

IS THEATRE @ EXETER A SAFE SPACE FOR QUEERNESS?

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AIMS

- **The theatre we make;** does all Theatre @ Exeter offer only include normative theatre with outdated values?
- **Casting queer:** queerbaiting and tokenisation of LGBTQ+
- **Creating a safe space:** ensuring LGBTQ+ people feel valued and welcomed

THE THEATRE WE MAKE: DISCUSSION

1. Capitalist ideology at Theatre @ Exeter causes societies to put on only big name shows to fund and sell tickets. These shows hold outdated, and discriminatory values - homophobia, traditional gender roles, and problematic storylines
 - a. Queer interpretations are innovative, interesting, achievable and important, too (e.g Sweeny Todd, dir. Jessica Thompson 2019)
2. "Theatre @ Exeter is not a community, it is competing societies and reputations." Where is the accountability, where is the community? Committee is a limited number of people representing a huge acting community at Exeter

THE THEATRE WE MAKE: PUSHING FOR CHANGE

1. Commercialisation of student theatre is no prison; OUR CHOICE to prioritise representation rather than profit
 - a. Plenty of mainstream queer musicals/plays to choose from
 - b. Worried about performance rights? Contact them. Be a PROACTIVE ally.
 - c. Is there a way that societies can financially help anti-normative theatre? Could be unsuccessful submissions, or non-society productions in general. An all-year 'T3 vibe' would fuel creativity hugely. Time to go back to our roots: experiment with theatre, taking risks, and feel creatively fulfilled

- d. Taking what we learnt in theory modules (Approaches to Criticism in English, Pretexts and Contexts in Drama, etc) to our theatre practise
- e. Reading group that can meet up once a week, where we read a different play by queer community. To be set up by Opening Up
- 2. Want more community? Let's see some more democracy! Less power play, more member engagement, and more representation of minorities.
 - a. All show proposals could be accessed by the public, and show choice can be put up for a vote (e.g Shotgun Survey for Term 2 2020)
 - i. BUT would this become a popularity contest? How would this be logistically achieved and be successful - TwT had 20 play submissions, not all members will read.
 - b. Workshops can be part of a show proposal; an open space to explore creative visions. Organic learning process, organic safe environment, organic advertisement, and organic way to ensure that LGBTQ+ have opportunity to sense-check queer theatre. (People really like this idea!)
 - c. M&D room could weekly open for a group to perform anything. 'Open Mic' but with theatre pieces.
 - d. Expertise and money should be public so other projects can thrive

CASTING QUEER: DISCUSSION

1. Lack of queerness in Theatre @ Exeter's stage, and little there is is exclusively cisgendered.
 - a. "Ticking the box" trend of auditioning one character genderblind in effort to be inclusive, when in reality that could be just queerbaiting.
2. Queer actors flocked into 'Neens and Peedle' auditions - are queer actors not getting in because of anxiety-inducing society auditions?
3. Anxiety around accidentally tokenising LGBTQ+ culture. How can we avoid appropriation and queerbaiting, especially in casting calls?
4. Debate: should queer characters be open to non-queer people?
 - a. Sexuality can be portrayed by straight people, gender identity cannot - cisgender actor can't portray a trans experience, if at all. 'Disclosure' documentary is really illuminating on this
 - b. Straight people PLAYING UP to playing a trans/non-binary role is problematic and inappropriate.
 - c. Trend of queer roles being the comedic role, and being of little significance to the plot

CASTING QUEER: PUSHING FOR CHANGE

1. There are several ways to carve out opportunities for LGBTQ+ community in our show choice and audition processes.

- a. More genderblind roles available to audition for can reduce overall anxiety for non-binary and trans people: less focus on gender identity.
 - b. Gender-conscious casting: reduces chance of inner subconscious biases around gender and sexuality, and recognising that characterisation is holistic. One's gender/sexual identity informs character and narrative. LGBTQ+ is an important aspect of a story and role
2. 'Neens and Peedle' (dir. Bella Finlayson and Morgen Johnson 2019) was a fantastic example of an inclusive concept and audition process; it said, "Hey, we want you," to LGBTQ+ community.
 - a. A safe space was guaranteed. Committees need to learn from examples such as these
 - b. Casting queer does not have to be political. "We just exist."
3. If our intentions are pure, it is unlikely tokenistic. Look internally. "Don't think about what it looks like for you, focus on prioritising their feelings," and listen.
 - a. Also OK to go wrong sometimes; ensuring that you are being held accountable
4. General agreement that a queer person has to be on the creative team AT THE VERY LEAST to ensure that queerness has been told/produced by someone in the community.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE: DISCUSSION

1. How can we make a space safe when discriminatory microaggressions in the rehearsal room, and sexual assault in the community, is a common occurrence?
2. Lack of marginalised people in powerful positions in Theatre @ Exeter. Makes power play and censorship of queerness common

CREATING A SAFE SPACE: PUSHING FOR CHANGE

1. It's 2020. Actively unlearn your biases, and be respectful.
 - a. Zero tolerance policies need to be more implemented, with the Guild and within productions.
 - b. Make inclusivity routine: introducing oneself (and renaming self on Zoom) with pronouns
 - c. Dramasoc could train Freshers, or Theatre @ Exeter more widely, to unlearn homophobia learnt in school
 - d. Emphasis on RESEARCH processes for every production can ensure that homophobia in all its forms (as well as racism, sexism and classism) can be deconstructed
 - e. Not prioritising discriminatory people for roles and positions
 - f. Learning how to facilitate discussions when someone feels hurt/discriminated against by another.

- g. Ask LGBTQ+ community DIRECTLY through workshops, facilitating talks, and linking with LGBTQ+ societies
- 2. Having people from LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities in power
 - a. 'Diversity Inclusion Officer' can be a new committee position, or a new independent position that sits with presidents of societies
 - b. Another society can be created to ensure theatre committees can be held to account.
 - i. In previous years, this proposal has not worked - 'societies can't be above other societies' - however, Opening Up Town Hall meeting with Guild reps has revealed that the Guild is more open to change. Is now the time to strike?
 - ii. Being bogged down by bureaucracy excuses people for not being proactive. Things don't need to be Guild approved and 'official' to work