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southern star

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City to build symbolic honour

ANDIE CONAN

The Melbourne GLBTI community may have its first public monument courtesy of Yarra Council.

City of Yarra Mayor Jane Garrett told *Southern Star* a meeting held last week was about forging closer links with the community so the council could better service GLBTI needs.

"We're focusing on things council can control and be involved in," she said.

"We don't want to be biting off things we can't chew at a local government level. We need to be doing the best we can with what our role is, and also advocating where necessary ... to make people feel celebrated, protected and safe."

Among the proposals put forward, Peel Hotel owner Tom McFeely pledged $10,000 towards a public art monument to celebrate the GLBTI community.

"Too often with bureaucrats and elected representatives, all they see is people walking down Mardi Gras, walking down Pride March ... but we need to show there are a lot of other aspects to us," McFeely said.

"I feel it's fantastic that an initiative's been made asking what else can be done."

McFeely said he wanted something "symbolic" which celebrated the community in a public place visible to the wider community.

Garrett confirmed the council would now consider the proposal.

At the same meeting a number of areas within the council's responsibility were identified as needing improvement to better cater for the gay and lesbian community. These included youth support, information on same-sex parenting services, and training for all council staff on community inclusiveness.

"It's about putting things into action. It's not about finding new resources, it's about changing the way we do things now, looking at what we do now and how we can do it better," Garrett said.

Melba Ward councillor Dale Smedley said he was "blown away" by the productivity of the meeting and promised the talks would be further developed.

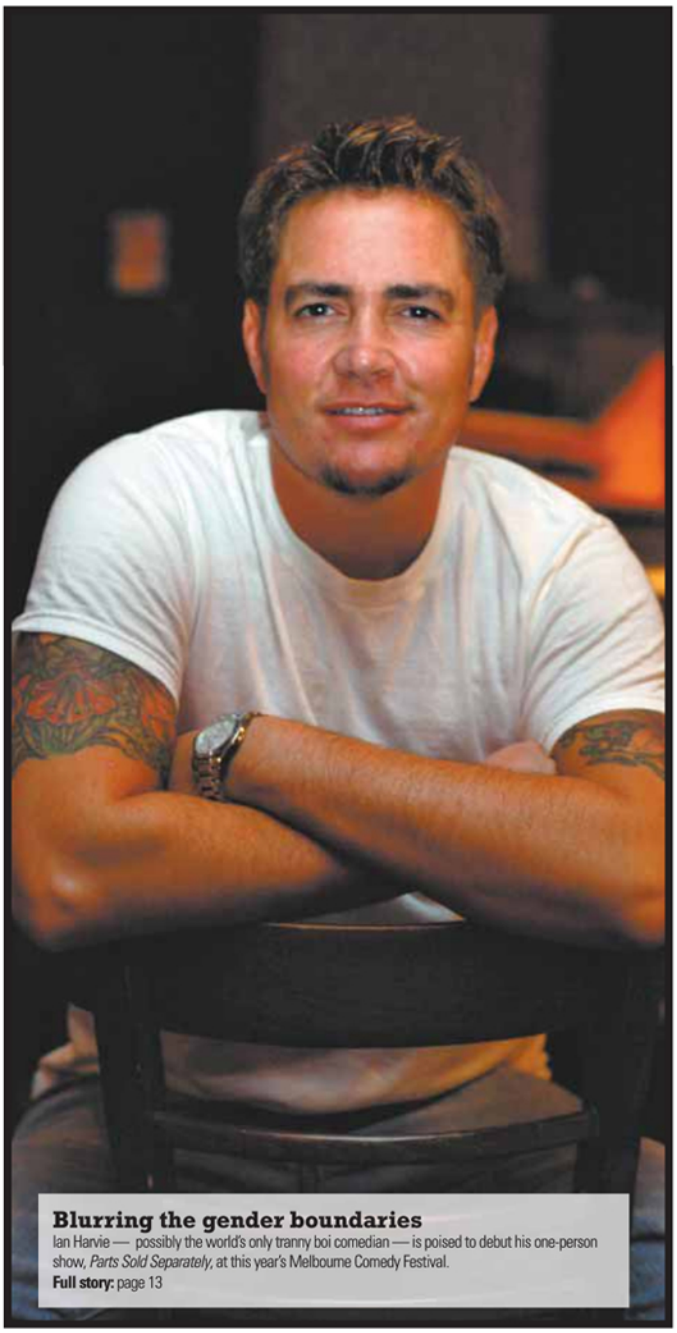
"It's not a bullshit or a whitewash. Something's going to come out of it," he said.

