
By Jules Becker

Decades before experts identified PTSD, William Wharton was vividly and hauntingly describing it in his memorable novel "Birdy." A moving look at the adolescence to adulthood bromance of two fictional best friends, "Birdy" also focuses in good part on the wartime treatment of the title character's formidable disorder and buddy Al's considerable efforts to help. Talented playwright Naomi Wallace ("One Flea Spare") gave impressive attention to both their singular friendship and Birdy's profound struggle in her affecting adaptation of the same name—now in a soaring production by Commonwealth Shakespeare Company at Babson College's Carling-Sorenson Theater. Clint Ramos' brilliant scenic design serves notice—before a word is spoken—of the challenges confronting both friendship and treatment of Birdy's disorder. A stage-spanning metal construct resembles in its own way a jungle gym on which Birdy and Al will climb. Exploring its three levels and many experience-related props—among them hub caps and baseball bats, the stalwart friends will arrive at the construct's top meant to serve as a kind of roof and take-off place for Birdy's flight.

"He is circumcised. I have a gorgeous, circumcised penis and I want him to have the same."

— Andy Cohen is not talking about what he looks for in a prospective paramour's equipment. He's talking about his son.
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BGMC

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“Seven Last Words of Christ,” to give powerful voice to the final words of Michael Brown, Amadou Diallo, Kenneth Chamberlain, John Crawford, Eric Garner, Oscar Grant, and Trayvon Martin—black teenagers and adults who died at the hands of police or authority figures—inviting reflection on their humanity, their value, and the tragedy of lives lost too soon.

The second act of the concert, which is at New England Conservatory’s Jordan Hall March 16 and 17, will feature solo and joint performances by Hall, the entertainers, director and choreographer known for a star-making turn on “American Idol,” his inventive YouTube presence, and his starring Broadway roles as Lola in “Kinky Boots” and Billy Flynn in “Chicago.” Hall and BGMC will perform selections from “Kinky Boots,” and celebratory, affirming pop anthems made famous by the likes of Whitney Houston and Christina Aguilera.

BGMC Music Director Reuben M. Reynolds III discussed the inspiration and impetus for “Raise You Up” in a recent interview.

Q: “Seven Last Words of the Unarmed” is an intense and eye-opening piece of music. The last words of each of these men tell such revealing stories on their own: “Mom, I’m going to college.” “You shot me!” “It’s not real,” and so on. Taken together, the weight of tragedy is almost too much bear. How did you come to include this piece in “Raise You Up”?
A: I’ve been so active in the gay rights movement for years, but this would never have been possible without the work that was done in the sixties for racial equality. We build up to “Seven Last Words of the Unarmed” with a series of songs and one of them is a wonderful South African piece that talks about how it takes a whole village to raise our children. I think about these seven black teenagers and adults who died at the hands of police or authority figures—inviting reflection on their humanity, their value, and the tragedy of lives lost too soon.

Q: Can you talk about the other music in the show’s first half?
A: The opening piece is a wonderful combination of “Never Get Lost” and “Take Me To The World” by Martin Blitstein and Steven Sondheim. They’re gorgeously romantic songs that let the audience know we’re about to embark on a journey.

Q: Where are you taking them?
A: To a celebration of equality. We’ll do “We Sang Our Songs” by William Grant Still, the first widely recognized African American classical composer. He performed with the New York Philharmonic and wound up going out west and writing music for movies. His wife Verna Arvey was a concert pianist and journalist and she wrote the text. The song is about how the fight for equality never ends and the need to keep telling stories: “We have sung our songs so that you can sing yours. We fought and you have to continue to fight.”

The song was written for the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a group that was formed in 1871 to tour the country to raise money for Fisk University in Nashville, which is one of the first historically black colleges. The Fisk Singers popularized the Negro spiritual tradition among white audiences at the time because those songs weren’t previously sung in public. The ensemble continues to this day and is still made up of Fisk students.

