

TORONTO'S PREMIER GAY LIFESTYLE DIGITAL MAGAZINE

# MGT

*We Know*

MY GAY TORONTO

ISSUE #64 MAR 2019.



PAUL JAMNICKY



**This issue highlights:**



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**Bil Antoniou** finds **Isn't It Romantic** delightful (page 52)

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**MGT DIGITAL MAGAZINE**

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**BIL ANTONIOU**

**PLUS MUCH MORE!**



PAUL BELLINI

# Tom Bierdz and the need to create



You'd think after 20 years of conducting interviews that I would get it right every time. But this morning was a disaster. I arranged to speak to actor Thom Bierdz from his home in the woods in California. We were speaking about his artwork, and it was a terrific interview. Then we hung up and I realized I had forgotten to turn on the tape recorder.

Luckily, Thom's artwork speaks for itself. The former soap star, who played Phillip Chancellor the Third on *The Young and the Restless* back in the '90s, lives an idyllic life in a gorgeous cabin, surrounded by dogs and nature. In the past 15 years, Thom has taken up the paint brush, and boy, has he been busy, literally producing dozens of paintings in various styles. Now, he has compiled all his work into not one but five different volumes. Get ready for Bierdz Art. The five volumes are titled *Landscapes*, *Expressionism*, *Nudes in Trees*, *Portraits*, and *Pop*. They constitute a major collection of artwork, and my head was spinning from so much eye candy.

I can't quote, but I can paraphrase from our interview. Tom told me he started doing artwork as a child and has always kept it up. In the past decade he has completed numerous commissions, mostly portraits. He's done gallery shows, which he said are great for press but not so great for sales. He is aware that gay artwork is tough to sell. The buyer has to be rich, have wall space, and not be closeted. If I was rich, I would buy the half dozen paintings of lumberjacks, inspiring depictions of machismo in action. But then there is also the celebrity work. Tom did a series of celebrity fantasy gay couples that is both cheeky and irreverent.

Some of his expressionism is in turns harrowing and ravishing. The painting of a bunch of chairs organized in a circle lends itself to multiple interpretations. The most haunting of all his paintings shows Bill Cosby as both a young man and as an aging rapist, and it served to remind me of how incredibly





cute and sexy the young Cosby was in the '60s. There are also paintings of buffalo, centaurs, angels, dogs, cabins, weird made-up creatures, nudes, and some abstracts. Throughout our interview, Thom kept saying how important it was for him to create, how he is driven to do so.

Thom Bierdz sounds pretty happy, and why not. He's healthy, good looking, lives in a place that most of us fantasize about living in, and he's doing work that fulfills him. Now all he needs to do is find his audience. The hard cover version of his books are priced around \$60, but he has also made them available as \$3 digital downloads. For a mere three bucks you can look at some truly original artwork. We talked about other famous actors who paint as a hobby, like Elke Sommer, Sylvester Stallone, Johnny Depp, Jim Carrey, Viggo Mortensen and George W. Bush, to name just a few. We can now add Thom Bierdz's name to that list.

Go to [www.thombierdz.com](http://www.thombierdz.com) for more information.





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DREW ROWSOME

# Bon Voyage

## forward to summer and back the '60 with ES



The Canadian winter and slowly thawing spring make one want to hear those joyful envious words, “Bon Voyage.” To jet off to sun and sand and sea, and shed as much clothing as possible to bask in the heat and the gaze of the men on the water’s edge. Barcelona has been a sensual visual from Antonioni to Almodovar, and the men a shimmering example of European eroticism. Barcelona is also home to ES Collection whose 2019 collection of swim and casual wear is dubbed “Bon Voyage.”

The Bon Voyage swim line draws its inspiration from the first wave of '60s tourists who discovered Barcelona’s beauty and ethos, “a new way of seeing life and understanding leisure.” The melding of cultures, “the hippie movement, pop and optical art, and hyperrealism,” blended with the Spanish hedonistic flavours to create a moment of change. ES Collection goes further, mixing in the mythological potency of sailors, the organic lushness of palm fronds and flowers, and the masculine energy of men cruising.

From a simple short swim boxer with vertical side striping, to a retro '60s pop art eye-popping pattern, the Bon Voyage swim line covers all the bases while barely covering the basics.

[escollection.es/en/](http://escollection.es/en/)











# MGT CONTEST GIVEAWAY, WIN THESE:

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Contest is open till March 31st 2019.

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RAYMOND HELKIO

# STONEWALL 50

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# WORLDPRIDE

Stonewall was not a riot.

Back in November, my partner and I went to a Reclaim Pride Coalition meeting in New York City. This growing [global coalition of over 70 organizations](#) (including some from Toronto) are using the 50th anniversary of the march at Stonewall as an opportunity to create an event that better represents the LGBTQIATS+ communities.

And while this is exciting news for those of us who've felt pushed out of Pride, the most revealing part of the meeting came when Jim Fouratt, an early member of the Gay Liberation Front and longtime Yippie member, got up to speak, reminding the room that despite Heritage Pride's (NYC Pride committee) disconnection with its history, "Stonewall was not a riot."

Here in Toronto our Pride organizing committee is busy at work also honouring the "riots" which, at best, reiterates a false heteronormative narrative that paints our communities as violent. A riot is defined as a "violent disturbance of the peace by a crowd". But this, was not that. The rebellion that began at Stonewall was a community display of anger and frustration, but it never turned violent. No looting, no violence and no rioting took place.

This "return-to-our-roots" ideology is expanding to other Prides around the world including France, Cologne Germany, Manchester England, Los Angeles and Calgary Alberta to name a few. Perhaps it's time to rally behind a more inclusive theme such as "Until we're all safe!", but instead we've been sold out to corporations and organizations who present themselves as allies, while coopting Pride as a marketing vehicle. This shift in focus says a lot about the current generation of Pride organizers, many of whom are so far removed from history they cannot appreciate the hard-won privileges they enjoy.

The world will be watching NYC this summer as they celebrate both Stonewall 50 and WorldPride which is why the Reclaim Pride Coalition organized a return to its roots with the people's march, which will be void of corporate floats and weaponized police. This grassroots action is also intended to mobilize the community around the many of the social and political battles that continue to be fought locally, nationally, and globally.

The March recognizes the powerful legacy of the Stonewall Rebellion by highlighting the most marginalized members of our community, as we commit to addressing the ongoing struggles that our communities face.

50 Years Since Stonewall & WorldPride: The Queer Liberation March, NYC - June 30th, 10AM Begins at The Stonewall Inn and proceeds up Sixth Avenue to Central Park ending in a community-focused rally on the Great Lawn. [More info.](#)

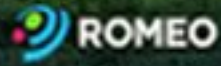




A Blogger's Lament:  
the war on Christmas?  
What about the war on sex?



HAPPY  
HOLIGAYS

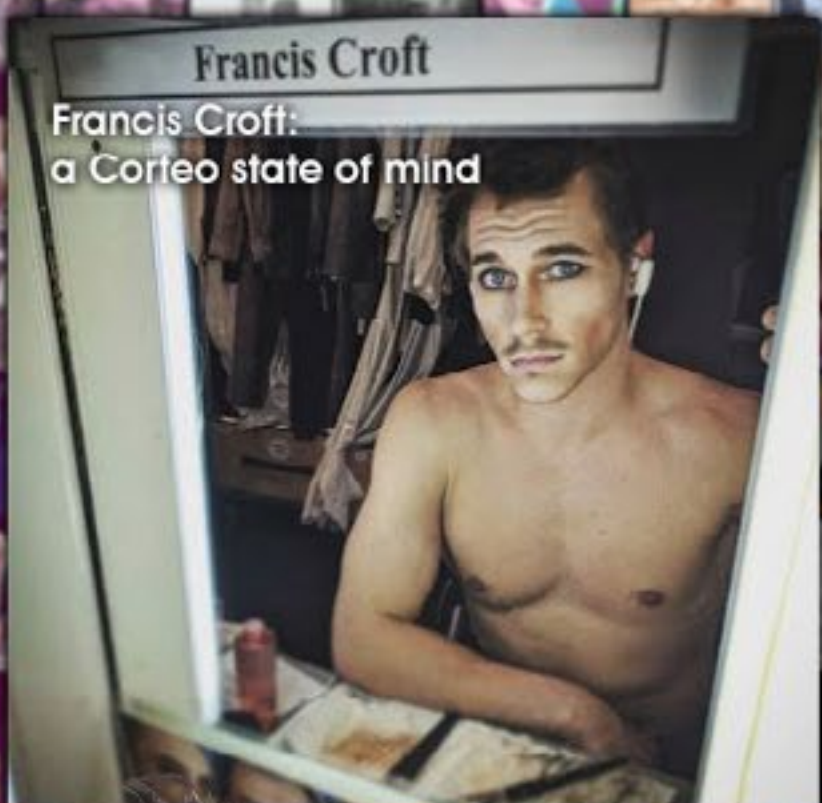


Tom Saint Clair:  
MGT's cover photographer's passion for the erotic

[DrewRowsome.blogspot.com](http://DrewRowsome.blogspot.com)

