Frank Farinaro explores cultures, heritage through belly dance

By Tammye Nash, page 8
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Belly dancer Frank Farinaro.
Photo by Tammye Nash

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Subscriptions via First Class Mail are available: Three months (13 consecutive issues), $65. Six months (26 consecutive issues), $130. To subscribe call 214-754-8710 x114.

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Texas Senate passes anti-trans bills

Republicans in the Texas Senate on Wednesday, July 14, approved two bills attacking transgender youth. But House Democrats’ decision to leave the state to break quorum to stymie the GOP’s efforts to pass voter suppression laws will derail the anti-trans bills, too.

Nine Democratic state senators and 57 Democratic state representatives left the state for Washington, D.C., to break quorum in Gov. Greg Abbott’s called special session. The senate still has enough Democrats — four — left to continue voting on bills.

Senate Bill 2 and Senate Bill 32, both authored by Republican Sen. Charles Perry of Lubbock, would allow student athletes to participate on sports teams based only on the sex listed on their birth certificate at or near the time of their birth, rather than on the team that aligns with their actual gender identity.

Perry claims he pushed the legislation attacking trans youth to protect the “integrity” of women’s sports, because he worries that some students would try to change the gender marker on their birth certificate to gain a competitive advantage — even though such a scenario has never happened and the very idea of teen and pre-teen boys legally transitioning for such a reason is ridiculous.

The GOP also ignores the fact that their bills would, in actuality, threaten the very “integrity” they claim to be protecting in women’s sports by forcing transgender boys to compete against girls.

— Tammye Nash

First same-sex couple buried together at DFW National Cemetery

The first known same-sex partner burial happened this week at Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery when Ken Sims was buried at the military cemetery on Monday, July 12. He was interred in the same grave as his husband, Lowell A. Worthington (1933-2017). Worthington served in the U.S. Army and was a Korean War-era veteran.

Veterans and their partners are buried one above the other in military cemeteries. A commenter on the Dallas Voice website has said that a lesbian couple were previously buried together at a different VA cemetery.

The Rev. Erin Wyma, associate pastor at Cathedral of Hope, officiated.

— David Taffet

Mj Rodriguez makes history with Emmy nomination

Mj Rodriguez, the iconic Blanca Evangelista on Pose, made history this week when she was nominated for Outstanding Leading Actress in a Drama Series at the 2021 Emmys. She is the first transgender person to be nominated for an Emmy for a lead acting role.

Billy Porter, who portrayed Pray Tell in the series, made history at the 2019 Emmys by winning Lead Actor in a Drama, becoming the first gay Black man to do so. He won again in 2020, and is nominated in the same category again this year.

— Tammye Nash

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Meet Crescent. If there are any fans of Clifford the Big Red Dog out there, Crescent looks a lot like that over-sized cartoon pup. This 2-year-old red-and-white Hound mix is a whopping 93 pounds of pure goofball. Crescent loves to play with other big dogs, and, despite how big he is, he’s a very polite playmate. Crescent knows sit and down, and he is always happy to see his human friends.

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Adoptions will be available by appointment. Adopters will need to submit an adoption inquiry form in order to begin the adoption process and schedule an appointment to complete the adoption. Please 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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VOICES
OPINIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY

Lingering after-effects?

The pandemic may have stripped away some common courtesies, but there was already plenty of meanness in the halls of power.

I saw something in the news that said Dallas has reached “herd immunity” as far as COVID-19 is concerned. Personally, I have a feeling that we aren’t done — not by a long shot. The worst may be over, though, as far as the actual disease is concerned.

But it’s the “side effects” that have me concerned. There is abundant evidence that points to isolating a large percentage of our population being detrimental to our collective mental health.

We used to be social beings with a sense of connection to those we work with and to the cities we live in. But now, there seems to be an odd selfishness and disconnect from the world around us.

This past week, I was returning home from lunch, driving down Mockingbird Lane, when a woman in an SUV decided she could ignore Pauli’s Exclusion Principle (You know: No two electrons in an atom can have identical quantum numbers). I lacked the same faith, so I hit the brakes, and I hit the horn. She did not even wave.

We seem to have lost our humanity. This is but one example of numerous daily occurrences. Look, I get it. I experienced it just like you did. I worked from home for the past 15-16 months. I took the health department’s warnings seriously. I almost never left the house. If we needed groceries, we either had them delivered or we masked up to go get them. Business was done via Zoom.

And I guess it’s too much to ask for everyone to snap back to smiling and waving at one another, holding doors open and — God forbid — actually talking to one another. But there is more to it than that.

Perhaps this pandemic has not been so much a cause of the social breakdown as it has been a broom that swept away the façade to reveal that which was already crumbling after four really divisive years with a president who listened more to TV talk hosts than to scientists.

The former guy’s administration bungled the pandemic response in every way possible, costing thousands of lives. Yet the man remains inexplicably popular with his base.

Meanwhile, here in Texas …

In February, we saw a freak cold snap that the weather forecasters all predicted but that ErCOT missed. Dozens of people died! Countless others lost power and had their pipes freeze and then break and flood their homes when the power came back and the temperatures rose above freezing. The result was BILLIONS of dollars in property damage.

