VICTORY: MICHIGAN MARRIAGE BAN UNCONSTITUTIONAL

SCHUETTE 0, GAYS 315
Friedman Rules In Favor Of Equality, Michigan Couples Marry Next Day

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As always, I support gay marriage. I feel like it will happen eventually, but wouldn’t it be great if it happened sooner rather than later?

– Kylie Minogue, pg. 16
Michigan Makes History With First Marriages

State Is Number 18 In March To Equality

BY SUSAN HOROWITZ

As soon as U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman declared the ban on same sex marriage in Michigan unconstitutional at 4:50 p.m. Friday and it was clear no stay was attached to his sweeping decision, Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette immediately requested an emergency stay. The stay would come, but not before 4 counties in the state married 315 same sex couples Saturday morning.

The case centered on Hazel Park couple April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse who originally sued to be able to jointly adopt their children. The case was later amended to include the right to marry and Judge Friedman ruled unconditionally in their favor. Attorney General Bill Schuette is appealing the case, and a stay would have prevented any marriages from taking place until after an appeal.

DeBoer and Rowse were not among the couples to marry Saturday. Instead they are waiting until after the appeals process is complete and their marriage - and adoptions - can go unchallenged. “We will do it when we know it is for real,” DeBoer said at a press conference held Friday at Affirmations Community Center in Ferndale.

In Judge Friedman’s ruling he wrote of the couple, “No court proceeding could ever fully convey the personal sacrifice of these two plaintiffs who seek to ensure that the state may no longer impair the rights of their children and the thousands of others now being raise by same-sex couples. It is the Court’s fervent hope that these children will grow up to understand the integrity and closeness of their own family and its concord with other families in their community and in their daily lives. Today’s decision is a step in that direction.”

Knowing that a stay was inevitable, County Clerks in Oakland, Ingham, Washtenaw and Muskegon Counties rushed to give residents the chance to marry. They opened for special hours and waived waiting periods. The honor of being first in the state to wed went to Glenna DeJong and Marsha Caspar of Lansing, who were married by Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum just after 8 a.m.

In Washtenaw County the first couple to marry was Beth Patton and Jonnie Terry. “A big thank you to the two of you, who became our poster children yesterday as the first same-sex couple to be married in Washtenaw. Congratulations! With their high profile wedding, Jonnie fears repercussions at her employment, as it is still legal to fire someone for being gay in Michigan,” said Sandi Smith, president of Jim Toy Community Center in a letter to the community Sunday.

In Oakland County 142 couples took their vows. Statewide the total is 315.

Oakland County Clerk Lisa Brown, who was a defendant in the case because of her position as county clerk, was on hand to personally officiate
Michigan Marriage Ban Struck Down

Judge Friedman Says State’s Witnesses ‘Entirely Unbelievable’

“In attempting to define this case as a challenge to the ‘will of the people,’ state defendants lost sight of what this case is truly about: people.”

BY JAN STEVENSON

DETROIT – U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman’s ruling was unequivocal. In the strongest possible terms, he struck down Michigan’s marriage ban as unconstitutional just before 5 p.m. on March 21, writing that the state’s objections to marriage equality did not reach even the bare minimum legal threshold — they weren’t even rational. The opinion repudiated each of the state’s key witnesses, describing some of them as “entirely unbelievable and not worthy of serious consideration,” and described all the plaintiffs’ witnesses as “highly credible.”

At a quickly assembled press conference at Affirmations Community Center Friday evening, over 100 people cheered, wept and screamed upon the arrival of the plaintiffs, Jayne Rowse and April DeBoer, and their attorneys Dana Nessell, Carol Stanyar and Ken Mogill.

“Obviously this is a pretty historic and monumental day in Michigan, and in our lives, and probably in the lives of most of the people gathered here,” said Jayne Rowse. In thanking their attorneys April DeBoer said, “We were the ones who stood up and said we aren’t going to take it anymore, but they are the ones that did all the hard work.”

As lawyers and activists pored over the decision there was elation — then an incredulous state. But until a higher court responded to their request for a more permanent stay that would presumably last until the case goes through the full appeals process.

Although it shut the door on marriages for now, the 315 marriages performed March 22 remain legal marriages in the State of Michigan. Gov. Snyder’s spokesperson, Sara Wurfel, announced Monday that Snyder and his administration consider everything to be on hold for now, including the marriages performed Saturday. “We are not saying that we aren’t or won’t recognize the marriages that happened on Saturday, but that we’re awaiting further court or legal direction on this complex, unusual situation,” Wurfel said in an email. “Either way, this can’t be construed one way or another as not recognizing the validity of the same-sex marriages.”

The Decision

Judge Friedman’s 31-page decision goes through all four of the state’s objections to marriage equality. Friedman then explains why each objection has no merit.

The state’s four reasons for excluding same-sex couples from Michigan’s definition of marriage are:

1. Optimal Environment, or providing children with “biologically connected” role models of both genders that are necessary to foster healthy psychological development;
2. Proceeding With Caution, or avoiding the unintended consequences that might result from redefining marriage;
3. Tradition and Morality; and
4. Federalism, or promoting the transition of “naturally procreative relationships into stable unions.”

Optimal Environment

Friedman rejected the optimal environment argument because the evidence presented at trial disproves that theory. Friedman cited testimony from psychologist David Brodzinsky and sociologist Michael Rosenfeld as evidence that children raised by same-sex couples progress at almost the same rate through school as children raised by heterosexual married couples. He described open any earlier.

Then at around 9 p.m. Washtenaw County Clerk Lawrence Kestenbaum announced he would open at 9 a.m. Saturday, March 22 and marry as many couples as he could until 1 p.m. Just before 11 p.m. Oakland County Clerk Lisa Brown announced she would open Saturday morning too, as did Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum and Muskegon County Clerk Nancy Waters.

The rush to marry was on. Despite the short notice, by 7:30 a.m. the next morning dozens of people were already in line at the four county clerks’ offices. At the Oakland County courthouse in Pontiac, over 500 people waited for the clerk’s office to open. That number grew quickly to over 500 people by mid-morning. Couples came with friends, families and children to marry in the window of opportunity created by Judge Friedman’s decision. The mood was gleeful, excited, emotional, loving and appreciative to Brown and her staff who came in on their day off to solemnize 147 couples’ legal Michigan marriages.

Clergy and other officiants rushed to the courthouse to perform marriage ceremonies. Metropolitan Community Church pastors Rev. Deb Dysert and Roland Stringfellow performed about 30 ceremonies in and around the halls of the courthouse. County Clerk Lisa Brown, who not only issues the marriage licenses, but is also empowered to marry couples, finally gave up trying to perform ceremonies one-at-a-time and instead started marrying people in groups of about 25 couples each.

Similar scenes played out at the Washtenaw, Ingham and Muskegon clerks’ offices. By the end of the day, those four county clerks had married 315 couples.

Then, late in the day, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati granted Schuette a temporary stay of Judge Friedman’s decision until March 26, pending review of Schuette’s request for a more permanent stay that would presumably last until the case goes through the full appeals process.

See Ban Struck Down, page 8
The Stay, Delayed By Judge, Allows 315 Couples To Wed In State

BY LISA KEEN

The Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals issued a stay at 5 p.m. Saturday of a district court decision Friday that struck down Michigan’s ban on same-sex couples marrying, but hundreds of couples had already married by that time.

Michigan’s first marriage of a same-sex couple took place just after 8 a.m. Saturday morning in Mason, just south of Lansing. The couple was Marsha Caspar and Glenn DeLong, both in their 50s, who have been together for 27 years.

In all four counties that had office hours on Saturday and issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples including Muskegon County, Ingham County, Oakland County and Washtenaw County. In Oakland County a line stretched out the door when the office opened at 9 a.m., and marriages were being performed in auditoriums and hallways. Jim Ryder and Frank Colasonti, Jr. were the first couple married by Oakland County Clerk Lisa Brown and BTL publishers Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz were witnesses to the wedding. In all Oakland County was able to marry 147 couples. The offices stayed open until past 3:30 p.m. when the last couple were legally married.

At least some of the rush was fueled by the knowledge that Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette filed an emergency order Friday evening seeking a stay of U.S. District Court Judge Bernard Friedman’s ruling that the Michigan Marriage Amendment was unconstitutional.

In issuing its stay late Saturday, the {URL Sixth Circuit http://sblog.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/DeBoer-stay-order.pdf} said the stay would remain in place until Wednesday, March 26, so there could be “a more reasoned consideration of the motion to stay.” Plaintiffs attorney Dana Nessel said attorneys have not been alerted to provide oral argument so she assumes the appeals court will make its decision Wednesday based on briefs due Tuesday at noon.

Nessel said the plaintiff couple, April DeBoer and Jayne Rowe, opted not to seek a marriage license Saturday, noting that to do so at this point in the litigation, they could lose legal standing to pursue an appeal if the Sixth Circuit overturns the district court decision.

“Our clients have decided to get married when they can legally stay married,” said Nessel, “and their marriage cannot be deemed illegitimate.”

A federal judge in Detroit ruled Friday that Michigan’s ban against same-sex couples marrying violates the couples’ constitutional rights to equal protection.

The Michigan decision, from U.S. District Court Judge Bernard Friedman (a Reagan appointee), falls squarely in line with rulings from federal district court judges in eight other states in the past year since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) with U.S. v. Windsor. The other eight are all on appeal to their various courts of appeal. Some suggest the Michigan case, DeBoer v. Michigan, may have a better chance at reaching U.S. Supreme Court appeal because, unlike the others, it involved a two-week-long trial.

Friedman issued the DeBoer ruling two weeks after hearing closing arguments in the trial that gave the state of Michigan a chance to establish a rationale for banning same-sex couples from marrying.

Judge Friedman said he found the testimony from the state’s star witness, California sociologist Mark Regnerus, to be “entirely unbelievable and not worth of serious consideration.” He said he was unable to accord the testimony of three other state witnesses “any significant weight,” because it was “largely unbelievable” and represents “a fringe viewpoint that is rejected by the vast majority of their colleagues across a variety of social science fields.”

Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette filed an emergency request for a stay of Friedman’s decision and an appeal of the decision to the Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals.

Human Rights Campaign President Chad Griffin said the Michigan decision shows that the “momentum for marriage equality is undeniable.”

