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SLAYING ALIVE
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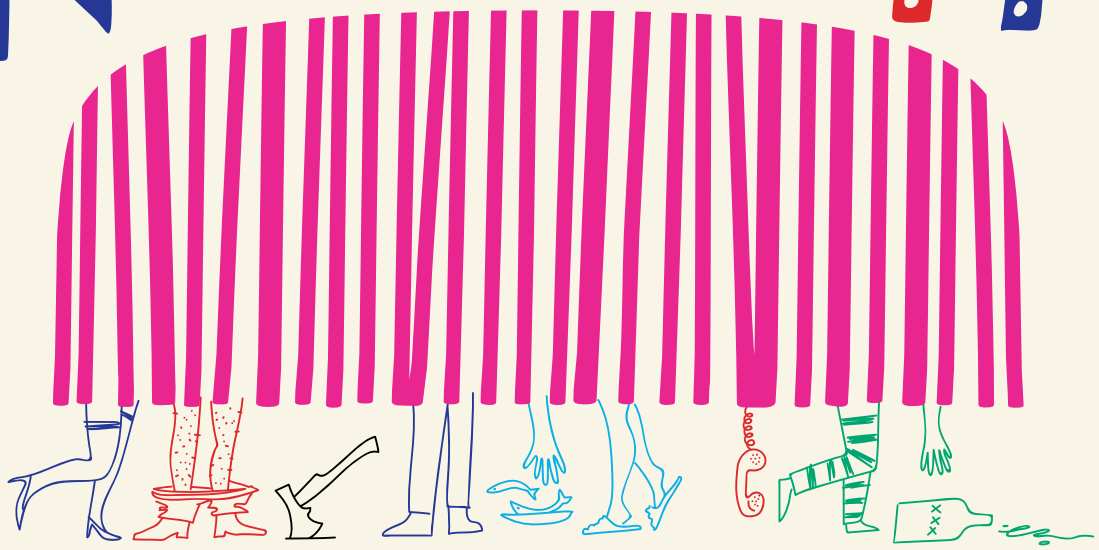
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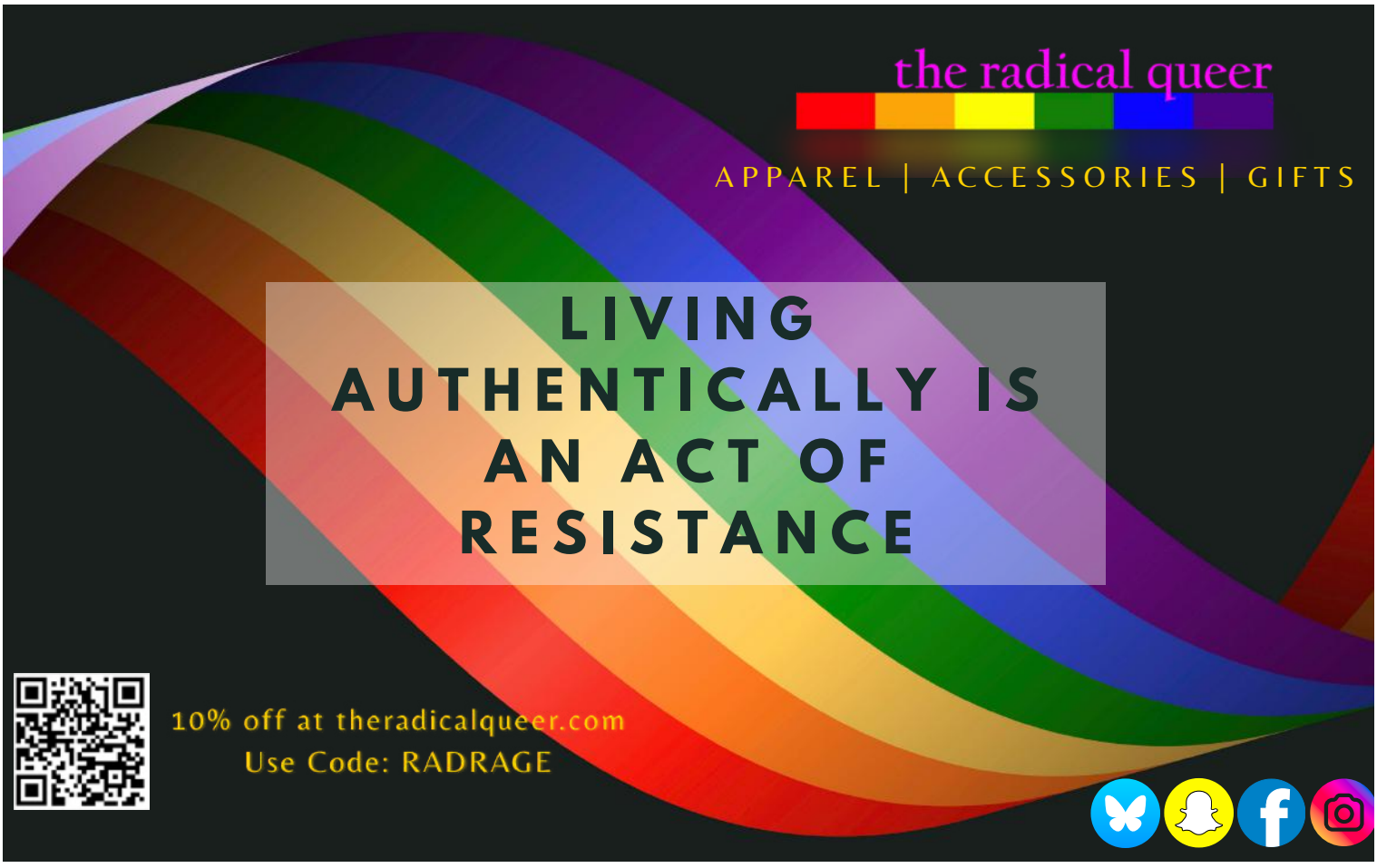
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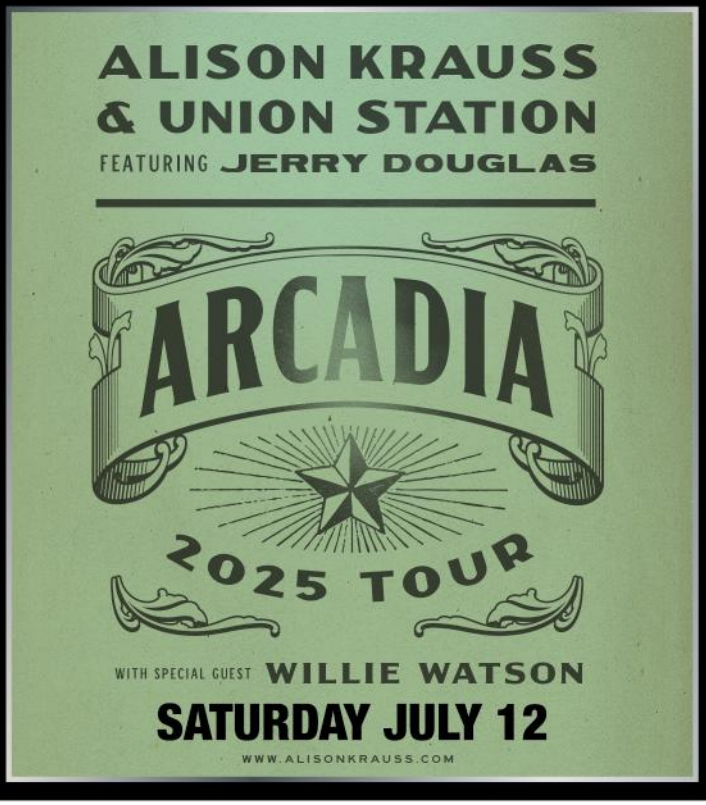
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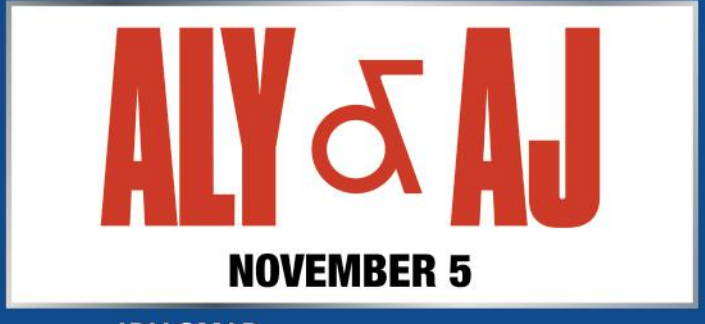
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PRIDE LIVE! HOLLYWOOD IS A BOLD NEW CELEBRATION OF LGBTQ+ CULTURE

This June, Hollywood will transform into a vibrant stage for LGBTQ+ Pride with the launch of **Pride LIVE! Hollywood**, a monthlong celebration of queer creativity, history and culture. Organized by the creators of Infinity Festival in partnership with The Hollywood Partnership and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, this inaugural event anticipates becoming a landmark addition to the Pride calendar, running from **Wednesday, June 11** to **Sunday, June 29**.

"Pride LIVE! Hollywood isn't just a festival, it's a movement," co-programmers **Jim Colucci** and **Frank DeCaro** said. "From comedy to culture, disco balls to discussion panels, this is where the past, present and future of LGBTQ+ pop culture meet."

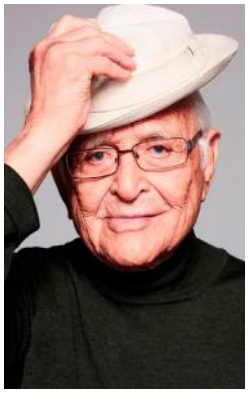
With Hollywood as its stage, the event will feature an impressive lineup of **screenings, tributes, performances, literary talks and interactive experiences.** Highlights will include an **opening night tribute to Norman Lear**, celebrating his groundbreaking work in LGBTQ+ representation on TV. Fans of ***The Golden Girls*** and ***Queer as Folk*** will rejoice with anniversary salutes featuring cast reunions and behind-the-scenes insights.

The film slate will be equally rich, showcasing LGBTQ+ storytelling from classic to contemporary. One standout will be the **Los Angeles premiere of *Where the Bears Are: The Documentary*,** a moving and humorous look at three gay creatives who self-produced their now-iconic web series. The **disco-themed screenings** of *Saturday Night Fever* and *Can't Stop the Music*, complete with dance parties and celebrity panels, will promise nostalgia and fun.

Literary voices will take center stage in the **Queer Authors Roundtable**, with appearances including Bruce Vilanch, Curtis Chin and Rasheed Newson. **Amoeba Music** and other iconic Hollywood venues will host concerts, parties and interactive panels that will explore the intersection of queerness and pop culture.

