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The Editor

Greetings and Salutations,

Welcome to our end of summer 2020 issue. While we're not yet back in print format, we're still here working hard to bring readers the best LGBTQ+ content on all things entertainment. In this issue we've even added a special feature on the inaugural **Pride Afrique Pan-African Virtual Pride** that's happening online August 14 to 16, that's filled with guest speakers, performances, and more.

Our main feature is on **Canada's Drag Race**. Yes, *We The North* are now officially part of RuPaul's harem. After Toronto's own **Brooke Lynn Hytes** captured the eyes and hearts of drag fans on the original **RuPaul's Drag Race**, getting our own version of the show, and having Hytes as one of the presiding judges, became the next logical step. Hytes is the first queen in the history of the Drag Race franchise to become a permanent judge after having been a contestant. She's joined on the judges panel by other noted Canadians, actor/model **Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman**, and fashion icon **Stacey McKenzie**. Raymond Helkio chatted with the threesome to discuss a variety of topics.

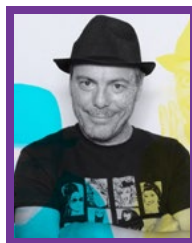
Feature two brings us into the world of Las Vegas native **Shamir**, an out non-binary, gender-queer, singer, songwriter, and actor who has many Canadian connections. Ryan G. Hinds caught up with this talented performer to discuss his forthcoming album, his own record label, diversity in music, and how he's learned to set boundaries.

Our guest *Wigged Out* columnist in this issue is **Elvirus**, who created her own web-series, *Get Dragged*, where 'competiwhores' critique each other until only one is left in the camp. Cat Grant chatted with fine artist **Melanie Day**, who has a wonderful collection of oil-based landscape paintings that she's shown around the world. Boyd Kodak caught up with **Tyler Vile**, a writer who has a new poetry collection out, and is working on four other books. Paul Bellini reflects back on the closing of **Club 120**, formerly known as **Goodhandy's**, and recalls some of his most memorable moments there. Raymond Helkio also takes a look back at a long standing community staple that's also calling it quits this year, **AIDS Walk Toronto**.

Our popular **BUZZpicks** events listings are now virtual, but that doesn't stop our Events Editor, Sherry Sylvain, from assembling an extensive list of what to tune into online. As always, kudos to our designer, Mychol Scully, for making us all look fabulous!

Stay safe. Enjoy the read!

Bryen Dunn
Editor-in-Chief



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By Raymond Helkio



RuPaul's Drag Race (RDR) has officially arrived in The North to celebrate all that is drag. Canada's Drag Race (CDR) began with twelve of the fiercest queens from across the country vying against one another in a creative battle to capture the title of *Canada's First Drag Superstar!*

CDR contestants take part in a series of challenges designed to eliminate one per week, until there's only one queen left, who walks off the runway with a \$100,000 grand prize. While most viewers are aware of the show's basic competition framework of fashion, pose, and authenticity, what often manifests through each season is the peer-to-peer pep rally of encouragement. This is often seen in the form of critiques that push the queens beyond their comfort zone. Which is precisely what the entire franchise is all about, pushing buttons, opening doors, and shining a spotlight on what makes each of us truly unique.

CDR is full of boundary-pushers, including the power judge trio of **Brooke Lynn Hytes, Stacey McKenzie, and Jefferey Bowyer-Chapman**, who each bring a potent dose of moral courage and humility to their work. theBUZZ had an opportunity to connect with each of these



individuals to find out how the show goes beyond just the notion of providing entertainment.

Toronto's own *Brooke Lynn Hytes* was the first Canadian to compete on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, finishing second overall. Professionally trained in ballet, she is a former dancer with *Cape Town City Ballet*, and *Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo*. She also won *Miss Gay Toronto 2013/14*, which has had an obvious impact on her career. "It definitely took my 'pageant-ness' into the competition, which was good for me, but was also a little bit to my detriment," she says.

