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# EDITORIAL



The *Sunday Independent* was a virtual smorgasbord of gay features on Sunday February 10, the majority of them written by Donal Lynch. "Drugs, Drink Divorce, Gay Sex - all is changed utterly," the front page blared in relation to a Millward Brown IMS National Opinion Poll the paper commissioned, which I'll come to later. The feature I want to talk about beforehand appeared in the *Life* magazine supplement to the paper, flagged in the contents page with the sentence: "Irish gays tell their stories of lots of sex, but very little love". The feature itself, titled 'What's Love Got To Do With It?' tells us in the heading, "Gay love, he discovered, was all about internet sex encounters, leather and studs."

The feature is illustrated by a confetti-strewn, flamboyant gay male couple dancing down the steps of a church, miniature dog in hand, as if making a mockery of the sanctity of religious marriage, complete with the pull quote: "I laugh when I read those arch-conservative commentators saying gays would cheapen marriage. It's pretty cheap already, but I'm sure we'll do our best."

In the feature Donal Lynch interviews a succession of gay men with first names only, who pronounce that love and commitment are not part of the gay psychological make-up for one embedded reason or another, that older gay men

are all lonely, that gays aspire to romance and marriage, but our very nature makes these things utterly unreachable.

In his feature on the National Opinion Poll in the main section of the newspaper, Lynch focuses on the fact that 37 per cent of parents would be concerned if they had a child who was gay and 35 per cent of siblings would feel the same (despite the 53 per cent and 56 per cent not being concerned at all). Lynch posits that 'concern' equals the worry that parents feel for their children. "Anything they think is going to get in the way of their progeny's success, love, happiness or their ability to fit in, is going to make them fret a bit," he says.

So, imagine the 'concern' those parents might feel reading propaganda like his feature in *Life* magazine? They might imagine that their gay children will never find the happiness that committed love can provide and are doomed to a lifetime roaming a netherworld where the only thing on anyone's mind is sex. And leather and studs, of course.

The message writ large in this article is a lie. Hundreds and thousands of gay people settle down and have monogamous lifetime relationships. Sure, there is a large element of promiscuity to gay life, but maybe we see it more because it's far more overt than the promiscuity that goes on in straight life. Straight people have one-night stands, go to fetish clubs, have affairs, etc. They're human after all, just like those who don't enjoy throwing it around.

This is not an attack on Donal Lynch's writing - I think he's a great writer. But he is in a unique position as a gay journalist in a newspaper read in the main by middle Ireland and he should be using that position wisely, instead of feeding into a myth that seeks to disenfranchise him, his friends, and the entire gay community, by dubbing us all as sexually and emotionally sub-human. In agreeing to write this story, he is bolstering the myth that gay people are not as valuable as straight people.

For the record, I love my partner and I hope to be with him for the rest of my life. I am one of thousands in Ireland in the same position, many of whom would like to get married, which I believe is a human right. Articles like this place a major obstacle in the way of those human rights. They feed into bigotry and misconception and they damage individuals - individuals like Donal Lynch.



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# LETTERS

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

The opinions expressed on these page  
are not those of the NLGF or GCN.

## OLDER AND GOLDER

Dear Editor,

The January and February issues of *GCN* contained two rather gloomy and depressing takes on being gay and getting older. I turned 59 recently. Like your correspondents James and Mark I have been out on the gay scene for about 30 years. Like them I was not very successful in establishing a long-term relationship - until recently.

I don't know for sure why I couldn't meet a long-term partner but I always assumed that it was at least partly my own fault. Maybe I gave out the wrong vibes. I think maybe I was too cagey. I definitely wasn't good with chat-up lines.

Nevertheless I did not lack for friends both gay and straight. I made these friends by being involved in things. A lot of straight friends came from my involvement in football and rugby clubs - even though I never played those games. I also joined gay groups like the swimming groups and outdoors groups. Guys became friends and their friends became friends. These friends spanned the age range from 18 to 80.

In the last few years Gaydar became available on line so I thought, 'Great, I'm bound to find someone compatible among all the guys who are on it'. Well I did - eventually. Of course it took several years and many contacts that yielded nothing. Then one day I

spotted the profile of a guy who seemed to want someone like me. So I sent him a message. That led to six months on line chat. Then we met. Now 20 months after meeting we are very much in love. And so I approach my 60th birthday as happy and content as I have ever been.

So to James and Mark I say - Ray O'Neill is right. Action is required. Join gay groups. Widen your circle of friends. Use Gaydar. I know it can be frustrating but keep at it. And for heaven's sake try to present a cheerful face to the world. People might think I was lucky to get a boyfriend at the age of 57. But I wouldn't have been lucky if I hadn't kept trying.

Yours sincerely, John Kilcullen

## NO MARRIAGE FOR ME

Dear Editor,

Before the discussion about same-sex marriage ends up winding its weary way down the moral/religious versus equality road, may I say that neither I nor my partner (of over four years) want gay marriage.

Firstly, I don't simply want a 'replicated marriage' based on, let's face it, the failed straight model.

Secondly, gay culture and communities have existed for a long time without the need of social 'acceptance' (and therefore forced conformity) from the straight community and we have developed our own mechanisms for forming unions or relationships, without the need for a piece of paper to validate such relationships.

Thirdly, historically and economically, the current western model of marriage was devised in conjunction with, primarily, the Roman Catholic Church, as a means of controlling society financially and psychologically. Do we in the gay community, having strived for so long for our current degree of liberation and visibility, really want to subjugate this to the State?

However, I do wish for and strive for an end to the obvious inequality and discrimination which exists in the form of taxes, social welfare, wills and inheritance, adoption, parenting rights, just to name a few areas.

As most legal experts have said, a constitutional referendum would be required plus the repealing of a lot of legislation, which would take years, and I don't think this would be welcomed by the Irish public. Nor, currently, would the concept of two men or two women presenting at the Registry Office sit comfortably with a society who tolerate but don't accept us.

At the very least let us not call it 'marriage'. If the marriages I am familiar with are anything to go by, I don't want the heartache!

Yours, Franc Neary, Dublin 8

## RESPONSE TO THE GREENS

Dear Editor,

I wish to respond to the letter in your February issue (Issue 218) from the Green Party's Roderic O'Gorman. The author's banal attempts to justify his party's now diluted approach to the issue of

same-sex relationship recognition aside, I'd like to point out some interesting observations made by Mr O'Gorman.

He seems to view civil partnership as but an interim measure on the road to same-sex marriage, which it may not be, as history has shown us. If, as he states, the Green Party believes that "real equality for same-sex couples means full access to civil marriage", then his party's endorsement of the introduction of civil partnership legislation "solely for same-sex couples" is very worrying indeed. This is because none of the EU governments that have first created the "separate but equal" institution of civil partnership solely for same-sex couples has subsequently allowed them to marry. Are we really to believe that a future, no doubt equally conservative Irish government will be the first?

By completely segregating the institutions of marriage and civil partnership, i.e. one for opposite-sex couples alone, one for same-sex couples alone, it is arguable that the Fianna Fáil/Green Party/PD coalition government's proposed strategy will merely serve to perpetuate the orthodox understanding that same-sex relationships are less worthy of recognition than their opposite-sex counterparts.

Mr O'Gorman states on one of his many ostentatious webpages ([www.roderic.wordpress.com/2007/11/](http://www.roderic.wordpress.com/2007/11/)), that he and his partner "hope to enjoy the benefits of a civil partnership" and he says that he is "very pleased with the progress that the Green Party has made on the issue".

However we've waited 86 years for adequate same-sex relationship recognition and simply because Mr O'Gorman and his partner are in a hurry to obtain legal rights and responsibilities in respect of each other does not mean that he and his party should now arrogantly proceed to potentially condemn us all to the inadequate institution of civil partnership for the next 86 years.

Perhaps Mr O'Gorman should either admit his obvious endorsement of civil partnership legislation and spend less time pretending that he is reluctantly sanctioning it, or devote more effort to powerfully promoting his party's alleged commitment to gay marriage and equality for all?

Yours, Brian Tobin, Lecturer-in-Law,  
Faculty of Law, NUI Galway

## BOUNCER COMPLAINT

Dear Editor,

I was very disappointed by the welcome I received from one of the bouncers at The George Bar on February 7. It was a long time since my last visit to the pub, and I have always been welcomed on previous occasions.

I arrived at the door around 9.40pm. When I was going in, the bouncer asked where I come from. I responded that I came from home, and he asked me if I knew the place. I said, 'Yes, I am gay and I've been coming here since 2003. He asked me again about where I come from. I said that I live in Dublin (5 mins from the pub), and he said, 'Well, you are

## POTTYMOUTH!



PILSUNG

We've been publishing the cheekiest Letters to The Editor over the past three months. All three chosen letter-writers' names will be put in a hat and the lucky winner will get his or her own Digital Bidet - which incorporates a unique gentle wash action and hot air drying system which all but eliminates the need for toilet paper and is worth €800! To find out more about the Digital Bidet, visit [www.pilsung.ie](http://www.pilsung.ie) or call 040 442 937.

Dear Editor,

I was well chuffed to finally get some cruising pointers in last month's issue of *GCN* ('Q Tips', Issue 218). As a young lad from the bog, the only erotic scene I was used to before I came to the big smoke was the occasional meeting of the vet's arm with a cow's arse.

Hoping for a bit of the same, I took to the Dublin clubs with your tips at hand. Trying to mix both 'aloof indifference' with the 'big gay stare' led to a guy who looked like a young Dermot O'Leary mistaking my advances for a seizure. A quick trip to St James's resulted, where I chatted up a Filipino male nurse called 'Honey' and before I knew it we were ridin' in the on-call room with him making me feel like his very own Dais.

Thanks for the pointers, *GCN*. On a side note, if you're reading this, Honey, I found your watch.

Yours,  
Johnny Thompson, D8

not Irish anyway and I never saw you here'.

I felt discriminated against. As a customer, I cannot understand what criteria bouncers are using in deciding who to let in and who to refuse entry to. Thanks to the bouncer at the George, I met my friends in another place.

I believed that The George was a place where black, white, fat, slim, would gain entry, but apparently for someone playing god at the door, a sober gay guy is not 'queer' enough to get in.

I feel already discriminated against without reason in a lot of situations. I do not deserve this kind of treatment at the gayest place in Dublin.

Yours, NDM

## RIGHT TO REPLY

Firstly I would like to say to your correspondent how sorry I am that he felt discriminated against. It is certainly not our policy or habit to make distinctions on the basis of size, sexuality, nationality, age or ethnic origins.

As you may understand it is not appropriate to address individual cases here, but if the writer would like to contact me directly at the club or email me to [thegeorge@capitalbars.com](mailto:thegeorge@capitalbars.com) we can discuss what happened on this occasion.

Again, apologies for any misunderstanding.

Best regards, Peter McLoughlin,  
General Manager, The George

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# CURRENT AFFAIRS

## NEW GAY RIGHTS GROUP CALL FOR CIVIL MARRIAGE

THE CIVIL REGISTRATION ACT COULD BE AMENDED IN 24 HOURS TO OPEN MARRIAGE IN A REGISTRY OFFICE, TO GAY AND LESBIAN COUPLES, ACCORDING TO NEW ACTIVIST GROUP.



At the launch of MarriagEquality, a new organisation dedicated to fighting for full and equal marriage for gay and lesbian couples in Ireland, it was claimed that the Civil Registration Act 2004 provides for the reorganisation of the registration of marriages and therefore could be opened to gay couples immediately.

Gráinne Healy, MarriagEquality co-chair, outlined that the change to the Civil Registration Act 2004 could be made at 24 hours notice, with political will and cross-party agreement, "Throughout this debate the Constitution has been presented as an unmovable obstacle to civil marriage for gay and lesbian couples. But we don't know whether this is true," she said.

"Instead of presenting a constitutional referendum as a fait accompli, politicians should find out first by amending the 2004 Act and then see what happens. This would be

progressive and brave legislating on behalf of all citizens."

Healy acknowledged that a constitutional referendum may indeed be necessary but stressed that this is not the certainty that government is currently presenting. "If the constitutionality of the law is questioned," she said, "the onus would be on the courts either to go with majority consensus and uphold the legislation or strike it down."

The government has committed to the Heads of a Bill, or draft legislation, on civil partnership by the end of March, but Healy asserts that civil unions are not the same as marriage.

"People see immediately that civil partnership confers fewer rights, is a separate institution and is essentially unequal and discriminatory," she said. "It is a pity the legislators who represent them continue to fail to see this."

## LESBIAN COUPLE SUE FOR GAY MARRIAGE IN COLORADO

A lesbian couple have mounted a case, seeking to overturn Colorado's constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

Kate Burns and Sheila Schroeder have filed a motion with Denver County court claiming that Amendment 43, which defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman, violates their constitutional right to equal protection. The measure was approved by 55 per cent of Colorado voters 15 months ago.

"The American system does not allow for the tyranny of the majority," said the couple's lawyer, Mari Newman. "Marriage is a fundamental right, which should be for all Coloradans, not just some Coloradans."

Nine US states and the District of Columbia afford a variety of benefits to gay and lesbian couples, but only Massachusetts allows same-sex marriage. 26 states have constitutional bans on same-sex marriage, whose legality is also being weighed by the highest courts of Connecticut, California and Iowa.

The couple say their case is emblematic of discrimination faced by gay and lesbian couples throughout America. "We are planning on sticking with this until the law has changed," Ms Burns said. "When you see something unjust, you want to change it."



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## GOVERNMENT GIVEN TWO MONTHS TO RECOGNISE TRANSSEXUAL BIRTH CERTS

The High Court has given the Irish government two months to decide how to provide proper recognition of gender identity on birth certificates for post-operative transsexuals.

Mr Justice Liam McKechnie said that birth registration laws in Ireland are in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In October he ruled that the failure of the government to provide proper recognition of the female identity of Dr Lydia Foy, a dentist who underwent gender reassignment surgery, is a violation of the European Convention. He said that the system of birth registration in Ireland is incompatible with the convention as it prevents Dr Foy's registration as female at birth.

The government will now have to outline how it intends to comply with Article 8 of the convention, respect for private life.

Dr Foy changed her name to Lydia in 1993 and has previously been issued with an Irish passport and driving licence in which she is

identified as female. She also obtained a Gender Recognition Certificate in the UK, but the High Court in Dublin questioned the relevance of the document in the Republic of Ireland.

In 2002, Dr Foy was refused a direction by the courts to the Registrar of Births to describe her as female on her birth certificate. Just days after that High Court decision the European Court of Human Rights ruled on a landmark case.

The UK's refusal to give transgender people new birth certificates breached their rights to marry and to respect for privacy under the Convention, the European court ruled. At that time the High Court in Dublin urged the Irish government to take action, but nothing has been done in the intervening five years.

## ON THE WIRE

WITH MARK RYAN OF THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LGBT NETWORK



Last year, the United States Food and Drug Administration upheld a blanket ban on men who have sex with men from donating blood to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS. This month, the Canadian Health Ministry followed suit and has included an extra provision that would forbid organ donations as well.

Health Canada formalised legislation last month that would prevent men who have had sex with other men in the last five years from donating vital organs. "The intent of the guidelines is to prevent communicable disease being transmitted from a potential donor to potential organ recipients," Bill Wall, head of the multi-organ transplant program at London Health Sciences Centre in Ontario, explained to the Canadian Broadcast Company.

Wall also said that the new regulations, which are similar to the guidelines about blood donations in Canada, are aimed at risky behaviour,

not individuals, yet the ban focuses solely on the sexual activity of men with other men rather than sexual promiscuity.

Gary Levy, director of the multi-organ transplant program for the University Health Network in Toronto, criticises the new rules for targeting gay men and says that the ban is unfounded and improper.

"In the past, the gay community was considered a high-risk community because of a perception of high-risk behaviour," Levy explained to the *National Post*. "We now know it's not a homogeneous community. The fact is, if someone has 62 partners, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, there still is a risk."

The new restrictions also limit drug addicts, prisoners, prostitutes and people who have had tattoos or body piercing in the last 12 months using shared needles from donating blood or organs.

Levy explained to the Canadian Broadcast Company that currently there are over 4,000 people in Canada on the transplant waiting list. With the new regulations in place, about 7 out of every 100 prospective donors would be turned away.

To take action on this, write to the Canadian Embassy in Ireland at 3rd floor, 7-8 Wilton Terrace, Dublin 2.