We found out later that we came within four minutes and 37 seconds of our electric grid collapsing completely! That’s less than five minutes away from finding what life was really like when they built the Alamo!

When this catastrophe happened, Gov. Greg Abbott said, “Tragic does not even begin to describe the suffering Texans endured.”

That was in February.

In July, Abbott showed exactly how much he cares about the average Texan. How much is he truly bothered by our “indescribable suffering?” Not very much, as it turns out.

The issue of fixing the grid was not solved during the regular legislative session. But that’s OK, because, fortunately, Gov. Abbott can — and did — call a special legislative session. He alone sets the agenda for the special session, so surely the deaths, suffering and property damage done by the winter storm and the imminent collapse of the electric grid will be addressed during special session, right?

No. It won’t.

Because addressing the subpar electric grid isn’t on Abbott’s special session agenda. But keeping trans girls from joining the volleyball team in high school is.

No, seriously. The issue of keeping transgender girls from playing high school sports is among his legislative priorities! Really? Really!

Abbott is using fear to demonize a small group of already marginalized children. Where is the humanity? Where is compassion? Where are the careful stewards of our tax dollars?

Instead of reassuring Texans that they will be able to cool their homes in our ever-warming summers and to provide life-saving warmth when our winter temperatures fall to dangerous levels, Abbott found his sacrificial lamb in the form of transgender children.

I just don’t get it. Transgender kids playing sports isn’t a problem — anywhere. The governing body of Texas scholastic sports, the UIL, already prohibits participation by trans kids. Why rub it in?

Here is the deal: There are 29 million people in the state of Texas. We are not expendable zombies. We are your neighbors and friends. Teachers and students. Police, firefighters, medical professionals and food service workers. We are mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors, some elderly, some young.

It would be nice to look to Austin and see people working to bring equality to all Texans, to see leaders who care about our health and safety rather than a bunch of petty, vindictive, partisan hand puppets using fear to manipulate people. After all, “governor” isn’t something you are, it’s something you DO.

So yeah, the pandemic quarantine was hard to endure, and, yes, it has had its impact. But I think the meanness we’re seeing in Austin has been going on much longer.
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Frank Farinaro talks about his work as a student, performer and teacher of belly dance

TAMMYE NASH  |  Managing Editor
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Frank Farinaro gets his audience’s attention from the minute he dances his way onto the stage. The first thing to catch your eye may be his costuming: “harem”-style pants in muted but luxurious colors, a scarf tied around his head and a multitude of bracelets and anklets and necklaces and medallions and belts and maybe even a brightly-colored hip scarf.

Or maybe the first things you notice is his height, his long arms and legs. Or maybe his dark eyes and intense stare.

But no matter what you notice first, it is his dance that will stay with you long after Frank himself has left the stage — the way he spins and shimmies, the way he can contort his long, lean body into backbends deep enough that he touches the floor before spring back up, and the way he stretches out to fill the whole stage. And most of all, it’s the joy and the energy in his dance — so much of that it can’t help but spill over, off the stage and across the audience, making you want to get up and dance, too.

But Frank isn’t just known as one of the premiere male belly dancers in the U.S., he’s also known as one of the most genuinely sweet and friendly people in the whole belly dance community; the joy and energy he expresses on stage shining through when he is teaching or even just chatting with a fan.

Over the last 15 months, since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Frank has shared publicly another side of himself as well, speaking of his experiences as the biracial son of a white mother who worked as a police officer.

As he prepared to head to the DFW Metroplex from his home in Colorado to once again teach and perform at the 20th anniversary Yaa Halla, Y’all, a weekend of belly dance workshop and shows, in Grapevine, Frank took a few moments to sit down and answer a few questions for Dallas Voice.

Dallas Voice: Tell me some basics about you: Where do you live? Where do you work? Tell me about your partner. Frank Farinaro: I live in the Denver area, between the foothills of the mountains and the downtown skyline. I have two of the best jobs ever, and I have no idea how I got so lucky. When I am not teaching or performing ethnic dance, I manage a culinary herb and spice shop, where I spend my days talking about ethnic food!

My partner Brian and I have been together for nine years. He is also a dancer as well as a cosmetologist.

How long have you been involved in belly dance, and how did you get started? Do you have a background in other kinds of dance? What was it about belly dancing that caught your attention and made you want to be a dancer? I have been involved with belly dance for more than 21 years. Belly dance first caught my eye when I first saw Veena and Neena [twin sisters Neena and Veena Bidasha, well-known belly dancers] on television, in the 1990s. I started studying folkloric foundations of belly dance with my first instructor, Donna Mejia, in my college years.

As a student of dance, I have run the gambit from folkloric to technical to social. Belly dance was just the first style of dance that I encountered that fused elements of other ethnically-specific dances. I did not know...
You have talked about studying the cultural roots of belly dance/Middle Eastern Dance. Why is that important to you? How do you honor that culture and history without crossing the line into cultural appropriation?

