



DSQUARED2

UNDERWEAR

SHOP AT [DSQUARED2.COM](https://www.dsquared2.com)

attitude

THE BEST-SELLING GAY MAGAZINE

April 2020

the
style
issue

**UNSUNG
HERO**

Life as an HIV
nurse during
the Aids crisis



Cub Sport
Cybil War
Sasha Velour
Dorian Electra
And Then
We Danced



CONNOR JESSUP

THE LOCKE & KEY STAR ON HOW
FINDING LOVE HELPED HIM COME OUT

DESIGNED TO STEAL ATTENTION.



JAGUAR E-PACE

With a sculpted bonnet, muscular rear haunches, sweeping roof line, J-blade lights and a bold honeycomb mesh grille, our compact SUV is designed to be aesthetically teasing.

Book a test drive at your local Retailer.

Official WLTP Fuel Consumption for the E-PACE range in mpg (l/100km): Combined 26.2-42.7 (10.8 - 6.6), in accordance with EU legislation. For comparison purposes only. Real world figures may differ. CO₂ and load and accessories.



NEDCeq CO₂ Emissions 203-143 g/km. The figures provided are as a result of official manufacturer's tests fuel economy figures may vary according to factors such as driving styles, environmental conditions,





The image shows the interior of a classic car. A white steering wheel with a three-spoke design is prominent in the upper left. The dashboard is black with a speedometer and a tachometer. A person's hand is visible on the left, resting on the gear shift. The gear shift is black with a silver knob. The center console has two USB ports. The text "RUFSKIN" is overlaid in large white letters, with "california" in smaller white letters below it.

RUFSKIN[®]

california



KU-BAR

Proudly Independent
www.ku-bar.co.uk



attitude This issue

April 2020



p32

Agenda

- 11 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S LETTER**
- 12 ATTITUDE LOVES**
What we're thirsty for this month
- 22 THE BIG ISSUE**
LGBTQ fostering
- 24 THE RULES**
For reinventing your look
- 26 COLUMNIST – ANTHONY GILET**
Dating game
- 28 BIG IN A WIG**
Baby Lame

Features

- 32 CONNOR JESSUP**
New doors opened for the Locke & Key actor when he fell in love
- 44 AND THEN WE DANCED**
Georgia's first explicitly gay film has all the right moves
- 48 JONATHAN DEL ARCO**
Everybody's favourite Borg beams back on to TV in Star Trek: Picard
- 50 RICKY GELLISSSEN**
Reflects on what life was like as an HIV nurse during the Aids epidemic
- 54 DORIAN ELECTRA**
We're totally amped up about the gender-fluid pop star
- 56 CUB SPORT**
The Aussie alt-pop band on mixing business with pleasure
- 60 KADIFF KIRWAN**
Investigates as a gay detective in new crime drama The Stranger
- 62 BUSINESS PROFILE**
PRM Agency's John Bruce and Paulo Ribeiro
- 146 FAVOURITE THINGS**
Interior designer Luke Edward Hall

p56



p54



p60



p96

Travel

- 67 JUST THE TICKET**
The latest travel tips and news
- 68 BILBAO**
We, ahem, Basque in the glory of northern Spain
- 76 THREE OF THE BEST**
Distillery hotels
- 78 MALLORCA**
There is a sting in the tale during a trip to the capital city of Palma...
- 80 HOT HOTEL**
Atzaró, Ibiza

Active

- 84 CYBIL WAR**
The drag queen and SAS: Who Dares Wins star is ready for battle
- 90 REAL BODIES**
Burlesque performer Rudy Jeevanjee is such a tease
- 92 A PROBLEM SHARED**
- 93 MATT LISTER**
Fitness in focus

Social

- 96 LIFE LESSONS**
Drag Race winner Sasha Velour
- 98 WORD ON THE STREET**
- 101 REVIEWS**
Books by Uli Lenart, films by Guy Lodge, music by James Barr
- 103 HOMO FOMO**
Festivals, theatre, events and more
- 104 BFI FLARE**
Our guide to London's annual LGBTQ+ film festival

Style

- 110 BAD BOY**
- 112 CRUSH**
Hot to trot
- 114 MIX UP**
Dress up, dress down
- 124 DSQUARED2**
Ready to pop
- 127 GROOMING**
Hair stylist Andrew Fitzsimons
- 128 HOT SUMMER NIGHTS**
Turn up the heat

Meet the team

WHAT WAS YOUR CRINGE-TEST LOOK BACK IN THE DAY?

Nick Byam,

junior fashion editor

I used to be obsessed with cheap and tacky plastic/costume jewellery. I would pile it up around my neck and wrists and think I looked like a superstar! On holiday, the look went into overdrive with skimpy vests and underwear as shorts and the biggest curb plastic chain in white – awful!



Taylor Miller, photographer

Back in 2011, when I was studying in London, I went through a necklace phase, an over-sized scarf phase, and – worst of all – a bow-tie phase. Luckily, I have Facebook to remind me every couple of weeks about the unfortunate decisions I made in the past

Conor Clinch, photographer

My hairstyle choices were the worst. I once had blond highlights that went terribly wrong and I was nicknamed “Crunchie” at school because it looked like the inside of a Crunchie bar. Not a good look



#BEKIND

Remember: if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all

FACE MASKS

This year's must-have accessory. We're waiting for the Louis Vuitton range before we partake...

NAILED IT!

It's not just our cover star rockin' the painted nails: Harry Styles and Bad Bunny are putting the “man” in “manicure”, too

THE LIDL MIDDLE AISLE

Pop in for some milk, leave with a Lazy Susan, 30-piece food processor and a fleece slanket



PRINT | ONLINE | TABLET | MOBILE

Editor in chief

Cliff Joannou
cliff.joannou@attitude.co.uk

Assistant editor

Tim Heap
tim.heap@attitude.co.uk

Features editor

Tom Stichbury
thomas.stichbury@attitude.co.uk

Chief sub editor

Hugh Sohn
hugh.sohn@attitude.co.uk

Travel editor/staff photographer

Markus Bidaux
markus.bidaux@attitude.co.uk

Sports editor

Mark McAdam
mark.mcadam@attitude.co.uk

Editor at large

Matthew Todd
matthew.todd@attitude.co.uk

Art director

Gary Simons
gary.simons@attitude.co.uk

Junior Designer

Sacha Dance
sacha.dance@attitude.co.uk

Fashion and grooming director

Joseph Kocharian
joseph.kocharian@attitude.co.uk

Junior fashion editor

Nick Byam
nick.byam@attitude.co.uk

Web editor

Will Stroude
will.stroude@attitude.co.uk

Web editor

Steve Brown
steve.brown@attitude.co.uk

Head of digital production

Jamie Wareham
jamie.wareham@attitude.co.uk

Head of partnerships

Mike Buckley
mike.buckley@attitude.co.uk

Commercial manager

Andy Goddard
andy.goddard@attitude.co.uk

020 3598 6741

Account manager

Joanna Hill
joanna.hill@attitude.co.uk

01342 872041

Account manager

Sean Lineker
sean.lineker@attitude.co.uk

020 3598 6743

Sales executive

Tom Doyle
tom.doyle@attitude.co.uk

01342 872 043

Managing director

Darren Styles OBE

Commercial director

Craig Lewis

Operations director

Nigel Russell

Events manager

Lesley Harris

Subscriptions Enquiries

attitude@warnersgroup.co.uk

01778 392005

Warners Subscription Department

Freepost, PE211, Bourne,

Lincolnshire PE10 9BR

RNIB

See differently

Attitude is now available through the RNIB Newsagent service, which delivers the latest news, magazines and stories in a range of formats to people with sight loss. To subscribe to RNIB Newsagent, call the helpline on 0303 123 9999, or email them at: helpline@rnib.org.uk. rnib.org.uk

Copyright © Stream Publishing Ltd 2020 all rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced in whole or in part without the written permission of the publishers. Unsolicited contributions must be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope if they are to be returned. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts and photographs or for material lost or damaged in the post. Letters submitted to Attitude or its editors are assumed to be intended for publication in whole or in part. The mention or appearance or likeness of any person or organisation in articles or advertising in this publication is not to be taken as any indication of sexual, social or political orientation of such persons or organisations. Newstrade distribution by Intermedia Brand Marketing Ltd, Unit 6, The Enterprise Centre, Kelvin Lane, Manor Royal, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 9PE. Tel: 01293 312001. Published by Stream Publishing Ltd. Printed by Wyndeham Bicester

stream

Attitude, The Cowshed, Ladycross Farm,
Hollow Lane, Dormansland,
Surrey RH7 6PB
attitude@attitude.co.uk

ppa The Professional
Publishers Association
Member

attitude.co.uk | @attitude.co.uk | @attitudemag | @attitudemag



 **FARAH®**  Crafting
Modern Menswear
for a Century

London

Brighton

Leeds

www.farah.co.uk



The future? it's
right *behind* you

THE WASHLET RW BY **TOTO**

- The shower toilet that is perfection in both function and design -



Editor in Chief's Letter

In January, I received the news that a friend who I used to hang out with some years ago had taken an overdose and ended their life. We'd lost touch over the years, but they struggled for some time with their gender identity. Having started to transition late in life, I understand they faced a barrage of abuse on social media, which ultimately wore them down to the point at which they could only see suicide as a way out.

This isn't the first LGBTQ person I know to have ended their life. I don't like to count how many others I know who have struggled to escape issues that plagued them. With some, the torment they endured was evident, and try as friends and family might to help, they still suffered.

One such young gay man was having difficulty coming to terms with his identity and ended his life rather than reveal his sexuality to his religious family. He was just 20 years old.

Not every story ends so terribly. I have seen people pulled back from the edge — be it with the support of friends, family or professional help — having managed to find the strength in themselves to get through another day. Then the next day. And so on.

The news of Caroline Flack's death made me reflect on these situations, to think about the strong people I have met who have battled seemingly insurmountable feelings to get through the haze that can spark self-harming, and how lucky they were to have found the strength to get beyond those menacing dark thoughts that can push others too far.

It was another reminder of how showing a little kindness, and taking a moment to bite your tongue before you judge, can be the difference between life and death.

The same weekend as Caroline's news hit, Wendy Williams took it upon herself to attack gay men for wearing skirts and heels, to a wave of applause from her audience. I won't get into how ignorant her argument was. The next day, she followed this with a pathetic, disingenuous, half-arsed apology that entirely missed its mark. It all came across as a calculated move to generate publicity, hastily deflected by a substandard retraction.

The same day, my friend posted a statement about how we all need to be more kind in our online language. Somehow, one of our mutual Facebook "friends" then (somehow) turned the conversation in the post to Sam Smith's choice of outfit on *The Graham Norton Show*, and the language became quite vile, very quickly. And all because of a glittery shirt. You couldn't make it up.

My instinct was to react, but what good would that do, other than feeding another heinous person's ego who was clearly looking for a reaction? I simply unfollowed, then blocked them.

As I write this column, 18-year-old singer Billie Eilish told Radio 1 she could no longer read her social media messages because of the amount of hate directed at her. We have become surrounded by a rolling snowball of hate that continues to gather pace. There is increasingly no accountability for the hurtful things people feel they have a right to share.

The old adage "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," no longer rings true. Words grind us down, wear at us and tear away at a person's sense of self. To quote a meme from Instagram: "Mainstream media and social media have made too many people comfortable with disrespecting other human beings, and not being punched in the mouth for it."

Now, I'm in no way advocating violence, but what kind of reaction would a person receive if they said to their victim's face the kind of things that they feel at liberty to type on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram? Not everyone has the strength to stand tall in the face of the kind of hate and vitriol that has become second nature online.

Be kind, people. And if you can't be kind, then keep your mouth shut.

@Cliffjoannou

**"The language
quickly became
vile — all over a
glittery shirt"**

On the cover



Photography **Taylor Miller**
Fashion **Joseph Kocharian**
Tee, by **M&S Collection**, jeans,
by **Levi's**
Location **The Standard**,
East Village, New York



Photography **Taylor Miller**
Fashion **Joseph Kocharian**
Top, by **Sunspel**
Location **The Standard**,
East Village, New York



JAGUAR F-TYPE

The Jaguar F-Type, as a coupé or convertible, has long been considered an object of beauty. It has perfect proportions – long nose, short tail – and a silhouette that echoes the revered E-Type of the 1960s. But a nip and tuck never hurt anyone, and the just-landed facelift has added modernity. In an F-Type R guise, it offers 575bhp, a 3.5-second 0-60mph sprint time and 186mph capability. Prices: from £54,060.

jaguar.co.uk





HAPPYNESS

After a three-year hiatus, the London band are back (yay!) to spread more, erm, Happyness. Duo Jonny Allan and Ash Kenazi have been dealing with their own personal dramas behind the scenes: Ash came out then embraced the world of drag. Now the pair get to the root of their life changes on Nineties-inspired single *Vegetable*. It's about more than the importance of eating your five-a-day... They have also booked their biggest gig to date, at London's Scala in November.

[@happynessmusicβ](#)



SMALL TRANSPARENT SPEAKER

Finally, a speaker that's as see-through as you are. Transparent Sound's downsized edition to the original Transparent Speaker is a chic and sleek aluminium-and-glass two-for-one, combining objet d'art aesthetics with the tech needed to fill a room with crisp sound. With built-in Bluetooth pairing capability, it's compatible with external add-ons for Alexa and Sonos and can be upgraded as new technologies emerge.

Price: £450.

transparentspeaker.com



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal,
providing you various content:
brand new books, trending movies,
fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

One site



AVXLIVE ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open <https://avxlive.icu>



**CHARLIE BY MATTHEW
ZINK MUSTANG
SERIES**

With US rapper Lil Nas X leading the round up, the Wild West is enjoying a resurgence (yee-haw). And keeping pace, Charlie by Matthew Zink have donned their chaps and refreshed the already-popular Mustang series. There's a selection of ribbed and smooth briefs (classic and bikini), thongs and jockstraps, complete with a cream logo waistband and gold label. Ride 'em cowboy!

charliebymz.com



TOM FORD BEAU DE JOUR

Tom Ford has conquered fashion, film and beauty. And his nose for success continues with new fragrance Beau de Jour. Fresh and cool, it contains notes of lavender, rosemary, green geranium, and a hint of mint, as well as oakmoss and a punch of basil, patchouli and amber. The great smell is matched with a great look – the scent's campaign stars Taylor Swift's beau Joe Alwyn. Price: £83/100ml.

tomford.co.uk





WILHELMINA ROSS

ANDY WARHOL

Marilyn Monroe, Coca-Cola bottles and Campbell's soup tins. Three things that spring to mind when you mention Andy Warhol. But a new exhibition shines a light on some of his lesser-known works. Among those on display at London's Tate Modern, between 12 March and 6 September, is 1975's *Ladies and Gentlemen*, a series of portraits reflecting the experiences of New York's African-American and Latinx drag queens and transgender women. The collection was created shortly after the death of Warhol's trans muse, Candy Darling.

tate.org.uk



SANTA CATALINA, A ROYAL HIDEAWAY HOTEL

Attitude's been checking out Gran Canaria's capital Las Palmas recently, with a stay at the reopened Santa Catalina, A Royal Hideaway Hotel. It's the Canary Island's oldest hotel – previous guests include Winston Churchill and Prince Charles – and a £21.4m investment has seen it restored to elegant grandeur with 204 guest rooms, a wellness centre and a stunning roof-top infinity pool with city and sea views. Rooms start at €136 (£114) per night.

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





F45 NOHO

If you're still sticking to your 2020 fitness resolutions (or you want to get back on track), global fitness empire F45 has introduced three classes to get the blood pumping and calories burning. Alongside weights-focused The Piston and cardio-heavy Empire, our favourite is hybrid workout Noho, which pushes the usual class time from 45 minutes to 60. Work your way three times around 18 different stations, offering a mix of resistance, body-weight, functional, agility and plyometric movements. Then feel the burn.

f45training.co.uk





(UN)BIAS FROM DEBENHAMS

Debenhams are all about clean cut lines and versatility with their (Un)Bias collection. The pieces can either be worn alone or layered up for a polished together look. Classic hues and chic simple pieces have been mixed with stripes and subtle prints. Brilliant... but then we're biased.

debenhams.com

attitude I VES more...



Cedar Sneaker by Ugg
Trainers as comfy as Ugg boots? No, we haven't lost our marbles. Take our word for it
ugg.com



Whitney Houston Vinyl
Mark the 35th anniversary of the superstar's classic album with this special-edition vinyl
whitneyhouston.com



Libratone TRACK Air
Set sound free with these small but powerful wireless noise-cancelling earbuds
libratone.com



London Sock Company
Give your sock drawer a dramatic upgrade with this palette of bold colours
londonsockcompany.com



Jockey Roadtrip Y-Front Short Trunk
A colourful offering from the masters of men's underwear
jockey.co.uk



Under Armour Running Shoe
Add these to your armoury to make running just a bit easier
ua.com



Lionel Zip Top by Filippa K
Simple basics given a modern twist from a Scandi favourite
filippa-k.com



649 Sunglasses by APC
Sunglasses label plus French label equals a cool, chic collaboration
persol.com



Silk Dressing Gown by New & Lingwood
Feel like a king with this peacock print silk robe
newandlingwood.com



Calvin Klein CK Everyone
A fresh, uplifting unisex fragrance with top notes of orange oil
notino.co.uk



KEF LSX Wireless Music Speakers
A compact sound system designed to fit almost anywhere
kef.com



Dr. PawPaw Scrub and Nourish
Pucker up in no time with this two-in-one lip-rescue kit
drpawpaw.com

Families don't have to be biological

Martin Leitch, head of fostering operations at Five Rivers Child Care, says it's vital to have LGBTQ people as foster parents

There's no doubt that the concept of "family" is becoming more diverse. We've made huge strides as a society in recent decades to understand that the heteronormative male-female biological family idea of yesteryear is not the only representation of family that should be acknowledged.

Families today come in all shapes, sizes, colours and forms.

Although more and more LGBTQ individuals and couples are becoming parents, the number of heterosexual foster carers continues to far exceed their LGBTQ counterparts. This needs to be remedied urgently.

The New Family Social network, the founders of LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week, estimates that if just one per cent of the LGBTQ community was to foster, there would be no children or young people waiting for a family to call their own.

We surveyed the public around misconceptions about who could foster and worryingly discovered that 60 per cent of people are unaware that those from the LGBTQ community are allowed to foster.

This is a misconception we want to clear up, particularly with more than 78,000 children and young people

across the UK in the care system and in need of a loving home. A home that so many prospective LGBTQ carers and parents could provide.

This idea that those from the LGBTQ community, who have love and support to offer, are unable to foster is denying the chance for a queer individual or couple to become a mum or dad, and equally denies a child or young person the chance of finding a loving and safe home.

One's gender, sexuality, religion or ethnicity does not hinder anyone from fostering. At Five Rivers Child Care, our only requirements are that carers must be over the age of 21 and have a private and furnished bedroom for each child, with some exceptions for siblings. This means that single people, co-habiting couples, same-sex couples and people living in rented accommodation can become foster carers. Of course, all prospective carers must pass a thorough assessment.

We believe it's especially important to have foster carers from all backgrounds, to reflect the diversity of those in the care system.

We currently have some amazing

LGBTQ carers who are enriching the lives of children and young people every day.

There are a number of fostering opportunities available, including short-term and respite care, long-term placements, which means a child or young person will usually stay with a carer until they reach the age of 18, and parent-and-child carers, when a young person moves in to foster care with their own child to help them look after the youngster themselves.

We are also looking for people who are able to care for sibling groups, helping to keep brothers and sisters together. Our goal is to not only dismantle this ideal of heteronormative families but also to celebrate all diverse and blended families and reinforce the idea that family doesn't equal biological.

After all, if someone has the capacity to love and care for someone in need, that's all that really matters. 

If you are interested in becoming a foster carer, call 0345 266 027 or visit five-rivers.org/fostering or email care.enquiries@five-rivers.org



"If just one per cent of the LGBTQ community was to foster, there would be no children or young people waiting for a family"

★★★★★
THE LONDON ECONOMIC

“A LUMINOUS TOUR DE FORCE”
INDIEWIRE

★★★★★
“A SENSUAL TALE OF IDENTITY AND DESIRE”
THE MIRROR

A FILM BY LEVAN AKIN

AND THEN WE DANCED

QUINZAINE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2019

GULDBAGGE AWARDS
4 BEST FILM BEST ACTOR
BEST SCRIPT BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY

IN CINEMAS MARCH 13
www.AndThenWeDanced.film



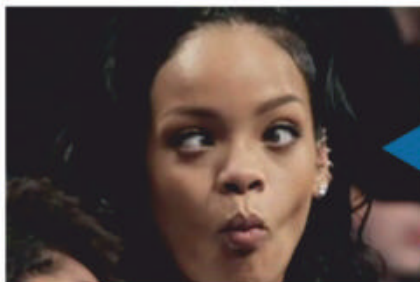
The Rules

...for reinventing your look

DON'T PRESUME that you can just remove your glasses and that's job done. That shit only happens in the movies, babes



SAY ALOUD the name of your style icon. Repeat until a concerned partner/roomie/pet pops their head round the door to find out why you keep muttering: "Rihanna"



HOWEVER, ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN words. Start strong with a bold, statement haircut that is guaranteed to get everybody talking



BUT DON'T REACH FOR THE PEROXIDE. Pay for therapy instead – you're clearly going through something if Jedward-style locks are your way forward



CLEAR OUT YOUR EXISTING WARDROBE. That includes your dead nan's cardie – no room for sentiment in fashion – and those god-forsaken espadrilles!



DO YOUR REINVENTION RESEARCH. Think more Christina wrestling in leather chaps, less Miley rubbing herself with a giant foam finger



IGNORE FRIENDS who say you've changed since your image overhaul. You can form a new clique – who cares if they are a bunch of bitches, they look great!



AVOID COSMETIC SURGERY. If there's one more thing the world can do without – along with environmental and political disaster – it's another pair of plumped-up lips



DON'T LISTEN TO RUPAUL. That whole, "If you can't love yourself..." schtick is so 2019; 2020 is all about self-loathing. If you can't love yourself, change yourself!



TOPGAY.COM

THE BEST GAY FASHION BRANDS ON ONE SITE



• **ES** •
collection

ADDICTED

FETISH

THANCUTE



**100% DISCREET
PACKAGING & BILLING**



**FREE SHIPPING
ON ALL ORDERS**

#INSTAMAN

@yohannbeaufils

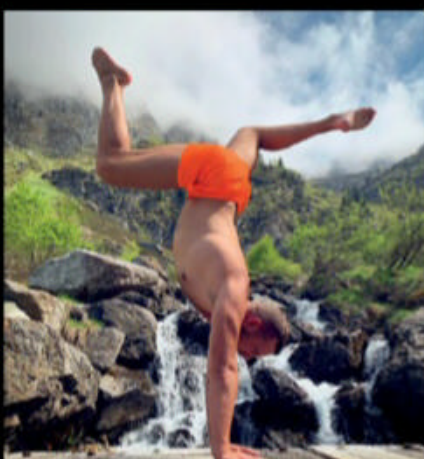
FRENCH SINGER **YOHANN BEAUFILS** IS HITTING ALL THE RIGHT NOTES. WOULD WE LIKE TO MAKE SWEET MUSIC WITH HIM? MAIS, OUI!



Don't look so confused, hun, it's just your reflection!



He scruffs up very nicely indeed 🤔



No "Om"-ing and aah-ing, Yohann is fit... nama-nasty

In my view



THIS ISSUE
ANTHONY GILET



AMROU AL-KADHI



MAX WALLIS



JONNY WOO

There's a reason I'm so picky

As I was thrashing through potential dates on Hinge, Steph exclaimed: "Gosh, you're so picky!" I'd become an expert skim-reader and could easily finger my way through a dozen boys in a couple minutes. But it's easy for her to think that when you've been riding the same dick since you were 19.

Times had changed, especially in the dating game. What she saw as picky was actually just an advanced screening process since the three previous dates I'd been on had turned out exactly the same — with me wishing I'd stayed indoors.

There was nothing particularly wrong with any of these men, they just weren't right. More specifically, they were, for lack of a better word, wet. And not because I looked so good they were dripping with pre-cum.

When you're a "picky dater", people like Stephanie see you as high maintenance, judgmental or shallow and while that may be true from her viewpoint, the irony is that we picky daters see people like Stephanie as basic bitches.

It's not uncommon for long-term relationships, rooted in your teens, to stunt your emotional growth, but in six year's time, when Grant fucks up in one way or another — possibly by putting his dick somewhere he shouldn't — she'll realise that dating so many men ain't shit, and that's why being picky is now necessary.

After a while, you realise that pickiness is an evolutionary

skill we've adapted to survive predators, something you fine-tune based on previous mistakes. For example, I wouldn't swipe left on someone who was a few inches shorter than my ideal, but they can fuck right off if they listen to Radio 4 or work at LBC.

That may sound superficial but a guy's interests are a pretty clear indication of

"A guy's interests are an indication of his personality"

his personality. It would obviously be less of a riddle if dating apps just asked more appropriate questions, such as: have you ever seen a therapist? How high is your

self-esteem? Is Gran Canaria your idea of fun? Are you into choking?

