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Charming his way into history



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The Editor

Greetings and Salutations,

Being an entertainment publication, we like to cover a diverse array of topics and talents, from established celebrities to the next generation of emerging artists. In this issue, we take a look at individuals who are shaking up the music world here in Canada, and also an actor breaking boundaries on television.

Our main feature takes a look at five very unique Canadian musicians who are on the radar of Geri Atrick, our newest contributor who also has her own blog on theBUZZ, *The Singing Politician*. Here's your chance to discover the pop sounds of **Mackenzie Drive** from North Bay, Ontario, the rockier sounds from the duo known as **Partner Band**, electronic beats from 2-spirit trans musician **Quanah Style**, Iranian rap from Toronto-based **Säye Skye**, and the smooth jazz styling from Nanaimo via Rwanda chanteuse, **Nicole Utulinde**, who is featured on our cover.

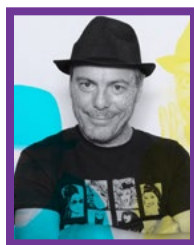
In feature two, Mandy Goodhandy chats with **J.J. Hawkins**, who is making history for his role in W Network's reboot of the *Charmed* series. In the third season, viewers are introduced to Kevin, a recurring regular trans character being played by Hawkins, marking the first time a trans person is playing a trans character on network television. Hawkins also discusses his life growing up in a Mormon family, and he hints at a book he'll be writing in the near future.

Our Wiggled Out guest columnist is none other than **Tynomi Banks**, who tells us how, like many, COVID crushed many dreams, but then she pulled herself up and found herself in a Super Bowl commercial! As usual, our regular columnists bring us exciting profile pieces. Cat Grant spotlights expressionist artist and teacher **Sarah Hunter**, Boyd Kodak chatted with **Vangelis Polydorou**, a finalist on *The Voice UK* who is releasing new music, Paul Bellini converses with provocateur playwright **Brad Fraser** about his new memoir, and Jon Pressick introduces us to **MUKA**, a Hamilton business that focuses on products from queer and BIPOC artists.

Our popular **BUZZpicks** events listings are carefully selected by Events Editor, Sherry Sylvain, and as always, a huge thanks to our designer, Mychol Scully, for making us all look so damn fabulous!

Wishing everyone a safe and sunny Spring.

Bryen Dunn
Editor-in-Chief



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Queering the Music

Let The Music Play

By Geri Atrick

Let The Music Play, was a huge hit in the 1980s by an artist known as Shannon. It speaks volumes when it comes to music, because everyone should just let the music play, and dance like no one is watching.

The arts have struggled over the years, and there was a time when coming out would destroy one's career. But times are changing because of some brave individuals who are sharing their true authentic selves, and encouraging others to do the same by just being who they are.



Mackenzie Drive is creating a name for themselves in their hometown of North Bay, Ontario. They surfaced on the queer scene a few years ago as a non-binary pop artist, and has developed a solid following within their local community. Their self-titled debut album, *Mackenzie Drive*, came from the lived experiences of a bad marriage, and surviving like a Phoenix.

"My songs are my passion, and I use my passion to inspire myself to keep going through difficult times. My songs are my tool to express myself and work through life's lessons. If we do not inspire ourselves, how can we inspire others?" Mackenzie said. Even though this is more of a pop album, you can feel the pain that has driven them to move forward. Mackenzie is working on their next album with a tentative release for 2021. Stay up to date via [Facebook](#), and all the usual social media channels.



Quanah Style is a 2-spirited trans person who is Saulteaux & Cree, and was born in Chetwind, British Columbia, now living in Vancouver. If you want that club vibe to dance shirtless, this is your artist. However, there's more than meets the eye (and ear) for this artist. [Billboard.com](#) listed Quanah Style's self-titled album, *Quanah Style*, in their *10 Best Dance Albums of 2020*.

