

TORONTO'S PREMIER GAY LIFESTYLE DIGITAL MAGAZINE

MGT

We Know Gay

MY GAY TORONTO

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PAUL BELLINI

Rubber Dolphin

and the policies we create around anal sex



Rubber Dolphin is a film from Israel that depicts a hot night in the lives of two young guys. The one who lives at the apartment serves drinks as his guest looks around, but soon enough they start to make out. They have bareback sex, then lie around talking. I won't give away the ending, suffice to say that the film delves deep into the policies we create around anal sex. And it does all that in just 28 minutes.

Directed by Ori Aharon, who was born and raised in Haifa and lives in Tel Aviv, made *Rubber Dolphin* as his graduation film at the Steve Tisch School of Film and Television at Tel Aviv University. And let me tell you, Ori is cute enough to be in the movie himself. The director will be in town next week to present his film at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. Let's hope some poor bubbie doesn't wander in expecting an aquatic adventure movie. The actors in *Rubber Dolphin* wear clothes for only about 10 percent of the screen time, and although the film is not hardcore, it still made me blush.

Having premiered at Cannes, *Rubber Dolphin* is described as "a deep exploration of the sexual relationship between two men during a one-night-stand." But more importantly, it's a story that most of us have lived as well. Sometimes there is nothing more exciting than to see our experiences portrayed accurately on the screen.

***Rubber Dolphin* plays Sunday, February 3, 5 PM at the Regent Theatre in Toronto.**



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DREW ROWSOME

Christopher House

and why Toronto Dance Theatre never does the same thing twice



The Shape, We Are In and Slow Dance photos by Omer Yukseker
Marienbad photos by Alejandro Santiago

For the twenty-fifth time, Christopher House is promoting the launch of a new season at Toronto Dance Theatre. He is surprised and pleased. “The first time I danced with the company was in 1978,” he says, “That’s like 40 years ago. It seems like a long, long time, but I kind of grew up there. My time as an artistic director has gone fairly quickly because we’ve never really done the same thing, it’s always changing and evolving. It keeps it fresh. It doesn’t feel like I’ve been working in the same place as when I took over the company in 1994.”

In that time Toronto Dance Theatre and House have received raves and accolades while never losing their edge and sense of exploration. “I’ve really been blessed with this company because it was founded to be a creative organization. It was never beholden. It wasn’t a dance company that was founded by a board of directors who had an idea for what it should be, and who want it to be relatively safe in the programming so that the audience is never alienated. We sort of do a fancier dance with that in trying to challenge our audience in the way we challenge ourselves. But we give them the tools to enjoy the challenges.”

It doesn’t always work. “I was asked to speak at a private club that brings in guest artists,” says House with a laugh. “I probably spoke for 40 minutes about my own artistic vision and after, one of the people who had been a donor to the company and had stopped giving because she didn’t really understand what was happening in the theatre because it didn’t speak to her, approached me. After she’d had a



chance to hear me speak about what we were trying to do, it made her curious again. It gave her a window. I think it's about trust. That people trust that we're not trying to talk down to them or put something over on them. A lot of suspicion comes with more experimental work. For me it's including the experimentation in a continuum that includes much more accessible work as well. What links them is that they have similar humanist values."

And there are always new audience members discovering Toronto Dance Theatre. "It's often people with zero experience who just come and it's all new and it's all kind of interesting," says House. "And they often have really clear insights into the intention of the work. As do people who experience contemporary art frequently, or are art practitioners or writers or something. Part of our experience of the world is discovering what we like and what we don't like and often making judgement calls based on that. I often find that when someone tricks me into letting go of my judgement that there is something that I didn't think I liked but in fact is my new passion. That's something artists are always having to deal with, how to unlock that in the audience."





Programming a season has its challenges. “Last year we toured most of the year with a mixed program,” says House. “The pieces were all related in that I made them all up. They considered performance and composition in very different ways. I think it was interesting for people to see how one artist’s voice could change over 28 years. I didn’t choose the pieces for variety. But I’m conscious that not every piece on the stage have black costumes or that every piece have violins in the score. You want to keep people guessing within the curation of the program in the same way that you want to keep them guessing within the individual pieces. That program was very successful even though there were challenging works hidden inside it.”





The 2019 program is a very exciting one. “Jeanine Durning’s work *This Shape, We Are In*, that’s about to open and Marie Lambin-Gagnon’s work *Slow Dance*, they’re both pretty radical interpretations of choreography,” says House of the two works running Wednesday, January 23 to Saturday, February 2. “I think they’re also really fun and interesting. People often think that contemporary dance is heavy but, even if it’s dealing with concepts and ideas that are common across other contemporary art forms, it’s often very playful in execution. And these two works are very playful.”

Playful but a welcome challenge that fits into Toronto Dance Theatre’s spirit. “I work with amazing people,” says House. “Over 25 years, at a certain point I realized that it wasn’t just about what I was making as an artist, the company itself became an overarching work of artistry. Every choreographer,





every artist or guest that I invite in to work with us has an impact on what's going to happen. The experience of going on a journey with like-minded artists. Every artist is a distinctive human being with likes and dislikes and interests, but everyone enjoys the process of working together. With Jeanine on this piece *The Shape, We Are In* right now, I'm amazed because her process is so intense but the company just keeps stepping up. That makes me really proud that somehow we've created an environment where people have that kind of commitment. It's really gratifying and quite touching."

House's own choreographic work is up next with *Persefony Songs* running Tuesday, March 5 to Saturday, March 9. "It's a piece of mine, more traditional, that's set choreography. We have live music by composer Thom Gill and a six piece band, Bernice, on stage. It's a beautiful new adaptation. The singers



are gorgeous. We're absolutely thrilled."

The piece, based on *The Odyssey*, was first staged in 2001. "Looking at it again it just felt so gendered because of course *The Odyssey* is very heteronormative in its structure. But there's this beautiful thing, this rethinking of *The Odyssey* that occurred in medieval times, that is when they got back to Ithaca, to their wives and were reintegrated into the capitalist processes of farming and trading, they got really bored with that. And they got back on their ships and went back to Circe's island to turn into animals and take drugs and have sex and just generally live a hedonistic life. So I've really kind of ungendered the piece. Any of the roles could be performed by anybody. It's very queer in its unfolding, in the pairings of people, but the whole sense of the piece and the way music is used, reveals a lot of the beauty within the continuity between ancient Greece and today. So I can have very clear social and political goals in the making, but its about how much does beauty need to be framed in order to affect people. It was originally called *Persephone's Lunch*, pomegranates figured in it, but it's now



called *Persefony Songs*."

Not only a new adaptation, but also a continuation of House's explorations. "When I first started I made very short pieces because I was learning how to choreograph. Through making these short pieces it became very much about attention to craft and compositional ideas. I really like composition, keeping the audience in a sense of anticipation through the decisions I make. It's a super interesting thing to do and something that I really take pleasure in doing. That's been a thread through everything I've worked on. Not so often do I start with a piece of music and I rarely interpret the music or dance to the music. Interestingly in *Persefony Songs* there are a couple of sections that there are steps and counts, it's almost in a folk dance structure which I think is really pretty and really lovely to see. And they have fun doing it. I think experiencing performers not performing pleasure but experiencing real pleasure is something quite special to show in a theatre."

Thursday, May 23 to Saturday, June 1 sees the return of *Marienbad*, House's collaboration with writer

([Liminal](#)) and theatre artist ([Botticelli in the Fire and Sunday in Sodom](#), [Declarations](#), [Concord Floral](#), [Late Company](#), [The Magic](#), [Post Eden](#))

Jordan Tannahill. “One of the things that is really interesting about coming back to *Marienbad* is that Jordan’s experience, he’s done so much in the ensuing years - it hasn’t been that long but he’s packed in so much - his physicality is much richer,” says House. “And I’m in much better shape than the original so I think we’re going to be able to pump up the physicality, and also hang on to the same instinctive quality that we had in the original, but refine some of the things that will make the piece more interesting to us. And then because we’re more excited, the audience experience will be better.”

Again House is exploring with other artists. “It’s great to collaborate with Jordan. The thing I like about performing in *Marienbad* is being in conversation with the audience in a way that is not attempting to show how accomplished you are but rather attempting to show how attentive you are to the time and place you are in. You’re inviting their attention by being as honest as you can be in attempting to move them. It’s a very intimate piece but it’s also unusual this inter-generational queer friendship. We share so many ideas. He made a solo for me five years ago and he described it as him 30 years in the future. We are performing shared concerns but there’s something beautiful about that age spread. It’s fun to be doing this. Jordan is one of my closest friends, we’re sort of brothers from another mother aesthetically.”



While proud to be celebrating a 25 year anniversary and season, House is also excited about the future. “I won’t be the director of Toronto Dance Theatre in another 25 years,” he says. “I have lots of other interests and I do things outside of the company as well. There’s a lot of pleasure in doing that. Sometimes it’s so nice not to be in charge. I’m at an age now where, not that I don’t have a healthy ego, but I have no more fucks to give in terms of being the best at things if I throw myself into something new. Sometimes it’s fun to be terrible at something. Just sort of embrace that, little by little, one can learn new skills. I’m lucky not to have that fear.”

Much more from Christopher House at drewrowsome.blogspot.com

The Shape, We Are In and Slow Dance run Wed, Jan 23 to Sat, Feb 2
at the Winchester Street Theatre, 80 Winchester St. tdt.org

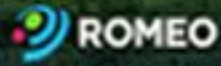
Persefony Songs runs Tues, March 5 to Sat, March 9
at the Fleck Dance Theatre, 207 Queens Quay W. tdt.org

Marienbad runs Thu, May 23 to Sat, June 1
at the Winchester Street Theatre, 80 Winchester St. tdt.org



A Blogger's Lament:
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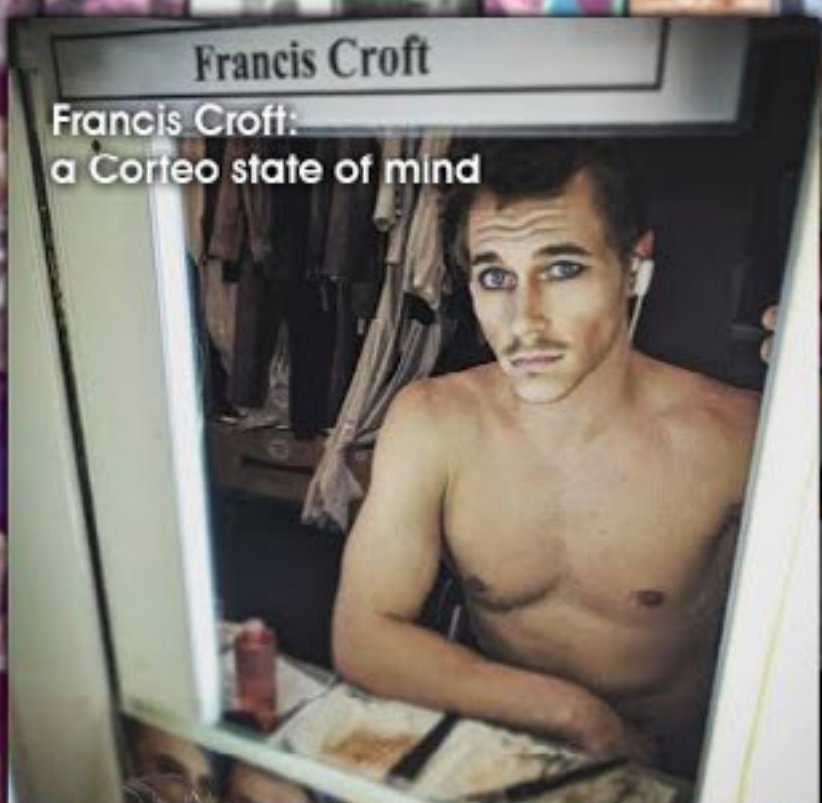


Tom Saint Clair:
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Francis Croft

Francis Croft:
a Corteo state of mind



God's Own Country:
an aching romantic
gay love story



Bohemian Rhapsody:
entertaining and infuriating



RAYMOND HELKIO

How To Get High In Toronto

While the road to marijuana legalization has been paved with good intentions, the reality of the process has been much different. So if you want to get your hands on some legal pot, here's what you need to know.

