

# MGT

*We Know Gay*

MY GAY TORONTO

ISSUE #67 NOV/DEC 2019.





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**RAYMOND HELKIO** goes underground with Donnarama Versace and photographer Sean Leber (page 16); finds Todrick Hall fierce (page 3); rocks with Men In Suits (page 5); suggests some really GAY gift ideas (page 8); muses on five wonderfully weird things about The Wizard Of Oz (page 10) and The Shining (page 13); surveys the hottest events of the coming club season (page 15)

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**PLUS MUCH MORE!**

**MGT DIGITAL**

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RAYMOND HELKIO

# TODRICK



If you haven't heard of Todrick Hall, you're in for a sweet surprise. He's behind some of the fiercest tracks that combine his bold, over-the-top persona and choreography with equally unapologetic lyrics. With three number one albums and over three million YouTube subscribers, Todrick is taking queendom to a whole new level.

As a recurring judge and resident choreographer on RuPaul's Drag Race Todrick has also been on Broadway including Kinky Boots, Chicago, The Color Purple and Memphis. He has choreographed videos for Beyon-

cé; written and starred in the Virgin America safety video, was featured in Taylor Swift's record-breaking music video "Look What You Made Me Do" and most recently he starred in/co-executive produced her latest video "You Need to Calm Down." Todrick can also be seen on the television shows, Queer Eye, Crazy Ex-Girlfriend, Dear White People, Bring It, Dance Moms, Catfish, Bob's Burgers, American Idol, Muppet Babies and is the star of the Netflix documentary Behind the Curtain.

While most musicians are zigging, he's zagging his fanny all

over the charts, taking up huge amounts of space as an out queer artist which makes his performances brave, if not morally courageous. But all of this has become a backdrop to the latest allegations from former disgruntled employees of his. In any event, the music is still genius and a whole lot of fun to watch, grab yourself a glass of bubbly and subscribe to his YouTube channel for a solid bout of ferociousness.

Enjoy.



PAUL BELLINI

# Kappa Force: exploring what's happening now through genre fiction



Addison Heimann worked in theatre in Chicago. Then one day, “in the deep darkness of a depression that almost got me . . . while binge watching old Buffy the Vampire Slayer episodes until six in the morning, I dreamt up a crazy farce. An intersectional queer superhero force dedicated to saving the world and destroying evil frat bro scum. I created a world I wanted to live in: a world in which a trans woman, an asian woman, a black woman, and a lesbian kick butt and take names.”

The result is the new Revry Original series Kappa Force, which takes place at a fictional American university. It’s about Jen (Madeline Weinstein of Alex Strangelove), who is new on campus and almost instantly drawn into the superhero sorority. When one of the sorority sisters is murdered at the hands of a villain calling himself The Douche, the stability of the sisterhood, and the college, comes into jeopardy.

“We made it for about \$50,000 in Chicago,” says Heimann. “We asked a lot of favours to make this thing happen. We couldn’t pay anywhere near a full rate, but our director knew the Chicago scene so she knew who to call.”

Other than Buffy, Heimann’s influence was *Scream Queens*. He’s very good at finding that comedic tone without sacrificing the action or the jeopardy. And of course, the Kappa Force are all over the spectrum. “I grew up on comic books. I knew I would make it subversive, because I wouldn’t want to watch something that didn’t have different queer voices. I can’t make things that aren’t inclusive.”

Heimann is working on lots of other ideas, including a show about humans interacting



with artificial intelligence that would feature a girl in conversation with a computer waiting for her consciousness to be uploaded to an animatronic body, and something he refers to as ‘a gay *Knightrider*’. “Everything I write is genre fiction, which is a great way to explore what’s happening right now.”

**KAPPA FORCE** is released on Pluto TV, XUMO and Revry on Oct. 27th.

## RAYMOND HELKIO



Okay, so they're not all men in suits. At one time the band was made up of all Bay Street business executives, and while it's still true for some, their sexy singer Trish Fonberg is anything but a man in a suit. Leading the vocals with her is powerhouse rocker Gerry Throop who also plays the guitar alongside Jim Hardy (guitar) and underscored by Vince Mazza on drums.

The band was conceived by technology thought-leader Don Tapscott on keyboards who onstage is a mix between Elton John and Chris Lowe of the Pet Shop Boys. During their 20 years doing gigs for charity, the band has managed to raise more than \$3 million playing at venues such as The Revival Room, Roy Thompson Hall, This Is London, C-Lounge, The Design Exchange and, if you're old enough to remember, The Bamboo Club. They even once played the Air Canada Centre for a Canadian Blood Services drive. But it's the intimacy, not just the great sound system, that The Orbit Room is famous for. Co-founded by Alex Lifeson of RUSH, the venue has seen its fair share of celebrities. According to Stewart, "Once we were playing a gig there and doing a Barenaked Ladies number and who walks in but Ed Robertson!"

Men In Suits have also performed live with Canada's darling Amy Sky, rapper Duke McKenzie and Triumphs' Rik Emmett. They even earned a nod from the *National Post* who has referred to them "Bay Street's hardest working band." Men In Suits' repertoire spans the '60s through to the present so there is something for almost every age and musical peccadillo. But at heart, they are a dance band and their setlists have been time-tested and reduced to pure hardcore party tunes.

Their upcoming gig at The Orbit Room is being spearheaded by Men In Suits' bassist Stewart Borden who is raising funds for Rainbow Railroad, a charity that helps LGBT people around the world escape persecution and violence and find a safe, secure place to live. Borden, who is also part of a Rainbow Railroad newcomer settlement team, is holding the event to raise funds to help safely relocate two gay Iranians forced to flee from persecution. "The money raised through this event will directly help two people who have had to flee their country in fear of their life. Right now I'm hosting them at my home and it's been eye-opening to learn about LGBT life in the more hostile parts of the world."

While we do have things pretty good in Canada to put things in perspective it is illegal to be gay in over 72 countries, with six of those countries imposing the death penalty if you are caught or even suspected of being gay. Iran is one of those countries, and if recent news reports of President Hassan Rouhani's position on LGBT human rights haven't shocked you, his public executions of gay people should.

"It's a big problem but not insurmountable when people can use their power to collectively to change this. I hope this event helps to uncomplicated the current situation of LGBT people around the world. I know it'll be a great time," says Borden.

Join Men in Suits as they party down at the amazing Orbit Room, proceeds to help LGBTI refugees escape persecution and violence through Rainbow Railroad.

**MEN IS SUITS**

The Orbit Room  
Thursday, December 5, 2019  
8:30 PM – 11:30 PM  
580A College Street, Toronto  
TICKETS: \$25 & \$100 VIP seating:  
<https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4442132>

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BIG  
SCREENS



# RuPaul's UK

DRAG RACE

## VIEWING PARTY

PAUL BELLINI

# The danger of meatballs

Three weeks ago I was fighting for my life. On October 25 I entered St. Michael's Hospital for routine hernia surgery. The operation went fine. The problems started the next night. Hospital food being what it is, I was served a plate of horrific Swedish meatballs. A few hours later I went to sleep, still on heavy pain killers. The next thing I remember was a blinding white light. I was trying to claw my way upward as doctors and nurses with wings flew around me, telling me to calm down.

Two days later, I came to in the ICU unit. I was surrounded by glowing lights and my family and friends. It felt like I was in a Brazilian soap opera. They gathered around, clucking and clutching my hands. I was told that I almost died, from choking on my own vomit. That fucking Swedish meatball.



For four days I was on a breathing tube, unable to eat, drink or move anything other than my bloodshot eyeballs. I had suffered from pulmonary aspiration, so popular with rock stars, the same thing that killed Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham, AC/DC singer Bon Scott, and Jimi Hendrix. Except I was lucky. A nurse had noticed that I had stopped breathing and I was rescued in time, but for several days I was on the critical list. Eventually, the breathing tube came out and I lay there weak and stunned. Although the prolonged lack of oxygen did not affect my heart or brain functions, my kidneys failed and there was talk of dialysis.

