

SLUG MAG



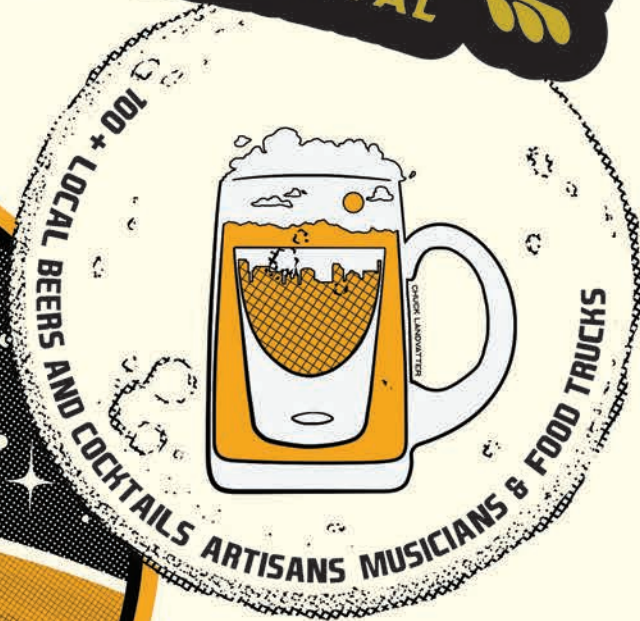
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LGBTQ+ PRIDE



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ABOUT THE COVER: In celebration of Pride Month, Kenneth JP Mailo (@mixed_gummybear on Instagram) illustrates the beauty of transformation for LGBTQ+ individuals by incorporating *Sailor Moon*-inspired magical elements with the colors of the Progress Pride Flag.

Jess Gruneisen

Contributor Limelight Photographer



Since joining the *SLUG* team in 2022, Jess has shown her skills in everything from band portraits to action shots. She takes on each assignment with dedication and creativity. See her *Localized* photos on pages 28–29 and check out more of her work on Instagram at @jessgruneisenphotography.

Garrian Spivey

Contributor Limelight Brand Ambassador



As a Brand Ambassador, Garrian has been an enormous help at *SLUG* events due to his reliability, dedication and positivity. You might have seen him at *SLUG*'s booth at the *SLC Tattoo Expo* or *Kilby Block Party!* He's also a superb comic illustrator—see his work on Instagram at @garcomics.

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Inclusivity at its Core

What's in Store for SLC Pride

By Olivia Greene • greenecg@gmail.com

Roberto Lopez vividly recalls his initial encounter with SLC Pride. Despite concerns about his undocumented status, a few of the organization's members told him that they accepted anyone and would find a place for him. Their warm welcome affirmed his passion for community building and set the tone for Lopez's soon-to-be role as the organization's Development Director.

SLC Pride was born from the desire to highlight a sense of family within the Salt Lake community; to emulate "a sense of unity that we found within each other," Lopez says. From its humble beginnings with just a handful of members, SLC Pride has quickly catalyzed into a robust team of 38 representatives, united by a shared vision of inclusivity and support for all. Their goal is to create a space where everyone, regardless of identity, feels represented and valued. This mission will be made experiential in their first Pride event, happening June 27–30 at *The Gateway*, built for and by the local community. "There was this gap that needed to be filled in terms of local Pride celebrations that this organization is aiming to fill," Lopez explains.

Accessibility and inclusivity are at the forefront of this new festival. Everyone under the age of 18 will get in for free, as part of the organization's financial transparency and accessibility goal. "At such a vulnerable age, it is paramount for [kids] to be able to exist within an affirming space that keeps them safe with their people," Lopez says. For neurodivergent folks, there will be a "chill-out" space away

from the concert stages, as well as a silent disco for those who want to engage with the music in a controllable, scaled way. For those with disabilities and/or wheelchairs, paths will be clear and accessible. "We don't want to add more barriers—for anyone," Lopez says. In their pursuit of sustainability, SLC Pride is partnering with local universities to minimize their environmental footprint, emphasizing the importance of responsible stewardship for future generations.

Unlike many Pride events reliant on corporate sponsorship, SLC Pride remains steadfast in its dedication to putting the community first. While corporate funding is often necessary, the "community can kind of get blurred out, or put on the back burner," says Lopez. By allowing multicultural vendors to show up without the financial barrier of a booth fee, "the vendors have the autonomy to provide and cater to their community with whatever they would like to showcase," Lopez says. One such community collaborator who will be tabling during the event is the Nuanua Collective, dedicated to amplifying the voices of LGBTQ+ Pacific Islanders by exploring the intersection of queer and ethnic identities.

At the heart of SLC Pride is queer liberation—most of which has been fought for by the generations that came before us. Queer elders from Seniors Out And Proud Of Utah will be there to support queer youths. Elders can exemplify that although their "outness" has been

a battle won, "these kids can be shown that it's going to be okay," Lopez says. This kind of intergenerational support offers a sense of validation and familial belonging potentially not seen in some of the young attendees' biological families themselves.

95% of the local musical lineup for the weekend's celebrations is trans or nonbinary. Artists are coming from St. George, Logan and more and will showcase a variety of musical genres: country, hard rock, hyperpop and beyond. There will also be an education initiative to support educators in this political climate. The Human Rights Campaign and the ACLU of Utah will be tabling and the latter will be providing information on how to get engaged in community politics so that attendees can have an impact on the communities they care for. Behind the scenes, dedicated individuals such as **Liz Pitts**, who sits on the Utah Chamber of Commerce, **Bonnie O'Brien**, Festival Director and **Kate Rusk**, who constructs SLC Pride's marketing, work to make the event a reality, embodying the spirit of empowerment and collaboration.

As SLC Pride continues to evolve and expand its reach, it remains steadfast in its commitment to unity, diversity and celebration of all identities. At the center of this event is the idea that "people can go to this festival and meet people from their community and kind of build the gap that they've been missing all along," Lopez says. Volunteer, donate or attend at slc-pride.com.



Roberto Lopez and Bonnie O'Brien have both engaged in LGBTQ+ activism work for over a decade.

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Tara Lipsyncki is a terrible capitalist. As a drag queen and owner of *Mosaics Community Bookstore & Venue* in Provo, their self-proclaimed bleeding heart will forever put people ahead of profit, and not always without personal consequence.

The brainchild of Lipsyncki, *Mosaics* is much more than a shop selling wares. Their mission zeroes in on “elevating the voices of queer, BIPOC, non-LDS and other marginalized groups in Utah.”

It starts in a name, one that outlines their mission succinctly. *Mosaics Community Bookstore & Venue* is, first and foremost, a community space—safe to anyone that is othered. It is a space of authenticity, the definition of which is specific to each individual.

As a bookstore, *Mosaics* is meant to educate, enlighten and provide escape. Books are donated and purchasable through a pay-what-you-can model, with a suggested price of \$4. Staff, however, have been known and even encouraged to donate a book to a patron when it is clearly an unaffordable resource for them.

Finally, as the name suggests, *Mosaics* is a venue—unlike any other in Utah County. With regular events rotating on their calendar, such as all-ages drag shows and childrens’ story times, the space acts as a full safe room with lock-down capabilities and exit strategies.

“It’s tough to convince people we’re a safe space when we are literally receiving bomb threats,” Lipsyncki says, referring to an incident that occurred in April. They continue, “We do everything to protect those who walk through our doors.”

The shop is innocuously—and quite intentionally—tucked away in the corner of an unassuming strip mall in Provo, a stone’s throw from the *BYU* campus. From the outside, it is not apparent that the shop is inhabited at all, with shades often drawn, and a simple vinyl sign strung up atop the facade. Once the threshold is crossed, however, the world is transformed from drab black-and-white into a burst of color, à la the journey from Kansas to Oz.

White shelves with books of all kinds

Mosaics: Provo’s Only Queer Bookstore

By Kate Neal kttrulyb@gmail.com

are set and staged amongst pieces of thrifted, gifted and collected art. In the center of the space are two church pews with mustard yellow fabric covering the beaten-down cotton batting within. The banned books pointedly rest upon the shelves next to the pews, a juxtaposition that many patrons relate to.

