

20.10.10 How To Go Clubbing Hour.wav

SM: Sarah McConnell

AS: Audio Sample

mm: madison moore

GSR: Gregory Samantha Rosenthal

DM: Don Muse

PT: Peter Thornhill

LK: Lauron Kehrer

AE: Al Evangelista

[00:00:00]

SM Today on With Good Reason, we're staying up late, putting on our most fabulous outfits and heading out on the town.

[club music]

SM Bars and clubs have been central to LGBTQ life in the United States for decades, from big cities like San Francisco and New York, to small towns here in Virginia.

AS I don't know what it is about, like small-town kind of gay culture, but it's just like welcoming to the extreme, and I love it.

AS It's almost like finding a little bit of Southern hospitality in your local gay bar.

SM We recently spent a Friday night at The Park, a gay bar and nightclub in Roanoke, Virginia. Since 1978, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people have traveled to this spot, sometimes driving for hours from the surrounding rural communities and Appalachian towns. Here, they found family.

AS I met Corey, who works here, and like I was out here having a cigarette and I'm just by myself. But he comes over to me and was like, "What's your name?" And I'm like, "I'm Claire". And then he grabs me, pulls me over his group and is like, "This is Claire, everybody" and it's - like from that second, everybody in the group to me were like, we'd been best friends since we were 10 - you know, like that was the dynamic.

SM But these days, spaces like The Park are increasingly rare. All across the country, LGBTQ+ bars and nightclubs are disappearing. And that's why on today's episode, we want to bring you inside these spaces, where the lights are dim and the music is loud. From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason. I'm Sarah McConnell. And today, How To Go Clubbing. Later in the show, we go back to Roanoke, where take a closer look at this once thriving LGBTQ+ club scene.

AS There were many bars and clubs and speakeasies, where you get yourself into all kinds of trouble after 11 o'clock.

SM But first, madison moore. Moore is professor of Gender, Sexuality and women's studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. Madison's also a professional DJ and runs a queer dance party called Opulence. Madison's first book, "Fabulous", looked at how queer and trans people of color

use fashion, beauty and dance as a way to connect with each other and be themselves in unwelcome environments. Madison, you're writing a book called "How to Go Clubbing". How did it come about?

mm Well, actually, it came about when I was in graduate school. I taught a seminar, a junior seminar at Yale in American studies called Dance, Music, and Nightlife Culture in New York City. And this was, for me, a really exciting opportunity to, you know, look at club culture, look at dance music history as a way of also teaching students about, you know, gender politics or changes in social values and changing approaches to, you know, the home. And I got into a lot of trouble. Word of the course spread out and hit the news and kind of the blogs. And it was on Page Six of The New York Post on Thanksgiving 2011. It was a fiasco.

SM What kind of news? How did that make the news?

mm The course had guest speakers. So we had amazing people like Vjuan Allure, who's a great DJ, Voguing and Ballroom DJ come. We had Simonez Wolf come, who was a kind of promoter in New York. And I did an interview with someone, with a journalist from - from Page Six, and I think I was maybe naive and thought, oh, it's just going to be like a, you know, kind of simple interview about the class. And it was sort of, I guess maybe a slow news day that day, because it was the headline on that day at Thanksgiving. And the headline was "Yale Meets the Velvet Rope". And of course, once Page Six writes about something, then so do all the other blogs and kind of news outlets and whatever. So I started getting emails from, you know, Yale alum saying, shame on me for dragging Yale's name through the mud. How can you teach such rubbish to students? Or so, I thought I was gonna get kicked out of my program, you know, but thankfully, my dissertation advisor was super in my corner and super supported me throughout this whole process. So that's really where the book got started, to be honest.

SM And when you're talking about clubbing, this is for the LGBTQ set, right?

mm Well yeah. I mean, I think, you know, LGBTQ people, trans people, people of color, really invented and shaped modern club culture. And this is something that folks don't remember. I mean, being in gay clubs, queer clubs were not even, you know, legal till fairly recently. So I think it's important to think about the value and shape that these spaces have as spaces of community and spaces of connectivity. So much of gay history has taken place in bars and clubs and the kind of fight to have them anyway.

SM How did gay culture really inform and almost create this whole club culture?

mm Think about voguing and ballroom culture, which is a kind of culture that really is part of a broader history of drag and female impersonation that stretches back into the Harlem Renaissance.

