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# The Editor

## Greetings and Salutations!

Well here we are, waving goodbye to 2019, and a hello to 2020! In this issue we have two up and coming Toronto based female singers that should be on your radar. Our main feature is on JUNO Award winner, bülow who recently released her latest album, The Contender. Originally from Germany, she has lived around the world, honing her skills busking on the streets of London (UK), and getting inspiration to write her first song from Avril Lavigne, while at a camp up in Muskoka.

For our second feature, RALPH talks about how she started writing songs when she was just a kid. She's already toured across Canada, including an opening slot on a recent Carly Rae Jepsen tour, along with dates in the United States and Europe. She has just released her latest EP, Flashbacks & Fantasies, and has ambitions to continue touring, including dates at some key music festivals.

Finally, we have a bit of a magical rainbow to guide you through this festive season – a Randy Rainbow that is. The political satirist, parody pundit, and YouTube sensation has released a Christmas album that features many recognized musicians and a couple of well-known celebrities.

Our guest Wiggled Out columnist is Canadian, Christopher Peterson, who gives us the dirt on Key West, his current home base, where his cabaret-style show, Eyecons, has been entertaining audiences for many years. Our columnists continue to spotlight some of the most interesting individuals from our community. Cat Grant chatted with writer/director Steen Starr, who has worked in both theatre and film, while Boyd Kodak caught up with local non-binary femme activist, Jade Pichette, who currently works as Manager of Programs for Pride at Work Canada. Paul Bellini tells us how he ended up with his very own namesake, Peach Wheat IPA, available exclusively here at Woody's in Toronto, and Raymond Helkio can't get enough of his favourite local haunt in the east end area of Leslieville, Tango Palace Coffee House.

Don't forget to flip to the back pages for our popular BUZZpicks events listings, where you'll find an eclectic mix of Toronto area happenings and Road Trip suggestions, all compiled by our Events Editor, Sherry Sylvain. As always, kudos to our designer, Mychol Scully, for making us all look so beautiful!

Thanks for picking us up. Enjoy the read!

**Bryen Dunn**  
Editor-in-Chief





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# bülow

The musical journey from street busker to JUNO Award winner

By Raymond Helkio

Originally from Germany, bülow (pronounced boo-low) is currently taking the music scene by storm from her base right here in Toronto.

She's released a stream of EP's, beginning with *Damaged Vol. 1*, that garnered her *Apple New Artist of the Week* in 2017. She followed that up with *Damaged Vol. 2*, which lead her to being a first time nominee and winner at the *JUNO Awards* in London Ontario this past March. She had a total of four nominations, taking home the award for, *Breakthrough Artist of the Year*. She lost *Single of the Year*, and *Pop Album of the Year*, to Shawn Mendes.

Since then she's released *Crystalline*, and now her latest, *The Contender*, which she has been promoting on her recent tour that began in Berlin, then travelled throughout the United States, and ended right here in Canada.

While Canada is now her home, she's moved a lot over her life, having previously lived in Germany, England, United States, and Holland. The young singer, who was born Christmas Day, 1999, first discovered her love for music while busking on the streets of London. Here in Canada, her summers were often spent at camp in Muskoka, just north of Toronto. This is where she first met another of Canada's powerful female singers, **Avril Lavigne**, who inspired bülow to write her first song.

It should also be noted the coincidence that Lavigne won the *JUNO Fan Choice* award at the same 2019 Awards ceremony, running up against such heavyweights as Shawn Mendes, The Weeknd, and... bülow herself.

*It's a brand new life, it's so beautiful  
I'm too alive, I got some other guys  
Back of my mind, get back of the line*

— Lyrics excerpt from bülow's single "Boys Will Be Boys" from her latest EP, *The Contender*

*The Contender* features five tracks, including the first single, *Boys Will Be Boys*, which was written and produced by fellow *JUNO Award* winner **Michael Wise** (Ellie Goulding, James Blunt). The song was actually written over two years ago, and was completed in the back of a friends burger shop, the perfect setting for teen love, heartbreak and revenge.

From those early days busking the streets of London, to where she is today with over 100,000 YouTube subscribers and 71,000 Instagram followers, bülow has gathered years of real-world experience. Afraid of telling her parents, she would sneak out to busk and gained more than practical experience performing. She quickly learned to appreciate the polarity in reaction to her work, which helped push the work itself, which she explains as such. "Not everybody's going to be your fan. It may be more clear when busking, because some people will



straight up spit on you or scream at you if they don't like what you're doing. But I think you also do a lot of people-watching when you're busking. I learned a lot about my music through that, what works, and what doesn't."

bülow has also made her presence known on the international festival circuit, appearing at *Electric Picnic* and both *Reading* and *Leeds* festivals in Europe, as well as *Bonnaroo*, *Lollapalooza*, *Osheaga*, and *SXSW* in North America. She's also collaborated with American DJ and production duo, **The Chainsmokers**, as guest vocalist on their single, *Do You Mean*, along with rapper **Ty Dolla \$ign**. And this is just the beginning for bülow, who despite a challenging industry has carved out a huge space for herself.

