CONTENTS

NEWS
4 News

OUT & ABOUT
44 Scene photos

ARTS
52 Arts News
53 Art Matters
54 Classical Notes
55 All That Jazz

REGULARS
50 Shopping
51 Fat Pigeon Art
64 Turn Back the Pages
66 Craig’s Thoughts
67 Wall’s Words
67 Gay Socrates
68 Rae’s Reflections
69 Golden Hour
70 MindOut
71 Village MCC
71 Scene It, Done It
72 Laurie’s Allotment

INFORMATION
72 Classifieds
73 Services Directory
74 Advertisers’ Map

FEATURES

18 CLARE PROJECT CELEBRATES 20 YEARS
Rory Finn looks at its history and evolution

20 MELANIN MONROE
Rachel Badham catches up with the multifaceted queen

21 WILLIAM DORSEY SWANN
America’s first drag queen was a former slave and LGBTQ+ rights crusader

22 JUSTIN FASHANU BRIGHTON MEMORIES
Alf Le Flohic looks back on the life of Justin Fashanu

24 QUEER LIBERATION
Peter Tatchell’s Pride lecture explains why LGBTQ+ equality is not enough

26 THE JOY OF PETS
Gscene looks at the positive impact of pets on our mental health and physical wellbeing, the lengths to which dog-lovers will go to keep their pets looking good, reveals how cover star Mildred was rescued from the circus and became a permanent family companion, and shares the pet pictures and stories of our contributors and readers

56 THE POSTMAN & BROKEN HARTIST
Eric Page looks at this LGBTQ+ visibility project

58 LEXI LAINE: MAKING WAVES
Jaq Bayles take a dip with the award-winning underwater photographer

61 PHOTOWORKS FESTIVAL
Queer Heritage South takes part in Propositions for Alternative Narratives

62 THE PRETTIEST STAR
New exhibition of photographer Geoff MacCormack’s portraits of David Bowie
Come Celebrate a Jamaican flavoured Day of the Dead

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Ahead of the UK government’s response to the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), a consortium of charities and organisations – Trans in the City, DIVA, InterTech, InterMediaUK, Clare Project, BP Pride, Mermaids, Cool2BTrans, MindOut, Gendered Intelligence and Stonewall – announced last month that 100+ major UK employers have come together in a show of support for trans communities. To read the open letter, visit: www.intermediauk.org/post/trans-rights-open-letter-update

The brainchild of Bobbi Pickard, founder of Trans in the City and co-chair of BP Pride, the campaign has seen Unilever, BP, British Army, University of Brighton, British Gas and Sky join LGBTQ+ publications, including Gscene, Pink News and DIVA, by adding their names to the public statement to say trans rights are human rights, and to highlight their support for trans colleagues, employees and customers. To see the full list of organisations, visit: www.transrightsarehumanrights.co.uk

Many of these organisations (70) have also written to the prime minister directly to call on the UK Government to honour its commitment to protect trans people’s rights and reform the GRA.

Bobbi Pickard said: “The campaign came about because I spoke as a Mermaids trustee and founder of Trans in the City at an event about the negative impact the implied changes the government were proposing to the GRA would have on trans and non-binary people’s careers and lives. I mentioned, fairly strongly if I remember rightly, that an organisation saying they support trans people is not enough, they need to prove it and actually take some positive steps to support trans people. A discussion with the amazing Pedro Pina of Google, also on the panel, followed and we both quickly formed a core team with Mermaids, Trans in the City, BP Pride, Stonewall, InterTech, InterMedia, Stop Funding Hate, Diva and LBTO Women.

“Everyone has had a rough year but trans and non-binary people especially with the GRA, huge and horrible assaults in the media and complete misrepresentation turning to blatant hatred from high profile people. We wanted to show that the reality for trans people isn’t negative - they are valued, valid and they can flourish in their careers and life. We wanted to show that huge global corporations and organisations really do support them to be themselves and value them as they value all diversities.

“The campaign is going fabulously; we aimed for 100 organisations, started with 136, and it continues to rapidly grow. We’ll carry on, trans awareness and education for businesses is key to understanding that the fabricated anti-trans rhetoric is exactly that and that’s what we’ll continue to highlight.”

Nancy Kelley, chief executive of Stonewall, which campaigns for LGBTQ+ equality in the UK, said: “We’re proud of all the business leaders who are ‘coming out’ for trans equality. All these companies are sending a powerful message to trans communities that leading businesses have their backs. Across the UK, corporate leaders are speaking up because they care about protecting and supporting their trans colleagues, customers, friends and family.

“At a time when trans rights feel increasingly under threat, the diversity of all these businesses taking part shows there is a wealth of support for trans people at the most senior levels of British industrial and cultural life. But we can’t be complacent. If we want to live in a world where every trans person can be themselves, each of us must use our voice to challenge transphobia and take action to create more inclusive communities.”

A spokesperson from Mermaids, the UK charity supporting trans kids, young people and their families, said: “We believe #TransRightsAreHumanRights and we’re glad to see so many UK employers standing up for their trans employees, colleagues and customers. We’re also so proud of our trans colleagues and all the trans people we support. The future is bright.”

Katie Neeves from Cool2BTrans, which centres on supporting, educating and empowering, said: “Today is a VERY special day as global companies show support for trans people by saying that ‘Trans Rights Are Human Rights’ and ‘We value trans people as our employees, colleague and customers’.

A spokesperson from MindOut, the LGBTQ+ mental health charity, said: “We are glad to see over 100 major companies have come together to show their support for trans equality. At MindOut we value our trans employees, volunteers and service users. #MindOutForEachOther”

To show your support and see the full list of businesses who have signed up, visit: www.transrightsarehumanrights.co.uk (see most recent GRA update, p16)


Companies urge UK government to ‘make progress for the trans community’

The Rainbow Hub adapted quickly to the new challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and, during the lockdown, transferred all of its services over to a telephone system staffed by volunteers. Now it is welcoming visitors back for face-to-face consultations.

Carolyln Ansell, Rainbow Hub’s manager, said: “We’ve been busy preparing the Hub according to Covid-19 guidelines and requirements to keep our volunteers and visitors safe. Our volunteers are at the core of the Rainbow Hub, and they’ve been awesome in adapting to these unprecedented times in continuing to support our community. Our doors have reopened for three days a week initially, but follow us on social media as we will extend the opening times very soon.”

For more info, visit: www.therainbowhubbrighton.com or follow @RainbowHubBrighton

GIVE AS YOU LIVE FOR THE BRIGHTON RAINBOW FUND

In a year when necessary cancellation of the usual large fundraising events has impacted on the support that the Brighton Rainbow Fund is able to distribute to local LGBTQ+ and HIV projects, it has been looking at how our communities can donate in innovative ways.

Chris Gull, chair of the Brighton Rainbow Fund, said: "We have already announced the BRF Weekly Lottery, with the first draw and a chance to win £50, on October 3, and tickets just £1. We wanted to make everybody aware that they can raise funds for us to distribute by shopping at over 4,000 retailers, including all the big high street and online stores.”

The Give As You Live project is easy to join, costs you nothing, and benefits many. For more info and to sign up, visit: https://bit.ly/2F0d0Um

For more info on the Brighton Rainbow Fund, visit: www.rainbowfund.org

The Rainbow Hub reopens
NEW EQUALITY RULING PROTECTS GENDER NON-CONFORMING PEOPLE

A new addition to the UK Equality Act, made official on September 16, 2020, will provide greater protection to the gender non-conforming community by recognising non-binary identities. According to Forbes, the amendments to the Equality Act encompass ‘non-binary and gender fluid people’. It confirms these people do ‘fall under the gender reassignment category’ which is already covered in the rulings.

The ambiguity as to whether the UK Equality Act previously covered non-binary people was brought to public attention when a non-binary Jaguar engineer, Ms Taylor, was discriminated against on the grounds of gender reassignment. Jaguar argued because of Ms Taylor’s non-binary identity, they did not fall within the definition of gender reassignment. Robin Moira White, a representative of Ms Taylor, said the new rulings are important in “recognising those with complex gender identities”.

A spokesperson from Stonewall, the LGBTQ+ equality charity, said: “This ruling is a milestone moment in recognising the rights of non-binary and gender fluid people to be protected from discrimination under the Equality Act. Up until now, it’s not been clear whether non-binary people would be protected by anti-discrimination legislation, which is what makes this Employment Tribunal judgment so important.”

For more info, on Stonewall, visit: www.stonewall.org.uk

SCHOOLS MUST MAKE EDUCATION LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE

New LGBTQ+ inclusive education curricula are to be integrated into UK schools over the course of the next academic year. With many students returning to school for the first time since the coronavirus outbreak, school boards will have until next summer to incorporate the new curricula requirements into teaching practices. New teaching topics include consent, pornography and LGBTQ+ rights.

The new regulations follow those in 2019 that introduced mental health and online safety into the national curriculum with the aim to ensure schooling discusses issues that affect children in the 21st century.

LGBTQ+ organisation Stonewall has campaigned for a more inclusive education system for a decade now. Mo Wiltshire of Stonewall told i News the changes to UK education will be ‘life changing’. The 2017 Stonewall school report found nearly half of LGBTQ+ pupils experience bullying at school; Mo suggested that this issue will be alleviated as “young people will be attending schools that accept LGBTQ+ people.” Schools will also be expected to improve support networks for LGBTQ+ students.

In 2019 it was confirmed that LGBTQ+ inclusive education would become compulsory, however this is the first academic year in which the new regulations will be put into effect.

Autumn 2020 Ofsted inspections commenced last month as the new curricula are integrated into UK school systems. Schools that fail to teach students about LGBTQ+ matters risk being marked down by Ofsted inspectors. Ofsted officials said they will comment on whether schools have ‘adequate plans’ in place to implement the new curricula.

A recent survey by research company Kantar found four in 10 would not want young children to be taught LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons. Although the study demonstrated 90% of British people would be accepting of gay, lesbian and bisexual colleagues and friends, nearly half said six-year-old children should not be taught that it is ‘okay to be gay’.

Craig Watkins, UK chief executive of Kantar’s public division, told Reuters the study shows “social progress is not guaranteed” even though “we have come a long way”. He continued the greatest concerns about non-heterosexual people tend to be related to “the education of children”.

Amanda Spielman, the chief of Ofsted, told the BBC in February that it is crucial young children are taught families do not just consist of heterosexual parents.

LGBT-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION HAS MY SUPPORT.

To see the Stonewall school report, visit: www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017

SCHOOLS MUST MAKE EDUCATION LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE

The Clare Project
The Clare Project
@TheClareProject
@TheClareProject

TNB
TNB
@TNBBrighton
@TNBBrighton

It is a safe space both organised and facilitated by trans and/or non-binary people, and offers a great opportunity to socialise. TNB also hosts an informal platform for resources, information and discussion surrounding topics that affect the community.

6-8pm, the third Thursday of the month at Café Domenica, Preston Road, Brighton

TNB is a drop-in group for anyone who identifies as trans, non-binary, or questioning and/or exploring their gender identity or variance.

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ATTENDING SCHOOLS THAT ACCEPT LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

To see the Stonewall school report, visit: www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017

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COMMUNITY RAISES £5,500 FOR MISS JASON

Last month the community raised over £5,500 for Miss Jason, one of our most dazzling cabaret stars and a pillar of LGBTQ+ communities. Miss Jason went deaf in their left ear in July. Following an examination, it was confirmed that Jason has a tumour which has killed off the localised nerve endings and the only treatment is with hearing aids. Jason is currently suffering with tinnitus, affecting the ability to listen and concentrate. This has also had a knock-on effect on their balance.

The funds raised will now help Miss Jason purchase a Bluetooth hearing aid, which they can connect to sound systems within venues, allowing them to perform their regular cabaret show and carrying role in panto. The clinic Jason attended said this will also correct their ongoing tinnitus and balance issues.

Miss Jason said: “Thanks to all for your kindness and support, I can now make plans to get back to work, on stage where I love to be. I will never be able to thank you enough and I will never forget what you as a community have done for me. Love and gratitude from the bottom of my heart.”

Follow Miss Jason on Facebook: www.facebook.com/Miss-Jason-184041121658881/

MR BRIGHTON BEAR 2020 CONTESTANTS DONATE £130 TO BRIGHTON RAINBOW FUND

Mr Brighton Bear 2020 winner Gavin Bennett and runner-up Rhykar Bauer have both donated their winnings (a total of £130) to The Brighton Rainbow Fund. Graham Munday, chair of Brighton Bear Weekend, said: “In these challenging times, we’re overwhelmed by the generosity of our contestants, showing their support of our community by donating to the Brighton Rainbow Fund. This is yet another virtue that we prize in our Mr Brighton Bear winners.”

The Brighton Rainbow Fund provides grants to local LGBTQ+ community groups and HIV/AIDS charities, to support frontline services. With many sources of fundraising income not available this year due to Covid-19, the

MR BRIGHTON BEAR 2020 RECEIVES PORTRAIT FROM LITTLE BIG MEN DRAWINGS

Gavin Bennett, Mr Brighton Bear 2020 winner, received part of his prize, a portrait by Fraser Dickson of Little

Brighton Rainbow Fund is in need of further support. You can donate here: www.brightonbearweekend.com

For info on the Brighton Rainbow Fund, visit: www.rainbow-fund.org

EOTT RAISES £320 FOR MINDOUT

Eott, the mental health-driven music and art project, raised £320 for LGBTQ+ mental health charity MindOut last month with a 12-Hour/12 Month Anniversary gaming stream.

Levvy from Eott said: “Given it was a Pride T-shirt, we thought it made sense for anyone buying one to know that it’s going towards a relative cause. MindOut was on our minds since the inception of this project, as we’d heard of it from a friend, so we did a little research and made a phone call. We spoke to Lucy Kamper (business development manager at MindOut) quite a bit over the course of the project, she was really great. We found out a nice bit about them and what they do and how they’ve been doing it, and they’ve been running also for 20 years which is mad!“

“Lucy also kindly detailed to us the different areas that the charity money can be focused on so that helped us come to a more specific decision, of supporting the counselling sessions. Our donation funded 25-30 sessions, which is pretty positive we think. Respect to Lucy and MindOut!”

For more info on Eott, visit: www.facebook.com/eott.uk

For more info on MindOut, visit: www.mindout.org.uk

RIOTBANANAS RAISES £2,118 FOR MINDOUT

RiotBananas, which streams all sorts of games over Twitch, raised £2,118 for LGBTQ+ mental health charity MindOut last month with a 12-Hour/12 Month Anniversary gaming stream.

Steve from RiotBananas said: “RiotBananas is a bit of an online alter-ego, a silly name I chose to use years ago for various gaming services that just kind of stuck. It’s been a great outlet for my creativity and mental health. The 12-hour stream was absolutely amazing, the support came in immediately, I had only set a £500 goal for the entire 12 hours and we smashed through that within the first hour or so and I had to increase the goal to £1,500, which we then smashed through again. It was so heart-warming to see our amazing community come together in what have been difficult times for every one of us.

“I chose MindOut for a few reasons. A couple of years ago my cousin, who had recently come out as gay, took his own life. I can only imagine the pain he was in and I really wanted to help support people in similar positions so that other families may not lose a loved one who could be helped by having someone relatable to talk to in such difficult times. Mental health is such a big part of my stream, the community and Twitch in general, as is making the community a safe, welcoming space for members of the LGBTQ+ community so helping MindOut felt like the perfect fit.”

For more info on MindOut, visit: www.mindout.org.uk

Follow RiotBananas on Twitter: @RiotBananas

And on Twitch: www.twitch.tv/riotbananas

For more info on Eott, visit: www.facebook.com/eott.uk

For more info on MindOut, visit: www.mindout.org.uk

For info on the Brighton Rainbow Fund, visit: www.rainbow-fund.org
The Rainbow Hub is recruiting three new Trustees committed to continuing Older & Out

Deadline for applications: 5pm Wednesday 7th October 2020
Interviews (online via Zoom): Friday October 9th
Role: Trustee for The Rainbow Hub CIO Charity

The board currently consists of the three founding Trustees. As we embark on planning our move forward into a Post COVID future, one with real challenges for our LGBTQ+ communities, we wish to expand the board to five Trustees. One of the existing Trustees is standing down, so we are looking to welcome three new Trustees to our board.

This is a great opportunity for applicants of all ages, including those who have no experience in such a role. A real opportunity to gain experience whilst bringing new ideas and a fresh perspective to ways in which we can continue to serve and support our communities.

To apply please email with your contact details, and a few sentences on what you can bring to the role. If you prefer to write to us, please send to the address below or drop into The Hub.

To receive more information, including on how to apply, please email hubmanager@therainbowhubbrighton.com or call 07530 636636

Please note we welcome applications from the trans, non-binary, intersex and gender-variant community. Further to this, we recognize that those from Black trans communities, and non-Black People of Colour are under-represented in our team, in addition to those with disabilities. As a course of positive action to improve community representation in our team, we actively encourage applications from these under-represented groups.

Accessibility: If you would prefer to submit your application in another way, or different format, please do get in touch. Likewise, if you require assistance and/or have any questions regarding the application process, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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The Stay Home Stay Homo print was initially just designed to go in my window at home. Lots of people took to walking during lockdown. I simply wanted to make an image to raise a smile. It’s wonderful that we’ve raised some money along the way too. I chose to donate to MindOut as a friend of mine suffers with their mental health and told me about the valuable work the charity does.

OLDER & OUT UPDATE

Frances Horsley and Jane Traies from Older & Out, the social network and community group for the older LGBTQ+ community (over 50s), met up with Somerset Centre manager Jude Eighteen and chairman of trustees John Barry, to talk about the current situation and how it affects the group. During lockdown, staff and volunteers worked hard to make the Somerset Centre Covid-safe. The kitchen has been refurbished and the whole building, including bathrooms and toilets, has been redecorated. It is expected that this and some other works (new signage and removing some furniture) will soon enable the Centre to reopen within the current government and council guidelines, though still only in a very limited way.

Older & Out said: “The main limitations are that, because of social distancing requirements, only 12 people can attend at any one time; and no food can be served from the kitchen. Sadly, these restrictions have the greatest impact on Older & Out, which has many more than a dozen members, and is based on a shared lunch.

“The Trustees are absolutely committed to continuing Older & Out as one of the Centre’s activities, but can see no way that the group could meet safely or legally under the present restrictions. So, sadly, Older & Out will not be able resume its meetings for some time yet.

“However, there are things we can do to help ensure its future. Although members are asked to sign in when we attend Older & Out, only about half of us have ever added our contact details to the sign-in form. In future, that will need to change, as (like pubs, clubs and restaurants) the Centre will need to know contact details of all attendees for track-and-trace purposes.

“But in the meantime, it gives us a problem because it means we can’t easily keep in touch with members. So, please ask anyone you know who comes to Older & Out to email info@somersetcentre.org.uk or ring the Centre on 01273 699000, giving us a way of contacting them.

“As the new manager of the Centre, Jude is keen to ensure that Older & Out provides what its members want and serves their best interests. In the past we have had useful information sessions and talks from various organisations, as well as a variety of entertainments and a few outings. We’d like to hear from you about what you value, and any suggestions you have for future meetings.”

Email them your thoughts: info@somersetcentre.org.uk
For info on Older and Out, visit: www.olderandoutbrighton.org.uk

For more info on Hayden Kays, visit: www.haydenkays.co.uk
For more info on MindOut, visit: www.mindout.org.uk

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SALES RAISED £967 FOR MINDOUT

Artist Hayden Kays and Jealous Gallery, London, raised £967 for LGBT+ mental health charity MindOut last month from sales of their Stay Home Stay Homo print.

Jude is keen to ensure that Older & Out provides what its members want and serves their best interests. In the past we have had useful information sessions and talks from various organisations, as well as a variety of entertainments and a few outings. We’d like to hear from you about what you value, and any suggestions you have for future meetings.”

Email them your thoughts: info@somersetcentre.org.uk
For info on Older and Out, visit: www.olderandoutbrighton.org.uk
Ollie’s Jerk Shack & Cocktails is a new venture focused on bringing Caribbean food and good vibes to the city, with drag hosts and a diverse team of BAME and LGBTQ+ people and allies focused on providing amazing service, an electric night out, and giving back to charities that support all our community.

Ollie’s also has a special story attached to its name. The owner’s best friends, Rodney and Sacha, have a 13-year-old son, Ollie, who was diagnosed with an aggressive brain cancer last year. After a successful crowdfunding campaign this brave young man is now receiving specialist treatment, and Ollie’s has been named after him to help bring good vibes to him, and every guest. If you would like to donate to Ollie’s battle, visit: www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/ollies-fight-against-cancer

There’s a passionate team behind the venture. Leanne Brand, general manager, is described as the powerhouse committed to making Ollie’s buzz with good vibes and a great time; Jevan R S Weeke, bar manager, is the mixology wizard, bringing his eclectic knowledge to the bar; Tom Boyland, team supervisor, is a proud Brightonian, taking the sea and the city and bringing it into one great place; while Melanie Monroe, drag & entertainment organiser, is a regular on the Brighton cabaret scene with access to the very best local cabaret, visual/theatrical, horror, burlesque and lip-sync artists.

The new venture boasts a drinks menu featuring carefully crafted Caribbean cocktails alongside classics, Taste of the Islands Caribbean Specials, innovative CBD-infused drinks as well as the chance to craft Caribbean Specials alongside classics, featuring carefully crafted Caribbean cocktails.

There’s a one-off routine, when Johannes Radebe and Graziano di Prima performed to Emeli Sande’s Shine last year. Some applauded the routine, but the BBC received 189 complaints from viewers who found it offensive. Jack Mizel, founder of Inter Pride 365, which publicly certifies companies to bring an end to ‘pinkwashing’ and make companies more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community, said: “It was Nicola Adams who suggested having a same-sex partner on Strictly Come Dancing, stating that ‘it’s definitely time for a change’. And she was right. We’ve seen in the past and especially this year; if you don’t fight for something, nothing will change.

“However, a lot of conversation in this space is about how even when something good happens, it can be easy to comment on how it isn’t enough, or that we still have far to go, which distracts us from celebrating how far we have come. Champions are key allies in the fight for inclusion and celebrities such as Nicola Adams, who highlight what is needed for the LGBTQ+ community to feel present, raise the bar for representation, empowerment and engagement.

“Representation is key, especially natural representation. However, it isn’t merely a barrier for people to engage with a show and Strictly is already popular within the community so getting them to watch the show isn’t a problem, but it offers points for relatability. Representation, especially in media, is vital and does more for individuals than people realise. It removes loneliness, tackles mental health issues and builds confidence.

“This is why it’s important to have more positive and authentic LGBTQ+ representation in the mainstream media. I hate to use the word, but the more we ‘normalise’ same-sex couples and love, the more we’ll be able to see it highlighted.

“Though it’s important to remember that negative backlash may happen, it is not the enemy. The enemy is people being stuck in their silos or bubbles, not willing to talk about ‘challenging’ subjects. Some people will be happy, some won’t, but what’s important is that this conversation creates engagement and engagement breaks down barriers. By Nicola asking for a same-sex partner, she has paved the way for this and set the tone for both the future of Strictly, and other reality shows.”

The new series of Strictly Come Dancing kicks off on BBC One in October. For more info on Inter Pride 365, visit: www.interpride365.com
ISLE OF WIGHT PRIDE SEeks TRUSTEES

Isle of Wight Pride is seeking new members of the community to join its board of trustees to help shape the future of the charity and ensure it continues to meet its objectives. The Island-based charity campaigns for equality and the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, and raises public awareness about the issues and difficulties affecting the lives of LGBTQ+ people.

A spokesperson for Isle of Wight Pride said: “Volunteering with Isle of Wight Pride as a trustee is an incredibly rewarding experience that will enable you to make a difference to the lives of LGBTQ+ people on the Island.”

To find out what being a trustee entails, email: info@iwpride.org

For more info on Isle of Wight Pride, visit: www.iwpride.org

CRAWLEY LGBTQ+ CHOIR SEeks MEMBERS

Crawley LGBTQ+ Choir, which aims to create a safe environment for the LGBTQ+ community to have fun, sing and be themselves, was launched last month. The choir, which is for people of all abilities, has yet to find a venue for rehearsals but has already been offered two places for free, and two musical directors. Meetings will be taking place soon.

Crawley LGBT, a group providing educational and advisory services to the local community, said: “We are proud to support and help develop the LGBTQ+ choir. The new and local group is looking for singers to form a network of individuals who want to express themselves through the art of song.”

Email Ayling Marisa for more info: aylingmarisa@gmail.com

For more info on Crawley LGBT, visit: www.crawleylgbt.com

ACTUAL PLANS - HOLD THE DATE!

Actually Gay Men’s Chorus (AGMC) is very much hoping that it will be able to go ahead as planned with its Christmas shows, a fundraiser for the Sussex Beacon and one of the highlights of the LGBTQ+ Christmas season, which are currently scheduled for Friday, December 18 and Saturday, December 19.

AGMC says: “We hope you can make it and promise that when we’re able to perform for you again, it’ll be exactly the start to Christmas we’ll all need after this year. In the meantime, please #StaySafe #StayHome #LoveActually”

AGMC was set up with the aim of providing a place where gay men can socialise, have fun and develop skills in a unique environment. Since its creation, the choir has helped raise thousands of pounds for local causes.

For more info, visit: /ActuallyGMC

www.actuallygymc.org

PROUD VOICES HAND IN HAND

Proud Voices UK & Ireland LGBT Choir Network hosted the Hand in Hand Virtual Festival 2020 last month with top LGBTQ+ performers and choirs coming together to celebrate their love of music in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. Since the end of July 2020, Proud Voices has been running the #ChoirsVsCOVID series of roundtables. The Hand in Hand Virtual Festival was the culmination of a two-month series of events through which LGBTQ+ choirs shared their experiences of lockdown and their strategies for survival and growth.

The Hand in Hand Virtual Festival 2020 took some of its cues from its in-person counterpart: there was an opening and closing ceremony featuring local LGBTQ+ performers Hannah Brackenbury and Lorraine Bowen, a series of concerts and workshops, and a stirring joint performance of the eponymous song Hand in Hand from 43 singers from 15 LGBTQ+ choirs, including a strong Brighton & Hove contingent comprising: Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus, Sweet Chilli Singers, Actually Gay Men’s Chorus, Rainbow Chorus, GLOW Choir and Resound Male Voices.

In the run-up to the Festival, Proud Voices said: “It is an opportunity for all our choirs to get together for a fun weekend of activities and entertainment. The virtual format also allows choirs which have never taken part in one of the previous Hand in Hand festivals to join us for the first time, and to experience the excitement of sharing their music-making with hundreds of like-minded people.”

“With Hand in Hand Newcastle postponed to 2022, and in the face of restrictions on rehearsing and performing as choirs due to the coronavirus pandemic, there was never a greater need for all our choirs to pull together and celebrate what has been achieved, and all there is to look forward to when they are eventually able to meet face-to-face again.”

Proud Voices sent special thanks to Silvio from Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus for running the Zoom, the YouTube stream, and for “gamely taking part in the choreography workshop”.

To view the Hand in Hand Virtual Festival 2020, visit: www.youtube.com/channel/UCpoaFBg0QFapqK1mXI4cEkg

For more info on Proud Voices, visit: http://uk-ireland.proudvoices.org

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01273 623 408
INTEGRATING CARE FOR TRANS ADULTS SURVEY

An ongoing project, Integrating Care for Trans Adults (ICTA), in partnership with the Open University and the LGBT Foundation, is reaching out to groups within the transgender, including non-binary, and wider LGBTQ+ community, asking them to complete an initial survey. The ICTA project is looking at how trans, including non-binary, people have experienced healthcare in the UK – at any point in time. It wants to know how to best integrate the care they receive from Gender Identity Services and the rest of the NHS. The project will be gathering these personal experiences through the survey and then through further one-to-one (online) interviews with participants.

Benjamin (Benji) Taylor, community development worker for the ICTA project, said: “With this information we are going to work alongside the NHS to train and inform healthcare workers on how best to care for trans, including non-binary, people. We are also going to be creating a resource for trans people to use to best help them navigate the healthcare world, specifically looking at experiences with gender identity services.