Gradually, I came to realize how close I came to kicking the bucket. The staff at St. Mike's were



amazing, and the whole time I kept thinking of Tommy Douglas, and how he created our health care system and how all this would cost me nothing. Had this happened in the States, I would have survived the trauma but died from the hospital bill. I kept saying prayers and writing thank you notes in my head. I felt nothing but love for everybody.

Not once during this ordeal did I feel like I was alone. I had the support of my sister Christine and her family, my partner Georges and his mother, and the support of my oldest and closest friends, including Scott Thompson, Randall Finnerty, Paul Pogue and Josh Levy, many who flew in to make sure I would pull through. When it occurred to me that my prolonged convalescence would lead to financial ruin, my cousin Jessica, aided by Maggie Cassella and Brad Fraser, launched a successful gofundme page. The amount of donations offered to me was overwhelming, and will more than cover my financial woes. The vast majority of the donors were from the comedy community, or Kids in the Hall fans, or former students. Some were people I haven't seen in over 40 years. I thank each and every one of them. After 12 days, I finally went home to begin my long convalescence. If I learned anything from all this, it is that love that keeps us alive. It is love that keeps us going. It is a lesson that has both humbled and energized me. It will probably take the rest of my life to truly show my thanks. I am also certain that I will never ever again eat a Swedish meatball.

RAYMOND HELKIO

# Rainbow Lightboxes, Queer Portraits & Other Really Gay Gift Ideas

Church Street display of Rainbow Lightboxes by David O'Brien, photo by Raymond Helkio. Handmade Rainbow Lightbox also by David O'Brien. Stephen Beckly print. Gertrude Stien portrait by Sarah Hunter.



A stunning collection of back-lit works called *Rainbow Lightboxes* by artist David O'Brien. A few pieces have been installed in The Window at 558 Church Street with prices for the larger works ranging from \$500-\$1500. But if you're not flush with funds this year, there are several works under \$100 including a handmade 4 x 7" lightbox for \$85 and the IMAX Lightbox Canyon, \$75 (both pictured here). All stunning. [lightboxgallery.ca](http://lightboxgallery.ca)

Queer portraits by Toronto artist Sarah Hunter capture some of history's greatest queer people including Gertrude Stein, Alice Toklas, Billie Holiday, David Hockney and Marcel Proust. Prices are set by the artist and range from \$325 to \$350, check out more of their work at [turtlart.ca](http://turtlart.ca).

Buddies In Bad Times Theatre has Artist Limited Edition Prints for sale which are introduced each year at ArtAttack and remain on sale after the event. Prints



available include Steven Beckly's *There's a land that I heard of*, 10 x 14", \$500 and Daryl Vocat's *Save Lives*, 14 x 18" both come framed courtesy Akasha Art Projects, proceeds to support the theatre. [buddiesinbadtimes.com/support/limited-edition-prints](http://buddiesinbadtimes.com/support/limited-edition-prints)

"Musings From The Bunker" is a grand and bold book from Patricia Wilson, the bar manager behind Buddies In Bad Times Theatre. Raw, honest and at times intense her writing is balanced with a straight-forward sense of humour. Life experiences, wisdom and good old fashioned storytelling that you can stuff in your stockings! Available on Amazon or at Glad Day Bookshop, 499 Church St.

Another great stocking stuffer is

a walking tour by The ArQuives through their house on Isabella Street. For a minimum \$5 donation per person, this bi-monthly tour will take you through some of their collections, including Mark Leduc's boxing belt, Mark Tweksbury's Olympic torch and playwright John Herbert's typewriter as well as matchbooks, coasters and buttons from queer bars and spaces long gone but not forgotten. Book online: [arquives.ca](http://arquives.ca)



Church Street display of Rainbow Lightboxes by David O'Brien, photo by Raymond Helkio. Handmade Rainbow Lightbox also by David O'Brien. Stephen Beckly print. Gertrude Stien portrait by Sarah Hunter.



SKY GILBERT

# Should We Censor The Joker?

Photo visual from official movie trailer

Joaquin Phoenix's new flick *The Joker* is stirring up endless controversy. The *Toronto Star* says: "at the post-screening party, a debate broke out amongst the journalists and industry executives over whether the movie could become part of the texts cited by mass shooters." Sarah Hagi of *The Globe and Mail* warns us: "the film does offer a queasy sense of entitlement, which seems to ring true to how lonely, violent men view themselves."

The subject here is censorship — though no one seems capable of mentioning the word. For even if critics are not asking for *The Joker* to be pulled from theatres, this brand of journalistic rhetoric delivers a chilling message to artists and creators. Has the time come finally to stop creating films and plays with controversial themes? Maybe we should only write stories about politically correct heroes and heroines — men and women who are non-violent, virtuous, tolerant, and loving? The problem with cleansing art of any representation of toxic humanity, is that repellant individuals do exist (and will exist forever, unfortunately). Not thinking about them — or not talking about them — doesn't solve the problem, it simply exacerbates it.

Those who suggest that *The Joker* should not have been made or widely distributed are buying into the false notion that art is the cause of human evil. This has never been proved, and never will be. Art — far from being the cause of societal

distress — is merely its symptom. Art offers a barometer about what plagues and obsesses us; it is a unique and often weirdly accurate snapshot of how awful we are.

But it is not only art that is threatened by these veiled journalistic threats. This controversy over *The Joker* also endangers free speech. Social justice warriors have recently suggested that only those they deem 'without privilege' can ever really be victims of censorship. These suggestions are much more toxic than any movie representation of a comic book villain. Censorship is censorship no matter who is censored. I detest right-wing hate as much as anyone, but eradicating such speech from theatre, films, books and entertainment will merely silence thought and drive hate underground.

Joaquin Phoenix's *The Joker* originates from the long tradition of discomfiting and attractive villains — one that goes back to medieval morality plays. We might as well banish 'The Devil' from *Everyman*. (The fact is that 'The Devil' happens to be the most interesting character in the play — much more enthralling for an actor to portray, or for us to watch — than a rather pallid and predictable character named Jesus!)

The fact is that banishing the representation of evil from art, spells the end of art itself.

RAYMOND HELKIO

# 5 Wonderfully Weird Things about The Wizard Of Oz

## 5

### WONDERFULLY WEIRD THINGS ABOUT THE WIZARD OF OZ

#### #1 THE STINKY COWARDLY LION

The Cowardly Lion's costume was made out of real lion hair which, under the intense heat of the studio lights, meant the studio had to have actor Brent Lahr's costume put into an industrial drying bin.

#### #2 ALUMINUM KNOCKED THE TIN MAN DOWN

For two weeks, the Tin Man was hospitalized and kept on oxygen because of the toxic amount of aluminium in his make-up.

#### #3 TOXIC SNOW

The Wizard of OZ has grown into a holiday favourite in part because of the magical snowfall scene in the poppy

field. To get that effect, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer used chrysotile asbestos which is essentially the purest form of asbestos. At the time, the risks of exposure to asbestos were widely known but because it looked so realistic they used it anyway. Prior to asbestos flakes, studios would often use cotton pieces but as you can imagine, coating a movie set with highly flammable material was not exactly a safe practice either.

#### #4 THE WITCHES ARE BURNING!

Margaret Hamilton who played the wicked witch caught on fire during the scene where she was supposed to disappear in a cloud of smoke. The studio crew had used a real fire to create the smoke but acci-

dentally started it before she was safely out of range. The fire had started on her broom and quickly spread to her hat, ultimately was engulfing it in flames and leaving her forehead and hand badly burned. A stunt double was brought in to try the scene again and she too caught fire.

#### #5 IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

While there's nothing wonderful about this fact, it is true. Judy Garland was just 16 when she accepted the role as Dorothy. She was the second lowest paid actor after the dog Toto, whose real name was Terry. Okay, calling your dog Terry is totally weird.

