

WINDY CITY TIMES

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Making History

Obama's Marriage Views Changed

Exclusive: WCT Examines His Step Back



pages 6-7

This week's Windy City Times features an exclusive look back at Barack Obama's views on same-sex marriage as they have evolved since his Illinois State Senate campaign in 1996. He has gone from a strong statement in favor of gay marriage in that race to what he viewed as a more practical support of civil unions when he ran for U.S. Senate and then president. See inside for WCT's exclusive review of Obama's marriage views, pages 6-7. This photo is from the "Yes We Can: John Gress on the Campaign Trail with Barack Obama" exhibit opening Friday, Jan. 16, at the third-floor gallery of the Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted. Gress's work involves commercial and photojournalism/documentary photography, and the show will run through Sunday, March 1.

One state rep's take on Blagojevich

BY ANDREW DAVIS

History was made Jan. 9 as embattled Gov. Rod Blagojevich became the first person in his post to be impeached (formally charged with misconduct) by the State House. The vote, which was in favor of the governor's impeachment by a vote of 114-1, directs the Illinois Senate to put Blagojevich on trial—with the goal of removing him from office.

Later that day, Windy City Times spoke with State Rep. Greg Harris, one of the politicians who voted for Blagojevich's impeachment. Harris talked about various aspects of the vote and what he thought of the governor's press conference that took place earlier that afternoon. (During the press conference, Blagojevich said

that he was not surprised by the impeachment—not because of the allegations, but because of ongoing friction between him and the House.)

Windy City Times: I just want to make sure I understand this from a technical perspective: So now it's all in the Senate's hands, correct?

Greg Harris: Right, but there are a number of steps. We voted to create an investigative committee to look into the circumstances surrounding the accusations toward the governor. They can determine if, in their mind, there was evidence there for impeachment, to gather that evidence and then make a recommendation to the full House, which they did [Jan. 8]. Today, the House impeached the governor by a vote of 114-1.

Impeachment is akin to an indictment in this case, so it now goes to the Senate, and then there will be a full trial.

WCT: Were you surprised the vote wasn't unanimous?

GH: [Pauses.] I don't know if anyone knew what to expect; it's the first time this has happened in the history of the state. Everyone voted their conscience.

WCT: How difficult was it for you to vote to impeach the governor? What was that whole process like for you?

GH: There were certainly a number of allegations—dozens of pages in the investigative

Turn to page 9

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Ally Sheedy (right) talks about her many movies, including her latest, *Steam*. Read page 18.

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Windy City Times talks with the Illinois Department of Human Rights' Rocco Claps about sexual-orientation and gender-identity discrimination. See page 8.

Photo courtesy of Anjali Julka

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Bishop V. Gene Robinson. Photo by Tracy Baim

Robinson part of inauguration

Openly gay Episcopal Bishop V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire has been selected to deliver the invocation Sunday, Jan. 18, at a concert that will kick off the inaugural celebrations.

In addition, the Rev. Sharon E. Watkins will deliver the sermon in the National Prayer Service (which ends the ceremonies) at Washington National Cathedral. She will be the first woman to lead that service.

The choices of Robinson and Watkins make for a diverse group of religious officials who will be involved in religious activities. Obama had already chosen the Rev. Rick Warren, an evangelical minister, to deliver the invocation during the inauguration ceremony—a choice that angered many gay-rights activists, as Warren had gone on the record saying that he was against same-sex marriage (even comparing the concept to incest and pedophilia). Also, the Rev. Joseph Lowery, a Black civil-rights advocate, will deliver the benediction.

LGBT-rights groups praised Robinson's selection. Jennifer Chrisler, executive director of the Family Equality Council, said, "In a period when others have used faith to justify bigotry and discrimination, Bishop Robinson has stood for peace and for the rights of all religious persons to express and act upon their faith. ... I look forward to hearing such a courageous voice at the first inaugural event, and to religious discourse during the Obama Administration that honors and respects all of God's children."

Robinson had actually endorsed Obama during his run for the presidency—but called the president-elect's selection of Warren a "slap in the face," according to the Washington Post.

However, having Robinson tapped to participate in Sunday's concert—which will feature Beyonce and U2, among others—has stirred controversy as well. According to USA Today, Catholic League President Bill Donohue commented that Obama selected a "polarizing person" who "offends Catholics as much as he does Protestants. If that's his idea of inclusion, he can keep it."

As for Robinson—who participated in a civil-union ceremony with partner Mark Andrew last June—he said, "I am totally excited and a little overwhelmed. It ranks up there with some of the most important moments of my life. We have put an enormous burden on this man and I want to remind the country that we have a part to play in this too," according to The Guardian.

Who voted for Prop 8

BY BOB ROEHR

Party identification, ideology, religiosity and age were the factors most likely to determine how a person voted on Proposition 8, California's initiative that banned gay marriage. The report by political scientists Patrick Egan and Kenneth Sherrill was released Jan. 6.

It also called into question an election day exit poll which said that about 70 percent of African Americans had voted in favor of the ban. The report found that Black support for the measure was 57 to 59 percent.

The report was based upon a new survey of 1,066 California voters soon after the November election, precinct vote totals, and demographic data on those precincts.

"The main story is that California voters have shifted dramatically toward support for same sex marriage," said Egan, a professor at New York University. Compared with the Knight Initiative in 2000, "the movement toward marriage equality was across just about all demographic groups, with the only holdouts being Republicans, conservatives, and those born before World War II. This shift is the most important story coming out of Proposition 8."

Women outnumbered men among voters (54 percent to 46 percent) and opposed the amendment by a slim margin (51 percent to 49 percent) but support was stronger among men (54 percent), who provided the margin of victory.

A strong majority of those 65 and older (67 percent) voter for Prop 8, while it lost among other age groups (45 percent to 48 percent) with the differences between the groups within the margin of error of the survey.

Fewer than half of Asians (48 percent) and whites (49 percent) voted for the measure, while Blacks (57 percent) and Latinos (59 percent) supported it.

Voters who identified as conservative (82 percent) and Republican (81 percent) were most likely to have voted for Prop 8, compared with Democrats (30 percent) and liberals (22 percent). Independents (53 percent) and moderates (51 percent) also were more likely to support it.

Those who attended religious services weekly (70 percent) supported the measure, while those who "hardly ever" attended services did not (30 percent). Intermittent attendees (46 percent) were less likely to support it.

Egan concluded, "Holding all variables constant, age, religiosity, party identification, and political ideology have strong, significant, and independent effects on how Californians voted on Proposition 8."

The Black vote

Hunter College professor Ken Sherrill said the exit poll conducted by NEP indicating that 70 percent of African Americans voted for Prop 8 "was an outlier unsupported by any other poll, and more importantly, not supported by the actual election returns." Four other polls around election day found estimates of black support that ranged from 41 percent to 58 percent.

He looked at precinct returns from counties representing two-thirds of California's black voters and merged that with census data. "We came to the conclusion that between 57 and 59 percent of African-American voters supported Proposition 8 ... a far cry from the NEP estimate."

Higher rates of participation in religious activities appears to explain the higher rates of support for Prop 8 among African Americans and Latinos. "Once we held the effect of attending religious services constant, the effect of race and ethnicity were reduced to statistical insignificance," said Sherrill.

Knowing someone gay

One surprise is that knowing someone who is gay did not appear to have a significant effect on how the person voted. "This factor appears to have been trumped by voter's party identification and ideology," said Egan.

Sherrill added, "About two-thirds of California conservatives said they knew or were related to someone who is LGBT. About four out of five of them voted for the referendum," the same proportion of those who said they didn't know someone LGBT.

"This leads us to the conclusion that, at least in terms of marriage equality, opposition to our rights isn't personal, it's ideological and partisan."

Looking at broader trends over time Sherrill said, "Support for marriage equality has increased by about 1 percent a year since 2000, and virtually every demographic trend is on our side. This is very good news. The second is that we face hard core, generally implacable opposition among Republicans and conservatives."

"Mitigating that is the fact that California is becoming less Republican and less conservative. In fact, hard core opposition to such things as marriage equality may be costing Republicans the support of younger voters."

Changing minds

"We need to redouble our work with people of faith to overcome the notion that civil marriage of same sex couples somehow threatens their religious liberties," said Rev. Mark Wilson, coordinator with the African American Minister Outreach. "We have to convince them that protecting all families equally is just, moral, and within their own religious realities the moral thing to do."

He spoke the power of personal stories, of empowering "gays and lesbians within the churches to hold their churches accountable." How can they preach love and goodness while practicing injustice and inequality at the same time, he asked rhetorically.

Egan said there has been movement towards marriage equality among religious groups since 2000. "There has been a 9 point movement among Protestants, a 4-point movement among Catholics, and a 7-point movement among Jews. It suggests that not all people of faith are not necessarily out of contention."

Sherrill said, "What we find is that knowing gay people doesn't make much of a difference ... It's another thing to sit down and talk with them about everyday life and what marriage equality really means." He said that rich and layered understanding of gay people can come through direct contact and through the media.

Scott Davenport, managing director of Freedom to Marry, said, "It is the sustained, ongoing set of conversations that happen one-on-one, among the culture, and in the media over a long period of time that has created the shift that we see. It is not the flashpoint in the heat of a campaign that moves people along. That sustained work will help us set up a win the next time out."

The activities were funded by a grant from the Evelyn & Walter Hass, Jr. Fund, through the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Former Task Force executive director Matt Foreman is now a grants officer for the Fund with responsibility for its LGBT activities.

A PDF version of the 16-page report is available at www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/issues/egan_sherrill_prop8_1_6_09.pdf.

NATIONAL ROUNDUP

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Former Sen. Larry Craig is dropping further attempts to appeal his conviction connected to a sex sting in a Minneapolis airport bathroom, the Associated Press reported. Craig was arrested in 2007 by an undercover police officer, and pled guilty to disorderly conduct; however, he changed his mind after finding out that arrest was publicized.

In Seattle, Wash., almost a dozen gay bars have received anonymous typewritten letters that are **threatening to poison customers with the toxin called ricin**, according to the Seattle Times. However, the bar owners have refused to close their businesses, and the FBI and the city's police department are involved in an investigation. Ricin, a chemical found in castor beans, can be fatal ingested or inhaled in its purified form.

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Protesters gather at the Thompson Building. Photo by Yasmin Nair

Groups protest in Loop

BY YASMIN NAIR

Chicago gay groups participated in two protests this past week, both propelled by the November passage of Proposition 8 in California and subsequent protests against them nationwide. The first was a feeder march outside the Hyatt Global Headquarters building at 71 S. Wacker. This was part of an action that began in California in the spring of 2008, when gays discovered that Doug Manchester, owner of the Manchester Hyatt in San Diego, had donated \$125,000 to the efforts behind Proposition 8. Since then, protesters have asked the Hyatt Corporation to sever ties from Manchester. (Hyatt manages the hotel for him.) The second protest was a rally at the James R. Thompson Center, 100 W. Randolph, where people gathered to rally against the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) signed into law by then-President Bill Clinton in 1996. Both rallies occurred Jan. 10.

The Hyatt action was called by Equality Illinois, and approximately 30 people braved the extreme cold and thick snowfall to participate. Board president Art Johnston and emcee Allison Leber rallied protestors. People were encouraged to sign a petition that asked Hyatt to take action against Manchester and support "marriage equality." Johnston talked to Windy City Times about the impetus behind the protest, saying that, "We're here today to bring the message home to Hyatt that they cannot ignore the actions of Doug Manchester, whose early donation to Proposition 8 certainly helped it pass, leaving us with the consequences." Some have questioned whether Manchester should be punished for money he gave as a private citizen; Johnston's response was that "There's no question that he has a right to spend his money the way he pleases. And we also, as citizens, have the right to bring it to people's attention and suggest that they might not want to stay at the Hyatt. As long as the sign outside the Manchester hotel says "Hyatt," Hyatt has to repudiate his actions."

Rick Garcia, political director of Equality Illinois, echoed Johnston and added that Hyatt was already seeing economic costs. Garcia said that Hyatt officials acknowledged they had lost about \$2.5 million due to the boycott. Garcia also said that non-LGBT groups were paying attention: "Some associations, such as the American Psychological Association, [are] considering boycotting Hyatt."

The Hyatt protesters joined the anti-DOMA rally, which drew about 60 people, making for approximately 100 people overall. Sherry Wolf of Join the Impact, the group that organized the DOMA protest, welcomed everyone and stressed the importance of overturning DOMA by putting pressure on both Republicans and Democrats to overturn the legislation.

Speakers included Andy Thayer of Gay Liberation Network (which co-sponsored the event); Henry Tamarin, President of the Local 1 chapter of Unite Here; and Tania Unzueta of the March 10 Movement, an immigrant-rights group. Tamarin asserted that his union, which works on behalf of restaurant and hotel workers, was in solidarity with the same-sex-marriage movement: "We voted to support the Illinois civil-partnership bill. We have supported the gay marriage bill in California, and pledge we'll do that in Illinois when the time comes." Unzueta spoke about the intersection between queer rights and immigrant rights, as in the case of "undocumented gay workers who are fired because of no-match letters and undocumented queer students who may not be able to access the same scholarships as citizens." She also spoke of the needs of people like Victoria Arellano, an undocumented immigrant transgender woman "who died shackled to her bed after being detained by immigration and denied access to her HIV medications." She concluded by saying that "any law that restricts the rights of people to be happy should be abolished." Following the rally, people marched past Holy Name Cathedral, 735 N. State, to protest the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops giving \$200,000 toward Prop 8.

Study: Clergy badly trained on LGBT matters

A study was released Jan. 8 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, 151 E. Wacker, that revealed a serious lack of training among U.S. clergy regarding LGBT issues.

According to the study, Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice, seminaries are failing to prepare clergy to address issues around sexuality in their congregations and communities; including dealing with instances of abuse, sexual orientation, conflicts over same-sex marriage, gaps in sex-education, debates over reproductive rights and teen pregnancy. Most denominations currently do not require ministerial candidates to be competent in sexual health and education beyond sexual-harassment prevention, according to the study.

Among other things, the survey showed that over 90 percent of the seminaries surveyed do not require full-semester, sexuality-based courses for graduation; and that seminaries offer three times as many courses in women's and feminist studies as they do in LGBT studies or other sexuality-related issues.

To read the survey, see www.religioustudies.org/SeminaryReport.htm.

Ted Lechowicz dies

BY YASMIN NAIR

Former Cook County Commissioner Thaddeus S. "Ted" Lechowicz died Jan. 5 at the age of 70. Lechowicz was from a family of Polish immigrants and was the model of a traditional Chicago Democrat, representing a large Polish-American voting bloc on the city's Northwest Side, where he spent his entire life.

Despite what many might consider the relatively conservative bent of his Catholic community, Lechowicz was instrumental in getting the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance passed in 1993. Rick Garcia, one of the gay activists who worked on the legislation, told Windy City Times that "We would not have had the ordinance without him. I met with him [on the recommendation of Maria Pappas], and he agreed to cosponsor a comprehensive human rights ordinance with Pappas. This was a huge step because it gave the other white ethnic commissioners the permission and the nod to support it."

This would seem to be an unusual move on the part of what Garcia called a "regular Democrat," but, according to him, Lechowicz supported the bill for two reasons. One, he "understood the issue and had enough power that it wouldn't hurt." In addition, it provided him an opportunity to "stick it to the [supposedly] progressive Democrats" who, according to Garcia, "told us they'd support gay rights and told their suburban [constituents] it would never happen."

Lechowicz was also unique in that he once had seats in both the Illinois Senate and on the

County Board. According to Garcia, "He was also helpful in Springfield. I often counted on him to get Democratic support in the Senate."

Emanuel vacancy has March primary

The race to fill Rahm Emanuel's U.S. House seat became real as Gov. Rod Blagojevich has set the dates for the primary and general elections.

The primary will be held Tuesday, March 3; the general election will take place Tuesday, April 7.

Emanuel's 5th Congressional set was officially vacated Jan. 2 when he formally resigned in order to be President-elect Barack Obama's chief of staff.

Over a dozen people have expressed interest in the position, including Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley and Illinois State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz.

Positively Aware marks 20 years

Positively Aware magazine has marked the 20th anniversary of publishing with a special anniversary edition in the January/February 2009 issue, released last week.

The issue looks back at the history of Positively Aware magazine, which first began publishing as TPA News, the agency newsletter of Test Positive Aware Network. To order copies of the magazine, call 773-989-9400 or e-mail distribution@tpan.com.

'YPC Idol' Tuesdays

Youth Pride Center (YPC) is holding its second season of "YPC Idol" Tuesdays at Pie Hole Pizza, 737 W. Roscoe, 7-8 p.m.

It's open to the public. E-mail youthpridecenter@gmail.com for more info.

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PASSAGES

Samuel Page

Samuel Robert Page—an Edgewater resident who formerly resided in Columbus, Ohio—passed away after a brief illness Dec. 28, 2008. He was 67.