Francis Croft

Francis Croft:  
a Corteo state of mind



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



Bohemian Rhapsody:  
entertaining and infuriating





DREW ROWSOME

# Men and Water: David Vance

## kickstarts a new art book



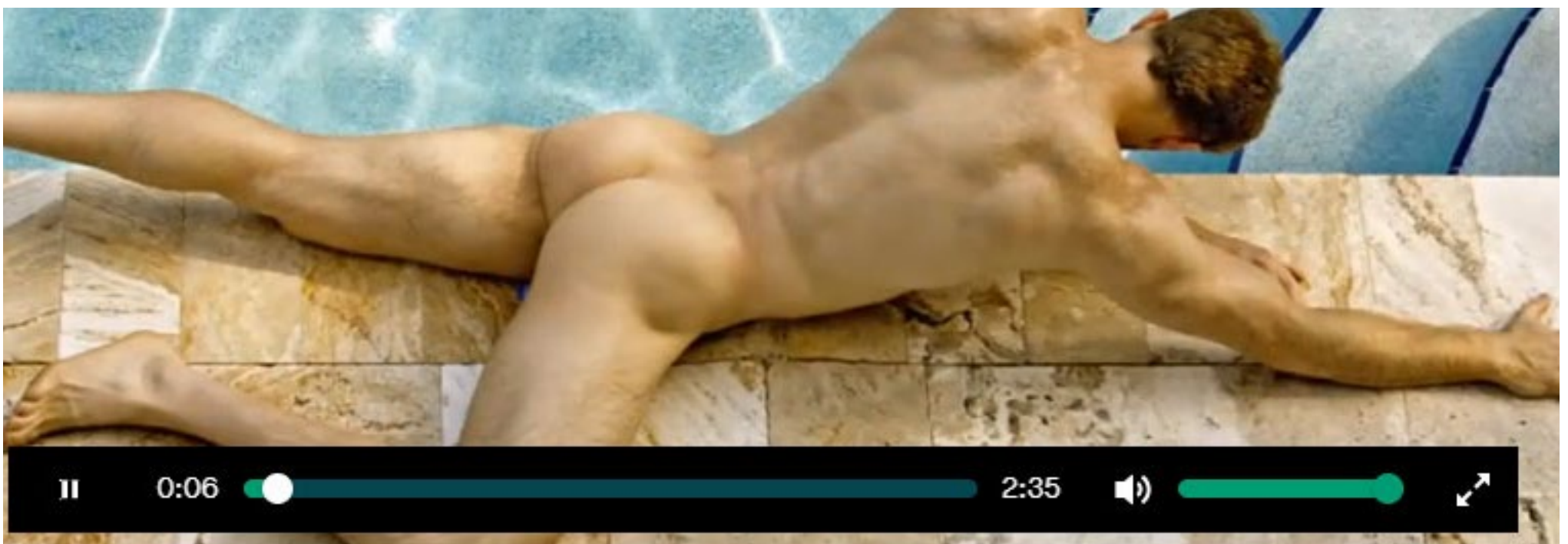
"Living in Miami with the ocean so available, I've been around water all my life," says photographer David Vance. "I love the water. I love men. The combination is natural."

That natural erotic combination is being collected by Vance for a new coffee table book *Men and Water*. The men are, as always, as evidenced by [MGT's cover story featuring Vance](#), sexy and striking. And Vance notes that the men will be in "various stages of undressed from fully clothed to totally nude." The water flows from oceans and lakes to pools and showers, anywhere skin meets liquid. Vance is understating when he says, "The photos are sexy, sensual and fun."

There have been over a dozen, some sadly out of print, books of Vance's work published and he is an expert on what is the best formatting to display his art. *Men and Water* will be 128 pages, sized at a hefty 13.5 X 10.4 inches, and will be printed in Italy. In order to achieve the quality Vance demands, he has started a Kickstarter campaign which functions essentially as a chance to pre-order *Men and Water* as well as to get in on a few tasty perks, early access and a luxurious hand-signed collector's edition.

All the details and more photos can be found at:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/635001273/men-and-waterdavid-vance-large-scale-photobook>



0:06



2:35





# Plays That Turn Into Land Acknowledgements



Have you noticed that land acknowledgments have started to turn into plays and plays have started to turn into land acknowledgements?

No, really.

I affirm the importance of land acknowledgments. We must remember that we are settlers here and that this land was not given to us, but stolen by force. It's also important to acknowledge that we heartlessly exterminated another culture, and to take responsibility for our crime.

Perhaps in a good land acknowledgment the speaker might suggest some course of action? Some way to try and compensate aboriginal people for the wrongs done to them? I know it's not easy to figure out how to actually make change, but anything would be better than what land acknowledgments have been turning into.

Like personal memoirs? Like when the (usually white) person who is doing the land acknowledgment does not want to appear cold, or impersonal, or uninvolved, so they set about offering us a personal anecdote that they reckon is related to aboriginal issues? Inevitably the speaker strays from the topic at hand and sometimes (embarrassingly) ends up doing a little (perhaps unintentional) self-promotion? Ugh.

But what's really frightening is that not only are land acknowledgments turning into plays but plays are turning into land acknowledgments.

These days when I read a review of a play in Toronto, it tells us what the theme of the play is. And the play is judged to be good if the reviewer agrees with the that theme and bad-to-middling if the reviewer cannot find a theme to agree with. Is this what a theatre experience should be? I remember when a good play would set the reviewers puzzling over what it meant, or arguing about what they thought it meant — but nobody really knew for sure.

And I kind of liked that.

These days, at the beginning of the play, the author(s) tell you who is oppressed and who is not. After that it's very boring. Am I suggesting that writers should be on the side of the oppressors? No. I'm just suggesting that plays should be more complicated and interesting than a game of football where you know before it starts which side you're on.

I used to write gay plays that sometimes featured awful and nasty gay characters. I remember someone came up to me once and asked "Why do you hate gay people so much?" And I said "I don't hate gay people, it's just that a lot of gay people are stupid and mean just like straight people. Would you like to see a play about people who were smart and nice? I think it would be a very boring play."

Land acknowledgements are not suppose to be entertaining. They are supposed to make a point. But plays . . . well plays used to be something other than well just — political views you know you agreed with before you came in, and still agree with, only more so, when you come out.

I long for that.

<https://skygilbert.blogspot.com>



RAYMOND HELKIO

# Don't Label Me: embracing the other

**“We rally for diversity of appearance but flake on diversity of viewpoint.”  
- Irshad Manji, Don't Label Me**

Pulling from her own experiences as well as that of Bruce Lee, Ben Franklin and Audre Lorde, Irshad Manji dismantles how the labels we use to define others, ultimately define and limit ourselves. *Don't Label Me* deconstructs our use of labels, highlighting how they polarize the very people it was meant to build up.

Manji is a (label warning ahead) professor of moral courage, a lesbian Muslim, Islam reformer, wife, daughter, friend and mother to a blind canine elder named Lily. It's through Lily's perspective that Irshad invites readers on a journey of self-discovery that deconstructs how labels fence us in, furthering the divide between Us and Them, but more importantly, Manji offers practical advice for bridging the divide and enabling personal accountability for the conversations we keep.

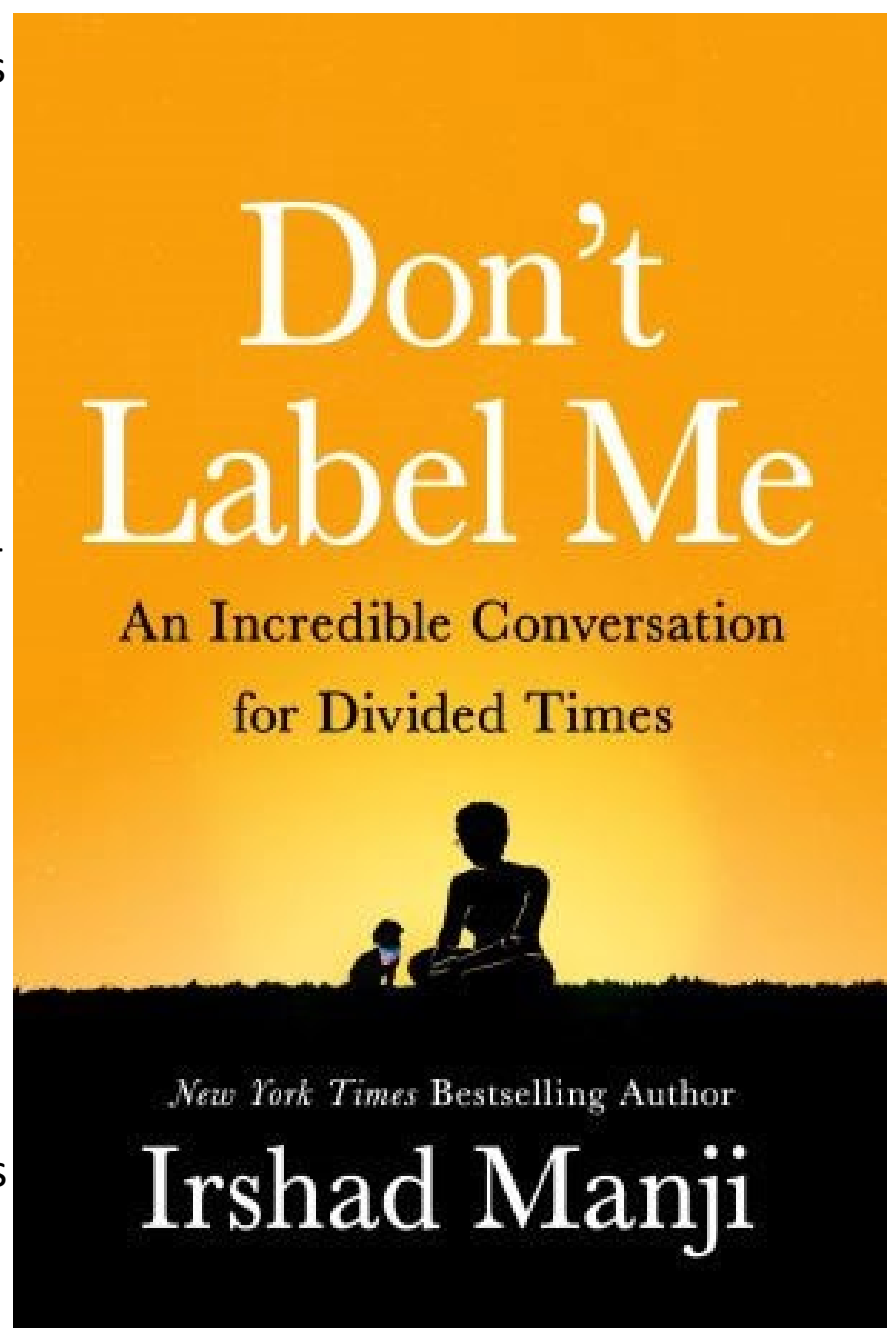
As heartwarming as it is heartbreaking, *Don't Label Me* invites the reader to experience the world through a conversation with an elderly blind dog. With provocative chapters like “Straight White Male,” “We The Plurals,” “Why And How Not To Be Offended,” and “Even In Canada,” Manji's book reveals the silver lining behind our collective cultural cloud.

