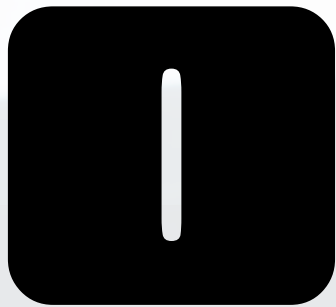


our lives



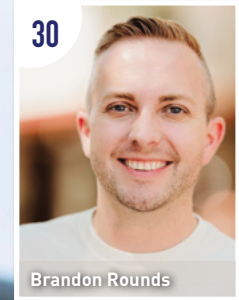
48

Tracy Danner



26

Nykoli Koslow



30

Brandon Rounds

# ENTERTAINMENT

**INSIDE:** Our Annual Wisconsin LGBTQ+ Arts Directory

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

September/October 2025

# TARL

## CREATIVE PLACEMAKER

**Tarl Knight**

A revitalizer sparking a cultural revival in Northeast Wisconsin that connects tradition with fresh energy.

### IN THE COURTS

The impact of recent SCOTUS rulings against the LGBTQ community and what it forecasts going forward.

### TRUE CRIME

A 30-year murder case has finally been solved with a surprising Wisconsin connection.



TAKE A SMART STEP TO  
A HEALTHY SMILE

**SMART DENTAL**

**CALL TODAY (608) 241-8782**

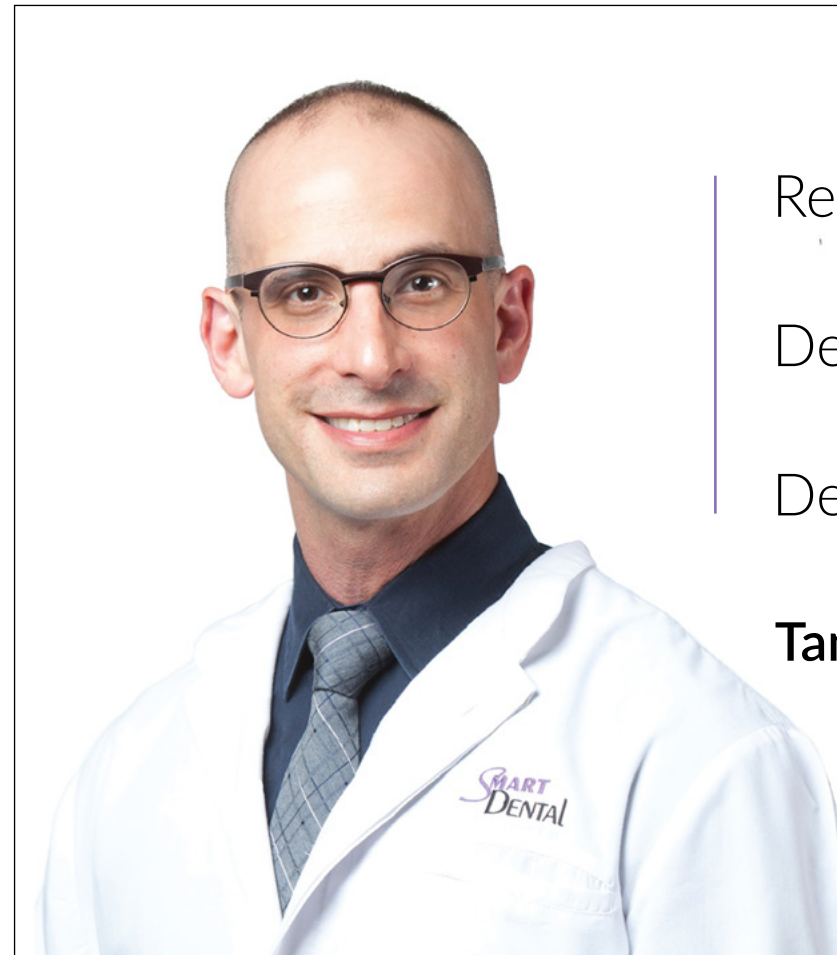
**U Belong.**

At UW Credit Union, we believe in creating a place where every member can thrive. That's why we offer best-in-class mobile banking, great rates on mortgages, and friendly service that supports you at every stage of life. Visit us online or in-branch to join today.



Here For Every You. | [uwcu.org](http://uwcu.org)

Federally Insured by NCUA



Recruiting Top Talent!

Dental Hygienist

Dental Assistant

**Tamim Sifri, DDS**

Learn more at  
[smartdentalmadison.com](http://smartdentalmadison.com)

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 ADVERTISER DIRECTORY
- 6 EDITOR'S LETTER & BOARDS OF DIRECTORS
- 7 OBITUARY & HUMOR

FEATURES

- 22 A CULTURAL SAVANT RISING  
Green Bay's Tarlton Knight on, culturally relevant, innovative arts spaces.
- 26 BUILDING NEW WORLDS ONE CANVAS AT A TIME  
Visual artist Nykoli Koslow.
- 30 LOOK, LISTEN, & LEARN—AND GIVE BACK  
Brandon Rounds on his persona of Bianca Lynn Breeze.
- 34 THE GREAT WISCONSIN LGBTQ+ ARTIST SURVEY

CONNECT

- 9 FORGOTTEN NO MORE  
A case that went unsolved for more than 30 years has now been solved, and with a Wisconsin connection.
- 12 NEWS BRIEFS
- 14 OUR SPACES  
Small town queer bookstores.
- 16 OUR ENTERTAINERS  
An art exhibit featuring memorabilia from Cass Downing's career as a drag performer.
- 18 OUR PAGES  
Wisconsin authors & Lucy, *Uncensored* review.
- 20 OUR ORGANIZERS  
Trans on the Land.

IMPROVE

- 46 OUR RIGHTS  
Recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions in the *Skrametti* and *Mahmoud* cases.
- 48 OUR TASTE  
Tracy Danner of EVP Coffee.
- 50 OUR YOUTH  
Athletic Ability: Portraits of LGBTQ+ Student Athletes.



Cover photo by Ian DeGraff.

©2025 All Rights Reserved. Sept. / Oct. 2025, Volume 19, Issue 2. Life in the Middle Publishing, LLC. Patrick Farabaugh, Publisher. PO Box 1202, Madison, WI 53701  
Any reproduction of OL: Our Lives Magazine in part or in full without the written permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited. OL: Our Lives Magazine shall not be held responsible for any claims made by our advertisers. Submission of photographs or other images to OL: Our Lives Magazine may be published without providing image credit.



Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

Patrick Farabaugh  
Publisher / Editor-in-Chief  
Alexandria Delcourt  
Editor

Virginia Harrison  
Copy Editor

Contributing Writers  
Elise Filka  
Christen Lester-Jones  
Scott Seyforth  
Rae Sowards  
Steph Tai  
Michail Takach  
Sophia Voight  
Karin Wolf

Contributing Artists  
Ian DeGraff  
Melanie Jones  
Samantha Rae Waldron  
Hannah Wenthe  
Vintage Lulu Photography

Digital Media Curator  
Melanie Jones

ADVERTISER DIRECTORY



**HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT OUR WORK**

Our Lives is a 100% ad-supported publication. We are able to exist because you support our dedicated advertising partners. As time get more volatile for our community, please help ensure Our Lives remains a platform for giving LGBTQ Wisconsin a voice and place to connect.

ADVERTISE IN OUR LIVES | SUPPORT OUR ADVERTISERS

ARTS / ARTISTS / ART SUPPLIES

- p. 37 Forward Theater
- p. 23 Madison Museum of Contemporary Art
- p. 25 Madison Opera
- p. 52 Madison Symphony Orchestra
- p. 41 Monroe Street Framing

ATTORNEYS

- p. 7 Balisle Family Law

AUTOMOBILES

- p. 33 MINI of Madison

BANKING / FINANCIAL ADVISING

- p. 39 Shannon M. Anderson  
*Ameriprise Financial*
- p. 4 Phillip Knutson  
*Edward Jones*
- p. 2 UW Credit Union

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- p. 46 New Harvest Foundation
- p. 11 OutReach
- p. 10 Wisconsin LGBT Chamber

COUNSELING / SUPPORT

- p. 31 Alexander Einsman, MS MFT  
*Atlas Counseling*

FOOD & BEVERAGE

- p. 21 Capitol Centre Market
- p. 49 Dinotto
- p. 23 D'Vino
- p. 31 Harmony Bar & Grill
- p. 49 The Sow's Ear
- p. 43 Willy Street Co-op

HEALTH/WELLNESS

- p. 28 Dental Health Associates
- p. 12 Forward Fertility, LLC
- p. 31 New Health Chiropractic
- p. 3 Smart Dental

HIGHER EDUCATION

- p. 51 Madison College

HOSPICE

- p. 7 Agrace

INSURANCE

- p. 5 Colleen Frentzel Agency  
*American Family Insurance*
- p. 5 David Ryan-Sukup  
*American Family Insurance*

INTERIOR DESIGN / HOME

- p. 35 Bethke Heating & Air Conditioning Inc.
- p. 13 Chad's Design Build
- p. 29 Kool View
- p. 35 MaraLee Olson Design Studio
- p. 6 Renovation Sells
- p. 17 Quigley Decks & Cable Rails
- p. 18 Time 2 Remodel

JEWELERS

- p. 33 Goodman's Jewelers
- p. 27 Jewelers Workshop

MEDIA

- p. 47 Towns & Associates, Inc

OUTDOORS

- p. 21 Rutabaga

PAPER SUPPLIES & CARDS

- p. 15 Anthology

PETS

- p. 27 Angel's Wish
- p. 49 Bad Dog Frida
- p. 17 EarthWise Pet Supply

PHOTOGRAPHY

- p. 32 Dutcher Photography
- p. 47 Melanie Renee Photography
- p. 20 Vintage LuLu

REALTY

- p. 26 Vivienne Anderson
- p. 6 Vicki Kenyon
- p. 29 Lauer Realty Group

UTILITIES

- p. 8 Madison Gas & Electric

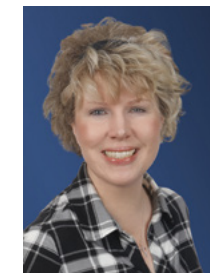
WEB SERVICES

- p. 45 Design Garden



AS YOUR DREAMS EVOLVE, WE'RE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU.

Whether you're buying your first car or your retirement home, American Family Insurance is with you every step of the way, ensuring that your dreams are always protected.



**Colleen Frentzel, Agent**  
(she/her)  
4407 Milton Ave Ste 110  
Janesville, WI 53546  
cfrentze@amfam.com  
(608) 302-4101



**David Ryan-Sukup, Agent**  
(he/him)  
514 Grand Canyon Dr  
Madison, WI 53719  
dryansu1@amfam.com  
(608) 833-1717



American Family Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. & its Operating Companies, American Family Insurance Company, 6000 American Parkway, Madison, WI 53783 008747 - Rev. 12/15 ©2015 - 15616751



**Edward Jones** > edwardjones.com | Member SIPC

Dreaming up the ideal retirement is your job. Helping you get there is ours.

We're excited to hear from you.



**Phillip H Knutson**  
CFP®, AAMS®  
Financial Advisor  
110 E Main St  
Stoughton, WI 53589  
608-873-5289

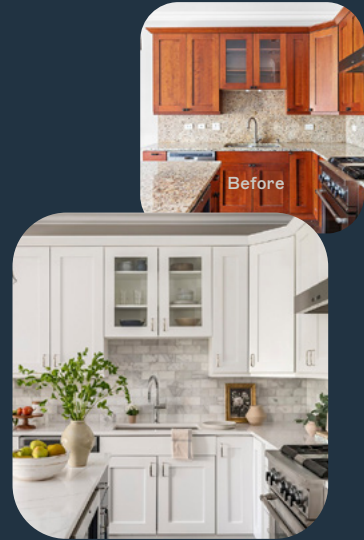
RET-1848K-A-E-AD AECSPAD 26382215

# Renovations Simplified



## How it Works

- 1 Tell Us About Your Home
- 2 Tour & Estimate
- 3 Renovate Today, Pay Later
- 4 Expert Design, Streamlined
- 5 Project Launch



Chat with *Adam*  
Your Dane County Renovation Expert



(608) 650-6010  
adam@renovationsells.com  
renovationsells.com



## Dream with Confidence

Buying or selling a home should be safe for ALL.



Sign up for the Monthly Market Watch - a free monthly e-newsletter with up to date market trends for your area.\*



Scan code to visit [vkenyon.starkhomes.com/market-watch/](http://vkenyon.starkhomes.com/market-watch/) to sign up or find more information.



**VICKI KENYON**  
608-982-6794  
VKenyon@StarkHomes.com

"Everyone has a home here"

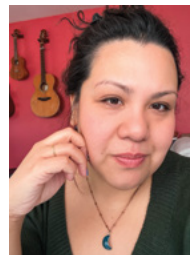


\*Stark Company Realtors will never sell or share your information without your consent.

## EDITOR'S LETTER ALEXANDRIA DELCOURT



## ART, ENTERTAINMENT, RESISTANCE



**I HAVE BEEN LOOKING** forward to working on this Arts & Entertainment issue since stepping into the Editor role back in February. As someone with a background in creative writing, storytelling, music, and theater, I consider the arts—and spaces of entertainment by extension—to be integral and sacred for the health and safety of human communities, especially for those of us who live and breathe in marginalized identities.

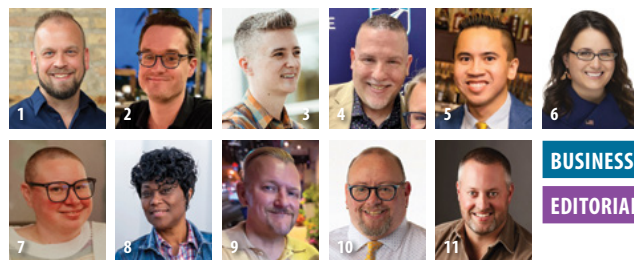
In addition to the pointed attacks on LGBTQ+ people we have seen coming out of the political sphere recently, we've also seen widespread funding cuts and irreparable harm done to organizations that strive to support artists, performers, communicators, publishers, storytellers, makers, and anyone working in the humanities. In short, to anyone whose work involves building bridges, closing gaps, interpreting experience, validating uniqueness, and giving voice to what is unheard.

And sure, it's easy to let that kind of news depress you. But at the same time, I hope it also reaffirms that the old adage is true: That all art is political. If it wasn't, they wouldn't be trying to suppress it.

For us, this issue is a testament to the work that LGBTQ+ artists across Wisconsin are doing and will continue to do in the face of the often-terrifying unknown. On the cover, we feature **Tarlton Knight**, a Green Bay-based entrepreneur and artist who is working to revitalize and expand the growing arts district of Green Bay. We are also proud to feature **Brandon Rounds**, aka **Bianca Lynn Breeze**, a Madison-area drag performer who uses the art of drag to educate, advocate, and even help raise funds for worthwhile causes whenever possible. You'll also find a write-up about a recent art exhibit featuring the life, work, and impeccable fashion of legendary drag performer **Cass Marie Domino**; an interesting Q+A with the founders of **Trans on the Land**, a social and educational network for trans and non-binary folk in the Driftless region of the state; and of course, as we do in every Arts & Entertainment issue, we have compiled a list of LGBTQ+ artists, performers, musicians, crafters, and writers currently working in Wisconsin. The list is by no means comprehensive, but we do our best to represent as many people as we can find!

But if I had to choose one article that I think is especially worth the time to read, I would recommend **Christen Lester-Jones'** "A Fortress in the Mind," which explores the role of literature, independent bookstores, and queer booksellers specifically as spaces and agents of political resistance. The article features a number of small, LGBTQ-owned bookstores around the state. ■

## OUR LIVES MEDIA BOARDS OF DIRECTORS



1. Adam Erdmann, Waunakee
2. Andy Hartman, Milwaukee
3. Emily Mills, Madison
4. Steve Noll, Sun Prairie
5. Micah Ogé, Milwaukee
6. Katie Rosenberg, Wausau
7. Nik Sheir, Menasha
8. Genia Stevens, Beloit
9. Michail Takach, Milwaukee
10. Willem Vanroosenbeek, La Crosse
11. Greg Wright, Princeton

## OBITUARY



**LINDA ANN NOVINGER** died peacefully at home on September 19, 2025, following a long struggle with metastatic breast cancer, which she met with remarkable strength and grace.

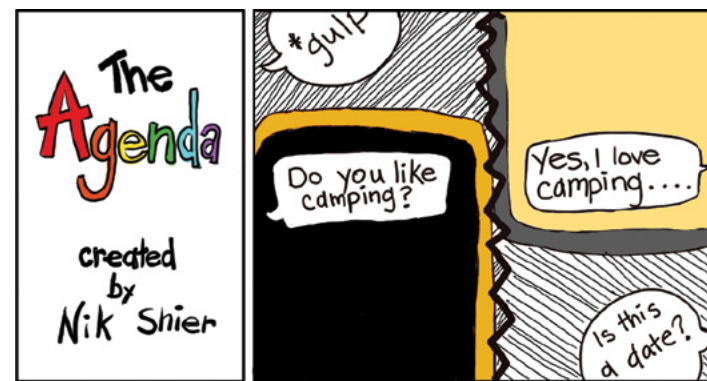
Linda was born on September 12, 1943, in Springer, New Mexico. She spent her younger years in Springer and Hutchinson, Kansas. She earned a bachelor's degree from Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa, and taught physical education in Kansas, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

Linda moved to Madison in 1973, where her occupations included youth services provider at a group home for adolescent girls; professional driver for Purolator, Independent Living, Airborne Express, Madison Metro, and Care Wisconsin; and massage therapist in a private practice. Linda was active in Madison's lesbian community. She was a card-carrying member of Lysistrata. She played softball for many years. She was an avid fan of UW-Madison women's sports. Linda was an early fan of the WNBA; she enjoyed attending some games and watched countless games on TV. She had a gorgeous voice and sang with Womonsong feminist choir and participated in the annual Lesbian Variety Show.

Linda was loved by all who knew her, and she was blessed by a wide circle of friends. She and Deborah Daniel ("DD") met in Womonsong in 1995. Their friends liked to say Linda and DD were joined at the hip, which was essentially true. They enjoyed life together for almost 30 years, having as much fun as humanly possible, even in the face of Linda's cancer diagnosis in 2018. Linda and DD were married at the Dane County Courthouse by the honorable Rhonda Lanford on December 9, 2016.

Linda was preceded in death by her entire immediate family. She is survived by niece Jama Schott and nephews Dennis Schott, David Schott (Victoria Schott) and Chris Novinger. She is further survived by her large circle of friends and chosen family in Madison, her wife, Deborah Daniel, their daughter and son-in-law, Nicole and Joel Heiman, granddaughter Grace Heiman (Sam Parker), and grandson Sam Heiman (Sara Polinag).

## HUMOR NIK SHIER HEARTBRAIN.ORG/QUEERJOY



A team of experienced lawyers committed to the rights of the **LGBT Community**.



## BALISLE FAMILY LAW

LEGAL COUNSEL, S. C.

Linda S. Balisle, Attorney | Lindsey E. Cobbe, Attorney  
Ashleigh M. Hacker, Attorney | Niall T. Martin, Associate

Our mission is to ensure that your rights and best interests are protected as you navigate the complexities of the legal system.

Divorce  
Powers of Attorney  
Partnership Agreements  
Wills

Marital Property Agreements  
Child Custody Disputes  
Maintenance/Spousal Support  
Mediation/Arbitration

608-765-1001 | [balisfamilylaw.com](http://balisfamilylaw.com)  
1 E. Main St., Suite 403 Madison, WI 53703

## Authentic Care and Connection



**Agrace**

Age at Home • Palliative Care • Dementia Support  
Hospice Care • Grief Support

[Agrace.org](http://Agrace.org) (800) 553-4289

2025 CREDENTIAL PLATINUM

LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Training  
sagecare.



Interested in 100% renewable energy for your household?

Sign up for MGE's Green Power Tomorrow (GPT) program. Get 100% clean energy for less than \$5 more per month\* with GPT 100.

\*Based on typical residential energy use.



Visit [mge.com/GPT](https://mge.com/GPT) to learn more and sign up.



Billy Newton a.k.a. Billy London, was a Wisconsin transplant.

## Forgotten No More

In October of 1990, the remains of Billy Newton were found in a Hollywood alleyway. The case went unsolved for more than 30 years, but now the case has been solved, and with a surprising Wisconsin connection.

NEWS TRUE CRIME POLITICS & LAW MYSTERY

ON OCTOBER 29, 1990, the remains of 25-year-old William Arnold Newton (aka Billy London) were discovered in a Los Angeles dumpster south of Santa Monica Boulevard. The crime was shockingly sinister: Newton had been chopped into pieces. Only his head and feet were ever found.

"It was the reverse of what you'd do when you're trying to cover up a murder," said author Christopher Rice. "The killer left the most identifiable body parts where they'd be found. The killer was trying to send a message."

Today, such a brutally violent crime would trigger

widespread panic. But Los Angeles was a different city in 1990: Ravaged with record-breaking homicide rates, battered by the AIDS crisis, and trapped in a spiritual spiral with seemingly no bottom.

Although the Tom Bane Civil Rights Act has provided protection against hate crimes since 1987, certain victims continued to be overlooked due to sexual identity, occupation, and criminal history. As a gay man, bathhouse employee, sex worker, and adult film star, Billy—like many victims of the 70s, 80s, and 90s—was not seen as an innocent victim by society.

The Newton murder quickly became known as



IS YOUR  
BUSINESS  
**51%**  
OR MORE LGBT  
OWNED?

**GET CERTIFIED AS  
AN LGBT BUSINESS  
ENTERPRISE TODAY!**

Don't miss out on new procurement pathways! Become a certified LGBTBE and seize untapped opportunities to grow and support your business in an inclusive marketplace.

Learn more about NGLCC's LGBTBE Certification at [WisLGBTChamber.com](http://WisLGBTChamber.com)

the “Gay Black Dahlia,” and like the original Black Dahlia, it was riddled with speculation. Rumors circulated that Billy was killed in a drug deal gone bad, or by an especially violent trick, or in a “gay panic” incident, or by someone he’d infected with AIDS.

None of these were even close to the truth. Despite the best efforts of his father, private investigators, and a devoted police detective working against time and across decades to crack the case, Billy’s murder was still unsolved 30 years after his death. By 2020, very few people even remembered the crime, much less the name Billy Newton.

Thanks to the remarkable efforts of filmmakers Rachel Mason and Dion Labriola, social worker Clark Williams, writers Eric Shaw Quinn and Christopher Rice, and Los Angeles Police Detective John Lambert, the case was finally solved in February 2023 after a five-year investigation. Their journey spanned from California to Wisconsin to Oklahoma, as the team explored the sordid sides of the adult film industry, the white supremacist movement, and the Jeffrey Dahmer murders.

Here’s the incredible story.

**MEET RACHEL MASON**

Rachel Mason wears a unique crown in West Hollywood.

“I’m gay porn royalty,” she said half-jokingly. “I have an emotional connection to gay men of a certain generation. I guess you could say it’s because of my background.”

Rachel grew up in Los Angeles, where her parents owned Circus of Books (1982–2019.) Barry and Karen Mason, former distributors

for Flynt Publications, served an ever-growing demand for gay adult content at the peak of the video boom. In the time before Grindr, their shop became a destination, if not community center, for a generation of gay men. While locations later opened in Silver Lake and Sherman Oaks, the West Hollywood location was especially popular for its neighboring cruising spot, “Vaseline Alley.”

Growing up, Rachel had limited involvement in the bookstore operation, but as an adult, she became fully embedded within the LGBTQ+ community. While taking a Gay and Lesbian Studies course at Yale, Rachel was inspired to document her family’s unique experience.

“My professor Jonathan D. Katz said, ‘You’ve got to do something about this, Rachel. This store contains our history.’”

