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AUTUMN 2026

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interview with*

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WAINWRIGHT**

Fall Entertainment  
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SEASONS  
MEDIA

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# CONNECTICUT VOICE™

## EDITOR'S NOTE //



There's something special in all the seasons in Connecticut, but I can't help thinking that Autumn in our state is its most magical time. From the views of the river at Gillette Castle Park to the riot of color in the Litchfield Hills, I always joke that this is the season when they take the pictures for the postcards and the jigsaw puzzles.

With the cooler, shorter days, our focus turns indoors. It's time to pull out the sweaters and get cozy after the heat of the preceding months. I've also always wondered no matter how old we get if we ever lose that excitement about new starts in fall that come with a new school year?

There are certainly a lot of new starts in entertainment. Frank Rizzo has made your planning for entertainment this fall easier with a comprehensive list of concerts, plays, and events (page 23). He also looks at *Oh, Mary!*, the Broadway phenomenon that is starting its national tour at the Bushnell (page 50).

Alex Dueben looks at burlesque in the state. It's an art form that's been growing around the country and transforming into a more than a peep show and an artistic commentary on gender experience and expression. (page 44).

You probably noticed Rufus Wainwright on our cover. Brian Scott Lipton had an extensive conversation with the music star. Wainwright's unique style and artistic exploration have guided a career that's included opera, folk, pop, and more (page 34). Brian also talks with Rufus about his marriage, what's next, and his commitment to social issues.

As always, we look at current issues that affect the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals in the state. Jane Latus covers the life-changing power of the new fertility laws in Connecticut (page 40). Lauren Davies of Pullman & Comley lays out the importance of estate planning particularly within our communities (page 12). Our always forthright sex columnist Kim Adamski looks at kink with a clear-eyed view of the potential and possibilities of expanding one's sexual repertoire (page 16). In our Last Word, education advocate Beth Bye talks about her new life ... not exactly retirement (page 61).

Finally, we pay tribute to Elliott Leonard who left us earlier this year. He co-founded the Leonard Litz Foundation and has devoted his life to supporting our communities (page 14).

As your focus turns to fall, we thank you for being part of the *Connecticut Voice* family. We wish you a wonderful season and be sure to find even more online at [ctvoice.com](http://ctvoice.com).

**CHRIS**

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SOMETHING BRIGHT IN ALL!  
FLOWERS IN THE SUMMER,  
FIRES IN THE FALL!”

—Robert Louis Stevenson House



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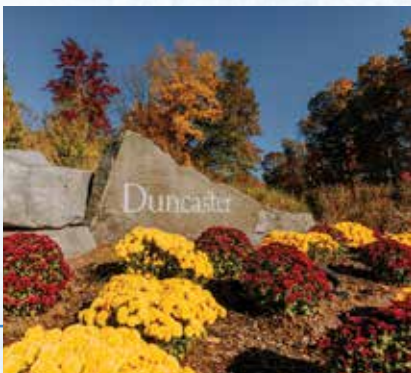
Our interview with multi-talented Rufus Wainwright about his concerts, his life, and how he fell in love with Judy Garland.

Rufus Wainwright  
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# Estate Planning for LGBTQ+ People

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An estate plan allows you to direct where your assets go when you die and ensure your wishes and your relationships are honored. For LGBTQ+ individuals, the default rules that apply to an estate plan were largely written with a traditional picture of marriage and family. If you die without a plan, state intestacy statutes decide who inherits your assets, who raises your children, and who makes decisions on your behalf. Those rules may not reflect your spouse, partner, chosen family, or the family you have built through adoption, surrogacy, or assisted reproduction.

It is also critical to keep your estate plan updated to reflect current wishes. Life events that merit a review include the birth or adoption of a child, entering into a marriage or domestic partnership, a separation or divorce, the loss of a loved one, a move from one state to another (especially important for LGBTQ+ people), a legal name or gender change, or a change in your financial circumstances. Even without major changes, it is prudent to review your estate planning documents every year or two.



Lauren Davies

## ANATOMY OF AN ESTATE PLAN

### *Last Will and Testament*

A Last Will and Testament directs where assets will go after you die and, where appropriate, names guardians for your minor

children. It also names your executor (called a personal representative in some states)—the person or people responsible for carrying out your wishes and administering your estate under the laws of the state where you lived.

If you have minor children, you will want to name a guardian(s) and a trustee to manage assets left for their benefit. Naming guardians in a valid will is an essential protection.

### *Advance Health Care Directives*

An Advance Health Care Directive names who can make medical decisions for you if you become unable to make them yourself. This document has particular significance for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Before marriage equality and modern directive laws, same-sex partners were routinely denied hospital visitation and excluded from medical decision-making. Even today, if you are unmarried, partnered without being married, or relying on chosen family, a state's default hierarchy for medical decision-making may bypass the people you want making these choices. Naming an individual explicitly is the only reliable way to ensure your wishes are honored.

Depending on where you live, an Advance Health Care Directive may also state your preferences regarding organ donation, access your confidential health information, and may include a living will, a binding statement of





your end-of-life care preferences. If you have preferences regarding the custody and control of your remains—including who should be responsible for those decisions—you may state them, on a non-binding basis, in your directive.

### **Power of Attorney**

A power of attorney names a financial agent during your life. Default agency and intestacy rules often favor legal spouses or biological relatives, which can leave an unmarried partner or a chosen family member with no authority to act on your behalf. Because the powers granted are broad and sweeping, it is important to name someone you trust completely. You may also revoke this at any time.

### **Trusts**

Many estate plans also include trusts to accomplish specific goals for a person or family. Trusts in estate planning establish control over how your assets are used after your death or disability; minimize estate taxes; create a framework of rules for a beneficiary's inheritance and to leave assets to a current spouse or partner while ensuring that any remaining assets ultimately pass to your children from a previous relationship.

### **A Note on Chosen Family**

Many LGBTQ+ individuals build close, family-like bonds with people not related by blood or marriage, aka "chosen family." Chosen family members typically have

no legal standing to inherit, to visit you in the hospital, or to make decisions for you unless you document those wishes. If chosen family plays an important role in your life, your will, trust, health care directive, and power of attorney are tools that give those relationships legal effect.

### **Beneficiary Designations**

Beneficiary designations govern assets such as life insurance and retirement benefits, letting you direct, in a binding way, where those specific assets go when you die. Reviewing and updating your beneficiary designations is essential, especially after life changes. Updating your will alone is not enough. Assets with a beneficiary

designation pass to whomever is designated, even if it is outdated.

### **Bringing It All Together**

Estate planning gives you the power to define your family and protect the people you love on your own terms. Whatever your current situation—and whatever your age—taking the time now to put a complete, up-to-date estate plan in place is one of the most meaningful steps you can take to protect your legacy. 

—Lauren Davies

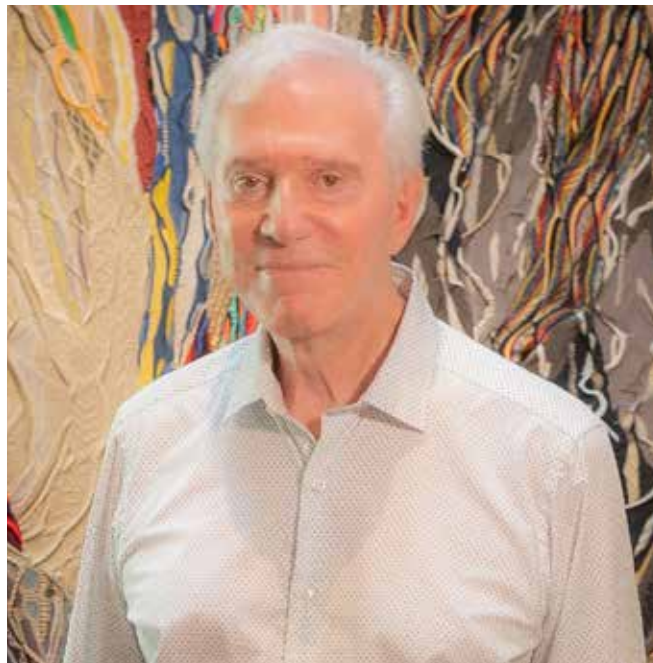
*Lauren Davies is an attorney in the Trusts and Estates practice at Pullman & Comley, LLC.*

# REMEMBERING ELLIOT LEONARD:

## A Life of Generosity, Courage, and Hope

**O**n June 6, 2026, our LGBTQ+ community lost one of its most devoted champions with the passing of Elliot Leonard. To many, Elliot was a philanthropist, advocate, and founder of the Leonard-Litz Foundation. To those fortunate enough to know him personally, he was family, a trusted mentor, a loyal friend, and a man whose kindness, generosity, and quiet strength transformed countless lives.

Elliot believed every LGBTQ+ person



Elliot Leonard

remarkable ability to recognize potential in others, often before they saw it in themselves. He inspired leaders, nurtured organizations, and reminded us that meaningful change always begins with compassion.

Together with his beloved husband and partner of more than five decades, Roger Litz, Elliot created the Leonard-Litz Foundation to ensure philanthropy would become a lasting force for LGBTQ+ equality. Under his leadership, the Foundation has awarded more than \$5 million in grants to LGBTQ+ organizations nationwide, with a particular focus on the Northeast.

Here in Connecticut, Elliot's impact is woven into the fabric of our community. His vision and generosity helped launch the Bridgeport Pride Center, supported the growth of the Triangle Community Center, and strengthened organizations that continue to serve thousands of LGBTQ+ people and their families.

Elliot also believed philanthropy should respond to the needs of the moment. When

deserved to live with dignity, safety, and the opportunity to thrive. Throughout his life, he invested in organizations, leaders, and programs that strengthened our community—not for recognition, but because he believed lifting others was simply the right thing to do.

His generosity extended far beyond financial support. Elliot shared his time, wisdom, encouragement, and unwavering belief in people. He had a



Connecticut established the Safe Harbor Fund under the leadership of State Treasurer Erick Russell, the Leonard-Litz Foundation proudly became its first donor with a gift of \$25,000. The fund helps remove financial barriers for individuals traveling to Connecticut to access reproductive or gender-affirming healthcare that is legal here but restricted in their home states, reflecting Elliot's steadfast belief that everyone deserves access to compassionate, affirming healthcare.

As Executive Director of the Leonard-Litz Foundation, I had the privilege of working alongside Elliot during the final chapter of his remarkable life. I promised him we would continue leading the Foundation with the integrity, strategic vision, and compassion that guided every decision he made. That promise remains at the heart of our work today.

Even as his health declined, Elliot never stopped thinking about our community. In May, as Pride Month approached during an especially challenging time for LGBTQ+ people across the country, he prepared one final message. Although illness prevented us from sharing it then, his words have become an enduring part of his legacy.

