Boston's city council swears in most diverse body

Including first openly gay woman

BOSTON (AP)—Boston’s city council swore in the most diverse body in its history Monday.

The council made up more than half by women and people of color was ushered in by Mayor Martin Walsh during a ceremony at Fanueil Hall, the Boston Herald reported.

The mayor swore in 13 members that included four new faces, which is an unusual amount of turnover for the council.

Voters in November also elected the council’s first Latina member, Julian Mejia, as well as district councilors Ricardo Arroyo, Kenzie Bok and Liz Breaux, who is the first openly gay woman to serve on the council.

City Councilor Kim Janey will also make history as the third woman of color to serve as the body’s president.

The council was a white male bastion for decades, but Boston is now a “majority minority” city where whites comprise roughly 47% of the population.

Walsh proclaimed education, housing and transportation as the main priorities the council and his administration will take on this year.

“Partnership is essential for good government,” Walsh said. “In these very divisive times, Boston must find a way forward.”

MassEquality Welcomes New Executive Director

Submitted by MassEquality

The Board of Directors of MassEquality announced this week that Tanya Neslusan has accepted the position of executive director of the organization. Having left the corporate tech world to turn her full attention to her activist roots, Tanya joins MassEquality at a critical juncture. MassEquality is redirecting its focus from a primary emphasis on policy work on Beacon Hill to direct organizing in geographic communities throughout the state.

Tanya is an experienced political and social justice organizer and life-long resident of Central Massachusetts. In 2018, she completed EmergeMA Candidate Training and threw her hat in the ring to unseat a seven-term and largely uncontested State Representative. Though the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, Tanya cemented many relationships throughout the Commonwealth. Tanya has also served as Secretary of the Sturbridge Town Democratic Committee, Planning Committee Member of Showing up for Racial Justice Worcester, and Board Member of the Bay State Stonewall Democrats.

Tanya is a founding member of the leadership team of Grassroots Central Massachusetts and is a member of both the Massachusetts Women of Color Coalition and Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop.

Tanya resides in Sturbridge with her wife, Rebecca, her teenage son, Nick, a dog, two cats, and a bearded dragon. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Massachusetts and has spent the majority of her career working in health insurance information technology.

Board President Michael Pizziferri says of Tanya’s hiring: “Tanya has an impressive set of organizing skills that will bring the work of MassEquality alive in local communities. There is positive alignment between our strategic direction and Tanya’s desire to inspire social change through community organizing, developing accessible tools for people to put to work to move forward.”

Reasons for Hope in the New Year

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com

The new year is starting off on a grim note for the world. The escalating tension between the U.S. and Iran. Bushfires destroying an estimated billion animals in Australia. Earthquakes in Puerto Rico leaving nearly a million people without power. Families still detained and children separated from parents at our southern border. Continued incidents of violent racism and anti-Semitism. A federal administration that seems bent on rolling back tory. After all, thoughtful theatergoers know that this overrated Tony Award-winning even with 18 years on Broad-

"Porn. But art-house porn"

— Robert Pattinson's response to what he'll do if his turn as "Batman" flops. So there you have it, readers. Pattinson’s assets are in your hands.

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Our impulsive president, scrambling to justify having taken us to the brink of war by ordering the assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassem Suleimani, claimed on January 9 that Suleimani had planned "to blow up our embassy" in Baghdad. The next day it was four embassies. Defense Department sources contradicted him.

Meanwhile, top Trump officials, including his secretaries of State and Defense, frustrated members of both parties in Congress with a briefing lacking evidence that Suleimani had posed an imminent threat. The only thing imminent is Trump's impeachment trial in the Senate.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gamely assured us after the assassination that "Americans in the region are much safer today," even as his own department advised Americans to leave Iraq. Pompeo, perhaps eager to speed the Rapture, had urged Trump to launch the attack.

Contrary to Trump's assertion that he killed Suleimani "to stop a war," his action was the greatest escalation in forty years. He targeted a second Iranian official in Yemen unsuccessfully. He threatened to hit 52 Iranian targets if that country retaliated, invoking the 52 Americans taken hostage by Iran in 1979. He specifically threatened to hit cultural sites, a war crime that would put us in the company of ISIS and the Taliban. He later backed off of that in the face of protests, but trusting this compulsive liar is akin to an...
A Junior Senior
by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

I’ve recently reached the age (62) where I qualify for Senior discounts. This sets off an internal struggle—can I still call myself “middle aged” when I seem to have achieved Senior status—a status I never wanted, and couldn’t even imagine? Should I take the discount, when that means owning up to my age, another form of coming out of the closet?

