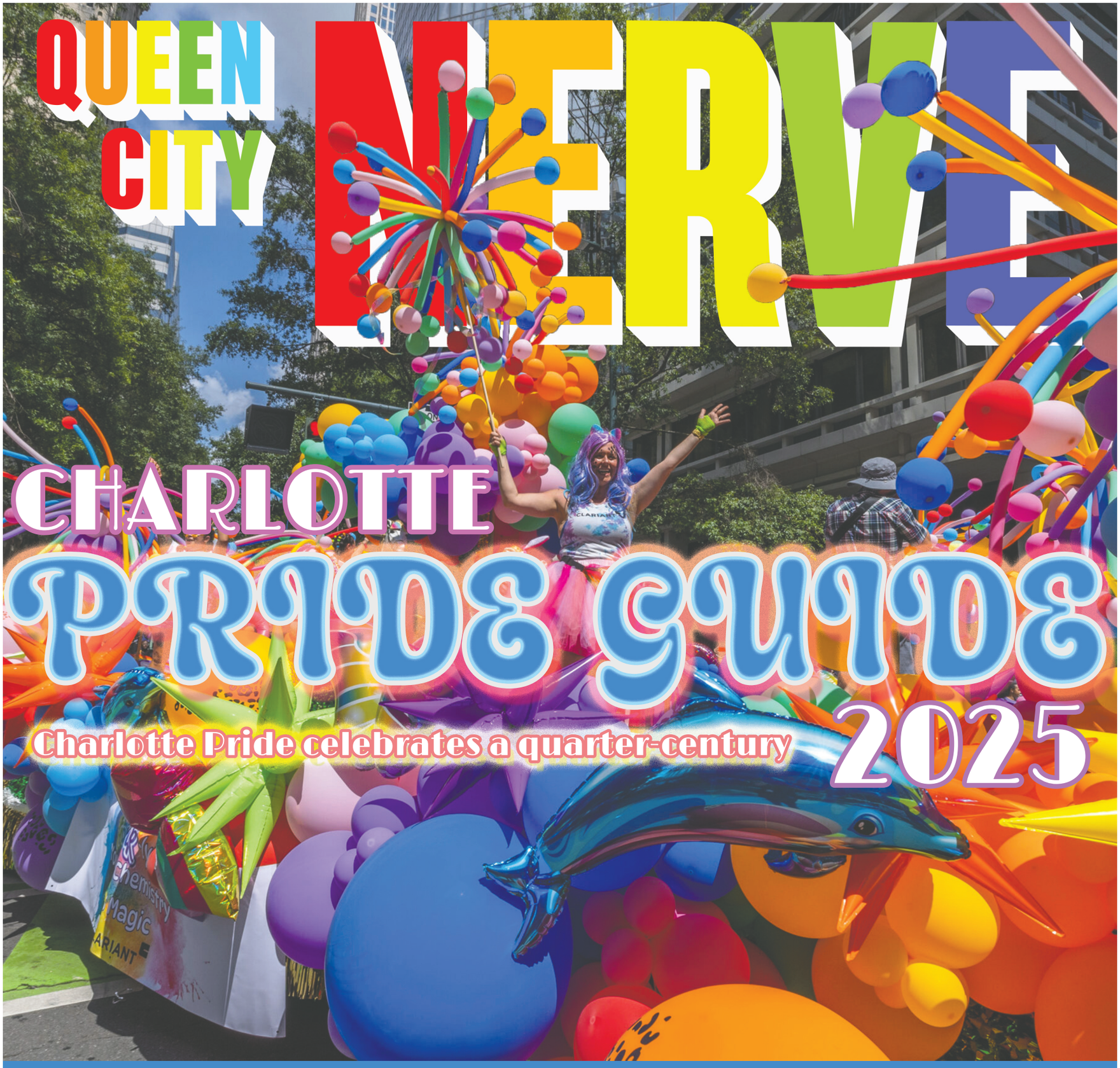
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QUEEN CITY NERVE



CHARLOTTE PRIDE GUIDE 2025

Charlotte Pride celebrates a quarter-century

NEWS: Anti-DEI push impacts corporate PRIDE funding ◊ PG. 4

ARTS: Black as the Cosmos is a deep, space revolutionary ◊ PG. 6

NIGHTLIFE: Visiting Charlotte's LGBTQ sports bar ◊ PG. 22


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Celebrating Pride in 2024. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Pride

MIND THE GAP

Anti-DEI push leads to shortfall in sponsorship funding at Charlotte Pride

BY ANNIE KEOUGH

Donald Trump's objective to eradicate any and all initiatives that push for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) across the country has been well documented — a point of pride for him, in fact — since he took office for the second time in January.

It was on the first day of Trump's second term that he signed an executive order ending the so-called "forced illegal and immoral discrimination programs" associated with DEI, stating: "Americans deserve a government committed to serving every person with equal dignity and respect, and to expending precious taxpayer resources only on making America great."

The order banned all DEI programs across the government and withdrew federal funding from countless DEI initiatives countrywide.

The administration has not slowed down. A July 29 U.S. Department of Justice memo asked all federal funding recipients to proactively ban any DEI programs that were still active, laying out specific "unlawful" practices that could result in revocation of said funding. Examples include race-based scholarships and prioritizing underrepresented groups in hiring practices.

These anti-DEI policies and intimidation tactics have had ripple effects that have reached organizations big and small in the Queen City, from institutions like UNC Charlotte to smaller groups working to make a more equitable world.

Time Out Youth (TOY), Charlotte's LGBTQ+ youth community center, kicked off Pride Month by urging community members to step up as corporations have begun distancing themselves from the nonprofit.

"Time Out Youth has always been a place that shows up for queer and trans young people, no matter who's in office, and no matter how 'uncomfortable' their very existence makes certain boardrooms in Charlotte and across the country feel," a release from the organization read. "For nearly 35 years and six presidencies, we have been here. And we aren't going anywhere."

The same companies that once claimed DEI as a core value have dropped their support for Time Out Youth, leaving a $175,000 hole in TOY's budget as the number of youth seeking help continues to rise.

In the first five months of 2025, TOY saw a 44% increase in sign-ins for its Drop-In Space, a safe and affirming place for youth ages 13-24, compared to the same span in 2024.

As the lack of funding impacts year-round organizations, queer and trans folks across the country look forward to the time of year they're able to publicly celebrate themselves at Pride parades and festivities.

Now, those parades are at risk, too.

New York Pride, the largest Pride event in North America, saw nearly a quarter of its corporate partners either cancel or reduce their support this year out of fear related to both economic uncertainty and potential retribution from the Trump administration, The New York Times reported.

As Charlotte Pride celebrates its 25th anniversary and Charlotte Black Pride its 20th, those organizations are dealing with the same blowback on a local level, leading the groups to consider other financial avenues in the future.

Charlotte Pride and Charlotte Black Pride feel the strain

Although Charlotte Pride's funding comes from corporate partners that are headquartered in the city rather than national nonprofits, the organization is still facing a deficit in funds compared to years prior, managing director Meredith Thompson told Queen City Nerve.

Some corporate partners have reduced their funding or pulled out altogether. Thompson said she has spoken with corporate sponsors who are now expressing fear from fallout that could come from their logo being photographed at a Pride event and used against them by right-wing supporters.

Right-wing media outlets and influencers often post out-of-context pictures to social media pages to garner backlash against certain corporations, slanting photos to make it seem like the companies are supporting something nefarious when they're not, she told Queen City Nerve.

"[Corporations] have a lot to counteract and navigate [the backlash], and they don't want that headache," Thompson said. "They don't want to take that risk of negative publicity."

That is why some corporations have taken to funding Pride organizations silently, acting as anonymous donors with the understanding that they won't be named, she explained.

"It worries me for the future, number one, because what we're selling to them is exposure to a quarter-million people, we're selling them marketing value on so many levels," she said. "So when a corporation says, 'I don't want to align my logo with yours, I don't want public alignment, I don't want that visibility,' it's rather strange, right?"

Thompson understands that some corporate partners don't want to deal with a media storm or controversy that they have to pivot resources to fix, but she's still frustrated that Charlotte Pride must exhaust itself by fighting disinformation and attacks against the queer community.

Charlotte Black Pride (CBP) is doubly affected by corporate partner's aversion to DEI initiatives.

CBP Chair Shann Fulton said the organization has seen its sponsorship funding cut in half this year.

Leaders within the organization have even had to turn away some sponsorships because of the stipulations companies wanted to place on any agreement, including removing any words related to "queer" or "LGBTQIA" from promotional materials.

CBP is welcoming of corporate funding, Fulton emphasized, but some companies had to get rid of their DEI initiatives to be able to receive the funding they are trying to put back into CBP.

"So, it's like, you expect for us to do the same thing? To act like we're not supporting the queer community or the Black community or anything that anyone in ... white corporate America would deem as DEI?" Fulton dubiously asked.

This year, Charlotte Black Pride celebrated its 20th anniversary, holding a week of events in mid-July. Fulton said that companies that CBP has relied on for as many as 15 years are no longer willing to support.

Even before the loss of sponsorships, CBP has been historically underfunded compared to Charlotte Pride. If CBP was to receive $5,000 from



The Charlotte Pride Band performs. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Pride



This year's Charlotte Pride Parade takes place on Aug. 17. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Pride

one corporation, Charlotte Pride may be getting $30,000 from that same company, Fulton said.

Besides the elephant in the room — it is Charlotte Black Pride, after all — Fulton said the one legitimate reason that corporations favor Charlotte Pride over CBP is due to the brand visibility and promotion they get in return for their money.

In 2024, Charlotte Pride brought in an estimated 260,000 people for its parade and weekend festivities. Charlotte Black Pride's seven-day event welcomed roughly 52,000 people in the same year.

What companies don't consider, however, is that CBP could be as big as Charlotte Pride with the proper funding, Fulton insisted.

"I would say [even] if we had half the money, because [with] the amount that we get, which is minimal compared to other large Prides, we still find a way to put on events for four or five days a week," they said.

Though it's been challenging, the lack of funding for CBP and reduction for Charlotte Pride has allowed the organizations to consider diversifying their support network.

Relying on small businesses

When Charlotte Pride felt the effects of corporate pullout, local businesses like Sidelines Sports Bar and Bar Argon stepped up and contributed nearly as much as the organization's largest sponsor, Thompson said.

The generosity of the local community led her to wonder if offering small sponsorship packages to local businesses in addition to corporate partners could be an option they explore further in the future.

"We look at ... some different avenues we could take so we're not quite as dependent on corporate partners who may be subject to political whims or beholden to public opinion," she said.

Charlotte Pride renegotiates corporate partner contracts every year, which subjects the organization to changes in the political climate such as the increasingly aggressive Trump administration policies as well as changes in the economy.

The reality of corporate "rainbow washing" — a performative form of allyship in which corporations feign support for the LGBTQ+ community while engaging in no meaningful actions — has also been a talking point among the queer community for years.

Though it's beneficial for corporations to donate to Pride organizations, their business relies on getting something back.

While economic uncertainty remains an everlasting threat and small businesses can't always offer the support that a corporation can, partnering with local LGBTQ and ally businesses ensures a consistent and more community-driven means of social and economic backing.

The future of small business partnerships is a bright one, but it does not diminish the role of corporate individuals who fought for funding designations within their companies.

Thompson's relationship with Charlotte Pride's corporate supporters are primarily with the company's LGBTQ employee resource group. Now that corporations have begun pivoting away from DEI initiatives or generalizing all minority groups into one, it's becoming more rare for a company to even have such a resource group.

Small businesses built off of large corporations could also be unlikely donors. One of CBP's sponsors is a local State Farm representative acting as an independent business owner, Fulton said.

"I don't know how this is going to continue to play out, if things are going to get even harder," Thompson said. "Hopefully we will get over this and move forward on a better path next year."

Charlotte Pride strives on

No matter the outside influences, Charlotte Pride and Charlotte Black Pride continue to support one another.

While CBP's event week has already passed, Fulton is thankful to Charlotte Pride for giving CBP its own "Black on Purpose" stage during its own coming festivities, allowing the organization to curate its own entertainment for a second straight year.

Last year's stage brought a packed crowd, monopolizing the entire street the stage was on. This year will be bigger and better, Fulton promised.

Despite the funding deficit, Charlotte Pride was still able to secure a venue upgrade, this year stretching from Tryon Street to First Ward Park to accommodate the demand for more vendor and visitor space.

The Pride Festival will be held in First Ward Park while the parade route will remain along Tryon Street in Uptown from Aug. 16-17.

"I feel like, no matter what, we will always have Pride," Thompson said. "It'll exist in some form or fashion because ... there's always going to be that desire for it and that support for it ... It started as a protest, right?"

Fulton ended with a call to action for corporations to ensure a diverse representation of folks sit on their boards despite how any presidential administration may try to bully them into compliance.

"Even if you don't have a DEI initiative, it's basically just [about] having good morale to make sure that the people that work for you, the people that live in Charlotte and surrounding areas, that all demographics are represented.

"Because if you have a board that's colorful or that's diverse, then more than likely the things that you represent, the things that you support, are going to represent each person on that board [and] no one will feel left out," they added. "It's possible."

Visit charlottepride.org or flip to our independent Pride Guide beginning on page 10 to learn more about Charlotte Pride.

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DJ Black as the Cosmos at work. Photo by Brianna Daniels

ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

Black as the Cosmos explores culture through crystal art, music, sex and magic

BY PAT MORAN

Brianna Daniels is an unclassifiable creative. Like the light-refracting crystals she uses to fashion wearable art, there are many facets to her personality and passions.

As B/rianna or Brianna Daniels, she's a theater technician and actor, a yoga guide, a crystal Reiki practitioner, an artist who crafts crystal "cosmosis stones," a sex educator and a Black esoteric.

As DJ Black as the Cosmos, she spins what she calls "expansive Black music," a melange of house, alternative R&B, jazz, Afropop, country music, ambient sounds and more — all made by Black artists.

Under these guises, the Black, queer, unquenchably curious polymath and Charlotte native prefers in person to be called either B or Black as the Cosmos.