“We believe that this is an incredibly important area of research and that we have a really good opportunity to work with the community to create change for them to see in their lifetime. Our team is led by trans, including non-binary, people – like myself – who truly understand the gravity of the task we are undertaking. We have been granted a special remit by the National Institute for Health Research to change the current way trans people are treated so it is a project we all hold close to our hearts.”

To complete the survey, visit: www.demographix.com/surveys/RZHW-GEV6/KNBWAT97/?ictawebsite
If you’d prefer a paper version of the survey, email your name and address to Ev Callahan at: evelyn.callahan@open.ac.uk – or call 01908 858 185.
For more info on ICTA, visit: http://business-school.open.ac.uk/research/projects/icta

TRANS WOMEN ON TEEN VOGUE COVER

Two transgender models, Jari Jones (29) and Munroe Bergdorf (32), both featured on their own cover of the September issue of Teen Vogue, with the headline ‘what is fashion now?’. Teen Vogue tweeted it wanted to centre women ‘at the heart of fashion’ who were often ‘left out of the conversation’. It continued Jones and Bergdorf are ‘trailblazers’.

Bergdorf, who is also a writer and broadcaster, told Teen Vogue she had embraced the label ‘activist’. On her official website she states: “I believe passionately in inclusivity for all, no matter your race, ability, religious beliefs, sexuality or gender identity. I believe we should always stand up for what we believe in and call out acts of injustice when we encounter them.” Teen Vogue referred to her as a “powerful, unstoppable force”. Munroe Bergdorf’s debut book Transitional is out in 2021.

Jones, who was the face of Calvin Klein’s 2020 Pride Campaign, told Teen Vogue she hoped she could inspire young queer people. On her Instagram, she wrote it was a dream come true to have a Teen Vogue cover in her “authentic skin”. Both Jones and Bergdorf are advocates for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Both women have been congratulated for their “powerful covers”, and Teen Vogue has been praised for bringing trans narratives into the spotlight.

TRANS CAN SPORT

Trans Can Sport, a group providing safe and friendly fitness and leisure activities for trans folk in Brighton & Hove, held its first face-to-face session since lockdown at the end of August.

The group said: “Thank you to everyone who attended Trans Can Volleyball last night. It was a blast.”

For more info on Trans Can Sport, visit: www.transcansport.co.uk

VOICES IN TRANS BODYBUILDING AND POWERLIFTING

The International Association of Transgender Bodybuilders and Powerlifters (IATBP), which usually hosts a bodybuilding contest and powerlifting meet in Atlanta, US, will this year be holding the free IATBP Inaugural Virtual Conference 2020: Voices in Trans Bodybuilding and Powerlifting on Saturday, October 3 from 4.50pm (BST)

IATBP says: “Due to this year’s unprecedented circumstances, we have decided to take the event online to give a platform to trans athletes in strength and physique sports to host workshops and roundtables on a number of issues, from how to be a successful bodybuilder to the problems faced by transgender powerlifters in the sport.”

IATBP is an organisation created for bodybuilders and powerlifters who identify as trans (belonging at any level of the trans spectrum) as well as non-binary/gender non-conforming people.

For more info, visit: https://iatb.info
**ALLSORTS PUBLISHES FAITH RESOURCE**

Allsorts Youth Project has published a new resource, *Allsorts Of Faith*, which is a collection of writings by LGBTQ+ people of faith, many of whom have faced adversity because of their identities.

Allsorts said: “Many people, both within the LGBTQ+ community and outside of it, assume that being part of a faith group and being LGBTQ+ are polar opposites. At Allsorts, we embrace and celebrate the amazing diversity of our service users, staff and volunteers and the rich tapestry of experiences and voices that we all contribute to.

“It’s often not our own sense of faith or relationship with God that is challenged by the discovery or acceptance of our LGBTQ+ identity, but our relationship with others in our faith community. Many faithful people feel that God is the embodiment of love and light in our lives, both love for others and for ourselves, and that everyone is worthy of this love.”

“Faith and religion are multifaceted and wide-reaching and therefore not all practices could be represented in a small resource like this one. We hope that all LGBTQ+ people of faith and their allies will be able to relate and reflect on this content, regardless of belief or background.”

One of the many insightful contributions to this latest resource comes from Sabah Choudrey, who says: “Our faith exists on a spectrum, as does our gender. Our faith is individual, our Islam is personal. And we can move along this spectrum tool.”

To read the full resource, visit www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/resources/toolkits-booklets-guides

For more info, visit: www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

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**SEA SERPENTS’ PICNIC**

Brighton & Hove Sea Serpents Rugby Club (BHSS), the gay and inclusive rugby club, held its Sea Serpents’ Picnic, supported by NatWest RugbyForce, at Hove Rugby Club last month.

BHSS organised a mini touch rugby tournament, which was won by the Red Team, there was the chance to hear more about BHSS, complimentary sweet and savoury vegan treats and a bottle tombola.

BHSS said: “We may be going into autumn, but it means you can still ‘bite the bullet’ and come down and join us at training. All levels of experience are welcome throughout the year - you just have to take that first step!”

BHSS train at Hove Rugby Club every Wednesday from 7pm. If you’re interested in giving it a go, email them in advance: info@bhssrfc.com

For more info on BHSS, visit: www.bhssrfc.com

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**PROTEST IN SOLIDARITY WITH POLISH LGBTQ+ PEOPLE ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24**

Solidarity with Polish LGBTQI+ Brighton is to host a Protest in Solidarity with Polish LGBTQ+ people on Saturday, October 24 from 1pm.

The Protest will meet and march from Brighton Railway Station before stopping for three-minutes’ silence at the Clock Tower, then heading to Old Steine Gardens where the protest will end with speeches.

In July, Polish President Andrzej Duda was re-elected with 51.2% of the vote following a campaign in which he demonised and scapegoated LGBTQ+ communities. Although the race was widely viewed as a referendum on the European Union, the president targeted the queer and trans community. Referring to LGBTQ+ rights as “ideology”, he claimed it is “destructive to man” and worse than communism. Duda also pledged to ban same-sex unions through a constitutional amendment if re-elected.

Since Duda took office in 2015, Poland’s global LGBTQ+ rights standing has consistently eroded. Five years ago, it ranked 33rd in ILGA’s Rainbow Europe ranking, which rates European nations on their friendliness to queer and trans people in law and policy. It has since fallen nine spots to 42nd, the lowest ranking among EU member countries.

Earlier this month, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen publicly condemned the creation of ‘LGBTQ+ free’ zones in Poland, saying they have no place in the EU.

Organisers of the protest said: “Brighton is a place where LGBTQI+ people can express themselves and therefore we call our community to stand up with the Polish LGBTQI+ community and show solidarity. We have to remember that not long-ago in the UK Section 28 meant many stayed imprisoned, in the closet and lived in fear of losing their jobs. Therefore, we cannot allow this to happen to the LGBTQI+ community in Poland. We need to spread the message that we stand with our worldwide LGBTQI+ community.”

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**Breaking up can be difficult...**

For a free consultation to discuss your options, please contact Adam Douglas in our Family Law department on 01273 204411 ext 253.

Or send him an email at adam@engleharts.co.uk.

For any information on our other services, please contact us at Engleharts Solicitors, Vallance Hall, Hove Street, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 2DE or email angela@engleharts.co.uk.
**MORE TO ME THAN HIV**

More To Me Than HIV, an online exhibition for World Aids Day 2020 on December 1, is inviting people living with HIV to share pics and some words to publicly combat stigma and show and celebrate how they are winning at life. Supported by Brighton & Hove Police and Brighton & Hove Library Service, the project hopes to show that people living with HIV aren’t just surviving but thriving.

The organisers of More To Me Than HIV, say: “With the Covid-19 pandemic, parallels have been drawn between our current situation and the emergence of HIV in the 1980s. Fear, misinformation, blame seeking, judgement and stigma play a part in both epidemics. While the whole world looks for a cure for Covid-19, there is still no cure for HIV, some 30 years after it emerged.

“The good news now for HIV is that it is treatable, though not curable; with early intervention and support, we can achieve a healthy life. “However, stigma is still experienced by many people living with HIV and can have serious negative effects on a person’s wellbeing. The more people who can be visible and stand with us, the more we can support, and give courage to those who feel that stigma is preventing them from being visible.”

**To get involved, email one self-portrait, two pics and three words that you would use to define yourself to info@moretomethanHIV.life**

All images will be posted on their website at the start of National HIV Testing Week on the last day of November and for World Aids Day on December 1, 2020. It is hoped the printed exhibition will return to Brighton & Hove Libraries next year.

For more info, visit: http://moretomethanHIV.life/

**I MADE THIS FOR YOU’ FREE TO WATCH FOR WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY**

I Made This For You, a searingly honest British feature film that tackles mental health, depression and suicide head on, is now available to watch for free on Youtube globally. The release marked World Suicide Prevention Day last month and will be showing on the platform for a month until World Mental Health Day on Saturday, October 10.

I Made This For You follows a man, played by Gary Grant (Enemy Lines), who cuts himself off from his friends and family and has recently attempted suicide. He is pulled back from the edge by a documentary made about his life by a friend, played by director Cristian Solimeno (Guilt. Rush. Footballers’ Wives). His friends also include Alison Newman (EastEnders, Footballers’ Wives), Dermot Murphy (Animals, The Drummer and The Keeper), Francis Magee (Star Wars: Rogue One, Game of Thrones) and West End star Siobhan Dillon (Cabaret, Grease, Sunset Boulevard, Miss Saigon).

The film within a film mixes reality with fiction in a unique and groundbreaking way. Despite the seriousness of the subject, what results is something funny, beautiful and deeply cathartic that provokes action and conversation. Following the film, director Cristian Solimeno also created the #IMadeThisForYou social campaign, which invites people to take a moment out from their lives to try to make something for someone who is going through a hard time and share these acts of kindness for the week of World Suicide Prevention Day. The aim is to create an explosion of love, kindness and creativity that empowers people to reach out and gives us the confidence to actually try. It can be a cake, a card, a jumper or a song. The point is to make things with other people in mind and to give these things away to show you care. Random acts of kindness count and can make a real difference.

Watch I Made This For You for free by visiting www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWLhoUr2vCM

**THT FREE HIV AWARENESS TRAINING COURSES**

HIV and sexual health charity Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) is running another free online HIV Awareness training course in September/October over Zoom. Anyone wanting to take part will need to complete the first three compulsory two-hour modules that make up the normal one-day HIV Awareness training. They are then welcome to add one or both additional modules that focus on specific issues around HIV & Ageing or HIV & Black Communities. Those who have already attended the HIV Awareness training, either online or in person, can book to do the extra modules.

The training is free and will be delivered interactively via Zoom. THT stresses the importance of participants being able to attend all the modules in the correct order to ensure all the information is received.

Module 1 (Introduction to HIV), Wed. Oct 7, 11am–1pm
- Current Snapshot of HIV in the UK & Worldwide
- Definitions of HIV & Terminology
- HIV Transmission

Module 2 (HIV Treatment & Prevention), Wed. Oct 14, 11am–1pm
- HIV Prevention Methods
- HIV Treatment Overview

Module 3 (HIV Stigma & Discrimination), Wed, Oct 21, 11am–1pm
- Impact of HIV Stigma & Discrimination
- Personal experiences from someone living with HIV
- Case Studies

Optional Extra Module (HIV & Ageing), Wed. Oct 28, 11am–1pm
- Specific considerations around Ageing & HIV
- The impact of diagnosis before medication
- Personal experiences of over 50s living with HIV

Optional Extra Module (HIV & Black Communities), Wed. Nov 4, 11am–1pm
- Differences within black communities from sexual health and HIV perspective
- Insight into ways in which black communities are affected by HIV and sexual health
- Why healthcare disparities exist and impact of stigma in black communities

To sign up to online courses, email brightontraining@tht.org.uk and let them know if you would like to attend any of the optional extra modules. If you’re interested in a bespoke online training for your staff team, send them an email to discuss.

For more info on THT, visit: www.tht.org.uk

**NEW WORK AND WELLBEING ONLINE SESSIONS WITH THT**

- October 14: Losing My Job: Looking after and understanding my emotions
- October 21: Job Search: Identifying my strengths and values
- October 28: Facing the Fear: Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable
- November 4: Job Search: Defining my goals and aspirations
- November 11: Job Search: Looking for work or development opportunities
- November 18: Healthy home working habits in the digital workplace

To register for any or all of the seven sessions on offer, visit: www.tht.org.uk/our-services/at-home/living-well/employment-skills
‘URGENT ACTION NEEDED’ – THT RESPONDS TO NEW FIGURES FROM PHE

HIV/sexual health charity Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) has responded to new figures from Public Health England (PHE), which show there were 468,342 sexually transmitted infections reported in England in 2019 – a 5% rise on 2018. The data shows that gay and bisexual men and people living with HIV continue to be two of the groups most impacted by STIs. For example, in the past four years gay and bisexual men have seen an 83% increase in chlamydia diagnoses.

Key statistics:
- 468,342 diagnoses of STIs in England in 2019 – 5% increase from 2018
- 26% increase in gonorrhoea since 2018
- 10% increase in syphilis since 2018
- 7% increase in number of consultations at sexual health services
- 13% decline in chlamydia testing of young people since 2015 – increase of 2% in chlamydia diagnoses in this group since 2018

Ian Green, THT chief executive, said: “These new STI figures clearly show the impact of the government’s ongoing inaction and lack of vision for improving the nation’s sexual health. Rates of sexually transmitted infections like gonorrhoea and syphilis are rising significantly while sexual health services are over-burdened and under-funded. The overall number of new infections is heading the wrong way, with a 5% increase in a year, including big jumps in gonorrhoea and syphilis diagnoses. There was a 2% increase in chlamydia diagnoses among young people since 2016, despite a 13% decline in the number of tests since 2015. All of this underlines the need for urgent action.

“There are clear inequalities in terms of the communities most impacted by STIs. These include BAME communities, young people, gay and bisexual men, and people living with HIV. The data shows that black people bear a far higher burden of common STIs, with a 9% increase in STI rates among black Caribbean people in 2019, while in the last four years gay and bisexual men have seen an 83% jump in chlamydia diagnoses. These inequalities aren’t new but there’s still a shocking lack of information about the impact of structural inequalities including racism, homophobia and transphobia.

“This data is for 2019 and so doesn’t account for the Covid-19 pandemic, impact of lockdown or social distancing. It’ll be some time before the impact of coronavirus is known – good or bad – but a pandemic is not a sustainable solution for tackling soaring rates of STIs. Covid has driven innovation in sexual health services with the welcome scaling up of digital services and STI testing by post. But digital services don’t work for everyone and we know digital poverty is a big challenge for many. That’s why a range of options for accessing sexual health services must be maintained – including proper funding – to avoid further entrenching sexual health inequalities.

“Coronavirus and lockdown were never the answer to the question of how to improve the nation’s sexual health and we need long-term solutions. Now, as people start to have sex again following lockdown, vital services and access to testing and treatment need to be scaled up in parallel. The government has committed to a national sexual health strategy to improve the nation’s sexual health, which has been delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. These new figures underline why this can’t be delayed any further. That includes the need for significant investment in public health to ensure sexual health services are accessible as lockdown continues to ease.

“Coronavirus has had a big impact on all aspects of our health services, but it can’t be used as an excuse for the government not setting out its vision for sexual health and moving us towards that vision. We’ve already waited too long for action and inequalities are deepening with marginalised groups bearing the burden. Enough is enough.”

For more info on THT, visit: www.tht.org.uk
**MORE TO ME THAN HIV: PERSONAL EXPOSURE OF THE DIGITAL KIND**

Malcolm shares his disclosure story as part of the ongoing project, More To Me Than HIV, aimed at breaking down the stigma historically attached to the virus.

My first HIV test was in 1988, in Canada, and it was positive. My blood results were dire so I was quickly granted a disability pension from my compassionate employer in Vancouver. Surprisingly, not least to me, as time moved on I was still around and eventually improved HIV treatment options ensured not only my survival, but they also snatched friends from death’s door.

I used my newfound free time to help with friends to establish the Vancouver Friends For Life Society, a charity Wellness Centre for people living with HIV. It was pretty evident from the users of the Centre that low self-esteem was an issue for many men I met there, and that it was often responsible for them being much more vulnerable to stigma loaded comments and all the subsequent repercussions that came along with them.

Back then, as an early adopter to digital photography, I had my own makeshift studio in a spare room and I started to photograph these men. Yes it was just a little insignificant photo shoot on the surface, but it was almost like a therapy session behind the scenes. I never knew who would walk through the door and it didn’t matter. We’d chat over tea for a while so that I could quickly get some together, they would subsequently be proudly posted by the subject around the web for all to see and I’d get feedback later, sometimes much later…

“Thank you very much for a wonderful time, an excellent shoot, relaxed experience & wonderful pictures. I feel like doing it all over again, you made me look and feel so good about myself.”

“How did you manage to take off at least ten years? Great work, even my roommate didn’t even recognise me in some of those shots, how embarrassing! It turns out you must be a bit more of an exhibitionist than I thought!”

“How I feel like I can go out dating again, those photos have done so much for my self-esteem, you will never know what a difference they have made to my attitude about myself, thanks so very much guy.”

I was honoured to be part of that process. Time has moved on, now in these digitally enlightened days of 2020 you probably already have some photographs of yourself and your hobbies and pastimes filed away somewhere. Dig them out, send them to us, we can always scan, edit, crop and enhance them so you look like an absolute star. A star standing up proudly in front of any doublers out there, YES!, there is more to me than HIV!

For more info, visit: [http://moretomethanhiv.life/](http://moretomethanhiv.life/)

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**SUPPORT FOR ABUSE SURVIVORS**

Stay Brave has launched an ambitious five-year strategy to amplify the voices of male and LGBTQ + survivors of abuse – and work with frontline service providers to change the way these victims are able to access services and support. The charity aims to provide a voice for under-served survivors of intimate abuse, while working to erase the unique barriers they face when seeking help.

Thousands of people in the UK each year are victims of sexual assault, rape and domestic abuse. While media reporting in recent years has helped increase awareness for survivors, what’s often overlooked is that some survivors are missed by current service provisions. Cases in the media often depict straight female survivors, and omit men, boys, those in the LGBTQ + community or vulnerable minority communities.

Given recent media attention around the increase in calls to domestic abuse helplines during lockdown, it’s hoped that Stay Brave will be able to act as a credible, authentic and courageous voice for the victims and survivors it represents. Ahead of the launch of its annual fundraising challenge, Walking Brave, it’s hoped this strategy will re-ignite supporters into helping the charity achieve their mission.

Led by a team of passionate volunteers, and working across the UK, Stay Brave has an ambitious target over the next five years. Knowing that survivors can find strength and healing in telling their stories to others, Stay Brave is able to position the insight and inspiration it gains from survivors to save lives. It also works as part of the Men & Boys Coalition and Employers’ Initiative on Domestic Abuse.

Alex Morgan, founder of Stay Brave, said: “Seeking help can be daunting for victims of intimate abuse, and I know first-hand what it can be like to be turned away from the support we desperately need when we eventually build up the courage to report our abusers.”

Rhodri Roberts, chair of trustees at Stay Brave, added: “We’re incredibly proud of the success we’ve achieved as a charity over the last four years. This new strategy will help us champion the voices of survivors that are too often ignored. We will support them in speaking out and using their experiences to help shape better policy across the UK and challenge the stigma faced by survivors.”

“With the release of this strategy, Stay Brave will be working on a range of communications and fundraising projects to highlight the experiences of LGBTQ + and male victims of intimate abuse, and raise awareness with key policy makers.”

For more info about Stay Brave, and to read the new policy document, visit: [www.staybrave.org.uk/our-strategy](http://www.staybrave.org.uk/our-strategy)
THE DRAG DEBATE

Why universities are cracking down on ‘drag socials’. By Rachel Badham

RuPaul’s Drag Race took home six Emmys at the annual TV award ceremony last month, beating Nailed It!, The Masked Singer, The Voice and Top Chef to scoop Outstanding Competition Programme, and RuPaul also won Outstanding Host for a reality or competition show. Other wins included Outstanding Casting For A Reality Programme and Outstanding Contemporary Hairstyling.

Drag Race season 2 star Raven (also featured in All Stars season 1) won her first Emmy this year for Outstanding Makeup for a multi-camera series and was widely congratulated by fans of the show.

Aberystwyth University in Wales made headlines in early September for banning ‘drag-themed’ parties and social events. Student Union (SU) members explained the move, saying these kinds of socials were “usually dressing up as the opposite gender with the intention of being as funny as possible”. The university’s LGBTQ+ society supported the ban, saying drag socials often made “a mockery of trans women and the trans-femme experience”.

Dr. Jess Pettigrew, Senior Lecturer in English at Aberystwyth University, explained: “When people say ‘drag socials’, they are referring to and queer social events that appreciate the history and meaning of drag. Furthermore, the Sussex Drag Society events were not the ‘fancy dress parties’ Abberystwyth condemned, but performances by queer society members who recognise the deeper meaning of drag.

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However, the SU at Aberystwyth noticed the community’s rich drag culture is often appropriated, saying cisgender and often heterosexual people “take drag socials as an opportunity to ridicule trans people”, and said the university “will not accept that”. Having just graduated from the University of Sussex, I found the recent events in Wales made me consider how this issue manifests itself in Brighton.

Although the majority of UK universities now have an LGBTQ+ society, Sussex was the first university in the country to start a drag society. While completing my degree I attended multiple events hosted by Sussex Drag Society, which has received widespread recognition for its dedication to providing a safe space for LGBTQ+ people, and always admired how the society celebrated drag culture.

It is this understanding and sensitivity that distinguishes the drag socials the Aberystwyth SU is referring to and queer social events that appreciate the history and meaning of drag. Furthermore, the Sussex Drag Society events were not the “fancy dress parties” Aberystwyth condemned, but performances by queer society members who recognise the deeper meaning of drag.

Becca Ellis, president of the Sussex Drag Society, said: ‘At Sussex, we have had interactions with ‘drag socials’ from majority cis, straight men societies, such as the sporting teams. However, they were not referred to under this name, instead being called ‘tranny’ socials. Clearly, the use of a slur is unacceptable but also furthers supports the claim that these themed socials mock the trans-feminine experiences.

“One of these themed socials happened to be occurring in the same bar as one of our drag events and when the people involved with the social were asked if they were attending the drag event, they responded with disgust and homophobia. This is not an uncommon experience and breaks my heart. I think it’s more important to explore the differentiation between drag-themed socials, such as those run by us in which people of all backgrounds are welcomed and gender exploration is encouraged, compared to those which are fuelled by toxic masculinity and homophobia/transphobia, and use ‘cross-dressing’ for comedic effect.”

Olly De Herrera, welfare officer at Sussex LGBTQ+ Society, continued: ‘Drag is a sacred part of the LGBTQ+ community that has its place at the heart of our culture. Drag is participated in by both cis and trans people alike, and has both feminine, masculine and gender fluid aspects to it as an art form. Drag has a much deeper significance and artistic meaning to it than simply the ‘dressing up as a woman’ reductionist notion that much of the general population hold. Drag has helped many trans people find and shape their identity, either by participating in or experiencing it.”

Where LGBTQ+ clubs do not allow ‘fancy dress’, Olly says: “Most people understand it to be a policy to combat the misappropriation of drag by groups of cis men who view the act of “cross-dressing” as purely comedic, which is insensitive both to the art form and the trans experience. Drag is not a costume, or a dressing up theme, it is a cultural art form which requires protection from harmful misappropriation. Such protection is vital to educating on the art form, and also keeping it a safe space for people to enjoy and express themselves.”

The SU at Aberystwyth added “drag socials designed to celebrate drag and LGBTQ+ pride would be supported”, but made it clear that mocking the trans experience and appropriating drag culture will not be tolerated. Aberystwyth’s move is an important step in recognising the experiences of gender non-conforming people and the true artistry and power of drag.

Although Brighton is generally considered to be accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, Becca Ellis highlighted that the area is not exempt from homophobia and transphobia in the form of these offensive socials. Much like the Aberystwyth SU, the Sussex Drag Society and LGBTQ+ Society are a prime example of how drag socials should not be something used to mock LGBTQ+ people, but a celebration of the community. My hope is that it inspires other institutions to stand up to homophobia and transphobia, and to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community with us.

‘SU bans drag socials because they’re used to ridicule trans people’ – Ffion Haf, Redbrick, June 2020.


Drag Race has claimed 19 Emmys in total.
GOV STATEMENT ON THE GRA

Liz Truss MP, minister for Women & Equalities, last month announced the government’s response to the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) 2004. Earlier this year, The Sunday Times reported that the government was considering making changes to the GRA, including scrapping plans to make it easier to change gender and protecting women-only facilities.

THE STATEMENT

As a government, we are determined that everyone in the UK should be free to live their lives and fulfill their potential regardless of their sex, gender identity, race or disability.

We are proud to have introduced same-sex marriage and passed the Turing law.

We want transgender people to be free to live and to prosper in a modern Britain. We have looked carefully at the issues raised in the consultation, including potential changes to the GRA 2004.

It is the government’s view that the balance struck in this legislation is correct, in that there are proper checks and balances in the system and also support for people who want to change their legal sex.

It is also clear that we need to improve the process and experience that transgender people have when applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) — making it kinder and more straightforward. Our changes will address the main concerns that trans people themselves tell us they have about it.

In 2017 we conducted by far the largest survey ever of British LGBT people, with over 108,000 respondents, of whom 7,000 were trans. Of those who had completed their transition, around two in five said that they had a GRC, a higher proportion than is often believed. The survey then asked those who had not applied what had prevented them from doing so. They were able to choose as many reasons as they wanted.

Thirty-eight per cent told us the process was too bureaucratic. So we will place the whole procedure online. Thirty-four per cent said the process was too expensive. This, too, we will address. We will reduce the fee from £140 to a nominal amount.

We have also come to understand that gender recognition reform, though supported in the consultation undertaken by the last government, is not the top priority for transgender people. Perhaps their most important concern is the state of trans healthcare. Trans people tell us that waiting lists at NHS gender clinics are too long. I agree, and I am deeply concerned at the distress it can cause.

That is why we are opening at least three new gender clinics this year, which should see waiting lists cut by around 1,600 patients by 2022. The full benefit of the increases in clinical capacity that we’ve been able to secure will lead to greater patient choice, shorter waiting times, better geographical coverage and easier access. It will also make it easier to fulfil the medical requirements of obtaining a GRC.

It is why we last year provided funding for the UK’s first National LGBT Health Advisor to help improve transgender people’s experience.

Britain leads the world as a country where everybody is able to lead their life freely and treated with respect and that, for many years, transgender people have been widely accepted in British society; able to use facilities of their chosen gender; and able to participate fully in modern life.

At the heart of this is the principle of individual liberty. Our philosophy is that a person’s character, your ideas, and your work ethic trumps the colour of your skin or your biological sex. We firmly believe that neither biology nor gender is destiny.

The Equality Act 2010 clearly protects transgender people from discrimination. The same act allows service providers to restrict access to single sex spaces on the basis of biological sex if there is a clear justification.

We want every individual, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity to have the confidence and the freedom to be themselves.

In light of the statement, Gscene contacted relevant organisations, charities and individuals asking them for their thoughts…

Nancy Kelley, CEO of LGBTQ+ equality charity Stonewall, said: “The UK government has fallen far short on its promise to reform the GRA and has missed a key opportunity to progress LGBTQ+ equality. It’s a shocking failure in leadership that after three years and a robust public consultation, the UK Government has put forward only minimal administrative changes to improve the process for legal gender recognition of trans people in England and Wales. While these moves will make the current process less costly and bureaucratic, they don’t go anywhere near far enough toward meaningfully reforming the GRA to make it easier for all trans people to go about their daily life.

