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Mistress of the Dark

John Cameron Mitchell

Shortbus, 15 years on

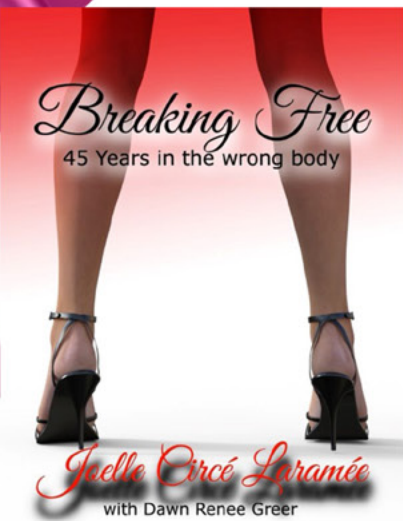
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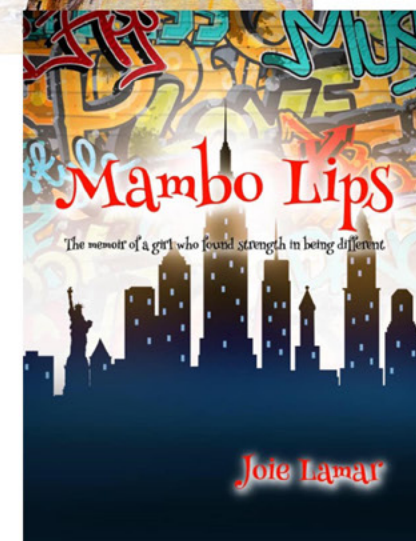
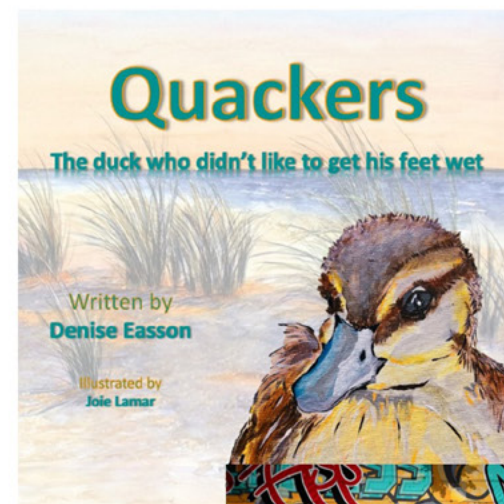
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Greetings and Salutations,

Well, here we are, another year comes to a close, and we're going out with a bang! We've had some great issues over the years, but this is one that we can't stop gushing over. We have the beautiful **Cassandra Peterson** on the cover, who is more commonly known by her alter-ego, *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark*. She has a new tell all memoir out, which our writer Melissa MacMullin reveals some details on, most notably her disclosure of being in a long-term relationship with a woman. #TeamElvira. As well, fans will have an opportunity to travel with Cassandra to Romania next year on an escorted tour!

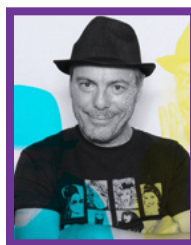
In our second feature, writer Aaron Rothermund caught up with one of his industry heroes, **John Cameron Mitchell**, to chat about the 15th anniversary re-release and remastered version of his classic film, *Shortbus*. He assembled a grand ensemble cast that included Canada's Sook Yin-Lee, and other notable Toronto area musicians. The *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* writer discusses how making films with sex scenes is just as difficult as those with fight scenes, among other things.

In our columns, we welcome guest Wigged Out columnist, Ottawa celebante, **China Doll**, who is also the owner of Shanghai Restaurant, and a dedicated fundraising queen for various local charities. Our regular columnist Cat Grant caught up with photographer, **Moe Lavery**, while Boyd Kodak spotlights painter and writer, **Joelle Circé**. Jon Pressick got the sexy scoop from **Jack Lamon** on Toronto's worker-owned co-operative sex shop, **Come As You Are**, and Rolyn Chambers revisits some of the queer venues we lost during COVID, by way of a ballad.

Be sure to also check out our [online event listings](#) as Toronto continues to reopen once again for live events.

Wishing everyone a joyous and safe holiday season!