Growing up with a multicultural background, I enjoyed learning about the cultures of my family as much as learning about others. My favorite learning experiences are ones that...
No Hate in Hurst using rainbow sidewalks, silent protest and ‘a loving mindset’ to rid their city of Stedfast Baptist

TAMMYE NASH | Managing Editor
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It was June 2016, shortly after the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, when a group staged a protest one Sunday morning outside the Stedfast Baptist Church in Sansom Park, a tiny enclave on the northwest edge of Fort Worth. The protest was prompted by a video posted to YouTube by Stedfast’s pastor, Donnie Romero, in which he preached that the victims at Pulse deserved to die because they were LGBTQ. Three years later, in January 2019, Romero resigned as pastor of Stedfast after being caught sleeping with prostitutes, gambling and in possession of marijuana.

Fast-forward two years and Stedfast has a new location in Hurst and a new pastor, Jonathan Shelley. But the hate remains. And after a video of Shelley saying during a sermon that LGBTQ people should be shot in the head began making the rounds on social media, protests have begun again.

This week, No Hate in Hurst’s co-founder, Teri Pate, talked to Dallas Voice about how the group started and why.

Dallas Voice: Did you start the No Hate in Hurst group? Who helped with getting it started, and why did you feel called to do this? Teri Pate: Yes I did — me and Kevin Day, Kim Trussell and her wife, Dawn Summers. There was quite a big outrage that [Stedfast Baptist was] in our own backyard. So, I suggested one 30-minute sidewalk stance. I spoke to the police, and we didn’t need a permit so it was on. I had three people join me at my house to make posters, and we had about 45 people the first morning.

In the middle of that first one Kevin, Kim, Dawn and some others said we had to come back. We went back that evening and there were 20 people that met us. And thus began our movement.

How did you first hear about Stedfast Church? I first saw them on our community Facebook page. I was appalled at what he said and even more so that he was saying such things in my city.

How often does No Hate in Hurst protest outside of Stedfast Church? We protest every Sunday at 10 a.m. and again at 5 p.m. and Wednesdays starting at 6:30 p.m.

Your group focuses on peaceful protest, right? Tell me what the group does. You have signs, I know. Are there chants? Singing? We have encouraged our protesters to stay on the sidewalk, hold up signs towards the passing cars and not to verbally engage with the cult members. At first, we were yelling things like ‘Have a nice day,’ ‘We like your dress,’ ‘Drive safe.’ Unfortunately, that allowed some protesters to yell obscenities and hateful things.

We now encourage a silent protest. We are a new group and have had some heated discussions about what our protest should look like. The four of us have decided to stand by our belief that citizens can have a peaceful protest and still facilitate real change within a community.}

Tell me about decorating the sidewalk outside the church. We had a woman hear about us and drive in from Arkansas. She is retired and travels the country protesting different things. The way I remember it is the sidewalk rainbows were her idea. It began with a rainbow flag drawn onto the public sidewalk, in front of the church, with regular chalk. The next morning the cult was out there power-washing it off. Every night since, the sidewalk mysteriously gains a bigger and bigger rainbow. And every morning, the cult comes out and washes it off with their power washer.

The rainbows have even been made out of modge podge and environmentally friendly glitter chalk.

The preacher at this church has basically called on his followers to kill gay people, and it is my understanding that he is known, as are other members, for carrying guns. Are you afraid? Do you worry that someone from the church might respond with violence, and if
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they do, have you and your group developed a plan for that? I am worried about the amount of firepower the members seem to have. That is why we have encouraged our members to come with only a loving mindset and have tried very hard to not give them any reason to justify their murderous hatred of so many people.

What kind of response have you gotten from church members? Has anything happened that makes you feel like you are getting through to any of them? Our intention was never to get through to church members. Our intent was to show the rest of the world that they do not represent Hurst, Texas.

Our peaceful ways were working; they were getting nasty phone calls every few minutes, according to Brother Dillon in a sermon he gave last week. The attendance appears to have dropped. One woman, last Sunday, spoke to some protestors and then turned her car away and left.

The public is looking into them and not happy that this is in their backyard. We are accomplishing what we set out to do, make the public aware and remove them from the DFW area.

What about other residents in the area? How are they responding? Do you feel supported by them? We have had one set of hecklers. Everyone else honks, stops to give us water, stops to hold up a sign, our protest grows every time. We had over 100 this past weekend. My Facebook group, NO HATE IN HURST, was started on June 29 of this year and now has almost 900 members. Most people are tired of the hate and are hopeful when they read about what we are trying to accomplish. Most people support ONLY peaceful protests. It has been heartwarming after the past two years to see people choose love over hate.

Your group has gotten a good response from Hurst police, yes? Tell me about how No Hate is working with police to stay safe and make sure you stay within the law as you protest. I contacted them before our first stand-in to see what my legal rights are, as I am a community activist virgin, and I have been in contact with them throughout this entire experience. My belief is that police and citizens can actually work together to facilitate peaceful change within a community. Kim Trussell, one of our group administrators, is working closely with them to maintain as peaceful a stand-in as we are able to have.

What is your ultimate goal for these protests? What will you consider to be a victory? And how long are you prepared to keep going? Our ultimate goal is to get them out of DFW and see their church abolished throughout the country. We will consider it a victory when they are gone from DFW.

