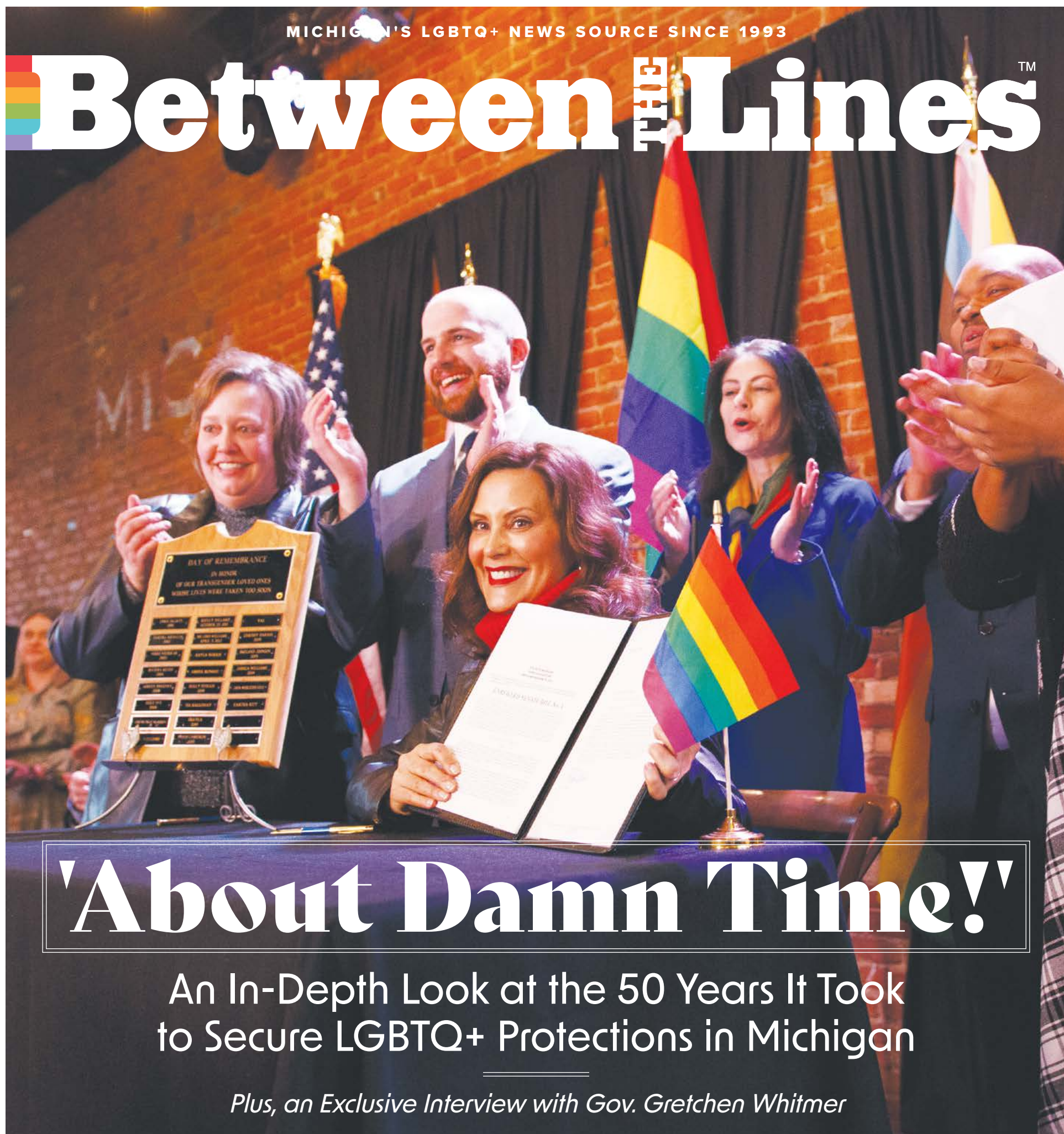


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(Clockwise, left to right) Erin Knott, Jeremy Moss, Dana Nessel, Jason Hoskins and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. Photo: Whitmer's office

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The stresses of life can take a toll on well-being and happiness, but self-care in the form of entertainment, creation and juicy conversation with interesting people can make all the difference. Shake up your routine by solving a murder mystery over an Italian meal, grab tickets for the Elton John Broadway production “Rocket Man,” work through trauma while creating art or dive into literary pursuits like a banned book club or a virtual discussion with an up-and-coming local author who is making a big splash.



Solve a Murder Mystery Over Dinner

A 1950s prom has gone drastically wrong (as in, there's a dead body on the dance floor), and it's up to you to solve the murder — in between dinner courses at Andiamo in Warren. The three-course Italian meal includes short rib braised in a Barolo sauce and a rolled chicken dish featuring sundried tomato and spinach. You'll also enjoy a glass of wine and raspberry cheesecake for dessert. The restaurant encourages guests to wear their best “sock hop” formal wear, including puffy-sleeved prom gowns and black and white suits.

Thursday, March 30, 6:30 p.m., Andiamo Warren, 7096 E. 14 Mile Road, Warren. Ticket link at andiamoitalia.com/locations/warren.



Create Cathartic Art

Affirmations invites trauma survivors to participate in a unique art project. Constructive Destruction is a series of workshops and an art gallery installation featuring the work of self-identified survivors. The project explores the concept of directing the negative emotions associated with trauma at a canvas, says organizer Sara Pezzella. “I’m excited to gather with other survivors to express ourselves and share art with the world. This project isn’t just for trained artists, and I hope that this is an opportunity for people to access art in a new way,” she adds. The exhibit will be anonymous and workshop participants are not required to share details about their trauma.

April 1, 15, 22 and 29, 12-3 p.m. at Affirmations, 290 West 9 Mile Rd., Ferndale. Pre-register at bit.ly/trauma_art.



Marvel at the Talents of Elton John’s Body Double

If you missed Elton John’s farewell tour last year (or if you just can’t get enough of the bespeckled international treasure), be sure to grab tickets for “The Rocket Man Show,” set to play the Fisher Theatre in Detroit on April 13. The Broadway in Detroit show features Scottish actor Rus Anderson, who actually worked as John’s body double, playing a 1973 version of the superstar. The show recreates a ’70s concert, down to John’s actual costumes (including his iconic glasses and boots from that era) and live musical performances.

April 13, 7:30 p.m., Fisher Theatre, 3011 West Grand Blvd., Detroit. Ticket link at rocketmanshow.com/dates.



Join a Banned Book Club

Certain politicians seem to have a kink for cosplaying 1940s-era pearl clutchers, pushing for bans on “subversive” and “confusing” content in school libraries, classrooms and, in some locations, even pressuring public libraries to pull books off the shelf that are just too much for the general public. All too often, queer books are in their crosshairs. “Stand with Trans decided to launch this book club in an effort to not only come together, expand community, and connect — but also to fight back against the banning of accessible information from and to trans folks,” says Stand with Trans program manager Danica. The Discord discussions will focus on a different book each month — to start things off, the group will chat about the frequently-banned book, “Gender Queer: A Memoir” by Maia Kobabe.

March 31, 7-8 p.m. and then the last Friday of every month on Discord. Sign up link at standwithtrans.org/event/banned-books-book-club.



Meet the Author of a Haunting Queer Horror Novel

Queer author Gerardo Sámano Córdova is having a moment. The University of Michigan grad’s debut horror novel, “Monstrilio,” out now, is the talk of the literary community lately, with reviewers doling out descriptors like “haunting and often bleakly humorous.” The story features a Frankenstein-esque vibe related to a grieving mother and her recently deceased 11-year-old son. One reviewer wrote that the book “combines queer themes touching on identity, kink and consent with Latin American mysticism for an unusually visceral coming-of-age tale.” Read the book now (available at an independent bookstore near you) and then meet the author when Ann Arbor bookstore Literati hosts Sámano Córdova April 3 for a virtual discussion.

April 3, 7 p.m., online. Visit bit.ly/4OuDfql for more information. Pre-registration is not required.

Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.

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- April 9, Easter Sunday:**
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Gov. Whitmer Answers All of Our Questions

Including How She Felt Having Her Gay Daughter With Her as She Signed the Bill for LGBTQ+ Protections in Michigan



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.
Photo: Whitmer's office

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Following the signing of Senate Bill 4, which amended the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections for the LGBTQ+ community, Between The Lines was granted a one-on-one interview with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

But even before she put her powerful pen to the ELCRA bill on March 16, queer Michiganders knew they had a friend in Whitmer. One of her first actions when she assumed office in 2019 was to issue an executive directive aimed at strengthening nondiscrimination protections, including those relating to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression in state employment and services. That year, she also became the first Michigan governor to fly the Pride flag on a

government building. Furthermore, in 2021, Whitmer and Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist signed a proclamation declaring June as Pride Month for the first time in Michigan history. Also in 2021, Whitmer authorized an executive directive prohibiting the use of Michigan Department of Health and Human Services funds for the practice of conversion therapy on minors.

one where every person has full civil rights protections. And as an ally, this is something we've been fighting for my whole career. As the mom of a gay woman, it took on an even more impactful, powerful emotion as well. I had tears in my eyes as I thought about what this means for people all across our state and future residents of the state.

Michigan. And it's really important for people to see, getting the state on the right side of this issue is gonna be good for business as well as being the right thing to do. And I think other states are gonna want to emulate what we are doing here.

As we celebrate the ELCRA amendment to protect LGBTQ+ Michiganders, at the same time

The day after she signed the ELCRA amendment, the steadfast ally candidly discussed subjects ranging from how she felt at the ceremony to the reasons behind her unwavering commitment to Michigan's trans community. We also chatted about her Twitter account, where an array of pop-culture-oriented memes and GIFs live, including one from March 16, which featured actress Kristen Bell in a rainbow t-shirt and the words "Come on in," with Whitmer writing, "Michigan has a place for you" as she addressed those in states that aren't welcoming to LGBTQ+ people.

Could you describe how it felt signing this landmark legislation with original ELCRA co-sponsor Mel Larsen right beside you?

I was just so proud and pleased to be able to bring Michigan into the right side of history to make Michigan a place that is truly

What was it like having your daughter Sherry right there with you?

It was spectacular. I asked her if she wanted to come from school. She goes to school in Ann Arbor, and she was so excited. And so it meant a lot to be there with incredible leaders from Mel Larsen to [State Sen.] Jeremy Moss to [State Reps] Jason Hoskins and Emily Dievendorf to having my own child who is an outspoken, thoughtful leader in her own right and a future leader in the state, I hope. [Laughs.]

Let's look at Michigan in comparison to states like Florida or Tennessee. Do you think our state could become a national leader in LGBTQ+ rights?