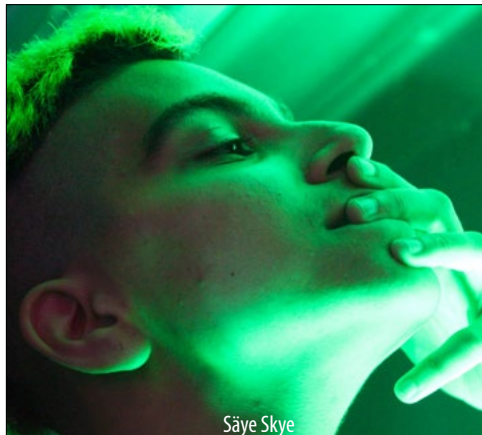
Quanah's personal transition has allowed them to truly be their authentic self, and it comes through in their music, which is reminiscent of something similar to **Deborah Cox**. Quanah is working towards releasing new music, which will certainly show the diversity of talent they have. Definitely one to keep your eye on. Follow their journey on [Facebook](#), and other social media links.



Partner Band is comprised of two friends who both found support within each other during university, that allowed them to create a sound that you can feel in your soul. They describe themselves as being part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community who love post classic rock era. If you remember the days of bands like **Heart**, this band will take you there. Their music videos tell stories with

humour and rock beat, while sharing a message that is important to them. Josey and Lucy are clearly on the brink of stardom in the rock category, inspired by **Tegan and Sara**. They are true authentic rockers.

When asked what music means to them, they said, "It's a way to accept ourselves, our talents, and where that leads when you embrace all that you are. Hopefully, that makes others feel that they can do that too. Just be your true authentic selves." Find them on [Bandcamp](#).

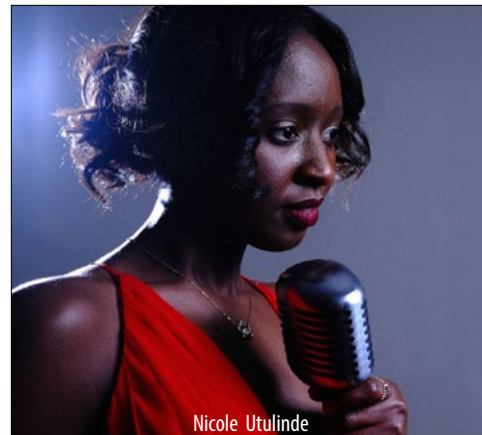


Saye Skye is an Iranian Trans person who fled to Canada as a refugee because of threats from the government to their life. I felt the warmth of this person through a Zoom chat that came with a distinguished light that shines while they talk about their art. Rap is the style for Saye, who tells a story about inclusion and opportunity with lived experience. This [Teddy Award](#) winner has a story to tell about some countries that are so far behind on issues around equality. Coming from a country that claims, "We have no homosexuals", has motivated Saye to be true to themselves and speak out.

Giving up friends, family, and possessions has given Saye a deep understanding of what truly matters in life, and you can feel that come through their lyrics in their songs. You may not understand every word, but you will get that feeling right away. One of the best lines in the song *TNE*, "Let's not piss on each others parade," speaks volumes not only to the 2SLGBTQ+ communities, but all communities experiencing inequality. Check out Saye Skye [website](#) for more info.

Nicole Utulinde is an immigrant from Rwanda who came to Canada with her family, and recently came out as a self identified lesbian. If you enjoy jazz, this is the artist you want to follow. She has that voice that relaxes you down to your soul, letting you get lost in your private thoughts. You can feel the passion through her lyrics as

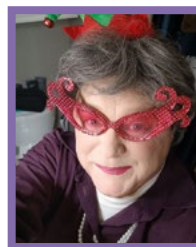
she sings, and she's definitely one to watch as her career grows. You can find more on Nicole [here](#).



As you can see if it were not for artists like these, standing tall, and being who they are, the entertainment industry would be stuck in a time, when diversity and inclusion just never happened. We can all agree that the industry has a way to go yet, but there is hope, and change is happening. Every artist no matter what they do, or what their art is, brings something to all communities no matter their background. Communities are embracing more loving individuals who stand tall, that we can all relate to.

In closing, we reached out to Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth, Bardish Chagger, to find out more about the changing scene in music and entertainment. She commented, "Being more consciously inclusive means that everyone, including 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, are able to be their true, authentic selves. Artistic expression and performance offer insights into lived experiences, challenge the status quo, and inspire others to be exactly who they are. Representation within all sectors of society matters and the music industry is leading the way."

