

LEAP YEAR



Mero, left,
and Desus

SHOT IN HUDSON YARDS LOFT

All hail the locals who stepped up to make NYC better, bolder and more kick-ass—in a year that kind of kicked our asses. Photographs by *Tawni Bannister*

DESUS AND MERO

ILLUSTRIOUS TV HOSTS

Desus and Mero can't turn it off. Over the course of their conversation with *Time Out New York*, the hosts of Viceland's late-night show (Daniel Baker, a.k.a. Desus Nice, and Joel Martinez, a.k.a. the Kid Mero) tackle only a handful of questions, inevitably stretching each answer into an improvised routine often miles away from where they started. Discussions of being recognized on the street lead to the topic of Barack Obama (a fan of the Bronx-born and -bred comedy duo), then pivots to trying to nab Vladimir Putin as a guest. "I'd be like, 'Why'd you hack our election?'" says Desus. Mero chimes in, as Putin: "Come on, my nigga. Ah, you mad? You want to bomb the Ukraine?" Back to Desus for the layup: "That's his rainbow: 'I'm sorry, America.' People are like, 'Oh, I see him in a new light now.'" [Editor's note: Guests on Desus & Mero end interviews by creating a phrase that flashes onscreen on an animated rainbow.] Both crack up, moving on to the next goof. The only difference in watching their quick-thinking, off-the-cuff back-and-forths in person versus on the show is that one is taped. (True to this spirit, they don't even have a writing staff or rehearse bits.) In each episode, the pair simply sound off on newsy or viral or completely random clips—all topics are listed on the top right corner of the screen—and then welcome a guest. Visiting celebs range from Erykah Badu and Seth Rogen to *New York Times* food editor Sam Sifton and Diddy; subjects like "Trumpito," rap beefs, bee sex and why Malcolm-Jamal Warner has a tongue ring are all fair game. It's a refreshingly off-the-cuff approach you just don't see on TV. "We were talking about doing a graffiti backdrop, and [Viceland cofounder] Spike Jonze was like, 'No, you guys are the graffiti,'" Mero says about getting the show together. "You're the art. You don't need anything. It should just be you." Desus, not skipping a beat: "'Cause, also, who's gonna tell Spike Jonze he's wrong? The guy made a movie about fucking computers."

■ *Tim Lowery*

"YOU'RE THE ART. YOU DON'T NEED ANYTHING. IT SHOULD JUST BE YOU."

—SPIKE JONZE TO DESUS AND MERO



ASHLEY C. FORD

WOMAN OF LETTERS

Scrolling through writer Ashley C. Ford's Twitter feed (@iSmashFizzle) is like hearing thoughtful stream-of-conscious musings from your favorite group text—you know, the one that makes you laugh and keeps you sane. Sincere thoughts on politics, personal relationships and mental health ("I just had an anxiety attack, and the whole apartment started shaking") give way to silly reflections ("My country-ass fiancé calls going to Manhattan going 'into town,' and it makes me smile a little"). Her deeply relatable voice—found in its purest form in personal essays on subjects such as body image, queerness and Black Girl Magic, published in *BuzzFeed*, *New York* magazine and many others—is an inspiring flash of light on an internet that can often seem like an endless night. Her hustle paid off in a big way this year: *Forbes* named her on its 30 Under 30 in Media list.

(She turns 31 in a few weeks and is enjoying this new era. "I am thir-ty," says Ford. "I am dirty thirty. I'm the thirti-est.") As of October, she's the host of the daily Brooklyn-arts-and-culture-focused TV show and podcast, *112BK*. Oh, and in her spare time, she's writing a memoir about girlhood in Indiana and growing up with an incarcerated father. But she didn't just slip into the warm bathwaters of success when she moved to Brooklyn in 2014. She admits that the first time she tried full-time freelance writing, she was frozen with fear, missing deadlines and messing up. But through perseverance and under the mentorship of friends like writer Roxane Gay, she reached the other side. "I'll always, always get back up and try again, and now I know that about myself," says Ford. "And it kind of makes me feel like I'm unstoppable, and not because I'm perfect or a superhuman. I'm unstoppable because I won't stop." And, this time around, she's accomplished something many freelance writers never do: "For the most part, I have editors reaching out to me," she says. "I don't pitch anymore." ■ *Jillian Anthony*