Serious, thought-provoking, challenging, *Don't Label Me* is more than an incredible conversation for divided times, it's a road map for navigating the conditions inherent to a heart-centric life. Acknowledging that others have a path as individual and as unique as is our own, requires the willingness to practice honest diversity. As Manji notes, “We rally for diversity of appearance but flake on diversity of viewpoint” which can have the effect of an echo chamber, exacerbating the divide between diversity supporters and sceptics. *Don't Label Me* is punctuated by puns that serve to remind the reader that the way forward doesn't have to be a “zero-sum game, as in for me to win you must lose.” Labels come with generalizations that have the effect of distorting who a person truly is while ignoring the layered complexity of the individual.

Like two porcupines trying to kiss, *Don't Label Me* is more than an explanation of our growing frustrations, it provides concrete solutions for meaningful connection with the ‘other.’ a beacon of hope for these complicated times. Irshad's clarity of voice is honest, vulnerable and challenges the cultural dogma that plagues our progress as multi-layered individuals. Her arguments aim to expose the labels we employ as the very thing that's keeping us divided, “When we, diversity supporters, clear space for diversity sceptics, then diversity will be consistent.”

**“America's founding genius is diversity of thought. Which is why social justice activists won't win by putting labels... on those who disagree with them.”  
- Irshad Manji, Don't Label Me**

Don't Label Me: [available here](#).





PAUL BELLINI - DREW ROWSOME

# A Leo in underwear



“Living in Toronto has been an amazing experience for me, every day I learn something new,” says [Augusto](#) as he strips down for a underwear photo shoot. “I started to model at 19. At first it was just a few small projects here and there.” Now he is modelling for [RawStudiosDesign.com](#)

“Each one of my tattoos has a specific meaning,” says Augusto. “They’re a story of my life. The lion one was my first, and I chose this one because I’m a Leo and I identify a lot with my horoscope sign.” Leos love the spotlight but can also be stubborn. Augusto however is willing to compromise for the right reason. “I love my beard but I wouldn’t mind shaving it off.”

He keeps in shape by working out “for about an hour and a half each day.” He enjoys his time at the gym and “my favourite is the seated machine chest press.” His favourite song is Alesso’s cover of “Heroes” and says that “I love to travel, as much as I can.”

[https://www.instagram.com/guto\\_lion/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/guto_lion/?hl=en)



SEAN LEBER







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RAYMOND HELKIO

# Tarantino Documentary Footage Freed From Weinstein Company



A new documentary about Quentin Tarantino is now in post-production after a lengthy legal battle between director Tara Wood and The Weinstein Company.

The feature-length documentary, *21 Years: Quentin Tarantino* is a celebration of Tarantino's works-to-date and his domination of the global box office. While there's no firm date when we can expect the film to be released, rumours are it could be by end of this summer.

In 2017, Wood, co-director of 2014's acclaimed *21 Years: Richard Linklater*, asked The Weinstein Co. to release the documentary following the onslaught of sexual harassment allegations against company founder Harvey Weinstein. "TWC should respectfully release us from our deal," Wood said in a statement at the time, "To allow the project to be handled with the care and consideration it, Mr Tarantino, and all the participants deserve." The company refused, and Wood embarked on a prolonged legal battle.

Now, Wood is proud to announce that the film has returned to the creative team at Wood Entertainment, and is ready to find the right home for distribution. "We are thrilled, and eager to conduct our final interviews and complete the documentary, free from Harvey Weinstein and his complicit cohorts," said Wood last week. "We look forward to finding a new distribution partner, timed with the July 2019 release of Quentin's next film, *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*."

Quentin Tarantino's career is unmatched in its wellspring of talent and the diversity of subjects in his eight films to date. In the trendsetting *Reservoir Dogs* and the ground-breaking *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino revolutionized the status quo. He reworked genre and celebrated badass women in films like *Jackie Brown*, *Kill Bill* and the gasoline-charged *Death Proof*. He took on issues of race in America in *Django Unchained* and boldly rewrote history in *Inglorious Basterds*, leaving us snowbound in the ultimate "who done it" murder mystery, *The Hateful 8*. His films reap as much controversy as they do accolades. The documentary coincides with the end of an era – the collaboration of Tarantino with the now disgraced Harvey Weinstein.

[More Info.](#)



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# Why a Woman Should Not Play Lear

I shall have to wait until I'm dead before someone reads this essay and agrees with me.

Seeing Glenda Jackson in *King Lear* (previewing in New York City presently) was an enormous pleasure. She is an amazing actress and an amazing woman. At 82 to take command of this role in the way that she did — it was awe inspiring!

I agree with non-traditional casting in general — and by this I mean that characters should be played by actors of any colour or gender — *except* in cases when such casting changes the meaning of the play *in ways that are not intended*.

This is what happens in Sam Gold's production of *King Lear*.

Here is the first thing you will not agree with in this essay: *Shakespeare was a feminist*. 'But,' you say,



'what about the fact that the leading characters in most of his plays are men — and his characters often say such awful things about women?' True. But I would suggest that all Shakespeare's tragic heroes suffer a crisis of masculinity — one that nearly destroys the patriarchy and kingship. Macbeth and Hamlet both find it difficult to act in manly fashion, and both Antony and Othello are brought down by their love of women. Lear is absolved of masculine privilege and his kingdom to boot — and ends up naked on the heath cursing thunder. Shakespeare is suggesting that Lear's experience is a good one for a sexist, patriarchal male king.

Glenda Jackson is fully capable of presenting all the subtlety, strength, intelligence and hurt that is Lear's. (At one point when she is wheeled forward slumped in a wheelchair, and she looks so much like Stephen Hawking — it will break your heart. And the "butterflies in a cage" speech — it's worth waiting for!). But Glenda Jackson is not a man. Part of Shakespeare's dramaturgy is to bring a man with a male body and a penis under his clothes to centre stage and then humiliate him. The point is to *decimate the male*. This humiliation must be real or there is no drama. It is pointless to humiliate a woman in such a fashion. In fact doing so short circuits the feminist message. Are we to infer that women are *just as bad as men*? That they are *responsible for the same sins as men*?

One thing we can say for certain is that there *is* a patriarchy and male leadership is responsible for much of what is wrong with the world; this is what Shakespeare is saying. That message is undermined by putting a woman in the role; the play then becomes a *less feminist* play.

This is the problem with many stagings which attempt to correct the sexism of these old plays; it is done with no real understanding of the message of the play, or the message that non-traditional casting sends.

With Jayne Houdyshell's brilliant portrayal of Gloucester in the the same production I have no casting problem. The character of Gloucester is not principally about the poisonous patriarchy; it is principally about blindness — it is about perception and reality. Thus, it makes no difference if a man or woman plays the role.

Years ago, I asked an artistic director of colour (who I won't hold responsible for her remarks here) what her opinion was of what was then called 'colour blind' casting. She said: "As long as the play is not a *contemporary political* one, where it would unintentionally change the meaning of the play, it's an important thing to do."

Because Shakespeare is, phenomenally, still 'our contemporary' — I must say, I agree.



DREW ROWSOME

# Party with Hot Brown Honey



The Hot Brown Honey cabaret is unapologetically sexy and political. A hip hop concert, a pep rally, a dance and laugh-filled smashing of stereotypes, the cast delivers sass and raucous defiance to get across their message of female empowerment. The show is aimed at “Game Changers, Myth Slayers, Poets, Movers, Music Makers, Ground Breakers, Truth Sayers, Shake em up Women, Queens, Queers and Risk Takers,” which explains why there is a special discount for MyGayToronto.com and MGT readers.

