

# YOUREX

SHOULD  
SOCIAL  
MEDIA BE  
BANNED?

ARE WE  
TIPTOEING  
INTO THE  
FUTURE?

CELEBRATING

40

YEARS  
HOMOSEXUAL  
LAW REFORM

+

JOE BIRD  
FRAN WILDE  
HOLDEN  
SHEPPARD  
HOTTEST  
PROPERTIES  
HOUSE OF THE  
DRAGON

STILL CONFESSING

MADONNA  
RETURNS

TO THE DANCEFLOOR

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## FROM THE EDITOR



### Putting Community At The Centre

While the Northern Hemisphere is facing one of the hottest summers on record, here we are snuggling with our icy cool August magazine cover courtesy of the Queen of Pop!

Our local community sits at the heart of this issue and we are thrilled to include contributions from queer organisations across the month, including: InsideOUT Kōaro, RainbowYOUTH, The Burnett Foundation, Auckland Pride, Rainbow Auckland, OutRunnerz and Palmy Drag Fest.

Leaders of our political parties also join us this issue to celebrate the milestone of 40 years of Homosexual Law Reform, and we look to the future with discussions on how social media affects our community, whether modern-day homophobia and transphobia are taking us backwards, and the importance of safe spaces for queer women.

Don't miss our interviews with community leaders Ken Ogg, Joshua Martin and Matt McVeigh for heart-warming stories of finding out where they fit, through friendships and found family.

*Olly & Matt xx*



COVER | MADONNA BY RAFAEL PAVAROTTI

# 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

Ariel De La Campa  
Ethan Christensen  
Joel Devereux  
Ricardo Gomes  
Tuc Hika  
Angus McDougall  
Steven Oates  
Stefanos Papadopoulos  
Jasmin Sheikh

#### PRINTER

Webstar

#### DESIGN

Spinc Media

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## YOUR EX'S TALENTS



#### FIONA CLARK

is one of our most renowned social documentary photographers. In 2023, she was awarded the Arts Foundation Laureate, and this year will attend the Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art in France.



#### DR MATARORIA LYNDON

is the Co-Founder and Director of Population Health & Equity at Tend. He's also a public health doctor and senior lecturer, championing inclusive healthcare for our rainbow whānau.



#### GARETH WATKINS

runs PrideNZ, a community website exploring the voices and opinions of Aotearoa's rainbow communities through over 700 audio recordings of interviews and local LGBTQ+ events.



#### 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.



#### 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.



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# REFLECTING ON 40 YEARS OF HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM

*To mark this month's 40th anniversary of Homosexual Law Reform, YOUR EX contacted the leaders of Aotearoa's significant political parties\* to ask what this landmark moment means for New Zealand today*



**PRIME MINISTER AND NATIONAL PARTY LEADER CHRIS LUXON:**

"I'd like to acknowledge and celebrate the courage and determination of those who fought so hard for Homosexual Law Reform.

"This law stands for inclusivity, dignity and equality – something it's easy to take for granted in this day and age but which was hard-won 40 years ago.

"We can all rightly be proud to be part of a New Zealand which recognises the rights and freedoms of all Kiwis."



**LABOUR LEADER CHRIS HIPKINS:**

"Forty years after Homosexual Law Reform, we honour the courage, persistence and sacrifice of rainbow communities who fought tirelessly to be seen, heard and valued.

"This change was hard-won and laid the foundation for the progress that followed, including marriage equality and the banning of conversion therapy.

"At a time when division is on the rise, Labour's message is clear: we stand alongside our rainbow communities and will never accept discrimination dressed up as law."



**GREEN PARTY CO-LEADER CHLÖE SWARBRICK:**

"Our community stands on the shoulders of giants. Our rights were not given, and they cannot be taken for granted.

"That's abundantly clear with Luxon's Government, and far-right Governments around the world, who chip away at support, fan culture wars and try regulate parts of our community back into the closet.

"That's why we need pride. It's why we need joy, fun, community and collective action. Together, we win. History proves that time and again."



**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND ACT LEADER DAVID SEYMOUR:**

"The 40th anniversary of Homosexual Law Reform marks an important milestone in New Zealand's journey toward a freer and fairer society. The reform recognised a simple principle; consenting adults should be free to live their lives without fear of criminalisation by the state. It stands as a reminder that individual liberty, dignity, and equal treatment under the law are values worth protecting for every New Zealander. That's why ACT's founding MPs voted for it."



**THE OPPORTUNITIES PARTY LEADER QIULAE WONG:**

"I'm full of admiration and gratitude for those who fought so hard to pass the Homosexual Law Reform Act 40 years ago. It's easy to look back and think that progress was inevitable. It wasn't then, and it isn't now. Even as we celebrate this milestone, we need to keep working for the dignity and safety of all New Zealanders."

*\*Despite numerous approaches, Te Pāti Māori did not respond to the request for comment, while New Zealand First acknowledged contact but chose not to supply a quote from their leader.*

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# THE BILL THAT CHANGED NEW ZEALAND: FRAN WILDE ON STRATEGY, BACKLASH AND BRAVERY

*Mayor of South Wairarapa, Fran Wilde, reflects on the 40th anniversary of Homosexual Law Reform and why social media may have changed the outcome*

**A**s Aotearoa marks the 40th anniversary of Homosexual Law Reform, former MP Fran Wilde says reform was won through courage and face-to-face persuasion. But she is not convinced it would have survived the hostility of today's social media environment.

Wilde, who sponsored the Homosexual Law Reform Bill, says the political conditions around her made her a practical choice to lead the legislation through Parliament.

"Firstly, I was the MP for Wellington Central, which was a pretty liberal electorate, so there was no particular political pressure on me from my electorate not to do it," she says.

"Secondly, I had indicated my support for this when I had been lobbied. Then they came back to me later and said, 'Well, would you sponsor a bill?'"

"It probably helped that I was not a lesbian. Having a straight woman MP in a liberal electorate worked."

Wilde had been working on reform from as early as 1982. The first attempt was drafted as the Equality Bill, which would have changed the Crimes Act so the age of consent applied equally to all sexual activity, regardless of gender.

But the political climate was complicated. Aotearoa was still feeling the divisions of the Springbok Tour era, with mass demonstrations and deep public unrest. Wilde says the Labour



Party was nervous about taking on another controversial social issue, particularly in rural and provincial electorates.

"The other group that was not happy was the radical lesbians, who said, 'You are now actually criminalising us,' because they were not mentioned in the law before," Wilde tells us.

The proposed bill would have criminalised sex for anyone under 16, which created unintended consequences. Wilde says it soon became clear the approach would not work, and the bill was redrafted.

The 1984 snap election then brought a wave of younger, more liberal MPs into Parliament, giving the reform a stronger chance.

"I knew we had a sporting chance of getting it through," Wilde says.

But she had not anticipated how brutal the campaign would become.

"I had no idea when it was introduced how awful it was going to be for everyone. If I had

been a gay man, I would have expected that, because, of course, they had had this all their lives."

"We realised very quickly that this had to be a very organised and very focused campaign."

There were many moments when Wilde feared the bill could fail. One of the most critical came when opponents called a vote and National MP George Gair crossed the floor to support the bill.

The most fraught issue was the age of consent. After the bill returned from select committee, Parliament considered it clause by clause in the Committee of the Whole House. Wilde believed there was a real risk that MPs would reject the legislation if the age of consent was set at 16.

She took that concern back to the gay community.

"They just said, 'It has to be 16 or nothing.' I said, 'That's fine. That's your decision. That's what we'll do.'"

# HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM

In a twist, opponents of the bill also believed the age of consent being set at 16 would doom the legislation, so they strategically voted for it. Once that happened, Wilde knew supporters could not retreat.

“I had to say to all the MPs, ‘We’ve got 16, and we can’t change it now. You know what has been unleashed in New Zealand because of this bill, and what the opposition are like. They have shown themselves now. We know how terrible they are. Not just for the gay and lesbian community, but for any kind of liberal cause that we had.’”

For Wilde, the bill became about more than decriminalising sex between men. It came to represent a wider fight over the future direction of NZ society, including women’s rights and race relations.

“They understood by then that the opposition to this bill was made up of entrenched radical conservatives who, if they had stopped this legislation going through, would have realised they had a majority in Parliament and would have tried other things as well.

“So it was not just looking after gay men; it became a symbol of a much wider liberalisation of New Zealand society.”

The original bill had two parts: decriminalisation through changes to the Crimes Act, and anti-discrimination protections through changes to the Human Rights Act. Wilde believed both were essential for gay people to be treated fairly under the law.

However, the human rights protections did not pass at the same time. Some MPs were prepared to support decriminalisation but wanted to reassure their electorates they had not forced them to employ or rent accommodation to gay people.

That came in some years later, in a bill sponsored by National MP Katherine O’Regan.



**DID YOU SIGN THE PETITION AGAINST HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM? IF SO**

WHEN YOU SIGNED WERE YOU TOLD THAT— YOUR NAME CAN BE REMOVED!

**•HOMOSEXUALS MOLEST CHILDREN? FALSE.** Most child molestation is done by heterosexual men. Fran Wilde's Bill gives boys exactly the same protection as girls now have.

**•HOMOSEXUALS RECRUIT TEENAGERS? FALSE.** Sexual orientation is determined in the first years of life—long before the teens.

**•CHANGING THE LAW WILL ALLOW HOMOSEXUALS TO MARRY & ADOPT CHILDREN? FALSE.** Fran Wilde's Bill does nothing whatever to change the present laws on marriage and adoption.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**  
 IF YOU HAVE SIGNED THE PETITION & WANT YOUR NAME REMOVED— RETURN THE COUPON  
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To... **FRAN WILDE, M.P.**  
 c/o PO Box 2773  
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When the anti-homosexual petition is examined, please disregard my name.

NAME: **W H Jenkins**  
 ADDRESS: **P2 Rossmore Terrace Christchurch**  
 SIGNATURE: **W H Jenkins** DATE: **15/7/83**

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That was the messaging that underpinned everything they said.”

The way to counter that, Wilde says, was visibility. New Zealanders needed to understand that gay men and lesbians were their neighbours, colleagues, family members and friends.

Many gay men responded by speaking publicly about who they were. They appeared in newspapers, met with MPs and told their stories, even though they were still treated as criminals under the law unless they lived celibate lives.

“They were incredibly brave because they were likely to be sacked from their jobs, possibly lose their accommodation if they were renting, and quite likely lose whānau relationships too.”

Wilde says their willingness to be visible changed the public mood.

“I could not believe the numbers who were prepared to come out publicly, and our polling showed attitudes shifting because of it.”

