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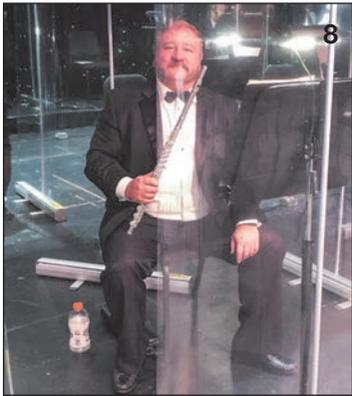
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Supreme Court rejects challenge to same-sex parents on birth certificates

The U.S. Supreme Court, which many predicted would roll back LGBTQ rights with its new 6-3 conservative majority, has turned down a request to hear a case that would have undercut the guarantee of full marriage equality for same-sex couples nationwide.

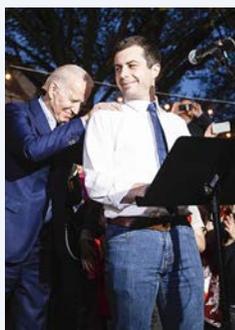
In its orders list Monday, Dec. 14, the court without explanation signaled it had denied certiorari in the case, known as *Box v. Henderson*, which seeks to undermine the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision in terms of birth certificates for children born to lesbian parents.

Despite the widely-held perception marriage equality for LGBTQ families is settled law and beyond any challenge, the question before the court was squarely framed as a challenge to same-sex marriage and asked the court to "take this case to address whether Indiana's paternity-presumption law is consonant with *Obergefell*."

The petition was filed by the state of Indiana, which sought in cases of children born to same-sex parents who are women to refuse to place the name of a non-birth mother on the child's birth certificate, even if the two same-sex parents in the relationship are married to each other.

— Chris Johnson/Washington Blade

Biden nominates Buttigieg for transportation secretary



President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday, Dec. 15, nominated Pete Buttigieg for transportation secretary. If approved by the Senate, he will become the first out LGBTQ cabinet secretary and the second

out LGBTQ person to hold a cabinet level position. Donald Trump appointed gay man Richard Grennell as acting director of national intelligence, a cabinet-level position.

Buttigieg is the former mayor of South Bend, Ind., who ran as the viable openly gay presidential candidate to participate in the debates and win delegates. Serving in the cabinet will give Buttigieg federal government experience should he decide to run for president again. He's seen as a rising star in the Democratic Party.

Buttigieg is the first LGBTQ person Biden has nominated. More are expected in a variety of sub-cabinet positions.

— David Taffet



Lady Gaga booed by Trump supporters

Trump supporters held their second Million MAGA March since the election in Washington, D.C.,

over the weekend, among the speakers at a rally was Lady Gaga, a far right-wing drag queen.

Lady Gaga defended the white nationalist group The Proud Boys but was heckled by the crowd with shouts of "shame." She said the heckling came from a rival group of Nazis, the Groyper Army.

The purpose of the march was to protest election fraud even though there's no evidence

INSTANT TEA, Page 9

pet of the week / PERSEPHONE



Meet **Persephone**, a 7-year-old female Rottweiler mix weighing 86 pounds. She's a big, beautiful gal, mostly black with

tan markings on her face, floppy ears and big, brown eyes. She may be a senior girl, but she still has a whole lotta love to give. She will do just about anything for treats and attention from people. She loves belly rubs, curling up for naps in a soft bed and playing with soft toys. Persephone would prefer to be the only queen in your home without other pets. She would do well with older children and will make a loving companion to anyone looking for a giant teddy bear. Persephone is waiting to meet you at the SPCA of Texas' Russell H. Perry Animal Care Center in McKinney.

In an effort to reduce the potential for spreading COVID-19, the SPCA of Texas' shelters, clinics, mobile adoption events and mobile wellness events remain closed to the public until further notice. Adoptions are available by appointment only. Adopters will need to submit an adoption inquiry form in order to begin the tele-adoption process and schedule an appointment to complete the adoption. Browse our available animals at spca.org/findapet and visit spca.org/dogadopt to inquire about a dog or spca.org/catadopt to inquire about a cat.



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Feeling like a team again

While many events have been canceled due to the pandemic, Lost Souls figured out how to make one work

DAVID TAFFET | SENIOR STAFF WRITER

taffet@dallasvoice.com

In the year of the pandemic, it's hard to say what's been hardest hit. Certainly the bars — which are only open right now if they're operating as restaurants — have been a casualty. So have restaurants, which are currently operating at only 50 percent capacity. And sports, which have experimented with playing in a bubble and without fans. And non-profits that rely on their fundraising events to keep providing their services.

Lost Souls Rugby certainly fits into the category of teams that have been shut down because of the physical contact of the sport. Team Captain Todd Maria said there was no way to physically distance or play the game safely while COVID-19 rages.

So how could he keep his team together so that once the pandemic ends, they'd be ready to practice and return for another shot at the Bingham Cup? That was the question on his mind.

Service to the community has always been a big part of Lost Souls mission. Among the events the team has put together over the past eight years has been a toy drive for the students at Adelfa Botello Callejo Elementary School in Pleasant Grove, where about 95 percent of the students are considered economically disadvantaged, Maria said.

Maria knew a number of events like his have been canceled. The Teddy Bear Party, which collects teddy bears each year for children who are patients at

Children's Hospital, for example, had to be canceled because the hospital isn't accepting donations of items during the pandemic.

But Maria checked with the school, and officials there said they'd welcome the donations.

Next, Maria said, he knew they couldn't do the toy drive the same way they had in the past. In previous years, the team took over the pool room at the Round-Up, and people delivered bags of toys that were piled up on and around the pool table.

They couldn't do that this year, but, Maria reasoned, they could do a drive-through event where everyone was safely socially distanced and wore masks. There could still be music. And they could still collect toys for the school they love.

"In some ways it was magical," Maria said, adding that people responded to a post in Dallas Voice and to messages on social media. The response overwhelmed team members.

"For some of those kids, it may be the only present they receive," he said.

And for the members of Lost Souls, the toy drive got them back together as a team. Community service, Maria explained, is the "secret sauce" that's made them successful.

"Some other teams have seen the success we've had," he said. "If every team could give back, we'd be a better community for it."

So just because Lost Souls isn't playing rugby on the field, they're still acting as a team. Maria said he's labeled this the season of service.

Because the Round-Up, which has been a big supporter of Lost Souls, had been closed, and its employees severely affected by the pandemic, the team did a "fill the boot" campaign. Maria described it as a knock off of the firefight-



This year's Lost Souls toy drive place in the parking lot of The Round-Up Saloon. (Photos courtesy of Todd Maria)

be held sometime at the end of January or in February and will probably be another drive-through event.

Despite his commitment to serving his community, Maria said he can't wait to get back on the rugby pitch. In local through international competition, his team has been very successful.

In 2016, Lost Souls won the Challenger Cup, the tier three level of competition in the Bingham Cup held that year in Nashville. That's the international competition named in honor of Mark Bingham, the gay rugby player credited with helping stop a plane hijacked by terrorists on Sept. 11, 2001, and headed for the U.S. Capitol by crashing it into a field in Pennsylvania.

In 2018, Lost Souls won the Hoagland Cup in the Bingham Cup competition. That cup, named after and presented by Bingham's mother, is the level two championship.

Lost Souls was headed to play in the 2020 competition, but like all events, this year's Bingham Cup was canceled. But it will come back.

In the meantime, Maria and his team are happy serving the community. Getting together to collect toys means more than just making children happy on Christmas.

"It's been a tough year," Maria said. "I needed this. It made us feel like a team again." ■

Black Tie distributes \$875K

FROM STAFF REPORTS

In a year when pandemic-related restrictions have caused nonprofits to either take their fundraising events online, scale them back drastically or even cancel them completely, the Dallas/Fort Worth Black Tie Dinner — the nation's largest LGBTQ fundraising dinner — this week distributed \$875,000 to its 17 beneficiaries.

Black Tie Dinner officials handed the funds out Thursday night, Dec. 17, during the Digital Wrap Party, which was underwritten by BBVA & Lexus.

Most of the distribution amount was generated through the Black Tie Dinner's first-ever "Black Tie LIVE" give-a-



Jeremy Hawpe, left, and Brad Pritchett. (Photo by Sheryl Lanzel)

thon television special, which reached an audience of more than 30,000 in nearly 100 Texas cities, 47 U.S. states and eight different countries via television and digital platforms.

"As we know, 2020 has proven to be a year of challenges and pivots," said Black Tie Dinner Co-Chair Jeremy Hawpe. "We were blown away by the support

of our sponsors, allies and the LGBTQ+ community throughout 2020 and for Black Tie LIVE. We were able to reach nearly more than 10 times the audience through our give-a-thon television special than [we would have with an] in-person dinner.

"Due to the success of Black Tie LIVE and the dedication of our board, supporters and sponsors, we were able to distribute close to or more than the previous year's total for most of our local beneficiaries, which is a huge accomplishment," Hawpe added.

In previous years, about half of Black Tie's proceeds would go to the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, and local beneficiaries could increase their respective distribution amounts by going above and beyond with assigned requirements, such as selling raffle ticket sales, donating auction items and more. But during

this "difficult and unprecedented year," the Black Tie Dinner board voted to distribute all funds evenly.

