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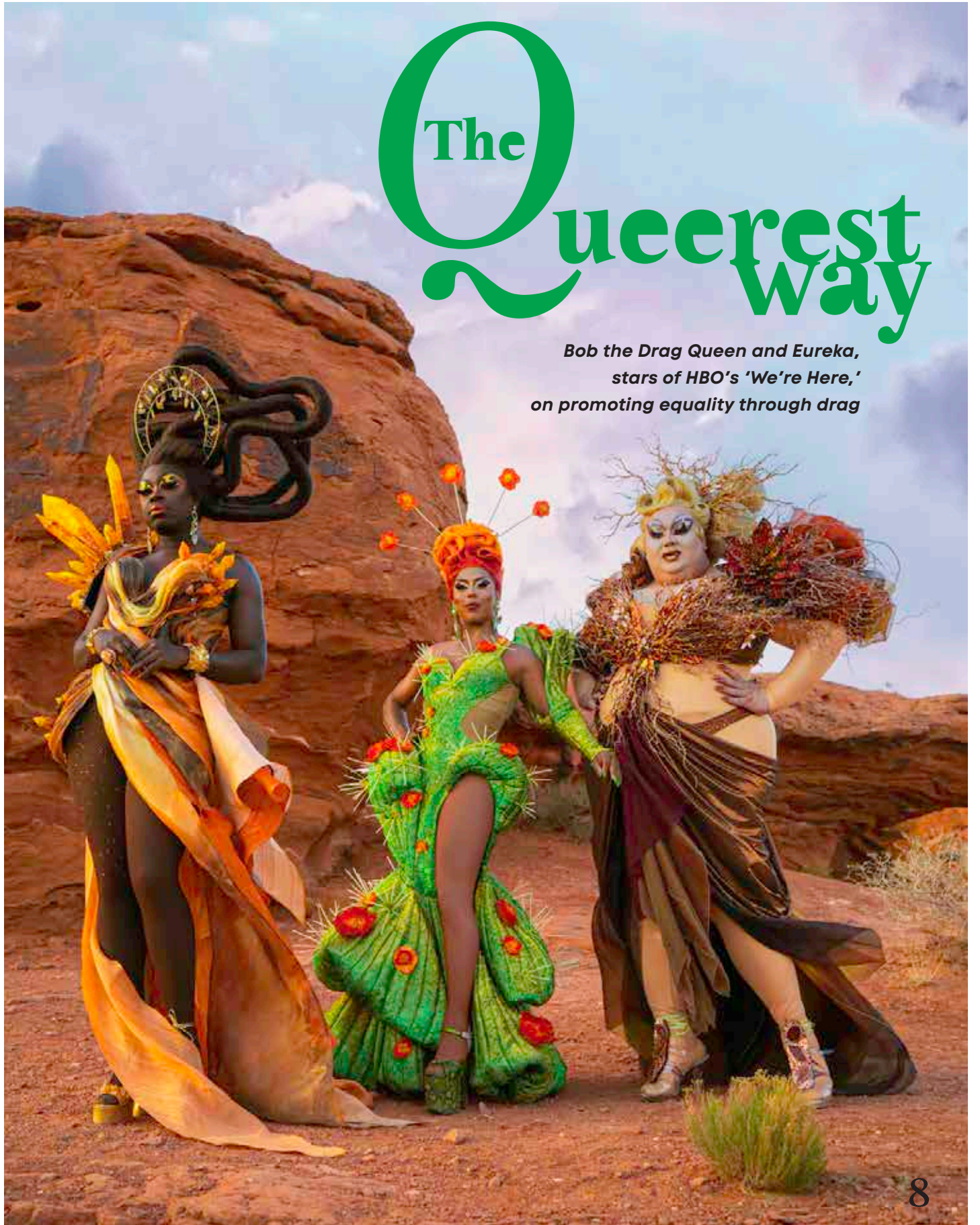
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PUBLISHER  
LAURA M. VILLAGRAN

PRODUCTION  
RAFA ESPINOSA

NEWS FEATURES  
JOHNNY TRLICA

COPY EDITOR  
NANCY FORD

SCENE WRITERS  
FOREST RIGGS  
COLBY ETHERTON  
DISTRIBUTION  
MIRIAM ORIHUELA  
ELIZABETH MEMBRILLO

## THE STAR CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



**NANCY FORD** has enjoyed a front row seat to the most remarkable and sparkly Cultural Revolution in the history of mankind. "What a world!" She reflects appropriately. After moving to Houston from Ohio in 1981, Ford became a highly visible player in Texas' LGBT publishing circles as an editor and contributor to myriad other local and statewide LGBT magazines and newspapers.



**FOREST RIGGS** FOREST RIGGS is an author and writer living on Galveston Island. He describes himself as a "raconteur with a gypsy spirit." Recently he released a collection of stories about his strong connection with the island. No stranger to the adventures that life offers, Riggs enjoys spinning tales and sharing his stories with others. For more information, contact [ForestRiggs.com](http://ForestRiggs.com).



**JOHNNY TRLICA** has called the Houston area home all of his life. Four years ago he founded and still edits the Houston Rainbow Herald and has worked in the apartment leasing industry for the past two years. His passion is keeping the battle for LGBT rights at the forefront of today's headlines and fighting complacency in the LGBT community.

## HRH REPORT

# Does God answer prayers?

BY JOHNNY TRLICA

**C**ommentary: For a very long time it has been a misnomer that gays are not religious or believe in God. If that were true, why do so many LGBTQ individuals pray to God to make them "normal?" On any given Sunday, churches are filled with gays, on their knees, praying to Jesus, just like everyone else. Many people need to witness a miracle first-hand to become believers. While I have never experienced a miracle, the Lord's blessings touched me in other ways and smacked my mother right in the mouth.

Growing up poor in a small town in Texas can have challenges and blessings at the same time. My mother was a stay-at-home mom, and my father was an automobile mechanic who worked on commission. The rent on the house we lived in was only \$60 a month. My parents sometimes struggled to make the first of the month deadline, but they always seemed to find a way to make ends meet and provide for the family.

Since we lived less than a block away from the elementary school I attended, I came home for lunch every day rather than eat in the cafeteria with my classmates. That was except for Thursday, hamburger day, when Mama would scrape together the 35 cents I needed. I remember watching her dig through her coin purse to find enough change for my lunch money.

To help put food on the table, we always had chickens and a garden in the back yard. We grew lettuce, squash, okra, and an assortment of other vegetables. I always looked forward to the okra maturing so we could harvest it since Mama made the best fried okra I've ever eaten.

It was my job to hold chickens across a block of wood, while my dad swung a large heavy axe and chopped its head off. Thankfully, he was a good aim. I'd then toss the chicken so it would bleed out, learning the meaning of "running around like a chicken with its head chopped off," at an early age.

But that wasn't the worst part. After being properly dunked in hot water, I along with my siblings would commence to pluck the headless fowl and heaven help us if we missed a feather or quill. The fresh fried chicken we'd have for supper later that night made it worth it, though.

Going home to eat lunch, raising your own food and killing and plucking your own chickens may be character builders, and looking back now they are nothing to be ashamed of. In its own way, it was a blessing.

There is one part of growing up poor that I haven't spoken of to many people. Our house had two bedrooms for seven people. The living room was quite large so that's where my bed was placed. Mama tried making it my own space by hanging a curtain petition or arranging the furniture to accommodate a faux bedroom, but it was always a bed in the living room.

That wasn't all bad, though. After everyone had gone to sleep, I could sneak over to the television and watch late night movies. That's where I fell in love with Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, and many others. I would often stay up until the FBI Most Wanted List, the Lord's Prayer, and the "Star Spangled Banner" would play.

Sometimes, when my parents had an argument, Mama would come to the living room and get in my bed. One night after she



and Daddy had a really bad fight, she came to "my room." It was around midnight, in July or August and with no a/c, the windows were open allowing the attic fan to pull in tons of cool air from outside. I was 12, maybe 13, and she asked me if I believe in God. I told her I wasn't sure.

She didn't scold me or insist that there is a God. She proceeded to tell me the story of why she knows He's real. During the Depression, when she was in her late teens, she developed a toothache. The family was struggling to survive, often eating boiled thistle as a meal, so seeing a dentist was not feasible.

Mama, who was born with a cleft palate, endured non-stop intense pain for over a week. None of the home remedies of the day worked. She said the pain was so bad that she could hardly take it anymore.

In an act of desperation, Mama told me for the first time in her life, she got on her knees and prayed. She asked God to please take the pain away. She did not try to make a deal or make promises, just begged for relief. She crawled into bed hoping God had heard her prayers.

When she awoke the next morning, she felt better than she had in weeks. The pain was gone. Her toothache had miraculously vanished.

She said God performed a miracle on her that night and that's why she believes there is a God. From that day on, she prayed to Him every night.

She then decided it was a good time to teach her middle child how to pray. She said you do not have to be on your knees or have your hands together. She said to just talk to Him and He'll listen. You can talk to Him in silence, and He still listens. She encouraged me to pray that night. I did and have been praying every night since.

After her prayer to God that night sometime in the 1930's, she lived the rest of her life without ever having another toothache. She always thanked and credited God for that.

Growing up poor has its own blessings and being unfortunate enough to not have my own bedroom may have been one of the biggest. We learned to appreciate the little things and to believe in miracles. We may have been poor, but we were rich in so many other ways. ¶

JOHNNY TRLICA IS THE EDITOR OF THE HOUSTON RAINBOW HERALD, THE BAYOU CITY'S ONLY DAILY LGBT INTERNET NEWSPAPER. CONTACT HIM AT [TXHRH@YAHOO.COM](mailto:TXHRH@YAHOO.COM).