She brings her Black diasporic sound experience to the Ultraviolet Sapphic Dance Party at Petra's on Aug. 9, then the Southern Fried Gospel Pride Party at Sip City on Aug. 17. With both events, Daniels is pleased to take part in Charlotte Pride, which she characterizes as "radical resistance and radical liberation."

It's a role she takes on herself during all months of the year.

"Brianna's work as a sculptor, facilitator and DJ reimagines cultural memory," says Daniels' friend, colleague and collaborator Alicia Bell. "They create experiences and pieces of work that are both liberatory and grounded, honoring Black histories while envisioning expansive, joyful futures — and she does all of this while caring really deeply for people, place and community."

Daniels' balance of both personal and expansive visions informs her ongoing whirlwind of creativity, which began with dance.

Daniels' mother taught dance and performed in competitions in Fort Bragg before moving her family to Charlotte, where B was born. Growing up, Daniels remembers dancing and listening to Celia Cruz, James Brown and the Spice Girls.

"There was always a musical aspect to whatever I did," she notes. An avid concertgoer at an early age, Daniels saw Janet Jackson on her 1998 Velvet Rope Tour. She also remembers seeing Sweet Honey in the Rock, the Grammy-nominated a capella ensemble comprising all Black women — at Queens University.

Daniels' love of dance and music led to an interest in art, and all these interests entwined with Black esoteric practices and rituals.

"My spiritual practice is part of the ritual of moving to intentional sound," she says.

Before Daniels delved into her spiritualism, however, she dove into making art. The practice of making art started at home, Daniels recalls, but it was also encouraged by teachers at Oakhurst Elementary School, where Daniels began sculpting, weaving, painting, sketching and working with paper and glue.

"Most of my life, although [making art] was visible, it was definitely internal," Daniels notes.

She approached making art not as a way to be seen but as something she did in moments of self-reflection. As she moved on to middle school and East Mecklenburg High School, Daniels' creativity became more public. She got involved in stagework at Charlotte's now closed Afro-American Children's Theatre.

B explores different paths

After attending Central Piedmont Community College to study drama, theatre arts and stagecraft, Daniels started working at nonprofit experiential theatre company Carolina Actors Studio Theatre (CAST), then located at 2424 North Davidson St.

There Daniels worked as a stage manager, collaborating with playwright and CAST co-founder Dee Abdullah, who remains a close friend.

"Whenever Dee asked me to act, I would — reluctantly, but definitely for her," Daniels offers. "I've always participated in the Charlotte theatre community as a technician, whether it be stage management, board management, costumes [or] lighting."

Daniels' theatre and dance interests led to a stint working at Morris Costumes, the Monroe Road landmark and retail shop that specializes in theatrical costumes and makeup, magic tricks, animatronic figures, tuxedos and dancewear.

"I've always been a costume jewelry wearer, from the theatre [and] dance aspects of my life," Daniels remembers. "At [Morris] I got to play with different styles of jewelry."

At that time, Daniels started carrying interesting-looking stones with her, just because she thought they were pretty.

One day, in conversation with a friend at work, Daniels picked up a pretty stone and some copper wire and without paying attention to what she was doing started fashioning a piece of jewelry — a necklace made of a crystal warped in wire.

Soon, Daniels moved on to another job at erotic boutique The Reddoor. She loved the job and stayed there for seven years.

"I was a library card kid," she explains. "So I was reading all the books I could about the human body, specifically a woman's body."

Coupled with access to 1990s and 2000s TV shows focused on sex, Daniels' library learning led her to the popular adult store, and that in turn inspired Daniels' burgeoning sex-positive advocacy.

"[The job] was cool because I was a nerd," she remembers. "I had access to all of these books and I got to test out products to help customers make selections. I loved how people would come in looking for one thing based on a trend [about how] to keep a man or that type of shit."

B, however, flipped the script, giving customers information about how to please themselves as well as their partner so that both would have a beneficial experience.

While working at The Reddoor, Daniels continued to craft wire-wrapped crystal jewelry. Customers began asking her to make pieces for them. She started putting her unsold pieces on Instagram and directing people to her page.

"That's really how it started," Daniels says. As more clients commissioned Daniels for aesthetic pieces, some began asking what the crystals actually signified. Ever the library-loving nerd, B started doing research online, learning the esoteric and metaphysical properties of the stones.

Crystals are believed to possess properties that can influence a person's energy field and well-being through healing or by enhancing spiritual connections. For instance, amethyst is believed to enhance intuition; citrine is purported to attract wealth and abundance and rose quartz is said to enhance love.

Daniels noticed that people are drawn to certain crystals without realizing that the stones possessed the properties they seek or need. She maintains that crystals function by helping people facilitate hidden memories they harbor about what they need to work on.

"We know more than we think we know," Daniels says. "[That's why] different elements resonate with us."

Meanwhile, Daniels continued to develop as an artist. She got involved in The Roll Up CLT, an artist residency program in Charlotte's historic Camp Greene neighborhood. The residency, which connects national artists, local talent and residents through collaborations and art creation, was founded by Jessica Gaynelle Moss in 2016.

Moss, an artist, arts administrator, curator, arts consultant and former creative director of the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Art + Culture from 2016 to 2017, says she's known Daniels for over 20 years. The two first met when Moss worked on-and-off at Common Market in Plaza Midwood.

"Brianna's contributions to The Roll Up have been invaluable," Moss states. "She has been part of the project from its inception — initially as a volunteer, later as a program coordinator and now as program manager. Early on, she helped prepare the physical space. Over time, she has shaped its atmosphere through intentional curation of music, energy and light."

In addition to The Roll Up events, Daniels hosted and housed several exhibiting artists who were visiting Charlotte for the opening reception of Moss' 2018 curatorial project, Black Blooded, at the New Gallery of Modern Art.

Daniels also accompanied Moss on home visits to Black Charlotte art collectors, an important step in preparing Moss' exhibit The Vault, which displayed art works from the private collections of Black Charlotteans at The Mint Museum in 2023.

"Brianna's unwavering presence and reliability are qualities that not only distinguish her as a collaborator, but that have profoundly shaped the characteristics of our work together," Moss offers.

Throughout this time, Daniels continued to research the metaphysical influence of crystals. She realized that her esoteric interests complemented her yoga practice, a revelation that expanded her awareness of how everything is interconnected.

In 2017, Daniels left The Reddoor and pursued

crystal adornment and craft full time. Nowadays she mostly does commission work for clients, but her crystal adornments can be seen at Charlotte locations like Reggae Central and Mama Bessie's Place.

She has also displayed her work at Mood: B L A C K at Goodyear Arts in Camp North End and at The AdornMINT exhibit at Mint Museum Uptown in 2024.

Crafting a piece for a client is an informal, intuitive and collaborative process, Daniels says. Choosing a crystal for a person can be based on their needs — personally or spiritually.

Often Daniels will ask customers what colors they are drawn to. Sometimes those colors resonate with those of the chakras, a yogic concept drawn from the Sanskrit word for the body's energy centers.

The red root chakra provides grounding and helps release insecurity. The orange sacral chakra promotes joy and creativity. The yellow solar plexus chakra boosts confidence and mental clarity. The green heart chakra opens the heart to love and emotional healing.

The blue throat chakra facilitates clear communication. The indigo third eye chakra enhances intuition, insight, and spiritual awareness. The violet crown chakra connects you to spiritual enlightenment.

Crafting a piece, and choosing the right crystal for a client is inextricably linked with Daniels' esoteric practice.

"Everything that I do is magic," she says. "Everything I do is connected to Source, [which is] the practice of gratitude, the practice of presence."

Daniels believes that a number of her practices, including, art, music, dance and yoga, overlap.

"[They have] different titles, but they're all the same in a lot of senses," she notes. "It's really about connecting to Source and to yourself, and knowing that they're not separate at all."

Daniels' pathway to liberation

On her website, Daniels writes: "Through years of self-investigation and recalibration amid colonial oppression, I have discovered pathways toward the liberated Black being."

Unpacking that statement, Daniels says the reference to "self-investigation and recalibration" refers to the practice of self-reflection she developed through 500 hours of yoga instructor training.

In reference to colonial oppression, Daniels remembers becoming aware of oppression against people of color through watching movies.

One of those films, the 1995 drama *Panther*, is a fictionalized account of the The Black Panther Party (BPP), a militant revolutionary organization that advocated for Black liberation and protected Black citizens from police brutality from 1966 to 1982.

Another film Daniels saw at an impressionable age was *Rosewood*, a 1997 historical drama depicting a 1923 massacre where a white mob attacked and destroyed a Black town in Florida.



Black as the Cosmos — Photo by Brianna Daniels

Daniels says watching these cinematic history lessons created an awareness about truth and safety, and how both can be elusive.

She also notes the concept of overcoming white nationalist oppression is something that informs her art, music and particularly her metaphysical beliefs.

"I stay connected to my body," she says. "I pay attention to the planet, my immediate surroundings, the people around me, my loved ones, [and] the people who choose to be in my life and I choose to be there. It's a care thing; it's a liberation practice."

As someone striving to be a liberated Black being, Daniels says she's a follower of Jesus Christ, but there is one caveat.

"I wouldn't call myself a Christian by any means, at least not the way it's operating currently in the world," she says.

Daniels traces the music she spins and curates as Black as the Cosmos back to her love of dance, specifically to one of the first forms she learned: salsa.

She points out that salsa, often considered to be a Latin dance, is actually Afro-Cuban, drawing on deep roots in African traditions brought to the Americas via the slave trade.

For example, Puerto Rican bomba, which influenced salsa, originated from West African music such as the Martinican vidée.

As a dancer, and as DJ Black as the Cosmos, Daniels welcomes such musical hybrids.

"I currently dance samba and house music," Daniels declares. "I taught jazz dance and ballet for 13 years. I'm trained in the Silvestre technique, which is an Afro-Brazilian dance technique. I love Black electronic music [and] techno."

Daniels maintains she loves listening to all of the Black sounds that are available to her and sharing them with people who may have a narrow perspective of what comprises Black music.

That said, she's shooting for broad appeal when she deejays.

"I am coming from a Black, queer woman's vantage point, [but] I'm interested in the liberation of all people," Daniels says. "I like to play music with my friends."

Like other artists who play dance music, she thrives on the energy exchange between a moving sea of dancers. In fact, at any given moment in her set, Daniels says she there are multiple energy exchanges happening between sound booth and dance floor.

"As a person who feels connected to Source, I feel like I'm channeling messages — messages of love," Daniels attests. "I know that I'm doing the right thing in my conductor's position when people come back to me and say, 'My heart felt full and I haven't danced like this in years.'"

Daniels hopes people who encounter her art and music come away with the realization that we're all better together.

"We're infinite," she says. "We're the ultimate authority of our bodies, minds and spirits. We connect like that."

Daniels cites the moment when people react to a track she's playing and she can see an emotion move through their bodies.

"Brianna proves that Black identity is not a limitation but a vast and generative cosmos of creativity, history and future-making," Bell says. "Her practice shows that healing and rebellion can co-exist in delightfully aesthetic ways."

Daniels cherishes those fleeting seconds when she looks out on the dance floor and sees people with eyes closed and faces uplifted. She knows then that the dancers are transported. They're not wondering if anyone is watching. They don't feel like they're being monitored or surveilled.

It's at moments like this when dancers and DJ share the same wavelength, when artists like B/Brianna/Black as the Cosmos entwine their art, music, dance and mysticism, that all the aspects of humanity come together like the facets of a gem — a beautiful crystal that inspires, heals and instructs.

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JOHN WATERS' POLYESTER

August 8 • 7:30 p.m. • VisArt Video, 3104 Eastway Drive • $10 • paperhouseplus.com

PaperHouse Theatre proudly presents cult filmmaker John Waters' gleefully perverse *Polyester*, a dark satire of suburbia and the demise of the American family. Not as glossy as Waters' *Hairspray* (1988) nor as transgressive as his *Pink Flamingos* (1972), where transvestite diva Divine devours real dogshit on camera, *Polyester* employed a grindhouse-worthy gimmick called Odorama when it first screened in 1981. Audience members were given scratch-and-sniff cards that they were instructed to activate during key scenes. PaperHouse Theatre dispenses with the cards and devises their own means to waft unsavory scents through the theater — an experience well worth seeing (and smelling).

TOTALLY RAD VINTAGE FEST

August 9 • 10 a.m. • Park Expo & Conference Center, 800 Briar Creek Road • $15-$29 • tinyurl.com/RadVintageFest

Promising "a time warp of style and nostalgia," the Fest hosts vendors that specialize in clothing and accessories, plus curated collections of vintage records, toys and home goods from the 1980s, '90s, and aughts. Attendees can relive the halcyon days of *Tetris* and *Pac-Man* with a free-play video game arcade, where they can challenge their friends to epic battles on the games that defined a generation. If working a joystick isn't their jam, patrons can also peruse iconic gadgets, artifacts and retro tech at Rad Relic Museum or strike a pose with friends and family at the festival's nostalgic photo ops.

CYPRESS HILL, ATMOSPHERE, LUPE FIASCO, THE PHARCYDE

August 12 • 6 p.m. • The Amp Ballantyne, 11115 Upper Ave. • $50 and up • ampballantyne.com

Setting paranoid stoner lyrics to B-Real's high-pitched nasal vocals and Sen Dog's threatening bellow to DJ Muggs' abrasive, earth-shaking beats and psychedelic production, Cypress Hill became the first Latino rap superstars, crossing over with rock and metal fans. In 2025, Cypress Hill performed their breakout 1993 album *Black Sunday* with the London Symphony Orchestra and released the gig as a live album and concert video. Minneapolis alternative rap duo Atmosphere trade in introspective rhymes and eclectic genre-fluid production. Lupe Fiasco balances top ten hits with enigmatic, complex narratives and metaphorical verses. Alt-rap quartet The Pharcyde deliver soulful and irreverent story-telling songs.