But Wilde says one major difference between then and now may have helped the bill survive: the absence of social media.

In the 1980s, the campaign was vicious, but it moved through newspapers, public meetings, letters, petitions and direct lobbying. Today, Wilde believes the same debate would have been exposed to a level of online hostility that could have made it even harder for MPs to hold their ground.

“When you see how toxic social media is, I am not sure we could have got this bill through if we had had it then.”

**Wellington is hosting a number of events to commemorate Homosexual Law Reform’s 40th anniversary throughout July. Visit [40yearsoflove.nz](http://40yearsoflove.nz) to find out more.**

Looking at the rainbow community today, Wilde understands why some people fear progress is going backwards amid increasingly hostile culture war debates.

“We have trans visibility becoming a massive issue all over the world. This whole movement about ‘a woman is a woman’ is dividing the lesbian community too. It is not as though everybody in the rainbow community has the same view.”

But Wilde does not believe New Zealand has returned to the climate of the 1980s.

“Back then, most New Zealanders did not know that they knew any lesbians or gay men. They were maiden aunts who had never married, and it was never even talked about.

“Now we have gay MPs, and gay men and lesbians in senior positions throughout the country.

“But there is a much more vicious campaign, centring around the trans community.”

Wilde says the true heroes of Homosexual Law Reform were the gay men who publicly came out during the campaign, despite the enormous personal risks.

“The stereotype being put around by the people opposing the bill was that these were all child molesters. If this became legalised or decriminalised, your children would not be safe.

# STILL CONFESSING: MADONNA RETURNS TO THE DANCE FLOOR

**Oliver Hall** previews *Confessions II*, Madonna's new album – 21 years in the making

In August 2006, I stood in London's Wembley Arena next to a runway that stretched out from the stage, holding my breath with anticipation that I was about to see an absolute icon.

Like many of my age, *The Immaculate Collection* had been my introduction to Madonna. I was given a copy by a friend's older sister and just kept playing it over and over again, no matter how sick of it my parents got. It remains, I think, the best greatest hits collection ever made.

But for Madonna, that collection came with an asterisk – Greatest Hits \*Part One. She would continue to deliver so much more, giving us her versatility on *Something to Remember*, her spirituality on *Ray of Light*, dragging disco into a tech-infused future on *Music*, before staring down right-wing politics on *American Life*.

With the *Confessions on a Dance Floor* album release in 2005, she offered something much more carefree: the invitation to dance all our worries away. Its release came after she had fallen from a horse while living in the UK. Initially, the back injury was thought to be very serious. Rumours swirled that she might never walk again, but rehab, mental determination, resilience and the best surgeons' money could buy ensured otherwise.

Recorded in a loft studio in London with executive producer Stuart Price, after weeks of being bedridden, *Confessions* simply celebrated the ability to move again, with no breaks between songs and joyous sampling of disco gems from ABBA on first single, *Hung Up*, and the Jackson 5 on the second, *Sorry*.

At *The Confessions Tour* in London, we stood just a few rows in front of Victoria Beckham, who had been given the prime position right at the runway's tip. The lights went down and a giant disco ball descended from the ceiling.

It landed right next to us and opened to reveal the Queen of Pop in Jean Paul Gaultier-designed horse-riding attire, looking radiant despite her skin being so pale it seemed she had never seen the sun.

For the next 90 minutes, Madonna proceeded to outmove dancers and gymnasts more than twenty years her junior, while taking wild risks like pole-dancing on a moving horse saddle raised high above the audience. She genuinely seemed to 'feel so free'.

Fast-forward twenty-one years and, with the right still wreaking havoc over the White House, the Queen of Pop is revisiting that era and adding to it. On *Confessions II*, she again teams with Price to create another non-stop collection of ecstatic songs made to make you move. The first release, *I Feel So Free*, set the tone, picking up exactly where *Confessions on a Dance Floor* left off; the Sabrina Carpenter collaboration *Bring Your Love* seamlessly blends their timeless styles, while *Love Sensation* has long-time fans comparing it to her eighties heyday. The Queen's first studio album since the pandemic is shaping up to be an immaculate collection indeed.



**"Every year, we work harder, dream bigger and keep pushing forward. The world feels like it's in a pretty dark place right now, so who better than Madonna to come and *Rescue Me* with a new disco banger? If anyone can get us all back on the dance floor and remind us to *Vogue*, it's her."**

— Rhubarb Rouge

PHOTOS | RICARDO GOMES

## QUEEN OF POP



In her promotion for *Confessions II*, Madonna has made it completely clear that the queer community has the ears, hearts and feet this album was created for. She kicked off New York's Pride Month with a surprise gig in Times Square that gave us a taste of what a *Confessions II* tour, or perhaps Parisian residency, could look like, with incredibly innovative staging, an army-sized dance troupe and a setlist combining the new and old *Confessions* with euphoric remixes of iconic hits sprinkled throughout.

Unlike many singers in their sixties who are phoning it in with covers and Christmas albums, the Queen of Pop seems as ambitious as ever, and that creative drive is keeping her fans inspired.

"Madonna has always been my queen because she's the definition of perseverance and success through hard work," Rhubarb Rouge, the organiser of New Zealand's biggest drag festival, Palmy Drag Fest, tells us.

"No matter what people have said about her, she has never stopped evolving, creating and believing in herself. She's shown me that if you keep working, stay true to your vision and never give up, success will follow."

It's well documented just how hard it is for local talent to put on festivals in Aotearoa, but Rouge assures us that no matter how hard the mahi, Madonna is the role model that keeps her going.

"Every year, we work harder, dream bigger and keep pushing forward. The world feels like it's in a pretty dark place right now, so who better than Madonna to come and *Rescue Me* with a new disco banger? If anyone can get us all back on the dance floor and remind us to *Vogue*, it's her," says Rouge.

"We only need *4 Minutes* for the Queen of Pop to save the world!"

**Confessions II will be available on streaming platforms and in record stores from Friday 3 July**



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# JOE BIRD LEADS QUEER HORROR INTO NEW TERRITORY WITH LEVITICUS

*From Talk to Me to Leviticus, the rising Australian actor steps from breakout horror success into queer genre cinema's next frontier*

There is a special kind of excitement that comes with watching a young performer find the role that proves exactly what they are capable of.

For Australian actor Joe Bird, that moment began with *Talk to Me*, the internationally acclaimed hit that turned a low-budget Aussie production into one of the most talked-about horror films of recent years. But if *Talk to Me* announced Bird as a performer capable of holding his own inside a nightmare, his new film *Leviticus* showcases an actor ready to lead one.

*Leviticus* uses the language of the genre to explore sexuality and shame. For Bird, who plays Naim, that layered ambition was what made the script impossible to ignore.

"*Leviticus* is horror, but it has so many other elements," Bird tells Oliver Hall. "It's a drama, it's coming-of-age, it's a romance, it's a film about identity, family, and intergenerational religious trauma. All of those things combined make it a living, breathing story."

"It's been great to see a lot of gay media coming through and breaking into the mainstream," he

says, nodding to the wave of LGBTQ+ stories finding wider audiences.

"I remember reading the script and thinking, 'I've never heard of a gay horror film before.' That immediately drew me in. That's what you want to do as an actor: challenge yourself and push yourself."

"It isn't just two boys, or two girls, or a straight relationship," he says. "It was two people looking for a connection, and that's really all you want in a script."

That connection depended heavily on the chemistry between Bird's Naim and Jeremy Blewitt's Hunter. In a film where romance and fear are so tightly wound together, the casting needed to click.

"I was flying down to Melbourne for it, and I actually bumped into Jeremy at the airport before," he recalls. "I didn't know who he was, and he came up to me and said, 'I have a weird feeling you're also going for the same thing as me.'"

The instinct proved right.



"Then we found out it was, and thought, 'This seems like it could be the vibe.'"

*Leviticus* doesn't only focus on attraction; it asks what happens when love and desire are placed under pressure by systems that seek to punish

## FILM

and erase them. The film draws on conversion therapy.

“What’s so great about it is that you can take so many different metaphors from it and perceive it in different ways,” he says.

“The way I perceived the conversion ritual and what happens after is a metaphor for homophobia. That is the monster,” he says.

“It’s showing that homophobia can kill people. It can genuinely affect people’s lives.”

For Bird, *Leviticus* also marks a major professional milestone. While *Talk to Me* placed him inside an ensemble and gave him an award-winning breakout moment, *Leviticus* asks him to carry the lead role at a time when Australian and New Zealand low-budget screen stories are receiving significant buzz. Bird is proud to be part of that wave.

“I’ve been really honoured and privileged to be part of two Australian projects that have ended up getting international distribution.”

“I saw the Kiwi film *The Weed Eaters* the other week; it was amazing!” he says. “Oceania is showing the rest of the world what we can do.”

That sense of regional pride sits alongside his refreshingly grounded attitude to success. When he started receiving acting award nominations and wins for *Talk to Me*, Bird was stunned.

“I remember being sent an email by my agent and thinking, ‘That’s really cool, but you can’t let it get to your head.’”

Asked whether he walked away from *Talk to Me* knowing he had done a good job, Bird is candid about the anxieties of a young performer.



“With *Talk to Me*, I remember having this inner critic in my head the whole time before the screening, being like, ‘You’re terrible, you’re horrible, this is going to ruin your career,’” he shares.

Finally watching it brought relief.

“After my first scene, I was like, ‘Okay, I’m happy with that.’ And I started to get emotional. I was thinking, ‘I can’t cry right now while I’m watching the movie with all my castmates,’ but it’s so exciting when you’re with the people you made it with. Because they become your second family and you get to watch the baby you made!” he tells us.

Now, with *Leviticus*, Bird has another cinematic baby ready to meet the world. This one is darker, more intimate and more explicitly gay. It positions him not just as another promising young actor from Australia, but as an exciting emerging global screen talent.

He has also wrapped another film, *Crashed Out*.



“It’s a Gen Z satirical thriller directed by Nick Annason, and I’m starring with Catherine Laga’aia, who is playing Moana in the new live-action film,” he says.

Despite the success, Bird is not desperate to abandon Australia for Hollywood, though he is open to wherever the work takes him.

“If they want me over there, that can be arranged,” he laughs.

A confident answer from a young actor who knows the work is speaking for itself.

With *Leviticus*, Joe Bird is helping mould the horror genre into something more intimate and queer. And in doing so, he proves that the scariest stories are often the ones that tell the truth.