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**CREEP OF THE WEEK**

# All the bad stuff that happened in 2022

By D'Anne Witkowski

**H**appy New Year everybody! Except for people who made it their life's goal to attack LGBTQ+ people. I hope your New Year sucks. 2022 was much better than the two years before it (I know, it's a low bar). We saw some historic wins by LGBTQ+ candidates in the 2022 midterm elections, including the election of the nation's first openly lesbian governors, Tina Kotek in Oregon and Maura Healey in Massachusetts. WNBA player Brittney Griner was sprung from prison in Russia, high profile anti-LGBTQ+ candidates like Dr. Oz in Pennsylvania, Herschel Walker in Georgia and Kari Lake in Arizona lost their elections, and a bill to protect marriage equality for LGBTQ+ people and interracial couples passed the U.S. House and Senate and was signed by President Joe Biden. Still, many things were not great! Queer icon and perpetual bright spot in this dark world Leslie Jordan died. 2022 saw the repeal of Roe v. Wade and a very clear signal from the ultra-right Supreme Court that they can't wait to get rid of marriage equality, too (hence the need for the above-mentioned Respect for Marriage Act). There was also the horrific shooting at Club Q in Colorado, and widespread protests against drag queens. And then there was Florida, where old people go to live out their golden years by clawing back all the progressive wins they've seen in their lifetimes. In 2022 Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill passed faster than a hurricane and was championed by Governor Ron DeSantis, an out and proud homo- and transphobe who wants to become our next U.S. President.

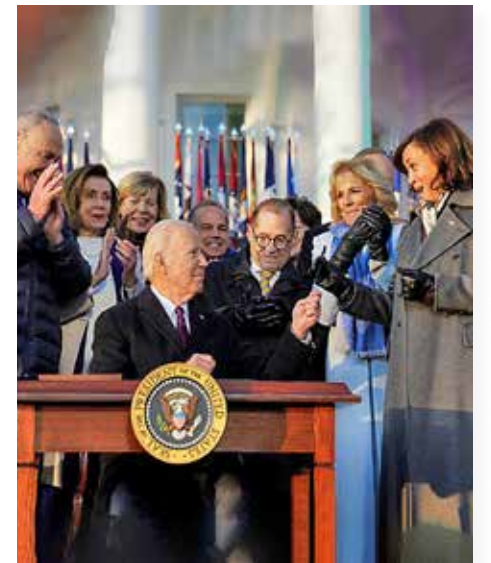
While the bill's stated objective is to keep schools from talking about sexual orientation or gender identity from Kindergarten through third grade, the bill has had wider reaching effects. It's clear that the intent of the law was to enshrine the idea that LGBTQ+ people are a threat to children under the guise of an education law. Well, attorneys general across the state aren't having it. Among other problems, "the law does not define many of its key terms, like 'classroom instruction,' so Florida teachers are already censoring themselves out of fear of the law. Indeed, the law allows a parent to bring a civil claim against a school district to enforce its vague prohibitions," reads a press release from D.C. Attorney General Karl A. Racine. You read that right. Parents in Florida can sue if they think the teachers in their school are't anti-LGBTQ+ enough. Racine and 17 other AGs have submitted an amicus supporting a lawsuit brought by several Florida families opposing the Parental Rights in Education Act. He's joined by the AGs in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington. "Florida's law is unconstitutional," the brief argues according to Racine's office. "The law is causing significant harms to students, parents, teachers, and other states. Non-inclusive educational environments have severe negative health impacts on LGBTQ+ students, resulting in increased rates of mental health disorders and suicide attempts. These harms extend to youth not just in Florida, but throughout the country."

It's true. Over a dozen other states have proposed bills "inspired" by Florida's. The Venn diagram of people who are anti-LGBTQ+ and people who are racist has two overlapping circles. As Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund's Legal Director David Brown tells NPR, "What is truly concerning is that these anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been coupled with legislative proposals that forbid teaching about structural racism and slavery, and patriarchy and sexism, on the grounds that these concepts make others uncomfortable." But making LGBTQ+ people uncomfortable? That's OK. That's the point. Legally dehumanizing people is a green light for violence against them. We saw that play out at Club Q and at drag queen events that drew armed protesters. "The institutionalization of these bills is an overt form of structural transphobia and homophobia, and it goes against all public health evidence in creating a safe and supportive environment for transgender, nonbinary, queer, gay and lesbian youths and teachers to thrive," Arjee Restar, a University of Washington professor of epidemiology told NPR. Of course, that's exactly the point. Supporters of this kind of legislation don't want a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ people. They want us back in the shadows, timid and weak. But the closet door has been smashed open. We refuse to go back. v ♪

D'Anne Witkowski is a writer living in Michigan with her wife and son. She has been writing about LGBTQ+ politics for nearly two decades. Follow her on Twitter @MamaDWitkowski.



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### OPINION

## What have Democrats accomplished during lame-duck session?

By Colby Etherton

On January 3, 2023, the 118th Congress was sworn in. While Democrats maintained and even improved upon their lead in the Senate, they did narrowly lose the House to Republicans — something that was expected, but by a smaller margin than most were anticipating. The House currently stands at 222 seats for Republicans and 212 seats for Democrats, with one seat still up for grabs in Virginia's 4th congressional district after its incumbent, Donald McEachin, passed away on November 28, 2022. A special election for the seat is slated for February 21, 2023.

With Republicans taking control of the House a few days ago, it gave Democrats one final opportunity to pass legislation during the lame-duck session: the period after a new Congress has been elected but before their term begins. What did they race to get done in that two-month period?

On December 8, 2022, the House voted to advance the Senate's version of the Respect for Marriage Act, ensuring it would go to President Biden's desk to be signed into law. Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act into law days later on Dec. 13. The landmark law guarantees federal and state recognition of same-sex and interracial marriages, and while it does not guarantee that all states must recognize these marriages if, say, Obergefell v. Hodges were overturned by the Supreme Court, it does require states to recognize marriages performed in other states or marriages that already exist.

The other piece of legislation that has been

passed is the nearly \$2 trillion spending bill to fund the government up through September of this year. Inside the massive spending bill are numerous provisions and priorities from both parties, including reforms to the Electoral Count Act of 1887. The reforms are a direct response to the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection, and clarifies that the Vice President does not have the authority to block certification of an election — a maneuver Trump tried to pressure Pence to do in the weeks following the 2020 presidential election. It also will now require at least 20 percent of members from each chamber to challenge a state's electoral results, when previously all it took was one representative and one senator.

Inside the spending package are billions of dollars allocated for aid to Ukraine, and for response to natural disasters such as wildfires, hurricanes and flooding. A whopping \$858 billion in defense spending was included, notably an all-time record and billions more than what Biden had requested, with the remaining \$772 billion allocated to domestic spending and funding for domestic programs.

It is the last time for at least two years that Democrats will have uniform control of the legislative branch, and with split control tends to come gridlock. Congress has been unusually bipartisan with the passage of several blockbuster bills in the past year — the infrastructure bill, the CHIPS Act, the Respect for Marriage Act and now the government funding bill. Will we see the same in the next Congress that was just sworn in? ☞



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## HCC Coleman College helps meet growing demand for medical assistants



By Adrena Dow

**H**ouston Community College Coleman College for Health Sciences provides students a pathway to become medical assistants, an occupation growing in demand within the health care sector.

Medical assistants are at the frontline of every successful medical practice as essential team members in providing health care practitioners the support they need to diagnose and treat patients. Responsibilities can include a mix of traditional office work as well as hands-on medical tasks like drawing blood, administering injections, performing electrocardiograms, preparing patients for physical exams and keeping accurate medical histories and records.

HCC Coleman College students learn through extensive instruction in the college's state-of-the-art facilities and labs. As a member of the Texas Medical Center, HCC Coleman College also offers students opportunities for hands-on practicums conducted at affiliated

health care organizations. The program's rigorous curriculum is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs.

"Our students learn a variety of skills valued by medical employers that can be applied in a variety of work settings," says Cynthia Lundgren, program director. "Whether students are interested in working in doctors' offices, hospital-based clinics, urgent care sites or research labs, career opportunities are in abundance and have great potential for career advancement."

When the pandemic overloaded health care providers with a surplus of patients, providers became dependent on medical assistants more than ever. This caused a monumental strain on the U.S. health care system, forcing allied health care workers such as medical assistants to tackle new challenges and expand their roles.

"Our program trains students to be multi-skilled professionals in the fast-paced environment of this in-demand career role," says Jeff Gricar, Ed.D., dean of Health Sciences at Coleman College for Health Sciences. "This often means taking on new tasks and learning how to support physicians in their vital work while assisting with patient safety and care." The demand for medical assistants continues to increase, thanks to the vast number of aging baby boomers who require care. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects 18.4 percent employment growth rate for medical assistants through 2030.

Visit [hccs.edu/medicalassistant](https://hccs.edu/medicalassistant) or email [cynthia.lundgren@hccs.edu](mailto:cynthia.lundgren@hccs.edu) to learn more about the HCC program





## | SPOTLIGHT

## From one whale to another: watching 'The Whale' as a fat queer man

**Why writer Sean Donovan wanted more for Brendan Fraser's gay character**

By Sean Donovan

When Brendan Fraser's character Charlie first appears in director Darren Aronofsky's new film "The Whale," he is masturbating to gay porn. Shown first as an anonymous shape sitting on a couch, Charlie is circled by the camera tentatively, as if it's afraid to approach him too quickly, a reticence that is hard to distinguish as a fear of what Charlie is doing or a fear of what Charlie is.

