

# YOUREX



**JUDY O'BRIEN**  
What Queer  
Leadership  
Should Look Like

**JOEL CREASEY**  
Headlining  
CHCH Pride  
& Sweating With  
Kylie & Dannii



EXCLUSIVE PHOTOSHOOT

**MAX  
SMALL**  
Your South  
Island Farmer  
Fantasy

**PRIDE PICS**  
AUCKLAND'S  
RAINBOW  
PARADE,  
BIG GAY OUT  
& MR BEAR NZ

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## FROM THE EDITOR



### The Midpoint of Pride

There's something about March in Aotearoa that feels electric. The days are long, the evenings warm, and our communities spill into streets, parks, theatres and dance floors in a glorious reminder that we are here, and thriving!

Auckland's Pride Month may have wrapped, but across the motu, Pride energy is peaking. In Tāmaki Makaurau, Woof: The Auckland Rainbow Dog Show will bring joy (and impeccable grooming) to Western Park on 8 March. Wellington Pride Month lights up the capital, with the Pride Parade on 7 March set to flood Pōneke with colour and visibility. In Ōtautahi, Christchurch Pride builds toward the Urge Party on 14 March and a huge closing celebration on 28 March.

Beyond explicitly queer events, our arts communities are also shining. The Auckland Arts Festival (5–22 March) and the Aotearoa NZ Festival of the Arts in Wellington showcase the bold, brilliant creativity that so often includes and uplifts our rainbow voices.

So get out there and get involved. This is our time!

*Olly & Matt*



COVER | YOUR SOUTH ISLAND FARMER FANTASY, MAX SMALL.

# YOUR EX

UNAPOLOGETICALLY QUEER

#### PUBLISHER

TMO Publications LTD

#### EDITORIAL

Oliver Hall  
editor@gayexpress.co.nz  
021 206 2902

#### ADVERTISING

Matt Fistonich  
advertise@gayexpress.co.nz  
021 420 680

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Ollie Ali  
Paulo Fallone  
Georgia Jane Griffins  
Tux Hika  
Jack Mould  
Steven Oates  
Ash Penin  
Milan Popovic

#### PRINTER

Webstar

#### DESIGN

Spinc Media

[www.YourEx.co.nz](http://www.YourEx.co.nz)

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### YOUR EX's TALENTS



**JASMIN SHEIKH** splits her time between managing finances for a large real estate firm and indulging her passion for photography, specialising in events of all kinds.



**ANGUS MCDUGALL** Angus is a *New Zealand Fashion Week* ambassador and *Fashion in the Field* judge, who channels his love for the fashion and beauty industries into crafting recommendations that celebrate inclusivity, individuality, and self-expression.



**PETER JENNINGS** has had a camera in his hand since age 14, inspired by the work of Andy Warhol. Capturing Auckland's scene for over five years, Peter's talents are beloved by the community, who trust him to capture their best angles.



**JESSIE LEWTHWAITE** works in rainbow inclusion and awareness and likes to joke that she is gay for pay. She splits her spare time between co-chairing the Rainbow NZ Charitable Trust, being an exec for Rainbow Auckland and playing video games.



**JOEL AMORES** designs *YOUR EX* pages. He is a founding member of Spinc Media, which has been producing graphics and artistic illustrations for magazines since 2011. When he's not working, you'll find him camping or off-roading.



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**G.J. Gardner.** HOMES

# BOLD, FUNCTIONAL AND REFINED: THE TRENDS DEFINING KIWI HOMES IN 2025

*Discover the top home design trends G.J. Gardner are seeing in 2026, from moody colour palettes and green interiors to hidden sculleries and seamless indoor–outdoor flow.*

#### MOODY COLOUR PALETTES:

A return to the dark side! A resurgence of love for dark and moody vibes is on the rise. Showcasing a minimal and sleek style, this colour palette is sure to create a standout feature in the home, and combining it with statement lighting is sure to wow anyone.



## G.J. GARDNER × YOUR EX



### ▲ GREEN TONES:

Green has been a go-to for a few years now, with many showhomes incorporating this popular colour. While green is said to have a calming effect, we can't help but get excited when we see these gorgeous hues as feature walls and cabinetry!



### ▲ LUXE TOUCHES:

A little glitz and glam have been popping up in our showhomes. We've seen lots of statement lighting, feature walls, luxurious bathrooms and even a hidden bar and wine cellar in our Rodney West showhome.



### ▲ FEATURE WALLS:

Feature walls have been a trend for a few years now, but this year has seen the resurgence of wall panelling. Combining panelling with bold colours like green and blue, popular textured effects like limewash or brick, and subtle patterned wallpapers is taking this trend up a notch.

### INDOOR-OUTDOOR FLOW:

Perhaps not a trend but a major priority for Kiwi-style living is indoor-outdoor flow. Prioritising the flow from indoor spaces like the kitchen to outdoor dining and lounges creates the perfect space for entertaining and the typical Kiwi summer BBQs, plus the ability to open up the spaces and bring the outdoors in.



### ▲ HIDDEN SCULLERIES:

Hidden sculleries are becoming a popular feature that provide both functionality and style to any kitchen. Concealed behind what looks like another pantry door lie endless opportunities: hide mess from guests, create extra space for a large household, add an extra sink or fridge, and include plenty of additional storage. These secret little hideaways are definitely growing in popularity.

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# AUCKLAND RAINBOW PARADE DRAWS 25,000+

*Ponsonby Rd was packed for Auckland's Rainbow Parade, creating a vibrant display of pride and solidarity. Politicians, including ACT leader David Seymour and Labour deputy Carmel Sepuloni, joined the march, while spectators filled Ponsonby and its businesses. Event manager Shaughan Woodcock thanked volunteers and acknowledged Police and security teams for ensuring a safe, welcoming celebration for all.*



# OUT & ABOUT



**Rainbow Parade**  
Ponsonby Rd, Auckland  
PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



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# FROM CODE-SWITCHING TO COMMUNITY

*Rainbow Games trustee Paea Longopoa shares her journey growing up queer in a Tongan family in Auckland, navigating culture, identity and finding belonging through rugby and Pacific-led rainbow spaces.*

**P**aea Longopoa grew up in Auckland as the only daughter in a Tongan family of five children. Her parents migrated from Tonga in the early 1970s, arriving in New Zealand during the era of the Dawn Raids, a period marked by hostility for Pacific families.

Like many Pacific households, her parents came seeking financial stability and the chance to support family back home. Paea and her siblings were born and raised in Auckland, navigating the realities of diaspora life alongside the expectations of Tongan culture.

Growing up surrounded by four brothers, Paea describes herself as a tomboy, something that felt natural at the time but complicated in the context of traditional expectations placed on Tongan women.

“You grow up picking up traits from your brothers, masculinity, competitiveness and toughness,” she explains. “But in Tongan



Paea Longopoa.

culture, there are very clear expectations of how women should behave. Being tomboyish wasn't always seen as fitting those values.”

As she entered her teenage years and began to understand her sexuality, Paea struggled with isolation, feeling unable to speak openly

about being queer within her family or church community.

“It wasn't that I didn't trust my family,” she says. “It just didn't feel like they were the right people to talk to about my sexuality at that time.”

Instead, she found refuge in sport.

## FINDING A CHOSEN FAMILY THROUGH RUGBY

Rugby became both an escape and a lifeline. Paea joined Ponsonby Rugby Club, initially drawn by the opportunity to play competitively, but she also hoped to find community.

“Sport was freedom,” she says. “I joined because I loved rugby, but also because I was looking for a chosen family.”

There, she met other openly queer women. While most were Pākehā rather than Pacific, their openness helped her feel safe.

“They were unapologetically themselves. Seeing that made me realise I could be myself too.”

Even so, there were layers of complexity. Many of her Pacific teammates were deeply connected to church and cultural expectations, and Paea often felt unable to share her sexuality openly with them.

“There was always that fear of judgement,” she says. “You worry about how people will see you, whether they'll feel uncomfortable around you.”

Despite those challenges, rugby provided a space where she could begin to reconcile her identity and find confidence.

## COMING OUT, AND FINDING UNEXPECTED SUPPORT

Paea eventually came out to her father during a particularly difficult time, after experiencing her first heartbreak.

“He could see something was wrong,” she says. “He asked if I was okay, and that gave me the chance to tell him the truth.”

His response surprised her.

“He was very understanding. He just wanted to make sure I was okay. It felt warm and safe.”

Her mother, however, found it more difficult.

“As the only daughter, there were expectations that I would marry, have children and fulfil the traditional role of a Tongan woman. Being gay

## COMMUNITY

challenged those expectations.”

Her brothers also needed time to process the news, but they came to accept her sexuality.

### CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS AND THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

In Tongan culture, women hold significant status and responsibility within the family structure. As the only daughter, Paea carried both honour and expectation.