[Opening night tickets on Fri, April 5 are only \\$25 when using the code “Party”](#)

Be aware that there are a series of serious warnings attached to Hot Brown Honey: “Performance contains adult themes, drug references, nudity, coarse language, strobe lights, haze, smoke, loud noises, and trigger warning VAW. May also cause women to feel liberated.” They also warn that “Fighting the power never tasted so sweet.” Sweet as Sweet Brown Honey.”



Hot Brown Honey runs from Fri, April 5 to Sun, April 7 at the Bluma Appel Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre, 27 Front St E. [sonycentre.ca](http://sonycentre.ca)



SKY GILBERT

## Exposing subtle racism and homophobia

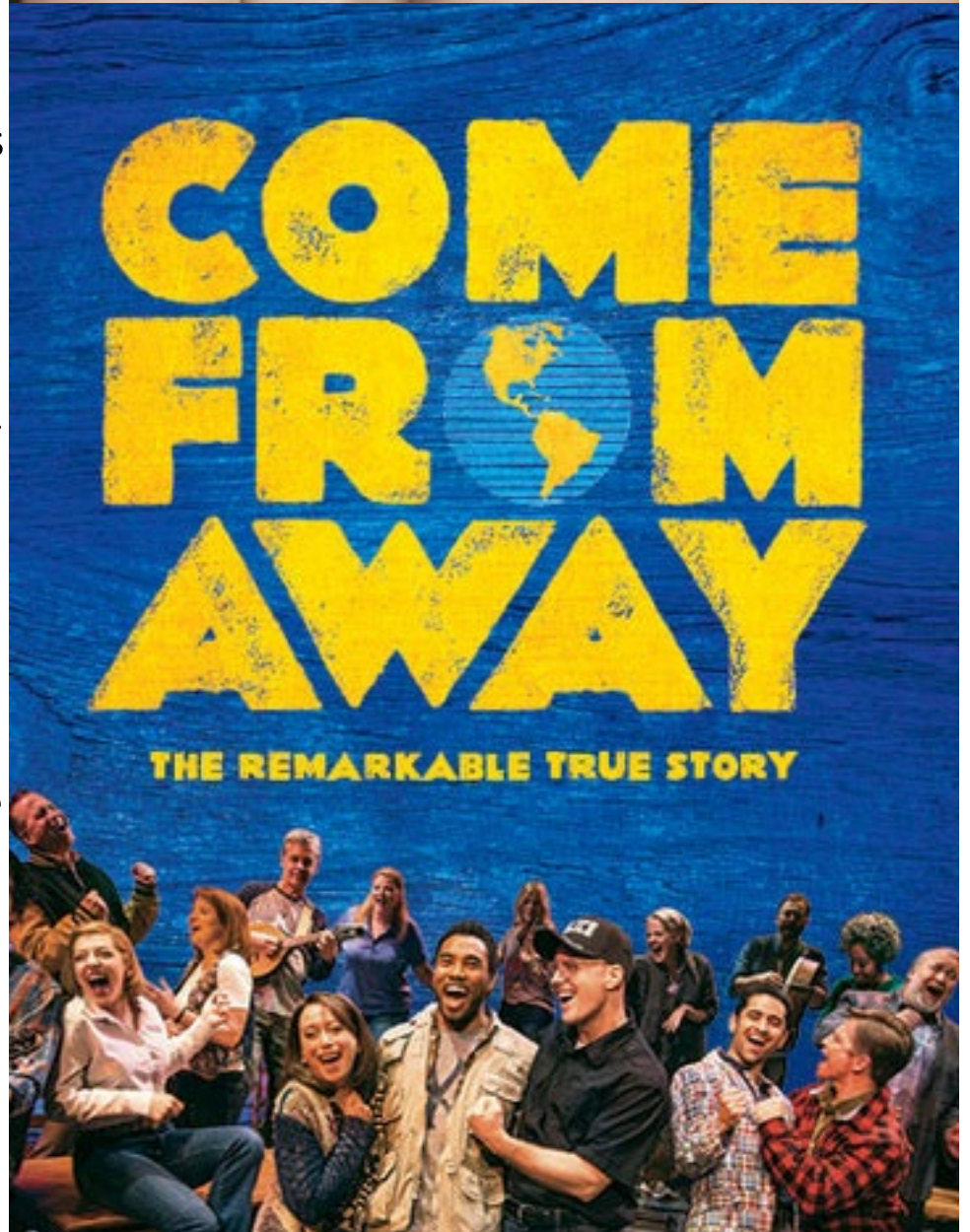
Racism has at last become unfashionable, at least in the mainstream. So when racism makes a high profile appearance it's a surprise. I haven't seen *Come From Away* for nearly six months, and for six months I've been asking everyone the same question, "Why is such a mundane, unhummmable musical so popular?"

I've also been complaining about the token gay characters. The musical is all about the kind, nice, straight people of Gander - but now and then a chirpy gay couple pops in and makes us laugh with their harmless shenanigans. Why is this offensive to me as a gay man? Because gay men have been represented as secondary characters who provide comic relief since the dawn of time. (This even applies to *Will and Grace*, which — though it features a gay man as the leading character - is all about his friendship with a woman, leaving Jack MacFarland, Will's sidekick, to be the effeminate guy who actually has gay sex and is therefore, well, the real gay man and punchline.)

The presence of these two 'chatty Jacks' in *Come From Away* does not explain its popularity. But this mega-musical's treatment of people of colour may very well do so. The theme of *Come From Away* is 'Aren't the people of Gander, Newfoundland kind and wonderful?' The plot centres around the population of a mainly white little town that opens its heart to foreign airplanes forced to land there temporarily during 9/11. It makes much of the ability of the town's mostly white, Celtic citizenry to put aside their prejudices and welcome a Muslim passenger. Of course *Come From Away* makes every attempt to humanize its token Muslim character (just as it tries to humanize its token gay couple) — but ultimately this is a musical about how wonderful white, straight people are. The leading white characters are extolled for helping the marginalized secondary characters. It's a giant congratulatory slap-on-the-back for North American whites — who are specifically celebrated in *Come From Away*'s opening song, "Welcome to the Rock." *Come from Away*, like *Kinky Boots*, is part of a new trend: mega-musicals that celebrate tolerance. Funny, but I personally have never been very fond of being tolerated.

Am I being a nit-picky, political correct lefty a-hole? After all, how can you possibly accuse an anti-racist musical of being racist? I'm not saying that any play that celebrates the fabulousness of white people is racist. But, sorry, the person most likely to get-teary eyed over the fact that some old Newfoundland lady has to go out and buy extra toilet paper for an unexpected guest is probably another old white lady (the target audience for this musical) and her husband that she dragged out to see this corny stuff. And how did that lady get her hubby there? Well, both of them feel a little guilty about being white people these days. And *Come From Away* makes them feel better.

I'm not blaming anybody (certainly not the fine cast, director, etc.), just our messed up 'tolerant' culture. But perhaps this is something to think about? When plays become all about making money (not art) then sometimes quality is sacrificed for pandering to our very worst instincts. And we may not even know it's happening.





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PAUL BELLINI

# The taiko drummers of Kodo

## just don't call them sexy

My job is to ask people questions about the things they do, but sometimes there just isn't that much to talk about. Case in point: the taiko drummers of Kodo. They drum. They tour. That's about it. Both publicists and myself look desperately for angles to make this seem interesting. Don't get me wrong. The show itself, in which a group of well-muscled Japanese men and women bang on huge drums, is fantastic. It's an auditory experience, and culturally significant, and strangely beautiful. But what else can one say?

Because the 30 members of the troupe are Japanese and have limited English skills, I was asked to submit questions in advance. So I did. I looked at pictures of the troupe. Lots of drums, lots of bare chests. This being a gay magazine, I thought I'd sell the 'sexy' angle. But when I submitted the questions, two were axed. They were "Who is the sex symbol of the troupe?" and "Can one experience ecstasy while drumming?"



The company's press person wrote back saying, "It is a part of the human experience that they essentially relinquish in favor of this primal connection to a life-force rhythm — the members of Kodo do not think about this work or their performances sexually, and we would like to respect that aspect of their artistic practice. If possible, we would be very grateful if Paul could consider changing those two questions."

I guess her point is that sexy is in the eye of the beholder, and not part of the troupe's image. So that leaves a lot of questions about drumming. Fortunately, the man I spoke to, Ryotaro Leo Ikenaga, was far from boring, and his English was impeccable.

"Our drums are very unique, unlike western percussion instruments," he told me. "The heaviest one takes more than 20 people to carry it." The show isn't all drumming. "We have some parts that feature bamboo flutes, but also some drumming sections that are very quiet."

I asked him if anyone ever flubbed on stage. "We notice if someone plays a wrong note but I think it's hard for an audience to tell. Sticks break often. We always have spare ones close by." And is it exhausting to drum all the time? "During the show you get an adrenaline rush but afterwards you feel some fatigue. We do 30 shows in two months, so we're used to the grind."

I wondered if there are any related injuries to the practice. "The drums are loud, and we don't use ear plugs, so it might be affecting our hearing in some way, but no one has ever had any hearing problems." Finally, I thought I would get to the heart of the matter. If I can't ask him about sexuality, I could at least ask him about the sacred aspect. His answer surprised me.

"There are no strong religious connotations to taiko drumming," he declared. "Taiko as a performing art has only been around 50 or 60 years. We incorporate a lot of traditional dances. But a religious aspect isn't featured in the show."

