

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[THEME MUSIC]

JIMMY CARPER: Oh yes, you've tuned in to *After Hours*, queer radio with attitude right here on KPFT Houston, 90.1 FM. The crew of *After Hours* is ready to bring you news, interviews, dialogue, and music geared for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people and their friends.

Here at *After Hours* we may be diverse, but we have one thing in common, we are all out of the closet, and urge everyone to come out of their closets. That means standing up for yourself, taking responsibility for your own life, and being proud of who you are.

Realistically, we know not everyone can do that because of age, job, or frame of mind. That's OK, we're here for you too. So sit back, relax, and enjoy this week's edition of *After Hours*.

[THEME MUSIC]

CHRIS HARRISON: Hello, Houston, College Station, and the world. This is *After Hours*, queer radio with attitude for Saturday April the 6th. No, this isn't Jimmy, this is Chris Harrison. I'm filling in for Jimmy. We are broadcasting on KPFT in Houston, KEOS College Station, and of course, on the world wide web at kpft.org. And we're glad you can join us tonight.

This is going to be an interesting show, it's a short show, thanks to all the wonderful people who gave us daylight savings, sorry daylight saving time. That's one thing they corrected me on that is daylight saving time.

So we have 3 hours of program to squeeze into 2, so unfortunately we're killing some of the music, but we are going to start off pretty quickly here. First half is Bi-Net with GiGi, and second half will be *After Hours News and Views Magazine*. Hopefully my guest will be here. I forgot to call him on Friday, so. Let's see. If you want to introduce your person, and let me see if I can get them on the line here.

GIGI: Yeah. We've got Barry Saiff and Matt Le Grant. Barry Saiff is chairperson of the board of directors for Bi-Net USA, and Matt Le Grant's a long time activist from way back. He's been with Bi-Net and--

CHRIS HARRISON: Let's see if I can push the magic buttons to get it to work here.

GIGI: Oh OK.

[LAUGHS]

Hello, Barry, do you hear me?

BARRY SAIFF: Yes, I do GiGi.

GIGI: Oh good, you're coming through. We got the magic buttons.

BARRY SAIFF: Great.

GIGI: Well, a lot's been happening with Bi-Net USA. I know that there's been a big opening gala, bi gala in San Francisco.

BARRY SAIFF: Yes. Actually, the San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center opened the first week in March. And it's actually, of 142 community centers around the country, it's the first one to be built from the ground up by the queer community.

GIGI: Wow. And I know they had over a week long festivities--

BARRY SAIFF: Yeah, from March 2 through March 10, there were parties and festivities. And I was at the opening gala on March 2, and then on March 9, we had the Bi and For The People party.

GIGI: Oh wow.

BARRY SAIFF: And that happened the same time as some kind of queer, which was kind of a trans and intersex party. And so the whole building, we took over. And that night, over 2,000 people walked through the door, which was a record for the new center.

GIGI: Oh wow, that's awesome.

BARRY SAIFF: So the bi and trans communities really made a statement about our presence there.

GIGI: That's-- we're taking over.

BARRY SAIFF: Yeah. Yeah.

GIGI: Really start for me.

MATT: Hi, GiGi, this is Matt.

GIGI: Hi, Matt. Good to hear from you.

MATT: Yeah, nice to chat.

GIGI: Can you give a little introduction of yourself, Matt.

MATT: Sure. I was the chairperson for the Bay Area Bisexual Network, that is the San Francisco Bay Area Bisexual Community Organization. I was chairperson I believe from about '92 to year-- '92 to '98. And continued to try to be involved in the bi community as much as I can and support Bi-Net USA, of course, in addition to other things in my life.

GIGI: Oh good.

BARRY SAIFF: Just to jump in there a minute, GiGi. Matt has been a bi activist for actually 15 or 20 years.

MATT: That's true.

BARRY SAIFF: Because I believe it was about five years ago, maybe four years that I attended a dinner in his honor. And it was honoring him for 15 years of bisexual activism, and there were about 75 people there.

GIGI: Wow.

[CHUCKLES]

Well, I know that a lot is happening with Bi-Net USA, I want to kind of jump around a little bit.

BARRY SAIFF: Sure, just to focus on Bi-Net for a minute here. Bi-Net USA has been in existence for about 12 years, and until the end of 2001 had been an all-volunteer organization. In the beginning of 2002, we hired our first ever executive director, Penina Porter. And so we're now I believe the only bisexual organization with-- at the moment-- with a full-time staff person.

GIGI: Yeah. We were going to try to have Venita on tonight, but logistically it didn't work out.

BARRY SAIFF: Yeah, she's traveling. She's in Boston now.

