quite typical: they're filled with gay men, doing what gay guys do in a pornographic setting — there's a much better selection of men at a bathhouse or sex club.

I decide to try the straight ones instead, just out of curiosity, and am pleasantly surprised. There is something sexually ambiguous about them, something I haven't experienced before, along with an element of danger, especially if you hit on the wrong guy. Needless to say, I am hooked. Most of the men here are not the type you'd notice on the street. Many wear ball caps, carry backpacks and look like they just got off a city bus. You'd think they just made a quick pit stop on their way home — and maybe they did. If you're lucky, you'll get the occasional jock or daddy, the handsome sort, though that requires a bit more patience.

There are three doors past the gate in the straight section: Cinema 1, Cinema 2 and the washroom, which is a private stall. I turn into Cinema 1 and find some kinky fare playing onscreen: a man with puffy chest hair and thin arms is fucking a girl in fishnets from behind, using his foot to press her face into the wooden floor. Her moans are muffled by the theatre's cheap speakers, making them sound like something in an inaudible dream. Three other men are in the cinema watching; it is too dark to tell who is masturbating, but I hear a belt buckle clinking.

The cinemas are small, with only a few rows of seating in each one. I stand at the back near the door to keep an eye on things — I don't want to miss an opportunity. At first, I worry that I look odd back there, peering at people: I'm the only one standing. Nothing is truly odd at the Loft, though, so I stop worrying.

I scan the room, back and forth, waiting for some action to erupt, using the



N. MAXWELL LANDER

Most of the men here are not the type you'd notice on the street. Many wear ball caps, carry backpacks and look like they just got off a city bus.

porn onscreen as my focal point. Later I'll learn that all it takes is for someone to make a sign: flash their cock, give that look, something, anything and the whole room ignites. People start gawking and grabbing, sucking and tugging. On this first visit, though, I wait 20 minutes and nothing happens — it's as if people are there to watch the film.

I venture to Cinema 2, which is much more lively. Approximately 20 men stand around the first row with their cocks out, jerking off to something happening there. The bluish glow from the movie screen seems pasted on the skin of the patrons, adding to the frenzy. I move to the front and find a

woman leaning back in her seat with her skirt up and panties at her ankles. An elderly man in his 60s is eating her out, chomping down at her crotch. A few minutes later, the man next to him gets on his knees and takes over. The crowd stares, ravenous, jerking off and licking their lips. It isn't quite what I was looking for, but I find the scene intriguing so continue to watch as other men take turns . . . X

Hole & Corner is a first-person look at public sex and the people who enjoy it. It appears every Wednesday on the Ideas page of dailyxtra.com, where you can also find Part 2 of "Eating Out."

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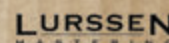
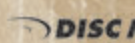
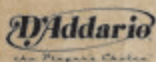


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Moving House

Christopher House makes a welcome return to the stage

ALEJANDRO SANTIAGO

It’s taken 36 years, but Christopher House has finally come full circle. This month, the longtime artistic director of Toronto Dance Theatre returns to his roots and takes to the stage in *I’ll Crane for You*, a solo performance choreographed by Deborah Hay that blends text and song with movement.

House started as a dancer with Toronto Dance Theatre in 1978, began choreographing in 1979 and took the reins in 1994. As his focus shifted to creating, he gradually gave up performing. “I had never really planned to stop dancing, but once I became the director I felt weird hogging stage time when there were so many amazing dancers in the

company,” he says. “To be honest, performing was always a bit stressful for me, so it wasn’t tough to let it slip away.”

His journey back to performing started in 2014, when he appeared alongside the rest of the company in Ame Henderson and Jennifer Castle’s *Voyager*, then in the solo *Rough House*, co-created with Jordan Tannahill.

Though he’s been mostly absent from the stage, he’s hardly been sedentary. He still teaches regularly, does Pilates and rides his bike nearly everywhere, maintaining a physique men half his age would envy. Back on the floor with his character-

istic optimism in tow, he sees more possibilities than limits for his 65-year-old frame.

“There are lots of things I can’t do as well as I could when I was young, but there are an equal number of things I can do now that I couldn’t do then,” he says. “My body is more articulate, more conscious and more sensitive than it used to be. It’s a crazy game, but I have nothing to lose, so I’m seizing the day.” —Chris Dupuis

I’ll Crane for You runs Thurs, Jan 15–Sun, Jan 18 at the Winchester Street Theatre, 80 Winchester St. craneforyou.eventbrite.ca

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

The Gladstone’s 2015 art show is bigger than ever

Building on a tradition of fostering artistic creation, this year’s edition of the Gladstone Hotel’s art and design show, *Come Up to My Room*, will be the longest yet. For 10 days, visitors will enjoy artwork of every kind displayed and performed throughout the charming 125-year-old building.

“The Gladstone is one of the longest-standing hotels in Toronto. There used to be a station here, which would be the last stop before Hamilton, so a lot of artists and burlesque dancers would come and stay,” exhibitions coordinator Lukus Toane says. “The Gladstone’s always been a kind of creative hub, and I think *Come Up to My Room* fits in with



Alexandra Mackenzie’s *Love Design Party*. GLADSTONE HOTEL

that history really well. In terms of it being a queer space, I think we really want to get the picture into people’s heads that it’s a safe place for risk taking,” he says.

Some of the must-see components

of this year’s show are *Design Pirates*, a late-night, talk-show-style event hosted by Zahra Ebrahim and Fluffy Soufflé; Heretical Objects Cooperative’s evening of music and art; and multimedia artist Alexandra Mack-

enzie’s *Love Design Party*, a combination closing party and art installation that seeks to express Mackenzie’s concerns about the environment and indigenous rights.

This year’s installations include Lizz Aston’s *Fibre Optic/Radiant Light*, which “reflects transient patterns of lights, colour and shadow in her immersive installation.” Lindsay Montgomery’s *Third Eye Experimental Figure Theater* brings together installation, puppetry and performance, while Menalon and The New Beat collaborate on “a stunning and interactive laser harp where viewers become musicians with the simple stringing of a chord.” —Jeremy Willard

Come Up to My Room runs Fri, Jan 16–Sun, Jan 25, at the Gladstone Hotel, 1214 Queen St W. comeuptomyroom.com

GINGER QUEST

Shawn Hitchins spreads his gay genes at Buddies

How do gay men make babies? That’s one of the questions Shawn Hitchins sets out to answer in his solo show *Ginger Nation*. “That conversation isn’t happening,” Hitchins says. “Or if it is, it’s happening in a very middle-class, upper-class perspective with sperm donors; it’s not the bare-bones, at-home, in-the-bathroom making babies.” For Hitchins, helping a lesbian couple he was friends with conceive meant going DIY (or as DIY as you can get without actually putting a penis in a vagina). After a few months of lending his friends samples of his precious ginger DNA, they successfully made a baby in the bathroom. “I never really wanted to have a family or have a kid,” he admits, “but I managed to do it in a really queer way that doesn’t compromise my beliefs, the core of who I am or my lifestyle.”

Ginger Nation, which tells the story of Hitchins’s journey to pseudo-fatherhood (and quest to repopulate Earth with redheads), certainly isn’t the first solo

performance he’s done in Toronto. But it is the first to be a hit before it’s even opened. In 2013, *Ginger Nation* had its debut at the Edinburgh Fringe, where it received an almost unheard-of amount of media coverage. “It was almost 50 shows in 30 days,” Hitchins says, “and then all the media stuff, which was unprecedented. Nobody has hit



Shawn Hitchins
JEN SQUIRES

that festival as hard as I hit it; I kinda broke the festival.”