'Electricidad'
Courtesy of Three Bone Theatre
8/15-8/31



Pleasure House
Via Facebook
8/13

'A WALK IN MY SHOES'

August 13 • 11:30 a.m. • Duke Energy Plaza, 525 S. Tryon St. • Free • ganttcenter.org

An outdoor performance of the urban musical *A Walk in My Shoes* follows four lifelong friends grappling with the challenges of being Black or brown and LGBTQ+ as young adults. The creative team behind the show is a brain trust of Black Charlotte creatives: songwriter/playwright/stage director Jermaine Nakia Lee; poet L'Monique King; musical director JR McQueen; and co-composer Tyrone Jefferson, who once worked as music director for James Brown. Presented as a concert with vocalists performing original R&B, hip-hop, jazz and gospel tunes, the show is staged and narrated as it would unfold in a fully staged production.

PLEASURE HOUSE, MOLD!, SUNSET HONOR UNIT

August 13 • 9 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $12 • snugrock.com

Charlotte's Pleasure House, which continues its Snug Harbor residency on every Wednesday in August, is a changeable musical beast. The alt-rock combo can range from "Stoner Song," a suitably hallucinatory anthem that sets a heavy Black Sabbath-ready riff to gospel vocals and a country rock-infused shuffle, to the dense and noisy "I Was Boy," a pulsing multi-vehicle pileup where grunge, Brit pop and garage rock collide. On tunes like the bouncy yet grinding "Elevator!" Miami's Mold! delivers post-punk Brachiosaurus riffs and poppy, buried-in-the-mix vocals. Atlanta's Sunset Honor Unit specializes in smart, tuneful indie-pop songs with ringing guitars.

OSCAR MAYDON

August 14 • 8 p.m. • The Fillmore, 820 Hamilton St. • $64 • fillmorenc.com

With a warm, matter-of-fact tenor and a knack for distinctive yet direct song-writing, Oscar Maydon entwines Latin folk and traditional Mexican music with irresistible pop melodies. Maydon emerged in 2020 from Mexico's alternative corrido scene, which seeks to broaden the lyrical themes and musical styles of traditional corridos beyond their frequent subject matter of narcocorridos, which recount the exploits of drug traffickers. In contrast, Maydon's 2025 single "Amigo? No," sets a heartfelt and relatable tale of unrequited love to a musically adventurous mix of galloping percussion, pinwheeling silvery/spidery guitars, heroic Latin horns and dense layers of celestial synths.

'ELECTRICIDAD'

August 15-31 • times vary • The Arts Factory, 1545 W. Trade St. • $15-$30 • threebonetheatre.com

Written by Luis Alfaro and directed by Glynnis O'Donoghue, *Electricidad* transplants Sophocles' Electra from ancient Greece to modern day Los Angeles. As a Latino family grapples with their father's murder, the play explores violence and the cyclical nature of revenge. The production comes after Three Bone Theatre lost a $20,000 National Endowment for the Arts grant awarded to the company last year to support its run of the Luis Alfaro Trilogy — which also includes *Oedipus El Rey* (Sophocles' *Oedipus*) and *Mojada* (Euripides' *Medea*) — due to federal funding cuts to the arts. While the company was able to claw the money back in late-July, 'Electricidad' showed that they were sincere in their commitment to finish the run regardless.

HAYLO FIRE PARTY 10TH ANNIVERSARY

August 16 • 6 p.m. • Haylo Healing Arts, 1111 Central Ave. • donation suggested • haylostudiolounge.com

After a decade in its Central Avenue location, Haylo Healing Arts holds one last annual Fire Party before leaving Plaza Midwood due to rising rents. The healing lounge's 10th anniversary celebration includes collaborative live painting by artists including Haylo owner and founder Hayley Moran, plus an interactive outdoor fiber arts installation. The event, devoted to spiritual alchemy, also features an immersive listening experience with Krystle Baller's new album *Dust of the Self*, music by DJ Mojo LeFay and a fire performance by Spinning Vixen & Stryx. Donations go to Cohoba, a nonprofit that advocates for equitable psychedelic-assisted therapy, drug policy reform and harm reduction initiatives.

DEE LUCAS

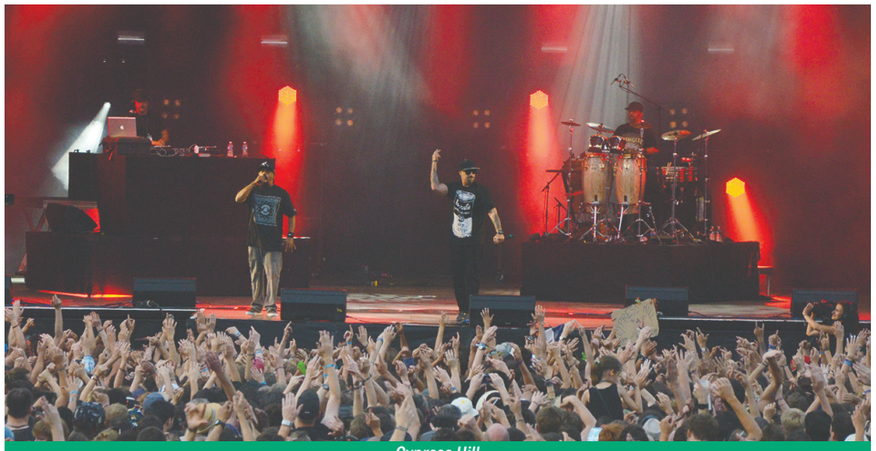
August 17 • 6 p.m. • Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. • $37-$46 • middlecjazz.com

Atlanta-based saxophonist Dee Lucas has consistently expanded his fanbase since the release of his well-received 2004 debut solo LP *Remembrance*, which was a tribute to the late, legendary saxophonist George Howard. Like Howard, Lucas developed a polished fusion of funk, jazz and urban soul that concentrates on groove and overall sound instead of improvisation. Lucas imbues every piece he plays with his own unique melodic phrasing and he has developed a distinctive style by bringing a more aggressive sound to the soprano sax on top of his smooth compositions. His latest album, *Twenty* (2024), marked two decades as an independent solo artist.

GLUTEN FREEDOM

August 19-20 • Starting noon, Tuesday • Monday Night Garden Co., 2217 South Tryon St. • Free • tinyurl.com/GlutenFreedomCLT

For two days, Monday Night Garden Company's Neapolitan pizza kitchen serves up their pies with 100% gluten-free dough, which they say is nearly indistinguishable from their usual crust. The establishment will also be serving its gluten-free pilsner, Placebo Pils; and Yacht Water, a gluten-free tequila-based canned cocktail. "If you have been disappointed by gluten-free pizza in the past we challenge you to come try this," the eatery says on its website. The team understands that, for those living with celiac disease or other severe gluten intolerance, cross-contamination is real, so they're shutting down the kitchen early on the night before in order to do a deep clean of the ovens, kitchen and prep stations.



Cypress Hill
Photo by JB Quentin
8/12



'Polyester'
Courtesy of New Line Cinema
8/8



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Celebrating Charlotte Pride in 2024 Photo by Mike Mazely

PRIDE GUIDE 2025: EVENTS

How to find all the fun that's going on for Pride Week

As usual, there will be plenty of Pride parties and events happening throughout August, most of which are independent of the Charlotte Pride organization. We've compiled a number of those events below to help you make the most of Charlotte Pride 2025.

OFFICIAL CHARLOTTE PRIDE EVENTS

CHARLOTTE PRIDE INTERFAITH SERVICE

A longtime staple of Charlotte Pride, this event features speakers from different spiritual backgrounds reflecting on how they have brought about positive changes in their local communities, with food and fellowship to follow.

More: *Free; Aug. 10, 4 p.m.; Unitarian Universalist Community of Charlotte, 234 N. Sharon Amity Road*

CHARLOTTE PRIDE DRAG PAGEANT 2025

The Charlotte Pride Drag Pageant is a gender-inclusive pageant for contestants who believe in the power and importance of community service. "Pageant winners are more than just titleholders; they live and breathe the spirit of Pride," the organization states. "They envision a world in which all LGBTQIA+ people are affirmed, respected, and included, free from any discrimination, rejection, or prejudice. They commit their volunteer work, time, energy, and talent to the Charlotte Pride mission to enrich, empower, strengthen, and make more visible the lives and experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in Charlotte and the Carolinas." Three crowns are up for grabs for the year — Mr., Miss, and Mx. — at Chasers in NoDa.

More: *Free; Aug. 14, 7 p.m.; Chasers, 3217 The Plaza*

FLOURISH: A CELEBRATION OF LGBTQ ARTS & CULTURE

A free, air-conditioned space to escape the heat and take in some performances from LGBTQ performing and fine arts groups including song, spoken-word, short films and more.

More: *Free; Aug. 16, 1-6 p.m.; DuBois Center, 320 E. 9th St.*

CHARLOTTE PRIDE FESTIVAL: COMMUNITY & CELEBRATION

Charlotte Pride's two-day cultural festival includes a variety of national, regional, and local entertainers, musicians, bands, and hundreds of participating vendor booths, including art exhibits, local nonprofits, retailers, a food court, and more. The parade runs from 1-4 p.m. on Aug. 17.

More: *Free; Aug. 16, noon-11 p.m. & Aug. 17, noon-6 p.m.; First Ward Park, 301 E. 7th St.*

NEIGHBORHOOD MARKET & HEALTH FAIR

Support local artists, artisans, craftspeople and makers while adorning your home with unique, handcrafted wares. Visit the Health Fair along 8th Street to check up on your personal health and wellness, get an HIV or STI test, get vaccinated, visit with wellness vendors and more.

More: *Free; Aug. 16, noon-10 p.m. & Aug. 17, noon-6 p.m.; First Ward Park, 301 E. 7th St.*

YOUTH & FAMILY ZONE

The Great Lawn of First Ward Park will be reserved for family-friendly entertainment and resources including arts and crafts, community resources, a family care tent and special speakers and entertainers.

More: *Free; Aug. 16 & 17, noon-6 p.m.; First Ward Park, 301 E. 7th St.*

Learn more including parking details, a parade map, hotel partners and how to find merch at charlottepride.org.



Charlotte Pride Parade (Photo by Mike Mazely)

INDEPENDENT PRIDE EVENTS

MENAGERIE: AN AUDIOVISUAL DRAG EXPERIENCE

Hosted by Fellini, this bold collision of art, sound and performance features appearances by RC Cola, Erica Chanel, Leonasia, Angel Facze, and Medusa Chaos.

More: *$15.70; Aug. 8, 7 p.m.; Petra's, 1919 Commonwealth Ave.; petrasbar.com*

VANITY HOUSE CHARLOTTE PRIDE KICKOFF DRAG BRUNCH

Charlotte's premier drag company kicks off its Pride festivities with this brunch at Catalú for a fabulous event filled with drag performances, delicious food and great company. Meet and greet opportunities will immediately follow brunch.

More: *$24.86; Aug. 9, 11 a.m.; Catalú, 125 New Bern St.; tinyurl.com/VanityHouseKickoff*

TOY DROP-IN/PRIDE T-SHIRT DECORATION

Young folks looking forward to Pride events in the coming week can drop in at the Time Out Youth center and fashion their own look for the next weekend's festivities.

More: *Free; Aug. 9, noon-4 p.m.; Time Out Youth Center, 3800 Monroe Road; @timeoutyouthcenter on Instagram*

CM OAKWOLD PRIDE KICKOFF PARTY

Common Market Oakwold celebrates the beginning of Charlotte Pride with two drag shows (all ages at 6:30 p.m. and a not-all-ages show at 8:30 p.m.) plus a vendor market, beverage specials and a raffle benefiting Charlotte Trans Health.

More: *Free; Aug. 9, noon-10 p.m.; Common Market Oakwold, 4420 Monroe Road; tinyurl.com/CMOakwoldPride*

LITE BRITE PRIDE NITE

Billed as "craft night meets a rainbow rave," you'll groove to beats from DJ Spider, sparkle under the lights with glitter tattoos and fairy hair, check out live glow art and more. A vendor market organized by the queer-led Makers & Mics starts at 4 p.m.

More: *Free with registration; Aug. 9, 8 p.m.; Blume Studios, 904 Post St.; blumenthalarts.org*

ULTRAVIOLET SAPPHIC DANCE PARTY

The monthly Ultraviolent party is all about queer women loving queer women. An auditory oasis for queer, lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual+ women, nonbinary and trans folks with nothing but divine vibes.

More: *$10; Aug. 9, 8 p.m.; Petra's, 1919 Commonwealth Ave.; petrasbar.com*

HEAD SPACE STUDIO PRIDE SHOW

An evening filled with amazing performances, art and community spirit. Show up earlier in the day (noon-3 p.m.) for a free pre-party and vendor market. Folks bringing young family members should be aware that, during the later shows, adult content may be included.

More: *$44.52; Aug. 10, 5:30-7 p.m.; Head Space Studio, 3929 Monroe Road; tinyurl.com/HeadSpacePride*

SERVING PRIDE DRAG DINNER

The Crown Kings of Charlotte are kicking off Charlotte Pride weekend at The Long Room with dinner, drinks and drag. Liam Laughin hosts with appearances from Will Charmer, Sassi Guinevere Michaels, Crystal Violet Van Dank and Vincent Sational, plus a few surprise guests and food from How Sanguine.

More: $*15-$25; Aug. 15, 6:30 p.m.; The Long Room, 111 Central Ave.; tinyurl.com/ServingPride*

GAG! QUEEN CITY

Arrietty from RuPaul's Drag Race headlines a night of drag performances and nonstop dancing hosted by Trey Roberts with music by DJ Domii and Luxe Posh.

More: *$35; Aug. 15, 7 p.m.; The Fillmore, 820 Hamilton St.; fillmorenc.com*

PRIDE FRIDAY BEAR HAPPY HOUR

Great music and videos from DJ Marvy Marv and DJ Jimmy, the Frankenburger food truck, and local vendors set up selling a range of items to get you ready for the weekend.

More: *Free; Aug. 15, 7 p.m.; Crown Station, 3629 N. Davidson St.; tinyurl.com/CrownBearHappyHour*

CHARLOTTE PRIDE SILENT DISCO

A night of music, movement and community to celebrate love, identity and self-expression while benefiting the Campaign for Southern Equity.

