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Everyone Gets Naked for Justin Luke Zirilli

BY SAVAS ABADSIS JULY 05 2012 3:24 PM ET



Zirilli in his signature pink frames at Gay Pride XL with Chris Crocker of "Leave Britney Alone" fame

New York is famous for its literary movements. There was Dorothy Parker and the Algonquin Round Table, the Harlem Renaissance, the Beats, and so on. The dawn of the 21st century was rife with doom and gloom about the end of the publishing industry (and, if it was to be believed, the closing of LGBT bookstores heralded the death knell of gay literature). Yet, as in any other counterrevolution, the Facebook generation has produced a number of unlikely breakout stars, including author Justin Luke Zirilli.

On any given night Zirilli can be found out and about in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York City, at the helm of two massively successful weekly parties. He throws 20Something Thursdays at XL with his business partner, Alan Picus, the creator of one of the city's longest-running and most successful gay promotional companies, BoiParty. He also works every Saturday at XL, alongside two of New York nightlife's historic luminaries, club owners (and husbands, recently married in a ceremony officiated by Fran Drescher) John Blair and Beto Sutter. But on many nights, Zirilli forgoes the intoxicating world of gay nightlife for something different: the writing room in his apartment, typing away on his trusted MacBook Pro.

Zirilli's self-published book *Gulliver Takes Manhattan* quickly drew the attention of Amazon Encore with its robust sales. "People think this is my first book, which isn't true," Zirilli says. "I have at least 20 more lying in a closet somewhere. However, when I self-published *Gulliver Takes Manhattan*, I had a platform from which to market it from and a world I was deeply a part of, both thanks to Alan Picus and BoiParty. I don't think I would have become the highest-rated gay book or anywhere near it without a previously discovered and installed fan base."

The author promoted the book in some unusual and innovative ways. He managed to get photos of hundreds of half-naked (and sometimes totally naked) young men reading his book, a particularly potent form of viral marketing. (That's dancer Aaron Hooper reading *Gulliver Takes Manhattan* below.)

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PHOTOS: L.A. Pride in West
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Tonys Host Hugh Jackman's 5

“Nightlife is about the beauty. It’s about sex. That’s also what my book is about. By encouraging guys to snap a pic of themselves in a bathroom, bedroom, backyard, or elsewhere, and then blowing it up on all of my social media channels, I propelled them into a greater limelight. It turned them into superstars and turned my book into a status symbol. After a few weeks, I was no longer begging people to take photos, they were begging me to take them.”



Although it’s been sad to see the closing of many gay and lesbian bookstores, Zirilli’s found a new way to breathe life into the gay literature market. His Facebook page and blog are like a combination focus group and salon, bringing disparate groups of young men together and giving them a sense of community that would not have been possible otherwise.

“Amazon was floored to discover that there were no specific books that were like mine: a *Sex and the City* that just happened to be filled with gay 20-somethings,” Zirilli says. “It seems that the publishing world has just overlooked gay men in their 20s, assuming they don’t read. What I discovered is that they do read ... it’s just that nothing to date has made them want to read — besides *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, etc. of course. Also interesting is that my books are being more widely read on mobile phones and tablets than in traditional paperback form. It’s their preferred content device, and the ratio of digital to physical sales is staggering. And now I am able to use social media to focus-group everything. I have thousands of test readers. I put my book covers up to a poll vote. I run contests where the winner gets to make a guest appearance in my book.”

When he’s not writing or hosting XL parties, Zirilli feeds his addiction to social media as the creator of Gorgeous, Gay and Twenty-Something, a private international Facebook group, as the New York correspondent for the national gay talk show *The Swish Edition*, by moonlighting as a social media and new business consultant, and spending time with his boyfriend, Mash-up Mastermind DJ JoeRedHead.

“Gay 20-somethings live for social media,” he says. “And so do I. It’s a perfect combination.”

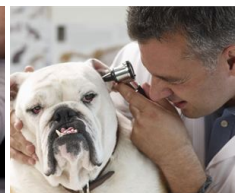
The sequel, *Gulliver Takes Five*, comes out at the end of October, and Zirilli’s social media fans are ready.

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