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EDITORIAL



Although the Jade Goody/Shilpa Shetty story, contrived to boost the ratings of this year's *Celebrity Big Brother*, is practically dead in the water already, it's worth comparing it to a very similar media-enhanced scandal that happened in America at almost exactly the same time. While in our part of the world Jade was the focus of a politically correct witchhunt for her stereo-racist comments about Shilpa, across the water an actor called Isaiah Washington was the focus of similar media hounding for uttering homophobic remarks about a fellow star of the medical drama, *Grey's Anatomy*, the recently out of the closet TR Knight.

Washington's mistake was to deny in front of the world's media at January's Golden Globes that he called Knight a faggot some months previously on the set of the hit show. In the aftermath of his denial, Knight went on Ellen DeGeneres' talk show and told America that Washington was lying. And one-by-one the other stars of *Grey's Anatomy* lined-up behind their gay colleague.

The result of the ensuing storm saw Washington desperately treading water, pulling PR stunts by pledging to work with gay rights education groups as the network that employs him threatened to pull the plug on his starring role. Like Goody, Washington subsequently retreated into the hideaway of confused celebrities everywhere - rehab - trying to make some sense of this new turn in

his life and, no doubt, review further career options now that the eye of a particularly vengeful media storm has passed by.

While I believe both Goody and Washington should be censured for their use of the language of oppression, I wonder if it's right that they should be held up as the objects for all our fears and the symbols of every possible hatred in the world? What worries me about the scapegoating of both is that in somehow making them the focus of our anger and ambivalence about racism and homophobia, we are absolving ourselves of our own racist and homophobic thoughts, feelings and actions.

As Jade Goody comes to terms with the catastrophic change in her life, there is a ridiculous sense that all the racist ills of modern Britain have been suddenly confronted and cured, particularly as Shilpa Shetty gets on with her dignified, and greatly enhanced career. The victim has been vindicated, the oppressor has been deposed and the world is a better place. Yet, if you are Muslim in Britain right now, I don't think the world is so rosy, and racist attacks are hardly things of the past. The shop on the corner is still 'the Paki shop', and despite an outpouring of empathy for Shetty, people from non-white backgrounds and cultures are still eyed with suspicion both here and in the UK; and not only by the working classes, as some commentators on the *CBB* 'scandal' might have you believe.

Meanwhile in America, the homophobic Washington may have been the focus of a massive counter-attack and the gay TR Knight might have had his own vindication, but will the same incredibly righteous media stay watchful of every single act of homophobia in showbusiness from now on? Will they openly condemn producers who quietly fire (or never hire) gay actors? Gay stars who flaunt their hetero marriages for the cameras? Movies and television shows that constantly use the 'gay' word as a term of derision and the predominant set-in-stone stereotypes? I don't think so.

It's all about surface cures and common complacency. If some people get hurt along the way to our own shallow absolution, so be it. As long as we don't have to really look into the dark and historic heart of why those two sides of the same coin, racism and homophobia, exist. And as long as we don't have to confront the deep-seated things everyone keeps doing to preserve the nasty status quo.

GCN

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LETTERS

Send your letters to: editor@gcn.ie or
The Editor, GCN, Unit 2, Scarlet Row, Dublin 8

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A PLACE FOR US

Dear Editor,

Nobody can have read through John's letter in the January edition of *GCN* (Issue 205) without feeling enormous sympathy for him, his son and his family. A mixture of anger and incredible sadness comes over me each time I re-read of how his son - now in his first year of secondary school and so presumably aged about 12 - is being bullied and taunted daily by those around him. This is not just the all too common situation of picking on someone who is effeminate because he is an easy target. No, this is because John himself is gay and has come out enough for word to spread like wildfire where he lives. Two major questions arise - why does this bullying still happen, and what can be done about it? My own pain surrounding this issue is considerable, after so many years of being made to feel a freak just because I'm gay and married, but for now let me focus on John.

Our attention was drawn to this letter at the January meeting of the Married Men's Group (MMG), which is designed as a support group for those of us who are or were married but have now realised we are gay. All sorts of issues arise, including the situation described by John. MMG is not a counselling group, but I think every one

of us who attends it feel that its therapy is vital to our continued survival and growth. That may sound melodramatic, but it is the truth.

Assuming John to be now in early middle age, life would not have been easy for him as a teenager. He would have known that there was no way on earth his homosexuality could be revealed, let alone accepted, so presumably he had to hide his sexual orientation for fear of physical attack and verbal abuse. Now, 30 years later, his son is suffering all over again.

When my son was 13 somebody copped on that I was gay and the news spread very rapidly indeed. Life became very unpleasant for all of us, but I think our son got the worst of it. Although he didn't tell us this until years later, he was constantly taunted by comments like "Does your dad feel you up?" Our biggest mistake was not taking more decisive action sooner, and we're still dealing with the consequences.

It was only some years later I discovered the Married Men's Group and ever since then it has helped me a great deal. Although no two situations are ever identical, frequently we can be surprised by how much we have in common with others. In my case, my wife and I decided to stay together. This was - and sometimes still is - hard work, but it is what we want. I find attending the MMG helps me deal with my frustration and pain. There I find a group of welcoming, friendly men who are non-judgmental, totally confidential and supportive and I am afforded a regular opportunity to express my otherwise hidden feelings. If John - or anyone else who is gay and married or even just thinking of getting married - would like to join us, please just ring Gay Switchboard Dublin (01 872 1055) to find out details of the next meeting. We're not there to solve your crisis overnight, but we will be there to help you along the way.

During the past 30 years or more there have been enormous changes in the way homosexuals are treated by society, but there is still so much more to be done. In particular, one thing that has yet to be addressed is the way gay men are still seen almost exclusively as either dangerous paedophiles or camp lightweights whose sole purpose is to provide comic entertainment. Thus, if we're not being

beaten up, we're just being laughed at. In neither case are we taken seriously as men. This shows up in most schools' attitudes towards anti-gay bullying. A brief talk with an offending group is generally the most that's on offer, and that doesn't include what can be done when the bullies are the teachers themselves.

However, there is a small number of secondary schools where boys have been able to come out as gay and have had no adverse reaction from either other pupils or staff - quite the opposite, in fact. Hopefully John's son might find a place in one of these and become a normal, happy boy again.

Situations like this are extremely stressful to everyone involved, but talking it through with others, seeking new ideas and trying new strategies will certainly help. The Married Men's Group would be delighted to welcome John to our meetings and to do whatever we can.

With much sympathy, Bryan

FACING THE BIGOTS

Dear Editor,

I write to tell you about an act of discrimination I was naive enough to think was long past in this country.

Yesterday, while I was standing at my front door searching my pockets for the keys, I overheard a letting agent speaking inside the door on the apartment directly across from me. The gap between our doors is only about 1.5m, so anyone standing directly behind the door can be heard out in the hall. To my total amazement I overheard the woman question the potential tenants about their sexual orientation: "You are not gay are you? There are only two beds and there are three of you."

The three foreign-sounding men all replied, "No, No," one even telling her that he had a girlfriend. To which she replied, "That's fine then, we don't want that here, it is too nice a place."

I could not believe what I was hearing. I went into my apartment and left the bags of shopping I had carried back on the floor of the kitchen. My partner was in the living room and I told him what I had overheard. As soon as I did that I turned on my heels and went back out to the apartment next door. I knocked on the door, but by now the woman was talking to someone on her mobile phone.

I waited for her to finish her call and when she did I introduced myself and explained that I lived directly across the hall. I explained also that I had overheard her conversation with the three men and that she needed to make herself aware of a law call the Equal Status Act in which it is illegal to discriminate in the provision of goods and services on the grounds of sexual orientation, and that even to ask someone in this situation about their sexual orientation was enough to break the law.

She then tried to deny what she said and I reminded her I was standing directly outside the door when she said it. From her reaction I can only assume she realised I had her dead to rights. She then said, "How dare you!" and slammed the door in my face. I stayed there talking through the door and told her that she was a bigot and I was going to find out who she was and report her to the Equality Authority.

Today I contacted the property management company who look after the building to find out the name and contact details of the owner of the apartment and make him aware that an agent acting on his behalf is discriminating against potential tenants. And, that now he has been made aware of this fact he too might find himself on the receiving end of a hearing at the Equality Tribunal.

As someone who has lived in the same apartment for 10 years paying rent without fail every month, and having had the experience in the past of being asked why two men wanted a single room apartment, I just wanted to say to anyone reading this that we don't have to take it.

If *GCN* readers are ever asked any such question when looking for an apartment then record the details and get onto the Equality Authority straight away. Make a complaint and stand up for your rights. Don't let bigots like that woman get away with it. If the only way they are going to change their way of doing business is to be hit in the pocket, then make them pay.

People in our community have worked too hard and too long to get this kind of law in place. Don't make it a waste of time and energy by not using it against such bigots.

Yours, Karl Hayden, Dublin 2

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GCN

CURRENT AFFAIRS

GAY GARDA PROJECT AWARDED

The Garda Advice Service in association with Outhouse has been highly commended in the *Irish Times* Living Dublin Awards.

The Outhouse Garda Advice Service was honoured by Dublin's Lord Mayor Vincent Jackson at a ceremony at the Weston Hotel on January 31. "People do a lot of small community projects because they need to happen and it's very good to have that acknowledged," says Louise

"No matter what circumstances people find themselves in they're guaranteed to find an open mind at the Outhouse Garda Advice Service."

Tierney, manager of Outhouse. "We are really seeing the practical benefit of the Garda Advice Service to individuals and we were delighted to be commended at the Awards."

The annual *Irish Times* Living Dublin Awards are divided into five categories. The Community Development category is open to individuals, groups or organisations involved in projects to improve their local areas and benefit the local population.

We were absolutely delighted with the commendation," says



Divisional Gay Liaison Sergeant, Joe Flaherty, "especially for the Gardaí in the Advice Service, who are all volunteers in the project and have done the training to provide an empathetic and non-judgmental service to LGBT people.

"No matter what circumstances people find themselves in, they're guaranteed to find an open mind at the Garda Advice Service in Outhouse. Our advice can help them sort out their individual problems.

"With the ethos of the awards in mind, the Outhouse Garda Advice Service is about community building. It improves society across the board."

In 2005 GCN was highly commended at the *Irish Times* Living Dublin Awards for its contribution to culture in the city.

The Outhouse Garda Advice Service is on every second Wednesday at 7.30pm. For more information visit www.outhouse.ie

GAY THEATRE FESTIVAL DENIED FUNDING

For the third year running, the Irish Arts Council has turned down an application for funding from the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival.

Established to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Oscar Wilde, the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, now in its fourth year, has been turned down once more by the Arts Council for funding.

Director of the Festival, Brian Merriman said, "It is sad that the Arts Council, which produces plan after plan to bring innovation into the arts, cannot support or see the value of this unique event.

"Dublin City Council and Fáilte Ireland have recognised the significant contribution the Festival makes to the arts in a changing Ireland. The British Council has also generously supported the event."

The IDGTF will run in Dublin from May 7 to 20 and will feature 20 diverse productions, drawn from submissions made by production companies and playwrights from America, Italy, UK, Ireland, Spain, Iran, South Africa, Canada and Australia, along with new Irish plays.

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NEW BOARD ELECTED FOR DUBLIN PRIDE

A new Board of Directors for Dublin LGBTQ Pride has been elected, with a view to moving the festival forward.

Dublin LGBTQ Pride Ltd, the organisation behind Dublin's annual Pride festival, held its first Emergency General Meeting (EGM) on February 1. This meeting resulted in the establishment of a nine-member Board of Directors who are charged with control of the Pride Festival and parade.

The three previous committee members, Paul Byrne, Myra McGuirk and Gareth Kelly are joined on the Board by six new faces, elected from among the members present, each of whom has some measure of previous relevant experience. The newly elected Directors are Mark O'Donovan, Amy O'Keefe, Jonathan MacCumhaill, Ódhrán Allen, Lorraine Hernon and Conor Prenderville.

The new Board will now foster the development of an effective Festival Committee to organise the event, which they will oversee. The objective is for this committee to be divided into functional sub-committees, such as Events, Media, Sponsorship, Administration and so on.

"This is an exciting time for Dublin Pride," said



newly elected Board Member, Conor Prenderville. "Having recruited approximately 100 ordinary Pride members from Dublin's community, we are now keen to kick off the organisation of this year's Festival, culminating in the Pride Parade in Dublin's city centre.

"There is a place for everyone to become involved. Be it accountancy, event management, or just helping out, any contribution is welcome."

To join Dublin LGBTQ Pride Ltd as a member or to help out with the Festival organisation, send an email to dublinpride@gmail.com. Further information at www.dublinpride.org

ON THE WIRE

with Mark Ryan of the Amnesty International LGBT Network



A survey carried out across the EU has found that the Italians are the most attuned to homophobia, while Swedes are the quickest in the European Union to embrace the concept of the multi-cultural society. They are also among the least satisfied with efforts to combat discrimination, according to a new Eurobarometer survey.

Some 73 percent of Italians thought discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was widespread, the highest figure in the EU. The EU average was 50 percent. In Sweden, 86% of those asked in the survey took the view that ethnic minorities enrich the country's culture. Fewer than four out of 10 respondents shared this opinion in Malta (32%) and Cyprus (39%).

In an apparent paradox, a mere 28 percent of those asked said that enough was being done to tackle discrimination in Swedish society - only Poles were less satisfied. Eurobarometer asked people across the EU whether they thought discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, race and religion was common in their own countries.

The head of Italy's bishops has lashed out at a government proposal to give same-sex couples rights similar to those of married people and criticised euthanasia in a speech that provoked an immediate political backlash.

Premier Romano Prodi's centre-left government has pledged to come up with legislation to safeguard rights for all unmarried couples, including same-sex ones, by the end of January. The issue has been divisive in a predominantly Catholic country, closely watched by the Vatican.

"It must be said that (gay unions) are at odds with basic anthropological facts, in particular with the non-existence of the blessing of generating children, which is the specific reason for the social recognition of marriage," Cardinal Camillo Ruini said in an address to the Italian bishops' conference.

Proponents of the law accused the cardinal of interfering in Italy's political affairs. Ruini spoke "like a premier or the head of a political party setting his agenda to the government and Parliament," said Daniele Capezzone, of Italy's tiny Radical Party. But right-wing politicians opposed to the proposal praised Ruini's stance as a defence of the traditional family.

The proposed legislation would give unmarried couples inheritance rights, joint medical insurance, visiting rights in prisons and hospitals, and the right to make decisions in case one partner becomes ill.

Amnesty International LGBT Network meets the first Thursday of every month at 6.30pm on 48 Fleet St Dublin 2 all are welcome.

BRIEFS

A television advertisement for the chocolate bar Snickers, launched during the American Super Bowl has been pulled from the air because of complaints that it's homophobic. The ad showed two car mechanics accidentally kissing while eating the same candy bar and then ripping out some chest hair to do something macho.

The Snickers Website had an alternate ending that showed the men attacking each other. It also featured video of players from the Super Bowl reacting negatively to the kiss.

The Human Rights Campaign said, "jeering" from the players is the kind of thing that fuels "anti-gay bullying" on playgrounds. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation called it "inexcusable" prejudice.

A spokeswoman for Snickers said they just wanted a funny ad and didn't intend to offend.

Britney Spears has slammed allegations from one of her ex-husband's friends that she is into lesbian sex. Rapper Omar 'Iceman' Sharif told US magazine *In Touch* that 25 year-old Britney is into threesomes and girls.

"There was tons of porn in the house - but it was mostly Britney's," Sharif claimed. "There were friends of hers who she would invite to her house and they would drink and party.

"They had their hands all over each other." A spokesman for Spears simply stated that the allegations are not true.

A Chinese doctor who helped expose blood-buying schemes that infected thousands with HIV has been put under house arrest to stop her from travelling to the US to be honoured by a charity backed by Senator Hillary Clinton.

Gao Yaojie is one of China's most prominent AIDS activists and has received numerous awards for her efforts a decade ago

to alert people in her home province of Henan in eastern China to an AIDS epidemic that was being spread by tainted blood transfusions. Operators often used dirty needles, and people selling plasma - the liquid in blood - received replenishment from a pooled blood supply.

Gao, who is in her 80s, was warned by Henan authorities not to attend the Vital Voices Global Partnership awards ceremony next month, but she refused to comply, said Hu Jia, a Beijing-based AIDS activist. The city authorities put her under house arrest ahead of a planned trip to Beijing to apply for a US visa.

In the late 1990s, Gao spoke openly to the press and distributed brochures about the spread of AIDS among poor farmers in China because of the blood-buying industry. Health officials then accused her of helping "anti-China forces".



With speculation still underway about the future of *Attitude* magazine, *Gay Times* is being relaunched with a new editor, a new design and a new moniker of *GT*.

According to newly appointed editor, Joseph Galliano, there are plenty of changes in store to content, design and most notably, the mast-head.

"Embracing our nickname allows the cover to reflect the myriad of exciting changes inside the magazine. *GT* will take centre stage and define the agenda for the modern gay man in Britain. The title's evolution represents one of the most exciting times in the magazine's long, prestigious history."

The March issue is a future-themed issue with contributors including Bruce LaBruce, Scot Capurro and a new style and fashion editor, Ian Brown.

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ALS

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

We're so loving the hip 'n' trendy new Smile Clinic at Dublin's Toni & Guy. Created by dishy dentist, Dr Anthony Welsh, the Smile Clinic is one of the first dedicated tooth whitening specialists in the country and his group of specially trained dentists turn lacklustre smiles into bright, white beams, all in the comfort of a specially created zone that couldn't be further away from your normal dental experiences.

Decorated with funky Andy Warhol prints, the Smile Clinic's atmosphere is infused with chilled out music and a visit to its environs is a pleasure from start to finish. While your yellowing molars are getting a make-over, you can relax in a massage chair watching a movie of your choice on the Clinic's special DVD glasses, or simply listen to some music you love.

The whole, painless, in-clinic whitening procedure takes approximately an hour and you emerge from Toni & Guy with a sparkling smile that's

guaranteed to make you feel like a different person. It's white up our streets!

We have a free tooth whitening treatment at the Smile Clinic worth €395 to give away to one lucky reader. Just email your answer to this simple question, along with your name and address, to competitions@gcn.ie, marking the subject box: 'Big Bright Smile', or on a postcard to Competitions, GCN, Unit 2, Scarlet Row, Essex St West, D8:

The Smile Clinic is located at which salon:

- a. Toni & Guy
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You can book a free consultation at The Smile Clinic at 44 Clarendon Street, Dublin 2. Phone: (01) 671 4403, enquiries@thesmileclinic.ie



LA BOYS IN LOVE

There's a small gay revolution happening in the music industry Stateside. Gay duo (and real life

couple), Jason & deMarco are beginning to make waves with their out, proud and oh, so gay music.

In January, viewers of the American gay channel MTV LOGO's popular video countdown programme, *The Click List*, voted Jason and deMarco's music video for This Is Love the No.1 music video for 2006.

This is Love was not originally intended to be released commercially as a single. However, due to the overwhelming popularity of the song, a double disc CD/DVD set which includes the music video, new remixes, and a behind the scenes look at the making of the music video, with an exclusive J&D interview, has hit the shops.

"This is Love is about finding that special someone and the intense, explosive emotions that follow," says Jason, from the apartment he shares with deMarco in Los Angeles. He says he felt the emotions the moment he first set eyes on

deMarco, his partner of five years. "No matter how the world may judge the love we share, what we have is love and it can't be taken away."

Ah, bless.

Jason & DeMarco's *This is Love* can be purchased at www.rjnmusic.com

GET YOUR TONGUE AROUND THIS!

Gay tourism is booming across our gorgeous planet, and with the natty *How to Say "Fabulous!" in 8 Different Languages*, you'll always know how to speak the native tongue, or get your tongue around the



natives. Featuring outrageous phrases, all translated from English into French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, this twisted book contains sections on Night Life ("Are there any gay bars around here?"), Shopping ("Those shoes! I must have those shoes!"), Opening Lines ("I am a flight attendant/choreographer/actor/owner of a greeting card store"), Dining Out ("You've had worse things in your mouth!"), Parting Glances ("I never meant to hurt you"), and much, much more. You'll never be lost for a gay thing to say abroad again!

How to Say "Fabulous!" in 8 Different Languages is available from www.quirkbooks.com



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GIRLS ABROAD

You know when you're a lesbian, right? And you go on holidays to a gay destination but you can't find any bars or clubs with women in them, and instead you spend your time surrounded by boring buff boys?

Well, forget that. Just pick up the *Damron Women's Traveller* guidebook and make your holidays as gloriously woman-packed as you want them to be.

It's a complete travel guide made by and for lesbians, with over 9,000 listings covering North America, Mexico, the Caribbean and major capitals of Europe, listing women-run businesses, vegetarian menus, wheelchair access, multiracial clientele, and the inside scoop on local lesbian hotspots, with unique city overviews, including Paris, London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna, Rome, Prague, Barcelona and Madrid.