*Amnesty International's office, shop and coffee shop are located at 48 Fleet St Dublin 2.*

## MY NOISY VALENTINE!



Photo: Emma Haugh

Protesters form a human bouquet as part of a Valentine's presentation to An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern on February 14. Organised by LGBT Noise, the demonstration included the delivery of a Valentine's card to Mr Ahern, seeking his endorsement of same-sex civil marriage.

The card was printed with 1,000 messages including one saying, "Roses are red, violets are blue, give us the chance, to say 'I do'".

LGBT Noise member, Mark McCarron, said, "We are here to show Bertie a little love. We want him to reciprocate the love and grant civil marriage."

## GAY HATE MURDER IN US HIGH SCHOOL



A 14 year-old boy has been arrested for the murder of a gay fellow pupil at a school in California.

15 year-old Lawrence King, who was reportedly openly gay, was shot twice while in class at a junior high school in Oxnard, California on February 12.

He has been declared brain-dead and remains on a ventilator as his family want to donate his organs. King's classmate, Brandon McInerney has been arrested and charged with murder.

Californian prosecutors said the killing was a pre-meditated hate crime and McInerney would be charged as an adult.

The *Los Angeles Times* reports: "He would come to school in high-heeled boots, make-up, jewelry and painted nails, the whole thing," said Michael Sweeney, 13. "That was freaking the guys out."

Several students said King and a group of boys, including the defendant, had a verbal confrontation concerning King's sexual orientation a day before the killing.



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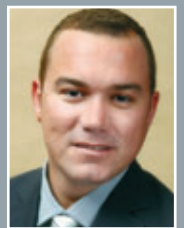
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Strauss carried on a life-long affair with the sound of the female



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voice, and this obsession found ample expression in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which abounds in soaring melodies for its three female protagonists.

*Ariadne* is directed by Opera Ireland's Artistic Director, Dieter Kaegi, and the costumes and sets have been designed by the award-winning Stefanie Pasterkamp.

We have 5 pairs of tickets to the opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* for Tuesday, April 1. To be in with a chance to win email competitions@gcn.ie by 21 March with your name, address and contact phone number, marking the subject box 'Opera Ireland'

## GAY DETECTIVE

Faithfully adapted from Richard Stevenson's popular Donald Strachey gay detective novels, the first of a series of film adaptations comes to DVD this month with a mysterious mix of murder and men.

Starring Chad Allan (*Dr Quinn: Medicine Woman*) as Strachey, *Third Man Out* follows the ruthless private investigator as he becomes embroiled in the dangerous world of John Rutka, a notorious member of the gay community, infamous for outing public figures. When the treacherous game of dragging men out of the closet turns deadly, it's up to Strachey to discover who's behind the fatal game.

*Third Man Out, TLA DVD, €21.99*

## SPORTING HEROES

With the Bingham Cup fast approaching you may well find yourself engulfed by a passion for all things rigger related. Well, make some room on the bookshelf/under the bed and



indulge your passion with photographer Pedro Virgil's *Gods of Sport* photo collection.

Virgil (a former photographic artist with *Bent* and *DNA*) has compiled photos of some of the scrummiest sport studs around and snapped them in all their mucky, sweaty glory for your visual delectation.

*Gods of Sport by Pedro Virgil, Bruno Gmünder, €65.95*

# 10 THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH...

### UNTIL MARCH 15 BLOOD BROTHERS

Tell me it's not true! Willy Russell's beloved musical returns to the Dublin's Gaiety

### MARCH 1 OUTWEST DISCO

Go gay in the West at Menlo Park Hotel, Galway City, €12, info from [www.outwest.ie](http://www.outwest.ie)

### MARCH 2 UH HUH HER

Go see Leisha Hailey aka the only bona fide lesbian on *The L Word* cast as she rocks out with her band at Dublin's Village, [www.ticketmaster.ie](http://www.ticketmaster.ie)

### MARCH 4 GARY NUMAN

Our friend electric plays all his greatest hits at TriPod, Tickets from €27.50. [www.ticketmaster.ie](http://www.ticketmaster.ie)

### MARCH 10 TO 29 MAMMA MIA!

The legendary ABBA musical returns to Belfast's Odyssey Arena, Tickets £12.50 to £39.50

### MARCH 14 FELIX KUBIN

Get your head around his crazy camp brand of electropop at Dublin's Crowdaddy, late night.

### MARCH 14 TO 16 THE L CUP

Annual lesbian golf championship and socialising at Ballykisteon Hotel, Co Tipperary, [www.thelcup.com](http://www.thelcup.com) for more info

### MARCH 16 ALTERNATIVE MISS IRELAND

Panti leads the antics on the stage of the Olympia for yet another year, tickets from [www.ticketmaster.ie](http://www.ticketmaster.ie)

### MARCH 20 & 22 JACK L

The showman returns with two gigs in Dublin's Vicar Street, €35 from [ticketmaster.ie](http://ticketmaster.ie)

### MARCH 30 HENRY ROLLINS

Fancy a bit of rough? The wordmaster does his unique thing at Belfast's Empire Music Hall



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# SCENE

## THE PROFILE...

GERI SINGER, DRAG PERFORMER



Singing (as opposed to lip-synching) drag queens are few and far between, and many of those who do should come with a health warning. Not Geri Singer, though. To witness this man belt out a pitch-perfect rendition of Whitney's I Will Always Love You clad in a ball-gown and stilettos is an electrifying experience.

Geri Singer began life as plain old Gerry, a cabaret singer who gigged up and down the country, recording the odd Eurovision track but never quite getting the crowds. So how does one make the transition from lounge singer to drag performer?

"Well, I was in the George one Sunday afternoon for Bingo! and Shirley was looking for somebody from the audience to get up on stage with her. My friend at the time anyway was like, 'Gerry get up and sing, go on get up!' so eventually I sang Careless Whisper and the crowd loved it. Shirley said to me, 'Come back next week, we've a

television crew coming in and I'll pay you,' so I went back the next week and then became a regular.

"The following year a couple of friends and I decided to drag up for Pride and I went as Pamela Anderson from Baywatch. The drag queens were like, 'Gerry why don't you do that on stage? Drag up and sing?' Eventually they talked me into it, so I went to Bingo! and did R Kelly and George Michael in drag. It was very strange, I was very uncomfortable and I decided then that I would stop."

After a while, instead of singing boy's songs, Geri began belting out ditties by his favourite divas, dressed as a diva, and the combination worked much better for him. Now Geri is more than comfortable to do his drag diva thing across the country to appreciative crowds.

The Irish drag scene is a notoriously competitive environment, so how is a performer as unusual as Geri received? Given the formulaic nature of the average drag act, how does a queen, who does no schtick and sings on perfect pitch, fit in?

"I'm very lucky," says Geri. "I've never had any bad experiences - maybe a bit of jealousy now and again with certain people (no names mentioned!), but I'm well able to handle that. If people aren't jealous I'm doing something wrong!"

*Geri Singer performs at Sinners Restaurant on Dublin's Parliament Street, February 28*

## SCENE&HERD

JOANNA RYDE'S NEW CLUB... SPICE'S BIG BIRTHDAY... PANTI'S NEW LIVING ROOM... BIG BROTHER BRAWN IN GALWAY... Q+A ON THE MOVE...

A new club with big ambitions is winding its way onto the Dublin scene. Created by AMI 2006 winner, Joanna Ryde, with her best friend Charmin Electric, **FLIRT** will click its chart 'n' pop-lovin' heels together for the first time on **February 28** at **Karma** on Dublin's **Fishamble Street** (just off Dame Street, near the Civic Offices) and then once more on **March 13**, and on every second Thursday thereafter. With all drinks just €3 before 10.30pm, get there early to get pissed!

**March 15** sees super Saturday-nighter **Spice** celebrate its first birthday at Spy on Dublin's South William Street. Featuring more dance floors than you've had hot dinners, serving up everything from pop to house to hard, it's been a breath of fresh air over the past 12 months and we hope it's still going just as strong this time next year.

There'll be plenty of partying in Dublin around **AMI** on **Sunday March 16**. Panti will be hosting a **post-AMI party** at **PantiBar** late into the night, which should be kicking, but if you'd like some futher musical interludes, go see **Geri Singer** belt her heart out at **Sinners** on Parliament Street after the show.

Speaking of PantiBar, **Make & Do nights** are still running **Mondays**, and are, according to Lady P herself, "an absolute

hoot!" Meanwhile, the basement is being converted into **Panti's Livingroom**, complete with sofas, wallpaper, rugs, flying ducks on the wall, and a TV showing every episode of *Coronation Street*, *America's Next Top Model* and so on and so fabulously forth. There'll also be a Nintendo Wii for the kids.

We're all hot 'n' boverred about the appearance of **Big Brother 6** winner **Anthony Hutton** at Galway's newest gay haunt, **Twirley's Showbar**. The little hunk will be spinning a few tunes and giving his best PA on **March 8** as part of a host of great nights throughout the month in the same venue.

**March 31** sees the return of **Monday** nighter, **Slam** at **Wax** in Dublin's Powerscourt Centre on South William Street. With DJs Karen and Rocky on the decks, it promises to pump your week into action from the get-go.

We've decided to be good and give you advance notice that **Q+A** is returning to its spiritual home in Temple Bar on Friday, **April 4**. Renovations have finished on the Temple Bar Music Centre (now known as the **Button Factory**) and the venue has been transformed from music venue into a stylish club, with plush carpets, velvet curtains, bouncye seats, heated smoking areas and most importantly extra bar areas! Visit [www.queerandalternative.com](http://www.queerandalternative.com) for more info!

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## WIN TICKETS TO SEE LEISHA!

Ever wonder what the cast of *The L Word* gets up to when they're not gaying it up in front of the cameras? Well, wonder no more about Leisha Hailey, aka Alice. She's getting her groove on and gigging around the globe with her band UH HUH HER. And guess what? They're coming to Dublin.

UH HUH HER is the brainchild of Hailey, formerly of alt-pop band The Murmurs and Camila Grey, bassist and keyboardist with lo-fi rock band Mellowdrone, who has also worked with Dr Dre and Kelly Osbourne. Introduced through mutual friends, Hailey and Grey began making music together at the beginning of 2007, writing the emotionally charged electro-pop tunes that make up *I See Red* EP, which is the band's sole release thus far. A full-length album is slated for next May.

New tracks from the album are bound to be debuted and the gig promises to be a must-see for electro-pop fans, indie

hipsters and just about anyone who's every lusted after Leisha on *The L Word*.

**We have 2 pairs of tickets to UH HER HER's upcoming gig in Whelans on March 2 to give away to one lucky reader. To be in with a chance, answer the following question:**

**LEISHA HAILEY STARS IN WHICH TV SHOW?**

- A) The L Word
- B) Sugar Rush
- C) Bad Girls

Send your answer, along with your name and address by February 29 to [competitions@gcn.ie](mailto:competitions@gcn.ie)



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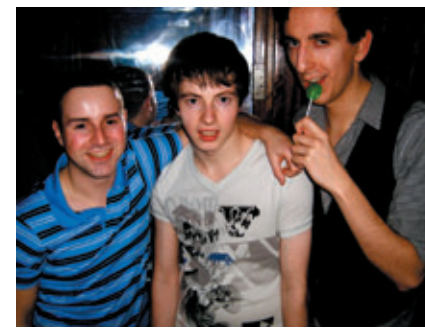
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# NIGHTS OUT

**Q+A, THE VAULTS, JAN 25, DUBLIN**  
PHOTOS BY HAZEL TRACEY



**LAUNCH OF TWIRLEY'S SHOWBAR,  
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# HOT FUZZ

Current titleholders of the Bingham Cup, Aussie gay rugby team, the Sydney Convicts are bringing no less than three teams to Dublin for the tournament in June. **Steven Dempsey** meets Andrew Purchas, better known as Fuzz, the Captain intent on leading his team into gay glory once more.



**T**he Bingham Cup, which will be toughly contested in Dublin in June, is named after Mark Bingham, a player from gay rugby team, the San Francisco Fog, who was on Flight 93, which crashed in

Pittsburgh on September 11, 2001. Bingham is believed to have been among the passengers who attempted to storm the cockpit to try to prevent the hijackers from crashing the plane into the Pentagon.

The Mark Kendall Bingham Memorial Tournament, or the Bingham Cup as it is now known, is a biennial international, non-professional, gay rugby union tournament. The first Bingham Cup was held in July 2002 and hosted by the San Francisco Fog, Mark Bingham's home team.

Playing for the San Francisco Fog that year was Australian Andrew Purchas, or Fuzz as he's known to his friends and family. Fuzz joined the Fog in 2000 when he and his partner moved from Sydney to San Francisco and he has fond memories of playing his very first game with Mark Bingham on the team.

"He was a good guy," says Fuzz. "I think the whole gay rugby team thing was quite seminal for him, it really changed his life. In America particularly, if you're not involved in a competitive sport at high school, or you don't do well in that arena, there are very few opportunities to become involved once you graduate into adult life. If you've got the added complexity of being gay, it's especially difficult to get involved.

"It was a bit of an epiphany for me about how important sport is to people, and how important teams like the San Francisco Fog are and were for people like Mark."

Fuzz may have helped the Fog secure the inaugural Bingham Cup but now he captains the Fog's most serious rivals, The Sydney Convicts, who are the current Bingham Cup holders.

"One of the guys who was at that first Bingham Cup and was part of the organising committee for London 2004 said to me that it's crazy Sydney doesn't have a team. He was like, 'Why don't you get one together and come to the next Bingham Cup?'"

Fuzz and his partner moved back to Sydney in 2003 and that's just what he did.

"We did a bunch of recruiting and ended up taking 30 guys over to the Bingham Cup in London. I would say of the team we brought

over that 70 to 80 per cent of them had played rugby league at some stage. Some of them hadn't played since school, some of them only played a little bit, but there was some experience there."

Fuzz has a wealth of rugby experience of his own. "I've been playing since I was about six," he says. "In my 20s I played first grade premier league in Sydney for about three years before retiring and playing in one of the second tier competitions for four or five more years."

Despite the levels of experience on the team, the Sydney Convicts lost out to the San Francisco Fog in London, but Fuzz says it was a galvanising moment rather than a failure.

"We came back to Australia and rebuilt during 2005. In that time we became the first gay team in the world to ever win a regular, straight league competition. And then in 2006 we took two teams over to New York and beat the San Francisco Fog in the final.

"Our second team won the Plate that year too, which is one of the other divisions in the competition. In some respects almost winning the Plate competition was a bigger thrill because some of those guys had never played before and that meant a huge amount to us all. It was kind of a relief to win the Cup; we had put so much effort into it. We never really thought we'd win both competitions."

So with Paddy Power dubbing them the favourites to win the Cup in Dublin this June, what kind of strategy has Fuzz put in place for the team?

"It's to win, I guess! You definitely do have to have some sort of a strategy, but we're not entirely sure what that is right now. I'm confident in saying that we're going to have to be better than we were in New York. The standard of the teams in the Bingham Cup is going up all the time. It's an entirely different thing than it was in London in 2004.

"We're extremely excited about coming to Dublin. We hope to have three teams this time and we're really impressed with what the team who put the Dublin event together have done. It's a really professional outfit and the kind of sponsorship they've gotten has sent a lot of excitement across the gay rugby world.

"Including Australian supporters who are coming to support us from different parts of the world, in excess of 100 of us will be coming to Dublin in June, so Australia's very excited about coming there. Win or lose, we're going to have a great time."

*The Bingham Cup takes place from June 15 to 17, 2008 at DCU. You can bet on your favourite to win at [www.paddypower.com](http://www.paddypower.com) and to find out more about the tournament, visit [www.binghamcup.com](http://www.binghamcup.com)*

## RUGGER BUGGER

Feeling perplexed by funny shaped balls? Our Bingham Cup 2008 columnist, Sinéad Deegan, is here to help with the second of her gay man's, sorry, layman's guides to the beautiful game that is rugby.



Spring has finally sprung and with the basics under your belt, it's time to progress onto more stimulating rugby subjects. This month we'll be looking at Players & Positions.

So listen up! Knowing who does what on pitch will make off-pitch scoring more satisfying in the long run.

Think of the game as a stage production; all 15 team members have different roles to play. A team is made up of backs (full back, wingers, centre, fly half, and scrum half) and forwards (props, hookers, flankers, second rows, and No 8). As with thespians, some are more important than others (or at least think they are), but that aside there's bound to be at least one position to suit your leaning. Let's examine some of the possibles.

Looking for a tall powerful man with hands like glue? Then the second rows (also known as locks) are for you. They wear shirt numbers 4 and 5, work to win the ball in lineouts and provide the main thrust to the scrum.