Regardless, a fear it is, in a film where the dominant emotion alternates between slightly removed shock and condescending sympathy. But this entanglement at the center of the film's representation leads one to ask: gay or fat, what's the "shocker" here? Which one is shocking, and which one is the provenance of patronizing faux concern?

Charlie weighs roughly 600 pounds, we are told in the film, and in his physical condition is largely housebound, confined to a small apartment in Idaho where he teaches a writing composition class online. The entirety of the film takes place inside this apartment, a sign of its origins as a play. It's a device intended to place the viewer in Charlie's solitary life, interrupted intermittently by visits from his best friend and unofficial nurse Liz (Hong Chau), his estranged daughter Ellie (Sadie Sink), ex-wife (Samantha Morton), and a Mormon missionary (Ty Simpkins).

"The Whale" has attracted publicity and interest as a comeback vehicle for Fraser, a heartthrob in the '90s and early 2000s who has since faded from stardom. What has acquired less media attention is the film's notability as the rare film — one privileged to have a great deal of film festival buzz, a major Oscar-nominated director, and a boutique distributor in A24 — to focus on the life of a fat gay man, potentially opening up a community to media representation that often lacks it.

I can't be alone in facing this kind of representation with fear. When you're a person of one or several minoritarian identities, seeing a film or television show allegedly "about" someone like you can be a discomforting process of coming face to face with how you are seen in the imaginations of others. Any excitement you had to "feel seen" stands to be outweighed by the disappointment of finding loaded misrecognitions in its place.

Unfortunately, my experience watching "The Whale" was more of the latter. There I sat in the theater, one whale watching another, hoping to find just a trace of connection between the two of us. Instead Fraser's Charlie, in a fat suit and layers of prosthetic makeup, feels overcome by the baggage of a world doubly homophobic and tyrannically favoring thin body shapes, rendering the actual lived reality of a fat gay man somewhat sketchy and unconvincing, his consciousness written by belief systems that seek to destroy him.

As a fumbling, awkward teenager, much of my life was defined by keeping my queer sexuality a secret at all costs, scared enough of the straight world around me that, even without a direct threat of physical violence to me personally, I simply couldn't imagine what a livable queer adulthood would look like. I was in an uneasy purgatory adolescence, seemingly awaiting nothing but gay hell (incidentally, great nightclub idea).

An image that sticks out to me now is from the TV series "Glee," the first season of which aired in my senior year of high school, when the closet was becoming truly unlivable and I was starting to stick limbs out of it in a confused, furtive panic. Chris Colfer's character, the young, starchy twink Kurt Hummel, was living a queer life, in all its challenges and pain, as well as its joys and validations.

The show was allegedly inspiring people — theoretically this could have provided a life raft for a young queer! But I looked at Kurt — trim, fashionable, small, cute — and I saw only new layers of blockages that prevented me from imagining a queer life. Sure, someone like Kurt could be gay. So could the fleeting other images I saw — predominantly white men, if not small and twinkly like Kurt then chiseled and muscular with an athletic physique, like the pack of men on "Queer as Folk." But my body, my fatness, seemingly prevented me from finding a legible queer identity. My self-love and healthy self-image has soared since, but the vulnerabilities of queer adolescence are grave and formative.

Brendan Fraser played the kind of beefcake beauty I felt impossibly distant from in the 1998 film "Gods and Monsters," a biopic of the gay 1930s horror filmmaker James Whale — another gay whale! — deliciously played by Ian McKellen. Fraser's character Clayton Boone, Whale's

gardener, is certainly curious about his boss's taboo flirtatiousness with him, when the film's 1950s setting makes such flirtation criminal. Throughout the film we see Clayton re-conceptualizing his own physicality through Whale's eyes, learning a new rhetoric of his own desirability that begins to excite him. I wish this openness to being desired existed for Fraser some 25 years later.

Fraser's casting in "The Whale" — and his own body's changes, not to the extent of 600 pounds but still weight beyond what mainstream Hollywood finds acceptable in a leading man — lends precious poignancy to the film, buoyed by Fraser's sparkly eyes and light charisma evocative of his time as himbo par excellence in "George of the Jungle." I do believe that Fraser, who came forward as a victim of sexual assault in 2018, has a deep and sincere awareness of the troubled politics of existing in a body in this world, as it changes through different shapes of variable desirability, and as it is exposed to violence.

But Charlie the character's body rarely coheres as a lived-in body on screen at all, and it's not just because of the hotly debated fat suit. Sweat stains on his shirts look more like aestheticized ink blots than the signs of a real, sweating person. When the film shows its cards as a story of depression and grief, Charlie's obesity a manifestation of his negative emotions, it begins to feel jarringly vague, the man more of a metaphor with arms and legs than a human.

What realities are left unexplored when fat bodies like his stand as signposts for ideas rather than the bearers of complicated lives? The film is at its best when it slows down to capture Charlie's daily routines, taking note of the difficulties a man of his size encounters, and the strategies he's employed to get around them. Otherwise, "The Whale" resorts to an assemblage of slurring wet mouth sounds as we watch Charlie eat. Overwrought music cues emphasize how very pathetic the poor man is, living out a hopeless life both shocking and saddening.

Charlie is characterized as a saint and martyr, passively taking the beating of a brutal life. Not every film needs to be a story of joy — certainly people both queer and morbidly obese have more than their full share of tragedies that are worth exhuming and processing through storytelling. But the one-note nature of the film crafts a very limited picture of what the filmmakers think a body like Charlie's is even capable of feeling.

The ticking clock generating tension in "The Whale" is a health emergency. Charlie's showing signs of congestive heart failure, with a deeply troubling blood pressure ratio. Despite all this, Charlie refuses to go to a hospital. The reasons for this refusal eventually become clear as part of the film's soap opera plotting, revolving around interpersonal secrets ►► 23

# THE SOUND INSIDE

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A FAMILIAR PLACE TO BE

# Ben Aldridge

The 'Spoiler Alert' star came out in 2020.  
Now he's the leading gay man  
in two big studio films



By Chris Azzopardi

This is Ben Aldridge's moment, and that's no spoiler alert. The Los Angeles Times already made that call in a recent profile of the 37-year-old English actor, writing that Aldridge is "on the cusp of stardom."

And so it seems, as Aldridge, an established London theater actor who came out publicly as gay in 2020, thrusts himself into leading-man roles in two major studio films after a recurring role in "Fleabag" and a more substantial part, as Thomas Wayne, in HBO's "Pennyworth."

On the big screen, the actor can currently be seen in the new romantic tragicomedy from Focus Features, director Michael Showalter's "Spoiler Alert." In the film, Aldridge portrays Kit Cowan, a photographer whose romantic relationship with real-life pop culture journalist Michael Ausiello, played by Jim Parsons, is suddenly challenged when he's diagnosed with cancer (the film is based on Ausiello's 2017 memoir of the same name).

In early 2023, Aldridge will try his damndest to survive M. Night Shyamalan's apocalyptic horror film "Knock at the Cabin," portraying another gay character, this time alongside "Looking" actor Jonathan Groff. Aldridge and Groff lead the Universal Pictures project, out Feb. 3, as gay dads vacationing at a remote cabin, which ends up not being much of a vacation at all when they're taken hostage.

From the Park Lane Hotel in New York City, Aldridge spoke about how it feels "invigorating" being a gay actor playing gay characters, his reaction to Sally Field portraying his onscreen mother and the "wave of progress" in LGBTQ-led content.

*What was it like to tell such an emotional story that really happened in "Spoiler Alert"?*

I think exactly that. I think it was emotional. It was intense, but kind of intensely wonderful. I feel like this is the kind of acting role and piece that you dream of doing. From falling in love, to the diagnosis, to the tragedy of Kit's passing, it's really a full life lived over 14 years in the film. And that's kind of a dream come true, to be able to play someone that experiences all of that. I felt really honored, and sometimes daunted and overwhelmed, that I had been given the responsibility of telling the portion of Kit's story in the film. It was a privilege from start to now. Still talking about it feels like a privilege.

*I imagine that you and Jim had a lot of work to do between the two of you to really make this feel authentic to Michael and Kit's story.*

I really felt like my performance wouldn't have existed without Jim's. I felt so informed by him at all times and so much empathy for them as real people. But then that kind of just concentrated itself into me feeling specific empathy for Michael and Jim playing Michael that it just really felt like everything I did was influenced by everything he did the whole time.

In terms of chemistry, we just started emailing. So as soon as the film came together and I was signed on to do it, Jim emailed me and the subject header said, "Let's start." We just started this pen pal-ship of these long letters. Sometimes about the project, but not very often; mostly just about ourselves to get to know each other. And we'd ask each other questions about acting, maybe, but more about our lives and our partners and all sorts, really. And there was still a leap of faith in that. We were very lucky that we've formed a real friendship, which I think definitely helped us just to know each other and trust each other in the scenes. And I think it helped with that chemistry.

Our guide really was the material in the book and it is so detailed, and it's so rich, and so full. It was always tethering it back to that. And Michael Ausiello was there on set as an exec and had really lived this. So I think we were just really lucky.

*I read that you used Kit's actual camera in the film, and then I wondered what kind of role Michael had in helping you portray Kit. Had he shared with you some details about Kit that brought you closer to who he was to play him?*

Yeah, he did. As soon as I finished reading the book, I emailed Michael and he then emailed me back and just made himself a very open resource for anything Kit-related, him-related, relationship-related, including artifacts and specific things. It felt very powerful to hold that camera on set and to think that I was doing the thing that Kit did with it. There was something just very sacred in the object itself. Other things I asked him questions about, and that really helped me.