DeBoer v. Snyder started out as a lawsuit to challenge a state law barring unmarried couples from adopting. April DeBoer and longtime partner Jayne Rowe were seeking to adopt three children they had been raising together. But while hearing arguments in that case last year, Judge Friedman suggested the plaintiffs amend their lawsuit to challenge the law barring same-sex couples from marrying.

The Tenth Circuit will hear oral arguments in a case from Utah - Utah v. Kitchen - on April 10. Earlier this month, the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals removed the Nevada and Hawaii consolidated cases from the court’s calendar for April 9 in San Francisco. Yesterday, the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals scheduled oral arguments in two lawsuits challenging Virginia’s ban on same-sex couples marrying.


Like Michigan, the other four cases — from Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas and Oklahoma — are just arriving at their respective circuit courts.

Interested factoid: From 1996 to 1999, one of Judge Friedman’s law clerks was Judith Levy, the lesbian recently confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve on the Detroit federal court. Levy was sworn in office at the Detroit courthouse on the same day Friedman issued his decision in the DeBoer case. On Saturday Levy was officiating weddings in Washtenaw County.

Many of the couples that were married on March 22 waited decades for that opportunity,” wrote Byrum and Tripplett. “Their marriages complied with Judge Friedman’s order and all relevant provisions of Michigan law and should be recognized as such by state and federal authorities without delay.”

Holder Asked To Recognize Michigan Marriages

Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum and East Lansing Mayor Nathan Tripplett sent a joint letter today to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder asking the federal government to recognize all the same-sex marriages performed in Michigan March 22.

“Many of the couples that were married on March 22 waited decades for that opportunity,” wrote Byrum and Tripplett. “Their marriages complied with Judge Friedman’s order and all relevant provisions of Michigan law and should be recognized as such by state and federal authorities without delay.”

Holder took similar action in Utah after a federal judge struck down Utah’s marriage ban as unconstitutional in late Dec. 2013. In the 17 days it took for the U.S. Supreme Court to issue a stay on that ruling, over 1,300 couples married in Utah. The Utah attorney general announced that none of those marriages would be recognized by the state. But within 45 minutes of that statement, Holder announced that the federal government would recognize all the Utah marriages for all relevant federal benefits.

Byrum and Tripplett performed 57 same-sex marriage ceremonies. Three other county clerks opened Saturday to perform marriages - Oakland County Clerk Lisa Brown, Washtenaw County Clerk Lawrence Kastenbaum, and Muskegon County Clerk Nancy Waters. In total, 315 same-sex marriages were performed March 22 in Michigan.
Couples Marry

Continued from p. 4

weddings. Upon hearing about the decision Friday night she said, “It’s a relief that my office is no longer forced to discriminate against same-sex couples. During the course of the trial I’ve heard from many residents who want to be first in line to get a marriage license. I couldn’t be happier to say that their wait is finally over. It’s taken too long to get to this point, but we are finally here.”

Frank Colasonti Jr. and James Ryder of Birmingham waited in line starting at 6 a.m. to be first in Oakland County. Prior to that moment, they waited 26 years to call themselves “husband and husband.” The couple met while attending Metropolitan Community Church then located in Birmingham. They got married Saturday “to ensure our protection for each other as we grow older,” Colasonti said. To celebrate they planned on going out to lunch and maybe picking out wedding rings.

Brown performed several ceremonies, but soon realized there were so many couples, they would need to be done en masse. Through the day she led rounds of ceremonies, 25 couples at a time, in the County Commission Auditorium.

“It’s just an honor to share in somebody’s very special moment like this,” Brown said. “It’s just a great feeling to see two people who love each other so much be able to have a right that other people have enjoyed for years.”

Kat and Jennifer LaTosch met in college. Kat recalled always wanting to meet Jennifer because “she was the cool girl who walked across campus like she knew what she was doing.” Over 20 years later they are raising two kids.

Being able to declare their love is not the only reason that Jim Schaffer and Jason McIntosh of Pleasant Ridge came out to exchange vows. “We’re in the process of adopting Norah,” Shaffer said, “This will make it easier.”

Ferndale Mayor Dave Coulter officiated at two weddings at Affirmations Community Center. People had to secure a license at the Oakland County courthouse in Pontiac and then do the roundtrip to Ferndale and back to ensure their marriages were recorded with the office of Vital Records.

“Even though I thought the court testimony was obvious and the decision would be favorable, hearing the verdict was still shocking to me. I have wondered if I would ever see this day, and when it finally happened there was a powerful sense of relief and excitement. I was in the car, and I wanted to start blowing my horn like we had just won the World Series or something,” said Coulter.

The moment Coulter heard about the ruling he went into “work mode.”

“I stayed up late contacting our city clerk and the staff at Affirmations and we all began to make plans. I knew I had just lost my day off, and I couldn’t have been happier.”

“During the first ceremony with Ken (Siever) and Zaid (Ismail), I had to stop a couple times and compose myself. It was such a touching and emotional moment to be a part of and I wanted it to be special for them,” said Coulter.

In Washtenaw County longtime community leaders Keith Orr and Martin Contreras were number five in line to marry.

“Shortly after our wedding on Saturday, Martin and I had to run back to the Aut Bar to make and serve brunch. At one of my first tables I mentioned that the chef was my husband of one hour and ten minutes. First, what a feeling to call Martin ‘my husband!’ Second, everyone in that part of the dining room cheered,” said Orr.

“Its great to be married (even if Snyder and Schuette have not yet figured out that we are legally married). I am so appreciative of all of the people that made this happen...April DeBoer and Jayne Rowe and their legal team, my county clerk and all the court employees who made our wedding possible, Gail Geisenhainer for being an amazing minister. These people made our happiness possible. They also opened a door which will make it possible for others to share in marriage equality in the very near future.”

A temporary stay ordered by the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals was issued late Saturday afternoon and will remain in effect until Wednesday, the earliest possible time for same sex couples to resume getting married depending on the court’s findings.

Coulter reacted to the stay, “Honestly, I’m not as upset about that as I thought I would be because the joy I felt is so much more powerful an emotion for me than that, and also because I know this is nothing more than a delay tactic that cannot ultimately change the destiny of equality. Give Schuette his temporary stay, but history is now being written and it won’t reflect kindly on the actions of our attorney general.”

Crystal A. Proxmire editor of Oakland115. com contributed to this story.
the state’s response as unconvincing and not believable, citing a “small number of outlier studies in support of the optional child-rearing rationale.” He also wrote that the “state’s justification for the Michigan Marriage Amendment is belied by the state’s own marriage requirements” which do not include a couple’s ability to have children, or to raise them in any particular family structure, or to achieve certain outcomes for children.

Friedman threw the state’s arguments back, writing the MMA actually fosters the potential for childhood destabilization in same-sex families, because if the legal parent dies, the surviving non-legal parent has no rights or responsibilities on behalf of the surviving children “without resorting to a prolonged and complicated guardianship proceeding.”

Also, Friedman wrote, “the state’s defendants’ position suffers from a glaring inconsistency. Even assuming that children raised by same-sex couples fare worse than children raised by heterosexual married couples, the state fails to explain why Michigan law does not similarly exclude certain classes of heterosexual couples from marrying whose children persistently have had sub-optimal developmental outcomes.” He cited Oakland County Clerk Lisa Brown, who’d testified that, for example, she cannot deny a marriage license to a person with a felony record, a convicted pedophile, someone who has children already that have progressed poorly, or to a couple who cannot or have no intention of having children.

Finally, Friedman wrote that prohibiting gays and lesbians from marrying does not stop them from forming families and raising children. “There is, in short, no logical connection between banning same-sex marriage and providing children with an ‘optimal environment’ or achieving ‘optimal outcomes,’” he wrote.

Proceeding With Caution
Friedman wrote that the wait-and-see justification for MMA is not persuasive, finding that any deprivation of constitutional rights calls for prompt rectification. “The state may not shield itself with the ‘wait-and-see’ approach and sit idly while social science research takes its plodding and deliberative course,” he wrote. “The state must have some rationale beyond merely asserting there is not conclusive evidence to decide an issue one way or the other. the ‘wait-and-see’ approach fails to meet this most basic threshold.”

Federalism
The state tried to argue that the authority to define marriage falls within the exclusive powers of the individual states. But Friedman wrote that the state’s domestic relations authority can not trump federal constitutional limitations. Friedman cited the 1967 Loving v. Virginia federal case that overturned that state’s ban on interracial marriages as precedent.

Friedman dismissed that argument and wrote that the popular origin of the MMA does not insulate it from constitutional scrutiny. Friedman wrote, “In attempting to define this case as a challenge to the ‘will of the people,’ state defendants lost sight of what this case is truly about: people.”
Schauer Celebrates Overtune Of Michigan Marriage Ban

BY TODD HEYWOOD

LANSING - Democratic candidate for governor Mark Schauer was excited Friday evening. In a phone call conversation with BTL minutes after the ruling was issued, he hailed U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman’s ruling that strikes down Michigan’s marriage amendment.

“I think this is a major victory,” Schauer said. “Loving, committed couples across the state can now be married. They can finally be a family like any other Michigan family. “

Schauer said he has been an advocate for LGBT equality for many years. “I have been such a profound supporter of marriage equality and equality in general because this ban hurts our economy,” he said. “It prevents us from attracting the businesses and workers who value diversity.”

On Saturday, four county clerk offices opened their offices and performed 315 same-sex marriages. Late that day the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals issued a temporary stay, thereby stopping any more marriages in Michigan until the court can consider the state’s request for a more permanent stay.

“I am incredibly proud of the clerks who stood up for equality and performed marriages across the state last weekend,” said Schauer. “It is simply shameful that Governor Snyder is continuing to waste taxpayer dollars to defend this discriminatory law, which is hurting families and hurting children. By refusing to recognize these legally-performed marriages, it’s clear this governor is out of touch, and on the wrong side of history.”

Attorney General Bill Schuette said that Judge Friedman’s ruling goes against Michigan’s constitution and “the will of the voters.”

“It’s time for Schuette and Snyder to end these ridiculous, costly appeals,” Schauer said. “When I am governor, discrimination will have no place in our state. I will wake up every day committed to making sure everyone is treated fairly.”

SCHAUER FOR GOV.