What more could a lady lovin' lady with travel on her mind desire?

GOOD LESBIAN SEX, WITH PICTURES!

A big call-out is going to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and downright queer women across our fair nation to show the world your best side, backside, or any side you like, both in pictures and words.



In the interest of art, literature and general hilarity, the organisers of A Lesbian Arts Festival (aLAF 2007) are asking you to dust off your cameras and start snapping photos of yourself or

whatever takes your fancy for a special exhibition to be mounted (phoar!) during the Festival, from May 25 - 27 in Dublin. And if that's not enough, they're calling on women lovin' women to pen their own erotic stories for a special CD to be released at the same time.

All photos must be framed or mounted on form/cardboard and ready to hang and there is a maximum of five submissions per person. Oh, yeah and it's kinda important to attach your name, contact details and title of each work with your submission.

On the erotic story side of things, stories should be no more than 1500 words, on any sexy subject you like. The organisers will need to know your name in case you win a prize, although names can be changed to protect the not so innocent (if requested).

*All photo submissions to aLAF-
Photographic Exhibition c/o Outhouse,
105 Capel St, Dublin 1. Closing date Friday
May 4, 2007, while your stories should
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10 THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH...

FEBRUARY 25 THE INDIGO GIRLS

The lesbian singer-songwriters extraordinaire are unmissable at the Ambassador Theatre, 8pm. Tickets €32.50.

MARCH 1 MIKA

Is he or isn't he? Who cares! We love him. Get Grace Kelly'd at Spirit on Abbey Street, 10pm. Tickets €25

MARCH 2 SAMANTHA MUMBA

Ireland's favourite singer-slash-model-slash-actress performs in Vicar St, 8pm. Tickets €25

MARCH 9 OSA

The place to be queer and alternative this month is Temple Bar Music Centre from 11.30pm, or the pre-party in GUBU from 8pm if you're making a night of it.

MARCH 9 HARDCORE AT THE BOOM ROOM

A host of seriously cool bands play The Boom Boom Room in Parnell St including New Yorkers Renminbi, Dubs Janey Mac and Dae Kim from the Daisce. Doors open 9pm, admission €8. For more click on www.myspace.com/ladylucan.

MARCH 9 ALTERNATIVE MISS IRELAND 2007

Get your gay ass down to Dublin's Olympia Theatre for the best night on the annual queer calendar. Tickets from www.ticketmaster.ie or minus booking free from Olympia Box Office at 0818 719 330

MARCH 17 THE L CUP

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27 MARCH SUGABABES

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THE PROFILE...

PAUL BRADY, MANAGER DUBLIN'S CENTRE STAGE CAFÉ



When The Centre Stage Café opened on Dublin's Parliament Street nearly three years ago, Dublin's super-savvy gay community didn't really know what to make of it.

Was it a café? A theatre hangout? An über-camp bar for über-gay people? The penny didn't take long to drop; it's all of those things and more. Once the confusion wore off, Dubs realised that we had finally got a little bit of sparkle in the city.

"We get a complete cross-section of people here," says Paul Brady, manger of the Centre Stage. "People from their late teens to people in their 60s, men, women, and everyone who comes into the place loves it.

"People love the acts, the music and the cosiness of the bar. We have Anne Bushnell (celebrated singer of Edith Piaf songs) who is just fabulous. We also have had Kristin Cappelli, Paul

Ryder, Heidi Konnt, Paddy Finnegan, Busty, Jeri Singer - all of them have been here at some stage. We always try to keep the entertainment different and interesting, mixing it up for people so there's always something new on."

If Centre Stage is just a bit bling, it shouldn't come as a surprise that their champagne cocktails are the most popular drinks on the menu, at €5.95 a pop and with names like Sparkling Kylie and Bitter Tart, they are supped by the gilded bucket-load.

"We've been doing tapas now for the last few months so people can have a nibble as they chat and have a glass of wine," says Paul. "It's very European, very chic.

"We're happy with the way things are going for the moment. The most important thing for us is to stay popular and keep it interesting. We're looking for new talent all of the time, we don't want it to become stale with the same stuff all the time. We're always looking for ways to improve, whether it is the food, the wine, the entertainment or the bar. We want people to let us know what they think and what they want."

The Centre Stage Café, Parliament Street, Dublin 2. For more info click on clubcentrestage.bebo.com or email clubcentrestage@gmail.com

SCENE&HERD

A BIG NIGHT OUT IN CLARE... Q+A PREDICTS A RIOT... AMI COCKTAILS 'N' CHEESE... KINGS AND QUEENS AT GLITZ... A NEW GAY BAR IN CORK... SLIGO IN THE PINK...

So, you're gay and you live in Clare... what the hell do you do of a Saturday night? Well on **Saturday February 24**, if you have any sense at all, you'll get yourself down to the **Gay Clare Night Out**. Taking place at the **One Mile Inn** on the Lahinch Road in **Ennis**, the best of crack is promised, along with some great dance tunes. To find out more you can email gayclare@yahoo.co.uk or phone 085 721 2674.

The organisers of the already legendary queer indie club **Q+A** at the **Temple Bar Music Centre** on **March 9** are predicting a riot this month when it comes to ticket sales, so why not pick up a queue-jumper ticket at the **pre-party in Gubu** from **8pm**?

The **Alternative Miss Ireland** 20th anniversary show, comin' atcha on **March 11** at **The Olympia**, promises to be one to remember. Among the divas up for your consideration on the night will be **Alternative Miss Cork**, **Kitty Cartier**, who literally brought Cork's Savoy Theatre down last month, and the gorgelicious **Hit Chillie Jenny**, voted by an overwhelming majority to represent Galway at the main event. And last year's winner **Funtime Gustavo** promises to pull out all the stops for her hand-over return to the stage. We're all a quiver with anticipation!

If you have a ticket in your mits get down to **The Front Lounge** before the big bash and present it at the bar to get lubed up for the event with a half price **pre-AMI cocktail**.

You can continue partying after AMI into the following week when **Funtime** appears with his **Dopplegang** mates at a very special performance **Glitz** on **Tuesday March 13**. The nature of their latest act is a secret, but considering the big musical feats they've pulled off in the past, you can expect it to be Broadway with a capital B.

There's a new gay bar opening in the People's Republic of Cork. As we speak, burly workmen are moving furniture and the like to get **Flux** on MacCurtain Street in the pink for a prospective opening on February 17. Knowing workmen as we do, we realise they can get, uh, distracted, so this date is only provisional. Keep an eye on www.gcn.ie for the heads up.

Galway's regular gay club, **Eden** (every Friday and Sunday at The Junction Nightclub) is going on one of its infamous road trips this month, taking the music and the madness to **Sligo's City Hotel** on **Saturday March 24**. More details can be found closer to the date at www.edenexperience.ie

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CORKING IT

The website gaycork.com is ten years old this month, making it the second oldest queer website in the country. Founder Jonathan Neville believes its development has been integral to the evolution of gay Cork.

"It has helped open up my own idea of my sexuality. At the beginning I was very closed-minded and now I think I've dealt with a lot of the internalised homophobia I used to carry about with me by sharing in the experiences, and acknowledging the opinions, of others."

So says Timmy, one of the hundreds of members of the forums on gaycork.com, and he's just one of many people who have found the same kind of self-affirmation from the website, which is an amazing ten years old this month.

"There was nothing much on the web for Irish gay people when I set gaycork.com up," says Jonathan Neville, founder of the incredibly popular site, "and certainly nothing for gay people in Cork!"

"The site hosted the very first gay forums in Ireland and became a template for the way gay websites have developed here afterwards.

gaycork.com was a precursor for the style of a lot of them. Chris Fildes at queerid.com spoke to me extensively before launching that site, and it was originally based on the gaycork.com model."

In the ten years since gaycork.com launched, Jonathan has seen major change in his native city for gay and lesbian people, and he believes the site has been integral to that evolution.

"It's allowed more people to come out and communities to form," he says.

"It's affected people's lives; several people have met their partners through gaycork.com. There's a social life built up around it, we have regular meet-ups. We go to the cinema, for a meal, to the bars.

"It's the best gay resource for Cork. People who don't live in the south log on and are amazed by the level of entertainment and



Left to right: Jonathan Neville, founder of GayCork.com with friends Paul Madden (SGMHP) and Dave Roche (Cork Gay Project) at Gay Pride Cork, '06.

things to do for gay people in Cork.

"Currently, you can find a bustling gay classifieds section on gaycork.com, which is probably the second busiest in Ireland, next to Gaire; the forums are very active - people discuss everything there, from politics to celebrity gossip, to the Alternative Miss Ireland. There are regular

columns and features and a directory of what's on in Cork and beyond."

Although Jonathan's commitment to the site has made it flourish over the years, he's eager to pay tribute to the work of other people.

"Everyone who works on the site does so voluntarily," he says, "and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for the work they've put in. The site wouldn't be what it is without them."

Visit www.gaycork.com for everything you need to know about the queer scene in the People's Republic of Cork



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LADYFACE



SCREENED OUT

A favourite on the gay calendar, The Jameson Dublin International Film Festival doesn't have so many queer-identified films on the roster this year, but what's on offer explores the further reaches of gay sexuality, says **Mary Considine**.

It is Michael Dywer's final year programming the Jameson Dublin International Film Festival and he's certainly going out with a bang. The annual cinematic smorgasbord is packed with movies from

across the globe, including some highly anticipated Irish premieres, including Robert De Niro's spy movie, *The Good Shepard* (starring Angelina Jolie), Woody Allen's second project starring Scarlett Johansson, *Scoop*, and Danny Boyle's eagerly anticipated sci-fi thriller, *Sunshine*.

But despite the strength of the programme, queer audiences might be a little disappointed with a smaller number of gay-related titles on the programme this year. Still, few and far between as they may be, at least you won't be disappointed with their calibre.

First up is the Danish drama *En Soap (A Soap)*, which explores a budding romance between Charlotte, a confused woman who looks for love in all the wrong places and Veronica, her depressed, male-to-female transsexual neighbour, who supports herself by turning tricks out of her apartment. On paper, *En Soap* sounds like something out of a Pedro Almodóvar film, but it plays more like an old-fashioned Dogme movie with extra bells and whistles. It works exceptionally well, handling its outré plot with easy-going nonchalance, while

complex feelings simmer just under the surface. Another director might have made a more melodramatic meal out of the screenplay's material, but Pernille Fischer Christensen shows admirable circumspection and a gently humorous touch.

German writer/director Stefan Westerwelle's *So Lange Du Hier Bist (While You Are Here)* explores another oddly shaped relationship, between an elderly man and a hustler. In an airless, dark home, aged Georg waits for his regular appointment with young hustler Sebastian. Westerwelle refuses to go for stereotypes here: hustler Sebastian quotes from the poet Heinrich Heine, while Georg is never presented as a dirty old man. The two men are barely more than strangers and yet both yearn to communicate with the other, and Westerville's camera lovingly picks up on the details of their lives and personalities.

Yet another off-kilter relationship is in the mainframe in Antony Cordier's sexy French coming of age film, *Douches Froides (Cold Showers)*. 17 year-old Mickael's two big passions are judo and his girlfriend, Vanessa. But when he becomes friends

"Cold Showers elicits uninhibited performances from its three leads, but never sacrifices emotional depth for eroticism."

with fellow judo-club member Clement (Pierre Perrier), the three eventually end up having a different kind of tumble together on the mats during a practice session one day. This makes for an *ménage à trios* film that elicits uninhibited performances from its three leads, but never sacrifices emotional depth for eroticism.

The two-boy-one-girl scenario pops its pretty little head up again in *The Dreamers*, as part of a retrospective tribute to producer Jeremy Thomas, who is attending the festival to talk about his latest film *Fast Food Nation*. Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci and adapted by Gilbert Adair from his novel, *The Holy Innocents*, *The Dreamers* takes the threesome flick to a different corner by exploring incest along the way. Set in 1968 as the war rages in Vietnam, it tells the tale of pacifist American student, Matthew, who falls in with Isabelle and Theo, the home-alone teenage son and daughter of a famous French author who are in love with each other. A sexual relationship quickly evolves between Matthew and Isabelle, but most of the eroticism is saved for Matthew's political exchanges with Theo.

Although it's set in the slums of the Philippines, things lighten up somewhat in Aureaus Solito's *Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oli (The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros)*, at least at the beginning. 12 year-old Maximo is a vision of lipsticked, hip-swiveling, baby-gay fabulousness. Treating shantytown back alleys as pageant catwalks, Maxi plays doting mother hen to his family of petty-crook tough guys; his father and brothers, in turn, are not only tolerant but touchingly protective. All is improbably well, until the boy's undisguised attraction to a hunky policeman sparks tensions at home.

In much the same fashion as Gregg Araki's *Mysterious Skin*, Aureaus Solito's feature debut confronts the taboo of pre-teen sexuality with a startling mix of openness and sensitivity. No less than precocious Maxi, the film is alarming, endearing, and utterly unflappable.

Last, but by no means least on the gay menu is a rare chance to see David Cronenberg's visually stunning treatment of gay author William Burroughs' seminal novel, *Naked Lunch*, first released in 1991. It tells the story of Burroughs' alter ego, William Lee, a cockroach exterminator who experiments with injecting his own insecticide. His subsequent surreal experiences bring him to terms with the murder of his wife and his own repressed homosexuality. This film might not be to everyone's taste, but in true keeping with the extreme explorations of queer sexuality at this year's Festival, it's one that leaves a lasting impression.

The fifth Jameson Dublin International Film Festival, February 16 - 25. Box office: Curved Street, Temple Bar, D2, (01) 672 8861, boxoffice@dubliniff.com

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STEPHENMEYLER

COLUMN

In January, the UK government turned down appeals by Catholic adoption agencies and their lobbyists to allow them to 'opt out' of legal changes there that make it difficult to refuse leave to adopt to gay male or lesbian couples on the basis of their sexuality. That's 'difficult' rather than 'impossible', since the decisions about adoption remain with the professionals who run adoption agencies, both secular and religious ethos ones. In other words, an individual's judgement about who would make a suitable parent.

Should that adoption agency professional decide that the problems the child might face at school from the double bullying incentive of being adopted (i.e. abandoned, in schoolyard lingo) and by gay parents (i.e. queer themselves), are strong enough reason to refuse leave to adopt, then how easy will it be to prove them wrong? Or that their motivation was actually their fear that the child would be spiritually corrupted?

"An adoption agency professional might decide that the problems a child could face at school as a result of being adopted by gay parents are a strong enough reason to refuse leave to adopt."

In any case, the religious adoption agencies are claiming they would rather exit the business of finding homes for parentless children than be in conflict with the ethical system they operate under. This would cause serious problems for both potential parents and children they might provide homes for, but at least religious adoption professionals could sleep easy in the knowledge that they were adhering to their particular interpretations of the Word of God.

What's more likely to happen in the UK is that the religious adoption agencies will come to some sort of understanding with their secular counterparts, so that lesbian and gay male wannabe adoptive parents will be directed to the secular agencies, while more acceptable candidates will be free to choose what sort of agency they prove their parenting worth to.

Here in Ireland, no such situation will arise, of course. Adoption remains very much the territory of Catholic morality, which, given that the majority of Irish citizens profess Catholic beliefs, would seem only 'fair'. While cases of adoption by the partner of a lesbian mother do happen, they are very much left to the discretion of the agencies' decision-makers. Fostering is often less strictly subject to the rules, but lesbian couples (and gay men) would be best advised to forget this route to parenthood.

After all, not many of the powers-that-be question a person's fitness to have children by the traditional method, so good people who want to provide a loving home to children can do so; they just need to have hetero-sex, either directly or by artificial means.

There's no evidence lacking that people like the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), the Equality

Authority or liberal elements at the Department of Justice, who might wish to give lesbians and gay men rights to parenthood (and I seem to remember that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has something to say on the matter of the freedom to have children), would have an uphill battle to convince both the populace and the media.

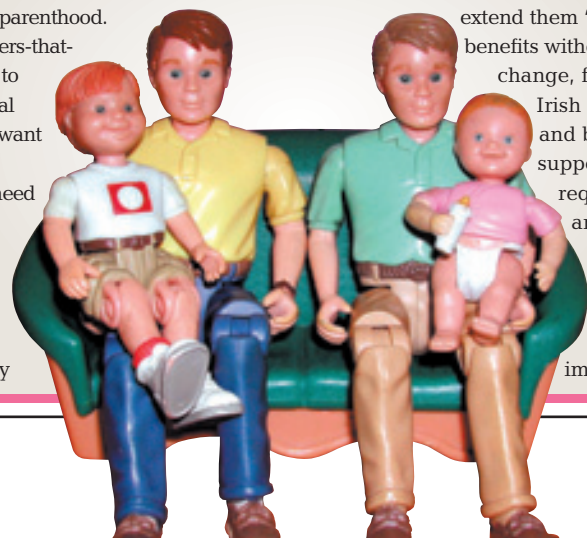
Just look at the whole gay marriage debate, which one would imagine is less controversial than gay parenting rights. *The Sunday World*, read by almost a million people in Ireland every week, feels this significant part of the population identifies with the idea that giving gay people rights that are given to other citizens tramples on those same rights. Commenting on February 4 on the UK adoption changes, one of its columnists, Paddy Murray (whose Panama hat, worn at a jaunty angle in his byline photo, belies an old-school reactionary head), thought the idea of marriage between two men or two women just 'daft', since

'every definition of marriage there is maintains that it takes place between a man and a woman.' That definition cannot be changed, apparently, as it would be the same as: 'Changing the definition of a dog to describe it as a large, grey African mammal with big ears and a trunk, doesn't make your pet an elephant.'

Of course, where this elephant model of marriage falls down is its failure to deal with the uncomfortable fact that definitions of marriage change almost by the generation. In Ireland and Britain before 1829, it was next to impossible for a Catholic to marry a Protestant - social exclusion and disinheritance were common outcomes - that society defined marriage in those terms. In the US, there used to be a crime of miscegenation, which meant people of different ethnic backgrounds were forbidden to marry. More recently, women required the legal permission of their fathers to marry. And obviously the advent of divorce created an enormous change in the definition of marriage.

But there's an even simpler example, which would seem to have little possibility of controversy: allowing long-term gay couples the same taxation benefits that married heterosexual couples have. The Zappone-Gilligan case, which tried to show that it would be possible to recognise this lesbian couple's Canadian marriage and

extend them 'long-term partner' taxation benefits without resorting to constitutional change, failed. Therefore, for some Irish citizens to enjoy the rights and benefits their constitution is supposed to provide them, would require that constitution to be amended. Not simple, particularly as the majority of 'yes' votes this imaginary amendment would need could prove impossible to achieve.



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FUNTIME GENTLEMEN PLEASE!

A year after she won Alternative Miss Ireland, drag-king Funtime Gustavo, a.k.a. Iris Meehan, is reluctantly ready to impart to **Brian Finnegan** the secret to securing Ireland's most coveted crown. Photograph by Mary Furlong

The annual Alternative Miss Ireland (AMI) contest has long been a standard-setter on Ireland's drag scene, in Dublin and beyond. And as the years progress, the event itself becomes ever slicker, attracting a calibre of act, for the most part, that delivers big performances with a keen eye on that coveted crown.

Iris Meehan, creator of last year's winning act, the über-cheesy drag king Funtime Gustavo, is in no doubt as to why she won the hearts and text votes of a packed-to-the-rafters Olympia Theatre. "I did AMI the year before as a dancer for my friend and I saw the kind of thing people loved," she explains over lunch in the Front Lounge. "Big musical numbers really get the crowd going, and they like a good story too."

Of course, the winner of AMI 2005, when Iris was a mere back-up dancer, was Heidi Konnt, a queen who took the show to new extremes by delivering a strong back-story choreographed to songs from the most queer-loved musical of all time, *The Sound of Music*. The following year, Iris plumped for the big number from another much-loved, if very different Broadway standard, *West Side Story*, while her strongest competitor, Mary Poppers tried to steal the show with another Julie Andrews take, from the film, *Mary Poppins*.

But Mary Poppers didn't have that all-important back-story, and she didn't carry the crazy nanny theme throughout her act. Funtime Gustavo, on the other hand, got audience sympathy by sharing the story of his emigration from Cuba to the US of A and topped it all off at the climax with a sleekly choreographed version of *West Side Story's* America, complete with a cast of many from the drag group, Dopplegang.

"I'm in love with that song, and I had been dying to do it for a long time," Iris explains. "I needed a lot of people on stage to get that extra energy, so with Dopplegang on board I was in the perfect position. When we finally did it, the crowd just roared. That was the most amazing moment. I wanted that wow factor. If you get that

moment right, the audience really feels it."

A year after her win, Meehan is still brimming with effusive enthusiasm about the moment she stole the crown, and the whole experience in general. She's a tiny little thing, which is a shock after seeing her larger-than-life performances as Funtime, and just like her alter ego, she's dressed to camp-lad effect in a crimson shirt with black braces.

