

**Our democracy is at risk!  
If we are complacent it will FALL**



## New for spring: music, art and theater



LGBTQ+ friend  
Dolly Parton  
faces challenges

-pg 7

R&B legend,  
LGBTQ+ ally  
Roberta Flack  
dead at 88

-pg 7





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The focus of QNotes is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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### New Gallup poll finds nearly 1 in 10 identify as LGBTQ+

According to Gallup, the latest info shows how the rise in acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities over the course of the past few decades has made people more comfortable to be who they truly are – even in the face of state and national politicians weaponizing their power to try to strip away LGBTQ+ rights.

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### Our People: Gina Stewart

Gina Stewart is the Executive Director of VisArt, which houses the largest collection of film and video on the east coast. There's a cafe and screening room that's comfortable, warm and an incubator for the creative community. Stewart tells Qnotes it's a space that welcomes all artists, regardless of genre.

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# Trump has politicized science, scientists have had enough

Tens of thousands of scientists protest at 'Stand Up For Science' rallies across the country



by Taylor Heeden Larkins  
Qnotes Staff Writer

In the less than two months since President Donald Trump has assumed office, his administration has continually taken unprecedented action to target federal agencies designed to advance America into a brighter and better future. The MAGA movement has opted to invest into Project 2025 — a road map laid out in the nearly 1,000 page manifesto titled “Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise.” This book, composed by Trump allies and former Trump appointees, lays out every federal government agency and how the next conservative president could do away with Biden administration directives and organize around right wing ideals.

This plan detailed what an incoming, conservative presidential administration would implement to gut and purge the “administrative state” from within, by firing federal employees and eliminating initiatives believed to stand in the way of a conservative president’s agenda. From there, the president could replace those pushed out with more “like-minded” officials to help fulfill the mission behind Project 2025.

And that’s exactly what the Trump administration has done since his first day in office. Despite disavowing the makeshift manifesto, saying he “had nothing to do with Project 2025,” Trump’s transition team has named multiple people directly tied to the initiative into positions where they could implement those policies proposed.

It’s clear Trump’s plan for America isn’t just a concept: It was always to implement Project 2025 into every aspect of American governance.

Now, federal funding for many government entities hangs in the balance as the administration continues to utilize Elon Musk and the department he *definitely* doesn’t run (yeah, right) to gut entire agencies. One of the most recent institutions targeted by Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is the National Institutes of Health, also known as NIH.

The NIH is a U.S. government-funded agency which is also the world’s largest source of funding for medical research. Operating under the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, the NIH comprises 27 institutes and centers dedicated to conducting research, training research scientists, developing and disseminating health information to the public, as well as supporting biomedical and behavioral research domestically and abroad.

NIH research is responsible for a vast majority of biomedical and health-related scientific advancements, particularly in regard to HIV/AIDS. In fact, the NIH established the Office of AIDS Research (OAR), which provides the largest public investment in HIV/AIDS research globally, supporting a wide range of research areas from prevention to treatment and cure. The OAR coordinates HIV/AIDS research across



Students, scientists and supporters protest in Raleigh against potential funding cuts for research and higher learning. CREDIT: Facebook

all NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices (ICOs), ensuring that funding is directed to the highest priority research areas. It also develops the NIH Strategic Plan for HIV and HIV-Related Research, which serves as a road map for NIH HIV/AIDS research.

All of these research efforts could be axed in an administration set on targeting offices, departments and agencies it seems as “unnecessary” or “gratuitous.” In recent weeks, the administration has shut down federal funding to programs related to diversity, equity and inclusion. What this resulted in was millions upon millions of

facing a grim future,” said Jamie Vernon, CEO of the research honor society Sigma Xi. “Now, we find ourselves at a critical juncture once more. The assaults on science have intensified, and the stakes have never been higher. Our future hinges on whether we choose to defend and uphold scientific integrity.”

Nyssa Tucker, a Ph.D. student at UNC-Chapel Hill, spoke at the March 7 rally, laying out the demands she had for the administration: reinstate fired federal workers; end censorship in research and political interference; expand

retired from the Environmental Protection Agency, Angela Buckalew, who said she “saw what was coming,” and is fearful of what that could mean for the future.

“The future of science are the people that are going first, so my concern is, where’s science going to go?” Buckalew said. “When you cut funding to science, it’s not like anything else. You could lose years of data, years of work.”

Johnna Frierson, the associate dean of DEI for the basic sciences at Duke Medical School, spoke on the recent attacks against research with any ties to diversity, equity and inclusion. Frierson — a Black woman from Rock Hill, South Carolina, who was the first in her family to obtain her PhD — said these cuts will dictate not just what research will get done, but it will also decide who gets to do the research.

“I’ve earned my place to be here, and I’ve earned my place to have a voice and share my message,” Frierson said. “If someone wants to call me a DEI hire, make sure the DEI stands for ‘definitely earned it.’”

Dani Lin Hunter, a research and education manager with the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network, told the crowd on Friday if the attacks from the administration feel personal, it’s because they are.

“The relentless attacks on science are not abstract. They are deeply personal and they are affecting you and your loved ones, and they are affecting me and my loved ones. I share your rage today,” Hunter said. “My plea for you is to remember that rage when you obtain justice — because I do believe, perhaps naively but fiercely, that justice will come for you.”

These scientists are ready to stand up and fight against the administration planning to shut their work down. Their ability to research and make scientific discoveries will impact us way more than any hypothesis could speculate, and, it’s arguably better for our country to stop this experiment before its variables become too volatile and out of control. ::



dollars worth of scientific research was put on hold, resulting in American scientists wondering how they will be able to do their jobs and, in turn, keep the United States a global leader in scientific advancement.

A field which has historically been viewed as bipartisan is now a political target, and scientists are fed up. It’s why tens of thousands of scientists took to the streets to voice their concerns and sound the alarm on what they believe could destroy the American scientific world as we know it.

Stand Up For Science 2025 was composed of 32 rallies across the nation — in state capitols, urban hubs and in Washington, D.C., scientists across all disciplines marched, holding signs against Trump, Musk and DHHS head Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. while clad in PPE and lab coats.

In Raleigh, hundreds of scientists gathered at Halifax Mall to protest the current administration’s targeting of funding for the sciences and higher education.

“Because of the rhetoric that we heard in the 2016 campaign, I knew science was

research funding and continue scientific advancement; and open doors for those historically left out of scientific research.

“Science is for everyone, science keeps us safe and enables to live longer, healthier lives,” Tucker said. “We call on leaders at every level, regardless of political affiliation, to champion and protect scientific research, education, and communication for the progress, prosperity, and well being of us all.”

WUNC spoke to a few of the protesters at the Stand Up For Science demonstration, one of whom was Duke University Ph.D. student Anna Towne. Towne said for her and her colleagues, these funding cuts hurt deeper than people realize.

“A lot of us are in really pivotal times in our research training,” said Duke University Ph.D. student Anna Towne. “It feels like it’s necessary that we come out and do this, because this is for our own future and anyone else who cares about the biomedical sciences, which is essentially everyone — you would hope.”

WUNC also spoke to a woman who

# Trump uses joint session address to laud anti-transgender efforts

Speech made before Congress may be the most partisan in history



by Jonathan Golian  
Qnotes Staff Writer

At a joint session of Congress March 4, Donald Trump gave one of the most partisan and divisive speeches known in American history.

Among the derogatory comments laid out during the 99 minutes at the center podium, Trump continuously blamed former President Joe Biden and speaker Nancy Pelosi. He offered praise a-plenty for his administration's quick following of his executive orders and gloated about his anti-transgender and D.E.I. attacks.

"We've ended the tyranny of so-called diversity, equity, and inclusion policies all across the entire federal government and indeed the private sector and our military," Trump said just after the start, going on to promise, "our country will be woke no longer."

