

QUEER REPRESENTATION IN THEATRE

JUNE 2021

INTRODUCTION

The lack of LGBTQ+ representation in theatre has plagued our communities for decades, and the movement for more representation continues to evolve. Yet LGBTQ+ representation of the many non-heteronormative genders and sexualities has still “been limited by repressive tolerance,” where every milestone has been met with new issues, whether it be stereotypical archetypes, legal discrimination, or poor casting choices. Each of these conflicts allow the history of representation to be looked at through different lenses.

There has been a growth in gender and sexual diversity on the stage in recent years. However, in the last century, these figures have tended to fall into three categories: “the tragic victim, the sexual deviant, and the comedic relief.” By only portraying the community within the boundaries of these stereotypes, there is little room to normalize concepts like gender fluidity, sexual exploration, and identity.

For anyone involved in theatre and the arts, it is our collective responsibility to create and distribute content that uplifts these communities and creates outlets for all age groups. The young LGBTQ community should especially grow up with stories that will make them proud of their identity. We can acknowledge older generations and their milestones in creating representation, but in order to move forward, we must fight repressive tolerance and push for the breaking of systemic limitations.

SIGNIFICANCE & EVOLUTION

Broadway has not been producing work that is fully representative of the community, even though it is home to a significant portion of the LGBTQ+ community. Initially, Broadway had zero representation of openly Queer characters because of heteronormative society’s deeming of LGBTQ+ characters as taboo. The 1974 production of *A Chorus Line* was one of the first shows to have an openly gay character who talked about their sexual experiences. While *A Chorus Line* was not the first musical to include LGBTQ+ characters, it was a well-known, hit Broadway show that began introducing Queer themes into the mainstream media. As the 21st century approached, more and more musicals were produced that contained LGBTQ+ themes. While the number of LGBTQ+ characters began to increase, they were often portrayed through, stereotypes, ultimately harmful to the Queer community. In musicals, gay men would be portrayed as overly flamboyant and feminine, while lesbian women would be seen as hypersexual, man-haters. These damaging stereotypes fed audience’s negative perceptions of Queer people, shifting the central problem from needing Queer representation in theatre to needing authentic, non-stereotypical representation.

Part of the problem is that this process mostly involves gay and lesbian characters. There is very little representation for the other LGBTQ+ identities, specifically trans and nonbinary folks. Currently, the musical *Jagged Little Pill* (music by Alanis Morissette) is facing severe scrutiny because evidence suggested that they changed one of their characters from being nonbinary to a cisgender woman. The nonbinary community is rightfully frustrated at the erasure of their representation on Broadway. The production team on *Jagged Little Pill* responded, apologizing to the community, but ultimately denying the claim that Jo was suppose to be a nonbinary character. Actress Lauren Patten, who played the initially nonbinary character Jo, spoke on a livestream apologizing and explaining how she went about approaching this character. While the apology from Lauren and the team on *Jagged Little Pill* was appreciated, they muddied the waters by claiming that the character was never nonbinary to begin with, even with audio recording evidence from one of the pre-Broadway runs that suggested Jo’s gender to be not cisgender.

Ultimately, the musical theatre community needs to continue incentivizing new work that:

1. Includes characters from various marginalized groups within the LGBTQ+ community
2. Ensures that they are being portrayed in a correct light that does not rely on stereotypes
3. Include people from the represented community on the production team and in the cast to help ensure that no misrepresentation is occurring

DIVERSIFY YOUR FEED

Student Organizations at USC dedicated to Queer representation



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[@dftcusc](#)



Queer Students in SCA

[@qscusc](#)



USC Queer & Ally Student Assembly

[@uscquasa](#)



Follow Queer Theatre Professionals to hear directly from the community!



Theo Germaine (The Politician)

[@theogermaine](#)



Ezra Menas (Jagged Little Pill, Spielberg’s West Side Story)

[@ezra_menas](#)



Ben Levi Ross (Dear Evan Hansen)

[@benross](#)

ACTION ITEMS

Check out these websites!

[SCA Diversity and Inclusion Page](#)

[SDA Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)

[Annenberg Inclusion Initiative](#)

For continued reading, check out:

[Brett V. Ries “The Relationship Between LGBTQ+ Representation on the Political and Theatrical Stages”](#)

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Who Does Your Theatre Serve?