Bryen Dunn
Editor-in-Chief



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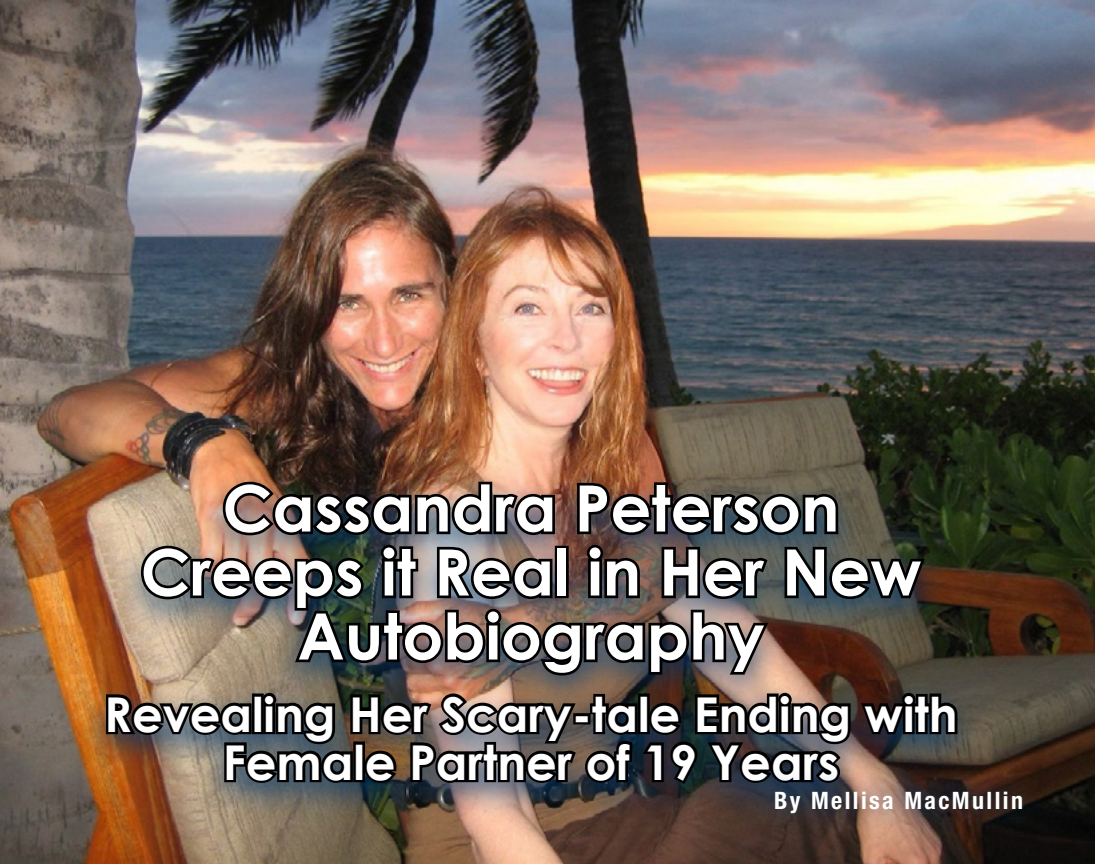
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Cassandra Peterson Creeps it Real in Her New Autobiography

Revealing Her Scary-tale Ending with Female Partner of 19 Years

By Mellisa MacMullin

You better boo-lieve it, Cassandra Peterson, the ageless Queen of Halloween is now the Queen of coming forward and OUT with her no holds barred, laugh until you're crying and coffin autobiography, *Yours Cruelly, Elvira: Memoirs of the Mistress of the Dark*.

Peterson, now 70 years young, continues to reign as a pop culture icon via her spooktacular Elvira persona, now celebrating 40 fang-tastic years as the ghoulish who put the "boob back in the boob tube" with "enormous ... ratings." I mean, if you've still got it, haunt it! Vampy, campy, and everything in-between, she's our beloved *Mistress of the Dark* and unpleasant dream master of horror-genre B-movies.

Behind that punk-esque raven bouffant and slapstick macabre Elvira persona, is the extraordinarily charming and witty, red-haired Kansas-born, Cassandra Peterson.

As an animal welfare advocate and woman of superior strength and perseverance who overcame a multitude of obstacles, she's sparing no details.

"It was cathartic to work my way through difficult times in my life, but after I did I kind of saw them with a wide lens. I could stand back and see relationships in my life and everything differently. It's like I realized I'm the cat with nine lives." She also mentioned, "very few fans know about my private life because I've kept it very private for the reason that I have a character (Elvira), and I didn't want my crazy personal crap affecting the brand."

Released September 21st by [Hachette Books](#), Peterson stated how her autobiography was fifteen years in the making. "It's crazy but everybody has been asking, 'Why did you decide to do it now?' If I hadn't gotten an agent and a book deal, I'd probably still be writing it for the next fifteen years [laughs]. But my friend, **Pamela Des Barres**, who wrote *I'm With the Band*, said to me one day, 'You know, if you don't get a deal with a book publisher, you will never finish this book. You have to get a deadline otherwise it won't happen.' She was 100% right. She turned me onto her agent, I got a book publishing deal, and then I had a deadline. I was being paid to sit down and write it – so it turned out well."

The book recounts her as a fourteen-year-old go-go dancer donning fringed and tasseled bras, to having been the youngest Las Vegas showgirl in history at age seventeen, and her years spent chasing bands as a self-proclaimed, Beatle-loving, virgin groupie. It continues with the time spent in Italy singing in a band, to appearing in a Fellini film, and later learning and performing with the *Groundlings* alongside **Phil Hartman** and **Paul Reubens** (Pee-Wee Herman).