Learn More About Mark Schauer For Governor Campaign at:

>> http://markschauer.com

Snyder Says Schuette Going Against Trend

NEW YORK - Politico reported Monday that Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said he will follow however a federal judge rules on the legality of same-sex marriages in his state. Snyder made the comments at a Bloomberg View forum with reporters in Manhattan, as same-sex couples who married March 22 await clarity after a ruling overturning Michigan’s ban on gay marriage.

“If a federal judge changes the law... then I’m going to follow what’s been redefined as the law,” Snyder said. “So I am not spending time [on] the issue itself... hopefully the Court of Appeals and their stay or something can clarify the status [of weddings that took place in the interim]. Those couples are in a tough spot. So I want to get some clarity,” Snyder told Politico.

Snyder also told the reporter that he generally doesn’t take positions on social issues. However, while campaigning for governor in 2000 Snyder said he supported Michigan’s marriage ban. Last month Snyder told a Republican gathering in Oakland County that he strongly supports the ban and the Michigan Supreme Court’s decision to expand its definition to not allow public employers to extend healthcare benefits to the same-sex partners of LGBT public employees.

Within minutes of Snyder’s remarks being tweeted, the Democratic Governors Association posted video from a gubernatorial debate in 2010 in which Snyder said he considered marriage to be “between a man and a woman.”

When a Politico reporter pressed Snyder at the Bloomberg View event about whether Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette, who had been defending the state’s ban on gay marriage, was swimming against a changing social tide, Snyder replied, “If you look at it you could say, again, the trend is generally toward changing those rules....[the AG is] going contrary to that.”

Gay Marriage Defines Schuette’s Reelection Campaign

Bill Schuette launched his campaign for another four-year term as Michigan’s Attorney General March 22 at press conferences in several locations across the state. Although he gamely tried to stay focused on his campaign, reporters questions were almost exclusively about gay marriage and Schuette’s opposition to it.

“The constitution is not like a buffet line at some restaurant where you can pick and choose which item you might wish,” Schuette told reporters. “It doesn’t work that way. I took an oath to defend the constitution, and I’m consistent.”

His presumed opponent this November is Michigan State University law professor and Democrat Mark Totten who strongly supports same-sex marriage in Michigan.

“I think Bill Schuette has waged a crusade against some of Michigan’s most vulnerable children,” Totten told BTL. “He’s argued from the beginning of this case that the kids at the center of this trial would be better off as orphans than with two gay parents. That’s wrong, and it violates the U.S. Constitution and its commitment to equal protection under the law.”

Totten began his legal career in Washington, D.C., where he served in the U.S. Department of Justice. He later clerked for a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, where he advised on critical national security cases winding through the courts in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. He lives in Kalamazoo and teaches criminal law and ethics at MSU.

For more information about Mark Totten and his campaign to unseat Bill Schuette go to www.marktotten.com.

Rick Snyder On Gay Marriage

As a political candidate, Rick Snyder has repeatedly said he opposes marriage equality:

“As I believe that marriage is a sacred bond between a man and a woman.” [WXYZ, 10/7/10, VIDEO https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MP78V1iQJw&feature=youtu.be&t=50m30s]

“I believe that marriage is a sacred bond between a man and a woman and thus oppose gay marriage.”

Michigan Governor Denies That Same-Sex Families Are Deprived Of Any Rights at http://thinkprogress.org (July, 2013)

Gov. Snyder recently defended the law he signed banning domestic partner benefits for same-sex couples in court, arguing the discriminatory policy is “financially sound.” [MLive, 2/17/14 http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2014/02/gov_rick_snyder_asks_federal_j.html]
On the Passing of Fred Phelps

OPINION BY KEITH ORR

Well, my old nemesis is dead. I outlived Fred Phelps.

It is a delightful coincidence to Michiganders that Fred Phelps death comes the same week as the first victory in our fight for Marriage Equality.

Fred and I have a history. He and his Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) came to picket the ‘Fag BAR’ in 2001. Martin and I decided to turn his appearance into a fundraiser for the Jim Toy Community Center. We pledged one dollar to the Center for every minute he picketed. Hundreds of people joined in, and by the time of his picket we had pledges of two dollars for every second he was there. He helped me raise $7500 for our local LGBT Center, and in a series of fundraisers modeled on ours, we raised over $100,000 for LGBT Centers, suicide hotlines, service members support, and more.

Also, thanks to Fred Phelps, I got to know Howard Dean. Howard had been picketed by Phelps on several occasions, because he had famously signed into law the first Civil Union bill. That act was the first victory in the long march to Marriage Equality. Howard Dean heard of our fundraiser and contacted me to ask me to join his campaign. Over the course of the campaign we became friends as well as political allies.

So I really owe a bit to Phelps. By this point, Phelps’ death, or journey to hell, or whatever, is really a non-story. He has been exposed for what he was, a disbarred attorney looking for attention and money. In an interesting side note, it is reported that Fred was recently excommunicated from his own church. He had advocated a kinder approach between church members after his daughter lost a power struggle. Note that this is not some late life conversion. He did not suggest a kinder approach to fags. He was upset that his heir-apparent, his daughter Shirley Phelps-Roper, lost a power struggle.

I have said for a long time that the WBC would die with him. Cults rarely survive their founder. The only real hope for the church to survive in any meaningful way (I use that phrase ironically) would be if Shirley would become the new charismatic leader.

For those of us of a certain age his story is interwoven with ours...and our relationship to society. In the late 80’s he started picketing funerals of gay men who had died of AIDS. Only a few people considered it in poor taste. Most people clearly thought his protests reflected their feelings about the death of a diseased fag. There were no calls for laws which would keep him a certain distance from funerals. He had been protesting unchecked for about a dozen years when Matthew Sheperd was brutally murdered. Matthew’s story captivated the nation. The image of the angels of mercy protecting a fragile family from a hateful lunatic was a profound moment in our movement. It was one of the first collective moments to humanize us.

They are now left without that leader, and have pretty much guaranteed their demise. I anticipated a power struggle after his death. However, I thought they’d wait until he died, and that the power struggle would be among his children. The church is hurtling towards oblivion.

So I say to you, Fred, “You lost the war. You don’t even get to die the disease?”

I am grateful that we are at the point where Fred’s antics are considered sick. I am grateful that there are laws which can both respect freedom of speech, but also the dignity of a funeral. But there is still some bitterness that those laws came about after Fred started picketing funerals of soldiers who died in the Gulf War. Where was the angst over the funerals of our soldiers who died is an unwinnable war against a disease?

So I say to you, Fred, “You lost the war. You don’t even get to die the dignity of a Good Soldier. You die alone and pathetic, reviled by most of the world. I shall not ‘dance on your grave’. You have done enough to despoil it without my help.”

There...that’s my eulogy to Fred Phelps.

Keith Orr is a longtime activist, co-owner of aut Bar and Common Language in Ann Arbor with partner his Martin Contreras. The two legally married Saturday in Washtenaw County and are officially husband and husband.
Remembering ‘Honey Combs’

OPINION BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Mort Crowley’s “Boys In the Band” opened Off-Broadway some 46 years ago. I bought a copy of the play in Chicago in 1968, and read dialog aloud while driving back to Detroit with my then partner Larry Smithson.

We saw a local production a few years later at the now long-vanished Rivera Theater, movie house turned legit stage, starring Wayne State University theater major Paul Pentecost.

Seeing gay life as we sometimes found ourselves living it proved fascinating: a big city birthday party turned truth game, much drinking, high camp dialog, line dancing to the sweet turn-on sounds of Burt Bacharach’s “The Look of Love.” A play about us.

“Boys” opened timely one year before New York City’s liberating Stonewall Riots. (The same year Rev. Troy Perry started the first gay-lib Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles.) Change was in the air.

“Boys” was exciting on two counts. It was gay from start to finish, with camp humor putdown. And - score one up for me - I had spent a romantic summer week with one of its Off-Broadway production actors: Frederick Combs.

I met “Honey Combs” at Detroit’s Woodward bar in 1966. He was appearing in 18-year-old British playwright Shelagh Delaney’s international hit, later movie, “A Taste of Honey” at the Fisher Theater.

Freddy Combs played Geoffrey, a gay artist. It was his big break. The cast included legendary Uta Hagen.

Freddy was staying at the Wardell Sheraton hotel, later Park Shelton Apartments. (I later lived there for 24 years. The property was once owned by comic Gilda Radner, of Saturday Night Live fame.)

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Freddy said his two high school drama teachers believed he had talent and much promise and paid for his ticket to New York to study acting. He also said he had been brought out by an Army sergeant when he was 16.

I followed him to Chicago New Year’s weekend, but was gently told our final curtain had rung down in Detroit. I never saw him again in person, but in 1970 had the pleasure of seeing him playing Donald when “Boys In the Band” was made into a movie.

Looking back at Crowley’s pre-Stonewall play, given all that’s happened - Gay Liberation, the AIDS crisis, Clinton’s don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy, Ellen Degeneres, “Brokeback Mountain,” “Angels in America,” Michigan same-sex marriage - “Boys” remains entertaining, well-crafted, compelling, if gay self-loathing.

It’s characters are guys of another time and place who have yet to shake off the constricting onus placed upon them by religion, psychiatry, police, politics, and even the Mafia. You name it. Just about everyone and everything straightjacketing.

Given as much, today we either like the play for its moments of history replayed or loath it for its internalized homophobia; nonetheless, it’s courageous, especially compared to cautious, earlier 50s and 60s plays dealing with homosexuality preceding it, like “The Children’s Hour” and “Tea and Sympathy.”

The boys in “Boys” are who they are in spite of a culture that demonizes them.

Frederick Combs’ later career included writing, producing, and directing an Off-Broadway mystery play that got soundly panned, prompting him to leave New York for L.A. He then appeared in TV soaps and miniseries, and for a time ran his own drama school. He died from AIDS-related causes on September 19, 1992.

He was 57. His acting talent, face - and rather memorable backside anatomy - are available for repeated DVD viewing or downloading. I watched the movie this week and remembered where and when. It seems so long ago.

As one of the old boys in an old band I’m still grateful to be tooting my horn. On or off-key.

The boys in “Boys” are who they are in spite of a culture that demonizes them...

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As one of the old boys in an old band I’m still grateful to be tooting’ my horn. On or off-key.
Marriage Equality Isn’t The End

By Attorney Rudy Serra

The fight for LGBT equality in Michigan is significantly advanced by Judge Friedman’s decision in DeBoer v Snyder. The judge made detailed findings of fact about the studies used by both sides regarding children raised by same sex couples. He concluded that the best interest of children is served by allowing same sex couples to marry.