"The critique I kept getting on *RuPaul's Drag Race* is, *you need to loosen up, we're not really seeing you, you're not really showing us personality*. And it's true, I was trying to be the perfect proper pageant queen all the time, but it wasn't until I finally learned to let go of that and just be silly and goofy, and not be afraid to make an idiot of myself, that I kind of broke through that shell. This is such an important thing for *Drag Race*, because you always want to be told, *wow, that was a lot, thank you, but we need you to scale it back a little bit*, as opposed to *wow, you just didn't give us enough*," she added.

Joining Hytes at the judge's table is *Stacey McKenzie*, who is internationally recognized for her impact within the Canadian fashion and entertainment industry, yet she acknowledges there's still a long way to go. "Pay us properly! I love what's going on right now in terms of diversity and modelling in the fashion industry, but when it comes to us getting paid, especially black models and black entertainers, we don't get paid what we should,



life, and it shows. "Those are things we just learned to accept as fact, and the fact that we learned to accept that as fact, makes me so sad to think back on that now. That I allowed myself to be used in this way, to be complicit in playing small within the industry," he adds.

What also makes CDR uniquely Canadian is the diversity of the contestants themselves, which included two-spirit Indigenous artist **Ilona Verley**, reigning Miss Black Continental, **Anastazia Anaquway**, and Toronto's **Priyanka**, who originally chose her name because she wanted, "queer people of colour to have someone repping for their culture." The inclusion of people who have been marginalized by mainstream media is just the first step in pushing the entertainment industry to see beyond its colonialist roots.

Bowyer-Chapman surmises, "It's no longer enough to *not be racist*. To be an ally in these times means educating yourself. Do what Brooke Lynn is doing, along with so many of my friends and family, and EDUCATE yourself. Pickup books, Google, have conversations with your white friends, and listen to podcasts. Educate yourself in every possible way, because that is the job!"

Sometimes fighting the good fight is not about joining a larger movement, but more about pushing for change as it appears in your own life. In many ways, it's what qualifies these three judges and twelve contestants to be morally courageous in their willingness to say what needs to be said, yet still have fun. As Hytes confirms, "It's also important to not take yourself too seriously. You can be beautiful and poised, but you can also make a fool of yourself, and that's okay too."

With this kind of fire and beauty, *Canada's Drag Race* contestants will have their work *coutured* out for them! Watch on [Crave](#).

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



Photo: One of Ho's theatre and performance event rooms

and what we're really worth. I would love to see our black models who are getting those advertising campaigns get paid like the white girls. That's what I want to see. In the beginning, I wanted to see diversity and get paid what we're worth, but now it's payout," she states.

Rounding out the judges' table is **Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman**. Originally from Edmonton, Alberta, he is a model, actor, TV personality, and righteous advocate for being the change he wants to see in the world. He grew up in the predominantly white small town of Rimbey, which is nicknamed "Texas of The North", and for good reason. His younger brother is a famed defensive for the *Toronto Argonauts*, so Jeffery's life is in sharp contrast to the world around him.

"I wish that somebody had told me three things. Be yourself, know your worth, and understand the power of the word, *No*. I feel like I compromised myself, and my integrity, time and time again from my first years in the industry. I took jobs that didn't really align with who I was, or weren't a positive representation of blackness or queerness. You do it because so much of it plays into segregation and racism in the entertainment industry. There are less jobs out there for black models and actors than there are for white models and actors," he explains.

In many ways what he's describing is akin to the kind of complacency that comes from years of being denied, overlooked, and outright ignored. The old adage that *whatever doesn't kill you, makes you stronger*, is true, and Jeffery is proof of that. What he describes as once being a detriment, has now become the fuel that fires his

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SHAMIR

SETS HIS BOUNDARIES

By Ryan G. Hinds

Shamir is the iconic pop star that we need for 2020. With a shimmering counter-tenor voice, a striking visual presence, and a boundless creative vision, it should come as no surprise that his new album arrives on its own terms.