“When my parents decided they needed to close the stores, that’s when I really felt the urgency to document the legacy of Circus of Books. And it was truly for the historical record within the LGBTQ+ community. Netflix couldn’t have been further from my goal, because I never thought that mainstream audiences would care.”

While filming the *Circus of Books* documentary (2019) Rachel confirmed what she’d long suspected: Gay pornography wasn’t just cheap entertainment, but a significant source of cultural history.

“I remember my professor saying, gay pornography is gay history,” said Rachel. “In the decades when it was illegal to be gay, the entire culture was forced to be underground. The men who made porn were like outlaws.



“The year 1990 was the height of the AIDS crisis. Men were vanishing all around us. People were getting sick and dying within a weekend. People were returning home to die at their parents’ homes. Gay life was much more private, transient, and anonymous. It was as easy to lose people as it was to get lost yourself.”



At left: Billy Houston in *The Devil and Danny Webster*. Christopher Rice & Eric Shaw Quinn’s podcast.

LGBTQ+ people saw no representation of themselves anywhere in the world at that time, so these publications were a tremendously valuable source of visibility for the community.

“Gay pornography didn’t just celebrate the reality of men being free to be with each other, however, it documented how people dressed, spoke, cruised, and partied, where people went and why, and their use of language: Code, slang, innuendo, humor. It offered a spark of hope for a liberated world where long-term relationships, and even love, might be possible,” Rachel said. “If you care about gay history the way I do, you have to accept that gay pornography has historical value—and I believe more

so today than ever.”

After the Masons closed their retail operation, businessman Rob Novinger created a luxury gay adult boutique store in the original building in West Hollywood, keeping the store’s original name.

“When their store was closing, elderly men came through, some even barely able to walk, they were crying real tears saying their goodbyes like it was a funeral, paying their last respects to a porn store. I was so moved by that,” said Rachel.

That moment sparked Rachel to make a startling observation. Circus of Books wasn’t just a retail store. It was a place of safety for a generation, a place where they could be

completely themselves no matter how harsh the world outside.

“What I’ve learned over the past few years through my conversations with a person in prison who perpetrated such violence, is that there’s a specific history of unthinkable oppression, cruelty, and targeted violence against gay men,” said Rachel. “This violence is so much worse than anyone has ever reported, documented, or known. The AIDS crisis was just one part of the suffering for a generation of gay people.

“I saw the AIDS crisis with my own two eyes. These guys were so amazing: Gorgeous, funny, well-dressed, the ultimate gay men of the 1980s. I was in love with all of them. That’s how I became the fag hag I am to this day,” Rachel said.

“And I remember asking my parents whatever happened to this one, or that one, and my parents just point blank telling me they’d died,” she said. “Where’s Jimmy? Dead. Where’s Johnny? Dead. Where’s Rob, Tom, Jack? Dead, dead, dead, dead. As a kid, I was bewildered. I never really processed what happened to these men. I didn’t process it until I made the documentary.

“We witnessed the AIDS crisis in real time,” said Rachel. “My mother and father became substitute parents to so many guys who had no parents. Where did they come

**OutReach**  
LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY CENTER

**NAVIGATING HAZARDS AHEAD**

A HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE FOR COLLECTIVE CARE AND HEALING

**CALLING ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ADVOCATES, AND PRACTITIONERS TIRED OF THE SAME OLD STATUS QUO IN CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITIES!**

**NOV 20TH & 21ST**  
MADISON COLLEGE  
MADISON, WI

**JOIN US FOR A GRASSROOTS CONFERENCE ON CAREGIVING WITH CONVERSATIONS AND STRATEGIES AROUND BRAIN HEALTH, HARM REDUCTION, COMPASSION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND RADICAL FORGIVENESS.**

**BECAUSE HARM REDUCTION ISN'T JUST A BUZZWORD, IT'S A MOVEMENT.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
GO TO: [WWW.OUTREACHMADISONLGBT.ORG/NAVIGATINGHAZARDS](http://WWW.OUTREACHMADISONLGBT.ORG/NAVIGATINGHAZARDS) OR EMAIL OR EMAIL OUR HIV PREVENTION COORDINATOR [LOVB@LGBTOUTREACH.ORG](mailto:LOVB@LGBTOUTREACH.ORG)







HAPPY HOMEOWNERS

"We loved working with Curt and Janean. The results are enjoyed aesthetically and functionally every day!" PAULA & ANN

Looks like it's...

**TIME 2 REMODEL**

time2remodel.com

do you dream of a

but you only have

**FORWARD FERTILITY**

Christie Olsen, MSN, NP

forwardfertility.com • christie@forwardfertility.com

608-217-7511 • Madison, Wis.

EGG DONATION AND SURROGACY  
PROVEN RESULTS IN THIRD-PARTY FERTILITY



from? Who were they? Where did they all go? There is an actual scene in the *Circus of Books* documentary—and it's such a coincidence now, or perhaps foreshadowing of the next film I would have to make—where my dad said, "Some of them would go back where they came from, you know, places like Wisconsin."

Rachel knew exactly what those Wisconsin boys looked like: Blonde hair, blue eyes, broad shoulders, looking like the California dreamboat, but actually from the cornfields, dark winters, and tiny towns of the Midwest, where they couldn't safely be themselves.

"There was almost a gay diaspora in West Hollywood," said Rachel. "While making *Circus of Books* I became obsessed with

thinking of how to preserve the memory of this generation lost to AIDS, and that started with understanding who these men were."

Rachel met with Mike Szymanski, adult industry journalist and historian (who is known in the industry as Mickey Skee) to view archival photos of men lost to the crisis. She didn't want to see glossy headshots or press kits. She wanted to see pictures with personality, unfiltered and untouched, with authentic boy-next-door realness, so that she could pay tribute to them with a montage in her documentary. Mike offered her his full collection.

As he was flipping through his scrapbook, an article clipping flew out, and the headline immediately caught Rachel's attention: COPS HAVE NO CLUES IN GRISLY KILLING OF LA PORN ACTOR, co-written by Chris Bull and Szymanski. A January 1, 1991, article in *The Advocate* explored the gruesome murder of Billy Newton.

The article featured casual photos of Newton, as well as interviews with his friends, roommates, and Los Angeles police detective Ron Venneman.

Rachel was speechless. "I was just like...

**Continue**

Scan the QR code to the right to continue to the full story on our website.

**NEWS BRIEFS** WRITTEN BY ALEXANDRIA DELCOURT

**MADISON'S STAGEQ, FORWARD THEATER COMPANY, MADISON BALLET, & MADISON OPERA ANNOUNCE THEIR UPCOMING SEASONS**

**STAGEQ:** StageQ's mission is to celebrate and advance queer representation through theater. Their upcoming season is one of quiet ripples and ancient stories. Of roaring waters and divine betrayal. Of trolling for the best red snapper and one last supper with friends. This season is one of Common Humanity.

**The Gulf** | Nov 7–22 | Bartell Theatre  
This Lammy Award-winning drama explores the intimate divide that exists between two women in a deeply committed relationship.

**Corpus Christy** | March 20–April 4 | Bartell Theatre  
A truly infamous moment from StageQ's past, "Corpus Christi" returns after 22 years! Come see a queering of the one of the oldest (new) testaments to cruelty, divinity, and humanity.

**Note:** StageQ will present at The CapitalQ Theatre Festival in 2026.

**FORWARD THEATER COMPANY:** The 2025–26 season features four extraordinary plays about people who refuse to accept the status quo in their lives. Characters who challenge expectations, take control, and remind us that change is always possible.

**Gutenberg! The Musical!** | Nov. 6–23 | Overture Center  
Bud and Doug have poured their hearts (and not much research) into their brand-new, Broadway-bound musical about Johann Gutenberg, inventor of the printing press. With nothing but trucker hats, a piano, and relentless optimism, these two lovable underdogs play the entire cast of characters in a laugh-out-loud love letter to musicals. Written by Scott Brown & Anthony King. Directed by Jen Uphoff Gray.

**Ironbound** | Jan. 29–Feb. 15 | Overture Center  
It takes work to dream...especially at a bus stop in New Jersey. An immigrant fighting for a better life learns what's fleeting and what lasts, in this clear-eyed and darkly funny

portrait spanning 22 years. Written by Martyna Majok. Directed by Marcella Kearns.

**Lady Disdain** | April 9–26 | Overture Center  
A wildly successful romantasy series needs the best of the best to voice its audiobooks. Who better, alas, than exes Bea and Ben? Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* gets a makeover—and Beatrice and Benedick a do-over—in this fierce and sexy comedy about the hottest books on the market and standing up for those you love—including yourself. Written by Lauren Gunderson. Directed by Jen Uphoff Gray.

**MADISON BALLET**

**Rock the Ballet** | Oct. 10–12 | MYArts  
*Rock the Ballet* breaks down barriers, blending classical technique with contemporary flair and music not traditionally associated with ballet.

**The Nutcracker** | Dec. 12–21 | Overture Center  
Our 2025 production brings Tchaikovsky's unforgettable score to life with stunning choreography, lavish costumes, and a dazzling cast of dancers from our company, school, and community under the glorious Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra conducted by Maestro Andrew Sewell.

**Pointes of View** | Feb. 13–15 | Overture Center  
*Pointes of View* explores the expressive power of ballet through a wide range of artistic lenses. From tutus to combat boots, each work offers a bold reinterpretation of classical technique, pushing boundaries while honoring ballet's rich traditions.

**ChoreographerHER** | April 3–5 | MYArts  
The highlight of our 2025–26 season is a bold celebration of the female choreographic voice. Although women have long been the faces of ballet, they remain vastly underrepresented in choreography—especially women of color.

**Innovation II** | May 8–10 | Overture Center  
In this invigorating artistic initiative, the dancers of Madison Ballet step into the role of choreographer, creating new works on one another.

**MADISON OPERA**

**La Bohème** | Nov. 7 & 9 | Overture Center  
Beloved by audiences worldwide for over a century, Puccini's classic opera about young people in love has no equal.

**Everlasting Faint** | Feb 13 & 15 | Overture Center  
Based on the true story of the 1897 Greenbrier Ghost, *Everlasting Faint* is a ghost story, a maternal love story, a true crime drama, and an all-American opera. Don't miss this world premiere by Madison composer Scott Gendel and librettist Sandra Flores-Strand.

**Così fan tutte** | April 24 & 26 | Overture Center  
Join us for love, laughter, and true humanity, as a vibrant cast brings Mozart's enthralling classic back to Madison for the first time in 17 years. ■

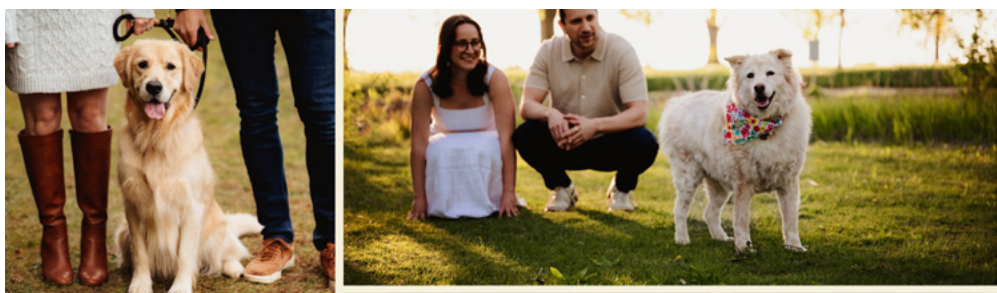


**Remodeling Done Well with Love**

See our commitments to you and your home at  
chadsdesignbuild.com

Kitchens • Bathrooms • Additions  
Whole House • Lower Levels • Porches • Decks

608-221-1799



**Dulcy**  
dog photography

dulcydogphotography.com



LITERATURE POLITICS COMMUNITY SPACES

# A Fortress in the Mind

Queer bookstores are serving as spaces of resistance across Wisconsin, ensuring that physical books continue to get into the hands of anyone and everyone without censorship.

**THERE IS SOMETHING** inherently subversive and anti-authoritarian about a printed book: A compact, relatively durable vessel for transmitting knowledge, that needs no battery or charging cable, that cannot be hidden behind paywalls, that can be passed from person to person without a trace, that cannot be edited invisibly to meet the changing demands of dictators and their imitators. There is a very good reason why authoritarians put such a high priority on destroying and restricting books: Books are the weapons of rebellion, and when we read, we build a fortress in our minds that tyrants cannot destroy. Even when the State dominates every other aspect of life—when bodily autonomy is denied, relationships are invalidated, and we are called wrong, broken, and perverse—for queer people, books can be the lifeline to keep our identities, and sanity, intact. So, it should come as no surprise that across Wisconsin, in communities large and small, queer booksellers are agents of resistance.

In Madison, we're lucky to have well-established queer-owned bookstores like A Room of One's Own playing a role in queer culture building and resistance, along with smaller bookstores like Kismet Books in Verona who purposefully host LGBTQ-inclusive spaces and events like their Queer Joy Book Club. For the purposes of this article, I chose to focus on newer and smaller operations in other parts of the state.

## WORDHAVEN BOOKHOUSE, SHEBOYGAN

When CJ Arthur (they/them) opened WordHaven BookHouse, a independent bookstore and writing center in Sheboygan, they weren't expecting picketers and death threats. After years of fighting for justice as a social worker and educator, they were just looking for a quiet place to start over. But when you're a trixie, trans, nonbinary person running a queer bookstore in smalltown Wisconsin, just being yourself is an act of resistance, and CJ wasn't shy about being themself.

Rather than just having a "queer shelf" or two, CJ interspersed books with queer topics and queer authors liberally through their store, paying special attention to books that were getting banned in the local schools.

"If you're not pissing off white supremacists," they quipped, "you can probably be doing more."

Rather than just having a "queer shelf" or two, CJ interspersed books with queer topics and queer authors liberally through their store, paying special attention to books that were getting banned in the local schools. But that was just the beginning. WordHaven hosts Drag Story Time, a Trans Support Network, a Banned Book Club, and more. CJ also organizes assorted keynotes, workshops, and retreats through WordHaven



Ignites, a consulting business they run on the side, focused on creating safe spaces for conversations about equity, advocacy, and "learning how to be healthy with ourselves and each other." Much more than a book shop, WordHaven has become a hub for queer community and connection.

## BALDWIN'S BOOKS AND RECORDS, MADISON

Lily Someson (she/they) and Micah Robinson (they/he) met in an undergraduate poetry program in Chicago. Both were from small, conservative Midwestern towns where their queer identities were suppressed, and both had turned to books from an early age as a way to understand themselves.

"The library was a sacred place for me; it allowed me to learn about people who I didn't see in my world," Micah said.

"I feel like books are the difference between surviving and thriving," said Lily. "Books put us in a place where we can see other options. It's a way to find out more about yourself and the world around you."

Together, Lily and Micah began exploring ways to spread literacy, especially with the rise of the second Trump administration. In January 2025, they launched Baldwin's Books and Records as a pop-up venture. Named after Black author and queer icon James Baldwin, Baldwin's specializes in "rescuing literature" by buying books at estate sales, library sales, and online auctions, refurbishing the books, and offering them at an affordable price.

"All of a sudden it became very apparent that this work could not wait," Lily said. "During the first Trump presidency, things like censorship felt like they were coming but not quite here. This time, things started getting censored immediately."

They had their first booth in February, at Femmfestival at the Garver

Feed Mill in Madison. "We applied for it before we even had the name figured out," Micah said. "We started buying up any kind of radical literature we could find and piling it into a suitcase Lily's grandma gave us."

Lily and Micah organize their finds into samplers of different parts of the queer experience: Black voices, Asian and Pacific Islander voices, etc. Many of their books and magazines have been out of print for decades, and represent unique moments in queer history.

Baldwin's does not yet have a storefront, but they continue to table at events around southern and central Wisconsin, including the Fox Valley Pride event. They are also regular attendees at Picnic on the Patio, a recurring event at the Northstreet neighborhood collective in Madison.

"We think a lot about what our place is in the revolution, and this is it," Lily said. "Reading things like James Baldwin, we really want people to come into our space and leave inspired to do better."

## BOUND TO HAPPEN, STEVENS POINT

A hundred miles further north in the small city of Stevens Point, Bound to Happen Books opened in 2021. The three owners—Lyn, Nicole, and Rachel—all identify as queer, and none of them had prior experience running a bookstore.

"We recognized a resource missing in our community," Lyn said, "An independent bookstore where you could come in, meet people, and take on some of the larger issues that are going on in the world."

Originally sharing a building with another business, Bound To Happen soon outgrew their initial space, and by 2023 occupied the entire building. They stock a wide variety of books, from comfort reads to texts that challenge, provoke, and expand the reader's worldview. They host a number of book clubs: Some centered on popular genres, and others that focus on specific themes like radical politics or dealing with grief.

"Books are a way we can find community with others," Lyn said. "We feel isolation or alienation until we have a common vocabulary and people who share it. Around here, it's not always an accepted thing to be queer, so having books available where people are talking about their feelings and experiences is an incredibly powerful way for people who feel alienated and forgotten, and wrong."

The shop's owners are also not shy about using their platform on social media. "We have kicked things up a notch in the last year or so," Lyn said. "We've been pretty explicit about what it's going to take to fight back against those in power who are attacking trans rights—not just Trump, but also Democrats who are looking to abandon trans rights to appeal to the center."

Like WordHaven in Sheboygan, Bound to Happen has faced protesters for their support of trans people and drag performers. "Drag Storytime was our first time being protested—for at least a week before, religious people were coming in and sticking tracts into books, sometimes damaging the books in the process. They also protested outside of the store. But we immediately flipped it around: We put a call out to our community through social media, and had 15–20 people come to stand outside the store and cover the windows, so the protesters couldn't come in. For every tract we found, we pledged to donate \$10 to a pro-LGBTQ+ nonprofit. We found more than 100 of them, but I worry about how many we didn't find that ended up leaving the store."

Still, Lyn believes that their most important work comes in the small conversations they have every day with their customers. "We talk about the attacks that are going on," they said. "We need to find this joy, and this love, but also anger, and justice, so we can build a more just world."

## THE WELL RED DAMSEL, MILWAUKEE

Understanding history and politics is crucial for resistance, but if there's a single defining aspect of queerness, it's love: Who we love, how we love them, and how we love ourselves and our own bodies. In

light of that, it's appropriate that Wisconsin's newest queer book shop is dedicated to love in all its myriad forms. The Well Red Damsel (WRD) opened the doors of its first brick-and-mortar location in June 2025, billing itself as Milwaukee's first romance-only bookstore. Owner Natasha Meyer (she/her) is a bisexual woman, a Milwaukee native, and a lifelong reader. She credits her love of romance novels with helping her to figure out her own sexuality later in life.

"We feel isolation or alienation until we have a common vocabulary and people who share it. Around here, it's not always an accepted thing to be queer, so having books available where people are talking about their feelings and experiences is an incredibly powerful way for people who feel alienated and forgotten, and wrong."

"Seeing love stories in books that didn't match what I had experienced piqued my interest," Natasha said. "My hope is that anyone who comes into our bookstore will find a love story that fits their experience."

Natasha strives to make WRD a safe, comforting and inclusive space for everyone. She makes a point to showcase books that offer a wide variety of love stories: Gay, straight, asexual, trans, and others.

"We're only three weeks in," she told me in mid-July, "but I work really hard to promote queer love stories and queer authors. We just had a 'Pride's Not Over' book event with six queer authors, and we had 300–400 people show up. I want to do more events like that."

WRD opening its doors this year may prove to be timely for another reason. Milwaukee is home to Romance Con, a very large convention that has recently come under fire for its associations with the Harry Potter fandom and, by extension, transphobic author J.K. Rowling. As a result, some fans and authors have announced their intention to boycott Romance Con as a show of support to the trans community.

## SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL, QUEER BOOKSTORE

Of course, not every town in Wisconsin is lucky enough to have a queer, independent bookstore. But that doesn't mean that you can't support these amazing booksellers. Each of the organizations I spoke to offers the option of purchasing books online, either directly through their websites or through Bookshop.org. Buying audiobooks is also an option thanks to a service called Libro.fm. Just select a bookstore you want to support, and they will receive a payment for each purchase you make.

"Books have saved my life, in so many ways," says WordHaven owner CJ Arthur. "That's not hyperbole. We became the healthiest when we are owning our shit and connecting to others' stories. That's the way we make the world a better place." ■

*Editor's Note: We've profiled a few queer bookstores here; please reach out to [contact@ourliveswisconsin.com](mailto:contact@ourliveswisconsin.com) to suggest stores for future profiles.*





ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DRAG NIGHTLIFE HISTORY

# Living, Not Just Surviving

**Scott Seyforth**, Co-founder of **Madison LGBTQ+ Archive** and longtime friend of **Cass Downing**, a.k.a Cass Marie Domino, discusses Cass's life and explores the goals and process of creating an art exhibit featuring memorabilia from Cass's legendary career as a drag performer.

**"LIVING, NOT JUST SURVIVING,"** an exhibition that ran at the Main Gallery in the UW-Madison Memorial Union from June to September of this year, celebrated the life and legacy of Cass Downing, a.k.a. Cass Marie Domino, and her enduring impact on Madison's LGBTQ+ and drag communities as an entertainer, activist, and trans woman.

Born and raised in Madison, Cass has been gracing local stages, pride festivals, club shows, drag competitions, TV, and radio spots since the 1980s. As arguably the longest-performing drag entertainer in town, Cass was one of the performers who brought mainstream visibility to drag locally. Over the last 40 years as drag branched out of the clubs and into drag brunches, drag bingo, and drag story hours, Cass has been at the forefront of this locally. She was the long-time host of the popular fundraiser for AIDS Network, Camp Bingo, from 2007 to 2020. She has also been a frequent invitee to host Drag Story Hour events in our region over the last decade, including in Beaver Dam, Beloit, Cottage Grove, Madison, Milwaukee, Rockford, Sun Prairie, and Watertown. A participant in different drag pageant systems since the 1990s, she won a national title in 2017 and has continued to win regional titles in Minneapolis, La Crosse, and Madison since then.

### CASS'S LIFE OUTSIDE OF DRAG

Outside of drag, Cass Marie Domino is Cass Downing. She worked professionally as a Certified Nursing Assistant for 20 years, providing support and comfort to countless patients. For the past several years,

Cass has worked as a job coach and vocational support for people with developmental disabilities. She enjoys her dogs, riding horses, traveling, and building connections and community. She and her husband, Ryan, are enjoying life together in Madison.

One of the things people appreciate about Cass is her vulnerability in openly discussing challenges in her own life. An important member of the local sobriety community, she celebrated 25 years of sobriety in 2025. In the early 2000s, at a time when HIV/AIDS was still deeply stigmatized, she came out as HIV+ on the front page of the *Wisconsin State Journal*. "I was told to be quiet for so long, that once I found my voice, I used it," says Cass.

### FROM DONATION TO EXHIBITION

The exhibit started last November as a conversation about items Cass wanted to donate to the Madison LGBTQ+ Archive. "I have a Trans Phoenix dress I will give you!" she said. Of course, with a career as a local drag artist spanning nearly 40 years, it quickly became apparent her donations to the Archive, along with her personal story, could make a meaningful exhibit.



Cass performing at Miss WI Youth Entertainer.

The career retrospective uses documentary photography to show Cass's beginnings as a performer within the vibrant drag community at the Hotel Washington in the 1990s. Her iconic Red Ribbon Dress is just one item used to celebrate her ongoing philanthropy for HIV/AIDS causes and her coming out publicly as HIV+. Personal ephemera document her journey in recovery and embracing her gender identity. Children's books, photography, and costumes represent her contributions to Drag Story Hour and her participation in the mainstreaming of drag in Wisconsin. Photography documents her 10-year commitment to mentoring young drag queens. Finally, a wall of sashes, tiaras, and awards showcase her drag accolades from 1990s Miss Gay Wisconsin contests, through her recent titles in Minneapolis, La Crosse, and Madison.