Michigan is the 18th state to overturn anti-gay marriage laws. Court after court has recognized and honored the same constitutional values. In case after case, conservative state officials have been unable to identify or prove even one rational basis for these anti-gay laws.

The court’s decision to enjoin the state from enforcing the same sex marriage ban and not to delay implementation of the order while it is appealed is important. It shows that Judge Friedman has high confidence that his decision will stand on appeal. Since he followed clear precedent and gave both sides ample opportunity to prove facts, marriage equality in Michigan is probably here to stay.

This tremendous victory does not mean that the struggle has ended. Michigan still has obsolete anti-gay laws like the “abominable and detestable crime against nature” and “gross indecency” laws that must be repealed. The latter provides for a prison sentence to punish oral sex in private. Every married couple in Michigan should be outraged at the implications, yet courts still enforce these forensic fossils. Jury instructions still exist for each, and people have been sent to prison under these draconian enactments even after Lawrence v Texas found similar laws in other states to be unconstitutional.

Michigan law will now have to adapt to new realities in custody and support guidelines and new challenges in schools, businesses and other groups. Evidentiary doctrines such as the “spousal privilege” and property laws that control the disposition of estates are all affected. The most important law, the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, still requires the additional language of “sexual orientation and gender identity.”

All of these changes will take time. Experienced leadership will be needed to make sure that the time is as short as possible. Justice cannot be kept waiting by tantrums or by apathy.

Gov. Snyder should disavow Attorney General Bill Schuette’s attempt to delay enforcement of the decision and should direct the Attorney General to drop any appeal. If the Attorney General refuses, the Governor can and should direct the Attorney General to drop any appeal. If the Attorney General refuses, the Governor can and should direct the Attorney General to drop any appeal.

Michigan Republican Attorney General Bill Schuette is lying to the residents of Michigan. His blind pursuit to continue to enshrine discrimination in our state Constitution is not about the will of the voters, the integrity of families in Michigan or any of the other ridiculous arguments his team pushed in federal court. Schuette’s push to continue to spend Michigan taxpayers’ dollars is about one thing: scoring political points with an increasingly out of touch, and ever shrinking right wing base.

If the will and integrity of the vote was truly on his agenda, then we would see Michigan’s medical marijuana law being enforced as written, rather than being chewed into increasingly smaller pieces. Schuette not only opposed the ballot measure that approved this law, he ran the campaign against it in 2008. And he has continued to undermine the law since being elected in 2010. That law was approved by 63 percent of the voters, four percent more than the marriage initiative.

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Gov. Snyder should disavow Attorney General Bill Schuette’s attempt to delay enforcement of the decision and should direct the Attorney General to drop any appeal. If the Attorney General refuses, the Governor can and should retain independent outside counsel to represent his office on behalf of the 2,650 same sex couples in Michigan already raising 5,300 children. As a long-time LGBT rights and family law attorney, I would volunteer to provide legal services to fight in favor of marriage equality at no cost to the tax payers. If I were in the legislature, I would lead the fight to amend Elliott-Larsen to protect marriage equality and assure that archaic anti-gay criminal laws are changed.

Rudy Serra is an attorney and former Judge and co-author of “Non-Marriage and Non-Traditional Relationships” in Michigan Family Law.

BTL Editorial

Schuette Lies To Satisfy Political Base

He can at least be honest as he throws more precious taxpayer dollars at this ridiculous appeal and admit he is pursuing it because it is his own personal faith perspective.

Michigan Republican Attorney General Bill Schuette is lying to the residents of Michigan. His blind pursuit to continue to enshrine discrimination in our state Constitution as a protection under marriage equality as a protection under the equal protection clause – and to a state law restricting marriage to a traditional definition. Schuette’s appeal will result in the Court being able to take the step it was on the verge of taking in June 2013. It will approve marriage equality as a protection under the equal protection clause – and marriage will be won in all 50 states.

We do note, however, that despite is dishonesty to the voters and taxpayers, Schuette is doing one thing that fits into the silver lining category. Schuette’s ill-advised, costly appeal will send a case, with an outstanding judicial record of a trial, to the U.S. Supreme Court. In his dissent to the majority opinion in U.S. v Windsor, Justice Antonin Scalia wrote that the majority opinion of the court, “arms well every challenger to a state law restricting marriage to its traditional definition.” Schuette’s appeal will result in the Court being able to take the step it was on the verge of taking in June 2013. It will approve marriage equality as a protection under the equal protection clause – and marriage will be won in all 50 states.

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Creep of the Week
OPINION BY DANNE WITKOWSKI

Bill Schuette

In 2004 when voters passed the so-called Michigan Marriage Amendment I had been “married” for a little over a year. My wife and I had a wedding on the eve of our 6 year anniversary. We both wore white dresses. Each of our six bridesmaids wore a dress corresponding to the colors of the rainbow. Because, you know, gay.

Some people close to us urged us not to call it a “wedding.” They were more comfortable with “commitment ceremony.” Because, after all, it wasn’t like we were really getting married.

Except we were. Granted we knew full well that our marriage wouldn’t be legally recognized in Michigan or, for that matter, in the entire United States. But when I slipped that ring on my wife’s finger and promised in front of my friends and family that I would love her forever, I meant it. I meant it so much that I cried really hard and embarrassed myself. Still, I wasn’t “pretending” to get married. As far as my wife and I were concerned, this was it.

So it was especially shitty when nearly 60% of folks going to the polls voted against my right to be legally married. Not to mention the fact that George W. Bush got elected again.

Michigan’s Democratic leaders were largely silent on the amendment. Gov. Jennifer Granholm tepidly rejected it late in the game. Most said nothing. They were too chicken shit.

But a lot has changed in 10 years. The Democratic Party is a vocal supporter of equal rights. Anti-gay marriage amendments have been falling like dominoes to legal challenges. More states have legalized marriage equality. And when my wife and I went to California last summer we made our “marriage” into a marriage at the San Diego courthouse. Attending that wedding was our 4-year-old son.

Our son is a really lucky kid. He’s got two parents who love him and each other. But because Michigan doesn’t recognize our marriage, he only has one legal parent. Which also feels pretty shitty.

So far Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette has spent tens of thousands of tax payer dollars to defend the law that kept my son from having two legal parents and he based that defense on the very premise that gays and lesbians were bad moms and dads.

And he lost. Badly. U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman didn’t just strike the law down, he smashed it down saying it “impermissibly discriminates against same-sex couples in violation of the Equal Protection Clause because the provision does not advance any conceivable legitimate state interest.”

But that doesn’t mean anything to Schuette who is hot to appeal the ruling; to keep fighting against Michigan families like mine.

He’s also running for reelection in Nov. Running against him is Democrat Mark Totten who said of the ruling, “There was never a doubt that Schuette’s crusade to deny a loving home to some of Michigan’s most vulnerable children was morally repugnant. Today, the courts confirmed it was also unconstitutional. Children should never be sacrificed to score political points.”

My son, my wife, and I deserve to have someone like Totten defending us. Not someone like Schuette trying to hurt us.

Schuette claims that he is a defender of the Constitution. But really he’s an ideological hack, whether it’s fighting against marriage equality, contraceptive access for women, or Obamacare. If you’re a rich conservative, Schuette is your man. Because he doesn’t give a shit about anyone else.

Learn more about Totten at www.marktotten.com. Let’s fire Schuette in November.
Biden Sets The Bar

As the 2016 presidential primaries begin to creep into view on the political horizon, Vice President Joe Biden sounded well prepared to take on all comers for the LGBT vote Saturday night. Speaking to an audience of one thousand people at a Human Rights Campaign fundraiser in Los Angeles, Biden reminded the crowd of his remarks on Meet the Press in 2012 which many believe led President Obama to announce his support for same-sex couples marrying much sooner than he had planned. He also prodded Congress to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and denounced draconian laws and practices in Russia and African countries. And he praised the LGBT community for its efforts in standing up for and demanding equal rights. “Many of you paid a personal and professional price for stepping up and speaking out,” said Biden, but the effort has “bent the moral arc of this nation.”

Panel Urges End To U.S. Ban On Transgender Troops

The United States should join the dozen other nations that allow transgender people to serve in the armed forces, a commission led by a former U.S. surgeon general said in a report released March 10 that concludes there is no medical reason for the decades-old ban and calls on President Barack Obama to lift it.

The five-member panel, convened by a think tank at San Francisco State University, said Department of Defense regulations designed to keep transgender people out of the military are based on outdated beliefs that require thousands of current service members either to leave the service or to forego the medical procedures and other changes that could align their bodies and gender identities.

“We determined not only that there is no compelling medical reason for the ban, but also that the ban itself is an expensive, damaging and unfair barrier to health care access for the approximately 15,450 transgender personnel who serve currently in the active, Guard and reserve components,” said the commission led by Dr. Joycelyn Elders, who served as surgeon general during Bill Clinton’s first term as president, and Rear Adm. Alan Steinman, a former chief health and safety director for the Coast Guard.

The White House referred questions to the Department of Defense.

“At this time there are no plans to change the department’s policy and regulations which do not allow transgender individuals to serve in the U.S. military,” said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Nate Christensen, a defense department spokesman.

The report says that while scholars have yet to find government documents explaining the basis for the ban, which has existed in medical fitness standards and conduct codes since the 1960s, it appears rooted in part in the psychiatric establishment’s long-held consensus, since revised, that people who identity with a gender different from the one assigned at birth suffer from a mental disorder.

The ban also was apparently based on the assumption that providing hormone treatment and sex reassignment surgeries would be too difficult, disruptive and expensive. But the commission rejected those notions as inconsistent with modern medical practice and the scope of health care services routinely provided to non-transgender military personnel.

“I hope their takeaway will be we should evaluate every one of our people on the basis of their ability and what they can do, and if they have a condition we can treat we would treat it like we would treat anyone else,” Elders said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The panel’s work was commissioned by the Palm Center, a think tank based at San Francisco State that is funded in part by a $1.3 million grant from Jennifer Pritzker, a Chicago billionaire and former Army lieutenant colonel who came out as transgender last year.