Ginger Nation is clearly a watershed show for Hitchins — he’s currently working on both a televised version of the performance and a book. But you won’t find any butterflies in his stomach. “I’m actually excited because it’s one of the first times I’m not worried about the material,” he says. “I’ve taken it to the harshest environment you can take it to, and it’s survived and thrived. To get a compliment from a Scottish audience is pretty impressive.” —Chris Dupuis

Ginger Nation runs Thurs, Jan 22–Sat, Jan 24 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St. shawnhitchins.com

The star of stage and screen dishes on Broadway, his brave new book and, of course, Spice World

CUMMING ATTRactions

JOHNNIE WALKER PHOTO BY STEVE VACCARIELLO

“I think if you’re going to be a drag queen, you should just know the words. Do you know what I mean?”

Alan Cumming asks the question while grazing on pomegranate seeds in a conference room at the TIFF Bell Lightbox. Impeccably dressed in a pinstripe suit and round Harry Potter glasses, the 49-year-old actor, author and singer is in Toronto in connection with TIFF’s *Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition* (remember him as the flirty concierge in *Eyes Wide Shut?*). After arriving in town the night before, Cumming caught a drag show in which he noticed the queens covering their mouths or turning from the audience when the lyrics seemed to escape them. But after his playful critique, he’s quick to add a compliment: “They were nice. I don’t like a mean drag queen — I think that’s a very over-rated virtue.”

Surely if anyone’s an authority on nightclub performance, it’s Cumming. While his acting resumé is as lengthy as it is eclectic, the Scottish performer is perhaps best known for his turn as the Emcee from *Cabaret*. In fact, you can catch him right now in the Broadway revival, returning to the iconic leather jacket and white suspenders he first wore more than 20 years ago.

His story about the drag queens makes him think of Emma Stone (his current “Sally Bowles”), who certainly knew the words in her epic lip-sync battle with Jimmy Fallon. If Cumming were asked to do battle with the *Tonight Show* host? “I’d have to do a slow song,” he says. “A Shania Twain ballad.” With a smirk, he reveals his favourite song from Shania’s catalogue: “From This Moment On,” in spite (or perhaps because) of her unique phrasing. “She chooses to

breathe in the middle of the word ‘because.’” And then the Tony Award winner puts down his pomegranate seeds and bursts into song: “My dreeeams came truuee be—” pausing for a gulp of air, “—caaaause of yooou. Seriously, listen to it. It’s a choice. But it’s not one that I approve of.” He gently skewers the Pride of Timmins in the same archly scolding tone he used on the forgetful drag queens.

It’s hard not to be charmed by Cumming. He’s handsome, well spoken and has a conspiratorial way of telling a story that makes you feel like you’re sharing a well-loved private joke. He’s funny, and when he laughs the deep dimples in his cheeks bring out a boyish, almost elfin quality to his face. On screen, he’s often doing an accent: Russian as a Bond villain in *GoldenEye*; German as the superhero Nightcrawler in *X-Men 2*; American as the acerbic Eli Gold on *The Good Wife*. As a civilian, he speaks with a soft Scottish brogue and the same easy candour found in his memoir, *Not My Father’s Son*.

Cumming’s second book is worlds away from your typical celebrity tell-all. While his wry Scottish wit is on full display as he describes, say, a funny story about auctioning off a duet by Patti Smith and Mary J Blige that neither knew she had signed on for, at its heart his book is a mystery and a family saga, unfolding in a series of cliffhangers and dramatic twists.

The book is divided into alternating “Then” and “Now” chapters. In the “Then” chapters, Cumming describes his childhood in rural Scotland. It is difficult to read at times; he remembers the trauma of growing up with an angry, violently abusive father who terrorized him and his brother. Meanwhile, the “Now” chapters track his experience filming on the British version of the reality show *Who Do You Think You Are?* in 2010. Cumming’s episode of the program





(which investigates celebrities' family trees) centred on his maternal grandfather. Tommy Darling, who died in Malaysia sometime after the Second World War, had always been a question mark for Cumming and his mother, Mary, who was only eight at the time of her father's death. What had he been like? Why hadn't he returned to Scotland? And how did he really die? In the midst of investigating these questions, the "Now" and "Then" threads converge as Cumming's estranged father returns in the present with shocking revelations and long-buried secrets.

Gripping and emotionally powerful, *Not My Father's Son* reads like the late-night confession of a close friend. "I couldn't stop talking about it," Cumming says. "I literally was obsessed with it." His need to share his stranger-than-fiction story is almost tangible. "It was an urgent thing. I don't think you can have something like this happen to you without expunging it in some way. It's great for other people in the world to share in the same kind of anger or amazement or horror that you have experienced. It makes you calmer."

While he doesn't shy away from his harrowing relationship with his father, he also spends time describing the healthy relationships he shares with his mother and brother. "People tend to focus on the more violent bits, but actually, ultimately it's about three people who survived. I think that it's quite uplifting."

While the writing process was cathartic, Cumming worried how his family would take the candid memoir. "I was nervous about it coming out because of the effect it was gonna have on my mom, especially, and me," he confides. "But actually, it couldn't have gone better. My mom asked for 10 more copies to give to her friends. And I thought that was the best review I could have got!"

Cumming hopes *Not My Father's Son* can help others who have experienced similar abuse come to terms with their past, or at least start that conversation. "Everyone's got fucked-up families. I think that the word 'dysfunctional' is almost irrelevant as a prefix to the word 'family,' because everyone's is. And so many people say, 'Oh, I'm buying your book for my mom.' And I think, 'Wow!' As a family gift, I wouldn't put it at the top of my list. But I like it. I think it's really making people talk about things."

If exploring his past with his father was the most painful part of writing *Not My Father's Son*, discovering the truth about his grandfather Tommy Darling was perhaps the most rewarding. As he travels with a TV crew through France, the UK and, ultimately, Malaysia, he pieces together an idea of the grandfather he never knew.

"The thing with Tommy Darling was I actually felt so close to him, so like him, and I know that I can spot the genetic line much more closely from that side than from my father's side. And I think that's also why I was so sad for him, 'cause I really could recognize parts of myself in him." His grandfather was a combatant in some of the most brutal battles of the war, and Cumming believes Darling's traumatic experiences shaped the man he became. "I feel like I have a form of PTSD from my dad. So, learning all this stuff about him, it was so intense. I did feel this — not sympathy, but complete connection to him. And to be able to go back to Malaysia and take my mom there — that was such a beautiful thing to be able to do."

It's fitting that Cumming is releasing a book that reflects on his past in the same year he returned to his star-making turn in *Cabaret*. Not that it was easy. "I am so fucking old!" he says with a laugh. "When I came back to doing it this time, I couldn't remember anything about it. I had to go to the Lincoln Center Library and watch the video of it from last time to remind myself. But I have been doing it for 20 years. I did it in London, New York. I've only done ... it's only 660 performances — I count them every day."

It's amazing that a production that premiered in 1993 feels as fresh, daring and vital as ever — even when things go wrong. "There were some drunk people in the other night," Cumming says, "and obviously, there's drinks, you're supposed to be in a club ... But there was this kind of ugly scene afterwards with the audience saying how disrespectful they were being."

In a departure from the original staging, the Sam Mendes-directed production ends with the Emcee stripping off his sexy leather jacket to reveal a concentration-camp uniform displaying both a pink triangle and a Star of David. "So I'm saying, 'I'm going to a concentration camp; I'm gay; I'm Jewish; I'm dead.' And these people are still laughing." While the experience was jarring for both the performers and the audience, for Cumming, those kinds of reactions are important for the message of the show. "The audience were horrified that these people were not respecting this terrible thing that happened, but of course, the whole show is saying that you've got to be vigilant because there are those people who don't get it and are going to be the ones who are going to let it happen. And so the whole thing sort of happened in microcosm right there."