This year's beneficiaries and the funds they received are:

- AIDS Outreach Center: \$48,546
- AIDS Services of Dallas: \$48,996
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Lone Star: \$49,296
- Cathedral of Hope United Church of Christ: \$49,101
- Celebration Community Church: \$50,421
- Coalition for Aging LGBT: \$25,136
- Equality Texas Foundation: \$49,221
- Health Education Learning Project: \$53,091
- Human Rights Campaign Foundation: \$76,001
- Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund: \$50,021
- Legacy Counseling Center: \$49,371
- Northaven United Methodist Church: \$75,147
- Planned Parenthood of Greater North Texas: \$52,491
- Promise House: \$48,546
- Resource Center: \$50,271

BLACK TIE, Page 9

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INSTANT TEA From Page 7

of election fraud.

The leader of the Groyper Army said that at the first march in November that if the Republican Party didn't do everything it could to keep Trump in power, his group begin to destroy the GOP. And at last weekend's march, he called for the destruction of the GOP.

Protesters clashed with counter-protesters leaving nine people injured including four who were stabbed. Four churches were vandalized by Trump supporters. At least 33 people were arrested.

— David Taffet

Prism Health doctor elected as IDSA Fellow

Officials with Prism Health North Texas announced Monday, Dec. 14, that Dr. Jason Gillman, M.D., physician at Prism's Oak Cliff Center and the agency's chief clinical informatics officer, has been elected as a Fellow of the Infectious Disease Society of America by the IDSA.

The IDSA is the nation's leading infectious diseases professional society. Each year, a group of distinguished physicians and scientists from around the world are elected to be IDSA Fellows, a designation that is particularly impactful this year as ID physicians across the globe battle the COVID-19 pandemic.



Dr. Gillman has worked on the PHNTX team since 2014, with a focus on treating HIV and related infections. He is also serving as an investigator on several clinical research trials, including the AstraZeneca Oxford COVID-19 vaccine trial currently being facilitated at PHNTX's Oak Cliff Center.

Dr. Gillman is the first PHNTX physician to be elected as a Fellow of the IDSA. "For me," he said, "election as a Fellow of IDSA means a life-long commitment to respond to these unexpected challenges, and I hope it is something I can live up to."

— Tammye Nash

OBITUARY

Nancy "Nini" Jessula-Clark of Richardson passed away peacefully on Dec. 10, at the age of 64, at T Boone Pickens Hospice Center in Dallas.

Nancy was born at Maxwell AFB in Alabama and was raised in a military family, living in many places around the world. She obtained a master of arts degree in History of Ideas from University of Texas-Dallas in 2004.

Nancy had a positive impact on so many lives. She was outgoing, had a positive attitude and a wonderful sense of humor. For many years, Nancy was active in the Jewish community, teaching both children and adults and tutoring many for their Bar and Bat Mitzvah. She was affiliated with several synagogues over the years and served as president of Beth El Binah before her illness took over.

Nancy is survived by her wife of 23 years, Lili; by her brothers, Mike and Joe; and by nieces and nephews Cari, Michael, Cameron, Katie and Joanne. A graveside funeral service was held Dec. 14 at Restland Cemetery in Richardson. Shiva mynan was held via Zoom on Dec. 15 at 7 p.m.

Memorial donations may be made in Nancy's name to the ASPCA.



BLACK TIE

From Page 7

- Turtle Creek Chorale: \$49,746
- Uptown Players, Inc.: \$49,596

Also during Thursday night's Digital Wrap Party, Black Tie officials announced the 40th annual dinner will be held Nov. 13, 2021, at Sheraton Dallas Hotel. Hawpe, who has been co-chair for 2019 and 2020, will be stepping down from that position. Terry Loftis will become junior co-chair, and 2020 Co-Chair Brad Pritchette will be senior co-chair for 2021.

"We would like to thank Jeremy Hawpe for his service and leadership the past two years," Pritchett said. "He leaves an incredible legacy as co-chair, including 2019's record distribution amount and the very successful Black Tie LIVE give-a-thon television event this year. I'm looking forward to partnering and leading with Terry Loftis as we move into our historic 40th year."

Pritchett and Hawpe also announced the Black Tie board's first-year members for 2021. They are Mackenzie Salenger and Lec Garcia.

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RANDALL REED'S LINCOLN WISH LIST SALES EVENT

Virtual reality

Queer-centric arts groups fight to survive the pandemic but still live for the applause

RICH LOPEZ | Contributing Writer
richlopezwrites@gmail.com

At the end of this 2020 tunnel, there is the light of hope with the news of a coronavirus vaccine on the horizon. The idea of returning to normal — or perhaps adjusting to an entirely new normal — is within grasp. But still, the collateral damage has already been felt beyond individuals and hospitals. Bars, restaurants, small businesses, charities have all felt the heavy blow of the pandemic.

Area arts organizations have suffered greatly as well, to the tune of almost \$70 million dollars in lost revenue.

The Save Our Stages Act could provide \$20 billion in grants to the performing arts depending on current negotiations in Congress. That money would revive the industry across the country with its relief, but the damage has been done.

For the local queer community, the loss of the arts is a heavy blow. Not simply because of the lack of the theater or the concerts, but because the community has the privilege of organizations that speak directly to LGBTQ audiences. In addition, there are plenty of out musicians, artists and actors all absent from their respective stages.

"I imagine that in the general public mind, a musician is not a frontline worker. The arts are probably not at the forefront of other people's thoughts right now," professional musician Mark Trimble said.

But as the country is almost a year into the pandemic, the arts have had to adjust big time. Much like everything else, performances are now virtual (mostly). The Turtle Creek Chorale hosted its annual holiday concert online last weekend, and The Women's Chorus of Dallas will hold its "Love and Joy" holiday concert virtually on Saturday. And Uptown Play-

ers filmed its holiday show for online streaming.

But a screen, for these guys, just ain't the same.

Voices activated

"We're just tired of being onscreen or on our screens," TWCD's Executive Director Crystal Koe said. "But our outlook is to remain optimistic. It's difficult at times, but we can come back from this."

Albeit a diverse group of singers, the Women's Chorus of Dallas has been a home for queer female voices since 1989. The group has about 100 singers on its roster with an average of three concerts per season.

With 2020 being what it is, active singers have significantly reduced. Determined to keep its holiday show, Artistic Director Melinda Imthurn pivoted to Zoom rehearsals for the year-end concert, even with less than 50 percent of its singers chiming in.

They know the impact won't be the same when patrons watch them sing on their computers, tablets and smart televisions. But, Koe said, "It's better than nothing. We're all just pulling together like a large family."

Imthurn wanted something — anything — for her chorus to keep some semblance of its usual self. "For me personally, it's been about keeping the membership as engaged as we can," she said. "That has been the challenge. Keeping them engaged means that when we can be with each other, we have a chorus to come back to."

Now they Zoom each week to rehearse, which is a tricky feat for Imthurn. While they sing on their end, everyone is muted, and she leads but doesn't hear them. In today's age, the technology doesn't exist for her to lead a "live" chorus on screen.

The rehearsals, though, have become something much more: "We are on a forced hiatus — from concerts, performing live, hiatus from the office and each other," Imthurn said. "Our members need the singing, so we've shortened rehearsals and stay to socialize. Virtual or not, this has saved my life.



Mark Trimble (Photo courtesy of Ami Sadeh)

"Right now, there is nothing like logging into a Zoom call. They need what music offers them. There is the need to feel involved and contribute. It's very powerful," she added.

As TWCD has gone virtual, Imthurn and Koe have discovered some positives to all this. Being in a virtual world allows them to invite former members back into the fold, wherever they are. And, for now at least, they've let go of the pressure of attendance.

"I get to explore possibilities of what's going on and creative ways to connect with our patrons. We have new partnerships and have the potential for an even bigger audience," Koe said. "Sure it's hard to feel optimistic sometimes, but we're still able to create and look forward to future projects."

Virtual concerts and rehearsals also mean one more thing: technological know-how. If there was a silver lining, it was that.

"None of us were trained for the world

WHERE TO GO FOR INFO

For more information about upcoming events or how to help, visit these websites:

- SaveOurStages.com
- TheWomensChorusOfDallas.com
- TurtleCreekChorale.com
- UptownPlayers.org

we live in now," Imthurn said. "We all had to stretch our creative muscles to be as engaging as possible and [stretch] our technological skills, but those will become super handy now."

Koe added that there has been time to explore within as well. "We've been able to see where and how our organization falls into the larger conversation of our society. A big motivator has been taking the time of difficult conversations on what we want the chorus to look like."

A longtime goal for Koe and Imthurn is to remove any systemic problems that may have lingered within the chorus. With diverse leadership, those talks have opened up the group to proceed with complete self-awareness. With the pandemic black cloud still lingering, Koe and Imthurn do believe that TWCD will come out of this ahead existentially.

Solo artist

Trimble is a professional musician who serves as principal flutist for the Ir-

ving Symphony Orchestra as well as the Amarillo Symphony. During the holiday season, he often finds himself busy with performances.

"Normally during Christmas season I'm doing *The Nutcracker*, two or three Christmas shows, a kids' concert, some have church gigs," he said. "December is normally the busiest month for musicians."

This year though, Trimble only prepared for one: last weekend's "Home for the Holidays" concert with the ISO at the Irving Arts Center. All his shows in Amarillo were canceled.

For Trimble, the pandemic is frustrating on different levels. At the Irving concert, the show was limited in capacity, and musicians played with barriers between.

"It was very small, and it's a very different sound experience for us as individuals," he explained. "You don't hear the neighbors as you would normally, and thus it's hard to know if it's in tune. You get the gist but it's not quite the same."