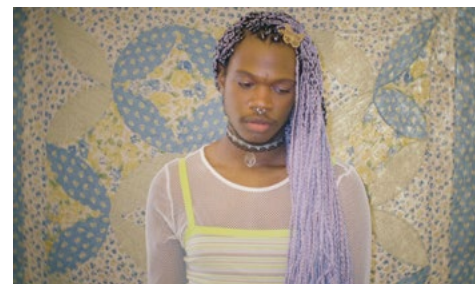
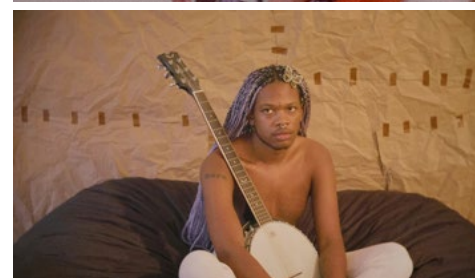
The self-titled album comes out this fall, and is best described as an intimate and accessible affair, featuring guitar-driven indie pop, blended with synth and punctuated drum beats. Following previous albums that were decidedly more R&B dance pop, this new release feels like an artist coming into their power and realizing their true form.

"I think it's a new page and a new chapter," Shamir tells me. "I think I finally know who I am through and through as an artist, and I could never say that in the previous six years of being in the industry."

The Las Vegas native recently moved to Philadelphia, but I was surprised to learn about his Canadian connections. "All my friends are Canadian! In Toronto, I've played the Drake Hotel and Mod Club. One of my best friends lives off of Bathurst Street, another lives in Ottawa, and one of my [Accidental Popstar Records](#) artists lives in Toronto as well." Shamir is further connected to us in ways that extend past his social circle. "I wrote the instrumental of [On My Own](#) in Toronto!"

His most recent single is cruising towards 75,000 views on YouTube and bops with his signature energy. With lyrical themes of healing and boundary setting, *On My Own* displays a newfound maturity as a singer: "Setting boundaries is a really new thing for me. It's very easy to set boundaries for overtly toxic people or simply cut them out, but when it's family or close friends, it's really hard. You just can't avoid the possibility of pain in the process." Noting his journey with fame he adds, "A recurring theme with my whole career is boundary setting with my fans. Imma say what I want to say and you can take it or leave it, not that I'm ungrateful!"

A Black queer artist, with a career on their own terms? You love to see it, and Shamir revels in that power. Starting his



Accidental Popstar Records artist development initiative last year has allowed him to be more than just an artist, and to have an impact on the music industry. He's able to help other artists build their careers and grow, whether through production, releasing music, art direction, or directing videos. "The goal is for all of the artists on Accidental to grow past Accidental. Artist development is completely lacking in the music industry these days because there's no more money in it, so bigger labels don't do artist development deals: they want fully formed ready artists," he explains.

So why do that job instead of just focusing only on his own music? "I know I have the knowledge, and I want to help be a part of putting artists who are deserving, good people out into the world." Hearing him speak about Accidental Popstar Records is to believe in the possibilities and power of queer artists. "I have another Black non-binary indie rock artist on the label, and I'm working with a trans woman right now. Almost everyone on the label is queer. And it's not even on purpose!"

Of course, most things in the world are up in the air right now due to Miss Rona. So how is Shamir handling everything? "I'm a Scorpio, so I'm relatively pessimistic, but I leave the door open for optimism and hope." In a time when lots of people are trying to self-improve, he's already ahead of the game: "I have stopped smoking. August will be a full year without a cigarette! I have more agility in my voice since I stopped. However, if I'm being honest, I'm still very bad, as I don't warm up."

This may come as a big surprise to anyone who has marvelled at the rare clarity of his counter tenor. Think *Sylvester*, but warmer; *Bejun Mehta*, but less operatic. "I never warmed up when I smoked. Warm up for me was five cigarettes and three glasses of whisky before the stage. But I think stopping smoking has shown a lot of improvement in my singing. I'm glad that I was able to stop before I started the recording for this record!"

Shamir's new album comes out October 2, 2020. Check his [website](#) and social media channels for updates.

All photos courtesy of Shamir.