Here's a game: open up Cumming's IMDb page and scroll through his credits. You've seen him in more things than you realized, haven't you? His artistic output is prolific and remarkably varied. He's just as likely to pop up in highbrow fare like Julie Taymor's *Titus* or a Jane Austen adaptation as something deliciously lowbrow, like *Josie and the Pussycats* or *Burlesque*.

But does someone who's really "done it all" still ache for new challenges or pine for the roles that got away? "Mostly it's like, 'Oh, I dodged that bullet!'" Cumming says. "I'm not a yearner. People can waste so much time yearning or aspiring for something. That takes up your energy. That takes you away from the present and closes you off to what might happen. I feel I've tumbled through life and really fascinating things have come to me. And I just do what I like. I've actually more often had a terrible time doing something that I really thought I was doing for my art rather

than for my wallet. Because when you enter into something because it's a job to earn money, then you have fun; you get on with people. But when you go into something and your heart is in it, your soul is in it, and it doesn't go well and people are dicks, then that hurts you more."

When asked about his appearance in the critically reviled *Jaws 4*, character actor extraordinaire Michael Caine famously remarked, "I have never seen it, but by all accounts it is terrible. However, I have seen the house that it built, and it is terrific." Cumming has an equally sanguine take on his less prestigious work. "You can actually trace my filmography through when I was either renovating a house or getting a divorce by the films I've done; that's absolutely true," he admits. "And why shouldn't I do that?"

Recently, on the BBC's *HARDtalk*, host Stephen Sackur asked Cumming if he regretted saying yes to certain roles. "He named certain films, like *The Smurfs* and *Spice World*. And I was like, 'No. Why do you think I should just do rarefied, arty things just because you would like me to, rather than do *The Flintstones* to earn a lot of money?' And finally I said, 'And actually, I think *Spice World* was really good.' And he went, 'Oh, I've never seen it.' And I said, 'Then don't cast aspersions! I love that film.'" Besides, his role as a documentary filmmaker following the every move of Baby, Sporty, Ginger, Posh and Scary made him an instant hit with co-star Emma Stone. "Emma Stone is a huge Spice Girls fan!" he says, with a grin. "We have Spice Girls lip-sync battles in my dressing room with the Kit Kat Girls!" It's probably safe to assume they know the words. X

NOT MY FATHER'S SON

By Alan Cumming
HarperCollins
harpercollins.com

STANLEY KUBRICK: THE EXHIBITION

Runs until Sun, Jan 25
TIFF Bell Lightbox
350 King St W
tiff.net

WHAT'S ON

FOR MORE EVENT LISTINGS, GO TO DAILYXTRA.COM

ARTS & LITERATURE

Butch: Not Like the Other Girls

SD Holman's photographs explore masculinity in contemporary communities, fighting the way women, gender and sexuality are defined in the mainstream. Runs until Fri, Jan 23. Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, 34 Isabella St. Free. clga.ca

Art Calorie

This mixer and art show raises funds for the Toronto Arts Foundation and OCADU's Digital Media Research and Innovation Institute. Runs Fri, Jan 9–Sun, Jan 11. Inclusive Design Institute, 49 McCaul St. \$10–15. artcalorie.eventbrite.ca

Colours of the City

An exhibit of Philip Cairns's abstract paintings and drawings. Opening reception Sat, Jan 10, 2–6pm; runs until Sun, Feb 1. Arcadia Gallery, 680 Queens Quay W. Free. philipcairns.com

Bawdy Art

Facilitator Stephanie Baptist shares poetry and art from The Vagina Project, inspired by Naomi Wolf's book *Vagina*. For women only. Sat, Jan 17, noon–2:30pm. Good for Her, 175 Harbord St. \$33. goodforher.com

Giving It Raw

Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco launches an AIDS memoir in a place that inspired some sections of his book. Mon, Jan 19, 6–9pm. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. Free. blackeagletoronto.com

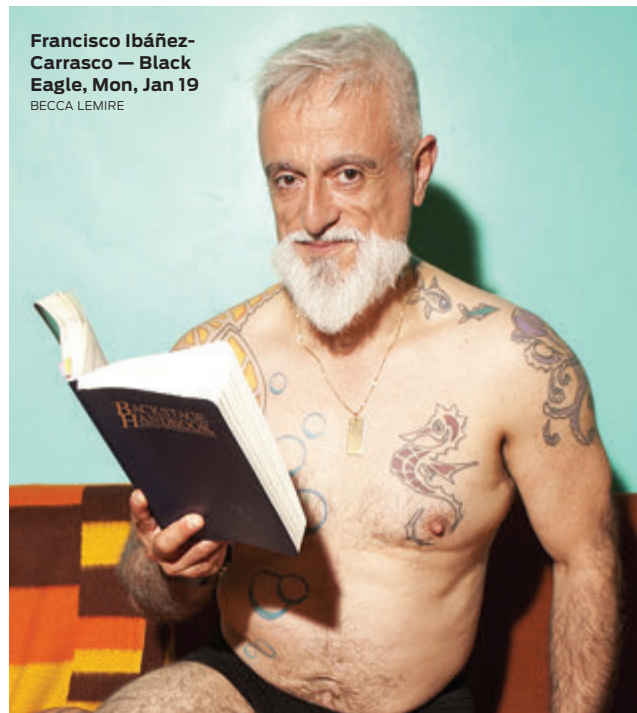
COMEDY & CABARET

Singular Sensation: A Musical-Theatre Open Mic

Jennifer Walls invites amateur crooners to perform their favourite songs accompanied by a live band. Every Monday, 9:30pm–12:30am. Statlers, 487 Church St. No cover. statlers.ca

Paul Bellini's Liar Liar

Guests tell dubious tales and audience members are challenged to decide whether the stories are



Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco — **Black Eagle, Mon, Jan 19**
BECCA LEMIRE

true. Wed, Jan 14, 7:30pm. The Flying Beaver, 488 Parliament St. No cover. pubaret.com

Scott Thompson: Off with His Head

Famous for his roles on *The Kids in the Hall* and *Hannibal*, Thompson is a performer whose comedy is best experienced live. Sat, Jan 17, 9pm

and 11pm. The Flying Beaver, 488 Parliament St. \$20 advance, \$25 door. pubaret.com

Too Queer: A Bi Visibility Cabaret (version 2.0)

Writers, musicians, dancers, visual artists and more present pieces related to bisexuality. Sun, Jan 18,

7pm. Gladstone Hotel, 1214 Queen St W. No cover. gladstonehotel.com

HEALTH & ISSUES

The 519 Legal Clinic

A free, accessible service for low-income people. Volunteer lawyers provide legal advice, referrals and help with forms and letters. The confidential and private visits are first-come, first-served. Bring any necessary documents. Every Thursday; registration 6–6:30pm. The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St. Free. the519.org

LEGIT

Legal counsel for same-sex couples immigrating to Canada. Tap into the community and access useful resources. The second Thursday of each month. Thurs, Jan 8, 7–10pm. The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St. Free; donations appreciated. legit.ca

The Black Queer Youth Initiative

Black and multiracial youth aged 29 and under who identify as queer or questioning gather in a safe, social space. Every Wednesday, 6:30–8:30pm. Sherbourne Health Centre, 333 Sherbourne St. Free. soytoronto.org

LGBTQ Peer Support Drop-In

Queer people with mood disorders gather for support and discussion. If the building door is locked, press the

button under the intercom near the wheelchair entrance. Takes place the first and third Wednesday of each month. Wed, Jan 21, 7–9pm. Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, 36 Eglinton Ave W, Ste 602. Free. moooddisorders.ca