I’ve always (at least until recently) looked younger than my years. Back when I was in college, and well into my 30s, this was a source of frustration; I had to pull out my ID and prove I was over 18 in college, and over 21 when I was pushing 30. But now, the tide has turned. When I was promoting my one-man show about late middle age in Calgary and Edmonton, Canada, I was thrilled when a few fringe festival goers thought I was in my early 50s.

A few years ago, I was at Westminster Abbey in London, where the entrance fee was approximately £25. I noticed there was a small discount for Seniors, (what the English call “pensioners,” which sounds even worse), and so I swallowed my pride and prepared to show the shocked ticket-taker proof that I was 60 years old. But the clerk, a millennial under 30, barely blinked and didn’t ask for ID; to him I probably looked positively ancient. I was simultaneously relieved and pised—Id saved a few dollars (or British pounds), but at what cost to my pride?

Over the past few years, I’ve grown accustomed to taking those discounts. After all, there aren’t many benefits to life past 60 why not take what’s offered? I’ll save a few bucks at the movies, and, for the first time, I got a Senior pass for our local town pond last summer, which saved me $20. Besides, I could always comfort myself with the knowledge that I still looked young for my age—or is that an oxymoron when one is in his seventh decade?

Summer may seem far away for many of us, but registration is now open for the 26th annual Family Week, the world’s largest gathering of LGBTQ families, July 25 to August 1 in Provincetown. More than just a vacation, Family Week has been a vital source of community, inspiration, and support for thousands of families for more than a quarter century now. Visit proxwnfamilyweek.com for details.

In international news, Sanna Marin on December 10 became Finland’s youngest prime minister, its third female premier, and the youngest sitting leader in the world. She also has two moms—she “was raised by a single mother who later entered a same-sex relationship,” reported the Guardian.

Momlbian
Continued from page 1

protections for LGBTQ people. Add in the personal struggles and simple-to-do lists that we each have and things can feel overwhelming. I don’t have solutions, but I have found a few recent signs of progress for LGBTQ parents and our children.

Five more states—Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, and Oregon—will this year join California in adding LGBTQ history to the public-school curriculm. Even outside these states, resources are growing for teaching about LGBTQ issues and history. Newsela, an online service that aggregates news articles and historical documents for classroom use, in December launched the Newsela LGBTQ+ Studies Collection, with content for various grade levels. Newsela says its overall resources now serve 90 percent of schools in the U.S., reaching 25 million students and over two million teachers.

After the school district in Kalamazoo, Michigan received complaints from three parents about LGBTQ-inclusive books in its diversity initiative, administrators decided to focus the books in the initiative solely on issues of racial and ethnic diversity. A public outcry, however, convinced the board to change its mind, and the program will now include books on LGBTQ, disability, and socioeconomic topics as well.

Illinois is updating its birth certificate system to be more accurate for parents of all gender identities. As residents Myles Brady-Davis and his wife Precious Brady-Davis found out when they had their child in December, currently, the gestational parent can be only named as the child’s father. Precious, a transgender woman, identifies as the mother. With the help of Lambda Legal, the Brady-Davis’ reached out to the Department of Public Health to ask that their child’s birth certificate correctly reflect their relationships to the child. As Lambda explained at its blog, incorrect information would be “a clear mistake that could compromise the family’s safety because of the confusion it might create.” The state confirmed they have been working since October on updating the system to more accurately reflect the identities of all parents; the work is not yet done, but in the meantime, they will issue an accurate certificate to the Brady-Davises, reported the Chicago Tribune.

Last year, Rhode Island failed to pass legislation that would revise outdated statutes and make it easier for parents of any gender, married or not, to establish legal parenthood of a child born through assisted reproduction. Supporters of the changes aren’t giving up, though. A coalition of Rhode Island parents, with the support of LGBTQ and family advocacy organizations, in December announced the launch of Rhode Islanders for Parentage Equality (RIPE) to push for passage of the legislation this year.