Trump would go on to revisit points like this throughout the event, celebrating what would mainly amount to wins for far-right talking points. "We have removed the poison of critical race theory from our

public schools, and then signed an order making it the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders, male and female," Trump said. "I also signed an executive order to ban men from playing in women's sports," he added.

In an effort to bolster his attacks on the LGBTQ+ community, Trump brought in the likes of Payton McNabb and Riley Gaines, both individuals he claimed were affected by transgender inclusion in sports.

McNabb, Trump said, was "seriously injured" three years ago when her girls' volleyball game was "invaded by a male" who spiked the ball "so hard in Peyton's face, causing traumatic brain injury." Gaines had previously been an NCAA swimmer, and her claim to fame is finishing in fifth place behind a trans opponent.

"Take a look at what happened in women's boxing, weight lifting, track and field, swimming, or cycling, where a male recently finished a long distance race five hours and 14 minutes ahead of a woman for a new record by five hours," Trump touted.

Ahead of the address, GLAAD, the LGBTQ activist group, provided a fact sheet about the two women to be highlighted.

"Payton McNabb, a former high school volleyball player injured during a match

with a transgender player," GLAAD wrote, "is a paid spokesperson for an anti-transgender group that also advocates to ban medically necessary, best practice health care and to force schools to dangerously out LGBTQ youth without their consent."

For Gaines, GLAAD wrote that the former athlete, "parlayed her fifth place finish into a career of testifying in states she does not live in to support[ing] full bans on transgender youth as young as kindergarten from playing sports."

Both women have been found to work with the Independent Women's Forum (IWF), which, as the GLAAD fact sheet explains, "has ties to Project 2025, has lobbied against access to contraception, and activates against transgender people under the guise of 'protecting women' but has taken actions that do not protect women and instead tries to harm LGBTQ people."

"The Trump White House is using the address to Congress to continue its baseless and unhinged disinformation campaign against transgender Americans," GLAAD said. "The invited guests being deployed to smear transgender people are paid spokespeople for anti-LGBTQ



Donald Trump stands in front of J.D. Vance and Mike Johnson (R-LA)  
CREDIT: Facebook

groups that demand schools dangerously out LGBTQ students without their consent, who go against every major medical association supporting medically-necessary health care, and do nothing to promote women and girls in sports or protect everyone's safety and well-being."

"Every American must demand that leaders stop targeting innocent people to enrich themselves and their billionaire friends. Media must elevate the truth about LGBTQ lives and hold the administration accountable to words and actions that hold all of us back." ::



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# Senate Dems use filibuster to block anti-trans sports bill

On March 3, Senate Democrats came together to block a GOP-led bill set up to ban transgender women and girls from school sports teams designated for female students.

Utilizing a filibuster, one of the last tools of check and balance available to block bills during Donald Trump's second presidential term, the Democratic party was able to stall the legislation, with the votes being 51 to 45. Republicans would have needed 60 votes to overcome a filibuster and have the bill be brought up for consideration.

The bill in question, dubbed the "Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act," was introduced by Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala) and split on a party-line vote from Republicans. Had it achieved the required number of votes, it would have stopped all federal funding from going to K-12 schools that allowed

transgender students' participation in women's and girls' athletic programs.

The transgender community has been a leverage point for Trump and the GOP for many recent Republican campaigns, and the movement of the bill would have followed up on an executive order Trump signed in February, titled "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports."

Democrats have continuously denounced the legislation as an effort by Republicans to gain political currency through denouncing the small but vulnerable population of transgender children and adolescents.

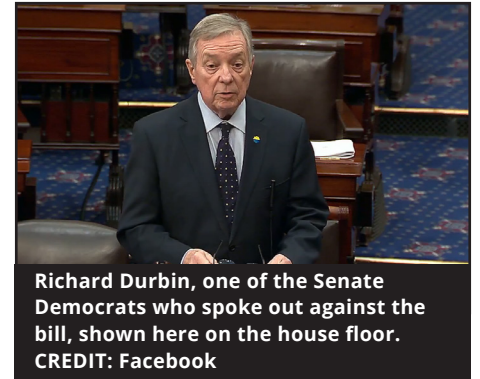
"What Republicans are doing today is inventing a problem to stir up a culture war and divide people against each other and distract people from what they're actually doing," said Senator Brian Schatz, Democrat of Hawaii. He called the bill "totally irrelevant to 99.9 percent of all

people across the country."

Senate Democrats also argued that the legislation was not only an attack on basic human dignity, but also a waste of time. Of more than 500,000 athletes in the N.C.A.A., they noted, fewer than 10 identify as transgender. This fact was also brought up last December by the president of the sports organization, Charlie Baker, during a separate Senate Judiciary Committee hearing.

Senator Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) also noted that the bill had no enforcement mechanism and "could subject women and girls to physical inspection by an adult if someone from an opposing team accused them of being transgender," thereby hurting the people Republicans claim they want to protect.

"Sen. Tuberville is trying to churn the social wars about something that really doesn't exist," Sen. John Hickenlooper, (D-Colo.), said after he voted to block the bill. Hickenlooper has announced he will run for re-election in 2026 and, despite his vote, said he does not believe transgender women should be able to compete in women's sports if the other women object.



Richard Durbin, one of the Senate Democrats who spoke out against the bill, shown here on the house floor. CREDIT: Facebook

Four senators didn't vote: Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va.; Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo.; Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich.; and Peter Welch, D-Vt.

Trump's "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports" executive order allows the current administration to cut funding for schools and organizations that don't enforce the order, although it can be overturned by a legal action or a different presidential administration. ::

—Jonathan Golian

# Department of Homeland Security changes policy protecting LGBTQ+ Americans

Following the sweeping attacks Donald Trump has made nationwide against the Transgender and nonbinary communities and the removal of any reference to "TQ+" from government websites, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has now erased terminology that may impact all members of our community.

In accordance with Trump's executive orders, the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" have been cleared from the department's policy manual. That means LGBTQ+ individuals or groups, previously protected from surveillance or questioning by the government just

because of their identity, are no longer.

The terms were added to the list of protected individuals by former President Biden on his first day of office, under the executive order titled "Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation."

The manual's language regarding personal protections, located on Page 79 under General Requirements, now states, "OSIC [Open Source Intelligence Collection] Personnel are prohibited from engaging in intelligence activities based solely on an individual's or group's race, ethnicity, sex, religion, country of

birth, nationality or disability. The use of these characteristics is permitted only in combination with other information, and only where (1) intended and reasonably believed to support one or more of [Intelligence and Analysis'] national or departmental missions and (2) narrowly focused in support of that mission (or those missions)."

The very quiet edit made to Homeland Security's intelligence policies has the possibility of sending the queer community back to a time that disproportionately targeted LGBTQ+ citizens for a variety of reasons, whether being deemed security risks as during the 1950s "Lavendar Scare," or a "public health concern" during the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s.

Speaking with independent LGBTQ+ journalism platform Erin In The Morning, Don Bell, policy counsel at the Project on Government Oversight (POGO), said the renewed policy is alarming, especially considering the ever increasing government attacks on the LGBTQ+ community.

"Whenever you remove protections,



it increases the risk to disfavored communities, and really, if you're able to violate the civil rights and liberties of one community or one individual, then there's no limit to it," Bell added.

While the changes don't specifically label LGBTQ+ Americans citizens as potential targets for surveillance, it is the absence of the terms that give ambiguity to the "updated" list of rules and potential cause for concern. ::

—Jonathan Golian

# Park Service censors queer activists with website purges

After taking down any mention of transgender people from the Stonewall National Monument, figures of the movement such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera are also missing from the National Park Service (NPS) website.

Johnson and Rivera were both transgender activists, on top of being key figures, present at the Stonewall Uprising in 1969. Previous to the most recent edits on the main website, both also had pages dedicated to their histories chronicling their lives and roles in the iconic protest. Johnson, for what is left of their inclusion on the site, has been reduced to just a photograph on one of the monument's pages. Curiously as well, a video chronicling Stonewall's history, narrated by former President Obama, is also absent from the website.