“We’ve had some come in with their head entirely wrapped in a scarf so no one could see them, and then transform into someone entirely different once they’re safely within the walls of the shop,” Lipsyncki says. “This is a space where they can be themselves—without worrying about an honor code.”

While *Mosaic’s* mission is to elevate voices, Lipsyncki and their husband **Sean** quickly saw that the community was seeking quieter events. As a teenager, Sean found his first safe space amongst other introverted gamers, those less likely to go to the bars or clubs to express themselves. When it was clear the community echoed Sean’s feelings, Gayme Night on Fridays was born. With space for board games, Magic: The Gathering and D&D campaigns, this event quickly became *Mosaics’* most-attended.

Devout believers in freedom of religion, Lipsyncki and Sean are both ordained ministers in the Church of Fabulosity, founded by **Minister La La**. This 501(c)(3) federally-sanctioned religion believes in “celebrating unique human experiences and the divine fabulousness that resides in each of us.” Their participation as ministers allows many of their events the same government sanction all religions are granted, adding a layer of security and mitigating the discomfort patrons may feel.

Mosaics Community Bookstore & Venue

is, in the end, simple to define: a one-stop shopping experience, an event-driven venue and, most importantly, a safe space, offering community and connection to marginalized people of any sort. And in Utah County, that’s not easy to come by.

For more information about *Mosaics Community Bookstore & Venue* and to view their full schedule of events, follow them on Instagram at [@mosaics.utah](https://www.instagram.com/mosaics.utah) or visit mosaicstah.com.



Photo: Maralee Nielson

Tara Lipsyncki has worked hard to create a safe space for all kinds of people and all kinds of books at Mosaics.

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THE BOLD & Beautiful MATRONS OF MAYHEM

By Nikki Bradham • nicolebradham93@gmail.com || Photos by Bonneville Jones

The Matrons of Mayhem are an amazing drag troupe who have dedicated themselves to raising money for charity via drag bingo events. This group of absolutely chaotic and wonderful queens was created 17 years ago by **Ruby Ridge** (also known as **Don Steward** outside of drag) and first went by the name "Cyber Sluts." "They went through a few iterations and did bingo at different spots around town just to raise money for small charities," **Terry (The Mule) Gillman**, current Matrons of Mayhem Producer, recalls. "Somebody took off with the money about nine or ten years ago ... so that's when it changed to 'Matrons of Mayhem' because they had to completely rebrand [since] there was a reputation issue."

Following the rebrand, **Petunia Pap Smear**, also known as **Courtney Moser**, took the reins and began running the official Matrons of Mayhem. The Matrons have been hosted by the *First Baptist Church of Salt Lake City* for 11 years and were run by Moser until they chose to retire last year, entrusting Gillman and artistic director **Buddy Eyre** (aka **Contasia VonClappe**) in charge.

The Matrons also give lots of room to various charities to run the concessions during bingo events. "We've always had some group that needed money off the concessions to run that, so we've just kind of opened up the kitchen. 'Serve nachos and pretzels, we don't care! Just keep our people fed!'" says Gillman.

The Matrons of Mayhem's primary mission is to service small charities and

support local organizations. Some of the more notable charities the Matrons have worked with include the local chapter of the American Cancer Society and *Camp Hope*, a summer camp for children with cancer.

They generally do not work with large charities and work with Camp Hope each year, but are open to adding more partnerships. "We always try to pull in at least two or three fresh ones just so we can have some new experiences," Gillman says. They tend to bring back charities with whom they have had successful events with.

Every dollar earned by the Matrons of Mayhem goes straight back to the charities they collaborate with, and any money that goes into their events comes straight from Gillman and Eyre's own pockets. The Matrons of Mayhem are not out to be competitive; they do it all for the love of the community. Due to being volunteer-based queens, they're allowed to be extremely expressive while still keeping performances family-friendly.

The cost of bingo participation isn't the only unique way the Matrons raise funds—for \$50, you can have your friends dress up for the last half of the show in full drag. The queens also do what's known as "party fouls," which they choose



The Matrons of Mayhem raise money for local charities through regular drag bingo events, running on altruism and camp.

randomly—whether it be not sharing food, hoarding too many bingo cards or even putting your elbows on the table. You're then required to wear hats, boas, etc. as punishment. In terms of what inspires the Matrons' drag aesthetic, "it's mostly based on the individual, but we aim for more of a camp style," Eyre says.

When asked what keeps the Matrons running, Gillman says, "Altruism and how positive things have to be ... how selfless you have to be." He also remarked how fun it all is and explained how being the baton holder or, "in a cabaret sense, the MC," allows the queens to have the freedom to have a good time with lots of laughs. "The queens love it because the charity is phenomenal. We pick different charities every year. We have fun with the artistic side. It's getting out and doing something different. We have queens [for whom] this is the only time they are queens, and we have queens that are professional drag queens," Eyre expresses.

If you want to support the Matrons and get involved in drag bingo for charity, stay in the loop by following the Matrons of Mayhem on Instagram at [@matronsofmayhem](https://www.instagram.com/matronsofmayhem) or by visiting their Facebook page.



(From L-R) Liberty Belle (Brynnen Green), Venus Flytrap (Mike Winget), Contasia VonClappe (Buddy Eyre), Adora Belle (Josh Tipton), Mona Bummin-Hurtin (Charles Mio Hanners) and Persuasia Kline (Ryan Randall) pose with a bingo guest (second from right).

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Access Unclear Gender-Affirming Care in Utah

By Zoe Zorka • zoezorka25@gmail.com || Photos by John Taylor

As Utah enters Pride month during yet another election year, healthcare has become an important issue in the LGBTQ+ community, both in the Beehive State and nationwide. The Salt Lake Tribune found that an estimated 2.8% of Utah adults identify as gay or lesbian, 6.1% as bisexual and 1% as transgender. However, even as a nationwide survey found that Utah ranked seventh-highest in the nation in healthcare, many members of the LGBTQ+ population continue to face barriers accessing care.

A National Center for Transgender Equality report found that 34% of respondents who saw a health care provider in the past year reported having at least one negative experience related to being transgender, including being refused treatment, verbally harassed, physically or sexually assaulted or having to teach the provider about transgender people in order to get appropriate care.

Two local healthcare providers who specialize in LGBTQ+ healthcare (with a specific emphasis on the trans community) discussed some of the current challenges that Utah patients and providers face when it comes to accessing and providing care as well as addressed common misconceptions about gender-affirming care.

Dr. Rixt Luikenaar, board-certified OB/GYN, transgender health expert and founder of *Rebirth Health Center*, says that one of the biggest logistical challenges facing many patients is navigating the complexities of health



Transitioning is not quick either. While *Rebirth Health Center* does offer some cosmetic procedures (including laser hair removal with Lidocaine), Dr. Luikenaar cites statistics that show that while about 95% of transgender men opt for breast reduction surgery, only about 25% of transgender women opt for top surgery and only about 10% opt for bottom surgery.

This means that transitioning relies heavily on hormones and social adjustment. "The process for hormone treatment takes years," Dr. Luikenaar explains. They describe how it takes time not just for an individual's body

insurance, explaining that obtaining health insurance is an important first step in receiving care.

Another common misconception about transgender patients that providers hope to dispel is that transitioning is quick and only physical. "It's not transactional at all," explains **Dr. Matt Bryan**, a primary care physician at *UAF Legacy Health*. Both Dr. Bryan and Dr. Luikenaar stress the importance of holistic health, which includes not only physical health, but also mental and emotional health.

Dr. Luikenaar also practices trauma-informed care, in which providers take the patient's medical and social history into account when delivering services—especially given that some services involve intimate physical examinations. Dr. Luikenaar explains that many patients suffer from conditions such as depression, anxiety, ADHD and PTSD. Patients on the autism spectrum also benefit from a trauma-informed care approach.

Dr. Bryan dispels another misconception, stating that "mental health, while it goes hand in hand with trans health, it's not the cause [of being transgender]—trans people are not mentally unwell, but [when you're] living in a society where everyone says there's something wrong with you and you're treated differently because of it, that's where depression, anxiety and PTSD come in."

to physically change, but also for them to psychologically begin to adopt a new identity while existing in the same world.