**Leviticus is out in cinemas now**

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# WINTER-READY HOMES TO WATCH

*Aspirational houses with snuggly fireplaces that have recently graced the property market with their presence*



**▲ 61B Pratts Road, Ramarama, Franklin, Auckland**

Entered through electric gates and set among park-like grounds, The Old Coach House brings early-1900s character firmly into winter-ready luxury. Ornate verandahs, kauri floors and stained glass set the scene, while two fireplaces, eight-zone air conditioning, a pool, tennis court, grazing paddocks and garaging make this heritage home beautifully liveable year-round.



**▲ 103 Hinau Road, Waimauku, Rodney, Auckland**

Between Muriwai Beach and Waimauku Valley, this restored 1913 homestead sits on four hectares with rare privacy and promise. Rebuilt for modern life with new foundations, insulation, wiring, roof, skylights and French doors, it keeps its character cosy with a woodburner, generous sheds, garaging and future subdivision potential intact.



**▲ 15 Fortification Road, Karaka Bays, Wellington**

High above Karaka Bays, this three-bedroom mid-century sanctuary turns Wellington weather into theatre. Floor-to-ceiling glazing frames harbour, headland and Orongorongo views, while double glazing, insulation, ducted gas heating and a woodburner keep things snug. Add a wraparound deck, native-tree barbecue nook and shared cable-car access for effortless coastal ease.

**► 400 Pound Road, Yaldhurst, Christchurch City, Canterbury**

Inspired by Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, this 809sqm landmark is a study in precision, glass and stone. Himalayan schist, Brazilian stone and American white ash shape luminous interiors, while 11-zone underfloor heating, a concealed media room and four hectares of manicured grounds provide winter luxury aplenty, not to mention a gas fire overlooking the indoor pool!



▼ **217 Brown Road, Brixton, New Plymouth, Taranaki**

Elevated above 1.63 hectares by the Waiongana Stream, this first-time-listed brick home is made for winter pottering. A large wood fire warms the generous living room, while wraparound verandahs, established gardens, orchard, paddocks and a barn stacked with firewood complement extraordinary basement garaging, workshop space and serene rural Taranaki outlooks.



◀ **9 Sullivan Road, Horsham Downs, Hamilton, Waikato**

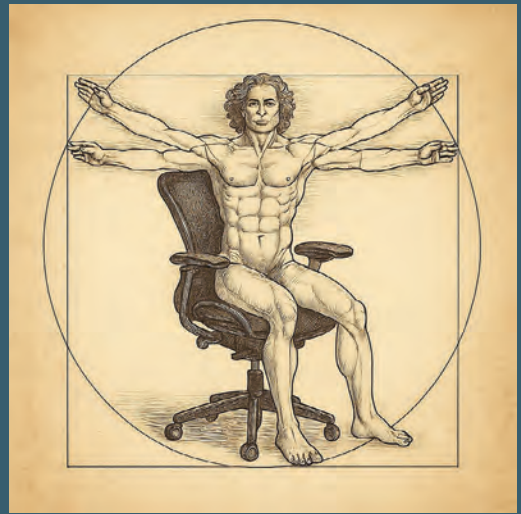
Set above the Waikato River on 1.6 hectares, this award-winning 545sqm retreat pairs grand family living with serious winter comfort. The outdoor living room fully encloses around a woodburner, while underfloor heating, solar power, a pool, tennis court, gym, wine cellar and river-trail access complete the lifestyle dream in style.



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# SHOULD SOCIAL MEDIA BE BANNED FOR UNDER-16S?

ARTICLE | OLIVER HALL

*B416 argues social media is harming young people, but youth organisations warn a ban could cut off vital connection for isolated rangatahi*

**A**s Australia and the UK are restricting social media access for under-16s, a similar conversation is gathering momentum in Aotearoa. At the centre of that push is B416, a campaign group calling for stronger protections around young people's access to platforms built on algorithmic content, infinite scroll and persuasive design.

For Dr Samantha Marsh, a senior research fellow in the Department of General Practice and Primary Care at the University of Auckland, the issue is that young people are being placed inside digital environments deliberately designed to hold their attention before their brains are developmentally ready to manage that pressure.

"We want our young people to thrive again. We see social media as a barrier to achieving that goal," Marsh says of B416.

B416 wants social media and similar online spaces to have an age restriction of 16. Marsh says that is not because a 16th birthday magically transforms a young person's brain, but because laws require a line to be drawn somewhere.

"A lot of kids have left school by 16, so they are part of the workforce. Research shows girls are particularly vulnerable to social media harms between 11 and 13, while boys are especially vulnerable between 14 and 15, when identity formation is happening."

"In adolescent years, the limbic system, the emotional part of the brain, is exploding," Marsh says.

Meanwhile, the prefrontal cortex, which Marsh describes as "the brakes in the car", is still developing.

"It is the part of the brain that says, 'Maybe this is not a good idea.' It is involved in self-regulation. It is not fully wired until the mid-20s, and even a little bit older sometimes," she says.

That developmental reality, she argues, is in conflict with the way social media platforms operate.

"This is a particular issue for the LGBTQ+ community," Marsh says. "We know that things that are upsetting, that rile you up, get engagement. There is a whole lot of 'anti' stuff out there that exists for engagement because it gets people upset on both sides."

It is here that the debate becomes more complicated. For many young people, social media can provide community and connection they may not have found offline.

Marsh acknowledges research showing that for some rainbow kids, social media can buffer

against the most extreme harms. But she worries that framing social media as a solution risks accepting an unsafe compromise.

"It is a bit like saying a kid in an unsafe home environment should go to the local pub where it is warm and dry and they might get some food," Marsh says. "It is safer for them, but it is not an ideal environment. There are still potentially a lot of harms."

She says research suggests rainbow young people are exposed to more harms online than others, but accepts it is difficult to separate the impacts of social media from broader mental health disparities.

"It is fair to ask, how do we create safer online spaces and offline spaces? But you cannot make social media safe. It is the Wild West," she says.

That is not a view universally shared by youth organisations, including the Children's Commission and Youthline.

Judy O'Brien, Chief Executive of InsideOUT Kōaro, says it is "undeniable that young people can experience harm online", and supports efforts to make digital spaces safer. However, she argues a ban is the wrong tool.

"A blanket ban on social media for under-16s is a blunt instrument that fails to address the root of the problem or hold platforms accountable for implementing meaningful safeguards," O'Brien says.

She says safer online spaces can provide "vital connection, affirmation, and access to



Samantha Marsh

community. In some cases, that connection can be life-saving.”

RainbowYOUTH agrees. Executive Director Petazae Thoms says social media can be “a lifeline” for takatāpui, MVPEAFF+ and rainbow rangatahi, offering access to broader communities, learning and expression.

“We owe it to young people to be committed to solutions that address the root causes of this harm,” Thoms says.

He encourages adults to talk to young people about navigating social media safely, rather than supporting restrictions that could drive further isolation “where community is essential.”

Marsh compares the challenge to tobacco control.

“We did not just say, ‘We are going to let kids smoke because they will find workarounds and push back against it,’” she says. “Researchers figured out that you work with adolescent values. Instead of talking about the harms, you talk about how these companies are exploiting young people.”

She believes the conversation should centre on whether multinational tech companies should have unrestricted access to our youth.

“There is so much research now showing that social media is associated with so many harms, and very consistently, at scale, with our young children,” she says.

She points to recent legal action overseas against Meta and Google, saying it highlighted

allegations that companies knew their products were addictive, designed them that way, and understood the potential for harm.

“These are purposeful design decisions,” she says. “I do not think there is any will from these companies to make their platforms safer, because they are making huge amounts of money.”

“These are not companies that care about our children. They were found liable, and Meta came out straight and said, ‘We are going to appeal this. We believe our product is safe.’ These are not companies willing to change their product anytime soon.”

Parents, Marsh says, are exhausted by the issue.

“Parents are drowning in this,” she says. “They see the harms, but there are also harms from isolating your child socially.”

As part of her work, Marsh talks to parents in schools about Dunbar’s number, the idea that humans can only sustain a limited number of meaningful relationships. While young people may have hundreds of online connections, Marsh says what they really need is much smaller and deeper.

“In terms of actual close friends, your child needs two to four, and those friendships need to be nurtured through a lot of face-to-face time.

“What we know about in-person relationships is that we can hear tone of voice, see facial expressions, and all that stuff makes our relationships a lot deeper and more genuine.

“We were never designed to have 500 friends

online, or 200 friends we have to message every day.

“When kids give up social media, they say it was a hard lesson, but they figured out pretty quickly who their real friends were. Those are the friendships associated with wellbeing and better outcomes for our kids,” Marsh tells us.

For rainbow communities, the challenge is making sure those face-to-face spaces exist. If young people are to be moved away from unsafe digital environments, they still need somewhere to go.

That may be the common ground. B416 wants to restrict access to platforms it sees as harmful and exploitative. InsideOUT and RainbowYOUTH want the platforms held accountable, while protecting young people’s access.


Both sides agree young people are experiencing harm online. The question is whether a ban protects them, or cuts off the connections that help some of them survive.

Marsh encourages anyone interested in this issue to get in touch with B416.

“We do see this as a really important issue and quite a nuanced issue for your community. We want input. We want to partner with people who can help us understand this.”

**For more information or to connect on this issue, visit [b416.co.nz](http://b416.co.nz)**

**For more information on support for rainbow rangatahi, visit [insideout.org.nz](http://insideout.org.nz) and [ry.org.nz](http://ry.org.nz)**

A photograph of Alan Cumming standing at night at what appears to be a festival or fair. He is wearing a dark green leather jacket over a light-colored button-down shirt and dark jeans. He has a mustache and is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is filled with colorful string lights and blurred structures, creating a bokeh effect.

“What it made me feel was how it absolutely needs to be told because it’s so prescient and it is so about now.”

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:  
**ALAN CUMMING**  
**ON TIP TOE**

*The Scottish star discusses the hard-hitting show that is putting modern-day homophobia back in the spotlight*

After the cultural impact of *It’s A Sin*, writer Russell T Davies returns with *Tip Toe*, a five-part drama that looks directly at the growing tension, misinformation and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric creeping back into everyday life.

*Tip Toe* stars Alan Cumming as Leo Struthers, the owner of Spit and Polish, a gay bar in Manchester, and David Morrissey as Clive Goss, his troubled next-door neighbour.

The series begins with a brief but shocking opening scene, where Clive’s wife can be heard screaming, “What have you done... you’re a

monster!” as the camera pans around to show Clive standing on his suburban doorstep and Leo hanging from a nearby lamppost. An ominous subtitle reading ‘SIX DAYS EARLIER’ appears and the story begins.

“What it made me feel was how it absolutely needs to be told because it’s so prescient and it is so about now. Violence and hatred have become so normalised. It has got completely out of control,” Cumming tells us.

