

MATTHEW SHAFFER

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ARTIST STATEMENT

I spent my childhood fighting to be seen, while hoping not to be found out. This duality served me as I navigated between peer groups exploring my identity. Through the lens of others, I developed the ability to seamlessly shift perspectives, transforming how and why I challenged mainstream norms. Constantly trying to prove myself, I discovered that I could disrupt commercial conventionality, through stories that provide space to understand, connect, and unite while maintaining what makes us unique.

I'm a storyteller drawn to touchstones in society that examine family and childhood trauma, investigate how we manage grief, and question how commercial artists can share LGBTQ+ stories. Collaborating with a diverse range of seasoned artists who identify as, or support the LGBTQ+ community, I inquire and interrogate the way the entertainment industry represents gender and identity. Working with patterns and repetition I create narratives that are informed through the harmony of conversation and interaction—physically, verbally, and written.

As a director and choreographer, I orchestrate a dialogue between the performers and creative teams. Together, we curiously unearth the root of the story to cultivate an exchange of behavior-driven movement, action, and transitions that become the pulse of the show.

I believe every object in life dances—an idea that informs how I direct and choreograph every element of the play—from props and set pieces to every member of the cast. I'm inquisitive about how to make these elements move with emotion and purpose to motivate the story. In the Maine professional premiere of *Matilda the Musical*, we needed to get sixteen school desks on and off stage within a thirty-second blackout. Rather than hiring additional crew, I decided to have the actors use their school desks as dance partners, dancing into place in a sequence that brought the schoolyard into the classroom. Sometimes magic is more rewarding when we see it happen in front of us, and are still surprised when a new picture appears. As recognized by Allen Adams of *The Maine Edge*, "There's a breadth and a brightness to the movement of the show, to the almost balletic sense of many parts moving precisely when and where they are meant to."

Through the use of satire, my writing analyzes, articulates, embodies, and informs narratives regardless of gender or sexuality. My stories celebrate the myriad of ways we dance through the absurdities of life with humor, humility, and tenacity with the goal of inspiring commercial filmmakers, artists, and educators to reimagine inclusivity for queer and female voices - especially in underrepresented roles.

We are all looking to connect, feel validated, and heal, and it is my lifetime quest to create purposeful, all-encompassing, art grounded in the belief that emotion is genderless. Art is an equitable and accessible space for all.