Instead, we're left to decipher eligibility through fashion choices and short, vague answers to irrelevant question, which is easier when you know the non-negotiable qualities you need from a man. It also prevents you from being so open-minded you settle: we'd all rather be in a happy mismatched relationship than one based mostly on looks that falls apart at the first hurdle like a three-legged pony.

I won't even entertain a relationship if I don't think there's longevity. This is 2020 and I don't need a man to waste my time, we have TikTok for that.

Ultimately, there has to be something about him that excites you, that separates him from other men. Mr Average who "seems nice" but doesn't have much banter probably isn't going to surprise you and sweep you off your feet.

Maybe I am a little picky, Steph. And I'm OK with that. 🤔



INVESTMENTS
MORTGAGES
PENSIONS
LIFE INSURANCE

WE'LL
COVER
IT

ATTITUDEFS.CO.UK
01342 850 432

attitude
FINANCIAL
SERVICES

Attitude Financial Services Limited is an appointed representative of Quilter Financial Services Limited and Quilter Mortgage Planning Limited, who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Guidance and/or advice offered is subject to the UK regulatory regime, and is therefore targeted at consumers based in the UK. Enterprise Investment schemes (EIS) and Venture Capital Trusts (VCT) invest in assets that are high risk and can be difficult to sell such as shares in unlisted companies. The value of the investment and the income from it can fall as well as rise and investors may not get back what they originally invested, even taking into account the tax benefits. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage. The value of pensions and investments and the income they produce can fall as well as rise. You may get back less than you invested. Tax planning is not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Tax treatment varies according to individual circumstances and is subject to change. Registered company name: Attitude Financial Services Limited. Registered as a Limited Company in England and Wales No 11695594. Registered Address: Woodlands House, Beeches Lane, Cowden, Kent TN8 7LA

big in a wig

Baby Lame

Sweet dreams are not made of this: “drag nightmare” Baby Lame is hairy, scary and guaranteed to keep you awake at night – especially if she’s getting down and dirty to *Agadoo*!

What were your rejected drag names?

It’s only ever been Baby Lame. The lack of consideration has been a thread throughout my career.

Describe yourself in three emojis.



Describe your drag style in five words.

Acquired taste. Borderline shy/wild.

Worst pick-up line someone has said to you?

“Do you need a stud in your life? Cause I got the STD and all I need is U”. Cute, right?

What’s the worst thing someone could say to you in bed?

“I’m good thanks.” It happens all the time.

How would (or does) your Grindr profile read?

Open all hours.

What is your biggest turn-on?

A pulse.

And turn-off?

No pulse — I’m a simple gal.

Where is the weirdest place you’ve had sex?

A dark room. I find most people prefer not to see my face.

What is your “sexy time” song?

Agadoo, by Black Lace. I like how instructional it is.

If you could be an inanimate object, what would you be?

Shia LaBeouf’s underwear. I can’t imagine he washes them that regularly — it would be a nice way for us to get up close and personal.



“I’d like to be Shia LaBeouf’s undies — that would be a good way to get up close and personal”

Who, or what, would you most like to be reincarnated as?

A cockroach. They can survive for a week without their heads!

What is your pet peeve?

When guinea pigs make those weird squeaking noises.

What would a film of your life be called, and who would star as you?

Baby Lame: Skid Marks. Julianne Moore, Jessie J or Letitia Dean.

What’s your life motto?

Worry... it might never happen.

What three items couldn’t you live without?

Black liquid eye-liner, white clown make-up and pepper spray.

Your house is on fire: who set it alight and what’s the one thing you’d save?

Drag Race UK’s Crystal. She has always been jealous of my beauty. I would save my little mannequin, Lucille — great for scaring young children.

Let’s play Cluedo. You’ve been murdered: who did it, where and with what?

Boris Johnson. In my damp studio flat, dead because I can’t afford health care after he’s sold the NHS to Trump.

You’re dead (sorry). What would your headstone say?

Oh, I thought her name was Lil’ Poundcake.

What does heaven look like?

A Britney Spears perfume ad.

And hell?

Look around UK peeps... we’re in it!

What is your biggest vice?

Dick.

What is your biggest fear?

Ed Sheeran. Or dying.

You’ve been abducted by aliens.

What’s your parting message to Earth?

“Good luck bitches, you’re gonna need it!”

If you could be a fly on the wall in someone’s home, whose would it be?

Mariah Carey’s. I think she’s a cross between Mommie Dearest and Waynetta Slob.

You’re known for your shock performances. When were you last sent into a state of shock?

I still haven’t recovered from *THAT* video of Dane Bowers putting his toe in Katie Price.

See *Whatever Happened to Baby Lame?* at London’s Pleasance Theatre on 24 March. @baby.lame

INVESTMENTS
MORTGAGES
PENSIONS
LIFE INSURANCE

STRAIGHT ADVICE

ATTITUDEFS.CO.UK
01342 850 432

attitude
FINANCIAL
SERVICES

Attitude Financial Services Limited is an appointed representative of Quilter Financial Services Limited and Quilter Mortgage Planning Limited, who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Guidance and/or advice offered is subject to the UK regulatory regime, and is therefore targeted at consumers based in the UK. Enterprise Investment schemes (EIS) and Venture Capital Trusts (VCT) invest in assets that are high risk and can be difficult to sell such as shares in unlisted companies. The value of the investment and the income from it can fall as well as rise and investors may not get back what they originally invested, even taking into account the tax benefits. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage. The value of pensions and investments and the income they produce can fall as well as rise. You may get back less than you invested. Tax planning is not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Tax treatment varies according to individual circumstances and is subject to change. Registered company name: Attitude Financial Services Limited. Registered as a Limited Company in England and Wales No 11695594. Registered Address: Woodlands House, Beeches Lane, Cowden, Kent TN8 7LA



3 ISSUES FOR £3

THEN ONLY £3 AN ISSUE

Saving more than 45%

CALL NOW

CALL 01778 392005 AND QUOTE ATT320

OR VISIT MYMAGAZINESUB.CO.UK/ATTITUDE/PROMO/BESTEVER



PRINT

Subscribe to *Attitude* — Europe's biggest and best-selling gay lifestyle magazine — by direct debit on trial today and get the next three issues delivered to your door for just £3! That's just £1 an issue instead of the regular cover price of £5.50, so saving yourself a tidy £13.50.

Better still, when the trial period comes to an end, extend your subscription automatically every six months for just £3 an issue — saving £15 each time: a discount of more than 45 per cent!

Every issue is delivered to your door, in a discreet envelope, on the day it appears in shops.



OUR BEST SUBSCRIPTION OFFER EVER

DIGITAL

13 issues for just
£19.99
Save almost 70%

The award-winning digital version of *Attitude* is the only mobile-friendly gay magazine of its kind, available to download and view anywhere in the world on your mobile, tablet or online.

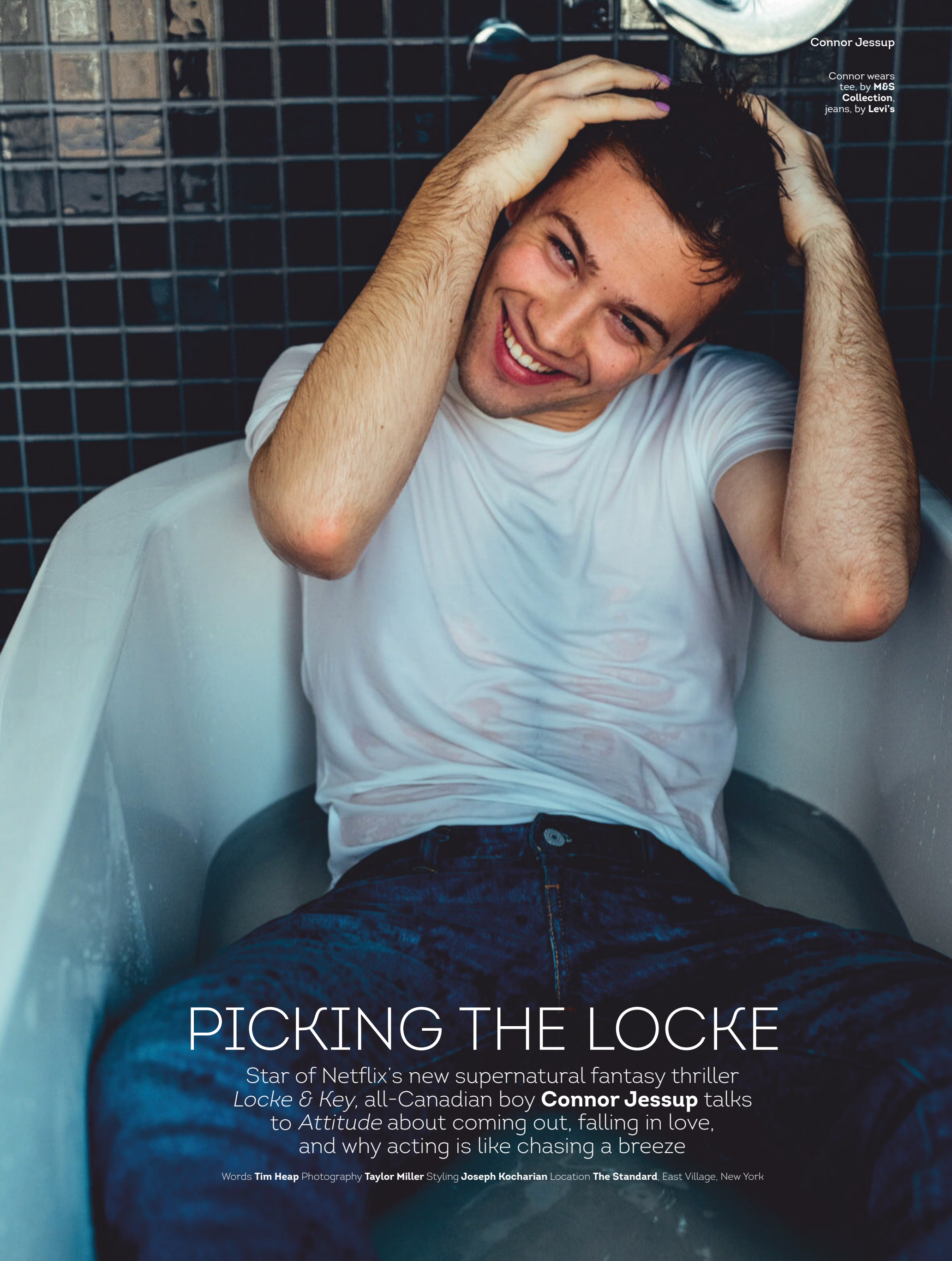
Subscribe today! Enjoy a one-year, 13-issue subscription for only £19.99 and save almost 70 per cent on the £4.99 single-issue price (the equivalent of £1.54 an issue). This is our BIGGEST saving as part of our BEST EVER promotion and is available for a limited period only. You know you want to...

POCKETMAGS.COM/OFFER/BESTEVEVER
OR VIA THE ATTITUDE APP



*BOTH OFFERS END 31 AUGUST 2020





Connor Jessup

Connor wears
tee, by **M&S**
Collection,
jeans, by **Levi's**

PICKING THE LOCKE

Star of Netflix's new supernatural fantasy thriller *Locke & Key*, all-Canadian boy **Connor Jessup** talks to *Attitude* about coming out, falling in love, and why acting is like chasing a breeze

Words **Tim Heap** Photography **Taylor Miller** Styling **Joseph Kocharian** Location **The Standard**, East Village, New York

Connor wears knitwear
and trousers, both by
Dior, trainers, by **Lacoste**,
socks, by **Sockshop**



fter almost a decade in the works, Netflix premiered comic-book adaptation series *Locke & Key* in February, hoping that its horror-tinged teen fantasy vibe will be a hit with fans of the original material and new audiences. Its bumpy gestation period included Fox and Hulu as potential homes, and big names such as Steven Spielberg and Andy Muschietti as producer and director.

The final version has been headed up by show runners Carlton Cuse (*Lost*, *Bates Motel*) and Meredith Averill (*The Haunting of Hill House*) and leans into the story's more fantastical elements over the horror and gore of Joe Hill's original comics.

For those not up to speed with the plot, *Locke & Key* centres around the Locke family: recently widowed Nina and her three children Tyler, Kinsey and Bode. After witnessing the brutal, unexplained murder of their father, the family moves from Seattle to his ancestral home, Keyhouse, in Massachusetts, where the discovery of several keys with different magical powers results in a showdown with a malevolent entity seeking to use them.

Connor Jessup, 25, brings a nuanced performance to the role of eldest child Tyler, who is grappling with the effects of his new-found responsibility as the man of the house, the guilt he feels over his father's death, as well all those normal pesky teenage problems.

The Canadian-born actor, who splits his time between his home in Toronto and LA, hasn't actually watched much of the show

"I've been acting for a while now and I've come to learn that it tends to be healthier for me not to watch — it complicates my feelings towards a project; it's better for me to just have my memories of an experience. Part of that is being an actor, and part of that is me.

"Maybe in 10 years I'll feel differently," he adds.

Having been in the business since he was about 11, Connor has had notable roles in the Spielberg-executive produced post-apocalyptic series *Falling Skies* and anthology drama series *American Crime*. He's also played gay characters, while distancing himself from questions about his own sexuality that arose in interviews until making the decision last summer to come out publicly via an Instagram post.

Speaking of the realisation of his sexuality, he wrote: "I folded it and slipped it under the rest of my emotional clutter," before going on to admit that with his background, "acceptance was never a question. But still, suspended in all this privilege, I balked."

Now, happily stepping out of the closet, with his boyfriend— *13 Reasons Why* star Miles Heizer — and into the world of Netflix, Connor speaks candidly to us about how being in love has changed his life. >

Were you familiar with the *Locke & Key* comics before you came to be involved in the show?

I'd heard about, but never read, them. My introduction was through the show, the first few scripts that were sent to me. After I read those, and before we started to shoot, I went back and read all the comics, but my experience was very much coloured by knowing that I was going to be in the show. Part of the interesting thing about the series is that the tone of it — and the plot, the way that the narrative unfolds — is quite different from the comics. Partly that's to keep people who are familiar with the comics on their toes, but also to open up this world, that show runners Carlton [Cuse] and Meredith [Averill] love, to a wider audience. The hope is that even if you aren't familiar with the comics, you can enjoy it.

What did you make of Tyler initially, from the scripts? Did your take on him change much during filming?

It always changes as you go. I'm drawn to characters — and most of those I've played reflect this — who deal with whatever they're going through, whatever pain they have, whatever conflict they're caught up in, internally. I always find it interesting when there's something happening under the surface that you can't quite see, when there's a storm happening in the centre of someone that isn't getting out. I find that compressed turmoil fascinating. There's a certain type of it that is specific to young men; this masculine thing about feeling so much but not having the tools or the language to express it or even know exactly what it is. It all just stays inside, and Tyler, in the comics and in our show,

is [like] that. The genesis of this story is that these kids witnessed the brutal death of their father, and they all carry that trauma in different ways. Before that, Tyler was comfortable, confident and in control, but afterwards everything stops working: his relationships with his siblings have soured, he feels awkward and uncomfortable. He feels so much that he didn't feel before, and he doesn't know how to deal with it. That's always interesting, when you have characters who feel a lot and don't know how to deal with it. For some reason, I always find that a little more intriguing than characters who are emotionally articulate.

Do you think that attraction to characters who have a “storm in the centre” comes from feeling that way yourself, as a closeted teenager?

Yeah, for sure. I guess it's easy to say that everyone feels that way because the truth

is everyone does feel that way. Of course, as a teenager everyone feels as if they have a whole universe inside them and if only they could be properly seen or understood... it's a universal thing, but it's also specific because everyone has their unique version of it. And mine was coloured by a lot of different things. One of them was being a gay kid and another was being a child actor who never had friends my own age. There were a lot of factors in my personal teenage storm. Thankfully, none of them were the violent death of my father, so it was not as intense as what these kids are going through. But I feel that that's one of the reasons why these sorts of fables have such a consistent, universal appeal — they are stories about growing up. Any great fantasy is a story about growing up and growing up with trauma. Hopefully, if [*Locke & Key*] works on any level, it works on that one.

How do you relate to Tyler? Is there any trait of his that you admire?

When you spend so long filming a TV show, inevitably the lines between you and the character you're playing start to blur, and the question of who is this character, what are his traits and qualities, fades away and it almost stops being something you think about. I didn't have Tyler's confidence. I was an awkward and lonely teenager. Tyler is on the hockey team, he had a lot of friends, he never felt out of place at a party or in a crowd. Even after everything that's happened, Tyler deals with it by disappearing into whatever social setting he's in. That was not me at all, and those are all qualities that, when I was 17, I loathed and now I >

“I DON'T HAVE TYLER'S CONFIDENCE. I WAS AN AWKWARD AND LONELY TEENAGER”



Connor wears shirt, by
Maison Kitsune, top, by
120% Lino at Matches
Fashion, trousers, by
Rubinacci at MR PORTER



Connor wears
top, by **Reiss**

admire because they show versatility. He shows empathy and sensitivity. It's also interesting when we were shooting the show, I was 24 while Tyler is 17, and it was like seeing a ghost or going back in time because on the one hand it's not that long ago, but on the other, those [seven] years are pretty big ones. It feels as if there's an ocean of time between now and then. I enjoyed this character because there's a lot of overlap between me and him, but in many ways he's so different.

Presumably, as a child actor, you were sort of dipping in and out of school. Was that difficult to navigate?

Yeah. I started acting when I was 11 but at about 13 began working more or less consistently on things that took me out of town for long periods of time. For most of high school, I was away from September until March or April, then I'd finish the [school] year. So, it was a bit transient, I didn't really know anyone at school and I don't have any lasting friendships from those years. Everyone I know now from when I was a teenager are people I met working. That shapes you in different ways. I feel grateful to have had good experiences, I never had nightmarish child-actor stories — I never felt unsafe or uncomfortable or threatened, I never felt exploited, so I was lucky that way. But there is something that happens to you, I think, when you're 15 and you spend all your time around adults in a professional setting, who know what they're doing and know what their life is. When you're 16 or 17, it's probably healthier to spend time



around people like you, who have no idea of those things because you also have no idea. The permission to be lost and confused is really healthy and probably essential, and I didn't feel that as much. I felt more pressure to decide who I was and what I wanted, immediately. I'm sure there were a lot of other effects, and I don't know

“THE PERMISSION TO BE CONFUSED IS REALLY HEALTHY AND PROBABLY ESSENTIAL”

what kind of person I would be, of course, if I had not grown up the way that I did. I'm sure I would be different in ways that would surprise me.

Is that something you think about a lot?

I don't know. Like all of us, things happen, our life follows a certain course, then we can try to speculate about what it would have been otherwise. It's probably healthy when you're in your late teens or early twenties to feel confused, to not know how you want to spend your time or what you love, because when you don't know, you try things and experiment, and over time — at least, this is the romantic version I have in my head — you slowly figure out who you want to be and how you want to spend your time. I have kind of been doing the same thing since I was 15, spending my time in very similar ways. The ambitions I had then are, in kind of a sad way, similar to the ones I have now. I don't know if that's just me or if that's a direct result of growing up the way I did. [Maybe] it's a combination. I'm lucky, I have so much love in my life. I have friends who I really care about, I have work that I get excited about, I live close to my parents and I love them. There's so much that's good in my life so it's difficult to imagine a radically altered version where I would be significantly happier — it's not like I'm drowning in blueness and wistfully dreaming of what my life could have been.

You came out publicly in June via Instagram. What was the impetus for that and was it a relief?

It was more of a relief than I was expecting. >

It was something I'd been thinking about more and more, and the reasons that I wasn't saying anything felt thinner to me every day. The excuses that I'd been giving myself for years were dissolving, and I couldn't think of any reason not to. I've played a few gay characters in the past four or five years, and the ways that I would bend and contort to answer questions without actually saying anything, and to not lie but also not to say anything personal... I would talk a lot about fluidity and sexuality as a spectrum — of course, all that's true but I was using it in a way to not have it reflect on me. But also I'm an easily embarrassed person and I can't imagine that anyone would care about my personal life. It seemed so presumptuous to make a post and assume that people would want to take a moment out of their time to read it. It felt almost arrogant and that held me back, but eventually I decided that it was easier to do it than to not do it. I thought of it as almost like completing a task; I was surprised by how much weight, I didn't [even] realise I had been carrying, was lifted. I was out in my personal life, to all the people who mean something to me, and I didn't think that making an Instagram post to strangers would have an effect on me emotionally, but it did. I'm still trying to understand that.

Was there external pressure put on you to stay in the closet, too?

I feel very fortunate that the people who are in my life have always been so supportive and the day-to-day effect of my career on my life has been very marginal.

From when I first came out to them to now, I've always been loved and cared for and I also feel, thankfully, that the realities of this industry are changing, and I don't know how much it matters any more — unless maybe at the highest budget level, if it's some super-hero movie. The truth is, no one is going to cast me as Spider-Man, and I don't think it matters much for the parts that I'm probably right for and interested in. I was in the middle of shooting *Locke & Key* when I made my post, and everyone was so supportive, openly and genuinely. I'm grateful that I am starting my career at the time that I am, but that's a very different reality than it was even recently. I'm hyper-aware of that.

In your post, you said that you knew you were gay at the age of 13. Was that a realisation that you were more interested in boys than girls?

Yeah, I mean, the caverns and details of my teenage years are probably better left

unsaid but I think I had a very normal experience. I was 12 or 13, which is the age that your friends start paying more attention to girls than they do to you, and that was clearly not happening to me [laughs]. But again, I come from a family that is so open and supportive and it was made very clear to my brother and me from a very young age that we could be whoever we wanted to be and we could love whoever we wanted, and no one would think of us any differently. So, I grew up in the best possible environment to be gay and still I felt I had to hide it from myself for so long. I think about how much of a struggle it was for me to come out, and I think about so many other kids who are still coming from much more hostile and unsupportive, unfriendly environments — it amazes me what so many people have been through and how strong they are because it felt like life or death to me, and it really wasn't.

How long have you been with your boyfriend?

About 18 months. I'll spare you the boring story of how we met because it's truly unexciting, but I will say — not to get sappy — that the other factor that led to me deciding to come out, and I guess maybe one of the sparks at the beginning of the fuse, was that I fell in love. When you're happy, you want to be happy publicly, and it made me think about the whole construction of my life in a way that I had been avoiding. I probably wouldn't have [come out] if that hadn't happened.

Had you had any relationships before this?

Nothing like the one I'm currently in. >

“I'M AMAZED BY OTHER PEOPLE'S STRENGTH: COMING OUT FELT LIKE LIFE AND DEATH TO ME”



Connor wears shirt, by
Fendi, jeans, by **Versace**,
top, by **120% Lino** at
Matches Fashion

Connor wears top, by
Sunspel, jeans, by **Lanvin**
at **Matches Fashion**



GROOMING **John
Ruidant** at See
Management
LOCATION **The Standard**,
East Village, New York

The excuse was always that I was busy working and there was never the time to meet people — that's all true to an extent, but also I think I was afraid. There's still this phenomenon where you can be out like I was, but in my day-to-day life, I wasn't doing anything that would make people think I was gay. I wasn't in a relationship and I wasn't looking to be because I was ignoring that part of me. I put myself on pause for a while. So, I had relationships, but nothing like the one I'm in right now. This is my first time being in love.

What inspired your acting ambition?

I was a very bored kid. I was graceless and hopeless at sports, so most of the ways that kids burn energy and time. I was either terrible at, or had no interest in, any of them. My parents thought that maybe a drama group would help — as a nice, fun way to [be able to] run around and scream. And that was my introduction to the idea that you could do this professionally. It seemed cool, exciting and glamorous. I also loved movies and it was one of the few things I was passionate about. When you're still a minor, there's not much you can do professionally in movies other than acting, but I didn't know what the job entailed. Over the course of the next eight years, as I actually started to work a bit more, I started to understand what it was and came to love it — but underneath all that was always this very raw feeling of: "I love movies and I want

to make movies," and acting is just one part of that.

Alongside acting, you've done a bit of filmmaking and directing. Where do you feel most comfortable?

I feel more at home behind the camera. Acting, for me, is hard. It's not difficult in the way that physical labour is. It's such a privileged job, so it's always tricky to talk about it without seeming deeply ungrateful. I've read those interviews and rolled my eyes. I am very grateful for it; I get to work with wonderful people and I get to do exactly the thing I dreamed about doing when I was 10 years old, which is play dress-up and fight magic things. But it becomes emotionally taxing because I always feel as if I'm not doing [well] enough and it's a job where you feel a little bit as if you are chasing a breeze because you only get a couple takes, then

it's behind you and gone. Other people wrote it and other people take the footage and shape it, so you're only serving a very liminal purpose in the centre of this huge mechanism. It's nice to not have to worry about those things, especially when you are in the hands [of people] who you trust. But it's also not great for anxiety and insecurity. Directing is different. It's also difficult and overwhelming and anxiety-ridden, in a way that acting isn't, and maybe the fact that this is what I need right now betrays some deep unhealthiness. But the balance that I have in my life is sort of ideal — on a show like *Locke & Key*, you shoot for five or six months, and it's really demanding, then it's over and you have the rest of the year to work on your own stuff in what is a fairly low-pressure environment.

Do you have a desire to tell queer stories in your work?