SM Really?

mm Yeah. And so this is a space where folks would go - vogue balls - because they were able to create her own family networks and they were able to kind of be around queer and trans people of color, perhaps many of them were kicked out of their homes. Perhaps many of them, you know, needed to just find a community to know that you're not alone in your queerness. So that's just

one example of how clubs can work as kind of a home for people who are fundamentally disenfranchised and even ejected from society.

SM What is - what is a ball in this context?

mm Yes, a ball is a hybrid party performance. So every ball is themed around a particular kind of theme. And then there are categories and you basically dress, you know, for the category that you want to be in. So, for instance, a runway category, maybe that category would be Black Panther Fantasy. So you have to come in your best Black Panther Wakanda looks, you know, let's say.

SM Sounds great.

mm Yes, I would - I would love that. Or another category. That's - you will find a vogue balls is hand - hand performance. And so that category might be, tell us a story with us with a sequined glove. So everyone has to wear sequined gloves, fabulous gloves and tell a story to their hands in that moment. So that's a ball.

SM How did what started this way and Harlem Renaissance translate to today?

mm Well, I think you know, what's really fascinating when you think about club culture history is that there was an heiress in 1916 called Eugenia Kelly, who - her mother had her arrested because she was going out to too many parties. Can you imagine she was - she had gone on a trip kind of upstate New York and came back to Penn Station and got out of the station and was apprehended by the police right away. There was this really publicized - highly publicized trial in this period. And, you know, one of the things Eugenia kind of said and kind of her testimony was, well, if I don't go to at least six cabaret's a night, I lose my - I lose my social standing. And she writes all of these kind of op-eds for, you know, different news outlets about the value of clubbing or going to cabarets, I guess, at the time, and what she got out of going to these spaces. And so when I teach about nightlife, especially now at VCU, it is important to look back at the history so that we can, of course, take a look at the kind of career night life scene in Richmond, let's say, or wherever folks are from, and then actually point back to these really important moments in history. And so that students realize this is part of a historical continuum that didn't just start today or even 10 years ago, but that has been happening for like 100 years or more.

SM You're writing about dance parties and fashion. But you write dance parties and fashion is not frivolous, it's political - style is political. How so?

mm You know, it's really interesting when you when you do work on style and fashion because people think that, you know, a lot of people say, you know, I don't really care about fashion. I just kind of put on whatever is on the floor, let's say, or whatever is clean. And I also do that, too, you know. But in fact, when we get dressed in the morning, we're not just putting on clothes. We're putting on messages. We're putting on a sense of how we see ourselves. We're telling people how to - how to connect to us. We're also sharing our vision of the world, too. And so when I think about style as politics, I'm also thinking about - thinking about those people who can walk down the street and get a sandwich. You know, this is what I say is - it's really as simple as that. Some of us are able to go on a lunch break and go to Panera or whatever, and that walk there will - might be totally smooth, no turbulence at all. But for others, those who might perhaps be outside of the norm, those who might perhaps have chosen fabulousness as a way of circulating, might be met with all kinds of threats, verbal threats, physical threats, people taking your photo without

permission, you know. So the journey basically for these two groups to get a sandwich is either precarious or simple. And so that's kind of one example I use to kind of get across the point of fabulousness as - as a politic.

SM You're writing this book about clubbing, but your most recent published book is "Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric". Help us understand, what is fabulous and - and who decides to be fabulous. Is it something that you're born with, or something that you don't?

mm Maybe you're born with it, maybe it's Maybelline? I don't know. No. So for me, fabulousness is not about, first and foremost, it is not about money or a certain kind of material, like a sequin or particular material. It really is an attitude. And it's the way that people decide that they are kind of fed up with living in a world that doesn't value them in their body. And also, it reflects how people choose kind of themselves at last. And that at last part is really important, because people, especially marginalized people, are fighting every day for air in a world, you know, that is - were there still misogyny and trans misogyny and white supremacy and anti-Blackness. And so folks who choose fabulousness, essentially are giving up on norms that are not made for them anyway. And so for me, this is what fabulousness really is about. I often get asked if, you know, if reading the book will help make people fabulous. And I guess if you read it and it makes you reevaluate or think about how you might be suppressing yourself in whatever ways, then that could be a space where, you know, you open yourself up to other possibilities of - of circulating. And that's what I'm really interested in, is kind retaking these norms and also helping people realize, you know, what - what are the ways, or think about even - what are the ways you might be suppressing ourselves everyday to make other people feel comfortable. And how do we give up on that and kind of choose our own path?