"This festival reflects the energy and diversity that make the district so vibrant today," said **Kathleen Rawson**, CEO of The Hollywood Partnership. "Pride LIVE! honors both Hollywood's legacy as an entertainment capital and its rich LGBTQ+ history."

With its thoughtful programming and celebratory spirit, Pride LIVE! Hollywood aims to reclaim Hollywood's role as a cultural epicenter — not just for film and television, but for the LGBTQ+ stories that have helped shape them. **pridelivehollywood.com**









PRIDE ON THE ROOFTOP: SAN DIEGO'S SKY-HIGH CELEBRATION OF QUEER CINEMA

Celebrate Pride Month in style, under the stars and above the city at **Rooftop Cinema Club Embarcadero**, nestled on the rooftop of the Manchester Grand Hyatt in downtown San Diego. During June, the city's most iconic open-air movie experience will be rolling out a glittery, popcorn-filled carpet for a fabulous lineup of LGBTQ favorites and cult classics.

The Pride Month screenings are set to deliver an abundance of queer joy. Highlights include ***To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar***, ***Burlesque***, ***Jennifer's Body***, ***Challengers*** and a mini marathon of ***RuPaul's Drag Race***.

And it's not just about the movies. Arrive early to soak in sweeping skyline views, play lawn games, vibe to great music and grab classic concessions. Dress up, bring your crew and get ready to cheer, sing and quote your favorite lines, all while celebrating what makes our community shine.

As a cherry on top, **15% of tickets sold from select screenings will be donated to San Diego Pride**. So yes, watching some of your favorite flicks can officially be considered activism.

This month, let's take the party to the rooftop. Because love, like cinema, is best shared loud and proud. **rooftopcinemaclub.com**



DISNEYLAND AFTER DARK: PRIDE NITE

Returning to Disneyland Park on **Monday, June 16** and **Wednesday, June 18**! This vibrant after-hours event celebrates the queer community and allies with dazzling entertainment, themed photo ops and specialty treats. Dance the night away at the **Ohana Dance Party** in Tomorrowland Terrace or the **Pride Nite Dance Club** along the Rivers of America. Don't miss the **Pride Nite Cavalcade** featuring Mickey, Minnie and friends in rainbow-inspired outfits, and cap off the evening with the spectacular "WELCOME!" fireworks show. With shorter wait times for select attractions and unlimited **Disney PhotoPass** digital photo downloads, it's a night of magic and inclusivity you won't want to miss. **disneyland.disney.go.com**

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THE TEA DANCE

GENTEEL ENGLISH TRADITION TURNED LGBTQ+ PRIDE STAPLE

"What exactly does that mean, *tea* dance?" a friend asked me one Sunday as we strolled past The Rail, San Diego's oldest gay bar nestled in the heart of its LGBTQ+ Cultural District. "Is it tea like *gossip* or tea like [*covers one nostril and inhales sharply*]," I couldn't quite hear him over the Kylie Minogue remix blaring well past the club's walls at that moment, but I knew what he was asking. A peak through the window revealed a picturesque queer tableau — scantily clad bodies, icy cocktails in hand, smiles from ear to ear, all coming together on a sweat-covered dance floor. "Sorry girl," I replied. "It's actually the Celestial Seasonings kind."

That wasn't a euphemism. The tea dance as we know it today originated from a refined type of 1800s singles mixer that was popular with the upper class in pre-WWI England. While it achieved the vibes of an early evening happy hour, a tea dance would typically take place on a Sunday afternoon with no alcohol. The "tea" was *actual* tea, which, coupled with the daylight hours, made for a more "proper" and "respectable" singles gathering. The chances of debaucherous, pearl-clutching behavior in this environment were slim.



Cut to the 1960s — gay bars were frequently being raided, and public displays of affection were increasingly criminalized. LGBTQ+ individuals had to outsmart the system in order to continue connecting. It was in this climate that the modern American tea dance was born. Gay men in the New York area began to hold tea dances, modeled after the English, just outside the city. There was no better place for this than Fire Island, a nearby resort destination now synonymous with queer summer-party life.

Taking place on a Sunday afternoon, these tea dances were considered less conspicuous than nightclub parties and were sometimes framed as fundraisers or private social clubs in order to evade scrutiny by law enforcement and other suspicious outsiders. The caveat was that gay men were still barred from dancing together by law. The solution? Choreographed group dancing. Line dances like the Hully Gully and the Madison allowed men to dance together as long as there was at least one woman involved (thanks, diva). It became all the rage at places like The Blue Whale, Fire Island's premier tea dance destination that is still in operation today. The ingenuity of the tea dance was in its quiet resistance as LGBTQ+ individuals adapted their activities to keep their community's vibrant expression alive.

The Stonewall Riots in 1969 marked a turning point in LGBTQ+ history, and with the emergence of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s, tea dances flourished. Disco music on an open-air dance floor in an atmosphere of carefree joy was the peak of anyone's week. Even better, since tea dances were held on Sunday afternoons, you could enjoy a full day of dancing and still be home by sunset — rested and ready for work on Monday.

During the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, the tea dance continued as a vital social event, serving as a space for both resilience and remembrance. It provided emotional release and a sense of normalcy amid constant grief and loss. Fundraisers were sometimes incorporated into a tea dance, blending celebration with activism and community support. Music and dancing offered brief reprieve from devastation, reinforcing a sense of solidarity within the community.

Today, the tea dance continues to be a cherished and enduring ritual in LGBTQ+ culture. Steeped in nostalgia, the tea dance has its roots in quiet resistance and perseverance through hard times and has evolved into a joyful expression of identity and community. What began as a coded way for queer people to gather safely under harsh laws has transformed into a celebrated ritual. Its hallmarks as an unabashed, out-in-the-open queer celebration find the most meaning during Pride, when we remind ourselves and others that we refuse to hide who we are or be afraid to love who we love.

While the form of the tea dance has shifted through the decades, what has remained constant is the ideals at its core: joy, togetherness, and freedom. It is a living symbol of queer endurance — a dance floor where history, identity and celebration meet every Sunday afternoon.

Hanz Enyeart is a queer Jewish educator and storyteller living in Hillcrest in San Diego, California.



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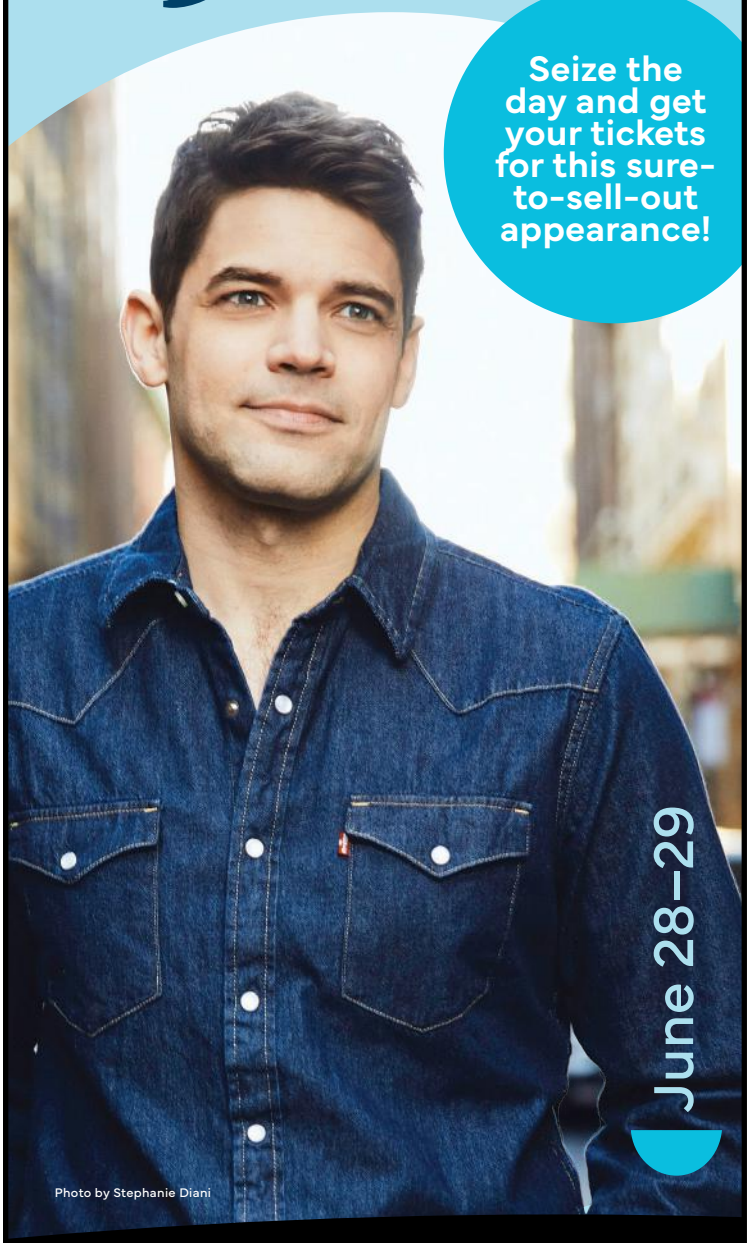
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SUMMER MOVIE FULL RELEASE

This summer marks what became a Hollywood trend thereafter: the summer blockbuster. On June 20, 1975, audiences found out why it wasn't safe to go into the water with the release of Steven Spielberg's ***Jaws***, and it ended up being boffo box-office making $260,002,562 during its original run.

What the great white shark movie left in its wake was why it was good to go into the cinema to see popcorn movies designed to get butts in seats worldwide with fare such as ***E.T.***, ***Jurassic Park*** — damn Spielberg, give someone else a chance — and ***Star Wars***. Later day audiences — no, not Mormons, they are Latter-day Saints — were treated to any number of superhero flicks, remakes and sequels abound.

And 50 years on, since that people-eating shark's reign of terror on the big screen, there have even been a few LGBTQ+ flicks swimming in the movie waters. ***Call Me by Your Name*** and ***Moonlight*** are recent examples of ones that have taken their own bite at the summer box office. Be careful with them teeth!

How will this year stack up against the plethora of remakes and the like? And will LGBTQ+ characters and actors sink or swim, in terms of screen time, this summer? Well, let's take a deep dive into what the next three months hold in store. OK, that's enough water analogies! I was drowning in them! Dammit!