Recreational cannabis was legalized on October 17, 2018 by the Federal Government, however, since then, the Ontario Cannabis Store (OCS) website remains the only legal option for purchasing it in this province. Ironic, considering up until this point pot had been available through bricks and mortar outlets all across the city, but instead of working with them, they've been actively forcing them out of business with threats of harsh fines and penalties.

Toronto could have followed New York's lead, simply by tapping into the existing marijuana infrastructure, instead of dismantling what was already working. As it stands, the medicinal shops across the GTA have mostly closed up, in effect making it harder than ever to get pot now that it's legal.

Our government claims we have a supply problem, but never in the history of drugs has this been true, especially now with so many grow-ups all across Canada. What we have is a distribution problem which is caused by no licences being issued, and therefore no businesses to sell to. Instead of Toronto's model of "destroy and rebuild," New York plans to offer existing medicinal outlets a huge discount on a legal licence, an effort aimed at encouraging them to stay in business, uninterrupted.

Since the OCS website is the only legal option right now, I gave it a try. It's simple to use, however it requires that you enter personal information along with the order and because the product will be sent via Canada Post your order(s) are linked to your address. You don't have to be a big brother conspiracy theorist to be nervous about having anyone collect this type of data, especially a government. But I ordered anyway.



What I liked about their website is that it breaks out the THC and CBD content for each product. A high CBD content is what most medicinal users opt for, while a high THC content is better for, well, getting high. The downside of the website is that they display all of the pot in the manufacturer's packaging so it's not possible to see what the buds look like before you buy.

I placed my order on a Monday and by Wednesday it was delivered. There's no set delivery time, so when I wasn't home when Canada Post came by, they left me a note to go my postal outlet to pick it up the next day. When


I finally got home with my goods, I shook with anticipation as I unpackaged what seemed like a lot of stuff for a few buds; a box, paper stuffing, a letter, a receipt, a packing slip and a plastic tub for the pot. Given all of the hurdles still involved in getting your hands on legal weed, at least it's reassuring to know that when you finally get some to smoke, you'll at least enjoy it.



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PAUL BELLINI

Bonding people with laughter:

Zack Noe Towers

Zack Noe Towers is a talented young gay stand-up comedian. Busy as a bee, I first saw him when he hosted Dekkoo.com's *Out on Stage*, a six-episode show featuring various queer comedians. Zack told a joke about dating a high-maintenance guy who had digestive issues and could only eat 13 different foods, and he considered breaking up with the guy, "but one of those 13 foods was ass," so they stayed together. I laughed out loud. I knew I had to speak to him.

"As a kid I would mimic scenes from *Home Alone* to entertain people at parties," he tells me. "I'd always be the comic relief in the high school musical. Bonding people with laughter is amazing.

When you have a crowd in your hands, there's nothing like it."

He's been doing comedy for about eight years. "I was always a musical theatre kid and when I got to LA I was discouraged by the process of becoming an actor on screen. So a friend signed me up for a stand-up show and I had fun onstage and it satiated that aspect of me. Its better than going for an audition and being in a toilet paper commercial."

But is it? The world of stand-up comedy is very competitive, often harsh. Other stand-ups are stand-offish until someone proves they can make an audience laugh. "I perform for 97 percent straight audiences. So my gay jokes are usually for people who don't really know what a top or a bottom is. My gay jokes don't really work for gay men, they're almost bored by them."

It doesn't help that gay men were often targeted by comedians in the past. "I got my first paid gig on a gay cruise and I told an AIDS joke. I said, 'Gay Pride is more trouble than it's worth. As soon as I got there my phone started filling with random dudes' numbers and it died of AIDS.' The older gay men in the audience didn't like it. I thought they were going to throw me off the boat. I don't think it's horribly mean, but that joke will not appear on any more gay cruises."

Ask almost *any* gay male stand-up and they will tell you that gay male audiences are not there for them. "It does feel like there's an underlying competitive aspect to being a gay man. We see each other either as trophies or competition, with not much in between." Yet who else could appreciate a joke like this:

I have to share with you how my friend met his husband. They met at a sex party while sucking the same wiener. I didn't ask any further questions . . . like, did they *Lady and the Tramp* it?

Well, I met my second boyfriend in a threeway, so I definitely get it, and I enjoyed the joke immensely. There are dozens of other young gay male stand-up comedians out there right now, and they need our support. And our laughter.



PAUL BELLINI

Kirsten Rasmussen

is doing it every night



Kirsten Rasmussen is a Second City comedian, currently starring in the popular female-centric show *She the People*. “The show comes from a feminist point of view,” she said. “It’s written by all women and it’s exciting to have material that is specifically feminist. I’m not interested in doing comedy that is anti-men, but I do like to talk to the other people in the room.”

Those of us who have seen *She the People* know what she’s talking about. As the world of comedy grows, it becomes more and more inclusive. So, yes, the past few years have seen a seismic change. “It now seems weird to see a comedy troupe that is all-white, or all-male,” declared Rasmussen. It took companies like Second City to help change that. Part of the company’s genius is that it can deal with controversial topics without being controversial itself.

However, it still remains a challenge to attract a gay audience. A few months ago, Rasmussen directed Tom Hearn’s all-queer show *Extravaganza Eleganza*, which played two nights at Tallulah’s in November. The room was packed, but even at a glance it was obvious that the audience was made up more of the comedy community than gays. For decades gays and lesbians were mocked and marginalized, the brunt of the joke, and there is still a mistrust of comedy. But Rasmussen welcomed the opportunity to write queer material. “When you’re the only woman in the room full of straight guys, there isn’t even any space to bring queer comedy into the process. So Tom’s show was an opportunity for us to write for the gay community instead of writing for an empathetic straight audience like we do at Second City.”

Rasmussen is busy. She has two other troupes, K&M and The Bloody Marys, and she is prepping two shows for the upcoming SketchFest. “I’m doing *Binge* with Leigh Cameron, and a solo show called *The Kiki*, which is my nickname. I’m not sure what’s going to be in it, but for sure there will be a song about cysts.” There is also the possibility that there will be a *She’s the People 2.0*. “They’re doing it in Chicago, so it might trickle up to Canada,” she said.

And she’s still immersing herself in the queer community, but slowly. “I want to be more involved, but when you’re a comedian you have to devote so much time to that. My other queer friends spent all their time becoming gay, but I had to choose. Well, I thought, my sexuality isn’t going to change, but I can’t get better at comedy unless I’m doing it every night.” I understand. I did the same thing.

She the People continues its run at the Second City MainStage until March 17.



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PAUL BELLINI

Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke

A few months ago, a stand-up comedian named Nimesh Patel was doing a set for a student audience at Columbia University. He told a joke about how a gay homeless man he knew should choose between his two oppressions. It was not a tasteless or mean-spirited joke. Regardless, the organizers walked on stage during his set and asked him to leave. They felt his humour was disrespectful. The irony, that what they were doing was the ultimate in disrespect, was lost on them. It would have been a watershed moment had just one audience member stood up and shouted "Get off the stage, you stupid cunts." Alas, we cannot expect common sense from university students nowadays.

It's just as bad on Facebook, where morons denounce *Seinfeld* for its 'soup Nazi' jokes. Bringing this level of scrutiny, where people take old comedy and deconstruct it for 'offensive' content, is sick. Why are so-called 'woke' people so afraid of comedy? Easy. Because they are too stupid to understand context. Can't understand irony. Don't realize that making a joke about something is not the same as attacking it.

So there probably couldn't be a better time for an all-queer stand-up comedy series. Meet *Out on Stage*, from TLA Releasing, a six-episode series showcasing up-and-coming queer comedians. Bitches will bitch that most of them are white and male. It should not matter. Funny is funny, a rare gift that most people on earth do not have, so can we just take a moment to celebrate queer comedy, please? I can't help but quoting my favourite lines from this show. Like:

As a kid I would watch To Catch a Predator to learn how to catch a predator. So as a kid I might have taken naked photos of myself and then sent them to older men in order to lure them to my house. And the most fucked up thing is that no one came over. I think its because pedophiles want to rob you of your innocence and nobody wants a slutty kid. - Chris Bryant

A transgender girl called me a fag the other day. We're friends, but I had no idea what to say back. "You're a fag, Joe," she said. "Oh yeah, well, good luck ... on your journey." I don't know what the rules of ball-busting are with trans people. Even 'ball-busting' the phrase sounds like a problem right out of the gate. But she called me a fag, I had to say something. All I could think to say was "Takes one to know one, little miss wrong genitals." - Joe Dosch

I don't know why people don't like gay people. Are you aware that they are killing gay people in Chechnya right now? I don't know what to do. I definitely feel like the community is looking to me for answers. So I shared it twice on Facebook. - Jonathan Rowell

Oh. My. God! Jokes about predators and transpersons and killing gays in Chechnya? How dare they? Reading them, these statements may cause offence and outrage and indignation. Which I suppose is my point. Stand-up comedy is meant to be listened to as it is *performed*, not read off a page. No other context can matter.

Allow me to summarize with a quote from writer Konstantin Kisin, who recently said, "The underlying assumptions of social justice censorship are that words are a form of violence, that a *subjective interpretation* matters more than the speaker's intent ... Comedians use lies to tell the truth—the notion that the exaggerations, stories and carefully crafted falsehoods we deliver on stage should be taken literally will be the death knell of comedy." Well, I hope the producers of the excellent *Out On Stage* are not stymied by such literal thinking. As we used to say when we were kids, "Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke."



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DREW ROWSOME

Festival season: Progress and Rhubarb

banish the winter blahs



February is the most miserable month in Toronto. Cold, snowy and seemingly without sunshine. But it is also one of the most enticing months for theatre and performance art because of the Progress international festival of performance and ideas, and the Rhubarb festival where "artists explore new possibilities in theatre, dance, music, and performance art." This year the festivals overlap briefly with Progress running from Wednesday, January 30 to Sunday, February 17 and Rhubarb running from Wednesday, February 13 to Saturday, February 23. Instead of competing, the two festivals have teamed up to create The Performance Bus.