The most recent move by the NPS is one in a line of changes the federal government has made to censor LGBTQ+ histories and identities. What started as erasing the letters "T" and "Q," which stand for "transgender" and "queer," over multiple government sites has expanded into erasing whole

educational and informational pages regarding the queer community.

Where there are obvious hits of censorship, like on the Stonewall National Monument website, there are other places online that seem to have been clipped randomly. For instance, there are .gov sites that have retained the "TQ" letters while many only display "LGB." Certain LGBTQ+ history research pages have been disabled, while some still directly link to insightful material.

Other sites have been completely dismantled by the NPS, including one about Philadelphia gay history, one that commemorated a now-closed Black LGBTQ bar in Washington D.C. and a page about an eighteenth-century American preacher who appears to have been gender nonconforming.

Alan Spears, a senior director at the National Parks Conservation Association, a nonpartisan group established in 1919 to help protect the national parks, published a statement regarding the direction of the recent barrage of historical white-washing. "These efforts to

tamper with our history set an unacceptable precedent," the statement reads.

"LGBTQ+ history is history, period. It should remain represented at national parks and on the National Park Service website, so that people all over the world can learn about it from the best of the best in the history preservation business."

"As mandated by law, dedicated National Park Service staff have poured more than one hundred years of work into preserving, protecting and interpreting the stories that built our nation," the statement continued. "By removing these educational and historical materials from public access, the administration is making it harder for National Park Service staff to fulfill their obligation to tell the stories of all Americans and maintain an accurate account of history."

Michael Bronski, a Harvard University history professor, pointed out that a disproportionate number of the erasures also affected webpages about Black activists and spaces. A specific example he found on one of the NPS sites were deleted references to queer and transgender Americans during the



Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson at the 1969 Stonewall Protest. Their names was removed from the site. CREDIT: Facebook

Cold War, which Bronski claims are attempts to purge LGBTQ people from the government.

"I really see this as a symbolic attack," said Bronski, who authored the 2011 book *A Queer History of the United States*. "The impulse behind it is to symbolically eradicate all of this progress: all of the government recognitions, gay rights, the presence of gay pride, flags on government buildings."

"Since you can't get rid of transpeople or gay people, or bisexual people, or queer people, you can try to get rid of documentation about us," he added. "That means you're trying to rewrite history." ::

# Legendary singer and composer Roberta Flack dead at 88

Roberta Flack, one of the most beloved R&B singers of the 1970s, died on Monday in Manhattan. She had just turned 88 this February.

According to Suzanne Koga, her manager and friend, Flack died from cardiac arrest in route to a hospital. In 2022, Flack revealed that she had been diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS. She did not perform onstage again following that announcement.

Born in North Carolina and raised in Arlington, Va., the singer had pursued a music career at a young age. Winning a scholarship to Howard University at just 15, she was initially seeking to be a classical pianist, all before her professors discouraged her from attempting to break into what at the time was a mostly white-controlled genre.

Following graduation, Flack became a school teacher in D.C. and North Carolina while moonlighting in clubs, both as a pianist and singer. The moonlighting led to a contract with Atlantic Records, who released her debut album, *First Take*, in 1969.

Flack's career took an upward turn the album, but took a rocket shot to stardom when Clint Eastwood used her cover of Ewan MacColl's "The First Time I Ever Saw Your Face" in his 1971 movie "Play Misty for Me."

Along with "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face," Flack topped the charts during her reign and beyond with hits like "Killing Me Softly," "Feel Like Makin' Love," "Where Is the Love" and "The Closer I Get To You."

Early on in her career, Flack

demonstrated that she understood love in all forms by continuously celebrating the LGBTQ+ community through her music. Her first exposure to our community occurred while performing at Mr. Henry's Opera Restaurant in DC's Georgetown in the 1970s. In an interview from 1979, Flack said that the restaurant was "basically an underground place frequented by a lot of gay people" which "opened up a whole new world" for her.

From that point, Flack would regularly dedicate a portion of her music to the queer community, confirming that the 1969 cover "Ballad of the Sad Young Men" "was all gay." She also sang the theme song to the film "Making Love," which had been controversial during the early 1980s for depicting a relationship between two men.

In an interview with LGBTQ+ media in the early 2000s and posted to her Facebook account, she recalled her experience with the song. "Reporters asked me if I was afraid to be involved with a gay film. Me? Afraid of singing a song about love? Never. I was so proud when that song charted in the top 40. People did not know that the song was about two men in love – and they loved it anyway! Love is love. Between two



Roberta Flack was a longtime ally for the LGBTQ+ community. CREDIT: Facebook / Michel Rolf

men, between two women, between two people. That's what I've always believed. Love is universal, just like music."

Most recently, one of Flack's songs was featured on the soundtrack of FX's queer TV series "Pose." Taking to Instagram to celebrate the inclusion, Flack wrote "I am thrilled to be featured in the soundtrack of a show that spotlights the triumphs and trials of '80s queer and trans communities and culture. #Love is beautiful in all forms!" ::

—Jonathan Golian

# Dolly Parton's support for LGBTQ+ community still stands strong

Several quotes from a 2023 "Hollywood Reporter" piece about long-time LGBTQ ally Dolly Parton have resurfaced recently, bringing increased attention to the country artist and her inclusive and caring sensibility.

In the interview, Parton was asked about her reaction to Tennessee's passing of anti-trans measures into law earlier that year. While Parton said that she wasn't interested in talking about "the politics of everything," she did offer a few specific comments, including that "I just want everybody to be treated good."

She pointed out during the conversation that she has people in her life who identify as queer and trans, and

that it was important to hear what they are saying.

"I know and love them all, and I do not judge. And I just see how broken-hearted they get over certain things and I know how real they are," she said. "I know how important this is to them. That's who they are. They cannot help that any more than I can help being Dolly Parton, you know, the way people know me. If there's something to be judged, that is God's business. But we are all God's children and how we are is who we are."

Over the past few months Parton has faced some unexpected challenges. In February, Indiana Governor Mike Braun's new state budget cuts resulted in the

loss of a 50 percent matching funds grant for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL). The non-profit, funded by Parton and various grants, has worked with all 50 states to provide books for rural and economically challenged children five and under. Other reported comments have appeared in social media indicating that the program was being "quietly phased out" in North Carolina, as well, although no specific reason has been given why. Parton has stated she hopes the trend will change course.

Another unexpected development: Parton's extremely private husband of nearly 60 years, Carl Thomas Dean, passed away on Monday, March 3. Parton addressed his death on Instagram. "Carl and I spent many wonderful years together. Words can't do justice to the love we shared for over 60 years. Thank you for your prayers and sympathy." Although not officially announced as the cause of death, Dean was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2019.

Despite the loss of her husband and the challenges with DPIL, Parton



Dolly Parton promoting her upcoming 'Threads: My Songs in Symphony' orchestral tour. CREDIT: Facebook

is moving forward with a full plate of creative efforts, including the stage show "Dolly: The Musical," set to premiere this summer, with a 14-month national tour; and additional musical collaborations with Selena Carpenter; and The Wiggles. For more details on Parton, visit her website at <https://dollyparton.com/>.

Additional material added by Qnotes staff. :: —Jonathan Golian

# Gallup poll finds nearly 1 in 10 in US identify as LGBTQ+

New polling released from Gallup shows that almost one in 10 adults in the U.S. identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, called by the organization "an increase from a few years earlier," although many estimates have placed the number of individuals identifying as lesbian and gay at one in 10 dating back to the 1980s.

According to the release, the latest information shows how the rise in acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities over the course of the past few decades has made people more comfortable to be who they truly are – even in the face of state and national politicians weaponizing their power to try to strip away LGBTQ+ rights.