This year’s GLAAD Media Award nominees include a record 10 shows selected for the Outstanding Kids & Family Programming category, reflecting the increased number of LGBTQ characters in children’s television. GLAAD tells us that the category grew “as a result of an increase in LGBTQ images across the kids and family television programming and an increase in GLAAD’s work to advocate for inclusion in this genre.” The nominees are: Andi Mack (The Disney Channel); The Bravest Knight (Hub); High School Musical: The Musical: The Series (Disney+); The Loud House (Nickelodeon); "Mt. Rathburn and the Special Someone," Arthur (PBS); Rocko’s Modern Life: Static Cling (Netflix); She-Ra and the Princesses of Power (Netflix); Steven Universe: The Movie (Cartoon Network); ’A Tale of Two Nellas,’’ Nella the Princess Knight (Nick Jr.); and Twelve Forever (Netflix). Maybe next year they’ll even have enough entries to offer separate categories for both series and individual episodes, as they do for grown-up television.

In domestic news, Donna Gambling on December 10 became Finland’s youngest prime minister, its third female premier, and the youngest sitting leader in the world. She also has two moms—she “was raised by a single mother who later entered a same-sex relationship,” reported the Guardian.}

Serving LGBT Boomers and Pioneers
January 16, 2020

A Junior Senior
by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

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In international news, Sanna Marin on December 10 became Finland’s youngest prime minister, its third female premier, and the youngest sitting leader in the world. She also has two moms—she “was raised by a single mother who later entered a same-sex relationship,” reported the Guardian. The good news this year outweigh the bad? That remains to be seen. For many of us, much of the answer depends on the outcome of the presidential election—but November is a long time away. Until then, we can take heart that there is progress being made for our families despite the obstacles. More importantly, we can listen to our kids’ questions and concerns about the state of our country and our world. We may not have all the answers, but we can at least help our children see that there are still reasons to hope. We can assist them in finding their own strengths and ways of making a difference as we face the future together. Here’s to a good year for us all.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Momlbian (momlbian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.
The Cake needs more time in the oven

By Jules Becker

Is baking an art? Certainly legends like Jacques Pepin and the late great Julia Child would wholeheartedly say that it is. Perhaps Della, the fictional practitioner in the Bekah Brunstetter play "The Cake"—now in its Boston debut at the Lyric Stage Company of Boston—would agree. The owner of Della’s Sweets—well-detailed and vividly designed by Matt Whiton—would certainly insist that any novice baker make sure to use all of the ingredients as she does and “follow the directions.”

Much as there are several fine elements in director Courtney O’Connor well-mixed Lyric Stage effort, the lesbian couple’s wedding cake-centered play needs a stronger consistency and more to say about the intersection of love and understanding with that baking.

Inspired by a case involving a baker’s unwillingness to create such a wedding cake, Brunstetter (“This Is Us”)’s 2015 play rightly presents its four characters—the couple Jen and Macy and Della and her plumber husband Tim—as characters rather than types. Della in particular possesses a degree of unaffected charm that sometimes offsets her Christian fundamentalism-based bigotry. Speaking about her showcased Noah’s Ark cake, she points to what she claims are dinosaurs. She also naively believes that her confection could conquer ISIS where armies and governments struggle to do so. Meanwhile she hopes to win the Great American Bake Off and amaze its (heard but unseen) handsome host (think of his counterpart on the Great British Baking Show).

Ultimately, though, Della’s greatest challenge is what to do about the cake that Jen—the daughter of her best friend—would like for her upcoming wedding to African-American Macy. While the gregarious baker claims “I don’t see color,” she unequivocally does have a serious problem with sexual orientation as does Tim—who admits he “can’t pick and choose Bible” when it comes to laws about gays. At this point, an allusion in the play to Sodom and Gomorrah would have done well to bring in the cities’ clear laws about gays. At this point, an allusion in the play to Sodom and Gomorrah would have done well to bring in the cities’ clear laws about gays.

Brunstetter does provide balance with considerable dialogue about both Jen’s complicated family dynamics and Macy’s back story. As the wedding day approaches, though, the plotting and Della’s decision-making seem less convincing. Is Della really open to change? Does Tim’s surprise for Della constitute genuine quid pro quo or a predictable device? Nowwithstanding cake, can there be a real understanding between Della and Meg if the later fears that the former hates her? These questions are likely to prove nagging for some theatergoers.

Under director O’Connor’s careful guidance, there should be no question that the pacing is sharp and the cast first-rate. Karen MacDonald—always one of the Hub’s premier actresses—is a true standout. In body language and accent as well as a blend of family caring and cluelessness, she proves commandingly watchable as a kind of flawed Everywoman. Fred Silverman, Jr. has all of Tim’s judgmental posture and coarseness. As master performers, they improve upon the couple’s otherwise somewhat conventional bedroom scenes. Chelsea Diehl captures Jen’s heart as well as her frustrations. Kris Sidberry finds all of Macy’s fire and feeling. Diehl and Sidberry have all the naturalness of soon-to-be newlyweds.