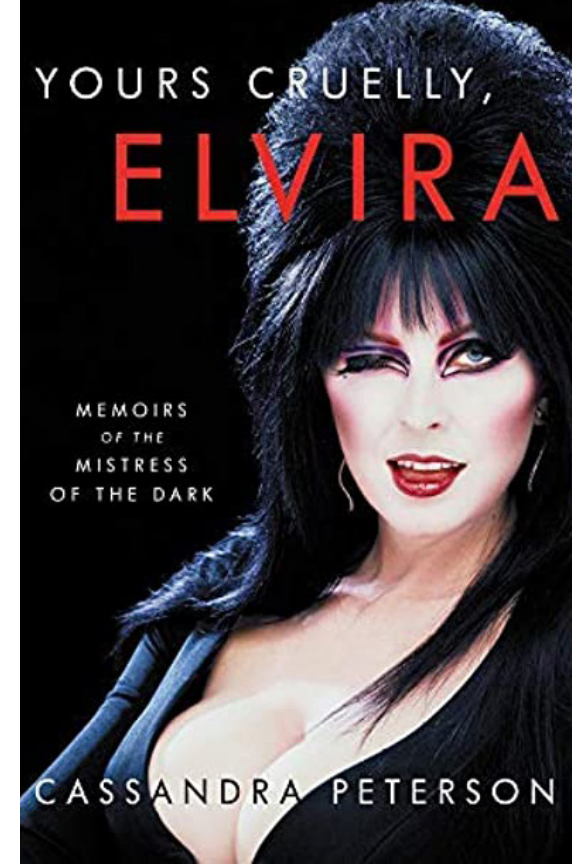
There are also more intimate revelations, like the near-fatal burns she suffered from boiling water she accidentally pulled from a stove at 18-months old, that scalded 35% of her body, resulting in multiple skin grafts. She refers to her strained relationship with her mother, who later called her ugly due to the extensive scarring on her body.

Of course, there's mention of her run-ins with celebrities like, **Elvis**, who was fatherly and protective and, **Tom Jones**, who caused her to require stitches after a sexual encounter, and belittled her by identifying her as the woman with the scarred back. Then of course, there's the rainbow-coloured bright light at the end of her tunnel, her long-time love, **Teresa "T" Wierson**.

It goes without saying that Elvira had already been idolized by her legions of queer fans for many years, but now she's *really, really* a gay icon – and the LGBTQ+ community couldn't be more chilled and thrilled. Although, she doesn't dig labels (or graves for that matter), the person she fell for 19 years ago happened to be a woman that she was friends with before becoming romantically involved.

"It's amazing how many people have come up to me and said, 'You completely changed my outlook on what gay is or is not.' A straight man at this farmer's market came up to me the other day and said, 'I want to thank you for waking me up. I now understand that people aren't just straight or gay, but they're everything in-between.' Peterson expressed. "It really depends on the person you meet. People keep asking me, 'Oh, when did you know you were gay?' and I say, well I still don't know. I met one particular person, fell in love with them, and they happen to be a woman."

Peterson hadn't been attracted to women before meeting her current partner, and she still swoons over the sight of a good-looking man. Peterson first spotted "T" at Gold's Gym back in 1995 mistaking her at the time for a tanned and muscular man with a mysteriously intense "bad boy" look and energy. It wasn't until they bumped into each other in the women's bathroom did she realize her rebellious-looking crush was a woman. She had trained with "T" three times a week for a handful of years as a friend before noticing the chemistry.



One evening, "T" showed up on Peterson's doorstep with her belongings and nowhere to go. She had recently split with her partner and Peterson was simultaneously going through her own divorce from her ex-husband, who she had been married to for twenty-five years. The pair started living together, and Peterson admits that having "T" around was fun and a huge relief. She'd help around the house and garden, and they'd also sing and dance while prepping dinner in the kitchen with Peterson's child, Sadie.

After seeing a movie one night, Peterson made the first move. "She would have never, never, never made a move on me, because she knew I was in a straight relationship and had a child, and we were really good friends by then." It never really crossed over into anything romantic until one day I just went for it. I grabbed her and kissed her. My feelings for her had changed, and like I said, she would've never made the first move. I'd still be waiting 20 years later."

Peterson then added, "It's easier with a woman because they keep the toilet seat down [laughs]." before sharing how it wasn't exactly all black roses and bats in the beginning, "I talk in my book how when I was attracted to her and then when we got together it was kind of horrible. I sent her away. I said this isn't me. This is not how I am.



I am not ready for this relationship. She went back to her hometown for a few months and then I called her because I figured it out. It was like being a teenager going through this confusion about whether I'm straight or gay or whatever. So, when she came back that was it – no turning back."

Following a 1982 3D special of *Elvira's Movie Macabre*, she became an overnight sensation. She would later star in two films, *Elvira Mistress of the Dark*, and *Elvira's Haunted Hills*. When asked if there was another Elvira movie in the works, Peterson shared, "I wrote one a few years ago, a very detailed treatment, and I would love to get it made because it picks up exactly where *Elvira Mistress of the Dark* left off. Elvira's in Las Vegas, it's not working for her, and she needs to get out. So, I'm throwing that around a little bit, but haven't really taken it out there. I just don't know if I've got another movie left in me [laughs]."

