



Celebrities and Tributes

The Watson Writes Portfolio

(These are just a sampling of the dozens of articles written on this subject matter)

“Starving for Perfection” and revisiting Karen Carpenter forty years later

Could the non-binary movement have saved her life?

“Long ago, and so far away, I fell in love with you...”

*from **Superstar**, made famous by Karen Carpenter.*

Tragedies take many forms. There are tragic stories of individuals who deserved a wonderful existence, who were taken obscenely early in lives full of promise. Then there are tragedies where someone with a great contribution to the world is cut down in their prime and we are deprived of a unique talent.

The tragedy of Karen Carpenter embodied both. She was “the voice” of her time, and in many ways has become established as one of the rare classic voices that will extend to all times. Her warm deep melodic tones conveyed beautiful melancholic rainy days and Mondays to top of the world euphoria, to taking us back to connect with yesterday once more. We won’t even talk about how it brought us the warmth of a holiday fire and a Merry Christmas, darling.

Her voice was so perfect that many thought it was not real, that it had been manufactured by her brother Richard's studio magic. Fil Henley of Wings of Pegasus recently did [an analysis](#) of Karen's voice from her live singing versus her studio vocals. He declared, "Karen's waveforms are INSANE. When it comes to vocal accuracy and pitch... due to Karen's accuracy, pitchwise and ability to hold a note on pitch, she is dead on. These were not autotune waveforms, in fact this was before autotune was invented... but these are the most dead on that I have seen in my life."

Karen has been dead for exactly forty years from the effects of anorexia nervosa, but her loss still inspires intrigue around the demons that took her and silenced her for good. Speculation has fueled articles and movies ranging from a video version of her life told in Barbie dolls, to a Cynthia Gibb led Movie of the Week. In each re-examination, proverbially, "layers of the onion" get pulled back.

None have pulled as deeply as a new documentary called ***Karen Carpenter, Starving for Perfection***, which premiered this last week at the Santa Barbara Film Festival. The documentary was produced by author Randy L. Schultz and based on his bestselling book ***Little Girl Blue***.

Starving takes filmgoers deep into Karen's story in ways her life has not been discussed before. It brings fresh new perspectives and insights about her personal struggle told in her own voice through never-before released recordings and through the voices of those who knew her including Carol Burnett, Olivia Newton-John, Suzanne Somers. There are also interviews with Cynthia Gibb who portrayed her, and with Belinda Carlisle, Kristin Chenoweth, and Carnie Wilson whose own careers were inspired by Karen's music.

The convergence of Randy Schultz and Cynthia Gibb on the project represents a full circle moment in the documentary's creation. The biopic in which Cynthia starred as "Karen Carpenter" was 13-year old Randy's introduction to the Carpenters. He became obsessed with their records and music from that moment on. "I wanted to know everything because I had been born right in the middle of the Carpenters heyday and missed a lot of it first-hand," he told me when he sat down for an LA Blade exclusive viewing of the film, and an interview on my [Rated LGBT Radio podcast](#).

Cynthia's insights in ***Starving*** were significant. She bore witness to Karen's life more than just as an actress who had played her. Every dress she wore in the TV movie had been Karen's. They filmed in the actual house where Karen died and both Richard and Karen's parents were present during filming. The extras playing the EMTs in the movie were the actual first-responders who had been to the house on the day that Karen died.

Cynthia told of seeing the evidence of Karen's anorexia first-hand. As she went through Karen's closet, she saw the size differential go from garments too big, to Karen's most recent, which were very tiny. Both Cynthia and Mitchell Anderson, who played Richard in the film, described the family dynamic to Randy. Harold and Agnes, Karen's parents, were a constant presence on the set with Richard giving daily script revisions protecting the family's image. Agnes laid the groundwork with the first day of production when she answered the door and spurt out at the film's director,

"I did NOT kill my daughter."

Starving does not let Agnes off as easy as the TV movie rendition did. While it does not accuse Agnes of murder, it paints a complex picture of a mother who promoted and completely worshipped her son. She was a mother, at the same time, who tended to disregard and undervalue her daughter and seemed

driven to make Karen fit into the appropriate Richard-supporting role. No one in the family, Agnes, Richard or even Karen herself, seemed to find joy in Karen's success in the spotlight that put Richard in a supporting role.

The film portrays Karen as having two driving desires—to earn the love of her mother, and to carve out some accomplishment and actualization on her own. She never seemed to attain either, and it was the striving for perfection to get them that may have killed her.

The family seems to have been driven by an inherited obsessive compulsive disorder complex. Agnes certainly had it, Richard exhibited it, and it may have exacerbated the weight obsession fueling Karen's anorexia. Randy told me, "Olivia Newton John talked to me in the book about it, not the documentary. She said that when she went to Karen's apartment that she noticed that all of the hangars were exactly a half inch apart, and everything was color coded as far as the clothing and the shoes. Everything was very OCD for Karen. She grew up with a mother who, the neighbor kids told me, would not only polish the locks, the gold brass locks on the windows, with a toothbrush, but then she would go next door and clean the windows of the house, the neighbor's house, that faced hers. So, I mean, this was, this was a woman who dealt in control in just about every possible way. Karen saw that from the time she was born and didn't know that it was unusual."

Karen also seemed to be challenged by the feminine gender expectations thrust upon her. She had been a sports loving "tom-boy." She was masculine in behavior, was a guy's guy drummer hanging out with the band. In the early days, she crossed the stage "like a mack truck." She literally got trained on how to present in a more feminine way. Randy stated, "I get asked this question quite often because I think nowadays people are tuned in: was she gay? ... I don't want to out anybody and didn't want anybody to out me when I wasn't ready so I never want to go there. What I feel comfortable talking about based upon my research with the friends of hers, that talked to me about some really intimate things, is that she was, I guess, she struggled with the expectations of femininity." He added, "There was this unmet expectation from Agnes, and maybe the reason she was a little disappointed in her daughter, that Karen was not the ideal 1950s, 1960s girly girl."