He acknowledged the fear and uncertainty many were experiencing but refused to let despair



Elliot and Roger



Elliot and Roger

have the final word. Instead, he reminded us that hope requires action. He challenged LGBTQ+ organizations to continue advocating, educating, and engaging their communities. He encouraged each of us to volunteer, give what we

can, participate in civic life, and stand beside one another. He thanked families and allies for their unwavering support and reminded them that their voices continue to change hearts and open minds.

Above all, Elliot wanted

every member of our community to remember this:

**“You matter. Your life matters. Your voice matters. Our community matters.”**

Those words capture the essence of who Elliot was. He believed every person deserved to be seen, valued, and empowered. His legacy is measured not only by the millions of dollars he invested in LGBTQ+ organizations, but by the lives he changed, the leaders he inspired, and the hope he instilled in so many.

The greatest way we can honor Elliot is to carry his values forward—with kindness, generosity, courage, and an unwavering commitment to one another. If we continue to show up for our community as he did, his legacy will live on in every act of compassion, every opportunity created, and every life uplifted.

In the closing words of his final message, Elliot left us with a challenge that now belongs to all of us:

*“We have faced difficult moments before, and we are still here. We are survivors and builders of community. So please—don’t give up. Never give up.”* 

—Judy Troilo, Executive Director and Trustee, The Leonard Litz Foundation.

# SEX TALK:

## Kinky and Queer

**A**re you a millennial who had a home internet connection in the 2000s? If so, you've surely heard of Rule 34. For the uninitiated, Rule 34 promises that "there is porn of it. No exceptions." It was originally accompanied by a comic in which the writer as an adolescent wears a look of alarm as he stumbles across Calvin and Hobbes themed smut.

The idea is that if an idea exists, someone has made erotic content about it. And as someone who has been an internet user since my teen years, I have yet to find an instance in which this is not true. I have seen some strange and surprising content in searches for topics I thought were benign. (Seriously. Even Sonic the Hedgehog.)

If anything demonstrates the scope of human creativity and ingenuity, it's how we get off. Modern pornography illustrates a diversity of sexual behaviors (though in a dramatized, heavily scripted way). While it can be entertaining, porn is not a direct mirror to people's real sex lives. So what are people really doing behind closed doors?

Turns out, most people are not having missionary-

only sex in the marital bed with the lights out. In fact, a Canadian study found that almost 85 percent of adults surveyed had kinky fantasies! In this University of Quebec study, kink behaviors were classified as typical, common, unusual, or rare. Turns out, even fetishes categorized as "unusual" and "rare" were reported by nearly 20 percent of participants.

regularly having sex that isn't within the cultural narrative or standard. Indeed, to the broader cultural landscape, many queer sex acts are already thought of as kinky. So, if they're already doing it unconventionally, they're likely more amenable to sexual creativity, since they're navigating waters that have been left uncharted by the mainstream. Kink

too, must be preceded by research, education, and discussion. Just like conventional sex, there are risks in kink play. The lack of an established social script is a boon for creativity but also means that health and safety information is harder to come across. You're not going to find it in high school sex ed classes; that's for sure.

Luckily, there are resources available. You just have to ask around. A quick internet search will help you find your local kink community (or the one in your nearest city). Populated areas often have queer-specific groups. Even if you can only access online spaces due to distance, people are generally willing to share educational resources to get you started.

Just as there's no reason to be ashamed of queerness, there's no need to be embarrassed of having kinky interests, provided that you keep your sexual interactions consensual and in the appropriate venues. The LGBTQ+ rights movement is, in large part, about freedom of sexual expression. It's normal and healthy to explore yours, whether it's "vanilla" or kinky. 

—Kimberly Adamski

# 85%

Percent of adults surveyed had kinky fantasies!

A small body of research suggests that people in the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to play with kink than the general population. This should come as no surprise, given how intertwined the modern LGBTQ+ liberation movement has been with the kink community. There are a lot of theories as to why, but one in particular stands out.

Consider the kinds of (non-kinky) sex that queer folks have. LGBTQ+ couples often do not have the combination of parts needed for penetrative vaginal sex, so that's off the table. They are already

becomes a way to fully explore queer sexuality, for which they never received a script in the first place.

People who engage in kink report that they find it empowering and freeing. Unbound from the cultural constrictions of heterocentric sex norms, they are empowered to build their own sexual interactions from the ground up. They become sexual explorers. Ingenuity has been a foundation of queer sexuality since queer folks have existed—which is to say, forever.

That said, it's important to note that kink play,



# Mental Health Isn't Seasonal, But Stress Can Be

As the seasons change, so do the pressures we face. Whether it's returning to school, preparing for the holidays, navigating election cycles, or managing year-end deadlines, each season brings shifts in routine and new demands on our time and energy. Even positive events can add stress, from busy calendars and travel to financial obligations and family gatherings. Furthermore, for those living with mental health conditions, including Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or Seasonal Affective Disorder, seasonal changes and added demands can intensify existing symptoms. For many LGBTQ+ individuals, these seasonal stressors may be compounded by concerns about discrimination, family acceptance, political uncertainty, or the emotional labor of navigating spaces that don't always feel affirming. While everyone's

experience is different, recognizing the factors that affect your mental well-being is an important first step toward protecting it.

One of the most effective ways to manage stress is to identify patterns. Think about the times of year when life feels especially overwhelming. Is it the excitement and busyness of Pride season? The transition back to school? The preparation for autumn celebrations? Or perhaps the anticipation of election season? Understanding your personal stressors allows you to prepare for them instead of simply reacting when they arrive.

### Self-Care Without a Price Tag

Supporting your mental health doesn't have to be expensive. It is important to distinguish between evidence-based self-care (sleep, movement, social connection, healthy boundaries) and the commercial wellness industry, which often frames well-being

as something consumers can purchase.

Some of the most effective forms of self-care are simple, intentional habits that help you recharge and protect your well-being.

- **Set boundaries.** *When was the last time you said "no" without feeling guilty?* Protect your well-being by setting limits and reducing commitments that leave you feeling overwhelmed. Declining an invitation or postponing a commitment is sometimes the healthiest choice you can make.
- **Practice breathwork.** *When was the last time you took a deep breath?* Even a few minutes of slow, intentional breathing can help calm your nervous system, reduce stress, and bring your attention back to the present moment. Simple breathing exercises can be practiced anywhere, anytime.





- **Prioritize sleep.** *Are you getting the rest your mind and body need?* Consistent, quality sleep supports emotional resilience and helps your body manage stress.
- **Move your body.** *How do you enjoy being active?* Whether it's walking, stretching, dancing, or spending time outdoors, regular movement benefits both your physical and mental health.
- **Stay connected.** *Who can you turn to when life feels overwhelming?* Spending time with supportive friends, chosen family, or your community can reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen resilience. If you notice certain times of year are especially challenging, let your support network know so they can check in and offer encouragement.

- **Plan ahead financially.** *Does financial stress affect your mental well-being?* Finances are consistently one of the leading sources of stress for Americans. If certain seasons bring added expenses, creating a simple budget or planning ahead can reduce anxiety before it builds.

#### **Sometimes We Need More**

Self-care is an important part of maintaining good mental health, but it isn't always enough, and sometimes establishing good self-care habits requires help, and that's okay. Mental health professionals consistently emphasize that while self-care can improve well-being and resilience, it is not a replacement for therapy, medication, or medical care when managing a mental health condition. Reaching out for support is a sign of strength. Consider taking a mental

health screening and talking with your primary care provider or a mental health professional. Therapy, support groups, medication when appropriate, and other community resources can help you build the tools to navigate life's challenges. No matter the season, you deserve support. By recognizing your stress patterns, building healthy habits, and asking for help when you need it, you can care for your mental health all year long. Looking for more information and resources to get started? Visit [mhconn.org](https://mhconn.org) and click on "Find Help."

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, please contact 988. Additional resources include the Trans Lifeline (877-565-8860), SAGE, and the Trevor Project (Text 'START' to 678-678). 

—Bethany Simmonds

## The Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts AT THE INTERSECTION OF CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY



Sol Invictus. Photo credit: Mélanie Lhôte

For more than three decades, the Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts at Fairfield University has stood as one of Connecticut's premier destinations for the performing and visual arts.

As Lori N. Jones, director of programming and operations explains, the Center, which features two theaters and one gallery space is more than just a showcase. Its mission is to engage the entire community in participation in the arts.

Jones notes that the mission and work of the center reflects Fairfield University's Jesuit tradition by involving the whole person, encouraging critical thinking, and emphasizing lifelong learning and fostering the arts as thriving, essential and accessible to anyone. It emphasizes the Jesuit principles of *cura personalis*—care for the whole person—and a commitment to educating individuals who will lead lives of service, compassion, and justice.



Cirque Kikasse. Photo credit: Katie Lang.

