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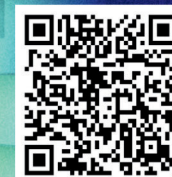
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The Editor

October! It is time for chilly evenings, where warm sweaters, coats, hats, and gloves accessorize your outfits in fabulous layers. The leaves are falling, and Hallowe'en is HERE! Ideally, at least half of September was required just to start creating your Hallowe'en look. Sadly, some of us then find it takes half of November to clean up the sequins, glitter, feathers, adhesives, and much else which helps make our costumes really scream for attention.

And, if this issue of theBUZZmag, we have some great reading for you to absorb as you curl up with that warm sweater, and visions of vampires and ghouls who will be vying for your attention at some seasonal soirée.

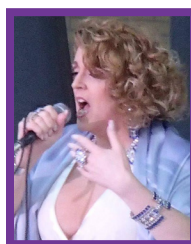
Serafin LaRiviere talks to Molly Johnson about music and motherhood, while Gil Segev talks Heroes and Villains with author Natalie Zina Walschot. And, Sean Beaton talks to The Q Music Awards' Emerging Artist award winner, Sarah Vanderzon, about being queer in Country music.

Meanwhile, in "Deep Dish", Rolyn Chambers takes us to Fierté Ottawa Pride, and Lucas Silveira discusses why "Boys Don't Cry" in his trans culture column, "A Quick Klik". We take a look at events in Toronto and beyond throughout the autumn season, and we learn about a newer queer-oriented venue, Cake Cabaret, in "Beyond The Village".

We also welcome a writer who has submitted to our sibling publication, PinkPlayMags, Dahlia Black, the female voice of a gender fluid community member who tries to keep a lower profile when not in some form of drag. Dahlia speaks about pronouns in and out of drag, in our recent history as well as the present.

Plus, in this issue, we bring to you a new writer, Kelly Guarnaccio, whose recurring column, "HerStory" will talk to and about our strong lesbian and female presenting community.

Sherry Sylvain
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AND THEN THERE'S MOLLY...
A WARM AND CANDID CONVERSATION ABOUT MUSIC,
MOTHERHOOD, FAME, AND INTEGRITY

By Serafin LaRiviere

The voice is immediately recognizable: warm, resonant, enveloping. It's a voice that conveys both approachability and confidence. It is the voice of Molly Johnson.

Johnson is one of our few, true Canadian icons. Starting out in 1979 with the funk-rock band Alta Moda, she quickly established a solid reputation encompassing not only her riveting and utterly unique singing voice, but also her work as a songwriter with something substantial to say. Alta Moda eventually evolved into the Infidels, whose self-titled 1991 album earned the group the 1992 JUNO Award for Most Promising Group. Johnson's later solo records moved more decisively into jazz, soul, and blues, building an audience in Canada, and an especially devoted following in France.

Our phone conversation is warm and candid. Johnson is engaging, candid, and laughs easily. The smile in her voice instantly conjures images of her publicity photographs, which are unretouched and filled with that undeniable Molly grin. The irony is that the process of taking these cheerful, joyful photos is actually hard work for her.

"I hate having my picture taken," she says. "Indigenous people say that every time they click the camera, they take a bit of your soul. With photography, I know it's critical to the job, so how do I make it something I can do? I've had the same photographer, Chris Nicholls, and when you're seeing laughter, it's because he's said something hilarious."

Her solution is pragmatic: build a trusted team and do enough in one sitting to avoid returning too soon. Nicholls is joined by stylist Nicholas Mellamphy, and hair and makeup artist Grace Lee. "I don't wear a lot of makeup," Johnson says, "and don't allow photo correction, because I have to autograph those f***ing pictures. I take a huge amount of photos so I only have to shoot every couple of years. It's a way I've built around something I find very uncomfortable."

The cover of her 2026 album, "Talk To Me", turns the necessary publicity exercise into autobiography. "I wanted to create a career outfit," she explains. "Somebody who's been following along will see I'm wearing my first band's T-shirt, and on the lapel, I'm wearing the Governor General's pin." It is less a costume than an archive: the young woman in a Toronto rock band and the artist

honoured in 2023 with a Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement occupying the same frame.

That image might be public, but Johnson keeps a distinction between the woman being photographed and the figure audiences know and love. Fame, she says, is "uncomfortable. Writ large, I've always been uncomfortable with fame. I have an iconic look onstage, but that's another girl." She says it lightly, yet the boundary is firm. Molly Johnson the image has work to do. Molly Johnson the person gets to leave.

She's also a person who is open about her home life. Molly's dog of 17 years has just died, and she's grieving. She's also a mother adjusting to an empty nest, proud of the independence she helped create and honest about its sting. "I'm a mother, and it's empty-nester time," she says, somewhat ruefully. "That's a thing. I support my kids. My big job has always been being a mom. It starts from the minute they're born, really. The better you are at it, the more independent they are, which is a double-edged sword."

Motherhood was never fitted around the margins of a music career. It determined the shape of that career. "I've always made records and had kids and always made them the priority. There was a lot of me saying no. We all have kids in my trio; they grew up together. We've always worked around our kids' schedules. I've always managed to carve out time to write songs, but for me, I start with an empty canvas. You need a particular sort of time."

Her children are older now, but the role has not ended. "They still have questions and I still support them. It's just another dial change on motherhood," she says. Then her own mom enters the conversation: "My mother's been gone for six years, and I still hear her voice now." The comment lands without ornament. Across generations, independence and attachment remain braided together.

Johnson has been making records for roughly 45 years and has spent 14 years with Universal Music Canada. Yet longevity has not hardened into nostalgia. Talk To Me places her long-time trio—pianist Robi Botos, bassist Mike Downes and drummer Davide Di Renzo—alongside collaborators from different generations. "My favourite part of the music business is writing music," she says. "I wrote with a young rapper named Haviah Mighty, a Polaris winner, and a young kid called CUBE, who was 19. It was really fun working with a kid of a younger age. I have three tracks with him. And there's one with Jim Cuddy—we did the Tragically Hip."