DO IT FOR ME ONE MORE TIME



So far, we've seen two stars from *The Outsiders* face off for box-office supremacy. **Tom Cruise** has let the self-destruct message tick down as his time as Ethan Hunt with his recent, and final, turn in ***Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning***. On the flip side of that coin, **Ralph Macchio** resurrects his Daniel LaRusso character for the big screen for the first time since 1989, after the Netflix show ***Cobra Kai*** has proven to be popular. Out now ***From the World of John Wick: Ballerina*** comes from the world of *John Wick* — it's right there in the title! — and I am here for it, henny. One, I love the series from which it sprang. Two, I've mentioned it many times before, but it bears repeating: I love a movie featuring a chick who kicks ass. And **Ana de Armas** fits that bill as a female assassin out for revenge, and she gets an assist from **Keanu Reeves**, as this film is set between the events of the third and fourth installments of the venerable action franchise. IYKYK. June 6



It's with a bit of trepidation that I "might" see ***Jurassic World Rebirth*** because the last one, *Jurassic World Dominion* sucked and not in a good way in wasting its legacy cast of Sam Neill, Laura Dern and Jeff Goldblum. The one before it, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, wasn't that great either. This time around, **Scarlett Johansson** leads a mission to the original island that has a research facility that contains DNA material that can prove beneficial to humans. Along for the adventure is *Wicked* star **Jonathan Bailey**, who needs to watch out for those pterodactyls. He'd be defying gravity if one picks him up. July 2

I'm still bitter that Henry Cavill won't be returning as the Man of Steel, boooooo! **David Corenswet** dons the red cape in the creatively titled ***Superman***. Thankfully, the movie won't be another origin story about the superhero, with the focus being on Clark Kent and Lois Lane with *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* herself, **Rachel Brosnahan**, playing the intrepid reporter. The upswing for me is that Jesse Eisenberg won't be returning as Lex Luthor — he was aw-ful! — and **Nicholas Hoult** will give his take on the evil mastermind. Plus, we finally get a big screen version of **Krypto the Superdog**, and it's directed by **James Gunn** of *Guardians of the Galaxy* fame. July 11



Probably the biggest cinematic question of the summer is: Will the third time be the charm for ***The Fantastic Four***, after less-than-stellar previous attempts on film? It certainly doesn't hurt that **Pedro Pascal** will lead the quartet as Richard Reed/Mister Fantastic who can stretch his body into many different positions – the mind reels! *The Bear* star **Ebon Moss-Bachrach** portrays Ben Grimm/The Thing, *Mission Impossible* alum **Vanessa Kirby** is The Invisible Woman/Sue Storm, and *Stranger Things* hottie **Joseph Quinn** plays her brother Johnny Storm/The Human Torch. Flame on indeed! The trailer has a very kitschy vibe, which is perfect for its 1960s setting that pays homage to when Marvel's First Family was introduced in comic books circa 1961. July 25

I'm so on the fence about ***The Naked Gun*** reboot that there's a splinter factor. On one hand, I don't see a need for it to happen, especially with star **Liam Neeson**, who doesn't really have any comedy street cred.

But neither did Leslie Nielsen prior to ***Airplane***. Surely you remember that he was known for his dramatic work before he was Lt. Frank Drebin of *Police Squad!* You don't? Well, now you do. And don't call me Shirley! Anyhoo, Neeson plays the son of Drebin and looks game to be goofy in the trailer. So, we shall see. August 1

Get your score card out for ***Freakier Friday***. **Jamie Lee Curtis** returns as Tess Coleman, **Lindsay Lohan** reprises her role as Anna Coleman, two new characters are introduced, **Julia Butters** as Harper Coleman, who is Anna's daughter, and **Sophia Hammons** as Lily Davies, who is Anna's soon-to-be-stepdaughter. Tess ends up body swapping in Lily's body, Anna swaps with Harper's, Harper winds up in Anna's, with Lily in Tess'. I have a headache! August 8

1989's *The War of the Roses* gets the re-imagining treatment with ***The Roses***, but one thing remains the same: Their divorce will be a battlefield. The couple is played by **Benedict Cumberbatch** and **Olivia Colman** this time around and will be more based on the 1981 novel than the previous film with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner. I have to say that it does look funny and features openly gay actors **Ncuti Gatwa** and **Kate McKinnon**. August 29



EQUAL PARTS COMEDY AND HEARTBREAK

Director **Wes Anderson's *The Phoenician Scheme*** has, gulp, an original premise with **Benicio del Toro** as a father who appoints his nun daughter, **Mia Threapleton**, as the sole heir to his fortune, which leads to her becoming the target of assassins and the like! Ay, Dios mio! **Michael Cera**, **Tom Hanks**, **Bryan Cranston**, **Jeffrey Wright**, **Scarlett Johansson** and **Benedict Cumberbatch** co-star. Out now

Stephen King is more recognized for his "there's something hiding under the bed" novels, but he has also penned *The Shawshank Redemption*. ***The Life of Chuck*** takes a page from that playbook, which I think is a sports term. **Tom Hiddleston** embodies the man who has three distinct chapters of his life chronicled in what is being touted as the feel-good movie of the summer. It is directed by **Mike Flanagan**, who helmed the underrated *The Shining* sequel, *Doctor Sleep*. June 6



Dakota Johnson may be living in the material world of New York City, but that doesn't mean that she's a material girl. Still, she has herself a classic rom-com dilemma in ***Materialists***. As a professional matchmaker, she finds her own love life torn between feelings for her ex, **Chris Evans**, and her current flame, **Pedro Pascal**. Damn, what a conundrum. I can take one, or both, off your hands there, Dakota! June 13

Who hasn't been to a wedding that is taken hostage by mercenaries — am I riiiight? Well, that's the premise behind ***Bride Hard*** — see what they did there? However, **Rebel Wilson** has an ace in the hole as the maid of honor, who is also a secret agent. June 20

Everything's Going to be Great is the mantra of the Smart family, led by **Bryan Cranston** and **Allison Janney**, in helping their offspring, and themselves, find their place in the world. Aww, I think I had an emotion about that. Oh wait, it passed. June 20

BE SCURRED, BE VERY SCURRED



Judging by the trailer for ***Bring Her Back***, you might think you're straight trippin' boo, as it is just that, a trip, and involves a brother and sister witnessing a ritual at their new foster mom's house. Um, run kids! Out now

The Ritual stars **Al Pacino** as an exorcist and is based on the true story of the possession of Emma Schmidt, one of the most documented exorcism events in American history, except for the movie *The Exorcist*, of course. June 6

28 Years Later details the doings of a zombie apocalypse in the third film of the horror franchise, with original director **Danny Boyle** back behind the camera and stars **Aaron Taylor-Johnson**, **Jodie Comer** and **Ralph Fiennes** in front of it. Survivors of the rage virus have holed up on an island with one entry point in or out, and someone decides it's a good idea to venture out and bring back a present for everyone else — a mutation to the original virus. Surprise! June 20



She's baaaaaack and this time she ain't alone! ***M3GAN 2.0*** is resurrected and up against a new foe, Amelia, who is a military-grade weapon/ infiltration spy. Somehow, I sense a dance off will be involved. **Allison Williams** and **Violet McGraw** return to try to thwart the AI danger. June 27

So much time has elapsed since the first ***I Know What You Did Last Summer*** that this new iteration with the same title should be called *Gurl! Are You Still Going on About That Summer 28 Years Ago?* **Jennifer Love Hewitt** and **Freddie Prinze Jr.** return from the first two movies in the slasher franchise. Much like the original, and stop me if you've heard this one before, a group of friends are involved in a car accident that has repercussions a year later. As Meryl Streep said in *The Devil Wears Prada*, "groundbreaking." July 18

Weapons is a new fright flick starring **Josh Brolin** — it was set to star **Pedro Pascal** before he dropped out cuz he's bizzy, and I am not mad about it. Like. What. Soever. Brolin has daddy vibes to spare. The movie sounds intriguing on paper in its telling of all but one child disappearing one night, while his classmates don't share the same fate, leaving a town, including their teacher **Julia Garner**, to unravel the mystery of what happened to them. August 8

WOULD YOU LIKE GAY ON YOUR POPCORN?



In ***Things Like This***, a struggling writer Max Talisman meets Joey Pollari, a talent agent assistant who is in a stagnant relationship. And their meeting seems fated, as they discover they have a shared past. Ooh drama! Out now

I Don't Understand You is a horror comedy starring **Andrew Rannells** and **Nick Kroll**, who are a couple about to adopt a baby. To celebrate, they travel to Italy to celebrate both impending fatherhood and their anniversary. However, the language barrier causes a series of nightmarish events! Sounds like somebody should have used Rosetta Stone! June 6



Hot Milk is described as a "lesbian psychological drama," which sees **Emma Mackey**'s Sofia, who travels to the Spanish coast with her domineering and ailing mother **Fiona Hughes**. However, she meets an alluring traveler, **Vicky Krieps**' Ingrid, who causes her to question her sexuality. And the answer is they aren't attending a clam bake party at the beach. It's a room service type of sitch. Nudge, wink. June 27

Ponyboi has a strong cast, including **Murray Bartlett**, **Indya Moore** and **Victoria Pedretti**. **River Gallo** is the main character, an intersex sex worker who tries to stay gold — c'mon, you had to see that one coming — amid being pursued by the mob when a drug deal goes wrong! June 27

WATCH OUT!



But there are a few other community-based offerings coming to a streamer near you! Well, on Netflix and HBO Max to be specific.

Fear Street: Prom Queen represents with its plot involving the IT Girls, vying to be crowned Prom Queen in 1988. An earlier entry, *Fear Street: Part One*, featured a lesbian romance between lead characters played by **Kiana Madeira** and **Olivia Scott Welch**. So, the chance for more LGBTQ+ characters could be a thing, according to writer/director Matt Palmer "many of the challenges that '80s kids faced still seem to totally resonate today." Totes. Out now

Charlize Theron is back heading Netflix's ***The Old Guard 2*** and it will be interesting to see if the first movie's queer trajectory will show that everything old is new again. The first time around, there was a love story between **Marwan Kenzari** and **Luca Marinelli**'s immortal characters. But Theron also had a romance with the latter and it was implied she was bisexual because of her mourning of the character played by **Van Veronica Ngo**. July 2



If your attention span is limited, you have a few options from returning series and a promising sounding new one. Netflix's ***Too Much*** stars bisexual comedian **Meg Statler**, who plays Kayla on ***Hacks***, and co-stars aforementioned out actor **Rannells**. It comes to us from **Lena Dunham**, and centers on New Yorker Jessica, who does a geographic after a bitter breakup by moving to London. July 10

Hmm, that sounds like something that **Carrie Bradshaw** may contend with on HBO Max's ***And Just Like That...*** But that remains to be seen, literally, as plot details for the spinoff's third season are being kept under wraps, save for a few gay crumbs.

