

## BOOKS

# Ross Mathews drops names, opens hearts in new celebrity tell-all

BY TONY PEREGRIN

Until recently, the dishy and endearing celebrity stories featured in Name Drop were tales Ross Mathews—a Chelsea Lately alum and current RuPaul's Drag Race judge—only divulged over happy hour.

Name Drop—dedicated to “everyone who never got to sit at the cool kids table in the cafeteria”—spills the tea on some of Hollywood's most iconic celebrities, from Liz Taylor to Lady Gaga.

The Name Drop Tour, which launches in New York City Feb. 4, combines elements of stand-up, game show, and audience Q&A.

“Right now, I'm in L.A. and I am feverishly doing laundry and getting myself prepped to go on this 30-city tour, which is just insane,” Mathews told Windy City Times. “I've never done this before in my life, going on this big of a tour. So really, it's about logistics right now: Who's watching the dogs, and when?”

**Windy City Times:** You write in the prologue that “no celebrity was harmed in the making of this book.”

Ross Mathews: But I go there. we tell every story because I am the superfan [who] won the golden ticket and got to go sort of beyond the red carpet and meet these people. And sometimes they blew me away and were better than I ever could have imagined; and sometimes they broke my heart. So, we tell the truth in this book. And it's so funny and it's an emotional rollercoaster—and I think people are going to love it. Not to toot my own toot-er, but toot-toot!

**WCT:** Were you nervous about spilling some of this hot tea?

RM: No. I wasn't nervous about spilling tea because I don't think anyone's going to read this and have their heart broken, because it's just what happened.

I write about experiences like when I was a co-host on The View with Barbara Walters, and she was not exactly be who I wanted her to be. But then I also write about coming to terms with that and then meeting her so many years later and realizing that she was just doing her job. It was therapeutic for me to write this book because some of the experiences I had been holding onto when people didn't exactly live up to who I wanted them to be—I kind of got to let go of it and forgive them a little bit.

**WCT:** My favorite story is the one about Lady Gaga and her appearance on RuPaul's Drag Race. Gaga revealed to you on set that she had watched you on TV on the red carpet right before the Golden Globes, where you announced you were excited, in fact, to see Lady Gaga. She let you know that she had been very nervous that night because she didn't feel, as a singer, that she belonged with all of those movie stars at the event—but hearing you say that empowered her to go out there for Ross and all the other Rosses out there.

RM: I never anticipated what would happen when she pulled me aside in front of everybody and told me this story, which I think is the best Lady Gaga story of all time. It really made me realize how human all these people are—the people who I used to cut out of magazines and obsess over, they're just human beings. And I know that sounds so stupid, but to have somebody of her level say that she heard something I said and what it meant to her made me realize the strength of this platform that I'm so lucky to have.

**WCT:** On Dec. 6, you tweeted a memory of being sent out by Jay Leno 18 years ago to cover the Ocean's 11 premiere, and that David Duchovny, who was at the event, was your first celebrity interview. Looking back, what advice would you have for young-intern Ross?

RM: Well, I would just say trust your gut. I mean, at that point, nobody on the planet thought that I'd be sitting here talking to you and going on a 30-city tour with my second book, 18 years later, but I am. I just knew it in my bones. I had no other skillsets, so there was no other option for me, but I just knew it. Lean into what makes you different. Because I think a lot of people try to change it or avoid it or hide whatever it is, but what makes you different can make your life if you celebrate it and lead with it.

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Ross Mathews.  
Photo by Ricky Middlesworth

## 'Love Out Loud' ball Feb. 8

In Demand Entertainment and CSU Royal Court are presenting the Love Out Loud Ball on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2-10 p.m., at Chicago State University's Student Union Building, 9501 S. King Dr.

The ball-approved event is offering up to \$14,000 in prizes, incentives and scholarships, with the latter sponsored in part by In Demand Entertainment, Chicago State University, South Side Help Center, AIDS Healthcare Foundation, The Chicago Center for HIV Elimination, STAR Team Agency and The HIV League Scholarship.

The emcees will be Icon Neiman Marcus Escada and The Adonis 007.

See "17th annual Love Out Loud Ball" on Facebook.