### CREATING THE EXHIBIT

The exhibition is co-curated by the Madison LGBTQ+ Archive and UW's Open House Learning Community seminar. Professor of Gender



CHAD SCHULD.

& Women's Studies, and Art History, Anna Campbell, offered her spring 2025 seminar at Open House a choice of class projects they could work on. The class chose to work on building an exhibit honoring the career of Cass Downing. In explaining why they chose this as their project, student Cam Young says, "It's not often that drag performers get celebrated in such a way, so the opportunity to create an art exhibit celebrating a local drag artist and telling her story was really exciting."

According to Professor Campbell, "Working on this exhibit gave my students and me a hands-on opportunity to prepare a curated selection of Cass's beautiful and historic gowns for display, while also learning from Cass herself about the context for these gowns—the life and decades-long career that she's built in the face of so many challenges." Evelyn Geier, a student in the class, explained, "I learned that Cass Marie Domino is a model for resilience, for courage, and most of all, for staying true to yourself and not letting anyone stop you. This gallery is her courage, resilience, and truthfulness laid out." And Cam Young similarly noted, "Learning about Cass's journey taught me that no matter the hardships you endure, there is beauty ahead, you just have to find it. If you embrace your authentic self, you can live, not just survive."

Cam went on to say, "I hope that when people see this exhibit, it shows them the beauty and complexity of being a drag performer. Ultimately, I hope it serves as a testament to the resilience of the queer and trans communities, shows the beauty of embracing who you are, and challenges preconceived notions about trans people and drag queens. This exhibit is great for people of all ages, from all walks of life. Whether you're a drag queen yourself or have never seen one, this exhibit will meet you where you're at. It's a great experience to take a few minutes and really soak in the beauty and culture displayed in this gallery." Geier offers, "Drag is an expression of queer culture and the lives of its performers. I'd love to see more recognition of Wisconsin queer history and culture, and I hope this exhibit really brings that to light. We've been here, we're still here, and we're staying."

Cass's friend Julia McConahay, owner of Chrysalis Hair & Body on Madison's east side, was intimately involved in the creation of the exhibit, including helping interview Cass for the exhibit text. In reflecting on what they hoped people might get from the exhibit, Julia offered, "I wanted to be part of this process because I know in my bones that the more education humans have about each other, and the more familiar we get with each other's stories, the richer our communities and life experiences will become."

### LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

And what has it been like for Cass to be honored in such a way? "I never thought anything like this would ever happen in my life. It's been a huge honor and very humbling," says Cass. "This exhibit shows some of what I've done so far. There's more time for me to continue doing this work, and I'm not going anywhere." ■

# Pets Are Family



**EARTHWISE Pet**  
SUPPLY • GROOMING • WASH  
LOCALLY OWNED & OPERATED

### SHOP OUR TWO MADISON LOCATIONS

MADISON EAST  
6071 GEMINI DRIVE  
MADISON, WI 53718  
(608) 230-6210

MADISON WEST  
3260 UNIVERSITY AVE  
MADISON, WI 53705  
(608) 284-9007

EarthWisePetMadison.com



**QUIGLEY**  
Decks



Making the **outside** of your house

a **home.**

**QuigleyDecks.com**

tim@QuigleyDecks.com

608.577.4277



## Writing in Community

Wisconsin authors explore identity through recent fiction that explores identity, community, and belonging.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN** to be part of the LGBTQ+ community in Wisconsin as an author today? Does participation in this community influence a writer's feeling of belonging? Their sense of identity? And does that belonging impact the words that they put down on the page?

As an LGBTQ+ writer myself, these are the questions I hold close as I read and write, and the ones I was most eager to explore as I set out to interview a few Wisconsin authors with upcoming and recently released novels across the state.

### COMMON THREADS

Interestingly, when I picked up books from all the authors I was planning to meet, a few trends emerged right away: Many of their characters were on paths of self-discovery, and many were also trying to break free from the molds in which they grew up. This was especially true for middle grade and young adult stories. But more than that, the stories coming out of Wisconsin's queer community featured characters that were reflecting on where they belong and what it means to be queer through their connections with others and with the natural environment.

In other words, community—often full of imperfect and messy characters—is at the heart of all these stories.

2016 National & Regional award winner NARI basement under 30k  
2017 Regional award winner NARI kitchen under 50k  
2016 Angie's List Super service award



HAPPY HOMEOWNERS

"It has been great to know that I could refer to my husband without fearing that weird look people get on their faces when they aren't expecting that." **CHAD & DALE**

Looks like it's...  
**TIME 2 REMODEL**  
time2remodel.com

### PEBBLE STONE CHRONICLES

For most of the authors I interviewed, finding a community took some trial and error, and a willingness to put themselves "out there." Madison author **Huckleberry Rahr** says that it took a while to find a supportive feedback group, possibly because of her dyslexia, and because of folks not understanding the fantasy elements of her work. Eventually they found a group of people who, in their words, "all worked to teach me about the world of writing, critiquing, editing, and publishing. My background is in teaching, so I've always loved helping others, but the help I was given so freely gave me the confidence to share my knowledge." Huckleberry is the author of the *Pebble Stone Chronicles*. And the latest book in their series, *Zephyr*, was just released in August.

### THE INK WITCH

Giving ourselves grace in the process of figuring out our identity and finding community is important. Milwaukee-based author, **Steph Cherrywell**, wants their readers and aspiring LGBTQ+ writers to know that, "Being able to define yourself is good and powerful and important. But also, it's okay if you're not great at it right away." In their latest middle grade novel, Steph blends magic and the power of names in *The Ink Witch* (released September 16).

In the novel, Becca Slugg discovers she's the descendent of a witch coven, and has to find her place in this lineage as a witch who happens to be a trans girl. But as Cherrywell explains, "Becca being trans wasn't the original idea. I wanted a trans kid at the heart of a story that was about something other than having to fight for their identity. As important as those stories are, we should get to have other kinds of stories, too."

But as they continued to write, they realized something deeper about magical tropes. "There's another really old idea about magic, and that's the power of names. It's the idea that if you know someone's name, you have a form of control over them, and because of that, some powerful creatures keep their true name secret. I wanted to turn that idea on its head, too. In *The Ink Witch*, having your true name known makes you stronger, rather than weaker."

For both Rahr and Cherrywell, fantasy fit as a genre for discovering the magic of where you belong and what it means to be queer. Fantasy is playful: Characters—and even entire worlds—that are fluid and malleable, much like the fluidity of gender and sexuality. For LGBTQ+ authors in Wisconsin, building magical worlds full of characters and stories that reflect our lives is an essential way to reaffirm our humanity.

### LUCY, UNCENSORED

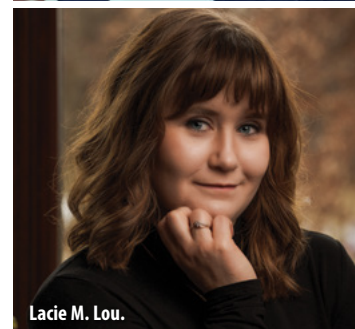
But writing and sharing queer stories is necessary work for building community among LGBTQ+ people in the state as well. For **Mel and Teghan Hammond**, sisters and co-authors of the queer coming-of-age YA novel *Lucy, Uncensored*, writing helped the siblings re-connect. Mel lives in Madison, and her sister Teghan lives in Indiana. But while they were co-writing their novel together, Teghan was serving time in an Indiana state prison. As Mel recalls, "Teghan would handwrite chapters and mail them to me in state-issued envelopes, and the prison system would deliv-



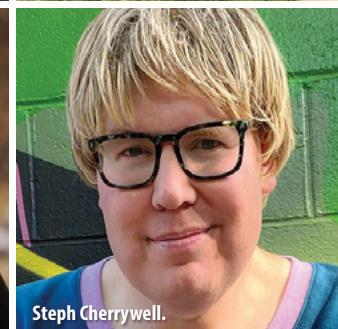
Huckleberry Rahr.



Mel & Teghan Hammond.



Lacie M. Lou.



Steph Cherrywell.

er our messages hours, days, or weeks later, always out of order."

At the end of her chapters, Teghan would write about the personal stories that inspired what she'd written, like when she painted her nails in high school and was called gay slurs because of it. That vulnerability allowed Mel to open up about times she wished she'd been a better ally. "The process brought us closer together than ever," Teghan said.

### THE AURORIAN TRILOGY

In this current political climate in our country, sharing queer stories of identity (and building community around them) is in itself a form of political and cultural resistance. Madison author **Lacie M. Lou** is working on building a community of LGBTQ+ writers in the area, meeting up at a local library on a monthly basis and sharing information together. She says, "If I didn't have my online and in-person writing community, I probably would have been done writing after my first book." Lucie's dark fantasy (for ages 16+) is "full of vengeance, monsters, grief, and diverse queer representation." The latest book in her series *The Aurorian Trilogy* was just released on August 28.

In late July, Lacie and I sat down at Lakeside Street Cafe in Madison. Even though we'd just met at her booth at the Big Gay Market, we quickly bonded over our love of fiction and our memories of growing up reading *The Animorphs*, a 90s kid classic that has profoundly radicalized so many of us with its shape-shifting characters. But there was something deeper there as well: Our shared love of reading and editing stories that our friends have written. There's something special about reading something that was written by someone you know personally, someone with whom you share time with outside the pages of a book.

### REPRESENTATION MATTERS—AND HEALS

For younger readers, stories with queer characters let them know there are other people out there who share their experiences and who are rooting for them. This is especially true for readers who live in places where access to diverse representation is limited. And for mature readers, we are able to heal parts of ourselves when we read these stories, young parts of us who yearned to know we weren't alone. The LGBTQ+ community is re-shaping the landscape of literature in Wisconsin, but not on our own. We are working together, sharing resources and ideas and all of our beautiful, shape-shifting characters, because we know that while writing is a solitary act, it is best cultivated in community. ■

## Book Review: *Lucy, Uncensored*

Wisconsin authors explore identity through recent fiction that explores identity, community, and belonging.

**EVERYONE DREAMS** of a fresh start at some point in their lives. For many of us, college is the first chance we get to really step outside of the script that is pre-written for us and write our own story. But what happens when your dream school won't actually let you be your true self? BFFs Lucy and Callie hit the road to try and find out if the perfect college for them exists and if their friendship can stand the test of time.



Like many good road trip novels, *Lucy, Uncensored* is a coming-of-age story that also incorporates the magic of theater. Theater-loving folks will delight in a queer retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Lucy and Callie work together to write, direct, and perform this play as part of their admission to college. In the end, the production they pull off leaves the reader feeling like listening to that *RENT* soundtrack again for the hundredth time.

Lucy is the kind of confident YA voice that you'd want your younger queer self to read: She has already figured out she is trans and is determined to find a place where she can finally be herself in a world that sometimes feels like it still wants her to use her deadname. The heart of the story focuses on how Lucy finds the strength to look beyond what is expected of her, even if that means jeopardizing her friendships and her relationship with her family.

This laugh-out-loud funny Young Adult gem will charm your socks off with a blend of Midwestern sass mixed with tender, coming-of-age queer realism. Sibling co-authors Mel and Teghan Hammond, Midwesterners themselves, have a way of pulling you in and making you feel like you are more than just a reader.

As Mel explains, just like her characters, the desire to leave home and find her own path was strong in her late teenage years, but she did eventually come back to the midwest. In her words, "I think many of us want to escape the box of where we grew up, and that's why we wanted to write this road trip novel."

For many in the LGBTQ+ community, finding our way is a rite of passage, but it can often be traumatic. Mel and Teghan flip the script by telling us a story of two young adults who make this journey in a safe, funny, and beautiful way. As someone who spent a large amount of time on cross-country road trips, reading this account of Lucy and Callie finding their way together with supportive but imperfect adults in their lives was deeply healing.

Indeed, Teghan explains that she hopes the book helps older readers "heal their inner child" and that everyone who reads this novel might feel inspired to "find or create spaces where they can express their full selves—plus be fearlessly and selflessly supportive of their friends." Despite their play being censored, Callie's indecisions, and a distracting love interest, the two friends eventually find one another again at the end, and pull off the performance of a lifetime. In a world that is banning books and silencing queer voices, this story of two young people standing up for what is right and doing so in a playful way is exactly what we need right now. ■



## READY TO START HEALING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BODY?

JOIN QUEER BODY IMAGE BOOTCAMP HOSTED BY REVERENCE INTIMATE PORTRAITS FROM 3/19/26 - 3/22/2026

WANT MORE INFO?



CONNECT → OUR ORGANIZERS OURLIVESWISCONSIN.COM



Hawthorn McCracken and Rufus Jupiter.

ORGANIZATIONS COMMUNITY BUILDING RURAL COMMUNITIES TRANSGENDER

## Making Space: Trans on the Land

Hawthorn McCracken, one of the founders of Trans on the Land, and organization member Rufus Jupiter spoke with *Our Lives* about this growing Viroqua-based network for trans and non-binary residents of the Driftless Area.

**TRANS ON THE LAND** was co-created by Hawthorn McCracken and Murray Valentine to create a network for trans and non-binary folks in the Driftless Area to learn about foraging, farming, and food preservation. Since the start, it's evolved into a social club with a shared interest and passion for the land. A quarter of the members are actively farming or managing land. The group acknowledges that the Ho-Chunk Nation are the true owners of the land in the Driftless Area. *Our Lives* sat down with Hawthorn McCracken and Rufus Jupiter to learn about Trans on the Land.

### WHY DID YOU FORM TRANS ON THE LAND & WHEN?

**Hawthorn:** I am a goober. I make friends as an adult by starting a group. I have a trail of other social organizations behind me. This group started online in 2020. Our first in-person gathering was a walk through the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. I had attended events at Soil Sisters (Wisconsin) and Queer Farm Conversion in Iowa, and although both groups were welcoming, I didn't feel like I truly belonged or that anyone understood my identity. But I loved their model of hosting skill shares and teaching people how to navigate the world of farming and facilitate friendships.

**Rufus:** One thing I've noticed is new people

are moving to this area because there's a shared love of the land itself. Some live in town or outside of town, but we all have a shared value of caring for this particular land.

### HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE IN THIS GROUP?

**Hawthorn:** There are about 150 people on the email listserv, including people from Milwaukee and Madison who dream of living in the Driftless Area. Between 24 to 30 people meet regularly. They live in La Crosse to Viroqua and even Decorah, Iowa.

### WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES DO YOU DO?

**Hawthorn:** The activities are driven by the group's and individuals' interests and needs. We've inoculated mushroom blocks on straw and wood, removed garlic mustard and other invasives from someone's land, and planted native species. Originally, I planned that we would go on two foraging walks per month and do skill share potlucks at members' houses, but it's less formal now. If someone wants to host something on their land they do, with art meet-ups and swimming in natural areas thrown in.

### TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE DRIFTLESS DREAM ZINE.

**Murray Valentine:** It shares art and writing from 18 trans and queer contributors, most of

whom are either from or living in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa. The prompts for the latest issue were, "What kind of community do you long for? Do you know what it feels like? How do the local ecology and your identity shape these dreams?" The contributions are interesting, thoughtful, strange, funny, heartfelt, curious, hopeful, melancholic, joyful, playful, and revolutionary. I'm extraordinarily proud of the writing, art, and the final product. A lot of work and care went into it. We gave out 50 or so copies at Viroqua Pride and you can check out copies at the UW-LaCrosse Library. We have plans to print more in the near future, and there is a full-color PDF and printable black-and-white version available for free on the Trans on the Land Linktree on Instagram page.

### DOES THIS GROUP FULFILL A UNIQUE PURPOSE?

**Hawthorn:** We're not a nonprofit, we're not a political action organization, but in our steering meetings we ask, "What do folks need from Trans on the Land emotionally, physically, artistically, and how are we meeting those needs?" One thing that's come out of national uncertainty is resiliency organizing—talking about how we're moving forward as a group that provides resiliency in the face of national uncertainty about the future and natural disasters like floods and fires. We've also done things like meal trains to support each other through health issues.

**Rufus:** The future is tenuous right now, and we're rural. We need to make sure a safety net is in place. We're not all in proximity to each other; we're all over the place in the hills. It's important to stay in contact with each other as a group, as a network.

### HOW DO YOU WEAVE TRANS IDENTITY & FARMING?

**Rufus:** I own several acres of land and had a fresh flower business. Trying to navigate the farming world as a queer person felt lonely. I look around, and I don't see other people like me doing this. I feel like I stick out. I feel like I have to do a lot of masking. I felt myself wanting to be more macho to pass as a more masculine-perceived person, especially around someone I didn't already know. In general in rural life, even in Viroqua, you still don't know who you're encountering when you're out in public. I feel very guarded.

**Hawthorn:** The loneliness of not seeing yourself in the space was a huge motivator for creating this group. There have been increased political attacks on trans youth, and representation is so important to combat that. As someone who grew up in the Bible Belt, for the longest time I thought I had to move away to be myself. Trans people are out here in rural areas and living good lives. I want to show

queer and trans youth in a rural area what's possible. If you want to be in 4-H and be trans, you can. We're supporting friends in the community with trans kids. It's becoming a big part of what we do as a group.

Rural communities have been gutted, so there's a lot of attention on revitalizing rural areas. You don't have to go to Madison or the Twin Cities to do cool shit.

**Rufus:** Jack Halberstam coined the term "metronormativity." There's this idea that queerness belongs in large metro areas and doesn't belong anywhere else.

**Hawthorn:** Being in a group specifically for trans, non-binary, non-gender-confirming people, there are so many shared insights. We are on the same wavelength of queering, and that influences our approach to community building. If you live in the Driftless Area and want to join us, do it. If you want a group like this in your area, build it.

Trans on the Land is transforming both lives and the rural landscape. By community building and physically removing invasive species, they are able to heal the land and each other. Follow them at @transontheland. ■

## RUTABAGA PADDLESPOrts IS CLOSING.

SO DARREN IS HAVING A

## RETIREMENT SALE!

CLOTHING 20-60% OFF

CAMPING GEAR 30-60% OFF

FOOTWEAR 30-60% OFF

DRYWEAR 20% OFF



2620 Rimrock Rd, Madison, 53713  
608-223-9300 www.rutabagashop.com

Why is Darren retiring? This.



Capturing Every Story, Embracing Every Journey

Vintage  
Lulu  
PHOTOGRAPHY

Trans & Queer-Owned



- Open Daily 7am-Midnight
- Shop Online 24/7
- Free delivery available!

LOCALLY OWNED & OPERATED  
CELEBRATING 40 YEARS 1983-2023  
COMMUNITY SHARES PARTNER

111 N. BROOM ST. • CAPCENTREMARKET.COM • 608-255-2616

# A Cultural Savant Rising

In Green Bay, **Tarlton Knight** is one of the major players working to expand the downtown arts district and bring vibrant, culturally relevant, and innovative arts spaces into the city.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CULTURE THEATER POLITICS PEOPLE GREEN BAY



Take, for example, the theater itself: The century-old building was once slated for demolition. Mark Mariucci, who previously owned The Historic West Theatre, was considering another attempt to save it, but needed someone with fresh ideas about how to activate the venue. Serendipitously, Knight connected with Mariucci after Knight played a music gig at Green Bay's Pride celebration. The two formed a business partnership that ultimately safeguarded the historic building.

Mariucci's experience in providing spaces for the LGBTQ+ community through film, dance, and other artistic mediums struck Knight as the perfect skillset to help him manifest his vision for a performing arts venue. Knight explains, "The age difference helps us to balance experience with new creative risk-taking. We balance each other out and are supportive of each other's goals with this creative project."

## NAMESAKE

Not many emerging musicians get to see their name up in lights on a theater marquee, but Mariucci insisted that the theater be named after his business partner, the then 23-year-old singer songwriter, because "Tarlton" has the perfect art deco ring to it. "He took a big risk," Knight acknowledges. "I think he saw that I had a lot of drive. We got to talking, and by the time we really sat down, had dinner, and discussed the decision, we were both invested." The two men opened The Tarlton Theatre on December 15, 2018. Along with their creative team, they have since turned the space into a popular, eclectic cultural destination.

As the namesake of the building, Tarl Knight, who is now 29, is not only a multi-platform artist, but also what *Our Lives* publisher Patrick Farabaugh has dubbed a "cultural revivalist." Knight's passion for art, historic preservation, community building, volunteerism, and representative democracy has helped breathe new life into one of Green Bay's most storied venues and into the city's cultural landscape as a whole.

Knight's commitment to historic preservation goes beyond simply maintaining the building's functionality. Partnering with Mariucci, he formed the Historic West Fund, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and restoring the theater's Art Deco elements and historical architecture. Through their nonprofit's efforts, they intend to restore the marquee to its former glory.

## EARLY INFLUENCES

Knight's journey to becoming one of Green Bay's most prominent cultural leaders began when he was only 13. As an aspiring singer-songwriter in Sturgeon Bay, he became involved in a songwriting festival created by musician Pat MacDonald, of Timbuk 3 fame. MacDonald started the festival to help save the historic Door County Steel Bridge from demolition. At the Steel Bridge Songfest, MacDonald and others wrote and performed songs about preserving the Steel Bridge, recorded them at MacDonald's Holiday Music Motel, and released a CD

**THE EYES ARE THE WINDOWS** to the soul, and Tarl Knight's are big, hazel, and on the prize. His are the eager eyes of someone who is hungry to make an impact on the world. You can see it in his direct gaze, which reflects the amber light of the art deco table lamps in the historic Tarlton Theatre, where nearly a hundred years of entertainment history now shares the stage with Green Bay's cultural avant-garde.

about the iconic bridge to raise funds and further the cause. This early experience with the Steel Bridge Songfest proved transformative for Knight, who was involved with the effort throughout his teens. Through that experience, Knight performed before Sturgeon Bay's City Council, an experience that opened his eyes to the powerful intersection of arts, culture, and community building.

Knight's mother is Pamela Gantz, a former small business owner and entrepreneur who currently serves on the Common Council in De Pere, a municipality just south of Green Bay. Knight credits her with his ambitions and success. "A lot of who I am is who she is because she is my mother," he said. She is, "A go-to-the-end-of-the-world type of mother." Knight's mother supported him through everything, including childhood bullying, which he attributes to his "way of speaking" and the fact that he is "a creative guy," as well as a frightening experience he had when he was 16 and lost his vision for over half a year.

These ventures reflect Knight's holistic approach to community building, recognizing that cultural vitality depends on creating clusters of complementary businesses and experiences that encourage people to spend time in downtown areas.

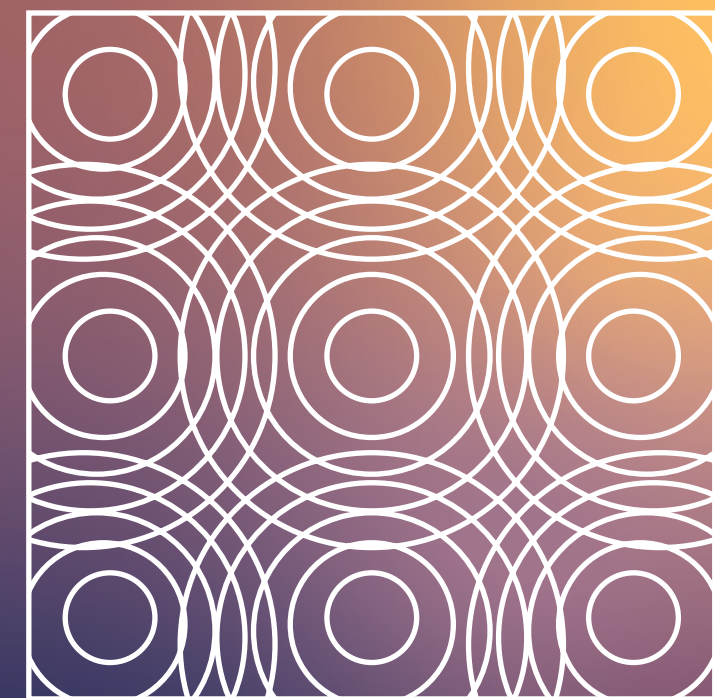
His mom "bent over backwards" seeking free and affordable opportunities for him. She recognized his passion for art and music and cultivated his talents. "She did everything she possibly could to expose me to art and music," he said. That included arranging piano and guitar lessons for him, though he acknowledges he didn't last long with any one teacher. She also tried many schools to find the right fit for him. At one point, he attended Renaissance School for the Arts in Appleton. Eventually, she even sold an heirloom baby grand piano to fund his musical education at Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, where he further honed his craft in the fall of 2013. After finishing high school, he then spent time traveling to play music around the Midwest.