SM Tell me a little bit about the history of fabulousness.

mm You know, thinking about the origins of kind of the word fabulous or how - what are the roots of the word - that it's rooted in fable, which means storytelling and really imaginative storytelling. I mean, that really tells you what fabulousness is about just on its own. That it is about people who use their bodies, and they use style and fashion and whatever they have, whatever resources they have available to them, to kind of tell this really tall tale, this really tall story about how they see themselves and how they want to circulate in the world. You know, the politics come in when you're in a body that is kind of what I usually say is, kind of, in a - in a state of duress. You know, I think that marginalized bodies are constantly living in a state of duress or - or even emergency. And so, thinking about how that state of emergency has transformed, you know, through beauty, through esthetics, into kind of a statement of agency, really.

SM You know, decades ago, clubbing meant something very different. But has the culture changed since queer life has become so much more mainstream and accepted?

mm I think about spaces like Paradise Garage, which I wish that I could have had a chance to go to, because you've read all these really great stories about how amazing it was, how great the sound was there, how Larry Levan really knew how to tease the crowd, you know, through sound and through music and through track selection. You read about, you know, David Mancuso's Loft in New York City, which was, you know, just his loft apartment that he would use to have these, you know, really curated parties. I wonder what it would be like to be in those spaces now. But rather than talking about kind of club culture as something that is dying, it's evolving. I would say it's evolving. And what I think you see now, especially in the queer scene, are party collectives and

party crews such as Disc Woman, such as Hot Mass or Honcho in Pittsburgh, such as even perhaps Opulence in London. These are crews who are really trying to, let's say, reunite dance music and queerness by their own parties, by supporting artists who are femme-of-center or trans, who are non-binary, who are of color, who are in Mexico or South Africa. Right, and so are really trying to expand the conversation and the dialogs so that DJs are not seen as only like straight white men.

SM A lot of people of color have encountered racism within the gay scene in the - back in the 70s, 80s. Is that still the case today?

mm Well, my goodness, yes. And I don't mean to laugh, it's more of a kind of historical laugh than like a funny laugh. But I was - I was mentioning the Paradise Garage earlier. You know, when you read about the fact that, sort of how prevalent racism was even in gay clubs. Yeah. As you mentioned in the 70s and 80s, that it's still there today. You know, there's always stories about folks at the door being turned away because they're this or that. And it's really hard to have this conversation because people think that it shouldn't be about race, that it should be about the music only. But, you know, you go to a gay club, let's say, in D.C. or wherever, and there's a certain kind of like white supremacy in place where - or even kind of a cataloging of bodies where if you are not white and if you're not mac and cis-gender, then you are - you essentially don't exist. It's really sad, but I - sometimes I don't really enjoy going to gay clubs anymore because of precisely this, because of the sense of the way in which my body as a Black person who is femme either is entertainment, so people want to say "yes queen - honey, work", you know, snap, snap, snap, but they don't actually see me as a person. They see me as a look or they see me as sort of - a piece of entertainment. For me, this is why I love creating and curating my own spaces and curating the parties that I would like to go to. And it's why I love going to warehouse parties and particular parties, in particular clubs, because in those spaces, you know, it is - you have - you have less of that. I don't say that it's, you know, 100 percent immune or that it doesn't exist at all. But you - you have less of it. And I felt kind of freer in those kinds of spaces. I mean, that's really what it's about. It's about, how do you create a space when there's no place to go for you, really? Because maybe you don't want to go to that space because it makes you feel uncomfortable. Maybe this space makes you feel that way, or maybe that space makes you feel that way. And so, you know, you create the space on your own terms. And one of things I like to tell people is, if you have an idea for a party, you should do it because you are certainly not the only one. So if you're a lesbian into punk rock, start a party that targets that because you will not be the only one.