The polling of 14,000 adults showed

that 9.3 percent identified as LGBTQ+, including 5.2 percent identifying as bisexual, two percent as gay, 1.4 percent as lesbian and 1.3 percent as transgender. Applied to a national population of 341 million people, that would be 31.7 million LGBTQ+ adults, including 17.7 million bisexual people, 6.8 million gay people, 4.8 million lesbians and 4.4 million transgender people.

"This polling reflects what we've been saying all along: The future that anti-equality politicians are fear mongering about is already here," said Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson. "LGBTQ+ Americans have always been here, and we are not going anywhere. There are way too many of us to be

ignored, there are way too many of us to drive us out of everyday life, and the politicians who think they can turn back the clock on LGBTQ+ acceptance will fail. It is a beautiful thing that growing acceptance over the course of recent decades has allowed more and more people to show up as their authentic selves, and we should all be working toward a future where everyone can be exactly who they are."

According to Gallup, in 2020 less than six percent of the population identified as LGBTQ+, and in 2012 it was less than four percent. The Times noted that most of the growth in the LGBTQ+ population comes from young people and bisexual women.

Dr. Mitchell R. Lunn, a researcher of LGBTQ+ health at Stanford University, told The Times that he believes the Gallup numbers are likely an under count and that the increase is "largely driven by the many decades of gradual increasing



An estimated 341 million Americans identify with some part of the LGBTQ+ rainbow

societal acceptance."

The polling echoes research from the Human Rights Campaign and Bowling Green State University that indicated by 2040, about one in five voters will be part of the LGBTQ+ community, making us one of the fastest growing voting blocs in the country. ::

—Qnotes Staff

# A look at Trump's interim ED of the Kennedy Center

Grenell has been a face in the Republican party for decades



by Jonathan Golian  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Donald Trump, during the current administration and his previous term in office, has proven he is not an ally of the LGBTQ+ community. Especially during his latest term, as evidenced by his executive orders targeting minorities, he has been shown to only favor those swearing allegiance to him, or to those invoking a "strong man" stereotype.

That hasn't stopped portions of the queer community from siding with the aspiring dictator, often against their own interests, as found in groups like the Log Cabin Republicans.

This phenomenon continues in Richard Grenell, the man who Trump picked as the interim executive director at the John F. Kennedy Center. Who is this person exactly, and how does he fit into the path that Trump is currently executing?

Grenell is a longtime veteran appointee in presidential administrations as far back as George W. Bush's first stint in 2001, where he was positioned as Director of Communications and Public Diplomacy for the United States permanent representative to the United Nations in New York. Serving at the rank of Minister-Counselor until 2008, Grenell promoted the U.S.'s position on issues like the "War

on Terror," the nuclear proliferation, and the corruption scandal surrounding the UN's Oil for Food program.

In 2012, while running a consultancy company he founded named Capitol Media Partners, Grenell worked for Republican candidate Mitt Romney as his spokesman on foreign policy, which made him the first openly gay person to fill that role for the Republican party. The year 2013 saw Grenell play a part in the re-legalization of same-sex marriage in California, having submitted briefs in favor of it during the Hollingsworth v. Perry case.

When coming from Republican administrations that now seem from a bygone era of the party, it doesn't necessarily make sense that his values would have much to do with Trump, who has sat on the fence politically and bounced between sides until the 2010s.

In fact, it wasn't until Trump became the nominee that Grenell gave praise to the man. Previously, he described Trump as "unserious," "reckless" and "dangerous" in since-deleted posts from Twitter. Grenell, along with many members of the party that previously denounced Trump, have seemingly fallen in lockstep with Trump and his plans for the future.

During Trump's first administration, Grenell would take on the role of United States ambassador to Germany from 2018 to 2020. After years of being politically isolated for unprofessional comments in his role toward the German government,

and his alleged association with the far-right Alternative for Germany Party, Grenell would resign from his role on June 1, 2020. During his time with the first administration, it does have to be said that Grenell used Trump's platform to promote the decriminalization of homosexuality in nations where it was outlawed.

Throughout the years of service in the government, Grenell has seen his share of controversies. While under Romney during his campaign, Grenell used his Twitter platform to criticize various public women in office, including then Democratic Party official Susan Rice, who described Grenell as "one of the most nasty, dishonest people I've ever encountered" in a 2020 New York Times article.

In defiance of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), Grenell did not disclose accepting more than \$100,000 from the Magyar Foundation of North America to provide public relations support for Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán before accepting his 2017 ambassador position. This type of activity would again come up during his short time as acting director of National Intelligence, with Grenell not disclosing payments for advocacy work on behalf of Moldovan politician Vladimir Plahotniuc.

While the facts and situations laid out do not give a full breadth of his actions or character, for better or worse, much like Trump himself, Grenell seems to be a person that acts for his own benefit. As to his role in Trump's second administration,




Trump appointed openly gay conservative Richard Grenell as interim director for the Kennedy Center. CREDIT: Public domain

in addition to interim executive director at the Kennedy Center, Trump had also tapped Grenell to serve as an envoy for special missions regarding foreign policy.

In his own words, Grenell is also looking at potentially running for California's Governor's office, especially if former Democratic presidential nominee and Vice President Kamala Harris decides to run.

"If Kamala Harris runs for governor, I believe that she has such baggage and hundreds of millions of dollars in educating the voters of how terrible she is, that it's a new day in California, and the Republican [party] actually has a shot, and I wouldn't say no," Grenell told reporters Feb. 14 while on a trip in Munich. ::




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# NC art exhibits ongoing and upcoming

Works include photographic exhibits of Black Winston-Salem history



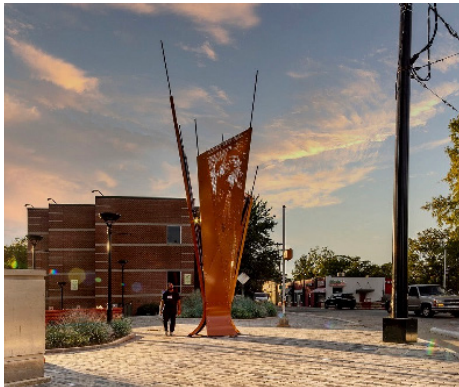
by **Wendy Lyons**  
Qnotes Staff Writer

As 2025 unfolds, artists and allies of our community are using the power of creative expression to provide support and solidarity during times of uncertainty and political unrest. North Carolina is set to come alive with a vibrant array of arts exhibits that celebrate the richness of culture and creative diversity.

As it has for centuries, art plays a very crucial role in society. Galleries and museums create spaces where communities can learn about history and culture, and celebrate our many unique identities.

In North Carolina a number of upcoming exhibits exemplify this spirit. We've collected several here and hope they add to your artistic enjoyment this spring.

## Ongoing indefinitely ASC Public Art Trail



Location: Throughout Charlotte  
Details: The Arts and Science Council's Public Art Trail celebrates the Arts with semi-permanent exhibits throughout Charlotte that represent artists' collaborations with their community. Open year round and it's free!

<https://artwalksclt.com/celebrate-asc-public-art>

## Ongoing through 2025 ArtPop Public Art Display Cities Program Class of 2025



Location: Artists on Billboards Around Charlotte  
Details: Region-wide artwork displays on billboards, digital displays, and many other public advertising spaces.  
<https://www.artpopstreetgallery.com/cities-program>

## Ongoing through April 28 March & April Exhibits at the Pullen



Location: Pullen Arts Center, 105 Pullen Rd., Raleigh  
Details: Works on exhibits from now throughout the end of April include Adriana Ameigh, Freddie Bell, Larry Adonis Brown, Chris Facey, Lynette Knight, and Eric McRay. Closing reception takes place Saturday, April 27, 2:30 - 4:30 p.m.  
<https://raleighnc.gov/arts/places/pullen-arts-center>

## Ongoing through Dec. 31, 2025 Still I Rise: The Black Experience at Reynolda



Location: Reynolda House Museum of American Art, 2250 Reynolda Rd., Winston-Salem.  
Details: Bedroom gallery photographic exhibit of imagery dating from the 1900s to the 1950s, one of the most repressive climates for Black people in North Carolina history.  
<https://reynolda.org>

## Ongoing through March 22 "SEEN:" Large Scale Multimedia Portrait Exhibit

Location: Nine Eighteen Nine Studio, Charlotte  
Details: This immersive experience invites you to explore a captivating fusion of mediums, where traditional portraiture meets the dynamic expressions of live performances. Wander through a gallery where each piece tells its own story, capturing the essence of diverse identities and cultures.



