

ISSUE 06.24

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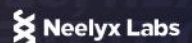
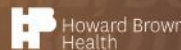
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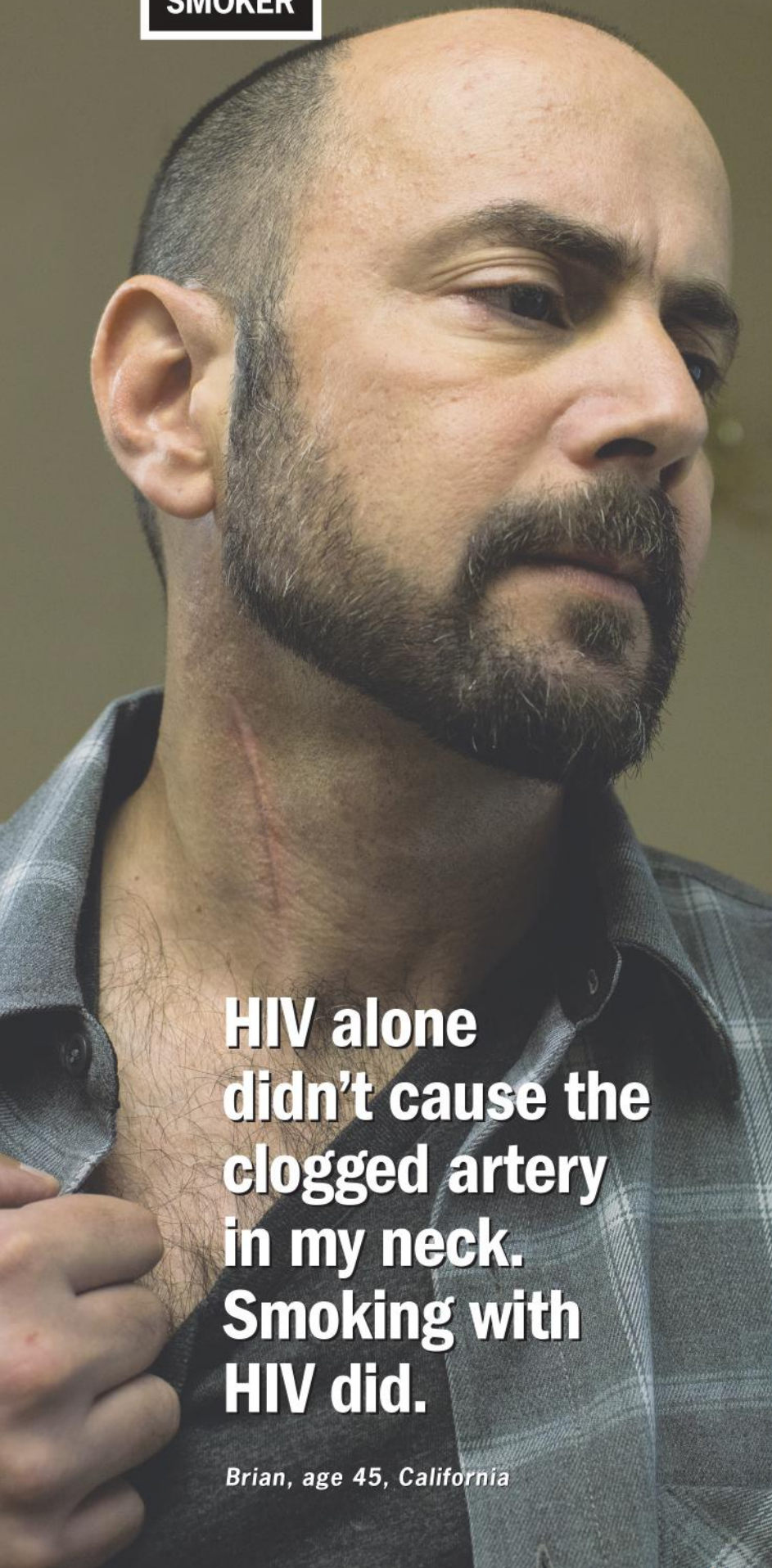
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Brian, age 45, California

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About Chicago Pride Fest®

- ▶ **What:** Chicago LGBTQ+ street festival during June Pride Month, est. 2001
- ▶ **Features:** live entertainment on 3 stages, vending & food
- ▶ **Location:** [Halsted & Addison](#) to Halsted & Grace St, Chicago IL 60657
- ▶ **Date:** June 22-23, 2024 **Hours:** Sat 11am-10pm, Sun 11am-10pm
- ▶ **Why:** A celebration of LGBTQ+ pride & community in Chicago's [landmark](#) Northalsted neighborhood
- ▶ **Attendance:** 100,000 (estimated)
- ▶ **Organized by:** [Northalsted Business Alliance](#), chamber of commerce 501c6
- ▶ **Presenting Sponsor:** Bud Light - [other sponsors](#)
- ▶ **Admission:** suggested \$15 donation, all ages
- ▶ **Website:** [pridefestchicago.com](#) **Social Media:** [Facebook](#) - [Instagram](#)
- ▶ **Contact:** info@northalsted.com (773) 883-0500
- ▶ **Media:** [press kit](#) - [high res photos](#) - [logos](#) - [video clips](#) - [youtube](#)

Info

Chicago Pride Fest® is a two-day street festival on June 22-23, 2024; taking place the weekend before the Chicago Pride Parade (June 30, 2024). The 24th annual Chicago Pride Fest is a celebration of LGBTQ+ life, culture and community in Chicago's landmark LGBTQ+ Northalsted neighborhood.

