

DRAKE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE

"Uplifting LGBTQIA+ Voices "



MISSION STATEMENT

The Drake University Theatre Department Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee includes faculty and student representatives. This committee aims to promote and develop a culture of collaboration and inclusion in the department, college and university. The committee interprets diversity as embracing and respecting all races, nationalities, colors, creeds, religions, ages, disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, or associational preference. The committee works towards greater representation of those currently underrepresented in the department and in the theatre community.

VISION

We strive to cultivate a safe and supportive environment that celebrates the diverse, unique and multifaceted group of students and faculty in our department. We actively work to understand the complex and rich identities of self and those around us, and lean into difficult conversations related to equity, diversity and inclusion. We envision a department and university where equity, diversity and inclusion are recognized as core values that drive the development of all policies and practices. We believe in creating learning environments where hate, discrimination and microaggressions are not tolerated.

VIOLET SURPRISE THEATRE

Celebrating Queer Theatre Companies

Violet Surprise Theatre is a new Chicago-based queer theatre company that was founded in 2019 by Iris Sowlat and Allison Fradkin. Its mission is to "present new work that vibrantly and valiantly validate the identities and experiences of queer women, with fierce allyship to the non-binary community." Violet Surprise has hosted three festivals since its founding in 2019 - *Violet Surprise: Fem-slash Fest*, a festival of short plays that rewrote straight narratives in popular stories such as *The Avengers* or *Wicked* to be queer, *Lez Beaus*, a festival of new works that celebrate queer love, and *SapphFest*, a monthly zoom queer variety show. Current projects include *The Icon Project*, a devised play that will focus on the different experiences and lives of queer women, and *Lavender Menaces*, a festival of short plays about queer superheroes.

LGBTQ+ theatre tends to skew towards stories about queer men, and Violet Surprise's fierce dedication to the stories of queer women is a welcome change. It is also refreshing to see stories about LGBTQ+ identities that do not center themselves around queer trauma, and instead center themselves around vibrant expressions of queer identities.



Iris Sowlat



Allison Fradkin



To read more on Violet Surprise Theatre click [here](#).

"BEYOND THE BATHROOMS"

CULTIVATING MEANINGFUL TRANS INCLUSION IN THEATRICAL SPACES

Editorial piece written by John Meredith and M Sloth Levine of the Howlround Theatre Commons. July 28, 2019

Many arts organizations across the United States have started to vocally back the fight for transgender and non-binary equality. In a lot of cases, gender inclusion—at least for the New England theatre organizations where we work—has taken shape in the form of gender-neutral restrooms.

The swift creation of gender-inclusive facilities is a task on the advocacy checklist that theatres have clung to with surprising fixation. While this is a significant symbol of solidarity with the trans community, it is indicative of the New England theatre scene's dynamic with trans inclusion as a whole. There have been quick and outwardly-positive changes that highlight inclusivity, but broad and meaningful change requires long-term work and systemic shifts in how theatres operate. To see why deeper change is critical, just look at New England audiences. It's true theatres have been putting out more stories featuring trans characters. However, the majority of productions still have entirely cisgender casts, include far too many femme-acting men in dresses as a punchline, and present other harmful jokes at the expense of the trans community.

If inclusion efforts aren't reflected onstage, theatre patrons who aren't as attuned to LGBTQ+ issues may not understand why a company wants to put "men in dresses" in their restrooms during intermission. Case in point: at spaces where gender-neutral restrooms have replaced binary-designated ones, it's not uncommon to witness people turn with a suspicious glance to a friend and whisper something along the lines of, "I know which one used to be the women's room... follow me."

With violence against the LGBTQ population at an all-time high, it's vital that the theatre community dismantles stigma against trans people on all fronts. So, what can you do to continue growing an inclusive theatre scene?

TIPS TO GROW AN INCLUSIVE THEATRE SCENE

By John Meredith and M Sloth Levine

Talk the Talk: Language Matters

When it comes to language usage, some common complaints trans people hear are: I'm trying! But it feels impossible to keep up. Or, we used to be able to say this, why can't I anymore? When we correct you, it's not because we don't understand these realities—we do. But the world is constantly changing, and language will never stop changing with it as people's needs shift.

