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My Final Interview with Michelle DuBarry

The Loss of a Legend

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It has been an interesting summer, and in many respects it is sad to realize that it will soon be coming to an end. Although we may miss the warmth and sunshine which are such a prized commodity in Canada, we can welcome a change that should help to reduce the wildfires which have ravaged such vast areas.

This July, we lost a legend. We publish a long-unseen final interview of the Iconic Michelle DuBarry by Rolyn Chambers.

In this issue, Menaka Skrypnyk gives us a touch of magic in her interview of the NB drag artist/magician/comedian/performance artist who is Lucy Darling. And, Sean Beaton talks with **The Q Music Awards** "Emerging Artist of the Year", OMG Classic.

Meanwhile, though we must bid a fond farewell to long-time contributor, Boyd Kodak, and his "A Kodak Moment" column, in his place we welcome singer-songwriter, musician, and trans advocate, Lucas Silveira with, "A Quick Klik" in which he will be addressing topics and individuals of interest to Trans Men, and the broader Trans community.

We also have the pleasure of welcoming a new guest writer for the popular column, "Wiggged Out". Gil Segev, a.k.a. Gila Munster, gives us some insight into "difference", and the value of being different, not only as a drag artist, but also as a person.

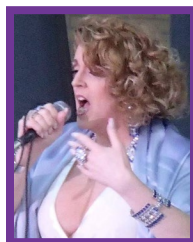
Finally, we bring you a look at a queer bookstore in Ottawa, The Spaniel's Tale, in our recurring column, Beyond The Village, looking at queer owner/operated or supportive businesses outside of Toronto's queer village. And, we continue to keep you aware of some of the best events going on in and around the city, with our events listings.

Enjoy the rest of the warmth while it lasts; the deep freeze will be here soon enough, and for more than long enough.

Sherry Sylvain

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Behind The Curtain: The Life and Death of Canada's Oldest Performing Drag Queen

By Rolyn Chambers

Russell Alldread, famously known as Michelle DuBarry, lived an openly queer life before queer rights were won, before queer marriage was legal, before the first Pride marched down any street, and well before the Stonewall Riots ignited the fire that seemed to start everything.

One afternoon, in 2019, I sat down with Russell (out of drag) over tea and scones at the old Glad Day Book Store in the heart of Toronto's Queer Village for an interview. An interview, that because of the two-year Covid lockdown just months later, would never be published. Until now.

A Boy in Heels

Rolyn Chambers- What was the start of your drag journey?

Russell Alldread/Michell DuBarry- My family were performers. With my two sisters and three girl cousins, we would sing in church and at women's groups. When I was nine (in 1940), they dressed me up in a black velvet strapless gown and blonde wig. They took a picture of me in my first drag outfit. I still have it. It's framed in my apartment.

RC- What was it like growing up queer back then?

RA/MD- I was alone as a little boy on a farm with all these women around me, but I always knew who I was. I was always drawing lady's shoes as a child, so when I arrived in Toronto when I was 21, I became a shoe salesman. This is where I met my wife.

RC- Wife?

RA/MD- Yes. I was working at Antonio's Bootery on Yonge Street. I sold her some shoes, and she made me escort her home on the streetcar. We were married soon after. She was very aggressive. We were both 27 and were married for five years. We lived in a bedroom in her mother's house the entire time. But I was very much dressing in drag and going to gay bars at the time, too. One night, I came home and the lock to our bedroom was changed.



If The Heels Fit

In the 1950s Alldread began going by the drag name Anita Modes (pronounced Mo-Day.)

RC- What was the Toronto gay scene like back then?

RA/MD- Actually, at first, I would get dressed up with my trans friend, Lynne Powers, and hang out at straight bars. The Ronnie Hawkins Band always played at The Pilot on Yonge Street and they always invited us to hang out after the bar closed, for more drinks. The guys never suspected a thing.

RC- Was this why your marriage ended?

RA/MD- Probably. But Anita, my drag persona, came out more once it ended, at my new home I shared with three gay guys, and sometimes socializing at gay bars. Letro's was one of my favorites.

RC- What made you decide to do drag professionally?

RA/MD- One of my roommates insisted. They were all sick of seeing me do it at home. He introduced me to the manager at The 511 bar on Yonge Street. The 511 put on miniature Broadway shows. It was very much a production. Craig Russell got his start there before moving to Hollywood.

Defiant Dubarry

At the St. Charles Tavern Alldread got his first taste of gay resistance.

RC- I've heard and read about the horrible Hallowe'ens at Toronto's legendary St. Charles Tavern. Every year people gathered on the opposite side of the street to mock and throw things at the gay men and drag queens going inside. Instead of stopping the disorderly mob, police just set up barricades. What was it like for you?

RA/MD- At my first Hallowe'en at the St. Charles, I got all dressed up in a red velvet dress and long blonde wig and walked over to the mob of people on the other side of the street. I wasn't scared. It was Hallowe'en. Why wouldn't I walk over to them? I of course had eggs thrown at me. I just went home and changed to another stunning gown and went back.

The Heights of Drag

A series of fortunate incidents, some by chance and some by choice, propelled Alldread's career as Michelle DuBarry forward.



RC- When did you become Michelle DuBarry, and why?

RA/MD- While I worked at 511, I was also part of a drag group. It was me, another gay guy named Jimmy Durante, a bisexual guy named Lonnie Robertson, and Lonnie's straight wife. It was Jimmy and Lonnie who convinced me to change my stage name from Anita Modes to Michelle DuBarry. They said it would look better on a marquee.

RC- And then you began touring with them?

RA/MD- Just for a short while. Those guys ended up moving to Vancouver and they left me with all their stage equipment. So, I got three other queens together (Rusty Ryan, Tracy Reeves and Angel Adams) and went on the





road with them instead. We called ourselves, The Great Impostors.

RC- The legendary The Great Imposters. You toured small town, after small town, all over Canada, for ten years. I read your shows were so popular that many were held over for weeks at a time. And this was the 1970s.

RA/MD- We would walk around town in cowboy hats, jackets and jeans during the day and people would come up to us and say, 'You're those guys who dress up as women.' They saw us as men, performers, not queer. Though some of the men would often try and get up to our hotel rooms after.

Reflecting on the Past

RC- What do you think of the drag scene now? And do you have any advice for new drag queens?

RA/MD- Everyone is doing drag now no matter if they look good or not. On the weekends, the village is filled with these queens in weird looking outfits. Before, we did drag to look like women, now some do it to look like aliens. But it's all for the better. They decide what they want to look like. You don't tell drag queens what they should do, and I don't really give advice.

RC- Do you still have many of your gowns you've worn over the years?

RA/MD- I've kept almost all of them. I sleep on them. I don't have a bed in my bedroom anymore. I sleep on my gowns.

RC- Even your coronation gowns you've worn as the twice crowned Empress of The Imperial Court of Toronto?