Q: Will you perform the songs as the Fisk Jubilee Singers would?
A: We definitely didn’t want to try to perform these spirituals in an historically authentic manner. We’re a predominately white chorus and it would have too easily been seen as cultural appropriation when our goal is to pay homage. So we drew on source materials and our assistant music director Chad Weirick created new music for the pieces with big arrangements. For example, we have five string players and Chad wrote parts for them that approximate the flowing sounds of a river for “Deep River.”

Q: Tell us about the second act and the one-and-only Todrick Hall?
A: The second half takes a whole different turn. Todrick does a solo set onstage for about 20 minutes. Then the chorus returns and we do two wonderfully inspirational songs, “Beautiful,” by Christina Aguilera, and Whitney Houston’s anthem, “I Wanna Dance With Somebody.” It’s just so uplifting and it really will raise you up.

Q: That sounds like a good balance.
A: We end with music from “Kinky Boots,” which was scored by Cyndi Lauper. Todrick will sing “I’m Not My Father’s Son,” in which the main character, Lola the drag queen, wrestles with finding her way to his father’s ideals. Then we’ll sing “Raise You Up/Just Be,” the “Kinky Boots” finale. The story of “Kinky Boots” is how this little shoe manufacturer in England stays in business by making giant thigh-high boots for drag queens. So the finale of our show is all these guys in leather thigh-high heels dancing. I’m going to have to take an insurance policy out!

Q: Yes, you are.
A: The guys are so excited about it. I think the program as a whole shows so much hope and so much joy. It acknowledges all of our racial strife but also that there is beauty in the world for all of us—and we can use it to make change.

“Raise You Up” takes place Saturday, March 16 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, March 17, 2019 at 3 p.m. at New England Conservatory’s Jordan Hall, 50 Gainsborough St., Boston. Tickets begin at $25. Call 617-542-7464 or visit BGMC.org.

Birdy

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flight, Wallace has smartly turned the two men into Young Al and Birdy and Al and Birdy to facilitate the play’s flashbacks and insights about the characters’ very different fortunes and development.

CSC artistic director Steve Maler sure-handedly pilots the highs and lows of the friends’ experiences and their respective moves between past and present. Maxim Chumov captures Young Al’s apathy and support for Young Birdy. Spencer Hamp finds all of Young Birdy’s reserve and diffidence. By contrast, Damon Singletary—replacing James Ricardo Ricci as Dr. White—brings a tender, caring, and noble spirit to the role. Steve Barkhimer has all of White’s one-track medical attitudes. By contrast, Damon Singletary—replacing James Ricardo Ricci as Dr. White—brings a tender, caring, and noble spirit to the role. Steve Barkhimer has all of White’s one-track medical attitudes.

Perhaps most stunning of all is Will Taylor’s uncanny portrayal of Birdy. Watch Taylor’s second act foot movements as he crouches in an amazing balletic stance on his toes and his corresponding arm insinuation that the two soldiers are impulsively pleasuring each other. Steve Barkhimer has all of White’s one-track medical attitudes. By contrast, Damon Singletary—replacing James Ricardo Ricci as Dr. White—has all of his understanding and patience nursing Birdy.

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If you have read the fine novel (or merely seen the sensitive 1984 movie version), you will find Wallace’s adaptation and Maler’s staging equally triumphant. Most of all CSC makes Wharton’s beautiful ode to friendship, nature and the imagination take wings.

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Over the years, my frequent phone calls to my elderly mother back in Ohio have gone brief, as if we were following the same script. I attempt to draw out some answers, to gauge her mood, which is usually good, and to see how her ( unreliable ) short-term memory is functioning.

Me: What are you up to?  
Mom: Just relaxing, watching TV.  
Me: Did you get your meds?  
Mom: Yes, they came in after dinner.  
Me: How was your day?  
Mom: Fine.

Today, my mom lives mostly in the present. I've learned, particularly when I call in the evening, not to ask too many questions; my mother can tell me that she went to several programs during the day but can't remember any details. Mom's memory loss is both a blessing and a curse; I miss the intelligent, highly-organized competent woman who ruled the roost of my childhood home, who could and probably should have set up a home-organizing business to help less fortunate souls get their collective acts together.

Mom was a great reader, and though she still peruses novels from the independent living center's small library, I doubt she recalls much of what she has just read. But the act of reading, or just turning pages soothes her.

