



Top Stories



Spanish King's 'shut up' to Chávez becomes ringtone

Dutch Justice Department bans Wikipedia for employees following vandalism



The Justice Department in the Netherlands will temporary suspend access to Wikipedia for employees, following recently revealed

vandalism by staff members.

Featured story

Murray Hill on the life and versatility of a New York drag king

Wikinews interviews New York City downtown legend Murray Hill, performer, comedian, former Mayoral candidate and drag king, about the differences between drag

queens and kings, the future of downtown culture, and his life on the stage.



Wikipedia Current Events

Pakistan rejects US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte's demand to lift the state of emergency in Pakistan.

•Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's former Prime Minister, announces he will dissolve the Forza Italia party and found a new one called Freedom People's Party.

•Japan resumes whaling of humpbacks for the first time in 40 years. Greenpeace and other environmentalist groups condemn the decision.

Chávez warns oil prices could double if US invades Iran

The president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, warned that the price of crude oil could reach \$200 per barrel "if the United States committed the madness of invading Iran", or attacked his country.

Chávez made this statement in the act of opening the third Summit of Chiefs of State of the Organization of Exporting Petroleum Countries (OPEC).

Mr. Chávez pleaded that OPEC should adopt a more political agenda and requested "that the threats against the countries" of the organization should stop. He said that \$100 dollars per barrel was a "fair" price and remembered that when he assumed presidency of Venezuela in 1999, the price went up to about ten dollars.

The prices of raw oil approached \$100 last week before settling

down again. Some observers think it is possible that the \$100 barrier may be broken. During the trading session following this two-day summit, that is expected to result in the "Declaration of Riyadh", the price of petroleum rose \$0.80 in the New York market and \$0.66 in London.

Spanish King's 'shut up' to Chávez becomes ringtone

The angry "Why don't you shut up?" that King Juan Carlos I of Spain uttered against Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez a week ago on Saturday has apparently reached a cult status in Spain and Venezuela.

A mobile phone ringtone remix of the quote text has been downloaded 500,000 times (generating some €1.5 million revenues). The ringtone features a voice actor (avoiding legal issues) with beats and a loop effect emphasising the 'shut up'. A student group from the Venezuelan capital of Caracas which opposes the President has downloaded the ringtone too. "It's a form of protest, it's something that a lot of people would like to tell the president. Now, whenever we call each other, that's what we hear," said Laura Solorzano, 21, in a telephone interview with the Miami Herald.

Today, the internet domain name of the quote was sold on eBay for €10,200 to a Spanish power seller called 'daikoku-design'. Juan Antonio Morales, 34, of Almería, Spain, had reserved the domain

Gymnasium, located in the western district of Weiden. The items had been confiscated at their homes.

Finalists head for Canadian football's 2007 Grey Cup

The Saskatchewan Roughriders will face off against the Winnipeg Blue Bombers at the 95th Grey Cup game in Toronto next Sunday, the 25th, as the Canadian Football League's 2007 season nears its completion.

The Roughriders defeated the BC Lions with a 26-17 score in the Western division final today at Vancouver. Saskatchewan last played in the Grey Cup finals 10 years ago.

Winnipeg won the Eastern division in Toronto after a 19-9 victory against the Toronto Argonauts.

The Grey Cup, first awarded in 1909, is Canada's most significant football trophy. This year's Grey Cup championship game features a scheduled performance by American rock musician Lenny Kravitz during the half-time intermission.

Murray Hill on the life and versatility of a New York drag king

Drag—dressing in the clothing atypical of your born gender—in recent years has found mainstream success. Films such as *Priscilla, Queen of the Dessert*, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything!* Julie Newmar have prominently featured drag performers. But they have all focused on men in drag as women.

Murray Hill is a comedian, emcee and performer. He is also a drag king. Called "The Hardest Working Middle-aged Man in Show

Business", The New York Times christened him "the current reigning patriarch of the downtown performance community." He is seemingly everywhere, emceeing a bingo night at the now closed, Jimmy Fallon-backed Mo Pitkins' House of Satisfaction on Avenue A, or hosting the Polyamorous Pride Day in Central Park. Hill has become a legend in New York's "anything goes" counterculture theater scene who is beginning to find mainstream success; which would be a first for a drag king.