I do. I think that states that are living these values are going to be setting themselves up for long-term economic success. I think we're creating paths to prosperity for people in all of this historic investment that we're growing into

we still have threats to our local community, like the recent protest at a Drag Queen Story Time and the efforts to ban library books with LGBTQ+ content. Could you weigh in on those issues?

Absolutely. The sad thing is that with every progress, there is often a backlash. It's unacceptable, especially when it's violence or it is hurtful and hateful rhetoric. And so we will not let anyone scare us from doing what we know the right thing to do is. But to community members who have felt that or feel unseen or attacked, it's important for them to know that they are loved exactly as they are, and I'll respect them and protect them, for one, and I will use my platform and my signing pen to make sure that we do more to support members of the LGBTQ+ community.

In 2014, you were in the state legislature and amending ELCRA looked like it might be a possibility, but some were proposing leaving out the transgender community. You've always been a steadfast ally in particular to the trans community. Could you talk about your commitment to trans Michiganders?

Absolutely. When I was in the state Senate, we thought we really had the opportunity and the votes to include the whole LGBTQ+ community in the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. And the Senate Majority Leader [Randy Richardville] at the time came up to me, and I was the minority leader then, and he said, "Listen, we don't have the votes for the whole thing, but if we drop the trans community..." He didn't use that language — he was not as conversant in these issues as I — but essentially he said, "If we drop the trans community, we can get this done." And I said, "You know, I don't think that's gonna fly. I'm not a member of the community. I'm not the spokesperson for the community, but I'm gonna talk to the folks that I'm working with, and I'll get back to you."

And of course, they were like, "Absolutely not, this is the most vulnerable part of our community. We stand together, we support one another, and we're gonna amend this act together, whether it's now or sometime in the future." And I think that was a powerful moment in terms of keeping me really focused on why it's

“

We will not let anyone scare us from doing what we know the right thing to do is. But to community members who have felt that or feel unseen or attacked, it's important for them to know that they are loved exactly as they are, and I'll respect them and protect them, for one, and I will use my platform and my signing pen to make sure that we do more to support members of the LGBTQ+ community.

See Whitmer Q&A, page 11

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LGBTQ+ Civil Rights Expansion in Michigan Was 50 Years in the Making

"I'm feeling pretty equal today." – Buzz Thomas, chair of Equality Michigan

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Pop open the Champagne and sparkling juice. The day so many in the LGBTQ+ community tirelessly battled for has arrived. Gov. Whitmer has made good on her promise to sign the legislation to expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act

to include LGBTQ+ people. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who came before to rally, lobby, vote and shout from the rooftops that it doesn't matter who you are or whom you love, we are all worthy of protection under state law. It's a great day to be a queer Michigander. Let's celebrate — then get back to work.

"I've been waiting my whole adult life for this," Tim Retzloff told BTL. The Michigan State University history professor and LGBTQ+ historian took a trip to his storage unit to peruse vintage news clippings to help BTL compile this timeline, which follows a journey toward equality rooted in a few brave first steps taken by

Michigan activists in the 1960s who entrusted the fight to the generations that came after them. The weight of that responsibility is not lost on modern LGBTQ+ leaders and allies, who have worked tirelessly to enshrine LGBTQ+ rights into Michigan law to benefit generations to come.

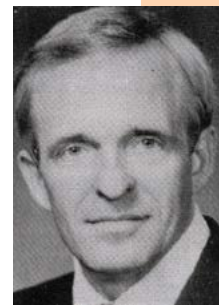
1963: The Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) is created.



1966: State Rep Daisy Elliott (D-Detroit) attempts to pass a law modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. She is told it will fail without a Republican co-sponsor. With voters — including Democrats — leery after the 1968 Detroit riots, legislation would not be introduced for several years.

1976: The Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) is introduced, barring discrimination in Michigan on the basis of "religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight and familial status" in employment, housing, education and public accommodations.

1977: The Michigan Organization for Human Rights (MOHR) is founded.



1983: Closeted gay Republican Jim Dressel of Holland introduces an amendment to protect gay and lesbian people from discrimination in employment and housing, the first such bill. A former president of the Michigan Organization for Human Rights, Dressel dies in 1992 of AIDS-related pneumonia.

According to Retzloff, at one time, an amendment was introduced to explicitly exclude "homosexuals" from protection against discrimination, as a preemptive measure.

1960s to 1970s

The Fight Begins



1964: The federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

June 28, 1969: Following a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a series of LGBTQ+ uprisings launches the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for LGBTQ+ rights in the U.S.

June 1972: Christopher Street Detroit is the first Pride celebration in Michigan, with events in Detroit, Ann Arbor and Greater Lansing.

1977: Named for its primary sponsors, Daisy Elliott (D-Detroit) and Melvin (Mel) Larsen (R-Oxford), ELCRA is signed into law by Gov. William Milliken. Notably, Milliken's daughter, Elaine, was gay.

Larsen was elected in 1973 and served on the House civil rights committee. He was a former Catholic high school principal with a deep commitment to civil rights.

Years later, Larsen recalled, "At the time, most of the legislature was Democrat and white male that had come out of suburban, rural areas while the Black community was mostly urban. The attitude of the legislature toward the civil rights act? They would probably have preferred a root canal." From the beginning, LGBTQ+ activists insisted they be included. It would be almost 50 years before that came to fruition.



1980s to 1990s

The Early Activists

For context, the era of Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981 to 1989) was not a popular time for LGBTQ+ rights. It wouldn't be until 1987 that he addressed the AIDS crisis seriously.

Late '80s: Jan Stevenson moves to Michigan and becomes Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center's first executive director in 1991. In 1993, she and wife Susan Horowitz begin publishing *Between The Lines*.

"I remember going into one of my first [MOHR] meetings when I first came to Michigan [and] the goal was to get Elliott-Larsen amended, and that was in 1988 when I first moved here," Stevenson said. "And every year thereafter, we would sit down as a group and say, 'OK, what are the plans? What are the goals for this year?' And whether it was Jeff Montgomery or any of the many people, many of whom are gone now, I wish they were still here to be able to see it. Every year we'd beat our head against the wall and say, 'How can we get this done?,' and we'd try and come up empty."

With the expansion of ELCRA, Stevenson said, "It's a unique feeling because for most, if not all of my adult life, I've been on the outside of the law, and to actually feel like I have full citizenship with full citizen rights is unique for me. I'm 70 years old, and I've never experienced feeling fully protected under the law."





“Michigan was known as a ‘lost state,’” said Jay Kaplan, ACLU of Michigan staff attorney for the LGBT Project. Kaplan has been with the organization for 22 years. He recalled the tenure of Republican Gov. John Engler, (1991 to 2003) and “a legislature that was hostile towards the idea of LGBTQ rights” in addition to a politicized state supreme

court where several clearly anti-LGBTQ+ justices served.

“Every time those bills were introduced, there would be a press release, a press conference,” Kaplan said. “But you know, it’s pretty much dead on arrival because the Republican leadership was not going to let those bills get a vote.”



2014: Future Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel argues in front of the federal district court on behalf of April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse, who sued the Snyder administration to turn over Michigan’s ban on same-sex marriage. The case was later combined with three others in the Obergefell (pictured here with husband John) v. Hodges Supreme Court case, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2017.



2001: Chris Kolb is elected as Michigan’s first openly LGBTQ+ state legislator. He also introduces bills that would expand ELCRA in 2005 and 2006. Later, he would serve as the state of Michigan’s budget director for two years, following his appointment by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2019. Today he is vice president for government relations at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor.

2004: By popular vote, the Michigan Constitution is amended to prohibit marriage of same-sex couples.

March 25, 2013: The Michigan Department of Civil Rights issues a “Report on LGBT Inclusion Under Michigan Law.” It is adopted by the MCRC.



2014: Republican Gov. Rick Snyder expresses support for adding LGBTQ+ protections to ELCRA and encourages the state Legislature to take up the issue.

2015: Religious Freedom Restoration Act legislation is introduced. If enacted, RFRA would have legalized discrimination if in accordance with one’s religious belief.

Early 2000s A Lost State

Mid-2010s Not Without the Trans Community

Continued on page 18



2001: In 2001, Representatives William McConico, Chris Kolb and Buzz Thomas, pictured above, introduced a package of pro-LGBTQ bills that went nowhere. As McConico, a powerful ally today as District Court Judge, told BTL in 2020, some Democrats told him privately they would not be able to vote for such legislation. Buzz Thomas served in the state House and Senate from 1997 to 2011. He wasn’t out publicly, but fought just as hard for LGBTQ+ causes. “I’m feeling pretty equal today,” said Thomas, who now serves as chair of Equality Michigan. “That period of time personally began my activism in supporting our community and being able to stand up for myself,” he added.

2013: Mark LaChey is elected chair of the Michigan Democratic Party LGBT & Allies Caucus. He tells BTL, “Our goal is electing pro-LGBT candidates statewide. The ultimate goal is to elect pro-LGBT leaders.”



Dec. 2, 2014: Sam Singh (D-East Lansing), pictured here, and State Rep. Frank Foster (R-Petoskey) introduce an amendment to ELCRA to include sexual orientation and gender identity.



Nov. 24, 2014: The MCRC adopts a resolution in support of expanding ELCRA to include sexual orientation and gender identity. “Check your politics at the door on this one and do what is right for the state,” said Foster, whose bill would have added sexual orientation. By that point he had already lost his primary. Foster tells Time he has no regrets.

The Trans Woman Leading Michigan Into a Queerer Future

Emme Zanotti on Her New Position at Equality Michigan

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

A few weeks into her new gig, Emme Zanotti, Equality Michigan's new director of advocacy and civic engagement, says she's still in the "humble and honored" phase, but a few minutes into our call, it's clear she's already off and running. "It's just the honor and privilege of a lifetime to be able to get to do this full time on behalf of the community," she says. "I never envisioned being able to do something like this."

Right now, Zanotti, a queer trans woman, seems to be living a pretty settled life. She's a new homeowner in Royal Oak, where she lives with her rescue dog, Lina, a mixed breed she says is "basically just a wolf that lives in my house." But as is so often the case, the road to get here has been winding. Her new Equality Michigan role comes a decade after she came out and transitioned — 10 truly transformative years that saw her considering the bright lights of New York City and the coastal scenery of California but which ultimately led this Bay City native back home to Michigan.

When it comes to her passion for the Great Lakes State, it's clear there's no lip service involved. Zanotti's roots run deep, and her childhood experiences tell a story familiar to many a Michigander, including being raised by a dad who was a card-carrying United Auto Workers foundry worker.

"So, you're ultimately a Michigan girl, then?" I ask.

"You got it, and I'm increasingly proud of Michigan," she replies, citing the incredible political turnaround the state has witnessed over the past few years ("2016 Michigan is nothing like 2023 Michigan"), and then there's the natural beauty of the Upper Peninsula and the hills of Ann Arbor. "Michigan is everything. The coasts. The lakes. The trees. All of it."