She's also excited about working on a documentary of her life using the book as a blueprint. "I'm hoping there will also be a bio pic with somebody else playing me because I go from 0 to 70 years old. Everybody has been asking, 'Who would you have play you?' and I go, Dolly Parton? I'm generally not big into country except for Dolly. I always thought, oh my God, some day I've got to meet her. I've met pretty much almost everybody that I really admired, strangely. The one regret I have is John Lennon. I've met all of the Beatles now finally, but the person I did not meet

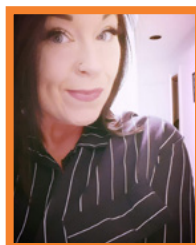
was my favourite Beatle – and there's no chance of fixing that."

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Elvira's Haunted Hills*, Peterson teamed up with Craftours to host a trip to Romania for nine days in May of 2022 – space is limited and on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Peterson hopes that people reading her autobiography will learn from her shared stories to accept every part of themselves, especially for feeling, looking, acting, or loving different. "Let your scars not be a curse, but a blessing. I grew up with a lot of scars and a pretty hard start. Don't let things that aren't working right stand in your way of being who you are. Don't let them stop your dreams."

And our horror hostess with the mostest wanted to leave her Canadian fans with these titillating and heartwarming words regarding her legacy, "I think I want them all to remember that I was more than just a great pair of boobs, I was also an incredible pair of legs. That's a quote from my book. Sorry, I couldn't resist. That's the line I would like on my gravestone. I'm not kidding."

Melissa MacMullin is a freelance content writer and journalist for leading publications. A strong distinct queer Canadian voice with pride and purpose.



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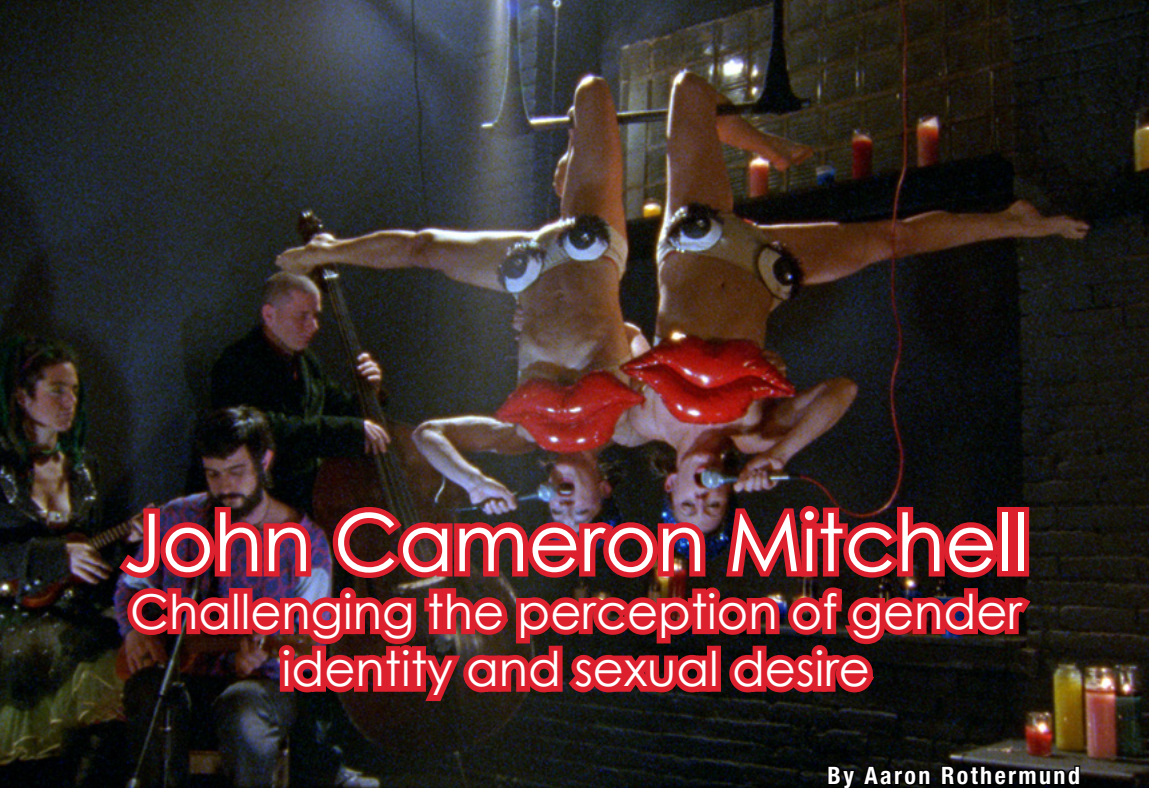


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John Cameron Mitchell

Challenging the perception of gender identity and sexual desire

By Aaron Rothermund

For over three decades, John Cameron Mitchell has been on a steady path to stardom.