David Shankbone's examination of New York City's culture has brought him to the whip's end of a BDSM dungeon, on the phone with RuPaul, matching wits with Michael Musto, grilling Gay Talese, eating dinner with Augusten Burroughs and quizzing the bands that play the Bowery Ballroom. In this segment he talks to downtown legend Murray Hill, former New York City mayoral candidate and comedian, on the last night of Mo Pitkins' House of Satisfaction.

Murray Hill the performer

David Shankbone: Where is Murray Hill from?

Murray Hill: Murray Hill is from Murray Hill. 23rd Street and Third Avenue. What I like to tell the kids is I was born in the back seat of a cab right there, which is how I got the name. The cab driver asked my dad, 'Is it a boy or a girl?' and my dad said, 'No.' I knew right then and there, kid, that I was going to wind up in Showbiz! And here I am! Fifty-five years later, lookin' good!

DS: What does Murray Hill do on a Saturday?

MH: I'm doing shows. I am the only entertainer who has the most diverse working schedule, and my nickname is "The Hardest Working Middle-aged Man in Show

Business." This Saturday I hosted the Polyamorous Pride Day in Central Park. That was 106th Street and Central Park West. Then I got into a cab and a half later I was on Canal Street and West Broadway to be in a burlesque show I hosted for a completely different audience. And that's showbiz!

DS: Do you ever talk about the Iraq War in your routines?

MH: I don't necessarily talk about the war, specifically. I do not speak favorably about our President.

DS: Has the war affected you at all?

MH: I think September 11 affected me greatly. As far as what I do and how I relate to audiences, I don't know if the war has affected me as much in the last few years other than having pure anger at our government and being ashamed sometimes when I go overseas. I'm just like, "Ugh!" I'm against war completely. I don't talk about that stuff too much. I talk a lot about New York gentrification.

DS: Would you ever leave New York?

MH: In my shows I talk a lot about New York and sticking with it. I've seen the changes so drastically. I would never leave it permanently, but I would go to L.A. for awhile.

DS: Why?

MH: Showbiz! But I could never do it permanently.

DS: Do you feel like you are being held back here because it has dwindled so much?

MH: I have performed in New York for almost ten years and people still come to my show for the first time and are like, "Whoa!" They had never heard of me and they

had never seen me. I think New York is a place where that can happen over and over. You can't really do that in a place like L.A. or San Francisco because in two years everyone and their mother have seen you twenty times. I'm a performer who accepts the changes of New York and I perform to that. I had a closing night here upstairs where there were no East Village people and I couldn't believe it! These are all new out-of-towners. It was almost the gentrified audience that was at my show. I'm addicted to it. I've never been more electrified by my audience than this year.

DS: How has your show evolved since you started doing it?

MH: It started as something I just did for fun and how it has changed I have put in the time with my craft. I'm very much an improv performer and I think over the years I have developed more of a back-story and honed my craft. I'm a professional now. A full-time career, I'm living off of it, I'm doing movies and music videos. Plays, some TV stuff. It's become a full-blown career.

DS: When you say you have honed your craft, what sort of research do you do?

MH: A lot of people just see me and think it's improv, but improv is a skill. Nobody knows I do a lot of research; I read everything and listen to a lot of records. Toady Fields records and Bell Bart. Francis Bay records. All the old guys who are full-bodied entertainers. I have this extensive knowledge of that 50s, 60s and 70s comedy. I'm influenced by Bette Midler—those old concerts are unbelievable! Justin Bond, Lady Bunny, Alan Cumming, Jack on Three's Company, Benny Hill, Jackie Gleason, Carol Burnett, Lily Tomlin, George Jefferson, Neil

Diamond, of course. I do a lot of writing and then develop on stage. Over the years I've learned to write things down and develop a catalogue of material.

DS: They say all really great comedians they honed their craft through personal tragedy.

MH: I agree with most of that.

DS: Does that apply to you?