LEISURE & PLEASURE

Board Games Night

Nerds bond over such games as Wizard and 7 Wonders. Sat, Jan 10, 7pm. Glad Day Bookshop, 598 Yonge St. \$6 before 9:30pm, \$3 after. gladdaybookshop.com

Gay in a Corporate World

The featured speaker at The Fraternity's dinner meeting talks about being an out gay senior manager at TD Canada Trust. RSVP to meet@thefraternity.org. Mon, Jan 12, 5:45–9pm. Courtyard Marriott, 475 Yonge St. \$20–40. thefraternity.org

'90s Trivia

With Miss Fluffy Soufflé hosting, teams of up to four people compete to see who knows the most about such topics as Orbitz, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and fly girls. Mon, Jan 12, 7–10pm. Wayla, 996 Queen St E. No cover. waylabar.com

MUSIC

She's Listening

Singer/songwriters Heather Hill, Kat Leonard, Angela Saini, Jessica

4PLAY

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DJ **MARK FALCO**
SATURDAY, JAN 24TH
10^{PM} UNTIL 3^{AM} (OR LATER)
COVER: \$5 BEFORE MIDNIGHT, \$10 AFTER



Church/Wellesley

Speziale and Kristine St-Pierre perform to benefit Ovarian Cancer Canada. Thurs, Jan 8, 7pm. The Flying Beaver, 488 Parliament St. \$15 advance, \$20 door. pubaret.com

Nightingales: Undiscovered and Unplugged

Johnny Salib hosts a night of songs written and performed by local Toronto artists, including Maccie Paquette, Shayne Stolz and Chris Tsujiuchi. Fri, Jan 9, 7:30pm. Buddies in Bad Times, 12 Alexander St. \$15 advance, \$20 door. buddiesinbadtimes.com

SEX

South Asian Night

When they're not cruising the rooms and dark areas, horny men enjoy a 50/50 draw, tel-maalish head massage and a safe-sex workshop. Thurs, Jan 8, 8–11pm. Spa Excess, 105 Carlton St. Regular rates apply. spaexcess.com

TNT Naked Night

Men are invited to join Totally Naked Toronto for a monthly celebration of nudism and sex. Tues, Jan 27, 7–11pm. Spa Excess, 105 Carlton St. Regular rates apply. spaexcess.com

THEATRE

Next Stage Festival

Some of the best productions from this year's Toronto Fringe Festival return for encore performances. Runs until Sun, Jan 18, various showtimes. Factory Theatre, 125 Bathurst St. \$10–15. fringetoronto.com

Her2

This Nightwood Theatre production tells the story of a group of women who form an unbreakable bond when they participate in a clinical drug trial for breast cancer. Runs Tues, Jan 13–Sun, Feb 1, various showtimes. Buddies in Bad Times, 12 Alexander St. \$39–45. buddiesinbadtimes.com

Into the Woods in Concert

To benefit local charities, Beyond Boundaries presents the musical that combines the songs of Stephen Sondheim with characters from *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and other fairy tales. Sat, Jan 17, 8pm. Metropolitan Community Church, 115 Simpson Ave. \$20, \$15 arts workers. brownpapertickets.com

Blithe Spirit

Angela Lansbury plays the implausible medium Madame Arcati in Michael Blakemore's revival of Noël Coward's beloved comedy. Runs Wed, Feb 11–Sun, March 15, various showtimes. Princess of Wales Theatre, 300 King St W. \$29–130. mirvish.com

CLUB SCENE

Thurs, Jan 8

Heavenly Thursday Kim Jee Young plays the piano in the lounge, 6–9pm; Jade Elektra and Heaven Lee Hytes give saintly and sinful performances at 11pm. DJ Relentless on decks. Zipperz/Cellblock, 72 Carlton St. No cover. facebook.com/zipperz

T-Girl Party DJ Todd Klinck spins upstairs for an evening of socializing with T-girls, their friends and admirers. 8pm. Club120, 120 Church St. \$8 before 11pm, \$15 after; additional \$10 for all-night VIP booth access. club120.ca

Pup Night Argo and Sprocket D'Husky host a night of pup play at the Black Eagle Kennel Klub, with renovated play room and wrestling mats. Pups, handlers and spectators of all genders and experience welcome. 9pm. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. blackeagletoronto.com

Woody's Thursday DJ Mark Falco provides the beats for the boys showing their pecs and abs at the Absolut Best Chest Contest, with \$300 in cash up for grabs. Midnight. Woody's, 467 Church St. No cover. woodystoronto.com

Fri, Jan 9

Fabulous Friday Fierce & Flawless, with Ivory Towers, Katherine Hytes Dior, Carlotta Carlisle and DJ Chris, at 8:30pm; DJ Roxanne in Tangos and DJ Relentless in the Zone, both at 10pm; Bitch-a-Palooza, with Daytona Bitch, guest Xtacy Love and DJ Sarah, at 11:30pm. Crews & Tangos, 508 Church St. crewsandtangos.com



Trade — Black Eagle, Sat, Jan 10

TNTMen: Nighttime Dance Take it all off and dance with the wind in your pubic hair at the monthly *au naturel* party. 9pm–2am. Club120, 120 Church St. \$10, \$8 members, \$5 students. tntmen.org

Sat, Jan 10

Last Night on Earth Elegy: A Doompunk LARP gets interactive with its 18+ post-apocalyptic live-action role-playing game. Apocalyptic dress encouraged. Salvage and ammo not accepted in trade. 8pm. Club120, 120 Church St. \$20, \$15 advance. elegy.ca

Business Woman's Special: Electric Circus Cassandra Moore performs, while DJs Nino Brown, Sammy and Diego Armand spin some managerial dance beats. 10pm. Round, 152A Augusta Ave. \$6. roundvenue.com

Trade: Underwear Party DJs DD Whitebread (LA) and Scooter McCreight throw down sexy beats in their tighty whiteys. 10pm. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. \$5 before midnight, \$10 after. facebook.com/getsometrade

Buddies Afterhours DJ K-Tel spins in Tallulah's, throwing down top 40, dance, house and retro faves, with a different drag performance on the stairs every weekend. 10:30pm. Buddies, 12 Alexander St. \$5 before midnight, \$8 after. buddiesinbadtimes.com

Sun, Jan 11

Rough House Leathermen and friends get into all kinds of BDSM play, including saline, percussion play, sounding and suspension at this social dungeon-cum-house-party. 1–5pm. Club120, 120 Church St. \$15. roughhouse.ca, club120.ca

Sultry Sunday Diva Supreme, with Michelle Ross, Alisha Van Horne and DJ Jay, at 8:30pm; Sultry Sunday, with Farra N Hyte, Jada Hudson and DJ Alex, at 11:30pm. Crews & Tangos, 508 Church St. crewsandtangos.com

Karaoke Sunday Cajo hosts and belts out some favourite songs. 9:30pm–1:30am. The Boat, 158 Augusta Ave. No cover. theboatkensington.com

Mon, Jan 12

Woody's Monday DJ Blue Peter spins for people taking advantage of the all-night day prices. 8pm. Woody's, 467 Church St. No cover. woodystoronto.com

FML Monday Rotating DJs spin top 40, hip hop and dance music for hard-working industry folk looking for post-weekend fun. 10pm. Flash, 463 Church St. flashonchurch.com

Tues, Jan 13

Industry Night Carlotta Carlisle, Katherine Hytes Dior, Brooke Lynn Hytes and Vitality Black take the drag stage, while Elyse warms up the karaoke mic.