More: *$9.50-$18; Aug. 15, 7:30 p.m.; Hi-Wire Brewing, 340 W. Tremont Ave., Suite 140; tinyurl.com/HiWireSilentDisco*

ICONS: PRIDE GOES POP!

Celebrate Pride with power chords, powerhouse vocals and pure joy as The Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte presents a bold, high-energy concert of anthems that have defined LGBTQ+ visibility and resilience over the last two decades.

More: *$12-$37; Aug. 15, 7:30 p.m.; First United Methodist Church, 501 N. Tryon St.; gmccharlotte.org*

LOLGBTQ+

Hosted by drag royalty Devida and featuring razor-sharp stand-up from LA Redd, outrageous sketch comedy by The Lynns, live music courtesy of Mona Lisa Musiq and Maggie Lowe, and more, this night celebrates some of the region's most beloved queer artists.

More: *$23; Aug. 15, 8 p.m.; Carolina Theatre, 230 N. Tryon St.; thecarolina.com*



This year's Charlotte Pride Parade takes place on Aug. 17. Photo by Mike Mazely

BUZZ CITY BREAKS PRIDE + VINYL

Old-school DJs from the heyday of Queen City nightlife spinning actual vinyl at Blackbox will include legendary Scorpio resident and Central Records owner Lin Benfield, DJ Levi Brown from Liquid Lounge and Tutto Mondo's, and breakbeat connoisseur Jungle Gym Jones.

More: *$18.22; Aug. 15, 10 p.m.; Blackbox Theater, 421 E. Sugar Creek Road; blackboxcharlotte.com*

ALL PINK PRIDE AFFAIR

Grab your pink fits — hot pink, pastel, glitter, or metallic — and head to Blush for $75 towers with bold fashion, fierce energy and radiant love.

More: *Free; Aug. 15, 10 p.m.; Blush CLT, 7631 Sharon Lakes Road, #Suite E; tinyurl.com/AllPinkPrideAffair*

PRIDE MIMOSA KICKOFF PARTY

Get a head start on the festival next door at Victoria Yards for a mimosa (or several) all while giving back and doing good for your community. The event benefits the Twirl Assistance Program, which provides emergency hardship grants to LGBTQ adults in the Charlotte area who need support with mental health treatment, food assistance, medical care or transportation.

More: *$25-$50; Aug. 16, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.; Victoria Yards, 209 E. 7th St.; tinyurl.com/MimosaKickoff*

GIRLS ROOM PRIDE FESTIVAL

As a movable dance party series that celebrates and provides safe spaces for queer women in music and art on a monthly basis, Girls Room is always throwing down with inclusivity, so you know they have to do it big during Charlotte Pride. Multiple music stages, amazing local and regional LGBTQ+ artists, performers, vendors, DJs and more.

More: *$16, Aug. 16, 4 p.m.; The Music Yard at SouthBound, 2433 South Blvd.; musicyardclt.com*

BAEWATCH PRIDE: POOL PARTY

Sexy lifeguards, complimentary food and live performances are only the beginning of this Lez Party! event. Also expect hookah, games, drinks, food and poolside vibes.

More: *$19.19; Aug. 16, 4-9 p.m.; TBA, address info sent upon RSVP; tinyurl.com/BaewatchPoolPride*

LEGENDS, DIVAS AND STARS

Hosted by Palm Springs' Tommi Rose, this Time Out Youth fundraiser features performances from RuPaul's Drag Race alum Trinity K. Bonet; America's Got Talent alum Delighted Tobehere and Juneau, Alaska's Gigi Monroe covering icons of LGBTQ entertainment. With a combined stage experience of more than 100 years, this show is one that London's QX Magazine says "has to be seen to be believed!"

More: *$37; Aug. 16, 7 p.m.; Carolina Theatre, 230 N. Tryon St.; thecarolina.com*

GOLDEN GURLS DRAG DINER

Grab your caftans and clutch your pearls because Dorothy, Blanche, Rose and Sophia are strutting into the spotlight for a drag-tastic Pride event featuring Buff Faye and her cast of drag divas and entertainers serving up one-liners, over-the-top looks and Pride-filled cocktails.

More: *$24.79; Aug. 16, 7 p.m.; Midtown Tavern, 1500 E. 3rd St.; tinyurl.com/GoldenGurlsDragDiner*

TWIRL UNDER THE SEA

Dive into a magical night of color, beats and community as Jason & Zuni of Just Twirl Events present a full night of underwater enchantment, queer celebration and nonstop dancing with the fabulous DJ Sam Gee spinning all night long. Costumes are highly encouraged.

More: *$39.19; Aug. 16, 10 p.m.; Blackbox Theater, 421 E. Sugar Creek Road; blackboxcharlotte.com*

ALTERCATION: A QUEER PUNK DRAG SHOW!

A night full of drag, burlesque and theatrical trill that's split into two with an early show followed by some chill time to meet and greet, dance and/or take in a T-boy wrestling match before the final event begins at midnight. Enter to win a tattoo raffle from special guest Priscilla Chambers of The Boulet Brother's Dragula.

More: *$17; Aug. 16, 9 p.m.; Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St.; snugrock.com*

SPLASH PRIDE TEA DANCE

Head south after the parade to catch this pool- and beachwear-inspired event to benefit the Twirl Assistance Program.

More: *Free; Aug. 17, 4-8 p.m.; Bar Argon, 4454 South Blvd., Suite H; barargon.com*

PRIDE ENCORE

Wrapping up Charlotte Pride Month with a vibrant day of love, art, music and community in true NoDa style.

More: *Free; Aug. 30, noon-10 p.m.; NoDa Brewing Co., 150 W. 32nd St.; nodabrewing.com*



Adore Delano Promotional photo

PRIDE GUIDE 2025: PERFORMERS

Charlotte Pride turns 25

While Pride Month has come and gone for much of the country, in Charlotte, festivities are still to come. Charlotte Pride 2025 will take place on Aug. 16-17 in a new location as it celebrates its 25th year.

The parade will still run down Tryon Street but the festival will take place mainly around First Ward Park, allowing for more space for what's expected to be the festival's biggest year yet as it reaches a quarter-century.

While funding this year has been a bit of a struggle thanks to President Donald Trump's tactics targeting all things LGBTQ and DEI and the ripple effects that those policies have had on corporate spending (more about that on page 4), the team at Charlotte Pride has filled in the gaps and will be putting on a party worth remembering.

Below, we list some of the performers to check for, including three headliners and a slew of local acts.

In case you missed it, head back to page 10 for our listing of Pride-related events to check out while you wait for these folks to hit the stage.

HEADLINERS

ADORE DELANO

Adore Delano is the first artist we know of who made the jump from *American Idol* to *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which just goes to show her range. She was runner-up in *RuPaul's Drag Race* Season 6 before returning for Season 2 of *RPDR All-Stars*. In 2019, Adore was included as one of New York Magazine's top 10 most powerful drag queens in America. With more than 2 million Instagram followers and 716,000 on TikTok, she is also one of the top 5 most followed *RPDR* contestants across social platforms.

Where Adore really shines is on the mic, however. As a musician, she has released three studio albums and the 2021 EP *Dirty Laundry*. With several songs and videos reaching tens of millions of streams across all platforms, Adore has solidified herself as a titan of drag music and pop/rock. Her music has also appeared on several television programs including *Pretty Little Liars*. Her most recent tour, Party Your World, spanned 50 cities, including many sold-out dates across three continents.



Snow Wife Promotional photo

In a recent interview with the online magazine Them, Adore said her recent music has drawn inspiration from her (also trans) partner Sasha Allen, a former contestant on *The Voice*, as Adore tries to provide hope in the gloomy climate of the second Trump administration.

"He writes his own music and I love hearing his input," she said. "I'm pulling from my perspective on what's going on in the world, but also kind of giving people hope at the same time. No matter what position you are in life, you can find love within yourself and with other people."

SNOW WIFE

With a stage name that puts a domestic spin on the OG fairy tale princess, Snow Wife embraced songwriting by accident. Trained in her hometown of Houston for a career as a dancer, Snow moved to Los Angeles where she discovered her voice and love of songwriting. Drawing on influences ranging from the eclectic dance pop of Lady Gaga to the sexually explicit rap of Doja Cat, Snow introduced audiences to her husky, raspy vocals and uncompromising lyrics with her moody debut single "7FIGURESUPERMODEL."



Janelle Sy'mone Courtesy of Charlotte Pride

The pop provocateur's follow-up single, the sensual and cinematic "American Horror Story," quickly became a viral sensation. The song appears on Snow's 2023 debut EP *Queen Degenerate*. With raunchy lyricism and infectious dance rhythms on tunes like "I Love Drugs" and "Fuck," the EP drew praise for its originality, energy and unabashed celebration of queer sensibilities.

Subsequent releases display Snow's increasing range, with music embracing hyper-pop and hip-hop, and words exploring the emotional bonds forged between women. With swooning melodicism and a pulsing beat, 2025 single "Sweat" emphasizes desire with a romantic embrace of life, dance, partying and relationships. Released in June, the glossy, gritty and glitter *Bodyology* EP, blends catchy nostalgic 2000s-style pop with a modern, experimental sound

In her music videos, Snow's fluid dance moves complement the elastic textures of her tunes. As a queer woman and advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, she champions representation. The videos also depict gender-fluid dancers and love interests while Snow often wears clothing from queer-owned brands.

SHAUN ROSS

Shaun Ross made his mark on the modeling world as the first professional male model with albinism, working with a number of fashion designers, magazines and campaigns including Givenchy, Alexander McQueen, Vogue, GQ, and Nylon. You may recognize him from his appearances in high-profile music videos like Beyonce's "Pretty Hurts," Katy Perry's "E.T.," or Lana Del Ray's short film *Tropico*.

Ross began releasing music in 2017 with the debut single "Symmetry" dropping in November of that year. His first full-length LP, *SHIFT*, would follow in 2021. He's well-known in the underground ballroom scenes of New York and Los Angeles, voguing as the West Coast father of the famed House of Ninja.

The 33-year-old went viral on Threads in January when he recollected the story of how he came out to his grandfather — and his grandpa's hilarious response, which was accepting if still leaning jokingly on stereotypes.

"I remember coming out to my grandpa a year before he passed," Ross wrote. "I was shocked by how he embraced me. I said, 'Grandad, I'm gay,' and he replied, 'Well, can you cook?' I said, 'Not really.' He laughed, 'How do you expect to keep a man?'"

More recently, Ross has built his name as a DJ and at Charlotte Pride will close out the night with the renowned Stardust Vogue Ball, a set that's all about radical self-expression, beauty and ballroom energy.

LOCAL PERFORMERS

JANELLE SY'MONE

Voted Best Female R&B artist at the 2019 Carolina Music Awards, Charlotte's Janelle Sy'mone crafts tunes that take listeners on an emotional journey. An electrifying energy threads through Sy'mone's stage performances and songs like the blues-based "Prove It 2 Me," the punchy gospel-infused "Got You," and the ebullient electro-funk dance-pop banger "All Night."

"Good Girl," the title track of Sy'mone's debut album, is a tribute to her beloved sister, a Black trans woman named Diamond Z. Starr-Reynolds.

Charlotte Pride carries a deep personal resonance for Sy'mone because Starr-Reynolds was murdered by her romantic partner. Each song on Sy'mone's album is interspersed with brief audio interludes that mix dialogue with evocative background music. The dialogue on the interlude "Diamond's Wisdom" is taken from a recording made by Starr-Reynolds.

Sy'mone, who performed on the Charlotte Pride Main Stage in 2023, returns to the Main Stage this year.



Angel Blacc Courtesy of Charlotte Pride



John Maddrey Courtesy of Charlotte Pride

MAGGIE LOWE

Maggie Lowe is a local musician who's been described as a soulful musical storyteller, pairing irreverent wit with sides of spicy sass. Their songs are sincere and raw with a flare of humor while telling the tales of love and identity. Lowe writes lyrics that appreciate the human experience with something everyone can relate to, with inspirations that include Tracy Chapman, Brandi Carlile and Alabama Shakes.

Lowe's debut album, *Tunes for Terrible Times*, dropped last August and features Southern charm at its best, with roots in folk and, well, roots music. This year saw two back-to-back follow-ups with May's *Coming In Hott* and June's *Like Love*. Lowe won a spot on the Main Stage during Charlotte Pride's community auditions last year and returns for 2025 with three Pride-related performances: one on the Main Stage, one on the Flourish stage and another at LOLGBTQ+ on Aug. 15.

CAROLINA DOWN BOYS

Carolina Down Boys is a queer-based Americana/dark-folk group from Charlotte that challenges social norms through community-minded lyrics, aiming to rouse the crowd into a state of love and unity. Their live performances are intimate, compelling and tenacious. Instrumentation from cello, violin and banjo provide the perfect backdrop to lead singer Heather Himes' rich vocal harmonies, taking listeners on a journey of resilience.

"We write songs that bring us hope and it's amazing when they do the same for others," said lead singer Heather Himes. "Especially those who struggle with being in their own skin or wounds from religious trauma."

COMMUNITY AUDITION WINNERS

GEREM3

A self-described "Storyteller. Rain dancer. Dreamcatcher. Air bender," Charlotte's own Gerem3 started out as a dancer, one-third of the local troupe Basic Instinct. In our 2019 profile of the group, Gerem3 told us he was inspired to move by watching videos of Michael and Janet Jackson as a kid. By that point, the trio had already performed at five Charlotte Pride events.

Since then, Gerem3 has been making waves as a solo musician, an art he's long been talented in but avoided out of insecurity in the past.

"Being an artist was the only thing that really made sense," Gerem3 told SHOUTOUT HTX in 2024. "I can't but truly be myself COMPLETELY when I'm writing or performing. Music just cuts me wide open. I can't hide, I can't pretend. I'm my strongest and most vulnerable and have the most fun doing what I do!"

ANGEL BLACC

With "big mood, bold style and queer anthems," local rapper Angel Blacc dropped both volumes of their *prettylittlethug* EP this summer, providing a hot lead-up to this year's Pride performance featuring old-school, sample-heavy Southern beats reminiscent of Three-Six Mafia in their prime plus a merciless flow that Meg Thee Stallion fans would appreciate.