Near the end of the play, Della quotes the First Corinthians observation that “Love is always hard.” In that light, “The Cake” needs stronger texture and more satisfying attention to the love the title confection represents.
Judge orders Google to turn over Jussie Smollett’s emails

CHICAGO (AP)—A judge has ordered Google to turn over a year’s worth of Jussie Smollett’s emails, private messages, photographs and location data to a special prosecutor who is looking into why prosecutors abruptly dismissed criminal charges against the actor.

On Wednesday, the Chicago Tribune reported that it had obtained two search warrants submitted by special prosecutor Dan Webb and signed off by Cook County Judge Michael Toomin last month.

Cook County State’s Attorney Kim Foxx’s office filed and quickly dropped 16 counts of disorderly conduct against Smollett for allegedly staging a January 2019 attack in downtown Chicago and lying about it to police. Toomin appointed Webb months later and the warrants offer the first public hints about what he has been investigating.

When the charges were filed, Chicago police alleged the black and openly gay Smollett—unhappy with his salary and hoping to promote his career—paid two brothers to stage what appeared to be a racist and homophobic attack, in which one of the men looped a rope fashioned as a noose around Smollett’s neck.

In the warrants, Webb seeks information from the Google accounts of Smollett and his manager, including unsent draft emails and deleted messages. He also requests files from their Google Drive cloud storage services, Google Voice texts, and web browsing history.

Webb has not publicly discussed the investigation and Smollett has maintained his innocence. But the fact the warrants seek data between November 2018 and November 2019 suggests investigators could be trying to support the original police allegation that Smollett planned and helped stage a fake attack.

It remains unclear if Google has turned over the information. In approving the warrants, Toomin ordered Google not to disclose the order, saying that doing so “may jeopardize an ongoing criminal investigation”. A Google spokesman told the Tribune that he could not comment on requests for records from law enforcement.

Police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi confirmed the department is conducting “follow-ups” of its initial investigation but he declined to comment further. An attorney who tried to block the appointment of the special prosecutor and another attorney representing Smollett in a federal civil case did not immediately return calls for comment.

Rosendall

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ancient Roman courtier trusting Caligula.

Trump’s belligerence, which contradicts his insistence that he does not want war, can be explained by his eagerness to change the headlines amid a continuing stream of new evidence against him despite his stonewalling the impeachment investigation. Determining his state of mind requires no speculation, only a check of his Twitter feed. His lethal sandbox does not cultivate thoughtfulness.

America’s allies distanced themselves from Trump. Iraqi lawmakers passed a resolution “to end the presence of any foreign troops on Iraqi soil.” Iran suspended its 2015 nuclear deal commitments. Vice President Mike Pence linked Suleimani to 9/11, contradicting the 9/11 Commission Report.

Trump supporters cynically brand his critics pro-terrorist. No Americans mourn Suleimani, but his villainy was not a recent development, and he was not a non-state actor like Osama bin Laden. Alas, Trump’s provocations bypass higher brain functions to stir something more primitive.

Typical of the incessant noise from trolls, one person online called me a warmongering Tory and another claimed I was a social justice warrior in solidarity with the homophobic Iranian regime. No and no. Iran is ruled by awful people, but Trump’s drone strike was no help to the opposition. The street protests in Tehran did get a boost from Iran’s mistaken downing of an Ukrainian passenger jet, a tragedy that echoed America’s downsizing of Iran Air Flight 655 in 1988. We could blunder into victory, if you ignore the blood and chaos.

Redeemless from a president bereft of forethought is no surprise. But we must do more than pull him from the precipice of another ruinous war. We must take back our Middle Eastern policy, to the extent we have one, from his right-wing Evangelical base whose vaunted support of Israel is driven by visions of the Apocalypse even as they declare that Jews who refuse to convert to Christianity are bound for hell.

Saying Suleimani “had it coming” is not good enough. The world has plenty of awful people, but few are targeted for assassination.

Trump shows no concern for the mayhem he creates. He might show up at Dover Air Force Base when our service members’ coffins start arriving, but only for the photo op. He is a mercenary, not a patriot.

If we want leaders who put America’s interests before their own, we must keep our eyes on November and resist the disinformation campaign already underway.