In a normal year, he'd have close to a dozen performances at both orchestras. The holiday show was his fourth and his last for the year. As a musician, it's taken a toll.

"Well, everything about the pandemic is bringing me down. It's devastating for musicians, but there are those who are getting super creative with it. There is an outpouring of creativity, but I haven't tried that," he said.

He's taken refuge in another instrument — that and some updates to his house with husband Ami. "I have a nice piano at home," Trimble said. "I took that up and have refined techniques that had gone out of my fingers. It became this fun hobby, and right now I like it more than the flute because that now just reminds me of work."

"I'm like the least handyman person there is, but I built most of a wood path and redid our cabinets. I guess there are definitely some ways for me to be creative outside of music," he added.

Otherwise, he's waiting it out with the awareness that nothing could happen for a long time.

"Those of us in the arts or music, it's just the least practical profession right now because it's inherently dangerous for us and for audiences," Trimble said.

His Irving concert served as some distraction. The music was familiar enough to be easy for rehearsal, but the performance itself, different as it was, helped.

"I think everyone was pleased there was a gig at all. We know the situation is challenging," he said.

Trimble was doubly affected by the pandemic earlier this year. He is one of the founders and board members of the nonprofit BearDance, the dance event held during Texas Bear Round-Up in March that had to be canceled the same day county commissioner Clay Jenkins decreed the lockdown. The event raises money for local nonprofits.

"There was a lot of disappointment, but we were still able to donate a fair amount of money," he said. "I was thrilled we could do something."

Trimble does have the freedom to make choices should his creative side need to break out: "Musicians are often dependent on organizations, but we're freelancers, too," he said. "I can always do my own thing — especially if things go on much longer like this."

Positive notes

The Turtle Creek Chorale was all set for its big Corona comeback with Turtles in the Park(-ing Lot) performance

REALITY, Page 13



TCC's 2017-18 holiday concert. (Photo by Michael McGary)

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REALITY , From Page 11

in October at the Jackson Street Parking Garage. The venue was sold out for two nights, and Dallas case numbers appeared to be on the decline. Feelings were good until . . .

“The week before, we had to cancel which was devastating,” Artistic Director Sean Baugh said. “Just when we stuck our feet back in the water, too. We worked hard, and our members were so upset. That was a blow. I still credit the organization for having that bravery to try something different.”

Next up would have been TCC’s holiday concert which is perhaps the chorale’s signature performance and, like their sisters in TWCD, this year, they went virtual.

“We’re following that lead, but it was more of a produced musical hour,” Baugh said. “We’re all learning that transition from live performance to broadcast.”

The concert featured soloists, smaller ensembles and prior performances. The live concert being absent from the holiday landscape, however, was tough.

“It’s a huge financial hit because it’s the concert that sustains us throughout the year,” Baugh said. “Not having that is a bit strange. This was the first time in 41 years the concert was not live.”

Still, Baugh considers TCC lucky. The Chorale’s fundraising concert featuring Idina Menzel was held in February, before the pandemic hit, which has helped keep the financial side of things afloat.

But he knows that only lasts for so long.

“We have to continually raise money. If we can still produce, donors are more willing to give. They may not, however, give to a group that hibernates. So we’re asking all the time,” he said.

What worries Baugh though is many people are having to prioritize donations right now. “If there’s any catastrophe, any emergency, people start to forget that arts need funding. This is going to be a long time with no revenue and as a nonprofit, we’re reliant on sponsorship and donations,” he said.

All is not lost however. Baugh has discovered a few plusses. For him, putting creative people in a bind amounts to a wealth of reflection and discovery.

“The thing I’m really challenged with right now is the need for us to get out

of the concert hall,” he said. “I think by limiting ourselves to the hall, we limit who we can reach. So I’ve been thinking about the time we come back together as a chorus and getting our message out from behind the walls.”

Hence, the parking garage venue; but that hasn’t been the only innovation for TCC.

“If it wasn’t for the pandemic, we wouldn’t have our new podcast Off-Stage, and we’ve discovered small pockets of singers that work well together we’ve never put out before. That’s been a huge positive.”

As TCC moves ahead with virtual programming and podcasting, Baugh is adapting to a bevy of new skills. For the sake of the choir, he’s working on video editing, recording skills along with leading virtual rehearsals and piecing together concerts.

But the emotional aspect of it all has not been lost on the Turtles: “We used to rehearse twice a week, which is an enormous amount of time the guys gave,” Baugh said. “Going from that amount of time to zero was a pretty traumatic thing. The chorale is their musical and social outlet and a central place of joy in their week. These guys have so much passion as volunteers, so it was definitely an adjustment.”

Baugh likened rehearsals to a three-hour therapy session. In lieu of physical company and in addition to rehearsals, TCC members try to make up for it with virtual game shows, cooking demos and other types of socials.

“None of it equals coming together as a family and singing, Baugh said. “We kind of understand it’s totally fake. We try.”

He does say that without the performances and the live rehearsals, the group sees exactly who they are and what they provide.

“I’ve been thinking about what it feels like when something has been taken from you. It’s interesting to see all these things unfold in the news and not sing about them. It makes it very clear the importance of a mission-based choral organization,” he said. “Now we see the power of that, and I don’t think we’ll ever take that for granted after this.”

One parallel that strikes TCC as well

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Uptown PLayer livestreamed "Sister Helen Holy" for the holidays

as the entire queer arts community is the effect of another virus wreaking havoc. TCC has often tackled HIV/AIDS in song and performance, and now the population is suffering under another virus.

The group has compared what people are going through now with COVID-19 to the AIDS crisis. There are massive differences, but it's also the cloud of a virus that affects everyone.

"We're not seeing the same number of deaths as we did then, but it's equally painful. The big difference is that we could get together before and be around each other," he said. "I think singing about solidarity and coming together out of conflict and sadness is all very pertinent.

"The garage concert was going to be all about that."

Baugh adds that each time they sing addressing an issue, the goal is to show the light on the other side.

"We believe there's no situation that can't be tackled through community or brotherhood," he said.

The show must go on

Co-producers and Uptown Players

founders Jeff Rane and Craig Lynch were overseeing rehearsals of the musical *Fun Home* when the pandemic struck. The show was set for an April opening, but everything came to a halt for the company, and it has been on perpetual pause.

Uptown Players, a favorite among LGBTQ audiences because shows primarily revolve around queer topics and themes, took their stage to the screen with past performances and two new shows.

"We have been able to do the virtual thing," Rane said. "In September, we got permission to stream an archival performance video of *Pageant* from 2014. But right now, our other three shows of the season are on hold."

In the meantime, Uptown will wrap up its stream of *Helen Holy's Holiday Streaming Spectacular* on Sunday and will open the streaming one-man comedy *Application Pending* with BJ Cleveland in January. The hope is, though, that the season can resume by May 2021 following vaccine updates and safety protocols.

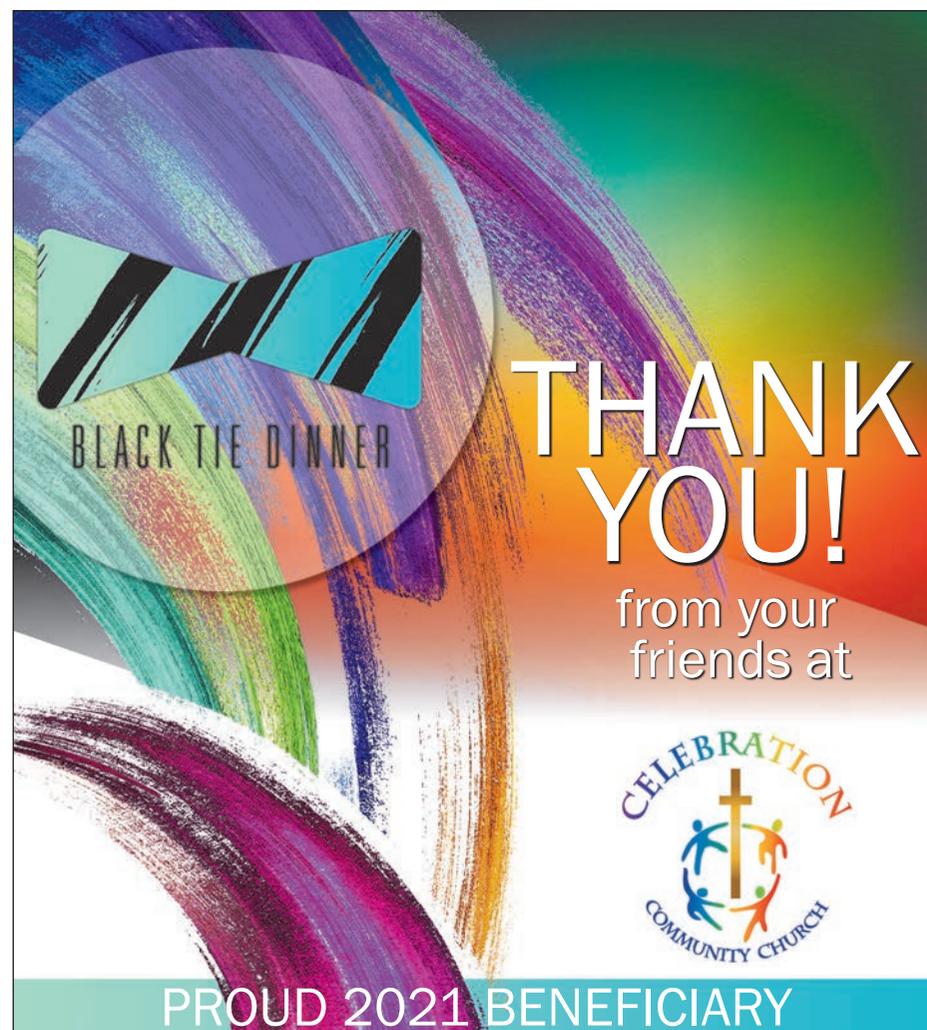
Really, for the company, they are behind schedule at the moment.