Cassandra Moore at Business Woman's Special — Round, Sat, Jan 10



10pm. Crews & Tangos, 508 Church St. crewsandtangos.com

Wed, Jan 14

Toronto Wranglers Bust out with some do-si-do at this weekly country-western hoedown. 7–10pm. Zipperz/Cellblock, 2 Carlton St. No cover. facebook.com/zipperz

Crooked Soul DJ Cozmic Cat spins soul, Motown, funk and remixes at a low-key, laid-back night in the west end. 10pm. Crooked Star, 202 Ossington Ave. No cover. facebook.com/crookedstarto

Thurs, Jan 15

The Danny Show Host Danny Adhim showcases talented Toronto comics and performers every week. 7pm. 120 Diner, 120 Church St. No cover. club120.ca

Ultimate Thursday Beauty and the Bitch, with Daytona Bitch and Katinka Kature, at 9pm; Ultimate, with DJ Craig Dominic, in Tangos and Vocal Rehab karaoke, with Elyse, in the Zone, both at 10pm; Drama Queen, with Ivory Towers and guest, in Tangos at 11:30pm. Crews & Tangos, 508 Church St. crewsandtangos.com

Fri, Jan 16

DFMO DJs John Caffery and Phil V throw down tracks to get the crowd sucking face and more on the dancefloor. Hosted by David Kraft. 10:30pm–3:30am. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. \$5. blackeagletoronto.com

House Music Anthems DJs Josh Karmin and Kevin Bailey spin their favourite house beats in the swanky venue. 11pm. Byzantium, 499 Church St. No cover. byz.ca

Best Men's Ass Contest DJ Mark Falco spins as guys expose their plump behinds for the \$300 in cash prizes. Midnight. Woody's, 467 Church St. No cover. woodystoronto.com

Sat, Jan 17

Cherry Bomb DJs Cozmic Cat and Denise Benson spin dancefloor faves for queer women and their friends.

birthday candles. Now that's talent. 11pm. Byzantium, 499 Church St. No cover. byz.ca

Sun, Jan 18

Woody's Sunday The Hollywood Broadway Show, with Miss Conception, brings out the flash drag performance at 6pm; Old School, hosted by Georgie Girl, brings out the classics at 9pm; Smokin' Hot Divas, hosted by Georgie Girl, brings out the glam at 11pm. DJ Blue Peter on decks. Woody's, 467 Church St. No cover. woodystoronto.com

Mon, Jan 19

Giving It Raw Book Launch Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco reads excerpts from his AIDS memoir, then writers Trystan Cotten and Daniel Allen join him for a literary threeway. 6–9pm. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. No cover. blackeagletoronto.com

Dirty Monday DJ Relentless starts the week off on the right beat. Daytona Bitch and guest perform drag on the main stage and host a game show with prizes. 11pm. Crews & Tangos, 508 Church St. No cover. crewsandtangos.com

Tues, Jan 20

Karaoke with Foofer There are thousands of songs to choose from if you can get the mic off Foofer. 10pm. WAYLA, 996 Queen St E. No cover. facebook.com/waylabarnounge

Varsity Tuesday Sofonda Cox hosts the amateur So You Think You Can Strip? competition, with a \$100 cash prize. 11pm. Remington's, 379 Yonge St. \$5 before 11pm, \$7 after;



Josh Karmin at House Music Anthems — Byzantium, Fri, Jan 16

shows his sexy self. 10pm–3am. Black Eagle, 457 Church St. \$5 before midnight, \$10 after. blackeagletoronto.com

Fly Saturday DJ Sumation and other locals spin house, top 40 and dance faves. 10:30pm. Fly 2.0, 8 Gloucester St. No cover for first 150 before 11:30pm, \$10 before 1am, \$15 after. flyyyz.com

Fit DJs Kris Steeves and Phil V werk it out with house, pop and disco for the sweaty west-end boys. 10:30pm. The Beaver, 1192 Queen St W. \$5. beavertoronto.com

Double Xposure DJ Cajjmere Wray throws down Nicki Minaj and Rihanna beats while blowing out his

no cover with student ID before 11pm, \$2 after. remingtons.com

Wed, Jan 21

Latin Live The best Hispanic talents in the city take the stage. Featuring a special tapas and trago menu. 7pm. 120 Diner, 120 Church St. No cover. club120.ca

College Night DJs Sumation and Cajjmere Wray spin for the favourite Hump Day event back where it all started. Check Facebook page for updates. 10pm. The Marquis of Granby, 418 Church St. facebook.com/collegenightwednesday

Submit your event listing to listings@dailyxtra.com.
Deadline for the Jan 22 issue is Tues, Jan 13.

DEEP DISH

BY ROLYN CHAMBERS

Fly NYE

WED, DEC 31, 11:45PM
FLY NIGHTCLUB

2015. 20-15=5. It's the average age, I think, that most of the people in here were when Fly Nightclub first opened almost 15 years ago. Fresh and frisky. We enter good old Fly on this frightfully cold winter evening at 11:45pm, and the club is just filling up. As we whisk past the lengthy line to catch the end of DJ **Sumation's** opening set, I wish everyone outside a happy New Year, knowing that some of these latecomers won't make it inside before the clock strikes midnight. A lineup is the worst place to be. The other worst place to be as the year begins is outside on the sidewalk having a cigarette. Yes, even though Fly has a spacious patio where everyone has always been allowed to smoke, new bylaws now prevent partygoers from doing so. Even though smoking is the only reason anyone would need to go out to a patio in the middle of a wintery night, the enclosed space in front of the club is blocked off, forcing people onto the sidewalk like displaced homeless huffers. Inside, however, the night is about to be set on fire as **Sofonda** — surrounded by four backup dancers — leads the riotous crowd on a 10-second countdown that culminates with white balloons bursting onto the dancefloor before her seven-minute show-stopping performance. But stealing the countdown spotlight are dancers **Logan and Ryan**, who break rank to cross the stage and exchange a midnight kiss in front of the approving crowd. I almost forgot that this is a tradition. Another tradition is introducing audiences to new talent. Tonight it's American pop singer **Skye Stevens**. Singing his catchy "Pass the Keyz" in a light-up leather jacket, he keeps the energy up post-Sofonda. The night now belongs to headliner DJ **Mark Falco**. The year, however, belongs to us.

1▶ **Rolyn & Alex** 2▶ **Ariel & Tom**

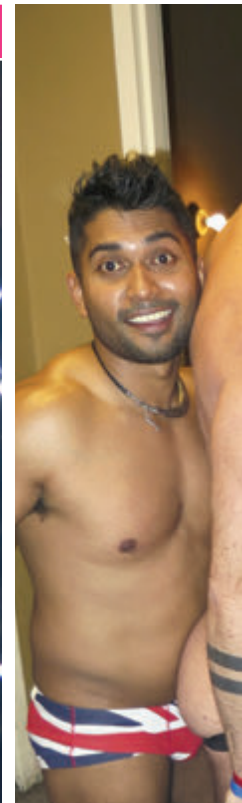
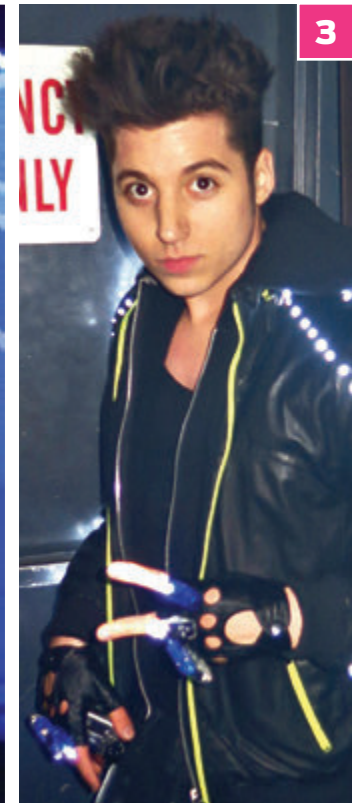
3▶ **Skye Stevens and his light-up jacket** 4▶ **Logan & Ryan**
5▶ **Star & Jeffrey**