I have no idea how long this will go; we are prepared to go as long as it takes. I originally only wanted to do this for 30 minutes, but then I suddenly became an accidental activist. None of this was on my radar when this thought first manifested, but I’m excited to see how many people are like-minded. It’s renewed my faith in humanity.

If someone wants to join No Hate, what do they need to know? What are the rules for participating? We have information on our Facebook page and rules are posted. Basically, anyone with a loving mindset is welcome to come out or join our group. We stay on the sidewalk at all times and do not engage the cult members in any way.

What else do you want to mention that I haven’t asked about? Our ULTIMATE goal is to convert their current space into an LGBTQ+ resource center.
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When it comes to the queer theater continuum, \textit{The Laramie Project} is high on the list. The play, by Moises Kaufman, depicts the strong reactions to the 1998 murder of Mathew Shepard in the titular city in Wyoming. Drawn from interviews conducted by the Tectonic Theater Project for the stage, the play is heavy and rife with emotions and language.

The show recalls a brutal moment in queer history, but director Jason Robert Villareal had a vision of telling that story through a young cast.

“I’m very proud of these young performers and their excitement to tell this story,” Villareal said. “The show stars artists from the sixth grade to high school seniors.”

\textit{The Laramie Project} opens this weekend at the Starcatchers Theatre at Willow Bend Center of the Arts in Plano. The show is by North Texas Performing Arts.

\textbf{Dallas Voice:} To start, how did you come up with the idea for casting such a play with young actors? Jason Robert Villareal: One thing I think is most beautiful with youth is they forget — or maybe not even know — there was a generation that fought for their rights before them. And then one of the coolest things is that we assume kids are just kids. We fail to recognize that they are growing in a generation where the media is in the palm of their hands and quickly understanding their bodies and acknowledging each other and recognizing consent.

\textbf{What is the cast like and how did you work the auditioning process?} Luckily enough, a large percentage is either genderfluid, nonbinary, gay, lesbian or gay-friendly. Some did research; some knew this spoke to them simply as a queer story and dove right in.

\textbf{What have rehearsals been like for these actors?} First, before we start, I always tell them they have purpose; they have a story; they are light, kind and love, because that is what I’m hoping to get out of the show. I ask them about a highlight of their week before rehearsal. It’s important to have good energy before we take on this massive heartbreaking story.

When it comes to young artists, any sort of judgment or negative comments don’t have a home there. My approach to any show, especially this one, is to cultivate a loving and safe space.

\textbf{Did parents have any concern with their children taking on these roles?} I understand that some of the adults and patrons might be offended by the language or the word “faggot.” This is adult subject matter. It’s gonna get ugly; it’s gonna get uncomfortable. Their children are telling a story.

At the beginning of rehearsals, I have a parent meeting. The beauty of it is how supportive these parents are, and they have said they prefer us not to censor the show.

One of my girls has lesbian mothers, so she was privy to this history of gay rights. But to see all these youth explore this story together is awesome.

\textbf{Reassuring how?} We are trying to set the tone for a younger generation to carry on our stories. This isn’t just about homophobia but also about racism and classism. These matters are hard to face, and they are diving right into it.

\textbf{So how did NTPA move forward with \textit{The Laramie Project} when audiences are so familiar with its more family-friendly fare?} We’ve been trying to do this show for some time, but it wasn’t a very popular choice. We are also a school, and we really want our kids to grow. There was some discomfort to it. I do think partly that there was some relief for families when they realized a gay director would be at the helm and helping their children with this kind of opportunity. There has been some “adult” fare. NTPA will be doing Hamlet soon. But also, we remind them and audiences that not everything is Disney.

This is an interesting moment because perhaps many queer people of a certain age
didn’t have this type of experience in their youth whether performing or watching. I care for these kids so much, and I remind them that I see them; I hear them. I didn’t feel seen as a youth and never really had the guidance or leadership. Now, having them come out as trans or nonbinary and know that they are in a safe space, it’s great to provide that because these are our future voices to tell our older stories.

The show runs through Sunday. Visit north-texasperformingarts.org for tickets.

The cast of The Laramie Project at Starcatchers Theatre. (Photos courtesy of Jason Robert Villarael)
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Pushing for Black ‘femuline’ acceptance

**MUSIC**

Todrick Hall talks re-invention, industry bias and what drives his advocacy

EVE KUCHARSKI | Q Syndicate

Todrick Hall is serving bitch but making it, as he says on his latest record, fashön. The album’s title, “Femuline,” is exactly as it seems: the blending of feminine and masculine attributes to create a greater, queerer whole. That theme serves as the perfect narrative for an artist who has made a music career out of reimagining classic stories like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Cinderella* through his own creative lens.

The difference this time, he says, was that there was no “pre-existing blueprint.”

“It may exist, but I’ve never heard a song talking about how you can be both: You can be a prince; you can be a princess; you can be the bride; you can be the groom. And that was very interesting for me to explore,” Hall says. “But it was uncharted territory as far as I know.”

Full of club-ready bangers that seem tailor-made for Pride season, “Femuline” is Hall’s “open love letter to the LGBTQ community,” he says. And an already queer experience is made queerer thanks to both LGBTQ+ and allied icons like Brandy, Tyra Banks, Ts Madison, Chaka Khan and, of course, Hall’s signature Broadway vocals.