GIGI: Yeah. But you've been working with Venita a lot, Barry. Can you tell us how that's going.

BARRY SAIFF: It's going great actually. Venita is really an amazing person. I think we've all been very impressed with her. She has many years of leadership experience in the queer community, particularly in the AIDS service and AIDS prevention community.

She was, I know with Stop Aids in San Francisco, but she's been with many different kinds of AIDS organizations. She also worked at the Queer Community Center in the East Bay. And she started out about 15 years ago, 20 years ago in Boston, and did a lot in that community. She's always done all of this stuff as an out bisexual woman.

She's an African-American woman, a woman of color. And something a lot of people don't know about her is that she's also an actress. And I actually saw her perform in a play last fall in San Francisco, and she was great.

GIGI: Oh, wow.

[CHUCKLES]

Can you tell me-- I don't want to have you put words in her mouth, but working with her, can you get a sense of her vision for Bi-Net USA?

BARRY SAIFF: Boy.

GIGI: I know that's a big question.

[LAUGHTER]

BARRY SAIFF: I mean, I can talk about some of her strengths and some of what's important to her. I'm not sure that she-- I mean, she may be ready to speak about her vision of Bi-Net USA, but she's really just come on board recently. And while she's been active in the bi community for a long time, she hasn't really been involved with Bi-Net USA until this year.

But I think all of us have been very impressed with both with her people skills and her people savvy, and also with her media savvy. She has a lot of experience in dealing with the media. And that's going to be very helpful to us.

GIGI: Yeah, and--

MATT: She spoke at this event that Barry mentioned earlier, Bi and for The People kickoff event that happened at the San Francisco LGBT Center, and addressed the group about where Bi-Net-- where we want to try to take Bi-Net in the future. And she's quite an impressive person.

GIGI: Can you recap a little bit of that?

BARRY SAIFF: Well, I could talk a little bit. I've heard her speak in several arenas, and she's talked a lot about inclusivity and diversity, and the diversity of the bi community, and how we need to include all those different people. And that includes racial diversity and abilities diversity and political diversity, and you name it.

And she just has a lot of experience of building coalitions and reaching out to different kinds of groups, and I think is very good at building a consensus among such a diverse group of people.

GIGI: Yeah. Well, you touched on a key word that's going around Bi-Net right now and that's media, and becoming a voice. Can you talk a little bit about that?

BARRY SAIFF: Sure. What happens-- if I go back a little bit of history about a year and a half ago when we decided to restructure Bi-Net USA, and we were really looking at the question of, should we continue Bi-Net USA?

And a group of us gathered there in Austin, Texas. And we looked at the question, OK, there are other bisexual organizations, and do we really need another one? And what is there, if anything, that these other organizations aren't doing?

And what we came up with, and this really had developed over the last year among activists around the country is that there's one task that really needs to be done, and that is for bisexuals to have a national voice. And there's no other organization that is poised to do that.

And gays and lesbians, and even I think trans people do have organizations that speak for them nationally that are resources for the media, so that if you're a reporter, you know where to go. You can go to HRC or NGLTF or GLAD to find out the truth about an issue that involves gays or lesbians. But if it's bisexuals, where do you go?

And so we created a new mission for Bi-Net USA, which is to be a national voice for bisexuals. And that involves working with the media, and becoming a resource for the media.

GIGI: Yeah. And I know that there's plans to set up a media response network all across the country to respond to things that come out.

BARRY SAIFF: Yes. Yes. And there are plans for that, although-- and I think we'll be doing that. We do have volunteers around the country, and we haven't really mobilized them effectively to work with the media yet. And one of the things we're going to be doing in the next few months is having some trainings definitely in the Bay Area, perhaps in other areas to train people in how to work with the media.

But really for the last year and a half and still now, what we're focusing on in Bi-Net USA is infrastructure. Because one of the things you need to do to be able to succeed in working with the media and getting your views across is you need to have stability.

GIGI: Yeah.

BARRY SAIFF: You need to be there today and tomorrow, and Bi-Net needs to become an organization that's not in danger of disappearing. So that's what a lot of our focus has been on, fundraising and infrastructure building.

GIGI: Mm-hmm. Well, Matt, I want to get your perspective because I know you've been in the background a lot. How do you feel about where Bi-Net is and where we're going?

MATT: Well, it's interesting because one of the things that I recall looking back is somewhat of the history of the roots of Bi-Net USA, and the history that we do have. And it goes back to the 1987 march on Washington, which was then named Lesbian and Gay Rights.

But that was a point in which was one of the first gathering of bisexual people, of kind of a nation-wide gathering of bisexual activists from around the country. And out of that, several things happened. There was a 1990 conference, the first national bisexual conference that happened here in San Francisco. And the creation of at that point, the predecessor group to Bi-Net USA.