We have to wonder if the deeper understanding now, forty years later, about the non-binary, fluidity and being one's authentic self could have saved Karen Carpenter. We will never know. What we still know, and feel, is the shock of losing her. In the documentary, Olivia Newton John, in her last on-screen interview, showed that virtually no one experienced that shock more than she. She had been literally on her way to have lunch with Karen when she heard the news of Karen's death announced on her car radio.

Karen famously sang of asking "perfection of a quite imperfect world." Sadly, it may have been demanding perfection of herself and how others would perceive her that ended her own world.

She sang that all she knew of love was "how to live without it."

Therein lies the biggest tragedy of all. There was so much love for her, and still is, that she seemed unable to accept, from millions of hearts completely willing to love her just the way she was, as a "tom boy", as a full-figured human being and as a cherished talent. So, to Karen, we can only sing her song back to her... and hope she hears us.

"We love you in a place where there's no space or time

We love you for your life, you are a friend of mine

And when your life is over, remember when we were together

We were alone and you were singing this song..."

From [A Song for You](#)

We Don't Need Another Hero, There Will Only Ever Be One Tina Turner

Today, upon her passing, everyone around the world is declaring Tina Turner "an icon."

It doesn't fit. There are icons, an atmospheric leap, all of Heaven, and then, and only then, sitting above it all... is Tina Turner.

Simply, The Best.

For the non-conforming male personas amongst us, and for the female personas among us, she was our phoenix rising from the ashes of toxic masculinity, over coming it, and becoming the epitome of the queen, the warrior, the triumphant. She was the diva of rock, not just as in "Rock and Roll", which was true, but as in "rocking your world". When she borrowed Sir Elton's "I'm Still Standing", we knew she meant it.

In case you missed her story told many times, written about and immortalized on film, she was born Anna Mae Bullock. An up-and-coming musician named Ike Turner domineered her into his act and gave her the name "Tina Turner." In classic "star is born" form, Tina Turner overcame her mentor in talent and popularity, and he married her.

Her voice was not one of sweetness and ice cream sodas. She was the real deal. Right from the start, she sang from the edge. She was not likely to be mistaken for Doris Day or Petula Clark, no, Tina Turner had grit, strength and even a tone of rage.

While other "iconic" singers debuted in film as sweet innocents, Tina's launch was as the Acid Queen in Tommy. She played an erratic prostitute who advocated prophetic LSD in an effort to cure the title character.

With her humanness, her fight, and her willingness to be authentic, she spoke to, and for, many in the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

As we enter an era where identities are valued and under siege, Tina Turner was a pioneer. While she was a cisgender woman of color, and none of those descriptions were ever challenged, she famously stood to fight for something that was... her name. When, during their contentious divorce, and Ike sought to deprive her of the identity she had built for herself, she fought back and she fought back hard.

She gave up everything to keep what she treasured. She famously said, "Except my name. I'll give up all that other stuff, but only if I get to keep my name. I've worked too hard for it, your Honor."

For our transgender and drag brothers and sisters, hear her. She blazed a trail for the chosen identity, and who could deny that “Tina Turner” was not the real her?

The outpouring of love and respect from the world’s LGBTQ+ population is deserved. She has been a longtime supporter and adored queen diva of the gay and LGBTQ community forever. She pioneered when others wouldn’t, by performing at the opening ceremonies of the first ever Gay Games in San Francisco in 1982. It was a watershed moment in sports for LGBTQ athletes and allies. She has been imitated by drag queens for decades on platforms all across the world in the best “imitation is the highest form of flattery” way, beyond the point of homage and in some cases, to the point of worship.

She loved us back. Tina frequently expressed her gratitude and love for her gay fans in interviews and concerts. She did not capitalize on her own sexuality but acknowledged her bisexuality and her relationships with women. While being open about her sexuality, she did not consider it a defining factor of her identity or her music.

Only Tina Turner defined Tina Turner.

She meant something to all of us. Grief and wonder is pouring out from everyone from Diana Ross to NASA.

NASA, not an organization to normally recognize celebrities, but an absolute authority on things Heavenly, tweeted, “Simply the best. Music legend **Tina Turner** sparkled across the stage and into millions of hearts as the Queen of Rock 'n' Roll. Her legacy will forever live among the stars.”

Mick Jagger said, “She was inspiring, warm, funny and generous. She helped me so much when I was young and I will never forget her.”

“Rest in peace to one of my favorite artists of all time, the legendary queen of rock n’ roll Tina Turner,” stated Magic Johnson.

Speaking for many under and over the rainbow, George Takei stated, “She was our River Deep and our Mountain High, the Private Dancer in our hearts. She showed us that love really does have everything to do with it, and that we really did need another hero. And she was it.”

It was not just that Tina Turner was a hero. It was that she was a survivor, trailblazer and hero to so many. From women of color who needed to see their strength demonstrated, to people in abusive relationships who needed to see their possibilities illuminated, to beaten gay boys who needed to see the power in standing and fighting, she gave hope to them all.

She showed us all how to embody our authentic selves and capture our creativity, our innovation and our truth. She said, “Sometimes you have to let everything go - purge yourself. If you are unhappy with anything - whatever is bringing you down - get rid of it. Because you will find that when you are free, your true creativity, your true self comes out.”

There is a line from *We Don’t Need Another Hero*: “So what do we do with our lives? We leave only a mark. Will our story shine like a light? Or end in the dark? Give it all or nothing.”

She gave us her all, and the mark she left?

Her story does not just shine like a light, it seared every person, every walk of life, she touched. She lived as any true hero would and has gone out in a fierce blaze of glory.

David Archuleta May Have Lost the Masked Singer but He is Winning at Life

David Archuleta is easily the sweetest of crooners. His warm romantic sweet voice has charmed a breadth of audiences for over a decade, first as a top contender on American Idol, and most recently with his boyish face completely hidden on the Masked Singer. In both competitions, he beat out dozens of massively talented singers to land in the #2 slot.

