

A photograph of two men in a white t-shirt and a white tank top kissing on a stage set. A red car is visible in the background. The text 'The Culture Project' is overlaid in large white font.

The Culture Project

Photo credit: Johan Persson

Welcome to the 10th Edition of The Culture Project.

We hope your summer has got off to a good start! In this edition, we are celebrating Pride at New Adventures. Highlights include Matthew Bourne in conversation with Glenn Graham on bringing queer stories to the stage, read on to hear about early audiences' shocked reactions to the gay kiss in *The Car Man*.

We are also spotlighting the work of our brilliant partner organisation, Global Butterflies, and reflecting on our recent Learning and Development session. In this article, we share important resources around Trans Rights and allyship. We hear from Queer Audio Descriptor, Dot Alma who opens up about their unique and thoughtful practice and how they collaborate with performers to ensure Audio Description scripts are reflective and empowering of their identities.

This issue reaffirms our commitment to visibility, trailblazing representation and partnering with change-making organisations. We hope you enjoy!

The Culture moves team

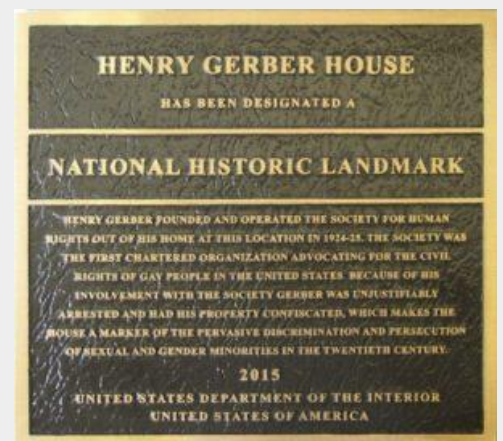
Pride Facts

The Stonewall Uprising took place on June 28 1969 in Greenwich Village, New York City, when Police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar and known safe space for the community. This was a spark in the LGBTQ+ movement, and the first Pride parades took place the next year in the form of Gay Liberation Marches.



The first Pride flag was designed by gay artist, Gilbert Baker, in 1978. It originally had eight stripes, with each symbolising a different concept, and was first flown on San Francisco Gay Pride Day on June 25 1978. Today, there are over 30 flags, each representative of a different identity.

The Society for Human Rights is the oldest documented gay rights organisation in the USA, founded by Henry Gerber in 1924. Although the organisation was short-lived due to legal and societal pressures, it inspired future activism.



In the past, secret codes and phrases were used to identify other members of the community without risk of persecution. Examples are the slang language of Polari, the handkerchief code, and the well-known term “Friend of Dorothy”, amongst many others.

Trans and Non-Binary Allyship with Global Butterflies

We have been working with Global Butterflies as a learning provider for our Learning and Development weeks for almost 4 years. Led by the powerhouse trans couple, Emma Cusdin and Rachel Reese, their organisation offers trans and non-binary advocacy and learning opportunities for organisations across different sectors, from law to the corporate world to the performing arts.

In our most recent session, we learnt more about how the external noise of the transphobia in politics, social media and UK mainstream media is becoming increasingly loud for trans and non-binary people. It can be hard to tune out, with discrimination moving away from microaggressions towards outright macroaggressions.

In 2025, the Trans Actual Trans Lives Survey¹ asked trans and non-binary people how they felt about UK society, media and politics. 56% of people surveyed said they felt unsafe in UK society and 99% had been affected by the transphobia in UK Media. Global Butterflies shared their own experiences with negative press, which has partially encouraged them to move their business abroad to Ireland. They emphasised the need for allies to be vocal and to speak up for trans rights and people, especially given the current climate.



How can we challenge transphobia?

- Speak up for trans people when they are not in the room by being assertive in your views.
- Check the policies in place at our touring venues, ask/advocate for them to review their policies.
- Work a small step of allyship into your day.
- Practise ethical allyship in what you buy and how you spend your money.
- Challenge people's views around you.
- Signing petitions and challenging your political representatives.