Another myth that Dr. Luikenaar dispels is that transgender people who seek gender-affirming care regret their transition, saying that "the studies show that the regret rate is less than one or two percent when it comes to hormone [replacement therapy] and even less when it comes to surgeries."

The idea that patients, especially young ones, will regret their choice to pursue gender-affirming medical care is one that currently presents itself as the biggest challenge for Dr. Luikenaar and other providers. In 2023, the Utah Senate passed SB-16, a bill that essentially prohibits gender-affirming care for transgender youth, meaning that minors can't get gender reassignment surgery or hormone treatment, including puberty blockers, if they haven't already been diagnosed with gender dysphoria. While there is a great deal of gray area surrounding the bill's implementation, Dr. Luikenaar believes that the bill takes away an individual's right to bodily autonomy, leaving the decision to the government rather than the individual and their families.

For more information about treatment options and resources, check out *Rebirth Health Center* at rebirthhealthcenter.com and *UAF Legacy Health* at uafhealth.org.



Dr. Matt Bryan at UAF Legacy Health emphasizes holistic health for his LGBTQ+ patients.



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Dr. Rixt Luikenaar seeks to dispel the myth that trans people often regret transitioning.

CROWDSOURCED COMEDY

Queer Community Teaches Good Laughs

By Dillon Ely • dillon.b.ely@gmail.com



In 2015, SLC was introduced to Crowdsourced Comedy, a diverse comedy troupe birthed from within the queer community.

Broadly, Crowdsourced Comedy is composed of a 30-to-40-member cast who provide stand-up comedy for hire, weekly comedy shows and stand-up and improv workshops. Executive Producer and Co-owner **Craig Sorensen** puts the company goal simply: "We wanted to find a place to promote women, people of color and, of course, the queer community ... [people] that don't get opportunities other places." Sorensen has extensive, nationwide experience in comedy performance and chose Salt Lake City as Crowdsourced Comedy's headquarters.

Two components speak to the success of Crowdsourced Comedy. First, they operate under an ethos of "no punching down." As Sorensen puts it, "people should avoid going after a group or type of person who is disenfranchised and shouldn't take cheap shots at what they represent or who they are." Second, there has been growth among their comics, both cast and students alike, on account of their diversity. Students and crowds are provided with a wide range of cultural, sexual, religious and queer topics from people within those communities. Crowds simply won't hear jokes on topics the comedians aren't personally experienced with.

Crowdsourced Comedy offers a variety of classes, including one that focuses on overcoming social anxiety, curated by licensed therapist **John Robbins** and Sorensen himself. It is offered on Tuesday nights from 6-7:30 p.m. and runs four weeks at a time. Sorensen states that it has turned into a life skills class promoted by

students from Improv 101. The students' most common reflection was overcoming social anxiety and building confidence. "I call it the awkward class ... we teach improv principles to apply to moments of social awkwardness," says Sorensen. It is not unheard of for students to work their way through classes and end up with the skillset to become cast members. Roughly 80% of the current cast followed this route.

OG cast member **Kit Cactus**, with Sorensen's guidance, has taken advantage of the resources provided by Crowdsourced Comedy from the very beginning. Cactus cites the wisdom of **Marshall McLuhan**: "Art is anything you can get away with." Cactus has learned the art of comedy without being offensive, learning what will get good laughs and what will keep giggling butts in seats. "Comedy can be compassionate and I think that some people don't get that," says Cactus. They also often comment on the aforementioned diversity component. "We're pulling from reality and having a diverse group of people on stage gives you a diverse set of stories," Cactus explains. This is a primary component that allows comedians to get away with art.

The oddities that someone might think would coincide with a SLC comedy fan base are minimal. Their audience is largely non-LDS or formerly LDS. Though "the elephant in the room," as Cactus puts it, does show its face through the experiences of cast and students when they have something personal to add to a story, the overall feeling is of healthy conversation, growth, confidence and a lot of laughing. "Anytime you put an

ultimate voice up ... someone who is female-identifying, gay, a person of color, etc., you're already one step ahead in comedy. [It's a] straight white males' game," Sorensen says.

The current growth focus for Crowdsourced Comedy is to acquire a permanent venue of their own. The easiest way to give support is to come see a show. Tickets range from \$5-15 when purchased online, making for an inexpensive and entertaining Friday night. For further information on scheduling, classes and shows, visit crowdsourcedlive.com, [@crowdsourcedcomedy](https://www.instagram.com/crowdsourcedcomedy) on Instagram or head to a live show at *Why Kiki* at 69 W. 100 S.

Photo courtesy of Crowdsourced Comedy



Crowdsourced Comedy cast members (from L-R) Kit Cactus, Rebecca Depew, Jasmine Lewis, Connor Cheney, Maddie Bell and Executive Producer Craig Sorensen are passionate about sharing their "no punching down" approach to comedy.



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THE RISE, FALL AND REVIVAL OF LESBIAN SPACES IN SLC

Words and Photos by Asha Pruitt • asha@slugmag.com

There are somewhere between 20 and 40 lesbian bars in the United States, compared to upwards of 800 gay bars. In Salt Lake City, and across the country, the number of explicitly lesbian spaces peaked in the 1980s and has since dwindled drastically.

“It’s really hard to get lesbians off their sofas,” jokes **Babs De Lay** (they/them), a local realtor and prominent activist in the SLC lesbian scene since the ‘70s. In reality, though, there has always been a demand for women-centered spaces within the larger queer community. Rising costs and gentrification, dating apps and online communities, prejudice against women-owned businesses—these factors all contributed to this decline.



Babs De Lay sits at Paxton Pub, currently the only SLC bar owned by a lesbian.

“The very first [lesbian bar] that I went to was called *Perky’s*,” De Lay says. “My friend and I got up the courage to go. We were underage and we were scared to go in. And when we finally did, we walked up to the door and it was locked.” A sign informed them that the bar was permanently closed. They cite other SLC gay women’s bars that eventually shuttered over the years: *Puss and Boots*, *Sisters*,

Mo Diggity’s, *Paper Moon*. “Women came from Wyoming, Idaho and Nevada on Saturday nights [at *Puss and Boots*]. There’d be easily 200 women in there having a great time,” De Lay says, until the owners started facing financial problems.

De Lay was a board member for the first gay community center in Utah, a long-time volunteer for the Utah Aids Foundation and a producer of *The Vagina Monologues* at various local theaters for 20 years. They also met their wife, **Bella De Lay**, at a lesbian bar in Portland. *Paxton Pub*, where we sit together for this interview, has been open for two years and is the only SLC bar currently owned by a lesbian.

Today, however, lesbians are slowly reopening more physical spaces and reestablishing their own sense of community. “It’s just a stereotype that lesbians don’t really go out—that they just want to stay in with their cats,” says **Miel Franco Pérez** (they/them). Also known as **VI:BRA**, an “agender, a-genre” DJ, they are the founder and creative director of *¡DYKED!*, a dance party and inclusive, affirming space for queer women and nonbinary individuals. Their first event was held last August at the *Mobile Moon Co-op*, a queer-led farming collective. The second, titled “Lovebound Gala,” took place on Valentine’s Day this year at *Metro Music Hall*.

Franco Pérez first found community with other lesbians online, discovering people like them on TikTok. “In 2020, when COVID came along, it was such a pivotal point for a lot of [queer people]. I came to the lesbian label, I came to the nonbinary label.” Now, they say, “we’re collectively starting to find all of these communities in person.” Franco Pérez had been involved in the SLC dance and electronic scene for years, but after experiencing assault within that community, they needed a place to dance and meet people that felt safe, reliable and relatable—somewhere that would welcome

their newfound identities. “I could see that many others need that, too,” they say.

When *¡DYKED!* was first announced as a femme-only event, “we got a lot of backlash from gay men” who felt excluded, Franco Pérez says. In an effort to center the lesbian experience, they only booked non-cis-male DJs and security personnel. The response from the lesbian community, though, has been immense; both events sold out immediately. “I go dancing a lot, but this is the first time that I actually feel safe to dance, to move, to feel my body,” Franco Pérez says. Lesbian bars and events like *¡DYKED!* matter because you don’t have to be in “fight or flight” mode. “You can actually connect with yourself and then connect with everyone around you,” they say.