To start, make sure you use people's correct pronouns. It's a simple but meaningful first step—like the bathrooms. Bring the phrase “what pronouns do you want to use in this space?” into your introduction circles and contact forms.

Correct language usage is more than just memorization, it is about respect and empathy.

While we're on the subject, cut the phrase “preferred pronoun.” Just like a name, pronouns aren't “preferred,” they just are. Moreover, avoid saying “she series” or “he series.” It may seem like a quick and useful phrase, but it has an academic air that makes pronouns feel even more alienating. “She/her/hers” is generally more accessible. It explains what each of the main pronouns are and removes the allusion that “she” is normal because everyone can fill in the “her/hers” part, unlike “they” or “xe.”

Walk the Walk: Hire Us

Trans people are administrators and actors, designers and directors, playwrights and puppeteers, carpenters and costumers. Companies need to hire trans workers in all roles—not just front-facing positions that may bump diversity optics. Start by including diversity statements in all casting calls and job descriptions. But please, stop asking for “diverse applicants.” A single person cannot be diverse. Be specific in how your company is trying to be inclusive regarding gender, race, ethnicity, disability, etc. Regarding gender, try something along the lines of “we encourage actors of all gender identities to apply.”

TIPS TO GROW AN INCLUSIVE THEATRE SCENE

Train Everyone. All Aboard!

When a trans person is hired, they suddenly become the unpaid cultural consultant for the production. But “educate the production team on the Trans Experience and how to interact with trans people” likely isn’t part of their job description. If you’re missing some information in order to produce a particular play, you’ve skipped something crucial during the planning process, and it’s not on the token trans person to do that work for you. Instead, train everyone from the top down and all around:

administrators, executive directors, designers, technicians, front of house staff, and board members. Beyond being an HR concern, this is about growing in the ways you interact and live alongside those around you.

Stand Up for Us

Too often, trans people are the only trans person in the room, sometimes even the first openly trans person a company has hired. This can make them feel like a lab rat being vigilantly watched, like they have to act as the perfect example of the trans community. This can lead to a fear of speaking out. If I keep correcting people am I going to be labeled as the “problem actor”? If they don’t have a good experience with me, maybe they won’t want to hire a trans person again. Cis theatremakers: speak up during introductions if people aren’t saying pronouns. Correct co-workers when they misgender or deadname someone. Encourage a culture of “calling in” and speak up if your friends, peers, and supervisors make questionable or transphobic statements.

Tell Trans Stories by Trans People

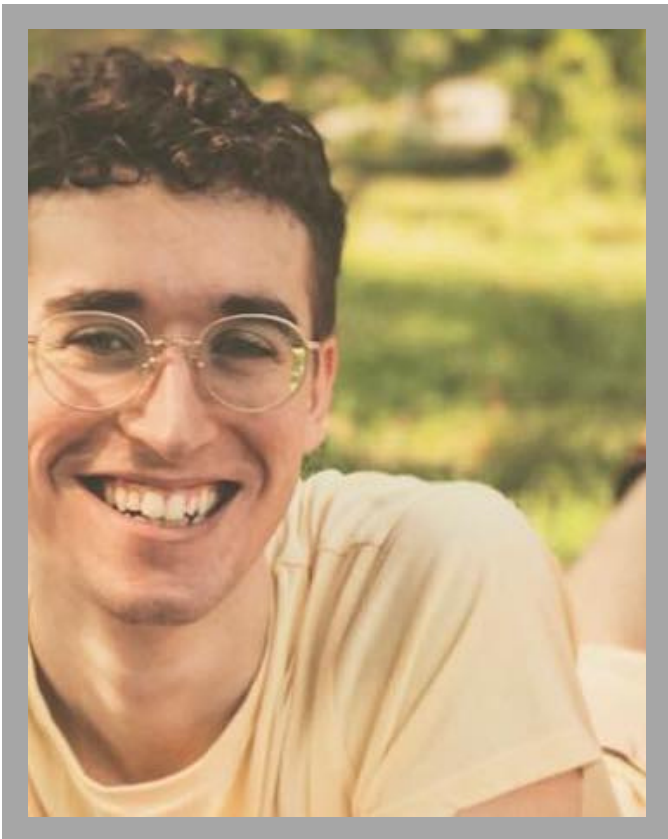
There are plenty of resources for finding scripts to produce. You don’t have to shadow New York and the big Off-Broadway theatre companies to plan seasons—there are trans writers in your local communities creating exciting work. Organizations like the New England New Play Alliance can help connect you. New Play Exchange has a database of over twenty-five thousand scripts that you can filter for LGBTQ themes, characters, or author identities. The Kilroys curates lists of underproduced new works by women, trans, and gender non-conforming playwrights. The Non-Binary Monologues Project showcases work specifically for non-binary actors.