Pride Fest features live music on 3 stages, a Youth Pride Space for teens, best of Chicago drag performance, Miss Foozie's Proud Pet Parade with prizes, dance exhibitions, Chicago Gay Men's Chorus, guest speakers and over 150 food and merchandise vendors

A \$15 suggested donation for entry helps pay performers and festival workers, and supports local non-profits & community programs like the Chicago Pride Crosswalks; 14 rainbow paved intersections installed in 2019 that make up the longest installation of it's kind in the world.





After years of touring around the globe, Bob the Drag Queen geared up for her biggest tour yet, with pop icon Madonna.



In a recent interview with Billboard, the drag superstar dishes on her special guest slot on Madonna's 40 year-retrospective world trek, the Celebration Tour. "You ever think about how lucky you are to be alive at the same time as someone else?" Bob says. "We get to be alive at the same time as Madonna."

Bob was first introduced to **Madonna** when Bob served as host for Madonna's New York Pride show at **Terminal 5** in 2022. "Her daughter recommended me to host, and Madonna just really took a liking to me after that," she says. "She sang me 'Happy Birthday,' she's bought me cupcakes, I talk with her kids, and we just became really fast pals."

It wasn't until November of last year that Madonna officially asked Bob to join her on her expansive tour, or at least, Madonna thought she was officially asking Bob. "She DM'd my mom on Instagram, because she thought it was my Instagram," Bob says with a laugh. "My mom texted me like, 'Madonna wants to work with me!' I was like, 'Mom, I'm pretty sure she thinks you're me.'"

It came so close to being my mom on tour with Madonna instead of me."

The RuPaul's Drag Race season eight winner teased that fans was taken on "a journey through four decades of the top-selling woman in the history of music," with the queen "there to help facilitate the journey" throughout the show's run.

Fans spotted Bob in Madonna's tour announcement video, in which the star had a series of her celebrity friends, including **Diplo, Amy Schumer, Judd Apatow, Jack Black** and **Lil Wayne**, join her for a game of Truth or Dare. As Bob tells it, no one in the video knew what was supposed to happen until the cameras started rolling.

"I was the first one there, and then all of these people began streaming in. I was like, 'Wait, Amy Schumer? Jack Black? What is going on?'" Bob recalls.

"We all thought that we were individually going to be taking some photos with Madonna, none of us knew about this. Only Madonna could get us all to show up like that."

When it comes to personal impact, Bob the Drag Queen says she's been moved by Madonna's grace and trust in her. "She respects me in a way that doesn't feel like a novelty," she says. "Obviously, what matters most is how I feel about myself, but still, a stamp of approval from Madonna is just like ... 'What?!'"

You can see Bob the Drag Queen live on stage at Chicago's Pride Fest on Sunday, June 23rd, 2024.

For more information go to: PridefestChicago.com.



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Natasha Bedingfield is a British singer and songwriter who has a net worth of \$13 million.

Bedingfield earned a Grammy nomination for her song "Unwritten," which was the title track of her 2004 debut album. Since her successful debut, the album has sold more than 2.3 million copies.

Natasha has released the albums "N.B.," "Strip Me," and "Roll with Me" and hit singles such as "Soulmate," "Love Like This" (featuring Sean Kingston), and "Pocketful of Sunshine."

She also performed the theme songs of the MTV reality series "The Hills" and "The Hills: New Beginnings," and she has appeared on the shows "Degraasi: The Next Generation" back in 2008, "The Naked Brothers Band," "True Jackson, VP," "Web Therapy" in 2012–2013, and "The Masked Singer" in 2021. Bedingfield was ranked #66 on VH1's 2012 list of the "100 Greatest Women in Music."

As a teenager, she formed **The DNA Algorithm**, a dance/electronic group, with her siblings **Daniel** and **Nikola**.

When Bedingfield was 14 years old, she sang on the Origin album "Refined Intricacy." She studied psychology at the **University of Greenwich** for

a year, then she dropped out to focus on her music career. Natasha recorded demos in her friends' garages, and she composed songs for **Hillsong Church UK** in the early 2000s, which appeared on the albums "Shout God's Fame," "Blessed," and "Jesus Is My Superhero."

Bedingfield signed with **BMG UK & Ireland's Phonogenic Records** in July 2003, and she released her first album, "Unwritten," on September 6, 2004. The album was certified 3x Platinum in the U.K. and Gold in the **U.S.** and reached #1 on the UK Albums Chart and #4 on the Irish Albums Chart. The title track went 3x Platinum in the U.S. and Platinum in the **U.K.** and **Canada**, and it reached the top 10 in nine countries.

In 2010, Bedingfield released the album "Strip Me," and the following year, she performed on the **Simple Plan** single "Jet Lag," which was certified 2x Platinum in **Australia** and Platinum in **Canada**.