Audience members attending Progress on the 13th can hop on a shuttle bus to join in the raucous festivities at Rhubarb's notorious opening night party. Those attending Rhubarb on the 16th can bus to the Progress festival's big closing bash. The Progress festival is centred around The Theatre Centre



and Rhubarb is headquartered at Buddies, not that far apart geographically or artistically. But why risk the TTC when one can be hosted by a yet to be named artist (for a memorable party bus experience, I'm hoping for Keith Cole), peppered with "pop up performances en route." That sounds infinitely preferable to delays for track maintenance, mysterious emergencies and the inevitable weather.



Though parties are a crucial component of any festival, it is the content that illuminates the grey of February. Progress presents Australian Jacob Boehme's *Blood on the Dance Floor* billed as a "blend of theatre, image, text and choreography" paying homage to traditional Indigenous ceremonies while "dissecting the politics of gay, Blak and poz identities." Boehme's intersectional identities are channeled into art that speaks to the "need to love and be loved" that we all share.



Already almost sold out is *salt*. wherein two artists recreate their journey retracing one of the routes of the Transatlantic Slave Triangle to question how colonial history exists in the everyday. And answer the loaded question "Where are you from?" Artist Haley McGee offers very useful advice with the self-explanatory *The Ex-Boyfriend Yard Sale* which lead her to discover a mathematical formula for the cost of love. Not only entertaining and inspiring, but information we can all use.

Documents explores "race, class, gender, and sexuality" through the contents of a filing cabinet. *Poor People's TV Room SOLO* commemorates and explores Nigeria's Woman's War of 1929/Woman's

Egwu through dance, theatre, the visual arts and an array of spare but spectacular sets. For one night only, *real real* brings the heat of Brazilian music to the stage as queer artist Bruno Capinan blazes through songs and videos set "at the crossroads of sexuality, race, gender, politics, and art."



The first weekend of Rhubarb is packed with short tasty performances. Who could resist "an afro-futurist, queer rock opera that charts alien witch BiG SiSSY's journey from Black Starr Planet to Earth to liberate us from our oppressive systems," or a visit to *The Temple of Divine Queer* set in "a future world where Queerness has become the dominant religion. You're invited to take part in a future-faith that isn't just making room for you, but where your joys are the very Word of God. There will be glitter." Even more glitter from *A Trouble of Queers: The Brick and Glitter Cabaret* featuring "performance art, queerlesque, comedy, and an avant-garde slop queen."





Weekend two is just as eclectic and tantalizing with Femmes du Feu's *In the Fire* "grappling with fire, trauma, and the memories of her firefighter father in an intimate aerial circus performance." *The Green Line* explores queer love in the inhospitable environment of an Arabian war. New York's Pioneer Go East Collective present "a dance-theatre kinetic ride through the cowboy myth, inspired by artist-activist Agosto Machado's stories of Stonewall and the early Gay Liberation movement" with *CowboysCowgirls*. And Tobias Herzberg "digs beneath the labels he's been assigned – gay, Jewish, German, romantic, nymphomaniac, and uncircumcised – to create a militant hymn for the perverted and marginalized of this world" in *Feygele*.



Perhaps the most radical Rhubarb offering is also the most innocent and sweet. Superstar dragsters Fay Slift and Fluffy Souffle bring an expanded version of their popular and populist *Fay & Fluffy's Storytime* out of the libraries and bookstores and onto the stage with *Fay and Fluffy's Family Fun Cabaret*. While all festivals brag that there is something for everyone, Progress and Rhubarb deliver. Plus a bus ride.

The Progress festival runs Wed, Jan 30 to Sun, Feb 17 at The Theatre Centre, 1115 Queen St W. progressfestival.org

Rhubarb runs Wed, Feb 13 to Sat, Feb 23 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St. buddiesinbadtimes.com

PAUL BELLINI

A visit to the future

I spent Christmas in a seniors' home.

I know, I'm a little too young to be put away. But my mother, who lives in Timmins, sold her house in April and moved into the Georgian Residences. It's a retirement community, not a care facility per se, more of a Golden Girls set-up. Everyone here is old, but still feisty. They just like being catered to, and they while away the hours playing Bingo and Wii. The age range is vast. The youngest resident is in her early 60s, whereas the oldest just celebrated her 100th birthday. Interestingly, there are over 40 female residents, but only a half dozen males.

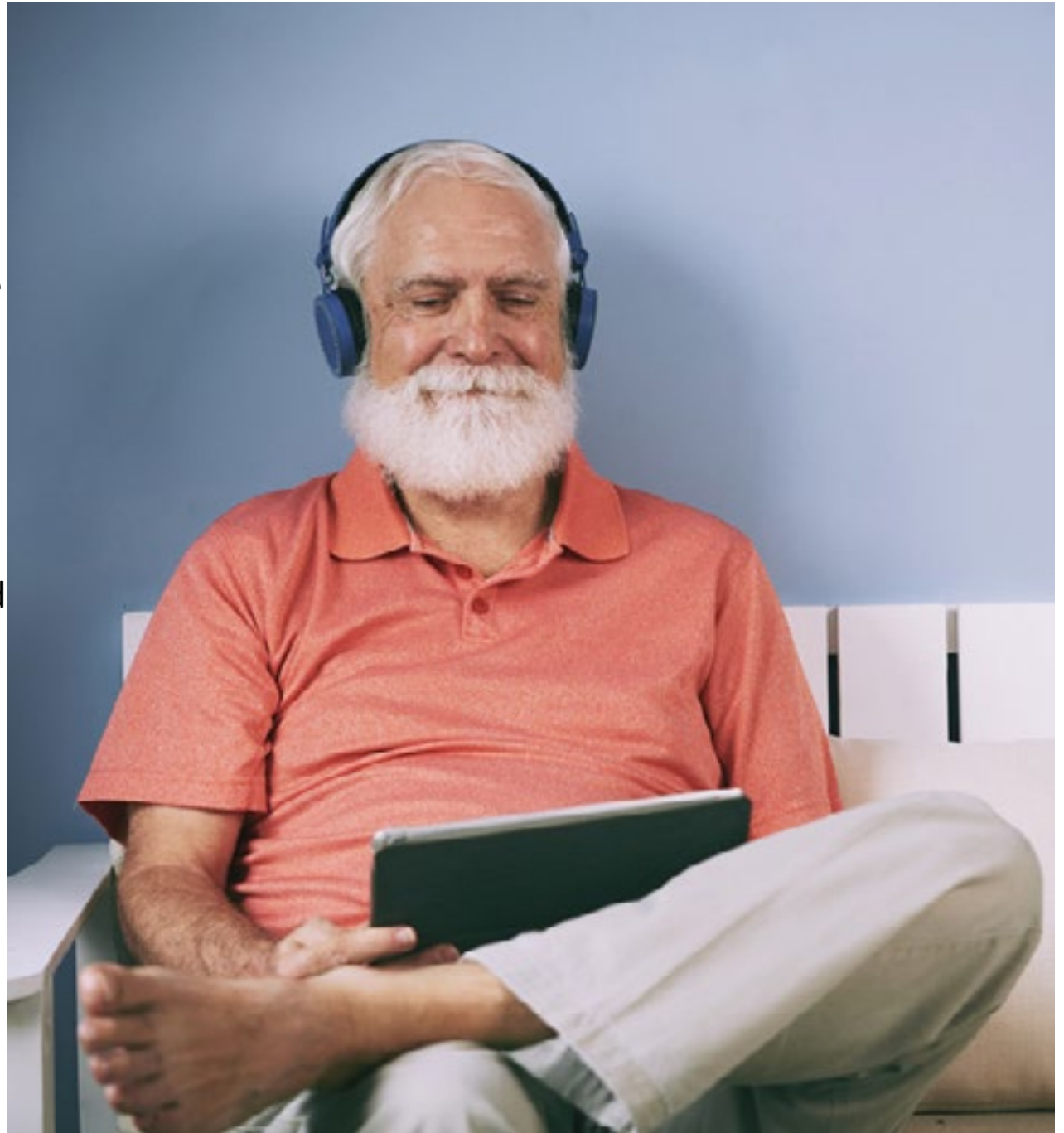
When she moved in, my mother asked the administration if her son could stay in her room when he's in town, and they said yes, so now I'm obliged to do so. I decided to embrace it as an 'immersive experience' or something like that.

Mom suffers from dementia, and as a writer, her loopy logic is endlessly entertaining to me. For instance, she kept telling me that her best friend is 'a cute young guy' who eats lunch with her. The 'guy' turned out to be an 83 year old woman named Jackie with a short hair cut. Lunch with the two of them, and their other friend Anne, is a riot, in part because all three ladies sport bizarre hair colours. My mother is copper topped, Jackie is snow white, and Anne, the real eccentric of the bunch, dyes her hair a bright purple. It augments her glitter fingernail polish.

Life at the home is regimented. Everyone goes to bed early, and it's just as well because the days start early. On the first morning, as I struggled to find a comfortable position on my mom's couch, a woman barged into her room at 6am to help her bathe, then another arrived at 6:15am to take her blood pressure. Luckily, I'm someone who can sleep through a rock concert. The meals are classic 'old people' food - chicken soup and bland pasta and vegetables - but the conversation was cool. Anne asked me if I had a wife, so I told her I was gay. Anne was thrilled to be speaking to a homosexual, someone who could really appreciate her odd choice of hair colour. I asked her if any of the other residents were gay, but she didn't think so.

The days dragged, even though it was Christmas. Usually, after every meal, everyone has a nap, including me, then we eat again, then nap again. Life at the Georgian wasn't odious in the least, but it also isn't very challenging. After a few days, I started to notice my Zelig-like tendency to become like those around me, and I started using my mother's walker to get around the hallways.

Yes, the day will come when I will welcome the ease of living at some place like the Georgian. I'd love to live in a gay retirement home, if one ever comes into existence. But in the meantime, my brief stay here was a sobering reminder for me to live it up while I'm still ambulatory.



Bruno Billio: Illuminating Life



Bruno Billio describes his artistic practice as being “informed by the active displacement and staging of the found object, a contemporary art strategy with a historically established lineage. The everyday is reinterpreted through its spatial and contextual re-appropriation by the artist, who presents himself by proxy as both an interventionist and an inventor.”

Bruno Billio is an installation artist, sculptor, and designer of contemporary works of art that awe-inspiring. For the 2019 instalment of Gladstone Hotel’s Come Up To My Room, Bruno transformed a studio into what can only be described as a living room overtaken by Tron the video game.