SM Are gay, trans, queer artists really getting their due now, or are they still fighting for the light?

mm I think that folks are still fighting for the light. We have artists, producers and musicians like Kiddy Smile, like Lotic, like Azur, who are really doing great things for club culture and, you know, electronic music. But I still think there's definitely a long way to go. And I always say that I'm not really particularly interested in tolerance or even visibility. I'm interested in being centered. And I think that most queer and trans people would prefer to be centered rather than tolerated.

[00:16:20]

SM Madison Moore is a DJ and creative director of the Queer Techno Party Opulence and a professor of gender, sexuality and women's studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. Madison is the author of "Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric". Coming up next, while queer nightclubs in big cities like London and New York might still host rambunctious all-night raves, it's a different story out in smaller cities and towns. There, gay bars and clubs are shuttering

their doors. Roanoke, Virginia, is a small city nestled right at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Today, Roanoke boasts a quaint farmer's market and a new art museum and multiple craft breweries. But just a few decades ago, it was home to a totally different scene, a vibrant and often risky LGBTQ+ nightlife popping with drinks, drag queens and plenty of disco. Producer Cass Adair here wanted to know what happened to urban Appalachia's forgotten gay culture. So we headed to downtown Roanoke to hear the story from people who lived it.

DM You see where the stairwell is right there? The building was right there.

CA That's Don Muse. He's pointing toward his now this tidy street corner in Roanoke, Virginia.

DM All of these little spots right here were holes in the walls, like little liquor joints.

CA Don spent a lot of time in those little liquor joints. So did Peter Thornhill.

PT You really could have a wonderful seedy, fun - a wonderful seedy, I say it again, time.

CA Peter and Don are both African-American gay men. They're both in their 60s. In the 1970s and 80s, you might have found them at any of Roanoke six - yes, six - gay bars and nightclubs that popped up during the disco era.

DM If you didn't come here, you died somewhere in the boonies. Let's face it, ladies and gentlemen. These young gay men and women came to Roanoke because they lived in these rural, rural counties. Roanoke was off the chain. It was off the chain.

[I'm Coming Out - Diana Ross]

CA One of those places that made Roanoke such a hot spot for LGBTQ nightlife, it's still standing - kinda.

DM We've been through this door, a video. You see, this door is the same door, it's the same door. Take a look at this door.

CA There's no historical marker or anything like that. There's just a tiny red brick building and a sign reading Central Virginia Methodist Mission. But Don and Peter, they don't call it that.

PT This is The Straw.

CA The Last Straw was once one of Roanoke, Virginia's most notorious gay nightspots.

PT ...And the best look at hustlers, oh my goodness. They were hot.

[Hot Stuff - Donna Summer]

PT It was like disco heaven.

DM We would go to the club and they would cut on to "ladies and gentlemen, this is the first song tonight" and it's Sylvester - do you want to dance? Suicide. We killed ourselves on that floor.

[Do You Wanna Funk? – Sylvester]

DM Summer would slow it down.

[Last Dance - Donna Summer]

DM Diana Ross would pick it up again.

[Stop in the Name of Love - Diana Ross]

DM I was just doing the white T-shirt and tight jeans and a baseball cap, and I was damn good looking, Ladies and gentlemen, Don was a handsome Afro-American gay man, you trust me. I don't have any problem with picking up...

PT Those pants were tight!

DM They were really tight.

CA To be clear, these places were not total utopias. Roanoke has a deep history of segregation. And some white people, they wouldn't cross the color line, even to go dancing.

DM There were clubs that you didn't see white gay men and women coming over there, because it was still considered, you know, sort of iffy and challenging to be over there by yourself.

CA But Gainsborough, the African-American neighborhood where Don grew up, it was a really friendly place to be queer.

DM The first bar was called the Horoscope, and it was owned by a Black gentleman named Ron Jones. The liquor was great, you saw as many boys from out in the boonies as you wanted to see. They'd never seen a gay Black man before, so, you know, that was good. It was just crazy.

CA So actually, Roanoke LGBTQ bars were probably less segregated than their straight counterparts. You might even think of these bases as hinting at this brand-new kind of Southern culture, one that was more tolerant, more racially integrated and probably a lot more fun. There was just this one big problem. All of this was against the law.

PT There was a big sign on the front door about the ABC laws. You can't serve, known homosexuals, drug dealers, da da da. Right there at the front door when we walked into a gay bar.