Ryan G. Hinds is a theatre artist and writer. His Toronto at Night column ran for 5 years in Xtra, chronicling the doings of the fabulous, and previously he was the editor of Crew Magazine. As a performer he has toured internationally and appeared across Canada in shows like MSM: [men seeking men], We Will Rock You, #KanderAndEbb, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, and It's A Wonderful Life. More at [RyanGHinds.ca](#)





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PRIDE AFRIQUE

A PAN-AFRICAN VIRTUAL PRIDE EVENT

By Emmanuel Munyarukumbuzi

Pride Afrique (14 - 16 August 2020) is a three-day virtual line-up of stories that build bridges between the statistical fact of queer existence in Africa and the lives, dreams, careers, hopes, doubts, fears, and joys that ground it.

This event will provide a great opportunity for queer Africans on the continent and overseas to showcase who they are, what they do, and the opportunities available to them. There will be total respect for privacy, since being outed can lead to dire consequences in Africa.

Below is an exclusive interview with *Mr Kehinde Bademosi, Project Lead - Pride Afrique.*

What is the whole event about, and why do queer Africans need it?

It's about the three-dimensional stories of LGBTQI+ Africans at home and abroad. We hope to center our voices on significant issues to the continent. By showcasing our history and our journeys, we can inspire the generations coming after

us to reach for the sky, irrespective of their identities. *We believe a young person is listening or watching, and we are hoping to let them know that they are worthy.*

How did the virtual pride idea come about – COVID related innovation or avoiding persecution?

COVID came with an opportunity to democratize access to resources and events that were previously only possible for those who could afford to travel. With the advent of post-COVID virtual space, Pride Afrique gives the LGBTQI+ Africa a virtual space to tell our own stories as a tool of advocacy and self-preservation. As someone who had never seen Pride before relocating to the United States, I had always thought no one should be denied the joy of Pride because of where they live. Pride Afrique is only a start.

Who is putting things together, where are they located, and how did they all come together?

It was a call that started on Facebook Messenger. Once I saw the opportunity of what we could do, I reached out to David and Udo in Nigeria, Kevin in Kenya, Gabriel from Brazil, Segun in South African, Miss Sahhara, and John in the UK; and Dolapo in the US. We immediately created a Google document for open-source collaboration. Within four weeks, the open document had received over 54 contributions from across the continent and from abroad. We then conducted

a Google survey for areas of interest. We now have over 75 partners working on various committees and tasks to make this happen.

How can individuals and companies lend a helping hand?

Pride Afrique is 100% volunteer-driven. Join us —pitch in your talent and gift. Write. Edit. Design. Help with IT. Promote. Translate. And there is so much we can do together. We want organizations to send us support videos that LGBTQI lives matter in Africa.

How can people stay up to date with the preparation and events?

People can use @prideafrique handle or #prideafrique2020, our hashtag for social media conversations. We are on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. We will keep updating our website with relevant information in various languages.

The website says you are not receiving monetary sponsorship. Why? And how do you run such an event with no funds?

Because we need to change the narrative that when Africa steps on the scene, we are looking for money. This is a self-advocacy event. Run and fully funded by the communities. Pride Afrique is 100% volunteer-driven. All items have been contributed in kind by all volunteers.

What have you learned in this process?

That one week is not enough to tell our African queer stories, and that our people are truly resilient and beautiful. Follow the journey and listen to people. It's an honor to have people contribute their voices, and they must be heard.

What is the future of the event?

More diverse voices. Government agencies and corporate organizations in partnership to address institutional homophobia in Africa.

Agenda

Day One is the launch of Pride Afrique with the unveiling of the virtual gallery containing archival material and queer stories, videos, interviews, conversation photos submitted from across the African continent.



Day Two will be a deeper public engagement with pre-recorded conversations on several themes among which include faith and sexuality, queer representation in academia, film, and literature, as well as intergenerational conversations.

Day Three will be the celebrations of queer heroes and the announcement of our art contest result.