“There’s pressure to uphold family values, to behave a certain way and to serve your family,” she explains. “That pressure becomes even more complex when you’re queer.”

She describes the emotional toll of “code-switching”, adapting her behaviour depending on whether she was with family, church or her queer community.

“You’re constantly navigating different versions of yourself,” she says. “At home, your role is to serve your family. Outside, you’re trying to find space to be yourself.”

This dual existence created emotional strain, particularly during her early adult years.

“You suppress parts of yourself to meet expectations. That takes a toll.”

### THE ABSENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF REPRESENTATION

One of the most difficult aspects of Paea’s journey was the lack of visible queer Tongan role models.

“When I was younger, there weren’t many people who looked like me,” she says. “You could find queer communities, but not necessarily people who shared your cultural background.”

This absence contributed to feelings of isolation, even within welcoming queer spaces.

“It would have made such a difference to talk to someone who understood both parts of my identity, being Tongan and being queer.”

Today, she has seen that change. Visible queer Pacific athletes and community leaders are helping younger generations feel less alone.

“Visibility matters. It tells young people that they belong.”

### CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

For her Auckland University thesis, Paea explored the experiences of queer Tongan individuals in Aotearoa. Many shared similar struggles, including mental health challenges, isolation and lack of culturally safe support.

“People talked about feeling disconnected, from family, community and t’hemselfes,” she says. “There weren’t many spaces that understood their experiences.”

But she is optimistic about the future.

Rainbow organisations led by and for Pacific communities, such as FINE Pasifika, Moana Vā and Fafswag, are creating safe, affirming environments for young people to explore their identities.

“It’s beautiful to see,” she says. “There’s a sense of belonging now that didn’t exist before.”

She believes these spaces are essential for wellbeing and resilience.

“They offer love, safety and support, things many of us didn’t have growing up.”

### ADVICE FOR YOUNG QUEER PACIFIC PEOPLE

For young queer Pacific people navigating their identities today, Paea’s message is simple: “Be brave. Reach out. There are communities waiting to support you.”

She emphasises the importance of connection and finding safe spaces where people can be themselves without fear.

“You don’t have to do it alone.”

Looking back, she wishes those spaces had existed when she was younger. But she takes pride in knowing they exist now, and in contributing to that change.

“There’s still work to do,” she says. “But the future feels hopeful.”

**The Rainbow Games returns on Thursday 29 October 2026. Registrations are open now at [rainbowgames.co.nz](http://rainbowgames.co.nz).**

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PHOTO | MILAN POPOVIC

# SAPPHICS AND THE SILENCE AROUND OUR ISOLATION

*Queer women are statistically lonelier than straight people and often more than gay men — yet media narratives focus on the so-called male loneliness epidemic.*

*Jessie Lewthwaite explores sapphic isolation, and the best ways to make it better.*

I was out at a bar with some friends (yes, I know a lot of my stories start this way) when I found myself in conversation with a straight man. Bro was quick to reassure me that he was fine with lesbians. What a gem. However, he did add a but... “I just want to know,” he said, pretending to enjoy the neat scotch he ordered, “what are lesbians doing about the male loneliness epidemic?!” I have to admit he had me there because I’m not doing a damn thing about it except maybe contributing to it. Straight men being lonely is like crypto: confusing, overhyped, and absolutely none of my business.

However, because of the way my brain works, the conversation stuck with me. Suddenly every thinkpiece I see is a eulogy for “the lost young man,” as if loneliness was invented the moment a dude realised his group chat only replies with memes. The media is so quick to declare this an “epidemic” because straight men seemingly have the short end of the stick. I mean I could say it’s the consequences of their own actions for being deplorable people... but the media doesn’t like holding men accountable, so here we are. I had to look into how actually real this was. And wouldn’t you know it, but men aren’t even the most affected group by loneliness! And since no one in the media wants to write about that, I felt compelled to.

Yes, that’s right, fellow sapphics, we get the gold medal in loneliness. We are statistically lonelier than straight people and often lonelier than our gay brothers, but you wouldn’t know it from the coverage. Unlike our cis gay brothers who’ve had decades of visible bar culture, many queer women still build community through small, fragile ecosystems: book clubs, sports teams, one chaotic share-house where six lesbians and an anxious dog attempt emotional communism. Those spaces

are beautiful — and incredibly easy to lose. One breakup, one move back in with parents, one landlord selling the flat, and suddenly your “community” is an Instagram feed and the three exes you’re trying not to accidentally sleep with again.

So what can we do that isn’t just “touch grass” or download Tinder again, like a raccoon returning to an overflowing bin? The research on queer loneliness is pretty clear about one thing: chosen family matters. Even small, consistent connections — a fortnightly games night, a queer climbing crew, a sapphic walking group that mostly walks to the nearest bakery — are protective. They don’t fix the structural stuff, but they make it survivable. Mutual aid and group chats might not look like much, but they’re quietly doing more for queer mental health than half the government strategies with glossy PDFs.

I also want sapphic readers to give themselves permission to name what’s going on. If you’re lying on your couch scrolling through everyone else’s Pride photos and feeling like the last lesbian on Earth, that isn’t you “being dramatic”. It’s a rational response to being part of a community that is both hyper-visible as a culture war talking point, yet weirdly invisible in everyday life.

If you’re reading this and feeling the ache, consider this your formal diagnosis: you are not too needy, too intense, or too late. You are experiencing a political and social problem in a personal body. The cure won’t be found in a self-help reel; it will be in the slow, unsexy work of queer women continuing to find each other, again and again. If the world insists on making us lonely, the least we can do is refuse to be lonely alone.

OUT & ABOUT

# CHAOTIC FUN AT EAGLE BAR

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**Eagle Bar**  
259 Karangahape Road, Auckland.

PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH

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# INSIDEOUT'S NEW CEO

## ON LEADERSHIP AND HOPE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

*Judy O'Brien shares insights on allyship, online safety, youth advocacy, and hope for rainbow communities in Aotearoa.*

**W**hen Judy O'Brien stepped into the CEO role at InsideOUT Kōaro, she did so at what many would describe as a difficult moment.

"This is not a time where people are standing up in support of particular communities," she says.

"They're recognising that self-protection might be their priority at the moment."

And yet, when she heard that outgoing CEO Tabby Besley was moving on, she felt something else: responsibility.

"I thought this was a really important organisation to continue. It provides an essential service to rainbow rangatahi in New Zealand and has impacted people's lives really positively."

InsideOUT Kōaro has spent years building support structures for queer and trans young people across Aotearoa — in schools, in communities, in policy spaces. For Judy, the move from NZ Rugby's Head of Culture, Inclusion and Safeguarding into youth advocacy might look like a shift. But at heart, it's the same work: protecting people, strengthening systems, and widening belonging.

### LEARNING ALLYSHIP IN THE MASCULINE MAINSTREAM

Before taking the helm at InsideOUT, Judy worked inside one of the most culturally powerful institutions in the country: NZ Rugby.

From the outside, rugby can represent Aotearoa at its most masculine and mainstream. But Judy's experience complicates that stereotype.

"I benefited greatly from the allyship of men who worked across the rugby system," she says. "It was often men who were the first people to step up to champion the kinds of initiatives I was promoting."

Her portfolio wasn't limited to rainbow inclusion — it included Māori, Pacific, and women as well. She tells us the groundwork had already been laid.

"A lot of great work had happened to build an appetite for inclusion. I got to build rainbow inclusion onto a number of years of work that had already been established."



## LEADERS

She tells us the key to making the work resonate was familiarity.

Instead of framing inclusion as an accusation — a call-out of homophobia or failure — Judy framed it as an extension of rugby's existing values.

“Rainbow people have always been in rugby. The Black Ferns have been inclusive since day dot. This was about community.”

That approach unlocked personal connections. She heard countless stories from co-workers who had queer family members — people who simply wanted rugby to be safe for everyone.

“There were some really senior men who spoke up and said, ‘No matter who you love, rugby has your back.’”

By inviting people into a solution, rather than positioning them as the problem, she built allyship in spaces many assume could be hostile.

It's a lesson she carries with her: change from the inside works best when people feel seen, not shamed.

### THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF ONLINE LIFE

Now leading an organisation that works directly with young queer and takatāpui people, Judy is deeply aware of the digital landscape they inhabit.

“It's a nuanced conversation,” she says of social media.

For many rainbow rangatahi, online spaces are lifelines — places of connection, representation, and self-discovery. Youth-generated communities can ease isolation and provide validation.

“When they find others like themselves, it can be incredibly validating.”

But the same platforms also expose young people to rising hostility: misinformation, harassment, unmoderated hate speech, and targeted abuse.

“That kind of exposure to harmful content can really do damage to a young person.”

Rather than blanket bans, Judy is more interested in systemic accountability.

“What we need is greater moderation and greater safety for all online and digital spaces.”

She points to grooming, sexual violence, and conversion practices as serious online harms that demand attention. For her, the priority is equipping young people with media literacy and critical thinking skills — and holding platforms responsible for safety.