Geri Atrick is co-host of [Str8 Talk](#), a show that focuses on marginalized & 2SLGBTQ+. Geri also organizes national events around music and the arts, is deeply passionate and active in politics, and is an advocate on many social justice issues.



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Photo: Anthony Mongiello

J.J. Hawkins gets Charmed

By Mandy Goodhandy

J.J. Hawkins is a gender-non-conforming trans-masculine individual (he/him, they/them), known for roles in *NCIS* (2003), *Stupid Cupid* (2018), and *Criminal Minds* (2005).

He can now be seen on the *Charmed* (2020) television series, where he plays the role of Kevin, a transgender male college student who inspires one of the Charmed Ones to take on a very formidable opponent. He stated that viewers will be introduced to Kevin as a mere mortal, but he is hoping that magical elements come into his story line.

In my opinion magic is the universe, and the universe is what created all of us diverse individuals.

Just like futuristic shows, magic themed shows can get away with casting queer folk a little more easily. It also makes sense that queer folk are being cast as magical beings in those roles, since we are quite magical.

In playing the role of Kevin, J.J. stated, "I can tell almost immediately when reading a script whether it's 'Look at us we have done the trans thing, we check the box.' or if it's people

who genuinely see our humanity as a cool experience to add to their story."

J.J. states that luckily with *Charmed* the viewers are met with the fact that Kevin is written in an inspiring sort of tone that shows a lot of strength and power. The show writer often asked J.J. if he had any ideas, suggestions, or thoughts for his character, giving J.J. the opportunity to be part of the process. He stated that this happens only in the best shows he has worked on.

Recently, the topic on whether queer roles should be played solely by queer actors has been a hot point of discussion within the industry. In J.J.'s ideal world there would be such an abundance of roles for people, that there would be no reason to streamline who goes where. It would simply be about the human who fits that role best.

"We are still in a place where our queer stories are not being told nearly as often as non-queer stories. Also, they are mainly being told by non-queer people. When I think back to the times where I have seen trans men being played by cis people, there is a level of pain there that I don't feel would be reciprocated if things were switched. When I have seen a cis woman play a trans role, I think they are communicating that this is a woman dressed up as a man, therefore I am just a woman dressed up as a man. That pain runs so deep."

I had read that he's from a Mormon background, and asked him if this had any effect on him. He stated that this was quite the crux because his Mormonism runs very deep. In fact, six generations deep, as deep as it goes from the beginnings of Mormonism. He said it was not just about approaching his parents and siblings regarding his gender, it also includes all his extended family, including his ancestors as well. In his case he felt he was looking down the barrel of a gun telling them this is what he is, this is who he is.

He questioned, "Is it worth being myself if I have to lose everything? At what point am I losing more than I am gaining?" He added, "In coming out to your family, it is a willing goodbye. It is knowing that at the end of this conversation they may not be there. Now that I have solved the problem in me, what's left is now their problem."

He and his family are still figuring it out. They are still in the middle of his story, without compromising beliefs on either side. His family is ultimately supportive of both his personal and his career choices, and have no problem with anything involved in television portrayals. So I guess the magic thing is okay then. *Charmed* fans can all take a sigh of relief on that one, including his family.

So what's next for J.J. after *Charmed*? "I have some hopeful projects, but none that are concrete to share as yet," he says. He also mentioned that he's in the midst of writing a

book. While not working he enjoys binge-watching shows like, *Bridgerton*, and has a passion for snowboarding, beat boxing, and juggling! "I learned how to juggle in high school for a play. It's honestly the funnest party trick. I never had to use it for anything at all, except for impressing people randomly with oranges at a party," he laughs.

Finally, I ask, who in the industry would he work with if he had the opportunity? "Betty White," he quickly replies. Here's hoping that dream, among others, comes true for this rising actor.

Follow the journey of [J.J. Hawkins](#), and catch the latest episodes of *Charmed* on the [W Network](#).