Small, fast, flexible and a superb ball handler sound more up your street? Then hunt out the hooker! (No' 2 shirt.) They are centre of the scrum and use their feet to 'hook' the ball while having both arms bound to the other players. It's considered to be one of the most dangerous positions on the pitch (perfect for post-match pulling - "Oh honey, I saw the way those brutes in the scrum squashed you - come back to mine for some deep, deep heat!")

If monstrous aggression turns you on, then you could always opt for a prop (shirt numbers 1 and 3). They support the hooker and lift the locks, so generally they're the beefiest characters on the field.

Brains more your thing? The fly-half (No'10 shirt) is probably the best rugby brain on the pitch. They need to make decisions under pressure (The George, PantiBar or Dragon? It always helps to have someone around that won't procrastinate). Our would you like to get down 'n' dirty with an all-rounder who likes ass in his face? The 8th Man (aka No'8) controls the ball at the back of the scrum and generally has the asses of the second rows in his face 80 per cent of the time. It's not a position for the faint-hearted. Mr Gay Ireland plays No'8 for the Emerald Warriors. Quiz him if you need more insight.

Although this is just a snapshot of the 15 positions, hopefully I've given enough options to get your interest up. If your type hasn't been covered then feel free to email [sinead@pinkink.ie](mailto:sinead@pinkink.ie) and I'll give you the 101 on the rest!

Till next month, ruggers, xxx

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**BUKAKE**

# EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND RESPECT

In the second of a two-part series interviewing key players in bringing about equal partnership legislation abroad, **Ciara McGrattan** meets John Fisher, who as Executive Director of EGALE, helped secure same-sex marriage in Canada.

Last November, John Fisher travelled to Ireland to give his perspective on the debate currently surrounding gay marriage equality. Speaking at a conference organised by the National Lesbian and Gay Federation (NLGF) and supported by the Equality Authority under European Burning Issues funding, Fisher was clear in his message that full marriage rights were the only equality option for Irish gay and lesbian couples.

After his address, I took time out with him to discuss exactly how the gay rights organisation EGALE, of which he was Executive Director, helped usher in same-sex marriage in Canada. I also wanted to know why he advocates marriage, despite the fact that he has no plans to marry his own partner of 12 years.

**What do you think about the fight for gay marriage equality in Ireland at the moment?**  
It's a very exciting time. There is a will for change and a sense of something happening at governmental level to recognise same-sex relationships. There seems to be a lot of community engagement about how, and what form that will take.

**Same-sex couples in Canada have the right to full and equal marriage. What do you think of the UK Civil Partnerships legislation, which sets up a separate institution for gay people?**

In EGALE we never had any objections to registered partnerships, civil unions or other models, provided it was recognised that same-sex couples were entitled to the full range of relationship options as heterosexuals, including the right to marry for those who chose it. Within Canada, by the time we came to advocate for equal marriage, virtually all of the rights and responsibilities attached to the institution of marriage had already been extended to same-sex couples. What was left at the end of the day was simply the symbolic status of being treated as equal citizens and having equal access to a fundamental social, political and legal institution - namely marriage.

As more and more lesbian and gay individuals and same-sex couples came forward to tell their stories along with many of their family members, it became increasingly clear that we were talking about an inclusive society, about the values of equality and inclusion and respect.

If heterosexuals had the option to marry

then it was felt that same-sex couples ought to have that option also. There was no valid basis other than discrimination to deny that choice to same-sex couples.

**By far the most anti-gay marriage rhetoric comes from the Vatican at this point. What is the appropriate response to that message?**

Often religious leaders like to polarise the debate into 'religion vs homosexuality' and part of the challenge we faced in Canada was to reveal that as a false dichotomy. It suggests that all people of faith are unequivocally and uniformly opposed to the values of equality and tolerance and inclusion. It also suggests that LGBT people are not themselves people of faith or people with sincere religious beliefs.

So we made sure the public was able to hear the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people who have sincere religious values and who see equality and inclusion as highly compatible with those values. We also made sure there were heterosexual and mainstream church leaders from a variety of denominations who would speak about their values of faith, if they wished to, to ensure that all members of society were treated equally.

It was important to underline throughout that the struggle for legal equality was just a question of legal equality and to underline the differences between civil and religious marriage. A lot of people see marriage as a religious institution and of course we made it clear that it's up to religions to determine their own rules for themselves, but what we were seeking access to is the legal institution of marriage as created and administered by the government.

**What do you think about the argument saying that gay marriage will bring about the loss of queer identity?**

I fought strongly within Canada for the right to marry even though on a personal level I have chosen not to marry my partner of 12 years. I believe very passionately that whether or not to marry is a choice that my partner and I are entitled to make for ourselves, and not one to be denied to us because the government feels our relationship is not equally worthy.

There were certainly those within the LGBT community in Canada for whom marriage was something that they personally aspired to, there were others for whom it wasn't and it was very important and part of advancing that campaign was to build community solidarity, to advocate protocols and to do so in a way that respected the diversity of perspectives.

It's not about any particular perspective being right or wrong - it's about recognising that we're entitled to the same range of relationship options as heterosexuals, including marriage for those who choose it.

**How can people who are not involved in gay rights organisations, but who are unhappy about a lack of equality, affect change?**

We found as the debate unfolded in Canada, it became a very national and inclusive campaign. One of the encouraging things about it was the



extent to which people who previously may not have been involved felt moved to become so.

Structurally, one of the challenges was to put in place a campaign that reached out to both ordinary gays and lesbians, to their families and friends and to other members of society who cared about the issue but might not have been politically involved. We put together kits, action alerts and developed websites, focusing on the actions that any of us who care about this issue could take.

One of the most obvious courses was, of course, writing to one's Member of Parliament [TD]. Politicians are influenced by what they

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Canada introduced a charter of rights, which has fairly strong protections against discrimination so we also began to engage more at the legal and judicial level to challenge political decisions in the courts. We also engaged with media and public awareness campaigns.

It took some time to piece all that together but within a few years we had fairly good integrated strategies that involved political advocacy, legal interventions, media and public awareness campaigns and grass-roots organising.

**How has the introduction of gay marriage affected society in Canada?**

We found that once the changes came into effect in Canada it really did have an impact on families around the country. There were many heterosexuals who felt uncomfortable perhaps with their child's sexuality in the past, but once they attended the wedding service and saw the affirmations of love and commitment they were really moved to reflect on their own values. Ironically, as the opposition often likes to portray us as anti-family, the impact was actually the opposite of this: same-sex marriage helped to bring families together.

**The Irish Government is introducing civil unions legislation, which may not include all the rights currently pertaining to heterosexual marriage. How do you think we**

**should respond to this?**

Our own approach in Canada was that if a legal change helped to reduce discrimination and move us in the right direction, then we would be willing to accept that, providing we made it clear that that was not the end of the struggle and politicians should not feel that we would be grateful for anything that they might offer.

We would certainly accept changes to bridge discrimination but continue to work towards the day when there would be full equality.

**Beyond partnership legislation, what do you think are the key issues the LGBT community should be focusing on?**

Clearly different issues assume different levels of priority in different parts of the world. In many European countries one of the core issues is how our love and our relationships are equally recognised and valued. In other parts of the world the core issues are against criminal sanctions or violence - in Eastern Europe there are a lot of government crackdowns or banning of LGBT Pride parades.

The priorities are very different in different parts of the world, but at the same time the struggles are all connected in the sense that at core, we're all seeking the right to be ourselves, to live our lives, celebrate our identities in freedom with dignity and respect.

To find out more about the work of EGALE, visit [www.egale.ca](http://www.egale.ca)

hear at ground level. Many of them assume that this is just a gay rights advocacy campaign without realising that it's something that affects us, our families and our friends on a day-to-day level and that there are many people who care about this and want to see society move in the direction of equality and respect.

**How did EGALE go about achieving its aims?**

We engaged across a range of strategies and I think that was a part of the effectiveness of the organisation. In the year we were founded there were no other LGBT organisations working at the federal and national level and

geographically Canada is a large and diverse country.

In the earlier years, my job as Executive Director of EGALE was to travel across Canada and put in place the structure for a national network. I would journey from the west to the east, staying with activists across the country trying to build some grass-roots engagement. I think prior to that date we'd focused primarily in the capital, in Ottawa, on political lobbying, but as the years went by and we found the politicians unresponsive, we recognised that there needed to be more of a national effort backing up our advocacy work.

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## DEBORAHBALLARD

COLUMN

Cathal Ó Searcaigh belongs to two intersecting groups - to the gay community and to the Irish artistic elite. He gets to belong to the gay community because he describes himself as a gay man and no other criterion really works. In judging membership of the gay community, there would also be the issue of who or what organisation would accept or reject particular people. In the absence of such an organisation, we tend to use the law. Before 1993 in Ireland, it was being outside the law that defined us; now we prefer our community to be securely within the law, but this creates its own problems.

Ó Searcaigh's membership of the tax-privileged Aosdána more than qualifies him as a member of the Irish artistic elite; that and the fact that he may well be the only internationally well-known poet in the Irish language.

Largely, the two communities have reacted differently to the documentary *Fairytale of Kathmandu*, made by Ó Searcaigh's neighbour

**“We need to be sure that we are not taking part in a witch-hunt that is a knee-jerk reaction”**

and friend Neasa Ní Chianáin in which she, as the first person narrator and behind camera interviewer, develops doubts about the exact nature of the relationships her language hero, a 52-year-old Westerner, has with more than one 17-year-old Nepali boy.

The director has been criticised on a couple of fronts: since she was making the film in the guise of a friend and fan of the poet and therefore had pretty intimate access to his life and thinking in Nepal, she should have told him how the film's characterisation of him was changing in the edit.

There's also a suspicion that the St Sebastian-style image used to illustrate the film and the timing of the publication of the director's qualms about her erstwhile hero smack of cynical promotion. David Norris was criticised for alluding to this in his *Irish Times* letter explaining why he wouldn't go see the film, but the image, while not overtly sexual in today's terms, most definitely uses the well-worn visual language of homoeroticism.


Regardless of these criticisms, Neasa Ní Chianáin happened to be in a position to record and interpret something that disturbs most people, so the

problem remains of how to deal with what Ó Searcaigh may have done.

The elite has closed ranks with their fellow member. Highly respected liberal arts types (and Eoghan Harris) have been lining up to defend Ó Searcaigh on a variety of grounds - he's their friend, he's a poet, he had a difficult early life, Nepal is a homophobic society, he works for official charities in Nepal - none of which, naturally, excuse any wrongdoing, but they are pretty much the only excuses available when public people feel betrayed by a revealed shortcoming in a friend or colleague.

On the other hand, the gay community, apart from Senator Norris, has been running away from Ó Searcaigh as quickly as possible. Of course, there is an imbalance of power when a rich older man gives large sums of money to impoverished teenagers; gifts that could change a family's fortunes forever. Whether it is also a misuse of power depends on how we judge what he wants in return. Some have pointed out that 17-year-olds are just above the age of consent in Nepal, but since homosexual acts are forbidden there at all ages, the legal argument can't be applied to the situation. Consensual sex with 17-year-olds may be within the law in Ireland; gays aren't allowed in Nepal. That's a whole other immorality of course.

We have to judge this individual imbalance of power by our own moral standards. Yes, it is wrong to take advantage of the huge socio-economic difference between a third world teenager and a Western 52-year-old. This happens on a vast scale every day across the world, but we each remain largely responsible for our own actions, so there is a qualitative as well as a quantitative difference between individual acts of abuse and the ones societies and industries perpetrate as a result of global inequities.

The gay community that Cathal Ó Searcaigh claims membership of needs to be sure that we are not taking part in a witch-hunt that is a knee-jerk reaction rather than a careful consideration of both the facts and what is done with them. In our eagerness to appease or integrate with mainstream society, we shouldn't lose a healthy suspicion of motivation. Cathal Ó Searcaigh may some day be judged for his actions by the people he is alleged to have hurt, rather than the tabloid mob that the gay community seems to be so enthusiastically supporting. 

I am open-mouthed at the *Fairytale of Kathmandu* affair, not at the sadly predictable pillorying of Cathal Ó Searcaigh before we've heard a word from the alleged victims, but at the irrational attitudes it has thrown up.

As a culture we are very squeamish about intergenerational sex, assuming either that the older person is being taken for a ride by a gold-digger or that the younger person is being manipulated by the older one. Not all cultures have felt the same. Less than a hundred years ago, in this country, it was seen as normal for an older man, now financially secure, to marry a woman young enough to have plenty of children. Feminism shone a light on the way such customs both resulted from and perpetuated the inequality of women, but this discourse of inequality of power is - or should be - very complex.

In ancient Greece it was part of growing up to have an older lover to mentor you in sex,

**“This country is so racked with guilt about the way vulnerable children were abused in institutions that it is not easy to have a mature debate about young people's sexuality.”**

manners, the ways of the world and what it is to be a man. It was much the same in France, except that the mentor had to be a woman. This still happens; in due course the younger person moves on, and the older person lets him or her go (and is often the more heart-broken of the two). That this sort of relationship has been collapsed uncritically into abuse is reductive - you have to look at what's actually going on. I don't know enough to comment on the *Fairytale* case, but I have observed a number of intergenerational relationships; in some I thought the younger partner benefited greatly from the nurturing and mentoring of the older partner; in others I felt uneasy about the vulnerability of the younger one.

This country is so racked with guilt about the way vulnerable children and young people were abused in institutions that it is not easy to have a mature debate about young people's sexuality.


How do young people learn about sex? (I mean the *it* of it, not the nuts and bolts, and the discussions about maturity, and the warnings about pregnancy and STDs beloved of sex education programmes.) If we remember how we felt - eager,

hormone-driven, oblivious to risk, feeling powerful because we were desired (at last), careless of anyone's feelings but our own - we feel a tenderness and protectiveness towards the young, and if that informs a sexual relationship, it can't be all bad. It's often not that way, of course; most of us were hurt and disappointed by lovers barely more sexually and emotionally competent than ourselves, but we dusted ourselves off and went off to look for something better. It is not helpful to underestimate the strength and agency of young people, especially those who have been taught to have a sense of their own self-worth.

There is certainly an issue in the Ó Searcaigh case, but Ní Chianáin's behaviour has been, to say the least, dubious. I don't doubt that she was genuinely concerned about the young men, but she should surely have told Ó Searcaigh that her film was becoming something quite other than the one he agreed

to participate in. It was unconscionable to take advantage of her subject, not to warn him that the film was turning into an exposé.

According to the *Irish Examiner*, “she passed tapes to health authorities in Ireland, *after her funders became concerned* about some of the material in the documentary.” Not that troubled herself, so. And as Máire Mhac an tSaoi said on *Liveline*, why are we only hearing about it now, two years later, just as the film screens at the Dublin International Film Festival? As a final irony, the film's publicists have, incredibly, chosen a picture which might have been used as an ad for sex tourism.

No doubt the HSE is obliged to report suspicions to the Gardaí, who are obliged in turn to contact the Nepali police. The Sexual Offences Act provides for an Irish person to be prosecuted here for having sex abroad with someone below the Irish age of consent, even the young person is over the age of consent in their own country. Abusive sex-tourism should certainly be contested, but good intentions aside, you would wonder what our legislature thinks ‘age of consent’ actually *means*. It may be one-size-fits-all, but it is the point a particular culture has chosen to mark a young person's transition from vulnerability to responsibility, a consensus of which the young themselves are part. It is not for us to take that dignity from them. 



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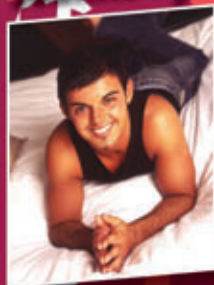


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# WOULD YA RYDER?

It might seem like last year's Alternative Miss Ireland Joanna Ryde virtually disappeared from Dublin stages after her big win, but as her alter-ego Colin Byrne explains to **Brian Finnegan**, she's been successfully carving out a very particular career niche ever since.

It was a safe bet one quarter of the way into last year's Alternative Miss Ireland that Joanna Ryde would walk away with the crown. Her act, a kind of girlz-in-the-hood update of a brand of Irish knacker-drag that was created by 1998 AMI winner Shirley Temple Bar, was uproariously funny and pitched at just the right level.

A teenage mother from a sprawling Finglas family, Joanna Ryde was a cleverly conceived creation, her 'amateur dramatics' choreographed to flow so everyone was in on the laugh, including her. She may have come across as a slightly dazed juvenile delinquent-come-ingénue, but there was nothing dazed about the act. It was as slick as an oil-spill and designed to hit all the proper highs.

