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DEC. 2025

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

THE MAKING of FRIDA

MFAH traces Kahlo's
ascent to global icon
Pg.40

A HOMESPUN
HOLIDAY with

Sarah
SACHI

THE HOUSTON NATIVE BRINGS
LGBTQ REPRESENTATION TO TUTS'
BELOVED 'WHITE CHRISTMAS'

Pg.34

PLUS

CLAIMING our SPACE

Community-led Pride
projects bring visibility
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Pg.29



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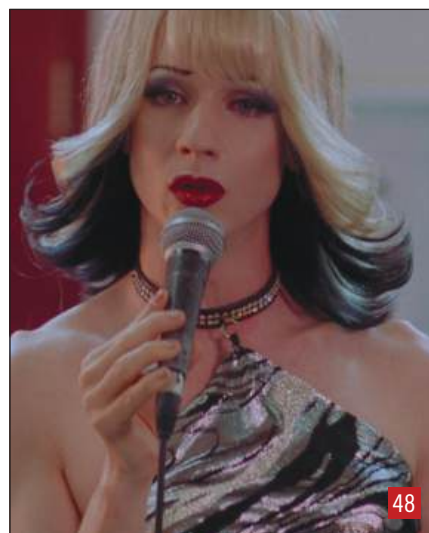
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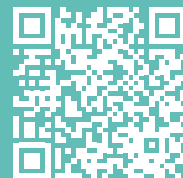
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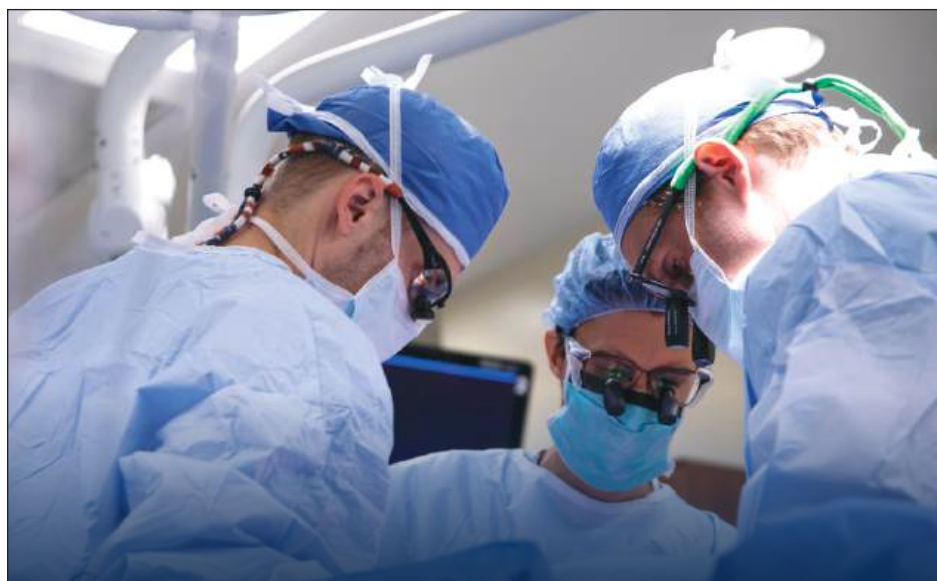
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A HOMESPUN HOLIDAY WITH SARAH SACHI

The Houston native brings LGBTQ representation to TUTS' beloved 'White Christmas'

Story by Zach McKenzie

Photos by Victor Contreras @closeyoureyesphoto

Art direction by Alex Rosa

Shot at Sawyer Yards in Houston on November 25

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This month's issue begins with news from Austin, where Equality Texas enters a new phase of leadership as Brad Pritchett becomes the organization's permanent CEO. Most readers will recognize his name from years of organizing in Houston, strategic campaigns across Texas, and efforts that ended up blocking most of the more than 200 anti-LGBTQ bills proposed during the last Texas Legislative Session. In the words of board member Jack McBride, Equality Texas will continue to be there under Pritchett's leadership to fight whatever battles come next.

Also on the legislative front, efforts are underway to deal with Senate Bill 12, widely labeled a "drag ban" even though it does not actually prohibit all drag performances. Drag artists Brigitte Bandit and Violet S'Arbleu are explicit in their assessment: the bill is less about "safety" and more about generating fear and discouraging queer expression. They remind readers that drag remains legal in Texas, and that visibility continues to matter.

Meanwhile, the fight for visibility has taken on new forms in Houston. After Gov. Abbott ordered the removal of the Montrose rainbow

crosswalks, the youth at Tony's Place have chosen to paint the center's entrance ramp in bold rainbow colors. Bering Memorial United Church of Christ followed suit by painting rainbow colors on its front steps, using the moment to make a public statement that reflects the church's decades-long commitment to LGBTQ inclusion. These actions are intentional responses to a political climate where erasure is becoming increasingly normalized.

Our cover story turns to the arts, where Theatre Under The Stars has mounted a reimagined production of *White Christmas*. Cast member Sarah Sachi, a Houston native, reflects on what it means to return to the TUTS stage for a holiday production that offers audiences a fresh and inclusive take on the beloved 1954 film.

Hedwig and the Angry Inch, another classic film of an entirely different sort, will be featured on December 28 when director John Cameron Mitchell returns to Houston for a special Arthouse Houston screening at Numbers Night Club, complete with Mitchell's live commentary during the film.

We also check in with the Galveston Gay Chorus ahead of their holiday performances,

visit MFAH's new exhibit that highlights Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's global cultural resonance, and then spotlight Catastrophic Theatre's new production from queer Asian playwright Kathy Ng, who leans into the pain of being seen as "other" by creating a surreal onstage world that is strange, tender, and unexpectedly human. Finally, don't miss our year-end roundup of standout books that showcase the breadth and power of contemporary LGBTQ storytelling.

As we head into the holidays, we're deeply grateful for your continued support. You keep *OutSmart* magazine and the OutSmart Foundation thriving—amplifying LGBTQ voices and stories that matter most.

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Greg Jeu
Publisher



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SCENE OUT

Photos by
DALTON DEHART AND CREW



Katy Pride 2025, the annual celebration at Bear Creek Arena, was held on October 18, 2025. Pictured are **Heather Tolleson, Amanda Rose, Chris Nelson, Nikki Darby, and Lan Tran.**



On October 21, 2025, EPAH held its October Dinner and Program at Weights and Measures. Pictured are **Jody Morris, Richard Trevino, Michele Laprade, and Brian Reeves.**



The Woodlands 6th Annual Pride Festival was held at the Waterway Marriott Convention Center on October 25, 2025. Pictured are **Jason Rocha, Rachel Walker, Karol Seiplax, Briony Scott, Cailyn Dougherty, Cole Guillory, and Alex Morrison.**



On October 30, 2025, Theatre Under the Stars presented OUT at TUTS night for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* at The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. Pictured is the cast.



On November 2, 2025, The Diana Foundation hosted Miss Angela's Country Brunch. Pictured are **Andrew Liebig, Tom Grass, Hunny Phillips, and Antrease Bozeman-Bender.**



Allies in Hope presented the Hope for Houston Ball 2025 at Revaire on November 14, 2025. Pictured are **William "Jeffrey" Campbell, Dr. Joseph Gath Jr, Deanna Breaux-Gathe, Chris Lewis** (recipient of the Kyle T. Pierce Distinguished Board Member Award), **Kyle T. Pierce, Michael P. Broderick, and LaRence Snowden.**



On November 20, 2025, the Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce held its 3rd Thursday Community and Connections with special guest *Houston Chronicle* columnist Chris Tomlinson at Cadillac Bar & Grill. Pictured are **Tammi Wallace and Sara Brook** owner of the Dessert Gallery.



On November 21, 2025, EPAH hosted its Pre-Holiday Shopping Event at Eclectic Home. Pictured are **Michele Laprade, Dale Johnson, Dennise O'Doherty, William Hyatt, Colby Weems, and Jeanette Jeffries.**



The Krewe of Olympus held its Swampfest at Oaks of Inwood Clubhouse on November 22, 2025. Pictured are **Lea Valerio and Clint Harwell.**



On November 22, 2025, the Texas Democratic Party held the 2025 Johnson Jordan Dinner at the Royal Sonesta Houston. Pictured are **Congressman Jamie Raskin and Judge Jerry Simoneaux.**



TGiving, the annual Transgender Thanksgiving celebration, was held at the Montrose Center on November 25, 2025. Pictured are **Raul Chaidez, Bibi Xia, Meghan Fairbanks, Avery Belyeu, and Kevin Nguyen.**



Disco Turkey 2025, themed Up, Up, and Away, was held at the Montrose Country Club on November 29, 2025. Pictured are **Kini Philpot, Sally Teichgraeber, and Charles Solomon.**

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QUEER THINGS to DO

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Sunday, December 28

Hedwig and the Angry Inch

with Live Director's Commentary

Arthouse Houston presents a special screening of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* featuring the film's visionary creator, John Cameron Mitchell.

tinyurl.com/4usdyv7j



STAGE

Thursday, December 4

Alley Theatre ActOUT for *The Night Shift Before Christmas*

Ticket holders for the December 4 performance of *The Night Shift Before Christmas* can enjoy a pre-performance mixer with music, socializing, light bites, and drinks.

tinyurl.com/4rzajj7d



STAGE

Friday, December 5

Victorian Vaudeville at Soundbar, A Music Hall Sing Along & Drag Variety Show

Join ARTS Downtown GTX and Soundbar for a jubilant kickoff to the Dickens Festival Weekend. A night of Victorian Vaudeville, merry music, and dazzling drag! tinyurl.com/2k86cu2s

STAGE**Saturday, December 6
Houston Pride Band's
Holiday Concert**

The Houston Pride Band's "Evergreens & Icicles" concert reflects the beautiful diversity of our city, with holiday music sure to please everyone.

tinyurl.com/5n75up2m

**COMMUNITY****Saturday, December 6
Annual Tree Lighting
and Concert**

Reliant presents this festive annual event that begins with the Mayor's annual countdown to the holiday tree lighting, followed by a holiday concert.

tinyurl.com/34jdee3

COMMUNITY**Sunday, December 7
Houston LGBTQ+
Political Caucus Brunch**

The Caucus hosts its 16th annual Equality Brunch celebrating the organization's 50th anniversary. Funds raised will support get-out-the-vote initiatives for next year's midterm elections.

tinyurl.com/3pkzn2d

STAGE**Thursday, December 11
Main Street Theater's
Pride Night**

Main Street Theater hosts a pre-show Happy Hour and SingOUT Cabaret before the performance of Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon's *Georgiana and Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley*.

tinyurl.com/5n6f328x

STAGE**Thursday, December 11 -
Saturday, December 13
Bob the Drag Queen Stand-up
at Punchline Houston**

Bob the Drag Queen brings her hilarious stand-up show to Houston's Punchline for three nights.

tinyurl.com/2suvpydc

**TAGE****Friday, December 12
Out at the Ballet
for *The Nutcracker***

Houston Ballet and *OutSmart* magazine host a special reception for LGBTQ+ ballet lovers and friends. Get 25% off select seats, a complimentary drink voucher, and access to the reception area before the show and during intermission.

tinyurl.com/2w3jnnt5

STAGE**Sunday, December 14
Sismas 2025**

This December, Sis Thee Doll takes us on an extravagant, bigger-and-better-than-ever journey through the music and spirit of the holidays in a way that only she can.

tinyurl.com/3e4hcrye

**STAGE****Thursday, December 18
LGBTQ Night for
It's a Wonderful Life
at Stages**

Join Stages and *OutSmart* for a FREE pre-show reception featuring charcuterie, themed beverages, holiday card making, and an Ugly Sweater contest.

tinyurl.com/4t56u3ds

COMMUNITY**Saturday, December 20
Houston Gaymers Meetup**

The Houston Gaymers' monthly meetup is the place to make new friends while playing your favorite games. Every major system is represented with the latest titles.

tinyurl.com/4hvvvyph



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Monday, January 19

MLK Unity Parade

The City of Houston, in collaboration with the Black Heritage Society and the MLK Grande Parade, presents the city's first MLK Unity Parade honoring the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. tinyurl.com/5n8ypft5



STAGE

Thursday, February 5

Alley Theatre ActOUT for *Real Women Have Curves*

Ticket holders for the February 5 performance of *Real Women Have Curves* can enjoy a pre-performance mixer with music, socializing, light bites, and drinks. tinyurl.com/4rzajj7d



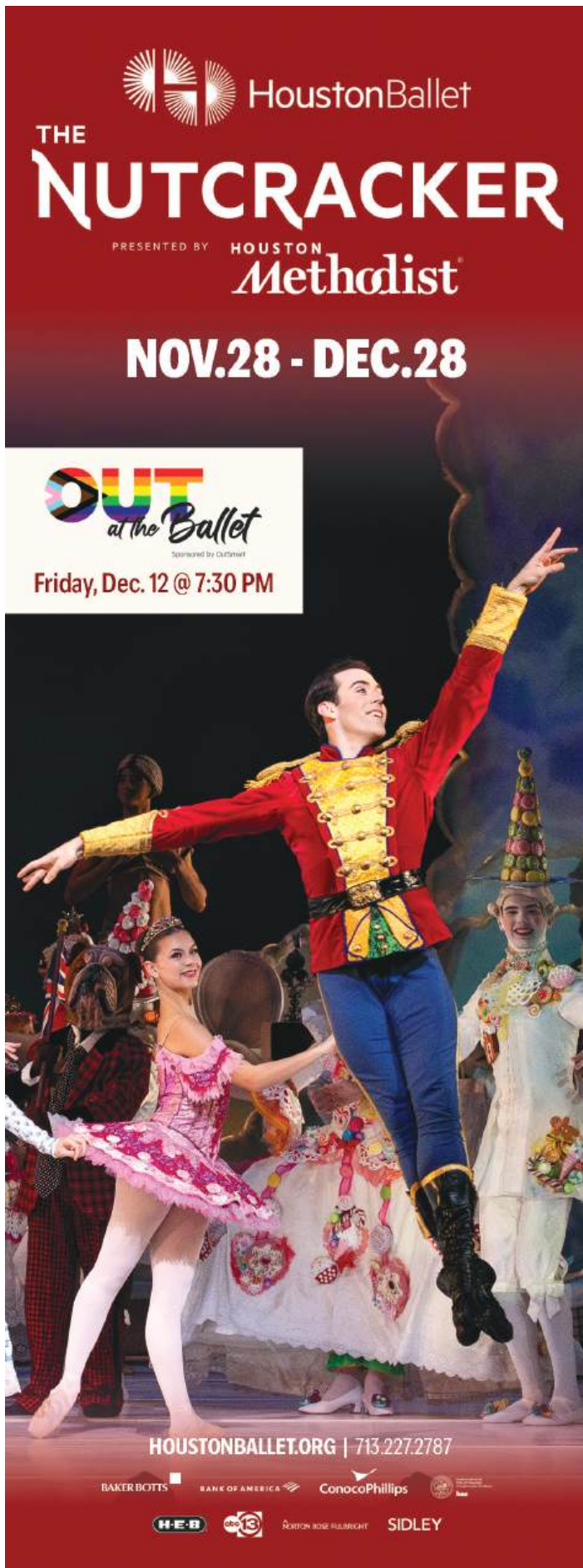
STAGE


Thursday, February 5

Out@TUTS for *Million Dollar Quartet*

Theatre Under The Stars presents its Out@TUTS reception for LGBTQ theatergoers and friends featuring light bites, drink specials, and live music. tinyurl.com/4z7d9btp

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Are 50-Year Mortgages a Good Idea?