Johnson insists that songwriting is not confession. Her raw material comes from attending to the world around her. “I never write about my personal stuff. I write about you, not me. I eavesdrop on people’s conversations and listen to my friends’ conversations. I’m a huge news junkie—national and international. I think that’s a really important part of songwriting: know what the f*ck’s going on. We tell your stories.”

Her songs may not be diary entries, but they are not detached. The songwriter’s responsibility, as she describes it, is to notice the world closely enough to return it to listeners in recognizable form.

Then there is the trio. Johnson has worked with Botos, Downes and Di Renzo for more than 25 years, and she speaks about them less as accompanists than as a permanent creative conversation. “It’s a lot of collaboration,” she says. “They’re so talented and brilliant, and we have deeply embedded jokes. They call us the Rolling Stones of the music scene in Paris. There are four voices on that stage, talking when we’re onstage.”

That closeness makes possible the part of the profession she likes least. “I hate performing live,” she says, while I try to hide my shock. This is, after all, a woman who inhabits a stage with seemingly effortless confidence and grace. “It’s honestly my least favourite part of the business. The best part is writing songs, then recording them. I love collaborating. I love writing for other people. I love recording songs. The live-performance part works because I have the same trio. If they’re not available, then I don’t take the gig. That’s the only way I do it—performing and hanging out with them.”

France has long understood the combination. Johnson’s first solo albums found an enthusiastic audience there, and France later named her a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. She believes the connection begins with the seriousness French audiences bring to art. “They like art. They understand art. It’s in their DNA. They appreciate old things; it’s not something they’re trained to do. And the audiences are very engaged.”

She brought that ideal of engagement home to Toronto. The Kensington Market Jazz Festival began on September 16, 2016, from Johnson’s vision and the work of a founding team that included Genevieve Marentette and Ori Dagan. Johnson remains its founding artistic director, curator and producer. The festival is artist-run, community-driven and powered by volunteers; in 2026, it enters its 11th year.

“It came out of a thought I had around supporting my local colleagues in music,” she says. “I felt there was a real

depth of extremely fine musicians, and I just wanted to celebrate them. I work on it for six months, and then for the three days of the festival I recover. It’s a very joyful, very old-school festival, and I really love that. It’s a lot of joy, and the artists really love it.”

Old-school does not mean carelessly nostalgic. It means restoring elements of musical life that efficiency has eroded. “I grabbed a lot of ideas from playing festivals in France and brought those ideals to Kensington jazz,” Johnson says. “We don’t have green rooms; we have a beautiful artist check-in where you can store your instruments. It allows all of us to sit together and talk to each other. We’re often like ships in the night, never having the chance to sit down and compare stories. It’s a real chance for us to gather as a tribe.”

She is everywhere during the weekend but has learned how not to become its centre. “I pop in and out of places, and once I start to be recognized, I get out very quickly.” The festival exists to direct attention toward the musicians she has programmed and the rooms that hold them.

Its economics are deliberately direct. Admission is cash at the door, and artists work for the door rather than a distant promise. “They pay cash money, which is collected by my volunteers. I book my artists to work for the door. I play Massey Hall and it’s a door gig. I don’t get money from my record label or grants to play Massey Hall. It’s a door gig.” For Johnson, the scale changes; the essential transaction does not. Artists must draw listeners, venues must provide rooms, and audiences must decide that live music is worth paying for.

She has little patience for the idea that Toronto’s live-music culture has simply vanished. She points to the El Mocambo, the Rivoli, the Cameron House, the Horseshoe Tavern and newer small rooms. But she is unsentimental about what damaged the ecosystem. “It was the guarantee that tanked the business, because the bar owner was saying, ‘This artist wants a thousand-dollar guarantee. I can hire a DJ for \$250, and now I can just put a playlist from Spotify on.’ But there are a lot of smaller, very cool little clubs popping up. People whine and moan, but the stuff is there. You’ve just got to work at it.”

Work, in this context, includes promotion. “With our artists, we do a ton of promotion and a ton of interviews. We work hard to make sure those little venues are full, but we also expect and encourage the artists to do that themselves.” The festival has expanded its support by producing recordings for artists including Laura Hubert and Billy Newton-Davis. Johnson does not regard audience-building





as separate from art; it is part of the infrastructure that lets art continue.

She is also handing over more of that infrastructure. Two women in their twenties now work closely with her on the festival. "I love working with them," she says. "I'm definitely giving more voice to others. I've always done that with the festival, but it's quite specific with these two. I'll always be good for curation and getting sponsors. We have Grammy Award winners, but I follow the clubs. I put a pin in artists I see and then try to book them. It's like a big jigsaw puzzle."

Johnson's own promotion has shifted from pounding the pavement to digital legwork, although TikTok celebrity holds little appeal. "It took me a long time to earn it, but if anyone's going to get a grant, get one for social media. I've built a team over time. I don't post a lot. I've had many conversations with Universal; they wanted me to be TikToking. It's not really me. I tend to be more elusive." Elusiveness, in her case, is not passivity. It is another carefully built boundary, supported by a team she trusts.

There is, as she says, "all kinds of stuff buried in the bio." When she received the Governor General's Performing Arts Award in 2023, honourees were asked to select a director for a short documentary. Johnson chose her brother, actor and director Clark Johnson. His six-minute Molly Movie ends with her walking onstage. At the National Arts Centre gala, she completed the illusion in real time.

"The way he built it, the last frame of the documentary is me walking onstage," she says. "At the awards at the National Arts Centre, when I walked onstage, it was in the same dress. I snuck my band up to Ottawa to play that

song with me. I just didn't want to sit there in public with someone trying to work their way through some freaky sh*t that I wrote." It is a perfect Molly Johnson solution: honour the ceremony, then quietly rewrite its terms.

Authenticity is an overused word in music, often polished until it means nothing. Johnson makes it practical. It is the unretouched photograph she is willing to sign, the mother who said no to protect time with her children, the festival founder who slips out when recognition begins to distract from the artists, the veteran who still listens to 19-year-olds, and the singer who will decline a song rather than counterfeit somebody else's voice.

It's an instinct that has survived and thrived from the very beginning. Before the bands and records, Johnson performed as a child, appearing in Toronto theatre alongside her brother Clark. "I retired from theatre at 11 years old," she says. "Prior to that I had to be a cute kid, and that was easy. But the thing is, I've never wanted to be someone else. I always wanted to be me."