Mario Cantone's new love interest **Sebastiano Pigazzi** and **Dolly Wells**, who is **Cynthia Nixon**'s new flame, have been brought on as series regulars, which makes room for the exit of Miranda's former one, **Sara Ramirez** as Che, and **Karen Pittman**, who played her professor, Dr. Nya Wallace. Also not returning is Mr. Big, because they killed him off in Season 1. Oh, spoiler. Out now

The second season of Netflix's ***Wednesday*** brings a dark little rain cloud to azure summer skies; its gothic nature raining down, a respite for the dog days of the last month of the season associated with warmth. OK, enough waxing poetic.

This year, the Addams Family will join **Jenna Ortega** at Nevermore Academy, including **Isaac Ordonez** as Pugsley and, gay gasp, **Joanna Lumley** as Grandmama! Look for the former Uncle Fester in the movies, **Christopher Lloyd**, to come aboard as Professor Orloff, a teacher at Nevermore Academy, which will be the locale for another mystery! And hopefully another dance number! Part 1 of Season 2 debuts on Aug. 6, followed by Part Two on Sept. 3.



HBO Max brings back ***Peacemaker***, and more importantly, the chance to see star **John Cena** in his tighty whiteys. According to the show's logline the plot will revolve around, "the vigilante Superhero as he struggles to reconcile his past with his newfound sense of purpose, while continuing to kick righteous evil-doer butt in his misguided quest for peace at any cost." They forgot to add that he might do this in his tighty whiteys! Shiny object! August 21

CUT. PRINT. THAT'S A WRAP!

Welp, there you have it, a preview of ways to entertain yourself in the dark. And you can go to the movies, too! Will any of these films have the longevity that Bruce the shark has enjoyed? Only time, and box-office receipts, will tell. Until next time, that's all the news that's fit to print.

Tim Parks is a freelance and columnist, and has been part of Team Rage since 2009. He is the award-winning author of *The Scheme of Things* and *The Best Laid Plans,* available on amazon.com.

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Queer Reels, Real Feels

PRIDE MONTH'S MUST-WATCH LINEUP

MIDNIGHT IN PHOENIX

Acclaimed LGBTQ+ filmmaker **Anthony Bawn** returns with *Midnight in Phoenix*, a powerful drama-musical that fuses romance, danger and identity into one unforgettable ride. Premiering late last month via Breaking Glass Pictures, the film follows Levi, a fierce, charismatic drag queen, and Ezra, the mysterious man who captures her heart. But what begins as a whirlwind romance quickly spirals into chaos when a robbery gone wrong turns the pair into accidental fugitives.

Starring **Dueal Andrews** as Levi (and her drag alter ego, Jax Diamonds), alongside **Richardson Pierre**, **Brentley Willis**, **Lydia Corbin** and **Tyree Ballard**, *Midnight in Phoenix* is a bold blend of musical spectacle and raw emotional depth. From glamorous performances to pulse-pounding twists, it is a story of love under fire and finding strength in your truth.

Breaking Glass Pictures CEO **Rich Wolff** calls the film "a celebration of self-discovery and the strength found in community," praising Bawn's ability to balance heart, humor and high-stakes storytelling. As Levi and Ezra race through a series of wild misadventures, their growing bond reminds us that sometimes the most powerful escape is stepping fully into who you are.

Bawn, known for *Emo Valley* and *Bonded*, once again centers queer voices in stories that challenge and inspire: "Rich Wolff and Breaking Glass Pictures have allowed me, as a filmmaker, the space to express my stories in a way I can only see fit! Rich has encouraged me to do whatever 'within means' lol, which makes the partnership just that great!"





A NICE INDIAN BOY

Move over, heteronormative love stories, *A Nice Indian Boy* is everything a queer rom-com should be: heartfelt, hilarious and genuinely groundbreaking. After a successful limited run, the film — now 2025's top-grossing English-language queer release — is available to rent or buy.

Directed by **Roshan Sethi**, the movie stars **Karan Soni** and **Jonathan Groff** as two men navigating love, identity and family in a world that still struggles with the in-between. Soni plays Naveen, a reserved Indian American doctor who falls for Jay (Groff), a white man adopted by Indian parents. Their relationship is sweet and sincere, but introducing Jay to Naveen's conservative family proves more complicated than expected.

What sets this film apart is its refusal to rely on trauma or stereotypes. Instead, it explores the joy, awkwardness and complexity of queer love, especially when interwoven with cultural expectations. It's a celebration of messy families, chosen ones and the dream of a big, bold Indian wedding.

Funny, moving and deeply relatable, *A Nice Indian Boy* isn't just representation, it's resonance. It's the kind of queer love story we could all use more of.

LAVENDER MEN

The bold and genre-defying film *Lavender Men*, directed by **Lovell Holder** and co-written with **Roger Q. Mason**, will arrive nationwide on digital on **Tuesday, June 17**. After a successful theatrical run and festival acclaim, it's now set to reach a wider audience via streaming.

This inventive and emotionally charged story follows Taffeta, a lonely, nonbinary stage manager stuck in the shadows of a lackluster play about Abraham Lincoln. Nursing a one-sided crush on the director and grappling with invisibility, Taffeta's breaking point launches them into a richly queer fantasia — one that reimagines Lincoln's legacy through a secret romance with his clerk, Elmer Ellsworth.

In a wildly theatrical and deeply personal journey, Taffeta plays every role — from a dancing chandelier to Mary Todd Lincoln — as they reclaim their own story from the margins.

As fantasy unravels and reality sets back in, *Lavender Men* delivers a powerful meditation on self-authorship: What happens when we stop living in others' stories and begin to tell our own?



RENT FREE

Celebrated film *Rent Free* by writer/director **Fernando Andrés** will be released this June in honor of Pride Month. Cinephobia Releasing has secured the rights to the movie through negotiations led by Cinephobia president **Raymond Murray** and **Ryan Kampe**, president of Visit Films. *Rent Free* will be available on VOD and digital platforms starting **Friday, June 27**.

"Fernando Andrés expertly crafts an endearing tale of two men just trying to find their way in the world," Murray said. "Between its stylistic charm, intriguing characters, and fresh look at young adulthood, this film is sure to make an impact. We're excited to bring Andrés's latest vision to North American screens."

In his sophomore feature, Andrés introduces best friends Ben and Jordan. Facing emotional and financial struggles, they devise a plan to live a year without paying rent, relying on the support of friends, family and strangers in the ever-evolving city of Austin, Texas.

"I'm thrilled for *Rent Free* to find its audience beyond the festival world, both in theaters and online," Andrés said. "It's a privilege to work with a distributor like Cinephobia, one that champions true independent cinema in an American market that — despite a growing culture of adventurous young cinephiles — is offering fewer and fewer opportunities for low-budget productions and queer stories to be seen."

Rent Free stars **Jacob Roberts**, **David Treviño**, **Zeke Goodman** (Amazon's *Cruel Intentions*), **Sarah J. Bartholomew** (*The Chosen*) and **Temple Baker** (*Everybody Wants Some!!*).

The film had its world premiere at the 2024 Tribeca Film Festival in the US Narrative Competition, where it received critical acclaim and two encore screenings. It has since screened at major festivals worldwide, including BFI Flare London, Frameline San Francisco, New Orleans Film Festival and São Paulo International Film Festival.





KNOCK OUT BLONDE: THE KELLIE MALONEY STORY



Knock Out Blonde: The Kellie Maloney Story is a compelling documentary that chronicles the life of **Kellie Maloney**, the renowned British boxing promoter who once managed heavyweight champion **Lennox Lewis**. Beyond her professional legacy, the film intimately explores Maloney's personal journey of self-discovery and acceptance as a transgender woman.

After decades in the hyper-masculine world of boxing, Maloney came out in 2014, choosing to live openly as her authentic self. Her story is one of resilience — confronting personal and societal expectations while navigating the reactions of family, the boxing community and the public.

Directed by **Tom DeNucci**, **Seth Koch** and **Rick Lazes**, the film combines candid interviews with archival footage to chart Maloney's evolution from childhood to her very public transition. At its core, it's a story about identity, courage and living life unapologetically. *Knock Out Blonde* is now available on VOD in North America via Apple TV, Fandango at Home and Prime Video.

MAXXIE LAWOW: DRAG SUPER-SHERO

Suit up, glam up and prepare to meet the world's first animated drag queen superhero. *Maxxie LaWow: Drag Super-Shero* will debut on TVOD platforms including Amazon, iTunes, Google and Dish on **Tuesday, June 17**.

Created and directed by **Anthony Hand**, the film is a fabulous blend of drag artistry, pop music and superhero flair, following the journey of Simon, a shy barista who discovers a magical wig that transforms him into Maxxie LaWow, a bold, bedazzled champion for justice.

As Maxxie, Simon must face off against the villainous Dyna Bolical, a fellow drag queen and rogue scientist with a devious beauty-based scheme. Alongside the laughs and lip-syncs, the film delivers a heartfelt message about self-love, empowerment and the strength of chosen family.



The voice cast features some of drag's biggest names, including **Jinkx Monsoon**, **BenDeLaCrème**, **Monét X Change** and **Rosé**. Newcomer **Grant Hodges** voices both Simon and Maxxie. **Terren Wooten Clarke** brings flair and menace to the role of Dyna Bolical, making the showdown as entertaining as it is empowering.

With four original songs, stunning animation and over-the-top style, *Maxxie LaWow* has been winning hearts on the festival circuit. It has picked up multiple awards, including Best Animation at the San Francisco Independent Film Festival.

"In a time when LGBTQ+ stories are being challenged, we need heroes like Maxxie more than ever," Hand said. "This film is about stepping into your truth — with heels on and head held high."


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OVERCOMPENSATING AND OVERFLOWING: BENITO SKINNER'S BOLDEST ROLE YET

THE INTERNET SENSATION BARES ALL (LITERALLY AND EMOTIONALLY) IN HIS DEEPLY PERSONAL, LAUGH-OUT-LOUD PRIME VIDEO DEBUT



Out comedian, actor, online celebrity Benito Skinner may be best known for his online persona, Benny Drama. But, it's time to ditch the personal "Benny" as Skinner debuts his new Prime Video series, *Overcompensating*. This semi-autobiographical saga premiered on the streamer on May 15 and all episodes are now available.