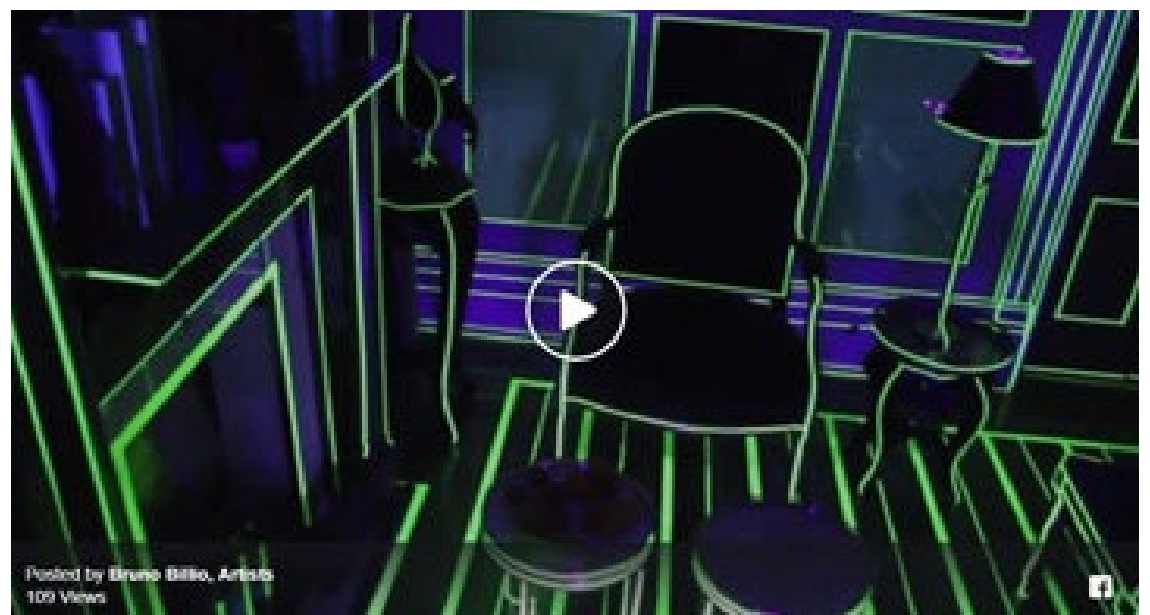
Called TRON209, the neon-meets-blacklight interior is futuristic in its application, but because it’s imposed over a relatable living space, the effect is oddly welcoming and familiar. A long-time resident artist at Gladstone, Bruno has been creating magical light works that stretch the imagination and are as sophisticated as they are whimsical.

As an independent artist, Bruno has been living off his craft since he was 24 when he decided that he “was going to be an artist and nothing else would do” Bruno told MGT during an [MGT interview](#) back in January 2017. True to his word, Bruno has taken the world around him into and given us back sculptural experiences and exhibits that have taken him to Milan, London, Miami, New York and Los Angeles.

Bruno currently lives in Toronto at the Gladstone Hotel and has shown his work at Nuit Blanche, AGO, SPIN Gallery and the Design Exchange to name a few.

For more on Bruno:

<https://www.brunobillio.com/>





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NEW SHOW

Welcome to Marwen: It's a Hate Crime



I just watched *Welcome to Marwen*, Robert Zemeckis' new film. I almost missed it. Since it only earned a rating of 27% on Rotten Tomatoes, I'm sure I'm not the only one who crossed it off their list.

But here's a tip. Rotten Tomatoes is aimed at the 'I rely on movies to babysit my kids' crowd. As a result, most of the really bad reviews are for films that have adult content.

For instance, the holiday flick *Holmes and Watson* got only a 6% rating on Rotten Tomatoes - and rightly so. I saw it and I can attest to the fact that it's basically a bunch of bad penis jokes. But *Welcome to Marwen* is, on the other hand, a real work of art. It easily measures up - perhaps surpasses —Zemickis' earlier classic *Forrest Gump*.

Unfortunately hardly anyone is going to see it.

What a lush, gorgeous, thoughtful, compassionate, imaginative movie this is! I had tears in my eyes when I wasn't laughing. It's based on the real life story of Mark Hogancamp, an outsider artist who created his groundbreaking works after being almost beaten to death by a bunch of thugs. He was left with parts of his memory and some cognitive skills missing. As part of his recovery, he devoted himself to photography — producing achingly beautiful photographs of the dolls that peopled the miniature cardboard city he created in his own backyard.

But Zemickis' film has a beauty all its own. He has used his consummate animation skills to recreate Hogancamp's inner artistic world. You will find yourself watching animated scenes full of unlikely drama that are disturbingly, absorbingly real. The film carefully explicates the complex relationship between art and the soul.

So why is everyone ignoring it?

Like the TV shows of Louis CK, and the movies of Woody Allen, *Welcome to Marwen* is the most recent casualty of #MeToo. Whatever the noble intentions of that movement, the effect (as the French feminists have noted) has been to put a chill on sexual art.

Zemeckis' masterpiece is a film about a heterosexual crossdresser. Mark Hogancamp was a shoe fetishist who photographed busty Barbie Dolls in sexy outfits. One of the politically correct criticisms of *Welcome to Marwen* on Rotten Tomatoes tells us: "The female characters in *Welcome to Marwen* are all a little too yielding, a little too understanding . . . They expect so little of Hogancamp that it's all too easy for him to impress them, and all too easy for us to feel good about ourselves in the process."

Right. Women should reject a sexual man like Hogancamp, shouldn't they? It doesn't matter that Hogancamp was effectively a victim of gaybashing. We are told to have no compassion for the man, and consequently not to enjoy a movie about him — because, in his dreams and his art, he had sexual fantasies about women and liked to wear high heels.

It was a vicious hate crime when those thugs to beat up Hogan Marenkamp for acting 'queer.'

But when you reject Zemeckis' film for the same reason? Well, I don't know how to tell you this, but - you're doing exactly the same thing.

RAYMOND HELKIO

Black, Gay & Xennial: New Podcast Challenges Groupthink

Category Is... is a new queer podcast based out of Philadelphia hosted by two black, gay Xennials as a means to bring attention to our lesser heard experiences and stories. The podcast is fun, shady, informative, and engaging, all while managing to bring a dose of levity to some very serious discussions.

Though they have a shared history, Justin and Maurice are as different as their preferences in wine which is what their lead-off segment is about. The hosts present, and are not afraid to defend, their varied thoughts on a wide range of current events and pop culture topics called "Categories." Justin and Maurice challenge groupthink and the status quo as they share unpopular opinions in an oft-heated section called "I Said What I Said." In "10s Across the Board," the hosts highlight a particularly inspirational or uplifting person who made headlines that week.



In the words of the hosts, "We wanted to create content of which, if we weren't the hosts, we would be avid consumers and that speaks to us as well as audiences at the intersections of numerous societal groups. We want to provoke thought, start conversations, and facilitate introspection but at the heart of our podcast, we want to have fun no matter what the Category Is..."



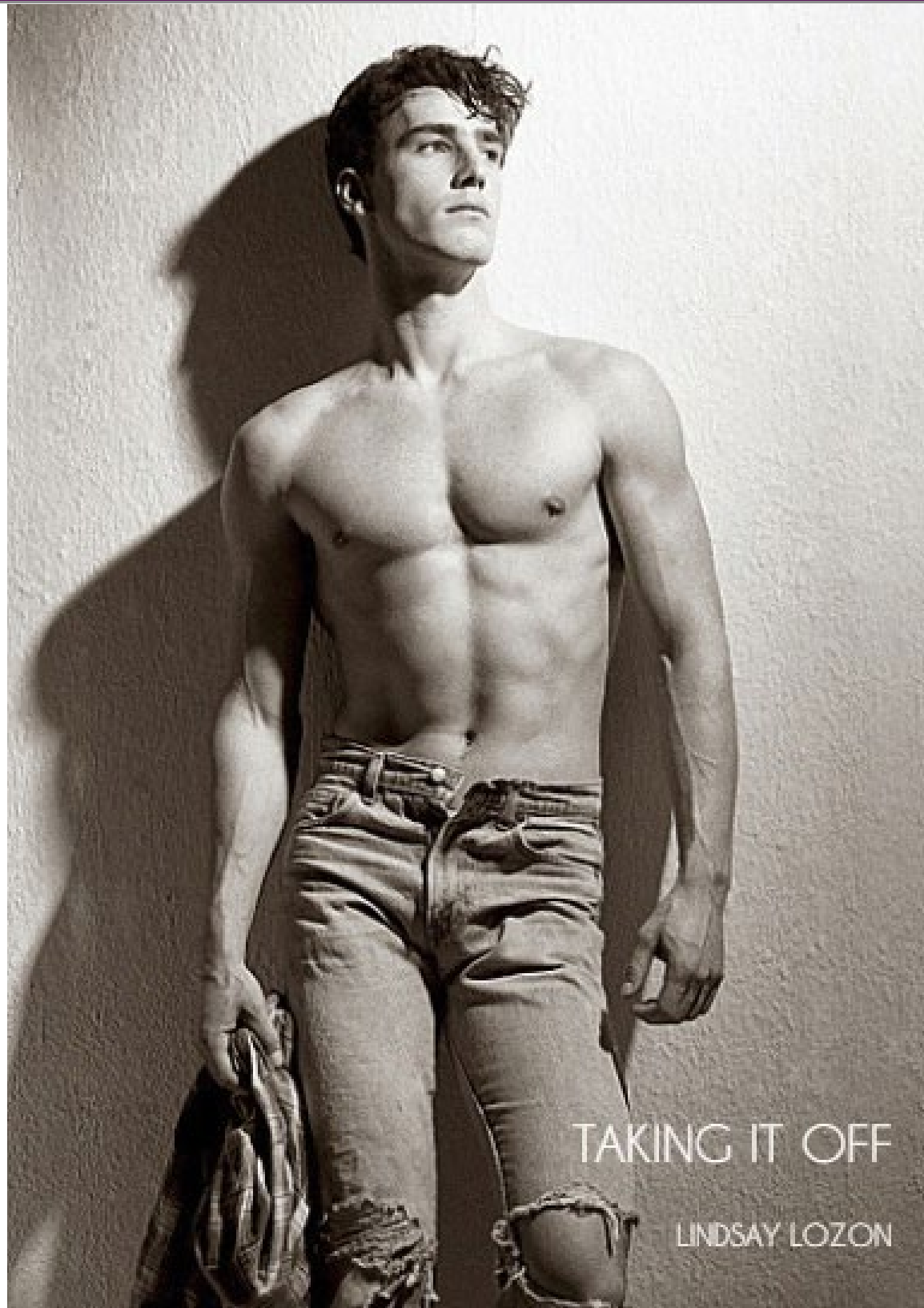
DREW ROWSOME

Photographer Lindsay Lozon

And TAKING IT OFF

While it is always fascinating to explore the themes and processes of the *MGT* cover photographers, it is an enhanced experience when one has actually experienced them at work in the act of creation. So when publisher Sean Leber announced that he had got Lindsay Lozon to agree to an interview and for us to publish his work, I jumped at the chance. Lozon has had three bestselling books published, multiple exhibits of his work that resulted in prints being bought by major collectors, and no model or actor's portfolio was complete without a Lindsay Lozon body shot. His direct, deceptively simple, photos are intensely flattering as well as eye-catching and full of personality.

The occasion is the impending publication of Lozon's new book *Taking It Off*. "It's a project I started about three years ago," says Lozon. "The cover shot is probably one of the first body shots I ever did. It dates back to the mid-'80s, maybe around '82 or '83, and the very last shot in the book is the very last body shot I ever did. This kid from Toronto came down to Sarnia and we went to the beach and I did the shot of him with his backside."