Beginning his acting career on Broadway stages in *Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Six Degrees of Separation*, followed by screen appearances on *Law & Order*, *Head of the Class*, and *Party Girl*, Mitchell's writing and directing background then took off with the Obie award-winning 1998 rock musical, [Hedwig and the Angry Inch](#), with composer, Stephen Trask.

The critical success of the *Hedwig* stage production eventually led to the award-winning 2001 film adaptation, where Mitchell first formed a collaborative working relationship with Canadian broadcaster, actor, and director, [Sook-Yin Lee](#), when she portrayed musician Kwahng-Yi in the film.

"When thinking about my next project, [Shortbus](#) I wanted to create the story with the actors, because I knew there would be a select group of people who would be willing to go there. To think of explicit sex as a tool in the narrative. And she was one of them. She's very punk rock," Mitchell tells me over Zoom.

Lee was asked to audition for *Shortbus* by submitting footage of herself recounting a sexual encounter, which earned her the role of Sofia Lin. During the 2.5 years leading up to principal photography, Mitchell and Lee worked together to explore the

relationships of a sex therapist, whom had never been able to achieve an orgasm. The internationally lauded film depicted graphic nudity and genuine sex scenes featuring Lee, that caused an uproar amongst the morality police, and Lee almost lost her respected position at the CBC.

"There was this thought that sex should be left to porn. I don't think porn is complex enough to be trusted with sex," Mitchell says thoughtfully. "Sex is a lot of things connected to a lot of parts of our lives. Porn only has a couple of plug-ins. It doesn't have the big picture. We wanted to be a bit of an antidote."

Shortbus was filmed in 2006, and takes place in New York City, centered around real artistic salons that blurred the lines of art and sex. The film starts with an animated NYC, and the audience as floating voyeurs, catching glimpses of private moments in the lives of these epic characters.

The first window viewers come through is a bathroom, where we are introduced to James (**Paul Dawson**), perfectly nude in his bathtub recording himself urinating and flatulating for his partner, Jamie (**PJ DeBoy**). Then, it cuts to a frazzled dominatrix (**Lindsay Beamish**) dealing with a bratty client, and back to James in a masturbatory and mournful Yoga position.

It soon skips to Sofia Lee (**Sook-Yin Lee**) and Rob (**Raphael Barker**) in many adventurous yet uncomfortable looking sexual positions. Rounding out the diverse group of characters, are an obsessive documentarian (**Peter Stickles**), the



effervescent sexual adventurer (**Jay Brannan**), and Canadian musical artists: **John Caffery**, **Gentleman Reg**, and **Lex Vaughn**.

"Shooting a sex scene is as difficult, albeit in a different way, as shooting a fight scene. It has physical restrictions. There's a memorable scene where someone cums in his own mouth, and there's quite a metaphor there for me," Mitchell explains of his process. "What a great metaphor for someone who feels isolated, and in fact, is sort-of self-fertilizing."

As the stories and bodies intertwine, hidden truths and sexual revelations explode, resulting in a city-wide blackout. Powered by sexual curiosity, the wayward characters culminate at the underground party to witness a stunning musical performance by the mistress of *Shortbus*, [Mx Justin Vivian Bond](#), accompanied by the *Hungry March Band*.

"If you grew up under the queer umbrella, which I define not so much sexually, but in terms of looking at the world through the prism of gender, and if you're specifically aware that there are energies within you that might be called male or female, and there's a mix of them, then you're probably queer, and it's a privilege," Mitchell states with emphasis.

It's been two decades since Mitchell began challenging the mainstream perception of gender identity, sexual desire, and functional relationships with these two hard-hitting films, but it doesn't seem like they will soon be forgotten.



Hedwig and the Angry Inch fans delighted when Mitchell reprised the role on Broadway in 2015, and four years later, rejoiced as he began touring his show, [The Origin of Love: The Songs and Stories of Hedwig](#), featuring songs by **Stephen Trask**.

For those who may have missed out on the original run of *Shortbus*, in celebration of the 15th anniversary, the film has been remastered and is being re-released this year in crystal clear 4K format, with an anticipated theatrical run in early 2022.

Watch for Mitchell to shine this year, back in front of the camera as a as-of-now unnamed yet pivotal character in the highly anticipated Netflix series, [The Sandman](#), based on the graphic novels by **Neil Gaiman**. He also recently finished filming Peacock Channel's, [Joe Exotic](#), a series based on the Wondery podcast, [Over My Dead Body](#), which will be released in 2022.

Aaron Rothermund is a freelance writer, theatre creator, and filmmaker. Aaron has worked on articles for The Courier, Culture Days, theBUZZ, and PinkPlayMags.





