

TEGAN & SARA'S EVOLUTION
The lesbian twin singer/songwriters continue to move forward with the new "Heartthrob."
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THE VOICE OF PROGRESS FOR WISCONSIN'S LGBT COMMUNITY

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UWM adds to equality cred with its new LGBT-sensitive housing policy

By Louis Weisberg

Staff writer

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has created a new housing policy to meet the unique needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming students – as well as their allies and other students who have specific needs based on their cultural background or identity.

UWM is the first institution in the University of Wisconsin system to approve such a policy. It goes into effect for the fall 2013 semester, according to a press statement issued on Feb. 15. Incoming students will be able to select an inclusive housing assignment as part of the enrollment process.

"We strive to provide an inclusive environment for all students, and with this policy campus leaders at UWM recognize that traditional room assignments do not meet the needs of all students," said Kelly Haag, the university's housing director. "Inclusive housing extends UWM's mission to develop an environ-

ment conducive to cultural, intellectual and experiential learning."

The inclusive housing policy is the latest milestone in UWM's ongoing efforts to create a campus that's welcoming of LGBT students. UWM's busy LGBT Resource Center occupies a high-profile space on the ground floor of the student union building – a placement that officials say symbolizes the university's commitment.

As a result of its efforts, "UWM was ranked No. 12 in Newsweek's Daily Beast as a 'Gay Friendly Campus' in 2011," said Jennifer Murray, director of the resource center. "The new inclusive housing policy will continue to increase UWM's ranking in both the Campus Pride Climate Index as well as the TONI Project – two prominent national standards of LGBT+ inclusion in higher education. The new ... policy also supports the university's 'Best Place to Work' and 'Best Place to Learn' initiatives."



KICKING OUT THE CLOSET DOOR

Soccer player Robbie Rogers comes out as gay. **Page 6**

The petition craze



Progressive 'click-tivism' spreads virally on Web

By Lisa Neff

Staff writer

We, the people, are petitioning for greater gun control, marriage equality, term limits for Congress, bans against animal research, permits to hunt wolves, Texas' secession from the union and Atlanta's secession from Georgia.

We, the people, are petitioning to close Wal-Mart stores, build more Wal-Marts, free chimpanzees, pardon pot smokers, teach Creationism, mandate school prayer, repeal Obamacare and institute universal health care.

With ever-improving, ever-expanding digital tools, we, the people, have e-exercised our digits and made the petition all the rage. The fever has even seized anti-petitioners – who are signing a petition to stop petitions.

In May, the Boy Scouts of America will decide whether to repeal a ban against gay Scouts and troop leaders. Public pressure, largely from petition drives over the past

year targeting both the youth group and its corporate supporters, propelled the BSA to reconsider a policy it had taken all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court to defend. Only a year ago, the Scouts reaffirmed the anti-gay policy. But petition drives against the policy that were launched on Change.org and promoted by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation have yielded 1.4 million signatures.

In another campaign, Katy Butler, a teenager from Ann Arbor, Mich., launched a Change.org petition last spring that ended with a motion picture rating change for "Bully." Without the change, a key audience – kids – could not see the documentary. Butler's petition went viral and found support with more than 500,000 people, including pro athletes, movie stars and members of Congress.

Butler has started other petitions on Change.org,

PETITIONS page 14

News with a twist

WIGWAG

By Lisa Neff & Louis Weisberg



DIVINE WEATHER

Lightning struck St. Peter's Basilica, one of the holiest Catholic sites, on the same day that Pope Benedict XVI announced he was stepping down. Catholics rushed to the Web en masse to share their interpretations of what they called a divine message. A few years ago the Vatican installed a lightning rod on the basilica because it gets struck so often.

FAUX NEWS

There's no shortage of erroneous news circulating on the Web, even on the mainstream press sites. But

what about the quality of TV news? A recent Public Policy Polling survey of voters found there's only one source with a trust rate above 50 percent – PBS. And Fox News? Its trust rate is at an all-time low, according to the survey. Nonetheless, it's the channel a majority of Republicans prefer.

SPEAKING OF FAUX NEWS

A man who accused a North Carolina church of holding him hostage and abusing him as part of his "ex-gay" treatment has recanted his story and apologized to the Word of Faith Fellowship. He says the abuse didn't happen. And he also lied about being gay. The man, Michael Lowry, is now under investigation and could be charged with filing a false report.

VICTIM OF TEMPTATION

A prominent "ex-gay"



activist who blogs about the evils of homosexuality for the Christian Post recently put his profile on the popular gay app Grindr, where men troll for quick sex hook-ups with others in their immediate vicinity. Matt Moore, a poster child for the "ex-gay" movement, acknowledged that his recent move to New Orleans proved to be too much temptation and he'd succumbed to his religiously repressed urges to have sexual relations with other men.

QUEER BEHAVIOR

The mayor of a southeastern Ohio town resigned after repeatedly calling a gay police officer "queer" in front of his colleagues. Jackie Welker, council president in the village of Pomeroy, told The Associated Press that 78-year-old Mayor Mary McAngus submitted a letter of resigna-

tion after telling gay Officer Kyle Calendine, "I don't like a queer working for the village."

THE PREDICKTOR

A new "medical prediction" app called "The Predicktor" attempts to predict a man's penis size by using stats such as his height, sexual orientation and finger length while cross-referencing trends from scientific studies. Though the site stresses that the app is strictly for humorous purposes, Dr. Chris Culligan said he hopes the Predicktor will help dispel myths and relieve the "penis-related insecurity, anxiety or dissatisfaction" men have about themselves. "It's not how long your penis is, but how you write your name," he said.

MODERN FAMILY

A gay man agreed to help out a lesbian couple by becoming their sperm donor, with the understand-

ing, he said, that he'd be involved in the child's life. Several months into the pregnancy, he claimed the couple tried to exclude him from the family. That prompted a legal battle of multiple years, which recently ended in an understanding and agreement between the lesbian couple and the gay man for some parental rights. Working on a treatment for a sitcom or a family drama?

GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT

Two granddaughters of Fred Phelps, the gay-obsessed leader of Westboro Baptist Church, have left both their church and their family behind. Westboro is best known for its "God Hates Fags" campaign, which includes intrusive protests of military funerals. As children, Megan and Grace Phelps-Roper were frequent participants in Westboro's anti-gay protests. They were also behind

the group's social media campaign spreading hatred of homosexual relationships. But on Feb. 6, Megan Phelps-Roper posted a message online announcing her and her sister's apostasy and apologized for their past behavior.

CHURCH TALK

A Catholic school assistant principal was fired over comments he made on his blog in support of marriage equality. The Archdiocese of Cincinnati fired Mike Moroski from Purcell Marian High School, telling him in a termination letter that he had shown "poor judgment" and violated the teachings of the Catholic Church. Moroski, who is married and lives in downtown Cincinnati, signed a contract every year that required him to "comply with and act consistently in accordance with the stated philosophy and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church."



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Progressives see opportunity in pope's parting

By Lisa Neff

Staff writer

Pope Benedict XVI's church-shaking announcement of his retirement produced a series of aftershocks, rumblings in the Roman Catholic community of the potential for liberal reform.

But, more than a week after the pope announced his plan to again become Joseph Ratzinger, the search was still on for a moderate to possibly succeed the exceedingly conservative Benedict as the most visible religious leader in the world.

Benedict, who had been a top aide to Pope John Paul II, announced his retirement on Feb. 11, becoming the first pope to abdicate since Pope Gregory XII stepped down in 1415.

"After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths due to an advanced age are no longer suited" to the demands of being the pope, Benedict said.

A conclave of cardinals will meet in March in secret at the Sistine Chapel to elect a successor before Easter. There are 118 cardinals eligible to vote – more than half of them appointed by Benedict. In 2007, he decreed that a two-thirds majority is needed to name a new pope.

Possible successors, according to The Associated Press, include Cardinals Gianfranco Ravasi, the Italian head of the Vatican's culture office; Angelo Scola, archbishop of Milan; Marc Ouellet, the Canadian head of the Vatican's office for bishops; Timothy Dolan of New York, the former archbishop of Milwaukee; and Wisconsin native Raymond Burke, an arch-conservative and former bishop of La Crosse. He's the Vatican's top judge.

Long-shots include Cardinal Antonio Tagle, the archbishop of Manila; and Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson of Ghana, one of the highest-ranking African cardinals at the Vatican.

"At this time of significant transition, we hope that the cardinals who will elect the new pope take time to listen to the people of the church, and that they hear the voice of the Holy Spirit calling for a pope who will be a shepherd to all of God's people," said Dignity USA, the nation's largest LGBT Catholic group. "We hope for a leader who will work to heal the divisions of recent decades, and who values dialogue above conformity."

Benedict was not that kind of leader.

He became pope in 2005. His election – there had been no clear successor to John Paul II – was opposed by liberals, who were worried about his dislike and disdain for the modernizing reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s.

Benedict proved to be an ultra-conservative who led the church in attempting to hold back a tide of social change. He opposed legal recognition for same-

sex couples, going so far as to say such unions threaten world peace and humanity. He sought to crack down on American nuns who pursued social justice issues. He opposed family planning for sexually active women and men, even claiming that condoms contribute to the spread of HIV in Africa.

Benedict also led at a time of scandal – corruption within the Vatican and also worldwide outrage over clergy sexual abuse and institutional cover-up. He has never acknowledged any personal or Vatican failure for the thousands of crimes.

And the pope, who was enlisted in the Nazi youth movement against his will when he was 14, also has offended many Jews with his quest for sainthood for Pius XII, the World War II-era pope accused of having failed to sufficiently denounce the Holocaust. Benedict also removed the excommunication of a bishop who denied the Holocaust.

With optimism, Equally Blessed, an organization seeking Catholic reforms, said now "the church has an opportunity to turn away from his oppressive policies toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Catholics and their families and friends, and to develop a new under-

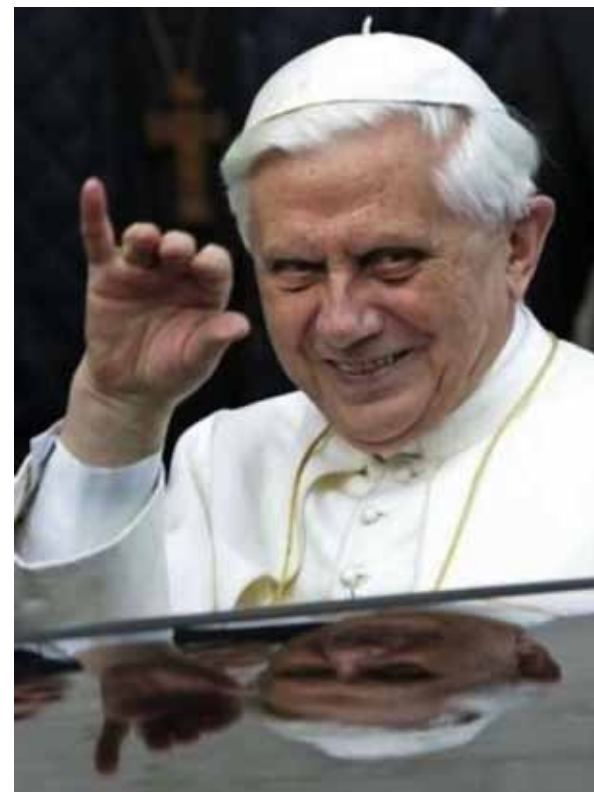


PHOTO: PROVIDED/VATICAN

Pope Benedict XVI will abdicate at the end of February. A conclave of cardinals will choose his successor in March.

standing of the ways in which God is at work in the lives of faithful and loving people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity."

Dignity stated, "As members of the church who are

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, as well as family members and allies, we call on the cardinals and the new pope to enter into a true dialogue with our community. We call for an end to statements that inflict harm on already marginalized people, depict us as less than fully human, and lend credence to those seeking to justify discrimination. We call on our church not only to embrace but to champion the dignity and equality of all humans, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity."

Members of another LGBT Catholic group, the Rainbow Sash Movement, said they pray that Benedict's successor will be a leader like Pope John XXIII and that he might convene a Third Vatican Council.

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New MPD policy recognizes the risk LGBT people face due to officer bias

By Louis Weisberg

Staff writer

The Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission recently added sexual orientation and gender expression to its list of characteristics that make citizens especially vulnerable to police bias.

The two characteristics were included in the Milwaukee Police Department's Standard Operating Procedures, under SOP 001, in response to a suggestion from Chris Ahmuty, executive director of the ACLU of Wisconsin. After noticing that the categories were missing from the original text, Ahmuty brought the oversight to the commission's attention. Commissioner Richard Cox made the motion for inclusion, using language suggested by out FPC chair Sarah Morgan.

"The fire and police commission is always working to move forward to make good changes," Morgan said. "There's a new training program called Fair and Impartial Policing,

and I think this is part of a more advanced level of cultural competency that's based on identifying biases."

Inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in the very first SOP could have symbolic impact, Ahmuty said, by communicating to officers in the field that sensitivity toward LGBT people is a top priority.

Ahmuty described the department's SOPs as directives or rules that function as a code of conduct. "This directive is partly reiterating the chief's worldview and partly instruction to officers, particularly to those conducting training," he said.