Page was the adored and adoring father of Andrea (Peter) Sullivan of Rye, N.Y., and grandfather of Nicholas, Luke and Quinn Sullivan, who were the joy of his life.

Page was the beloved brother of Joan Page of Columbus; Marlene Calabro of Rochester, N.Y.; and the late LaRue Meehan of Omaha, Neb. He was also the eccentric uncle of Michael, Mark, Kristen, Michael, John, Brenda, Tom, Danny, Chris, Deanna, Dave, Dennis, Lisa, Cindy and others.

He was the former spouse and friend of Lynn Page of Columbus, and the cherished friend of many across the country.



Samuel Page.

Page's mother, Margaret Anthony, and father, Samuel Isaac, preceded him in death. Page never met a stranger, though he always relied on their kindness. He will be desperately missed and joyfully celebrated.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to Howard Brown Health Center, 4025 N. Sheridan, Chicago, IL 60613, Attn: Bryant Dunbar.

WINDY CITY TIMES EXCLUSIVE

Obama answers
1996 gay media

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Dear Ms. Ring:

Below are my responses to your questionnaire:

- 1) I would support and co-sponsor a state civil rights bill for gays and lesbians.
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- 3) I favor an increase in funding for state AIDS services.
- 4) I favor more aggressive (and better funded) prevention programs, particularly targeted at young people and minority communities where infection rates continue to increase.
- 5) I favor mandatory Medicaid coverage for persons with HIV/AIDS.
- 6) I favor legalizing same-sex marriages, and would fight efforts to prohibit such marriages.
- 7) I believe in the rights of gays and lesbians to become foster parents, adopt children and have the right to custody of their own children on the same basis as heterosexuals.
- 8) I support a woman's right to choose an abortion, favor Medicaid funding of abortions for poor women, and oppose parental notification laws.
- 9) I vigorously support existing affirmative action programs.

Please call me at the number listed above if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,



Barack Obama
Candidate for State Senate, 13th District

Shown here is a copy of Barack Obama's typed responses to the Outlines newspaper 1996 primary election questionnaire. Obama signed and dated the form Feb. 15, 1996, sending it to Outlines political reporter Trudy Ring. In 2000, Outlines newspaper purchased and merged with Windy City Times.



From a photo from Windy City Times archives, 2004

Obama changed views on gay marriage

1996 statement:
'I favor legalizing
same-sex marriages'

NEWS ANALYSIS BY TRACY BAIM

During the final weeks of the presidential campaign last fall, several media outlets contacted Windy City Times because of an old Internet story from the 1996 Illinois State Senate race. In that campaign, Outlines newspaper, which merged with Windy City Times in 2000, reported that 13th District candidate Barack Obama supported gay marriage. Reporters wanted to know what exactly Obama had said.

Outlines newspaper, as with the new Windy City Times, surveyed candidates for all levels of elected office, and also reported on the results from pro-gay and progressive groups. We summarized the results in that 1996 article by Trudy Ring, but did not list exact answers to questions. In that article Outlines did note that Obama was a supporter of same-sex marriage; that article was never challenged or corrected by Obama.

Now, in the process of sorting through my 25 years of archives of Chicago gay reporting to eventually post materials on www.ChicagoGay-History.org, I have found the original surveys on which Ring's reporting was based. Sometimes, it pays to keep those boxes.

IMPACT, which was Chicago's main GLBT political action committee for several years, surveyed Obama and other candidates, as did Outlines. What we are including with this special Presi-

dential Inaugural issue of Windy City Times are copies of the answers to the IMPACT and Outlines questions. For IMPACT, the Obama campaign simply responded on the form. For Outlines, the candidate typed in his answers and signed his letter.

More recently, as Obama has run for higher office, from senator to president, he has further shaped his views on marriage, and now he does not back same-sex marriage. In a January 2004 interview I conducted with Obama at the Windy City Times' office, Obama clearly stated that lack of support for full marriage equality was a matter of strategy rather than principle, but in even more recent comments, it appears he is backing off even further, saying it is more of a religious issue, and also a "state" issue, so he favors civil unions. Both are compromises most gays do not support. First, the U.S. has a separation of church and state, and laws are in place locally and nationally that give benefits based on the very word, "marriage." Therefore, marriage as it is now defined is a government (both state and federal) institution that comes with specific financial and social benefits (taxes, benefits, inheritance, immigration, custody, etc.). So, until government eliminates the word "marriage" from state and federal laws, it is a government issue, and that includes the federal government.

Obama's answer to the 1996 Outlines question was very clear: "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages, and would fight efforts to prohibit such marriages." There was no use of "civil unions," no compromise whatsoever.

The IMPACT marriage question was a bit less direct. It asked if Obama would support a Mar-

riage Resolution being considered at the time, which read in part "Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice, RESOLVED, the state should not interfere with same-gender couples who [choose] to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of civil marriage." Obama responded: "I would support such a resolution."

What follows are Obama's responses in our Windy City Times 2004 interview, six years after his successful 1996 state Senate run, when he was now running for U.S. Senate:

Tracy Baim: Do you have a position on marriage vs. civil unions?

Barack Obama: I am a fierce supporter of domestic-partnership and civil-union laws. I am not a supporter of gay marriage as it has been thrown about, primarily just as a strategic issue. I think that marriage, in the minds of a lot of voters, has a religious connotation. I know that's true in the African-American community, for example. And if you asked people, 'should gay and lesbian people have the same rights to transfer property, and visit hospitals, and et cetera,' they would say, 'absolutely.' And then if you talk about, 'should they get married?', then suddenly ...

TB: There are more than 1,000 federal benefits that come with marriage. Looking back in the 1960s and inter-racial marriage, the polls showed people against that as well.

Obama: Since I'm a product of an interracial marriage, I'm very keenly aware of ...

TB: But you think, strategically, gay marriage isn't going to happen so you won't support it at this time?

Obama: What I'm saying is that strategically, I think we can get civil unions passed. I think we can get SB 101 passed. I think that to the extent that we can get the rights, I'm less concerned about the name. And I think that is my No. 1 priority, is an environment in which the Republicans are going to use a particular language that has all sorts of connotations in the broader culture as a wedge issue, to prevent us moving forward, in securing those rights, then I don't want to play their game.

TB: If Massachusetts gets marriage and this gives momentum to the proposed federal Constitutional amendment against gay marriage?

Obama: I would oppose that.

After Obama's WCT interview, he called to clarify that he opposed the proposed U.S. Constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. He said he also opposed the two proposed state bills banning same-sex marriage.

During his presidential campaign, he has remained consistent with his 2004 position, but clearly he has moved away from the 1996 statement of "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages." A rose is a rose is a rose, but civil unions are not "marriage" unless 100 percent of the benefits are the same across all states and the federal government.

The full 2004 interview can be found at: <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/ARTICLE.php?AID=3931>

Tracy Baim is publisher and executive editor of Windy City Times. She was the co-founder and publisher of Outlines newspaper.

Obama makes an IMPACT

Shown here are copies of the 1996 primary election questionnaire issued by IMPACT, which was Illinois' Gay and Lesbian Political Action Organization. The form had been due Jan. 12, 1996, and was signed by Barack Obama on Jan. 7, 1996. In this election, he was running for the Democratic nomination for 13th District State Senator. He won the primary and eventually the election that fall.

IMPACT
ILLINOIS GAY AND LESBIAN POLITICAL ACTION ORGANIZATION

IMPACT ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE
(Due Date: Midnight, January 12, 1996)

Office: 13th District (The incumbent's name: _____)

Candidate Name: Barack Obama

Address: 3755 South Dearborn Ave., Suite 200, Chicago, IL 60653 (Home) 3755 South Dearborn Ave., Suite 200, Chicago, IL 60653 (Work)

Campaign Manager: Barack Obama

Phone: (773) 437-1111 Fax: _____

Please note that your completed questionnaire must reach our office by 11:59 PM on January 12, 1996. If questionnaires are received after the deadline, candidates will not be considered and candidates will not be considered for an endorsement.

Please complete all questions on the standard questionnaire. Although some of the questions may involve issues that are not within the direct responsibility of the office you seek, please respond to all of the questions.

The questions refer to issues of importance to the lesbian and gay community. If you have held public office, please be specific about how you have supported the gay and lesbian community while in office. If you have not held public office, please indicate when you have been in a state and when you will do so if elected.

If you do not support a specific issue, please clearly state the reason(s) why. Lack of support for issues outlined on the political agenda will not necessarily disqualify candidates from endorsement.

If you do not understand an issue, or would like more information, please feel free to contact the IMPACT office. We are happy to make you in any way possible.

Candidate Signature: Barack Obama Date: Jan 7, 1996

IMPACT Questionnaire: All Offices

1. The following is based on the IMPACT Political Agenda. Please respond to each of these issues in the manner described on the cover sheet.

A. The election and appointment of qualified, openly gay and lesbian candidates to public office. Please specifically address the following three questions:

1.) In general, do you support the election of qualified openly gay and lesbian candidates? YES

2.) Have you ever publicly endorsed an openly gay or openly lesbian candidate for public office? I HAVE NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO.

3.) In the current election cycle, IMPACT has already endorsed the candidacies of Larry McKeon (Candidate for State Representative, 34th District) and Judge Sebastian Patti, countywide candidate for Circuit Court Judge. Both are openly gay men. Have you endorsed these candidates or do you intend to? If you have not made an endorsement, what is your reasoning for not doing so?
I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE CANDIDATES, BUT WOULD BE HAPPY TO LEARN MORE.

B. The creation of a cost-neutral, city- or countywide domestic partnership registry which would certify gay and lesbian relationships through the issuance of a domestic partnership certificate.

1.) Would you publicly endorse legislation which would create such a registry? Would you agree to have your name published as an official endorser of such legislation? YES.

2.) Would you assist in advocating for such legislation? YES.

C. Amendment of the Illinois Human Rights Act to include prohibition of Discrimination based on sexual orientation. SUPPORT.

D. Opposition to anti-lesbian or anti-gay public initiatives, such as Colorado's Amendment 2, which is currently being reviewed by the United States Supreme Court. I WOULD STRONGLY OPPOSE SUCH LEGISLATION.

E. Repeal of Illinois Criminal Code Section 12-16.2 (a)(1) regarding criminal transmission of HIV. I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE LAW, BUT WOULD OPPOSE SUCH A LAW TO THE DEGREE THAT IT STIGMATIZES OR UPHOLDS THOSE DEALING WITH HIV.

F. Increased funding for HIV/AIDS education, prevention and health care services. YES

G. Increased funding of women's health care related issues. YES

H. Preservation of privacy and reproductive rights, including the right of women to choose an abortion. In your response, please address public funding of abortions for indigent women, and restrictions on a woman's right to choose abortion, such as parental or spousal approval. I OPPOSE RESTRICTIONS ON A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE, AND DISCOURAGE VARIOUS NOTIFICATION STATUTES, AND OPPOSE PUBLIC FUNDING OF ABORTIONS.

2. Please respond to each of the following issues in the manner described on the cover sheet.

A. Restrictions on gay men and lesbians becoming foster or adoptive parents. OPPOSE TO SUCH RESTRICTIONS.

B. Legislation that eliminates discrimination in custody and child visitation. SUPPORT SUCH LEGISLATION.

C. Continued availability of free, anonymous HIV antibody tests. SUPPORT CONTINUED AVAILABILITY.

D. Opposition to any initiative which requires mandatory HIV testing. OPPOSE SUCH INITIATIVES.

3. How have/will you reach out to the community to encourage and actively recruit qualified lesbian and gay persons to apply for jobs, boards, task forces, etc under your jurisdiction? I PLAN TO SET UP A GAY/LESBIAN TASK FORCE IN THE DISTRICT TO IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE.

4. What specific steps have/will you take to educate the personnel in your office and others under your jurisdiction on lesbian and gay issues? IT WOULD BE USEFUL ORGANIZATIONS LIKE IMPACT COMING INTO MY OFFICE TO CONDUCT WORKSHOPS.

5. Will you issue a statement and/or sign a policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in your office? Will you additionally grant certain domestic partnership benefits to your employees, to the extent allowed by current law, like bereavement leave? YES TO BOTH QUESTIONS.

6. If you receive IMPACT's endorsement, will you acknowledge it in your campaign literature and advertising? YES.

7. Do you endorse the Marriage Resolution, a statement of support for the right of same-gender individuals to marry:

Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice, RESOLVED, the state should not interfere with same-gender couples who chose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of civil marriage.

If you do not support the resolution, will you at least oppose any attempts to outlaw same-gender marriage and/or to amend reciprocity agreements with states which permit same-gender marriage? Will you oppose any federal initiatives which attempt to override certain state laws which allow same-gender marriage?

I WOULD SUPPORT SUCH A RESOLUTION.

Putting Obama's questionnaire in context

BY TIMOTHY STEWART-WINTER

In this issue of the Windy City Times, the world learns for the first time that almost thirteen years ago, during his first campaign for office, Barack Obama answered a questionnaire with the phrase, "I favor legalizing same-sex marriages." The response appeared in a questionnaire that his campaign faxed to the office of Outlines—a local LGBT newspaper that purchased and merged with Windy City Times in 2000—on Feb. 15, 1996. Later that year, in its voter guide for the general election, Outlines summarized Obama's positions: "Supports gay rights, same-sex marriage; increased AIDS funding, abortion rights, affirmative action."

Publisher and Executive Editor Tracy Baim retrieved the form from her archives while working on the Chicago Gay History Project. Her release of the document occurs at a unique time. On Jan. 20, for only the third time since the Stonewall riots, a new Democratic president will be sworn in. Some LGBT activists, infuriated by the president-elect's decision to invite evangelical pastor Rick Warren to pray at his inauguration, argue that Obama must do better than the last two Democratic presidencies, which they believe have resulted in pro-gay judicial appointments but too little else. Jimmy Carter was the first to invite gay activists to a White House meeting (which he did not attend); Bill Clinton was the first to pursue gay voters during his presidential campaign. Yet Carter said little to nothing in the course of Anita Bryant's national anti-gay crusade, and Clinton's left us with the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

To put Obama's stunning statement in context, it helps to know how things were going for him in mid-February 1996: he was in the middle of a messy standoff with the 13th District's incumbent state Senator, Alice Palmer. After promising not to run for reelection and publicly endorsing Obama, a civil rights lawyer who had never held office, Palmer changed her mind in December 1995 and tried to get back into the race. For several weeks, neither candidate backed down, while local political leaders sought a resolution. The conflict would end in a matter of days, when Obama supporters successfully challenged the validity of signatures collected by Palmer's campaign. But on the day the fax went to Outlines, Obama was an unlikely candidate, up against a progressive incumbent in a very progressive district, who needed all the help he could get.

Earlier, in January, Obama had filled out his first known questionnaire on LGBT issues, which his campaign faxed to IMPACT Illinois, which was then the state's LGBT political action committee. Instead of asking about marriage directly, IMPACT asked candidates if they would support a resolution stating that "marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice" and that the state "should not interfere" with same-sex couples' right to marry. Obama's response, which appears to bear similarities to his handwriting on other documents from the period that have been released, was "I would support such a resolution." Other answers, expressing unfamiliarity with HIV laws and with two openly gay candidates for office, reflect Obama's inexperience.

The two questionnaires are an artifact, of course, of a very different moment in Obama's history, but also in the history of the same-sex marriage debate. Beginning in 1995, after the highest court in Obama's native Hawaii began seeking to force that state to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples, legislators in statehouses nationwide stampeded to ban the practice preemptively. On Feb. 13, 1996, just two

Turn to page 8



Rocco Claps.

Righting wrongs: Talking with Rocco Claps

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Three years after the Illinois Human Rights Act amendment that bans sexual-orientation and gender-identity discrimination went into effect, the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) has seen its fair share of complaints being filed. Windy City Times talked with IDHR Director Rocco Claps about the complaints as well as domestic-partner benefits.

Windy City Times: How are things going with the amendment and filing?

Rocco Claps: What I find really interesting—and you should know that when I talk about numbers, I have three different stacks in front of me and we keep numbers by fiscal year—is that no matter if you look at fiscal year or calendar year, we see a distinct increase. So far, within 2009, 5 percent of all the charges coming in [involve] sexual orientation and gender identity, which is a big increase for us; originally, it was about 1 percent in '06.

WCT: And what do you attribute that increase to?

RC: We have an increase in charges coming in, which I [attribute to] the economy. Typically, the most vulnerable employees in a workplace setting are the ones who are victimized first, fired first or treated differently when the economy gets bad. We've seen that in repeated patterns over the years, so that's not so surprising to me. What is surprising is that we're at 5.3 percent—and I do believe that's because people know that we exist.

WCT: Well, I want to go back to something you said: You talked about a correlation between filing and economic hardships. So, when people have jobs, do they tend to *not* file and possibly [put up with] possible harassment?