He has an active Kit Cowan Archives on Instagram and also his Flickr account. I'm surprised at how much that gave me an insight into the way he viewed the world. And he was a documentarian, so just very quirky observations. There's a lot of humor in his work. The things that he captured were very specific to the way he saw the world. And Michael told me that, really, Kit's camera was Kit making sense of the world and of himself. He also took a lot of selfies, probably in a time where not many people did, but lots of famous photographers have done that as well. I just really enjoyed poring over the photographs. They helped me in a way that I didn't think they would.

*There's the moment where there's this de-gay-ing of Kit's place right before his parents come over. It's funny because I feel like that's relatable to every gay person. Did you relate to that particular experience?*

Yeah, definitely. I think something the film does very subtly is show us the journey of... as gay people, until the moment our parents find out about our true selves, we are very used to managing their handle on the truth and what they know about us. And I think it can keep a distance between you and your parents, and certainly I could relate to that.



What happens in the film, once [Kit's parents] Marilyn and Bob know and are accepting, there's just such an honest exchange. I think it just deepens the parental relationship for them to really know who you are. I did really relate to that. And I think the de-gaying of the apartment, I can relate to almost de-gaying myself a little bit when going home when I was younger, and maybe potentially dressing differently or just being more conscious of that. I'm glad that element of the book is represented in the film.

*I love that Kit had "Beaches." And not just "Beaches" on DVD, but the special edition.* Those DVDs are very specific. Sara K. White, the [production] designer, [made] everything in the apartment so specific to the book. But then things outside of the book, we shared several emails back and forth about what I wanted there. Certain books and art books. If you look at all those films, they all make a lot of sense. And again, there were things of Kit's in there. So yeah, it was very cool.

*What was your initial reaction when you found out that Sally Field would be playing your mother?*

So she was attached before I became part of the conversation, before I met Michael [Showalter] and Jim. So I knew that was always the deal. But of course, I was so excited. But also definitely a healthy amount of intimidation, just to think that I would be looking into her eyes and saying lines and hoping that she believed me. And yeah, that was a good nervous energy. But it was wonderful, and I could just marvel at her.

All of us were really free to improvise and she did a lot of improvisation. And sometimes I'd be just in a scene, of course acting with her, but being a bit like, "Wow, she's so amazing." And Bill [Irwin, who plays Kit's father] too. Such wonderful actors. And they both have gay children themselves. So I think there was a real understanding and a real care. They had so much care over us and over playing parents to gay children. I just really felt that from them. They're both wonderful in the film as well.

*Was "RuPaul's Drag Race" actually on in that scene with Sally? Did you really watch "Drag Race" with Sally Field?*

Definitely knew we were watching "Drag Race." I can't remember if it was actually on the screen. Because there's a funny thing about actually playing stuff [on TVs] and filming, so I don't know. But we definitely knew we were watching it. But also, Kit at that moment is so almost in and out of consciousness. It was a really special moment because, I mean, I never watched "Drag Race" with my parents, and I wonder if they would understand it or not. But I just love that in our story that they sat down with their parents. It was just a really nice moment, cuddled up next to Sally Field. There was something really tender and gentle about [that].

*Is this your first gay character?*

No. I played a gay character on stage in a play called "The Lyons" in my 20s. And then I had done a UK detective series ["The Long Call"] just before filming this where it was apparently the first ever gay detective on UK screens. But yeah, that was very, very personal. I'm not a detective, but it really reflected my own life. And it's been really nice over the last three years, and something I've craved and wanted to do is to play people that I really identify with.

My 20s [as an actor] was about escaping. I was playing lots of straight romantic parts, which I love doing. But it was about escaping something. I think more recently I've wanted to do a deeper dive on myself and meet myself in the projects that I'm doing and really emotionally understand. We're in a wave of progress where there's more quick content, and I feel really excited and privileged to be getting to play these characters.

*To see your identity reflected in these characters on screen in kind of a big way, what does that mean to you?*

Yeah, it's a very personal experience. It's strangely relieving to be on a set and being witnessed by a crew. It kind of feels like taking your skin off a little bit and being the most unguarded you've ever been. Even though you are still playing something, it feels invigorating, it feels life-affirming, it feels emboldening. And as someone who really struggled with their identity and a lot of shame in my teenage years and throughout my 20s, there is something... I feel very privileged to be doing it. And I feel like I'm part of riding a wave of progress. And I'm very pleased to be there and really glad that we're getting more stories about ourselves that are not just connected to tragedy in the way that we've been represented before.

Love is at the center of [this] film. And yes, tragedy strikes, but it's a real story that really happened. We're not immune to the reality of life. What we should be calling for is real reality and real stories about us. And that also should contain the spectrum and the breadth and diversity of our community as well.

**THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN CONDENSED AND EDITED FOR CLARITY.**

Chris Azzopardi is the Editorial Director of Pride Source Media Group and Q Syndicate, the national LGBTQ+ wire service. He has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.

COOKING WITH PAULA DREAM

# Achiote. Gesundheit!

By Paula Dream (AKA Kale Haygood)

Here we go again, MONTROSE STAR readers — Happy New Year! Once again, my resolution is to count those calories — glass by glass.

A buddy who always sends me the greatest cartoons on my phone recently sent this one. In the caption, a man (I'll add my own humor and call him Donald T.) says: "I'll be saving my resolution for 2023; I think I want to be an a\*\*hole for one more year."

Moving on to the food, my true love for shrimp brings me to share a simple and spicy recipe. Our first two recipes of the year both call for achiote powder, which usually can be found in the Asian, Latin, or Spanish section of your favorite market. And what side dish would go good with these succulent shrimp? Most anything, but you'll enjoy the complimentary citrus flavor in this potato recipe.

And as a bonus to kick off the New Year, I'm sharing some handy tips to make your kitchen life easier.

Folks, thank you again for your questions and comments, and for supporting our advertisers who make this publication possible. I have found the Golden Rule works.



**EASY GRILLED ACHIOTE SHRIMP**  
1 dozen raw jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined, with tails

**MARINADE:**  
1/4 cup fresh cilantro  
1 teaspoon each of lemon juice  
1 teaspoon orange juice  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 teaspoon black pepper

**SAUCE:**  
1/4 cup olive oil  
2 tablespoons garlic, chopped  
1/2 teaspoon achiote powder  
Zest of 1/2 lemon, minced  
Zest of 1/2 orange, minced

Whisk together cilantro, lemon juice, orange juice, kosher salt and black pepper in a medium-sized bowl. Transfer to a large sealable plastic bag and add the shrimp to

marinate. Seal and place in refrigerator for no longer than 45 minutes. After marinating, thread three shrimp on metal skewers from head to the tail so shrimp are in a circular appearance.

While shrimp are marinating, heat olive oil, garlic, achiote powder and zests over low heat in a saucepan. When it starts to bubble around the edges of your pan, remove from heat and let sauce rest for about 15 minutes.

Preheat stovetop or outdoor grill to medium heat. Brush your grill with oil and grill shrimp until pink or cooked through, with grill marks on both sides, about one-and-one-half minutes per side, basting with achiote sauce.

2 strips orange zest  
Kosher salt to taste

Flatten potatoes (but not too flat) with the palm of your hand. Whisk together oil, achiote powder, garlic and zests in a cast iron or regular skillet over medium heat until the oil shimmers and glistens. Add potatoes to skillet, frying approximately 15 minutes until both sides are gold and crisp.



**BONUS TIPS FOR 2023**

- Briefly soaking meat in a solution of baking soda and water tenderizes it. It raises the pH level, therefore making the proteins more difficult to bond.
- Save those bacon drippings! After frying bacon, place it on the splatter screen over the skillet to allow it to drain.



- A Mason jar lid is a great substitute for a cookie cutter or a biscuit cutter.
- Remove silk from a cob of fresh corn by wrapping a large rubber band around your fingers, and proceed down the cob.

Paula Dream, AKA Kale Haygood, owns Beyond Service, a Montrose-based, home-cooking catering company. For more information, call 713-805-4106 or email [barrykale@yahoo.com](mailto:barrykale@yahoo.com).



**CITRUS AND GARLIC CRACKED POTATOES**

1-1/2 pound new potatoes, boiled and chilled  
6 tablespoons olive oil  
3/4 teaspoon achiote powder  
3 cloves garlic, smashed with skin on  
3 strips lemon zest

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## Sponsored Article

**Sustainable, Chemical-Free Frack Fluid Is a Win for Both Oil and Gas Companies and the Environment**

When it comes to hydraulic fracturing, the oil and gas industry has long been in a quandary. Hydraulic fracturing - or tracking - uses water and sand to release oil and natural gas deposits that traditional vertical drilling can't extract. After the oil and gas is released and collected, the big question has been what to do with the water that comes out with the oil and gas. To track, it requires as much as 650,000 barrels of water, or 27,000,000 gallons, per well that comes at the oil and gas companies' expense. Their solution until now has been to deposit or inject nearly all flowback and produced water into saltwater disposal wells, sometimes at high pressures. It's a process that's both potentially affects local water supply and profitability. It's been too costly for oil and gas companies to pause tracking until they find an alternate solution so new incentives have been introduced to encourage the industry to find cleaner solutions. A publicly traded company's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) score has become a linchpin of socially conscious investors to screen potential investments. Finding away to improve a company's sustainability without reducing its production, all while -remaining financially viable, has never been more- crucial.