These formative experiences shaped Knight's identity as both an artist and an activist. When he eventually made his way to Green Bay, he carried with him a deep understanding of how cultural programming could serve as a catalyst for preserving historical architecture and fostering community connection. When his path led him to the Tarlton Theatre—his "first and only real job," he jokes—his eyes opened to the opportunity and responsibility to grant people like his younger self access to perform on a stage before an audience.

## A BUILDING WITH A HISTORY—AND A BROADER PURPOSE

The building that The Tarlton Theatre occupies has survived numerous incarnations since its construction in 1925. Originally built as an automotive dealership, it became a cinema in 1941. Its name changed often over the next 64 years, but the word "West" was on the Marquee until 2005, when the building was purchased by Green Bay Packer Nick Barnett, who turned it into the short-lived nightclub, the FiveSix Ultra Lounge. Next, it was home to the Funky Monkey, but when that business closed, the historic venue awaited an uncertain fate. According to Mariucci, the City of Green Bay had plans to raze the building to put up a parking structure. For Knight and Mariucci, the building represented more than just another business opportunity. They recognized that the location had a long and nostalgic history with the people of Green Bay.

What began as a straightforward live music venue quickly evolved into something more ambitious and inclusive. Knight and Mariucci initially focused on hosting bands and songwriters in a live music venue



## MUSE AT MMoCA

Gallery Night Afterparty

Friday, November 7 • 5-10 PM • Free Admission

**MMoCA**  
MADISON MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

[mmoca.org/muse](http://mmoca.org/muse)

**D'Vino**  
Aperitivo...

**BRUNCH • LUNCH • APERITIVO • DINNER**  
116 KING ST • [DVINOMADISON.COM](http://DVINOMADISON.COM) • [RESERVATIONS@OPENTABLE](mailto:RESERVATIONS@OPENTABLE)

Inside the Tarlton.



in the heart of downtown. But within a year of operations, they realized their space could serve a broader purpose. This revelation led them to shifting their mission “to accommodate all local, original creators, performers, and community organizations looking for a home on our stage and screen.”

The 10,000-square-foot space, with its ornate ceiling, curved walls, booth seating, and movie screen, provides an appealing cabaret club venue where guests can enjoy dinner, drinks, and a variety of cultural experiences. The Tarlton Theatre’s programming team includes Kylie LaCombe who serves as their program and booking manager and who graduated with an arts management degree from UW-Stevens Point. Knight and Mariucci credit her with much of the venue’s programming success. She shares a guiding philosophy about the role of arts venues in building inclusive communities.

#### TARLTON EVENTS & PROGRAMMING

Their team is willing to partner with local nonprofits who wish to bring their programming to downtown Green Bay. For example, UW-Green Bay’s Weidner Center for the Performing Arts presents The Weidner Downtown at the Tarlton series there, and the Green Bay Film Festival presents independent film projects at The Tarlton Theatre throughout the year—a large number of which are created by local and Wisconsin-based filmmakers. The Green Bay Jazz Orchestra also performs free classic jazz concerts on The Tarlton Theatre’s stage throughout the year

The Tarlton Theatre has become a hub for events Knight wanted to help make happen that were previously less accessible to Green Bay and Northeast Wisconsin-area audiences. The regional draw speaks to the success of Knight’s vision. Programming, like their signature quarterly “ArtWar” live painting competitions, features 360-degree viewing of local painters participating in speed painting rounds, and exemplifies the kind of unique cultural experiences that The Tarlton Theatre has made possible. The venue also hosts The Bay Area Music Awards, also known as “The BAMMY Awards,” or just “The BAMMY’s,” providing sound systems, stages, audiences, and recognition for hundreds of local bands.

The team is open to any quirky idea they think will float. They host classic films, burlesque shows, drag shows, comedy shows, theatrical performances, and festivals such as the Annual Green Bay Fringe Festival. They even host a Saturday Morning Cartoon Brunch, where guests

can watch their favorite cartoons with a breakfast Old-Fashioned or bottomless coffee.

Their project has faced challenges, including opening their doors just a couple of years before the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically altered the entertainment industry. Despite the obstacles, Knight sees clear evidence that his vision and willingness to experiment is working. When asked if The Tarlton hosts the Moth StorySLAM storytelling event, Knight was quick to quip that they don’t yet, but they probably will be going forward.

#### COMMUNITY BUILDING BEYOND THE THEATER

Outside their building, the Tarlton Theatre recently opened The

Truck Yard At The Tarlton, or simply “The Truck Yard,” a food truck park adjacent to the theater. There, they host Wednesdays On Walnut, which features free local outdoor music with rotating food trucks. Thursdays bring “In The Yard” concerts in partnership with Ahnapee Brewery and von Stiehl Winery. “Flea Market Fridays” showcase vintage and handcrafted markets with live music.

Success at The Tarlton and its food truck park has led Knight and Mariucci to expand their cultural programming beyond the theater. Recognizing demand from local musicians seeking performance space, the business partners recently opened At The Tracks, a new music venue in Green Bay’s developing Shipyard District. The new venue, housed in the former Rockabilly’s Saloon, is designed to serve local rock, punk, and metal bands, among other musical styles, that complement, rather than compete with, The Tarlton Theatre’s diverse programming.

These ventures reflect Knight’s holistic approach to community building, recognizing that cultural vitality depends on creating clusters of complementary businesses and experiences that encourage people to spend time in downtown areas. That philosophy may be the reason Knight volunteers as the director of Shipyard District, Inc., an organization whose mission is “to revitalize the commercial, residential, and industrial corridor along the Fox River and improve the quality of life for all in our neighborhood district.” Shipyard District, Inc. presents All Bands On Deck, Green Bay’s largest music festival and has facilitated murals throughout the district.

Knight’s entrepreneurial vision extends into other aspects of community development as well. He is chair of Green Bay Neighborhoods, a governmental body that consists of the presidents of recognized neighborhood associations, the mayor, staff, and various community leaders. Their role is to provide a link between neighborhoods and local government to improve quality of life by empowering citizens working through their neighborhood associations. Because Knight believes so strongly that everyone deserves access to arts, culture, and community, this summer The Tarlton Theatre and Green Bay Neighborhoods partnered with the City to start Grooves on the Green, a summer concert series that brings free live music to neighborhood parks across Green Bay.

#### PROGRESSIVE ARTIST CANDIDATE

Knight has also entered the political arena. He has twice run for and lost elections for a seat on Green Bay’s Common Council. In his first

campaign for District 9 in 2022, he lost by under 140 votes. In his second run for the very popular downtown district, in 2024, he lost by just 65 votes. When asked if he would run again, he does not hesitate. “I’m the kind of guy who is never going to stop until I can make it happen.”

He doesn’t represent any big interests; he’s “neighborhood friendly” and is concerned about balancing development with affordable housing, which to him includes addressing issues and services that will help people who are houseless, an issue that impacts the district in which he both lives and works.

He would also like to address the “gargantuan coal piles, which occupy huge areas of the riverfront” and cause, in Knight’s opinion, “disuse of the riverway, and prevent people’s enjoyment of waterfront property.” He believes that providing riverfront access, remediating the land, water, and air in the district, and attracting mixed-use, downtown-style development is a priority. He thinks that it is important to do all that while acknowledging the cultural legacy of shipping, paper manufacturing, and the steel industry in the district.

He identifies as a progressive artist candidate. “As young people, who haven’t even reached our thirties yet, we still deserve to have a voice.” He added, “There are a lot of unrepresented people in their teens, twenties, and thirties when you look at different governmental bodies, especially in Northeast Wisconsin. There are a lot of older folks. I love the wisdom that older generations bring to the table, but new creative identities and solutions need to be represented, too.”

#### CREATIVITY IN MANY FORMS

Originally, music and painting were Knight’s primary artistic outlets, but when asked if he still has time to make music or paint, he admits that he does not have much free time these days, though sometimes he opens for a band that is performing at one of his venues. He says he

has been working on his album for the last 10 years, but he is satisfied with his current creative pursuits. He has a multitude of platforms and creative tools at his disposal. Instead of focusing solely on making songs or paintings, he creates experiences that engage people with the larger human condition, exploring a range of emotions, challenges, and aspirations that define what it means to be alive.

Knight is a proud full-time volunteer in all of his positions, including serving as Director of Shipyard District, Inc., Chairman of Green Bay Neighborhoods, and Owner/Creative Director of The Tarlton Theatre and their family of venues. He would love others to notice and appreciate the value of volunteering in their communities as much as possible, regardless of compensation, stating that, “Our community is our own, and it’s ours to create!”

#### YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

Earlier this year, Knight was recognized by Current Young Professionals and the Greater Green Bay Chamber as Young Entrepreneur of the Year. His responsiveness to community needs has been a defining characteristic of Knight’s approach, from his teenage activism in Door County to his current role as one of Green Bay’s most visible creative business owners and aspiring politicians. His willingness to take risks on untested programming, and his commitment to accessibility reflect a deep belief in the power of arts and culture to transform communities.

In an era when many small cities struggle to maintain vibrant downtown cultural scenes, Tarl Knight’s work in Green Bay offers a compelling model. By combining historic preservation with inclusive programming, accessibility with artistic ambition, and business acumen with community responsiveness, Knight and his partners have created something rare: a cultural institution that serves both as a guardian of the past and a catalyst for the future. ■

DON'T MISS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR OPERAS!

# La Bohème

By Giacomo Puccini

NOVEMBER 7 & 9, 2025  
OVERTURE HALL

Adored by audiences for over a century, *La Bohème* tells of the lives, loves, and losses of a group of young artists in a Bohemian quarter of Paris, all set to a ravishing score.

*La Bohème* simply has no equal. Come fall in love all over again.

Sung in Italian with projected English translations

TICKETS START AT ONLY \$21

MADISON OPERA 608.258.4141  
madisonopera.org/Boheme/

# Building New Worlds One Canvas at a Time

Visual artist **Nykoli Koslow** is doing the work of reimagining what the world could be and putting it on display for all to see.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT TRANSGENDER PEOPLE



**IN THE VIBRANT** Milwaukee art scene, artist Nykoli Koslow (they/he) has been busy worldbuilding. Working primarily in painting and drawing but extending into installation, video, and virtual reality, Koslow has spent the past decade creating abstract paintings and other-worldly scenes rooted in what he calls *queer abundancies and alien semiotics*. In these works, Koslow increasingly represents trans experiences as something simultaneously ancient and futuristic, personal and cosmic.

Koslow was raised in a household where his Christian mother and Jewish father's influences were overshadowed by the conservative ideologies forced upon them at the Christian schools he attended. He was sent to a Lutheran junior high and high school that taught creationism instead of science. Students were required to memorize "facts" about how the earth was created in seven days.

#### DISILLUSIONMENT IN SCHOOL

"If you had a logical mind, you just didn't do well," Koslow recalls. "I wasn't trying to challenge anybody; it was so illogical." They remember the feeling of disillusionment when an elementary school teacher refused to verify the fact that dinosaurs lived before humans. Eventually, this questioning led to a profound realization: Religion itself is a form of worldbuilding, in that religions create cohesive fictions that include geographies, cultures, rules, language, and social structures.

"I was born an atheist, so I never bought into religion. I always considered myself an outsider looking in, even though I was within it," they explain. "I always tried to dissect their beliefs and their reasoning. I tried to understand why they hated gay people. I tried to follow their threads of reasoning, and the stories that they spun around themselves to believe in that. That is why I got into mythmaking and recreating biblical myths in my own way, because I was immersed in people that existed in a reality that wasn't a reality, but they all convinced themselves that it was reality. They all made it real."

Koslow's experience sparked their fascination with ideologies. "Just trying to understand why they thought the way they did made me really interested in how we construct the world that we live in. And how we can tell new stories to create better worlds."

#### FINDING FREEDOM IN PAINTING

What began as a survival mechanism evolved when Koslow discovered painting during his undergraduate studies at UW-Milwaukee. Originally an English major, he took an art class and immediately fell in love.

"It felt like complete freedom. You can do whatever you want," he said. The first time he worked in oil, he knew he had found his niche. "My painting is more of an immediate mark-making to build something up. It is very dopamine-friendly. As soon as I did oils for the first time, I knew it was my medium. I am still an oil painter before anything else."

After graduating in 2013, Koslow worked in the service industry

while painting in his limited free time. In 2015, his breakthrough came via participation in the first 30x30 exhibition at Var Gallery, which led to a studio there and deeper immersion in Milwaukee's arts scene. In 2017 he participated in the MARN Mentor/Mentee program with Jason S. Yi, one of Wisconsin's most prominent artists, forming a close relationship that furthered his artistic development.

#### RECOGNITION AND TRACTION

Since then, Koslow's work has found significant recognition within Wisconsin's art community. In 2021, they served as Artist in Residence at Milwaukee's historic Pfister Hotel. Though interrupted by the pandemic, the residency proved transformative, providing time and financial support to create a substantial body of work.

"It was a blessing in disguise. The first six months I still got paid to be there," he reflects. "I was able to get commissions and gigs because I was there, and I got a lot of work done. I didn't get any other opportunities during Covid, so the fact that I landed that was a huge blessing."

However, the opportunity came with expectations of propriety that Koslow had to navigate. "I kept them really abstracted so I could still paint their stories, but not do something that would upset anyone."

"Trans people have an awareness of their bodies and the limitations of it," they observe. "They kind of celebrate what their bodies can do in a way that maybe non-trans people don't think about as readily and easily."

The residency culminated in their solo exhibition *Queer Mythologies: TransAbstractions* (February 25–June 26, 2022) at Saint Kate Hotel, where the gallery space was transformed into what Koslow described as a "queer altar." The exhibition invited guests to move through vibrant gestural canvases and drawings that enveloped the room, creating an immersive environment where viewers could experience his imagined futuristic universe firsthand.

#### PAINTING FROM LIFE, BUILDING NEW WORLDS

In his recent series *Earth 38.2*, started in 2023 and ongoing, Koslow creates a post-apocalyptic, pre-Eden world: "This alien-esque world where these trans beings are recreating these epic mythic narratives." When asked if the worlds are safe spaces, he offers a nuanced response.

"I think that because there is uncertainty in life, and I only paint from life, that uncertainty is going to show up in everything I create," he explains. "Even in Eden-esque worlds, Eden is an impossibility in being human. There is always this underlayer of chaos, death, and destruction that exists underneath the surface of everything. So, I think there is an uncertainty and unsettledness to everything I make because that is the world that we live in, and I can't really make anything outside of that."

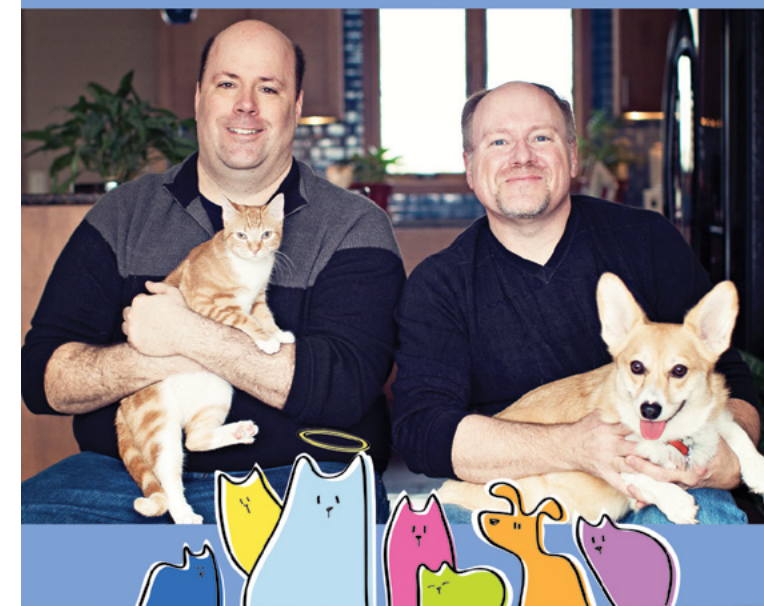
Is it escapism? "Complete escapism doesn't really exist. Even if I tried to make it complete escapism, I think I set it up to be like that, but then it always mirrors and reflects back everything that I'm dealing with."

Koslow's exploration of virtual reality adds another dimension to their artistic practice, wherein VR offers a unique form of embodied experience that resonates with trans identity.

"Trans people have an awareness of their bodies and the limitations of it," they observe. "They kind of celebrate what their bodies can do in a way that maybe non-trans people don't think about as readily and easily. I'm aware of the confines of my body and my skin and the limitations of it, maybe moreso than someone who isn't trans would be aware."

In VR, this awareness transforms into liberation: "When I exist in the

purrrrrsonal matchmaking for every family!



Angel's Wish

WWW.ANGELSWISH.ORG

Pet Adoption • Microchipping • Retail Store  
Educational Resources • Volunteer Opportunities

JEWELERS WORKSHOP



YOU DREAM IT  
WE MAKE IT!

EXPERTS IN CUSTOM DESIGN & REPAIRS

2110 ATWOOD AVE. MADISON, WI 53704 | 608.251.7705 | JEWELERSWORKSHOP.COM

VIVIENNE ANDERSEN  
REALTOR®

V@VIVIENNEANDERSEN.COM  
608 425 0929





headspace, my body completely ceases to exist. It is just like a space of pure non-embodiment and energy. It helps me exist beyond my body in a very literal way that I don't have access to otherwise."

He can trace his body in virtual space and, "Make my body whatever I want it to be in that space, and then I can create the world that I want it to exist in. So, I can have a lot of fun and a lot of freedom within the worlds that don't exist." As he puts it, "You get to play God. All art really does feel like that. You get to create whatever you want."

#### INSPIRATIONS

While few painters are described as worldbuilders, Koslow draws inspiration from various artistic sources. After someone compared his VR work to artist Emma Webster, he became a fan of hers. Webster is a landscape artist whose images have been described as convincing and hallucinatory. He also references contemporary artist Jacolby Satterwhite who creates immersive installations of animation and live-action films. Looking back through historical art, Koslow is fascinated by the illustrations of religious concepts in the hellscapes of Hieronymus Bosch.

His 2023 exhibition *Queer Cosmology: The Making of a Universe* at Var Gallery (which represents him) demonstrated the evolution of Koslow's mythological system. He exhibited at the Museum of Wisconsin Art's Ten at Ten exhibition (2023) and their Wisconsin Artist Biennial (2024), marking him as one of the state's most promising artists.

#### MORE LEARNING AHEAD

Despite their success, Koslow has decided to pursue an MFA at UW-Madison, seeking to deepen their engagement with academic and theoretical frameworks and to have the necessary time and resources to focus on creating new art. They look forward to studying with faculty artists they admire like Fred Stonehouse, Leslie Smith III, and Christina West,

as well as learning with and from the other students in the MFA program.

At UW-Madison, Koslow intends to focus on their rendering abilities: "Not necessarily more figurative in a human sense, but I want the characters that I'm creating in this world to be more believable." They also plan to experiment with different mediums and technologies.

Graduate school, they hope, will give them the freedom to create expanded, uncensored, more kinky, versions of the work they want to make. They believe Madison will provide the platform and conditions necessary to make their dream series, the concept for the next body of work already forming in their mind. "I have all the threads. I've been kind of working out what the people are going to look like or what the nature scenes might look like, and the narrative, but putting it all together and creating the actual series, I feel like it will be super-beneficial to have the feedback, the inspiration, and the facilities."

#### NEVERTHELESS, THEY PERSIST

Koslow's work persists at a moment when transgender visibility and rights are under threat. Rather than working within existing religious or mythological frameworks, he creates entirely new ones where transness is not just accepted, but foundational. By positioning trans identity as ancient, cosmic, and fundamentally natural, his work challenges the premise that queer and trans identities are somehow new or unnatural.

In an era when many LGBTQ+ artists focus on visibility, representation, or political activism, Koslow's approach is notably different. He creates parallel universes where the very terms of existence are different, where his sense of queer maximalism and his own alien mythology provide the fundamental building blocks of reality itself.

His philosophy emerges clearly in his own words: "Nature is inherently diverse. Our bodies are inherently diverse." He takes marginalized figures and makes them the main character, normalizing them through mythological framework where abstraction and figuration merge. In doing so, he offers both refuge and revolution, worlds where queerness is not just tolerated but cosmically essential.

"Fiction is what gets us to the real world," he explains. "Our emotions and our vulnerabilities, and understanding our humanness is what makes us so real."

Perhaps most powerfully, Koslow finds hope in the natural world's persistence. He recalls a late-night encounter he recently had near Lake Michigan. "I went to the woods by the lake really late at night and saw all these flashes of light from the fireflies. There were so many! It was so beautiful, and so peaceful. It felt out of place, and out of time—otherworldly. But it was real. Is real. I was having a mini-existential crisis crying at these horny fireflies that were just trying to find mates because nature is always trying to create more nature. Life is always propagating, creating more life. More beauty. More love. This is real. A real fact: Love is normal, and easy, and natural."

This vision infuses their broader philosophy: "History doesn't have to repeat itself. It doesn't even have to rhyme. History can be history. And tomorrow can be brand-fucking-new. And in between today and tomorrow, maybe we find optimism. Maybe we don't find optimism. But we do find each other. We always do. And we, like nature, create, and love, and dance, and organize, and we do our very best to survive despite insurmountable odds, simply because life is beautiful."

Through painting, drawing, installation, and emerging technologies, Nykoli Koslow continues to build universes where the margins become the center and where worldbuilding serves as both artistic practice and survival strategy. Their work stands as a testament to the power of imagination not just to reflect reality, but to fundamentally reimagine it—confronting historical marginalization while envisioning a future that recognizes queerness as intrinsic, natural, and life-affirming. ■

Our pride panels show our commitment to creating a positive space for LGBTQIA+ youth in Dane County and beyond. In the month of June, aka Pride Month, our listing agents will donate 10% of our commission to GSAFE. Selling this spring? Let our experts guide you through your sale while helping promote LOVE is LOVE for all.

[www.LauerRealtyGroup.com](http://www.LauerRealtyGroup.com) | 608.467.3220

**IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO ENCLOSE YOUR PORCH BEFORE WINTER. CALL TODAY TO SCHEDULE A FREE CONSULTATION.**

**PORCH ENCLOSURES**

BEFORE

AFTER

BEFORE

AFTER

Get a New View from  
**Kool View**  
*52 Years in Business*

**608-222-7777**  
**KOOLVIEW.COM**

Dental Insurance You Can Smile About

**Momentum DENTAL PLANS**

Personalized and Affordable for Individuals & Families.

**Enroll Online Today!**  
[MomentumPlans.com](http://MomentumPlans.com)

608.729.6500  
 Locally owned and operated in Madison

**LOCAL CLINICS. OUTSTANDING CARE.**

MADISON MAGAZINE'S **BEST OF MADISON** 2023 GOLD  
 MADISON MAGAZINE'S **BEST OF MADISON** 2024 GOLD

**DENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATES**  
[dhamadison.com](http://dhamadison.com)

**7 Convenient Locations**

Family Dentistry • Orthodontics • Implants • Cosmetic Dentistry

**608-284-5400**

# Look, Listen, & Learn— And Give Back

**Brandon Rounds** slowly came into the world of drag, developing his persona of Bianca Lynn Breeze. With the pandemic came a new focus from performing for self-promotion to advocating for others.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DRAG COMMUNITY BUILDING ADVOCACY



**BRANDON ROUNDS** grew up in the 90s in Boscobel, a town of about 3,000 people. As a kid, he dealt with a good amount of bullying, but nevertheless remembers being surrounded by a really great group of friends.