***Overcompensating* is a college-set ensemble comedy about the chaotic journey of Benny (played by Skinner), a closeted former football player and homecoming king. He becomes fast friends with Carmen (Wally Baram), a high-school outsider on a mission to fit in at all costs. With guidance from Benny's older sister and her campus-legend boyfriend, Benny and Carmen juggle horrible hookups, flavored vodka and fake IDs. The show explores the lengths to which we can all overcompensate as LGBTQ+ individuals while we're on the path to finding out who we really are.**

Skinner did indeed play football at Bishop Kelly High School in Boise, Idaho. He then attended Georgetown University and studied acting as well as film and media studies. He subsequently found success creating celebrity impression videos on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, plus his pop culture podcasts Obsessed and Ride.

Skinner recently spoke with *The RAGE Monthly* via Zoom about his first streaming series. Some questions and responses have been edited for length and/or clarity.

Hi, Benito, or do you prefer Benny?

Hi! Benito is great. I think if it gets into Benny, then it's like, when I talk about my character, it makes me seem like I'm a crazy person. So it's like "Are you good?" (*laugh*) So Benito is great.

Congrats on the show. It's very funny and sexy in spots, but it really shines, I think, in the more serious or heartfelt moments during the course of the show. I'm sure this is the question everybody's asking, but how factual or autobiographical is it?

It's so hard to say. All of the moments of gay awakening and the coming-out experience, I think, are as honest as possible. You know, we went there. It really was *George of the Jungle*, and it really was falling in love with someone who couldn't love me back. I tried to stay as sharp to it as possible.

But, you know, I love character. And so once I thought about these relationships, the relationships I had with a woman in college who changed my life, and my sister. I liked the "spy" being there in the form of the sister who kind of knew you in your past life. But my sister and I have never fought. We literally get along beautifully. She encouraged me to go to the same college as her. So there are things like that where then you make a TV show and you build character, and I loved that aspect of it and I could do that forever. It's so about why all of these different characters are overcompensating. That was like candy to me and to all of us in the writers' room too once we got in there.

You started developing this as a one-man show, is that right? And did you think like "Oh, this is going to be a streaming series one day?" How did it all kind of develop and come about?

Yeah. I wish that I had been like "this is going to be on a streamer one day." (*laugh*) It's funny, I was making sketches and Caroline's on Broadway was like, "Do you have a show? We have the New York Comedy Festival coming up, and your sketches are hitting on the Internet." And I was like, "Well, of course, I have a show." I just needed to pay rent, and I knew that I could pay rent with that check. So I was like, "Well, yeah, I'll make a show."

The show immediately was these stories of me being in the closet, in college and in high school. While going out on the road — I toured it throughout the US and in London — I was just like this is hitting with audiences, and feels so cathartic for me, and it feels like people are latching on to these stories and they're seeing themselves in it, even if they aren't gay. And then I had made a sketch, I think it was like *A Kardashian Christmas* or something, and my agent called me. He's like "these sketches are feeling episodic; have you thought about writing a script?" And I was like "I have; I just can't call myself a writer because, you know, they'll come and get me." (*laugh*) I was just like "I could never." The first scene I wrote was the pregame scene with Benny, Carmen and Haley and, honestly, so many of the jokes remain the same. It just felt like, "If I'm thinking about this idea of overcompensating at the time when I stopped overcompensating so much, that is when I met my best friend in college." And what a perfect, I think, world and tapestry to pull from, of overcompensation and performative identity and performative sexuality. That was to me just like candy, and then we were off to the races.

I read online that some of your early comedic inspirations were Robin Williams in *Mrs. Doubtfire* and (the animated character) *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

Of course. Yes. The greats. (*laugh*)

Who were some of your early gay or LGBTQ+ role models or inspirations?

You know, I was thinking about this. Rupert Everett and *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) was maybe the first time I saw myself, in a way. I remember watching the brunch scene where he sings "Say a Little Prayer," and I was like, that's me and my family saying, "Oh, this is so Benny." I remember being like "God, OK; well, don't say it too loud." And the fact that he ends up with Julia Roberts in that really stuck with me, and I feel like that was just my brain clicked a little bit. It was like, "Oh, that's interesting." So it would just be little things like that. But I think he's so brilliant. And so I think that performance stands as this first time I really saw myself, in a way, and by a gay man, yeah.

It's interesting you mentioned him because you actually kind of look like young Rupert Everett, especially when you turn your head and I see your profile.





(*He's pleasantly surprised.*) Do not do this to me, do not. (*To an assistant.*) Emily, write that down! That's the pull quote. This is, oh my God, I wish! You've made my life! Damn!

Sometimes, if I'm asked this question, I get really sad that I didn't have any other (gay role models). I wasn't seeking it and I grew up in Idaho, so no one was sharing that with me. It was maybe just being stuck in a movie theater and I could kind of see a hint of being gay on screen, and that was kind of my first inkling. And I was so scared of researching more, I think, that I didn't. And I think that's something that I feel fortunate that I got to do now and in my 20s.

I also read that you experienced some bullying and homophobia, and who doesn't when we're coming of age as gay men. But how about now? Given the current political climate in this country, have you gotten any pushback? Or are you concerned about any pushback to *Overcompensating*?

You know, I went to the White House during the Biden administration and made a sketch, and the response from conservatives was so unbelievably vile. I've heard everything at this point so I don't think I would care, to be honest. I was told that I should be put in camps. I was sent photos of guns. They found my parents' numbers and asked them if I had AIDS. I've experienced everything at this point, so if they have anything to say about *Overcompensating,* I don't f--king care. I really don't. I'm like, "Go ahead, you've done it all." And, "Maybe you should watch the show; you'll see some human empathy. I think you could use some; that would be really fantastic." (*laugh*)

Absolutely.

I more worry for the cast, who maybe hasn't been on the Internet in the way that I have and seen these comments, and known that they come from places of hate and boredom and insecurity and, I think, ignorance. I think, honestly, this question serves as maybe a reminder before the show comes out to my cast. They all know in part what they signed up for being in the show and are proud of the message of it, and I feel really lucky for that.

But, yeah, I think I would worry more for someone in my cast to be told one of these things, because those are like my babies now. You know what I mean? I'm like, "Don't talk to my kids like that." But as far as me, I've heard it all and haven't all queer people, unfortunately. The thing that terrifies me the most is thinking that this is the response to me in the White House, and I am a cis, white, gay man, and I at times I can pass. That is what scares me the most for so many others in our community.

I hope you don't get that but I'm glad that you're prepared. It's always good to be prepared. You mentioned your parents and your sister. Are you all still very close? Are they excited for the series and for your career?

Yeah. My sister just saw the first two episodes, which was so bizarre, but her response was she was crying, and it really was like this beautiful moment. My family is super excited. I think my parents are ready to close their eyes every now and then (*due to Skinner's nude scenes*). I prepped them for that. I'm like, right around the 20-minute mark in the pilot. Let's just shut them and enjoy a meditative moment. (*laughs*)

So they're prepped for that. I mean, they've been with me the last eight years of my work, so they've kind of seen it all at this point. But they're very excited and they're having trouble, I think, in the same way I am of wrapping their heads around it existing and coming out, and that it's finally happening. I've been working on this for so long that they were like, "Is he lying?" And now they're like, "Oh, we saw a commercial. This is happening. They're putting it out." They'll be at the premiere, which will be so fun.

Is this intended to be a limited, just kind of one season thing? Or is it open to future seasons?

Oh, I hope not; I need future seasons. Oh, my God! If I ended on that, could you imagine? No, I have four in my head, and I really I hope we get to keep going. I have so many more things I want to say, and more things I want to say about the experience of Benny's experience, but also all the characters I think. These stories are intentionally not finished.

Awesome! Well, that's all my questions. Anything you want to add or say that I didn't ask about?

That was fantastic! It was so nice talking with you.

It was great talking with you! I wish you every success with the show, and I hope it goes on for four more seasons. And stay safe!

Thank you, we will!

Chris Carpenter has been writing about entertainment since 1996 and a member of Team Rage since 2012. He is a founding member and vice president emeritus of GALECA: The Society of LGBTQ Entertainment Critics.

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JUNE 14 | 70'S - TIGHTY WHITIES NIGHT
HAPPY HOUR PRICES FOR WEARING TIGHTY WHITIES

JUNE 21 | 80'S - BOOTY SHORTS NIGHT
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BEE GEES GOLD

SLAYING ALIVE WITH A TRIBUTE BAND

Memories are a collective delusion, tricking us into viewing the past through a blissful, kaleidoscopic prism. As we throw back to turbulent times gone by, our minds cushion the blow with a layer of cozy, cotton-candy haze.

Take, for example, the disco era. Yes, please!

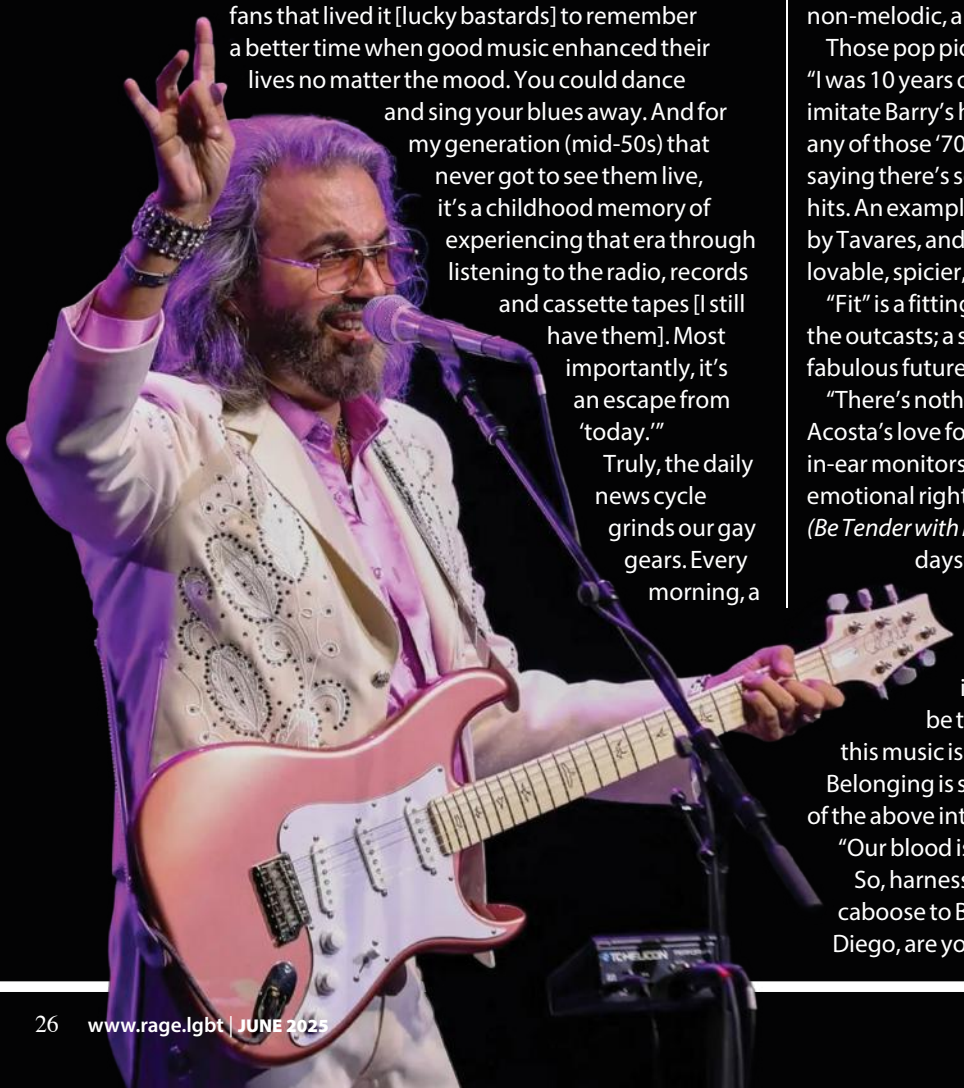
When we retroactively reflect on the 1970s, images of bell-bottom bulges flood our brains. Gleaming glitter balls dangle overhead, sweaty gyrations caress our consciousness, and we are whisked away to a shimmying Shangri-la. Forget the hostage crisis, gas shortages and Watergate scandal: There's dancing afoot!