His portrayal of Leo is at the centre of the story.

“Leo is a man nearing sixty who is a little bit lost, but functioning. He means well. He’s kind.

He’s got his found family around him. And then this series of insane events happen around him. He could be any of us.”

*Tip Toe* is not a warning from some imagined future. Davies is writing about a climate already here: a world where online radicalisation, culture-war rhetoric and casual dehumanisation can quickly move from screens into streets, homes and minds.

Leo and Clive have lived next door to one another for 14 years.

“In a funny way, I feel that Clive probably speaks to Leo about things that he’s never spoken to anyone in his life about before. It becomes very intimate very quickly.”

That intimacy is part of what makes the show

## SOCIETY

so unsettling. *Tip Toe* is a pressure-cooker portrait of modern life, where fear, ego and ideology can sit dangerously close to the surface.

“Russell is so clever,” Cumming says. “You’re on the edge of your seat despite knowing what is going to happen. The structure of the show is a mirror to society. You’re genuinely terrified of what might happen in life. And I think we should all be terrified of how society is going.”

He adds that while some projects can be done for pleasure, *Tip Toe* belongs to another category.

“This is something that challenges people and you choose those things for a reason.”

A major part of that challenge is the show’s depiction of the digital age. *Tip Toe* explores how misinformation and online hostility can isolate people further rather than connect them.

“Social media and the digital age don’t come out too well in this story,” Cumming says. “There are many great things about it. The information available to us, access and the potential to connect with people who are different to us. All these things that you think would make our society better. But of course it presents these opportunities for misinformation and for that to breed, as it does in this story, horrible consequences.”

For Cumming, it is not simply about technology, but about disconnection.

“It’s a warning in many ways. About how much we’ve stopped connecting with each other. About how much we’re dissociating from one another. We have our heads down too much when we should be looking at one another.”

“I do think and hope that everyone is challenged by this. It’s a genius piece of writing, planting a flag in the ground and saying, ‘Hey, everybody, let’s stop for a minute and look at what is happening and try to hopefully make this better.’ It’s not pointing fingers.”

While *Tip Toe* looks at a queer generation that has fought to grow older with visibility and legal protection, it also asks what life now looks like for queer youth. Cumming acknowledges things can be

easier for young people today, but also harder.

“I know some young people who didn’t even need to come out; they just were. But it can be so much harder. You have a whole system of information that will spread your news despite yourself. It’s all about family. If you’re scared to tell your parents and family, then it’s going to be hard, no matter what.”

So who does Cumming think should be watching *Tip Toe*?

“Middle-aged gay men, parents, women who consider themselves to be open-minded, and of course people who espouse anti-LGBT+ rhetoric, to be challenged about their prejudices,” Cumming says.

Ultimately, he says, that challenge is universal.

“Everybody has their prejudices challenged in *Tip Toe*. This is a piece of drama, but it is also a piece of social commentary that is essential viewing for where we are in the world right now.”

**The full season of *Tip Toe* is streaming now on TVNZ+**

## WHAT DOES OUR COMMUNITY MAKE OF IT?

*Tip Toe* paints a bleak picture of a turning tide of public acceptance of queer communities in a misinformation-fuelled world. But is this all just made-for-TV drama, aiming to drag people away from doomscrolling and wallow in anxiety watching their show instead? We asked some notable Aotearoa rainbow community members for their take.



**THE BURNETT FOUNDATION’S CHIEF ENABLEMENT OFFICER, MARY HADDOCK-STANILAND:**

“Whether *Tip Toe* feels exaggerated or not will depend on people’s lived experience. For many rainbow communities, particularly trans people, the tension it explores is familiar. Progress has absolutely been made, but so too has a growing caution about visibility, belonging, and safety. The most powerful stories are often the ones that make us uncomfortable enough to reflect.”



**AUCKLAND PRIDE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BLAISE CLOTWORTHY:**

“*Tip Toe* is a reminder that the lived experiences of trans and intersex people are being

systemically invisibilised. Watching this show is a call to action for us to honour the legacies of the many generations who fought for law reform, for the generations of people we lost to AIDS-related illnesses, and the lived memories of those who are still with us.”



**RAINBOW AUCKLAND BOARD MEMBER ZINA ABU ALI:**

“I watched *Tip Toe* with bated breath. The micro-aggressions, the uncertainty, and the constant concern for the characters’ safety felt painfully familiar. While these things are cyclical, it feels as though we’ve been pushed out of the closet and into an increasingly hostile world.”



**WOOF! THE AUCKLAND RAINBOW DOG SHOW HOST STEVEN OATES:**

“Unfortunately, there still is real homophobia in the world. We can’t kid ourselves that everyone understands and respects us. I think it’s possibly worse now than at any time in the past 30 years. Social media has a lot to answer for. It has allowed people to cluster together in homophobic, racist echo chambers, giving each other permission and encouragement.”

## OUT & ABOUT

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**GEORGE IRELAND**  
LAWYER  
DDI 3066-736  
gireland@mcveaghfleming.co.nz

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# HOLDEN SHEPPARD: WHY GAY MEN NEED TO RECLAIM THEIR OWN STORIES

*The Australian author takes aim at publishing houses' status quo of straight women writing gay men's stories*

**W**hen *Invisible Boys* found an audience, Holden Sheppard was not expecting it.

"The success was a massive surprise," he tells YOUR EX's Oliver Hall. "Not least because, as a book and as a manuscript, it was rejected by almost every publisher in Australia."

He says publishers could not decide where it belonged.

"No one could work out how to market it. They said, 'It's too adult for young adult and too young for adults,' or, 'We've got same-sex marriage now, so we're really looking for happy gay stories, not this trauma stuff,' which made me f\*cking furious because it was denying a whole part of the gay experience."

PHOTO | JOEL DEVEREUX

## LITERARY

That emotional range is central to Sheppard's work. His stories often sit in the messy, painful and sometimes confronting realities of gay male life. When *Invisible Boys* was adapted for television, seeing that world reimaged was not always easy.

"It was harrowing, because when you're in the writers' room, you're watching them tear your baby apart in front of you. You have to put your ego aside and let it happen."

Sheppard wrote two episodes of the six-part series and was part of the writers' room throughout the season.

"We had an all-gay writers' room. So for every episode, we talked about our experiences growing up. It lent something really authentically gay and authentically Aussie to the whole show."

For Sheppard, that authenticity mattered.

"The show was gritty and it was sexy. Not in a *Heated Rivalry* way, where it was for straight women to get off. It was for gay men. It was for us to show what we live through."

When asked about *Heated Rivalry*, Sheppard laughs: "This is where I get cancelled!"

But his critique is not aimed at the book, the author or the fandom. It is about a much bigger issue.

"There is a huge problem in the publishing world, where stories written by women about gay men, which are male-male romance as opposed to gay fiction, are the ones that are getting the push. They are getting stocked en masse in bookshops and they sell millions.

"Guys who write gay fiction can't even get published because *Heated Rivalry*, *Red, White & Royal Blue* and *Heartstopper* are being held up as 'what the public wants'.

"Gay men aren't authoring our own experiences anymore. They are being authored by people who want to put out a safe, consumable version of the gay experience that people won't be threatened by."

Sheppard says his own work resists that sanitised version of gay life.

"In my work there is sadness and trauma and a lot of dirty gay sex and characters not always behaving in a commendable way. They are flawed, self-destructive and angry. With *Heated Rivalry*, you might get that for a scene, but then it is quickly rectified.

"I have no hatred towards *Heated Rivalry* or author Rachel Reid and I do believe everyone should be able to write outside their experience. I just think we are looking at an industry-level, global problem where gay fiction by gay men is being totally sidelined.

"Is there any other identity in this world, in the space of identity politics, where you can very blithely write outside of that experience and not give a f\*ck?"

"You can't write a lot of identities without doing a heap of consultation, or having it written by someone from that background. Except gay men!"

Sheppard does not believe that issue is discussed enough.

"Often when I have seen gay authors raise it, they get quickly told to shut up. That is part of the reason the first two pages of *Yeah, the Boys* read like an angry manifesto against straight allies, which is what it is.

"I am fed up with straight allies telling us what to do in our own spaces. Readers are frothing for those pages. So I know I have tapped into something a lot of people are feeling."

Much of Sheppard's writing is set far from the big-city queer spaces that dominate many queer stories. For him, regional Western Australia is not just a backdrop. It is part of the emotional and sexual pressure cooker his characters inhabit.

"As a teenager in rural WA, I was desperate to act on my sexuality and explore it, because I was horny as hell. But you're stuck in a town where, if you hook up with anyone, someone is going to see you, because there are people who know you on every street, and it can get straight back to your family, your school, everyone.

"As a 17-year-old, I was working in the supermarket, saving all my money, dreaming of going to London the moment I turned 18. The week after my birthday, I flew to London. I got to my hostel, went straight to a bathhouse, and I was like, 'Finally, I can f\*ck.'

"Growing up gay in a country space is so hard and so isolating, and it fucks you up."

That experience has also shaped how he views queer spaces.

"I know the value of a gay bookshop or a gay bar that is just for gay men and doesn't let straight people in.

"It makes me sad to see a lot of those spaces closing down, or going, 'Let's include all the straight people.' Then it ends up being a bunch of hens' nights, and that brings the straight men in, and that brings homophobia in, and suddenly it's not a safe space anymore."

Sheppard's work frequently returns to masculinity, shame and the emotional damage many gay men carry. He says he is drawn to the subjects because they are the things that often felt unsayable.

"It was so curious to me that there wasn't space for gay men with agency, or gay men to be angry, or gay men to be tough and masculine. If that was on screen, it was kind of like, 'Oh, he's a problem and we need to fix him, and once he comes out, he'll be shitting rainbows and dancing on stage at the gay bar.' That is not the truth for a lot of us."

His new book, *Yeah, the Boys*, continues in the world of *Invisible Boys*, but Sheppard says it is not simply a sequel.

"*Yeah, the Boys* is the book I left uni 15 years ago planning to write."

"I wanted to write a book about a gay football player. *Yeah, the Boys* was called *Dead Straight* initially, and it was a gay footy story about this bloke in his 20s. Then I thought, I don't have a handle on this dude, because he would have worked out he was gay when he was a teenager.

"So I decided to write a short story about Cade, who became Hammer, when he's 16, to flesh that out. Accidentally, that short story went for 100,000 words and became *Invisible Boys*.

"So it wasn't *Invisible Boys 2: The Search for More Money*, but the plotline around the first gay male AFL player is suddenly very topical!"