It's arguable that the music scene has become more diverse, but it's still a largely male-dominated industry, and bülow's success speaks volumes. It's a reminder that the talent it takes to make it is immense, but the effort is usually more when you're forced to play against the grain. "There's a lot of aspects [of the music industry] that need improvement. I think the stigma around some of these male-dominated jobs in the business needs to change. Women are just as capable and talented, we just need more of them," bülow states. She also notes that it's also her female perspective about "relationships and topics that aren't talked about a lot," that she uses in her work to explore the extremes of emotions.

## Take Five - bülow

**What do you know now that you wish someone had told you when you started out?**

I would have told myself to probably stop auditioning for talent shows. I had a couple of auditions, but never made it to any live rounds. I had a vision that this would be my big break.

**Looking back, what would you say has been the most rewarding part of making music?**

Once you actually let it go and release the music, it's the best feeling in the world. At that point, you can't change anything about it anymore. Also, I have to make the "control freak" part of me shut up. I think as an artist you feel things can always be better or different, but knowing that the chapter is done and I can move onto the next, is amazing.

**The most challenging?**

Translating the songs from the studio to live hasn't always been easy. I love it once I do it, but the idea of being exposed and not having something to hide behind can be challenging.



**If you had one wish for the future of your career, what might that be?**

To keep growing with my fans and keep pushing each other. I hope I'll have a long career ahead of me making music that people will care about years from now.

**Any advice you'd like to give to a young person just starting out in the business?**

Trust your gut always. There's a reason you feel a certain way about something.

While bülow's tour ended in November with the final two shows played locally here in Hamilton and Toronto, you can still find her on Spotify, Youtube, Apple Music and through her website, [bulowmusic.com](http://bulowmusic.com). Keep your eyes and ears open, as you're guaranteed to be hearing and seeing more of bülow in the future.

---

Raymond Helkio is an author, director filmmaker, and graduate of Ontario College of Art & Design. He currently lives in both Toronto and New York. His most recent play, *LEDUC*, is now available in paperback.  
[www.raymondhelkio.com](http://www.raymondhelkio.com)



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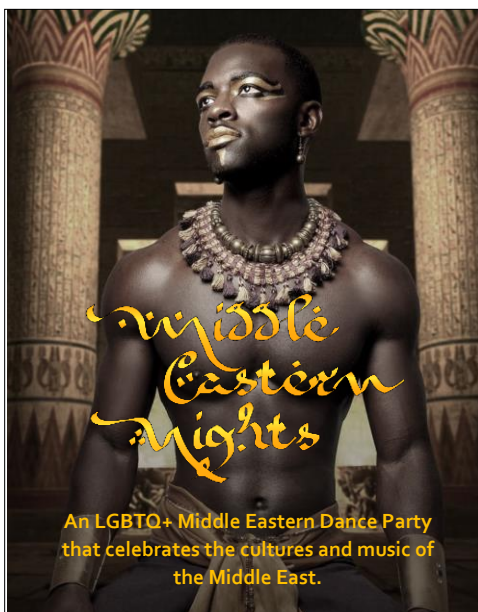
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# RALPH

## Putting Toronto on the Musical Map

By Cat Grant

**RALPH is a 29-year-old singer/songwriter hailing from right here in *The Six*. Born Raffaella Weyman, she recently found a school homework assignment from when she was six asking, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Her answer... “A STAR”. She’s well on her way!**

The talent gene runs far and wide in her familial DNA. Her mother and father were an artist and filmmaker respectively. With a grandfather, and many aunts and uncles in the entertainment industry, it’s no surprise that **RALPH** is an *Etobicoke School of the Arts* alumni. “I studied musical

theatre in high school, and I fell in love with singing jazz in grade 12. I felt so much more connected to the emotions and melodies in jazz standards,” she explains.

It’s a step away from her first musical inspiration. “I remember saving up my babysitting money to buy a **Britney Spears** album, and I poured over the pictures and lyrics for months. ‘E-Mail My Heart’ is a banger.”

Doing her undergrad studies at *University of Toronto* in Film Theory and English, **RALPH** also took a year abroad studying in Copenhagen. She said, “Studying film was pretty amazing. You just watch movies and then dissect them. It helped me become a critical thinker, which is something I utilize all the time in my life and career.”

When asked about personal inspiration **RALPH** admitted it was the kindness and generosity of her parents that comes to mind first. She then adds, “My manager is pretty amazing too. She’s



been at my side since the start, just hustling and hoping along with me.” RALPH sites her high school teacher, Mr. Morgan, as an influential person as well. “He taught me some invaluable writing lessons that I’ve never forgotten. He also ignited my love for poetry.”

Writing songs since a youth, RALPH told me her mind is always in songwriting mode. “I find myself coming up with lyrics whenever, wherever - when I’m on a run, when I’m biking, when I overhear an interesting conversation, when I watch a good scene in a movie, etc.” When I inquire about writing routines and habits, she tells me she has many beloved rituals. “Order makes me feel calm, which is helpful for my anxiety. I have a morning ritual when I’m home and living in my apartment. It’s pretty simple but I find it shapes my entire day, and if it gets thrown off, my day is f\*\*ked. I also make my bed every morning, no exceptions,” she laughs.