And nobody helped us transcend the tough times more magnificently than the Bee Gees.

"They truly are some of the greatest songs ever written," said **John Acosta**, frontman for Bee Gees Gold. This triumphant tribute experience will grace the **Balboa Theatre** in San Diego on **Saturday, June 28**. Acosta's mastery of Barry Gibb is so authentic that you'll swear you're in a Saturday night fever dream from which you never want to awake.

Or, as Acosta puts it, "Da Feva' Phenomenon."

Bee Gees Gold has a simple yet sublime mission: "Transporting the fans that lived it [lucky bastards] to remember a better time when good music enhanced their lives no matter the mood. You could dance and sing your blues away. And for my generation (mid-50s) that never got to see them live, it's a childhood memory of experiencing that era through listening to the radio, records and cassette tapes [I still have them]. Most importantly, it's an escape from 'today.'"



Truly, the daily news cycle grinds our gay gears. Every morning, a despotic proclamation targets our community. So, how can we stage a groovy getaway? Acosta has the answer: Lose yourself in next-level nostalgia.

"That music opened those tightly closed doors and so did that magical dance floor with freedom to express yourself — well, until Disco Demolition Day but that's another story."

He's referring to the devastating cultural milestone of July 12, 1979. Dance music had reached peak popularity, ushering in a utopian era of racial, sexual and gender equality. And we couldn't have that, could we? So reactionary demons engineered *Disco Sucks*, a malevolent movement that railed against diversity and inclusion.

Sound familiar?

Major League Baseball held a hate rally at Comiskey Park in Chicago, culminating in the detonation of thousands of disco records, many of them by the Bee Gees. The only "winner" that night was bigotry.

But the beat went on. Dance went underground, much like our LGBTQ+ existence, as we summoned our strength to fight another day.

"If it wasn't for them, who bravely brought this blend of disco, funk, R&B and Latin music to the masses, where would we be? Groove-less, non-melodic, auto-tuned, etc.," Acosta said.

Those pop pioneers inspired an impressionable young John Acosta. "I was 10 years old when I heard the Bee Gees and discovered I could imitate Barry's high falsetto sound," he said. "I'm fully aware any fan from any of those '70s bands could claim the same reaction, but I'll go as far saying there's something extra with the falsettos they used on those hits. An example would be hearing a great song like *More Than a Woman* by Tavares, and then you hear Barry with falsetto and it becomes extra lovable, spicier, add your own adjectives, it still fits."

"Fit" is a fitting phrase. Bee Gees Gold is designed as a celebration of the outcasts; a soiree that spans from our awkward adolescence to our fabulous future.

"There's nothing like it when I witness the touching of their hearts." Acosta's love for the audience is timeless and boundless: "I feel it in my in-ear monitors when singing these classics where I say, 'My god, I'm emotional right now,' when singing *Emotion* or *Love So Right* or *Fanny (Be Tender with My Love)* because I'll be transported to my 'better' radio days as well."

Acosta punctuates his pitch-perfect point: "I know I'm performing it, but I'm a huge fan too."

As he gears up to glam out, the emcee of excess invites fans to liberate their leisure-suit realness: "It will be the most freeing 90-minute feeling of their lives; I mean this music is therapy for every community."

Belonging is sexy, humanity is electrifying, and Acosta orchestrates all of the above into a unifying mantra.

"Our blood is red and we are one, period."

So, harness the happiness of yesteryear and shake your cute caboose to Balboa Theatre because John Acosta wants to know, "San Diego, are you ready for Da Feva'?" **sandiegotheatres.org**

photo by kim lawrence photography

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SEPT 10 - 27, 2025 | 7:30 PM

THE STAGE IS SET FOR A SHOW-STOPPING MONTH



LIFE OF PI

Embark on an unforgettable journey as *Life of Pi*, the Tony and Olivier award-winning theatrical masterpiece, will make its highly anticipated debut at **Segerstrom Center for the Arts** in Costa Mesa. From **Tuesday, June 3** to **Sunday, June 15**, Segerstrom Hall will transform into a mesmerizing oceanic world, bringing Yann Martel's beloved novel to vivid life through groundbreaking puppetry and stunning visuals.

The production follows the extraordinary tale of Pi Patel, a 16-year-old boy stranded at sea after a shipwreck, sharing a lifeboat with a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan and a formidable Bengal tiger named Richard Parker.

Critics have hailed it as "a dazzling marvel of stagecraft" (*Entertainment Weekly*) and "an exhilarating evening of theater" (*The Wall Street Journal*). The production's innovative use of puppetry and stagecraft has captivated audiences worldwide, earning it three Tony Awards in 2023, including Best Scenic Design, Best Sound Design and Best Lighting Design. **scfta.org | 714.556.2787**

THE ANGEL NEXT DOOR

Look for the Los Angeles premiere *of The Angel Next Door*, a wildly witty and deliciously offbeat romantic comedy by **Paul Slade Smith**, the playwright behind last season's International City Theatre hit *The Outsider*. Directed by acclaimed L.A. veteran Cate Caplin, this theatrical romp will run **Friday, June 13** through **Sunday, June 29** at ICT's home in the **Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center**.

At the center of the chaos is Oliver Adams, a young novelist whose big break is just around the corner. His debut novel, *The Angel Next Door*, is being adapted for the stage by none other than Broadway royalty Charlotte and Arthur Sanders. And who's their pick for the leading role? None other than Margot Bell — Oliver's muse, crush and the real-life inspiration behind his book… not that she knows it yet.

When this entire theatrical crew, plus Margot's narcissistic co-star Victor Pratt, gathers for a weekend at a luxurious mansion in Newport, Rhode Island, secrets simmer, egos clash and the truth about Oliver's "angel" threatens to blow the whole production sky-high. Toss in a world-weary maid and the only thing more tangled than the plot is the emotional fallout. But with the magic of theater on their side, anything — even a rewrite of reality — is possible.

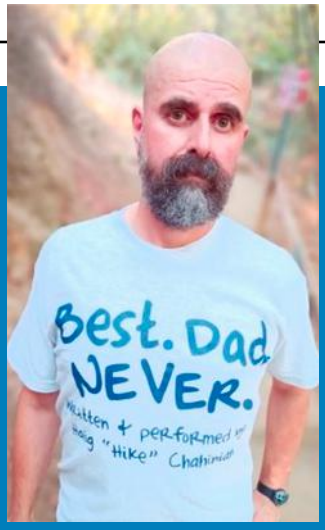
"It's a comedy that's in love with theater," Smith said. "About people in love with theater who, in pursuit of a surefire Broadway hit, might have to give reality a rewrite to arrive at a happy ending."

Inspired by a 1924 drawing-room comedy by Ferenc Molnár, *The Angel Next Door* was originally commissioned by David Ellenstein for North Coast Rep and Laguna Playhouse, premiering in September 2023. Since then, this charming farce has been winning hearts across the country — and now, it's finally landing in L.A. for a laugh-packed run. **ictlongbeach.org | 562.436.4610**



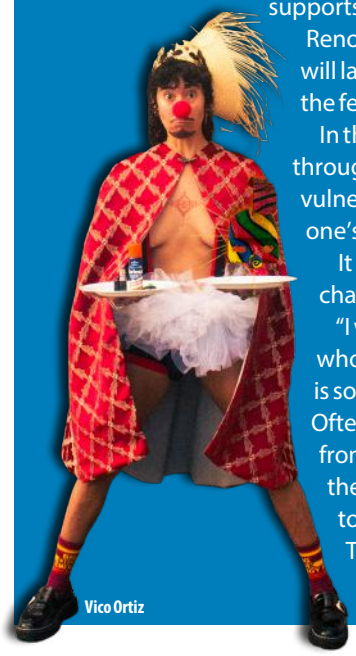
Paul Slade Smith

HOLLYWOOD FRINGE FESTIVAL



The 15th annual Hollywood Fringe Festival will return to Los Angeles in 2025, promising another vibrant celebration of independent and experimental performing arts. The Opening Night Party on **Wednesday, June 11** will set the stage for the main event, which will run from **Thursday, June 12** to **Sunday, June 29,** across various venues in Hollywood Theatre Row and beyond. This open-access, uncurated festival invites artists of all backgrounds to self-produce and present their work, fostering a dynamic environment of creativity and community engagement. With hundreds of performances spanning genres from comedy and drama to dance and immersive experiences, the festival continues to be a cornerstone of Los Angeles's cultural landscape.

This year's festival proudly showcases a rich array of LGBTQ+ themed performances, reflecting the diversity and vibrancy of queer voices in the arts. One of the standout solo performances is ***Best. Dad. NEVER***. It is a heartfelt and humorous exploration of queer fatherhood by writer-performer **Haig Chahinian**. The show follows Haig, a gay Armenian-American man, as he navigates the joys and challenges of raising a biracial Black daughter with his husband, Peter. Through witty storytelling and poignant reflections, Chahinian delves into themes of identity, race and the complexities of modern parenting. Inspired by his essays published in *The New York Times, Cosmopolitan* and *O: The Oprah Magazine*, this solo piece offers a candid look at the intersections of culture, sexuality and fatherhood. The show will be performed on various dates at **Hudson Mainstage Theatre**. Proceeds from the Father's Day show on **Saturday, June 14** will benefit GWK Academy, a nonprofit that educates and supports LGBTQ+ people about all options for family building. **bestdadnever.com**


Vico Ortiz

Renowned nonbinary performer, writer, producer and activist **Vico Ortiz** (*Our Flag Means Death, Fionna* and *Cake*) will launch their impactful solo show, ***Rise of a King***. This eagerly awaited production will have its West Coast debut at the festival on **Thursday, June 12**, **Monday, June 16** and **Wednesday, June 18** at **Greenway Court Theatre**.