These three days will focus on diverse voices and stories that ground LGBT people in their realities as Africans. Whether it is the story of Tunisia's first openly gay presidential candidate - Mounir Baatour, or the story of [our trans sister who sued her government and won](#), we are uplifting proudly African stories.

Notable Participants

John Amaechi, the first openly gay NBA star

Reverend Jide Macaulay, the founder of *House of Rainbow* with a presence in Nigeria

Justice Edwin Cameron, an out and proud man who fought alongside other activists for the constitutional provision of queer persons in South Africa

Mike Ebah who constantly challenges the clout of Nigeria homophobia in the Nigerian courts

Phyll Opoku-Gyima, co-founder, trustee and executive director of *UK Black Pride*, which promotes unity and co-operation among all Black people of African, Asian, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and Latin American descent

Arnold Mulaisho, a queer Zambian asylum seeker in South Africa who works within his limited means to shed rays of hope on other asylum seekers and his community

Bahiru, the Ethiopian founder of *House of Guramaye* that constantly pushes back the exclusion of queer persons in Kenya through art, and other multimedia approaches

Tiffany Mugo a Kenyan storyteller who transgresses hegemonic form and style to centre queer narratives and to claim back the dignities of black queer female bodies.

More updates are available on the [website](#).

Emmanuel Munyarukumbuzi is an academic, content producer, communications consultant and researcher based in Rwanda. He is interested in issues of sustainability, human rights, and social justice. His research interests are in the areas of communication for development, media literacy, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and the deployment of ICTs in communication.



WIGGED OUT

Get Dragged: Drag Tournament

BY ELVIRUS



I reached out to tons of queens on all social media platforms, from all sorts of backgrounds, all over the world. This was a huge task to take on, especially since they'd have to create content on their own. The queens of *Get Dragged* are in charge of everything, from creating their looks, preparing a set to film on, and recording their own material.

I had seven queens, but needed an even number to make the tournament structure of the show work. Panic sunk in and, out of desperation, I messaged a queen who had just followed me that morning. She was so unusual and unique that I was elated when she agreed to not only come on board the show, but also film her challenge THAT NIGHT! Thanks [Phantasma](#).

With a background in comics and animation, I knew I wanted a huge cartoon influence. I even managed to find a brilliant drag queen artist, [Dillon Valenzuela](#), who offered to draw caricatures of the queens as a challenge prize. I then reached out to a friend who works professionally in television who helped connect all the dots and push me further to achieve all my goals.

I now had multiple queens and artists counting on me and I had to deliver a final product they could be proud to be a part of. What followed were many long, late nights of editing, fixing, mixing, and tweaking, resulting in a show that brings my initial vision to life.

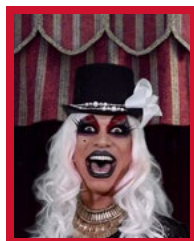
Get Dragged is a labour of love starring eight entertaining competitors that I adore! Originally, we had a tip option, if you enjoyed the show you could send a tip that would be divided by all of us at the end. After a few episodes into the run of the show, we all collectively agreed to donate that money to [Rainbow Railroad](#). We were so happy to share all the love our supporters showed us by gifting it to people in our community in need.

The show is loaded with campy fun, twists, prizes, celebrity appearances like the iconic Jackie Beat, and way too many laughs.

You can watch all episodes on [YouTube](#), and if you're a charismatic queen with a good sense of humour who wants to be on a future episode, please don't hesitate to reach out.

She's a Scream Queen. She's a Coverhoul. She's Elvurus.

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By week three of this pandemic self isolation, my boredom and the need to be productive kicked into overdrive. That lead me to the idea of *Get Dragged: Drag Tournament*, an online web series where drag queens compete against each other, with a big, fun dose of shade baked into the format.

I wanted to create a drag show that would give queens something to get excited about, something to showcase their talent and personalities. I didn't want it to be just about their looks or lip syncing abilities, so I searched for queens with that special touch of magic, and a whole lot of character.



Melanie Day



Hailing from Yeovil, Somerset England, fine artist Melanie Day was brought up within a creative household.