The history, the hype, and the risks of ultra-long mortgages.



As conversations about the housing affordability crisis continue nationwide, one proposal that often resurfaces is the 50-year mortgage. While this concept

might sound like a brand-new strategy to help buyers manage high home prices, it actually has a long history—both in the United States and abroad. Understanding that history, along with the potential advantages and drawbacks, can help you determine whether an ultra-long mortgage could fit into your broader financial picture if it becomes more widely available.

50-Year Mortgages Aren't New

Before the modern 30-year mortgage became the US standard in the 1930s, home loans came in many shapes and sizes. Some lenders experimented with longer terms, including 40- and 50-year structures, though they were not widely adopted and often came with restrictive

terms and higher borrowing costs.

In the 1950s, a few institutions explored extended mortgage terms to help meet demand as returning veterans sought housing and suburban development expanded. However, government-backed loan programs ultimately made the 30-year mortgage the industry benchmark.

The most recent US example of longer mortgages came during the early- to mid-2000s when parts of California saw soaring home prices. Some lenders introduced 40- and 50-year mortgages to help buyers manage rising monthly costs. These products disappeared after the 2008 financial crisis, as they were associated with slower equity buildup and increased risk during market downturns.

Elsewhere, long-term mortgages have persisted. Japan and the UK have experimented with 50-year, 60-year, and even 100-year “multi-generational” mortgages in markets where housing costs are high and land avail-

ability is limited. These structures highlight both the appeal and the potential challenges of ultra-long repayment periods.

Potential Benefits of a 50-Year Mortgage

1. Lower Monthly Payments – The primary advantage is reduced monthly payments. Stretching repayment across 50 years lowers the required monthly amount, which may make homeownership more accessible, especially for buyers facing high prices in competitive urban markets.

2. Expanded Access for Some Buyers – A longer repayment period could help certain buyers qualify under debt-to-income guidelines, or they might be able to enter the market earlier than expected. For households that value cash-flow flexibility, this structure may provide breathing room during the early years of ownership.

3. Flexibility for Younger Buyers – Younger buyers may view a 50-year mortgage as a starting point rather than a long-term commitment, with the expectation that they may refinance, move, or upgrade to a larger home before the full term plays out.

Potential Drawbacks of a 50-Year Mortgage

1. Higher Lifetime Interest Costs – A longer mortgage dramatically increases the amount of interest that you will pay over time. Even if monthly payments feel manageable, the total cost could be significantly higher than with a 15- or 30-year mortgage.

2. Slower Equity Buildup – Because payments in the early years mostly cover interest, equity grows slowly in a 50-year structure. This may limit flexibility to move, borrow against the property, or absorb market fluctuations.

3. Exposure to Interest-Rate Changes – If offered as an adjustable-rate mortgage, a 50-year term increases the likelihood of →



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encountering multiple rate changes over the decades, each of which could raise monthly payments.

4. Potential to Push Prices Higher – Some economists argue that longer mortgage terms do not fix affordability; they simply allow buyers to borrow more. This can unintentionally contribute to rising home prices in already competitive markets.

5. A Mortgage In Later Adulthood – A loan stretching well beyond traditional retirement ages may conflict with your long-term financial goals. For many, entering retirement with a mortgage still outstanding could reduce flexibility when income becomes more fixed.

Other Considerations

If 50-year mortgages become more widely available in the US, they may be most appealing to younger buyers focused on cash-flow management, households in high-cost regions, and buyers planning to refinance or sell before the full 50-year term.

Even so, it's important to weigh lower monthly payments against the long-term implications, especially regarding total interest, equity growth, and retirement planning. A 50-year mortgage is not a new idea. It has resurfaced during prior affordability challenges, and it may re-enter policy discussions as today's housing pressures continue. Like any long-term financial commitment, it's important to understand both the short-term benefits and the long-term consequences.

If you're thinking about how a mortgage choice fits into your overall financial plan or how rising housing costs could impact your long-term goals, speaking with a financial planning professional can provide clarity. A comprehensive review can help you evaluate how different mortgage structures align with your cash flow, retirement strategy, and broader financial objectives.

The opinions voiced here are for general information only and are not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual. Grace S. Yung, CFP®, is a Certified Financial Planner™ practitioner and the CEO & Founder of Midtown Financial Group, LLC, in Houston. Since 1994, she has helped LGBTQ individuals, domestic partners, and families plan and manage their finances with care and expertise. She is a Wealth Advisor offering securities and advisory services through LPL Financial, a Registered Investment Advisor. Member FINRA/SIPC. Grace can be reached at grace.yung@lpl.com. For more information, visit www.midtownfg.com or www.midtownfg.com/lgbtqplus.10.htm.

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This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY® and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and your treatment.

(bik-TAR-vee)

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BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- ♦ **Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection.** Your healthcare provider will test you for HBV. If you have both HIV-1 and HBV, your HBV may suddenly get worse if you stop taking BIKTARVY. Do not stop taking BIKTARVY without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to check your health regularly for several months, and may give you HBV medicine.

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BIKTARVY is a complete, 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in adults and children who weigh at least 55 pounds. It can either be used in people who have never taken HIV-1 medicines before, or people who are replacing their current HIV-1 medicines and whose healthcare provider determines they meet certain requirements.

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Brad Pritchett Is Named Equality Texas' New Leader

Board member Jack McBride's speech emphasizes Pritchett's tireless work in the fight for LGBTQ civil rights in Texas.

Photo by NORA DAYTON

Equality Texas board member Jack McBride delivered these remarks during a "Save Public Schools" press conference organized by the Texas Freedom Network on March 15, 2025, and at the annual Equality Texas gala event in Austin on November 15, 2025.

Equality Texas has been fighting anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation for nearly 50 years. It's been a long, strenuous fight. We're battling restrictions on basic human rights, harassment from state officials, and an army of vigilantes eager to drive trans people out of this state.

For the past six years, I've been honored to support the work of Equality Texas as a member of the Board of Directors. I've seen the organization, its incredible staff, and network of thousands of Texans achieve progress, fight against hateful legislation, and spread joy across the state in the face of hardship. Yet queer Texans still face an uphill battle.

Tonight, however, we have a beautiful moment of joy and celebration as we come together at our annual gala in Austin. Equality Texas isn't just resting on its laurels, remembering fights from days gone by. Together, we're charting a path to a better future. It's difficult work to keep moving forward at a time when LGBTQIA+ rights are being rolled back, but it's the hope of our collective future liberation that drives the work at Equality Texas.

The queer movement in Texas took a major step on Saturday when we officially announced Brad Pritchett as the permanent CEO of Equality Texas. Brad's been knocking on doors from Montrose to the statehouse for decades, and we're excited about what the future looks like under his leadership.

Brad's Houston roots run deep. From his early days with the Houston Stonewall Young Democrats to working with the Harris County Democratic Party, Brad has been fighting for equality in Houston for decades. As his career has grown, so has his impact. At the ACLU of Texas, Brad was driving political and electoral strategy. Then when he joined the Equality Texas team as its field director, he launched an ambitious plan to reach constituents in every corner of the state.

Organizing is where Brad's heart is.





Texas Freedom Network's "Save Public Schools" press conference on March 15, 2025

In 2014, he was knocking on doors to push through Houston's first nondiscrimination ordinance. Up until that point, LGBTQIA+ Texans in Houston had no protections, no safeguards. When he became the Equality Texas field director in 2021, he knew what he was up against. Houston is a perfect microcosm of our

state—bustling, busy, diverse, enterprising—and breaking through all that noise requires some real force. Brad brings that experience, drive, and force to our fight. Earlier this year, in his leadership position at Equality Texas, Brad and his team successfully organized a massive advocacy effort that defeated 94% of the more

than 200 anti-LGBTQIA+ proposed bills during the Texas Legislative Session.

As a leader in Texas' equality movement, Brad inherits a major challenge. The climate in Texas has never been exactly welcoming to queer and trans people. Private gay relationships were illegal in Texas until 2003. The Republican platform labels queer people "unnatural." And since 2021, there has been a consistent escalation of attacks on life-affirming health care and freedom of movement for trans Texans. Not only are threats to the safety and well-being of trans and queer folks on the rise, but pressure from the Trump administration has major corporations second-guessing their support of organizations like ours. Texas has always been on the front lines of the LGBTQIA+ movement, but the fronts seem to be growing. But in the face of such pressure and high stakes, I am so grateful to know that Brad, his team, his network of allies, and Equality Texas all have my back.

Whatever fight we have to face next, the board members of Equality Texas are grateful that Brad will lead us through.

For more information, visit equalitytexas.org

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Texas Drag Performers Refuse to Be Silenced

The Texas Senate's SB 12 law threatens free expression and LGBTQ visibility.

By DAVID CLARKE



In 2023, Texas lawmakers passed Senate Bill 12, a piece of legislation that was pitched publicly as a drag ban and signed by Governor Greg Abbott amid a national surge

in anti-LGBTQ legislation.

"After Governor Abbott signed Senate Bill 12 in June of 2023, he tweeted out that he had banned all drag performances in public in Texas," Brian Klosterboer, a senior staff attorney with ACLU Texas, explains. "That's not actually what this law does."

The text of SB 12 prohibits sexually oriented performances in public or in the presence of minors, using definitions so broad and undefined that they risk sweeping in constitutionally protected expression.

Klosterboer exposes just how broad these definitions are by digging into them. For example, "the definition of nudity includes any brief or partial nudity; any portion of the butt or breasts below the areola is considered nude," he says.

What the law *doesn't* do is ban drag outright. In fact, the recent ruling from the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals clarified that "all of those all-ages, family-friendly shows are not even possibly impacted by Senate Bill 12," Klosterboer points out.

Still, the ruling also removed the injunction that had blocked SB 12 from ever taking effect, which means the law could go live as soon as the case returns to the district court.

"Currently, the schedule is that the law would go into effect possibly as early as December 5," Klosterboer notes. "What that means is that across the state, drag shows

could be under more scrutiny."

Despite this, he stresses that the law remains largely untested and muddled. "It's so vague. It leaves a lot of things really unclear," he adds. And that confusion, he believes, is part of the harm. "That's the chilling effect that we've already seen happening."

Dismantling the Arguments Against Drag

One of the most enduring anti-drag talking points hinges on the belief that drag performances, regardless of the setting, are inherently sexual and sexualized. Most of us know this couldn't be farther from the truth. However, opponents of drag will claim that performers who appear in adult-oriented shows are unfit to perform in a family-friendly setting.

Brigitte Bandit has little patience for that

line of thinking, calling it out with an analogy that exposes how flimsy the argument really is. "Would you take an actor who's done both a G-rated movie and an R-rated movie and take a clip from the R-rated movie to argue that the G-rated movie is inappropriate for children because it has the same actor?" she asks.

For Bandit, this isn't a random or hypothetical scenario. It's her personal and lived experience. "They'll take photos of me from my adults-only shows, with my tits out and being all crazy, and put it next to a picture of me reading to children and say, 'This is who's performing for your kids.' Okay, well, one of those is literally me in an 18-and-up show."

Bandit believes this tactic is being promoted to mislead the public and instill fear rather than understanding.

"WHEN WE LET ANY PART OF OUR LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY BE ATTACKED, WE'RE ALL AT RISK OF BEING ATTACKED."

— Brigitte Bandit



JAY YBARRA

The Fight Ahead

Despite the confusion and fear, Klosterboer is clear about one thing: “Drag itself remains fully legal across Texas. Family-friendly shows are not impacted by this law—or should not be impacted by this law.”

Still, he warns that SB 12 arrives in a moment of extreme backlash for LGBTQ rights across Texas. “It’s going to create a chilling effect, no matter what.”

And that, performers say, is exactly why the fight matters. “We must fight back against very single attack. Every single little attack matters,” says Bandit.

Texas drag shows may be in the crosshairs, but it’s far from being defeated—as Bandit and Violet S’Arbleu, two veteran performers who have been following SB12, explain.

Brigitte Bandit

“A way to scare the public away.”

Austin-based drag performer Brigitte Bandit has been fighting SB 12 since the bill’s earliest drafts. “I’ve followed along Senate Bill 12 ever since it was first filed,” she says. She’s even testified in drag at the Capitol. “That testimony made worldwide news. It was crazy,” she recalls.


Her advocacy only escalated as the bill’s language shifted. “They tried to redefine that bill to try to make sexually oriented performances the thing they were using to target drag performers, referencing prosthetics, the things that we wear, and the way that we perform.”

From her perspective as a plaintiff in the ACLU lawsuit against the bill, the goal of SB 12 isn’t legal clarity. It’s actual intimidation. “This is just a way to scare people from supporting us, booking us, and whatnot,” she says. “It’s not really about what it actually says. It’s about the public perception of it.”

She’s already seen the seeds of misguided perception take root. “We had people arguing that drag shows were illegal here in Texas,” she says. “I hate these headlines that are saying ‘Drag Is Banned in Texas.’ No, it’s not!”

And the danger, she warns, goes far beyond drag. “These people who are pushing this legislation see no difference between a drag performer and a trans person,” she explains. “Whenever we let any part of our LGBTQ+ community be attacked, we’re *all* at risk of being attacked.”

Bandit’s message to performers and venues is simple: “Don’t retreat. Continue to keep doing drag. Every drag venue needs to continue to keep booking drag. Don’t be afraid to support us.”



“I THINK SB 12 IS INTENTIONALLY VAGUE BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE ABLE TO TAKE A BUNCH OF PEOPLE TO COURT JUST SO THAT THEY CAN LOSE.”

— Violet S’Arbleu

Violet S’Arbleu

“It was written to do nothing except make a bunch of fuss.”

Houston performer Violet S’Arbleu has spent months dissecting the language of SB 12, and what she sees frustrates her. “The majority of the SB12 revisions that I’ve been able to decipher don’t seem to have anything new,” she says. “It seems to be the same vocabulary that was already in it.”

To her, the vagueness isn’t accidental. “I think it is intentionally vague because they want to be able to take a bunch of people to court just so that they can lose.”

To that end, she also believes the bill was crafted to create chaos, and not safety. “All they’re doing is signing into law the idea that parents can make decisions for their children. It’s just ridiculous. There are so many other

things in the state that this time and energy could be spent on.”

