



Early morning on June 28th 1969. 50 years ago today, the riots against a police raid took place at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. Much more than an isolated event, it is usually remembered as the founding event of the possibility for LGBTIQ+ minorities to become visible, and even though much has changed, there is still a lot to do. We have made three questions to artists in the world of opera who identify as part of these communities, about their experiences and the work that, according to them, has yet to be done. Happy Pride!

***1. What does Pride / Pride Month mean to you?***

***2. How do you feel opera has allowed the LGBTIQ+ community visibility? If anything, what else could the industry do to help even further?***

***3. What advice would you give LGBTIQ+-identifying young artists who might be starting out in the business?***

JAMIE BARTON (mezzosoprano)

1. To me, Pride Month is about inclusion and support. It's a chance to celebrate those who got us here and also an inspiration to look forward and consider how we can be doing better for each other. In particular, I think it's an important time to take stock and make sure we're hearing each other's voices.

2. The opera industry has been a haven for a lot of us, but I think we can do more to ensure that marginalized voices within the LGBTIQ+ community are being heard. For starters, I want to see more diversity represented on stage so that people in the audience can recognize themselves in the stories we're telling. Given opera's history with gender-bending roles, as well as the safe haven it has been for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, I think this art form is uniquely equipped to amplify a myriad of stories. I'm certain that broader representation in both voices and narratives would resonate with modern audiences.

3. Learn what makes you unique and develop your artistry with integrity - with the honesty of who you are. Audiences crave that kind of vulnerability and authenticity from those of us on stage. And offstage, don't forget to build your chosen family - what I call my "logical" family, which supplements my biological family. Many of my chosen family are colleagues within the opera world, and they really help me deal with homesickness when I'm on the road. Having that kind of support will help you immensely through the ups and downs of this crazy business!



### TRACY COX (soprano)

1. To me, pride is about visibility and renewal. It renews me to celebrate my identity publicly with my community. Pride is the refusal to internalize shame – and there is so much strength in that communal demonstration of joy and acceptance.

2. I think one of the greatest things opera does is give visibility to queer artistic excellence. There is not an opera production on this earth that doesn't include contributions from queer people - usually significant contributions - whether from the production or performance side. I think where the industry can continue to do better is not just with visibility for queer performers, but by making space for leadership by queer women, trans and non-binary people. Opera has done a lot for the visibility of cis, white, gay men – what would it look like if that wasn't the end of the road for diversity in this business?

3. Many LGBTQ people are late bloomers as we often don't have the opportunity to organically figure out who we are - to make mistakes and take chances the same way young heteronormative people are. Once you have an understanding of who you are and what is important to you as an artist, that clarity will also crystallize in your art. Your uniqueness, your identity and experience are assets to you as an artist. Oh - and always write thank you notes. :)

### STÉPHANE DEGOUT (baritone)

1. Pride Month didn't really mean a lot to me apart from a great occasion to party publicly, which I like although I'm not really into these kinds of big demonstrations with too much people around. My mind has slowly changed to a more political way (maybe) of looking at these demonstrations, since I've studied and learnt where all this came from: behind the party, the feathers, the loud music, the colours and the naked skins, there is some deep suffer, either personal or communitarian that will always be there. We'll always have to fight to keep the rights we are gaining year after year. Pride Month is an extreme way to show we exist, but we need it. And it can't be bad to show we exist in a very friendly and generous way!

2. Show business has always been full of gays and I never felt I was not in the right place to do my work. I have basically never suffered for being a homosexual, neither in my family, nor in my studies and the business. I'm lucky and I know it. Homosexuality has always been present in opera subjects, either hidden, or openly shown: Oreste (which I'm currently singing) could have a relationship with Pylade that is stronger than only friendship (although the frontier between friendship and love is still not clear to me). What about Thésée in *Hippolyte et Aricie*? He's going to hell to get his friend Pirithoüs back - isn't it a proof of a strong relationship ? What about Hamlet? Lots of theories about his troubled sexuality have been written. Rodrigue and Don Carlos? What is their relationship? Rodrigue has no personal life known by the authority, which makes him a dangerous character. He may be more open-minded than what was authorized. And in more recent works, the King in *Lessons in Love and Violence*, is openly homosexual and clearly provokes the politics with his lover Gaveston. Another example is the opera *Brokeback Mountain*, created in Madrid a few years ago, etc.