“We were always very supportive of each other, as were most people in my life,” Brandon said. “I didn’t even realize I was gay yet, but I was raised by parents who really encouraged me to be my authentic self no matter what.”

Brandon remembers his father as a very positive person. The two would work on motorcycles together, and he was supportive of Brandon’s involvement in activities like Forensics, band, and theater. As Brandon recalls, “Years later, when I came out to him, he said, ‘Well, we’ve known for many years.’ So, I guess everyone else knew before I did.”

Despite his parents’ generally positive attitude, he recalls not feeling as comfortable discussing the topic with his mother. “I actually came out to my mom first,” Brandon remembers. “I told her that I thought I liked both guys and girls, and she answered by saying, ‘Well, when I was your age, I thought I liked girls, too.’ Maybe she thought it was just a phase, but as a younger person, it was difficult for me to talk about, so we didn’t discuss it much.”

Then, in 2008, Brandon’s mother was diagnosed with lung cancer and passed shortly thereafter. “Because of her diagnosis, I never really got the opportunity to have that conversation with her,” Brandon recalls. “Although, she did tell me once that as soon as I turned 21, she would take me to my first gay bar. So, in the end, I knew she would have supported me no matter what.”

#### DISCOVERING DRAG

Brandon attended college at UW-Platteville, where he studied marketing and business. It was there that he first discovered the world of drag. “In Platteville, I was the president

of the Alliance, which was the gay organization,” Brandon said. “In that role, I helped organize an LGBTQ+ conference that included a drag show. We hosted sessions and panels, and we invited students from a number of other schools. I didn’t really know much about drag at that point, but some of my friends convinced me to get in drag and perform. I wasn’t a professional or anything, but that was technically my first time, and I didn’t take it too seriously. After that, I ended up dating one of the people we hired to perform drag, so I would go to his shows.”

After graduating, Brandon moved to Madison, where the drag world opened up for him even more. “I would watch *RuPaul’s Drag Race* at Plan B on Monday nights with a group of friends and ended up doing my first dress up in 2013,” he remembers. “This particular drag queen used to host the watch parties, and sometimes she would banter with us during commercial breaks.”

During one of those parties, as Brandon was showing off some photos of his first drag performance in college, the host noticed and asked him, “Who is that?” She asked if Brandon had ever thought about trying drag, and encouraged him to think about it. “A couple of martinis later, I agreed,” Brandon laughed. “She is the one who took me shopping, got me my first wig and makeup, and helped me get into drag for the next Monday show with her. Then it escalated from there.”

One time, someone told me, “I’m a non-binary person, and it meant a lot that you said your pronouns because I don’t feel like I can do that in this town. I appreciate you saying that in front of all these people.”

Growing up, Brandon had always been interested in plays and musicals, but never felt like he was good enough to pursue that passion seriously. But in the world of drag, he found a space in which he would be able to put on a mask and perform without the pressure of people knowing who he was outside of that. “It was a way for me to be on stage and be in front of everybody lip syncing to Britney Spears—my favorite artist,” he recalls. “Never would I have thought that I would be able to do



something like that. It was very freeing.

“I felt like I could be this character on stage in front of people and bring joy to people, which was something my mom always did in her life,” he continued. “She always brought happiness to people wherever she was. So, in a way, drag was a connection to her, too. In fact, whenever I wore brown wigs, I could always envision my mom in the mirror. That was a really special thing for me to experience.”

#### BUILDING A BRAND

In the drag world, Brandon worked on building the persona of Bianca Lynn Breeze, the glitz and glam mix of old-school drag and new-school ways who loves performing to Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, and Ke\$ha, along with Broadway songs, eighties hits, and everything in between. In the early days of her drag career, Bianca surrounded herself with a network of friends who were all discovering and learning together. Together, they practiced, listened to, and watched other performers, always looking to learn and improve their art. As Brandon recalls, “I always say you have to look, listen, and learn, because that’s how you grow. If I was in a show, I would go get ready with other people and just sit and watch them get ready and mimic what they were doing. That’s how I learned.”

“I was lucky to have a handful of wonderful and influential mentors like Danielle Avalon, Cass Marie Domino, Josie Lynn, and Bryanna Banx\$,” said Brandon. “Windy Breeze, my

ALEXANDER EINSMAN  
MS LMFT



ATLAS  
COUNSELING

ATLASMADISON.COM  
608.535.9285

Mind +  
Body Focus  
LGBTQ-  
Affirming  
Relationship  
Therapy  
EMDR  
Hypnosis



2201 ATWOOD AVE, MADISON



2690 Research Park Drive, Suite J • Fitchburg

#### NOW FEATURING

Emsculpt NEO for body contouring & core fitness and Emsella chair for pelvic floor & sexual health



Chiropractic • Massage therapy  
PRP therapy • MLS laser therapy  
Nutritional counseling • Weight loss  
Regenerative medicine

Call for a free consultation!

608-273-2222

newhealthmadison.com  
NewHealthMadison





drag sister in Chicago, helped me with a lot as well. She taught me more about makeup, but also about working with designers on costuming to build yourself that way.”

But the success of Bianca came down to more than makeup and costumes. A large part of her early experience came from performing at FIVE Nightclub in Madison. Dave Eick, the owner of FIVE, often held Thursday shows where drag performers could perform for tips and drink tickets to gain valuable experience and exposure. Later, Eick went on to create a show called The Debutantes, which exclusively featured entertainers who had only been performing for a year or two. “He would bring in mentors to teach us about padding, or how to maintain a wig, or some other topic,” recalls Brandon. “So, it was a great learning opportunity. We did that show for about a year.

“I am a go-getter. If I want something, I’m going to go get it,” Brandon continued. “I’m a networker because I went to school for marketing. I do a lot of networking in my full-time career, which is how I got my first official gig hosting drag bingo at Hotel Red, where I was working at the time.”

The Hotel Red drag bingo show blew up very quickly. As crowds began to grow, Brandon found plenty of opportunity to promote and find work for Bianca Lynn Breeze. The idea of Drag Bingo seemed to resonate with a lot of folks, and it didn’t take long for fans to start suggesting hosting their own Drag Bingo events. “I started to build myself just through networking,” explains Brandon. “And as I continued doing shows like that, I started making more money, and started investing more in my drag, which led to more shows, and so on. That process helped me get better and better.”

As Bianca Lynn Breeze grew in popularity and experience, she began winning titles. “I’m a former Wisconsin Entertainer of the

Year (2014), Miss Gay Madison (2017), Miss FIVE Nightclub (2019), Miss Gay Wisconsin (2023), along with others,” Brandon said.

#### DRAG BECAME SOMETHING BIGGER

With the titles and awards, people started really recognizing and seeing Bianca in a new light, and things were looking up for her career. Then the Covid-19 pandemic happened, and everything shut down. “That really changed who I was as a person and where I saw my future going,” said Brandon. “My mindset changed from just making money for myself, to suddenly wanting to do more work for the community.”

“I really wanted to help people see what drag is, to show them that it’s not a bad thing, that it’s its own art form, that it’s different from the trans experience. I’m not trans, so I can’t speak on behalf of trans people, but I can advocate for them and for my community through my work. That became my goal.”

Bianca switched from doing shows in Madison, Milwaukee, and Green Bay to seeking performance opportunities in more “straight venues,” or in smaller communities like Cambridge, Cottage Grove, Verona, Cross Plains, and Oshkosh. Most often, these shows are bingo, though Bianca doesn’t shy away from other kinds of events like brunch or evening shows either. Nevertheless, there is something about drag bingo that feels like a perfect home for Bianca. “I find that bingo really gets people in the door,” explained Brandon. “Sometimes people aren’t sure what drag is or what to expect, but everybody knows what bingo is, so I think that helps the show feel accessible. Those events are always busy. People just love it, so I’m going to ride that until it’s done.”

#### CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS

Bianca’s advocacy work switches depend-

ing on the type of performance and what is happening in the world at any time. But no matter what, her shows always include some kind of educational aspect. “One thing I always do is start my shows by saying, ‘Hi. My name is Bianca. My pronouns and she/her/hers. Outside of drag, I live my life as a man and my pronouns are he/him/his. Although I live my life as a man, right now I’m in drag, so you would say she/her. You wouldn’t say, ‘Oh, he’s a beautiful drag queen.’”

“Then, I close my shows saying, ‘Thank you so much for being here and supporting local queer artists. Please remember that if a friend, a cousin, an aunt, an uncle ever comes out to you, make sure to let them know that you’re a safe space, because you never know if that’s going to change their life.’”

That point is one that resonates deeply with Brandon. “You have to be a safe space for people because some people have never heard that,” he said. “When I came out to my family, I knew they were supportive, but nobody really said that to me.”

Occasionally, Bianca’s social media presence and event postings garner the expected hate comments and trolling, but by and large, her performances in smaller communities are met with enthusiasm and gratitude. “That surprises some people,” said Brandon. “But

people at those shows will often come up to me and say, ‘Thank you, that’s great, I didn’t know.’ One time, someone told me, ‘I’m a non-binary person, and it meant a lot that you said your pronouns because I don’t feel like I can do that in this town. I appreciate you saying that in front of all these people.’”

That moment meant a lot to Brandon and reinforced the fact that the advocacy work he does as Bianca Lynn Breeze is worth it for the future. “My goal is always to change at least one person’s mind at each event,” he said. “I always want people to see that I’m a real human outside of drag. I’m a full member of society. I pay my taxes. I’m doing all the same things that you are, and this is just a part of my life. It’s a character, an illusion. And I’m not trying to groom your children.”

“In fact, when I was Miss Gay Wisconsin, I started co-hosting Ready-to-Wear, which is Madison Reading Project’s annual fundraiser,” he continued. “I have done that event every year since then as well, and I’ve helped raise \$150,000 for their nonprofit to buy books. I have done stuff for OutReach’s Willma’s Fund, GSAFE, and a lot of others, too.”

On top of the work Bianca does, Brandon has a full-time job working for the Fitchburg Chamber Visitor and Business Bureau as the Director of Partnerships and Events, a non-

profit that works on behalf of the businesses in the city. “I love my job because we get to watch people start their own business, their dream, and just grow it from the ground up. It’s so cool to see,” he notes.

“And ultimately, the part of me that loves that kind of work is the same part of me that loves being able to give back through my drag work as well, which is kind of the point. I enjoy what I do because of the love and joy and happiness that it brings into the lives of others, whether that comes from my daily life or my drag life. That’s just who I am.” ■

At Goodman's, *love* is the most important thing!

**GOODMAN'S Jewelers**  
The Diamond Store of Madison Since 1933



HAPPY HOMEOWNERS

“The design you came up with is a wonderful marriage of beauty and function.” **CHAD & DALE**

Looks like it's...

**TIME 2 REMODEL**

time2remodel.com

MEET THE NEW MINI COOPER 4 DOOR.

THE ALL-NEW MINI COOPER

THE ALL-NEW MINI COUNTRYMAN

**BIGGER NEVER LOOKED SO MINI.**

## Meet the New MINI Family.

The sleek new MINI Cooper delivers the classic go-kart feel with a modern twist, while the new four-door MINI Cooper offers added versatility without sacrificing style. Meanwhile, the redesigned MINI Countryman combines rugged sophistication with urban flair, making it the perfect companion for any adventure.

### MINI of Madison

310 West Beltline Highway Madison, WI 53713 608-729-MINI (6464) MINIOFMADISON.COM



**Karl Barton**  
MINI Motoring Advisor  
608-729-6444



**QUEER PEOPLE** have long contributed enormously to the fabric of our community through work that adds texture, vibrancy, and contemplation to our lives. To honor those creative efforts locally, below is our seventh annual survey of LGBTQ artists in Wisconsin.

As always, this is by no means a completely comprehensive list. We reached out to our various networks for names and resources and did our best to contact each artist for updates. Entries are made through a form where participants are free to choose a category, self identify, and provide a description in their own words.

Thank you to everyone who participated and shared our form with their networks. We hope to continue building on this in future years, so feel free to reach out with recommendations at [contact@ourliveswisconsin.com](mailto:contact@ourliveswisconsin.com).

#### PERFORMING ARTISTS: BURLESQUE / DRAG

**A'ryiah J. St. Klaré** | A'ryiah is a rising star in the Milwaukee drag community, renowned for her captivating stage presence and dedication to the art form, earning her the title of "the dancing diva of Milwaukee." She is also recognized for her collaborative work with inner-city youth in MPS.

**Angel Voyer Angel** | [instagram.com/angel\\_voyer\\_](https://www.instagram.com/angel_voyer_) | Angel is a proud trans drag artist and dynamic performer who has captivated audiences for over a year. In 2025, she made history as the first Gay Madison Rising Star and was crowned Miss Trans Midwest USA 2024. With Midwest roots and values of kindness and inclusion, Angel brings her Latin heritage to every performance and uses her platform to uplift trans and underserved communities.

**Anita Spanx** | [instagram.com/spanx\\_me](https://www.instagram.com/spanx_me) | Anita is a creative queen who wants to make you laugh. She loves to bring you characters, concepts, and absolute buffoonery!

**Baylee IJ Davenport** | Baylee is more than just a name on the stage; she's a movement, a mentor, and a symbol of resilience. A proud Black transgender woman and Milwaukee-based drag performer, Baylee Davenport embodies the intersection of art, activism, and authenticity.

**Bianca Lynn Breeze** | [linktr.ee/blbreeze](https://www.linktr.ee/blbreeze) | Bianca has loved entertaining and educating others through drag since 2012. She owns her own event management company, BLB Productions, hosting Bingo, Brunch, Evening Shows, and Private Events.

**Bryanna Banx\$** | [facebook.com/bryannabanxs](https://www.facebook.com/bryannabanxs) | Over the last 20 years, Bryanna has been performing across the country, most recently in West Hollywood, California. She is most known for her witty personality, the many local drag pageants and accolades she has won including the most sought-after stage titles of Miss Gay WI USofA 2011 and Miss Club Wisconsin 2018, voted WI best drag emcee, WI best drag queen, WI best social media presence, best drag legend, as well as being an awarded pageant director for FIVE Nightclub.

**Cadence Vuitton** | [instagram.com/cadence\\_vuitton](https://www.instagram.com/cadence_vuitton) | Cadence is a Madison-based up-and-coming drag queen.

**Cass Marie Domino** | [@theecassmarie](https://www.instagram.com/theecassmarie) | Fabulous at 50 and performing for more than 30 years, Cass is a former Miss Gay Madison Elite and the first trans woman to win the National Entertainer of the Year Femme pageant. She is an advocate for the trans community as well as for people like her who live with HIV.

**Cici Voyer** | Cici has been performing as a drag entertainer for just under 2 years. She is honored to be a member of The Haus of Voyer, and more specifically, The Voyer Sisters. She recently held two titles, Madison Pride Queen 2024 and Drag League Champion 2024.

**Cynthia Mooseknuckle** | [cynthiamooseknuckle.com](https://www.cynthiamooseknuckle.com) | Known as the Queen of the Pups and the Mother of Moose, Cynthia Mooseknuckle is a Wiscon-

sin-based drag entertainer and bingo host with stylings that vary from Broadway to country, diva ballads, and concept costuming.

**Dee Dee Purrr** | [linktr.ee/deedeeppurr](https://www.linktr.ee/deedeeppurr) | Dee Dee has been gracing the stages with her comedic and theatrical style for more than seven years. She was awarded Best Comedy Entertainer in 2023 and Wisconsin Entertainer of the Year F.I. 2023. She has a monthly show at FIVE Nightclub, the third Sunday of each month that was awarded "Best Drag Event of 2023" at the Wisconsin Drag Awards.

**Enya Dreams** | Enya is a disabled, queer, non-binary, fat, polyamorous, Jewish burlesque performer based out of Madison. Enya is a member of Shekhar Haus and a team member of Full Moon Burlesque. Tagline: The Plus-Sized Succubus.

**Erde** | This quirky goddess of pleasure has been gracing theater stages since the second grade, but she entered the world of burlesque in 2023. Since then, she has been awarded 2025 Master of Munchies from Mile High Burlesque Festival and 2024 and Miss Congenial Star Performer from Maze Odyssey Competition. For two years in a row, she has performed at Milwaukee Pridefest with Cass Marie Domino and Hue Revue, and this year she assisted as co-stage manager for the Intersection stage.

**Gio** | [instagram.com/gio\\_guzman\\_180685](https://www.instagram.com/gio_guzman_180685) | Gio has been a drag entertainer since 2008. They infuse their performances with hope and their Mexican culture. They have represented as Mr. FIVE Nightclub, Mr. Gay Latino Madison, Mr. Club Wisconsin, and Miss Wisconsin Capital Pride.

**Holly Garland** | [linktr.ee/hollygarlandburlesque](https://www.linktr.ee/hollygarlandburlesque) | Holly has been on stage from an early age but got her start in burlesque in July of 2022. Hailing from Milwaukee, Holly has most recently had the opportunity to perform in several burlesque festivals around the country. She is the reigning 2024 Burlesque Gotz Skillz Grand Champion.

**Jacques Infiniti-Hall** | [facebook.com/jacqmckinz](https://www.facebook.com/jacqmckinz) | Jacques is from Milwaukee, is a former Mr. Five Nightclub 2022, and co-hosts male revue THROB in Chicago. He represents the House of Mizrahi MKE Chapter.

**Jupiter Voyer** | [@Jupiter\\_voyer](https://www.instagram.com/@Jupiter_voyer) | Your trans Latina, indigenous deity is ready to serve you glamour, beauty, creativity, and entertainment.

**Kawaii Canary** | [linktr.ee/kawaiicanary](https://www.linktr.ee/kawaiicanary) | The Singing Latina Magical Girl! They have performed at many anime conventions in the Midwest, and even performed alongside Milwaukee Space Cats and Melee during Milwaukee Pridefest. They are working to help build Milwaukee's Kpop Scene by hosting Events like Kpop Market and Kawaii Fiesta, and also creating art and making stickers as Kawaii Canary Arts.

**Kayos Mirage** | [instagram.com/worldofkayos](https://www.instagram.com/worldofkayos) | Kayos has grown to be one of Madison's hottest show hosts with her quick wit and appreciation to each and every person in the audience. She directs multiple shows and drag bingos across Wisconsin, and was voted as Best Drag Queen 2023 at the Wisconsin Drag Awards. You can see her every Sunday at Five Night Club co-hosting the Mad City Drag Revue Show, Madison's longest running show.

**Lola Monroe** | [facebook.com/lola.monet.9275](https://www.facebook.com/lola.monet.9275) | A comedy queen from the final frontier of Alaska. From ballads to cartwheels, she brings a smile to all who watch her perform. She strives to support all manner of drag.

**Loretta Love Lee** | [instagram.com/sheezlovelee](https://www.instagram.com/sheezlovelee) | Loretta was crowned Miss Gay Madison 2023 and later Miss Gay Wisconsin USofA. Drew is also a Tattoo and Body Artist at Blue Lotus Tattoo and The Piercing Lounge in Madison.

**Lucina Reer** | From newbie to star, I am your Glampy Queen with a bigger dash of glamor and love. I have evolved into my best form while living an enjoyable life outside of drag!

**Lucy Von Cucci** | [linktr.ee/lucyvoncucci](https://www.linktr.ee/lucyvoncucci) | She has been performing for 10+ years and held many regional and state titles. Lucy's first love has always been the stage, and adds her theater background to all she does.

Make Room for Love



Mara Lee Olson  
DESIGN STUDIO

[maraleeolsondesignstudio.com](https://www.maraleeolsondesignstudio.com)

**BETHKE**  
HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING, INC

Furnaces • Boilers • Air Conditioners  
Humidifiers • Duct Cleaning  
Preventative Maintenance Plans

Emergency Service 24/7 **251-2222**



FINANCING AVAILABLE  
**BethkeHeating.com**



**GABRIEL AGUILAR**

**Dancer & Composer** | [instagram.com/gabriel.a.aguilar](https://www.instagram.com/gabriel.a.aguilar)

**I MOVED TO MADISON** in August 2024 to join the Madison Ballet—my first season dancing professionally, and a moment that still feels surreal. I grew up in a rural town in Cuba, a world away from snow-covered streets and pointe shoes. Wisconsin wasn't just far from home; it was far from anything I ever imagined. But life has a way of surprising you—especially when you're open to the unexpected.

Before dance entered my life, music was my first love. I discovered it two years after immigrating to the U.S., when I started learning piano at age 12. That early spark eventually led me to study music composition at New World School of the Arts in Miami. During those college years, I stumbled into dance—which at first, was purely recreational. Then one day, a teacher said something that changed everything: Even though I had started extremely late by ballet standards, she believed I had the potential to dance professionally—if I fully committed. That moment gave me permission to imagine a new version of myself.

That spark—and the grit it takes to chase a dream you found “too late”—has marked me deeply. I've come to believe that “too late” is a myth. There's no wrong time to begin, to pivot, to dream again. There's only *your* time.

This season with Madison Ballet has been more than a debut—it's been an awakening. The rigor, the beauty, the bruises—it's all taught me how deeply alive the body can feel. Dance isn't separate from my music—it deepens it. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to compose an original score for a ballet. That opened a new door: A dream of blending my creative languages into something uniquely my own. I hope to continue exploring that intersection by creating more original music for ballet and dance in the future.

If there's one thing the journey of my career has taught me so far, it's to stop pretending I know where I'm going. All I know is, I want to keep saying yes. I want to live a life filled with art, love, and freedom—one that dares to evolve again and again. ■

**Madam Lacy** | [facebook.com/kiki.lacy.9](https://www.facebook.com/kiki.lacy.9) | A burlesque, drag, and vocal artist, Madam Lacy's performance style is a campy mix of Disney Princess and storytelling that's sure to have you laughing and blushing.

**Malaiya Marvel** | [@malaiyamarvel](https://www.instagram.com/malaiyamarvel) | Malaiya has been Wisconsin's Queen of Cosplay since 2014. They previously hosted Wisconsin's only cosplay drag show: “MANIA!” At This Is It! in Milwaukee, and also host at D.I.X. Malaiya has been featured in Entertainment Weekly, was a Milwaukee Bucks halftime performer, and appeared on Judge Jerry.

**Mercedes Benzova** | [instagram.com/themercedesbenzova](https://www.instagram.com/themercedesbenzova) | A bodacious diva that's a whole lotta fun with an extra side of sass. She is Miss Gay Madison Plus and Miss Gay City of Festivals Wisconsin USofA 2023.

**Michael Lynn** | [instagram.com/thatchichaellynn](https://www.instagram.com/thatchichaellynn) | Michael is a pageant competitor, entertainer, MC, producer, and promoter as well as a former Mr. Gay Minnesota America and Mr. Gay Wisconsin USofA.

**Mistruss Lola** | I am America's longest performing female impersonator, having performed for more than 55 years on stage—over 2500 shows! I have been named Miss Magic Touch 1971 and '73, and Miss Chicago 1973. I perform internationally, and regularly in North Central/Northeast Wisconsin, mostly doing tributes to rock goddesses. I am transgender, and the last of the show girls!

**Mystie Von Cucci** | [facebook.com/mystie.voncucci.9](https://www.facebook.com/mystie.voncucci.9) | Mystie's drag can be described as fun and comedic. You can catch her at FIVE Nightclub.

**Nemo** | [nemodrag.com](https://www.nemodrag.com) | Nemo is Wisconsin's premier teen drag queen. Nemo is a show producer co-hosting Voices of the Next Generation at FIVE Nightclub and co-promoting for the Miss Wisconsin Youth Entertainer Pageant. Nemo is a former MX Five Nightclub (2024), and Miss Wisconsin Youth Entertainer (2022). Nemo's story is featured on the series Generation Drag, produced by Tyra Banks on HBO Max.