What SB 12 *does* do, she warns, is open the door for logistical and legal harassment, from zoning pressures for businesses to permit requirements for individual performers. “Being in a red state doing drag and then having all of our names on a list just seems a little suspect to me,” she says. “I think that’s also potentially part of the point.”

But like Bandit, she sees another outcome brewing: resistance. “If we temporarily have to change the way people interact with drag, I don’t think that a ban is going to succeed. If anything, I think it’ll make drag stronger.”

At the heart of that resistance is community. Drag, she says, “is a form of freedom of speech,” and a more successful resistance could come from all of the young and veteran performers who will be forced to speak out against conservative politics.

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PAINTING PRIDE AT TONY'S PLACE

Youth participants create a rainbow walkway to celebrate queer visibility.

by DAVID CLARKE

Tony's Place Executive Director Carrie Rai and volunteers in front of the rainbow crosswalk

When the rainbow crosswalks in Montrose were removed, the impact rippled far beyond that Westheimer intersection. At Tony's Place, a drop-in center serving LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, the response came not from leadership, but from the young people themselves. "A couple of days after the crosswalk was removed, a few clients actually came to our staff and suggested that we paint our ramp and railings," says Executive Director Carrie Rai. "It was their idea. Then my team got right behind it."

What followed was a community-powered

Pride project. "We coordinated events on a Saturday," Rai explains. "We had a number of youth, volunteers, and community partners come out the day of, and it looked beautiful."

For the young people who rely on Tony's Place, the rainbow walkway is more than decoration. "This is part of putting themselves into our outdoor space and really taking claim that Tony's Place is their space. It is a safe space," Rai explains. "They want to be represented and seen in the world, which they absolutely should be."

The effort also aligned, literally and symbolically, with Bering Church, which leases one of their buildings to Tony's Place. "Pastor Diane McGehee offered a resounding yes," Rai

notes. "I think it just reaffirms such a great partnership and how aligned we are in the vision we have for our community."

And while Pride symbols on public property may face pushback, Rai sees a movement growing in private spaces. "If other people want to shut us down, we are finding more ways to become visible. We might lose a crosswalk, but we're gaining dozens of more visibility opportunities."

Standing in front of the finished walkway, Rai can't help but smile. "It looks more beautiful than I ever imagined it would be. We're at the top of the rainbow!"

➤ For more info, visit tonysplace.org.

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Pastor Diane McGehee



BERING CHURCH'S RAINBOW STAIRS CELEBRATE COMMUNITY

The bold artwork reminds Houstonians that queer identity is a gift from God.

by DAVID CLARKE | photos by DON ACTON



At Bering Memorial United Church of Christ, the front steps now rise in vibrant rainbow stripes. The paint job is an unmistakable symbol of affirmation in a moment when LGBTQ visibility in Houston feels increasingly under attack. For Pastor Diane McGehee, the project isn't just decorative. It is deeply historical and profoundly spiritual.

"Bering Church has stood, for over 50 years, for the inclusion of the LGBTQ community fully in the church," she explains. "About 70% of our congregation is LGBTQ."

"So many churches have harmed the LGBTQ community, falsely stating that there's

not full inclusion, and that there's something wrong with your identity and the way God made you," Pastor Diane admits. "We actually left the Methodist Church because they were continuing to harm people. Now, fortunately, that has begun to change. But we've been in this neighborhood for a long time, standing with and for the community,"

When Houston's rainbow crosswalk was removed, the congregation felt the impact immediately. "This effort to just erase us is not okay," Pastor Diane says. "You can't erase us." Therefore, painting the stairs became a creative act of resistance and love—one that resonated with neighbors who stopped by to

share how much the rainbow stairs meant.

For Pastor Diane, the rainbow carries sacred meaning. "The rainbow is a symbol of all the diversity in creation. All of life is included." She rejects any theology that diminishes queer identity. "There's nothing simple about your LGBTQ identity or gender identity or sexual orientation. That's a gift from God."

In today's climate of erasure, the stairs symbolize what the church has lived for decades: "We're not going to allow anyone to take away the gift that LGBTQ people are to our community. And so this is where we stand."

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A NEW SHINE ON A SEASONAL FAVORITE

Local actor **Sarah Sachi** shines in TUTS' production of *White Christmas*.

by **ZACHARY MCKENZIE**
photos by **VICTOR CONTRERAS**



A timeless classic leaps from the screen and onto the Hobby Center stage this holiday season when Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS) presents Irving Berlin's

White Christmas. Houston's home for musical theater invites all to experience this dazzling production packed with nostalgia, familiar Christmas tunes, and even snow. Local artist and performer Sarah Sachi is bringing her show-stopping talents to the beloved musical as a member of the ensemble cast, and she's thrilled that audiences can celebrate the holidays with this iconic musical.

White Christmas follows two WWII buddies turned entertainers as they team up with a pair of sisters to save a snow-covered Vermont inn—and discover the true meaning of the holidays along the way. While the film version, which premiered in the 1950s, lacked racial diversity in its cast, TUTS plans to bring cultural representation to their take on the Christmas classic. "I am very pleased with the casting. It's a beautiful, diverse cast, and I am just really genuinely excited, honored, and grateful that director Mitchell Greco decided to go in this direction," Sachi says. "If the show is not calling for specific races (like in *Hairspray* or *Memphis*), I don't understand why it can't be a mixed bag of people. I definitely feel like this is one of those shows."

While Sachi (a graduate of San Jacinto College and Sam Houston State University) didn't consider the film to be a holiday tradition in her youth, she eventually embraced it, thanks to her friends. "I wouldn't say that *White Christmas* was a holiday movie that was always playing in my home. I think the first time I saw it was when I was in college," the

26-year-old recalls. "My friend was like, 'Girl, we need to watch this.' So, we put it on one day and I was immediately like, 'Oh, wait, this is fun.'"

Sachi quickly latched on to several aspects of the movie musical. "I especially loved the dancing. I was completely mesmerized by all of the routines and the lead girly doing so much—going back and forth and tip-tapping on her little toes."

The music also struck a chord with the out bisexual performer. "I have a sister and we like to randomly sing the song 'Sisters' to each other," she says with a laugh. "I think all the sisters out there love that song to this day. Family and love are big themes in this show."

Having grown up in Pearland, Sachi has attended TUTS productions from a young age. Finding herself on one of Houston's most iconic stages has been a "pinch me" moment for her. "I have seen shows at TUTS throughout my entire life, and when I finally got to perform there in 2022, I was so thrilled."

Sachi has performed in previous TUTS holiday shows, including Disney's *Mary Poppins*, *Cinderella*, and *Frozen*. "This has become one of my new holiday traditions. I don't want to be anywhere else than TUTS during the holiday season, because it just feels like home."

The full-circle experience is sentimental to the Houston native. "The little Sachi inside me is constantly just jumping up and down and screaming any time that I get the chance to step on that stage again. It doesn't matter if it's the holidays or not. The holiday vibes just make it that much more sweet," she says. "My family loves coming out and having an excuse to go to the theater, and childhood-me would not believe that this is happening. I never take

it for granted. It's always amazing."

Having also starred in past TUTS productions such as *In the Heights* and *Little Shop of Horrors*, Sachi believes the magic of the season is unmatched during the TUTS holiday shows. "It's going to snow in the theater! Even if it doesn't snow outside in Houston, it's gonna snow at Theatre Under The Stars, okay?" she exclaims. "We're gonna make it happen this year!"

Sachi is stepping into a number of roles for this production, and she is thrilled to bring her flair and whimsy to the stage. "I'm just really excited to be in *White Christmas* and to play any part in it," she says. "I was cast in a bunch of side roles, so I get to delve into all these different characters and just have fun."

Houston's Theater District is electric during the holiday season, with options aplenty for celebrating with friends and family. Sachi embraces the hustle and bustle while focusing much of her anticipation on the fun-filled celebrations that will unfold at the Hobby Center. "You can't go wrong with a classic. It's always gonna make you feel good and make you feel at home," she says. "You're going to watch *White Christmas* at home for the holidays anyway, so why not come see the live version where you really get to experience those emotions in real time and feel the energy in this space? That's why I love live theater and musical theater. There's something about that in-person energy that you just don't always get through a screen. It's going to be really special."

WHAT: *White Christmas*

WHEN: December 9–24

WHERE: Theatre Under The Stars

INFO: tuts.org





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Galveston Gay Chorus members gather for rehearsal ahead of their holiday performances.

CONNOR BEHRENS

COMMUNITY CAROLING

The Galveston Gay Chorus spreads queer joy and holiday cheer with their performances.

by CONNOR BEHRENS

Despite the Gulf Coast's typically humid December weather, the voices of the Galveston Gay Chorus can bring a festive chill to the air. The ensemble has become as much a celebration of identity as it has a beacon of community on the island.

Founded in 2024 to give Galveston Island its own gay chorus, leader Brandt "Matt" Molitor says the group began as part of a nonprofit program through Pride Center Galveston. Having grown to about 15 members, the group now performs across the island throughout the year, spotlighting several holidays like Christmas and Valentine's Day.

The Galveston Gay Chorus will bring festive cheer to several holiday events this season, including the 52nd anniversary of Dickens on the Strand (December 5-7) and a special Victorian vaudeville-themed evening at Soundbar on December 5. In partnership with ARTS Downtown GTX, the Soundbar celebration will kick off the Dickens Weekend festivities as the chorus fills the room with classic carols beginning at 6:15 p.m..

Their performance sets the tone for a rousing music hall sing-along led by drag hosts during a sparkling drag variety show featuring artists such as Kymber DeVine and Tisha Flowers, with support from sponsors including Access Care of Coastal Texas and Cate Black

Architecture.

Molitor was convinced the island needed a gay chorus to complement its gay community center.

"I felt that with the Pride Center getting started, we wanted something else positive to continue that momentum," he says. "Our group of friends was like, 'OK, a gay chorus sounds like a fun idea.'"

While the group lends its voices to entertain crowds, it also raises funds for local charities, Molitor says. "We've performed at fundraisers for other organizations. We've also done charity performances at the Pride Center. We don't charge anything specifically for the Gay Chorus."



Since its inception as a men's choir, the group has expanded and is now open to women, as well. "It doesn't matter who you are," Moli-tor says. "If you want to sing and have a good time with us, you're welcome."

That sense of fellowship is something audiences can feel. "When we perform, people see that we're average folks having a good time doing it," he says. "Here in Galveston, when we have performed at a variety of different places, it's been nice to get a warm welcome. And now that we are in our second season, people have seen us a couple of times so they're recognizing us. They're beginning to own us a little bit. That's really nice."

Member Brian Mayes still remembers hearing the news that a gay choir was forming. "I was looking for something to do with my time, something to give me a purpose," he says. "I decided to try this, and it's been really good for me. There's a lot of camaraderie. I didn't know any of these people when I first joined, so I've expanded my social network a little bit."

Member Jim Nonus has always loved music, and since he had a piano in his condominium, he thought he could be an asset to the group—and he was right. "I thought, 'Well, they could practice here,'" he says. "It's really worked out well. I'm delighted to kind of be the den mother of the rehearsal hall."

Nonus' favorite part of being in the chorus is seeing how audiences respond. "I think a couple of our performances at the churches have been very, very moving. We showed up, we sang, and they loved it. I just want everyone to walk away happy. And if we can brighten the holiday season, then we've done our job."

Member Matthew Raines, the group's pianist, is used to playing gigs at various venues, but being part of the chorus is something different. "This is always a pleasure, coming and being part of this group," he says. "It's a very positive environment. I think we're able to express that feeling to people. We're just spreading a message of love and light."

Member Shawn Flores notes how the chorus has found joy with one another, and hopes the same can be said for their audiences. "Music has a very special power," he says. "I just hope people come and enjoy us and say, 'Hey, here's a great group of people singing.'"

➔ For more information, go to facebook.com/galvestongaychorus.

WHAT: Victorian Vaudeville at Soundbar

WHEN: December 5, 2025

WHERE: 2411 Mechanic St., Galveston

INFO: artsdowntowngtx.com/events

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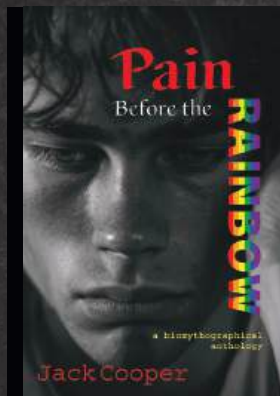
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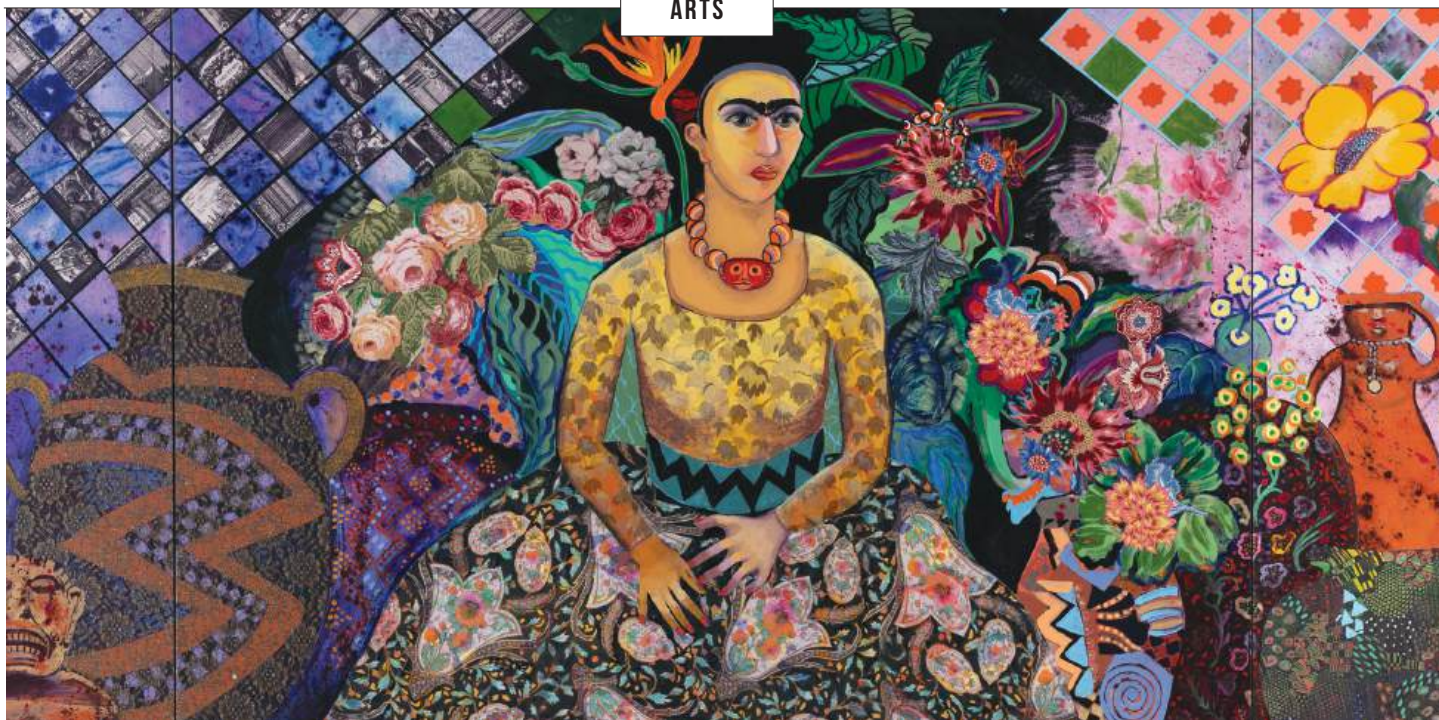


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Miriam Shapiro (American, b. Canada, 1923–2015), *Conservatory (Portrait of Frida Kahlo)*, 1988; acrylic and fabric collage on canvas

The Queer Magic of Frida Kahlo

MFAH's new exhibit examines Kahlo's profound influence on dozens of notable artists from around the world.

by OLIVIA FLORES ALVAREZ



In the early 1980s, Mari Carmen Ramírez was a young scholar spending time in Mexico when she discovered artist Frida Kahlo. At the time, Kahlo was undergoing a newfound popularity.