The problem is not only what group-blaming war rhetoric does to our targets, but what it does to us. The more heedless our imperialistic swagger becomes, the more we hobble ourselves and the ghastlier our grandchildren’s inheritance.

We’ve been staring into the abyss so often of late, we should ask what it wants on its pizza. “Oh, nothing for me,” it’ll answer cheerfully. “I’ll have you soon enough.”

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist at rosendall@one.com.

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Judah

Continued from page 4

have become all sharp angles and angled lines. Though my weight has remained fairly constant, my face is furrowed, my arms lean and without visible muscle, as if life is cutting me down to the bare essentials.

I’ve seen my contemporaries age, and some even pass away, a reminder that this river flows in one direction. Still, I somehow thought that the aging process wouldn’t happen to me – though I knew intellectually that it would. I didn’t really believe it. (I think this denial is endemic among Boomers, and also among gay men).

The truth is that I’m a single gay man in my early 60s. I am not getting younger, or more attractive, and my body—while still flexible, with many parts that are still working—cannot do what it could do at 35 or even 50. Here and now, in 2020, I take the discounts, take the somewhat rare but much appreciated compliments from younger men who like daddies, and try to focus on what I can still do—write, teach, and tell stories, if anyone cares to listen.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher and storyteller in Boston. He will be performing his show It’s Now or Never at the Piano Craft Gallery, 793 Tremont Street in the South End on Saturday Feb 22 at 7:30pm. Ticket: https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4492590 or call 617-466-9637.
'Modern Family' to bid farewell in April series finale

By BETH HARRIS
Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — "Modern Family" will air its finale after 11 seasons on April 8, and there are no spin-offs in the works involving its large cast.

Eric Stonestreet jokingly pitched one featuring Cam and Mitch, the gay couple played by him and Jesse Tyler Ferguson, after executive producer Steven Levitan told a TV critics meeting on Wednesday that nothing is planned.

"The Pritchett-Dunphy-Tucker clan isn't done traveling, though. They visit Paris in an episode airing Feb. 12, continuing their tradition of trips to such places as Australia, Hawaii, Las Vegas, New York and Wyoming."

"I was able to do a lot of shopping, so it was perfect," said Sofia Vergara, who became a breakout star when the series began in 2009.

Levitan and co-creator Christopher Lloyd knew from the start the show would include a gay couple who adopts a baby.

"When we locked it in, I remember saying to Chris, 'Well, there goes Middle America,'" said Levitan, whose concern proved to be unfounded.

"We got zero blowback. They were embraced because here was this couple, their first priority was their baby and raising it and doing it right, and people said it was hard to argue with that." Stonestreet added: "We were able to make all the same mistakes raising a child that everyone else did."

The younger cast members, including Rico Rodriguez, Ariel Winter and Nolan Gould, grew up on the show. Sarah Hyland, who was 18 when "Modern Family" began, mentioned the "key-players" who criticized the changing appearances of her and Winter over the years.

"Between the two of us, we have gone and tacked them all with our spit and vit," Hyland said.

Rodriguez credited O'Neill, who was sick Wednesday, for taking him under his wing as a 10-year-old newcomer.

"Some of the jokes would just fly right over my head," Rodriguez said. "He was always there for me."

Before the finale, ABC is presenting a fan-curated tribute on March 11. The network will kick off the night in prime time with the series’ very first episode, followed by favorite episodes that fans get to vote on next month.

The cast will soon be leaving behind the security provided by being on an enduring hit.

"I had been working almost 20 years when I got lucky with 'Modern Family,' Vergara said. "I might never get a job again, but now I have the money and I can sit in my house.'"

'Ugly Betty' co-creator Silvio Horta dies in Miami at 45

Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Award-winning producer Silvio Horta, who was acclaimed for creating the hit series "Ugly Betty" with actress Salma Hayek, has died. He was 45.

The Miami-Dade County Medical Examiner said Wednesday that based on the investigation Horta died by suicide at a Miami hotel on Tuesday.

The Cuban-American producer and screenwriter is credited for breaking ground for Latinos and gays in Hollywood with a show about a Mexican-American woman who arrives for her first day working at a New York fashion magazine in a poncho. The sitcom made actress America Ferrera a star.

Ferrera and others in the entertainment industry, including singer and actress Vanessa Williams, mourned his death on social media.

"His creativity and passion will be missed by so many of us that worked with him," Williams tweeted.

Horta's family said in a statement that "Silvio touched the lives of millions," but he had an ongoing struggle with addiction and depression.