"When I started performing on the gay scene I was a belly dancer," she tells me, as we talk about the lead up to her moment of glory. "I did a lot of burlesque and began doing that with the (now defunct) Shamcocks drag king troupe. It seemed to me like all the kings were having all the fun, so I was, like, I wanna be a boy now.

"I had my first outing as Funtime with Busty Lycra, when she was playing in Gubu on Wednesday nights. With a couple of boyfriends who dragged up for the occasion, I did Barry Manilow's Copacabana and it was probably the worst show I've ever done! But people really liked it and it was a great gig to come out doing drag at.

"Then I started doing more and more gigs, and developing the character. I went off to Chicago with the Shamcocks and we did a big show there and after that I co-founded Dopplegang, which was a good grounding experience in terms of performance.

"Funtime is a joy to perform. He's like this little Chihuahua who goes round humping people's legs all the time. Nobody likes him, but he thinks everyone adores the ground he walks on!"

When asked if women on the scene are extra-attracted to her when she's all dragged up, Cuban-style, Meehan pauses before bursting into infectious laughter. "Funny enough, I've been in the George after performing as Funtime and I've had guys give me the old passer-by crotch rub. I turned around this one time and it was a friend of mine. He was like, 'Oh my God, I'm so sorry!' and I'm like, 'Is that the way you come on to guys? You've got to change that. It's disgusting! I felt everything!'

Another time I walked out of the George in drag and

these two guys were outside and when I walked by the two of them went, 'Cah-hamp!' And I said, 'Yeah, so camp I have a vagina.' Their mouths dropped to the floor!"

Despite the quick tongue, it took Meehan a while to get used to the level of attention she attracted after winning AMI. "It was so enormous on the night itself, I almost couldn't handle it. We were partying late into the night, but I lost all my friends and was just bombarded with people coming up to me. It was great, but a little scary! When I eventually found one of my friends, I was begging her to stay with me and hold my hand, and to just talk to me. It was so overwhelming.

"Ever since then people have been coming up to me and saying, 'You're the Alternative Miss Ireland, aren't you?' At first it was a bit daunting, but I've met some really lovely people this way. And I wouldn't change it for the world."

Unlike previous freshly crowned AMI's, Iris didn't make an immediate assault on the Dublin gay scene in the hopes of securing career longevity. Instead, she took herself off to America to learn more about her craft. "I wanted to break away from Dopplegang and do my own thing for a while," she says. "I performed in Chicago again, and then at the Great Big Drag Extravaganza with kings and queens from all over the world in Washington DC. That was a great experience. At first I was really nervous about doing my own thing at such a large drag event, but I learned so much from the other performers."

After coming back to Ireland, Meehan joined up with Dopplegang again to star as the scarecrow in *Oz: A Fairytale Story*, a drag hybrid of *The Wizard of Oz* and current musical smash hit, *Wicked*, at the Dublin Fringe Festival, a performance she is in talks about repeating at the forthcoming Dublin Gay Theatre Festival. She also created a couple more characters, which have had successful outings in The George and The Front Lounge.

"I do a routine to the song I've Got No Strings from the Disney film *Pinocchio*, which is great fun to perform and audiences really love it. I do another kind of demented toy



soldier thing to Justin Timberlake's Sexy Back. It's creepy, but sexy too.

"The thing about winning AMI is that it means having to come out with this fantastic standard of act all the time. It's a bit pressurised. Heidi Konnt went on to do amazing shows. Trying to fill those shoes is daunting. And look at Katherine Lynch, Veda and Shirley - they're all so professional. Winning it puts you in that category and you have to try and live up to it."

"I walked out of the George in drag and these two guys went, 'Cah-hamp!' I said, 'Yeah, so camp I have a vagina!'"

Not that Meehan is complaining. Remembering the moment she won the pageant literally leaves her speechless, for a moment at least. "Doing AMI was by far one of the best experiences of my life!" she exclaims. "During the show, a few people were coming up to the dressing room saying, 'Iris, you're going to be first or second, and that it was between three of us, me, Mary Poppers and Trudi Scrumptious. I was like, 'Oh my God, oh my God...'. When they brought us out on stage at the end I was literally shaking. Panti called out who was in second and third place and I was like, 'Oh, no, I haven't gotten anywhere.' And then she called out my name. The whole moment was a blur, like a dream that wasn't really happening. Sometimes I still can't believe it.

"What I love about AMI now is that it's a public vote that elects the winner. It's a democratic process. The voice of the people."

The voice of the people will vote once more for a new AMI on March 11 in The Olympia. With that in mind, Meehan has some sage advice for the line-up of new contenders. "I'd say, rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse. Rehearse until you feel you can't rehearse any more, and then rehearse again. The audience is really sharp. They know what they like, and they like the acts to be professional. And funny. There is a place for left-of-field acts in AMI, but in my experience, the audience loves something they can identify with. And they love a big moment, so if you deliver that you're on to a possible winner."

Meehan will, of course, be handing the crown over to that winner and, truth be told, she's a little reluctant. "It's weird, to tell you the truth," she says, and her eyes genuinely water. "When people ask me about it, I feel a bit sad. But then again, I've had a great year and I'm really looking forward to performing for that audience in the Olympia again. I have a huge number planned, complete with a big troupe of singers and dancers, so people should prepare to have their socks knocked off. I can't wait!"

Alternative Miss Ireland 2007 is at the Olympia on Sunday, March 11 at 8pm, tickets from www.ticketmaster.ie or minus booking free from the Olympia Box Office at 0818 719 330. For more information, visit www.alternativemissireland.com

WORKINGG

For the past 20 years, folk-rock lesbian duo The Indigo Girls have been mixing a critically acclaimed career with grassroots political campaigning, a contradiction in terms in a music industry that tends to like its product issue-free. On the eve of the Irish leg of their current tour, one half of the duo, Amy Ray, speaks to **Brian Finnegan** about the secret of their longevity.

Ever since Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, collectively known as The Indigo Girls, burst forth on the world in 1987 with their album *Strange Fire*, they've been a rare presence. In the intervening decades they've juggled songwriting, extensive touring and solo careers and an indie label with a brand of radical activism that would normally be the kiss of death in the music industry.

But then again, the Indigo Girls' outspoken political sensibilities appeal to a core audience that just keeps on growing. Both Ray and Saliers are lesbian and from the outset they have courted a devoted following of similarly inclined sisters. They may be a generation or two beyond today's younger lesbians, but there isn't a baby dyke on the block who doesn't know who the Indigo Girls are. And because Ray and Saliers keep on delivering the goods, they keep gaining new fans.

The two got to know each other as children at elementary school in Georgia and started performing together as The B-Band when they went to high school. They subsequently split up to go to college, but homesickness got the better of both and they returned to Georgia to form the Indigo Girls.

The rest, as they say, is herstory. The success of *Strange Fire* led to a major contract with Epic Records and a second album, *Indigo Girls*. The first single from that album, Closer To Fine made them a household name and it won a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Recording in 1990.

Since then they've released nine critically acclaimed albums of original material, one live album and one greatest hits compilation, and had a raft of hit singles. They have also championed gay rights, the rights of Native Americans, environmental conservation and the abolition of the death penalty in certain US states. Last year they featured on P!nk's album, *I'm Not Dead* in the song, Dear Mr. President, a pop-political statement to George W Bush about poverty, queer rights and the right to education for all children.

P!nk returned the favour and appears on the Girls' latest album, *Despite Our Differences*, which goes back to Indigo basics, interspersing folk ballads with all-out rock 'n' roll, with a keen political and personal edge.

The duo are coming to Ireland this month to perform tracks from the new release along with some of their classic tunes, and Amy Ray, for one, is looking forward to it. Down the line from her home in Georgia, she's a little quieter than you might expect at first, taking her time to get into the swing of the interview. But after a while she finds her own comfortable ground and starts sharing like we're old buddies.

So, you're coming to Dublin with your new tour. Do you like playing here?

We've played in Dublin quite a few times over the years and we always have a good time. The audiences are great and we like hanging out and catching up with friends we have there. It's just a really warm place to be.

You've been friends and performing partners since 1980. What's the secret of your longevity?

I think a lot of it comes from the fact that we write our songs separately and then come together to arrange them. This gives us that creative space so that we always feel we have a way to express ourselves artistically as individuals.

If we have differences of opinion or if we have anything that we feel might interfere with that, we always remember that it's really precious and it's what we want to be doing, and to protect it.

Do you ever have any political disagreements?

Not major ones. Usually it's about things like lifestyle choices - the difference between being vegetarian or not.

As far as the big political things go, though, we work together as activists on certain issues and we feel very similar to each other on those things.

Is your activism as important to you personally as your music is?

I think I would be an activist no matter what I was doing, so it's definitely as important. But it's also important for us to keep our activism in its proper place.

I mean we don't spend the whole show talking about politics. Sometimes we do benefits for certain causes and that's what we're there for and that's what we talk about. But other times it's just about the music. The activism might be implied in the lyrics of the songs, but it's important to have a space to celebrate and play too.

Do you think it's the duty of celebrities to speak out if they have political opinions?

I don't. As a human being it is important to interact with your community and engage and give back, to be involved. But I don't think there's a special pressure on people who are in the limelight to do something big. I don't value one artist above another just because they are politically outspoken.

Emily and I have always been activists and we met some people very early on who helped us create a few situations that have carried on for a long time. We've been lucky because we get a lot out of it.



"I think there are moments in our career when we would have done better if we hadn't been so gay, or so political."

GIRLS



When the Dixie Chicks spoke out against George W Bush, their career was damaged. Do you think this put pressure on other artists in America to keep quiet about their political convictions?

I think in certain areas of music, yes. The Dixie Chicks existed in this very pop-country radio arena and I definitely think that other people who work in that area got scared and decided to back off.

People who owned labels or were managers were saying, 'Oh, we've got to be careful', but I think other groups, who weren't scared about the ramifications for their careers, might have been encouraged to speak out more.

The Dixie Chicks were very inspiring. For the radio to go as far as it went, pulling the song and inspiring this kind of witch hunt was absurd to me. What happened and what it meant inspired righteous indignation in a lot of people.

You worked with Pink on her recent album. What was that experience like?

Amazing. She's a great person and we were totally flattered when she asked us to do it. She's a great artist and a really cool person. We had such a good time that we asked her to come sing on our record.

She's one of the very few pop stars who actually try to make political points on their records. She really addresses society, and I love that.

What's your opinion of George W Bush's State of the Union Address?

[Laughs] We were playing a show when he was delivering it, so I only saw highlights. I feel like he's just walking this line, wanting to have some kind of legacy. So he's feeling out what he should do domestically that might satisfy some people.

But it's kind of a joke. It's very empty. He had a few guests there that he pointed out, like, here's this guy who saved somebody's life on the subway. Every president does this, gets people from the real community, but it felt with Bush like it was kind of a parody and that he was just trying to do what someone told him to do.

I think that they're delusional about Iraq. I used to always want to listen when he spoke about Iraq, to see what's going on. But I can't even listen anymore. It's so absurd and I think he's actually gone crazy.

Are you a supporter of Hillary Clinton for the Presidency?

I don't know. I like Hillary Clinton a lot, but I'm sort of a Barack Obama fan. So I vacillate between those two. The dream ticket would be both of them, with Obama as Vice-President.

This is definitely one election where I want to see a debate. I want to hear what the different candidates have to say before I make any decision. I love Hillary Clinton, but I don't know what her agenda is from a Presidential point of view. Neither she nor Obama have made any specific references to policy yet.

Do you think that the Indigo Girls have been discriminated against in the music industry because of your gender or your overt sexual orientation?

It's not anything that we let hold us back, but the media and radio are extremely homophobic and sexist still, and they're anti-political too. So we sort have everything going against us!

I think there are moments in our career when we would have done better if we hadn't been so gay, or so political, but it's hard to quantify. I definitely have felt it, but it's not something we let get us down. There are enough people who don't feel that way.

I read that you prefer the term 'gay' to 'lesbian'. Is that true?

I prefer the term 'queer' actually, because it's more encompassing. But I don't have a negative feeling about the term 'lesbian'. A lot of people do though. It's like this thing where there's a kind of backlash against saying 'lesbian'. It seems to have all these negative connotations, for some reason I don't get.

You also describe yourself as butch. What do you think of these labels we give ourselves?

I am butch! Labels are important sometimes and not important at other times. I just don't think people should be boxed in by them. I think we all to learn how to articulate gender and sexuality and our different stands on those things - what our identity is. When the world won't let you have an identity, you start articulating it more specifically. Those terms can be useful, but they're only dangerous when you can't be anything other than that.

I don't believe you should label other people, but it's perfectly okay to label yourself, if you feel comfortable with that.

What's your personal stance on gay marriage versus civil union or partnership?

I think people who want to get married should be able to get married. Civil unions are a halfway point, but marriage is something to work towards.

I don't think we should spend all our resources fighting for gay marriage, though. There are such high suicide rates in the queer youth community, there's such a lot of public health issues to be looked at, socio-economic issues, racism within the queer community... I don't want marriage to be the only thing we talk about.

For me, marriage is an institution that's tainted in so many ways, so sometimes I'm like, who cares about gay marriage? Let's create our own way of doing this after getting the legal protections set up.

Are you aware of Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan, the lesbian couple who are bringing an appeal to the Irish Supreme Court to have their Canadian marriage recognised here?

Yes I am. I think they are pioneers and they are paving the way for other people to have rights. I really applaud a couple that are willing to go through that. It's pretty hard to stay together in the middle of all that controversy and to keep on fighting.

Have you ever considered having children?

Carrie (Schrader) and I have been together a long time, and we plan to have kids. She's a film producer and she's really busy, so we plan to have them in about three years.

Who do you think is making the most interesting music right now?

There are so many great people, and when it gets into world music, it's just mind-blowing. I listen to everything from hip-hop to folk, to spoken word. Some of the most interesting music I get is on demo tapes that people send to me, that they made in their garage.

Who is the most recent signing to your own label, Daemon Records?

The most recent thing was a box set from a man called Utah Phillips, who is an anarchist, hobo folk singer. He's quite a bit older so he has a history. We put together a box set of his stories and songs.

It's a very small label and we do left-of-centre stuff.

Your last solo project was the album *Prom* in 2004. Are you working on more solo stuff?

I actually released a live record last month. It's out digitally on a site called emusic. It's called *Amy Ray and the Volunteers: Live in Knoxville*.

Are the Indigo Girls going back in the studio soon?

We're touring with the new record at the moment, so it will be a while before we go back into the studio. But we definitely plan to.

The Indigo Girls play the Ambassador in Dublin on February 25. Tickets at www.ticketmaster.ie

STATE OF THE UNION

In the year-and-a-half since EU enlargement, several of the countries that became new members have actively discriminated against gay people, despite agreeing to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects our rights. With two more countries just joined, **Jeanette Rehnstrom** talks to gay MEP Michael Cashman about efforts to ensure the safety of our rights as the EU expands.

The EU is an odd beast to most of us. It seems an eclectic mix of people, countries, cultures, values and ideas that have little in common. Nevertheless, it is meant to strive towards common goals, and we are meant to come to agree upon, or streamline, the manner in which we all deal with most everything in our lives, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) issues.

Many of the original EU countries are still far from up to speed with regard to LGBT rights. In 2004, the EU slowly began to integrate 12 new countries into its fold, whereas it disallowed other countries, for example, Turkey, because of the failure to address basic human rights. This year we have witnessed the appalling manner in which a few of the recently added EU countries, such as Poland and Latvia, have dealt with the burgeoning Pride festivals that have claimed their rightful place in these open-minded and human rights-conscious countries. This begs a lot of questions.

Michael Cashman, who played *EastEnders'* first gay character in the 1980s, is today a Member of European Parliament (MEP), and more importantly President of the European Parliament's Intergroup for Gay and Lesbian Rights. So, what is Intergroup doing to influence the safety of LGBT rights as the EU continues to expand?

Could you tell us about the Intergroup for Gay and Lesbian Rights, how it came about, who's involved, and how it functions?

The Intergroup came about approximately 10 years ago with the work of the then Labour member of EU parliament, Christine Crawley. The group was looking at issues that could come to effect LGBT people. When I was elected in 1999, we reformed the Intergroup along with a Dutch woman of the Socialist Group called *Joke Swiebel*. Because of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), Article 13, the EU got the right to deal with issues of rights based on sexual orientation. Prior to that it did not have a legal basis, although it could produce recommendations, resolutions and motions. But the final say so came down to the council members of each state to decide upon whether or not any action was considered relevant.

Article 13 led on to a law being implemented which prohibited discrimination in the workplace and in vocational training. The Intergroup is like the eyes and ears, operating across the EU, to ensure that what the member states agreed to is being done, and that they are abiding by treaty

obligations of human rights in that they have to treat all people, including LGBT people, equally.

As such, the Intergroup functions as a watchdog, and when there is something that is not being done properly, or where there is a failure to abide by their obligations under the law or under the treaties, then we act.

Equally we act with regard to countries outside of the EU, as in 1999, when Egypt suddenly arrested 52 gay men at a disco on a boat on the Nile. This situation added to the momentum for the reformation of the Intergroup, and we were offered support for our campaign from both non-parliamentarians such as Elton John and Jean-Michel Jarre, as well as from parliamentarians across the political spectrum.

This is the strength of the organisation: it is not the remit or the work of one political party, it represents nearly all the political parties in the EU parliament (bar right-wing groups), and its strength is that it is encouraging all the political groups to get involved in this issue and to make certain that the Commission takes action against member states that are failing to meet their obligations.

Is it still the case that the only areas in EU legislation that specifically cover LGBT rights are the areas of employment and vocational training?

Yes. We have demanded, and have been promised, another directive prohibiting discrimination in all other areas, including goods and services, and the Commission has said that it will propose this. However, the negative aspect of Article 13 is that decisions have to be agreed by every single member state. And I do not think that we will see either Poland or Malta (both strongly influenced by the Vatican), putting their hands up and saying that 'yes, we vote in favour.'

Nonetheless we are pushing for this. We are also arguing for the addressing of same-sex partnerships, such as mine, which is recognised and registered in the UK, and the freedom of movement, freedom of association, which



would carry with them the same rights in all the member states.

That right is not there, and there needs to be a change. These changes can come through the work that we do, but equally by all countries putting pressures on their national governments. I managed in the Border Code, a piece of law that I wrote for the Parliament, which dealt with the entry conditions of the entry into and out of the so-called Schengen countries (the countries that have no internal borders between them), to introduce the notion of non-discrimination on the grounds of Article 13. That was the first time that that principle has been enacted in a law which is not to do with non-discrimination. So the principle is there to be exported into other legislative areas.

We can always hark back to the European Convention on Human Rights, because every single member state has to be a signatory of the convention as one of the pre-conditions for joining the EU.

So is this not a bit of a contradiction, in that the member states have to comply with the Convention on Human Rights to enter, but then some actually do not comply once they have become members?

It is not a contradiction because the Commission will say to us that this falls under a member state's competence. So let's say that there is discrimination in a member state on the grounds of housing, or in the treatment of a lesbian or gay family; what we can do is expel their voting rights, put sanctions upon them, make them pay huge daily fines, or expel them from the EU. Indeed

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when Austria elected the far right Freedom Party, based on what the party had promoted during the election campaign, the EU moved to remind them of their obligations under the treaties and under the Convention on Human Rights, and also reminded them that persistent breaches would result in them being ejected from the union.

Thus, I do not see this as a contradiction, but it is something that the council of ministers needs to take more action on. The council of ministers, for those who don't know, are the government ministers of the 27 member states who come together to meet and discuss the issues which are germane to them. So there are mechanisms for action on persistent breaches of human rights, they are there in the treaty, and this is what we are pushing on in relation to countries like Poland where we are seeing persistent breaches of LGBT people's rights.

Which of the new EU countries have been persistent in breaking the laws?

Latvia has given us some worries recently, but also Poland, where there have been concerns about the rise of populism, use of hate-speak and the defamation of minority groups, not only of LGBT people.

There is a general concern, but if you look at it historically, any government that takes its country into the EU invariably suffers in the next election. I think that the initial government is under the impression that this is the solution to all the problems in the world, and of course it is not, it is an evolutionary process, an organic process.

However, I must say that the rise of the right wing is causing me concern and this is where the Council of Ministers has to act. It can't just be the Commission, it can't be the parliament because otherwise you will have these member states sitting together, these governments negotiating and ignoring the appalling right wing populism in these other countries. If people say it is happening in Latvia, it is happening in Poland, but that has nothing to do with us, then we get back to the conditions that started World War II. What is happening in another country absolutely has to do with us, and is of concern to us. We are a union based on common principles and common values.

What do you think about Turkey's situation in trying to get into the EU?

I think that Turkey is light years ahead of Romania and Bulgaria. It makes no sense that the latter two have joined the EU while more obstacles are being put in Turkey's way. It has more to do with the fact that Turkey is perceived as a Muslim country, and of course it is not. It is a secular country. LGBT rights are there in Turkey, but it seems a bit difficult to enforce them. There are changes that need to come through, and I have argued with Turkish ministers for them. I think that it would be a jointly beneficial situation for Turkey to join the EU.