The flip side, the blessing hidden in this loss, is that my high-anxiety mother can no longer create the fearful scenarios that drove her for her first eighty years. She can no longer worry about the potential dangers that lurk around every corner, since she can't remember those dangers or put out the extra energy that worrying demands. (An example: About 30 years ago, as I was leaving Cleveland to embark on a Scandinavian vacation without a formal itinerary, to bike, sightsee and explore four countries where I knew no one: "Don't trust anyone.")

My mother was a high-maintenance individual—wedded to her routines, on a constant mission to weed out any dirt that might have invaded her living quarters. The house I grew up in felt, in many ways, like a hospital ward or some other institution. One could literally eat off the floor, but walking on those floors meant tip toeing on eggshells, our family dynamics fueled by Mom's need to be in control of her environment.

Now, her small one-bedroom apartment is clean, but not spotless. And my mother is, if not exactly relaxed, relatively calm when it comes to life's minor inconveniences; a bit of dirt tracked in on her carpeting, a bill paid a day late, no longer lead to a blow up or a day-long drama.

Still, I miss the mother I had until 7 or 8 years ago. That woman had learned to be independent after my father, and then years later, her second husband died. My mother navigated through her second husband's illness and decline, losing weight in the process. By the time he passed away, Mom was down to about 90 pounds; today she tips the scale at 102. But she regrouped, went out with friends, and managed quite well until she was rushed to the hospital with a ruptured appendix. After a long and difficult recovery, my mother recovered physically, but her short-term memory was mostly gone.

It turns out that many older folks lose some memory after undergoing general anesthesia. They may forget a week or a month until they come back to themselves. But in my mother's case, her short-term memory never returned; the drugs triggered a form of mild dementia that has never left her. Still, without the surgery she would never have survived, and as she has reached 90, and I've passed 60, I am grateful for the time we've shared since that medical scare.

The years pass, and bits and pieces of her fall away, stripping my mother down to her essence. She is no longer the woman who raised me, but a kinder, gentler figure, like the mother I share with her is like my life in general, both bitter and sweet.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher, and storyteller in Boston. He will be performing his one-man show "It's Now or Never" at Medford Public Library on Thursday April 18 at 7 PM. For more information, check out judahleblang.com

LGBT Elders in An Ever Changing World 8th Annual Conference

Submitted by LGBT Aging Project

The LGBT Elders in An Ever Changing World 8th Annual Conference will be held on Friday, March 15, 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM, at Salem State University, 352 Lafayette St, Salem, MA 01970

Today's keynote speaker is Karen Fredriksen-Goldsen, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Aging with Pride, National Health, Aging and Sexuality/Gender Study and Professor and Director of the Healthy Generations Hartford Center of Excellence at the University of Washington.

The Eighth Annual LGBT Elders in an Ever Changing World Conference is a collaborative effort of the following:

• The LGBT Aging Project, a program of Fenway Health in Boston, Massachusetts
• North Shore Elder Services and the Over the Rainbow LGBT Coalition in Danvers, Massachusetts
• Salem State University School of Social Work in Salem, Massachusetts
• Care Dimensions -- a non-profit hospice & palliative care organization serving Eastern Massachusetts
• AARP Massachusetts

The conference presentations address substantive practice and policy topics that affect and involve the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities and allies. The conference strives to create an open and welcoming forum as well as a convening of community. LGBT Elders in an Ever Changing World conference is intended for consumers, educators, researchers, and public policy makers as well as professionals who support and work with LGBT older adults and caregivers. CEUs are offered for social workers and nurses.

The conference planning committee anticipates hosting fifteen breakout sessions following the keynote presentation.

For more information visit www.glbeteldersconference.org

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Newseum
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the Stonewall uprising—the impetus of the gay rights movement. The Front Pages display is a daily exhibit that can be viewed by passersby as they walk by the front of The Newseum.

"Rise Up: Stonewall and the LGBTQ Rights Movement," is an exhibit that explores the modern gay rights movement in the United States and marks the 50th anniversary of the June 1969 police raid of the Stonewall Inn in New York’s Greenwich Village. The protests following the raid are considered to be the catalyst that inspired the modern gay liberation movement and the ongoing fight for LGBTQ civil rights.