The story returns to football, masculinity and the search for belonging. Sheppard says he was not interested in writing a straightforward condemnation of the AFL.

"I didn't want that to be my contribution to the discourse. I wanted to do something different, especially through Zeke's storyline, where he joins a gay footy team and that leads him to tap into masculinity he has not been part of before. A world of male bonding that can actually be really supportive, and really good for your mental and physical health."

With *Yeah, the Boys*, Sheppard is making a case for gay men to take up space again, on the page, on the field and in the telling of their own lives.

**Holden Sheppard's books, including *Yeah, the Boys*, are available now. The TV adaptation of *Invisible Boys* is streaming now on TVNZ+**



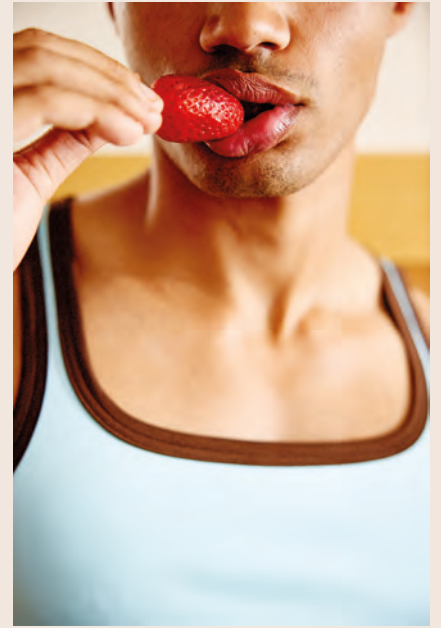
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# FACING THE FIRE: WHEN FANTASY GETS REAL

*Actor Steve Toussaint on power, racism and returning to House of the Dragon*

## TELL US ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF FILMING HOUSE OF THE DRAGON SEASON 3?

From the minute you walk onto the set and see those huge ships they built, it was enthralling. We all got to feel like Errol Flynn for a few weeks.

## YOU STARRED IN THE EPIC AIDS DRAMA, IT'S A SIN. HOW DIFFERENT WAS FILMING HOUSE OF THE DRAGON?

Chalk and cheese! *It's a Sin* was epic in its themes, the time period it stretched across, and how impactful that horrible part of our history was, but the actual work was still kind of small and personal. Whereas *House of the Dragon* is sweeping vistas and grand movements, and all that violence. It was exercising a different muscle.

## WHEN HOUSE OF THE DRAGON FIRST DEBUTED, THERE WAS SOME BACKLASH FROM UGLY, DARK CORNERS OF THE INTERNET ABOUT BLACK ACTORS PLAYING VALYRIAN NOBILITY. DOES THAT RHETORIC AFFECT YOU PERSONALLY?

It was initially a surprise. Not that racism exists, of course. I have lived with that my whole life. But that it had seeped into what is just a fantasy story.

It is one thing to say to somebody, "Just ignore it," but it is another thing to be the target of it.

There was one specific moment I remember. Some of my family members had come over for Sunday lunch, and a message popped up on my phone and it was somebody racially abusing me for being in *House of the Dragon*.

Looking at it now retrospectively, I think they are feeling upset with whatever is happening in their life, and they think, "I'll just pile on to this for now," because it is an escape valve for them.

## I ASK BECAUSE MANY OF OUR READERS KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO EXPERIENCE HOSTILE COMMENTARY ONLINE, AND I WONDERED IF YOU HAVE FOUND ANY USEFUL WAYS TO KEEP THAT IN PERSPECTIVE?

It is a difficult one... the word "woke" has now suddenly become an insult, when it actually just means, "I hear and respect you and your views."

Sometimes we have to take a couple of steps back before we take three or four forward.

My coping mechanism is that when I think about these people, I feel somewhat sorry for them, but I know that is easier said than done.

## THIS SEASON OF HOUSE OF THE DRAGON DIGS FURTHER INTO THE ETHICS OF POWER AND WHAT IT DOES TO LEADERS. HOW DID THAT MAKE YOU REFLECT ON THE WORLD WE ARE LIVING IN TODAY?

Well, the pursuit of power does not always take into account what gaining it will do for you.

In *House of the Dragon*, you seek, struggle and strive to get the throne, but once you have that responsibility, "Do you really want it? And why do you want it?" Because power can corrupt.

In our so-called liberal democracies, we are meant to have a system of checks and balances so that nobody can ride roughshod over others, but if you are the monarch, what you say goes, until, of course, you fall foul of the people.



## RIGHT NOW YOU ARE LOOKING VERY DIFFERENT TO YOUR CHARACTER, LORD CORLYS VELARYON. WE DO NOT HAVE THE GREY DREADLOCKS OR THE BEARD WE SEE ON SCREEN. DO YOU MISS ANY OF THAT WHEN FILMING WRAPS?

As far as the beard is concerned, I am relieved; it just gets on my tits!

The wig, I quite like. I have asked several times to take it home and I am just met with strange looks.

**New episodes of House of the Dragon Season 3 drop every Monday throughout July on HBO Max**

# BIG CONSOLE ENERGY

Remember when the PS5 first dropped in 2020 and getting one felt harder than securing Taylor Swift tickets, or a rental in Auckland? Some Kiwi gamers waited six months or more to get their hands on Sony's sleek, futuristic beast.

Thankfully, those days are over. Stock is plentiful, PS4 support is slowly fading from online titles, and big-budget releases are going PS5-only. Translation: babe, it's time to upgrade.

So, what makes the PS5 worth the glow-up? For starters, it is faster, smoother, and, frankly, a bit sexier. Load times are snappy, graphics are brighter, and everything feels more polished. Comparing *Mortal Kombat 11* on PS4 with *Mortal Kombat 1* on PS5 is like comparing a ring-light selfie with public bathroom lighting.

But the real magic is in the *DualSense controller*. Its haptic feedback makes gameplay feel deliciously physical. In *Astro Bot*, every tiny footstep taps through your hands. Walk, and it gently pulses. Run, and it gets more intense. In *Marvel's Spider-Man 2*, every web-sling feels

like it is shooting straight through your nervous system!

Then there are the adaptive triggers, where L2 and R2 respond with resistance, like pulling back a bow. It makes gaming feel less like watching the action and more like being inside it.

And as 'gaymers', we are eating. From *Dragon Age: The Veilguard* to *Final Fantasy XVI*, PS5 titles are giving us characters with



depth, drama, and sparkle. We love *Baldur's Gate 3*'s Dame Aylin and Isobel, an immortal power couple with serious protect-the-vulnerable energy, and *Life is Strange*'s Alex and Stephanie, who bring different age perspectives with wit, warmth, and charm.

With games averaging around \$120, you can try before you buy with streaming service PS+, then grab your faves from JB Hi-Fi.

**Pick up a PS5 at [jbhifi.co.nz](http://jbhifi.co.nz)**



PS5



Baldur's Gate 3's Aylin and Isobel

# 5 REASONS WE CAN'T STOP WATCHING

## SCREEN QUEENS



Veep's Julia-Louis Dreyfus

**HBO Max** landed in Aotearoa last month with a suitably glossy launch party at Auckland's Viaduct Events Centre, complete with highly Instagrammable food, an endless bar tab and a guest list stacked with influencers keen to be seen. Its arrival has left Sky's streaming platform NEON looking a little less luminous, after losing its strongest content.

The HBO name is iconic. First launched in the US in the seventies, the network has been behind some of television's most celebrated

series, from *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City* to *Game of Thrones*. It has also delivered a wealth of unforgettable queer characters and stories. Here are five of our favourites:

### VEEP

The greatest comedy series ever made? *Veep* was savaging American politics long before reality made the joke too easy. Julia Louis-Dreyfus is sensational as Selina Meyer, a wildly self-absorbed vice president desperate to escape the world's worst job.

### EUPHORIA

Across three flawless seasons, *Euphoria* dives into the chaotic lives of teens at a California high school awash with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. With pitch-perfect casting, the series helped turn Zendaya, Sydney Sweeney, Jacob Elordi and trans actress Hunter Schafer into major stars.

### I LOVE LA

Following the trail blazed by Lena Dunham's *Girls*, Rachel Sennott's *I Love LA* is a sharp, stylish ode to ambition, excess and a generation that can barely look up from its phone. The perfect antidote to doomscrolling.

### I MAY DESTROY YOU

Like Richard Gadd's brilliant *Baby Reindeer* follow-up *Half Man*, *I May Destroy You* is a co-production between HBO and the BBC. Michaela Coel writes, directs and stars in this powerful exploration of how disturbingly common sexual assault is, told through a predominantly Black British cast.

### ENLIGHTENED

Before *The White Lotus*, Mike White co-created and co-starred in *Enlightened* alongside Laura Dern. This earlier HBO gem turns its gaze towards self-important saviour complexes, set against the bleak world of corporate workplaces. It is laugh-out-loud funny and quietly thought-provoking.

## GIVEAWAYS



### 2 x Double Passes to *Foo Fighters' NZ Tour*

Win a double pass to see Foo Fighters bring their stadium-sized rock show back to Aotearoa this summer. Dave Grohl, Nate Mendel, Chris Shiflett, Pat Smear, Rami Jaffee and Ilan Rubin hit Christchurch's brand-new One New Zealand Stadium on Tuesday 19 January, before taking over Auckland's newly refurbished Western Springs Stadium on Friday 22 January. With marathon sets, career-spanning anthems and local supports including Dartz, Seek Help!, Dick Move and Ringlets, this is set to be massive. One double pass is available to each NZ show.



### 2 x Tix to *Silo Theatre's JOB*

Win two tickets to Silo Theatre's *JOB* at Q Theatre on Wednesday 9 September at 7pm. Straight off Broadway, this funny, devastating thriller follows a tech-savvy woman whose routine psych evaluation spirals into power, panic and doubt!

### 3 x *Madonna: Confessions II on Vinyl*

Madonna is back where she belongs: on the dance floor. We have three vinyl copies of Madonna's new album *Confessions II* to give away, the highly anticipated follow-up to *Confessions on a Dance Floor*.

Featuring the Sabrina Carpenter collaboration *Bring Your Love* and produced with Stuart Price, the album promises euphoric beats, ritualistic release and a whole lot of Queen of Pop magic.



### 2 x Tix to *Palmy Drag Fest*

Step right up! YOUR EX has two tickets to Palmy Drag Fest's spectacular headline event at the Regent on Broadway on Saturday 3 October. Hosted by Rhubarb Rouge and RubyDax, the high-camp line-up includes *Drag Race* legend Miss Vanjie, Vybe, Elektra Shock, Kita Mean, Anita Wig'l'it, Rita Menu, Hugo Grrrl and more. Expect glamour, chaos and pure drag excellence.