When he came in second on Idol, he got lost within the sea of confetti heralding David Cook as the winner. On the Masked Singer, when he lost to Bishop Briggs, he was all anyone was talking about, including by the winner herself.

When he was revealed as The Macaw, usually comedic judge Ken Jeong was brought to tears. David Archuleta's voice was personal to Ken. His American Idol rendition of *Imagine* had gotten the Jeong family through tough times. Reminding the world that David's was the voice of an "angel" Ken told him, "You are a ray of light to me, my wife and to my kids— thank God for you!" In response, David shared his walk back from suicidal thoughts to coming out as queer. Then the rest of the audience, and winner Bishop Briggs, were also brought to tears. The Macaw may not have won the night, but David did.

David has always had his eye on love and compassion for all, even when he could not extend that courtesy to himself. His consideration came into play in his choices on how to present *Imagine* to those many years ago. He had to decide which of the three verses of the song to perform. He told me why he chose the third verse. "If I was only going to have one verse, and it was my last time being in front of an audience of that magnitude, I thought the song's message was a lot bigger in that verse, avoiding lyrics where people usually get stuck on the words. I didn't want them focusing on what the words were saying, I wanted them to see that the song talks about looking past differences, and just being one. Imagine a world of peace where there wasn't fighting, there weren't differences, there wasn't division. That's what I wanted to emphasize, and I felt the third verse did the best with that message, and was not going to turn people away, turn people's hearts off, hearing trigger words like 'Imagine there's no Heaven' it's easy if you try."

David is not about "no Heaven", he is about bringing it to everyone.

David may have come in second in the highest profile singing contests on the planet, but he refuses to come in second in his own life now. There, he is and will be, the hands-down winner. He makes that clear in his newest song release *Up*. Rising back into popular view from his period of darkness, the song declares that he is headed "Up, up, up up."

David talked to me on a recent episode of Rated LGBT Radio. We discussed the religious and mental health crisis from which he has emerged. He told me, "Religion gives you a very structured view of life and of purpose...why you are here, and where you are going to go, who God is, and what God expects of

you. Being raised and being told ‘what God thinks of homosexuality and gay people’ and that if you succumb to it, you are distancing yourself from Him. I tried so hard to do what I was told I needed to do and growing up a Mormon, I was told to call it ‘same sex attraction’ acknowledging that I had a ‘weakness’ or ‘challenge’ that I needed to overcome, and if I did not give into it, I would be OK.

When I realized that I was never going to ‘overcome this challenge of same sex attraction’ I looked at myself as not just inauthentic, but as a failure. Clearly, I thought if I was truly a righteous person, I would be able to change myself from this ‘wicked’ state. When I realized I couldn’t, I thought ‘I’m wicked’, and there was nothing I could do about that. It made me afraid of myself, and I did not want to be a ‘wicked’ person walking the earth. No matter how many times I tried, no matter how many times I tried dating a woman, I went to church and fasted, never looked at pornography, and despite that, I realized it was just my nature. It was not even that I was trying to have sex with anyone, I just felt a bond and attraction to other guys—falling love or having a crush on someone. It led me to wanting to terminate my life. That ideology came from the way I was raised, from my religion, my spirituality as I saw it at that time. “

During his time of struggle, he even hid himself musically – he put out several outstanding Christmas albums. He released an album called *Therapy Sessions*, which highlighted, albeit veiled, his thoughts and struggles trying to suppress his sexuality.

He finally ended up throwing himself to God in a final prayer of desperation.

He recounted the experience, “When I tuned into that Higher Connection, I heard God say, “David, you need to stop asking me this, because you’ve been asking me this for over half your life and you can see, it’s not changing. You need to understand, I do not intend it to change. This is what I meant for you. You are supposed to be this way. You are meant to be happy the way you are. You are meant to connect with the people I designed you to connect with. It is not an error despite what well meaning religious people say, and understand.”

David realized once and for all that he was not evil, that gay people were not evil. “There was an absolute clarity and assurance, absolute confidence, so loving support from a Higher Power greater than me, that showed me how to love greater. It taught me to love myself and allow myself to be loved. It was pure, it was healing.”

The revelation gave him the confidence to confront Church leaders, to see through their “suggestions” and stand alone as his true authentic queer self.

While cloaked in the Macaw, he could demonstrate to himself that the talent that he was, he still is. He walked the stage clearer and truer than ever, and at the unmasking, the world was seeing not just David Archuleta, but a David Archuleta it had not known before.

Now he is singing a new song, literally. The song is an anthem that can speak to every trans, LGBTQ+ kid or adult in the community.

More, it is a declaration of who David Archuleta is, and what we can expect from him.

*The only place I'm goin' is up
Only make room for love
'Cause my story's far from over
It's only begun*

*I'ma throw it all away
Every last piece of your hate
And though my story's far from over
I've already won
I'm goin' up, up, up, up, up, up, up*

Yes. Archuleta is back, winning, and this time, he is taking us with him.

Best of LGBTQ LA 2024 (2023)

Seventh annual special issue celebrates the community

Welcome to the seventh annual special issue of the Best of LGBTQ LA! The Los Angeles Blade continues its proud tradition to celebrate the best of our community. The year for LGBTQ people and families has been a flood, both in weather and in the news that ruled us. At home, we had to deal with physical floods, while cultural flooding came down on us as well from the death of Friend, Matthew Perry, to the local reality tsunami of Vanderpump Rules and “Scandoval.” Nationally, and in some local school board meetings, anti-LGBTQ forces got more aggressive and violent with LGBTQ families and our gender non-conforming population came under direct political and physical attacks. We saw dubious history being made with a former president being legally defined as a rapist, and subsequently being indicted on 91 criminal counts, all the while being the Republican’s frontrunner in this year’s election.

The Los Angeles LGBTQ scene continues to thrill. Enjoy these highlights of Los Angeles living that demonstrate the best LGBTQ people experienced in 2023.