SKY GILBERT

# You Are Erasing My Desire



With the rise of all-gender washrooms comes the end of urinals. Apparently what we have to look forward in this 'ideal world' is rows and rows of bathroom stalls, with all genders and non-genders waiting in line to use them. There is only one problem with this model of the new washroom.

It erases my desire.

Washroom sex is part of gay culture. And before you say — “What the . . . ?” — try and understand that yes we are a minority group, and yes we are oppressed, and yes we have developed a culture that is different than yours. Sure gay men are sometimes raped by other men. But our rape does not make us afraid, like heterosexual women. No, in our bars, bathrooms, backrooms and bath houses we have developed a civil sexual culture in which gay men understand that they can flirt and touch other gay men — in very intimate ways - and that ‘no still means no.’ Sure there are rude outliers — but gay culture simply has less rules around unwanted touching. Frankly we need them less than you do. Men’s bathrooms are sexual places. Try reading the graffiti (or maybe that will be banned now, too?) Yes, when men — all of them, straight or gay — stand at urinals, you know what? They look. They look, and sometimes they touch. Sometimes they get a message — “No way.” Most men when they get that message will stop touching. It’s civil. But all men know that urinals are sexual places, whether men choose to be sexual there or not. Period.

The end of urinals means the end of all that. It means the death of an iconic gay image — the drag queen at a urinal, her dress hiked up above her ass, proudly,

freeing her libido and her wee. It’s over. We will not see that image again; we are not allowed to have that desire again.

I want to ask those who believe that all washrooms should be all-gender washrooms one simple question. Why are you doing this to us? Why? Why are you so intent on erasing my desire?



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RAYMOND HELKIO

# 5

## WONDERFULLY WEIRD FACTS ABOUT

# THE SHINING

### 1 The soundtrack was written by a transwoman.

*The Shinning* was composed by Grammy award-winning Wendy Carlos who is also responsible for the music of *A Clockwork Orange* and *Tron*.

### #2 Stanley Kubrick hadn't read Stephen King's screenplay.

Kubrick not only avoided reading the screenplay, but he hired another writer to rework the entire thing. Stephen King didn't like the adaptation at all.

### #3 Jack Torrance was a repressed homosexual.

In the opening scene, Jack

Nicholson, who plays Jack Torrance, is sitting in the hotel lobby leafing through a magazine while he waits for the hotel manager. That magazine was *Playgirl*. There are dozens of other references to his character's sexuality but that's fodder for another article.

### #4 Room 237 never existed.

Room 237 was the room in the hotel where all the freaky shit went down, but the actual room they filmed in was 217. The hotel, the Timberline Lodge in Oregon, was worried about future guests not booking the room so they picked a number that didn't correspond to any actual room numbers. Ironically, after the films release room 217 became, and

remains, the most booked room at the hotel.

### #5 The Shining was (almost) a flop.

The Shining was the follow-up to Kubrick's worst received film, *Barry Lyndon* in 1975 which cost \$11 million to make but earned only \$9.5 million. With this failure fresh on his CV the success of this film was more important than ever to save his reputation, but when *The Shining* came out it did so badly that it earned them Razzie nominations for "Worst Actress" and "Worst Director." It cost \$19 million to make and after some major editing, the film was made shorter and went on to generate over \$50 million, one of the highest-grossing films of the '80s.



SKY GILBERT

# Let Meghan Murphy Speak!



Have we gone insane?

I ask that quite literally. A woman dares to identify as a woman, and dares to say that there are two genders, and people consequently brand her words as ‘hate speech’ and ‘equivalent to physical violence’?

What is going on here?

Anyone who has actually read Meghan Murphy’s writings will tell you that her words are not hateful, and that she is not ‘transphobic’ or even homophobic. She is a thoughtful woman with an important, well-reasoned point of view.

Frankly, even if her words were homophobic, I — for one — would not demand that she be silenced or locked up.

Those who wish to ban Meghan Murphy’s ideas are effectively burning books. It is not merely ironic — but terrifying — that a library in a free society is being asked to curtail freedom of speech.

Vickery Bowles is undoubtedly Toronto’s top librarian. She should be given some sort of award for defending Meghan Murphy. She is on the right side of history, and has spoken bravely and eloquently— as a librarian should — about the importance of the unfettered circulation of ideas

in a free society.

We need to stop the finger-pointing, name-calling — stop the hatred and the demonization — and start respecting each other as human beings. Will some be driven to pain, distraction, or even suicide by ideas they hear or read? Sadly yes; this is the downside of living in a society that does not censor ideas. The alternative is much more horrifying — a world unburdened by the unfettered circulation of ideas.

Words are not violence. Books are not violence. Libraries are not violence.

In fact, they are quite the opposite.

Society has a duty to protect the weak from physical assault, but not to protect the vulnerable from offensive speech.

Libraries offer ideas that may offend. It is their job to challenge our established and entrenched feelings and prejudices, and that is a good thing.

We abandon them at our peril.

RAYMOND HELKIO

# Dance Kahmps, Santa's After Workshop and DJ Abel goes all night long!



Photo of previous Dance Camp Gogo boys by Raymond Helkio

## Camp it up at Dance Kahmp

Dance Kahmp has returned and has made itself a home at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre. The over-the-top performances, go go boys and zany themes make this monthly Saturday night event a huge hit. Host Rolyn Chambers' party coincided with the closing of FLY 2.0 which gives the kids a performance-based replacement dancefloor. The next parties are November 9, December 14 and January 11. Keep your eye out for the party zine YumeEe! which comes out just before each party.

## Santa's After Workshop

On Friday, December 21, Buddies In Bad Times Theatre's After Werk series will pack 'em in for Santa's After Workshop. Wear red, white and green or some other equally tacky colour combination and settle in for D'Manda Tension, Sapphire Titha Reign and DJ Sofia Fly. Cover is \$5 before 11 pm, \$10 after.

## Dance Floor Make Out

After kissing all those relatives it nice to know there's a place you

can go and full-on make out with someone. Just hop on the dance floor and get making out to the sexy beats of DJs John Caffery and Joshua Reid. Friday, December 21 at The Black Eagle. Also on December 21, cubs collide at The Beaver, 1192 Queen St West for DJ Scooter McCreight, hosted by BONBON. \$10 (\$5 before 12).

## FML Mondays

DJ Recklezz, Devine Darlin and Sofonda Cox are just some of the talent you'll find at FML Mondays at Flash on Church Street. Hosted by MoJo Toronto, this space takes on a friendly super-party

atmosphere attracting a wide array of industry, club and late-night party goers. 11PM every Monday.

## DJs Galore!

November 16 at 10 p.m Prism presents Manzone and Strong, Amalia Leandro, AERYN PFAFF and Leo Franco for a huge dance party at One Loft, 292 College Street. Tickets \$20-\$25. Also presented by Prism, DJ/Producer Abel on December 6, 10 pm until the early morning at 5 am at CODA nightclub, 794 Bathurst Street, \$30.



RAYMOND HELKIO

Going UNDERGROUND with

# DONNARAMA VERSACE

Photos by Sean Leber







*We've known each other since we were teenagers. We first met when she was on the floor of an after-hours, wearing nothing but a cherry-red wig and her own vomit. She's cleaned up a bit since then. We did a bunch of shows together in the early aughts. She dumped buckets of fake blood on me and nailed me to a cardboard cross. I threw a glass of milk in her face and pushed her down a flight of stairs. Très avant-garde. One time we're getting ready for a show at Woody's and she casually drops the fact that the manager is giving her a free ticket to Madonna. But only one. I can barely draw my eyebrows straight I'm so pissed, especially since it happens to be my birthday. Anyway, we finish the show and the manager drops by the dressing room with an envelope.*

*"Oh, girl!" she says. "Wanna see my Madonna ticket?" I politely decline, still livid. She whips it out of the envelope and shoves it in my face. "See! Isn't it beautiful." Then, suddenly, she slides her fingers apart and a second ticket appears behind the first one. "Oh look!" she says. "There's two! Happy Birthday, Cunt!" I'll always love her for that. – NYC's Bitter Lydia to MGT about Donnarama*







If you know Donnarama, then you know her name is synonymous with outrageously imaginative costumes. Every outfit is hand made only to be recycled after every show into entirely new concepts, or as she explains, “I keep very few things, I donate them to wherever I can, I’ll drop them off to a place like Value Village. In fact, before Halloween, I dropped off at least 50 things, an entire rack of my stuff just and then on the night of, I see all of these people walking around in my outfits! I just can’t keep them, there is such a mass quantity of stuff and because I’m always making something new, I just can’t. I give them to anyone who needs them, especially young queens.”