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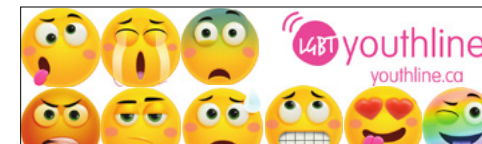
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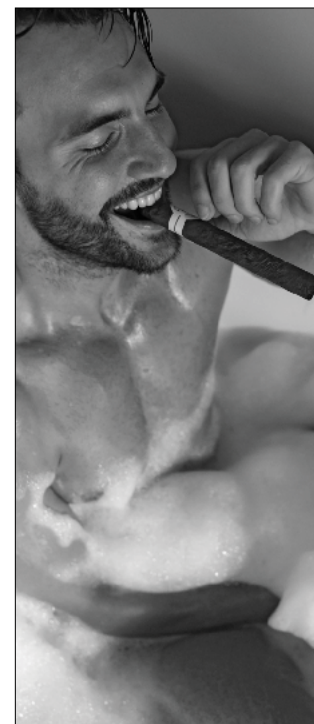


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WIGGED OUT

Ottawa's QUEEN OF CUISINE

BY CHINA DOLL



China Doll is Ottawa's reigning queen on the scene, and of cuisine. As the owner and chef of **Shanghai Restaurant**, after a long day in the kitchen, **Edward Kwan** trades in his apron for a wig, and makes a grand entrance for adoring fans. The family owned restaurant on Somerset Street opened in 1971, and to celebrate the 50th anniversary in business, the *Nancy & Alan Kwan Shanghai Foundation* was established in honour of Edward's parents.

"Hello, my little dumpling," China Doll beckons, as another night of hilarity begins. It all began with a birthday party at Shanghai back in the fall of 2005, when a customer booked a karaoke DJ for her birthday party, and wanted one of the staff to sing. Edward agreed as long as he could wear a costume, since Halloween was nearing. He threw on a wig and some old maternity clothes that belonged to his mother, then made his debut as what would eventually become his alter ego, China Doll. The song he performed that evening, *At Last* by Etta James, remains his signature song at shows today.

Today, China Doll has become somewhat of a celebrity in the city, attending many events outside of the restaurant as well, many of them fundraisers for local charities, "especially anything to do with animals, LGBTQ+ events, and cancer, being a survivor/thriver myself." She estimates helping to raise approximately \$500K over the past 16 years.

Most Memorable Performance – a surprise karaoke party for a long time loyal customer with Stage 4 terminal cancer

Strangest – a Bark Mitzvah for a local Jewish family, singing songs like *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window* and *Who Let The Dogs*

Most Inspirational – party for a centenarian surrounded by three generations of family singing all *The Sound of Music* songs. Also, a proposal on stage after the couple sang a duet together.

Outrageous Outfit – COVID inspired white dress ensemble made with tubing and toilet paper

Favourite Wig(s) – black rubber Afro, a 2 X 3 foot Diana Ross doo, and a Target foam wig. Local artists also create originals to wear.

Edward's younger brother Don is a visual artist, who China Doll dubs Baby Doll. Along with his husband John Cameron, the couple came up with an idea to create a colouring book based on his older sibling's drag persona. It came to fruition with a \$1,000 grant from [The Awesome Foundation](#), and they initially printed 800 copies of the book, with the option of printing a PDF copy for free. There's now a [Drag Queen Colouring Book Facebook page](#) and a [GoFundMe](#) page in hopes of creating a follow up book. Don explains more about the concept behind the book in this [video](#).

A short documentary film was recently done on Edward, titled [China Doll - A Many Splendored Queen](#). The spotlight covers three segments, his heritage and family legacy of generosity and hard work, his tireless giving and supporting of the community, and good causes; and the amazing, flamboyant, wonderful China Doll. Available on OutTV, Apple TV, and YouTube. Watch the trailer [here](#).

"Chow mein for now my little pork dumplings."

Honey, I was conceived, born, raised, learned, earned, played, and will die in O-Town.

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Moe Lavery



2005. She has been privileged to be included in many shows, at venues such as, *Gladstone House, Toronto Public Library, The Beaver*, and many others. She's also exhibited in several galleries, and at Toronto's annual photography festival, *CONTACT*, featured Moe's work more than once.

She's influenced by what is seen around her, whether it's people or places. When I asked about her influences and other inspirations, Moe replied, "I love the work of Gregory Crewdson, Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. And of course Diane Arbus. Crewdson's work is really staged, but I love the subject matter of his carefully detailed landscape type photographs, that concentrate on a tension between domesticity, nature, and the unknown, and how he uses lighting. He definitely inspires me. I'd love to have his budget and crew! Evans and Lange documented the effects of the Great Depression on people and places. It's not a happy, uplifting subject matter, but it really speaks to me."

Interestingly, if Moe couldn't be a photographer she would have chosen music as a career path. However, her love of her chosen craft is obvious. "The thing with photography is, you never know what goes into making a great picture." Moe explains, "It could just be the click of the shutter where the lighting and subject are perfect, or everything could be staged and lit by an entire props and lighting crew. There are no boundaries with digital photography, and some imagination."