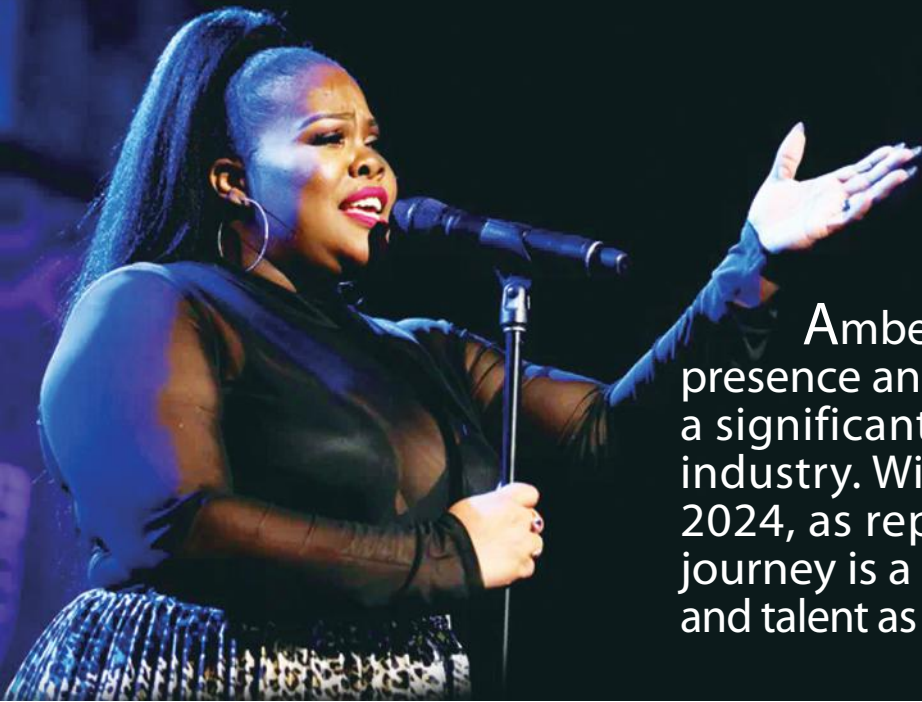
That year she was also featured on the **Platinum Rascal Flatts** single "Easy," which earned her an **Academy of Country Music Award** nomination. In 2012, Natasha appeared on the **Lifehouse** single "Between the Raindrops," and in May 2013, she served as a guest judge on **New Zealand's** version of the music competition "**The X Factor.**" Her brother Daniel was a judge and mentor on the series that season.

In 2021, she competed on **Fox's "The Masked Singer"** as "**Pepper,**" and in March 2022, it was announced that she would be hosting "The Masked Singer" National Tour.

Natasha is an ambassador for the charitable organization **Global Angels**, which was founded by her mother. Bedingfield got involved because she wanted to help "people around the world, particularly children, who live in conditions that would horrify us."

You can see Natasha live on stage at Chicago's Pride Fest on Saturday, June 22nd, 2024.

For more information go to: PridefestChicago.com.



Amber Riley, known for her dynamic presence and exceptional talent, has made a significant impact in the entertainment industry. With a net worth of \$7 million in 2024, as reported by MovieMeter, Riley's journey is a testament to her perseverance and talent as an actress, and recording artist.

Her early life in **Los Angeles** provided a backdrop for her aspirations, as she navigated the challenges of breaking into the competitive world of showbiz. Her initial forays into the industry were marked by minor roles and appearances, but her persistence and unique talent soon led her to more significant opportunities.

Amber Riley's career reached new heights with her iconic role as **Mercedes Jones** in the hit television series **Glee**. Her portrayal of the confident, talented singer won hearts worldwide and showcased her exceptional vocal and acting abilities. This role not only earned her critical acclaim but also opened doors to numerous opportunities in both television and music. Riley's performance in **Glee** was a cornerstone in her career, significantly contributing to her burgeoning net worth

and establishing her as a prominent figure in the entertainment industry.

Beyond her television success, Amber Riley has also made a name for herself in the music and theatre industries. Her musical career, marked by powerful vocals and captivating performances, has garnered her a dedicated fanbase and critical acclaim. Riley's transition to the stage, including her remarkable performances in **West End** productions, further showcased her versatility as a performer. These ventures into different realms of entertainment have not only enriched her career

but have also been vital contributors to her financial success, aiding in the accumulation of her \$7 million net worth.

In addition to her professional achievements, Amber Riley's involvement in philanthropy and advocacy reflects her commitment to making a positive impact beyond the entertainment world. Her efforts in various charitable causes and her stance on important social issues have earned her respect and admiration in the entertainment industry and among her fans.

You can see Amber Riley live on stage at Chicago's Pride Fest on Sunday, June 23rd, 2024.

For more information go to: PridefestChicago.com.



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INFORMATION

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FAQs

- Admission:** (all-age) a \$15 suggested donation that helps pay performers, festival workers, and supports local non-profits and community programs like the [Rainbow Crosswalks](#). Past beneficiaries include: Human Rights Campaign Chicago, AIDS Foundation Chicago, Brave Space Alliance, Howard Brown Health, Equality Illinois, and Chicago House.
- Proud Pet Parade:** The fun [Proud Pet Parade](#) with Miss Foozie is Sunday at 12:00pm starting from the North Stage. Register your proud pet from 12:00-12:30, then at 12:30 Miss Foozie will lead the contestants to the winners presentation & prizes at the South Stage at 1:00pm.
- Chicago Pride Parade:** The [Chicago Pride Parade](#) is a separate event organized by PRIDEChicago scheduled for June 30, 2024. See: info@pridechicago.org (773) 348-8243 pridechicago.org
- Youth Pride Space:** A new space for LGBTQ+ teens and allies age 12-18 near the Waveland & Broadway entrance, Features: performances, food & drinks, DJ, dancing, games & giveaways, counseling and support resources.
- Performer Lineup:** Announced Spring 2024
- Past Performers:** [past performers](#) include international and legendary acts like such as Debbie Gibson, Belinda Carlisle, Taylor Dayne, Betty Who, Darren Criss, Leann Rimes, Crystal Waters, Mya, Alaska Thunder*ck, Shangela, Thelma Houston, Jennifer Hudson, and more.
- Vending:** Merchants & Food Service Vendors (and Food Trucks), Artists, Local Non-Profit Organizations look for Vending Opportunities info/application at chicagoevents.com/event/chicago-pride-fest
- Sponsorship:** contact Norine Smyth nsmyth@chicagoevents.com 312-799-0354
- Landmark Status:** In July 2019, the city recognized the Northalsted Rainbow Pylons and Legacy Walk Memorial installation as a [designated Chicago landmark](#) with cultural significance.





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IN CONCERT

2024

by: **Jorge Suarez**
Chicago Producer, Music Aficionado



Friday, April 26th was a 2 fer at the Arcada Theatre in St. Charles. Obviously at some point, cover bands/tribute bands will have to replace the original bands.

