

Mr. J.J. Murray · Hustla Ball · Max Wolf Valerie · Beyond the Village

David Arquette

Humour, Hurt, and Harvey Brownstone

The Brownstone Effect

Rejection, Resilience, and Reinvention

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David Vogelhut, Adam Matonic

Events Editor

Sherry Sylvain

Counsel

Jerry Herszkopf Law

Feature Writers

Menaka Skrypnik, Bryen Dunn

Columnists

Mr. J.J. Murray, Rolyn Chambers, Boyd Kodak, Sherry Sylvain

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Mailing address

205-1691 Pickering Parkway
Pickering, ON L1V 5L9
416.926.9588

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We are very proud to present some very interesting and exciting reading material to our audience for this Pride issue, starting with two related feature articles about the up-coming film, "Without Prejudice" starring David Arquette as Henry Brownstone, the now-retired first openly gay judge in Canada. The film, based on Brownstone's memoir, "Without Prejudice: My Life as a Gay Judge," recounts Brownstone's experiences as an openly gay man in Canada's legal system, including his experiences dealing with the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Menaka Skrypnik has interviewed David Arquette, about portraying Harvey Brownstone, an openly gay man, as well as the writer of "Without Prejudice," Harvey Brownstone.

Next, Bryen Dunn takes us on a tour of the music of the 80's and how it survives today, with his look at, "The Generations Tour," a successful tour headlined by "The Human League," and featuring "Soft Cell" and "Alison Moyet".

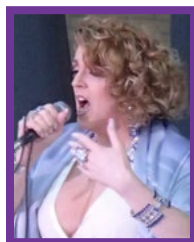
Additionally, Rolyn Chambers gives us a glimpse into the growing popularity of naughty gay parties in Toronto in his regular column, "Deep Dish". Sex parties, you say? Well, I never! This ties in nicely with "Beyond The Village," looking at a local sex toy shop.

We follow up these articles with, "A Kodak Moment" by writer and trans activist, Boyd Kodak speaking with First Nations trans man, poet, writer, and actor, Max Wolf Valerie.

Finally, along with our regular listing of events in and around Toronto, we are excited to have a special guest writer for the recurring column, "Wiggid Out". Discussing the topic of Classic Drag, and some of the history of Drag in Toronto is the incomparable and legendary, Mr. JJ Murray, a respected drag artist, drag/community elder, and former Empress VII (1993/94) in The Trillium Monarchist Society, now The Imperial Court of Toronto.

As my first effort as editor-in-chief of this venerable publication, I hope you enjoy the topics which have been put before you, and find the material interesting and thought-provoking.

Sherry Sylvain
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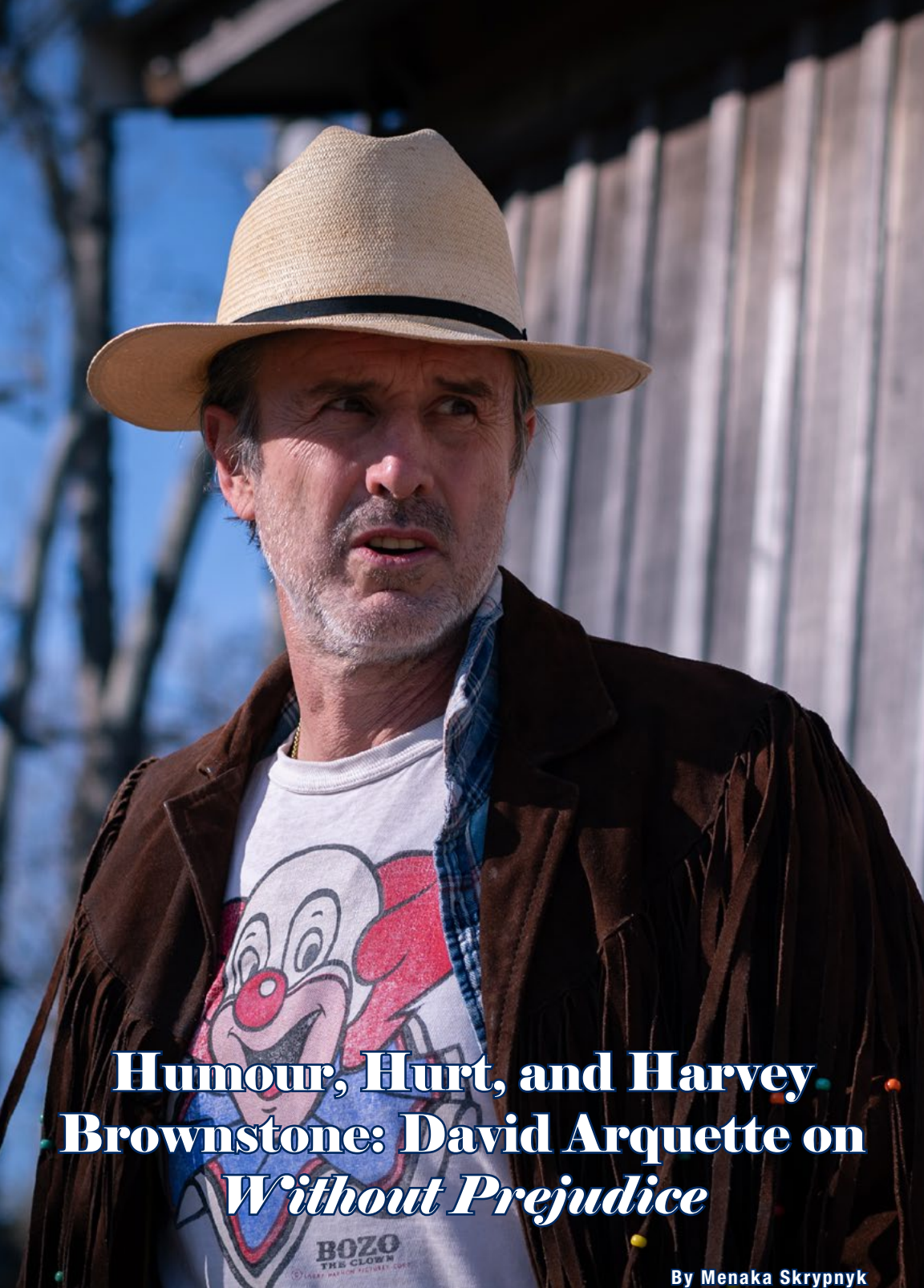
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Humour, Hurt, and Harvey Brownstone: David Arquette on *Without Prejudice*

By Menaka Skrypnik

“We were living in a society that forced homosexuals to live in hiding and then tyrannized them for living that way.” (Harvey Brownstone, “Without Prejudice”)

Living openly and authentically lies at the heart of “Without Prejudice”, the upcoming film adaptation of former Justice Harvey Brownstone’s memoir, “Without Prejudice: My Life as a Gay Judge”.