PilotPure, Inc., a produced water remediation company in Texas, has that solution: sustainable recycling and remediation technologies for produced water reuse that are scalable and available to oil companies. PilotPure's proprietary water recycling system optimizes the treatment and disposal of produced water, providing oil and gas companies reliable, remediated produced water without the need for adding chemicals. By minimizing water disposal and trucking of treatment chemicals, PilotPure saves companies money while providing a sustainable environmental solution. If this sounds like pie in the sky, it was, until recently.

Now, the only thing standing in the way between oil and gas companies and environmentally sustainable hydraulic fracturing is the awareness to use PilotPure's chemical-free recycled and remediated water for the frac fluid.

***The Numerous Benefits of PilotPure, Inc.'s Water Treatment System***

PilotPure's team has over 75 years of combined experience in oil and gas operations worldwide and knows the industry inside and out. PilotPure's team realizes the industry earnestly wants to operate sustainably, remain profitable and satisfy ESG metrics. PilotPure's chemical free, sustainable water treatment system helps solve these obstacles and offers companies an opportunity to increase production yields. Here's how.

Most water used in tracking is subsequently disposed by injection into saltwater disposal wells (SWD). This practice is costly, inefficient, and may contribute to increased seismic activity near the disposal wells. The largest majority of flowback and produced water is either recycled without being remediated or injected into SWD wells. PilotPure remediates 100% of recycled water while accelerating the removal of in-situ iron. Instead of injecting the wastewater into disposal wells, PilotPure takes the water, cleans it, and returns it to the oil and gas company for reuse. It's PilotPure's goal to vastly diminish the industry's reliance on SWDs and recycle every single gallon of wastewater for reuse. Using PilotPure's system allows the oil and gas producer to reuse produced water instead of having to purchase non-potable fresher water for tracks thus saving the freshwater for crop irrigation and other beneficial reuse.

This undoubtedly will save companies money, in more ways than one. Using remediated water costs about half as much as using fresh water. By eliminating the need for freshwater, you eliminate the costs of extracting and transporting it, too. But perhaps more consequential, PilotPure's recycled water is a nearly homogeneous product, meaning their clean, remediated frac fluid is the same, every time. Oil and gas companies spend significant time, energy and effort fixing problems caused by using water with different mineral, PH, and chemical qualities. Fresh water can even contain bacteria which can be harmful to equipment and extracted oil and gas. Using PilotPure's bacteria-free, nearly homogeneous frac fluid for every frac, helps to eliminate complications that arise from using fresh water.

How is PilotPure's frac fluid able to be so clean without the use of chemicals? PilotPure's proprietary system uses innovative ion transfer technology, rather than harsh chemicals. The byproduct of the ion transfer process is monochloramine and dichloramine, which can keep the water bacteria-free for up

to three weeks, allowing it plenty of time to return to the well and be used again. No one else in the industry can offer this level of clean, sustainable frac fluid.

Ion transfer is not new Sean Gustin, PilotPure, Inc.'s Executive Vice-President, and Jonathan Warner, its Senior Vice President and CTO, used ion transfer technology in aquaculture farms in central Florida. A third-generation oilman, Gustin returned to Texas and, with the help of PilotPure's team and Warner, applied the technology to help solve fracking's water challenges. Now, PilotPure has the capacity to clean 230,000 barrels a day offering the oil and gas industry a completely scalable solution. Our footprint, says Gustin, requires less than 10,000 sq. ft. or about ¼ of an acre for this remediation system.

Convincing the prevailing culture of oil and gas companies - one that is often resistant to change - that using PilotPure's frac fluid is both sustainable and profitable should only be a matter of awareness. PilotPure's ability to save companies money while actively helping the environment is a powerful solution to fracking's water problem. Companies that use PilotPure will help make our world more sustainable, without sacrificing profitability or the valuable energy production they provide.

"Scientific progress is a cumulative effort," says PilotPure President and CEO, Michael Gustin. "The oil and gas industry always builds on the discoveries of its predecessors: a collaborative advancement that is unstoppable towards a greater and better way. PilotPure thanks all the Permian operators and explorationists for their combined risks. Without them, many challenges would never be solved to the benefit of all. We at PilotPure are proud we are already helping keep this great state of Texas clean for future generations."

To find out more about how PilotPure can save your company money while also increasing production and profits, visit [www.pilotpure.com](http://www.pilotpure.com) today.



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# It's all just a little bit of history repeating

BY NANCY FORD

I have a confession to make: I am a Pawn Stars junkie.

It's true. I've watched the gang at the Las Vegas-based Gold & Silver Pawn Shop for most of its 14 years as a staple of the History Channel. I am powerless over the Harrisons and their antagonistic, snarky kind of family values.

For years I've witnessed main man Rick Harrison helm the second-hand ship built by his father Richard, an erasable yet remarkably likable old man whose passing in 2018 brought a tear to my eye.

Rick isn't as codgerly as the Old Man was, as his family affectionately called him, but the Pawn-in-Chief does not suffer fools gladly. Finally, we have Olivia, the series' lead female employee who, except for her masterful command of the English language, is a straight-up doppelganger of Lauren Boebert, that bobbleheaded Congresswoman from Colorado.

The Harrisons et al are a fun bunch, and if I ever find myself in Las Vegas, you can bet your last \$20 plastic chip that I'll stop by their fine establishment to say hello.

Pawn Stars is not only entertaining, but it also imparts a bounty of fascinating information about American history and culture. Any given day a potential customer might bring in a rare artifact from the Civil War, or an even rarer piece of jewelry once worn by Marilyn Monroe.

At this point, Pawn Stars is one of the very few shows in the History Channel lineup that still offers historical content to its viewers. It's a captivating, wholesome show for anyone, but especially for kids to watch, particularly since our educational system is being so diluted by conservative right-wing book burners attempting and in many cases succeeding to remove any reference that might shed unfavorable light on our white straight male founding fathers.

Switching away from Pawn Stars, I recently stumbled upon one such history lesson, thanks

to a wildly meandering doom scroll stroll on social media that led me to — of all places — MaternityWeek.com. There I found a remarkable story that is not likely to pop up in current public school curriculum.

It seems that shortly after setting sail from England for the New World in 1624, a man named Thomas Morton landed in Massachusetts. There he established Mount Wollaston, so-named after the ship's captain, Richard Wollaston.

Now the site of Quincy, Mount Wollaston became known among the colonists as "Merry Mount," based on the Captain's notorious fondness for "the fine arts and wild parties." Sound like a delightful Saturday night to me.

Drawing the ire of the Puritans, Wollaston befriended the local Algonquin tribe instead of trying to convert and/or kill them, setting the table, so to speak, for Dorothy Parker and her philosophical friends three centuries later.

OK, I made that last part up about Dorothy Parker. See how easy it is to alter history?

What mostly pissed off the Puritans, however, was the shocking fact that the settlement was the colonial version of modern-day Provincetown. Yep, it turns out the many Merry Mount men enjoyed "dancing and frisking together" as well as mounting each other. And so did the women. We always find our own, don't we?

The surrounding colonies were truly horrified by the Bacchanalian lifestyle embraced

by these Merry Mounters. Guess what happened next? By 1630, any traces of the freethinking settlement were scattered to the wind by Puritans who would stop at nothing to Make the New World Great Again. Puritans gonna purify.

Head on over to Maternity Week for the rest of story. It's crazy, and scarily familiar sounding. The only thing that could possibly make the story more intriguing would be if some Quincy-ite unearthed a 17th-century disco ball while breaking ground to build a new Dunkin's, and then brought it in to Chumlee for a big payout.

And that's we call full circle.



Thomas Morton

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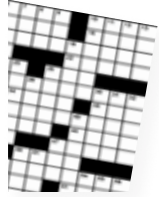
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| ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY

**GALVESTON COUNTY MUSEUM**

# The 'grandmother's attic' of the Island

By Forest Riggs

**D**o you ever think about the old treasures that are stored in dusty attics around the country? Folks like to hang on to things, especially keepsakes that contain a story or hold great value and meaning, all tucked away in the quiet darkness of an attic space or unused closet.

One of the best semi-hidden treasures on Galveston Island is within the old Galveston County Courthouse, located at 722 Moody at 21st Street. There, a massive collection of more than 22,000 items are housed in displays and storage facilities in this state-of-the-art museum, a joint project of the Galveston County Commissioners Court and Galveston County History, Inc.

Over many past decades the museum and its vast collection have been housed at various locations around the downtown area, starting with the historic Moody Bank building as well as in the Shearn Moody Plaza (old train depot) and finally in its current location near the tax offices inside the old courthouse.

And what a treasure it is!

Most people visit the building several times a year to pay taxes, renew license plates or perform other civic duties. Everyone notices a few items from the collection, carefully placed around the lobby, like an antique tamale vending cart, a giant metal anchor, a few vintage photos and even one of the last crystal lenses from the old Galveston Lighthouse. What many people don't know is further down the way is a magnificent glimpse into the history and story of Galveston – and admission is free!

When folks think of a museum, an entrance fee is usually involved, however, this is not the case with the Galveston County Museum. Such a fine treasure is, in a sense, a hidden jewel for locals and visitors alike. There is ample parking and, unlike many locations downtown, it is free, as well!

Jodi Wright-Gidley, local historian and author of *A City on Stilts* has been at the helm of the museum for many years. Trained in museum sciences,

exhibit design and interpretation, Wright-Gidley has lovingly overseen and directed the museum forward to its present status that competes equally with any major museum in the country. The collections and exhibits are filled with donated historical artifacts that have been stored in homes, attics, schools and libraries, only to find their most rewarding destination: this museum.

The very well-designed exhibits include artifacts, photographs, stories of the 1900 Storm, county military history, cornerstones, historical architecture and much more. There are exhibits depicting the huge role Galveston Island played in early immigration, early photography, corner stores, commerce, pirates and gambling and even items revealing the pre-history and early Native American Galveston residents.