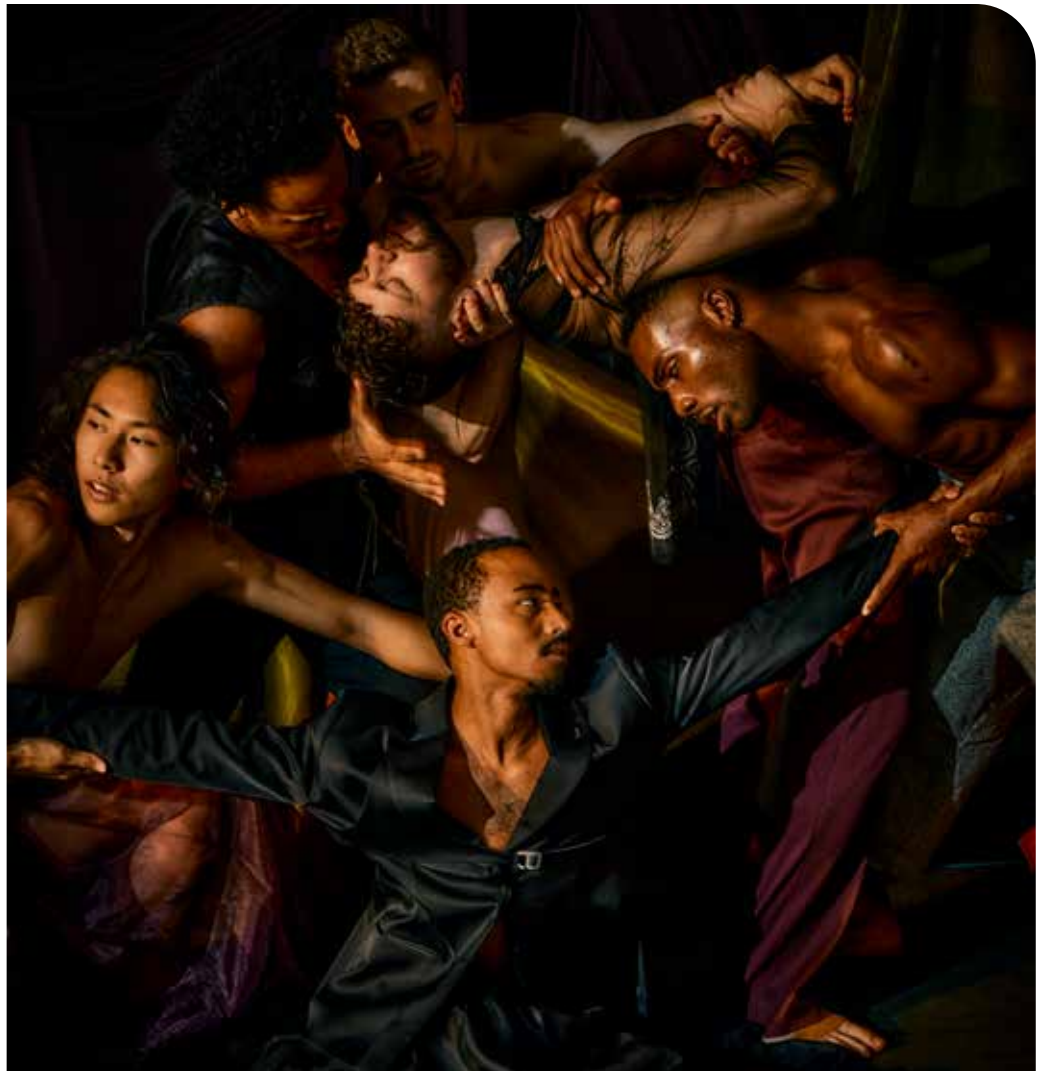
As a result, since its founding in 1990, each year, tens of thousands of visitors have attended hundreds of performances, lectures, and community events, making the Center one of Fairfield County's leading cultural institutions. Audiences include students, alumni, school groups, families, and visitors from throughout the region. Jones also said the Center has also been working with children from the Bridgeport public schools, and that for many of the participants, this is their first time in a theater.

Jones emphasizes that this broad reach beyond the university community helps the Quick Center fulfill their commitment to being a cultural resource in the community and bringing people together for enriching experiences.

For all this serious underpinning, however, there is a lot of fun going on—and for people of all ages.

Jones cited the Center's Missoula Children's Theatre that celebrated its 35<sup>th</sup> season last summer, giving 60 children from grades 1-12 the chance to learn about performing and express themselves on stage, perhaps launching themselves into a life in the arts.

The overall programming spans classical and contemporary music, international dance companies, circus, jazz, theater, renowned speakers, film screenings, family programming, and exhibitions presented by the Fairfield University Art Museum.



Limón Dance Company. Photo credit: Kelly Puleio

The fall season this year will be no exception, and Jones cites the diversity of offerings being presented. She's particularly excited by the return of Mariachi Herencia de México on October 16. This popular band appeared previously in 2022, and is back with *La Nueva Generación*.

Other upcoming events include screenings of *The Met: Live in HD*, productions from England's National Theater Live, and other live performances and lectures.

The Center also has a dynamic Artists-In-Residence program. As Jones explains, there is no formal application process for this program. Rather, the Center identifies artists whose missions complement those of The Quick and provide them with the opportunity to develop and refine their pieces, giving Quick Center audiences the first looks at this exciting and often groundbreaking work. Current residencies feature contemporary, visionary

artists working in theater, dance, and music.

There is so much more there—and you're all invited. Discover this vibrant arts community, which, for many, is in your backyard.

The Quick Center is on the Fairfield University Campus at 200 Barlow Road, Fairfield.

See all of the activities and opportunities online at [quickcenter.fairfield.edu](http://quickcenter.fairfield.edu).





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# FALL ARTS PREVIEW

By FRANK RIZZO

Summer's over, alas, and yeah, we're bracing ourselves for the onslaught of nastiness surrounding the mid-term elections. But don't despair. Keep your heads up, your hopes higher and when you need some additional uplift, just look at what's ahead entertainment-wise this fall in Connecticut.

From *The Wiz* to *Hell's Kitchen*, from Sting to Graham Nash, from Samara Joy to Mt. Joy, Connecticut has a cornucopia-full of performing artists that will add even more color to our autumn foliage. The range is enormous and covers all regions of the state so get your calendars out and get ready to circle some prime dates. >>>

# FALL ARTS PREVIEW



Ailey Il Jada Ammons  
Photo Credit: Nir Arieli

## Go to 'hell'

The hit Broadway musical on tour is now called *Alicia Keys' Hell's Kitchen*—and why not, since the singer-songwriter composed the score for the musical's story, which was based on her own life growing up in Manhattan. The tour of the Tony Award-winning show lands at The Bushnell's **Mortensen Hall** ([hartfordhall.net](http://hartfordhall.net)) in Hartford December 8 to 16. Fans of Broadway star Cheyenne Jackson can catch him in concert with his *The Guy from That Thing* show. Jackson is a popular draw for anyone who loves Broadway and sexy male crooners. There is one more can't-miss event; the hysterical Broadway comedy *Oh, Mary!* will prepare to launch its national tour with performances September 19 to 23.

## Nobody beats *The Wiz*

Early October has two terrific shows at the **Shubert Theatre** ([shubert.com](http://shubert.com)) in New Haven: one that will make your heart soar and the other that will make your sides split with laughter. First up from October 1 to 4 is the national tour of the latest Broadway revival of *The Wiz*. The 1975 musical—an African American take on the *The Wizard of Oz*—has a first-rate score of funk, pop, R&B, soul, gospel and rock that will have audiences, yes, easing down the road. Then on October 5, **David Sedaris**, a humorist



The cast of *Mystic Pizza*  
Photo Credit: Evan Zimmerman

who has a unique and irreverent point of view, will share his latest twisty and very funny stories.

### No anchovies, please

A musical with Connecticut roots—kind of—comes to Waterbury's **Palace Theatre** ([palacetheaterct.org](http://palacetheaterct.org)). ***Mystic Pizza*** is a musical based on the 1988 rom-com film, which was shot and set in Mystic, and launched the career of Julia Roberts. The show centers on three working-class girls who navigate the complexities of life, love and family in a small-town pizza joint serving everyone from the townies to the privileged country club set. The touring show plays October 2 to 4.

### More than potatoes

Samuel D. Hunter has made most of his career exploring his home turf of Idaho. His latest work is ***Little Bear Ridge Road***, which was recently nominated for a Tony Award for outstanding new play. Following its off-location successes with *Circus Fire* and *Sweeney Todd*, **TheaterWorks Hartford** ([twhartford.org](http://twhartford.org)) fans return to its Pearl Street stage with this play about a razor-tongued aunt and her long-estranged gay nephew navigating their new relationship. The production runs from October 8 to November 8.



Cheyenne Jackson  
Photo Credit: Jenny Anderson

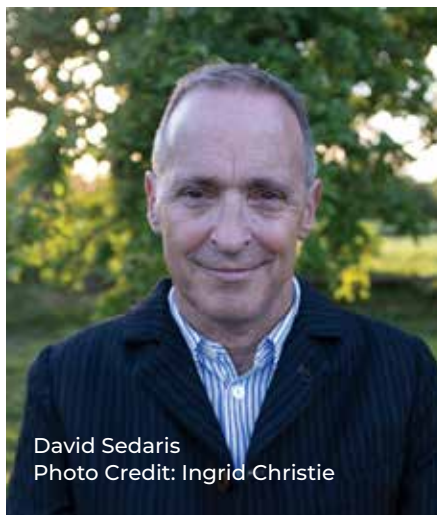
## FALL ARTS PREVIEW



Sting 3.0  
Photo Credit: Carter B. Smith

### Original 'Lost Boy'

It seems that **Hartford Stage** ([hartfordstage.org](http://hartfordstage.org)) is on a bloody good run. Following this summer's 'Sweeney Todd,' the theater will next sink its teeth (sorry) into the American premiere of Morgan Lloyd's new adaptation of Bram Stoker's **Dracula**. The London hit was praised for its nerve-shredding tension and striking contemporary lens, stripping the legendary myth to its psychological core. Sounds like a perfect pre-Halloween treat. The production runs from October 9 to November 1.



David Sedaris  
Photo Credit: Ingrid Christie

### A Legendary Session

It already looks like a million-dollar hit. West Hartford's Playhouse on Park ([playhouseonpark.org](http://playhouseonpark.org)) has already extended its fall production of the rock and roll musical **Million Dollar Quartet** from September 24 to now November 2. The musical tells the real-life tale when Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins were brought together on a December evening in 1956 at Sun Records. The result? One of the greatest jam sessions of all time. The tunes? Oh, how about a score of chart-topping hits, like "Blue Suede Shoes,"



The Cowsills. Photo by Danny Clinch

“Fever,” “Walk the Line” and “Great Balls of Fire,” for starters. Toes tapping yet?

### Coming Full Circle

Need another recording session? Well, this one is also a kind of a homecoming. August Wilson’s *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* returns to New Haven’s Yale Repertory Theatre ([yalerep.org](http://yalerep.org)) where the play had its world premiere in 1982. This work began Wilson’s relationship with the “Rep” and its artistic director Lloyd Richards. It also was a high-profile launch of Wilson’s 10-play, decade-by-decade cycle chronicling the 20th century African American experience. Set in a Chicago recording studio in 1920s with real-life blues singer Ma Rainey recording her latest song, the play explores issues of race, art, religion and the exploitation of Black recording artists by white producers. The production runs from October 2 to 24.

### A Historic Return

Has it really been 50 years since the world premiere of the musical *Annie* at the **Goodspeed Opera House** ([goodspeed.org](http://goodspeed.org)) in East Haddam? The musical went

on to become a Broadway and worldwide phenomenon—and a bonanza for the nonprofit theater. Goodspeed Musicals notes the special anniversary with a greatly anticipated revival. It even has famed animal trainer Bill Berloni — who began his career with *Annie* in 1976 — returning to find the latest pound dog to star as *Annie*’s pooch Sandy. The show runs from October 30 to December 27. Goodspeed continues the tradition of premiering musicals with *The Snow Goose*, based on the beloved novel by Paul Gallico, which is now running through October 18.

### A Different Price

Arthur Miller’s *The Price* will be seen through the lens of an Asian-American family in a **Long Wharf Theatre** production presented at Branford’s **Legacy Theatre** November 5 to 22. Ralph B. Pena, who staged Long Wharf’s impressive *The Chinese Lady*, returns to direct this American classic. ([longwharf.org](http://longwharf.org))

### Happy feet

Dance lovers can catch *Ailey II—The Next Generation of Dance* at the **Westport**

**Country Playhouse** ([westportplayhouse.org](http://westportplayhouse.org)) on September 24. Early-career dance talent—both as exciting performers and as emerging choreographers—are featured in a company whose history goes back decades. Francesca Harper sits at the helm in her sixth season as artistic director of the young company from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, bringing fresh perspectives to Ailey’s legacy, while nurturing new creative talent.