Los Angeles Blade readers nominated finalists; the top five vote getters in each category were then added to the final ballot. Twenty thousand of Blade readers then voted and the winners are presented here. The Blade staff congratulates each of this year’s winners and finalists.

Local Heroes Presented by Ariadne Getty Foundation

Reverend Troy Perry

There were numerous fore-parents of the LGBTQ movement. Individuals who stepped up and created part of the foundation on which today’s LGBTQ citizenry benefit. Reverend Troy Perry was one of those

parents. Without him both the LGBTQ+ spiritual and pride communities would be without a significant legacy, if they existed at all.

Before 1968 there was virtually no Christian denomination of any kind that was not hostile, let alone tolerant or welcoming, to out LGBTQ parishioners. At that time, Troy Perry felt a calling after a dark suicide attempt. He says, "The Lord was dealing with me. My previous church taught that you couldn't be both Christian and gay. After a suicide attempt while I was arguing with God that he couldn't love me God spoke to me in a still small voice in the mind's ear, 'don't tell me what I can do. I love you, Troy, and I don't have any stepsons or stepdaughters. Reread my Word.' And reread God's word I did." Shortly after that revelation, a close friend was arrested.

Reverend Perry's answer was to start the Metropolitan Community Church movement which extended loving principles of Christianity (Yes, there are some) specifically to LGBTQ people hungry for a spiritual community. He started with 12 people in his living room. Today there are several hundred congregations in 37 countries. He performed the first public same sex wedding in the United States in 1968, and filed the first ever lawsuit seeking legal recognition for same-gender marriages in 1970, many decades before even LGBTQ Americans recognized the heterosexist discrimination, and the understanding that we had the ability, and responsibility, to fight back.

Perry was one of the masterminds behind the very first Pride parades in the world, and throughout his life has garnered the attention of Presidents. Jimmy Carter called him to Washington to discuss gay and lesbian civil rights, Bill Clinton sought him out about hate crimes and AIDS, and Barack Obama called him to come and celebrate the 40th anniversary of Stonewall.

In 2023, Perry and his husband celebrated the 55th anniversary of their church at the Founders Metropolitan Community Church Los Angeles where he reports they had "great music, great sharing and great times seeing long-time friends again."

Many voices around the world have paid tribute. Inglesia Casa de Luz thanked him "for having been the instrument that divinity inspired in your heart to begin this mission, this inclusive ministry where all people, without distinction, can have a sense of belonging to the family of God and of being in the place correct in a place of spiritual refuge where no one is condemned."

Stephen Schmidt was more to the point and said, "You have reshaped the world and made the Church a safe place for our people."

The Los Angeles Blade is proud to identify him as one of our two Heroes of 2023.

Jewel Tais Williams

Reverend Perry shares the fore-parent dais with Jewel Tais Williams. If Perry laid the foundational planks for LGBTQ spirituality, Tais Williams laid the foundation for POC, intersectionality and civil rights for healthcare for the most marginalized. Shortly after Perry launched into creating MCC Church in a space no other denominations wanted him, Tais Williams bravely stepped into an arena where no others in the space wanted her either: she became probably the first black lesbian to own a bar in Central (or any other part) Los Angeles.

She evolved the bar, Jewel's Catch One, into a safe haven for the queer black community. She was visible when she really was not "supposed to be." She told the LGBTQ History project, "If you were one of the browner people then, there were things that you couldn't do. They were jobs that you didn't even think about applying for. The darker-skinned, for instance, couldn't work out where the public would see them." Well. Screw that. She was and would be seen. More importantly, she would be felt.

She had intended for the club to be "a nice place where we could go and be comfortable." A fight between two gay lovers changed the bar's brand and reputation. In the early 70s, West Hollywood clubs wielded their own level of discrimination and would not allow people of color or women. Undeterred, Jewel's Catch One expanded as a dance club in 1975.

In the early 80s, the AIDS crisis hit Los Angeles. As the LGBTQ community realized that no one was coming to save us, AIDS Project LA took hold with its growing support from the Hollywood community. Tais Williams quickly realized that the total community was not getting their needs addressed and sought to rectify it by co-founding the Minority AIDS Project. APLA asked her to be on their board, and she only agreed if they would make their "face more friendly" so black community members would feel welcome to come get food and health services. In 1989, she also co-founded Rue's House with her partner Rue. Rue's House was the first housing facility for women with AIDS and their children in the United States.

2023 marked the 50th anniversary of Jewell's Catch One, and Tais Williams has been featured in several documentaries including Jewell's Catch One and Commitment to Life. She has lent her voice and wisdom to The Lavender Effect.

For those who follow after her, she advocates for "loving yourselves." She tells us "Look in the mirror every day, and say I love you just as you are. There's a universal plan for everybody's presence here on this planet. How did I happen to go to this place? Why did that idea come into mind? ... I just think that everything goes according to plan. The important part is you just being willing to carry out whatever you wish in the end."

The LA Blade's wish is to honor her as one of our two Heroes of 2023.

Game Changer Award

Gilead

The LA Blade is pleased to award pharmaceutical company Gilead with the 2023 Game Changer Award. This year, Gilead Sciences provided a total of \$3 million in grant funding to eight organizations to provide services to communities disproportionately impacted by HIV in rural areas in the United States. (While HIV is prevalent in both urban and rural communities in the United States, resources are heavily concentrated in urban centers, and lack of public health infrastructure and heightened stigma in rural communities create barriers of access to necessary care.) These grants are part of Gilead's ongoing Zeroing In™ program to help end the HIV epidemic by supporting organizations working to improve the overall health and wellness of communities most impacted by the HIV epidemic. Gilead selected the grantees due to their strategic, community-driven approaches toward dismantling the systemic barriers that prevent people in rural communities from accessing quality HIV testing and treatment. As Jane Stafford, Gilead's Executive Director, Public Affairs, states, "Gilead is proud to go where the need is greatest." From our perspective, that is the key to being a game changer.