"Yarra works with other minority groups and it's about establishing needs of our community like we do with others.

"I'm sick of people viewing us as same-sex first. We're a community first and that's how we should be treated."

A second meeting with the community is scheduled in six weeks time. In addition, an online survey will be developed to further canvass the community's ideas.

info: Could local councils be more inclusive and would you like to see a public monument? Email editor@ssonet.com.au



Blurring the gender boundaries

Ian Harvie — possibly the world's only tranny boi comedian — is poised to debut his one-person show, *Parts Sold Separately*, at this year's Melbourne Comedy Festival.

Full story: page 13

Booklet to help gay seniors

ANDIE CONAN

Getting older often presents health complications, but for people ageing with HIV there is now some help at hand.

A new booklet, *Ahead of Time: A Practical Guide for Growing Older with HIV*, has been released by the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) and the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) this month to give some timely advice on the complex medical issues older people living with HIV face.

NAPWA Health Treatments and Research Unit senior coordinator Peter Canavan told *Southern Star* ageing and HIV is an area the health sector needs to address. "We do have changes in our epidemiology, We've got an ageing population and it does have implications for service provision. There are real clinical concerns," he said.

The booklet has a full list of service care providers aware of the issues, along with easy-to-read information about new medical and social challenges and the best ways to maintain ongoing health.

NAPWA estimates there are around 19,000 people living with HIV in Australia. Just over 30 percent are over 49 years old.

According to National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research data, before 1999 17 percent of people diagnosed with HIV were aged 40-49 years, and about 9 percent diagnosed were over 50.

Between 1999 and 2007, this number jumped to 22 percent of new diagnoses in the 40–49 age bracket, and 13.2 percent in the 50-plus category.

Canavan said now people with HIV are living longer, fuller lives, aged care facilities and nursing homes must be better prepared to provide appropriate care.

"Aged care is not really geared up," he said. "We need to think what does [ageing with HIV] mean in terms of the way we operate our services and care?

"People with HIV, who may need specialist care, may be managed by an oncology specialist, a liver specialist, a HIV specialist. [The aged care system] needs streamlining and improvements in its coordination of care."

info: Download the booklet from www.afao.org.au

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Blurring the gender boundaries

NICK BOND

Despite the wealth of talent on offer, there's sometimes a wearying familiarity to the majority of comedians at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival — so many white straight guys making dick jokes, so little time.

At first glance, it'd be easy to assume Ian Harvie fits into this category. You'd be half right. Only difference is, Harvie's not straight and any dick jokes he makes relate to his lack thereof.

Harvie's a transman, and possibly the world's only 'tranny boi comedian.' His one-person show, *Parts Sold Separately*, deals with his experiences living outside traditional gender lines.

"The show's primarily about how I came to understand that I felt this way about my body. I make it very accessible. I think a lot of people think they don't understand trans people, and don't understand how people could take such big steps to change their bodies, and I try to make it understandable in a way that's not preachy," Harvie told *Southern Star*.

"Everybody will be able to relate to it and laugh at it, whether or not they identify as trans."