3. To young artists, I would just say they should be themselves. We don't need to hide and we don't need to show off, either. When I'm asked about my sexuality, I answer I'm gay and that I have been in a happy relationship for almost 23 years - that's it. Should people be happy or unhappy about it, that's their problem, not ours.

#### RENATO DOLCINI (baritone)

1. It's interesting, as opera singers travel constantly, to experience Pride in different parts of the world (sometimes in the same country): in some place it may be mostly a cheerful manifestation and although the fight for rights never ends, you can clearly see that it is lived as a lighthearted moment of joy; whereas somewhere else (I'm thinking of Jerusalem, for instance, where I have recently been), the atmosphere was very different, as you see the city fully armored and you also feel that something bad could happen at any moment. And unfortunately those are the places where Pride is needed the most.

2. The opera ambience is probably one of those where our community is most accepted (also thanks to Music, which is a very inclusive and universal language). But the "opera world" doesn't exist in itself, it's made of many different persons and realities (for better and for worse), and like in every other ambience, every individual should be (and should be allowed to be) themselves: the fact that many important figures (singers, stage directors, conductors...) are proudly out, I think, helps younger generations a lot, both among people working in our medium but also among people who simply love and go to the opera.

3. I'd advice the same to any young person starting out in any business: be yourself and stay true to yourself, behave heartedly, don't allow anybody to step on you; there will be moments when it's going to be tough but if you started this career it is most likely because you HAVE to, you feel the URGE to do so. You will have to fight, but in the end it will be the most rewarding of journeys.

#### MICHAEL FABIANO (tenor)

1. I think of the stonewall riots 50 years ago and what so many people were fighting for then and how far we've come. Pride is the journey from then until now and knowing where we need to go.

2. The advent of social media has actually greatly helped. Now, I find that the community has the tools to be present and have a voice that was harder to heard in the past. So long as the opera world continues to promote great singing, great artistry, and great talent, the community will be of huge benefit.

3. Go for it. Know that your artistry and talent will carry you and that being who you are is freedom.

#### ZACHARY JAMES (bass)

1. Pride Month is a time for celebration - it's a time to celebrate diversity in all of our communities and to lift up the LGBTQ+ community. Pride is a time for awareness and visibility.



2. I feel very fortunate to work in an industry, which celebrates diversity. I've never been discriminated against as a gay man in my industry. There was a recent time when people felt the need to hide who they were in the workplace in the different communities, and I think that still persists in some places. We feel, as we travel around the world, that we have to be careful and protect ourselves, not knowing where we are at all times and whether we'll be accepted for who we are or not. So bringing visibility and awareness to our industry and to the communities which we bring to our music and our art is really important. As artists we are expected to be vulnerable and communicate deeply from the heart. No one should feel like they have to hide who they are. We need to be able to be free and open to let our messages ring clear. We want to be respected and seen and heard. That increased awareness and visibility is crucial to make it known that we are here in the opera industry and are a major part of opera, as a force, globally.

It's exciting to see LGBTQ+ people in positions of leadership in opera, and to see especially trans members of our community celebrated and lifted up and brought to a position of visibility in our industry. I hope to see a lot more of that as we move forward in the future. Happy Pride!

#### LAURA KAMINSKY (composer)

1. It's a time to remember that our LGBTIQ history has not been an open one for very long, but that it's deep and rich history and one that must be known. It's a time to honor those who fought to give us rights and visibility, and to remember that our fight is not over. It's a time to celebrate our beautiful diversity and strength. It is also a time to rededicate ourselves to the task of insuring that our rights are not taken away. And it's a time to continue to educate and enlighten, in the hope that one more LGBTIQ person feels comfortable acknowledging who they are, and that one more person full of fear and hate learns to let it go and is able to see LGBTIQ people as, well, just people.

I remember walking in Pride marches in New York City during the height of the AIDS pandemic. I remember creating a tiny Pride gathering in my village in Ghana in 1993. I remember arriving in Oslo in June 2014 to finish composing the music, and to assist Kimberly Reed in shooting the film sequences, for the "Norway" scene of AS ONE, and to find myself in the middle of World Pride there, and being elated to see LGBTIQ folks from all over the world coming together to celebrate, well, as one.