Indeed, as Joanna remembers, the audience got so carried after her evening wear rendition of Joyful, Joyful, which was performed in Mountjoy Prison, where Joanna found redemption after being nicked for shoplifting, they cheered for a solid two minutes.

At first sight, in the cold light of a February day, Joanna's creator Colin Byrne is a Clark Kent to Joanna's Superman. Dressed in a suit and tie, he's a bespectacled insurance claims manager with Quinn Direct. But get him talking about Joanna and the suit fades into the background. What appears in the insurance man's place is a fiercely intelligent and ambitious performer who is crystal clear about what he wants and is taking the right steps to get it.

Colin, you realise, wants to take Joanna on the ride (or is that Ryde?) of her life.

## Tell me how the character of Joanna came about?

We had a *Stars in Their Eyes* night in Dunnes about four years ago, back when I worked there. Me and two of the lads were the Sugababes and it started me off on the whole drag thing. I got to do Gubu on Monday nights with Ivana Dance for a couple of weeks and then I asked Veda if I could do her show at the George. This was all with me miming to songs. It had the seeds of Joanna, but it was a different character.

After a while I gave it a rest and then Joanna stayed alive on the website QueerID.com. She really developed there, with me writing about her on the forums. Her whole story began to emerge.

## With her QueerID articles, Joanna has become a kind of queer, northsider answer to Ross O'Carroll Kelly. Is she a sign of her times?

She doesn't have a message, if that's what you mean. She's just always trying to sell something. She's kind of like a Del Boy character in lots of ways, always trying to do a few dodgy deals and make a bit of money.

She's also a very family-orientated person. Her Dad is in the Joy, her mother's always on the broad of her back with sciatica, and she's very protective of her daughter, Phoenix, who was conceived in the Phoenix Park. She reckons the father might have been Swedish, but there's no way of knowing.

She has her big sister, Anita who has a boyfriend called Nunchuck and two kids called Pola and Amiya. Her little sister is called Wanda, and her little brother is Andy. She has a really comprehensive family.

## You came second in AMI Cork a month before you were finally crowned Alternative Miss Ireland in Dublin. Were you gutted back then?

I was far too cocky in Cork for my own good. I felt gay Cork had really taken me to its heart, having appeared there at AMI the previous year and performed at Cork Pride, so I was totally shocked. When they called the winner I was all ready to walk up. So, yeah, I was gutted when they called Kitty Cartier.

Later that night, Panti said something to me along the lines of, 'It's like the Champions League. You've lost the away day and you're going to do great on homeground.' To have her say something like that was all the encouragement I needed. I threw myself into it and made sure that every last detail was right. Even the colour of the bobbins in my hair changed with each costume change in the final. I wanted it to be that perfect.

## Were you aware at any point on the big night that you might win?

I was aware at three o'clock that day. In the weeks beforehand when I'd drive by the Olympia I'd be so nervous I'd be heaving. But when I walked into the Olympia that day, I felt fine. It was like everything has led up to this point, and this was it.

I normally don't drink, but I was sitting there having a couple of glasses of wine and all the other contestants were rushing around, getting it together. I think the panic they were in compared to the complete lack of panic with us made me more confident.

## It was clear that you put a lot of preparation into the act.

There was 11 of us involved, nine people on stage and two in the background. We called ourselves Real Finglas, like the football team. I don't see Joanna as a solo act. My friends have always been helping and I've met friends since who have been a huge help to me. They know who they are.

We choreographed it very quickly. Then we sat down on the floor in the student's union in Griffith College and mapped out all the colours we were going to use and everything. I said from the start that we wouldn't use any props. A piece of Sellotape can go AWOL on the stage!

And then it was just a case of beginning rehearsals, which were a bit of a nightmare to organise. The night before we were working on it until four in the morning.

Will St Leger, who played the cop that arrests me at the end, came to rehearsals that night with handcuffs and by the time we finished I had big bruises on my wrists!

## So, how did it feel once you finally got out on stage?

When Panti announced my name just before I came out for the first time on stage that night, the crowd went wild. Lots of them had never even heard of me, but there was this mad sense of anticipation in the air. My heart nearly stopped!



Photo courtesy of Mary Furlong

Luckily I had a few seconds to get myself together. When I got the reaction to the bit where we did Riverdance to the song Maniac, it was like people were going mad. I'll never forget that moment; I was like, 'Holy shit!'

When Panti was interviewing me later, I said I want everyone in this audience to say, 'I'm proud to be gay, I'm proud to be a lesbian, I'm proud to be a scanger from Finglas,' and that's exactly how I felt. At that moment I felt like I was proud



to be where I was. I never felt prouder to be gay, to be a northsider, to be a drag performer...

That moment when Panti said, 'the new Alternative Miss Ireland is Joanna Ryde,' is indescribable.

**You say that everything led up to AMI, but you were writing for years before that.**

When I was at school, I used to change the lyrics of songs in my head. I remember there was a girl

in our class who really hated herself and I changed the words to the TLC song, Unpretty to suit her.

When I went to college this character came about called Sharon Dunne. I was studying media and we had to make radio shows and I didn't like the sound of my voice presenting and stuff. The guys were having a laugh and they said, present it as another character, and so Sharon was born and she had songs that had the lyrics changed.

**What's this I heard about a book in the works?**

I wrote a book about a year in the life of Sharon, who is kind of an aspirational version of Joanna. I'm trying to get it published at the moment. Really, looking back I wish I wrote it as Joanna, but it's too far gone now. I would really like to do that in the future, though.

**Compared to other AMI winners, it seems your ambitions are quite different. Is that true?**

Winning AMI has had the opposite effect of what I thought it would have on me. I've realised that I don't want fame and glory, but that I want to do something in my life that I love doing. Right now, this is what I want to do and I find it very exciting.

I haven't performed very much in Dublin since I've won. Don't get me wrong, I would like to do more in Dublin, but there are a lot of other avenues I'm exploring. I've built up a following around the country and I'm constantly travelling and performing outside Dublin, which is an untapped scene, and that's been great. But I'm well aware of the work I have to put in to make a career out of it.

**You've appeared on the Podge & Rodge TV show a couple of times. Would you like to do more television?**

The producer of that show is pretty adamant that things are going to happen for me. I can't say if that's going to be the case, but I would like it to be.

**Have you any advice for this year's AMI entrants?**

If you think winning AMI is going to make you an overnight star, think again. There have been 13 winners of this competition and only a handful of them have made a career out of it. It took Katherine Lynch (Miss Tamy Lilette, AMI 1998) ten years of hard work to get where she is now, with her show on television. Declan Buckley (Shirley Temple Bar, 1997) has spent a long time carving out a career for himself too.

What people don't see with me is that for every act that I do on stage a huge amount of work goes on. I constantly have to come up with fresh material so it doesn't go stale; I constantly have to up my game. You can't just sit there and wait for RTÉ to come to you. I went to the people who do *Podge & Rodge*, they didn't suddenly call up looking for me.

Doing *Podge & Rodge* has been a great boost, but I'm not sure what's next. There's a lot I want to do. We're setting up a new club in Dublin called FLIRT, which will be bi-monthly and we want to take it around the country.

**Is there an AMI winning formula?**

I knew to be in with a chance, I would have to have eight dancers, I would have to have a story to tell, I knew that I would have to make people laugh, I would have to really deliver a show. The likelihood of an act that no-one has heard of winning is slim, although Heidi Konnt (2005) was strong enough to do it, so it's good to get yourself out there before you hit the Olympia stage.

I think a lot of the regional winners are at a disadvantage. If they're not known in Dublin, they have to convince a huge part of the audience to vote for them on first sight.

**Have you any idea what you're going to give the audience this year for your outgoing AMI performance?**

Yes I do, but I'm not telling. Just wait and see, it's gonna be huge!

*AMI 2008 is at the Olympia Theatre, Dublin on Sunday, March 16. Tickets from [www.ticketmaster.ie](http://www.ticketmaster.ie) or at a slightly reduced cost from the Olympia box office at 0818 719 330*

# LET'S MAKE NOISE

It's amazing what can come of a chat between friends in a bar. Three months ago, a group of friends were talking about how they felt about gay marriage and now they're one of the most vibrant new voices in gay Ireland. Meet LGBT Noise.

Last October, a group of gay and lesbian friends were talking about the issues surrounding gay marriage. What they felt was powerlessness in the face of a government that seemed to be making decisions about their lives without listening to what gay people really want and need.

Each of the group wanted equality for gay people in Ireland, but they felt that nobody was really standing up and representing them in the public eye. They believed that the fight for equality was happening behind closed doors where they could not have their voices heard, and that people were confused about the issues involved.

Instead of just talking about it and then dropping the subject, the idea of forming a gay rights group of their own came about. And so, one month later, LGBT Noise, or Noise for short, was born.

Noise consists of a group of seven people, supported by about 10 event-running volunteers, who want to demonstrate for change. They want people in the gay community to be seen and heard and they will work in tandem with all the other gay rights organisations in Ireland for equality.

Noise is an independent, politically unaffiliated organisation that hopes to reach out to all people, gay or straight, who believe in equality and human rights for all. The group believes that unless people make enough noise, the government will continue to allow

discrimination against same-sex couples in Ireland.

Noise wants to provide a public outlet for all people to vent their frustration at a government that refuses to grant full equality to gay people. They also hope to mobilise people and grab attention by holding events that will be exciting, colourful and dynamic. Already there are 412 members on their facebook page, 311 on Bebo and 260 on the mailing list, and the numbers are growing daily.

We've asked each of the founders of Noise to say why they took the ball into their own hands to create Noise and fight for equality.

## UNA MCKEVITT (32)

Coming out to myself was a long and difficult journey. As a result, I often think, 'How can society change so that the first option isn't for gay people to try and resist who they are, but instead feel the excitement everyone should feel as they become aware of their sexuality?'

As a child, I had absolutely no experience of gay people and until the advent of Channel Four, I don't think I'd heard the word used in popular culture other than as a term of abuse among teenage boys. When I first went to university, it was much discussed, but the attitude of students towards homosexuality, and I include myself here, was still very negative.

I went back to college in 2003 and things were different, both for me and the younger



gay students I met there. This has a lot to do with confidence within the gay community, as well as a real commitment from many in the straight community to recognise and respect our entitlement to love and be loved.

But now we need to make the big leap towards demanding what we know is only fair - an equal right to state recognition of the relationships we hope will take us 'til death do us part.' And a Big Gay Wedding, of course!

I'm here to make some Noise because I've found a partner who's willing to make that leap with me and because I believe that the reality of marriages between same-sex couples will provide a much healthier country for young gay people to live in."

## ELOISE MCINERNEY (27)

"When I moved back to Ireland from Spain six months ago, I had no idea I was going to end up becoming a gay rights activist.

While living Spain I met lots of gay people who were married or planning to get married. Indeed, in my militant 'Spain is better than Ireland days', my second-favourite argument after the weather was that it was a progressive country where gay people like me might one day have the chance to tie the knot.

Given these excellent arguments for favouring Spain over Ireland, one might well ask why on earth I would come back? The truth is, I missed my Irish friends and sunshine seemed

like a fair trade-off for having them back.

But you can't trade off on your rights. And it's something gay people have done for far too long. Sometimes we're so miserably thankful just to be allowed exist that we lose track of the terrible discrimination that still goes on. Seeing the differences between gay rights in Spain and Ireland woke me up to that. It's ridiculous that a Catholic country like Spain has full gay civil marriage while we can only look forward to a selection box put together by politicians.

In classic armchair activist fashion, I did nothing but moan about it for a while. But then I went to the candlelit vigil organised by Labour LGBT outside the Dáil in November and started to get ideas about how things might actually get done. I wasn't the only one, and the rest as they say, is Noise history."

## PAUL KENNY (28)

"So, why did I get involved in a group like Noise? For one thing, I believe in equality for gay people, and for their relationships. But then so do most of us (I hope). I'm also in a committed long-term relationship - I've been with my partner for three years, and hope to be for many more. But while it's wonderful, it doesn't make us unique.

What set things off for me was finding that I'd had enough of the lies and distortion of those who hate us: groups and individuals with money, influence, and - most importantly -



Photo by Emma Haugh, [www.emmahaughphotography.com](http://www.emmahaughphotography.com)

willing mouthpieces in our national media who hide their intolerance behind smooth PR and a thin veneer of reason.

I'm in Noise because it's a way to even things up - it's a way to make our side of the story heard."

**ANNIE HANLON (27)**

"Around the time I came out, homosexuality wasn't against the law and the government had just enacted the anti-discrimination laws. Gay rights weren't a major concern for me, and I never felt particularly oppressed. I figured that Irish society would evolve so that my sexuality was no longer an issue at all. I watched with interest as gay couples were awarded partnership rights throughout Europe, in parts of North America, and as far away as New Zealand and South Africa.

The world appeared to be evolving in a positive way and I believed that Ireland would soon catch up. I was complacent and I assumed there were lots of people out there sorting out those little details on my behalf.

That all changed in 2007. I watched in dismay as the Labour Civil Union Bill was voted down in the Dáil. For the first time in my life, I realised I had to stop relying on others to speak on my behalf in matters with such personal consequences.

Neither the politicians nor most of the people I knew seemed to be aware of the negative effects of failing to legislate for full equality. The

idea for Noise grew out of this need for change. I realised that if this situation continued, anti-discrimination laws would be of little use to me. I would never be considered or treated as an equal in Irish laws or minds.

If we want change, we can't sit back and wait for it. We have to get up and do something about it. And if we do, there's an unbelievable amount we can achieve."

**LISA CONNELL (25)**

"I believe passionately in the work we are doing with Noise because I truly believe in equality. As an Irish citizen, I don't feel any different to anyone else, but I *am* different because in the eyes of the law, I am not equal.

All I want is to be given the same rights as every heterosexual citizen. I mean, if my brother can ask his girlfriend to marry him, why can't I ask mine? How are we so different? Is this too much to ask? Equal rights for gay people in Ireland should not be a dream, an unrealistic fantasy - it should be a reality."

**MARK MCCARRON (27)**

I am very much an accidental activist. While I took an interest in politics, I'd never felt particularly repressed as a gay man. This changed last year when I went to a number of my straight friends' weddings. They were great fun, but I was left with the very clear feeling

that I'm not equal to them and that I'm being denied the same right to plan for a future that they took for granted.

I'm being denied this choice because of my sexuality and it's hard to take. Coming out is a difficult experience for everybody, but walking through that barrier leaves you feeling like you're finally equal - so it's frustrating to suddenly wake up and realise that the politicians we elect can pick and choose our rights.

What does that say about how the straight community views gay people and their relationships? Do they just dismiss them as promiscuous, fun, camp partygoers? Not normal people like them who marry, work, have kids and then retire with and support their partners?

I joined Noise because I want that to change. I want other gay people to think about it and be annoyed like I am. I also believe that the legal recognition of gay relationships will lead to a much healthier and less homophobic country for new gay children to grow up in. And I believe that we all have an obligation to achieve this."

**EDWARD MATTHEWS (27)**

"When I came out, I lived in a small rural area and was working in a traditional environment. My memories of coming out are not unpleasant because, in fairness to everyone, nothing much was said.

I remember moving to Dublin, that intense


sense of fear, a longing to find a place, a place where I fitted. It wasn't easy. I suppose it never is, but the circle of friends grew and so did my comfort zone. Work took over, along with various other things, and before I knew it, there I was, living in my very own cocoon. I forgot how horrible it had been when I was growing up, thinking I was somehow second class, that any relationship I would ever form would never quite cut it.

I learned from good friends that I could love and be loved, and I'm lucky to have had that experience. But the status quo isn't good enough any more. It might not be illegal to be gay - a not insignificant achievement when you look around some parts of the world. But crumbs from the master's table don't satisfy me. We deserve full recognition of who and what we are, and whom we choose to love, not simply permission to associate in public.

Activists aplenty have championed our cause in the past, but I thought it was time for me to do something. Thankfully someone reminded me recently of all that I had forgotten, I think its time we remembered how special loved ones are to us all.

Why Noise? Because it's the silence that deafens."