She has much love for the state's urban cores, too, including Detroit, which is no longer a "late-night punching bag," Zanotti notes. "There's been a real shift to valuing



Emme Zanotti. Courtesy photo

the humanity in that city."

She rattles off several other places where she's noticing a groundswell of positive energy — Grand Rapids, Ypsilanti, rural spots above and below the Mackinac Bridge... The Pure Michigan campaign should bottle what's she's selling — Zanotti's enthusiasm for the state is so earnest, it's hard not to immediately start planning a road trip after we hang up.

The activist's pure-hearted love

for her home state is rooted in something deeper than tourism, though — it's the people, and in particular, it's her deep and abiding love for the state's queer community. That's why she's already spent a good portion of her young career volunteering for organizations like HRC Michigan, Stand with Trans and Equality Michigan (before taking on the director of advocacy position) and working in the trenches on political

initiatives like the LGBTQ+ for Whitmer Leadership Council and the Michigan Democratic Party's LGBTQ&A Caucus. She also headed up Oakland County Commissioner Charlie Cavell's successful 2020 campaign. Getting in deep helps her understand the numerous, complex issues facing the community and to develop pragmatic strategies for solving them.

Cavell, who calls Zanotti a "tremendously amazing person

who is thoughtful, understanding and above all, empathetic," says he decided to work with her because he was looking for a partner who was truly seeking to transcend the way transactional politics often works, versus someone looking to simply pad their resume. "She's the type of person whose aura simply emanates kind-hearted leadership and honesty," he adds. "Emme was that person for us in 2020, and she is that person today for all of us in the movement for justice."

These early days of the newly flipped Michigan legislature are critical for furthering Equality Michigan's many social justice-oriented goals. "We have a pro-equality trifecta, as we call it, in Lansing right now, with Governor Whitmer, Dana Nessel as the attorney general and now the legislature. We can pivot from defense and go full-on offense," she says.

Already, the new legislature is making queer history by delivering on Democratic campaign promises to prioritize the recently passed Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) amendment, which will extend statewide discrimination protections to the LGBTQ+ community. Equality Michigan, and Zanotti specifically, played a key role in developing public hearings that centered on real people — a critical aspect of bridging the gap between vulnerable queer community members and the flavor of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric popular among today's GOP leaders and many of the party's supporters.

"So, we found faith leaders, police officers, families who will benefit from the amendment," she says. "People willing to advocate and affirm the LGBTQ community, to be recorded and go on Senate television to share their narrative and defend their passion, and their love, and their empathy, for this community. It's a story we're going to continue to tell in Lansing and beyond. It's a story that a majority of Michiganders

See **Emme Zanotti**, page 26



Gov. Whitmer with her daughter Sherry Whitmer at the ELCRA bill signing. Courtesy photo. Photo: Whitmer's office

◀ **Whitmer Q&A**
Continued from page 6

important to ensure that we're providing these protections for the trans community. And I've had the opportunity to befriend so many trans Michiganders and learn from young people who are going through the transition. And I think that as I look at what a future in Michigan is for people, I'm always gonna fight for those who are most vulnerable. And that's why it is so important that I use my platform to support the trans community and the LGBTQ+ community en masse.

You've always been an ally to the LGBTQ+ community and one reason is that it affects you personally today, but would you say that it's always been in your DNA or could you point to a person or experience that made the difference?

Like so many people, I've got some family members who are LGBTQ, and I think I learned early on from my parents that every person's important. Every person has a birthright to live who they are as they are. I think this is something that was ingrained in me, but certainly as someone who's got relatives who have educated me over the years, it's all informed who I am and how I conduct myself and things that I fight for. So I'm proud to be a longtime ally and even prouder to be a mom.

So what's next? Are you ready to sign a bill to ban conversion therapy?

Well, you know, I signed an executive order across state government two years ago on that subject. And I'm eager to continue working with the legislature to expand rights and protect fundamental rights for the LGBTQ community. And it would include that as well as a lot of other potential subjects that I know Senator Moss is eager to

start pursuing as law.

And what do you think about establishing an LGBTQ+ Commission as one of our state boards and commissions?

Well, you know what, that's a great idea. I wanna make sure that we work closely with the [Michigan] Department of Civil Rights. I know that there are a number of ways that we have empowered LGBTQ voices, whether it is appointments to commissions and agencies, to the bench. We've made a big difference in the last four years, and I expect this next four years, we're gonna take it a lot further. And so I'm excited about that. And if a commission is something that ultimately makes sense, I'm absolutely open and interested in doing that.

And my final question — the editorial director of BTL would like to know who curates the memes you share on Twitter. But I'm more interested in who designs your fabulous jackets. Could you comment on either?

Well, the first one, there's a woman named Julia Pickett, who is a gay woman, whose wedding I performed last year, who does all of my social media on top of a lot of other things in my operation. And then with the jackets, most of them are bought pre-owned — [laughs] I'm trying to be a good steward of the environment.

I'm so glad you made the time for us, I really appreciate that. Anytime you're available to talk to BTL, we want to hear from you. And on the bill signing, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you. And thank you for the work that you're doing, too. It's really important and it was such a big part of how we educated the public and got to this point in Michigan and made history together.

This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.

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Hero Parent Challenges Christian Fascist Book Ban in the Most Epic Way Imaginable



The concerted effort to ban books that offend Christian fascist sensibilities rages on across the United States.

While I suspect the 2023 numbers will be even higher, 2022 was

The Year of Banned Books, according to the American Library Association (ALA), with 2,571 different titles challenged.

“Overwhelmingly, we’re seeing [book] challenges come from organized censorship groups that target local library board meetings to demand removal of a long list of books they share on social media,” Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, told ABC News.

Hey, as the old adage goes: Books, you can’t live with them, you must live without them. Especially if those books are in any way queer.

According to an ALA press release, “Of [the] titles, the vast majority were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color.”

Wait, “and people of color”? Wait, are Christian fascists racist, too? Why, yes. Yes, they are.

As Caldwell-Stone told ABC News, “Their aim is to suppress the voices of those traditionally excluded from our nation’s conversations, such as people in the LGBTQIA+ community or people of color.”

You don’t say. Or rather, “You can’t say.”

The supposed aim of these book challengers is to protect children from what they deem pornographic material in our country’s libraries and schools.

So God bless the parent in Utah who is using the state’s Sensitive Materials in Schools act to challenge a book that they call “the most sex-ridden books around.” The book includes, as the parent details in their written challenge, “Incest, onanism, bestiality, prostitution, genital mutilation,

fellatio, dildos, rape, and even infanticide.”

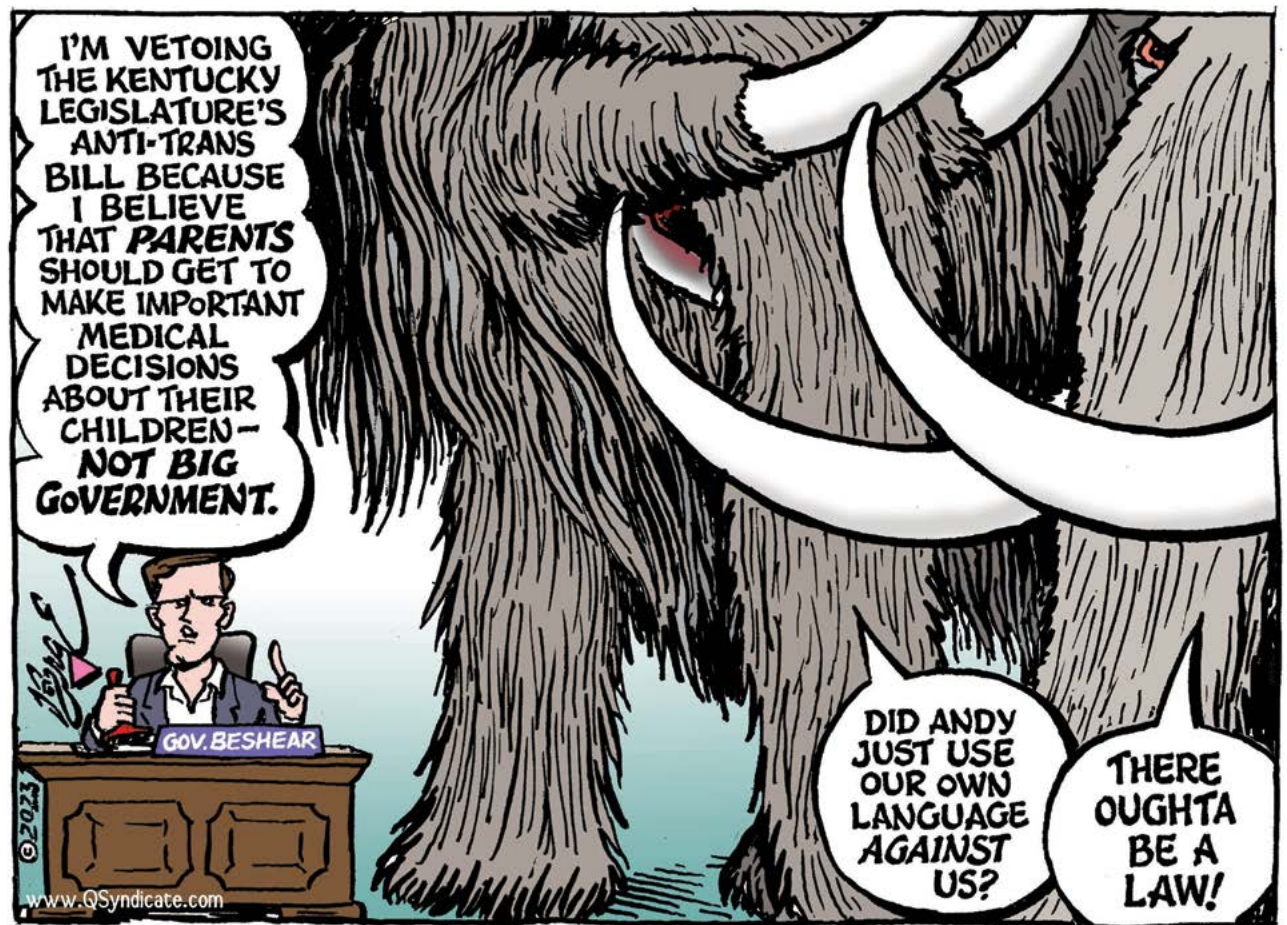
Oh, wow. That definitely sounds like a book inappropriate for children. Kind of shocking that a book like this would be available in any school libraries. Until you realize that the book in question is the Holy Bible.