The fact that Angel Blacc was a featured artist at Charlotte Black Pride as "The People's Choice" just last month only to turn around and earn their way onto the main Charlotte Pride stage goes to show that their fearless style is ready for a larger fanbase, and we see that happening in the very near future.

JOHN MADDREY

Self-proclaimed "singer/songwriter/sadboi" John Maddrey is bringing his style of alt-folk from the bedroom, where he got his start recording much of his earlier music, to the Charlotte Pride stage.

While interning at Jason Jet's Grindhaus Studios at age 18, Maddrey sharpened his skills in engineering and production, adding a crispness to his music on recent projects such as *Issues*, the five-track EP he dropped on New Year's Day of this year. The project displays Maddrey's range from the electronic, video-game-inspired production on "Hard to Find" to the more traditional, stripped-down acoustics of "If I Drown."

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CeeLo Green Photo by Gage Skidmore

GET RICH TO THIS

CeeLo Green teams up with longtime Charlotte friend Adrian Crutchfield at Carolina Theatre

BY PAT MORAN

When jazz, pop and R&B fans catch saxophone virtuoso Adrian Crutchfield's high-energy hometown gig at Uptown's Carolina Theatre on Aug. 8, they will also witness a force of nature.

Crutchfield, an accomplished solo artist and key collaborator with Prince, will be joined onstage by his friend and colleague CeeLo Green, cofounder of iconic Atlanta rap collective Goodie Mob, one half of eclectic psych-soul duo Gnarls Barkley, and a formidable innovator himself as a solo soul and R&B performer.

Green has been at ground zero for much of the music that shaped today's pop landscape. As a cofounding member of Goodie Mob, he helped invent Dirty South rap with fellow Dungeon Family cohorts such as OutKast. The hardcore-gangsta-bounce hybrid brought earth-shaking 808 drum machines to mainstream music.

As one half of Gnarls Barkley with Danger Mouse, Green gave pop a much-needed infusion of risk and adventure with a mix of hip-hop, funk, psychedelia, melody and a touch of melancholy.

As a solo artist and songwriter, he retrofitted classic soul, R&B and disco for modern ears, fusing this irresistible musical mélange to a larger-than-life, flamboyant personality that dazzled TV viewers when Green joined the cast of hit reality singing competition show The Voice.

Green's willingness to test boundaries has frequently spilled over from his music into his public persona. He's enlivened his energetic stint on The Voice and glitzy red carpet events by showing up in a series of outlandish outfits, including a gold-plated outer space alien, a Roman gladiator, a Muppet with a metal breastplate, Darth Vader and more.

He has also found himself at the center of controversy related to charges he faced for giving a woman ecstasy. After pleading no contest to those charges, he posted multiple tweets about what should or shouldn't be considered rape that led to his own reality TV show getting canceled. He would later apologize for the tweets, calling them "idiotic, untrue and not what I believe."

CeeLo's songwriting often carries a dramatic and moral weight. Growing up in Atlanta, Green lost both his parents before he turned 20. His mother's death in 1993, when Green was 18, triggered suicidal thoughts, as he addressed in Gnarls Barkley's "Just a Thought." He also touched on the deaths of his parents and the behavioral problems they caused in the Rorschach ink blots animation of the duo's video for "Crazy."

Today, CeeLo says he's focused on spreading joy.

"I love to make people laugh," he told Queen City Nerve. "I love to make people feel alive."

We spoke to CeeLo Green in the lead up to the Aug. 8 show in Uptown.

Queen City Nerve: Adrian Crutchfield told me he's known you since he was 14 years old because you were family by marriage [through CeeLo Green's ex-wife Christina Johnson], but that you got to know each other better later on. Do you remember how you met Adrian and how you two started working together?

CeeLo Green: We were introduced through the shared family. When we first met, he was much younger. We met at a couple of family functions and stuff like that. So it was really casual. When he started to venture out on his musical journey and career, which is illustrious in its own right, that's when we [really] met. I think it was on a Lionel Richie tour, [where] I had the pleasure of opening up for Richie. Adrian and I joined ourselves and we stayed close and in contact. Then I had the opportunity to utilize his skill set — him and my man [saxophonist] Marcus Anderson, who both have an affinity for Prince.

[Anderson and Crutchfield are friends and both played in Prince's New Power Generation horn section. Crutchfield remembers that six months after meeting Green at the Lionel Ritchie show, Green's manager called Crutchfield and hired him for Green's touring band.]

We've been rocking ever since. This [Carolina Theatre show] is an opportunity, a very rare one, that I get a chance to come out and support him, to reciprocate all of that love and that devotion that he's given me over the years.

What can folks expect from your show with Adrian?

We're going to go from A to Z, man, from top to the bottom doing a lot of the old classics and some current music, too. We'll definitely do what we do. Any CeeLo Green fans, you're welcome to come on out ... and come right up. Do whatever you got to do to get up in front of that stage so you can feel that energy firsthand.

Visit qcnerve.com to read the full interview with CeeLo Green about his journey in music and the legacy he'll leave behind and also check out our full piece on Adrian Crutchfield from the annual Music Issue in July.

CeeLo Green and Adrian Crutchfield will take the stage of the newly restored Carolina Theatre on Friday, Aug. 8 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets start at $37. Visit thecarolina.com for more info.

PMORAN@QCNERVE.COM



PLAY: THE SHOWCASE

FROM THE STAGE: JULY 2025 **Submit your photos to info@qcnerve.com**



PEARL performs at Snug Harbor, 7/30/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)



HiDAZE at Snug Harbor, 7/23/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)



Ghost Brain at Snug Harbor, 7/23/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)



Alright at Snug, 7/23/25 (Dan Russell-Pinson)



AJR at PNC, 8/2/25 (Photo by Jeff Hahne)



I Hate Dave at Snug, 7/30/25 (Photo by Dan Russell-Pinson)

PAUSE: PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Featherpocket's 'Cowboy Hat'

By Pat Moran

Jason Cline's country-adjacent alt-rock band Featherpocket delivers a delightful four-minute pocket Western in the jaunty new single "Cowboy Hat," which premiered today and can be found below.

Drawing on Cline's chiming, coiling guitar; producer Justin Aswell's cantering percussion; and Jason Atkins' tinkling honky-tonk piano and swirling zydeco accordion, the catchy tune evokes faux Wild West music like The Beatles' "Rocky Raccoon" and Joe Strummer's soundtrack to spaghetti Western satire Walker.

In "Cowboy Hat," Cline spins a tall tale about a habitual, cowboy-hatted liar in his good-natured, grainy and adenoidal drawl. Meanwhile, Dazy Bea's ethereal backing vocals sigh like wind sweeping down the dusty plain.

"*Lean back in your cowboy hat/ Lyin' like you're tellin' the truth/ When thunderstorms come rolling in/ (You're) lyin' like you're tellin' the truth…*"

Cline told Queen City Nerve he started writing the song's melody on a guitar then began ad-libbing words. Someone walked by wearing a cowboy hat, which prompted the lyrics: "They've got the hat but I bet they never wrangled no cattle/ Probably can't even tie a lasso…"

"I think that's true of most who don the Stetson, myself included," Cline noted.

"Cowboy Hat" boasts a battery of organic-sounding instruments, but a weird electronic touch underpins the amiable, ambling tune — a fuzzy foot-dragging sound that shadows the song's drums.

As it turns out, the sound was a happy accident.

"We tried using real drums, but wound up … using the programmed drums [on my demo for the song]," Cline said. "To expedite the process, we ported my demo in and used software to separate the different tracks. The software created that cool sounding artifact that begins the song and runs throughout [it]."

Like tumbleweeds rolling down a frontier street, that artifact adds a baleful texture to the folkloric tune.

Among the song's many pleasures is a drop-out where Cline huskily intones, "Lie to me, baby," followed by a resounding slap to the face. At another point, the crack of a gunshot ushers in the song's bridge.

Here Cline delivers a spoken word interlude in a husky, slightly menacing tone: "*I'll tell you what you ain't/ Not a hero/ Not a saint/ Not a cowboy on the trail…*"

If those words carry emotional heft, it's because Cline learned that someone once close to him had lied to him about some foundational truths at the core of their relationship just as he was composing "Cowboy Hat."

"I took that story, dressed it up in a Western theme, and finished the song," Cline says. "At its core, it's an allegorical murder ballad warning about the perils and destructive power of lying to avoid accountability."

Near the end of "Cowboy Hat," the ululating cry from Ennio Morricone's theme for The Good, The Bad and the Ugly echoes eerily, setting up the song's climax in which the unreliable protagonist is gunned down outside a saloon.

One last rendition of the honeyed yet ominous "Cowboy Hat" chorus spells out the epitaph for an inveterate liar: "Thunderstorms come rolling in/ They finally caught up with you…"

Visit qcnerve.com to check out the official video for Featherpocket's "Cowboy Hat."



Jason Cline of Featherpocket (Photo by Amber Mullins)

SOUNDWAVE

WEDNESDAY AUG. 6

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Primrose w/ Park National, Peach Rings, Moving Boxes (The Milestone)
- Volbeat w/ Halestorm (PNC Music Pavilion)
- Pleasure House w/ Bravo Pueblo, Somnium (Snug Harbor)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Josh Daniel, Jim Brock & Kerry Brooks (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

JAZZ/BLUES
- Jazz Night feat. DJAM Collective (Camp North End)
- Lovell Bradford Trio Jazz Jam (VisArt Video)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Tabitha Meeks w/ Kenny Sharp (Evening Muse)

COVER BANDS
- Eternally Grateful (Comet Grill)

OPEN MIC
- Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
- Open Hearts Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)

THURSDAY AUG. 7

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Catchbliss w/ Applefield, Midsummers, The Abstratica (The Milestone)
- Congress the Band w/ Elby Fraser (Visulite Theatre)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Bluegrass Jam (Birdsong Brewing)
- Sierra Carson w/ Briggs McElwee, Timothy Chandler Hicks (Evening Muse)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Rent Party: DJ Spunk (Crown Station)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Dave Koz & Friends (The Amp Ballantyne)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Jade Moore (Comet Grill)

COVER BANDS
- Roots of Creation: Grateful Dub (Amos' Southend)
- Postmodern Jukebox: Magic & Moonlight (Knight Theater)
- TRS Sings Famous Girl Groups (Middle C Jazz)
- Pretty Tied Up (Guns N' Roses tribute) w/Fury 58 (The Rooster)

FRIDAY AUG. 8

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Owen & The Smokes w/ Nikki & The Barn Boys (Evening Muse)
- Ashley! w/ Cocojoey, Rosary, YRD SLE, Jelly Diver (The Milestone)
- The Band Camino (Neighborhood Theatre)
- Neil Young & the Chrome Hearts (PNC Music Pavilion)
- Prowess w/ Midnite Massacre, The Graveyard Blvd (The Rooster)
- Blackberry Smoke w/ Mike Campbell, The Dirty Knobs (Skyla Amphitheatre)
- Elijah Johnston w/ Human Resources, Whistler (Snug Harbor)
- Blind Melon (The Underground)
- Sam Holt Band (Visulite Theatre)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Ben Gatlin Band (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Morgan St. Jean w/ Alexa Jenson (Camp North End)
- Simple Sole Band w/ Caleb Davis (Goldie's)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Rambler Kane (Heist Brewery)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Adrian Crutchfield & CeeLo Green (Carolina Theatre)
- Morgan James (Middle C Jazz)

COVER BANDS
- Captain Mike & The Shipwrecked (Jimmy Buffet tribute) (Amos' Southend)
- Shot Thru the Heart (Bon Jovi tribute) (The Amp Ballantyne)

SATURDAY AUG. 9

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Cordovas w/ Time Sawyer, Gavin Kattesh (Evening Muse)
- Tyger w/ Raviner, Viola Swamp, Altered Vision (The Milestone)
- Weekend Friend w/ The Baxbys, Celler Dwellers (Snug Harbor)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Dierks Bentley (PNC Music Pavilion)
- Sam Burchfield w/ Arsena (The Rooster)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Philip Funderburk (Primal Brewery)
- Lucid Dreams w/Mariah Van Kleef, Marissa Missing (Starlight on 22nd)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Purgatory (Amos' Southend)
- Juelz (Blackbox Theater)
- Ultraviolet Sapphic Dance Party (Petra's)
- DJ Gallixc: Limewired 200s Dance Party (The Underground)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Celestial Company (Birdsong Brewing)
- Space Truck (Comet Grill)
- Ozomatli w/ Bakalao Stars (Neighborhood Theatre)
- New Potato People (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)

COVER BANDS
- The Original Drifters w/ The Tams (Knight Theater)
- Diamond Dixie w/ Bald Brothers (Goldie's)
- Gena Chambers (Gladys Knight tribute) (Middle C Jazz)
- Long Strange Deal & Friends (Grateful Dead tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY AUG. 10

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- The Last of Lucy w/ Pathogenic, Celaris, January Knife (The Milestone)
- Atlanta Rhythm Section (Neighborhood Theatre)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Soul Sundays feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)

FAMILY
- Gracie's Corner Live (The Fillmore)

COVER BANDS
- The Good Life: Tribute to Tony Bennett (Middle C Jazz)

MONDAY AUG. 11

JAZZ/BLUES
- The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)

OPEN MIC
- Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Olivia Joy (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY AUG. 12

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)
- The Struts (The Fillmore)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Cypress Hill w/ Atmosphere, Lupe Fiasco, The Pharcyde (The Amp Ballantyne)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Close Knobs (Snug Harbor)

OPEN MIC
- Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY AUG. 13

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Pleasure House w/ Mold!, Sunset Honor Unit (Snug Harbor)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Bill Noonan & Tom Kuhn (Comet Grill)
- Carson McKee w/ Dane Page (Evening Muse)
- Josh Daniel, Jim Brock & Kerry Brooks (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

JAZZ/BLUES
- Jazz Night feat. DJAM Collective (Camp North End)
- Lovell Bradford Trio Jazz Jam (VisArt Video)