Yeah. As I said, I played a handful of gay characters before I was out publicly and found them to be the most interesting roles, partly because they are queer and they're dealing with their queerness in dramatic and fascinating ways. A lot of the cinema, music and people I like are the queerest out there. It's a question of what queerness means to you. I'll quote someone who put it much better than me, a gay filmmaker friend, who said: "For me, queerness means anything is possible." That says it better than I could. 🏳️

"MAYBE THAT THIS IS
WHAT I NEED RIGHT
NOW BETRAYS SOME
DEEP UNHEALTHINESS"

Locke & Key is available on Netflix now



BY GEORGIAN:
Levan, seated,
and Gelly

Dancing through the darkness

Director **Levan Akin** and rising star **Levan “Gelly” Gelbakhiani** delve into the drama behind Georgia’s first explicitly gay-themed film

Words **Thomas Stichbury**
Photography **Markus Bidaux**

If you’re making a gay movie and commit to including some sad-eyed shirt-sniffing in it, you better do it well because 2005 tear-jerker *Brokeback Mountain* still casts a huge plaid-patterned shadow over the LGBTQ cinematic landscape — we wish we knew how to quit you, Jack.

So, huge props go to director Levan Akin for rising to the challenge in his new (cowboy-free) film *And Then We Danced*, in which a stand-out moment sees one of the main characters take a mighty whiff of his lover’s clothes. “I’ve sniffed some t-shirts in my life,” he teases.

Attitude meets Levan and his leading man Levan Gelbakhiani (who helpfully goes by the nickname Gelly) to discuss the coming-of-age tale about the sexual awakening of young dancer Merab (Gelly), a member of the National Georgian Ensemble, whose life spins in an unexpected direction when he falls for his charming twinkle-toed rival, Irakli (Bachi Valishvili).

Dazzling at Cannes last year, where Levan was nominated for the Queer Palm prize, *And Then We Danced* raises the barre (sorry...) as the first explicitly gay-themed feature to come out of the former Soviet republic, Georgia. “There is one [other] movie that is super down-low and art-house,” Levan clarifies, adding with a flash of a mischievous grin: “[directed by a] Lynch wannabe.”

Located in the mountainous Caucasus, Georgia has an appropriately rocky track record when it comes to queer rights. Although homosexuality is legal there, the country ranks as the third most homophobic on the planet, according to the World Values Survey.

Levan, 40, who was born in Sweden to Georgian parents, felt compelled to make his latest project after seeing and being haunted by footage of the shocking violence at a Pride event in the capital, Tbilisi, in 2013.

Spurred on by incendiary comments from the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Illia II, who compared being homosexual to a disease and drug addiction, furious protesters took to the streets to oppose the rally, which in a stroke of cruel irony was held on the International Day Against Homophobia.

In a sequence of events that wouldn’t look out of place in a horror flick, hordes of men descended on a bus carrying activists trying to flee the city centre to safety. All that was missing were flaming torches and pitchforks in a shameful spectacle so at odds with the glitter-doused pictures of *Pride* to which we’ve become accustomed.

“The images stuck with me,” Levan sighs. “Basically, it’s thousands of people attacking kids. They’re climbing on top of the bus, trying to tear it apart — and they would have torn [the activists] to shreds.”

Dissecting the clash of cultures in Georgia, the filmmaker identifies a tug of war between more liberal forces and those stymied by the taboo of tradition, in the imposing shape of the Church. “LGBTQ people are [legally] protected, but it’s not implemented. Georgia wants to see itself as one of the most progressive countries in the area and, in many ways, it is, and they want to move towards the EU. But there is also the Russian factor. Russia is there with heavy anti-LGBTQ propaganda, a political tool to scaremonger: if you go West, everybody will turn gay, get married and have sex parties.”

Traditional Georgian dance provided an inspired backdrop, then, for Levan to weave his story of burgeoning sexuality struggling to burst forth from the confines of oppressive heteronormativity.

“I felt it was a great place to show the patriarchal structure of Georgia, with the bodies and these hard, masculine lines,” he adds. “It was a good metaphor.”

After spending time exploring Georgia’s underground LGBTQ scene (“There is one gay bar”), Levan encountered the first of many obstacles over the course of the problem-plagued production: the casting of Merab.

It turns out that Gelly, a dancer with little acting

CHEMISTRY:
Merab (Gelly)
quickly falls in
love with dance
rival Irakli (Bachi
Valishvili), left



"I saw thousands of people attacking kids. They would have torn them to shreds"

experience, rejected the role five times. "It was a scary thing for me because of the topic. It's a tiny country — three million people live there — and anyone can recognise [you]. It can be scary," he explains.

The 22-year-old Georgian, who was discovered on Instagram, was eventually won over and attention turned to the search for his on-screen love interest.

As soon as Levan saw red — literally — during Gelly's chemistry test with Bachi, he knew he'd found his man. "It was instantly obvious that this was the person because he [Gelly] blushed, his neck became red," Levan divulges. "Blushing is the best sign that 'OK, there's energy here!'"

That hard-to-put-your-finger-on frisson is keenly felt in the pair's carefully choreographed sex scenes.

Few shots stray below the waist as Levan opts for sensuality over "porn", most notably in the boys' initial clumsy fumble by a lake. "The first sex scene is just one take, there are no edits," Levan recalls. "It's about being there in the moment: [Gelly] probably has butterflies in his stomach and a hard-on as he's walking down there. I wanted it to feel tactile and I've had people tell me that it's the most organic, natural sex scene they've seen. I love it when he smells his hand [afterwards]." Apologies, belated

spoiler alert: Merab sniffs more than a shirt.

Gelly jumps in to add that he wasn't nervous about the more intimate parts of filming. "There were only five people on set," he recalls. "For me and Bachi, it was fun."

Plenty of folk in Georgia didn't want the film to see the light of day, but no matter how many times Levan and his team were tripped up and wrong-footed, they pushed on.

For example, pre-booked locations suddenly became unavailable on the day of the shoot. "When we went to [places] that the municipality were in charge of, they wouldn't say: 'No, you cannot [film] because this is a gay movie', but they would make up excuses such as: 'We're renovating', which would piss me off. We also made the mistake of going to an ensemble in Georgia and asking for help. They were like, 'No, you can't do this, you're crazy', and started calling everybody, warning them about us. So, then we lost a huge location, the dance studio. Other locations we'd lose the night before," Levan says

At one point, he even came up with a fake synopsis to avoid further trouble. "It was about a French tourist who visits Georgia and falls in love with the culture!"

Levan, who also wrote the film's screenplay, received little support from the Georgian Film Center and had a run-in with Nino Sukhishvili, from the Georgian National Ballet, who turned her back on them when they asked for advice. "She did an interview where she was going to tell her version, which backfired because she showed herself to be a huge homophobe, which was funny," Levan smiles.

Another hiccup occurred while shooting with local sex workers, who Levan had befriended. "They were working that night, so customers would be coming up in their cars," he exclaims. "[But] it gave the film so much life."

Things took a far more sinister turn when death threats were issued from a right-wing group, culminating in

the hiring of an on-set bodyguard. "Some people called our casting agent and told her that she was a disgrace to Georgia and that, if she doesn't watch it, things would go badly," Levan reveals.

The bulked-up security didn't cause mass panic, however. "I was like, 'who are these people following me around?' We were sort of oblivious.

"We were kept in a bubble of working and hustling to make the movie," the director adds.

Nodding in agreement, Gelly, whose turn won him the best actor award at the 25th Minsk International Film Festival, maintains: "We didn't feel the stressful moments because we were so focused."

The protection was factored into the budget so that cast members were not in Georgia in the wake of the film's release. Levan stresses: "Being there for Gelly and Bachi is our number-one priority in life. This is more than a film for me. I have a personal relationship with them. We became like a family."

The situation did intensify at the premiere in Georgia in November, with protesters outside the Amirani cinema, in Tbilisi. Riot police were on speed-dial as anti-LGBTQ locals threw rocks and firecrackers, and chanted "Shame" and "Long live Georgia" at film-goers.

At one point, an Orthodox priest recited prayers over a burning Pride flag. "I knew the film would spark a debate, but I was surprised by the level of aggressiveness," Levan reflects. "They thought the film was promoting paedophilia and such nonsense."

He continues: "It was a tough time. We didn't want anybody to get injured because of our film, which was made out of love and respect. I just wanted the film to be seen by the majority of people in Georgia who actually support it and want to see it."

Levan assures *Attitude* that the hate-fuelled protest hasn't overshadowed the outpouring of love for the

"It was a scary thing for me because of the topic. Anyone could recognise you"

film. "It is a celebration of culture and tradition, and how it needs to be inclusive and not dictated by a few," he insists, placing emphasis on that final word.

Georgia still has a long way to go when it comes to recognising and representing the rights of its LGBTQ community — indeed, plans to hold a Pride event last year were called off due to yet more threats.

Gelly, who has travelled around the world to promote *And Then We Danced*, adds that he has no desire to move away, in the hope that, one day, his home land will dance to a different beat.

"I really like my country, but there are lots of problems," he says. "I want to stay there and fight for change."

And Then We Danced is released in the UK on 13 March
See p102



DANCE PARTNERS:
Gelly as Merab, and,
left, Bachi as Irakli



GHOST IN THE MACHINE

As the part-human, part-cybernetic life-form Borg, Hugh, in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Jonathan del Arco became an instant gay favourite. Now, as he reprises the part in *Star Trek: Picard*, he reveals the heartbreak that inspired him to take the role in the first place

Words **Darren Scott**

S

tar Trek didn't explicitly come out and say, "gay rights" until the launch of Discovery in 2017 but looking back, it had a sprinkling of fairy dust from the start — George Takei in the original series, Zachary Quinto in the reboot movies, and the

Borg you wanted to take home to your mother, Hugh, in *The Next Generation*.

However, it was a tragedy that inspired the man behind all that Borg make-up and special effects, Jonathan del Arco.

Having appeared on stage, he quit acting to care for his sick partner, Eddie. And, ultimately, that's who would shape Jonathan's decision to return to the profession and take the role of the humanised Borg, Hugh.

"I didn't really have a choice," Jonathan reveals, "because when I read the script, it was his voice I heard. Eddie died of an Aids-related illness.

"He went through dementia, which is a common process for people with HIV and Aids and didn't recognise other people. But one of the most astonishing things that happened to him was that he became incredibly innocent.

"Any conversation you had with him when he was 'in dementia' was like talking to a child. Scared — all those things.

"To me, that's what Hugh was, 100 per cent. It was like: 'Oh, I know who this is. This is Eddie in his last days'.

"When Eddie got sick, my life was turned upside down. I was young and he was slightly older than me. I never contracted it. To this

day, I'm HIV negative. So when he died, there was a tremendous amount of survivor guilt."

Following Eddie's death, Jonathan went on an *Eat, Pray, Love*-style journey through India and Europe but it was only when he visited London that he felt revived enough to give acting another go.

"Not that long after that, I got Hugh, which was kind of an amazing gift. So, London holds a very special place in my life."

Jonathan realised he was gay at the age of 13, and his acting career began in Harvey Fierstein's hit play about a New York drag queen, *Torch Song Trilogy*. But while immersed in that world, he wasn't vocal about his sexuality. "A little known fact is that I [tried out] for roles early on that would have meant playing a gay character," he recalls.

"I auditioned for [1989 Aids drama] *Longtime Companion*, for the part that Dermot Mulroney played, and for [Nineties TV series] *My So-Called Life*, Wilson Cruz's role.

"If I'd got those, it would have been easy for me to say: 'I'm gay.' But I was playing straight characters. I was scared I wouldn't get a job."

Later roles — and a lifetime of activism — helped him get past that.

And when asked to reprise the character of Hugh 25 years later in new series *Star Trek:*

LONG JOURNEY: Jonathan took time away from acting to travel

Picard, the Uruguayan-born actor turned to an icon for inspiration.

"There's a lot of medical things that are happening to the Borg, and I was trying to find an emotional hook to Dahj [played by Isa Briones]," he says.

"When Princess Diana went to an Aids clinic in the Nineties, took her gloves off and shook the hands of the patients — what a seminal moment that was for the gay community.

"I have a great love for Princess Diana and that's how I found my love for Isa's character."

"In preparing to play Hugh [again], that would be my relationship to Dahj."

Having found a YouTube clip of Diana's hospital visit, Jonathan played it repeatedly in his trailer before his first scene with Isa so he could feel for Dahj what he felt for Diana.

He continues: "In a weird way, playing Hugh now is much more of my life experience as an activist, as someone who went through the struggle and saw all his friends [die], including his lover. That is a lot of stuff.

"I feel I'm a mature enough actor and person now to be able to tap into that and not be psychologically scarred for the rest of my life," he says.

Playing Hugh, aka Third of Five, is also easier now for another, much simpler reason.

"I was on a Borg ship," he says with a gasp. "They built sets — massive, massive sets. You

HIGH (THIRD OF FIVE): Jonathan is playing Hugh again

**“WHEN I READ THE
SCRIPT, I HEARD
EDDIE’S VOICE —
HIS INNOCENCE”**

didn't have to imagine a bunch of things. It wasn't green screen, we were in real scenarios. That just made me, as an actor, able to go to a new level. Also, the tone of the show, in terms of the language, is much more contemporary. This is a very real, visceral show."

He says that he'd place Hugh on a non-binary level in terms of identity. But why do sci-fi gays like the Borg so much?

"The hot rubber suit," grins Jonathan, who turns 54 in March. "Jeri Ryan [Seven of Nine] is the most beloved gay icon and she's not gay. There's just something about the Borg, something about not fitting in, which we as LGBTQ people comprehend."

"There's the idea of sacrifice, which — no matter where you live, whether it's an oppressive culture or a place you could be executed for being gay — plays into that experience, the thought of being disconnected, of being in a world where you have to be like everybody else."

Jonathan, who also played openly gay medical examiner Dr. Fernando Morales in *The Closer* remains tight-lipped about Hugh's journey in the new series, only revealing that he has an important role in upcoming events.

But he's not keeping quiet about his new podcast, *Hollywood Caucus*. "Every week we're going to have either an actor, producer or political consultant talking about Hollywood, talking about politics, talking about Hollywood politics — which includes all the #MeToo stuff."

"All the things that have to do with showbiz politics. Of which, there is plenty."

And his dream guest, he reveals, would be Meryl Streep.

"Maybe if she reads this, she'll come talk to us," he says hopefully.

Resistance is futile, Meryl... 🙄

***Star Trek: Picard* streams on Amazon Prime
Hollywood Caucus is on all podcast platforms**



A beacon of hope

The British Library has added an oral history of HIV health-care workers to its archives, to record the stories of those on the front line of the Aids crisis in the Eighties and Nineties. Contributor **Ricky Gellissen** provided end-of-life care at London Lighthouse, a vital HIV/Aids centre and hospice

As told to **Tim Heap**
Photography **Markus Bidaux**

I joined the Royal Army Medical Corps when I was 17, with a view to becoming a nurse. I'd been informed that nursing had Crown exemption, so you didn't have to wait until you were 18 as with other professions. But when I completed my military basic training and passed out, I learnt that wasn't exactly the case: it only applied to women who started their training at 17 years and 10 months, so that by the time they finished they'd be 18.

At that point, I could either leave, without having to pay as you normally would, and rejoin at 18 to do my basic training all over again, or stay in the army with another trade.

I decided to do that, as going home wasn't really an option for me — I wasn't getting on well with my stepfather, who'd made me drop out of college as he didn't want me pursuing

further education. It was suggested I become a medic so that I could put some of that experience towards my nursing.

I had two older brothers in the army, so I knew that, despite all the regulations of being in the military, I'd have some freedom compared with staying at home, as well as accommodation and steady pay.

I was always interested in nursing, or doing something to care for people. As a child, I briefly flirted with the idea of becoming a doctor, but I thought against that because the expected level of interest in the sciences was too much. I could handle biology, but there was no chance of chemistry and physics, too. I did, however, have the qualifications for nursing, which still allowed me to be involved in looking after people.

I knew I was gay from a young age; I



ARMY DAYS: It was illegal to be gay in the military when Ricky served



AT LONDON LIGHTHOUSE: Ricky is proud of the work he did at the HIV/Aids centre and hospice



“When I was posted to Germany, there was a witch-hunt for gays”

remember having feelings towards men before I was even aware it was sexual. I'd also had sex with people prior to joining the army, before I was a teenager.

In the circles my brothers moved in, there was a lot of talk about who was a virgin, which in their eyes I was because I'd never had sex with a woman. In retrospect, I'd probably had more sex than them.

It was illegal to be openly gay in the army when I joined, but it was a crime to have gay sex under the age of 21 at that time, anyway. So, whether I was in the army or not, I was already a criminal in the eyes of the law — I was risking a penalty for having under-age sex in the first place, so did it really matter if I was doing that in a uniform?

I left the army in 1987 after realising that my efforts to transfer into nursing weren't

going anywhere. I had a friend who worked in the chief clerk's offices and he had pulled out the confidential file and told me that a senior officer had written that I was never to be interviewed again for a nursing position.

Tied in with that, I was also wary of being caught out for being gay. There was one guy who had found a gay-porn magazine in my locker in Germany and he was going around telling people about it, but he never actually put it through as evidence.

When I was first posted to Germany, it was in the middle of a massive witch-hunt for gays, with a big court martial going on, so you

went into that atmosphere on day one.

When I decided I was going to leave, I applied to various places in civvie street to do my nurse training and when I was offered a place, I gave my one year's notice.

I did my nurse training with the Wigan Health Authority, and the later part under Tameside and Glossop Health Authority and took a job on the ward I was allocated to for my last placement.

During that time, I was living and working in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester, and I was out about my sexuality — although one of my colleagues, a charge nurse, told me not to talk about it on the ward itself. He was petrified that patients would find out.

At that time, I was also doing a significant amount of volunteering work in my spare time, at Manchester Aids-Line (which later

>

RAY OF LIGHT:
London Lighthouse
was there for those
in need



became the George House Trust), the Lesbian and Gay Centre, and Body Positive North West, and I was also involved in the Village Charity, the founding organisation behind what is now Manchester Pride.

Once, I was asked to go on a panel debate programme to talk about Operation Spanner, which was where the government was looking at the legality of consenting S&M acts between homosexuals. I used to wear leather and hang around with others wearing leather, so there was an assumption I was into S&M.

I went on the show after I'd finished an early shift, and people at work knew about it. The charge nurse took away the television from the ward itself and closed the patients' sitting room early, so that by the time the programme came on air, no one would be able to watch it.

That was the kind of reception I was getting, and that was the attitude around gay people in general — never mind HIV.

I went on a course called the ENB 934, which was all about the care of people with HIV and Aids-related conditions. I seemed to be the only person there who had actually volunteered for it rather than been sent, because some of the attitudes towards gay people and towards HIV were outrageous.

We were given a questionnaire that said things like, "When did you know you were heterosexual?" and "Who did you confide in?" — all those kinds of questions that gay people are asked. Some people were livid, they just couldn't process it.

There was also homophobia when talking about risk factors, with people failing to understand the biomechanics of gay sex in terms of it not necessarily requiring an erection from all parties.

After three years, partly because of those kinds of attitudes, I began to look for positions in HIV nursing. I felt I had skills and values that could be used in caring for those with the virus.

I'd seen that there were only two areas in nursing where the level of care you were able to give to patients matched the level I felt should be given, due to restrictions on funding.

One was casualty, which I had a natural affinity for from being a medic, and the other was palliative care, to make the end of someone's life as comfortable as possible.

The idea of working in HIV health care came through almost like a rallying cry.

It just made sense — why am I going to go into some other area, when there's somewhere I can go and make a difference to my community? It's one of those things where those who can, should.

"Attitudes towards gay people and HIV were outrageous"

I was aware of London Lighthouse, which had opened in 1988, because I'd had friends who were looked after there.

It was one of the world's most famous HIV and Aids centres and hospices — Princess Diana used to visit it, and I also knew of it through a *40 Minutes* documentary on the BBC, and an earlier coincidence where a cartoon illustrator friend of mine had contributed to a special edition comic called *Strip Aids* that was a fund-raiser for the centre, before it had finished being built.

What was different about London Lighthouse, and what made it such a beacon for HIV health care during those very difficult and dark years, is the model of care we provided to our patients.

In the NHS, patients would have to give

the name of their next of kin, from whom they might be estranged due to having HIV, whereas at Lighthouse, we allowed people to choose their circle of care.

Their name would go in the middle of the form, with a circle around it, and you'd add as many spokes as necessary to it, with a person's name, contact number and the nature of their relationship.

We would never confirm or deny whether someone was a patient at Lighthouse. We'd sometimes have people calling up, trying to find out, and if we weren't aware of them being a known person for one of our patients, we refused to give any information because they might not be in what that person considered to be their logical family — to borrow a phrase from Armistead Maupin.

Some of the residents — as we called them — had large and supportive families coming to see them. I remember one, a gentleman from Ireland, hadn't been out to his family but after he was admitted, they all came over to visit him.

We did our best to accommodate them where we could; one of the sitting rooms effectively became theirs. You'd have some of them in the room with him and the rest would be in the non-smoking day room, sometimes even sleeping overnight.

There were between 15 and 30 people at any one time involved with this one patient — that was the most unusual one we had.

On the other hand, I can remember another resident who had family literally fighting over them on his deathbed. We had to try to manage the conflicts as best as we could.

As well as palliative care, we also gave respite care, to give their carers a break or to alleviate their circumstances and conditions temporarily. From a staffing perspective, half were general nurses and half were mental-health nurses, which was good not only for the holistic nature of care for patients but also for the transference of skills between the staff members.

As the Aids crisis went on, and effective treatments were developed, the nature of the people who came to Lighthouse changed. Over time, we noticed an increase in people



then became an HIV clinical nurse specialist there. I'm now a hepatitis nurse, but there's still a cross-over with HIV patients needing treatment for hep C.

I wanted to take part in *The Aids Era: an Oral History of UK Health-Care Workers* because there's value in preserving our stories, and I don't think we recognise that enough.

Those years at Lighthouse were an acute-crisis period, and although we've moved significantly out of it, there's nothing to say that we won't get something similar in the future. People need to know what the challenges were and how they can be dealt with.

The issue of the stigma that surrounded, and still surrounds, to some extent, HIV is important — even if you look at some of the daft comments going around about coronavirus now.

I see it in my hepatitis work too, where people from the gay and HIV communities will proudly display their HIV status on dating apps but shun people with hepatitis.

I'm proud of my work at Lighthouse, of helping people to have a "good death". I can't think of a better way of putting it.

Health-care workers possess an internal need to help others, it feeds something in you, and it's nice to know you've done a good job, to have made someone's death as easy and comfortable as possible.

You can't bring anyone back to life but in those moments where you talk about people and remember them, there is an essence of them being alive again, for a brief moment.

We suffered such loss during that period, of brilliant, valued people, and so many of them came through Lighthouse.

It's the Museum of Brands now, and that's fine: buildings change over time, but there's little to mark it, to remember the people who passed through it, so this oral history archive is just one part of that.

As with any part of history, if it's not recounted, it's lost, and the chance to learn from it is lost, too. 🙄

The Aids Era: An Oral History of UK Health-Care Workers is a project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, launched in November at an event supported by Gilead Sciences. Audio files and transcripts from the project are available at the British Library

needing sub-acute care: for those not needing intensive care but who weren't ready to live independently at home.

At the end of 1998, the residential unit at Lighthouse had to close, to allow the rest of the centre to stay open. I remember being with some of the residents at the time the decision was announced and we heard a big cheer from below as the news was delivered. We had to arrange transfers for some people to finish their palliative care elsewhere.

I distinctly remember one resident saying she wanted to die before Lighthouse closed because she'd made up her mind that this would be where she was going to pass away.

It wasn't an easy phase, and it wasn't because there was no need for it, but unfortunately the funding wasn't there any more. I was made redundant, along with about 40 others.

After six months of agency work, I started a job on an HIV ward at St Mary's [in London],



LIVE WIRE

Gender-fluid pop star **Dorian Electra** is ready to cut a tache through life and the music industry

Words **Thomas Stichbury** Photography **Charlotte Rutherford**

Moustaches may have made a comeback, but they're still a tricky look to pull off. For every hipster channelling Errol Flynn with their sword-like swishes, or hot daddy sprouting sexy Tom Selleck-esque sluggers just screaming to be tugged, there is a poor unfortunate soul shuffling along with what would appear to be a hairy caterpillar squatting above his top lip.

However, some of the world's greatest queer icons — from Freddie Mercury and Prince to fabulously filthy filmmaker John Waters — have tackled the tache and won.

Gender-fluid singer Dorian Electra, therefore, is in exceptional company then with their artfully drawn-on 'taches.

"I love the moustache because I do a full face of super femme, over-the-top make-up, big drawn-on lips, rosy cheeks and so on, and still feel grounded by these two little lines above my lip that say, 'MALE. MAN. MASCULINE', in a very clearly communicable but cartoonish way," they explain. "I love the juxtaposition of extremes. That's definitely one of the guiding principles in my art."

Hailed as the Liberace of fantasy pop music, the 27-year-old American has collaborated and toured with Charli XCX, smashed a bottle of champers over their head for Paris Hilton — read on, all will become clear — and just released a deluxe version of their debut album, *Flamboyant*, the sonic equivalent of taking a stick of dynamite to traditional notions of gender, sexuality and religion.