A leisure stroll through the museum is like a trip through time, complete with excellent interpretation and printed materials to make the visit more educational.

"We are so proud of this museum and the collection it houses," says Wright-Gidley, "The items we maintain and present in the beautiful and informative displays offer our visitors a real glimpse into the history of the island, so much more than just a book can convey."

The storage rooms are filled with documents, books, art, statues and just about anything one can imagine that was part of the developing island, socially and economically.

"We love the donated items and will take anything as long as we are able to house it and care for it properly," states Wright-Gidley. "One of my favorite pieces among the many is the detailed coroner's logbook from the 1900 Storm. It is amazing to read the notes and details entered into the book. You get such a feeling for the immensity and toll of the storm – lives lost and so much devastation."

With Mardi Gras just around the corner, Wright-Gidley and her volunteers are busy preparing a colorful exhibit of vintage Mardi Gras costumes and items associated with the



festive holiday. It appears that Galvestonians are very generous and eager to share their family treasures and heirlooms with the public.

The museum is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Again, there is no charge! Thursday and Fridays are available for tour groups, educational programs, classes and other activities such as book signings and demonstrations.

"We are hoping to develop some educational programs for schools and interested groups, as well as resource kits to share upon request," says Wright-Gidley.

Whether you are paying your taxes, renewing a registration or visiting from another city, you owe it to yourself to continue down the hall and enter this fascinating museum. In a time when everyone charges for any and everything that seems enjoyable, this jewel is free and waiting for your visit. Check it out.

Private tours and research appointments are available. Visit [www.GalvestonCountyHistory.org](http://www.GalvestonCountyHistory.org) or call 409-766-2340 for more information.

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## POSITIVE THOUGHTS

## PREP ADVOCATE DAMON L. JACOBS

# Gets real (and naked) in splashy web series

By Neal Broverman

“What do you like about your body?”

That’s typically one of the first questions that therapist, life coach, author, PrEP promoter, and longtime HIV activist Damon L. Jacobs asks his guests on his YouTube show, “Tub Talks With Damon L. Jacobs.” This query is posed while Jacobs and his guests (mostly men, but sometimes women, too) are naked and sitting inches from each other in a sudsy bathtub.

The series allows people like a U=U proponent (Randy Davis), a sex writer (Alexander Cheves), a “thickfluencer” (Alex Borsa), a journalist and ACT UP legend (Liz Highleyman), and even one of President Obama’s HIV experts (Greg Millett) to talk about everything from self-esteem to self-care to substance abuse to sex positivity. “Tub Talks,” now with dozens of episodes available, is the latest feather in Jacobs’ cap, a New York-based marriage and family therapist who first became known in HIV circles for his early support of PrEP and U=U knowledge. Jacobs spoke to us recently about the origin of “Tub Talks” and why so many people let loose when their clothes come off.

*Tell us about your work as a therapist and the kind of folks you specialize in helping.*

I have been proudly serving the LGBT community as a psychotherapist since 1996, in private practice in New York City in 2010. My work utilizes facets of cognitive behavioral therapy, Buddhism and a little bit of Cher, to help people experience peace, power and pleasure in their daily lives.

*How did you get connected with the HIV-positive community?*

I came out as a teenager in the 1980s, at a time when AIDS was devastating our community. I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1990 where I loved and lost several friends, coworkers, lovers, clients, roommates, to AIDS. It seemed incumbent on me to challenge my training as a traditional “therapist” i.e., the kind that sits on their ass in an office all day. If I was going to take my role seriously as a healer, it means standing up, getting out, acting up, fighting back, doing something, anything, to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. I started volunteering facilitating “Rubberward Parties” on college campuses in 1991, and have just continued to work/volunteer in HIV prevention in some capacity ever since.

*Your “Tub Talks” series is incredible.*

*Where did the idea spring from?*

Thank you! I originally got the idea from a friend of mine in San Francisco, Mike Enders, who did his own bathtub series in the early 2010s. I got to be a guest on one of his last shows and it was the most fun interview I ever had. I thought — what a wonderful way to talk about ideas, hopes,



“Tub Talks” features honest conversations about sex, body image, and HIV — all while naked in the tub.

Photo courtesy Damon L. Jacobs

dreams, struggles, by sitting naked in a bathtub with another person! Around that same time, I was talking with my friend Matt about his work as an escort, how often most of his sessions centered around a naked man telling him his inner thoughts and fears. I realized that as a sex worker Matt’s clients were often more open and trusting with him than many of my clients were being with me — that people in general are so much more honest and vulnerable when they are naked than when they have their clothed defenses on.

When I turned 50-years-old in 2021 I wrote an online series about the 50 Lessons that helped me to get older with power, purpose and pleasure (<https://50lessonsof50.com/>). It was while writing this series that Covid vaccines became widely accessible, rates were coming down, and I was reminded that New York City is home to some of the most interesting individuals in the world. Actors, activists, healers, leaders, educators, entertainers, AIDS historians — wouldn’t it be interesting to capture their experiences and words of wisdom on video? Wouldn’t it be fun to listen to their experiences of aging, healing, grieving, celebrating sexual empowerment, creative expression, while taking a bath together? In the summer of 2021 I asked a few friends if they would be willing to come take a bath with me and almost all said yes. I started airing these interviews on September 13, 2021, and from there the momentum went forward.

Yet another source of inspiration was the fact that I continuously go to HIV conferences where people sit around and say, “Why can’t we get people to use PrEP? How do we get people to learn about U=U?” And I’m like — maybe it’s time to try to not do the same thing over and over again and expect different results! What if we communicated and taught about sexual health and pleasure in creative ways that aren’t being done by hundreds of other people? That was part of it as well — could I deliver education and information in a way that is innovative and entertaining? I’m trying!

*Have to ask: Have all your guests actually been naked?*

Yes. Except for one.

Do conversations flow easier while folks are squeezed together with little to no clothes on? Conversations flow so much more naturally when we are naked! Whether it’s in a bathtub, on a beach, by a pool, in a bed. People’s minds and thoughts are so much freer when they are not being encumbered by clothes. I have done so many bullshit interviews in my time — I used to do some red carpet stuff at the Daytime Emmys and at the GLAAD awards. Those are absolute piffle — they rarely contain any meaning or depth. It’s three minutes of me asking people how they’re feeling and who they are wearing. So I reevaluated during Covid — if I ever was to do interviews again they have to be real, not fake. They have to contain sustenance, not verbal masturbation. When people are naked, they are real. When people are open they are able to share words of insight and wisdom that can help change people’s lives. Those are the only kinds of interviews I want to do anymore.

*Talk a little about how different life is now than two years ago — you’re hosting a bathtub series now and in 2020 we couldn’t even be in the same room as strangers.*

Right, so this is one of the reasons I waited until 2021 to start filming. I really wanted to start the series back in 2018 but at the time I was too busy with my private practice and traveling/teaching about PrEP to commit adequate time to the tub. Then Covid hit — and that clearly was not an ideal time either. But by the time I started shooting the first episodes in the summer of 2021, everyone had access to the vaccines. So shooting interviews in 2022 is delightfully different from anything we could have done safely in 2020, and I’m just so grateful that science and technology made it possible for us to connect and take baths together again. “No masks, no underwear.”

*Do you think the worst of monkeypox is behind the LGBTQ+ and HIV+ community?*

The data suggests that the worst of monkeypox is behind us. And to me that makes sense — it’s not like we had to reinvent the wheel here. Effective vaccines were already developed, the science was already available. It was just a matter of the government and health departments using them — and that has been the biggest disappointment for me. In NYC the MPX vaccine distribution is a complete embarrassment, especially because they just did the same thing with Covid vaccines. They created a system that perpetuates racial disparities in vaccine access. It’s not like we didn’t see this one year earlier with Covid. And I’m skeptical anyone learned their lesson from MPX either. But yes, I do think that thanks to the eventual vaccine distribution happening now we are on the other side of what could have

been so much more painful and traumatic.

*How are you feeling about the state of HIV right now, especially with World AIDS Day this month? Are you hopeful with some of the advances, like injectables and Covid research, or discouraged that we’re not yet at a vaccine or cure stage?*

I don’t get discouraged so much as I’m a realist. I’ve been working in this field for 31 years. It was dubious then that we would ever have a vaccine or a cure for HIV, and it’s pretty dubious now. Are there strides forward? Yes. Are there incredible people working their asses off to make that happen, yes. Is there sufficient money and funding to make it happen — as far as I know, yes. But HIV is a very tricky virus to cure and I’m not sure I’ll see a cure or an effective vaccine in my lifetime. Meanwhile — injectable PrEP allows you to reduce your risk of acquiring HIV by nearly 100 percent and all you have to do is get a shot every eight weeks. What is the effective difference between that and a vaccine?

My hope rests more in people understanding and utilizing biomedical interventions to embrace sexual health and pleasure. We have three FDA-approved ways of using PrEP now, and more than 50 FDA-approved medications that help someone living with HIV become undetectable. Some of those drugs only have to be taken once a day. When someone is undetectable they are untransmittable, meaning they cannot give HIV to their sexual partners (“U=U”). When I see people organizing, celebrating, and connecting around their joy of sexual empowerment, that is where I feel hope, that is where I’ve witnessed substantial change. ¶

Neal Broverman is the editorial director of Plus magazine. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service. Visit their websites — <http://thebody.com>, <http://hivplusmag.com>, <http://positivelyaware.com> and <http://poz.com> — for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS.

