



UMS Announces First-Ever Digital Pride

Free Digital Presentations and Lectures Run June 12-July 6

ANN ARBOR, MI (June 10, 2020) — The University Musical Society (UMS) announces its first-ever Digital Pride, which features three digital presentations, two lectures, a special Performance Playground unit for middle and high school students, and blog content released throughout the month of June. Full details are available at ums.org/pride.

“LGBTQ+ artists — and audiences — have been an integral part of UMS’s 143-year history,” said UMS Vice President for Programming and Production Michael Kondziolka. “We’re thrilled to celebrate artists who are out and proud through artistic works that celebrate and commemorate LGBTQ+ identity.”

The Digital Pride Festival opens with an encore digital presentation of **Becca Blackwell’s *They, Themselves and Schmerm***, which was first presented during UMS’s 2018 No Safety Net theater festival. Becca, a U-M alum, is a New York-based trans actor, performer, and writer who exists between genders and works collaboratively with playwrights and directors to expand our sense of personhood and the body through performance. They have also appeared in *Untitled Feminist Show* (2016) and *Is This a Room: Reality Winner Verbatim Transcription* (part of the 2020 No Safety Net theater festival). *They, Themselves and Schmerm* will be available from June 12-22 at ums.org/pride.

The award-winning choral ensemble **Conspirare** presents ***Considering Matthew Shepard***, a three-part oratorio written by Conspirare artistic director Craig Hella Johnson that reflects on the life of the young, gay student at the University of Wyoming who was brutally beaten and killed in October 1998. The work sets poetic and soulful texts by Hildegard of Bingen, Lesléa Newman, Michael Dennis Browne, and Rumi alongside passages from Matt’s personal journal, interviews,

and writings from his parents. *Considering Matthew Shepard* will be available from June 19-29 at ums.org/pride.

The final artistic presentation in UMS's Digital Pride Festival is **Taylor Mac's *Whitman in the Woods***, a 20-minute compilation of poetry from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Filmed in New York's Hudson Valley in July 2020, the work includes three interpretations of Whitman's "Native Moments," "When I Heard at the Close of the Day," "To a Stranger," and section XXIV of "Song of Myself." Mac's drag wardrobe and makeup are inspired by the woodland surroundings of the Lower Hudson Valley, with costume designer Machine Dazzle and makeup designer Anastasia Durasova incorporating local ferns, pine cones, snake skins, and other natural elements found on set. *Whitman in the Woods* will be available from June 26-July 6 at ums.org/pride.

In addition to the three digital presentations, UMS is collaborating with the Penny Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series to make two archival lectures available to the public. **Mx. Justin Vivian Bond**, a singer, songwriter, and Tony-nominated performance artist whose 2011 lecture "Tango Backwards and in High Heels" will stream on Thursday, June 17 at 8 pm through the end of the month on demand. Additionally, South African photographer and self-proclaimed visual activist **Zanele Muholi**, explores black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex identities through her series of 200 portraits of South Africa's lesbian community through a series called "Faces and Phases," which was presented as part of her 2015 Penny Stamps lecture. Muholi's talk will stream on Thursday, June 24 at 8 pm and will also stream through the end of the month.

UMS has also released a new episode of its "Performance Playground" series with teaching artist **Thani Brant**, a senior undergraduate at U-M who is pursuing a BFA in Musical Theatre. Thani grew up in Fresno, CA, where they fell in love with performing and the creative process. Their episode for middle and high school students explores how to tell personal stories through song, particularly through the construction of an "I Want" song, using excerpts from *Hadestown* and *The Prom*.

Additional content will be available throughout the month. For more information and links to LGBTQ+ organizations and resources across the University of Michigan campus and Southeast Michigan, visit ums.org/pride.

Press Photos

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