<https://www.nineeightennine.com>

## Ongoing through May 5 Asheville Strong: Celebrating Art and Community after Hurricane Helene



Location: Asheville Art Museum, 2 South Pack Square, Asheville  
Details: exhibitive works by area artists and Southern Appalachia celebrating their resilience and creativity and exploring their experiences during and post Hurricane Helene.  
<https://www.ashevilleart.org/>

## April 4 - 20, 2025 Charlotte Shout



Location: Uptown, Charlotte  
Details: Charlotte SHOUT! Spotlights internationally and locally acclaimed artists all throughout Uptown. Discover dozens of interactive installations and exciting pieces that will be sure to inspire your own creative side.  
<https://charlotteshout.com/shout/art/>

## April 4 First Friday Gallery Crawl

Location: Southend, Charlotte  
Details: South End is one of the most exciting and popular areas of town to experience art, great dining opportunities and more. The area is home to a number of public murals and a seemingly endless number of serious places where artists work



and create.  
<https://southendclt.org/events/first-friday>

## April 27 - Aug. 31, 2025 The Work of Annie Leibovitz



Location: Mint Museum Uptown,  
Details: ANNIE LEIBOVITZ / WORK presents a compelling mix of new and rarely seen photographs alongside some of the most recognizable portraits in American culture. Visitors will enjoy the exhibition in an engaging dual format, with prints on paper complimented by cutting-edge digital displays.  
<https://www.mintmuseum.org/exhibition/annie-leibovitz-work/>

## May 17 - 18, 2025 Artsposure - The Raleigh Arts Festival



Location: Downtown Raleigh on Fayetteville Street in the blocks between the State Capital and the Marin Marietta Center for the Performing Arts.  
Details: Artsposure's mission is to give all people in our community meaningful opportunities to experience the arts and enhance their cultural perspective.  
<https://www.artsposure.org/artsposuretheraleighartsfestival> ::

# The art of theater in North Carolina

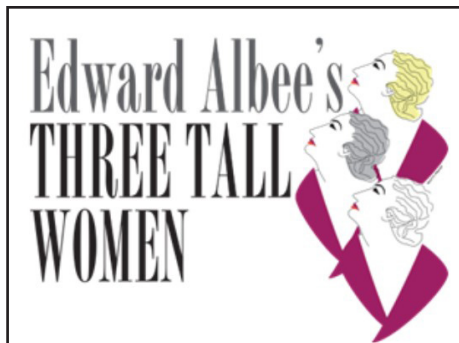
Multiple theaters across the state offer entertaining stage fare



by Jonathan Golian  
Qnotes Staff Writer

**W**hy is theater important? There are many reasons: It provides a platform for exploring human experiences, and emotions; it offers a variety of perspectives through storytelling. It promotes empathy, critical thinking, creativity, communication skills and social awareness through diverse viewpoints. It makes you laugh, cry, get angry, and feel sad or happy. It's one of the most important forms of live action storytelling that exists. We've collected a number of presentations coming up for the spring season guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat. It's mix of staged tales that many in the LGBTQ+ will identify with, as well as a handful of theatrical presentations featuring some of your favorite drag entertainers. We hope you enjoy!

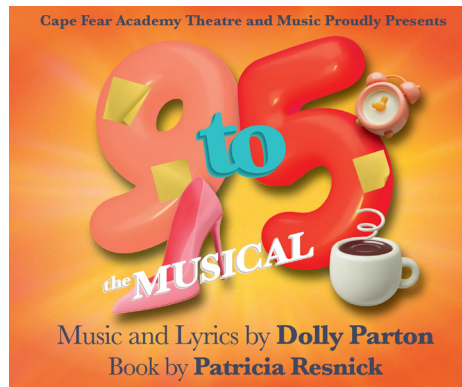
**March 20 - 29**  
**Edward Albee's "Three Tall Women"**  
Magnolia Arts Center, 1703 East 14th St. Greenville, N.C.



In Edward Albee's award-winning play *Three Tall Women*, the main character, a compelling woman more than 90 years old reflects on her life with a mixture of shame, pleasure, regret and satisfaction. In conversations with her caretaker and a woman from her lawyer's office, she bitterly recalls negative events that caused her regret. In a recent 2018 revival, the play won three Tony awards on Broadway. <https://app.arts-people.com/index.php?ticketing=mac>

**March 21 - 23**  
**"9 to 5: The Musical"**  
Thalian Hall Center of the Performing Arts, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington

Based on the 1980 film with the same name, the musical is filled with music and lyrics by Dolly Parton. The show is an office satire about three female secretaries who decide to get revenge on their tyrannical, sexist boss. The trio, one of whom has been passed over for promotion because she is a woman, one who has the boss telling everyone she is having an affair with him, and one whose



husband cheated on and abandoned her forcing her into the workplace for the first time, spend an evening together having hilarious fantasies of killing the slave-driving chauvinist. One of them panics the following day when she suspects she really has poisoned the tyrant. <https://www.thalianhall.org/cfa-9to5-25>

**March 21 - 30**  
**Charlotte Conservatory Theatre presents "Continuity by Bess Wohl"**  
Van Every Theatre at the Mint Museum, 2730 Randolph Rd., Charlotte



It's magic hour in the New Mexico desert as an exhausted film crew races against the setting sun to shoot their blockbuster (yet artsy) action movie, which takes place on an arctic (styrofoam) ice floe, and features an eco-terrorist plotting a bombing mission to save all of humankind. As the clock ticks and the desert sun beats down on the not-so-frozen landscape, personalities clash, artistic vision meets Hollywood demands, and the gap between fiction and science grows wider than ever. <https://charlotteconservatorytheatre.org/>

**March 22 - 23**  
**Greensboro Ballet: "Storybook Tales"**  
Carolina Theatre of Greensboro, 310 S. Greene St., Greensboro

For 2025, the Greensboro Ballet brings a unique new version of the classic story, *Alice in Wonderland*, a tale about a young girl who falls into an adventure beyond any dream, filled with strange and fanciful characters including the Rabbit, a mischievous Cat, a wise Caterpillar, the evil Queen of Hearts



and, of course, the Mad Hatter. This season's *Storybook Tales* will be full of powerful, stunning, and charming ballet stories created by the Greensboro Ballet faculty and guest choreographers. <https://carolinatheatre.com/event/greensboro-ballet-storybook-tales-2/>

**March 25 - 30**  
**"Parade"**  
Belk Theater at the Blumenthal Arts Center, 130 North Tryon St., Charlotte



Leo and Lucille Frank are a newlywed Jewish couple struggling to make a life in the old red hills of Georgia. When Leo is accused of an unspeakable crime, it propels them into an unimaginable test of faith, humanity, justice and devotion. Riveting and gloriously hopeful, *Parade* reminds us that to love, we must truly see one another.