"We should have already been selling another season," Rane said. "We've taken a pretty substantial hit, and over 50 percent of our revenues are gone. We've relied on minimal revenue from the streamers but we were able to retain our subscription funds."

Uptown Players relies on revenue not only from its approximately 1,000 subscriptions but also single ticket sales, concessions and merchandise.

If there was a highlight for 2020, it's that Uptown was able to do its annual *Broadway Our Way* fundraiser in Janu-

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ary, which also provided what would become much-needed funds. Those funds aren't all for putting on shows. They keep the lights on and pay the rent. And Uptown is determined to keep its limited staff of three full-timers and two part-timers.

"We did receive some CARES Act money, which was \$1,000, and there are grants and emergency funding out there. But the demand exceeds those limited funds," Lynch said.

Rane added that any city funding dollars are currently on hold. Needless to say, Uptown is stressed because of the pandemic. Now, they are learning to live with the situation with alternative entertainment.

"There's so much uncertainty but not just with the virus. We could never get clear messaging as it progressed," Lynch said. "As we became more educated about everything, it feels like we may be on the other side of the hump. The morale at first was shock and awe and fear. It's better now with vaccine news and a new president."

Almost a year into the pandemic, now Uptown can bring something to its audiences, and that offered some relief to its company. After being isolated, cooped up or on Netflix overload, actors, musicians and crew were put to use.

"The 13 actors and five orchestra members and the crew we hired for the virtual projects are so grateful just to be able to perform," Rane said. "I think that helped them. After all these months, they had something to look forward to."

Rane and Lynch took extra measures to ensure safety for the cast and crew. Strict guidelines called for participants to be tested; there are temperature checks, and only one to two people can be on stage and, of course, six feet apart.

Uptown Players have shared at least one bonus effect with the other arts organizations: Now they are also audio/visual techs as well.

"We knew nothing about the technology when we brought actors in safely to film. We learned through doing these that is a skill we now possess," Rane said.

Rane and Lynch mentioned that it was immensely reassuring to know and see their patrons have had Uptown Players' back this whole time.

"One hundred percent," Lynch said.

"Our subscribers can't wait for us to be back, and they've let us know they are behind us with their donations. We've had two North Texas Giving Days where we matched our goals both times. It's nice to know that they are there when we're in need, and I think it's testimonial to our mission of telling our life stories on stage."

Uptown Players has the luxury of being both a theater for everyone and a niche theater for LGBTQ voices. For their patrons to offer such support shouldn't come as a surprise then. Lynch describes Uptown's subscribers more as a family.

"At our theater it's a fellowship. You see groups of friends or partners come and hug and kiss and greet each other. They know our actors. We've had the same box office and concessions staff, so they know them. There really is that human connectivity there."

When they look to the future, they have a vague idea of what it looks like. They have secured rights for some 2021 shows, but there are no definite dates. For now, they are keeping flexible about the future and getting through the next few months as best they can.

The bigger challenge for the professional theater is working with its unions. Whatever the future may look like is determined by those unions' stamps of approval. Rane explained that a vaccine itself doesn't automatically mean shows will magically reappear.

"That would be positive news, but it's about reducing the case count. Those numbers would determine if our unions would give us the go-ahead," he said.

Fans of Uptown Players can continue to help the company. Although volunteers can't be used at this time, Rane and Lynch remind that Uptown is still selling merchandise, including Uptown Players face masks and 2021 calendars. In conjunction with the holiday special, Uptown is hosting an online auction that includes items such as a cabin getaway in Fredericksburg and a wine tasting.

"We'd love for people to help promote us in any way through the auction, wearing our masks and just tell us about their experience with Uptown Players," Rane said.

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TITAS Does Drag II. (Photo courtesy of Jamie Bolton)

On the forefront

TITAS/DANCE UNBOUND Executive Director Charles Santos has been on the frontlines of advocating for local arts organizations. He's on the steering board of the Dallas Area Cultural Advocacy Coalition which mobilizes support for arts and cultural groups. He's also on the board of the Dallas Arts District, and both have given him insight to the struggles across the arts landscape.

"What we do at DACAC is a lot of advocating and organizing voices. Joanna St. Angelo really leads that charge, and Chris Heinbaugh, who came to us from the mayor's office, has the most experience with advocating government officials," Santos said. "But we're pushing to write letters to congressmen and to the city for funding and to Save Our Stages."

Santos has also led a roundtable of talks with other arts CEOs to discuss how to navigate today's pandemic challenges as they received updates and guidelines. He took that information to open up a forum to other arts groups.

"We were getting information that was helpful to developing protocols that others weren't so we'd have a discussion every other week to share that and rebuild our community," he said.

Those talks will resume in January.

With TITAS, Santos was able to create an opportunity both for his organization and local performers. Normally, TITAS presents touring companies, but in October, they looked to their own backyard.

"People want to go to stuff. I started to think about other opportunities I

could put together, and so we did a drag show," he said.

Initially, TITAS was going to present a new series of edgier, adult performances called TITAS Unfiltered which boasts the slogan "If you're easily offended, don't come." The original idea had to be scrapped though, because shows couldn't be brought in. So Santos looked to the Rose Room.

"These are performers who make a living as performers but are often forgotten. It was a big success, and people had such a good time."

Held outdoors in the Annette Strauss Square, Santos saw a big audience enjoying the entertainment. He also saw that the queens were thrilled to be on-stage. It was such a success, they repeated it earlier in December, giving the Winspear Opera House stage over to the drag queens. Not only did TITAS step in to help the community, those events likely did more bridge-building.

"There were a lot of people who I bet it was their first time there. And it was a first for the queens to be on such a stage. Cassie Nova was such a professional. Kennedy Davenport went to Arts Magnet, and her teacher came. They signed the show wall backstage. It was such a good show," Santos said.

For now, TITAS is keeping its schedule with a new performance in February. They hosted Parsons Dance in November following the company's guidelines and their own. Santos knows it can be done.

"Right now everyone says 'yes.' We have six more shows, but we'll see," he said. ■

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■ commUNITYvoices

Joseph Epstein: Noted misogynist, noted homophobe

I'm trying to think of a scenario in which it would be appropriate to call Dr. Jill Biden "kiddo." Maybe if you were a long-dead relative of hers who has come back from the dead? Maybe if you are one of her children, and you are teasing her in a playful but loving fashion?

But if you're some creepy old man writing an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal? Definitely not.

Unfortunately, both the WSJ and writer Joseph Epstein missed that memo. Thus was published a completely sexist piece of trash column that urged Dr. Biden to act like a lady, damn it.

"Madame First Lady — Mrs. Biden — Jill — kiddo," Epstein begins. "Any chance you might drop the 'Dr.' before your name? 'Dr. Jill Biden' sounds and feels fraudulent, not to say a touch comic."

Wut? Dr. Biden earned a doctorate in 2007. So she's, like, a real doctor.

"A wise man once said that no one should call himself 'Dr.' unless he has delivered a child," Epstein continues. "Think about it, Dr. Jill, and forthwith drop the doc."

Uh, does Epstein not know and/or understand the difference between medical doctors and people who have earned a doctorate? Also, Dr. Biden has delivered a child, and that child's name is Ashley Biden. And it is worth noting that there are many medical doctors who have not delivered babies because, like, specialties and stuff.

Also, that's Dr. Biden to you, sir, not Dr. Jill.

Epstein's entire piece is so ragingly sexist that it teeters on the edge of parody. But he means every word of it. So who the hell is this guy? And why did the WSJ publish him?

The answer to the second question is that the WSJ editorial section is a safe



harbor for horrible conservative ideas by horrible conservative people. So Epstein's piece is very on-brand.

Epstein is a writer

who used to be the editor of The American Scholar magazine and a teacher at Northwestern University. And he's also — and this is going to shock you — anti-gay.

In 1970, Harper's published an essay by Epstein in which he claimed that homosexuals were "different from the rest of us" and that he wanted to "wish homosexuality off the face of this earth." Oh, and not only did Harper's publish this essay, they made it their cover story. The September 1970 cover has a close-up of a man's very muscular chest in a tight red shirt with, "The Struggle for Sexual Identity" printed over the ripped bicep.

In that piece, Epstein wrote about his personal history with homosexuality, beginning with his father explaining to a young Joseph that there were perverts in this world who might want to "play" with him. He also recounts a story about learning that a friend of his was gay and that Epstein felt "victimized by his duplicity."

"We were not close friends, but I liked him," Epstein wrote, "and it now seemed that every moment we had spent together was a huge sham, an elaborate piece of deception to hide the essential, the number one, fact in his life. Of course his duplicity was necessary, I realized that, but I was nevertheless offended."

DUDE! If you feel "offended" that your gay friend didn't feel safe coming out as gay to you, then imagine how your friend felt. Spoiler alert: His pain was far greater than yours, you empathy-deficient creep.