"This is a great first step in addressing the gulf that exists between many transgen-

"This is a great first step in addressing the gulf that exists between many transgender and gender non-conforming residents and the MPD..."

der and gender non-conforming residents and the Milwaukee Police Department," said Loree Cook-Daniels, of the Milwaukee-based transgender advocacy group FORGE. "We thank the ACLU for helping make this happen, and look forward to working with them and the MPD on next steps in its implementation."

The new directives come at a time when the MPD is under increased scrutiny from the ACLU. Four Milwaukee police

officers face multiple felony counts in connection with unauthorized rectal searches, including some without protective gloves. As a result, federal investigators are looking

into an alleged pattern of illegal body cavity searches at the MPD's District Five.

The FBI also is conducting a civil rights investigation into the death of Derek Williams, who died while in Milwaukee police custody in July 2011.

MPD officials, the district attorney's office and the Fire and Police Commission all concluded the officers involved did nothing wrong after viewing a video of Williams begging for help as he sat handcuffed and choking to death in the back seat of a squad car. But all three reopened their inquiries after the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel posted the squad video online, creating a massive public uproar.

An inquest into Williams' death was ongoing as WiG went to press. Two officers have been offered immunity in the case in exchange for their testimony.

Wisconsin one of nation's least gay states

By Louis Weisberg

Staff writer

Wisconsin is one of the nation's least gay states, ranking 41st among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in terms of the percentage of citizens who identify as LGBT, according to a Gallup poll.

Gallup questioned 4,633 Wisconsinites between June 1 and Dec. 30, 2012, asking them, "Do you, personally, identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?"

Wisconsinites who responded "yes" numbered 2.8 percent of the sample group, while 92.9 percent said "no." The survey's authors did not explain the more than 4 percent who said neither "yes" nor "no."

Nationwide, 3.5 percent of respondents said they identified as LGBT. The poll did not ask them whether they had same-sex encounters, only whether they identified by the labels LGBT. Gallup conducted 206,186 interviews, making the poll the largest ever on the subject.

The gayest place, according to the poll, is Washington, D.C., where 10 percent of respondents identified as LGBT. Hawaii came in second with 5.1 percent. Vermont, Oregon, Maine, Rhode Island, Massachu-

setts, South Dakota, Nevada and California round out the top 10, with California reporting an LGBT population of 0.4 percent.

The least gay state is North Dakota, where 1.7 percent of the population answered "yes." The nine states above North Dakota, beginning with the least gay, are: Montana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Utah, Idaho, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Alabama and Iowa. Although Iowa and Wisconsin both reported rates of 2.8 percent, .4 percent

more Iowans said "no" than did Wisconsinites.

The authors of the survey concluded: "While the variation in LGBT identification across states is relatively small, findings do suggest some evidence that the variation is not entirely random. Social climates that promote acceptance of or stigma toward LGBT indi-

viduals could affect how many adults disclose an LGBT identity. LGBT people who live in places where they feel accepted may be more likely than those who live in places where they feel stigmatized to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity to a survey interviewer.

"In general, states where residents express more liberal views are more accepting of LGBT individuals, while socially conservative areas are less accepting. Of the 10 states and D.C. where at least 4 percent of respondents identified as LGBT, seven are among the most liberal in the country. Conversely, six of 10 states with the lowest percentage of LGBT-identified adults are among the top 10 conservative states in the country."



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Soccer player Robbie Rogers receives outpouring of support after coming out as gay

By Rick Freeman

AP Sports Writer

Robbie Rogers, a former player for the U.S. national team and Major League Soccer, says he is gay and "could not be happier" about his decision to go public with his disclosure.

In a post on his personal website, Rogers writes: "Life is only complete when your loved ones know you. ... Try explaining to your loved ones after 25 years you are gay."

PHOTO: MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP

Robbie Rogers celebrates after scoring for the Columbus Crew against the San Jose Earthquakes during the second half of an MLS soccer match in San Francisco on Aug. 8, 2009.

Rogers' agent, Shaun Higgins, confirmed to The Associated Press that the post was from his client. Rogers, who linked his post from his Twitter account, said he was retiring.

"It's time discover myself away from football," he said. "It's one a.m. in London as I write this and I could not be happier with my decision. Life is so full of amazing things. I realized I could only truly enjoy my life once I was honest."

The midfielder has been receiving an outpouring of support from U.S. teammates, players in England's professional leagues, soccer officials and others around the world. Among those tweeting support to Rogers were many U.S. teammates and U.S. women's players, MLS Commissioner Don Garber, NBA star Steve

Nash, Minnesota Vikings punter Chris Kluwe and former England star and broadcaster Gary Lineker.

While several major individual-sport athletes have been openly gay, no professional male athlete in any of the four major North American team sports has come out until well after he was done playing. U.S. women's soccer star Megan Rapinoe came out last year before the Olympics and plays for Lyon in France.

Rogers played for the Columbus Crew of MLS from 2007 to 2011, winning the MLS Cup in 2008. For the United States, Rogers made 18 appearances, seven in games that were not exhibitions. He scored two goals, one in a CONCACAF Gold Cup match, and another to give the U.S. a draw in an exhibition game

'It's one a.m. in London as I write this, and I could not be happier with my decision.'

against Mexico.

After five seasons in MLS, Rogers went to play in England last January. He joined Leeds United, which plays one step below the Premier League. He never really got going with Leeds because of injuries and went on loan to third-division Stevenage for this season. After more injury trouble, he returned to Leeds in January and was released.

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REGIONAL BRIEFS

ILLINOIS SENATE PASSES MARRIAGE EQUALITY BILL

Roses, chocolate, diamonds, a candlelit dinner – all are favorite Valentine's Day gifts. But can any top the Illinois Senate's passage of a marriage equality bill on love's big holiday?

The Senate on Feb. 14 voted 34-21, with two voting present, for a bill to legalize same-sex civil marriage in the state. The measure still needs the support of the House before it reaches the desk of Gov. Pat Quinn, who is eager to sign.

The legislation – the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act – was sponsored by Sen. Heather Steans, D-Chicago, who opened the debate saying it is time to eliminate second-class status for gays and lesbians in the state and stressing the measure's protections for religious freedom.

Opponents, meanwhile, argued that same-sex marriage threatens traditional families, wondered why civil unions weren't enough to pacify LGBT people and complained that the focus on the legislation was diverting attention from the economy.

Openly gay Chicago Democrat Greg Harris is the bill's sponsor in the House. "The momentum is building," he said after the vote. "More and more House members are telling me they want to be on the right side of history and that they intend to support the bill."

APPLETON WOMAN ARRESTED FOR PARTNER'S 2007 SLAYING

Three women have been arrested in connection with the 2007 shooting death of a Wisconsin woman, including the victim's domestic partner, who was previously charged with paying someone to beat her up, Outagamie County sheriff's officials said Feb. 14.

Lara Plamann, 30, died from a gunshot wound to the head while seated in a chair in a shed on the Greenville property she shared with Dianna Siveny, one three people taken into custody. The other two arrested were a 34-year-old woman and a 38-year-old woman who both live in St. Paul, Minn., officials said.

Sheriff's Capt. Michael Jobe said he expected charges to be filed soon. Jobe declined to comment on a motive for the shooting.

Siveny, 53, who now lives in Appleton, had been charged in 2010 with paying someone to beat Plamann a year before Plamann died. The attack wasn't carried out, and charges were dropped. Court documents alleged Siveny was upset that Plamann was seeing another woman.

IN OTHER NEWS...

University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Michael Kissick, represented by the ACLU of Wisconsin, filed a federal suit against the state alleging its policy against demonstrating at the Capitol violates the First Amendment. The suit seeks to block the state from requiring permits for Capitol demonstrations and from punishing protesters who engage in expressive activity in the Capitol Rotunda without a permit.

Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton, in his State of the State address Feb. 6, called for marriage equality. He said, "Let me mention one other cause, which is controversial, but consistent with my faith and my principles. And, more importantly, consistent with this country's founding principles and its Constitution. I believe that every Minnesotan should have the freedom to marry legally the person she or he loves, whether of the same or other sex."

A former teacher is suing a central Michigan school district that did not renew her contract following a dispute over a poster for LGBT history month. Brook Johnson claims the district has violated her First Amendment rights and that she received negative evaluations because she was involved with a high school diversity group.

– from AP and WiG reports

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

CHICAGO PRIDE EXTENDED TO 2 WEEKENDS

Chicago's Pride celebration will be extended to two weekends to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers who want to celebrate the LGBT holiday.

Traditionally Chicago's Pride festivities have been crowded into one weekend close to the anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

But this year, the Pride parade and the Pride festival, which are organized by different groups, will take place on different weekends.

The festival is June 22-23. The parade is June 30. For more, go to www.chicagopride-calendar.org.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

The Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, 1110 N. Market St., holds an Academy Awards viewing party at 6 p.m. on Feb. 24. The party includes appetizers and door prizes in addition to the Oscar telecast. Also, the center's annual meeting is at 6 p.m. Feb. 28. For more, call 414-271-2656.

"The Queer Program" celebrates its 20th anniversary 7:30-10 p.m. on March 15 at the Milwaukee Gay Arts Center, 703 S. Second St.

The broadcast is Milwaukee's longest-running weekly community interest public access cable program.

Milwaukee's LGBT running/walking group, FrontRunners, celebrated its 17th anniversary on February 16. The group meets Saturdays at 9 a.m. near the North Avenue water tower for a 6k run and 40 minute walk. For 17 years the group has enjoyed breakfast immediately after at Ma Fischer's. For more, go to frontrunnersmke.com.

The ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation invites artists to submit 3-10 art items for Gallery Night & Day, which will take place April 19-20 at the nonprofit's Third Ward offices. Submissions are due Feb. 22. For more, call 414-272-4032.

The Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools conference is set for March 15 in Madison. The theme is "Gender," and organizers are considering workshop proposals on the topic. For more, call 608-661-4141 or email tim@gsafewi.org.

The Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools conference is set for March 15 in Madison. The theme is "Gender," and organizers are considering workshop proposals on the topic. For more, call 608-661-4141 or email tim@gsafewi.org.

Three Indiana high school students created **One Million Teens for LGBT Rights**, with the goal of mobilizing teenagers for equality. "The advent of social media advocacy has had a huge impact on this country's social politics," said Emma Troughton, a founder. For more, go to facebook.com/OneMillionTeensForGayRights.

– Lisa Neff

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Plans for prom banning gays rock Indiana community

By Pamela Engel
AP writer

A small Indiana community best known for its parks and corn festival has become the center of a national discussion about intolerance over a group's plans to host a "traditional" prom that bans gay students.

Residents and officials in Sullivan, a city of about 4,200 near the Illinois border, are scrambling to escape the uncomfortable spotlight cast when a teacher supporting a "traditional" prom for Sullivan High School said she believes people choose to be gay and that gays have no purpose in life.

"I just ... I don't understand it," Diana Medley, referring to gays, told Terre Haute television station WTWO.

The comments by Medley, a special education teacher in a neighboring school district, have gone viral and sparked online campaigns to have her fired. Already, a petition on

Change.org calling for her dismissal has generated more than 17,500 signatures from as far away as the United Kingdom as of Feb. 14, and a Facebook page supporting a prom that includes all students had more than 27,000 likes.

The fallout has surprised many residents, who say the issue roiling the community in an area known for coal mining and attractive parks is being blown out of proportion.

"We are conservative around here. That's just the way of this town," said Nancy Woodard, 60, who owns the Hidden Treasure Exchange store. "In any town in this county, you'll find four or five churches no matter how small the town. ... The Bible is a big belief system here."

"Everybody has jumped on this little town. To me, there isn't any need for it," she said.

Sullivan High School principal David Springer said talk

of the "traditional" prom began in January, after a student began circulating a petition demanding that gays be allowed to participate in the grand march at Sullivan's April 27 prom. The "traditional" prom would not be sanctioned by the district and wouldn't be held at the school.

Springer said the school, which has 545 students in grades 9-12, has never banned same-sex pairs from the event.

"I've been to eight grand marches and ... we always had girls go out together, and a lot of times they just didn't have a date," Springer said. "Our prom is open to all of our students."

But others say calls for a "traditional" prom, fueled by Medley's comments, speak to a larger climate in which gay students fear being bullied and aren't welcome.

"When someone says your kid has no purpose,

how do you think that makes a parent feel?" asked Annette Gross, Indiana state coordinator for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, whose son came out at age 19.

Aaron Gettinger, a 20-year-old Stanford University student who graduated from Sullivan High in 2011, said he isn't surprised by the push for a "traditional" prom that would ban gay students. He said he was bullied daily because he is gay and encountered viewpoints similar to those espoused by Medley.

"It's just the way that it is," he said. "It's part of a way of thinking that the rest of the country needs to know still exists and goes on."

Organizers of the "traditional" prom declined to comment, and it's unclear whether the event will still happen.

School officials and the minister of a church where planners met have worked to distance themselves from the flap.

Dale Wise, the senior minister at Sullivan First Christian Church, said his church turned off its fax machine and took its website offline because both were the target of hate mail and pornographic messages.