We've seen original band members replaced as time passes. These timeless rock classics will never fade due to the talented musicians making up these cover bands as they rightly deserve the same respect and appreciation. Two tribute bands performed on this night at the Arcada. First, Anthem, À Grand Illusion. You can't get any closer to Tommy Shaw, Dennis DeYoung, and James Young, than with this group's Kevin Willison. Kevin nailed it! Hit after hit, for nearly 2 hours.

I'll say this, I wasn't expecting anything

outstanding, but this group blew me away!

Not only were the vocals on cue, but the keyboards, drums, guitar, everything was on cue. All the classics hits performed had everyone on their feet. Kevin Willison on lead vocals and guitar, Len Schillaci on guitar, James Cairo on bass guitar, Mike Gerbitz on drums, and Mark Hofstetter on keyboards.

Peter Greco, lead singer and founder of LP Vinyl. While he has his own distinct voice, Pete had no problem covering Steve Perry. Mike Vermland on keyboards, Gino Buonamici (lead guitar/backing vocals), Lenny Vertucci (guitar), Mike Gerbitz (drummer), and JET (guitar). To add, many of the members in both groups hail from Chicago. Both groups can stand next to the original and you'd barely know the difference.



A must see!
Vynil's Escape:

Bringing back those classics and reliving those moments is worth any ticket. In which case, LP VINYL, À ESCAPE: A Journey Tribute band also nailed it! Band members include:

Both groups have musicians with an extensive resume in music practically since birth.

The keyboards were so close to Jonathan Cane as was every other instrument so close to the original members of Journey.

COMMENTARY UNCENSORED



by: Screamin' Rachael
Recording Artist, Entrepreneur, Publisher, Music Mogul, House Music Icon, sometimes Controversial, with a dash of Opinionism for good measure.

The opinions offered in this column are "uncensored" and are intended for "open dialog" and "entertainment purposes" only. Use of this column not intended to replace or be a substitute for any professional, financial, legal, advice or any other professional service. The opinions or views expressed in this column are those of the columnist, and not necessarily those of anyone else.

The City of Chicago is celebrating 40 years of House Music and we're very excited about that. The only problem is that Trax Records was excluded by the producers of the event. According to Rolling Stone Magazine, TRAX is "arguably the most important label in the history of House Music," So why is it that we weren't even invited? It could be politics or the fact that the artists involved have their own agenda?

There was an opening celebration at Navy Pier, thankfully one of our artists, Irene Michaels, was invited and attended. With some prodding from the TRAX Director of Operations, Jorge Cruz, I decided to show up. Even if I was banned from the party, Jorge said, "Just Go!" Well I got there a little later and the party was over! Apparently it was a small gathering of about 100 people.

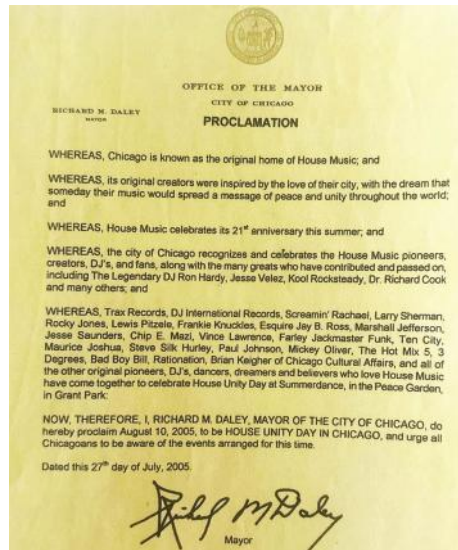
A couple of people I knew were still there, and they said "What's up Rachael? Did you get invited?" I said no, and they had not been invited either... One of them was Producer/



DJ **Ron Carroll**. He told me that it didn't matter if the people behind everything, had an agenda and ignored him. What he cared about is all

the love he gets from the LGBTQ+ community. He has a party, **Power House Monday** every week at **2210 South Michigan Avenue**, 6-11pm and I recommend that any House Music fan go. Recognize and support, that's what our community needs. There were others there who said that photographs of their's were altered and displayed without permission. Well that has been done to me a number of times including our Trade-mark label, that was seen there. What if they decided to display AT&T's logo? My famous shot of **Marshall Jefferson** has been in the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, used by Amazon and others, but recently they displayed it at **Navy Pier**, without so much as a photo credit or party invitation! Certainly no license. There are those in our city who take liberties without proper consideration or respect, except when monies are involved, and it's conveniently easy to find and contact you when there's a lawsuit.

Well the thing is, there's no way to exclude Trax Records music! Maybe all the work that we at the label have done can be snubbed, but the music won't ever be stopped being played or referenced.



On August 10th, 2005 under **Mayor Daley** and **Governor Rod Blagojevich** claimed "House Unity Day in Chicago."

Since I'm "Uncensored" here, I can call people out on what's happening these days. It seems **David Chavez**, at the department of Cultural affairs, knows us and seems to purposely excludes us. Hopefully the new contact I sent out can mend whatever the problem is.

The City of Chicago used my photo for giant banners, with the intention of not giving me a photo credit, and not even inviting me to the exhibition. That happened several years ago at the **Cultural Affairs** building on **Washington Street**. After I complained, I did agree to let them use it, and even got a party invitation. Lo and behold, it featured my photo. They borrowed some valuable artifacts, and when I got them back, my first edition "Move Your Body" vinyl pressing was gone!

There was also another celebration in **Millennium Park** that we were not included in. They were even selling bootleg Trax T-Shirts. I made a deal with the booth, after learning about it, but once again, no invitation, and no advanced warning. I came by anyway and spoke with **Mark Kelly** who was then the President of Cultural Affairs, and he at least agreed to thank Trax Records at the end of the show. As a woman entrepreneur, I can say that there is a case involving 21 men, and only one woman against me. It would be a lot to explain, but if you read April 11th 2023 **Rolling Stone Magazine** article, by **Oli Coleman**, my name is cleared.