And so there's been some history. As Barry's noted, it's been a history in which it's largely been volunteer-based, and we're now in transition to a professionally-staffed organization. And it's important-- There has been a history in which Bi-Net USA has allowed a place for different media to go to, to say, wait a second, we're doing a story on bisexuality, here's an issue out there that we'd like people to take a bisexual perspective.

And people have worked really hard to ensure that that voice is there. There are bisexuals obviously all over the country, but it's a conduit. It's a place where people can go to, they can contact Bi-Net USA and say, hey, we've got a story about this, do you have people that you can provide us to do interviews, and so forth

GIGI: Yeah. And I know that-- I look back over time and see such a need just for education through the media because there's so much misinformation and myths and stigma around the word bisexual.

[CHUCKLES]

BARRY SAIFF: Yes.

MATT: Yeah. It's such a loaded term that people posit many, many assumptions about, and then of course is something that once people-- bisexuals have their own voice to talk to people about their perspective, it's been an incredible way to break down those stereotypes and wrong assumptions.

GIGI: Yeah.

BARRY SAIFF: Yeah, I just see the media as such an effective-- potentially effective way to do that, and because I've been educating people most of my life about this. And all of the gay men I met or straight men who told me that, no, you're not bisexual because there's no such thing as a true bisexual. and--

[LAUGHTER]

And I have a lot of experience of that--

GIGI: Hello.

[CHUCKLES]

BARRY SAIFF: --one-on-one education, but there's a lot of people out there, and one-on-one takes a long time.

GIGI: Yes. I've been there, I've done that.

[LAUGHTER]

We do exist in small numbers. At least those of us that are really out there, we do exist. But I think that's part of the problem that I'm seen is that the bi community is such an invisible community in many ways.

BARRY SAIFF: Well, since you and I talked on this show 364 days ago--

MATT: Oh my gosh.

GIGI: Yeah.

BARRY SAIFF: --on April 7, 2001. And since then, on September 6, 2001, we-- Bi-Net USA, we have actually worked with the media over many years, but on September 6, we had I think what was our greatest success to date. Which is that CNN did a four minute segment on bisexuality, which GLAD and Bi-Net USA helped them with. And they actually interviewed four very diverse bisexuals, and gave people all over the country and I believe all over the world a very good education about what bisexuality is.

GIGI: And I think that might be a good place to go right now. What is bisexuality? Because I think a lot of people have different ideas of what it is.

BARRY SAIFF: Yeah. Yeah, I couldn't take a crack at that. Bisexuality is a sexual orientation, and that's one of the most important points is that there are more than two sexual orientations. There is heterosexuality, and that's basically an attraction for members of a different gender than your own. And there's homosexuality, attraction for people of the same gender as you, and there's bisexuality, which is attraction for people of different genders.

And it's not a relationship style like heterosexuals and homosexuals, bisexuals can participate in many different kinds of relationships. They can be monogamous, they can be polyamorous, they can cheat on each other just like heterosexuals and homosexuals.

GIGI: What about you, Matt?

MATT: Well, I think Barry's right. And one of the ways I think of bisexuality is the capacity to have both emotional and sexual relationships with different genders. And in taking that perspective, it's very hard in our culture to think about the possibility of being involved with let's say men and women. And that you do have the capacity to be attracted to them sexually, that you can have bond with them emotionally and have emotional relationship with them, and it's something that--

And I think there's lots of people in the world that have that, but unfortunately many, many institutions push people in one way or the other. Oh you have to-- of course, given homophobia that people are pushed into heterosexuality.

And then on the other hand in gay and lesbian community, what I've found is many people, if they've gone through the process of coming out and they find a gay, lesbian community to feel safe in, that even though they may still have the capacity to have relationships with the opposite gender, that they may feel hemmed in by sort of a community that-- some aspects of that community that says, well, wait a second, there's no such thing as bisexuality. It's not true.

GIGI: Mm-hmm. I think you kind of hit on one key word there and that is, that it's-- it's kind of a-- I forget the word you said but being bisexual, you have an attraction to both genders, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to act on both at once.

MATT: Right, right.

BARRY SAIFF: Right. The sexual and emotional capacity, I would say.

GIGI: Yeah, capacity, that was the word.

BARRY SAIFF: And one thing I like is the way that actually Fritz Klein talks about it in his books is that there are many dimensions to sexual orientation.

GIGI: Oh yes.

BARRY SAIFF: And one of them-- maybe one of the most important or the easiest to define things by is attraction. To whom are you attracted? But there's also, who do you fantasize about? Who do you have sex with? Who are you in intimate relationships with? And these can all be different for different people. And then also there's the past, the present, and the future, which can also be different in the same person.