HAVE 1 ON US



- GRETA GERWIG -

Actor-writer turned filmmaker-to-watch

- CARDI B -

Sonic ambassador of Bronx badassery

- FEARLESS GIRL -

Wall Street sculpture we can get behind

- JONATHAN KULIG -

Subway hero

- JAMAICA COW -

Slaughterhouse escapee

- BEN PLATT -

Pitch-perfect Tony winner

- JULIA -

First muppet with autism on *Sesame Street*

- BROOKE GUINAN -

FDNY's first trans firefighter

- TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET

Hell's Kitchen's own white-hot actor

- JUDGE ANN DONNELLY

Travel-ban fighter

- JODI KANTOR AND MEGAN TWOHEY

Times reporters of the Harvey Weinstein scandal

BRIDGET EVERETT

ENTERTAINER

Gravity. Electromagnetism. *Bridget Everett*. All awesome forces of nature, but only one 6', unhinged alt-cabaret superstar is likely to spew chardonnay in an audience member's face right before sitting on it. And it isn't only those in the front row of Joe's Pub who worship the Bridger: She has acolytes including Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz—who plays in her backup band, the Tender Moments—and feminist icon Gloria Steinem, who attended Everett's live show in 2013. Everett says, "If anybody ever walks out of my show because they think it's too much, I'm like, 'Gloria Steinem doesn't have a problem with this, bitch. Fuck off!'" Still, it's comic Amy Schumer who helped raise Everett's visibility in 2013, with invitations to appear on *Inside Amy Schumer* and,

in 2015, with a part in *Trainwreck*. Since then, the momentum behind this 45-year-old—whose original songs include lyrics like, "You got them little nippy titties, put 'em in the air!"—has only increased. In 2017, Everett stole scenes in the bawdy comedy *Fun Mom Dinner*; delivered a surprisingly dramatic turn in hip-hop underdog tale *Patti Cake\$*; and starred in the not-yet-picked-up Amazon pilot *Love You More*, created with the help of her mentor, Michael Patrick King. Keep in mind, late bloomers, this force of nature quit waiting tables just three years ago. "New York is full of people like me," says Everett. "It's just a matter of finding what makes you special and sticking to it. Eventually, someone is going to listen." ■ *Matthew Love*



Everett with her dog and onstage companion, Poppy



"I WANT TO BE AN AMBASSADOR OF BROOKLYN."
 — SASHA VELOUR

SASHA VELOUR

KWEEN OF DRAG

On the eve of NYC Pride, a bald-headed Brooklyn queen took the crown and scepter for *RuPaul's Drag Race's* most widely viewed, zeitgeist-defining season. Vowing to "get inspired by all this beauty and change the motherfucking world," Sasha Velour has since taken her pop-culture intellectualism, resplendent fashion taste and Bushwig-informed sensibility to a global stage, touring cities worldwide. But the Fulbright scholar still finds time to return to the cradle of drag civilization for her beloved monthly revue, *Nightgowns*. "I want to be an ambassador of Brooklyn," says Sasha Velour. "The cities that I go to where I can tell that they have a lot of different types of drag, I tell them that they remind me of Brooklyn, and I mean that as the highest compliment in the entire world," she says. "I hope that people look at Brooklyn as kind of a drag utopia, because that's what it's been in my experience—all genders and bodies and ages doing drag. And I think *that* is an important message for people right now." We're sold, ambassador.