Fast-forward to the present, and Ramírez is now the Wortham Curator of Latin American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), and curator of the exhibit *Frida: The Making of an Icon*. And Kahlo, far from the unknown local artist she once was, is now a worldwide phenomenon with hundreds of exhibitions of her work, thousands of artists claiming her as an influence, and a self-portrait, *El Sueño (La Cama)*, that recently sold for \$54.7 million at a Sotheby's auction.

When Ramírez began organizing the MFAH exhibit, she decided against a Kahlo retrospective, choosing instead to focus on how Kahlo went from an unknown artist to a global icon who is claimed and admired by multiple communities.

"We've had many, many retrospectives of Frida Kahlo; we don't need one more. Plus, it's extremely difficult to get her work. So I

decided to focus on how this phenomenon unfolded," Ramírez tells us. "She went from being an alternative figure who was rediscovered to being appropriated by feminists, Chicanos, the LGBTQ community, and then by contemporary artists."

Ramírez originally planned to create a historical exhibit focusing on the 1980s and '90s, decades that were so crucial to building the icon. But then Ramírez was impressed to see how much growth continued after 2000.

"I was surprised to see how relevant she continues to be today. She has now spawned a new movement of disability art. So even now, her influence continues to change and shape new artists."

There are 30 works by Kahlo and some 120 works by 80 other artists in the show who all have a relationship to Kahlo, and recognize her as the starting point to their own work.

Ramírez quotes Rosalie Favell, a well-known LGBTQ Métis artist whose work is included in the MFAH exhibit. Discussing Kahlo's influence on her own work, Favell says, "The fact that her work was autobiographical was a huge part of my attraction. It was like



Mari Carmen Ramírez, the MFAH's Wortham Curator of Latin American Art and Director of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas



Yasumasa Morimura, *An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo (Hand-Shaped Earring)*; color photograph on canvas

she ripped out a part of her soul, her pain, her reality, and laid it out for others to see. Her work gave me courage. Her intimate paintings gave me permission to share my feelings and my experiences.”

As global as her reach is now, Kahlo was not always well known or influential. When Kahlo died in 1954, she had a devoted—albeit small—circle of fans and collectors, but she had always lived in the shadow of her husband, the legendary muralist Diego Rivera.

Until the late 1930s, she did not consider herself a professional artist. During her lifetime, she had only two solo exhibitions and sold only a handful of her works.

“We’re not talking about a professional artist who was developing from art school on. It was not until the 1970s when her biographies were published that she became well-known,” says Ramírez. “You had male icons and deities like Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol. Now Frida has surpassed all of them in name recognition. Everyone in the world knows who Frida is. There are Frida look-alike contests all over the world. There are more than 100,000 objects on Amazon and Etsy that have her image, including sanitary napkins,” Ramírez says, laughing at the absurdity.

A downside to the enthusiasm for Kahlo’s rediscovery was that the market created a stereotype of her. She was seen as representative of all of Latin America.

“Frida is the exception, not the rule,” says Ramírez emphatically. “People who are new to Latin American art look to Frida’s work, but her art cannot be taken as representative of an entire continent made up of 33 countries.”

“WE’VE HAD MANY RETROSPECTIVES OF FRIDA KAHLO; WE DON’T NEED ONE MORE. I DECIDED TO FOCUS ON HOW THIS PHENOMENON UNFOLDED.”

— MFAH curator Mari Carmen Ramírez

For a while, Ramírez was the honorary president of the anti-Frida club. “We couldn’t allow that narrow vision of Latin American art to overwhelm the reality of there being so many other artists, so many schools,” she admits.

While Kahlo does not represent the entirety of Latin American art, she has a unique position in its history. “The most important thing is that she has stimulated something that I have never seen with any male artists, which is the desire of artists, both male and female, to embody Frida, to dress themselves as Frida,” says Ramírez. “They paint themselves as Frida. This is unheard of. She definitely has a certain magic to her, and she has the power of endurance to her.”

Everything that Kahlo did was deliberate, Ramírez tells us. Kahlo constructed and projected her image in a very particular way. And it wasn’t just one image. “She was a flapper. She was an avant-garde artist and intellectual. She was a devoted wife. She was a modern-day woman. She was a bisexual woman. All of these factors converge and become what we know as Frida.”

WHAT: Frida: The Making of an Icon

WHERE: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston,
1001 Bissonnet

WHEN: January 19–May 17, 2026

INFO: mfah.org



Rupert Garcia, *Frida Kahlo (September)*, from Galeria de la Raza’s 1975 calendar; screenprint on paper

Welcome to Heaven's Parking Lot

The Catastrophic Theatre debuts *Beautiful Princess Disorder*,
Kathy Ng's surreal meditation on the messiness of life.

by DAVID CLARKE
photos by ANTHONY RATHBUN





There are plays that feel grounded in reality, and then there are plays that rocket-launch themselves into parts unknown. *Beautiful Princess Disorder*, a

world premiere from playwright Kathy Ng at The Catastrophic Theatre, belongs unabashedly to the latter. Billed as “a fuzzy-edged sibling drama for the only child,” the production opens the gates to a surreal afterlife where Triangle Person lives in the parking lot of Heaven with Mother Teresa and Tilikum, the infamous SeaWorld orca. God lives next door, but, hilariously and tellingly, “he has never come to visit.”

The comedy is wild, but it’s not chaos for chaos’s sake. For Ng, the seed of this specific universe began in graduate school with a solo-performance prompt that forced her to explore unfamiliar terrain. “The prompt that semester in school was solo,” she recalls, adding that she began imagining a character that she would never do in real life, inspired by a childhood doodle of “a triangle-headed person with a swimsuit.” That doodle grew into the play’s central figure, Triangle Person, and the parking lot of Heaven emerged from a real place Ng often walked near her home. “There’s this parking lot that’s above ground, that’s really close to the sky, that I really love walking across,” she elaborates.

“Mother Teresa and Tilikum just slowly emerged as I was exploring that world,” Ng says. The result is a comedic landscape governed by absurdity, shapes, confessions, and a celestial bureaucracy that keeps promising, “The Angels will be here to process you shortly.”

Ng’s writing is rooted in curiosity about form and language. “I love it when I feel like I’ve learned a new language, almost,” she explains. “I’m always trying not to take language for granted when I write.” In this play, she even found herself meditating on how “shapes themselves can be words and evoke memories, or the way that our subconscious talks to itself.”

But beneath the surreal exterior is something intimately human. *Beautiful Princess Disorder* spirals toward a series of confessions. These acts of disclosure echo the queer experience of revealing deeply held truths. “I was playing with the idea of shame, which, of course, is what makes people curl up into a ball,” Ng notes. “It leans into a more autobiographical confession of things that I swore I would never, ever share.” The acts of revelation in the play came from a time when she was feeling down on herself and was wondering,

“What would happen if I did the scariest thing possible?”

That experiment mirrors the queer experience of naming oneself, especially in a world that would rather avoid complexity. Ng says the process felt both momentous and quotidian. She connects this duality to the act of coming out, which involves “telling people who you are, who you like, and who you want to be.”

As a queer Asian playwright from Hong Kong working in the American theater, Ng’s perspective infuses the work even when she pushes against labels. “Working here has really made me want to explore what is ‘other’—what’s alien,” she reveals. She’s drawn to “the cracks, crevices, and the ooey-goey stuff that’s not necessarily out in the open all the time.” Though she acknowledges that there is absolutely an underrepresentation of queer Asian playwrights, she adds that artists like Celine Song and Aya Ogawa help her feel brave, as well.

That bravery manifests in the play’s bold assertion of identity, especially in Triangle Person’s insistence that they are a Beautiful Princess. “I was interested in something that is almost unrecognizable to us, making this demand, making this declaration of themselves,” Ng says. Princesshood, she points out, is a fantasy that “tends to begin at very early stages of life.”

She first encountered the phrase “Beautiful Princess Disorder” as a meme that she came across online in reference to Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Through that, she saw a doorway into exploring BPD, mental-health stigma, and the human ache to be seen. “I self-diagnosed myself with it,” she explains, adding that she was trying to find answers →



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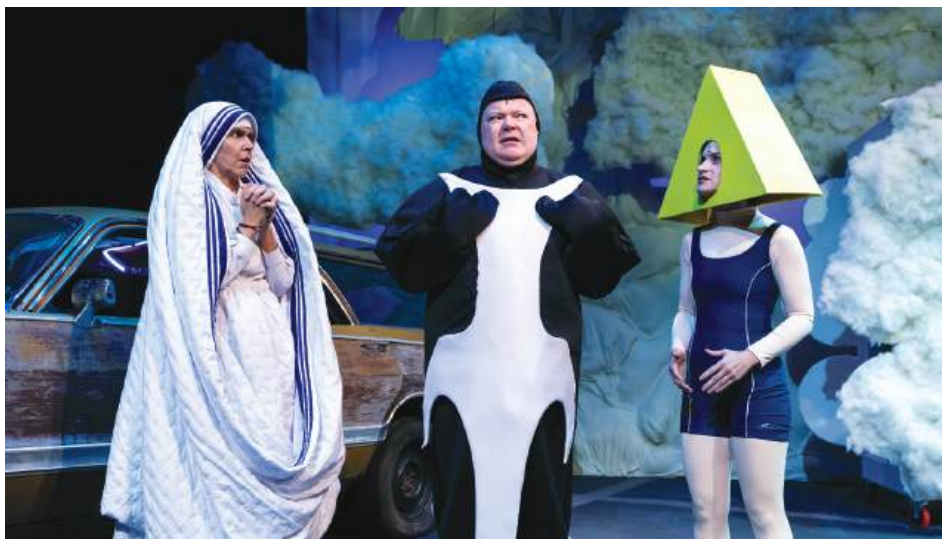
Playwright Kathy Ng

Amy Bruce (l) as Mother Teresa,
T Lavois Thiebaud as Triangle Person,
and Kyle Sturdivant as Tilikum

to things about her own mental health and behaviors that she wasn't proud of. She became interested in "softening those edges," hoping that the play might offer an alternate way of understanding, both for those with personality disorders and for those who love them.

As heavy as that sounds, comedy remains central for Ng. "Laughter is a lifeline just for existing," she notes. Some of her favorite moments come when she writes something so dumb that it makes her crack up. She points to playwright Suzan-Lori Parks' observation that laughter is almost like the release of vomiting. "So much of theater I love because it sometimes feels like an inside joke with the audience."

That spirit is amplified by The Catastrophic Theatre's adventurous ensemble. Ng describes working with them as an adventure, especially since it's her first time in Houston. She was struck by the cast's decades-long relationships, remarking, "it's really cool and inspiring to me because I don't have those relationships yet." The collaboration has even inspired large-scale design choices. "This version of the play has a whole car in it—a station wagon," she notes, laughing at the audacity of putting a real car onstage.



At the heart of everything is an invitation. Ng believes that theater is always a two-part gesture. "The audience has to also jump in or accept the invitation." For queer audiences specifically, she hopes they feel held and seen, especially in moments when Triangle Person is called "a little guy, a little gremlin, a little goblin," and also a princess. "That's how I feel walking through the world a lot," she admits.

Ultimately, Ng wants you to leave the theater "feeling a little softer on yourself, a little gentler, and maybe more okay with the goopy, confusing parts of you."

In a world that often demands simplicity, *Beautiful Princess Disorder* makes space for the beautiful mess of being alive. And in that parking lot of Heaven—surrounded by saints, whales, and angels who are always running late—Ng offers you the chance to see yourself differently after you return to Earth.