The songs are also catchy as hell so if you're not already amped up about Dorian Electra, well, you should be...

Who was your biggest music hero growing up?

A very unpopular answer: Bono. Obviously, he has issues and there are many valid criticisms of him, but as a kid I thought it was really cool that somebody could use their rock-star status to at least try to do good in the world, and support and raise awareness of important political issues. I know he's considered lame and people hate him.

What themes do you like to dive into in your music?

Right now, I'm really interested in exploring masculinity and how our rapidly changing ideas of gender relate to our culture and the world at large — politically, economically and more. I have also always been fascinated by sex and sexuality. That's something that has long been a staple of pop music, but I just like to explore it in a slightly more academic way.

What is the strangest inspiration you have ever had for a song?

If I'm trying to be objective, I guess it's pretty "strange" that, on *Emasculate*, I wrote about a man (me) begging to be castrated...

You identify as gender fluid. Can you put your finger on why that term strikes a chord with you?

I liked it because it seemed to imply a certain "chillness" about gender that really resonated with me. I see gender more like a mood or a flavour than the core of my identity, and I feel very "fluid" about it.

"MY PARENTS WERE PROUD TO BE WEIRD AND
THE BLACK SHEEP OF THEIR FAMILIES"

Have you always challenged the "norm", for want of a better word?

I was a super-happy kid and was lucky to have amazing parents and go to a supportive school, but I also felt I didn't always fully fit in — not that it was a bad thing. I knew from a young age that I didn't like traditionally "girl" or traditionally "boy" things; I just felt more like a "kid." As a teenager, I grew to embrace and appreciate certain aspects of "femininity" more but was always dressing up as crazy characters (a lot of them male) and doing musical theatre and making outrageous videos for school projects for shock value and trying to entertain. I felt a sense of pride in being "different" which I definitely got from my parents, who were both the "black sheep" of their families and always proud to be weird.

You turn the tables on traditional notions of masculinity and gender stereotypes. What does the word "gender" mean to you?

I see gender as something that can be a part of a person's identity, but it doesn't necessarily define their whole being. Same with sexuality or sexual orientation. The meaning of the word itself is also changing and will continue to [do so] as we find new ways to talk about and understand things.



Your debut album is called *Flamboyant*. Why was that a fitting title for the collection of songs?

I wanted to pick a word that was positive and uplifting but also cheeky and a humorous F-you to those who might say, "Wow this is really uncool." It's also a

word that, historically, has been used in a derogatory way against queer people, so it felt special to reclaim it.

The song *Adam & Steve* takes aim at homophobic religious rhetoric. What kind of response have you had to the track online?

Surprisingly, I haven't received as much criticism as I expected. It's been amazing to see how people have received the track and related to it. I am so grateful for that.

You worked on a music video for Paris Hilton. Take us back to that day...

My friend Charlotte Rutherford was directing the music video and asked: "Do you wanna come be in the video and smash a bottle of champagne over your head?" And I was like, "Ummm, yes!" I love Paris Hilton, but, unfortunately, I had to leave the set before she arrived. Next time, though.

What jobs did you have before venturing into music? We've heard you once worked as a stripper...

I primarily worked as a freelance video director/producer then I worked at a strip club in Chicago. It was amazing. I learned so much about other people, the culture surrounding sex, and also about myself. Many of the people who went in were just looking to connect with, and talk to, somebody. It made me a lot more comfortable with my body and sexuality, which has had a positive impact on my performance and helped with my self-image.

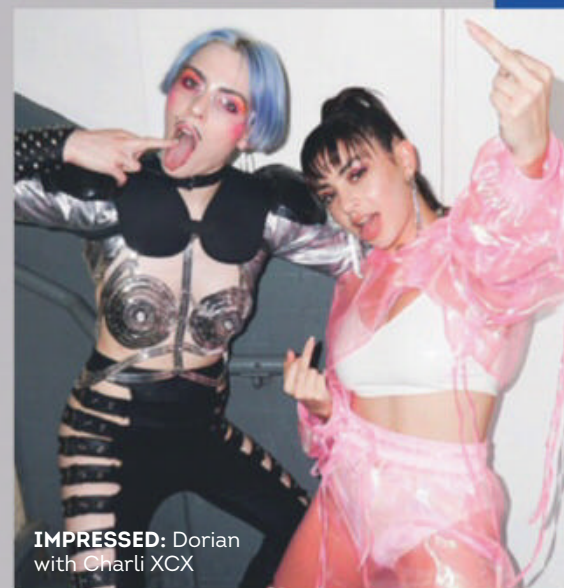
What advice do you have for queer artists trying to break through?

It's impossible to say "come up with something 100 per cent original" but in terms of trying to make something unique, it helps to try to combine two or more vastly different things that you love, in an unexpected way.

What is the most memorable encounter you've had with a fan?

Some of my fans formed a group called the Church of Electra (they call themselves Electralytes) and they started a campaign to sell these pins that one of the club founders designed and make money for the LGBT Center in LA. It was amazing and they've raised more than \$2,000 (£1,500). I try to talk to my fans a lot and I love it when we're able to have a relationship that feels more like being a part of a community where we inspire and support each other, rather than just a one-sided fan-artist transaction.

The *Flamboyant* Tour: Chapter II arrives in London on 24 April
Dorian Electra will also play The Great Escape, Brighton, 13-16 May



IMPRESSED: Dorian with Charli XCX

In | full | cry

Cub Sport's **Tim Nelson** and **Sam Netterfield** open up to Thomas Stichbury about falling in love, mixing business with pleasure and their trippy-sounding sex life...

being left alone in the company of a couple can often be a tad awkward, or at least a little trying, especially if they're pulling out the PDAs, having a barney or failing to hide their feelings of seething resentment towards each other. On this occasion, however, *Attitude* happily gives the role of "third wheel" a spin to hang out with Tim Nelson and Sam Netterfield — or Bolan, as Tim affectionately refers to him — partners, married ones at that, and members of Aussie alt-pop band Cub Sport.

Following a last-minute change of location, after spotting a rodent scampering across the premises of the original suggestion, we gather at a cosy tea room run by a wondrously waspish woman who's a cross between *The Devil Wears Prada's* Miranda Priestly, Ab Fab's Patsy and Mary from *Gogglebox*.

When the boys, both 29, enquire about vegan options, she bluntly tells them that there aren't any, before adding that they look surprisingly healthy for vegans. Ouch.

It's the morning after their headline gig at London's Scala and they are still surfing a wave of high emotion. "I nearly cried," lead singer Tim begins. "These people are basically celebrating our love story and it's something that we were ashamed of for so many years, so to reflect on where we've come from and to be in that moment is overwhelming. I looked over at Bolan and had to stop myself."

Crying is a common theme. Indeed, the

lead single from Cub Sport's upcoming fourth album is called *I Never Cried So Much in My Whole Life*, featuring Savage Garden's Darren Hayes. "It was a specific moment where I walked into the living room at home and Bolan and our two dogs, Missy and Evie, were all on the couch. It was impossibly cute, and I was just like, 'whoa, this is my reality right now'.

"And, yeah, I couldn't stop crying," Tim laughs.

Although not particularly partial to a romantic drama (unless it involves a touch of tragedy), Tim and Sam's love story feels as if it has been ripped from a page-turner.

So, it's fitting that it all began with one. Sort of.

The pair briefly dated when they were 17 — both closeted at the time — but things didn't work out and they agreed to stick to being friends. The terms of that shaky platonic agreement were upheld when they formed the group (originally called Tim Nelson and the Cub Scouts) in 2010.

Then author Hanya Yanagihara's mighty tome *A Little Life* entered the picture with a whopping great big thud. Sam discovered the break-your-heart-then-stamp-on-it-for-good-measure novel, about friendship and queer love, in 2016, and it gave him the nudge to tell Tim how he truly felt.

Being a prop queen, I pull a copy of the modern classic (which I have been reading, honest) from my rucksack.

Sam says: "I remember crying in the first few pages because at that point in my life I had sort of happily resigned myself to the fact that I might just be single and on my own for ever. I was chill with that because of how incredible our family of friends was. >

"I'd resigned myself to the fact that I might be single and on my own for ever"



LOVE STORY: Sam (left) and Tim are partners in every sense

"I was so struck by the message of friendship. Then as the story goes along and you see how the friendship becomes something more, it echoed our journey so closely that when it got to the end, I thought: 'What am I doing? Why haven't I told Tim?'"

"We were on a tour of North America and after the final show we had a big celebration, so I told him that night," the keyboardist continues.

"I said, 'I don't want this to ruin our friendship, but I love you and I want to be with you.'"

Of course, the feeling was mutual. Sam was "out" at this point. "I may have just told Tim and one of our other best friends, but I'd barely said it to myself," he reveals. Tim, however, had been wrestling with the subject of his sexuality and, in turn Sam, in song.

Tim adds: "When I was writing a lot of *Bats*, our second album [released in 2017], I was giving away details about how I was feeling and our situation before we had any sort of conversation. I was in denial about what they were about.

"Looking back, these lyrics are very clear to me now, and thankfully it was clear to Sam as well because he was hearing the songs and had a good idea of where I was at."

Angelic-faced Tim can't bring himself to read *A Little Life* though. "I haven't finished it..." he admits, with a sheepish smile. "It's a pretty heavy read!"

The couple became engaged soon after, before tying the knot in August 2018, within a year of Australia passing its historic same-sex marriage law.

"I proposed to Tim," Sam recalls. "We were just lying in bed having one of those happy cry-reflection moments and I just blurted it out. I had a grand plan for a proposal, but I was like, 'no, this is the time.'"

It's almost cloyingly sweet... until, that is, you consider just how far they have come in their queer journey.

"We both grew up in very Christian households and went to a Christian school," Tim clarifies.

"Every person that I knew was a Christian and shared these same views, and one of those views is that homosexuality is wrong.

"That set us up for an ingrained homophobia and disdain for who we are at our core."

Sam chips in: "Self-worth and everything is entangled in that," before Tim adds, "When there was queer representation, the people around me

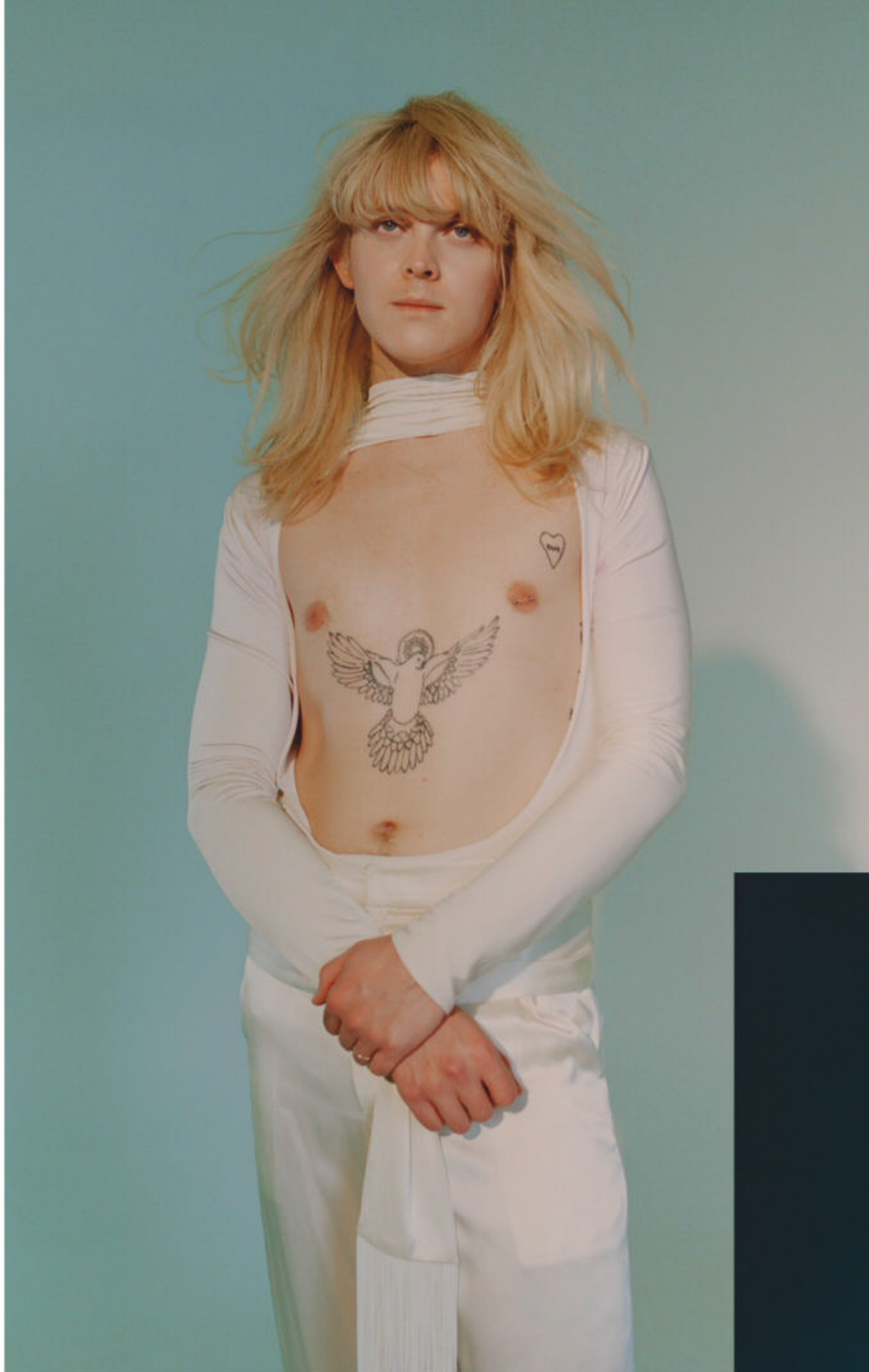
were usually looking at that in a negative light. That was kind of the attitude that I took on too... I thought that the more I could distance myself from anything queer, the less people would suspect that I was."

Having long since shaken off the shackles of repression, they are proud to represent and speak up for the LGBTQ community in their music.

"We were still closeted when we put out the first album [2016's *This is Our Vice*]. The hurdle there was that we weren't being who we really are, so there was a disconnect. We were trying to be this straight indie band and I feel that the best parts of Cub Sport are how queer it is," Tim argues.

That prompts a question from Sam. "We've been incredibly fortunate to not, in the grand scheme of things, face any external negativity for being queer. Would you agree, Tim?"

The reply is swift. "A couple of comments, but compared with what many other artists got, we've been incredibly fortunate. Being white cis men, we are privileged and sharing our story is easier than, say, a trans person of colour."



"The more I distanced myself from anything queer, the less people would suspect"

Tim and Sam's relationship is the beating heart of Cub Sport — the band is completed by guitarist Zoe Davis and drummer Dan Puusaari — and I can't help but wonder if Sam finds it ever so slightly unnerving to be his songwriter lover's muse. "It feels natural, I guess," he, ahem, muses.

"Tim writes about everything from his life and I happen to be a big part of that. It feels nice and right.

"I don't think about it too much. I don't try to get in the way of whatever is flowing."

Sometimes that creativity flows beneath the sheets into their sex life, like on the song *Limousine*, which contains the lyrics:

I can see myself gliding on the surface now/ I can feel I need it deeper, can you show me how/ cause fucking you is like DMT.

"That was definitely an example of writing something that I was a little wary about," Tim giggles. "My parents listen to all the music and I know mum doesn't like *Limousine*! I never want to stifle my creativity, or to change what's coming out of me of fear of who's going to listen to it." As for the reference to DMT — the hallucinogenic drug dimethyltryptamine — Tim discloses that he dabbled after writing the down-and-dirty

ditty. "I haven't really spoken about this in an interview before," he confesses.

"I had watched documentaries and read a lot about DMT because it intrigued me. I have had, I guess, multiple experiences where it feels like, erm, I have left my body during sex."

He continues: "It's a moment of heightened connectivity where you are like your higher self. It's a soul-mate

thing. It's very trippy. I had always imagined that that was maybe what DMT was like, where you leave your body and go to the astral realm or whatever.

"Then I tried it and realised I was not far off the mark with the lyric. It isn't something I do very often. It's not like drugs in a partying sense, it's more spiritual."

While not the first couple in the world to make music together (Abba, Fleetwood Mac, Sonny and Cher), Tim and Sam acknowledge that mixing business with pleasure can be tricky. "There has never been any tension, [but] it has its pros and cons.

"It's great that all our wins are the same, but the flip side of that is any challenges or disappointments are shared," Tim shrugs.

The band's next step towards global domination is new album *Like Nirvana*, inspired by the first year of their marriage.

"There is a lot of love on there, and, over all, it feels freer and lighter, but at the same time it embraces the duality of the human experience, where there is this shadow side that never goes away," Tim explains.

"My perspective has broadened and I'm learning to understand more than just the part of me that is joyful, touching on some of the ongoing struggles and new struggles," he adds.

"If you feel like you completely know yourself, then maybe you've stopped trying to grow."

As we drain the dregs of our drinks, the cynical unromantic in me screams for something negative. They must have niggly annoying habits that drive the other up the wall...

"I don't think we have one," Tim insists. "We've literally never had a fight," Sam adds, and you don't doubt him.

Before leaving the vegan-unfriendly tea room, I make sure to leave a tip for its sharp-tongued owner because sometimes you need a bit of sour to balance out all this sweet.

Without lemons you can't make lemonade, after all. 🍋

***Like Nirvana* is out 8 May**



BAND OF GOLD: Guitarist Zoe Davis (front, left) and, on her left, drummer, Dan Puusaari complete the line up



Perfect stranger

Fleabag star **Kadiff Kirwan** cuts through the yellow tape as a gay detective in a new thriller. He tells Thomas Stichbury about diversity in the industry and, of course, pencil haircuts

Making the most of his snip of screen time — all 2½ minutes of it — in the sublime second series of *Fleabag*, Kadiff Kirwan proved to be a cut above the rest as hairdresser Anthony. Yes, the man responsible for Claire's amazing (and very French) pencil 'do.

And the pencils have been sharpened against the actor ever since. "I did one scene and it's genuinely been bonkers, people stopping me in the street," he exclaims. "I was in Charing Cross, I had my earphones in, and I swear I could hear someone saying my name. So, I took an earphone out and a woman was screaming: 'Hair is everything, Anthony'."

Counting *Fleabag* co-star and creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge as a good friend — we're more than a little jealous — and with a growing roster of rich TV and film roles to his name, 30-year-old Kadiff has come a long way.

Born in Montserrat and growing up in the Caribbean, he and his family were forced to flee their home land when a devastating natural disaster struck. "I was born on a tiny island, a British overseas territory, and in [July] 1995, a volcano [the region's Soufrière Hills, which had been dormant since before the start

"I struggled financially at points," he adds. "I wrote to people for help and the wonderful actor Jonathan Pryce [replied]. I [contacted] him for advice when I was about to enter my third year and he gave me a bit of sponsorship, which was the loveliest thing."

The Pryce was right and Kadiff has proven to be a worthy investment, notching up appearances in small-screen gems such as *Chewing Gum* (penned by another of his trail-blazing pals, Michaela Coel), *Black Mirror* and *Timewasters*, about a jazz band from South London who are transported back in time, and one of the few shows on television led by performers of colour.

"It's at a glacial pace, but [representation] is improving," he states. "I'm seeing far more actors of colour and [also] disabilities being given the scope to do what they do best, which is tell stories."

Kadiff reveals that he has been discriminated against on account of the colour of his skin in the industry.

"Absolutely, even at drama school," he begins. "They were like: 'You're not a male lead'. I would ask why, and they'd reply: 'You're just... no'. Things like that."

"I auditioned for a show in the West End that was well received," he

"If you're going to take the elevator to the top, send it back down for the others"

of the 20th century] erupted," he recalls. "We lost relatives in it. I moved to the UK at nine years old — going from the Caribbean to Preston is quite a leap."

After a stint in a Christian boy band, "We were called Like One and did tours of churches, very rock and roll, drinking lots of consecrated wine," he chuckles, Kadiff was pestered into giving acting a go during his more tumultuous teenage years.

"I got suspended [from school] a couple of times and there was this drama teacher, who was like: 'You need to come to after-school drama classes because it will really help with your behavioural issues', and I thought: 'I haven't got any fucking behavioural issues, what you on about?' I went to one and that was it, I caught the bug."

Kadiff went on to study at the Central School of Speech and Drama, in London, an experience he describes as great and traumatic at the same time.

"I got there and the first thing that was extremely obvious was the class difference," he explains. "There were 18 people in my group, I think six of us hadn't gone to boarding or private schools."

"I'd never been in that kind of environment before but it was a learning curve for all of us because you can't buy your way into good training, you have to do the work."

goes on. "I got the part, then I decided that I wanted to audition for something else within the production because [the first role] was a bit functionary."

"I went back to my team and asked if I could be seen for one of the other characters that was bigger which also had a proper arc and storyline. I think the feedback was, 'We know what we'd like to do with the part, aesthetically'."

That's why Kadiff is keen to tell his own stories to redress this imbalance. "I've got two TV shows in development," he teases. "I'm writing for me, but also for everyone else. Using the platform that I've got from shows like *Fleabag*, I'm absolutely going to use it for good and to try to bring up the rest. If you're going to get the elevator to the top, send it back down for the others."

First up, however, is Netflix's twist-laden thriller *The Stranger*, based on Harlan Coben's best-selling novel of the same name.

Kadiff slices through the yellow tape as DC Wesley Ross, opposite Richard Armitage, Siobhan Finneran, Anthony Head and *Absolutely Fabulous* legend Jennifer Saunders. It is safe to say that no other series on the box features decapitated llamas.

"We shot that [scene] in Bury," he reminisces. "Siobhan and I were trying to keep a straight face, then we heard this group of school



IT'S A FAIR COP:
Kadiff with co-star
Siobhan Finneran

children go past going [puts on a Mancunian accent]: 'Oh my God, fucking hell, who killed that polar bear?' They were being deadly serious. It makes you worry about the youth of today!"

The part of Ross, a detective who just happens to be gay, appealed to Kadiff, an actor who just happens to be gay, because the writers didn't make a big deal out of the character's penchant for "daddies" on Grindr.

"It was nice to see a character who was openly gay but the show wasn't about him being gay," he stresses.

"No one in my experience walks around with their sexuality as the only defining feature."

That said, Kadiff has never made a secret of his sexuality. "I am absolutely proud to be a black gay actor in the UK.

"It's nothing that I've ever hidden from anyone," he maintains. "I make a point of saying I am gay when people ask because it is for the next generation.

"I remember growing up not seeing any black gay actors out there, there just weren't any, or not in my world anyway.

"I want people to know that you can have a career and be successful and play a range of roles and not be defined by your sexuality," he says.

"I marched at Gay Pride last year for the National Theatre, and I was in the front row, making sure people know we're here and we're not going nowhere, so get on board or fuck off."

Case closed. 📌

The Stranger is streaming on Netflix now

BUSINESS PROFILE

John Bruce & Paulo Ribeiro

Co-founders of PRM Agency

Words Markus Bidaux

Fiancés John Bruce and Paulo Ribeiro launched their London-based model agency Paulo Ribeiro Management (PRM) in 2012. They discuss the changing world of fashion, the gender pay gap and working together.

How did you get into fashion?

Paulo: I started at the London College of Fashion. I left fashion design because I couldn't find a proper position so I had to look into other things. PRM wasn't planned, it just happened.

John: Straight out of high school. I started modelling at the age of 18 in South Africa but got a part-time job in the office, which eventually led to full-time booking career.

So, quite a short modelling career?

J: Yes, I didn't like it.

What's it like working together?

P: It isn't easy because we have different visions in things and we do have arguments every day, sometimes a few times a day!

J: Paulo never worked in another model agency, that makes a big difference. I've worked in two in London so I've had first-hand experience.

P: He knows the practical things about running the agency, whereas I know about clothing and model fittings. It's not just about finding a model with a pretty face.

J: We have our ups and downs but at the end of the day, when we go home, we are best friends.

What's PRM's unique selling point?

J: We didn't want to be a big agency, we just wanted to be a well-known, respected, wholesome boutique agency. I've worked at the big agencies and I felt the need to just give a little bit more time to the people I represent, actually turn modelling jobs into careers.

P: Last year, we represented five ex-refugees from South Sudan. That opened up a world of opportunities: two of them have done campaigns for Burberry and Victoria Beckham.

What are clients looking for in 2020?

J: There is so much diversity that people don't know what they really want! You can get a brief looking for a blonde and within 30 minutes it's changed and they are open to everything. We are in the middle of preparing for Fashion Week and it's a mix of nationalities and ethnicities.

How do you discover models?

J: It's important to do the street scouting, we go to the festivals looking for new faces, that's a big percentage of our job. It's better for us to have as many UK-based models as possible, but we need to fill in the gaps with international faces, so we travel quite a lot.

P: Brazil, China, Ukraine, Russia... the biggest problem is getting them work visas.

How many models do you represent?

J: About 100 men and 150 to 200 women.

Huge barriers are being broken down with trans models appearing on magazine covers.

P: There is a Brazilian model who is beautiful but I wouldn't sell her as a trans model.