CA Virginia law at the time stated that a bar's license may be suspended or revoked if the bar has become a meeting place and rendezvous for users of narcotics, drunks, homosexuals, prostitutes, pimps, panderers, gamblers, or habitual law violators. And the reality, yeah, these bars, they were rendezvous, meeting points for gay people and for sex workers. Sex work was just part of the scene there. Trans and gender nonconforming people might work the streets for a few hours and then head over to perform at a drag show or get a drink at a bar. And this kind of community with two kinds of lawbreakers, the "homosexuals" and the "prostitutes", it attracted the police.

DM Know, you had to be you got to be quick about getting into your trick's car. So, you know, if the police was undercover or they were driving around, they didn't see you, you know, walking. You couldn't be dressed up in women's clothing and heels and wigs, or you would be arrested.

GSR The policing was really stepping up in the late 70s and up under their own police department.

CA Gregory Samantha Rosenthal is a professor at Roanoke College and the director of the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ Oral History Project.

GSR And a notorious sergeant of the vice squad there that was well-known in the gay press. The gay people we've talked to, they remember how vicious the crackdown on both gay cruising at Elmwood Park and the sex work down at the market was.

CA However, the research also shows that it wasn't just the vice squads that pushed queer and trans nightlife out of downtown Roanoke. Another big culprit was a lot more subtle - urban planning.

GSR In 1979, this new plan Design '79 plan went underway. The goal was to basically create what it is today. To attract tenants downtown, that would cater to a declining white, straight population.

AS Roanoke Design '79, an adventure in civic planning involving citizens, business and government, in a unique cooperative enterprise, is being partially underwritten by First Federal Savings and Loan - partner and savings with people who are building for their future.

GSR It was touted as extremely democratic. They do some new things that hadn't been done before, such as a televised call-in community input mechanism.

AS Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Ted Powers. This is the second in the series of programs Roanoke Design '79. And today we want you to join in because we need your input into this whole process. I think we've got a phone call.

AS Hello. Hello. Yes. The proposal for the cultural center in downtown Roanoke, is perhaps the most exciting proposal I've heard tonight.

AS You say you like the idea of a cultural center downtown. Right.

AS OK. And we're over here with - with another phone call.

AS I would really like to see the library moved. I just think you'd be wasting a really good atmosphere and a good thing to move the library.

CA So this new democratic urban planning process, it helped generate ideas for things that a lot of people would want in their city, like cultural centers and nice libraries. But not all the comments were so innocuous.

GSR The Design '79 documents we looked at talk about focus groups with white heterosexual middle-class people. And they said, we're afraid to go downtown because of the type of people who are on the streets down there. They never say trans sex workers, but we get a sense that the city is trying to push this population out of visibility. Gay cruising moves to other parks further out

from downtown. And the sex work is also pushed out on to more marginal streets where according to oral histories we've done, it becomes a lot more dangerous for the sex workers.

CA And on top of that Design '79 was not the only disruptor to Roanoke's queer nightlife in the late 1970s and 1980s. Something else was emerging at the same time, something that would further devastate the community. HIV.

DM It was nothing for you to lose 100 to 300 people that you knew.

GSR The impact of HIV AIDS goes well beyond the individuals and the community who are suffering and caring for each other, but it does impact the way that larger straight society sees LGBT people and increasingly sees them as a threat.

DM If you had gotten sick in the early AIDS epidemic and let's say you went to the hospital like Georgetown University, they wouldn't feed you. They left your tray out front. They put yellow tape in front of your door. Your doctor came in on a mask. If you didn't have a friend, gay or lesbian friend to help you. You were done because they were afraid, they were absolutely terrified.

GSR Roanoke renews its crackdown on sex work in the late 80s, early 90s. We have just arrest, arrest, arrests, in a couple of years span.

CA These days, downtown Roanoke has plenty of places you can go and have a good time. That cultural center, the one that was dreamed up by the citizens and the architects of Design '79. It's right downtown, and I have to admit, it's pretty nice. But now - now that I know the history of this place, it's hard not to feel like there's something just missing. A whole queer world full of sex workers and drag queens and disco and drinking and dancing. So, before I left Roanoke, I made sure to hit up the last remaining gay bar. And you know what, it wasn't that seedy fun that Don and Peter were telling me about, but I still got to dance. For With Good Reason, I'm Cass Adair.