In this heartfelt burlesque piece, Ortiz invites audiences on a whimsical, astrological and gender-bending journey through their childhood, employing drag as a means to both untether and re-root themselves. By merging humor, vulnerability and magic, *Rise of a King* offers a touching and comedic narrative about discovering and embracing one's true self while reconnecting with loved ones.

It is also a genre-breaking experience that invites audiences on a transformative and self-reflective journey, challenging traditional notions of masculinity, femininity, queerness and what it means to be your most honest self.

"I wrote this as a love letter to my family and to an older (younger) version of myself," Ortiz said. "I hope that those who see this show can see themselves and honor and celebrate their journey no matter how messy, because there is so much beauty in the messy magic of it all. Our path in life doesn't need to be perfect in order to be celebrated. Oftentimes we wanna jump onto the celebration, which is a totally valid thing to desire, while also running away from the grief that inevitably encompasses it. In this show I hope to integrate and celebrate it all (the joy, the mess, the sexyness, the discovery, the grief) with love, care, curiosity, whimsy and compassion. I would love for everyone to walk out of this show feeling empowered to witness their journey and the journey of others with curiosity. To extend themselves the magic they already have, integrate it and share it far and wide with love and care."

celebrationtheatre.org/king

WAITRESS

Sugar, butter . . . theater magic! The hit Broadway musical *Waitress* will be coming to **Moonlight Stage Productions** from **Wednesday, June 4**, through **Saturday, June 21**, and it's serving up a delicious slice of heart, humor and music under the stars.

Follow Jenna, a small-town waitress and gifted pie-maker, as she bakes her way through life's challenges with the help of her hilarious co-workers, a quirky new romance, and a whole lot of sugar and courage. With a toe-tapping score by Grammy-winner Sara Bareilles, *Waitress* is the feel-good, soul-filling show we need right now.

Set in the breathtaking Moonlight Amphitheatre in Vista, California, the venue is a perfect place to enjoy live theater with a side of sunset. Bring your picnic, kick back in a lawn chair (provided), sip on something refreshing from the bar, and enjoy Broadway-level talent beneath the stars. **moonlightstage.com | 760.724.2110**



MEMORIES WITH BABS



Dear readers, indulge me for a moment as I deviate from the usual monthly format of my Rage Recommends column. Like me, you must have that one singer who serves as a soundtrack to your childhood, or to one summer, or to a road trip adventure. For me, that singer is Barbra Streisand.

In first grade, I would listen to *The Broadway Album* with Uncle Char while driving out to Dudley's Bakery to pick up fresh-baked specialty bread and to get a slice of Julian pie. I can still hear him singing (with hand gestures), "Fish got to swim, birds got to fly. I gotta love one man till I die. Can't help lovin' that man of mine."

In the second-grade talent show, I performed a lip-synch (aka drag) to "Secondhand Rose." It's such a fun tune. Uncle Char and my Mom taught me all my moves and I won the Best Solo Performer award.

How I loved staying overnight at Char's Craftsman-style house in University Heights with the cool Murphy bed, twirling a parasol over my shoulder while singing. I can picture him ironing his jeans while singing "Sam, You Made the Pants Too Long."

Then came "Sadie, Sadie, Married Lady," "I'm the Greatest Star," "Don't Rain on My Parade" and "People" with wooden cooking spoons as microphones, while cleaning the kitchen after Thanksgiving dinner. We loved *Funny Girl*.



In fifth grade, Uncle Char had a new boyfriend, Bill Biss (former *RAGE Monthly* editor, copy editor and columnist). Bill was magical to me, too. He had a love of all music, all things Hollywood glam, estate sales, thrift stores, art, writing and photography. I'll never forget one Sunday, he was making biscuits and gravy for us, and he said that Char and I could each catch a whole biscuit in our mouths. We were, of course, singing along with Bab's.

When Char was nearing the end of his days, I was an eighth-grader. I discovered the powerful beauty of songs like "Being Alive" and "Send in the Clowns." I started researching the songwriters and listening to the cast albums of the shows listed on Streisand's album covers. I fell in love with Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd-Webber. That era also brought about Streisand's second Broadway album. Another instant favorite.

Uncle Char never saw her perform live, but Mom and I did. In 2012, we barely afforded nosebleed bench seats at Hollywood Bowl. Babs looked about the size of an ant on the distant stage. But no complaints. She sounded wonderful. We took along a framed photo of Char. I think we cried through half the show. Bittersweet, tears of joy.

I guess one would call this a love letter, maybe, to Streisand, but more so, to my wonderful uncles. I was so lucky. I still put on the Broadway album when I want to feel connected, safe and blow off steam on hard days. It's like a warm hug.

Honestly, there are so many more Babs songs and memories I haven't mentioned, but all of this really does tie into this June edition of Rage Recommends. Here it goes: Streisand has a new duets album coming out this month! Her latest studio album is titled ***The Secret Of Life: Partners, Volume Two***. The album features iconic artists, including Sir. Paul McCartney, Bob Dylan, James Taylor, Sting, Hozier, Laufey, Sam Smith, Tim McGraw, Josh Groban, Seal and a trio performance with Mariah Carey and Ariana Grande. I can't wait to hear the entire album.

The album will serve as a sequel to her 2014 duets collection, *Partners*. In previewing the song "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" with Hozier, the style reminds me of her at the beginning of "Evergreen." Which means it holds another soft spot in my heart and my left temporal lobe (where song lyrics stay). Happy Pride season and happy summer, everyone.

Barbra Streisand's new album will be available on June 27.

Uncle Char and Lisa singing "Matchmaker" from *Fiddler on the Roof* together circa 1991

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THROUGH THE LENS

DENNIS COVEY'S CREATIVE JOURNEY IN SAN DIEGO AND WITH THE RAGE MONTHLY

I arrived in San Diego 48 years ago to complete my acting degree. Following an internship acting in the Shakespeare Festival at The Old Globe, I decided instead to pursue my passion for photography, which had been my first love since sixth grade.

I began shooting headshots for actors, modeling portfolios for models, and covers and ads for various San Diego gay publications. My work eventually caught the attention of the art director for *International Male* catalogs, leading to a 15-year gig shooting fashion, swimwear, and most importantly, men in underwear. Over the years, I've had the privilege of working with clients such as the American Council on Exercise, Petco, Cox Communications and Coronado Leather, my longest-running client that I still shoot for.

Following *International Male*, I ventured into the Halloween costume industry. I excelled at directing models and creating a fun atmosphere that resulted in captivating marketing images. My work changed how Halloween costumes were presented. At one point, I was shooting for five Halloween costume companies that were wholesale to all of the major retailers. My images graced packaging and catalogs across the Halloween season.

Eighteen years ago, I was approached by art director Cesar Reyes, with whom I had collaborated on other projects, about the possibility of creating covers and fashion/art spreads for a new gay arts and entertainment monthly glossy magazine called *The RAGE Monthly*. This introduction led me to the publishers Jay Jones and Brad Hart. They both share an enthusiasm and passion for photography, which instantly connects any of us in the photography community. Cesar and I had always worked well together, which created an exciting and joyful environment for creative experimentation and artistic expression. Jay and Brad contributed additional creative vision, ideas and concepts, and pitched in as grips and gofers as needed, meshing the entire team into a creative powerhouse. Having these images featured in *The RAGE Monthly* has always been a wonderful balance to my commercial work.

As I bid farewell to San Diego, I reflect on the diverse chapters that have shaped my artistic journey. The magazine will always hold a special place in my heart as some of the most memorable and artistic pieces of imagery I've created. I want to express my extreme gratitude to Jay and Brad for the wonderful creative and personal journey we've shared.

~Dennis Covey



Here are a few of the many cover photos Dennis Covey has produced for *The RAGE Monthly* during the past 18 years.


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HARRAH'S DIVE INN TOWER MAKES A SPLASH

FEATURING MODERN DESIGN AND RESORT INDULGENCES

Harrah's Southern California is one of the most popular resorts and casinos in the region. With 1,600 of the latest and classic slots and 50 table games, the casino floor is a wonder to behold. Harrah's has garnered multiple awards recognizing its philanthropic efforts, its dining venues and its rewards loyalty program. A multitude of amenities include a lazy river, swim-up bar, three outdoor pools and seven Jacuzzis. The Spa at Harrah's is the place to pamper yourself, and the fitness center is state of the art.

ROOMS

From double queens to deluxe kings to ultra-sweet suites, every one of the 1,087 rooms is designed for luxurious relaxation. Last summer, Harrah's completed a $24 million renovation of its Dive Inn Tower, which features 203 guest rooms and suites. The remodel, which began in October 2023, includes modern designs, luxurious finishes and a Southern California beach-inspired aesthetic. The renovation also includes updated amenities like larger TVs, new furniture and unique artwork.

We stayed in the deluxe Surfside Suite. The 987-square-foot Surfside Suite is on the ground floor and comes with a pool view.





Our favorite amenity was, by far, the outdoor hot tub with our own private patio. I spent two hours in the Jacuzzi staring at the stars and felt completely rejuvenated. I also loved the spacious, well-appointed suite, which included a separate bedroom and living room, as well as a workspace for those who must conduct business. They have newly renovated showers with a separate soaker tub and a well-lit bathroom. We truly did not want to leave this spectacular suite, but there was gambling to be had and cuisine to be eaten.

CUISINE

Because we had an early check-in, we got a quick bite to go at the new **Corner Counter**. They offer delicious Italian favorites plus some unique specialties. We opted for a slice, but sandwiches and salads were available. They also had a nice selection of gelato. I had a huge slice of Pepperoni and John went vegetarian. It was a unique preparation and quite tasty.

It happened to be my birthday on the evening of our stay, and one of my favorites is **KJ's Chinese Restaurant**. Their Asian cuisine expands out of China, and the chefs are trained in preparing multiple dishes throughout the surrounding regions. One of our favorites is the Rice Noodle-Salted Fish & Chicken; it is a spectacular dish and one of the Chef's Specials. We ventured on the menu to Thailand and ordered Pad Thai Noodle with Shrimp & Chicken. I don't consider their preparation authentic Thai street food, but it is always yummy. The Sizzling Tender Beef in black pepper sauce melted in your mouth and was phenomenal. Finally, the Chicken with Orange Peel is a classic and was super fresh and flavorful.