For RALPH, the biggest challenge so far is managing her own expectations “Being an artist is a real emotional roller coaster of excitement and disappointment. I just have to remind myself that with every time something falls through, there’s always an unexpected nugget of good news that gets announced soon,” she explains.

RALPH has already toured across Canada several times, played NYC, LA and San Francisco in the United States, and also gigged in London and Paris. Her favourite gig so far has been London, England where she expected a couple dozen people in the audience, but when she arrived the venue was packed. “It was pretty amazing. I met fans who had flown in just for the show. It was really outrageous and moving,” she confides.

Her future dreams include playing such big name festivals as *Glastonbury*, *Bonnaroo*, *Coachella*, and *Roskilde*. “I’d also love to be a guest at the *Met Gala*, then do an extreme outfit change and perform for everyone during the party,” she smirks.

As well, within five years RALPH would like to be a better guitar and piano player, have her own studio space, and be a more confident producer. She also confesses, “I’d love to own a house in Costa Rica so I can escape Canadian winters and surf. I’d also hope to have travelled the world playing my songs, and I’d love to be able to pay back my friends and family who have contributed free labour towards my career!”

If RALPH wasn’t singing, she most likely would have chosen to be an actor. “I had an agent and did acting for awhile. I loved it, and I still do.” Ralph continues, “I would probably still be doing that. Or I would have utilized my film degree and I’d be making films in some capacity.”

Inspired by such a broad variety of music, RALPH wanted her new EP, *Flashbacks & Fantasies*, to reflect that, while still feeling honest and uncontrived. She elaborates, “The six songs that I ended up choosing all feel unique and different, but have common features that still feel familiar to me. I can hear my



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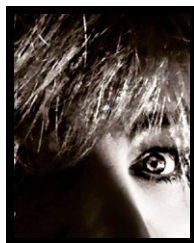
voice and writing style very loudly within each one. I think it’s a great representation of an artist evolving, while still staying confident and secure within the core elements that root their project.” As fans await more from RALPH, she concludes by stating, “I have some big US and Canada tour plans for spring, which I’ll be announcing soon.”

Find out more about RALPH at [www.songsbyralph.com](http://www.songsbyralph.com) and RALPH on Facebook

---

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

Facebook @grantedarts





**Comedian, satirist, musician, YouTube sensation – whatever you want to refer to him as, Randy Rainbow has sure proven his talent over the past few years.**

His spoofs of interviews with famous figures and parodies of musical numbers, often with a political focus, are what have helped propel him into the spotlight. Earlier this year he was nominated for an *Emmy* in the *Short Form Variety Series* category, and now he's released his first album, a Christmas offering where he's collaborated with some great music composers, Mark Shaiman, Norm Lewis, Jesse Kissil, along with a couple of well-known personalities, Kathy Griffith and Alan Cumming.

*Hey Gurl, It's Christmas*, a collection of original holiday tunes that have been done in his trademark style. "I've been doing musical theatre since a child, so this is my dream come true. As a gay Jew, I've always been a fan of Christmas," he explains. In terms of how he gathered such a great roster of contributors, he says, "I've been a fan of all of them for years, and they've been really appreciative of my work, so this was my chance to call in a favour."

The album is a combination of Christmas classics with some added sass, parody, and a pinch of politics, with Randy going into his typical rant on the opening title track, before realizing that they are working on a Christmas album. "I worked with Mark (Shaiman) on the opening track, and we wanted to write the biggest, gayest Christmas song ever, so we decided to put the political rhetoric on hold," he explains. Jesse Kissel orchestrates and plays piano on the rest of the album, accompanied by several well known Broadway musicians.

Track 2 features comedian **Kathy Griffith** and actor **Alan Cumming**, opening with Kathy acting as Randy's therapist, before he kicks into, *I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus*. Then, it's Alan's turn to be the therapist, also contributing vocals. **Norm**

**Lewis** appears on Track 3, *Merry Christmas Darling / What Are You Doing for New Year's Eve?* Well known for his acting and baritone vocals, his voice lends a soothing touch to this number.

Track 4 is the only tune not specifically Christmas themed. *Trump's Favorite Things* is done as a parody of, *My Favorite Things*, from *The Sound of Music*. **John Di Domenico** adds the vocals of Trump, as Randy sings through a full rundown of Mr. President's spoofs, right up to and including the current impeachment proceedings. **Lorna Luft**, the daughter of Judy Garland and Sidney Luft, appears on Track 5, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, adding her powerful vocals and some fun banter. Randy goes solo on Track 6, *The Christmas Movie Medley*, as well as the closing track, *Make Someone Happy*. Overall, a great effort for a guy that never figured he'd be in this position just a few years back.