Scan the QR Code to be in to win! 🗑️



## TEND × YOUR EX



# TALKING OPENLY ABOUT SEX WITH YOUR GP

*Dr Mataroria Lyndon answers your health-related questions*

**I'M ON PREP AND PRETTY ON TOP OF MY SEXUAL HEALTH, BUT I STILL FEEL JUDGED WHEN I TALK HONESTLY WITH DOCTORS ABOUT MY SEX LIFE. HOW DO YOU ENSURE QUEER PATIENTS CAN SPEAK OPENLY WITHOUT FEAR OF SHAME?**

That experience of feeling judged is something a lot of queer people carry, and it can make it harder to be open, even when you're doing all the right things for your health.

At Tend, we're very clear that our role is to support, not judge. Being on PrEP and staying proactive about your sexual health is something to be encouraged. Conversations about sex should feel normal, not uncomfortable or loaded.

That comes down to how clinicians show up: using inclusive language, asking open questions, and not making assumptions about partners or behaviour. We focus on creating a space where you can speak honestly, because that's what leads to the best care.

You should feel like your doctor is on your side: someone you can be upfront with, without worrying about being judged or shut down.

**Download the Tend app or visit [tend.nz](https://tend.nz)**

**Got a health-related question for Dr Mataroria Lyndon to answer?**

**Email: [ask@gayexpress.co.nz](mailto:ask@gayexpress.co.nz)**

# NEW BEGINNINGS AT THE BURNETT FOUNDATION AOTEAROA

*With the commemoration of Matariki and the anniversary of Homosexual Law Reform both landing in July, the Burnett Foundation is drumming up momentum for an exciting year of change ahead, writes Content Manager Ethan Christensen*

**W**e're stoked to see recorded HIV diagnoses trending downwards for another year. From our good friends at the University of Otago, whose HIV & AIDS Newsletter – 2025 was published in May, we found that 80 people were first diagnosed with HIV in Aotearoa, which is down 45% from 2010. Every line of transmission prevented is a victory in its own right.

The inverse, of course, is also true: one new diagnosis is one too many. The data shows that gay and bisexual men, and men who have sex with men, remain disproportionately affected by HIV. Male-to-male sex accounted for 60% of new diagnoses. Although local diagnoses overall have been in steady decline since the peak recorded in 2016, public health data showed a disproportionate increase for Māori, highlighting inequities that we still need to address.

The nine whetū [stars] comprising the Matariki constellation are first visible from late May. We took to Maungawhau [Mount Eden] in the early hours of Monday, 29 June, to reflect on who we are as an organisation, what the future means for us, and the collective impact we hope to achieve with our mahi. I spoke to our Pou Māori, Reremoana Ormsby, about what Matariki means for the kaupapa:

'Matariki looks different for all of us, depending on where in the world, or our thinking, we are

standing. [It] is a time to remember those who have gone before us, to celebrate the present, and to look ahead with hope and intention.'

If we hope to change the future, we must draw insight from the past. Winding the clock back to the early 1980s, our founders and forebears faced unconscionable social and legal discrimination just for being who they were. Through the tireless advocacy of our queer ancestors, the freedoms won for our rainbow community today look comparatively clearer than in times past.

However, what's true for one person is never true for another. Within the queer community especially, intersectionality means that the lived experience of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender is entirely different from person to person. This is even truer when turning to our Takatāpui and MVPFAFF+ communities, who weave fluid constructs of gender and sexuality along family and community lines. Though much progress has been made, we still have work to do in helping all to get their fair share at the table of post-colonial society.

At the top of a mountain, you cannot hear the blare of a horn, nor the belch of a bus's air suspension. In that early-morning stillness, Reremoana shared that we are 'closest to our tipuna'. If we look to the shining stars of our past, the queer community is more like a constellation than a disparate group of

individuals. Speaking with our Chief Executive, Liz Gibbs, that's our biggest focus for the year ahead:

'We outlined the new, wider focus for the Burnett Foundation in our 23–28 Strategic Plan, and that mahi continues.'

One such development is our new offering of whānau-based counselling, in which clients can invite as many members of their support network into the counselling space as they wish.

Seeing that we have already passed the halfway point of 2026, it feels like time is slipping by on some lux lube. Still, when we stare into the kaleidoscope that is the queer community across Aotearoa, the Burnett Foundation has some real standouts to anchor our focus on.



**We owe a special shoutout to Trevor [left], who recently retired after twenty-five years at BFA**

# JULY: A SIGNIFICANT MONTH FOR QUEER AOTEAROA

*Historian Gareth Watkins reflects on important July dates for the progress of New Zealand's rainbow communities*

## Late July 1970

At the National Party's annual conference in Rotorua, delegates endorsed a proposal urging the Government to liberalise the law relating to homosexuality. Moving the remit, Mr Sutton of Miramar said the question of homosexuality was charged with "emotion, ignorance and fear". The proposal sought to revise the law in line with humanitarian principles reflected in the Wolfenden Report, published in the United Kingdom in 1957.

However, the Minister of Justice, Dan Riddiford, said, "If there is to be a change in the law, which has by no means yet been decided, it should not be construed as an encouragement of the practice of homosexuality."

The New Zealand Homosexual Law Reform Society welcomed the move. Its secretary, Jack Goodwin, said it could bring New Zealand into line with accepted ideals of social justice. It would take another 16 years before law reform finally occurred.

## 11 July 1973

National Radio broadcast a programme examining the possibility of homosexual law reform in New Zealand. Hosted by broadcaster Lindsay Perigo, *Feminine Viewpoint* brought together a wide range of voices: academics, police, clergy, reform advocates and gay men themselves.

Professor Jim Robb, former president of the New Zealand Homosexual Law Reform Society, argued for reform, saying it would remove a "great burden of anxiety" and allow gay men to take a fuller part in society. In contrast, Detective Chief Inspector John Stevenson claimed homosexuality carried an inherent "propensity for crime," linking it with prostitution, robbery and homicide.

Religious voices were divided, with some expressing compassion while still describing homosexuality as abnormal. But possibly the



In 2017, Justice Minister Amy Adams apologised to gay men

most poignant moments came near the end of the programme, when three young gay men, Michael, Paul and Laurie, rejected the idea that they were sick, criminal or ashamed. Asked whether they would become heterosexual if they could, each said no.

## 6 July 2017

More than 30 years after the Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed, Parliament formally apologised for the historic criminalisation of consensual sexual activity between men. Justice Minister Amy Adams told the House: "Today we are putting on the record that this House deeply regrets the hurt and stigma suffered by the many hundreds of New Zealand men who were turned into criminals by a law that was profoundly wrong, and for that, we are sorry."

The apology accompanied legislation to create New Zealand's first expungement scheme. If an application was approved, a historical conviction for consensual homosexual activity would be treated as though it had never occurred. It would not appear on a criminal history check, and the person would be entitled to say they had no such conviction.

## Heritage Spotlight: Kawe Mahara

### Queer Archives Aotearoa, formerly known as LAGANZ

Its roots reach back to 1977, when the National Gay Rights Coalition established a resource centre to preserve its own archives and those of other queer organisations. Later known as the Lesbian and Gay Rights Resource Centre, it collected aspects of community life: newsletters, badges, photographs and organisational records.

As activism and visibility grew through the 1980s, so did the collections. Sadly, two months after homosexual law reform passed in 1986, the centre was attacked by arsonists. The fire caused significant damage, but most collections survived.

Today, Kawe Mahara remains a community-owned charitable trust, with its collections housed at the Alexander Turnbull Library by agreement with the Library. In July 2024, the archive established Queer History Month Aotearoa – Pūmahara Ia Te Wā. [laganz.org.nz](http://laganz.org.nz)



# WHERE ARE OUR LESBIAN BARS?

Mot and Aileen at The KG Club by Fiona Clark ([fionaclark.com](http://fionaclark.com) / [lett-thomas.com](http://lett-thomas.com))

*Jessie Lewthwaite wants a drink, as she reflects on NZ's history of lesbian watering holes and why we still need them*

It's 2010, and a 21-year-old Jessie had just graduated from university as a high school teacher. Having grown up in central Queensland and been to uni in north Queensland, my first priority was to get the fuck out of Queensland. With my Mitsubishi Lancer packed with everything I owned and just enough money in my account for fuel, I started the 27-hour drive to the place I decided I was going to be safe, happy and home: Melbourne. Why Melbourne? Simple: at the time, Melbourne was the only city in Australia that had a lesbian bar, and that was all the information I needed to set off down the east coast.

Here now, in 2026, Melbourne is still the only city in Australia to have a lesbian bar. So it is probably no surprise that New Zealand has none at all. But it wasn't always this way.

When lesbian bars first appeared, they weren't just about the cheap chardonnay and bad pool tables. They were a survival strategy. In the early 20th century, women who loved women found each other in hidden speakeasies and back rooms, watched by police who treated our existence as a public indecency display. You didn't go to these places because they were nice. You went because they were the only spot where you could look across a room and see another woman who had made the same dangerous decision you had: to live honestly.

Here in Aotearoa, we had our own flavour of this. The KG Club on Karangahape Road in Tāmaki Makaurau is often named as one of the first explicitly lesbian clubs in Aotearoa, founded around 1972 by Māori women including Raukura Te Aroha "Bubs" Hetet. You won't believe this, but at the time, women couldn't get liquor licences, so a lot of what the KG Club did around alcohol was technically illegal, and the police raided it more than once. By the '80s and '90s, K' Road and central Auckland had their own little lesbian galaxy: upstairs clubs, back rooms, those "if you know, you know" venues up dodgy stairwells. You'd arrive on the last train and leave with a phone

number, a political leaflet, and a vague promise to join a softball team. It was chaotic, but it was real.

And then the "fun" part: capitalism. From the 2000s on, the number of lesbian bars overseas plummeted. Rents went up, incomes didn't, and it turns out our community does not, in fact, drink like finance bros on bonus day. Here, the dedicated lesbian clubs quietly disappeared, replaced by mixed queer venues and straight bars that think putting up a rainbow flag once a year is a personality. Now, when a baby gay in Auckland asks, "Where's the lesbian bar?," we sort of point at K' Road and send them a list of sapphic parties that only exist on Instagram and in your heart.

So if the world is slightly safer now, and you can legally marry your girlfriend, get a mortgage, and fight over whose turn it is to clean the air fryer, do we still need lesbian bars? I'd argue yes. We need at least a few places where the centre of gravity is queer women and gender-diverse folks who orbit the lesbian-ish sun. Spaces where we're not the diversity garnish on someone else's Pride cocktail, but the whole drink.



