

Annapolis native stars in 'Drag Queen Story Hour' at Rams Head On Stage



capitalgazette.com/2023/04/06/annapolis-native-stars-in-drag-queen-story-hour-at-rams-head-on-stage

Rebecca Ritzel

April 6, 2023



It may have taken 30 years, but Annapolis native J.B. McLendon finally got to appear in drag – outdoors, in public – in his hometown last September when he presided over a drag bingo event hosted by the Inner West Street Association.

“To be standing in drag, proud and doing what I love to do in front of a receptive audience was a lot to handle,” recalled McLendon, who grew emotional during an interview Tuesday on the Zoom conference platform.

On Friday night, McLendon returns to West Street for a show at the Rams Head On Stage as a member of Kinsey Sicks, a long-standing and popular drag a cappella quartet that combines singing, drag and comedy. He joined the troupe, which tours this spring across North America, in 2018, and made his local debut as Angel, the quartet’s bass, last year during Annapolis Pride.

Much has changed in the political landscape and the world of drag since then. For those very pointed reasons, the Kinsey Sicks have titled their new show “Drag Queen Story Hour Gone Wild.”

Growing up gay during the 1970s and '80s in Annapolis meant coming out and getting out, usually to Baltimore or Washington, McLendon said. As a city, “Annapolis was behind,” when it came to LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance. Appearing in drag last year on West Street, within sight of St. Anne’s Church, where his parents were married in 1966, meant that, “Progress has finally been made.”

The handful of protesters who came to the family friendly bingo night was offset by the dozens of enthusiastic Annapolis residents, including Mayor Gavin Buckley, who attended the Dinner Under the Stars event, which also included other drag performers and the band SPICE. This was the acceptance McLendon had been craving, both for himself and his art form.

“I couldn’t wait to get out of Annapolis,” the 53-year-old recalled, wearing an Annapolis Pride T-shirt.

So far this year, drag performers and shows have been targeted for curtailing or bans by right-wing state legislators across the country, with at least 26 bills introduced in 13 states, [according to a Washington Post analysis](#). No such bills were introduced between 2015 and 2022, and none have been introduced in the Maryland General Assembly.

Kinsey Sicks baritone Nathan Marken believes the attacks on his profession are an extension of conservative aggression against trans people.

"Make no mistake," he said, "we drag queens are an easy target in that ongoing persecution."

It is unclear whether proponents of anti-drag laws understand that many queens, including the current foursome in the Kinsey Sicks, identify as gay men playing characters rather than as trans or nonbinary people.

"Drag Queen Story Hour Gone Wild," Marken said, is an attempt to stand up for the troupe's trans friends and LGBTQ+ family by mocking so-called "don't say gay laws" and other political attacks, like protests at story hours.

Plus, like Rapunzel, the Kinsey Sicks are adept at spinning politics into comedic gold.

"The opportunity to run childhood classics, from nursery rhymes to Disney, is just delicious," Marken said. "We get to skewer and call out the ridiculousness of don't-say-gay and anti-drag laws."

Marken also is quick to stress that the humor in "Drag Queen Story Hour Gone Wild," with parodies of "Sesame Street," Mickey Mouse and Mr. Rogers, is "entirely inappropriate for children."

"No one is safe where the Kinsey Sicks is concerned," McLendon said.

While some of McLendon's public performances as the character Gassy Winds are family friendly, such as at the drag bingo night last fall, the Kinsey Sicks never, throughout their 30-year history, hosted a story hour aimed at kids, Marken said. Previous touring shows include "Sicks in the City" (2002), "Electile Dysfunction" (2012), and "Oy Vey in a Manager," the holiday hit that has enjoyed long runs at Theater J in Washington.



The Kinsey Sicks, with Annapolis resident J.B. McLendon as Angel, center, has performed "Oy Vey In a Manger," at Baltimore's Creative Alliance.

The Kinsey Sicks take their name from the number “six,” the gay end of a sexual orientation scale developed by biologist and sexologist Dr. Alfred Kinsey. From the beginning, their performances have melded advocacy and entertainment. The group arose from the ashes of the AIDS crisis after five friends dressed in drag for a Bette Midler concert in 1993 in San Francisco. Over the ensuing three decades, they have toured the world and enjoyed a run in Las Vegas. In August, the group will debut at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, a leading showcase for alternative theater.

“Drag Queen Story Hour “is not just a cute little drag show,” McLendon said. “It’s about the message and the importance of the message.”

When he joined in 2018, McLendon replaced Ben Schatz, the last original touring member, although Schatz continues to write material for the group. McLendon saw the audition advertised on Facebook and applied after a friend urged him to consider his triple-threat skills in drag, improv comedy and singing four-part harmony. He earned a theater degree from Syracuse University, following in the footsteps of his best friend Miriam Luby Wolfe, an aspiring actor from Severna Park, who was among 35 Syracuse students killed in the terrorist bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Scotland in 1988, commonly called the Lockerbie Bombing.

Were she still alive today, Wolfe would be sitting “front row center” at Rams Head on Friday to celebrate the milestone, McLendon said.

“She’s the guardian angel who sits on my shoulder every time I walk out onstage,” he said.

After graduating from Syracuse, he moved to New York, where he starred in the long-running spoof “Forbidden Broadway.” What was supposed to be a 10-week trip to Key West, Florida, turned into more than a decade that McLendon spent performing as Gassy Winds, working in restaurants and playing everyone from Benjamin Franklin in “1776?” to Hannibal Lector on Key West stages. After joining the Kinsey Sicks, he made Annapolis his home base, returning to live with his mother Andy, who will be at the show Friday.

“She’s a proud parent, always,” McLendon said.

Although he’s accomplished much in his career, there’s one major Maryland milestone still not on his resume: playing Edna Turnblad in the musical “Hairspray,” a character originated by legendary Baltimore drag queen Divine in the John Waters film.

“I’m in my prime Edna years,” McLendon said. “There’s a production of ‘Hairspray’ that’s gonna have me as Edna sometime before I die. Even if I have to do it at 70, I am playing that role.”



Drag a cappella ensemble The Kinsey Sicks — Trixie, Trampolina, Winnie and Angel—returns to Rams Head Onstage Friday night. Annapolis resident J.B. McLendon (Angel, at right) is proudly performing in the quartet's new show, "Drag Queen Story Hour Gone Wild."