What about those infamous pink glasses of his? "I found them in my prop closet, and decided to wear them when I went to a meeting once. Since then, they have taken on a life of their own. We now sell them at the merchandise table at my shows, and people love wearing them."

Finally, I asked him if he has ever had someone comment about his likeness to PeeWee Herman. "I get that a lot actually, especially with the way I dress with the suit. I was a huge fan growing up, watching *Playhouse* and *Big Adventure*. While I don't consciously emulate his character, I don't mind the comparisons at all either."

The album is being released on Broadway Records with physical signed copies of the CD available via his website.

[www.randyrainbow.com](http://www.randyrainbow.com)

Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues.





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# WIGGED OUT

## CELEBRATE XXXmas in KEY WEST

BY CHRISTOPHER PETERSON



### You've never experienced Christmas until you see and feel it in the subtropics, better known as the Florida Keys.

I have to admit I only knew about Key West growing up from a song off my Village People album. But here I am twenty years later, and still enjoying a balmy 79 degrees (or 26.111 in Canadian) for the holidays. If you have never been here for Christmas and New Year's, it is a unique adventure.

Let's start with the way we decorate, a palm tree festooned with lights can bring on new meaning to *Oh Cum All Ye Faithful*, and the competition is fierce (we still using this word? Yes?) in over the top home trimmings. You can grab a drink and board a conch train ride to take you all over the island to judge for yourself.

But nothing beats a night on the town, with the first and most important stop being **La te da** (devil in creole) at 1125 Duval Street, and **The Crystal Room Cabaret** upstairs, where you'll be entertained by, *Christmas with Christopher Peterson's EYECONS* extravaganza!. A tradition for over 18 years, the show has some of the most famous icons celebrating the holiday season in the most twisted way. Marilyn as Mariah, Reba saw mommy kissing Santa Clause, Barbra spitting out Jingle Bells on 45, Liza bringing new meaning to White (sniff) Christmas, her mother Judy having herself a Mary Little Xmas, and many more surprises. All sung LIVE! sorry Rugurls no lip-sync here. It's a one of a kind show you will not see anywhere else in the world, Truth.

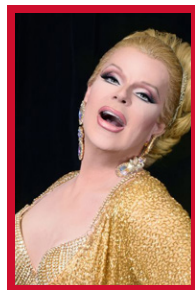
If a simpler form of drag is for you, where you can tip and ignore, hold on to your toques, as we have that too. Both **Aqua** and **801** down the street from *The Da*, located in the pink triangle of town (no explanation needed), give up the good, the bad, and the ugly of our current ilk.

Then, just when you thought Christ day couldn't get any more FABULOUS, wait a week and here comes New Year's. Join Sushi and five thousand people in front of **Bourbon St Pub**, for the *The Red Shoe Drop* at midnight, to take out the old and bring in the new. We really do blow the wade to ring in the new one, and if you can't make it down, you can watch it live on CNN. I've even made an appearance as Joan Rivers kvetching with Anderson Cooper after Kathy Griffin was fired.

Finally relax and get the hangover doctors to rejuvenate you, then start it all over again. Drag for the past twenty years has become a main stay here, seven days a week for any tourist, whether they be straight, gay, bi or what ever letter of the alphabet you're using this week. Happy ho ho all!

---

Christopher Peterson is (self-titled) North America's Foremost Live Celebrity Female Impersonator. Having performed for the past 40 years all over Canada and the United States, he's done it all from clubs to cabaret, movies, television, radio, commercials, bar mitzvahs, and even the occasional corner in the old days.  
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# Steen Starr

**Award winning director/writer Steen (Christine) Starr hails from Alberta, and went on to study law at the University of Toronto. “Think of where I’d be now if I’d stayed!” Steen laughs.**

“I was pursuing law as the practical thing even though I really wanted to write, as I had just finished my Honours BA in English at the University of Alberta. But after an intense year of law, I realized it would be hard to split my life between law practice and trying to write.” She decided to continue with English Literature, focusing on women’s writing for her M.A. at York University.

Steen is one of five daughters of an Anglican Minister and a vivacious, home-maker mother. “You’d think our family would be all pious, my sisters were smart with humour, and both my parents were a bit glam. My dad loved a good joke, and my mom remains wry to this day (she’s 93).”

## Three Fun Facts About Steen Starr

- That I have a lovely, well-adjusted and fierce grown-up daughter.
- That Starr is my actual, real, last name.
- That I worked 5 years part-time for UPS delivering packages in my sexy brown uniform and brown van

Steen got her start in theatre when her sister called and asked if there was something she could write for her, that she could then use to produce and present at the *Edmonton Fringe Festival*. Steen penned a poetic lament about her heartbreak experience, called *Holding*, that Steen divulged, “was my coming out piece.”

Steen followed this up by writing, *Looking for Boysland*, and her favourite role to date, *Dr. Constance Cumming Wants to Help You Get Laid*. After enrolling in an Artist Educator intro course at the Royal Conservatory of Music, Steen had the inspiration for her first short, *Putting the I in Trans*.