## OUTRUNNERZ: BUILDING BELONGING ONE STEP AT A TIME

*OutRunnerz founder Ken Ogg and lead runner Josh Martin share the keys to the growing success of Auckland's LGBTQ+ running club, where fitness meets friendship*

When Ken Ogg first joined LGBTQ+ sports clubs, he was searching for something he felt had been missing in his youth: a sense of belonging. After competing in swimming at the 2024 Rainbow Games, he found deep community, friendship and connection — and it inspired him to create something of his own.

That idea became OutRunnerz, an Auckland-based running and walking club for LGBTQ+ people and allies. What began with around 10 runners has grown to about 70 regular participants, creating a welcoming space where fitness is only one part of the story.

Ken saw a clear gap in Auckland's queer community. For many LGBTQ+ people, traditional sport can feel intimidating or exclusionary, particularly for those who had difficult experiences with sport when they were younger. Running and walking, he says, offer a more accessible way in.

For anyone nervous about arriving alone, Ken's message is simple: "just show up." New members are welcomed personally, introduced to others and supported through their first session. Whether people choose to walk, jog or run, the club is self-paced and non-competitive, with the focus on personal achievement rather than keeping up.

Ken believes the club's growth has been driven by that sense of safety and support. Members feel seen from day one, which has helped fuel word-of-mouth recommendations. He also credits strong social media work from lead runner Ning, who has helped grow the club's online presence.

OutRunnerz recently reached 1,000 followers on Instagram, a milestone Ken says validates the direction of the club. While the number is exciting, his focus remains on the people who turn up week after week and form the heart of the community.

As OutRunnerz has expanded, its structure has evolved too. A leadership group, known as the lead runnerz, now helps manage day-to-day operations, including venue logistics, while

protecting the club's values and culture. The group includes Josh, Ralph, Ning, Kristoff, Chris and Ken, whose combined skills have helped shape OutRunnerz into what it is today.

The club has shifted venues several times but has now settled at Lighthouse Café, which Ken says has been "amazing" in hosting the community.

OutRunnerz has also changed Ken's own life. Beyond fitness, it has reshaped his identity and career direction. Building a network of friendships, including connections that now extend beyond the club, helped him realise that leadership and community-building were a natural fit for the fitness industry.

His proudest moment so far was leading OutRunnerz in the Pride Parade 2026. Seeing first-time participants embraced by the crowd created what he describes as an unforgettable sense of joy, empowerment and belonging.

For lead runner Josh Martin, OutRunnerz has also become something deeply meaningful. A proud takatāpui Māori who has lived in Tāmaki Makaurau for most of his life, Josh works in community engagement and philanthropy, supporting organisations across Tāmaki Makaurau and Te Tai Tokerau. He has spent more than 20 years working alongside rangatahi and Rainbow communities and has served in advisory and leadership roles, including as Co-Chair of Auckland Council's Rainbow Communities Advisory Panel.

## RAINBOW SPORT



Ken Ogg by Cuetone Media

Josh was first drawn back towards sport through the 2024 Rainbow Games, after being invited to volunteer by organiser Teresa Platt. He was inspired by the kaupapa of a sporting event created for Rainbow communities and left feeling more connected and motivated to try sport himself.

At the Games' opening ceremony, he briefly met Ken. Later that year, after being invited by his cousin to take part in the Auckland Half Marathon, Josh began training and discovered a love of running, along with the physical and mental strength required for long-distance events.

When OutRunnerz held its first run in January 2025, Josh was invited along by his friend Kristoff.

His first experience was daunting.

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

“Bloody scary! I almost talked myself out of going, couldn't talk to anyone kind of nervous.”

But meeting Ning, who greeted him with warmth and kindness, helped him feel safe. Josh soon realised many others felt nervous too. The conversations and coffee after the run quickly became his favourite part — and remain so a year and a half later.

“OutRunnerz has given me so much. It has led to new friendships, a love of running and a community I now feel proud to help lead.”

Looking ahead, Ken hopes OutRunnerz will become a cornerstone of Auckland's LGBTQ+ community, offering a social alternative to nightlife while helping bridge the gap between queer communities and mainstream sport. He wants to see the club represented at major events such as marathons, increasing visibility and connection.

This year, OutRunnerz is partnering with Rainbow Games for the Auckland Marathon in early November. The club also continues to meet weekly, with runs and walks every Wednesday at 6.45pm at Silo Park and Saturdays at 7.30am at Lighthouse Café.

**Follow OutRunnerz on Instagram at @outrunnerz\_nz and register for the Rainbow Games '26 at [rainbowgames.co.nz](http://rainbowgames.co.nz)**

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More information from [www.mmf.nz](http://www.mmf.nz)

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SOUTH WAIRARAPA  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
*Kia Rerehahi Taitau*

# Deborah Caldwell: A Force of Nature



**“Whether chosen for ethical or price conscious reasons, they look great and they wear incredibly well.”**

Looking back over 20 years in fashion, Caldwell says one of the biggest shifts she has noticed is how much more relaxed personal style has become.

“Denim and a nice top is now very much a look that takes you to the office and out to dinner,” she explains. “I also believe the customer wants more longevity and wear from their pieces.”

She is right. People are shopping differently now. We want pieces that can be reworm, restyled and still feel exciting six months later instead of sitting abandoned in the wardrobe after one Instagram story.

That mindset is deeply woven into how STORM approaches design.

“If you pull the items apart you can see the timeless nature of them individually, it’s often just the styling of them that changes over time,” says Caldwell.

And that philosophy is exactly why pieces like the faux leather bomber resonate across genders and generations. The textured khaki finish gives richness and depth, while the funnel neck silhouette adds drama. It feels current, but equally like something you will still pull out in five years time and feel incredible wearing.

According to Caldwell, faux and vegan leather continues to dominate for good reason.

“Whether chosen for ethical or price conscious reasons, they look great and they wear incredibly well,” she tells us.

Caldwell says STORM is currently leaning into texture and standout fabrication.

“I always love novelty fabrics and something a little different,” she says. “Whether that’s gold metallics, studs, furs and leathers.”

That willingness to embrace fashion as fun is part of what makes STORM so enduring. The brand has never tried to be everything to everyone.

“We stay in our lane,”

Caldwell says. “We can’t be a supermarket and we don’t want to be.”

Instead, STORM has built its reputation on distinctive pieces with personality.

“Fashion that stands the test of time has always been important to me,” she says. “Transcending fleeting trends and creating timeless classics with personality.”

In a fashion world constantly chasing the next thing, that might just be the coolest thing of all.

[stormonline.co.nz](http://stormonline.co.nz)



*Angus McDougall chats with, CEO and Creative Director of STORM Deborah Caldwell, about the evolution of NZ fashion, statement dressing and the khaki faux pebble leather jacket he has not stopped thinking about*

For 20 years, STORM has remained one of NZ fashion’s most recognisable brands. While trends have come and gone, STORM has continued doing what it does best: creating polished, fashion forward pieces with edge, personality and serious staying power.

The recent NZ Fashion Week launch was a reminder of exactly why the brand still cuts through. Deborah arrived wearing a khaki faux pebble leather funnel neck bomber and I immediately became obsessed. Firstly, khaki is one of my favourite colours. Secondly, this

jacket was everything. Relaxed but elevated, oversized without drowning the body, and with that effortless “I just threw this on” energy that actually takes very good design to pull off.

The jacket perfectly captured the DNA of STORM. Luxe textures, directional silhouettes and pieces that feel fashion forward while still being wearable in real life. Styled with wide leg trousers it leans high fashion. Thrown over denim and a tee, it suddenly becomes your everyday uniform. That is the magic of good styling and something STORM has quietly mastered over two decades.

# SUZUKI e VITARA:

## ELECTRIC, PRACTICAL, AND READY FOR A GOOD TIME!



*Suzuki's first fully electric vehicle is a big shift for the brand, but the e VITARA still feels pleasingly familiar: compact, practical, easy to live with, and not remotely interested in making you decode 14 menus just to turn the air con down*

Arriving in New Zealand as an all-electric compact SUV, the e VITARA is designed for drivers who want to move into the EV era without losing the simple pleasures: a comfortable cabin, decent range, easy city driving and enough style to pull up outside a Ponsonby dinner booking without looking like you borrowed your dad's car.

It effectively replaces the outgoing Vitara hybrid in Suzuki New Zealand's local line-up, marking a clear move into electric. Consider it the brand's glow-up era.

Built on a dedicated EV platform, the e VITARA uses a 61kWh lithium iron phosphate battery, helping create a cabin that feels more spacious than its compact exterior suggests.

The boot, at 306 litres, is smaller than the hybrid it replaces, so it may not be the car for anyone transporting an entire drag wardrobe, wigs, smoke machine and emotional baggage. But for groceries, gym bags, overnight stays and a couple of well-packed sequinned options, it should do the job.

Inside, the e VITARA feels like one of Suzuki's most polished cabins yet. The design is clean, modern and sensible, with plenty of kit, including a 10.1-inch touchscreen, a seven-speaker Infinity sound system with subwoofer, 12-colour ambient lighting, wi-fi, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and a customisable 10.25-inch digital instrument panel.

Safety technology is also strong, with adaptive cruise control, lane keeping assistance, autonomous emergency braking, blind-spot

monitoring, rear cross-traffic alert, a 360-degree camera and seven airbags. Because whether you are heading to Big Gay Out, the supermarket or a second date you should absolutely have cancelled, you deserve support.

### HOW MUCH IS IT?

The e VITARA in New Zealand comes in one high-spec model, available in front-wheel drive or all-wheel drive. Front-wheel drive starts at \$56,990 plus on roads and delivers 128kW, 189Nm, and up to 426km of range, while all-wheel drive starts at \$64,990 with 135kW, 300Nm, and up to 395km of range. For the two-tone finish add a \$1,000 premium.

Special introductory pricing drops the price by \$2,000 for a limited period. Suzuki is also backing the e VITARA with an eight-

year/160,000km battery warranty and eight-year/160,000km warranty package and five years of roadside assistance.

### WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DRIVE?

For a first fully electric model, the e VITARA feels impressively sorted. Despite weighing more than the previous Vitara, it feels surprisingly agile. The front-wheel drive version reaches 100km/h in 8.7 seconds, while the all-wheel drive model does it in 7.4 seconds.

The steering feels accurate, the ride is comfortable, and the car deals well with bumps, potholes and less-than-perfect city streets. Driver assists are present and helpful without feeling bossy, which is exactly the energy we want from both cars and exes.