RC: Well, it's very individualized, but we know that people are getting laid off more often now. People have less options; in other words, they can't find jobs [as easily]. That may prompt people to file, so that they can possibly get back pay or their jobs back. But we find that individuals in the workplace who are more vulnerable to discrimination tend to be the first ones to be fired first.

WCT: OK. I'm no sociologist, but what does that say about employees and employers?

RC: Frankly, I'm much more prompted to feel discrimination if I don't have options; unfortunately, people tend to fire those who are different from [themselves] or who they don't like—and if I'm one who is fired or laid off, and I don't have an immediate ability to find another job, I think that my life is more affected by it so I might try to get some sort of remedy for it.

WCT: The other bases of discrimination [besides employment] include real-estate transactions; public accommodations; sexual harassment in higher education; and financial credit. Could you explain that last one?

RC: Basically, it's issuance of a loan, but keep in mind that real-estate transactions covers business transactions as well.

WCT: How long does it take to process a complaint?

RC: We're in pretty good shape right now. Our average number is about 320 days right now; we're required by law to process a claim in 365 days, and that's from walking in the door to a resolution. And about 33 percent of our charges are settled within the agency; we offer mediation throughout so the parties often come to terms within the process of investigation.

WCT: How much evidence does a person need? Obviously, the more evidence you have, the better off you are.

RC: It varies by what they're charging. But in our typical charge—employment—we tell people to bring in comparables. If a gay man is alleging harassment, you should be able to [show] that he is being treated differently than a straight man who does the same job he does. In employment cases, showing comparables often means getting records from the employer.

WCT: I don't know if you heard about this case in England, but a straight man was allowed to file a homophobia-based charge against his former company because his co-workers attacked him with gay slurs...

RC: You should know that the bill that the governor signed in 2005 does say "perceived sexual orientation," so that would be valid in Illinois as well. So it can be someone who isn't gay but who is treated like they're gay.

WCT: When you and I talked in '07, something you said regarding outreach was that you felt that you all could do more downstate. How has that progressed?

RC: Well, we need to do better at it. We've done a number of informational workshops around the state, and sexual orientation is always part of those [events] because it's part of the law. We've partnered with Equality Illinois in a number of things here in Chicago and a few places downstate, but we need to do a better job of that. It's always a challenge when you have budget restrictions and you're teaching people about what's available to them.

I do think that it's getting through, which is why we have an increase in charges. We've had an increase every year since the bill became law.

WCT: To our knowledge, have you received a substantial number of gender identity-related complaints?

RC: As a snapshot of fiscal year '09 (from July '08 to today), we've had 89 sexual-orientation charges and, of those, 11 are related to gender identity. But we've also had 2 bisexual, 67 homosexual, 2 heterosexual and 3 perceived orientation.

Visit www.state.il.us/dhr or call 312-814-6200.

LGBT couple murdered in Indianapolis

BY ANDREW DAVIS

A man arrested Dec. 31 for two murders in Indianapolis has admitted to committing the crimes, according to WTHR.com.

Christopher Conwell, 20, confessed to Indianapolis Metro Police Detectives that he killed Avery Elzy, 34 (who police said lived an "alternative" lifestyle, according to the Web site), and Michael Hunt, 22, on Dec. 26 at the couple's house at 5853 Rosslyn. One of the couple's three dogs was also killed.

When asked what was meant by "alternative," Sgt. Paul Thompson of the Indianapolis Police Department told Windy City Times Jan. 8 that the couple was "in the LGBT spectrum." Thompson added that, so far, the double murder does not look like a hate crime; however, authorities are still investigating the motive.

Andersonville eatery reopens

Andies, 5253 N. Clark, passed re-inspection Jan. 9 and was given its business license back a day after being shut down the previous day by Chicago Department of Public Health inspectors.

The inspectors visited Andies in response to a report that a customer became sick after eating a meal. Inspectors discovered a faulty walk-in cooler that was about five degrees warmer than the maximum of 40 degrees required by law.

'Cabaret' Jan. 16 at Center

Center on Halsted Youth Program's "Diva" workshops will culminate in "Gender Queer Cabaret, Showtime at the Apollo," an evening of gender-bending queer musical performances based upon shows at the historic landmark Apollo Theater in Harlem. "Cabaret" will take place Friday, Jan. 16, at the Center's Hoover/Leppen Theatre, 3656 N. Halsted, 7-9 p.m.

Tickets are \$10 and may be purchased at the door; they're \$3 for students and seniors with valid IDs. See www.centeronhalsted.org.

Brotherhood meeting on Jan. 17

Brotherhood of the Phoenix, a Chicago neopagan order for LGT men, will hold a celebration Saturday, Jan. 17, 5:30-10 p.m., at LifeForce Arts, 3148 N. Lincoln.

The suggested donation is \$10. See www.brotherhoodofthephoenix.org.

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days before Obama submitted the questionnaire, Republican Peter Fitzgerald of Palatine had unveiled a "defense of marriage" bill in the Illinois State Senate. The bill was signed into law in May by Gov. Jim Edgar; soon, Bill Clinton would sign the federal DOMA, which remains on the books. Obama clearly stated his opposition to such laws.

Today, the president-elect says he does not support "legalizing same-sex marriages." As late as his early 2004 interview with Baim in this publication, he added a qualification, saying, "I am not a supporter of gay marriage as it has been thrown about, primarily just as a strategic issue." Since the 2004 election, same-sex marriage has become far more widely discussed, and more politically explosive, than in 1996. Meanwhile, with his every word under scrutiny, Obama phrases his policy positions meticulously. To his credit, Obama, whose parents' interracial marriage in 1961 would have been illegal in several states, has generally avoided the phrase "traditional marriage," which has become popular among politicians who prefer not to mention the gay and lesbian people who are concretely helped or harmed by their decisions. On the other hand, the Warren debacle raises questions about his commitment to deliver for a constituency that overwhelmingly backed him against John McCain.

President Obama will be the first occupant of the Oval Office who has a real history with the LGBT community. Even Clinton, who famously embraced gay voters on the campaign trail in 1992, had never done so as governor of Arkansas. It will be a major change to have a president who has spent his entire 12-year political career in environments in which the LGBT community has been an organized constituency, and has sought LGBT endorsements in every campaign. What remains to be seen, though, is whether it is a change we can believe in.

Timothy Stewart-Winter is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Chicago, writing his dissertation on lesbian and gay politics in Chicago.

Saturday, January 17
7:30 p.m.
Sappho's Salon: A Provocative Night of Lesbian Diversions

Wed., January 21
7:30 p.m.
Siddarth Kara
Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery

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From left: The Rev. Stan Sloan, Mayor Richard Daley and 46th Ward Alderman Helen Shiller. Photo by Emmanuel Garcia

Mayor attends Chicago House ceremony

BY EMMANUEL GARCIA

Chicago House and Social Service Agency invited Mayor Richard Daley to the Uptown neighborhood for a ribbon-cutting to unveil the new Families Building on the North Side. The Rev. Stan Sloan, the organization's CEO, said the apartment-style residential building cost over \$2 million. Although a large portion of the funds came through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, half of the cost was paid for by private donations.

The apartment units are for families whose lives have become complicated or affected by the HIV/AIDS virus. The site is part of a city-wide effort to combat the homelessness that many people with HIV/AIDS are facing. "If any of you have been on vacation and have gotten like the flu or some really strong illness and you've been trapped there away from you home and away from your bed and all you want is your

own bed and your own home and your own doctor than you have some idea of what it's like to have HIV/AIDS and be on the street," explained Sloan.

The building offers a list of amenities that includes a computer lab, children's library and rec room. The ceremony was attended by members of the press, Chicago House staff and board members. Daley said, "All of us here this morning have one important thing in common. We are committed to help all Chicagoans without a home, find a home and the same opportunity as any other resident to benefit from [the] many opportunities Chicago offers." After reading his statement, the mayor cut a ribbon alongside 46th Ward Alderman Helen Shiller.

MLK, Jr., open mic on Jan. 19

On Jan. 19, Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted, will welcome Pow-wow Chicago for an open mic event in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., Day and in acknowledgement of the upcoming inauguration of the first African-American President, Barack Obama.

The event—which will feature female poets, writers and performers—will take place 7-9 p.m. Admission is \$5; for more info, e-mail creid@centeronhalsted.org or visit www.powwowchicago.org.

CJR's South Side march Jan. 19

The Coalition of Justice and Respect (CJR) will hold a march Monday, Jan. 19, at 10 a.m. that will begin at 63 E. 79th.

Among other things, CJR will march "for respect of African-American gays and lesbians and against racism in the LGBT community."

For more information, call 773-559-1751.

HARRIS from cover

committee's report. What really stood out to me were the [alleged] attempts to extort money from Children's Memorial Hospital; [or] attempts to extort the Chicago Tribune, [offering] financial assistance if they would fire different editors he didn't like or agree with. And then there was the whole thing with the intercepted wiretaps where he tried to sell Barack Obama's Senate seat.

Those three things seem to be criminal activities, but there were other things that, while they weren't criminal, certainly threaten the financial welfare of the state—[such as] these programs and expenditures of state money without approval, where the legislature has voted to restrict the ability of the government to spend money in these ways, and the governor went ahead and spent taxpayer money, anyway. That ran into millions and millions of dollars, which—given our financial situation—we can certainly use.

WCT: What were your impressions of Blagojevich's press conference?

GH: I would say that he has a vastly different perception of what is going on around him than I think the rest of the people in Illinois do. Whether you agree with the impeachment or you don't, I would say that—given what's happened in the last month, culminating with today—things put the governor in a very bad situation. And for him to get up and say that "it's business as usual" makes you wonder if he's paying attention or if he's listening to the same stuff we are.

And the people of Illinois are put in a bad position. We cannot pay our bills, it's costing us another \$20 million to borrow money to pay healthcare costs because of his legal situation; the state's bond rating has been downgraded—and we'll suffer for years because of the situation. He doesn't seem to grasp that he has a part in this.

WCT: Also, just to clarify: Even during the



State Rep. Greg Harris.

time the governor's on trial, he will still retain his power, correct?

GH: Yes, he is still the governor until the Senate votes to convict him on impeachment charges.

WCT: And the new session of the House won't take part in the proceedings?

GH: Well, they're sworn in [Jan. 14]. But the lawyers are advising that when this General Assembly ends—the 95th General Assembly—[Jan. 13] and the 96th is sworn in, one of the very first acts we'll do is to re-vote the impeachment of the governor so that is legally live in the General Assembly. Everyone who is newly elected will have to make the same decision that we already have.

WCT: Is there anything you wanted to add?

GH: There are so many other pressing problems that we could and probably should be addressing now, that a lot of us are just heartsick that this is what we are forced to do—because of the actions of this one man. And he does not even get the fact that he has any part in this. He's never said, "OK. I understand how you might've felt about some of the actions I've taken." He [seems] to [think] that it's just Happy Days Are Here Again for him.

QUOTELINES

BY REX WOCKNER

"AS WE SAW DURING PRIMARY SEASON, OUR PRESIDENT-ELECT is not free of his own brand of hubris and arrogance, and sometimes it comes before a fall: 'You're likable enough, Hillary' was the prelude to his defeat in New Hampshire. He has hit this same note again by assigning the invocation at his inauguration to the Rev. Rick Warren, the Orange County, Calif., megachurch preacher who has likened committed gay relationships to incest, polygamy and 'an older guy marrying a child.' Bestowing this honor on Warren was a conscious—and glib—decision by Obama to spend political capital. It was made with the certitude that a leader with a mandate can do no wrong." — *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich, Dec. 28.

"I RESIGNED FROM THE PLANNING COM-

MITTEE of the Equality Summit because I felt that the press should be allowed into the entire conference. ... It felt like the same old 'secretive' process that had happened during the No on 8 campaign." — *Veteran lesbian activist Robin Tyler on Dec. 30 protesting a decision to limit media access during portions of a big Jan. 24 summit in Los Angeles where more than 250 gay activists will organize and strategize on how to win back same-sex marriage in California. Summit organizers have said they are worried that media coverage could divulge strategies to gays' opponents, though Tyler's public resignation—and her turning over of internal documents to reporters—apparently has the organizers rethinking their decision.*

"IT IS ALWAYS HARD TO BE IN A TINY MINORITY whose rights and dignity are removed by a majority. It's a brutal rebuke to the state supreme court, and enshrinement in California's constitution that gay couples are now second-class citizens and second-class human beings. Massively funded by the Mormon church, a religious majority finally managed to put gay people in the back of the bus in the biggest state of the union. The refusal of Schwarzenegger to really oppose the measure and Obama's luke-warm opposition didn't help. And cruelly, a very hefty black turnout, as feared, was one of the factors that defeated us." — *Gay writer Andrew Sullivan on his blog, Nov. 5.*

"IN AN HBO DOCUMENTARY SET TO AIR JAN. 29, disgraced evangelical leader Ted Haggard says he never claimed to be heterosexual, as was once reported, and he continues to struggle with same-sex attraction. (Haggard says.) 'The reason I kept my personal struggle a secret is because I feared that my friends would reject me, abandon me and kick me out, and the church would exile and excommunicate me.'" — *From a news article in Colorado Springs' The Gazette, Dec. 17.*

"RELIGIOUS LEADERS OBVIOUSLY HAVE EVERY RIGHT to speak out in opposition to anti-discrimination measures, even in the degrading terms that Rev. Warren has used with regard to same-sex marriage. But that does not confer upon them the right to a place of honor in the inauguration ceremony of a president whose stated commitment to LGBT rights won him the strong support of the great majority of those who support that cause." — *Gay U.S.*

Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., Dec. 18 after Barack Obama announced that prominent evangelical preacher Rick Warren will deliver the invocation at the presidential inauguration.

"I HAVE DECIDED TO DECLINE THE INVITATION to attend the inauguration as I cannot be part of a celebration that highlights and gives voice to someone who advocated repealing rights from me and millions of other Californians. (Rick Warren) actively works to divide Americans based on who we are and has been an ardent supporter of efforts to ostracize LGBT Americans." — *Equality California Executive Director Geoff Kors Dec. 18 after Barack Obama announced that prominent evangelical preacher Rick Warren will deliver the invocation at the presidential inauguration.*



There are still some really, really ignorant people out there.

—Lance Bass

"I THINK THE MORE VISIBLE WE ARE, the more difficult it is for people to be prejudiced, and it just spreads; it's going to spread like a good virus around the world. Unfortunately there are still countries in this world where homosexuality is punishable by death and there's dozens of them that can put you in jail and will put you in jail. So we've got a long way to go. Here we are complaining that you can't get married, and if you're in Nigeria they'll hack you to death. So there's still a long ways to go. The easiest way to support it is to be out and be active here." — *Openly lesbian tennis great Martina Navratilova to the Vancouver gay newspaper Xtra! West, Oct. 23.*

"BOTH POLES OF THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT, FROM GRASSROOTS activists to polished politicians, complain that they were shut out of No on 8's decision-making process from the start." — *The Advocate, Dec. 16.*

"WE SPENT A LOT OF TIME TOGETHER AND I'M CURIOUS if you feel that all of our intimate cuddling and spooning all night long might have been a liiittle more enjoyable than you would like to admit." — *Openly gay "Survivor: Gabon" player Charlie Herschel to winner Bob Crowley during the final episode, Dec. 14.*

"YOU'RE A WONDERFUL PERSON. I like you a lot. And you're nice and warm at night. I didn't give a hoot." — *"Survivor: Gabon" winner Bob Crowley, in response to Herschel.*

"EVERY OTHER DAY, I GET CALLED A 'FAG,' and get threatened to be beat up. There are still some really, really ignorant people out there." — *Out singer Lance Bass to the Las Vegas Review-Journal, Dec. 26.*

—Assistance: Bill Kelley

VIEWPOINT


**RON
ROBERT**

Will 2008 be the end of hate?

There is a great deal of frustration and anger these days directed at those who oppose gay marriage. When discussing these topics, I often hear words like "hate," "bigot," "judgmental" and "intolerant." While it's completely understandable to react this way, it's not always a fair characterization of the people who oppose us. And even if it is fair, it's not the most respectful response. I'd like to propose an alternative—please hear me out.

The word "hate" is defined as "detesting, having intense dislike, extreme hostility, or animosity toward someone or something." By this definition, there are unquestionably those who hate LGBT people. Those who physically or verbally harm others due to their sexual orientation or who eternally condemn us by stating that "God hates fags" are clearly hateful. But fortunately, these people are a small, though still occasionally visible, minority. In any case, we have the choice to not respond to their hatred by hating them in return.

Putting them aside, there are far more people who simply disagree with us when it comes to gay marriage. While their denial of us having the same rights as they have is clearly an injustice, I don't see that as hatred. Hate is a strong word, and disagreement is not hatred. In many cases

it's just ignorance. Some people fear and oppose that which they don't understand or care to understand. Others just rely on the stereotypical images often portrayed by the media, or they object to changing the definition of marriage. Whatever their reasons, just because someone doesn't agree with us, it doesn't necessarily mean that they hate us.