Continued >>



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>> **UNCENSORED** *Continued*

Sum and substance is, I did not take their money. However a lot of damage was done to my reputation.

When the original owner, **Larry Sherman**, of Trax's Records died, and even though I never even signed their contracts, I was the one bullied and attacked because the "Sherman estate" was inherited by our daughter and I. When asked by "**Chicago Magazine**" why **Vince Lawrence** waited 40 years to complain, He said "*Because you don't sue your uncle.*" Right, so why come for me? Because you perceive me as a weak woman? Furthermore, Lawrence knew I had no money. We lost all of the company in 2006, and didn't even have ownership of the catalog for many years, as it was tied up in the courts, we only got control back in 2022! Vince Lawrence knows the truth, and today I just got word, and proof that he and his attorney **Sean Mulrone**y tried to stage a "coup d'état" against me! Well if nothing else happens, I managed to save the music for America, with help from my team, **The Lawyers for the Creative Arts**, and even more specifically, **Chicago**. NONE of the company's who took the music were American. The people fighting me could have gone for them, after-all they have MONEY. Being a woman in this vicious business, is almost impossible, but not impossible!

I hope to inspire others. I thank **boiMAGazine** for allowing me to have this "uncensored" platform. I'm uncensored because I wish to fight marginalization. Don't let anyone or even big business stop your dreams. Even if you lose, you can be proud that you fought. Look at how long we have fought for PRIDE, and we still have a long way to go.

Well that's enough venting. I sent a letter to The Mayor, **Chavez**

and several others. I got a response from **Laura Trejo Lozano** who was new, but said she would try to get our brand launch event on the city's event calendar, and also talk to others who might help to recognize us for the 40th festivities. Here is the information and I hope to see you there.

The independent Chicago label Trax Records which according to **Rolling Stone Magazine**, is "arguably the most important label in the history of House Music", is thrilled to announce the launch of two new collections, the Trax Collection designed by **Mario Maldonado** and Trax Atelier by **Michael Wesley White**. The debut of these collections will be celebrated with a launch party, on Saturday June 15, 2024, featuring live performances by myself, **Screamin Rachael, Jorge Cruz, Irene Michaels, Oliver Fade, Joe Smooth, Marcos Raya Jr.** and other special guest artists to be announced.

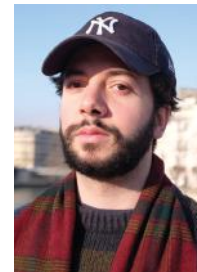
Both collections will be available for purchase and custom orders, on June 15 at the launch party hosted at **Chicago Midwest Made**, located at 1517 W 18th St, Chicago, Illinois In Pilson, which made **Forbes** coolest neighborhoods in the world list! The magazine described the area as "*a nest of cutting-edge culture and art.*"

I'm also excited about **Colby Gallery** in Pilson, 1626 W 18th St because of all the excellent artists she represents. As a performer, DJ and songwriter I have always also created art, video and photography. The gallery is a block away from **Chicago Midwest Made**. Our event will take place in both spaces! There are some great photographs of Michael's designs on display, and the gallery and its wonderful owner **Colby Luckenbill** are not to be missed!

I was interviewed by **Haley Medwell** for a new documentary "Beyond The Decks" produced by CardinalReleasing.com who flew in from the UK. To quote Cardinal, "*With the global success of EDM, why is there still such a gender divide and lack of diversity? What are the pressures of being a 'Superstar DJ'?*"

And if the music came from Black and LGBT communities in the US, and women have always been present within musical history, why is the industry now a white man's playground?" We talked about that and lots of other things. But darlings, I can't be on camera without fabulous looking hair! My crowning glory was styled by **Jerry Maldonado** at **Buzzed by Zea** (salon) located at 3707 N Halsted Street. Where else can you party at a hot trendy "night and day spot," while being styled and sipping a designer cocktail? Nowhere else that I know of!! I simply adore the place!

Lately I am very excited about my new album "Disco 3000,"



it's in the works and is almost completed! We put a hold on things to include a new break out single by **Pedro Cañas** and myself, tentatively titled "Addicted." When we heard the track it was something that had to be included! We decided that single will drop first! The album is underground, very creative, and certainly on the erotic, decadent side, with titles like "Bitch". **Jorge Cruz** curated it and tells me no one will be ready for this one, including me! I can't wait!

The good news is, NOW it's time to celebrate PRIDE in Chicago and around the world! So LETS' CELEBRATE!!!

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BEFORE WOKE, THERE WAS ACT UP, AND BEFORE THAT, WAS PEPI + ARTHUR & CHILLI PEPPER!

Danny Sotomayor was a spitfire gay man on a mission. The fiery openly gay AIDS activist, political cartoonist, and organizer took to the streets, using civil-disobedience to wage war on city officials who marginalized the LGBTQ community and turned a blind eye to the AIDS crisis, all while fighting a losing battle with the disease himself.

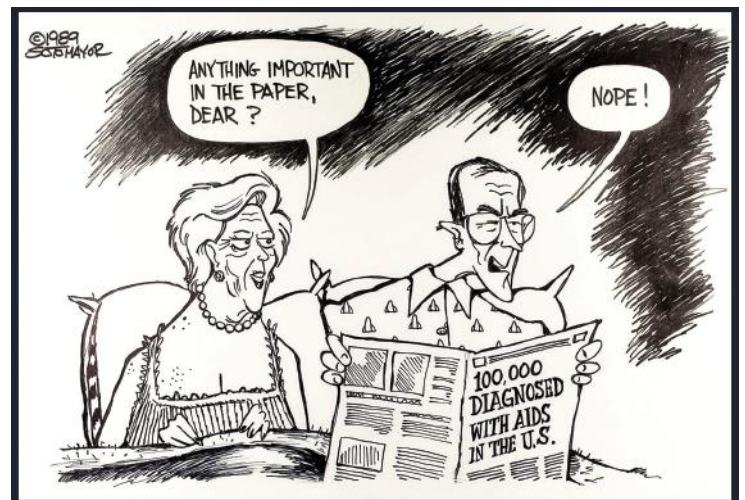


WTTW's documentary on **Danny Sotomayor** highlights a man who wouldn't take no for an answer, who channeled his internal rage and pain into a movement to effect positive change will be re-run once again this year on **Friday, June 28 at 9pm** and streaming on wttw.com.