- <https://www.blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/parade-1>

**March 29**  
**"Trixie and Katya: The Bald & Beautiful Live"**  
Durham Performing Arts Center, 123 Vivian St., Durham



The *Bald and the Beautiful with Trixie and Katya* features a pair of grizzled gay ghouls exploring the cultural boundaries of modern beauty through interviews with gorgeous guests who inhabit various facets of the beauty industry. From models, moguls, influencers and drag queens to adult performers, actors and more, Trixie and Katya break down the beauty behind it all, live! <https://www.dpacnc.com/events/detail/thebaldandthebeautiful-2025>

**March 30**  
**Murray & Peter Present: "Golden Girls - The Laughs Continue"**  
Cape Fear Community College's Wilson Center, 703 North Third St., Wilmington



The *Golden Girls* are back in an all-new show! 2024 finds Sophia out on bail, after being busted by the DEA for running a drug ring at Shady Pines. Blanche and Rose created CreakN, a thriving sex app for seniors. And Dorothy is trying to hold it all together, with help from her much younger, sex-crazed love interest who turns out to be the district attorney prosecuting Sophia. What could possibly go wrong! Relive the heartfelt hilarity of four ladies who never stopped being your friends! This new comedy is for fans 18 and older... because they're not the same girls from the '80s. <https://wilsoncentertickets.com/events/golden-girls-2025-03-30-300-pm/>

**April 11 - 13**  
**Durham Savoyards Presents: "H.M.S. Pinafore; Or The Lass That Loved a Sailor"**  
The Carolina Theatre, 309 West Morgan St., Durham



The story is set aboard the British naval ship H.M.S. Pinafore, and follows the romantic entanglements of the lovely Josephine, the captain's daughter, and her love for the lowly sailor, Ralph Rackstraw. But there's a twist: Josephine is promised to Sir Joseph Porter, the absurdly pompous and incompetent First Lord of the Admiralty. Filled with hilarious misunderstandings, mistaken identities, and tongue-in-cheek satire, "H.M.S. Pinafore" will have you laughing out loud. The live orchestra, infectious songs and charming performances make it an unmissable treat for all ages. <https://carolinatheatre.org/events/live-event/h-m-s-pinafore-or-the-lass-that-loved-a-sailor/>

**April 15 - 27**  
**"Kimberly Akimbo"**  
**Knight Theater at the Levine Center for the Arts, 550 South Tryon St., Charlotte**



Kimberly is about to turn 16 and recently moved with her family to a new town in suburban New Jersey. In this "howlingly funny heartbreaker of a show" (The New Yorker), Kim is forced to navigate family dysfunction, a rare genetic condition, her first crush ... and possible felony charges. Ever the optimist, she is determined to find happiness against all odds and embark on a great adventure. <https://www.blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/kimberly-akimbo>

**April 24 - 26**  
**"Dixie's Tupperware Party"**  
**Booth Playhouse at the Blumenthal Arts Center, 130 North Tryon St., Charlotte**



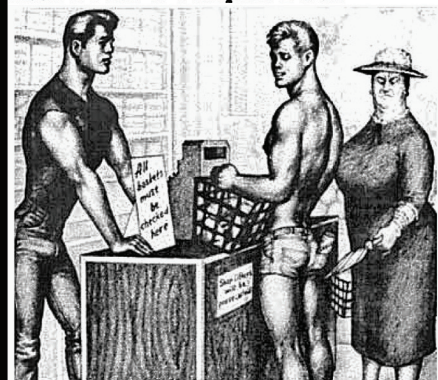
Dixie Longate is the fast-talking, gum chewing, ginger-haired Alabama gal who is bringing your grandma's Tupperware party into the 21st century. Audiences howl with laughter as Dixie demonstrates the many alternative uses for the iconic plastic kitchen staple. Filled with funny tales, heartfelt accounts, audience participation and a little bit of empowerment and homespun wisdom. <https://www.dixielongate.com/shows/tupperwareparty>

**April 25 - May 4**  
**RiverTowne Players Present:**  
**"Something Rotten"**  
**Masonic Theatre, 514 Hancock St., New Bern**



Set in the 1590s, Something Rotten! follows brothers Nick and Nigel Bottom, two struggling playwrights desperate to step out of the shadow of the Renaissance superstar, William Shakespeare. Their fortunes take a wild turn when a quirky soothsayer predicts that the future of theatre will combine singing, dancing and acting all at once. Determined to make history, the Bottom Brothers set out to create the world's first musical. But as opening night approaches, they discover that true success comes from staying true to themselves...and embracing the chaos along the way. <https://www.rivertowneplayers.org/>

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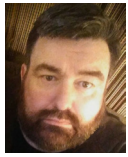


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# Music: Queer and allied artists in upcoming concerts

A list of musical performances in Charlotte and North Carolina



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

As the old saying goes, music is the universal language of humankind. A study released by *The Harvard Gazette* found that, across societies, music is associated with behaviors such as infant care, healing, dance and love (among many others, like mourning, warfare, processions, and ritual). Examining lullabies, healing songs, dance songs and love songs in particular, they discovered that songs that share behavioral functions tend to have similar musical features.

In short, we can all be moved by the sounds of music and the lyrics of a song. For most of us, there are some shared joys to be found that cross cultures, language and even genres of music.

We've gathered together a number of concerts set for North Carolina over the next few months as we move forward into spring. From LGBTQ+ artists to allies who care about our rights and community stability, there's something here for just about everybody.

**March 15**  
**Ani DiFranco**  
The Orange Peel, 101 Biltmore Ave., Asheville



Ani DiFranco came out as bisexual in her twenties, and has written songs about love and sex with women and men. She addressed the controversy about her sexuality in the song "In or Out" on the album *Imperfectly* (1992). She maintains a devoted queer following. Expect a stage show of classic DiFranco and material from her latest album, "Unprecedented Shit." <https://anidifranco.com/>

**March 15**  
**Matteo Lane**  
430 South Tryon St., Charlotte  
Matteo Lane is an openly gay comic and probably one of the hottest tickets



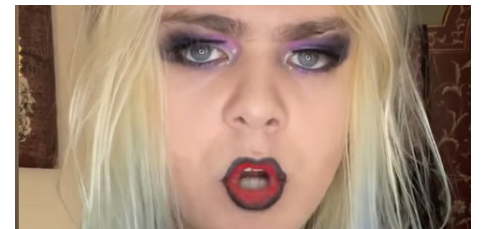
in town right now, He is genuinely funny. Why is he listed in the music section? His appearances in North Carolina are rare and he is a trained opera singer. In fact, don't be surprised if you hear him break out into an unexpected aria during his one-man comedy show. <https://matteolanecomedy.com/>

**March 17**  
**Kraftwerk**  
Ovens Auditorium, 2700 East Independence Boulevard, Charlotte



Alternative electronica indie band from Germany formed in 1970 by original members Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider, Kraftwerk is considered to be an innovator of modern electronic music. Over the past 50 years they have released successful albums such as "Autobahn," "The Man Machine," "Computer World" and "Tour de France." They captured the Grammy award for best dance/electronic album with "3D The Catalog" in 2018. With a devoted following both queer and punk, expect a history of music like no other. <https://kraftwerk.com/>

**March 20**  
**Kim Dracula**  
The Ritz, 2820 Industrial Drive, Raleigh



Dracula identifies as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns. In

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performance they blend genres like metal, industrial, jazz and Latin music, and often incorporate extreme visuals to create a chaotic experimental sound. <https://www.kimdracula.com/>

**March 28 - 29**  
**One Voice Chorus**  
**First United Methodist, 501 N. Tryon Street, Charlotte**



Charlotte's chorus comprised of LGBTQ+ and Allies will perform their latest presentation "Sing Me a Story" Fri., March 28 at 7:30 p.m. and March 29 at 2 p.m. <https://onevoicechorus.com/>

**March 29**  
**The Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte**  
**CPCC Dale F. Hilton Theater, 1206 Elizabeth Ave., Charlotte**



The Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte will perform "Sing for the Cure," the

25th anniversary performance of the powerful and unforgettable 60 minute, 11 song choral masterpiece. Features a full orchestra and a chorus of over 200 voices. Includes performances by renowned guest artists Ann Hampton, Callaway and Maria Howell. <https://www.gmccharlotte.org/>