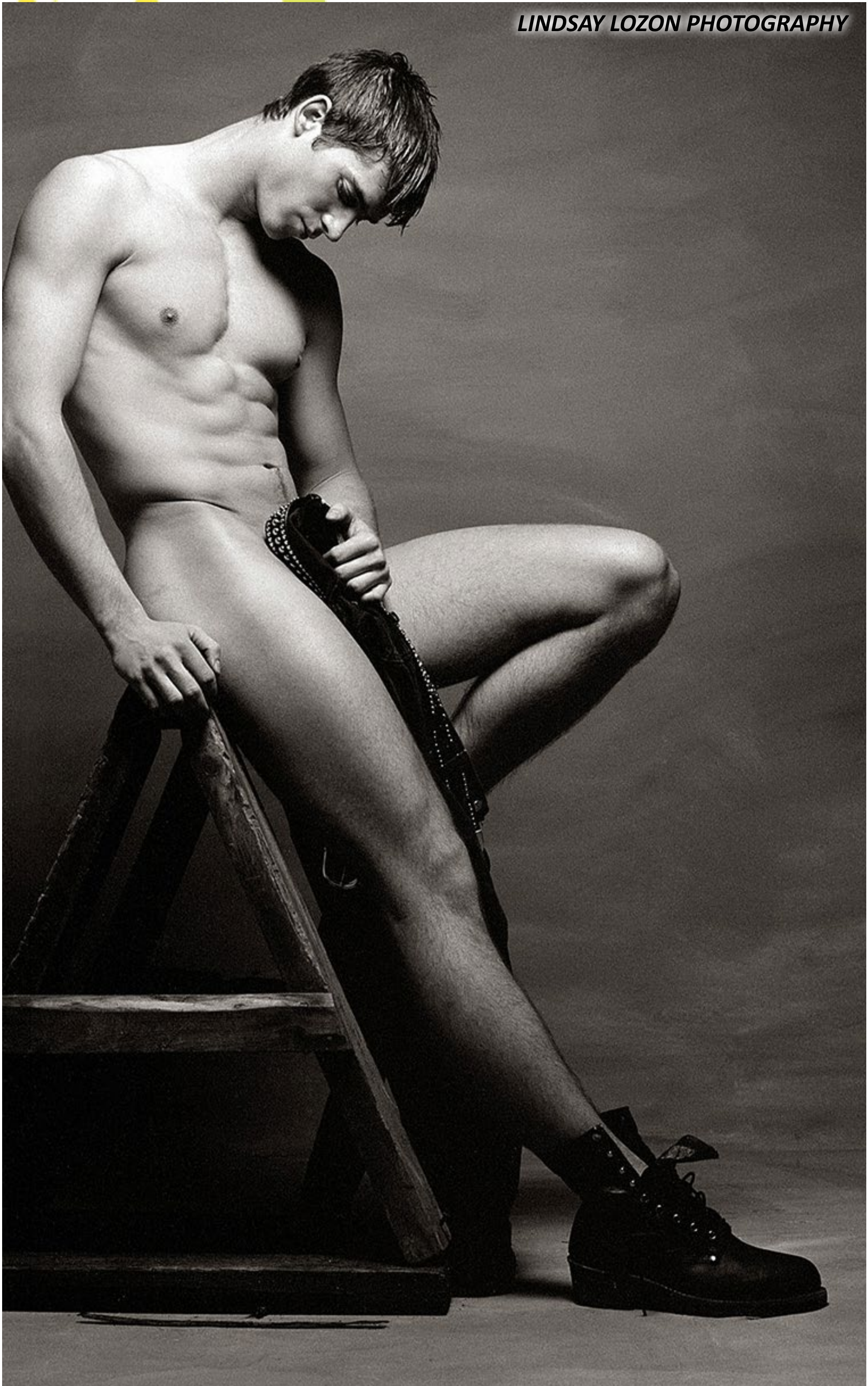


LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY





LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

Lozon has created a huge body of work and perusing the 400 pages of *Taking It Off* reveals photos that are familiar and iconic, but there are also many surprises. *"It's a total retrospective,"* says Lozon. *"There are some shots from the old books and a lot of new stuff. Stuff that I haven't even thought of putting in a book before, ones that I came across in my collection of negatives and contact sheets. I've literally got thousands of negatives, they took up the whole basement. Since I've been doing the book, I've also got about 70 framed prints that at some point in time I want to do another exhibit with. I've got a whole mixture of different frames, old and new, and a mix of prints, 8 x 10s, 11 x 14s and 16 x 20s even. So it's going to be a very nice show."*

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY





LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



**LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY**

Sorting through that amount of material was a daunting task. *"I just started scanning and I'd shot a lot of stuff from the time of the last book to this book,"* says Lozon. *"I kept all of it and I wanted it to be a bit of a mix from beginning to end. Everything is in this book. Everything is 100 percent that I love, there's no filler. I kept changing pages and mixing and matching. I'm almost afraid to print it, I enjoy that part of it so much. I think I've finished it. I like the way it looks right now."*

Just after Lozon and I talked, he was eagerly awaiting the first printed test copies to arrive for proofing. *"Fingers crossed the printing looks good,"* he says. *"They've done a nice job in the past. The book is for whoever wants one, I'm not printing quantities. You have to buy it, pre-pay for it, and I'll do a print and mail it out. If I sell one copy, I'll be happy. If I sell 10 copies I'll be happy. It's self-gratifying. There are shots in this book that people have never seen before, I've never published before, in fact that I've never printed before. It's going to be a very private book for those who want a collection of my stuff."*

When I tell Lozon how consistent and timeless the photographs are, he agrees, *"The cover shot and the back shot, as much as they are 30 years apart, they could have been shot on the same day. No distractions. There's a couple of boys in there with the erections and stuff like that. That was all part of them, that was part of why they came to shoot with me and that's what their personality was. It's just that simple. They're not graphic in any way, they're just there. That's how I see it."*

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



However he does note that, *"Some of the photos in the book I can't put out on the internet. Some of them are more private. Those guys have moved on."*

When I struggled to reference photographers that Lozon's work reminds me of, he gently contradicts me. *"I had never followed photographers. I grew up with a camera in my hand. I had a camera when I was 10 years old, shooting home movies, shooting stills. It was just something that came to me naturally I guess. That style was always just there for me. I never looked at other photographers' work, I was always just interested in what I was doing. I just shot people simply and the way they were."*

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

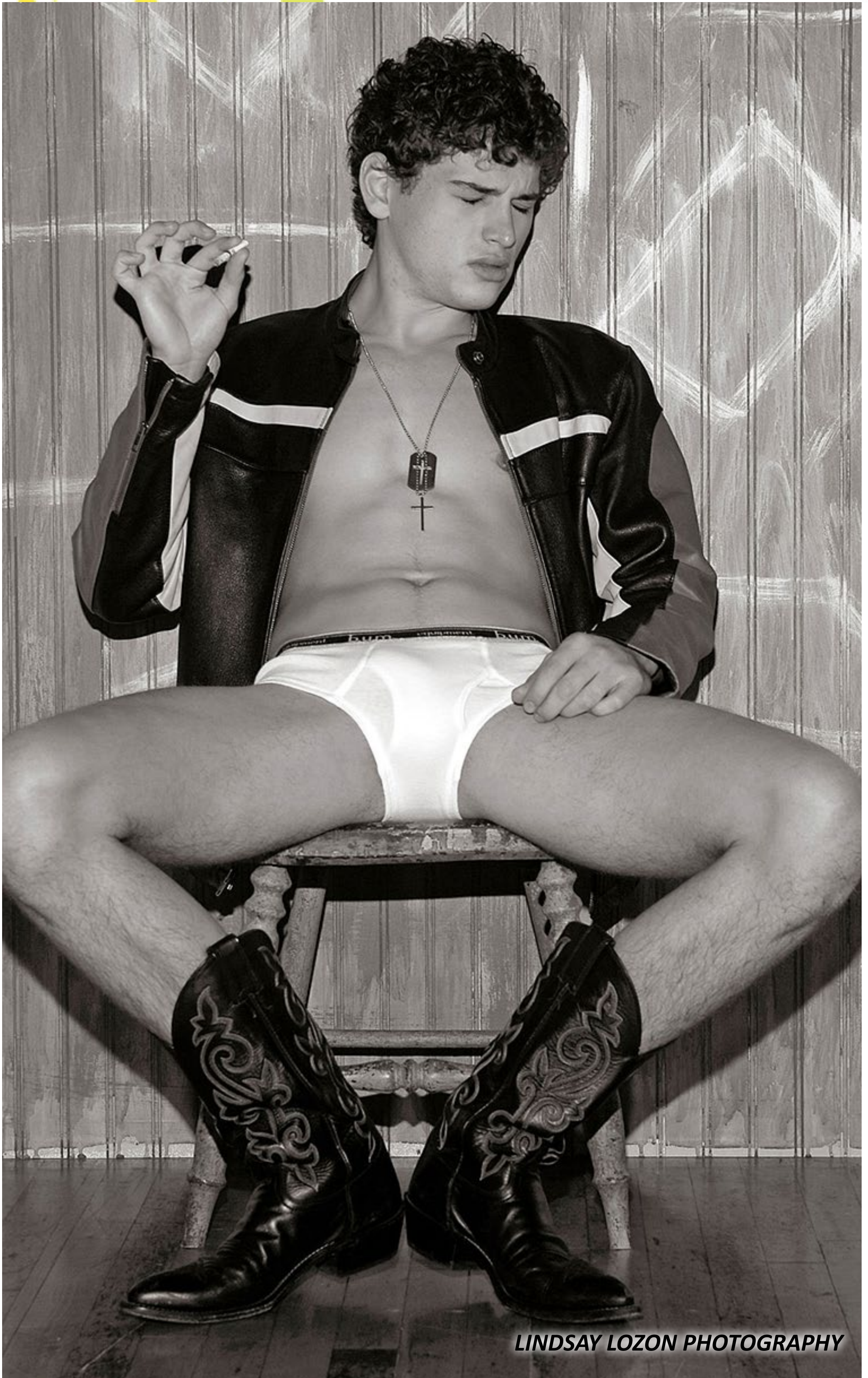




LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



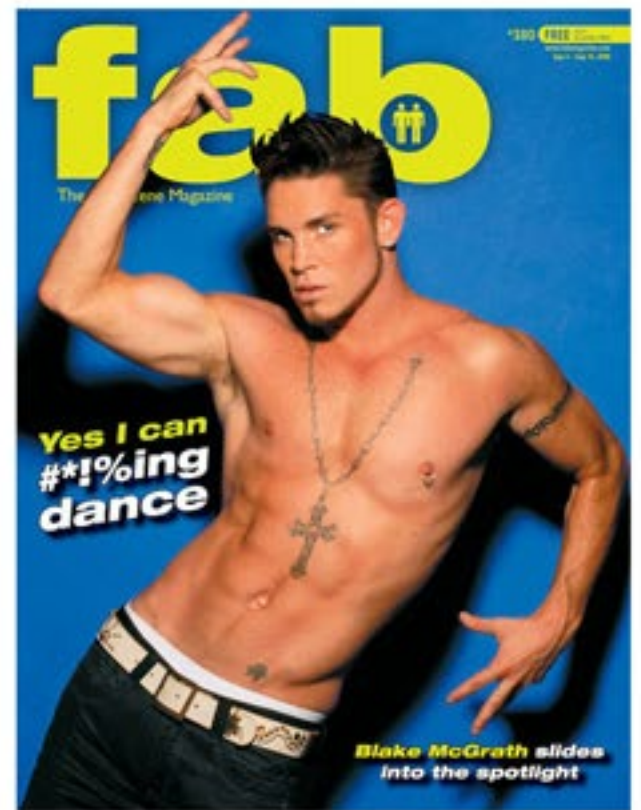


LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

Lozon is also well known for shooting many of the iconic covers for *fab* magazine in its two golden ages. Working with editor-in-chief Mitchel Raphael, Lozon shot covers that are still provocative: mayor David Miller in leather, Olivia Chow and the Honourable Jack Layton with a buff mountie, and innumerable hot men in scenarios from suggestive to outlandish.