*Find out more about Noise and how you can become involved at [www.lgbtnoise.ie](http://www.lgbtnoise.ie) or to sign a petition asking the government for full equality for gay people*



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Styling, hair and make-up: Noel Sutton  
Model: Laura McCann  
Location: JoBurger, Rathmines, D2





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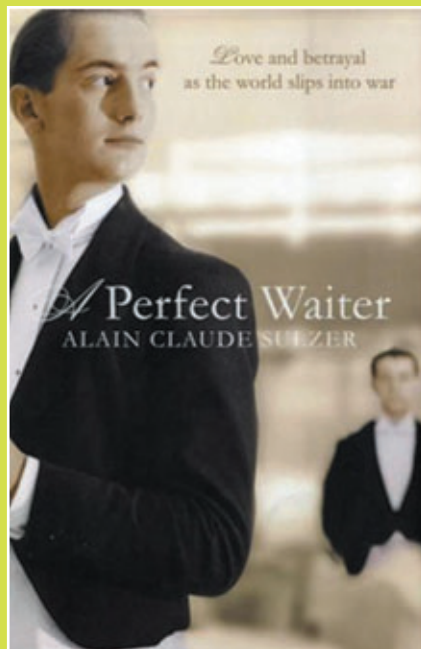
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SUMMER NIGHTS

A PERFECT WAITER

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 Denis Kehoe



The year is 1966 and Erneste is a middle-aged man who lives in a Swiss town, works in a smart restaurant, goes for the odd cruise but generally keeps himself to himself. His life is ordered, apparently insignificant, but with the arrival of a letter from the States, his carefully controlled world is thrown into turmoil, as he journeys back to two fateful summers 30 years earlier.

In 1935, as Europe moves ever closer to another cataclysmic war, Erneste works as a waiter in the Grand Hotel, an elegant, pompous place on the shores of a Swiss lake. It is standing on the shores of this lake that he first sets eyes on Jakob Meier, a stunningly good-looking 19 year-old German who has come to take up a post in the hotel.

Smitten from the word go, Erneste looks out for his slightly younger colleague, with whom he shares an attic room, and sets about schooling him in the ways of a perfect waiter. The former's actions aren't merely altruistic and Jakob is more than aware of the effect his charms have on Erneste. Soon the two are lovers and a blissful summer season at the hotel unfolds.

But all good summers inevitably end and when the two meet again the following year it is clear that a paradise has slipped from their grasp. With the arrival of a famous German writer who has exiled himself and his family to the hotel (and who bears more than a passing resemblance to Thomas Mann), the three men's lives become inextricably linked, and the consequences of their actions continue to echo mournfully decades later.

Written in restrained, careful prose where a word is never wasted, *A Perfect Waiter* is a short novel with a lot of depth. Sulzer masterfully captures the melancholy of a lost world and a lost love and seamlessly moves between the two time frames in which the novel is set. Elegant and composed as a master server it is a meditative, erotic and haunting work. The first of the Swiss author's books to be translated into English, we can only hope there is more to come.

GREECE IS THE WORD

THE GREEKS AND GREEK LOVE: A RADICAL REAPPRAISAL OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN ANCIENT GREECE

By James Davidson  
 Weidenfeld & Nicolson €40.00  
 Michael Wynne



"Lovelier than anything else is what the heart desires," is a Sapphic fragment quoted well on into this latest offering from the popular (in the broadest sense) ancient historiographer James Davidson, and to an extent it is the protean nature and forms of desire - whatever about its loveliness - which stands as something of the key theme of this fascinating, funny, decidedly comprehensive, overlong jalopy of a survey.

In a style and language that skilfully mixes the learned and a conversational, warmly ironic layman-ese, Davidson's thesis revolves around the distinction he makes between Greek Homosexuality - the official, institutional version sanctioned by laws and decrees which, themselves evolving from a time ancient to the ancients, were rooted in the age-class nature of the (rather varied) societal structures of the Greek city-states - and Greek homosexuality of a less regulated, more ordinary kind. This functions as what Davidson terms a type of "sexicity", that is, one of a variety of "inessential flexible roles" that people - depending on their environment, on their circumstances, on what (or who) really was at hand - have tried on since time immemorial.

Impressed with the Greek idea, or, more correctly, the Greek practice of taking it for granted that the essence of sexuality is its inessentiality, its role-playing-oriented changeableness, and also with how this notion of sex-flexibility is reflected through the ancient language's absence of defining terms for sexuality-types, Davidson, in over 500 entertaining and discursive pages, analyses ancient homo-myth and homoerotic art, as well as fragments of legal and other documents involving homosexual affairs, in the context of a unique culture in which (pretty much exclusively male) same-sex eros (longing) and philia (intimacy) was often publicly celebrated - and, occasionally, vilified, if strict social codes (usually to do with matters of age, or grasping ambition) were disrespected.

Ultimately, it is in its underlying presentation of desire as the kind of force that rises beyond and is impervious to statutes and customs, the kind, if you like, that is ahistorical, or whose real history, rather, is interior, that makes this book worth investigating for the student of that knottiest and most modern of concepts, sexuality.

FAMILY FEAST

WHEN WE WERE BAD

By Charlotte Mendelson  
 Picador, €11.99 paperback  
 Brian Finnegan



Charlotte Mendelson's *When We Were Bad* begins awkwardly on a couple of counts. Her style of prose is deceptively simple - present tense, short sentences - but from the get-go her use of metaphor hardly slips off the page. Complex and not-quite-

right comparisons abound as she opens the novel at a very awkward moment in the lives of the Rubins, an upwardly mobile middle-class and deeply dysfunctional Jewish family living in leafy Northwest London. In the midst of a lavish wedding, the oldest son Leo walks out on his bride to run away with the wife of the rabbi of a neighbouring synagogue.

Leo's shameful exit is a shocking betrayal of the perfect image his glamorous mother Claudia likes to project, both inwardly and outwardly. It comes in the lead up to the publication of a book that she hopes will not only seal her reputation as London's most prominent, liberal rabbi, but catapult her into another stratosphere of fame altogether. In her steely determination to keep her husband and four children trapped in a picture postcard version of themselves, she ignores a family meltdown in which Leo's departure is only one part of the equation and begins planning a gargantuan Passover feast, at which we realise the entire façade will eventually crumble.

Mendelson's awkward metaphors ultimately fit very well with the off-kilter relationships between members of the Rubin family and you slowly realise she's using language to explore exactly how families miscommunicate with each other to make life easier, but thereby more difficult, for themselves.

Claudia's husband, Norman, is on the brink of having a controversial bestseller of his own, which he's secretly been working on for years. Eldest daughter Frances is suffering from post-natal depression and quietly pushing herself towards an affair with the girlfriend of her sexually experimental and infantilised younger sister, Emily. The aforementioned Leo is struggling with the first real erotic relationship of his life, where he has to choose between his mistress and his family and youngest son, Simeon, is slipping into a depression fuelled by madly misplaced anger. Meanwhile Claudia is nursing an overwhelming secret of her own.

Mendelson only writes from the points of view of four of her characters, leaving youngest siblings Emily and Simeon out in the emotional cold, but that complaint aside, this is a book that works on you like a quality drama series. You have to invest in reading the first part to fully begin to enjoy the rest of what's on offer and by the end you care deeply for and identify with all the characters, despite their dysfunction and awkwardness.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

BANG CRUNCH

By Neil Smith  
 Weidenfeld & Nicolson, €16.99  
 Regan Hutchins



*Bang Crunch* is the debut collection of short stories by Canadian writer Neil Smith. They are set in his home town of Montréal and conjure up such a vivid sense of the city that it may as well be the main character in the collection.

Ordinary people find themselves in extraordinary circumstances. One girl suffers from a condition known as Fred Hoyle Syndrome where she will age a lifetime over weeks. A woman, who became pregnant as an antidote to loneliness, finds herself dealing with the emotional fallout of a premature birth. A teenager whose dad died recently starts to develop a crush on his nerdy friend. A recovering alcoholic stores her husband's ashes in a hollowed out curling stone. A man sets up a

support group for people who carried benign tumours. Oh, and some kids deal with the aftermath of a high school shooting.

Smith has style. He's witty. He's good at images. He twists phrases about and he often presents you with a unique way of seeing things. He describes a woman's hair as blonde like the boots workers wear. He's good at doing cute and poignant: "In her foolish 20s, she'd shared a loft with a boyfriend whose puppy-dog good cheer had made her want to drive him out to the country and leave him there".

There is tenderness in his stories. It shines through some of his characters. The gay story in the collection - Green Fluorescent Protein - is superbly crafted. Smith blends the family life of Max with his friend's obsession with genetics and Max's obsession with his friend so that the structure of the story resembles one of those plastic models of DNA.

These are short tales set against gigantic themes, played down with a flat deadpan, killer wit and an endearing dysfunctionality. AM Homes does it with practiced ease. So does Chuck Palahniuk. Neil Smith isn't quite up there yet. However, his stories are buoyant enough to keep you engaged.

## THE CHOICE CUT

**JANET JACKSON** ♥♥♥♥  
Discipline/Def Jam

It's been two years since 2006's bland *20 Y.O. and* in the intervening time Janet Jackson has changed record label to Def Jam and has been working closely with producer Rodney Jerkins. And so we come to *Discipline*, a thud-thumping beast of almost an entirely new nature.

The show opens with the hyperactive Luv, on which Janet runs a red light to sing about being hit by "his love" like a car crash. It's an incredibly catchy ditty, paving the way for an album that's never afraid to drop a metaphor to get its point across.

And what is that point? This is an album about the shiny, superficial sexual fantasy.

The almost robotic cover image is echoed through *Discipline's* songs, which pound hard and hit home, but have a slightly defensive tone. Thus when Janet's saying, "Daddy, I disobeyed you" on the title track, she's not letting us in on the Jackson family dysfunction. She's singing about the kinky, shiny PVC surface of S&M.



The high-voltage beat goes on with the Jerkins-produced, housed-up single, Feedback, on which Janet sings about her time o' the month, and the dizzy, multi-layered This Can't Be Good, which has echoes of Spending Time With You, the single from her 2004 album *Damita Jo*.

The house cranks up further on the magical Tonight, with its get-the-party-started flava. It's a superior stand-out, along with power-ballad, The Greatest Ex, which feels at least a little confessional. It's got sure-fire hit written all over it.

Rollercoaster is a major departure for Janet, with its heavy-handed layering and off-kilter melody. Rock With You, titled with knowing reference to Michael's 1980s megahit, is pure, slick sugar with Janet in croon mode. The title is the only reference to anything private about Jackson, but that's more than enough on an album that doesn't disappoint otherwise.

Mary Considine



Californian rock-chick can hardly survive such developments and so she's changing tack. In accordance with her wearing of an 'No War' guitar strap at the Grammys just as the US was about to invade Iraq and her participation in the Stop Global Warming tour, her latest album gets all serious, tackling one heavyweight topic after another.

While God Bless This Mess begins its life as bittersweet acoustic nostalgia about family holidays, before you know it the song becomes a damning commentary on Bush's post 9/11 war on terror. Shine Over Babylon kicks America's foreign policies in the guts, while Love Is Free gets all hot and bothered about Bush's lack of response to the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster and how it affected ordinary lives.

For all the serious intent, *Detours* is camouflaged with bland grooves and vocals, as if Crow is hoping her lefty lyrics won't put the mid-Western heart of her fanbase off. Take the song Gasoline for instance. It's a diatribe about the abandoned waste of natural resources with a chorus that goes: "Gasoline will be free, yeah, yeah, yeah." A case of trying to have your cake and eat it.

The album works better when it pulls back. The title track is an intimate country-folk song about feeling lonely and unloved and needing her mother. Crow sings in a pitch-perfect voice hanging between country ache, soul yearning and pop eloquence. Without all the bluster, it soars into reaches the rest of this album can't climb.

Mary Considine

**MARIA DOYLE KENNEDY** ♥♥♥  
Skullcover/Mermaid

Maria Doyle Kennedy's covers album is as eclectic as you might expect from an artist who constantly refuses to step into the middle of the road. Her trademark sleepy vocals wind themselves around a collection of songs, some well known, some obscure, experimenting but not with a heavy hand.

The acoustic opening bars overlaid with wailing horns of her slowed down version of The Cure's Lovesong introduces the overall ambience of this album. Each of the songs generally builds from acoustic to orchestral, with plenty of strings underpinning and sometimes almost overwhelming her gentle voice. Her version of The Buggles Video Killed The Radio Star turns a pop-stomper into a heartbreaking melody, while the torchy qualities of Perry Como's And I Love You So are invested with some real class amid some beautifully baroque orchestration.

Her version of Elvis Costello's Shipbuilding is a purely acoustic meditation that feels a little long. Without the orchestration Doyle Kennedy's voice is a bit same-same and it's hard to stick with. Still, despite the lack of cellos and violins, she does a remarkable job with Thin Lizzy's Still In Love With You, raising hairs on the back of the neck with melancholy, nostalgic vocals that showcase what a sterling songwriter Phil Lynott was.

Towards the end of the album we come to an extremely individual take on ABBA's SOS. As Doyle Kennedy slowly winds her voice around the melody it's hard not to want to kick it into action, especially as her guitar plays the familiar chorus intro. It's a good example of what the singer does best and the thing that might put listeners off at the same time. She has the ability to own a song, but that ownership is absolutely on her own terms. Expect only vague hints of the songs' original intentions to leak out.

Mary Considine



**MARY J BLIGE** ♥♥  
Growing Pains/Geffen

I saw Mary J Blige described somewhere as the 'Oprah of Song' and it's a moniker that's stuck. Throughout her career she's made a virtue out of laying her soul bare, charting her struggles with drugs and relationships and always wrapping the package up with a message of hope and spiritual growth.

There's no change on *Growing Pains*. Proud Mary is still struggling with life, but she's not stopped spreading world-wise messages nonetheless. The problem is it's hard not to begin to wonder if she ever listens to her own advice. Believing her brand of self-help is difficult when it just doesn't seem to work for her.

The first two singles show Mary's best side, musically anyway. On the disco-nod Just Fine, she tells you to, "Keep your head up high/In yourself, believe in you, believe in me." Meanwhile, the even more funky Work That kicks Destiny's Child to the curb announcing Blige as the ultimate guru of independent womanhood. "Read the book of my life/And see I've overcome it," she intones over a synthesized thump before issuing her battle cry: "Follow me, follow me, follow me, girl/Be yourself."

But what's this? On Feel Like a Woman, Mary spreads a materialistic message that's at odds with her other Oprahisms. "If you're on your way home," she sings to her man, "buy me somethin'/Buy me a bag, buy me shoes." So much for the spiritual message, baby.

The Neptunes-produced 'Til the Morning, is an oozing nighttime groove and the Ne-Yo produced ballads, veer from surprisingly sparse to lovely and lush on Fade Away and Smoke respectively.

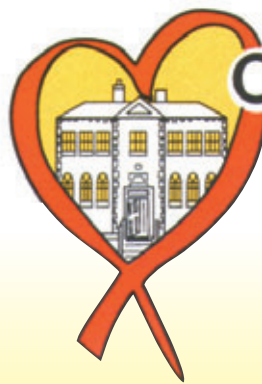
Mary might still be clearly in the process of finding herself and bringing us along for the ride, but to my mind it's all beginning to sound a bit preachy. Having said that, when she's good, she's very, very good.

Jeffrey Farrell



**SHERYL CROW** ♥♥♥  
Detours/A&M

Sheryl Crow is a 46 year-old single mother who's survived breast cancer and a much-publicised break-up with sports celebrity boyfriend, Lance Armstrong. She knows her persona as a



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# THE BIG DISH

When you're out on your trawl of the shops of a Saturday afternoon, where do you chow down? **William Lee** samples the fare at department store restaurants across Dublin and gets more (and sometimes less) than he bargained for.

We might be getting all political with the gay marriage stuff of late, but there's no denying it, us gays still love our consumer goods. With that in mind, this month I've been beating a path to the doors of in-shop restaurants across the city to find out what's hot and what's not, to help you choose where to shop and eat at the same time.

## CAFÉ ASPIRE, ARNOTTS, HENRY ST, D1

This first-floor restaurant feels cramped and difficult to negotiate when others leave their shopping on the floor. The tables were dirty and the place had a very unkempt look about it. The food layout was poor and it had a feel of a bad work canteen.

The menu offered a daily special for either €15.95 or €12.95, which included a starter, main and a gateau. There are also Chef's specials of pizza, pasta or wok. I chose the wok stir fry for €10.00 and I had a small bottle of white wine (€4.95) with the meal. The stir fry was very good and fresh and since the chef was cooking it to your order, you could add a few things you liked. A selection of standard starters and desserts were available.

Instead, I had a poor cup of coffee for €2.20.

## CAFÉ KITCHEN, BROWN THOMAS, GRAFTON ST, D2

Situated on the third floor near the kitchen and bedroom departments, this is a small restaurant and you have to queue to get a seat. While queuing you are given a menu to browse. It's a short food menu with two extra specials of the day added on, but the beverage menu is quite extensive, including wine by the glass.