Best Drag Performer

Sasha Colby

In 2023, Sasha Colby was crowned winner of RuPaul's Drag Race – Season 15. As an acclaimed drag performer, actress dancer, trans advocate and activist living in West Hollywood, LA Blade readers claimed her as their own, and their favorite. Colby started her transitional journey at age 17, became a drag daughter of the legendary Cassandra Colby, and won the Pageantry circuit's Miss Continental 2012.

Los Angelinos will have their chance to show her even more love in March when her tour lands at our own Palace Theater.

Editor's Choice: Rhea Litre

Best Drag Show

Showgirls at Micky's, West Hollywood

Hostess Morgan McMichaels seals the deal on the popular Showgirls at Micky's. Great food, friendly service and convenient parking were called out as factors making this the best, but the talent of McMichaels is the coup de grace in the eyes of LA Blade readers. "Morgan McMichaels is an amazing host that will take you into the wonderful world of Drag with magnificent characters," says Julie H. "Morgan McMichaels went out of her way to make me feel special," reports a birthday celebrant.

Editor's choice: Brunch with the Brunchettes at Hamburger Mary's

Favorite Influencer

George Takei

As we enter a vitally important election year, LA Blade readers have shown that they revere the guidance of one of the great LGBTQ voices, George Takei. It feels reductive to even remind people of his portrayal of Mr. Sulu in the original Star Trek. For queer people, he is so much more. He's an actor, social justice activist, social media mega-power, New York Times bestselling author, and subject of To Be Takei, a documentary on his life and career. Takei serves as chair of the council of governors of East West Players, the nation's foremost Asian Pacific American theater. He is also a member of the Human Rights Campaign, Chairman Emeritus of the Japanese American National Museum's Board of Trustees and a member of the US-Japan Bridging Foundation Board of Directors. In recognition of his contribution to the Japan-United States relationship, Takei was conferred with the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, by His Majesty, the Emperor of Japan. In 2023, Takei urged participation in our democracy, he wrote, "A Democrat was in the White House when my family was sent to the internment camps in 1941. It was an egregious violation of our human and civil rights. It would have been understandable if people like me said they'd never vote for a Democrat again, given what had been done to us. But being a liberal, being a progressive, means being able to look past my own grievances and concerns and think of the greater good. It means working from within the Democratic party to make it better... There is no leader who will make the decision you want her or him to make 100 percent of the time. Your vote is a tool of hope for a better world. Use it wisely, for it is precious. Use it for others, for they are in need of your support, too." Clearly, his LA Blade fans know how to vote. They voted him the best.

Editor's Choice: Gigi Gorgeous

Best Queer Artist

Guadalupe Rosales

Last year's runner up takes the top spot in 2023. Rosales's work has been featured by Vogue, i-D Magazine, The New Yorker, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, ArtNews, Artsy, and Artforum, Univision

and NPR. Rosales is a multidisciplinary artist and educator best known for her community generated archival projects, “Veteranas and Rucas” and “Map Pointz,” found on social media. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Dallas Museum of Art and Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City. LA Blade readers are anxious for her forthcoming book East of the River coming out this year.

Editor’s Choice: Farrell

Best LGBTQ Bar

Heart WeHo

Winning for the second year in a row, Heart WeHo is known as “where the night comes alive.” Key events in 2023 included Betsey Johnson and Miley Cyrus’s Pride Party. LA Blade readers called out its viewing parties and “phenomenal” music.

Editor’s Choice: The Abbey

Best Neighborhood Bar

Beaches

You will find Beaches in the heart of West Hollywood. Proud of its design and fashion, the hybrid restaurant and lounge is described as reflecting “nostalgia of 80’s Miami disco culture.” The two-story space offers two full bars and VIP seating and specializes in “California Cuban Cuisine.” LA Blade readers “love this bar!” Great music, good dancers and powerful drinks top some of the reasons why.

Editor’s Choice: Hi Tops

Best LGBTQ Party

Fuego at Heart WeHO

Fuego's Friday events have people talking, and LA readers voting! Featuring Latin music, hot Latin gogos, drink specials and lasting until 4AM, patrons partied til morning light.

Editor's Choice: Makeout Mondays at Rocco's

Best GoGo Dancer

Dante Martin

Regularly featured at Long Beach's Falcon North, Dante Martin gets pulses racing, and LA readers voting. He can be found online on Instagram, X, and Only Fans.

Editor's Choice: Ernest Guillermo Borilla Espinose

(May want to skip a "best brunch" recipient this year)

Best Brunch

The Abbey

2022's winner does it again. This year, LA readers called the "world famous" Abbey's brunch "amazing". Launched 32 years ago as a small coffee house by David Cooley as a safe space for the gay community. "Come as you are," was their mantra. The stain glass window décor inspired the religious themed name and atmosphere. A 2023 review read, "Came here for brunch last Sunday, and it was everything I was hoping for and more. The food was great, the drinks were flowing, and the Queens were perfection." LA Blade readers love perfection and brunch toasted The Abbey as the best.

Editor's choice: Beaches

Best Restaurant

Bottega Louie

Winning Editor's Choice for 2022, Bottega Louie served it up for LA Blade readers in 2023 and earned the Best-of spot! Opening its doors in 2020, Bottega Louie is known for its open kitchen and menu of pastas, salads, small plates, pizza, and pastries. In addition, Bottega Louie runs a gourmet market where patrons can purchase packaged foods including confections, chocolates, pasta sauces, dry pastas and preserves. Our readers said "yum!"

Editor's choice: Cecconi's

Best Radio or TV Station

104.3 Pride on iHeart Radio

Named the Editor's Choice of 2022, 104.3 Pride elevates to the top spot, swapping with last year's winner. The station considers itself the "pulse of LGBTQ+ America and plays upbeat Top 40 music (including remixes) and dance music targeted to the LGBTQ+ community. The service is also carried on the HD Radio sub-channels. The channel and accompanying online portal provide the LGBTQ+ audience with programming that aims to be entertaining, informative, and uniting.