### ANXIETY BY DESIGN

Across queer communities, there's a palpable sense of anxiety — a feeling that acceptance is being withdrawn or reversed. Judy doesn't dismiss that fear. But she contextualises it.

“Our community has been used to generate anxiety — scapegoated to produce fear in other parts of society. And that's by design.”

She describes intentional campaigns that fragment communities and drive division.

“They don't want us working together and uniting against the real challenges we're facing.”

That division fuels anxiety across the spectrum. Within rainbow communities, she sees that anxiety as understandable.

“It's reasonable to feel anxious about the genuine harassment people are experiencing.”

And yet, perspective matters.

“If I look back 10 or 15 years, we've still made far greater progress than we had before. The infrastructure and support systems that have been built in aren't being disintegrated. They may be challenged, but they still exist.”

When someone recently asked her if she still believes there's light at the end of the tunnel, her answer was characteristically pragmatic.

“I think we've had a cave-in in the tunnel. We need to pick up shovels and get to work to clear that.”

### WHAT THE WORK LOOKS LIKE

For Judy, “the work” starts with young people.

“Ensuring we take care of our rangatahi so they can grow up to be tomorrow's leaders.”

That means giving them the tools to self-regulate, to engage critically, to understand they have worth — political power, economic power, and inherent human value.

**“This is not a time where people are standing up in support of particular communities... They're recognising that self-protection might be their priority at the moment.”**

It also means safeguarding inclusive workplaces and advocating for policy that explicitly names rainbow communities.

“If we truly care about young people's wellbeing outcomes, then we need policies that recognise them.”

She is concerned about proposed government changes to how rainbow identities are addressed in education.

“Where there is no explicit recognition of rainbow communities, there is a gap. And in that gap lies shame, fear, and misunderstanding.”

Without language and representation, young people are left “lost in that gap”. InsideOUT has strongly advocated for the inclusion of diverse genders and sexualities in the draft curriculum currently under consultation.

### HOPE IN ORDINARY SOLIDARITY

Despite the challenges, Judy's hope is grounded in lived experience.

“I know things can be better because they've been better before.”

Hailing from a Christian family, her self-acceptance of her gender identity, and her family's acceptance of it, has been a journey — one that reached a milestone when she was married on New Year's Eve.

She describes walking down the aisle surrounded by “Christians and queers and lads and dads and sisters and mothers. It was this wonderfully diverse community around me.”

That moment crystallised something simple and profound: people from different backgrounds, with different views, can love and support one another.

“Kindness isn't necessarily cool anymore,” she says. “But it does exist.”

She speaks about family members who hold conservative Christian views, yet still show up in love and solidarity.

“They recognise that queer people exist and are worthy of love, and that gives me hope.”

In a time when division can feel amplified and anxiety weaponised, Judy O'Brien is choosing to stabilise and strengthen.

InsideOUT's mahi continues — in schools, in policy submissions, and in conversations with young people who need to hear that they belong.

The tunnel may have caved in. But Judy is not standing still in the dark.

It's time we all picked up a shovel.

For more information on the work of InsideOUT Kōaro, visit [insideout.org.nz](https://insideout.org.nz)

# FAMILY'S PROUD PARTIES

After the colour and spectacle of the Rainbow Parade wrapped on Ponsonby Road, the party shifted to Karangahape Road, where **Family Bar** delivered a high-energy afterparty. Aotearoa's largest gay bar pulsed with thumping beats, packed dancefloors and dazzling drag performances. A staple of Pride month celebrations — including its iconic **Big Gay Out** afterparty — Family once again proved a vibrant hub for queer joy and connection.



**Family Bar**  
K Road, Auckland.  
PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH

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# FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE AND INCLUSION

*Parliament's newest Labour MP, Georgie Dansey, reflects on Pride, representation in Parliament, and her commitment to protecting rainbow rights and inclusive healthcare in Aotearoa.*



Labour MP, Georgie Dansey

**R**epresentation of our queer communities is so important to me. It's one of the reasons I joined the Labour Party, which stands staunchly for justice and inclusion for all communities.

Kia ora, I'm Georgie Dansey. I am proud to be rainbow and live in Kirikiriroa Hamilton with my wife and three children.

February is always a great Pride month, and 2026 has started with a bang. Labour MPs and supporters were thrilled to attend both Big Gay Out and the Auckland Pride Parade this year.

The vibes at Big Gay Out on a glorious Sunday afternoon were on. Labour Leader Chris Hipkins was out among the bright colours, we had a slick stall – as we do every year – and we were overwhelmed with the public support. I caught up with Liz, CE of the Burnett Foundation, and she was thrilled to have over 30,000 people attend the event.

The Pride Parade the following week is always a highlight and drew in a huge crowd. There is something super special about our rainbow community and allies coming together in big numbers to celebrate Pride.

It really is uplifting and brings confidence to our people that is much needed when we see the divisive rhetoric coming out of the current Government and attacks on our rainbow communities.

Changes to legislation that exclude young people with gender dysphoria from accessing puberty blockers are going to make life harder for our transgender whānau.

I commend the Professional Association for Transgender Healthcare Aotearoa (PATHA) in seeking a judicial review of the decision.

All healthcare decisions should be made by medical professionals, alongside a young person and their family. It shouldn't be used as a political football or to distract from the Government's economic failures.

As politicians, our actions and words hold great weight. As disappointing as it is to see the Government stoke divisions, it's heartening to see the strong voices standing up against it and fighting for inclusion.

In my first speech to Parliament, I used a whakataukī of encouragement, urging one to be courageous, determined, and persistent; never giving up in the face of adversity, no matter how difficult the struggle.

With that in mind, I make this pledge: I will always back our marginalised communities. Your voices matter, you deserve to be heard, and it's your commitment to justice that will guide me and the work I do to represent you in Parliament.

Kaua e mate wheke, me mate ururoal!

*Authorised by Georgie Dansey MP, Labour List MP based in Hamilton East, Parliament Buildings, Wellington, funded by Parliamentary Services.*

# BIG GAY OUT'S JOY & PROTEST

*The BGO delivered a family-friendly celebration at Coyle Park, filled with colour and community spirit. However, the event made headlines when a protester breached the main stage, approaching Health Minister Matt Doocey. Burnett Foundation Chief Organisational Enablement Officer Mary Haddock-Staniland told YOUR EX, "Behaviour that crosses into abuse or puts others at risk is not acceptable. It undermines the safety of community members, volunteers, staff and attendees, and does not advance our shared goals of health, dignity and equity for rainbow people in Aotearoa."*



## OUT & ABOUT



**Big Gay Out**  
Coyle Park, Auckland  
PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



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## OUT & ABOUT

# BEARS CELEBRATED IN STYLE

Smiles, sass and solidarity filled Phoenix on Friday, 6 February as NZ Bear Week 2026 celebrated community and charisma. Auckland's **Matt McVeigh** claimed the Mr Bear New Zealand 2026 title in a joyous, laughter-laced evening brimming with pride and personality, packed with bears and their admirers.



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PHOTOS | PETER JENNINGS



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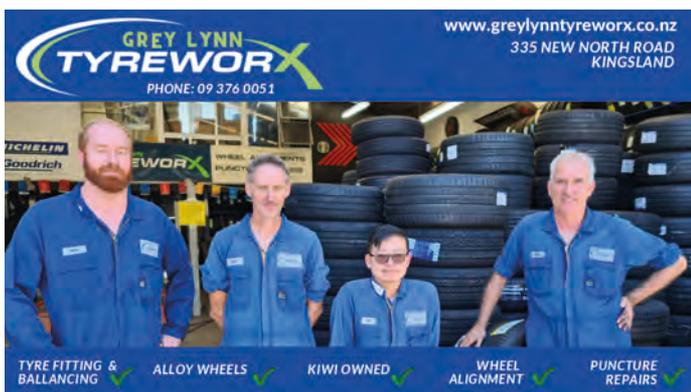
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# MARCH EVENTS

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# MAX SMALL: YOUR SOUTH ISLAND FARMER FANTASY

*Max Small describes how he turned his everyday farm life into an international rural fanasy brand.*



## COVER STORY



**B**y day, Max Small is spraying crops, mowing paddocks and tinkering with tractors on his family's South Island farm. By night, and often in the same golden rural light, he's building a global audience across Instagram, X and OnlyFans, selling the kind of rugged Kiwi fantasy that people all over the world can't get enough of.

"It's the same person, just different roles, I guess," Max shrugs when I ask if it ever feels like he's living a double life. The farmer and the online persona aren't separate identities. The "rural fantasy" that's become his signature is scattered throughout everything he does.

That fantasy, broad shoulders, country air, a man who looks like he could fix your fence and then sweep you off your feet, has become, as he puts it, "the identity that separates me from everyone else that's creating content."