For a photoshoot with *MGT* publisher and photographer Sean Leber, Donnarama ventured to a grimly lit parking garage in downtown Toronto to collaborate on a series of photos. After four hours, the two emerged with a collection (shown here) of images that are beautiful, divergent and sexy as hell!

Donnarama’s work is often wrapped in a political, satirical, or personal messaging which she unapologetically brings to life on stage through her boundary-pushing performances. After her first drag show at 17, the girl has literally been everywhere. She’s ruled the stage at Pride Toronto events, been invited by Keith Cole to speak at the Art Gallery of Ontario, been the star of numerous short films and videos, not to mention she has literally performed in every single venue in Toronto, with the exception of Bad Dog Theatre which she says is next on her list, “The one place I haven’t done is Bad Dog Theatre, otherwise I’ve performed in every single venue in this city. I’m not kidding. That was always my goal, I wanted to do every single venue there is!” In my recent interview with the crafty subversive genius, Donnarama and I spoke about her recent photoshoot, making art and her upcoming mixed media collaboration.



**Raymond Helkio:**  
**The photoshoot with Sean looks amazing, what was it like working together with Sean?**

***Donnarama:** It was so much fun, I loved it. He said "Let's go down here and see what we can do", and so I said, "Yeah let's go!" I loved the happy coincidences that we came up with. Most of it he had sent me location pictures ahead of time so we just scouted it out a bit more on the day of and then he was, "See what you can do with what you have, or what do you want to create. I just happened to bring this pink sheet with me, thinking it might be a nice backdrop for something. There's one particular picture where a car is covered up, just like the drag queen, I just loved it because it's the opposite of how everything should be, which makes it perfect. I also loved this shoot because it was underground, and there is less and less raw art and things like that happening now. Everything is much more stylized, plotted and planned so I love that he said let's just go underground and do something.*





### What performers inspire you?

**Donnarama:** Well, longevity-wise when I look at someone who's still kicking it, it's Ms Conception. We kinda came from the same school, literally actually. She went to the art school across from my school, so we grew up at the same time, in the same place all to end up in the same place. I love her. Also, Andrew Harwood was a major inspiration when I started. This guy doesn't give a shit about anything. He was wearing a green wig and silver lashes and that was very freeing for people, we're all very used to that Woody's glam look and the hot divas. And then you have Andrew, a wonderful alternative to all of the seriousness and he was pushing artistic envelopes. I really like him, he's a big weirdo!



### **What about in the international circuit?**

**Donnarama:** *Yeah, there's always Madonna, she's always the first answer. She easily turns people off by testing their limitations. You don't want to get too serious as an artist, but I do think that's she pissed about something, and so I really like that. In a way, it's not really entertainment then, it's about politics.*

### **You've been exploring a lot of movie themes through your costumes, why the sudden shift?**

**Donnarama:** *In all honesty, it came to a point where I had done everything. When I was putting in all the effort it was always in trying to make sure that people were happy, but my own interests were always getting buried. I feel strange to say it, but I really like even Garbage from back in the day,*

*stuff that isn't commercial or accessible. I like that kind of stuff. So I started to get into the movies. I'm a huge cult horror movie fan and initially, when I began getting into art I went to school as a visual artist because I wanted to get into special*

*makeup effects. That's why I incorporate so many props and things into my work now. Next, I really want to do an indie horror project, I really want to make a movie. I've already written it, but it's so crazy I don't even know where to begin.*





**Of all the drag shows you've done in over your career, which performance was the most rewarding, and why?**

**Donnarama:** *It was when I pulled a piece of chicken out of my bra, that was in 2007 at Shane Percy's Grapefruit. We did "Give Me More" by Britney. It was two days later after she went on stage and she had her nervous breakdown but then kinda got herself together again for her new*

*album. But she wasn't quite together, she had a publicly bad week and was a bit pudgy. So one day Shane said, "I really want you to do this," so I came up with some clever plans to stuff myself with food, where I was eating the entire time I was on stage. I was choking and screwing up my lipstick but I loved that one. I grew up, SCTV and SNL, those kinds of skits of celebrities, so it was rewarding to be able to eat AND do a show.*



**What aspect of the drag or entertainment industry would you like to see changed?**

***Donnarama:** I think there should be less control exerted over artists and journalists. If you're an artist or journalist, and you have what I consider to be your God-given-right to experiment, especially if you're in a "community" where we should be embracing and supporting one another, but it's not always*

*like that. I would probably take the edge off the vanity and the angst in our culture, make things less superficial, that's what I would change in my field.*

**Looking back on your career, what's been one of the most memorable moments?**

***Donnarama:** I've always ended up in a lucky spot. Like this film festival where they hired me to go cover it. It was for She Does*

*The City and they wanted to incorporate more drag into the life of the girls because of its fun, and so I went dressed like Madonna in an outrageous crazy outfit. It was exaggerated and funny like everything has to be. When we got inside and were sitting in the theatre, there was Madonna right there! We were all on a Jumbotron together, I love when things come full circle, it's very rewarding for me.*





**What are you working on right now?**

*Donnarama: I'm really excited about a project I'm working with an artist named Lorette Lutzajic. She collected a lot of my selfies and pictures over the past year or two and turned them into a mixed media art on canvas, it's an incredible project, and it's so so good, they look like tarot cards and I'm really into it right now.*

**When can the public see it?**

*Donnarama: Oh, definitely by the end of the year. She's put so much work putting it together and we're looking for the perfect place to do it. And when we do it, it will be an event, and you're all invited!*



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DREW ROWSOME



# Copy That: an effervescently nasty ensemble with crack comic timing



Production photos by Cylla von Tiedemann

Four harried writers are racing to get the scripts for a police procedural television series completed. Not only are they contending with their own internecine battles, but there are calls from Elsa, their boss and the level between the writers and the network's decisions, who has lot of notes and suggestions. *Copy That* is a fast paced comic vivisection of the foibles of television creation. The writers spout clichés in pursuit of being "fresh," use racial and gender stereotypes in pursuit of being woke, and insist they are artists with vision while they casually sell out.

The satire zings merrily along until there is an incident, driving while black, and one of the writer's has his political conscience set ablaze. Conflict among the five escalates and playwright Jason Sherman uneasily tackles some very tough issues while maintaining *Copy That's* comic tone. And doesn't succeed, which very well be the point. The *Copy That* characters not only turn on each other, the play turns on the audience with a conceptual masterstroke.

As the characters race to abandon their ideals - and struggle to come up with plausible reasons and excuses why - Sherman toys with the stakes. As a theatre audience, who have braved the





elements to experience art, we are predisposed to look at television smugly. We are eager to laugh at the inferior creative process even though Sherman is clear to point out it is work, an honest craft and job. And Sherman ups the ante by seducing us with television tropes - the disembodied voice (Charlie, Carlton the doorman, Debbie Wolowitz), rhythmic punchline beats, the workplace setting with outside relationships only existing for motivation, etc - which through sheer familiarity are comforting.