"Rise Up" explores what happened at the Stonewall Inn and how it gave rise to a 50-year fight for civil rights for LGBTQ Americans. Over the years, activists have used their First Amendment freedoms to demand an end to discrimination against LGBTQ Americans in housing, employment and public accommodations.

Frank Mitchell, Graphics Specialist/Exhibit Design, Newseum said "On an average day, the Today’s Front Pages display is the result of the efforts of people at more than 800 newspapers from around the world. All those people — from more than 80 countries on nearly every continent — took time out of their busy schedules to contribute to a project that they feel is worthwhile. There are no formal contracts involved. On big news days, more than 75,000 unique visitors come to the Today’s Front Pages website to see how newspapers around the world cover major stories, as well as news of local interest."

The fact that Bay Windows would appear in a museum on Pennsylvania Avenue in the shadow of the United States Capitol Building was something this newspaper’s founders could have never imagined would occur over 35 years ago.

Bay Windows was not the only LGBTQ newspaper to appear on this historic day. Other LGBTQ newspapers appearing in the windows of The Newseum were The Washington Blade, Philadelphia Gay News, Dallas Voice, San Francisco Bay Times, Seattle Gay News, Watermark (Florida), Qnotes (Charlotte).

Patty Rhule, Vice President/Content and Exhibit Development, and Sonya Gavankar, Director of Public Relations, were also instrumental in making this historic exhibit a reality. “Rise Up: Stonewall And The LGBTQ Rights Movement” will be on display through December 31, 2019 at the Newseum, 555 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C. 202-292-6100.

Letters Policy
Bay Windows welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed and accompanied by a mailing address and phone number. Because of space limitations, letters should not be more than 200 words.

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Men's Event

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All Photos by Marilyn Humphries
One of the statistics I have cited to these two-plus decades is that most men have their first sexual experience with other men. I realize this is not particularly scandalous to the men reading this column. But we are talking all men—straight and gay alike. Before you go all Corey Feldman on me, the term “sexual experience” often refers to a “circle jerk,” which figures into so many art films in my collection. This came back to me when I read about the proliferation of jerk-off clubs targeting straight men. Before you rush off to buy a membership, it should be noted that these clubs have strict policies against any oral or anal interaction, and one must keep one’s hands to oneself. Kinda takes all the fun out of it.

This inevitably leads to a discussion about “Leaving Neverland.” I can’t imagine anything in there shocked or even surprised my readers. Learning that Michael Jackson taught these boys how to masturbate fits into the aforementioned statistic. But the similarity ends there. Beyond all that sex stuff—which I believed—these boys (now men) truly loved Michael Jackson. What troubles most people about this—aside from, of course, the idea of falling in love with one’s abuser—is that these men identify themselves as heterosexual. Not only heterosexual, but married with children. I have had numerous discussions with people who cannot comprehend how any of this is possible. But what this doc hammered home was how it is possible to have two completely contradictory feelings at the same time. Kudos to Oprah’s after-show for focusing primarily on Wade and Jimmy’s emotional turmoil. Again, putting the sex aside, these boys who had no romantic experience fell totally in love with Michael and saw themselves tossed aside when the latest Macaulay Culkin came down the pike. I know how I feel when someone stops returning my calls, or simply moves on. I can’t imagine what someone their age felt like. I suspect this emotional upheaval is what has caused the most psychological damage, and I feel for them...but not in thatabo club kinda way.

Lots of people seem to have a problem with Andy Cohen returning to Grindr in search of love. But, give the guy a break—he’s got a kid, he doesn’t have a lover. When the kid goes to sleep, let dad break—he’s got a kid, he doesn’t have a lover. Despite all of the evidence pointing to Jussie Smollett’s guilt, some people are still giving him the benefit of the doubt and holding onto hope that it’s all just a big misunderstanding. His most vocal supporters are Tyler Perry and Queen Latifah, who say it is premature to have an opinion until we hear all of the evidence. The fact that two people with ginormous secrets say we don’t have all the facts speaks volumes.

