

ATHE 2025 Panel

Queering the Canon for Care

Moderator: Toby Vera Bercovici

Sponsorship: LGBTQ+, Theatre for Social Change

This panel will explore the idea of how onstage representation can reify various strata of society, making them more visible, and thus more real. By underlining, excavating, or creating queer narratives in what have been historically heteronormative stories, communities are able to see themselves reflected and feel a greater sense of rootedness, solidity, and presence.

Through a devising process which spanned three countries, five years, a global pandemic, and the deaths of friends and family from dementia, we created *When the Mind's Free*, a new work of dance-theatre “in conversation with *King Lear*” about a lesbian couple and their three daughters navigating the challenges of early onset Alzheimer’s and addiction. The piece performed in senior centers and senior living facilities as well as in traditional theatrical spaces; now, it is being turned into a film. I will share clips from the film and present the social impact made not only by the performance, but through post-show community conversations designed to call forth the lived experiences of audiences.— Toby Vera Bercovici

Is *Men On Boats* a queering of the canon? Considering the impact on both audience and actors, what is the significance of female and non-binary actors playing historical male adventurers in a play about the 1869 White American exploration of the Grand Canyon? How is our understanding of history changed by this casting? What new experience does it offer the actors? Does it provide the audience with an expanded understanding of women and non-binary people?—Eliza Ladd Schwarz

At the first rehearsal for *You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, I offered my undergraduates a history of queer performance societies which served as centers of community support and mutual aid. I encouraged the predominantly queer-identified group to draw inspiration from Café Cino, Pomo Afro Homos, Doric Wilson’s TASOS Theater, and Wow Café. Students then created community guidelines regarding how they wanted to support each other. Embracing this ethos of queer community catalyzed students to surface the

queer potentialities of canonical Peanuts characters. The day after the presidential election, circling before our dress, we returned to the conversation about mutual aid communities. Ensemble and audience reported feeling liberated from sadness by engaging with our “big queer *Charlie Brown*” during a moment of national strife.—John Michael DiResta

Queering a text doesn't always liberate it. I attempted to devise a queer take on Chekhov's *Three Sisters* filtered through the lens of '90s teen movies and the Riot Grrrl movement, titled *10 Things I Hate About Moscow (Idaho)*. The plan was to cast a femme performer as Vershinin and give Masha a queer awakening. However, when student actors began dropping out of the show for various reasons, I had to completely reconfigure the plot structure, ending up with a disappointingly heteronormative piece. I offer this as a cautionary tale and will enumerate the specific lessons learned from the experience, so that other queer-minded devisers don't suffer the same pitfalls and/or cause harm to their communities.—Michael Osinski

Toby Vera Bercovici