COVER BANDS
- House of Funk Plays Prince & The Time (Middle C Jazz)

OPEN MIC
- Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
- Open Hearts Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)

THURSDAY AUG. 14

LATIN/WORLD
- Oscar Maydon (The Fillmore)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Toto w/ Men At Work, Christopher Cross (PNC Music Pavilion)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Florencia & the Feeling w/ Duck, Celeste Moonchild (Petra's)
- Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
- Dizgo w/ Natalie Brooke (Visulite Theatre)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Nathan Davis (Comet Grill)
- Mariah Van Kleef w/Ennie Arden, Marissa Missing (The Rooster)

FRIDAY AUG. 15

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Witchpit with Derro, Holy Roller, Bridgeburner (Amos' Southend)
- The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
- Old Mervs w/ The Gringos (Evening Muse)
- Moravian w/ 6 Story Pyramid (Evening Muse)
- Auroras Hope w/ Slothh, Wash Away, Killer Feels, The Safety (The Milestone)
- verygently w/ Brother Elsey (Neighborhood Theatre)
- SWAE w/ Waltz entre el Cielo & la Tierra, Death Of August (Petra's)
- Blaakhol w/ Hellir. Basura, Dollhaver (Snug Harbor)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Buzz City Breaks: Pride Vinyl Edition (Blackbox Theater)
- Cumbiatron (The Underground)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Special EFX All-Stars (Middle C Jazz)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- Barcerado w/ Fatmouth, Nathan Harris & the Flood (Visulite Theatre)

COVER BANDS
- Unknown Artist w/ Big Fun (Goldie's)
- Storm'n Norman Experience w/Tangerine Trees (The Rooster)

SATURDAY AUG. 16

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Sweet Desire w/ Pageant (Evening Muse)
- The Reticent w/ Aterra, And I Become Death (The Milestone)
- Aurora's Hope w/ Shock Tea, Peach Candy Nut Boys (Petra's)
- Salamander X w/ Black River Rebels, Fury 58, Oh! You Pretty Things (The Rooster)
- Nonpoint (The Underground)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Twirl: Under the Sea (Blackbox Theater)
- Boots n Beats (Neighborhood Theatre)
- Latin Dance Party (Salud Cerveceria)*

JAZZ/BLUES
- BK Jackson (Middle C Jazz)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Bill Miller Band (Comet Grill)
- Krista Lynn Meadow w/ Matt Stratford (Goldie's)
- Miriam Moore w/ Maggie Lowe, Sara Harrod (Starlight on 22nd)

COVER BANDS
- Flying High Again (Ozzy Osbourne tribute) w/ Mostley Crue (Amos' Southend)
- The Mad Hatters (Tom Petty tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY AUG. 17

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- The Acacia Strain (The Underground)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Dee Lucas (Middle C Jazz)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- d4vd (The Fillmore)
- Vazum w/ Solemn Shapes, Mostly Mesh (The Milestone)
- Hazy Sunday (Petra's)
- Soul Sundays feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)

A CappelLa
- T.3 (Evening Muse)

COVER BANDS
- Avery Creek (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)

MONDAY AUG. 18

JAZZ/BLUES
- The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)

OPEN MIC
- Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY AUG. 19

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)*
- Citizen Soldier (The Underground)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Philip Bowen w/ Julia DiGrazia (Evening Muse)

OPEN MIC
- Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

*WEEKLY EVENTS THAT MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.
VISIT QCNERVE.COM FOR THE FULL SOUNDWAVE LISTING

QUEEN CITY NERVE

The Soundwave is Queen City Nerve's comprehensive guide to live music happening in Charlotte every night of the week. This list is pulled together by our editorial team every other week from combing through Charlotte music venue calendars and separated by genre. None of these listings are paid advertisements. We understand that many non-traditional music venues offer live music like coffee shops, breweries, art galleries, community events and more.

This list may not have every event listed. To have a venue included in the editorial compilation of this list, please send an email to info@qcnerve.com with the subject "Soundwave."


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Serving up toppings at Oh My Ganache. Photo courtesy of OMG

MAKE 'EM SAY OMG

Brittani Sheppard's Oh My Ganache is just the start of a larger vision

BY DEZANII LEWIS

When much of Charlotte shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic back in March 2020, Brittani Sheppard, a Bank of America teller at the time, went home. At several months pregnant and extremely high risk, she couldn't be face-to-face with anyone, not even her doctors.

While many people were able to return to work once restrictions were lifted, Sheppard was not one of them. In the time since she left work, she had given birth to a beautiful baby boy and discovered a health issue that impacted his breathing.

This limited Sheppard's ability to go back to work. She began contemplating other options.

Like so many others who sheltered in place during the first year or two of the pandemic, Sheppard had taken up baking during her time at home. Her interest in the hobby began out of necessity when she tried to replicate a cake for her husband's birthday after a professional baker quoted her $275 to make it.

Sheppard said she couldn't understand the cost at first, but later understood once she tried it herself.

"The math was not mathing to me," she said. "I was like, 'How did we get here?' And then I started decorating cakes and I was like, 'Actually, she should have charged me more.' So with that, it just really made me push forward to really create experiences throughout this entire process."

After being out of work for more than a year, she continued the hobby, transforming it into a business model called Oh My Ganache, adding a spin to the OMG reaction she hopes her desserts inspire using the chocolatey emulsion that's so prevalent in her treats.

As a dessert bar focusing on cheesecake and smaller desserts, Oh My Ganache started out small, doing pop-ups at Conn's HomePlus on JW Clay Blvd before it closed, and Taste of Charlotte, where the line was so long in their first year that the fire marshal had to shut them down in the interest of moving the crowds along.

On June 14, Sheppard celebrated the grand opening of Oh My Ganache, The Cheesecake Bar, her brick-and-mortar space in Camp North End, where customers can build their own customized dessert creations and enjoy specialty crafted drinks known as O.M.G. Sippers.

Oh My Ganache cheesecakes can be ordered whole or by the slice, with customers selecting from three base options – vanilla cheesecake, peach cobbler bread pudding and their signature sweet potato pie cheesecake – and a multitude of topping options including its most popular selection, the bourbon pecan sauce.

"Opening our first permanent home at Camp North End marks a beautiful new chapter for Oh My Ganache," Sheppard stated in a release announcing the opening. "This space will allow us to not just serve desserts, but to create a community gathering spot where sweet moments become lasting memories.

"The Camp North End team has embraced our vision from day one, understanding that what we're building goes beyond a bakery," she continued, "it's a continuation of family tradition reimagined for today's Charlotte."

Everything starts with the base

While it manifested as a pandemic hobby, Sheppard's true love for baking began with her grandfather, Leon Trigg. He had a sweet potato pie recipe that Sheppard said he refused to share with anyone, claiming he intended on "taking it to the grave."

He changed his mind one day, however, and



Sheppard and her team celebrate the new space. Photo courtesy of OMG



Many toppings are available at The Cheesecake Bar. Photo courtesy of OMG

shared the recipe with Sheppard. The first time she tried baking the pie, it didn't come out the way she was familiar with even though her grandfather had been there supervising the entire time.

When Sheppard pointed that out, Trigg told her there was a step she had forgotten: she hadn't prayed first.

That's where Oh My Ganache's slogan, "Pies with a Prayer," started. Now, each dessert that the team bakes gets prayed over and Sheppard insists that's what makes each one so good.

Another thing that makes her desserts unique is the concept itself.

Each dessert is built upon "base" in the flavor of a traditional cheesecake, sweet potato pie cheesecake, or a peach cobbler bread pudding. Customers then choose from a range of toppings including marshmallow fluff, red velvet cake crumbles, fruit toppings and the best-selling bourbon pecan sauce.

Of course, Sheppard's favorite ganache is on the list.

While some dessert bars may offer more base flavors, Sheppard said she went a different route in the interest of efficiency and quality. In short, she knows what she's good at.

"Mainly because I was working as more of a hobby and trying to control what I was capable of doing – the output, making sure I didn't have waste and all that good stuff," she said. "So for me, it was just becoming a little bit more strategic."

Sheppard said this model also allows customers to have a more fun and interactive experience because there's nothing like watching the smile on a customer's face when they're getting all of their toppings put onto their dessert bar.

"It doesn't get old," she said.

One thing she wants to make clear: Mistakes can and do still happen.

When she first opened the brick-and-mortar, she threw an entire pot away because she had burnt so much caramel in the pot. Rather than try to salvage the pot, she tossed it, insisting it's part of the process.

"I like starting over," she said. "I get a kick out of that end result."

A larger vision

For Sheppard, opening the storefront this summer served a two-fold objective. It helps her obtain a salary, for one, but will also help spur Sheppard's ultimate goal of opening a nonprofit to serve young people in need in the Charlotte area.

"I know that my purpose in life is to start a nonprofit organization getting emancipated and fostered-out youth off the streets and giving them a new opportunity," she said.

"But something that's always been in my heart is I don't want to take any salary or payment or anything like that out of the nonprofit. But because it is such a large vision, I know it's going to require a lot of my time. So I've been praying for years how, like, 'Lord, how do you want me to execute this? What is your plan here?'"

Sheppard said once she realized she could bake and decorate cakes, her vision became clear.

"What God showed me is that cheesecake is basically going to be what solidifies the funds coming into my household," she said.

The shop will also offer an opportunity for Sheppard to provide training behind the scenes to young people interested in understanding how to run and operate a business. She says she wants to teach the youth how to avoid the pitfalls she encountered when trying to open Oh My Ganache.

Sheppard said that the vision she currently has for her nonprofit will require a village to get up and running. Thankfully, she already has the makings of one.

Sheppard's best friend, who goes by "T," drove from West Virginia to join the team. Her father drove from Woodbridge, Virginia, and several of her in-laws drove up from Jacksonville, Florida.

Her mother, Renee, a business owner in her own right, wouldn't take Sheppard's idea for Oh My Ganache seriously until Sheppard provided a business plan, so she helped her create it and has stayed on part-time to help with back-of-house operations.

Ultimately, Sheppard said she wants to build on the base she already has, just like her customers building on a base of sweet potato cheesecake.

"My purpose was not in the workforce," she said. "We are here now. We are basically keeping record of everything. Even now, those that work for us, we tell them we're an open book. Whatever you want to know about this company, let us know. We're happy to help because there's enough for everybody."

Then there's the existing village that Sheppard has joined in the Keswick area of Camp North End.

In addition to Eggroll Company, which is relocating to the Keswick district this summer, the area is already home to Korean barbecue-fusion food stall Blasian Asian Way, Latin American food stall La Caseta, plant-based food stall Soul Miner's Garden, local skateboarding staple Parts & Service (formerly Armada Skate Shop), fast-casual Middle Eastern restaurant Halal Street Food, boutique cocktail and small bites lounge Room Service, dairy-free ice cream purveyor Seemingly Overzealous, streetwear brand and boutique Current Nostalgia, Rent Eboards Charlotte; Windy O'Connor Art + Home, Hardy Boys Records & Comics, and more.

"Oh My Ganache represents exactly the kind of homegrown talent that makes Camp North End a special destination," said Damon Hemmerdinger, co-president of Camp North End developer ATCO, in the June release announcing the opening. "Brittani has created something extraordinary in honoring her family's culinary heritage while boldly innovating. Her sweets have a devoted following, and we're thrilled to have this unique concept join our burgeoning food scene in the Keswick District."

No matter how her vision comes to fruition, Sheppard said she always wants to ensure she creates a welcoming environment for people.

"They walk in there, they can leave smiling and it can be the sweets if it needs to be," she said. "But even if it's just reading something on the wall or, you know, the level of customer service they get because somebody was just genuinely nice to them – It was important to me to create a space where people felt good."

Located at 270 Camp Road, Suite 103, Oh My Ganache is open Tuesday through Thursday from noon to 8 p.m. and Friday-Saturday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

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HOROSCOPE

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AUG. 6 - AUG. 12

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Relationships continue to thrive, but watch for any telltale signs of potential problems. Take the necessary action now to set things straight before they become troublesome later.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) Your powers of persuasion backed up, of course, by your considerable expertise help you establish your case even to the most dubious decision-makers in your workplace.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) You might still be a bit reluctant to face up to some less-than-pleasant realities. But the sooner you accept the facts, the sooner you can set about making some needed changes.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Expect to make adjustments, even where things seem locked up and ready to go. But cheer up! At least one change could lead to something you've been hoping for.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) The success of a recent project should do a lot to boost your self-confidence. You might want to start now to check out ways to make a long-deferred bigger and bolder move.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) Ease up on the pressure you might be putting on the new person in your life. It takes time for a budding relationship to blossom. Show more patience and understanding.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) You have lots of inner strength in your reserve. Use some of it to resist intimidation from those who might try to impose on your good nature for their own reasons.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) The good news is that your on-the-job status is improving. One cautionary note, however, involves a personal situation that you might have been ignoring for too long.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Congratulations! Once again, your sharp Sagittarian "horse sense" helps you work through a complicated situation that would leave most people confused.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Plan on indulging yourself in some well-earned good times through much of the week. Then be prepared to face some thought-provoking issues by next week.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Positive factors continue to dominate following a recent change in both your professional and personal lives. Expect to make contact with someone from your past.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Workplace stability allows you to continue making progress on your projects. But don't ignore your personal life. Spend more quality time with your loved ones.

BORN THIS WEEK: You have a gift for making people feel special. Maybe because you know how unique you are and what you can offer others.

AUG. 13. - AUG. 19

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) A more harmonious aspect favors all relationships. Family ties with mates and children are strengthened. LIBRA is Cupid's choice to win the amorous Arian's heart.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) The bold Bull is ready to take on fresh challenges. Expect some opposition as you plough up new ground, but supporters will outnumber detractors.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) An upcoming job change could mean uprooting your family to a far-distant location. Weigh all considerations carefully before making a decision one way or the other.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) A long-standing problem is resolved by a mutually agreed upon compromise. You can now focus on getting the facts you'll need for a decision that you'll soon be asked to make.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) The Big Cat needs to be wary of what appears to be a golden investment opportunity. This "sure thing" could turn out to be nothing more than a sack of kitty litter.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) You give of yourself generously to help others, but right now, you must allow people to help you. Confide your problems to family and trusted friends.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Relationships benefit from a strong harmonious aspect. Things also go more smoothly at work. Someone you thought you'd never see again asks for a reconciliation.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) A minor distraction interferes with travel plans, but the delay is temporary. Meanwhile, expect to play peacemaker once again for feuding family members.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Keep positive momentum going on the home front. Arrange your schedule to spend more time with your family. You'll soon have news about a certain job change.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Control your possessive tendency that sometimes goads you into an unnecessary display of jealousy. You could be creating problems where none currently exist.