TIPS TO GROW AN INCLUSIVE THEATRE SCENE

Beyond the Bathroom

Theatre spaces, in general, have become outwardly more welcoming for trans people by leaps and bounds. However, this work needs to be spread throughout the entirety of organizations and theatre processes. It is up to every single one of us to effect change to make the theatre community more inclusive—and this goes beyond gender-neutral restrooms and other surface-level changes.

Directors, managers, and producers: use your power to restructure your hiring and audition processes. Marketing, development, and literary folks: use your expertise to rethink your outreach and season planning. Everyone else: attend productions by and about queer people to show that these works matter and do bring in audiences. Speak up for the trans community and call in others to do the same. This can't be a one-and-done issue. Include us, listen to us, and pay attention to your actions as you move forward.



John Meredith



M Sloth Levine

To read the full article please click [HERE](#).

PERFORMER SPOTLIGHTS



Peppermint is an actor, singer, and television personality known for many things including her tremendous contributions to the LGBTQIA+ community. Peppermint is recognized as a queer pioneer for her years as a New York City night life drag queen and personality. She has been a well-known drag queen for a long time but in 2017 found worldwide notoriety when she was announced as a contestant on the popular reality television show

RuPaul's Drag Race. Peppermint of course is known for many of her accomplishments but her most proud accomplishment is one she recognizes as "game changing". Peppermint is the first openly transgender identifying woman to originate a principle role on Broadway. Peppermint made her Broadway debut in The Go-Go's-inspired musical *Head Over Heels* in June 2018 at the Hudson Theatre, playing the role of Pythio.

Billie Porter is a Grammy and Tony award winning singer, actor and fashion trendsetter. Porter is a queer identifying performer that has been doing musical theatre for majority of his life. Porter first appeared on Broadway in 1992 in *Five Guys Named Moe*. He also appeared in the original cast of *Grease*, *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, *Miss Saigon*, *Dreamgirls*, *Hair*, *Shuffle Along* and probably his most notable performance in *Kinky Boots*.



Porter has used his platform, talent and notoriety to be a voice for queer black artist just like him. Beyond his presence on stage and Broadway, Billie Porter has and continues to have an amazing career in film in television. There is so much to be said about the visible representation of an openly queer identifying Black man in the mainstream.



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT

Matt M. Morrow (he/her/they) is the artistic director of Diversionary Theatre in San Diego, CA. Matt is currently a Creative Catalyst Fellow with The San Diego Foundation and La Jolla Playhouse. He has developed new work with The Sundance Theatre Institute, The Old Globe, The Banff Centre, Center Theatre Group, American Conservatory Theater, Lincoln Center, PlayPenn, and Page 73 Productions in residence at the Yale School of Drama. He served as The John Wells Professor of Directing at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama (Graduate & Undergraduate Directing programs), and is a member of the Lincoln Center Director's Lab. He holds a BFA in Directing from Carnegie Mellon University.



Visit Matt's website [HERE](#).

DRAKE THEATRE EDI COMMITTEE REMINDERS!

- The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee has set up an anonymous submission link in an effort to allow students, staff, and faculty to share comments and questions about these issues. The committee will do our best to address your concerns and answer your questions. Additionally, if you have any ideas for events or topics you would like us to include in the EDI Newsletter submit them via the same link. You can find that submission link [here](#).
- Don't forget to visit our page on the Drake Theatre Department's website. You can find that link [here](#)!