SM That was Don Muse, Peter Thornhill and Gregory Samantha Rosenthal. Rosenthal is professor of public history at Roanoke College and the founder of the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ Oral History Project. To hear more stories from Roanoke and Virginia's Blue Ridge LGBTQ culture, go to the link at withgoodreasonradio.org. This is With Good Reason, we'll be right back.

[00:28:00]

SM Welcome back to With Good Reason. From Virginia Humanities, I'm Sarah McConnell. These days, you don't have to go to a bar or a nightclub to experience LGBTQ+ club culture, you can just tune into your local hip hop station. Lauron Kehrer is a professor of ethnomusicology at Western Michigan University. She's published research about Beyonce and Macklemore. Now she's writing a book about queer and trans artists of color in the Hip-Hop scene. Lauron, if people hear popular music artists like Drake or Beyonce on the radio, they're hearing straight artists talk about straight romance, but are they also hearing queer music?

LK Absolutely. There's a lot of queer influences, especially - there always has been in mainstream music, but especially in the last couple of years, we're really hearing a lot of influences that people don't necessarily know about from these marginalized communities.

SM Is that new? Is it new that they're influenced by this culture?

LK No, it's not necessarily new. But it's always changing. And we're hearing things in a new way and we're hearing new iterations of those influences. So, for example, in the last few years, we've heard a number of mainstream artists incorporate aspects of a local New Orleans hip hop genre called bounce music. Now, bounce is not inherently a queer genre, but especially in the years following Hurricane Katrina, openly queer and trans artists have been among the most prominent artists performing in this genre. And it's those artists that have largely influenced work by Beyonce, Missy Elliott, Drake and others in the mainstream. Bounce is a dance-focused genre comes out of New Orleans that typically features very fast tempos and was often associated with certain dance styles like what we know as twerking. So we may have seen aspects of bounce culture when Miley Cyrus performs or tries to perform twerking onstage. But we also hear some of those influences in things like Formation, where we have samples of - vocal samples from artists like Big Frida and the late Messy Mya.

[Formation – Beyonce]

LK If you're not already familiar with bounce, and with Big Frida and particular, there's not a lot to necessarily indicate who this artist is, but it does give us the clear example of a particular geographic place. Right. I like cornbread and collard greens, definitely referring to the American South, in particular African American cultures of the American South. But the problem with including samples by artists such as this and not being able to explicitly name them, is that these queer contributions often go unremarked upon on notice. And there's not always a fair compensation for these artists contributing these ideas, these musical ideas and their own voices. So in the opening of the song, Beyonce has a vocal sample of the late Messy Mya. And we can listen to a sample of that.

*AS What happened at the New Orleans, b**ch I'm back by popular demand.*

LK So for the uninitiated, these two samples sound very similar, right? They could almost sound like they are the same artist, but they're too queer artists. And without having any you know, their visuals don't appear in the video. Messy Mya went uncredited for that track and later Beyonce's facing a lawsuit by the estate of Messy Mya for not giving proper credit as the songwriter, even though that voice was included in the track and was a huge popular success. Right, everyone has heard Formation at this point.

SM How do you think Hip-Hop came to be influenced by queer artists?

LK I think that hip-hop has always been influenced by queer music. So in my work, for example, I look at what the earliest hip hop practitioners were doing, the types of music they were drawing on. They were drawing on disco records. Right. And disco comes completely out of these Black and Latinx queer spaces, especially in New York City. And hip hop artists have always drawn on these musics, even if at certain moments they've tried to distance themselves from the communities from which that music has emerged. So we now sort of have this narrative of when is hip hop going to have its big gay rapper? When is hip hop going to have its gay stars? Hip hop being inherently homophobic, right. We have Macklemore singing "If I were gay, I would think hip hop hates me". But really, I think the narrative needs to be, why haven't we already acknowledged the queer contributions to hip hop? Why do we still have this idea that hip hop is inherently more homophobic than other music genres?

SM And is hip hop more homophobic, would you say?