I have some very good straight Christian friends that simply don't agree with me on certain topics—gay issues being some of them. While this frustrates me, I don't question for a minute that they love me. Republicans and Democrats; Christians and Jews; and gays and straights can all love each other and still disagree. If love is the unconditional acceptance of someone regardless of the parts of them that we may find unfavorable, then hate is the unconditional rejection of a person in spite of any good qualities that they may have. So, even if someone does not accept one part of who we are (as much as that feels like a complete rejection of our personhood), it doesn't mean that they reject every part of us.

So maybe they don't hate us; they're just judgmental, intolerant bigots. Well, to judge is simply to have an opinion or estimation after careful consideration. Bigotry is intolerance of any differing viewpoint from one's own. And intolerance is not respecting or recognizing someone else's beliefs or opinions. We all have opinions and make judgments, but where the line is crossed is if someone is either not willing to listen to another's perspective or they form a judgment based only on their sexual orientation (or appearance, age, etc.). But it's entirely possible for someone to hear and acknowledge someone else's viewpoint—genuinely respect his or her opinion—but respectfully disagree. In that case, it's not judgmental, bigoted or intolerant. It's simply honest disagreement.

I realize that some of this is semantic, but

words have power and we have to be careful how we use them. Please understand that I am in no way saying that we should not respond to those who oppose us. Without those who have bravely stood up to injustice and demanded equality, we would not be where we are today. But when we publicly respond, we can still do so in a way that effectively gets our point across while still respecting those who oppose us.

Those who truly hate LGBT people will probably never change their views, so it's not even productive to engage in a dialogue with them. But for the vast majority of others, I doubt that we're going to change their minds by calling them haters when they don't genuinely hate us, or by calling them judgmental, intolerant bigots when they simply disagree with us. Perhaps taking these sorts of inflammatory words out of our conversations (even in cases where the words are justified) will invite a sense of respect toward us that will lead to an openness to further discussion and understanding. I think this is a far more productive approach.

It's certainly understandable for us to respond to rejection with anger and hatred, but I don't think that's our best and most effective option. As Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." So in 2009, let's be the change by not judging those who we feel are being judgmental. Let's be the change by tolerating those who we don't feel are being tolerant of us. Let's be the change by respecting the opinions of those who disagree with us. And maybe if we do that, 2008 will be the end of hate ... at least from our side.

Ron Robert is a freelance writer and is a co-founder and board member of Reconciling Journey Ministries, an affirming fellowship for LGBT Christians and their allies; contact him at ron@glbtchristian.org.



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A letter to Obama

Dear President Barack Obama,

Congratulations on the occasion of your inauguration.

On this special day, the hopes of billions of people across our precious planet are vested in your presidency. They look to you to show practical and moral leadership in resolving the great challenges that face humanity.

You have a historic opportunity to give new expression to the United State's founding ideals of liberty, justice and equality, by defending human rights—including the human rights of LGBTI people, in the United States and worldwide.

There are many new policies you can initiate, at relatively little cost, which will greatly extend the realm of justice and freedom and rebuild the moral stature of the U.S. across the globe:

—Propose a new U.N. International Human Rights Convention, enforceable worldwide and including protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, transgender identity and HIV status.

—Instruct the State Department to compile a global index of LGBTI rights and raise abuses of these rights in the U.N. and with offending states, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Uganda, Iran, Nigeria, Yemen, Jamaica, Cameroon, Lithuania, Afghanistan, Belarus and Iraq.

—Make U.S. aid to homophobic countries conditional on serious progress towards their repeal of anti-gay and anti-transgender laws.

—Show the way by eliminating such discriminatory laws in the US, including repealing the ban on same-sex marriage and "don't ask, don't tell," and enacting laws to protect LGBTI people against discrimination in employment, housing, education, advertising and the provision of goods and services.

—Use the network and resources of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to train LGBTI human-rights defenders and support LGBTI organisations, especially in poorer developing countries.

—Press for the worldwide decriminalization of same-sex acts.

—Seek the universal abolition of capital punishment, including the execution of LGBTI people. Give a lead by ending the death penalty in the U.S.

—Withdraw diplomatic, economic and military support from tyrannical regimes like Saudi Arabia that persistently deny freedom to their own people and oppress their own citizens, on grounds such as gender, sexual orientation, transgender identity, race, nationality, religion or belief, language and so on.

—Recognize and support the International Criminal Court, to bring to justice the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including homophobic tyrants.

—End the U.S. use of detention without trial, torture and extraordinary rendition, and close down Guantanamo Bay.

—Withdraw from Iraq and renounce the U.S. policy of selective and unilateral military intervention to overthrow foreign dictatorships, like the Saddam Hussein regime, in favor of a policy supporting democratic and humanitarian civil society organizations within those countries, in order to empower the victims of oppression to liberate themselves.

—Cease propping up corrupt, pro-western, and often homophobic, human-rights abusers, such as the Ugandan and Nigerian regimes.

—Devise a new, more just international economic framework, where the common good, environmental protection and global equity take priority over private privilege, corporate greed and national self-interest. A fairer, sustainable, regulated and accountable international

economic system is our best hope to safeguard jobs, homes, savings, public services, welfare provision, the environment and to bridge the chasm of inequality between the global north and south.

—Take action to save the lives of the 1.5 billion people on our planet who are malnourished and without safe, clean drinking water (of which about 150 million are LGBTI). What is the point of securing LGBTI equality if LGBTI people are left to die of starvation and disease?

—Lobby for a U.N. Convention Against War and Poverty, whereby the nations of the world, including the U.S., agree to cut their annual military expenditure by 10 percent and to divert the \$100,000 million saved into a "Marshall Plan 2" for the total eradication of hunger, malnutrition, dirty drinking water, poor sanitation and preventable illnesses by the year 2025.

—Act now to halt the single greatest threat to the future of humanity: climate chaos. It is more of a danger than terrorism and war, and threatens the survival of all species and all races, nationalities, faiths and sexualities. LGBTI freedom means nothing if we don't have a planet where we can enjoy it. Preserving our fragile biosphere is the precondition for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—for every human being, regardless of sexual orientation.

Destiny awaits you, Mr President. The hopes of humanity are in your hands. May you rise to greatness as a progressive and unifying leader who shapes a freer and fairer future—not just for the American people but for the people of the whole world.

Peter Tatchell
London, UK

LETTERS

GOINGS-ON

WINDY CITY TIMES' ENTERTAINMENT SECTION

Photo by
Johnny
Knight

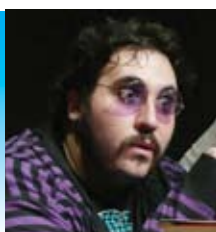
'MISS' UNDERSTANDING

Miss Saigon is running at Oakbrook Terrace's Drury Lane through March 8. Read WCT's review on page 12.

THEATER

'Pool' party.
page 12

Photo courtesy of Bernadette Johnston-Peck



MOVIES

This is Pitt.
page 15

MUSIC

Science project.
page 17

Dancin' Feats

BY ZACHARY WHITTENBURG

Although Hubbard Street Dance Chicago has been amassing works by Israeli dancemaker-cum-movement revolutionary Ohad Naharin since the waning days of the Conte administration, the occasion to see dancers chosen, trained and directed by Naharin himself could well be the most important event of an already landmark season.

In marked contrast to the precious significance assigned to individual pieces of choreography, Naharin treats even his most celebrated works as modular parts of larger collection, organizing and rearranging them at will into grand montages. One of the more traveled of these, **Deca Dance**, will alone represent the Batsheva Dance Company upon its first visit to Chicago since the mid-'70s.

Composed of excerpts from eight pieces dating from between 1992 and 2008, **Deca Dance** is sewn together by a total reinvention of dance vocabulary—an approach called “gaga”—that Naharin has refined for over a decade. Drawing from currents in movement therapy and somatic studies, gaga has become a tool Naharin uses to “find” movement within the body, as opposed to imposing forms upon it—it’s what gives all of his dances such thrilling unpredictability and ease. Combined with an uncommonly delicate touch with body language and a tendency toward explosive, seemingly dangerous abandon, his innumerable strengths as a choreographer make him one of dance’s most groundbreaking artists.

Batsheva Dance Company at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress, Feb. 7 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 8 at 2 p.m. Tickets and more information are at <http://auditoriumtheatre.org>.

—Four years ago I attended a touring festival of Japanese contemporary dance in Montréal and it remains one of the most enjoyable, unsettling and bizarre performances I’ve ever seen. One troupe on that program, Sennichimae Blue Sky Dance Club, appears here as part of the triple bill

Japan Dance Now at the Dance Center. Bold pop repackagers of the generally arch-serious dance form *butoh*, Sennichimae are bringing selections from 2006’s *The End of Water*. Complementing the evening are BABY-Q with the aggressive solo-and-video piece *E/G-Ego Geometria* and Nibroll, whose *Coffee* (2002) promises a trip into volatility. What happens in Japan’s modern dance scene is unlike anything on Earth: Be sure to venture out for a look at what the other hemisphere is up to.

Japan Dance Now at the Dance Center at Columbia College, 1306 S. Michigan Ave., Feb. 5-7 at 8 p.m., \$24-28. Visit www.colum.edu/dance-center.

—Suburban balletomanes get the goods brought to them when Sergei Radchenko’s Russian National Ballet Theatre brings its by-the-book **Swan Lake** to the McAninch Arts Center at the College of DuPage, 425 Fawell, Glen Ellyn, Jan. 11, at 2 and 7 p.m. \$36-46.

—Local treasure and recent Lucky Plush addition **Asimina Chremos** keeps things interesting this month with two happenings: Jan. 14 finds her and Fred Lonberg-Holm in the beer cooler at the Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, for the latest installment of the **Immediate Sound Series**, which this month features their “microgig” along with a quartet of musicians and a DJ set by art dealers Corbett vs. Dempsey. On Jan. 17 Chremos will perform with and host Baltimore composer Jon Berndt at Silverspace, 1474 N. Milwaukee, at 8 p.m. Find more information about her many projects at asiminachremos.com.

—CDI/Concert Dance, Inc. Director Venetia Stifler isn’t about to get caught up in iPhone mania: Her newest work, **Digital Fidgeting**, shines the hard light of reason on compulsive behavior in an always-on world, as part of communication-themed mixed bill *Talk to Me*. It’s at the Ruth Page Center for the Arts, 1016 N. Dearborn, Jan. 16-18 and 23-25, at 8 p.m., with Sunday performances at 3 p.m. \$20. See www.ruthpage.org.

—Populist new-music group Fulcrum Point taps the local dance scene by inviting Thodos

Dance Chicago to join in for **Modern Myths**. The company will premiere founder Melissa Thodos’ new *Aries*, with Fulcrum Point handling the Stockhausen. It’s at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph, Jan. 20 at 7:30 p.m. The admission (\$15-30) includes a complimentary post-performance wine-and-plates reception. Details are at fulcrumpoint.org, thodosdancechicago.org and harristheaterchicago.org.

—Bona fide Argentinian tango is unforgiving to all but its most expert practitioners. Fortunately, that’s exactly who will be onstage for **Tango Fire**, an internationally touring showcase with enviable production values and a lot of leg. At the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Jan. 24 at 3 and 8 p.m., \$45-85.

—Camille Saint-Saëns’ **The Carnival of the Animals** is one of my favorite ballet scores—if you want to introduce your kids to the good stuff, New York Theatre Ballet is performing it, along with an abbreviated *Sleeping Beauty*, at Governors State University in University Park, Jan. 25 at 4 p.m. \$23-48.

—Tireless Chicago choreographer Margi Cole hit a snag last year, kept off the stage by a serious injury. She’s back and in full swing, though, and celebrating her company’s 13th anniversary with a weekend of concerts at the Ruth Page Center for the Arts. The evening consists of Cole’s **13**, which looks prismatically at the number as both

current milestone and, in a look back, an age of awkwardness and transition. Cole will appear in a solo made for her by friend and colleague Liz Burritt, an ode to the superhero within that emerged through Cole’s surgery and recovery. Also on the program is *Wise Women Don’t Love*, a recent work by Colleen Halloran. Halloran’s dances are rich with the confidence of an experienced hand, their emotional and intellectual ideas communicated with calm precision.

The Dance COLEctive presents **13** at the Ruth Page Center for the Arts, 1016 N. Dearborn, Jan. 29-31, at 8 p.m.; \$16-20. Visit www.dancecollective.com or call 773-604-8452.

—One of my other favorite scores is **Prokofiev’s Cinderella**, which will accompany three performances of the three-act ballet by the State Ballet of Russia at the Harris, Jan. 30 at 8 p.m. and Jan. 31 at 2 and 8 p.m. See above for venue details.

—Peripheral to the Japan Dance Now festival is a special single, free performance of **Blue Sky Black Monk**, a collaboration between Sennichimae Blue Sky Dance Club and Chicago’s Black Monks of Mississippi. One can only wonder at what will happen when Sennichimae’s pop-meets-*butoh* approach meets the Black Monks’ Southern Baptist-meets-Buddhist stylings. Find out Feb. 3 at Experimental Station, 6100 S. Blackstone, at 6 p.m.

E/G-Ego Geometria
by BABY-Q.
Photo courtesy
of the Dance
Center at
Columbia College



Miss Saigon. Photo by Johnny Knight

THEATER REVIEW

Miss Saigon

Authors: Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil and Richard Matlby, Jr.
At: Drury Lane Oakbrook, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace.
Phone: 630-530-8300; \$29-\$35
Runs through: March 8

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

Theme-park spectacle was characteristic of big imported British pop operas in the late 20th century. The Phantom of the Opera had the falling chandelier, Cats had the levitating junkyard tire and Miss Saigon was famous as “the helicopter musical.”

That’s an oversimplification of Miss Saigon, though its realistic helicopter was one of its big selling points at its London debut 20 years ago. But as Drury Lane Oakbrook’s superlatively polished production of Miss Saigon shows, you need only suggest a helicopter to get the same dramatic wallop.

Fans of melodramatic sung-through pop operas will find a lot to love in Drury Lane’s Miss Saigon. The performances are genuine and the whole show is uncomfortably timely. Unfortunately, Drury Lane’s outstanding production can’t conceal Miss Saigon’s writing-related shortcomings.

French authors Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil wrote Miss Saigon in the declamatory style of their *Les Misérables*, tinged with stereotypical Asian flourishes (Richard Matlby, Jr., collaborated on Miss Saigon’s English lyrics). Characters over-amplify their emotions via bombastic power ballads and duets. (The style feels dated, especially with Spamalot spoofing it perfectly in the number The Song That Goes Like This.)

And as a revisionist Vietnam War-era take on Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly*, Miss Saigon still perpetuates the outdated Western stereotype of a submissive Asian woman who is willing to die for the love of an unworthy Caucasian (even though he isn’t such a cad in this updating). As David Henry Hwang points out in his play *M. Butterfly*, it wouldn’t be nearly as “romantic” in the reverse situation of a blond homecoming queen committing suicide after abandonment by a Japanese businessman.

Yet, Miss Saigon can be theatrically satisfying and even moving at times if you see past its well-intentioned problems. Drury Lane’s production, under Rachel Rockwell’s astute direction, certainly makes a strong and enjoyable case for Miss Saigon.

Front and center are Joseph Anthony Foronda as the hustling “Engineer” pimp and Melinda Chua Smith as the innocent and determined title character, Kim. (Katie Boren plays Kim at matinees.) Both Foronda and Smith are Miss Saigon veterans, so they know the characters inside and out—and how to command the stage and work the audience.

As Kim’s conflicted Marine, Chris, the strapping Kevin Vortmann sings wonderfully and gets his character’s anguish across (although he isn’t as convincing in his introspective Why God, Why falling-in-love song).

Also providing strong support is John Sanders as the Marine John; Melissa Dye as Chris’ American wife, Ellen; and Evan D’Angeles as the villainous Thuy. The rest of the ensemble throws themselves into the roles and Stacey Flaster’s gyrating choreography.

The spectacle in this Miss Saigon might not be as grand as its original production. Yet Drury Lane comes through where it counts emotionally, and that’s more important.

THEATER REVIEW

Look, What I Don’t Understand

Playwright: Anthony Nikolchev
At: XIII Pocket at the Athenaeum, 2936 N. Southport
Phone: 312-902-1500; \$15
Runs through: Feb. 1

BY JONATHAN ABARBANEL

All my grandparents did it. They sailed into the unknown (literally sailed, before air travel), seeking freedom and a better life in a fabled, far-off land. From America’s Pilgrim forebears, through waves of 19th-century European immigration, to late 20th-century Asian and Balkan arrivals, the tale of flight, escape and hope is familiar. Sometimes I’ve been moved to tears sensing the courage and desperation that made my grandparents—and millions of others—take such a leap of faith. Likewise, a gulag in any language is brutal and too familiar, whether gulags of the Czars and Soviets, the Nazi “labor camps,” the Cambodian killing fields or the not-so-friendly confines of Cuba, courtesy of Castro and/or Guantanamo.