“Stonewall stands with, and sends our solidarity to, trans communities across the UK, whose lives and identities have been made the subject of a relentless ‘debate’ ever since the government announced its plans to reform the GRA through a public consultation. In the three years since, waiting times for Gender Identity Services have grown longer than ever, recorded anti-trans hate crimes have trebled, and anti-trans bullying remains endemic in our schools. The UK’s stalled progress on trans equality is now one of the main reasons we continue to fall behind other European countries on LGBTQ+ equality in ILGA-Europe’s annual ranking.

“It is vital the UK government tackles these issues head-on, and so the opening of at least three new Gender Identity Clinics this year is an important step towards reducing these waiting lists.

“Thank you to the thousands upon thousands of trans people and allies who took to the streets, wrote and called MPs, and shared your support online in hope of more progressive change. Stonewall will continue to call for acceptance without exception, and we won’t stop until every trans person, everywhere, is free to be themselves.”

Rory Finn, co-founder of Trans Can Sport, which provides safe and friendly fitness and leisure activities for trans folk in Brighton & Hove, said: “The announcement doesn’t appear to make applying for gender recognition any more straightforward nor does it address the systemic inequalities that make it a prohibitive process for many trans people to complete. Years have been wasted in which toxic transphobia has been allowed to fester and great harm has been perpetrated on trans communities in the process. However, it is welcome news if more Gender Identity Clinics are to be commissioned and I hope this comes with appropriate funding to make them function properly and treat patients in a timely manner.”
Trans in the City, which increases trans awareness and education in industry, said: “It’s reassuring to see the changes implied earlier in the year by the government that would have so badly affected trans people’s lives and careers have been averted.

“It’s disappointing that positive changes promised and supported by the majority of the UK have been ignored. We’ll continue to strive to make positive changes in awareness and education within businesses until trans and non-binary people achieve full inclusion and equality within society and the workplace.”

Gray Hutchins, service & development manager from Clare Project, which supports trans communities and campaigns for inclusion, said: “It’s a far cry from what we were hoping for in terms of radical changes and reform that is desperately needed.

“Considering this year’s challenges and constant anti-trans attacks on our community, it could have been worse, but this shouldn’t erase that it could have been significantly better. It appears, at this early stage, there has not been a back pedalling on TNB rights, however there is still a painful amount of erasure for non-binary and gender variant communities, and a long battle ahead.”

Bobbi Pickard, organiser of the #TransRightsAreHumanRights campaign, said: “After three long years of the most virulent abuse and attacks it’s disappointing that no real positive changes have been announced. This may seem like a defeat to many in the trans community but it’s actually a huge victory for everyone that has worked so hard this year to aver the hugely damaging and misinformed plans the government implied it would implement earlier in the year. It’s another step in ensuring trans and non-binary people gain the equality, respect and inclusion they as valued members of our society deserve.”

Christine Burns MBE, editor of Trans Britain, said: “I don’t think the present administration is fit to perform any kind of legal reform which trans leaders were looking for and which I think a genuine majority of informed public opinion would support. Their task has also been made extremely difficult by three years of egregious misinformation amplified in some parts of the press. That said, I think the proposals set out by the minister make the best of a bad hand. I think they come from a genuine evidence-based attempt to address the worst problems with the status quo and they will be genuinely helpful. Proper reform will have to wait for proper government.”

Katie Neeves from Cool2BTrans, which centres on supporting, educating and empowering trans communities, said: “I’m glad that this whole sorry period of uncertainty for trans people has ended. It was a shame the process took so long as it was so damaging to the trans community by stirring up so much hatred. Hopefully, we can all just go and live our lives in peace now.”

Dr Sam Hall, Gscene contributor and trustee at Clare Project, said: “On the whole good news I think. Those pushing hard to make life more difficult for trans folk have gained nothing, and there are some concessions around accessibility of the GRA process which are welcome. If the investment in health services happens that’s a good thing, although it doesn’t solve the problem of institutional transphobia in the NHS. No doubt gender critical activists will claim there are protections being put in place but there is nothing new. Somewhat a Pyrrhic victory I would say…”

Mermaids, the UK charity supporting trans kids, young people and their families, said: “After years of unhelpful speculation, debate and concern, we are relieved an announcement has been made. Many of our supporters feared that trans and non-binary lives would be negatively impacted by new barriers, so we are pleased that the extraordinary effort of combined LGBTQ+ organisations and allies has prevented such harm. It’s particularly welcome news that the Equality Act 2010 remains resolutely unchanged amidst a barrage of misinformed demands to weaken equality law in the UK.”

TO BAN CONVERSION THERAPY

Prime minister Boris Johnson has been urged by numerous religious leaders to ban LGBTQ+ conversion therapy. Johnson’s lack of progression in banning the practice has been addressed by the Ozanne Foundation, an interfaith advisory board which “works with religious organisations around the world to eliminate discrimination based on sexuality or gender in order to embrace and celebrate the equality and diversity of all”.

According to GLAAD, the American non-governmental media monitoring organisation founded by LGBTQ+ people in the media, conversion therapy is any practice which attempts to alter someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Johnson pledged to ban conversion therapy in 2018, and earlier in 2020 he described the practice as ‘abhorrent’; saying it ‘has no place in civilised society’. However since this remark, there has been little progress towards banning conversion therapy.

The Ozanne Foundation has published an open letter to Johnson, saying “as senior religious leaders we recognise the harm done by this discredited practice”, and comparing conversion therapy to a form of torture. The letter also insisted that trans people are protected from the practice.

All major UK therapy bodies and the NHS have discredited the practice which is known to cause trauma in those who are subjected to it. In the last couple of months, several regions in the world have banned conversion therapy such as Louisville, Kentucky, and the Australian Capital Territory; the Ozanne Foundation is hoping the UK will follow.

For more info on the Ozanne Foundation, visit: https://ozanne.foundation

TRANSDAYOF Visibility and Acceptance

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For more info on the Ozanne Foundation, visit: https://ozanne.foundation
As the long-standing transgender support group hits its second decade, Rory Finn looks at its history and evolution, with the input of some who have benefited from its services through the years.

**HUMBLE BEGINNINGS**

In 2000 a group of trans people would meet at Shadi Danin’s clinic and salon in Hove on Friday evenings, to discuss living as a trans person, to share precious information about where to go for hormones, surgery and how to change documents to reflect their true selves. Even in the early days there was demand for such support, with 15-20 people regularly attending, hailing from surrounding areas and with a wide age range and gender identities.

It’s easy to imagine that peer support groups for trans people always existed, and in some ways they always have. Self help has been the cornerstone for the trans community. The Clare Project came about because Shadi Danin was already providing services for a number of trans women and suggested to them that they might find benefit from coming together.

These clients were among the founding members of the Clare Project. A number of the ideas they set into action are still going strong today.

They had hoped to hold their first meeting in August but the launch had to be delayed until October when the momentum began to gather. August would have been appropriate because they had chosen the name Clare Project after St Clare of Assisi. Tina, one of the founders, explains: “I’d read about some Franciscans in the US who were involved in outreach work among transgender Latinos (some of the most vulnerable trans people) and discovered that these trans women had the image of St Clare in their dwelling and that she appeared to be their patron saint. St Clare definitely pushed the boundaries of gender in her day. She wanted to belong to St Francis’s band of brothers, and although she and her female companions had to accept segregation from the men, it was Clare, far more than his male companions, who promoted and maintained his ideals after his death. Clare also means light and we were trying to shed light on our own situation.”

“There was tremendous synergy at the start. The Gender Trust was based in Brighton at that time and publicised the Project. More than one local LGBTQ+ organisation was also surprisingly supportive and the treasurer, Mel, was able to secure funding from local sources. We soon had a therapy fund to assist those who needed this kind of support but couldn’t afford it. The first year ended with members taking part in the 2001 Brighton Pride parade in a double decker bus and we had a stall in the park.”

With the help of this funding they even bought books about being transgender that were looked after by Hove Library. To begin with, Shadi’s clinic provided the venue, then they moved their meetings to Hove Town Hall before finally settling on its current location at Dorset Gardens Methodist Church (DGMC) in 2005. By this time they had appointed a facilitator for the weekly Tuesday afternoon drop-in. The Project has been going from strength to strength, organising events such as the Trans Day of Remembrance, trans swimming at the local pool, and working in partnership with the growing trans community organisations that began to form, as well as the long-standing LGBTQ+ organisations locally.

**WHAT MAKES IT WORK?**

Natasha, former chairperson, said: “Support groups are good for meeting other people in the flesh and talking. They’re good for making friends. The facilitator will introduce people, especially if they might have something in common to bond over. We don’t want to lose that in this internet age. It worries me that we might lose that.”

Naturally they were there for the first Trans Pride, hosting a stall in New Steine Gardens, and have participated ever since. In 2016 the Clare Project became a fully fledged charity and won a contract from Brighton & Hove City Council to deliver wellbeing services, which complemented the psychotherapy and speech therapy it already provided. The Clare Project now employs several people in roles varying from supporting the weekly drop-in to community development.
Zack: “After I retired I moved to Brighton, having visited often to be part of the trans community here. The Clare Project offered me a lifeline to be with people. I’ve made, and continue to make friends through coming. It’s really nice to meet people my own age. It’s really helpful. There are many people in their 60s; women, men and non-binary people. I’m interested in people regardless of their gender identity.”

MEET & EAT
Formerly called Posh Nosh, the monthly Meet & Eat is one of the most popular Clare Project regular events, usually attracting around 20 people. Meeting in an affordable and friendly restaurant or gastro pub in town, folk come together to share a meal and enjoy each other’s company in a relaxed and sociable setting. For those who find it difficult to afford this, there is a bursary available to pay for the food element.

The Camelford Arms is a firm favourite. Natasha went on to say: “They’re very accommodating and provide good food, with portions often more than anyone can manage.”

They walk as a group to the restaurant after the main Tuesday evening drop-in. The drop-in usually runs from 2.30-5.30pm, but on the first Tuesday of the month they meet later, from 5-7pm, to allow for Meet & Eat to happen straight after. The advantage of this is that those who are working during the day can also come along.

COUNSELLING
The first therapist was Michael, who used the gym at Shadi Danin’s clinic. Over the years the therapists have changed but the principle of providing affordable counselling to members of the Clare Project remains. Long-standing counsellor Virginia provided much-needed support for many throughout the differing stages of their transition. A lot of people have relied on it, knowing they can find a safe trans-affirmative therapist at the drop-in. Counselling is now provided by trans-identified therapists.

TNB
In 2019 a new venture was created. TNB has a different flavour to the Tuesday drop-in and aims to provide facilitated activities, workshops, discussions and guest speakers. Half of the drop-in is structured around this topic for 45 minutes, with time for discussion, or socialising.

TNB provides the community with a safe space to explore subjects and issues that may affect the trans community differently. Example topics include: self-care, volunteering opportunities, healthy relationships, fertility, trans health pathways, and more. You can participate in these activities however you wish. There is also space to hang out, or speak to one of the facilitators for informal advice and support.

TNB has also branched out to Hastings.

MEMORIES OF EARLY DAYS
Kim was an active member of the Clare Project from 2011 to 2019. In that time she became involved in many ways, including in the role of society secretary.

What was it like going for the first time?
“I went along to see what it was like. I was very nervous and only stayed for 20 minutes on the first visit. I remember talking to Rosemary Alix, the facilitator, and Steph Scott, who at the time was the chair. Rosemary was calming and reassuring. Steph was sitting in the main room working on a laptop. The chairs were lined against the wall and I sat there to have a short chat with her. I felt confident enough – and sure enough that it was for me – to return the following Tuesday and got more and more involved.”

Any fond memories?
“I remember one of my earliest visits to the drop-in, plucking up courage to walk there across town in daylight identifying as female. A lorry driver pulled up in Church Street and he leaned over. I thought he might shout abuse but he just wanted to ask directions. I mumbled a startled reply and he set off again. I was shaking after that, feeling self-conscious and vulnerable. Later, at the drop-in, Natasha helped me to calm down. We needed tea and biscuits for the meeting, so she persuaded me to join her on a walk down to Morrisons to buy them. It all went smoothly, without incident, and gave me a confidence boost. As a trans woman, I began to realise if you behave in a self-conscious way, it draws attention to you. Being with others who understand is the way to build confidence and help you live your life in the way you always wanted to.”

FOUNDING MEMBERS’ REFLECTIONS ON CHANGES IN THE TRANS COMMUNITY
Tina: “The Gender Recognition Act (GRA) 2004 has to be up there as one of the most important changes for trans people since 2000, but not many people have taken up the option. Attacks on attempts to reform are particularly pernicious.”

[Ed note: The GRA returned to trans people rights that were effectively taken away by the 1969 legal case ‘Corbett vs Corbett’, which set a legal precedent that trans people could not legally change gender. The GRA has well documented shortcomings and with a heavy bureaucratic and financial burden placed upon applicants for gender recognition, many trans people do not apply.]

“Waiting lists are still an issue as they were back then. It’s cruel that people had to wait so long as they were losing their youth missing out on living in their proper gender.”

Persia: “The changes for the trans community since 2000 are first the different age, the younger age, at which trans people transition. For me in my teens and 20s it was next to impossible, in the society I lived in. In the Liverpool suburbs in the 1960s there wasn’t even vocabulary for what I was. The only word we saw was transsexual, and that was far too weird for me to consider, with no avenues to follow to find out who and what I was. So many people in the Clare Project at its beginnings were in their 40s, that time of a second life change and re-evaluation. But it seems to me that the problems are still there, just different. Now there are so many gender-fluid identities that it can be hard to know who we are in a different way. And now we have the massive aggressions of the anti-trans, towards trans feminine folk. We just had normal social nastiness and rejection.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE
Persia: “I hope that the artificial fabrications of threat that are laid on trans people fade away, as did the excesses of hatred towards gay men in particular in the 1980s, and that who and what we are becomes more or less normal, perhaps as we’re more seen and accepted. Truth is that this will happen to some degree as the anti-trans league age and people who are young now, who’ve seen trans people around them, become the people in power. We will see.”

Natasha: “That we can carry on meeting up and socialising. Being nice and respectful, supportive of one another.”

For more info visit: www.clareproject.org.uk 
@TheClareProject 
@tcpbrighton
don’t get referred to as ‘just BBC’ on Grindr and Recon anymore, but during the height of the BLM protests this year, I shared across all my social media that there is still an issue with race in the LGBTQIA+ community. A few instances of incidents where my race was the main factor of an issue range from former dates casually using the ‘N’ word on social media, to having security called on me after my homelessness interview a few years back just for sitting in the lobby trying to phone friends to find somewhere I could crash for the foreseeable, to lastly being called multiple racial slurs and told I should kill myself just because I said ‘hi’ to someone on a dating app. Sometimes I can even be sent insults out of the blue.

“On the flip side, there are those that are particularly racist, it’s more ignorance from not being able to see me (an alternative/Goth, geeky, north London guy) as ‘actually black’ because I don’t really fit into a stereotypical appearance, vernacular, music taste.”

What does Black History Month mean to you? What is the importance of this month?

“It means a lot to me personally as it’s a chance to educate about prominent black figures in history. Artists, scientists, inventors... From what I’ve heard from most people, at primary and secondary school, Black History Month was just when they heard about slavery and the odd mention of Martin Luther King Jr, Marcus Garvey, I absolutely love your drag name - Melanin Monroe - tell us about the origin. “Why thank you. My original drag name was KoKo Divine, which was a play on words in two languages, coco as in chocolate and in Japanese ここ (koko) means ‘here’ (I’m a massive Japanophile and polyglot) but not many people got on with it and there are a few other queens with similar names.

“So, changing direction with my drag a little too I wanted to find a name that fits better and had a similar concept. I stumbled into Melanin Monroe through my love of that era of Hollywood and my fave X-Men character, Storm’s, real name as inspiration. But ultimately it’s down to not many queens of colour being on the circuit in Brighton and I wanted to celebrate my skin with my drag.”

As a black drag queen, have you found your experiences have differed to those of white queens? Have you experienced prejudice because of this?

“I guess in some aspects usually it’s just being confused for any number of other black queens, some not even near the same complexion or even similar acts or aesthetics. Or people being very surprised by the varied and wide range of performance numbers.”

Which black LGBTQ+ icons have particularly inspired you throughout your drag career?

“Too many to name them all. I mean Jason Jones, aka triniJayJay, Lady Phyll, Billy Porter, Dashaun Wesley. Closer to home I’d say pretty much every queen on the Brighton circuit has helped me in some way, including most of the Brighton Belles, Son of a Tutu, but Mel wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for Stephanie Von Clitz’s Open Mic Drag Night at the Marine Tavern, which has since moved to Le Village.

“The MindOut charity fundraiser was me taking hold of my mental health and overcoming the barrier that it had put on my creativity and me choosing not to let those things take control and Steph has helped me hone my craft as well as being a big supporter of my work.”

In terms of racial intersectionality in the LGBTQ+ community, are things improving? What could be done to create a greater degree of racial equality in the community?

“That’s a very tough question to tackle. On the surface things seem to be getting better – I
Drag culture has a long, rich history, often dated back to the Shakespearean era when men would dress as women to perform and the term ‘drag’ originated – from the fact that the male players wore dresses to play female roles and the garments dragged along the floor. However, the first self-proclaimed ‘queen’ was, according to a book to be released next year, born into slavery in Maryland, around 1860. William Dorsey Swann was better known as ‘the queen’ by his friends and was frequently seen in dresses and other ‘women’s’ garments. Although he is lesser known than other black LGBTQ+ figures, such as trans activist Marsha P Johnson, he was the earliest recorded American to take legal action to defend the drag queen community and form a queer resistance group.

Swann’s name has become well known since Channing Gerard Joseph published an article in The Nation (picked up by other mainstream media) earlier this year about his book, The House of Swann, to be published in 2021; the first literary work to detail the life of Swann and his role in the 19th century queer community. Joseph hails Swann’s activism as the “beginning of the fight for gay liberation,” as he battled for queer freedom nearly a century before the Stonewall riots, which are generally considered the beginning of the LGBTQ+ community’s struggle for equality. Many also celebrated Swann’s life and work on Juneteenth, which was the day US slaves were emancipated.

Joseph’s book chronicles how Swann was freed from slavery after Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation in 1862, which took effect in 1863, following which he later organised a series of secretive balls in the 1880s and 1890s, where guests would often dress in what would be described today as drag. As Swann was a central figure in the underground queer scene, this led to multiple arrests, the most notable being in 1896 when his home was raided and he was sentenced to 10 months for ‘keeping a disorderly house’ (a euphemism for a brothel). However, this was not actually the case as his home was in fact a gathering place for other queer people and drag queens.

Swann requested a pardon from president Grover Cleveland, making him the first person in American history to pursue legal action to defend the LGBTQ+ community’s right to gather. Although his request was denied, Swann paved the way for the black drag community. Even after he stopped organising drag balls, his brother continued to make costumes for drag artists. Swann was also known to be friends with Pierce Lafayette and Felix Hall who formed the first known male same-sex relationship between enslaved Americans.

Although it is thought that drag entered the mainstream LGBTQ+ scene in the 1930s where it was used in underground clubs as a mode of self-expression, Swann was a pioneer of the culture that has become so sacred to the queer community. Nowadays, drag is commonly seen in popular culture and millions partake in it to challenge normative gender roles.

The writer of The House of Swann has described Swann as a “former slave who reigned over a secret world of drag balls in Washington”, and hopes to bring his inspirational story into the public eye and preserve his legacy, which lives on in contemporary drag culture and in the black LGBTQ+ community.

Sadly, there’s no actual images of Swann. His story often gets paired up with this picture (below) of another incredible drag performer who is actually Mr Brown from the Vaudeville duo Gregory and Brown, who introduced the Cake Walk dance to the world.

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A “Drag Party” Raided.

This morning John Smith, Jacob Byard, William Dorsey, who by the way, was the “Queen,” Charles Myers, Jacob Lewis, John Lewis, Samuel Lewis, Samuel Jackson, James Waters, Laura Howard, James Taylor, Benjamin Moore and Lewis Jackson were charged in the Police Court with being suspicious characters.

Last night, attired in handsome silks and satins, each in complete feminine costume, they indulged in a ‘drag’ in a quiet-looking house on the south side of 6th street, near Twelfth. The ‘party’ was raider by Lieutenant Adams, and the officers of the First Precinct.

Nearer of the ‘girls’ succeeded by peculiar ball, ex-Commissioner of Pensions Dudley becoming bonds for William Dorsey, who is in his employ.
British football. There was something quite surreal about it all when I was giving him guitar lessons!"

While at Nottingham Justin had developed an interest in evangelical Christianity, something that came with him to Brighton. He became a regular part of the congregation at Emmanuel Full Gospel Church at 1 De Montfort Road. "I remember reading in The Argus that he was a born again Christian and never swore. Fifteen minutes into his first pre-season friendly someone clattered into him and you heard the word ‘bastard’ proclaimed by Fashanu,” came a comment from Steve Agace on the North Stand Chat forum.

The Albion were based at the Goldstone Ground opposite Hove Park. "After training he’d go for lunch with the other players in Hove Park Tavern. He was an absolute darling,” posted Philip Rees on the Brighton Past Facebook group.

The club gave Justin the use of the basement flat of 26 Regency Square, where he was soon visited by long-term friend and fellow footballer, Neil Slawson. "When I heard that Justin went to Brighton I was thrilled, because not only was it my hometown, but I had been on trial with Brighton the year before and I knew the squad and thought, oh he’s going to do great there.

“I went to go visit him and right out of his mouth he goes, ‘You can’t live with me here.’ I said, ‘I wasn’t asking,’ but he says, ‘Yeah, cos I’m ducking and diving all the time and it wouldn’t be a good match’. I took that to mean ‘you’re going to cramp my style’. My personal opinion is he loved Brighton because he could be freer and there were more people of like mind and like interests. It just allowed him to be freer because he was truly conflicted. I don’t think he’d have been as much in conflict if he wasn't religious and in the public eye.”

Fairly soon fellow Regency Square resident Terry Wing struck up a friendship with Justin. "My bedroom’s right at the very top, and we’d sit at the window and just watch people go by and chat. He was a lonely soul, he said he was a born-again Christian, which he wasn’t. He gave himself that title to offset any suggestions about his sexuality.

"I’d be like his handbag – if he wanted to go out to a restaurant for a meal with a friend, it would never be booked in his name, I’d book it.”

The name Justin Fashanu is remembered in Brighton by an unusual cross-section of people: football enthusiasts, the gay community, the black community and evangelical Christians. The sheer diversity of those groups tells you a lot about the complexity of the man himself.

Born in London in 1961 to a Nigerian lawyer and Guyanese nurse, at the age of three he was placed into a children’s home with his younger brother, John, when their parents split. They were there for two years before the Jacksons, a white couple near Norwich, adopted them. Both brothers went on to a career in football, but Justin showed talent first.

To put it simply, he became a huge star. At just 20 years old he was the first black player to be transferred for £1 million. Brian Clough bought him as a goal scorer for Nottingham Forest, but things didn’t go well. Not only were the goals not forthcoming but there was a personality clash between them. Clough hearded rumours of Fashanu being seen out at “that bloody poofs’ club” and suspended him. He even had the police remove Fashanu from the grounds when he arrived for training.

A year later Fashanu was loaned to Southampton and then sold to Notts County, before signing a three-year contract with Brighton & Hove Albion in 1985. Before he arrived, it would be fair to say Fashanu wasn’t popular with Albion supporters. While playing for Notts County the previous year, he had inadvertently hospitalised two Brighton players. However, once Fashanu had transferred to the Albion, the crowds began singing “We’ll take good care of you, Fashanu, Fashanuuuuu” to the tune of a British Airways advert of the time.

Justin bought an acoustic guitar from Southern Music in Castle Street, and staff member Yaasin Hanif agreed to give him lessons. “I was one of maybe three black guys I was aware of in the area. I remember being so proud when I was a teenager with a player who ‘looked like me’ in the upper echelons of
The Beacon Royal in Oriental Place was Brighton's premier gay venue at that point. “We went down to the Beacon quite a few times. He stayed quite close to me. I was there to protect him.” On one evening there they bumped into the infamous brothel keeper and party hostess Cynthia Payne.

But back to football - Justin had arrived in Brighton with a longstanding left knee injury. During his first season a football stud nearly shattered his right knee, which promptly ended his time with the Albion. He had played just one season, made 20 appearances, and scored only two goals.

The injured Justin met Karl Heyman, an 18-year-old Brighton resident and football fan, through his church. Karl said: “It was almost like that was his escape from everything he was involved with. The insurance policy meant he got paid a stupid amount of money and he was trying to justify in his own mind, morally and ethically, why he should be receiving this money when he’s not doing anything. We played snooker in Castle Street and we played a bit of tennis in Preston Park, and he used to go out on the back of my motorbike.”

Karl accompanied Justin out to pubs and clubs, including The Chequers Inn on Preston Street. “We went in there a few times, it was a very gay-friendly sort of pub. At that point he hadn’t come out, but all my friends ribbed me because they all thought he was gay.”

Karl remembers one trip to Brighton’s Palace Pier. “He bought a vanilla ice cream and covered all his mouth with it and then walked along, being black, vanilla ice cream, he just looked like a kid with ice cream all over his face. He was just doing it for laughs, and because he’s a big strapping lad and he’s a good-looking guy, he’s getting all the attention, so he was an attention seeker but for all the right reasons.”

Another friend Justin made in 1986 was Expressive Art student Kevin Weaver. “He was a lonely soul, he told the world, but the world wasn’t ready.”

“In brief, his brother John, and Justin’s own church, turned their backs on him. He managed to keep playing football but moved from club to club around Europe, Canada and the US. It seems Justin returned to Brighton in 1996, as he was seen out socialising. Mark Phillips remembers: “I met him at a friend’s mixed party in Palmeira Square, in white shirt and jeans, he was with a couple of gay friends.” He recalls Justin making a comment about being gay. “He thought it would be easier to tell the world, but the world wasn’t ready.”

In March 1998, a 17-year-old American youth accused Justin of sexual assault. The age of consent was 16, but homosexual acts were illegal in Maryland at the time. Justin feared he would be presumed guilty and fled back to the UK. On May 3 he was discovered hanged in a garage in east London. Towards the end of his life he wrote “I tried my best. This is a really hard world.”

In a tragic twist, art student Kevin Weaver, now a photojournalist, was sent to capture the location of a celebrity suicide. “I saw a yellow and green Norwich City scarf – and The Escape Club flat of 26 Regency Square, 1986 by Kevin Weaver.
My starting point is that equality is now the mantra of the UK and indeed global LGBTQ+ movement, so the idea that equality is not enough is very controversial and challenging.

Although equality has much to recommend it, I don’t feel comfortable with the way most of our community has lowered its aspirations to the limited goal of equal rights. They are important, but they are not enough. I ask the question, whatever happened to the lofty ideals of queer liberation and sexual freedom? Where did they go? We have too often moved away from defining our needs and fallen meekly into the prevailing heterosexual consensus.

Look at same-sex marriage. Winning marriage equality was tremendously important, and I was spearheading that campaign from way back. I agree that homophobic discrimination against same-sex couples is wrong, that it had to be challenged because it was a form of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, but I would ask the question, do we really think that the marriage model is the best framework for recognising relationships whether opposite sex or same-sex?

My argument would be that if we were starting from scratch, the marriage model wouldn’t be the one that we would adopt. It is too dogmatic and inflexible. Regardless of different diverse relationships and lifestyles, the marriage model is based upon a long tradition of the way in which the law recognises relationships.

We need a more democratic egalitarian alternative. The way in which we just conceded the argument that marriage is the gold standard of relationship recognition shows a lack of imagination and a bowing down before a model of relationship recognition and rights that was devised by straight people, not by us.

The end result of merely accepting equality is that the dominant agenda is about equal rights and law reform rather than transforming society. We don’t question what we want, equality within the status quo, and this is very much an agenda about conformism and assimilation. It doesn’t acknowledge that we queer, out of our history and experience, may have better ideas, may have alternatives that we could produce instead of what exists. This political retreat represents a massive loss of imagination, confidence and vision.