Pitbull: Whiteout

THURS, JAN 1, 12:45AM
THE PHOENIX

2015. 20+15=35. It's the average age, I think, of most of the men at Pitbull's NYE Whiteout party. Mature and manly. The countdown has long since passed and the new year has begun as we make our way into the sea of white-clothed — and partially clothed — men on the dancefloor of the Phoenix. Promoter **Francis Gaudreault** gushes about his team of go-go guys; they're wearing matching, sparkly silver Speedos, and they're shooting wads of confetti into the crowd with their massive cannons. Some stop to reload while two guys lie down on the stage to receive intimate midnight kisses from sweaty admirers on the dancefloor below. As we cruise to the beats of DJs **John Caffery** and **Shane Stiel** and pass by beard after beard after beard, I wonder if the hot, hairy, mountain man look will pass this year? I predict that handlebar mustaches trimmed to precision and waxed with Astroglide will be the next big gay-daddy look. It'll be more than a conversation starter; you'll actually be able to lube up your partner while licking his cornhole. Practical. And speaking of cornholes, a few guys are wearing nothing but butt-exposing, hole-highlighting jockstraps. I'm not sure how I feel about this. We've all been on the dancefloor when someone lets one rip. A little bit of fabric between you, us and your potential fart is, to me, a polite courtesy. Unless you're a go-go guy on a podium several feet above my nostrils. Then I'm all for it. All eyes are on them. This year, however, all eyes are on you.

6▶ **Munir, Mitch, Ricky & Elijah**
7▶ **Connor & Sterling** 8▶ **Brad the angel** 9▶ **Ryan & Christien**
10▶ **Anthony** 11▶ **Rob & Rob**



Deep Dish appears in every other issue of Xtra. For this week's Xposed column, by Anna Pournikova, go to dailyxtra.com.



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11



9

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Sin City's soft side

Skip the casinos and indulge in a luxurious weekend of pampering in Vegas

BRANDON MATHESON

Infamous for its reputation as a gambling, boozing and “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” party mecca, Sin City has been showing a softer side of late that each year gains in popularity with gay and lesbian travellers: that of upscale, luxury getaway.

Nestled among the more raucous entertainment palaces are enclaves of serenity and indulgence for mind and body. A hot-massage stone’s throw off Las Vegas Boulevard — aka The Strip — I checked into the eco-friendly Vdara Hotel and Spa, part of the Aria Resort and Casino. Nestled beside the Cosmopolitan Las Vegas and Bellagio, the Forbes four-star-award hotel is a smoke-free, no-casino oasis. The vibe and décor are

meticulous, contemporary elegance.

My spacious suite offered a comfortable living area separated from the bedroom by a console housing back-to-back flat-screen TVs. A spacious marble bathroom had both freestanding walk-in shower and Roman tub for two. With a kitchenette and quaint dining area for two, the accommodation reads more designer apartment than hotel room.

Vdara is attracting enough LGBT visitors to register on the company’s radar, according to David Gonzalez, public relations manager for MGM Resorts International, which operates Vdara. Of course, it’s difficult to track who’s gay, but some customers self-identify and the number of same-sex pairs requesting one bed has increased, according to Gonzalez.

Perfect pampering

Is there any better way to adjust to a new time zone than with a luxurious spa treatment? Entering Espa at Vdara at 8:30am, I perused a menu of signature treatments that included specialties for both guys and girls. I opted for an 80-minute personalized treatment: traditional Swedish massage, aromatic oils, hot stone massage and full-body salt scrub. Final destination: Heaven. On. Earth.

Rejuvenation continued in the men’s wet spa area, with tea with lavender-infused honey, servings of nuts and fruit, lots of water and invigorating rounds between the steam room, whirlpool and dry sauna.

If your first-day goal is to relax and unwind, start with the spa and then spend the afternoon with a good book and great cocktails at Vdara’s spacious pool and lounge-chair area.

Vdara is among a small group of hotels that have eschewed the “party pool” for a more serene setting. It’s social, but relaxation and sun worship trump the *Weekend at Bernie’s* vibe found at some hotels. The pool deck affords views of surrounding modern glass architecture set against a clear blue desert sky, or you can opt for more private retreats or spa cabanas with semi-private plunge pools.

Alternately, check out The Shops at Crystals, the largest collection of luxury brands in Las Vegas, featuring a shopping list of world-class designer boutiques: Tom Ford, Jimmy Choo, Tiffany’s, Hermès, Paul Smith,



Louis Vuitton and Versace. Crystals is a comfortable walk, or the Bellagio-CityCenter-Monte Carlo tram, which stops at Vdara, will whisk you there in just minutes.

A treatment at Espa includes same-day reentry privileges to the wet area, perfect for a refreshing hot tub or sauna after an afternoon poolside or shopping.

Start your evening at Aria, with cocktails at Sage, specializing in rare beers and spirits. Craig Schoettler, Aria’s first “property mixologist,” set out to break the boundaries of modern mixology and crafted a menu of sublime cocktails infused with puréed fruit, homemade bitters and boutique liquors. I fell in love with An Elusive Spring (Buffalo Trace Aria Select bourbon, blackberry syrup, lemon juice, mint bouquet).

For dinner, head upstairs to Jean Georges Steakhouse, a world-class steak and seafood eatery with a menu of eye-widening delicacies. Jump into the starters with Wagyu beef carpaccio with black-truffle fritters and lime salt or

caramelized foie gras with black-olive seasoning, lychee and brioche. From the wood-burning grill, mains include certified Kobe beef from Japan, an Australian six-ounce Wagyu filet mignon and a challenging 36-ounce porterhouse; be sure to sample the accompanying house-made flavoured salts, mustards and steak sauces. Jean Georges is renowned for its Australian tomahawk chop — a thick, marbled steak roughly the size of an adult’s face with a foot-long protruding bone handle, it’s easily shared. Broiled bone marrow with parsley-lemon gremolata and black-truffle mac and cheese are wonderful side additions. Surf the turf by adding a North Australian lobster tail; colder Aussie waters produce a flavour similar to Maine or Atlantic Canada lobster.

As the midnight hour approaches, make your way to the gay nightclubs. Liaison at Bally’s is the first gay nightclub housed inside a casino on The Strip. DJs in two separate rooms spin an eclectic mix of hip hop, rap and top 40. Liaison



Steak and sides at Jean Georges Steakhouse.

BIONDO PRODUCTIONS



has booth-style seating, multiple bars and a stage with surprise live performances. Not far off The Strip is Share, with a stylish modern nightclub on the first floor and a luxurious and private ultralounge/bar vibe on the second floor. On Friday nights, a large bizarre clown head signals it's time for Stripper Circus, a sexy show of gyrating go-go dancers that leave little to the imagination.

Nature & glamour

After sleeping in late, latte and rental car keys in hand, venture just outside the city limits to experience the serenity and calm of the desert (minimalists will love it). The majestic Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area is 29 kilometres from The Strip, an easy 25-minute drive. En route you'll get a feel for life in Las Vegas's neighbourhoods (where liquor stores, drug stores and shopping are less expensive than The Strip). Once at the park, a 32-kilometre scenic loop showcases the rugged

beauty of Nevada's desert terrain and geological formations. At designated stopping points, you'll find nature lovers and city slickers scampering along easy walking trails, exploring endless gullies and crevices or hiking more strenuous trails to vantage points with spectacular sightlines. Near the park entrance is a discovery centre that provides history and insight and a gift shop. At \$7 per carload (good all day for reentry), the second most popular tourist site in the Las Vegas area is a bargain.