RA/MD- Yes. They still fit perfectly. I can't afford to buy anything new. If I didn't still have them, I probably would never go into the village.

RC- I'm glad you do. People need to see that older generations of queer people don't just disappear.

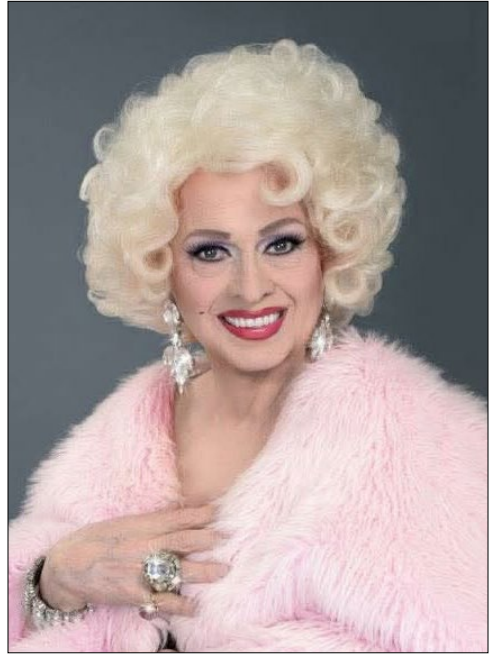
RA/MD- But its lonely. I still spend a lot of time in my apartment by myself.

Depending on the Kindness of Strangers

RC- Tell me about your 2015 entry into "The Guinness World Records".

RA/MD- That was all because of one of my fans who became a friend. For a year I held the title as "The World's Oldest Performing Drag Queen". But, then some bitch in the US proved that she was a couple months older than me.

RC- But you're still Canada's oldest performing drag queen. And now EGAL (Canada's national queer advocacy group) is campaigning to get you on the Ellen show.



RA/MD- I hope it happens. I love Ellen. I watch her every morning.

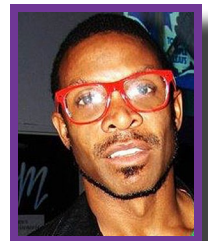
Sadly, Covid shut down the world a year later and Ellen ended soon after in 2022. Spearheaded by EGALE, a national queer advocacy group, the crusade was also used to raise much needed awareness of issues facing queer seniors; some of which Alldread, who was 88 at the time, was experiencing.

After we delved into his rich history, Alldread hinted at the simple life he was leading in his small rent-controlled apartment. Though he had come to terms with the fact that almost all of his close friends had long since died, the loneliness was hard on him. If it were not for his proximity to the queer village, and his notoriety, he probably would have gone out even less and would have been alone even more. I felt it important that he did go out, not just for his own physical and mental health, but also to act as a living reference of Toronto's queer history, and an important reminder that gay men are not simply put on pink icebergs and sent off to die on their own after a certain age. While in his later years, some Church Street bars and their patrons might have seen him as a novelty, a happy old queen who still interacted with the scene of today, a thick burgundy curtain separated the performance of Michelle DuBarry from the backstage reality of Russell Alldread. A curtain I

was privy to peek behind. The curtain that opened up onto the shining lights of local fame but would slowly close on personal isolation. Behind it though, in his final years, Russell Alldread, known famously as Michelle DuBarry, was loved and cared for by a small group of people, dedicated to ensuring this legend lived out his final years in the dignity befitting a diva.

This year, on Canada Day, Canada's queer community lost this icon who was at one time in The Guinness World Records. This icon who was known to many as Michelle DuBarry.

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, 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

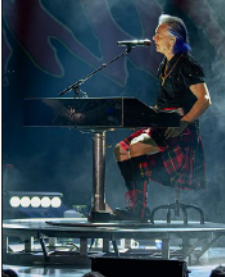




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Hendrix, Darling, What a Magical Act

By Menaka Skrypnyk

Carisa Hendrix has eaten fire, broken a Guinness World Record, and spent years performing across disciplines. But their most recognizable creation may be a woman seemingly plucked from a bygone era. Her name is Lucy Darling.

Lucy is a flirtatious, mischievous comedy magician with the sensibilities of a 1930s socialite and absolutely no interest in behaving herself.

Within minutes of speaking with Hendrix, I realized my five pages of questions were wildly optimistic; we made it through two. A newly minted fan myself, and only recently introduced to Lucy Darling, I found myself going down a Hendrix-Darling rabbit hole, from Hendrix's early years as a fire eater to a recent Lucy show.

Others who are also new to Hendrix and Lucy may not know what to expect from their shows; their work isn't traditional stand-up, nor is it simply a magic show where audiences know exactly what they're getting. Hendrix nods, "that's on purpose."

They explain that their interest in what entertainment could accomplish has always extended beyond entertainment itself. Hailing from Alberta, Canada, Hendrix attended Alberta College of Arts and Design (now known as Alberta University of the Arts) for visual and performance art. Their education, along with acting classes and improv, influenced their approach to live entertainment. Just as visual artists communicate through their art, Hendrix is always thinking of new ways to communicate, recognizing that "the barriers between mediums are arbitrary." Rather than consciously setting out to create a new kind of live performance, Lucy naturally evolved into something that didn't quite fit into one existing category. As Hendrix puts it, "the line between magic and acting is not as thick as people think it is. The skillset is ancillary to the primary purpose of entertaining and creating a world that people want to escape to."

And Lucy's world is one where the audience is very much part of the performance. Her crowd work veers into insult comedy that may leave audiences in shock or discomfort, as Lucy appears to walk a tightrope between appropriate and perhaps too far. A Jessica Rabbit-esque character, Lucy is sweet enough to get away with anything, often making mischievous observations about audience members, pointing out certain traits or making coy remarks in front of their partners.





Yet Hendrix rarely gets pushback for what Lucy says on stage. In fact, post-show feedback often comes from audience members wishing she had pushed them harder and kept going. For Hendrix, the question isn't whether a joke might offend someone, but who is being empowered by it, who is being targeted and whether the audience understands the context. They note that the pushback they do receive tends to come from people who weren't actually at the show, such as well-meaning individuals who may assume a joke is offensive without understanding how the community it references received it.

Hendrix points to their own experience as a person with autism, explaining that non-autistic people have sometimes contacted them to say they were offended by jokes about autism, even when those jokes were intended to empower neurodivergent people. "I think with some people, if I said a joke with the word 'autism' in it, they assume I'm punching down, because they're actually not listening," they say. Instead, Hendrix has found it "very interesting" to see the subcultures themselves celebrate the humour. With crowd work and audience banter, Lucy is ultimately playing a game with the audience, and Hendrix continues to learn with every show that the line between what the audience might consider too far and what they are willing to approach is "far beyond anything [they're] willing to approach."