The end of Epstein's essay is particularly vile: "There is much my four sons can do in their lives that might cause me anguish, that might outrage me, that might make me ashamed of them and of myself as their father. But nothing they could ever do would make me sadder than if any of them were to become homosexual."

Yikes.

First of all, NOTHING they could do would make you sadder than them being gay? Not even, say, murdering? Or publishing an incredibly sexist attack against the first lady of the U.S. for daring to use the academic title she rightfully earned?

Secondly, people don't "become" homosexual. I think he's confusing gays with werewolves or vampires, which is understandable considering how much gays love Halloween.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, "Hey, the guy wrote this 45 years ago. Surely he's disavowed it by now." To which I say, "No, he has not. And also why would you assume he's radically changed? Did you not read what he wrote about Dr. Jill Biden? Sexism and misogyny are directly linked with homophobia after all."

In 2015 he published a piece in The Washington Examiner where he defended the essay. He also said he didn't want "Noted Homophobe" on his gravestone. But he's earned that title through years of hard work, so who are we to deny him? ■

D'Anne Witkowski is a poet, writer and comedian living in Michigan with her wife and son. She has been writing about LGBT politics for over a decade. Follow her on Twitter @MamaDWitkowski.

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Making the yuletide gay



An interview with actress
Mary Steenburgen

Happiest Season (Hulu), written and directed by out actor Clea Duvall, is one of the queer Christmas movies that are especially popular this holiday season. Lesbian couple Abby (out actor Kristen Stewart) and Harper (Mackenzie Davis) are on their way to spend Christmas with Harper's family. But there's a twist, not revealed to Abby until they are almost there; Harper's not out to her parents, Tipper (Mary Steenburgen) and politician Ted (out actor Victor Garber), or her sisters Jane (Mary Holland) and Sloane, with whom she is extremely competitive.

This closeted fact leads to all sorts of wacky shenanigans — and a touch of heartbreak. Aubrey Plaza as Harper's ex Riley, and Dan Levy as Abby's outspoken gay BFF John add intrigue to the story.

It's a reminder that in 2020, even after all the progress that's been made, there are still places and families where being

queer comes at a cost. Steenburgen, who has a wonderful track record with Christmas movies, was kind enough to answer a few questions about the movie and her career.

— Gregg Shapiro

Dallas Voice: What was it about the character of Tipper in Happiest Season that made you want to portray her?

Mary Steenburgen: First of all, I was attracted by the theme of the movie and the fact that there hadn't been holiday rom-com movies that had a gay couple at the very center of the movie, as opposed to a tangential character — at least to my knowledge, especially with a big studio doing it. I felt like this is a nice thing because there are so many people that come out to their families at the holidays because it's when people are together and the families are all there. I know it's challenging. I thought it's an opportunity to talk about how hard that can be, but also have fun with it, too, and really explore those themes.

And I love the fact that Clea was the one that was directing it. She wrote a very beautiful letter to me that said, "This is my favorite genre of movie, but I've never seen myself reflected in them." That meant a lot to me to help her fulfill that vision.

Tipper is the mother of three daughters.

You are both a mother and stepmother. How much does being a parent

influence the kind of mothers you play onscreen? With my stepdaughters, we have three daughters and one son, so I'm very familiar with having a house full of daughters. I think there's little bits of me in each of these mothers.

I think that Tipper is probably quite different than I am [laughs]. She's really fun for me to play because she is so different from me and because my own kids would never let me get away with any of the bossiness and all that stuff that Tipper demonstrates — how she literally silences people and tells everybody what to do and where to stand and what not to say. That would never fly a single day in my family. They're all too self-realized to put up with any of that.

That whole combination of people — Victor Garber being my partner, who's just the funniest and kindest man, just such a sweet man, as well, to work with. From the minute we all laid eyes on each other, it was just a dream and a gift. We couldn't have known this at the time, but it was a gift that occurred right before we all were going to go into such isolation, to have such a magical human experience, full

of so much laughter on and off screen, especially off screen, we were constantly getting giggles and playing silly games.

But [there were] also, some meaningful moments, because this was a storyline that meant something to all of us. Much of our cast is gay. Those that aren't ... have loved people so long that have had these struggles. For us to pull together and make this movie that was in many ways about an ordinary family in some ways — wealthier, certainly, than a lot of families — [that has] a lot of the issues and the little pettiness and all [those things] a lot of people experience in their family. For each of us I think it became this passion project.

[One of the things] I love about it is that it isn't a preachy film. People are moved by it, regardless of their sexuality. I'm proud of it. I'm proud to be one little part of it.

Entertainment Weekly recently crowned you the Christmas movie MVP from your appearances in Happiest Season, Elf, One Magic Christmas and Four Christmases. Excluding your own movies, do you have a personal favorite Christmas movie? I have to say *Elf* is pretty special for a Christmas movie, but you said besides my own. I do love *Love Actually*. That's a favorite Christmas



movie and it's spectacular. I love [Richard Curtis'] writing. It's written and directed so perfectly. Such spectacular actors in it. I've always loved it.

We're speaking a couple of weeks before Christmas. Where does Christmas fall on your list of favorite holidays?

I do love it. I'm very partial to Thanksgiving because I love food. It's really the holiday that's mostly about food. Any holiday that brings my family together is a holiday I love. We have a very close-knit family, and I adore every single one of them. I find them completely fascinating and hilarious.

I love that regardless of what your faith is or even if that's something you think about, I think there is something at Christmas that challenges us all to think about being generous to others, to reach out and maybe give people a little joy. Maybe that's why I love doing Christmas movies. It's a way of being generous with oneself, and I like that.

Throughout your acting career you have struck a balance between comedic and dramatic roles. Do you have a preference for one over the other?

Yes, I really prefer comedic [laughs]. I know that they don't win the awards the way the dramatic ones do [laughs]. It's not that I don't love doing dramatic roles. But the only way I know how to do a dramatic role, which often equates to being stuff that's challenging for that character, being sad or whatever, the only way I know how to do it is to really go there. I don't like making myself be that sad.

I do a [TV] show called *Zoe's Extraordinary Playlist*, and last season was about the illness and inevitable death of my husband, who's brilliantly played by Peter Gallagher. It hurt my heart to do it. It's beautiful and challenging, and I'm honored to do it. But if you really ask me which I enjoy, anyone who knows me knows that I love to laugh.

I married the funniest man in the world (Ted Danson). I have funny children. I didn't get through a single scene in *Happiest Season*, except maybe the one at the very end, without breaking up. For me, doing a

comedy is me at my most joyful.

You were a Best Supporting Actress Oscar and Golden Globe winner for your third movie role, as Lynda in *Melvin and Howard*. What did that mean to you then and what does it mean to you now?

I miss my friend Jonathan Demme, who directed that movie. He was a spectacular director. It means a lot to me that I won those amazing awards for that movie. Bo Goldman, who wrote it, who also won Best Screenplay that year, wrote the most beautiful script. It was like flying to play that part. It was a true honor and I feel very blessed.

I think [winning an Oscar] causes the business to probably take you a little more seriously and to believe in you more.

That's a meaningful thing to me. This is something I've now done for 45 years. I treasure every single day that I'm on a set. I think anyone who's worked with me would agree that I'm not bored or jaded or any of those things. For me, it's still an utter privilege to do this for a living. I never forget that for a second.

Happiest Season is also not your first LGBTQ-themed movie. In 1993, you played lawyer Belinda in the Oscar-winning *Philadelphia*. Do you have an awareness of a following for your work in the LGBTQ community?

I would love to be a gay icon. That is something people have been writing about me lately, and that makes me really happy! I thought I won't be because I don't fall into the easy kind of gay icon category, but I'm working really hard at it. It's one of my main goals in life.

The thing about *Philadelphia* is, and I've talked about this before, I had an amazing experience about that movie. Two things — my friend Peter, who had been my roommate and one of my best friends and one of my acting partners in a comedy improv group I was in, died of AIDS right before I went to make that movie. I was very torn up when I went. I remember getting on the plane. I saw where my seat

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Christmas music by Jews

An overwhelming number of Christmas songs are by Jewish composers and lyricists

DAVID TAFFET | Senior Staff Writer
taffet@dallasvoice.com

So much Christmas music has been written by Jews that each year on the *Jewish Music Hour* on KNON, I host “The Totally Inappropriate Jewish Music Hour Christmas Music by Jews.” But who are some of these songwriters?

Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas” is the most-recorded Christmas song ever. Berlin was born in Siberia in 1888 and emigrated to the U.S. through Ellis Island when he was five. Although he had few memories of Russia, he always had a love and appreciation for his adopted land, which led him to write “God Bless America.” But not only did the Jewish Berlin write the most-recorded Christmas song, he also wrote “Easter Parade,” the most-recorded Easter song.

Johnny Marks made a career out of writing Christmas music. His most enduring song is “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” but “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” and “A Holly Jolly Christmas” were huge hits, too. “Silver and Gold,” “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” “I Don’t Want A Lot for Christmas” and “Everyone’s A Child At Christmas” are among his other Christmas hits. “Rudolf” was based on a poem by his brother-in-law, Robert L. May. May, like Marks, was Jewish.

Jay Livingston and Ray Evans are probably best known for writing the theme songs to *Bonanza* and *Mister Ed* as well as Doris Day’s theme song “Que Sera Sera.” But the Jewish songwriting pair go down in Christmas music history with their 1951 song written for the film *The Lemon Drop Kid*, “Silver Bells.”