"My sister paints, and my father worked in stone, and also had a very amazing creative sense of humour," Melanie remarks. Following in these creative steps, she won first place in an art competition at the age of 12, and later attended *Ontario College of Art and Design* in Toronto from 1973-1976, majoring in Fine Art.

Fashion inspired Melanie's painting. She loved *Fashion TV*, Karl Lagerfeld, and Alexander McQueen. "I was working in TV and film business as a fashion designer, and I had my own label and store on Queen Street West (in Toronto)," she divulges. "When I turned 40, I realized I wanted to get back to painting and make a living out of it."

She moved to Port Hope in 2015, and has thus far succeeded with that goal. "I had been living in Toronto for about 40 years, and enjoyed every minute of the city. Then in 2015, I felt I needed a change, and wanted a smaller community and countryside. My friend had a gallery at the time in Port Hope called *Engine Gallery*, and that's how I found my little town." She loves her community. "The people are very friendly, life is slower paced, and there's always lots of free parking!" While she doesn't miss Toronto, she confesses to missing her friends and seeing some good art at galleries.

Melanie's medium of choice is oils. "Acrylics are good if you need quick drying paint, however I like working wet in wet.

I also find the colours much more vibrant." She doesn't have any attachment to her work. "For me once I have had the thrill of painting it, then it's time for the painting to move on to another life in someone's lovely home. The painting has a journey to complete its cycle," she explains.

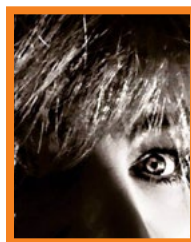
Her most successful series are her landscapes. "I have shown my work at many gallery exhibitions in Canada, United States, Mexico, and France. I also work with a few interior designers in Chicago, and have had my work featured on several television design shows and home decor magazines," she adds. "I generally showcase my work at my studio/gallery at 34 John Street in Port Hope, but it is sadly closed right now, and open for appointments only due to COVID-19."

She is represented by *Art Interiors* in Toronto, Ontario, *Sybil Frank Gallery* in Wellington, Ontario, and *O'Connor Gallery* in Gananoque, Ontario. She recently had a feature on her work in *Grapevine Magazine*, which is distributed free at select retailers throughout Prince Edward County, Northumberland, Hastings, Quinte, Kingston, Ottawa and beyond.

Melanie strives to work every day, as she states, "Passion, desire, and discipline makes me produce. After all, it's a job that I love." Find our more about Melanie 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.

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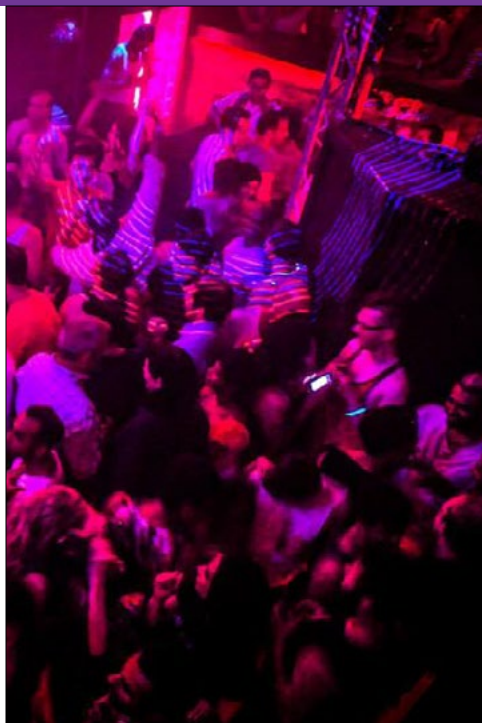


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GOODBYE GOODHANDY'S



It was at *Goodhandy's* that I met *The Scorpio Twins*, two adorable blonde twinks from Sudbury who eventually became good friends of mine. The good natured vibe of all the sex workers and the management made for a very special safe-space for perverts like myself.