Hendrix's approach to crowd work also comes from a deliberate desire to reclaim a form of comedy that has taken on new associations. As Lucy's popularity reaches new heights, particularly with a larger audience watching her videos online, in-person audiences may arrive with their guard up, already anticipating what Lucy might say. "I think especially in the last 20 years, crowd work in particular, and what would be defined as insult comedy,

has become something that is more and more owned by the right," Hendrix reflects. "So, it is cool to do something that is queer and neurodivergent, and very left-leaning, while also using a lot of crowd work and using what a lot of people would refer to as 'insult comedy.'" Hendrix still watches crowd work and insult comedy from the 1950s and '60s, noting that much of it was liberal and rooted in self-deprecation, as comedians didn't take themselves too seriously. "We've kind of lost that," Hendrix says, "so I'm glad to be doing it and prompting people to try and navigate it."

That navigation becomes even more complicated as, largely over the last two years, Hendrix and Lucy have garnered a new following through social media. With strategic cuts and filming choices, videos online can change how an audience reaction is perceived. Someone watching from home may wonder whether Lucy went too far based on a particular reaction, without seeing the full context of the exchange. Hendrix agrees, "we do control the edit and, respectfully, at times, deliberately edit to make it seem a little more edgy than it actually was. We take out all the softness to it, because that's what does well online." That missing softness is often evident in the comments, however. Under almost every video, the person with whom Lucy teased or bantered will leave a comment describing their positive experience at the show, often prompting equally positive responses from other viewers. For those left in shock by the interaction, Hendrix points out that context is usually visible in the comments section.

Anyone else new to Hendrix's genius in Lucy Darling may notice just how much of the show appears improvised; that's because it is. With a segment called Ask Lucy, audience members submit questions that Lucy answers onstage, with Hendrix never seeing them beforehand.

But the improvisation is only one part of what makes the show work; it has also been deliberately designed to exist in conversation with its online audience. While Lucy has to respond instantaneously onstage, viewers watching from home have time to formulate their own responses. “With the video online, the person who Lucy is responding to on the show will usually leave a comment and others will respond to them with, ‘here’s what I would have done in the moment’—in a way, trying to outdo [Lucy] comedically—and about 85% of the time, the comments are much funnier than the video,” Hendrix says. For them, that interaction is part of the performance rather than simply a byproduct of it.

That same balance between structure and spontaneity shapes how Hendrix builds a new Lucy show. Their goal, they explain, is to direct the performance while allowing it to write itself in real time. At home, they determine the larger arc and rhythm: “We meet these strangers, learn about them, give them either a character or a goal of some kind, and then provide them with a safe space to play pretend. And then it’s my job to turn whatever they come up with into a three-act play. It has to have a beginning, middle, and end.” Hendrix’s homework is to anticipate the possibilities within each scenario (and how Lucy might respond to them) without scripting the audience’s choices. “The best way to think about it is, I show up with all the jars, and they are of different shapes; but, then the audience fills those jars with whatever ideas they have. And sometimes, it overflows and gets everywhere, and it’s my job to clean it up and make it a tight show.”

It means that Hendrix’s writing process looks very different from sitting down and drafting a script. Much of the show development happens while they are doing other things: walking, cleaning or simply sitting without the distractions of music or an audio book. “I’ve gotten better and better at imagining concepts, but not writing anything,” they explain. “Because the more I sit down and write the actual words, the less it feels like the rest of the show.” Instead, Hendrix imagines worlds, scenarios and the shape of a routine, capturing ideas in a notebook with only a few lines and a sketch. Sometimes those ideas become physical prototypes, created with a 3D printer, and then sit on a shelf until they are ready to become part of a show. “So writing is more like building a box of stuff, filling it up, putting it on a shelf, and waiting until that thing is ready to come to fruition.”

For Hendrix, that philosophy of creating extends beyond the stage. Their work is rooted in the belief that entertainment can be a starting point for conversation and community,

rather than an end in itself. “It’s important to me that the social media videos start conversations,” they say. “What is engagement if not the first step in community.”

And these days, writing is only one part of Hendrix’s job. Much of their time is spent working as the equivalent of an artistic director and CFO: managing staff, getting through a full in-box, preparing P&L reports, planning tours, and organizing healthcare, while also running their own production company. That company grew out of Hendrix’s desire to protect and develop the unusual relationship between Lucy’s stage show and its life online. “Over the years, I’ve worked with great production companies and some not-so-great production companies, and I’ve seen how much that matters,” they explain. Their approach, described as “screen to stage, stage to screen”, requires a production model that understands both sides. Rather than teaching an established company a new method or relying on a less experienced team, Hendrix decided to build their own production company from scratch.

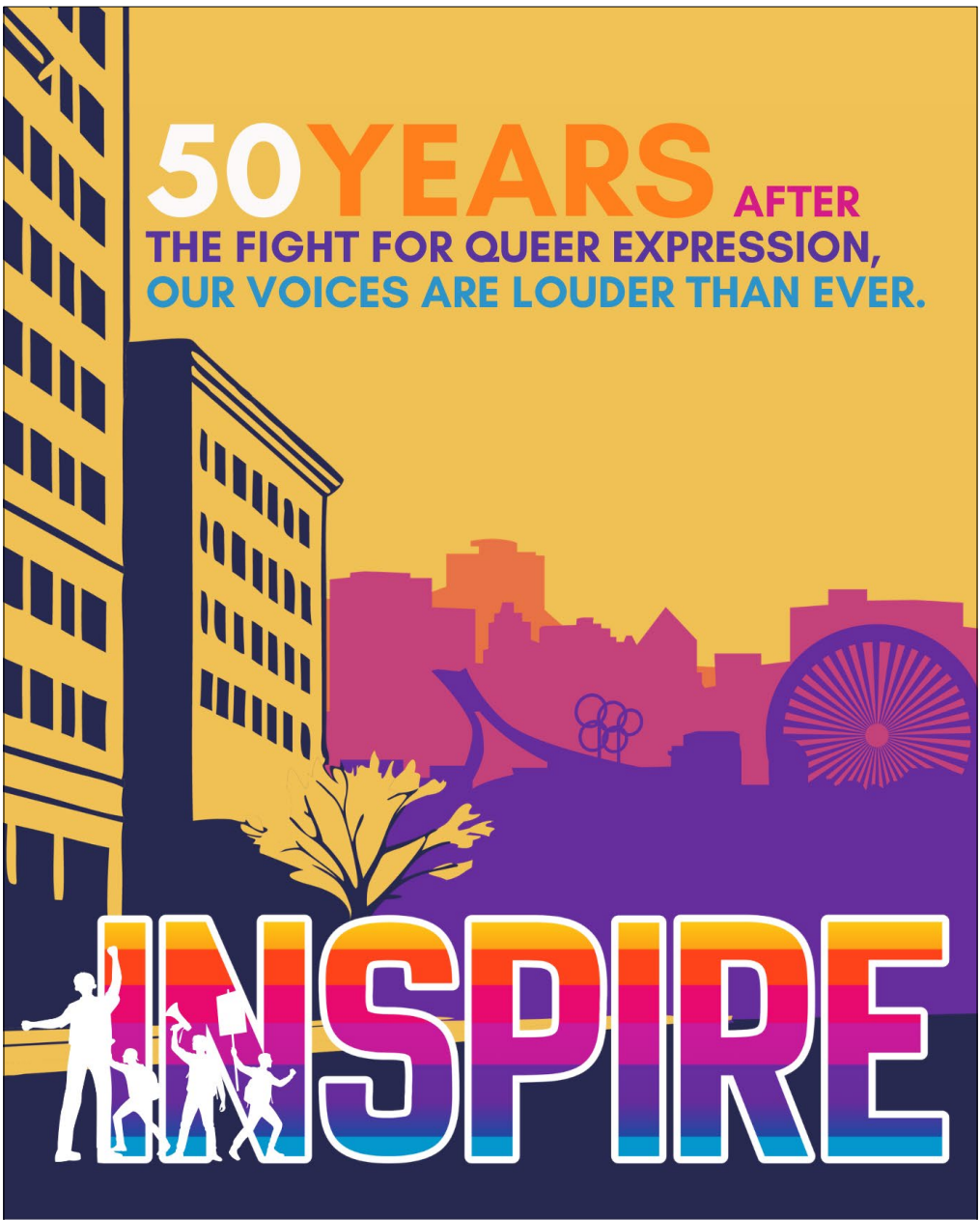
For someone who thrives on “big picture planning,” there is plenty on the horizon. Hendrix is working on a couple of books written in Lucy’s voice, preparing to celebrate 10 years of Lucy Darling in 2027 and planning an international tour. Thinking well beyond the next show, part of that preparation involves strength training four days a week, both to withstand the physical demands of touring, and to prepare for a future magic trick that will require a particular level of strength. And then there is the dress. “For the 10th anniversary, we’re launching a 30-pound dress,” Hendrix says, laughing. Lucy’s costumes are already heavy, often carrying their weight in awkward places, and Hendrix knows that maintaining Lucy’s physical demands will be part of sustaining the character for years to come. “I want to be able to tour forever,” they say.