Sherman even has a character quote from a screenwriting textbook about a technique which is then mocked by the other characters as a pointless suggestion. At which point Sherman uses the technique, not once, but twice, and both times successfully. The skill of satirical subtext is so effective that the audience is reduced to a laugh track. It is a comfortable and very uncomfortable place to be. Director Jamie Robinson pushes it just a bit further, having the cast fire off their lines with occasional appeals directly to the audience. Not enough to shatter the fourth wall but, in true television close-up style, enough to make the viewer/audience complicit.

Like a very special episode, we are presented with contentious difficult material that is never resolved, but a twist ending and gag lets us off the hook. Except, in this case, the hook remains lodged. The cast tasked with keeping the farce and clichés spinning while being unrealistically real, constantly operating on two levels, is formidable. Richard Waugh claims centre stage as the world weary showrunner who is nominally in charge, and whose crusty exterior cracks heroically. It is a showy role and Waugh bites into it with the glee of a television actor given actual dialogue.



Tony Ofori (*Bunny*) simmers with moral indignation making his eventual explosive dilemma all the more powerful. Emma Ferreira bristles with frustration and adds subtle shades to the conceptually

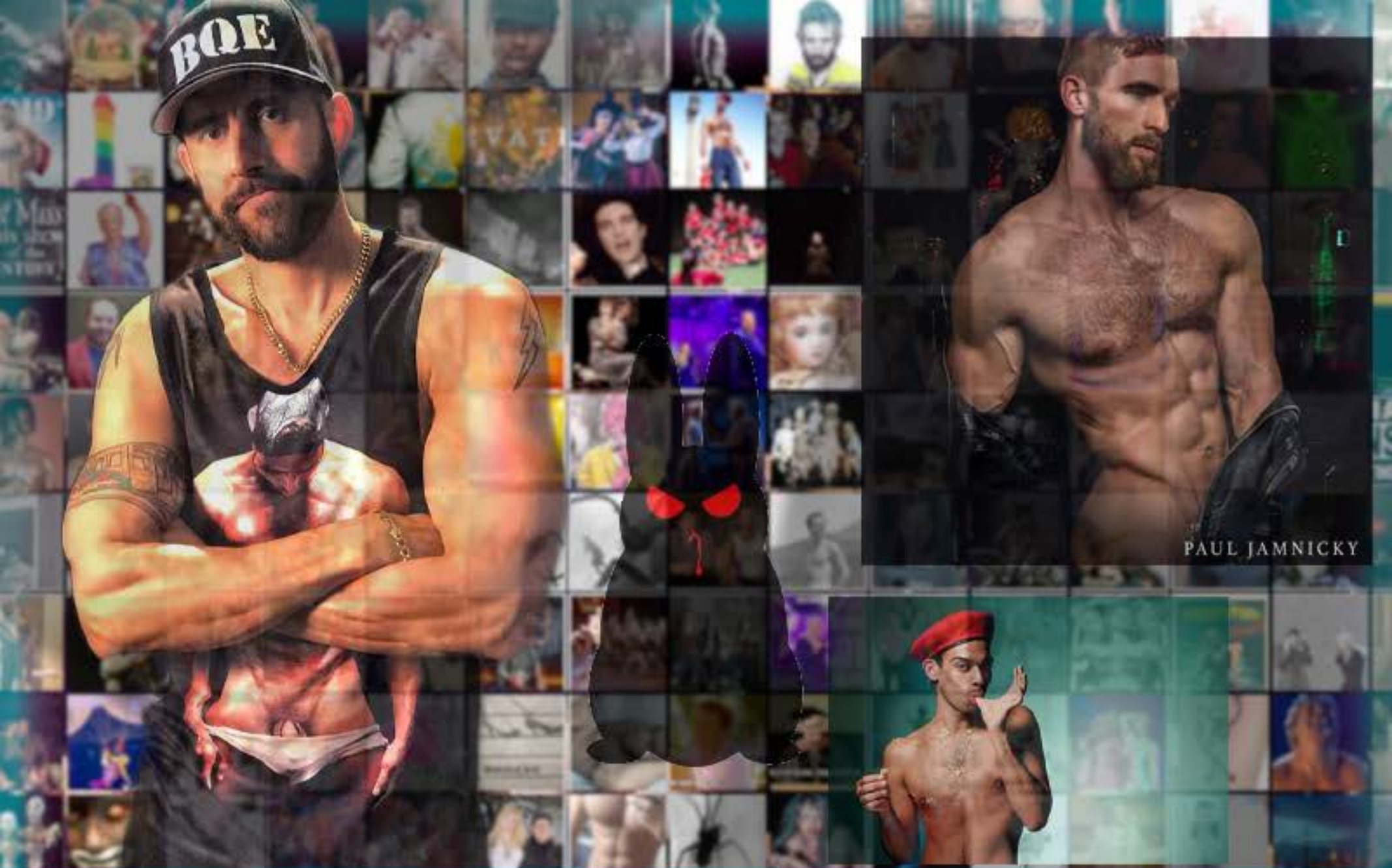
underwritten part of the underwritten female character. Jeff Lillico ([Unravelled](#), [Bang Bang](#), [Tom at the Farm](#), [Cinderella](#)) anchors the proceedings with a slimy but appealing utter lack of remorse or virtue. Janet Laine-Green is a grande dame diva and relishes not only her villainy but also the brief flashes of vulnerability. Together they form an effervescently nasty troupe as they banter and betray each other, adding a Lubitsch touch to the deceptive ease of a sitcom or procedural ensemble.



Waugh refers to the series' "bible" and it is not much of a leap to view *Copy That* as a meditation on basic morality and decency. The characters are not just flawed, they are frequently despicable. And tragically, their goal is never to create art, just to write what will either sell or please their overlords. In the same manner, *Copy That* is eager to please, there are copious laughs and plot twists but the final result is to force us to look at the machinations and analyze the problems and horrors that *Copy That* presents but doesn't grapple with. The hope is that we will apply the same scrutiny to life's inequalities and injustices as we do to television's, and theatre's, glib presentation of them as entertainment.

*Copy That* continues until Sun, Dec 8 at Tarragon Theatre, 30 Bridgman Ave. [tarragontheatre.com](http://tarragontheatre.com)