And that's about it. I wasn't sure what else to ask, but it's all moot. Seeing the taiko drummers perform live is a transcendent experience, and regardless of what the company's press person thinks, it is kind of sexy.

Break a stick, Leo.

*Kodo's One Earth Tour: Evolution is on March 21 at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts*  
 Tickets from \$55 at [ticketmaster.ca](https://www.ticketmaster.ca), or by calling 1.855.872.7669  
 Further information at [sonycentre.ca](https://www.sonycentre.ca)



SKY GILBERT

# News Flash: Hormone Blockers Also Block Sexuality

The latest trend in child-rearing sees parents taking their children to gender clinics to deal with their children's 'gender issues.' The CBC tells us that "Children's clinics across the country are seeing exponential growth in demand for treatment from teens who don't identify as the sex they were born with."

What's going on? Clinicians routinely say it all has to do with increasing awareness of transgender issues. But is that *all* that is happening?

It used to be that when boys were deemed 'effeminate' — that is, they liked to play with dolls — the psychological community used to think they were gay. Now boys who play with dolls (and girls who play with trucks) have moved from being labeled 'gender dysphoric' to the more politically correct label: 'transgendered.' We are told that their situation has nothing to do with sexuality, and everything to do with gender. But is it possible that these young people could be, in fact, gay and lesbian, and that they are being told by well meaning but ill-informed clinicians and doctors 'Don't worry, you are most likely transgendered?'

The likelihood of this scenario increases when you consider the effects of 'hormone blockers' which are the usual prescribed treatment for young people who come to gender clinics. The effects have not been fully studied simply because hormone blockers have not been in wide use long enough to see the long term consequences. It is suspected, however, that they could affect bone development, fertility and brain function.

But it is a much more significant and *immediate* side effect of hormone blockers — one that is being universally ignored — that has *me* worried.

I discovered this information in the Porto Biomedical Journal (available online at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2444866417301101>). PBJ is "an open-access journal devoted to the publication of top quality original research conducted in the biomedical fields. The journal only accepts articles that undergo a strict revision process in a double-blind refereeing system."

According to PBJ, hormone blockers do not simply block the process of menstruation and the development of secondary sexual characteristics in teens, they also block the natural progression of teen sexuality. The journal states "the impact on sexuality has not yet been studied, but the restriction of sexual appetite brought about by blockers may prevent the adolescent from having age-appropriate socio-sexual experiences" and "in light of this fact, early interventions may interfere with the patient's development of a free sexuality and may limit her or his exploration of sexual orientation."

Wow. So hormone blockers not only affect the gender of the child, but ensure that as they grow to adolescence they will be wiped clear — it seems — of that pesky little thing called sexual desire! This is really scary. When parents come to a clinic with a little boy who plays with dolls, they can be assured that the child will not only have their gender changed to one more appropriate for their activities, but that their sexual experimentation during adolescence will be reduced, due to the restriction of their sexual appetite.

We live a homophobic culture. It is also a sexually schizophrenic one that recommends abstinence to combat venereal disease for the same young people who can easily access porn online. In this contradictory, damaged sexual culture, parents can — utilizing hormone blockers — not only change their children's gender, but also rest assured that their children's adolescent sexual shenanigans will be under control.

*Brave New World, anyone?*

<https://skygilbert.blogspot.com>



DREW ROWSOME

# Paul Jamnicky

photography that is sensual, beautiful, sexy and a little dangerous.

THE YOUNG GODS  
Cory Myles  
By  
Paul Jamnicky

*"The first time I was ever in awe of another photographer was seeing Robert Mapplethorpe's work," says photographer Paul Jamnicky. "I'd never seen anything like it. Everything he shot was so sensual and beautiful, sexy and a little dangerous. I always loved photography. I got my first Polaroid camera at the age of 11 and then a fully manual SLR in university. I set up a darkroom and developed my own black and whites back in the day. It was pre-internet so I remember getting books from the library to try to learn various photographic techniques. But to be honest my photos were pretty boring and I never really got the hang of it technically at the time. I couldn't seem to make what I saw in my head happen in a photo so I put it away for 20 years."*

In those 20 years, Jamnicky explored other careers and art forms. He worked the bar at Buddies, his band The Jameson Project had a cult hit with the song "Baby Aspirin," and he established a career in real estate. *"Moving into photography professionally was a process and was by no means intentional in the beginning,"* says Jamnicky. *"Like anything in life, you open a door and other doors start opening. And some close as well. I made a decision with photography to not be afraid and to just do. I wanted to be fearless this time around and not listen to those horrible doubting voices in my head that say 'You can't'*



*or 'You're not good enough.' I shout those voices down. For the record, I still do real estate and it helps to fund my photography obsession and keeps me afloat."*

Jamnicky credits his time at Buddies with bolstering his nerve. *"It was hard as hell working there but the creative energy was everywhere,"* he says. *"We were all so young and had boundless energy so it was incredibly inspiring. Nothing was off the table at Buddies. It just really opened me up. I bought a new digital camera and decided this time I was going to master the beast. I stumbled across Scott Kelby's The Digital Photography Book. It changed everything."*



A voracious learner, Jamnicky also studied Kelby online. *"He's a genius and does these courses where you can learn with some of the best photographers in their field. You are basically on set with them and they show you exactly what they do with lighting and various techniques. It's honestly what I was missing back in the early days. They're very good teachers. Because of the internet you really can learn from the best. It's a game changer."*

The first photographs that Jamnicky produced were posted on social media accompanied by a self-deprecating commentary that belied his emerging vision. *"I still doubt myself all the time and I'm still surprised when people like my work,"* he says. *"It's that doubting voice I was talking about earlier. In the early days I was really just hoping the exposure would be right and the photos weren't blurry. Technically I've gotten much better and have a better grasp on how light works as well as the editing process, so I'm better at predicting what the end result will be. That helps. When I started getting published next to photographers I admired, that help build my confidence level as well. It started to legitimize the work I guess. I know there are always going to be photographers that are better than me, but that keeps me humble and striving to always challenge and better myself. I just try to make photos that I like and then I hope everyone else will like them too."*





PAUL JAMNICKY



Paul Jamnicky







**Paul Jamnicky**





Not only did people like Jamnicky's work but he started getting booked for fashion editorial, for portraiture and by fitness models. Whether a landscape, beads draped on a slyph-like neck, or, more frequently, rippling muscles in motion or repose, there is a consistent sensuality of line and shadow in Jamnicky's work. Sensual and beautiful, sexy and a little dangerous. *"I'm honestly just trying to create a striking image," he says. "We are so bombarded by imagery that I'm just hoping that people will stop on my photos for more than a second before swiping to the next."*

With a model the sensuality is not just because of the physical form. *"The easy answer is the expression,"* says Jamnicky. *"I'm usually barking out commands to the model like 'Abs, abs, abs . . . quads!' calling out what's not flexed so it's not particularly erotic when I'm shooting the photo but then we look at the computer and say, 'Okay, we got the body down, now lets work on the expression.' I guess there is also the pose too now that I think about it. A little 'peek-a-boo hip' I call it can generate quite a bit of fire. Interestingly if you look at traditional physique photos, they aren't particularly erotic because the expression is not there. It's usually a blank look or a put on smile with the dude stress flexing. I just try to press for an interesting expression coupled with an interesting shape or pose. I honestly think the really good models are like really good actors. They can get into a role. Sometimes it comes naturally to the model, sometimes we work hard at it."*

Not all models are created equal. *"It can be anywhere from very collaborative to not collaborative at all. I think when the model gets involved it's much better obviously. I love when we share photos and ideas back and forth for inspiration. I love when the model is excited about a shoot and is open and wants to challenge themselves. That positive energy really fills a room and comes across nicely in the photos. When the model just shows up the shots are usually not that interesting."*

But it always takes time and work. *"I keep shooting them until they finally give it up. Honestly though, in the studio I shoot tethered to the computer so we can look at the images as we shoot. The model can see how they look right away and then we make small tweaks on what seems to be working to hopefully improve an already good shot. I find that tool very helpful. The model can see that very small variations can make all the difference in the photo. I've found that it really is about the details."*





PAUL JAMNICKY





PAUL JAMNICKY





Paul Jamnicky





PAUL JAMNICKY

Despite his initial self-doubt, Jamnicky now has no trouble finding models. *"In the early days I used Model Mayhem and slowly grew up from there,"* he says. *"I would say most models as well as brands all come through Instagram these days. We seem to find each other. There is also a handful of photographers in the city and we all seem to follow each other and see who's shooting who. The models do the same so there is this little community building around photographers and models. A model can DM me on Instagram and inquire about a shoot. I've also been contacted by clothing companies for product shoots in the same way. Instagram has really become the new business card and portfolio for everyone to connect."*

Perhaps the most eye-catching element of Jamnicky's oeuvre is his way of capturing and glorifying male musculature. His latest works amplify that into realms of the mythological. *"I've always loved that shit,"* he says laughing. *"And it was always something I wanted to create but until now did not have the technical skill."*