"A lot of that was Mitchel," says Lozon. "I was reluctant to shoot for *fab* at first. Mitchel had to call me three or four times. I wasn't really sure what *fab* was all about and what I had seen wasn't exactly impressive. But then Mitchel started in, started art directing, and his art direction was incredible. We worked together. I have every single cover of *fab* that I shot all put away. I don't know how many I shot. Mitchel and I worked well together. And the covers stood out."

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



That was when I first met Lozon. There was always electric excitement when he would bring the proofs of the next covers to the office. Though always soft-spoken and collaborative, after all he was working with Mitchel who was a benign dictator who modelled his management style after Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*, Lozon was a little intimidating simply because he was so focussed and so respected as an artist. And I was a lowly intern.

Mitchel had a habit of conceiving a brilliant cover that then needed a story to go with it. Many of those were my assignments, and it was hard work coming up with text that lived up to Lozon's photographs. *"The very first cover I shot with Mitchel, the guy who was gift-wrapped and bodypainted,"* says Lozon, *"I used it this year as a Christmas card on my website. He had me hooked after that. Every cover was something quite different."*

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY





LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

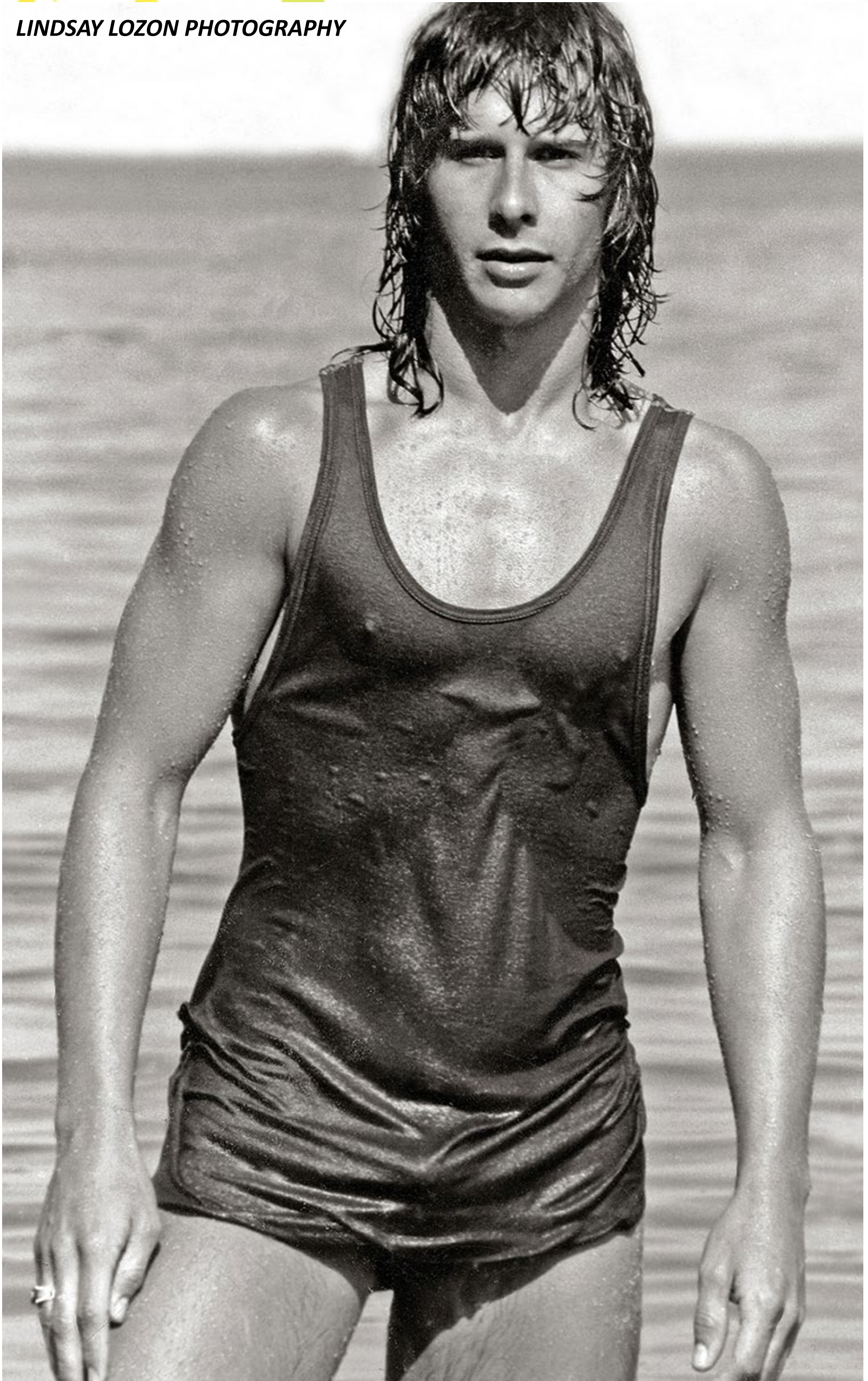


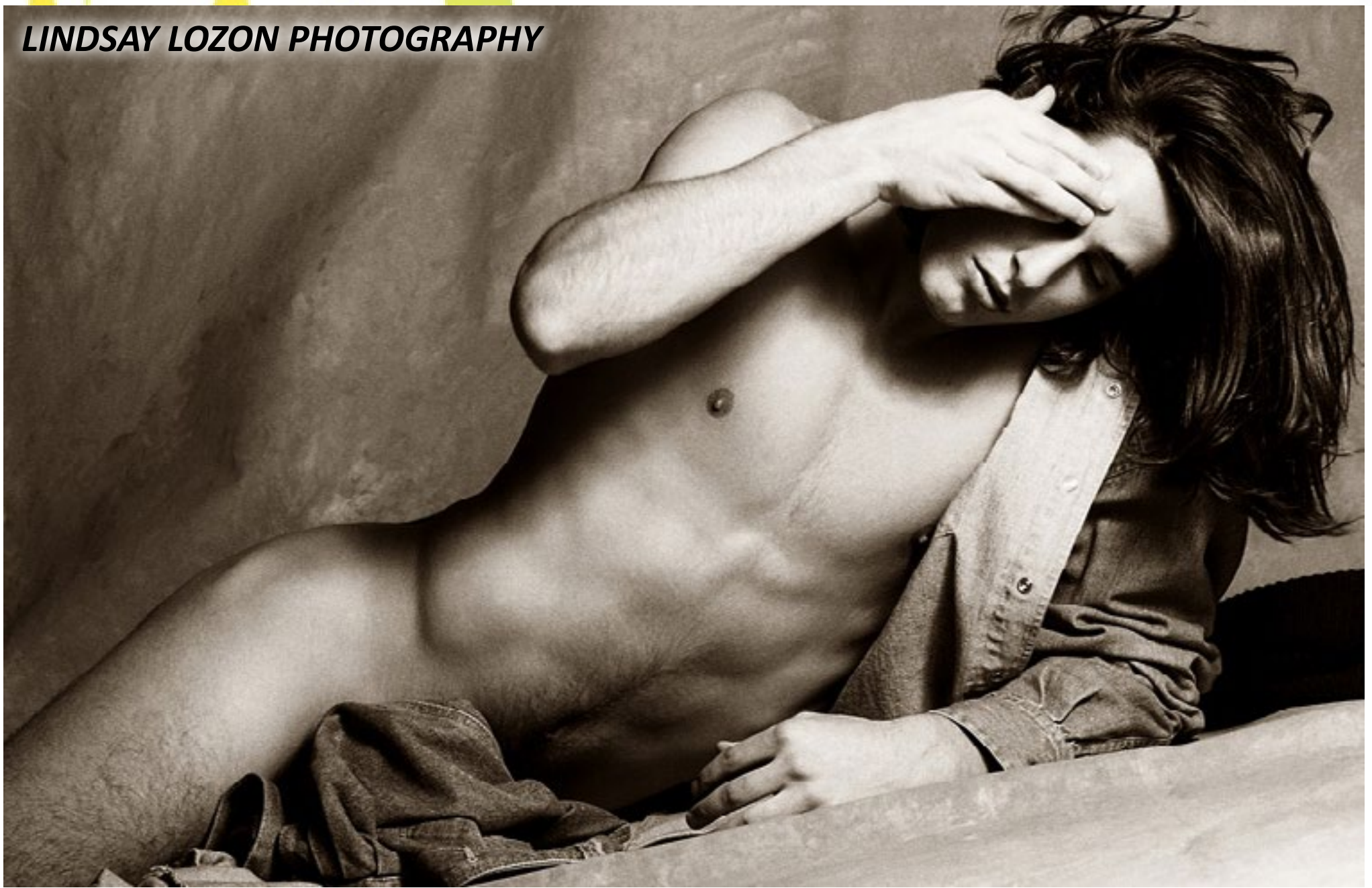
When, after a few years away, I became editor of *fab*, I got to work with Lozon again. The majority of the covers were under the jurisdiction of my fellow editor Matt Thomas, but the cover of our 2010 Christmas Gift Guide, the first issue to be printed entirely on glossy paper, was my responsibility. I explained my concept to Lozon and emailed him a couple of illustrations by Alberto Vargas that were my visual touchstones. He immediately countered with visual examples that were improvements, incidentally showing his knowledge of art history, pin-ups and composition.

I had hired an aspiring sports model who had a less twinkly look than a traditional *fab* cover boy. He was extremely nervous, but Lozon immediately put him at ease. He had done it many times before. *"Those guys when they came into the studio, they came for body shots,"* explains Lozon about his process. *"I said, 'Forget about your body. Your body's perfect. Be yourself. Give me a personality, the body will follow.' I would work with them and work with them. Most of them were amazing.*



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

It's the personality that has to come through and it does in those shots. You can see it in their faces, their comfort level."

The studio was a hive of activity with lights being set, props assembled and Rob Closs assessing the make-up requirements, but Lozon was calm, steady, and continually discussing ways to enhance the concept. And then we hit our first snag. The model was too hirsute for Lozon's liking. I was all for contrasting the Vargas girl sensibility with blatant masculinity (in fact that was what I was hoping for, a mild form of sexy gender fuck) but Lozon insisted it wouldn't photograph well. Instantaneously he pulled up more images on his laptop to prove his point, and I had to agree he was right. He then proceeded to persuade the novice model to be shaved head to toe, have his abs enhanced with make-up, and to pose essentially naked in multiple and obviously uncomfortable poses until Lozon knew that we had the shot.