Born to a Kiwi dad and American mum, a former model who suggested Max apply when she saw an ad for topless waiters, Max grew up between worlds. His parents met while his father was living in the United States, but returned to New Zealand to raise Max and his twin sister on the family farm. After his parents separated, his mum moved back to the States, and Max now heads over about once a year, usually adding a detour to somewhere that excites him. He's a big country music fan, so Nashville has featured. So has New York, where he once connected with Bravo's Andy Cohen and ended up at his apartment.

"He's quite small in real life," Max laughs. "I picked him up and carried him up the stairs!"

Despite dabbling in Sydney apartment life, he moved over initially to help his twin sister settle,



the city never quite fit. "That kind of life really separated me from who I am," he says. "When I moved back to the farm, I got back into the real side of me, that loves the outdoors and space and nature."

What the farm gives him is perspective, and a view. "Our apartment just looked at another apartment. On the farm, I get up in the morning and you've got the whole landscape to look at." Within 50 minutes he can be in the mountains. He can go off roading. There's space to breathe.

There are trade offs. Fewer events. Less nightlife. But for Max, authenticity trumps access.

OnlyFans, once simply a business move, is

becoming something more creative. "It's not as easy to get ahead as it used to be," he says. "You have to put a lot more effort into having something that's different."

His difference is simple: it's authenticity. Between snowboarding trips, gym sessions, working on his classic Dodge Challenger and the daily grind of farm life, Max Small isn't manufacturing a fantasy. He's just leaning into one that already exists, a South Island farmer with global appeal, and enough strength to literally carry you upstairs.

**Follow Max at [\\_maxsmall](#) on Instagram, YouTube, X and OnlyFans. [mxmstore.com](#) for more details.**

# MOTAT'S MILE HIGH COMEDY CLUB SOARS

*For one night, MOTAT's Aviation Hall, usually devoted to engineering marvels and the history of flight, became something entirely different: a vibrant, living expression of the rainbow community, where laughter ricocheted off metal wings and queer joy cruised at altitude.*



**MOTAT**  
Western Springs, Auckland  
PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



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# AN INSIDERS GUIDE TO CHRISTCHURCH PRIDE

**C**hristchurch Pride Festival is set to return this March with a full month of celebration, connection and unapologetic visibility across Ōtautahi. After the success of last year's expanded programme, organisers are once again delivering 31 days of events designed to bring our communities and allies together in solidarity and joy.

Chair of the Board of Trustees Jack Mould says continuing the month-long format was an easy decision. "Last year was the first time doing a month, and we heard from the community that they loved it," they tell us. "We're trying to outdo ourselves with bigger and better things."

## BIGGER & BETTER EVENTS:

Festivities kick off on Sunday 1 March with the newly revamped Pride Parade and Picnic from 2pm to 4pm. Starting at The Commons on the corner of Kilmore Street and Durham Street North, the parade will move through the iconic wooden arches and into Victoria Square for an afternoon of drag, dance, Moana vibes and live music. The event evolves from the much-loved Walk for Support, giving attendees more time to gather and celebrate in the heart of the city. Festival-goers are encouraged to bring picnic blankets, non-alcoholic drinks and their chosen family for a relaxed afternoon of entertainment and community spirit.

Throughout the month, the programme balances high-energy nightlife with thoughtful, inclusive spaces. "It's Bingo, B\*tch!" returns to Mui Mui on 4 and 18 March at 6pm, promising outrageous calls, cheeky banter and prizes from local Ōtautahi supporters. The first night features Tony Chestnut and Jack Swallows, while 18 March sees OG Bingo Queens Aunty Pipi and Meryl Vale take the reins. The R18 evenings are designed for laughter, mayhem and just enough structure to keep the numbers rolling.

On 14 March, URGE lands at Exchange Christchurch (XCHC) in collaboration with YOUR EX. With four distinct areas to dance, chill or explore — including a dark room for the adventurous — the party aims to celebrate the raw essence of gay culture. DJs Gregor, Division 4 and Everett Wayne will soundtrack

*Christchurch Pride Festival returns this month with a full calendar of events offering something for all rainbow communities to attend and enjoy.*



the night from 9pm. Organisers stress a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and emphasise that consent must be explicit, enthusiastic and ongoing.

For those seeking something more restorative, Hot Pools – After Dark at He Puna Taimoana in New Brighton offers a ticketed soak on 24 March from 8pm to 10pm, complete with music and entertainment. The following evening, 25 March, shifts focus to empowerment with The Gay (Financial) Agenda. Led by Tsarina Dellow of Trailblazer Accountants and Jackie Thomas of Paradise Financial, the relaxed session aims to build money confidence within the LGBTQ+ communities through practical, judgement-free guidance.

The festival will close on 28 March with the Love and Light Pride Closing Party at The Core Bar on St Asaph Street. With multiple DJs and roving performers, organisers promise an atmosphere filled with connection and electric energy — a final opportunity to gather and glow together. A community Dog Walk is also scheduled for 29 March, with details still to come.

## WHY IT MATTERS

For Mould, Pride remains deeply personal. Reflecting on past festivals, they recall the first walk along Cashel Street, with flags lining the

road and hundreds turning out in support. "That experience, to see that visibility in our city, was amazing," they say. "It's the young kids being able to see themselves as a queer adult... and being able to show that there is a community here."

In a shifting global climate, Mould believes this year's festival carries added weight. "We want this Pride to be about love, about sharing who you are unapologetically, and pretty much screaming it from the rooftops," they say. "It's all about that community this year — coming together and standing strong."

**For more information on these and many other events, visit [chchpride.co.nz](http://chchpride.co.nz).**

# JOEL CREASEY IS WEARING HIS HEART ON HIS SLEEVE

*Australian comedian, TV and radio host **Joel Creasey** returns to New Zealand this month for his first show in Aotearoa in over a decade. To mark the occasion, he talks to **Oliver Hall** about visiting Graham Norton's house, why Minogues don't sweat, and remembering his fearless teenage self in overwhelming times.*

**W**hen Joel Creasey talks about comedy, he talks about work. Not in the grindset way — more “you’ve paid for a ticket, I’ll do the heavy lifting!” It’s why he promises there’ll be no crowd work when he lands in Christchurch for the Rainbow Theatre Festival at The Court Theatre — and no sneaky TED Talk disguised as stand-up, either.



## CHRISTCHURCH PRIDE

“The safest place to be at one of my shows is the front row,” he tells us. “It’s a mental vacation, where you don’t have to think for an hour.”

Creasey is coming to Ōtautahi for the first time — not just visiting, but actually performing — as part of The Court Theatre’s Pride weekend injection of comedy, cabaret and queer chaos that’s become one of the festival’s most joyful annual fixtures.

This will be the first time Creasey has performed in New Zealand in over a decade, which is surprising, as he estimates he has visited our shores about 40 times in those 10 years. His home country has been keeping him busy. He’s a familiar face across TV and radio in Australia, including eight years as Australia’s Eurovision commentator, which feels less like a job and more like a personality type.

But this particular trip comes with a small existential sting: Creasey started stand-up at 16, and this year he turns 36. “So I’m going to come guns blazing — all out — and give you the best hour of stand-up that I have.”

It’s not an empty promise. Early in his career, he toured with Joan Rivers — the GOAT, in his words — and still carries one of her bluntest bits of advice like a lucky coin. “If you’ve got the microphone, you’ve already won — just don’t fuck it up from there.”

Rivers also gave him something softer, and arguably harder to live by: “Just laugh and everything will be okay.” Creasey admits it sounds basic, but in 2026 — when the news cycle often feels like a fire alarm — it feels like great advice.

### THE GRAHAM NORTON CONNECTION

Interviewing comedians is a bit like opening a wardrobe: you might be searching for one outfit, but a completely different story falls out and hits you in the face. In Creasey’s case, it’s Graham Norton’s house.

“I haven’t really told many people this,” he says, and then casually drops that he once went to Norton’s place in London, “just by Tower Bridge.” The invite came via his ex — actor Jeffrey Self — and even though Self actually knew Norton, both men arrived jittery enough to do what any sensible gay would do: stop at every pub on the way there for a drink.

When they finally got to the house, Alan Carr was there. Naturally. Then, three hours into the evening — after enough liquid courage to power a small Pride parade — Creasey asked who else lived nearby.

“Oh, Helen Mirren is my next-door neighbour,” Norton told him.

**Sweat is dripping off the ceiling, Cher is onstage “humping a cannon”, and he’s standing at the back with Dannii Minogue in what he calls “gay heaven.”**

Creasey describes clasping his pearls and emitting a gay gasp “that could be heard from Mars.” Norton offered to text Mirren and see if she’d pop over. She was in Portugal filming, which is perhaps the only acceptable reason to miss that kind of invitation.

As if that wasn’t already ridiculous enough, Creasey then ended up seeing Norton regularly through Eurovision: their commentary boxes were next to each other, Norton was “on the wines” (Creasey is still unsure how that works logistically), and the two compared jokes — including whether they’d both landed on the same Madonna eyepatch/pink-eye gag.