Wise said the planning group met at the church because it allows community meetings to take place there but the church "had no affiliation whatsoever" with the "traditional" prom effort.

Springer said his staff has been inundated with calls and



PHOTO: AP PHOTO/PAM ENGEL

Sullivan High School principal David Springer, left, and assistant principal Sarah Hannon pose in the school in Sullivan, Ind. Students and staff are trying to distance themselves from the media frenzy over one local group's plea for a "traditional" prom that would ban gay teens.

emails about Medley, whom he noted doesn't work for his school. She teaches in the Northeast School Corp., a neighboring district.

Neither Medley nor Northeast officials returned calls seeking comment. The district issued a statement this week saying Medley was "expressing her First Amendment rights" and that "the views expressed are not the views of the Northeast School Corporation and/or the Board of Education."

Sullivan isn't alone in its struggles over how to handle same-sex couples at proms. A small southeast Missouri school district is facing a threat of legal action over a policy barring same-sex couples from attending prom

together.

The Southern Poverty Law Center accused the Scott County Central School District in Sikeston of discrimination and gave the district until Feb. 25 to revise the school dance policy or face a potential lawsuit.

Sullivan High School freshman Te'Airra Walters, 15, said it shouldn't be a big deal for a same-sex couple to attend prom together. She said she doesn't like the negative attention the controversy has attracted.

"People from other schools around here are saying Sullivan is trashy," she said. "I think it's pretty much ridiculous."

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Lawsuit pending on Michigan domestic partner benefits ban

The Associated Press

People who lost domestic partner benefits under a 2011 Michigan law say they're feeling the pinch as they wait months for a judge to decide whether the ban affecting public school and local government employees is unconstitutional.

A law passed by the Republican-controlled Legislature and signed by Gov. Rick Snyder ended health insurance for people whose domestic partners work for certain public employers.

"I feel like a second-class citizen," said Gerardo Ascheri, 55, of Lansing, who lost insurance available through his partner's employer. "At my age, I'm beginning to think about retirement, trying to save as much as I can. This complicates it."

Ascheri said he now pays \$460 a month for insurance that doesn't include dental or vision coverage, more than double what he paid through Ingham County, where partner Doak Bloss, 59, has worked for the health department for 20 years.

Ascheri drives 75 miles to a Detroit-area college three times a week to certify piano teachers, partly because the job helps cover his insurance bill.

"I have two degrees, one of them a doctorate. I pay taxes, and this is how I'm treated? It's a feeling of impotence," he said.

Supporters say the law saves tax dollars and follows the spirit of a statewide vote in 2004 in which 58 percent of voters defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The law applies to all domestic partners – same-sex or not – but critics say it's aimed at gays and lesbians.

It's not known how many people are affected. Before the law, a handful of school districts offered domestic partner benefits, along with Ingham County, Washtenaw County and the cities of Ann Arbor, East Lansing and Kalamazoo, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

The law exempts colleges and universities, as well as most state government workers whose benefits are set by the Michigan Civil Service Commission.

The ACLU filed a lawsuit last year, claiming the law targets certain people and violates constitutional rights of equal protection.

U.S. District Judge David Lawson heard arguments in August but hasn't made a decision on a request for an injunction. The state, meanwhile, wants the lawsuit thrown out, saying there is no right to health insurance.

Assistant Attorney General Margaret Nelson told the judge that economic harm in the form of higher insurance costs doesn't add up to "irreparable harm."

'This act was intended to harm gay and lesbian people.'

"There clearly is no discriminatory purpose with respect to the elimination of the benefits," Nelson said.

ACLU attorney Amanda Goad said heterosexual domestic partners affected by the law can get married and qualify for benefits. But gays and lesbians in Michigan, she noted, cannot.

"Make no mistake, this act was intended to harm people and particularly to harm lesbian and gay people," Goad said in court.

In a recent court filing, Kalamazoo city employee JoLinda Jach said her partner, Barbara Ramber, lost insurance Jan. 1 because of the law. She had paid \$60 a month for Ramber's benefits and also paid taxes on the city's contribution.

Jach said Ramber still lacks insurance because they can't afford the high deductibles and monthly premiums.

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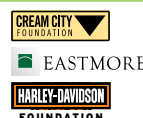


GUEST SPEAKER: John D'Emilio, professor of history and of women's and gender studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago and author of *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*.

2013 marks Bayard Rustin's 101st birthday and the 50th anniversary of the historic March of Washington, of which he was the major organizer. Bayard Rustin was an openly gay man in a fiercely homophobic era. He is credited with bringing nonviolent civil resistance theories learned from Mahatma Gandhi to the African-American Civil Rights Movement.

Reviving the Dream Celebration will include the presentation of Diverse and Resilient Leadership Awards honoring individuals and organizations for their leadership in, and on behalf of, Wisconsin's LGBT community as well as the inaugural **Bayard Rustin Leadership Award**.

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Abele donates \$75,000 to Fair Wisconsin during gala

Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele is donating \$75,000 to support Fair Wisconsin's marriage equality advocacy efforts.

Abele's contribution to FW comes just months after he announced a \$50,000 matching grant for Equality Wisconsin.

Abele is a strong LGBT ally. He was instrumental in enacting domestic partnership benefits for county employees and frequently talks about his support for equality during public appearances.

Abele announced his donation to a standing ovation during a Feb. 9 gala fundraising dinner at the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee, where FW presented its 2013 Milwaukee leadership awards. The dinner featured special guest U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin and keynote speaker Zach Wahls, whose Iowa House Judiciary Committee testimony about his two moms was viewed by 20 million people, making it YouTube's No. 1 political video of 2011. Wahls, who also spoke at the Democratic National Convention and wrote the bestselling book "My Two Moms: Lessons of Love, Strength and What Makes a Family," presented listeners with a sometimes-funny personal history that ultimately left most in tears.

Also featured at the event were this year's leadership award winners: Karen Gotzler was named activist of the year for her leadership



in saving the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center from financial failure. The LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin won organization of the year, and Chris Forsman was named community advocate of the year. Dick Wagner received the Tammy Baldwin Statewide Impact Award.

The awards dinner occurred in the middle of a leadership conference held Feb. 8-10 at the Hyatt Regency. The conference was a joint project of the Fair Wisconsin Education Fund and Diverse & Resilient.

— Louis Weisberg



PHOTOS: ERIC BAILLIES

From left, clockwise:

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan and U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin share a cross-table conversation.

Keynote speaker Zach Wahls.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, with Fair Wisconsin executive director Katie Belanger.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin presents the statewide impact award to Dick Wagner.



U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan presents the award for best organization to Jolie McKenna, director of the LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin.





U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan is greeted by Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele.

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Milwaukee LGBT Community Center is out on the move

By Louis Weisberg
Staff writer

Looking for something different to do on a Friday evening after work? A way to meet new LGBT friends away from the bars and the fundraisers?

The Milwaukee LGBT Community Center has the solution. The first Friday of each month, the group hosts an after-work mixer in a different Milwaukee-area restaurant or bar. Appropriately titled TGIF, the roaming event offers free hors d'oeuvres donated by the host venue.

Frequent attendees say TGIF also offers a laid-back and upbeat experience.

Realtor Wendy Young started the event "two or three years ago" as a way of getting supporters of the center out into the larger community together to socialize, she said.

"We have to start mainstreaming," Young said at the Feb. 8 event, which began at 5:30 p.m. at the Mexican restaurant Riviera Maya, 2258 S. Kinnickinnic Ave. in Bay View.

When the event started, TGIF was mostly a women's affair, Young said. Quest Mortgage served as the event's sponsor, picking up the food tab for more than a year.

But when Young handed off the event to John Cassanos – she now organizes a monthly dining-out social event for the center – the men started showing up, she said. Cassanos, who moved to Milwaukee about a year ago when his husband took a job at Kohl's, has "taken this about five levels higher," Young enthused.

TGIF is a win-win event for both the LGBT community and the host, Cassanos said.

"It's good exposure for the restaurant, and it gives the restaurant an early dinner boost," he said. At the same time, it gives LGBT folks and allies a break from all the serious issues and the bars, he added.

"It's not about causes or raising money," he said. "It's just a social event."

About 40 people braved slushy weather to attend the February TGIF at Riviera Maya. Depending on the weather and the venue, as many as 70 people have attended – and the number continues to grow, said center board co-president Paul Williams.

"I've made more friends with more women through this event than anything gay I've attended," Williams said.



PHOTO: DAVID LAUERSDORF

Above, Susan Messmer, Yoli Franciskas, Wendy Young, Dana Clark and Michelle Clark.



PHOTO: DAVID LAUERSDORF

John Cassanos and BJ Gruling.

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{ Editorial }

Corruption so obvious that it's blinding

It reads like a story from The Onion: "Mining company re-writes environmental rules for its polluting project."

But it's true. A billionaire Florida magnate and other business interests that stand to profit from a proposed mine in the Penokee Hills gave GOP Wisconsin officials at least \$15.6 million. And in return, those officials allowed Gogebic Taconite to write the environmental regulations surrounding the project.

As a result, the mining bill now before the Assembly will:

- Prevent local residents from having any input into the project.
- Expose the state's most pristine wetlands to arsenic, lead, and mercury.
- Allow Gogebic Taconite to contaminate groundwater with impunity.
- Let the mining company remove large quantities of water from lakes, rivers and streams already at historically low levels.

• Jeopardize Lake Superior, the largest and cleanest of the Great Lakes.

The fat-cat Republicans who support this heinous measure will grow even fatter from the project. They've convinced their tea party acolytes that the mine will bring a few hundred jobs to job-starved Wisconsin. It's a lie. The few good jobs associated with the mining project will require expertise that's not found in Wisconsin. Gogebic will bring in their out-of-state workers to fill those positions.

Besides, the state's GOP leadership already has eliminated thousands of government, transportation and alternative energy jobs for the benefit of their moneyed backers. Now they say we have to permanently destroy a significant swath of our state for those same robber barons.

The proposed iron ore mine will leave an ugly gash covering as much as 21,000 acres in one of the state's most beautiful regions and most significant natural habitats. It could destroy wetlands that are a sacred food source to Native Americans in the region, thus potentially breaking a long-standing treaty with the federal government.

The state's current Republican leadership has in fact done nothing to support job growth or the quality of life in Wisconsin. It has made economic decisions solely for the uber-wealthy, out-of-state titans of industry who will presumably finance Gov. Scott Walker's 2016 presidential campaign.

Walker has decimated our present and our future by appointing unqualified cronies to fill important business-development positions. His much-touted Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation has been plagued by scandal, including the shocking disappearance of \$56 million in funds.

Yet, under the terms of the GOP's mining bill, 40 percent of the tax proceeds from the proposed mine will line the WEDC's crooked coffers. Which of the governor's friends will be the beneficiaries of that payday?

Instead of opening Wisconsin up for business, Walker has put it up for sale. In other states, most notably our neighbor to the south, officials have gone to prison for such pay-to-play schemes and malfeasance.

Yet as the criminal probe of Walker's operations as Milwaukee County Executive drones on, Walker manages to avoid absorbing it, even as one after another of his former close associates are convicted.

Only a blind electorate would permit such transparently egregious behavior from elected officials.

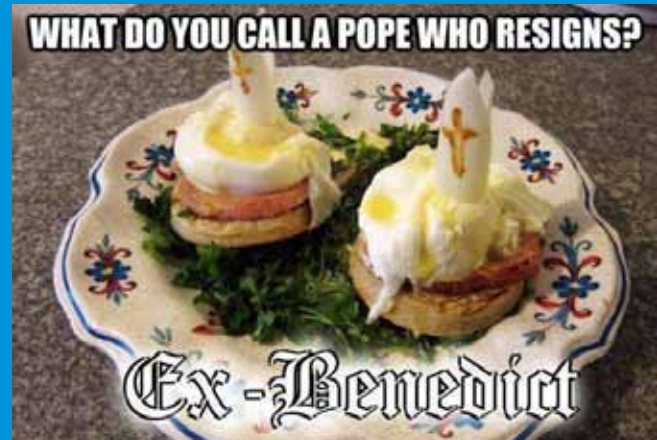
WiG's WEB PICKS

Some of our favorite recent pictorials from cyberspace



Hillary Clinton wrote to NASA as a child inquiring how to become an astronaut. NASA replied that girls could not be astronauts.

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ON THE RECORD



“They won’t let their members be gay, or openly gay anyway, but they’re letting them wear neckerchiefs and green short shorts!”

– ELLEN DEGENERES weighing in on the Boy Scouts’ anti-gay ban during her daytime talk show.

“When I got to college, I realized I was gay. I just didn’t know how to go about it. My college didn’t have a LGBT group to give me the language to come out. It was my quarterback who asked me first.”

– Pennsylvania State Rep. BRIAN SIMS, D-Philadelphia, talking about his coming-out process. Sims was the first openly gay delegate elected to serve in the Pennsylvania Legislature and also the only college football captain ever to come out, according to ESPN.

“I would like to play a lesbian. I don’t know why. And do a whole make-out scene and the whole thing – just something completely different than people would expect from me. Not a lipstick lesbian, either.”