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

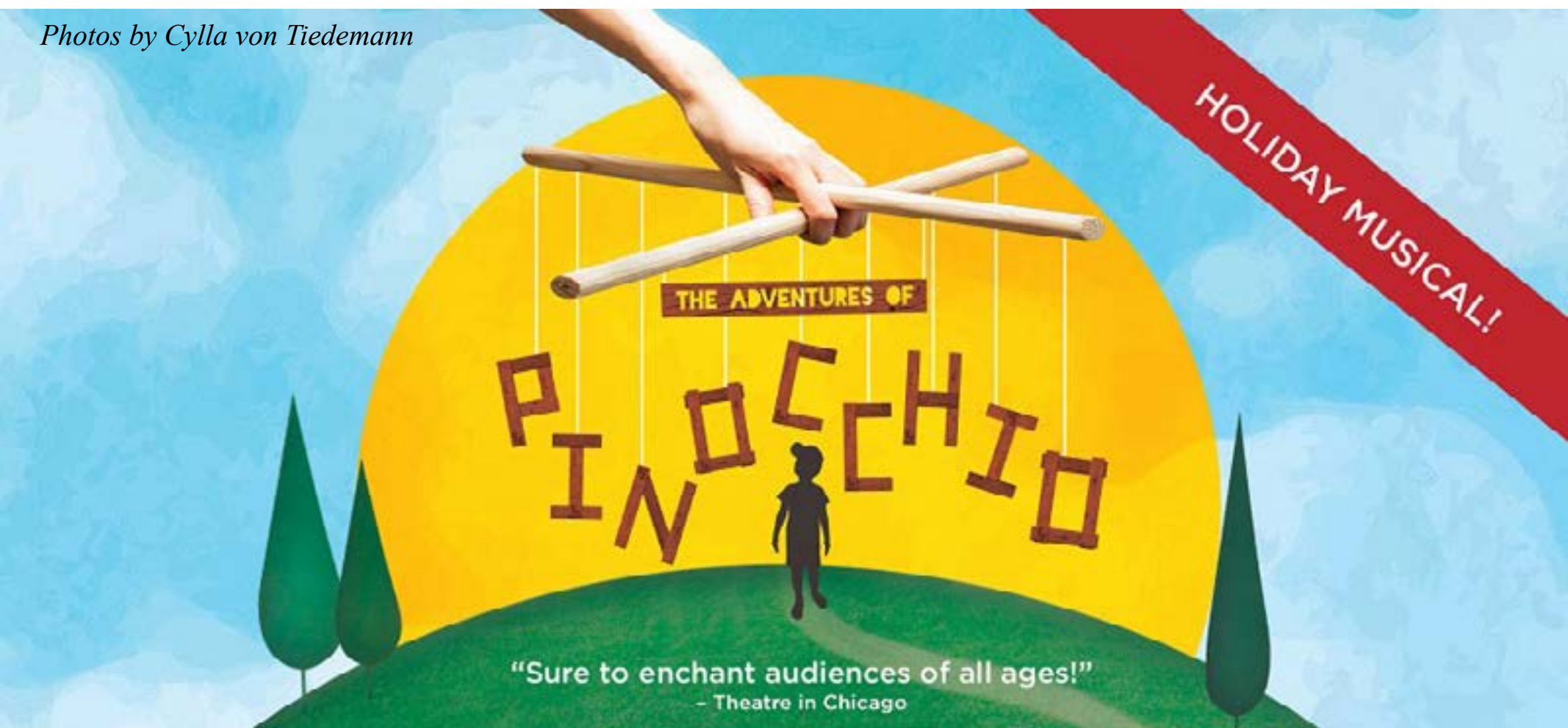




# Pinocchio:

## overwhelming innocence, song and dance, and fabulous fish

Photos by Cylla von Tiedemann



Scrooges and Grinches will hate *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. I, with all the Scrooge/Grinch attributes I acquire during the Christmas season, loved it. No amount of cynicism and no attempts to parse for subtext, were able to counteract the overwhelming innocence and joyful song and dance. And that is quite a Christmas gift.



Being a production from Young People's Theatre, I was aware that *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is not aimed at me as a demographic. That it is so effective and entertaining was a delight. The basic storyline is familiar from either the dark original tale or the slightly less dark Disney version. This incarnation skips over Pinocchio's quest to become "a real boy" and instead focusses on the consequences of choices. Fortunately, only superficially. The journey to Pinocchio's redemption is an rambunctious romp through Carlo Collodi's ambiguous fairy tale.



Director Sheila McCarthy and the Young People's Theatre creative team come up with solutions to a surplus of plot and locations with ingenuity and imagination. We do see Pinocchio's nose grow when he lies, we do travel to Terra dei Ragazzi, and a chunk of wood is transformed, before our very eyes, into a boy. And we get to see how the effects are created, share the secret. By the time the giant fish with the glowing eyes appears, the effect is to wonder at the power of suspending disbelief. It is a fabulous fish.



Whether that magical theatrical quality will translate to children raised on a steady diet of flashy special effects and CGI, is not for me to speculate. But the ones peppering the audience seemed rapt, and gasped in all the right places. More importantly, so did I. If the songs by Neil Bartram are not as earwormy as the Sherman brothers - I left singing "Comedy Tonight" from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* which one of *The Adventures of Pinocchio's* numbers somewhat resembles - each number was sold to the rafters by the cast.

Malindi Ayienga's Blue Fairy (though Pinocchio always refers to her as the "Blue Lady") is the mistress of ceremonies with a big voice and a very versatile gown that lights up and transforms into props and even a set. She materializes whenever the rascally puppet needs advice or a reprimand, while also dispensing considerable exposition. Turns out that a diva fairy is preferable to a good fairy, though it would have been nice to let Ayienga's pipes stretch a bit. Connor Lucas as Pinocchio never stops stretching. He affects a constant state of wonder all while singing, dancing acrobatically, tap dancing and even playing the violin. Aside from the costuming, this is not a wooden performance.

Shawn Wright is a warm and big-voiced Geppetto with PTSD from the sudden death



of his wife. The book by Brian Hill contains a plethora of clever word gags but Wright manages to sell, "What was I thinking sending a puppet out on his own? And he's not even a day old," to get a laugh but also empathy. Lithe and wide-eyed Noah Beemer as bad boy/role model Lampwyck, comes the closest to providing a subtext as his moves and bratty demeanour lure Pinocchio, understandably, into a bromance with barnyard consequences.



As always the villains get to have the most fun. Susan Henley as the overseer of Terra dei Ragazzi and Jacob MacInnis as the puppet master, are more campy comic than menacing, but they do gleefully chew the scenery. And then dance on it. Arinea Hermans and Joel Cumber as the con artists Cat and Fox are a homage to Verdon and Fosse with a lot of struts, thrusts, gloves and winks. The faint frisson of seductive larceny is very welcome. Most of the cast does double or triple duty as townspeople, lost boys and fish appendages, but like Lucas, they sing and dance without pause or a pause in their smiles.

*The Adventures of Pinocchio* clocks in at a brisk 75 minutes which makes it very kid-friendly, there just is not enough time to fidget. While I suspect I would have enjoyed the show even more with a tyke in tow - wonder is contagious - my inner child was quite entertained. And my inner Scrooge and Grinch got a bit of a pre-Christmas respite.

*Photos by Cylla von Tiedemann*

The Adventures of Pinocchio continues until Sun, Jan 5 at Young People's Theatre, 165 Front St E. [youngpeoplestheatre.org](http://youngpeoplestheatre.org)



DREW ROWSOME

# A timeless Cirque du Soleil production as fresh and exciting as the day it was first presented

## CIRQUE DU SOLEIL<sup>®</sup> ALEGRÍA IN A NEW LIGHT

Photos Marie-Andrée Lemire/Costumes Dominique Lemieux/Cirque du Soleil 2019

*Alegria* was, 25 years ago, the second Cirque du Soleil production that I ever saw. At the time I was mesmerized and have been a Cirque du Soleil fan ever since, having seen dozens of productions both here in Toronto as well as Las Vegas and Orlando (reviews and previews are throughout this blog). The tagline then was that Cirque du Soleil was reinventing the circus and yes, a first encounter with *Alegria* was revolutionary, a huge step forward for in the evolution of the art form. *Alegria* was also the production that turned Cirque du Soleil from a scrappy little outfit into a cultural powerhouse and, eventually, a corporation, an entertainment behemoth.



If one wants to consider the current incarnation of *Alegria* a nostalgia piece or a retreat from the constantly evolving experimentation Cirque du Soleil is known for, think again. *Alegria* is as fresh, startling and wildly entertaining as it was when it first arrived. My experience was enhanced by the occasional jolt of recognition, but I was so caught up in the show, so mesmerized again, that it was a new adventure. I could write pages on how the show was streamlined, technologically improved, or comparing the acts but that would be a disservice to both productions. What matters is that I left elated

and overjoyed. And that we ran into a woman who had been a Cirque du Soleil virgin and she, with literal tears streaming down her face, was now a enraptured fan.



*Alegria's* host, a variation on the concept of the ringmaster, is Mr Fleur (Eric Davis) who is a marvellous cross between David Johansen and Tom Waits, all akimbo lithe sex appeal with a side of debauched desperation for applause. He also seizes a writhing phallic scepter that appears to confer some form of power over a ragged gaggle of aristocratic clowns. None seem to take him too seriously, some seek to undermine him, and fortunately there is also a rebel force of hunky *Lost Boys* acrobats who are plotting revolution. Except for the lithe sex appeal, Mr Fleur could be a prescient, *Alegria* dates from 1994, Trump satire.