Her favourite project thus far is her short, *Older Than What?*, which Steen explains, “I loved interviewing LGBTQ seniors, and was so privileged to hear their stories and to get more insight and perspective on my own aging. I also learned a lot about editing on that project, thanks muchos to Cecilio Escobar.” She is still currently promoting this project, and says, “I finished it



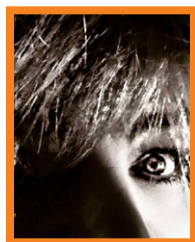
in 2017, and it is still being picked up by festivals and other screening venues, which is really rewarding.”

Steen was surprised to learn how similar the editing process is for writing, as compared to cutting film. She told me, “I actually love editing written work. It’s like a puzzle to figure out and create the best composition. Film/video editing is like that too, and I don’t think I realized how much rearranging, composition, and creativity go on in post-production.” Steen’s dream gig would be to have a big budget, be surrounded by creative people, and “To collectively realize some fabulous and crazy project.”

As for the future, Steen concludes, “I haven’t yet started on a new film or writing project, but some ideas are brewing.”

You can find out more about Steen at [www.christinastarr.ca](http://www.christinastarr.ca).

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







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INTRODUCING... *PAUL BELLINI PEACH WHEAT ALE*

**George Hislop has a park named after him. Sky Gilbert has a lane named after him. I have a beer named after me. Introducing the Paul Bellini Peach Wheat Ale. I taste great.**

Back in May of this year, a young man named **Phil Phillips** (yes, it's his real name) from *Black Swan Brewing Company* in Stratford, Ontario, sent me an e-mail asking if he could name his new peach-infused ale after me. You know, like the Peach Bellini, a mixed drink that combines peach nectar with champagne.

Now, I'm a small-town boy. The only Bellinis I knew were my relatives. But one night, back in 1989, I was at the *Rivoli* with the *Kids in the Hall* when **Uma Thurman**, just 20 years old at the time, swept in with her agent. She was in town shooting a movie called, *Where The Heart Is*, with **Dabney Coleman** and **Crispin Glover**.

Uma and the Kids shared the agent, who was happy to introduce everyone. When she was introduced to me, she grabbed my hand and said, "Bellini! I drink you in New York." I smiled, but I had no idea what she was talking about. Was it a come-on, I wondered? Uma is a beautiful woman, but I am not into pussy. Thank God she left before I could say anything dumb. Later, the agent explained that the Peach Bellini was a fashionable cocktail, and that I should stop being such a hick and try one.

Two years later, the image of me wearing a white towel, as though I was a found-in at a bathhouse, became the prize for a popular *Kids in the Hall* contest. For years afterwards, I'd be asked, "Hey, Bellini, where's your towel?" ("It's in the wash," I'd say.) Unless it was a gay guy. They usually asked what was under that towel. I'd respond with a flash.

So cut back to May, when **Phil Phillips** first sent his request. Phil's a bit of a joker himself. He also created a beer called *Holy Mole*, which uses mole chocolate as one of its ingredients and is blessed by a real Roman Catholic priest. I offered Phil the use of my photo as well, taken in 1993 by **David Silvercloud**. Phil went one further by making the background a terrycloth pattern. The batch was brewed and we were in business.

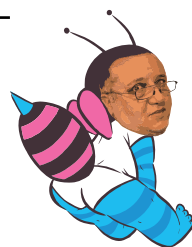
Finally, on September 15, it was ready. We convened at *Woody's* for a launch party, with **Heroine** hosting. She introduced my five taste testers - **Keith Cole**, **Patricia Wilson**, **Richard Ryder**, **Rolyn Chambers**, and **Ryan Russell** - who came onstage to tell the audience what they thought of the flavour. Russell tore off his shirt and chugged it, letting the foam drip down his bare chest.

What a showman. Everyone else also liked it.

However, *Paul Bellini Peach Wheat Ale* isn't easy to find. It's currently only available directly from *Black Swan Brewing Company* in Stratford, and at my local hangout, *Woody's*, here in Toronto. Won't you join me for a queer cheers?

[www.blackswanbrewing.ca](http://www.blackswanbrewing.ca)  
[www.woodytoronto.com](http://www.woodytoronto.com)

**Paul Bellini** is an award-winning television comedy writer (*Kids in the Hall*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*). He also teaches comedy writing at *George Brown College* in Toronto.







**KILLER KRISTMAS VOL. 1**  
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# A KODAK MOMENT

## Jade Pichette

BY BOYD KODAK

**Jade Pichette is a Diversity and Inclusion Educator living in Tkaranto/Toronto. They are a queer non-binary femme of mostly white settler ancestry.**

Currently Jade works as the Manager of Programs for *Pride at Work Canada*, as the Gythia of Vindisir Kindred, and as an independent consultant. Previously they have worked at the *ArQuives*, and *Kind Space*. Jade's personal interests include LGBTQ2+ interfaith work, drumming, and sacred play.