At least a dozen nations, including Australia, Canada, England and Israel, allow transgender military personnel. Transgender rights advocates have been lobbying the Pentagon to revisit the blanket ban in the U.S. since Congress in 2010 repealed “don’t ask, don’t tell,” the law that barred gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals from openly serving in the military.

The commission argued that facilitating gender transitions “would place almost no burden on the military,” adding that a relatively small number of active and reserve service members would elect to undergo transition-related surgeries and that only a fraction might suffer complications that would prevent them from serving. It estimated that 230 transgender people a year would seek such surgery at an average cost of about $30,000.

Retired Brigadier General Thomas Kolditz, a former Army commander and West Point professor on the commission, said he thinks allowing transgender people to serve openly would reduce assaults and suicides while enhancing national security. Lawyers for Chelsea Manning, the Army private convicted of giving classified documents to WikiLeaks when she was known as Bradley Manning, presented evidence that stress over having to keep her gender identity secret contributed to an irrational belief that she could end the war in Iraq and by leaking the information.

“When you closet someone, you create a security risk, and we don’t need another Chelsea Manning,” Kolditz said. “If I were a commander, I certainly wouldn’t want people in my unit in a position to be blackmailed.”

But Center for Military Readiness President Elaine Donnelly, whose group opposed the repeal of the ban on openly gay troops, predicted that putting transgender people in barracks, showers and other sex-segregated could cause sexual assaults to increase and infringe on the privacy of non-transgender personnel.

“This is putting an extra burden on men and women in the military that they certainly don’t need and they don’t deserve,” Donnelly said.

The commission recommends the president issue an executive order instructing the Department of Defense to amend its regulations so transgender people are no longer automatically barred. The Pentagon then would need to develop rules for assigning service members who are transitioning, said Palm Center Executive Director Aaron Belkin.

The Williams Institute, a think-tank based at the University of California, Los Angeles, estimates that the U.S. currently has about 15,500 transgender military personnel, nearly all serving under their birth genders and not transitioning in an appearance-altering way.

Army Reserve Capt. Sage Fox, 41, was one until recently. Following a deployment to Kuwait, Fox started taking female hormones. In November, with her hair getting long and her voice higher thanks to regular sessions with a speech therapist, she notified her battalion commander, whom she says expressed support. At drill time, an announcement was made to 400 colleagues at the B.T. Collins Reserve Center in Sacramento.

For a few days, Fox thought she might escape the ban. But then she was informed she had been placed on inactive status.

“When I transitioned, I wasn’t just a good officer, I became a better officer because I didn’t have to deal with that conflict anymore,” she said.
BTL's Wedding Expo: Like Pride in April

BY SHELBY CLARK PETKUS

SOUTHFIELD - BTL's Wedding Expo is fast approaching!

“But what if I’m not getting married? What if I’m single?”

No need to worry. Despite it’s large focus on LGBT wedding related vendors, the expo functions as a great, inclusive space for all LGBT and allies.

Expo vendors offer a variety of services regardless of wedding plans. Beauty services, restaurants, bakeries and dessert shops, security services, inclusive churches, supportive banks and more are a variety of local and state businesses that will be on site. Networking among LGBT and LGBT-friendly businesses is another great reason to attend the expo, regardless of relationship status.

As for the event’s “Pride in Spring” atmosphere, dancing, games, drag queens, good food and other activities make the wedding expo a nonstop party from start to finish.

StarTrax will be providing fantastic entertainment, including an emcee and great DJs, to keep the party going; expect the last hour of the expo to be a dance party. Even if you're not getting married, a fashion show with both unique and traditional wedding gowns by B. Ella Bridal and suits by President Tuxedo will be an exciting presentation, particularly with the celebrity models that will be revealed.

Bill Hamilton Designs is creating a unique food court, described as looking like a “streetscape.” Great food options will be available to try in addition to the multiple samples offered by the catering, baking and chocolatier vendor tables.

If romance bores you, find excitement with the expo “games.” An inflatable gaming area, “Twisted Love,” will feature three-legged races, interactive “Twister” games, and more... all for great prizes. If that’s a bit too taxing, a “Prize Cube” game will allow you to try and grab coupons whirling around in a cube for services from expo vendors.

After working off your samples at these games, relax at a “Sanctuary Space,” a luxe area within the expo to relax on white couches.

Looking to unwind further at the expo? Barefoot Wine is providing complimentary wine at the expo’s wine bar, in addition to a cash bar.

Over 100 different prizes can be won just by attending the expo, as well. Multiple tickets to ABBA, West Side Story and other plays, concerts and musicals are on hand, in addition to trips, gift certificates and even jewelry.

On the more serious side of things, support your fellow LGBTQ by looking into the LGBT Caucus Booth on site. Supporters of LGBT rights and LGBT non-profit organizations such as Affirmations and Equality Michigan will be offering support, information and more to all attendees.

Still sound like the expo is only for couples? We think not!

The Ultimate LGBT Wedding & Anniversary Expo runs from 12 to 6 p.m. April 12 at the Southfield Civic Pavilion, 26000 Evergreen Road, Southfield. Tickets are $10 in advance, $15 at the door. Registering online for the expo takes $5 off the ticket price.

Stay tuned to BTL’s Facebook for chances to win passes to the expo! For more information, visit www.btlweddingexpo.com.
Kylie Minogue knows the power of fate, determination and survival. That along with her many celestial-pop confections (and, let's face it, lots of gays) have propelled the Aussie showgirl further than a lot of doubters predicated when she was classified as a mere one-hit wonder back in the '80s.

She sure showed them. Not even cancer could get in her way, because 26 years after her self-titled debut, “Kylie,” Minogue releases her 12th – and quite possibly best – studio album, “Kiss Me Once.”

“Into the Blue,” the disc’s liberating lead single, is a mantra of perseverance and self-reliance that only someone like Minogue could profess: “I’m still here, holding on so tight.”

How did she keep her grip? In a recent chat, Minogue, 45, talked about the essentials to maintaining pop-icon longevity, Australia’s “backwards” gay marriage ban and how “Kiss Me Once” ended up reflecting her own life.

You’ve truly outdone yourself on this album, Kylie.

Oh, wow, I don’t even know what to say to that. That’s amazing. Thank you.

When we chatted at the end of 2012, around the time you celebrated 25 years in the business with “The Abbey Road Sessions,” you said you wanted your next studio album to be more personal. At this point in your career, would you say you’re making more deliberate choices song-wise to reflect your life? And what was the turning point – when did you decide that it was important to choose songs that meant something to you?

I don’t know how to answer that. That’s a hard question. At the end of 2012 I had a realization: I needed to change in order to move forward, and essentially I’m doing the same thing. I’m recording, I’m touring, I’m doing, at the core, the same stuff. But I needed some new energy. I needed new life to reenergize. I was celebrating 25 years in the business, and yeah, I just had a very powerful realization and I felt very calm that this is actually the right thing to do. So this is why
I changed management. I changed something that had been a constant for 25 years and I threw myself into a new environment.

And did you want this album to mirror your own experiences?

It actually didn’t transpire that way. I co-wrote one song on the album (“Fine”), and I felt going into this album, which is the case with every album, that I don’t mind if I write the song or if someone else writes the song – it’s really about the song. But I do feel like my frame of mind was open and I did a lot of songs that really – well, they’re not personal, but they’re more like “Sexercise.” They just felt right for where I am in my life at the moment.

Ironically, something like “Into the Blue,” that made sense for me when I recorded it, though I was still in a relationship and now I’m no longer in that relationship. So it’s odd that the lyrics and the sentiment of “Into the Blue” resonate even deeper now. I kind of feel like some of these personal songs – songs that might seem personal – I just gravitated toward those. “Kiss Me Once” – I feel that. “Fine” – I feel. So I don’t have a tidy answer for that, but I just feel like it’s the headspace I was in. The songs just made sense to me.

With regard to all the sex songs on the album, the media’s been saying you “blamed” Sia for them.

Oh, I didn’t blame her at all – someone put “blame” into my sentence! I didn’t blame her for anything. I thank her for them, actually.

I was gonna say, why would you blame her? Sex has been a constant in your music for nearly your entire career!

(Laughs) Well, maybe not on my first album, or even on my second album, but yeah, it’s nothing new. Let’s face it, most songs are about love, being out of love, sex, tears, breakup, makeup. It just so happens I have three with “sex” in the title on this album. It’s just how it transpired. You might as well do it in threes, right?

Has one of your steamier songs ever come on in the middle of some sexy time?

(Laughs) Ah, no! I think I can honestly say no. That could really – oh my, I don’t even wanna think about that. Not for me anyway. I don’t mind for other people!

What line on “Kiss Me Once” makes you blush most?

Lemme think. Probably something from “Sexercise.” Mmm … oh gosh! “I’ll make you wait for more / Make you ache to the core / Tomorrow you’ll be sore.” Lemme see you bounce, bounce, bounce.

Sia wrote that song, and she obviously possesses something special; everyone’s been tapping into her lately. And she executive produces your album. What did you find so special about working with Sia?

Well, first, I went to write with her to record some of her songs, and we got on so well that after a couple of our sessions I asked if she’d write more of the album and if she’d come onboard with me as executive producer. She said “yes” right away. I really wasn’t sure if that would interest her, but long story short, she was on board right away. I gave her everything that I’d recorded, which at that point was already quite a lot of songs. And she wrote the title track, “Kiss Me Once,” which I just adore. But I had a bunch of songs already. Definitely not all of them, but I had quite a lot – at least, god, 40 or 50 songs – and she said that “Into the Blue” was the first single. Sure enough, that was the first single.

She’s written for some of the biggest artists today, and she’s dialed in and knows what’s happening at the moment – I think she also knows what’s about to happen – so she’s really just perfect. And she’s an Aussie, and she’s a girl, and I’m a great admirer of her writing, and of how she breaks some of the rules and how she does things the way she wants to do them. I have so much respect for that. So I’m a bit of an uber fan, and now I can say that I’m a friend as well. It’s really just a great, great result.

I can see this album being the one that finally helps our straight American friends understand how amazing you are.

(Laughs) That would be lovely!

Was collaborating with Enrique Iglesias, Pharrell and Sia an intentional move to help build a more mainstream audience in North America?

Not really, but it might have been the intention of my new management! (Laughs) You know, Roc Nation has a lot of connections, and they’re able to call someone like Pharrell and say, “Hey, have you got any time? We have Kylie and we want to get her with you.”