J: If we are going to represent someone as a woman, we are going to sell them as a woman.

How do you ensure a model is looking their best before a job if they are not in London?

J: We constantly ask for Instagram updates.

"There's no school, no university, no rulebook in this business"

P: There are also downsides to Instagram. We have been catfished, we can't tell how many filters have been used on an image.

J: That can be disappointing. You are excited to meet someone, then they arrive and are not what you expected.

Do clients care about a model's social media following?

J: A lot of clients want to see their Instagram. A high following is alluring, but certain brands will also look more at their creativity and diverse style.

John, you were on *The Model Agency*, the Channel 4 documentary series. Would you ever consider doing something like that for your business?

J: There's a lot of stuff inside a model agency that should not be shown on TV and I didn't want to do it, but I was persuaded to appear. I never wanted to do this job to be famous. If we ever were to do a documentary, it couldn't be a *Big Brother*-style show. What would be amazing is to have a programme following the search for a model.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

J: Because we're dealing with youngsters, having to chase them constantly is tough. A high is obviously finding someone and seeing them go on to do something incredible. We're giving opportunities over and above what's being offered at school or what people think they're able to do. An 18 year old can travel the world with what we're doing.

And what's the lifespan of a model's career?

P: Let's just mention the top models such as Naomi Campbell and Claudia Schiffer. They have had long careers because they keep their measurements to fit the clothes.

J: It's no different for plus-size models, they need to maintain their shape too.

Modelling is one of the few industries where women make significantly more than men. Why is that?

J: Men started off as the accessory to the woman. Make-up, beauty, fragrances, they are all female dominated. I think it's purely sales figures at the end of the day and the biggest money jobs are in fragrance and beauty, which focus mainly on women.

P: A man will have one or two pairs of black shoes, whereas a woman could have four or five pairs. And there is really only one style of man's shirt, whereas there are so many varieties of tops for women.

Has being gay ever affected you in the workplace?

J: I've always been very comfortable being gay in this industry. We are very professional in the office. We don't hold hands or kiss here.

P: We've had people working here who didn't know we are a couple. They only realise when they see our Instagram, which is only images of us on holiday together.

What advice do you have for anyone who wants to go into the fashion industry?

J: To be an agent, you need to do two years of solid hard work. People presume you start a job and things will happen overnight. There's no school in this business, there's no university and no rulebook. So everything is based purely on experience. I'm happy to train someone up from scratch, but I need to see they have potential and a love of fashion. 📸

prm-agency.com

CV John Bruce

1999

Starts modelling in South Africa at the age of 18

2000

Works at Envy Models in Johannesburg

2003

Moves to London and becomes head of men at Nevs Model Agency

2007

Takes the job as head of commercial at Premier Model Management Ltd

2012

Becomes head booker at Paulo Ribeiro Management

CV Paulo Ribeiro

2009

Takes the role of assistant designer at JW Anderson

2010

Graduates from the London College of Fashion with a BA in fashion design

2012

Becomes director of Paulo Ribeiro Management

What will you remember?

The best gay men's resort in the world
Clothing-optional private compound.
24-hour poolside restaurant and bar. Heated
pool, two Jacuzzis, gym, sauna, steamroom
and erotic video lounge. Deluxe rooms.
Free WiFi. Free parking.



**WATCH OUR
VIDEOS** 
ISLANDHOUSEKEYWEST.COM


IsLand HouSe

ISLANDHOUSEKEYWEST.COM • 1 (305) 294-628
1129 FLEMING STREET • KEY WEST
FRONTDESK@ISLANDHOUSEKEYWEST.COM

 **tripadvisor**
CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE

Basque country
p68

Travel

THE WORLD IN FOCUS



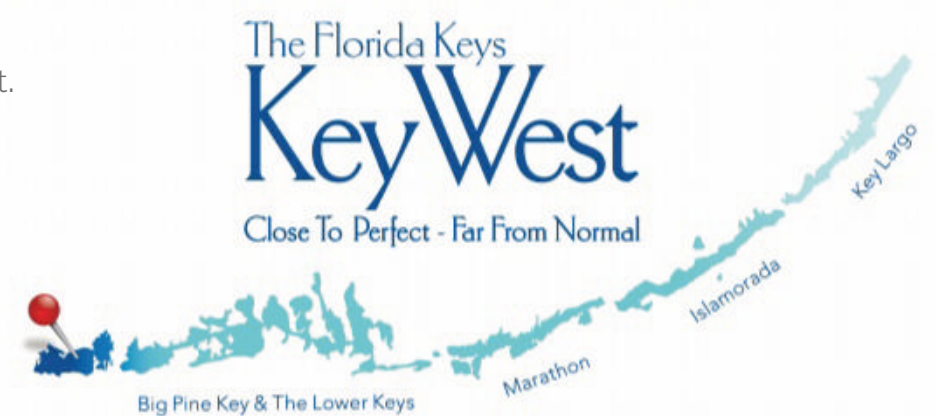
67 Just The Ticket **68** Basque Country
76 Three Of The Best **78** Mallorca **80** Hot Hotel

Because every ship needs a port.



No place is as open-minded and welcoming as Key West. So whether you come for the gay tours, live theatre, bars and bistros or the warm and incredibly clear water and weather, Key West has whatever floats your boat.

fla-keys.com/gaykeywest 0208 686 2600



SONDERS AND BEACH ITALY SRL, PHOTO: ROBERTO CHIOVITTI, MODELS: ANDREA MOSCON & ALESSANDRO MISCEO



Just the TICKET

Words **Markus Bidaux**

WHEN IN ROME...

If you're among those hooked on *The Two Popes* and *The New Pope*, both giving us a glimpse into life in the Vatican, Quiiky Travel's Untold History Tours could be just for you. The gay, Italian-owned company is offering an LGBTQ exploration of the Vatican museums, and although the Roman Catholic Church might tell us that our love is a sin, there have been plenty of scandals within the walls of Catholicism's HQ, including Pope Julius III's relationship with his adopted nephew in the 16th century. And then there's the homoerotic art...

untoldhistorytour.com



EUROGAMES HELSINKI

GAMES PLAN

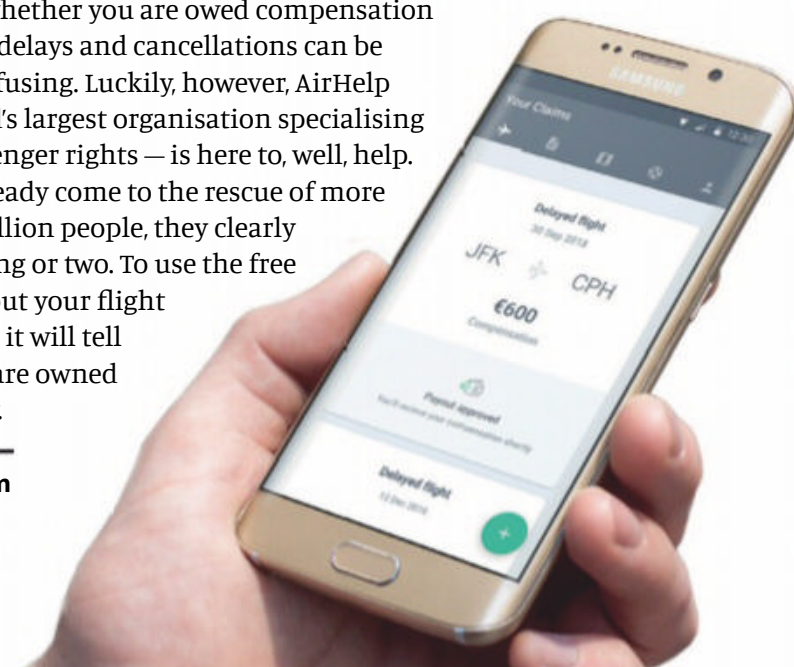
This year's EuroGames – governed by the European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation – is being held in the German city of Düsseldorf, in August. Thirty sports are planned and spectators can watch the vast majority free. A public transport pass for the whole event costs €25 (£21) and you can buy discounted tickets to the evening parties.

eurogames2020.com

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Knowing whether you are owed compensation over flight delays and cancellations can be highly confusing. Luckily, however, AirHelp – the world's largest organisation specialising in air passenger rights – is here to, well, help. Having already come to the rescue of more than 16 million people, they clearly know a thing or two. To use the free service, input your flight details and it will tell you if you are owed any money.

airhelp.com



Big deal in the Big Apple
Flying the fabulous way, every day, to New York City.



virgin atlantic 

A photograph of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, featuring its iconic metallic, undulating facade. In the foreground, the branches of a tree with vibrant autumn leaves in shades of red, orange, and yellow are visible against a clear blue sky. The museum's building is composed of large, curved panels of polished metal that reflect the sky and surrounding environment. A few small figures of people can be seen at the base of the building, providing a sense of scale.

Basque to the future

Markus Bidaux discovers a region steeped in tradition that's recovered from oppression to become a different destination for LGBTQ travellers going to Spain

METAL GURU:
The Guggenheim
Museum in Bilbao



My heart rate is quickening as a cracking noise reverberates through the large building over and over again. I'm in Bilbao in northern Spain, watching a game of *pelota*, an ancient Basque sport.

It's similar to squash but the court is larger and they have *xistera*, long curved plastic scoops, strapped to one hand to catch and throw the ball.

The two players make it look easy but all I can think of is the ball ricocheting off the wall and cracking my skull open. Thankfully, I am given a tennis ball for my lesson and my heartbeat returns to normal.

The players tell me to put the ball in the *xistera*, and, with a limp wrist, arch it over my head towards the wall. Soon I am hurling tennis balls and grateful for my limp wrists, for which I was bullied during PE lessons at school.

The lesson is over too soon and I head back into the fresh air.

Pelota is my first insight into the history of the Basque country, an autonomous region of Spain, which has its own culture and language.

Bilboa receives far fewer tourists than some other Spanish cities, but it's a great gateway to the area. It does not have the hedonistic allure of Spain's gay meccas Gran Canaria and Sitges, but it has formed an "Atlantic rainbow" with the seven provinces of Basque country, four in the north-eastern corner and three adjacent in France. Being an LGBTQ destination is not always about having the most gay bars or beaches, it is just as important to genuinely value the queer community whether local or from afar.

After a quick railway ride up Artxanda Hill, I have all of Bilbao in my sights. The Nervión river cuts

through the city like a horse shoe, and forests and mountains surround it, creating a micro-climate, making this one of Spain's greenest regions. But be warned, it can rain on about 140 days a year, so pack an umbrella.

My guide tells me that Bilbao has been transformed since the 1980s when its river ran black and smelled awful thanks to the mining of iron up stream.

These days, the properties hugging the river are the most desirable homes and the 1997 riverside addition of the Guggenheim Museum turned

the industrial city into the region's cultural hub.

The museum's metal exterior weaves together and mimics the colour-changing sheen of fish scales as the sun passes over it. Outside, art sculptures have been sown along the riverbank, most notable is Jeff Koons' 40ft-tall *Puppy*, which is covered in flowers, making it a mascot for the city.

I'm told that Bilbao Pride's parade each June is made up of dozens of boats that cruise along the river. The flotilla is packed with colourful revellers waving rainbow flags.

Sadly, I've missed the four-day celebration, but I'm here for the first Atlantic Conference, specifically focused on LGBTQ equality, diversity and inclusion.

It's the perfect spot to host the event since its radical shift on LGBTQ rights mirrors that of the local way of life. The Basque people have an ancient culture, which was oppressed when the dictator General Franco seized power after the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939.

Franco's desire for a totalitarian state led to tens of thousands of Basque people fleeing the fighting. Picasso immortalised the conflict in what is arguably his most famous work, the anti-war mural *Guernica*.

All this suffering led to the establishment of the separatist leftist group ETA in 1959. Thankfully, the Basque language is taught in schools once more and 2018 saw the disbandment of the terrorist group after years of de-escalation.

Meanwhile, the legal status of homosexuals went back and forth in the early 20th century, but during Franco's reign LGBTQ people were



SCOOPERMAN:
Markus tries his
hand at pelota



CLEAN SWEEP:
Bilbao has been
transformed since
the Eighties

labelled a danger and locked up in prisons called *galerías de invertidos*, or galleries of inverts, where they could be held for up to three years.

Franco's rule only ended with his death in 1975. Just four years later, homosexuality was legalised, and in 2005 Spain introduced nationwide same-sex marriage equality.

The Atlantic Conference is a source of inspiration with guests flown in from around the world to give talks.

LGBTQ activists from Mexico, Uganda and Poland tell their tales of hardship and progress before locals take to the stage to talk about the region's sexual diversity within the police forces, and the main beer and bottled water

companies' Pride campaigns. And in the evening, the Guggenheim is open for a gala dinner.

The following day is all about food, starting with a tour of the Ribera Market, an indoor food hall.

Although the site dates back hundreds of years, the current *mercado* was built in 1929, and a complete renovation has given the art-deco building a new lease of life.

Inside, there is a mix of huge clear and stained-glass windows allowing light to pour on to the stalls. The produce looks amazing and luckily my next stop is on the opposite side of the river bank at Mina, a small restaurant with only 25 guests per service.

The interior features exposed stonework walls, white-washed timber beams and an oak bar where guests can see into the open kitchen.

All the food is prepared using ingredients from local farmers and the Ribera Market. They only offer a short and a full tasting menu, 10 and 14 courses respectively, and it changes daily depending on availability. We have waistlines to consider and opt for the "short," which does not disappoint.

Back in the afternoon sun, ever so tipsy from the paired wines, I am convinced to try the ice cream at Tostadero Nossi-Bé. Classic flavours of chocolate and vanilla are available, but there's also a tangy frozen roquefort

BASQUE-ING IN REFLECTED GLORY:

Bilbao offers a different side to Spain



cheese with raisins, a black squid ink gelato and a cod flavour.

There is even one called *kalimotxo*, which is based on a uniquely Basque drink consisting of equal parts red wine and cola. A taste proves it's not bad, but a whole scoop? Make mine a mint-choc-chip, please.

The next course is basically a bit of bar hopping. The difference here is that many bars will have *pintxo* (pronounced pincho), Basque-style tapas, which traditionally come skewered on a toothpick.

This is a great way to discover Bilbao's Old Quarter: strolling along the cobbled streets from one bar to the next, fuelled by a little anchovy with

pickled pepper here, grilled octopus there and some deep-fried croquettes washed down with a beer.

This is the best tour of an old town I can remember, but for the tastiest *pintxos*, I have to drive to the region's culinary capital, Donostia-San Sebastián the following day. It's an hour's drive east and sits on the coast. Whereas in Bilbao the *pintxos* are pre-prepared and laid out on the bar for you to pick at, here they are often made to order and more refined.

Maybe that's why the city sports more Michelin stars per square mile than Paris.

"This city sports more Michelin stars per square mile than Paris"

I walk through the cool narrow street of its Old Quarter before slipping off my shoes to wander along the warm sand on one of the city's three beaches, which even on a weekday in autumn is quite busy.

My next stop is Hondarribia on the border with France. This quaint fishing village has a lovely bay filled with boats, and most of the former fishermen's colourful houses have been turned into restaurants, pubs and shops. Being so close to France, I can't resist driving over into French Basque country. Only 30 minutes up the coast is Biarritz.



WORK LIKE A DOG: Jeff Koons' Puppy sculpture at the Guggenheim



EAT YOUR HEART OUT: The Basque country had so much on offer



ON THE CREST OF A WAVE: Le Surfing restaurant, Biarritz

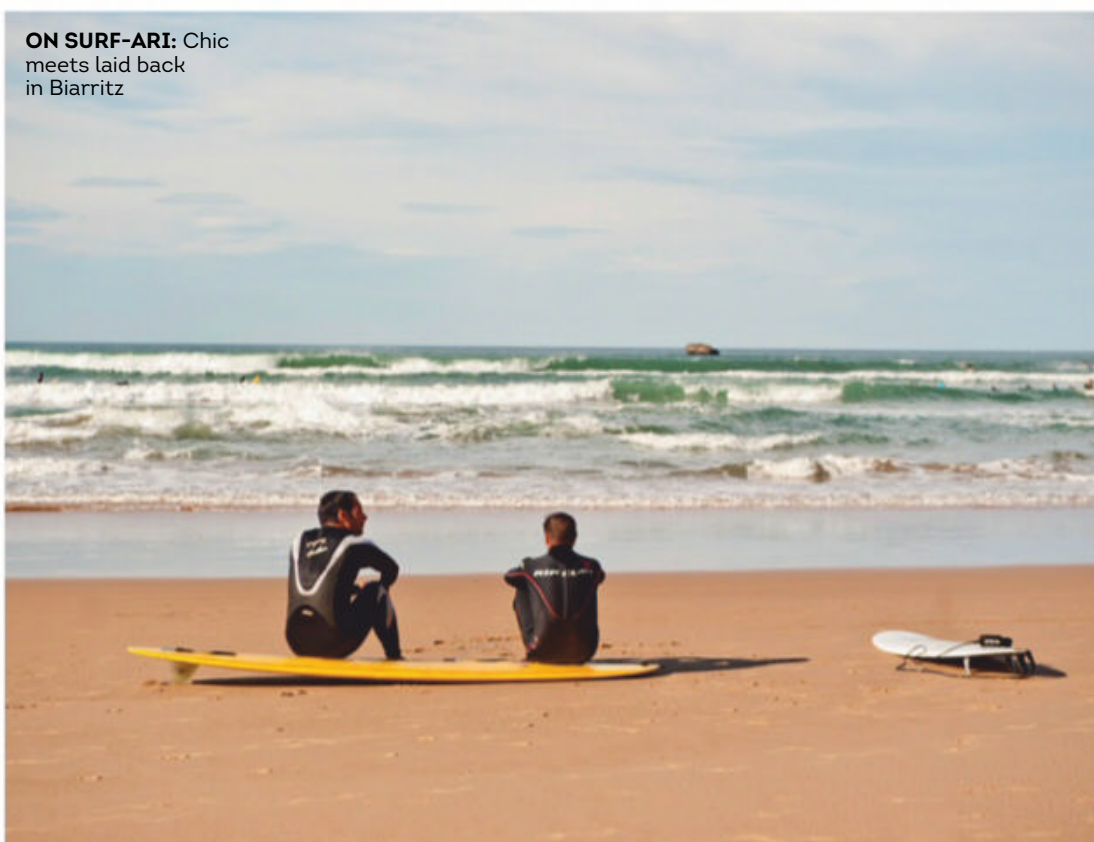


FRENCH TICKLER: Biarritz is a short hop over the border

SANDY SHORE:
Donostia-San
Sebastián has
three beaches



ON SURF-ARI: Chic
meets laid back
in Biarritz



**ANOTHER
KETTLE OF FISH:**
Hondarribia is a
fishing village

The coastal city feels similar to Brighton, with a history of hosting royals dating back centuries, but now it lays claim to being Europe's surfing capital — it's rumoured that the sport was introduced to Europe in 1957 when screenwriter Peter Viertel, working on *The Sun Also Rises* (starring Errol Flynn and Tyrone Power), saw the Atlantic waves and requested his surfboard be shipped from California.

The mix of chic sophistication and a causal laid-back vibe can be seen on the high street where Hermès is only a block away from the Rip Curl surf shop.

My mouth salivates at the best patisserie shops I have seen anywhere outside Paris, before visiting Le Surfing restaurant on Côte des Basques Beach. Its Fifties Americana style wouldn't look out of place in California.

The Le Mister Surfing burger with chips hits the spot as I watch people in wetsuits riding the waves, and a school class have their boards laid on the beach as they practise popping up on them.

I walk along the promenade, looking over the rugged cliff face and jagged islets, the biggest being Rocher de la Vierge (The Rock of the Virgin), a little island with a statue of the Virgin Mary at the top.

Across the bridge and past men fishing over it, I spot the city's white lighthouse in the distance. As the sun sets, I pass the art-deco aquarium and three-storey beach-front casino.

There are a few gay bars in Biarritz that I could explore but it's time to head back to Bilbao. Truth be told, it's a mistake to attempt to try to fit Donostia-San Sebastián and Biarritz into one day.

On my final day, I take one last trip out of Bilbao to Bodega Berroja, a vineyard established in 2001, with more than 1,000 hectares of land.

The vineyard specialises in *txakoli*, an award-winning (slightly) sparkling wine. The owners have built a large rust-coloured tasting room with

panoramic views of rows of vines, where we sample the wines with local cheeses and phenomenal tinned tuna.

I'm grateful not to be driving today as we head to San Juan de Gaztelugatxe, a little islet connected to the mainland by a set of 240 winding steps. It's possibly best known — outside Spain — for doubling as Dragonstone in *Game of Thrones*, so you can live your best Daenerys Targaryen fantasy here.

A word of warning, though: the castle on the hit show was CGI and in reality a small church sits at the top of the islet.

Back at my hotel, I'm standing outside with my luggage, waiting for my taxi to the airport and I see a couple of young women holding hands as they wait for the pedestrian sign to turn green.

I may be on the edge of the Old Quarter, but Bilbao and the Basque people are looking to the future. 🇪🇸

bilbaoturismo.net

"The islet is connected to the mainland by a set of 240 winding steps"



Where to stay

Hotel Tayko Bilbao

The riverside Hotel Takyo Bilbao is located in the Old Quarter and has a 1920's façade, suggesting a bit of old-school glamour awaits. But the interior of the hotel, which opened in 2018, tells a very different story.

Inside, the century-old brick walls have been exposed and the lift is glass on three sides, so as you ride up to your room you can see all the work that went into restoring the building, which used to be a department store with several storeys of flats above it.

Each floor has a suspended walkway to the rooms which are stark but comfortable.

There are rooms with stunning views, some even with baths next to the large windows, and all offer

L'Occitane en Provence amenities. On the top floor is a chill-out corner with sofas and the small Technogym-equipped fitness centre is open 24 hours a day.

The ground floor boasts gastro bar Patri, but the culinary star is one floor up: Ola Martín Berasategui restaurant. Chef Berasategui received a Michelin star for Ola in the 2020 guide. The eaterie has small windows looking out to the river, and the table service is impeccable.

The seasonal menu is focused on classics with modern techniques, and the petit fours are a perfect way to end pretty much any meal.

taykohotels.com

3 OF THE BEST... gin-toxicating hotels

Your time away should be an opportunity to relax and if a glass of something strong helps you unwind then these distillery-based hotels might be the place to raise a glass

Words **Markus Bidaux**



BREWHAHA

The Swan Hotel in Southwold, Suffolk, was bought in 1875 by the neighbouring Adnams brewery, where beer has been brewed for more than 650 years. Adnams now produces practically every alcoholic spirit as well as wines. In 2017, the seaside retreat was given a complete refurbishment and has 35 modern guest rooms and two restaurants, The Tap Room and The Still Room. Guests will discover a 20cl bottle of gin on the house in their room, but those with a thirst for more can tour the brewery or visit the Gin Lab to create their own tippie.

theswansouthwold.co.uk



GIN TONIC

Among the antique shops and colourful houses on Portobello Road in London's Notting Hill is The Distillery. On the top floor are three guest rooms decorated with mid-century furniture, and record players – bring your own vinyl. But the real fun takes place on the lower floors. The GinTonica bar has a list of 100 gins, which are served in 21oz glass goblets, with an accompanying tapas menu. On the ground floor is The Resting Room cocktail bar where mixologists specialise in gin and other in-house distilled spirits. And in the basement is The Ginstitute where master distiller Jake Burger and his team will let you make your own blend.

the-distillery.london

CUT TO THE CHASE

Verzon House in Herefordshire is owned by Kate and William Chase, who founded Tyrrells crisps in 2002 and sold it six years later for £40m. The country house hotel, with eight ensuite rooms, is a 15-minute drive from the farm-based family-run distillery, which offers tours showing the traditional methods of mashing, fermenting and distilling – accompanied by a gin and tonic, of course. Back at the hotel, the bar offers a cocktail (and mocktail) master class. There is also a brasserie restaurant or you can enjoy a classic afternoon tea.

verzonhouse.com



You belong in the city where you can be yourself.



CJ Run in
Chicago, Illinois

© 2020 ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, OFFICE OF TOURISM, TTY: 1-800-785-6055

illinois

enjoyillinois.co.uk

USA

VisitTheUSA.co.uk



In the Palma my hand

After discovering a different side to the Spanish island of Mallorca, Thomas Stichbury well and truly puts his foot in it...

We all put our foot in it sometimes, but what happens when its both feet? This is the question I am left to consider, and occasionally wince over, after a trip to Palma del Mallorca.

The Spanish island of Mallorca was once synonymous with package holidays: decent resorts, cheap booze and the promise of a traditional English fry-up. But the optics have long since changed and the region has undergone an image overhaul, sitting pretty as a sun-smooched retreat — hot summers, mild winters — rich in culture, history and, yes, cuisine.

This is the iteration I become acquainted with over the course of my short, sweet and, later, unexpectedly sore stay in the capital city.

After dropping my bags at Purohotel, a former palace fit for a princess (moi) in the Old Quarter, I grab some food (including a scoop of avocado ice cream, a first) before embarking on a trivia tour.

Facts range from the grim — under the reign of torture-happy dictator

Words
Thomas Stichbury

General Franco, residents would regularly be confronted by the smell of burning human flesh in the main square — to the fruity: on New Year's Eve, revellers are challenged to eat 12 grapes on the stroke of midnight, a tradition that has resulted, I'm told, in tragedy on a couple of occasions.