Support for trans and non-binary colleagues:

- Find a community within your specific sector to meet people who can also give guidance on navigating the industry. You might do this by reaching out to LGBTQ+ people in your company, or through networks like [Freelancers Make Theatre Work](#).
- [TransActual](#) share facts and support about UK law, NHS healthcare and transphobia.
- [Translucent](#) is a trans led advocacy and human rights organisation working for the transgender and gender-diverse community in the UK.

Trans Rights Resources

1. Equity Guide

The Equity Guide provides guidance specifically for working as and with LGBTQ+ performers

[Find the guide here.](#)

2. Terminology Guide

This provides further reading on the terminology used to describe a range of gender identities.

[Find the guide here.](#)

3. Preventing Discrimination

This guide includes information about the law, different types of discrimination, and steps for handling complaints and preventing discrimination.

[Read more here.](#)

4. Political Action

[You can sign the Not in Our Name petition here.](#)

[The Trans Solidarity Alliance also offers a range of templates and information here.](#)

5. Trans and Ally Voices

Jamie Raines (@jammidodger on social media): Trans man who critiques anti-trans social media and press with a funny twist.

[Find Jamie on YouTube.](#)

Dr Helen Webberly: Founder of Gender GP and host of podcast where she interviews allies.

[Listen to the GenderGP podcast.](#)

6. Book Recommendations

[The Transgender Issue](#)

Exploration into transgender liberation in the UK

[Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl](#)

Fantasy, fiction novel that follows a young queer protagonist.

[Sex is a Funny World](#)

A comic book for kids that includes families of all orientations and gender identities.



Queer Audio Description with Dot Alma

This year, our LGBTQ+ response piece performance was audio described for the first time. Dot Alma, audio describer of The Wrong Shoes, gives us insight into their process.

How did you get started in this industry?

I started in audio description in 2019 through a course taught by Quiplash, who are co-led by blind theatre practitioner, Amelia Cavallo. They created the idea of queer audio description as a methodology, subverting traditional rules of audio description and queering it in an academic sense. After that I did some training at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, where we did a method called whisper or cabaret audio description. You sit next to the audience member and deliver the audio description into their ears rather than through a headset. A big part of it for me is the relationship that I have with the person that I'm describing to, sometimes I'm sat next to them. So, some of my reaction to what is happening is authentic in the fact that I'm experiencing it with them.

Can you give any examples of audio description which centred queerness in your practice and what it means to you?

I would say working in Drag and Cabaret has been major in centring queerness, not only because it is queer performance and I'm a queer person describing it, but the technique that I use to do the audio description. Cabaret audio description is a good DIY technique, especially in some of the queer spaces that I started off audio describing in like the basement of the Glory!

I did a lot of drag and cabaret where I didn't necessarily get tons of preparation because people are often still sewing their sequins thirty minutes beforehand. I learnt this technique of quick visual translation in terms of what people are doing and wearing. And when COVID hit in 2020, I started working with Queer House Party, who ran online queer events that strove for accessibility.

How do you work with performers when creating your script and what are the challenges specific to queerness when asking a performer to describe themselves?

It's important to get feedback in how I describe people and their art. For a lot of queer and trans people, the way that we have been described has been taken away from us. Putting these descriptions back in people's hands to be like, 'you have the autonomy to be able to say how you would like to be described' is really important.

I always work with people by asking them for a person description, especially in terms of how queer and trans people want to be described and the language that they would like me to use. I think that does come with a challenge in that it can be feel really vulnerable to describe yourself. And this doesn't just sit with people who are queer and trans, I understand people from other marginalised backgrounds find that to be difficult. It's almost like, what do I want to look like? What do I think I look like? And is there a difference between that? And then also, how are other people perceiving me? It can be really vulnerable for queer people, people who are transitioning, or people who find their identity and appearance difficult to put a finger on. If anything difficult comes up for them whilst they're writing that, it's important to be able to hold an element of care and support that person to write in a very queer way.

These processes can take time, and I think there is something to be said about this in that time is needed for access. I think sometimes, the urgency that comes with some ways of developing art is inherently ableist and doesn't serve other people that it's trying to provide for.