After a few hours communing with nature, plan a swanky evening of refined dining and breathtaking entertainment at the Wynn and Encore, spectacles in design and opulence. Combined, they hold more Forbes five-star awards than any other casino resort in the world, and they even boast an "LGBT concierge" to provide guests specialized information.

Reserve a 7pm table at Andrea's at Encore, the glamorous Asian-inspired restaurant hotelier Steve Wynn named for his wife — and purchase tickets



SCOTT FRANCES



AL POWERS

Above left, Temptation Sundays at the Luxor's fantastic pool. Top, the tranquil whirlpool area at Espa at Vdara. Above, high-end shopping at Crystals.

to the 9:30pm show of *Le Rêve* (The Dream).

Chef Joseph ELEVADO's modern Asian cuisine complements Andrea's hip, high-energy dining experience that is integrated with the Surrender nightclub. Perfect for sharing are table plates of crispy pork *korokke*, Wagyu beef tartare and seared foie gras *bao*, or choose from five sashimi dishes. There are no wrong choices on the list of mouthwatering mains: Saikyo Miso black cod, five-spice garlic lobster tempura, spicy adobo shrimp and Jidori chicken breast all delight.

Wynn's stunningly beautiful water-based *Le Rêve* blends mystery and romance with gravity-defying acrobatics. Theatre-in-the-round creates an intimate experience where *The Dreamer* pulls audiences into the world of the show, especially if you opt for less expensive front-row seating. Three times a guest and I have braved the "splash zone" seating and left dry.

If a jaunt to the desert isn't in the cards, daytime attractions from fun to fascinating abound. Head north to old Vegas, where the Neon Museum and Container Park are must-visits; on the strip, The Linq Promenade and High Roller observation wheel make for great fun in the sun. Quirky but interesting is the Atomic Testing Museum to glimpse the impact atomic-age mushroom clouds had on Vegas — and the camp of the Miss Atomic Bomb beauty pageant.

continued next page ►

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Saturday excess

Commit to a Saturday night out on the town Vegas-style: experience cocktails, dining and entertainment at the upscale Cosmopolitan Las Vegas. To prep, make three reservations: tickets to the headliner at CLV's Chelsea theatre; pre-show dinner reservations at Rose Rabbit Lie; and a seat at RRL's free midnight show Breakfast at Piffany's.

Reinventing the social club, Rose Rabbit Lie blurs the lines between restaurant, bar, cabaret and high-energy dance club. The various club rooms (some hidden and worth searching out) have a seductive cocktail-culture vibe that shifts from relaxed to raucous; throughout, casual elegance is enforced by a reasonable dress code (consult RRL's website before you get there).

Start the evening at Rose Rabbit Lie, allowing time for pre-dinner cocktails in the intimate, manor-like Library, then migrate — cocktail in hand — to your table in the upbeat dining room, with its boisterous live entertainment. For a starter, try the snow-pea salad, caviar flatbread or crispy oysters Rockefeller. The Berkshire pork belly, rabbit fricassee and slow-roasted octopus are all perfect plates for sharing. For mains, duck-confit pasta or short-rib Stroganoff are highlights among an array of tantalizing offerings.

With show tickets in hand, head upstairs to The Chelsea theatre, a 40,000-square-foot black-box theatre with unobstructed views and sharp acoustics. We caught Chelsea Handler's Uganda Be Kidding Me tour; upcoming shows include Billy Idol (Feb 21) and Amy Schumer (April 24).

After The Chelsea, return to the Library at Rose Rabbit Lie for another round of cocktails and an intimate midnight show with one of Las Vegas's most quirky performers. Clad in a kitschy dragon onesie, Piff the Magic Dragon ("Maybe you've heard of my brother, Puff?") is infamous for stumping Penn and Teller with his magic on the British TV show *Fool Us*. Piff performs with Mr Piffles, the "world's first magic performing chihuahua" — and, if you think magic is for dorks, Piff opened for Mumford & Sons on their 17-date UK tour.

Diva Sunday

Brunch fans flock to Simon at The Palms to enjoy chef Kerry Simon's signature approach to American comfort food. The vast offerings include a buffet and made-to-order fare: French toast, omelets, sushi rolls, salads and carving stations. Simon's must-try dish is meatloaf, made from a secret family recipe, served with mashed potatoes and succotash. A restaurant staple is the whimsical "junk food platter": Hostess cupcakes, Sno Balls, cookies, Rice Krispies squares,



RYAN FORBES/AVABLU



KABIK/RETNA DIGITAL

Above, Yusho's bright modern vibe. Left, a cabaret performance at Rose Rabbit Lie. Below, Rose Rabbit Lie's duck confit. Bottom, signature French toast at Simon.



PATRICK TREGENZA



Froot Loops treats, brownies and cotton candy, and more. Consider enjoying Chef's food poolside: a private cabana at The Palms' chic, Hollywood-vibe pool comes with a \$150 minimum food and beverage purchase, so if you start with brunch, you'll be well on your way.

If you're in the mood for a pool-party vibe, in season (Sundays, May through September, 1-7pm) check out Temptation Sundays at the Luxor hotel, Las Vegas's longest-running gay pool party. Hosted by JSon of Naked Boy News, Temptation is a sexy social scene around an expansive pool area. With a vibe more modern nightclub than "boom boom" circuit party, it's easy to chat with new friends to a soundtrack of high-energy music by resident DJ Matt Lucio and special guest DJs. The crowd is a good mix of locals (\$10 admission) and tourists (\$20 admission),

with occasional sightings of headliners from The Strip. Full-day rentals of elite deluxe cabanas complete with LCD TVs and refrigerators start at \$300. Lounge in luxury in plush daybeds starting at \$150. Bottle service starts at \$100.

After a day at the pool, book a table at Yusho, the Japanese-inspired grill and noodle house at the Monte Carlo. With décor informed by vintage industrial spaces, anime and Japanese ramen shacks, the feeling is airy, bright and casual. Inspired by his travels throughout Japan, Singapore and mainland China, renowned Chicago chef Matthias Merages crafted his interpretation of traditional Japanese street food in a menu broken into five categories: pickles and relish, noodles, grilled/fried, steam buns and sweets. Meats and veggies are grilled over an open fire; order the duck breast with shiitake marmalade and Xinjiang lamb with cucumber and cumin. Traditional steam buns arrive open-face; crispy cod and pork shoulder deserve inclusion in your choices for the three-bun sampler. Complement your selections with a side of Yusho's house pickles or assorted kimchi, and don't shy away from the tasty rooster-ball ramen soup — it requires less commitment than the name implies. Japanese beer and a large sake selection complete the Yusho experience. Ask your waiter for advice on customized pairings of sake with each dish.

To complete the weekend, head to the Colosseum at Caesars Palace for a nighttime concert. For gay and lesbian fans, Caesars has in recent years firmly entrenched itself as the Vegas home of the one-name diva-queen residencies: Bette, Cher, Celine, Shania — and Elton. Late January through March, John will perform five decades of hits in his Million Dollar Piano show. Rod Stewart has dates scattered throughout January and February. For country fans, Reba McEntire joins Brooks and Dunn for summer 2015 dates.