– Singer, songwriter, reality star and actress TONI BRAXTON sharing with thegrio.com what might be her next career move. She also shared, “My choreographer and my video director are gay, and they’ve been my best friends since I started in the industry.”

“When the Republicans made contraception an issue, (we found out) that 98 percent of Catholics use birth control. Apparently, the only ones who don’t are the priests. Oh, they would if altar boys could get pregnant.”

– BILL MAHER speaking on the “Conan O’Brien Show.”

“Yesterday I thought he was a very good player and I still think that today. Should Robbie want to return to the game, we would still be open to him being part of the Fire.”

– Chicago Fire head coach FRANK KLOPAS responding to the news that professional soccer player Robbie Rogers had come out as gay.

“Amazingly, some gay activists don’t even try to hide the link between homosexuality and pedophilia. There are some who right now are actively involved in trying to legalize sex between adults and children by lowering the age of consent or removing it altogether.”

– ROBERT JEFFRESS, pastor of Dallas’ First Baptist Church, delivering one of his many sermons demonizing LGBT people. NFL quarterback Tim Tebow is scheduled as a guest speaker at Jeffress’ church on April 28.

“We’ve got fine dining and this is a private club and we have the right to refuse service to anyone. I’m not gonna have a fundraiser here for that or, like I said, for the KKK or the Nazis or, you know, any group that would be a controversial group.”

– RICHARD HODO, owner of Sisters Gourmet Bistro in Van Buren, Ark., telling local reporters why he canceled a reservation made by the River Valley Equality Center to hold a fundraiser at his restaurant.



Honoring gay and lesbian black Americans



February is Black History Month and a good time to learn about the contributions of African-American gays and lesbians.

Here are some path breakers everyone should know about.

Bayard Rustin (1912-87) was one of the most influential figures in the civil rights movement. Because of his homosexuality as well as his socialism and pacifism, many movement colleagues shunned him, and his efforts were not fully recognized until later in his life.

In 1947, Rustin organized the first Freedom Ride challenging segregation on interstate buses. He was the chief organizer of the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. He was a key behind-the-scenes adviser to Justice Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King Jr.

and nurtured leaders of the Congress on Racial Equality and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. He was the first director of the AFL-CIO’s A. Philip Randolph Institute, which addressed issues of race and economic justice.

Rustin lived to see the growth of the LGBT rights movement and was cheered by the progress being made. He was an honored guest at many gay Pride celebrations. “Brother Outsider” is a documentary about his life.

Barbara Jordan (1936-96) was a Texas congresswoman and educator best known for her role in the House Judiciary Committee hearings that adopted articles of impeachment against Richard Nixon in 1974. No one who watched the coverage on TV will ever forget her eloquent admonition: “My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution.”

Jordan retired from politics in 1979 but remained a beloved professor of ethics and political science at the University of Texas in Austin until her death. She lived with multiple sclerosis for many years and, toward the end, developed leukemia. It was only publicly revealed upon Jordan’s death that she had been in a decades-long relationship with Nancy Earl, an educational psychologist she met in the 1960s. The University of Texas erected a statue in Jordan’s memory and several Texas schools are named in her honor.

Octavia Butler (1947-2006) was one of the most accomplished science fiction/fantasy writers of her time. She described herself as “comfortably asocial ... a hermit,” but poured her heart and soul into her writing.

Butler told imaginative tales of time travel, immortal beings and alternate genders that explored important themes of social and racial justice. Among her best books is “Kindred,” about a

woman whisked from her life in 1970s Los Angeles back to slavery times in Maryland. In 2000, Butler won sci-fi’s highest honor, the Nebula Award, for her novel “Parable of the Talents,” which attacked religious fundamentalism. Most of her books are still in print.

RuPaul Andre Charles, born in 1960, is also a major historical player. No other entertainer has been “out” from the get-go and for as long as RuPaul. No other entertainer has spoken out so loudly, clearly and consistently about LGBT Pride. No one has been as flamboyantly gay, and no one has done more to bring drag style and performance into the mainstream.

“RuPaul’s Drag Race” and “Drag U” are highly rated cable shows that attract broad audiences. They are funny, catty, outrageous, schmaltzy and utterly entertaining. By bringing drag culture to the masses and sharing the love with everyone – “Everybody say ‘love!’” – RuPaul is a transformative figure.

MPS continues to stall on partner benefits



In 2008, the Milwaukee Public School Board voted to provide domestic partner benefits for its workers. But the benefits were not declared ready for implementation until two years later.

During the interim, MPS spent \$65,000 of taxpayer money to conduct a “best practices study” on how to qualify same-sex couples for benefits that are routinely extended by most of the state’s largest institutions as well as most Fortune 500 companies. And since Wisconsin is fortunate enough to have a domestic partner registry, the mechanism for qualifying employees for such benefits already exists.

Unfortunately all the money and time wasted on reinventing the wheel yielded a disgraceful, elaborately cumbersome process that

has left the school system’s LGBT employees feeling violated and disproportionately burdened.

Nine months ago, MPS employee Jennifer Morales and representatives of Fair Wisconsin and Equality Wisconsin attended a committee hearing to discuss the labyrinthine process used by the Milwaukee Public Schools to implement domestic partner benefits. To say the reception was lukewarm would be an understatement. But the committee promised to study the issue.

Then, in July, the committee reported back to the school board to present the changes they planned to implement in order to make the process “easier.” Shockingly, nothing within the process was changed. The only alteration proposed was to make staff more readily available to help explain the elaborate process to applicants.

With the help of Morales and other community members, Fair Wisconsin and Equality Wisconsin were able

to confront the situation at the August school board hearing – to let the board know that the change was inadequate.

The coalition of people and groups who are trying to change the policy came up with three easy steps the school district could take to make the benefits more equal:

1. Accept registration with the statewide domestic partner registry as proof of financial interdependence.

2. Revise the MPD affidavit to be similar to those used by the city and county when administering benefits.

3. Adjust the imputed income value of the benefits. The MPS “family plan” is currently valued at almost \$7,000 above market value. This increases the tax burden on both the employee and the school district.

In November, I represented the coalition at a meeting with MPS Superintendent Gregory Thornton. While he said all the right things during the meeting, his follow-up

has been dismal. During the meeting, we agreed upon the formation of a work group and a target date of July 1, 2013, to implement the changes above. Yet, to date there has been no follow-up, no communication and no work group.

While I know the school district is facing difficult times, where is there a leader willing to champion the cause of equality and fairness? Where is the board member willing to stand up and send the message that MPS values equality for all its employees?

Members of the school board are up for election. As you cast your ballots, I hope you will do your homework and make sure the person you vote for shares your values. The reality is this: If we wait for the superintendent’s administration to suggest these minor benefit changes, we will be left waiting.

Jason Burns is executive director of Equality Wisconsin.

It's now easier to get people involved

PETITIONS from page one

including one to promote LGBT Spirit Day and another to curb bullying in Michigan schools. On Change.org, she says people keep telling LGBT youth that it gets better, but "it can't get better if you don't make it better. I'm doing my part to help, please do yours."

Butler's "Bully" petition was among the first that Deb Pace of Eau Claire signed. "It was so easy to make a stand," she says.

Since then, Pace has delved deeper into the Web and connected with progressive petition campaigns at CredoAction, ThePetitionSite and SignOn.org, an affiliate of MoveOn.org, which gets its name from an early Internet petition calling on Congress to move on from its obsession with Bill Clinton and his definition of sexual relations.

"I work the third shift," Pace says. "That makes it hard to get involved. But I can do my part to fight the right

at any hour from my iPhone. Pretty cool."

The petition is a tool as old as the written word. In the United States, the First Amendment contains a clause guaranteeing the right of the people to "petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

We, the people, sign official petitions for candidates to qualify for office, petitions for redress in courts and, in some states, petitions for referendums and ballot initiatives.

Historically, Americans also have taken up petitions to free the colonies from British tyranny, to end slavery, to secure the vote for women and to advance the civil rights movement.

The Obama administration recognized this tradition when it created We The People, the online forum where citizens can start a petition or sign a petition – or 175 of them. The site is modeled on the popular e-petition sys-



PHOTO: GLAAD

Petitions calling for an end to the Boy Scouts of America's ban on gays are delivered to the organization's national headquarters in Texas.

tem in the United Kingdom.

The most recent We The People petitions ask the administration to commit resources to ensure an AIDS-free generation, stop the court-ordered euthanasia of a service dog named Dutch, classify the Los Angeles Police Department as a domestic

terrorist organization, ratify a treaty on women's rights and stop a proposed mine in northern Wisconsin. That last petition, as of Feb. 15, needed more than 97,000 signatures by March 8 to draw a White House response.

"It would be nice for the president to weigh in on the issue," says petition signer Jimmy Benn of La Crosse. "But even without (that), people all over the country are getting information about this serious environmental issue."

In the first month of We The People, 755,000 people used the platform to create or sign more than 12,400 petitions that gathered more than 1.2 million signatures. There was a new user about every 15 minutes and a signature added every 23 minutes.

While the White House petition site is popular – so much so that the administration recently increased from 25,000 to 100,000 the number of signatures required to generate a response from the administration – it doesn't rival Change.org. A year ago, Change.org had about 7 million users. Today the world's largest petition platform has more than 25 million members and petitioners from every country. About 140 million signatures have been attached to Change.org petitions since 2010, when the site had a million users.

On an "about" page, Change.org explains its role: "Gathering people behind a cause used to be difficult,

requiring lots of time, money, and a complex infrastructure. But technology has made us more connected than ever.

"It's now possible for anyone to start a campaign and immediately mobilize hundreds of others locally or hundreds of thousands around the world, making governments and companies more responsive and accountable.

"We want to accelerate this dramatic shift – by making it easier to make a difference and by inspiring everyone to discover what's possible when they stand up and speak out."

Critics complain that Change.org sells ads and accepts money from large corporations to promote their petitions. But the site has strict rules about who can engage: Change.org prohibits bullying, harassment, or intimidation; is against the promotion of hate groups, or persons/entities directly associated with them; and against advocating discrimination. As a result, there's more progressive click-tivism than conservative action on the site.

And there's no denying the influence of the free, people-powered, digital Change.org petitions. They've helped to bring about an ongoing prosecution in the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida, raised awareness of "pink slime" burgers in public schools, shut down government-supported "ex-gay" clinics in Ecuador and

eliminated an Amateur International Boxing Association rule requiring women boxers to wear skirts in the Olympics.

"If you want to get an idea of what's brewing in America's melting pot, get on Change.org," says petition-enthusiast Peter Warren of Green Bay, who says he signs a petition a day, sometimes more.

Warren says he reads some of the petitions to the end. And many, he adds, he seriously hopes bring about change.

"I just signed a petition to deport the Texans who signed a petition to secede because of Barack Obama's re-election," he says. "I'd really like to see that happen, man."

Warren also signed that "Bully" petition and has joined many other campaigns. Most recently he added his name to the Change.org petition that overloaded the city of Madison's email system. The petition called for the Madison Police Department to remove Officer Stephen Heimsness from patrol while the Justice Department investigates the fatal shooting of 30-year-old Paul Heenan.

"Only some of my friends will demonstrate at the Capitol," Warren says, "but just about all of them are using Facebook and have signed a petition for this or that. It's a good way to express yourself."



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NATIONAL BRIEFS



PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE/ERIN A. KIRK-CUOMO

Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta, President Barack Obama and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey stand for the U.S. Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps during a farewell tribute to Panetta.

DEFENSE SECRETARY EXTENDS SAME- SEX PARTNER BENEFITS

Outgoing Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on Feb. 11 announced the extension of some benefits to same-sex partners of gay and lesbian servicemembers. He observed that an obstacle to full equal benefits for same-sex partners is the Defense of Marriage Act, which bars the federal recognition of same-sex marriage.

"There are certain benefits that can only be provided to spouses as defined by that law, which is now being reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court," Panetta said. "While it will not change during my tenure as secretary of defense, I foresee a time when the law will allow the department to grant full benefits to servicemembers and their dependents, irrespective of sexual orientation. Until then, the department will continue to comply with current law while doing all we can to take care of all soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and their families."

The benefits changes that

can be made will happen as expeditiously as possible," he added.

IN OTHER NEWS...

President Barack Obama, in the first State of the Union address of his second term, called for a renewed commitment to equality and opportunity in the United States — including comprehensive immigration reform and equal treatment for LGBT families. He also said the promise of an AIDS-free generation could become a reality.

A man who admitted to assaulting another man at a Detroit gas station because he believed the victim gay was sentenced to 18 months in prison early in February for committing a hate crime. The case was prosecuted by the U.S. Justice Department.

Texas Sen. Juan Hinojosa, a Democrat, has introduced a bill to legalize civil unions for same-sex couples. "Texans are now realizing the importance of providing same-gender couples the

same protections that married couples receive," Hinojosa said.

The U.S. Senate in mid-February passed an LGBT-inclusive Violence Against Women Act, which still needs to get through the U.S. House to reach an eager-to-sign president. After the Senate vote, he said, "The bill passed by the Senate will help reduce homicides that occur from domestic violence, improve the criminal justice response to rape and sexual assault, address the high rates of dating violence experienced by young women, and provide justice to the most vulnerable among us."