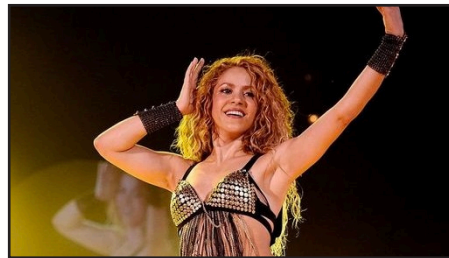
**May 4**  
**Pat Benatar & Neil Giraldo**  
**Ovens Auditorium, 2700 East Independence Blvd., Charlotte**  
 Live performance from rock icon and LGBTQ+ ally Benatar, known



for her powerful vocals and hits like "Heartbreaker" and "Love Is a Battlefield." She'll appear with her husband and musical partner, Giraldo, who is a guitarist, producer, songwriter and another friend to our community. Both have long and actively supported the LGBTQ+ community. In 2016, Benatar and Giraldo chose to donate the net proceeds from a performance in Mississippi to the LGBTQ+ community, rather than cancel the show in protest of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. They also joined the board of directors of the LGBTQ+ Family Connections Center, an organization serving at-risk LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit youths.

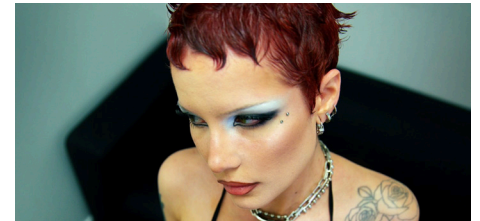
**May 13**  
**Shakira**

**Bank of America Stadium, 800 S.**



Known as the "Godmother of Punk" and the "Queen of Rock 'n' Roll," Jett's most widely known music successes include "I Love Rock and Roll," "Crimson and Clover" and "I Hate Myself for Loving You." She identifies as bisexual and frequently speaks out in support of the LGBTQ+ community.

**May 28**  
**Halsey**  
**PNC Pavillion, 707 Pavillion Blvd., Charlotte**



**Mint St., Charlotte**  
 Shakira's "Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran" World Tour, supporting her 12th studio album of the same name, kicked off in Brazil on Feb. 11, 2025, and includes a North American leg beginning on May 13, 2025, in Charlotte. She has consistently remained supportive of the LGBTQ+ community and continues to speak out on issues like trans rights and collaborates with contemporary LGBTQIA+ artists. Shakira will also perform at the upcoming World Pride celebration in DC on May 31 in Nationals Park.

**May 16**  
**Joan Jett & the Blackhearts with Billy Idol**  
**PNC Pavillion, 707 Pavillion Blvd., Charlotte**



The Jersey born American singer/songwriter has released five albums to date and is noted for her distinctive style of singing, with an accent different from her speaking voice. She is broadly categorized as a pop, electropop, synth-pop, art pop, alternative pop, alternative rock, R&B, indie pop and alternative R&B artist. Of her multiple single releases, "Without Me" is her only number one single in the United States. Others in the top 20 include "Eastside," "Nightmare," "Him & I," "Bad at Love" and "Now or Never." In a video released by GLAAD, Halsey said the following about her sexual orientation: "I'm a young, bisexual woman, and I've spent a large part of my life trying to validate myself - to my friends, to my family, to myself - trying to prove that who I love and how I feel is not a phase; it's not part of some confusion that's going to change or could be manipulated." ::

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# Charlotte's Legacy LGBTQ+ events continue through Ultraviolet Sapphic series

The event is one of many coming from the next generation of space curators



by Jonathan Golian  
Qnotes Staff Writer

**B**rianna Daniels, a Charlotte-born DJ who performs under the name "Black As The Cosmos" says Charlotte still hasn't recovered the playfulness it had prior to COVID setting in during early 2020.

Her comment brings up a lot of memories: Dance clubs and spaces have long had a lot of value to the city and Charlotte had no shortage of destinations to choose from. Whether on 5th street, jumping between spots like The Roxbury, The Attic or Phoenix, or starting out in First Ward at the Breakfast Club, making stops at the musical hubs of Epicenter and perhaps ending the night at Bar Charlotte, the opportunities were abundant.

Over time, the more queer-centric spots did start to dissolve a bit, or outright disappear. Both The Breakfast Club and The Roxbury shut their doors a decade after one another, and, more recently, the Scorpio Lounge shut down its old location, only to reappear in South End to mixed reception. Even Scott Weaver's Shiprocked, a queer-centric party fusing music and drag together on Thursday evenings at Snug Harbor started to produce fewer nights, currently leaving fans of the popular event with only one or two sold-out presentations a year.

Time passes, and in order to have more openly inclusive spaces, it is up to the next generation to craft Charlotte's next dance parties. One of the most recent people in the city answering that call is Alexx Baerwald Simard, the chief architect of Petra's Ultraviolet Sapphic nights, as well as a few more recent events catered to the LGBTQ+ community.

After being approached in August 2023 by Perry Fowler and Marta Suarez, the owners of Petra's, the trio worked out details for a quarterly gathering. The following month, Ultraviolet took on its first outing, and many in Charlotte's community immediately jumped on it.

Alexx Baerwald Simard



CREDIT: Facebook



A packed-out night at Petra's Bar during an Ultraviolet events.  
CREDIT: Instagram/Alexx Baerwald Simard

"It was immediately well attended," Simard recalled. "We put out ... the event promotion on social media, predominantly and then Petra's posted the flyer in their window like they usually do and we had a good turnout for the very first event. And in addition to the number of people in the room, the energy of the room was palpable. You could really feel that folks showed up to the space, eager to have a space that was by and for queer women, non-binary folks and gender fluid folks. There was this sense of freedom in the room that people had been craving this experience, and they had found it and felt very much at home with it, so then we've hosted Ultraviolet every other month since then. Over time, attendance has grown, and so now it's consistently attended by between 100 to 175 people."

For locals, or even for those who have lived and become a part of the Charlotte landscape over the years, many might recall a multitude of events that made their start at Petra's and called it home. Open party formats like those of former event series Le Bang and Mirror Moves and even the ongoing Hazy Sunday happenings allow for every part of the city to let down their guards and enjoy life within the music, especially for the LGBTQ+ community.

It is in the blood for the venue itself, as Petra's has been recognized as a queer space since its beginning. Starting out as a lesbian bar in 2007, the Plaza-Midwood establishment has only branched out further in catering to other queer-centric identities through its weekly event schedules. Each owner has also hailed from the LGBTQ+ community, from Connie Huddleston and her partner, Petra (for whom the bar is named after), to Jerry Brown, Dean Freeman and Curtis Tutt.

Especially from that angle, Simard's Ultraviolet plays into an extensive and vitally important legacy. As queer spaces within Charlotte have ebbed and flowed over the years, Simard's push to establish events like Ultraviolet allows attendees to get to know one another, strengthening the various queer communities in the city.

"I think my favorite part of the feedback that I hear on a regular basis is how many people who attend Ultraviolet

meet friends there, connect with people that they have never met before, and form new friendships," Simard tells *Qnotes*. "I really get to see the beauty of queer friendships when I see people I know in other spaces together and I ask them how they met, and they're like, 'Oh, we met at Ultraviolet actually a few months back, and we've been going to other dance parties or doing this thing that we really want together.' So, in addition to kind of hearing what a meaningful space it's been for folks [and] learning about ... the deepening of queer bonds between people has been really special."

Daniels has also seen this type of reaction at the events. From September 2023 and on, she has been with Simard in bringing life to each event, crafting the soundscape as the resident DJ. Having seen Charlotte's transformations through the decades, Daniels sees promise in how Ultraviolet has grown, especially for queer women who don't have many spaces specifically geared towards them.