Read De Lay’s “Urban Living” column in *Salt Lake City Weekly* for more bits of local history as well as real estate news. Be the first to hear about the next *¡DYKED!* event by following their Instagram [@dykd.sl.c](https://www.instagram.com/dykd.sl.c).



Miel Franco Pérez sits at Mobile Moon Co-op, the site of the first ¡DYKED! event.

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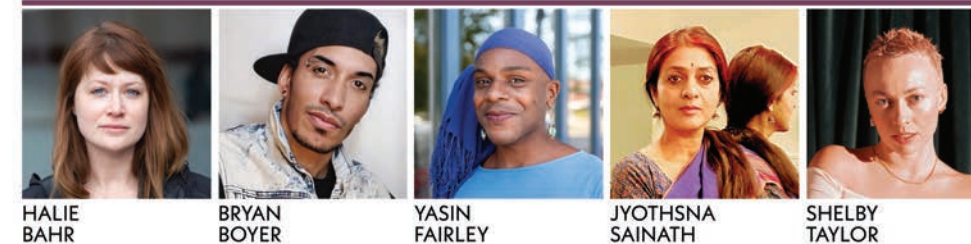
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Creating LGBTQ+
Inclusive Schools

By Arthur Diaz • arthur.f.diaz@gmail.com



Photo: Anna Chapman

F.A.M. co-founders Dr. Alli Martin and Dr. Kody Colvin lead a collective of Utah educators who are passionate about LGBTQ+ inclusive schools.

After a disheartening legislative session for Utah's LGBTQ+ community and their allies this year with the passing of a transgender bathroom ban and public school book ban, the movement to create a safe space for our youth to thrive as they grow into themselves is more timely now than ever. This Pride Month, meet two passionate educators—**Dr. Kody Colvin** and **Dr. Alli Martin**—who are leading the charge to foster an inclusive environment where all students can thrive.

As the co-founders of Friends, Allies, and Mentors (F.A.M.), the pair leads a collective of Utah educators who are passionate about LGBTQ+ inclusive schools and creating a state where all students can feel safe and supported. F.A.M. has a strong core group of educators who support and stand with LGBTQ+ youth on their own campuses across the state, while also helping to contribute to the different initiatives and trainings that the organization offers to schools, districts and fellow educators.

Utah has made strides over the last few decades to be more LGBTQ+ inclusive, with schools witnessing a small but growing faction of gay-straight alliances—which Dr. Martin explains was a controversial undertaking in the early 2000's. Despite progress, many in Utah easily fall subject to hysteria and misinformation. In this year alone, conspiracies about furies in Utah's Mt. Nebo School District made international headlines, legislators attempted to ban pride flags in

schools and Utah State Board of Education member **Natalie Cline** publicly bullied a student she suspected was transgender.

"The fake issue is that we're grooming children to be LGBTQ+, basically, and the real issue is that kids are still, by a large percentage, suffering from being in hostile environments throughout their childhood," says Dr. Martin. Emphasizing instead problems that deserve proper attention, she explains: "Suicide is still a very real issue for our kids, but also drug abuse, absenteeism, other forms of self-harm that kids will engage in—because they don't feel like they have a place in society."

Dr. Martin's advocacy over the last two decades hasn't been without controversy, especially after the birth of her transgender daughter. "I've had my picture put up by Natalie Cline, been called a groomer and was told that I shouldn't be able to raise my own child," she says.

Teachers have become more paranoid than ever before, and for good reason. "I know teachers who have been swatted. I know teachers who have needed police escorts to get in and out of their rooms and been followed by people in their cars. Teachers have been so harassed and bothered by administrators and parents in their districts here in the state of Utah," says Dr. Martin.

However, according to Dr. Colvin, it's important to remember even when we're

politically divided across key issues—not everybody of the same political party or religious affiliation believes exactly the same thing. "Just because someone may be conservative, if I don't first lean in and seek to understand before making any assumptions or judgments, I'm kind of creating that narrative for them," he says.

From his perspective, it's all too easy to shut down potential learning opportunities for people who may simply need a little more education before they're ready to change their perspective. "Once you can touch their hearts, things start to shift for most people," Dr. Colvin says. "That is why a lot of parents of queer children become strong advocates, because they have someone near and dear to them."

Dr. Martin also added that when we think of antagonistic groups such as Utah Parents United—a conservative, Christian parents group that advocates for book bans in schools—"they're not nearly as big as they want us to think they are and they're not nearly as powerful. They don't win battles. They just scare people into winning."

F.A.M. recently hosted their annual rally on May 17 at the *Utah State Capitol*, where they conferred their 2024 Affirming Teacher award. To participate or nominate an educator next year, stay up-to-date on other upcoming events or to request trainings and other available resources, visit utahfam.org.



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What's In My Closet? with Ms. Meredith

By Alton Barnhart • altonboy2009@gmail.com || Photos by John Barkiple

The closet: A cluttered gateway to the personality and mindset of its inhabitants. Or, to many individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, the launching point to find one's true self. Whether organized or messy, the closet is a tool to utilize the clothing and items inside as an extension of ourselves. No one quite knows that more than the gorgeous, smiling-eyed "blonde" shell, Ms. Meredith. Inspired by Y2K divas or the glamor of vintage Hollywood, Mer dabbles in it all! So, let's break open the fashion vault as we curate some of Meredith's most iconic (or simply sentimental) outfits that makes her the "polish, preppy and playful" performer she is today.

MS. MER'S FIRST PERFORMANCE:

"I knew my first performance had to be, like, **Avril Lavigne** pop-punk," says Meredith. With hand-sewn patches and rhinestones, this two-piece rebellious ensemble comes strapped with a jersey-type top and belt-fitted skirt. In turn, this outfit cemented Ms. Mer as a force to be reckoned with. "Using this art to transport me to this fantasy was such an iconic starting-off," says Meredith.



THE LOVELLOUD LOOK:

When asked to open for the 2023 *LoveLoud Festival*, feeling starstruck was an understatement. "I was so lost, like what do I do? How do I pull this off?" asks Meredith. Taken from **Lady Gaga's** "Enigma + Jazz & Piano" era, this rose-gold sequin and feather boa duo delivered smooth jazz and 1920's flapper dance styling. "I looked stunning ... I felt absolutely priceless at that moment."



TRANS GLORY FIT:

With Utah media covering more anti-trans bills through the legislative session, this **Ann-Margret**-inspired garment takes a stand. The pink dress and baby blue bows, reflecting the colors of the transgender flag, promotes advocacy for the trans community. "I wanted to make a goal to show what trans glory is," says Meredith. "If any of these people got to know us on a personal level, it could change their minds."



THE BARBIE DRESS:

Following the 2023 *Barbie* premiere, this puffy pink dress was a labor of love. "I wanted to challenge myself and see if I could bring this to life," says Meredith. Being the first dress that was actually planned and sketched out, Meredith hopes this method would segway into a future in couture fashion design. "The construction for this outfit wasn't cute, but once I had it on ... It felt like a *Barbie* fantasy."



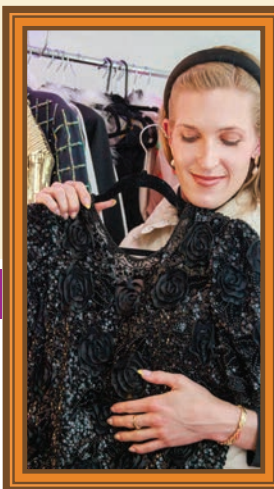
SLC QUEERFEST TWO-PIECE WITH ROBE:

Scandalously tasteful and glamorously bedazzled, this pink lingerie was a pivotal point in Meredith's career. "I was so nervous because I started hormones about a week before this performance," says Meredith. Nods for this piece are inspired by *Burlesque*, but the true force came in the form of confidence. "As nervous as I was, I just had to tell myself, 'Confidence is just a mindset,' and switch it on."



THE MOTHER GOWN:

"I saw my mom wearing this dress at one of our Christmas parties [and] I've been obsessed with it ever since," says Meredith. Not only does this silky black dress serve as an example of her passion for fashion, but also the common ground between her transition and her family's acceptance. "When she gave it to me, it was such a sweet gesture ... I bawled on my way home."