Directed by Shane Stanley and set for release in late 2026, the film traces Brownstone’s journey to becoming Canada’s first openly gay judge. It is a story marked by humour, resilience, and hard-won authenticity. For actor, David Arquette, who portrays a middle-aged Brownstone, the role carries both personal significance and professional weight; his performance being shaped by his experiences with loved ones and friends in the LGBTQ+ community, and the realities they faced throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

I opened the interview by admitting that my familiarity with Arquette’s career largely lies in the realm of quirky, comedic roles, citing the television show, “Friends” and the movie, “Never Been Kissed”, where his characters had an unmistakable offbeat charm. He kindly nodded and smiled at a comparison he has likely heard a hundred times. “Without Prejudice” reveals a different register. Here, Arquette leans into something quieter, heavier, and emotionally layered, without losing the humour that makes Brownstone such a compelling figure. While Arquette may not be an obvious physical match for Brownstone, reading the memoir made the casting choice click into place. Brownstone’s quick wit, resilience, and larger-than-life humour feel like qualities Arquette instinctively understands.

I asked Arquette what young David was like, especially since a lot of his performances have a fearless, offbeat energy to them. He mentions his goofiness and high energy, and recalls being “a little bit of a troublemaker”. I was curious to know how this project came onto his radar, and what made him say, “yes” to it. Arquette explained that he had met Brownstone when he was a guest on Brownstone’s podcast. At the time, he didn’t

know Brownstone was a former judge, but noted his sharp interviewing style which had clearly left an impression on him. When discussions of the biopic came his way, he read the memoir and recalls loving it.

With a wide variety of characters under his belt throughout his career, Arquette admits playing the role of Brownstone was challenging. He explains, “I don’t understand legalese that well to be able to act convincingly as a lawyer, so that was difficult. As far as the dialogue and complexity in the amount of scenes, it was an independent production, so they’re getting as much as they can done in a short amount of time. But Harvey is a wonderful person, so it was easy in that aspect to capture him and to be able to convey his journey to the audience.” Arquette also shared that, “as silly as it sounds, [he] also watched law films, just to get into the courtroom element of it all.”

Arquette’s personal connection to Brownstone’s story stems from his experiences with Alexis Arquette, his late trans sister. Reading the book, for him, was very powerful, especially Brownstone’s honesty about his experiences. Arquette somberly reflected on his and his siblings’ experiences growing up with their sister, Alexis, “Throughout her life, we had all experienced, witnessed, or were part of defending Alexis and defending the hatred that was shown toward her. We also saw the obstacles Alexis faced because of who she was and her experiences navigating the world.” Brownstone’s recollection of his mother’s response to his coming out and her initial unacceptance spoke deeply to Arquette, whose liberal parents surprisingly also had a hard time with Alexis’s coming out. Both Brownstone and Arquette’s sister were 19 when they came out, and both had parents who feared the challenges their children would likely endure simply by being themselves. “[My mom] was just scared at how difficult it would be for Alexis,” he acknowledges. “The difficult life she might face simply by being true to herself.”

Arquette’s connection to these themes predates “Without Prejudice”. He shares an experience early in his career when he starred in the 1996 drama “Johns”, playing a young street hustler navigating complicated relationships and questions of identity. Given three months to prepare for the role, Arquette immersed himself in the lives of the young people who inspired the character. Living near Santa Monica Boulevard, he would regularly take long walks and speak with street-involved youth, equipped with a list of questions about their lives, families, fears, and experiences. He recalls asking them questions such as: “Where did you come from? What does your family think? What’s the most dangerous situation you’ve been



in?" Their responses left a lasting impression on him, for many of the young people he met had been rejected by their families. "To think of families turning their backs on their kids, it was just the most heartbreaking thing," Arquette says. As a parent himself, stories of rejection land differently than they once did. Yet Arquette's understanding of the issue was shaped long before parenthood, through

both his experiences with Alexis and witnessing the consequences of family rejection firsthand.

This led to the discussion of LGBTQ+ experiences from the 70s to 90s, especially around the AIDS epidemic. In his book, *Brownstone* not only discusses his own experiences as a gay man, but he also sheds light on a broader generation of the LGBTQ+ community who had to survive in silence. Arquette agrees the historical context deeply

shaped how he approached the role. He recalls growing up in Los Angeles during that time and being exposed to gay communities and queer spaces from a very young age, even before learning about his sister. “We were also aware of people in our lives, especially as we got older, who weren’t comfortable being open about their sexuality. They would often hide behind personas that weren’t true to themselves, and therefore couldn’t live authentically or fully because they had to maintain that facade,” he notes. “Watching friends have to experience that would always pain me, because you want them to be free and not feel like what they are doing is wrong. But to then see people I’ve known who embrace it and do come out, there is a real beauty in not having to be fearful.”

In “Without Prejudice”, Arquette leans into heavier emotional terrain while still retaining the wit and humanity that define Brownstone himself. Brownstone’s memoir makes clear that humour functioned almost as armour, his sharp wit frequently disarming bullies into silence. Arquette balances wit with vulnerability in his portrayal of the former judge, as he mentions Brownstone’s involvement with the film. “He was there on the set every second, so we did have quite a few conversations,” he explains. “I could ask him to say lines, so I could mimic his cadence... If I had questions on a specific sort of structure, technique, or needed clarity on an exchange, he would say it, and it would be very clear.”

The book thrives on a juxtaposition between humour and heavier emotional material. Arquette agrees, “That is really Harvey’s superpower. It was really beautiful to watch. He’s very witty, he’s very quick on his toes, very full of life, very alive, and comfortable in himself. I mean, he’s gotten to that place.” The humour that Brownstone finds in themes of prejudice, identity, and acceptance is quite remarkable. I asked Arquette about his ability to use humour in navigating difficult moments in his life. “Real life is complicated,” he admits. “There are moments that are difficult not to take personally, or hard not to react, hard not to let anger take over when you feel upset or threatened. But, within a character like this, it was really rewarding to find the humour in those moments. And also, to be vulnerable, to have a voice, and to live in that safe space.”