Sometimes you really should spit, not swallow.

My favourite nugget of information, however, concerns a pair of sphinx statues, primed to pounce on the tree-lined avenue of Passeig Des Born. The traffic-stopping, Linda Evangelista-adorning Wonderbra billboards of their time, they were both given breast reductions because their mountainous mounds were considered obscene.

Our tour concludes with a visit to the Santa Maria Cathedral, a 13th-century structure dripping with gothic grandeur. As per usual when sauntering past such religious institutions, the doors shudder and shake into life, and I am met with the smog of extinguished candle smoke. Catholicism, get over yourself, hun.

Dinner awaits at Purohotel's swish on-site restaurant, Beatnik, where I polish off plate after plate of tapas — padron peppers are proof that there is a higher power — paired, of course, with fine wine.

Grabbing a left-over bottle, I ~~elegantly stroll~~ woozily stumble up to the terrace to admire the view and be alone with my thoughts: how can I like avocado ice cream, but so dislike avocados?

The next day, I feel the wind in my increasingly thinning hair as I set sail on board a *goleta*, an old-school, 12-person-capacity Mallorcan boat.

"There is no hotel room better than here," our captain enthusiastically exclaims. I'm not sure all the other passengers would agree, specifically a woman, whose sea legs are a bit wibbly-wobbly, hugging a bucket.

After cutting through the waters of the Med for about an hour, we drop anchor outside Purobeach Illetas, one of the hotel's two exclusive beach clubs, an oasis of white in the distance, so sparkly it brings to mind a TV advert for bleach.



SUN TRAP: Umbrellas aplenty at Purobeach Illetas... sadly, no sign of Rihanna

CLOTHES CLEARLY OPTIONAL: Casa de la Panadería,

FOOTING THE BILL: Thomas paid heavily for his Tom Daley impersonation (inset)

BED TIME: Purohotel

MED-ICAL EMERGENCY Purobeach Palma spelt trouble for Thomas

I am given two options: wait for a dingy to take me to shore or swim there. I'm a strong swimmer — I was in "dolphin" group at primary school, bitches — so I opt for the latter and spectacularly swan dive into the sea (think Cheryl's performance of *Call My Name* on *The X Factor*, circa 2012).

Yep, I've still got it and within 15 minutes, I'm emerging from the surf like James Bond. Call me delusional!

Opulence is everything and the club delivers brilliantly, as I recline on a sun lounger and make my way through an exquisite menu.

Back on the beach, the captain strolls into view, carrying my clothes... but not my shoes. He accidentally brings somebody else's and vows to return mine the following day. I feel like Cinderella waiting for her prince to come with her glass slipper as I pad, barefoot, to the bus back to my digs, where my Converse await.

I spend my final evening in Mallorca exploring its vibrant art scene. The timing couldn't be better as the annual Nit de l'art descends on Palma,

transforming it into a giant exhibition. The streets swim with people as the galleries open their doors until the early hours to showcase the works of contemporary artists, most notably American Jean-Michel Basquiat.

It's the perfect place to meet an eligible (read: moneyed) bachelor as I peruse a Koons here, a Banksy there, doing my best to imitate an intellectual culture vulture.

Alas, my performance flops and I'm forced to leave alone.

My last morning in Mallorca — with still no sign of my shoes — begins with a sugar high as I scoff the delights of a local bakery: the *ensaimada* (a traditional sweet bread) is lip-smackingly moreish.

With a couple of hours to kill before I need to be at the airport, I'm whisked off to the hotel's second beach club, Purobeach Palma, to stock up on some vitamin D. It is here that I am persuaded to take a dip in the sea. Reluctantly, I agree, and to quote Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*, "Big mistake. Big. Huge!"

"I feel just like Cinderella waiting for her prince"

Almost immediately, I experience a stabbing sensation in my left foot and think I've sliced it open on a sharp rock below.

Then I feel a shooting pain in my right foot: WTF!

The club's staff rush over and clean my cut, before their attention turns to another wound: spines dotted across my sole (and big toe)... I've had a rude run-in with a sea urchin.

With a taxi waiting, I dash (OK, limp pathetically) to the airport, feeling sorry for myself. However, time — and magnesium oxide — has been a healer and I'll fondly remember Mallorca for more than that sting in the tale. Or, the tootsies.

Oh, and just in case you're worrying: my shoes were returned to the UK. They weren't delivered by a prince, but the postman will do. 📦

Rooms at Purohotel start at €120 (£100) per night, based on two people sharing
purohotel.com

HOT HOTEL

Atzaró

IBIZA



There's no way I can be called a stranger to Ibiza — I've been visiting the island for almost 20 years. In that time, it's undergone many changes: clubs have come and gone, new hotels have sprung up. Even the once-derided San Antonio has found a new lease of life.

But one thing has remained constant on the island, from its hippy roots through its more-recent decadent decades, and that is an ethereal connection to its nature and its environment.

At Atzaró, that connection to Mother Earth begins in the orange groves across its 13 hectares, and continues through its vast vegetable garden, sprawling flowerbeds and many trees that wind their way across the property. Accommodation is split between rooms located in the traditional finca-style building on the main grounds and, across the road, in the newer village of apartment-style rooms overlooking swimming pools and ponds, the latter populated by frogs whose croaking adds to the charm of

Words
Cliff Joannou

a hotel that prides itself on being one of Ibiza's most-loved Agroturismo and luxury hotels.

The spacious rooms offer privacy and peace, whether you are with a special someone or just enjoying a weekend away with your bestie.

The 43m-long, fresh water pool divides the serene resort grounds in half, with pockets of hideaways to sunbathe in among the orange trees, where you can pick the fruits off the branches, peel the rind back and refresh yourself as the sun beats down.



Meanwhile, a 15-minute drive from the hotel is the Atzaró Beach Club and Restaurant, on Cala Nova, offering a peaceful seaside spot to top up the tan on those days when you don't fancy the maddening

throngs of the over-crowded beaches to the south of the island.

By night, we hop in the car and head to Aubergine, an intimate restaurant whose farm-to-table concept is renowned in Ibiza.

Owned by the Atzaró group, and just 20 minutes away by car, located between the towns of Santa Gertrudis and San Miguel, the chef uses home-grown ingredients — picked that very day from the company's farm and garden — and only the freshest fish and meats. You can taste the sun-ripened richness of every crisp veggie in each mouthful. It's all divine.

For the more-seasoned visitor, seeking the night-time thrills that the island is famous for, but also keen to indulge in the serenity of the island's holistic history, Atzaró offers the perfect respite from the island's devilish side. After a late night out under the disco ball, and with Ibiza town close by, Atzaró brings you back down to Earth with a gentle hug. 🍷

atzaro.com



LET'S CHANGE HATE FOR
LOVE

Axel Hotels promotes love and respect worldwide.

NOW ALSO IN AMERICA.



AXELBEACH

MIAMI • SOUTH BEACH

■ *we are heterofriendly* ■

Find out about our new hotel in Miami at www.axelhotels.com

wellmān®

Live life well®

WELLMAN.CO.UK

"I've been taking Wellman since my twenties to support my health and hectic lifestyle."

David Gandy



Made in Britain

From Boots, Superdrug, supermarkets, Holland & Barrett, health stores, pharmacies

*UK's No1 men's supplement brand. Source: Nielsen GB ScanTrack Total Coverage Value and Unit Retail Sales 52 w/e 7 September 2019. To verify contact Vitabiotics Ltd, 1 Apsley Way, London NW2 7HF.


VITABIOTICS



Cybil War
p84

Active

MIND, BODY AND WELL-BEING

84 Cybil War **90** Real Bodies **92** A Problem Shared **93** Matt Lister

ACT OF WAR



Part-time drag queen — the towering Cybil War — part-time CrossFit champ, Mark Whistler, 31, decided against heels when he joined the latest season of *SAS: Who Dares Wins*

Photography Markus Bidaux
Words Tim Heap
Location 1Rebel Angel



W

hat came first — drag or fitness?

Drag, I've been doing it for six years. I've always been active but I never found something

I could commit to for any length of time. I started drag when I was living in New York and it kind of took over my life while I was there. I was going out four or five nights a week in drag and doing my own show on a Wednesday, all while holding down a nine-to-five job. It took a toll on my body, then just before I moved back to the UK, a CrossFit gym opened at the end of my street, and I thought I'd give it a go. I've been hooked ever since because there's a community to it: you essentially have someone telling you what to do and it's so varied. It can seem intimidating but I joined with a load of people and we were all bumbling our way through it together.

Where did the idea to apply for SAS: Who Dares Wins come from?

I've been a fan of the show since series one, and my dad was in the SAS for 20 years — his entire military life, so it's always been there. I watched the first three seasons, then spoke briefly to a producer for series four, but I'd just started a new job and the timing wasn't right. Watching that season and knowing that I could have been there, I was like, "I have to do this." I also realised that that whole side of my

dad's life is a complete mystery. I knew nothing about his time in the SAS, and this was a way to get a small glimpse into the selection process he went through and to give us something to talk about, to bridge his world and mine.

How different is the show to his experience of the selection process?

What we did is more boot-camp type stuff. Dad said the show pulls from all different Special Forces regiments, not just the SAS. He never did team-based stuff, and the biggest difference was that he got fed and was allowed to sleep. Of course, there are aspects of it that were similar — they obviously did escape, evasion and interrogation — but what he went through was much more intense and for a lot longer.

Did it live up to your expectations?

It was much worse! When all you've seen is what's on the TV, you just assume that's what you're going to be doing — and that's terrible enough. But there's so much that doesn't make the cut, and you can't prepare for the lack of calories and the lack of sleep. Everyone in that room was at a certain level of fitness, but much of the challenge is mental and there's no way to prepare for that.

You were only on around 800 calories a day —

how many would you normally consume?

About 4,000. On that first day, we'd been up at 3am, on a jetty at 4am, on a boat at 5am, mic'd up by 6am, then thrown out of a boat into the sea. I was the first overboard, so after I'd swum to shore, I was standing on that beach — dripping wet — for more than an hour waiting for everyone else. Then we were "beasted" up the hill and had to run five kilometres back to base. By this point, it was about 10am, and we still hadn't eaten... When you watch the

show, it's like day one, day two, day three, but it doesn't feel like that when you're in it, it's one continuous day and you don't know when you're going to eat or sleep.

What do you think other recruits made of

the fact that you are a drag queen?

We were all sequestered when we first arrived and weren't really allowed to talk to each other, so it was only when we properly got in that I said, "I'm a drag queen." And everyone was like, "No way!" We're in a room full of people who are PTs, parole officers and business managers, and I'm this bearded giant, who's also a drag queen. It had caused me some anxiety going into it the show because it's very macho, this was only the second series that women have

"I was running on empty, no way was I going to make it up the hill again"



been allowed on and it's got such an alpha male following, that I was like, "I don't know who I'm going to be with, and I'm in a room of 25 people, we have to sleep together, we have to change together, there are no showers..." But everyone was very accepting, and I think being a drag queen helped me through some of the harder bits, because it gave me a chance to bring a bit of levity to the situation.

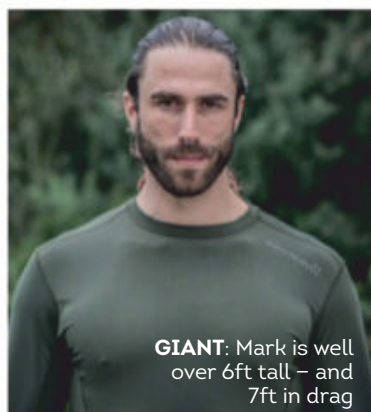
Did you censor yourself at all?

When I first arrived, I was definitely a little bit guarded but the thing the show does very well is completely strip away all pretence instantly. So, the parts of Cybil that are Mark and the parts of Mark that are Cybil came out straightaway. They strip you naked as they do in the real military because you're supposed to be getting rid of your old self and you're like a blank canvas. Then you're so exhausted that you can't have any sort of guard. You're literally shitting next to someone else. Once that's done, you're like: "You've seen everything of me now, so you're going to experience all of me."

You left in episode three — what are your feelings about how far you got?

I wish I could have gone further. I don't have

much memory of the task — we had to carry this log up a hill — or VWing [voluntary withdrawal] because I was so out of it. The voice-over guy was just like, "Mark, who's the tallest recruit, is at the back of his team. As the incline gets steeper, he will be taking the brunt of the weight of the log."



GIANT: Mark is well over 6ft tall — and 7ft in drag

And that hadn't occurred to me. About three-quarters of the way up I was starting to run on empty. We made it, then we went back down, thinking, "We've made it." But then they said: "No, go back up." That was when I VWed. I was done; there was no way I was going to make it up that hill and back down again. The stuff that came after, I feel like I could have done, but I'm proud of how far I got, and I would do it again tomorrow.

Did your dad's background make it more difficult for you to accept your sexuality?

We're a very close family but you never know how people are going to react. My mum is this small, fiery ball of Mediterranean energy and my dad is this stoic, military man, very

disciplined and controlled. It was difficult to read him, so I had no [way to] gauge how he was going to take it. I've always been myself, and I was out clubbing when I was 16. I was into the small glam-rock scene that there was in the heart of London: I'd leave my house wearing one of my sister's sequinned tops and have glitter make-up on my face, and my dad would always say, "Yeah, have fun!" So there had definitely been indications that I wasn't the classic army son. But when faced with the actual words, he was stoic. My mum took it a little bit harder to begin with, which I wasn't expecting, but we got past that.

Was there an expectation for you to follow your father into the military?

He never wanted to join himself; he stumbled into it at the age of 17 or 18. So to me, he was very much like, "If you want to, fine, but no expectations, I wouldn't advise it." As a young gay teenager, military life didn't seem like it would be terrible — we've all seen that porn!

Has the experience of going on the show brought the two of you closer?

Definitely. I think he's always been proud of, and respected, me but my life is so alien to him. I think that's true of a lot of queer people. Some of us are lucky to have accepting parents, but even though they love and embrace us, it's very difficult for them to relate to anything that goes on in our world. So, it's always been tricky to find that bridge that connects us — and drag certainly wasn't it. I think being on the show has given us a jumping-off point.

How do people typically react to your drag?

I always say my drag is the meeting point between masculinity and femininity. I want to try to build up the masculine aspects of my personality so that I can feminise them even more and force people to confront their ideas of what is considered

"They strip you naked to get rid of your old self"

masculine and feminine. When I started drag in New York, being a drag queen was a status symbol. Then when I moved back to London, I'd set up dates with guys and they'd find out that I was a drag queen and be like, "Oh, yeah, it's not really my thing, so..." It played with my head a little bit to begin with, then I thought: "Fuck these people. I'm just going to embrace it and make it part of my drag." Cybil's goal in life is to make big men feel small and make small women feel fantastic.

Has there been a softening of those prejudices as drag becomes more mainstream?

I think people are taking that moment to consider why they have a negative reaction to drag, or dating a guy who does drag. Before *RuPaul's Drag Race*, there were a handful of drag queens who performed in a handful of bars and they were 40-year-old men in wigs and gowns who were singing show tunes. Now, you're hard pushed to find any

THE ANGEL OF REBEL





queer person who hasn't got dressed up and thrown on some make-up and glitter. People are more accepting of it. But there's always the next thing to move on to, and that's now lifting up drag kings and trans performers.

We've now got Drag Race UK, would you be interested in being the British answer to Kameron Michaels?

I always said SAS was my Drag Race. I'm the world's number one CrossFit drag queen. That's the official tagline, and until someone beats me on the official CrossFit Open leader board, I'm keeping that title! I don't think there's a single drag queen who's never thought about going on Drag Race, so I'll probably apply at some point, but I don't know whether they would want me. I play with the idea that I'm a guy and in drag, whereas I think, historically, Drag Race has been quite focused on the female illusion. I also don't know whether I would want that level of fame... it's like they own your arse. I've read that contract — you sell your soul to Ru for an allotted period of time. 🙄

SAS: Who Dares Wins is available on All4



WAX & MASSAGE
BODY TREATMENTS FOR MEN

North London
(N4, Finsbury Park)



Male Intimate Waxing
Massage Therapy
Spa Treatments

**Male Brazilian
Waxing
only £40**

Book online or call George

www.waxandmassage.co.uk | 07557 783 482

BFI

MUSICALS!

NEW BLU-RAYS FROM THE BFI



ICONIC FILM MUSICALS
AVAILABLE TO ORDER NOW

amazon.co.uk

BFI SHOP

Image: Catherine Deneuve, Les Demoiselles de Rochefort

**A CITY
LAW
FIRM**

Be free. Be yourself.

Our belief is for us to help the next generation to embrace and develop LGBT rights. **A City Law Firm** will always be on your side to pioneer for equality in the law.

T 020 7426 0382 | acitylawfirm.com

A City Law Firm Ltd 64 Clifton St | London | EC2A 4HB

#lawgbt



RUDY AWAKENING

Normally seen wielding a whip on stage, burlesque performer **Rudy Jeevanjee** cracks down on toxic thoughts and self-destructive behaviour, and talks about learning to love yourself

Words **Thomas Stichbury**
Photography **Francisco Gomez de Villaboa**

I love to give audiences the full fantasy. My signature looks tend to have a traditional African or Asian touch, and more often than not I want to capture the feeling of a beautiful, ethereal, regal deity, radiating something calm and sensual, yet strong and whimsical.

Although I have never really identified as a “drag queen”, the art of drag was my first love when I was growing up. One of my inspirations and references is the work of Kim Aviance, a non-gender-conforming, trans-appearing entity. At the time I had little or no knowledge of chosen gender identity, or what being trans was, but watching them felt right.

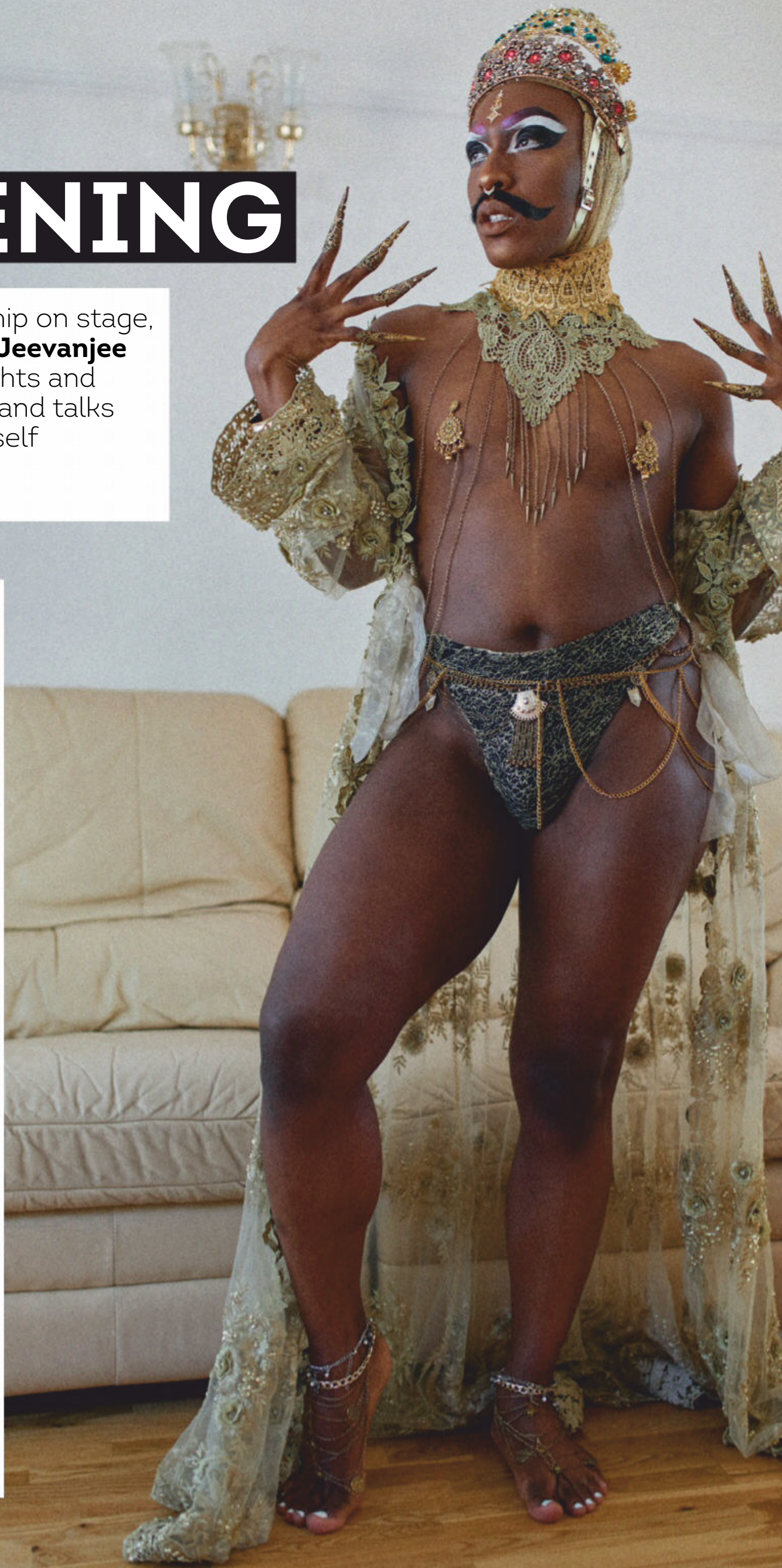
I remember coming across a video of Kim performing in 2006, when I was in my late teens, and I was entranced by their beauty and seductiveness: the twisting and turning, flouncing and bouncing of their dancing and powerful struts. I’d dance around my bedroom with a t-shirt on my head pretending it was a wig.

In the deep corners of my mind, I knew there was this innate desire to express a love and pride for my body as Kim was doing.

My debut burlesque performance was in November 2017, a couple of months before my 30th birthday. I was watching a BBC3 series called *Queer Britain* and one of the episodes focused exclusively on people of colour in the queer community, and the Cocoa Butter Club was featured.

I was immediately drawn to what this collective of performers was about and what it stood for, and it felt as if this was my chance to pursue my dreams in a space where my body, my colour and my sexuality would be accepted and celebrated.

I contacted the club’s founder, Sadie Sinner, and was booked in for a show.





powerful than the belief you have in yourself.

However, I haven't always been my own biggest cheerleader.

For the most part I had a decent childhood, but from the age of eight or nine I started to put on more and more weight, and soon started to struggle to feel comfortable with my heavy-set self.

Despite having friends and being quite happy in school, I hated my body and how I looked, especially at a time when your differences are becoming more apparent and being highlighted among your peers.

The toxic thoughts would emerge, and I'd often run a mental list of all the things that were "wrong" with me: too black. Fat. Short. Closeted gay boy. I was trying to rationalise my undesirability. In particular, I despised my hips and thighs. They were so big and womanly and took away from the manly appearance I "should" have. It felt they were giving away my sexuality, which I didn't like.

"Toxic thoughts appeared and I ran a mental list of everything wrong with me"

I had brief self-destructive moments as a young adult. Purging food was something that I did for a short time. It became a ritual I had to do as punishment for over-eating, but it got to a point where my body was feeling much worse off afterwards, so I stopped. I also started to use skin-bleaching

cream for areas of hyper-pigmentation — I was obsessed with having an even skin tone from head to toe.

After a couple of months of rubbing these foul-smelling chemicals over parts of my body and face, I took a moment, paused and thought: "What the fuck am I doing?"

Trying to bleach my skin was one of the most emotionally hurtful things I have done. It felt stupid and hypocritical, as if I was attempting to erase who I was.

Now, I embrace the many tones of my skin and the thickness of my body that I used to be in conflict with.

Performing has helped me become more at peace with my appearance as I've grown older. It's taken a lot of time, but I've learnt to love my differences and see them as gifts. 🌟

@rudyjeevanjee
thecocoabutterclub.com

I'll never forget it. It was the most nerve-racking and thrilling experience of my life and I realised that all those negative thoughts, that, for years, had been telling me I wasn't good enough, weren't true.

We are conditioned to think a particular way about beauty and about our bodies and are often made to feel something is wrong with us if we happen to think differently. This way of thinking wasn't sitting right with me: I was living a life I thought I should be living, not the life I wanted to be living.

To begin this journey to appreciating and loving myself, I had to recalibrate and undertook a major shift in mind and body.

I ended a long-term relationship, withdrew from friends and family for a while — years, to be honest — and started to exercise, eat healthier and proceeded to rebuild. By avoiding outside influences, I took the time to listen to myself; there is nothing more

A PROBLEM SHARED

Got a problem? Dr Ranj Singh is here to offer his advice

I recently noticed some blood in my urine. I've never had anything like this before and it's freaking me out. I'm a healthy young man and look after myself — I only drink at weekends and have the occasional cigarette. What could it be?

Miles, Cambridge

Unexplained bleeding from anywhere is something you should take notice of and definitely have checked out. So, make sure to book an appointment with your GP as soon as possible.

One of the most common reasons for men to have blood in their urine is an infection somewhere along the urinary tract. You might also experience some soreness when you pee, feel the urge to pass urine a lot, have a temperature, or pain in your sides or lower back.