So far in his career, Hall has been part of multiple Broadway smash hits, secured a spot as a recurring guest judge on *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and amassed a whopping 44 million views on YouTube with his 2019 “Nails, Hair, Hips, Heels” breakthrough single. Considering Hall only made the move to Los Angeles a decade ago, it’s all the more impressive that his hard-won successes have been so consistent and plentiful. Not even the vision board that he created upon his permanent move out West could’ve prepared the Plainview, Texas, native for everything he has accomplished at this point in his career.

“It wouldn’t have included any of these things, because I wouldn’t have had the courage and the wisdom and the diversity and the acceptance and the permission from society to be able to put things on there,” Hall says. “As a dreamer, I still even limited my dreams at that time.”

He says that shortly after breaking into the industry he realized that, because of societal stigma and bias, his identity as a Black gay man would only make achieving his goals more difficult than he imagined. Hall recalls a distinct moment on the Broadway stage when another Black performer in *The Color Purple* pulled him aside and told him that he was never going to get away with mediocrity.

“And in every Broadway show that I’ve ever been in, I had to tumble,” he says. “I had to be doing backflips and leaping across the stage, and riffs and singing high, and understudying eight billion roles, while I saw my counterparts that were a different race come in and give, in some cases not even a mediocre performance. But the skill set that was required for them [to succeed] was lower,” Hall says.

In some ways, Hall says, he views the high standards society places on him as a compliment, as an expectation to only bring the best quality to his work. Yet he recognizes their deeply problematic nature, racist origins and the consequences those standards have on both himself and fellow Black performers.

“You expect Black women to get up and out-sing everyone on the stage. If she doesn’t sing ‘And I Am Telling You’ or ‘I Will Always Love You,’ then why is she there?” he says. “To me, I think a Black woman should be able to get up and sing ‘Part of Your World’ from *The Little Mermaid*. The reality is that there are a lot of people who are musical-theater performers that, if they can’t deliver a gospel Jennifer Holliday-, Jennifer Hudson-, Beyoncé-esque performance, their opportunities to perform and exist in entertainment are almost non-existent.”
To Hall, one of the keys to dispelling the stigma that still persists around identity, whether conscious or not, is to push for representation whenever possible — not only of Black entertainers but those who are LGBTQ+ as well.

“Some days I wake up and I’m like, ‘You should be grateful for the things that you have.’ But then there are other days where I’m like, ‘You can count on one hand, without using most of your fingers, the amount of gay men who have come out and been gay when they were popular on the radio,’” he says, lamenting that he’s never heard a man sing a love song to another man on mainstream radio.

He adds that Hollywood’s acceptance of Black queer artists in 2021 isn’t enough: “We’re accepting breadcrumbs when we should get a slice of bread at this point.”

Hall believes that it should be a requirement and not an exception for radio stations to play same-sex love songs as a means of normalizing ideas of LGBTQ acceptance. Really, though, he’s out of patience for people who use a handful of examples of Black representation in popular culture as an excuse to say that visibility is equitable.

“People can make the decision to be like, ‘Yeah, there wasn’t a lot.’ Or they can bring up the fact that Oprah existed and be like, ‘That’s enough,’ when that wasn’t enough,” Hall says.

That extends to LGBTQ artists, too. He points to Lil Nas X’s “Montero (Call Me By Your Name)” as an example of audacious content created by a talented Black gay artist who’s seeking to break free from societal expectations of what Black queerness should look like.

“He probably knows singing a song that’s just a format that the Jonas Brothers, that Shawn Mendes, that James Arthur, that Ed Sheeran, that Sam Smith have been able to do would not be enough,” he says.

Hall’s passion about this topic and advocating for representation in his work comes from a personal place — a place, he says, that was born of being told “no” because of his Black, queer identity. It’s those roots that inspired him to take on advocacy projects outside of music, like being the face of Morphe’s “Live With Love” palette, whose full proceeds will go to benefit The Trevor Project.

But as vocal as he is about causes he cares about, Hall doesn’t feel every artist needs to be required to use their platform for advocacy — it’s just the “cherry on top” if they do.

Looking ahead, it won’t be until 2022 that fans will get to see Hall perform “Femuline” live, seeing as how COVID-19 has thrown things off-kilter for nearly every touring artist’s schedule. But until then, there’s no question about what he needs to do next: “Knock down walls and barriers so that the people that come after me are able to just strut without having to stress out [about] the things that I had to worry about that made me believe that I could never accomplish my dreams.”
involve music and food. Those two things are windows to the languages, lands and histories of other cultures. Through learning the histories of one culture, you can learn how that culture began to interact with others in past and modern contexts.

I think a healthy balance of doing just as much academic study as technical practice is a key element in avoiding cultural appropriation. The same way a dancer may enjoy learning any style of Egyptian dance in a class/workshop setting, they could learn just as beneficial a lesson by enjoying a documentary or book about Egyptian culture, history, music, dance, etc.

I have learned to avoid cultural appropriation by combining shared subjects of cultures that have a positive history of interaction and by avoiding subjects/themes [where] cultures either have a negative or no history of exchange.