Serafin LaRiviere is a bilingual, multi-faceted, transwoman singer and musician. Her focus is primarily in jazz; however, she does make forays into other genres, and does so with ease and relish.





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Villains, Heroes, and Timesheets - Oh My!

Interview with Natalie Zina Walschots, Author of Villain

A Novel

"Witty and inventive."
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on *Hench*

There's no such thing as
bad publicity, but what
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VILLAIN

NATALIE ZINA WALSCHOTS

Author of *HENCH*

By Gil Segev

Natalie Zina Walschots is the author of *Hench*, published by William Morrow in 2020, and the sequel *Villain*, published in spring 2026.

Villain is the humorous yet intellectual urban fantasy novel set in the *Hench*-verse, where superheroes employed by the Draft are the nemesis of villains embroiled in corporate-life villainy. The story follows Anna - AKA, the Auditor - allied to supervillain Leviathan, in her quest to bring down the Draft and help Leviathan to unleash wickedness (through Excel spreadsheets, mostly). The story takes us into power imbalances in relations, redemption, betrayal, irredeemable choices, and worst of all: office politics.

I caught up with Natalie on one of her writing retreats in a secluded cottage, iced coffee in hand, and we spoke about why queer people adore villains, hate as love, and imagining a world without queer trauma.

GS: For theBUZZ readers discovering you and your work for the first time, what should they know going into this book?

NZW: I've always been obsessed with superhero stories. I started collecting comics as a pre-teen, and that love of big, dramatic archetypal characters has been universally true for my entire life. I'm also obsessed with and have extensively studied classical literature, including two degrees in English literature and a couple of abandoned PhD's.

I'm interested in experimental poetry and Medieval literature, which may sound weird but relates to this because I feel that superhero stories are very allegorical, in that they have characters who embody concepts like justice or vengeance. You see, this a lot in Medieval literature, and I wanted to write a book that dug into the concepts of people who were highly stylized rubbing against the messy parts of being human.

I also worked as a music journalist for ten years, and have written a lot for video games, table-top role-playing games, and live action role-playing games. I've also done weird projects, like volumetric three-dimensional video LARP's, so I've gotten to do a lot of intertextual and metanarrative creative stuff.

GS: How did your previous writing prepare you for *Hench* and *Villain*?

NZW: Before the novels I published two collections of experimental poetry, including *DOOM: Love poems for*

Supervillains (2012, Insomniac Press). With video games, I started writing interactive, choose-your-own-adventure stories, which led to bigger collaborations, usually as scriptwriting or "story bibles," which is a guide to how a game's world works and who the characters are.

The evolution to novels wasn't far off, but despite having this technical experience professionally, every single time I write for myself it is an act of complete discovery. Like, who knows what will happen today? Certainly not me!

GS: If so, what's your writing process like?

NZW: I have a daily wordcount goal, depending on my capacity at the moment, which I punctuate with short writing retreats where I wave goodbye to the universe and lock myself away for a few days to focus on the manuscript without any distractions. I'm super lucky and my partner is extremely supportive and will feed the cat while I'm gone.

GS: Often you can tell a lot about a writer by who and what they read. What do you read?

NZW: I most enjoy horror novels and stories, which I would not characterize Villain as, even though it does engage with things like body-horror. Horror distills a lot of what it means to be human by isolating what we are afraid or repulsed from, but I find it very relaxing to have the bejesus scared out of me.

I also read a lot of speculative fiction like magical realism or classic fantasy, or a mind-blowing sci-fi short story. I don't read literary fiction or character-pieces or hard realism as much as I enjoy exploring more speculative and imaginative spaces.

GS: theBUZZ is a queer publication, and many of our readers are queer. Were you aware of potential queer readers as you were writing Villain?

NZW: Absolutely! I am a queer person, my partner is queer, and I don't think I've seen a straight person this week. I very much assumed that would be my audience, especially for *Hench*. I wrote this story because I wanted this story, and nobody else was writing it. I figured, if I am the target audience, hopefully there was a larger audience for it, too.

In *Villain*, I was writing it for myself, but also for the people who loved the first book. I wanted to create a sequel deserving of the attachment they had. So yes, I was certainly aware of the queer readers, because that's the community I am in.

Every time I'm told, "hey, the story has lots of queer people in it," I say it is a reflection of the people around me. I wanted the world I wrote to look like my incredible, diverse, lovely one - but slightly less evil!



GS: It's no secret that queer people are interested in and relate to heroes and villains. Why do you suppose that is?

NZW: Queer-coding villains is a long and time-honoured tradition in the media! As deeply problematic as that can be since there aren't that many queer-coded heroes, they are still the characters we are drawn to and see ourselves reflected in.

Superhero stories are often about being othered or being outsiders (like *X-Men* or *Superman*), which many queer people can identify with. Superpowers, too, can be used as a stand-in for identity markers to tell stories that would otherwise be very uncomfortable. This allows me as an author to get close to uncomfortable subjects without the audience looking at them straight on. For instance, a shape-shifting character may be an easier sell to read than a trans character.

The superpowers are also representative of the things that make a character unique and powerful, which queer people may relate to.

GS: Without spoilers, what can a queer reader look forward to in *Villain*?

NZW: Our narrator, Anna AKA the Auditor, is portrayed as pansexual from the beginning. She has a "disaster bi, has-a-crush-on-everybody" energy and very questionable taste in partners. There are openly gay characters, like the Head of Enforcement in the villain's lair, and a partner of one of the ex-heroes, Decoherence. There are also several openly trans characters mentioned in conversations about pronouns. Even if the characters hate each other, they still respect each other's pronouns.

All of this exists in the *Hench*-verse commonly, all the time. The queerness is rarely the centre of the narrative, but rather casually exists in all of the spaces that the characters inhabit. The story contains a lot of trauma, but it was important to me that queerness was never the source of the trauma or violence. I wanted this book to be a place where queerness was not a source of conflict.

Something to note is that similarly to love, enmity is portrayed as very intimate in the story, without being bound to gender or preference. It is a relationship with someone that matters a lot, regardless of gender or sexuality, kind of like transcending love.