For the perfect final night in Vegas, buy a ticket for Celine Dion's concert (she's on hiatus but will return) at the Colosseum. The show uses modern high-tech effects not expected alongside a large orchestra — from Celine performing inside a massive circular rainstorm to a mesmerizing optical effect in which she performs a duet with herself in holographic form. Celine's sophisticated show, the elegant orchestra and the luxury of the Caesars showroom evokes vintage Vegas: the era of atomic cocktails, dapper suits and smart evening dresses.

Las Vegas remains the perfect destination for a wild weekend of boozing and gambling, but when you deserve a long weekend of luxury and pampering, you can #DoVegasDifferently. ■

For the most up-to-date travel information on gay Las Vegas, see our city, listings, events and activities guides at dailyxtratravel.com.

Gay Las Vegas

Headliners on The Strip have long dished out camp culture and a queer sensibility

BRANDON MATHESON

A gay sensibility rests comfortably in plain sight behind the monstrosity of glitz and glam that is Las Vegas. Queerness is lost completely on many (most?) tourists doing The Strip. Others are confused about whether they're witnessing gay "that way" — or just the bevy of theatrical oddballs they'd expect to find in Sin City.

For decades, the blue-rinse set thought Liberace was just theatrical. They lapped up his frequent proclamations of heterosexuality, devoutly watching a pianist dripping in diamonds and pink feathers. "And doesn't his handsome chauffeur, Scott, look like a wholesome Midwestern boy?"

Wearing red, white and blue sequined hot pants and jacket patterned after the Stars and Stripes along with white majorette boots, Liberace marched past the double entendre of "pianist" and an attempt by gossip rag *Confidential* to out him in 1957 to become, during the height of his fame, the highest-paid entertainer in the world.

Liberace defined "absolutely fabulous." A curious oddity of prissy gayness, he laughed all the way to the bank on ticket sales to old Republican women and their begrudging husbands. Long before the sadness of his life story leaked into the tabloids and was dramatized in the film *Behind the Candelabra*, Liberace was the original Vegas gay diva. He died of AIDS in 1987 but denied his gayness to the grave.

While the Liberace Museum closed in 2010, many of his costumes are on display at The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas. A foundation formed in 2013 to resurrect the museum but within a year announced that the effort had failed.

In conversation at Toronto's Massey Hall a few years back, an audience member asked Penn Jillette how he and his silent partner, Teller, who have performed in Vegas since 1993, rose to become Sin City's leading magic act. "After a tiger bit the head off a gay guy," Jillette quipped.

He was referring to a tragic incident in 2003 when, during a Siegfried &



CAROL M. HIGHSMITH

Clockwise from above: Roy Horn (left) and Siegfried Fischbacher with their white lion; Liberace — the original Las Vegas diva; Frank Marino as Joan Rivers.

Roy show, Roy Horn stumbled mid-performance and was dragged offstage by a white tiger named Montecore, which clutched Roy in his jaws like a kitten. The cat's powerful grasp punctured Roy's neck. He suffered major blood loss and the ravages of a major stroke.

Don't mistake Penn's comment for homophobia; it's comedy closer to catty and cutting drag humour, though Penn is the avowed heterosexual in Penn & Teller. Both rushed to hospital after their show to join other entertainers gathered to support Siegfried Fischbacher as he awaited Roy's prognosis.

There is a queer sensibility to Penn & Teller's stage show, now in its 13th year at the Rio. It's cleverly laden with social commentary (they're both libertarians, atheists and skeptics), wrapped in mesmerizing artistry and Penn's witty narration. They skewer government interference in our lives, touching on issues from gun control and religion to the theatrics of airport security in a post-9/11 world. Much glides by the first-time tourist; after seeing them perform eight times, I find them clever and entertaining.

The Siegfried & Roy show at the Mirage closed immediately after the accident. The performing and life partners didn't officially retire from show

business until 2010 and remain firmly entrenched as magic and entertainment royalty in Vegas history. But no magician can lay claim to being the gayest show in Sin City.

It might surprise some to learn that the longest-running Vegas headliner is a drag queen. In 2015, Frank Marino will celebrate his 30th year performing on The Strip — and as "the Queen of Vegas" (his social media moniker). His current show, *Divas*, is a high-end Vegas showroom production at The Linq.

On two occasions while attending Marino's show, we've shared a classic showroom banquet with elderly couples in their 60s and 70s who were huge fans of Marino; we shared stories of his early days, about seeing him back in the mid-1990s at the Riviera. These weren't fans in denial like Liberace's — Marino is gay, gay, gay, and his legions of small-town fans — young, old, straight or gay — love him.

Situated in front of Caesars Palace in a large circus tent is Absinthe, the critically acclaimed "acro-cabaret" show by Spiegelworld. You'll endure bum-numbing folding wooden chairs, jammed cheek-by-jowl with your neighbour, but every minute is worth it.

Absinthe, one imagines, is akin to a Weimar-era German cabaret morphed



FRANKMARINO.COM

with world-class circus arts. But some of the show's oddball characters were likely delinquents at circus school — out back in an alley smoking, drinking and trying to one-up each other in cursing.

The sexual language and banter is for neither the prudish nor the faint of heart. Absinthe's greasy emcee delivers vulgarities and offensive quips that would make insult comic Lisa Lampanelli blush.

Some straight girls are crazy for the gay guys. Attending a late-night performance of the Chippendales is an energetic and interesting experience. Six gay men clustered at cocktail tables in row two stood out in a sea of raucous women (many clad in bridal tiaras or sashes) whose frantic energy and deafening screams outpace anything seen in a gay or straight men's strip club.

To thunderous applause, the buffed male beauties danced (far better than I was expecting) routine after rou-

tine, easily ripping and tossing their way through 100 skimpy white tanks. Curiously, the star who provoked the largest response from the women in the crowd was openly gay Jaymes Vaughan, of *Amazing Race* fame. And surprisingly, whether from the stage or in aisles interacting with the audience, many Chippendales acknowledged their gay fans with friendly winks and nods. Any dancer who arrived with anti-gay machismo, apparently, had checked it at the stage door.

I was in Las Vegas in August 2014 the day Joan Rivers died. I immediately bought tickets to Frank Marino's show that night, anticipating a sweet tribute. Marino is famous for his portrayal of Rivers, who was a close friend, and performs a "Can we talk?" segment each show in character. It was clearly a difficult night for him, but he was brilliant.

At one point between numbers, Marino pokes fun at Elton John's gayness, claiming the extravagant gown he is wearing was a hand-me-down from John. In another showroom, illusionist Jan Rouven tells stories of his friendship with Siegfried & Roy and also pokes fun at John's gayness. The German-born magician pulls comedy from his "English as a second language," referring to John as "her" and feigning innocence at the audience response. There's no note of cruelty or belittlement — Marino's and Rouven's banter is gay camp humour at its finest — and a kinship emerges that makes gay audience members feel welcome.

A queer sensibility abounds in Las Vegas shows. Perhaps many entertainers, like gay people, convey the experience of being outsiders in a "normal" world. Though Vegas is far from normal. ■

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XTRA HOT

DRASKO
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NAME: BARRETT MORRISON
AGE: 36 SIGN: LEO

Barrett is an actor who loves to challenge himself continually. "Great writing, great stories, honesty and working with amazing people inspires me," he says. "When you're holding the audience in the palm of your hand and you give them chills, that's one of the best parts of being an actor."

Barrett also gets satisfaction from his other job as a personal trainer, saying he loves "helping people and watching their confidence change as they become stronger and fitter. When a client gets that first compliment after they've started working with me, that makes me happy, too." He likes to hang out at Hanlan's Point in the summer, Allan Gardens in the winter and Woody's any time of year. As for dating, "I like to try something new that neither person has done, which can be really fun or really silly. Breaks the ice."

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