The fact that we live in an era where we can have international song lyrics translated for us quickly is also a huge benefit that I wish more people would take advantage of. Most importantly, it is unethical to treat the cultures of other people with the same frivolity that a painter does when mixing colors or a tailor when mixing fabrics.

Do you, personally, make a distinction between “belly dance” and Middle Eastern Dance? And how does what most people here in the U.S. think of as “belly dance” differ from Middle Eastern Dance? I do like to make a distinction between the two. In the United States, as well as the Middle East, “belly dance” really has become an amalgamation of different forms of Middle Eastern Dance. Through learning the history, I was able to get a sense of what came from Africa, Asia, Europe or America. They all have their contributions as well as their places.

**Talk about the different styles of belly dance, not just “cabaret” vs. “tribal” vs. “fusion,” but the different sub-styles within those styles and, of course, the distinctions among the kind of modern belly dance we are used to here in the U.S. vs. modern belly dance in the Middle East vs. the more “traditional” styles.** Shaabi is an Egyptian style of folk dance that has/does lend itself to belly dance as we know it today. There is the “old world” iteration, with dancers wearing long dresses and hip sashes dancing to hand-played instruments. The “new world” iteration has dancers in shorter, ruffled dresses dancing to orchestrated or even popular music.

In modern times, Mahraganat or “Street Shaabi” has become the most recent (and most political) form.
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In the Heights, photo: Karen Almond
Dabke style dance, from the Mediterranean, has had much the same journey. Its most recent evolution is called “Shamstep.” I am excited to be bringing it to Yaa Halla, Y’all this year!

Talk a bit about being a male belly dancer. Most people not in the belly dance world — as well as some who are — think this art form is just for “women.” Was it difficult to find a studio/teacher willing to take on a male student? Are you seeing more men in belly dance now than when you started? And what about men who perform a more cabaret style compared to men in fusion styles of belly dance?

Being a male belly dancer was, by far, the craziest journey I have ever experienced. Finding space to learn, grow and share was difficult in the beginning. I was so grateful that Donna introduced me to the belly dance festival circuit. It was there that I was able to take advantage of learning opportunities that my hometown could not provide me. Along the way, I have been able to find my community. I have noticed the numbers of male belly dancers tends to fluctuate through the years, but they seem to be evenly split between styles. More male dancers are starting to perform in more folkloric specific styles, which is beautiful to me!

Tell me about your experience being openly-LGBTQ in the U.S. belly dance world? Did you ever feel uncomfortable being a man in belly dance? What is your perception of the belly dance community overall in terms of being welcoming and supportive of LGBTQ people? If you feel the community is welcoming and supportive, more so than U.S. society in general, why do you think that is? If a man does ANY style of dance in the U.S., it is generally assumed that he is gay. Me being out has allowed women to feel more comfortable and less threatened by my outward appearance.

The time I was the most worried about being out in the scene was when I went to work at a festival in Russia. Luckily, it was just a great experience.

The belly dance community is quite supportive of the LGBTQ community. I feel that they are so inclusive because studying belly dance involves making space for all different ages and bodies.

Especially over the last year-plus since the murder of George Floyd and the protests that have followed, you have spoken openly about being biracial and about having grown up with your white mother who was a police officer. Your background, I would think, gives you a unique perspective. Do you mind talking a little bit about that? Existing as black and white at the same time is a challenge when white and black folks have a difficult time agreeing how the other exists. That story is a common narrative for the many biracial people like me. Growing up having a white cop as a mother gave me a unique insight as to how the police profile people, and what they can get away with in court.

From your perspective, how has the belly dance community overall responded to issues like the Black Lives Matter movement and racial justice in general? Do you feel like you have found more support in the belly dance community than you see in society overall? Does the belly dance community feel like a safe space to you as a man of color and as gay man? Honestly, I feel like the belly dance community is removed from issues of racial inequality. As much as the community loves African and Arab art, there is not much space made for African or Arab people on the scene. Colorism and Islamophobia are also still quite rampant.

When it comes to support for these issues, the options are limited on both sides. Being a minority within a minority does not afford much empathy, especially when seeking understanding from people who want to interpret your culture and deny your reality in their own way.

What do you want people not familiar with belly dance to know about belly dance as an art form and as a community? Whether you happen to see a live performance at a restaurant or dive into taking classes, belly dance will open your eyes to parts of the world that are as old as mankind and still relevant today. It may also connect you to some of your cultural roots.

Belly dance helped set the path to help me learn about my West African, South Mediterranean and American roots.

Last but not least, what have I not asked you about that you want to talk about? One of the best things about belly dance and Middle Eastern Folk dance is that it is made to dance with your body, for as long as you inhabit your body. That is a powerful thing!
Texas Ale Project, 1001 N. Riverfront Blvd. in Dallas, toasts “Cheers to Summer,” a virtual beer tasting event benefitting LifeWalk, from 6-8 p.m. Friday, July 16. Tickets are $40, with tamales added on for another $10 and chocolate truffles or bonbons for an extra $15. See the listings for details.