**Ponyboy** | [facebook.com/ponyboy.trevor.9](https://www.facebook.com/ponyboy.trevor.9) | A mix between funny and sexy, Ponyboy tries to get the people hyped up for a good time. He wants to inspire people to be who they are and not care what others think. He was Mr. TRANS Midwest 2024.

**RyRy Minaj** | [facebook.com/ryan.moffat.39](https://www.facebook.com/ryan.moffat.39) | RyRy is a male entertainer based out of Madison and performing since 2015. He has captured the titles of Mr. Gay Madison and Mr. Gay Wisconsin USofA.

**Sasha Christine** | [facebook.com/sasha.christine.1](https://www.facebook.com/sasha.christine.1) | Her drag can be described as a tiny dancer who is polished and pristine, but doesn't mind getting a little dirty. You can catch this kitty cat performing at her favorite place, FIVE Nightclub.

**Victoria Lynn** | [facebook.com/ThickVick89](https://www.facebook.com/ThickVick89) | Former Miss Gay Madison, Miss LaCage Plus, and Miss Gay WI USofA. Also known as Bicky the Bucking Queen, she is a quick-witted, kind, and statuesque drag queen who has been performing for years.

#### COMEDIANS

**Aristotle Awes** | [instagram.com/aristotle.awes](https://www.instagram.com/aristotle.awes) | Aristotle Awes is a balding, Greek, and homosexual comedian from Madison. He's the host of Hidden Cave Comedy, and produces and hosts for Cheshire Cat Comedy. He has opened for Alok Menon (Netflix), Gwen La Roka (HBO), and Rachel Mac (Comedy Central). His high energy comedy focuses on sexuality, gender, and dating in a way that brings everyone to the party.

**Dina Nina** | [dinanina.com](https://www.dinanina.com) | Trans comedian, speaker, actor, and Madison Alder. Her sass and charm has been featured in comedy festivals and world-class comedy venues. She is the founder of Lady Laughs Comedy and Artemis Bow Productions. She was named one of the “58 Trans Women Actors You Should Know & Also Love” by AutoStraddle.

**Linda Lenzke** | [mixedmetaphorohmy.com](https://www.mixedmetaphorohmy.com) | I'm an amateur stand-up comedian, spoken word storyteller, blogger, and LGBTQ+ community events emcee. I riff on the culture wars, politics, surviving the pandemic,

and draw from my lived experience as an aging lesbian and woman in recovery from substances.

**Vanessa Tortolano** | [facebook.com/vanessa.tortolano](https://www.facebook.com/vanessa.tortolano) | Vanessa jumps from improv comedy to a bit of burlesque and can be found on various Madison stages in support of women- and LGBTQ-centric events.

#### DANCE & THEATER

**Alyssa Pon-Franklin** | [facebook.com/alyssapon](https://www.facebook.com/alyssapon) | Alyssa has been active in the Madison community for eight years as a stage manager. She has worked with many local companies, including Madison Opera, Stage Q, and Oregon Straw Hat Players.

**Ankita Bharadwaj** | Ankita produces the show Subtle Desi Traits (writing and sound production including audio editing, mixing, fading etc.).

**Brian Wild** | [artandsoulinnovations.org](https://www.artandsoulinnovations.org) | Brian has been a key figure in Proud Theater since 2001, leading the organization as Artistic Director and Executive Director of its fiscal sponsor, Art and Soul Innovations, Inc. An accomplished playwright, director, and LGBTQ+ youth advocate, Brian has dedicated his career to creating inclusive spaces for young artists. Outside of theater, Brian enjoys composing music and is passionate about film.

**Chris Walker** | [education.wisc.edu/staff/walker-chris](https://www.education.wisc.edu/staff/walker-chris) | Chris is a professor in the Dance Department, Associate Vice Provost/Special Advisor to the Provost on the Arts, and Founding Artistic Director of the First Wave program in the Office of Multicultural Arts Initiatives at UW-Madison. He is also a senior choreographer with the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica and program director for the New Waves Dance & Performance Institute in Trinidad & Tobago.

**Gabriel Aguilar** | [instagram.com/gabriel.a.aguilar](https://www.instagram.com/gabriel.a.aguilar) | Gabe is a dancer and composer who moved to Madison in 2024 to join the Madison Ballet. He

grew up in Cuba, and before finding dance, music was his first love. Gabe strives to live a life filled with art, love, and freedom—one that dares to evolve, again and again.

**J. Michael Bruno Productions, Inc.** | [madstheatre.com](https://www.madstheatre.com) | Michael is host of SHOW BIZ BUZZ WITH BRUNO, a podcast that introduces audiences to theater, music, dance, and comedy. Local artists, companies and personalities share their projects and backgrounds with host Michael every other Saturday afternoon, live! The podcast is available on Apple, Sirius, Spotify, and Google podcasts and YouTube.

**Jim Chiolino** | [madisontheatreguild.org](https://www.madisontheatreguild.org) | Jim is a producer, director, and actor as well as a former president of the Madison Theatre Guild (Madison's oldest community theater organization).

**Kanopy Dance Company** | [kanopydance.org](https://www.kanopydance.org) | Kanopy Dance, a quintessential modern dance company, is a resident company of the Overture Center for the Arts. While the Kanopy Dance Company “informs” its works through its roots in the Martha Graham tradition, the company has developed its own brand, shaping an exciting new dimension and visual language to advance American Modern dance.

**KelsyAnne Schoenhaar** | [encorestudio.org](https://www.encorestudio.org) | KelsyAnne is the CEO of Encore Studio for the Performing Arts, Wisconsin's first professional theater company for people with disabilities. A professional musician and composer since the age of 12, KelsyAnne plays more than 30 instruments and has performed in a wide range of styles, including orchestral, jazz, and rock.

**Laura McMillan** | [ctmtheater.org](https://www.ctmtheater.org) | A proud Black/Lebanese queer womxn who is not only a 20-year theater vet, but a US Navy vet as well. Laura works as Children's Theater of Madison's Education Associate. Recent onstage credits include: *Clyde's* as u/s Clyde, u/s Letitia (Forward Theater Co.), *Da Classroom Ain't Enuf* as Self (Broom Street Theater), and *The Revolutionists* as Marianne (Mercury Players).

**FORWARD THEATER CO.**

**NOV 6-23**

**OVERTURE CENTER**

**DIRECTED BY JEN UPHOFF GRAY**

**A musical about making a musical - and getting it totally wrong.**

**TICKETS: FORWARDTHEATER.COM OR 608.258.4141**



**BJ DANIELS**

**Drag Performer** | [facebook.com/dragentertainerBJDaniels](https://www.facebook.com/dragentertainerBJDaniels)

**FROM AS EARLY AS I** can remember, I always wanted to be in show business. I was that little kid who loved playacting, putting on productions, and dreaming of a life beyond my hometown. As I reflect on my accomplishments, I realize how many people have helped me along the way. My first mentor, Michael Bruno, believed in my talent and encouraged me to pursue a career in entertainment. Thanks to him, I became the first Miss Gay Madison! That exposure in the local press of the time caught the eye of Ginger Spice and Samantha in Milwaukee who were putting together a cast for a new weekly drag show that would have production numbers and elaborate staging. Wow! I hit the jackpot and eventually went on to become Miss Gay Wisconsin and Miss Gay Continental Wisconsin.

Although I briefly worked as a server, bartender, and salesperson at a vintage clothing store, I never fully committed to any other type of work because it felt like a cop-out to me. In the end, drag opened many doors for me, especially after I moved to Milwaukee from Madison in 1982. As one of the famous Club 219 Showgirls, I had the opportunity to model for some of the best art photographers in the state, including Francis Ford, Shimon and Lindemann, John Grant, Stanley Ryan Jones, and many more. Those experiences taught me so much about what living your truth really means. Eventually, I became a makeup artist and hairdresser for film, video, and photography on sets across the city, state, and country.

My lucrative day job at one of the top salons in Milwaukee occupied 26 years of my life. There, I learned business management skills and became an educator for other stylists. Drag has been the catalyst for almost my entire career, both on and off stage. It seems unbelievable that a kid from a farming community could eventually work at Fashion Week in New York during its heyday and learn from some of the top talents in the arts.

Today, I proudly sit on the board of the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project and perform every so often, too. When asked, my advice to anyone is to pursue your dreams, no matter how silly or weird they may seem to others. Take chances and seize opportunities that might feel frightening or beyond your reach. Trust me, if I can do it, so can you! Dream Big! ■

**Ogunde Tremayne** | Ogunde is an actor, singer, dancer, and overall entertainer who lives to make people smile and laugh. He started his professional acting career with Milwaukee Repertory Theater through which he gained his representation Lori Lins Ltd. Ogunde also made incredible connections with many Wisconsin theaters, most notably the amazing artists of Children’s Theater of Madison.

**Oh, My Stars! Productions LLC** | [ohmystarsproductions.com](https://www.ohmystarsproductions.com) | Oh, My Stars! Productions is a LGBTQ+ focused performance troupe, but everyone is welcome! Created by Scott Albert Bennett aka Miss Taffeta Darling, OMSP is dedicated to the preservation of camp and drag performance styles in scripted theatrical productions in Madison and surrounding areas.

**Proud Theater** | [proudtheater.org](https://www.proudtheater.org) | Now in its 26th season, Proud Theater has been a powerful community for queer youth who create brave spaces for support and self-expression. Proud Theater teaches theater, activism, and the power of authentic storytelling to youth 13–19. No auditions or fees to join.

**Robert (Bobby) Goderich** | Bobby’s love for singing brought him to the stage with Madison Opera. He has worked with local theater companies including Children’s Theater of Madison, Verona Area Community Theater, Middleton Players Theatre, StageQ, and Four Seasons Theatre.

**Roseann Sheridan** | [ctmtheater.org](https://www.ctmtheater.org) | Roseann served as the Children’s Theater of Madison’s Artistic Director for 15 years and was previously Producer and Associate Artistic Director at American Players Theatre for 17 years. She has directed for regional and university theaters, including UW-Madison, Texas Shakespeare Festival, Next Act Theatre (Milwaukee), Penobscot Theatre (Maine), UW-Whitewater, Edgewood College, and UW-Oshkosh.

**The House Inc** | [Thehouseinc.org](https://www.thehouseinc.org) | Clyde Mayberry, CEO/Founder of The House Urban Arts Initiative, leads as Executive Director of the Performing Arts department. With over 21 years of teaching in movement dance, he champions a visionary approach, merging hip hop, house, and body positivity all in his dynamic rehearsals.

**The Space Cats** | [facebook.com/SpaceCatsMKE](https://www.facebook.com/SpaceCatsMKE) | The Space Cats are a loud colorful dance team created, produced, and led by Jinx & Micah Ogé with the mission to spread positivity. Since 2015, the group has appeared in music videos, club performances, local shows, and Pridefest Milwaukee.

**TNW Ensemble Theater** | [tnwensembletheater.org](https://www.tnwensembletheater.org) | Danielle Dresden and Donna Peckett are co-Founders/co-Producing Artistic Directors of TNW Ensemble Theater. TNW creates, produces, performs, and presents original works of art and cultural practice. The Company collaborates with artists and scholars working in the disciplines of theater, social justice, visual arts, tap dance, and music to promote the understanding of diverse cultures.

**Trevin Gay** | [ctmtheater.org](https://www.ctmtheater.org) | Trevin is an actor, director, teaching artist, and arts administrator—and is thrilled to serve as Associate Artistic Director for CTM. He holds an MFA in Actor-Created Physical Theatre from the London International School of Performing Arts.

**Zak Stowe** | [zakstowedesign.com](https://www.zakstowedesign.com) | Zak is a self-taught, award-winning lighting designer, director, and producer for theater and opera, having worked for various theater companies all over Madison. He is currently the Lighting Supervisor for the Overture Center for the Arts, President of the Bartell Community Theatre Foundation, and Marketing Director and Webmaster for Stage Q.

### DJS

**DJ Avalon** | [linktr.ee/theonlyDJavalon](https://linktr.ee/theonlyDJavalon) | A DJ since 2011, Avalon made her mark in Philly celebrating women in punk, riot grrl, and rock n’ roll. Since then, she has charmed audiences across clubs and bars with her empha-

sis on pushing women and LGBTQ+ artists toward the spotlight.

**DJ Femme Noir** | [facebook.com/DJFemmeNoir](https://www.facebook.com/DJFemmeNoir) | Femme Noir spins an eclectic blend of highly danceable tunes. Catch a show at FIVE Night Club, Hot Summer Gays, Majestic Madison, or many other venues around Southern Wisconsin.

**DJ Millbot** (Emily Mills) | [facebook.com/djmillbot](https://www.facebook.com/djmillbot) | DJ Millbot runs the monthly, free, early HOT FLASH event at the Cardinal Bar, which also features a rotating line-up of co-DJs who help bring the throwback jam dance party vibes to a vibrant and diverse crowd. You can also find Millbot at various (mostly queer) dance parties around town, spinning their beloved house, disco, and techno.

### MUSICIANS

**Amanda Jane Hoffman** | [facebook.com/AmandaJaneSingsALot](https://www.facebook.com/AmandaJaneSingsALot) | Amanda is a heartfelt singer and guitarist, singing songs from the radio, stage, and campfire.

**Arthur Durkee Arts** | [arthurdurkee.bandcamp.com](https://www.arthurdurkee.bandcamp.com) | An interdisciplinary artist who works in books, printmaking, photography, letterpress, poetry, Queer erotica, and as a composer and improviser. In 2025, I released my 75th album on Bandcamp, my handmade artist book “RedLine” was selected for the annual regional art exhibit at the Wright Museum of Art at Beloit College, and I’ve had art in two shows at Beloit Art Center.

**Basal Jones** | [@basaljones](https://www.instagram.com/basaljones) | Basal is a Madison rapper with a fairly unique sound all his own, which is evocative of the historical body of queer music in a way that will appeal to various ages of listeners.

**Brandon LePage** | [brandonlepage.com](https://www.brandonlepage.com) | Brandon is a classical flutist who is about to embark on a new journey as Assistant Professor of Flute at UW-Whitewater. His research and recent thesis “Queer Excellence Through Musical Activism” centers queer identity, representation, and

politics through the lens of classical music performance and interactive storytelling/lectures.

**Crimes Against Nature** | [crimesxnature.com](https://www.crimesxnature.com) | Playing music together in various forms over the past decades, Crimes Against Nature (cXn) brings a healthy mixture of riot grrrl, queercore, alt, indie, and punk rock from Milwaukee. Featuring guitars, bass, keyboards, and drums, they collectively write original music to sometimes share with friends.

**Damsel Trash** | [damseltrash.com](https://www.damseltrash.com) | Damsel Trash is the queer punk duo of Emily Mills and Meghan Rose. Celebrating their 11th anniversary in 2025, DT combines silly-but-serious lyrics and diverse sonic influences, plus live shows featuring free snacks and boisterous crowd interactions. Their songs have tackled subjects ranging from fiercely political diatribes to queer/trans love and liberation, reflections on bicycle safety, toxic masculinity, general hominess, celebrity crushes, misogyny in the music scene, and dogs they like.

**Dana and the Joanis** | [facebook.com/Danaandthejoanis](https://www.facebook.com/Danaandthejoanis) | Dana Perry is a powerhouse producer, vocalist, and rhythm guitar player, with poignant original songs of an evolutionary folk-rock variety. Jenna “The Joanis” provides smooth grooves on multiple live and recording projects playing drums, percussion, guitar and bass. Collectively, they’ve been involved in multiple multi-award-winning bands, recordings, and performances over the last several years.

**Emily AF** | [RockstarElise.com](https://www.rockstarelise.com) | Emily has been a live sound engineer and producer in Madison since 2007. A lifelong musician, her long-dormant project, Rockstar & Elise, was given new life after she came out as Transgender and began transition in early 2022. Though not explicitly about being trans or queer, her songs often speak of survival, struggle, and trying to make it through darkness to the other side.

**J-Star Domino** | [@JStarDomino](https://www.instagram.com/JStarDomino) | J-Star Domino/Julia McConahay (she/they) is a multi-instrumentalist and has been performing locally and touring



## Your financial needs are unique.

Whether you want to provide for your loved ones, support the organizations that are important to you, or plan for your own comfortable retirement, I can help you plan for your goals. I’ll look at all aspects of your finances, then find solutions that are right for your unique needs. I’ll be there to adjust your plan as life unfolds.



**Shannon M. Anderson, CFP®, APMA®, ADPA®**  
Financial Advisor

**Eventus Wealth Advisors**

A private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC

**608.819.0520**

2916 Marketplace Dr, Ste 104, Fitchburg, WI 53719

[shannon.m.anderson@ampf.com](mailto:shannon.m.anderson@ampf.com)

[ameripriseadvisors.com/shannon.m.anderson](https://www.ameripriseadvisors.com/shannon.m.anderson)

**Not FDIC or NCUA Insured | No Financial Institution Guarantee | May Lose Value**

CA Insurance #0G04178  
Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards Inc. owns the certification marks CFP®, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ and CFP (with plaque design) in the U.S. Investment advisory products and services are made available through Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC, a registered investment adviser.  
© 2022 Ameriprise Financial, Inc. All rights reserved.





**CHUANG WANG**

**Visual Artist** | [millenniumfae-artblog.tumblr.com](https://millenniumfae-artblog.tumblr.com)

**CHUANG WANG** (they/them) was born in Taipei, Taiwan, and joined their parents in immigrating to Madison at age two. They've watched Madison grow from an unimpressive engineering standby to the artistic multicultural mainstay it is now. Living the Midwestern Asian immigrant experience meant being an "outsider" even if they weren't the troublemaking, problem child, finding escape in early internet fan communities, which sparked an early interest in the media arts.

In art college, they excelled with multiple honors, scholarships, and accolades. Chuang's plan of success was mapped to the finest detail: Make connections with studios, find internships with big names, build a social media presence, and rub elbows with the bigwigs until they could get their own creations on the big screen. Ambition fueled every assignment to be bigger and better than the last.

But during the tail-end of their sophomore year of college, they fell sick to a severe panic disorder that has left them housebound and in chronic distress ever since. Their plans for success were completely derailed. Although they did graduate from the School of The Art Institute of Chicago in 2017 with a BFA and a focus on 2D animation, they couldn't continue walking the yellow brick road.

To many, becoming disabled is never considered a possibility. Those with chronic illnesses are the "other," and the "exception," and suddenly becoming part of this "other" is an extremely confusing and isolating experience. So it was that Chuang had to switch from playing the mass market masquerade, to finding their own place at their own pace.

If Chuang cannot pull a 9-to-5 in a high-profile studio, or are bound to assisted living, or is unable to travel, then their artistic career would have to be held from the safety of their home desk. It's been a surprisingly successful endeavor, much to their relief. They launched their own professional brand Whitemanning Critical, which began by selling fine art merchandise such as block and screen prints as well as novelty goods such as bath and body products. Market endeavors became acts of awareness. Their artistic designs explore social justice, self-growth, pride, and activism.

For now, Chuang plans on continuing to expand Whitemanning Critical through vendoring, while also traversing through the labyrinth that is the media world. Dreams can be achieved, it just has to be done your own way. ■

nationally as a contemporary improv violin player for the past 25 years. They are featured in local burlesque and drag showcases, along with having established bands which include CHANGELING, Compass Rose, and SHESHE.

**Jesse Waggoner** | [queermadisonmixtape.bandcamp.com](https://queermadisonmixtape.bandcamp.com) | One of the founders of the Queer Madison Mixtape project, they are drawn to songwriting themes such as rural queers, trans trucks, big hair, and femme utopias. Past projects include a drag gospel quartet, a femme-fronted Meatloaf cover band, Corn Palace, and Mary Okie.

**jilip** | jilip is where angst meets the ethereal, with catchy hooks and rad, socially conscious lyrics. Inspired by reimagining our social reality, ze makes music that speaks to hir soul and hopefully yours, too.

**Jinx Ogé** | [linktr.ee/jinxoge](https://linktr.ee/jinxoge) | Jinx is a non-binary, Jamaican-American artist, songwriter, and fashion designer from Wisconsin. They gained recognition with a mix of pop, dance, and R&B songs and visuals. They were also part of a music number on the hit television show Empire.

**Kat and the Hurricane** | [katandthehurricane.com](https://katandthehurricane.com) | Kat and the Hurricane is an all-queer and trans synth rock/indie-pop band from Madison. Their debut full-length studio album "Got It Out" showcases the band at new sonic heights, exploring themes of mental health, healing, and learning to love who you are.

**Ladyscissors** | [facebook.com/ladyscissorswi](https://facebook.com/ladyscissorswi) | Prolific and longtime Madison musician Stephanie Rearick joins forces with Brent George and Anne Bull for a boppy rock project with an irreverent core.

**LINE** | [linktr.ee/linesoundslike](https://linktr.ee/linesoundslike) | A queer indiepop band unafraid to play with labels, LINE weaves singer-songwriter sensibilities with multi-genre arrangements. They create songs that include rich harmonies, poignant lyrics, slap basslines, folk instrumentation, and synths.

**Maceo** | [linktr.ee/macy\\_cray](https://linktr.ee/macy_cray) | Maceo is an independent artist and singer/songwriter from Baltimore. He has auditioned for *American Idol*, *The Voice*, *ANTM*, *Xfactor*, and *Sunday Best*. His debut album "1330" honors his grandmother and the home he grew up in.

**Meredith Foss** | Meredith is a Madison-based songwriter with intermediate piano skills who'd love to collaborate with singers, writers, or producers. She would also love to connect with anyone who has music industry experience or even a great singer-songwriter playlist to share!

**Meskales** | [flowcode.com/page/meskales](https://flowcode.com/page/meskales) | Meskales is an energetic ska band with an impressive history of playing with renowned bands for their short trajectory in the ska scene. Their infectious blend of ska, punk, surf, and reggae has gained them a devoted following and allowed them to share the stage with some of the most influential acts in the genre.

**RAT BATH** | [linktr.ee/rat.bath.mke](https://linktr.ee/rat.bath.mke) | RAT BATH is an "All noise, no boys" queercore punk band known for reclaiming queer-coded villains in their unique way of storytelling. Collecting accolades such as The Milwaukee Record's Favorite Albums of the Year for three years in a row (2022–24), and keeping a diligent tour schedule, this band of all transgender musicians has scurried their way into the hearts of many punk scenes across the continental U.S.

**Sister Agnes** | [nebulousthey.bigcartel.com](https://nebulousthey.bigcartel.com) | The ALTAR ego of C Nelson-Lifson (visual artist and member of band Proud Parents). Using a drum machine and throbbing basslines, Sister Agnes attempts to set to music the sacred oath of devotion and sexual repression.

**The Stolen Sea** | [storiesofthestolensea.bandcamp.com](https://storiesofthestolensea.bandcamp.com) | Hannah is a clarinetist, with a varied background in music education and music therapy, as well as a lifetime of recitals and orchestral performance. Combining new ideas, instrumentations, and technologies, Hannah's music is truly unique. Hannah has a solo album out called "Somersault," and her music collective, The Stolen Sea, released two albums in 2024.

**threadfall** | [threadfall.bandcamp.com](https://threadfall.bandcamp.com) | threadfall is an indie pop band fronted by Angie Remington (former bassist of Sassy Come Home, Token Mi-

nority, Turbo Loogie). She writes about love and awkward situations. **Wynter Bates** | [linktr.ee/wynterbates](https://linktr.ee/wynterbates) | Milwaukee native singer and songwriter, Wynter is advancing the R&B world by navigating life's tumultuous nature in their music by incorporating warm, yet entrancing vocal harmonies. Wynter has a warm, enticing voice like Syd and produces explorative tracks resembling Solange's style.