Equality is important, but it’s not sufficient; it’s not the panacea that many people claim. Now equality for LGBTQ+ people inevitably means parity on straight terms within a pre-existing framework of values, laws and institutions. These have been devised by and for the straight majority, not by us. Equality within their system involves conformity to their rules. This is a recipe for submission and incorporation, not genuine queer liberation.

Although getting rid of homophobic discrimination is a laudable aim which I support, it doesn’t go far enough. Ending anti-LGBTQ+ bias will not resolve all the problems faced by queer people. Some of our difficulties arise not simply from homophobia, biphobia or transphobia, but also from the more general erotophobic and sex-negative nature of contemporary culture, which also harms straight and cisgender people.

You can see this in the way in which sex-negative attitudes are evident in the censorship of sexual imagery, the inadequacy of sex education lessons, the criminalisation of sex workers, the outlawing of consensual sadomasochistic relationships and of course the criminalisation of teenagers who have sex with each other before the lawful age of consent. In those different ways we see that the anti-sex culture is still deeply ingrained in our society.

I want to emphasise that the drawbacks associated with seeking mere equality are not limited to our community. They apply to women who are usually forced to compete on male terms to get ahead in the workplace. They apply to black people who tend to only succeed if they adopt a white middle-class lifestyle and assimilate into the dominant European culture. Both women and ethnic minorities have discovered to their cost that the equal rights agenda is not about respecting difference and validating it; it’s mostly about obliterating it.

So where is the dignity in that? How can we have self-respect if we sacrifice our queer identity and our queer culture for the sake of parity? It is acceptance, but acceptance at a price that is not worth paying.

“Whatever happened to the lofty ideals of queer liberation and sexual freedom? Where did they go? We have too often moved away from defining our needs and fallen meekly into the prevailing heterosexual consensus”
“Both women and ethnic minorities have discovered to their cost that the equal rights agenda is not about respecting difference and validating it, it’s mostly about obliterating it”

Moreover, equal rights does not equate with genuine freedom despite formal legal equality between the sexes in Britain for decades, women’s earnings are still only four-fifths of men, and of course years after the end of racially discriminatory statutes in the United States, informal segregation affecting black communities persists. It’s not enforced by segregation like it once was but there’s informal segregation based on economic inequality where black and white communities live very separate lives and as the Black Lives Matter movement has shown police brutality and murders are still commonplace, and poor black people in America are still locked out of economic success.

These lessons are lessons that we queers have to take on board. The same fate will befall us if we jump on the limited agenda of equality. We will end up with equal rights, but within a flawed, unjust society where for us the rules are skewed against sexual choice and self-determination. The rules are skewed against our own unique insights, experiences and lifestyle relationship models. Equality for queers is a political deal that leads to social assimilation. We assimilate into, accommodate to, fit in with society as it is, and that implies that we ourselves are pretty much worthless, that we have nothing to give society. If we go down that road, a condition of equal treatment is that LGBT+ people are expected to conform to the straight system, to its norms and aspirations.

I think we’re witnessing the increasing co-option and invisibilisation of LGBT+ people. You can say we’re everywhere more than ever, on TV and in public life. That’s true, but we are there as facsimiles of straight people and their values, lifestyles and aspirations, so the end result is that we get equality, but the price we pay is the surrender of our own unique distinctive queerness.

The insights and ethics that have forged our response to being excluded and discriminated against by a hostile straight world. Out of this suffering we’ve developed worthwhile understandings, insights, experiences and other ways of living which straight people could learn from, and we need to hold on to that.

We also need to acknowledge that the unwritten, unspoken social contract at the heart of LGBT+ equality and law reform is that we queers will behave respectfully. That we will comply with the heterosexual moral agenda. So no more cruising, orgies, sex clubs, sadomasochism, and even if none of that is your thing we need to defend the right of others who do. In return, the contract is that the good gays get equal treatment, meanwhile some of the sex repressive social structures, laws, values, institutions, remain intact and the bad gays remain sexual outsiders.

This kind of LGBT+ reformism involves an abandonment of any critical perspective on straight culture. We don’t distinguish between the good aspects and the bad. We don’t make an assessment about what is worthy of queer liberation and what is not. In place of a healthy scepticism, which I think is a great public virtue, towards the heterosexual consensus, we’re substituting a naive acquiescence. Discernment is abandoned in favour of compliance. We trade our souls for the gift of equal rights.

Increasingly advocates of LGBT+ equality never question the status quo. They take it for granted. They are straight minds trapped in queer bodies accepting society as it is. These Hetero Homos want nothing more than their cozy place in the Straight Sun. Most are all too willing to mimic heterosexual norms and values and discard the attempt to distinguish between those elements of straight culture that are good to follow and those that are not. This may be equality and it certainly would be progress, but it’s not liberation.

I want to go back to the point that I made about what we can bring straight people and culture. Gay, bi and trans men have shown straight and cisgender men a new way of being a man. We don’t in general normally conform to the machismo and the macho style. The toxic masculinity that has historically been associated with heterosexual maleness. We have evolved a new way of being a man which goes beyond merely not having sex with a person of the opposite sex. Of course there are exceptions. I would say that gay and bi men tend to be more in touch with their emotions and feelings, less uptight, less cold, and of course there are gay men and bi men who are very macho and even toxic but they’re, I think, the exception and this departure from straight norms or expectations or behaviours or feelings is one of the reasons why gay and bi men are disproportionately represented in the creative artistic and caring professions. In those professions you must be in touch with your feelings to do your job well.

Conversely if we look at lesbian, bi and trans women, they have shown a different way of being a woman. They’ve challenged the orthodoxy, the feminine stereotype, the way in which women are expected to behave, which goes beyond the mere fact that they don’t sexually relate to men. It’s about a much bigger psychological emotional mindset.

We don’t want to stereotype and over-generalise but I would say that these women tend to be more independent, less dependent on men, more assertive. That is why lesbian and bi women have been disproportionately represented in battles for women’s equality.

Look at the disproportionate number of lesbians and bi women involved in the Suffragette movement or more recently in the battle to open all male occupations to women.

I have lots of lesbian friends who were involved in the campaign for women in manual trades so that women could get apprentices to learn to be plumbers, electricians, carpenters and bricklayers. Looking around at that campaign, a high proportion of those women, far more than the proportion of lesbian and bi women in the population, were lesbian and gay, lesbian and bi women. They pioneered women’s advancement which paved the way for straight and cisgender women to follow.

We as a community have so much to give. We shouldn’t undervalue ourselves, our own achievements, the fact that we can teach straight and cisgender people a lot of positive things. It isn’t just about equal rights, or about fitting in with their system, it’s about changing their system and I’m so proud that so many members of our community have been pioneers for social reform and change not just on issues of sexuality and gender identity but on issues of women’s rights, black rights and many other struggles for social reform. That’s why I say today that queer liberation is important, that talking about transforming society is something we must get back to.

Equality alone is not enough. We need to have broader, bolder, horizons and think about what could be, rather than accept what is.

MORE INFO

- Watch the lecture, unedited, and Q&As here: https://bit.ly/3f2N8oK
- For more info on the Peter Tatchell Foundation, visit: www.petertatchellfoundation.org
BARKING UP THE RIGHT TREE

Starting off this issue’s series of features on the joys of pets and their positive impact on mental health and physical wellbeing, Jaq Bayles looks at current trends and the lengths to which dog-lovers will go to keep their pets happy, healthy and looking good. Then, over the following pages, Gscene contributors and readers share their pet pictures and stories.

For centuries – at least 14,000 years, according to general scientific consensus – dogs have been living side-by-side with humans in domestic harmony. Looking at the range of sizes, shapes, temperaments, coats and characteristics, it’s hard to believe all our canine companions today are descended from the grey wolves that, back in the mists of time, ventured ever closer to human hearths, seeking warmth and comfort in return for protection and hunting help.

Yet whether Chihuahua or Great Dane, all breeds share that common ancestor and today their popularity is arguably greater than ever, with lockdown seeing a surge in dog ownership and TV schedules perennially littered with shows that laud man’s best friend. It may just be that cats are notoriously more aloof and trickier to persuade to behave, but there’s no doubt that much more time is devoted to their sworn enemy – and the trade in dog-related paraphernalia is similarly more highly concentrated.

Cats are about as likely to enjoy being dressed up as they are being bathed or herded, but dogs – whether they actively like it or are simply doing their best to please – have increasingly become the target of fashion brands and accessory providers, while related industries such as grooming and walking have seen similar booms.

For all manner of reasons, LGBTQ+ people seem to have a particular affinity with dogs. “There are levels of pet ownership,” says Ben Thorpe, of grooming salon and dog-food producer Bone Idol in Kemptown. “You have a dog owner, then you have a pet parent – someone who treats their dog as a child. There’s nothing they wouldn’t do for their dog.” And he should know. His Shih Tzu, Dennis, sports “a rolled leather harness that cost more than my coat”.

Ben, along with friends Jon and Scott, set up Bone Idol in 2016 as a grooming salon, but then the trio realised they were all struggling to find a food that all their dogs loved. So began a search for a food that would make dogs “healthy, happy and fabulous” – the business slogan – which led to the launch of an eponymous grain-free brand. Then, during lockdown, came the formulation of cold-pressed brand Nora Nose Best.

“People are learning more about dog food. With programmes like For the Love of Dogs, they’re interested to learn what they’re feeding their dog. When we were kids my nan’s dog got a bit of dried food and the rest of your dinner.”

Half the time the descriptors on modern dog foods sound more appetising than those for many supermarket ready-meals. It’s all part of the anthropomorphisation process – if dogs are perceived as part of the family why shouldn’t they be treated as such? We want to believe we are giving them the best, in terms of nutrition,
For many people, Paul included, dogs proved a lifeline during lockdown. “He was a saviour. I don’t know what I’d have done if I hadn’t had him. Mind you, he lost loads of weight going out for all those walks – he’s more used to lying on a chaise longue in the shop.

People are always going to spoil their pets – they’re loveable, loyal, and if you’re lacking that in your life the love from a pet is priceless.”

Of course lockdown has brought its own set of issues for dogs and owners alike. If dogs have memories (the greeting received on going out and coming in again five minutes later would suggest they don’t), they will likely regard the past few months as a Golden Age, when owners were constantly at home and walks were plentiful (sometimes too plentiful – I’ve heard of dogs that were running away when they spotted their owners picking up the lead). But that bubble is probably about to burst for many, if it hasn’t already, and there could be fallout.

“I do worry there will be a lot of dogs that have got used to this life... with a certain amount of people then suddenly those people are going back to work and they are on their own” Cian Howlett

Cian used to work as a mental health advocate at MindOut, and believes dogs can have a hugely positive impact for people suffering mental health issues, saying they can keep people in a healthy routine in terms of having to get up in the morning to walk their pet and the very fact of having something else to care for is “enriching”. He says: “You become responsible for something other than yourself – that’s really rewarding. A pet is a great addition to someone’s lifestyle if they are in a responsible position.”
popular are Cockerpoos, Labradoodles and other hypoallergenic breeds, while some of the more breeds are coming back, according to Cian: “Terriers, Poms, Shih Tzus. Mini Dachshunds are very, very popular, as well as Frenchies and Pugs.”

Cian and Ryan have a French Bulldog, a Pug and a Chihuahua – “all the popular gay dogs” says Cian. He describes them as having beautiful natures and great personalities but cautions that anyone thinking of getting a flatter-faced breed needs to do some serious research (this applies to all dogs) as they often come with health issues. Brachycephalic dogs are shorter-nosed and flat-faced and breathing problems are quite common as a result of the facial structure.

Aiming to help people who want to better understand dogs or gain some grooming skills, Bone Idol is launching an Academy in Hove providing Level 3 Qualifications in dog grooming and training, as well as workshops and more.

Whether running on the Downs, walking in Stanmer Park or strolling through the North Laine, it seems you’re never more than about six feet from a dog in this part of the world. Is that level of canine concentration common to other areas? “Brighton people just love their dogs,” says Ben, adding that Brighton is an incredibly dog-friendly place, with many restaurants, cafes and shops welcoming them. “It’s so lovely to be in a situation where you can take your dog out for dinner with you, can go into shops and pubs. The community in Brighton – not just the LGBTQ+ community, it’s all the community of dog lovers – they are just so helpful to each other. We have people who come in and buy a toy once a week and it’s like the dogs are getting their pocket money.”

While some people see their dogs as child substitutes, it seems some children are less than enamoured of the treatment the family pet gets – especially when it comes to Christmas. Paul says: “People spend more on their dogs than they do on themselves, especially at Christmas. They come in saying ‘I haven’t got enough for my dog’ and their kids are there looking very grumpy.”

It’s not all dog-related for Aries and Holler though. Cats do get a look in, and there have been more unusual requests, like the one Holler had for a lizard harness. Possibly the oddest yet, though, is the ongoing hunt for a chicken harness. “It belongs to a friend and it’s really lovely but is always wanting to wander. I am working on it now. You can get a chicken harness but it’s not going to be a mass-market product.”

MORE INFO
- www.boneidol.co.uk
- www.rooddog.com
- /Aries.Designs.Fashion/
- https://holler.store

Matt Rood, former Mr Gay Europe, who runs dog walking business Rooddog in Brighton, Hove, Shoreham, Worthing and Lancing, says he would have been lost during lockdown without his Hungarian Vizslas, Hugo (8) and Lulu (10). “They’re my everything.” He too points to the importance of maintaining structure, without which he says it’s easy to let dogs form bad habits.

He has shown his dogs up to Crufts level and says the training that goes into such a hobby can be invaluable in teaching a puppy to focus in spite of distractions – it also helps with lead work and getting a dog used to being handled by other people. He has also bred his dogs and walks their offspring, while they, in turn, have helped him train for marathons. “I have taken Hugo on a couple of half marathons and they helped train me for marathons up to 18 miles.”

Matt decided on Vizslas after seeing one called Yogi win Best in Show at Crufts in 2010 and falling for its athleticism and energetic nature. “Once you find your breed that’s it,” he says. And, while many people like to rescue dogs, many do choose breeds as specific characteristics should be guaranteed. Currently
Growing up in Preston I had a true sense of community and identity. Everything was laid out for me: who I was, the youngest son of an esteemed Gujarati Patel family; what faith to follow, our ancient Hinduism. Who we associated with and what political party to follow. As the children of Gandhi we had a strong socialist backbone, working with the people for the people. All there in black and white – literally – births, weddings, lots of weddings more of a social thing, and deaths. All of it laid out for you, a path to follow and never, ever deviating. For deviating, read only deviants deviate.

I had an open-mouthed hunger for all that would change me, take me away from the safety of family into the danger and excitement that I was seeing on the BBC - Nationwide, August 9, 1979, nudists on Brighton's beach. How scandalous I thought, secretly thrilled. How decadent, Brighton!

Having been dressed up in silk sarees and my mother's gold jewellery by my sisters I was catapulted in front of my Papa and uncles to a Bollywood dance number. I won't treat you, my Auntiji.

Growing up in Preston, in an Indian Asian community, gave me a strong sense of community, something which has always attracted me to Brighton – that sense of interconnected community, linking in with each other, supporting and platforming each other's work, ideas and finding common priorities. I'm an intersectional guy – northern, queer, Gujarati, British Asian, Hindi, gay and proud of all these things. My work, particularly my embroidering, brings these strands of my life together in a literal rich tapestry, evoking the skills of Gujarati craftspeople, the colours and vibrancy of Preston's diverse neighbourhoods, the hopeful zest of LGBTQ+ lives and the eye for details that being a child I remember she would break into her dance, croaking wildly, sounding more like a demented frog than a bird, then would end her performance with a powerful projection of foul, grey-green sludge poo, ejected at great speed on to the wall behind her aviary. There wasn't a member of my family that didn't have a Mildred power-poo story to share.

“She would break into her dance, croaking wildly, sounding more like a demented frog than a bird, then would end her performance with a powerful projection of foul, grey-green sludge poo”

I wanted to keep her spirit alive with me every day. I need to take care of Mildred, she needs regular gentle attention to keep her in top form and reminds me every day of the fabulous diversity that life can create. My living pets are my plants, who I dote on, and they're lucky to enjoy plenty of sunshine, which enables them to flourish and bloom year after year.

I've really missed Pride this year, along with Trans Pride, Brighton Bear Weekend and all the other comings togethers we have in the city and across the UK. I usually work with LGBTQ+ groups across on the city creating themes, costumes and glamour for Pride Parade entries. It's seriously hard work, but I love combining political activism with creative performance. I'm feeling a need to be louder than usual, bolder, brighter, to claim us some space, so being on the cover is an opportunity to shout: I'm a queer little British Indian man, older, fabulously wiser, with a needle and thread as my tiller in life, creating colourful interventions in life to celebrate its diversity and, most importantly, I'm still learning but HERE and hear me ROAR.
THE PURRFECT MATCH
Rachel Badham assesses the prevalence of pet ownership in the LGBTQ+ community

Our community is known for its commitment to the belief that love and acceptance are a human right, regardless of gender identity or sexuality, but it’s less frequently discussed that we’re also a community of pet lovers. According to the website Smart Gay Life, more than 70% of LGBTQ+ people are pet owners compared to 60% of heterosexual, cisgender people. So why do we love our furry friends so much?

Reports examining pet ownership in the older population living in San Francisco showed LGBTQ+ people were more likely to be pet owners. This was attributed to the fact that LGBTQ+ people were more likely to live alone or lack family connections due to prejudice. Older queer people who were not able to come out until later in life were also less likely to have a long-term partner.

Pets may not be the answer to the prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community, but their endless love and companionship has been a lifeline for many queer people

So it’s no surprise that in 2007, studies found that 90% of LGBTQ+ pet owners see their pet as their family. Dr Anna Muraco, a coordinator of the San Francisco study, stated that “the love and affection pets bring to people is very important”, so when many LGBTQ+ people are rejected by their legal families for their sexuality or gender identity, pets often become their surrogate family.

LGBTQ+ people are more likely to own pets in general, but Smart Gay Life also suggested that queer people are more likely to adopt shelter animals, attributing this to the sense of empathy we feel with them as we may have also experienced cruelty and feeling unwanted.

It’s now no secret that many LGBTQ+ people suffer from poor mental health, which the Mental Health Foundation relates to prejudice and discrimination. However, on a par with this, it’s widely acknowledged that the company of a pet can ease the symptoms of mental illness, with Medical News Today saying that pets may offer a ‘distraction’ from loneliness.

As more LGBTQ+ people struggle with their mental health, it’s likely more will turn to pets for support. A BBC Earth report, exploring why so many people own pets, stated that reproducing has an evolutionary benefit, whereas owning pets will provide you with nothing in return – yet millions still consider them an integral part of the family. I believe that due to the difficult circumstances many LGBTQ+ people are placed in, such as being rejected by their families or not meeting heteronormative expectations to marry and start a nuclear family, they often have a greater understanding of the value of unconditional love, which demands nothing back.

Pets may not be the answer to the prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community, but their endless love and companionship has been a lifeline for many queer people

MORE INFO
PANTALAIMON, NIKOLAIA

I adopted Pantalaimon (Pan for short) about nine years ago when in a very abusive relationship. He’d been stray and abused for a long time, then in a shelter, and was extremely anxious and suffering symptoms of PTSD. Having suffered childhood and adolescent abuse myself, I was also suffering (C)PTSD. I’m also autistic, plus I have multiple physical health conditions, and always felt nobody really understood how I felt or what I was going through. My relationship was extremely hard, and made me feel more alone than ever.

The minute I met Pan I felt a connection. He ran into my arms and I knew he was going to be my new sidekick and best friend. He took a while to settle in - he had never lived in a home before. He didn’t know what a sofa or a bed was, he was scared by bins and windows and the oven door opening. He would wake me up at night just to check everything was okay. Sometimes he’d panic for no reason. But soon he learned to play and go for walks and enjoyed cuddling and snuggling on the sofa.

Fast-forward nine years, I’m living alone, and the change has been so incredible. He’s a very confident, smart dog and emotionally very sensitive. If I have a meltdown or a flashback or a nightmare, he knows exactly how to calm me down. If I faint or have a seizure, he’s right there. He’ll bring me my phone or a cushion or sometimes something I’m not expecting (he’s not a trained assistance dog) but it’s usually something useful. I’ve used a wheelchair for years (I have HEDS and a brain tumour). I’m practising walking more and he gives me the confidence to try. He’s so patient with me. If I fall he’ll help me up again. He’s so gentle and kind.

He is still a very nervous dog - I have to manage his nervousness very carefully as he’s anxious around particular things and has a lot of trauma with particular situations. But he’s doing so well and we manage to work together to have a beautiful relationship. On days where I don’t think I can keep going, he keeps me going. I don’t think I’d be alive without this beautiful soul to keep me smiling. He’s getting old now but still playful and so cuddly and kind. I feel blessed to be a part of his life. I always say to people that I didn’t rescue him, he rescued me.

STAN & INDIE, EM

My name is Emma (I go by Em). My pronouns are she/her and I am a bisexual/pansexual human living in Brighton with my partner, cat and doggo. I’m thrilled to write a piece about how important pets are in improving our mental health (well this is certainly the case for me) and what they bring to our overall quality of life.

I’ve suffered from depression and anxiety disorder since I was 12, this is born from childhood trauma, which sadly is the case for way too many of us. It has manifested in severe and long-term agoraphobia, obsessive compulsive behaviours, suicidal thoughts.

When I’m at my worst, I lose all concept of reality, including forgetting how to do the simplest of things like using my phone to make a call. I also begin to stumble over my words, unable to make a full sentence. This makes communicating very difficult and overwhelming for me, so I begin to shut down and avoid speaking on the phone or in person. This is a shock for a lot of people as when I’m at my best I present as a very upbeat, social and warm person. One of the best therapies for me has come from owning pets. Please let me introduce my fur babies, Indie and Stanley.

Ten years ago, a tiny cat named Indie came into my life. We found out that she was given to us way too young after we were informed by the vet that she was only four weeks old and had barely started weaning. This resulted in myself and my partner teaching her how to be a cat. This wasn’t something we’d prepared for so, after a lot of research combined with trial and error, we had a cat who behaved more like a dog than a cat! She is such a character and has been a beam of light throughout my darkest times, never leaving my side when I need her (or when she wants feeding of course). She’s very tiny and still looks like a kitten but acts like a chilled-out lady of leisure.

Most recently, we rescued a pup named Stanley. I couldn’t have predicted the effect bringing a dog into our life would have. I was in the midst of a breakdown when Stan arrived and hadn’t left the house in five months. Here was this pup who had been through an awful lot in the first six months of his life. He was scared and alone and needed me as much as I did him. Since he has arrived, he has taught me patience, focus and acceptance. He makes me laugh when all I want to do is cry, helps me leave the house when agoraphobia begins to rear its head and watching him overcome what he’s been through each day inspires me to do the same.

All we need to do now is convince the cat that he is worthy of her time (she is a total diva and we love her for it).
A worker honeybee (they’re all female) will progress through a series of tasks and ‘professions’ in her short life. They progress through several roles: nursery worker, cleaner, shelf/comb stacker, quartermaster, guard bee, honeycomb architect and builder and, finally, the ultimate prize, to be a forager, allowed out into a very dangerous but enthralling world, dodging insect-eating birds, spiders, wasps and hornets, finding sources of food for their sisters, and coming home to dance about it.

A good book that imagines life inside a honey bee colony is The Bees by Laline Paull. It does anthropomorphise the bee society, but it does help with understanding them. Insects have such an alien way of living compared to us mammals.

From egg to bee
Every bee starts as an egg. The egg looks like a grain of rice but is a tenth of that size. With careful tending and feeding, the egg becomes a larva. That larva is again nurtured until it’s capped and undergoes a metamorphosis. After the transformation a new bee will emerge, using its mandibles to eat through the wax seal, much like a chick from a bird egg. When we inspect our colonies, we often see little heads poking out of the comb as they nibble their way out. I always proclaim “It’s a girl!”, as 90% of them are workers. Queens are workers who have been fed extra royal jelly at the larval stage.

Boys, boys, boys
What do the male honeybees do? (They’re called drones due to their louder noise when their wings beat.) Well, they serve two purposes: to fertilise a queen and to keep the workers happy, and that’s it.

Honeybee colonies have been shown to have a better temperament when drones are present. I’m not sure if scientists know why yet. Perhaps when drones are around they emit a pheromone that pleases the workers, or perhaps the workers are aware that if a queen fails or dies there are males around to breed with a ‘princess’ leading to a new laying queen. The fate of the colony rests on having a constant supply of new bees.

The mating isn’t as glorious as it sounds. Drones from miles around will gather in congregation zones, such as above a landmark tree. The queen will sniff them out and fly among them, mating with up to 20-30 drones. The drones have much larger eyes to spot the maiden queens, and they mate with them in the air. The genital apparatus of the drones contains an explosive bladder of gas that ensures ‘purchase’ with the queen. This explosion kills the drone outright, and he falls to the ground, hopefully with an eternal insect smile on his face.

The unlucky (or perhaps lucky) drones that don’t mate can live for months, dropping into many hives (not just their birth hive), and getting fed and cleaned by the workers. Then, tragically, in the autumn the workers decide they’ve had enough of the drones and refuse them entry, leaving them starving and dying outside each colony. We call this the ‘dearth’. The reason for this mass cull is that drones consume too many resources over winter. It’s more cost effective to the survival of the colony to create new drones in the spring when resources start to increase.

THE GOLD AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW
David Fray on the magic of bees

Picture this. You’re about to take part in the biggest heist of the year. You’re tooled up and ready for action. There will be guards and you’ll have to sow confusion in their ranks to fool them. Perhaps smoke will be best – they won’t see you and they won’t smell you, at least, not until it’s too late. You’re suited up – it’s not wise to go in unprotected. Do you trust your accomplices? It’s best to have more than one person on this job, that gold is going to be heavy to cart away amid the chaos. You have your exit strategy planned, there might be a chase once the theft is noticed.

What are you? You are a beekeeper.
Robbing their surplus honey is the reward you get for tending to them, keeping them free from disease and safe from predators and parasites.
Questions...
As a beekeeper, there are some commonly asked questions that I hear.

How long does a bee live? A worker can live as little as six weeks in summer, and a few months outside the busy season. A queen can live up to five years. The drones can live from March to October, as long as they don’t mate.

Does getting stung hurt? Yes, it hurts! And getting stung several times at once hurts even more. I carry antihistamines and an Epipen in my toolbox in case I become allergic.

How much honey do you harvest? It varies from year to year; I’m not competitive about it as some keepers can be. I don’t measure it. I’m not too greedy, as they work very hard for their supplies. From a strong colony, I guess I would take 10-20kg per hive.

How much does it cost to start? To start up, you can buy a cheap hive and suit and tools from £150. There is usually always second-hand equipment for sale from keepers who have retired. You can buy bees, or get them free from swarms from your local association.

MORE INFO
Our Brighton and Lewes Beekeepers Association is friendly. I know a few LGBTQ+ beekeepers. If you don’t have access to a garden or land, they have sites across Sussex where you can keep your bees.

BLOSSOM & RUPERT, NEIL & AFFY
We’ve got two rescue moggies, Blossom (19) and Rupert (four). We got Blossom when she was eight, along with her sister, who died a couple of years ago. Blossom was not quite right for a while after – she’s very clingy and loves her daddy!

I’ve had cats from as early as I can remember. I love their independence. You are theirs, they are not yours. Blossom is constantly judging, like an elderly relative. She’s really determined. If you don’t allow her to do something she will have a hissy fit and tell you off. It definitely feels like cats are equals. Rupert is the first boy cat we have had. He’s so soppy, while the females are more intelligent and independent.

Our working days are devoted to them – I’m glad I don’t have to commute any more. It’s quite a luxury for us to be able to spend all day with them. We do govern our world around them – we won’t go on holiday if we think there’s anything wrong, we have house sitters rather than sending them anywhere. We don’t dress them up. We once got them some cravats but when we put them on they slumped low to the ground and tried to walk backwards out of them.