### Nice Ice

Montreal-based **Le Patin Libre** is an ice capade of an entirely different sort. The group has spent years reimagining what skating can be—stripping it of competition and showmanship and turning it into something tender, unexpected, and deeply human. The group plays the Yale Schwarzman Center in New Haven, transforming the epic Commons into a roller rink, “blurring the line between performer and audience in a way that is equal parts dance, theater, and pure joy.” All levels of skating ability and ages are welcome to become part of the show. This special event takes place September 10. ([schwarzman.yale.edu](http://schwarzman.yale.edu))

## FALL ARTS PREVIEW



Maya Drake as Ali with the cast of *Hell's Kitchen*.  
Photo Credit: Marc J. Franklin

### Norm!

Want to catch Broadway stars performing in an intimate setting? Following on the heels of such Tony-licious stars as Matt Doyle and Beth Leavel is Emmy, Grammy, Tony and SAG Award nominee **Norm Lewis**, (*Porgy and Bess*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, TV's *Scandal*) performing at the 75-seat **Legacy Theatre** ([legacytheatrecr.org](http://legacytheatrecr.org)) in the Stony Creek section of Branford on October 25.

### Not forgotten, dramatically

More than 11,000 women served in some capacity during the Vietnam war. Shirley Lauro's *A Piece of My Heart*—which plays at **Ivoryton Playhouse** ([ivorytonplayhouse.org](http://ivorytonplayhouse.org)) in Essex October 1 to 25—is a poignant drama. It follows the true stories of six women—nurses, a Red Cross volunteer and an entertainer—who served in Vietnam. Their stories and their music are powerful and remind us of the human cost of war and the scars that remain.

### The famous singers you've Never heard of

Singer-songwriter Barry Manilow spent years working on his musical *Harmony* and it finally it opened on Broadway a few years back. I saw it and it was terrific, though short-lived. It's a richly melodic—and yes, harmonic—show telling of the true story of the Comedian Harmonists, a groundbreaking six-man vocal group that rose from obscurity in 1920s Berlin to become one of the world's most celebrated musical acts—only to be torn apart as the shadow of the Third Reich closed in. Westport's **Music Theatre of Connecticut** ([musictheatreopfct.com](http://musictheatreopfct.com)) presents its production running September 11 to 27.

### Where is thy sting?

Want to hear Sting more intimately? His **Sting 3.0** tour—his long-running concert series launched in 2024 and continuing through this year—is built around a stripped-down trio format (with Dominic Miller and Chris Maas). Songs from his

The Police era (“Roxanne,” “Every Breath You Take,” “Message in a Bottle”) as well as his solo hits (“Fields of Gold,” “Englishman in New York”) are reimagined in a more personal and rhythm-driven way. It's less a nostalgia show and more like a modern reinterpretation of his entire catalog. The tour will stop at Wallingford's **Toyota Oakdale Theatre** ([toyotaoakdaletheatre.com](http://toyotaoakdaletheatre.com)) on November 9.

### Reggaeton's king

Don Omar, Puerto Rican reggaeton pioneer, singer and performer—widely considered one of the key architects of the genre's global rise in the 2000s—brings his arena tour to Hartford's **People's Bank Arena** ([peoplesbankarena.com](http://peoplesbankarena.com)) on September 27. Omar's shows aren't so much concerts as high-energy reggaeton productions. This legacy tour highlights Omar's role in shaping reggaeton from its early underground era into a global mainstream genre.

## Family reunion, kind of

The real-life inspiration behind the hit television series *The Partridge Family* were The Cowsills—teen siblings Bill, Bob, Barry, John, Susan and Paul in tandem with mom Barbara—who were from Newport, R.I. They were one of the biggest pop acts of the late '60s, scoring a series of hits with their gorgeous harmonies and sunny melodies, including “The Rain, the Park and Other Things,” “Indian Lake,” “Hair,” and the theme song for the TV show “Love, American Style.” *The Cowsills Trio Show* plays September 22 at **Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center** (theKate.org) in Old Saybrook.

## Eurovision meets Disney

English singer, songwriter and actress **Freya Skye** first gained international attention at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest 2022 with her song “Lose My Head,” winning the online public vote. Then the teen became a Disney-signed recording artist and Disney TV/film

actress, making her film debut in *Zombies 4: Dawn of the Vampires*. (She'll reprise her role as Nova Bright in “Zombies 5” in 2027.) Now she's on tour singing songs from her latest EP and will be at the **Hartford HealthCare Amphitheatre** (hartfordhealthcareamp.com) on October 9.

## Linger awhile more

Joy abounds, especially when the sublime **Samara Joy** sings. The young artist has emerged as one of the great singers of the 2020s. She earned praise for her 2021 debut solo album. The next year, she won a Grammy not only for best jazz vocal album, but as best new artist—the first time a traditional jazz singer has won that category. “A Joyful Holiday” last year earned her a few more Grammy awards. Her latest Verve album, “Portrait,” showcases the intimate, soulful chemistry she's developed with her touring band. She and her septet will be at the **Ridgefield Playhouse** (ridgefieldplayhouse.org) on September 20.

## Yet more joy

The breakout single “Astrovan” in 2017, which spread widely on streaming platforms, launched the touring career of **Mt. Joy**, the American indie rock/indie folk band. Its touring life continues and the group will be performing on September 22 at the **Westville Music Bowl** (westvillemusicbowl.com) in New Haven. The group's live shows are known for their energetic, extended performances that often lean into jam-band territory so be prepared to get in the groove.

## Not so far away

Another kind of music is celebrated in the musical *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* running from September 22 to October 22 at **A Contemporary Theatre** (actofct.org) in Ridgefield. The jukebox musical, which had a five-year run on Broadway, depicts King's songwriting career from her hiring at Aldon Music in 1958 to her debut performance in 1971, and includes her marriage to collaborator

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Gerry Goffin and their friendships with collaborators Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil.

### The perfect strum

Could the ukulele finally be getting it's due? **Jake Shimabukuro** thinks so. After all, the ukulele virtuoso has pushed the instrument far beyond its traditional boundaries and has collaborated with such musical legends as Bette Midler, Yo-Yo Ma and Jimmy Buffett. (His jaw-dropping rendition of George Harrison's "While my Guitar Gently Weeps" went viral.) He returns to the **Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts** ([jorgensen.uconn.edu](http://jorgensen.uconn.edu)) on the UConn campus in Storrs on October 10. (Leis are optional.)



Graham Nash  
Photo Credit: Misti Layne

### That signature grrrrrowl

**Tom Jones**—make that Sir Tom Jones—brings his throaty baritone and trunk-load of hits ("It's Not Unusual," "What's New Pussycat," "Delilah," "She's A Lady," "Green Green Grass of Home") from his six-decade-long, 100-million-records career to **Foxwoods' Premier Theater**

([foxwoods.com](http://foxwoods.com)) on September 27. The New York Times called the Welsh superstar "a musical shapeshifter...with a voice as husky as it was pretty," noting his massive range which encompasses pop, R&B, show tunes, country, dance, soul and gospel. At 86, the man still has the moves, growl and charisma.

### Rush tickets

When drummer Neil Peart died in 2020, the hard/progressive rock group **Rush**, formed in 1968 in Toronto, looked like it was *finis*. But Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson recently reunited to reform the group, known for its virtuoso musicianship and smart lyrics. Its Fifty-Something Tour, celebrating more than a half-century of the band's music—while honoring Peart's legacy, arrives at **Mohegan Sun Arena** ([mohegansun.com](http://mohegansun.com)) on October 30 and November 1. The men will be joined by Anika Nilles on drums and Loren Gold on keyboards and no doubt playing "Tom Sawyer," "Limelight" and "The Spirit of Radio," a few of its most popular songs.

### Generational rock mix

Musical reunion tours fill the fall and New Haven's **College Street Music Hall** ([collegestreetmusic hall.com](http://collegestreetmusic hall.com)) has one great gathering of stars from the '60s and '80s: the English group and MTV fixture **The Fixx** ("One Thing Leads to Another"), **Colin Blunstone** (lead singer

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“Gordon haunts the margins of history ... conjuring the sort of distant lives that don’t make it into textbooks, processed into oblivion by what he calls history’s ‘ruthless editing machine.’”

of *The Zombies*, think “Time of the Season”) and **Peter Asher** on September 26. Asher was half of the British Invasion duo Peter & Gordon (“A World Without Love”), but his greatest impact came later as a Grammy-winning record producer and manager. (Bet the backstage stories are something.)

### Details of a life remembered

Multiple Obie Award-winning theater artist Ain Gordon and composer-writer Josh Quillen will bring their extraordinary theater-music work “**Relics and Their Humans**” to Fairfield University’s **Quick Center for the Arts** ([quickcenter.fairfield.edu](http://quickcenter.fairfield.edu)) on November 13 and 14. The show is a theatrical and musical journey to the Quillen family home in Dover, Ohio. It covers a three-year odyssey of caregiving following a diagnosis of ALS for Josh’s father, Jerry. As *The New York Times*’ Ben Brantley wrote: “Gordon haunts the margins of history... conjuring the sort of distant lives that don’t make it into textbooks, processed into oblivion by what he calls history’s ‘ruthless editing machine.’”

### Killer comics

Stars from the wildly popular live podcast *Kill Tony* hit the road and arrive with *Killers of ‘Kill Tony’* at Stamford’s **Palace Theatre** ([palacetheaterct.org](http://palacetheaterct.org)) on October 23. The show is a standup lineup featuring fan favorites from one of the top live podcasts in the world. This gathering showcases the diverse talent pool of comedians—David Lucas, Martin Phillips, Ahren Belisle and David Jolly—who have enlivened the podcast with their wit, humor and unique comedic styles.

### Randy Travis redux

**Randy Travis** is one of country music’s biggest stars but, in 2013, he suffered a massive stroke. Technology has helped him release new music using carefully supervised AI recreations of his voice. *The Randy Travis: The More Life Tour* features Travis and James Dupré, his co-star in “The Price.” Travis’ long-time touring band will rejoin Travis on the road for the first time since 2013. Their show, which will play October 1 at **Garde Arts Center** ([gardearts.org](http://gardearts.org)) in New London, will consist of Dupré and the band performing all 16 of Travis’ hits. Travis will make a

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special appearance, engaging with the audience and taking part in the show, though not singing.