A lot of what I do with queerness in the story also applies to disability and neurodivergence. Anna suffers



a catastrophic injury in *Hench* that results in a lifelong disability, which is very important to her identity. It is important and a source of trauma but is something that the characters move through the universe with all of the time.

GS: Let's talk about the motifs in the story. What do you want readers to walk away from the story with?

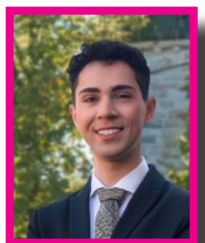
NZW: The concept of ledgering in the story is introduced in *Hench* and evolved in *Villain*. We are introduced to the idea that people keep complicated equations that they apply to superheroic actions, keeping a tally of the real cost of "doing good." However, we realize that different people's math prioritizes different values, creating very different outputs. Neither is mathematically wrong, but the idea is that morality is subjective.

The danger of labelling also comes up in both books. Once someone is labelled a "hero," we stop analyzing their behaviour and label it heroism, and vice versa with villains, even if the actions are identical. Think of a police shooting versus a murder - why is this one bad and this one fine? Like the ledgering, the concept here is to look at the same data and understand why it is interpreted differently.

GS: Is there a future expansion to the *Hench*-verse?

NZW: I am working on another sequel right now! There is nothing signed yet, but I would love to spend more time in the universe. There are interesting and important directions for the story to go from here, and I am having a great time writing it.

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



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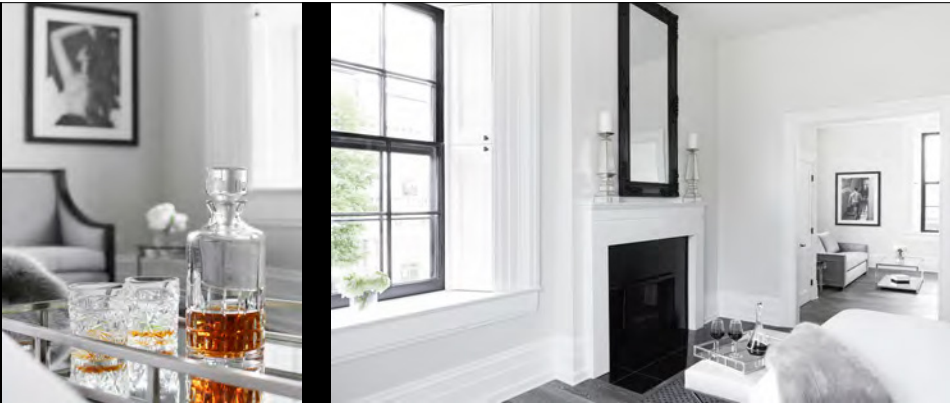
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Sarah Vanderzon



By Sean Ban Beaton

Breaking into the music industry as a woman is challenging.

I can recall being on a shuttle bus heading to a music industry event on Toronto Island and hearing two major label suits behind me discussing the future of women in Canadian country music. One of them posed the idea of bringing an up-and-coming artist to the fore-front, and the other matter-of-factly clarified that “there’s only room for one female country artist at a time.” It’s a dated trope the industry’s been telling itself for far too long.

Now imagine being a lesbian trying to break into the country scene - not impossi-ble, as K.D. Lang, Brandi Carlile, and others have proven, but certainly a test of your tenacity. Montreal-based artist Sarah Vanderzon knows that struggle is real - but when you’re a queer country artist from Quebec and still getting major label at-tention, at least you know you’re doing something right.

Her early success has come through country, having won Best Emerging Artist at a Boots & Hearts showcase in 2024, but her sound also leans heavily into America-na, folk-pop, and ‘alternative country’. We sat down with Sarah to discuss where her career has brought her since that win, and where she’s planning on taking it next.

SBB: Hello Sarah - great to meet you, and thanks for joining us. It seems you’ve been on a steady upward trajectory since Boots & Hearts a couple years back.

Sarah: Hiya! Lovely to meet you too, thank you for having me. It’s been a couple of big years since the Boots and Hearts win, that’s for sure.

SBB: How have you been holding up with all this attention?

Sarah: I’ve been working really hard for so many years prior to the Emerging Artist Showcase so it definitely feels good to receive recognition for my hard work.

SBB: Absolutely - and you actually released your *Fortune Teller* EP almost a year ago today, which was your first major-label release with Universal. Has the hustle been easier having a major label backing you?

Sarah: I wouldn’t say it’s easier, just different from when I used to release music as an independent artist. It’s nice to have a team put everything in place, but I also put a lot

more pressure on myself when it comes to promoting a song.

SBB: And you write all your own music, so has working with a label given you as much creative freedom as you were hoping for?

Sarah: I’m quite surprised, actually, with the amount of freedom I have. The label has given me a ton of space to let my creative side run wild which, in a way, is dangerous because then I’ll add pressure all on my own.

SBB: You also included a cover of Tracy Chapman’s “Give Me One Reason” - seems like she’s been having a country resurgence over the past few years with Luke Combs’ cover of “Fast Car”, and their performance together on the Grammys. What went behind your decision to include that song?

Sarah: When I won the Emerging Artist Showcase, Tracy Chapman’s song was what got me through to the final stage. I added it on the EP so that listeners could connect the dots.

SBB: Ahh - got it. Well, excellent choice. I see you worked with producer Jordan Honsinger on that EP, but your more recent work has been with Ryan Hadlock, who produced The Lumineers debut album, and was Grammy-nominated for his work with Brandi Carlile - what was that working relationship like?

Sarah: At first I was a little intimidated to be working with a Grammy-nominated producer. I was nervous because I thought he’d try to steer the project with whatever he had in mind - the fact that he’s been in the industry longer and has amazing work under his belt, I would’ve followed his lead and put myself as a secondary character. Which didn’t end up being the case at all.

SBB: So he encouraged you to lead the sessions?

Sarah: Ryan is all about the artist’s vision. There was never any tension be-tween us. If I heard a song a different way than he did, we would just record both versions just in case and sit on it for a day. He’s got this laidback energy that made it fun and easy to work on the album together.