The Quest for Freedom, then, is a general story which frequently features an Escape from Persecution subplot. But the general story can be filled in with personal and particular details: the conversation overheard, the bottle of cognac as a bribe, the hair-breadth escape, the unexpected gun, the gift of a radio, etc. It was *my* grandparents or *your* cousins or even *you* who took the journey. In the case of newly minted actor and writer Anthony Nikolchev, it was his grandparents and adolescent father who escaped in 1969 from Soviet-era Bulgaria to the United States via The Congo and Italy.

Look, What I Don’t Understand can’t claim to be original, so its magic is in the power and passion of the performance, in which Nikolchev easily morphs into/out of close to 20 characters. The passion is apparent as Nikolchev connects the dots of his own past, beginning with his grandfather’s nationalistic military service in World War II (during which the Soviets assassinated Bulgaria’s anti-Nazi monarch, King Mi-

chael, blamed the Germans and took over the government). Some story details are unclear—for example, I don’t know how gulag prisoner Gencho Shonev relates to Nikolchev—but the intensity of the experience never fails. As for the power of his performance, Nikolchev is positively ferocious in the best sense. He’s physically agile with explosive emotional and vocal resources. He even hints once or twice at comic abilities although there’s little to laugh about. He doesn’t even give the piece a happy ending, really, leaving his progenitors in a refugee camp grasping the tantalizing promise of America. The implied happy ending, I suppose, is Nikolchev himself performing this work.

Nikolchev labored on Look, What I Don’t Understand with five directors (although it plays seamlessly), most of whom have ties to Wesleyan



Look, What I Don’t Understand. Photo by Danica Pantic

CRITICS’ PICS

The Maids, Writers Theatre in Glencoe, through April 5. You can almost smell the overpowering perfume of roses and estrogen in this intimate auditorium barely larger than the boudoir where Jean Genet’s exploration of female power games unfolds. MSB

The Seafarer, Steppenwolf Theatre, through Feb. 8. Acting doesn’t get much better than in Conor McPherson’s combination of Beckett and Faust. John Mahoney’s blowhard blind man has flash, but look at the quiet, intense, detailed work by Francis Guinan and Tom Irwin. JA

Stop/Kiss, Gift Theatre, Jan. 15 through March 15. Two women fall in love and face the aftermath of a hate crime in Diana Son’s critically acclaimed drama. Expect the Gift to deliver an intense and intimate staging. SCM

The Sum of Us, 1027 Productions at Evanston Arts Depot, Jan. 16 through Feb. 7. This new theater company presents one of Australia’s most famous gay plays, which memorably featured Russell Crowe playing gay in the 1994 film version. SCM

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Morgan

University, of which Nikolchev is a 2008 graduate. How and why he/they arrived in Chicago is unknown, but they appear to have the talent to achieve things if they stay. Yassen Peyankov, watch out: There’s another hot Bulgarian actor in town now.

SPOTLIGHT



Fairy tales and nursery rhymes have always been used to teach kids about morals. But can these tales also provide insights to these times of economic turmoil and social malaise? Playwright Daniel Jackson and Blackbird Theatre Company seem to think so. See how these fantastical characters cope with real life in the world premiere of **Into the Pool, or the Cheshire Cat Mourns the Death of the American Dream**. Into the Pool... plays through Feb. 1 at The Side Project, 1439 W. Jarvis. Tickets are \$20; \$15 for students and seniors. Visit www.BlackbirdTheatreCompany.com for more information. Photo courtesy of Bernadette Johnston-Peck

THEATER REVIEW

Touch

Playwright: Toni Press-Coffman

At: New Leaf Theatre at Lincoln Park Cultural Center, 2045 N. Lincoln Park West
Phone: 773-516-3546; \$12-\$18
Runs through Feb. 14

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

Touch could be any run-of-the-mill tale of love won and tragically lost if it weren't for an unexpected series of storytelling choices made by playwright Toni Press-Coffman. New Leaf Theatre rises to Press-Coffman's challenge by doing its own smart subversions in its richly emotional and moving staging.

Press-Coffman's 1999 drama unfolds largely as a series of solo reminiscences by Kyle, an astronomer relating his courtship and blissful marriage to a free-spirited woman named Zoë.

Despite being seemingly mismatched (Kyle is a taciturn loner who finds solace in science; Zoë wears garish clothing and gregariously collects friends), they complete each other in the perfect sense.

Actor Dan Granata inhabits Kyle so honestly and commandingly that you feel every rush of joy and warmth as he reveals how Zoë opens him up to be a more expressive and emotional man. Yet you're also worried because Kyle's past-tense storytelling foreshadows that the happiness will end.

So when Zoë disappears while doing a mundane errand one Thanksgiving, you share Kyle's utter despair, anger and shock. That's when Kyle starts to close up and other characters barge in to relate what happens, sharing their side of the story and recreating events past as in real time.

As Kyle's childhood science buddy friend, Bennie, Matthew Gottlieb is great at showing his concern and jealousy of Kyle's happiness. Barely seen in the first act, Kristina Johnson comes into her own in the second act as Serena, Zoë's older sister who becomes increasingly agitated as Kyle turns away from his loved ones.

Press-Coffman throws a disturbing twist to Kyle's coping devices, and that involves Jacqueline Stone's steely take on the character of Kathleen. It not a comfortable or noble reaction, but it is refreshingly unexpected and certainly dramatically justified.

Director Jessica Hutchinson works wonders with her cast, who all genuinely inhabit their characters. Don't be surprised if they move you to tears.

Hutchinson and set designer Michelle Lilly O'Brein's reconfiguration of the theater space proves particularly effective at allowing more expansiveness and resonance to the characters' emotions. They do that simply by seating the audience on the elevated stage to look down on the actors in the shadowy auditorium.

Press-Coffman's Touch might not have been as poetical and contemplative on love and loss if Kyle wasn't a Keats-loving astronomer. While some may feel that aspect of the play makes



Yong Ki Baat. Photo courtesy of Lavina Jadhvani

Touch contrived, you can't deny that it works at tugging the heartstrings in the play's questions of science versus the spirit and the miraculous flashes of love that can happen when you least expect it.

So keep your tissues at hand if you want to be touched by Touch. New Leaf Theatre and Press-Coffman know just the right buttons to push.

THEATER REVIEW

Yoni Ki Baat

Playwrights: Anita Chandwaney, Mary Anne Mohanraj, Angeli Primplani, Rajani Adhikary, Devi Bhaduri, Shruti S. Tewari, Ky Dickens, Sheba Karim, Nisha Gurbuxani *et al.*

At: Rasaka Theatre Company in conjunction with Premiere Theatre & Performance, Strawdog Theatre, 3829 N. Broadway
Phone: 773-777-1070; \$20
Runs through: Feb. 1

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

If you've read the Kama Sutra (furtive scrutinies in the back corner of the bookstore count), you know that "yoni" is the Sanskrit word for "vagina." And if you've ever heard of a show called The Vagina Monologues (and who hasn't?), you also know that Eve Ensler has now made it hip for modern ladies to identify this organ as the center of their personality—not as a gynocentric counterpart to "thinking with your dick," but as affirmation of the entire female life experience.

Some of the first-person stories recounted during the 85 minutes of *Yoni Ki Baat* (a title that translates loosely as "The Vagina Talks"), deal directly with the physical realities, as when an adolescent girl fears that the pungent foods

characteristic of her ethnic region will affect her body odor, or another comes to terms with her hirsute complexion. Other episodes explore the results of cultural pressures on individual fulfillment—a writer of erotic fiction struggles to speak sensuous words aloud to her lover, and a boyfriend in dire need of an anatomy lesson is soundly put in his place by his outspoken consort. Still other testimonials discuss the larger ramifications of the denial promoted by repressive customs: why, for example, it may be easier, in some societies, for an unmarried young woman to play the "angry lesbian"—even while preferring to sleep with men—rather than face the risks associated with adult heterosexual roles.

Chicks talking about their innards could quickly degenerate into giggly slumber-party

chat or, conversely, into grim agitprop polemics. And since we're talking South Asian chicks, nothing could be simpler than to feed colonialist appetites hungry for atrocity-related tales of oppressive sexism. ("How brave these actresses must be!" marveled one opening-night playgoer, as if the artists had only yesterday stepped with dainty sandaled feet on the shores of Ellis Island). The Rasaka ensemble is to be commended, however, for selecting material that speaks with unflinching candor (laced with plenty of wry humor) rather than pandering to popular stereotypes. Also admirable is director Lavina Jadhvani and her four performers' rejection of gratuitous emotionality—no spare hankies will be needed tonight—to instead allow their authors' insightful words to convey the truth of a world virtually unknown to even the most enlightened U.S. audiences.

1027 premiering 'Sum of Us'

1027 Productions is starting life as a company with the gay comedy *The Sum of Us*, by David Stevens.

A major hit of the 1990 off-Broadway season and a successful motion picture with Russell Crowe, in one of his first starring roles, *The Sum of Us* is about a widowed father, Harry Mitchell, and his 24-year-old gay son, Jeff, and their search for love in working class Melbourne, Australia.

The *Sum of Us* will be presented at the Piccolo Theatre in the Evanston Arts Depo, 600 Main, Evanston, in the Main Street Metra station. Performances will be Fridays-Sundays from Jan. 16 through Feb. 7. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$15 for seniors, students and industry; call 773-334-2765 or e-mail 1027ProductionsChicago@gmail.com.

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Touch. Photo courtesy of New Leaf Theatre

THEATER REVIEW

These Shining Lives

Playwright: Melanie Marnich
 At: Rivendell Theatre Ensemble
 at Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark
 Phone: 773-334-7728; \$18
 Runs through: Jan. 31

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Madame Curie, just previous to her discovery in 1898 of the hitherto unknown element that would be called radium, said that she "hoped it would be a pretty color." When it proved to be a delicate blue substance that glowed softly in the dark like an angel's halo, it quickly became the prime ingredient in the coating on industrial machine and clock-face dials. But it was also highly radioactive. And while a single wrist-watch might not present a danger to its wearer, the women employed at the downstate Illinois factory who painted the numbers onto hundreds of timepieces every day—working bare-handed in small rooms, moistening their tiny brushes with their own saliva—soon began to complain of mysterious illnesses.

Melanie Marnich's docudrama recounts the story of Catherine Wolf Donohue, who took legal action against the businesses permitting these hazardous conditions. (After several appeals, she finally won her case, only days before her death—the publicity meanwhile spurring manufacturers to implement safety measures in their operations.) And though it's easy to imagine this chronicle as a 1930s-style populist propaganda film, sneering corporate bosses exploiting poor and helpless females, playwright Marnich is not so much interested in assigning blame or drawing speculative parallels to our own time than she is in the victim who refused die quietly. Indeed, our heroine herself warns us in the beginning, "This is not a tragedy, though it ends like one."

To be sure, Catherine and her eclectic band of



These Shining Lives. Photo by Anthony Robert LaPenna

co-workers embrace their newfound status as independent wage-earners (and later, martyrs) with proto-feminist enthusiasm—faltering at times, but always rallying to their purpose. Her war-veteran husband has his moments of ambivalence, but remains devoted to his wife. The villains emerge as less than monsters, however. (Recall that in the early part of the 20th century, "radiation" was not the immediately sinister threat it became after the advent of nuclear weapons.)

Rachel Walshe's direction for this Rivendell Theatre Ensemble production likewise shuns cheap-weep melodrama. Instead, Rebecca Spence (nestled cozily in Jessica Kuehnau's scenic-collage) conveys with intelligent compassion Catherine's spiritual growth from humble protector of her own loved ones to crusader on behalf of a "family" encompassing a nation of workers like herself. In this, she is ably supported by Justine C. Turner, Jessie Fisher and Ashley Neal's loyal comrades, along with Sean Cooper and Ron Wells as various men, supportive and otherwise. History lessons should all be this engaging.



Good 'Dirty' fun

The cast of the pre-Broadway production of *Dirty Dancing: The Classic Story on Stage* co-hosted a party with The Joffrey Ballet at the Joffrey Tower, 10 E. Randolph, on Jan. 5 to celebrate the opening of Academy of Dance, Official School of The Joffrey Ballet.

The evening featured two live music and dance sets by members of the *Dirty Dancing* cast, plus a silent auction and deluxe cocktail reception.

Proceeds from the party benefited the scholarship fund at Academy of Dance. Photos by Steve Starr; www.SteveStarrStudios.com.

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Entertainment news

Openly gay British talk-show host Graham Norton is planning to give the annual Eurovision Song Contest—which will take place in May in Moscow, Russia—a more risqué feel than his predecessor, Sir Terry Wogan, did, according to PinkNews.co.uk. Norton, whose TV shows involve nudity and blue humor, said that "the show goes on quite late so I plan to do some jokes." According to Wikipedia, the most notable winning Eurovision artist was ABBA, who won the contest for Sweden in 1974 with the song Waterloo.

Deborra-Lee Furness—the wife of hunky leading man Hugh Jackman—is growing tired of the gay rumors surrounding her husband, according to People.com. Jackman told the magazine that "she said the most infuriating times would be in the bathroom because all she'd hear is: 'Is he or isn't he gay?' 'I don't know, he's married.' 'Oh, who cares? I'm sure he's gay.'"

The movie *Mamma Mia!* has broken a record in the United Kingdom, according to IMDB.com. Twenty-five percent of all British households own a copy of the DVD, making it the biggest-selling film there, ever, beating out *The Curse of the Black Pearl*.

Howard K. Stern, the former attorney of the late Anna Nicole Smith, has apparently filed a \$60-million lawsuit against news personality Rita Cosby, alleging defamation because she said that Stern and Smith's lover, Larry Birkhead, had a same-sex affair. However, according to IMDB.com, Cosby claimed that the allegation is definitely not defamatory. "Engaging in a homosexual tryst, even if videotaped, does not reflect poorly on someone and in the 21st century it most certainly is not a 'criminal lewd act,'" said Cosby, who made

the allegation in her book about Smith called *Blond Ambition*.

Comedienne Kathy Griffin faced a lot of criticism from CNN after co-hosting that station's New Year's Eve telecast with Anderson Cooper, according to TheImproper.com. When Griffin mentioned that she might host a reunion of Bad Girls Club, Cooper and somebody off-camera started kidding her about it. "Screw you. Why don't you get a job, buddy?" she screamed to the off-camera guy. "You know what? I don't go to your job and knock the dicks out of your mouth."

Jennifer Hudson, Beyonce Knowles and Alicia Keys have received NAACP Image Award nods for their singing and acting, People.com reported. Hudson—still grieving the losses of her mother, brother and nephew after they were killed last year—led all nominees with seven nominations. The awards ceremony will air Feb. 12 on FOX.

Nicole Kidman felt that her latest movie, *Australia*, would be savaged by critics because she was not proud of her own work in the film, according to IMDB.com. Appearing opposite Hugh Jackman as British aristocrat Lady Sarah Ashley in the movie, Kidman said that she "couldn't connect emotionally" to her character.



Jennifer Hudson.



The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

BY RICHARD KNIGHT, JR.

The late film critic Pauline Kael might have been right to rigidly refuse to see a movie more than once. What at first seems a breath of fresh air on second glance seems a tad stale, and what is overlooked in the rush to take in the filmmaker's overwhelming vision becomes apparent after a second go round. This has been my experience with **The Curious Case of Benjamin Button**, the sumptuous romantic epic that marks the third collaboration between director David Fincher and Brad Pitt.

Who would've thought Fincher, with his overtly sour resume, would make what on first look seems such a strangely sweet movie as this? Based on a sliver-thin but tantalizing conceit by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the story follows the title character, who is born old at the end of the World War I and then grows younger as the years advance, and his on-and-off romance with red-haired Daisy, a free-spirited dancer. Pitt and Cate Blanchett play the two lovebirds whose ro-



The Curious Case of Benjamin Button.

mance blooms in the middle, when their ages and superb physical specimens finally match up. But the romance is doomed because as Daisy ages Benjamin continues getting younger—until he is glimpsed as a young boy beset with Alzheimer's and old-age maladies, and finally, as a baby, lying in Blanchett's withered arms. It's not quite explained how Benjamin physically shrinks, however.