Representatives with the Boy Scouts of America say a leak led to the frenzied lobbying over the fate of the nonprofit's ban against gay scouts and troop leaders. Meanwhile, representatives with the Girl Scouts of America are emphasizing that the two organizations are not related and that the girls' group has no such ban.

— Lisa Neff

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Pentatonix's star just keeps on rising

By Michael Muckian

Contributing writer

Even in the entertainment industry, prejudice – or fear – about sexual orientation sometimes rears its ugly head. Apparently, even the winning act on one of the most popular network talent shows is not immune to censure.

It didn't take a lengthy career of performing together for Pentatonix, the youthful a cappella quintet currently taking the country by storm, to nab top honors from NBC TV's "The Sing-Off." The five-member vocal group, only three of whom knew each other 24 hours before their initial audition, took home \$200,000 and a Sony recording contract in November 2011 at the end of the show's third season.

Prior to the concluding episode, the group visited the Los Angeles offices of The Trevor Project, the not-for-profit organization aimed at preventing bullying and suicides among LGBTQ youth. The group also filmed a public service announcement for the organization, which aired during the live finale of "The Sing-Off."

The show's producers, however, edited all LGBTQ references out of the PSA, creating a considerable controversy.

"I was a bit disheartened to know that the final cut didn't mention LGBTQ youth, but that doesn't mean I don't support the project," says out performer Mitch Grassi, who sings countertenor and tenor for the group. "Gay culture gets stronger day by day, and I think it's extremely important to empower struggling gay youth."

Despite the controversy, Pentatonix's philanthropic overture



PHOTO: COURTESY

The Pentatonix, with Mitch Grassi far left.

speaks well for Grassi, 20, and bandmates tenor Scott Hoying, 21, soprano Kirstie Maldonado, 20, bass-baritone Avi Kaplan, 23, and bass-beatbox Kevin "K.O." Olusola, 24. The group's social consciousness is outweighed only by its talent, something it will bring to Milwaukee's Pabst Theater on March 3 for a show that was all but sold out at press time.

"We've added a set, choreography and a few new songs to our act," says Grassi, who began singing with Maldonado and Hoying as a trio while the three still attended James Martin High School in Arlington, Texas. "The Milwaukee audience can expect more of a show and a few surprises."

No one is more surprised about the meteoric rise of their careers than the singers. After hearing about an Arlington radio talent contest whose prize was meeting the cast members of Fox TV's hit show "Glee," the three high school students worked up an a cappella

version of Lady Gaga's "Telephone" and submitted it. They didn't win, but word spread throughout the school and a YouTube version of their performance attracted attention.

Hoying and Maldonado went off to college at the University of Southern California and the University of Oklahoma, respectively. While in Los Angeles, Hoying heard about auditions for "The Sing-Off" and encouraged Grassi and Maldonado to join him.

However, the trio decided to become a quintet, so Hoying recruited Kaplan, who he met through a mutual friend, and found Yale University graduate Olusola in a YouTube video in which he performed a vocal beatbox rhythm while playing cello. Grassi skipped his high school graduation to make the audition.

The newly minted quintet passed and eventually went on to win the 2011 season.

Pentatonix, which takes its name

from the five-note pentatonic musical scale, has distinct preferences for material, which crosses a variety of genres. Producers of "The Sing-Off" picked most of the songs the group did on the show, Grassi says, including Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger," which helped the group win the competition.

But their approach to singing remains the same regardless of whose song they choose.

"Typically, we start with the bass line to create a sort of foundation," Grassi says. "Next, we add the beat to give it drive. We will then listen to the melody and movement of the solo line to see how we could add background parts that would complement the melody, but not distract from the soloist. We add any embellishments and tricks last."

Some of their more popular material has included Florence and the Machines' "Dog Days are Over," Katy Perry's "E.T.," and Kanye West's "Love Lockdown." The group also has reached back to cover Marvin

ON STAGE

Pentatonix performs at Milwaukee's Pabst Theatre March 3. For information, visit www.pabsttheatre.org

Gaye's "Let's Get It On," Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart" and Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild."

"My favorite song to perform is one I actually can't mention yet," enthuses Grassi. "As of right now, it is a tour-exclusive song, so you will have to come see the show to find out! But I would love to see us do a version of "Suit & Tie" by Justin Timberlake. I'm completely obsessed."

Obsession may also be the word that best describes the growing fan base for Pentatonix, a wide cross section that includes both gay and straight audiences.

"The best part about being an openly gay musician is that our fans are 100 percent supportive of us, no matter what," Grassi says. "I've never once feared judgment from any of them."

Dish it Out!

Observe Lent with sinfully rich designer mac 'n' cheese

By Michael Muckian

Contributing writer

On cold winter nights, nothing kindles the soul like a belly full of warm comfort food. At our house, that means macaroni and cheese. With the onset of Lent, the Christian season of meat deprivation, the quintessential American favorite takes on an added dimension for folks who like to connect with religious traditions, even in a small way.

As food writers, my wife Jean and I have "eaten professionally" for 25 years, but we've never kicked the Kraft habit learned in our mothers' Milwaukee kitchens. Our challenge: Make America's favorite comfort food a little more interesting.

Over the years our tastes have changed, even if our addiction to the comfort dish hasn't. Our original mac and cheese made from bleached-flour pasta was replaced by whole-wheat pasta that eventually took the penne form. The little grooved tubes added texture, while the larger cut made for a more filling "mouth-feel," as winemakers like to say.

American cheese became cheddar, but after meeting Sid Cook, we knew it couldn't be just any cheddar. The owner

and master cheesemaker of Carr Valley Cheese, Cook recommended mixing his 10-year-old cheddar, handcrafted in small vats, with his Ba-Ba Blue, an award-winning sheep's milk blue cheese. The cheddar's sharp report balanced with blue cheese's piquancy, making each bite a varied delight.

Every addiction is characterized by increasing levels of abuse, and our jonesing for designer mac and cheese is no different. In an attempt to moderate our growing addiction, Jean uncovered a Weight Watcher recipe that

added fresh or canned tomatoes to the dish. Skeptical, we nevertheless tried the addition. We were delighted to find that tomatoes' acidity complemented the sweetness of the cheese. The fruit's pulp also varied the texture, while its bright red color added visual appeal to the dish.

We were hooked all over again.

Then we heard about the wonderful properties of panko bread crumbs and,

as if the pasta itself didn't provide enough starch, we started sprinkling the dish with our favorite panko flavor (there are several to choose from) before baking. The result was a delightful, slightly rugged crust riding atop the softly bubbling mass of molten cheese.

It's become our mission to keep refining America's favorite comfort food, and we're keen to try a recipe we ran across that mixes in crimini and shitake mushrooms

and white truffle oil. But that's a story for another Lenten season.

JEAN'S DESIGNER MAC AND CHEESE

4 cups skim milk
2 bay leaves
½ tsp. nutmeg
4 T. cornstarch
1 lb. Carr Valley 10-year old cheddar
1 cup grated Carr Valley Ba-Ba Bleu cheese
2 fresh whole tomatoes or 2 15-oz cans diced tomatoes
1 lb. penne pasta or large pasta shells
Panko bread crumbs to taste

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. Cook pasta according to package directions. Rinse in cool water and set aside.
3. Put skim milk in a saucepan. Whisk in the cornstarch until smooth. Add the bay leaves and nutmeg. Heat over medium heat while stirring constantly (to avoid burning the milk) until mixture thickens (about 5 minutes). Set aside.
4. Grate the cheddar cheese (you should have about 4 cups).
5. Spray a 3-quart casserole dish with pan spray. Place 1/3 of the pasta in the bottom of the dish. Pour 1/3 of the white sauce over the pasta, then sprinkle 1 cup cheddar cheese over the sauce. If using fresh tomatoes, slice them and place 1/3 of the slices over the cheddar cheese. If using canned tomatoes, pour 2/3 of one can over the sauce. 6. Repeat layers until pasta, sauce, cheese and tomatoes are used. Top with 1 cup of the bleu cheese and bread crumbs to suit your taste.
7. Bake in 425-degree oven for 30-40 minutes. The dish is done when the cheese is hot and bubbling.

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Chefs pick best screen scenes with cuisine

The Associated Press

What happens when you ask a group of cuisine luminaries to name their picks for Best Food Scene in a movie?

You get some unexpected responses. Who knew "Pulp Fiction" was such a foodie flick? You pick up a few tips, like the "Goodfellas" guide to truly razor-thin garlic.

Fabio Viviani, "Top Chef" Season 5 "Fan Favorite" and host of Yahoo's Chow Ciao, took a practical approach for his choice, opting for the "Goodfellas" scene that shows Paulie slicing garlic with a razor. "What a way to get the perfect thin garlic! You can almost smell the garlic and tomatoes and meat cooking in the scene."

His takeaway? "Doesn't matter if you're a criminal or just a normal guy, there is nothing better than breaking bread with friends and

family and sharing food. Add some vino and BOOM!, that is what's most important in life."

No one suggested scenes from classic "food movies" like "Big Night" or "Tampopo," perhaps not surprising considering that those kind of films don't exactly qualify as escapism to a cook.

As Colman Andrews, editorial director of TheDailyMeal.com put it, "maybe it's just that I devote so much of my time to food - writing about it, editing a food website, cooking and eating it - that when I relax away from the table, food is the last thing I want to think about."

Memorable food scenes are the ones that "sneak up on me, in non-food movies," he says, like the old-fashioned bread-baking process shots from "The Baker's Wife," a French classic from



PHOTO: COURTESY

The characters Ringo and Jules in one of the memorable diner scenes from "Pulp Fiction."

the 1930s, and Ray Winstone intoning "I'm gonna 'ave the calamari," in "Sexy Beast."

But the food film moment he thinks about most "probably perversely, is the scene in 'Hook' wherein the grown-up Peter Pan figure (Robin Williams) joins the Lost Boys in a banquet of nonexistent 'Neverfood.' It just seems to say so much about appetite and the joy that the mere thought of food can summon up."

Sometimes movies poke fun at the trappings of fine dining, and Stephen Barber,

executive chef of Farmstead at Long Meadow Ranch in the Napa Valley is OK with that. He likes the scene from "The Jerk," in which a gauche Steve Martin, after first ordering some "fresh" wine, "no more of this old stuff," is horrified to find that his date's plate is covered with snails.

Barber doesn't have escargot on his menu, though he does make sure staff looks out for customers who may be baffled by what to do with a particular dish.

Michael Mina, a Michelin-starred chef and big movie

fan, went for something a little different with his favorite food scene - the dialogue between Jules and Vincent as they have breakfast at a diner in "Pulp Fiction."

"The whole scene is so perfect," he says. Vincent offers Jules a piece of bacon and prompts a diatribe against pork that segues into why Jules is planning on retiring as an assassin. "It's pure brilliance and classic Tarantino."

For his part, Mina has no such qualms. Bacon "is that one ingredient that you have

to have," he says. Just not too much. Mina jokes that he does a "bacon check" of restaurant menus in his Mina Group to make sure that the dishes aren't going overboard with the tasty breakfast meat.

Mina's a big breakfast fan in general. In fact, when he was asked to cook for a fancy post-Oscars party in Los Angeles a few years back he agreed on one condition: "I'm only coming if I'm cooking omelettes."

As they (almost) say in show business, break an egg.

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'Lintel' is a journey of self-discovery

By Michael Muckian

Contributing writer

Life is – or should be – a journey of self-discovery. Those of us who fail to initiate that quest are often prodded by life's circumstances down roads they wouldn't otherwise have chosen.

Such is the case of the protagonist in "Underneath the Lintel," the latest production by the Milwaukee Chamber Theatre.

The one-character play by author Glen Berger, perhaps best known for the Broadway musical "Spiderman: Turn Off the Dark," chronicles the travels of a character simply referred to as the librarian, played by American Players Theatre veteran James Ridge. Opening his library in the small Dutch town of Hoofddorp one morning, he finds a tattered Baedeker travel guide in the night drop and discovers that it's 113 years overdue.

The improbability of the book's appearance sets the librarian on a global quest in

search of the borrower – not so much to collect the overdue fines as to discover the story behind the book's sudden appearance. The librarian actually is searching for his own purpose, says director C. Michael Wright.

"I love this character on a very deep level," says Wright, who's also MCT's artistic director. "He's so honest, vulnerable and quirky. And he's dealing with such huge, important issues that we all need to be grappling with: Why am I here on earth? Do I have a purpose? Am I making a difference?"

The librarian's journey takes him to a London dry cleaners, an attic in Australia, a government records office in Bonn and even a post office box in Dingtao, China. In the process, he uncovers a thread that might well tie the narrative back to the time of Christ's crucifixion.

But at no point during the play do we ever discover the librarian's name.

"The character in this play

identifies himself to the audience not by name but by profession – 'I am ... a librarian,'" says Ridge, the actor who plays him. "But in the next lines he reveals that he has been fired, so who is he really? He is in limbo. He is searching for identity, for meaning, for significance, for forgiveness."