### WHO IS IT FOR?

The e VITARA makes sense for drivers wanting a compact SUV that feels modern without being intimidating. It is especially well suited to city and suburban life: commuting, weekend escapes, date nights, dog park trips, and gym visits.

It is stylish without being obnoxious, practical without being beige, and modern without acting as if it has just discovered techno. The e VITARA is not just a big change for the brand; it is a smart, approachable electric SUV with a bit of sparkle.

**For more information visit [suzuki.co.nz](http://suzuki.co.nz) or head into your local Suzuki dealer to test drive the e VITARA today**





Conductor Stéphane Denève

## THE FORCE IS STRONG WITH AUCKLAND PHILHARMONIA

*This August, Auckland Philharmonia celebrates the extraordinary legacy of a film score superstar in **JBWere** presents: **The Magic of John Williams**, a concert featuring the greatest **John Williams** works in full symphonic splendour, conducted by one of the world's foremost interpreters of Williams' music*

**T**here are few composers whose music can transport an audience before a single word is spoken. A soaring brass fanfare, and you are staring into the galaxy with Star Wars. A rush of

strings, and you are flying past the moon with E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial.

John Williams has not just scored films. He has shaped the emotional memory of cinema itself.

Originally announced for Saturday 29 August, demand has been so strong that Auckland Philharmonia has added a second performance on Friday 28 August, giving more film music lovers the chance to experience these blockbuster scores in full orchestral force.

Held at the Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre, Aotea Centre, the concert promises an electrifying night of movie magic, conducted by Stéphane Denève, one of the world's foremost interpreters of Williams' music.

French conductor Stéphane Denève, a close friend and collaborator of Williams, will share personal insights and anecdotes from the podium as he leads the Auckland Phil through some of the composer's greatest works.

Williams' career spans seven decades and more than 100 film scores. His music has become inseparable from the films it helped make legendary, from the epic theme of Star Wars and the prehistoric wonder of Jurassic Park, to the swashbuckling adventure of Indiana Jones and the warmth of Harry Potter.

It is almost impossible to imagine modern cinema without him. His melodies are not simply attached to films. They are cultural shorthand for fear, hope, adventure, childhood and heroism.

For audiences who grew up with these films, *The Magic of John Williams* will be a chance to revisit some of the most thrilling moments in popular culture. For younger fans, it is an opportunity to hear why Williams remains unmatched: a composer whose work bridges Hollywood spectacle and classical orchestral tradition with rare elegance.

There is something especially fitting about Auckland Philharmonia presenting this music live. Williams' scores were written for the big screen, but they were built from the full expressive power of an orchestra. They need scale. They need precision. They need musicians capable of moving from explosive action to intimate tenderness in a heartbeat, and in the hands of Auckland Philharmonia, these beloved works will be given the grandeur they deserve.

From alien encounters and wizarding worlds to man-eating monsters and intergalactic battles, *The Magic of John Williams* is a celebration of the composer who changed the way movies sound — and the way audiences feel.

**Head to [aucklandphil.nz](http://aucklandphil.nz) to get your tickets!**

**JBWere presents:  
THE MAGIC OF JOHN WILLIAMS**

7.30pm, Friday 28 August

7.30pm, Saturday 29 August

*Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre, Aotea Centre*

🕒  
7.30pm, Friday  
28 August

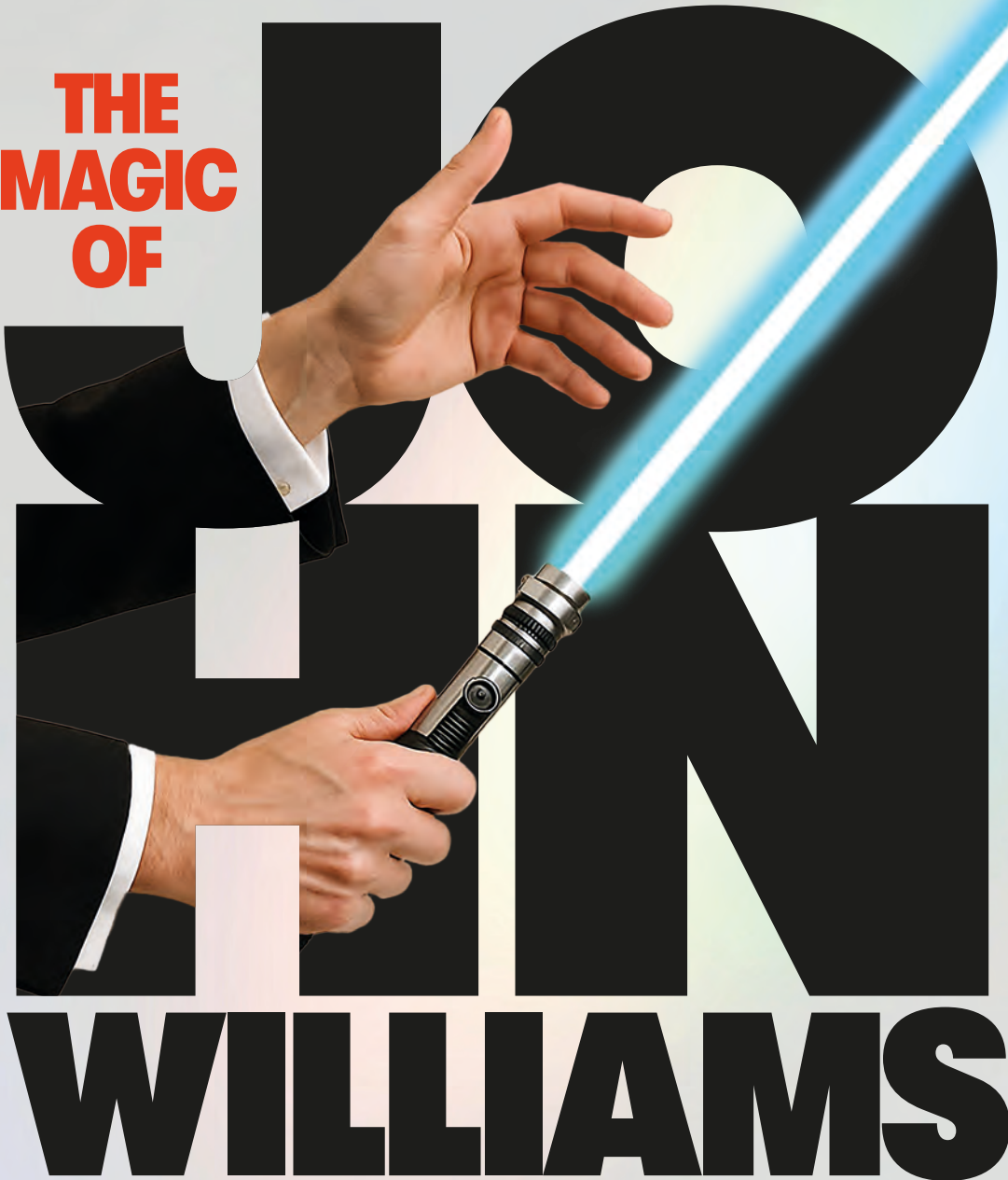
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## COMMUNITY



Matt McVeigh, front centre

# A BEAR BROTHERHOOD

*Matt McVeigh discusses his Mr Bear Australasia win*

## HOW DID IT FEEL TO HEAR YOUR NAME ANNOUNCED AS MR BEAR AUSTRALASIA WINNER?

What was running through my mind? Absolutely nothing for about 20 minutes!

Once my brain finally restarted, I just felt incredibly grateful—to the judges, the organisers, the competitors and everyone who had supported me along the way.

## WHAT BROUGHT YOU OVER FROM THE UK AND MADE YOU DECIDE TO MAKE AOTEAROA HOME?

It was a job and a sense of adventure. I grew up in Newcastle, went to university there and started working there, but I felt like I wanted something more.

It was only supposed to be for a year. Ten years later, I'm still here. I fell in love with the people, the community, the motu, and the sense of belonging I found here. Over time, New Zealand started feeling like home.

## WHAT DID YOUR COMING OUT EXPERIENCE LOOK LIKE?

I feel like I've come out several times, but I suppose I was about 23 when I came out to my Mam. She did NOT take it well but, kudos to

her, she has since become a huge ally. My Mam and Dad have since visited NZ a few times, celebrated at Big Gay Out and enjoyed the Pride parade. They have both said how grateful they feel to have seen my life here and know I'm safe and cared for not only by my partner and friends but by the wider community.

Sometimes people need time to process new information. Sometimes they surprise you. Sometimes they don't, but wherever you fall on the rainbow spectrum, you belong. You are worthy of love, friendship and community exactly as you are. You will find your people.

The only thing my Mam was concerned about was that she thought I was doing Mr Bare NZ rather than Mr Bear NZ. She didn't want me naked on stage, and as far as she's concerned, I have never been naked on stage! (Shhh!)

## THE BEAR COMMUNITY IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH A PARTICULAR LOOK. WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO FIND YOUR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY?

While appearance remains part of bear culture, being a bear is increasingly about self-identification, community and connection rather than fitting a specific physical mould.

I often describe myself as an otter rather than a bear, and when I first started attending bear events I wasn't entirely sure where I fitted in. What I discovered was a community with room for all.

## WHAT DOES THE BEAR COMMUNITY GIVE PEOPLE BEYOND THE SOCIAL SIDE OF THINGS?

Isn't it nice to walk into a space where you can just be yourself? I think that's really the heart of it.

## AS MR BEAR AUSTRALASIA, WHAT ISSUES WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO CHAMPION DURING YOUR REIGN?

The bear community gave me a place where I felt I belonged, and I'd like to spend my year helping create that same feeling for other people.

You don't have to look very far to see that we're entering a more uncertain time for parts of the rainbow community. Around the world, we're seeing increased debate around queer rights and identities, and that's exactly when community matters most. We have always been strongest when we stand together and support one another. That includes continuing to stand alongside our trans and gender-diverse whānau, whose voices and experiences deserve to be heard and respected.

## SINCE YOUR WIN, HAVE THERE BEEN ANY MOMENTS THAT HAVE PARTICULARLY STAYED WITH YOU?

What has stayed with me most was a conversation with a man in his 60s who had only recently come out. He said, "You're everything I wish I was when I was your age."

That moment perfectly captured why visibility still matters. Sometimes just seeing someone live openly and authentically can help another person believe they can do the same. That's what this community is all about.

**Bear community catch-ups take place at Furry Fridays on the fourth Friday of every month at Café 39 in Ponsonby, Auckland and S&M's bar on Cuba Street, Wellington; and in Christchurch on the third Thursday of every month at Pomeroy's Old Brewery Inn.**

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