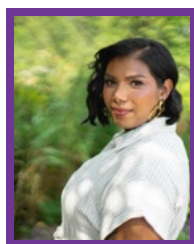
With Arquette’s experiences with his sister, Alexis, it was sometimes difficult to shed the weight of the more difficult scenes after filming was wrapped for the day. “There were moments that were definitely painful...the whole time I had Alexis on my mind, and other friends on my mind, just wanting to do them justice,” he shares. Playing Brownstone deepened Arquette’s understanding


of the emotional realities of living openly as a gay man while navigating a prejudiced society. It is also apparent that Alexis is never far from her brother’s mind, as he mentioned her several times throughout our conversation.

Just like Harvey Brownstone, there is complexity to David Arquette that extends beyond the characters he is known for. Over the course of our conversation, he showed sensitivity and a deep empathy for those who experience bullying, exclusion, or prejudice. Whether reflecting on his sister Alexis, the LGBTQ+ community he grew up alongside, or the vulnerable young people he encountered while preparing for past roles, Arquette consistently returned to the same theme: the importance of being seen, understood, and accepted.

For now, Arquette says several projects are on the horizon, though “Without Prejudice” remains the one he is most eager to see completed. He speaks enthusiastically about the film’s final pieces coming together, from Steve Dorff’s score, to the editing, and director Shane Stanley’s work. His greatest enthusiasm circles back to Brownstone himself. “There were so many wonderful moments we experienced on this film,” Arquette recalls. “It was a real pleasure to be a part of.” By the end of our conversation, one thing was clear: for Arquette, “Without Prejudice” was more than simply another role. It was an opportunity to honour a man whose story of identity, resilience, humour, and hard-won authenticity still resonates deeply today. “He’s such a beautiful human being,” Arquette said of Brownstone. “I was really honoured to be a part of telling his story.”

Menaka Skrypnik is a Sri Lankan-Canadian Communications professional with an innate passion for writing and exploring the unfamiliar. She enjoys spending her free time with her family -- and the occasional cheeky glass of wine.





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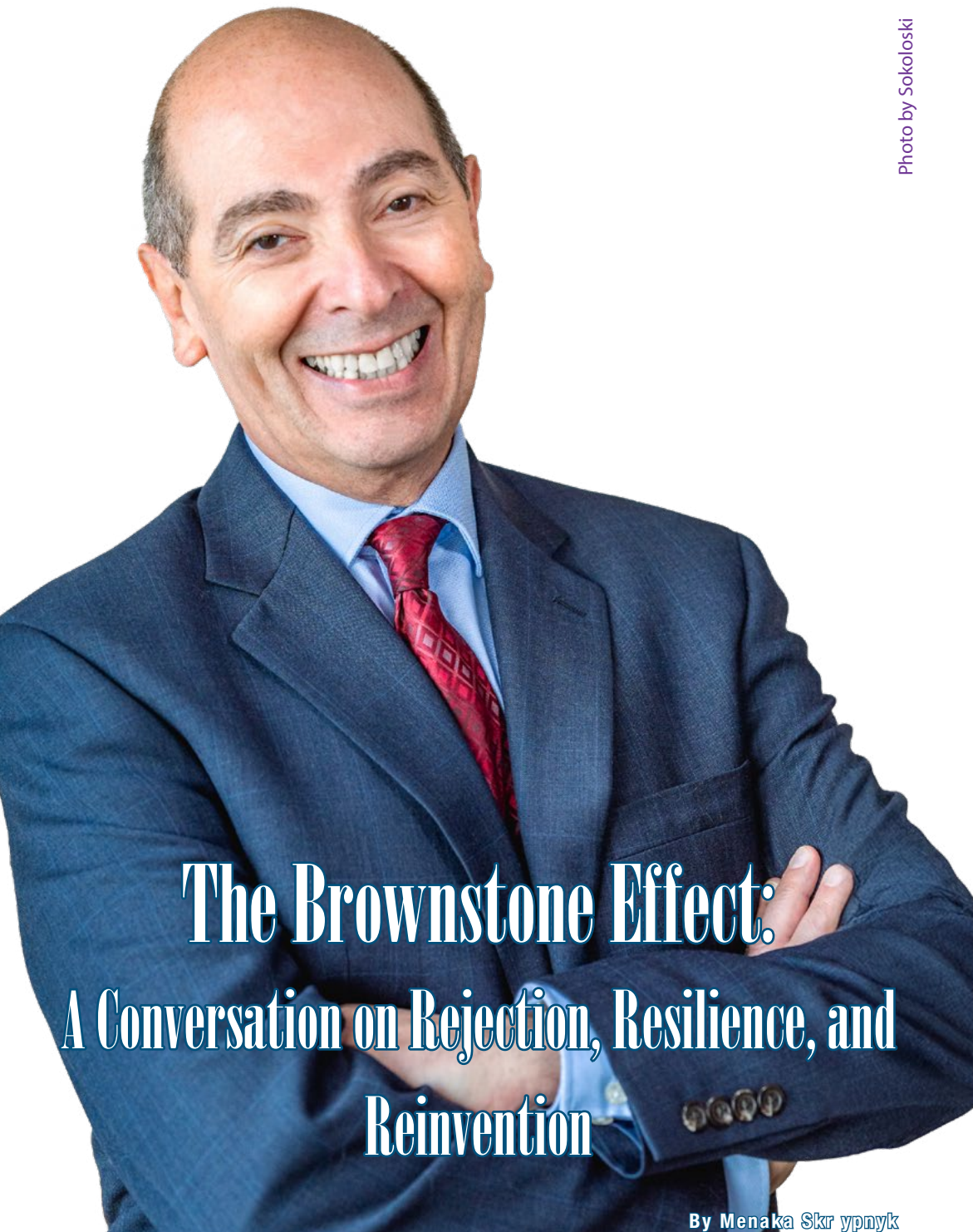


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The Brownstone Effect: A Conversation on Rejection, Resilience, and Reinvention

By Menaka Skrupnyk

Speaking with former Justice Harvey Brownstone feels less like interviewing a retired judge and more like catching up with a fun uncle after years apart.

Warm, animated, and full of life, Brownstone speaks excitedly about turning 70, the release of his memoir, *Without Prejudice: My Life as a Gay Judge*, its upcoming film adaptation, and, remarkably, shows equal enthusiasm for the person sitting across from him. What was meant to be a 40-minute interview stretched into a two-hour conversation; neither of us seemed eager to end it.