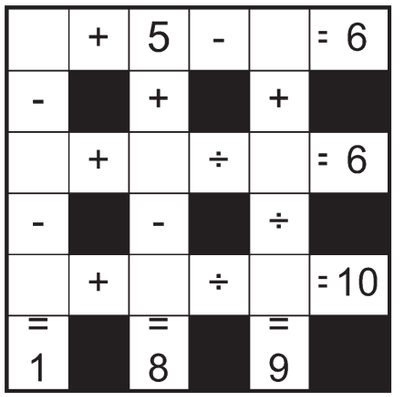
AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) A new project holds some challenges that you hadn't expected. But don't be discouraged; you'll find that you're more prepared to deal with them than you realized.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Yours is the sign of the celestial chemist, so don't be surprised if you experience a pleasant "chemistry" betwixt yourself and a new LEO in your life.

BORN THIS WEEK: You enjoy being fussed over, as befits your "royal" Leonine nature. You also have a strong loyalty to family and friends.

GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.



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Even Exchange

by Donna Pettman

Each numbered row contains two clues and two 6-letter answers. The two answers differ from each other by only one letter, which has already been inserted. For example, if you exchange the A from MASTER for an I, you get MISTER. Do not change the order of the letters.

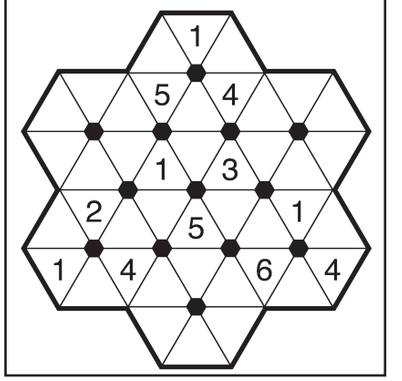
1. Team member	__ L __ __ __ __	Heavenly request	__ R __ __ __ __
2. Groucho's brother	__ __ __ __ O	Angelic instruments	__ __ __ __ S
3. Circular	R __ __ __ __	Located	F __ __ __ __
4. Talk turkey	G __ __ __ __ __	Sway unsteadily	W __ __ __ __ __
5. Canonized one	__ A __ __ __	Allotted period	__ T __ __ __
6. Take aim	__ O __ __ __	Emulate Picasso	__ A __ __ __
7. Put money into	__ __ __ __ S __	Turn upside down	__ __ __ __ R __
8. Kitchen furniture	T __ __ __ __	Aesop's story	F __ __ __ __
9. Clamor	__ __ I __ __	From Oslo	__ __ R __ __
10. Napoleon's country	__ R __ __ __ __	Prospective spouse	__ I __ __ __ __

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SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, **A** is used for the three L's, **X** for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each week the code letters are different.

Q GDWDKHRZD NVP RU NVP HDADAKDH ZSD FVCDH VE THRGD RIJ FHQJD, RIJ Q GSRWWDITD NVP ZV GSVVUD EHDDJVA VBDH EDRH.

— MRIDWWD AVIRD

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: **X** equals **Y**

MQKM XCTUO OTX VCZYD MC PJYDD JYKVVX DNKJMVX, DC H MCVP QHN "XCT'ZY AYYU K ZYJX UKMMX ACX!"

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TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. U.S. STATES: Which is the only state named after a president?
2. MYTHOLOGY: Which goddess is queen of the Roman gods?
3. LITERATURE: Who wrote the poem "Paradise Lost"?
4. HISTORY: Which monarch was known as the Sun King?
5. MOVIES: How many movies did Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers make together?
6. GEOGRAPHY: The country of Malta is on which continent?
7. CHEMISTRY: What is a substance that speeds up a chemical reaction?
8. FOOD & DRINK: What is tzatziki?
9. TELEVISION: What is the name of the family in the sitcom "Arrested Development"?
10. ANATOMY: What part of the brain converts short-term memory into long-term memory?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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5							9	
1	3					6		
9	8	6	3	5				2
			6	3	2			
	6				9		5	
		9				2		3
3	4	5						7
8	9		2	4	5			
	2		9	7	3	5	4	8

PLACE A NUMBER IN THE EMPTY BOXES IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH ROW ACROSS, EACH COLUMN DOWN AND EACH SMALL 9-BOX SQUARE CONTAINS ALL OF THE NUMBERS ONE TO NINE.

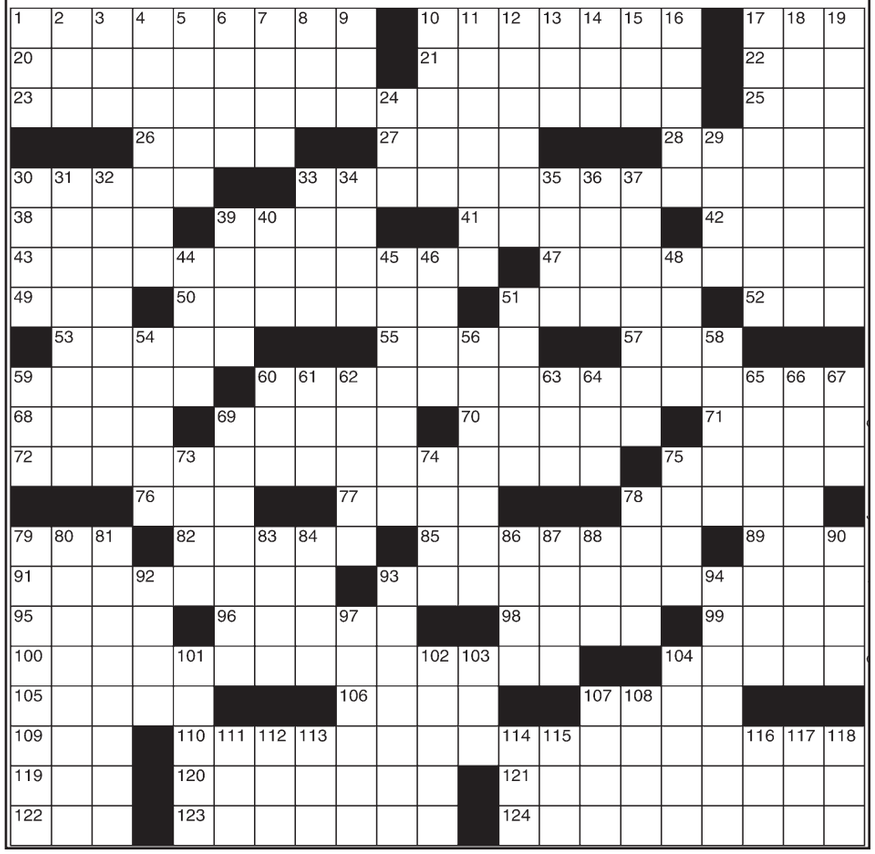
Carolina Conference on Queer Youth
Collaborate. Educate. Advocate.
Sponsored by: BANK OF AMERICA
Full-day, professional development conference dedicated to advancing the well-being and rights of LGBTQ+ youth for educators & youth-serving staff in the Charlotte region.
Friday, October 17th
8:00 AM-4:00 PM
Charlotte, NC 28202 *location disclosed upon registration*
Questions? Email us at haeley@timeoutyouth.org.
TICKETS ON SALE NOW!
Scan to register!
Presented by: time out youth, Carolinas Care Partnership, Charlotte Trans Health, GEN, Welcoming Schools, PFLAG Charlotte

CROSSWORD
COMMON FEATURES

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ACROSS
1 Devices for basement water removal
10 Moves joltingly up and down
17 Possesses
20 Repetition of a process
21 Faze
22 #1 hit for the Jackson 5
23 Clickers for couch potatoes
25 Letter before omega
26 Bygone Brit
27 Bklyn., e.g.
28 Neck backs
30 Fire remains
33 Food zappers
38 Luge, for one
39 "— your best behavior"
41 Starving
42 Really liking
43 Tops worn at proms
47 Rudolph, e.g.
49 "— changed man!"
50 Headlining hip-hopper
51 Lilylike garden staple
52 — Moines, Iowa
53 De Mille of dance
55 Irene of "Fame"
57 Figure skater Midori —
59 Pointing symbol
60 Xbox or Switch accessory
68 Spiteful
69 Freak out in fear
70 Italian actress Sophia
71 Piece for two
72 Events to rouse candidate supporters
75 Start a volley
76 Op. — (kin of "ibid.")
77 Dwarf planet beyond Pluto
78 — cavae (big blood vessels)
79 City of the White Sox, for short
82 Turnpike exit structures
85 More savage
89 Bro's sib
91 Sweetums
93 Some dueling swords
95 Kett of the comics
96 "Am not!" rejoinder
98 Actress Chaplin
99 Beer grain
100 Floor numbers appear on them
104 Monetary penalties
105 "R.U.R." playwright Capek
106 Like a res. of the U.S.
107 On the job
109 Every once — while
110 Theme of this puzzle
119 And more, in brief
120 Small hardware item split lengthwise
121 Drink with tapioca pearls
122 Squealer
123 Toppers for certain auto engine parts
124 Wandering pooches

DOWN
1 "Park it!"
2 Off-roading truck, in brief
3 Gibson of "Mad Max"
4 Come before
5 Puts asphalt over
6 Elec., water or gas
7 Fine rain
8 Luau chow
9 Lead-in to cone
10 Court case hearer
11 Very taxing
12 Like lawns needing to be cut
13 Lead-in to con
14 Passé PC screen type
15 Lead-in night
16 Emmy-winning journalist Frank
17 Occurred
18 No-show
19 Barber's tool
24 Seth Meyers' network
29 Very eager
30 — Spumante
31 Potential target of urban renewal
32 Certain six-pointed polygon
33 — scale of hardness
34 Still having a shot to win
35 Hendrix hairdo
36 Victory signs
37 Book version
39 Big snakes
40 Psychic "gift"
44 Sketched
45 Indy vehicle
46 — II (Gillette razor brand)
48 Pt. of NBA or NCAA
51 Vietnamese capital
54 Like sexist jokes
56 Arrives like fog or the tide
58 Of time past
59 "Better Call Saul" channel
60 Practical joke
61 "Raggedy" doll
62 Sticks in the mud
63 Luigi's three
64 Notes after dos
65 Like Russia, continent-wise
66 Morning bugle call
67 Enhaloed Fr. woman
69 Sound of falling rain
73 Ethereal
74 Animation
75 Feudal peasant
78 "Luka" singer Suzanne
79 More impudent
80 Nickname for Georgia's capital
81 Affect one another
83 Muralist Joan
84 Look intently
86 "Green" sci.
87 Jamaica's Ocho —
88 Anderson Cooper's network
90 Retired JFK jets
92 Roof edge
93 Gets lathery
94 Left out
97 Madrid's land, in Italian
101 In spite of the fact that, for short
102 Colorful salamanders
103 "— tu" (Verdi aria)
104 In a suitable manner
107 Truncated form of a wd.
108 Huge horn
111 "Bali —"
112 Unwell
113 Org. for the Eagles, but not the Ravens
114 0.5 fl. oz.
115 Crude house
116 Plains tribe
117 Like nos. below zero
118 Carrier to Stockholm



AERIN IT OUT

LOVE ON THE RAINBOW SPECTRUM

Visiting Charlotte's longest-running LGBTQ+ sports bar

BY AERIN SPRUILL

Disclaimer: As someone shaped by the LGBTQ+ community, I speak from within—not to offend, but to reflect with care.

Every year, after the rush of Pride Month and the resonance of Juneteenth, I forget about the lull of July — the quiet stretch where the glitter has settled, the cookouts have ended and the patriotic fireworks conjure more eye rolls than collective unity.

Charlotte Pride is still weeks away, and somehow the only thing filling my social meter is watch parties with no soul and even less substance.

As someone who breaks out in hives at the word "itinerary," the sudden ache — for culture, for connection, for something that feels like us — always catches me off guard.

And in today's world, where joy is flattened by unhinged politics, buried under push notifications and distorted by the surreal horror of watching genocide and global collapse unfold in real time, that ache hit harder than ever this year.

Normally, I shut down when everything feels too big, too loud, too unbelievable; when the rabbit hole gets too deep and I want to ghost the group chat. But I'd already sent up the bat signal to my favorite straight-for-the-sequel bestie and made plans with liquid courage.

Today, we were going to sashay the dread away for something rooted, something human — somewhere between cheap well drinks and the end of the rainbow.

And nothing says rooted and tooted like the Queen City's first gay sports bar, holding it down since 2007. Serving touchdowns, trick shots and thirst traps for over two decades, make some noise for a local legend: Sidelines Sports Bar & Billiards.

On the way there, I texted my girlfriend with giddy disbelief: "'80s jams in my Lyft rn and I'm so happy bahaha perfect for pregaming a gay bar!"

Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" was already pumping through the speakers, giving me a pre-entry serotonin boost. The night hadn't even started and somehow it already felt like a win.

"One night, I dropped so many people off here. I come here all the time — I love it," my driver said as we pulled into an unfamiliar shopping center in the Collingwood area, just a hop, skip and jump from Beef 'N Bottle, Charlotte's oldest steakhouse, on South Boulevard at Woodlawn Road.

"It's next to Bar Argon?! I had no idea!" I replied, clocking both my embarrassment that I hadn't been here once in my 13 years living in Charlotte and the instant affection I felt realizing this unassuming little plaza was home to two of the city's coveted gay bars, owned by the same duo.

Somehow (read: QC queer politics and the classic lesbian/gay divide), I'd completely missed the gayest nook in Charlotte and now I never wanted to leave.