Paul Jamnicky





Paul Jamnicky





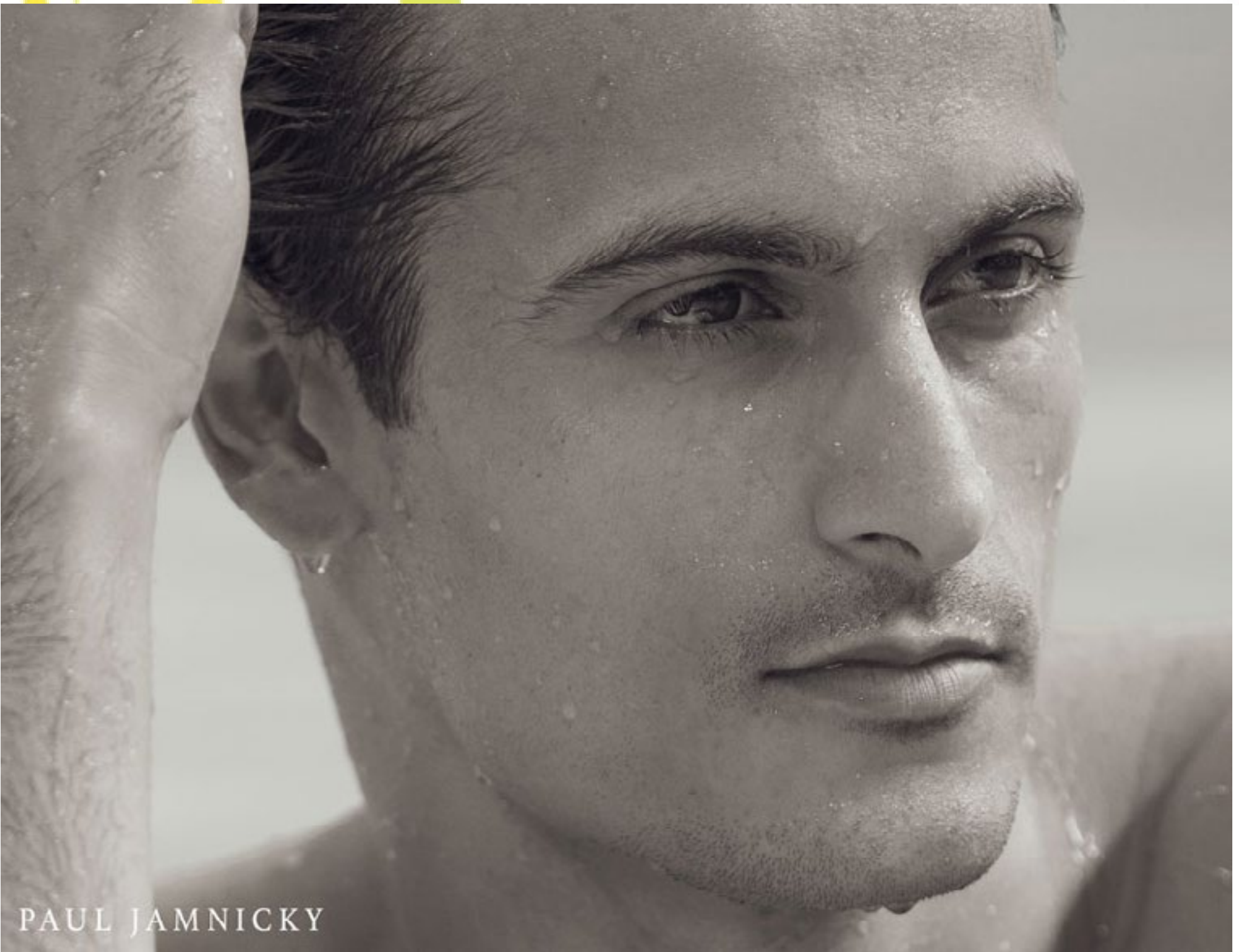
Paul Jamnicky





Paul Jamnicky





PAUL JAMNICKY

*I love fantasy, mythology, scifi, surrealism. It's something I would like to continue to explore and develop. I felt like the guys I was photographing were larger than life, the one percent of the population, so why not just make them superhuman? It seemed like a natural fit."*



Paul Jamnicky





Paul Jamnicky





Paul Jamnicky

PHOTOGRAPHY





PAUL JAMNICKY

No matter how god-like, there is one element that is crucial. *"It's usually after, when I start editing the photos, that helps to heighten that eroticism,"* says Jamnicky. *"I go hunting for that one photo where it all seemed to come together: the pose, the expression, the lighting, the angle... It all has to be there to make it work. Fitness photography is really only about capturing the musculature a certain way. You know that Muscle & Fitness magazine style. Always brightly lit with not much expression. Portrait is more about the expression and capturing something about the person and not just a photo of the person is the way I would describe it."*

Jamnicky is comfortable whether working in the studio or on location. *"I enjoy them both but hate the weather in Toronto,"* he says. *"It really only allows for a very short shooting season outdoors and I hate the cold. So by September I'm already shooting inside."* That ties in well with his ultimate fantasy shoot which is, *"All year round on a beautiful beach with a beautiful and expressive model,"* he says before adding. *"Or an old abandoned factory. I love shooting in those. Detroit is like heaven to me."*

Besides trips to Detroit, Jamnicky is continuing to follow his creative muse. *"I hope to just keep progressing and getting better at my craft. I'm a terrible business man so I think I need someone to handle the business end for me. I'm too content just creating photos and editing them and not thinking too much about how to market them. At this point I'm just taking it one step and one opportunity at a time. I'm of the belief that if you are good and persistent the money will come eventually. Hopefully."*



Paul Jamnicky's work can be found at [pauljamnickyphotography.com](http://pauljamnickyphotography.com)  
And on Instagram @[pjamnicky](https://www.instagram.com/pjamnicky) and Facebook @[pauljamnickyphotography](https://www.facebook.com/pauljamnickyphotography)





PAUL JAMNICKY



PI UNDERWEAR

VOLA

**URBAN ANGEL AND  
THE EVLTWIN**

*by Paul Jamnicky*



# social media - Tidbits

**Mikey Sin** updated his cover photo. 14 hrs · 🌐

THREE WEEKS LEFT!! My PopUP Shop at Mikah Styles Fabulous eleven salon!!  
The Debut of SIN by mikey sin Spring/Summer 2019 (Summer of Love) Hand printed Silk Screen Fashion Designs, Accessories and Art Prints. Featured in the Shop/Gallery will be the Collection, Theatrical Head Pieces and Photography for sale.

The POP UP Shop and Art Gallery will Run from FEB 7th to MARCH 30 2019.... See More



**David Harris** ▶ GUYS WITH INK 'R' DAMN HOT 😏 Yesterday at 3:06 AM · 📷



shared a photo to the group: THE REAL MUSCLE GODS TO WORSHIP & SERVICE! 11 hrs · 📷



Peter Lalev is with Maria Garcia and 2 others. January 27 · 🌐



**Out Magazine** 28 mins · 🌐 We'd like to see the ultrasound.



OUT.COM Lady Gaga Announces She's Pregnant with Her Next Album

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PHOTOS BY SEAN LEBER

# *MyGayToronto*







# New Magic Valley Fun Town:

## comedy masking damaging secrets



It is impossible to describe the plot or main themes of *New Magic Valley Fun Town* without ruining the surprises in store. Suffice it to say that what begins as an amiable comedy blossoms into a disturbing comedy of manners before escalating to a shattering conclusion. The audience had braved a vicious storm and I doubt there was anyone in attendance that felt it wasn't worth the hardship. *New Magic Valley Fun Town* is in a way about the indomitable spirit of human nature, and that makes a few feet of snow seem an insignificant travail.

Daniel MacIvor (*Who Killed Spalding Gray?*, *Cake and Dirt*, *The Best Brothers*, *A Beautiful View*, *Arigato Tokyo*, *His Greatness*) is both playwright and a quarter of the ensemble. He is also a trickster in both iterations. Beginning with a slapstick section that is both hilarious and a wordless - except for the occasional epithet - introduction to a character and his backstory. From there he trades quips and barbs with Caroline Gillis and, while their relationship is obviously crucial and intimate, it remains ambiguous for a good portion of the play. MacIvor seems to delight in revealing just enough to set up a puzzle and keep the audience guessing. And it works beautifully, it is riveting and compelling. And punctuated with laughter.

MacIvor's character is eagerly, frantically, awaiting the arrival of a longlost childhood friend. Their relationship is another mystery and I admit that in that regard I swallowed at least one macguffin whole. There is also a fourth wheel spinning and occasionally connecting, Stephanie MacDonald who alternately helps and hinders the preparations. Preparations that involve copious amounts of alcohol, social media misinformation, and large bags of No Frills no-name snacks. MacIvor, Gillis and MacDonald volley a tremendous amount of overlapping dialogue and bits of physical business, revealing character, teasing mysteries and landing one-liners with precision.





The childhood friend arrives and, despite Andrew Moonie's initial gravitas, the evening becomes a drunken party highlighted by dance numbers including an impressive retro display of finesse by MacIvor. It should be mentioned that the music selections are incredibly apt at setting the mood and the characters. And the complicity. While many smirked at the '70s soft rock, everyone in the audience sang along sotto voce, and became a part of the world of the play. The secrets when they are revealed are explosive and the metaphor they are wrapped in literally so. *New Magic Valley Fun Town* is artfully and meticulously structured and presented, but never for a second reveals that it is other than realistic people in an impossible and ultimately horrific situation.