WHAT: *Beautiful Princess Disorder*

WHEN: November 21–December 13, 2025

WHERE: Midtown Arts and Theater Center

Houston (MATCH), 3400 Main Street

INFO: catastrophictheatre.com/production/

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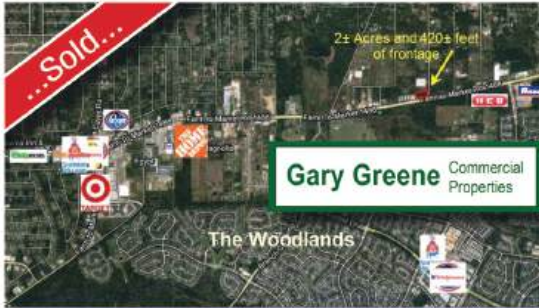
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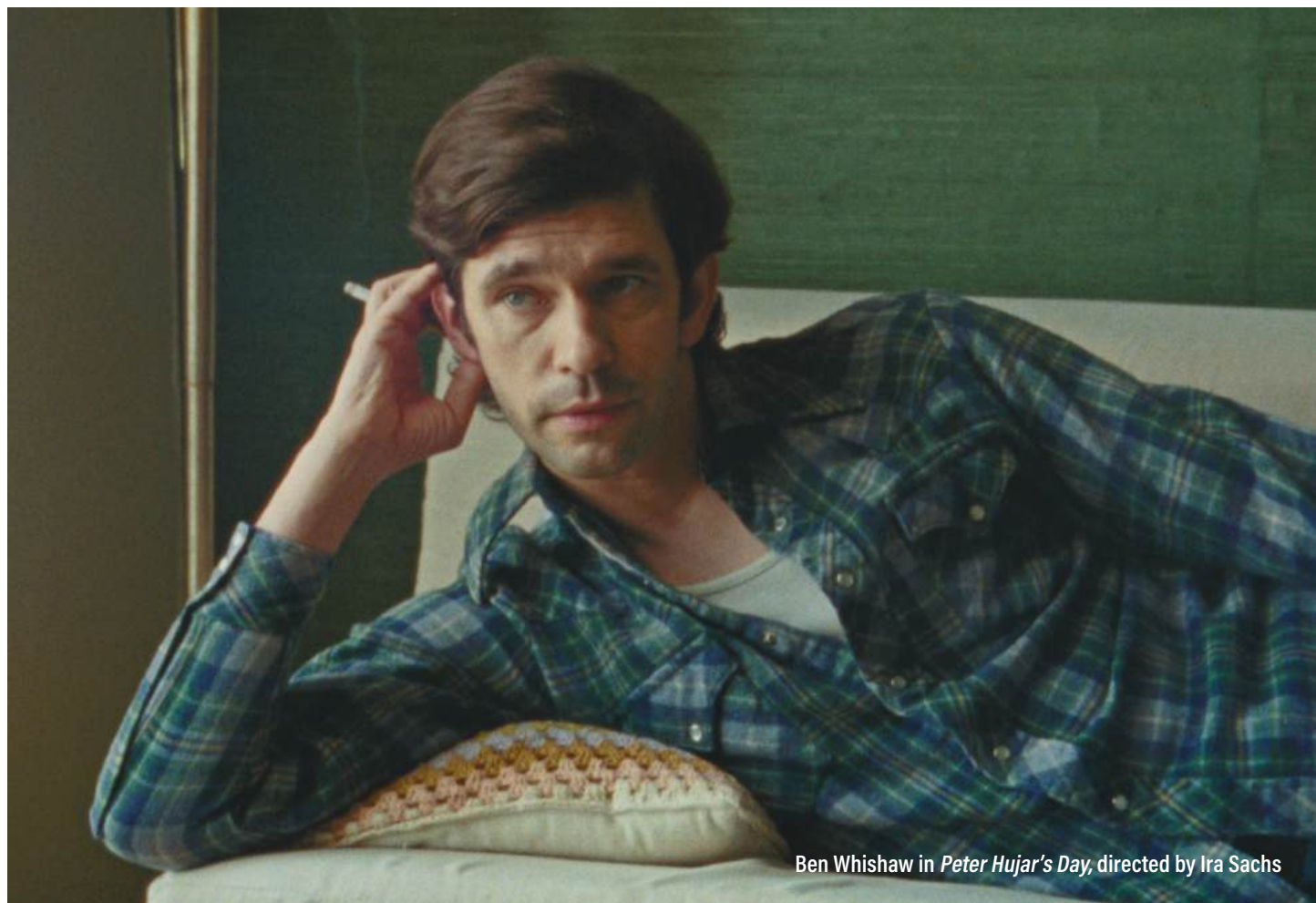
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A Day with Peter Hujar

Director **Ira Sachs'** film is a time-traveling exploration of intimacy and queer history.

by **MICHAEL ROBINSON**
photos courtesy of **JANUS FILMS**



Ben Whishaw in *Peter Hujar's Day*, directed by Ira Sachs



Peter Hujar's Day is almost an impossible movie—an adaptation of a 74-page transcript (later published into a book) for a single interview in one location between two people. Yet somehow, director Ira Sachs (*Leave the Lights On*, *Passages*) found a brilliant vision to make it work.

"I read the book when I was working in Paris on *Passages* with Ben Whishaw," says Sachs. "When I picked it up, I felt very intimately connected to the text, conversation, and time. I felt like it was something that Ben

and I could embark upon together as a kind of art project. The text had all the things that I look for in cinema—detail and authenticity and intimacy and emotion."

As the opening card of the film describes, the movie takes place on December 19, 1974, when writer and journalist Linda Rosenkrantz (Rebecca Hall) sat down with photographer Peter Hujar (Ben Whishaw) and asked him to recount his previous day in great detail. What follows is an elliptical back-and-forth, revealing the New York-based photographer through the quotidian aspects of his life as a worker, friend, and artist. Their banter

becomes immediately recognizable as the bond between a gay man and straight woman best friend, oscillating between serious and gossipy but always maintaining a level of intimacy. Each name mentioned becomes a constellation of worlds that Peter charted, from Susan Sontag to Allen Ginsberg to William Burroughs. It's a brief glimpse into a world long gone, but whose reverberations persist to this day.

The film can be seen as a departure for the director, whose films have been a cornerstone of queer independent cinema. Outside of *Mari-ried Life*, all of his feature films have been set

in contemporary times. *Peter Hujar's Day* feels almost like a collision of timelines, though, not only because it's a recorded recounting of a recounting, but also because it wears its contemporary construction. "The fact that it was 1974 was less significant than the fact that all the details seem so vivid," says Sachs. "It's a period film only in that the text was recorded in '74. It was made in 2024—50 years later. The process of making this theatrical reimagination of the original dialogue conversation was as essential to me as trying to go back in time, which I wasn't trying to do."

The script comes directly from the written transcript, including every pause and punctuation. Yet as much as the film is a recounting of documented events, it's much more an imagined possibility of how this encounter could have been. Dance sequences are inserted, drinks are poured, records are played. "I was staging something, and I was considering that the text is kind of the raw material for contemporary film. I was not interested in fact, but in feeling."

That feeling permeates throughout every single frame of the film, spilling out through the macramé on the dining room table to the record player in the living room to the fur sprawled out atop the bed. Much of this detailed production design came from photos that Linda herself shared with Ira. The two quickly formed a bond over the source material and circled the same milieu—just a generation apart.

"When I read the book, I reached out to Linda on Instagram and we started a conversation that became very sweet and personal quite quickly," says Sachs. "We had an immediate fondness for each other. I certainly don't have the place in her life that Peter did (or does), but I think both of us connected through art and art-making, and also as two Eastern European Jewish people."

This bond helped them become collaborators on the project, incorporating aspects of Linda within the film without becoming beholden to recreating her memories. "She read Rebecca Hall's dialogue on a tape recorder so Rebecca could hear how Linda might say it. And she tried to answer as many questions as I might have about who was who, and what they meant to her or to Peter," Sachs explains.

While Rebecca was able to rely on these tools from Linda to build a reference framework for her performance, there really weren't many video recordings of Peter available. Much of Ben's portrayal, through his affectations, gestures, and embodiment, focused on essence rather than imitation. "The essence comes through because he was working verbatim with the way Peter spoke," says Sachs. "Every word, every comma, every addendum

or change, every reshuffling of words, was true to how it was said. Or at least the words that were said in December of 1974. He didn't need to become Peter; it's the *essence* that the film is interested in."


In a space where so many biopics attempt an embodiment of affect and gesture to resemble similarities held in the popular imagination (look no further than the upcoming *Michael* movie), *Peter Hujar's Day* is unique in they way it pushes deeper for a truth that lies in interpretive materials. The film understands the source text as a space where truth lies in multiple possibilities, rather than aiming for an uncanny recreation of a single interpretation. This approach can be seen in the film in multiple forms, including the nonlinear timeline of events. Linda and Peter begin by recounting the morning's events in the morning, but it quickly slips into night and then evening. For Sachs, time is more evocative of a feeling than a strict linearity.

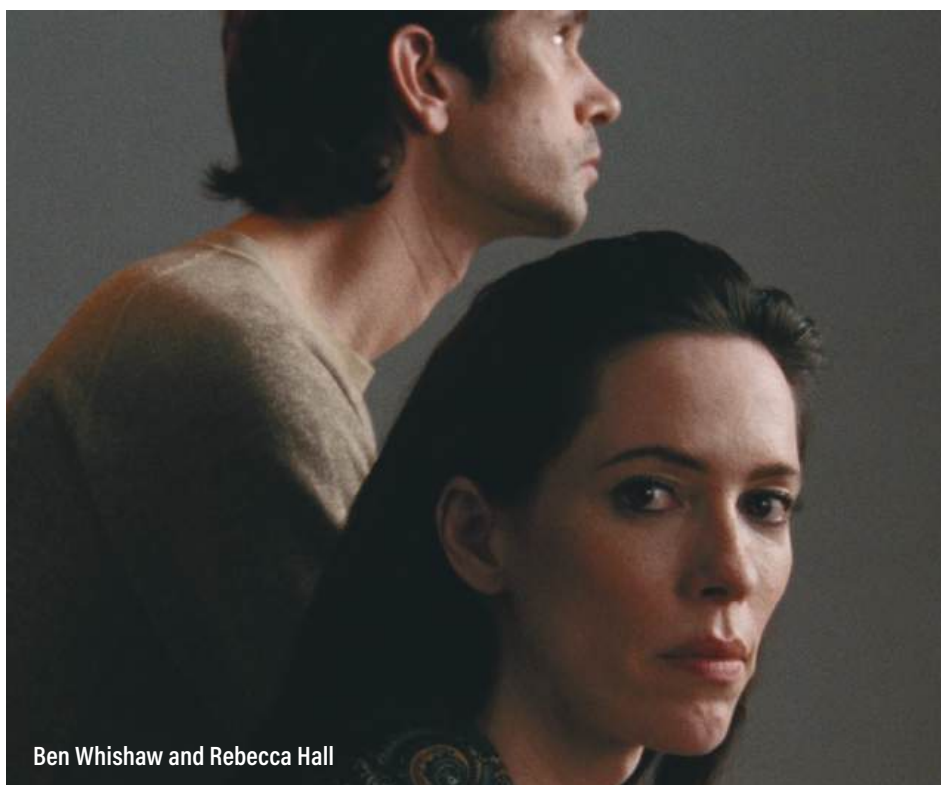
One reason for these creative interventions is practicality. While filming an 80-minute movie in one location from a single interview transcript with two actors is a feat in itself, that didn't start off as such a strength in the pre-production phase "That was the crisis of the film, to be honest. We had to figure out how to translate something that was most likely, in real time, quite static," says Sachs. The solution came only a few weeks before

cameras began to roll, looking at documentary portraits like Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason* and Andy Warhol's *Poor Little Rich Girl*.

"It's really the changing of time which creates movement from one space to another," says Sachs. "A subject is on a couch, and then they're on a terrace, and you don't know how they got there. But the continuity of the dialogue is what moves you along. Ultimately, I found that my interest was in examining and playing with different forms of cinematic portraiture. Each scene of the film is a conversation between light, space, and form, and how those interact to become a motion and a narrative."

Sachs' next work, titled *The Man I Love*, sees him reteaming with Rebecca Hall to tell the story of a gay artist living in New York City in the 1980s during the AIDS epidemic, as he takes on possibly one last great role. It's not too dissimilar to *Hujar*, who also passed from AIDS in the late 1980s. "The AIDS epidemic transformed my life because I came to a city that was a shell of itself," says Sachs, "and a city that glimmered with loss as much as with beauty. I'm making a film about an artist facing the end of their life, which in some ways means I'm making a documentary. Or an autobiography."

 *Peter Hujar's Day* is currently playing at the River Oaks Theatre.



Ben Whishaw and Rebecca Hall



Hedwig's Creator Takes the Stage Again

John Cameron Mitchell discusses
Hedwig and the Angry Inch
ahead of its special screening at
Numbers.

by MICHAEL ROBINSON
photo by MATTHEW PLACEK

John Cameron Mitchell returns to Houston with a special screening of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* presented by Arthouse Houston on December 28. The film, playing at Numbers Nightclub right before the new year, will be accompanied by a live commentary from the film's writer, director, and lead actor.

For those who are unfamiliar, the 2001 indie musical classic follows Hedwig, an East Berliner transplant and lead singer in a band, who is chasing down his ex for stealing his songs. The road-trip film is a kaleidoscope of the fringes, showcasing a punk scene that involved anyone defying labels.

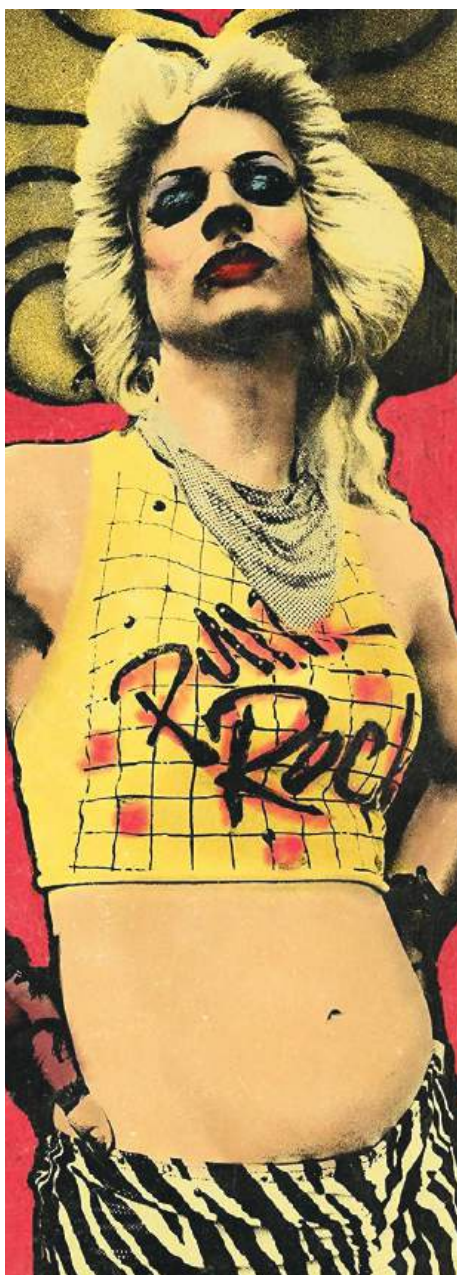
It's also adapted from a musical that Mitchell produced with his collaborator, Stephen Trask. Together, they came up with the idea, built the characters, wrote the script and music, and produced the production off-Broadway. "I had been hanging out in the drag and rock-and-roll clubs in the late '80s and early '90s, and the energy and excitement I would see at those performances didn't outstrip the excitement I would feel in a musical or on Broadway," says Mitchell. "So I wanted to bring the energy of punk and drag to a Broadway-style musical."

While it took almost 20 years for the production to actually transition to Broadway (where it won four Tonys, including Best Revival of a Musical), Mitchell didn't hesitate in finding his own adaptations of the material. "Bob Shaye, from New Line Cinema, liked how I operated. He later gave me \$6 million to direct the film version, having never made a short. It was a different time—pre corporate, pre-digital—where one person could make a decision like that. It was a wonderful opportunity to be free and to learn from my collaborators and just stay in the same vein as Hedwig."

These collaborators, sometimes on set and others behind the scenes, really helped champion Mitchell's vision and find the right outlet. While it was Bob who helped give him the financial means and freedom, it was through the Sundance Filmmakers Lab that he was really able to find the right visionaries to execute the film version that Mitchell intended.

"The lab was really important for that. Michelle Satter, who runs it, paired me with my cinematographer who ended up doing the film." It also helped to find the people who would work off the clock to find the right voice and ideas for the final film. They had a full year to work on it, culminating in a Sundance premiere where Mitchell won the Best Director prize.

While the film didn't exactly light the box office on fire, it completely changed Mitchell's life. "*Hedwig* was a flop, commercially," he admits, "but it's opened up every door in my life, introduced me to the most important people in my life, and continues to give."