With new shows, books, props, artists and an international tour all in development, Hendrix remains firmly in the role of project manager for whatever Lucy Darling becomes next. “The team is fantastic! I’m so lucky.”

All photos courtesy of James Murphy.

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 husband and adorable Sheepadoodle, Oscar.





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OMG Classic Jeff Graham

By Sean Ban Beaton

Every few years or so there seems to be an 80s music revival, and for good reason - it was an era of bold styles, synth confection, and sonic experimentation - a messy blend of art and artifice. The introduction of music videos made eye-catching visuals nearly as important as the music itself, and the concept of the 'bubblegum popstar' that still resonates today was born.

This issue's featured artist, OMG Classic (a.k.a. Jeff Graham), has taken inspiration from the sparkliest aspects of that era and infused it into his tight three minute club tracks - his upcoming album *Retro Future* marks his third full-length release, along with numerous singles, EPs, and music videos.

A recent recipient of the Emerging Artist of the Year award from The Q Music Awards, he credits his BFA in New Media from Toronto Metropolitan University for giving him the technical skills in video and sound production, interactive design, coding, and immersive installations to bring his artistic visions to life. A self-described perfectionist, he produces all his own music videos, album art, and social media posts, leaving no reversible sequin unturned.

Here he is to share a bit more about his work.

SBB - Hey Jeff, or OMG Classic as you're also known - I know you have a retro feel to your music, so is that where the 'Classic' part of your name originated?

OMG C - It actually started as my catchphrase growing up in the '90s. Whenever a great song came on, or a character did something entertaining in a movie, I'd be like, "Oh my God... classic!" I guess you could say it was my version of "yasss!" or "iconic!" before those words became part of our everyday vernacular. So yes, it's definitely rooted in nostalgia.

SBB - Well, great to have you here, and congrats on your recent 'Emerging Artist of the Year' win at the inaugural The Q Music Awards. How did it feel when you found out you won?

OMG C - I was absolutely over the moon. I've been making music for a long time now, and I had reached a point where I wasn't even sure I wanted to continue. So, to receive that recognition at such a pivotal moment was genuinely overwhelming. It felt like the ultimate pat on the back and a reminder that everything I've poured into my music over the years was worth it. And honestly, the "Emerging Artist" title makes perfect sense for where I am right now. It was only within the past year or so that I found the confidence to step out of the studio and onto the stage. Performing for a live audience has unlocked a whole new side of me as

an artist. The music I make, and all the theatricality that comes with it, is meant to be experienced with a crowd.

SBB - You won for 'Emerging Artist', but you've actually been at this since at least 2012 with the release of your first single "Champagne" - can you tell us a little bit about your journey getting to this point, and what struggles you've faced?

OMG C - You did your research! Now we're peeling away the layers of the onion and starting to reveal my age here. *laughs* I had this bucket list in my early 20s, and one of the things on it was "write and record a pop song." That's how "Champagne" was born. It was supposed to be a fun, kitschy little bucket-list item, but the funny thing is, and I'm not tooting my own horn here, it turned out surprisingly good. That's when I was bitten by the music bug... and I never really recovered. I've worked on music here and there in the years following, but it wasn't until 2020, when I released my debut album *One Hit Wonder*, that I started taking it more seriously. Since then, it's been a pretty wild ride.

SBB - You've described your sophomore full-length album, *Teenage Wasteland* (2024) as a "bold exploration of growing up feeling "different", and a "journey towards self-acceptance." What do you feel has brought you closer to that self-acceptance and embracing your differences?

OMG C - I think getting older has helped me realize that the things I once thought made me "different" (in a bad way) are actually the things that make me "interesting" (in a good way). For a long time, I felt like I had to tone myself down or fit into a certain box, and I'm finally at a point where I just don't really care about doing that anymore. Making music has been a huge part of that journey. It's given me a place to turn those feelings of being an outsider into something creative, colourful, and hopefully... relatable. And the more I've embraced that, the more confident I've become, especially over the past year performing in front of live audiences. I'm still a work in progress. But I've learned to stop fighting the unique parts of myself and start celebrating them.

SBB - And what would you say is the message you want to convey to your listeners?

OMG C - The main message I want to convey through my music is simple: be yourself. We're all incredibly unique, why try to change or hide that for anybody? And the message I want to convey through this interview is: it's never too late. Whatever you want to do in life, take the chance and do it. A year ago, I never imagined I'd be sitting here talking to you about my music... and here I am! So,

if there's something you've been putting off, maybe this is your sign to go for it.

SBB - I couldn't agree more! Aside from that message, it's clear that your music was intended to inspire people to dance. Are you big into the club scene?

OMG C - Not anymore! Well, that's not entirely true. I do still go out occasionally in The Village here in Toronto. But when I was younger, I was out at the clubs all the time. Fly Nightclub was legendary, and my friends and I did our fair share of dancing on the light boxes at Buddies in Bad Times. There I go aging myself again!