Ridge is no stranger to one-man shows, having performed previously in MCT's 2006 world-premier production of James DeVita's "Dickens in America." Being on stage alone for an entire production can be daunting, Ridge says, leaving an actor as weary and exposed as the psyche of the character he plays. Ridge often learns as much – or more – about himself as his characters learn about themselves.

"Every show, every collaboration with an audience teaches me something about my limitations as a person or artist, about patience and grace, about love of words and ideas," Ridge says.

'This play is skillfully layered and very human, funny and deeply touching.'

"Working on a character, I get to know his limitations and foibles, his baggage and dark places, but I empathize with him. This empathy often awakens a greater awareness of the lives around me, making me more present to my own life."

"Under the Lintel," which runs through March 17 in the Broadway Theatre Center's Studio Theatre, is the final production in MCT's "Exploring Jewish Voices" series, produced in collaboration with Jewish Museum Milwaukee and the Jewish Community Center. Other plays

in 2012-13 series included Herb Gardner's "A Thousand Clowns" and Donald Margulies' "Collected Stories."

The three groups have partnered to provide additional education and outreach opportunities including pre-show "ViewPoints" lectures and "Jewish Community Ticket" performances. During the project, MCT highlighted Jewish authors from different generations.

"I'm always looking for new and interesting ways to celebrate the arts," Wright says. "Although none of these plays would necessarily qualify as 'Jewish plays,' it's still fascinating to see how each of these playwrights uses and explores his background and his roots."

"The librarian gets hooked into a mystery that leads him all over the world, meeting all kinds of people from all kinds of cultures," Ridge says. "He grapples with the consequences of a single decision made years ago, with questions of mortality and signifi-

cance and free will."

Eventually the librarian comes to realize and accept that life is messy and confounding, while still offering great beauty and worth, Ridge says. Whether the realization solves his mystery is less important than the insight it offers audiences, Ridge says.

"I think that this is a wonderfully crafted play, skillfully layered and very human, funny and deeply touching," the actor says. "If I do my job right, I think people will identify with and come to care about this man."


ON STAGE

Milwaukee Chamber Theatre's production of Glen Berger's "Underneath the Lintel" runs Feb. 20 through March 17 in the Broadway Theatre Center's Studio Theatre. For more information, visit www.chamber-theatre.com.

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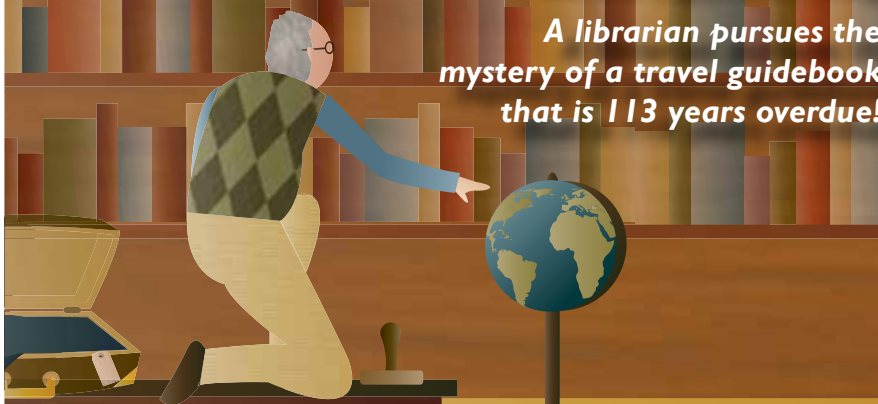
underneath the lintel

by Glen Berger


Directed by C. Michael Wright

Featuring James Ridge

A librarian pursues the
mystery of a travel guidebook
that is 113 years overdue!



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Screen Savor

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**'Sunset Boulevard'
a camp classic**

More than 60 years after Billy Wilder's Oscar-winning "Sunset Boulevard" premiered, forgotten silent film star Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) remains one of cinema's most enduring characters. She's been parodied by Carol Burnett and was the subject of an Andrew Lloyd Weber musical. Some of her most famous lines – "All right, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up" – have become part of the gay lexicon.

The black-and-white movie, now on Blu-ray, begins with the discovery of the body of a young man, struggling movie writer Joe (William Holden), floating in the pool of a former Hollywood star's mansion. Dead Joe, who narrates the story, takes us back six months to when it all began. Behind on his rent and car payments, Joe fears he's lost his writer's touch. His fears are confirmed during a pitch meeting at Paramount.

With no prospects, a flat tire and the repo-men in pursuit, Joe turns into the driveway of what he thinks is an abandoned, "grim Sunset castle." There he finds himself politely trapped in the web of Desmond and her manservant and ex-husband Max (Erich von Stroheim). A silent film goddess who could communicate with her eyes, Norma



PHOTO: COURTESY

Gloria Swanson is ready for her close up.

is desperate to make a return (don't call it a "comeback"!). She puts Joe to work revising her dismal screenplay "Salome," while keeping him wrapped in vicuna and doused in Champagne.

Alternating between film noir moodiness and a May/December mash note, "Sunset Boulevard" is one of the ultimate camp classics. Swanson, who was herself a silent movie queen in need of a return (she hadn't been seen onscreen for almost 10 years before "Sunset Boulevard"), gave the performance of a lifetime in the film. Holden, sort of sexy in a shirtless poolside scene, holds his own.

The movie is relevant today. Aging actresses still struggle to find meaty roles. Both Swanson and the character she portrayed were in their early 50s and considered washed up in Hollywood.

Blu-ray special features include featurettes, such as one paying tribute to Swanson by her granddaughter, a deleted scene and more.

'Cabaret' still powerful, relevant

The Oscar-winning film "Cabaret" is finally out on Blu-ray. A multitude of memorable lines and songs from "Cabaret" have left their mark on gay culture.

The film is based on the book "Goodbye to Berlin" by gay writer Christopher Isherwood ("A Single Man"). The book served as the basis for the play "I Am a Camera" and the subsequent Kander and Ebb stage musical "Cabaret."

The 1972 film was the darling of the Academy Awards 40 years ago, taking home eight trophies, including statuettes for lead actress Liza Minnelli in the most momentous role of her career, supporting actor Joel Grey and director Bob Fosse. Coming out at a time when the movie musical had been all but written off, the success of "Cabaret" was a special triumph. It tackled such serious subjects as bisexuality, abortion, parental abandonment and anti-Semitism.

Set in early 1930s Berlin, the musical numbers take place in the Kit-Kat Club, where divinely decadent "international sensation" Fraulein Sally Bowles (Minnelli), an American singer/actress, is on the bill. Residing in a boarding house, Sally meets newcomer Brian (Michael York), a Brit looking to rent a room and give English lessons to pay the rent. In spite of her "ancient instincts," Sally falls for him and they become fast friends.

Initially, Brian doesn't share Sally's feel-



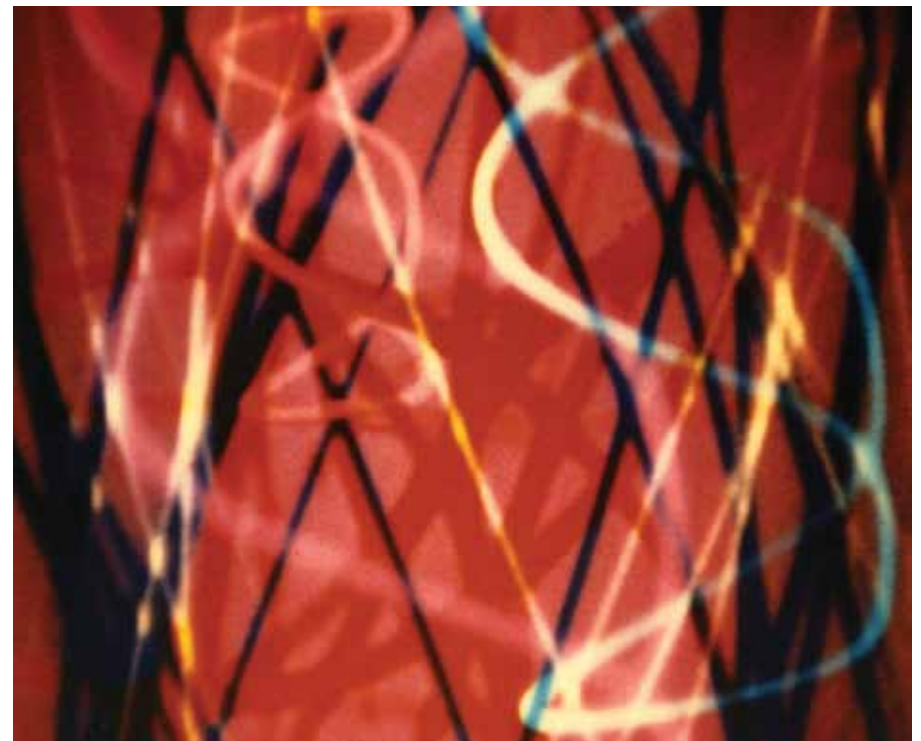
PHOTO: COURTESY

Liza Minnelli in her iconic role as Sally Bowles.

ings, but they eventually become lovers. Soon, their circle of friends grows to include Fritz (Fritz Wepper), Jewish department store heiress Natalia (Marisa Berenson) and flirtatious, well-to-do baron Maximilian (Helmut Griem). The club performances and the budding relationships are set against – and reflect – the rise of Nazism.

Still as powerful and relevant as when it was first released, "Cabaret" startles with its visionary direction, trendsetting choreography and staggering performances.

In addition to a 40-page book, Blu-ray bonus features include featurettes, such as "Cabaret: The Musical That Changed Musicals," narrated by Neil Patrick Harris.

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TOP: Anton Bruehl, *Harlem Number*, 1943 (detail). Anton Bruehl, Jr. Anton Bruehl Trust. Photo by John R. Glembin.
BOTTOM: Russell Lee, *Faro and Doris Caudill, homesteaders, Pie Town, New Mexico*, October 1940 (detail). Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF35-317.

Boulevard Studio's artistic director Mark Bucher is ready for his third act

By Louis Weisberg

Staff writer

After 27 years as the Boulevard Ensemble Studio's founder, artistic director, box office manager, janitor and just about everything else, Mark Bucher says he's ready for his life's third act.

The voluble Bucher is bowing out and moving on. That's sure to shock the many Bay View fans who consider the Boulevard as permanent a neighborhood fixture as the tattoo parlors.

Bucher says he's selling the building at 2250 S. Kinnickinnic Ave., and he plans to become an "itinerant director," producing small-scale works and readings at varying locations. Mounting full-scale productions for several weeks is no longer a financially feasible business model for a black-box theater, he says.

Moreover, Bucher, who's in his 50s, says he no longer has

the stamina to work seven-day weeks, 16-hour days and shovel snow off the theater's flat roof. He cringes at all the new-fangled hoops a theater manager has to jump through these days in order to draw an audience.

"To run an arts institution today, you have to have a full-time person just to do social media!" he exclaims.

Bucher, an out gay man with an outsized personality, says parting is sweet sorrow. But while letting go isn't easy, he envisions a simpler future that's more accommodating to a man his age.

"I would like to guest direct (for other companies)," Bucher says. "I would like to continue teaching acting. I've been doing more acting, and I'd like to do more guest appearances. And I'd like to travel."

Bucher says the Boulevard has been a victim of its own success. When he founded

the theater, the neighborhood was a very different place than it is today.

"It was sort of an urban wilderness," he remembers. "There was the Big Beer Bar, a Salvation Army re-sale shop, and a decrepit George Webb that was on its way out."

The Boulevard is widely credited with helping to transform the run-down neighborhood into the hip, thriving entertainment district that it's become.

"A theater company can serve as a magnet for other businesses, because it increases pedestrian traffic and activity, which improves general safety in the neighborhood," Bucher explains.

That's exactly what happened after the Boulevard raised its metaphorical curtain. Café LuLu opened across the street, followed by other restaurants and bars. Property values rose.

But the revitalization did



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Boulevard Ensemble Studio founder and artistic director Mark Bucher.

not take the form that Bucher had envisioned. Schwartz Bookshop closed, as did a nearby art gallery. Those storefronts and others were replaced by "bars, bars, bars – and guess what? More bars!" Bucher says, laughing.

"We've experienced a de-evolution," he says. "The street has morphed into a very youth-oriented party culture. It no longer wants me. Our audience is aging and I'm aging."

Bucher says the young people who've made Bay View so hip are not theatergoers. As an example, he recalls a conversation with a young woman who lived across the street from the theater. She told Bucher how much she loved the Boulevard, and he asked her which productions she'd seen.

"She'd never actually seen a performance, because she didn't like live theater," he says. But she expressed her appreciation that the theater had made the neighborhood safer.

Bucher has earned praise for his role as an urban pioneer as well as his theatrical achievements. He's received numerous honors from the mayor's office and was named "Outstanding Artist of the Year" by the Milwaukee Arts Board.

Through the Boulevard,

Bucher has provided training and mentoring to talented young men and women who have gone on to become key players in the city's burgeoning arts scene.

Unlike the artistic directors of most small theater companies, Bucher has taken on some of the classical theater canon, including works by Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Moliere and George Bernard Shaw. He's provided exposure to these classics for about \$20 a ticket while giving new actors a chance to participate in the timeless works.