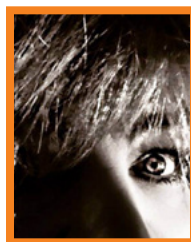
Moe's dream gig? "I'd love to be sent on an all-expenses paid assignment to photograph variety and convenience stores all across Canada! Or Two-Star drive-up motels! There would be some great places," she exudes.

Recently, Moe had a show at *The Window* on Church Street. "This was my 'Variety & Convenience' collection, which I'm always adding to," she said. You can see Moe's composite photo, "I Wanna Hold Your Hand", currently online at the Art Gallery of Ontario's exhibit "Portraits of Resilience".

To purchase a Moe original print, or to hire her, [visit her website](#).

Cat Grant (OCAD) is a multidisciplinary fine artist, with a focus on photography, multimedia portraiture, and illustrating children's books. She's also a published poet, and senior reporter for *On the Couch* LGBTQ TV show.

[Facebook @grantedarts](#)



Born and raised in Welland, Ontario to a working class family, photographer Moe Lavery got her first real camera in 1979. She explains, "Back when film was the only choice, I learned mostly on my own. I didn't really start taking photography seriously until the 1990's, when I took courses at X University, formerly known as Ryerson, and George Brown College."

While Moe loves travel photography, she does a lot more. "I love shooting events, and I also love shooting landscapes, but not what's considered typical landscape. I lean toward dilapidated landscapes, like old barns, buildings, fences, tractors, cars. I love the textures and colours."

Currently working with *Inside Out LGBT Film Festival, Planet in Focus, Out On Bay Street*, and more, Moe has curated shows for others and has been exhibiting her own work since

Requiem For Queer Venue COVID Closures



We knew you most as **Goodhandy**,
Though you tried being more dandy.
Reinvented, restarted, refreshed as **Club 120**,
Half-naked partiers were still a plenty.
We'll miss your balcony and private stalls,
Mandy and **Todd**, they had such gall.
Black Cat parties served ballroom big,
Nigel March's Boner brought out the pig.
From comedy nights and cock fights,
To trans strippers and supporting queer rights.
An iconic merge of all that we strive to be,
More than a bar, it was gutsy to the ninth degree.

Eastend queers remember **Old Nick Pub** dear,
A friendly spot to pop by for just one cold beer,
Before you stumble back to your warm pad,
Having consumed one brew too many, oh so bad.

Dive bar, tiki bar, loved bar, home bar,
Lipstick Dynamite is now another closed bar.
Red walls, action figures, Sylvester The Cat,
Portraits of dogs, curious toys, we'll miss all that.
Patrons rallied hard raising some needed cash,
GoFundMe sadly didn't fill the financial gash.

Boutique darling where did the time go,
Sipping martinis on your raised wooden patio.
Cruising the action unfold on Church,
Taking notes, eyeing prospects, research.
Time spent within your intimate walls,
Picturing your dates denim covered balls.
You almost survived this long lockdown,
Now there is one less bar in Queertown.

Drink, dine, and dance like you've never done before,
Because this life is not a metaphor.
Enjoy all that's left for us here and now,
But remember queer places that had to say, "Ciao."

Jamaican-born Rolyn Chambers grew up in the suburbs of Mississauga, before attending Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD). In 2001, he began his *Deep Dish* column with *fab Magazine*. *Deep Dish* has now been resurrected once again here in theBUZZ. IG @rahraholyn



The bells have rung sadly, quietly, loudly, one time last,
Last call has come for these queer bars of our now past.
Let's hope you were there to heave a toast,
Before they became history, legend, ghost.

Named after that hairy, toothy creature,
Or perhaps a hairy-lipped anatomy feature.
The Beaver busy on hip West Queen,
Ring-lipped Queer Westers were oft' seen.
Cramped, sweaty, skanky, drama-free,
Its dance floor / hallway was the spot to be.
Back patio chats to escape the blistering heat,
DJ Phil's kiddie pool soothed our burning feet.
Shows by *Jacklynne Hyde*, *Tash Riot*, *Ugly One* and *Seyoncé*,
FIT, *Bad Tuck*, *L'ez* and *Cub Camp* were our party mainstays.
Founder **Will Munro** left us too early years ago,
Wild parties like *Vaseline* he knew how to throw.
Fourteen years of memories to keep,
Partying hard before made to sleep.
The Beaver was small but larger than life,
Perhaps its with Will again in the afterlife.

Called **The Round** it clearly was not,
But was Kensington's queer hot spot.
Iconic burgundy wallpapered wall,
Booths to watch the frenzied dance hall.
April Wozny didn't create Post-Its,
But *Business Women's Special* was the shit.
Amateur Strip Contest, *Big Primpin'*, *Cherry Bomb*,
All best long on to *FindAnewHome.com*.
Walls may crumble and doors may close,
To not find another venue is squarely opposed.

get **EXCITED...**
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WORLDWIDE release on all music platforms from Supa Qween Records
+ watch for the music video coming to YouTube this December

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el Hashem featuring Azez Alaya/Self Control
produced and mixed by DJ Pluto



A KODAK MOMENT

Joelle Circé

BY BOYD KODAK



JC - Having my memoir published is up there, thanks to Joie Lamar and Antoine Elhashem.