SBB - After checking out your socials, it's clear you put significant effort into your media presence - numerous music videos, elaborate album art, choreographed live performances - rather ambitious for an independent artist. Do you have a team of people to help you with this, or are you doing this all yourself?

OMG C - I'd say I do about 95% of it myself. Of course, I need someone else to operate the camera when I'm filming a music video. But when it comes to conceptualizing, directing, styling, editing and all the other little details, that's all me. It's honestly a blessing and a curse. The blessing is that everything I put out is a very honest reflection of me and my vision. The curse is that I'm a perfectionist, so I tend to obsess over every tiny detail and drive myself completely insane in the process.

SBB - Sounds like a lot to take on. On top of singing and songwriting, do you also produce your own music? What is your involvement in that process?

OMG C - I write all of my own lyrics and melodies (apart from the cover songs, of course), but I leave the actual production side of things in the very capable hands of my long-time collaborator, Ashton Price (@morphpro). While I don't produce my own music, I'm very involved in the process - I'd love to learn more about the production side of things, but I'm too busy editing music videos! *laughs*

SBB - And who are the artists who have helped shape what you do and how you do it?

OMG C - There are far too many to name! But I've always been drawn to artists who are not only incredible songwriters, but have a really strong point of view and put just as much thought into their visuals. I've always said that a great music video can completely change how you feel about a song, and really bring a song to life. Cyndi Lauper, Freddie Mercury and Lady Gaga are some of the first who come to mind. They all have such distinct



personalities and visual identities, and they've never been afraid to be a little larger than life.

SBB - Do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like us to help promote?

My third full-length studio album *Retro Future* will be out on October 30th! I'm in the midst of planning a release party right now, where I'll be performing songs from the album for the first time, so keep your eyes peeled on my social media channels!

For more on OMG Classic - music, videos, show dates - visit his socials at @omgclassic, and all music platforms. His catalog is also available on vinyl, CD, and cassette, and watch for his upcoming full-length release *Retro Future*, out October 30th.

Sean Ban Beaton is a music creator, performer, and sound editor in Toronto.



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Different.

That word used to be weaponized against me. I was the queer immigrant with niche interests; an outsider, unusual, the model weirdo.

But an attitude shift changes everything. I'm unique, one of a kind, and extraordinary. Not queer as in odd, rather queer as in special.

I began performing in Drag in 2019. I showed up in full green face paint as the Wicked Witch. From the onset, I cemented myself as someone who defied not just gravity, but expectations.

When the pandemic shut down typical Drag venues, I pivoted. I reached out to local non-profits to see how we could use Drag to unite people during isolation. When lockdown lifted, I held on to the principle of Drag as a vehicle for community.

In this way, I'm not trailblazing. Drag pageants, for instance, used the art of Drag to promote important causes since the 1960s. Drag artists led many of the first Pride protests, and who can forget RuPaul's MAC Cosmetics campaign to raise funds for people and communities living with HIV/AIDS?

In other ways, however, I'm often the first Drag artist to do certain things. I'm the only one approved to work with Canada's largest school board. I marched with the Toronto Public Library to protest censorship. I'm Pride Toronto's 2026 Family Ambassador, at a time when Drag artists are vilified for family-friendly programming.

Perhaps more than anything, it's my audience that's different. They are professionals, decision-makers, students, congregations, and families. Sometimes, I am

the first Drag artist they ever meet, and I hope that their experience sets them up for successful future encounters.

So, different? Yes. But also dynamic, multifaceted, and collaborative (can't forget humble!). I love to challenge what folks believe is "Drag."

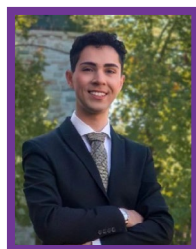
I am different in another, practical way. I treat Drag as my business, not just my art. I'm registered, licensed, and insured. I am an independent artist and a queer entrepreneur, wrapped in a veneer of glitter. Chalk it up to my law degree, or a healthy fear of the CRA, but my business has grown steadily for seven years because of it.

Certainly, there are others doing what I do and doing it well (perhaps even better). However, I'm unusual enough in my Drag practice to get attention for it.

So next time someone calls you "different," be grateful — you're doing something exciting and new, and people are taking notice.

Editors note: No part of this article is intended as or constitutes legal advice.

Gil Segev is an articling student and award-winning Drag artist known as Gila Munster. Find him at gilamunster.com.



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Festival Time



Summertime is festival time, outdoor music time, pop-up market time. And this summer is shaping up to be a great time for all of it. From huge circuit parties to intimate business expositions, to inaugural music awards, the Deep Dish plate was full.

First on the menu was my gay romp through the annual Prism Pride Festival. This year marked their 16th year bringing Toronto to the gay world by hosting one of Canada's largest queer pride parties, and yes, I've been to every single one. This year was a bit odd though. In the past, their three largest Pride events were usually held in various venues. This year was decidedly different in that it was somewhat the same. The Friday, Saturday and Sunday events for this year's Beyond the Thunderdome theme were all held at Rebel nightclub. Yes, Rebel is the crown jewel of Toronto, but after three days I started to suffer from déjà vu. Wasn't I just here? Didn't I just grind up on that guy dressed as Bulging Black Panther, yesterday? Wasn't that same guy, in a different jockstrap, cruising me on this same patio two nights ago...and nothing

happened? What did happen was Pervert, co-presentation by Matinee Group, which was dark and delicious. I've never seen so many different harnesses on so many men in my life. Friday's superhero themed Main Event was a super colourful cornucopia of beats and visual treats complete with drones zooming over our heads to capture the moment – and perhaps men in compromising positions on the dancefloor. Sunday's Revival party took us on a journey back in time, and simultaneously into the future, at the same magical time with a spectacular set by Victor Calderone, arial performances, and a show by Sofonda, who served Auntie Entity Mad Max realness.

As an appetizer, a few weeks before Prism, The Pink Pages Directory® in partnership with Canadian Queer Chamber of Commerce and Ontario Queer Chamber of Commerce held its second annual "Elevate the Rainbow" queer small business showcase at Toronto's Distillery Historic District. Bouncing into its Pride Pop-Up Marketplace, I was able to score a few unique items sold (and some created) by local queer business owners and entrepreneurs. Though



I didn't see an actual rainbow in the sky, warm weather and beautiful spirits oversaw the official ribbon cutting ceremony officiated by MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam.

And just a few weeks after this series of events, my decadent dessert consisted of The Q Musicales Festival, which held its 3rd annual queer music festival, this time in Sankofa Square (formerly Yonge-Dundas Square), and this time with a brand-new award night to compliment it.