A few years later, Todd and Mandy restructured the club to become more of a performance venue. [Mitchel Raphael's](#) *Sodom* nights were always fun. Mitchel asked me to play Rob Ford in a sketch one night. Then he asked me to play a female cheerleader a few months later. Mitchel really brought out the ham in me.

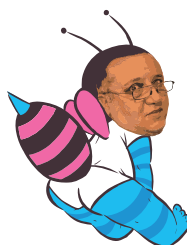
Then there was [Ralph Hamelmann's](#) *Spectra* events, an amateur singing competition that showcased some of the best young vocal talent in the city. I was one of the judges. I was especially impressed by two women, [Jay Harmony Davis](#) and [Jordan Alexander](#), who, if there was any justice, should have become big stars.

I was delighted when Mandy signed up for my sketch comedy workshop at *George Brown College*. She was a high-spirited performer, and when our original choice of venue fell through, Todd and Mandy volunteered to present the show on their stage, for free.

When the space on the building's main floor became available a few years ago, they opted to turn it into a diner, and re-branded as *120 Diner*. Mandy first turned it into a popular room for stand-up comedy, then later revealed her phenomenal singing talents when she, with the help of pianist [Ori Dagan](#), turned the room into one of the city's finest jazz clubs.

During quarantine, Todd and Mandy found it impossible to pay the bills so they are saying goodbye. Recently, Todd announced that he is getting married, and moving into real estate. Mandy will continue to be one of this city's most multi-talented performers. This venue, which hosted shows, sex, music, comedy, and was the city's best trans-positive social space, is gone. And we are all the lesser for it.

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.



I am sad. Among the casualties of COVID-19 is the popular queer nightlife establishment, *Club 120*. In the old days, they called it *Goodhandy's*. Whatever you call it, it was legendary.

When it opened in 2007, the proprietors, [Todd Klinck](#) and [Mandy Goodhandy](#), were both familiar to me. Todd and I were both *fab* magazine columnists, and I met Mandy when she and Todd ran a strip bar in Mississauga. Two more fascinating individuals would be hard to find.

The early years of *Goodhandy's* were fun and sexual. Not necessarily a strip bar, but they hired young guys to walk around barely dressed, and every Wednesday night Mandy would host an amateur strip show and spank the bad boys on stage. Todd would shoot porn, at first through a closed-circuit camera, then live in front of the audience. I probably watched more guys have sex on that stage than in any porn video. How they never got busted by the cops is a miracle.

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Tyler Vile



Tyler Vile is a writer, performer, and organizer from Baltimore, MD whose novel-in-verse, *Never Coming Home*, is available on [Topside Press](#).

She is a founding member of [Hinenu: The Baltimore Justice Shtiebl](#), a radically inclusive synagogue. Her work has appeared in the *Lambda Literary Award* nominated anthology, *Resilience*, published by Heartspark Press, as well as the magazines *Femmesparks*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and *Rogue Agent*.

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

Tyler Vile - This past year was really tumultuous for me personally, and when things get rough for me, I tend to throw myself into writing. There was a while where I felt like I was too stressed out to write, but quarantine hit and the floodgates just kind of opened for me. I couldn't stop writing if I tried. I started studying under a Jewish astrologer named *Lorelai Kude*, and I've been keeping busy with tarot and astrology clients. All in all, it's been an alright year considering the circumstances.

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

TV - The issues I was dealing with in my personal life started to calm down just as we all started going inside because of

COVID. There's a saying, "May you live in interesting times" that's often misattributed as a Chinese curse, but wherever it comes from, I think it applies to the world we're living in. I'm cautiously optimistic about the structural changes we could see!

BK - What are you looking forward to next year?

TV - I have Cerebral Palsy, which means I'm high risk for COVID, so I really haven't left the house since March. I'm looking forward to a time when it's safe to go out again. I miss doing literary readings in person, touring, and being able to be in nature, run errands on my own, and see people.

BK - Where can we see your work?