Last week, I went to a gala evening at the Dolby Theatre celebrating the 50th anniversary of “Laugh-In.” For “Still the Dolby Theatre celebrating the 50th anniversary of “Laugh-In.” For “Still

Part of the fun out of it.

Now we move onto the tragic news about Luke Perry. 52 years old, in good health, massive stroke, medically induced coma, and then dead. Having just crossed the half-a-century mark, this story hits a bit too close to home. But here’s something I didn’t know—he had his stroke while waiting to be picked up to go to the memorial service of “Young and the Restless” actor Kristoff St. John—who also died at 52. Talk about eerie. All sorts of lovely stories about Luke have come out. Ian Ziering reminisced about when he and wife Erin were doing some smiling in their backyard. Luke showed up with tools and supplies—he decided Ian needed a fenced-in area to keep the iminent arrival safe. The other story which tuged at my heartstrings was when Perry gave his son’s dinosaur blanket to Jarrod Emick when he had a baby boy. It came with a card. “Walker—Welcome to the world. Good to have you aboard. This blanket belonged to my son when he was your age. It kept him warm many nights, and all of these dinosaurs are friendly and will protect you. Mom & Dad—I wish you all the very best. Now your life has really started. Best wishes always, Luke.” I think that pretty much sums up the kinda guy he was.

Jussie Smollett has been indicted by a grand jury in Chicago on 16 federal felony charges. These are on top of the state charges which he was arraigned on last month. Of course, his attorney Mark Geragos also repped Michael Jackson on his sexual assault case (he was replaced by Thomas Mesereau). While people are picking up on my prediction that Jussie may be in the market for a plea deal, Robin Roberts revealed that Smollett showed up over two hours late for their TV interview. Let’s hope he’s more punctual when he appears in court on March 14th.
For decades there has been an ongoing struggle in the United Methodist Church (UMC) to adopt a policy of full inclusion of its LGBTQ parishioners and clergy and all the spiritual gifts we bring to the church.

However, UMC’s vote at General Conference last month to uphold - 53% to 47% - its Traditionalist Plan, which is to oppose same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy. Now the church has the potential for a schism with its global delegation outnumbering the U.S.

In the hopes of avoiding a schism, the Council of Bishops had recommended the One Church Plan that would grant individual ministers and regional church bodies the decision to ordain LGBTQs as clergy and to perform LGBTQ weddings. It was believed that such a decision on a church-by-church and regional basis would reflect the diversity as well as affirm the different churches and cultures throughout the global body of UMC.

The One Church Plan, however, was one of three proposed plans by the UMC’s Commission on a Way Forward. The others include the Traditionalist Plan and the Connectional Plan, both exclusionary to LGBTQ parishioners.

The One Church Plan would excuse the offensive and controversial language targeted at LGBTQs from the Book of Discipline and replace it with a more compassionate, accurate, up-to-date, and contextualized language about human sexuality in support of the mission and all its parishioners.

Also, the One Church Plan would uphold religious freedom and thereby safeguard those clerics and conferences unwilling to ordain or marry LGBTQ persons because of their theological convictions.

However, the UMC continues to be contradictory in its policies concerning LGBTQ worshippers, and the church’s contentious views reared its ugly head at the 2016 meeting of global delegates.

For example, while UMC states that we have and are of the same sacred worth as heterosexuals, and that the church is committed to the ministry of all people regardless of gender identities and sexual orientations. However, the church also views queer sexualities as sinful. The Book of Discipline states that sexuality is “God’s good gift to all persons” and that people are “fully human only when their sinfulness is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church and society.”

However, this rule is not applicable to LGBTQs.

While it is clear that the UMC is not in lockstep with the changing societal tide toward LGBTQ acceptance, it is also not in lockstep with its own more progressive arm of “reconciling and inclusive” congregations. However, the UMC’s history of struggle on this issue clearly illustrates the defiant will for LGBTQ inclusion, and churches in Massachusetts have always led the way.

For example, in last Sunday’s Boston Globe nearly three dozen United Methodist churches across the Commonwealth took out a half-page ad affirming their belief “in the sacredness of all.”