Editor's choice: KTLA

Best Coverage of LGBTQ Issues by a Mainstream News Outlet

KTLA

Winning for a second year in a row, KTLA featured LGBTQ pertinent stories that included the Dodgers uninviting the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence to Pride Night (they were subsequently re-invited, thanks to the backlash), hate crimes targeting the LGBTQ community and numerous stories of California schools fighting anti-trans proposed policies.

Editor's choice: the LA Times

Best Cannabis Retailer/Lounge

Green Qween

2022s winner of this category showed that they were not done with the top spot, taking it again in 2023. Business partners Andres Rigal and Taylor Bazley launched Green Qween as "a queer-driven cannabis dispensary in an industry where LGBTQ+ and BIPOC representation have been lacking." Donating a portion of proceeds to the DTLA Proud Community Center, Green Qween sees itself as an incubator for LGBTQ+ and BIPOC cannabis brands and growers. Green Qween has declared, "We will reclaim, honor, and sustain queer history in cannabis legalization by incubating LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, Women-owned, and marginalized brands." LA Blade readers just see them as the best.

Editor's choice: The Woods

Best LGBTQ Owned Business

Urban Pet

Winning Editor's Choice in 2022, Urban Pet chose 2023 to shine as the LA Blade readers' number one. Boasting celeb clients including Amanda Seyfried, Jenna Dewan, Channing Tatum, Ellen DeGeneres, Portia DeRossi, Mila Jovavich, Pink, Jennifer Jason Leigh, and Linda Resnick, Urban Pet is very much a reflection of its owner Zack Grey. After segueing from a 14 year career as a professional dancer, he worked as a personal assistant to a well-known dog trainer and transitioned into launching his own dog training company. He was quickly lauded for his innovative personal training and technique. Pet Product News has called him "one of the top 25 people to follow," and Super Zoo, the largest pet industry trade show, awarded him the Retailer of the Year award. LA Blade readers just call him "the best."

Editor's choice: My 12 Step Store

Best LGBT Social Group

Somos Latino Outreach and Understanding Division

The Latino Outreach and Understanding Division (LOUD) is a division of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) that addresses the social and health disparities that threaten the Latino Community through innovative programmatic, marketing and direct-action strategies. Founded in 2013 by Latinos determined to make a difference in their communities, LOUD works to fight the fight against HIV/ AIDS in underserved communities and supports critical Latin issues. Their marketing initiatives are culturally relevant and effective at encouraging positive behavioral change in Latino communities with direct action strategies throughout the United States.

Editor's choice: Impulse Group LA

Best House of Worship

Tie: Congregation Kol Ami and InVision Church LA

Congregation Kol Ami

2022's winner and Editor's Choice tied this year for the top spot. Kol Ami is an important leader in the Jewish, LGBTQ, and West Hollywood communities since its founding in 1992. Rabbi Denise L. Egers, who plans to retire in 2024, broke barriers that resulted in more LGBTQ inclusion at synagogues worldwide. Kol Ami describes itself as "a progressive, Reform congregation rooted in a rich Jewish tradition, with commitment to social justice, diversity, and a world in which all individuals are honored and connected. Our congregation celebrates an LGBTQ+ core at the center of a profoundly diverse community." (1200 N La Brea Ave, West Hollywood)

InVision LA

"The worship was amazing and the pastor delivered an amazing message," says one visitor. "I can't tell you how priceless that message is to the LGBT community especially," says another. InVision believes in "the demonstration of Spiritual Gifts given by God." They seek to promote excellence in all things in the "pursuit of a relationship with Jesus" and proclaim a steadfast, bold decree of acceptance, affirmation, and inclusion for every child of God in their midst and "every person that is to come, regardless of race, gender, class, background, or sexual orientation."

Editor's choice: Hollywood Boulevard Episcopal

Most Committed Activist

Chelsea Beyers

The new Vice Mayor of West Hollywood, Chelsea Beyers has impressed LA Blade readers with her 17 years of social impact strategies and community organization initiatives. She has worked tirelessly with nonprofits, grassroots and activist groups. Installed in her new role on January 16, Beyers said, "I'm looking forward to the year ahead, full of meaningful opportunities to advance issues most important to the West Hollywood community." LA Blade readers look forward to her growing impact as well.

Editor's choice: Michael Weinstein

Favorite Public Official

Lindsey Horvath

Our 2022 Editor's Choice, Horvath was named the favorite for 2023. As Chair of the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, she credits Supervisor Sheila Kuehl for supporting her to become the youngest elected woman to serve on the board. Under her leadership, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted on June 6 to expand healthcare services for transgender people and to establish for the first time a LGBTQ+ Commission to advise the board on related policies and programs. Horvath has laid out her additional ongoing objectives for her tenure. She states, "Voters chose a new path forward – a path where we humanely and effectively solve our homelessness crisis, a path where we invest in meaningful public safety solutions, a path where we fight unequivocally for full reproductive freedom, and a path where we urgently protect our environment and create a sustainable future for generations to come." LA Blade readers are on board and chose her as their hope for the future.

Runner-Up: Adam Schiiff

Most LGBTQ Friendly City

West Hollywood

The city of West Hollywood was born out of a determined campaign by LGBT activists, seniors and renters on November 29, 1984. The city has a rich history and can be credited for launching iconic rock and punk musical acts. It boasts celebrity-owned bars and restaurants, unparalleled nightlife and shopping. It hosts world impacting events like the HBO Emmy Party, Sir Elton John's Annual Oscar Party, WEST HOLLYWOOD PRIDE and the West Hollywood Halloween Carnaval, the largest Halloween street party in the world. With approximately 39,000 residents, it has been called "Los Angeles' hottest destination for the entertainment industry." Many feel that West Hollywood sets a standard for super creative individuals representing the state-of-the-art on trends and new ideas.

