

“I Am Enough” Ballet – Research and Arguments

Why Make this Piece?:

- As a queer woman and former dancer, Victoria found herself time and time again surfing the web for some sort of representation of a female romance, told through ballet. Something that would reflect her own life and experiences.
- She found duets between two female ballet dancers existed as captured on film, but none of them were decidedly romantic (as was so common in traditional male-female pas de deux).
- Royal Ballet dancers broke barriers by performing a female pas de deux in 2017. The film gained a lot of attention and was featured on CNN, but it was also very stiff and non-emotional in style: <https://www.roh.org.uk/news/watch-a-female-pas-de-deux-from-beatriz-stix-brunell-and-yasmine-naghdi>
- Victoria teamed up with queer choreographer Adriana Pierce, one of the first openly out women in the professional ballet world, to bring this piece to life. Adriana [shared her personal experiences with Conversations on Dance](#) back in June.
- The song, “I Am Enough” written and performed by queer artist, Daphne Willis, evokes the universal message about self-love and acceptance. Victoria found the song very fitting for this piece, in that it mirrors the experiences of many LGBTQ individuals trying to find their place in the world. Love and a strong support system are essential for anyone to find their voice.

Additional Points:

- While gay men often find their place in the ballet world, [it doesn't feel so welcoming for queer women](#). Some have even rejected the traditional company system in favor of creating their own niche companies, like [Ballez](#).
 - Mission from Ballez Website: *Ballez is the future of ballet, once it wakes up and evolves with the times. For too long ballet has upheld the values and desires not of its dancers, but of the wealthy straight white male patrons that have dictated its budgets, and thereby, its expression. We're taking ballet back, for ourselves, and for the next generations of dancers who could embrace this old form, on our own terms.*
 - Though I applaud Ballez's radical determination to create their own space that the ballet community doesn't provide, it saddens me that they feel the need to do so.
- What is the issue here, and why are many turned away?
- The answer is unclear, but it could possibly be similar to the [racial uniformity that also often exists in ballet](#).
- Decade after decade, ballet companies continue to perform ballets, such as Sleepy Beauty, The Nutcracker, and Giselle. Audiences continue to be captivated by these timeless performances.
- Ballet is an artform, meant to evoke emotion and tell stories. If this is the case, it should be able to imitate life, and all forms of humanity for that matter. It should be able to grow and evolve with the present day culture just as visual art, film, and theatre do.
- With Misty Copeland paving the way for diversity, being the first African American principal dancer at American Ballet Theatre, we similarly wish to expand representation for the LGBTQ community in the traditional ballet world.

Looking to Other Artforms:

- Disney is beginning to reject its tropes of love-at-first-sight and damsels in distress. Hollywood screenwriters are [earning Oscars](#) for their increasingly diverse stories and perspectives, especially through the female gaze.
- Queer stories in Hollywood were once very niche, and often poorly executed and cheaply made. Now, films about queer characters are sweeping major award shows, like *Call Me By Your Name*, *Carol*, *Moonlight*, and *Blue is the Warmest Color*.
- We wish for ballet to follow suit. [Over 80% of ballets are still choreographed by men](#). As new choreographers come onto the scene, doors open for more inclusive storytelling.
- Ballet is meant to move and inspire. It cannot do so if audiences cannot relate to the stories it portrays. We want ballet to remain fresh, relevant, and relatable while still preserving its foundation and traditions.

Additional articles supporting the heteronormativity argument:

- <https://www.theoccidentalnews.com/opinions/2018/10/29/dance-culture-promotes-heteronormativity-so-lets-raise-the-barre/2894738>
- <http://www.sfweekly.com/topstories/ballet-is-heteronormative-these-artists-are-fixing-that/>
- <http://shamelessmag.com/blog/entry/redefining-ballet-a-queer-feminist-introduction>
- <http://www.womensmediacenter.com/fbomb/a-feminist-goes-to-the-ballet>
- <https://cmns324.wordpress.com/2016/12/02/getting-en-pointe-negotiating-heteronormativity-and-masculinity-through-ballet/>
- <http://www.ballez.org/self-other-may-21-2013/>
- <https://www.dancemagazine.com/transgender-nonbinary-dance-2578353318.html>
- <https://www.sftravel.com/article/how-san-francisco-dancer-representing-queer-culture-ballet>
- https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/kzvq5z/james-whiteside-ballet-dancer-drag-queen
- <https://forro.club/articles/heteronormativity-dancing-gender-roles/>
- https://www.conwaydailysun.com/portland_phoenix_arts/dance/lez-dance-ballez-artistic-director-katy-pyle-on-queering-ballet/article_70639528-4d69-11e8-938d-03f2d7f70f52.html
- <http://www.newschoolfreepress.com/2017/10/26/new-york-city-ballets-blinding-diversity-problem/>
- <https://www.gramilano.com/2017/09/female-pas-de-deux-royal-ballet-dancers-beatriz-stix-brunell-yasmine-naghdi/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/arts/dance/same-sex-duets-justin-peck-lauren-lovette-new-york-city-ballet.html>
- <https://dancers.invisionzone.com/topic/50978-pas-de-deux-for-two-girls/>
- <https://www.wbur.org/artery/2015/09/18/women-in-ballet>
-

The Video:

- This piece, set to Daphne Willis's "I Am Enough" portrays two women dancing in a dimly lit room, interacting through a black chandelier of ribbons.
- Willis's lyrics nod to self-love and overcoming mental health issues, as the dancers eventually break away from the shadows and dance in the center of the room.
- At one point, the women kiss tenderly, following a joyous "pas de deux" or duet. There is equality in their movements, while they still physically lean on and lift each other - the way love should be.
- New York City Ballet Soloist, Georgina Pazcoguin (aka The Rogue Ballerina) and Sky Mattox, bring their performance talents, while approaching the subject matter with delicacy and humanity.

The Making Of:

- The piece was filmed at The YouTube Space in NYC and was funded via Indiegogo.
- Victoria Duncan, director, sculpted a narrative through collaboration with choreographer Adriana Pierce and with Daphne Willis setting the structure with her songwriting and producing. All queer women brought their own personal experiences to the table results in a piece that is sincere, honest, and compelling.

Goals:

- We wish to merge the strong message of Daphne Willis's song and juxtapose it with the relationship between these two women.
- We want to open ballet to broader audiences as well as welcome those -- who would otherwise feel turned away -- to participate in the artform.
- We want to expand LGBTQ representation through dance, a storytelling medium rarely utilized.
- On National Coming Out Day, we hope this video inspires audiences to be themselves while still pursuing their passions, and let love in despite all obstacles.