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For example, in last Sunday’s Boston Globe nearly three dozen United Methodist churches across the Commonwealth took out a half-page ad affirming their belief “in the sacredness of all.” The advocacy Massachusetts churches have shown for decades.

In the 1990s, the Union United Methodist Church (UUUMC), a predominately African American congregation located in Boston’s South End — once the epicenter of the city’s LGBTQ community — is one of them. And it is the one institution least expected to be lauded among LGBTQ people of African descent because of the Black Church’s notorious history of homophobia. When its pastor came out at General Conference in 2016 to move the global church body’s moral compass against its anti-LGBTQ policies, UUUMC was in full support.

Since June 2011 more than 100 Methodist ministers in New England have pledged to marry LGBTQ couples in defiance of the denomination’s ban on same-sex unions. Approximately one out of nine Methodist clerics signed a statement pledging to open their churches to LGBTQ couples that stated, “We repent that it has taken us so long to act… We realize that our church’s discriminatory policies tarnish the witness of the church to the world, and we are [complicit].”

In 2013, the Reverend Frank Schaefer, pastor at Zion United Methodist Church of Iona in Pennsylvania, was forced to stand trial for officiating his son’s 2007 same-sex nuptials.

“I love him so much and didn’t want to deny him that joy. I had to follow my heart,” Schaefer told the New York Daily News.

The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Church, however, wanted to drill home to Schaefer and his allies that he — irrespective of familial love or Christian belief — blatantly and willfully violated the churches law book, the Book of Discipline, prohibiting same-sex marriages.

Knowing where Methodist clerics in New England stand on same-sex marriages, Schaefer officiated his son’s nuptials here in Massachusetts.

UMC’s decision to oppose same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy is both wrong-headed and wrong-hearted. However, as LGBTQ people we must know that this religious intolerance and spiritual abuse are antithetical to the social gospel of Jesus Christ: that all people under God have the same sacred worth — even if the United Methodist Church doesn’t practice it.
LGBT Presence in the 2019 IRNE Nominees

By Jules Becker

Look for a rainbow of pride in the 2019 IRNE (Independent Reviewers of New England) nominees. Plays and musicals with LGBT plots, themes and characters dominate the recently announced nominations for this year’s awards. As usual, LGBT acting, directing and production talent are vying for IRNE’s in many categories.

A small stage revival of the landmark Tony Award-winning Kander and Ebb musical "Cabaret" by Moonshot Productions has garnered 11 nominations. The performance nods include best actor for Phil Taylor as the gay Emcee (who is seen as Jewish as well in many productions)—who ends up in a concentration camp.

The role of bisexual novelist Clifford Bradshaw has garnered a supporting actor nod for Jared Troilo. An Ogunquit Playhouse large stage production of "An American in Paris" is also cited 11 times. The Broadway musical has French budding entertainer Henri’s mother questioning his orientation in spite of his apparent engagement to a straight woman. Henri’s parents protected Jew- ish dancer Lise Dassin, a part that has brought a supporting actor one to Victor Almazar, who plays the boxer’s lover Luis. American Repertory Theatre has received several large stage musical nods for "The Black Clown," a show celebrating African-American poet Langston Hughes. Davone Tines has a best actor nod for playing the Harlem Renaissance man of letters. Lesbian Liza Jesse Peterson is a solo nominee for her Arts Emerson one-person performance piece "The peculiar Patriot." Gay writer-performer Vichet Chum gained a nomination for his own Cambod- dia-inspired "Knyum" at Merrimack Repertory Theatre.