The Human Rights Campaign has scored West Hollywood as earning 100 out of 100 possible in terms of LGBTQ friendliness. LA Blade readers already knew that as they name West Hollywood the friendliest city for the fifth year in a row.

Editor's choice: Palm Springs

Best Local Pro Sports Team

LA Dodgers

Earning the top spot was not an easy feat for the Dodgers this year. Sure, they had a lock on it going into their 10th annual LGBTQ+ Pride Night. For that event, they announced their intention to honor the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence activist organization. Then the fires of hell, as some evangelicals might

have predicted, broke out. Right wing homophobes clutched their pearls in protest. Shamefully, for five days, the Dodgers caved, and dis-invited the Sisters. Then, as the LA Times describes it, the Dodgers “Did the right thing by bringing them back.” As the Sisters were honored inside the stadium, thousands protested outside. The LA Times commented, “They didn’t listen. They didn’t run. They didn’t cave. The Dodgers, who caved once, didn’t cave again.” For that, LA Blade readers thank them, and have declared the Dodgers the best local team for the fourth year in a row.

Editor’s choice: LA Lakers

Best Realtor

The Collective

The Collective bills itself as the “hippest Boutique Real Estate Agency with some of L.A.'s most experienced real estate agents.” At the heart of the Collective , is the vision to be guides to building wealth through real estate. The team says it is not your average set of agents who simply search for homes or lists them on the mls. They have created a company that is education driven through webinars and events, both for their own agents, and their clients. LA Blade readers were impressed.

Editor’s choice: Rodeo Realty

Best Ally

Hilda Solis

Hilda Solis, the daughter of immigrants, was raised in her San Gabriel Valley working-class family. As a County Supervisor, United States Secretary of Labor, and lawmaker, Solis has always been an effective champion for expanded quality health care, new solutions to the homelessness and housing crises, reimagining public safety, cleaner air and water, immigrant rights, and better jobs and economic opportunities for all. Solis became the first woman to receive the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award in 2000 for her pioneering work on environmental justice issues. This year she advocated for the move to expand transgender healthcare services and establish a LGBTQ+ commission. Soils stated that the actions were to counter anti-LGBTQ+ bills being promoted and passed around the nation. For that, LA Blade readers stated, “Thank you!”

Editor’s choice: Laura Garcia Morales

Best Salon/Spa

FLEX Spa

FLEX Spas Los Angeles is a premier all male private club. Their facilities are an exclusive/private all male membership facility providing accommodations for full gym facilities, suites, cabanas, lockers, personal trainers and massage therapists.

Editor's choice: Burke Williams

Best Car Dealership

Honda of Hollywood

Honda of Hollywood is family. "Great staff, friendly service, feels like a small family-like environment" promises one customer. "At Honda of Hollywood, we strive for excellence during every visit. Our team of experts is here to help you with all of your automotive needs...Whether you're from Hollywood, Los Angeles, or another city, get in touch with our team to experience superior customer service," they state. "Amazing dealership. Recommend 100%," is their usual customer mantra. LA Blade readers have test driven them into being the Best Car Dealership for the third year in a row.

Editor's choice: BMW of Beverly Hills

Best Doctor/Medical Provider

AIDS Healthcare Foundation

The AIDS Healthcare Foundation is the largest provider of HIV/AIDS healthcare in the world. It currently has 1,725,070 patients in care across 45 countries. As a global non-profit, it provides cutting-edge medicine and advocacy. In recent years, AHF has expanded its focus on global public health to include housing, food security, pandemic response and preparedness, and more. Their local fans, and LA Blade readers, agreed naming them the year's best for the fourth year in a row.

Editor's choice: One Medical

Best Fitness

LA Fitness, Hollywood

Founded in 1984, LA Fitness now has over 550 clubs across the US and Canada. LA Fitness highlights their offerings this way: "LA Fitness offers many amenities at an outstanding value. Gym amenities may feature Functional Training, state-of-the-art equipment, basketball, group fitness classes, pool, saunas, personal training, and more!" Its clients call out its wide range of equipment, friendly staff, great classes and convenient parking. For the third year in a row, LA Blade readers have named LA Fitness the best.

Editor's choice: Equinox on Sunset

Most LGBT-Friendly Workplace

City of West Hollywood

The city of West Hollywood strives to maintain a high-quality work environment with competitive compensation and benefits. They have publicly committed to engage, attract, develop, support, and retain the best workforce to provide exceptional customer service to the West Hollywood Community. The City government states, "Since incorporation in 1984, the City of West Hollywood has become one of the most influential cities in the nation for its outspoken advocacy on LGBTQ issues. No other city of its size has had a greater impact on the national public policy discourse on fairness and inclusiveness for LGBTQ people. More than 40 percent of residents in West Hollywood identify as LGBTQ. The City has advocated for more than three decades for measures to support LGBTQ individuals and has been in the vanguard on efforts to gain and protect equality for all people on a state, national, and international level." This resonates with LA Blade readers who think they are the most LGBT-Friendly around.

Editor's choice: Getty Museum

Best Non-Profit

Equality California

Fighting for full, lived LGBTQ+ equality, Equality California has numerous initiatives. These incorporate passing pro-equality legislation, electing pro-equality leaders, fighting for civil rights in the courtroom,

reducing disparities in LGBTQ+ health and well-being, developing a pipeline of LGBTQ+ leaders and increasing civic participation within the LGBTQ+ community. LA Blade readers appreciate their leadership and have voted them the best non-profit.

Editor's choice: AIDS Healthcare Foundation

Best Actor

Bradley Cooper

Bradley Cooper is earning huge recognition for his self-directed performance in the film Maestro. The film portrays the life of the legendary Leonard Bernstein and his bisexuality. His performance has earned him nominations for Golden Globes, Bafta, Critics Choice and SAG awards. So far, he has not won any of those but, hey Bradley, with LA Blade readers, you're a winner, Baby.