How did you deal with the themes of desire, conformity and freedom of expression in your script and also in your vocal delivery performance?

Visually, there was a lot of use of props and movement and trying to translate as much of that as possible was important. I just thought the way that the community and dance artists produced this made it super fresh and exciting for me to be able to do. I think in terms of my script, I was thinking about conformity and non-conformity and how I express that. And then trying to describe the utter joy of when someone is then moving in a way that feels authentic for them as a person. In terms of my vocal performance, it's about expressing the excitement that I feel watching someone come to their authentic self.

New Adventures is a company with a long history of telling queer stories on big stages. What does it mean to bring that same spirit into a community setting and open this to new blind and partially sighted audiences?

I think it's really important to give blind and visually impaired people access to community spaces and in particular into LGBTQ+ community spaces. Historically, queer spaces have really poor access and there is a particular point of marginalisation for disabled queer people. In disabled spaces, they might experience prejudice, and in queer spaces, they might experience barriers due to their disability. It feels like there is that double intersectional layer and being able to give access to queer blind and visually impaired people is really important in trying to combat that.

Matthew Bourne on bringing Queer stories to the stage

Glenn Graham and Matthew Bourne in conversation on the impact and experience of bringing queer stories to the stage.

Glenn Graham: When you think back to the audience's reaction to the gay kiss in *The Car Man*, how did that feel?

Matthew Bourne: I remember people walking out at Swan Lake, with two men dancing together, and that was only about five years before, so we were aware of that precedent. But with *The Car Man*, we were quite conscious that we were doing something provocative. Partly because a male kiss was still provocative, but also because the story felt like a fairly conventional one: a relationship between a man and a woman, a flirtation, the kind of thing you might see in an old late-night film on TV. And then we subverted it by having him also become involved with a young man. It wasn't a case of us being surprised or uncomfortable by the reaction. We wanted a reaction. We knew we had a great moment there if it got a reaction. It felt exciting, to be honest.

Glenn Graham: It breaks down all the stereotypes, doesn't it?

Matthew Bourne: Exactly. And that's what's so different now. The biggest reaction I can remember was at a school's performance, where it caused complete uproar. We'd set that character up as a kind of sex symbol, so a lot of the young women in the audience were drawn to him, and then when he kissed a man, the young guys all felt they had to overreact. Peer pressure. It went on through



into the next scene, which was extraordinary. And yet the same moment now gets almost no reaction of that kind. People are so different, it gets more of an "oh, that's a surprise, he likes guys too." But it's already part of the conversation young people are having with each other. It's fine. It's cool.

Glenn Graham: You've spent decades putting queer love, queer desire, queer pain onto some of the biggest stages in the world. What do you think the next chapter will be, for you and for the art form?

Matthew Bourne: Part of me feels that not much has changed, honestly. I'm not really pushing any boundaries in dance in any significant way.

Sensibilities have shifted, people have changed, but the big companies, certainly the big ballet companies, are still not really leading in this area. It happens occasionally, but it's not at the forefront. So, I think there's still a long way to go.

There are some high-profile things happening, Northern Ballet are doing *Gentleman Jack*, which is a conscious choice to tell that story. And Rambert are doing something set in the AIDS era. But it's only very recently that's happened. There's been a big gap.

Glenn Graham: Do you think artists have a duty to push into uncomfortable territory, especially now? Or is there a risk that it becomes its own kind of performance?

Matthew Bourne: I think the best way of being an artist is to reflect yourself and your times. If you're working in another period, you can still subvert it, as we do, but being true to yourself is important. Not shutting any part of yourself out of what you're making.

I also feel, as a leader of a company, a responsibility to represent who I am, and to some extent, who is in the company. If a significant proportion of your company is gay, it's meaningful for them to see that represented in the work. But the other side of it is, I don't feel knowledgeable enough to claim everyone's experience. I can't identify strongly with certain things because they're not part of my own journey. I respect what they are in other people, but as an artist, you have to work from what you genuinely know and feel.

What you can do is feed off the people around you. Encourage them to bring who they are into the work. Eve is a good example of that; she's gone on quite a journey with us.