It can be argued that the EU countries that have been very strong and well developed in regards to LGBT rights will be weakened by the entry of countries that are lacking in these areas. Do you think that this could be the case?



“It makes no sense that Romania and Bulgaria have joined the EU, while more obstacles are being put in Turkey's way.”

I think that those countries that are strong should serve as an example. I have a very close relationship with the British Prime Minister because I am on the National Executive and have known him since 1987, and when I've talked to him he has said, 'Listen, I just turn around to the President or Prime Minister of Poland and say: What are you worried about? We've changed our country and the sky has not fallen in and the ocean has not swallowed us up. We're still there'.

So we serve as a brilliant example. But you know up until 1997 the British record was appalling, and we were behind Ireland. I remember Máire Geoghegan-Quinn made a brilliant speech on equality, and when decriminalisation was introduced into Ireland, the laws were in advance of old Imperial Britain, which had imposed them on Ireland in the first place.

To me the politicians who turn around to me saying that 'the public is not ready', are in the wrong. I mean that is why we get elected. Politics are about doing things that may not be popular but are right for the future. If you are going to follow public opinion you might as well get a dog on a lead.

Our rights won't be diluted as long as people elect strong parliamentarians, and not look upon the EU as a retirement shed for national politicians. This is not the last resort for people that can't get elected elsewhere. You need strong politicians with the courage to be unpopular with their own governments and their own electorate in order to defend rights and ensure that a Europe, which was created out of the ashes of the Second World War, will never allow another country, people or individual to be scapegoated, and for us to stand back to say, 'This has nothing to do with me'.

That is why we are together. What happens to another individual in the EU is as important as if it was happening to you personally.

Michael Cashman or the Intergroup can be emailed at: mcashman@europarl.eu.int, or visit www.gayandlesbianrightsintergroup.com or www.michaelcashmanmep.org.uk



DEBORAH BALLARD

COLUMN

L'Alliance Pour La Planète, a group of French environmental organisations, recently called for people across the western world to turn off all their electrical equipment for five minutes from 18.55 on the evening of February 1. The action was timed to coincide with the publication in Paris of the new UN report on global climate change - as the Alliance said, it didn't take long, cost nothing and showed politicians and the media how many people care about the environment with a measurable dip in national energy consumption.

It is magical to think of everyone turning off the lights, the world going dark, people finding their way home by moonlight (it was full moon, luckily) and every TV and radio in

“We all have to take responsibility for reducing our own consumption of oil and electricity, there's not much hope for the world if it has to rely on the best efforts of individuals.”

the land silent. And it would be possible for five minutes, except for those on life-support machines, but you might well jib at doing it for longer.

It seems that the world and her wife are suddenly more aware that we have to do something if global warming is not to spiral out of control, but have not yet been able to imagine living without oil and electricity.

How can we? Within living memory people rode to work on their bikes and you only heated one room in the house, and no one had a fridge, but now we live miles from our workplaces and the nearest shop; it is not a matter of personal choice but the way our whole way of life is structured that makes reducing our carbon footprint almost impossible. Sure, we can stop flying to Thailand, but how are you supposed to get to work? We have recently become a two-car couple - it was the only way we could both have jobs. There is no public transport where I live; the nearest train station is over 20km away, the nearest bus 25km, and it's 40km to the nearest cinema.


It wasn't always like that; a disused railway track runs two fields away from our house, there was once a cinema and a wide range of shops three miles away, and a little shop for essentials round the corner. Things weren't so different in the towns and cities, either. And it wasn't the people's choice which swept these things away but economic forces and government policy. And although it is true that we all have to take responsibility for reducing our own consumption of oil and electricity, there's not much hope for the world if it has to

rely on even the best efforts of individuals.

It's not just public vs private transport - look at refuse disposal. City councils are at last starting to collect recyclable stuff as well as landfill waste, but things are very different in the boonies. For us it means bringing your bin-bags down to the crossroads and hoping the bin men collect them before the foxes and dogs rip into them. Recycling we have to do ourselves - by car. Glass and cans can be dropped off at our nearest town, but not newspapers, as the local gurrriers set fire to the skip once too often. So we take them to another town, although we often find that the skip is full, so we have to take them home again.

Plastic bottles and bags can be recycled at the county landfill site, but not Tetrapaks. These can be recycled at another depot - which won't take plastic bags. Both are at the other end of the county. It is with real pleasure that I Name and Shame Carlow County Council for making it so hard to recycle that it's small wonder that half my neighbours burn or bury it.

Meanwhile our well runs dry because the water table has sunk, yet the Tolka valley is flooded because house-building is reducing the capacity of the land to absorb run-off. Something has to give, or we'll be boiling rainwater and it'll be goodbye to half Dublin and most of Cork. But no doubt we'll be told to wash less often and the flood victims will be blamed for concreting over their front gardens to park their cars. Of course we all have to reconsider our profligate lifestyles, but the lack of leadership and long-term planning by this government is breathtaking.

Maybe it's too late to 'save the planet', and maybe it's outrageously arrogant of us to think we can. After all, the earth has seen catastrophic climate change and mass extinction often enough before. We might not like the idea of cockroaches inheriting the earth, but what's so special about us? For all we know, cockroaches might evolve into angelic beings who would at least not build malls or replace their kitchens every five years. But it would be nice to think that we could learn to live more modestly and mindfully and with more concern for others who are suffering more than us from climate change. 

FREEDOM WRITERS ▼▼▼

Dir: Richard LaGravenese, Opens March 2

With her Marge Simpson pearls, toothy grin, and unshakeable belief in the essential decency of human nature, Hilary Swank cuts a decidedly anachronistic figure in *Freedom Writers*, Richard LaGravenese's fact-based inspirational-

teacher drama. Set in the mid-'90s, the film takes place in the sort of crime-ravaged Southern California war zones immortalised in NWA's music and movies like *Menace II Society*. But Swank animates her dogged positivity with an old-school combination of indefatigable '50s optimism and '60s civil-rights activism.

Playing yet another iron-willed true believer, Swank stars as an idealist who takes a job at a tough inner-city school where apathy and cynicism reign, and withering contempt for humanity is a widespread occupational hazard. Swank's Pollyanna pluck initially just earns her insolent glares from burnt-out teachers and students alike, but her persistence eventually wins her the loyalty and affection of shell-shocked

pupils unaccustomed to teachers driven by an almost messianic sense of purpose.

Swank ignites her pupils' imagination by getting them to write about their lives in cathartic personal journals, and by drawing parallels between their dangerous adolescences and the harrowing travails of Anne Frank. Patrick Dempsey co-stars in the thankless role of Swank's long-suffering husband, who pops up at regular intervals to complain that Swank's job is swallowing her life and their marriage.

Like its do-gooder protagonist, *Freedom Writers* doesn't have a hip or knowing bone in its body. It's so doggedly square that even the faintest hint of irony or sarcasm would probably shatter it, especially once it dives headfirst into the heavy emotional terrain of the Holocaust. Yet thanks to LaGravenese's empathetic writing and direction, and Swank's titanic force of will, the film's unabashed earnestness proves unexpectedly powerful. Its heart-on-its-sleeve humanism batters down viewers' defences just as diligently as Swank wears down her students'.

Though *Freedom Writers* seldom strays from the 'inspirational teachers' formula, there's something strangely moving about Swank's conviction that, in spite of everything, people are really good at heart.

Alan Corey

desperate need to connect with Whittaker, maybe to atone for a lifetime of mistreating women, and maybe because he's anxious to mistreat one more. He's a rogue to the end, but a regretful one.

When he tells Whittaker that the naked female form is the most beautiful thing most men will ever see, while for women it's the face of their first child, the sigh he lets out hints that he wishes, for the sake of his legacy, it had been the other way around.

Mary Considine

FAST FOOD NATION ▼▼

Dir: Richard Linklater, Opens March 23

There's a problem at Mickey's, America's most popular fast food chain. It has come to the attention of corporate management that the number one selling burger, The Big One, is being made with contaminated meat. Marketing VP Don Henderson (Greg Kinnear) is assigned the task of getting to the bottom of this potentially disastrous problem, but isn't prepared when he finds out that customers favour convenience over understanding what they are being fed in *Fast Food Nation*.

Turning Eric Schlosser's non-fiction exposé into an Altmanesque tableau, Richard Linklater grafts the book's concerns onto an ensemble cast of fast-food casualties: Greg Kinnear's compromised flack, Ashley Johnson's counter drone and Catalina Sandino Moreno's migrant worker among them. The results make you want to read *Fast Food Nation*, but they don't add to it: The one-from-every-column scheme largely obliterates the gain in giving statistics human faces, and the movie's drab, functional look doesn't add any pep to its pitches.

Still, a few standout scenes involving Johnson's teenage wage-slave lift the movie above its oppressive schematics, namely a tete-à-tete with her bohemian uncle (Ethan Hawke), who schools her in the advantages and trade-offs of the uncompromised life. Without forcing the character's awakening, the movie credibly creates a young woman just starting to understand the heavy and inspirational truth that her smallest actions have consequences, and figuring out a way to incorporate that knowledge into her daily life. In other words, it's a blueprint for social change on a micro level, which itself qualifies the movie as mildly revolutionary.

Beware, though, that Linklater takes his camera not just through the meatpacking process but also to the slaughterhouse. This latter part is hard to watch and will turn you off from hamburgers for life.

Alan Corey

SLEEPING DOGS LIE ▼▼

Dir: Bobcat Goldthwait, Opens Feb 23

In rough, loose digital camerawork usually reserved for film school shorts, Amy (Melinda Page Hamilton) - the nun from *Desperate Housewives* stares lovingly at her dog as he rolls around on the floor. Then, without much warning, she proceeds to tie her hair back and perform oral sex on the dog. An act usually saved for the apogee of a John Waters film, this bit of sexual daring serves more as a touchstone in *Sleeping Dogs Lie*.



Responding to suicide in Ireland: the LGBT dimension

The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and BeLonG To Youth Project wish to invite tenders for a research project, *Identifying and Providing Responses to the Issue of Suicide among the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Population, with Special Emphasis on Young People*. The budget for the project is €35,000 - €45,000.

The closing date for submission of tenders is Tuesday 13th March at 5:00pm and short-listed candidates will be interviewed on Friday 23rd March. It is expected that the final research report will be submitted by the end of November 2007.

Full project details, including tender guidelines, can be found on the GLEN website at www.glen.ie. For further information please contact Odhrán Allen, Director of Mental Health Strategy at GLEN on 01-473 2607 or odhranallen@glen.ie



VENUS ▼▼▼

Dir: Roger Michell, Opens March 2

The age of the British theatre and movie star that began with Laurence Olivier, and continued through Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole and onward, is fast concluding, and while a lot of *Venus* is dedicated to isn't-it-funny-when-the-elderly-swear? shenanigans and why-don't-these-young-folks-respect-their-history? moralising, it's hard to deny director Roger Michell and screenwriter Hanif Kureishi's central point, that the vitality of a whole culture is draining away one funeral at a time. And no one under 25 seems to care.

Realistically, Peter O'Toole is unlikely to make many more films, so *Venus* is pitched partly as a fond farewell to a beloved artist and his whole beautiful generation. Vanessa Redgrave shows up, playing O'Toole's long-neglected ex-wife, and veteran British actors Leslie Phillips and Richard Griffiths join him at the pub every day, to scan the obituaries for fallen friends and speculate over whether they'll get more column inches when they go.

To drive the point home, *Venus* gives O'Toole the crass 17-year-old Jodie Whittaker to ogle and instruct, though she's mainly interested in leveraging his lust into jewellery and dresses. The movie is both cutesy and tough, getting too-easy laughs from O'Toole's erudite lechery, then pushing in close to show that his attraction to Whittaker is no joke, and her callousness no act.

Even as the film ambles toward a somewhat predictable conclusion, it lingers on O'Toole's

Amy goes several years without talking or even acknowledging the act she performed on her dog. One night her fiancée, John admits a small sexual indiscretion in the hopes of practicing full honesty in their relationship. However, when Amy admits *her* indiscretion to John and her junkie brother, who is listening in, the result is not the welcoming forgiveness she was hoping for. Instead, it comes out to her parents and their perfect perception of her gets warped, along with John's perception.

Instead of the comedic tag-line of *Sleeping Dogs Lie*, director Bobcat Goldthwait orchestrates what equates to a low-budget attack on what we perceive to be 'normal'. Does it matter if someone did something extremely perverse in a moment of daring? This is a serious film about serious things, using its lighthearted setup to explore extremes of emotion, closer in spirit to a French comedy of manners than the gross-out flick its plot description might lead you to expect. Think Eric Rohmer with dog-blowing.

But Goldthwait only gets halfway there. He can't pull off the delicate tonal balance his inspired conceptual gambit requires. He can't really pull off much else, either. Aside from Hamilton's touchingly conflicted lead performance, the cast is hopelessly stiff, and the dialogue written in unseemly broad strokes.

Indeed, another reason why audiences might get stuck thinking of *Sleeping Dogs Lie* as a zany comedy is because it's quite simply not confident or subtle enough to work as anything else.

Mary Considine

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

The specially chosen gay strand of films at this year's Belfast Film Festival revisits classics and introduces exciting new movies that explore both the darker and lighter sides of being queer.

The Belfast Film Festival's same-sex strand is a queer mix of movies, both old and new, that focus on very diverse aspects of gay life. The roster of films on show have a strong activist feel, but manage, somehow, to be light-hearted explorations of the human condition at the same time. *Itty Bitty Titty Committee* is a case in point. It's a romantic comedy set in a radical feminist political art group.

Dumped by her girlfriend, rejected from the only college to which she applied, Anna falls in with Sadie, the sexy leader of a punk-feminist group called the CIA (Clits in Action), who seek to rid the world of phalloscentric and misogynist imagery. Things start to go sour when Anna finds out there's more to Sadie than meets the eye, and the CIA



Director of *Paris Is Burning* Jennie Livingston's latest short film, *Who's The Top?*, is presented in the same screening and uses two dozen Broadway dancers to tell the tale of Gwen and her distracted girlfriend, Alixe. Another classic from the cusp of the

discovers that all of their radical acts are quickly being undone. Babbit, who directed the 'ex-gay' comedy, *But I'm a Cheerleader* and has also helmed episodes of *Ugly Betty* and *The L Word*, pulls together an all-female cast in this nicely observed film, including Guinevere Turner (*Go Fish*) Daniela Sea (*Shortbus*). Turner also turns up as director and star of the accompanying short comedy, *Hung* (pictured), in which five members of a lesbian clique decide to wear penises for a day.

The legendary 1990 drag movie, *Paris Is Burning* gets a rare and welcome screening at the Festival. Lauded as the movie that taught Madonna how to 'vogue', it's a tribute to the New York drag subculture that took root as AIDS ravaged the city's gay community in the '80s. Inviting us behind the scenes at the city's secret 'drag balls' of the late '80s, the film presents an intoxicating high-camp world where contestants from rival 'houses' gather to compete in makeshift dress-up contests.

'80s and '90s, Marlon Riggs' award-winning *Tongues Untied* uses poetry, personal testimony, rap and performance to describe the homophobia and racism that confront black gay men. The film Riggs presents the rich flavour of the black gay male experience, from protest marches and smokey bars to the language of the 'snap diva'.

French documentary, *Beyond Hatred* follows a gay-bash murder victim's family through the ensuing court case. The details of the crime are presented, but the real focus of the film is its aftermath and the family's efforts to find a way of coping with the loss of their beloved son and brother. Director Olivier Meyrou gives us rare intimate insights into their heart-ache, their need to understand and their desire to forgive.

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ITTY BITTY TITTY COMMITTEE plus HUNG
Queen's Film Theatre, 9pm

MONDAY 26 MARCH

TONGUES UNTIED and K
Studio Cinema, 9pm

WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH

BEYOND HATRED
Studio Cinema, 8.30pm

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THE CHOICE CUT

MIKA ▼▼▼
Life In Cartoon Motion/Island

Like the very best pop artists, Mika is a phantasmagorical blend of the best of everything that's gone before him, capped off with something irresistibly shiny and new. This catch-all sensibility, along with his tendency to soar into falsetto vocal ranges, will invite routine comparisons to Jake Shears and the Scissor Sisters. And the comparison is fair. Like Shears and co, Mika enthusiastically imitates a cornucopia of classic pop riffs, from the stadium camp of Queen and Freddie Mercury to the folksy joy of the Mamas and the Papas; from the skipping beats of Malcolm McClaren's Double Dutch to the careless whimsy of Wham!; from the cartoon capers of the Beatles circa Yellow Submarine to the subversive sequins of Marc Bolan and T Rex.

And he does it all with a kind of effortless ebullience that suggests this boy danced himself right out of the womb and will be dancing his way into the hearts and minds of the entire globe for some time to come.

His debut, *Life in Cartoon Motion*, kicks off with the celebratory ode to identity crisis that is the current number one download, Grace Kelly, and from its tap-dancing opening beats on, the album hardly ever lets up. The exuberant Lollipop skips rope like a candy-striped girl on a sundrenched corner before the album's first ballad and weakest song appears, the bland (in comparison to everything else that's going on here), My Interpretation. Never mind, this song's MOR '80s mood is absolutely cancelled out by another '80s nod on the Whammed-up Love Today, a piece of blistering, high-camp electro pop that hardwires itself to the brain with a helium-pitched vocal, recalling Jimmy Somerville's heyday with The Communards.

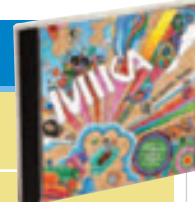


Relax, Take it

Easy reinterprets Cutting Crew's I Just Died in Your Arms Tonight, bringing the action to the dancefloor in fine style, while the album's centrepiece, Any Other World is pure theatre in large Lloyd Webber torch-song portions, veering just the right side of sentimentality. The Beatlesque Billy Brown tells the story of a married man coming out of the closet, its tongue-in-cheek lullaby delivery almost covering up the fact that this is Mika's 'serious moment'. Big Girl (You are Beautiful) is Queen's Fat Bottomed Girls through a horned-up Shears lens, while the piano-riff that once opened the Scissor Sisters' Laura is redefined to create arguably the best pop song since, uhm, Laura, on Stuck in the Middle.

The gospel bravura of Happy Ending is followed up by a secret track that takes the mood sublimely down, with Mika singing like a castrato about drunken abandonment against tinkling piano, and then the whole kit and kaboodle is wrapped up with a blinder on the storming Ring Ring. Mika is a fresh, bold new presence, ready to push the boundaries of British pop beyond the fodder we've come to expect from the *X Factor* production line. A saviour has arrived.

Shane McNamara



Still, in a world where female singer songwriters tend to wimp out with vague, verbose introspection, Leanne Harte is a welcome addition. She rocks, goddammit!

Mary Considine

NORAH JONES ▼▼▼
Not Too Late

For her third solo album, Norah Jones has firmly found some footing on the songwriting side, and in doing so gets to air her feelings on political issues at the forefront of everyone's mind in the USA right now. But is *Not Too Late* a departure for a woman who sweetly released *Come Away With Me*, only to find her music playing in supermarkets across the globe?

The album's opening number, the soothing Wish I Could, has Jones in the old-style Texas country ballad idiom, singing about a soldier departing for Iraq. Its gentle feel is, however, not maintained throughout the album. Following track Sinkin' Soon has a dirty cabaret feel in the style of Tom Waits - a longtime favourite of Jones. A far more textured affair, this track bumps and grinds with real dynamism at times, yet never quite loses that lounge jazz feel. The Sun Doesn't Like You provides the first real singalong moment of the album, with the infectious chorus "Time won't pass us by and I won't tell you lies", sitting beautifully on top of swiftly-plucked acoustic guitar rhythms.

My Dear Country is Norah's first angry moment on an album ever, although that endlessly sweet voice tends to catch you out. Is she really calling George Bush "the one we hate" here? Yes, folks, she is. But she's pulling it off like butter

wouldn't melt in her mouth.

The closing moments of the album are simple and expertly delivered. A chorus of "It's not too late for love", would seem tacky to some, but somehow Jones manages to legitimise every innocent turn of phrase that comes from her mouth. This collection of quaint, feel-good numbers is not going to set the world alight, but like the best Jones fare, it's like wrapping yourself up in a warm, comforting blanket.

Mary Considine



LADY SOVEREIGN ▼▼▼
Public Warning/Def Jam

Like most garage artists, Lady Sovereign sticks to the original blueprint: conversational flow-style of rap meshed with the tempo and energy of dancehall, plus a serious but entertaining edge (hence comparisons to early Eminem). Add the electronic pulse-pounding house beat, courtesy of the likes of Basement Jaxx, and you've got a new reigning queen of British hip hop.

With an avalanche of deft, cheeky wordplay and delightfully free of the usual hip-hop clichés, Lady SOV spews rhymes like a confetti cannon. Her motor-mouthed delivery always serves the song, though, and that's what these are: actual songs with structures, instead of a series of four-minute streams of ego stroking.