Also not explained is why—beyond the early physical fascination—the other characters are so drawn to the emotionally withdrawn Benjamin, who, until his affair with Daisy takes hold, seems only to exist by drawing on the life forces of the other characters. The lively swirl of humanity surrounding Benjamin—his black stepmother, an artistic piano teacher, a “character” who takes him to a sporting house for his first physical encounter, a rough hewn sea captain, an icy diplomat's wife, his guilt-ridden father, etc.—all seem to leave more than they take from Benjamin the Black Hole, who never reacts much to anything beyond a cautious smile. Pitt's character is a vacuum at the center of the film, sucking in all the others and not really giving anything back—until he finally looks like Brad the Movie Star, who audiences have enshrined

since his appearance in *Thelma & Louise*. The film finally comes to life when we see Pitt astride his Harley, a golden-haired, latter-day Brando—as the women and gay men in the audience swoon and everyone looks on in envy at his physical beauty and the confidence it projects.

The story is told in flashback by the dying Daisy to her daughter (Julia Ormond) as Hurricane Katrina is about to strike New Orleans. This hoary old framing device offers Blanchett the chance to practice her old-lady emoting, and the special effects and make-up departments go wild at the opportunity but these scenes really add nothing to the overlong, episodic story. Nor does Pitt as the elusive Benjamin, though for the first hour of the picture he also gets to play old and narrates the picture in his southern accent. (His bland monotone voice works, however, because the character's such a cipher.) Blanchett, playing the emotional southern belle—a dancer whose career is cut short—is just the opposite and her porcelain, delicate beauty and line shadings are entrancing.

The movie is gorgeously filmed, with much of it given a golden glow. It's mostly set in New Orleans and the combination of the sultry cinematography, the vintage Dixieland jazz and a

handful of quirky characters turns the city into one of the film's strongest characters. (It's like a faded valentine rediscovered in an old trunk.) The jazz is matched by another pretty, shimmering score by Alexandre Desplat.

Overall, the film seems more like a beautiful curio than anything else, a sort of artsy-fartsy *Forrest Gump* with the love affair played out against the great events of the 20th century (not unexpected, as both scripts were penned by Eric Roth, with this one co-written by Robin Swicord). The relationship between Benjamin and Daisy has many of the stop/start aspects of Pip and Estella from Dickens' *Great Expectations* that Roth also used in *Gump*, but there's not nearly as much of Pip's romantic yearning that practically leaps off Dickens' pages. Pitt, as Benjamin, says a lot more in voiceover than he ever seems to impart to Daisy (and the less said about Pitt's affair during the strange Russian episode with Tilda Swinton, playing yet another iceberg, the better). Also, like *Gump*, many of the voiceovers begin to sound like parody a second time around. But there is something undeniably cool and weird and oddly compelling here—it's a movie that goths will surely adore—and whatever it is swept me away the first time I saw the film.

After that first screening, I thought something the piano teacher tells Pitt was the message of the movie. Commenting about his tentative playing she says with reassurance, “It doesn't matter how well you play. It matters how much you feel,” but on reflection I think what Fincher the fatalist is really trying to impart is another of his grim messages—albeit one disguised within the center of his golden romance. So movie romantics are warned to see the film once and never again because Fincher's saying what he's pretty much said in all his dour pictures, and it's the antithesis of what any hopeless romantic fool likes to take home from a movie: Life sucks, then you die—and sometimes you leave behind a teeny, tiny corpse.

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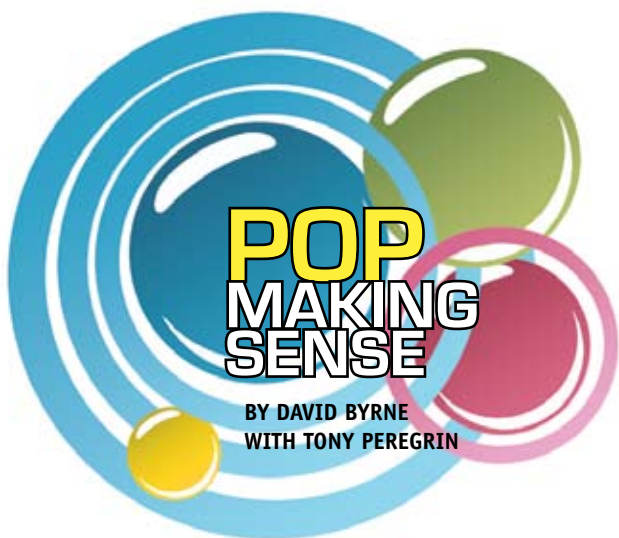


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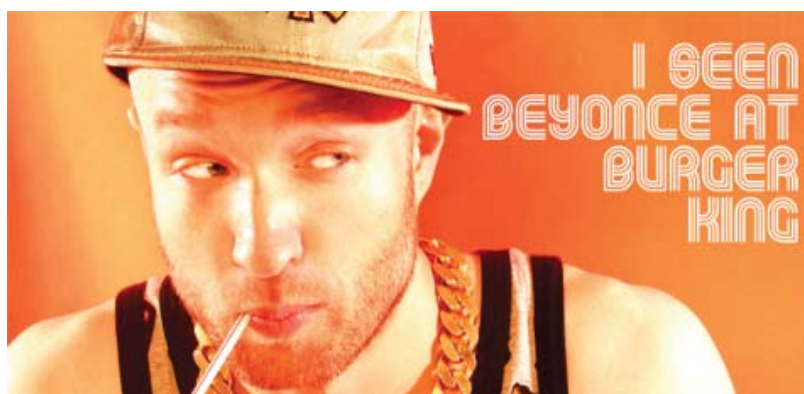
Need an extra push to go with New Year's resolutions? Uphonc Records offers the ultimate gym buddy with the compilation **Workout**. This 16-track mix keeps listeners at the target heart rate, courtesy of a combination of diva vocals, disco delicacies and electro thumpers. Workout even features a double dose of RuPaul: Opening the set, the drag icon is joined by Chris Willis to redo Frankie Knuckles' Workout, while RuPaul's other song is Feeling Good, Looking Gorgeous, which may be best recognized as the theme to NBC's The Biggest Loser. Jocelyn Brown and Oliver Cheatham team on the uplifting piano-based house number Mindbuster and Chicago's Georgie Porgie mixes Michal Nicholas's take on Send Me an Angel. The intoxicating That Sound by Brinsley Evans featuring Sy Smith deftly uses the Basement Jaxx's '90s jam Fly Life as its backdrop. For further incentive, Workout comes with a 72-minute mega mix and the physical CD has

a seven-day guest pass to Bally's Total Fitness.

With an international street date of March 23, the **Pet Shop Boys** will follow up 2006's Fundamental with another album with a one-word title: Yes. The electronic pioneers are working with British producers Xenomania, who have lent their skills to many (including Cher for her monstrous hit, Believe). Yes is expected to be more upbeat and electronic than its predecessor. The new number All over the World actually has incorporations from Tchaikovsky. No word

yet as to when the 11-track Yes will be out domestically. Next month, the Pet Shop Boys will receive the Outstanding Contribution to Music Award at the BRIT Awards.

Australian pop princess **Kylie Minogue** is issuing another remix package with Boombox. This collection has mixes of staples from her recent energetic effort X, as well as mixes going as far back as 2000's Light Years. Boombox is highlighted by the mash-up Can't Get Blue Monday out of My Head and the Scissor Sisters collaboration I Believe in You. Already featuring forward-thinking songs, Minogue's catalogue receives the remix treatment from an eclectic lot, such as Chemical Brothers, Mylo and Fischerspooner. Just remember: This pint-sized star sampled I Feel Love on Light Years and did the urban-cowgirl shtick for Cowboy Style before Madonna mainstreamed these trends. Need more Kylie? paulaabdul.com features a snippet of the American Idol host covering Minogue's song Boom-



Cazwell.

box.

Bananarama has done multiple of remakes like Venus, Long Train Running and Waterloo. Per the group's Web site, the duo is currently working on a covers project with acclaimed dance-pop producer Ian Masterson. This slightly recalls Sheena Easton's overlooked 2000 disco homage Fabulous. One request: Please do not tackle the overdone Don't Leave Me This Way or I Will Survive. The gals are remaining mum about the release date and track listing, save their version of Desireless cult classic Voyage Voyage. Bananarama recently joined Reverend Run from RUN-DMC in the recording studio. He wanted to sample their '80s take on Na Na Hey Hey (Kiss Him Goodbye), but invited the ladies to redo the vocals.

The release of The **Annie Lennox** Collection has been postponed until Feb. 10. Following an injury received while attending the International AIDS Conference in Mexico, the Why singer underwent spinal surgery to ease an impinged nerve. Containing 14 tracks, this is the first retrospective to span Lennox's impressive solo career. The core here consists of staples from 1992's Diva. The requisite two new cuts are a remake of Ash's Shining Light and Pattern of My Life, which is a composition by Keane's Tom Chaplin. On top of winning three Grammys for her solo works, Lennox's Cold and Little Bird are among her five songs heard in the Demi Moore vehicle Striptease. In November the socially vocal Lennox received the AMA Special Merit Award at the American Music Awards and the Special Achievement Award at the 2008 German Sustain-

ability Awards in Dusseldorf in December.

Openly gay rapper **Cazwell** is planning to drop his full-length Watch My Mouth come March. The New York based MC's latest, I Seen Beyoncé at Burger King, is a hilarious farce. On this rapper's delight, Cazwell runs into a broke Beyoncé doppelganger at Burger King, JCPenney and the liquor store. Cazwell adds tongue-twisting rhymes to Colton Ford's That's Me and Peppermint's Servin' It Up! On top of being a part of last year's True Colors Tour, Cazwell appears in the videos for Sir Paul's Do U and The Ones' When We Get Together.

Here are some other releases to look forward to in 2009: Morrissey's Years of Refusal, rising star Anjulie's self-titled debut, Jill Sobule's self-released California Years, Amanda Lepore's Brand New Woman, Placebo's sixth outing, Antony and the Johnsons's The Crying Light, Colton Ford's Under the Covers, Telling on Trixie's Ugly, Broke & Sober, funky-dance outfit LMFAO's debut Party Rock, India.Arie's Testimony: Vol. 2 Love & Politics and out singer-songwriter Levi Kreis' latest, as well as sophomore outings from Lily Allen, dance artist Brian Kent and Chicago's Dylan Rice.

Prince plans to trump all by having three albums out this year without the support of a major record label, according to the Los Angeles Times. MPLSOUND will offer more of an electro sound and a cameo from Q-Tip. Lotus Flower will focus more on guitars. Lastly, the 50-year-old purple one is working with a new protégé, Bria Valente, on the album Elixir.

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Upcoming concerts

Listed below are upcoming local concerts that, for various reasons, may be of special interest to the LGBT community. Venues are in Chicago unless otherwise indicated:

- Jan. 17:** Taylor Hicks, Martyr's, 3855 N. Lincoln, 10 p.m.
- Jan. 17:** Jeannie Tanner, Katerina's, 1920 W. Irving Park, 9 p.m.
- Jan. 19:** Adele, Park West, 322 W. Armitage, 7:30 p.m.
- Jan. 19:** Amy Armstrong, Freddy Allen, Mekole Wells and more, Davenport's Piano Bar, 1383 N. Milwaukee, 8 p.m.
- Jan. 19:** Mavis Staples, Northwestern University's Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, 50 Arts Circle, Evanston, 12 p.m.
- Jan. 20:** Inauguration gala/Martin Luther King, Jr., birthday extravaganza with Dee Alexander, Morse Theatre, 1328 W. Morse, 7:30 p.m.
- Jan. 20:** The Killers, UIC Pavilion, 1150 W. Harrison, 7 p.m.
- Jan. 21:** 4 Women Only with Kat Fitzgerald, Uncommon Ground, 1401 W. Devon, 9 p.m.
- Jan. 25:** Blessid Union of Souls, Schubas, 1346 W. Belmont, 8 p.m.
- Feb. 5:** Blood, Subterranean, 2011 W. North, 7 p.m.
- Feb. 6:** "A Tribute to Frank Zappa" by the Paul Green School of Rock Music, Kinetic Playground, 1113 W. Lawrence, 5:30 p.m.
- Feb. 7:** Lykke Li, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, 7 p.m.
- Feb. 15:** The Pretenders, Riviera Theatre, 4750 N. Broadway, 7:30 p.m.
- Feb. 18:** Lyle Lovett/John Hiatt, Rialto Square Theatre, 102 N. Chicago, Joliet, 7:30 p.m.



Lindsey Czechowicz. Photo by Kat Fitzgerald (MysticImagesPhotography.com)

- Feb. 20:** Thievery Corporation, Riviera Theatre, 4750 N. Broadway, 9 p.m.
- Feb. 21:** Jim Brickman, Genesee Theatre, 203 N. Genesee, Waukegan, 8 p.m.
- Feb. 21:** Lindsey Czechowicz, Uncommon Ground, 1401 W. Devon, 10 p.m.
- Feb. 28:** Chuck Wicks, Joe's Bar, 940 W. Weed, 9 p.m.
- March 8:** BETTY, Old School Town of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, 7 p.m.
- March 13:** Shemekia Copeland, Old School Town of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, 8 p.m.
- March 13:** Missy Higgins, Vic Theatre, 3145 N. Sheffield, TBD
- March 14:** Patty Loveless, Old School Town of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, 7 and 10 p.m.
- March 17-22:** Riverdance, Rosemont Theatre, 5400 N. River, Rosemont, various times
- April 28-29:** Britney Spears, Allstate Arena, 6920 N. Mannheim, Rosemont, 8 p.m.

—Andrew Davis

MUSIC

You just have to hear it: Talking with Chris Pureka

BY SARAH TEREZ ROSENBLUM

Lonesome-voiced New England singer/songwriter Chris Pureka has been compared to everyone from Bob Dylan to Stevie Nicks to Amy Ray. With the Jan. 20 release of her fourth album, *Chimera*—an eclectic mix of live songs, covers and previously unreleased studio tracks—Pureka once again reminds us that folk music is alive and relevant, especially in this time of hope and change. Before hitting Chicago's Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont, on Jan. 28 as part of her Northeast/Midwest tour, Pureka phoned to discuss the inspiration behind her album's title, her thoughts on Prop 8 and everything in between.

Windy City Times: How did you come up with your album's title?

Chris Pureka: I learned about the concept when I was a biologist and someone in the microbiology lab was working on a project splicing genes from one species into another species, typically called a "chimera project." This record has unrelated stuff from all over the place that I've been collecting, so *Chimera* seemed like a cool metaphor for what I was doing. [It's] also a throwback to my old friends.

WCT: What moved you to make *Chimera*?

CP: As a musician you record live shows, you record things with friends [and] you have songs you feel are worthy of the public hearing, but they haven't found a natural home. This record combines all that.

WCT: What was it like to sift through recordings to find your favorite live tracks?

CP: Awful! [*Laughs*] Often the best tracks were horribly flawed in some way, performances were ruined by recording problems or static or someone talking in the audience. Even the songs I put on the record are flawed, which is difficult for me because I like everything to be perfect. I tried to choose songs that weren't just live versions of the same musical arrangements on my records, which was a challenge, because when I perform live, I'm pretty true to the record.

WCT: Some performers—Bob Dylan comes to mind—like to mix things up when they play live, but it sounds like that's not your thing.

CP: One of my favorite parts of being a musician is being in the studio, and when I arrange songs I take it pretty seriously. Touring, I want [the songs] to sound as they do on the album because that's the way I think they sound best, but obviously, a live show is gonna be different, which is also fun.

WCT: Do you ever tire of certain songs?

CP: There are some that I don't feel like playing anymore, but I'll play them every once in a while because I know people want to hear them. If people come to hear a certain song you can't never play it ... unless you're Bob Dylan. Right now I'm writing a ton of new stuff, and I'm gonna play a lot of it on the tour because I'm super excited about it. That's the way it should be, I think.

WCT: The New York Times said of your songwriting, "There's no comfort, for her, in the clarity of her observations." Is that an accurate description of you in your day to day life as well?

CP: I don't walk around the world depressed; I reserve that part of me for my songwriting. It's obviously something in my core, but I'm not a creepy hermit who just thinks about poetry all the time.

WCT: Your songs are strikingly emotional, not just lyrically, but melodically. Why is that?

CP: Most of my writing is pretty visceral, I'm writing from an emotional place, and those emo-



Chris Pureka.

tions have to translate into something, because its energy, it can't just dissipate.

WCT: Reviewers tend to bring up your background in science. Why do you think people are so interested in that?

CP: It's surprising to people, that you can have an analytical mind as well as a poetic one, but part of biology is observation, which is also a big part of songwriting.

WCT: In what ways has making a living as a touring artist been more difficult in our current economic climate?

CP: The economy is affecting different sectors in different ways, but ultimately it impacts how many people are able to afford art. My main worry is, I'm making a new studio record, which is always really expensive. If people aren't able to buy the final product that's gonna be hard for me. On the plus side, gas prices are dirt cheap. Hopefully, they'll stay that way till the end of my tour!

WCT: A lot of queer people describe having a circumscribed period of pure joy when Obama was elected, followed by deep disappointment, almost an estrangement, after Prop 8 passed. What was your experience?