Mitchell grounded his next career steps in making projects he believed in, wanting to be proud of every project he was involved in rather than making choices in response to expectations. "Usually, the Hollywood path is you make an interesting film and then Hollywood grabs you and throws money at you and makes you do a Marvel movie or something," he says. "They don't give those to established directors. They give them to new directors so they can pay them less, control them, and then somehow co-opt their talent. I just knew I wouldn't like myself in an environment where I was doing something I didn't care about. So I just went on to do *Shortbus*."

Mitchell's commitment to determining his own career path has led him to direct four feature-length films, alongside a plethora of projects producing, writing, acting, podcasting, and more. "It's all the same storytelling tradition," he says, "just in different forms."

Elevating storytelling above a particular medium is central to his ideology, and how he envisions his role in inspiring future generations. "I'll always be trying new things, as well as trying to mentor people and help them along and find their own voices. I do college tours and try to remind the kids that things were worse," he says.

It's also vital in the current political climate to combat the contemporary wave of right-wing resurgence. "It's time to let go of some of the tools that people were taught, which tend to be more about political correctness and identity politics. That's irrelevant today. You can't cancel a dictator," he says.

This sentiment is rooted in the continual misunderstanding of Hedwig as a trans character, even though he never identifies as such in the film. For Mitchell, there's freedom in the absence of classification, which is part of the excitement around the culture of punk. He hesitates to even classify *Hedwig* as a gay movie. Mitchell sees the punk scene as a space that bridges differences rather than demarcating them, even publishing a *New York Times* opinion piece earlier this year calling for young people to find ways of organizing outside of approved systems.

The commitment to the possibilities of punk are integral to everything Mitchell does, including his recent endeavors with both the *Origins of Love* tour (familiar to anyone who has seen *Hedwig*) and his David Bowie persona, Queen Bitch. Both will be highlighted at Numbers, where Mitchell will follow the film with a live performance alongside Amber Martin and Chapman Welch. Martin, a native Texan (Port Arthur, specifically), will be bringing out some of her country originals including "I Left My Weed in Texas, and That Ain't Cool."

In addition to the screening of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Mitchell will be presenting a free masterclass from 12 to 2 p.m. on Friday, December 28, aimed at film and arts students. "I'll be talking about strategies of storytelling, strategies of resistance, and using art as a kind of resistance—because it comes through the same source as truth. In my view, when all news is fake, then all stories are true, for better or worse. Some of them are conspiracy theories that explain our failures or the failure of society, and others are beautiful, imaginative metaphors that help us live and feel empathy for someone that we are not. That is the point of fiction. Now that facts are dead, maybe the only thing we have left that brings us together is narrative—identifying with someone who is not you because it's good and it rings true."

WHAT: Special screening of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* presented by Arthouse Houston

WHEN: December 28

WHERE: Numbers Nightclub

INFO: arthousehtx.org

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The Must-Read Queer Books of 2025

A standout year of bold storytelling, groundbreaking voices, and LGBTQ narratives reshaping literature.

by OSM STAFF

Each year brings a new wave of queer literature, but 2025 stands out as a season of remarkable ambition, emotional depth, and genre-defying experimentation. Across fiction, memoir, fantasy, horror, and poetry-infused prose, LGBTQ authors around the world have delivered books that illuminate the breadth of queer life—its joys, its devastations, its long histories, and its imagined futures.

For *OutSmart*'s annual roundup, we combed through the year's most acclaimed releases—those championed by critics, celebrated by readers, and recognized by major literary outlets. The result is a curated list of works that challenge norms, expand representation, and capture queer experience in all its complexity.

Stag Dance: A Novel & Stories

by Torrey Peters

In this inventive collection, Peters expands the boundaries of trans fiction through a novel about rival lumberjacks preparing for a gender-bending dance and three sharp, unsettling stories about obsession, identity, and transformation. Acidly funny and deeply observant, the book explores desire at its messiest and most revealing.



Necessary Fiction

by Eloghosa Osunde

Osunde maps the intertwined lives of queer Nigerians navigating Lagos's creative, cultur-

al, and political landscapes. Through a kaleidoscope of interconnected characters, the novel examines chosen family, survival, and self-making in a society that both celebrates and constrains them. Lyrical and fearless, it's a landmark work of African queer fiction.

Baldwin: A Love Story

by Nicholas Boggs

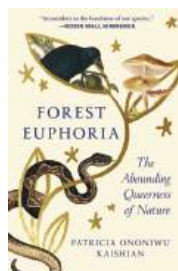
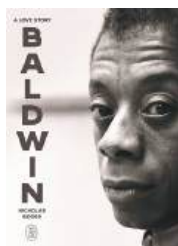
This revelatory biography examines James Baldwin's most significant romantic and artistic partnerships and how they shaped his voice. Drawing on newly uncovered archives and interviews, Boggs reveals a portrait of Baldwin centered not solely on politics or fame, but on the queer intimacies that fueled his greatest work.



Forest Euphoria

by Patricia Ononwu Kaishian

Queer mycologist Kaishian blends memoir and biology to uncover the abundant queerness of the natural world—from intersex slugs to fungi with thousands of sexes. Part science writing,



part personal narrative, the book challenges readers to see nature as inherently diverse and delightfully nonbinary.

Great Black Hope

by Rob Franklin

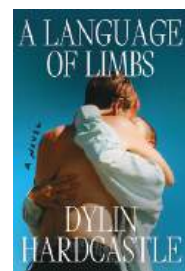
Franklin's gripping debut follows a queer Stanford graduate whose life unravels after a wrongful arrest and the sudden death of his best friend. As he seeks justice, he confronts grief, privilege, and the weight of public narratives. A suspenseful, emotionally rich story about identity and accountability.



A Language of Limbs

by Dylin Hardcastle

Hardcastle weaves two parallel coming-of-age stories set in 1970s Australia, following two women forced to choose between queer desire and social expectation. Their divergent paths converge decades later, forming an intimate portrait of love, loss, and community shaped by the AIDS crisis. A poetic, art-filled tribute to queer resilience.



Open, Heaven

by Seán Hewitt

Hewitt's debut novel chronicles a charged, tender relationship between two teenage boys→

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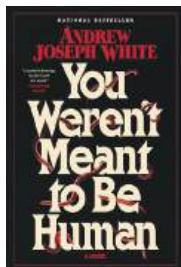
in a rural English village. With the lyricism of a poet, he explores first love, longing, and the ache of wanting more than the world seems willing to offer. A hauntingly beautiful story of queer awakening.



You Weren't Meant to Be Human

by Andrew Joseph White

This visceral work of queer body horror follows a trans man navigating an alien invasion that promises transformation at a terrible price. White combines gore, social commentary, and aching vulnerability to create a story about survival, autonomy, and the monstrous ways society treats marginalized bodies.



Mazeltov

by Eli Zuzovskiy

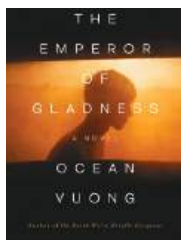
Set at a chaotic bar mitzvah on the edge of war, Zuzovskiy's debut examines queer desire, family conflict, and national identity through sharp satire and emotional clarity. Multiple narrators reveal a young boy's coming-of-age against the backdrop of Israel's political tensions and personal revelations.



The Emperor of Gladness

by Ocean Vuong

In his first novel since *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Ocean Vuong returns with a lyrical story of survival, unlikely kinship, and the quiet miracle of choosing to stay. In East Gladness, Connecticut, Hai—a young man contemplating suicide—is stopped by Grazina, an elderly widow. As he becomes her caretaker, they form an unexpected family with other overlooked townspeople. The Emperor of Gladness is a tender, mythic meditation on grief, resilience, and chosen family.



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2025 Queer Cinema Highlights

Independent and global films dominated a year of offbeat LGBTQ stories.

by MICHAEL ROBINSON

While other years may have had major Oscar-contending queer films or major studios positioning queer narratives in their awards lineup, this was the year for independent, international, and unconventional movies that showcase a true range of what queer filmmaking can be. The following ten films, listed alphabetically and not by preference, are just a sampling of what 2025 had to offer, with many more available if you just dig beneath the surface.

Cactus Pears

In the wake of his father's passing, Anand and his mother return from Mumbai to his hometown village where his extended family lives. The required grieving ritual includes rules like not trimming hair and not eating more than two meals (but snacking on fruit is okay). During this ten-day period, Anand reconnects with Balya, his "special friend," as they rekindle feelings that have long laid dormant. The film mirrors aspects of director Rohan Parashuram Kanawade's own life and the grieving process he also went through. Anand has come out to his parents but not to his extended family. Whisperings around him put more pressure on his mother than on himself, knowing that he can build his own life while she's tied to the expectations of those around her. This sense of attunement is consistent throughout, carrying a striking sense of place and time. *Cactus Pears* shines in the details; it's the sly smiles that both men exchange, the moments they choose to touch, and how Anand eats a fruit given to him by Balya. Characters demonstrate care through meticulously observed moments of expression, not in the secrecy and shame so commonly depicted in coming-out narratives. It doesn't come as a surprise that the film won the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize for a drama at Sundance Film Festival earlier this year.

Castration Movie Anthology ii: The Best of Both Worlds

Castration Movie Anthology ii: The Best of Both Worlds sounds both made up and completely unrealistic on paper—a 5-hour sequel to a 4.75-hour lo-fi film, filmed in Hi8 as a trans



Diego Céspedes's *The Mysterious Gaze of the Flamingo* brings surrealism and quiet tension to a Chilean mining town.

mumblecore that's part of a planned four-part anthology. Yet it is vibrant, hilarious, and completely brilliant, materializing the impossible. The film follows Michaela "Traps" Sinclair as she attempts to leave a trans separatist cult in New York called Polygon, where an AI-generated YouTuber guides each member. Michaela makes a brief escape to the real world, where she encounters a variety of gender ideologists and detransitioners including Ivy Wolk (*Anora*, and most recently *The English Teacher*) who adds a signature sense of discomforting humor. The film features a wide array of recognizable faces from queer media, including Jack Haven (*I Saw the TV Glow*), Theda Hammel (*Stress Positions*), and Lea Rose Sebastianis (*In a Violent Nature*). It plays like a dark B-side to the first *Castration Movie*, but has its own identity that doesn't require viewers to watch the first iteration (though they absolutely should). *Castration Movie* sounds off-putting in comparison to many end-of-year award con-

tenders but that's the point; there's a radical artistry in the patience, in the grainy look, and the prolonged scenes that make watching the film an experience you can't forget.

The Chronology of Water

Adapted from Lidia Yukanatich's 2011 memoir of the same name, *The Chronology of Water* chronicles Lidia's (Imogen Poots) chaotic life, from her abusive childhood and career as a competitive swimmer to her pivot as a writer. Each arch is underscored through intense imagery captured through 16mm footage, whispered dialogue, and harsh sounds, creating sensorial landscapes that give more weight to affective depictions than narrative articulation. This experiential approach is actress Kristen Stewart's first foray into directing a striking film, rupturing images and distilling scenes into an almost dreamlike haze. The composite materials are still incredibly harsh, with many moments of blood, violence, vulgar-

ity, and gruesome imagery that build toward a raw depiction of femininity, sexuality, and desire. *The Chronology of Water* becomes an overwhelming experience—one that is entirely unique, escaping the trappings of a “tone poem” through an incredible lead performance by Imogen Poots (also featured in this year’s *Hedda*) that consistently grounds the viewer as the film scurries across timelines to connect the fragments of Lidia’s life and traumas. It becomes clear why the actress has been chasing after this adaptation since announcing the passion project in 2018.

Fucktoys

After a swamp tarot card reading from Big Freedia reveals that sex worker AP (Annapurna Sriram) is cursed, she goes on a rowdy and crass multi-day adventure trying to break the hex through any means necessary. Taking cues from Gregg Araki, John Waters, and other beacons of transgressive queer cinema, Sriram, who also wrote and directed the film, emerges as a brilliant talent, creating a world of her own that begs to be lived in. *Trashtown* is littered (literally) with dives, divas, and leather cops, filmed in vibrant 16mm that feels dreamy without becoming overly romantic or sentimental. Here, violence can be both playful and painful, with sex as an act of joyful domination and humiliation. Each multiplicity is rooted in reality as Sriram uses the neon-trash aesthetic to make the familiar foreign. The film takes AP and her love interest, Danni, from a dilapidated house party to a mansion to a strip club, creating spectacle without losing the central tension of the precarious nature of sex work.

Hedda

Nia DaCosta (*Candyman*, *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*) adapts Henrik Ibsen’s classic play *Hedda Gabler* with a new queer dimension, gender-swapping Hedda’s (Tessa Thompson) love interest of Eilert for Eileen (Nina

Hoss). *Hedda* takes place across a single night, tracing tensions as they boil during a party thrown by recently married Hedda and her husband, where Eileen, Hedda’s former love interest, makes an appearance. The titular character is a trickster herself, spinning characters around and causing chaos, deciding if Eileen still has feelings for her or if she should be crushed entirely. While the original’s commentary on gender and class are maintained, the dimensions of sexuality are brilliantly woven throughout as the unspoken taboo that gives Hedda and Eileen power while making them vulnerable. Both lead performances anchor the film, but the film’s direction propels it forward, meticulously balancing the levels of turmoil before fully descending into chaos. The choice to omit “Gabler” from the title is a fascinating dissection. Ibsen’s Hedda is referred to as “Hedda Gabler” (her maiden name) and “Hedda Tesman” (her married name), referencing the father and husband who exert patriarchal power over her. DaCosta’s “Hedda” is free from both connotations as she decides her fate divorced from past or present.