I think we did what I normally do, which is work with some of the best and most dependable pop writers and producers. And I work with some new and upcoming people on this album – someone like MNEK, and someone like Ariel (Rechtshaid) – so it’s got all the same elements that I would have on a good album of mine. But I don’t know – I just think that everything feels a little more … I don’t know the word for it. It just feels right.

Will you finally do a full-fledged tour of the States?

I’m not talking just a dozen dates – a full tour.

You know, I would love to. The last couple of times that I have toured I have done shows in the States, but the first time (in 2009) was because I really ran out of excuses. I mean, I just kept saying “I can’t because my show is huge,” and logistically and financially...
Hear Me Out

George Michael, Nickel Creek

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

George Michael, ‘Symphonica’

Those personal woes, the drugs, the health problems – the toll all that’s taken on George Michael’s voice must be immense, right? Wrong. Though “Symphonica” is the pop star’s first release since 2004’s “Patience,” Michael sounds just about as pristinely crisp as he did during his ’80s heyday. And it’s surprising – something this live disc, a culmination from a series of recent orchestral performances, is not. Given that his talent hasn’t waned, that his voice still expresses passion, soul and beguiling tenderness, it’s a frustrating outing. Why this, and why now? And why so snoozy? For the most part, “Symphonica” is the middle-aged covers-album revival you predict from a bygone fixture – it reminds you Michael’s still kicking around, but with lesser-versions of classics like “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” and “Feeling Good” on the bill, it’s got the edginess of a spoon. It drags and drags – it needs a jolt, some drama – and then you get to “One More Try,” Michael’s hit ballad, and while it’s true he hasn’t lost his touch, it still begs that same question: Why? The original is still superior. For a “comeback” album, “Symphonica” doesn’t give you much to come back to. Grade: C

Nickel Creek, ‘A Dotted Line’

Bluegrass-benders Nickel Creek pick up where they left off a whole nine years ago with “A Dotted Line,” their first release since 2004’s “Patience,” Michael sounds just about as pristinely crisp as he did during his ’80s heyday. And it’s surprising – something this live disc, a culmination from a series of recent orchestral performances, is not. Given that his talent hasn’t waned, that his voice still expresses passion, soul and beguiling tenderness, it’s a frustrating outing. Why this, and why now? And why so snoozy? For the most part, “Symphonica” is the middle-aged covers-album revival you predict from a bygone fixture – it reminds you Michael’s still kicking around, but with lesser-versions of classics like “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” and “Feeling Good” on the bill, it’s got the edginess of a spoon. It drags and drags – it needs a jolt, some drama – and then you get to “One More Try,” Michael’s hit ballad, and while it’s true he hasn’t lost his touch, it still begs that same question: Why? The original is still superior. For a “comeback” album, “Symphonica” doesn’t give you much to come back to. Grade: C

“A Dotted Line,” their first release since “Why Should the Fire Die?” and the indefinite hiatus they went on thereafter. With the countrified rolllick of “21st of May,” and the beautiful ballad-building of the harmonious “Love of Mine,” the three-piece folkies ease back into it almost as safely as possible with the same contemporary fiddlin’, mandolin-pickin’ sound they distinctively made their own – and who’s gonna blame them for that? It ain’t broke; don’t fix it. “Hayloft,” a hardcore folk-out cover of the Mother Mother song that’s gotta be the most wildly amusing moment of their oeuvre, is a barn burner that’s rowdy enough to actually burn down a barn. It’s on fire. And if that doesn’t make you glad to have them back, hear Chris Thile inspire your rebirth with “Rest of My Life” – that chord progression is really something, isn’t it? – and the rocking Fleetwood Mac-ish “Destination,” a plucky kiss-off to the past fiercely sung by the trio’s sole female, Sara Watkins. “A Dotted Line” doesn’t necessarily take Nickel Creek to new heights; instead, it’s exactly what its title suggests: a line of dots taking you back to their brilliant beginnings. Grade: B+

Also Out

Christina Perri, ‘head or heart’

Christina Perri’s poor heart – it’s a wonder it’s still beating. That thing has been through the wringer. First some guy takes it and puts it in a jar, and now this: “head or heart,” the stinging, burning result of more brokenheartedness. So we have “I Don’t Wanna Break,” a doomed love song, and “Human,” a declaration of her ... humanness. They’re both emo-pop perfection, rendered with memorable melodies and lyrical sophistication; after her disappointing debut, “lovestrong,” this is major progress. If you can just overlook the cha-cha-chas on “Lonely Child,” you’ll have a hard time disagreeing.

Karmin, ‘Pulses’

So in-your-face with its hip-hop infused dance-pop that it’s as nauseating as it is ear-rapey, there are few good things to be said about Amy Heidemann and Nick Noonan’s first full-length. But here goes: a ballad (a ballad?!), “Neon Love,” portrays a new maturity lacking from their EP debut. “Drifter,” catchy if trite, and “Tidal,” a sleek, not-obnoxious Nelly Furtado-like anthem, avoid being as disposable as the rest of “Pulses.” And even if their sound reminds you of Black Eyed Peas, it’s not Black Eyed Peas, so, you know, that’s good.
we couldn’t make it happen. Then I finally stomped my stiletto and said, “I have to go; I have to connect to the people who have supported me thus far.” So I would, of course, love to travel to more cities, see more of the U.S. – and yeah, bringing my A-show to the States would be fantastic.

Make it happen, Kylie.

I’ll stomp the other stiletto!

Scissor Sisters’ Jake Shears, who worked with you on your last studio album, 2010’s “Aphrodite,” told Attitude magazine that you recorded enough songs with him over the years for an entire album.

Jake’s always getting me in trouble!

He said he’s gonna leak that album.

(Laughs) Yeah, well, if it ever happens I know whose door I’ll be knocking on. You know, I love him so much I probably couldn’t even be mad at him.

What are the odds these tracks could surface?

It’d be really good to do as a mixtape or something. If they were pressed and finished, then yeah. It’s different when things are leaked that are not where you want to get them, but I love the idea that these little morsels are around.

You have always been a proponent for equal marriage, but Australia, your home soil, still doesn’t legally recognize marriage for gay couples. In December 2013, the court ruled against same-sex marriages. What are your thoughts on the ban preventing gay people from getting married in Australia?

As always, I support gay marriage. I feel like it will happen eventually, but wouldn’t it be great if it happened sooner rather than later? I just came from Australia where they had Mardi Gras and it actually struck me when I was there, because I did Mardi Gras a couple of years ago – and I also did it in the mid-’90s too – and I thought, “Wow, it’s so fortunate that people can express themselves that way.” It seems ironic and a bit backwards that marriage isn’t fully embraced with that.

For over 25 years, you’ve successfully navigated the pop music scene and influenced a legion of stars. From your own experience, what does it take to be a pop icon and maintain not just your longevity but your sanity?

Hmm, sanity? Oh god. Keep your feet on the ground. Keep dreaming. Try and take care of yourself. Yeah, it’s somewhere in between being realistic and being a dreamer.
Pink: The Truth About Love Tour: Live from Melbourne

There she goes, that Pink, raising the bar all the way up to the ceiling of a sports arena. “The Truth About Love Tour,” named after her sixth studio album, doesn’t just impress with exhilarating ingenuity – it makes her competition look damn right lazy. With a Cirque du Soleil level of grandeur, it’s clear no one currently performing in her circle works that stage harder than Pink, and the home release of this heralded spectacle – shot in Australia last year – demonstrates a pop veteran at the top of her game. Literally, too, as she shoots out of the stage for “Raise Your Glass,” spins unharnessed on a whirling dome during “Sober” and then encores a masterful, career-spanning set – sung live, so take that – by blasting across the stadium. And for this cutting-edge concert film, the camera’s along for the ride. When Pink’s swooping through the air, you’re right there with her. The bonus behind-the-scenes feature is a fun peek into her life on the road, but what’s really special is seeing Pink do a rare performance of “Time After Time.”

Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy

One, two, Freddy’s coming for you – gay or not. The second installment of the dream killer’s mayhem wasn’t without plenty of queer subtext, and when the 1985 sequel to Wes Craven’s “Nightmare on Elm Street” was released, that wasn’t lost on its filmmakers. In fact, it was intentional. Over 100 “Elm Street” collaborators – including Craven, Robert Englund and Heather Langenkamp, along with peripheral victims who likely had nothing better to do – dig deep into the mythology and homoeroticism of a horror icon. Discussed during the extensive four-hour Blu-ray doc is a Divine cameo that never happened, Kelly Rowland’s tasteless “faggot” ad-lib during a confrontation with the villain and all the queer camp of “Freddy’s Revenge,” including its gay lead Jesse Walsh (out actor Mark Patton and screenwriter David Chaskin reflect on what’s referred to as the “Top Gun” of the series). With surprising frankness, the insightful brilliance of “Never Sleep Again” opens that boiler room door and lets you in on the evolution, drama, secrets and just plain horror of your worst nightmare.

Blue Is the Warmest Color

Thanks to seven minutes of news-making lesbian sex, the wonderful and wistful coming-of-age indie from French filmmaker Abdellatif Kechiche, “Blue Is the Warmest Color,” got mad buzz after its Cannes Film Festival premiere. And sure, there’s absolutely nothing subtle about how Kechiche portrays his two young ladies in bed, and perhaps, like many have debated, it’s superfluous, but this is about self-discovery – sex is a rite of passage. Based on a graphic novel, Kechiche’s arty and deeply resonate work about the onset of adolescent desire, and the confusion and fragility of the human heart, begins with Adèle (the tremendously affecting Adèle Exarchopoulos) succumbing to bullying woes and being distinctly unsure of herself – especially around men. Then she meets Emma (Léa Seydoux), a sexually secure
Fooling Around In Ann Arbor

BY SHELBY CLARK PETKUS

Make a “fool” of yourself this April in Ann Arbor when WonderFool Productions hosts two events in Ann Arbor: Festifools and FoolMoon.

Foolmoon is a unique, moonlight event on Friday, April 4. Starting at dusk and running until midnight, the free event will feature a procession of the community, with handmade illuminated sculptures and dancing “merrymakers.” The parade will end at Washington and Ashley in downtown Ann Arbor; the Farmer’s Market at Kerrytown, UMMA and Slauson Middle School will all serve as the starting places beginning at around 8 p.m. In addition to the art on display throughout the procession, candlelit treats and craft-brewed spirits will also be on hand. Other unique twists of the event include shadow puppet performances, experimental films and more.