There are multiple subtexts foregrounded and touched on but the main theme, which again can't be spoiled, is the engine that drives it all. MacIvor is hilarious and heartbreaking as he dons a ridiculous toupee and hides yet another awful secret. Gillis is brash and no-nonsense but aches palpably without having to say so. MacDonald is the most ridiculed but manages to brazen through with faux sophistication and become quite touching. Andrew Moonie, on whom it all hinges, somehow balances MacIvor's physical drollery with a handsome stolidity that also allows us to see the bond between them. Before we even know what that bond is. It is a true ensemble and their inner reality, aided by an achingly realistic Canadian melodrama set and Richard Rose's sensitive direction, makes the implausible believable. And eventually the unbelievable is made tragically real.

There are so many telling details and comedic riffs that offer clues but they too need to remain spoilers. In the world of *New Magic Valley Fun Town* there is an actual New Magic Valley Fun Town and it is a wonderful and horrible place that reflects the play. A glossy giddy place that masks darkness and horrors so unspeakable that they destroy. In MacIvor's trickster hands, it is an unsafe and important place to visit. Hilarious but ultimately devastating.

***New Magic Valley Fun Town*** continues until Sun, March 31 at Tarragon Theatre, 30 Bridgman Ave. [tarragontheatre.com](http://tarragontheatre.com)







# I.M.: Isaac Mizrahi

## creates a complete outfit out of a collection of spicy accessories

In the midst of his delightful autobiography I.M., author Isaac Mizrahi casually states that all that one needs to learn about fashion can be gleaned from D.V., Diana Vreeland's autobiography. Though Mizrahi never quite achieves, or descends to, the wacky wtf brilliance of Vreeland's demented opus, it is not for lack of intent.

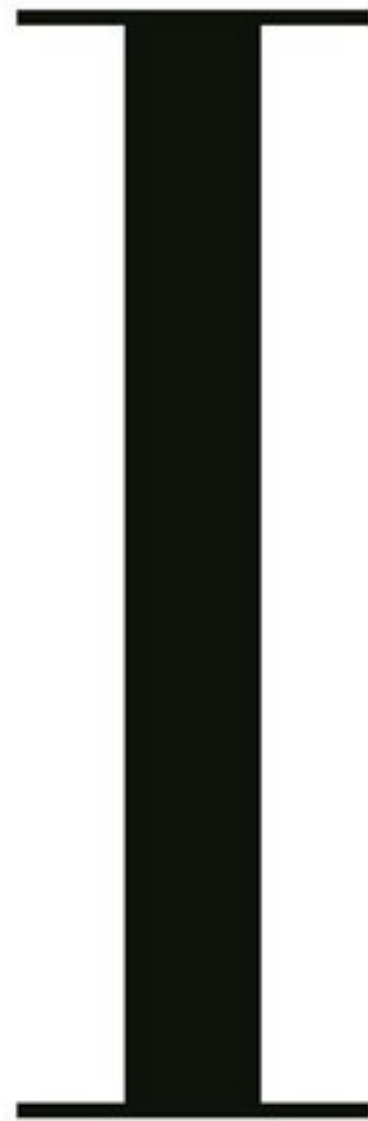
I.M. begins with Mizrahi explaining the original impetus for the book and how he, much as he explains his process of designing, trimmed and cut and rearranged for "shape." As he gives a list and brief discussion of the "tiny things, the day-to-day history of my own private life," that he edited out of I.M., the reader is both relieved and disappointed. I.M. is going to be an actual autobiography with a coherent story and a certain degree of honesty. The surprise is that it is such an enjoyable one.

Introductions dispensed with, Mizrahi flashes back to the pivotal moment when his mother was coerced into buying him a Barbie. From there the intersection of his artistic impulses - the vivid passages on his puppet theatre extravaganzas are as magnificent as the glittery productions must have been - and his sexuality. It is there that I.M. is the most powerful, recounting the life of a gay Syrian Jew with a weight problem, driven to create beauty and become a star, and, not insignificantly, desperate to be loved.

It is a coming out story on two levels. The subtext of Mizrahi's sexuality is never far from the surface and is often the dominant thread. Mizrahi was one of the first well-known designers to come out and he paid a price for it. He also lived through the AIDS crisis, Studio 54, and being born into a tight-knit religious community. It was not an easy process and he though he minimizes that throughout I.M. it just makes his bravery even more noteworthy. Those passages, right up to his current dilemma in regards to his sisters and their children, are tremendously affecting, moving and important.

Mizrahi's artistic coming out made him a celebrity designer, with the accent on celebrity. As such he has a position to maintain, a fan base to feed, and little need for discretion, there are few secrets that haven't already been aired. The passages detailing his rise to fame and notoriety are giddy fun, reflecting the heady artsy atmosphere of the '80s when anything was possible and too much of everything was not enough. There is gossip, Mizrahi moved in the New York demi-monde A-list, but the most intriguing passages detail Mizrahi's attempts at actual friendships, where they went right and where they went wrong.

Some of those are expected - Sandra Bernhard, Madonna, designers like Calvin Klein and Perry Ellis - but the portraits are precise and revealing, even if more revealing of Mazrahi than the subjects. Others are more nuanced and fascinating. The artistic ferment in New York City at that time also included great gay



A MEMOIR

ISAAC MIZRAHI



artists like Stephen Sondheim and Mark Morris. Mizrahi's relationships with them are much meatier reading than one would expect from a celebrity autobiography. Yet the overarching relationship is with Mizrahi's mother, a *monstre sacré* who is less a supporting player than a rival starring diva throughout I.M.

Mizrahi is, of course, an unreliable narrator and details get glossed over or just left out, and all events are framed from his point of view in hindsight. It's his autobiography and it is his right, especially when it reads so smoothly and is so entertaining. Even for this reader who has little interest in fashion or the business of fashion, the tales of Mizrahi's rise and fall and rise and fall, from his own couture label to Chanel to Target and now Xcel Brands, is fascinating and clearly recounted. And his memory of what people were wearing is phenomenal, with descriptions of fabrics, cuts and colours that achieve a bizarre and hilarious level of OCD camp.

Mizrahi has been seeing therapists for most of his life so he has a real knack for being revelatory while withholding crucial information. His attempts to describe his insomnia, depression, the art of cabaret as personal expression, and the difficulty of establishing a relationship with the man who is now his husband, are the weakest parts of the book. Perhaps because they superficially appear to be the deepest. Mizrahi's demons are no match for his *joie de vivre*, at least in the way he writes. He is now more known as a television personality than he ever was as a designer or the cabaret performer he now is. We never get to know the real Isaac Mizrahi - even Mizrahi admits that that is still a work in progress - but it is impossible not to be absorbed in this fabulous monologue that almost feels like conversation.

I'm sure that Mizrahi will be teasing the highlights on the epic promotional press tour he has planned. but I'm also sure that those will be different for everyone who reads I.M. - it is a complete outfit rather than a collection of spicy item accessories. I've already mentioned the puppet shows but Mick Jagger, Sarah Jessica Parker, auditioning and being in the film *Fame*, Janet Jackson, Jack Nicholson, the making of *Unzipped*, Liza Minnelli, Liza Minelli's wedding, and Audrey Hepburn must be added to the list of vignettes that do Diana Vreeland proud. Mizrahi claims at the end of the book to have revealed his true self, both in the pages and onstage. That is an impossible task but the Isaac Mizrahi we meet is a flawed and fabulous man whom it is sheer pleasure to encounter.



**HELLO ISAAC**

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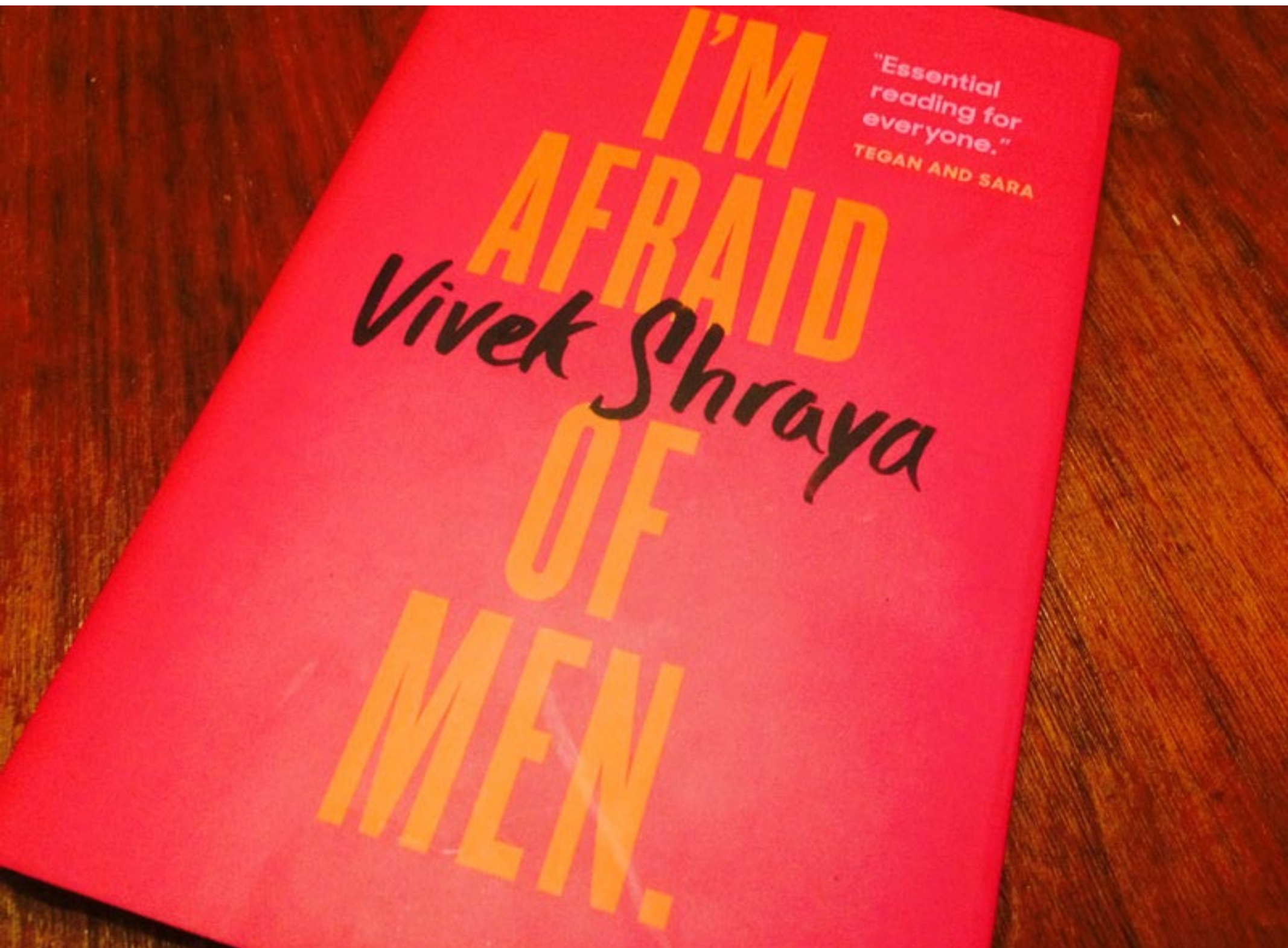
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# Vivek Shraya: I'm Afraid Of Men