That's not to say Lady Sovereign has no ego. She wouldn't be a rapper if she didn't. But she also has a sense of humour, and she's not shy about saying what she thinks. She slags off popular US rap songs on Random and disses girls with fake tans on Tango.

Public Warning also benefits from accompaniment by producer Medasyn, who mixes slashing electronic beats, dissonant piano tinklings and bleating synthesizers into catchy backing tracks that fit with Lady Sovereign's full-speed-ahead delivery.

Love me or hate me, it's still an obsession," the Lady cracks on Love Me or Hate Me. What's not to love?

Alan Corey



LEANNE HARTE
Leanne Harte/Red

The opening track of new Irish arrival Leanne Harte's eponymously titled debut is a song about elusiveness, but

there is nothing elusive about its execution. Recalling the heady days of punk-lite Martha and the Muffins, Harte rocks out against a heavy drum beat and jangling electric guitar strings for all she's worth. It's a great introduction to what this woman is all about, but it's not a patch on second track, Something Else. Like a cross between Bjork and Sinéad O'Connor, Harte uses this, the best song on the album, to vocally inject a kind of infectious anger into the proceedings. The track's rock sensibility melds with vague Latin stylings and works wonderfully.

Hopeless Cases is a ballad that uses overblown, sweeping guitar riffs lifted straight out of a 1980s Brat Pack movie, while the following track, Maybe sees Harte imitating her big influence PJ Harvey on a pared-down acoustic piece of perfection.

Mr Fortune is a stomping stadium blast, followed by a classic slice of rock 'n' roll on Losing Touch. And so it goes until the final song, Can You Hear the Sound, the prerequisite acoustic ballad. It's all a bit Sheryl Crow meets Neil Young (Leanne plays the harmonica on this album, along with a host of other instruments), which jars a bit, considering the overall sound of the album.



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ROBBIE McDONALD ▼▼▼
A Mighty Quiet/Allure Records

While lyrically Robbie McDonald's debut solo album might be a quiet meditation on life, love and loss, performance-wise it comes on like a big Broadway show written by Burt Bacharach.

The opening strains of Skimming Stones are pure lounge-Burt, with its lone, lazy-Sunday-afternoon piano intro, but as soon as McDonald's melancholic voice kicks, in the song moves into



FEEL THE BeRn

Reluctant cowgirl and poetry slam enthusiast BeRn has returned to Ireland from the top of the San Franciscan hills with her own brand of frock therapy. **Nicola Depuis** talks to the singer/songwriter about her narrow escape from yuppie life, her tale of two oranges and her plans for Lesbian Camp this year.



"In three plastic bags, I carry you around," sings BeRn, referring to three strawberry and apple printed bags-for-life that her father gave to her before he died. BeRn is one of those rare songwriters who can capture the enormity of the universe within an everyday object. Raw and uplifting, her lyrics veer from the socio-political to the intimate, whilst avoiding self-indulgence and 'poor me' tendencies. In fact, when Dawn Richardson from the Four Non Blondes declared: "BeRn's not just another wimpy chick with a guitar", she wasn't wrong.

Likened vocally to both Linda Perry and Natalie Merchant, BeRn takes to the stage with a fiery presence and an appetite for destruction, hell-bent on crushing the female singer/songwriter stereotype with a cowgirl yelp on the song of the same name or a rousing chorus on camp favourite... lesbian camp that is... Top of The Hill. "When people hear of a woman with a guitar they conjure up... la la la, nice candles and some kind of 'lite music'," says BeRn. "I wanted to get away from all that shite." Hence the creation of 'Frock', a word coined by BeRn to describe her eloquent mix of punk angst, rock 'n' roll, feminism, ire, folk, laughter and Celtic spirit. It was through poetry that BeRn realised her capabilities as a songwriter and so it's no wonder that today she still holds true to this medium and is a regular favourite on the poetry slam circuit, having won Poetry Slams in both Clarinbridge and North Beach Nights in Galway as well as going on to become a finalist in the *Cúirt* Galway Arts Festival Poetry Slam last year.

Born in Drogheda, Co. Louth, Bern Dunleavy left the College of Marketing & Design in Dublin when she found herself 'on the fast track to becoming a yuppie' and, like all adventurous tearaways, headed straight for Amsterdam where she was floored by a Kerry girl in a chambermaid uniform whose first words to her - "Good

morning fellow sufferer" - laid the foundations for a partnership. The pair soon decided to further their travels, making their way to Taiwan.

"We arrived in Taiwan with two oranges and \$100 and left five months later with \$15,000," says BeRn. "At the time Taiwan was going through what Ireland is going through now and it was called the Asian tiger. Every day I'd make between \$300 to \$400 dollars and every night I'd buy myself a \$20 bottle of Châteauneuf du-Pap."

Having developed a fondness for red wine and women, BeRn eventually ended up in San Francisco where she opened for her idol Patti Smith at the historic Fillmore Lounge as well as for the Indigo Girls, Shane McGowan and They Might Be Giants. BeRn returned to Ireland in 2000 to record her second album *She is Me* at Roscommon's Lake Studios.

Currently teaching private guitar lessons in Cork as well as rehearsing with the new Linc choir and falling in love with David Bowie again, BeRn assures me that her next album will be ready before camp.

"I'm going for two weeks this year. Well I have to... I don't remember being in camp last year so I'm going to have to make up for it. I'm bringing a huge tent and a case of champagne and I'll be doing it in style."

With her romantic air of rock & roll debauchery, it's hard to believe that BeRn could do it any other way.

BeRn plays live in Mulligan's, Stoneybatter, Dublin on Sunday February 18 at 4pm followed by an open mic session, Thursday February 22 at 9pm and Sunday March 18 at 4pm, followed by an open mic session. She will also be playing at Loafers on Cork's Douglas Street on March 25 at 9pm. For more info on upcoming gigs and releases, log onto: www.getberned.com

different territory. The vocal builds and builds until you get to the heart of what this man is all about. Two words: 'torch' and 'song'.

It's a gamble that few male singers can pull off, but McDonald has the vocal range and pitch and he clearly feels every deep emotional pang of this album, a catalogue of a lonely, hermetic year after splitting up from his long-term boyfriend.

On Hello, McDonald's writing is as smoothly professional as the best of Billy Joel, while Blood in Ice Cream, subtly shifts from the piano-base to a rhythmic acoustic guitar arrangement with cello compliment, continuing the introspective theme of McDonald's quiet year.

The album's centrepiece, Comic Book Hero is a mini-masterpiece about the unrealistic expectations we pin on relationships. Such is the plaintive melodrama in McDonald's voice, the song actually affects on a cellular level. Similarly moving is One Time Tonight, a perfectly structured, lyrically pared number about the moments when we recognise the end of love.

The tempo shifts up a tiny bit on the loungey I'd Beg For More, but for the most part the pace here is the same throughout. This production mood-blanket is the only criticism to be levelled at what is one hell of a polished debut. The final song, If Heaven Has a Say, is about the actual moment McDonald and his boyfriend finally split. I defy you to listen to it without getting a lump in your throat.

Shane McNamara

PINKCLASSICS

THE ALBUMS NO QUEER COLLECTION SHOULD BE WITHOUT...

NO'24: ARMY OF LOVERS MASSIVE LUXURY OVERDOSE (1991)

Hailing from the home of ABBA, in the early 1990s nobody did gay quite like Army Of Lovers. Their high-camp image, overblown costumes and super-kitsch videos secured them a place in the hearts of a whole generation of queers across the globe.

Their second album *Massive Luxury Overdose* was a gay dancefloor stunner, particularly because of the technofied, choir-backed, controversial single Crucified. "I'm crucified/crucified like my saviour/saint-like behaviour/a lifetime I prayed," the chorus went, and gay boys went wild for its pumped up operatic bravura. Then came *Obsession*, a sublime synthesised ballad that showed exactly what lead man Alexander Bard could do with his voice and secured critical acclaim for the Army.

We Stand United, with the backing choir back in place, is a bouncy anthem that nods to the cheesy excess of Stock, Aiken and Waterman's best, while *Flying High* is another SAW-type number, something Kylie would have been proud to sing circa 1990.

Army of Lovers split in 1996, but reformed four years later and continue to tour across Europe. They've earned a widespread gay iconic status and are often referred to as a perfect example of the postmodern take on the ideals of camp. *Massive Luxury Overload* is a big, gorgeous gayfest. If you don't have it already, seek it out.



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THE 5 MINUTE GUIDE TO: VIENNA

It may be all about architecture and opera to some, but **Ryan O'Donnell** discovered a Euro-gay party central in Vienna.



When you think of Vienna, you probably conjure up images of grand architecture, high art, Freud, waltzing at lavish balls and the opera. You certainly don't think of it as the home of the world's oldest gay sauna. A national historic landmark, the doors of Kaiserbründl are open to any visitor willing to drop his pants and exchange them for a towel to go on a tour. Built in the 1870s at the height of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and with Moorish influence, it's a steamy cathedral of exotic arches, tiled pools and marble slabs. Once a year Kaiserbründl is home to the Orgia Epikurea, a unique event that resurrects the decadence of all-male parties in ancient Rome.

The centre of today's gay and lesbian life in the city is the Rosa-Lila-Villa on Linke Wienzeile. Here, both gay and lesbian tourists and natives alike can obtain information and advice on LGBT issues. Café Willendorf, on the ground floor of this gay and lesbian institution, is a place to eat, drink and get acquainted.

The lion's share of gay and lesbian hangouts is situated near the Rosa-Lila-Villa, along Linke Wienzeile and Rechte Wienzeile.

Friends meet at the plush Café Savoy for a

'Mélange' coffee or a 'G'Spritzer' wine spritzer; young gays up for cocktails go to the Mango Bar or Felixx. During the daytime, Café Berg with its adjoining gay and lesbian bookshop Löwenherz - in reference to English King Lionheart, rumoured to be gay - is a popular place to meet. And the doors of Eagle, Nightshift and Sling are wide open to those who like their nightlife really late.

If you like it really hard, try Stiefelknecht, Vienna's main leather bar - with slings, swings and things. You have to be buzzed in but it is friendly and widely lauded - especially the darkroom. Same goes for Lo:sch, the other serious and strictly dress-coded leather bar in town.

Alongside Café Willendorf at the Rosa-Lila-Villa, there are several restaurants close to the scene offering fine food to their gay and lesbian guests. Lesbian-owned Conquerer serves classic traditional Austrian cuisine, and Motto - while not exclusively gay - is a stylish in-place with a high celebrity and gay-factor.

The Village bar (likewise located on a side street of Linke Wienzeile) used to be called Chamäleon and following refurbishment now

shines in new splendour. The clientele is a mixed bag and the atmosphere relaxed and communicative.

The Frauenzentrum Bar (Women's Centre Café) - commonly called FZ - greatly contributes to the lesbian scene in Vienna by regularly hosting parties and events. But the big women's party night right now is the Frauenfest at Andino, mostly on the first Saturday each month, or the occasional Women's Parties at U 96 on Fridays. There's also the Las Chicas Women's Disco open each Friday from 9 pm at the Studio 54. The party kicks off by showing the latest episode of *The L-Word* before dancing the night away.

Vienna's gay dance club scene has seen vast change in the last two years. While the number of events is limited, the clubs in Vienna let you party hard. The city's number one gay club Why Not offers a special program every Friday and Saturday. Parties like homoriental at Aux Gazelles, H.A.P.P.Y and queer:beat at Subzero are mixed gay and lesbian parties with a relaxed crowd. DRAMA is not only the name but also the theme of the exceptional event held every three months at the Ottakringer brewery: great theatre and smart outfits galore.

Vienna's variety of gay and lesbian special events is second-to-none. Every year at the beginning of July, the community celebrates the Rainbow Parade, which over the ten years of its existence has become one of the largest Pride events in Europe, with over 150,000 visitors.

A further sparkling jewel on the scene's calendar is the Life Ball, which is probably the most flamboyant and lucrative AIDS/HIV charity event in Europe. From the Austrian federal chancellor to Hollywood stars, everyone comes to admire the fashion show, featuring world-class designers and to celebrate one of Vienna's most uninhibited evenings afterwards. Unfortunately, however, tickets for the Life Ball are hard to come by.

The Regenbogen Ball (Rainbow Ball) proves that the Viennese Waltz isn't just something for straight people. At this classic Viennese ball, gays and lesbians swing arm in arm to the waltz's triple beat. Formal evening wear is mandatory. In contrast, the only thing at the Rosenball (Rose Ball) that reminds one of a classical ball is the opening polonaise. Otherwise, the Rosenball organized by Vienna's most famous drag queen, Miss Candy, is a flamboyant disco alternative to the renowned Opera Ball.

If you fancy a breath of fresh air, the outdoor cruising scene is well developed in Vienna. The Rathaus Park as you face the magnificent Dutch Gothic town hall façade, is probably the most brimming meeting place, especially in the wee small hours when bars close and spew forth into the cold night air. In summer, try the Donau Insel on the Danube with its nude beaches at either end - especially the northern one at weekends.

More information on Austria can be found at www.austria.info. Click on 'Gay and Lesbian Travelers'

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WOMEN'S BAR: THE FRAUENZENTRUM, WÄHRINGER STRASSE 59

An institution in lesbian Vienna is The Frauenzentrum Bar, affectionately known as the FZ. Full of cosy spaces, on Saturdays the FZ hosts a disco and throughout the year it's home to plenty of lovely lesbian events.

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Tom Dwyer went shopping in Dublin on a recent Saturday afternoon and accidentally found himself having a top-notch dining experience in Habitat, of all places.



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You know those Saturday afternoons when you are fully intent on shopping 'til you drop and then you accidentally end up in a top-end restaurant, having a long, leisurely lunch in fine style? No? Well then, unlike me, you haven't found yourself fighting off the throngs in the clearance section in Habitat in Dublin's College Green and then, on a curious whim, walking upstairs to check out their new restaurant, The Brasserie.

Myself and my friend only wanted to see what it looked like, but before we knew it, we were sitting by the window drinking a couple of glasses of perfectly chilled wine and waiting for our orders to arrive. That window gives on to a spectacular view of the College Green

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Bank of Ireland branch, which in bright spring sunshine has a monumental Roman glow that's far removed from your normal idea of Dublin. Habitat and The Brasserie are located in the old Ulster Bank building opposite, which has been lovingly restored, so if you don't feel like looking out the window, you can rest your eyes on some well-impressive architectural interior stylings as you lunch.

The second thing I have to compliment The Brasserie on is their staff, who are friendly and attentive, and greatly add to the experience of dining there. We ordered two glasses of wine from a strong menu, a full-bodied fruity Italian Pinot Grigio with vanilla undertones for my friend (€5), while I plumped for the delicate Australian Yarraman Chardonnay (€4.50), which was laced with a neat amaretto flavour.

Because we were only taking a break from shopping, we decided only to have mains from a very attractive menu that included a range of interestingly imagined dishes. My friend opted for Authentic Homemade Crab Cakes with Rocket tossed in Lemon Vinaigrette and Roasted Pepper Mayo (€13.50), while I ordered a vegetarian option, the Home Baked French Onion Tart with Gratin of Beetroot and Mixed Greens (€12.50).

Although the portions were a little small, the richness of the food so made up for the lack of quantity, we couldn't have eaten more. The presentation, too, was top notch. My friend's Crab Cakes were moist with a spicy kick and a good strong hint of coriander, served on very peppery rocket which was well complimented with a dressing full of lemon zest. She got a side of Rustic Hand Cut Chips (€4.50), which came in a generous, non-greasy, moreish portion, complete with crispy skins. My French Onion Tart was sweet with a tart underbite. The onion was a cooked to a melt-



"The portions were a little small, but the richness of the food so made up for the lack of quantity"

in-the-mouth texture and the filling was a béchamel sauce with a hint of nutmeg. The tart was served with the most innovative beetroot gratin, its parmesan crust complimenting the beetroot's sugary taste perfectly, as did the citrus dressing on the crisp watercress and rocket greens. Despite a slightly doughy base to the tart, this was a great little dish that I'll be returning to The Brasserie again to enjoy.

With coffees to finish, our bill came to €46.70 and comfortably lounged about for quite a while, chatting the afternoon away. The Brasserie does a Sunday Brunch from noon to 5pm, with a mouthwatering menu, which I will also be returning for. In the meantime, I'm steering well clear of College Green when I want to get some serious shopping done.

The Brasserie at Habitat, 34 College Green, Dublin 2, reservations (01) 674 6624



ON THE CASE WITH JEAN SMULLEN



Chris Seifried's family have been making wine in Nelson, New Zealand since 1973, when Chris's parents planted out 14 different varieties and got their first harvest three years later. Since then they haven't looked back and the winery has gone from strength to strength. Nowadays the Seifried family has over 100 hectares of producing vineyards.

The Seifried family are members of the emerging sustainable wine-growing movement within the New Zealand Wine Industry. Not quite organic (yet) the philosophy involves changing work practices that impact on the vineyard and the crop. A simple thing like monitoring tractor use to reduce soil compaction, as well as keeping a close eye on soil moisture and irrigation, all result in healthier crops. They emphasise that they are not organic but more environmentally aware.

2006 Old Coach Road Sauvignon Blanc €12.99

Seifried Estate has a two-tier range, and this comes from

their consumer friendly easy-drinking Old Coach varietal range. It's pungent and herbaceous with green apple fruit and lots of aromatics. New Zealand Sauvignon is probably one of the easiest wines to sell in Ireland and this is a competitively priced version with lots of bite.

Founded in 1992 by Ross & Barbara Lawson, Lawson's Dry Hills is an acknowledged premium wine producer in New Zealand. The couple are recognised as among the country's finest producers, whose philosophy is to produce wine of great character at a good price. Lawson's have been pioneers and ambassadors for the screwcap revolution for some years now. Their wines are amazing.

Lawson's Dry Hills Riesling, Marlborough 2006 €17.49

This wine is found mainly on restaurant lists, but it can also be located in good independent off-licenses. This is New World Riesling at its best: nice cool climate fruit, honey/lemon character with a crisp underlying acidity and tons of elegant fruit on the finish.

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BACK FOR GOOD

When our beauty writer **Declan Marr** phoned the office in a panic about the appearance of some hair on his heretofore smooth back, we knew just the right direction to point him in.

Being an investigative journalist who suffers the slings and arrows of the beauty industry for my art is sometimes rewarding, believe it or not. Take last week, when my boyfriend arrived in the bathroom as I was exiting the shower and pointed out the appearance of a patch of hair that had previously gone unnoticed on my back. Needless to say, I went into a complete panic. While I find it perfectly acceptable to be slightly hirsute on the chest and arms, like many of my people, I absolutely refuse to countenance any growth on my back, shoulders or neck.

Without even drying myself off, I called GCN towers and was put in emergency contact with Heaven, a slick little salon on Dublin's Grand Canal Street that specialises in laser hair removal. Quite rightly, Herr Editor didn't think waxing was the solution for me. He knows me to be a permanent type of guy; one who likes it cut and dried rather than eked out.

I made it to Heaven before lunchtime and

before you could say, "I'm turning into a bear!" I was whisked down to one of their treatment rooms by the lovely Julie, a girl with a Donegal lilt and a level of professionalism that puts you completely at ease, especially considering the waiver you have to sign for insurance purposes that says you understand that a side effect of laser treatment might be permanent scarring.

"That would only happen if some therapist didn't know what they were doing and was too gung-ho," Julie explained, adding that in her time she's never seen any bad side effects. Personally, I didn't care. I would have signed a death warrant to get rid of my growth. Heaven uses a laser system called Luminette, which was created by a medical company rather than in the beauty industry, so according to Julie it's a better, more reliable machine. The laser is essentially aimed at the pigment in hairs, so, if you have blond back hair, forget laser. The light cannot locate the blond pigmentation and therefore can't do its work.

Because of the pigmentation thing, it is also important to know that before you go for laser treatment you shouldn't have had the area you want treated exposed to the sun for at least six weeks, are not using sunbed treatments, and if you use fake tan, have not been sprayed for at least seven days. Although laser was pioneered as a permanent hair removal system, time has proven that it is not. However it is much more effective and long lasting than waxing, and can be maintained with just one treatment per year, after the initial six.