The efficient staff take your order and leave you to enjoy the surroundings and it's certainly a great place to people watch. On my visit the Specials were two pasta dishes, but I plumped for the Fish Pie with a Rocket Salad (€19.80) from the ordinary menu and a glass of Chardonnay (€6.20). Beneath the fish pie's crisp potato top were a few different smoked fish in a fluid tasty sauce. A selection of shop-bought desserts were available and the ubiquitous slice of gateau (€6.00). I finished with a good cup of coffee (€3.50).

## THE ROOFTOP, CLERY'S, O'CONNELL ST, D1

This is a large restaurant with third-floor

panoramic views of the city. The clientele are mostly shoppers but a few office workers were there having a quiet lunch or others were eating while reading. The Rooftop offers a three-course lunch including starter, main meal and dessert for €10 or €12.95. It's the same starter and dessert for both options. The €10 menu features mains of Chicken, Breaded Cod and Lasagne and the €12.95 features a choice of Salmon or Beef Carvery.

I chose the Salmon with a choice of vegetables and potatoes, my starter was an egg and tomato mayonnaise and for dessert I could have had Fruit Pie or Fruit Trifle.

The Salmon was nicely poached with dill, but it was a pity that they did not make a dill sauce to go with it; instead a meagre slice of dry lemon was included. The dessert was a reminder of days gone by when everyone made trifle from a packet. I finished with a poor cup of coffee for €1.85. Wine was sold in mini bottles for €4.75 and there's an outdoor terrace for smokers.

## THE ATRIUM, DEBENHAMS, HENRY ST, D1

The top-floor Debenham's eating area is pretty large and very well laid out, and it also has panoramic views of the city. In the area are various 'islands' - a salad bar (with a seriously fresh and original selection); a hot food bar (where you could get Rogan Josh curry or a Chicken pasta dish); and a finger food bar (vol au vents, mini pizza, etc.).

All these islands sold the food at €2.20 per



100g, so you could adjust according to your diet or budget. I had to wander around a few times as I was finding it difficult to choose what to eat. In the end, I bypassed all the islands and went with the Chef's Special of Gammon Hock. It was a very serious treat as it was cooked and served on the bone with a honey and mustard glaze. It came with mashed parsnip and carrots, mashed potatoes and broccoli. I selected a small bottle of Merlot (€5.10) and I got a table near the window of the outdoor terrace. A smooth cup of coffee (€2.20) and a slice of cake (€4.50) from a massive selection finished a most enjoyable meal.



## ON THE CASE WITH JEAN SMULLEN

Along with flared jeans and platform boots and cheesecloth, Black Tower evokes memories of the decade that style forgot, the 1970s. Before wine became an everyday commodity for the Irish consumer, sales of Black Tower soared in Ireland and the wine was perceived as a reliable purchase, especially for the novice drinker. 30 years have passed and Ireland has changed beyond all recognition and so too has the Black Tower brand. Gone are the dark bottles of yesteryear to be replaced by a modern, well-made, commercial wine.

Riesling, Pinot Grigio and a rosé wine are all part of 21st century Black Tower, the only difference is that the grapes are grown in Germany, which is a cool climate country, meaning that the wines are fresh and clean and have relatively low alcohol by volume, which is no bad thing.

### 2005 BLACK TOWER RIESLING RHEINHESSEN, €8.99

This wonderful grape variety, which has become so popular when grown in New World countries, is never better than when grown in the Rheinhessen, which is where the fruit for this wine is sourced. Aromas of sweet citrus blossom and wild thyme on the nose are complemented by lime and mandarin on the palate with juicy acidity.

*Stockists: Supervalu (Nationwide); Centra (Nationwide); Tesco (Nationwide); Superquinn (Nationwide); Dunnes Stores (Nationwide)*

Mindful of the success of 'New World' wines and the perception of French wine as 'stuffy', a group of French companies decided to come together in 2006 to launch a competitive French wine brand. They've given the French wine industry a radical shake-up with the launch in Ireland in 2007 of a thoroughly modern wine range, Chamarré [sha-ma-ray].

### 2005 CHAMARRÉ CHARDONNAY/SAUVIGNON €6.99

This Chardonnay/Sauvignon Blanc breaks barriers. Chardonnay comes from Burgundy and Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire. Under French wine laws they are not allowed to be blended together but OVS have done it and the melon fruit of the Chardonnay grape is nicely lifted by the citrus lemon fruit of the Sauvignon Blanc.

*Stockists: Nolans S/M Clontarf; Next Door Group (Nationwide); Coach House, Ballinteer; Rushes Eurospar, Killiney and Dalkey; McGrath's, Drumcondra; Shiels, Malahide; Callans, Dundalk; Harvest O/L, Galway; Rebel O/L Group, Cork; O'Sullivan's, Cork; Foleys, Sligo*

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# SMOOTH OPERATOR

Hearing that Stephen Thomas was Ireland's only qualified back, sack and crack waxing specialist, **Brendan Doyle** found himself convinced to have his nether regions seen to. It's an experience he'll be repeating.

"It can't be that bad. I'm sure it's all just hype. Sure, it's only a bit of hair being torn off my nether regions with hot molten wax..." So I told myself as I turned into a little lane off Dame St and pressed the buzzer of the Stephen Thomas Face and Body Clinic. I'd been told by Herr Editor that the Grizzly Adams look is out and that to cut it with the hot boys, I should be less Tom Selleck, more Tom Ford. He wanted me, for the purposes of good journalism, to get a back, crack and sack wax. A boyzilian.

Stephen Thomas has been manscaping men for five years now. After a bad experience himself in a well-known Dublin clinic, he trained up to become 'Ireland's only qualified specialist back,



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Temple Bar, Dublin 2



crack and sack waxer."

"The first time I got it done it was a terrible experience," Stephen tells me, an admission that hardly inspires confidence. "The people knew about waxing legs and chests, but not about waxing the more sensitive areas. They used a regular beeswax-based wax and the whole thing was a painful nightmare."

Stephen uses a tea-tree oil based wax specially formulated for use on the less robust areas of skin, such as around the genitals. All customers get a patch test at least a day in advance to check for any allergies to the wax, which there rarely are.

The procedure itself is straightforward. A dollop of warm wax is spread in the direction of the body hair with a wooden spatula. A cloth strip is then rubbed onto it and whipped off, removing the hair and any dead skin cells. After waxing, a tea-tree oil based antiseptic cream is applied to the area. Tea-tree oil is a natural antiseptic, preventing infection and promoting healing of the waxed skin.

The treatment, however, is not for the shy. There's no hiding anything when you're down on all fours with your bum in the air, so Stephen chats away to me to keep my mind off what he's doing and where he's doing it.

"When I started it was predominately gay men getting it done," he says, "But now it's about 50-



50, thanks to straight celebrities like David Beckham popularising the treatment."

"But why do men bother getting de-furred at all?" I ask as he spreads a cheek. "The number one reason most guys say is hygiene," he replies, not batting an eyelid. "But many get it done for other reasons, such as image, sexual reasons or even to make their penises look bigger."

It's true; the porn star look is hot right now, and not in a Ron Jeremy kind of way. Speaking about bigger penises, I ask Stephen if people ever get excited while he's, uh, down there?

"It happens sometimes and can actually help with the waxing since the sack tightens up during an erection. But generally its goes within a few

minutes because of the pain of the waxing."

Is it really that painful? The simple answer is yes, it hurts - a lot! The back part was not too bad, as I had hardly any hair there. The crack and cheek wax were uncomfortable, and the sack wax was excruciating. Pubic hair around the genitals has deeper roots than hair in other parts of the body, I'm told, and so that's why I feel like screaming. Thankfully, Stephen has done the procedure on hundreds of men and flies through the waxing at lightning speed. It only hurts for a split second, and the whole treatment is over in about a half hour.

Hair doesn't grow back in the waxed areas typically for four-to-eight weeks. An advantage of waxing is that areas repeatedly waxed experience a thinning of re-growth, with hair often becoming softer and lighter in colour over time.

So, is the old boyzilian for everyone? Some guys have very thin skin on their scrotum and waxing is unsuitable for them, as they could end up tearing it. Ouch! Also diabetics and those with varicose veins should steer clear and embrace the Burt Reynolds look.

"The people who notice the most benefit are dark haired people like yourself," Stephen tells me. Lucky me!

Afterwards, as I catch my breath, Stephen advises me not to shower for 24 hours and not to use any products on the area for two days. This reduces any irritation in the area, and helps prevent any ingrowth of hair. The first time is the worst time, according to Stephen, but the key is aftercare.

"Most people who have problems after waxing do so because they went and showered straight away or didn't follow the advice," cautions Stephen. In addition to back, crack and sack waxing, Stephen provides other specialised waxing services, as well as all the regular face and body beauty treatments. The whole service was very professional and now that I'm smooth as a baby's bottom, just like Herr Editor said I should be, I'll be making a return appointment.

*A Back, Sack and Crack Wax costs €80 at Stephen Thomas Face & Body Clinic, Top Floor, Coghills Court, Temple Bar, Dublin 2, Phone (01) 672 9444*

## THE BEAUTYBITCH

No one could have blamed me for mistaking the swollen-esque conical-shaped eight-incher on the brand new Nue Blue Eriu display table for a packet of Jaffa Cakes, with its similar signature blue cylindrical girth to boot. For a brief second, I wondered if Mister McVitie had created yet another spin-off product to add to his already consuming consumer list of Jaffa Mini Rolls, Jaffa Cake Muffins, Jaffa Cake Bars and of course, the ever essentials Lemon and Lime, Apple and Blackberry and not to forget Cranberry and Orange variants.

When I subsequently acknowledged my overpriced and beautifully arranged surroundings, my somewhat short spat

of stupidity subsided and I came to my senses to find not a biscuit in sight, but an ergonomically designed tube of certified Fusion Hand and Body Moisturiser.

"Certified?" I hear you all gasp with excitement. Well, that's what it said on the tin. Was I about to blag a sample of a legally declared insane substance by using the old Hey-I'm-the-Beauty-Bitch-routine? Yes, because I couldn't help but marvel at the cosmetic codology that was right before my eyes.

With a brand name that is homophonous with the word 'air', Eyre is the marsupial of

the moisturising world. Not only does it come from a land down under, it apparently contains water from a spring that dates back to when *Homo sapiens* walked the earth for the very first time. Again, that's what it says on the tin.

So, if you're unashamedly naïve when it comes to having silky smooth hydrated skin all over, this biobotanic skincare lotion is for you. If it was good enough for *Homo sapiens*, then it's good enough for homosexuals.







## THE 5 MINUTE GUIDE TO: MYKONOS

Known worldwide as a gay holiday destination, the Greek island of Mykonos has much more to offer than a frenetic queer sunshine and clubbing holiday, says **David Green**, who found summer romance on the Aegean Sea.

Gently lapped by the cobalt-blue waves of the Aegean Sea, Mykonos is a holiday destination for thousands of gay men every summer, May through September, but although you can't walk down one of its colourful streets or saunter on its golden sands without catching the eye of a fellow fellow-lover, it's no Ibiza. Instead, it's an almost unbelievably beautiful place for relaxing, unwinding and, if you're lucky like I was, sweet summer romances.

The island's epicentre is the town of Chora, which is directly beside the island's two ports. It's a twisting maze of small cobble streets lined with coffee shops, local designer stores

and Greek gyro joints. The longest street in the town is Matoyianni and it's so narrow you have to squash yourself up against a wall to let a car pass.

At the top of Matoyianni is the central bus station where you might hop on a bus to one of Mykonos' most popular beaches: Paradise, Super Paradise, Karanga or Elia. If you want to explore further afield, you can hire a car or quad bike to travel the island, which, considering the state of the Mykonos' roads and drivers, is challenging to say the least. Another popular and pleasant way to see the beaches is to take the boat and beach-hop.

These boats sail back and forth all day.

My favourite beach is the small but well-equipped Karanga. It's mixed and on the edge of a rocky cruising area and it's a lot quieter than the larger stretches. Paradise Beach sits neatly beside Karanga Beach and is well equipped with shops, self-service restaurants, dive centres and bars. It starts to pound with music by late afternoon, and the lively crowd start to drink and dance as the sun sets.

Further along, Super Paradise and Eliah beaches are more homogenously gay. The former has beautiful sands and water, but it's got far fewer amenities than Paradise, with one expensively priced bar and restaurant. There are plenty of hot men in Speedos though, and if you like less in the way of swimwear, the more relaxed and remote Eliah has plenty of nude men soaking up the rays.

When the sun goes down, it's back to Chora for a busy but compact nightlife that kicks off around 8pm. No holiday to Mykonos would be complete without an early evening visit to Montparnasse Piano Bar. Featuring cocktails and great cabaret, it's a chatty, friendly bar that looks out at the island's legendary sunsets. A number of bars along the same stretch such as Kastro's give the same view and people tend to find their favourite and stick with it for the duration. At the other end of the harbour front, Porta Bar is located all by itself in a tiny alley near a blue-domed church. It's cruiser than other venues and I met my summer love within five minutes of walking through its doors.

The dinner period tends to kick off around 10pm, so there's plenty of time to relax with cocktail aperitifs in the island's many bars beforehand. When dinnertime does arrive, a good place for fresh fish is Nikos Tavern, a preferred spot for many gays who choose to dine under the stars. The Blu-Blue Lounge, overlooking the old port of Mykonos, offers a wide range of local and international foods; try their amazing Greek salad, which comes with lavish amounts of feta cheese spread with olive oil and oregano. If you want to go top of the range, spend at least one evening at Interni Deluxe on Matogiannia. Its head chef Andreas Voulgaris is celebrated across Greece.

Once you've had time to digest your food, it's time to trip the light fantastic on the island's hopping gay club scene. The Ramrod Club sits right by the port on Taxi Square. The music here ranges from house to electro pop and you can lose yourself in the busy atmosphere or sit on one of the two verandas with stunning views of the bay. Ramrod gets going late, so it's best to arrive here after midnight; the shows start around 2am.

Almost next door, Pierro's Cafe is a busy dance venue with a mainly gay clientele. Pierro's gets busy later, and the hedonism goes on until the early hours. Watch out for their legendary drag shows, especially on the weekends. If you want to dance the night away out of town, head for Cavo Paradiso, which gets very, very busy in high season. It's a place to boogie on a diet of cocktails until sunrise.

**"Although you can't walk down one of its colourful streets without catching the eye of a fellow-lover, it's no Ibiza."**

There are literally hundreds of hotels on the island, some central, some way out in the suburbs. When you're booking or if you arrive on the island to pick up a place to stay from touts at the port, make sure you get a hotel near the town. All hotels are gay-friendly, but if you're looking for the gay-owned and run experience, book into the Elysium Hotel. Situated around the School of Arts area, just a 10-minute walk into the centre of town, this hotel has a host of exquisite rooms to offer within its spacious grounds and a stunning pool that overlooks the town and sea. If you're a couple, the gay-only Geranium has a minimalist tropical elegance and has a quieter vibe. Its rooms are nicely designed and comfortable and the studios and apartments have a fully equipped kitchen and a balcony.

*XL.com are the only operator offering a weekly service from Dublin to Mykonos every Wednesday, departing at 11am. There are seat only deals in May from €299 and seven night holidays from €349, and great deals available throughout the season*

### THE VERY BEST...

#### BAR MONTPARNASSE PIANO BAR

24 Agion Anargyron Street

It's one of those places where everybody knows your name five minutes after you've arrived into town complete with great cabaret and even better cocktails.

#### HOTEL ELYSIUM HOTEL

+30 22890 23952, [www.elysiumhotel.com](http://www.elysiumhotel.com)

With most of its rooms looking out on the sea, this is a super-deluxe, super-gay hotel a stone's throw from the nightly action, with every amenity going.

#### CLUB PIERRO'S

Manto, Icaros, Taxi Square

The island's three most popular clubs are situated next to each other in a little lane off Taxi Square. During peak summer nights, hundreds of guys spill out into the street.

#### RESTAURANT INTERNI DELUXE

Matogiannia, [www.internirestaurant.gr](http://www.internirestaurant.gr)

One of the best ten restaurants in Greece according to the 2003 Golden Hat Awards, this chic eatery has a sister restaurant that's the toast of Athens. It's expensive and top of the range, relaxed but funky.

#### CAFÉ ART CAFÉ

Fabrika bus station

This popular gay-owned haunt offers the best omelettes and cheeseburgers in town and great coffee.

# ONE LITTLE PILL

The long-awaited one-a-day anti-HIV drug has been launched in Ireland and the UK, **Noel Walsh** reports.