Scheduled to be held over the course of three consecutive Thursdays, July 9, 16, and 23, though the July 16 show was rescheduled by the City for air quality concerns to July 20, queer music was brought directly to the people, in the heart of Toronto, with consistently impressive crowds. Closing night, July 23, was hosted by Hollywood Jade, of "Canada's Drag Race" and "The Traitors Canada" fame, and made extra special with a closing set by iconic Canadian dance music singer Simone Denny. This was also the inaugural presentation of The Q Music Awards, presented to five artists - Sarah Vanderzon (Queer Album of the Year), Noah Malcom (Queer Song of the Year), nuepa (Queer Solo Artist of the Year), The Sling Sisters (Queer

Duo/Group of the Year), and OMG Classic (Queer Emerging Artist of the Year). Expect an even bigger event next year as this was a welcome addition to the cultural fabric of Toronto's downtown core.

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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What Makes a Man?



I came out as a trans man at thirty-three. A different time, when many trans men lived a good portion of their lives identifying and being socialized as women. Many had also lived as lesbians. I knew I wasn't a lesbian, but without any context for "I'm a boy," it was my only option.

I'd always been masculine.

One of my aunts remembers me at a Christmas party, two years old, crying because my mom forced me to wear a dress. I kept yelling, "But I'm a boy!"

My masculinity is innate. And while masculinity can take countless forms, and isn't exclusive to men, I know mine has always been at my core.

It was only after coming out that I became hyper aware of just how much masculinity is policed.

I remember flipping out at myself shortly after I'd come out because I was sitting with my legs crossed. Apparently, men don't sit like that. The existential crisis lasted about 2.7 seconds when I remembered David Bowie and Lou Reed. Plenty of male rock stars rocked the crossed leg. I told myself I was being an idiot, recrossed my legs and carried on.

As I began being read as male, the world offered other lessons in being a "real man."

Once, I described a pair of sunglasses I was trying on as "cute." The female shopkeeper responded, "Aww. That's sweet."

Why?

Apparently, men don't call themselves cute.

Another time I described my best friend Karl's four-year-old daughter as "adorable." Karl, who'd known me since I was fourteen, pulled me aside.

"Dude. You know that thing you talked about. Um, passing? Guys don't really use the word adorable."

I laughed. He was genuinely trying to help, and in his mind, keep me safe. But it made me realize how deeply even our language is gendered and policed.

Twenty years later, I've learned something remarkably simple about what makes a man.

Authenticity.

Wear makeup and pink tights. Grow a massive beard and tattoo yourself from the neck down. Cross your legs. Call the sunglasses cute. And puppies, for that matter.

I've even been criticized by queer people for being "too cis passing" as though I'm performing masculinity. Queer people sure do love to shit on each other, but that's another column.

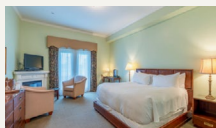
But the truth is, I don't perform masculinity to feel more like a man.

I -am- masculine.

What makes me a man is being exactly who I am.

Lucas Silveira is a singer-songwriter, musician and trans advocate. As founder and frontman of rock band The Cliks, he made history and became the first openly transgender man signed to a major-label record deal.





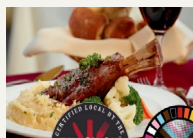
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THE SPANIEL'S TALE



The Spaniel's Tale Bookstore is a queer-owned independent community bookstore in Ottawa, Ontario, serving Hintonburg, Wellington Village, Westboro, Mechanicsville, Little Italy, and beyond.

They offer a curated selection of fiction, non-fiction, and children's books, as well as greeting cards, notebooks, and other gifts, in a safe, welcoming, judgment-free space. With over 4,000 unique titles and gifts in-store, and over 12 million additional titles available to order, The Spaniel's Tale Bookstore has something for everyone.

Their goal is to be a good neighbour, offer thought-provoking reads, inspire lifelong learning, and bring their community even closer together.

They strive to be the heart of their compassionate and progress-focused community. They do this by knowing their community and customers so they can curate and recommend the very best products for them, and by

ensuring every experience and every product consistently exceeds expectations, for every customer, every time. They work to make all of their customers and team members feel at home, heard, and welcomed.

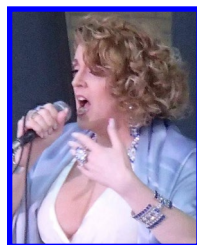
The Spaniel's Tale Bookstore was founded by Cole and Stephen Davidson. With a passion for books and an entrepreneurial spirit, Cole and Stephen started researching the book industry and working on a business plan in mid-2020 as an escape from the pressures of their jobs and the COVID-19 pandemic. It was clear to them early on that the Hintonburg/Wellington West/Westboro neighbourhoods needed an independent bookstore, so they got to work planning a business that would serve the community, starting with the mission, vision, and values that they still follow.

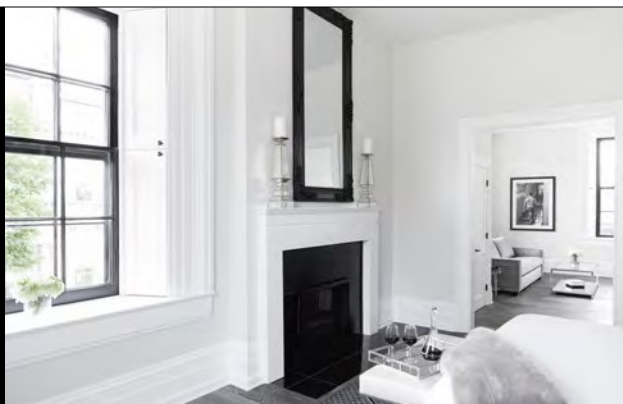
After 18 months of planning and searching for the perfect location, The Spaniel's Tale Bookstore opened in September 2022 in the historic Iona Mansions at the corner of Wellington Street West and Carruthers Avenue. Community support for the store was instant: over 300 people lined up to shop at The Spaniel's Tale on opening day.

Since then, thanks to the support of their community, The Spaniel's Tale Bookstore has continued to grow. In 2023, the shop began hosting and popping up at community events, launched a monthly book subscription service, created the popular Where's Waldo in Wellington West campaign, and began offering school book fairs. In 2024, the shop created its first Holiday Gift Guide, launched a series of candlelit shopping experiences, and hosted its largest event yet with 200 attendees. In early 2025, the shop endured a small renovation, greatly increasing the size of their kids section and improving storage and administrative capacity.

Today, The Spaniel's Tale Bookstore employs a team of nine booksellers and brings a constantly evolving selection of thousands of titles to the community.

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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BUZZPICKS

By Sherry Sylvain

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Wednesdays from 10:00 p.m.

Hosts Carlotta Carlisle and Katinka Kature welcome an array of special guest stars with DJ Chris Steinbach, and Toronto's Sweetest Staff.

Woody's, 467 Church St., Toronto

www.instagram.com/woodysonchurch

Jock Night Thursdays

Thursdays; from 10:00 p.m.

Join hostess Morgan James, everyone's second favourite drag queen, and the semi-clad (or less) men of Cock Bar for an evening of feisty fun and frivolity. Drink specials, prizes, and surprises. This is a "men only" space on the second floor, and not handicap accessible.