The personal stories that make up *I'm Afraid of Men* are compelling and framed from the perspective of a person whose gender expression ever-shifts against, and with, conventional norms, serving to challenge the status quo as well as each of our roles within it. The sharp, thoughtful and to the point writing paints a vivid portrait of Vivek's Shraya's search for safety in our masculine-dominated culture.

Vivek's experiences are relatable, and although she refers to them as common compared to the atrocities others have endured, her stories are no less heartbreaking, a striking portrait of a culture gone terribly wrong. Vivek illuminates one of the underlining threads that is keeping all of us stuck, "Most men don't think they're misogynists, let alone think they have misogynist attitudes or engage in misogynist behaviours" making this a blind spot that men themselves are solely responsible for.

But all this takes more than simply acknowledging blind spots, it's knowing one should look in the first place. Our culture has been putting men on a pedestal, imbuing them with a masculine ideal and characteristics that overlook the infallibility of being human. This infallibility is not to be confused with the right to be wrong, however, it is an entry point allowing for a fuller appreciation for the complexities that make up 'the other.' In response to one of Vivek's relationships, "First, it allowed me to see that one of these characteristics, didn't necessarily cancel out the others." It's insights like these that turn Vivek's experiences into possibilities for ways forward. Transforming a toxic boys-will-be-boys culture that rewards conformity over diversity may not happen overnight, however, acknowledging that the labels we employ are barely a one-dimensional starting point may help to speed up the inevitable.



# Isn't It Romantic



2019, BBB.5, I, TODD STRAUSS-SCHULSON

## Isn't It Romantic (2019)

Rebel Wilson loved *Pretty Woman* as a little girl but has grown up to realize that life can never fulfill the aspirational promise of a romantic comedy: her apartment is a cramped shithole, her New York City neighbourhood smells like garbage, the city's handsome men are neither available nor interested in her and, even though she has the impressive career of an architect, she is treated like a secretary at her drab office. She feels cynical about love and believes it will never happen, insulting her lovelorn assistant (Betty Gilpin) and ignoring the charms of the project manager at her office (Adam DeVine) because he isn't as dreamy as the rude but studly business tycoon (Liam Hemsworth) who has come in for a meeting. A mugging incident on the subway gets Wilson thrown face-first into a pole and she passes out, waking up in the most extreme rom-com of her dreams, every street corner decorated with flower-pots, every second storefront a cupcake bakery and every gentleman a handsome prince ready to love her for who she is on the inside. Unable to understand the nonsense she is living, Wilson indulges in an affair with the now devoted Hemsworth and enjoys the bright colours and spontaneous choreography, eventually questioning the values she had regarding partnership and self-worth. The laughs are deep and plenty from the start of this delightful satire, one whose pokes at the targeted genre are cruel jabs that are well deserved and given an additional pleasure by the constant look of incredulity on the star's face. It's as light and unimportant as the movies it is making fun of, and its empowerment message rings hollow, but it commits so beautifully to the cruelty of its gags that it can easily spread one joke over the whole film without dimming the humour (the "lost and found" outfit she is given to leave the hospital is memorably hilarious all on its own).





# Chicho: the beauty of Augusto Bitter



*Photos by Dahlia Katz and Graham Isador*

*Chicho* is a must-see if only for the opportunity to see Augusto Bitter ([Iphigenia and the Furies](#), [Lear](#), [The Monument](#)) centrestage and in full flight. Up close and personal is an understatement. [When I interviewed Bitter before the first incarnation of Chicho](#), which I tragically did not get to see, he described a deeply heartfelt piece dealing with his identity as a Venezuelan immigrant and his desire to be beautiful. That play is still there but the crisis, another understatement, in Venezuela has added an urgent subplot and a political cri de couer to *Chicho*.

The two threads co-exist uneasily but almost pull together through the metaphor of the avocado, in this case a very vocal avocado. The individual scenes in *Chicho* are spectacular and the anger and fear over the destruction of Venezuela fuel Bitter into a frenzy of passionate irony, acknowledging his privilege and bemoaning it at the same time. He is dealing with some very heavy stuff - just a recitation of the numerical facts about the crisis is devastating - and it can't help but supersede the more intimate revelations and dilemmas. So *Chicho* is not only about Bitter's intersectional identity, it becomes about a country's identity as well.



The link is beauty, the beauty of Venezuela and Bitter's quest to see himself as beautiful. There is a telling segment where Bitter incarnates a Venezuela beauty queen and describes how artificial enhancements are part of the necessity of achieving natural beauty. That dovetails with another powerful segment where Bitter wishes that the Latin lover he meets after his "Aryan" boyfriend, would,





"Fuck in Spanish." That it all coalesces with the metaphor of Venezuela's oil reserves and again that avocado, shows just nimble Bitter's mind is and how high the stakes have become.

Perhaps the thread about Bitter's personal beauty - *Chicho* begins with a large shrouded mirror that is a versatile prop though the sheet over it becomes more crucial and more dominant - faded not only because of the urgency in Venezuela, but also because Bitter's physical appeal can't be denied. By leading man standards, by racist Hollywood leading man standards, Bitter would be considered wabi sabi. However he is so expressive, big eyes and "big lips" have advantages, and gets such delight from the erotic heat he generates wriggling out of his "uniform" to writhe in short shorts, that I doubt there was an audience member of any sexual inclination that wasn't wondering if they could somehow take a crash course in how to fuck in Spanish.

Bitter is intense and the character of Chachi - a sort of game show host or mondo master of ceremonies - pushes the edge of aggressivity in some audience participation segments that push the edge of that form's already dubious appeal. It is a credit to Bitter's skill and charisma that he holds it all together and keeps the audience so spellbound that



there is no time to question where it is all going. And the urgency with which Bitter performs transcends the need for tidy endings. For Venezuela, for talented queer immigrants, there aren't necessarily going to be tidy endings. It is too soon to put a tidy bow on either thread, both are still in flux. Bitter's journey is just beginning, *Chicho* is one hell of a showcase.

*Chicho continues until Sun, March 24 at Theatre Pass Muraille, 16 Ryerson Ave. [passemuraille.ca](http://passemuraille.ca)*



# We Know Gay



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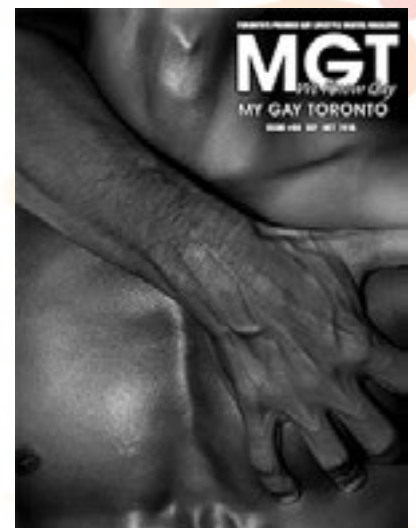
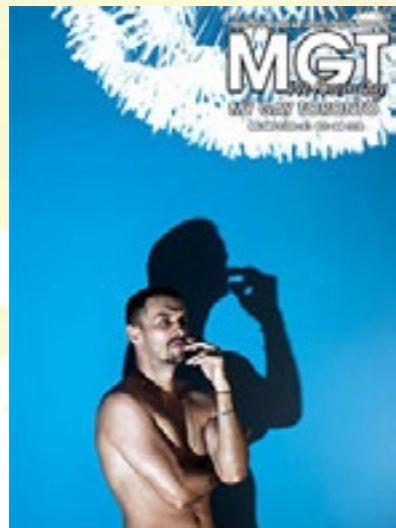
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