SBB: Nice. I hear congrats is also in order for winning Best Album of the Year at the recent The Q Music Awards. I have to admit, I’m fascinated by the emergence of queer representation in country music - what has your experience been being out in the country music industry? Have you been welcomed with open arms?

Sarah: Thank you! Yes, winning Album of the Year at the Q Music Awards was such a beautiful experience.

So far being openly gay in the country music industry has been smooth. I get a lot of praise for it and it's interesting because yes, I'm proud that I'm out, but at the end of the day, I'm just living life as my most authentic self, and that's what really matters, and I hope I can inspire other queer folk to feel at home in their art.

SBB: Even though I know more and more queer artists are showing up in country, it still strikes me as a brave move. Do you feel you have an opportunity to change minds being in this somewhat unique position?"

Sarah: Yes I think there's still work to be done. Every queer artist has their own definition of how to evolve in a heteronormative environment. Many queer advocates have paved the path before me and I'm so thankful for that. People know we exist because of them, and my approach is to normalize being gay, in this case, the country world. Even though my friends say I make everything gay, when it comes to my art, my music speaks to everyone. My main subjects being love, heartbreak, self-discovery, etc. - to me, those themes have no gender or sexuality. I do talk openly about my wife and our unique family, and that doesn't define my art, but it is a big part of it.

SBB: Was there a moment where you had to decide whether you wanted to share that side of yourself authentically regardless of the potential pushback, or did you enter the industry 'as is', take it or leave it?"

Sarah: In my experience, it was never a hard decision to be a lesbian artist. I've been blessed with a very accepting family and friends who never left my side after coming out. If anything, my entourage gave me the confidence to be who I am today, and I'm so grateful for that.

SBB: That's great to hear. Has it been more of a challenge breaking into the music industry as a queer person, or a woman?"

Sarah: From my experience, it's felt extremely challenging breaking into the music scene especially in the Country world as a woman. What's difficult about it, in my opinion, is the people working in the industry — not all but many — are not trying hard enough to shift the narrative by offering more female artist content to listeners on radio, festival line ups, opening acts, etc. Sure, there are more conversations happening on the situation, and may-be that's just the start, but there's a lot of work left to be done, and I hope to be a part of the solution.

SBB: We've been talking country, but it seems your sound has been leaning more towards Americana/folk since signing with Universal - is that a direction you've been meaning to go in for a while?"

Sarah: Yes and no... At my core, I actually consider myself a singer/songwriter. I write a lot about my own stories and focus on the lyrics rather than the music. But I do see how some of my songs lean more Country and others Folk. I tend to say I'm more Folk/Americana because I never really listened to country music.

When I was first talking with the Label, we agreed that the EP would lean more towards Country because I had won a contest in the Country space. But they know that my kind of music can exist in many genres.

SBB: Being from Montreal, I also notice some of your songs are bilingual, or have been released in French as well as English. You even appeared on a French singing reality show called *La deuxième voix* - Quebec's version of *The Voice* - and managed to finish top 3. What was that experience like?"

Sarah: That experience is exactly what I needed to get my confidence back in my career. After the pandemic, I spent a couple of years doubting myself as an artist and I kind of let go of the dream for a bit. I wasn't in a good head-space.

I saw ads that the show was coming back (I had tried out 4 times in the past) So I told myself this would be my last try at this whole "music thing" — Yes, I based my entire career choice on a televised vocal competition... not dramatic at all.

SBB: If gays can't be dramatic, who can!?"

More about Sarah Vanderzon can be found at sarahvanderzon.ca, or search her on all socials and streaming platforms. You can also see her live on her cross-Canada tour with John Muirhead, which kicks off in Gormley, ON on Oct. 23.

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



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HER SPACE

BY KELLY GUARNACCIO

Liana Georgi



I couldn't think of a better person about whom to launch this column than Liana Georgi. Since the day we met, she has impressed me with her intelligence, her grace, her leadership, and the way she shows up for our community. Liana is a powerhouse who leads with heart and never stops fighting for equality.

Born in Germany, Liana grew up between two countries and two languages. She calls herself "half-Bulgarian, half-German, but with a Turkish heart," and how she got that heart is a story in itself. At 19, she bought a one-way ticket to Cuba and learned Spanish (some may say she still speaks it with a Cuban accent). Years later, she and a friend cycled across Europe and by happenstance ended up in Istanbul, where she studied jazz, finished her master's in psychology, and learned Turkish on the streets. For Liana, languages are "less about grammar and more about connection."

As a little girl, she dreamed of being a singer, her family would call her "Family Manager" because she was always taking charge. She grew up to be both! She performed an original song for nearly 15,000 people at Sofia Pride, and today she's the new COO at CQCC (Canadian Queer Chamber of Commerce).

Then came Istanbul Pride in 2021, where Pride had been banned since 2015, but Liana marched anyway. When police moved in, she found herself walking in front of a line of officers. In broken Turkish, she turned and said, "Big brother, why don't we walk a little more slowly? It's so hot. You must be sweating too." The officers slowed down. Neighbours filmed the exchange from their windows, and the video went viral, reaching millions of viewers. Madonna was among those who shared it. Yes, *the* Madonna!

I had not planned to become an activist," she says. "I was simply there, holding my best friend's hand."

Her message from that day? "We need to show up for one another, across identities and borders."

Today, Canada is home, where she lives with her partner, Emmi King, who is both a businesswoman and a very talented musician. "Being able to live openly with my partner is something I never take for granted."

Here, her advocacy continues, where she champions the more than 120,000 queer-owned businesses across Canada at CQCC. "Supporting queer businesses isn't just good for our community," she says. "It's good for Canada's economy, its innovation ecosystem, and its future."

Her advice for anyone looking to support 2SLGBTQI+? "You do not need a platform, a perfect speech, or millions of followers to make a difference. Start by speaking to one person you trust."

"You do not have to become anything more than who you already are. You are worthy exactly as you are. Begin within your trusted community and allow your voice to grow from there, if that is what you want. Even reaching one person matters, and CQCC is here to support you along the way."

Liana spoke to one police officer, and millions around the world heard her.

Kelly Guarnaccio is no stranger to upLIFTing people and is thrilled to use her voice to celebrate the incredible queer women in our community.