Need some more of the Pink Princess herself? For future projects and glamorous performances, follow her on Instagram at [@msmeredith](https://www.instagram.com/msmeredith) and on TikTok at [@itsmsmeredith](https://www.tiktok.com/@itsmsmeredith). Check out the full-size images of each item on [SLUGMag.com!](https://www.slugmag.com)

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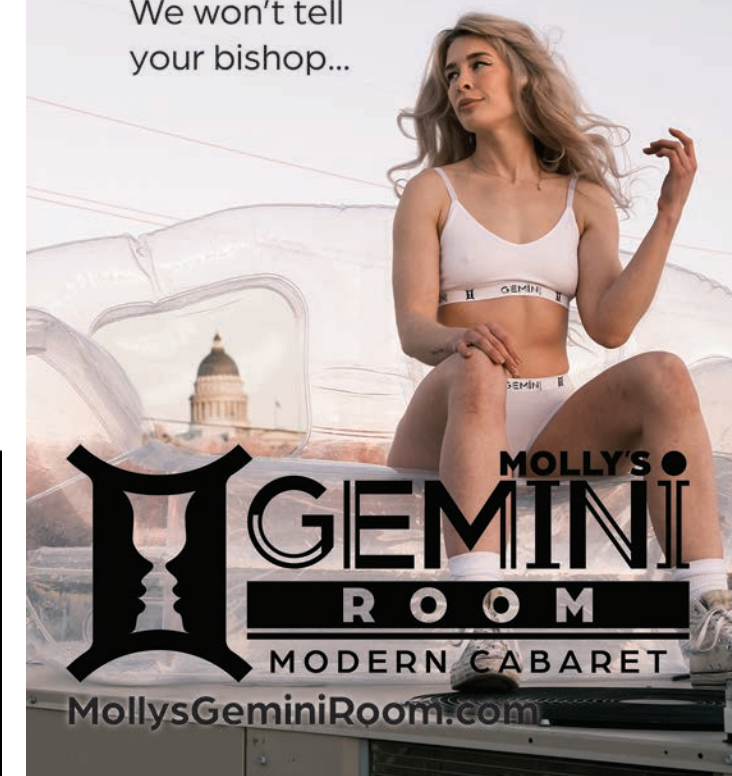


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Photo: Logan Fang

FROM HARM TO HOPE

Sue Robbins' Education-Centered Advocacy

Sue Robbins' advocacy work has led her to many opportunities to create positive change in her community.

By Jude Perno • jude.perno@gmail.com

Sue Robbins is many things: activist and educator, retired veteran, mother and grandmother. Robbins also happens to be a woman who is transgender.

"We often say 'transgender woman' and then people only look at us as being transgender," she says. "'Transgender' is on equal footing with every other piece of me ... all those things make up the person who I am."

Robbins' diverse identities have guided her community work with the *Utah Pride Center*, the KSL Community Advisory Board, KRCL and the *Huntsman Mental Health Institute*.

Most visible is Robbins' external advising role with Equality Utah, advocating for the local transgender community at the legislative level. "As a person who has the privilege of having time and connections, a network that allows me to get connected [to spaces] where I can have a voice ... I need to step up and also reach back to others who are trying to have a voice," Robbins says.

Robbins didn't set out to gain visibility; she frames it as an unintended consequence of this line of work, which often blurs the personal and political. "You can't work at the legislature and not be visible," she says. "I have to strike a balance ... How do I put myself out there so that I'm helping to educate while also making sure that I reach

out to other members of the community and help bring them in?"

This balance is a tough one to achieve, especially as Robbins acknowledges the risks that can come with visibility. Self-care has been important for Robbins, who has seen firsthand the emotional impact of local anti-transgender legislation—impact that has been backed up by research suggesting that the existence of targeted legislation alone causes harm, regardless of whether or not the law passes. "Our bills end up [making] headlines more often than not, so we hear about every step and it takes away emotional energy to be constantly absorbing daily updates on these," Robbins explains. "We need to be able to turn off a lot of that input to get the community to a healthy place, but we do need to understand the outcome."

For Robbins, community has been the foundation upon which progress is built. "If we burn all our energy on the people on the extreme, then we have no energy left to help someone become an ally and we're not going to win our rights without more allies," Robbins says. "I feel we don't need to combat extremism as much as we need to not let it suck the air out of the room for us."

Before legislative interventions, Robbins shifts into a headspace that allows her to educate others, even if it is, at times, uncomfortable. "If we're able to educate in a

personal manner where we can connect with people and not push them away, then we start to win over people as allies," Robbins says. Educating others can often be a burden saddled onto marginalized communities, many of whom are already struggling. Robbins acknowledges this while encouraging community members to do whatever they can. "Education brings knowledge, knowledge brings understanding and greater understanding brings social change," she says. "If we aren't educating people, then they're left to believe whatever they want to believe."

Robbins is hopeful that the legislature's targeted attacks on the transgender community are reaching their end, saying that people want to move on to "real things." "I don't want to see people detransition because of safety [concerns]," Robbins says. "We need to be able to go out and live our lives to the fullest because that's what we're engaging for—we get to be ourselves and we get to be ourselves throughout society, not just in our living room."

If community is the brick foundation for change, hope is the mortar. "Hope always has to be there or else you will not feel driven to do the things that you do in any endeavor in life," Robbins says. "We have to be hopeful or else we lose everything we transitioned for." Keep up with Sue Robbins on her website sueinut.com.

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PLEASE BEAR WITH ME

gay tattoos by cory harris

By James Orme • greaserjames@gmail.com



(From L-R) Brian Liburdi, Maxfield Blue, Max Garrett, Farook Khan and Nathan Graham surround tattoo artist Cory Harris (center).

Photo: John Taylor

How valuable is self expression if you don't feel allowed to be true to yourself? Cory Harris, an artist at *Loyalty Tattoos*, has had an incredible journey—from coming out as gay and going to jail for his art before finally coming to terms with himself and feeling comfortable to create art how he wants to.

Harris had an early fascination with tattoos; his father and grandfather were in the military, where he was first exposed to them. "Up until the '90s, you either had military tattoos or prison tattoos," says Harris. "I remember visiting my grandfather—he had an eagle on his forearm and a dagger through a heart—and I was completely blown away. At the time, it was like finding out you could play God and decorate your body with artwork. From then on, I was obsessed."

Feeling like an outsider, Harris soon was enthralled with another form of art that, like tattoos, existed on the fringes of acceptable expression. "When I was 13 or 14, I saw that somebody had tagged 'Love' on a building with a peace sign for the 'O.' I was like, 'Who got up on this building that was three stories tall, without anyone seeing, just to relay this message?' and I was hooked," says Harris.

Soon, Harris was spending his nights creating graffiti art wherever he could. It be-

came a comfort for him that he could create without revealing his identity. "I think one of the things that drew me to graffiti was that it's anonymous," explains Harris. "I could be a man or woman or whoever—it doesn't matter who I am. No one could judge me as a person, they could only see my artwork."

Unfortunately, that judgment was more present in the tattoo community, but Harris' passion for the art allowed him to openly be his true self in time. "Being gay in the masculine tattoo world was very difficult in the beginning," says Harris. "In the early 2000's, I didn't think I could be myself. I didn't want to be seen as weak or less than ... I think authenticity is important in art and in tattooing."

Harris served jail time and probation for his graffiti, but being an artist is what allowed him to persevere through it. "I think the community of subcultures is important," says Harris. "I have a community from tattooing, I have a community from graffiti, I have an LGBTQ+ community and they all support me. My shop, *Loyalty Tattoos*, has been amazingly supportive of me, and those communities have helped me survive through life."

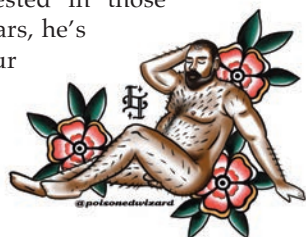
When coming out, Harris found it difficult to find his place—the stereotype of effem-



inate gay men that he'd see on TV just wasn't who he was. "It was like having a second coming out when I found the bear community," says Harris. "At first, it was hard to explain to friends and family that not only am I into dudes, but big, burly, hairy dudes as well. The bear community is where I fell into place. That's where I am most authentic."