Oh, and if you, like me, are thinking, “Wait, there are dildos in the Bible?” The answer is yes. I had to Google it (pray for my search history). It’s from Ezekiel 16:17: “You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them.” I don’t know who the “you” or the “I” refers to in this gem, but the same people trying to ban books don’t believe in pronouns, so I guess it’s cool.

The parent’s challenge continues, “You’ll no doubt find that the Bible, under Utah Code Ann. § 76-10-1227, has ‘no serious values for minors’ because it’s pornographic by our new definition. Get this PORN out of our schools! If the books that have been banned so far are any indication for way lesser offenses, this should be a slam dunk.”

I suspect that this is not the kind of challenge the authors of the bill expected to see. But, as the saying goes, “One man’s porn is another man’s Bible.”

“I thank the Utah legislature and Utah Parents United for making this bad faith process so much easier and way more efficient,” the parent continues. “Now we



“

The supposed aim of these book challengers is to protect children from what they deem pornographic material in our country’s libraries and schools.

can all ban books and you don’t even need to read them or be accurate about it. Heck, you don’t even need to see the book! Ceding our children’s education, First Amendment rights, and library access to a white supremacist hate group like Utah Parents United seems like a wonderful idea for a school district literally under investigation for being racist.”

Preach!

Oh, and about the school district being racist. In October of 2021, the Department of Justice settled with the Davis School District, requiring them to address their “racially hostile environment and discriminatory discipline” against Black and Asian students. Yikes!

Christians are, of course, very upset. Not about the racism, but about the Bible being challenged.

Rep. Ken Ivory, R-West Jordan, sponsor

of the Sensitive Materials in Schools Act, says that the challenge to the Bible makes him “very sad.”

“There are any number of studies that directly link sexualization and hypersexualization with sexual exploitation and abuse. Certainly, those are things we don’t want in schools,” Ivory told the Salt Lake Tribune. “For people to minimize that and to make a mockery of it is very sad.”

Ivory, who has no concept of irony, called the challenge to the Bible an antic to “drain school resources.”

There was no response in the story from a school district librarian, probably because they were too busy reviewing challenges to books that acknowledge that LGBTQ+ people and racism are real.

Celebrating a Major LGBTQ+ Michigan Victory in the Face of Ongoing Anti-Queer Attacks



BY JAY KAPLAN

With Gov. Whitmer holding a signing ceremony in Lansing this week, members of Michigan's

LGBTQ+ community were given a major milestone to celebrate while also being emphatically shown that they remain a prime target for those hoping to score political points by fueling bigotry and sowing hate.

The reason for celebration came after an overwhelming majority in the Michigan House voted to amend our state's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) on March 8 to explicitly include LGBTQ+ people. With the Senate already passing the same legislation, Gov. Whitmer quickly signed the bill into law on March 16. This culminates nearly 50 years of effort to explicitly add sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to ELCRA, making Michigan the 22nd state to have civil rights laws that are LGBTQ+ inclusive.

It is a tremendous victory that deserves to be hailed. But, one day after the House vote, an exclamation point was put on the undeniable fact that the work to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ people in Michigan is far from done.

My euphoria over the passing of this historic legislation was quickly

dampened the next day when I saw a posting on social media from the Oakland County Republican Party, which was encouraging people to attend a protest outside

the Sidetrack Bookshop in downtown Royal Oak for hosting a "Drag Queen Story Hour" for children. In the eyes of the Oakland GOP, a drag performer reading a children's story to kids is somehow a massive threat to society.

The protest was scheduled for Saturday afternoon, taking place when story hour was scheduled to occur. Along with providing insight to a right-

wing political agenda that includes the continued demonization of LGBTQ+ people, it also showed how out of step with the mainstream that despicable tactic is, and how it can be overcome.

The ACLU of Michigan, along with many LGBTQ+ and allied social justice organizations, immediately began mobilizing their membership and constituents to show support for both the story hour and the bookstore. Those mobilization efforts paid off in a big way.

While there were about a dozen protesters, hundreds of people showed in support of drag performers, story hours and the bookstore with signs that read "Protect Kids from Guns, Not Drag," "Teach Literacy Not Intolerance" and "Reading Is Fundamental — Bigotry Is Not." The counter-demonstration was a resounding display of support for diversity, inclusion and tolerance.

I think both events reflect the current state of LGBTQ+ equality in Michigan

Right now, we are fortunate to have a governor, attorney general and secretary of state — along with majorities in both houses of the Legislature and on the state Supreme Court — who are supportive of LGBTQ+ rights. This provides an unprecedented opportunity to make great public policy strides for our community in our state.

Yet, at the same time, we cannot ignore the growing number of attacks we are seeing in other state legislatures, where LGBTQ+ youth and transgender adults are being targeted.

In states where Republicans hold control, legislation is being passed that criminalizes the provision of gender-affirming care for transgender youth. They are denying transgender students the ability to participate in school sports as their authentic selves. They are prohibiting the discussion and recognition of LGBTQ+ people in school curriculums. They are making



it more difficult for transgender people to live their authentic lives, such as using public restrooms and obtaining accurate IDs. They are banning drag performers from appearing around minors. (The ACLU tracks this dangerous and destructive legislation, which can be followed by clicking on an interactive map that's been created, including anti-LGBTQ+ bills that have been introduced here in Michigan.)

While such legislation is unlikely to be successful in our state at this moment, we are seeing a resurgence of efforts by right-wing activists in a number of Michigan communities. They are demanding that books in school and public libraries featuring LGBTQ+ characters be removed, that transgender students not be supported by school staff, such as being addressed in accordance with their preferred names and pronouns. School board members are being threatened and harassed for supporting LGBTQ+ students and policies that promote

inclusion.

As just one example of the extreme positions being taken, a prosecuting attorney in Lapeer County is threatening to bring criminal charges against a librarian for her refusal to remove the book "Gender Queer," which has LGBTQ+ themes, from the library. Even in the face of such a threat, the librarian there is bravely standing her ground and refusing to cave in to the demands of would-be censors.

These actions are a backlash to the progress that has been made on LGBTQ+ rights in recent years. The attacks are based on fear, mistruths and misinformation about what it means to be LGBTQ+. Transgender people currently seem to be the primary focus of these attacks, but it is really a political assault on our whole community.

The size of the counter-protest we staged in Royal Oak was incredibly heartening. It also provided a template showing how we fight back against the hate and cynical political opportunism

by forces on the right: We show solidarity, we turn out when called upon to fight back, we speak the truth, and we continue to send the loud, clear, ironclad message that we refuse to let anyone shove us back into a dark and dismal closet.

That day is gone, and we're not going back. Ever.

But the price of freedom, it has been said, is eternal vigilance. To not just survive, but overcome the right-wing attacks aimed at our community, we must continue to remain engaged, especially at the local level.

So, let's celebrate our successes and take advantage of the opportunities we now have at the state level, but also remain vigilant and unbowed when it comes to working to address the serious challenges that still remain.

Jay Kaplan is the Nancy Katz & Margo Dichtelmiller LGBTQ+ Rights Project staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan.

Hopefully, Matteo Lane Doesn't Hate This Interview

The Comedian Will Headline 'Stand Up for Progress' in Lansing



Matteo Lane. Courtesy photo

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

There are many places where you've probably seen Matteo Lane: in Royal Oak last year at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle, on Netflix's queer comic showcase "The Comedy Lineup" and on his something-for-everyone Instagram, where he's been wearing more shirts.

This shift happened during the pandemic. Lane tells me he decided to pull back from thirst-trap pics, at least a bit (a recent tour poster features him slurping on spaghetti sans shirt), and offer more of his comedic thoughts. On Instagram, you'll find him doing just that on everything from a visit to the Museum of Sex in New York to making dishes featuring his Italian heritage. For instance, in one how-to video while he's making penne alla vodka, he

admits not ordering penne in Italy because the risk is too great for the word to be misheard as "pene," which means exactly what you think it does: penis.

Lane will bring his own brand of queer comedy — and presumably, a shirt — to The Venue in Lansing on Friday, April 14 for the "Stand Up for Progress" fundraiser. Progress Michigan, whose mission is to build "a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable Michigan" by promoting progressive ideas and holding public officials and government accountable, is hosting the benefit.

"With more than a million followers on social media and several Netflix credits to his name, Matteo is a rising star in the comedy world who is sure to give us a great show with plenty of laughs," said Lonnie Scott, executive director of Progress Michigan, in a press release.

Here, Lane talks about what to expect at his Stand Up for Progress show, why the pandemic doesn't always make for great comedic material and that time a journalist made him sound like a "depressed Fiona Apple."

How is doing an LGBTQ+ benefit show like this one for Progress Michigan different than a typical Matteo Lane show?

Well, for a performer, things don't change. I have a job to do. My job is to go up and be as funny as possible for the allotted time I'm given, and I hate to say, but that's pretty much it. That's the benefit of working in New York for so long, in so many different types of rooms and shows and bars and basements and houses and clubs and train stations — that you have worked up enough skill to perform in any environment.

So obviously because it's a fundraiser and it's full of queer people, they're not going to be hostile to me. If I was doing a fundraiser for, I don't know, hunting, that might be different. It might be out of place and they'd be like, "Please leave." And I'd be like, "You're right." But yeah, I mean, I'm happy to do anything I can to help out, and all I can really offer is my sense of humor, so hopefully it brings some joy to people.

Have you entered a room where it did feel hostile, first of all?

I'm a homosexual. Yes. Let's start with the Catholic Church. Let's start with locker rooms. Let's start with school in general. So yes, I have experienced not feeling welcome.

As a comedian, though, have you been in a space that wasn't welcoming to you?

Yes. The thing is, it's hard to explain to people sometimes, because people just don't know. People say things to you, or don't understand comedy or the world of comedy. It's not like I was excited to be a comedian and then suddenly I'm performing for sold out rooms. I spent 12 years performing in literal basements with three people, places all the way in deep Brooklyn. You just perform wherever you can. Nothing glamorous really happens to you until, for me, a year ago. So yeah, there's been so many times I've been on stage and people either make assumptions, or don't like that I'm gay, or whatever. But you know what? At the end of the day, my goal is to try and bridge that gap and show them we're more alike than we are different.

Well, keep coming back to Michigan. Our governor just signed a bill that protects LGBTQ+ people in the state. So Michigan's doing it right.

I will. I'll stop by. I'll wear my best muumuu.

We're living through a very polarized and divisive time, if you look at the political climate and what's happening to drag queens. I imagine conservatives would have a lot to say about children coming to your show.