## Chicago Auto Show Feb. 8-17

The next Chicago Auto Show will take place Feb. 8-17 at McCormick Place, 2301 S. Lake Shore Dr.

North America's largest auto show, the event spans more than 1 million square feet of floor space of the McCormick Place complex and displays multiple world and North American introductions and a complete range of domestic and imported passenger cars, trucks, sport-utility vehicles, minivans and concept cars.

Admission is \$13 for adults, \$8 for seniors age 62 and older as well as children ages 7-12, and free for children 6 and younger.

In addition to the public show, First Look for Charity will also take place. The black-tie-required affair will be Friday, Feb. 7, 7-11 p.m. There will also be two vehicle giveaways: a 2020 Ford Explorer. Follow it at #FLFC2020.

See ChicagoAutoShow.com.

## '...Love Is Queer to Stay' throughout Feb.

The Laughing Stock Theatre production The Masquerade; Or, Love Is Queer to Stay presents a queer spin on classical tropes, and will run at the Crowd Theater, 3935 N. Broadway Ave. on Feb. 8, 15, 22 and 29 at 8 p.m.

The cast includes Aaron Quick as Flaminio, Claire Proepper as Signora Rosaura, Jeffrey "JR" Rubin as Pedrolino, Jennifer Mohr as Smeraldina, Martin Downs as Lelio, Shea Lee as Pantolona, and Steven Yandell as Capitano. There will also be direction and choreography by Proepper, fight choreography by Yandell, sound design by Quick, and music composed by Downs, Quick and Proepper.

All shows are pay-what-you-can; visit <https://dime.io/events/Masquerade>.

## 'Bug' through March 8 at Steppenwolf

Performances have begun for Steppenwolf Theatre Company's production of Bug—the skin-crawling cult classic written by Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning ensemble member Tracy Letts, and directed by Tony Award winner David Cromer.

The cast of this Steppenwolf debut features ensemble members Randall Arney (Dr. Sweet), Carrie Coon (Agnes White) and Namir Smallwood (Peter Evans), along with Jennifer Engstrom (R.C.) and Steve Key (Jerry Goss).

Bug runs through Sunday, March 8, in the Downstairs Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St. Single tickets (\$20-\$125) are available through Audience Services at 312-335-1650, or Steppenwolf.org.



Tom Goss.  
Photo by Daren Cornell

NUNN ON ONE: MUSIC

## Out singer Tom Goss talks newest work, bears, 'Mean Girls'

BY JERRY NUNN

Out singer Tom Goss released his newest album, *Territories*, in 2019.

With the record, he created videos for several singles that spotlight relationships. The LA-based singer-songwriter is known for tackling LGBT issues with his studio albums and, in a past video, even documented his own marriage ceremony.

Goss has worked with gay singers such as Matt Alber, Max Emerson and Matthew Olshefski, also known as "The Shirtless Violinist."

Not only did he contribute to three songs on the soundtrack to the indie movie *Out to Kill*, but he also starred in it.

His latest video for "Quebec" dropped Feb. 13.

**Windy City Times: You are from Quincy, Illinois?**

Tom Goss: Yes. All of my family is from Illinois. My dad is from the Quad Cities area and my mom is from Chicagoland. I was raised in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

**WCT: You moved to Washington, D.C., after that?**

TG: Yes. I went to college at the University of Central Missouri and after that I decided to be a catholic priest. I moved to D.C. to join the seminary.

**WCT: You came out at that point?**

TG: Yes, it was a great revelation. I spent most of my life really believing that I was asexual. Sexuality didn't mean that much to me.

When I was in seminary, I fell in love with another man. This man happened to be a bear. It was through that process is when I realized I am attracted to bears. Before that, I was trying to ascribe my ideas to the societal norms what I should be attracted to. It wasn't until I fell in love with an older man that was hairy and chubby, with physical attributes that turned me on that my eyes were opened. I realized that I was attracted to a certain gender or type. It just wasn't something that I was expecting.

**WCT: Who you are attracted to came out in your music after that?**

TG: Well, I think it's important to note that I spent a good portion of my life not understanding who I was attracted to. From the flip side of

it, I think a lot of beautiful men spend time feeling unattractive. I don't think that's innate to us. I think that's learned behavior. We are constantly bombarded by what society deems as beautiful. If we don't fit those standards, we don't see ourselves as beautiful.