Danny Sotomayor received what amounted to a death sentence in 1988, he was diagnosed with AIDS. At the time, there was no cure, drugs designed to combat the disease were expensive and hard to come by, and people often died within weeks of the first failures of their immune systems. Feeling the clock ticking on his life, the 29 year old cartoonist set out to confront the AIDS crisis as only he knew how, by making a spectacle at places in the city, wherever it took him.

Sotomayor, as the founder of the Chicago chapter of **ACT UP**, the AIDS Coalition to **Unleash Power**, staged effective, carefully targeted, and highly theatrical acts of civil disobedience to confront the slow approval of life-preserving drugs, homophobic messaging from church leaders and city officials, and the exclusion of people with AIDS from research panels. As much as anyone, Sotomayor, with his persistent chant of "Act up, fight back, fight AIDS!" embodied the ethos.

When Sotomayor climbed out on an overhang of the **County Building** with four other activists in April 1990, unfurling a hand-painted reading "We Demand Equal Healthcare Now!" to the roars of thousands below in **Daley Plaza**, not only did the wider community learn who he was, and what he wanted, but much of the country did as well.



His weekly editorial cartoons published in the gay press nationwide found an even wider audience. As the country's first openly gay editorial cartoonist, Sotomayor captured the fight in clever, single-panel cartoons filled with wit and bite, charming national gay leaders like **Cleve Jones**, creator of the **AIDS Memorial Quilt**, with his humorous, sharp attacks on President **George W. Bush** and others.

The on-air documentary brings the story to life through interviews with fellow activists who climbed out on overhangs with him, friends who encouraged him, and followed him through his struggle until the very end when he died at age 33, and his older brother, who bravely describes their childhood as working-class Puerto Rican/ Mexican Chicagoans dealing with family violence and societal bigotry.

Continued >>

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Bolstered by an extensive collection of documentary and news footage, including interviews with Sotomayor, this is an intimate portrait of a community galvanized by the horrors of an epidemic that resonates with the recent COVID pandemic, complicated by the ugly specters of hatred and homophobia. It reminds viewers of the power of one person that acted up to get the attention of the nation.



Then, if you haven't seen it yet, on **June 28 at 8pm**, WTTW will once again re-air the program, **ART and PEP**, a moving profile of **Art Johnston** and **José Pepe Peña**, two civil rights leaders who in 1982 founded Chicago's gay bar **Sidetrack**, a pillar of the city's gay business district that for decades has helped fuel movements and create community in Chicago. They were also the forefathers involved in laying the foundation of the Halsted Street's bar **Roscoe's Tavern** in 1987 with **Jim Ludwig** and his partner **Ed Norris**. Arthur and Pepe share their 40-year love story and recall the struggle for fair treatment and the fight to love freely, a tale of activism born in the heartland that has inspired others to follow in their footsteps. Art and Pep was directed by **Mercedes Kane** and executive produced by **Kevin Hauswirth**.

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Speaking of legendary icons in the community, there's one person, *in our opinion*, who's not to be overlooked, and is a part of the story that **SHOULD** be told. Who knows, maybe one day we can see some new on-air

content in a future documentary that continues the conversation about other mega-influencers that hopefully time hasn't forgotten...??

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JUNE 27 - JUNE 29

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6/28 **TYLER CHILDERS**
w/ **S.G. GOODMAN & ADEEM THE ARTIST**

6/29 **KEITH URBAN**
w/ **NEEDTOBREATHE & ALANA SPRINGSTEEN**

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7/5 **MAROON 5**
w/ **DASHA**

7/6 **LIL UZI VERT**
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Over three decades, **Chilli Pepper** has entertained thousands of people as a female impersonator, serving as an ambassador for LGBT communities, building bridges between LGBT and non-LGBT communities, and heightening attention to the issues involved. She is an icon of the LGBT rights movement, having proved herself early as a visible and controversial symbol, gaining significant media exposure in the days when many people hardly spoke of, much less acknowledged drag queens, or AIDS.

Chilli was one of the first local personalities in the media to take up the issue of AIDS awareness, helping to bring HIV/AIDS into the homes of middle America at a time when the president of the United States was not publicly acknowledging the epidemic. Mentions in the Chicago Sun-Times (**Irv Kupcinet's** "Kup's column,") the **Chicago Tribune** (the "Tower Ticker" and "Inc." columns,) Chicago's neighborhood **Skyline Newspaper**, and **People Magazine**, plus television appearances on **Phil Donahue's**, **Oprah Winfrey's**, and **Jerry Springer's** shows as well as Chicago's **WGN-TV** (Channel 9,) all at a time before **Rock Hudson's** death and its revelations rocked the non-LGBT world, brought Chilli into the forefront of the fight to confront AIDS.

When **Donna Karan** wanted to make a statement at the opening of **Barneys** New York's Chicago store, she called on Chilli to model as a mannequin in the main display window at the store's launch party, which

also benefited the **Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS** (DIFFA). In 1979, when **Michael Butler** premiered the movie **Hair** in Chicago, Chilli was the "Premiere Entertainment" and introduced drag to an audience who may have thought "drag" applied only to car racing or having a bad day.