They eat better than us - Blossom has a raw diet of chicken and line-caught fish. They are the family that’s with you through thick and thin.
MADGE, HUBBELL & ARNIE, WILDBLOOD & QUEENIE
Since we first met we’ve always had some feline action in our life and our current rulers Madge and Hubbell are heading towards their 13th year with us. Defiantly in charge of the roost, they keep us in check and fill each day with affection - depending on the supply of fish fingers and custard obviously.

Arnie, the latest addition to our household, is a two-year-old rescued mutley from Portugal who joined us two weeks before lockdown. He is the dog we never knew we needed, fulfilling the cliché of becoming the rescue dog that rescued us. It helps that he looks exactly like a cartoon of the ideal dog Queenie would have drawn if asked.

And after much bribery the three of them all get along, especially when Madge is in charge of the aforementioned fish fingers, and although there is definitely less room on the sofa for us humans since he arrived, Arnie has filled this year of the unknown with the certainty of love. Unconditional, overexcited, love.

BOBBY & PHOEBE, GENA & SOPH
Bobby (short for Bob The Drag Queen) is our lockdown baby. He joined us in a very difficult time for everybody, and has brought so much joy to us ever since.

At just four months now, he doesn’t fail to entertain. His favourite naughty pastimes include: climbing our clothes-drying rack like a climbing frame and pulling all of the clothes off, sleeping in the sink, sitting on top of our moving fan, taking down our fairy lights and jumping in our fridge as soon as the door opens and refusing to get out. He is the most affectionate little man and we have loved spending our lockdown spoiling him and getting to know his cheeky personality. Your mums love you Bob-cat.

Phoebe is the most gorgeous dog with the biggest personality. She was the newest addition to my parents’ house about a year before I left home – their replacement baby. She never fails to put a smile on anyone’s face and she loves nothing more than a belly rub or a cuddle... or treats. She normally wears a pink tartan bow-tie, apart from Pride when she accessories with rainbow ribbons.

LILY, HILARY
Lily is completely one of the family; she loves everyone, especially Rachel and her brother. She grew up with them and is 17 now. I can’t remember what life was like without her. She is so companionable and affectionate.

Lily loves to potter in the garden with me when I’m watering the plants or curl up on your lap in the winter, and she also loves playing hide and seek, which makes me laugh. She is always happy to see us (even if it is because she is hopeful for something to eat!) and has made us happy too.'
Mark Richardson, fundraising and communications manager at FareShare Sussex, has a pet that would be the envy of many

Mark Richardson has a love of all things Icelandic, which he attributes to having started with the band Sigur Ros and their documentary film Heima. “It’s an amazing film that follows the band around Iceland playing their songs in small venues like village halls for local people. Beautiful. The scenery is stunning. I saw it in 2007 and the love affair began.”

That love affair extends to Mark’s choice of pet – he has a six-year-old rare breed Icelandic pony, which he keeps at Rottingdean and rides every day around the Downs. Jonsi – named after the lead singer of Sigur Ros – is the first horse Mark has owned, although he’s previously loaned them for two or three days a week, and he has a long history with them.

“When I was younger I used to do all the stuff that horse-mad kids do, but at 18 I went to university in London and lost touch with horses. When I hit my 50s I thought I would like to get in touch again. Icelandic ponies are small and robust, so there’s not so far to fall, which is quite important at my age.”

Once he had decided on the sort of horse he wanted, Mark started following breeders’ Facebook pages and one day a particular event caught his eye. A stud in Wales had nine brood mares that were having a summer off and resting in the fields – except it turned out they hadn’t had a summer off.

“A Welsh stallion got wild in the field and had his wicked way with them, giving them nine foals they didn’t expect,” says Mark. As the breeders are very particular about their horses’ heritage, the foals were being sold at an affordable price. Looking at the ‘babies’ as they were being born, one in particular stood out to Mark, and when it was three days old he asked if he could have him. Jonsi was six months old when he came to Brighton.

Jonsi’s lineage makes him exceptionally rare. Not only is he a sturdy mix of Welsh stallion and Icelandic mare, but “winter foals are unusual,” says Mark. “They normally come in the summer to give them a chance to harden up. Breeders are very defensive about purity, so this was a happy accident.”

Taking on Jonsi led Mark on an “amazing journey to learn how to train this horse”. He took a course in equine behaviour and immersed himself in making sure Jonsi got used to the world and all its oddities. From walking around the fields they worked their way up to long-reining, a form of riderless exercise which involves standing behind the horse “like you’re an invisible cart”, and getting it to walk on its own and get used to turning left and right.

“Jonsi’s amazing. He likes to use his brain so I started to do horse agility with him. It’s similar to dog agility – you get them used to various objects so they’re not startled when you’re out on the road and a car goes by or something. You don’t want them to run, so it’s a way of getting them used to the fact that humans do really weird things. We had to develop a bond so he knows whatever I do would not be dangerous.”

As with dog agility there’s a competitive element to horse agility, although this isn’t the most important aspect for Mark – rather it’s the experience of going somewhere new and trying different things for Jonsi.

To that end they take part in TREC contests, which test the skills of horse and rider in planning and executing a long-distance ride in unfamiliar country. However, Mark and Jonsi only undertake these two or three times a year as the cost of hiring transport is prohibitive. While some pet owners like to treat their animals by buying them clothes and toys, Mark’s approach is to spoil Jonsi by keeping him as natural as possible.

“I don’t use a bit because I don’t like putting things in his mouth – he has learned to go left and right and change speed to my voice. He doesn’t wear shoes because they don’t have them when they’re living in the wild. You can get rainbow lead ropes and saddle bags, as well as all types of coats, but his coat is really thick anyway. The horse I had before this was a cob and she looked beautiful with her mane plaited, but he looks really good rough.”

Keeping a horse might sound like hard work to many – not least the all-weather nature of the task – but clearly the pay-off is more than worth it for Mark.

“ Icelandic ponies are small and robust, so there’s not so far to fall, which is quite important at my age.”

Mark explains that horses are prey creatures, so their first instinct on sensing danger is to run away. “You have to understand that because it really helps in training.”

When Jonsi was four Mark was able to saddle him up and sit on him. After a further six months they started going for riding lessons and jumping. “He really, really likes jumping,” says Mark. “I’m not sure I like it as much as him. Mainly we go out for long rides. Every morning I come up to Rottingdean and we go for rides around the Downs. It’s a wonderful way to connect with nature and build this incredible bond. I do it in all weathers although it’s not always such fun when it’s raining and horrible.”
Gscene

tramping round the streets looking for him and following up FB messages and phone calls reporting sightings which turned out to be false alarms. Frances even managed to persuade one or two nonplussed cats into the cat basket and brought them home for me to double check they weren’t Dave. We got to know the neighbours, their gardens and our neighbourhood VERY well.

Not only were our hearts broken but we also suffered calamitous accidents and high drama while searching: a broken thumb, a badly sprained ankle, being physically attacked by a troubled teen, and having to take a dead cat that someone found and thought might be Dave to the vet to be identified.

Just when we had almost given up hope of ever finding him, our family was reunited after someone reported a stray cat who had been living at the bottom of their nan’s garden for four months over a mile away by the cemetery. It turned out to be our darling. We were totally overjoyed to have the love of our life back home though I’m not sure he thought the 11pm curfew from then on was entirely fair…

TILLY, CASSIE

This is my cat, Tilly, who I’ve had since she was a kitten and I was 24 years old. When my partner at the time presented her to me as a surprise, I wasn’t overjoyed as I always thought I’d be when I finally got my own pet. Instead I was terrified that I was too young for the responsibility and this led to many a sleepless night.

It turned out that having a cat at a relatively young age was incredibly grounding and helped to give me structure and purpose as I navigated the challenges of new jobs, numerous house moves and breakups of my 20s.

TILLY

Dave hangs out with his best friends Elfie and Basil from next door. Basil is the notorious Cats Of Hanover Knicker Nickers who steals pants from neighbours’ washing lines as ‘gifts’ for his owner. Local and national TV and newspaper coverage suggested Dave was his accomplice and branded them as ‘Purr-verts’.

Three years ago Dave went missing for over four months and we were totally bereft. We put ‘Dave Missing’ posters up everywhere and alerted all the local lost cat websites and Facebook pages. Every day was spent tramping round the streets looking for him and following up FB messages and phone calls reporting sightings which turned out to be false alarms. Frances even managed to persuade one or two nonplussed cats into the cat basket and brought them home for me to double check they weren’t Dave. We got to know the neighbours, their gardens and our neighbourhood VERY well.

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MYLO, MARIE

I’m a dog lover and Mylo brightens up almost every day. He’s a very bold character and usually can be heard before seen.

I love music and have always written it when time allowed and I’ve been doing a lot more of it lately. Mylo is rather highly strung, he is known down the salon as a drama queen, so I thought I’d try writing some ambient-style music to see if he liked it. According to various articles, the common thread of animal music is that the bpm is usually 80. So I’ve had great fun messing around, learning how to record sounds like the sea and rain and it’s been great. Mylo comes to visit me by pawing on the door of my little studio when the music is on – he usually has a doze unless a pesky seagull must be told whose house this is. Even playing the rain and sea at night has helped reduce some of the random single barks that are always such a treat. As someone captioned this picture, because he’s worth it!

SEB, RICHARD & NEIL

I thought I’d share this pic of me, my partner Neil and our lovely four-year-old Greek rescue hound, Seb. He’s our constant companion. Never judges, never argues, is always on hand for a much-needed hug and is a bit of a man-magnet when we’re out for walks. Cough. They’re not interested in us, but they are in Seb! I’ve been working from home since February and he’s been the best company over lockdown. Life’s so much better with a dog!

CHARLIE, GRAY

Charlie came to us as a rescue puppy at about 10 weeks after a friend rescued him from a difficult domestic situation. I was working with LGBT Switchboard at the time when my friend gave me a bell to say they were outside and had a surprise... and there was Charlie! My friend was unsure what would happen to him, as there was a long wait for dog homes and their flat wasn’t big enough. As soon as my partner saw the picture she was like ‘we have to take him!’ and ever since he’s been a part of the family.

We’ve also had another rescue join us from Romania, called Luna. They spend most of their time chasing each other round, bickering over a squeaky ice cream toy. Best thing about him is his cheeky character and how he has to constantly be in contact with us for a cuddle. His worst habit is his toxic farts and how he really seems to enjoy digging up freshly planted flowers.

Lockdown was so isolating and he gave us a reason to get up in the morning and go out for a walk some days when it was tough - but he’s also company that would make us laugh! We’ve both said it would have been a lot harder without him, we’re very lucky.

SEB THE MAN MAGNET WITH RICHARD & NEIL

CHARLIE & LUNA

CHARLIE & GRAY - OUR FIRST MEETING
Betty & Fiona, Graham

Betty and Fiona – my little furry sidekicks. I rescued these gorgeous girls about seven years ago from a cat shelter in Portslade. I was told that Betty was found waddling around Western Road, heavily pregnant; Fi rescued looking lost and worse for wear.

“She will never be a lapcat!”, the cat lady panted as she tried to coax a timid Betty from the corner of a room she shared with a bossy Tom. No wonder she’d been there for months... She was seldom ever seen! But how wrong the cat lady was!

Nowadays, there’s nothing more comforting than to have Betty’s pins clinging to my exposed leg for dear life. Princess Fi, as she is known, prefers what was at one time, probably one-hour max, my foot stool...

As girl cats they’re both fiercely independent, brilliant alarm clocks, can often drive me up the wall/around the bend, but I love them and their company very much!

Betty & Fiona

Tropical fish, stick insects, frogs, an axololt, a baby alligator, newts, gerbils, guinea pigs, rabbits, cats, dogs. I think that’s the full roster of creatures that graced my childhood home at one time or another and after setting out on my own I continued to have cats, but as soon as I was in a position to get a dog I was on the case.

Having grown up with an Alsatian I really thought it would be a big dog that stole my heart, but the day I set eyes on a Miniature Schnauzer for the first time, I knew that would be the dog for me. That first meeting was in a shop called R. Soles in the North Laine back in the early 1990s and the dog was called Roly. I did my research and discovered that not only were Minis the most stunning-looking dogs, they didn’t moult and their temperament was gentle, relaxed and funny. They were equally happy to yomp for miles through the countryside or just take a short spin around the block if you weren’t up for a trek – in short, they were the perfect utility dog.

And so Scooter came into my life. She was followed by Truffle, who was joined a couple of years later by Macy. And when we lost Macy, Sydney came to keep Truffle company in his final years (he was 16 when we had to say goodbye).

Sydney & Jaq

Sydney, or Squid, or Squiddles, as she is more often called, is now five and unashamedly our child substitute. She is funny, naughty, loving and has the most extraordinary vocabulary, which includes an astonishing sequence of trills and squeals that constitute what is known as “the greeting”, reserved for the chosen few. She is also a massive thief of socks, underwear and especially shoes, as can be seen from the pictures.

I couldn’t imagine life without a dog now and Minis are definitely my breed, although I am a huge fan of all dogs. When I went through a period of major depression it was that canine companionship that kept me afloat, and the unconditional love they give that lifted me when I didn’t feel liftable.

The power of pet ownership is quite magical – they give so much and their ability to make you feel special when that seems an impossibility is testament to their therapeutic abilities. That aside, my dogs have helped me discover places I would probably never have gone and meet people I would probably never have met. They truly have enriched my life in so many ways.

Princess Fi

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KEVIN, BESI

Kevin always put a smile in our faces. He has been amazing support for me and such a great companion to have. When I’m working and have passed his lunchtime walk, he will come to tell me. He can also be grumpy and sassy hehe. And just to clarify any rumours, Kevin is gay. When we come home, he still looks for James.

A Tale Of Two Kitties… or more precisely Four Moggies & A Funeral.

After 40 years in Brighton, Gary and I moved, lock, stock and Mau, our black and white eight-year-old moggie, to Valencia four years ago. We hated the idea of putting her in an aircraft hold, so bought a car, drove two hours to Portsmouth, 24 hours in a pet friendly ferry cabin, drove another five hours to Valencia, and then sold the car.

Within three months a friend found an eight-week-old fluffy kitten on the street, so we took her in and called her Bea.

Then last year we heard a loud crying coming from a wheel arch across the plaza, and took two hours to coax a jet black eight-week-old kitten out with some jamon. A little bob tail meant we called him Bob. He grew big and strong, but at ten months old he died, and we don’t know why.

Since the Universe proved adapt at providing us with our feline family, we waited, and sure enough, in the middle of lockdown we heard that a 10-week-old ginger kitten needed rehoming, and we’re now bringing Max up.

They all bring joy, interest, and love to our lives, and don’t need to be walked.
Pippin, Ralf & Martin
This is me with my husband Martin and our dog Pippin. We met Pip through borrowmydoggy.com six years ago, and Pip has lived with us now for about five years. We’re co-parenting with her owner, which is handy if we’re going away to dog un-friendly places. She’s a lot calmer now than when we first met - she would kick off at any dog regardless of size and would shout at children across the street, but now she’s a chilled lady (mostly). I love her dearly, we both do, even if she rarely goes through the night without having to have a sniff around the garden in the small hours to save us from real or imagined dangers.

Rocky, Gary
This is Rocky, aged nine in lockdown summer 2020. Rocky is everything to love in a being - authentic, independent, playful, usually ready for a kiss and always up for a walk! I love my dog.

Annie & Tommy, Sue & Vix
Introducing Tommy, a Patterdale Terrier aged 14, and Annie aged 16 plus, a Parson Russell Terrier. They are both rescues from a charity which rescues smaller dogs from council pounds all over the UK, Tommy from Wigan and Annie from Bristol. It has to be said, they are not really fond of each other... Annie thinks Tommy is a cat poo-eating, escape artist who doesn’t take his responsibilities seriously and eats like a feral dog. Tommy thinks Annie is too bossy and needs to chill out, especially as she has arthritis. Both have bad breath. But they are our ‘dear little friends’ and ‘the kids’ despite having the human equivalent ages of great grandparents in their twilight years. We adore them both obviously, and they continue to give us immense joy and substantial vet bills.
Loki and give her a new life in Brighton.

Becoming a dog dad, after only ever having had cats before, was a learning curve. I really enjoyed teaching Loki how to play, but I didn’t enjoy trying to teach her how to walk. She wouldn’t walk, only sit or stand in the middle of the pavement for ages. Looking back on it now I can only imagine what she might have been feeling, having been thrust into the care of strange humans in a strange land. Odd as it may seem, I could see a lot of myself in Loki. A lost pup who needed a home and family.

The relationship with my partner changed and we separated. Years later we’re friends again and I went to visit them both in their new home in Sweden this autumn. What amazes me is not only that Loki remembers me, but that she is visibly excited and happy to see me. She almost knocked me to the ground when I arrived at the station. Even the mention of my name makes her ears prick up.

PuFy, Lisa

My beautiful three-legged bestie PuFy was a street dog in Romania before she came into my life. She is covered in scars, I can’t imagine what she’s been through. She’s the most loving, gentle little being. I could go on and on about how wonderful she is! Everyone loves PuFy, it warms my heart every time I see people smile when they spot her.

PuFy has helped me through some incredibly difficult times, I honestly don’t know what I’d have done without her by my side. It’s definitely more a case of her rescuing me than the other way round.

The bond we have is unlike one I’ve ever experienced with an animal. I feel very honoured to be part of her pack.
The first time Louie and I met, I was washing my car outside my parents’ house, and this little pocket rocket came bounding out of my neighbour’s house to come and say ‘hello’! He was only a puppy, a Dachshund-Jack Russell cross (affectionately known as a ‘butch sausage’), complete with obligatory Doberman comedy eyebrows! Puppies being puppies, his mum, Jas, wasn’t aware of him bolting out of the house, and he unfortunately overshot and ended up gunning for the road… I have never had such a mix of elation and sudden horror in such quick succession as I had to step out and grab him and stop the car that was unwittingly trundling along at that precise moment. Both the driver and I let out a sigh of relief. I am a firm believer that our encounter and me being necessarily forceful with him at that moment forged our relationship into a firm and loving one.

I absolutely loved Louie, and he absolutely loved me. I’d never experienced such unconditional love from an animal. He was a little scallywag for his mum, and we always laughed at how well behaved he was when he was with me. Over the years I would take him out for walks, rides in the car and he would sit by the car if he wanted to go for an adventure! Whenever I took him up to the Fiveways I got into the habit of stopping by each road even when it was quiet, and in the end I didn’t need to say anything, he’d just sit, wait and look at me for the next instruction.

When I took on the studio, he would come to work with me from time to time. He loved the extra attention and the company. It was like I was his surrogate dad. It was such a lovely arrangement; his mum knew he was in safe hands with me, and due to my work situation, couldn’t commit to having a dog of my own. I would say ‘speak!’ and he’d let his mum know we were home! Such fond memories of such a beautiful boy.

He had a long life but inevitable tragedy struck a few years ago. I got the dreaded call from Jasmine telling me that Louie got spooked, bolted out of the house and got hit by a car, in the very spot where I grabbed him out of the road all those years ago. I was heartbroken. It was a hit and run, and Louie had to be put down at the vets as his injuries were too severe.

The way I have tried to deal with the loss of Louie is that if I didn’t pull him out of the road all those years ago, I would never have known how much a dog can have such a positive impact on someone. He was taken too soon, but had a long and happy life. I will always have a special place in my heart for my trusty sidekick.

Lympie lives in Brighton with her mum, Zoe. When she was about three years old, Lympie came to live with Zoe. Before this time, Lympie was known to be homeless, living in a shed, and then she was knocked down by a car. She was taken to the vet as she had broken one back leg; the other back leg sadly needed to be amputated. A friend who is a vet asked Zoe to look after the cat (who was called Olive at the time).

After a while of fostering Olive, Zoe realised she couldn’t let her go and decided on adoption. One night when sipping Margaritas with some friends, Zoe decided to change Olive’s name to Olympia; on hearing this, Zoe’s drinking companions laughed out loud and exclaimed “Look it’s Lympie!”. Hence Olive became Lympie.

Lympie now has two and a half working legs. She is loved by everyone who meets her and during lockdown she has hopped around happily. She helps Zoe, who loves Lympie’s big blue eyes, stay happy and we’re always amazed at how quickly she can hop up and down the stairs. She’s quicker than Zoe and probably could beat Usain Bolt in a sprint to her kibble.
GUIDING LIGHT

Richard Jeneway’s guide dog, Clover, not only keeps him safe when he’s out and about, she’s his companion and a great leveller when it comes to interacting with new people of all ages.

Some of my earliest memories are as a four-year-old child growing up in the New Forest. Having much older siblings, the family dog became my best friend – boy and his Corgi heading off along country lanes, exploring and having adventures.

As a natural progression when I left home, I was determined to have a dog of my own. Aged 21 on holiday in Cornwall, we happened across a farm where there was a sign advertising ‘puppies for sale’. My heart instantly melted when I met a little broken-coated terrier, which I purchased for the princely sum of £10. Esther, as I named her, remained my companion for 15 years. Other much-loved terriers followed and in 1998 a rescue dog called Sonny came into our lives and went on to become an extraordinary companion to me as my partner died the following year.

That little dog became my reason to continue, grounding me into reality when I could have gone off the rails. Even with my sight diminishing he stood by me, learning the tube and bus routes to home in London, becoming my helping dog emotionally and physically. We became inseparable until he died in 2005.

From losing my sight in 2006 and using a white cane, to getting my first guide dog in 2011, I didn’t realise how much independence I had lost. Sabin helped to break down social barriers and my own self-imposed stigma, giving me the confidence to become a volunteer.

Clover, who is my guide dog now, took over responsibility for me in 2016. I’ve no useful vision so rely totally on Clover keeping us both safe. She draws people of all ages to her with offers to help or just wanting to meet a guide dog who loves the attention. Clover and I have attended events representing guide dogs, including pre-school where small children ask awkward questions about my eyes and, to them, my great age, while climbing all over Clover, which in itself helps them to understand and accept. Clover is also popular in residential homes for older people – seeing and stroking the dog can have a very positive effect, which is evident in the smiles on faces as she passes from resident to resident.

It’s proven that interacting with dogs or cats and other animals impacts positively, benefitting both parties, helping to reduce stress, anxiety and blood pressure as well as lowering the heart rate. Stroking the animal produces in the brain endorphins, which give us that feelgood factor. There is evidential research that some people with autism can relate to animals easier than humans, learning about bonding and responsibility and receiving unconditional love. People in institutions such as prisons have shown markedly behavioural improvements.

With a dog you also have the benefit of physical exercise, which likely leads to chance encounters with others, which in itself can help to relieve social isolation and loneliness. This is relevant currently with an ageing population where many now live alone, and lockdown due to Covid-19 has significantly increased those feelings of isolation.

Given the level of trust and responsibility between guide dog and owner, there needs to be a clear demarcation between work and play. I personally ensure Clover has plenty of free time to play and exercise with our two Jack Russells and other dogs. I can’t imagine my own life without a dog as a companion. To anyone considering getting a dog, either a puppy or rehoming a rescue, take into consideration the dog’s need for accommodation, time and exercise. You will find a whole new sector of your community willing to engage where once they would have walked on by.

The Benefits of Pets

Two of Richard’s friends offer their personal and professional thoughts on guide dogs and pet ownership in general.

Malcolm Jemison, retired photographer and friend, says: “My elderly neighbour across the hall from me is almost blind. She lives alone and seldom leaves home, but I’ve noticed when her son visits with his friendly little dog it runs headlong down our long hallway to greet her. When it arrives the smile of delight on Ms Neighbour’s face at the open doorway is a delight to behold.

“I also frequently look on at the dynamic between Richard and his guide dog Clover. I find it truly amazing the amount of trust he puts in her as a working animal. Sure, they have both been trained to work together but Clover, after all, is responsible for her owner’s life as he goes about his daily business. I’ve watched her guide him safely along our narrow, uneven streets, past thoughtlessly parked vehicles, badly placed sandwich boards, temporary scaffolding and all sorts of other unpredictable hazards. If it’s just a weekly visit, as in Ms Neighbour’s case, or an ongoing daily relationship like Richard’s, dogs can certainly add an extra level of richness, pleasure and quality to life. Where would we be without them?”

Andi Myles-Wright, CPsychol AFBPsS, British Psychological Society Chartered Psychologist, Associate Fellow in Psychology and friend, says: “Regardless of shape, size, or type, pets can support a range of positive physical health benefits, as demonstrated by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). On a psychological level, pets help to increase two of our vital brain chemicals for survival and safety - serotonin and dopamine, which promote relaxation and aid emotional balance.

“Pets also help to fulfil our basic needs for touch, unconditional love, consistency, and mutual affection, all of which act as powerful influences upon a positive sense of self. The innate healing properties of pets makes them an invaluable part of modern-day life for many. They are a source of comfort, hope and optimism during some of our most challenging life experiences.”
**SHOPPING**

**WITH MICHAEL HOOTMAN**

1. **Kay Bojesen Lovebirds, £99**  
   (Hold, 14 Bond Street, Brighton)

2. **Chameleon Lamp, £90**  
   (England at Home, 22b Ship Street, Brighton, 01273 205544)

3. **Candles 4 for £16**  
   (Dowse, 27 Gloucester Road, Brighton)

4. **Love Bracelet, £75**  
   (Pussy, 3a Kensington Gardens, Brighton, 01273 604861)

5. **Tom Taylor cards reduced from £2.75 to £1**  
   (Prowler, 112-113 St James's Street, Brighton, 01273 603813)

6. **Clay Stem Vase, £130**  
   (Workshop, 13a Prince Albert Street, Brighton, 01273 731340)
**AFTER THE FOX** (BFI Blu-ray). This mid-1960s heist comedy has a lot of talent involved: its director is **Vittorio De Sica** (*Bicycle Thieves*), the writer is playwright **Neil Simon** and it stars **Peter Sellers**. Sellers plays an Italian career criminal who imports some stolen gold by pretending to make a film about criminals importing stolen gold. Evidently it’s gained a cult following for the way it parodies pompous directors and pretentious film critics (though the satire is so obvious, and so ridiculous, it’s barely satire). **Victor Mature** as the Hollywood film star who hasn’t come to terms with the ageing process probably gives the best performance – and, for me, delivered the sole laugh – but on the whole the film’s cultural and entertainment value is minimal.

**MADEMOISELLE** (BFI Blu-ray). **Tony Richardson**’s movie, based on a script by **Genet**, is atypical for a director associated with social realism (*Look Back in Anger, A Taste of Honey*) but it could well be his masterpiece. **Jeanne Moreau**’s icy charisma lends itself perfectly to the role of a teacher in a French village who – for reasons which aren’t elucidated – commits various acts of malign cruelty. An itinerant Italian woodsman is blamed by the small-minded villagers, while his son is routinely humiliated by Moreau. **David Watkins**’ black and white Scope photography is stunning and somehow imbues the beauty of the countryside with an almost sinister sheen. The movie is mythic rather than psychological which may infuriate some viewers – and a famous shot of Moreau caressing the woodsman’s snake is, no matter how much intellectual justification the director may have had, laughable as a Freudian cliche. In many respects it seems to have influenced Michael Haneke’s *The Piano Teacher* (the two films’ protagonists seem to share the same malign character and I don’t think it’s a coincidence by the small-minded villagers, while his son is genuinely ridiculed by Moreau. **David Watkins**’ black and white Scope photography is stunning and somehow imbues the beauty of the countryside with an almost sinister sheen. The movie is mythic rather than psychological which may infuriate some viewers – and a famous shot of Moreau caressing the woodsman’s snake is, no matter how much intellectual justification the director may have had, laughable as a Freudian cliche. In many respects it seems to have influenced Michael Haneke’s *The Piano Teacher* (the two films’ protagonists seem to share the same malign character and I don’t think it’s a coincidence

**TRANS PRIDE MEMORABILIA**

1. **Trans Pride Brighton** has announced a collaboration with **Trans Shop UK** on **Etsy** to offer people a limited opportunity to bag some old Trans Pride Brighton swag, including two T-shirt designs from 2018 and a batch from the 2019 event. Trans Pride Brighton says: “This is a great opportunity to snatch up memorabilia, help Trans Pride Brighton and support a trans-owned business in one fell swoop. Visit the Trans Shop UK Etsy shop and pick some complimentary pins for your future Trans Pride Brighton T-shirts!”
   - To buy, visit: [www.etsy.com/uk/shop/TransShopUK](http://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/TransShopUK)
   - For more info on Trans Pride Brighton, visit: [www.transpridebrighton.org](http://www.transpridebrighton.org)

**FAT PRIDE ART**

**FAT PIGEON ART DRAG QUEEN CHRISTMAS CARDS IN AID OF THE BRIGHTON RAINBOW FUND**

1. So, Christmas is coming and we’re all getting fat... or something like that. The coronavirus has certainly had an impact on every aspect of our lives and with Christmas just around the tinselled corner we’re all probably wondering what the celebrations will be like this year. Charities have been badly affected. Donations are down by as much as 70% and at a time when the demand for their help is probably higher than ever. Families may well be separated this Christmas due to local lockdowns and sanctions, which will no doubt put a damper on things.