A respected interviewer in his own right, Brownstone launches enthusiastically into discussing *Harvey Brownstone Interviews*, his show broadcast on YouTube and UK television. Behind him sits an expansive bookshelf filled with books written by former guests; fitting for an avid reader whose post-retirement hobby unexpectedly evolved into a program garnering millions of views. After a long and successful career as a lawyer and judge, Brownstone reinvented himself as a talk show host, fulfilling a childhood dream he once set aside over fears of instability and his parents' likely disapproval. When the pandemic elevated Zoom into everyday life, he decided it was the right time to retire and saw an opportunity to conduct interviews from home. "Never did I think it would turn into a career — and such a good career!" he says. "It is a dream come true! I'm interviewing legendary stars who I grew up loving and I have to pinch myself." One such guest was Dick Cavett, whom Brownstone still idolizes.

"That is what this book is about. It's about taking the rejection and turning it into success." — Harvey Brownstone

Yet behind Brownstone's buoyant personality sits a life story shaped by rejection, resilience, and reinvention; the very story he chronicles in *Without Prejudice: My Life as a Gay Judge*. Writing the memoir meant stepping back into moments of his life that were not easy to relive. He explains, "If you're writing a book, you have to take the reader there with you. You have to answer questions like: What exactly did I say? What was the response? How did it all play out? I realized I had to put myself in a zone and transport myself back there." The most traumatic event of Brownstone's life was the response from his parents

(particularly his mother), when he came out as gay at the age of 19.

Since completing his memoir and having experienced his life story translated from page to screen, Brownstone says "resilience" is the characteristic that stands out most to him in young Harvey. He shares that he was bullied mercilessly throughout elementary school and learned to develop coping mechanisms as a result. "If you can make them laugh, they're not beating you up", he recalls. "I learned early on that if you could cultivate a personality people liked and wanted to be around, even if you belonged to a minority they didn't really like, those were the skills that helped me survive."

Without Prejudice does not shy away from darker terrain, including Brownstone's struggles with suicidal ideation after being cut off by his parents following his coming out. Despite the memoir's sharp humour and wit, Brownstone makes clear that humour was not a shield against profound depression, hopelessness, and crushing isolation brought on by the circumstances he faced at the time. In the book, he recounts calling a suicide prevention hotline, only to be immediately placed on hold — an experience that ultimately made him reconsider the act. He acknowledges that rejection and expulsion from home were all too common for LGBTQ+ youth at the time, and that he witnessed many turn to alcohol, drugs, or die by suicide.

The determination in him remains palpable, as he expresses, "I was determined that wasn't going to happen to me. I made rejection a powerful motivator." Driven to prove himself worthy of his parents' pride, Brownstone channelled that rejection into relentless achievement: excelling academically, becoming a lawyer, then a judge at 38, later adding authorship (his first book, *Tug of War*, was published in 2009) and a television show to a growing list of accomplishments. "That's what the rejection did for me," he reflects. "It made me want to prove [my parents] were wrong to be ashamed of me."

"You know, anyone can have grandchildren. Not everybody can say their son is a judge." — Odette Brownstone, Harvey's mother

While Brownstone's memoir does not paint his mother in the warmest light, he says he eventually came to understand the fear and generational attitudes that shaped her response. "I know it sounds crazy, but I wouldn't change her for the world," he says. Brownstone also agrees an important nuance is often lost in conversations around acceptance: parental rejection is not always rooted



Brownstone and his mother, Odette Brownstone

in a lack of love, but in fear. “My mother came from an era where homosexuality was considered the most horrible, vile, taboo thing ever,” he explains. “She evolved because she eventually understood that all this tough love she was giving me wasn’t working, and I wasn’t going to change.” That evolution progressed when Brownstone became a judge at just 38 years old. “She was finally proud of me. If I was good enough for the government to appoint as a judge, well then I MUST be someone special,” he recalls of his mother’s thinking. “Now, should I have had to do that much to get her approval? No.” Still, Brownstone speaks of his mother without bitterness. “If I hadn’t experienced that rejection and hardship, I never would’ve become the person I became,” he says. “It was because of her, so I am actually grateful. I owe everything I am to her.”

Brownstone’s mother was not the only source of rejection in his life. He recalls the many naysayers who dismissed his ambitions due to his sexual orientation, particularly when he applied to become a judge. He writes, “Everyone said the same thing: ‘Harvey, I’m sure you’d be a great judge, but no government in its right mind will ever appoint an openly gay judge.’” One senior government lawyer was even more blunt: “For you to fill out an application form would be a waste of good paper. Do us all a favour

and save a tree.” Following his swearing-in, Brownstone began planting a tree each year in that lawyer’s honour, and maintains the tradition to this day. He shares, “When someone tells you that you’re not good enough, that you don’t belong, that you’ll never amount to anything, it becomes about finding a way to prove them wrong. When I plant that tree every year, that’s my way of saying, look how wrong you were!”

And wrong they definitely were. Brownstone’s story has already extended beyond the page, having been adapted into a completed biopic prior to the memoir’s release. Directed by Shane Stanley, the film features recognizable names including David Arquette (*Scream*), David Mazouz (*Gotham*), and Rachelle Lefevre (*Twilight*). Having viewed an early cut, Brownstone describes the experience of watching his life translated to screen as “absolutely redemptive and healing.”

“It was very cathartic,” he says, “to see these actors portray my parents and me, knowing this story is really going to touch people. And not only because it’s about being gay. I’ve learned there are many reasons people feel rejected by their parents, [including] career choices, their partners, their lifestyles. I think this story will resonate with anyone who has struggled to feel accepted.”



Brownstone and David Arquette

Questions surrounding authenticity in LGBTQ+ casting inevitably arise when a story like Brownstone’s reaches the screen. Brownstone is quick to clarify, when asked about Arquette’s casting specifically, that Harvey is portrayed by three actors across different stages of life – not solely David Arquette. He also makes clear that, although he had no say in casting decisions, the production did seek openly gay actors for the role before ultimately casting Arquette. Still, Brownstone rejects the notion that actors must share a character’s sexuality to portray them convincingly. “I do not believe you have to be gay to play a gay character,” he firmly says. “That’s what acting is.” Invoking examples such as *Philadelphia* and *Milk*, he frames Arquette’s casting as a Hollywood practice of “casting against type” (surprising audiences with performances they might not initially expect), and says he stands behind his performance.