"We do select challenging and thoughtful material," he says. "But we're living in the dim ages. When was the last time someone told you what book they were reading?"

Then he smiles. "As I like to say about myself, somebody's got to be the vinegar in the salad dressing," he says.

True to form, Bucher is not leaving without a swan song – or, in this case, a play. He's directing Joe DiPietro's comedy "The Last Romance," which runs through March 3. The playwright is best known for penning the book of the hit musical "Memphis."

Although he says it's strictly coincidental, "The Last Romance" reflects many of the issues that Bucher is facing.

"It deals very effectively with end-of-life and aging issues," Bucher says. "It's a well-constructed, solidly crafted play about the romance of an elderly widower who meets a mysterious female stranger and falls in love with her over the objections of his sister."

Another character in the play is the widower's younger self, who presents a counterpoint to the older man that the widower has become. "The play examines the widower's challenge of letting go of his youthful self," Bucher says. "It's about reconciling where you are with where you've been."

And that, he says, is exactly what he's in the process of doing.

ON STAGE

The Boulevard Ensemble Studio, 2250 S. Kinnickinnic Ave. in Bay View, presents "The Last Romance" Feb. 22 – March 3. For tickets, go to www.brownpapertickets.com or call 414-744-5757. For more information, go to www.boulevard-theatre.com/current-show.

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'Albert Herring' reflects composer's life as outsider

By Michael Muckian

Contributing writer

Art reflects life and, quite often, art's content reflects the life and nature of its creator. That's certainly the case with "Albert Herring," the comic chamber opera by English composer Benjamin Britten.

"Herring," composed on the heels of Britten's more serious works "The Rape of Lucretia" and "Peter Grimes," is no mere musical piffle. The tale of the young innocent set apart from the community in which he lives reflects Britten's experience as a gay man living and working in mid-20th century England, according to William Florescu, artistic director of Milwaukee's Florentine Opera and director of his company's upcoming production of the work.

"Although it's a comedy, it still addresses Britten's lifelong operatic habit of examining the outsider's place in society," Florescu says. "For me, what sets it apart from his other work is that he really makes use of arche-

types here to a large degree, whereas, in his other operas, the characters are much more iconoclastic."

In "Albert Herring," the protagonist is chosen to be the May King in his home village of Loxford, Suffolk, after it's discovered that none of the girls in town are pure enough to be May Queen. Teased for his timidity, Albert pines for Nancy, who already is dating Sid. The pair spike Albert's lemonade with rum, and he returns home from the May Day festivities alone and quite drunk. Frustrated by his lack of companionship, Albert sets out for a night of debauchery, paid for with the May King prize money. He returns home the next day a more worldly young man.

The opera's characters, especially Albert, are emblematic of the composer's own self-image, Florescu says. While Britten wasn't exactly closeted — he lived and worked with his life partner, tenor Sir Peter Pears, for most of his career — the composer had a strong wish to be a part of the English

mainstream.

"There are parallels because Britten, like the characters of Albert, Peter Grimes and Aschenbach in 'Death in Venice,' his final work, exist in some ways outside of society," Florescu says. "However, I think more accurately, Britten, like his characters, lived within the norms of society, while suppressing aspects of himself."

The son of a Suffolk dentist and a talented amateur musician, Britten blossomed early and proved to be a prolific composer not only of opera, but also choral, orchestral, solo vocal and even film music. He studied piano under Arthur Benjamin, collaborated with W.H. Auden and was friends with Aaron Copland. His opera "Peter Grimes" propelled him to international fame at age 32. "The Young Person's Guide to Orchestra" remains one of his most popular works.

In 1937, Britten met Pears, who became his collaborator and life partner. The pair traveled to the United

The tale reflects Britten's experience as a gay man living in the mid-20th century.

States during the early years of World War II, returning to Suffolk in 1942. Britten wrote "Albert Herring" in 1947, and the work premiered at the Aldebaugh Festival, which Britten and Pears helped establish, in 1948. New works by Britten were featured at the festival every year until his death from congestive heart failure in 1976.

Although Britten never hid his relationship with Pears — and in fact wrote many works precisely with the tenor in mind — he had trouble accepting his sexual orientation.

"Britten experienced a lifelong struggle between his homosexuality and his interest in being solidly within

societal norms," says Florescu. "From my reading, I think that he longed to maintain, or perhaps regain, lost innocence, and the character of Albert is a good synthesis of this."

"Albert Herring" may be a comedy, but the narrative runs as deep as that of any tragedy in the operatic canon, reaching the core of the human condition, according to Florescu. The Florentine's production, with new sets by Noele Stollmack and costumes by the Milwaukee Rep's Holly Payne, will feature the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Rodell Rosel in the title role. "This will be Rodell's third time with us, having appeared in 'The Magic Flute' in 2009 and 'Susannah' in 2011," Florescu says. "He has played important comedic parts in his previous performances, but this will put him front and center. I would also say that every role is a lead, and I think we've assembled an extraordinary cast." For those in the audience who might also live outside the



PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Benjamin Britten.

mainstream, the opera may share some of life's lesson while enabling them to laugh at themselves.

ON STAGE

The Florentine Opera's production of Benjamin Britten's "Albert Herring" runs March 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, and 17 at Vogel Hall in Milwaukee's Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. For more information, please visit www.florentineopera.org.

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Tegan and Sara evolve with 'Heartthrob'

Tegan and Sara, the band fronted by out Canadian twin sisters Tegan and Sara Quin, has evolved from simple acoustics to fuller arrangements drawing on a variety of influences, particularly electronic. Their latest disc "Heartthrob" is the culmination of that evolution. It pulses with irresistible songs, incorporating the duo's trademark infectious melodies, vocal interplay and harmonies, and a distinctive use of lyric repetition. The songs "Closer" and "Drove Me Wild" are full-fledged club anthems, placing the twins firmly in dance diva territory. I spoke with Sara Quin shortly after the disc's release.

What are the most significant elements in the evolution of Tegan and Sara as individuals and as a duo?

We've changed so dramatically as people. What's sort of remarkable about that transformation and change is that it hasn't meant the

Music

GREGG SHAPIRO

end of the band. Even though we've changed as people, and our sound has changed and our look has changed. I'm just grateful that all of that hasn't meant that the band had to be finished. In a way, I'm also glad that the band didn't get caught in a state of arrested development.

How important was it for you to feature same-sex pairs in the "Heartthrob" video?

This is the first time that we purposely included a narrative involving other people and characters. Most of our videos are sort of abstract and we just focus on me and Tegan. There's generally not much of a story involved. But with this video we knew that we were going to rely a little bit more on a narrative, and when it became clear that there was going to be

couples involved, it was the most important thing for us (to have) same-sex couples represented. I think we walk a fine line in our band where we are completely proud and comfortable and open about our sexuality. But we're also very cognizant about the fact that we still live in a world where if things are not portrayed properly or in a respectful way they can suddenly take a crazy left turn. I would never want people to think that we're exploiting anyone, straight or gay. I want to honor what I think is a really diverse fan base. Tegan and I have seen our band develop over some really important years in our society where being gay and being in a band doesn't necessarily mean you are a gay band. It also doesn't necessarily mean that you're only going to have a gay audience.

The most heart-wrenching song is "Now I'm All Messed Up," which has the line, "Now I'm all messed up



PHOTO: LINDSEY BYRNES

Tegan and Sara or is it Sara and Tegan?

sick inside wondering where/Where you're leaving your make-up."

It's interesting, that was the first line that I wrote for the song. It was something I had scribbled down. It is a really intense and emotional song and it started from one lyric. I wasn't going through a breakup or a trauma or anything like that. I had started to date someone really significant in my life, it was starting to get serious. I was thinking about the breakups that I had in the past and how traumatized I was by them. When you start to fall in love with someone, even when you're happy, that can be the scariest time. I was utterly paralyzed by the idea that I could go through a breakup or of

someone cheating or leaving me. My girlfriend wears mascara. I would wake up and there would be mascara on my pillowcases. I thought this would be the worst thing in the world, the idea that she would be with someone else, leaving her makeup in their bedroom.

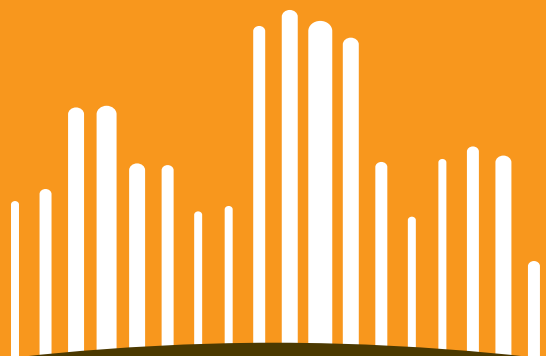
Jack Antonoff, who co-wrote the song "How Come You Don't Want Me?" with you and Tegan, had a good night at the Grammy Awards with his band fun., as did your fall 2012 tour-mates The Black Keys. What would it mean for you and Tegan to get some love from Grammy

voters?

(Laughs.) I was delighted to see both fun. and The Black Keys getting so much love at the Grammys. We shouldn't judge our lives or our careers by the accolades or awards that we win. Saying that, I think getting nominated for a Grammy is a remarkable thing. Recognition from your peers and your industry feels good when you've worked really hard.

ON STAGE

Tegan and Sara perform on Feb. 24 at The Orpheum in Madison and on March 7 at The Pabst in Milwaukee.



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'Dracula' brings new blood to Madison Ballet

By Michael Muckian

Contributing writer

Leave it to the undead to help bring a struggling Madison arts company back to life.

Next month, the Madison Ballet will stage the world premiere of "Dracula: A Rock Ballet" at the Capitol Theater in Madison's Overture Center for the Arts. The two-hour original ballet, danced to a score by Madison composer Michael Massey, is the third of four works in the ballet's 2012-13 season — a season marked by expansion, new ballets and a return from the financial precipice, says V. Earle Smith, Madison Ballet's artistic director.

Smith is betting that "Dracula" will help build the company's profile, as well as attract new fans. Described as a "steampunk" version, the ballet is original and shares nothing with the recent version created by the Milwaukee Ballet's Michael Pink, except that the source material for both is Bram Stoker's 1897 Gothic horror novel.

Due to its sexual themes, the work is being marketed

as "for mature audiences only." Ironically, it was Smith's "little brother," a boy he mentors through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dane County, who spurred the project.

"I started working on 'Dracula' about five years ago," Smith says. "My little brother was into the whole vampire scene, due largely to the 'Twilight' books. He got me to read the books, go to the movies and re-interested me in working on the project."

Smith's neo-classical approach to dance is a natural match to the subject matter. It fits beautifully with Massey's rock music score and gives the familiar tale a contemporary feel, according to Smith.

"When I started working with the look of the ballet, even before meeting with my creative team, I gathered a bunch of images," Smith says. "My costume designer Karen Brown-Larimore saw them and said, 'Clearly, steampunk designs' and it was clearly a perfect fit."

Steampunk, for those who don't know, refers to a style

that reflects an apocalyptic future powered by steam engines but inspired by Victorian style. In addition to matching the time and place in which Stoker's novel was written, the subgenre features fantastic machinations and a lot of black and metal-studded clothes, both of which suited the ballet's aesthetic.

Juilliard School-educated Matthew Linzer will dance the role of Dracula, aided by Jennifer Tierney (Mina Murray), Molly Luksik (Lucy Westenra) and Verona, Wis., native Brian Roethlisberger (Jonathan Harker). The cast is a mix of dancers trained by Smith, as well as some chosen from other parts of the country. The show's 19 dancers include 10 males, far more than is normal for a ballet, Smith says.

Smith has worked with Massey before, including on a 20-minute repertoire ballet a number of years ago, but he did not realize Massey had a rock 'n' roll background. The composer shared some samples and the choreographer knew he had found the

Smith's neo-classical approach to dance is a natural match to the subject matter.

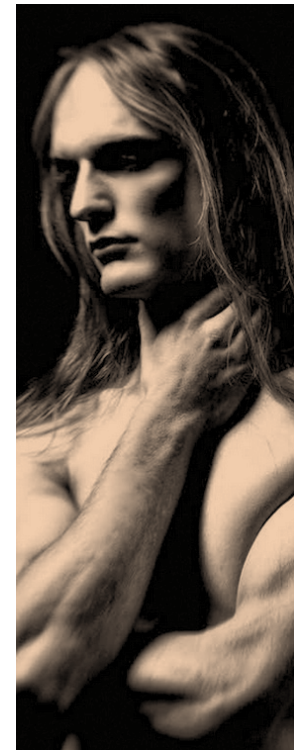
right partner to create a new work.

"Music comes first," Smith says. "It is the driver of the movement. In a full-length ballet, the story dictates where the music and movement should go, but music is its heart and soul."

Of course, Dracula technically has no soul. But short of a stake through the lead character's heart, Smith expects his ballet to continue helping to breathe new life into Madison Ballet's future.

The 2008 recession affected arts organizations nationwide, including the Madison Ballet, forcing the company to cut back on expenses and eventually productions, says Smith, who also has a background in accounting and financial management. The overall economy is now on the mend, and so is the financial outlook for the Madison Ballet, Smith says.