Grizzly Peak will have a “FoolBrew” tent preceding the event at 5:30 p.m. Live music, a specialty brewed beer (called FoolBrew) and more will be featured. Grizzly Peak Brewing Company is at 120 W. Washington St., Ann Arbor.

Not sure how to join in, or what “luminaries” are? A luminary is a “glowy” sculpture. Festifools.org offers a variety of tutorials on how to make these special masks, sculptures and more. WonderFools is also sponsoring Sunday workshops at 10 a.m. at Workantile, 118 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. The workshops are free, with a suggested donation of $10.

Following FoolMoon, WonderFools will host Festifools. The festival, considered a “gigantic public art spectacular,” kicks off Ann Arbor’s outdoor festival season. Created by community members and University of Michigan students, the event is unique in its duration: one hour. Working with the same mentality of Foolmoon, thousands of human-powered paper-mache puppets, masks and other works of art will fill the streets of downtown Ann Arbor. Look for “magnificent, huge, bizarre and politically incorrect” works. A secret panel of judges will observed all performances and art, granting the “most fun, foolish and impressive creation” with a Grand Fool trophy.

Festifools 2014 begins at 4 p.m. on Sunday, April 6 in downtown Ann Arbor. Festivities will begin on Main Street, between Washington and William. The event is free and open to all.

WonderFool Productions is dedicated to raising public art awareness and engaging communities with collaborative, educational and dynamic art experiences. The “fool” events are inspired by the floats and paper-mache works used in Italy, as well as Superior Concept Monsters, a professional arts workshop. Since April 1, 2007, FestiFools has been flooding Ann Arbor with music, art and fun. The event’s been praised by the Ann Arbor News and Mayor John Hieftje and is now supported by U-M.

For further details on WonderFool and their “foolish” events, call 734-763-7550 or check out www.festifools.org.

For more Ann Arbor events, check out BTL’s calendar at www.pridesource.com
Top of the Lamp would like to thank all our BTL readers for their support the last 8 years!

415 south maple road
Ann arbor 734.769.7019
www.topofthelamp.com
Thursday, March 27

Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals 1933-1945
The story of what happened to homosexuals in Nazi Germany is the subject of the exhibition, Holocaust Memorial Center, 48123 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. 248-553-2400 x24. Holocaustcenter.org

Free HIV Testing 2 p.m. Free, anonymous HIV testing is available at S3 Safe Sex Store every Thursday until 8 p.m. Testing is performed by HARC staff. Call to schedule an appointment, but walk-ins are more than welcome. S3 Safe Sex Store and HIV/AIDS Resource Center, 1929 S. University, Ann Arbor. 734-741-1434. info@b-ack-inc.com S3safesexstore.com

Gender Hormone Counseling Sessions 6 p.m. Darnell Jones, RPH and GNA, will conduct one on one counseling sessions for the transgender community. Affirmations, 290 W Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. Gaaffirmations.org

Relationship Skills Class 6 p.m. A series for LGBT people and their friends and loved ones. Topics include: exploring personal and cultural relationships, values, arguments and making agreements, accountability and building community connections. Tickets: $53 per person. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-545-1435. Michigangncounseling.org

Nerd Nite Ann Arbor 6:30 p.m. Monthly event including discussions and more. Tickets: $5. Nerd Nite Ann Arbor, 102 S. First St., Ann Arbor, annarbornerd.com

Saturday, March 29

Ann Arbor Film Festival Includes many LGBT works. Tickets: $7-9. Ann Arbor Film Festival, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-686-8397. Mocadetroit.org


Sunday, March 30

Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church 10 a.m. We are a welcoming congregation. Please join us for services every Sunday at 10 a.m. Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church, 23025 Northwestern Hwy, Southfield. 248-354-4888. office@northwestuuniversal.org

Outpouring 12:30 p.m. LGBT-affirming service. Non-denominational Christian. Affirming Love Ministries, 9550 Oakland Ave., Detroit. Affirmingloveministries.org

An Afternoon with Carolee Schneemann 4 p.m. Feminist icon. Cranbrook Art Museum, 3921 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills. 877-462-7262. Cranbrook.edu

Artistic Women's Entertainment 7-30 p.m. Stiletto’s, 1641 Middlebelt Road, Inkster, Stilettoentnightclub.com

Detroit Women's Coffee House Revival 8 p.m. A chance for us to celebrate the talent in our community and raise funds for Women musicians and artists and our local non-profit organizations in our community. GFT, 1641 Middlebelt Road, Inkster. 248-943-2411. lindabc Aristotle@gmail.com Womeninoutaboutand/calendar/detroit-womens-coffee-house/

Monday, March 31

Restorative Yin Yoga with Meditation 6:45 p.m. Get pampered. GOAL, 22812 Fourteen Mile Road, Southfield. 248-398-7105. Gaaffirmations.org

Circle of Life: Pet Ownership of Animals, Healthy Lives Adult Support Group 7 p.m. This one-of-a-kind program in Berrien County helps attendees support each other in healthy ways through active listening and caring feedback. OutCenter, 132 Water St., Benton Harbor. 269-926-8330.

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Editor's Pick

Is HIV really a crime? That's the question posed at "HIV Criminalization in Michigan: A Community Forum." All are invited to come join the discussion and learn how HIV specific laws hurt public health, and what people can do about it.

Multiple advocacy groups in the area, including BTL, Equality Michigan, MAC and the ACLU, are hosting the discussion, titled "When Sex is a Crime and Spit is a Dangerous Weapon."

The forum will begin at 2 p.m. on Saturday, March 29 at Affirmations. Affirmations is located at 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. Light refreshments will be served. Call 248-398-7105 or visit www.goaffirmations.org.
Family Contends With Autism In ‘Falling’

BY JENN MCKEE

Just hours before going to see Deanna Jent’s “Falling” at Meadow Brook Theatre, I stood in a deserted sector of a fancy restaurant with my restless, not-remotely-hungry daughters, ages 2 and 5, while my husband took his turn eating lunch and talking with the couple at our table. (We were at a post-bar mitzvah reception.) At one point, I comforted myself by thinking, “This, too, shall pass.” For as our girls grow older, my husband and I will eventually reclaim our place among couples that get to eat a meal together, in a leisurely way, and chat up friendly strangers.

But as “Falling” makes clear, if you’re a parent of a child with severe autism, hoping for a more independent, carefree day-to-day future may feel more like a wistful wish than a built-in expectation.

The play focuses on the Martin family. Parents Tami (Sarab Kamoo) and Bill (Chris Hietikko) work through various daily rituals and tricks to keep autistic, sometimes aggressive, 18-year-old Josh (Daniel Everidge) on an even keel, while Josh’s teenage sister Lisa (Lizzie Rainville) vies for attention.

Bill and Tami, despite being perpetually breathless from the effort of keeping everything together, manage to retain a sense of humor and camaraderie, but when Bill’s mother, Grammy Sue (Carolyn Gillespie), comes to visit, the family’s delicate balance is thwarted.

Everidge earned a nomination for a Drama Desk Award and a Lucille Lortel Award in the New York production of “Falling,” so it’s no surprise that his performance is one of the primary draws of Meadow Brook’s (70-minute) production, directed by Travis Walter. Yes, Everidge looks older than 18 – the age Josh is supposed to be – but this visual disconnect is quickly forgiven in the larger scope of Everidge’s embodiment of Josh.

For within moments of Everidge’s entrance, we see Josh’s immense capacity for joy in simple things – like a box jerry-rigged to rain down white feathers on his head – and, based on Tami’s emphatic guidance, his potential to detonate if not warned about things like a blender being turned on to make a smoothie. Everidge’s performance is a stunner in part because you key into Josh’s physical lexicon within moments, recognizing the ticks that indicate a looming storm; plus, while a pitfall of such a role involves an actor overdoing it, Everidge seems to establish a restrained tone that’s exactly right.

Kamoo and Hietkko also do great work as loving parents who, in turn, feel happy, terrified, hopeful, angry, hopeless, frustrated, relieved and spent. Hietkko conveys a likable decency as Bill, so that when he and Tami get into an argument, we sympathize with his perspective as much as with hers. Kamoo, meanwhile, takes your breath away as a mother who deeply, deeply loves the child that now, assuming the body of a man, threatens her with violence on a semi-regular basis.

Yet the play has its flaws. Josh’s aggression likely didn’t bloom overnight, so Grammy Sue’s obliviousness to his behaviors rings a bit of a false note. Kamoo’s rock-out fantasy dance to Heart’s “Barracuda” while cleaning up felt way too long and self-conscious; and an extended dream sequence, while offering some moments and ideas otherwise hard to express (not to mention an impressive acting feat by Everidge), ultimately feels like a manipulative cop out on the part of the playwright.

What Jent gets absolutely right, though, is the feel of a real family in the throes of an ongoing struggle. So while the play’s end isn’t neatly tied up, thus leaving some things ambiguous, the choice only makes sense. For no matter what choices this family makes about Josh’s long-term care – and there’s significant disagreement on this point – the decisions will haunt each family member and, in some ways, shape them, forging not only the sense of who they are, and who they will become. And stakes don’t get much higher than that.
artist who turns her world upside down. Over three hours, and many, many movie years, “Blue Is the Warmest Color” exposes all the complexities of their relationship as they discover and rediscover themselves. Even if it’s stingy on special features, the film itself – released via Criterion – is a thing of staggering beauty.

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire
As Katniss Everdeen, Jennifer Lawrence’s love-torn, anxiety-fueled emotions in “Catching Fire” are served with such realness she’ll make a mess out of you. And who can blame her? The rare better-than-the-first second entry in the “Hunger Games” saga goes deeper and darker than its predecessor, rendering an almost-hopeless dystopia where champs Katniss and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) unwillingly fake their way through some PR and then compete once more, to their surprise, during this survival of the fittest. Fear, war and drag-queeny wigs – they’re facing it all over again. But “Catching Fire” bites down harder on the very media hysteria it vilifies. Its teeth are bigger, sharper and scarier. And with palpable ambivalence, alternating heroic fierceness and total despair with nothing but ease, Lawrence is more than just Katniss – she’s all of us. Extras include deleted scenes, a filmmaker commentary and a thorough nine-part doc that’s as long as the film.