Well, I don't want children at my show, let's just start there. And number two, these conservative politicians, it's the most simple, basic therapy. Obviously, no one's mad at a drag queen reading to a child. They're mad about something else. And I think it's because they're losing grip with reality, and they know that they're losing touch, and they know they're losing their stand in America, and this is the last attempt to try and gain some control, and have kind of a message. Because the best way to get people on your side is through fear. And so they're trying to instill fear in people. And it's like, well, we've got arms, poison, car accidents, alcohol, the Catholic Church. These things hurt kids more than a drag queen reading a kid a book about Humpty Dumpty. You know what I mean? I think the most frustrating problem is that they don't actually care, but we are an easy target for them because they know they can instill fear into people. But I think their days are coming to an end.

It all reeks of desperation. And I also grew up Catholic, so everything you're saying about Catholicism is extremely relatable to a young queer kid, such as myself, who grew up feeling like I had to make a choice. It was either God or being gay.

Right. Well, for priests, it's both. By the way, I hope when you write this... I hate doing interviews because when people write stuff, I think I'm coming off funny, and then I read it, and you guys always try and make me sound way more serious than I actually am, and it ruins the vibe. So please do me a favor, and don't make me sound like I'm proselytizing and preaching. I'm here to be a comic.

It sounds like that's something you're very

See **Matteo Lane**, page 24

www.PrideSource.com

Is 'Gender Queer: A Memoir' Illegal?

Prosecutor Says It Could Be

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It's the latest brouhaha over a book. Conservative Lapeer County Prosecutor John Miller claims he's considering taking legal action if a local librarian, Amy Churchill, does not take the book "Gender Queer: A Memoir" off shelves. Churchill says that's a no go. And hundreds of parents who came to a library board meeting on March 16 appeared to be on Churchill's side.

"'Gender Queer' is not a salacious sex story," said one attendee, according to ClickOnDetroit. "It is not 'Fifty Shades of Grey,' a book any American teenager can find and read."

And "Fifty Shades" is by far not the only book on the shelves that might provoke Miller's puritanical beliefs. He better not start poking around in the classics section.

"Parts of Shakespeare depict sex acts," said Attorney Angie Martell of the Iglesia Martell Law Firm in Ann Arbor, talking to BTL about the possible legal implications of the matter. "We don't ban LGBTQ+ books, or other books, that are thought to be salacious."

So if Miller is not bothered by the sex in the above titles, could it be that his definition of dirty books are simply queer books?

"I do not advocate banning books that involve LGBTQ content," said Miller at the meeting. "That is not my position."

You might say his position is bottom feeder, though. He lurks beneath the waters of fairness and feasts on the vulnerable, such as queer and, in particular, trans and non-binary youth. That's the intended audience for the book. And by many indications, the book has been informative and transformative for many.

"Gender Queer," in which author Maia Kobabe writes about identifying as non-binary and asexual, was requested by a patron of the library. The critically acclaimed book has remained checked out since the library received it; other patrons are on a waiting list for a chance to check it out next.

But if Miller had his way, the names on the list might be fined for public indecency or some other frivolous charge, in the same fashion he's planning action against "Gender

Queer" remaining on the shelves. "I want our citizens of our county to understand that we have child protection laws in the state of Michigan," Miller told WDIV Channel 4. "Laws are already on the books, and this material, this book, in my opinion, meets some of the criteria for sexually exploitive materials." The law, MCL750.145A, carries with it a penalty of up to four years in prison.

Miller is not the first person to make such a claim. Activists like Stephanie Butler and divisive groups like the Moms 4 Liberty have been making much ado about nothing for months, trying to get "Gender Queer" and other LGBTQ-related titles banned from the Dearborn schools' libraries and other school libraries as well. They've had some success. The Dearborn School Board removed two books back in November. Several other titles

remain under review. But on the bright side, Butler lost her write-in bid — she garnered less than four percent of the vote — to win a seat on the school board last fall. Meanwhile, two incumbents were reelected.

Elsewhere across the state, these efforts have produced lackluster results. Tudor Dixon, who made parental rights a hallmark of her campaign, was trounced by Whitmer in the election.

And speaking of elections, Moms 4 Liberty members have been trying to install pro-parental rights candidates onto school boards across Michigan. Less than half of the 72 candidates they endorsed won, according to reporting from Bridge Michigan. But the Stepford Moms are still busy bullying queer youth and attempting to ban books that could be helpful to them.

"This is the first time a Michigan prosecutor has made this kind of threat," said Martell. "The First Amendment makes very broad protections for authors who write books that make people uncomfortable. Threatening the librarian with criminal charges is really dangerous and outrageous."

"It's really going back to a Nazi type of mentality," she went on. "Let's ban books. Let's burn books."



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The Glass Triangle
Puzzle on page 25

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Senator Jeremy Moss @JeremyAllenMoss · Mar 21

And you say horrible, untrue things about Jason while bragging about your own sex life. This is why I have no respect for you: You obsessively cast stones.



State Sen. Jeremy Moss. Photo: Facebook

Former State Rep Candidate Feuding with Gay State Senator Jeremy Moss

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The Michigan House of Representatives dodged a bullet when Wendy Webster-Jackson got trounced — she won a mere 20 percent of the vote — in her November bid to rep the state’s 18th district. Webster-Jackson, a pro-life, anti-queer Republican, is now engaged in a Twitter war of words with State Senate President Pro Tem Jeremy Moss. Moss, who is gay, alleges Webster-Jackson called him a groomer, and she wasn’t talking about the kind who works on Shih Tzus and Cockapoos.

“Senator @JeremyAllenMoss my daughter said she couldn’t understand why we had a fight today,” Webster-Jackson said in one extremely revealing tweet. “She said he wants rights for everyone. Everyone should be respected for being a human. However, there is an anti-God agenda behind everything you

all are doing. Jesus is the hill I die on.”

But Webster-Jackson isn’t standing on Golgotha. Instead, she is high upon a hill of hate and, as our president would say, a mound of malarkey. Discriminating against “the least of these” is what’s ungodly. Does she even know, really know, any gay folk? Has she met Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow of Metropolitan Community Church – Detroit or any of the thousands of Metro Detroiters who identify as Christian — or for that matter, Jewish or Buddhist? The point is, it’s indecent to attack that which you do not understand. And it’s abundantly clear that she doesn’t understand.

Emboldened in bigotry, Webster-Jackson went so far as to say the LGBTQ+ community in Michigan “love to castrate boys and remove girls’ healthy breasts.”

Not only is she a kook, but she’s a sore loser as well. In another tweet she took

on the man who won the seat she sought.

“My opponent Jason [Hoskins] got elected because he brags about how much cock he gets,” she said in yet another distasteful tweet. “True statement. He was bragging about being openly gay, so he won and was a Democrat.”

But Moss was having none of it.

“You say horrible, untrue things about Jason while bragging about your own sex life,” he responded to her tweet. “This is why I have no respect for you: You obsessively cast stones.”

Moss went on to mention Wicker-Jackson’s apparently disgruntled daughter. And that, friends, was checkmate.

“We fought because as I want rights for everyone, you call me an anti-God,” he said. “Your daughter is right, I can’t understand you either.”

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ELCRA Timeline

Continued from page 9

2018: Several of those interviewed commented on the significance of election 2018's Proposal 2, powered by Voters Not Politicians activists. The passage of this initiative would end Republicans' stranglehold on the state legislature. Not to be forgotten is Michigan Supreme Court justice Elizabeth Clement's role in ensuring the proposal appeared on the ballot. A Republican and Snyder-appointed, she told BTL in 2019 she was booed at her party's convention for her action.



2020: The Fair and Equal ballot initiative is launched. With broader support than the first attempt, yet with some of the same lingering criticism, what appeared promising became a casualty of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite a huge push to collect electronic signatures, the Michigan Supreme Court ultimately ruled they were inadequate in number.



2022: Seven openly LGBTQ+ state legislators, including Sen. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield, pictured above) are elected, and many more are candidates. Democratic majorities rule the House and Senate for the first time in 40 years. Gov. Whitmer, a steadfast ally, is reelected by a wide margin.

Jan. 12, 2023: Moss and State Rep. Jason Hoskins (D-Southfield, pictured above), Michigan's first Black and openly gay state legislator, introduce legislation that would amend ELCRA.



The MCRC adopts a resolution in support of amending ELCRA, introduced by that body's first openly LGBTQ+ commissioner, Luke Londo, an Independent.

May 21, 2018: By a 5-0-1 vote, the MCRC issues an interpretive statement on the meaning of "sex" in ELCRA. The motion is presented by Commissioner Alma Wheeler Smith. In a 19-page opinion, Attorney General Bill Schuette calls the ruling invalid. Within days, the MCRC responds that they will continue to hear cases of LGBTQ+ discrimination.

Jan. 2019: Gov. Whitmer signs an executive directive prohibiting state employment discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. In her first State of the State address, Whitmer discusses amending ELCRA.



July 2022: After out lesbian AG Nessel argues in front of the Michigan Supreme Court, the justices rule in a 5-2 decision in the Rouch World case that "sex" is inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity in ELCRA. Gov. Whitmer calls it "a monumental victory." The majority opinion is written by Snyder-appointed Clement.

March 2023: Bills aimed at amending the ELCRA are introduced in both chambers of the Statehouse. SB4 is adopted by the Senate in a bipartisan 23-15 vote, with three Republicans joining the Democrats. HB4003 is adopted by the House in a bipartisan 64-45. Of the eight Republicans joining their Democratic colleagues is Bill Schuette (R-Midland), son of the former attorney general.

2018 to 2021
The Tide Turns



2018: Gretchen Whitmer defeats former AG Schuette and is elected governor. Dana Nessel is elected attorney general, becoming Michigan's highest ranking openly LGBTQ+ elected official.

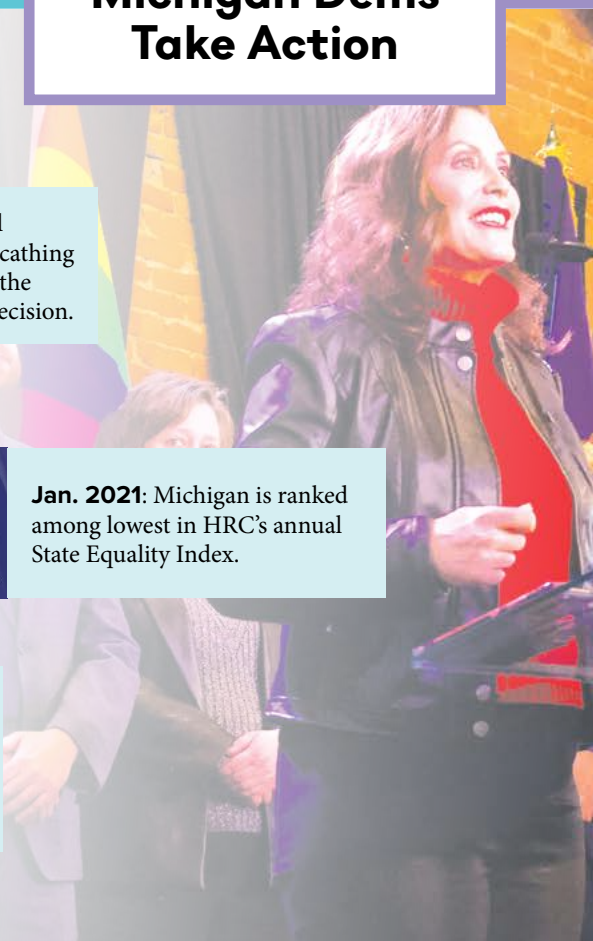
2019: The Equality Act is introduced at the federal level. It would effectively amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include protections for LGBTQ+ people. On May 17, the bill passes the House. The U.S. Senate does not act. It continues to be reintroduced.