If there is one defining characteristic that emerges from speaking with Brownstone, it is reinvention. From judge to author to interviewer, each chapter was born from setbacks he refused to be defined by. Today, Brownstone believes his parents would understand that journey differently. “I do believe, wherever they are now, that their spirits are supportive,” he says. “This was a story that

needed to be told.” *Without Prejudice: My Life as a Gay Judge* is more than a memoir about sexuality, law, and the justice system; it is a deeply human story about rejection, resilience, and the complicated pursuit of acceptance. And, fittingly, the young boy who once abandoned his dream of interviewing out of fear of instability and disappointing his parents ultimately found his way back to it, with millions watching and a story finally told without prejudice.

Menaka Skrypyk is a Sri Lankan-Canadian Communications professional with an innate passion for writing and exploring the unfamiliar. She enjoys spending her free time with her husband and adorable Sheepadoodle, Oscar.





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The Generations Tour

Reflecting Back, While Looking Forward

By Bryen Dunn

The 1980s was a decade unlike any other that has stood the test of time in terms of pop culture relevance. In the last millennia of music, the 60s had the hippies and stoners, and the 70s saw the battle of punk vs disco, while the 90s had its own battle of grunge vs eurodance.

Here in Canada, we were lucky to have our own slew of acts who dominated the charts, along with artists from the south of us, and others from overseas. In fact, the “second” British invasion flooded us with punk and new wave acts from the UK, and there’s something about that influence that continues to resonate with the young and old today.

That is clearly shown on the upcoming Generations Tour, featuring **Alison Moyet**, **Soft Cell**, and **The Human League**. The only Canadian stop on this North American tour is at the [Fallsview Casino Resort](#) on July 2, 2026, which was one of the first dates to sell out. These three acts remain the most inspirational and impactful artists who arose from that time period, and fans are eager to catch them live, either for the first time, or the first time in a long time.

“Since our debut in 1980, we have always enjoyed an awesome welcome in North America and we’re really thrilled to be embarking on a coast-to-coast tour in 2026,” says Philip Oakey of **The Human League**, who are headlining the bill. “Sharing the stage on this visit will be two of the best and most iconic music acts of our generation, **Soft Cell** and **Alison Moyet**. Both are personal favourites. We’re looking forward to being part of the bill of a lifetime and, once more, getting the chance to play in some of our best-loved places in the world. We can’t wait.”

“Live work really matters to me,” explains Alison Moyet about the live performances to which all three will contribute. “I love the physical feeling that singing gives me. It’s totally primal and euphoric. On stage, I remember how to connect with myself. I am honoured to have been invited to share a stage on this tour with **The Human League** and **Soft Cell**. Stunning artists that re-framed our music scene and by cutting their own shapes, made it possible for people like me to launch.”



“The opportunity to tour with the Human League is just incredible,” adds Marc Almond of Soft Cell. “They are legendary and I know they will do an unforgettable show, having not toured the U.S. for over a decade, and Alison Moyet is such a talented artist and a wonderful singer. Honestly, it will be an absolute honour to be part of the bill with these artists.”

For Almond, this will be a bittersweet experience, as it will be the first, and last, touring without his Soft Cell co-founder Dave Ball, who passed away late last year. The pair had just completed a new album to be released later this year, mere days before Ball succumbed to his illness.

Soft Cell’s sixth and final studio album, *Danceteria*, was inspired by early 1980s New York nightlife and the late David Ball’s final creative reflections. It’s a reflection of the duo’s formative musical years recording in New York and winding up in the legendary 80s Manhattan after hours nightclub of the same name, which also hosted the U.S. launch party for Soft Cell’s debut album *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret* in 1981.

The album was heavily influenced by the late David Ball’s experiences during his final months, including morphine treatment, which shaped the sound and atmosphere of the tracks. Marc Almond described the lyrics as reflecting his personal life and creative experiences in New York during the early 1980s, blending memories of the city’s underground culture with his own life changes. The album is a deeply personal and historically inspired album, blending Soft Cell’s synthpop roots with Ball’s final creative visions, making it a significant release in the duo’s storied career.



Almond describes this album as a musical bookend to a career that helped define not just a genre, but an era. Almond’s reflections on Ball are emotional and impactful, stating, “Thank you, Dave, for being an immense part of my life and for the music you gave me. I wouldn’t be where I am without you.” *Danceteria* will be released later this year by [Republic of Music](#). RIP Dave Ball, this one’s for you!

Emerging during a particularly fertile music cosmos, these three artists initiated a colossal shift in the industry, rising up the ranks quickly and staying there for the decades to come, proving their longevity was a result of their solid musicianship and not because of any trends. Reaching new generations of fans for over 40 years, they continue to inspire subsequent generations through the innovative sounds and songs they created which remain hugely influential even today. To this end, this tour celebrates their impact as landmarks in the British music scene, with their innovative music and style having influenced fashion, sound and club culture in the U.K., the U.S., Europe, and beyond.

[The Human League](#) have released nine studio albums, including the multi-platinum-selling *DARE*, four EPs, over thirty singles and several compilation albums. They have had five albums and eight singles in the U.K. Top 10, two U.S. #1 singles, and have sold more than 40 million records worldwide. The group has inspired new generations of artists, written some of the all-time classic pop songs, had #1 singles and albums across the world and yet, as they look to their fifth decade, they remain fiercely independent and true to their roots.

[Alison Moyet](#) started off as a punk, became one half of iconic synth-pop duo, “Yaz”, and released her groundbreaking #1 debut solo album, *Alf* – all by the age of 23. She’s released ten solo studio albums, won three BRIT Awards, been nominated for a GRAMMY® for ‘Best Female Rock Vocal Performance’ and recently graduated from university with a first-class degree in Fine Art Printmaking. She is one of the most celebrated and distinctive voices the U.K. has ever produced. In 2024 she marked her 40th anniversary as a solo artist with the Top 10 album *Key*, launched her podcast, ‘40 Moyet Moments’, which topped U.K. and International music podcast charts, and completed a huge sell-out 59-date world tour in 2025.

[Soft Cell](#) formed in 1979 when Marc Almond met Dave Ball at Leeds College, and came to be through their common interest in writing “catchy but twisted pop songs.” Released in 1981, their single “Tainted Love”

The title track, *Danceteria*, was released in a limited edition 12" white vinyl for Record Store Day 2026, featuring remixes by Mark Moore & Dan Donovan, an extended mix, and a dub version. They’ve also released the track, *Out Come The Freaks*, with both Ball and the legendary [Nona Hendryx \(Labelle\)](#) on vocals, with production from [David and Don Was](#) from [\(Was\) Not Was](#), who originally released the track back in 1981.