Mandy Goodhandy is a transgender woman; author, singer, comedian, and recording artist.

www.mandygoodhandy.com



Photo: jjhawkins.com



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Connecting in COVID TIMES

BY TYNOMI BANKS



What I've come to realize in the days, weeks, and months since my time on the show is that, sometimes the world gives you what you need and not what you want, and it's how you deal with that which sets the course for your next chapter. The acceptance of this opened me to the importance of the post-Drag Race platform. During the show, I gained a substantial number of followers and once I got over the initial shock of the pandemic, I started connecting with others via Instagram Live and Zoom. This resulted in an explosion of productivity that had me creating videos, performing online shows, and sourcing funny memes which took over my Insta stories (to rave reviews, I should add).

Most importantly, there was a lot more opportunity to talk to the fans because everyone was home with nowhere to go! I enjoyed hearing their stories and sharing mine. These connections really helped get me through some of the darkest times.

All of this time and effort in putting myself out there in new and creative ways resulted in one amazing, career changing opportunity! I was approached by [Wealthsimple](#), who were wanting to have me appear in their Super Bowl commercial. Yes, you heard right — a [Super Bowl commercial](#).

They thought I was a perfect fit for this particular project. The experience was a dream, and the final product was amazing, but the best part was the lovely messages and inspiring notes I received from people all over the world after they saw it. I finally felt like maybe this was the way everything was supposed to happen.

So yes, Miss Corona did sashay in to put a damper on what I thought was a "big opportunity," but all she really did was force me to make a choice: dwell on what could've been or get back on the runway and achieve new dreams and goals I didn't know were possible.

[Tynomi Banks](#) regularly impersonates icons like Whitney Houston and Beyoncé, by combining costumes and choreography with dancers, and upbeat pop numbers. She was a contestant on the first season of *Canada's Drag Race*, was the first Drag Entertainer to perform at Toronto's Dundas Square during World Pride 2014, has her own [fashion collection](#), and was recently featured in a Super Bowl 21 commercial.

Photo Credit: Kayla Mac



For many drag artists, the pinnacle of drag is being cast on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Up until last year, that wasn't possible for Canadian Queens until the announcement about *Canada's Drag Race*. It was a ray of light for those in our community who were interested in expanding their platform.

I think all of the cast would agree we had high expectations — tours, shows, money, travelling, meeting fans, and more. But everything came to a grinding halt when Miss Corona arrived. It dashed our dreams and killed our plans. It took me a while to get over the fact I had worked so hard, and a global pandemic hit the world just as my heels hit that iconic runway.

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Sarah Hunter



Born and raised in Toronto, expressionist artist and teacher, **Sarah Hunter** grew up in a creative family, where her parents exposed her to many different genres of art. "My father was a writer and theatre director, my uncle was a modern dancer, and I had cousins who became musicians. As well, my aunt taught drama to high school students, and her husband was a fiction writer."

Sarah loved learning, and was influenced by her art teacher, being particularly fond of Indigenous and Inuit art. She knew by the age of 10 that she wanted to be an artist, stating, "I thought I might like to illustrate children's books, then by the time I graduated from university, I knew I wanted to be a fine artist, and do drawing and painting."

She was inspired by Michelangelo's David, and several other classical painters at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, as well as many artists within the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Picasso's Guernica, The Sleeping Gypsy by Henri Rousseau, and a Jackson Pollack show that was mostly works on paper with ink, all made lasting impressions.

She later went on to attend Sarah Lawrence College in Yonkers, New York. "They didn't really have Major's," Sarah explained. "My areas of interest were, Visual Art, Psychology, History of Film, Mythology, and Philosophy of Religion. I studied different aspects of these subjects each year."

Sarah's favourite materials to use are India Ink (black), coloured inks and dyes, oil sticks, and pastels for works on paper and collage. "Before I go into the studio, I have an altar where I burn incense, pray, ask for guidance, and ask my creator to work through me to bring creative works into being," describing her creative ritual.

COVID has in some ways given Sarah license to spend more time in the studio without so many distractions. "On the downside sometimes it's hard to feel motivated in these challenging times given that everything is shifting for artists right now, and we are having to reinvent how we create our work and get it out into the world. It's still uncertain as to what lies ahead for fellow visual artists, and performance artists."

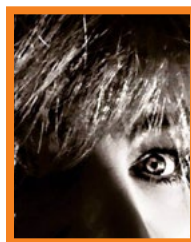
Sarah is the recipient of the 2021 *Goddess Day Arts Festival Award*, given to a woman artist who contributes to her community through service or philanthropy. She offers the following advice for young female artists, "Believe in yourself, trust that your voice matters, and that you will be recognized."