Yes, you heard me - six. To fully get rid of the follicles, you have to get four to six treatments. But, I have to say, even one treatment made all the difference to my feelings for my own back. Julie got me to strip my top off, lie on a plinth face down and done a pair of goggles to protect

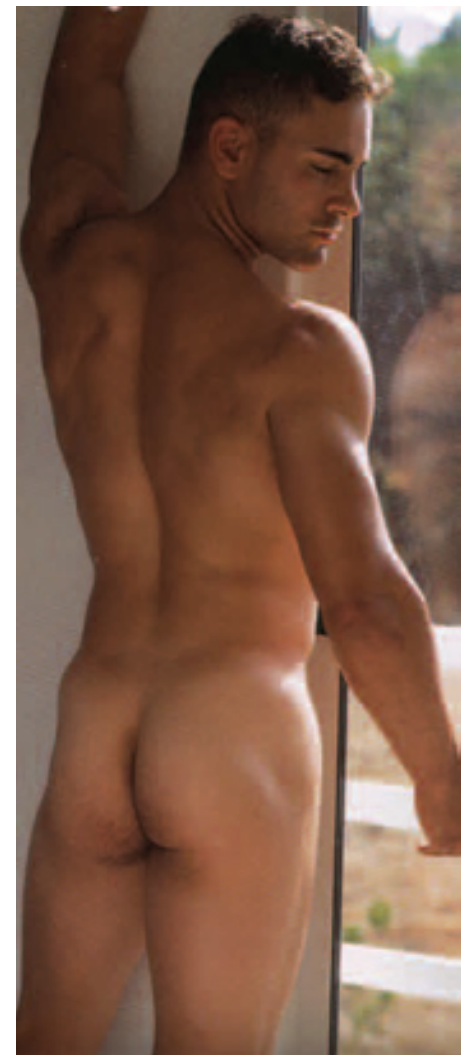
"In less than ten minutes, and I was out on the street again, happy and hairless."

my eyes from the intense laser light. She then shaved the area on my back and covered it with a conducting gel that was cold to the touch.

The feeling of each laser blast to the follicles is akin to been snapped with a rubber band. It's a kind of strange, discomfort that passes in the blink of an eye. I wondered if getting your whole back lasered would be terribly prickly, but Julie says people get more and more comfortable with it. "It's something you get used to and hardly feel any more, if you are having a large area done," she said.

The whole thing took less than ten minutes, and I was out on the street again, happy and hairless behind once more. For bigger areas of hair, it would take longer - like a whole hairy back might take 45 minutes to an hour. And although hair might grow again between sessions, I was advised avoid waxing or plucking.

There hasn't been a hint of growth since

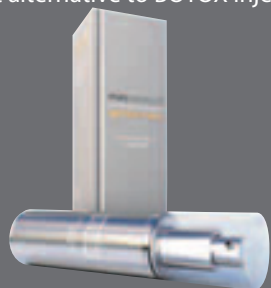


and my treatment was two weeks ago. Nevertheless I intend to go back for the required number of sessions. There's just no way I'm giving into having a hairy back.

You can get 20% of a course of four laser hair removal sessions at Heaven, 28 Lower Grand Canal St, Dublin 2, until the end of February. Phone: (01) 662 0111, www.teamheaven.com

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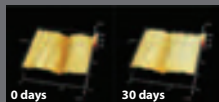


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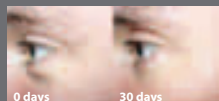
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*BOTOX® is a registered trademark of Allergan Inc. We have no connection, dealings or association with Allergan Inc. whatsoever.

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Stockists in Ireland: Stephen Thomas Face and Body Clinic, Temple Bar. Internet orders: www.4men.ie

Stockists in UK: www.wholeman.co.uk

THE BEAUTY BITCH

In days of old, way before the Celtic Tiger began devouring people's income, as an Irish boy was leaving his own native home to cross the broad Atlantic, his mother threw her arms around his neck and cried: "A mother's love's a blessing, no matter where you roam."

This little nugget of historical insight is forever immortalised in the lilting lyrics of TP Keenan, who, by the way, was the Johnny Logan of his day, but without the garish white suit, which is what Johnny Logan is really famous for, oh, and for trying to steal the limelight from Linda Martin when she won the Eurovision (yes Johnny, we all know you wrote Why Me? You've reminded us so many times). Since TP Keenan rests in peace in Cork, he must never have received the aforementioned maternal blessing, because he didn't

roam across the foam. He stayed at home.

If you're looking for a modern day paradigm of mothers and their blessings, allow me to introduce you to Betty Cosgrave and her blessed beauty salon: Sanas. If you're feeling slightly delustered (ie, ugly) and in need of a mother's blessing (ie, acceptance), it doesn't have to come from your own flesh and blood. Betty will bombard you with blessings in the form of facials, massages, waxings and tannings, along with a vast array of complementary therapies to hide the stresses of daily shopping, surfing and slurping.

Just take a look at her son: Fran, our very own inner city playboy, jetsetter and nightclub-owner-cum-DJ and minor celeb. He came

third in *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* and won *Celebrity Love Island*. Is there no end to his achievements? Hopefully there is, but with a mother like Betty to make him look as good as he does, he'll be forever blessed, no matter what reality TV show he roams into. So go on, book your treatments now. Log onto www.sanas.ie.

Email the Beauty Bitch at thebeautybitch@hotmail.com



JUST THE PILL

With a once-a-day treatment pill in the pipeline, HIV medication is advancing every day. Noel Walsh reviews the story so far and looks forward to a brighter future for the world.

Nowadays HIV has become 'a manageable illness'. For those of us in developed nations, HIV medications have dramatically changed our view of the disease. Thanks to the pharmaceutical industry, if someone is diagnosed with HIV in Ireland and they respond well to treatment, they can expect to live a full and happy life without the threat of sickness and disability endured by the previous generation of positive people.

In a new study from Denmark, it was found that although life expectancy is still significantly reduced, young patients recently diagnosed with HIV have an estimated life-span of more than 35 years. According to lead investigator Dr Nicolai Lohse, patients with HIV can have a life expectancy comparable to that of diabetics. "As a result, they will need to ensure they plan properly for the future," he said.

It is over 20 years since the first HIV medications came on the market and while their effectiveness was very limited, they were the beginning of what is now known as combination therapy. The days of people living with HIV, taking handfuls of pills and sticking to very strict drug regimes are over. With different drug companies combining their HIV medications, the future of HIV medication is very hopeful.

A new once-a-day pill is in trials at the moment. There used to be two classes of drugs available to treat HIV and these have become more effective over the years. The first class is known as protease inhibitors (PIs). They work by stopping the 'cycle of HIV'. Once HIV infects a human cell, the virus uses proteins and chemicals inside that cell to make more copies of it. Protease is an enzyme that HIV needs in order to make new viruses. PIs block the protease enzyme. When protease is blocked, HIV makes copies of itself that can't infect new cells.

Studies have shown that protease inhibitors can reduce the amount of virus in the blood and increase healthy cell counts. The biggest news and the greatest benefits to people with HIV came when PIs were discovered and made into anti-HIV treatments. When people started taking them in combination with other drugs, the number of people who became ill from opportunistic infections, or died from AIDS, dropped by about 70%.

The other class of drugs, which followed PIs, are called Nukes or Nucleoside/Nucleotide Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors. When Nukes are used in combination with other anti-HIV drugs - usually a total of three drugs - then this combination therapy can block the

replication of HIV in a person's blood. Nukes prevent healthy T-cells in the body from becoming infected with HIV. Nukes stop HIV's genetic material from being incorporated into the healthy genetic material of the cell and prevent the cell from producing new virus.

The effect these drugs have on the body has also changed dramatically over the past few years. In the beginning there were some serious side effects and some people could not tolerate them. Today most people can get used to their regime after a few weeks, with very few side effects.

For people living in the developing nations, access to HIV medications is a problem. The drug companies and governments are working together to ensure that everyone that needs medication gets access to it, but there are also other problems that have to be overcome, such as food, water and the distribution of medications, which is slowing down the process of achieving a world where every HIV-positive person gets access to what they need.



"Young patients recently diagnosed with HIV have an estimated life-span of more than 35 years."

POSITIVE THINKING with Noel Walsh

The announcement last December that BUPA is leaving the Irish market made me think about HIV-positive people and health insurance in this country. What is the situation for a positive person if they currently have BUPA coverage?

Well, according to BUPA themselves, other Irish health insurance providers, namely the vhi, will have to take their clients on. HIV-positive people who are currently covered by BUPA will not be subjected once more to the normal waiting period (five years before you can claim for HIV-related conditions) when they transfer to vhi.

The way health insurance works for positive people is the same as for everyone else. HIV is considered a pre-existing condition, just like diabetes or heart disease, and the five-year waiting period is standard.

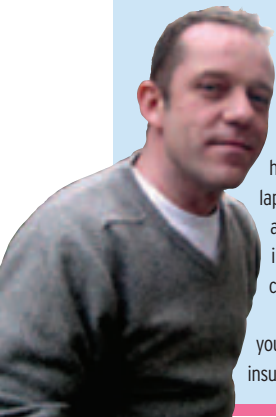
It is very important, if you do have health insurance, not to let it lapse - no matter what happens. If you are with BUPA it is imperative to immediately contact another company and arrange coverage.


Because HIV clinic treatment is free, you might wonder what actual benefit insurance is to HIV-positive people. HIV is a

disease that affects the immune system. It can affect any part of the body and you might need to see different specialist or consultant in relation to specific related conditions. With private insurance you won't be subjected to long waiting periods to be seen by specialists. Another benefit of insurance is that you can see a HIV consultant privately and you can see them outside normal hours, which means you won't have to take a day off work to sit in the clinic. If your appointment is at nine in the morning then you are seen at that time, not three in the afternoon. You won't even have to go to the hospital clinic. You can be seen in a private clinic instead.

One of the biggest benefits of health insurance for HIV-positive people (and if any of you has ever spent any time as a patient in Hospital Five, you will know what I mean) is that if you ever have to go into hospital as a patient, you can go private and not have to pay a penny.

For years the idea of getting health insurance as a positive person was a bit of a long shot considering the five-year waiting period. Most newly diagnosed people didn't even have a life expectancy this long. Today with the advances in HIV therapy and the recent study saying that people living with HIV and doing well on treatment can expect to live nearly as long as HIV-negative people, it is well worth looking into it.





THE GMH CLINIC

A Free, Friendly & Confidential Service for Gay, Bisexual Men and Other Men who Have Sex with Men.

WEDNESDAYS: DOORS OPEN 5.30PM TO 7.00PM
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TUESDAYS: DOORS OPEN 6.00PM TO 7.30PM
Return Appointments for Results, Hepatitis Vaccine and Genital Warts Treatment.
Walk-in for Blood Tests: HIV, Syphilis and Hepatitis. • No STI Screening on Tuesdays.


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AVAILABLE ON WEDNESDAY EVENINGS
Deaf gay and bisexual men are welcome, we have a Loop or we can have an ISL interpreter for Wednesdays only. Please SMS 087 9410934 before Mondays 5.00pm to arrange.

19 Haddington Road, Dublin 4 (beside Baggot Street Hospital)
Telephone: 01-6699553 Egmhpcclinic@maild.hse.ie

SEXUAL HEALTH INFORMATION AND LISTINGS AVAILABLE FROM
www.gaymenhealthproject.ie for Services, Reports and Links
www.gayhealthnetwork.ie for information on Safer Sex, HIV Testing, Syphilis, STIs, Hepatitis B and PEP
www.johnnie.ie for gay peer actions and advice.

GAY MEN'S HEALTH PROJECT
Part of the Health Services Executive, Dublin Mid-Leinster & Dublin North East.
GMHP Provides a Community Based, STI Clinical Outreach and Counselling Service.



COMMUNITY LISTINGS

DUBLIN & THE EAST

MONDAYS

- The Emerald Warriors training every Monday and Thursday. All levels of fitness taken into account. Check www.emeraldwarriorsfc.ie
- Transgender Personal Development Course. To book your place contact Gill on 085-730 3577 or e-mail gill@grs-thailand.com
- WomenTalk - Informal discussion group for women in Outhouse. T: Petra on 01-873 4999 or E: outreach@outhouse.ie

TUESDAYS

- Personal Development Course for Men. Six-week courses. To book your place contact GMHP on (01) 873 4952 or e-mail gmhpoutreach@eircom.net
- Women Together AA group meets weekly in Outhouse at 6.30pm.
- Johnny (Men's Gay and Bisexual peer group) meet Outhouse. 7pm. T: (01) 873 4999 for details. First Tuesday of every month
- Bi Irish soical group for Bisexuals and friends meets second Tuesday of the month in Outhouse Cafe at 7pm sharp.
- GIG (Gay International Group), multicultural group for women and men Outhouse at 7pm. First Tuesday of every month
- Gloria LGB Choir, meets every Tuesday 7.30-7.30pm E: info@gloria.ie T: Ian 086 354 5011 W: www.gloria.ie

WEDNESDAYS

- Friendly Gay Book Club meet at Outhouse 8pm on the first Wednesday of every month
- AlAnon Group at Outhouse 6.15pm every Wednesday. For families and friends of alcoholics. All Welcome.
- Dublin Devils FC - soccer club for gay men, all levels welcome. Meet 2pm Saturdays and 7pm Wednesdays in the Phoenix Park. For more information, visit www.dublindelivisfc.com or contact John at 087 2858058.
- The Phoenix Tigers, Dublin's lesbian soccer team train Wednesdays. Check out www.phoenixtigers.com for more details. New players all levels welcome.
- G-Swim, gay men's swimming group, meet 8.45pm at statue outside the Markiewicz Pool. E: Gswim@eircom.net
- Dundalk Outcomers Fri, Sun & Wed 8.30-10.30pm
- Amach Wicklow - Gay and lesbian group meets in Ashford on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 8.30pm T: (086) 235 2599 for more details.
- N.A.H.B Outreach Services & Chrysalis Community Drug Community working women's health promotion service. 7-9pm 27 Benburb St. Dublin 7. T: 01 6705544.

THURSDAYS

- Venus: Women's Night in Outhouse. 7.00 - 9.00pm T: 873 4999
- The Lady Birds, a supportive & fun group from BeLonG To Youth Project, for young women aged 14-23. Meets every Thursday at 7pm in Outhouse. For more info contact Almha at: T: 01 873 4184; E: almha@belongto.org
- N.A. meeting in Outhouse 8pm T: 873 4999
- First Out is a confidential discussion group for women exploring their sexuality. First Thursday of each month in Outhouse at 7.30pm. T Outhouse: 01 873 4999
- Gay Writers Group. Second & Fourth Thursday of Each Month. 7 - 9 PM. Outhouse Library. All welcome. Advice on publishing, competitions, workshops and feedback on work in progress. Info: queerwriters@hotmail.com or 086 849 9089.
- The Emerald Warriors training every Monday and Thursday. Beginners welcome - no experience necessary. Time: 7pm in the Phoenix Park Playing Fields.

FRIDAYS

- Gay Wexford social group meets the first Friday of every month in Wexford town from 8 p.m. 'til late. For further details text 0879536080 or E: outinwexford@yahoo.ie.
- Swimmin Wimmin, meets at 7pm for a swim, a chat or just a

- cuppa T: 087 773 1557 for info
- Dining Out for gay men 087 286 3349 E: diningoutireland@hotmail.com
- AA meeting in OUTHouse, 8pm
- Men's Night in OUTHouse, 7-10pm
- Queer Studies Group. Open discussions in WERRC Resource Room, Arts Annex Building, UCD Belfield 6.00-8.00pm. E: dublinqueerstudiesgroup@hotmail.com
- Open Night in Dundalk Outcomers 8.30 to 10.00pm

SATURDAYS

- Iris (LGBT mental health support group) OUTHouse 2.30pm.
- Live, Let Live AA Meetings in Friends Meeting House Abbey Street D1 6.30pm
- Dublin Front Runners: running club for gay men and women, all levels. Meet every Sat & Weds. E: dublinfrontrunners@eircom.net for details
- Dublin Devils FC - soccer club for gay men, all levels welcome. Meet 2pm Saturdays and 7pm Wednesdays in the Phoenix Park. For more information, visit www.dublindelivisfc.com or contact John at 087 2858058.
- Saturday Swingers. Womens Golfing group playing Par 3 golf at various courses around Dublin. Tel: 087 987 1661 (daytime) or 086 354 8017 (evenings) Mixed levels welcome.
- The Dublin Gay Music Group is a gathering of gay men who meet each Saturday afternoon to listen to recordings of classical music. An outlet for enthusiasts of classical and operatic music, the focus is on musical appreciation. New members are welcome. W: http://info.dublinmusicgroup.com
- Labour LGBT meets on the Ground floor of Labour HQ, 17 Ely Place, on the first Saturday of every month at 4pm. E: gbt@labour.ie. W: www.labour.ie
- Open Night in Dundalk Outcomers 8.30 to 10.00pm

SUNDAYS

- A.A. Meets in OUTHouse at 6.30pm.
- BeLoNG To, a group from BeLoNG To Youth Project, supports and resources LGBT young people aged 14-23 in a safe & fun environment. Meets every Sunday at 3.30pm in OUTHouse. T : 01-8734184 E : info@belongto.org
- BeLoNG Teen, a group from BeLoNG To Youth Project, for young people aged 14-18. Meets 1st and 3rd Sunday of each month at 1pm in OUTHouse. T :01-8734184 E :info@belongto.org
- Out & About Hillwalking Group meet at National Concert Hall Earlsfort Terrace 10am for a Wicklow Mountain hike. w: www.gay-hiking.org
- GLOW (Gays and Lesbians of Wexford) mixed social group, for details of meeting E: glow@iol.ie T: (051) 879 907
- Dundalk Outcomers Fri, Sun & Wed 8.30-10.30pm

COMMUNITY CENTRES

- OUTHouse, 105 Capel Street, Dublin 7 T: (01) 873 4999. www.outhouse.ie
- Dublin AIDS Alliance at Eriu Centre, 53 Parnell Sq, D1 T: (01) 873 3799 W: www.dublinaidsalliance.com
- Dundalk Outcomers, 8 Roden Place Dundalk T:042 932 9816

OTHER GROUPS

- Irish Queer Archive/Cartlann Aerach na hÉireann Ireland's LGBTQ archives and national repository for all things queer. Open by appointment only. E: irishqueerarchive@ireland.com
- OUT4TENNIS is Ireland's gbt tennis network. For details of our tournaments and ladders as well as overseas tournaments, visit us at www.out4tennis.com
- Women's Hillwalking Group (new group). Are you a Hillwalker? Would you like to go hillwalking with other Women? If so please contact 087 249 1624 or email murielhaire@eircom.net
- Older Women's wining, dining networking group. Regular meetings with a view to pursuing mutual social and cultural interests. Email: verity20042000@yahoo.co.uk
- A group for LGBT people who love their pets, and want to meet up for dog walking, outdoor activities with their pets (beaches, BBQs etc. when weather permits). http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/GayDogs
- LGBT group for primary teachers in Ireland, North and South. The group has the official sanction of the Irish National

- Teachers Organisation (INTO). Contact lgbt@INTO.ie or T: 087 695 2839.
- Group for gay, lesbian and bisexual teachers teaching in Ireland http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/glnbteachers/
- GLUE - Gay and Lesbian Unions Eire. Group lobbying for changes in the Partnership Laws in Ireland. W: www.glue.ie
- The Married Men's Support Group meet once a month. Contact Gay Switchboard Dublin on (01) 872 1055 for details.
- Labour LGBT E: lgbt@labour.ie. W:www.labour.ie
- Dining Out for gay men T: 087 286 3349
- E: info@DiningOutIreland.org or www.DiningOutIreland.org
- Transgender Equality Network www.teni.ie, E: info@teni.ie or 085 1477166
- Gender Identity Dysphoria Ireland (GID) supporting people with GID and their families. T: Lynda on 085 744 2697 or E: lyndatheeyes@yahoo.co.uk or Sara on 086 363 7412 or E: saracromwell@eircom.net.
- Queer Men's Night Out. Dinner, movie and a pint. Follow the link on www.nua.cc
- A new group for Kildare. e: Kildarelgbt@gmail.com for details
- Irish Queers are LGBT activists organising on issues in Ireland and Irish America. Also put on social events. 212.289.1101 irishqueers@hotmail.com and www.irishqueers.org
- Gay Wexford social group meets the first Friday of every month in Wexford town from 8 p.m. 'til late. For further details text 0879536080 or E: outinwexford@yahoo.ie.

HEALTH HELP

- Gay Men's Health Project (GMHP), 19 Haddington Road D4. Free sexual health service T: (01) 660 2189 E: gmhpl@eircom.net
- Johnny (Men's Gay and Bisexual peer group) meet Outhouse first Tuesday of every month. T: (01) 873 4999 for details
- Gay Health Network (GHN) T: (01) 873 4952 E: gayhealthnetwork@eircom.net W: www.gayhealthnetwork.ie
- St. James' GUIDE Clinic T:(01) 416 2315 or (01) 416 2316
- Transgender Equality Network advice, help and support for anyone at any stage of gender motivated transition. T: 085 1477166, E: info@teni.ie or W: www.teni.ie
- Drugs/HIV Helpline 1800 459 459 10am-5pm everyday
- Chrysalis Community Drug Project & NA Outreach Services Women's Health Promotion Service. 27 Benburb St, Dublin 7 Wednesday: 7/9PM. Health Promotion, Holistics, Information Outreach Ph: 01 670 5544 and Mobile 086 120 7421.