### SWEATING AT MARDI GRAS

Creasey’s Christchurch show lands in the context of Pride season — not just Christchurch Pride, but that wider trans-Tasman rhythm of queer summer that includes Sydney Mardi Gras. And this year, Mardi Gras comes with a heartbreak footnote: the organisation has “paused” the Mardi Gras PARTY for 2026.

Creasey is gutted. He hosted Mardi Gras for five years and describes it as the ultimate live-TV boot camp — hitting marks, spinning to camera, throwing to shots over your shoulder — all while 400 floats roll by behind you and you’ve got about 20 seconds to clock what’s worth naming.

And then there are the after-parties. Creasey’s eyes sparkle when he tells the story of his peak rock ‘n’ roll moment: it’s 3am at Hordern Pavilion, sweat is dripping off the ceiling, Cher is onstage “humping a cannon”, and he’s standing at the back with Dannii Minogue in what he calls “gay heaven.”

Creasey is sweating through his suit but refuses to take it off — “because I look like a paperclip wearing skin” — while Dannii, in a floor-length silk gown, isn’t sweating at all. When he asks how, she turns and says: “Oh babe, please. Minogues don’t sweat!”

The following year, he interviewed Kylie and couldn’t resist repeating the story, adding one professional-sounding question at the end: could she confirm Minogues don’t sweat? Kylie replied, without missing a beat: “Minogues only sweat glitter.”

His story feels like a love letter to queer festivals: where you experience history and hedonism in the same breath. That’s why Creasey has little patience for the predictable “why do you need a whole month?” crowd. Look at the history, he says. Look at what’s happening now. And if it offends you? “Don’t attend. Watch Antiques Roadshow on the couch, or whatever makes you happy.”

### A GUTSY 16-YEAR-OLD

For all the glamour in these tales, Creasey’s most affecting story is the one that starts with a 16-year-old Joel entering a stand-up competition.

If he began today, he says, he doesn’t think he’d do it. The world is louder and the scrutiny sharper. But at 16, he had a kind of reckless bravery — and a lot of favours to ask of his parents. Because the competition took place in a licensed venue, they had to drive him, sign him in, and keep doing that for the next two years, until he turned 18.

And at the same time, he had to come out to them, because so much of his material relied on his lived experience as a gay teenager.

“I reckon coming out to your parents as a stand-up comic is arguably harder than coming out to your parents as gay,” he jokes, because the stand-up part is the one that makes parents truly panic. His mum’s response to his sexuality was wonderfully underwhelming (“Cool... and we’re having pasta for dinner”), which he insists was “the most homophobic thing you could say — because I’m gay now, I can’t eat carbs anymore.”

Under the punchline, though, is the idea of diving in, making mistakes, flopping, and trying again. Creasey tells us in tough times he thinks back to being that brave 16-year-old and realises if he could do it back then, he can do it again.

And in a year that already feels like it’s asked a lot of us, that’s a mantra worth repeating: be brave and back yourself — even when you’re still figuring out the punchline.

**Joel Creasey plays Christchurch’s The Court Theatre at 6.30pm on Sunday 8 March. Tickets available at [courttheatre.org.nz](http://courttheatre.org.nz)**

# SURVIVING THE DREAM:

## FIVE OPEN UP AHEAD OF THEIR REUNION TOUR



*Five sit down with Oliver Hall to reflect on the pressures of sudden fame, burnout, and reclaiming the joy of their success.*

**W**hen I ask Five whether they're secretly harbouring the one thing that would truly complete their boy band mythology, a member coming out as gay, Jay doesn't hesitate.

"Yes! We all are and we've saved it for this to tell everyone," he laughs, before adding, "It would appear that we are one of those unicorns!"

The mysterious 'all straight boy band' unicorn.

But as the laughter settles, the band begin to explain that behind the success were five teenagers navigating an experience none of them were remotely prepared for.

Nearly three decades after they first formed, and ahead of their Keep On Movin' 2026 Tour, their first tour in 25 years, Five are confronting that reality with a clarity they didn't have the luxury of back then.

### THE DREAM AND THE REALITY

"The absolute antithesis," Jay says, when I ask how the reality of being in Five compared to the fantasy.

Ritchie elaborates. "You see it as walking out on stage in front of 100,000 people, and that part is exactly like the dream. But there were so many other factors you could never predict. You didn't realise most of your time wasn't spent doing that."

Instead, their lives became an endless blur of early mornings and late finishes. "You'd start at four in the morning and finish at one the following morning," he says. "Very quickly, you were very, very tired."

The success came almost immediately. While contemporaries like Take That and Boyzone spent a year touring schools and clubs, slowly

building an audience, Five were thrown straight into the deep end.

"We got into the band in May, and by Christmas we were in the charts," Scott tells me. "Our first-ever gig was on an arena stage."

There was no gradual adjustment. Just instant visibility, scrutiny, and isolation.

"When I left home to join the band, I lost contact with my teenage mates," Sean tells us. "I didn't have any friends outside the band, and I couldn't meet any new ones because I just didn't know who to trust."

"It still affects me now. I do everything alone unless I'm with the guys or with my kids."

Fame, at that level and at that age, doesn't just give you a new life. It erases the old one.

### THROWN INTO THE FIRE

Perhaps the most shocking revelation isn't how young they were, but how unsupported they were.

"We joke about it now," Jay says, "that our media training and psychological introduction to what was ahead lasted about 45 minutes in a room above a pub."

That was it. No sustained guidance. No emotional support systems. Just a brief warning and then a global career.

Scott puts their youth into perspective by comparing it to his own son. "When the band ended, I was only 22," he says. "When I look at my son, at 22 he could just about make beans on toast. You don't really find yourself properly until 25. We were lost for many years."

Being constantly visible didn't create confidence. In many ways, it destroyed it.

"Being visually thrust in front of everyone, I

felt very self-conscious," Ritchie says. "I was probably the least confident I've ever been in my life."

And yet, paradoxically, their lack of polish became part of their appeal.

Because they weren't media trained, they were honest, sometimes disastrously so.

"We were just real," Scott explains. "If something was upsetting us, we wouldn't wait until the cameras were off. We'd discuss it there and then."

Jay nods. "It was part of what people loved about us. But it was also part of what brought us down."

He recalls a meeting with legendary music executive Clive Davis, who was head of Arista Records, the label that would launch Five's career in America. Davis played them a demo of Whitney Houston's then-unreleased It's Not Right But It's Okay and asked for their honest opinion.

"We didn't like it and we told him that," Jay says simply. "And that really didn't go down well."

In 1998, Five would release three singles in the US before being dropped by Arista. Only one, When The Lights Go Out, was a hit. A stark contrast to their 11 Top 10s and three Number Ones in the UK.v

### BEFORE THEY WERE FIVE

Before the fame, the exhaustion, and the screaming fans, Five were just kids with different dreams.

Abs grew up immersed in hip hop and soul, shaped by a multicultural upbringing that made the band's "streetwise" positioning feel natural. Sean imagined himself as a singer songwriter in

## MUSIC

the mould of Seal. Scott loved The Backstreet Boys but needed his dad to literally drag him out of bed, hungover and reluctant, to attend the audition that would change his life.

Jay was chasing hip hop credibility in Manchester, sending demos to record labels and getting nowhere.

Ritchie, meanwhile, was eclectic, listening to everything from Grunge to House to Madonna.

They met, queuing outside a Covent Garden dance studio with thousands of other auditioning hopefuls, and became one of the defining boy bands of their era.

None of them could have understood what they were stepping into.

### THE THINGS THEY WISH THEY'D KNOWN

When I ask what advice they'd give their younger selves, the answers are immediate and revealing.

"Run!" Abs laughs.

Scott's is gentler. "I would tell younger Scott that everything will be okay."

Ritchie wishes he'd paid more attention to the business side. "We'd sit with solicitors about contracts, nodding along, then get in the van and say, 'Did anyone catch one fucking word of that?'"

Sean's answer cuts deepest.

"More compassion for each other," he says. "We were so young and completely consumed by what we were going through. You think you're the only one going through it."

Despite everything, there were moments of genuine magic. Opening the BRIT Awards with Queen. Playing Rock in Rio, and then staying up all night getting drunk with Liam Gallagher. Wandering through quiet Tokyo streets at 4am, jet lagged, and staring up at huge skyscrapers.

But trauma has a way of overshadowing joy.

"For some reason the hard times scar your mind more," Sean reflects. "Then I see footage of us laughing together and think, we did have beautiful times."

Jay describes massive gaps in his memory from those years, entire milestones lost to exhaustion.

"We just weren't present," he tells us.

### RECLAIMING THEIR SUCCESS

When Five disbanded, still at the height of their success, it wasn't because they'd stopped succeeding. It was because they couldn't keep surviving it.