MH: There's different ways to react to things, and you could be depressed and upset, or you can go another direction. Comedy got me out of the gutter and got me positive. It makes people happy. I think a lot comedians are very negative, angry, bitter people. I don't know if you have ever spent any time in the comedy scene. They can be brutal, on stage and off. I'm taking a different route than those performers. It's important to me that I'm a non-threatening character. People are more accepting. Because of that I've had a lot of opportunity in my career. Showbiz!

Murray Hill the person

DS: Who have you patterned your persona of Murray Hill after?

MH: It came across naturally. I was recently at a family funeral—

DS: As Murray Hill?

MH: No, half and half. I have an uncle who I knew growing up. Dead ringer to Murray! I'm half Italian. My grandfather and my father are pretty much the spirit of Murray, this patriarchal-yet-warm character. Roly-poly.

DS: Does your family accept you?

MH: That's a long story. I'll answer it saying I moved out when I was 18 and I have not gone back. But my Dad died so I did go back for that, and that was the first time in fifteen years.

DS: How was the reaction?

MH: I don't talk about that much. It's still new. A lot of where my work comes from in a human standpoint is that I came from a very conservative background and intense place. It's very important me to have the complete opposite in my shows. I accept everybody in my shows and I'm very positive. And—something I look up to RuPaul about—is visibility. It's so important today to be visible, to be out there, and take up space, to show people they have no reason to have fear. RuPaul was on TV in the 1990s, and I've been trying to get on TV and people are still worried, and it's been twenty years. I've been the first drag king—if you have to use the word—to do many things. I performed for Penelope Ann Cruz. The first to be on television. I really believe there is a place for us.

DS: What do you do when you're not doing show business?

MH: I got hooked on a new game: bowling. There's a bowling alley near my house. I'm into this new game called Speedmitton. I actually exercise. Then I watch Dean Martin DVDs. I have all of his shows on DVD from those late-night commercials. Have you seen those, with Don Rickles? I bought them. I was that schmuck at 3:00 in the morning I bought the whole damn set and they are still coming in the mail!

DS: Are you dating anyone?

MH: Quite a few. I will say my public girlfriend Is Dirty Martini; my Hollywood wife. My Beard, so to speak.

DS: The New York Times article made it seem like you are embodying this character, that you have become him, and have no personality outside of Murray Hill.

MH: Well, I don't know about that.

I think of myself as an entertainer and there are definitely some old school references, and I try to make it a little easier for people and say I am a comedian. I think people have an easier time understanding what that is.

DS: Do you consider yourself transgendered?

MH: I really don't label myself. It's a conscious—possibly political—decision and I try not to be labeled by gender.

DS: Do you consider yourself butch?

MH: I consider myself a tough guy. Butch is another label that doesn't sit well with me.

DS: Because it denies your femininity as well?

MH: No, just because people like to put narrowing labels on sexuality. I try to challenge that.

DS: Do you surprise yourself with your sexuality?

MH: What surprises me is I'm often in a lot of uncomfortable situations as Murray, and it surprises me how accepted I am in certain places. It's mind-blowing. What I do find surprising is when I go to a wedding, and then all the gender-sexuality issues are in a neon shining light, and that's when I'm like, "Whoa!" I really can say I think of myself as what I am, and I don't try to put that in a box. But when I go to a wedding, for example, I'm like, "Agh!" for the way I'm treated, looked at, talked about.

Drag as performance art for women

DS: You don't like the phrase drag king, is that correct?

MH: No, somebody said that—The New York Times wrote an article about me and they made it seem like I don't like the phrase 'drag

king'. What I tried to explain to them is that I don't like to be labeled as anything that people form a very narrow viewpoint about. This goes for drag king, this goes for anything else. When you say 'drag king' it's a very specific thing.

DS: What is a drag king?

MH: A cross-dresser who does some kind of performance, and I think I am much more than that. I really hammered the press about this and I finally got to a point where I think when people assume that somebody is queer, or different, or trans, they always want to put something before their name. And that is what drag king has been. Why can't you just call me a comedian like Jerry Seinfeld is called a comedian?

DS: What do you think people think of when they hear 'drag king'?