HELPLINES

- Dublin Lesbian Line (01) 872 9911 7pm-9pm Every Thursday - W: www.dublinglebianline.ie - Volunteers Required
- Gay Switchboard (GSD) (01) 872 1055
- Mon - Friday 7.30-9.30pm, Saturdays 3.30-6pm
- BeLoNG To Youth Project, supporting and resourcing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people aged 14 - 23 T:01 873 4184; E: belongto@eircom.net; W: www.belongto.org
- Greenbow LGB deaf group E: deafgreenbowlgbt@yahoo.ie www.greenbowdeaf.com
- Dundalk Outcomers, Louth LGB Helpline (042) 935 2915, 8-10pm Thursdays. www.outcomers.ie
- OutLouth 086 324 1579 E: info@outlouth.com www.outlouth.com
- Transgendered Equality Network T: 085 1477166, www.teni.ie or E: info@teni.ie

STUDENT LGBT SOCIETIES

- National Union of Students in Ireland, Lesbian Gay & Bisexual Rights Campaign - Contact Steven Conlon, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Officer E: lgbt@usie.ie, T: 01 435 3400, M: 086 - 8194900 www.usilgb.org
- Trinity College Dublin: lgbisoc@cscc.tcd.ie: www.TrinityLGB.org
- University College Dublin : ucdqueersoc@campus.ie
- Dublin City University : dcuqlgboc@yahoo.com
- Dun Laoghaire IADT : lgbt@iadtsu.ie
- Dublin Institute of Technology: www.ditlgbt.org
- Blanchardstown IT: itlgbt@gmail.com
- NUJ Maynooth: maynoothlgbt@hotmail.com
- Tallaght IT: supres@it-tallaght.ie

BED & BREAKFASTS

- Nua Haven Gay Guesthouse/Bed & Breakfast. Harold's Cross 10 mins City Centre. T: 087 686 7062, www.nua.cc or

nuahaven@gmail.com

GARDA LIAISON OFFICERS

- Community Relations Section - Inspector Finbarr Murphy 01- 666 3831
- Pearse Street - Sergeant Mark Kavanagh 01 666 9000
- Pearse Street - Detective Brendan Supple 01 666 9000
- Pearse Street - Sergeant Peter Duff 01 666 9000
- Pearse Street - Garda Paul Daly 01 666 9000
- Cabra - Detective Andy Tuite 01 666 7400
- Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit - Detective Sgt. Gerry Deegan 01 666 0000
- Bridewell (Dublin) - Detective Frank Tracey 01 666 8200
- Bridewell (Dublin) - Garda Ita Bradley 01 666 8200
- Fitzgibbon Street - Sergeant Joe Flaherty 01 666 8400
- Fitzgibbon Street - Garda Eoin Lynch 01 666 8400
- Mountjoy - Garda Maria Murphy 01 666 8600
- Store Street - Garda Lisa Nolan 01 666 8000
- Store Street - Garda Declan Freaney 01 666 8000
- Kevin Street - Inspector Philip King
- Cabinteely/Dun Laoghaire - Sergeant Derval Supple 01 666 5400
- Dundalk - Sergeant Vincent Jackson 042 933 5577
- Kilkenny - Inspector Padraig Dunne 051 305 300

BELFAST AND THE NORTH

TUESDAYS

- Border Area Group (BAG) Based in Monaghan also includes Cavan, Fermanagh and Tyrone areas. Tel 042 974 4110 Tuesdays 10.30-11.30pm

WEDNESDAYS

- Collective meeting at Cara Friend Centre 8pm

FRIDAYS

- Men of the North An alternative gay venue for men over 25 Meets on the 1st and 3rd Friday of every month at The The Nest, Belfast. E: info@menofthenorth.com W: www.menofthenorth.com

SATURDAYS

- Inspace Coffee Lounge at Queerspace Cara Friend Centre 3-6pm Everyone welcome
- Narcotics Anonymous Women's Meetings 6.30pm - 8.00pm at La Verna Grattan Street (next door to Project School)

SUNDAYS

- Out & About (NI), LGBT walking group now in its third year. Last Sunday of each month. Check out our W: http://outabout-ni.org.uk E: neil@outabout-ni.org.uk for details. Cathedral Buildings, 3-6pm

COMMUNITY CENTRES

- Rainbow Project Belfast. 2-8 Commercial Court Belfast BT 1 2NB. (028) 90319030 www.rainbow-project.org
- The Rainbow Project 12A Queen Street Derry BT48 7EG (028) 7128 3030
- QueerSpace in Cara Friend Centre Offices in Cathedral Buildings, Lower Donegall Street Belfast T: (028) 905 90257 and www.queerspace.org.uk

OTHER GROUPS

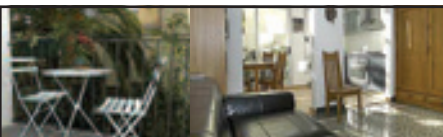
- NIGRA (Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association) PO BOX 44, Belfast BT1 1SH T: (028) (048 from ROI) 906 64111 E: nigra4@hotmail.com
- Gay Policing Northern Ireland, E: gpnii@yahoo.com
- Gay Newry, check www.gaynewry.com
- Gay Men's Spiritual Group meeting Clonard Monastery, Clonard Street, Belfast. E: jimger2000@yahoo.co.uk for details
- Lesbian Friends Northern Ireland, a Social Support Group for lesbian, Bi and TS women. LesbianFriendsNorthernIreland@groups.msn.com http://lesbianfriendsni.mysite.freereserve.com.

HEALTH HELP

- GUM Clinic at Altnagelvin Hospital, Anderson House, Derry,

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OVERSEAS ACCOMMODATION



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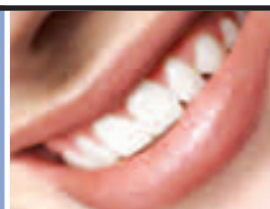
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GAY CONTACTS

find FUN or find the ONE...

1550 920 940

Text: GAY to 53050

Check out the **VOICEMAILS** below for a sample of some **GENUINE IRISH GUYS** looking for daytime fun and maybe more... To listen to today's messages or reply to one below:
Call: **1550 920 940** or Text: **GAY to 53050**

66044 Dave from Limerick 28, medium build but all man, if your interested and a straight acting bloke leave a message.

50385 Submissive leather male seek dominant master.

43302 Guy 24, looking for older gentleman he is clean and discreet.

61262 A Dublin guy non scene 22 years of age would like to meet similar aged guys for fun.

55765 Niall 26 from Waterford is looking for a 20 to 35 year old for adult fun, groups and couples also welcome, if you like the sound of him leave a message, all calls will be answered.

43979 Submissive male 29, smooth body is looking for older kinky males into bondage, genuine people only.

58991 Mark 25, living in Dublin is looking for a guy between the age of 20 and 30 for fun and possible relationship.

64959 Philip 26, has a tanned fit body looking for tvs for a good time.

62763 James 49, in the west of Ireland is longing to meet an Irishman for fun.

66647 Dublin northsider would like to hear from older males for some daytime meets.

67348 Attached bi-curious guy 38 years of age, would like to broaden his sexual horizons.

64872 A 30 year old gay guy in Galway would like to meet someone of the same age.

64804 Joe 27, is living in Dublin and would like a chat with older men.

43302 Dave from Cavan/Monaghan area would like to meet.

35838 An older guy into farmers, out door workers, and guys in uniform, get back to him.

35838 Older guy looking for builders and construction workers in overalls.

43979 Submissive male 29, with a smooth body is looking for older kinky males into bondage.

65220 A 32 year old Cork gay guy, he is 5ft8 in height, good looking and slim, he would like to meet discreet guys 18 to 28 especially farmers.

58050 Richard from north Cork, would like to meet guys in the area for fun and friendship.

33774 Galway 56 year old, 6ft, 170 pounds, slim build, hairy, versatile, friendly!

63779 Gay male into men in uniforms wants you to get back to him.

57311 Martin 30, living in Sligo is looking for male friends.

62272 Steve from Clare wants to meet up with guys for fun.

57409 A 29 year old guy from Cork wants to meet up.

57772 Robert 32, is looking for an older man, he is bottom and looking for a top and interested in spanking.

58464 Young 30 year old seeks older man for fun.

69775 Tall dark good looking guy would like to meet hairy guys for fun.

36733 John from Dublin is looking for a strict old fashioned master to inflict punishment.

57679 Richie 29, is looking for an older guy in the Kildare area so if your interested get back.

67343 Gay guy from the city would like to meet top guy for a good time.

57413 Male is looking for a mature male from the northside of Dublin he can not accommodate but likes to wear lingerie.

58743 Peter would like to meet a gay guy in Galway for some fun.

36100 Paul 43, is very open minded and genuine would like to meet a top guy for some useful fun and satisfaction.

67208 Ken 45, business guy Dublin area looking for TV's or feminine guys.

67208 Ken 45, business guy Dublin area looking for TV's or feminine guys.

***Casual Contacts**
***SMS Chat**
***Discreet Dating**
***Bi-Curious Fun**
***Mature Flirting**

66655 Bi-guy in the midlands is attached, 35 years of age and would like to meet another guy in the midlands in the same situation.

67861 Brian 39 from Dublin would like to meet convincing tv's or cross dressers.

35391 A 33 year old Limerick guy is up for a meet!

40041 Wexford gay guy with a hairy chest can accommodate wants to meet for fun.

59720 Kildare male naturist, 22 years of age with a hairy body would like to meet another naturist who can accommodate.

66641 Paddy bi guy looking for couple in Longford he would love to hook up.

46969 Jason professional guy south Dublin so if your interested leave a message

57772 Robert 32, is looking for an older man, he is bottom and looking for a top and interested in spanking

66884 Any guys from Cork would like to meet a 30 year old male

67662 Forty eight year old male would like to meet big strong men.

57772 Robert 32, is looking for an older man, he is bottom and looking for a top and interested in spanking.

63779 Gay male into men in uniforms wants you to get back to him.

67074 Vincent from Kerry in his late forties is a straight acting gay guy.

66647 Paul from the north side of Dublin is a submissive cross dresser who would like to get together for some daytime fun and games.

57413 Male is looking for a male in his late forties or fifties for daytime fun.

50432 Paul 41, from Dublin is into hairy guys between the age of 40 and 60.

58545 Andy is of stock build, hairy and would love to meet someone in the kilkeery, Carlow or wexford area for a first time experience.

67208 Dave from Dublin is in his mid forties is looking for TV's.

59828 Gary 28 from Cork is non scene with a medium stocky build and would like to meet non scene guys he can travel.

57720 A 21 year old, fit smooth bodied, bottom guy in the Dublin area, so if you interested leave a message and he will get back to you.

67104 Straight guy is looking for a first time experience with a tv, he is 30 years of age and reasonably fit.

66884 A 31 year old gay guy is from Cork and would like to meet tall handsome guys between the age of 18 and 27 for some discreet fun, no messers.

66647 Male is looking for a guy 50 plus in the north side of Dublin for daytime fun he can not accommodate.

56022 John 50 year old mature guy attached bi-sexual, would like to meet cross dresser, he cant accommodate.

65303 Andy 48 would like to meet guys in their mid twenties/thirties preferably rugby stocky guys, he likes to massage.

66072 Masculine hairy guy from Cork looks to meet other masculine guys for relationship he is 42 years of age and bearded.

59497 Dublin male 75, seeks males 60 plus.

67870 Mike from Dublin is looking for a male around the 40 age bracket for daytime fun.

64254 Paul in cork is looking for a bi-guy for some fun.

57413 Male is looking to hear from mature men, 50 plus preferably from north side Dublin, he likes to wear lingerie.



UPCLOSE AND PERSONAL

LADS

Dublin male, 39, straight-acting, wants older male to wear lingerie for me in private. I am friendly, single and genuine. Have very nice body for the right man. Box No. March 002

Feminine gay guy, early 50s, 5' 9", slim body, sincere, honest, genuine, seeks genuine gay male, 30 - 50 for friendship/relationship. Southern countries area. Box No. March 003

LASSIES

Bisexual male 45, wltm a bisexual female for friendship and socialising. Interests include theatre, swimming and sailing. Very genuine. Box No. March 001

38 year-old professional gay single female. GSOH, wide range of interests, WLTM similar for possible friendship. All letters answered in confidence. Box No. March 004

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Tickets for Dolly Parton, Millstreet Cork 31st March 2007. Price negotiable. Call Ann: 087 629 2430

HOMES FOR HOMOS

Double room (one person required) to rent in a two-bedroom apartment in Sandyford View, Dublin 18. Apt with all mod cons. Ph Anne: 086 104 9393

SOCIAL GROUPS

HIV Positive social/support group now forming in the South East. If you are interested in meeting other HIV people in Kilkenny, Carlow or Waterford areas and surrounding counties for peer support, socialising or friendship, please call 085 147 4848 and leave your contact details (eg. name, mobile number or email address). Alternatively you can email your contact information to saoleire@yahoo.ie. You will be contacted promptly to arrange a meeting. The agenda/activities of the group will be decided by the members. Total confidentiality assured and expected.

The next meeting of the INTO LGBT teachers group takes place on Sat March 24. Social evenings planned for Friday and Saturday. New members welcome. Confidentiality and discretion assured. Please phone, text or email for further details. 087 695 2839, lgbt@into.ie



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Seal your reply in an envelope and write the box no. of the ad which you're replying to in **pencil** in the upper right hand corner of the envelope. Enclose a loose 48c Irish stamp or equivalent postal order or International Reply Coupon, (please, no cash or foreign stamps!), in a larger envelope, and send to: GCN Classifieds, Unit 2 Scarlet Row, Essex Street West, Temple Bar, Dublin 8, Ireland. Any replies received without adequate postage shall be destroyed. Circulars will be intercepted and destroyed.

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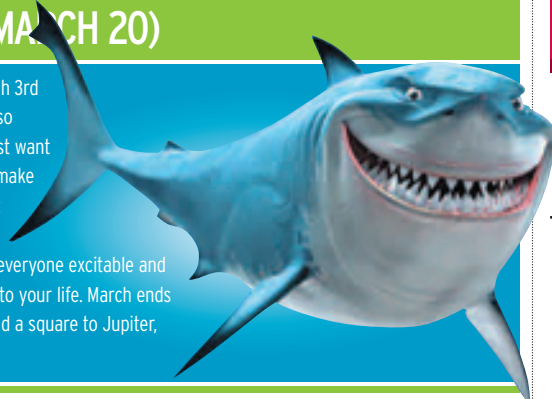
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TWINKLETWINKLE

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PISCES (FEBRUARY 19 - MARCH 20)

The energies near the full moon and eclipse on March 3rd will make you highly-strung and irritable. You'll feel so overwhelmed with other people's dramas you will just want to go off on your own somewhere. Good idea. Don't make any big decisions until after Mercury straightens out on the 8th. Right about then there is a BIG Sun-Jupiter-Nodes-Uranus combination which will make everyone excitable and will also bring interesting connections and people into your life. March ends with Venus pulling into a conjunction with Uranus and a square to Jupiter, bringing romance and flirtation your way.



ARIES (MAR 20 - APR 19)

After March 8th there will be a very nice Sun-Jupiter-Uranus combination that will make you forget nasty Mercury retrograde even happened. You'll meet some extraordinary people and reconnect with someone you thought was out of your life. Then mid-month, everyone hits a difficult stretch, including you. Ignore it all. Your only solution is music, art, inspiration. Avoid overdoing it in the food and drink department too.

TAURUS (APRIL 20 - MAY 21)

You are pulled in two major directions this month - Jupiter, Uranus and the Nodes make for interesting interactions, new people, and fabulous opportunities. Everyone wants to hire you, or talk to you, or do something with you. But the other dominant influence - that of Saturn and Neptune - makes you insufferably cranky and neurotic. You need to really focus your energy this month and work with the good energy.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21)

Jupiter, Uranus and the lunar Nodes are creating new opportunities and connections for you, with a nice dose of the unexpected. Saturn and Neptune in opposition, however, are a big sinkhole of energy unless you focus it. You may experience this month as a series of peaks and valleys, and although you'd prefer to just roll with the Jupiter-Uranus feeling, Saturn and Neptune will drag you down unless you take up some creative or meditative practice.

CANCER (JUNE 21 - JULY 22)

You'll continue to make good connections with people throughout March and there will be lots of interesting opportunities arising. It is just that there are two eclipses, and everyone will fall apart around the new moon on the 19th. At least Venus will be in Taurus starting on the 18th, which is a very grounding influence for you.

LEO (JULY 22 - AUGUST 22)

You're having a crisis of commitment around some big something in your life; you're asking tough questions about your self-expression. Don't be too hard on yourself, especially when Mars catches up to this picture around the 17th. Just go to the movies and call it a day! The world is way too stressful right now. Save your energy for the Venus-Uranus-Jupiter aspect around the 31st.

VIRGO (AUGUST 22 - SEPTEMBER 21)

Even though it is unpleasant, the time is now for breaking through your fear of failure - when Mars catches up to the Saturn-Neptune aspect in the middle of the month, you'll have

the chance to really confront that part of you that is judgmental and unaccepting of yourself. Everyone thinks Virgos are so critical - you are hardest of all on yourselves! Use the new moon square with Pluto to transform and heal this for once and for all.

LIBRA (SEPTEMBER 22 - OCTOBER 21)

Interesting and fun connections continue on the relationship front for you. But the Saturn-Neptune opposition that was so challenging in February is still around, and still making you really have to focus to get out of bed in the mornings. Make lists, schedules, routines, anything to keep your energy structured. You need to stay particularly centered around the new moon on the 19th - it's in Pisces, which drives you nuts.

SCORPIO (OCTOBER 22 - NOVEMBER 21)

Your challenge this month is to keep track of your (excessive) emotional energy, because it is flying around in ways you're not aware of. Try to have some boundaries; try to maintain some Scorpionic dignity even while the Saturn-Neptune-Mars combo mid-month makes you kind of wheedling and desperate... Hang on 'til the delightful Venus-Uranus-Jupiter aspect around March 31st that will have you back in comfortable dominatrix mode.

SAGITTARIUS (NOVEMBER 22 - DECEMBER 21)

Your biggest challenge this month is managing the Saturn-Neptune opposition, which makes you not want to go to work. In fact, you can barely get out of your pyjamas. It's not that you're depressed - in fact, you're very productive there at home in your bathrobe. But you are kind of spaced out - kind of needy, too, or flipping between extremes of wanting to be alone and desperately wanting someone at home next to you on the sofa watching old Catherine Deneuve movies.

CAPRICORN (DECEMBER 21 - JANUARY 19)

More than anything, you will spend the month kind of confused, awash in sensation and inspiration if you can let yourself feel it, but unable to really focus and get anything done. That's okay. Really try to avoid wrangling with anyone's ego this month, especially around the 17th. There is a lot of belligerence around, and you don't need it.

AQUARIUS (JANUARY 20 - FEBRUARY 19)

You feel like a fish out of water in a very extreme way right now. You want to feel alone and connected at the same time; you want to express your individuality but create a whole new vision of community at the same time. It's confusing. In mid-March there is high global drama of the sort that really gets you fired up; be careful of feeling so fed up with the planet that you just spend the whole month in a pub.

QUEER AND HERE

BY JEANETTE REHNSTROM

GAY IMMIGRANTS TO IRELAND TELL THEIR STORIES, ARIEL R MONTEZA, THE PHILIPPINES

"At six years old I knew that there was something different about me. I wanted to be like my three older sisters rather than like my two brothers. I was always borrowing clothes and other things from my sisters. Although my mother initially asked me why I was doing this; and my answer was simply that I wanted to be a girl, she did not make this into an issue at all. Part of the reason for her dealing with me so well had to do with her having an older brother who was gay.

When I began school I dressed up as a boy, but my way of carrying myself was still very feminine. I had my first boyfriend at 13 years old. He was the same age as me and we used to play house on my father's farm. We stayed together all the way up through college. I studied hairdressing in college.

The Philippines is very good for a gay person, and people are not shy about being out. Although it is a mainly Catholic country, it is very easy going and it is not hard to meet someone (in comparison to Ireland!). Although gay issues aren't talked about in the media, or indeed in general, life is very free and homophobic attacks are mostly unheard of. As far as I am aware there are no laws prohibiting homosexuality, and acceptance mostly depends upon how your family deals with it.

However, problems are presently arising where money begins to be involved in companionships or sexual transactions, and part of the reason for this happening, I think, is because people do not talk about the reality of gay life.

One of my clients in the Philippines was a woman who had married an Irish man from Galway. One day in 2001 she asked me if I would like to come to work in Ireland. She was thinking about setting up a hairdressing business there.

I came over with another hairdresser. None of us knew anything about Ireland at that time. On the plane I asked a man whether Ireland was cold or warm, and he told me that it was quite warm so I did not wear my jacket. I got a bit of a shock as I walked off the plane! It was May but we both found it very cold.

We lived in Galway for a little while and then we began setting up a salon in Ballsbridge in Dublin. After a while I began to feel very isolated and sad; I was seriously considering going back to the Philippines. I did not know that there were other gay people in Ireland so I had not been out to any gay places at all. Also I had left a partner in the Philippines and I missed him a lot.



Photo by Almha Roche

However, I then found out through some clients that there actually were places to go. The first place I went to was a club in a hotel in Donnybrook, and then of course The George. Life began to look up again.