### More close harmonies

Think Woodstock, Laurel Canyon and the Summer of Love and **Graham Nash** will be one of the legendary figures that will come to mind. First with The Hollies, then with Crosby, Stills and Nash (“Marrakesh Express,” “Suite: Judy Blue Eyes”), then with Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young (“Our House,” “Ohio”), Nash has also had an impressive solo career. The two-time inductee of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame returns to Connecticut in concert on September 20 at Torrington’s **Warner Theatre** ([warnertheatre.org](http://warnertheatre.org)).

### Good rap

R&B / hip-hop singer-rapper **Bryson Tiller** returns to large-scale touring behind new music and the 10-year legacy of *TRAPSOUL* for a stop at Hartford’s **Meadows Music Theatre** ([meadowsmusictheatre.com](http://meadowsmusictheatre.com)) on September 23. The rapper and R&B singer from Louisville, Ky. has had quite the career trajectory. His career began with a 2011 mixtape, followed in 2014 by a single “Don’t,” which was recorded in his living room. That became a surprise online success leading to his 2015 debut album which earned him the first of his four Grammy Award nominations. 

Rufus Wainwright

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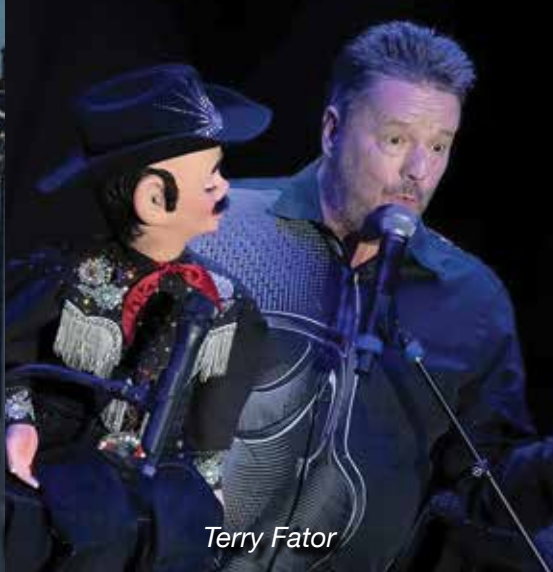


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with Solomiya Ivakhiv, violin  
and Melvin Chen, piano  
Thu, Nov 12, 7:30 pm (\$35-40)

**CATAPULT:**  
*Magic Shadows*  
Sun, Nov 15, 2 pm (\$25-35)

**Rufus Wainwright**  
*WANTED: Judy Garland*  
*Cabaret*  
Sat, Nov 21, 8 pm (\$55-65)

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COVER STORY //



Photo Credit: Jörn Weisbrodt

# RUFUS WAINWRIGHT

By BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

To the musical manner born, as the son of legendary folk singers Loudon Wainwright III and Kate McGarrigle, 53-year-old Rufus Wainwright has carved out a career as one of today's most eclectic and acclaimed musicians, producing nearly a dozen studio albums, as well as working on operas, musical theater and film soundtracks.

Wainwright is also a frequent touring artist, with numerous dates this fall around the world. On November 21, he'll appear at Connecticut's Jorgensen Center for the Arts with his show *Wanted*, which combines selections from his classic, Grammy-nominated tribute album *Rufus Does Judy at Carnegie Hall* and his two symphonic-oriented albums *Want One* and *Want Two*.

*Connecticut Voice* recently spoke to Wainwright about how his background has affected him, his initial exposure to Judy Garland, recording his newest CD, *I'm a Stranger Here Myself: Wainwright Does Weill*, his political activism as a gay man—married to arts administrator Jorn Weisbrodt—and which celebrities are listed in his phone (and the one name he wants to add).

**CV:** Given your family background, do you feel like a career in music was preordained or did you ever feel like there

was something else you could do? Were you ever tempted to rebel and just say, "Screw it, I'm not doing this."

**RW:** Music was preordained for sure! My first crib was actually a guitar case. My dad was working on an album and when my mother arrived home from the hospital there was no crib there, so they just put me in the guitar case. So, I was anointed at that point. But whether it was the circumstances of my birth or my ability for music or my passion for it, they were always in sync. I feel incredibly fortunate. It really has always been my calling.

**CV:** Over your career, you have branched out in so many different directions. Was that a plan, or do these projects come about because how the mood takes you at any particular time?

**RW:** When I started my career in the pop world, I had already been a big opera fan for many, many years—since I was 13 or so. I had this deep and very passionate knowledge about opera, so when I started making my first record, I treated that as sort of like a secret ingredient. I was able to kind of throw in certain ideas and certain dramatic structures that my contemporaries really didn't know about, and



Wainwright near his Laurel Canyon home.  
Photo Credit: Miranda Penn Turin

I thought would take people by surprise. It became a way to differentiate me, which was initially a good idea. But later, it became harder to market me.

**CV:** Is that why you started recording such diverse projects?

**RW:** Not exactly. But at some point, I felt it was important to give back to the spirits that got me to where I was going. I think that may have even started with the Judy Garland record because she had influenced me so much as a singer. I wanted to lay my offering at her temple, as it were.

**CV:** Do you remember when and how you first got exposed to her?

**RW:** I was very young, maybe three or four. I think I'm the last generation that never had a VCR so you could only see old movies on television when they were actually on. Every year around Thanksgiving, *The Wizard of Oz* would be on TV, and that was a true family event. Everybody would sit down and watch it together. Seeing Judy in that movie somehow impacted me deeply. Later, when I went to move to Hollywood to make my first record, I got more into the idea of Hollywood glamor and pizzazz, so I got into her Hollywood era of filmmaking. And then later when I got more into

substance abuse, I could relate to her struggle with addiction. So, she followed me into these different periods of my early life. [Note: Wainwright laughed wryly at this last comment.]

**CV:** A few months ago, you released *I'm a Stranger Here Myself: Wainwright Does Weill*. All of a sudden, did you wake up one morning and say, "I'm doing a Kurt Weill album?"

**RW:** No, that album was completely from left field! I was working tirelessly on a musical in London called *Opening Night*, which was based on the John Cassavettes movie, and then a friend said to me "Oh, there's this orchestra in LA called the Pacific Jazz Orchestra and they'd love to do something with you, Rufus." And I said, "you know, I love Kurt Weill a lot, and I've never really sung a group of his songs." And next thing you know, they booked a gig and I was flying to LA for like two days to do the show. And then at the last minute they said, "Oh, why don't we record it?" And, lo and behold, the album was born.

**CV:** Are you happy with it?

**RW:** I think what's interesting about that album is that I was so exhausted when I recorded that between working on musical and being jet lagged and so forth. But I think all of that actually adds something to the recording. I mean, there's a

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Album Cover: *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*

kind of weariness to the performance that it needed, I think if you're too spruced up for Kurt Weill, it doesn't really work. You got to be a little bit destroyed to sing his work!

**CV:** In general, are you the kind of artist who can leave your work in the studio or the stage, or do

you have to bring it home?

**RW:** No, it all comes home eventually. And, you know, I wish I was different. Lately, I've really gotten into Randy Newman's work intensely. And one of the biggest shocks that I ever received was when I was talking to someone about his songs, and they just kind of casually said, "Oh, yeah, all of his songs have nothing to do with his life. And he doesn't write about himself." But alas, I didn't take that path!

**CV:** Was that something you got from childhood? Did your parents take everything home, too?

**RW:** They took everything home; but I think as a family, we had an easier time communicating in song than in real life. So, yeah, I am not to be blamed for the situation I'm in!

**CV:** Did you purposely decide not to marry a musician for that reason?

**RW:** Yeah. I've never been able to, shall we say, cross-pollinate with other artists. Both my parents were musicians, and it was quite fruitful creatively, but the marriage kind of died on the vine!

**CV:** Speaking of marriage—and segueing into gay marriage and politics—I know that about two years ago, you really blasted Donald Trump for using your version of Leonard Cohen's



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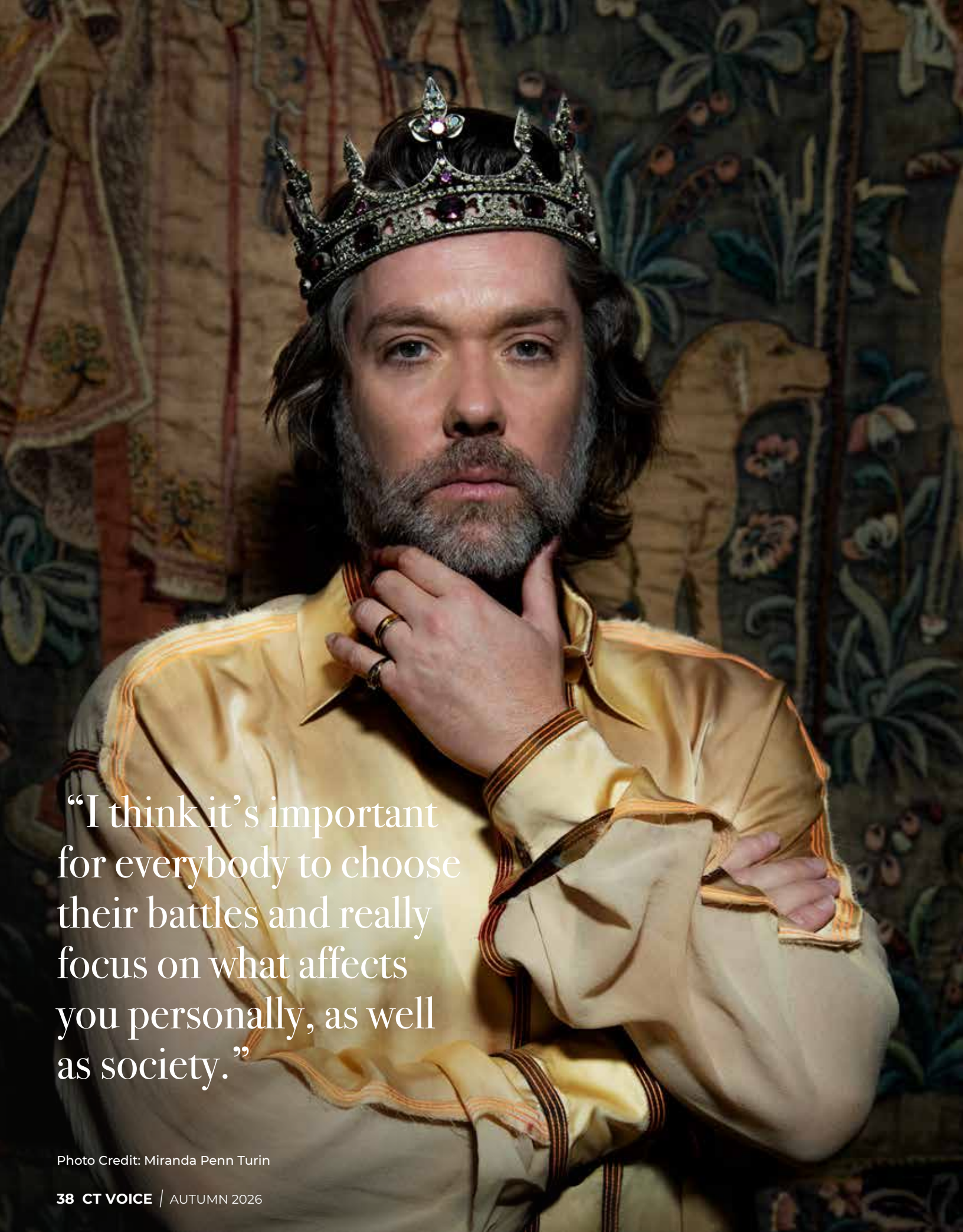
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A portrait of a man with a beard and a crown, wearing a yellow robe, with a quote overlaid on the image. The man has a serious expression and is looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a crown with multiple points and jewels. His right hand is raised to his chin, and he is wearing several rings. The background is a patterned tapestry.