On the patio, a group of juicy regulars turned, seemingly aware that a new face had entered the chat. Their glance wasn't unkind, but it carried the weight of a silent group text: Everyone is welcome here…but be sweet or be gone.

Inside, the first things I noticed were the mirrors surrounding the bar, giving the illusion of infinite depth.

"It's larger than I thought," I mused, scanning the space while trying to gather my drink order — buying time before fully exposing myself as a first-timer. I looked left, then paused, suddenly unsure if I was moving toward another room or into a wall of pure illusion.

My brain immediately conjured doomscroll-core videos of tiny humans confidently charging through mirror mazes only to collide face-first with their reflections. That would've been me — disoriented, delusional and absolutely causing a scene.

I steadied my "confident" gait. I was already being checked for spatial awareness and social cues at the door.

I grabbed a Twisted Tea and took it all in while I waited for my girlfriend to arrive. Unlike its high-vibe sister next door — Argon, home to the city's largest video dance bar, pulsing lights and wall-to-wall chaos — Sidelines keeps it simple.

To re-borrow a delightfully overused and already dated social media phrase, it was giving: very divey, very sportsy, very demure.

Aside from the rainbow flags and streamers overhead, the steady rotation of retro pop over the speakers and the occasional holy sighting of a drool-worthy leather daddy buss down, Sidelines is a sports bar through and through.

The décor leans classic: sports jerseys, wood paneling, rotating drink specials on mounted video screens, branded beer signage, console games and a dozen TVs all tuned to the given game of the moment.

At the center of it all, the turf-green pool tables provide the anchor to a steady flow of casual competition drinks balanced precariously on the edge.

Three Twisted Teas, a few Coors Lights, and a "Tete shot" later, I realized we'd been gabbing for three and a half hours. Time had slipped away and not a single sports game had been watched.

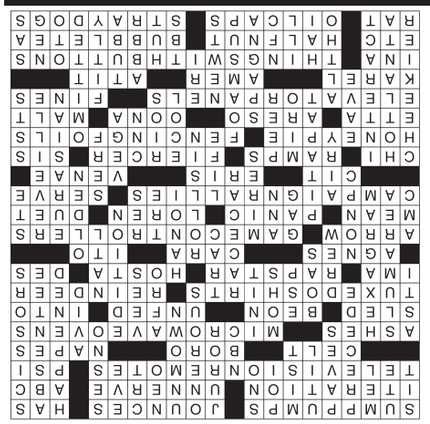
It may be called Sidelines, but the main character energy of "Daddy" had us in a chokehold; not the kind that makes you tap out but the kind that makes you want to sit on his lap, order another round you don't need, and text your boyfriend, "Don't wait up."

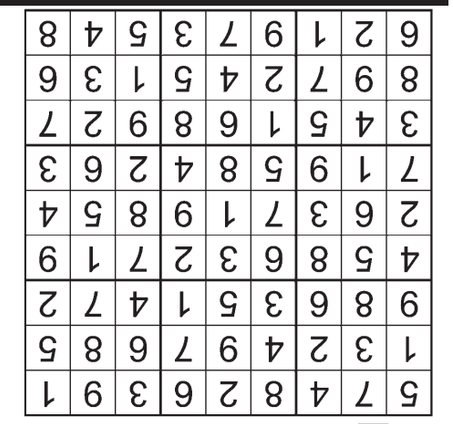
And the ultimate gag? "Daddy" gives back. He supports local LGBTQ+ orgs, shows up for the community, and knows how to treat his kids — on and off the field.

Sidelines Sports Bar & Billiards is located at 4544 South Blvd. Check them out on Instagram at @sidelinessportsbar.clt.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS





Even Exchange answers

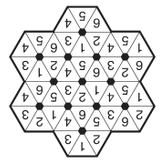
1. Player, Prayer
2. Harpo, Harps
3. Round, Found
4. Gobble, Wobble
5. Saint, Stint
6. Point, Paint
7. Invest, Invent
8. Table, Fable
9. Noise, Norse
10. France, Fiance

CryptoQuip answer

That young guy loves to dress really smartly, so I told him "You've been a very natty boy!"

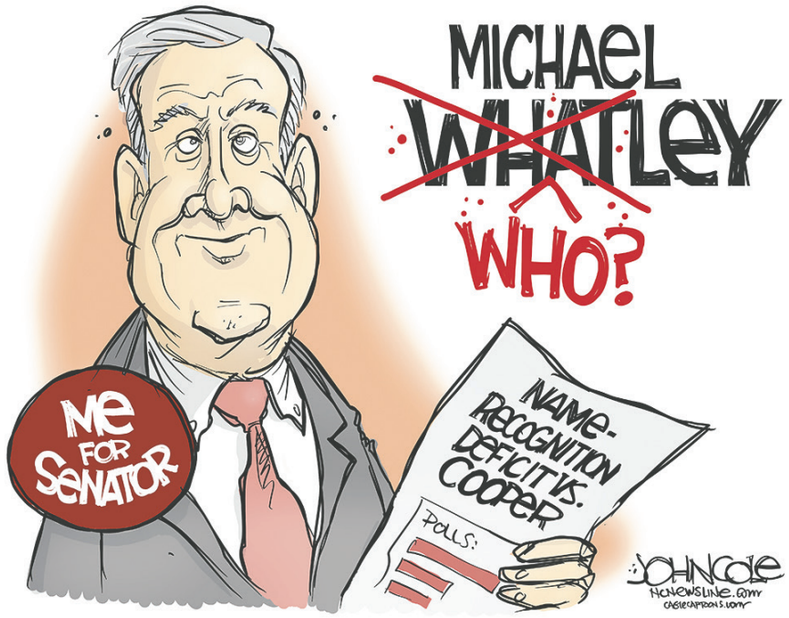
CryptoQuote answer

I celebrate you as you remember the power of grace and pride, and I challenge you to choose freedom over fear. — Janelle Monae



Trivia Answers

1. Washington.
2. Juno.
3. John Milton.
4. Louis XIV of France.
5. 10.
6. Europe.
7. Catalyst.
8. A cold condiment of yogurt, cucumbers, garlic and seasonings.
9. The Blutbs.
10. The hippocampus.



"Michael Who?" by John Cole. Originally published by NC Newsline.

SAVAGE LOVE QUICKIES

Separating work and play

BY DAN SAVAGE

Advice for a gay 28-year-old university professor who wants to cruise the apps in New York City while somehow avoiding his students?

"There's no easy solution to online dating in places where you might encounter students," said a sexually active gay university prof who lives and fucks (and wishes to remain anonymous) in a big city. "I recommend only posting things you won't be embarrassed about other adults seeing — don't show your face in dick pics or post pics inside your apartment that could be compared to other non-xxx pics you're sharing on social media — and be choosy about where you cruise. I recommend using Sniffies, which is more anonymous than Grindr or Scruff. And if you encounter a student on an app, either block them right away or have a brief exchange about privacy and respect, and then block them."

P.S. Running into students can't be avoided — running them through is a choice.

How do I stop thinking about my toxic ex? Fucking other people hasn't helped.

Let's try a more optimistic framing: Fucking other people hasn't helped *yet*. Think of your ass as half full, not half empty.

Reading anything interesting to distract yourself from the state of the world?

Just read and loved *It's Not the End of the World* by Jonathan Parks-Ramage; currently reading and loving *The Payback* by Kashana Cauley, and preparing to re-read and re-love *All Things Are Too Small: Essays in Praise of Excess* by Becca Rothfeld.

What's the best way to end a situationship?

Ask yourself how you would want a situationship to end, and then ask yourself if you're an outlier — if you can honestly say you would prefer to be ghosted, you're definitely an outlier — and then, if you're not an outlier, treat your situationship the way you would want your situationship to treat you.

I developed a blackmailing kink when I was a teenager. I found someone online and gave "her" my name and compromising photos. She would threaten to make them public if I didn't do what she told me, which was mostly send more blackmail material: JO vids in which I showed my face and my ID (driver's license, student ID). I was 18 then (no laws were broken) and I'm almost 30 now. I went silent on them and stopped hearing from them a decade ago. But I worry the videos (easily more than 100) are still out there. What do I do?

Grow a mustache, change your name, get a face tattoo — what can you do?

P.S. Not everyone who pretends to be a monster on the internet is actually a monster. For all you know, you got lucky and found someone to blackmail you (or pretend to blackmail you) who was a fairly decent person, making idle threats to give you pleasure. Seeing as they didn't follow through on the threat to make your videos public when you went silent on them, my money is on "fairly decent person."

P.P.S. Hard drives crash, people drop dead, democracies collapse — a lot can happen in a dozen years — and even if the person who was blackmailing you (at your request) was a malicious asshole who had it in them to destroy your life a dozen years later, it's entirely possible those videos no longer exist and/or that person no longer exists.

Everyone I've ever been with has cheated on me and now I'm not sure what to do.

Adjust your expectations.

This extremely attractive woman married in her teens. She was a stay-at-home mom until her husband left her for a man 10 years ago, totally blindsiding her. This woman has only ever had sex with her ex-husband. She's never even performed oral sex on a man. This woman is sexually naïve and has barely dated since her divorce. As her friend —and as an older and much more experienced man— how can I best help her?

By resisting the urge to do/offer what you're currently thinking about doing/offering.

I'm a 35-year-old bi female and I recently opened my relationship with my husband. Unfortunately, I haven't had any luck finding other partners. Our sex life kinda sucks and my husband recently said getting me off is too much work, which really bugs me. I don't want to get a divorce but I also want to get laid. Any tips for navigating this situation?

Was it over when the Germans bombed Pearl Harbor? No! Stay on the apps! Go places! Meet people! The dick is out there!

Under an intersectional feminist framework, the reproductive rights of trans men are protected — trans men can terminate a pregnancy — while the reproductive rights of cis men are not. Why? A pregnant trans man is allowed to escape the poverty imposed by an unwanted child, but a cis man like me is not. How is this fair?

What we have here is a biological disparity that — short of forcing AFAB people to get abortions against their will (which is just as wrong as forcing AFAB people to give birth against their will) — you can't "gotcha" your way out of by playing rhetoric games. The risk of an unplanned pregnancy is a well-known one and AMAB people who don't wanna pay child support need to take the great Gabrielle Stanley Blair's advice and ejaculate responsibly.

P.S. You know what cis men can do that trans men can't? They can get vasectomies.

Top three kinky things for vanilla-but-curious people to try?

Mummification, sounding, branding.

P.P.S. Kidding, kidding. If two people are vanilla, finding new and creative ways to enjoy vanilla sex, e.g., mix up the where and when and possibly the how many, is the best way to spice things up. If one person is vanilla and the other is kinky partner, exploring the kinky partner's actual kinks — remembering to take baby steps — is a better idea than asking a sex-advice columnist to assign kinks.

P.S. Okay, okay: light bondage, blindfolds and buttplugs are good kinks for the vanilla-but-curious to try.

My husband of 15 years recently came out to me as nonbinary and said he wants to try dressing feminine. He told me he doesn't want surgery or hormones — he also told me to keep using he/him pronouns for now — but when prodded, didn't know the extent to which he'd want to present as feminine. We both know and love queer people, but I am straight. I can handle androgyny, but I am turned off by the idea of him in full drag and I do not want a wife. How can I handle my own fears while still being a supportive partner?

Your sexual orientation is just as valid as your partner's evolving gender identity. For now, avoid catastrophizing; while your husband might be telling you what you wanna hear — no hormones, no surgeries, no transition — it's also possible he's being straight with you and nonbinary is where he's going to land. If that should change, you can re-evaluate your options — and your marriage — at a later date.

P.S. If you want kids and don't have any already, you might wanna put that decision off for a bit.

How do I bring up the topic of ED with a new partner who's clearly having trouble with his [eggplant emoji]?

Initiate sex that doesn't require your new partner's [eggplant emoji] to get and stay hard — mutual masturbation, him going down on you, vibrators and sex toys — and then, after you've shown him that you can have good-to-great sex even if he can't get/stay hard, gently broach the subject of ED meds.

I'm a 60-year-old male. I've been on a few dates with a woman my own age. Haven't had sex or even discussed it. Her gorgeous, funny, smart and well-educated 21-year-old daughter recently told me she likes older men and is attracted to me. What do I do? I would love to have sex with the daughter, but I don't want to leave a messy trail. I've never been in this situation. I wouldn't have any relationship with the mom if this were to happen.

I don't see how this could possibly go wrong.

P.S. Does anyone know why they canceled *Why Women Kill*? I really miss that show.

I'm a cis woman in my early 30s. If I have a really good orgasm, I laugh hysterically afterwards. Is that something I should warn future partners about in advance?

This is a tricky one. If you tell someone you laugh hysterically after you have a really good orgasm and then you don't laugh hysterically, they're gonna think — they're gonna know — that they didn't give you a really good orgasm. Just as some women fake orgasms to avoid a meltdown, you might find yourself faking orgasms and laughing fits to spare the ego of an insecure male partner. So, I think you're better off explaining afterwards than warning in advance.

My wife is bi and we're going to have a threesome with another woman. Sign me up! I am also bisexual and would like to have a threesome with another man. She says that will never happen because it wouldn't turn her on to see me with another man. Is this a double standard?

Yes.

My wife came out as asexual a decade into our marriage. I'm being as loving and supportive as I can be but I truly miss blowjobs. We are monogamous and she wants us to stay that way. What now?

Your wife can show her support for your sexual orientation — just as you've shown support for hers — by releasing you from the monogamous commitment you made to her at a different time (blowjob time) and in a different context (blowjob context). If she won't do that, you'll have to pick between leaving or cheating.

P.P.S. You can love, support and leave someone.

P.P.S. Not all asexual people are averse to sexual activity — some genuinely enjoy sex because it makes their partners happy. But if your wife is a sex-averse asexual, she can't expect you to go without sex for the rest of your life because she didn't realize she was ace until after the wedding.

Got problems? Yes, you do! Email your question for the column to mailbox@savage.love; or record your question for the Savage Lovecast at savage.love/askdan; podcasts, columns and more at Savage.Love.


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