Drawing inspiration from this newfound sense of self, Harris has created a new and unique interpretation of a classic tattoo theme. "I've always had a love of American traditional tattooing," says Harris. "The pin-up girls, the anchors and the eagles and how simple and elegant they were. I would draw pin-ups and boobs and try to think what I would want a girl to look [like], and I thought, 'Why couldn't we do this with men?' I really liked drawing guys with curves and hair because that's what I like."

Of course, Harris is a talented artist who can work with clients to create whatever they want, even outside of the bear world. You can see the evidence on his Instagram @poisonedwizard, but if you're interested in those big, hairy bears, he's definitely your man.



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SLUG STYLE



Photos by John Taylor • john@visionfoto.com

Lou Sant is a visual artist, plant and cat father and professional movie quoter raised between St. George, Utah and Waikiki, Hawai'i. Inspired by his parents' love of classic rock, his eclectic style reflects his outgoing personality and confidence in his LGBTQ+ identity. Read his full interview and see more photos on SLUGMag.com!



"My vest is definitely something that I hold very dear and is a constant work in progress. I love that it is something that truly shows what I'm all about."



"I think style has a big role in the queer community, especially here in SLC. It's not that hard to stand out among the majority of people here, so why not go all out?"



"It's not that I'm not 'out and loud' in my life, but I feel like I prefer that to be more about my personality than my outward appearance. I channel all of my love for color and design into my creations as an outlet."

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SHECOCK LOCALIZED

With a Vengeance

Photo: Jess Gruneisen



By Cherri Cheetah

wildhoneymagazine@gmail.com

Shecock With A Vengeance is a hard-hitting, riff-driven band consisting of (L-R) Snow Fell (vocals and guitar), Mileena Sampson (drums), Sofia Scott (vocals and guitar) and Squid Crawford (bass).

Pride isn't just a celebration, it's a protest. Let out your rage against society and stigma with Shecock With A Vengeance's passionate glam-rock and DoomCupcake's nu-metal mania at June's *Localized* performance, with an opening punk-rock set by False Dykotomy. Sponsored by *Riso-Geist*, this *Kilby Court* show on Thursday, June 13 opens at 7:00 p.m. and costs just \$5 for entry.

Shecock With A Vengeance is a glam-rock, dance-punk band from Salt Lake City founded by Sofia Scott, also known as **The Rock Princess**. The Rock Princess was a solo act, which attracted a couple of people who wanted to make the same music — but together, as a band—and thus **Vengeance Tampon** came about.

Sofia and Squid Crawford played together as Vengeance Tampon for a few years, up until the pandemic started. When their drummer wanted to leave the band, Sofia started to get messages from a trans woman who wanted to start a similar band, and so the group unanimously decided to revive the band. Two years later, Shecock With A Vengeance is thriving. The name is meant to be both a sequel and an homage to the prior iteration of the band.

Shecock's sound is influenced by bands like **Faith No More**, **Nine Inch Nails**, **Slayer**, **Stone Temple Pilots** and **Deftones**. It's very grunge-rock and very Riot Grrrl—the feminist rock music movement of the late '80s and '90s led by bands like **Bikini Kill** and **7 Year Bitch**.

"We don't really comment on it anymore. When we're on stage, we exist, and that's enough. Representation and making space for ourselves is super important," Sofia

says on the subject of being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

As the frontwoman of an all-transgender band, Sofia says that for her, Pride means representation, as in simply existing as a trans woman in music spaces. It also means celebrating how LGBTQ+ people got to this point in time of peace and pride, as well remembering and acknowledging those who fought and died to get us here. "We're honoring people by still existing, being visible and refusing to hide again—Pride is keeping us visible," Squid says. Being on stage as a trans person is a protest in and of itself, and it shows more than words can say. Being who you are genuinely and wholeheartedly is as powerful and punk rock as it gets. "We want people to see us and think they can do it themselves," says Sofia.

There's a really strong queer community in Salt Lake City that has been there for the band and vice versa. The band enjoys spaces like *Aces High Saloon*, where both the staff and regular attendees are welcoming and kind. They also like *Funk 'n Dive* and *ABGs* in Ogden and Provo, respectively.

Some of Shecock's favorite tracks they've created include "Riot," "Pink is Punk" and the yet-to-be-released track "Rock Jail," a nickname for the worn-out ware-

house in which the band records. Shecock takes inspiration from the largely femme and queer local artists they perform with, including **Form Of Rocket**, **Magda Vega**, **Die Shiny**, **The Plastic Cherries**, **Talia Keys** and **P.S. Destroy This**.

"Music is a language that speaks to a lot of people," Squid says. Shecock uses music to communicate and release emotions. It's art that speaks to a raw part of what it means to be human. When it comes to what inspires them to create, it's dealing with their emotions and letting them out, sharing messages of acceptance, being who you are and not giving a fuck about what others think. Squid talks about how music is an art form—music is the way they speak to others in this world. It can transcend cultures and languages, touching the human soul intimately—and that's what Shecock strives to do on stage.

Shecock With A Vengeance's future plans are to keep playing shows and creating music. They love what they do and have no plans to stop. You can find Shecock With A Vengeance on Instagram at @shecock.band and visit their website *shecock.band*. Their music can be streamed on Spotify and Bandcamp. Catch them at *SLUG Localized* at *Kilby Court* on Thursday, June 13.

DOOMCUPCAKE LOCALIZED

Photo: Jess Gruneisen



By Cherri Cheetah

wildhoneymagazine@gmail.com

Vocalist Zaza Historia VanDyke (second from left) and her "handy white guys"—(from L-R) Dave Crespo (guitar), Frederick Thorne (bass) and Cashel Barnett (drums)—make up the "Pastry Core" metal band DoomCupcake.

DoomCupcake is a four-piece, metal-punk band from Salt Lake City that makes "the kind of music you'd want to hear walking into a *Hot Topic*." Zaza Historia VanDyke, lead singer and songwriting expert, started the band about two years ago, right after the pandemic. What started as a solo internet project for her quickly became a full-fledged band after Shecock With A Vengeance's Sofia Scott messaged her and asked, "How do we book you?" VanDyke then messaged Dave Crespo, and the rest was history.

From making songs by herself in Logic to creating demos with Crespo (guitar), Cashel Barnett (drums) and Frederick Thorne (bass) to playing shows and festivals, DoomCupcake has worked hard to be the band they are today. After a year of writing songs and working out demos from VanDyke, they jumped in a recording studio and finally made their first single, "Blood, Bath & Beyond." It was their first time in the studio as a band, and they had written the song only two weeks prior. "It was a magical experience," says Thorne.

DoomCupcake's musical influences flow from '90s to early 2000s rock—**Fall Out Boy**, **Deftones**, **Cave In**, **Korn** and **Limp Bizkit**. The band humorously dubs their genre as "Girlfriend Metal" or "Pastry Core." Their influences definitely show

through their music, and it's a fresh take on the rock sound.

VanDyke is a Black trans woman while Crespo, Barnett and Thorne are lovingly referred to as her "handy white guys." They are cis, straight men who are allies of the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities. To DoomCupcake, pride means standing out and speaking out. It means resilience, inclusivity and protest. "It's a bit of activism to be in this band because to be an ally, you have to be proactive. It's our duty to call out any TERF-y bullshit and anti-LGBTQ+ crap that you see," says Thorne. Crespo, Barnett and Thorne are fiercely protective of VanDyke, but for Thorne, Pride reaches him on a more personal level because his 21-year-old son Max is trans. Thorne says, "Pride was always a beacon of hope for him. Mormon influence is very strong in this state, so Pride is an event that Max stamped hard on the calendar, and it became a big deal for us."

"A bunch of people like us who feel like we look weird and don't feel weird—there can be thousands of us all in one place, and that's dope," says VanDyke. Barnett adds, "I really like it when, at our shows, sometimes Zaza will do spoken word [or] a call to action ... and she will say [something] along the lines of, 'How often do

you see a Black trans woman with a bunch of white dudes on stage? They are my allies, they are a part of the community as well.' Playing in this band and living out here has brought me deeper into the LGBTQ community."