She came through our emerging artist programme and now identifies as she and wants to play female roles exclusively. It's been a real journey, and she's 100% supported. You can see it in her, in her whole presence on stage.

And honestly, I needed some education through working with her. That was something I had to learn.

Glenn Graham: What did it mean to you, to be seen and visible in that way at a time when so many queer people in public life were carefully invisible?

Matthew Bourne: I've never really had a problem with that. I've never promoted it loudly, but I've never held back from it either.

In the same way that being gay felt completely natural to me, it was never a difficult journey, it just felt more normal than anything else. I couldn't pretend to be anything other than what I was. And that became part of why I enjoyed putting it into my work.



Having my own company means I can make the work I want to make. Not everyone has that. There are people whose work simply isn't wanted. And there are still countries that won't take *The Car Man*, places we've toured other shows to successfully. Swan Lake has gone to some of those places because there's a mythical, once-removed quality to it, a man and a swan, it's not quite literal. But *The Car Man* is very clearly two men. There's no pretending otherwise. It's a real situation, and that's where the difference lies.

Glenn Graham: In fifty years', time, what would you hope *The Car Man* will have been? A breakthrough? Do you think that kind of shift is still possible?

Matthew Bourne: There's a real argument to be made at the moment that we're going backwards. And I think, as sad as it is to say, when something becomes more visible it also becomes more of a target for those who are prejudiced against it. The more out and open things are, the more potential there is for bigotry. That's why there's so much hostility around trans rights right now. It's a tiny, tiny percentage of the population, and yet people have such a strong reaction, largely because it's been talked about so much and everyone now has a platform for their voice.

I was listening to a podcast yesterday, in Memphis, the trans community are no longer allowed to change their passports or driver's licences to reflect their identity. They have to revert. That's gone backwards.

Glenn Graham: I read yesterday about a local council in Essex, banning Pride month promotion in libraries.

Matthew Bourne: Yes. And the more that leaders normalise that kind of thing, the

more others will follow. It worries me. Maybe the world goes in cycles. Maybe it provokes new art, something that says, "check this out, this is what's happening."

There have been such beautiful moments of change. In *Cinderella*, there's a small storyline, almost in the background, about *Cinderella's* gay brother, who develops an attraction to his sister's boyfriend. It runs quietly through the whole piece and ends with the two of them meeting at a railway station, one handing the other a bunch of flowers. Very sweet, very simple.

When we did it in Los Angeles, at a young people's performance, they followed that storyline all the way through, and when those two characters came together at the end, the audience cheered. Genuinely cheered. After years of people sneering at that same moment in other places, to go from that to cheers, it was heartwarming. It made you think, yes, things have changed. But it is geographical. Some places are so much further forward than others.

'The best way of being an artist is to reflect yourself and your times. If you're working in another period, you can still subvert it, as we do, but being true to yourself is important.'

Employee Assistance Programme

We want a workforce that thrives and we encourage all staff to seek support when they need it. There are also several Mental Health First Aiders whose details are on signage round the building at 369 St John Street.

New Adventures have an EAP through Health Assured, available to staff (including freelancers) and their immediate family (including partners, spouses and dependants aged 16-24 in full-time education who live at the same address). The programme is completely confidential and available to all current employees of New Adventures.

What does the EAP offer?

Wellbeing support: unlimited counselling access; with up to 10 free structured face-to-face or telephone sessions.

Financial coaching: 1:1 support for financial concerns with actionable goals to support financial management.

Legal advice: support on legal issues including renting, debt, civil disputes and other issues.

Virtual GP: fast access to medical care, prescriptions and referrals where needed.

Menopause care: support for individuals experiencing menopause symptoms.

How to contact

The main point of contact is through a 24/7, confidential helpline **0800 028 0199** which you can call for a triage conversation. From there, you may be directed to other services depending on your call.

The Wisdom App has a wealth of resources including mini health check ins, articles and web chat for support.

You can download and use the organisation code **MHA154138** to access support.

Resources

[Virtual GP Onboarding](#)

[Menopause Care Accessing Guide Assistance](#)

[Programme Leaflet](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)