2021: Fair and Equal Michigan releases a scathing statement criticizing the Board of Elections' decision.



Jan. 2021: Michigan is ranked among lowest in HRC's annual State Equality Index.

2022
Michigan Dems Take Action



March 16, 2023
Whitmer Makes It Official

Gov. Whitmer makes good on her promise to sign the legislation at a ceremony at Urban Beat in Lansing where she stands beside Mel Larsen, for whom the 1976 act is named. Whitmer's openly gay daughter, Sherry, is in the room. "It's about damn time," Whitmer said, quoting Detroit-born performer Lizzo.

Next steps: "This is exactly what Michiganders voted for last November," said Erin Knott, executive director of Equality Michigan. "This is the message that the people here in our state are trying to send to the rest of the country: Hate has no room here, no place here. We are a welcoming and inclusive state."

*Photos courtesy of Michigan Advance, Michigan House of Reps and various public domain resources

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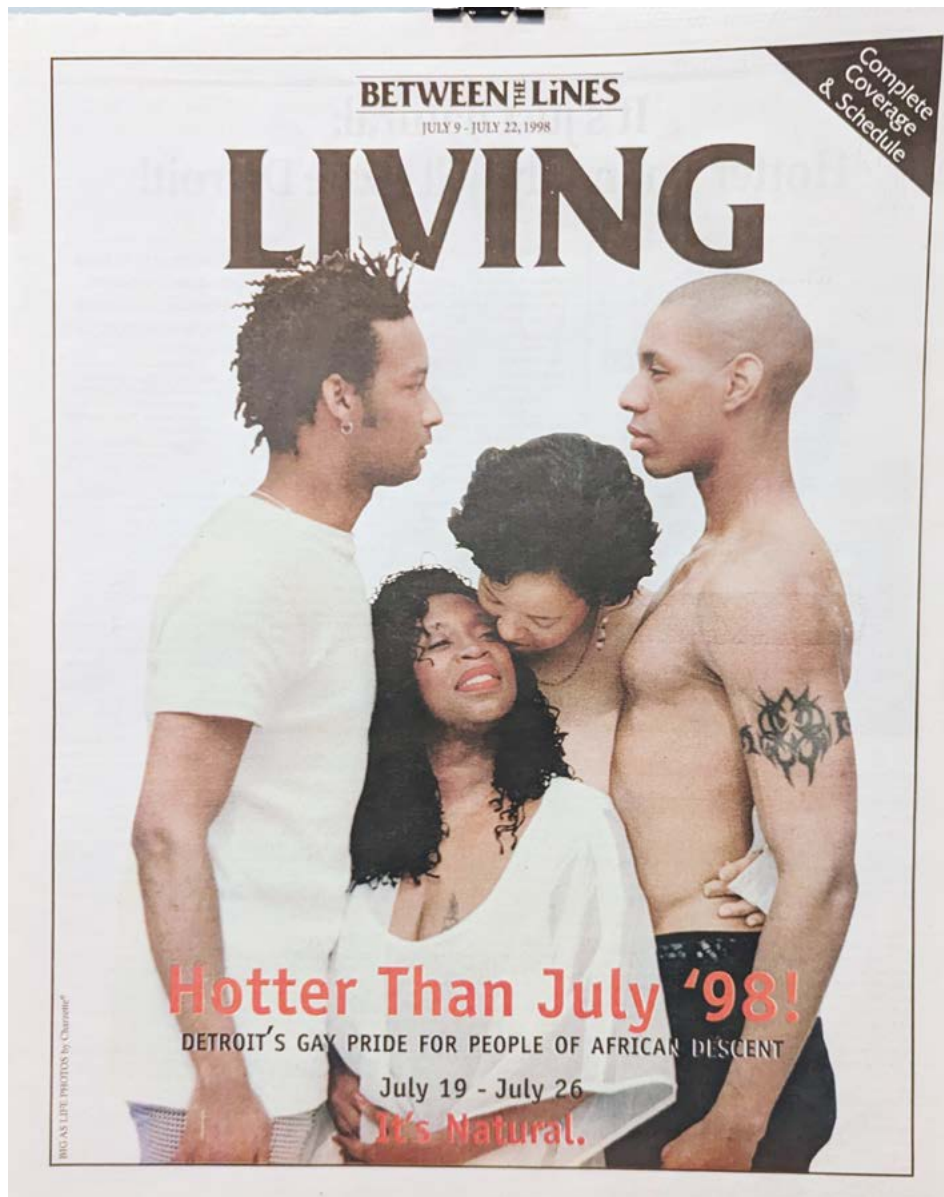
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Remembering Photographer Charzette Torrence

Torrence's Work Helped Shape the Visual Image of Black Queerness in Detroit



Charzette Torrence's award-winning photo from a 1998 BTL issue featuring Hotter Than July coverage. Courtesy Jason A. Michael

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Whether she was photographing national LGBTQ+ figures like Ellen DeGeneres or people in her local Michigan community, Charzette Torrence used her unique eye to capture the beauty she saw right in front of her. Torrence, a Detroit native, died Saturday, March 18 in New York, where she had lived since 2000, after suffering cardiac arrest. She was 59.

Torrence studied photography and earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from the College of Creative Studies (then the Center for Creative Studies) in Midtown. Torrence would teach at the Center from time to time. But a true photographic eye is something you're born with. A natural talent.

And Torrence had an eye for the ages.

She won the first award Between The Lines ever received for a stunning Living section cover photo she shot in July 1998. The shot was part of a campaign to promote Hotter Than July, Michigan's annual celebration of Black gay Pride.

"Charzette's photography captured the essence of Black queer Detroit at a time when our identity was hidden and devalued by others," said Johnny Jenkins, co-founder of Hotter Than July and its original parent group Detroit Black Gay Pride. "She understood the importance of our moment to showcase us loving and being our fierce authentic selves in a distinctly Detroit fashion."

Torrence traveled to Washington, D.C., along with then Pride Source and BTL

publishers Susan Horowitz and Jan Stevenson, to pick up the Vice Versa Award, presented by Q Syndicate, the national LGBTQ+ wire service.

"BTL was honored to include her work, and we knew when she won the Vice Versa award it raised the bar for the whole paper," said Horowitz, who went on to say that Charzette's "passion for her art was inspiring. Her enthusiasm and vision for an inclusive body of photography drove her to reach for what seemed impossible and go out and achieve it."

June Washington was a friend of Torrence's and one of the models

in her award-winning photo. Washington recalled posing until the point of exhaustion in the backyard of Torrence's home in the Woodbridge neighborhood of Detroit. They had been shooting all day when inspiration hit Torrence.

"She put a sheet up on the line," Washington recalled. "I looked at Oddis, the other model. I leaned on him because I was so tired. She snapped that photo and it turned out to be the most beautiful shot. Charlie just had an eye."

Torrence moved to New York in 2000. In 2009, she met her wife Danielle Johnson at a tea party event. "When I first saw her and she walked through the door, I was like, 'That's the woman for me,'" Johnson told BTL. "I just knew it when she walked in."

Torrence returned to Detroit in 2006 to curate an art show for Hotter Than July. In 2008, she returned to the Motor City again to present a show at Affirmations. "Just as We Are" depicted the lives of LGBTQ+ people from all walks of life in 30 black-and-white portraits.

"Coming home meant a lot to me; it means seeing loved ones and friends along the growth of Black Gay Pride," Torrence told BTL at the time. "I was honored that Detroit Black Gay Pride asked me to create a show."

In recent years, Torrence was busy working with Johnson on a scripted, episodic drama series, "Jillian's Peak," intended for television

and streaming. The pilot episode's script was officially selected by major film festivals in

New York and Los Angeles. It was also voted as one of the top 10 scripts in 2019 for the LGBTQ+ Toronto Film Festival.

In addition, Torrence photographed such celebrities as Aretha Franklin, Ellen DeGeneres and Chaka Khan throughout her career. Her work has appeared in magazines such as Black Enterprise, Code, Hue, Essence and Emerge. She also had a piece in the month-long Mighty Real/Queer Detroit art show in 2022.

L. Rambus was one of Torrence's early models. "I felt amazing because she captured my spirit in each photo," he said, adding that the images she took "transcend time. My spirit will



"Racist Gothic of Black Family in America," by Charzette Torrence. From the Mighty Real/Queer Detroit show in 2022.



Charzette Torrence. Courtesy photo

always be alive."

Johnson, for her part, said she was going to miss Torrence's silly smirks.

"We were like a team, and I fell into her world with the photography and the arts," she said. "Charzette was the type of person that always tried to help people, to give them advice and stuff. She had a big heart."

Torrence, a Buddhist, had a traditional service in New York. However, there will be a memorial service locally, as well. Details are pending.

Activist, 'Lesbian Grandma' Cindy Clardy Dies While Snorkeling in the Caribbean

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Cindy Clardy was known to many in Michigan's LGBTQ+ community as a queer activist and a "lesbian grandma," as she described herself. Tragically, Clardy died while snorkeling in Turks and Caicos on Feb. 28. While exact details are unknown, Clardy was in the Caribbean on the 50th anniversary Olivia cruise with her wife, Jocelyn Walters. In shock, Walters has asked for privacy. But Clardy's daughter, Stephanie Clardy, said in a Facebook post that her "warrior mother lost her soul to the sea." Clardy was 72.



Cindy Clardy. Courtesy photo

Clardy, who lived in Southfield, was instrumental in the forming and early operations of Ford GLOBE (later Ford PRIDE), the automaker's queer employee resource group. She would serve as the group's director of communications for several years and remained active until her retirement in 2008. She was also a popular member of the Senior Koffee Klatch that meets at Affirmations.

"She was involved in all of the early organizing," said Ford GLOBE co-founder Alice McKeage. "She became a tireless and outspoken advocate for a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment at Ford for LGBT employees."