"That edgy, angsty feeling I had when I was writing all of these songs, mad at the world around you ... the suppression of queer voices and queer people can generate that angst and resentment, and it's better to let it out in a mosh pit, in your music, than letting it fester," Barnett says.

Barnett says that using music to let out heavier emotions such as rage, anxiety and trauma can be cathartic. "When we play, I want everyone in the room to think, 'Oh shit, that guy's going ballistic.' That's my protest. It's for me, but it's also the release of these dark emotions. When I'm on stage, I want people to think they can do that too. I want to sweat. I want things to come out of me."

As for what's next for the band, they plan to play festivals over the summer, make music videos and release a lighthearted track called "Micro-Dose Calzones." You can find DoomCupcake on Instagram at @doomcupcakeuuvu or visit their website at *doomcupcake.com*. Don't miss them live at June's *Localized* show on Thursday, June 13 at *Kilby Court*.



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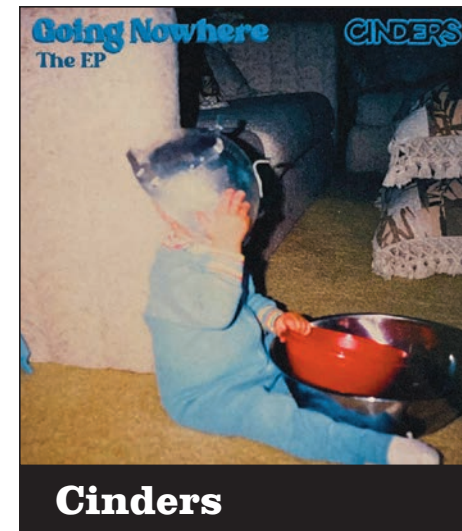
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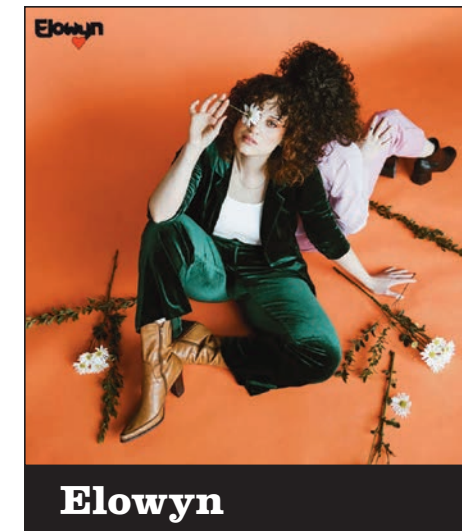
Another month, another six phenomenal singles from Salt Lake's best local bands, from *Elowyn's* debut solo crooning ballad "The Fool" to *Zodiac Killer's* skull-crushing metal track "Torn In Two," perfect for reading *Berserk* to. Come hang out for a while.



Cinders

"Going Nowhere"
Birchbrook Records
Street: 01.17
Cinders = The Front Bottoms + Grouplove

Do you ever feel pulled to pieces in the tug-of-war between optimism and realism? It's a common anguish, but it's rare to hear it articulated well. This is exactly what SLC trio Cinders have captured on their new single, though. The track "Going Nowhere" opens with somberly-plucked acoustic guitar while vocalist **Montana Smith** introduces the refrain: "I'm going nowhere / But one day, I'll get there / No gas in this car / Can't tell me that I won't get far." The track then steamrolls into a rowdy, acoustic-punk romp, complete with raucous drums, thumping basslines and plenty of shouting. The juxtaposition of the track's gloomy intro against the rollicking bop it becomes is a perfect fit for the lyrical theme of stubbornly (maybe even irrationally) holding onto hope, even when you feel becalmed by the mistakes you've made in an unloving world. —*Joe Roberts*



Elowyn

"The Fool"
Self-Released
Street: 04.05
Elowyn = Star Power + Bang Trim x bathroom bump (eight hour version)

After years of playing for other people's bands, Elowyn has finally released a self-titled EP that shows she has been the star all along. Lead track "The Fool" is a country crooning, back-of-bar ballad about the kind of intimacy that follows vulnerability. "I find myself inside myself / Come on in, I have something to show you," Elowyn sings in the first verse. The track opens with oohs and ahhs while the bass creates a soft bed in which the guitars can toss and turn and occasionally get twangy. "Here's my heart," she sings, "Here's my mind/ My pride/ My joy." The lyrics feel like you're squeezing the air out of them, lingering on the pleading vowel syllables to create the track's tacitly trusting texture: "Here's the hurt / Here's my guilt / Hold my heart with both hands / It's delicate." Trust is foolish, and that is the miracle, a magic trick that plays out so lovingly you must repeat it for the rest of your life. —*Parker Scott Mortensen*



Head Portals

"Stab"
Self-Released
Street: 03.29
Head Portals = Real Estate + Built To Spill

Head Portals' EP1 opens with "Stab"—a downtrodden yet spirited rock song forged in the image of Built to Spill. The track shares its title with a quintessential BTS recording from 1994, and, titles aside, the two "Stabs" are undeniable sonic siblings. From its wah-heavy lead guitar, breathy vocals and melancholic lyrics, Head Portals aren't trying to hide the source of inspiration behind "Stab." Straight away, the track establishes satisfying tension between its heavy recurring guitar theme and soft spoken lyrical phrasing. A constant stream of aggressive energy from the drums counteracts and emphasizes moments of wallowing self-pity. That's not a knock against the lyrics—the poetically rendered images here are both compelling and crafty. In its final minute, "Stab" ascends to its payoff, a cathartic cacophony of lingering emotions laid bare. Somewhere in Boise, **Doug Martsch** bobs his head in approval. —*Austin Beck-Doss*

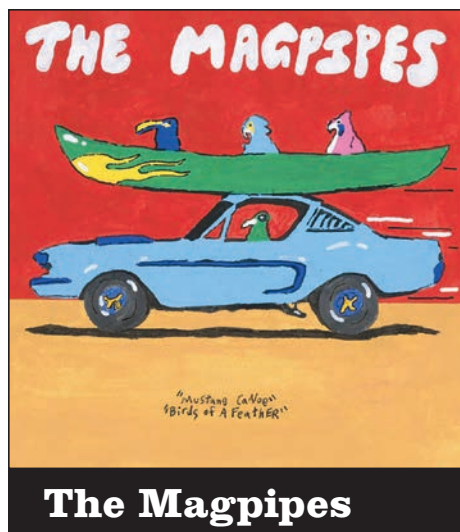
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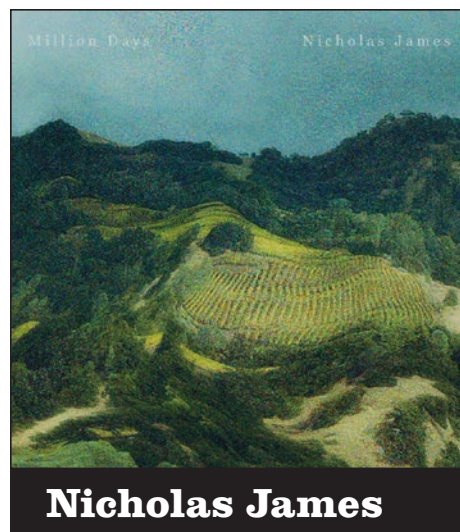
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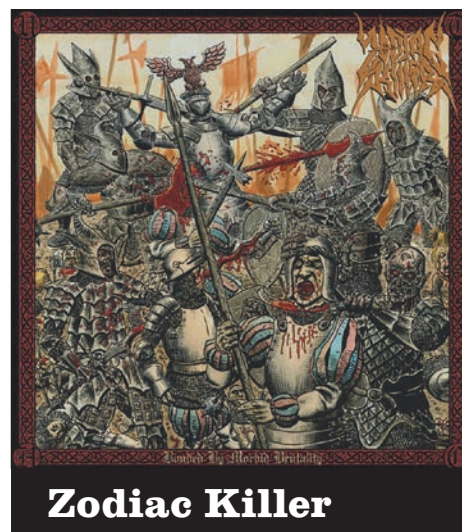
LOCAL MUSIC SINGLES ROUNDUP