"Through it all, he always found a way to turn his struggles into laughter," the statement said. "He was a kind and beautiful man. He may be gone but his light will shine on."

A service will be held in Miami, and a memorial service is planned for Los Angeles.

Taylor Swift, Janet Mock to be honored by GLAAD

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Taylor Swift and writer-director-producer Janet Mock will be honored at the GLAAD Media Awards for their advocacy for LGBTQ issues.

The pop star will receive the Vanguard Award, which is presented to allies who have made a significant difference in promoting acceptance of LGBTQ people. Mock, who is best known for her work on the FX series "Pose," will receive the Stephen F. Kolzak Award, presented to a LGBTQ media professional.

They will be honored at the GLAAD Media Awards in Los Angeles on April 16.

Swift has been outspoken proponent for the Equality Act, which would prohibit discrimination based on sex, gender or sexual orientation in a wide variety of areas. Her video for her hit "You Need To Calm Down" also featured prominent LGBTQ celebrities and mocked those who were against gay marriage.

Mock, who wrote a book about her life as a transgender woman, is a writer and director for Ryan Murphy’s "Pose," about 1980s ballroom culture with a large LGBTQ cast. She also signed a deal with Netflix in 2019 to produce content for the streaming service.

MassEquality

“Local organizing is critical to true social change and I am excited to be a part of MassEquality as we redirect our primary focus to diverse grassroots organizing in local communities,” says Neslusan.
I am usually unflappable. In fact, I would defy you to look at me and find a flap. But last week, comments on two reality shows took me aback... and afront. First was Tyler on "Project Runway". After ending up with one of the least successful designs, he quipped, “It’s funny—usually I’m not mad about being on the bottom.” Then he proclaimed himself to be the show’s “most popular bottom”—and he had the nerve to say it right to Christian Siriano’s face! But “Project Runway” is on basic cable, so while all this talk of sexual position seemed slightly risqué, I wasn’t shocked (I also wasn’t shocked when Tyler was eliminated). Then came the season premiere of “The Bachelor”. I’ve gotten used to all of the awkward chit-chat when the Bachelor meets his prospective concubines...er, candidates. But Victoria P. stood out when she proclaimed, “I have a very dry sense of humor...but that’s the only thing dry about me.” And on network television! Come on, ABC—couldn’t you do something slightly more subtle? Like have the camera pan to the puddle forming by her ankles?

One doesn’t criticize “The Bachelor” lightly—it is one of ABC’s top-rated shows. In addition to “The Bachelorette” and “Bachelor in Paradise”, we also have “The Bachelor Musical” coming this spring. Starting on April 13th, “The Bachelor: Listen to Your Heart” will allegedly feature 20 single men and women who search for love through music, singing well-known songs, both individually and as couples. They will meet and explore their relationships while living together and going on ‘Bachelor-style dates that focus on music.” After the contestants have been coupled-up, they will face musical challenges in live performances judged by stars in the music business. ‘This all sounds positively horrific—but the kind of horrific that might be fun to watch.

The combination of musicals and TV shows also pertains to our next story. Fran Drescher has announced that she and Rachel Bloom are working together to bring “The Nanny” to Broadway. The combination is intriguing, and reminded me of something Patti LuPone said about Bloom a few years ago. “I’m crazy for Rachel Bloom. I’m crazy for her. I think that is one smart show. Of all the musical comedies on television or on the big screen, Rachel knows how to do it.” But can she do it backwards and bring a TV show to the Broadway stage? We shall see...

It should be noted that Fran has not announced plans for her or any of the original sitcom cast to join this project. It will be its own entity, but will retain her unique "voice".

ABC just announced that their next live musical broadcast will be Mel Brooks’ "Young Frankenstein". While the show’s Broadway run paled in comparison to “The Producers”, it is a recognizable property which could do well if presented well. Although we have no details, we hear that Mel is pushing for casting many of the roles with the stars from the original Broadway production. First on that list must be Andrea Martin, who earned a Tony nomination (and stole the show) as Frau Blucher. Sutton Foster and Megan Mullally both have strong TV credits, so I’d think they should be a given. This could turn out to be fun...if it’s done properly.

We often talk about The Trevor Project—the famed non-profit organization runs the only nationwide 24/7 LGBTQ suicide prevention line. What we don’t usually get into is that The Trevor Project was named after "Trevor", an Oscar-winning short film based on James Lecesne’s story about a 13-year-old boy’s questions about how he fits into the world. That original story is now being adapted into a musical to debut off-Broadway in April. We’ve told the creative people behind "Beautiful: The Carole King Musical” will shepherd this show to stage.