Joan Javitz, niece of former New York Sen. Jacob Javitz, co-wrote the song “Santa Baby” that became a huge hit for Eartha Kitt in 1953. The song, which is often listed as the worst Christmas song ever, was temporarily banned across the American South, because its lyrics poked fun at all the things people want for Christmas.

During World War II, “I’ll Be Home



For Christmas” expressed the sentiments of soldiers stationed overseas hoping the war would be over soon.

It became the Christmas hit of 1942, but it was written by Walter Kent, a Jewish Tin Pan Alley songwriter from New York.

Jewish singer and songwriter Mel Torme wrote and recorded the Christmas standard “The Christmas Song,” better known for its first line: “Chestnuts roasting on an open fire.”

“It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year” is by Edward Pola and George Wyle. The Jewish songwriting duo wrote a number of songs together, but Wyle is best known for his solo work “The Ballad of Gilligan’s Island.”

Felix Bernard wrote “Winter Wonderland,” but he died at age 47 in 1944, two years before it was recorded and became a Christmas hit.

And what would Broadway be without its Jewish songwriters and lyricists? And lots of classic, heartwarming Broadway musicals have a scene that takes place at Christmas.

Mame’s music and lyrics were written by Jerry Herman. “We Need A Little Christmas” is one of the show’s stand-out hits that appears in the first act as well as in the finale. *Promises, Promises*’ music is by the Jewish songwriting team of Burt Bacharach and Hal David. “Christmas Day” is featured in the second act. Jewish songwriting team Martin Charnin and Charles Strouse wrote *Annie*’s “A New Deal for Christmas.”

Jule Styne, known for *Funny Girl*, and Sammy Cahn, who wrote the song “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” collaborated for one of either writer’s biggest hits, the Christmasy “Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow.” The story goes that the song was written during a heat wave in southern California, but it remains a Christmas standard.

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Dangerous art

New bio tells the life story of artist Tom of Finland and why his drawings are far more than erotica

***Tom of Finland: The Official Life and Work of a Gay Hero* by F. Valentine Hooven III, foreword by Jean-Paul Gaultier. (c.2020, Cernunnos, a division of Abrams). \$50; 295 pages.**

Sometimes, you can't worry about other people's thoughts. You can listen to them, but you don't have to hear them because there are days when making yourself happy supersedes any outside opinion, when you need to pay closer attention to you. As in the new biography *Tom of Finland* by F. Valentine Hooven III, sometimes what makes you joyful today can become a calling.

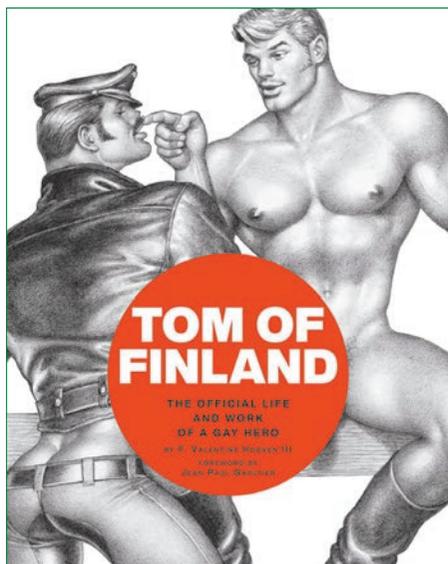
Born in the mid-spring of 1920 in Kaarina, Finland, young Touko Laaksonen was raised in a community of lumberjacks and farmers. He was fascinated by those "well-muscled laborers." But he didn't quite know why until he was an adolescent.

By the time Touko understood that he was homosexual, he'd become talented at sketching the men he saw, although, purely for his own enjoyment and sexual relief, he depicted those men naked. And for that, he had to hide his work.

He hid who he was, too: As a young man, he had a girlfriend, worked in a male-dominated world of advertising and even served in the Finnish army during World War II, where he sketched his uniformed "buddies" as gifts for their wives and girlfriends.

Uniforms — Touko couldn't resist a man wearing one, and they were highly featured in what he called "my dirty drawings." Those drawings included uniformed Nazi officers, artwork which got Touko "into trouble," but had he gotten caught in his habit of having illegal, exceedingly risky anonymous sex with random men during the war, it could have been far worse.

Post-war, art was enough for Touko the sexual being. Though he had a lover (a word he claimed to dislike), art was again his release, more than any other



physical act. This desire for erotica grew his portfolio throughout the 1950s, and he carefully shared it with "anyone he thought would appreciate it" — including the publisher of a new kind of international magazine who immediately accepted it for publication.

A year later, that magazine's cover featured "a new, exciting, never-before-published artist" who now called himself Tom of Finland.

Let's acknowledge this, up-front: *Tom of Finland* is absolutely filled with reproductions of Tom's artwork from the 1940s through 1991, when he died. Nearly every bit of it is explicit in nature, drawn in typical over-the-top, over-endowed Tom of Finland style.

That artwork is why readers should turn their eyes away and toward the narrative.

Author F. Valentine Hooven III explains quite often in this biography — which was finished just before Tom's death but never before published — how dangerous the mere creation of his art was for Tom of Finland: Literally, many times, the drawings could have gotten him jailed or killed.

This changes the meaning of the artwork, and it gives modern readers a sense of the amount of secret-keeping a gay man had to abide, pre-Stonewall.

Though Hooven's voice can be annoyingly too sunny at times, the courageous turn this story takes is irresistibly appealing, so find it. Savor it first, for the artwork then again for a story that'll fascinate you. Indeed, Tom of Finland will make you happy.

— Terri Schlichenmeyer

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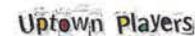
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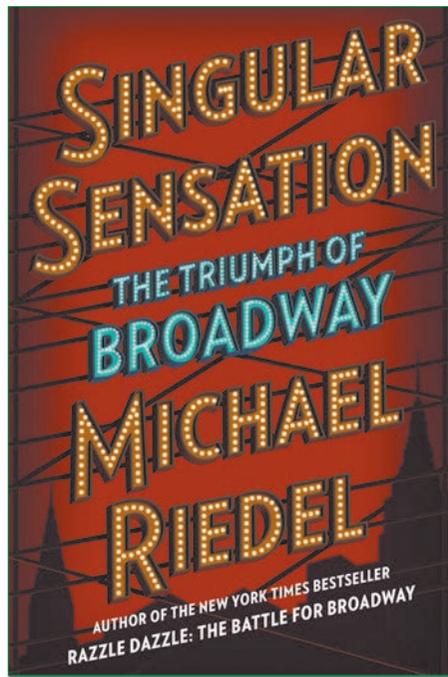
Riedel offers an insider look at theater

***Singular Sensation: The Triumph of Broadway* by Michael Riedel (c.2020, Avid Reader Press). \$28; 335 pages.**

You know every single role in your favorite Broadway show. You can name all the actors who've ever filled those roles. You know the plot and every word to every song. How many times have you seen that show, bought the t-shirts, read a playbook, coveted the posters?

And how much is there that you don't know? Come see in *Singular Sensation* by Michael Riedel.

Hollywood's supposed Golden Age lasted from the 1930s until just after World War II. The Golden Age of Live Television, says Riedel, roughly spanned the Eisenhower years. The Golden Age of Broadway, then, was from 1943 to



1959. At about that time, a "British invasion" arrived, lasting for decades.

And then, in the later 1990s, everything changed.

Suddenly, low-budget musicals were profitable. Musical comedies became popular again, and plays "made a comeback." Corporations began eyeing Broadway as a way to further their brand and make more money. Perhaps

most importantly, "[a] new breed of producers" stood up to theater owners who'd previously had serious power, and new theaters were established.

Literally, the landscape of theater-going changed.

It wasn't all singing and dancing, though. Says Riedel, "Broadway has a knack for survival," and it needed that knack: The AIDS crisis was in full-swing then; terrorism left its mark on theater audiences abroad; Times Square was seedy, and New York City itself was struggling financially. The industry was ripe for change, and Riedel tells about it.

He writes of egos, ideas and role replacements, all of which often clashed. He explains how money and power make or break a show, especially in behind-the-scenes deal-making with theater owners who decide which shows run and which don't. He writes of writers, actors, directors, costumers and criminals.