"For the 2011-12 season we reduced our performances so we could pay down more than \$150,000 of operational debt accumulated over three years," Smith says. "Madison Ballet is definitely in a much better position, but we have to be very careful with our finances since the overall economic recovery of the country is still rather slow."



ON STAGE

Madison Ballet's production of "Dracula: A Rock Ballet" runs March 8–10 at the Capitol Theater in Madison's Overture Center for the Arts. For information and tickets, visit <http://overturecenter.com/production/dracula>.

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Oscar-themed crossword puzzle

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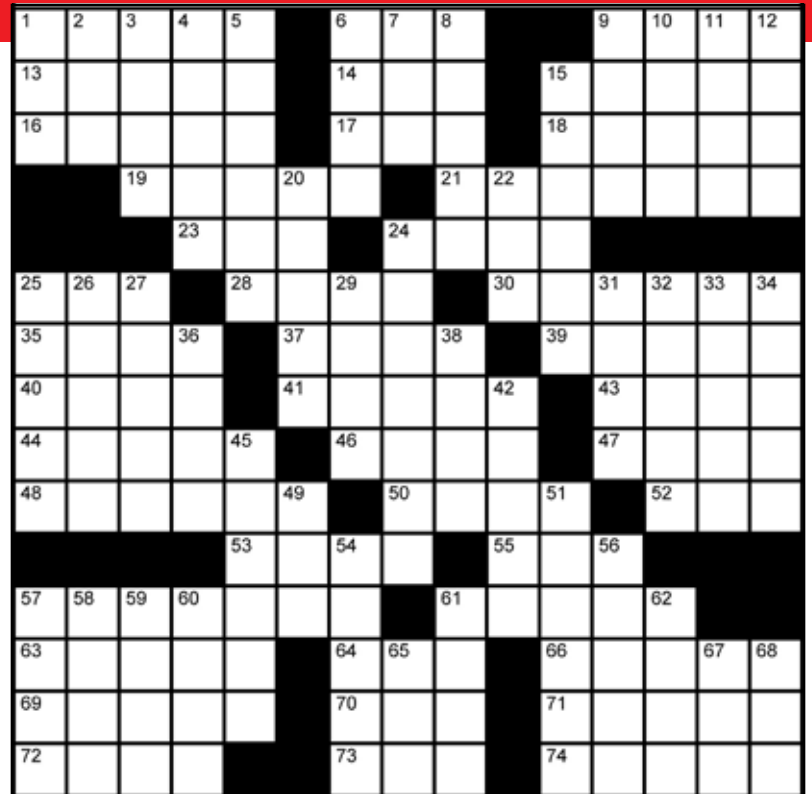
- 1. The knight on the Oscar statuette holds one
- 6. Possible best director
- 9. Sound of passing bullet?
- 13. Taekwondo country
- 14. ___ of Good Feelings
- 15. Twofold
- 16. Relating to Quechuan people
- 17. Energy unit
- 18. To set someone free
- 19. Bruce Wayne's Batman, e.g.
- 21. Historical drama and Oscar nominee
- 23. Feline cry
- 24. Secretary, e.g.
- 25. a.k.a. American Gas Association
- 28. Cleanse
- 30. Gather, as in courage, e.g.
- 35. Make fun of
- 37. Lord's worker
- 39. Controversial speech-making director (2003)
- 40. Aware of
- 41. They itch
- 43. Singing nominee
- 44. Apartments, e.g.
- 46. Bank claim
- 47. "___ in full"
- 48. Petered out
- 50. Put in the hold
- 52. Grazing land

- 53. *Vanity Fair holds a big one on Oscar night
- 55. ___ sheet
- 57. Western director nominee
- 61. "Cloud ___," snubbed by the Academy
- 63. Justin Timberlake's "___ the End of Time"
- 64. Under the weather
- 66. 1.75 pints
- 69. "Time is money," e.g.
- 70. Adam and Eve used its leaves for covering
- 71. Silly and insignificant
- 72. Comedy Central's "___ O"
- 73. Drug approver
- 74. Throat infection

DOWN

- 1. Often used with "bum"
- 2. Got an Oscar
- 3. Shamu, e.g.
- 4. King's domain
- 5. President portrayer
- 6. Ang and Spike, e.g.
- 7. Get it wrong
- 8. Bald symbol
- 9. Dietary mineral
- 10. Division word
- 11. Nervous biter's victim
- 12. Hidden valley
- 15. Hogwash

- 20. Flooded
- 22. Any doctrine
- 24. Ascetic Muslim monk
- 25. *Love
- 26. Going to
- 27. *Cooper and Lawrence ___ "Silver Linings Playbook"
- 29. Wedding cover
- 31. Daytime TV offering
- 32. Relating to tone
- 33. Bert's roommate
- 34. High-pitched
- 36. Japanese string instrument
- 38. Three of these in a yard
- 42. Horse or pig sound
- 45. Difficult to detect by the mind
- 49. ___ chi
- 51. Youngest ever nominee
- 54. Sense an odor
- 56. Colorful spread
- 57. African tea
- 58. Backward arrow command
- 59. Greek H's
- 60. Not far distant in time, space or degree
- 61. Aquatic plant
- 62. Like most in attendance at the Oscars
- 65. Manhole cover
- 67. WSW opposite
- 68. One in a set



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~ ONGOING ~

Recipient of a Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award, "**Clybourne Park**" runs through Feb. 24 in the Quadracci Powerhouse at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, 108 E. Wells. Call 414-224-9490.

"**How the World Began**" by Catherine Trieschmann runs through Feb. 24 in the Stiemke Studio at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, 108 E. Wells. Call 414-224-9490.

Broadway Across America presents "**Sister Act**," based on the Whoopi Goldberg movie, through Feb. 24 at Milwaukee's Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. Call 414-273-2787.

Cardinal Stritch University, 6801 N. Yates, presents "**An Evening With Noel Coward**" through Feb. 23. Call 414-410-4171.

The Boulevard Theatre, 2252 S. Kinnickinnic, presents the Milwaukee premiere of the comedy "**The Last Romance**" by Joe DiPietro ("Memphis") through March 3. Call 414-744-5747 or visit www.boulevardtheatre.com.

Win Wells' "**Gertrude Stein and a Companion**" and Brian Hill's musical "**The Story of My Life**" run in repertory on the Evjue Stage at the Bartell Theatre, 113 E. Mifflin in Madison, through March 9. Visit stageq.com or call 608-661-9696, ext 3.

FEB. 21, THURSDAY

Wu Tsang's "**Wildness**" is a documentary about a group of young artists who stage a weekly performance/dance party at the Silver Platter, "a historic Los Angeles bar/haven for Latin/LGBT immigrant communities." The doc screens at 7 p.m. in the UWM Union Theatre, UWM Student Union, 2nd level, 2200 E. Kenwood Blvd. Call 414-229-4070.

Milwaukee Chamber Theatre presents "**Underneath the Lintel**" by Glen Berger through March 17 at Broadway Theatre Center, 158 N. Broadway. Call 414-291-7800.

KODO Drummers of Japan hit the skins at 7 p.m. at the Pabst, 144 E. Wells. Call 414-286-3663.

MKE Unplugged, in the Helene Zelazo Center of the Performing Arts, 2419 E. Kenwood Blvd., presents the **Sugar Stems** with opening act **Grasping at Straws** (featuring UWM alum Christine Barclay) at 8 p.m. Call 414-229-4308.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 608 New York Ave. in Sheboygan, presents **Philadanco**, dance by African-American choreographers, at 7:30 p.m. Call 920-458-6144.

Marquette University Department of Performing Arts presents Maureen Kilmer's new adaptation of "**A Doll's House**" by Henrik Ibsen through March 3 in the Evan P. and Marion Helfaer Theatre on the Marquette campus, 525 N. 13th. Call 414-288-7504.



Craig Ferguson

FEB. 22, FRIDAY

The Pabst, 144 E. Wells, welcomes comedian and late-night TV host **Craig Ferguson**, at 6 p.m. Call 414-286-3663.

Milwaukee-based singer/songwriter **Pat McCurdy** performs at 7:30 p.m. tonight and tomorrow night at the Cedarburg Cultural Center, W62 N546 Washington Ave. in Cedarburg. Call 262-375-3676.

"**Pinkalicious The Musical**," based on Victoria and Elizabeth Kann's book of the same name, runs through March 24 in the Todd Wehr Theater at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water. Call 414-273-2787.



Windfall Theatre presents the world premiere of Milwaukee playwright Howard Goldstein's "**A Time to Live**" through March 9 at Village Church Arts, 130 E. Juneau. Call 414-332-3963.



FEB. 23, SATURDAY

The Madison Symphony Orchestra presents a recital by German organist **Felix Hell** and Wisconsin native and trumpeter **Andrew Balio** performing a program including works by Johann Sebastian Bach at 7:30 p.m. in Overture Hall at Overture Center for the Arts, 201 State in Madison. Call 608-258-4141 or visit madisonsymphony.org.

Contemporary music ensemble Present Music presents "In the Chamber," including "Motion" by out composer **Nico Muhly**, at 7:30 p.m. at The Hamilton, 823 E. Hamilton. For tickets, call 414-271-0711, ext. 5.

Legendary Minneapolis indie-rockers **Soul Asylum** play the Majestic, 115 King in Madison, at 9 p.m. Call 608-251-2582.

FEB. 24, SUNDAY

Queer twin sister singer/songwriters **Tegan and Sara** come to Madison in support of their "Heartthrob" disc at 7 p.m. at the Orpheum Theatre, 216 State. Call 608-255-6005.

Overture Center for the Arts, 201 State in Madison, welcomes **Golden Dragon Acrobats: Cirque Ziva** at 3 p.m. Call 608-258-4141.

FEB. 26, TUESDAY

The musical "**The Addams Family**," based on the characters created by legendary cartoonist Charles Addams, runs through March 3 at Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, 400 W. College in Appleton. Call 920-730-3760.

FEB. 27, WEDNESDAY

Bosnian Rainbow, featuring Teri Gender Bender, performs at 8:30 p.m. at the Majestic, 115 King in Madison. Call 608-251-2582.

Milwaukee Chamber Theatre presents a "**ViewPoints Lecture**" by Joel Berkowitz, director of the Sam & Helen Stahl Center for Judaic Studies at UWM, discussing Yiddish theatre and myths in relation to the current production, Glen Barger's "Underneath the Lintel," at 6:30 p.m. at the Broadway Theatre Center, 158 N. Broadway. Call 414-291-7800.

MARCH 1, FRIDAY

Catering to the after-work lesbian crowd who "still love to party but don't want to wait until 10 to get started," Hot Water Night Club, 818 S. Water, hosts **Ladies Night Out**, with a piano bar at 6 p.m., followed by dance music from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Call 414-383-7593.

In Tandem Theatre presents the Milwaukee-set "**Beast on the Moon**" by Wisconsin playwright Richard Kalinoski, through March 24 at Tenth Street Theatre, 628 N. 10th. Call 414-271-1371 or visit intandemtheatre.org.

Juan Siddi Flamenco Theatre Company dances into the Overture Center for the Arts, 201 State in Madison, at 8 p.m. Call 608-258-4141.

Richard Maltby, William Meade, Steven Bishop and Jeff Lisenby's "**Ring of Fire: The Songs of Johnny Cash**" runs through May 5 in the Stackner Cabaret at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, 108 E. Wells. Call 414-224-9490.

Ken Ludwig's comedy "**Be My Baby**," runs through March 17 at The Racine Theatre Guild, 2519 Northwestern (Highway 38) in Racine. Call 262-633-4218.



Cesar Milan

MARCH 2, SATURDAY

Sit and stay when Cesar Millan, aka **The Dog Whisperer**, stops by The Riverside, 116 W. Wisconsin, at 6 p.m. Call 414-286-3663.

Overture Center for the Arts, 201 State in Madison, presents "**Live & Let Die: A Tribute to Paul McCartney**" with Wisconsin Pops at 7 p.m. Call 608-258-4141.

Comedian **John Mulaney** brings the funny to Turner Hall Ballroom, 103 N. Fourth, at 7 p.m. Call 414-286-3663.

MARCH 3, SUNDAY

The a cappella group **Pentatonix**, featuring out member Mitch Grassi, performs at 7 p.m. at the Pabst, 144 E. Wells. Call 414-286-3663.

MARCH 6, WEDNESDAY

The Northern Lights Theater at Potawatomi Bingo Casino, 1721 W. Canal, presents **One Night of Queen** performed by Gary Mullen and the Works at 8 p.m. Call 414-847-7922.

Movie Time at the Charles Allis Art Museum, 1801 N. Prospect, presents a screening of the classic 1938 film "**Alexander's Ragtime Band**," starring Tyrone Power, Alice Faye, Don Ameche, Ethel Merman and Jack Haley, at 7:30 p.m. Call 414-278-8295.

MARCH 7, THURSDAY

Queer twin sister singer/songwriters **Tegan and Sara** come to Milwaukee at 7 p.m. at the Pabst, 144 E. Wells. Call 414-286-3663.

Barrymore Theatre, 2090 Atwood in Madison, welcomes comedian and actor **Bill Burr** at 8 p.m. Call 608-241-2345.

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