## LITERARY

**Ashling Meehan-Fanning** | [poemsbyashling.com](https://poemsbyashling.com) | Ashling Meehan-Fanning is a poet based in Madison whose work often includes themes of magic, ancestry, and the American Midwest. She spends a lot of time thinking about ghosts and trees. Ashling's collection COLOSSAL GIRL was self-published in December 2020.

**Callen Harty** | [callenharty.com](https://callenharty.com) | Author of 24 produced plays, 50 monologues, and numerous articles, essays, and poems in various print/online sites. He has published 14 books, most recently, *A Survivor's Guide to Living*. His monologues for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum's annual cemetery tour, Talking Spirits, won awards from the Wisconsin Historical Society and the American Association of State and Local History.

**Elizabeth Holden** | [linktr.ee/elizabeth.holden.author](https://linktr.ee/elizabeth.holden.author) | Elizabeth is the author of *Mighty Millie Novak*, now available wherever books are sold. Liz was inspired by her own (plentiful) experiences with anxiety, roller derby, and ridiculous schemes.

**Huckleberry Rahr** | [linktr.ee/huckle217](https://linktr.ee/huckle217) | Huckle grew up reading high fantasy. The books often had strong female characters, but lacked queer representation. The biggest desire Huckle had in creating stories was finding a way to incorporate a solid story line with twists and turns, a rainbow cast that looked and felt like their family and students, and a story anyone would find compelling, from teens to adults.

**Han Raschka** | [hanraschka.com](https://hanraschka.com) | Han (they/them) is a queer Midwest poet. Their first collection, *Splinters* (Collapse Press) was released in 2022, and their chapbook *Enamel* (Bottlecap Press) was published in 2023. They are the 2024 second place winner for the Wisconsin People and Ideas Contest.

**Harper Hazelmare** | [brownhorseherbal.com](https://brownhorseherbal.com) | Harper (she/they/we) is an author and visual artist living in Madison. When not loving the color yellow in nature, they can be found in her home studio working with found objects and writing speculative fiction.

**J. Sargent Rady** | From the *Gravel Roads of Mudbrook*, an autobiography, is a journey of growing up gay in rural America, including the struggles of self-doubt, understanding who you really are, painful losses, and heavy grief. With triumphs and tragedies throughout, it is an open and honest telling of one man's path to acceptance.

**Kassandra Novell** | [kassandranovell.com](https://kassandranovell.com) | Kassandra (she/her) is a voiceover artist and audiobook narrator. She has narrated for such Wisconsin authors as Miya Kressin, Huckleberry Rahr, and Hannah Willow. She's lent her voice to radio plays/musicals and animation.

**Joanna Lindblad** | [joannalindblad.com](https://joannalindblad.com) | With her first self-published poetry book *a sliver so slight*, Joanna Lindblad is a new author focusing on grief, hope, and the chaos of loss. Joanna currently lives near Madison and enjoys the wonder of nature, the immersion of art, and finding extraordinary moments in living an ordinary life.

**Mel Hammond & Teghan Hammond** | [melhammondbooks.com](https://melhammondbooks.com) | We are sisters and co-authors of queer YA literature. Our debut novel, *Lucy, Uncensored*, was published by Knopf (Penguin/Random House) in October 2024.

**mk zariel** | [mkzariel.carrd.co](https://mkzariel.carrd.co) | mk zariel (it/its + masc terms) is a transmasculine, neuroqueer poet, theater artist, movement journalist, and Bash-Back aligned anarchist. It is the author of *Voidgazing* (2026, Whittle

YOU MAKE THE MEMORIES.  
WE'LL MAKE THEM LAST.



Whether it's a beloved print or family heirloom, give your piece an artful presentation that will stand the test of time.

OPEN  
Tues – Sat, 10am – 5pm

Schedule an appointment or drop by

MONROE STREET  
FRAMING

"Nurse's Wings" by Mack Bo Ross, Instagram: @mackboross

1901 Monroe St Madison, WI | 608.255.7330 | [monroestreetframing.com](https://monroestreetframing.com)

f
t
i



**BRANDON LEPAGE**

**Musician** | [brandonlepage.com](http://brandonlepage.com)

**BRANDON LEPAGE** is a new Wisconsin resident as of June, 2025 after almost a decade of driving in and out of Madison to perform with the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra as their Principal Flutist. As the new Assistant Professor of Flute at UW-Whitewater, he is looking forward to expanding the work he did on his recent doctoral dissertation titled “Queer Excellence Through Musical Activism.” His work takes a look at three “aspects” of queerness: Identity, Politics, and Representation, and puts them on display through various modes of performance to make and create a meaningful and impactful change in the world around him. Through identity, Brandon strives to showcase how we can channel excellence through queer bodies to help uplift and empower communities. This experience acts as an enhancer to allow listeners to emotionally connect together through music. Most recently he performed a recital of music written by composers from Flint, Michigan including several world premieres and a featured piece by a new composer, Haden Plouffe, and he shared the stage with another professional gay musician who serves Flint, flutist Jordan Smith. His lecture recital titled “Music in the Age of the Gun” took a hard look at queer politics putting on display the stark contrast between the lack of gun legislation (which seems impossible to get into place) and the harmful laws being passed that aim to control or erase our queerness, particularly trans lives. He hopes to expand this series in the coming year with a focus on the Climate Crisis. Throughout that recital, he offered ways for audience members to actively engage in the political sphere tailored to their individual comfort levels, and several people in attendance were so moved they actually committed to change the way they vote moving forward showing that “active” is still in the word activism. Finally, Brandon consistently commissions LGBTQ+ identifying composers to write chamber music for intermediate middle school level musicians (which is severely lacking) as well as professional-level music that is intended to tell stories and inspire empathy. It is his hope that by allowing students to experience queer people through the positive lens of music that they are able to see honest and realistic representations of otherwise “sensationalized” individuals, helping them to understand that we are all human, beautiful, and deserving of love, respect, and dignity. ■

Micropress) and *Boy Apparition* (2025, Vinegar Press).

**Rita Mae Reese** | [ritamaereese.com](http://ritamaereese.com) | Rita Mae Reese (she/her) is the author of *The Book of Hulga*. She designs Lesbian Poet Trading Cards for Headmistress Press, is in the bluegrass band Coulee Creek, and serves as the Co-Director at Arts + Literature Laboratory in Madison.

**Sami Schalk** | [samischalk.com](http://samischalk.com) | Professor of Gender & Women’s Studies at the UW-Madison. She’s the author of *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race & Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction* (Duke UP, 2018) and *Black Disability Politics* (Duke UP, 2022). She identifies as a fat, Black, queer, disabled, femme and a pleasure activist.

**Steph Cherrywell** | [stephcherrywell.com](http://stephcherrywell.com) | Nonbinary author of two speculative books for ages 8–12, *Unboxing Libby* and *The Ink Witch*. In the past they’ve also written and illustrated graphic novels, written and programmed text adventure games, and created occasional spot illustrations.

**Tessa Jade Price** | [linktr.ee/tessajadeprice](http://linktr.ee/tessajadeprice) | Tessa (she/they) is a multimedia artist and trans woman who writes articles and writes/records acoustic, indie pop, and electronic music under the name T. Price. She does everything from web design to advocacy and direct work with the community.

VISUAL ARTS

**Adam Raiford Wilson** | [@adamraiford](https://www.instagram.com/adamraiford) | Adam moved to Madison from Arkansas in 2020. Adam’s multimedia projects include “found item” style incorporations with layers of paint.

**Angela Richardson** | [angela-richardson.com](http://angela-richardson.com) | Richardson’s work often explores the idea of “community.” As a teaching artist, she’s led classes at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery, Center for Healthy Minds, Madison Children’s Museum, and Madison Public Library.

**Anna Campbell** | [annacampbell.net](http://annacampbell.net) | An artist and professor, their sculptures, installations, and ephemera mine history and queer desire.

**Ari Gochberg** | [@ari.g.ink](https://www.instagram.com/ari.g.ink) | Ari is a white, trans, and autistic tattoo artist at Red Clover Tattoo Collective who focuses on fine-line illustrative works in black and gray or soft colors. He draws inspiration from manga and anime, botanical illustrations, mythology, art history, queer sexuality, and the human form.

**Babette Wainwright** | [babettewainwright.com](http://babettewainwright.com) | As a youth, Babette exhibited at the Centre d’Art of Port au Prince, Haiti. Her work has been shown in Baton Rouge, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Chicago, Iowa, North Carolina, and Madison. She makes clay sculptures informed by her African roots and the work of the pre-Colombian people of Haiti, the Arawaks.

**Bear Cunningham** | [redclovertattoocollective.com](http://redclovertattoocollective.com) | Bear is a queer tattoo artist at Red Clover Tattoo Collective specializing in fine-line minimalist and illustrative design. They love working with a range of subject matter from florals, pop culture references, celestial bodies, and occult imagery, to pin-ups, portraits, and anything involving queer forms and identity.

**Bernie & Zuzu** | [bernieandzuzu.com](http://bernieandzuzu.com) | Bernie Witzack is the current Artist-in-Residence at Pinney Public Library. They believe everyone deserves to have more beauty and joy in their lives, adding it through hand painted, printed and dyed home goods, accessories, and prints.

**Beth Racette** | [bethracette.com](http://bethracette.com) | Beth’s visual art spans a variety of media—acrylic ink paintings, sculptures, and installations. Since 2010, she has been working on a series called Gaia, in which she explores Earth as a living being. She has also worked on an extensive exhibition in which she examined the U.S. prison system as a legacy of slavery.

**Bigblurrpaintings** | [@Bigblurrpaintings.bsky.social](https://www.instagram.com/Bigblurrpaintings.bsky.social) | Projects include abstract imagery oil paintings, glass mosaics, woodcarvings. All works are available through Arts for All Wisconsin.

**Bryon L Hobbs Photography** | [bryonlhobbsphotography.com](http://bryonlhobbsphotography.com) | Bryon is a photographer in Madison who specializes in creating compelling urban

landscapes, nature images, and concert photography.

**Carmen “Rain” E. Schwierking** | [caramelcocooncreations.com](http://caramelcocooncreations.com) | Rain runs their solo illustration and craft studio, Caramel Cocoon Creations, which is focused on creating art of nature, fantasy, food, and Queer Pride. The motto is “A Little Art For Everyone” and they strive to have diverse, inclusive, and sustainable products.

**David Wells** | David is Curator of Edgewood University Gallery and Director of Ernest Hüpeden’s Painted Forest, a Kohler restored folk art site in Valton, WI, hosting summer programs in art, music concerts, and star-gazing events.

**Elaine Pasinski Thomas** | Elaine is a visual artist, painting portraits and landscapes in oil and acrylic. Elaine’s paintings are of elderly, disabled, poor, and oppressed persons in a manner that compels the viewer to see the subjects’ humanity.

**Geoff Staub** | [instagram.com/Geoff.paints](https://www.instagram.com/Geoff.paints) | Paintings featuring and focused on “Love” in American Sign Language, LGBTQ+ Pride, Deaf Culture, addiction, equality, oppression and suppression.

**Janis Nussbaum Senungetuk** | [jnscreativevision.com](http://jnscreativevision.com) | After 40+ years of fine art education/working in a variety of mediums and exhibiting, Janis is now working in fine art photography with a focus on florals, farmers’ market imagery, and backyard critters. Janis’ images are included in the collection of various hospitals locally and in Europe.

**Jess Draws** | [bumblechub.com](http://bumblechub.com) | Jess, aka bumblechub, loves making drawings, collages, and zines centered around weirdness, justice, and bugs.

**Joel Bell-Duffrin** | [jbelldg.com](https://www.instagram.com/jbelldg.com) | The founder and creative soul behind J Bell Design Gallery, Joel is a seasoned photographer and graphic designer who blends emotion, light, and texture into black-and-white, abstract, and mixed-media works that stir the senses.

**Karin Wolf** | Karin serves as the Arts Administrator for the City of Madison, curating events, running grant programs, and advocating for all

things arts and artist. She goes to neighborhoods for local art projects to learn the community’s concerns then addresses them through art.

**Kelly Jane Goodman** | [cara.app/kjgoodman](http://cara.app/kjgoodman) | Kelly Jane Goodman is a 2-D visual artist working primarily in paint and ink. Her work focuses on therapeutic pieces regarding mental health and her sexuality. A select number of her works are currently available at Stay True Tattoo in McFarland. She can be found at various fairs in the Madison area.

**Kimberly A. Blanchette** | [kimberlyblanchette.com](http://kimberlyblanchette.com) | Kimberly is an author (poetry, plays, inspirations), artist (painter, photographer), activist, officiant, and comedienne. Kimberly currently resides in Janesville with her wife Colleen and is a member of a local comedy improv troupe called Steadily Improv’ing.

**Lisa Kidd/The White Dog Studio** | [thewhitedogstudio.com](http://thewhitedogstudio.com) | Lisa’s voice as a contemporary, abstract, expressionist artist using mixed media is influenced by feelings and nature. Lisa paints the rhythm of life’s emotions; blemishes, vulnerabilities, joy, challenges, and the pursuit of beauty in every experience and the opportunities to continue life’s journey.

**Lois Bielefeld** | [loisbielefeld.com](http://loisbielefeld.com) | Bielefeld’s work explores identity, family, and daily rituals through intimate, conceptual photography. Blending portraiture and documentary, she examines how personal and collective routines shape belonging, gender, and community—transforming the ordinary into visual reflections on human connection and individuality.

**Mar Gosselar** | [@theseboneshavefeelings](https://www.instagram.com/theseboneshavefeelings) | Mar (they/them) is a white, queer, and mad artist. They strive to engage with tattooing at Red Clover Tattoo Collective as a consensual, trauma-informed practice that centers collaboration and the client experience. They make art inspired by vintage illustrations, woodcuts, naturalist paintings, pattern-making, and their clients’ input.

**Melanie Renee Photography/Dulcy Dog Photography** | [melanierenephotography.com](http://melanierenephotography.com) | Weddings, people, branding, and lots of dogs.

**EAT LOCAL MONTH**  
willy street co-op

**CELEBRATE LOCAL IN SEPTEMBER!**

ENJOY SALES ON LOCAL FAVORITES, TASTY SAMPLES, AND STORIES FROM THE FARMERS, CHEFS, AND MAKERS BEHIND THEM. THE DOOR COUNTY CHERRY ON TOP? WE’RE GIVING AWAY 24 TOTE BAGS PACKED WITH \$100 IN LOCAL GOODIES!

**EVERYONE’S WELCOME AT WILLY STREET CO-OP**

NO MEMBERSHIP NEEDED TO SHOP—BUT MEMBERS GET EXTRA DEALS AND PERKS. JOIN FOR JUST \$10, OR LESS IF YOU QUALIFY FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

**SUPPORT LOCAL. TASTE THE DIFFERENCE.**

[WILLYSTREET.COOP/EAT-LOCAL-MONTH](http://WILLYSTREET.COOP/EAT-LOCAL-MONTH)

<b>WILLY EAST</b> 1221 WILLIAMSON ST. MADISON, WI (608) 251-6776	<b>WILLY WEST</b> 6825 UNIVERSITY AVE. MIDDLETON, WI (608) 284-7800	<b>WILLY NORTH</b> 2817 N SHERMAN AVE MADISON, WI (608) 471-4422
---	--	---

**OPEN: 7:30AM - 9:00PM**

WE DEFINE “LOCAL” AS WITHIN 150 MILES OF THE STATE CAPITOL OR ANYWHERE IN THE STATE OF WISCONSIN.

WE CARRY MORE THAN

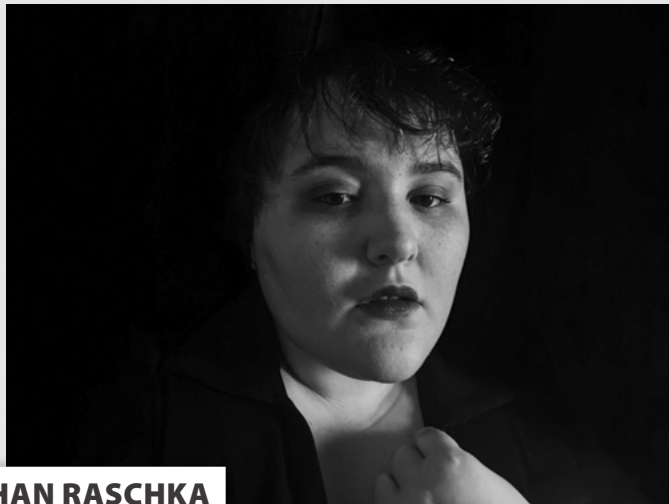
**5,311**

PRODUCTS FROM

**527**

LOCAL FARMERS, ARTISANS, AND MAKERS.





HAN RASCHKA

Poet | hanraschka.com

HAN RASCHKA is a born-and-raised Wisconsinite by way of Stevens Point. They are currently hunkered up in the Driftless Region. They attend the UW-Madison, majoring in creative writing with a focus in poetry.

Han found a passion for poetics during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, taking online workshops through the San Francisco Creative Writing Institute and Brooklyn Poets to develop their craft. Within the confines of Zoom calls and remote workshops, they assembled a body of work that eventually comprised their first collection, *Splinters* (Collapse Press). *Splinters* was a practice in exorcism rooted in Midwest cultural identity and space within the framework of personal trauma. Han continued this theme in their chapbook, *Enamel* (Bottlecap Press) and firmly established themselves as a practicing (always practicing!) poet.

Han's poetry frequently utilizes religious iconography, embodied language, and the queer experience in order to construct a deeply intimate exploration of their Wisconsin identity. They spent their childhood in Central Wisconsin, running around in the woods and building a cultural repository in a brain their mother affectionately refers to as "the sponge." Han came of age in a multifaceted transitional period: Flip phones gave way to Blackberries and then iPhones; Don't Ask Don't Tell's repeal and the legalization of gay marriage occurred in their middle and high school years; and the Wild West known as social media grew at an exponential rate. They consider this backdrop an integral part of their poetics and their personal development as a queer Midwesterner.

Han has taught community workshops, curated readings, been a featured reader at poetry events, and is a stalwart attendee of their favorite virtual open mic, The Friday Collapse. Their favorite way to explore poetics is through this lens of community practice and joy, and emphasizes the intentional process of community building as a key focus of their writing pedagogy. Their poetry has won awards, earned them fellowships and scholarships, and has been published in various journals and anthologies.

Their writing currently centers on an autobiographical exploration of internet culture, public/personal digital historiographies, and the experience of growing up within and alongside the Web. Their central question: What is the line between public and private persona, and how do we experience these personas in the context of both the internet and our personal lives?

Han feels that at their core, they are still off running in the woods. If you'd like to join them, you can find their work at hanraschka.com. ■

Melanie's also a regular *Our Lives* contributor.

**Michael Velliquette** | velliquette.com | Velliquette is an artist internationally renowned for his intricately crafted works in the medium of paper. Cut and assembled by hand, Velliquette's works can take hundreds of hours to complete. They are at once abstract forms made from colored paper, and also structures that from one moment to the next suggest fortress-like constructions, tiered mandalas, or complex mechanical gears.

**Nicole Bresnick** | nicolebresnick.com | Nicole Bresnick paints in a way that puts positive energy into the universe. She practices this, but is also developing her darker side with what she calls "Forbidden Art," which purposefully flouts artistic and community norms to carry its message.

**Nykoli Koslow** | instagram.com/nykoli.koslow | Nykoli is an artist working in the realm of painting and drawing, fusing figuration with abstraction to explore notions of gender, sexuality, and agency. Part autobiographical and part research-based, his work pulls from ancient history, mythology, religion, mysticism, and a kind of theoretical physics infused with sci-fi.

**Radillustrates** | radillustrates.com | Rachal A Duggan is an illustrator and author. She draws butts, comics, pets, people, houses, and so much more. When she's not creating illustrations, she teaches drawing workshops to all skill levels. Interested in having her draw Booty Portraits at your wedding? Reach out for details!

**Rae Sowards** | instagram.com/raesowards | An author, poet, and fine art photographer with a special focus on shooting with film and in black and white. The photos are often beautiful and gritty at the same time, showcasing deeply personal reflections on identity, location, class, and more.

**Rolando Cruz** | rolandocruz.com | An award-winning artist and photographer, as well as an ardent runner, who frequently explores issues of identity and race through his work.

**RothePrints** | ingridrothe.smugmug.com | I seek to make photographs that are interesting and inspire curiosity and awe. My subjects are the world around me, including landscapes, wildlife, city life, and architecture. My outlook is Midwestern, but I try to do justice to other parts of the world as well.

**Rufus Jupiter** | rufusjupiter.com | Rufus Jupiter (they/them) is a queer- trans multidisciplinary artist living in the rural Driftless region. Their creative practice combines ecological inquiry, improvisational movement, visual imagery, collaborative partnerships, and play. A founding member of WE dances Movement Collaborative, they also instigate local queerspace dance parties and host a community radio show under the moniker Titmouse.

**Sarah Stellino** | Sarahstellinophoto.com | Sarah Stellino uses imagery to explore intimacy, identity, and legacy. Her photographic practice is greatly informed by using a view camera, and she continues the craft and care of each photograph by creating prints by hand in the darkroom. She is driven by a deep sense of the importance of record-keeping and legacy-making and the impact that can have on future generations.

**ArtofScottJones** | instagram.com/scott\_steven57 | Scott is a painter who celebrates life, art, nature, and beauty.

**Shawpawprints Watercolor** | Ashley Shaw Adams is a watercolor artist who paints what she loves...and she loves a lot of things! Each of her pieces is inspired by her life, her friends, her family, and her preferred methods of escapism.

**SNollPhotography** | snollphotography.com | Artistic photography of people, places, and things. Specializing in portrait, boudoir (all genders), events (theatre, drag), and sports.

**The Art of Dena Tullis** | linktr.ee/denatullisart | Dena Tullis is a southern Wisconsin-based artist who loves to share her whimsical ideas. You may find her and her art at conventions around the Midwest, local Wisconsin markets and festivals, or even hidden in a planter at an amusement park.

**Trans Artists Collaborative** | TheTransperience.com | The Transperience

is a multi-media, digital immersive art installation and experience that shares the amazing real life and stories of transgender persons. Installations have taken place at UW-Green Bay Weidner Center for the Performing Arts, St. Norbert College, UW-Green Bay Student Union and The Brown Co. Neville Public Library.

**Paul Baker Prindle** | paulbakerprindle.com | Baker Prindle's images build on the traditions of portraiture, but quickly confound those traditions by using index, vernacular conventions, and the landscape to evoke impressions of the body that go beyond what is visually represented. Currently he is the Gabriele Haberland Director of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art.

**Penumbra Photography** | behance.net/gallery/165739817/Familiar-Strangers | Penumbra offers documentary, street, and event photography. Exhibited in: Wisconsin Photography 2024, Racine Art Museum; and Photo Midwest Biennial 2024, Madison. Penumbra is interested in documenting unusual events, people, places.

**Vintage Lulu & Vintage Moon Photography** | vintageluluphotography.com | Vintage Lulu & Vintage Moon are trans- and queer-owned. With a blend of artistic storytelling and a playful, vintage aesthetic, we strive to create timeless images that reflect your unique personality and style.

**Vivienne Timchenko** | innovatsia.com | Vivienne is a Qartveli-American, queer, multidisciplinary artist. Within Timchenko's work, she shapes and synthesizes themes of purpose, peculiarity, and protest. She describes her art as a loving, labyrinthine, labor of life.

**Woody Olsen** | woodyolsen.com | An abstract painter, his acrylic, watercolor and mixed media paintings are rendered in bright, floating, overlapping metallic colors. A graduate of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, his work has been in juried shows throughout the Midwest.

#### CRAFTERS/MAKERS

**After While, Craftodile** | afterwhilecraftodile.com | Geometric mobiles and sculptures inspired by folk-crafts and the full moon. Think Himmeli, Pajaki, Puzurs, etc., things for your mantle, altar, home, and life. Made of a combination of things: Brass tubes, nylon string, beads, crystals, love, and attention. They are sparkly and pleasing to the eye in the light.