Brianna Daniels



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"I'm really grateful for it happening, at Petra's in particular," Daniels said. "I'm the biggest fan, I love being in the space. I've been there for Hazy Sundays since its inception, and it's become one of the main queer spaces in Charlotte. But the patronage, although it's diverse, it definitely orients towards gay white men, which is totally fine. I'm still having a great time, but as a black queer ... appreciating woman energy, or feminine energy, I'm really delighted by the party, and I know that when I'm having a good time, other people are often having a good time."

Ultraviolet, from a certain angle, can be seen as Simard's flagship for these types of spaces to bloom from. Her latest event for Charlotte's queer community, The Big Gay Picnic has been an all-ages event to gather at since 2023, and as of its start in 2024, the Queer Icon Dance Party at Camp Northend's Room Service bar has also exploded in popularity.

More than ever, as the newest presidential administration seeks to bring fear to and erase the identities of many in queer communities all over the United States, the availability of events like these offer not just a friendly atmosphere, but also a place where the life-saving skill of organizing is involved. While planning out each happening, Simard is keenly aware of this.

"My stance is that outward acts of queer joy are inherently political, and that in the act of gathering in a space together and maybe engaging in political activities that aren't inherently political is a political act," says Simard. "I would say that when I think of political change or resistance, there is policy change, but there's also a culture change, and that an event like Ultraviolet contributes to, or at least bolsters the cultural change that we need to continue to maintain and build in order to also invest in policy change."

"It's really important for those people to have a space where they can step out of that kind of high alert ... responsive, reactive mode that we get so stuck in every day," Simard continues. "So, I see it as a place where we get to recharge and make sure that, in that next day or next week, we can wake up and hopefully fight in whatever that means for each person." ::

# Our People: Gina Stewart

A local lesbian thespian discusses theater, music and love during turbulent times



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

It's not often you meet a native Charlottean, but we found one. This unicorn has been living in the Plaza Midwood area for over 30 years with a partner she absolutely adores. During this interview, long time musician, actress and nonprofit organization founder Gina Stewart shares details of her life as a Charlotte community member fortunate enough to make her livelihood acting and supporting the arts.

**L'Monique King: What led you to becoming an artist?**

**Gina Stewart:** I went to UNC-Charlotte in the '80s. At that time, I wanted to be a music artist. I played the electric bass guitar but couldn't major in electric bass guitar at the time. Back then, if you were a music major you had to pick your instrument, but they didn't offer Electric Bass Guitar, so I opted to go with voice, but I didn't want to sing opera, so I ended up gravitating towards acting and received a B.C.A (Bachelor of Creative Arts).

**LMK: Any thoughts on this year's Oscars? Did you watch?**

**GS:** Fundamentally I don't like contests or comparisons of the best when it comes to art. It's art and everything is valid to me. But I did watch this year's Oscars. The whole ceremony was way elevated, dignified and I loved it. I've said many times, the decisions were difficult because everything nominated was good in different ways.

**LMK: Past or present, who are your top three favorite actors/actresses?**

**GS:** <Without hesitation> Meryl Streep, Vivian Lee & Viola Davis.

**LMK: Top three favorite films?**

**GS:** "Being John Malkovich," "Gone with the Wind" (the whole spectacle of that thing) and I still love "Terms of Endearment." I like story films, narratives. I don't really go for the action films very much. I watch Disney, documentaries and art films. Love "The Lion King."

**LMK: We've heard that you've done some things that might have put you on the red carpet. Care to share a few details on that with our readers?**

**GS:** <Laughs> I made a living as a film and stage actress appearing in regional theater productions like "Wildwood Flowers," the story of June Carter-Cash, the wife of Johnny Cash and Off Broadway in "Good Ol' Girl." I've done quite a bit of film also. I was in "The Walking Dead" in seasons seven and eight; working for Eugene's Team. I was the older lady (laughter) making bullets, passing out sponges, supplies and arguing with Eugene. And I've done other shows as well like "Walker Texas Ranger," "Homeland," "Rectify" and others filmed in the Carolinas and Atlanta.

**LMK: How do you make your livelihood today?**

**GS:** I'm executive director of VisArt, housing the largest collection of film and video on the east coast. It includes a cafe and a screening room holding about 100 people. It is the coolest space in Charlotte. It's comfortable, warm and an incubator for artists. I've tried my hardest to make it a space where people feel comfortable for all artists, regardless of genre.

**LMK: What's the best thing about being a business owner?**

**GS:** I wouldn't say I'm an owner because a nonprofit is owned by the community and funded through people's donations and grant money. It's about people having a need for us.

**LMK: What have you found most challenging about being at the helm of a nonprofit?**

**GS:** Well, there are several things in today's modern world and climate. Getting grants and funding is more challenging now than ever. I have been leading this nonprofit for about seven years. Right when we became a nonprofit, there was COVID. The people who work for nonprofits aren't making a lot of money. With a staff of about 10 people their welfare is concerning to me, that they make a living wage. It's going to be artists that come up with the type of creative thinking that will push us forward, because we're in deep, deep shit right now. The other issue is handling the workforce, people who are in the workforce of different generations. Their priorities and what they want out of life are different. I don't attribute this to any specific generation. We've all been traumatized by so much, people haven't had time to heal from it all. We're all walking around just trying to heal and sometimes [that causes us to] clash.

**LMK: What concerns you most about our current administration?**

**GS:** Oh my God! I grew up in the military with a career Airforce dad, living in DC most of my young life - believing in the sacredness of democracy. My father's job was to guard Airforce One during the Nixon administration. Today, I find myself all over the place with this administration. In the first Trump administration I never thought I would live to see the fall of the greatest democracy ever. If you truly believe in the constitution, which says all men are created equal - which means all people, then these things that are oppressive and full of hate and have no place in a democracy. I'm also concerned with the lack of empathy, the lack of compassion, the judgment, the attitude that some people are better than other people. The foundation of that really bothers me. Either we're all equal or we're not. Thinking we're not, thinking God made some less than others gives birth to all kinds of things and it seems like we're headed backwards into that [type of mentality]. We've fought these fights for women's rights, gay rights and have come so far and now I'm hearing the same things I heard growing up - things I thought we'd



A Charlotte native, Gina Stewart is dedicated to creating space for artists.  
CREDIT: Facebook

overcome. Mostly, I'm concerned about a judicial system that will not provide us with any defense or recourse for this.

**LMK: Considering all that, if offered the opportunity to leave the U.S. would you relocate?**

**GS:** I'm glad you asked me that. I would leave for the sake/safety of my family, my partner but I would not in my soul ever be at peace with it because I was brought up to be a proud American and would feel like I was deserting my [extended] family. I think it would be more difficult for me than most because of my military background.

**LMK: Since you mentioned your partner, answer this - what do you think is her best quality?**

**GS:** She was trained as a raw-food vegan chef, but we're not vegan - though she makes great vegan dishes and great vegan desserts, but I can't pick a best trait. My wife is phenomenally gorgeous and she's super talented. She has an incredible ear for music, plays the violin by ear and she sings. She's pretty brilliant.

**LMK: Okay, let's get personal. What's your worst habit?**

**GS:** <Chuckling> Disorganization. I'm bad at time management. I start a lot of

things and eventually finish everything, but I start too many things at once. I'm a Libra and just about everything they say about me as a Libra is me - almost across the board.

**LMK: What's your greatest fear?**

**GS:** Violence.

**LMK: And your most resounding joy?**

**GS:** Collaboration.

**LMK: What do you now know that you wished you'd known at 25?**

**GS:** At the risk of sounding egotistical I'm going to say that I know something about my own worth and my own uniqueness that I didn't grasp when I was younger.

**LMK: Thanks so much for taking the time to speak with us. If you have some words of advice for young LGBTQ community members, what would you say to them?**

**GS:** Hang in there. We've fought this fight before and by God we'll fight it with you now. Be who you are and be courageous. Us older people - we've got your back. ::

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