TV - My first book of poetry, *Never Coming Home*, is available on [Bookshop.org](#), a network of independent bookstores. I have a piece in the upcoming erasure anthology, *Erase the Patriarchy* from *University of Hell Press*, edited by my friend [Isobel O'Hare](#). I have a few poems in *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and other literary magazines. I am submitting poems and prose to a bunch of different places right now, so keep a lookout!

BK - Future plans?

TV - I'm in the middle of writing four books right now. Well, it's five if you count the prayerbook I'm working on with a wonderful team of folks from *Hinenu: The Baltimore Justice Shtiebl*, the synagogue I helped to found. Other than that I'm writing a book of tarot poems, a collection of sci-fi short stories that centre disabled characters, a poetic reinterpretation of the *Book of Genesis*, and a sequel to *Never Coming Home*. I'd like to be a Rabbi someday, but that feels a long way off!

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

TV - Stay safe, take care of yourselves and each other! These are deeply uncertain times; governments and corporations can't be trusted to help you in most situations. Invest in your communities!

BK - Finish this sentence for us - I couldn't live without-----

TV - Community and creative expression.

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



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AIDS WALK TORONTO



After 32 years, [AIDS Walk Toronto](#) (AWT) will be no more.

While that's sad news on the surface, most fundraising events never gain and maintain that kind of momentum and longevity. It's no surprise that the event's endurance is due in large part to the strength of Toronto's queer community, and also the incredible continued activism by both individuals and organizations like the [AIDS Committee of Toronto](#) (ACT).

Founded in 1983, ACT was a direct response to the spread of HIV/AIDS in the LGBT community, and subsequent government inaction. They set out to offer programs and services to increase awareness, promote health, and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. To do that effectively the organization started looking for ways to increase revenue. At the time, there was only one [AIDS Walk](#) in Canada which had been started in Vancouver in 1986. *AIDS Committee of Toronto* decided to host their first walk in Toronto the following year, supported by *M•A•C Cosmetics*. By 1996 the event had grown into a leadership role within Canada's national AIDS Walk event strategy, essentially enabling AIDS organizations from coast-to-coast to set-up their own walks.

The *AIDS Memorial* in *Barbara Hall Park* beside *The 519* was erected in 1993, however the area had been used as a memorial space since the mid-eighties, just without the monument of engraved names of the deceased. According to *Stewart Borden*, a volunteer with [The ArQuives](#) who also conducts tours of the gay village, "The first AIDS case in Canada was reported in 1983, and hundreds of names were added every year following. However, in 1996 a *drug cocktail* was introduced, and the outlook began to change for the better. In 2019, only one entry was added, which is proof of our progress, but there's still a long way to go given that there are 36 million people worldwide who are currently living with the virus."

While AIDS had at one time decimated our community, it became the catalyst for incredible change by inspiring drug and government protests that ultimately pushed for pharmaceutical research, better access to medication, and a dedicated and diversified AIDS service organization structure.

While all this is good news, it doesn't mean HIV and AIDS have gone away. The challenges surrounding AIDS have changed as has ACT's response to how it delivers services and education, so saying goodbye to this event also makes room for new ways of raising funds.

Many aspects of this year's walk are going to be different, especially considering the uncertainty brought about by the current pandemic. ACT has met this challenge by offering a year-long celebration marked by unique events, such as the recent *Amateur Drag Race* hosted by *Canada's Drag Race* contestant [Priyanka](#).

It will be bittersweet to see the beloved AIDS Walk take its final steps, but the event is leaving behind a footprint for what a community-in-action looks like. For up to date walk events, to volunteer or to register as a virtual walker, visit the [AIDS Walk Toronto website](#). The final *AIDS Walk* will take place as part of the *Pride Toronto Parade* in 2021.

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



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In response to COVID-19 and the closure of venues due to restrictions on social gatherings, all events, festivals, and other group activities have either been cancelled or postponed for the immediate future.

In the meantime there have been several creative virtual events taking place online.

Please check our listing of events that are happening from a screen near you - www.thebuzzmag.ca/events

Our regular events print section will return as soon as venues start reopening.

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