

Artist Statement

Gina Stevensen

What I love most about theater is that it is a form entirely dependent on collaboration. I am passionate about creating stories of healing and self-discovery, and those processes never occur in a vacuum. Other people are always involved: we are hurt and learn how not to hurt in return; we struggle to find and express our authentic selves so we can be loved and known, and so others can look to us as they navigate their own journeys. There is no healing without collaboration; there is no theater without collaboration. When the process has the same values as the product, theater becomes an essential space in which we are actively practicing for how to be together in the world.

Two years into a seemingly heterosexual marriage, I came out as queer and the two of us began exploring polyamory. I felt suddenly free, suddenly expansive. All these parts of me I had been avoiding and ignoring my whole life refused to return to sleep. And the discoveries kept unfolding – around my gender, how I occupy my body, how I move through the world. Two years into polyamory, I found the courage to do something I had been terrified to admit even to myself I had been wanting: I told my (straight, cis, pretty-monogamous-despite-giving-polyamory-the-ol'-college-try) husband that I wanted a divorce. It was the hardest and most impossible thing I've ever done. I broke his heart. And at the same time, we kept talking through the messiness of it, because we love each other; marriage and romantic partnership just wasn't the right container for how our love evolved. We're still great friends, and great housemates, so we're figuring out what this new chapter of our relationship will look like. In figuring out how to talk and listen to each other through divorce, I think we both deserve black belts in communication (though I'm a purple belt in actual karate).

A few years ago, I could never have imagined any of this would be possible. I could never have imagined knowing myself deeply enough to articulate my needs without shame; I could never have imagined my then-husband being gracious enough to see my authenticity not as a rejection of him, but as a gift to us both. But as I've become more awake to myself, I've also become more awake to how deeply my imagination of what is possible has been limited by the narratives I've consumed – poison wrapped in honey. And now I truly believe that we are all capable of profound growth, if we can know ourselves more deeply, and speak to each other with more honesty and compassion.

My plays are full of people crying and laughing and fucking up as they stumble messily towards healing – healing themselves, each other, their communities. We need more stories in which characters can help us look discomfort and pain head-on, and help us believe in the transformations that are possible when we are not afraid to be uncomfortable. It's in the hands of storytellers to show us all what could be possible, and in theater the real-time collaboration between artists and audience activates this within our imagination and our bodies in a way that only theater can. It is a sacred space for holding us, our pain and our joy, in which we can imagine new futures and experiment with how we might get there together.