BK - What are you looking forward to next year?

JC - I'm excited to get to do book signings, and I'm very much looking forward to meeting people and getting the word out for my memoir.

BK - Future plans?

JC - I plan to keep writing thrillers. At the moment, I've created this main character who is a woman of trans origin who gets pulled into a deadly cat and mouse game with a serial killer. How this resolves, well, when the book eventually comes out, we will see. I mean I still don't know with any absolute certainty. The underlying story is about the greater LGBTQ+ communities, of our strength and resilience.

BK - Any message you would like to put out there?

JC - I'm not one to get on a soapbox, but I would like to say that I worked as a paintress since the early eighties. It was a great adventure and I loved it. I even have one of my paintings in the permanent collection of the *Leslie-Lohman Museum* in New York City. After this period, I needed a change in my creativity. Since I had always dreamed of writing, I wrote my memoir and was very fortunate to come across the perfect publishers for me. They are all about LGBTQ+ authors, and I love that they exist. I guess I'm getting at it because there is no such thing as too late to start over, and being creative has no expiration date or retirement.

BK - Finish this sentence for us - Life wouldn't be the same...

JC - ... had I listened to others telling me to fit in this or that box; there would not have been me, the artist, there would not have been all the adventures I have had, both good and not so good; indeed, there would not have been a transition and coming out. I think life would have been dark, for me without me taking those risks despite social and peer pressures to conform.

Boyd Kodak is an award-winning trans activist, musician, writer, filmmaker, curator, and festival/entertainment director.



Trans woman *Joelle Circé* is a painter and writer, originally from Montreal. She now lives with her wife and five cats, in the Quebec mountains. Joelle has participated, and had her work shown in numerous art exhibitions across Canada, the USA, and the UK.

Boyd Kodak - What have you been doing over the last year?

Joelle Circé - I've been staying home and writing. This past year has seen my memoir, *Breaking Free: 45 Years In The Wrong Body*, get published through *Brainspired Publishing*. I have also started writing my first thriller, so no rest for this pleasantly wicked lady.

BK - During that time, which was the most exciting event for you?

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COME AS YOU ARE



Every city needs cultural institutions, and [Come As You Are](#) is a cornerstone of Toronto's sexual pleasure and wellness. The venerable worker-owned co-operative sex shop has been a beacon of positive sexual culture for almost 25 years. After a lengthy residence on Queen Street West, the team took a bricks-and-mortar hiatus and operated solely online for a while. But they are back, having established a new home in Kensington Market.

"Kensington Market feels like where we were always meant to be," exudes worker-owner **Jack Lamon**. "Kensington is one of the few neighbourhoods in Toronto that has mostly resisted gentrification, and it feels so good to be in a real community again. The vibe on the streets here is electric and infectious and inspiring. Truly, everyone seems delighted to have us around, and many of our neighbours are queer if not extremely queer-positive."

Community, accessibility, quality, and providing an inclusive environment to those shopping, seeking knowledge, and exploring their sexuality, are critical elements of the Come As You Are experience. The shop's [core values](#) are infused in all aspects of their presentation—from their product offerings and customer service, to their relations with their neighbours and community. In a society where sex—particularly queer sex—is still so stigmatized, CAYA's commitment and drive are a beacon.

With the holiday shopping season upon us, Jack is excited to share some top picks that will definitely excite shoppers as well. "We recently picked up these sweet binders/compression

vests from Toronto's [Pack Animal](#). They're super comfy, provide excellent compression, come in a ton of colours and skin tones, and they're made here in Toronto by a queer and black-owned independent company. We've also expanded our collection of gorgeous glass toys from Niagara's [Peace Lily](#) toys. Also, check out the delicious oil-based lubricants from [The Butters](#)—a Michigan-based queer and black-owned business. They're safe to use with most toys and all body parts and their lubricants are the first we've encountered that aren't just great for sex, they're also so good for your skin too."

Bringing CAYA back into a storefront space during the pandemic has been a challenge, but Jack is grateful to be right where they are. Once folks are feeling safer to come out, we can all look forward to a couple long-awaited grand opening parties and the return of their signature community event.

"We're going to have two parties—something chill during the daytime for our introvert friends, fans, and customers, and something a little louder at night for our extrovert folks. We're also psyched for the return of the [Erotic Arts and Crafts Fair](#) in February (fingers-crossed), where we get to highlight all of the sex artisans in our midst," Jack concludes.

Jon Pressick is a writer who focuses on sex and sexuality. View his work at [sexinwords.ca](#)





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As Ontario continues to ease up on restrictions and regulations, allowing more events and activities to take place in person, we have begun to update our event listings accordingly.

We are now back to providing a wide array of happenings throughout Toronto, the GTA, and beyond, and are hoping our regular events print section will return shortly

In the meantime please continue to check our combined online listing of both in person and virtual events
www.thebuzzmag.ca/events.

Let's all stay safely connected.

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