2. Complicated question - and I can't answer from the perspective of a general director, who chooses works and artists, nor from the perspective of LGBTIQ artists in general, but I can say that the past 20 years has led us to a place where there are now quite a number of operas with LGBTIQ themed stories. Paula Kimper's "Patience and Sarah," Gregory Spears' "Fellow Travelers," Charles Wuorinen's "Brokeback Mountain," "Stonewall," which just premiered this month with New York City Opera, and, of course "As One." And there are many operas with LGBTIQ characters, including my second opera with Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed, "Some Light Emerges," and my latest work, again with Kim Reed, "Hometown to the World." So this is a good direction, and I expect it will continue in the coming years.



It was profoundly gratifying to have been invited by the New York Festival of Song and Five Boroughs Music Festival to curate an evening of vocal music by women - mostly lesbian - for Pride month in New York. We presented two collaboratively created song cycles - "Fierce Grace: Jeannette Rankin" - that had been commissioned by Opera America and premiered at the Library of Congress two years ago, but had not yet been heard in New York. With a libretto by Kimberly Reed, the four-part dramatic cycle relates the story of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to the House of Representatives - in 1916, before she herself could even vote - and on a pacifist platform, with contributions from composers Ellen Reid (this year's Pulitzer Prize-winner), Kitty Brazelton, Laura Karpman and me. And, on the second half of the program, a commissioned cycle, "After Stonewall," on texts by poet Elaine Sexton, with songs by me and Karpman, joined by four other lesbian composers: Paula Kimper, Kayla Cassetta, Nora Kroll-Rosenbaum, and Jennifer Higdon (another Pulitzer Prize winner!).

So the tides are changing. Progress is slow but happening. As I noted earlier, this is a good direction, and I expect it will continue in the coming years.

3. Make the best work you can. Be honest with yourself and to others. Keep going, no matter how hard it may seem.

#### LUCIA LUCAS (baritone)

1. Pride Month is a celebration to remind people who are not LGBT, as well as people who are not out yet that we live happy lives. It is a reminder to ourselves that being LGBT does not reduce our ability to live our lives, but enhances our lives.

It is a reminder of all the generations before us, going back as long as our history allows, and to celebrate them. We celebrate those known and unknown who made incremental progress so that we may be out and proud now.

2. I think, overall, opera has been a conservative art form in practice for a long time. It is only in the last 20 years or so that someone could be openly out, even though LGBT artists have been doing it since the creation of the art form. I think that a focus on especially vocal quality and acting proficiency would see an increase in diversity including LGBT participation. In the 1970s and 1980s, orchestras began blind auditions which resulted in more diversity. This may not work in practicality for opera, but such ideas can foster new talent.

3. Be the best. Learn what you can from everyone around you and work hard on all your skills. Get a good solid technique early, because it can last you a lifetime if solid. Search out every performing opportunity you can afford. Sometimes our best acting growth happens outside of opera, so don't be afraid to do musical theater, film, theater, etc. You must be so much better than your peers, so that it's ridiculous for someone to not let you perform.

#### FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO (stage director)

1. I love celebrating it. Living in a rural community, Richfield Springs, NY (near Cooperstown), my wife and I celebrate Pride with a big party, inviting everyone we know who is LGBTQ to come visit us. It is always a fun day and a way for those spread through



this setting to reconnect, especially after a long winter. On a more serious note, I love Pride month as it gives us a chance to remind people who we are and that we are here.

2. We work in an art form that can be conservative and also very forward-thinking. I find this dichotomy difficult sometimes to deal with. A certain part of the audience care for works that address relevant issues of today and others want to live in a world where the Barber of Seville must be done with geranium pots. In a way, that passion is our biggest plus and our minus! Many works of the canon and those being written work to deal with gender issues in constructive ways. My hope is we can change opera eventually to be as open as the theater on our views and practices.

Things start at the top so accepting diversity has to be from company leaders and the board of directors to make real change.

3. Be above reproach. Exhibit the highest moral integrity. You have to be twice as good as others often.... especially gay women!