I have a chance to showcase different kinds of beauty and to be authentic to my voice as to what I see as beautiful every day. I would be doing a disservice to myself if I cast the romantic lead as a twink.

**WCT: How did you get involved with [Mean Girls actor] Daniel Franzese for the video "Quebec"?**

TG: Danny and I have been friends for a little bit. I did a video for a song called "Round In All the Right Places." It was more of an adult follow-up to the song "Bears."

I have always admired Danny for being a voice for body positivity. I was casting and wanted to get his perspective. I wanted to be sensitive to the subject and find out if he knew anyone that would be a good fit for a role. We talked about it and that project wasn't right for him.

When we started making "La Bufadora," I talked to the director Michael Serrato. I suggested Daniel and Michael was already a fan of his work. We decided to make a trilogy of videos together.

**WCT: Were you a fan of Mean Girls before?**

TG: Yes, but I haven't seen it in so long. I feel bad because we are such good friends and I haven't gone back to watch it again.

**WCT: You had a love scene with Daniel. How was that?**

TG: It was really fun! [Laughs] There were moments when I got lost in it. I forgot a camera was there.

**WCT: You made pancakes for breakfast afterward in the video. Do you cook?**

TG: Yes. I didn't make those pancakes, but recently I started putting powdered peanut butter in the batter. It's so good. You should try it!

**WCT: How was performing with singer Andy Grammer?**

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**WCT: Does leaning into what makes you different play a part in how you approach dating as well? You've said you've been dating a fair amount and that you're good at it. How so?**

RM: I'm confident and I'm inquisitive and kind. I'm imperfect, but I think if you can be those things, I think you'll be fine. I never had this kind of confidence when I was younger. And so it's a different experience to be in the dating world and not being necessarily apologetic for myself or my body or my success or my opinion, to just sort of own it. And you take it or leave it—that's kind of liberating.

**WCT: It sounds like you've been dating some legitimate snacks at this point!**

RM: I know. Isn't that great? Wonderful people too, really interesting people, kind.

**WCT: I want to ask you about Drag Race All Stars 5. Social-media chatter suggests that the details around the new season are being held hostage due to the fandom complaining about Drag Race burnout.**



RM: I just heard that doing interviews—I hadn't heard that, it hasn't been on my radar. And, to be quite frank, I don't really pay much mind to it because I think we're making the best show on television. I don't think there's burnout. I'll tell you this: All Stars 5 is great. The way the producers keep it fresh and keep you on your toes is so impressive. And I think when people see All Stars 5, there will be no talk of burnout.

**WCT: While we're talking drag, give us an update on your Dragtastic Bubbly Brunch events in Chicago.**

RM: Well, I love drag queens and I love drag brunch—and now we're in 16 cities across the country and in Puerto Vallarta, and this includes Chicago. So, we've taken a couple months off in Chicago and as we're spreading out we want to make sure everything's up to snuff. So, I would imagine we'd be back in Chicago very, very soon.

**WCT: What happens when Ross Mathews swans into Sidetrack or Roscoe's? Do people recognize you instantaneously?**

RM: They do, but people are nice. I love it. I

don't know what I would do if they didn't. I feel like I have friends everywhere I go. Sometimes people will tweet me later: "Oh, my God. I saw you Ross, and I was too scared to come up." That drives me bonkers because [you shouldn't] be scared. If you see me, don't just come say hi—give me a hug. I want to meet everybody, and I mean it.

**WCT: A 30-city tour is quite a large undertaking. What is the most outrageous question you've ever been asked by an audience member or fan?**

RM: They'll ask me everything from who was the rudest celebrity you've ever met to [if I'm] a top or a bottom.

**WCT: And?**

RM: You'll have to buy a ticket to the show. I'll see you in Chicago!

**Name Drop: The Really Good Celebrity Stories I Usually Only Tell at Happy Hour is now available. The Name Drop Tour arrives in Chicago at the Athenaeum Theatre on Saturday, Feb. 29; visit AthenaeumTheatre.org.**