But what can we do? How can we support the local charities as well as bring laughter to our loved ones, even if we are forced apart? **Fat Pigeon Art** had an idea to at least help out a little. Collaborating with UK drag queens, including **Kara Van Park**, **Dave Lynn**, **Lola Lasagne**, **Davina Sparkle**, **Sally Vate**, **Miss Jason** and **Spice**, a series of 12 Christmas cards have been designed with 50% of sales going directly to the **Rainbow Brighton Fund**, to help support our LGBTQ+ community. Humorous and colourful, they should bring a little bit of Christmas cheer to all who receive one. The cards are bright, funny and a real tribute to our gorgeous drag queens. They are limited, so get your orders in quick. If you want to reserve and pay before then, get in touch using the info below.

So, where? When? How much? I hear you all cry... They’ll be available to purchase from the end of October online via the **Fat Pigeon Art** Instagram and Facebook pages, at the **Grosvener Bar** thanks to **Collin and his crew**, and at **The Brighton Bird Cage** thanks to **Wain aka Kara Van-Park**. They come in packs of 12 and cost **£15** a pack.

Fat Pigeon Art also has a big collection of celebrity prints, mugs, T-shirts and other items available now on Instagram. Check it out! So, all that’s left to say is buy buy buy and carry on supporting our amazing LGBTQ+ community.

**MORE INFO**

- [fatpigeonartbrighton@outlook.com](mailto:fatpigeonartbrighton@outlook.com)
- [https://fatpigeonart.uk](https://fatpigeonart.uk) & @fatpigeonart & @fatpigeonart1
- The **Grosvener Bar**, 16 Western Street, Hove, BN1 2PG
- The **Brighton Bird Cage**, 35 Gloucester Road, Brighton, BN1 4AQ
**IRIS PRIZE LGBTQ+ FILM FESTIVAL 2020**

The wait is over for 15 filmmakers as the organisers of the Iris Prize, the Cardiff-based international LGBTQ+ short film prize, have announced the directors of the short films competing for this year’s Iris Prize Best British Short, supported by Film4. For the first time in the festival’s history, UK audiences can join in the experience by watching all the nominated shorts for free online. It also means the Iris Prize, which runs October 6–11, will be reaching a wider audience than ever. Audiences can explore a multitude of stories reflecting richly diverse LGBTQ+ experiences of contemporary British life in cities or countryside. The filmmakers invite audiences on journeys of self-discovery and belonging from childhood into old age. These are tales of falling in and out of love, addressing personal battles lost and battles won, all filled with tears, laughter or hope. The films are billed as “a joyous celebration of how we express our individuality in our community, our family, and the wider world, helping to bring us together”.

The shortlist of 15 films are: **Better** by Michael J Ferns; **Cindy** by Rosanagh Griffiths; **Dungarees** by Abel Rubinstein; **Go Home Polish** by Jan Smith; **Just Me** by Adam Tyler; **Mandem** by John Ogumuyiwa; **My God, I’m Queer** by Matt Mahmood-Ogston; **Paint the Dragons’ Eyes** by James Lucas; **Pompeii** by Harry Lighton, Marco Alessi & Matthew Jacobs Morgan; **Queens** by Nick Bechman; **Queering Di Teknolodjik** by Timothy Smith; **Rhiw Goch (On the Red Hill)** by Anna Winstone; **The Passing** by Nichola Wong; **The Scene** by James Corley; **Wings** by Jamie Weston.

This year also marks the first new three-year sponsorship agreement with British producer/broadcaster Film4, which will acquire broadcast and streaming rights to each film.

**Berwyn Rowlands**, festival director, commented: “Congratulations to the Class of 2020.I hope that the many thousands who have shown an interest in Iris but have been unable to join us in Cardiff for our annual celebration of LGBTQ+ cinema, will get a better idea of what the fuss is all about. These films are without a doubt the best of the best.”

**Tim Highsted**, senior editor, acquired feature films for Film4, added: “The Iris Prize, with its focus on diversity, inclusion and new voices, and its setting in Cardiff, is a perfect fit for Film4. Short form content is a critical proving ground for rising talent, but with new platforms allowing for a wider range of voices to be heard, it’s also increasingly a draw for viewers. We’re looking forward to giving these filmmakers a chance to reach a nationwide audience through Film4 on All 4.”

All of the nominated films are eligible for consideration for BAFTA and can automatically be entered by the filmmakers. You can view all the shortlisted films with extra details about the directors by visiting www.irisprize.org/bestbritish/

Thirty-five international filmmakers will compete for £30,000 prize as organisers of the Iris International LGBTQ+ Short Film Prize, supported by the Michael Bishop Foundation, have announced this year’s shortlisted films. To see the full list of films, visit: www.irisprize.org/irisprize/

Directors from India, China, Brazil and Macedonia compete with counterparts from the UK and around the world, offering dramatically diverse representations within the global LGBTQ+ community. The one unifying factor in all 35 films is an exhilarating celebration of lives of LGBTQ+ people across the world. To see a trailer of shortlist films, visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v-tmRHc6DfL8g&feature=emb_title

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**BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL**

The 64th BFI London Film Festival (Oct 7–18) in its necessarily reimagined format announced its ambitious programme including 50 virtual premieres, previews at BFI Southbank and screenings in cinemas across the UK.

**Cicada**, directed by Matthew Fifer and Kieran Mulcare, stars Fifer, Sheldon D Brown and Sandra Bauleo. In New York City in 2013, a young bisexual man enters an inter racial relationship. Against the background of a cicada summer, he comes to terms with his own childhood trauma.

**Supernova**, directed by Harry Macqueen, stars Colin Firth, Stanley Tucci and Pippa Haywood. Sam and Tusker, partners for 20 years, travel across England in their RV to visit family and friends and places from their past. Diagnosed with early onset dementia, Tusker realises their time together is the most important thing they have.

To view the full programme, visit: www.bfi.org.uk/london-film-festival

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**SHE DOES FILMZ STREAMING PLATFORM**

**She Does Filmz** is a new streaming platform showcasing exclusively female-led films. Women filmmakers are getting the chance to showcase their talents thanks to the forward-thinking and inclusive She Does Filmz, which was set up by film fans who noticed that work by women filmmakers received less distribution than the work of their male counterparts. By subscribing, you can watch some of the best in filmmaking by women including The Watermelon Woman, written, directed and edited by Cheryl Dunye. This groundbreaking film stars Dunye as Cheryl, a young, black lesbian who, between working her day job, is trying to make a film about a black actress from the 1930s. Sweet, romantic and funny, The Watermelon Woman was declared ‘an impressive landmark work’ by Vanity Fair.

She Does Filmz brings iconic films past and present with no censorship, no taboos but with guaranteed film-festival quality! For more info, visit: www.shedoesfilmz.com

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SARAH HEGAZI MURAL
York Grove, Brighton, BN1 3TT

A mural for Egyptian human rights activist Sarah Hegazi, who took her own life while living in exile in Canada after being arrested, detained and tortured for raising the LGBTQ+ flag at a concert in Cairo in 2017, was revealed at York Grove, Brighton last month. The mural includes Sarah’s final words: ‘To the world. You were cruel, but I forgive you’ and Sara Alsherif, who organised the mural painting event, played Sarah’s favourite music while artists worked on it. Sara Alsherif, said: “Thank you to the fantastic artists, and everyone who helped to bring this mural to the light.”

SARAH JANE MOON INCLUDED IN ROYAL SOCIETY OF PORTRAIT PAINTERS’ EXHIBITION

LGBTQ+ artist Sarah Jane Moon’s portrait Nicole & Kai was included in the Royal Society of Portrait Painters’ Annual Exhibition at Mall Galleries, London last month. Sarah Jane Moon, an LGBTQ+ artist whose work explores identity, sexuality and gender presentation as well as interrogating formal painterly concerns, describes her portrait Nicole & Kai as “a portrait of two wonderfully creative women who live in Amsterdam and are friends of mine through the queer community”.

HOW ‘BOUT A CUPPA TEA?

Lesflicks, a film enthusiast website focusing on LBQ stories about women who love women, has secured the first women-loving-women short film about life in a world hit by Covid-19. How ‘Bout a Cuppa Tea, written and directed by Jan Miller Corran, delves into the silver linings that can accompany isolation. While many feel isolation is suffocating, this gentle story shows that you are not alone, and that positives can result when you’re forced to stop living in the rat race.

Naomi Bennett, Lesflicks founder, said: “I never in my wildest dreams thought that 18 months after launching Lesflicks as an initial concept, that we’d be fast tracking our launch and attracting so many new films and a growing audience. Since March we’ve run over 35 events online and re-entered the cinema to support the release of Summertime and adding over 50 films to the platform to meet growing demand. Lesflicks is a part-time volunteer-led organisation still in the bootstrapping phase and so I couldn’t be prouder of the team of amazing women who have joined my vision and helped us achieve everything we have so far!”

For more info on Lesflicks, visit: www.lesflicks.com

HASTINGS MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

Hastings, www.hmag.org.uk

Beginning with the HASTINGS OPEN where my painting Self Portrait As Archaic Sculpture will be on show till January 3, 2021. The Hastings Open is a major open-entry art show celebrating the creative talent of artists and makers from across the world. The exhibition brings together pieces from artists working in painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, digital and more, selected by a panel of practising artists and curators.

PINEAPPLE BLACK GALLERY

Middlesbrough, www.pineappleblack.co.uk

ENOUGH IS DEFINITELY ENOUGH (till Oct 17) includes 60 contemporary artists who have made new artworks in response to a postcard version of Velázquez’ Las Meninas, inspiring a huge variety of different artistic responses to the Spanish painter’s masterpiece. The artists in this exhibition build upon previous interpretations by renowned artists such as Pablo Picasso, Richard Hamilton, Francesco Goya and Eve Sussman. With these new artworks there is potential for new relationships with Velázquez’s original painting to open up. Curated by Andrew Bracey, and forming part of his PhD research at University of Lincoln, it explores how contemporary artists use and appropriate existing paintings by other artists, through a position of using the metaphor of the parasite and symbiosis in connection with painting. The exhibition is touring from General Practice, Lincoln and Oceans Apart, Salford, with new artists being added for Pineapple Black.

BEANEY HOUSE OF ART & KNOWLEDGE

Canterbury, www.canterburymuseums.co.uk/beaney

THE MUSEUM OF YOU (till Oct 18) includes two of my paintings and celebrates the creativity, stories and experiences of visitors and the local community, during the coronavirus pandemic. Every fortnight during the countrywide lockdown it released a new theme to inspire its audiences with ideas of art they could create. These themes were based on the six ways to wellbeing; Be Kind (in partnership with People United), Be Connected, Be Mindful, Be Active, Be Green and Be Inspired. Participants were encouraged to be as imaginative as possible. The responses varied in mediums from paintings, drawings and photographs, to textile, prints and other methods. The collective result is an inspiring snapshot of the lives of ordinary people during an extraordinary period in history.

ELYSIUM GALLERY

Swansea, www.elysiumgallery.com

Finishing with a solo art in the bar exhibition (Oct 3-Nov 7). The Elysium Gallery has become an effective and active arts provider within the Swansea community. Since 2007 Elysium has grown from a small roaming pop-up organisation to Wales’s largest studio provider and a gallery programme that has presented over 145 exhibitions featuring national and international artists.
REVIEWS

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet Piano Concertos of Beethoven (Chandos CHSA5273). French pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet turns his attention to the five Piano Concertos of Beethoven (1770-1827) for his latest project. He also throws in a performance of the Quintet for Piano and Winds, for which he is joined by players from the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, who play alongside him in the concertos.

Beethoven’s five concertos span well over 20 years of his career, and sketches exist at either end of concertos from as early as 1783 and as late as 1815. Here the five completed concertos are placed in order of their composition, so No. 2 in B flat major comes first, as it was actually composed back in 1787, before No. 1 in C major from 1795. No. 2 is clearly Mozartian, but already with Beethoven’s stamp, with dramatic contrast of emphatic statements followed by delicate responses in the slow movement, and constant playing with the sense of downbeat and upbeat in the joyful Rondo.

No. 1 has the same sense of rhythmic confusion in its Rondo, and here Beethoven makes wonderful use of the clarinet in conversation with the piano in the slow movement. There is sprightly energy from the Swedish Chamber Orchestra throughout, and Bavouzet positively fizzes in the rippling runs, and attacks the finales with a great sense of fun. On the other hand, his delicacy of touch in the slow movements is delightful, and this comes to the fore again in No. 3 in C minor. The Swedish wind players are also prominent here, and their conversational exchanges with Bavouzet are subtle and poised. In the faster movements, Bavouzet’s tempi are always brisk, but never feel rushed, his fast runs always fluid and effortless.

No. 4 in G major moves things on to another level, with a much broader sense of architecture, from its prayerful opening, right through to the galloping finale. Again, the slow movement is conversational, this time between just strings and the piano, with Bavouzet and the Swedish players creating a moment of intimacy amidst the grandeur of the outer movements.

No 5 in E flat major is again on a grand scale, and there is a real sense of opening out here, with more expansive playing from both Bavouzet and the orchestra. The central slow movement is understated, and Bavouzet avoids over-sentimentalising proceedings – although I could have tolerated a little more indulgence here. But this is a minor point of taste – overall, this is an impressive collection, and I’ll definitely be returning to this frequently. The bonus Quintet is a treat – the Swedish players here play alongside Bavouzet with great style, creating a pleasing palate-cleanser to round off the three-disc set.

Johan Löfving Fandango! (Resonus Classics RES10260). Last year I reviewed a delightful recording from Flaugiussimo Duo, who I first came across when they were part of the Brighton Early Music Festival’s BREM Live! scheme. Now, one half of the duo, guitarist Johan Löfving, has recorded Fandango!, a collection of music for solo guitar from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when the six-stringed guitar flourished in the salons and concert halls of Paris and Vienna. So the works on offer here vary from the Viennese classicism of Mauro Giuliani’s (1781-1829) Sonata Brillante, to the more explicitly Spanish influenced Fandango Varado by Dionisio Aguado (1784-1849), with its swirling dance rhythms and strumming flourishes. Interestingly, the guitar’s lack of ability to sustain notes creates interesting pregnant pauses in the slow movement of the Giuliani, but Löfving’s gentle vibrato manages to still make the melodies sing.

French composer Napoléon Coste’s (1805-1883) Soirées d’Auteuil is unashamedly romantic, full of operatic melodies, virtuosic runs and cascading arpeggios, and Löfving has great fun here. In the short Étude from Fernando Sor (1778-1839), Löfving’s touch is delicate and expressive, bringing out the duetting melodic lines with great sensitivity.

To close the disc, he is joined by the Consone Quartet, current BBC New Generation Artists, for a performance of Luigi Boccherini’s (1743-1806) Quintet No. 4. This opens with a warm Pastorale, full of birdlike violin twiddles and musette-droning lower strings. The sound here is somewhat muted, and the rippling guitar part is understated, with only a brief moment of emphasis towards the movement’s conclusion. The strings sound more insistent in the second movement, but again, perhaps with an aim to achieve the right balance with the quieter guitar, the overall sound is subdued, although energy picks up with rustic dancing and a joyful, trilling close to the movement. The final movement, after a dramatic introduction and guitar solo, launches into a spirited and lively Fandango, and here the performance takes flight.

To add to the joyful sense of occasion, Nanako Aramaki joins in with castanets, and the energy rises to a spirited conclusion with lots of string tremolo and guitar strumming. A fun end to a very enjoyable disc, full of refreshing and sprightly-performed repertoire.

Ivy Duo Piano Ensemble Elements of London (Convivium Records CRC055). The Ivy Duo Piano Ensemble (pianists Natalie Tsaldarakis and Panayotis Archontides) and composers Hugh Shrapnel (b.1947) and John Lewis (b.1947) were completely unknown to me, so their new disc, Elements of London, combining movements from two collections by the composers, was a total voyage of discovery. Lewis’ pieces (Elements) are all inspired and named after chemical elements, while Shrapnel’s (London) are all associated with people, places and even politics of South London – hence the combined title of the disc – and they are mixed together to form an overall programme. Despite their differing inspirations, the pieces fit together remarkably well, with influences of minimalism, jazz and blues cropping up throughout. Lewis makes use of insistent rhythmic repeated chords in Niobium, and minimalist influence is most evident in Mercury and Phosphorus. Yet there are Latin-infused rhythms in Chlorine, and hints of Shostakovich in the gently romping Cerium. Shrapnel’s pieces are more overtly expressive, such as the atmospheric Ladywell Station (surely quoting Misty) with its background train whistles, and the plaintive, lamenting In Memoriam Jane Clauison. Dad’s Army even makes an appearance in Hunt Shrapnel, a defiant political piece dedicated to the Save the Lewisham Hospital Campaign.

Few pieces are longer than five minutes, yet they are surprisingly effective in capturing a mood or emotion. Tsaldarakis and Archontides have clearly developed a strong affinity for this music, and a close relationship with the two composers, and their performances are strong throughout, contrasting well the thicker chordal textures with bright melodies (often in bell-like octaves), and enjoying the jazz-infused melodies. A very enjoyable discovery.
REVIEWS

IDRIS ACKAMOOR & THE PYRAMIDS Shaman! (Strut). To get you up to speed, Idris Ackamoor is an American multi-instrumentalist, composer (and tap-dancer), born in 1951 and still going strong. Part of the black avant-garde, Ackamoor formed The Pyramids in the early 1970s. The band split up in 1977 but has since reformed and is now on its third new album. Ackamoor mixes his styles, from jazz funk, soul and tango to space-age trippyness and more, the whole shebang driven by congas and drums, some excellent flute from Margaux Simmons and raffish violin from Sandra Poindexter, topped off with the leader’s own fiery tenor and alto saxophones. His vocals have the same semi-spoken lilt as Gil Scott-Heron, their message here elegiac and often wistful. In a way this set sounds somewhat dated – perhaps a slice of 1970s soul jazz from Pharoah Sanders, perhaps, or the Sun Ra Arkestra on walkabout – but its good intentions and sheer 80 minutes of joy push everything gloriously forward.

THUNDERCAT It Is What It Is (Brainfeeder). And now for some real sonic mayhem, this time from Thundercat, or Stephen Bruner, as he is known to his mum. The man is a bass player of immense ability, but also a very fine songwriter and producer: he won a Grammy for his work on Kendrick Lamar’s seminal To Pimp A Butterfly. On this, his fourth album, he turns in his usual real sonic mayhem, this time from 1970s soul jazz from Pharoah Sanders, perhaps, or the Sun Ra Arkestra on walkabout – but its good intentions and sheer 80 minutes of joy push everything gloriously forward.

WOLFGANG MUTHSPIEL Angular Blues (ECM). Austrian guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel plays both electric and acoustic guitar but in a subtle style. He keeps any rock affectations well hidden and showcases his jazz abilities through some unusual time signatures and a few displaced melodies that sound familiar but that you can’t quite place, as if he were playing a familiar tune in an unusual way. On this fine set he is ably supported on bass by Scott Colley, whose big, singing tone is always a joy, and on drums by Brian Blade, whose quiet accuracy and thoughtfulness always impress. The songs are all by Muthspiel, except a Cole Porter number and the concluding I’ll Remember April, totally reworked at the end of what is an unexpectedly strong set.

BRIGHTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL BREM@HOME – ACROSS THE EARTH

For obvious reasons, there will sadly be no live concerts to attend in this year’s Brighton Early Music Festival (BREMf). However, undeterred, BREMF will present a series of events online instead, to be premiered on YouTube and remain online for a week. Although freely available, BREMF is requesting that viewers make a donation in place of buying tickets via www.bremf.org.uk. This is crucial, as most of their regular funders have diverted funds to emergency Covid-19 crisis aid.

The festival will include a pre-event on Wednesday, October 14, a brand new concert play from Clare Norburn, Love in the Lockdown, inspired by a 1348 quarantine in Florence, and performed by The Telling. Main events then run Friday, October 23 to Sunday, November 1.

Pocket Sinfonia will perform Mendelssohn and Beethoven, adapted for chamber proportions, with animation and film of the natural world. Meanwhile, Spiritato! take the music of Heinrich Biber, and puppets made from recycled materials, to present Birds, Bugs and other Beasts – A Musical Menagerie.

A 15th-century barn and the pastoral Sussex landscape are the setting for Ensemble Augelletti’s Arcadian Wilderness, with music by Handel, Corelli and others, while James Duncan from Sussex Wildlife Trust is joined by Piers Adams on recorders for Bird Charmer, a talk with music on the song birds of Sussex. Continuing the Sussex theme, Musickle in the Ayre will perform Sweet Ayres of Arcadia, set in the house and gardens of St Mary’s House, Bramber, in the Sussex Downs.

Father and son Dirk and Adam Campbell play new and traditional music on a variety of instruments from Africa and Asia in Connections, while Joglaresa introduce us to medieval songs of protest in Rebellion!

Despite not being able to hold auditions for their prestigious BREMF Live! scheme this year, previous ensembles will be showcased with past and new footage of their musical activities.

And as ever, the festival will end with a celebration – The Four Faces of Gaia. Four regions of Earth (Africa, India, the Middle East and Europe) and the four elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water) combine in a celebration through traditional and early music and dance.

MORE INFO
For more reviews, comment and events, visit:
• nicks-classical-notes.blogspot.co.uk
• @nckb86uk
• nbc@nbc.co.uk

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The viaduct on Preston Road is next on the list to have an updated mural on one of its large columns. This will repair the Freddie Mercury piece which was pasted up for last year’s Pride festival.

Altogether, The Postman’s icons remind us that we, and our diverse LGBTQ+ community, are everywhere. The artist has an international reputation but is based in our city. Their work is instantly recognisable with its colourful punk style. Their idea is to place art in our daily lives and celebrate pop culture. The artworks educate, challenge and always entertain.

In a year without Pride, Trans Pride or any of the other highly visible public community events which are usually held across Brighton & Hove, it’s important to have some strong sense of visibility on the streets that LGBTQ+ people live on, use and visit. We need to see ourselves represented in a range of ways, and on our own terms.

Gscene managed to track down the modest and anonymous group of international artists who make up The Postman Collective and their friends Broken Hartist and asked them a few questions about this current project.

Hi Postman, tell us about your new project...
“This project involves a number of murals of iconic queer or LGBTQ+ individuals, displayed at agreed public spaces. Our works aim to cheer up the public during these strange times. We aim to celebrate LGBTQ+ culture in an impactful, yet respectful, culturally aware manner. Our works are durable, but non-permanently pasted up on the streets.”

Why now?
“Since Covid-19, we are aware of the loss of key LGBTQ+ community events and the visibility they provide for LGBTQ+ communities across the UK. The importance of ‘seeing yourself’ on the street and being in the presence of peers is not happening. This is a huge loss to many people and impacts on mental health. Pride and being visible in a safe way is a huge part of the empowerment of Pride events.”

Who do you feature?
“We generally feature pop icons past and present and iconic movie characters. But we have recently diversified our work by featuring key feminist icons, NHS workers and Black Lives Matter-related individuals. Our artwork is positive, carefully positioned, and has an essence of fun at its heart. We believe that public art can be both beautiful and empowering. Last year we joined forces with Brighton & Hove Pride. We hope there is much more to come.”

Who are the trans icons that you’ve used for this project?
“We’ve chosen two trans and non-binary activists and performers. Our friends Broken Hartist have added explanatory words to our murals, describing Amanda Lepore as per her own quote: ‘I really associate glamour with being happy. If you put on high heels and lipstick or get a new outfit, you feel great. It’s a celebration of loving yourself, and the whole ritual of it is so great.' For this design we’ve collaborated with UK photographer Marco Cerrone.

“The Honey Dijon artwork is based on a photograph by US photographer Ricardo Gomes. Honey is a NY-born, Berlin-based DJ. She once

The viaduct on Preston Road is next on the list to have an updated mural on one of its large columns. This will repair the Freddie Mercury piece which was pasted up for last year’s Pride festival.

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“The Honey Dijon artwork is based on a photograph by US photographer Ricardo Gomes. Honey is a NY-born, Berlin-based DJ. She once
said: ‘I am a citizen of the world and a human being. I only want to engage in energy that heals and uplifts people. Of course I have views on things happening in humanity, but I can’t be everything for everybody. My mission as an artist is to bring people together, not separate them’.

For this project we collaborated with local TNBI+ community members for ideas. Intersection is at the core of what we do. Visible representation is a very powerful way to support community cohesion and promote diversity. The quality of our designs ensures people see our work as art, which adds cultural weight to the representation of key marginalised groups.”

**Why is this important?**

“We understand the importance of queer space which is fully inclusive, open to all and accessible regardless of background. With traditional community spaces beyond reach and no cultural spaces open or LGBTQ+ events taking place, it is vital that communities feel visible, cherished and worthy of ‘taking up space’.

“We offer an artistic intervention, street art, that is of the moment, inclusive and fun. This allows communities to see themselves represented on the streets, buildings and spaces they use in their everyday lives. In our opinion, public space is for everyone and should have a larger share of positive images of diversity and not just commercial advertising or company logos.”

**Who are these artworks for?**

“For all TNBI+, QTPoC and LGBTQ+ community, living, working or passing through the city and anyone else who enjoys them. We promote and engage with any community; our work is meant to be visually engaging with the whole city population and its visitors. We would hope that this project offers communities who are under-represented a visual reassurance of the public realm being inclusive, especially to trans and non-binary communities and QTIPoC groups who rarely, if ever, see themselves represented in public space. With our artistic icons we bring to the forefront their voices and provide a source of community, connection and emotional support in an engaging way which adds to the cultural fabric of the city and its environment.”

**MORE INFO**

Check out The Postman and Broken Hartist fully accessible, free-to-enjoy artwork up and down St James’s Street and across the city. Grab a photo of yourself with one and #thepostmanart and #brokenhartist as well as us @gscene.

For more info, visit

* [https://thepostmanart.com/](https://thepostmanart.com/)
* [thepostman_art/](https://thepostman_art/)
* [broken_hartist/](https://broken_hartist/)
**MAKING WAVES**

Sussex-based underwater photographer Lexi Laine recently won the Beautiful Bizarre Magazine Art Prize 2020 iCanvas photography award, so what better time to showcase some of her incredibly beautiful pictures?

How did you get into underwater photography?

“I did a fine art degree in my early 20s and found myself drawn to photography as a medium. Since then I’ve spent the last 12 years or so building my career as a commercial photographer, shooting portraits, weddings, anything people based really. I think the artist in me longed for a creative project that could combine some of my passions, which is why around six years ago I decided to buy an underwater housing for my camera. I grew up as a bit of a water baby so I longed to take photographs in these beautiful places I had discovered under the waves.”

Why this particular medium?

“It’s the perfect creative outlet for me. I can make art that reflects my feelings about the underwater environment and how we as humans need to take better care of this vital resource. I started off making underwater portraits without any end goal of where the pictures would be shown - I had no brief to fulfill or client to satisfy. And for this reason I could experiment and play and push boundaries within myself and what I’m capable of achieving, both physically and creatively.”

It must be an extremely specialist area, what is the process for getting the image that you really want?