MH: I'm not really sure. I think that they immediately think lesbian and sexuality as a show, as a spectacle. It's a longer discussion, with drag queen and somebody like Justin Bond and somebody like Lady Bunny. They are two totally different types of people and perform two different types of ways. Lady Bunny is a drag queen—

DS: Who is rarely divorced from that personality—

MH: Well, who knows. I've known her for ten years and I've only known her as Lady. Justin Bond doesn't go by drag queen; he says he is a transgendered artist. It's much more fluid. And I think I'm more in that camp.

DS: Then there's Lypsinka, who very much sees it as a character.

MH: Yes, as an actor playing a character. I'm more in the Justin vein. The lines are more blurred.

DS: Do you think it's less acceptable to be a drag king or a drag queen?

MH: The differences are unparalleled. Drag kings have it rough. I just had a reviewer say some really inappropriate things about me, and I always say to myself, 'Would they ever say that about Lady Bunny?' They were questioning genders and names and this, talking about body parts. Drag queens have been in the culture forever. They've had mainstream visibility and success. Drag kings are just not comparable.

The gay community and drag artists

DS: Do you think you get it worse from the gays or worse from the mainstream?

MH: I've worked very hard, and I still have to work very hard to be recognized by the gay media, because most of it is run by gay men. They've been very supportive, but I've had to really push them. I think mainstream doesn't ever know what's going on, but the press has been good to me.

DS: I interviewed Michael Musto and he spoke about how younger gays are embracing their femininity more and have overcome body fascism; but in my interview with RuPaul she said almost the exact opposite. She felt men using femininity as part of their emotional palate is still considered anathema. What do you think about how gender is seen today among younger people?

MH: It's definitely different now. RuPaul does a lot of touring, and it's very different when you leave New York. I have noticed the last five years in New York that the lesbian, butch/femme thing has

eroded. It's much more fluid and multi-gendered. I think the gay guy scene is like that. If you go to Williamsburg and the East Village gay male scene, it's completely what Michael said. RuPaul doesn't hang out in that scene anymore. He was here in the 1980s and it was very different.

DS: You think RuPaul's perspective is coming from a show-tour world?
 MH: I'm not sure, but he's not in a daily New York scene as much as Michael is, or as much as I am. It is different now. If you go to a gay pride, and I just did gay pride in Baltimore, it's a whole different ball game. You've got your butch, you've got your femme, you've got your closeted people who are coming out at Pride and being feminine for that one day only. It's very different. The club scene now is more queer than it is gay and lesbian. It's more trans. The lesbians, the Trans and the gay guys all hang out together. If you go to this club called Metropolitan on Wednesday night you'll see it.

Drag queens and drag kings: the differences

DS: With drag queens it seems like almost anything is on the table. If they want to butch it up, if they want to fem it up. In the craft, are there boundaries you feel you can't cross?

MH: I will never take off my shirt and tie. That's about as far as it goes. I take off my jacket and every once in awhile when the audience is screaming for me to do it, I'll take off my pants at shows. I really don't have too many rules. My rules are more about the environment I create for the shows. I'm very strict about having a positive environment. I will never put somebody down in a negative, crass way, which you'll see at comedy clubs and drag queen shows pretty much all the

time. I make fun of everybody, but I do it in a way where we all feel good about it instead of a way where somebody thinks, 'Wow, somebody is really getting it.' I'm very aware that women come to the show and they feel safe and that it's a fun place. That's my biggest rule.

DS: What about in terms of gender roles, how you use gender? Are there boundaries for a drag king when they are performing in terms of what they should or shouldn't do?

MH: I don't know. When there was a consolidated drag king scene here—1997—there was a heavy scene but now it's faded away. There isn't really a group anymore. But all across the country there are groups everywhere. Their performances are very different than what I'm doing. It's overtly about gender, sexuality, politics and a reveal. They'll show the dildoes, strip down and do a transformation. A lot of it is about getting the terms right—drag kings, boyz, and now there's a scene of lesbians doing F2F drag. That's all about challenging the gender stuff. It's part of the act; whereas my stuff doesn't make that the core of the act. Obviously it's there, but I don't hit the kids over the head with it. Which is why more people come to my show. They're not threatened by the sexuality aspect of it.

The direction of New York downtown culture

DS: Why do you think the drag king scene in New York has died down?

MH: New York is a very different place. People who do drag have a lot of strong personalities in New York. There's a scene, and we all know each other from the scene,

but in terms of a group getting together having meetings and a theater company it's just not part of New York culture.