Riedel explains how a daytime talk show host made Broadway a must-see destination for New York City's tourists. He explains how Disney made its mark on Broadway, with the help of Rudy Giuliani. He writes of a genius who never saw his masterpiece and never knew its

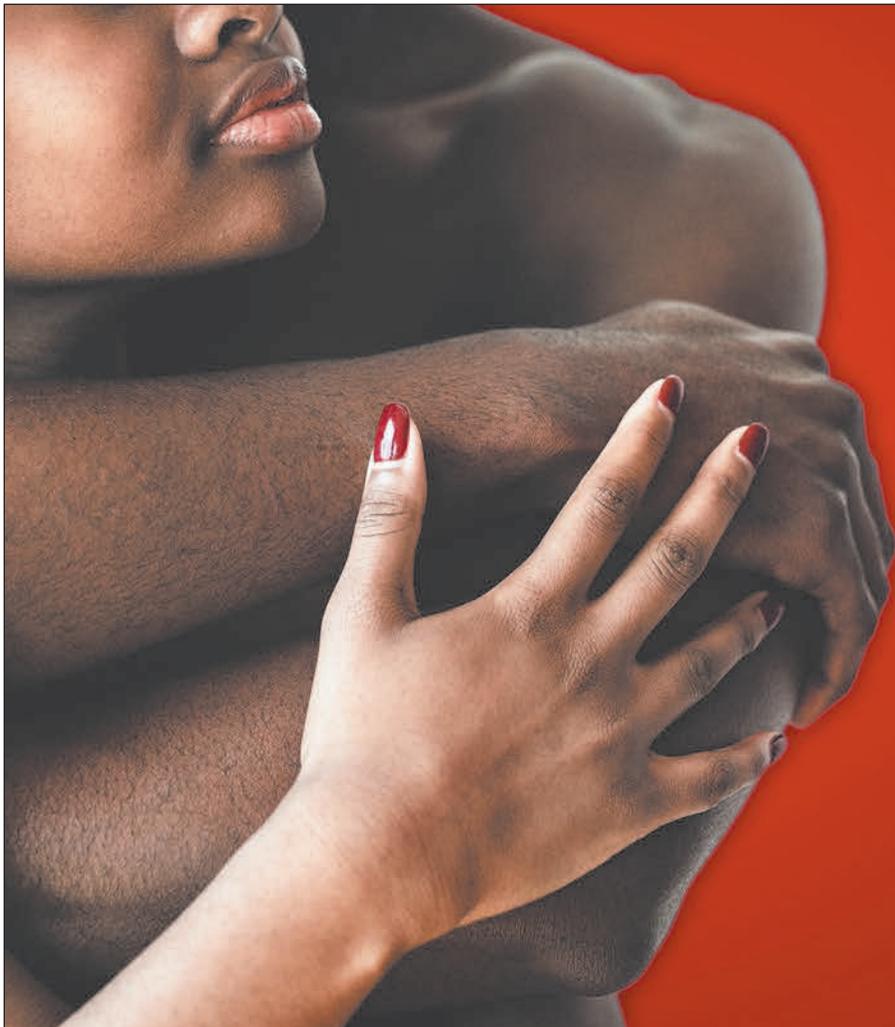
popularity. And he tells of a show rescued from near-obscure by a husband-and-wife team who couldn't let it go.

House lights down, stage lights up and, within minutes, you're transported to another place and time. Reading *Singular Sensation* is something like that: Author and theater columnist Michael Riedel takes readers backstage, overseas, onstage and in rehearsals and meetings with people you'll recognize if you're perpetually Broadway-bound. The nice surprise is that this serious-but-light-hearted, semi-scandalous collection of related stories will, because of the size of the names involved, make a non-fan happy, too.

Indeed, Riedel gives readers a fly-on-the-wall feel through a bit of non-catty, relatively kind celebrity gossiping, done with an absolutely correct amount of drama. This keeps *Singular Sensation* under control while maintaining a sense of being an insider, somewhat like reading *Variety* with a delightfully droll PhD.

It's likely been a minute since you sat in a theater seat, and you miss it very much. But that shouldn't stop you from enjoying Broadway on paper. So grab *Singular Sensation* and roll with it.

— Terri Schilchenmeyer



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was, and I was seated next to this man who was very thin and gaunt. He had a sort of bandana over his head where I could see his hair had kind of been taken out by chemo or something. I thought, "Oh my God, I'm already such a wreck because of the loss of my friend, and now I'm going to sit next to someone who has AIDS on the plane, and the whole thing is going to make me even more heartbroken than I already am. He looked up at me and it was Tom Hanks, who I knew well, but I didn't recognize him, because he had done such a commitment to play that role. He was frail.

It was so extraordinary not to immediately recognize him because of his physicality and the commitment he had already made to that character, which I thought was really something. For my part, it took a moment for me to get there with my character because I was kind of the bad guy. I was personalizing so much of what I had just been through with my friend. It was a little tricky at first for me to play that character.

The first day, which I was not good, not good at all. The one day of my acting like that I just felt like a dismal failure, Jonathan said to me, "Mary, you're making this about AIDS. This is about justice. I



want you to think about the fact that every person who hires a lawyer, whether it's a good person or a bad person, they deserve the best defense possible because that's how we uphold this beautiful justice system. It's not about what you think or

feel. It's about you giving your client the best defense possible."

From that second on, I knew how to play that character. I loved being a part of it. I loved the impact it had on people, particularly hearing from very conservative

people how this film modeled for them a family that surrounded their son with love. That theme meant a lot to families at that time because it was still kind of new to even talk about being out.

You mentioned directors Clea Duval and Jonathan Demme. Do you have any interest in directing for film or television? No. [Laughs] I have much more interest in writing the theme song at the end of the movie. I write music. Last year I had the end credits song ("Glasgow") for the movie *Wild Rose* that Jessie Buckley sang. That's my happy place, to be able to write music. I don't think I'd make a very good director. I have a son (Charlie McDowell) who's a wonderful director. I don't think I'd be very good at it because I get too lost inside the story, as opposed to being able to have that kind of overview of everything.

Having some kind of distance. Yes, I don't think I'd be good at distance. My problem is I get too into it. That kind of passion for story does allow me to express myself musically. That I think I prefer.

Do you think you might have a Broadway musical in you? From your lips... [laughs]. I would love that very much. That would be a dream come true.

FORT WORTH
Weekly
Holidays 2020

From a look at local nonprofits to the hottest video games and gifts, plus seasonal drink recipes, and more, the Fort Worth Weekly's annual Holiday edition has you covered. (Big props to cover guy "Hello, I'm Tony Green." Photo by Vishal Malhotra.) Happy Holidays!

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SUN 12.20

It's been a tough year for LGBTQ arts organizations, but the community has stepped up in so many ways to help our organizations make it through. Now Marsha Dimes hopes to bring a little yuletide cheer your way — and a little yuletide cash the Turtle Creek Chorale's way — with A Marsha Dimes Christmas Special, virtual show featuring “some of your favorite (and second favorite) queens,” including DeManda Refund, Aunt Marge, Stormy Weather, Nippy Peaks and more. And everyone who donates at least \$10 for their ticket will receive the link for the Zoom After Party, hosted by Marsha herself. A Marsha Dimes Christmas Special streams live on YouTube at 8 p.m. Tickets require a \$10 minimum donation, available at MarshaDimes.com/give.

SAT 12.19

Everybody needs a little “Love and Joy” this holiday season, and The Women’s Chorus of Dallas is here to give it to you with the premiere of its special virtual holiday concert on Saturday, Dec. 19. Best of all, the concert is free — although you are certainly welcome to donate to the Chorus — when you register at TicketTailor.com/events/thewomenschorusofdallas/458899#. *Love and Joy: Virtual Holiday Concert* by The Women’s Chorus of Dallas premieres online at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 19, and will be available online until Monday, Dec. 21. Register at the link above or email TWCD at TWCDOffice@twcd.org or call 214-520-7828 or information.

THU 12.24

Make sure the stockings are all hung by the chimney with care, because Santa is on his way! It's Christmas Eve!



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ASK HOWARD

How To Do The Wrong Thing Right

Well, she did it, my Christmas revelers! Let's give her a big draught of eggnog and a slice of limited-edition fruitcake, too—Devil's food flavored! Miz Rona, within less than a single year upon her arrival here on the shores of Freedom's Land, has now emerged triumphant as the number 1 killer in the entire United States—surpassing even heart disease and cancer (each of which only claims, respectively, 1,800 victims and 1,700 victims, per day). Coronavirus now snatches 3,000 souls every 24 hours, and rising. Yes, my pets, the bitch is back . . . and with a demonic vengeance, as a matter of fact.

"Official" winter begins this week—capping-off all of spring, summer and fall's unofficial frostbite: 2020, The Year Without A Summer. The year that "Rona"—our black-cloaked/sickle-wielding Chinese dominatrix, that Whore of Wuhan—bound the world mercilessly in chains and a sensory-deprivation hood! Real starvation has now stormed the former land of plenty that was America.

When I was growing up, the catchphrase to lure a tot to eat, say, sweet potatoes, was, "You'd be wise to remember, young man, children in Africa are starving." All the more miserable a commentary on our Oracle L'Orange's past four years in office—realizing that kids today in, say, Somalia are now sharing equally in our bountiful food inequality as those here where freedom rings; meanwhile, in just the past week alone, a million more Americans applied for unemployment benefits.

And yet the band plays on, with the new holiday "stimulus" deal nary one scintilla closer—thank you, Mitch, for absolutely nothing. You old frog-faced, Trumpian road-kill toadie . . . yes, oh, she can bitch, she can bitch better than you. And with January looming suddenly but two weeks away, too! As another of yesteryear's anthems laments (for those with a showtunes' flair), "Things have reached a pretty pass/When someone pretty lower-class/Graceless and vulgar, un-inspired/Can be so respected and admired: Trumpita!"

I mean, what gives with these crypt-keeper weasels in Washington? Honestly! Why is it such anathema for them to place country first? Virus victims are overwhelming our hospitals nationwide. Every hospital's besieged! There are practically no more intensive care beds remaining. Especially not in Texas. Just ask Abilene. Or El Paso. By Christmas day, there will simply be nowhere left for the sick to go. Not unless they're planning to convert Dallas Cowboy Stadium into a field hospital. Already, rumors run roughshod that Texas—taking a freshly humbled cue from California's COVID playbook—will be barricading into total lockdown again come January 1, New Year's



Day—yet with a new, Lonestar twist being incorporated this time: Even private gatherings shall be banned — such is the stuff one hears now through the grapevine, rather. What . . . what's that you say, Mr. President? Come again, L'Orange? "Let them eat urinal cake?"