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

**Jade Pichette** - It has been one of transition for me as I started the year as the Volunteer and Community Outreach Coordinator at the *Archives*, but the organization lost funding for my position and I had to move on. I spent much of the summer on the Toronto Islands enjoying the sun, going to religious retreats, while picking up the odd presentation or short diversity contract. In late 2018 however, I started my new position as the Manager of Programs at *Pride at Work Canada*, which I couldn't be happier with.

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

**JP** - The *Parliament of World Religions* that was held in Toronto in 2018. It hosts people from 220 different faith traditions from all over the world to work on an interfaith level, including Indigenous leaders whose teachings I was so grateful for. 2018 was also the first Parliament that had explicitly LGBTQ2+ content including my presentation in the women's track *Passing Through Divinity: Trans Women & Religion*.

**BK** - What are you looking forward to over for the next year?

**JP** - I'm really looking forward to getting the ability to travel to various parts of Canada for *Pride at Work Canada*. I love to travel, and I adore the fact that I can see the country while advocating for more LGBTQ2+ inclusive organizations and society as a whole.

**BK** - Where can we see your work?

**JP** - People can connect with me directly through reaching out through [consulting@jadepichette.com](mailto:consulting@jadepichette.com), connecting with me at *Pride at Work Canada*, or at the myriad of gatherings and conferences I'll be at over the year.



**BK** - Future plans?

**JP** - My plans for the future include trying to approach the world with more vulnerability, more compassion, and more play. I want to pull this into my personal life, but also my professional life.

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

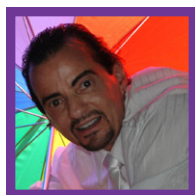
**JP** - I wish people would come to each other with more compassion. I used to be a participant in call-out culture, and these days I see that it tends to divide us more than building us up. We need to have more courageously compassionate conversations with those we disagree with.

**BK** - Life wouldn't be the same without...

**JP** - My communities. My Heathen (Asatru) community, and the queer community that fuel my heart.

[www.jadepichette.com](http://www.jadepichette.com)

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







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# TANGO PALACE COFFEE COMPANY



**Walking into Tango Palace Coffee Company on Queen Street East, I feel like throwing my arms out and spinning around like Julie Andrews from *The Sound of Music*, but I'd risk knocking something over.**

This is one of its enduring charms that has made it a mainstay in Leslieville for the past 27 years. It's still the perfect independent coffee shop, yet now it's located right in the middle of Toronto's hottest new area.

Perhaps I'm overly fond of *Tango Palace* because I was a regular there more than twenty years ago when that area was considered a neglected part of town. When this was an "up and coming" neighbourhood, the street traffic was limited to the few of us that lived in the area. There weren't really any other coffee shops to speak of, unless you count the gas station down the street. There wasn't a *Starbucks* nearby, and in fact *Tango Palace* first opened well before the behemoth coffee chain even came to Toronto.

More important than coffee though, this place had a great vibe, was nostalgically gay in decor, and for many this place became a bit of a safe haven on what was once a not-so-friendly area of town for LGBTQ people. Perhaps the biggest reason to love *Tango Palace* is that it's hardly changed since its early days, and like a good friend, while there have been some modifications over the years they've managed to stay pretty much as they always have been. Now the area is packed with grocery stores, upscale antique shops,

art galleries, and chef-driven restaurants, that make it a destination area in Toronto.

With less than 30 seats, a mix of cafe style and armchairs, a typical weekday night can see streams of people coming in to grab a coffee or sandwich before the next streetcar. The place is quick to fill up and very often almost at capacity. One night I went, the room was split between small groups of conversations with playwrights, actors, students, and business folk talking shop. During my last visit, I ordered some of their Queen East-famous cookies and waited patiently for one of the front window chairs to open up.

When one did, I sat down, opened my laptop and began channelling the *Sound of Music*:

*Lampshades with frills, Biscotti and tea  
Old candelabras, A buddy and me  
An old chair to sit on, comfy as can be  
These are a few of my favourite things*

**Tango Palace Coffee Company**  
1156 Queen Street East, Toronto (416) 465-8085

Raymond Helkio is an author, director filmmaker, and graduate of Ontario College of Art & Design. He currently lives in both Toronto and New York. His most recent play, *LEDUC*, is now available in paperback.

[www.raymondhelkio.com](http://www.raymondhelkio.com)





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# BUZZPICKS

By Sherry Sylvaín

## BUZZ Local Picks

### Toronto Christmas Market

Through December 22

Hundreds of unique shopping experiences, stunning light canopies, non-stop entertainment, heated mulled wine, beer and hospitality gardens, and of course, Santa and the elves.

Distillery District, 55 Mill St., Toronto

[www.torontochristmasmarket.com](http://www.torontochristmasmarket.com)

### Holiday Fair in the Square

Through December 23

Combining the charm and elegance of a Christmas market with the excitement and allure of a thriving winter carnival, this is a new favourite Toronto holiday tradition supporting Epilepsy Toronto.