CP: Obama's election was a big step for minorities in general, but I feel like (the queer community was) left out. That's especially disappointing because many queer people were instrumental in the Obama campaign. But prop eight isn't as important as the Obama election; if McCain was president it would be like, who cares if gay people can get married because much worse things are going to be happening. Pick your battles. Given the choice I'm pleased with the outcome.

WCT: What do you think about evangelical pastor Rick Warren delivering the invocation at Obama's inauguration?

CP: I know Obama is reaching out to the right, he wants to smooth everything over. That's great in a lot of ways, but I feel like he needs to throw the left wing a bone. For the last eight years we haven't had a voice; we haven't had anyone representing us. He hasn't nominated anyone radical to his cabinet, and then to also be catering to this random Christian right thing is really unfortunate. So, some of Obama's choices have been disappointing, but I don't want to pass judgment until I can see what he does when he truly has authority.

WCT: Back to music, what can your fans expect from the album following *Chimera*?

CP: That was actually a nice segue way. The next record feels darker, more political, still very emotional, whereas [*Dryland*] was really internal. Production-wise, it's gonna sound a little more "indie," for lack of a better word. The last record was kind of an "Americana" record. I'm not sure I'm describing it well. It's really hard to talk about music. I mean, you can talk about it all you want but really, you just hafta hear it.

See www.chrispureka.com.

Playwright Susan Miller brings drama to the Net

BY JOAN LIPKIN

Enterprising artists like writer Susan Miller and director Tina Cesa Ward see the potential of the Internet because of its speed, audience potential, freedom of expression and relative low cost. And they're not alone. Their new show, *Anyone But Me*—created specifically for the Internet—is being featured on the innovative new Web-based network StrikeTV (www.strike.tv), which was started during the writer's strike to produce and promote original programming for the Web.

Executive producer and writer Miller is an Obie award-winning playwright (*My Left Breast*) and was a consulting producer/writer on Showtime's groundbreaking series *The L Word* and ABC's landmark series *thirtysomething*, among other TV hits. Director/writer Tina Cesa Ward screened her short film, *In Their Absence*, at more than a dozen film festivals around the globe and was awarded best short film four times.

"I've written and produced television series, like *The L Word* and *thirtysomething*, so it didn't seem out of my realm at all to help create a Web series which takes the best of television as its model," Miller said.

Anyone But Me premiered on Strike TV in December and, having been selected as an Editor's Pick Video on *AfterEllen.com*, is officially hot. The people behind *AfterEllen.com*—the Web site for news, reviews and commentary on lesbian and bisexual women in entertainment and the media—are so psyched about the new series that they have begun streaming episodes.

Produced by Miller and Ward, the show is about New York teens coming of age in a post-9/11 world. The series introduces a new generation—ethnically diverse, gay and straight—searching for love and acceptance as they confront their own diverse identities and sexual awakening.

Their show is the only one on StrikeTV to be set and shot in New York City and address the stories of both teens and their parents. "I'm so proud of *Anyone But Me*. It's about something. It's about difference. It's about relationships... it's about us," Miller said.

While the show includes several gay storylines such as one involving Vivian and Aster, two 16-year-olds involved in a romantic relationship, and Breck, a gay male teenager, Miller said she has had really positive responses from straight women and men, gay men and straight teenagers: "We have a multiethnic cast. And we depict both gay and straight relationships. We explore the city and the suburbs. So, I think we have broad appeal."

And with each episode being eight minutes long and available online 24/7, the show should fit into anyone's schedule. "Theatre is something you should be able to make happen anywhere," Miller said. "But, there are more and more obstacles. This seemed to have no bounds, you know? It's a new form—[it's] wide-open territory."

To read more about the show, see www.anyonebutmeseries.com. To read a full-length interview with Susan Miller, in which she also discusses her experiences working on *The L Word*, see www.windycitymediagroup.com.

Joan Lipkin is the artistic director of That Uppity Theatre Company and a judge for the Kevin Kline Awards. She may be reached at JLipkin@aol.com.



Susan Miller. Photo by Marite Jones

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***For more information and a list of valid performances:**

www.BroadwayInChicago.com/President



Ally Sheedy (right) with Chelsea Handler in Steam.

NUNN ON ONE

Ally Sheedy: 'Steam' player

BY JERRY NUNN

Eighties icon Ally Sheedy has built a career on quirky roles in *The Breakfast Club*, *St. Elmo's Fire* and *Short Circuit*. She took a moment from her busy schedule to drop the towel and talk about her new movie, *Steam*, and her career with *Windy City Times*.

Windy City Times: So how did you start acting in the first place?

Ally Sheedy: It was something that I always wanted to do. I did a class on the weekends in high school, all the usual plays, etc. Then when I turned 18, I went out to L.A., got an agent and just started pounding the pavement.

WCT: Your first big break was *War Games*, correct?

AS: No, it was called *Bad Boys*. Then it started to pick up speed.

WCT: Do you get sick of the whole "Brat Pack" thing?

AS: No, not really. It was something that just happened. You know, with actors it just became a kind of shorthand slang about different groups, the same thing even with a group of writers. Remember *Bright Lights Big City* Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis? They were defined as a certain group, Generation X, Y, whatever it is. So, for me, it was the same thing, a kind of easy-going slang.

WCT: Do you still keep in touch with anyone from that group?

AS: Yeah. Actually I do, so it's nice.

WCT: Did fans ever confuse you with past characters that you played?

AS: Maybe with some of the high schoolers now. When I walk around the streets in New York, everyone has seen a different movie so I don't seem to get pigeonholed into everything. I will hear from one person in the drugstore that they liked this one and someone else at Starbucks liked that one.

WCT: For people who have not kept up with your career, you have [made] over 60 television and movie appearances. What were some of your best experiences?

AS: Actually there have been a few of them but they have been offbeat. Obviously, I loved doing *Breakfast Club*. I loved doing *High Art*. There was a movie that loved doing even though it was a tough subject matter. It was called *The Interrogation of Michael Crowe*, which was up in Canada. It was a television movie and I was really happy on that one.

I just worked with Todd Solondz. Do you know who he is? He did *Welcome to the Dollhouse*.

WCT: Oh, yeah; he's really controversial.

Is that why you were in *Puerto Rico* and I couldn't find you?

AS: Yes.

WCT: Have there been any roles that you have turned down that turned out to be huge hits?

AS: To tell you the truth, I don't know that I have ever turned down a role. I have been in talks with people over the years but it never came down to someone giving a direct defining offer. So it's not usually that black and white.

WCT: Tell me about *High Art*.

AS: It was wonderful. It was a once-in-a-lifetime character. When I read it, it completely resonated with me. Everything about that movie worked perfectly. Lisa Cholodenko the director was just brilliant. The cast was really fun. I liked the way it was shot, everything about it.

WCT: Your new movie, *Steam*, is about three generations of women who get to know each other in a sauna. What interested you in this project?

AS: Well, number one, that Ruby Dee was doing it. I liked the character and the storyline. I like doing independents. You never know ... but this one had a good feeling about it. I liked the way it turned out.

WCT: That's a steamy poster for the movie with the three women on it. What was it like working with Ruby Dee?

AS: I didn't have a lot of scenes with her—just the three scenes where the women wind up together. But I am in awe of her. I was overwhelmed. She's an amazing artist, legend, icon, everything. She has been involved in politics and a brilliant stage actress. I felt I was so lucky to sit next to the camera and watch her up close.

WCT: You have done so much in your career already, but what's next for you?

AS: I like doing different projects. I like characters that are offbeat, and funny and dark sometimes and complicated, all depends on the script. I have done a few episodes of TV, which is kind of new territory for me.

I like the last two films I did. One of them is called *Welcome to the Rileys*, which is with James Gandolfini and Melissa Leo. I don't know when that's coming out. They just finished shooting it.

And the Todd one was, like, going to moon, it was so great.

WCT: Do you have a Web site?

AS: Nope. I heard that there are a couple of people that have set something up on Facebook—that it's supposed to be me but it isn't.

WCT: That sounds like *War Games*! When are you coming to visit your fans in Chicago?

AS: Oh, I always end up going down to Chicago. It's one of my favorite cities. I have worked there a whole bunch. I have always had a great experience there. It's one of those places where you get a good feeling when you think about it.

DVD REVIEW

Save Me

BY STEVE WARREN

Save Me was filmed on location in the middle of a metaphorical minefield and escaped unscathed. You've never seen a better balancing act at the circus.

With emotions running so hot on both sides there may not be a market for a fair and balanced (not in the Fox News sense) drama, even a good one like *Save Me*, about a Christian center that attempts to "cure" homosexuals.

Since out and proud actors Chad Allen and Robert Gant play two of the lead roles you needn't fear that *Save Me* will take a homophobic stance, but the surprise is that the Christians aren't thrown to the lions. Instead of one-dimensional villains, Gayle (Judith Light) and Ted (Stephen Lang) are portrayed as decent, well-meaning (if fallible) human beings.

They run Genesis House, a good name for a place that offers men a new beginning. The residential facility is described as "a Christian recovery program specializing in sexual brokenness." Gayle's 17-year-old gay son OD'd eight years ago and she chose to blame his orientation rather than his addictions. Ted began as her employee and became her second husband.

Mark (Allen) is dumped in Genesis House by his family, who can't deal with him anymore. His combination of problems reminds Gayle of her son, so she takes a special interest in him.

So, for other reasons, does longer-term resident Scott (Gant), whose issues revolve around trying to please his dying father. Mark settles in and the program actually does him good in terms of recovery from his addictions. As far as becoming dehomosexualized, most of the guys seem to be going through the motions on that one.

An exception is Bill Prior (William Dennis Hurley), a "fifth-phaser," defined as "those who've accomplished what they set out to do." He's engaged to a woman he's been dating for a year. Who knows? Maybe it will work, but he

admits to "having thoughts" about Mark.

The most sympathetic character is Lester (Robert Baker), Mark's roommate, whose plumpness gives him low self-esteem (or did the egg come before the chicken?). He's "never acted on my sexual brokenness," but knows what he's attracted to. He provides comic relief, like a sad clown, but is also the closest thing to a romantic in the story.

The weeks and months go by, with individual and group therapy, church on Sunday, constructive activities like making birdhouses to sell for charity, and unspoken lust building up in Mark and Scott. Ted encourages their "healthy, nonsexual friendship" while Gayle worries about it.

Genesis House is on thin ice financially and Gayle frequently has to put economic necessity ahead of her sincere beliefs and emotional problems. Light stays in a low-key mode because the script, written by her husband, actor Robert Desiderio, from a story by Craig Chester and Alan Hines, doesn't encourage heavy histrionics; or if it did, director Robert Cary, whose previous films, *Anything but Love* and *Ira and Abby*, were lighter in tone (and deserved a wider audience), chose to take a higher road.

Save Me could have been a crowd-pleaser if there had been a screaming climactic confrontation followed by Gayle getting hit with a drop of water and melting, but then it wouldn't have been respectful of all its characters, as well as a film you can show to conservative Christians and possibly have them learn from it instead of being offended. On the other hand, open-minded gays can watch it and not throw the baby Jesus out with the bilgewater.

If you want the other kind of movie, see Jamie Babbit's *But I'm a Cheerleader*. Had they been made in reverse order it would have been seen as a satire of *Save Me*.

It's ironic that the screenplay mentions the 12 Steps but not the Serenity Prayer, which is really what it's about. While most of her charges at Genesis House learn to accept the things they cannot change and gain the courage to change the things they can, it's Gayle who lacks the wisdom to know the difference.



Chad Allen in Save Me.



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Gays GOT TALENT

Word up: Performer wins 'Talent'

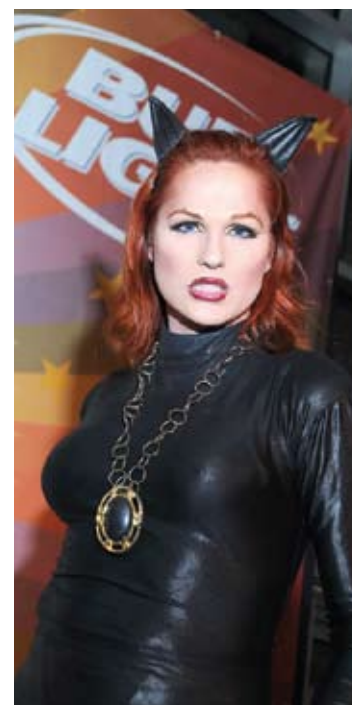
Photos by Kat Fitzgerald/www.MysticImagesPhotography.com; see more photos at www.windycitymediagroup.com or in this week's Nightspots.

Lucy (top, left), a spoken-word performer from POW-WOW at Jeffery Pub, took top prize at the "Gays Got Talent" final that happened Jan. 10 at Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted.

Sami (top, second from left), a singer/songwriter who advanced to the final because of her performance at Star Gaze, was first runner-up. Kerri (top, second from right), who also advanced from Star Gaze, was second runner-up.

Entertainment included drag-king troupe Windy City Blenders, Hot Toddy (male burlesque) and Angelique Munro. Sofia Saffire, Mitchell Fain and Kirk Williamson served as judges.

The contest was sponsored by Bud Light, Tourism Toronto, Broadway In Chicago, American Airlines, gayinsurance.com and Windy City Media Group.



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WHAT TO DO?

Wednesday, Jan. 14

Groups for HIV+ individuals ages 18-35 looking to connect with others living with HIV/AIDS and to share stories and experiences in a safe and friendly environment. Free. 6 - 7 p.m., Center on Halsted 3656 N. Halsted, Information or register, call Aldo Hernandez, LCSW, Health Educator/Social Worker at 773-472-6469 X 450 or email Aldo at ahernandez@centeronhalsted.org. Registration ends on Jan. 29, 2009. www.centeronhalsted.org.

Thursday, Jan. 15

Groups for HIV+ individuals age 35+ looking to connect with others living with HIV/AIDS and to share stories and experiences in a safe and friendly environment. Free. See Wednesday, Jan. 14.

Pulse, a safe place for HIV Positive People, TPAN Fundraiser every Thursday 6-10 p.m. The North End, 3733 N. Halsted St. www.tpan.com

Friday, Jan. 16

Center on Halsted presents Gender Queer Cabaret, Showtime at the Apollo, \$10/\$3 students, 7 to 9 p.m., Hoover/Leppen Theatre, Center on Halsted 3656 N. Halsted, www.centeronhalsted.org

Leather Archives & Museum opens G.A. Gallery Show "Beauties Service" a themed retrospective of watercolor figures, by Chicago Fetish Artist Kate Tastrophe, illustrating women who have taken complete and utter control over their own external sexuality. Leather Archives and Museum, 6418 N. Greenview Ave. 773-761-9200, www.nastyrubber.com

Yes We Can: John Gress On The Campaign Trail With Barack Obama, exhibit opening reception, \$5 donation, 6:30 - 9:30 p.m., Center on Halsted's 2nd Floor Living Room Space 3656 N. Halsted 773-472-6469, www.centeronhalsted.org. RSVP to Ben Gannon at ben@centeronhalsted.org or call 773-472-6469 X 177

Saturday, Jan. 17

4 All Womyn presents "Pizza and a Movie Night". New organization open to women of all ages, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Suggested donation \$5. Pizza and pop provided. Bring snacks to share, if you wish. 7:30 p.m. Zacharias Center, 4275 Old Grand Ave., Gurnee.

9 to 12 Bowling League, GLBT bowling league meets once a month. \$10, 9 p.m. River Rand Bowl, 191 S River Rd., Des Plaines, retroactive1@comcast.net

Chicago Filmmakers presents Sen. Obama goes to Africa, the Man Who Would be President returns to His African Roots. Director Bob Hercules, Director of Photography Keith Walker, and Editor Melissa Sterne in person! \$8/\$7 student, 8 p.m. Chicago Filmmakers, 5243 N. Clark St. in Andersonville, 773-293-1447, www.chicagofilmmakers.org/navkino.htm

Comedy Night @ the Second City, Chicago Lesbian Brunch Group. Second City 96th revue "America: All Better!" \$25 plus a \$7.50 fee, 7:15 p.m., Mainstage Theatre, The Second City, 1616 N. Wells Street. www.secondcity.com/?id=theatres/chicago/mainstage

GayCo Productions and the Chicago Sketch Comedy Festival Present STOP THOSE HOMOS! A Rally Against Gay Marriage, Presented by GayCo Productions as part of Sketchfest 2009. \$12.50. 7 p.m. Theatre Building Chicago, 1225 Belmont, 773-327-5252, or ticketmaster.com www.gayco.com; chicagosketchfest.com

Quiteus, a Celebration of the Stillness Within, Brotherhood of the Phoenix, neo-pagan order for gay, bi-sexual and transgendered men who love men 18 and over. \$10 (no-one turned away for lack of funds). Workshop: 5:30 p.m. - 7 p.m. Ritual: 7:30 p.m. - 10 p.m. LifeForce Arts 3148 N. Lincoln Ave. 773-572-6600, Chicago-Scribe@brotherhoodofthephoenix.org, P.O. Box 13352; Chicago, IL. 60613-0352

Sappho's Salon at Women & Children First, a provocative night of lesbian diversions featuring Aquamoon, Kathie Bergquist, and DJ SpinNikki, 7:30 p.m., Women and Children First Books, 5233

N. Clark St., 773-769-9299

Writing, Performance, & Video Festival: When Does it or You Begin? (Memory as Innovation), 8 p.m. Links Hall, 3435 N. Sheffield, <http://www.linkshall.org/09-pp-jan.shtml>

Sunday, Jan. 18

Human Rights Campaign and Showtime celebrate Season 6 premiere of The L Word! Season 6 Series Finale Premiere & After Party. Space limited. Suggested donation: \$10. Doors 6 p.m., show 7 p.m. Circuit Night Club, 3641 N. Halsted. RSVP: http://www.hrcactioncenter.org/actioncenter/events/chi_lword09/details.tcl

Screening, Waiting to Inhale by the Marijuana Policy Project, Winner of several award/ Free, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Peter Jones Gallery, 1806 W. Cuyler, 2nd Floor, Chicago, 60613, Dan Linn, event organizer 847-341-0591, www.MarijuanaPolicy.org.