GIGI: Yeah. Another sexual orientation, this gets confused a lot is sexual orientation and gender identity.

BARRY SAIFF: Yes.

MATT: Sure.

GIGI: And those are two very distinct things.

BARRY SAIFF: Yes. I have a very strong gender identity as a man. And it's not that I think all men should be men or that all people should be men, but myself, I feel very masculine, and I enjoy being a man. And so that has nothing to do in a sense my sexual orientation.

GIGI: Mm-hmm. I kind of want to get back to the gala a little bit, and just-- can you tell me a little bit about what happened? What all--

BARRY SAIFF: What happened? Are you talking about the opening gala of the center?

GIGI: No, the bisexual segment.

BARRY SAIFF: OK. Oh the Bi and for The People party. I didn't get nearly as drunk at that one.

[LAUGHTER]

But I did have a great time. And one of the things is that they honored bisexual activists. And there were I think 250 people that were honored.

GIGI: Oh wow.

BARRY SAIFF: And the certificates were printed out for each of those people, and many of these people actually got their certificates.

[LAUGHTER]

MATT: The evening was it was great because many, many people that-- again, as a person who's been involved for some time, and people I hadn't seen in years actually were there. And we had-- the program was set up to first have some presentations of some honoring those people who have done a lot of bisexual activism.

But then following this was just-- all I can say is the word fabulous evening of entertainment with comedy and music. And this room was strewn out with these huge 18 inch balloons of multicolors covering the floor that every time you walk through, they bounced all over the place.

BARRY SAIFF: And then we had a circus show in the lobby. So the center has a two-story, tall lobby.

MATT: Auditorium, yeah.

BARRY SAIFF: And this group that's-- it's kind of like Cirque du Soleil, but there are about six or seven of them. And you had-- I mean, we were just in awe. Everyone watching.

MATT: Keith Hennessy's Group.

BARRY SAIFF: Yeah, Keith Hennessy's group. And what they do with their bodies. I mean, they are these like contortionists, and they do all that. And then they climb on curtains that were hanging from the balcony and contort themselves, and contort the curtains together with them. And yeah.

MATT: Scantily clad.

BARRY SAIFF: But actually, Matt, touched on one part, the part that was frustrating for me is that there were many people there whom I hadn't seen in many years, and I didn't see them.

GIGI: Oh.

[LAUGHTER]

BARRY SAIFF: I heard they were there. I know--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

MATT: There was such a crowd. It was wall-to-wall folks, and a lot of fun. I think it was an incredible evening.

GIGI: Well, it sounds like it was a historical event, because a lot of organizations are inclusive in name only. But I think we're seeing a new trend developing where bisexuals and transgendered are becoming included in more than name.

BARRY SAIFF: No, I think you're right. And frankly, I think that the opening of this center in San Francisco is very important for the queer community internationally. And it is a very inclusive thing, and the way it's being done is very inclusive. And I'm very proud of it, and I'm proud of the part that bisexuals have had in building the center.

GIGI: Yeah.

MATT: Many people were-- Barry touched on earlier-- were-- during the development of this center, obviously, they went to the community to help raise funds. And people that became founders, which I have to say Barry has generously donated, and his family has donated much.

And the Bay Area Bisexual Network itself became a founding organization, and so serve on the ground floor in San Francisco the various aspects of the bisexual community were involved and listed as founders. And I think it's almost a coming of age of recognition of that.

BARRY SAIFF: Yes, I have in front of me a printout of an email from January 3, 2001, and the subject is, we got the office approved. So there's a coalition of bisexual groups that were working for the last three or four years to have a bisexual office in the new San Francisco center, and it's actually over a year ago that we got the approval to do that. But then the building wasn't open yet.

GIGI: Mm-hmm. And that kind of brings us back to connecting all this together, and that's having Bi-Net USA housed in the center.

BARRY SAIFF: Yes. And we're not quite there yet. But there is an office for us, and we haven't occupied it yet. And that has to do with the difficulty of transitioning to a staffed organization with an office. We've never had an office before.

And one of the things we have to do in order to occupy the office is get insurance according to the center's lease requirements. And so we're working on all those issues.

GIGI: Yeah. Well, another some delay just because they had originally planned to move people in last October and it got pushed back and pushed back and pushed back.

BARRY SAIFF: Right, I mean it's a 10-year long project then it's basically like six months late opening.

GIGI: Yeah.

BARRY SAIFF: So that's-- I mean, it's a \$15 million building. It's an amazing project.

MATT: Incredible.

BARRY SAIFF: They've done an amazing job on it. And the planning that went into it, and the just everything that's provided for and--