“So I guess the first thing I should mention is that I’m a freediver which means that everything I do is on a single breath hold. The same goes for the people I work with to photograph underwater. So we train to be able to hold our breath for longer periods. I know a lot of underwater photographers use scuba equipment to be able to stay underwater long enough but I much prefer working without. When you remove all of that bulky equipment from the equation you can move a lot more freely in the water and you develop a much better connection to the environment and the person or people you’re shooting.

“The locations I work in are almost always natural outdoor spots such as the sea or inland bodies of water. I think the two most difficult parts of what I do is finding models who look natural underwater and locations with clear enough water. But the difficulties involved in all of this is part of what I enjoy.”

How much of the final outcome do you leave to nature and the conditions on the day?

“I always start off shoots with particular ideas in mind for what I want to achieve. This begins with sketches normally and my ideas normally develop months before shoots happen. I often will travel to clearwater locations and spend up to a month shooting intensively. But even with months of planning, my ideas always develop when I am actually on location. The particular topography of underwater landscapes, the way..."
What are the important themes in your work?
“I love making images that feel ethereal or otherworldly and that celebrate the beauty of the underwater world. The themes that have meant the most to me are ones with a strong and sometimes disturbing environmental message. One piece I made last year, Single Use Planet, depicts a woman with large pieces of plastic bags. I combined multiple images of her holding the plastic in different parts of the water so that the overall image creates a loose depiction of the world map. I like to make images that seem aesthetically pleasing on first glance but have an underlying message that raises awareness of various climate based concerns.
“Another piece I made very recently is called Ghost Nets and highlights the problem of plastic fishing waste discarded in the oceans by commercial fishing trawlers. These nets are a huge problem and lead to a lot of destruction of corals and killing of wildlife. This particular image was very challenging to make as it involved five underwater models and a huge ten metre fishing net. Safety during shoots like these is always the top priority and whilst it looks like the models are trapped in the net, they are actually just behind it and far enough away not to get tangled! I also of course had a safety diver on hand just in case too.”

How long do you spend in the water on a shoot and how does that time pan out?
“That really depends on where we’re working and the time of year. So basically water temperature. Past locations I’ve worked in: Cornwall in May last year… Each shoot lasted around 20 minutes maximum before the shakes kicked in too much (for both me and my model). Or for example the Mediterranean in August, it’s possible to stay in the water for hours at a time and getting properly wrinkly before getting out!”

the light is on any given day and what different models bring to the shoots will often send my ideas off on little side tangents! It’s all part of the creative process.”

What are you working on now and what do you have planned for the future?
“Well travel is a bit difficult right now and the water where I live near Brighton is not the clearest so it makes things a little challenging.
But restrictions always encourage an unplanned form of creativity I think so I’m embracing cooler waters around the UK. And I’ve also got a few exciting exhibitions to plan for so I’m keeping busy at the moment.”

Which artists inspire you?
“I love the aesthetic of historic painters - the way artists such as Rubens, Artemisia or Caravaggio used light in their work is very inspiring to me. Since lockdown restrictions have eased I’ve been enjoying visiting galleries again and just yesterday spent the afternoon at the National Gallery in London looking at all of the incredible Renaissance and Baroque artwork. Photographer wise, I love the work of Francesca Woodman, Tamara Dean and Brooke Shaden.”

Where’s your favourite location?
“I think probably the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico. I have shot in the fascinating cenotes of this region several times now. All the rivers in this area run underground and cenotes are formed when the limestone bedrock collapses, exposing the groundwater beneath. They are basically these perfect little freshwater pools that are dotted around the jungle. It’s estimated that there are over three thousand of them in Mexico and the history behind them is really interesting. It’s believed that the ancient Mayans saw them as gateways to the afterlife and even made sacrificial offerings in them. They’re almost always really clear water so it’s perfect to photograph and I love how magical, eerie they feel.”

Where can we see your work?
“I’m exhibiting at The Other Art Fair at The Truman Brewery in London (October 8–11), The Contemporary Art Fair in Windsor (November 13-15), and on my website.”

How do you relax outside of your work?
“It sounds like a busman’s holiday but I love sea swimming. I’m also part of a local freediving club in Brighton called NoTanx. Freediving as a sport is incredibly therapeutic, a lot of it is about breathing exercises and I find it very relaxing. Swimming pools are starting to reopen now thank goodness so our training can finally restart.”

What is your guilty pleasure?
“Errrrrr probably pineapple on pizza? Actually, there’s nothing guilty about that. It’s the best thing ever.”

MORE INFO
@ www.lexilaine.co.uk
@ /lexilainenphoto/
https://beautifulbizarreartprize.art/icanvas-photography-award-winners-2020/
www.theotherartfair.com/octoberexhibitors/
https://contemporaryartfairs.co.uk/windsor/
QUEER HERITAGE SOUTH TAKES PART IN PHOTOWORKS FESTIVAL

The first Photoworks Festival, Propositions For Alternative Narratives, takes place across Sussex till Sunday, October 25, with a collaborative project between Queer Heritage South and Photoworks displayed for the first time.

The first Photoworks Festival, Propositions for Alternative Narratives takes place from Thu, Sept 24–Sun, Oct 25 and has 11 international artists coming together to exhibit work for audiences to engage with in real life and online. Photoworks Festival is the reshaping of one of the UK’s longest running photography festivals - Brighton Photo Biennial - and asks what a photography festival can be and who it is for. The 2020 edition can be experienced by audiences in three ways – via a printed Festival in a Box, through a major presentation of outdoor exhibitions on billboards across Brighton & Hove, Worthing, and the University of Sussex campus, and in an online series of events.

“Our inaugural festival rethinks both the form and content of traditional festivals,” said Photoworks Director, Shoair Mavlian. “We look forward to presenting the festival across these three formats, allowing a wide range of audiences to engage with what a photography festival is and could be and enabling a global audience to access our festival for the first time and Sussex audiences to see our work in a new way.”

Works will be installed in locations, including: Brighton Laines, Trafalgar Street, North Road, Portland Road in Hove, and George Street in Kemptown, along with Brighton & Hove railway stations. A partnership with the University of Sussex and Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA) has enabled works to be shown at ACCA and on the Sussex campus, outside the university’s student union.

The programme of works to be seen outdoors in Sussex ranges from the dazzling Afrofuturist-inspired works of Alberta Whittle, to Ivar Gravlje’s poetic compositions of the everyday captured in supermarket checkout-lines, and Farah Al Qasimi’s brightly-coloured observations of post-colonial structures of power and gender in the Gulf region. These works will sit alongside the poignant telling of a cross-cultural relationship as experienced by Pixy Liao. The sites of past borders as observed by Roger Eberhard, and Poultomi Basu’s exploration of the ongoing conflict in India, which flies largely under the radar of the global media. Alix Marie asks us to consider the body’s tactility and capacity to provoke emotions when transferred to the photographic medium.

Sethembile Msezane’s interdisciplinary practice combines photography, film, sculpture, and drawing to explore issues focused on spirituality, politics and African knowledge systems. Ronan Mckenzie’s project explores the colour brown as a concept and a starting point. Lotte Andersen’s work examines movement and its properties and oscillates between investigative, documentary and autobiographical.

A map is available at www.photoworks.org.uk and the posters will have QR codes so audiences can learn more about the artists as they come across the works. Digital tours will also be available through this link.

Now partially on show at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, to create their own responses to queer history. These responses will also be part of the Festival In A Box as a queer manifesto and represented in the online festival.

FESTIVAL IN A BOX

Referencing Marcel Duchamp’s Bolte-En-Valise (Box In A Suitcase) and inspired by Dayanita Singh’s innovative book-objects, Festival In A Box is a portable photography festival for which each audience member becomes the curator and can choose how to install the festival at home or in their own community space. Designed by artists Giliane Cachin and Joshua Schenkel, this unique limited-edition object includes a combination of different textures, shapes and forms to experiment with at home, along with posters made by the festival artists and texts by Julia Bunnemann, Simon Baker, Pamila Gupta, Shoair Mavlian, Lucy Soutter and Queer History Now. Galleries, shops, cafes and community groups have collaborated with Photoworks to bring a Festival In A Box to their own spaces. www.photoworks.org.uk/shop/photoworks-friend/

ARCHIVING YOUR LIFE

Archiving Your Life is led by Brighton-based LGBTQ+ youth group Queer History Now, which is dedicated to preserving queer archives and enabling the queer community to take control of the stories and narratives that are told about their lives. The group has been looking at the Tommie and Betty archive, a set of photos and mementoes first found discarded in Sussex, and...
David Bowie was one of the most influential and captivating artists of all time. A new photographic exhibition at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery offers a rare glimpse into a fascinating time of his life spent with one of his oldest friends – photographer Geoff MacCormack.

Geoff MacCormack's close friend from the age of eight years old was David Jones, the boy who would become David Bowie and one of the most influential performers in music, fashion and theatrical stage craft of the twentieth century.

In 1973 Bowie called his childhood friend and suggested he join his band The Spiders From Mars and go on a worldwide adventure, travelling first class by sea to New York and then on to Japan. From Japan they travelled to Siberia, through Russia by Trans-Siberian Express, to Moscow for May Day Parade, Poland, East and West Germany, just in time for tea at the George V Hotel in Paris, followed by a relaxing holiday in Rome, just to chill out.

And just when Geoff thought the fun might be over, Bowie said; "Would you mind being a Diamond Dog and coming back to New York on an even better ship, eating caviar every day and joining another band, then another band, helping out on a few albums and generally hanging out and having the time of your life for a couple more years?"

Geoff didn't hesitate and became Bowie's backing singer and percussionist in 1973 on the Ziggy Stardust/Aladdin Sane world tour. Arriving in Japan, Geoff ditched his Kodak Instamatic camera in favour of a Nikon and began taking a few images here and there, starting in Siberia on the Trans-Siberian Railway and ending two and a half years later in Los Angeles during the Station to Station sessions.

Because Bowie disliked flying they travelled together by cruise liner and trains across the world giving MacCormack and his camera the opportunity to capture Bowie at his most informal and relaxed.

From Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane of Britain's Glam Rock years, the ground-breaking Diamond Dogs tour across the USA and their obsession with American Soul music, to Bowie's first major film The Man Who Fell To Earth (1975) and the recording of Station To Station and his Thin White Duke persona, this exhibition of intimate photographs, some of which never seen before in a public exhibition, gives a glimpse of a close friendship, travel and life on the road with one of the greatest rock stars of all time.
The show will be held in the museum’s three large galleries and will include 60 large original framed photographs of Bowie by MacCormack. These photographs will be complemented by a short film never seen before in the UK shot by Bowie on their trip to Moscow in 1973, music videos of Bowie and MacCormack on stage together, film excerpts and music in the galleries.

David Bowie photographic exhibition, featuring the work of Geoff MacCormack, at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, from Friday, October 17, 2020 to Sunday, June 6, 2021. For tickets, visit: www.brightonmuseums.org.uk

All images copyright Geoff MacCormack
October 2015
Following the sudden death of Professor Martin Fisher in April 2015, the Martin Fisher Foundation was conceived by those close to Martin along with his colleagues, to enable his work to be recognised and continued.

LAUNCH OF THE MARTIN FISHER FOUNDATION
Cllr Warren Morgan welcomed delegates from all over the globe to the launch of the Martin Fisher Foundation at the Brighton Dome and committed the city to achieving ZERO stigma, ZERO transmission and ZERO deaths from HIV/AIDS by 2020.

Cllr Morgan said: “Brighton & Hove has the highest prevalence of people diagnosed with HIV outside of London. In 2013, nearly 1,700 Brighton & Hove residents attended NHS HIV treatment services. Over the last 30 years Brighton & Hove has witnessed the incredible progress that has taken place in the diagnosis and treatment of people living with HIV.

“Professor Martin Fisher was at the forefront of these improvements both locally and nationally. With his colleagues he transformed the care of local people living with HIV and built an outstanding unit both in terms of the care it provides and the contribution it makes to research and clinical knowledge. Because of the progress made in preventing transmission, prompt diagnosis and effective treatments, people diagnosed early with HIV can now expect to have a near normal life expectancy. The council, with its public health role, needs to work together with partners across the health sector to support the furtherance of this vital work.

“The Martin Fisher Foundation will continue Professor Fisher’s life-saving work. I look forward to the advances in the care and treatment the Foundation’s work will bring to everyone, including the people of Brighton & Hove. It is down to us all to achieve Martin’s goal: zero stigma, zero transmission and zero deaths from HIV/AIDS.”

The afternoon session was brought to a close by Martin Fisher Foundation Patron Jane Mezzone, former lead commissioner for sexual health at East Sussex Brighton & Hove Health Authority and presently the Strategic Sexual Health Commissioning Co-ordinator for London ADPH across all 33 local authorities, who called for a strategic approach in achieving ZERO, and James Ledward, editor of Gscene who reflected on the importance of the new Foundation involving LGBTQ+ and HIV community organisations in all plans to reduce HIV infections to ZERO.

We asked MFF for an update on how Zero, Zero, Zero turned out and Dr Gillian Dean, consultant in HIV at The Lawson Unit, said: “Since 2015 MFF’s main aim has been to work collaboratively with other stakeholders to advance efforts to reach zero new HIV infections, zero HIV-stigma and zero HIV related deaths. In 2017 we succeeded in securing Brighton & Hove as the first UK Fast Track City. This means we’re working with an international network of cities and our local community to STOP new cases of HIV by 2030.”

Dr Gillian Dean will be contributing a fuller update on the work of MFF and achievements of the last five years in the November issue of Gscene magazine.

WHERE WILL WE LIVE WHEN WE GET OLDER?
James Ledward wrote this article five years ago in 2015, nothing appears to have come from it. Should we as a community be revisiting this idea for Brighton & Hove?

As LGBTQ+ focussed residential communities become established in many countries around the world, here in the UK there’s a definite lack of similar resources, despite an extensive and prominent LGBTQ+ population. Although the younger LGBTQ+ community at large faces less prejudice than those who went before them, members of the older LGBTQ+ community are still facing discrimination. A publication by the Social Care Institute for Excellence noted that: “Social care commissioners and providers don’t often think about LGBTQ+ people when planning and delivering services, but this does not mean that LGBTQ+ people are not using services or do not want to use services.”

Community living for older LGBTQ+ people isn’t a new concept – far from it. Established LGBTQ+ residential communities already exist in the US, as well as in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and France. LBQ community focus organisation Planet Residential have raised the question: where will we live when we get older?

Planet Residential have identified that the housing shortage, along with the extensive LGBTQ+ community, come together to produce a definite need for similar facilities to be created in the UK as those seen in other countries.

In raising this question, Planet Residential is calling out to key players in the housing sector to get involved – and in doing so, they hope to form collaborations which could see the facilitation and development of quality LGBTQ+ older residential communities within the UK.

“Ninety-one per cent of lesbians and 75 per cent of gay men want to see specific accommodation for lesbians and/or gay men.” (Hubbard & Rossington, Polari, 2009)

In order to create a service which best fits the needs of older LGBTQ+ community members, Planet Residential hope to spend some time talking to members of the community to establish what it is they would ideally want and need from such facilities. Planet Residential will then aim to go on to take these ideas to associated partners within the housing sector, who can help them make the vision a reality.

Planet Residential is a community organisation, and a part of lesbian, bisexual and queer brand Ultimate Planet, which offers community and social support to LBQ women, with a wide range of services and support being offered through their ‘Planet’ brands.
The Planet Residential vision is the creation of a community-driven, sustainable housing solution that meets the needs of an inclusive older LGBTQ+ population in the UK.

**October 2010**

Regular readers will know that 10 years ago the whole way that Pride was delivered was contentious. The chair of Pride, which was a charity in those days, resigned, and local LGBTQ+ business leaders wrote an open letter...

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**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!**

1. Enough is enough! Do people really want to have another year like last year, with months of arguing and fighting while businesses and the voluntary sector are pitched against each other by the organisers of Pride?

It would appear that the present trustees of Pride and the paid worker intend to continue in post following a year when much division has been created within both the gay business community and LGBTQ+ voluntary sector. The time has come to consider what the real problems of Pride are:

- Pride lacks transparency and has a problem communicating with local businesses which has stopped local LGBTQ+ businesses who want to help Pride, staging fundraisers for the organisation.
- Some businesses report they have problems working with the paid worker of Pride.
- New trustees are being recruited and interviewed by the very trustees responsible for last year’s chaos and bad feeling. Is this a really a good start?
- The City Council have refused Pride’s request for scrutiny. How can Pride expect people to put money in the buckets at fundraisers when many of the concerns from the last 12 months remain unaddressed especially with regard to Pride’s tendering process. Despite Pride’s claims that this was the biggest and best Pride ever, it’s now becoming clear that behind the scenes it was chaos on the day and all statutory partners have made it clear that Pride will not be able to stage a similar event on Preston Park next year.

In two years we’ve gone from having the best organised Pride in the county to this year’s event which had the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS) saying in minutes taken from the City Council’s debrief and circulated by mistake by Pride; “East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service will not accept a poorly managed event in the future irrespective of the community it represents. Pride needs to consider whether the event has outgrown the park, or whether the capacity in the tents can be managed, if not then Pride needs to consider if tents are appropriate. ESFRS will discuss with Sussex Police the potential need for conditions to be placed on the licence.”

We need people to rally behind a new organisation which has at its heart the interests of the LGBTQ+ voluntary sector in Brighton & Hove. A real ‘Gay Pride’. Pride is failing to meet its charitable objectives. We will not be supporting any fundraising for Pride until we know what Pride’s current trading position is, verified by an independent accountant.

We will support any community organisation that chooses to reclaim Pride as a community event, set up to benefit local voluntary sector organisations and most importantly of all can bring everyone to work together rather than work against each other, which happens at the moment.

We support the concept of Pride but can no longer support the present regime and want to see it replaced by an organisation committed to raising money for our local gay voluntary sector organisations.

Neither The Amsterdam or Legends Hotel have contracts with Pride nor have sought to engage in any contract that gives us financial gain. We want to see an event organised by people who have the support of the community, local LGBTQ+ businesses and LGBTQ+ voluntary organisations. This is not the case at the moment.

Tony Chapman owner of Legends Hotel and David Calderhead owner of The Amsterdam Hotel.

Supported by Steve Chillingworth owner of The Marine Tavern, Maria Baker owner of The Star Inn, Andy Tull owner of 112 Church Street.

**October 2005**

Fifteen years ago our Pride parade caused this reaction from an actual, elected, councillor.

**HANGLETON BIGOT CONTINUES CAMPAIGN OF HATE**

1. Conservative Councillor for Hangleton, Peter Willows, continued his campaign of hate against the LGBTQ+ community through the letters to the editor pages of The Argus last month. His general thrust was concerning the state of dress or undress of some revellers in this year’s Pride Parade and his concerns about why the police were not enforcing the law and arresting those gay people. Division Commander Paul Curtis said: “The Pride procession contained nothing, in terms of standard of dress, that you wouldn’t see at Notting Hill or any other major celebrations. We did not and have not received any complaints about conduct on the procession. We apply the law even-handedly across all sections of the community, unfortunately, and for their own reasons some members of the community would like to think this is not the case.”

LGBTQ+ TOURISM

Again, from 15 years ago, a reminder that there was a Gay Business Forum in Brighton with a plan. In 2020/21, post Covid-19, with LGBTQ+ leisure and hospitality businesses recovering from lockdown, adapting to guidelines, and ‘staycations’ being considered by many, is this an idea to revisit?

A recent Gay Business Forum presentation focused on future tourism opportunities. On the premise that more visitors to Brighton can only benefit everyone, a tourism sub-group discussed how this might be. Three groups of visitors have been identified: Day-Trippers, Weekend Visitors, and Foreign Travellers. Work needs to be done to identify the massive potential of the area and to entice more people to visit. A business plan has been presented to Tourism South East (TSE) to secure financial support for new LGBTQ+ tourism. With support from GBF businesses, which provide front-line services to the city’s visitors, it is hoped members of the Gay Business Forum will sign up and become members of TSE. Then money may be forthcoming to find sponsors, matched funding and roll out fresh ideas to encourage people to visit and return to the area for more than just the Pride weekend each year.
In January 2005 I spoke to a friend about the new clan I’d been welcomed into during the festive season. My new friends were incredible. In their company I felt alive like never before and the excitement, nay exhilaration, was electric. I neglected to inform my friend that this new group relationship wasn’t entirely platonic but on reflection all these years later I’m sure she knew. In her gentle yet affirming way she said: be mindful Craig that if you’re using drugs with these people how much the drugs may be influencing your feelings and emotions. I didn’t listen. What followed was the most challenging year of my life and I’m lucky to be here to tell the tale. Of course in the moment I lived off the accelerating exhilaration and ignored the context of my equally accelerating drug use. These substances were after all party drugs, legitimate amongst the middle classes and gay community. How I turned up for work everyday is unfathomable to me now. Of course, I didn’t always.

Towards the end of 2005, an acquaintance took delight in describing how others were talking about me. In less than sophisticated tones she defined how those around me saw my disappearing hopeful light of a future, not to mention my weight loss and dull complexion. Her words were poisonous and yet, it was the jolt I needed.

In all the time that ran the expanse of that year, only one sober friend made reference to it. In my moment of need, she alone reached out or spoke of it, even though they do not feel alone in their habit. They prey manipulatively, often unknowingly. In their company I felt alive like never before and the excitement, nay exhilaration, was electric. I neglected to aspire to belong to. The magnetic draw is the future is bright. Gleaming sunlight. I promise you that and I live to tell the brightest story I choose who are you to raise an eyebrow or a seemingly judgemental question? They make us feel exciting, attractive and maybe even desirable. They make us feel in the social world we may never otherwise belong to. It’s as manipulative as it’s deceitful and dangerous.

We think a little here and there won’t hurt and after all they load us with an exhilaration we feel we can never get from another quarter of life. I’m free to be who I want to be and if this is what I choose who are you to raise an eyebrow or a seemingly judgemental question? They make us feel exciting, attractive and wanted. They also steal into our worlds as a chemical SAS in the dead of night when our defences are weak and the effects on all those caught in the backdraft are devastating.

Men walk amongst us who through their use manipulate and deceive with faux kindness, shady glamour and a friendly welcome so that they do not feel alone in their habit. They prey upon the vulnerable albeit sometimes unknowingly.

These drugs, or chems as they’re now colloquially defined, are highly addictive life changing substances that rob families of their sons, sisters of their brothers, significant others from their partners, and dear friends from those who care about them. And we, the gay and bi male community, see it amongst us and are criminally silent. We don’t want to lose the friend or alienate the brother and so we trundle about our daily choreography deliberately blind. We who are silent are just as guilty of the manipulation if not more so and we’re killing each other with a quiet kindness that is morbidly stupid.

More tragic than the distance drug use creates between those we love, is the murder of the self. The light that’s dimmed, the creative spirit slowly buried, the potential to love, live and fly into a future so bright we are unstoppable - we kill it. Dead. I’m not ashamed of my history and proud to have been strong enough, brave enough or perhaps just lucky enough to start over. But without question, everything I am today, in love, life and career is because someone opened a door for me and I was able to walk through it.

We must STOP ignoring this plague, STOP legitimising community abuse, and STOP using PREP or an undetectable HIV status as a get out of jail free card that means you can throw yourself safely into the ‘party scene’ with wild abandon, slam the life out of your veins, or smoke yourself into a future that is dead inside. STOP. Get help. Your sober friend can’t do it, your family can’t do it, and you can’t do it alone. We can support and care and walk and talk but you have got to come on that journey with a system that knows how to look after you properly. Knowing you’re loved won’t be enough, you’ll find a way around it and be back on the cutthroat carousel indefinitely. If you’re that friend, get them to get help. Don’t facilitate a forgiving silence with potentially horrific consequences.

The future is bright. Gleaming sunlight. I promise you that and I live to tell the brightest story full of sunshine warmth. As for the rest of us, remove the blindfold and start screaming. These men deserve better and perhaps if we were just a little bit more upfront and honest to them and ourselves about it, one of them might wake up. Just one. It’s got to be worth supporting that one bright kind soul into a future, right?

American writer and HIV/AIDS activist Larry Kramer said of the emerging pandemic in the early 1980s: “If what you’re hearing doesn’t rouse you to anger, fury, rage and action, gay men will have no future here on earth”. So called acceptable drug use amongst our kind is its own pandemic and robs gay and bi men, and those who love them, of a meaningful future.

It’s time to ACT UP, FIGHT BACK. SHOUT. SHOUT TODAY. WAKE UP and meet the sun.

“lucky to be here to tell the tale.... in the moment I lived off the accelerating exhilaration and ignored the context of my equally accelerating drug use”
MAN’S BEST FRIEND?

This month’s theme is pets. When I was born, many millennia ago, a pet was a dog, a cat or, as in my case, rabbits which, occasionally, ended up in a pie. Times have certainly changed. Today almost any animal can be a pet, from tarantula spiders to pythons and anything in-between. My late husband, Michael, always wanted a dog but our busy lives got in the way. Now of course I’d like nothing more than a four legged companion, but despite the many animal charities, there are no dogs available in Sussex. There are plenty of cats, but not being a cat lover that narrows the field. A donkey? Not a problem, there are quite a few and of course there are loads of reptiles, nice I’m sure but just not for me.

Of course if you’re from the north east of England then your closest friends can be called ‘pet’ as a term of endearment, then there are those who became a ‘teacher’s pet’, not something to aspire to in my school days. This is where we get into deeper and slightly more unusual water, which is ‘human pets’. Our first experience of this rather unusual phenomenon was at a Brighton Pride in Preston Park nearly 20 years ago. Thinking that we were men of the world, we shouldn’t have been as surprised as we were at the sight of a man walking on all fours being led by his ‘master’ on a lead, complete with harness and studded collar. We had never come across the BDSM world, after our initial surprise we had to take a look and had our eyes opened.

Puppy play is easy to laugh at or even dismiss as some stupid fetish – grown men wearing ridiculous rubber costumes – but in the last 15 years it’s become quite acceptable to like-minded people. While the pup community is a broad church, human pups tend to be male, gay, have an interest in dressing in leather, wear dog-like hoods, enjoy tactile interactions like stomach rubbing or ear tickling, play with toys, eat out of bowls and are often in a close and loving relationship with their human ‘handlers’. Human pups find a real release from their ‘normal’ lives.

“At least you wouldn’t have to get up on a wet November morning to take the dog for a walk... or perhaps you might”

There are female pups but they’re outnumbered by their male chums. There is a well-known 23-year-old bitch living happily in Kent and no that’s definitely not an insult in this connection. This can bring a whole new meaning to ‘man’s best friend’ or even ‘walkies’ but at least you wouldn’t have to get up on a wet November morning to take the dog for a walk... or perhaps you might.

Who am I to say that it’s strange? There are many much stranger things in the world, it was just a surprise. This appears to be perfectly harmless and if that’s your thing, go for it. The whole world of pets, be they animal or human, is fascinating, I’ll just stick to my wish for a nice non-human, four-legged furry friend.

Auf Wiedersehn, Pet.

RADICAL FAERIE GATHERINGS: THE CULTIVATION OF QUEERNESS

Radical Faeries have been gathering together and creating transient pop-up queer community for more than 40 years - ever since the very first call to gather back in early September 1979. These pre-Covid19 Gatherings (which until recently had become a regular global phenomenon) would often be held on the occasion of pagan earth-appreciating festivals as a way of tuning into natural seasonal rhythms.

Some Faeries might say that the fundamental purpose of these gatherings was to enable an energy (which could be named as ‘The Queer’) to heal itself from the destructive attacks of those who felt threatened by it and who, for many and varied reasons, would wish to establish themselves as ‘Non-Queer’

By creating community-encouraging-of-queerness, Faeries have been able to develop their consciousness around power dynamics and the mechanisms of persecution, seeing their positioning and roles in the complex intersectionality of oppression as it manifests in the various isms (sexism/misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism).

And to also appreciate the potential world-healing value of this natural-Faerie-propensity to engage in this particular kind of work!