It's been a long time coming, but the one-a-day Atripla anti-HIV drug is finally with us. This is great news for anyone already on the combination of the three drugs in Atripla and it will also give the option to others to switch, depending on their treatment history.

To someone like me, who has been on HIV meds for a long time, the early days of rattling around taking 15-20 pills a day, having to wake up twice nightly to get up to mix up your medication, not to mention the dreaded Crixivan cramps three times a day, seem like torture. Having to take one pill once a day will be so easy. And word is that you can take it at night before bed, so most if any of the nasty side effects will happen while you are asleep.

Atripla does not contain a protease inhibitor, so there is very little chance of associated lipodystrophy (the uneven distribution of body fat associated with antiretroviral medications).

Also, it is hoped that this new pill will help with drug resistance. "Atripla makes it simpler to stick to the treatment regimen and thus

could curb the emergence of drug-resistant strains of the HIV virus," John Martin, President and CEO of one of Atripla's manufacturers, Gilead, said.

Drug-resistant HIV strains can develop if a person takes less than 95 per cent of their pills. Martin says, "The fewer pills, the better they are able to achieve that 95 per cent threshold patients are told they have to achieve to optimise their treatment."

"The availability of an effective HIV treatment in a single pill requiring a once-daily dose is a welcome advance in the management of the condition," said Professor Brian Gazzard, Clinical Research Director at London's Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. "Not only does Atripla offer the patient more convenience, it also helps adherence. This is important because inadequate adherence, often associated with a more complex pill burden, can lead to a patient developing resistance and needing to switch to a different treatment, in turn limiting future therapy options.

"Atripla provides long-term efficacy, durability and tolerability plus the unparalleled convenience of a single pill, and will prove particularly important as patients stay on therapy longer."

So what is Atripla? It contains two different types of anti-HIV drugs: one non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI) and two nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs). Atripla is a combination of three drugs: Sustiva (efavirenz), Viread (tenofovir DF) and Emtriva. These drugs block the reverse transcriptase enzyme.

This enzyme changes HIV's genetic material (RNA) into the form of DNA. This has to occur before HIV's genetic code gets inserted into an infected cell's own genetic codes.

What makes this combination so unusual is the fact that it brought two different drug companies together. Atripla is marketed by both Bristol-Myers Squibb and Gilead Sciences, who announced in December 2004 that they would collaborate, with the aim of developing



the single daily combination antiretroviral drug.

So who will get to take this easy combination? Anyone on the drugs that are in Atripla will be eligible, but it is worth asking your HIV doctor about it. However, it is unlikely that someone starting treatment will be put on it at first as it would be hard to pinpoint any adverse reaction to one of the constituent drugs.

**"Everything you wanted to know about working with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people but were afraid to ask"**

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(If you are interested but cannot attend this two-day course please contact us for details of other training courses for later in the year).

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Registration Form and further information available from GMHS Administration, Tel: 01-669 9553 or e-mail [gmhsadmin@hse.ie](mailto:gmhsadmin@hse.ie)

This popular two-day course, held in Outhouse, Dublin 1, explores the issues confronting counsellors and psychotherapists, who are or may be working with gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender clients. Through interactive training; around homophobia, Irish research on counsellor bias, client issues, sexual terminology and practices, married gays and lesbians, experiential exercises on self-awareness and understanding. The course organised by the Gay Men's Health Service (HSE) is delivered by counsellors, psychotherapists and outreach worker and LGBT people.

## GAY MEN'S HEALTH SERVICE

Part of the Health Services Executive (HSE) GMHS provides a Community Based, STI Clinical, Outreach and Counselling Service to gay, bisexual men and other men who have sex with men. [www.gaymenshealthservice.ie](http://www.gaymenshealthservice.ie) for service details, reports and links.



## POSITIVE THINKING with Noel Walsh

Doctors in the UK are now being told not to treat people of uncertain immigration status for HIV infection. Unless they can prove that they have a right to be in the country they can be denied access to life-saving HIV drugs.

It seems to me the British authorities are on some sort of a witch-hunt against people living with HIV. Between 2001 and 2007 there were 15 prosecutions and 12 convictions of people with HIV for 'reckless' transmission of the virus. Prison sentences of between 2.5 and 9.6 years have been handed down to those convicted. Nine white British, four black Africans and two white Europeans with HIV have so far been prosecuted.

Of the cases, 10 were for male-to-female transmission, two female-to-male and three for male-to-male. In order to be prosecuted successfully for Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) in the UK, the defendant has to be HIV positive and be proved 'reckless' in foreseeing possible harm done by his or her actions.

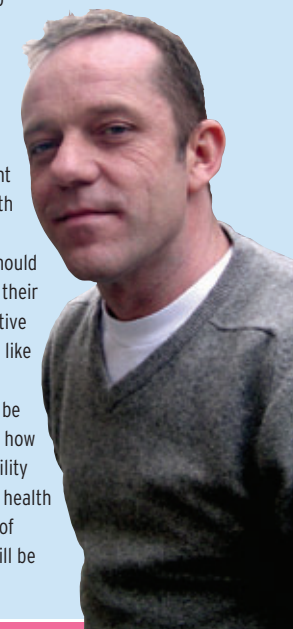
However, there is good news from China and the USA. Both countries have announced plans to change current restrictions on HIV-positive visitors. However, whereas the US proposals will still require HIV-positive visitors to disclose their status and adhere to several conditions in order to obtain entry for up to 30 days, China says it is committed to removing all restrictions on HIV-positive visitors.

"The new law, which hopefully will be passed in the coming months, will be in line with the

global conventions, which recognise that travel restrictions for HIV-positive people do not have any public health value," Michel Kazatchkine, Executive Director of the Global Fund, told a Beijing news conference, which was attended by China's Vice Minister of Health, Huang Jiefu.

Now if only we could get the rest of them to start thinking like that. The US law still makes positive people disclose their status, which is something I am totally against. No one should ever have to disclose.

On the same subject I have been asked to a debate in the Front Lounge next month about whether positive people should be made disclose their status to prospective partner. It sounds like it will be a good debate and it will be interesting to see how putting responsibility for others' sexual health on the shoulders of positive people will be justified.



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# UPCLOSE ANDPERSONAL

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Gay male, 46 seeks under 50 male. Can accommodate. No bisexuals. Seeks romance leading to long-term partner. Good personality. Have little cottage. Box No. Mar 004

Male, late 40s, seeks young gay male for fun, friendship and travel in Wexford County or Wicklow. Ph: 053 948 4852

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Single Dublin guy, 35, into music, nights out/in, film, seeks genuine honest guy 25-45 for friendship/relationship. Box No. Mar 006

Dublin guy, 35 sincere, genuine, fun-loving, non-scene seeks like-minded guy for fun, friendship, possible relationship. Box No. Mar 007

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## BITS AND PIECES

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Calling all ladies! Are you interested in playing bowling/darts/pool for fun in the south east area. If any of these interest you please email grooloo@hotmail.com

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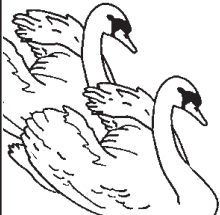
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# RELATIONSHIPS

WITH RAY O'NEILL



## MY GIRLFRIEND JUST WON'T LET ME FIGHT WITH HER, AND IT'S DRIVING US APART

Dear Ray,

My problem might sound like a strange one to you or to GCN readers, although it's bothering me more and more as my relationship progresses. The problem I have is that my partner and I never fight. And I mean, never.

The reason for this is that my girlfriend is so afraid of confrontation that she goes into meltdown whenever it happens. We did have some arguments at the beginning of our relationship three years ago, while we were sorting out the initial differences between us, but because my girlfriend found it so traumatic and was so completely freaked out by any words of anger or negativity between us, I have learned to pussy foot around any anger that might come up as time has progressed. I know this is not healthy, but it's almost been an automatic response to seeing her so traumatised.

I would not describe myself as someone who is harbouring anger, but I definitely believe that we all have some inside, including me. And I think it is best to express that anger in a safe way. I have told my girlfriend this but she says no anger feels safe to her and that I'm crazy to want to fight anyway. To her, our fight-free relationship is perfect.

This is not the case for me. I love my girlfriend dearly, but like normal couples, from time to time we do piss each other off. We also have on-going issues that need to be confronted. If we never communicate anything negative or controversial between us about our relationship, how are we supposed to sort out our feelings? To me love covers the whole show, all the good stuff and all the bad stuff. However, if the bad stuff rears its ugly head (even in a non-confrontational situation), my girlfriend completely shuts down and will not even talk to me.

While I don't want to be fighting with her all the time, I need to get our relationship on a footing whereby unexpressed things aren't building up between us, which they most definitely are. We have issues to discuss about how we live together, commitment-phobia, and most particularly around whether we will have children or not. But we never, ever get to discuss them because my girlfriend sees any challenge to the status quo as a fight. And a fight makes her take flight.

Do you have any advice for me about how I can introduce more communication into this relationship without freaking my girlfriend out?

Yours, Julia, via email.

Dear Julia,

If something isn't being allowed space in a relationship and is consciously and constantly

being pushed away, it will always come back. You can't keep sweeping things under the carpet without expecting that initial small bump of repression to, over time, gather mass and contagion.

What seems worrying in your letter is that your girlfriend not only does not like arguments, which might seem straightforward and reasonable enough, but that she has successfully eliminated the possibility of any disagreement and divergence. And evolution, growth depend on difference.

What is important to see is that your girlfriend is fighting and disagreeing with you, but doing so passively. You say she "is so afraid of confrontation that she goes into meltdown whenever it happens" and in this meltdown she is controlling the relationship and the emotions therein in a typically passive aggressive manner. You say you "have learned to pussy foot around any anger" but you resent this pussyness in yourself and are therefore growing in your resentment towards her. You have clearly tried to address "the bad stuff (even in a non-confrontational situation)", but again your "girlfriend completely shuts down and will not even talk". But yet in this not talking, she is clearly telling you the conditions and condition of your relationship.

You need to have a relationship with an adult, and adults express themselves and take responsibility for their expressions of themselves. Your girlfriend is not. She needs to see and own what she is communicating, and how she is arguing about not having arguments. If she wants to take flight then let her, it is a ploy that has worked on you too often in the past to bring you around to her way of thinking and being. And it ain't going to stop, 'til you wise up.

In life, where arguments cannot be brought into the open for diplomatic or sensitive reasons, then a mediator is needed, someone who doesn't argue but can express and understand both sides and their arguments. Maybe a mediator is needed, someone you both trust personally or professionally. You have big questions to ask but no space to ask them in, and that is not fair. Your girlfriend's fear is just that - fear, and all fear ever wants is to be conquered.

And besides, if you can't fight, then you can't make up and in most relationships that can often be the best part.

Good Luck, Ray

*Ray is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist specialising in individual and relationship counselling. He can be contacted on 086 828 0033*

# QUEER & HERE

BY JEANETTE REHNSTROM



## GAY IMMIGRANTS TO IRELAND TELL THEIR STORIES, JORGEN LANDBY FROM SWEDEN



Photo by Jeanette Rehnstrom

"My heritage is of an unusual mixture, my mother is from a very small village in a remote northern part of Sweden called Lapland, whereas my father is from the city of Paris. My father ended up in Sweden through a job that he had got hired for by Mercedes Benz. When this job ended he went to work in a restaurant, where he met my mother, and then ended up staying on. He is now more Swedish than French. Unfortunately my father did not teach any of his three children any French. He claims that he had his hands full trying to learn Swedish. Furthermore, he has little family in France so we never did travel there much.

I went to a village school with only ten pupils. Nobody in our village had ever known a local gay person before, but that soon changed. Out of my class it turned out that two of the pupils were gay - me and my cousin.

I knew I was gay from a young age, but I still ended up having plenty of girlfriends. I was even engaged at one point, for three years, to a woman from Switzerland. However, on a holiday when I was 24 I finally broke it to her that I could not continue with the relationship because of my sexuality. We are still friends but it was a hard blow for her.

I did not come out properly until I was 26. By this time I had moved to Dublin and was living in a dingy little apartment in Phibsborough. My mother asked me why I had settled into these regrettable circumstances and I explained simply that I had fallen in love. When my mother wanted more details about this special woman in my life, I explained that 'she' was six foot four had hair on 'her' chest. My mother said, 'Oh, it is a man,' and that was that. My parents knew already, I think, and it was not a problem, but my mother would never have asked me straight out.

I lived in Lapland until I was 20 and then I moved down to Stockholm to go to college,

where I studied to be a make-up artist for two years. Then I worked in the Opera House in Stockholm for almost six years. After that I moved to Switzerland and then to Greece, holding down different service industry jobs and just enjoying my life.

My arrival in Dublin happened through a friend of mine who asked me to come visit for a few days. This visit soon turned into weeks and months. Then I met my Irish partner and my life here became a bit more settled.

However, it has been a tempestuous relationship. After two years I wanted to move from him, as far away as possible. I went to Stockholm, went into a travel agent and asked for a ticket to a place that had sun and a beach. The travel agent checked her computer and told me that she could get me a ticket to Mexico leaving in two hours. I said 'great.' I had \$200 on me and set off for what I imagined would be Acapulco, but turned out to be Cancun instead. I ended up staying in there for two years earning a living by doing drag shows in a gay club. My partner kept coming over trying to convince me to return to Dublin. Eventually he managed. I moved back and begun to work with Lancome.

The gay scene in Stockholm is very flamboyant and happy, even 10 years ago, but Dublin ten years ago was very drab and dark. However, what's great about the scene here, then and now, is that people are very, very friendly. You always get talking to people. Also the scene is gradually changing for the better and is becoming more fun.

I have been here for 10 years now. Currently I am working freelance, doing make-up. I will stay on in Ireland for a while yet, but I am not sure for how long. My partner has to stay in Ireland for his work, whilst I would like to move to a better climate, maybe to New York or Spain, at least for a while. My partner will simply have to take holidays to come visit.

This type of long-distance relationship should not be too difficult in that we both value our own space enormously. Indeed we have been living apart here in Dublin for three years now, although we only live a short walk from each other. However, we'll have to see what happens. I am happy here for now, and so far always end up coming back."

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



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*ghn*



# GAY CONTACTS

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**61646** James is new to the scene and would like to meet a nice man between the age of 55 and 60 years of age.

**36733** Dublin guy is looking forward to an old fashioned older guy.

**67147** Colm 19 hot stud is looking for fun.

**66622** Johnny is looking for an older man to take care of him, he has a muscular build.

**59946** Mark 31, 6foot1 from Dublin would like to meet a male for some discreet fun.

**65303** Married guy in Clare looking for feminine cross dresser for meet.

**66647** Paul 47 from the northside of Dublin would like to meet a guy in his fifties or sixties.

**66766** Greg is looking for guys who can show him a thing or two he is new to the scene.

**27439** Dave from North Dublin, 28 years of age, any guys about?

**61121** Billy is in his later 50's and would like to meet a shy non scene bloke.

**61667** Steven from Dublin would like to hear from genuine guys for some fun.

**57409** A 30 year old guy from the Cork area is looking for fun.

**43979** Submissive male looking for guys who are genuine.

**32590** Bi-guy from Sligo/Roscommon area is discreet and aged 32 get back and leave a message.

**64959** Philip from Dublin is slim with blue eyes and is looking for a good looking guy for discreet fun.

**36100** Paul 41 is 6ft tall and looking for a guy for some mutual fun.

**36353** Gay male in the west of Ireland interested into jeans who is willing to meet.

**66078** Bi-guy mid fifties would like to meet.

**60834** Tom 33, is undecided and wants you to contact him.

**51781** A Wexford male would like to meet an interesting but genuine person in their fifties.

**36502** Mike 34 from Tipperary would like to experiment.

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

**34834** Adam 37, fairly fit into most sports would like to meet fit muscular guys.

**36198** James is a straight acting dominant guy in the Kerry area.

**36100** Paul is in his early forties and wants you to give him a call.

**66647** Paul is a cross dresser and would like to meet guys from Dublin who are 50 plus.

**29975** Sean is looking for some guys out there for a chat.

**28842** James 35, with black hair blue eyes would like to meet an experienced guy who can accommodate for a bit of fun.