Marc Almond commented, “I have loved working on this album. Dave’s music has once again inspired me to write a set of lyrics that reflect a time in my life in New York in the early 80s, at a particular creative and pivotal time of changes in my personal life and the city itself. Some of the songs are very personal. Soft Cell have always had a strong connection to New York, recording our first three albums there, and taking inspiration from its underground and culture. My Soft Cell lyrics have often looked at America through British eyes”.

Dave Ball reflected, “I’m very excited about the new Soft Cell album, the first thing to be created in my new studio in London. With Marc’s vocals recorded across the river in Soho (NYC), it’s inspired by, and tells the tales of our London and New York experiences in the early 80s”.



was a No. 1 hit in 17 countries and in the UK, it was the second bestselling single of the year. The track even set a Guinness World Record for the longest consecutive stay on the US Billboard 100 chart. With over twelve top tens in the UK, they were electro pioneers and their influence spread throughout the industry, racking up collaborations with Rhianna, NIN, Pet Shop Boys and Nona Hendryx amongst others. Soft Cell will be releasing their latest and final album *Danceteria* in Summer 2026, following the sad passing of Dave Ball last year. Soft Cell have won a Brit Award, and in 2018 Marc Almond was given an OBE for his contribution to music and charity. This tour is dedicated to Dave Ball.

Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities.





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WIGGED OUT

BY MR. J.J. MURRAY

"CLASSIC DRAG"

What is Classic Drag? You could ask that question to fifty people, and you would get fifty different answers.

Really, it's based on one's perspective and experiences. Drag has evolved over time, from generation to generation, so our perspective may come from what (drag) was available to us at influential moments in our lives.

This writer came out in the late '70s, so when I think of Classic Drag, my thoughts automatically go to what I would call "Old School Drag". A time when going to watch a drag show meant something special. A time when shows were not a dime a dozen, as they are today. Back then, shows generally took place on weekends, Friday & Saturday nights.

My Toronto drag career began in September 1981. At the time performers like Michelle Ross, Tony Brown, Michelle DuBerry, Miss Goodwill, Bryan Greenwood, Ronnie Holiday and, of course, "The Great Imposters" (among many others) were very popular. What I think I miss most about those times is what special significance a performance took on: weeks of preparation were common; handmade posters; learning new numbers rehearsing group numbers; and perfecting impersonations. Many of these traits are missing from today's shows; but, there are the exceptions which give hope.

Impersonations, Impersonators, and Impressionists have always had a special place in my heart. Mainstream examples like Milton Berle, Flip Wilson and Harvey Korman made us laugh on T.V.; but, it was female impressionists like Craig Russell and Charles Pierce who brought "drag" into its own. Dead on impressions of Hollywood royalty like Bette Davis or Joan Crawford allowed acceptance of what many considered immoral and socially unacceptable.

Today, in Toronto, we have few whom I would consider "old school". Old school has a certain attitude to it. A badge of honour of sorts, worn proudly. Unfortunately, the best of the best are no longer with us. Legends like Rusty Ryan, Danny Love, Jackie Loren, Chris Edwards, and Michelle Ross, helped to define old school drag. However, we do have the likes of Miss Conception who has brought her own version of drag and impressions to thousands throughout the world using old school professionalism, hard work, wit and charm.

It would be unreasonable not to mention RPDR - the elephant in the room. We must give credit where credit is due, and say that, because of this show, drag has become more mainstream. Those girls do makeup like nobody's business, and costumes are next level; but, they can't teach stage presence. Death drops and cartwheels do not a performer make. Lip sync is an afterthought nowadays. Glamour needs to make a comeback. Professionalism needs to be learned, which requires time and dedication to the craft.

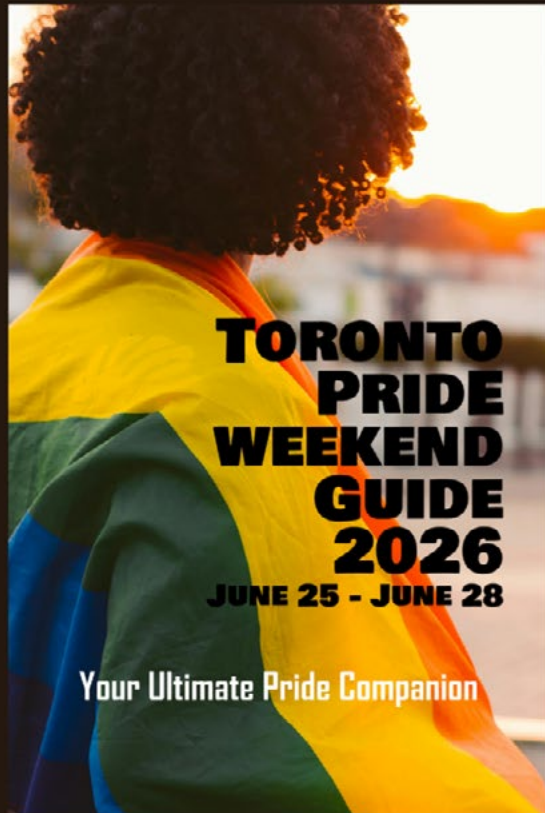
Ultimately, it comes down to the audience. After all, as performers these are the people who will determine success or failure in one's drag career. It becomes blatantly obvious when an artist has put time and effort into their performance, and audiences appreciate the effort. The alternative is both uncomfortable and painful to watch.

In conclusion, "classic" or "Old School" drag has not disappeared, it's been forgotten. Not by those of us who enjoy the good ol' days, but by those who are new to the craft. Much of the road that they walk these days was built on the backs of the many, many drag queens who came before all of us. The days when "ladies" were very, very special. Now is a good time to be nostalgic. We look back and we think the summers were warmer, people were cheerier, and the sky was bluer. Memories are precious. It was good to be around during a time when drag got the recognition it deserves. New or old school.

Mr. J.J. Murray (a.k.a. Canada's original lip sync assassin) is a Canadian Professional Female Impersonator who has been entertaining audiences from coast to coast for almost 50 years. Along with his impressions of Bette Midler, Liza Minnelli, and Dolly Parton, J. J. is also an accomplished host & Master of Ceremonies.