I’ve waited long enough. Clearly, I—who has something to say about everything—have something to say about Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. As you know, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex have announced plans to step away from their roles as senior royals, will split their time between the UK and North America, and will (eventually) be self-sufficient. In other words, they no longer want the responsibility and scrutiny that come with being a royal. We’re told that they made this announcement WITHOUT discussing it with either Harry’s father (Prince Charles) or grandmother (Queen Elizabeth II). And that was just their first mistake. One of Meghan’s fiercest critics, Piers Morgan (who was once a close friend), made the following statement: ‘People say I’m too critical of Meghan

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recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person,” the proposal, “PROTOCOL OF RECONCILIATION & GRACE THROUGH SEPARATION” stated.

Truth be told, the UMC has always been contradictory in its policies concerning LGBTQ worshippers. While it states that we have and are of the same sacred worth as heterosexuals, and that it’s committed to the ministry of all people regardless of gender identities and sexual orientations, the church views queer sexualities as sinful. ‘The Book of Discipline states that sexuality is “God’s good gift to all persons” and that people are “fully human only when their sexuality is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church and society.” However, this rule does not apply to LGBTQs. Since the church’s conservative and liberal wings merged in 1968 to become the UMC, it has implemented stricter positions against us. In 1972, for example, UMC delegates inserted in The Book of Discipline that as a church body, “We do not condone the practice of homophobia and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

In the hopes of avoiding a schism, the Council of Bishops in 2018 recommended the One Church Plan that would grant individual ministers and regional church bodies the decision to ordain LGBTQs as clergy and to perform LBQT weddings. It was hoped that such a decision on a church-by-church and regional basis would reflect the diversity as well as affirm the different churches and cultures throughout the global body of UMC.

The One Church Plan, however, was one of three proposed plans by the UMC’s Commission on a Way Forward. The One Church Plan would excise the offensive language targeted at LGBTQs from the Book of Discipline and replace it with compassionate and up-to-date wording about human sexuality in support of its mission. The One Church Plan was voted down in 2019. The others include the Traditionalist Plan and the Conventional Plan, both exclusively to LGBTQ parishioners.

Many UMC members will point a finger to its African churches as the sole reason for the new “traditionalist Methodist” denomination. However, the U.S. conservative wings-the Wesleyan Covenant Association and the Good News movement—had been preparing to leave before the traditionalists won by a narrow vote in 2019.

The schism in the UMC, sadly, mirrors today’s ongoing battle among religious conservatives. A movement for some time now has been afoot in state legislatures across the country to disenfranchise LGBTQ Americans. These bills called “Religious Freedom Restoration Acts” are a backlash to the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage, and the Supreme Court legalized it nationwide in 2015.

For example, the case that had many of us LGBTQ Americans on pins and needles was “Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission”. In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Jack Phillips, the baker who refused to make a wedding cake for a same-sex couple—Dave Mullins and Charlie Craig—on the grounds of religious freedom. I was hoping the case would render once and for all a cease-and-desist order; thus, resolving the God versus Gay rights dispute for those who want to codify discrimination against us under the guise of religious freedom. As a nation, we’re at a crossroads on many issues. It’s a shame when a church cannot bring us together.
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Cats
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way has virtually no story—T.S. Eliot’s “Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats” notwithstanding.

At the same time, composer Andrew Lloyd Webber’s score—save for “Memory” and perhaps “Magical Mister Mistoffelees”—remains as relatively unappealing as the clutter-busy alleyway—kudos to John Napier—that greets audiences at the Citizens Bank Opera House.

If this musical endures and returns umpteen times, perhaps child audience members are major reasons why. Young theaters are likely to always be fascinated by the John Napier costume design that turns performers into a wide variety of felines. At the same time, Andy Blankenbuehler’s crisp choreography does full justice to predecessors Gillian Lynne’s original in moving individual performers and the well-timed ensemble groupings that ultimately compensate in good part for the thinness of the plot—basically the new annual choice of a cat to go “Up, up up to the Heavyside Layer.”