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## | CELEBRITY FEATURE

# There might be a better way, but this is the queerest way

*Bob the Drag Queen and Eureka, stars of HBO's 'We're Here,' on promoting equality through drag*

By Eve Kucharski

Glitz, glam and, oh, just the small matter of changing hearts and minds. That's a tall order for anyone, and the basic setup of every episode of the HBO show "We're Here." But of course, once again in Season 3, drag queens Shangela, Eureka O'Hara and Bob the Drag Queen use their skills to deliver on that recipe and then some.

On the surface, "We're Here" is a show about drag queens teaching their craft to queer and allied people in small, conservative towns across middle America. However, look past all of the costumes, makeup and dance numbers, and it becomes clear there's a deeper message of acceptance running through each episode.

Drag becomes the conduit for the queens' drag kids to not only build up, and sometimes actualize, their confidence in deeply anti-LGBTQ+ environments, but it calls attention to the intricate and nuanced realities of small-town life for queer people — all while putting on a once-in-a-lifetime show in the unlikeliest of places.

Bob the Drag Queen and Eureka O'Hara, two-thirds of the iconic drag trio, joined me for an interview about the show's latest season. They discussed the importance of giving patience to those who want to listen, how spirituality and queerness can intersect, the political environment during each season, and much more.

*Every time you head into a new town there is a bit of resistance, but I felt like this season it was especially bad. There were hostile threats on social media, and then there was the Utah council that was working to cancel your filming permit. Did you feel that way?*

**BOB THE DRAG QUEEN:** We've had resistance before. I mean, we even had the cops called on us in Season 1. Several times, actually

[laughs]. And having a whole town try to shut us down, I don't know if that's a reflection of where we are now or if it's a reflection of where we were at the time, physically. But the political climate has changed. Each season has been a different world. Season 1 was pre-pandemic; Trump was still president. Season Two was a very tumultuous election year, and we were in the middle of an election year. And now, [with] Season Three, we were ramping up to midterms, we had a new president and we are getting back out into the world in terms of coming out of lockdown.

**EUREKA O'HARA:** Yeah, I agree. Bob hit it on the nose.

*Maybe some of the resistance you faced this time around was partly because more people are aware of the show than before.*

**BOB:** Well, I still wonder if they watch our show. What the hell do they think we're doing? What are you protesting? What do you think is going on at these shows? Do you think that it's some kind of orgy? What do you think is happening on stage? Who could protest this?

**EUREKA:** That's true. It's wild. It's just people being misinformed and not understanding.

Misunderstanding is one of the biggest causes of discrimination. Honestly? I find most of the time that the people that fight against our show the most have not seen an episode of our show. They've just heard rumors or they see drag and they automatically make assumptions. There's no facts behind their fear tactics; it's all assumptions. I would love to test these people and say, "Why don't you watch an episode and see what we're showcasing before you combat us?"

*Eureka, at the Fourth of July parade in Granbury, Texas, there was a man holding up a sign with anti-LGBTQ+ scripture and he said, "I just want to show that there's two sides of the story here," and you were clear that queer people see his message every day.*

**EUREKA:** Yeah, I'm like, in your home, you say these things every day. The people that you live with already know you feel this way. People in your world know this is how you're feeling. It just frustrates me because I'm like, "No, you want to create this circle of innocence around what you're doing." And you want to be like, "Oh, I'm just doing this because of the grace of God." Well, I also do everything in my life, as a Christian person, as a spiritual person, by the grace of God as well — she's a Goddess. She's the God that I believe in, and I was raised Southern Baptist Christian, and I still believe very heavily in that faith. And how dare you tear me down for how I decide to live and for how I decide to praise? It just goes against everything you say you believe in.

**BOB:** And as someone who is absolutely not religious in any regard, I want you to know that if you're reading this, you do not have to justify your life based on anyone's religion.

**Eureka:** Work! And the reason that me, as a spiritual person, is on Bob's side when he says something like that is because that's the truest and most honest way of thinking: allowing people to have their own free will. I'm not God. I don't get to play that part. I don't get to judge and pick and choose.

That's an interesting point, and at least those people actually stopped to try and listen to you, Eureka. Bob, you were just trying to cross the street in one of the episodes, I think you were looking for ice cream —

**BOB:** [Laughs.]

*And this guy just started shouting at you.*

**BOB:** Yeah, and that's when I realized that guy didn't actually want to talk. It wasn't about God. It was about him. It was about his ego. And even if it was about God, I don't believe in that, so why do I care? [Laughs.]



You can't come at me with your religion, telling me that I need to live my life by some rules that you don't even know what they are. You and your own parishioners can't agree, and now you want me, someone who doesn't even believe in it, to go by a set of rules that y'all motherfuckers can't come up with? [Laughs.] I don't have as much grace for religious bigots as Shangela and Eureka do. I have actually no grace for religious bigots. None whatsoever. I want to say, "Fuck you, don't tell me who to believe in. Mind your fucking business," but I didn't say that on television. [Laughs.]

*This show got me thinking about the social pressures that exist in small-town communities and the niceness to your face but the lack of overall kindness to those who are outside the status quo. Do you think that's why even large and vibrant queer communities are forced to be silent even within their own spaces?*

**BOB:** I always ask myself, "Do you want to be a nice person, or do you want to be a good person?" And every good person isn't nice, and every nice person isn't good. You know what I mean?

**EUREKA:** True.

**BOB:** I think that a lot of times, people do feel completely silenced in these communities, especially because it's even harder to combat hate when it's thinly veiled as love. Because people say, "Well, we just want to protest because we love you and we don't want your soul to go to hell." And then you think to yourself, "Wait. Is it really because they love me? Are they really here just to save my soul?" And then you have to take a step back and you go, "No, no, no. That's none of their business."



*Was there something positive about meeting these lovely queer and allied people that you were surprised by this season?*

Bob: There's always something surprising to me. I'm always shocked and gagged when I see the amazing things that our drag kids can do. You know, everyone is remarkable at something. Isn't it wild? Not just kinda good, but remarkable at something. And sometimes we get to see that not just on stage but in their communities, and in how their

fellow townspeople see and revere them. I got to see it with my drag kid, Micah, in St. George, Utah, where the community was just like in awe of how remarkable of a person they were.

Eureka: Same, honestly. We got a chance to work with some really interesting youths, the people that are the new generation. Especially this season, I had an experience with several young people who are a part of the generation that's coming behind us that wants to create change and they want to

promote progression and equity. It just gives me so much hope in the world.

*It's really hard to go into communities that don't accept you even when you're trying to spread love. Bob, you said that it's not really about the drag, but it's about giving voice to these queer people. Is that what motivates you both to come back to "We're Here" season after season?*

Bob: Let me be very clear — I sound like Obama, "Let me be clear." There

has got to be an easier, softer way than rolling into a town with a bunch of drag queens [laughs], putting on a show, making costumes, blood, sweat and tears. This is not the easiest way to be doing what we're doing. I don't even believe that it's necessary that it has to be this. It doesn't have to be this, it could be something else. But this is what we do. This is what me, Eureka, and Shangela do and happen to be very, very good at. I don't want to be egotistical and say, "It has to be this, and it has to be us," because there's a lot of people doing a lot of stuff. But I know that what we're doing is effective. People tell me all the time, "I watched the show with my mom, and my mom used to be extremely homophobic, extremely transphobic, extremely racist, and now we're actually having conversations about it." And goddamn it, I like doing it this way. [Laughs.] It's fun and it's glitzy and it feels fantastic, quite frankly.

Eureka: And Bob just loves saying goddamn it..

Bob: Goddamn it.

*Bob, lastly, I loved the dichotomy*

*of you being out and proud in "BLACK" and the very demure and controlled version of your responses to hate in "We're Here."*

Bob: Well, thank you, and I would love for you all to go and check out my music video for "BLACK." I'm really, really proud of it. It's me, Basit, Ocean Kelly, and it's directed by Marvin Brown, one of the creative directors of "We're Here," and I love it. Check it out.

EUREKA: Sponsored by Eureka, too, with two big thumbs up, honey. It is big, old, fat, white, pussy-approved, honey. [Laughs.]

*Eureka, anything that you'd like to leave readers with?*

EUREKA: Send love to everybody, let them know that [my new song] "Big Mawma" is coming out, and it's about caretaking for others and lifting each other up in need and it's about celebrating each other, and it's about body positivity. And, more than that, it's celebrating the big, fat, juicy heart of big Mawma and also celebrating me and my voice and the gender expression in my voice. I used to be really afraid to sing with my male vocals because I always wanted to be feminine and I really celebrate my natural male talents as far as stereotypically male vocal talents. And it opened my eyes to loving another little piece of myself, so, hopefully, the [audience] can, too. Everything's always so much deeper with me. I'm like a poet and didn't know it, you know? ♪



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# Titus Burgess wants 'The Preacher's Wife' on Broadway **ASAP**

By Romeo San Vicente

**T**itus Burgess, star of the late great sitcom "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," is also on his way to being a Broadway mogul. He bought the rights to the 1996 movie, "The Preacher's Wife," and is developing it as a stage musical, which makes perfect sense. The hit Whitney Houston/Denzel Washington-starring comedy-drama, with its Christmas setting and gospel music soundtrack, is tailor-made to be adapted for a crowd-pleasing theater experience. The story involves a minister in a financial bind and an increasingly estranged marriage, both of which need a little boost from a visiting angel. Obviously, this is all based on the 1947 holiday classic "The Bishop's Wife" starring Cary Grant, so there's also a multigenerational appeal. Burgess recently appeared on "Live With Kelly and Ryan" where he discussed the project, and anticipated that it's a couple years away from making the future seasons bright, but we'll be ready to give it our ticket money when it drops down from musical heaven.