**Plan Your Week**

**JULY**

- **July 16-18 and July 22-24: The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)**
  Shakespeare Dallas presents parodies of the plays of William Shakespeare performed in comically shortened form by three actors at Samuell-Grand Amphitheatre, 6800 E. Grand Ave. at 8:15 p.m.

- **July 16: Federal Club**
  The history of LGBTQ in North Texas, Part 2. Dr. Stephen Pounders discusses the history of the AIDS crisis in North Texas. For information, visit DFWFederalClub.org.

- **July 16: Name and gender change workshop**
  Lambda Legal discusses what the process looks like in Texas to secure state and federal identity documents. Lawyers can receive CLE credit. Meeting via Zoom. LambdaLegal.org.

- **July 16: Cheers to Summer**
  Virtual beer tasting benefiting LifeWalk hosted by Texas Ale Project. $40 ticket includes a sex pack of Texas Ale Project beers, souvenir glass and more. Eventbrite.com/e/lifewalk-virtual-beer-tasting-tickets-154605580453. Pick up kits from Texas Ale Project, 1001 N. Riverfront Blvd. before the event. $40. LifeWalk.com.

- **July 16-22: Rooftop Cinema**

- **July 17: State Memorial Service**
  The Council of Emperors & Empresses along with the Members of the United Court of the Lone Star Empire present a State Memorial Service and Fundraiser in loving memory of Emperor Maverick, Empress Pam Steele and Empress Messy Panocha followed by a fundraiser for AIN. The Hidden Door, 5025 Bowser at 5 p.m. DallasCourt.org.

- **July 17: Wheels for Rick**
  The Wheels for Rick awareness event will bring the public and local citizens with disabilities together to learn, celebrate, eat, dance, mingle, and fundraise for a good cause. Live music, guest speakers, exhibitors, raffle, food trucks and an outdoor playground for kids. From noon-7 p.m. at Elm Grove Pavilion, 703 NW Green Oaks Blvd, Arlington.

- **July 18: Working: A Musical**
  Play written and directed by Matthew Posey. CURSED!, a new play written and directed by Matthew Posey. CURSED! is a down-and-dirty musical about the biblical prophet Enoch and the Watchers, angels sent by God to teach mankind. It is set in a small shanty town called Babylon, located off Cannery Row in the 1930s. The show will be held at Deep Ellum Art Company, 3200 Commerce St., and runs July 22-25 and July 29-Aug. 1, at 8:15 p.m. Visit OchreHouseTheater.org for tickets — $15 — and more information.

- **July 22: White Trash Bash**
  Anita Bump and Trayla Trash of Trailer Park Productions present the White Trash Bash Thursday, July 22, at 9 p.m. at Woody’s, 4011 Cedar Springs Road. The event benefits Woody’s bartender Harold Smith who was hit by a car July 1 when he was walking home after his shift at the bar. Smith recovering at home now with his family.

- **July 24: Remembering Joy Gordon**
  Friends of Joy Gordon are invited to gather Saturday, July 24, from 4-6 p.m., at Sue Ellen’s, 5025 Bowser at 5 p.m. DallasCourt.org.

**GAY AGENDA**

**SEE THIS**

Jurassic World: The Exhibition, on view through Sept. 5 at Grandscape in The Colony, immerses audiences of all ages in interactive scenes inspired by the Jurassic World movie. You get a chance to learn about the actual science of Jurassic World, meet some baby dinos, get up close and personal with those clever girls, the velociraptors, and come face-to-face with life-sized dinosaurs. Tickets start $34.50 for adults and $24.50 for kids under 16. VIP tickets are also available. Get details and tickets at ShowClix.com/event/Jurassic-World-Exhibition-dallasntnyh3y.

**DRINK HERE**

Bear Happy Hour at the Round-Up Saloon — with bears, bears and barbecue, oh my — kicks off at 5 p.m. Saturday, July 17, at the Round-Up Saloon, 3912 Cedar Springs Road. The happy hour features bartender Chris Lopez behind the bar and a raffle for best bear-wear. Masks are required. Visit RoundUpSaloon.com for details.

**REMEMBER THEM**

The Council of Emperors and Empresses and the members of the United Court of the Lone Star Empire host a State Memorial Service and Fundraiser in member of the late Emperor Maverick, the late Empress Pam Steele and the late Empress Messy Panocha, Saturday, July 17, at The Hidden Door., 5025 Bowser Ave. The memorial ceremony starts at 5 p.m., and will be followed by a fundraising show benefitting AIN (formerly AIDS Interfaith Network). For more information visit Facebook.com/events/802983767272913/.

**WATCH THIS**

Ochre House Theater, in collaboration with The Dallas Flamenco Festival, presents CURSED!, a new play written and directed by Matthew Posey. CURSED! is a down-and-dirty musical about the biblical prophet Enoch and the Watchers, angels sent by God to teach mankind. It is set in a small shanty town called Babylon, located off Cannery Row in the 1930s. The show will be held at Deep Ellum Art Company, 3200 Commerce St., and runs July 22-25 and July 29-Aug. 1, at 8:15 p.m. Visit OchreHouseTheater.org for tickets — $15 — and more information.