To LGBTQ+ communities in Chicago and beyond, Chilli's career of 30 plus years is an exemplar of dedication, professionalism, and success. She has taken the art of female impersonation to new heights, and her career at **The Baton Show Lounge** has helped to put Chicago at the forefront of that field. Since being crowned as the first **Miss Continental** in 1980, she has become well known across the United States and around the world.

Chilli Pepper has used her dynamic and formidable presence to advance awareness and understanding of the notion that diversity is both healthy and American. She explains who she is without apology, doesn't care if you accept or like her, and best of all, challenges us to stand up for ourselves in the same way. She has become a Chicago institution, much like the **Water Tower**, only with better jewelry.

If that's not enough, the, 35th annual **GLAAD Media Awards** that took place at **The Beverly Hilton** in **Los Angeles** on March 14, 2024, and on this memorable evening, **Vanguard Award** winner **Oprah Winfrey** invited Chicago's very own Chilli Pepper to present her with the award alongside co-presenter **Paolo Presta**. Oprah humorously remarked that Chilli, who has a fear of flying, had to travel by train, which took three days to get there, dedicating herself to reach the event in support of "her friend." The two became friends when Chilli was invited to be a guest on the **Oprah Winfrey's show** back in 1987, regarding anti-drag legislation that was being initiated in other states, along with other topics at the time like the drag community and AIDS.

Oprah delivered an inspiring speech to close out the night and said "35 years ago, my brother, *Jeffrey Lee, passed away when he was just 29 years old from AIDS. Growing up at the time we did, in the community we did, we didn't have the language to understand or speak about sexuality and gender in the way we do now. And at the time, I didn't know how deeply my brother internalized the shame that he felt about being gay. I wish he could have lived to witness these liberated times and to be here with me tonight.*" Now that was an iconic moment in history!

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Charla's giving a lecture at a summer camp on mental health and wellness, along with taking a pottery class while at the camp. She will be with us for the next issue.

In the meantime, we are introducing this new column for the Pride / Election season, opening Pandora's Box with an explosion of controversial issues that are a hot topics, button pushers and food for thought, as we try to sort out the confusion bombarding us from all sides of today's pressure cooker issues.

PANDORA'S BOX

Pandora's Box has been opened, and it's not the one between her legs!

Americans' Complex Views on Gender Identity and Transgender Issues. Most favor protecting trans people from discrimination, but fewer support policies related to medical care for gender transitions, and many are uneasy with the pace of change on trans issues as the media gives us a constant reminders, and social media amplifies the topic.

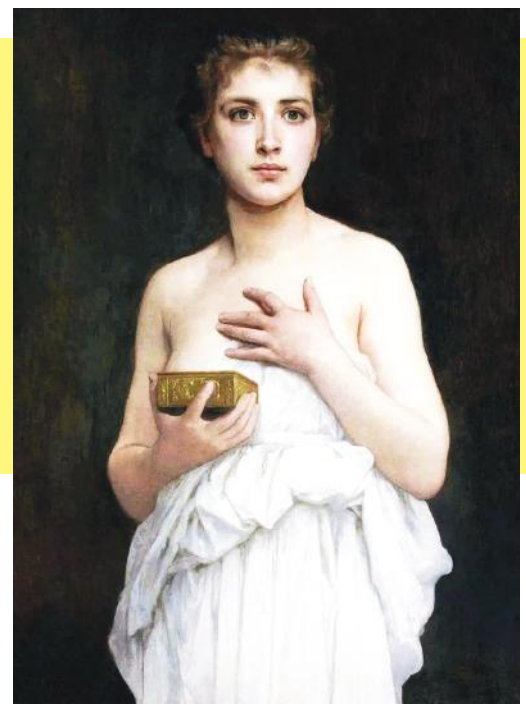
As the United States addresses issues of transgender rights and the broader landscape around gender identity continues to shift, the American public holds a complex set of views around these issues, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

Roughly eight-in-ten U.S. adults say there is at least some discrimination against transgender people in our society, and a majority favor laws that would protect transgender individuals from discrimination in jobs, housing and public spaces. At the same time, 60% say a person's gender is determined by their sex assigned at birth, up from 56% in 2021 and 54% in 2017.

The public is divided over the extent to which our society has accepted people who are transgender: 38% say society has gone too far in accepting them, while a roughly equal share (36%) say society hasn't gone far enough. About one-in-four say things have been about right. Underscoring the public's ambivalence around these issues, even among those who see at least some discrimination against trans people, a majority (54%) say society has either gone too far or been about right in terms of acceptance.

The fundamental belief about whether gender can differ from sex assigned at birth is closely aligned with opinions on transgender issues.

Americans who say a person's gender can be different from their sex at birth are more likely than others to see discrimination against trans people and a lack of societal acceptance. They're also more likely to say that our society hasn't gone far enough in accepting people who are transgender. But even among those who say a person's gender is determined by their sex at birth, there is a diversity of viewpoints.



Half of this group say they would favor laws that protect trans people from discrimination in certain realms of life. And about one-in-four say forms and online profiles should include options other than "male" or "female" for people who don't identify as either.

When it comes to issues surrounding gender identity, young adults are at the leading edge of change and acceptance. Half of adults ages 18 to 29 say someone can be a man or a woman even if that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This compares with about four-in-ten of those ages 30 to 49 and about a third of those 50 and older.

These views differ even more sharply by partisanship. Democrats and those who lean to the Democratic Party are more than four times as likely as Republicans and Republican leaners to say that a person's gender can be different from the sex they were assigned at birth (61% vs. 13%). Democrats are also much more likely than Republicans to say our society hasn't gone far enough in accepting people who are transgender (59% vs. 10%).

SEXBOT TECH TRENDS

by Jack Santo

INTIMATE TECHNOLOGY

This progression from life-size sex dolls to more sophisticated sexbots mirrors the growing desire for more lifelike and interactive companions.