What was supposed to be a short simple shoot stretched into a full day and into the evening. Lozon never lost his soft-spoken cool and it was mesmerizing to watch as he coaxed the shy and nervous model into becoming impossibly alluring while remaining resolutely masculine. In the cab back to the office, the model pulled out his phone and enthused to his girlfriend that the shoot had been an incredible experience. And that she was going to enjoy the feel of his newly denuded skin. Lozon's people skills are as sharp as his eye. I ask if it is different when working with celebrities. *"You would think so but not really,"* he says. *"They're just people. I was nervous as hell when I shot my first celebrity, Shania Twain. When she came up those stairs I was shaking in my boots. Following me was the CBC with four guys with huge cameras on their heads. They were behind me as I was shooting her which made me more nervous. But the shots came out amazing."*

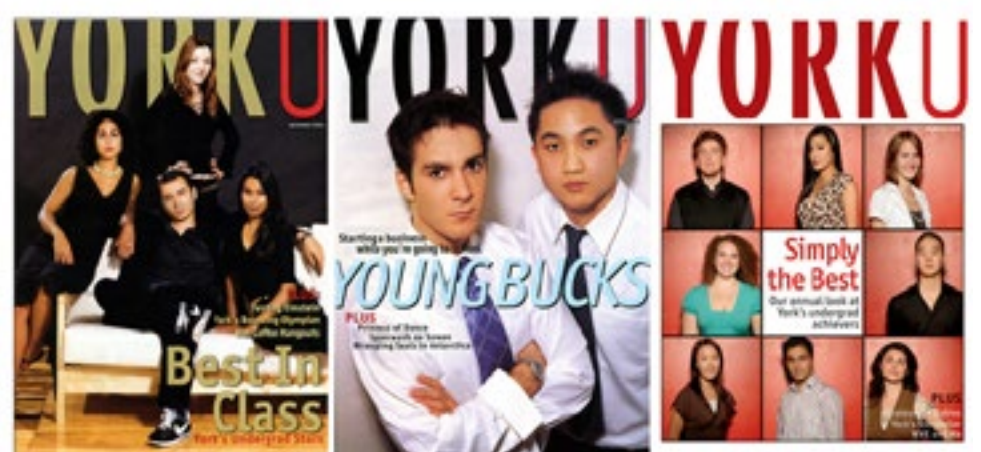
Twain was the first of many. "I shot Celine Dion in her hotel room in Toronto," he reminisces. "We were only supposed to have 20 minutes with her and we were in there for three or four hours. Sweet as pie, just so nice. Gaga was the other big star and she couldn't have been nicer. She came up and gave me a big hug before we even started shooting. When I got the negatives back, I was looking through them, looking for something different, something special. And I realized they're just people. They had their eyes closed, they were blinking, bad shot, good shot, same as anybody else. But sweet people, nice people."

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



And it was a celebrity endorsement that moved Lozon into the big leagues. "Elton John, that came out of the blue," says Lozon of the musician and owner of one the world's most outstanding photography collections. "I was sitting in the studio one day and the phone rang and it was Elton John. An article had been written about me in an Australian magazine and so he called. He bought seven or eight prints of mine. He called back a few times looking for images that were on my website. He ordered huge prints, 16 x 20, and afterwards he gave me four tickets to his concert and we met him backstage."

If the *Taking It Off* book and exhibition have a retrospective hue, they are also indicators of a transformation in Lozon's career. "About eight years ago I moved," he explains. "I had some health issues and Sarnia's my hometown. It's a nice little town. I left here where I was 20 or 21 years old and moved to Toronto. I was in Toronto for 30 or 35 years. My sister invited me back to stay at her place for awhile to deal with what I was going through. I also needed a break from Toronto. I was finished to say the least. I was seven years in that building at Leslie and Queen. The area was getting incredibly busy and incredibly expensive. When I moved in there I was paying about \$1,100, when I moved out I was paying \$1,800. It was just ridiculous. You have to keep moving to get those rents paid and still live. Sarnia's so much cheaper, there's no comparison."





Inevitably his art evolved to reflect his surroundings. "It's a whole different ball game here," he says. "I do portraits, I shot a few weddings, I did a huge family reunion that turned out amazing. Grandmothers and granddaughters, parents and kids, and the shot turned out absolutely incredible. It's actually on my website. I'm not really a wedding photographer, I shied away from it, but I don't mind doing them and hopefully I'll put a little twist to them of some sort. You're shooting dresses and grooms and bridesmaids. There are shots you have to cover. I'm not doing any models, not doing any boys. I've been asked but I'm not pursuing it. If you want to come to Sarnia I'll be glad to shoot you. I don't usually charge for that kind of stuff. I do it for myself."



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



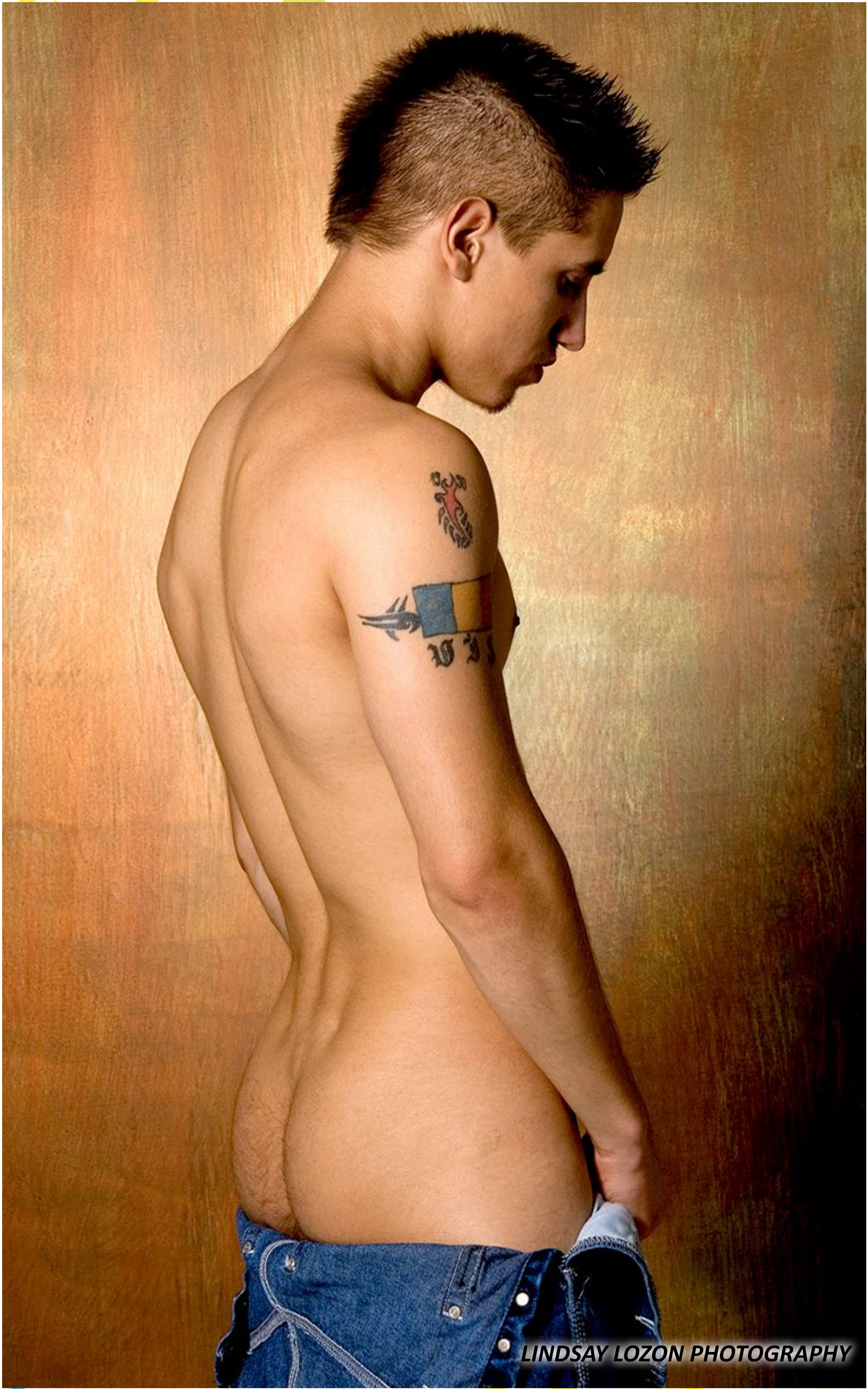
While photography is still an artform that Lozon is deeply embedded in, the business of photography has changed. *"When digital took over, so many people were offering their services for free,"* says Lozon. *"They wanted to put their names on stuff and if you go into any website like Kijiji, you'll see a list of photographers who say they'll shoot your wedding for free, just put my name on it. That got to be a real problem for a lot of photographers. They're shooting weddings for \$200 or \$300 and they're only hurting themselves. In the long run it hurts everybody."*

While not condoning, he understands. *"New photographers want to get their name out. When I was young and new in the business, I'd do a lot of testing and stuff for free. Eventually I got the jobs. It was different then, we were shooting film and you had to know what you were doing. I went shooting catalogues for Eaton's in Mexico and Florida and places like that, and we'd be down there for 10 days and we'd be shooting film. You had to come back with results. It was a huge change when things went to digital."*

Lindsay's photographs have always been erotic but in an innocent fresh way. In an interview with *fab* on the state of photography, he had talked about losing commercial jobs because he was seen as the man who shot 'boys in their underwear.' *"That's always an issue,"* he says. *"I've always had that in the background. When I got the MGT invitation, I said to Steven my lover, we've been together for 35 years, that I was done with that, and I didn't want it all over the internet. And then I thought about it and I thought, damn it, this is who I am and this is a huge part of my life. A huge part. So here I am. The homophobia is always going to be there. I've got to live my own life, not somebody else's."*

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY





LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

He then amends his statement slightly, *"Anyone who's ever seen my work, and I've had a lot of people see my work, they love it. I've never had anyone, ever, say that it was too much or react homophobically. Never have I run across in all my years of shooting. And I always expected it to happen at some point in time. I don't know if it's the images, or the style, but the straightest people can come up and look at my work and just go on and look at every picture. They may not say anything but they certainly don't criticize it. For 99 percent of the time, it's very positive. I've got family that lives below me and she can't get enough of it."*

Perhaps it's that emphasis on personality, the boys in their underwear, or out of it, fill *Taking It Off* and Lozon's oeuvre with a cheeky playful life force. Like Dion and Gaga, like the *fab* magazine cover boys, they are having fun, trusting that Lozon will make them look like the idealized versions of themselves that they are in their heads. Turn them into art. "It has to say something or what's the point?," says Lozon. "Otherwise you just walk out of the room with a blank look on your face."