Children always enjoy the ascent of former glamor cat Grizabella (by now almost no one need worry about a spoiler alert here) with Natasha Katz’s brilliant lighting and Mick Potter’s rich sound design. That radiant lighting also figures prominently in the visually arresting “Magical Mister Mistoffelees.” PJ DiGaetano—with bling as this standout tuxedo cat—electrifies in turns and pirouettes. Keri Rene Fuller builds the emotion of “Memory” well and satisfying captures the high range of the score’s one great song. Brandon Michael Nase brings impressive resonance and strong phrasing to wise Deuteronomy’s “The Addressing of Cats.” Another performer who brings singular phrasing to his work is Timothy Gulan, who has the right combination of fragility and majesty as Asparagus (Gus) the Theater Cat.

This critic should make sure to disclose that I am a pet parent two cats—one charcoal gray and the other admittedly a tuxedo. In that light, I really wish that this world success musical—which was greeted opening night with virtually a total standing ovation as usual—had more of the artistry that theater cat Gus laments is largely missing in his day. Is a new work—a stage Puss and Boots musical, for example—in the works? In all due respect to the composer of “Evita” and “Phantom of the Opera” one hopes so.
Markle. But she ditched her family, ditched her Dad, ditched most of her old friends, split Harry from William & has now split him from the Royal Family. I rest my case." On the surface, he surely has a point.

But was this completely out of the blue? After all, we know the transition has not been an effortless one for Meghan—her troubles have been well-documented. The couple spent Christmas in Canada with her friends ("Suits" was shot in Toronto, so Meghan has ties there). Lots of headlines in England state things such as, "Black Britons know why Meghan wants to leave"—presuming the difficulties are ethnic in origin. I, personally, wouldn’t be surprised if the American angle wasn’t at least a partial factor. And then we hear that Meghan has already signed a deal with Disney for "an unspecified project in return for a donation to an elephant charity". The charity in question is "Elephants Without Borders"—which I presume is like Doctors Without Borders, but without scalpels. Why is she doing this Disney project? What we do know is that some higher-ups at Disney gave her an original Winnie the Pooh watercolor when Archie was born. Just out of curiosity, what did the queen give her?

Of course, this affects lots of other things connected to the royals. Hours after Harry and Meghan’s announcement, the couple was taken out of Madame Tussauds’ display of the royal family. Since the display is of senior members of the royal family—a group Meg and Harry no longer wish to be a part of—they were moved to somewhere more suitable in the facility. The move was addressed on Tussauds’ official Twitter page: "We’ve got to respect their wishes," followed by a shrug emoji and the hashtag #Megxit. On a grander scale, there are the rumors that QEII will step back from her royal duties when she turns 95 in a year and a half. She would still be Queen, but she may adopt a Regency for Charles to all but rule in her name. So, big changes are coming to the House of Windsor.

Elsewhere in the Commonwealth, the devastating fires continue to ravage Australia. As I always say, one of the good things that come out of tragedy is you see the people who rise to the occasion. And one group that has no problem rising is gay porn stars. Rocco Steele will send nude photos to anyone who contributes at least $10 to any of the charities helping the victims and firefighters. Of course, this wasn’t an original idea—female porn star Kaylen Ward did the same thing and has already raised over $1 million. So, support Rocco...and the bush!

Speaking of bushes, you may bump into Andrew Scott’s if you’re looking for love online. According to the "Daily Mail", the sexy priest from "Fleabag" has been spotted on Grindr. Your beloved Billy shrugs his shoulders and says, "So?" Like, is that news? A single gay guy is on a cruising app? There must be more to the story, right? Wrong—that’s actually the entire story. In fact, the reporter goes to great pains to say that Scott doesn’t show off his naughty bits on the app. "I have a copy of the picture and while Andrew is not naked, it is a little too racy to use here." You know what I call a non-nude photo that cannot be published? A mirage!

Salacious stuff is not limited to the UK. The "New York Post" ran a story about Andy Cohen zipping down to South Beach after completing his New Year’s Eve hosting duties with Anderson Cooper. The rag ran photos of Cohen and his son on the beach, making sure to note that he was also joined by his hunky trainer, Stanislav Kravchenko. I will now transcribe verbatim how that story concluded: “He isn’t, however, opposed to finding a companion and was spotted on dating apps Scrugg and Gridiz, Page Six reported last March.” Scrugg? Gridiz? If they can’t even get the names of the apps correct, what are the chances anything else is right?

When I’m trying to figure out what kinda guys are on Scrugg, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. While the mainstream media may get many things wrong, you can always find reliable dish at www.BillyMasters.com—the site that names names, and spells them correctly, too! If you have a question, send it along to me at Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Cohen announces who Bravo’s most popular bottom really is. So, until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
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