Where does Sarah see herself in 5 years? "I really have no idea, but I hope I will still be creating and growing and learning."

To purchase work or take lessons from Sarah contact her at: www.turtart.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.

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BRAD FRASER — ALL THE RAGE

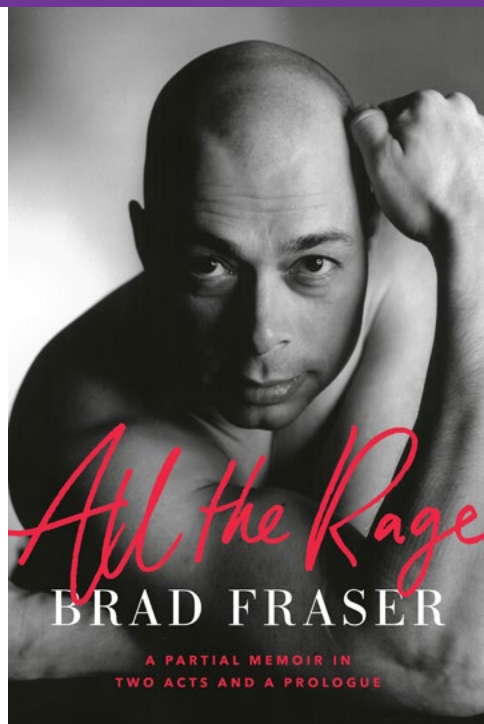


Photo: David Hawke

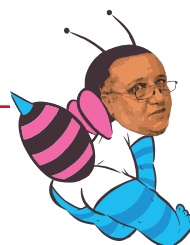
Though the events depicted in *All the Rage* end in 2000, a lot has happened since, prompting the idea of a second volume. Though recent plays have been produced around the world, and his play *Kill Me Now* was made into a movie last year in South Korea, Fraser cannot for the life of him get any Toronto-based theatre to mount his new work. But the past four years have brought him a new mission in life. He became acquainted with an elderly lesbian named Shirley who lives in his apartment building. When it became obvious she was no longer able to care for herself, he became her primary caregiver. "Everything in this century seems to lead not to my fame and fortune, but to my caring for another person."

In his spare time, Fraser co-hosts (with [Spencer Schunk](#)) a YouTube series called *Old Movies for Young People*. But I couldn't help asking - will *All the Rage* reignite his playwriting career?

"I've been away from Toronto stages for a long time, so the book might renew interest in my plays. I'm more concerned about the negative ramifications with how some people and the media are portrayed in the book. I got away with a lot in the old days. If some of the things I said in the 90s were on Twitter today, I would be completely cancelled out of existence."

All the Rage: A Partial Memoir in Two Acts and a Prologue is available from [Penguin Random House Canada](#).

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.



[Brad Fraser](#), the legendary gay Canadian playwright, has just published a memoir, *All the Rage: A Partial Memoir in Two Acts and a Prologue*. As one of the 90s great gay male provocateurs, he created challenging art that confronted homophobia and dealt honestly with AIDS. A few years back, when he posted on Facebook about all the friends he lost to the disease, a representative from the *University of Regina Press* contacted him about writing a book that would detail the legacy of AIDS, and the impact on Fraser's work. His first draft was 400 pages long. The manuscript changed hands and changed form, eventually becoming more of a memoir detailing his remarkable career.

"I'm not shy about raising hell or agitating. I don't disguise the fact that I can be a real asshole. That's part of my charm," he told me. "My anger came from AIDS, but young queers don't have to fight those battles anymore. Audiences no longer want to be challenged, they only want stories that agree with them."

Over the course of his career, he often suffered scathing reviews. "I didn't want this book to be a settling of accounts, and while there was some of that in earlier drafts, I wanted to take responsibilities for my failures as well, like the script for the *Love and Human Remains* movie."

