

Histories:

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I came out of the closet as queer and an artist in the late 80's/ early 90's. At that time the arts and queer communities were being decimated by the war (AIDS). I was young, idealistic, proud and angry. SILENCE = DEATH rang so loudly, I felt it in my bones.

At that time Queer culture was hitting some mainstream outlets with shows like *RENT* and *Lonely Planet*, and films like *Philadelphia*. It was all so sad. Artists like Robert Mapplethorpe, Karen Finley and Holly Hughes were making the news for receiving and losing NEA funding for creating 'pornographic' art.

To me these attitudes said we were only acceptable when presented as sad and sorry, but not bawdy and celebratory. loving, sad, dying men = good. Subversive, perverted, sex loving queers = bad. As queers we were fighting a war of perception. Were we going to come out in society as good, clean citizens, just like anybody else? Or are we a bunch of bad ass, leather wearing, freaks? I didn't like my choices. I loved the queens, freaks, geeks, trannies and perverts. I liked that our voices were now being heard, but I felt we were losing something important, our queerness. I did not want to see us tone it down.

By the mid-nineties I was poised to complete my BFA in theatre and dance - and was brought up short by serious health issues myself. At that time, disability and diversity were not the catch-phrases they are now. I was still Loud and Proud, yet in pain and surrounded by death.

I brought project after project to my main advisor for my BFA, and each time my projects were rejected. Finally he said to me (direct quote, I'll never forget it), "Quit bringing me this lesbian feminist crap". He felt that directing was a man's field, and I had a hard enough road ahead without advertising my lesbianism with my thesis project. He wanted me to pick a project that would play it safe. He wanted me to choose a "dead white guy" project.

My 'Loud' tuned into a Scream.

I switched to a BA - dropping the need to do my thesis project for credit. But I still did my project, I even wrote the paper. A few fellow students and graduates also supported my vision. Together we formed a company, and chose to produce Holly Houghes' *Well of Horniness* at the local gay bar. This title of the show is a take-off on the lesbian classic *The Well of Loneliness* - a book that depicts the sadness and ostracization of the gay life-style. *The Well of Horniness* flips (off) this view. The play is happy, irreverent, silly, perverted. It is a great big 'fuck you' to the prevailing culture of sorry-ness and sadness. And a welcome respite from all of the AIDS dramas. We dubbed ourselves the Screaming Weenies.

An interesting side note is that many in this group of artists were not gay, but each one of them embraced and loved their own queerness. And this is why I have never identified as gay or lesbian. My people are a much wider representation of humans - I like to say I am one of the “freaks, geeks, trannies, and tweeks”.

The show was a screaming success! It was held over and I have produced the show twice since then. My former BFA committee, minus the main advisor, all attended the show, and even graded my thesis.

Screaming Weenie went on to create many many shows over many many years - Irreverent, in-your-face with a good laugh, and righteous indignation. We said we do not make serious work, we make important play(s). You can not clean us up, or shut us up. Monty Pythons Flying Circus, meets the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence?

We put up a black comedy about the missing women during Pinktons trial (*Belly*). I heard that our show *Lounge* sparked the need for a re-definition of the word ‘theatre’ for the Jessie Awards. (*Lounge* was almost disqualified from the Jessies for not being ‘theatre, in the end we were nominated for 2, winning 1).

Over the years I have argued with other funders, institutions, and other ‘authorities’. Are drag queens and urban street artists ‘professional artists’? Is a DJ a musician? Where exactly is the line between theatre/opera/performance/rap? Why can’t I arrange a rehearsal schedule around my artists touring/gig schedule? To most of these question, at the base, my answer was simply:

It’s not your job (funder, bureaucrat, institution, committee, etc.) to answer these questions. Thats my job. As an artist, its my job to ask/answer these questions, present them to the world, and see if it sticks. You’ll have your answer when the community votes with their ass (in seats). It is our job as artists to define, re-define, ask, fail brilliantly, throw a wrench in the works, rock the boat, question authority, ridicule the king. Because...
SILENCE still = DEATH.

Keep screaming...