That is the basic plot though, as is typical for Cirque du Soleil shows, the effect on the senses and soul is more important than any narrative throughline. And it doesn't matter because the entire evening is hijacked by the two clowns Pabo Bermejo Medina and Pablo Gomis Lopez. And they provide an emotional core to *Alegria* that is the most powerful I have experienced. Judging from the audience's very vocal reaction, it wasn't just my own personal biases. Medina and Lopez, "Tall Clown" and "Small Clown," have a Laurel and Hardy-esque competitive bromance that blossoms into much more, a gay romance, complete with kiss.



That the clownmance is played for maximum poignancy and non-mocking comedy is wonderful, that when they do reunite after a tearjerking (tears of laughter and of empathetic sorrow) spat, in a variation on Slava's Snowstorm, a mass catharsis of joy shakes le grand chapiteau to its foundations, is extraordinary. Extraordinary.

Of course the plot is, theoretically, just a conceptual framework to string the circus acts into a sequence. And when acts perform, they counteract the upstaging by Tall and Small. Jonathan Morin displays physical prowess and a flawless physique in a cocky crossed wheel solo. That builds into a trapeze duo from Roxane Gilliland and Nicolai Kuntz that is full of breathtaking moments, before Lisiate Tovo literally ignites the stage into flames with his Fire Knife Dance. Tovo's act



hits that sweet spot between a circus skill and a sideshow act, one winces as often as one is dazzled. And he reveals the secret of a big top experience, while balancing flames on the bare soles of his feet, he turns to offer a sweet smile of satisfaction. Not only are we seeing spectacle, but the space we share is intimate enough for a moment that small and resonant to register.



The second half opens strong with an aerial straps routine from Catherine Audy and Alexis Trudel that has a high quotient of death-defying derring do. Trudel has a scar across his ribs that must have been placed there by the make-up department so that the audience would realize that his phenomenal fantasy form is actually human. The remaining acts rely on spectacle, building to a finale, but what fascinated me was how, if my attention dared to wander, the sidelines were alive with characters. Characters all in character. Not an inch of stage or a moment of time was wasted by anyone. The concluding trapeze act generates much suspense but not as much payoff in prowess.



No matter, the theme song, which is now a permanent part of our collective unconscious, explodes in a fanfare and the cast troops out. They have been smiling all evening, except for when a different emotional state was required, but they beam at the end. And the audience is just as ecstatic. And I had to marvel, as I had while the Powertrack acrobats flipped and flew across the stage, that much of the cast was not even born when *Alegria* first premiered. Yet they are performing a timeless classic born of a timeless tradition. A new, and timeless, experience for a new generation. And for those of us who are lucky enough to get to experience it again.

***Alegria runs until Sun, Nov 24 under le Grand Chapiteau, 955 Lake Shore Blvd W. [cirquedusoleil.com](http://cirquedusoleil.com)***

DREW ROWSOME

Photos courtesy of publisher: Raincoast Books

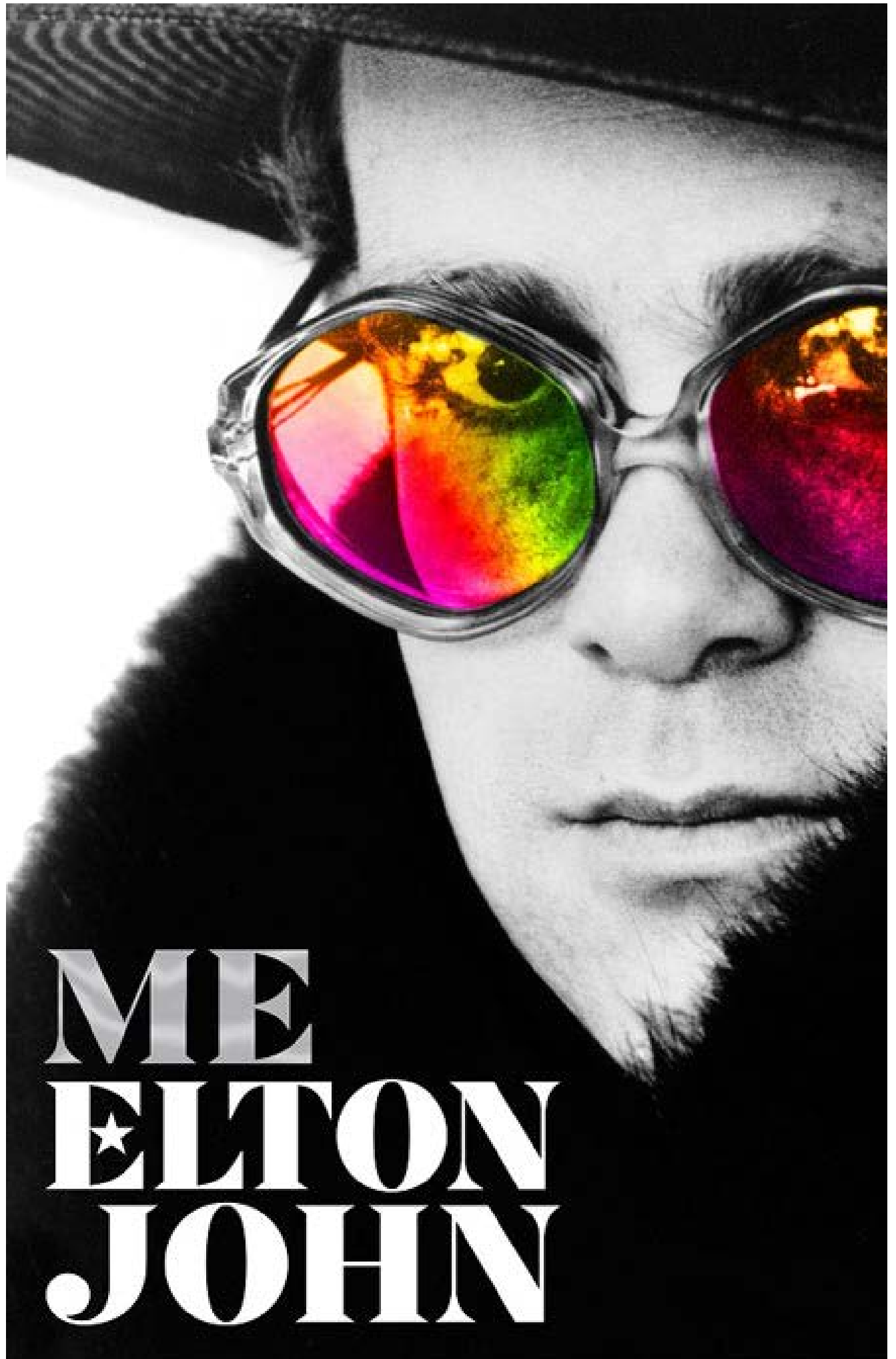


# Elton John's autobiography of sex, drugs, rock n roll, and gay redemption

At the same time Elton John was down the road playing the Toronto dates of his Goodbye Yellow Brick Road retirement tour, I was reading about the first time he retired. In 1977. And there was another retirement tour in between. At the very end of his autobiography, *Me*, John writes that "It isn't the end," he still plans to write, record and play live, it will just be on his terms. Depending on where his artistic and philanthropic inspirations lead him, instead of the grind of 120 to 130 gigs a year, he'll try new forms of expression on different scales. Like the memoir *Me*.

John has always been the musical half of songwriting partnerships, most notably with Bernie Taupin, and he even makes a point of mocking his early attempts at being a lyricist. Maybe that was just a format problem, because *Me* is a light, breezy read that never stumbles as prose. How much of that is due to the ghostwriter Alexis Petridis and what must have been a small army of editors and fact checkers, will never be known. All that counts is that reading *Me*, is like sitting down for a cup of tea with a gossipy queen who just happens to be a superstar.

There are a lot of juicy anecdotes about fellow celebrities, but much of it - Michael Jackson, Aretha Franklin, Freddy Mercury, Lady Gaga, George Michael, Tina Turner, etc, etc - has already appeared in sound bites promoting *Me*. But the story, and all the others, of disco dancing at Buckingham Palace with Queen Elizabeth (and her purse) is much more entertaining in context. The anecdote interacts with previous



ones about a disastrous dinner party with Princess Margaret, and an overview of John's friendship with Princess Diana. And John's childhood and youth on a much lower rung of the English social ladder.