Urine infections in men are less frequent than in women, but they are still possible. The first thing your GP may want to do, then, is take a sample.

Another possibility could be kidney stones: these are small amounts of hardened minerals found in the kidneys or ureters (the tubes connecting your kidneys to your bladder). Very small stones may not create any problem, and you could pass them without even knowing, but larger ones can cause pain, fever, feeling sick and passing blood.

This usually requires a blood and urine test, as well as a scan.

Inflammation within the kidneys, an enlarged prostate — this usually affects older men —

and certain medications can also result in bloody pee. However, one potential explanation that needs to be investigated is bladder cancer.

This is the growth of abnormal tissues within the bladder itself and blood in your urine is the major symptom. In fact, in the early stages you may have no other symptoms at all.

The important thing to note here is that smoking is behind one in three cases of bladder cancer, so you need to stop.

“One of the most common causes of blood in urine is an infection”

The chances of you having this are lower than other diagnoses, and you will have to be referred to hospital for a camera test and scan to find out if this is the case.

Finally, it might sound silly, but just check your symptoms don't happen after you've eaten beetroot — you'd be surprised at how many people mistake red wee caused by the naturally occurring dyes in beetroot for blood. This is completely harmless, albeit a bit of a shock when it first happens! 🙄



HEALTH NEWS

Coronavirus

The recent outbreak of coronavirus has made everyone worried. However, there is no need to panic. This is among a common group of viruses that normally cause mild coughs and colds, although this strain seems more serious (especially for the elderly and those with long-term medical problems). If you have been to China or in contact with someone who has recently, then contact a health professional right away. Otherwise, good hand-hygiene, minimising exposure to people who might have flu-like symptoms, and staying indoors if you are sick is the best advice.

Don't ignore coughs

It's common to have a cough or cold at this time of year, but a persistent cough could be a sign of something more sinister. Most coughs settle down within three weeks; if yours lasts longer — and is accompanied by other symptoms, including shortness of breath, chest pain and coughing up rusty-coloured phlegm or blood — make sure to see your doctor.

●●● IF YOU'D LIKE TO SUBMIT A PROBLEM FOR DR RANJ TO ANSWER, TWEET @DRRANJ OR EMAIL THOMAS.STICHBURY@ATTITUDE.CO.UK



Photography
Markus Bidaux



ROPE TRICK
Don't exercise
only at the gym

If your goal in the gym is to lose weight, but it's not happening and you can't put your finger on why, Matt Lister suggests some culprits, and how to change your routine and get back on the right track

■ **YOU'RE FOLLOWING A DIET AND EXERCISE PLAN THAT ISN'T TAILORED SPECIFICALLY TO YOU**

Googling a free PT programme isn't the answer, especially if you have specific goals in mind. It might be worth spending money on sitting down with a personal trainer who'll be able to talk through your aims and piece together a plan to help you achieve them.

■ **WHERE YOU LIVE OR WORK MAKES STICKING TO YOUR PLAN A COMPLETE BITCH!**

There is temptation on every corner. Within 500m of my house, there's a Greggs, a chicken shop, chippy, a cafe and more. Be aware of your surroundings and avoid those unhealthy traps if you can. If you put it out of your mind, you're far less likely to crack!

■ **HEALTHY FOODS AND PORTION CONTROL**

It seems really simple, but it's easy to overlook how much "cheating" is going on. That goes for naughty snacks, cheat meals, and even just the general amounts of food you're piling on your plate. It's easy to cook that little bit too much every day, then say: "Sod it, I'll just finish what's left." It soon adds up...

■ **YOU ONLY EXERCISE AT THE GYM**

There are countless opportunities in your day to burn a few extra calories: walk to the gym or to work, take the stairs instead of the lift or escalators, and cycle when

and where you can. Make the most of every opportunity when you have a goal as difficult as losing weight.

■ **YOU'VE HIT A WEIGHT-LOSS PLATEAU**

It happens: you're doing brilliantly but then suddenly all those things you were doing don't seem to be making any difference. Take a step back, look at what you've kept the same and what has slipped or changed. Be honest with yourself. Don't be afraid to try new things, but, in my opinion, almost always avoid trends and fads.

■ **YOU NEED MORE SLEEP**

Good quality sleep will allow your body to recover and repair from all that

weight-loss effort. Evaluate your sleep environment and routine and make changes to ensure you're getting a good seven or eight hours each night. If you need to squeeze in a little extra, don't be afraid to add in a 20-minute power nap if you can.

■ **CHECK YOUR MENTAL HEALTH**

Sometimes we don't notice how a little extra stress, tension or worry affects our habits, causing us to snack more or skip the occasional workout. Be kind to yourself, and if you realise there may be something a little more serious going on, don't be afraid to reach out to a friend or a professional. There is no shame in admitting we need a little help sometimes. 🧠

"A little extra stress can cause us to snack more"

trends and fads.

Good quality sleep will allow your body to recover and repair from all that

weight-loss effort. Evaluate your sleep environment and routine and make changes to ensure you're getting a good seven or eight hours each night. If you need to squeeze in a little extra, don't be afraid to add in a 20-minute power nap if you can.

■ **CHECK YOUR MENTAL HEALTH**

Sometimes we don't notice how a little extra stress, tension or worry affects our habits, causing us to snack more or skip the occasional workout. Be kind to yourself, and if you realise there may be something a little more serious going on, don't be afraid to reach out to a friend or a professional. There is no shame in admitting we need a little help sometimes. 🧠

norwegian 

**Europe has
never been closer**



Fly non-stop from London Gatwick

Book now at norwegian.com/uk

Sasha Velour
p96

Social

PEOPLE, PLACES, PERSPECTIVES

96 Life Lessons **98** Word On The Street **101** Books and Music
102 Films **103** Homo Fomo **104** BFI Flare

My introduction to drag was watching the movie *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* as a 12 year old. Then, in college, I started learning about the history. It was discovering that drag queens like Sylvia Rivera had been activists, or influential artists like Lypsinka who made me want to try it myself

IF I COULD TURN BACK TIME, I WOULD REVISIT THE STONEWALL UPRISING TO GET SOME PROPER DOCUMENTATION OF IT

My biggest strength is bringing what I see in my head into the world. My biggest weakness is worrying about what others think of me

The most difficult thing [I've faced in my life] was when my mom died. I realised I was far more reliant on her than I ever [thought]. I had no choice but to build up a greater self-reliance, immediately. Drag really helped me with that. As a queen, I got in touch with my own femininity, which brought me closer to her

My happy place is doodling in my notebook with a coffee

life lessons

SASHA VELOUR

Drag Race winner and visual artist

As told to **Thomas Stichbury**
Images **Tanner Abel**

Laying down her roots on season nine of *RuPaul's Drag Race* in 2017, Sasha Velour fully bloomed during the finale when she snatched the crown with an iconic lip-synch to Whitney Houston's *So Emotional*. Since winning, the avant-garde, gender-fluid queen and visual artist has been touring the world with her spellbinding theatre show *Smoke & Mirrors*. "Through Sasha Velour I've learned that I can transform myself profoundly, not just on the surface, but in deep ways," she explains. "Drag asserts that queer expressions and experiments with gender are normal and beautiful and noteworthy. This is vital because there are still loud voices saying that trans, non-binary and fluid gender isn't real." Sasha, 32, lives in New York with her partner Johnny and their beloved greyhound, Vanya.

Smoke & Mirrors begins its UK tour in Birmingham on 2 March
smokeandmirrorslive.com

THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE I EVER RECEIVED IS: "DON'T DEFINE YOUR LIFE BY THE THINGS THAT SEEM TO BE HAPPENING TO YOU, BUT RATHER BY THE CHOICES YOU MAKE IN RESPONSE TO THOSE THINGS." A THERAPIST SAID THAT

My most treasured possessions are a silk dressing gown, once owned by 1920s Chinese opera star and international drag sensation Mei Lanfan, and a matchbook from Bonnie's, the original name of the Stonewall Inn, given to me by Sister Purrrr Do from the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence

My pet peeve is people who talk but don't ask questions

My favourite item in my wardrobe is my *So Emotional* finale lip-sync dress. It's not just for the memory of that life-changing moment but also because it was hand-stoned and fringed with eight different colours of rhinestones and fringe. Me, my partner Johnny and our friend Vigor Mortis stayed up for two consecutive nights putting the finishing touches to it



"Gender" is just a category for a person based on where they fit in to the binary of male and female. I call myself gender fluid because I strongly connect with bits of both, and at different times

I met a girl at Smoke & Mirrors in Toronto, maybe 11 years old. She had lost her mom to cancer like me and was celebrating having made it through the first year by coming to see the show with her dad. She showed up in a recreation of one of my most over-the-top stoned and feathered looks and looked like a million bucks. I wish I had been that self-aware and cool at that age!

MY LIFE MOTTO IS: IF YOU AREN'T INSPIRED TO BE AS EXTRA AS POSSIBLE WITH YOUR PASSIONS, THEN YOU NEED NEW PASSIONS

I went to an LGBT student fair at the University of Illinois when I was in high school. It was my first time feeling part of a community, and that people like me actually had some power and place in this world

My biggest regret is never growing out a snatched high ponytail when I still could

If I could rule the world for a day, I would put more women in charge of things 🌈



ZOOEY Leigh Bowery. Major icon, costume aesthetic, hand embroidery, sense of humour and incredible silhouettes



Jay Detox, because she's always moving with the times but her style also has a nod to the ages



PABLO Violet Chachki. I have a crush on her in and out of drag. She has so much confidence and is the best Drag Race winner for me



ANTONIO Adore Delano and Bob the Drag Queen, because they are more relatable to my own style. Adore doesn't feel the pressure to look perfect and feels real

DragCon UK
at Kensington
Olympia,
London

THE WORD ON THE STREET

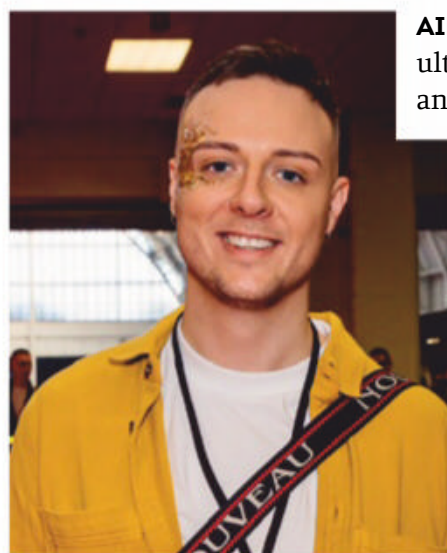
Which drag queen's
style do you most
admire?

Photography & as told to **Michael Chapman**



MATTHEW
*Naomi Smalls
is everything!
Her style
changes all
the time and
she has that
Nineties look
that I love*

Valentin
*Valentina.
She's spicy
and fiery, she
has flair and
is sexy*



AIED RuPaul — the
ultimate queen: classic
and glamorous

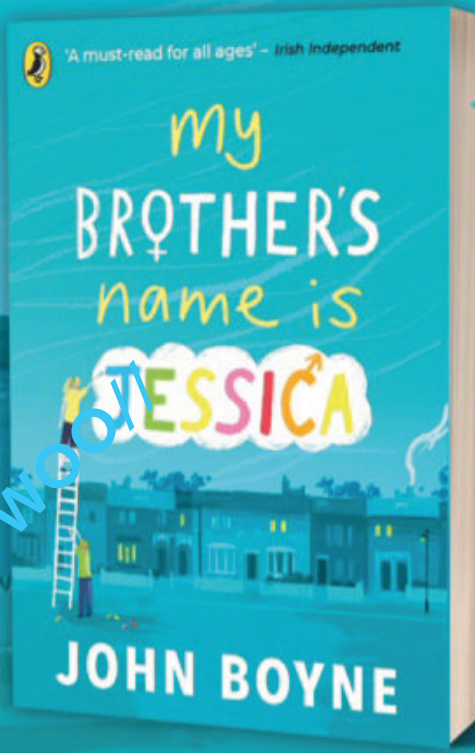


Jorye Trixie Mattel.
I like drag to have a
fantastic, imaginative
feeling — it should be
over the top!





SAM HAS KNOWN HIS SISTER
JESSICA ALL HIS LIFE.
TONIGHT IS THE FIRST TIME
THEY'RE GOING TO MEET.



OUT 16TH APRIL

TRT

BRIDIES//FT. PIXIE WOO
EVERY THURSDAY

WWW.THEGEORGE.IE    THEGEORGEDUBLIN
89 SOUTH GREAT GEORGE'S STREET, DUBLIN 2

SJM CONCERTS BY ARRANGEMENT WITH CAA PRESENTS

ADAM LAMBERT
VELVET
THE TOUR



TUESDAY 01 SEPTEMBER
LONDON
THE SSE ARENA,
WEMBLEY

GIGSANDTOURS.COM TICKETMASTER.CO.UK
AXS.COM
VIP PACKAGES ALSO AVAILABLE

NEW ALBUM 'VELVET'
RELEASED MARCH 21



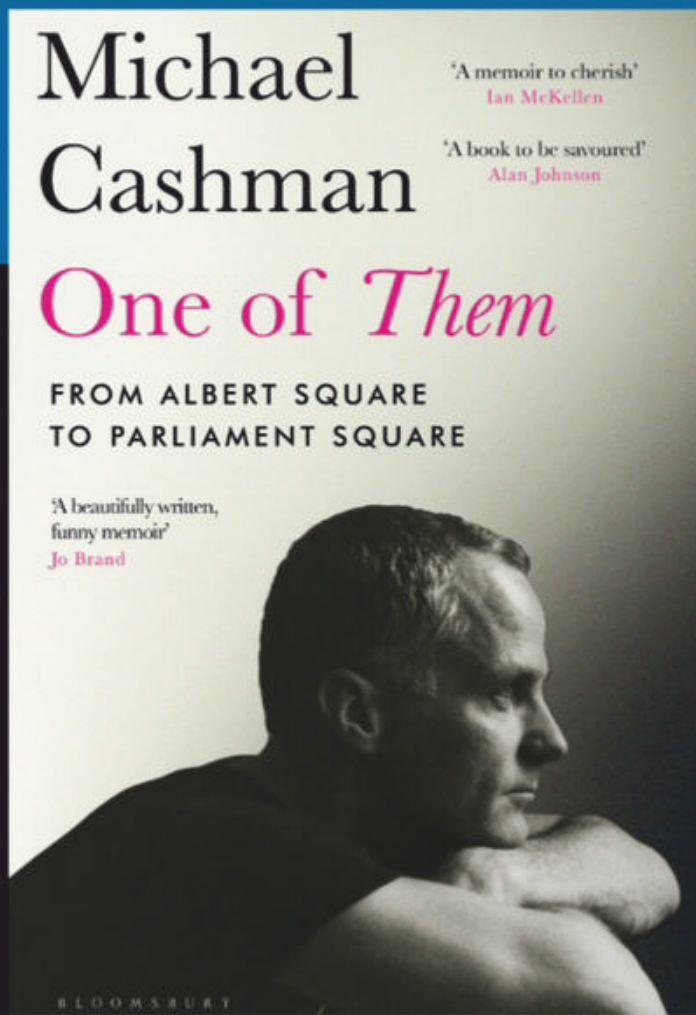
Books

Words **Uli Lenart**

**BOOK
OF THE
MONTH**

Square route of success

Former *EastEnders* star Michael Cashman delivers a captivating biography



ONE OF THEM: FROM ALBERT SQUARE TO PARLIAMENT SQUARE

Michael Cashman/Bloomsbury

The articulate and beautifully written autobiography by Michael Cashman, who played Colin in *EastEnders*, one half of the famous first gay snog in a British soap, and who would go on to become a pioneering gay rights activist, MEP and member of the House of Lords. Cashman captivates with the extraordinary characters and events of his East End childhood, his sweep into the world of theatre and British film, becoming a playwright and protege of Alan Ayckbourn, through to the vitriolic media response to that kiss, the bricks through the window, the anti-Section-28 marches and his role as a founding member of Stonewall alongside Ian McKellen. Adorned with praise from Simon Callow and Armistead Maupin, this is the story of a tenacious and compassionate gay rights hero. But more than anything, *One of Them* is a heart-breaking love story told by an incredible, kind man who fought for a world where that love would be respected. Brilliant and beautiful. **Out now**

Music

Words **James Barr**



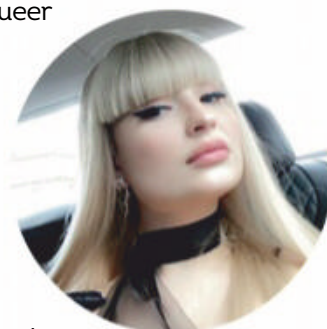
Dolls in the house

Mariah and **Pussycat Dolls** are headlining Brighton Pride in August and I am shook. The Doll's *React* is a fierce and fiery return to the charts, with a video so sexual my eyes are burning. At one point, Nicole, Ashley, Jessica, Carmit and Kimberly pop their shoulders over their head, leaving their legs split wide apart with their arses in the air... try this for the top in your life – I've just signed up to a yoga course. I caught up with Nicole on Hits Radio's breakfast show recently where she told me there are no album plans just yet and the girls are taking new music one month at a time.

Sam Smith's new album *To Die For* is, however, on the way after they announced it by opening a wig shop in Soho! Sam says they've set themselves free on this album, and the title track slaps with a very relatable feeling of queer loneliness.

There's new music from **Kim Petras** (right) too, in the form of fresh break-up bop *Remind Me*, a banger that'll make you cry and dance at the same time. She dedicated it to her single fans, inviting us to hang out with her. I can't wait to see her supporting **Camila Cabello** on her UK tour this summer.

Speaking of tours... come and join me as I take my hit podcast *A Gay and A NonGay* to cities around the UK this March – visit gaynongay.com/live for tickets and info. 📺



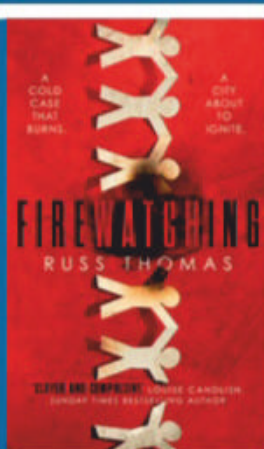
INSTAGRAM

**ALSO
THIS
MONTH**

FIREWATCHING

Russ Thomas/Simon & Schuster

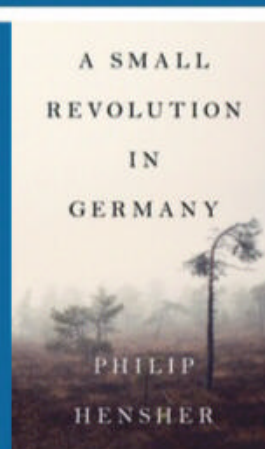
A gripping new British gay crime thriller that kept us guessing right up to its incendiary climax. When a body is found bricked up in the walls of an old house, it's clear from the state of the dead man's hands that he was buried alive. Cold-case investigator DS Adam Tyler angles to get himself assigned to the case, unaware that he has already compromised the complex investigation. We couldn't put it down. **Out now**



A SMALL REVOLUTION IN GERMANY

Philip Hensher/Fourth Estate

Written with incredible dexterity and skill, this sparkingly smart tale of youthful idealism and its aftermath is Philip Hensher's 11th novel. Everyone remembers what it's like to be 17: the conversations you have, the ideas that burst upon you, the kiss that transforms you. Then you grow up and make a deal with adulthood. Hensher at his shrewd, original, brilliant best. **Out now**



Words:
Guy Lodge

5/5

TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG

George MacKay, Nicholas Hoult, Russell Crowe, Charlie Hunnam, Earl Cave
OK, here's a tease: in one scene of Justin Kurzel's wild Aussie outlaw adventure, Nicholas Hoult delivers a homo-erotically tinged monologue to George MacKay wearing nothing but sock garters. Come for that, stay for everything else in this thrillingly unhinged spin on the legend of Ned Kelly, played by MacKay with roaring, primal ferocity. Dripping blood, sweat and fury from every pore, it's revisionist history with rock-star vitality. **28 February**

ALSO THIS MONTH**DARK WATERS**

Mark Ruffalo, Tim Robbins
Unjustly overlooked in the awards season, this stirring true-life legal drama is a new direction for queer American director Todd Haynes, more severe than modern classics of his, such as *Carol*. Given the subject, it needs to be: Ruffalo plays the corporate lawyer uncovering a case of corporate Teflon poisoning in a West Virginia town. You'll watch it, weep, and maybe throw out your frying pan. **28 February**

MILITARY WIVES

Kristin Scott Thomas, Sharon Horgan
This laughs-and-tears Brit-com from Peter Cattaneo, the director of *The Full Monty*, is risk-free, feel-good comfort viewing: the cinematic equivalent of a freshly laundered cardigan. Based on the true story of the chart-topping Military Wives choir, it's given just a tinge of vinegar by Kristin Scott Thomas as the grieving mother of a soldier killed in Afghanistan, who finds a musical outlet for her mourning. **6 March**

FILM OF THE MONTH**Changing all the rules**

Rather than painting by numbers, Céline Sciamma's 18th-century lesbian love story is a celebration

5/5

PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE

Adèle Haenel, Noémie Merlant, Luàna Bajrami, Valeria Golino, Armande Boulanger

It's quite the month for queer European cinema of the most ravishing order. The latest film from lesbian French auteur Céline Sciamma — the woman behind *Tomboy*, that pitch-perfect study of a gender-non-conforming child — is her most lushly traditional in appearance, which is not to deny its burning core of subversive sexuality. Sciamma rewrites the rules of the period bodice-ripper, marking this slow-burning romance between an 18th-century noble woman (Haenel) and the female artist commissioned to paint her portrait (Merlant) with a striking, explicit female gaze at every turn. It's rare to see women's bodies observed and celebrated with such sensual empathy on screen. The two leads have a quiet, shivery chemistry, while every frame is composed and coloured like a painting in its own right. Whatever your gender and desires, see it with someone you love. **28 February**

AND THEN WE DANCED

Levan Gelbakhiani, Bachi Valishvili, Ana Javakishvili, Giorgi Tsereteli

Make a note of the names Levan Akin and Levan Gelbakhiani: the director and star of this achingly graceful Swedish-Georgian gay ballet romance, the big hit of last year's LGBTQ festival circuit. They should be global successes soon enough. Set in a strict Tbilisi ballet academy, where male dancers' muscles are pulled as taut as their desires, talented student Merab (Gelbakhiani, himself a mesmerising ballet professional) is told by his instructors that "there is no sex in Georgian dance." However, when he sees rebellious new arrival Irakli (Valishvili), it's clear he'll prove them wrong. As the two men become rivals and lovers, the ensuing duet is classically swoon-worthy and straight-up hot. After all, it's not every film that offers you a sexy shirtless dance to Robyn's *Honey*. See p44. **13 March**





THEATRE

BOSIE

Rik Barnett stars as Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas (or Bosie, as he was known) in this one-man play. The illicit lover of Oscar Wilde is given a chance to share his side of the story in an intimate character study at The Old Rep Theatre, in Birmingham, from 1 to 4 April.

oldreptheatre.co.uk



FESTIVAL

WOMEN OF THE WORLD

Celebrations are in order as the festival marks its 10th anniversary at the Southbank Centre, between 6 and 8 March. Delving into the LGBTQ landscape, highlights from the 70-plus panels, talks and workshops include Amelia Abraham's *Queer Intentions*, which warns of the dangers of pink washing.

southbankcentre.co.uk



HOMIO FOMO

QUEER THEATRE, FESTIVALS, EXHIBITIONS AND MORE

3 things to see

...at And What? Queer. Arts. Festival. Celebrating LGBTQ culture with 25 events across 12 London venues, it runs from 13 to 29 March

1// THE FABULOUS LYP SINKA SHOW

(The Pleasance, 26-28 March)

Give New York's pioneering lip-synch artist a warm welcome back as she makes her first UK appearance in 16 years.

2// UNSIGHTLY DRAG

(Jacksons Lane, 25 March)

Disability-led circus cabaret group Quiplash rolls into town with a drag show all about embracing difference. With audio description and BSL interpretation.

3// SHANNON: BITE ME

(Seventeen, 19-29 March)

The exclusive premiere of Joseph Wilson's exhibition of photos and videos about social isolation, inspired by San Francisco trans woman Shannon Pat and her home.

andwhatfest.com



PERFORMANCE

INSANE ANIMALS

Cult cabaret duo Bourgeois & Maurice have the X(tra terrestrial) factor in their new out-there musical. The pair appear as hyper-glam aliens on a mission to save Earth from impending political, environmental and social doom. Runs at Manchester's Home theatre until 14 March.

homemcr.org

by
**MICHAEL
BLYTH**



MOFFIE

Directed by Oliver Hermanus

After being drafted for compulsory military service, a young South African man is forced to keep his feelings for a fellow recruit secret at all costs. Confronting issues around racism and homophobia head on, Oliver Hermanus' extraordinary Apartheid-era drama is by no means an easy watch, but it is an unforgettable one.

PRIDE & PROTEST

Directed by Blaise Singh

A fascinating documentary which follows several black and minority ethnic activists in their day-to-day lives as they confront and interrogate prejudice in contemporary British culture. Guaranteed to be a starting point for some much-needed debate, this is a timely examination and celebration of QTPOC communities in the UK.