Editor's choice: Jodie Foster

Best Museum/Art Gallery

The Getty

The Getty embarks on numerous philanthropic projects including several supporting the LGBTQ community. As this year's winner, The Getty confirms that it is a Los Angeles treasure. In its two locations, it represents over 6000 years of art. Besides a library collection of books, archives and services, the museum holds over 100,000 artwork images as well as special collections. The Getty Center, with its bird's eye view of Los Angeles, is located in Brentwood and showcases European art amid modern architecture. Its second location is the Getty Villa Museum which lies along the coast and displays ancient Greek and Roman art in a recreated Roman house. LA Blade readers have shown their appreciation for the second year in a row by naming the Getty as the Best Museum of the year.

Editor's choice: LACMA

Best Theater

LA Opera

With six mainstage productions, the LA Opera kicked off its 38th season “offering illuminating interpretations of classic works through the extraordinary artistry of the world’s leading musicians.” The season’s roster included Alexander Zemlinsky's *The Dwarf*, the LA Opera premiere of William Grant Still's *Highway 1, USA*, the company premiere of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, *Don Giovanni*, *La Traviata*, and *Turandot*. LA Blade readers were humming along and belted out a sincere “you’re the best.”

Editor’s choice: LACMA

Best Music Venue

The Hollywood Bowl

Three years ago, the Hollywood Bowl won for Best Virtual A&E Events. Two years ago, they were named the Best A&E Venue. This year, marks their second win – for Best Music Venue. This can only lead you to conclude that live or virtual, artistically or musically, in the eyes of LA Blade readers, they are still perennially the best. Since its opening in 1922, the Hollywood Bowl has been the premier destination for live music, hosting everyone from Billie Holiday to The Beatles to Yo-Yo Ma under the iconic silhouette of its concentric-arched band shell. Janet Jackson opened the 2023 season and LA Blade readers were impressed.

Editor’s choice: Disney Concert Hall

Best Hotel

Fairmont Hotel

Fans cite the hotel’s great location, excellent staff and overall beauty as the secret formula the Fairmont commands over other hotels in the area. A recent reviewer said, “This is one of the nicest and most luxurious hotels my family and I have stayed at. The room was huge ... The staff were exceptional and very attentive. This hotel is in a great location next to Century City Westfield in a very clean and safe part of Los Angeles.”

Editor’s Choice: Sunset Tower

Favorite Musical Artist

Dolly Parton

Last year, Dolly was our Editor's Choice. Since she kicked off New Years 2023 with god-daughter Miley Cyrus, her popularity shifted into high gear. In defense of her transgender audience she was quoted this year as saying, "How we are is who we are." She ended the year releasing her rock album Rockstar at the end of 2023 and it shot immediately to #1 on the charts. LA Blade readers agreed and put her #1 in their hearts.

Editor's choice: Bad Bunny

Best LGBTQ Event

GLAAD Awards

Winning the top spot for the second year in a row, the GLAAD Awards has special meaning for the LA Blade. It, and sister publication, The Washington Blade won the Barbara Gittings Award for Excellence in LGBTQ Media. The award honors a pioneering individual, group, or community media outlet that has made a significant contribution to the development of LGBTQ media. The award is named after Barbara Gittings in recognition of her groundbreaking work as editor of The Ladder, and for her appearances as an out lesbian on national news media throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The award program featured appearances by Christina Aguilera who was introduced by Club Q Survivor, Michael Anderson. Bad Bunny was honored with GLAAD's Vanguard Award and was introduced by Ricky Martin; Jeremy Pope received GLAAD's Stephen F. Kolzak Award and was introduced by Gabrielle Union. As for best LGBTQ event, LA Blade readers honored GLAAD.

Editor's choice: OutFest

Best Regional Pride

WeHo Pride

WeHo wins for the second year in a row. Last year, the City of West Hollywood presented its second WeHo Pride in early June, kicking-off celebrations across the nation during Pride Month. WeHo Pride Weekend celebrations in and around West Hollywood Park included an all-weekend music fest dubbed OUTLOUD with performances from Grace Jones, Carly Rae Jepsen, Orville Peck, Passion Pit, Santigold and Princess Nokia. LA Blade readers named it the best around again.

Editor's choice: LA Pride

Best Streaming Service

Revry

Revry is the world's first global queer TV streaming network. It offers free 24/7 live TV channels and on demand movies, and shows. The network launched in 2016 and only focuses on queer content and creators. It was founded by Damian Pelliccione, Alia J. Daniels, Christopher Rodriguez, Wadooah Wali and LaShawn McGhee. Revry releases original content, including the series Gayborhood, Before I Got Famous, and Drag Roast.

Editor's Choice: Amazon Prime

Most LGBTQ Friendly Entertainment Company

Netflix

Featuring top caliber LGBTQ content such as Rustin, Nyad and Maestro in 2023, Netflix waved its rainbow flag loud and proud. Other queer content included Stay on Board: The Leo Baker Story and long timers like Orange is the New Black and Grace and Frankie.

Editor's choice: Paramount Pictures

Best LGBTQ Friendly Employer of 100+ Employees

Disney

Disney's commitment to their employees includes investing in and supporting their people "through our focus on creating a collaborative and inclusive workplace culture, investing in their well-being, health, and safety, and providing opportunities for their continued growth, development, and career mobility." The company is a leading diversified international family entertainment and media enterprise with five business segments: media networks, parks and resorts, studio entertainment, consumer products and interactive media. DeSantis may hate them, but LA Blade readers love them.

Editor's Choice: TikTok

Best LA Region Airport

LAX

Last year's Editor's Choice landed its planes in the Best spot this year. Providing enhanced travel experiences across Terminals 2 and 3 this year, LAX surpassed pre-pandemic passenger numbers on consecutive days. With more domestic travelers beginning or ending their trips at LAX than any other U.S. Airport, it has gotten both busier and better. LA Blade readers named it the best.

Editor's choice: Hollywood/Burbank