Also Out
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

About Time
Nobody’s perfect, but what if they could be? Tim (Domhnall Gleeson) gives it a shot when he inherits his father’s ability to time travel and change his past. Now, suddenly, he’s a Casanova – no screw-ups, no awkwardness. He turns the charm on when he meets Mary (Rachel McAdams), and they both expect to see each other again. But the consequence to changing the past is that it also changes the future. Enriching and thought-provoking, the wonderfully sincere “About Time” is mushy and sweet and life-affirming – and duh: Rachel McAdams stars and “Love, Actually” filmmaker Richard Curtis directs. Bonus features include a cast/crew commentary, bloopers and a music video for Ellie Goulding’s featured song.

Carrie
Can you imagine if this new “Carrie,” from “Boys Don’t Cry” director Kimberly Peirce, was a vehicle addressing this sickening trend in queer-targeted bullying? I mean, can you? No? OK, good. Because you wouldn’t wanna have your hopes dashed by this unnecessary repeat of the 38-year-old Sissy Spacek classic in which a young girl, ostracized by her peers and condemned to hell by her god-crazy mother, is so soul-depleted she unleashes the monster inside her. As Carrie, Chloe Moretz gets it right, relishing every messy moment of the prom massacre, but Julianne Moore’s exaggerated religious lunacy verges on parody. “Carrie,” the comedy? Anything but this. A Peirce commentary and an alternate ending are among the extras.

Fantastic Mr. Fox
Of course Wes Anderson would make a film about foxes. Because, uh, why wouldn’t he? Adapted in 2009 from a children’s novel about a fox family on the run after a chicken heist, the fable’s right out of left field. And it’s marvelous. It’s got the fantastically weird familial charm of every Anderson picture, the voices of Meryl Streep and George Clooney, and indelible characters (teenage outcast Ash is a huggable hoot), but it’s also easy on the eyes. There’s some seriously impressive animation going on here. Just look at that hair. And now look at it in glorious hi-def, a detailed Criterion Collection transfer that’s aesthetically foxy but also remarkably thorough in contextual supplements.

The Spectacular Now
Aimee Finicky is the virtuous virgin you bring home to mom. But Sutter Keely? Not so much. Still, the two high schoolers, despite differences and the opposite roads they’re on, meet at a crossroad. They dote, they have sex. It’s clear something is brewing between them, but there are walls and there are exes and there is alcoholism. What they experience is the kind of moment you remember more fondly with age, when you realize what it meant then and what it means now. And this drama, from the writers of “500 Days of Summer,” epitomizes that — spectacularly. A director commentary and a short making-of round out the set.
MARCH 27, 2014

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**Editor’s Pick**


“Suburbia” centers on a group of aimless 20 year olds who hang out by a convenience store. Tragedies and comedies have bound together these nine young lives and changed them forever. Based on the author’s own experience, Bogosian sketches a generation of dazed and confused middle-class young people who find themselves unable to cope anywhere outside their own town, and do little more than live at home and hang out at the mall.

Tickets are $10-$12 and are available by calling the theatre box office at 313-577-2972 or by visiting the box office in the Hilberry Theatre located at 4743 Cass Avenue on the corner of Hancock in Midtown Detroit.
‘Torch Song Trilogy’ Stands Test Of Time

Stagecrafters Launches Fierstein Play March 28

By Dana Casadei

It’s the first scene for John Nowaczyk during a recent rehearsal of “Torch Song Trilogy.” Nowaczyk’s character, Ed, is trying to get the attention of Jamie Richards’ Arnold.

“Did you feel seduced Jamie?” Nowaczyk jokes.

After a brief pause Richards says “yes” before sending an email from his phone. Then the two men get on stage for their first scene together.

Three weeks from opening night and both are still on-book for Act I. That doesn’t seem to bother director Jerry Haines, who willingly gives lines if either asks.

“It’s a great environment to work in,” Richards says. “He (Haines) knows I have a hard time, not once the show opens, but learning my lines as I get older. He gives me a lot of leeway on that, which is very nice, because I’m scared shitless.”

It doesn’t help that this is a dream role Richards thought he would never get a chance to play. Or that Broadway great Harvey Fierstein originated the role. Or that Fierstein won a Tony Award for it. Or that ... well, there’s plenty of reasons for Richards to be scared shitless. But Haines knew quickly that Richards would be perfect for Arnold.

“Jamie came prepared; you don’t always get that,” Haines says. “He (Jamie) read with Rae

See Torch Song, page 33
Feminist icon Carolee Schneemann will visit Cranbrook Art Museum for an afternoon of discussion and more. The multidisciplinary artist is known for her artistic work on the body, sexuality and gender. Schneemann’s art has been shown in Los Angeles, Paris, New York City and more.

“An Afternoon with Carolee Schneemann” begins at 4 p.m. on Sunday, March 30 at Cranbrook Art Museum.

The museum is located at 39221 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills. For more information, call 877-462-7262 or visit www.cranbrookart.edu.

The PRTC Spring Comedy Festival: Lovers, Liars & Lunatics $18.50-42. The Purple Rose Theatre Company, 137 Park St., Chelsea. April 3 - May 24. 734-433-7673. www.purplerosetheatre.org


ART ‘N’ AROUND

Cranbrook Academy of Art and Art Museum “The Islands of Benoit Mandelbrot: Fractals, Chaos, and the Materiality of Thinking” One of the most notable mathematicians of the twentieth century, this exhibition explores the role of images in scientific thinking. Cranbrook Art Museum, 39221 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills, Nov. 16- March 30. 877-462-7262. Cranbrook.edu

Cranbrook Academy of Art and Art Museum “My Brain is in My Inkstand: Drawing as Thinking and Process” An original exhibition that brings together 22 artists from around the world to redefine the notion of drawing as a thinking process in the arts and sciences alike. Cranbrook Art Museum, 39221 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills. Nov. 16-March 30. 877-462-7262. Cranbrook.edu


Editor’s Pick

The multidisciplinary artist is known for her artistic work on the body, sexuality and gender. Schneemann’s art has been shown in Los Angeles, Paris, New York City and more.

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Solution to puzzle from page 34

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Say Hi To Clover!
(McIntosh), who is playing the mother, and I knew instantly that he was right.”

“My turn,” Richards replies.

Richards jokes that his role is very small, that he’s just the annoying neighbor who talks a lot. Half of that is true; his character does talk a lot, but the role isn’t small.

During the three-hour-plus play, Richards portrays Arnold Beckhoff. Each act will see Arnold, a gay drag queen living in New York, at a different stage in his life. The show was written in the early ‘80s, which Haines says gives it some character. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t relevant today.

“When Harvey Fierstein wrote this, I don’t know that he had any idea that it would stand the test of time, but it has,” Haines says. “The themes in it ring true today.”

While the play focuses largely on gay men, on them getting married and starting a family, Richards says that the situations could be applied to anyone, gay or straight, single or in a relationship. Fierstein’s text is that good. Richards says that all you would have to do is change a couple pronouns and the play could easily be about a heterosexual couple. Fights, loves and losses – it’s all about the human experience.

“Those struggles are always going to be there,” Richards says. “Until we’re all robots.”

In all seriousness, though, both men are glad that Stagecrafters is taking a risk on a show like this – especially on its main stage. More conservative shows tend to be done there.

When Haines found out that the selection committee was considering this show, he was “all about it,” even though he only knew the 1988 film.

“That was enough for me,” Haines laughs. “When I finally read the play, it was like, ‘Whoa.’ Then when I got the show I was like, ‘This is huge.’”

But neither Richards or Haines wanted to merely repeat what was done on Broadway. Richards is quick to say that he is no Fierstein. Plus, he didn’t want to just do a gravelly voiced impression. He also said the show was intimidating because of how close he’s always felt to it. It’s been a big part of his life as a gay man.

Haines wanted to take the show on its merit and make sure audiences see Arnold as Jamie, not Fierstein. It was also important to keep the show fresh, new and real.

“For me that’s what will make this work,” Haines says. “And then there’s the drag queen.”

The show was originally written for a torch singer, who shows up in Act I and in between some scenes at a piano. Since Stagecrafters is doing four musicals this year, “Torch Song Trilogy” didn’t get a budget to cover musicians. Enter Marcuz Weatherspoon as Lady Blue, the aforementioned drag queen. Haines said Lady Blue will open each act.

“I’m really looking forward to how it all comes together at this point,” Haines says.

And don’t you worry about Richards. “I will have my lines,” he says. “I promise.”

Torch Song
Continued from p. 29

Happenings
Continued from p. 30

Detroit Institute of Arts  “Samurai: Beyond the Sword” The exhibition looks at how Japan’s legendary warrior class sought balance between military and cultural pursuits. Tickets: $6-16. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2100 Woodward Ave., Detroit. March 9-June 1. 313-833-7900. Dia.org


Janice Charach Gallery “Breaking the Mold Glass and Clay Exhibit Sale Janice Charach Gallery” Opening Reception on Sunday, March 18th from 1-4 p.m. Refreshments will be served. This exhibit celebrates 25 cutting edge local artists. Janice Charach Gallery, 6600 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield, March 16-April 17. 248-435-0535. Charachgallery.org

Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum “The President’s Photographer: Fifty Years Inside the Oval Office” The exhibition features 50 framed images and a text panel with brief biographical information on each photographer. Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum, 7400 Bay Road, University Center. Feb. 3-May 24. 989-964-7125. Marshallfredericks.org/
presidents


MOCAD “Mobile Homestead” A permanent art work by the late Mike Kelley. Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, 4454 Woodward Ave., Detroit, Jan. 1-June 30. 313-832-6622. Mocadetroit.org


Riverside Arts Center “10th Annual Docent Exhibit” Riverside Arts Center, 76 North Huron Street, Ypsilanti. March 4-April 27. 734-483-7550. Riversidearts.org

Riverside Arts Center “Mosaic Evolution” Both 2D and 3D creations. Riverside Arts Center, 76 N. Huron St., Ypsilanti, March 6-April 27. 734-483-7550. Riversidearts.org


UMMA “Frames from the Past: Islamic Art from the Collection of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology” University of Michigan Museum Of Art, 525 S. State St., Ann Arbor. Nov. 30-April 13. 734-763-4186. Umma.umich.edu


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