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Hustla Ball



With the rise of HIV meds like PrEP, and after the fall of the COVID pandemic, Toronto saw a rise in what can be described in polite conversation, as naughty parties. Avert your eyes clutch your pearls! From the now closed “Lair” club and “Boner” parties, through “Bunker” and the tried-and-true “Black Eagle,” to the new “Complex 19” and the city’s first ever “Hustla Ball,” Toronto is overflowing with parties where queer men can hookup and get down. All while dancing with a cold beverage.

“Complex 19”, the home of the hugely popular “YumYum” parties since summer 2025, has now been bought by a group of gay men, including **Michael Schwarz** and **Kier MacRae**, the former owners of the legendary “Fly” nightclub. With its gorgeous and historic interiors, it seems set to become this generation’s “Fly”. Besides cosmetic changes to the venue, they have moved into the future by investing in automated smart lockers. Now when you buy your party tickets, you can also purchase (after downloading the app) a locker which you can enter as many times as you like during your stay. But the biggest

announcement, which has been their policy since their first “YumYum” party, was recently revealed by co-owner **Bradley Baylock** via an Instagram post, and the backlash to it was surprising. The space is officially camera-free. This means a plastic strip is placed over everyone’s cellphone camera lens. The purpose is to bring people back to the party and keep them in the moment. The other purpose, which media training has obviously told them to avoid saying, is to ensure photos of the club’s more sexual activities – in the basement – are not posted for the world to see. This also protects the privacy of those involved in said activities. But, some online are claiming this is an invitation for predators, and accuse the club of encouraging abuse. To me, this is wild. It’s no secret what happens in these types of spaces, and cameras have never been socially acceptable in them. This policy just makes it official, and if anyone sees abuse happening, I’m sure the club would support the removal of that lens blocker in documenting it for the authorities. It’s not that complex.



But T-dot may not be that naughty. Case in point was the recent “Hustla Ball” Toronto. Props must be given to **Callum Colbey**, whose monthly “Service” party at “Black Eagle” is a feat of slutty Shakespearean theatre. This May, with his party partners, Colbey brought the legendary “Hustla Ball” to our oft prudish city. Originating in New York in late 1990s to de-stigmatize sex workers and adult film actors, “Hustla Ball” has grown into a massive international touring erotic party now bringing men to their knees in Berlin, London and Las Vegas. Though Toronto’s four events, called “Royal Affair”, over Victoria Day long weekend, were not as well attended, the parties were as kinky as a Prince Albert. From erotic pop-up shows, to gogo dancers in jewel encrusted jockstraps, to rope binding demonstrations, we were entertained. Part of the attendance problem might have been due to their shadow ban, and temporary full-out ban on social media platforms like Instagram. Though there was a slight influx of tourists,

I’m sure more of our American neighbours, would have made the trip up to sample some Canadian bacon.

Photos courtesy of [MitchelRaphael.com](https://www.instagram.com/mitchelraphael)
@hustlaball_official

Jamaican-born Rolyn Chambers grew up in the suburbs of Mississauga, before attending *Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD University)*. In 2001, he began his *Deep Dish* column with *fab Magazine*, which ran for a full decade, allowing him to interview everyone from clubbers and promoters, to celebrities and politicians. *Deep Dish* has now been resurrected once again here in theBUZZ. Chambers is also the author of, *The Boy Who Brought Down A Bathhouse*, available on Amazon. IG @rahraholyn





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Max Wolf Valerie



Max Wolf Valerie is a First Nations trans man, poet, writer and actor, living in Colorado. His transition memoir- “The Testosterone Files” was a 2007 Lambda finalist.

His book, “*The Criminal: The Invisibility of Parallel Forces*” features poems written from the punk eighties to the post transition punk nineties. Max has appeared in several films. His works have been published in many magazines.

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

Max Wolf Valerie-I’m mainly trying to keep my head above water in these horrific Trumpian times in the USA. I’m writing, organizing my archives, downsizing storage, and trying to stay fit and reasonably sane in what appears to be an increasingly insane world. I’ve been learning French on and off, since I’m a Francophile at heart. I also have a Substack where I publish poems and some essays, including essays on trans culture and politics.

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

MWV- I traveled to Los Angeles with a close friend to see Leon Mostovoy’s “Self-Made Man” exhibit at the One Institute. Leon is an old friend from the eighties, a trans man photographer who has done gritty, provocative work with strippers in San Francisco as well as trans men and artists in the punk scene. I love visiting LA, particularly Venice Beach—that carnival by the ocean. This was my second visit to LA in 2025. The first was for a small gathering to discuss the work of lesbian feminist poet

Adrienne Rich. She used one of my early, pre-transition poems, “I am Listening: A Lyric of Roots” in her work.

BK- Nice, I love LA, too. What are you looking forward to next year?

MWV- More travel, maybe even to Canada. I would love to drop into Montreal, being the Francophile I am.

BK- Many folks here would love to see you. Where can we see your work?

MWV- Check out my poetry and trans Substack “Maximum Threshold”. <https://maxwolfvalerio.substack.com>

My books can be ordered at multiple online sites. I’m featured in a recent episode of “Stealth: A Transmasculine Podcast”. <https://www.transmasculinepodcast.com/episodes/max-1>

BK- Super. Future plans?

MWV- Becoming more fit with weights to stave off Grandpa Time. More writing of innovative poetry, essays, and a surreal, freaky novel. More fun as the world recreates itself as a lunatic reality show. Buddhist Meditation! More travel—maybe this time to Iceland, France, Germany, Scotland, Ireland and Istanbul.

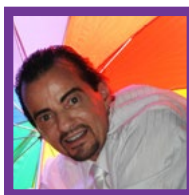
BK- Haha, that all sounds great. Any message you would like to put out there?

MWV- We are in hyper-reactionary and terrifying times, particularly in the US. It is important to have a long view, and while being uncompromising regarding freedom and resistance, to build internal resilience. Keep your sense of humor. Read widely, and always question.

BK- Wise words. Finish this sentence for us. Life wouldn’t be the same without. . .

MWV- My red Min Pin Ozzy. He’s a bundle of energy and curiosity. A beautiful little dog with a courageous heart.

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






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As a worker-cooperative, this shop is run democratically by its worker-members. This means that they do not profit when you purchase your new favourite toy, book, or gender affirming gear from them. Instead, any profits go back into worker wages, keeping prices low, and providing low-cost gender-affirming gear to the community.