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BY DAHLIA BLACK

Pronouns?



I am gender-fluid and non-binary. My pronouns are usually they/them; however, I do drag. I do female drag and male drag, and I prefer the pronouns used to address me to conform to my presentation at that time.

And, I've been around the community for many years. Long enough that I remember when a drag queen was female impersonator, and drag kings were unfortunately rare within the Toronto bar community.

These days I ask people I don't know what their preferred pronouns are. But, I do get a bit confounded by the past versus the present. In days of yore, a drag queen was addressed as "she" when she was in drag, and "he" when he was presenting as a boy. These days, there are many drag queens who are offended if you address them as "she" or "Girl!" when they present as female. I know sufficiently few drag kings to know what is common; and many of them prefer to be similarly inclined to be addressed by the pronouns appropriate to their non-drag presentation.

Unless, it seems, you happen to be the host of the drag show. Then, I'm not sure who is guiding the pronoun

selection. I've heard different hosts announce the same drag artists by contradictory pronouns at different shows.

As a person who is gender fluid, I certainly recognize the fluidity of pronoun use and preference. I also recognize that there are many people who do not understand pronoun preference. To those who do not understand I say, "You do not need to understand, you need to respect." If I tell you my name is Dahlia, it would be disrespectful to call me John. I do not call you by names or pronouns which are not your preference if you have been introduced.

And, in the vein of pronouns, there is one I cannot abide. That. "The person that..." is just wrong. That is a pronoun which refers to an animal or a thing, not a person. Doing so is on par with refer to a person as "it". The proper pronoun is "who" or "whom". Sadly, it has become common to misuse the word "that". And, really, who wants to be common?

Dahlia is the female voice of a genderfluid guest writer. Dahlia is newly self-identified as genderfluid, and does not yet feel comfortable with a photo. Dahlia enjoys exploring their identity, and reading fantasy and fantasy-realism fiction.



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Fierté Ottawa Pride



We are lucky to live in a time when Pride celebrations happen all over the world.

Of course, there are still many countries where being queer is not only not celebrated, but also illegal. So, remember, none of us are free until all of us are free. Thankfully, living in Canada, I have been privileged to have attended Pride celebrations in Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna, New York, Miami, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Vancouver, Halifax, Montreal and of course Toronto. Surprisingly, even to me, this year marked my first time attending Fierté Ottawa Pride. I have **Francis Gaudreault** of **Pitbull Events** to thank for inspiring this trek to our nation's capital. Last time here I was in art school, visiting as a board member of the of The Canadian Federation of Students. I found it abysmal. Which is probably why I've never been back. This time, however, I was here to party and not protest (student

fees.) As this was a last-minute trip, decided upon with my bestie the night before, we were determined to make it as cheap as possible. After a night of partying and no sleep in Toronto, we took the bus.

Pulling into Ottawa just before 11PM, we headed straight for **Pitbull Pride** held at The Bronson. Having changed into our party gear in the bus washroom, we shocked some passengers with our slutty transformation. Reminding me of a modern version of Toronto's Opera House, The Bronson was teaming with the usual harnessed men and jockstrapped twinks. Shocking. Exposed, energetic, and eye-catching were the gogo men. Bouncy, brazen yet breezy were DJs **Brady Price** of Chicago and **Diskommander** of Montreal. Dancing, while making new dance floor friends until 4:00 a.m., we left for our glamorous accommodations.

Having not secured an Airbnb and sticking to our ghetto-cheap game plan, we checked into Ottawa's only bathhouse. We figured we would have sexy fun, while

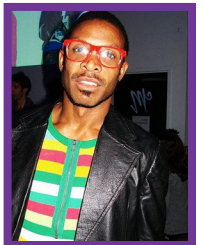


also getting a night's sleep, for cheap. It was a mistake. **Club Ottawa Sauna** was like going back in time. Retro, regressive and rank with no hot tub (with the state of the place, we probably would've skipped the dip anyways). The sole employee working that night, who was the check-in person, launderer and room attendant, was surprisingly cheerful. We left a generous tip. The men? Manic, mature, and a bit messy. But when in ghetto-Rome. After our lowered-expectations-fun, we settled in, on thin sheets and scratchy towels, with booming dance music lulling us into a restless sleep.

Next day, donning shades, we exited the dark bathhouse and stepped onto a bright and bustling street teaming with people. Thank the gods the bathhouse door is cleverly disguised. After a light breakfast we made our way to the parade and the street festival on Bank Street. With clouds spitting down on us for most of the day, threatening to ruin our only day in Ottawa, the sun finally came out like a diva. This allowed us to throw it back to some beats at the

outdoor T-Dance with **DJ Slushy**, and classically trained, deep house singer **BLK PRL**, before boarding our bus back to Toronto at 11PM. In and out. Fast and quick. Cheap and easy. Fierté Ottawa Pride was how we like our men.

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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Boys Don't Cry



Testosterone made me unable to cry for years. I still felt sadness, anger, melancholy, and grief. But the pathway to accessing tears was just... gone. And it wasn't toxic masculinity. I wanted to cry. I just... couldn't.

As an artist, it was one of the most frustrating parts of my transition because that pathway to crying seemed connected to the same place I went to write songs. Suddenly, I couldn't access either. I remember panicking, "Will I ever cry or write a song again?"

I know I'm not alone. Many trans men describe similar experiences. And conversations with cis men made me question how often we mistake the inability to express an emotion in the way we expect for the absence of emotion itself?

Toxic masculinity is real. Boys are taught not to cry. Coldness is not innate to men. It's learned behaviour. And I feel it's why so many cis men express their sadness and pain as anger and rage. Sadness, without tears, can exist in a state of grace. But when you're taught that even to feel sadness is a weakness, you use anger to beat sadness to death.

But I absolutely, positively no longer believe toxic masculinity explains why it's hard for men to cry. I'm living proof.

Fifteen years into testosterone, I can cry again. Somewhere along the way, the pathway back opened. I don't know if I found it, or if something hormonal shifted and found me. Maybe it was both. But, it still isn't like it was before.

My father died ten years ago. I loved him. I grieved him. But, I didn't cry.