10

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BY BOYD KODAK

Photo: Kim Hardy



Vangelis Polydorou first came to our attention when he auditioned for *The Voice UK* in 2016. The gender non-conforming performer's voice pushed him through to the finals and made him one of the clear stand outs of the season. His mentor on the show was legendary pop icon **Boy George**, who saw something in Vangelis and has continued to work with him ever since. George hand picked Vangelis to sing in his band *Culture Club* for their 2018 world tour, and more recently Vangelis supported them with his own set at *Wembley Arena*. With George on board as his Creative Manager and ex-*Cocteau Twins* drummer **Benny D** on production, Vangelis began working on songs for his debut album, and recently released his first single and music video - 'Throw Me'.

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

Vangelis Polydorou - My 2020 was surprisingly productive. I finished my debut album, shot my first music video, and performed my own set at *Wembley Arena* supporting **Boy George & Culture Club**.

BK - Wow, that's excellent. During that time, which was the most exciting event for you?

VP - Finishing my debut album. I had quite a lot of time to get the vocal just how I wanted, so it was nice to have that freedom and be able to create something I could be proud of.

BK - What are you looking forward to next year?

VP - Hopefully performing with a live audience, but with what's going on you just don't know. We need live music back!

BK - That's for sure, there's nothing like live music. Let's hope it's back soon. In the meantime, where can we see your work?

VP - Everywhere! [YouTube](#), [Spotify](#), [Apple Music](#). You can also follow me on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)

BK - Tell us about your plans for the future.

VP - A few more music videos, and then I want to release my debut album later in the year.

BK - Is there any message you would like to put out there?

VP - Don't live for someone else; live for yourself.

BK - Answer these questions for us: The last thing I do before I go to sleep is...

VP - Brush my teeth

BK - I couldn't live without...

VP - My phone

BK - What's your favourite TV Show of all time...

VP - Probably *Drag Race*. Love the creativity and seeing talented queens.

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

VP - My boyfriend, family and friends.

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



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MUKA

DESIGNS FOR THE QUEER AND BIPOC COMMUNITY



Photo credit: Rannie Turingan

Long-time friends Lisa Wang and Alexis Fu always wanted to start a business together. After a trip to Disney World in 2018, Alexis returned full of new design ideas, and a love of enamel pins, while Lisa admires the indie fashion scene and artist alleys. They knew these combined interests could become something. After roping in their spouses, Tony Song and Anita Tang, Hamilton's [MUKA](#) was established.

"In 2018 we started by gathering products from different queer and BIPOC artists we loved and admired, and we hauled all this to *Pride Toronto* in 2018," Lisa recalls. "It was a really successful event for us that showed us people really liked our business idea, so we started designing and curating more products."

A hallmark of the MUKA team's business goals is a focus on authentic representation for BIPOC and Queer folks in their products and imagery. With designs inspired by their own cultural experiences, and photography featuring a wide range of bodies and gender expressions, MUKA currently curates from mainly BIPOC and Queer artists and plan to grow that representation in the future. Being part of both communities, they've baked diversity into their business model.

"We always ask ourselves, how do we make things better for our Queer and BIPOC siblings? What is it that we can help change? All of it comes down to one thing: celebrate our existence. Celebrate the joy of being queer and being a person of colour no matter what the world tells us otherwise."

Featuring an ever-growing line of enamel pins, stationary, apparel, earrings, and other fun items, MUKA showcases their

communities across their lines. Check out their *Proudly Queer* collection to meet Pridapus!

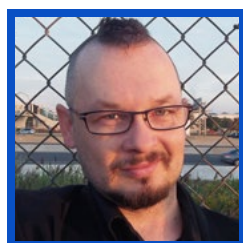
"The platypus is a creature that lives in a space in between where it doesn't belong in a single category, and people always have a hard time identifying where it belongs. We feel this really represents our experiences as queer people and as people of colour."

For a business that relies on connecting with their communities, the pandemic has been a challenge for the MUKA crew. After many planned events were cancelled, MUKA lost all sources of income. But rather than be deterred, they've taken the situation as a "blessing in disguise."

In the meantime, they've focused on rebranding and growing their online presence. "We are still learning how to do it better like others who have been in this game a lot longer, and we have a real sense of purpose to keep going no matter how hard it is. We're also encouraged by our customers who all really seem to love us for who we are."