**35838** A 50 year old guy from the West would like to meet any guys interested.

**27039** Michael from the West would like to talk to others over fifty.

**43302** Male is looking for a guy from Tipperary who is fifty plus he is 35 and genuine.

**65798** Paul 33, can accommodate is genuine and looking for some fun.

## \*Casual Contacts

### \*SMS Chat

### \*Discreet Dating

### \*Bi- Curious Fun

### \*Mature Flirting

**61150** 38 year old bi guy can accommodate in the Wicklow area.

**64253** Phil 38 is into underwear and would like to meet a dominant guy.

**59954** A 33 year old guy is looking for guys over 18, leave a message and he'll contact you.

**34834** Adam 37, is fit would like to meet guys over 18 for some lunchtime fun.

**57409** A 30 year old guy would like to meet with some guys during the week.

**63091** A straight acting guy wants to meet other guys.

**58814** Dublin guy 34, is looking for a bit of fun.

**67357** Dean 30 is bi and would like to meet other discreet bi guys, no strings attached.

**61168** A 34 year old bi guy would like daytime fun.

**49652** Bi guy age 29 looking for some fun.

**62046** Gay guy looking to meet some foreign guys or builders.

**35838** A country guy looking for farmers over 50.

**67963** Good looking Dublin south male wants you to come back.

**28191** Joe Dublin South, good looking, non scene wants to hook up for some fun.

**65474** Dave from North Dublin, 28 years of age is looking for fun.

**64173** Male is looking for some action!

**63216** Clean, professional male is looking for daytime fun.

**61181** A 47 year old in Cavan who is bi and attached would like to meet someone for conversation and fun.

**66647** Paul 47 from Dublin is looking for guys in their 60's for discreet daytime meets.

**35838** A West of Ireland guy into boots would like to meet construction workers.

**28921** A 20 year old gay male is looking for first time fun.

**28563** A 39 year old guy is looking for discreet fun with a friendly easygoing guy.

**65177** Male from Cork is a TV and would like to meet another guy who wants to be a girl.

**25988** Male looking for a guy in Cork.

**66647** Male looking for mature man in the Dublin area for daytime fun he can't accommodate.

**40041** A Wexford guy with a hairy chest is looking for guys under 34 for fun.

**62023** Male 19, good build, green eyes, looking for fun.

**36502** Submissive bi-curious guy in Tipperary is looking for a dominant guy to train him.

**66486** Anyone out there to chat to?

**36100** Paul early forties, 6ft tall is looking for a dominant experienced guy who wants a good time.

**53613** Guy looking for a bit of fun.

**43979** A 30 year old submissive guy is looking for older guys into bondage.

**36502** A 36 year old guy is looking for a younger slim guy for no stings attached fun.

**35838** Male in the west is looking for guys into rubber boots.

**58424** John from Louth is looking for guys around the age of 22 for first time experience.

**60786** James, 46 is looking for some guys between the age of 18 and 27 years of age.

**33621** Fifty year old male is tall and smooth and would like to meet a discreet honest and sincere male from Sligo.

**58814** Dublin guy 34, is looking for a bit of fun.

**66647** Paul from Dublin is curious to know if there are any men in their fifties or sixties interested in some daytime fun.

**62789** Noel from Galway is shy and would like to meet a guy between 22 and 25 for fun.

**66647** Male looking for mature man for daytime fun.

**59954** A 30 year old guy is looking for a sugar daddy.

**49677** Martin from Donegal would like to meet somebody genuine he is 26 years of age.

**57575** Bill is looking for fun.

**60983** James 54, is slim and good looking he is seeking a real genuine friend with a view to relationship.

**60722** Steve from Clare is 44 years of age and would like to meet guys in the west.



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# TWINKLETWINKLE

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## PISCES (FEBRUARY 20 - MARCH 19)

Early March is fraught with deception and the temptation of infidelity, so Piscean Eva Longoria better watch her back. Meanwhile Mars and Pluto oppose each other again for the first two weeks of the month, creating a lot of volatility personally and politically. Mid-month you'll feel some pressure when Saturn, retrograding in Virgo, opposes first Venus and then Mercury in-between the 13th and 19th. My advice is to focus on creative pursuits and ignore everybody.



### ARIES (MARCH 20 - APRIL 19)

The Mars-Pluto opposition continues to wreak some amount of havoc with the world for the first two weeks of March, giving you a drama-filled life. Perhaps it's because you stepped out on your partner during that reckless Neptune conjunction with Mercury and Venus earlier this month? Either that or you're just in the midst of some major power struggles. Do whatever you can to enjoy the benefits of Venus-Mercury conjunction all month, which will make your charisma more irresistible than usual.

### TAURUS (APRIL 20 - MAY 21)

Nothing could be better for your creative life than a Venus-Mercury conjunction, which we have with us throughout all of March, first in Aquarius and then in Pisces. The only challenging part of this is when both planets catch up to Neptune between the 4th and the 10th. That week the amount of confusion around you will be great, especially involving a Leo in your life. The situation is just not what it appears, or else they are flat-out lying to you.

### GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21)

March should continue the emphasis on connections and relationships that began in February. Just be careful of making some bad decisions or people close to you might disappoint you. The new moon in Pisces that involves Uranus will add to the excitement and sense of opportunity in your life. Just imagine those doors opening and opening, and keep that image in mind at the end of the month when you start getting pessimistic.

### CANCER (JUNE 21 - JULY 22)

The themes of transformation and change will continue for you this month - Mars and Pluto are opposed for the first half, and then, on the spring equinox, the Sun squares Pluto. It is a wonderful month for creative inspiration, so work with your insights and fears and put them to good use through writing or organising. On the personal front, the continued untrustworthiness of some people in your life is definitely making you cranky.

### LEO (JULY 22 - AUGUST 22)

Make sure you say what you mean and mean what you say this month - the potential for misunderstanding is great. We want to try to use the Mars-Pluto opposition for organising and getting things done and not for power struggles and unconscious acting out, if you know what I mean. Speaking of Pluto, its influence will be clearly felt this month, especially after the Sun enters Aries. Expect heavy weather politically from the 21st until the end of the month.

### VIRGO (AUGUST 22 - SEPTEMBER 21)

You need to stay focused on inspiration and avoid drama

this month, because there is a lot of it about. The strong Neptune influences at the beginning of the month will make friends and family unreliable and irritating. Do not get caught up in it. It is a good month for getting things done because you'll have the Mars-Pluto opposition to help you out. The world will be suffering greatly this month and you are feeling it intensely.

### LIBRA (SEPTEMBER 22 - OCTOBER 21)

March is a great month for writing, for talking, for relating - all things that you love to do. I recommend that especially between the 4th and the 10th, you focus on whatever creative project you can find. The new moon on the 7th is also good for inspiration but also for excitement and for new connections.

### SCORPIO (OCTOBER 22 - NOVEMBER 21)

There is a Venus-Mercury conjunction all month long, which you will find enjoyable. Everyone will want to talk to you and your powers of charm and seduction will be at their height, intellectually, emotionally, and physically. Then everyone gets all serious and intense after the Sun/Moon/Pluto T-square that kicks in on the 21st. There may be some hell to pay, or at a minimum, some clarification or negotiation about boundaries.

### SAGITTARIUS (NOVEMBER 22 - DECEMBER 21)

The Mercury/Venus conjunction that dominates the entire month will be delightful for you, enabling you to make connections and draw people to you very effectively, especially between the 4th and the 10th. Of course, during that same week you could be utterly deceived by someone in your life whose unreliability just keeps trapping you again and again. Use this month to hone public image - do some outreach and get out there however you can.

### CAPRICORN (DECEMBER 21 - JANUARY 19)

There is a lot that is attractive about being around other people right now - the energy of relating is very fruitful and strong. Just be careful, you may be disappointed at the beginning of the month. People will be appealing but unreliable. Use Saturn in Virgo and Jupiter in Capricorn to be grounded and calm even while pulled by excitability at the beginning of the month and at the end.

### AQUARIUS (JANUARY 20 - FEBRUARY 19)

What a great month this is for you, if you can roll with it. Be careful of being misunderstood and misconstrued during this period. Try to stay calm during the Mars-Pluto opposition the first half of the month, which might tempt you to argue and be difficult. It's not worth the fight - this time. A Venus-Mercury combination conjoins Uranus at the end of the month, making for some really expansive artistic inspiration.

## Q TIPS: TIPS FOR QUEER LIVING

WITH ANDREW CONSTANTINE



### THIS MONTH: TUBBY OR TEDDY?

It is not unusual for a gay man in his mid-to-late 30s to wake up one morning and through the brutal honesty of a full-length mirror, discover that a bulging, hairy tummy now sits where a waxed washboard once reigned.

The most common reaction to this hard truth sees him renew his lapsed gym membership, and start eating, sleeping and breathing crunches, sit ups, spin classes, low GI foods, carb-free binges and taste-free dinners. The results may be desirable after some months of exhausting effort, however, time, a lack of interest and neglected tastebuds will doubtlessly catapult the transformed homo back to square one.

There is however a simple solution to the battle of the queer bulge, and it lies deep within an urban den.

The bear tribe consists of a



group of men who have embraced nature in the truest sense of the word. This clan of proud homosexuals wear their weight, fur and beards as their crowning glory. This is a world where six-pack abs are replaced with six cans and a side of BBQ ribs. Here, the oppressive pages of the gay rulebook, which dictates our queer aesthetic, are used as beer coasters, saying "fuck you" to the rest of the homo-dysfunctional world that holds mature men at ransom.

For the new recruit to the bear tribe, misconceptions regarding heavy fellas not getting much cock are quickly dismissed. He will quickly find himself flooded with offers of one-on-one, threesomes or group 'den' activities. This is a welcome change from cruising near-perfect 'super-gays' who are always waiting for a better offer.

So the next time you look in the mirror and see a heavier you staring back, remember the gym is just a Betty Ford Clinic for repeat offenders. True happiness may lie within life's simple bear necessities.

## LICKY'S LICKS

WITH LICKY RAKE



### GETTING A HANDLE ON THOSE SPECIAL LESBIAN PROBLEMS, WITH TV GURU LICKY RAKE...

#### Dear Licky,

I've been seeing my girlfriend for about eight months now and I have to say I'm getting a little fed up of her antics in the bedroom. There are a couple of things that she does to get herself off that I don't like.

I'm really bad at talking about intimate issues and always presumed that I could subtly hint or physically manoeuvre her into doing more of what I like, but this hasn't seemed to work so far. What can I do to stop our bad sex life getting worse?

Confused, Belfast

#### Dear Confused,

Reading your letter reminded me of the fantastic sex life I had with my ex-husband, Reggie. He too used to do some of the craziest things to get himself off, auto asphyxiation (me), blindfolds (him), porn (him, lots of it, gay porn, especially when I wasn't there), begging (me begging him, then him begging me not to)... oh, what fantastic kinky times!

The secret to our successful sex life was that Reggie always talked his wacky ideas through with me before initiating anything, in fact a lot of the time Reggie said he actually preferred talking to me rather than fucking me,

which I could totally understand because we were so emotionally connected.

You see, you've gotten yourself into a bit of a predicament because you didn't speak up as soon as the wacky sex reared its ugly head and now you're left lying flat on your back while your girlfriend thrashes about on your nose, presuming that you're getting off on it too. And if I know women like I know women I'd say you've faked it a couple of times just to hurry her up.

This is of course the ultimate no-no; it may seem like a good idea at the time but imagine going to a restaurant and you don't like what you're being served. Do you call the waiter over and order more, wolfing every disgusting mouthful down with a look of ecstasy on your face, declaring that it's the best dish you have ever had in your life and then tipping extravagantly? No. Or do you demand to see the manager as soon as the dish is put down in front of you, declaring that you're not going to touch it, never mind eat it and that if he doesn't get you something else you will be telling all your friends and anybody else who will listen what a shit restaurant experience you've had and that you will not be darkening their door again? YES.

Yours, Licky

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# 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

**I don't know if there wasn't a worse time for the Cathal Ó'Searcaigh scandal to break, says Tom Butler. Here we all are, talking about gay marriage, trying to normalise gay relationships for the politicians and people, and what do we have? A storm of media controversy about a well-known Irish man in his 50s who has sex with poverty-stricken Nepali boys much less than half his age and declares that this is okay, because he's gay.**

While I recognise that the issues surrounding Neasa Ní Chianáin's documentary, *Fairytale of Kathmandu* are myriad, sensitive and complex, I have a major objection to Cathal Ó Searcaigh going on in press statements about the fact that he has never hidden the fact that he is a gay

man from anyone. It's as if by saying he's gay, he can be excused for what is generally perceived as sexual exploitation.

As the witch-hunt against the poet continues, I feel the need to assert that I distance myself as a gay man from his actions. I know a few men who are into younger guys. I am not judgemental about the age-gap and look at it within the context of general society, but with the money involved in the Ó Searcaigh scandal and the poverty surrounding the boys, I think there is much more than just the fact that he's a gay man making up the equation.

Ó Searcaigh regularly went to Nepal and lent a financial hand to boys of a certain age-group (boys, not girls) and had sex with some of them, which he freely admits in *Fairytale of Kathmandu*. Whether he likes it or not, there was a financial trade-off going down. He bought a shop for one boy who made his acquaintance



early on and built a house for another. The boys who went through the "open door" of his room are well aware of this fact and therefore having sex with him was coupled with hope for the future in a bleak and poverty-stricken world.

This kind of sexual exchange is a fact of life. It happens between men and girls, men and women, women and women, men and men, all the time. The issues surrounding such exchanges can be argued from both sides, but the plain fact of the matter is that being gay does not excuse them or brush the fact that they are such exchanges under the carpet.

In fact, what I find fascinating about the whole documentary and the controversy surrounding it is how almost everyone involved seems to want to brush the fact that the entire show was based on dodgy exchanges of one sort or another under the carpet.

Ó Searcaigh, with his infantilised idea of sexual relationships, was exchanging vague promises of a financially secure future for sexual favours with people he obviously sees as his sexual contemporaries (although they're not). No matter how much she denies it, Neasa Ní Chianáin exchanged integrity for notoriety as a film maker when she chose to change her documentary into an exposé of the poet halfway through making it, without mentioning the fact to Ó Searcaigh until it was mostly in the can.

The production company chose to exchange a dignified stance in terms of releasing this documentary for getting bums on seats by using a homoerotic poster image of one of the Nepali boys to sell the film. Fiona Neary, the Director of the Rape Crisis Centre, who has been all over the media criticising Ó Searcaigh and pointing towards a police investigation of the case, has chosen to exchange waiting for due process to happen in order to stoke up a storm of righteous indignation in the here and now.

Sadly for the boys in the film, many of whom were financially supported in one way or another by Cathal Ó Searcaigh (under dubious circumstances or not), they have exchanged the money he brought them every year for a few minutes on film in which they tell the tale Neasa Ní Chianáin wants from them. If, as Ní Chianáin constantly tells us throughout the film, the Nepalese people are very innocent and don't know much about sex (what a shocking generalisation of a whole race of people, coming from the 'wiser' West), they couldn't possibly have known the repercussions that would spread across the world in the wake of the publicity stoked up by the producers of this documentary.

And what is Cathal Ó Searcaigh exchanging every time he says, "I never pretended I wasn't gay"? He's exchanging the truth for a veneer of protection that he thinks political correctness can give him. It is not politically correct for a 52 year-old man to sleep with teenagers from a poor country. However, it has become politically correct not to slag off the gay community.

No matter how much political correctness there is on the surface, behind closed doors and in the hearts and minds of some people, the fact that Cathal Ó Searcaigh is using the gay defence is just bolstering old misconceptions that gay men are predatory of young boys.

If he had the honesty and presence of mind to come out and say that, yes, there is a fundamentally problematic element in the exchange of money for sex with young, vulnerable and poverty-stricken people, I would have more respect for him. As it is, just when we are so close to being taken seriously as equal to heterosexuals in terms of our relationships, he's spreading the stereotype by clinging on for dear life to the gay defence.



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- Information • Advice • Counselling • Support •
- Condoms • Lubricant •

**AVAILABLE 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 0879410934 before Mondays 5.00pm to arrange.

**SEXUAL HEALTH INFORMATION & LISTINGS:**

[www.gaymenshealthservice.ie](http://www.gaymenshealthservice.ie) for Services, Reports & Links.

[www.gayhealthnetwork.ie](http://www.gayhealthnetwork.ie) for information on Safer Sex, HIV Testing, Syphilis, STI's, Hepatitis B & PEP. [www.johnny.ie](http://www.johnny.ie) gay peer actions & advice.

**GAY MEN'S HEALTH SERVICE,**

HSE, provides an STI clinical, counselling, outreach, training and research service in relation to sexual health and HIV awareness and prevention.

 **HSE**  
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



**THE GEORGE**

MONDAY-TUESDAY 12.30-11.30PM  
WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY 12.30PM-3AM

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