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.



It was a beautiful summer night in 2011 on the back patio of the beloved, now-gone Beaver Café. I was two years on testosterone watching my reflection beautifully crawling towards itself.

I struck up a conversation with a dapper British trans man who was pre-testosterone and planning to stay that way. When I asked why, he spoke with a certain self-righteousness about toxic masculinity within trans male culture. Not that he was all wrong, but then he said something I knew, from experience, was wrong.

"This bullshit that trans guys go on about not being able to cry. It's such a farce! It's just their way of saying 'real men' don't cry."

I could have been offended; but, my gracious silence ended there.

"Dude," I interrupted. "You're wrong."



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Cake Cabaret was founded by Natalie Borch and Grant Van Rensburg; a brother and sister entrepreneur team with a passion for creating body-positive and queer-safe spaces. After successfully launching The Pink Studio—a place to dance, move, and embrace confidence, Natalie and Grant were inspired to open Cake Cabaret. Born from the same spirit of empowerment and fun, Cake wants to put a spotlight on all the incredible talent we have in Toronto.

As the name may suggest, Cake Cabaret offers sweet treats such as cake (vegan/GF options available), fun cocktails, and mocktails which are available to purchase from the bar.

Cake Cabaret is Toronto's one-of-a-kind destination for dance, burlesque, drag, and special events.

Burlesque and drag are costume-based performance styles, usually comedic, satirical and/or sensual. Burlesque centres around the art of the striptease, while drag primarily plays with gender expression. With each curated experience, Cake delivers performances that are unique and captivating.

Tipping is never mandatory, but always appreciated. Each performance is different, so staff will let you know how tips will be collected for each show, while some performers may come right up to you, others may have a tip-jar passed around. There is not an ATM on site, so you need to come prepared with appropriate cash for tipping.

Cake Cabaret also hosts social events like Trivia and Early Clubbing Nights. These do not feature a performance and are more relaxed environments for socializing.

This venue leans heavily toward the accessible; elevator access with low-reach buttons, gender-neutral bathrooms with push-buttons, wide stalls and low sinks, and a range of seating options that are easy to move.

The space is available for booking for private events, performances, theatre productions, album releases, weddings, or parties.

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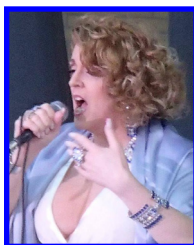
You can also book the Cake Cabaret dancers to perform at your next event.

Cake has a zero tolerance policy against racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, misogyny, fatphobia, or anything else that makes other guests, staff, or performers feel unsafe.

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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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Harbourfront Centre, 235 Queens Quay W., Toronto

harbourfrontcentre.com/event/sleuth

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Orlando

October 29; 7:00 p.m.

Orlando is, primarily, a riff on the character and energy of Virginia Woolf's groundbreaking 1928 novel, as well as subtle echoes of the medieval Chanson de Roland and Ludovico Ariosto's epic poem Orlando Furioso.

Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor St. W., Toronto

www.rcmusic.com

ROM After Dark: All Hallow's Eve

October 30 and 31; 7:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.

As night falls, the Museum transforms with eerie décor for an unforgettable evening of live music, DJ sets, and non-stop dancing. Come dressed in your best Halloween look or simply ready to celebrate. The night will be packed with high-energy entertainment and so many spooky surprises.

The Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto

www.rom.on.ca/whats-on/events/rom-after-dark-all-hallows-eve

Boom 97.3 80's Hallowe'en Costume Party

October 30; 9:00 p.m.

"In order to be eligible for the Best Costume Contest, all participants must be within the venue and have their costume judged by our panel of judges at the designated judging station by 11:00pm EST. A minimum of 5 finalists will be selected and invited on-stage at approximately 11:40pm EST."

The Phoenix, 410 Sherbourne St., Toronto

www.ticketweb.ca/event/boom-973-totally-80s-halloween-the-phoenix-concert-theatre-tickets/14341804

Championship Show Jumping

November 7; from 1:00 p.m.

Enjoy National show Jumping along with the strength and beauty of Clydesdale, Belgian, and Percheron horse competitions.

Coca-Cola Coliseum, 45 Manitoba Dr., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca

Toronto Burlesque Festival

November 12; 6:00 p.m.

The journey begins with an exclusive pre-show cocktail reception (for VIP and Festival Performers) featuring live jazz and decadent delights in Tallulah's cabaret, followed by performances in The Chamber.

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

www.showpass.com/the-toronto-burlesque-festival-2



The Jinx and DeLa Holiday Show

November 19; 7:00 p.m.

The greatest holiday show south of the North Pole is back with another brand spankin' new wintertide wonder! Award-winning comedy icons, writers, actors, and drag queen powerhouses, BenDeLaCreme & Jinx Monsoon, are back with another wildly successful, internationally acclaimed show.

Meridian Hall, 1 Front St., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca



Liberace And Liza

November 21; 8:00 p.m.

Liberace & Liza Minnelli never performed together, but that didn't stop David Saffert & Jillian Snow from creating this wildly successful mashup of two over-the-top icons. Saffert's dizzying piano skills and Snow's powerhouse belt team up in Cabaret, New York, New York, Over the Rainbow to surprise covers by Lady Gaga and Britney Spears.

TD Music Hall, 178 Victoria St., Toronto

tdmusichall.mhrth.com/tickets/liberace-and-liza



Thought You Knew with Shade Electra

November 26; 6:00 p.m.

This is an intergenerational LGBT event at the Reikai Centre (please use the entrance at Homewood and Wellesley). You will need to sign in to participate, but there is no admission fee. They want people to come enjoy some rounds of trivia with the residents of Toronto's only Rainbow Wing for the Senior LGBT residents.

Reikai Centre, 345 Sherbourne St., Toronto

www.reikaicentre.com

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

November 27; 8:00 p.m.

Canadian conductor Tania Miller has distinguished herself as a dynamic interpreter, musician, and innovator. She is the Artistic Director of the Brott Music Festival, and is internationally recognized for her talents.

Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor St. W., Toronto

www.rcmusic.com

Korpiklaani

November 28; 7:00 p.m.

