



Paul Burston

By the time you read this, I'll be in Bishops Stortford. That's a sentence I never thought I'd write. But then when I started Polari literary salon way back in 2007, I never envisaged us venturing beyond Soho. For two years we didn't stray beyond the gay square mile. In 2009, we moved to the Southbank Centre – and the following year we were invited to go as far afield as Watford! But as every man knows, sometimes things take a little longer to grow.

This year, thanks to the generous support of Arts Council England, we've just begun our third national tour. It's our biggest tour to date, taking in 14 towns and cities across the UK. Between now and the end of November we'll be appearing in Birmingham, Blackpool, Brighton, Edinburgh, Hull, Nottingham, Newcastle and more, showcasing the best in emerging and established LGBT literary talent. Featured writers include authors Jake Arnott, Jonathan Harvey and Val McDermid, and poets Sophia Blackwell, Keith Jarrett and Paula Varjack.

Also, for only the second time in Polari's nine year history, I have a new novel of my own to promote.

So in addition to producing, marketing and hosting the events, I'll also be performing. Expect me to be a total husk by the time my next column is due.

One of the literary talents joining me in Bishops Stortford will be actor and playwright Alexis Gregory, whose new play *Safe* is a verbatim piece about young LGBT people at risk of homelessness, created in association with The Albert Kennedy Trust. The charity is one close to my own heart. A few years ago I edited



a short story collection called *Boys & Girls*, part of the proceeds from which went to the Trust. The book included fictional stories by new and established lesbian and gay writers, as well as two true tales of young people helped by the organisation. Interviewing them was a deeply humbling experience. In many ways, it's a lot easier being gay now than when I was growing up. We have an equal age of consent, partnership rights and a whole raft of other legal measures in place to protect us from discrimination in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services. But homophobia hasn't gone away. Young LGBT people are still at risk of bullying. Some still take their own lives. Some are still rejected by the families and find themselves at risk of homelessness. And this is where the Albert Kennedy Trust and *Safe* come in. Alexis Gregory has interviewed some of the young

people helped by the Trust and turned their stories into a compelling piece of theatre. The show opens on 17 October at London Theatre Workshop.

Some people say that nostalgia ain't what it used to be. I'm not sure if Penny Arcade would agree, but her latest show *Longing Lasts Longer* suggests that she knows a thing or two about the power of the past and how it impacts on the present. The woman who featured in Andy Warhol's *Women in Revolt* way back in 1971 is still talking about a revolution. Equal parts memoir and manifesto, *Longing Last Longer* covers four decades of pop culture as Arcade turns her sights on ageism, political correctness, urban gentrification and the tyranny of cupcakes. It's a dizzying, dazzling performance, full of razor sharp satire and hilarious one-liners. But more than that, it's a work of great wisdom, from a woman who has not only seen things but can honestly be called a seer. I caught it at Soho Theatre last week for the second time

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and, if anything, it was more affecting the second time around. Arcade is one of those performers who truly improves with age.

I haven't watched *Big Brother* in years. I gave up on the celebrity version when it started featuring people whose only claim to fame was appearing on other reality TV shows. Some might call this post modernism. I call it flogging the empty space where a dead horse used to be. In any case, I missed the recent spat involving Christopher Biggins, and can't name a single other recent housemate apart from Sam Fox.

But last month I had a taste of the *Big Brother* experience, courtesy of my good friends Jason and Mark Ford. A year after they got married in great style in London, they invited a group of friends to celebrate their first anniversary with them in Sitges. Among our fellow guests were performers Chris Green and Dusty Limits, curator Paul Darling, and set and costume designer Jean-Marc Puissant. For five days, seven of us lived together under one roof, complete with a pool and a steady supply of alcohol. Some didn't drink – others drank rather a lot. Some slept late – others were up early. Food was shared and new friendships were formed. There were long conversations. There was skinny-dipping. Thankfully there weren't any TV cameras, or someone might be feeling a tad embarrassed. And by 'someone' I mean me. It takes a man with great style and grace to ride an enormous inflatable rainbow unicorn. Unfortunately, I am not that man. Several times I attempted to mount said unicorn, and several times I made a complete fool of myself. But here's Jason Ford showing us how it's done and enjoying my new book at the same time. This, gentlemen, is how you make a splash on holiday...

The Black Path by Paul Burston is published by Accent Press.

Paul is reading: 'The Age of Bowie' by Paul Morley. It's as much about Morley as it is about Bowie, but don't let that put you off. Inside its 480 pages there's a far better, far slimmer book struggling to get out.

Paul is watching: 'The Collection' on Amazon Prime. It's been described as the 'Mad Men' of the fashion industry. I'm not sure if I agree, but the first episode was promising.

Paul is listening to: 'Do You Wanna Come Over' by Britney Spears. I'm not sure what she has in mind but I like the sound of it.



Photo by Brytynna Fitzgerald-Morris