Sunday Mass by the Archdiocese Gay and Lesbian Outreach Chicago, 7 p.m. Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, W. Belmont between Halsted & Broadway, # 106, 773-525-3872 www.aglochi-cago.org/

Monday, Jan. 19

PFLAG Palatine, 7 p.m. Countryside Unitarian Church, 1025 N. Smith, Palatine

Martin Luther King Jr. Day activities include dramatic readings and musical performances that reflect Dr. King's messages of peace and justice. Chicago History Museum, free, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 1601 N. Clark St. www.chicagohistory.org/planavisit/upcomingevents/special-events/mlkNorthwestern University's Martin Luther King Jr. celebration: Mavis Staples, Legendary soul and gospel singer, keynote performer, noon, Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, 50 Arts Circle Dr., Evanston campus. Author Tim Wise, prominent anti-racism writer and activist, will be keynote speaker at noon, Thorne Auditorium, 375 E. Chicago. All free and open to public. www.northwestern.edu/mlk/index.html

Obama Pre-Inaugural Celebration and Community Service Event: learn about volunteer opportunities avail-

able through Inspiration Corporation a local non-profit for homeless and low-income. Enjoy food and drink specials and help prepare bagged lunches for Inspiration clients 7 p.m. The Holiday Club, 4000 North Sheridan Rd. RSVP to: Sean.Tenner@ObamaAlumni.com

Tuesday, Jan. 20

Chicago Inaugural Ball, Supporters of President Barack Obama will celebrate Inauguration of the 44th President. \$175 includes: valet, 2 glasses of champagne, dance floor, hors d'oeuvres, large video screen, 7 p.m., Skyline Ballroom, McCormick Place, West Building, 332 E 22nd St (aka Cermak Rd) , www.chicagoinauguralball.com/

Coalition for Justice and Respect, A celebration of the inauguration of Barack Obama as President. Bus leaves Chicago for Washington D.C. on Jan. 19 at 4 p.m., \$350.00/person, RSVP to cjr.chicago@gmail.com or call 773-559-1751

Homolatte: Queer Words and Music Hosted by Scott Free, Free, 7:30pm, @ Big Chicks/Tweet 5024 N Sheridan Chicago 773-728-5511

Wednesday, Jan. 21

4 Women Only Hosted by Kat Fitzgerald (folk/rock) the only show in Chicago dedicated to new women artists. 9pm, Uncommon Ground Devon 1401 W. Devon Ave. 773-465-9801, www.uncommonground.com

Roe v. The Real World event. Our Voices, Our Choices reproductive justice coalition and Chicago Foundation for Women special event marking the 36th Anniversary of the landmark Roe v Wade decision. \$5 donation, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Center on Halsted, Hoover-Leppen Theater 3656 N. Halsted St. www.cfw.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=843&srcid=183

Women and Children First Books. Sid-darth Kara author of Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery Every year millions of women are sold into sexual slavery with billions of dollars changing hands. 7:30 p.m. Women and Children First Books, 5233 N. Clark St, 773-769-9299

Sunday, Jan. 18



'L' YES!

Catch the premiere of the last season of **The L Word** at Circuit, 3641 N. Halsted.

Photo from 2008 premiere by Kat Fitzgerald (MysticImagesPhotography.com)

Monday/Tuesday, Jan. 19-20



CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES

There is a slew of pre-inaugural and inaugural photos centered around this country's newest president, **Barack Obama**.

Photo by Bob Olayas

See our online calendar: www.windycitymediagroup.com/calendar



Nude awakening

"Many-One," local artist Jeff Stevenson's new show at the Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted, opened Jan. 9 with a reception in the facility's second-floor gallery. Composed primarily of a series of paintings of male nudes, Stevenson (above) said that the show intends to evoke the human thought process; by "taking subject matter, taking it apart and putting it back together," he suggests ways in which "social ideas are learned."

Each piece stretches across multiple canvases, which are rearranged in such a way as to lend Stevenson's work a fractious and challenging feel. Stevenson said that in highlighting male nudes, he cites the archetypal nude, Michaelangelo's David, and asks the viewer questions about the "absence of the male nude" in contemporary society: Why, for instance, is the nude assumed to be "automatically homoerotic?" "Many-One," which also features a collection of Stevenson's "meditative" daily painting exercises, runs at the Center on Halsted through Feb. 15. Photo and text by Sam Worley



Get out the coat

Town Hall Police District Commander Kathleen Boehmer (above) and Officer Jose Rios, that district's LGBT liaison, were at Vital Bridges' Northside Grocery Center, 5533 N. Broadway, on Dec. 30 to hand out coats to the facility's clients. Photos courtesy of Lori Cannon



Well 'Red'

Self-described "Queen of All Media" and Internet gossip guru Perez Hilton was at Borders, 1600 15th, Oak Brook, on Jan. 11 to promote his book, *Red Carpet Suicide: A Survival Guide on Keeping Up With the Hiltons*. Hundreds of people showed up for the event. Photos by Kat Fitzgerald (MysticImagesPhotography.com)



BUSINESS

The incredible 'Edible' enterprise

BY ROSS FORMAN

Her first restaurant job was at D.B. Kaplan's, a sandwich shop inside Watertown Place, where she earned \$5/day plus tips as a runner in 1975. Andrea Herrera would make about \$50 by the end of her shift, and was thrilled.

Amazingly, all these years later, Herrera is still active in the food industry. Quite active, come to think of it.

For the past 15 years, she has been the owner of Amazing Edibles, a full-service catering company located just west of UIC in Chicago.

"I like the kind of people who gravitate to the restaurant industry and food jobs. Plus, I like taking care of people, giving them pleasure through feeding them," she said. "Throughout high school and college, I often ended up being the manager of projects or the resident advisor of my dorm, so being the manager and being in charge, coupled with my interest in and experience with food, kind of married into me having my own company."

About 70 percent of her business is with educational institutions and not-for-profit organizations. The remaining is corporate, social parties or events in people's homes. Amazing Edibles offers breakfast, lunch and dinners for groups ranging from 20 to 5,000.

"I have a great team of people working with me, which I think sets us apart from other catering companies. Plus, we have great food that is reasonably-priced, and we have excellent service."

"I kind of found a niche in the professional development market, which primarily deals with schools and universities, and community organizations where they're doing ongoing training, seminars and/or meetings, and just need great food at a reasonable price."

Half of her clients have been with here for more than 10 years.

"The company is small enough that we can give people one-on-one attention, but large enough that we can take care of their needs," Herrera said.

Amazing Edibles offers simple meals such as Continental Breakfasts and boxed lunches to elaborate \$250/person seated dinners.

The company does a lot of parties/events for not-for-profits, and is very prominent in the LGBT community, even though Herrera is straight.

Amazing Edibles has done the catering for the movie *Hannah Free*, which is co-produced by Windy City Times Publisher Tracy Baim. Amazing Edibles also worked with the 2006 Gay Games in Chicago, and has done business with Equality Illinois. Plus, Herrera has had a long-term relationship with The Children's Place Association, which is a safe haven for children and families whose lives have been devastated by disease and poverty. Since 1991, the agency has reached out to HIV/AIDS-affected children and families. Amazing Edibles also has made donations to Beyondmedia Education, an outreach program for teenage women.

"Among our staff, I have a number of gays and lesbians. Same with our clientele and my personal friends," Herrera said. "I feel I am part of the community and I think it's important to reach out to everybody. I don't see why we wouldn't support this community strongly."



Andrea Herrera.

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LEVEL OF COMPETITION

We are hoping to register enough individuals to host both a competitive and recreational league. Participants will be able to self-select into one or the other upon registration. The Competitive League is for players who have several years of soccer experience. Although still a friendly league meant for recreation, it will be faster, more controlled, and more competitive than its recreational counterpart. The Recreational Soccer league is for players who want a friendly, fun league where they can play and develop skills even if they are relatively new (or just returning) to the sport. Our ability to maintain two divisions will be dependent upon the number of participants for each.

LOCATION:

Center on Halsted
3656 N. Halsted St., Chicago

THE LEAGUE

The next CMSA co-ed indoor soccer league begins in January and runs through March of 2009. Games will be played on Saturdays between 2:00pm and 6:00pm. Open gym/practice will be held January 10th and the season will start January 17th.

REGISTRATION

Player fees are \$81 and must be paid prior to the season starting. All players must be current CMSA members as well. Registration is available online at www.chicagomsa.com - please check our soccer page for additional information.



CONTACT: For more information on the league, please email Jason and Nick at soccer@chicagomsa.com

SPORTS

Smucker's Stars on Ice at Allstate Feb. 21

The Smucker's Stars on Ice tour will stop in the Chicagoland area Saturday, Feb. 21, 2009, when famed figure skaters perform at Allstate Arena, 6920 N. Mannheim, at 3 p.m.

The all-new production, "On the Edge," will feature stars such as Sasha Cohen, Todd Eldredge, Michael Weiss, Ilia Kulik and special guest skater Evan Lysacek.

Tickets start at \$25. See www.starsonice.com.

Lesbian group organizing Wis. hike

The Chicago Lesbian Brunch Group is organizing a hike through South Kettle Moraine State Forest. It will take place Saturday, Feb. 14, at 11 a.m.

The address is S91 W39091 Highway 59, Eagle, Wis.

In case of snow, this will be a snowshoe expedition instead of a hike. Participants can rent snowshoes from a local REI store for \$15/day.

Visit www.meetup.com/queergirls or e-mail pphd1226@yahoo.com.

Bike to Work Day Jan. 20

Tuesday, Jan. 20, will mark the Winter Bike to Work Day. Hundreds of bicycle commuters will convene at Daley Plaza, 50 W. Washington, 6:30-9 a.m. for Winter Bike to Work Day. Cyclists will be treated to coffee, hot cocoa and Eli's cheesecake.

The day marks the coldest day in Chicago history: Jan. 20, 1985, when the official temperature at O'Hare International Airport was -27 degrees with 36 mph wind gusts, producing wind chills as low as 93 degrees below zero. Inauguration Day highlights the patriotic nature of bicycling.

Badminton sign-ups in Jan.

Second City Badminton is currently holding its winter doubles league sign-ups.

Online registration is taking place through Friday, Jan. 16; see www.chicagomsa.com.

Individuals looking for a team are encouraged to e-mail badminton@chicagomsa.com and indicate their experience level.

The cost is \$165/team. Each team must carry a minimum of three players on the roster, although four are strongly recommended.

Play begins Monday, Jan. 26, and run for 13 weeks, including playoffs. The schedule will be posted the week of Jan. 19-24.

E-mail badminton@chicagomsa.com or secondcitybad@yahoo.com.

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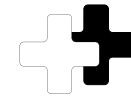
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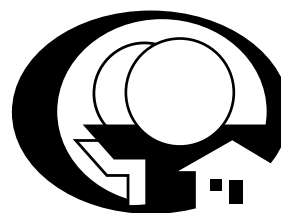
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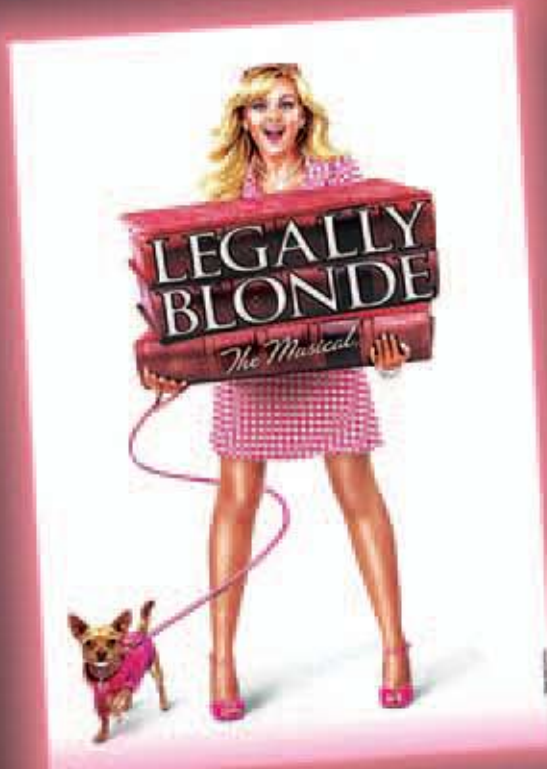
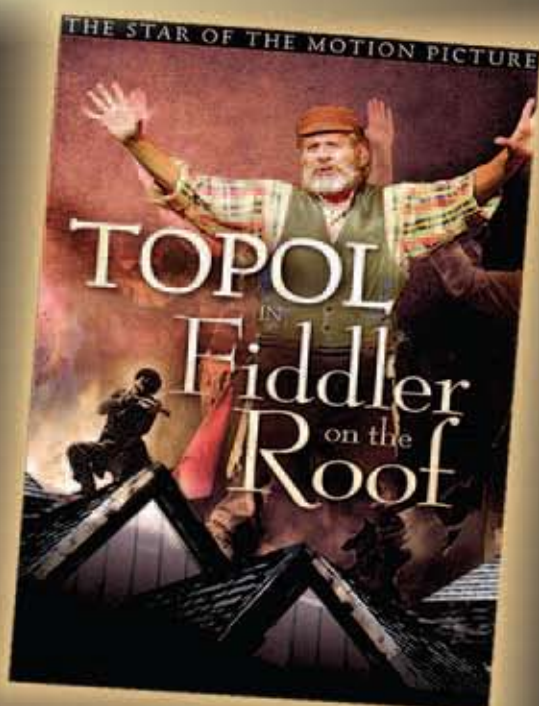
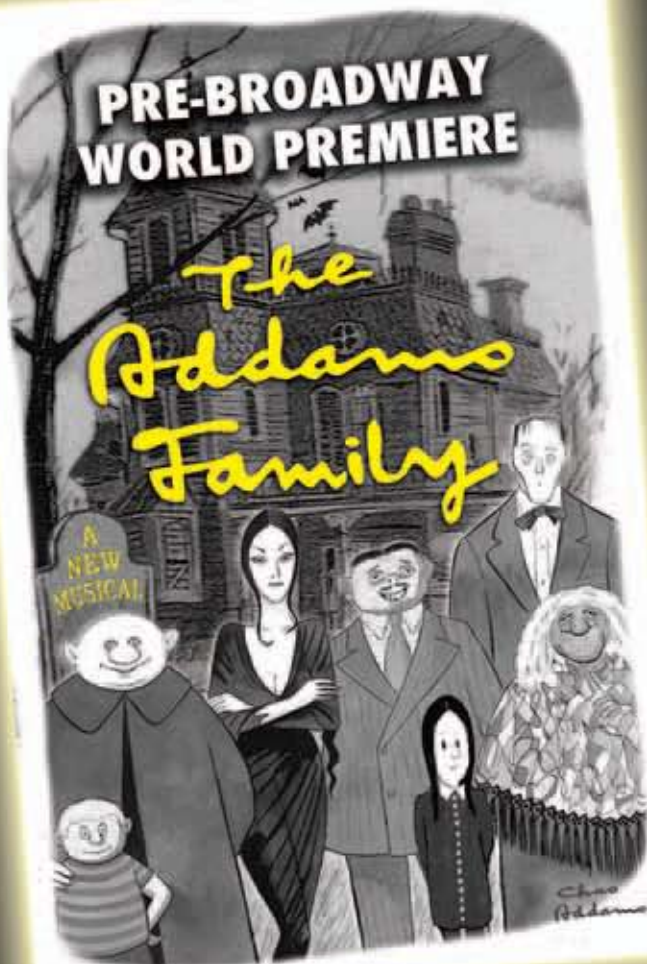
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