My fellow Americans, on a lighter harbinger of things to come, take a gander here at my favorite fake news headline of the past week, complements of worldnews-dailyreport.com: "Belgium Health Minister Maggie de Block Has Put A Ban on All Nonessential Sexual Activities on Persons Indoors of 3 Or Greater." Yes, Belgium, the beer-drinking and group sex capital of the world just announced, effective immediately, that all "nonessential" activities involving the reproductive organs of a threesome or more are now banned in indoor areas. You gotta love it! You can't make this stuff up; oh, wait, but someone just did. I wonder if even the phantasmagorical year 1918—peak of The Spanish flu pandemic—ended on such a sci-fi cliffhanger: Every hospital in the country overflowing with hacking, delirium-ridden patients, from a disease that nobody one year previously had even heard of, amidst a miasma of distant wars stalled in mud pits? Let's insert our rectal probes and just get right to it:

If it's any consolation to you, kids, this holiday season's gloom-&-doom is already quite dispiriting enough, without my adding

yet another unwanted two cent's worth of year's-end commentary review; hence, in what has become a regular Christmas tradition here regarding my column's annual year-end issue, let's instead toast our warm mugs of cognac-spiked cocoa to an uplifting Christmas carol homage featuring Dear Howard's high-rise menagerie of mollycoddled, little minxes of mayhem—the Sky Ark Aristocats!

Yes, sweet readers, Roo, my 15-year-old Abyssinian-airhead returns again this holly-&-mistletoe season, 2020, by popular demand; albeit, jingling and jangling with major feline troupe changes since last December . . . his elder statesman sidekick, big brother Boo, 20, passed away peacefully in his sleep this past September. Roo, who worshipped the very air Boo breathed, immediately sank into a catatonic funk. Depressed, he became Velcro at my side. A born loner Roo is not; rather, Winnie-the-Pooh is more his natural domain: "His top is made out of rubber/His bottom is made out of springs/He's bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy/Fun, fun, fun, fun, fun!"—Roo's malaise from a happy-go-lucky, bouncy Tigger cat was swift and heartbreaking.

Prayers were answered in the appearance of Siamese Luna (aka, HRH Miz Priss) courtesy of kitty play dates arranged via my neighbor, Tash, across the hall: Tasha's Siam sourpuss of terror (alias, Empress Tasmania De Vil) was followed within a few weeks by the gorgeous, but demurely shy SPCA adoptee, Peppermint—a British Blue/Tortoiseshell mix, flashing stary, onyx-green eyes! Mighty happy, too, is Roo—despite Luna and Peppermint's 24/7, polar-opposite estrogen dramatics: A bargain at any cost, they are, in this winter of our housebound hell—an embarrassment of excitement-filled riches—kitty, kitty, kitties, welcome home!

A typical daily snapshot of our quarantined environs here usually has poor little Peppermint (aka, 'Pineapple') cowering atop my bedroom's Japanese tan-su all day long—trembling and cornered behind a pair of antique leather giraffes—as Luna, that ill-willed Indochine herself, hisses up at her in siege-mode from below—more sinuous than a moat filled of cobras as, all the while, Roo arcanelly goes about his mundane retinue of snacking, napping and swatting his neon-green rubber ball through an enfilade of echoing caverns. Officiously, he feels duty-bound to deliver fresh writing pens to me in whichever room I happen to be, blithely oblivious to our sky ark's contentiously ionized estrogen ricocheting throughout. Come nightfall, Peppermint (whom I've bizarrely begun calling 'Pineapple' for no logical reason I can fathom) sleeps cuddled up under my chin closely as she can; ultimately, Roo joins us in bed, too—my own body serving as Hadrian's Wall between them, an impenetrable bulwark against Luna's dreaded tread.

All 3 of us practically sleep with one eye forever open—warily on the lookout for

Luna of Babylon's stealthy creep; moreover, compounding Miss Peppermint Pineapple's epileptic scares of Luna (alias, The Queen of Hissy-Snark) is the fact that Princess Pineapple is deaf. As a dinosaur fossil, she is: Throughout the night, downtown Dallas's variously changing skyline colors reflect off my ceilings, illuminating the continuousness, eternal, of Pineapple's blue-furred ears bobbling around, dizzily, like a dashboard dog's the whole evening long through: Imagine your own life as if trapped inside a kaleidoscope . . . with a Siamese, soul-sucking demontor on the loose—a creature one can neither hear, nor barely even see, but lurks everywhere: Well, welcome to Chez Howard!

My advice? Just haul out your old toybox from under the bed yet one more time again, bois. Put a fresh pot of dildoes on the boil, and keep those family jewels safely zipped away inside your pants for but a little while longer now: The vaccine's a comin', kidz, I promise, it is. For those we lost this year, she'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes! You, me, we'll surely all meet again here next year, same time: Roo, Luna and Miss Peppermint Pineapple, too — all at our red-nosed brightest! Remember, my pets, isolation is consolation . . . simply wear your masks, is all!

It ain't much longer. It ain't even hard. The vaccine will be here . . . "She'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes! She'll be drivin' six white horses when she comes/ She'll be swagged in pearls and rubies, a wearin' red pajamas and comin' round the mountain when she comes!"

Merry, merry Christmas, bois and girlz! Again now, one more euphoric time: "She'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes . . . !"

—Howard Lewis Russell

Send your question to AskHoward@dallasvoice.com and Howard may answer it here!

this week's solution

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Omar and Adam receive Dallas Voice's LGBTQ Texans of the Year Award

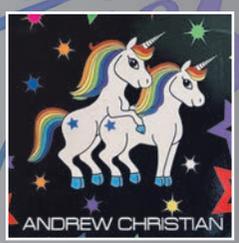


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Solution on Page 30

Across

- 1 All's Well That ___ Well
- 5 Bitch
- 9 Cut leaves of grass by the sidewalk
- 14 Draw a cross over
- 15 Shape of an office that will soon lose a homophobe
- 16 Island near Sicily
- 17 Land of Sinead O'Connor
- 18 Kelly once of *All My Children*
- 19 Section for Bernstein
- 20 Start of a quote about chessmaster Beth Harmon from *The Queen's Gambit*
- 23 Delivery by Rev. Perry
- 24 Gay activist, e.g.
- 25 I, to Rilke
- 28 They may be civil (abbr.)
- 30 Worn-out horse
- 31 Home state of J. Nabors
- 32 More of the quote
- 37 Market bear's fear
- 38 It may be cold and hard
- 39 Yellow-brick way
- 40 Lanford Wilson's room renter
- 41 AC unit

Down

- 42 Turn sharply
- 44 E. Lynn Harris' ___ *Way the Wind Blows*
- 45 Title role for Salma
- 47 Photographer Adams
- 48 Stamp of _Valkyrie_
- 50 Military cross-dresser Jeanne ___
- 52 End of the quote
- 57 Well-worn
- 60 Home paper
- 61 Ms., to Mauresmo
- 62 '80s tennis star Ivan
- 63 Hebrides language
- 64 Genie portrayer Barbara
- 65 Strand in a drag wig
- 66 Things to connect
- 67 Suffix for "bi"?

10 Disney's *That ___ Cat!*

- 11 *Spartacus* extras
- 12 UFO pilots
- 13 Yeses of Nuryev
- 21 ___ *Song Trilogy*
- 22 They help bakers get it up
- 26 Cut
- 27 *Messiah* composer
- 29 Screwball
- 32 Taking it lying down
- 33 Lech of Greek lore
- 34 Big initials in fashion
- 35 Bellow in the library?
- 36 Cole Porter's fifty million
- 37 Converse at Zoosk, e.g.
- 41 You may play him on your organ
- 43 Shoot off a flare, e.g.
- 45 Small hills
- 46 Most queer
- 49 "Holy crow!"
- 51 Baldwin staffers
- 53 Wolfe of fiction
- 54 Alan of *And the Band Played On*
- 55 Glenn Burke, formerly
- 56 Say, "We never actually kissed..." perhaps
- 57 Lunch-counter order
- 58 Atmospheric prefix
- 59 Opposite of SSW

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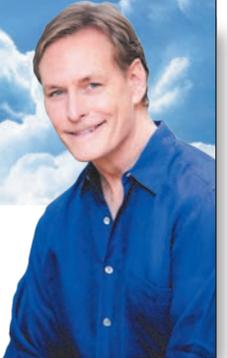
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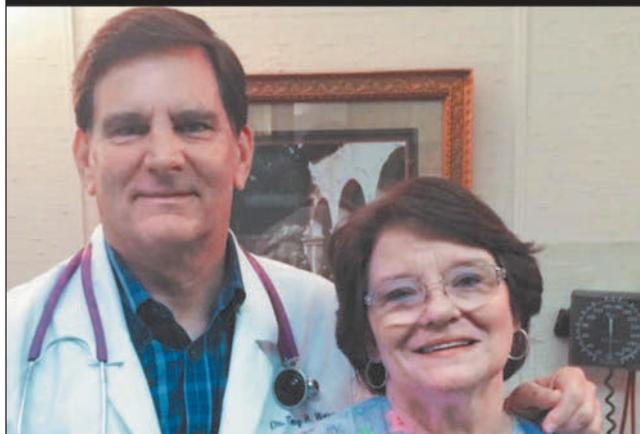
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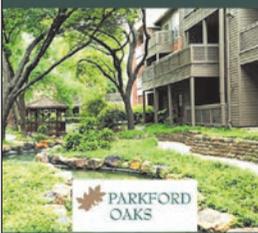
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