## Daniel Craig will once again play 'Queer'

**D**aniel Craig is back onscreen in Rian Johnson's "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery," and just in case you haven't paid attention to the finer details of this sequel, his detective character Benoit Blanc is now openly gay. So let's all raise a glass to the former James Bond doing that again as he moves onto his next starring role in Luca Guadagnino's upcoming adaptation of the William S. Burroughs novel "Queer." Written in the early 1950s but not published until 1985, "Queer" is the semi-autobiographical novel about a gay U.S. ex-pat in Mexico City. A follow-up to



Burroughs' "Junkie," it's more or less about Burroughs' own experience of getting off heroin. Craig is, of course, no stranger to gay roles, having played queer in the '90s indie drama "Love Is the Devil" before he was an A-lister. No other casting news or production information for this one just yet, but there'll be more to come soon.

## Rachel Maddow's 'Ultra' in feature development with Steven Spielberg

Now that Rachel Maddow hosts her successful MSNBC news show one night each week, she's been working on lots of other projects, including the podcast "Rachel Maddow Presents: Ultra." What's that? It's an eight-episode series that explores right-wing extremism and an attempt to destroy democracy in the United States during the 1940s, including a 1944 sedition trial, even as the country was embroiled in World War II. Now Steven Spielberg is developing the true story into a feature film project — as producer so far, director position as yet undecided — with Tony Kushner ("Lincoln") and Danny Strong ("Dopesick") in talks to write. More as this turns into something tangible, but it's always good news to know that Maddow is using her power for important stories that need telling.

## Drag isn't going anywhere

We were taking drag for granted there for a bit, silly us. We thought that with the global popularity of "RuPaul's Drag Race" and more drag queens

moving their careers into the mainstream, that the art of drag was no longer controversial. All you have to do is pay attention to the news for a day or two to know that's not the case at all (briefly, the anti-trans movement has decided to take on drag, too, just to make queer peoples' lives more difficult whenever they can). So, though it might seem a bit odd to cheer for one performer to have a monopoly on the business of drag, we're still glad for any positive development on that front, and it comes in the form "Drag Race" expanding its global reach even further. MTV just announced the expansion of the franchise into Brazil, Mexico and Germany, with the first ever "Drag Race Global All Stars" series to air on Paramount+ globally. Then there's "RuPaul's Secret Celebrity Drag Race," which will return for a third season on VH1, and, of course, the 15th season of the original competition show drops in January. The bigots can protest all they want; we're thrilled to see the queens thriving. ♣

Romeo San Vicente knows you can't stop the beat.



**| SPOTLIGHT**

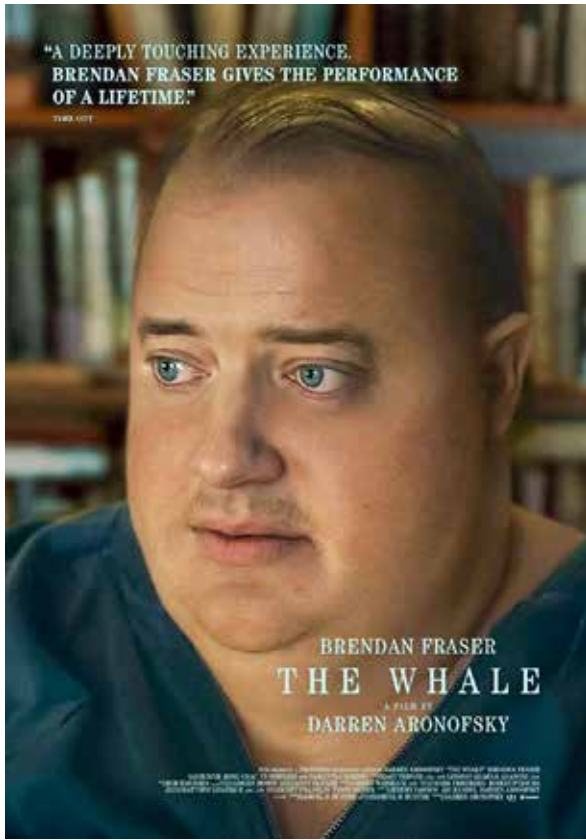
▶▶ **6** hidden and revealed, in a perfect example of the film's failure to generate meaning and nuance out of Charlie's identities as both a fat and gay man.

Hospitals are not neutral spaces for fat or queer people. Frequently they are places of immense judgment and mockery. Despite efforts to change, healthcare offices for many are reminders of what kinds of bodies and sexualities are most comfortably in tune with dominant patterns of social life. Like every other fat and/or queer person I know, I have had doctors diminish unrelated health concerns due to my fatness ("You just need to lose weight") and stumble awkwardly over my sexuality in advice about sexual health and wellness. The shame felt in medical spaces is a real danger to queer and fat populations, causing us to avoid them precisely when they are the most needed.

These contexts never come up in "The Whale," to its detriment, as they could have invested the film with the breath of true challenges and barriers facing queer and fat people in the world.

In the play upon which "The Whale" is based, scenes end with the sounds of splashing waves, in reference to the essay on "Moby-Dick" Charlie continually clings to as an example of superlative writing, and in his own existence as a large, doomed animal. Perhaps too theatrical for film, this fantastical gesture is replaced with rain pouring down on Charlie's apartment, keeping the same water-drenched vibe, but by more realistic means. The play's version, as small a gesture as it is, allows us to imagine just for a moment whales as figures of serenity, even grace — not aberrations incompatible with their landscape. Large, majestic creatures, the kings and queens of the oceans!

Fat gay men have spent many years, dating to at least the 1970s, if not earlier, using bears as a cultural symbol, identifying not just with their large hairiness but their cuddly appearance, an animal comparison



born of affection and warmth. I wonder what this film could have been had it embraced the whale. Media's ability to conjure new possibilities of ways to be queer in this world can and should encompass a mode of being a fat queer defined not by the fear and shock of outsider's eyes, but an embracing of self and body. I think Charlie deserves it. ♪



Sean M. Donovan (he/his) is a graduate student in film and media studies at the University of Michigan and a programmer for the Ann Arbor Film Festival. You can find him at @theseanmdonovan on Twitter.

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# The Battle of Brittney

**Across**

- 1 Barrie's boys
- 5 Enjoys Quentin Crisp
- 10 Gomer Pyle's branch
- 14 Actor McCormack
- 15 Any song by Johnny Mathis
- 16 Marilyn Monroe facial feature
- 17 River to the Colorado
- 18 Start of a quote from Brittney Griner
- 20 Antoni Porowski of "Queer Eye"
- 22 "Family Matters" nerd
- 23 Hrs. in P-town
- 24 "Xena" deity
- 26 Genetic info carrier
- 27 More of the quote
- 33 HMO concern
- 34 Sommer of film
- 35 Lyon king
- 36 Nice Nellie
- 39 Scouring pad
- 41 More of the quote
- 44 "Aren't \_\_\_\_\_ lucky one!"
- 45 Shooters' org.
- 46 Fruit center
- 47 Ask from one's knees
- 48 Pen for talking animals
- 50 Male actor named Julia
- 52 End of the quote
- 57 Excavate again
- 60 Sniff out

- 61 Wilde country
- 62 Firm-fleshed fruit
- 63 "\_\_\_\_\_ On Down the Road"
- 64 Richard of "A Summer Place"
- 65 Rash action
- 66 A Brit soldier may shoot it off
- 67 Ridges on condoms

**Down**

- 1 Got a move on, with "it"
- 2 Like an opera melody
- 3 Cut, as liquid
- 4 S&M souvenir
- 5 Tinkerbell portrayer Julia
- 6 Tickled pink
- 7 Certain plugs
- 8 Cartoonist Browne's "penile" name
- 9 "\_\_\_\_\_ America First" (Cole Porter)
- 10 Shadows of the moons of Uranus, e.g.
- 11 Emulate three men in a tub
- 12 Miss, to Mauresmo
- 13 "Kiss of the Spider Woman" setting
- 19 Do a mole's work
- 21 "Death in Venice" author Thomas
- 25 Foam at the mouth
- 26 STNG guy under Picard

- 28 Communicate manually instead of orally
- 29 Haul ass
- 30 Practiced Cather's art
- 31 Vag, euphemistically
- 32 Lubricated
- 36 Part of a fruity drink
- 37 Avis adjective
- 38 Muslim holy man
- 39 Half of Shakespeare's pentameter
- 40 Grandpa Walton portrayer
- 42 Pastoral poem
- 43 Skye of "Say Anything"
- 47 Use of a homophone, perhaps
- 49 Bonehead
- 50 Witherspoon of "The Morning Show"
- 51 Clay of "American Idol" fame
- 53 Ginsberg's kind of poet
- 54 Colette's Parisian heroine
- 55 Gaza Stripper, e.g.
- 56 Deep desires
- 57 Sound of the New York Spirit cheerleaders
- 58 Doe in Disney's "Bambi"
- 59 Singles players

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713-227-8688 • toutsuitetx.com  
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832-740-4933 • pearlhouston.com  
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Country | Cowgirl | Neighborhood Bar

**The Room Bar**  
4915 FM 2920 Rd, Spring  
(281) 907-6866 • roombarspring.com  
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**La Granja Disco & Cantina**  
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(713) 518-6753 • lagranjadisco.com  
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Houston, TX 77092  
(713) 677-0828 • neonbootsclub.com

**Viviana's Night Club**  
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(713) 681-4101 • vivianasniteclub.com  
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**Crystal Night Club**  
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**SOLUTION**

FROM PAGE 25

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