"We left because we were genuinely getting towards nervous breakdowns," Ritchie says.

Now, decades later, they're returning, not as boys, but as men who understand what they lived through.

"That's why I'm enjoying myself so much now," Scott says. "I wish I could have lived in the moment more. That's what I'm doing this time."

Jay agrees. "Now we're genuinely appreciative of being allowed to do this again."

In an era obsessed with nostalgia, reunions often feel like attempts to recreate the past. But Five aren't trying to be who they were. They're trying to finally reclaim and enjoy their success properly.

Boy bands were always about fantasy, about selling the illusion of closeness, the men you wanted to date and the friends you wanted to have. But the truth, as Five know, was always far messier and more human.

They weren't unicorns. Just five young men trying to survive a dream that arrived faster than they could understand it.

And now, for the first time in 25 years, they get to step back into it, not as who they were, but as who they've become.

**Five will perform at Auckland's Trusts Arena on Monday 25 May. Tickets available from [ticketek.co.nz](https://www.ticketek.co.nz)**

**"It still affects me now. I do everything alone unless I'm with the guys or with my kids"**  
— Sean



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# FINDING HEALTHCARE THAT ACTUALLY WORKS

*Matt Fistonich shares his experience of using Tend for GP appointments and prescriptions, exploring how the app simplifies healthcare access with a seamless, user friendly experience tailored to modern life.*



Matt Fistonich.

I've tried a lot of things in my life. New cafes, new bars, new men. But actually getting healthcare sorted? That always sat somewhere between "urgent" and "why is this so hard?" Until I tried Tend.

I first heard about Tend through a friend who raved about how simple it was. I'll be honest, I was sceptical. I've spent years navigating phone menus, scrolling through clinic websites looking for appointment forms, and feeling overwhelmed just trying to book in for the basics. But Tend? It wipes all that anxiety out before you even open the app.

## ZERO STRESS, START TO FINISH

Downloading the Tend app felt like any other app install. The moment you open it, you're greeted with something that makes healthcare feel manageable. And it genuinely is.

I signed up using just a few details. No multi page forms. No clunky login process. Just a sensible, intuitive flow that made me feel like I was making real progress and taking control of my health.

## BOOKING A GP APPOINTMENT WAS EASY

When I needed to see a GP, I tapped a couple of buttons in the app. Within seconds, I could see available appointments, down to exact time slots. There were options for video consults or in person visits, which meant I could pick what worked for me that day. Tend appointments are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you're enrolled with Tend, you also benefit from lower consultation fees.

I chose a same day appointment with a real GP. The confirmation came through instantly, and the app reminded me before the consult. It felt like scheduling brunch with a friend, not something I'd been procrastinating about for weeks. My last GP had a wait time of nearly three weeks for an appointment.

## GETTING MEDICATIONS SORTED QUICKLY AND SIMPLY

After the appointment, my prescription was sent straight through the app. You can select a preferred pharmacy as your "home" pharmacy, but you can have your prescription sent to any pharmacy in Aotearoa. No awkward calls. No waiting at reception. The whole thing was seamless, the kind of process that makes you wonder why health systems everywhere aren't this straightforward.

Within hours, I had my medication sorted. Easily online, without the usual fuff.

## WHY IT WORKED FOR ME

For queer people, especially those of us juggling work, community commitments and mental load, having something this simple makes a huge difference. It shouldn't feel like moving mountains to look after your health, and with Tend, it doesn't.

Clinic visits can be stressful, especially if you're nervous about how you'll be received or if you're juggling dysphoria, anxiety or tiredness. Tend cuts through the noise, the forms and the waiting on hold, and leaves you with what you actually needed in the first place, care.

Beyond GP appointments, Tend offers free 30 minute mental health video consults to anyone aged 16 and over. Free. No referral needed. No long waitlist. I could even see someone

today. Just book it through the app and have a chat with a trained mental health clinician if you're feeling stressed or anxious.

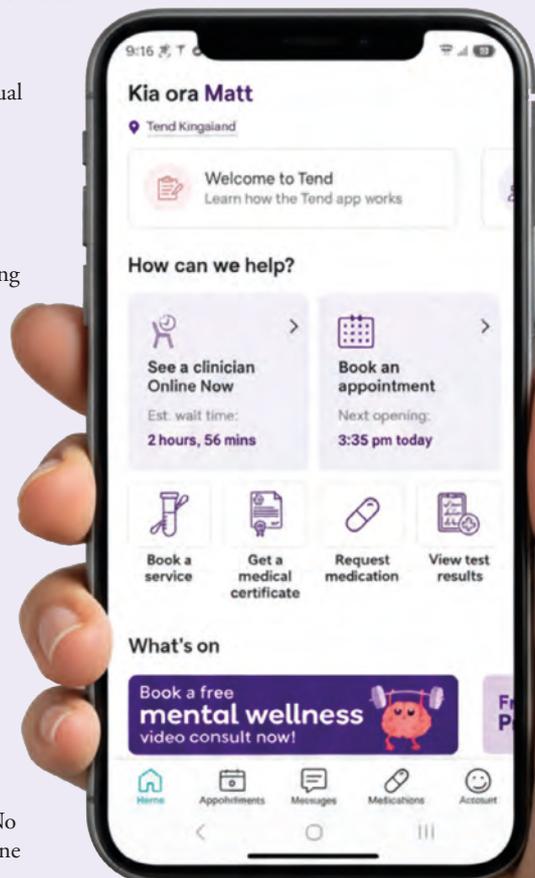
## WHY IT COULD WORK FOR YOU

If you've ever put off booking a GP appointment because the process felt too hard or you hate waiting on hold, Tend might just change that. It certainly changed how I think about accessing care, quick, respectful and genuinely user friendly.

It's healthcare that finally feels designed for people, not paperwork. Switching to Tend is simple, and you don't have to "break up" with your current GP. They handle the transfer for you. Just download the app, create an account and tap "Enrol now" on the home page. Follow the prompts, have your ID ready, and you can be enrolled in just a few minutes.

Download the **Tend app** or visit **tend.nz**

Got a health related question? Email **ask@gayexpress.co.nz**



## GIVEAWAYS

### 2 x Double Passes to **Butterfly Who Flew Into The Rave**

Thanks to our friends at Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts Festival, we're giving away two double passes to **Butterfly Who Flew Into The Rave**. This electrifying performance blends dance, theatre and club culture into a high-energy, visually immersive experience that pulses with sound and movement. Expect bold storytelling and a boundary-pushing celebration of identity and transformation. Don't miss your chance to be part of the rave. Find out more at [aaf.co.nz](http://aaf.co.nz)



### 2 x Double Passes to **Wild Dunedin's Wild Night Masquerade**



Step into an evening of elegance and intrigue at Wild Dunedin's Wild Night Masquerade. Held at Tūhura Otago Museum from 7pm on Friday 17 April, this lavish gala and charity auction embraces a 'secrets of the sea' theme. Dress to impress in your finest aquatic-inspired attire and enjoy live music, delicious food and flowing drinks. Proceeds from the auction will support local charities. Discover more at [wilddunedin.nz](http://wilddunedin.nz)



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# AUCKLAND PHILHARMONIA'S SIX-THIRTY SESSIONS RETURN WITH BIG DRAMA IN BITE-SIZED FORM

**T**here are two distinct kinds of weeknight mood. One involves collapsing onto the couch for a date with Netflix. The other? A brisk martini, a confident stroll into the Auckland Town Hall, an hour of orchestral catharsis — and still home in time for dinner.

In 2026, Auckland Philharmonia is championing the latter.

The much-loved Six-thirty Sessions are back at the Auckland Town Hall, offering two tightly curated concerts that run just over an hour while delivering all the grandeur of a full-scale symphonic evening.

Pierre Bleuse.  
PHOTO | MARINE PIERROT DETRY

## FATE, FEELING AND FULL ROMANTIC TURMOIL

**SIX-THIRTY SESSION: TCHAIKOVSKY 4**  
— THURSDAY 9 APRIL

April's programme leans unapologetically into romantic intensity — perfect for those navigating complicated emotions (even if you resist sending that text).

French conductor Pierre Bleuse returns following a triumphant Australasian debut, hailed by critics as “a conducting force to be reckoned with” (Arcana.fm). He leads a programme brimming with emotional voltage.

At the core of the concert is Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No.4* — frequently described as his ‘fate’ symphony. Composed during one of the most turbulent chapters of his life, the work surges through anxiety, yearning, defiance and resilience. It's raw, restless and deeply human — a 19th-century emotional reckoning set to orchestra.

Opening the evening is the *Prelude and Liebestod* from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* — an intoxicating meditation on passion and heartbreak that swells with intensity. If you've ever embraced love at full volume, this programme will feel strikingly familiar.

## SHEKU KANNEH-MASON MAKES HIS NEW ZEALAND DEBUT

**SIX-THIRTY SESSION: SHEKU & ELGAR**  
— WEDNESDAY 12 AUGUST

If April centres on destiny, August is about witnessing a generational talent.

British cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason makes his New Zealand debut in a performance already generating significant anticipation. Labelled a “global phenomenon” by *The Telegraph*, Kanneh-Mason's rise has been remarkable.

Many will remember his appearance at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, yet that moment is just one highlight in a career that includes winning BBC Young Musician of the Year and serving as Artist-in-Residence at the New York Philharmonic. He is now firmly established among the world's most sought-after classical performers.

In this concert, Sheku Kanneh-Mason performs Edward Elgar's *Cello Concerto* — a profoundly introspective and intimate work often regarded as one of the most moving pieces in the cello repertoire. Under the direction of Australian-Swiss conductor Elena Schwarz, the programme also includes Jean Sibelius' *Symphony No.5*, bringing sweeping Nordic grandeur and triumphant scale to the evening.

This additional Six-thirty Session was scheduled in response to overwhelming demand for

Kanneh-Mason's appearance in the orchestra's The New Zealand Premier Series concert the following night — making this the earlier, distinctly stylish option for those keen to say they experienced it first.

For a community that values gathering — whether beneath disco lights or the ornate ceiling of the Auckland Town Hall — there is something uniquely powerful about sharing live orchestral music in a space filled with collective emotion.

Often, the most memorable nights out are with live music.

## EVENT DETAILS

**Six-thirty Session: Tchaikovsky 4**  
6.30pm, Thursday 9 April  
Auckland Town Hall  
Conductor: Pierre Bleuse  
Wagner – *Tristan und Isolde*: Prelude and Liebestod  
Tchaikovsky – *Symphony No.4*

**Six-thirty Session: Sheku & Elgar**  
6.30pm, Wednesday 12 August  
Auckland Town Hall  
Conductor: Elena Schwarz  
Cello: Sheku Kanneh-Mason  
Elgar – *Cello Concerto*  
Sibelius – *Symphony No.5*

Tickets are available now via [aucklandphil.nz](http://aucklandphil.nz) or [Ticketmaster](https://www.ticketmaster.co.nz).

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# TCHAIKOVSKY

🕒 6:30pm, Thurs 9 April

📍 Auckland Town Hall

4

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Pierre Bleuse

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# WEST HOLLYWOOD: A PARTY WORTH SHOWING UP FOR



*Oliver Hall* discovers vibrant queer nightlife and rich LGBTQ+ history in Los Angeles' most walkable and proudly defiant neighbourhood.

Los Angeles is vast — a sprawl of freeways, palm trees and possibility — but West Hollywood feels like its secret village. In just a few walkable blocks, you can move from world-class dining to queer nightlife, from rock 'n' roll history to progressive art spaces, from late-night comedy to early-morning coffee without ordering an Uber.

WeHo is a gaybourhood where creativity and pride pulse through the streets, where drag queens, designers, activists and A-listers share the same pavements.

And right now, in a country led by a president that they did not vote for, gay villages like WeHo, and their queer businesses and communities, need to be supported by international gays and theys — not shunned. And as well as offering solidarity to our brothers and sisters, West Hollywood knows how to throw a party, and we're all invited!



Kimpton La Peer.

## TO STAY

Just steps from Melrose Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard, **Kimpton La Peer** ([lapeerhotel.com](http://lapeerhotel.com) | [@lapeerhotel](https://twitter.com/lapeerhotel)) sits in the sweet spot between the Design District and the Rainbow District. All the nightlife is walkable — dangerously so — yet inside, it feels like a design sanctuary.

The lobby makes an immediate impression: grand ceilings, contemporary art climbing the walls, reception discreetly to one side, and award-winning restaurant, Ladyhawk, to the other. We hear guests raving about their

cocktails and snacks at 'No Rose', the bar tucked beside the intimate outdoor pool, as we head up to our room.

Rooms are unexpectedly spacious for such prime real estate, with an elegant, calm, neutral palette that nicely counterbalances WeHo's neon nights.

Having dinner at **Ladyhawk** ([ladyhawkrestaurant.com](http://ladyhawkrestaurant.com) | [@ladyhawkweho](https://twitter.com/ladyhawkweho)) is non-negotiable. Crowned LA Mag's 2025 Best New Restaurant, Chef Charbel Hayek's Eastern Mediterranean menu is theatre: freshly baked breads torn tableside, silky dips, mezze,

## TRAVEL



dancers (not strippers) are a tradition that exploded in LA's bars during the 1960s as part of the city's liberated nightlife laws, with go-go girls in the straight bars and boys in the gay ones. Beyond entertainment, this was a declaration of sexual expression and liberation for gay men at a time when even gathering in public could be criminalised — which kind of makes it even sexier that they are still going strong today.

### TO REMEMBER

With hungover heads, the next morning we visit the new **West Hollywood AIDS Monument** ([aidsmonument.org](https://aidsmonument.org)), which opened in November. It sits in West Hollywood Park, near restaurants and bars — a deliberate reminder of the joy and grief that coexist.

The monument features 147 bronze pillars that glow like candlelight at night, engraved quotes and oral histories honouring those lost and those who fought back. It's open to the public from 6am to midnight, and artist Daniel Tobin's clever design means it looks different throughout the day as shadows fall and the lights come up.

We are guided through the space by Tony Valenzuela, Executive Director of America's oldest active LGBTQ+ organisation, the One Institute, which puts on educational programmes, exhibitions and community initiatives to ensure LGBTQ+ histories are not forgotten. He tells us:

“For many queer men, HIV/AIDS was the defining event of our generation. The AIDS Monument represents my story and countless other stories of loss, grief, survival, community work and triumph. It educates the public about the terrifying and inspiring history of HIV/AIDS in West Hollywood, Los Angeles and beyond, and celebrates the hard-fought victories in science, politics and community that helped us to persevere.”

CONTINUED...



birthdays, breakups, all colliding beneath flashing lights and big beats.

Booths line the dance floor for those wanting table service and to be seen; everywhere else is sweaty, shirtless gay club nostalgia that feels gloriously early 2000s. Sunday brunch brings drag superstars to the stage from 1pm, because in WeHo, daytime is not downtime.

Next door, sister bar **The Chapel** (@[thechapelweho](https://thechapelweho.com)) offers a more intimate and themed space, with wilder party nights that feel so 2026. Just last week, *RuPaul's Drag Race* judge TS Madison officiated a night of queer weddings during a trans-themed 'Paul's Dolls' party. You will never be bored here.

Just metres away are **Mickey's** ([mickeys.com](https://mickeys.com)), **Mother Lode** ([motherlodela.com](https://motherlodela.com)) and **Revolver** ([revolverweho.com](https://revolverweho.com)), each trying to outdo the other with celebrity appearances, *Drag Race* alumni and boatloads of sexy go-go boys. These

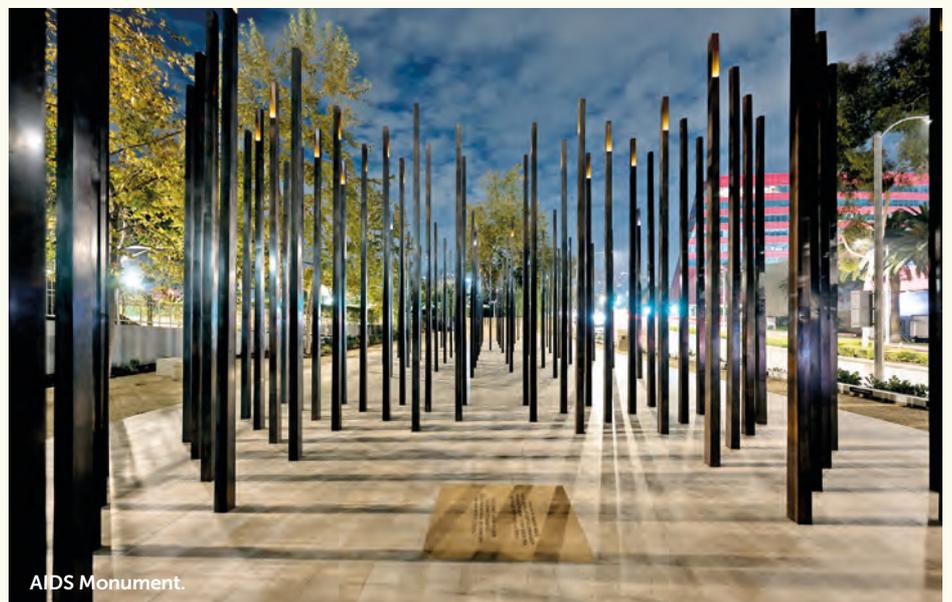


rotisserie meats, wood-fired perfection. We recommend grabbing a bar seat and watching the open kitchen perform. This is one of the best hotel restaurants in all of LA.