Look for extended listings online at DallasVoice.com

Have an event coming up? Email your information to Managing Editor Tammye Nash at nash@dallasvoice.com or Senior Staff Writer David Tuffet at tuffet@dallasvoice.com by Wednesday at 5 p.m. for that week’s issue.
Ask Howard

HOW TO DO THE WRONG THING RIGHT

The flaming days of summer are upon us — forever, apparently. When towns way up in Quebec begin to spontaneously combust at 115-degrees in the shade, one knows the jig is up. Time to pay thine piper: “Climate change” is no longer even the politically correct coinage for what’s fulminating all around us.

The newly-correct term is “climate crisis.” By 2035, from May all the way through to September, there won’t be even one molecule of the vast Arctic Sea’s polar ice sheets remaining. And without packed snow’s white enamel shield to reflect heat away, the exposed gray waters absorb warmth, instead. And expand.

Polar bears, we’ll miss you.

Hot, expanding water molecules account for fully half our rising sea levels; melting Greenland and Antarctica, the other half. For over a decade now, root vegetables can be grown outdoors in Greenland. Next year, balmy January Antarctica will join the global harvest. Earthlings have already tilted our planet’s uninhabitability likelihood 1.8 degrees Celsius too far in the red. At a mere 6-degree temperature increase, humanity ceases to exist. We’ve but 4.2 more to go.

Meanwhile, more than three dozen new “clean” coal factories went into production just last year in China, alone. Makes one almost nostalgic for last year’s quarantined sweet days of whine reduction just last year in China, alone.

No gay man over the age of 35, who isn’t already in a long-term relationship, will ever be in one. Uh huh. That’s right, I said it, and I’m standing behind it until proven otherwise wrong. Oh, and by “long-term,” I mean minimally five years. No gay single man beyond 35 ever quite manages to break through beyond to the other side of even four years’ commitment to any relationship’s future.

Keep in mind now, this is pure conjecture on dear Howard’s part; there have been no scientific studies to back my theorem up. Nonetheless, my 16 years now (and counting) of being the Dallas LGBTQ community’s advice columnist debase that should hold a smidge of studied clout.

Dear Howard: My boyfriend and I have been in a committed, non-monogamous relationship for the past four years. I’m now 32; Jacob is 36. We’ve finally grown into some sense, and I want to marry and settle down. Jacob wants to still wait and see.

Like, wait and see what? I don’t understand. Is he tired of sex with me? We had sex together several times a week our first year (we live about 80 miles apart). Gradually, that turned into a menage-a-trois with someone we picked up together in the second year, followed by each of us picking up someone separately by the third year, which descended into tossing a coin to determine who gets to drive the distance to meet up on weekends now (there may or may not be sex involved).

Jacob and I still love each other deeply, but is it normal not to want sex with each other? I know I still want it, but he keeps mumbling hippie-shit things, like, things needing more freedom. What’s going on now?

— Jacob

HOW TO DO THE WRONG THING RIGHT

Dear Howard:

I couldn’t resist inquiring if they’d ever gotten legally hitched. Both shook their heads no.

“What’s the point now?” shrugged Price. “We’ve been through everything together.” Waterhouse concurred, nodding, “We’re set and comfortable.” Dryly, Price added, “Harmonizing with nature each weekend at our cabin in East Texas is enough for us” — as though mere simple folk were they, roughing it in a precarious tin-roofed, lean-to shaded by a scrub pine. Waterhouse chuckled, “We even put in an 8-acre pond, although the ranch hasn’t seen cattle for years.”

Indeed, we four ancients all had a grand old time at dinner that evening — closed the restaurant down, in fact. Bear with me kids, for there is a point to this Facebook-esque geegaw, in that it dovetails perfectly with my own observation regarding the success of long-term relationships for any of you first seriously starting off your husband-hunt after 35. You’re doomed.

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Daphne and Shane at the Round-Up Saloon

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14 South Park composer Shaiman
15 Julianne of The Hours
16 Rubik of cube fame
17 What JoJo says about perseverance
20 Cat with spots
21 Forget to use the KY?
22 Existential woe
24 One of the “Maneater” singers
25 South Pacific heroine
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44 Fencing move
45 Type of triangle

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51 Expat Barney
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1 Casablanca’s croupier
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4 F. Scott Fitzgerald short story, with “The”
5 Come out
6 Byron and others
7 Dress (up)
8 Like the 13 Amer. colonies
9 Campbell of The Company
10 The brainy bunch
11 Inside tongue?
12 Toughen up
13 Boobs
14 Become invisible
15 “Take ___ leave it!”
23 Runway activity
25 It holds your head up
26 Liberace’s style, for example
27 Low-calorie
29 Mutt’s mate, in the funnies
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32 Long, long time
33 Star-Lord and others, to the galaxy
34 Earthy color
35 Barrie’s boys
36 Prissy hissy
38 Verizon acquired it
39 Readily available
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44 Hot dish for Susan Feniger
45 West Side Story girl
46 Bayou cooking style
47 Jennifer Lopez movie of 1997
48 Blow job and more?
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52 Queen’s “___ Born to Love You”
53 Bring home the bacon
55 ___ B’rith
56 Pac 10 school
57 Fashion line?
59 Peeples of Fame

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