Cock Bar, 461 Church St., Second Floor, Toronto

www.flashonchurch.com

Hollywoody to Broadway Show

Sundays from 8:00 p.m.

Hilarious host Georgie Girl welcomes a selection of guest performers every Sunday evening serving up your favourite hits of stage and screen, and more.

Woody's, 467 Church St., Toronto

www.instagram.com/woodysonchurch

Open Stage Cabaret

Tuesdays from 10:00 p.m.

An open stage event hosted by a stunning array of leading queens, with special guests. DJ Cory Activate. GLORIOUS Star Making Machinery & BIG Fun. Arrive early to sign up as a performer.

Woody's, 467 Church St., Toronto

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General admission standing floor \$55.00; general admission standing balcony \$70.00.

The Phoenix, 410 Sherbourne St., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca

John Fogarty: The Legacy Tour

August 21; 8:00 p.m.

Few artists have shaped the sound of American rock quite like John Fogarty. As the legendary voice, songwriter, and guitarist behind Creedence Clearwater Revival, Fogarty created a catalogue of timeless hits that defined a generation, including "Bad Moon Rising," "Fortunate Son," "Proud Mary," and "Have You Ever Seen the Rain."

Great Canadian Casino Resort, 1133 Queens Plate Dr., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca

Symphony in the Gardens - Big Band

August 24; 7:30 p.m.

Enjoy stunning views of the city, the majestic castle, and the beautiful estate gardens while listening to the Casa Loma Symphony Orchestra under the stars. Guests will have an abundance of al fresco food and drink options.

Casa Loma, East Gate, 1 Austin Terrace, Toronto

www.ticketweb.ca/event/symphony-in-the-gardens-big-casa-loma-tickets/14791803



TICOT Charity Drag Brunch

August 30; 12:30 p.m.

A monthly charity drag brunch of an open stage where all tips to all performers are donated to support the charities – Friends of Ruby, PWA Food Essentials Market, Durham Alliance Outreach Food Pantry.

The Well, 487 Church St., Toronto

www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com

Iconic Tour - TLC, Salt-N-Pepa, En Vogue

September 2; 7:30 p.m.

A co-headlining concert tour featuring '90s R&B and hip-hop legends TLC and Salt-N-Pepa, with special guest powerhouse vocal group En Vogue.

RBC Amphitheatre, 909 Lakeshore Blvd. W., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca



By Sherry Sylvaín

The Gay AF Comedy Awards

September 2; 8:00p.m.

Celebrating some of the best and brightest of our Toronto LGBTQ+ comedy community, the GAY AF Comedy Awards promises to be a night full of Queer joy, big Gay laughs and a lot of surprises! Find out who will win the coveted GAFA for Best Drag Comedian, Best Social Media Comedian, Best Concept Show, Best Host & Best Musical Act. Hosted by Robert Watson.

Comedy Bar, 945 Bloor St. W., Toronto

comedybar.ca/shows/gay-af



High On Fire

September 3; 8:00 p.m.

Universally recognized as one of the most potent acts in music today, High on Fire creates dynamic metal that merges primal fury and aggression, heshier bombast and hall of fame heaviness.

TD Music Hall, 178 Victoria St., Toronto

tdmusichall.mhrth.com/tickets/highonfire

The Wizard of Oz in concert

September 12 and 13; 2:00 p.m.

See The Wizard with a live orchestra! One of the most beloved films of all time, The Wizard of Oz can now be seen and heard in a magical production with the full score performed live to picture by the TO Live Orchestra.

Meridian Hall, 1 Front St., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca/wizard-of-oz-tickets/artist/844213



TICOT Charity Bingo

September 13; 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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Flash On Church, 463 Church St., Toronto

www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com

Micah Barnes sings Leonard Cohen

September 18; 8:00 p.m.

Alma/Universal recording artist Micah Barnes salutes Montreal's favourite son in an intimate concert of Leonard Cohen classics! Micah's rich baritone voice brings a new perspective to Leonard Cohen's powerful lyrics, honouring the intricacy of the storytelling and the depth of musicality in these much-celebrated songs. Join Micah and his band of top-flight musicians, including guest vocalist Rique Franks, on a magical journey through Leonard's world.

Hugh's Room, 296 Broadview Ave., Toronto

www.showpass.com/happy-birthday-leonard-with-micah-barnes





By Sherry Sylvain

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PRESENTS

FALL WITCHES MARKET

Indoors at The Village At Black Creek Museum
Sunday September 20 2026 11am - 5pm

**40 AMAZING, TALENTED AND MAGICAL
VENDORS FEATURING WITCHCRAFT, TAROT,
ASTROLOGY, WELLNESS & MORE!**

Hands-On Magical Workshops
Amazing Speakers
Take a Selfie at our Enchanting Themed Photo Wall
Free Family Craft Station To Make Your Own
Fun Intention Jars & Back To School Bookmarks

FREE ADMISSION
to the Fall Witches Market

FREE SWAG BAGS
for first 30 attendees

The Village At Black Creek Museum
1000 Murray Ross Pkwy, Toronto, ON M3J 2P3
Parking \$9.30 + hst. Tickets to The Village available for purchase on site.

DONATIONS TO
NORTH YORK HARVEST FOOD BANK

APPRECIATED
NORTH YORK HARVEST
FOOD BANK

Alchemy & Harmony
Events Ontario

Fall Witches Market

September 20; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

This event brings together a beautiful mix of vendors, artists, healers, mystics, witches, readers, and creators in a welcoming, and supportive environment.

The Village at Black Creek, 1000 Murray Ross Pkwy, Toronto

blackcreek.ca

TICOT Charity Drag Brunch

September 27; 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Monthly Open Stage Drag Brunch for Charity. Hosted by: ICP to Reign 39 Hugo Hudson; ICP to Reign 39 Georgina Hudson. Funds raised in support of Reign 39 Charities: PWA FOOD ESSENTIALS MARKET; DURHAM ALLIANCE OUTREACH FOOD PANTRY; FRIENDS OF RUBY. All tips for all performers are donated to the charity.

The Well, 487 Church St., Toronto

www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com

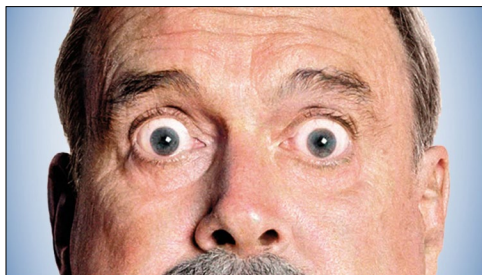
Not Dead Yet - John Cleese and the Holy Grail at 50

October 2; 7:30 p.m.