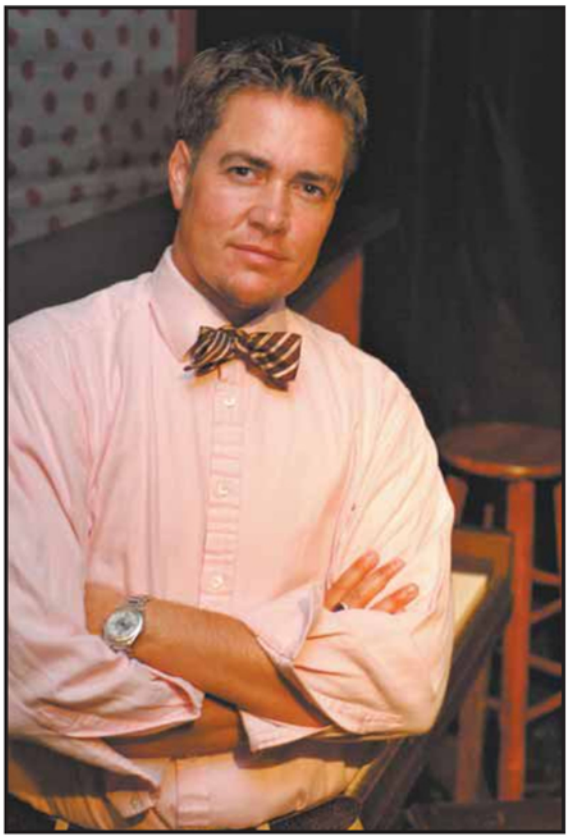
While Harvie previously toured Australia as the support act for friend Margaret Cho as part of the Mardi Gras festival two years ago, he also regularly performs to audiences outside the 'gay ghetto.' This has lead to some less-than-enthusiastic responses to the on-stage trans 'bombshell.'

"There's often an audible silence. People don't believe me. I just did a small comedy festival this past weekend in North Carolina — a very conservative area in the South. The audiences were predominantly straight, and didn't even have the vernacular for 'queer' and what that means, let alone trans.

"I had to take a moment to say, 'I wouldn't travel to North Carolina and think it was a good idea to tell a bunch of people who I don't know that I'm transgender if it wasn't true."

Funnily enough, Harvie also experiences some rather befuddled reactions when he performs to largely queer audiences.

"I always have gay men come up to me after the show like, 'Really? But you're so cute. I think you're cute and I'm a gay man, what does that mean?' I usually just say, 'Look, it's not you, it's me.' "



Ian Harvie challenges widely-held views about trans people.

Harvie is, at this point, used to having a confusing effect on many people. It's not just gay men who find themselves questioning their sexuality when they meet him — he's also veered close to turning a straight man or two.

"When I was a girl in high school, I had this great male friend. I saw him again over the Christmas holidays when I went home to visit my folks.

"He asked me, 'What does it mean if I thought you were cute in high school? And what does it mean if I still think you're cute?' This is a married straight guy with kids asking me this."

What did you say?

"I said, 'It means you're a fag,' " he laughed.

"He told me that speaking to me like that allowed him to open himself up in a new way, and I thought that was beautiful. Here's a married man with two kids in his early 40s, suddenly questioning his life: 'I've been so closed off, what does this all mean?' It means that you're growing, that's all."

Harvie's attitude towards his trans identity challenges the widely-held view that trans people are in some way victims of their own bodies. On his website he states, 'I don't feel like I was robbed of the correct biological sex; I believe I was born in the right body, and that I just may want to change it a little bit.' It seems a more empowering viewpoint to take than feeling like you're trapped in the wrong shell, desperate to get out.

"There is the idea that being trans makes you a victim of your body, but I try not to be a victim of anything. In the very beginning of recognising how I felt about my body — that I wanted to be more masculine, that I wanted to have a flat chest — I really did feel robbed.

"Now I've come to a place where I really do have love for my body, in a way that I haven't before. I feel sexy and fuckable for the first time in my life, and I'll be 42 in May.

"I'm also clean and sober and have been for 17 years, and that helped with the process enormously. I drank heavily in my teens and early 20s over the fact that I was interested in girls and I felt miserable with my body — looking down, I didn't connect with what I saw."

Ultimately, Harvie said he hoped his own openness would help others to embrace their own trans tendencies.

"I believe there are many people out there who don't necessarily identify with their bodies, or their genitalia. Men might wish their chests were bigger, or their butts were more bubbly, or their muscles broader. There are so many types of image dysphoria out there that are actually adjacent to what I felt.

"And I think there are a lot of people out there who are trans and don't know it. Women who get breast implants so they feel more feminine — how is that any different from me wanting to take mine off so I can feel more masculine? The feeling is the same.

"I joke in the show about Cher and Dolly Parton being trans. They've modified themselves in the extreme. They have body dysphoria just like I do, but because mine is about flipping from feminine to masculine, it's considered shocking."

info: Harvie performs at Gasworks Arts Park March 31- April 4. Visit www.ianharvie.com

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