Born from the northern spirit of Finland, Korpiklaani ("Backwoods Clan") stands as one of the pioneers of modern folk metal — a genre where the energy of heavy metal meets the heart of traditional folk music.

TD Music Hall, 178 Victoria St., Toronto

tdmusichall.mhrth.com/tickets/korpiklaani



Sinfonia Toronto - Holiday Cheer

December 5; 7:30 p.m.

Montreal piano prodigy Angela Yixuan Miao joins Music Director Nurhan Arman and Sinfonia Toronto for an audience favourite, Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2

Meridian Hall, 1 Front St., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca

"Twas The Night Before..." by Cirque du Soleil

December 10; 7:30 p.m.

"Twas The Night Before..." follows a young girl by the name of Isabella who has become jaded by the spirit of Christmas. She is brought into another world where she meets the characters from Moore's Christmas poem who help her get back into the holiday spirit.

Meridian Hall, 1 Front St., Toronto

www.ticketmaster.ca

ROAD TRIPS

The Creepshow

October 30; 7:00 p.m.

For the past 13+ years The Creepshow have been smashing the whole damn world in the face with their brutal-tastic mélange of punk, country, psychobilly and good old-fashioned rock'n'roll.

Biltmore Theatre, 39 King St. E., Oshawa

tickets.biltmoretheatre.com/eventperformances.asp?evt=368

Mrs. Doubtfire

November 3; 7:30 p.m.

Based on the beloved film, this heartfelt and hilarious musical comedy tells the story of Daniel Hillard, an out-of-work actor who will do anything to stay close to his kids.

Centre In The Square, 101 Queen St. N., Kitchener

centreinthesquare.com/event/mrs-doubtfire



Streethart, Harlequin, and Helix

November 6; 7:00 p.m.

Canadian rock icons Streethart have been delivering powerhouse performances for decades, earning a place among the country's most celebrated classic rock bands. Harlequin is a prominent Canadian rock band that originated in 1975 and continues to thrill audiences to this day. Helix was formed in 1974, in Kitchener, Ontario, has sold over 2,000,000 albums, and had four gold and 2 platinum albums.

Pickering Casino Resort, 888 Durham Live Ave., Pickering

www.ticketmaster.ca



Burlington Handmade Market

November 7 and 8

Craftadian is back with 120+ local makers (with a fresh lineup each day!) for two full days of handmade holiday magic. Whether you're shopping for that perfect unique handmade gift or just want to treat yourself, Craftadian is the place to be.

Ron Joyce Centre, DeGroot School of Business, 4350 South Service Rd., Burlington

www.craftadian.ca

Etsy Holiday Market

November 14 and 15

Curated collection of local makers, crafters, artists, and dealers of collectibles and great gift ideas. Admission: \$2, cash only at the door, 16 and under free, AND free re-entry all weekend.

RIM Park, 2001 University Ave. E., Waterloo

www.etsywaterlooregion.com

Ballets Jazz Montreal

November 18; 8:00 p.m.

Developed with Leonard Cohen's personal blessing, Dance Me transforms his legendary work into movement, capturing the depth of his voice, the wit of his lyrics, and the emotional pull that made him an icon.

Centre In The Square, 101 Queen St. N., Kitchener

centreinthesquare.com/event/ballet-jazz-montreal-dance-me-the-music-of-leonard-cohen

Uncharted - Crime and Mayhem in the Music Industry

November 19; 7:00 p.m.

The award-winning podcast that looks at the intersection of true crime and the world of music. Hosted by renowned music journalist Alan Cross, this podcast chronicles all manners of bad behaviour.

Biltmore Theatre, 39 King St. E., Oshawa

tickets.biltmoretheatre.com/eventperformances.asp?evt=354

Eagles Tribute - Hotel California

November 20; 8:00 p.m.

For almost three decades, The Original HOTEL CALIFORNIA have been recreating the legendary sound of THE EAGLES, and thrilling audiences all over the world.

Pickering Casino Resort, 888 Durham Live Ave., Pickering

www.ticketmaster.ca

Barenaked Ladies

November 21 and 22; 8:00 p.m.

For more than 37 years, the beloved Canadian quartet has entertained audiences around the world with infectious songs, quick-witted humour, and unforgettable live performances.

Centre In The Square, 101 Queen St. N., Kitchener

kwtickets.venue.net/event/26-27/26EE1122

A Christmas Story - The Musical

November 25; 7:00 p.m.

Set in 1940s Indiana, the musical follows young Ralphie Parker as he dreams, schemes, and pleads for the ultimate Christmas gift: an official Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200-Shot Range Model Air Rifle.

Centre In The Square, 101 Queen St. N., Kitchener

centreinthesquare.com/event/a-christmas-story-the-musical

Jann Arden and her Holiday Orchestra

December 1; 7:30 p.m.

The holiday tour brings Arden's voice, spirit and humour to an evening of Christmas music, hits and fan favourites with her holiday orchestra.

FirstOntario Concert Hall, 1 Summers Lane, Hamilton

www.ticketmaster.ca

Ashley MacIsaac

December 10; 7:00 p.m.

Celebrate the season with an evening of Cape Breton Christmas charm and Celtic toe-tapping entertainment from one of Canada's most celebrated fiddlers.

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

ticketscene.ca/events/65275

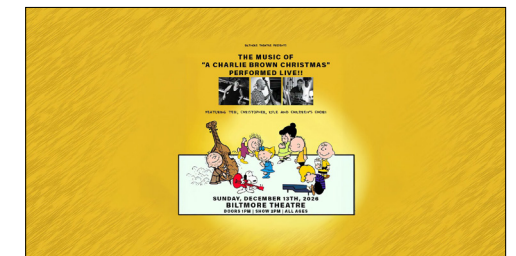
A Charlie Brown Christmas Concert

December 13; 1:00 p.m.

Sullivan-Parker-Kettlewell Trio performs the beloved award-winning 1965 album soundtrack, A Charlie Brown Christmas. The Trio features piano, upright bass, and drums, along with a local children's choir to perform this best-selling jazz album.

Biltmore Theatre, 39 King St. E., Oshawa

tickets.biltmoretheatre.com/eventperformances.asp?evt=288



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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