Heightened Scrutiny

Heightened Scrutiny follows Chase Strangio, the ACLU attorney who argued in the *U.S. v. Skrametti* case, making history as the first trans lawyer to argue in front of the Supreme Court. The film centers on the first date of oral arguments, December 4, 2024, but it traces the process back to the moment the Court took the case. Notably, the film ends before the decision has been made, giving an incredibly different feeling now that we know how the justices ruled in the Tennessee-based case, and how it impacts trans youth today. Director Sam Feder (*Kate Bornstein Is a Queer & Pleasant Danger*, *Disclosure*) is more interested in making a tool to educate about the machinations of manufactured consent that led so many states to adopt anti-trans legislation. The film’s political

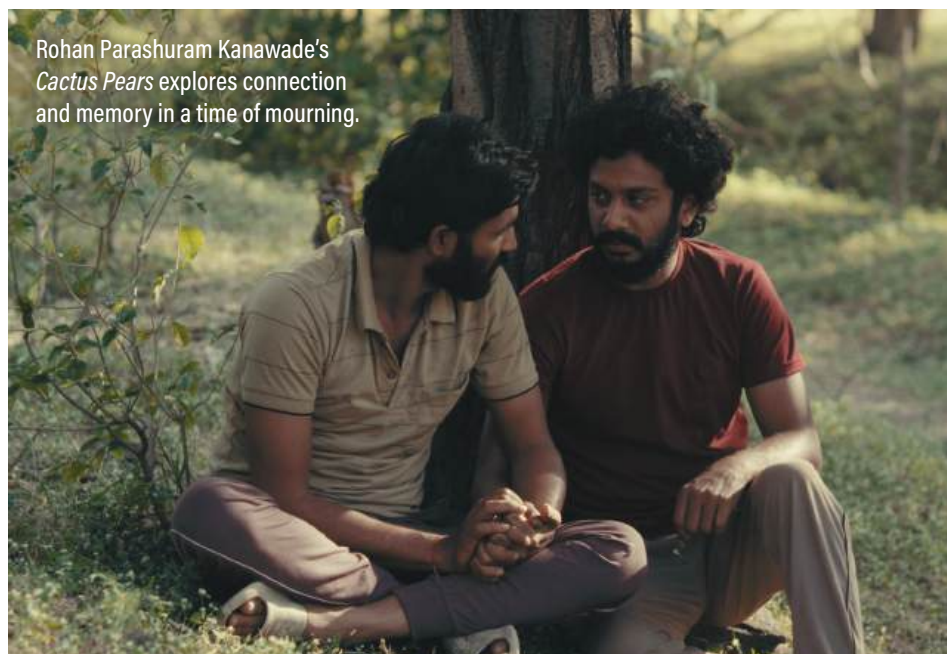
stance is not to defend the right of trans youth to access gender-affirming care, but to explore why this is even a point of debate in the first place. *Heightened Scrutiny* acts as an inflection point, illuminating a transitory moment in history that is instructive for the future. It allows viewers to sit with the recent facts and piece together how agendas are advanced, with the hope that we can then use that knowledge to protect queer and trans rights.

Misericordia

Director Alan Guiraudie (*Stranger by the Lake*) returns with *Misericordia*, one of the best-directed films of the year. The movie follows Jérémie (Félix Kysyl) as he returns to a small town in France upon hearing of the death of his friend’s father. What begins as a short visit extends indefinitely as his presence causes a ripple effect that results in an act of violence. We see just a few characters in the village: the mother, the son, the local priest, the childhood friend, and the two police officers. They intersect at exact moments, escalating both the tension and sense of humor as a comedy-of-errors ensues. Jérémie chameleons himself around each main player, reluctantly embodying (to the best of his ability) their desires, sexual or otherwise. Guiraudie knows exactly how to position the audience, moving from thriller to comedy through his deployment of *Candide*-like levels of absurdism. *Misericordia* is queer in every sense, showcasing what queerness can represent outside of the realm of sexual desire: a sense of possibility, oddity, and freedom.

Move Ya Body: The History of House

Director Elegance Bratton (*Pier Kids*, *The Inspection*) details the history of house music in Chicago through the Black and brown queer musicians who created not only the music but the clubs and ecosystems that allowed the genre to thrive. Much of this celebrated documentary connects how disco informed house, and how both became targets by white listeners as another way to discriminate. Most famously, the Disco Demolition Night was a lightning-rod moment in the genre’s relationship to popular culture, encouraging mob-like behavior to physically destroy vinyl disco records in violent displays. Yet from this destructive act, budding musicians and music producers Vince Lawrence and Jesse Saunders were able to create a new genre to play at the underground club The Warehouse. Bratton does a fantastic job of incorporating the voices of those involved from all angles, allowing each interlocutor to narrate their own events. It’s a small filmic turn that allows creators like Lawrence and Saunders to celebrate their own work while the collaborators who took advantage of them reveal unpleasant truths about their involvement. *Move Ya Body* never forgets who made the music, who the music is for, and →



Rohan Parashuram Kanawade's *Cactus Pears* explores connection and memory in a time of mourning.



Annapurna Sriram's *Fucktoys* follows AP on a chaotic quest to break a curse revealed in a swamp tarot reading.

who wanted to claim the music, understanding that the playbook of disco and house music are the same.

Mysterious Gaze of the Flamingo

Diego Céspedes's feature directorial debut takes place in a small mining town in Chile in 1982, where a group of trans women are accused of cursing the local men through capturing their gaze, imposing some sort of blight that eventually ends their life. To avoid infec-

tion, the men of the town cover their eyes when the women go outside, but still venture to meet them at night when their urges get the better of them. Twelve-year-old Lidia and her adoptive mother, Flamingo, are at the center, as the former struggles to understand the sickness that has enveloped her mother and is taking hold of her community. Told in quiet surrealism with astounding performances, Céspedes blends humor, genre, and history together to tell a visually arresting and emotionally affective

story about the early years of the AIDS crisis.

Twinless

James Sweeney's *Twinless* explores the relationship between two twins, Roman and Dennis, who lose their respective brothers and rely on each other for the kinship that they lost. It becomes quickly evident that something is not quite right. Dennis's behaviors begin to escalate as Roman comes to understand what he needs in life and becomes less dependent on the relationship he's formed. Dylan O'Brian plays both twins Roman and Rocky, showcasing a range of talent that won him the Best Actor prize at Sundance Film Festival earlier this year. Sweeney, who wrote, directed, and stars in the film, captures a level of discomfort in desire, veering occasionally into a level of cringe-inducing anxiety that's both entertaining and mildly terrifying. It's a difficult film to pin down, which is to the film's credit: it's squirmy in how it circumnavigates genre lines to present slightly unpleasant characters who all deal with loneliness in varying degrees.

Other films deserving of mention are Trương Minh Quý's achingly beautiful *Viet and Nam*, Andrew Ahn's reimaging of Ang Lee's classic *The Wedding Banquet*, and Emma Hough Hobbs and Leela Varghes's wacky animated sci-fi adventure *Lesbian Space Princess*.

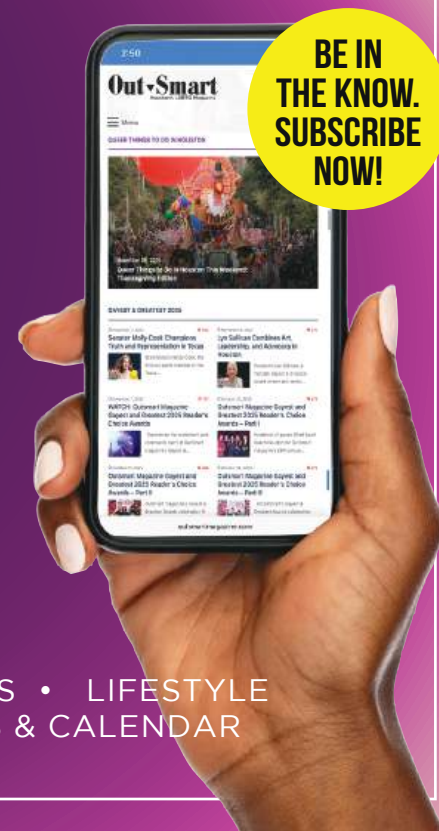
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OUT@TUTS FOR THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE OCTOBER 30, 2025

Houston theatergoers gathered at the Hobby Center for a performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, followed by an Out@TUTS reception hosted by drag performers Regina Thorne-DuBois and Dynasty Banks-Couleé. Guests enjoyed drinks, conversation, and

light bites while mingling with cast members, some dressed in Halloween costumes. Out@TUTS continues to provide Theatre Under The Stars audiences with a unique opportunity to socialize with cast members and Houston LGBTQ community friends.



PARTYING IN PARADISE

Kelley Delesandri and Lauren Gamble celebrated their love in Cancún with 155 guests.

by DAVID CLARKE
photos by SANTIAGO GABAY

Lauren Gamble (l) and Kelley Delesandri



When Kelley Delesandri says she and her wife, Lauren Gamble, met the old-fashioned way, she means it. “We met at a birthday party, actually,” Kelley recalls. “I

always tell people we met the old-fashioned way—in person, at an event.”

Lauren was finishing grad school in Houston, and Kelley was living on Galveston Island. They kept bumping into each other. “We kept meeting up at the beer cooler,” Kelley says, “and after a couple of times going to grab a beer around the same time, we just made a joke about it.”

“Kelley makes jokes, so yeah, I was attracted to her humor,” Lauren adds.

About a month later, fate intervened. The pair crossed paths again, and this time Lauren took the lead. “I actually gave Kelley my phone number,” Lauren says with a smile. “She never stopped texting and talking to me after that.”

Kelley doesn’t dispute it. “She did give me her number. I did not ask for it,” she says.

They agree that their first official date was “super awkward,” Lauren admits. “We literally talked about the weather.” But the second date sealed the deal.

Soon after, the couple found themselves navigating a year of long-distance romance while Lauren was in College Station. That chapter became pivotal. “I pretty much spent as much time as possible visiting her there,” Kelley says. “There was a night where I was sick and she was taking really good care of me. And I just felt so much at home with her, like that was where I was supposed to be.”

For Lauren, those quiet nights were everything. “We just got to spend a lot of time together and really got to know each other, talking about what a future would be like.”

That future arrived in grand fashion when Kelley orchestrated a surprise proposal weekend at Houston’s Hotel ZaZa. “I had tricked

her into going to celebrate something stupid,” she explains. Things took a comedic turn when Lauren discovered the ring Kelley was hiding. “She found the ring in my bag and was like, ‘What is this?’” Kelley remembers. “It wasn’t the romantic ambiance that I thought it would be, but it was really fun.”

The celebration afterward was just as memorable. “She had coordinated with all of our friends and family,” Lauren says. “It was really special.” So special, in fact, that Kelley recalls the restaurant they were at ran out of champagne that night.

The couple married on February 2, 2019, at Dreams Playa Mujeres in Cancún, a venue that left an unforgettable impression. “It was better than we imagined it, actually,” Kelley says. “It was amazing!”

For a destination wedding, their guest list was enormous. “We had about 155 people come,” Lauren says.

“We pretty much took over the resort,” Kel-



ley adds. "It far exceeded our expectations. It was the most fun trip I've ever been on."

The Dreams Playa Mujeres wedding team, including their coordinator Ana Ralph, delivered a seamless experience that the couple still raves about. Kelley says, "I was blown away by how easy they made everything. Everything that we thought up, they made it happen."

"We had no stress, no worries," Lauren agrees.

Kelley adds that the staff were true professionals who seemed to "crank out three or four weddings a week" while still making their own celebration feel effortless and deeply personal.

Their vendors became part of the story, too. The couple found photographer Santiago Gabay through social media, and he exceeded every hope they had. "He is fantastic," Lauren says. "He and his partner were there, and I think they had fun. They ended up staying even past when they were supposed to and hung out with us." Likewise, their videographer, Oscar Nuñez of Oscar Video, was a spontaneous last-minute addition that the brides now cherish deeply. "We weren't going to get the video," Lauren admits, adding that they will now cher-

ish their wedding video forever."

As they revisit the highlights reel, they especially like the moment featuring Kelley's uncle reading from the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision. "It brings us back," Lauren says. "It's very moving."

Despite the destination wedding, their rings tie back to Houston. Kelley and Lauren worked with jeweler Nicole Wysocki of JNS Diamond Imports, a choice that became part of the sentimental fabric of the day.

When it came to budgeting, they kept their priorities crystal-clear. "We spent the majority of our wedding budget on the party, and we have no regrets," Kelley says. "We had a light-up dance floor. We had so much light-up stuff."

The ceremony was also special, with one of Kelley's best friend's fathers, a nationally known rabbi, officiating. "We always joke that we had this gay Jewish wedding in Mexico, but we're not Jewish," she laughs. He incorporated Hebrew traditions, including a blessing and shared wine beneath a makeshift chuppah.

Their massive wedding party reflected the life they've built together. "We just put all the kids in it. It was just this super-long, fun

procession of friends," Kelley recalls.

For Kelley, the ceremony and reception topped her list of favorite moments. "The after-party was just so much fun," she says, noting that the day-after gathering, which was on Super Bowl Sunday, became "a whole additional party that we hadn't planned."

Lauren's favorite part was simply having so many friends and family come together. "Never again in our lifetime will we have everybody that we love and care about getting along and hanging out. It was just really special."

Now married nearly seven years and together for eleven, Kelley and Lauren's love story includes two children and a tight-knit circle of queer families and allies. "We actually do have a really great community of queer families," Lauren says. "It's really fun getting to raise our kids with them."

For anyone thinking about becoming parents, their advice is simple: do what makes sense for your family, ignore outside opinions, and embrace the joy. "If it's what you want," Kelley explains, "you'll never regret having the kids."



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VOICES FOR HOPE GALA HONORS HOUSTON LEADERS IN HIV CARE NOVEMBER 7, 2025

On November 7, 2025, Avenue 360 Health & Wellness and Omega House welcomed supporters to the River Oaks Country Club for Voices for Hope: Rhythm & Roots Revue, an evening celebrating Houston's musical heritage. Community leaders, advocates, and new donors gathered for a night of reflection and gratitude for the essential HIV continuum-of-care services that both organizations provide.

Co-chairs Jeff Gremillion and Carrie Brandsberg-Dahl opened the fundraiser with remarks underscoring the importance of compassionate, community-driven healthcare.

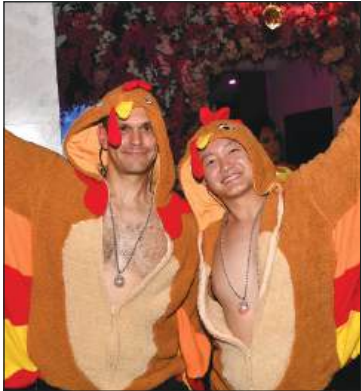
Avenue 360 President and CEO Dr. Charlene Flash followed with a message of appreciation that reaffirmed the organization's mission to deliver high-quality, holistic care—from primary and dental services to mental health support, housing programs, and comprehensive HIV treatment.

The event honored three pioneers of Houston's early HIV/AIDS response in the

1980s: dentists Dr. Ed Cordray, Dr. Bruce Smith, and Dr. Harry Hodge, whose work at the Bering Dental Clinic transformed access to dignified care.

The Executive and Professional Association of Houston (EPAH) was also recognized, with Randall Hendrick, Mike Bodin, and Jack Berger accepting on the organization's behalf.

Guests also enjoyed performances by Denise Lee and her band, music by DJ Darrell, cocktails, dessert, and continued fellowship to conclude the evening's festivities.



**DISCO TURKEY 2025:
UP, UP, AND AWAY AT
THE MONTROSE COUNTRY CLUB
NOVEMBER 29, 2025**

Disco Turkey 2025 brought a packed crowd to the Montrose Country Club on Saturday night, where guests fully embraced the '70s glam theme. Sequined tops, metallic jumpsuits, and sharp retro tailoring turned the room into a moving runway, with standout

looks at every turn. Several hosts arrived in pilot-inspired outfits that nodded to the theme without feeling overdone, adding a clean visual cohesion to the night.