**Angie & Kal Jones** | itsjustus.shop | Angie and Kal are a mother and son company that takes resin and digital art and mashes them together. Kal paints and draws while Angie does the rest. They do custom colors, ideas and painting to customers' liking and put things together to make happiness.

**Bruce Seeds** | bruceseeds.com | Bruce is a former architect who has been making quilts since 2008.

**C3 Designs** | facebook.com/AwardWinningFineJewelry | Chris is the owner of C3 Designs, a fine jewelry store in South Milwaukee that specializes in custom design. He has been designing jewelry for more than 20 years and is the recipient of more than 30 design awards. All his designs are handcrafted to the highest standards.

**Darn Queers/Universal Friend** | facebook.com/groups/930631423985133 | Kandra is a sewist and multimedia artist living in Madison. They co-founded the monthly queers sewing/fiber arts meet up Darn Queers. Kandra likes to paint, cook, and make apparel. Need a live event painter or a custom garment made? Reach out!

**Haus of Ogé** | instagram.com/hausofoge | A Wisconsin fashion brand created by Jinx and Micah Ogé, the brand features signature designs with a strong emphasis on LGBTQ+, drag, non-binary, femmes, and more—from high-fashion echoing pop culture, '80s and '90s trends, barbiecore and futuristic-themed looks, and beyond.

**Jennifer Froh Jewelry** | Jenniferfroh.com | Jennifer creates colorful anodized aluminum chainmail jewelry and sterling silver wirework jewel-

ry—and Pride jewelry all year round. Custom designs welcome!  
**Mindfully Inspired** | artwithoutjudgment.com | Mindfully Inspired is a gallery-style art collective retail shop featuring 40+ Wisconsin artists. Our eclectic and often upcycled or reimagined art includes small gift items, jewelry, home decor, and furniture.

**P&S Glassworks** | @p.s.glassworks | Established in 2023 by a gay couple who make stained glass pieces, P&S Glassworks would love to bring some more color into your home! DM on Instagram for commissions.

**Queer Suave By Niko** | queersuavebyniko.wixsite.com/queer-suave-by-niko | Niko is a queer trans man who runs a fashion house that specializes in making garments and leatherwear including harnesses, collars, and more for the queer and trans community to their exact measurements. I strive to give clients the most euphoria I can.

**Scott by Design** | linktr.ee/ScottbyDesign | Scott by Design's creations reflect their love for body inclusivity, neurodiversity, queerness, thrifted finds, and all things unique. Abbey specializes in stunning artificial floral wreaths and wall hangings, while Haley's artistic pursuits are wonderfully eclectic—spanning painting, collaging, drawing, and more.

**Spicy Squirrel Creations** | Creator/owner Melvyn Marcum (he/him) works with wood and leather, but also creates paintings, jewelry, and upcycled items to keep the spicy (ADHD) brain happy. He is currently working on small, carved animals/figures and by commission only.

**SR Robinson** | suebob.net/Beads\_and\_Such/0beads\_talismans.html | An eclectic mix of ceramic beads, talismans, mugs, plates, tiles, and bowls.

**Red Mitten Games** | redmittengames.com | Red Mitten Games is fresh off the fully funded Kickstarter for the board game Five By Five, which is being sold in shops around the Madison area.

**The Rat Tail Taxidermy** | linktr.ee/therattail | The Rat Tail specializes in ethical and sustainable taxidermy such as bone art, wet specimens, traditional mounts, and pet memorials. The Rat Tail is trans/queer-owned and they are always looking for new projects, opportunities, and friends!

**WisMx Zines & Art** | Myranda (they/them) loves to find creative ways to recycle and reuse broken toys and other unwanted items into jewelry and art pieces. They also write a personal zine about rural life in Wisconsin as a plus-sized, queer person and their orange cats. ■

## How to be included

If you don't see yourself, or someone you think should be included, **let us know!** To participate in this annual list, complete the submission form on our website:

**ourliveswisconsin.com/  
wisconsin-lgbtq-artist-survey**

NEED WEBSITE HELP?  
**DESIGN.GARDEN IS HERE FOR YOU.**  
organic web development  
www.design.garden



funding wisconsin's LGBTQ+ communities since 1984

### RAISING MONEY

tax-deductible donations, community fundraising events, workplace contributions, and planned giving

### GIVING BACK

awarded over \$375,000 to organizations promoting LGBTQ+ rights, services, culture and community development in Wisconsin

contact us to learn how you can make a difference

info@newharvestfoundation.org  
www.newharvestfoundation.org

PO Box 1786  
Madison, WI 53701-1786



IMPROVE → OUR RIGHTS

OURLIVESWISCONSIN.COM



POLITICS & LAW HISTORY CURRENT EVENTS NEWS

## Discrimination & Double Standards

Recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions in the *Skrametti* and *Mahmoud* cases were discriminatory in their reasoning and contradictory in their methods, always with the intention of deciding against LGBTQ+ rights.

**THIS TERM**, the Supreme Court decided two cases that will be consequential for our community. In very bad ways.

On June 18, the Supreme Court upheld Tennessee's ban on gender-affirming care for transgender minors in a 6 to 3 decision in *United States v. Skrametti*. In doing so, the majority, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, also held that the ban did not trigger "heightened scrutiny" review, which is the second most stringent form of review under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the standard usually applied to legal challenges based on sex discrimination.

Rather than heightened scrutiny, the majority applied what is known as "rational basis" review. Under rational basis review, the burden is on the challenger to demonstrate that the challenged law is not rationally related to any legitimate government interest.

So why didn't this decision get heightened scrutiny? Because according to the majority, the Tennessee law was related to age and medical use, rather than sex-based discrimination, and thus did not merit heightened scrutiny review. This was despite evidence presented by the challengers that other forms of gender-affirming care (such as hormone blockers) would still be available to cisgender minors under the Tennessee law.

The dissent, written by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, pointed out this glaring failure of the majority to consider the ways in which the Tennessee law discriminated against transgender minors in ways related to their sex. As she wrote, "Male (but not female) adolescents can receive medicines that help them look like boys, and female (but not male) adolescents can receive medicines that help them look like girls." She discussed the many ways in which the ban constituted discrimination based on



So why didn't this decision get heightened scrutiny? Because according to the majority, the Tennessee law was related to age and medical use, rather than sex-based discrimination, and thus did not merit heightened scrutiny review.

sex, adding, "In sadness, I dissent."

The Court issued a similar 5 to 3 decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor* on June 27. That case involved a Montgomery, Maryland, county school board decision to introduce a variety of LGBTQ+ inclusive books into the public school curriculum without an "opt out" option for students whose parents come from religious backgrounds that may object to such materials. The Court rejected this effort, saying that the introduction of the materials without a way to opt out was unconstitutional. The school board had actually stated that it had previously considered implementing an opt out option for parents, but found that it was not administratively practical.

The majority in this case, written by Justice Samuel Alito, considered the introduction of such books without an opt out to be a burden on the parents' right to the free exercise of religion, and concluded that it constituted an unconstitutional infringement of religious liberties. Unlike in *Skrametti*, the majority applied the most stringent form of scrutiny, known as

"strict scrutiny."

The dissent, also written by Justice Sotomayor, was scathing. As she wrote, "Exposing students to the 'message' that LGBTQ people exist, and that their loved ones may celebrate their marriages and life events, the majority says, is enough to trigger the most demanding form of judicial scrutiny." It even drew attention to the majority's double standard. As Justice Sotomayor pointed out, in *Skrametti*, the Court took a differing approach, requiring any objections to the gender-affirming care ban to be raised in the political, rather than legal, arena. But in *Mahmoud*, the majority made no such requirement.

What does this mean for our community? It is, to put it frankly, really bad for us. Most directly, it means that states who want to ban gender-affirming care for minors can do so. It means that public schools that want to allow LGBTQ+ books to be available in the curriculum must implement costly measures in order to do so, or avoid introducing such books entirely.

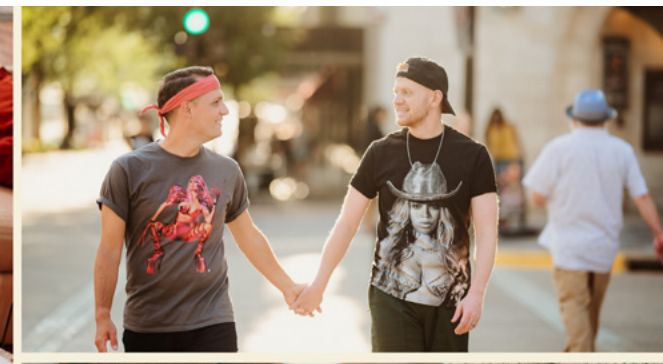
More broadly, these cases open the doors to other forms of discrimination. The reasoning of *Skrametti* and *Mahmoud*, put together, could potentially be applied to allow other forms of harm to LGBTQ+ youth. It could be applied to anti-bullying policies that are designed to protect LGBTQ+ youth. It could be applied to the use of bathrooms or participation in sports. Indeed, a case involving the latter—a transgender sports ban—will be heard by the Supreme Court this upcoming term (to be discussed in a future column).

But our community has been here before. Until the Supreme Court decided *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003, laws criminalizing sodomy existed in 14 states. Until the Supreme Court decided *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015, same-sex marriage was not guaranteed by the Due Process and Equal Protection clauses of the U.S. Constitution. Until the Supreme Court decided *Bostock v. Clayton County* in 2020, it was unclear whether Title VII of the Civil Rights Act protected employees against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Yet LGBTQ+ people have persevered. We have fought these battles not only in courts, but in the streets and in state capitols. And we have provided mutual aid and support for each other throughout even more troubling times. We must continue to do all of these things. ■



**STEPH TAI** is a law professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School, and also Associate Dean for Education and Faculty Affairs at the UW Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies. Their research is primarily in the area of environmental, food, and health regulation.



Melanie Renee PHOTOGRAPHY



melaniereneephoto.com

ASJ PUBLISHING LLC



coming 2024

TOGETHER!  
we make a difference

madisonlocallysourced.com | secondactmagazine.com | madisonhomemagazine.com



BUSINESS FOOD & DINING COMMUNITY

## Êtes-Vous Prêts?

**Tracy Danner** intentionally created Madison's **EVP Coffee** in 1997 as a place to serve people and offer a warm and welcoming environment. Decades later, the coffee and community-supportive spaces are still going strong.

**WALKING INTO** an EVP Coffee shop is like stepping into a family member's home. The chairs and tables are worn and lived in; the couches are homey and show signs of lounging. One can tell many friendly conversations and study sessions have happened in these seats.

The walls are painted in warm shades of red and yellow, with fun pops of turquoise and purple, creating a cozy, intimate atmosphere. Large paintings adorn each shop, depicting eccentric cowboys, abstract plants, and colorful landscapes. Each painting is custom-made for the individual shop, adding a familial touch.

"I'm really not a cool coffee shop," owner Tracy Danner said. "I'm really about creating spaces that feel sacred to me and where everybody feels welcome."

The inviting atmosphere is emblematic of how Danner runs Madison's EVP Coffee. Twenty-eight years into the business, with four locations and two production sites, Danner brings the same warmth and welcoming environment to managing employees, serving customers, and providing a good cup of coffee.

### ÊTES-VOUS PRÊTS?

Born and raised in Alaska, prior to opening EVP Coffee, Danner was a substance abuse counselor in Anchorage. She loved how social work allowed her to get to know her community intimately and help the people in her hometown. But after six years in the role, the intensity of the job started to take a toll on her.

After deciding to leave social work, Danner aimed to incorporate the aspects of that career she loved into her next one. She was most passionate about serving people, listening to their stories, and helping them get through the day. She realized she could continue her service work by creating a community space that treated customers with respect. "I thought, 'What do I love about this job?' and I thought maybe I could use coffee as a way to serve other people and still do human service work," Danner explained.

Transitioning into the next stage required revisiting a previous one. Danner attended UW-Madison for two years after high school and was part of the women's rowing team.

When deciding to open a coffee shop in Madison, she wanted to honor that original connection and named her shop EVP Coffee, which stands for "Êtes-vous prêts," and is the starting rowing command that translates from French to "Are you ready?" Now, instead of helping people through social work, Danner is able to serve people with a cup of coffee. "I use coffee as a vehicle to get people to walk through the door so I can serve them," she said.

When the first shop opened in October 1997 on Highland Avenue, Danner set out to see if she could "lead with love" by treating employees with kindness and serving a great, fairly priced product while still running a profitable business. Danner said people told her she needed to



be cutthroat if she wanted to run a business, but she wasn't willing to do that. Now 27 years later, Danner believes she achieved all those things without sacrificing her love for helping people, saying, "I feel like it's been a perfect fit for me."

### BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH KINDNESS

Danner chose the warm, unassuming decor for the shop because she wanted it to appeal to everyone. She didn't want it to be a trendy coffee shop or a place you get in and get out; she wanted the decor to feel inviting for everyone.

Along with the decor, Danner has created an inviting environment by treating each customer with a "spirit of love, kindness, and respect." Her goal was to create a place that was more than a spot to grab coffee; she wanted to create a neighborhood gathering space where she could get to know everyone who came in. EVP's Lead Roaster Chris Tiller said he frequently witnesses customers strike up conversations with Danner like they're old friends, and Danner goes out of her way to chat with regular customers. "Tracy truly does care about people," Tiller said.

Danner asks her employees to bring the same level of kindness and respect to customers. When hiring baristas, Danner looks for a positive attitude in the interview process. She said EVP doesn't train employees or have long conversations about how to be extra kind—she just looks for people with good hearts. "I'm really asking these folks to love people," Danner said.

By hiring kind employees and cultivating an environment that priori-



tizes customer care, General Manager Monica Goncze believes EVP has successfully cultivated community spaces where people feel at home. And by providing this service, EVP has earned a lot of loyal customers. According to Goncze, 70% to 80% of customers are repeat visitors.

### EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES

Danner applies her background in social work to employee management by building their confidence and demonstrating that they are valued. "I feel like a lot of places send the message to their workers that, 'I don't trust you, I expect the least of you,'" she said. Danner takes the opposite approach by respecting her employees and teaching them that their voices should be valued. She does so by making it clear to employees that their work is important and that she appreciates the effort they put into the business.

Danner builds employee confidence by teaching self-advocacy skills "so that when they move on to another job, they know they have worth and know how to respond when they are not treated well."

Goncze has been working at EVP Coffee since 2018 and has described working with Danner as "a breath of fresh air." Together, Goncze and Danner try to create a stress-free work environment. If there's ever an issue with an employee, they try to work through it and facilitate dialogue to address the issue and move forward. They also create a culture of open communication, so if someone is struggling, they know they can come to Goncze or Danner for help.

The communicative and appreciative environment is the reason Tiller has stayed with EVP Coffee for seven years. "Tracy's just a really good boss," he said. "She's understanding and really tries to meet people where they're at."

### CRAFTING COFFEE

Cultivating a welcoming environment and a healthy workspace is so important for Danner that she often forgets how good EVP's coffee is—but it is really good, she says.

EVP Coffee roasts its own coffee daily at its East Washington Street location, so it can always be served fresh to customers, and Danner said that's the best way to drink it. EVP's coffee is air-roasted: a process that utilizes hot air instead of the traditional drum-roasting method, where beans are roasted on a hot surface. The air-roasting method creates a, "smoother cup of coffee with more balanced flavors," according to Tiller.

EVP is known for having strong, dark-roasted coffee, according to Tiller, who noted that EVP attracts a lot of loyal customers because of its coffee. Even after regulars move out of Madison, Tiller said EVP sells a good amount of their coffee beans around the country to former customers.

Regardless of how someone prefers their coffee, Danner stated it will be served with a loving gesture, as this is her way of caring for the community. With happy tears welling in her eyes, Danner said, "My whole thing has been providing great coffee, beautiful spaces, and safe spaces for people to come and be. EVP is my poem to the community." ■



YARN SUPPLIES & CLASSES  
CAFE  
BEER, WINE, & CIDER  
MENU FEATURING LOCAL  
FARMS & ARTISANS

WWW.KNITANDSIP.COM

125 S. MAIN ST. • VERONA, WI • 608.848.2755

**bad dog frida**  
has really cool things  
for good dogs, cats,  
and their people

### upcoming events\*

- Nail Trim Clinic
- Ask the Trainer
- Meet-N-Greet Adoptable Dogs



Your local source for healthy foods and treats, nutrition advice, great gear, and unique toys.

Shop in-store or online. \$5 same-day delivery!\*

\*See website for details.

608-442-6868 baddogfrida.com 2094 atwood ave. madison, wi



DELI • LUNCH • TAKE-N-BAKE • DRY GOODS • WINE  
GELATO • ITALIAN/SICILIAN SPECIALTIES

106 S. WEBSTER ST • DINOTTOMADISON.COM

TOAST TAKEOUT.COM

MONDAY-FRIDAY 10AM-3PM



YOUTH SPORTS POLITICS PHOTOGRAPHY TRANSGENDER

## Athletic Ability: Portraits of LGBTQ+ Student Athletes

In light of the anti-trans student athlete bills sweeping the nation, **GSAFE** and **Fair Wisconsin** teamed up to create a photo series that features LGBTQ+ student athletes.

**GSAFE AND FAIR WISCONSIN**, two LGBTQ+ organizations in Wisconsin, have teamed up to create a photo series that opposes and brings to light the anti-trans student athlete bills sweeping the nation. Because not all trans youth are out, we wanted to protect students' safety and privacy. We decided to photograph anyone identifying as a LGBTQ+ student athlete in Wisconsin; in that way, no one is singled out. Our fight is most effective when the entire community comes together to support each other.

Skylar, whose portrait appears in the photo series as the golfer said, "What I love most about golf is the feeling that I'm out on the course playing with my friends, not against them; that sense of community is what matters most to me."

This series hopes to put a human face to LGBTQ+ youth in Wisconsin, and to help them tell their own stories. In too many instances, they are only seen as a statistic when in fact, they are individuals following their own dreams and living out their own passions.

The idea of community and/or chosen family is something that has been a central theme in queer life since the beginning. For LGBTQ+ people, athletics is another way to build that community as well. It is a way to have a common experience with a group of others—one in



Learn about the Project

which you are cheered on and encouraged to always do your best—and no matter the outcome, you are accepted because we are all on the same team.

As the photographer of the project, this series was close to my heart. I am a queer BIPOC person who grew up somewhat isolated. Sports became my refuge. The ball field was the place where I was most accepted for all of the things I thought were unacceptable about myself. Being able to photograph these young LGBTQ+ athletes has been a full circle moment in my life. I truly thank

them for allowing me to capture a moment of their beautiful lives, and I hope their courage and willingness to share their story with the public helps people understand why playing a sport you love is a human right that should not be questioned or politicized.

In the end, this series hopes to put a human face to LGBTQ+ youth in Wisconsin, and to help them tell their own stories. In too many instances, they are only seen as a statistic when in fact, they are individuals following their own dreams and living out their own passions. They are just starting out in life and need all the support and encouragement they can obtain from their school and their community. We hope to show this through these portraits.

You can learn more about the project and donate to help fund the project by visiting the QR code above. ■



## The Madison College community welcomes Dr. Jennifer Berne

With a new academic year and a new president, we have a lot to be excited about.

Dr. Berne, Madison College's new president, brings a vision for transformative success and fostering a welcoming environment, fueled by a career in academic and leadership roles.

We are confident her positive impact will be felt by Madison College students, faculty and staff, as well as the greater community, our workforce partners, K-12 institutions and other organizations shaping the future of our region.



To learn more about Dr. Berne, visit [madisoncollege.edu/welcome-drberne](https://madisoncollege.edu/welcome-drberne)

Welcome to Madison College Dr. Berne, and Go WolfPack!



# MADISON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

JOHN DEMAIN | MUSIC DIRECTOR

**100** YEARS  
TOGETHER IN MUSIC

Experience breathtaking moments and memories throughout our 100th season — masterworks with world-renowned guest soloists, plus MSO at the Movies live-to-film presentations. Subscriptions to 5-8 concerts, Create Your Own 4 Concert Classical Series, and single tickets are available now!

Your Symphony's October, November & December concerts:

**OCT 17-19**

FRI & SAT 7:30 PM | SUN 2:30 PM | OVERTURE HALL

## Primal Light

**JOHN DEMAIN** *Conductor*  
**CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR** *Piano*  
**JENI HOUSER** *Soprano*  
**EMILY FONS** *Mezzo-Soprano*  
**MADISON SYMPHONY CHORUS**  
Beverly Taylor, *Director*



### MUSIC

MASON **BATES** *Resurrexit*  
CÉSAR **FRANCK** *Symphonic Variations*  
GUSTAV **MAHLER** *Symphony No. 2 in C minor, "Resurrection"*



**PRESENTING SPONSOR**  
Rosemarie and Fred Blancke

**MAJOR SPONSORS**  
Marilyn Ebben, *in memory of Jim Ebben*  
Larry and Jan Phelps, Martha and Charles Casey  
Robert and Linda Graebner

**ADDITIONAL SPONSORS**  
Margaret Murphy, *in memory of Howard Kidd*  
Rodney Schreiner and Mark Blank,  
Wisconsin Arts Board

**NOV 21-23**

FRI & SAT 7:30 PM | SUN 2:30 PM | OVERTURE HALL

## Radiance

**ROBERT MOODY** *Guest Conductor*  
**ALBAN GERHARDT** *Cello*



### MUSIC

CHRISTOPHER **THEOFANIDIS**  
*Rainbow Body*  
JOSEPH **HAYDN**  
*Cello Concerto in D Major*  
MODEST **MUSSORGSKY**  
*arr. MAURICE RAVEL*  
*Pictures at an Exhibition*



**MAJOR SPONSORS**  
Judith Werner, *in memory of Stephen Caldwell*  
Capitol Lakes  
Skofronick Family Charitable Trust

**ADDITIONAL SPONSORS**  
Scott and Janet Cabot, *in honor of Ann Bowen*  
David Lauth and Lindsey Thomas  
Bassam Shakhshiri  
Wisconsin Arts Board

[madisonsymphony.org/radiance](http://madisonsymphony.org/radiance)

**DEC 5-7**

FRI & SAT 7:30 PM | SUN 2:30 PM | OVERTURE HALL

## A Madison Symphony Christmas



**JOHN DEMAIN** *Conductor*  
**ALEXANDRA LOBIANCO** *Soprano*  
**KYLE KETELSEN** *Bass-Baritone*  
**MADISON SYMPHONY CHORUS**  
Beverly Taylor, *Director*  
**MT. ZION GOSPEL CHOIR**  
Tamera and Leatha Stanley, *Directors*  
**MADISON YOUTH CHOIRS**  
Michael Ross, *Artistic Director*



**OUT**  
AT THE SYMPHONY

([madisonsymphony.org/out](http://madisonsymphony.org/out))

**PRESENTING SPONSOR**  
Lau and Bea Christensen

**MAJOR SPONSORS**  
American Printing

Fiore Companies, Inc.  
Judith Werner, *in memory of Stephen Caldwell*  
Richard and Pamela Reese, *in memory of Maurice and Arlene Reese*  
Peggy and Tom Pyle  
John and Twila Sheskey Charitable Fund,  
*in memory of Jennie Biel Sheskey*  
An Anonymous Friend

**ADDITIONAL SPONSORS**  
Reinhart Boerner van Deuren s.c.  
Wisconsin Arts Board

[madisonsymphony.org/christmas](http://madisonsymphony.org/christmas)

**Be part of the experience.**



Purchase single tickets (starting at \$20) by phone (608) 258-4141, in-person at the Overture Box Office, 201 State State Street, online at [madisonsymphony.org](http://madisonsymphony.org) or [overture.org](http://overture.org).



Dates, artists, programs, and prices subject to change. Overture Center fees and sales tax apply to all orders. Additional Overture fee applies to phone and online orders (no fee for in-person orders at the Box Office).