“I think it’s important for everybody to choose their battles and really focus on what affects you personally, as well as society.”

Photo Credit: Miranda Penn Turin



Photo Credit: Miranda Penn Turin

**“Hallelujah” at one of his campaign rallies. That was very important, and even very brave. Is that your nature, or do you feel the need to be political, especially as a gay man, in our current climate?**

**RW:** I feel the need, but I think everybody should feel the need to be political at this point. It’s not a luxury. The s..t has hit the fan, and it’s splattering everywhere. It’s just a question of being a good citizen or, or even a good human being at this point. And I also consider it a fight for survival in a lot of ways. I think it’s important for everybody to choose their battles and really focus on what affects you personally, as well as society. Right now, for me, it is gay rights and trans rights. But it’s also the environment and voting rights. Fighting for these things can take up all your time. And we must remember that we’re in a basket with so many other people who are losing their rights or having them trampled on!



Album cover from *Down in the Willow Garden*.

**CV:** Speaking of people in your particular basket, I’m curious—how far in advance did you have to call Meryl Streep to do your album *Dream Requiem*?

**RW:** Very early on. She’s a pretty popular person, you know. Actually, I texted her since I’ve known her for years.

And she agreed to do it, which was very, very sweet.

**CV:** Who would be the person we’d be most surprised to find in your phone?

**RW:** Usher! I mean, I don’t talk to him often, but he is in my phone.

**CV:** OK, who do you want to be in your phone who’s not in your phone now?

**RW:** Well, I’m quite liking the Pope these days. I’d love to call him for a certain papal perspective.

**CV:** What would you ask him?

**RW:** Right now, I would just ask him to pray for us, please!

*Rufus Wainwright will perform at the Jorgensen Center on November 20, and at Ridgefield Playhouse on November 21. For tickets and other dates, go to [gotickets.com](http://gotickets.com) and search on Rufus Wainwright.* 



The Cutlers (l to r) Lorelei, Jenna, Erica, Isabella.  
Photo Credit: Jacque Leigh Pagan

# Fertility Care Law

By JANE LATUS

**Y**ou want to become a biological parent, are healthy, and have health insurance. Lucky you! Get ready to welcome that baby. Right? Because even if you (or your partner, if you have one) turn out to have fertility issues, your insurance will cover that. Right?

Ha, not so fast. In 43 states, insurance doesn't have to cover—and almost certainly won't—fertility care for same-sex partners or single people, as well as others whose disability, illness, gender identity or other factor prevents them from conceiving without medical help.

# “Fertility healthcare is healthcare that is so core to people’s most basic needs and wants”

— **Polly Crozier**, Director of Family Advocacy, GLAD Law



Polly Crozier. Photo Credit Chris Rakoczy

In May, Connecticut became the seventh state to require private insurance to cover this care for all, by changing the old definition of infertility: the inability of opposite-sex partners to conceive after a year of unprotected sex.

The law now defines infertility as “the need for medical intervention, including, but not limited to, the use of donor gametes, donor embryos or a gestational surrogate, to establish a pregnancy either as an individual or with a partner.”

The impact will be literally life changing. As in new life versus no new life. It will enable families to make financial decisions that could have lifelong positive ramifications. And it will provide a sense of fairness and dignity from the ability to access care just like anyone else—care that you, by the way, paid for.

The law’s passage was top priority for the legislature’s LGBTQ+ Caucus last session (see “Small Caucus, Mighty Legislative Agenda” in the spring *CT VOICE*). It is the result of two decades of advocacy by the coalition Fertility Access CT (FACT)—led by GLAD Law and including Equality CT, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, the Center for Reproductive Rights and other organizations.

Advocates are thrilled despite seeing it as incomplete because the change doesn’t apply to HUSKY, Connecti-

cut’s Medicaid program. They’re buoyed by the fact that the bill was bipartisan from start to finish, passing unanimously in the senate, and nearly so (140 to 8) in the house.

Still, the climate is ugly enough that several people hurt by the previous law, and who had sought help from legislators and advocacy groups, declined to speak to *CT VOICE*, citing the hateful online comments on news stories after the bill’s passage. *VOICE* can report, however, that the old law stopped LGBTQ+ Connecticut residents from becoming parents. It forced them to pick and choose from their dreams of home ownership, wedding celebrations and parenthood. It dictated where they could afford to live. They took on second and third jobs. They took out loans. They adopted instead, paying out-of-pocket.

## ONE COUPLE’S STORY

Jenna and Erica Cutler of Hamden, however, are willing to share the old law’s impact on them: \$80,000. “Technically we’re fertile. Just together we aren’t fertile,” says Jenna. She says she and her wife are lucky to have careers as an attorney and physical therapist, enabling them to pay to conceive their daughters, now 6 and 3. But she adds, “This bill would have been a complete



game changer. It could have impacted where we live. We would have had more money for a down payment.”

When Jenna found out her insurance wouldn’t cover reproductive care, she says, “I remember I was enraged. I went to my employer and said, ‘This is not fair.’” She asked them to

cover the cost, which she was aware some firms did at least partially. They declined, and she is now with a different firm.

Adding insult to injury, after their first daughter’s birth, Jenna had to adopt her. This was before the 2021 passage of the Parentage Act, which put an end to that requirement for same-sex parents. (See “DeFacto Parentage & LGBTQ Families” in the spring 2026 *CT VOICE*.)

It’s too late for the Cutlers, but as an activist who serves on the Connecticut Bar Association LGBT Section and is past chair of the National LGBTQ+ Bar Association, Jenna is relieved for others. “We have a lot of friends who wanted to have kids and were not able to because of the cost.”

And she’s counting living in Connecticut as a blessing. “At least in a time when a lot of states are repealing the rights of people based on their identity, Connecticut is progressing.”

### A BASIC, BIPARTISAN NEED

“Fertility healthcare is healthcare that is so core to people’s most basic needs and wants,” says Polly Crozier, director of family advocacy at GLAD Law. “So many people want to build a family, and so many people want to nurture that next generation. And we have heard time and again from people



The Cutlers. Photo Credit: Jacque Leigh Pagan



# ESCAPE TO THE UNEXPECTED

A LUXURY ESCAPE THAT  
EXCEEDS ALL EXPECTATIONS



“It feels amazing to get something  
done that’s tangible for people.”

— Rep. Dominique Johnson (D), Co-chair of the LGBTQ+ Caucus

who’ve faced barriers—people who have insurance, but it doesn’t cover it.”

The desire for family is so fundamental, says Crozier, that she wasn’t surprised the bill was bipartisan. Helping the effort, she adds, “A number of legislators and advocates worked very hard to form it that way.” Still she called its passage “really exciting. Honestly, really a bright spot in times that can be so polarizing.”

The bill was introduced and championed by representatives Tammy Nuccio (R) and Raghib Allie-Brennan (D), co-chair of the LGBTQ+ caucus.

Rep. Dominique Johnson (D), the other co-chair of the LGBTQ+ Caucus, says, “It feels amazing to get something done that’s tangible for people.” She adds, “It’s not just for our community. It really does help a large coalition of people who’d like to use IVF on their journey to parenthood.”

According to the Movement Advancement Project, other states requiring private insurers to cover fertility care inclusive of LGBTQ+ people are California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, New Jersey and New York. Crozier says bills are pending in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

## NEXT UP: HUSKY RECIPIENTS

Advocates’ next goal is to expand the mandate to HUSKY. Last session, FACT drafted a bill to study the possibility, but it was a short session. “We generally ran out of time. It’s something we’ll pick up next session,” says GLAD Law Senior Human Rights Counsel Karla Torres.

Allie-Brennan says, “I think it’s worth continuing the conversation about expanding access to fertility care, including for HUSKY recipients. Any future proposal would require careful consideration of costs and implementation, but I believe everyone deserves a fair opportunity to build a family.”

## IF YOU NEED HELP

For free help with insurance issues including denial of benefits, contact the state Office of the Healthcare Advocate. ([portal.ct.gov/oha](http://portal.ct.gov/oha))

GLAD Law Answers provides free legal aid to LGBTQ+ and HIV-positive New Englanders. ([gladlaw.org/know-your-rights/](http://gladlaw.org/know-your-rights/)) 

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT //

# Burlesque in Connecticut

By ALEX DUEBEN

Professor Marvin. Photo Credit La Photographie Boudoir

**B**urlesque flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Similar to vaudeville, it was a variety show featuring a combination of comedy, dance, variety acts, striptease and more. Eventually, it became known for striptease and for performers like Gypsy Rose Lee, Sally Rand, and Hartford native Ann Corio. Though it largely died out in the 1990s, Neo-burlesque emerged which pays homage to old school burlesque but has its own attitude and approach.

You can find these shows in Connecticut, though in smaller venues, not large theaters where burlesque shows played in their heyday. In Neo-burlesque, striptease remains the center of the show, but it's less about sexual titillation and more about queering gender norms. Contemporary performers have very consciously sought to use burlesque as a form of expression and, much like drag, use it to explore ideas around gender performance and identity.

None of which, however, explains exactly what burlesque is in the context of 2026.

"The typical definition I go to is that it's a compilation of striptease and comedy and performance, and sometimes satire and storytelling," burlesque performer Ladybird Vixen said in a recent conversation. "When I'm teaching workshops, I say, burlesque is whatever the f\*\*\* you want it to be."

Ladybird Vixen described getting into burlesque as "accidental." Interested in dance and performing since childhood, she got into pole dancing. "One of the studios that I was going to shared space with a burlesque troupe and belly dance classes. And so on a whim, I applied for one of their shows," she said. "I relocated to Connecticut in 2023 and realized that I just really liked burlesque. I liked the community. I liked the art form."