CICADA

Directed by Matthew Fifer

The opening-night film at this year's festival tells the story of a blossoming relationship between two men in New York. But as their feelings develop, each are forced to confront traumas in their pasts. A deeply heartfelt and moving piece of work that sensitively deals with some difficult themes, and signals the arrival of a thrilling new queer filmmaking voice. It's set to be one of the year's best.

MONSOON

Directed by Hong Khaou

Henry Golding stars in Hong Khaou's exquisite study of cultural displacement, in which a man returns to Vietnam for the first time since his family fled the country when he was six years old. Khaou opened BFI Flare in 2014 with his gorgeous debut *Lilting*, and *Monsoon* continues to prove that he is one of the most thoughtful and distinctive queer filmmakers around today.

SPIRAL

Directed by Kurtis David Harder

For those who appreciate the darker side of cinema, this chilling nail-biter is especially for you. When a gay couple relocate to a small suburban town, they slowly begin to realise that the neighbours are not quite as friendly as they first appeared. Like a gay riff on *Get Out*, this is smart and scary horror filmmaking with a keen social conscience.

A FLARE FOR MOVIES

BFI Flare: London LGBTQ+ Film Festival returns in March, with a blistering line-up of the world's finest queer films. Three of the event's lead programmers pick their favourites for *Attitude*

Moffie



by
**ZORIAN
CLAYTON**

T11 INCOMPLETE

Directed by Suzanne Guacci

Gripping yet understated, this tale of a woman of mystery really keeps you guessing. A carer with a dramatic past develops a relationship with a woman she looks after, the title being a reference to her spinal cord injury. It raises questions of second chances in life, sexuality and disability.



T11 Incomplete

DISCLOSURE: TRANS LIVES ON SCREEN

Directed by Sam Feder

All the biggest trans stars are out for a timely history lesson in transgender lives on screen, and you might be surprised to know that trans people have been in the movies since the dawn of cinema. Exploring theatrical cross-dressing and the best and worst examples of trans narratives, the documentary critiques the power of film and TV in having cemented nasty stereotypes. Thankfully, these days are coming to a end and many excellent examples of the present will make you happy to be living in the here and now.

TRANSKIDS

Directed by Hilla Medalia

Four very different trans kids in Israel are nearing the end of high school. With military conscription fast approaching, there are a variety of ways to avoid it, but this may incur a range of society and family taboos for these teens. Charting their access to treatment, family support, and coming out at school, this is an insightful film, delving deeply into gender and Judaism.

PIER KIDS

Directed by Elegance Bratton

It is wonderful to see more films coming through from inside the communities themselves rather than by others temporarily entering marginalised groups. This raw documentary by Elegance Bratton captures life on the Chelsea piers in New York, where trans and gay people of colour — many of them homeless — have congregated for decades. It exposes the negative impacts of gentrification and increased control of public spaces.

LINGUA FRANCA

Directed by Isabel Sandoval

What we have all been waiting for: more trans directors! Isabel Sandoval is also the writer and takes the lead role, playing a home carer to the elderly and living under the radar as a migrant to the USA from the Philippines. Set in New York, it is subtle and hard-hitting, telling a 21st-century Brooklyn love story set against the harsh backdrop of crackdowns on immigrants.



Pier kids



Lingua Franca

NO HARD FEELINGS*Directed by Faraz Shariat*

Parvis is a German-born Iranian who is doing the things that young, gay men get up to: clubbing, online hook-ups and avoiding responsibility. But his life is turned upside down when he's charged with shoplifting and meets some Iranian refugees as part of his community service.

FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO*Directed by Daniel G Karlake*

The description for this powerful documentary may not seem like an instant crowd-pleaser but the account of how religion affected four families with trans and gay kids is astonishing. It also gets to the heart of how little things really matter, focusing on the fragility of human lives and the power of love.

MEMORIES OF A TEENAGER*Directed by Lucas Santa Ana*

A beautiful and spirited evocation of the fragility of adolescent desires starring Renato Quattordio as teenage blogger Zabo. Angst, betrayal, self-discovery and deep emotions compete for our hero's attention as he struggles to lose his virginity. And when he does, life doesn't get much easier.

SUK SUK*Directed by Ray Yeung*

Nominated for a Golden Horse Award as best film at the Taipei Film Festival, this is a gentle and utterly compelling story of two older, closeted gay men. Pak and Hoi are both married and have families, but find each other — and romance — in later life: one is 70, the other 65. It's a rare portrait of older gay men and the reality of their lives.

ASK ANY BUDDY*Directed by Evan Purchell*

It always feels like people had more fun before you came along. This occasionally hardcore nostalgia fest of a film is a brilliant editing together of 125 gay porn films shot between 1968 and 1986. There are many pleasures to be had in this celebration of cruising, masculinity and unbridled desire: an aesthetic, erotic and historic delight.



by
**BRIAN
ROBINSON**



Ask Any Buddy



Suk Suk



No Hard Feelings

Can't get tickets for the film you want? Returns for sold-out screenings are released 15 minutes before the start of each film. The festival runs from 18 until 29 March. bfi.org.uk/flare



London LGBTIQ+ Film Festival



18-29 March
BFI Southbank

#BFIFlare

25 & Under tickets £3

Main Supporter

PURELAND
FOUNDATION

Supported by



Official Partners



Media Partner



Aged 16-25? For £3 tickets on the door, visit the box office 45 mins before start time with your ID.
One ticket per customer, subject to availability.

I TRAVEL FOR THE UNDISCOVERED

📍 Isle of Skye, Scotland.

©VisitBritain/Clementine Lallamant



FIND YOUR

GREAT

BRITAIN



visitbritain.com

Allan wears jeans, by **Bottega Veneta**,
trainers, by **Nike at Foot Locker**
p114

Style

"WALK LIKE IT'S FOR SALE, AND
THE RENT IS DUE TONIGHT"

112 Crush **114** Mix Up **124** Dsquared2 x Pepsi **127** Grooming **128** Hot Summer Nights

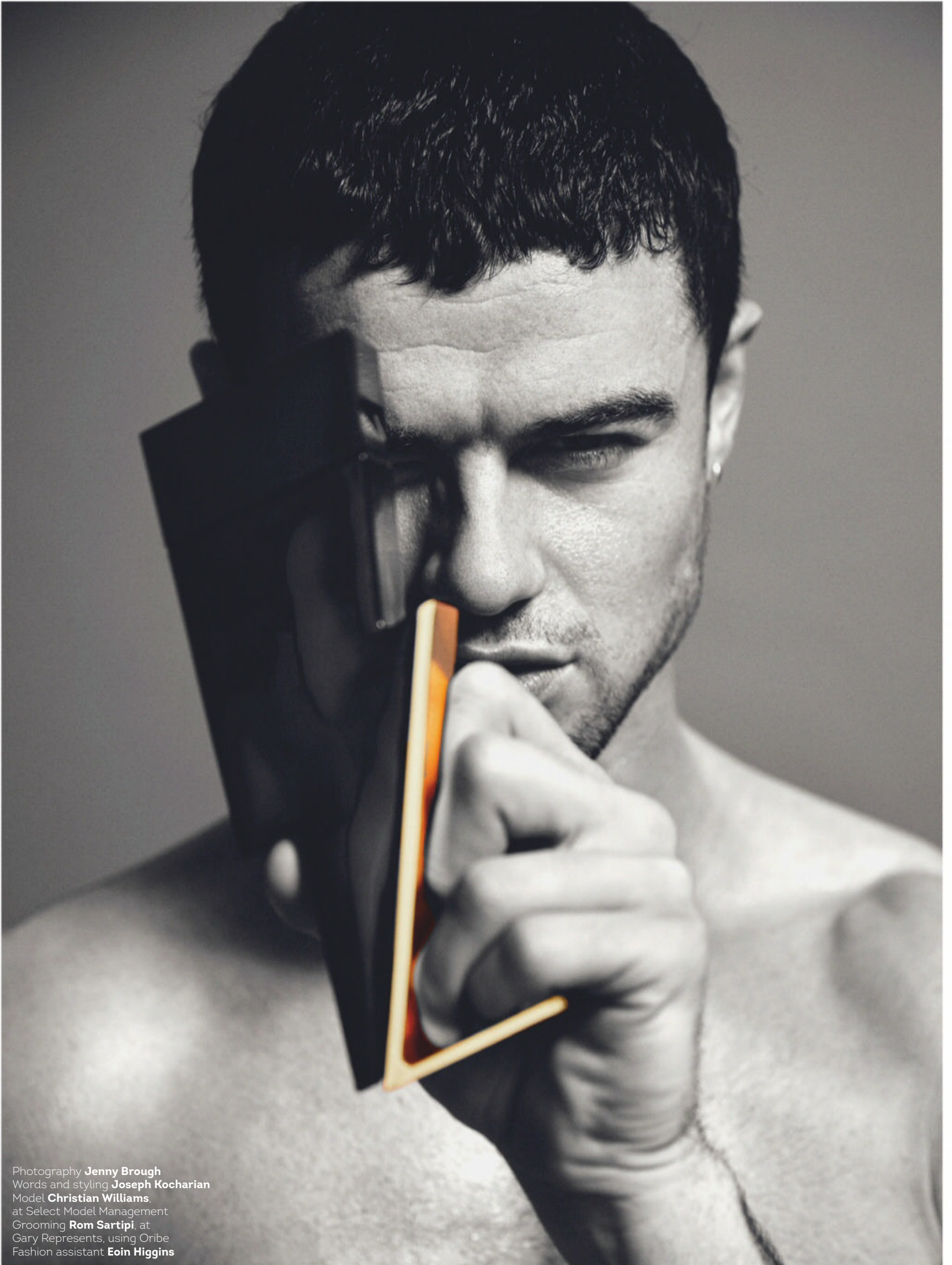
GOLDEN BOY

There's always been something irresistible about a bad boy. We're talking the romanticised version, of course: JD in *Heathers*, Han Solo in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Sebastian in *Cruel Intentions*, and James Dean in, well pretty much everything. Carolina Herrera have now tapped into this with their latest fragrance, Bad Boy. It plays about with both the masculine and the feminine, with bright vert de bergamot, white and pink pepper blending with luxuriously darker tonka, cocoa and cedarwood notes.

Price: £75/100ml.

theperfumeshop.com





Photography **Jenny Brough**
 Words and styling **Joseph Kocharian**
 Model **Christian Williams**,
 at Select Model Management
 Grooming **Rom Sartipi**, at
 Gary Represents, using Oribe
 Fashion assistant **Eoin Higgins**



EQUIPPED TO THRILL

French label Equipment has always been known for an androgynous aesthetic but now the brand is launching its first all-inclusive/ gender-fluid line. Taking inspiration from looks of the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, the collection pays homage to Equipment's original fit, detail and tailoring.

equipmentfr.com

c · r · u · s · h

Words **Nick Byam**



MATCHES MADE IN HEAVEN

For the first time since the brand's ready-to-wear debut in 1966, Paco Rabanne are back with a new menswear range. With more than a slight nod to the 1960s and 1970s, creative director Julien Dossena unites bold stripes with clashing micro florals, glam-rock tailoring and the brand's signature chain mail, reimagined through a romantic lens. The line pre-launches exclusively at Matches Fashion in February.

matchesfashion.com



TOGETHER AGAIN

Horse riding meets British pop culture as Camper and designer Kiko Kostadinov – teaming up again for spring-summer – give us their hot-to-trot two-piece Together collection. Classic styles are reworked for a playful finish with a whole lot of colour. Available online and in selected Camper stores.

camper.com

Keep track of time, whatever your orientation



The C1 Grand Malvern Worldtimer is perfect for style-conscious globetrotters, with a choice of Italian Cordovan leather strap colours. Set the hands for the timezone of where you are heading and the orange radar marker for home - or another city of your choice. With a moving GMT ring, the Worldtimer effortlessly keeps up with you. Two-timing has never been so easy, or attractive.

Do your research.



christopherward.co.uk

Allan wears suit, by **HUGO**,
shirt, by **Farah x YMC**,
trainers, by **Fila**, bracelet
throughout, model's own



MIX UP

Break the rules by smartening
up your denim or dressing
down your tailoring

Photography **Conor Clinch**
Styling **Nick Byam**



Allan wears all clothing
and accessories,
by **Burton**

Allan wears all clothing
and accessories, by
Marks & Spencer





Allan wears shirt, by
Filippa K, trousers, by **Folk**
at **MR PORTER**, tie, by
Polo Ralph Lauren



Allan wears jacket, by **Lee Jeans**, shirt and trousers, both by **Lacoste LIVE**, shoes, by **Kurt Geiger**, socks, from a selection at **Sockshop**

Allan wears shirt, by
Marks & Spencer, top
(worn underneath), by
Comme Des Garçon
Play at Selfridges, jeans,
by **Armani Exchange**,
trainers, by **Asics**, tie,
by **Tommy Hilfiger**



Allan wears vest, by
Sandro, jeans, by **Lee
Jeans**, shoes, by **Kurt
Geiger**, cap, by **Polo Ralph
Lauren**, blazer (in hand),
by **PS Paul Smith**





Allan wears all clothes
and accessories,
by **Burton**

Allan wears jacket, by
Calvin Klein Jeans, shirt,
by **French Connection**,
trousers, by **Nanamica**,
trainers, by **Axel Arigato**





Allan wears blazer, by
H&M, top, by **PS Paul
Smith**, jeans, by **Levi's**

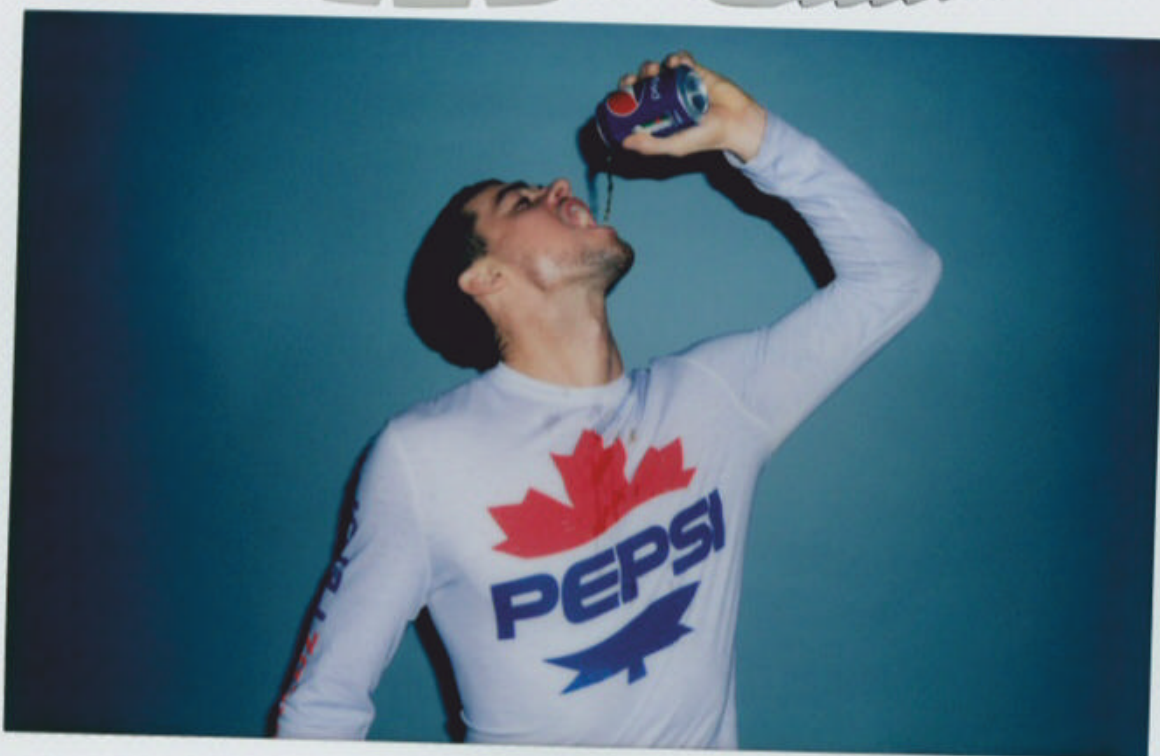
GROOMING **Rom Sartipi** at Gary Represents,
using Murad Skincare and Oribe
MODEL **Allan** at Supa Model Management
FASHION ASSISTANT **Will Simons**
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT **Rami Hassen**



iPhone case, £70



Sneakers. £605



Photography **Jenny Brough**
Styling and words
Joseph Kocharian
Model **Christian Williams**, at
Select Model Management
Grooming **Rom Sartipi**,
at Gary Represents



Denim shorts, £375

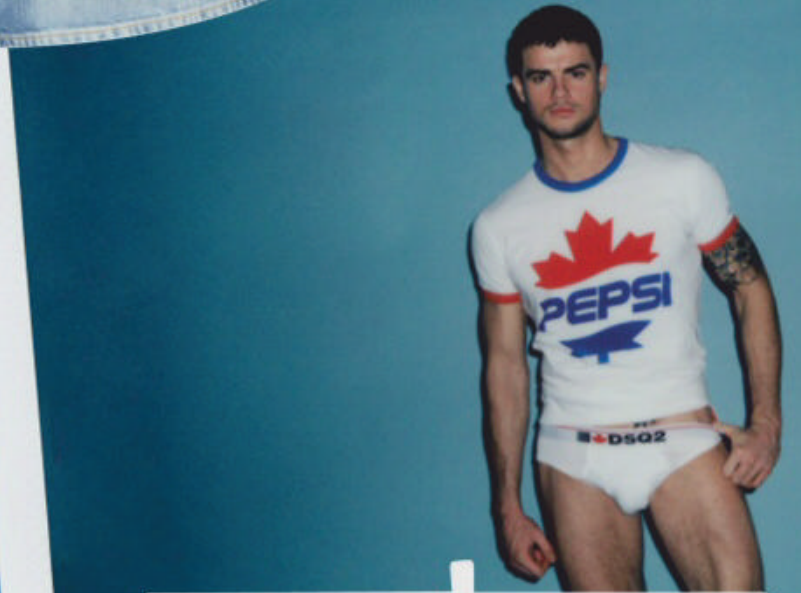
DSQUARED2 X PEPSI

Fashion will always have an affection for all things retro, and we know and love Dsquared2 for their forays into fun. So it's no surprise to see they have created a capsule with Pepsi. The D2xPepsi limited-edition collection, designed by Dean and Dan Caten, incorporates the cola's vibrant colour palette from the ads of the Eighties and Nineties and put the logo on everything from denim jackets, sweaters and swimwear, to shorts and tops. What's even better is the scope of the range: there's also footwear and accessories such as belts, caps and even phone cases. All we need now is a bit of Beyoncé, P!nk and Britney to really ring in the Pepsi nostalgia.

dsquared2.com



Jacket, £1,225



Swim briefs, £130



A WHOLE LOTTO LOVE

Primark are taking a stroll into streetwear by teaming up with Italian sportswear brand, Lotto.

The 24-piece collection has everything from clothing to accessories, with the Lotto logo featured throughout, in various iterations – printed, stitched or as repeated pattern on the clothes. Taking inspiration from being on and off the pitch, it definitely has “kit” vibes, with jerseys, tracksuits and shell suits coming in a monochrome palette with shocks of hot pink and green, which can be teamed with bucket hats, caps and sliders. Available now in stores, with prices from £7 to £18.

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



Words **Joseph Kocharian**
Photography **Conor Clinch**
Fashion **Nick Byam**
Grooming **Rom Sartipi** at Gary Represents,
using Murad Skincare and Oribe
Model **Allan** at Supa Model Management



**ANDREW FITZSIMONS
X PRIMARK**

Hair-stylist Andrew Fitzsimons's clientele includes the Kardashian family, models Ashley Graham, Karlie Kloss and Bella Hadid, and actresses Susan Sarandon and Shay Mitchell. But now, the Dublin-born coiffeur is collaborating with Primark on an affordable hair-care range. The Andrew Fitzsimons X Primark collection includes everything from shampoos (blended with argan oil, pro-vitamin B5, keratin and amino acids for glossiness), conditioners and styling sprays as well as accessories. Prices: £2- £12.

primark.com



GROOMING

Words **Joseph Kocharian**





Elliott wears

Gucci

Ryan wears

Celine

Hot summer nights

Spring-summer 2020 is
indulging in the past, while
looking to the future

Photography **Kosmas Pavlos**
Styling **Joseph Kocharian**



Raphael wears

Balmain





Ryan wears
**Bottega
Veneta**

Ryan wears

**Louis
Vuitton**





Raphael wears

**Emporio
Armani**

Elliott wears

**Ludovic de
Saint Sernin**



Elliott wears

JW Anderson

Ryan wears

Prada





Elliott wears

Dsquared2

Ryan wears

**Paco
Rabanne**
at Matches Fashion



Elliott wears

**Alexander
McQueen**





Raphael wears

Dior



Elliott wears

Givenchy

Raphael wears

Berluti







Raphael wears

Burberry

Elliott wears

Moschino



Elliott wears

Maison Margiela

STOCKISTS

120% Lino at **MR PORTER** mrporter.com

A **Alexander McQueen** alexandermcqueen.com
Andrew Fitzsimons x Primark primark.com
Armani Exchange armaniexchange.com

B **Balmain** balmain.com
Berluti berluti.com
Bottega Veneta bottegaveneta.com
Burberry burberry.com
Burton burton.co.uk

C **Celine** celine.com
Charlie by Matthew Zink charliebymz.com
Comme Des Garcon Play at Selfridges
selfridges.com

D **Debenhams** debenhams.com
Dior dior.com
DSquared2 dsquared2.com

E **Emporio Armani** armani.com

F **Farah x YMC** farah.co.uk
Fendi fendi.com
Fila fila.co.uk
Filippa K filippa-k.com
Folk at MR PORTER mrporter.com
French Connection frenchconnection.com

G **Givenchy** givenchy.com
Gucci gucci.com

H **H&M** hm.com
HUGO hugoboss.com

J **JW Anderson** jwanderson.com

K **Kurt Geiger** kurtgeiger.com

L **Lacoste LIVE** lacoste.com
Lacoste lacoste.com
Lanvin at Matches Fashion matchesfashion.com
Levi's levi.com
Lotto x Primark primark.com
Louis Vuitton louisvuitton.com
Ludovic de Sant Sernin ludovicdesaintsernin.com

M **M&S Collection** marksandspencer.com
Maison Kitsune maisonkitsune.com
Maison Margiela maisonmargiela.com
Marks & Spencer marksandspencer.com
Moschino moschino.com

N **Nanamica** nanamica.com

P **Paco Rabanne** pacorabanne.com
Polo Ralph Lauren ralphlauren.co.uk
Prada prada.com

R **Reiss** reiss.com
Rubinacci at MR PORTER mrporter.com

S **Sunspel** sunspel.com

T **Tom Ford Beauty** tomford.co.uk

V **Versace** versace.com



GROOMING **Adrian Rux** at Gary Represents, using Oribe
MODELS **Elliott Reeder** at Supa Model Management
Raphael Balzer at Next Models
Ryan Danvers at Kult Models
FASHION ASSISTANT **Eoin Higgins**
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT **Luke Johnson**



...SONG?

Soft Cell's *Say Hello Wave Goodbye* is a gay anthem and has one of the best opening lyrics: "Standin' at the door of the Pink Flamingo cryin' in the rain..."

...POSSESSION?

There is a picture by the brilliant George Platt Lynes I'd hate to lose. It's from the 1940s and depicts a naked man half covering himself with a polar-bear rug



...design you've created?

Working with the Stockholm-based interiors company **Svenskt Tenn** in 2019 was a dream for me. Our collection was called **Endymion** after the ancient Greek shepherd king



Luke Edward Hall

Favourite Things

Words **Tim Heap**

With a penchant for Greek motifs, bold colours and a healthy dose of whimsy, Luke Edward Hall has notched up collaborations with the likes of Habitat, The Rug Company, Swedish interiors brand Svenskt Tenn and the manufacturers of hand-made slippers Stubbs & Wootton. A proponent of the maximalist trend, his "more is more" approach has led to accolades such as being named "the interior design world's wunderkind" by *Vogue*, and last year he released his first book, *Greco Disco: The Art and Design of Luke Edward Hall*. Luke is currently working on the interior design and art direction of Hotel Les Deux Gares, a new 33-bedroom hotel and bistro in Paris, due to open in Spring. Here are a few of his favourite things...

@lukeedwardhall

...pop diva?

Enya. She has sung songs in her own fictional language because English, Irish and Latin just weren't good enough



...HOLIDAY DESTINATION?

Italy. I love the food, the culture, the history, the people... Venice is my favourite city

...item in your wardrobe?

I own a patchwork-quilt coat from the New York-based brand Bode, who are doing some really exciting things

...word? Pavilion

It conjures up images of a long lunch in a garden folly on a hot summer afternoon

...HISTORICAL FIGURE?

Outrageous poet and artist Stephen Tennant – he was a great beauty with an excellent eye. He wore gold dust in his hair and spent most of his time in bed



“An Outrageous Comedy”

ATTITUDE

**“A raucous Priscilla-style road movie...
in speedos. FABULOUS”**

BOYZ



The
Shiny Shrimps

On Bluray, DVD & On Demand Jan 13

www.theshinyshrimps.film