I soon discovered that being a gay person in Ireland is very different from what I was used to. You have to watch yourself here and cannot express yourself as you would like. This might have been especially linked to the fact that I had decided to let my hair grow, and also had begun to take hormones again (sent Fed-Ex to me by my mother in the Philippines). However, I soon met my first boyfriend here, an Irish man from Blackrock. In 2003 we went to the Philippines for me to have a breast operation and also to meet my family. However, when we returned to Ireland our relationship fell apart.

I stayed single for over a year before I met my current partner, who is Polish. We were visiting his family in Poland just last week and had a very nice time. There I was amazed to see snow for the first time in my life, and also tried to ski, almost breaking my arms! Eventually, my partner wants us to get married, and as I have a female passport now this should be fine if we decide upon it.

We are planning to stay on in Ireland, and I have applied for residency and hope to get some positive news soon. However, I have saved money working in Ireland and built a house for myself in the Philippines, so you never know. Also, I am hoping to be able to go home as soon as I can to visit my mother who is very ill."

If you live in Ireland, are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered and were born and grew up abroad, we would like to hear about your experiences. If you would like to share your story, email editor@gcn.ie

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RELATIONSHIPS

WITH RAY O'NEILL



NOW THAT WE'VE SPLIT UP, MY EX-BOYFRIEND WANTS ME OUT OF HIS LIFE. BUT I WANT HIM BACK.



Dear Ray,
My boyfriend and myself broke up recently after 11 months together. In the last few months we fought a lot, but we always seemed to make up. We had a very good sex life and were very intimately close with each other, and I would have to say this was the first relationship in which I emotionally opened up so much.

We both did things we weren't proud of while we were together, but we could admit to our failings and move on. But recently, out of the blue, he decided he wanted it to be over. He went out within a few days and has already kissed someone else, even though he said he wasn't attracted to him, nor is he interested in anyone else. I have tried to get him back, but he has gone from wanting me back to now saying he hates me, and wants me out of his life forever. But I don't think this is true. When we see each other, it seems to me as if he feels the same. I can see the hurt in his eyes, and he is very physical with me. There seems to be a bond between us that can't be broken.

I still have strong feelings for him. I still want him back and am struggling to cope with not having him round. I don't know what to do. I lost my mates when I came to college in Dublin, so I don't have them to turn to. I am hurting so much and have tried to tell him how I feel, but he said for me to leave him alone. What can I do to get him back?

Yours, Eddie, Dublin

Dear Eddie,
It is never a good position to find yourself alone. But how exactly did you lose your mates coming to

Dublin? Did they just fall off the cart on the way up? Well, if they're straight you'll probably find them in Tramco or Copper Face Jacks.

What strikes me is your ability to lose people without any self-reflection. The bigger question you're not asking is why did he leave? You don't ask this question, despite mentioning "we fought a lot" and "we both did things we weren't proud of." What does this mean? Can you so easily brush this off?

Because whatever it amounted to, there was a straw that broke his camel's back, though for you it came "out of the blue". Hence him "saying he hates me, and wants me out of his life forever". You are definitely missing something here and it isn't just him.

In the wise, concise and precise words of the late Roy Orbison: "It's Over". Getting someone back is not something one does. Or rather, not something one succeeds in. Instead of trying to get him back, which borders on obsessive stalking, why not give him, and perhaps you, some space to see what actually happened for you both?

Your unbreakable bond is now one of anger, disappointment, and hate. Give him the space he asked for; honour that hurt you can see in his eyes, and maybe in time ask what happened for him and even then just listen. Relating involves thinking of the other; there are not just your feelings and needs to be considered.

It is a cliché, but if you love someone let them go, and if they love you they will come back. The only important exception to this rule is a very stubborn constipated piece of shit. Please don't be that shit.

Ray

LIFE

WITH DENIS MAHONEY



Life coach Denis Mahoney helps you get to grips with modern life. This month: **All You Need is Love**

The single most important emotion to help you overcome all obstacles is love. Love of yourself and love for others. If you can master this, you've made it!

Love for yourself means complete and total acceptance of who you are, right now. Not who you might be some day in the future, not who you are becoming, but who you are now, faults and all. But it must be *complete* acceptance. If you dislike one aspect of yourself, whether it's how you look, think or behave, then you do not really accept who are.

Non-acceptance means regular regrets, talking yourself down, or even feeling mostly okay but with a subtle uneasiness about some aspect of yourself. It's very difficult to break free from this pattern if you keep adding yet more negativity.

LOVE YOURSELF AND LIKE IT

*** Accept yourself unconditionally.** Appreciate your qualities and attributes. Have the confidence to emphasise your good points. Respect yourself as you are today, rather than how you would like to be someday.

*** Take complete responsibility for your life.** Taking complete responsibility makes you feel self-reliant and in control. You begin to work on the unsatisfactory aspects of your life rather than wasting time and energy making excuses or blaming others.

*** Set yourself some goal.** Setting worthwhile goals gives you something to aim for. You start to believe in yourself.

*** Take care of yourself.** When you treat yourself well, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, you feel a greater sense of self-respect and self-love.

*** Practice affirmations.** Phrases such as 'I like myself, I like myself, I like myself' repeated over and over change how you talk to yourself. Affirmations act as a conscious message to balance the negative messages you repeatedly send to yourself. If done repeatedly, you will notice the positive effects on your body language and attitude.

LEARN HOW TO PUT IT OUT

Once you love yourself, the natural tendency is to turn outward towards others. Have you ever noticed when you feel particularly good about yourself you also feel a greater sense of friendship towards others? If you are habitually negative towards other people, how can you really love yourself? It's impossible to have real love for yourself unless you can give it freely to others.

Love is not just something you feel, it's a verb, it's something you *do*. The act of love generates the feeling of love. Continually look for ways to show acceptance

and friendliness towards others. Sometimes when we feel unloved, we think the solution is for others to show more love towards us, but if you practice giving love, you'll have no problem getting it back.

Have you noticed that you tend to attract certain people and situations into your life depending on how you think and behave? When we're habitually negative towards others, we tend to attract like-minded people who feed and reinforce this cycle. We get comfort from similar people displaying negativity towards others (and by implication towards themselves). However when we decide to operate in a positive, optimistic and loving way, we attract like-minded people into our lives. If you're looking to change negative patterns, avoid negative people. Associate only with positive people who recognise the value of love and encouragement.



FORGIVE AND FORGET

If you are harbouring feelings of resentment, guilt or anger towards someone, then stop clinging to those negative feelings. Sometimes people's entire lives are built around such resentments, they have little else to talk about.

Realise that this is a major obstacle to loving yourself and anybody else, and make the decision to forgive. Contact them and arrange to talk, send them a letter or a card. For your sake.

Another factor is your reaction to unacceptable behaviour from others. If you react negatively you simply reinforce bad behaviour. If you deal with a difficult person in a calm friendly way, you will often see his/her attitude and behaviour change. They might be so surprised at being treated with courtesy and kindness that you will see their personality soften as their defences drop.

More important is that you will have maintained your own personal and emotional integrity. Play your part in improving matters by deciding to only react in positive ways.

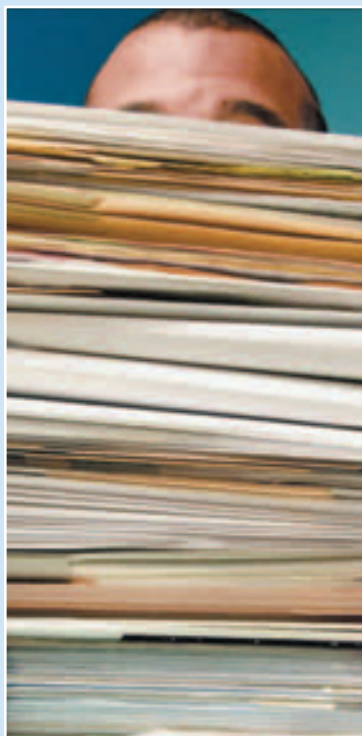
NO REGRETS

When you look back over your life, your biggest regrets are those of not having loved enough or being loved enough. You never hear someone on their death bed saying "I wish I spent more time in the office". To quote that wisest of us all, anon, "only one life that soon is passed, only what's done with love will last".

Denis is an experienced Personal and Business Coach. For info please contact him at www.denismahoney.com or on 086 123 2038



People who have been diagnosed with HIV often believe they will not be able to get a mortgage. Stuff and nonsense! It just means you have to do it a little differently.



the easiest thing in the world to sit down with an uptight banker/broker and divulge personal medical information, not being sure how it's going to affect your mortgage and chance at home ownership.

Once you divulge your health status you will be automatically declined by an insurance company. The legislation concerning mortgage protection does allow for this eventuality, allowing an option to 'waive' cover upon being declined. This is, however, left to the individual lender's discretion.

FINDING AN OPEN LENDER

For some strange reason known only to themselves, in the last few years most lenders have decided not to allow borrowers avail of this option, with the result that no mortgage protection policy equals no mortgage with the vast majority of them.

But it's not all doom and gloom. There are a few lenders out there who will allow this condition for cover to be waived. This is done very much on a case-by-case basis.

However it should be noted that in order to use this option you must be officially declined cover by an insurance company and a copy of this letter must go to the lender with your signed waiver. When you are declined by the insurance company a note to this effect will go on the insurance register, to which all insurance companies have access.

GET A FRIENDLY BROKER

If you are HIV-positive and uncomfortable about discussing your options with a financial person, the various organisations such as the Dublin AIDS Alliance and Open Heart House will refer you to a friendly broker, who will be only too happy to sit down and have a chat about this whole topic or in fact any topic you fancy chatting about.

So now there's no excuse for not buying that dream shoebox in the city for a mere €500,000. Stop the partying, forget the designer labels and make do with a bus to Dollymount for the hols. It's time to get some cash together and get on that property ladder. Failing that look out for an elderly 'bachelor' with a nice pad and move on in with him - just think Anna Nicole without the knockers!

For further information on any mortgage matters, contact John Hughes at PNI, (01) 676 1970 or 087 699 3668, or email john@pnitd.ie

There seems to be a common misconception in 'gayland' that anyone who is diagnosed with HIV can forget about getting a mortgage and resign themselves to filling some fat cat landlord's pocket for the rest of their lives. This old wives' tale is based partly on fact and partly on musings from barstool experts in the gay local.

In relation to HIV, there actually is no issue with getting a mortgage approved. Money talks when it comes to lenders, so if you can show you have the means to repay a mortgage you are halfway there. Submitting an application and getting your approval will be a relatively straightforward process.

THE INITIAL HITCH

The problems start when you receive your written approval and discover a note hiding in the mountain of crap telling you about conditions relating to mortgage protection cover.

To all you dizzy queens out there who overdid E in the '90s or reach for the vodka bottle with the cornflakes, mortgage protection is simply a type of life assurance policy that guarantees to clear your mortgage in the event of death. There are numerous variations on such policies available but the concept is basically the same across the board.

You'll soon be receiving a call to come in and have a chat about arranging this cover. It's not



THIS MONTH: SEDUCING YOUR STRAIGHT NEIGHBOUR

Every now and then you may come across a neighbour who is straight, yet unusually friendly towards you, once he discovers you are a poof. It's a little bit of a strange phenomenon. Like Céline Dion's fan club, it can't really be explained; however it's important to know how to handle the situation.

More often than not, (and if there is a God), your neighbour will speak to you with his shirt off. He does this on purpose, of course, in a vain attempt to grab your attention. This doesn't make him a rocket scientist. You're gay, you're going to look, go figure!

As your friendly, straight (and insanely hot) neighbour talks randomly about the weather, the football and that movie starring The Rock, you may notice him adjusting his privates rather obviously. This is not a case of crabs, but rather a very well-calculated move on his part to see if your eyes will shift from his gaze down to his graze. Don't be intimidated by the situation. Do what comes naturally and stare down there without a second to lose. Stare long, stare hard and if no one is watching, lick your lips.

It may sound sleazy, but it's how men used to hook up before the days of the Internet. Ask anyone over 35 and they will tell you it's vintage and it works.

Now that he knows you have read his signal, invite him in by asking him to set your DVD timer. This will immediately reaffirm his position as the dominant male. Whilst seated on your unusually small sofa, make sure there is adequate leg contact made and hand him the remote. As you pass it to him drop it clumsily in his crotch and fumble around that area, whilst making a poor attempt at reclaiming it. Once its back in your hands, accidentally let the gay porn play and look surprised and embarrassed as to what has just 'popped' up on the screen.

If he watches more than 4 1/2 seconds of it, then you can quite confidently move to Plan B, which involves saying "I know your straight but this is getting me hot". If he doesn't get up and leave at this point, then the rest is history, and every gay man's fantasy.

Once it's all over, speak his language by ignoring him almost completely. This works for him with women, so you need to bring it to a level playing field. He's not used to being ignored in this way, so he will be back to play another day.

LICKY'S LICKS

WITH LICKY RAKE



GOT A LESBIAN ISSUE OR TWO? TALKSHOW HOST LICKY RAKE IS HERE TO DISH OUT SOME SAGE SAPPHIC ADVICE

Dear Licky,

I'm in a bit of a pickle; I've been with my partner for over eight years. We own a house together, have two cats, have set up our own pottery business and share the same friends. While I'm very content with our life, my partner seems to be hearing her biological clock ticking and is yearning for a child.

While I've been supporting her outwardly, inwardly I dread the idea of bringing a baby into our idyllic lives. I can't tell her how I really feel because I think if it was a choice between me or a baby, she'd choose a baby.

Confused, Limerick

Dear Confused,

The majority of conceptions usually come accompanied with the sexy line, "I won't bother wearing a Johnny, I'll just be a sec". I should know; I speak from experience. So count yourself lucky that you are in a position to change that poor deranged woman's mind.

Not only do babies not do anything, apart from make damn good door stops, they're boring, inarticulate, illiterate little blobs who wouldn't know a gin and tonic from a Long Island iced tea, which in my books makes for very bad company indeed.

As someone who spent twelve long years dragging up three inconsiderate, unable-to-comprehend-the-most-basic-of-poker-hands morons, let me tell you: it ain't no picnic. The quicker

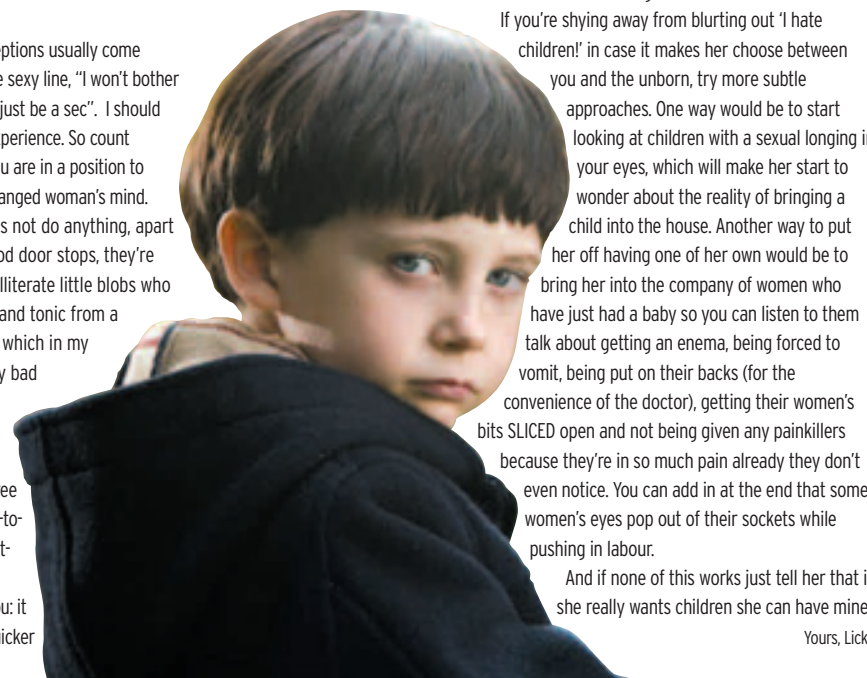
you can get them out the door and into a job the better. I do like to think that forcing lil' Lucy to work as a chimney sweep has kept her mindful of the importance of keeping slim. And when times got hard after my ex-husband Reggie went to find his 'inner bear' and left us with NOTHING (apart from a subscription to *Hairy Butt Monthly*, which I have to say was of some comfort) lil' Lucien was a godsend with the money he brought home from bullying other children in the schoolyard.

It is your job to explain to your partner that while she may think she wants a child, what she really wants is a holiday to Lesbos every year, which will give her just as much excitement, won't cost as much but will do the same amount of damage to her women's bits.

If you're shying away from blurting out 'I hate children!' in case it makes her choose between you and the unborn, try more subtle approaches. One way would be to start looking at children with a sexual longing in your eyes, which will make her start to wonder about the reality of bringing a child into the house. Another way to put her off having one of her own would be to bring her into the company of women who have just had a baby so you can listen to them talk about getting an enema, being forced to vomit, being put on their backs (for the convenience of the doctor), getting their women's bits SLICED open and not being given any painkillers because they're in so much pain already they don't even notice. You can add in at the end that some women's eyes pop out of their sockets while pushing in labour.

And if none of this works just tell her that if she really wants children she can have mine.

Yours, Licky





PARTIN' SHOT

Would you like to write a Partin' Shot? If you've got something to get off your chest, write 1000 words and submit your sentiments to editor@gcn

All submissions are subject to editorial control

As a 30 year-old gay man, how can I role model for my younger peers so that they can be confident about who they are? asks Ciaran Nolan.

We're in a time when more and more of us are feeling comfortable and at ease with our sexuality. Teenagers are coming out at a much younger age than ever before, more of us are out, not just in our gay community, but in the wider community at large - in our jobs, with our friends and family.

Times are changing and yet there are those of us around the country in smaller towns and villages who still feel trapped, unable to be our true selves. There are those of us who feel isolated and not connected to any community at all. There are those of us who are married, have children and who find it near impossible to accept our sexuality or even contemplate

what our sexuality means for us.

In a recent 'Partin' Shot', Mark Charlton argued that we should be fighting for our teenagers' rights with regards to the legal age of consent, that in some way we are letting them down. I am wondering if we should be putting more energy into working with the younger members and indeed all members of our community with regard to building our sense of self-esteem and self-worth as gay people in society today.

I applaud the work that BelongTo Youth Group are currently doing, in particular their anti-bullying campaign. The message they are sending out not only to the youth in our community, but to all of us, is that it's okay to be who we are. We are still very much in an age of homophobia; our lack of partnership equality is just one example of that.

Something like bullying eats at the core of one's soul, it's like planting a bad apple in the barrel and in time the whole barrel becomes rotten. I am wondering about what part I can play to help my younger peers find their own way in society today, to find their own voices and celebrate their uniqueness. As an openly gay man at 30 years of age, how can I role model for my younger peers so that they can be confident about who they are?

I have made the choice to live my life openly as a gay man. Having been the victim of horrendous bullying at school, I know only too well how that has made an impact on my life. However I have also made the choice that the bullying and harassment I suffered at school will not define me, it does not say anything about me or my sexuality. Today I can look myself in the mirror and say: "I am a gay man and I'm more than okay". I have built my sense of self-esteem and self-worth and I have put one foot in front of the other, holding on to the energy of all the gay men and women in Ireland who went before me and made my journey easier.

What I have learned for myself is that coming out is not a once-in-a-lifetime experience. When I came out it didn't mean that suddenly the veil was lifted and everything was okay. In truth I am always coming out. Every time I meet a new person, I come out.

So, what does coming out really mean? For me it's about living my life as I truly am. I am lots of things as well as gay, and being gay is a very important part of who I am, even though it's not all of me. Ironically, to get to this point in my life I had to come out and then venture back inside myself, I had to take stock of how I truly



"How do we get in touch with ourselves in terms of how we truly feel about being gay?"


felt about myself. In doing so I could see the darkest corners of my being where work had to be done to get me to the point of happiness and real self-acceptance.

How do we get in touch with ourselves in terms of how we truly feel about being gay? We can look at the messages we were given as we were growing up. How many times did we hear about what we couldn't do, what we couldn't be and where we couldn't go? By bringing those messages from our subconscious into the forefront of our minds we can re-write them and free ourselves up.

This truth probably hit me most when I was living in San Francisco. I remember attending my first gay pride down Market Street and being in awe of the waves of colour and excitement, but most of all acceptance. What was really apparent was that everyone seemed to have an innate acceptance of themselves and the idea of being gay was just so normal. At that

time in my life, although I was out of the closet, this idea was very alien for me personally. I realised that in order to be happy I needed to find acceptance in myself.

From there my self-esteem and how I really felt about myself as a gay man began to take form, and I work on that to this day. Any kind of verbal abuse will eat at the core of your soul, and this is why I believe the BelongTo anti-bullying campaign is so important.

We should be putting more energy into helping the younger members of our community really love who they are and we can do this by celebrating ourselves. For those of us lucky enough to be out and who live openly, let's remember those who cannot, and let's hope that they too some day can find the strength in themselves to fully celebrate who they are. For every moment I live openly, there is a spark of hope and opportunity for my peers who are not at that stage. 

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