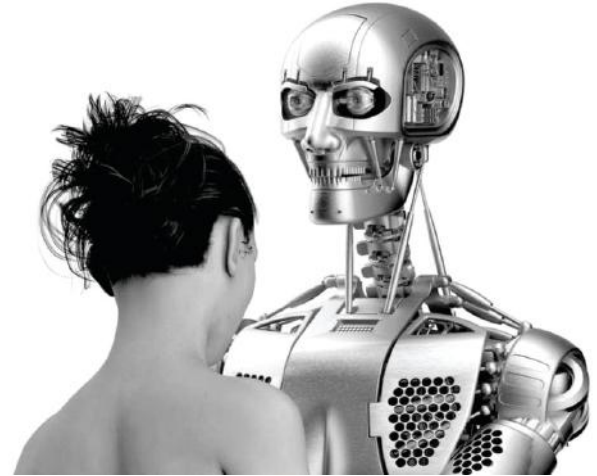
Early sex dolls, made from materials like silicone or latex, provided a physical representation of human form but lacked any semblance of personality or responsiveness.

As the technology evolved, so did the ambition to infuse these dolls with traits mimicking human behavior and interaction.

The incorporation of AI in these dolls marked a significant leap, turning them from mere objects to robots capable of basic communication, facial expressions, and, in some cases, movements. Today's sexbots, while still far from achieving the complexity of human interaction, showcase a remarkable journey from static models to beings that can interact, learn, and respond to human stimuli to a certain extent.

While the current generation of sex robots has made significant strides compared to their predecessors, they still represent an early stage in the journey toward fully autonomous and emotionally intelligent companions. Drawing from podcasts, articles, books, and independent research into recent developments since 2022 (see Additional resources, below), let's take a look at where sexbots currently stand today and where we might expect them to be in our future.

Roxxy and Harmony: Early models like Roxxy laid the groundwork for more advanced iterations. Harmony, for instance, represents a leap forward with enhanced interactive capabilities.



These robots can perform basic conversational tasks and display limited facial expressions, but they fall short of replicating the depth of human interaction. Harmony, created by RealDoll, is designed with customizable personalities and can engage in simple dialogues, but the scope of emotional intelligence is still basic. Harmony currently goes for around \$10,000.

Emma: A more recent example is Emma by AI-AITech. As of 2019, Emma was reported to be under development to include features like arm movement, a breathing chest cavity and potentially walking. These advancements aim to create a more

human-like experience, but true lifelike motion and complex emotional interactions are yet to be achieved. The current version of Emma is AI-capable with basic conversation skills and is priced at around \$3,830.

Samantha, a creation of Synthea Amatus, stands out in the sexbot evolution for her multifaceted capabilities. More than just a sexual companion, she can engage in varied conversations, from discussing philosophy to telling jokes, showcasing a leap in interactive abilities. Equipped with sensors for responsive touch, Samantha offers an immersive experience that transcends basic functionalities, she is designed to be capable of enjoying sex.

Continued >>



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A distinctive feature is also her programmed consent: she can shut down into a “dummy mode” if mistreated, introducing a complex dynamic in human-robot interaction. While her advanced technology hints at the future potential of sexbots, Samantha’s price, around \$5000, signifies that truly affordable emotionally intelligent robotic companions are still a work in progress.

Henry, the first generation of male sex robots, introduced by Realbotix in 2018, represents another step in the world of lifelike sex robots. Costing between \$11,000 and \$50,000, Henry is designed to be not just a sex partner but also a companion, aimed at fulfilling the user’s desire for a connection. He features a customizable “bionic” penis, described as having more ribbed-for-your-pleasure vascularity than occurs naturally. One of his key selling points is his endurance, as he can “go as long as you want,” being plugged into electricity instead of being battery-operated.

The market for sex robots remains niche, with high costs contributing to limited accessibility. Given the complexity and sophistication of these robots, they are also quite heavy (ranging from 75 to 125 pounds), making handling and transportation difficult for individual users. This aspect, combined with their high cost, could indeed make them less accessible for personal use. The development of more affordable, lighter, and sophisticated models could potentially expand the market in the future.

Alternatively, the business model for their use and distribution might shift towards sex robot brothels, a concept suggested by experts like Justin Lehmillier in a November 2023 interview with Sarah Tomchesson on the Future of Sex Toys. However, this concept has already faced legislative challenges. In Texas, the Houston City Council voted unanimously to ban a sex robot brothel

on October 3, 2018, reflecting the first major legal response in the United States to the concept of robot brothels.

While AI and robotics have seen exponential growth, translating these advancements into fluid, human-like movements and deep emotional intelligence in sexbots remains a significant challenge. Current models, despite their progress, still exhibit a noticeable gap between human and robot interactions in terms of fluidity, responsiveness, and depth of conversation.

Sexbots, despite their technological sophistication and potential applications, are heavily stigmatized in many societies. This stigma stems from a complex web of social, moral, and ethical concerns surrounding their use.

For many, sexbots challenge traditional notions of intimacy and relationships, leading to discomfort and disapproval. The idea of mechanizing and commercializing intimate acts raises questions about objectification, consent, and the nature of human relationships. Additionally, there’s a prevalent concern that sexbots could perpetuate unhealthy attitudes toward sex and contribute to the objectification and dehumanization of real individuals, particularly women.




This stigma is often reinforced by media portrayals, which tend to focus on sensationalized or extreme aspects of sexbot use, further entrenching societal apprehensions.

As a result, individuals who express interest in or use sexbots often face judgment and social ostracism, limiting open discussions about the potential benefits and implications of these technologies. The stigmatization of sexbots thus represents a significant barrier to their acceptance and integration into mainstream discourse on sexuality and technology.



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