Ladybird Vixen has been performing and producing at New England Brewing Company in Wallingford, Small Batch Cellars in North Haven, and other venues across Connecticut and Massachusetts. "I do think [burlesque] is inherently queer just because it is a radical form of expression," she said.

"Maybe the act itself is also queer,

even if it has nothing to do with the sexuality of the performer," Ladybird Vixen said. "Burlesque is inherently queer for me because I'm queer, whereas I don't know if a straight person would have the same perspective.

"Every person who does burlesque does it in a different way. This, I think, also lends itself to the queerness of the art form," Professor Marvin, another performer and producer said. "I think one of the things that makes burlesque inherently queer in a lot of ways is that it questions the roles that we put on."



Ladybird Vixen  
Photo credit: Nick De Duca

Professor Marvin came to burlesque as a fan in the early 2000s, years before he ever performed. "I thought it was so much fun. The combination of theater, comedy and storytelling and stripping. Back then, this was the time of post-90s politically incorrect, edgy humor. All these things came together into a really fun and irreverent environment. If you remember what drag was like at that time, it was very similar," he said.

"I got to know a bunch of local performers and producers in the scene. I wasn't performing myself. I had a background in theater in school and college, and doing a little bit of acting. In 2015, I was talking with a friend who was stressing out about a Halloween show he was producing. I made my pitch. I asked if I could co-host the show with him and perform, and he didn't bat an eye. I did my first show in October of 2015 at Hardcore Sweet Cupcakes in Watertown. It all just sort of kept going from there.

"I started as a suit and tie wearing, singing, hosting guy, and then over time, I just kept adding more and more stuff, and the costumes got sparklier and smaller as I went on."

Professor Marvin produces and hosts Scandalous Saturdays Burlesque monthly at Trevi Lounge in Fairfield. Professor Marvin also brought up the relationship of burlesque to drag, calling the two art forms "siblings."

"You're dealing with uncovering these ideas of gender as performance, of gender as costuming, of gender as 'I'm supposed to wear this and walk around like that,'" he said.

"The dominant queer performance art is drag. There's nothing wrong with that. I love drag," Professor Marvin said. "There are a ton of burlesque performers that also perform drag and incorporate drag elements into what they do. But [those are] men performing. And women want to see themselves up there. They want to see themselves perform, too."

"Burlesque was part of my own road to accepting my own queer identity," Professor Marvin continued, "and being able to put a name on that. Doing so has just made my life so much more full, so much more expansive."

Both Professor Marvin and Ladybird Vixen mentioned that burlesque is often misunderstood. "A common misconception is [the experience] is going to be men ogling women. I've even had venues that say, we want to make sure these are also women friendly events. I'm like, 'you don't understand, this is women-centric, actually,'" Ladybird Vixen said.

Burlesque shows have a largely female audience, in part because the audience understands what's going on. That the performers strip, but a lot more is going



Lady Vixen  
Photo credit: Eric Wallis

on. Part of that is who is on stage. “The core piece of burlesque is that every body is worthy of doing burlesque. Every body is worthy of being heaped in glamour and rhinestones and to be seen on stage,” Professor Marvin said.

“Sooner or later,” Professor Marvin said of the shows that he, Ladybird Vixen and other locals produce, “you’re going to run into a body that you yourself are not attracted to. You have one of two options there. You can turn away. Or, is that the moment that you let the artistry in?”

“And if you let the artistry in, then how you view people, how you view humans, and how you view desirability, glamour, grace, bodies imbued with power and confidence, will change,” Professor Marvin said. “I had a gay male friend of mine who hadn’t been coming to my show because he said, ‘I’m not attracted to women. I don’t need to see female flesh.’ Then [he] had to sit and think about it because he liked what I did,” Professor Marvin said. “[My friend] decided to, and he said, ‘this show is great. These women are performing amazingly.’

“He let the artistry in,” Professor Marvin said. “If you’re only going to do burlesque to be attracted to it [sexually], you’re going to miss out on so much. If it’s not a body that you are attracted to, then see the artistry.”

Both artists struggled to rebuild their audiences after the pandemic but cited a new generation of performers and attendees that have grown up since then, and the way that burlesque performers and community are very connected.

“We like to lift each other up as much as we can,” Professor Marvin said. “Even to the point that we coordinate our shows so that nobody is scheduling their show on the same night as someone else’s. We’ll tell our own different audiences about each other’s work.”

“Going back to my motto about burlesque is that it’s what you make it,” Ladybird Vixen said, “I’m sure there are folks that walk in and don’t even realize the queer component of it but still enjoy the show. Then there are also people who are going to walk in and go, ‘holy shit, this space is queer as f\*\*\*, and I feel the support and I feel the community.’ It’s going to be something different for that individual.”

“Go see as much of it as you can,” Professor Marvin concluded. “Go participate as much as you can because it’s all different. Every person who does burlesque does it a different way.”



Professor Marvin. Photo Credit  
John Gram Photos



SAYBROOK POINT RESORT & MARINA

# FALL

## IN LOVE WITH THE SHORELINE

Make the most of the season with a coastal escape designed to help you slow down, unwind, and savor every moment at Saybrook Point.



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## A SHORELINE SEASON OF ITS OWN: Fall at Saybrook Point Resort and Marina

By **KERRI-LEE MAYLAND**

Photos courtesy of Saybrook Point Resort and Marina

**T**here is a moment each year when Connecticut begins to turn toward fall, but along the shoreline, the transition is never quite as immediate. In Old Saybrook, September can still feel like summer, with boats moving through the harbor, warm afternoons inviting outdoor dining and long sunsets stretching across the water. By October, the landscape begins to change, bringing brilliant foliage to the shoreline and a distinctly New England backdrop to the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound.

It is this in-between season that makes a fall stay at Saybrook Point Resort and Marina particularly appealing.

Set where the Connecticut River meets Long Island Sound, the resort puts guests

close to the water while offering an easy starting point for exploring Old Saybrook. The pace is noticeably different after the height of summer. A waterfront walk becomes more leisurely, a bicycle ride into town feels less hurried and there is time to pay attention to the changing landscape.

At the resort, autumn encourages a slower kind of getaway. Many accommodations feature fireplaces, while recently renovated guest rooms offer contemporary comforts alongside the property's relaxed coastal character. The resort's guesthouses provide additional space and privacy, and guests can add Butler Service for a more personalized experience.

"If you're looking to make your getaway even more memorable, reserve Butler Service," says Casey Parmelee,

director of rooms. "This personalized, white-glove experience takes the planning off your plate, with a dedicated Butler curating seasonal activities and thoughtful details so you can relax and enjoy."

For travelers who want to combine relaxation with a little activity, fall offers plenty of options. Golf, in particular, seems made for the season, when summer's humidity has eased and the surrounding landscape is beginning to take on its autumn colors. Saybrook Point's Stay & Play package includes an overnight stay, a round and cart at Fox Hopyard Golf Club, its private-club golf partner, and a \$50 resort credit per guest.

Fall is an ideal time to turn attention toward restoration after months spent in the sun and saltwater. The Spa at Saybrook Point offers facials, massage



and body treatments, while qualifying treatments include access to the resort's indoor and outdoor saltwater pools, whirlpool, sauna and steam room.

"Fall is the perfect season to slow down and focus on self-care," says Spa Manager Rachel Serrano. "Whether it's a Hydrating Rose Wrap, a rejuvenating peel or a relaxing CBD Massage, our treatments are designed to help guests unwind, recharge and feel their best. We offer an experience that benefits both mind and body, creating a true escape from the demands of everyday life."

Food is another reason to linger.

At Fresh Salt, the waterfront remains part of the dining experience, with a menu centered on fresh, locally inspired ingredients from land and sea. New England classics such as clam chowder are particularly fitting as the evenings turn cooler, while early fall may still provide an opportunity to dine outside.

Later in the season, the experience

moves indoors, where lunch or dinner can stretch comfortably into the evening. A glass of wine, a view of the water and nowhere else to be can make an ordinary meal feel like part of the getaway itself.

The Choo Choo Lounge on the lobby level is a cozy bar pays tribute to Old Saybrook's railroad history, serving craft cocktails, food and hosting live entertainment. It is an inviting place after dinner, particularly when the temperatures have dropped and the evening feels distinctly autumnal.

Then, just when the season seems firmly

established, Saybrook Point adds a touch of Christmas.

The resort's limited-time "Christmas in October" suite brings the atmosphere of a classic New England holiday to the shoreline. Seasonal décor, twinkling lights and waterfront touches create a festive escape that allows guests to enjoy the holidays before the traditional rush begins. For some, it may be a whimsical weekend; for others, an opportunity to start a new tradition.

Yet the most memorable part of fall at Saybrook Point may be what isn't scheduled.

There is time to walk along the water, explore town by bicycle, browse local shops and galleries, play golf or spend an afternoon at the spa. There is time for chowder, cocktails and sunsets, and for letting dinner run a little longer than planned.

That sense of unhurried time is increasingly rare, and it is one of the pleasures of visiting the shoreline after summer has faded.

At Saybrook Point, the season changes gradually, giving guests an opportunity to enjoy the best of both worlds — the lingering pleasures of summer and the unmistakable beauty of New England in the fall.

Sometimes the best time to visit is the season that refuses to rush into the next one. 



By FRANK RIZZO

Alaska  
Thunderfuck  
plays Mary  
Todd Lincoln in  
Hartford Tour  
Launch. Tony  
winner  
J. Harrison Ghee  
to play Mary's  
Husband,  
(and later Mary).

Here's the pitch: A wild comedy about a bored and hyper-anxious Mary Todd Lincoln, oblivious to her husband's Civil War stress, and desperate to be—a cabaret star.  
If suggested by any other theater creator, producers would laugh the proposer right out the door.

But this was not just any theater creator, and the laughter instead began when they first read the Cole Escola's loopy script about an unhinged First Lady.

The non-binary Escola, while not well-known at the time, had developed an online following for the off-beat YouTube clips featuring the performer as twisted, demented and unironic characters: a suburban mom whose sunny spiel on nutrition gives way to the dark side or another titled *Bernadette Peters Does Her Taxes*.

Fortunately, producer Lucas McMahon was a fan, so when he read the script to *Oh, Mary!* and then saw the hysterical reaction to a 2023 reading, "We knew we had something special."



Show creator Cole Escola.  
Photo Credit: Frank Rizzo

Next came an off-Broadway production—which became a downtown sensation. "No one believes us when we say we really didn't set out to go to Broadway—and conquer the world," says McMahon. But with producing partner Kevin McCollum and others, the show moved to a 900-seat Broadway theater where it became the surprise hit of the 2024-25 season.