“I’m now tuned into the way homophobia is just one facet of the many-faced invisible oppressive forces”

I’ve been attending gatherings for over 10 years and during this time I’ve been able to acknowledge the homophobic inflicted pain and suffering I’ve had to endure as a same-sex-loving human being. However I also see that this horribleness of experience is just a ‘drop in the ocean’ of what it might have been had I not been identifiable as a member of the most privileged classes (ie white, educated, middle-class, cis-seeming-male, and able-bodied/able-minded).

This realisation hasn’t made my own pain and suffering any less and it hasn’t meant I’ve been able to avoid a whole lot of work to understand its far reaching effects on my personality (particularly the extent to which I’m hampered in my ability to engage in intimacy with others). But I’m now tuned into the way homophobia is just one facet of the many-faced invisible oppressive forces constantly directed towards women, towards the undereducated, towards the non-white, towards the colonised, towards the differently abled and towards my dear queer trans siblings.

It’s interesting to see how, within our various Faerie communities, once the intention of creating a queer-nurturing environment and ethos is set, the forces which seem to oppose this intention begin to assemble. The microcosm begins to manifest elements of those oppressive forces from the macrocosm. Shock! Horror! A group of predominantly able-middle-class-cis-white-gay-men unintentionally/unthinking behave in ways which are uncomfortable for women, non-white, poor, disabled, trans etc folk!

Thankfully Faerie Gatherings are becoming increasingly more inclusive and this has meant more work to do in understanding our relative privileges and the ways in which these might be contributing to the relative ongoing oppression of others, or alternatively how our privileges might be engaged with consciously and constructively to raise awareness and to work towards the redressing of unfairnesses and inequities.
We all know that there’s an inside joke in the LGBTQ+ community that lesbian, bisexual and queer women are always cat people. Musician and gay YouTube star Ally Hills even sang ‘if she looks like she’d want a few cats, she’s probably a lesbian’ in her viral video How To Know If A Girl Is A Lesbian. And one of the most famous lesbians out there, Ellen DeGeneres, celebrates Cat Week every year on her talk show. After counting how many times I’ve referred to my 17-year-old family cat Lily as the love of my life, I’ve realised that this stereotype is most definitely true, and the queer corner of the internet has some theories as to why this is.

A humorous Pink News article by Bea Mitchell, Thirteen Reasons Why Lesbians And Cats Are Soulmates, explores this feline phenomenon. Lesbians don’t tend to hiss at each other like cats as Bea jokes (although perhaps I just haven’t had the chance to socialise with these hissing queer women yet) but she does point out that both cats and lesbians are ‘known for causing chaos’. While I appreciate the tongue in cheek tone of this piece, I certainly think that like cats, many queer women are fiercely independent and unafraid to do as they please.

The article also states that both cats and queer women are ‘extremely loyal’, which again I think has a lot of truth to it. Another joke in the LGBTQ+ community is that lesbian couples tend to enter committed relationships very quickly; while this is another stereotype, I’ve found this to be fairly accurate when thinking of my past relationships and those of my queer friends. Like cats, queer women are often loyal to those that they love and will commit to them wholeheartedly.

But jokes and stereotypes aside, Bea Mitchell’s hyperbole ‘since the dawn of time, lesbians and cats have been inextricably linked’ does actually have a great deal of historical merit. Nicole Pasulka wrote a piece for The Cut in 2016 branding the cat lover stereotype ‘one of the most enduring lesbian clichés out there’, highlighting that while many cat owning women try to avoid the ‘crazy cat lady’ image, queer woman have instead ‘embraced the cat lady label’ and integrated it into our culture.

Obviously, the more explicit answer to why queer women adore cats is that both cats and the vagina have been colloquially dubbed ‘pussy’ as Nicole highlights, and although I can certainly see the correlation here she continues that this ‘doesn’t fully explain the appeal’. Vaginal euphemisms aside, Nicole has suggested that the symbolic connotations of cats are a source of attraction to queer women, with the ‘domesticated huntress’ image being a point of interest for LGBTQ+ women who are forming an identity within but on the margins of society.

Cats also have historical significance in the lesbian/queer community as these women often looked to what Nicole refers to as goddess worshipping cultures during the 20th century, such as the ancient Egyptians who also worshipped cats. Even in contemporary society, cats are often associated with femininity as their supposed polar opposite species, dogs, have been appropriated as a ‘man’s best friend’.

Nicole has even theorised that queer women may ‘seek to emulate a cat’s ability to exist contentedly outside of the patriarchy’. Clearly, the lesbian cat lady trope has much more depth than one might think. However, on a less existential level, my delve into the queer culture theories of the internet got me thinking about why I love my cat so much.

While I frequently joke that I love my cat more than I’ll ever love a partner, she most definitely holds a special place in my heart. Lily, our beloved tortoiseshell (and rather on the plump side) family cat, is 17 now and has been a part of my life since I was a young child. Throughout my teenage years I consistently struggled with my mental health, particularly when I was questioning my sexuality as an early teen, but I knew that I could always count on Lily for comfort. Unlike people, pets don’t ask questions, and just the quiet company of Lily was often enough to lift my mood even in my deepest depressive episodes.

Although I no longer live at my family home, I genuinely look forward to seeing Lily again and I cherish all the times I have with her. Her little habits such as drinking from the watering can while my mum waters plants, or sleeping behind our living room curtains, always make me smile. She isn’t just a pet to me, but a being with a unique personality, and she is most definitely a very loved member of the family, and I would probably feel the same affinity no matter what.

Although we queer women may be biased towards cats, no matter how you identify I think we can all agree that cats are truly special creatures. While their fiercely independent nature and connotations of femininity may be a reason why LGBTQ+ women tend to be cat lovers, their kind and caring nature is something that appeals to pet owners regardless of their sexuality or gender identity. So perhaps it isn’t just queer women who are crazy cat ladies, and maybe we’re all cat lovers at heart. Now excuse me, I have to go and catch some mice and then take a nap in the sun.

MORE INFO


“Unlike people, pets don’t ask questions, and just the quiet company of Lily was often enough to lift my mood even in my deepest depressive episodes”
I lost my dog of 20 years this year. Thankfully it was just before lockdown so I could be with her, and with my mum who had kept my little Holly safe, well and happy for most of her life. Like many family pets she had been there through most of the major milestones in my life, from my first day at senior school to my first time stumbling through the door drunk, and several heartbreaks. We made the decision to let her go while she at least still recognised us, and went with a mouthful of cake and sausage, safe in our arms.

It started me thinking about the fact that I have always had something sentient to talk to, with animals being around me most of my life, (including horses, fish, small furry things, you name it), my mental wellbeing had pretty much relied on me talking to one thing or another, and being loved unconditionally. I wondered if humans were really meant to be alone for long periods of time without something or someone to talk to, as the loss of Holly wasn’t only for me that she was no longer there, it’s the feeling of home. With her not there it wouldn’t be a case of greeting the dog, sitting on the sofa and having her jump into my lap, I could sit where I like, and not worry about taking her out for a walk, and I hated it.

“We made the decision to let her go while she at least still recognised us, and went with a mouthful of cake and sausage, safe in our arms”

Having something to care about other than myself has always been a double-edged sword. When I was younger I cared for horses, up at 5am every morning before school, and again when school had finished, never worrying about the hay in my hair, or the likely scenario of smelling of horse poo in class, it never mattered because they were cared for and happy.

Although what we are basically doing when we get a pet is saying “I will love this member of the family more than my own life, and will likely be utterly devastated in eight-16 years when they die”, it never seems to phase us. We willingly steel ourselves for eventual heartbreak that comes with losing a pet, but having said that, I simply don’t trust people who aren’t animal people, although technically someone saying that they choose not to own something that is going to cause pain is in fact entirely sane and reasonable.

I can’t currently own a pet due to my property being a rental (that and I fear I would never actually leave the house apart from dog walks), so I’m looking into new apps like Borrow My Doggy. I truly believe that even though they cause us endless worry, vets bills, and the occasional trashed carpet, pets make us all better people, in some cases they can even save lives and cure depression. Most humans on their own can’t not love, that’s why pets are so important, it has to go somewhere.

“All the food in the cafe is vegan and gluten free, which is fine, but it could benefit from having a bacon sarnie on the menu. My tea is served in a mug with a saucer. This is clearly madness. A mug on a saucer? The milk comes in a tiny shot glass that you can’t pour properly from. Why do some coffee shops do this? Put milk in something that’s clearly designed to not be able to pour milk? I’ve seen milk served in test tubes, in small clay pots and new shot glasses. It’s baffling when jugs are readily available to use. Jugs that pour things properly. As a result of my shot of milk I now have milk all over the place... on the table, on my saucer, on me and also on the lovely pictures of goats glued to the table top.”

All the food in the cafe is vegan and gluten free, which is fine, but it could benefit from having a bacon sarnie on the menu. My tea is served in a mug with a saucer. This is clearly madness. A mug on a saucer? The milk comes in a tiny shot glass that you can’t pour properly from. Why do some coffee shops do this? Put milk in something that’s clearly designed to not be able to pour milk? I’ve seen milk served in test tubes, in small clay pots and new shot glasses. It’s baffling when jugs are readily available to use. Jugs that pour things properly. As a result of my shot of milk I now have milk all over the place... on the table, on my saucer, on me and also on the lovely pictures of goats glued to the table top.

So yeah, this place is clearly trying too hard. So keen to be edgy and hip. Oh, and there’s graffiti covering the walls of the toilets. You’re encouraged to leave more presumably so they don’t have to spend any money on something as mundane as paint.

There also seems to be two cracked sinks and one broken tap in the communal loos. They’ve clearly been blowing any budget they have on pointless crap to cover the walls with rather than maintenance.

I’ve kind of lost the joy of having a tea/snack break. This place is kind of overwhelming and not in a good way. I am clearly not its target audience. I’d normally have a listen to hear what people were chatting about. I think here I’d just hear about obscure experimental theatre and the latest Japanese fashion craze. Think I’ll down my tea as quick as possible and leggit...
Many people who have pets find they’re really good for mental health. Not everyone has the stability or funds or support to be able to care for a pet, even if they’d like to. Some people find caring for animals adds to their stress levels, especially if the human/animal relationship doesn’t go well. What follows is an inspiring story of how Louie is helping Stewart with his mental health...

What do you think of when you think about lockdown? I think I speak for all of us when I say it’s been a struggle to adapt to a new way of living, to process the loss of the freedoms we’ve always taken for granted and as a gay man, the feeling of being forced backwards to a time we weren’t as visible. As a single man living alone, I’ve noticed feelings of isolation and loneliness creeping forward day by day living through this pandemic. I’m not ashamed to say that being disconnected from friends and loved ones and not being able to socialise in queer spaces has had an impact on my mental health. I’ve felt stagnant, anxious and sometimes desperate, uncertain of what the future holds. Those closest to me have become increasingly distant as they struggle with their own headspace processing this frightening new normal.

I tried to practise self-care by taking up new hobbies, learning skills and keeping in touch with people online, but as time passed and weeks turned into months, I realised that I needed company, a distraction that would allow me to refocus and create a sense of purpose. It just so happens I found solace in the form of a new pet, a kitten called Louie. Even before collecting him I noticed a change in my behaviour. The preparation to make my home cat friendly, ordering the essentials, moving furniture around and catching up with chores, knowing that my focus would be on an energetic youngster for the coming weeks.

I was flooded with self-doubt the day I collected him. Was I capable of keeping him alive? Would he want to be around me? Would he be happy in my home?

The first few days I thought these fears were valid. He was frightened and understandably so. I was determined not to permit my negative inner critic to win and persisted in allowing him to get used to his environment. And get used to it he did, from cowering under the sofa for two days to racing around in a relatively short space of time. It’s been a joy to watch him develop and play, learn his quirks and develop a magical bond that’s allowed me to start to repair the damage done during lockdown.

I never thought that caring for and nurturing an animal I’d also be fulfilling my own needs: for reciprocal love that’s unconditional; to be wanted; to play and explore. Louie has brought these things out in me.

I’ve particularly enjoyed rediscovering laughter while Louie remains oblivious as to how removing every leaf from my indoor palm tree when my back’s turned, the welcome home dance, or discovering him in a newly discovered ridiculous hiding place positively affects my mood. I sleep better knowing he’s there, my energy levels have increased and I’m more motivated in self-improvement. After all, who would look after him if I wasn’t here?

We need to celebrate our pets and how good they can be for our wellbeing. To all of you struggling, sometimes it takes some courage and risk to discover something that can help us to refocus and bring clarity. For me this was Louie.

Pets and how they help us to manage our mental health features often as a topic of discussion during Work It Out, a weekly peer support group hosted by MindOut that I have attended online during lockdown. Between the service users who attend, we have pets that we all champion and agree aid us in a variety of ways. Our animal companions give us purpose and motivate us to explore and interact with the world in ways we may not do without them.

Walking our dogs takes us out into nature and gives opportunities for human interaction with others in our communities, a chance for connection that is more important now than ever. We enjoy watching our pets grow, reaching milestones and achieving training goals that are incredibly rewarding. It’s obvious to me from our conversations how influential our furry friends have been to us over lockdown.
MY BEAUTIFUL, WONDERFUL, EVIL FRED

Over the years Chris and I have lived with both cats and dogs, and presently share our home with a handsome hound called Odie. However no animal I’ve ever met was quite like Fred.

In New York, Chris worked away a lot and I felt quite lonely on an evening. I thought a cat would help keep me company. Chris was okay with the idea, as long as we found one that had personality, that would be a part of the family and not just an occasional lodger. I checked the local ads and found Fred. His owner was moving from NY to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (my home town) and couldn’t take him with her. The picture showed a handsome three-year-old British blue with emerald green eyes. I mentioned I was looking for a cat with personality. “Oh, don’t worry” she said, “Fred has bags of personality.”

It turned out that Fred had way too much personality for one animal. If we left him alone he wrecked the place. He disembowelled cushions, scratched furniture and urinated on clothing. We took to locking him in the bathroom when we went out simply to limit the damage. But he’d get into the bathroom cabinet and pull everything out into the sink. We put trays of water on top of boxes of medication so that if he pulled them out he’d get wet. It worked. He stopped pulling stuff out of the bathroom cabinet and shredded the shower curtain instead.

One night I came home, and instead of paying him attention I went straight to the computer to send an email I’d forgotten to send earlier in the day. Fred was so angry with the rejection that he defecated on the bed behind me; three feet way from me, as I sent the email. Not the biggest, sloppiest, smelliest mess imaginable. I could hear it, and smell it. I turned around. The look on his face said: ‘Now ignore me’.

We got a little cat to keep him company. He tortured her. We had a guest visit from the UK. Fred urinated in his suitcase. We got a dog. Fred became obese. We couldn’t work out the connection until we found him buried deep in the sack of dog food gorging himself. Alas, the salt level in dog food is way too high for a cat. Fred developed kidney problems and a urinary tract infection. The vet had to remove his penis. He was extra affectionate the day he came home from the vet. I think he even tolerated our other cat and the dog. But by the following day he was as ornery as ever.

Fred lived to the grand old age of 21. I did wonder if he’d mellow with age, but he never changed. The day we had to let him go he gorged himself on chicken and then sat for an age by the bowl. On the other side of the glass panelled kitchen door the dogs were salivating in the hope that he’d leave something for them. Daft dogs, the only interest Fred had was in torturing them.

Fred was an absolute pain. I had to make sure that everything was washable, all food was out of reach (he’d be half way through a loaf of bread if you were dumb enough to leave it out), and visitors had to be warned that it was never the dogs they needed to be afraid of.

And I miss him so much. My beautiful, wonderful, evil Fred.

THE CAT WHO LIVES IN A DRAWER

My sister has a cat who lives in a drawer. We shall call her Sally.* I’m visiting for a couple of days. Actually, my sister has two cats. The other one (Jim, let’s say) is tough as nails. Gets into fights, comes back with half his fur missing, loving it. Lives his best thug life. Never know when chance will chuck you a bit of chicken! Jimmy greets me at the door, growl-purr, to inquire whether I’ve brought anything edible for him, and then saunters off to square up to a Rottweiler or something.

“Where’s Sally?” I ask as we carry my bags down the hall. “Sally,” head nodding towards the study door, “is probably in her drawer.” And indeed. My sister removes the top drawer of her desk (which curiously, already stands open a bit), thereby exposing the second drawer, and also exposing Sally. She is placed, neatly, atop an A4 padded peel & seal envelope. She blinks, and parts her jaws just a fraction, letting the tiniest ‘meow’ escape. Just about. Yes, Sally lives in this drawer. Here is where you can find her should you, to her horror, come looking for her. **

I was puzzled, but concluded she is quite simply an introvert. For starters, Sally’s always been a feline of a rather nervous disposition. Mice used to chase her as a kitten. Loud noises make her freeze, then dart away in any given direction, she is not a cat’s cat. ‘Hide and seek’, for Sally, has never been a game, it’s her life. Just hide actually, no seek. So I guess Sally comes to the drawer because it’s her safe space. Her haven, where she can shut out the world and get some me-time; let go a little. Escape her anxieties, and quite frankly, just the stress of being her.

“‘Hide and seek’, for Sally, has never been a game, it’s her life. Just hide actually, no seek”

I get you, Sally. While I myself love being the centre of attention, equally, I need time on my own, time to recharge, by myself. Sometimes I have to be able to close my door, and spend a whole evening watching Murder She Wrote. I have a strong and undeniable introvert streak, and I need my base where I touch down every so often.

What are you comfortable with, that’s the simple question? What, and where, makes you feel safe (or if you never ever feel completely safe - I suspect this is Sally’s predicament), what makes you feel a bit safer? So don’t worry Sally, you’re okay. Spend as much time in that desk, second drawer, as you need. Come out when you’re ready. Or not.

*All persons appearing in this work are completely real. Any resemblance to real felines, living or dead, is not coincidental. But, as will become apparent, it is better for Sally that we provide her with an alias.

**She enters, I’m told, via the back and cleverly pushes the top drawer open to make her little space. Quite the stir the first time my sister was working, and suddenly the drawer, like furniture possessed, started sliding out by itself!
Greetings from the land-locked state of Quarantinia! No news from the allotment this month (other than King Weed Donald has kept the weeds down and is full of beans!) as we spent August in France. We were visiting friends in the Vendee who have been growing their own squashes and lovely roses like ‘Claude Monet’.

We travelled across to the Alsace stopping at Vitteaux (some ideas below if you only have a small space out front) and Flavigny-sur-Ozerain where Chocolat was filmed (no sign of Johnny Depp).

The Alsace is a renowned wine region and we did a fair amount of tasting and purchasing of the local produce. The villages in the area make the most of small spaces and fill them with flowers or growing tomatoes and chili peppers. Back in the Vendee we visited an arboretum where we found a Portuguese Quince and a Medlar.

If your outside space tends to get waterlogged you could always nurture a lily pond, which rather gives me the impression we’re back with Claude!

Many thanks to King Weed Donald and Tina Thyme for help etc.

PS Now’s the time to get your onions, garlic and spring bulbs in.
SERVICES DIRECTORY

LGBT SERVICES

● ALLSORTS YOUTH PROJECT
Drop-in for LGBTQ or unsure young people under 26
Tues 5.30–8.30pm 01273 721211 or email info@allsortsyouth.org.uk www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

● BRIGHTON & HOVE POLICE
Report all homophobic, biphobic or transphobic incidents to: 24/7 assistance call Police on 101 (emergencies 999)
Report online at: www.sussex.police.uk
LGBT team (not 24/7) email: LGBT@sussex.pnn.police.uk • LGBT Office PC James Breeds. Tel: 101 ext 551686
James.breeds@sussex.pnn.police.uk

● BRIGHTON & HOVE LGBT SAFETY FORUM
Independent LGBT forum working within the communities to address and improve safety and access issues in Brighton & Hove. For more info: 01273 675445 or admin@lgbt-help.com or www.lgbt-help.com

● BRIGHTON & HOVE LGBTV SERVICES
LGBT Older Peoples’ Project • LGBT Health Improvement and Engagement Project • LGBTQ+ Disabilities Project • Rainbow Café: support for LGBT+ people with Dementia • Volunteering opportunities 01273 234 009
Helpline hours: Wed & Thur, 7–9.30pm; trans-only webchat on Sun 3–5pm; call 01273 204 050 email info@switchboard.org.uk webchat@switchboard.org.uk/helpline www.switchboard.org.uk/brighton

● BRIGHTON ONEBODYONEFAITH
Formerly The Gay Christian Movement. Contact: Nigel Nash nigelnash@me.com www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk

● BRIGHTON WOMEN’S CENTRE
Info, counselling, drop-in space, support groups 01273 698032 or visit www.womenscentre.org.uk

● LESBIAN & GAY AA
12-step self-help programme for alcohol addictions: Sun, 7.30pm, Chapel Royal, North St, Bn (side entrance). 01273 203 343 (general AA line)

● LGBT COCAINE ANONYMOUS
Meeting every Tues 6.30-8pm, 6 Tilbury Pl, Brighton, BN2 0GY. CA isn’t allied with any outside organisation, and neither endorses or opposes any causes. Helpline 0800 6120225. www.cocaineanonymous.org.uk www.sussexcocaineanonymous.co.uk

● LGBT NA GROUP
Brighton-based LGBT (welcomes others) Narcotics Anonymous group every Tue 6.30–8pm, Millwood Centre, Nelson Row, Kingwood St. 0300 999 1212

● LGBT+ MEDITATION GROUP
Meditation & discussion, every 2nd & 4th Thur, 5.30–7pm, Anahata Clinic, 119 Edward St, Brighton. 07789 861 367 or www.bodhitreebrighton.org.uk

● LUNCH POSITIVE
Lunch club for people with HIV. Meet/make friends, find peer support in safe space. Every Fri, noon–2.30pm, Community Room, Dorset Gnads Methodist Church, Dorset Gnads, Brighton. Lunch £1.50 07846 464 384 or www.lunchpositive.org

● MCC BRIGHTON
Inclusive, affirming space where all are invited to come as they are to explore their spirituality without judgement. 01273 515572 or info@mccbrighton.org.uk www.mccbrighton.org.uk

● MINDOUT
Independent, impartial services run by and for LGBTQ people with experience of mental health issues. 24 hr confidential answerphone: 01273 234839 or email info@mindout.org.uk and out of hours online chat www.mindout.org.uk

● NAVIGATE
Social/peer support group for FTM, transmasculine & gender queer people, every 1st Wed 7-9pm & 3rd Sat of month 1–3pm at Space for Change, Windlesham Venue, BN1 3AH. https://navigatebrighton.wordpress.com/

● PEER ACTION
Regular low cost yoga, therapies, swimming, meditation & social groups for people with HIV. contact@peeraction.net or www.peeraction.net

● RAINBOW FAMILIES
Support group for lesbian and/or gay parents 07951 082013 or info@rainbowfamilies.org.uk www.rainbowfamilies.org.uk

● RAINBOW HUB
Information, contact, help and guidance to services for LGBT+ communities in Brighton, Hove and Sussex at Rainbow Hub drop in LGBT+ - one stop shop: 93 St James Street, BN2 1TP. 01273 675445 or visit www.therainbowhubbrighton.com

● SOME PEOPLE
Social/support group for LGBT or questioning aged 14-19, Tue 5.30–7.30pm, Haslinda. Call/text Catherine Connolly 0797 3255076 or email somepeople@eastsussex.gov.uk

● THE VILLAGE MCC
Christian church serving the LGBTQ community. Sundays 6pm, Somerset Day Centre, Kemptown 07476 667353 www.thelivillagemcc.org

HIV PREVENTION, CARE & TREATMENT SERVICES

● AVERT
Sussex HIV & AIDS info service 01403 210202 or email confidential@avert.org

● BRIGHTON & HOVE CAB HIV PROJECT
Money, benefits, employment, housing, info, advocacy. Appointments: Tue–Thur 9am–4pm, Wed 9am–12.30pm
Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, Brighton Town Hall. 01273 733390 or 520 or www.brightonhovecab.org.uk

● CLINIC M
Free confidential testing & treatment for STIs including HIV, plus Hep A & B vaccinations. Claude Nicol Centre, Sussex County Hospital, on Weds from 5–8pm. 01273 664 721 or www.brightonsexualhealth.com

● LAWSON UNIT
Medical advice, treatment for HIV+, specialist clinics, diet & welfare advice, drug trials. 01273 664 722

● MARTIN FISHER FOUNDATION
HIV Self testing kits via digital vending machines available from: The Brighton Sauna, Sublime, Prowler, Marborough Pub and The Rainbow Hub martinfisherfoundation.org

● SUBSTANCE MISUSE SERVICE
Pavilions Partnership. Info, advice, appointments & referrals 01273 731 900. Drop-in: Richmond House, Richmond Rd, Brighton, Mon–Wed & Fri 10am–4pm, Thur 10am–7pm, Sat 10am–1pm; 9 The Drive, Hove 01273 680714 Mon & Wed 10am–12pm & 1pm–3pm, Tue & Thu 10am–4pm. info & advice only (no assessments), Fri 10am-12pm & 1pm-3pm. • Gary Smith (LGBT+ Support) 07884 476634 or email gsmith@pavilions.org.uk For more info visit weblink: pavilions.org.uk/services/treatment-recovery-options/

● SUSSEX BEACON
24 hour nursing & medical care, day care 01273 694222 or www.sussexbeacon.org.uk

● TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST SERVICES
For more info about these free services go to the THT office, 61 Ship St, Brighton, Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm 01273 764200 or info.brighton@tht.org.uk • Venue Outreach: info on HIV, sexual health, personal safety, safer drug/alcohol use, free condoms/lubricant for men who have sex with men. • The Bushes Outreach Service @ Dukes Mound: advice, support, info on HIV & sexual health, and free condoms & lube • Netreach (online/mobile app outreach in Brighton & Hove): info/advise on HIV/sexual local services. THT Brighton Outreach workers online on Grindr, Scruff, & Squirt • Condom Male: discreet, confidential service posts free condoms/lube/sexual health info to men who have sex with men without access to East Sussex commercial gay scene • Positive Voices: volunteers who go to organisations to talk about personal experiences of living with HIV • Fastest (HIV testing): walk-in, (no appointment) rapid HIV testing service open to MSM (Men who have sex with Men). Anyone from the African communities, male and female sex workers and anyone who identifies as Trans or non-binary. We now offer rapid 15 minutes results for HIV/Syphilis: Mon 10am–8pm, Tues-Fri 10am–5pm, Thurs 10am–8pm (STI testing available)

SAfaust at The Brighton Sauna (HIV testing): walk-in, (no appointment) rapid HIV testing service for men who have sex with men, results in 20 minutes: Wed–6–8pm (STI testing available)

Face2Face: confidential info & advice on sexual health & HIV for men who have sex with men, up to 6 one hour appointments • Specialist Training: wide range of courses for groups/individuals, specific courses to suit needs • Counselling: from qualified counsellors for up to 1.2 sessions for people living with/affected by HIV • What Next? Thurs eve, 6 week peer support group work programme for newly diagnosed HIV+ gay men • HIV Support Services: info, support & practical advice for people living with/affected by HIV • HIV Welfare Rights Advice: Find out about benefits or benefit changes. Advice line: Tue–Thur 1:30–2.30pm, 1–2.1 appts for advice & workshops on key benefits

● TERRENCE HIGGINS EASTBOURNE
Web support & info on HIV, sexual health & local services via netreach and myhiv.org.uk • Free condom postal service contact Grace Coughlan on 07598485690 or grace.coughlan@tth.org.uk

● SEXUAL HEALTH WORTHING
Free confidential tests & treatment for STIs inc HIV, Hep A & B vaccinations. Worthing based 0845 111345645

NATIONAL HELPLINES

● NATIONAL LGBT DOMESTIC ABUSE HELPLINE at galop.org.uk and 0800 999 5428 • SWITCHBOARD 0300 330 0630 • POSITIVELINE (EDDIE SURMAN TRUST) Mon-Fri 11am-10pm, Sat & Sun 4-10pm 0800 1696806 • MAINLINERS 02078 825286 • NATIONAL AIDS HELPLINE 08005 67123 • NATIONAL DRUGS HELPLINE 08007 76600 • THT AIDS Treatment phone 08459 470047 • THT direct 0845 1221200

GSCE 73