Every item that I have ever eaten on **The Café** menu has been of excellent quality. For breakfast, some standouts are the unique Pancake Tacos, three pancakes wrapped around scrambled eggs, bacon and shredded cheese served with salsa and choice of hash browns or tots, and the Avocado Toast Everything Bagel topped with whipped cream cheese, sliced avocado, baby heirloom tomatoes and balsamic glaze. Served with two poached eggs and a side of fruit and turkey sausage. But, because it was almost noon, we ordered burgers. I previously enjoyed the Backyard Burger, American cheese, lettuce, tomatoes and onions and I added bacon. It did not disappoint, and it is a huge, top-quality burger patty cooked to perfection. John went for the Herbivore Burger, Gardein chicken patty on a vegan bun with lettuce, tomatoes and onions. We both opted for the fries because they are truly some of the best that we have ever had. We get those crispy delights every time we go.

One of the newer grab-and-go places is **Best of Cluck**, a Nashville-themed eatery. From strips to sandwiches, this unique pleasure is hatching delicious meals on select days. Fortunately, we were there for a late lunch on a Thursday (closed Monday through Wednesday), and ordered the six-piece Chicken Tenders, which come with two sauces, prepared regular or Nashville Hot style. The combo comes with one side, either Clucky's Mac-n-Cheese, avocado ranch slaw, tzatziki slaw, seasoned waffle fries or fried pickles. John and I ordered ours Nashville Hot, and he ordered the Mac-n-Cheese, and I went for the tzatziki slaw. The spicy version of this comfort food was the bomb, and oh so crisp on the outside, tender on the inside.

Other on-site upscale eateries include the incomparable **Hell's Kitchen** (closed Monday and Tuesday), **Salt and Fin** and **The Oyster Bar** (closed Wednesday and Thursday). **Rita's Cantina** (closed Tuesday through Thursday) has tasty Mexican food, and other quick bites include **The Earl of Sandwich**, **Smash Burger** and **Starbucks**.

LIBATIONS

For those who prefer to explore the world of libations, there are several options: **Corked**, which features rotating taps, high-end wines and carefully crafted cocktails; **The First Down**, a cool sports bar; **Rincon Reservation Road Brewery,** an on-site brewing facility; **Spiked**, a world of craft cocktails; and **Tini's**, martinis with a "funner" twist.



ENTERTAINMENT

Harrah's offers concerts, comedy and other entertainment. Upcoming shows at the Event Center will feature Charley Crockett on June 6, Ryan Bingham and The Texas Gentlemen on June 13, Clint Black: Back On The Blacktop Tour on July 4, **David Foster and Chris Botti featuring Katharine McPhee** on July 18, and The Docksiders on July 25. Mark your calendars for ***RuPaul's Drag Race* Werq The World Tour 2025** on October 10.



Harrah's Resort Southern California is located at 777 Harrah's Rincon Way.
harrahssocal.com | 760.751.3100

LUSHFUL AESTHETICS BRINGS GIRTH ENHANCEMENT TO LA JOLLA

If you haven't heard of **Lushful Aesthetics** yet, you will soon — especially if you're even mildly curious about the rising world of penis filler and functional esthetic procedures like HoleTox.

Founded by board-certified nurse practitioner **Chris Bustamante**, more affectionately known as InjectorChris, Lushful Aesthetics has become a national name in the sexual-wellness space, and the buzz around its new La Jolla location is building fast.

"I just don't like L.A.," Bustamante told *The RAGE Monthly* of his decision to open here. "I love San Diego. I've been coming here every summer for the last four years. I think it's such a beautiful place."

After operating a high-traffic clinic in New York City, expanding to the West Coast felt like a natural move, but not just for fun in the sun. "Most of our patients aren't local, even in New York. They're flying in from all over the country. And when it comes to procedures like penis filler or HoleTox, people are willing to travel to the person they trust."

That trust is precisely what Bustamante has built a career on. With a background in esthetic medicine as well as sexual-health urology, InjectorChris has become one of the leading voices in male enhancement — especially in queer circles, where **HoleTox** (a Botox-like injectable designed to relax the anal sphincter) is gaining popularity as a form of functional and preventative care.

"HoleTox in itself is a functional medicine procedure," he said. "It's not designed to change anything cosmetically. It's preventative. It helps people live more comfortably and safely."

Bustamante initially connected with San Diego's Dr. Carlton — another queer sexual-wellness expert — through a viral TikTok. Instead of dismissing or criticizing the content, Dr. Carlton publicly supported it, calling it an essential tool for the community. From there, the collaboration grew. "It was just nice to have someone so like-minded," Bustamante said. "We found alignment on HoleTox being preventative medicine because it's preventing people from getting injuries down there."

The core of Bustamante's business is **penis enhancement** — and he has seen demand skyrocket, especially since it appeals to all men, gay and straight. "Now it pretty much makes up the bulk of my day. I do far more penises than faces when it comes to filler at this point."

I tried the latter procedure myself, which went pretty smoothly. I was nervous going in, but Bustamante's knowledge and personability calmed my nerves. Fortunately, he warned me that I "wouldn't like him" for the first week due to the bruising and swelling that occurred, but his "trust me, there's no pain" stance proved true.

The appointment takes about an hour, but most of that time involves Bustamante explaining what will happen, as well as the healing process after (don't expect to have sex for up to three weeks). Fortunately, no injections prevent you from peeing or doing your daily business. So long as you maintain the daily massages that you are told to do, everything should heal up just fine.


Chris Bustamante

You can also expect an additional one to two inches of girth, depending on how many syringes you get. However, it's also important to note the injections only impact your girth, not the length of your penis. The procedure isn't cheap — averaging about $10,000 — but it is long-lasting. "If you do this once and only once, you should expect the fillers to slowly fade over two to three years," he said. For clients looking to maintain or go bigger, touch-up appointments can be spaced from six weeks to a year out.

Safety remains his top concern. "We use a 22-gauge cannula, which isn't sharp — it's a blunt tip. So it actually moves around vessels instead of piercing them. That's what makes this procedure so safe."

Bustamante offers each client a comprehensive recovery guide and emphasizes open communication. "Everyone gets my textable number. If anything feels concerning, they have access to get in touch with me right away. I'd rather you over-ask and freak out than assume something is normal when it isn't."

His ethos is simple: patient autonomy, transparency and body-positive empowerment. "This is an elective procedure. It's not something being enforced on anyone. But it can absolutely boost confidence and enjoyment when it's done safely, and it's totally reversible if you change your mind."

Whether you're curious about HoleTox, interested in a consultation, or just want to see what all the buzz is about, the new Lushful Aesthetics La Jolla clinic is officially open for business.

lushfulaesthetics.com



Andrew J. Stillman is a writer of fantasy stories and freelance content. He makes YouTube videos and explores the world on his travel blog at lifeinanotherworld.com. Follow him @andrewjstillman on all the things.



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F*CK MAIN CHARACTER SYNDROME– BE THE GUEST STAR

Not too long ago, I came face-to-face with something big. And after I left that D appointment, I determined that two things — though entirely opposite — can be true at the exact same time. Numerous people have already discovered and accepted this fact, but I enjoy taking the scenic route.

You see, at the end of the day, I do want the fairy tale. (I know, insert belly laugh/eye roll here.) F*ck Julia Roberts, *Pretty Woman* and every single Disney movie for setting those of us who desire a healthy, no bullshit, monogamous relationship up for failure. Still, the happy ending etched in my mind is as firm as Henry Cavill's ass and doesn't include a massage table or random masseur all-too-eager to put his back into it.

Except when it does.

Over the years, I've learned that traveling creates a convenient opportunity to unabashedly explore your hoe side — masseur and all, if you're lucky. Additionally, not only does this help keep tourism alive, but I'm almost certain it means you can write off your trip expenses come tax season. Just in case, err on the side of safety and double-check with an accountant.

But, in general, when done correctly, this leads to a no muss, no fuss experience. A simple, "Thank you for your time, and you'll likely never see me again." Unless that time was good, then I recommend going back for seconds. Possibly thirds. However, use caution! No sharing of names, careers, passions or fears. Nothing specific.

Remember, no one wants a hoe who catches feelings — or gonorrhea. But that's a tip for another column.

This brings me back to my point from earlier, about how two very different things can be true simultaneously. Like me wanting a loving, monogamous relationship while also enjoying a slutty side hustle. What a discovery! Sorry, Mom and Dad.

This scientific notion, backed by hours of research conducted by yours truly, lead me to another interesting find: When embarking on that slutty side hustle, f*ck main character syndrome — be the guest star. Specifically, when it comes to three-ways.

In my 30-plus years of life, I've managed to find myself in some compromising positions, and they usually involve a man or two. According to my therapist, I'm human, so that's my excuse. I'm human. That, and I'm also inquisitive. So inquisitive that I wanted to test out a theory:

Are six hands better than four? Are three tongues better than two? Are multiple di*ks — you get the idea. Again, sorry, Mom and Dad.

The answer? Hell, yes — and to all the above! In moderation, anyway. To be honest, navigating all the extra limbs can get exhausting. And inevitably, someone will eventually feel left out.

Regardless, I learned how fun it can be to entertain a married couple and then dip out when done. I repeat: No muss, no fuss. A cameo appearance, if you will. A guest-starring role.

However, I do feel like there should be some ground rules put into place. You know, to be considerate of all involved parties.

For example, while mid-performance, Husband A said to Husband B, "Do it like Cutter." Not cool, but what a compliment for me. Unfortunately, I'm unable to put that nifty skill on my professional résumé.

On the contrary, I've had some not-so-great moments while hoeing — I mean traveling. During two different sexcapades with two different men, I heard some variation of, "I'm not all that in to fit guys, so I *love* your body."

Umm, excuse me? F*ck you! Only, I didn't have the balls to say that to either one of them. Unlike one of my girlfriends. When a man told her she was thick, she told him to "f*ck off." And knowing her, probably punched him for good measure.

But I digress.

So, as we strut into Pride Month, hopefully wearing a new pair of Christian Louboutin boots, I think there is some vital information to remember from my big gay rendezvous.

Two contrasting things can be true. Use your vacation time wisely. Err on the side of safety. When given the choice, be the guest star. Always tell someone to go f*ck themselves when they disrespect you.

And finally, when you find yourself in a three-way, and you most likely will, especially during Pride Month, be *fully* prepared. Things have a way of ending up where you least expect them to.



Cutter Slagle is the author of suspense, horror and crime-fiction works. cutterslagle.com

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