Co-founder DJ Chad Guidry kept the energy high with a tight, steady set that filled the dance floor early and never lost momentum. The crowd was ready to show up, dance, and enjoy being in community, creating an atmosphere that stayed lively from the first track to the last. With expressive

fashion, a strong soundtrack, and guests eager to celebrate together, Disco Turkey 2025 delivered a night that felt genuinely alive.

The event's origins date back to 2001, when Disco Turkey began as a simple idea: end the holiday weekend with chosen family. What started as a disco-themed birthday gathering in Chad Guidry and Bryan Hlavinka's apartment has evolved into a beloved annual tradition that continues to unite Houston's LGBTQ community.



**ALLIES IN HOPE PRESENTS
HOPE FOR HOUSTON BALL 2025
NOVEMBER 14, 2025**

Supporters, community leaders, and advocates filled The Revaire for the 2025 Hope for Houston Ball, Allies in Hope's signature fundraising event. With the theme "All In for Hope, All Out for Houston," the evening embraced an elegant casino motif, blending celebration, philanthropy, and HIV advocacy. Guests enjoyed a seated dinner,

dancing, and an expansive silent auction along with a special performance by singer Jack Freeman that added to the night's festive spirit.

The event was co-chaired by Michael Broderick and Brian S. Hull, joined by Dr. Joseph Gathe Jr. and Mrs. Deanna Breaux-Gathe. Honorees included U.S. Business Action to End HIV, recipient of the Shelby Hodge Vision Award, and the Greater Houston LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce and State Senator Borris L. Miles, who received the Ada Edwards Humanitarian Award for their

leadership in health equity and community impact.

A wide range of sponsors—among them Avita Pharmacy, AARP, H-E-B, Gilead, and the Frost Foundation—helped make the evening possible. Formerly known as AIDS Foundation Houston, Allies in Hope has dedicated more than 40 years to ending the HIV epidemic by providing education, testing, housing, and access to care, while working to reduce stigma and expand healthcare equity across the Houston area.

BAR GUIDE



OutSmart's Bar Guide is now on your phone! Scan here to check out our directory of LGBTQ bars and clubs in and around Houston, including your favorites in Galveston, Huntsville, Spring, and College Station. Whether you're a local or a visitor, we've got you covered with this updated guide to the best LGBTQ-friendly spaces.



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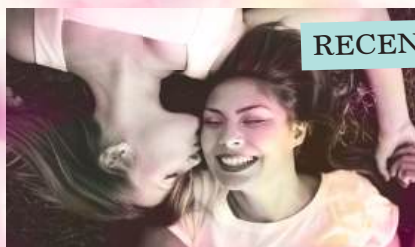
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by KEVIN CASEY

Neptune's Last Light

A powerful shift arrives for **Pisces**.



Dream maker Neptune has been retrograde since July of this year, and goes direct this month on December 10. This is the final stretch for Neptune in Pisces, which began way back in 2011. Neptune can certainly be dreamy and mystical, but the higher purpose of this ethereal planet is to expose the illusions and delusions we hold on to that keep us entangled in all kinds of unhealthy attachments. When it comes to Neptune, the cosmic hack is letting go and the final destination is spiritual insight; we finally see the light. Neptune will leave Pisces for good on January 26, 2026, and enter Aries for the next 13 years. Saturn, the Taskmaster, will join Neptune in Aries on February 13, 2026, for the next two and a half years.

Saturn grounds us; it's the planet that orders us to go out and touch some grass. Find your sign below and see what illusions and delusions Neptune plans on dissolving and the lesson plan Saturn has for you.



ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)

Learning to let go and trust yourself has been a major lesson for you during the last couple of years. Neptune and Saturn wanted to show you that sometimes you have to get still, wait, and just float. When you do this, your intuition will whisper what to do next. You've always been good at clocking who a person is in a matter of minutes, and when Neptune and Saturn make their move into your sign, you'll be taking your psychic vibe to a whole new level.

TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)

You've been learning some serious lessons about who you invite into your life—particularly when it comes to friends or groups of people. No more looking at others through rose-colored glasses. Neptune and Saturn are about to throw you into the deep end of the cosmic pool, shattering any illusions you may have about not being able to handle the deep waters of your subconscious. Things are about to get surreal and supernatural, maybe even a little weird like a David Lynch film. If you take a deep breath and remain present, you'll be shocked at all the signs the universe sends you to let you know exactly which doors to walk through.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

Career most likely settles down after Neptune and Saturn leave Pisces in early 2026. You're a bundle of energy and love to be on the go, but running on empty is an illusion in 2026. Neptune is spiritual and ethereal, while Saturn is grounded and earthy; put these two in the cosmic blender, and you're likely to find yourself in a meditation group or a yoga class to be reminded that breathing is our friend.

CANCER (June 22–July 22)

You're always thinking about or helping others, but in early 2026 there's a shift that puts the focus on you. It's time to take a risk, Cancer. Leave that cozy, familiar shell and try something new. This is your call to adventure, and the adventure most likely involves your career in some way. New opportunities will present themselves, whether it's a new job, a new career, or even starting your own side hustle. This is an exercise in remembering you have what it takes to make things happen, and it could also be an alternative career path for the future. This is a year of opportunities, so don't miss them!

LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)

You've been doing some serious, deep soul searching the last couple of years, cleaning out your closets both literally and figuratively. Relationships, both good and bad, have changed you on a profound level. Neptune's next assignment is an overhaul of your spiritual beliefs and your philosophy of life. It's pretty heady stuff. Travel will do wonders for you. Consider the next several years your *Eat Love Prayera*.

VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22)

In the relationship department, you don't need any more projects or fixer-uppers. You really get it now when you hear people say you can't fix or change another person. When Neptune moves into Aries on January 26, 2026, the focus shifts to intimacy and vulnerability. Forget trying to keep things neat and organized, Virgo, this is messy work. *Superficial* is out while *deep and soulful* is in. You're learning the deep lesson of loving yourself, warts and all.

LIBRA (Sept. 23–Oct. 23)

Once Neptune and Saturn enter Aries in early 2026, the focus is me-versus-we. Sure, relationships are your thing, Libra, but relationships that have that draining effect on you are

going to get frustrating; the same goes for situations where you have to mommy people. No thanks. In other words, you need adults in your world—people who show up and do what they say they’re going to do. Flakes and commitment-phobes need not apply. When it comes to relationships, you’re ready for the real deal.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)

You’re putting the finishing touches on lessons revolving around self-expression, creativity, and red flags in romantic relationships. Have you missed seeing the red flags when it comes to romantic relationships? You may not be perfect just yet, Scorpio, but you’re getting a lot better. Those victim/savior relationships are starting to lose their shine. Putting a lock on your creativity and comparing yourself with other artists is also on its way out. As we enter 2026, Neptune will help you dissolve those pesky control and perfectionism issues.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22–Dec. 21)

Neptune in Pisces put you in a deep dive around family, home, and daddy issues. Putting down roots and creating the perfect home or living space for yourself is what Neptune had in mind for you. Saturn’s move into Pisces these past couple of years put you on Freud’s

couch to address any self-defeating illusions you have about family—and specifically, any lingering “daddy issues.” Now that you’ve survived Neptune’s deep and serious soul-searching waters, it’s time to learn to love yourself, come hell or high water. Indulging in your creative side, even if you don’t consider yourself a proper artist, can have a very healing and therapeutic effect on your self-esteem.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)

Logic and being realistic have certainly served you well, Capricorn, but you’re warming up to the idea that trusting your intuition isn’t so bad after all. You’ve had the weirdest feeling, like you are picking up what other people are thinking. That weird feeling was your mind and thinking getting tangled up in Neptune’s cosmic haze, making you downright psychic at times. Next up, you can’t be everyone’s shoulder to cry on forever. You learned very early in life to be strong and put others’ feelings before your own.


AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)

Alright, Aquarius, you’re done with selling yourself and your talents short. That illusion is evaporating; your work has worth and you’re not giving yourself away for free anymore.

Starting in early 2026, Neptune begins a long process of flooding your mind with psychic energy. At first, it will feel a little weird, but you do weird quite well. This sensitive and psychic turn of mind also has a romantic flair to it—no more keeping that inner poet in the closet. Meanwhile, Saturn will demand you face your fear of slowing down.

PISCES (Feb. 19–Mar. 20)

You have been so at home with Neptune’s energy; it’s your ruling planet. You can’t really stop being a psychic sponge. It’s who you are, but you can stop absorbing others’ perceptions of who you are and what they think you should be doing with your life. You’re building a new identity for yourself, one that more reflects who you are now. Starting in early 2026 you’ll need to get on top of those finances. You have a very trusting nature, Pisces, and you just hate seeing anyone go through a difficult time financially. Neptune certainly has her deceptive side, and if you aren’t careful, you could get played when it comes to money.

 Follow Kevin Casey’s stellar insights at popastrologyreadings.com and Instagram @p0pastrology.

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The Show Stopper

Marci Mogul, the high-energy big-hair diva, has it going on.

by SAM BYRD



To see Marci Mogul out of her drag outfit, complete with tattoos and facial hair, is a lesson in body art. Then, wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am,

with the help of a razor and some makeup, a full-fledged goddess emerges ready to take the stage like Venus rising from the sea. This dance diva channels the moves of Beyoncé while maintaining the grace of a beauty queen onstage as she speaks to her fawning fans.

Pronouns? He/Him

Inner Avatar? Owl

Hometown? Jacksonville, Florida. I've been in Houston for two years.

Drag birthday? October 31, 2009

Story behind the stage name?

There is a clothing store named Marciano, and my friends always brought dresses from there. When I started drag, oddly, my mind went to that store, and I shortened it to Marci.

Describe the outfit in your photoshoot.

I knew I wanted to feel sexy and empowered. The gold dress was a statement. I wanted to feel my curves.

What got you interested in drag?

This may sound so cliché, but Beyoncé is what got me interested in drag.

Describe your performing persona.

Confident, sex appeal, glamour, and high energy.

What does "the season of giving" mean to you?

Spending time with loved ones and being thankful for life. The season of giving means giving gifts to friends and family to show how much you care about them.

Most memorable moment as a performer?

Having my family come to see me onstage for the first time.

Most embarrassing moment onstage?

One time I was wearing a corset and did a split, and the corset tore open in front of everyone.



Follow
Marci Mogul
on Instagram
@MichaelvsMarci

What's your ultimate goal as a performer?

To uplift people and share my world.

Thoughts about legislation restricting drag performances?

The government needs to stop worrying about LGBTQ people and focus on more important issues like gun control.

Do you have a drag family?

I started my gay family many years ago. We call ourselves Moguls. Most of them have been with me since they were 16 years old, and they are now adults. They really get on my last nerve, but I would not change them for the world.

Describe your aesthetic.

Big hair and an over-the-top dance costume.

What was your dream job as a child?

I wanted to be a choreographer so bad.

Who is your celebrity crush?

Aron Perrie.

Who is your favorite drag character from the media, and why?

Shangela, because she is always so professional, entertaining, and polished. I loved her glow-up.

Where can fans see you perform?

I perform around town a few times a month, and you can also catch me once a month at the Montrose Country Club, formerly known as Rich's.

Which candy or dessert would best describe you, and why?

A Snickers bar, because it is packed with a mix of different elements. That describes my personality because I'm talented in so many areas.

What have you learned from drag that you use in your everyday life?

Patience. Everything will come in due time.

How would you describe the Greater Houston drag scene for a visitor?

High energy queens who are glamorous and who love to entertain.

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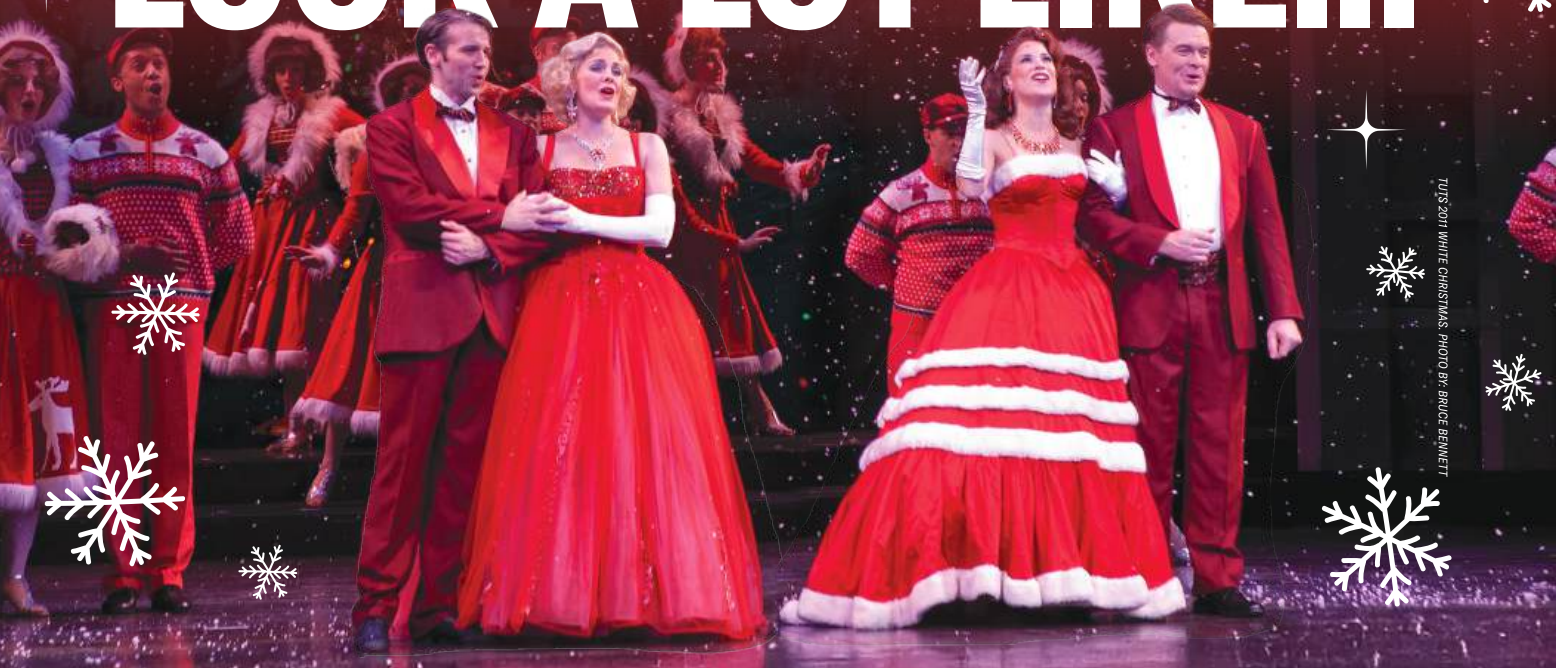
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TUTS 2011 WHITE CHRISTMAS PHOTO BY BRUCE BENNETT

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