Allen Wolf, a retired Ford manager and ally, said in a post on the Ford PRIDE website that "Cindy broke new ground for the LGBT equality movement. She was responsible for the first campus recruiting visit by any U.S. auto company targeted at LGBT graduating students. She was fearless."

Judy Lewis got to know Clardy through the Klatch.

"Cindy was very friendly," Lewis said. "She was the first one to step up when someone needed a ride to Senior Koffee Klatch or food or something like that. Cindy was the person who always volunteered. She was really quite extraordinary in that respect."

Beth Singer, another friend from Koffee Klatch, also described Clardy as loyal and dependable.

"The thing about Cindy, the thing that definitely stands out about her, is she has this endless capacity to help people," Singer said, adding that Clardy gave countless rides to doctors' appointments, community activities, the Koffee Klatch and more. Plus, she was a frequent visitor to friends who were hospitalized.

Clardy was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up as a self-described "army brat." She lived in various locations throughout her childhood,

including Pakistan and Vietnam. After her father retired from the service, the family moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, which she called her hometown. She received a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Nebraska in 1973 and lived in the state until moving to Michigan in 1994.

She ultimately bought a home in Southfield and took a position as an engineer with the Ford Motor Company. She came out on the job after only a year and soon became active in Ford GLOBE, advocating for more rights and protections for its queer employees. After retiring from Ford, Clardy worked part-time for two years as an election inspector for the city of Southfield.

Clardy was also a motorcycle enthusiast. She started as a member of Women on Wheels back in Nebraska. More recently, she was the safety captain of the Southeast Michigan chapter of Sirens Women's Motorcycle Club. Identifying as a Pagan, "she knew a lot about Pagan rituals and what not, and she would be happy to expound about it," Singer said.

But of all her accomplishments, Clardy was perhaps most proud of her family. In addition to Stephanie, Clardy had two stepdaughters and one stepson. She also leaves behind five grandchildren.

Clardy had never been on a cruise when she and her wife bid on one at a charity event. The Olivia cruise, which departed from Fort Lauderdale and was scheduled to visit Half Moon Cay, San Juan, Saint Thomas and Turks and Caicos, was also to be full of women's music, the kind she loved. Clardy was thrilled when she won the auction. For the past few months, said Singer, she spoke of little else.

The cruise began on Feb. 26. Two days later, Clardy, despite having no experience with it, took place in a snorkeling excursion. She had purchased and tested new snorkeling equipment before leaving Michigan.

"She would joke that she was allergic to exercise and vegetables, so she wasn't necessarily in the best physical shape, but she decided to try snorkeling," Singer said.

But for all her excitement, it was only tragedy that awaited Clardy. Though she was wearing a life jacket, according to Singer she did not resurface with the rest of the group on the excursion and drowned.

Plans for a memorial service will be announced later.

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This Opera on Federico García Lorca Bulldozes the Gender Binary

Actress Daniela Mack Plays Male Lead, But It Gets Even Queerer

BY MIKHAL WEINER

This April, the Detroit Opera will bring a fresh and unusual piece to the stage — Osvaldo Golijov's "Ainadamar: Fountain of Tears." Fresh, because it's relatively new, in operatic terms; the piece premiered in 2003 at Tanglewood in Massachusetts. Unusual, because this stunning work brings together classical operatic forms and technique, flamenco instrumentation and technique, and surrealist imagery to create a wild ride of a performance. I've heard a lot of opera in my time, and I've never heard anything like this before.

Golijov's opera is named after Fuente de Aynadamar, a teardrop-shaped fountain in Granada where blue-green water burbles beneath olive and plane trees. Its name, which means Fountain of Tears in a combination of Spanish and Arabic, was given due to the shape of the 11th-century structure. It was only many centuries later, in 1936, that the name would prove prescient; it became the chosen location for multiple nationalist assassinations during the Spanish Civil War. Among those who were shot in the dead of night for resisting Franco's dictatorship was an eminent young poet named Federico García Lorca.

Lorca is also one of three main characters in "Ainadamar," which conjures him as a sort of patron spirit of Spanish art and contends with his violent death at the hands of fascist soldiers, a murder committed equally due to his politics and his homosexuality. His story is told by his friend and muse, Margarita Xirgu, who relates her relationship with Lorca to her friend and student, Nuria, in a series of arias and recitatives. As she calls to mind the restless but brilliant mind of Lorca, he appears before us to relive his demise. Xirgu is brokenhearted, adamant that she should have convinced him to flee. Lorca is forgiving, even as he is arrested and shot, insisting that Spain is his love, Spanish his language, the Spanish people his brethren.

To say that Golijov's musical choices are unorthodox is a major



Aitor Hernandez in "Ainadamar." Photo: James Glossop

understatement. Right off the bat, the first prelude makes use of an audio sample of hoofbeats on cobblestones, over hauntingly brassy trumpets and a droning contrabass ostinato. The effect is of being both haunted and pursued by angry soldiers at once. The prelude then transitions into a powerful groove played on a flamenco cajon, before introducing a chorus singing in wide open vocal technique, common in flamenco but definitely not in opera (which uses more closed vowels) before stopping all at once to give space for handclaps. Only then does Margarita enter with her heart-rendingly perfect soprano performance.

That's the first five minutes. It gets even more gorgeous as the opera, directed by Deborah Colker, goes on.

"When I first got the inquiry from my agent, I went on Spotify [to hear the piece] and immediately knew it was unlike anything that I've ever done," says Daniela Mack, who will be performing in the role of Lorca. "It piqued my interest right away, especially seeing that this role sits so low, so much lower than anything else that I've sung."

Mack is no stranger to playing male roles (mezzo sopranos often

find themselves in operatic drag), but this role feels different to her. Often, she finds herself trying to inhabit a traditionally masculine guise. Here, though, the composer is intentionally creating an opportunity for gender-bending.

"There's a certain freedom in the interpretation," says Mack. "Here's this man who, according to what I've read, had a softness to him. And there's this sort of ambiguity, this element of the androgynous about him in this iteration. It's freeing for me to not have to think so much about presenting 'masculine.' It's just about finding the kernel of who the human was and what he stood for. It's about identifying what about him as a human I identify with. It's a beautiful experience, discovering this character."

Indeed, the whole opera strays from the long-accepted format of recitatives (pieces that are more spoken and drive the plot forward) alternating with arias (performative songs that express the emotional landscapes). One notable feature of "Ainadamar" is the sparseness of solo pieces, giving more stage time to either trios, duets, or choral moments. That's not to say that there are no arias; opera lovers will get their resplendent

solo works to swoon over (I certainly did). It's just that this work seems more about the collective than about the individual, in keeping with Lorca's work and ethos.

This collective-first mentality is not lost on the creative team. "Normally, at the beginning of a rehearsal, the director singles out the main characters, but there was none of that here," says Mack. "Our director gathered us and said, very intentionally, there is no art without unity. Yes, there are primary characters, but nobody has more importance than anybody else. If you have a moment where you sense that two people on stage are not connected, then the piece doesn't work. There's no success, no thriving without equality."

Despite coming from privilege, Lorca was enchanted by and dedicated to the marginalized peoples of Spain, perhaps because he, himself, suffered persecution as a gay man in

a fundamentalist Catholic country. He wanted to give everyone a voice, to celebrate the multifarious facets of Spanish society. This desire comes through in the libretto — when Xirgu tries to convince Lorca that he must flee to Havana (she sings a lively and lilting melody, describing the dreamlike life they could live in Cuba).

Lorca, for his part, replies "quiero cantar entre las explosiones" (I want to sing amid the explosions) in a recitative-esque duet with Xirgu. The words are, appropriately, set over traditional flamenco and Arabic orchestration and harmonic flavors. A casual listener might think they were listening to live music in a town square in Granada. The message comes through loud and clear: to leave his country and its people for personal salvation would be unconscionable.

There are a great many reasons to love this opera. The music alone is fascinating and powerful, opening doors to new vistas of sonic amalgamations. The story is important, told by way of a compelling libretto. And, of course, it's an important part of LGBTQ+ history that needs to be told, and not only because Lorca was gay (although that's crucial as well).

The very foundation of the piece feels queer to me, the way it underlines collective freedom over individual exploration, the liberty it finds outside the rigidity of the gender binary, the space it makes for different

kinds of identities and love. In a world that feels increasingly regressive, "Ainadamar: Fountain of Tears" offers new winds of change.

"Ainadamar: Fountain of Tears" will play April 8, 14 and 16 at Detroit Opera, located at 1526 Broadway Street in Detroit. For more information, visit detroitopera.org.



Daniela Mack. Courtesy photo

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◀ Matteo Lane

Continued from page 14

conscious of.

Because I did an interview once, years ago, for a magazine. I was trying to be really funny, and being funny sometimes can be self-deprecating, and they twisted it on me and made it sound like I was this depressed Fiona Apple who's trying to do comedy. And I'm like, "Wow, OK, lesson learned that not everyone has your best interests in mind when doing things."

Does that make it difficult to talk to journalists for you? Not being able to really control the narrative?

Yeah, because it's not really in my control. If we're doing a TV interview, I'm fully in control. People hear how I say things, see how I say things. When people write stuff, they put their voice into [my] head, and assume how I feel, and it's tricky.

Yeah, I get that. But I've been doing this for a long time, and it's really important to me to make sure that I preserve the voice of the subject that I'm interviewing.

Gosh, the title of the article is Matteo Lane, in quotes: "I hate myself."

You mentioned your ascension earlier. But when you look back, and you touched on this a little bit, how do you reflect on your journey to getting to this place right now in your career?

I was just talking about this with my therapist today, and I'm so in the eye of the storm that I can't quite feel it yet. I just sort of feel like I'm still working, just more. Nothing has really changed. I mean, I have better hair now. But I'm just always on planes, always in hotels, just performing. I feel like Liza Minnelli. I'm taking a break this summer, so hopefully I can reflect on the cool things I've done. But I'm just kind of a workhorse right now. So I haven't really thought about it, to tell you the truth. I'm happy.

What's your process for writing your comedy?

I write on stage, so I use the Comedy Cellar in New York to write. I can't sit at a coffee shop and write for hours. My brain just doesn't do that. So what I do is I have ideas and go on stage, and record myself and work them out on stage. Write with the audience. And then figure it out through repetition that way.

Are you watching the audience to see what works best?

You're listening, yeah. If they laugh, yay.

Well, that's the goal, right?

Evidently not every comedian's goal, but that is my goal.

What about the material on this tour? It's been

an interesting time in the world, as we talked about, and you, like the rest of us, were in isolation for a while. Did you draw upon any of that for this show?

