

Show Me The Rainbow

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Sometimes I wonder why our most visible Queer symbol is a rainbow flag. Why? Well, it seems that whenever there is a queer event the majority of people there are white and male and all wearing designer labels.

I thank the organizers of "Outwrite in the Park: A Night of Poetry, Performance and Pride" for showing us all the colours, textures and layers that should be in our rainbows. On Tuesday night in Cawthra Park (Just behind the 519 Community Centre) poets from across Southern Ontario let us know that being queer is not as easily defined label and it can mean something completely different from one person to the next. Most of all I was thrilled to see such a dichotomy of queer culture. There were men, women, people of colour, heck, even the audience of onlookers were a nice mixed bag.

The theme that seemed to unify all the pieces that were performed was in one word FREEDOM. The freedom to express how we truly feel and who we truly are. Toronto Pride has become so big and flamboyant, that the real message of Pride seems to get lost in all the bare breasts and buttocks. For years we have been told to be ashamed of who we are, to shut up and keep quiet. None of the poets at "Outwrite In The Park" shut up. Many of them wailed to the skies.

What is freedom? Rozena Maart who originally came from Capetown, South Africa and now teaches at The University of Guelph defined freedom as "letting the sun shine on your cunt". In some ways I believe that's what being queer is really about - loving ourselves and not being afraid of our bodies. The freedom to express ourselves in the most innocent and honest of ways, an despite what some straights may say, one of the most natural ways, through our sexuality.

What it means to be queer was explored in almost every piece. From Domin Adella's "I'm Guess I'm Over It Now" – a bitter look at a lesbian relationship breaking up due to the infiltration of a straight man, to Andra Simons "Coming Home" – after breaking ties with his family a queer black man comes home to see his ailing father. Some pieces were about how we feel inside, such as Dunstan James' "My Melancholy Friend" and others were about how others perceive us, such as Jacquire Bencel's "In The Closet With My Relatives On The French Riviera". Some were sarcastic and bitter attacks on the hypocrisy of our own queer culture. Michael Giglio's rant "Pride Party" and Kevin Slade's hilarious "The Homosexual Agenda" both remind us there is still so much more to do and woke us up from our complacency.

"Outwrite" was such a refreshing experience and to me it was truly what Pride should be about. Not being afraid to express what we truly feel inside. The mix of writers went from a list of credits a mile long to being a "virgin". Some such as Hillary Cook have been writing and performing for years and have an arm's length of published works. Other such as Vaughan Fitzpatrick have never written or performed till that evening and were very nervous in front of the crowds. Yet, the love and support of the audience were able to make almost all fears dissipate. Michael Gigolo who is one of the organizers of "Outwrite" said it best in beginning the evening's event with a quote from Audrey Lord – "It is better to speak, knowing that we will never survive". Thank you to all those who spoke. I feel richer for having heard you.