The Magpipes



Nicholas James



Zodiac Killer

“Mustang Canoe”
Holsom Records
Street: 01.24
The Magpipes = 311 + ½ Sprung Monkey
+ Jim Croce

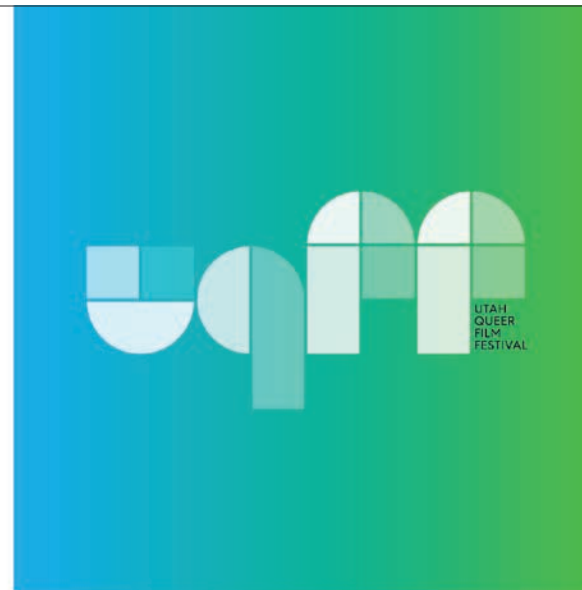
Fairly paramount to the local psychedelic scene, The Magpipes hash grind an herbal haze of multi-purposed genres. Influences of smoked-out reggae and the loose drawl theme I like to call “working class rock”—the type of bluesy stylings that can be heard in any Louisiana dive bar after your 9–5 day job—can be heavily absorbed. And for their new single “Mustang Canoe,” its chunky chords and stream-of-consciousness lyrics feel comfortably at home. The track is a mixed bag of goodies and surprises, received in the aftermath of a full-blown rager. Strums from guitarist **Chase Kemp** are elongated and clay-molded. **William Sangster**’s voice hits a ghostly, neo-jazz tone, like I just arrived in Santa Carla (“The Murder Capital of The World,” per *The Lost Boys*). It may not electrify you into catching-green-fairies dance moves, but it’ll definitely zone you out through jam night. —*Alton Barnhart*

“Incredible Dust”
WelchWasHere
Street: 04.11
Nicholas James = Nathaniel Rateliff + Ed Sheeran + Death Cab for Cutie

From Nicholas James’ recent EP *Just A Breeze*, “Incredible Dust” is pensive, poignant and gentle in its pastoral melancholy. The EP as a whole has a certain sonic warmth—a slow, mythic grandeur made for mild swaying and summer picnics. James, an SLC native-turned-Portland-transplant, has a dexterous fingerpicking style and a talent for transcendental lyrics. “Breathe out,” James intones over a stripped rendition of the track’s catchy riff, “Breathe in if you must / Don’t fog up the mirror / Given time you will wither / Into incredible dust.” With images like quiet strangers, off-duty grammar police and forgotten pocket weed, James proves his poetic prowess throughout this indie folk tune. If indica = “in ‘da couch” (mellow, dreamlike and hazy) then “Incredible Dust” = “in ‘da cosmos.” It’s a song that feels a lot like what I imagine being high on the moon is like: bouncy and beautiful, everything else glimmering and far away. —*Libby Leonard*

“Torn in Two”
Self-Released
Street: 04.20
Zodiac Killer = Gulch + *Altered State*
Era Sepultura

A medieval twist on a modern act of viscous brutality, Zodiac Killer’s newest release “Torn in Two” rides an armored steed through your living room window and drags you out the door and through the street while you’re left screaming all the way. The latest addition to the seasoned hardcore vets’ discography channels a more thematic approach than their previous releases have, making use of galloping dark-fantasy themes as opposed to straightforward Salt Lake hardcore. However, I can’t emphasize enough how masterfully they balance this new influence with their older sound. Zodiac Killer’s conscious decision to keep the feel of their music consistent with that of mainstream hardcore while adding their own spice into the mix is a testament to their musical prowess and ability to generate a creative sound within a traditionally sonically narrow genre, all while keeping the long-time fans happy. Give “Torn in Two” a listen if you’re craving a proper mental flogging. —*CJ Hanck*



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Just to get it out of the way: Bagels get people passionate. I've heard debates sparked about these chunky hula hoops of leavened dough anywhere they're consumed: whether the water matters, the only true correct toppings and, of course, "toasted or untoasted?" I'm avoiding all that shmeat and focusing on whether I enjoyed the entire bagel experience, and on that front, *Baby's Bagels* scores a hole-in-one.

When *Canella's Restaurant and Lounge* closed in 2020, a lot of Salt Lakers wondered what would happen to the restaurant-scene mainstay's classic building. After a worrisome period of emptiness, the space was filled in 2023 by not one but a trio of small local businesses while the iconic brick corner storefront remains the same. *Baby's Bagels* cohabitates with both *FOUNTAIN Records* and *Nica Joe Espresso*. *Baby's* itself features a funky-but-homey vibe with brick floors and minimalist art. White tile, sea-green trim and laminated wood booths make it feel almost like a diner, but you order from the friendly staff at a counter before taking a seat to wait for them to call your name. The music is often modern and chill, blending into the slice-of-life feel of the space, with people coming and going comfortably.

The menu at *Baby's* is straightforward enough that I can list its tasteful brevity in its entirety for you now. They make the classics: plain, sesame seed, poppy seed, salt and everything (\$15/½ dozen, \$26/baker's dozen). In addition to the iconic cream cheese, available in plain, scallion or a rotating special (\$7/pint for plain and \$8/pint for scallion), you can get a bagel with butter and honey (\$4) or a choice of three more elaborate bagel sandwiches, the Muhammara (\$11), the Egg & Cheese (\$11) and the Lox (\$14). Along with drip coffee and other assorted non-alcoholic beverages from a reach-in cooler, that's it, but the menu's simplicity is its strength.

The bagels stand on their own, chewy with a nice texture to the crust, but the best part is how they're completely covered with your favorite topping, not just dusted on top. On my favorite, the poppy seeds alone are so dense, the pale dough is barely



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visible beneath the inky little orbs. The sesame and everything mixtures are nearly as widespread and carry with them toasty notes and bursts of salt, fennel seed and garlic. While *Baby's* recommends them as is, I'm a fiend for toasted bagels with a fluffy interior and crispy exterior. The sesame bagel toasted, warm and heaped with the gloriously chunky scallion cream cheese (\$5) is breakfast euphoria for me. The special cream cheese when I visited was Honey & Walnut, which was wonderfully sweet spread on an untoasted salt bagel (\$5), with large chunks of walnut and salt helping to cut the honey's sweetness.

Of the sandwiches, the Muhammara is a standout, thickly slathered with a house-made version of the red-pepper and walnut spread which is balanced and nutty with just a bit of heat. On top of that is an extremely generous pile of fresh green herbs and touches of olive oil and pomegranate molasses. The bright freshness of the dill, mint and parsley keep the sandwich light, while the drizzles add to the luxurious mouthfeel. The Egg & Cheese is also fantastic, especially with the added house-made sausage patty (\$3 extra). The sausage is classic, with hints of garlic and black pepper, while the egg is simple and the cheese is extra melty from being cooked all together on their griddle. I don't always love breakfast sandwiches, but this was an exercise in balance and the result was very satisfying.

***Baby's* Muhammara sandwich consists of a red pepper and walnut spread topped with fresh herbs, olive oil and pomegranate molasses.**

get yours toasted or plain and no matter what your topping preference is. Keep up with *Baby's* on Instagram at *@babys.bagels* or order bulk bagels for your next breakfast event from their online store at *babysbagels.com*. You won't be disappointed.

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SKATE

Bryan Gennaro—Salt Lake local, *Woodward* king, professional skateboarder and all-around cool guy—ollies over the alley street gap and onto the curb cutout. Take note: sometimes simple is better.

By Chay Mosqueda • dmosqueda.photography@gmail.com



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