Yeah. I mean, you would be surprised, but when you get in front of a thousand people, they don't want to be reminded that they were quarantined for two years. But also, too, what am I bringing to the conversation that Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat... I have to think of things that are a little more evergreen and universal, that will last for more than just what's happening in the now, because people made the jokes already. I talk about Fortnite and Call of Duty a lot, because that's what I was doing the whole time I was in the pandemic, and I wrote a lot of material as a result of it. So a lot of material came from the pandemic, but it's not an hour where I'm like, "And remember when?"

You just make a decision of where you want to go. And I mean, it's frustrating, because we all went through some shit [and] deep trauma for two years and we all just pretend it didn't happen. But during the pandemic, I was doing all those park shows and rooftop shows, and I talked about it then, but then you just naturally feel that the time is up.

How do you navigate between the obvious gay thirst for you and also the interest in your actual work as a comedian?

Depends on how horny I am. I don't know. Am I feeling lonely? Do I need to date someone? Throw up a shirtless picture, see what you can get. Pretty much it. I'm no different than any other gay. I just want attention.

I mean, to tell you the truth, I haven't posted thirst traps regularly. I mean, I was, up until the pandemic, and then I just made the decision to start posting my material instead. I really benefited from having people appreciate me for my thoughts. I enjoy working out, and I enjoy feeling good and healthy, and I'm very proud to say I see a trainer and eat healthy. And I don't drink, and I don't do drugs. And that's just sort of a life I chose.

After your Lansing show, after touring, what's next?

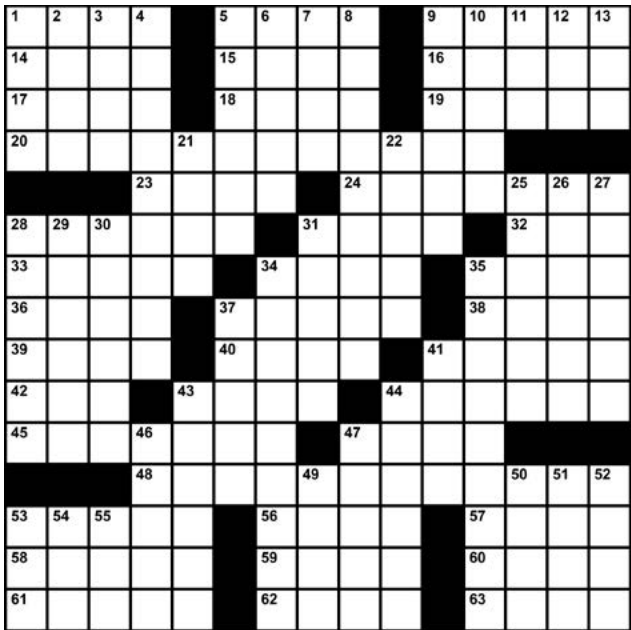
Eating pasta in Italy.

What's the Matteo Lane fan base like in Italy?

Gay, but they speak Italian.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Matteo Lane headlines Progress Michigan's Stand Up for Progress benefit on April 14 at The Venue by E11 in Lansing. Doors open at 7 p.m., and the show starts at 7:30 p.m. Tickets and more information are available at eventbrite.com.



Across

The Glass Triangle

- 1 Blow your own horn
- 5 Narc's find, maybe
- 9 Blows it
- 14 Neet rival
- 15 What muscle Marys pump
- 16 Brendan's award for playing Charlie
- 17 In the year, to Nero
- 18 Advice from Richard Simmons
- 19 Ejects, like a volcano

Q Puzzle

- 20 Start of how you know 41-Across is gay
- 23 He cruised for 40 days straight
- 24 "Some Enchanted ____"
- 28 No longer in the hole
- 31 Type of ski lift
- 32 Hard top
- 33 More of "how you know..."
- 34 Benefit
- 35 Room in a casa

Down

- 1 Sons of, at Beth Chayim Chadashim
- 2 Give a lot of mouth
- 3 Isn't informal
- 4 Sausage?
- 5 Emulate the SLA with Patty Hearst
- 6 Like Emma Donoghue
- 7 MGM co-founder Marcus
- 8 How chops or ribs or a BJ may be served
- 9 Jodie of "The Accused"
- 10 Navratilova's winter home

- 11 Rudy Galindo's milieu
- 12 Field of Perry Mason
- 13 MTF operation
- 21 Give an ass-kicking to
- 22 An escapee from the Donald
- 25 Michelangelo's land
- 26 As a surprising fact
- 27 2023 award for Kim Petras
- 28 Emergency room supply
- 29 Male counterpart of Earhart
- 30 Tune out
- 31 ____ Quest of sci-fi cartoons
- 34 Culture Club frontman
- 35 Vidal's "____ History"
- 37 Randolph Scott companion Cary
- 41 Type of sci, in college
- 43 Furs from rabbits
- 44 San Francisco team
- 46 Gaynor of "South Pacific"
- 47 Chord type, to David Diamond
- 49 Many millennia
- 50 Wooden trunk
- 51 Wilson of "Zoolander"
- 52 It may be hard or soft
- 53 Hippie's home
- 54 First in a Latin threesome
- 55 Billy Budd, for one

See p. 16 for answers

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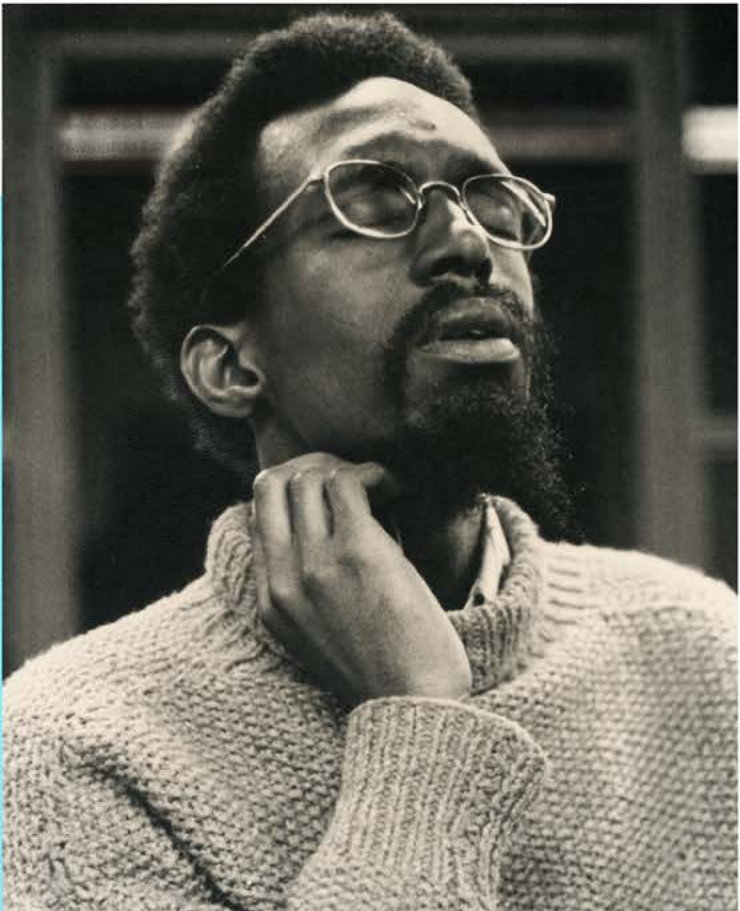
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American composer, pianist, vocalist, and dancer Julius Eastman was young, gay, and Black when it was even more difficult to be young, gay, and Black in America. He died in 1990 at age 49, less than a decade after the New York City Sheriff's Department evicted him and threw most of his scores and belongings into the winter snow of the East Village.

Now, the Los Angeles music collective Wild Up is creating a series of performances and a multi-volume anthology of his music, starting with the 1974 minimalist work *Femenine*. Eastman was dismissed for being ahead of his time, in the rejection of both his music and his person, but his works are now being unearthed to critical acclaim.

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Emme Zanotti (left). Courtesy photo

◀ Emme Zanotti

Continued from page 10

support the LGBTQ community and believe it's a community that deserves access to basic protections, including civil rights."

With Elliott-Larsen a done deal, Zanotti lists a host of issues she and Equality Michigan will spearhead in the coming months, including banning conversion therapy and codifying into law many of the executive orders Gov. Whitmer enacted during her last term when the legislature was led by a Republican majority. Those issues include things like state ID gender markers and rules around legal name changes.

"But it's also about instances where nothing is being done," Zanotti adds. One such instance is the state of healthcare among LGBTQ+ community members. "We need to secure better access to gender-affirming healthcare for the trans and nonbinary community by looking at what we can do to strip away some of these blanket exclusions that exist in the insurance sector." Zanotti also plans to take aim at "archaic pieces of legislation" still on the books, including the criminalization of HIV transmission.

One issue that stands out among Zanotti's targets is the hot button topic of public school curricula. "Over 20% or so of Gen Z identifies as LGBTQ," she says, "Yet the conversation has been 'Let's remove any semblance of LGBTQ people from our

educational institutions, and our books, and academia.' Is it really OK that one fifth of the population sees zero representation of themselves in their curriculum?"

"It's my job to engage the community in that discussion and to engage the community in helping to keep a pro-equality legislature and pro-equality executive leaders in office in Michigan. We have

"It's my job to engage the community in that discussion and to engage the community in helping to keep a pro-equality legislature and pro-equality executive leaders in office in Michigan."

to flex the power of our voting bloc," she says, noting that the LGBTQ+ voting bloc is projected to be a fifth of the nation's voting base by 2040.

"Michigan's a leader for our country and for the world, for that matter," Zanotti notes. "Whether you're talking about industry or you're talking about techno or Motown. Now we have opportunities to be a leader on LGBTQ rights. Michigan can serve as a glimmer of hope for people around the country."




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www.lordoflight.org

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www.kingofkingslutheran.org

Trinity Lutheran Church
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www.trinityA2.org

Zion Lutheran Church
1501 W. Liberty St
<https://zlc-aa.org>

• **Battle Creek**
Trinity Lutheran Church
2055 Columbia Ave. E.
www.tlcbattlecreek.org

• **Burton**
Our Risen Lord Lutheran Church
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www.ourrisenlordelca.com

• **Dundee**
St. John Lutheran Church
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www.stjohnsondundee.wordpress.com

• **East Lansing**
University Lutheran Church
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www.ulcel.org

St. Paul Lutheran Church
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www.stpaul-el.org

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Antioch Lutheran Church
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www.antiochelca.org

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Zion Lutheran Church
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www.zionlutheranmi.org

• **Freeland**
Zion Lutheran Church
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• **Kalamazoo**
Lutheran Church of the Savior
3616 East G Avenue
www.lcoskzoo.com

• **Kentwood**
Ascension Lutheran Church
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www.twochurches.org

• **Mount Pleasant**
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www.immanuelmp.com

• **Okemos**
Faith Lutheran Church
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www.faithlutheranokemos.org

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www.oursavioursaginaw.org

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