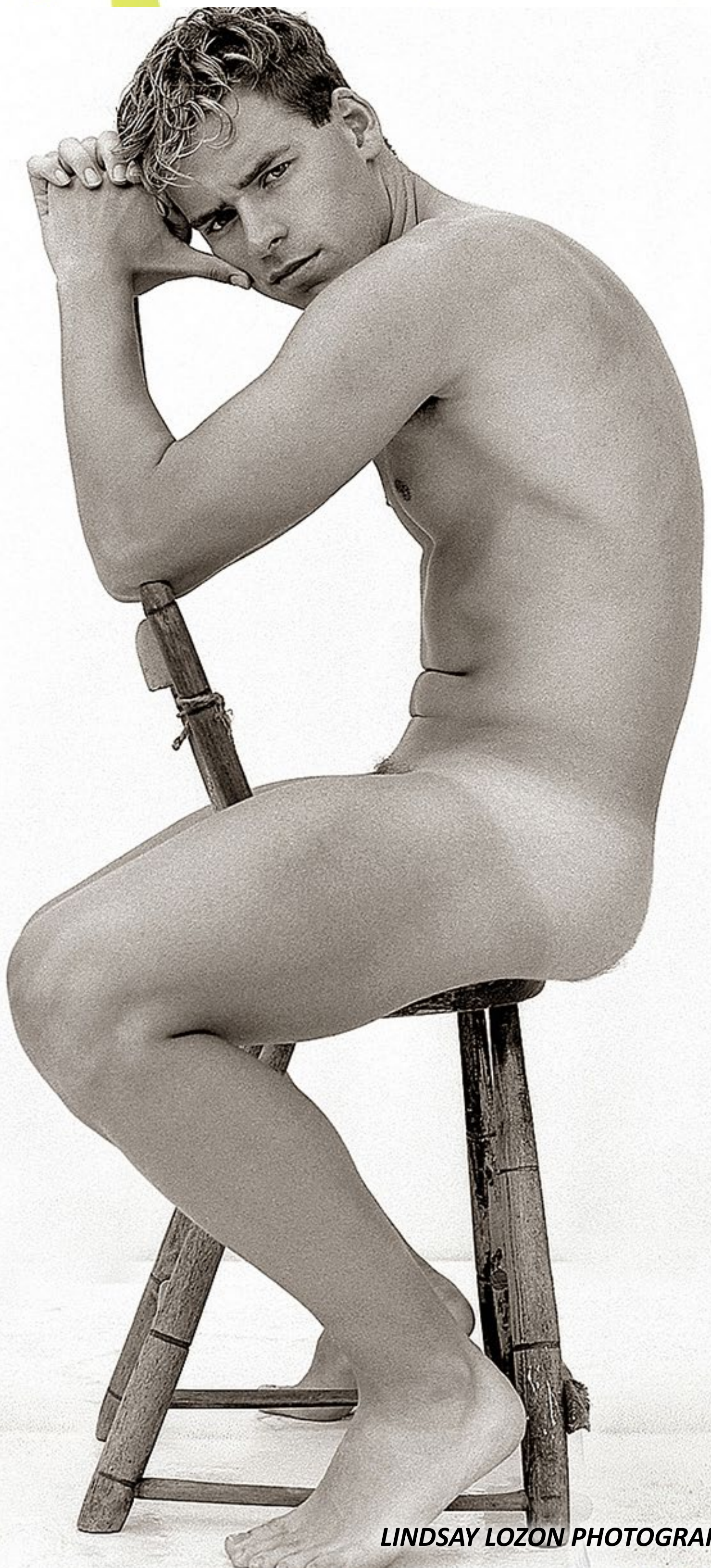
For more of Lozon's work and to order a copy of Taking It Off, visit lindsaylozon.ca



LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY





LINDSAY LOZON PHOTOGRAPHY

social media - Tidbits

Michael Walsh shared ONLY MEN's post to the group: THE REAL MUSCLE GODS TO WORSHIP & SERVICE!
2 hrs



ONLY MEN
12 hrs · Like Page

Michael Walsh shared Mike Thurston's photo to the group: THE REAL MUSCLE GODS TO WORSHIP & SERVICE!
2 hrs



Glad Day Bookshop
January 27 at 8:40 PM

home-grown talent Brooke Lynn Hynes to walk the main stage on next season's Drag Race!



CBC.CA
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NewNowNext
9 mins

Many of the responses to Harl's social media posts called out why the attack on Smollett, an openly gay, black man, is why such jokes should be condemned.



NEWNOWNEXT.COM



THEGLOBEANDMAIL.COM
Bruce McArthur's victims: A look at the eight lives lost
Most were refugees or immigrants, living without financial or family...



PHOTOS BY SEAN LEBER

MyGayToronto





Rose song and dance, Gertrude Stein, an existential crisis and disco lions



Photos by Cylla von Tiedemann

Rose is part of Soulpepper's "Family Festival" and anyone taking children, or those still retaining a sense of child-like wonder (it is recommended for ages "5-105"), will be delighted. An old-fashioned blue curtain parts to reveal a folky trio, before opening to unveil a stark art deco-ish set that soon proves to be very versatile and filled with eye-popping colour. The music and gags don't pause and the energy is contagious. On the surface it is a glossy fun-filled musical that entertains throughout and sends everyone home happy and smiling.

Fortunately, for those of us with a more jaded frame of mind, *Rose* also delves into other intriguing areas. Poor Rose, a very spunky and fine-voiced Hailey Gillis ([Onegin](#)), is in the midst of an existential crisis. Because of her burning question of "Who am I?", she is unable to say her name out loud. Her quest for self-knowledge and expression is the backbone of the show. That it resolves with the ambiguous



"I won't do what I can't, I'll do what I can, because that's who I am," is very realistic and somehow quintessentially Canadian. Fortunately, co-creators Mike Ross and Sarah Wilson manage to contort that semi-triumph into a 11 o'clock number that makes it feel almost like a Disney princess resolution.

The fourth wall is broken from the moment we meet the genial guitar-wielding narrator Frank Cox-



O'Connell (*Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*) to the delightful moment when Love the dog, portrayed as a hilarious furry by the remarkable Jonathan Ellul, launches into the power balled "Let Love Out." The number, as do many in the production, simultaneously satirizes the conventions of musical theatre while shamelessly seducing us with the same conventions (because, damn it, they work). Of course this does slightly damage the finale with its reliance on a choral "Climb to the top!" and Gillis's impassioned "Set me free!" And I could have lived without, despite the masterful comedic set-up, Love the dog's audience participation number, a variation on *Peter Pan's* "Clap if you believe in fairies, don't let Tink die." To be fair, the children in the audience loved it, as did the opening night actor-heavy contingent eager to demonstrate that they should be the ones onstage.



Gertrude Stein's source children's book *The World is Round*, provides subtly linked touchstones as well as wordplay that is very funny and thought provoking in a meme-worthy style. It is a revelation to hear how satisfyingly Stein's distinctive precise prose translates into lyrics that are a catchy mix of patter song and folk/rap. And the songs are lovingly belted by a cast that is invested in their multiple characters while also enjoying themselves so thoroughly that it radiates off the stage. When the ensemble contains sterling eye-and-ear-catching pros like [Troy Adams](#) ([Love Train](#)), Raquel Duffy ([La Bete](#), [Animal Farm](#), [The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?](#)) and Sabryn Rock ([The Royale](#), [Fun Home](#), [Obeah Opera](#)), Rose has a near overload of talent.

Alana Bridgewater ([Ma Rainey's Black Bottom](#)) is a force of nature and there is delicious theatrical tension when she attempts to not blow everyone else off the stage, and the roof off the theatre, while essaying both Gloria the Choirmaster (some delicious introductory gospel riffs) and Mysterious Woman/Lion Lady. While she slinks around her comely-costumed disco lions, Bridgewater incarnates just the right tone of Stein-esque sexually explosive repression. And the lion that Rose chooses (it makes sense in context) for her pride, Oliver Dennis ([La Bete](#), [Animal Farm](#)), asserts himself comedically in a mime role. In the midst of a musical.



If this weren't a "family friendly" show, I would dub Willie, the ever engaging and brattily sexy Peter Fernandes ([A Midsummer Night's Dream](#), [Romeo and Juliet](#), [Love and Information](#), [King Lear](#), [Onegin](#)), Rose's love interest. Fernandes romps through the role, interjecting quips with flawless timing, and selling a heartfelt ballad of bewildered confusion with aplomb. The timing throughout *Rose* is exquisite. Choreographer Monica Dottor ([Bears](#)) is in a playful mode, and director Gregory Prest ([Bed and Breakfast](#), [La Bete](#)) keeps everything moving and always involving. School desks become mountains, school supplies become percussion, and musicians - the spirited Michelle Bouey, Scott Hunter, Raha Javanfar, John Millard, James Smith and Adam Warner - morph into integrated characters without missing a beat.

A new Canadian musical, especially a very good one, is something to be celebrated. When it has such a slick and dynamic production, even more so. That it balances between innocence and menace - perhaps best exemplified by the wide-eyed Cox-O'Connell intoning that "Otters can rip your throat out" at a



particularly surreal and fabulous moment, before collapsing into hapless frustration when Rose strays from her heroine duties - gives hope for its future. *Rose* will undoubtedly be a big hit but if I have to quibble, there is just a little too much flannel. The fabric should be added to the entrance warning sign about the use of fog and strobe lights.

Photos by Cylla von Tiedemann

**Rose runs until Sun, Feb 24 at Young Centre for the Performing Arts,
50 Tank House Lane, Historic Distillery District. soulpepper.ca**







Aquaman (2018)



The Queen of Atlantis (Nicole Kidman) washed up on shore and won the heart of a lighthouse keeper (Temuera Morrison), but a few years later had to abandon her husband and small child or else risk the rage of her home kingdom being wreaked upon the human world. Decades later, the boy has grown into a bar-fightin' hunk (Jason Momoa) who exists ambivalently between worlds, gifted with abilities to swim fast and talk to whales but also looking pretty kickass in tight jeans on a motorcycle. His anger at the place that took his mother away from him means that he is unmoved when a beautiful princess (Amber Heard) emerges from the waves begging him to come help save the planet from his warmongering half-brother (Patrick Wilson), who would like to spread his oceanic superiority over humanity and make regular mortals his slaves. To do so would mean voyaging to a mythical place to find an all-powerful Trident that will help Momoa lay claim to his rightful throne and unite the worlds of aquatic and land life, but first he has to survive having every conversation in the movie interrupted by explosions. If you think the film is going to have a charming environmental message, you would be wrong; instead, beautiful recreations of worlds deep beneath the brine are undone by humorless, noisy fights and a bloated, self-important tone. Momoa doesn't have the acting chops to match his physical grandeur, his attempts at the film's humorous lines seem more like he's making excuses to finish early, while Heard seems quite impatient to try and bring him up to speed with her own skills. The pedigree of the supporting cast, which also includes Willem Dafoe, gives a great deal more class to the funky hairstyles than they deserve (who knew aquatic life required so many top-knots and chignons) but director James Wan has no idea what opportunities for creative fun exist in this tale.

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Raymond Helkio - is an author, director and award-winning filmmaker. He cofounded TheReadingSalon.ca



Paul Bellini was a writer for The Kids in the Hall and a producer for This Hour Has 22 Minutes, and columnist at Fab Magazine...



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