### TO DANCE

It bears repeating that the Kimpton La Peer is dangerously close to West Hollywood's queer nightlife. Everywhere is walkable. Spill your drink in the wrong places and you can head back to the hotel for an outfit change and have rejoined your friends within 20 minutes. The closest bar is also the most legendary!

**The Abbey** ([theabbeyweho.com](https://theabbeyweho.com) | @[theabbeyweho](https://theabbeyweho.com)) is the original Pink Pony Club — twice crowned the Best Gay Bar in the World — and it wears that title well. Saturday night finds it heaving: locals, internationals,



## TRAVEL

### ... CONTINUED

On the current political climate in the US, he says, “We’ll continue to educate about LGBTQ+ history and the immense contributions queer and trans folks have made to make our society better... We’ll continue to create spaces of support and reflection, reminding people we’ve been through dark times before. It’s important to remember that the 1980s and early 90s for our communities were far worse.”

### TO FORGET

Within West Hollywood is the Emerald Village, a strip where cannabis consumption lounges have been permitted since 2018, and the jewel in the Emerald Village’s crown is **The Woods** ([thewoodsweho.com](http://thewoodsweho.com) / [@thewoodsweho](https://www.instagram.com/thewoodsweho)).

The Woods was founded by Hollywood actor Woody Harrelson, chat show host Bill Maher, tennis legend John McEnroe and acclaimed gay interior designer Thomas Schoos, and feels like an A-listers’ penthouse garden. It is truly one of the most unique spaces in all of WeHo.

Enter through a reclaimed-wood retail space resembling an upscale urban garden centre. Then the doors open to palatial outdoor gardens: towering monstera, sparkling koi ponds and private cabanas tucked into greenery. We’re handed a jar of Sonoma Hills Farm’s Glitterbomb — hands down the most beautiful bud I’ve ever seen — and an ice-packed, crystal-clear glass bong that feels absurdly luxurious. As LA’s year-round sunshine is dappled through the lush green leaves, the Bee Gees’ More Than A Woman plays merrily over the sound system. There’s a bar that serves yummy non-alcoholic drinks. Everything about this moment feels utterly joyous.

“Medical cannabis essentially started in West Hollywood & San Francisco. When AIDS medications made people lose their appetites, they turned to cannabis to give them appetite and steroids to look healthier,” Scott Schmidt, the Executive Director of Emerald Village, tells us.

“This industry is built on the backs of us gays. Because of us there is legal cannabis in this world. We started this, we got it legalised and we should be the ambassadors for it,” he says proudly, adding that he believes WeHo is “the world’s best recreational weed destination.”

**Green Queen** (@shopgreenqueen) founder Andrés Rigal agrees. Rigal worked in queer nightlife in Los Angeles for 20 years before creating dispensary Green Queen (located just



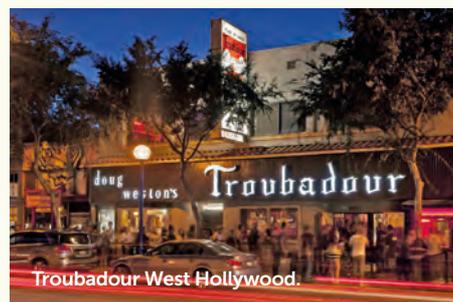
The Woods.



The Comedy Store.



Ka'Teen.



Troubadour West Hollywood.

steps from the Kimpton La Peer) as a space for our community to feel safe, visible and celebrated.

“West Hollywood is the epicentre of queer culture in Southern California, yet until now it didn’t have a queer-owned dispensary, which honestly felt like an oversight that needed to be corrected. When the opportunity arose to secure a retail licence in WeHo, it felt like a natural next step for Green Queen,” he says.

Green Queen spotlights queer-owned brands like Stone Road. “Our goal is to reclaim space and ensure queer leadership isn’t an afterthought in cannabis, but a permanent part of its future,” he tells us.

In WeHo, even escapism has legacy.

### TO EAT

Tonight we will head to the world-famous Comedy Store, and locals have recommended we try the nearby restaurant, **Ka'Teen** (@kateen\_la), beforehand. Ka'Teen channels the lush spirit of Mexico’s Caribbean coast — think the Yucatán Peninsula’s jungles and seaside resorts — right on Sunset Boulevard. Its name means “afresh” in Mayan, and chef Wes Avila (of Guerilla Tacos fame) brings ancient Yucatán traditions to life with local Californian ingredients.

You step through a reed tunnel past palms and fire pits into a sprawling, mostly outdoor garden space that feels like a jungle retreat. With dark walls, warm lantern light and jungle textures — this is seriously sexy dining, ideal for a date night or a proposal. If someone brings you here on a first date, you’re absolutely going home with them, and it’s hands down the best meal we have in LA.

The menu celebrates bold Mexican flavours like cochinita pibil, grilled pescado zarandeado and lamb neck barbacoa, alongside fresh ceviche tostadas. The short rib was our favourite dish of the night, and for drinks don’t miss the piña colada to share, which arrives in a frozen pineapple.

### TO LAUGH

Tonight’s main event is **The Comedy Store** ([thecomedystore.com](http://thecomedystore.com)), a Sunset Strip institution that has shaped American stand-up since the 1970s. Legends like Robin Williams have tested material on this very stage, and you can feel that history in the low ceilings and packed rooms.

We book the late-night show — a gamble, as the line-up isn’t revealed until you arrive. An A4 sheet taped to the wall lists the names, including one mysterious “special guest” who turns out to be Gabriel ‘Fluffy’ Iglesias.

We see a staggering 15 comedians perform that night. We didn’t plan to stay so late, but everyone was so good. Our favourites are Mary Lynn Rajskub, Steph Tolev and Don Barris, all of whom use sharp humour and clever crowd work, without punching down or any lazy homophobia or transphobia.

In a city that has produced some of the world’s most renowned performers, a visit to The Comedy Store feels like an essential pilgrimage.

### TO SHOP

You can’t visit West Hollywood and not check out the shopping — though prepare for an experience that feels more like visiting an art museum. Browsing is educational and we rarely

## TRAVEL

actually consider spending. These are pieces other people will own. We will enjoy the voyeurism.

**Maxfield** ([maxfieldla.com](http://maxfieldla.com)) is the high temple of that philosophy — part boutique, part gallery, and a long-time haunt of Hollywood royalty. They, afford it. When we visit, The Art of Travel, an exhibition of historic luxury luggage, is on. It's mind-blowing that this includes Louis Vuitton trunks dating back to the 1800s. I didn't dare ask the price.

Down the road, **Municipal** ([municipal.com](http://municipal.com)) is an activewear brand co-founded by Mark Wahlberg. This is their first physical store and I predict the first of many. Designs are understated but effortlessly sexy, so much so that even I felt motivated to train harder.

A few blocks away, **Meta Lab** ([meta.com/laul/meta-lab/los-angeles](http://meta.com/laul/meta-lab/los-angeles)) feels less like a shop and more like a glimpse into the future. The space is sleek and minimal. Staff guide you through hands-on demonstrations of AI-powered smart glasses and immersive VR headsets, reminding us that in WeHo, even shopping has stage presence.

### TO HEAR

Live music is woven into West Hollywood's identity. The **Troubadour** ([troubadour.com](http://troubadour.com)), open since 1957, is where Elton John first conquered America and where generations of artists have sharpened their edge. We catch Matt

Harkenrider & the Meltdowns, headlining on an all-queer bill — proof the venue still champions up-and-comers.

**The Peppermint Club** ([peppermintclub.com](http://peppermintclub.com)) offers something more intimate. Art Deco details, low lighting and sound tuned for clarity rather than chaos make it feel like a glamorous house party renowned for being filled with music industry executives.

And then there's **Whisky A Go Go** ([whiskyagogo.com](http://whiskyagogo.com)), the Sunset Strip's rock cathedral since 1964. The Doors, Janis Joplin, Led Zeppelin — they've all passed through. Today's line-up might be less legendary, but electricity still fills the atmosphere.

### TO LEAVE

Few places pack this much culture into a handful of walkable blocks — and even fewer do it with this much pride. West Hollywood isn't just fun; it's intentional. Nightlife here has history. The community is at the heart of its infrastructure.

It may only be 4.9 square kilometres, but West Hollywood plays on a global stage. Come for the party. Leave remembering why it matters.

For more information check out **VisitWestHollywood.com**, **@westhollywood** and **@visitweho** and book your flights at **United.com**.



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OUT & ABOUT

# SYDNEY'S FABULOUS FAIR DAY

*The event renowned for kicking off Mardi Gras season, Fair Day returned in a vibrant celebration of Rainbow pride and community. Headliners Janice Robinson (Livin' Joy), Blusher and Courtney Act delivered high-energy performances that had crowds dancing beneath the summer sun. From drag showcases and queer country line dancing to the beloved Doggywood pageant and Trans Camp, the park buzzed with connection and colour.*



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Victoria Park, Sydney, NSW.  
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