■ David Goldberg

MICAH MELTON

COCKTAIL INNOVATOR

It may be the oldest of New York clichés: Make it here and you'll make it anywhere. When Micah Melton arrived in town earlier this year as the beverage director of the Aviary NYC, an expansion from a showstopping Chicago bar, that was the plan: Open well enough in New York to make expanding to London, Shanghai and Tokyo a natural next step. On our turf, he's masterfully dragged Prohibition-era cocktails into the 21st century, one tippie at a time. (Take his Science A.F., a pyrotechnic chemistry-set of an homage to New York's own legendary Penicillin.) "We know we're about presentation. That's the idea," says Melton of his wild reimaginings of classic cocktails. "That way, we're always under the spotlight. We've had a 'prove yourself' mentality since day one. It keeps us better." Even with mixology's thirst for Instagrammable drinks, New Yorkers have kept him humble: "We have regulars here, coming maybe three times a week. They're not going to order the crazy stuff every time. They want a martini, Scotch and soda, wine—things you have to do well without much room for weirdness. It's amazing: We go through more wine in a week here than we do in a month in Chicago." He's a long way from a previous job bartending at an Iowa City dive where one \$21 special involved 21 pitchers of beer for customers' 21st birthdays. "The thing about New York is, it's never just about New York. It's about what's next." ■ Richard Morgan



AUDREY GELMAN AND LAUREN KASSAN

THE WING WOMEN

Audrey Gelman and Lauren Kassan (cofounders of the Wing, a networking space for women) speak in unison about the past 12 months: “It was a big year!” And so it was, not only for them but also for women around the globe. (Can you believe the Women’s March was nearly a year ago?) In that spirit, the duo has created a much-needed home base where New Yorkers can band together during what Gelman calls “a female renaissance.” The pair launched their Flatiron social club (45 E 20th St) in October 2016. A year later, the New York natives opened a second spot in Soho (52 Mercer St); hosted a public retail market with 30 female-owned businesses; and launched a biannual feminist zine, *No Man’s Land*. Each of their spaces boasts multipurpose lounges (featuring showers and nap

rooms!), and members get to attend cool gratis events like a recent *Lady Bird* screening and Q&A with Greta Gerwig. (The waiting list for membership is 8,000 ladies long.) But the main draw is that the club allows New York women and nonbinary individuals of all professions and backgrounds to connect and foster friendships with others in their early twenties to their seventies. “We make sure we have a really dynamic group of women who might not necessarily get to meet outside of our walls,” says Kassan. Gelman adds, “We want to create a space where a woman like Lisa, a counterterrorism analyst at the NYPD, can interact with a woman who is a physician or in academia or in graduate school. That’s what makes an interesting room.” ■ *Jennifer Picht*

Kassan, left,
and Gelman





"PEOPLE WANT TO VISIT HERE, PEOPLE WANT TO MOVE HERE, PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE HERE, BECAUSE OF THIS CITY'S ICONIC NIGHTLIFE."

RAFAEL ESPINAL

PARTY POLITICIAN

If you told most locals that dancing was once banned in pretty much all NYC bars, they'd probably think you were crazy—not to mention that you were a real downer. Surprisingly, that *Footloose*-like scenario was legally the case until November 2017, when a bill introduced by Brooklyn City Councilman Rafael Espinal finally succeeded in striking down the city's century-old Cabaret Law. "Only about 90 businesses across the city, out of 25,000, actually had a license for dancing," says Espinal. "And unfortunately, the city, especially during the Giuliani era, used the law to shut down businesses they didn't agree with and thought were a nuisance." Over the years, the obscure law was often used to target marginalized communities—from black Harlem jazz joints in the '20s to gay raves in the '90s and Latino clubs in this decade—and resisted multiple attempts at repeal. Now that the law has bitten the dust, the 33-year-old has created a Nightlife Advisory Board and a new government position to oversee nightlife issues with a very memorable name: the Night Mayor. ("Mayor [Bill de Blasio] says it's the most sought-after job he's ever had [to fill]!") Until then, Espinal has no plans to stop fighting for your right to party. "People want to visit here, people want to move here, people want to live here, because of this city's iconic nightlife." ■ *Will Gleason*

DISCOVER!

Watch videos of Sasha Velour and duo Desus and Mero at timeout.com/ny2017.