Nathan Phillips Square, 100 Queen St. W., Toronto

[www.fairinthesquare.ca](http://www.fairinthesquare.ca)



### Annie The Musical

November 16 to December 29; matinee and evening shows

Story about a fiery young orphan girl who must live in a miserable orphanage. Her seemingly hopeless situation changes when she is chosen to spend time at the home of a wealthy munitions industrialist.

Randolph Theatre, 736 Bathurst St., Toronto

[www.lowercrossingontheatre.com](http://www.lowercrossingontheatre.com)

### EARLY RUBENS

Through January 5, 2020

The exhibition highlights works the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) produced between 1609 and 1621 – a crucial time that was the artist's most innovative and inspired.

Art Gallery of Ontario, 317 Dundas St. W., Toronto

[www.ago.ca](http://www.ago.ca)

### It's Alive! Classic Horror and Sci-Fi Art

Through January 5, 2020

One of the world's most extraordinary collections of classic horror and sci-fi movie posters explores and examines the connection between artistry, emotion, and popular culture.

Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto

[www.rom.on.ca](http://www.rom.on.ca)

### Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2019

Through March 29, 2020

All-new photographs from around the world revealing striking wildlife, breathtaking landscapes, and the remarkable beauty of our natural world.

Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto

[www.rom.on.ca](http://www.rom.on.ca)

### TICOT Sunday Brunch

December 15; January 12, 19; February 9, 16 – 1:00 p.m. to 15:30

A variety show featuring all kinds of entertainers - Drag Queens, Drag Kings, Live Singers, Musicians, and so much more. Proceeds from the show go to support Reign 33's Charities of Choice.

Church Street Garage, 477 Church St., Toronto

[www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com](http://www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com)

### Toronto Children's Chorus: A Chorus Christmas

December 15; 2:00 p.m.

More than 400 choristers, plus the TCC's Alumni Choir and the Toronto Youth Choir perform an afternoon of festive favourites from around the globe.

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto

[www.roythomsonhall.com](http://www.roythomsonhall.com)

### Beer Bash!

Every Sunday 4:00 p.m.

This event is a Sunday social, a Sunday service if you will. Mix and mingle, strip down to underwear if you like (free clothes check), and enjoy music from a rotating roster of DJs.

The Black Eagle Toronto, 457 Church St., Toronto

[www.blackeagletoronto.com](http://www.blackeagletoronto.com)







## **VYLE Tuesdays**

**Every Tuesday through January 15, 2020; 10:00 p.m.**

Selena Vyle takes over every Tuesday, bringing her unique brand of exciting dance and lip-sync, hilarious comedy, powerful social message, and so-so looks in this all new one-woman drag show.

The Beaver, 1192 Queen St. W., Toronto  
[www.thebeavertoronto.com](http://www.thebeavertoronto.com)

## **Messiah**

**December 17 to December 22**

Handel's Messiah with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, and four dazzling Canadian soloists.

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto  
[www.roythomsonhall.com](http://www.roythomsonhall.com)

## **The Illusionists - Magic of the Holidays**

**January 1 to 5**

A powerful mix of the most outrageous and astonishing acts ever seen on stage. This non-stop show is packed with thrilling and sophisticated magic of unprecedented proportions.

Meridian Hall, 1 Front St., Toronto  
[www.meridianhall.com](http://www.meridianhall.com)

## **21C: Against the Grain Theatre's Ayre**

**January 11; 8:00 p.m.**

A lush fusion of Arabic, Hebrew, Sardinian, and Sephardic folk melodies. Lebanese-Canadian soprano, Miriam Khalil and a cast of international musicians.

Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor St. W., Toronto  
[www.rcmusic.com](http://www.rcmusic.com)

## **Motherhood The Musical**

**January 17 to February 16, 2020**

Book a sitter, grab your friends, and join the fun at a baby shower as four women share the insights, challenges and pleasures of motherhood.

Lower Ossington Theatre, 100 Ossington Ave., Toronto  
[www.lowerossingtontheatre.com](http://www.lowerossingtontheatre.com)

## **HYPROV: Improv Under Hypnosis**

**January 24; 8:00 p.m.**

Hypnosis and improvisation - two art forms that capture minds and imaginations worldwide - are brought together by two masters of their crafts, Colin Mochrie and Asad Mecci, uniting to create a totally unique theatrical experience.

Meridian Arts Centre, 5040 Yonge St., Toronto  
[www.meridianartscentre.com](http://www.meridianartscentre.com)

## **Found Footage Festival**

**January 24, 25; 8:00 p.m.**

Guided tour through bizarre VHS finds, including the 1987 Miss Junior America Wisconsin pageant, and a mysterious tape labeled "bonion sergery" with Joe Pickett and Nick Prueher.

The Royal Cinema, 608 College St., Toronto  
[www.theroyal.to](http://www.theroyal.to)



## **23rd Maple Blues Awards**

**February 3; 7:00 p.m.**

Canada's blues music all-star concert and annual awards event features performances by some of the hottest blues musicians from across the country, hosted by Iranian-Canadian blues artist Raha Javanfar.

Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor St. W., Toronto  
[www.rcmusic.com](http://www.rcmusic.com)

## **Toronto Woodworking Show**

**February 7 to 9; 10:00 a.m.**

Canada's newest consumer woodworking show celebrates everything to do with wood for hobbyist and professionals. Adults - \$15.00 or \$20.00 weekend pass.

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga  
[www.woodshows.com/toronto](http://www.woodshows.com/toronto)

## **Sinatra with Matt Dusk**

**February 14; 8:00 p.m.**

Take a journey with award winning, multi-Platinum selling crooner Matt Dusk as he whisks you away to Las Vegas 1966, paying homage to his hero, Frank Sinatra.

Rose Theatre, 1 Theatre Lane, Brampton  
[www.brampton.ca/sites/rose-theatre](http://www.brampton.ca/sites/rose-theatre)

## **GTA Home & Reno Show**

**February 14 to 17; 10:00 a.m.**

Need advice from industry professionals? Want hands-on experience with power tools? Looking to see how you can add value to your home? Here is everything you need to get your next project started.

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga  
[www.gtahomeandrenoshow.com](http://www.gtahomeandrenoshow.com)



# BUZZPICKS

## BUZZ Road Trips

### Country Christmas

**Through December 22**

Visit the historic homes for unique holiday traditions, enjoy a horse-drawn wagon ride, let your little ones meet Father Christmas, and sing-along to your favourite Christmas carols. Waterloo Region Museum & Doon Heritage Village, 10 Huron Rd., Kitchener

[www.waterlooregionmuseum.com](http://www.waterlooregionmuseum.com)



### The Polar Express Train Ride

**Through December 22**

Enjoy hot chocolate and treats as passengers read along with the classic children's book, The Polar Express. Santa and his helpers board the train at the North Pole, and give gifts.

York-Durham Heritage Railway, 19 Railway St., Uxbridge  
[www.ydhr.ca](http://www.ydhr.ca)

### Haus of T's - Christmas Extravaganza

**December 20; 10:30 p.m.**

A huge event; the Christmas Extravaganza! They have performances from Tatyana Romanov, Peechez, Rhonda Darling, PomponMinoune, DeeDee Delite, and Mychol! No Cover.

T's Pub, 323 Somerset St. W., Ottawa  
[www.tspub.ca](http://www.tspub.ca)

### Gordie McNeil - New Year's Eve With Elvis

**December 31; 9:00 p.m.**

Doors @ 9pm show @ 10pm. Light buffet & bubbly @ midnight. Tickets are \$25 - Ring in 2020 with The Bell Tower Staff & your friends. Special guest Chantal Cartier.

The Bell Tower, 575 Central Ave., Fort Erie  
[www.thebelltowercommunity.com](http://www.thebelltowercommunity.com)

### New Year's Eve

**December 31; 9:00 p.m.**

Celebrating 30 years of NYE's with a Black and White Theme. Party with and support the community at this venue recognized as a Safe Space for over 30 years.

Club 717, 7-717 Wilson Rd. S., Oshawa  
[www.club717.ca](http://www.club717.ca)

### New Year's Eve with the "Beatles" White Album

**December 31; 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.**

Everyone has a favourite Beatles song — many from the legendary White Album. Ring in the new year with tunes that are truly inter-generational. \$50.50

Capitol Theatre, 20 Queen St., Port Hope  
<https://capitoltheatre.com>

### Queer Trivia Night

**January 2; 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.**

Following trivia, the stage is opened up for anyone who wants to perform in drag - Kings, Queens, and other royalty welcome. Bring your music on something with an auxiliary port.

The Twisted Wheel, 379 Water St., Peterborough  
<http://www.trentqueercollective.com/>

### Health and Wellness Expo

**January 12; 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

Local and commercial vendors with the intention of sharing ideas, techniques and products which encompass mind, body and spirit. Educational seminars and hands-on demonstrations will take place.

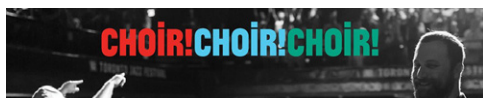
Budweiser Gardens, 99 Dundas St., London  
[www.budweisergardens.com](http://www.budweisergardens.com)

### Choir! Choir! Choir!

**February 8; 8:00 p.m.**

This local Toronto group takes a non-traditional approach to music. There are no auditions, and the audience is the choir. Just show up and they'll teach you an original arrangement to a song you love.

Centre In The Square, 101 Queen St. N., Kitchener  
[www.centreinthesquare.com](http://www.centreinthesquare.com)



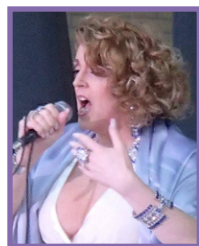
### Bravo Niagara! Presents Kurt Elling

**February 14; 8:00 p.m.**

Renowned for his singular combination of robust swing and poetic insight, GRAMMY winner Kurt Elling has secured his place among the world's foremost jazz vocalists.

FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, 250 St. Paul St., St. Catharines  
[www.bravoniagara.org](http://www.bravoniagara.org)

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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