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Jon Pressick is a writer who focuses on sex and sexuality. View his work at [sexinwords.ca](#)



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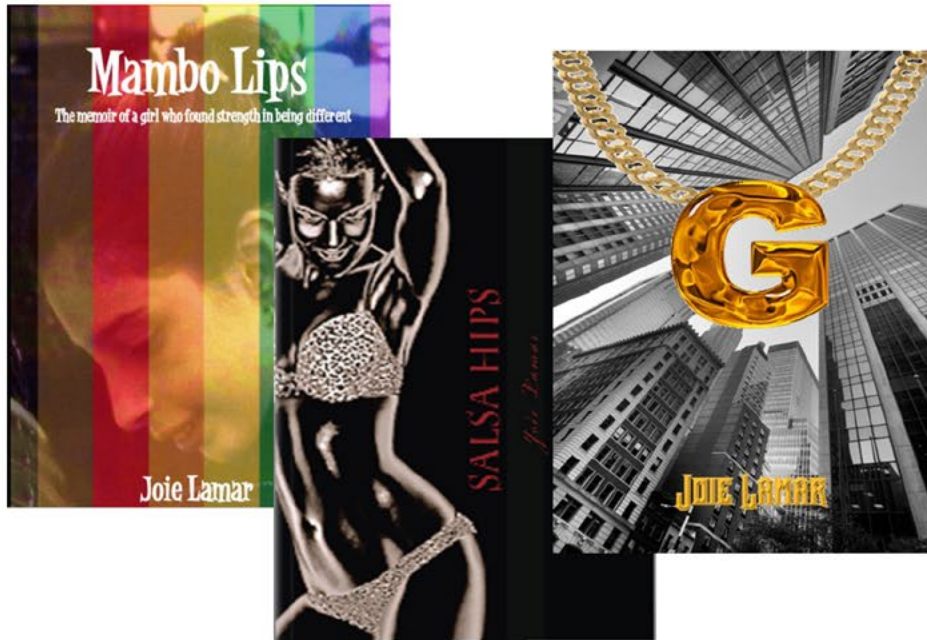
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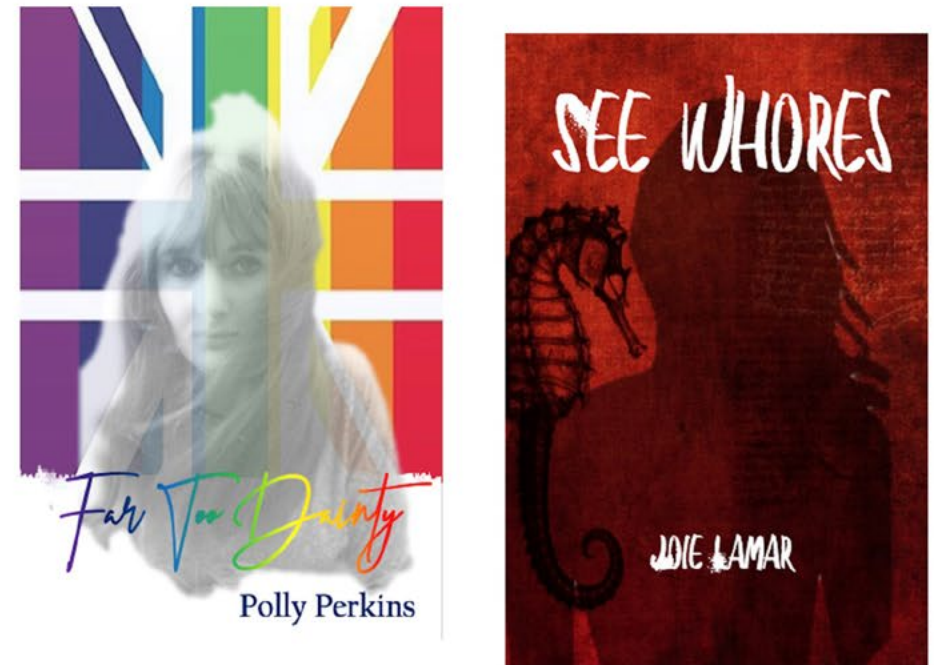
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In response to COVID-19 and the closure of venues due to restrictions on social gatherings, all events, festivals, and other group activities have either been cancelled or postponed for the immediate future.

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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