DS: But it used to be?

MH: Not so much. I think people are very individual here. It's not a group mentality. It's more about community building and creating your own community. Since everything in New York is 'cool' here there's not much of a need to create a community since we are accepted. Lady Bunny, RuPaul, they are very much who they are and went off on their own. They were part of the East Village scene.

DS: The Pyramid Club days—

MH: Yeah, but it wasn't a group.

DS: Where do you think downtown Manhattan culture is going right now?

MH: [Laughs] Brooklyn! [Laughs]

DS: Where in Brooklyn?

MH: There's a lot of stuff happening in Williamsburg. There are more queer bars and performance spaces cropping up. There are more corporate places, too. Clear Channel just bought a club in Williamsburg. We are now sitting in a place that still has East Village type performance, and that's what this wall is about behind me, honoring all the downtown legends. And now this is closing. Fez closed, which is where I started, and so did Kiki and Herb. That place is closed, and now this place is closed.

DS: Do you think it's a permanent change?

MH: I definitely think that the East Village begin a counter-culture melting pot is definitely over. Definitely over. We're not all in one place anymore but we're spread out. Nobody just lives in

the East Village anymore; nobody just lives in Williamsburg. We can't afford it. There's no consolidation. When I first started in New York—

DS: When was that?

MH: In 1996 I ran for Mayor. Then you could go to a club every night and the scene would be packed with all kinds of performers like Dean Johnson, who just passed away. Mario, Jackie Beat, every night! That's how I knew everybody, but that's definitely over.

DS: Where did it go?

MH: It spread out. It ended and it spread out. A lot of clubs got raided and a lot of the clubs closed. Nightlife has really changed.

DS: Is there not an audience for it anymore?

MH: There's always an audience for it!

DS: Why wouldn't they cultivate a scene? Everybody is still here.

MH: You can't compete with a real estate developer. So places like these are being bought up and being turned into condos or WholeFoods. It's not just about the audience, it's about the actual pushing out of the artists and performance spaces, pushing them further and further out of the city. People still come to my shows and people still go out every night to see shows. It's just more spread out.

DS: Manhattan was always so central, do you think Brooklyn can fulfill that role or is the centralness gone?

MH: I think it's an era that's gone, but there's a lot of activity happening in Brooklyn. I live in Brooklyn, but I used to never perform there. But I performed there twice last week. I used to go

to Manhattan every weekend, but now I stay in Brooklyn.

DS: What kinds of places are cultivating the scene there and by whom?

MH: Larry Tee is somebody who is trying to keep things alive. He has a couple parties he has started up in Brooklyn. He started the electroclash movement in Williamsburg. There's Music Hall. Union Pool. Sugarland. Northsix, which they just changed the name to Galapagos. Luna Lounge is in Brooklyn now.

Today in History

284 – Diocletian became Roman Emperor, eventually establishing reforms that brought an end to the Crisis of the Third Century.

1700 – Great Northern War: Swedish forces led by King Charles XII defeated the Russian army of Tsar Peter the Great in the Battle of Narva.

1902 – While discussing how to promote the newspaper L'Auto during a lunch meeting in Paris, sports journalists Henri Desgrange and Géo Lefèvre came up with the idea of holding a cycling race that became known as the Tour de France.

1910 – Francisco I. Madero promulgated the San Luis Plan, starting a revolt against President Porfirio Díaz that marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution.

1945 – The Nuremberg Trials against 24 leading Nazis involved in the Holocaust and various war crimes during World War II began in Nuremberg, Germany.

1998 – Zarya, the first module of the International Space Station, was launched on a Proton rocket from Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan.

November 20 is Zumbi Day in Brazil, Revolution Day in Mexico, Teacher's Day in Vietnam.

Quote of the Day

It is the high privilege and sacred duty of those now living to educate their successors and fit them, by intelligence and virtue, for the inheritance which awaits them. In this beneficent work sections and races should be forgotten and partisanship should be unknown.
~ James A. Garfield

Word of the Day

conundrum; n

1. A difficult question or riddle.
2. A difficult choice or decision that must be made.

About Wikinews

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