The show was nominated for five Tony Awards, including best play. Escola became the first non-binary person to win as best actor in a play, memorably

“Oh, Mary!”



Alaska Thunderfuck  
as she's usually seen.  
Photo Credit: Shaun  
Vadella

# Oh, Alaska!



J. Harrison Ghee

hiking up their gown and galloping to the stage to accept the prize.

After two years, the show is still selling out, and is one of Broadway's top grossing shows, taking in as much as \$1.4 million a week.

The national tour launches September 19 to 23 in Hartford at The Bushnell's 900-seat Belding Theater. The full creative team will be in Hartford for the six-performance run before the tour moves to the West Coast.

McMahon said besides being drawn to Hartford because of Connecticut's tax credits, the closeness to New York City and its "smart and enthusiastic" audiences were also part of the draw. Any concern

that the show would not be on theatergoers' radar beyond New York were eased when Hartford's run nearly sold out months in advance of the opening.

#### LIFE AFTER COLE

When Escola decided to step away from the role after had played Mary for nearly 400 performances, producers were faced with the casting challenge.

"We didn't know what the show would be like without Cole," said McMahon. "But this is a role for anyone who feels passionately that they have something in them that they need to let out into the world."

Succeeding Escola—now 39—were

"Mary is a self-absorbed, preposterous, ridiculous, mean, and she doesn't do everything right and she often has the wrong fucked-up things to say, but she's also vulnerable. So, yeah; I guess I see a little bit of myself in her. When I saw the play on Broadway, it spoke to my soul."



Cole Escola (center) and members of the original cast on Broadway. Photo Credit: Emilio Madrid

nearly a dozen comedy, television, drag, and theater performers reinventing the role of Mary.

When plans began for the tour, the question was: Would producers play it safe and cast a TV star or—wary of the drag restrictions in some states—avoid the issue by casting a woman in the role?

Lucas said producers and the creative team wanted to remain authentic to “the show’s content and humor rather than making accommodations,” noting that the Broadway production successfully attracted diverse audiences for its wide range of performers.

In a bold move, drag performer Alaska Thunderfuck 5000—best known as one of the most memorable stars of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* series—would play Mary for the first half of the tour. (BTW: The drag monicker of the self-described “gender non-conformist” is based on a potent strain of marijuana.)

Appearing as Mary’s Husband is Tony Award-winner J. Harrison Ghee. The gender-fluid actor will take over the role of Mary on the tour beginning in January.

It’s not the first time a drag performer

has played Mary or expanded their careers to “go legit” and star in major musicals: Peppermint (*Head Over Heels*), Willam (Titanique), Bob the Drag Queen (*Moulin Rouge*), Latrice Royale (*Little Shop of Horrors*), Valentina (*Rocky Horror Show*) and Nina West (*Hairspray*).

“There are more people paying attention to drag as an art form,” said Alaska, speaking on Zoom from Amsterdam’s

World Pride events. “That means drag performers are getting more opportunities to just do different things and be in different arenas.”

## AN EERIE ALASKA

Primarily known for dry humor, high-hair and a lithe silhouette, the six-foot-one Alaska was a theater kid from the get-



Cole Escola in the Broadway production. Photo Credit: Emilio Madrid



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with the goal of creating a culture of  
inclusion and belonging.**



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Jinkx Monsoon and Kumali Nanjiani in the Broadway production. Photo Credit: Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

go with a passion for the stage. The fledgling star even played Harold Hill in *The Music Man* at Erie High School in Pennsylvania. “I was wearing so much makeup, way more makeup that a teenage child in high school should be wearing.”

Following her run as a drama student at the University of Pittsburgh, Alaska’s professional drag career began in 2007, followed by a career boost as a finalist in the fifth season of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* in 2013. (Jinkx Monsoon took top honors.) But Alaska finally got the crown in 2016 in the second season of *RuPaul’s Drag Race All Stars*.

In *New York* magazine’s “Most Powerful Drag Queens” story in 2019, Alaska also placed seventh out of 100. But she also faced personal and

“*Oh, Mary!* helps unite people through the share experience of theater and laughter.”

professional challenges—including a turbulent romantic relationship with drag star Sharon Needles—which were revealed in her 2021 memoir *My Name’s Yours, What’s Alaska?*

Alaska also proved her stamina to master the sometimes-grueling eight-performance-a-week schedule over the years as Dr. Frank ’N’ Furter in a Texas production of *The Rocky Horror Show*, *Head Over Heels* at the Pasadena Playhouse and in 2024 and Off-Broadway in 2025 on *DRAG: The Musical*.

But Alaska has a special connection to the role of Mary. “Mary is a self-absorbed, preposterous, ridiculous, mean, and she doesn’t do everything right and she often has the wrong fucked-up things to say, but she’s also vulnerable. So, yeah; I guess I see a



little bit of myself in her. When I saw the play on Broadway, it spoke to my soul.”

## DRAG RESTRICTIONS CONCERNS

The show will not be playing in any red states with restrictions on drag performances until Florida and Texas in the spring, though those laws are being challenged. In March, the show will play North Carolina, where some lawmakers have proposed—but not passed—restrictive legislation.

“I just had gigs in Kentucky, Florida and Texas,” said Alaska, “and the way I think about it is wherever you go there are gay and queer people who need

sustenance so I’m not thinking about the people who have hate in their hearts. I’m just thinking about the people who love us, need us and want us.”

The tour forges ahead regardless. “We want to stay true to what *Oh, Mary!* is and not change the way we talk about the show or pretend the show was something other than an hysterical 80-minute romp, not apologizing for any of the content or humor, and not apologize that *The New York Times* called it ‘the gayest show in New York City.’ We are very proud of that.”

But McMahon added the producers are talking to marketers in each of the tour’s cities “to think strategically about how

we want to communicate to audiences in each market.”

When asked if America was ready for *Oh, Mary!*’s comedic brand of stupidity, Lucas laughed saying, “America was built on stupid! Oh, don’t quote me!” But she then allowed the quote in context: “Gathering to laugh at something that is so proudly stupid for such shows as *Oh, Mary!* helps unite people through the shared experience of theater and laughter.”

For more information or to book seats, visit [bushnell.org](http://bushnell.org). 

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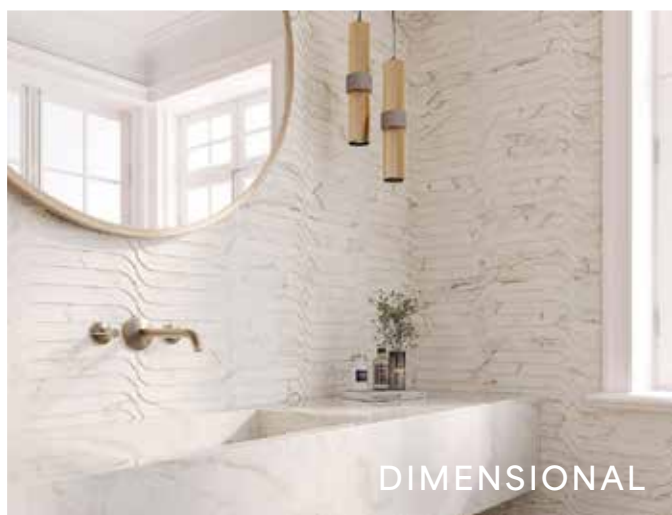


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# Embracing The Next Chapter

**BETH BYE TALKS WITH ALEX DUEBEN**

*Photos courtesy of Beth Bye*

“I felt like the work was done there,” Beth Bye said in a recent conversation about her decision to retire last year. “I wanted to get back to working with people and working with families.”

Bye retired in 2025 as Commissioner of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. She was appointed to the role in 2019 by Governor Ned Lamont, following fourteen years in the Connecticut General Assembly as both a State Representative and State Senator.

For decades, Bye has worked in early childhood education, and “retirement” is not quite the right word to describe the next stage of her life. When she made the announcement, Bye said that she wanted to get back to caretaking and working with people and has gone back to school to get her Master of Social Work.

“This came out of spending time in hospitals with Tracey,” Bye said of her wife, Dr. Tracey Wilson, who died of cancer last year. The two were the first gay couple to marry in Connecticut on the day it became legal in 2008. “After spending all that time in hospitals and caretaking and dealing with everything, I really wanted to help families who were going through this. I hadn’t intended to go back to school, but it turns out that hospitals don’t let random people give professional advice to families in these situations. Which is probably for the best,” Bye said with a laugh.



**Beth Bye with Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont**

Bye described her political career as an almost accidental thing, which is odd considering how long and how much substantive change she’s helped to accomplish in her tenure, but from running for school board because of concerns over her children’s education, to her run for the state house which was inspired by her representative’s comments during the debate around civil unions in the state, for decades now, her career and her focus has always been on children and early childhood education.

In the last few years of her time in government, she was working on the Early Childhood Education Endowment, which will greatly expand childcare and pre-K in the state, including increasing salaries for workers, which will begin in 2027. “I feel like I had seven years to work at the office and build toward this. Certainly the last three or four years in office, we were working towards this, so there was a lot of time to structure it and think about how to do it

well. To look at other states and cities and what had worked, and not worked, and learn lessons from there. And I’ve been engaged nationally for thirty years. We’re unique, but we’re not so unique, and so we could learn a lot,” Bye said.

“I feel like passing it and getting the funding was a critical step. There were people who were part of building it who are still



Governor Lamont, Bye, Rep. Dominique Johnon and AG William Tong.

there who understand the goals. I don't worry at all. It was the governor's initiative. I think he's really committed to it. It was time. There were good people. I really had the draw to go back and work directly with children and families. I'd done that for many years of my career," Bye said. "The framework is there, and we have great advocates and a great commissioner and great staff at OEC and incredible early childhood professionals that are going to make sure this happens."

I made the point that stepping away as Bye did is the mindset of a teacher or social worker, where the work is important, but people will continue to do the work after just as they did before, and continuity is important. "Exactly," Bye said. "And I think in leadership, if you've done a good job, things will carry on when you leave. If things fall apart, it means you didn't set up an infrastructure that was going to outlast you. Certainly this infrastructure will outlast me, and I'm proud of that."

All of which is true, but it also speaks to how Bye has always approached her life, and even as she talked about research projects and writing papers, she sounded excited.

"I never intended to run for public office. It just happened because of my concerns around first my kids' education and then around civil rights and human rights issues. So I had a detour from my caretaking jobs as a teacher and really had felt like I had time to give back still," Bye said. "I wanted to get back to direct care after my wife passed away. I was doing a lot of caregiving and I really missed caregiving. That's just how I've always been in my career. Whatever calls me next is where I go." 



Bye (4th from right) celebrating the passage of the Endowment with the team from the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood.

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