LGBT characters brought recognition elsewhere. Patricia R. Floyd received a best large stage nod playing a lesbian factory mentor in Huntington Theatre Company's staging of "Skeleton Crew." Malaki Hernandez was nominated for best large stage musical supporting actor playing vulnerable gay dance Paul in Reagle Music Theatre’s staging of "Skeleton Key.” Davron S. Monroe is a lead actor nominee—midsize stage—as Roland Hayes, the show’s big-voiced subject. Parent is also a supporting actor nominee, large stage for "Skeleton Key." Other acting nominees include Bill Moor’s lead actor, Les Salonnieres, Greater Boston Stage Company; Greg Marzo, lead actor-fringe stage, for "Brawler" at Boston Playwrights’ Theatre; Nick Dussault, supporting actor-large stage, for "Wig Out!" at A.R.T. at Club Oberon; Eddie Shields as Marlowe in "Shakespeare in Love,” and Victor Shopov in Hub Theatre Company of Boston’s revival of "True West.” For a complete list of 2019 IRNE nominees, go to the IRNE site on Facebook or to Theater Mirror. The awards ceremony will be held Monday, April 8 at the Inn at Brookline.
Laugh-In: The Stars Celebrate”, Netflix hoped to assemble the remaining living cast members. They were one short—no Goldie Hawn (for reasons well known to them, or so I’m told). In the role of Goldie we got Miss Loni Anderson (no, not in a bikini). Happily, we did have Lily Tomlin (who did two new Ernestine and Edith Ann sketches—both of which were pre-taped), Jo Anne Worley (who was chewing up the scenery) and Ruth Buzzi (who currently bears a striking resemblance to Ruth Bader Ginsberg). The event was hosted by Tiffany Haddish and self-proclaimed sword swallower, Neil Patrick Harris. Guest stars included Jay Leno, Billy Crystal, Bill Maher, Chelsea Handler, Cheri Oteri, and a bunch of others who I must say neither Bruce Vilanch nor I could place. The low point was a musical number by the two Ritas—Moreno and Wilson. And we had to sit through it twice. I loves me some Moreno, but this was not good. The spunky Latina made sure to let the audience know it wasn’t her fault. “I’m not taking the blame for this shit—we’ve been sitting back there in the freezing cold for two hours!” The evening ran very long and towards the end, people were leaving. At one point, I was pulled from my seat and asked to sit in the front row next to Norman Lear—talk about television royalty! Two seats over was “Laugh-In” creator, George Schlatter—who recognized me and said hi. All I kept thinking was, FINALLY I’m the young one! Then Norman leaned over to George and said, “Can you believe we created being funny on television?” George said, “Yeah, and they’re KILLING it! But we can fix it in post!” Priceless. The special will air later this season.

If you’re a fan of “RuPaul’s Drag Race”, you’ll wanna catch Peaches Christ’s touring production of “Mean Gays”! The outrageous parody features a cavalcade of stars, including Kim Chi, Willam, Peaches and Laganja Estranja. The capacity crowd at LA’s Montalban Theatre could not have been more enthusiastic—especially with the surprise appearance of Daniel Franzese, who was in the film “Mean Girls”. I eagerly await their next endeavor—a mash-up of “First Wives Club” and “Fight Club” called “First Wives Fight Club”. For dates and tix, check out PeachesChrist.com.

At long last “Mad About You” is returning to TV, although it’s not gonna be on a channel anyone’s ever heard of. The reboot has been picked up by Spectrum, which used to be Time Warner Cable. I know what you’re wondering—is it gonna be on public access? Nope. This new channel is called “Spectrum Originals”, which you can get if you have Spectrum, or you can pay to see it online. Who knows how this will work. I’m told that the limited series will have no commercials, it picks up Paul and Jamie as empty nesters, and Helen Hunt will direct the first episode (she directed the finale to the original sitcom). Look for it to debut next season.

Time for another Fayewatch. You’ll recall I told you that Miss Dunaway would be returning to Broadway playing Katharine Hepburn in Matthew Lombardo’s play, “Tea at Five”. Faye Dunaway playing a legendary Hollywood actress—what could possibly go wrong? Prior to opening on Broadway this summer (theatre and date to be announced), the show will run from June 21st through July 7th at Boston’s Huntington Theatre. It’s somewhat of a homecoming for Faye—she studied at Boston University, which operates the theatre. Tix are on sale now at HuntingtonTheatre.org.

When we’re looking forward to months and months of Fayewatch items, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. For the best dish, be sure to check out www.BillyMasters.com—the site that’ll never jerk you around. Sorry we didn’t have room for an “Ask Billy” question. But I always have time for you. Dash your queries off to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Peaches Christ is announced as Faye’s understudy! Until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
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