Unlike many other retailers, workers do not make commission on sales. Instead, they are interested in helping you find the sex toy that will work best for you - not the one that will generate the most profit for the store. Being a co-operative keeps everything they do honest, ethical and focused on helping you access the resources that will work best for you. They even offer a one year in store warranty on everything they stock.

In the shop, you will find fully functioning demos of all products so that you can get a full sense of how each toy works and how they feel in your hand. CAYA try every single product in their shop to ensure all of the toys do what they claim to, work well, and are safe to use. If you see a toy on

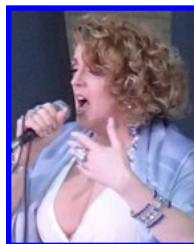
these shelves or on their website, it is because someone at CAYA has loved it and thinks you will too.

The selection of products is broad and educating. Their stock selections seem to run the gamut from lubes and massage oils through vibrators and dildos, through BDSM gear to chest binders and packers. And, it doesn't stop at equipment and accessories, CAYA also carries a selection of books, and offers gift cards – because nothing beats the gift of freedom of choice in addressing one's sexual interests.

CAYA believe that sexuality is a human right. Sexuality is as essential to the human experience as eating or breathing. That is why CAYA is focused on providing an open, judgment-free environment where anyone can discover and access paths to sexual health and pleasure.

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Events Editor, Sherry Sylvain is a transgender woman who has been working in the LGBTQ community for too many years to count (or admit to).



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torontojazz.com/artists/the-soul-rebels

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Hugh's Room, 296 Broadview Ave., Toronto

torontojazz.com/artists/isaiah-collier-coltrane

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June 24; 7:30 p.m.

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Buddies In Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St., Toronto

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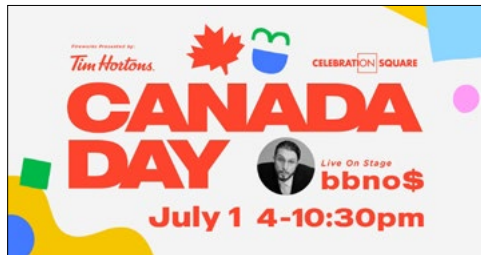
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Don't miss the incredible lineup of Canadian rising stars and biggest acts on the saugaLIVE Stage, featuring the pop stylings of Tedy, Latin-Pop powerhouse Aiona Santana, and multi-platinum, JUNO award winning, bbnos\$.

Celebration Square, 300 City Centre Drive, Mississauga

www.mississauga.ca/arts-and-culture



The Q Musicale Festival

July 9, 16, 23; 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

All queer, all live music! Featuring special guest artists Micah Barnes, Nicolina Bozzo, and dance music Icon, Simone Denny. Plus, The Q Music Awards on July 23 featuring 5 exciting artists who are the recipients of the new awards for Queer Song, Solo Artist, Group, Emerging Artist, and Album of the Year.

Sankofa Square, Dundas St. E., Toronto

theqmusicale.ca



Black Gold

August 15; 8:00 p.m.

A talent-packed music review featuring solid gold hits from Motown, R&B, Disco, and Soul to Rock'n'roll!

Living Arts Centre, 4141 Living Arts Dr., Mississauga

www.ticketmaster.ca

ROAD TRIPS

Karaoke

Thursdays from 8:00 p.m.

Whether you're an award-winning vocalist, a show-tune aficionado, or just enjoy a great time, with great music, and great friends, this karaoke night is for you! No cover.

Club 717, 717 Wilson Rd. S., Oshawa

www.club717.com

Reverend Horton Heat with The Surfrajettes

June 23; 7:00 p.m.

A true rock and roll institution storms the Maxwell's stage. Reverend Horton Heat deliver a high-octane, sweat-soaked live show that fuses psychobilly, rockabilly, punk, surf, and country into something wild, primal, and unforgettable.

Maxwell's Concerts and Events, 35 University Ave. E., Waterloo

ticketscene.ca/events/58292

Drag Bingo

June 26; 8:00 p.m.

They are excited to bring you a live, intimate, fun night of Drag BINGO - part of their 'Pride Tour'! Drag, BINGO, and Prizes in an interactive environment all wrapped up in Rainbows! Happy Pride!

Raging Bull Dart Lounge, 84 Lewis Rd., Guelph

www.tickettailor.com/events/troyboventertainment/2242865

Pride Palooza

June 26; 9:00 p.m.

Join host Scarlett Letter and special guests Gloria Hoal & Dixie Normus for a night of incredible drag, cheap drinks, and unforgettable Pride celebrations!

Club 717, 717 Wilson Rd. S., Oshawa

www.club717.com

Canada Drag

July 3; from 9:00 p.m.

This show is dedicated entirely to Canadian music, with local drag performers taking the stage to celebrate iconic Canadian artists and legends through lip sync performances, comedy, and runway moments.

Club 717, 717 Wilson Rd. S., Oshawa

www.club717.com



By Sherry Sylvain

PRIDE PALOOZA
 HOSTED BY SCARLETT LETTER
 WITH GLORIA HOAL & DIXIE NORMUS
 26 JUNE 2026
 8:00RS @9 SHOW @10
 UNIT 717 WILSON RD N
 \$10 ENTRY NON-MEMBERS

Pitbull Rave

July 10; 10:00 p.m.

On arrival, you'll be handed a bald cap. From that moment on... you're part of it. A sea of bald heads. Sunglasses on. Hands in the air. Pitbull, reggaeton & Latin party anthems.

Biltmore Theatre, 39 King St. E., Oshawa

tickets.biltmoretheatre.com/eventperformances.asp?evt=338

Summer Noise Fest

July 11; from 6:00 p.m.

In its inaugural year, Summer Noise Fest takes over Biltmore Theatre with a stacked line including: The Wild High; Excuses Excuses; The Jailbirds; Double Experience; Army Of One; ZAFITG.

Biltmore Theatre, 40 King St. E., Oshawa

tickets.biltmoretheatre.com/eventperformances.asp?evt=331

Pitbull X Fur - Camp Boozy

July 24 - 26

Ready for all the naughty boys to head to the woods for a weekend of shenanigans at Cedar's Campground? Pack up your sunscreen and speedos, they're about to get wild in the woods.

Cedars Campground, 1039 Concession Rd. S.W., Hamilton

www.camplife.com/1061/reservation/step1

PITBULL & FUR PRESENT
CAMP BOOZY
 @ CEDAR'S CAMPGROUND
 JULY 24-26, 2026

Events Editor, Sherry Sylvain is a transgender woman who has been working in the LGBTQ community for too many years to count (or admit to).



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