



When A Dirty Queer Deviates – Long Time Open Mic Changes Format After 9 Years

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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(With contributions from a handful of the thousands of local queers who have expressed themselves on this tiny, potent stage.)

I've been producing and hosting Dirty Queer, the X-rated open mic, for almost 9 years now. I began with the intention of creating a space where art about sexuality and gender could be explored, witnessed and mirrored as safely as possible. I did this because I am a sex radical—believing in access to resources and support around sexuality, and the importance of control of our own bodies—and also a writer who frequently uses themes of sex, kink and gender. This made me a startling contributor to most open mics I participated in, which didn't feed either myself or the audience.

DQ participant: “Dirty Queer has been a place where I can go to be a pervert amongst other perverts, where I can cruise to my heart's content and speak my sexy truth and open up my twisted mind for all

to see. Having a regular non-alcohol-focused queer gathering means a lot to myself and many queer friends of mine. “

Over the years we have laughed and mourned and moaned, shifted nervously or with pleasure, opened doorways, shone lights into dark corners, and held each other tenderly. We have made space for each other, even in moments that haven't made us tingle, and employed trigger warnings so we could do self-care in the face of all the glorious, dangerous and unfathomable things that sex can be.

DQ participant: “In my first year, I wouldn't stay through a whole set, one of the only people of color consistently in the room. But when I dared speak about racism, the space was held. I talked about racism in sex and that was empowering for me, that allowed me to go further, to move past that pain and find pleasure...and that's just as a performer. As a person who has challenged ignorance in various arenas and grapples with hostility and gratitude at those fronts, content warnings make sense. It allows audience members to take care of ourselves without censoring the performer. It's sometimes been hard being the only one walking out, but to have that choice is beautiful.”

We've also collectively changed the terms of, and shame around, these conversations. We've sparked so hard we dissipated some of the charge, but in the positive way. The way that says our perversions and pleasures and bodies are no longer so prone to lurking in the shadows, seeking each other in whispers.

DQ participant: “As a fat, queer, woman of color, my body and identities are so often sexualized and fetishized without my consent. DQ has been a place for me to talk about embodiment and sexuality in many forms, on my own terms. So much of an artists work, especially around topics like sexuality and

identity, is deeply vulnerable. In cultivating a space that is supportive, and an audience that so clearly holds deep love for their community, DQ has helped to create a sense of both safety and freedom to explore for the artists that take that stage.”

I am so proud and grateful and satisfied. I also feel us shifting, as a whole, to desiring a wider conversation. I've been paying attention—to individual feedback, to online dialog, to the collective consciousness, to my gut—and what I perceive is that we're ready for something more. A new chapter of our collaborative art and learning.

DQ participant: “I'm excited for the change! The body of my writing work is non-erotic in nature but Dirty Queer holds a safe, supportive atmosphere where the audience/communities role is to be present and aware. To hold space for that person being raw and vulnerable on stage, fucking it up, starting over and continuing to try, and to hold them accountable.”

Our city is being priced out from underneath us, water is being stolen and poisoned and sold, our prisons are factories and our factories are closing, racism and sexism and homophobia and transphobia and shame and fear and greed are rampaging across the world and across our lives, our bodies are hungry and tired and disabled and trampled and shunned and disrespected and complicated, we have miles of assumptions and privileges to untangle and undo, and it's all part of the same conversation. The one where we figure out how to push back, how to dismantle, how to intersect, and how to do better.

DQ participant: “The boundaries and the reminder that those boundaries will be enforced are incredibly integral pieces to creating a space where people can open up, be vulnerable, ask hard

questions. And on the other side, to take in, to be present, to listen to deep needs. The kicker is that all of these things combined allow the participants to partake, to enjoy, to find something they liked, and to leave wanting more- knowing that it will continue to feed rather than take from communal spirit.”

January 8th, 2016, will be the 9 year anniversary of Dirty Queer, and also the last one ever. After that, it will transform into Deviate – a queer open mic that explores the ways we are deviating from and deconstructing the normative. We will fold our conversations about sex, sexuality and gender into larger examinations of the world we live in, and all the ways we're seeking to change it.

DQ participant: “This shift is a bittersweet one, but I’m also excited about the opportunity to have wider conversations. To share more of the hurt we each hold about more than just sex. I think performance art is a tricky thing. It's certainly a living, breathing thing that needs the people around it. It needs the community and the audience to hold a space that is safe to allow this expression in. And it needs the community and the audience to interact with it.”

I believe we have the capacity to make room for discomfort and dialog in the same evening as desire and frustration and hope and rage and joy. I believe we can find a path to accountability and accessibility and mutual respect. I don't expect it'll be easy, but that's never been our thing.

DQ participant: “I think it's time to broaden our conversation. Sossity has helped to build such an amazing and supportive environment and community around DQ, that now we are ready to dive into the deeper currents; to talk about the ways in which our identities intersect and deviate from dominant culture, and how we as artists and thinkers can move through these waters and understand

them.”

The dates, times, and location will be the same (quarterly, In Other Words, 6:30pm,) barring unforeseen issues, and the first Deviate will be on April 8th, 2016. There will be some changes to the format—like featured artists who also teach an accompanying workshop—but it will still be 18+ due to keeping dirty part of the conversation. The workshop topics and teachers will expand, as will the active participation of the audience in interrupting and dialoguing hate speech and problematic content when it comes up. I will be researching how other organizations and events have handled this, and reaching out to various communities for input and resources. I will continue to prioritize marginalized voices, keeping my own privileges in mind, and will hold all participants to that same level of accountability so we can learn and unlearn and evolve together.

DQ participant: “I'm hungrily anticipating the queer antics we might all get up to together. I fully expect this event to feature prominently in the queer anti-capitalist revolution. Let us make joyful noise together.”

Sossity Chiricuzio is a writer and columnist based out of Portland, Oregon. She is a regular contributor for PQ Monthly and focuses on social justice, communication, community, and changing the world. You can follow her adventures online @sossitywrites and find more at sossitywrites.com.