*Me* is relatively chronological and the years that John spent struggling are the most passionate chapters of the book. Reading how he discovered rock n roll

and his own talents, and then worked to make the two connect is fascinating. As are the early attempts - touring with Long John Baldry, trying to sell a song to Cliff Richards, playing pubs and learning to hold an audience in the midst of a brawl (according to John it is excellent training for keeping a stadium full of fans enthralled) - to become the success he achieved with his legendary gigs at The Troubadour.



Young Elton at the piano" If I heard a tune once, I could go to the piano and play it perfectly by ear". photo credit: Elton John family collection

John never romanticizes or exaggerates the hardships of that period. He also never pretends that he isn't privileged. He considers his composing skills and photographic musical memory to be gifts that he has not only taken advantage of but has abused. There are many, many passages where John rues temper tantrums, cocaine binges, alcoholic binges, and temper tantrums caused by cocaine and alcoholic binges. That he managed to create so much memorable music - and every song title mentioned played instantly in the soundtrack of my mind - and avoid self-destructing is remarkable.

Tied in with the his musical career is the saga of John's sexuality. He is simultaneously very frank and quite skilled at glossing over many details. It has a lot to do with the difference between North America in the '70s and '80s and Britain where John's worldview was formed.

As John writes, he was so camp - stage outfits designed by Bob Mackie and Versace that were anything but understated - that everyone knew. It was an open secret. Until it wasn't. And it didn't seem to affect his career trajectory at all. From the very beginning

John and his closest friends gave each other pet drag names, but then so did his enduring rival/friend Rod Stewart who may be camp but is also enthusiastically heterosexual.

He is blunt about his taste for voyeurism, tells of losing his virginity (but doesn't describe any emotions attached to the experience), avoids any details of his marriage to Renata Blauel by explaining that she has kept to the terms of their non-disclosure agreement, and describes his multitude of partners over the years as accessories that he bought and paid for, not how they made him feel. Of course now-husband David Furnish gets a lot of praise as do John's two sons. Becoming a family man is a fitting finale for an epic tale of sex, drugs and rock n roll though John, mercifully, attaches no moral superiority to it.



Dee, me, Davey and Nigel at the Château d'Hérouville in 1972. Photo credit: © Bryan Forbe

We also learn about John's love of football and his adventures as the owner of the Watford football club. It is all tied in with his complicated family dynamics



which are also nonchalant but insightful reading. The most affecting passages are when a spoiled superstar with a shopping addiction, develops a political conscience in regards to gay issues and AIDS. The passages where he writes about Ryan White and the beginning of the Elton John AIDS Foundation moved me to tears. We need to thank John for more than just a catalogue of indelible music.

John gloats that The Lion King soundtrack outsold The Rolling Stones' Voodoo Lounge (though Keith Richard's comment is the punchline), but also notes that Lestat was a complete flop. He excoriates his 1986 album Leather Jackets (I had to search out the duet "Don't Trust That Woman" he co-wrote, as Lady Choc Ice, with Cher. It is even worse than he describes) but delights in collaborating with Eminem. He is a complicated man and while Me doesn't untangle John's psyche, he makes it clear that he is way past worrying what anyone thinks about him or his choices - he states that the documentary Tantrums and Tiaras is hilarious. And accurate - it shows clearly how that psyche was formed. The days of rock superstars, their excessive lifestyles and musical reach, may be long gone but they live on tantalizingly in the pages of Me.



Elton Headshot. Photo credit: © Greg Gorman ; With David Furnish, madly in love and fully Versacéd. Photo credit: © Greg Gorman





# Stand!: and epic Canadian Heritage Momelement with musical numbers

Production photos courtesy of Manitoba Film & Music and Telefilm Canada

Opening during Oscar season and smack dab between the big-budgetted *Frozen II* and *Cats*, *Stand!* has the advantage of being a movie musical with heart. Set during the Winnipeg general strike of 1919, it becomes impossible not to root for *Stand!* in the same way that the film roots for the strikers. *Stand!* is an epic *Canadian Heritage Minute* with musical numbers and a *Romeo and Juliet/West Side Story*-esque love story slid in as an extra hook. Although the general strike was 100 years ago, *Stand!* couldn't be more timely in 2019, the year that wage inequality reached its peak.

Surprisingly the backdrop of the general strike becomes the most exciting through line. The climax of the film is truly horrific and shattering. There are multiple subplots carefully presenting an array of secondary characters - Lisa Bell as the exploited black maid, Gabriel Daniels as the Indigenous war veteran, Robin Ruel as the housewife discovering feminism and a social conscience, Tristan Carlucci as the crusading and betrayed Jewish journalist - and when they gather to march, in what is cleverly shot to look like a cast of thousands, one wants to cheer and put down the popcorn and grab a placard. The individuals are sketched schematically but the masses are inspiring.

Director Robert Adetuyi, a musical veteran with *Stomp the Yard* and *Bring It On: Worldwide #Cheersmack* on his resumé, pulls out all the stops and combines Leni Riefenstahl with Winnipeg architecture for "Ultimatum." Paul Essiembre ([The Normal Heart](#)) as the villainous capitalist and Hayley Sales as Winnipeg's Emma Goldman face off in vocal battle for the hearts of another cleverly shot to look like a cast of thousands, and *Stand!* becomes a politically correct MGM '40s musical with sonic Sondheim nods.

The music and lyrics by Danny Schur is tuneful but has a lack of orchestration. Lisa Bell's big number suffers the most as a voice that powerful should be riding a flotilla of strings instead of piano and electronic-sounding drums. To be fair, I was watching a screener and a theatre equipped with surroundsound may have a quite different effect. *Stand!* is a film version of the stage musical *Strike!* and the translation may just be slightly off: an ingenue with a big voice can sell a number in an intimate space but can appear caged in by the edges of a screen.



Marshall Williams of *Glee* and Laura Wiggins of *Shameless*, are the star crossed lovers. He's a Catholic, she's a Jew. They are both very pretty with Williams having an edge. The period costumes suit the former model and the scenes where he is shirtless or sweaty in a tank are riveting. We know there are sexual sparks because the camera tracks their eye movements, and because they sing about it in the lovely number "Love in a Place Like This" that is all exposition and clumsy metaphors.



*Wisely Stand!* opens with a number by Gregg Henry as the hardworking alcoholic scab father. Henry is a veteran of the film and television world with hundreds of credits including *The Love Boat*, *Slither*, *Falcon Crest*, *Gilmore Girls* and seven episodes of *Murder She Wrote*. Though he is instantly recognizable as a familiar character actor, with the help of a beard and a wavering Bolshevik accent, he disappears and the character of Mike Sokolowski rips out our hearts in his big dilemma scene. He should have had another number, as should have Ryan Ash who, as the villainous returned soldier, does everything but twirl his moustache (actually only sexy George Michael scruff) and seems to be having the most fun of anyone in the film.



A musical, especially a musical on film, is a risky and ambitious endeavour. *Stand!* has ambition to burn and that it succeeds so well is remarkable. Songs in a musical express the inexpressible, emotions that are too oversized to be contained. With *Stand!* tackling worker's rights, the travails of the immigrant experience, interfaith romance, racism and greedy political corruption, it makes perfect sense for the characters to burst into song. And when Bell



hits the upwardly anthemic modulation in "Stand" - "I'm going stand on the strength of the shoulders of those who stand up and never back down . . . I've drawn my line in the sand, and this is where I stand" - gritty Winnipeg labourers win out over animated princesses and pushy pussies.

*Stand!* opens nationwide on Fri, Nov 29. [stand-movie.com](http://stand-movie.com)



# We Know Gay



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**Sean Leber** - Founder, MGT Creative Director.



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