This evening begins with a special screening of the classic film that redefined comedy for generations. From killer rabbits to knights who say "Ni!", Monty Python and the Holy Grail remains as brilliantly absurd, quotable, and laugh-out-loud funny as ever. Following the film, John Cleese takes the stage for a live conversation and audience Q&A.

Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre, 189 Yonge St., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca





By Sherry Sylvain

The Imperial Court Of Toronto, Emperor XXXIX David II of Valois, Empress XXXIX Rachelle II of Valois, and Our Membership



Invite you to the

40Th

ANNIVERSARY

October 10th 2026

Celebrating our
PAST,
PRESENT,
and FUTURE

Featuring:
Single,
Double,
Triple, and
Quadruple Decade Walks



Crowns That Care



In Defence of Democracy

October 6; 6:30 p.m.

With Carissa Véliz, author of *Prophecy: Prediction, Power, and the Fight for the Future*, from Ancient Oracles to AI, and renowned journalist and Samara Centre board member Lisa LaFlamme.

Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre, 189 Yonge St., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca

Laura Jackson conducts the Royal Conservatory Orchestra

October 9; 8:00 p.m.

Jackson, Music Director of the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra, is praised for her innovation, passion, and commitment to the continued growth of the symphonic repertoire and expanding music's impact within communities.

Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor St. W., Toronto

www.rcmusic.com

Crowns The Care - Coronation 40

October 10; 5:30 p.m.

Celebrating The Past, Present and Future with the theme: Spanish Royalty - Red, Black and Gold - this is a charity gala to help raise funds for community organizations. This is a night of glitz and glam, so dress to impress.

Marriott Downtown CF Eaton Centre, 525 Bay St., Toronto

www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com

TICOT Charity Bingo

October 11; 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Supporting the Reign 39 Charities of Choice: PWA FOOD ESSENTIALS MARKET; DURHAM ALLIANCE OUTREACH FOOD PANTRY; FRIENDS OF RUBY.

Flash On Church, 463 Church St., Toronto

www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com

ROAD TRIPS

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. Illustrating in song the evolution of Motown music to the current hits of mega star entertainers.

Living Arts Centre, 4141 Living Arts Dr., Mississauga

www.ticketmaster.ca

Mississauga Italfest

August 21 and 22

With thrilling performances from rising stars and international headliners straight from Italy, immersive art and history exhibits, lively kids acts, and family attractions, plus the excitement of bocce tournaments and soccer showdowns.

Celebration Square, 300 City Centre Drive, Mississauga

mississauga.ca/arts-and-culture/saugalive

The Drag Stop - Summer Sizzle

August 22; 8:00 p.m.

For ONE night only they bring to you just some of Ontario's BEST Drag Starz! Catch the revamped show filled with new choreography, sickening new looks, and all of your favourite music from different divas.

Two Doors Down, 139 Market St., Brantford

www.tickettailor.com/events/troyboyentertainment/2338529

Summer Sizzle Drag Bingo

August 23; 6:00 p.m.

A live, intimate, fun night of Drag BINGO. Part of their Summer Sizzle tour 2026! Drag, BINGO, & Prizes in an interactive environment. With Drag Race Star Jada Hudson.

The Mule, 101-60 Main St., Cambridge

www.tickettailor.com/events/troyboyentertainment/2339801

MuslimFest

August 28, 29, and 30

Featuring artists from all over the world, there is something for everyone to enjoy! MuslimFest celebrating the best in Muslim arts, culture and entertainment - a space where diversity thrives and creativity flourishes.

Celebration Square, 300 City Centre Drive, Mississauga

mississauga.ca/arts-and-culture/saugalive

Fredathon 26

September 5; noon to 10:00 p.m.

An epic all-day in-person and live streamed charity concert of Queen & Freddie Mercury songs, performed by talents from all over the world. They're looking to raise \$5K for Rainbow Railroad, who help queer people in need escape violence.

Dreams of Beans, 138 Hunter St. W., Peterborough

www.fredathon.com

The Furious Bongos

September 9; 7:00 p.m.

Get ready for an unforgettable night of weird, wild, and wonderfully Zappa music as The Furious Bongos bring their acclaimed tribute show to you.

Biltmore Theatre, 39 King St. E., Oshawa

tickets.biltmoretheatre.com/eventperformances.asp?evt=245

AfroCan Roots and Rhythms Festival

September 18 and 19

Roots & Rhythms Festival is a two-day celebration of food, arts, music, and culture that highlights the rich heritage of diverse communities within Mississauga and the Region of Peel.

Celebration Square, 300 City Centre Drive, Mississauga

mississauga.ca/arts-and-culture/saugalive

Reggae North Music Awards

September 27; 4:00 p.m.

The Reggae North Music Awards presents The Night the Stars Align. A celebration of Canada's reggae and dancehall communities, this is an evening of live performances and cultural recognition. Artists, musicians, DJs, producers, cultural leaders, media, and fans gather to celebrate the creativity and influence of reggae and dancehall music from across Canada.

The Rose Theatre, 1 Theatre Lane, Brampton

tickets.brampton.ca/Online

An all-day in-person & livestreamed charity concert of Queen & Freddie Mercury songs, performed by talents from all over the world.



FREDATHON '26

Saturday September 5th 12 PM EST

Online at www.fredathon.com and in-person at Dreams Of Beans, Peterborough ON

Fundraising for queer rights via Rainbow Railroad & mutual aid

Pre-filmed or in-person performances from:
Ron Sexsmith | Flamy Grant | Royal Wood | Susan Werner | Ryan Cassata | Carling Stephen | Taylor Abrahamse | Many More | And maybe you?

Perform, sponsor or volunteer:

www.fredathon.com

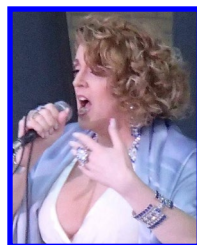


In support of
RAINBOW
RAILROAD

Dreams
OF BEANS



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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Creative Network
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Connect. Create. Celebrate.

Canadian Non-Profit Advocacy, Support, and Resource Hub for 2SLGBTQIA+ Creatives

OUT LOUD

Queer Creatives Podcast



Conversations with Queer Artists, Creatives, and Changemakers Mixed with New Music Releases from 2SLGBTQIA+ Artists

curatedbyq.com/podcast

OUT LOUD

Queer Music Radio Show
Canada's LGBTQ New Release Hour

Thursday Nights at 9pm EST
communityradio.ca
Hosted by Kenney Fitz

Artists! Submit Your Music Online
curatedbyq.com/submit-music

KINGSTON

BETTER TOGETHER IN KINGSTON

The food, the laughter. The smiles
across the table and time with each other.
It's better together in Kingston.

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Arc-en-ciel
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COMING SOON

SEASON 13

The longest running queer talk show in Canada's history

Casual, fun, friendly chats



Your host Antoine Elhashem

ROGERS tv

Durham . Uxbridge . London . Owen Sound . Georgina
Orangeville . Kitchener Waterloo