LK Absolutely not. I think there are many queer and trans artists, listeners, practitioners. It's just that we're now in a political and social moment where those communities are getting more visibility in the mainstream. So it feels like a new thing, but it isn't actually new. The way we talk about it might be new. We've had artists like Jay-Z come out very vocally in support of LGBTQ communities, especially around issues like gay marriage or marriage equality. There's still some challenges within the music industry, but I think we're at the point of stardom like Drake and Beyonce, that's not necessarily going to hurt your career at this point. But I do think that a lot of these bounce artists, because they don't have the same resources, that they can't necessarily fight any kind of legal battles if an artist samples their material, for example, without giving them credit. So there is definitely a power imbalance going on that is probably contributing to this. And there is still homophobia in the industry. It is much harder to break out as a queer artist than it is for their straight counterparts. Some managers are a little worried about presenting their artists in that way because they're afraid that it's not going to allow them a lot of opportunities or that certain aspects of the hip hop audience are not going to connect to that artists. That they're not going to want to support an openly queer or trans artist. The main concern for the artists, even if they are out, is that they don't want to be labeled as a gay artist. So, for example, in New Orleans, music journalist Alison Fensterstock coined the term "Sissy Bounce" to sort of describe this phenomenon of having so many out artists in the local scene. And she uses the language that draws on what the artists themselves use. So, for example, Sissy Noby is a very popular performer down there. So it's a - it's a reclamation of formerly sort of pejorative term. But the artists are very insistent that there's not really such a thing as Sissy Bounce. There's just bounce. It's not a distinct genre for them, it's part of the larger bounce scene. And I think managers sometimes take that to the other extreme, of sort of obscuring - obscuring a part of their identity so that they can have an easier time navigating the music industry.

SM How did New Orleans after Katrina come to be such a hotspot for bounce music and these artists? What was it about the city at that time that allowed this to flourish?

LK Well, there are a couple factors going on. A lot of people, unfortunately, lost a lot of their musical instruments during the storm. bounce is a style that, you know, if you have a basic speaker setup and a prerecorded track on your laptop and a microphone for the rapper, is pretty easy to put together a show. So there was a convenience factor involved. The other thing is that some of the bounce artists were the first to return to the city. And of course, New Orleans being such a musical city, they were very much in need of live music that they could go and enjoy, working through trauma, through dance in post-Katrina New Orleans. Everyone keeps talking about that beat, right? That beat. It's infectious. You can't not move when you hear that beat. It really gave people an outlet for their grief and to work through some of that trauma. So it was very important to them when bounce came back.

SM There was also a period where there were marginal gay nightspots decades ago when this was more of a culture that had to be careful. And I wonder if in New Orleans after Katrina, before a massive development in mainstream culture came back, this community was able to thrive.

LK I think also New Orleanians pride themselves on being such an open culture. And part of the reason I was drawn to bounce was because there are queer and trans rappers, which is very hard to find elsewhere. But a lot of folks down there are like, it's just New Orleans. We got respect for everyone down here. It's not an issue for us. So, yes, they are still particular queer spaces and in

particular Black queer spaces. And those are still very much a part of balanced culture, but bounce also crosses many different sort of social boundaries as well. So part of bounce's moment post-Katrina, I think, was having these more mixed stages of different kinds of audiences because everyone was just looking for something - something to help them get through that recovery period.

SM What was your favorite nightspot?

LK Well, while I was down there, I went to a club that actually - there are scenes of it in Beyonce's formation video. I want to say it's like the edge of the Tremé. It's right on Esplanade. There's no sign out front. It's the kind of bar where you're going to order a beer or something that involves two ingredients, if not going to a cocktail bar. But the thing that was amazing to me were the dancers. So shaking is kind of the broad term for different dance styles associated with bounce and twerking is one of those styles of shaking. So, sort of traditionally, women do more sort of hip work, which is what twerking largely is - hip and buttocks area. And men tend to do more shoulder work and some footwork. But there's a large number of gay men, especially in New Orleans, who've created a sort of combination of these styles that is sometimes called sissy style or punk style, in which they move. - they do shoulder work, but they also twerk. And some of these dancers are the most athletic and the most fabulous shakers that I have ever seen. And they're all in this little hitting club. That's kind of dingy it's very dark. It's not fancy at all. And they really know how to work it.

SM It's so interesting to think that this is the same sort of moment this decade for bounce music and other genres that we saw in Chicago, New Orleans, New York during the jazz era.

LK Yes. And those two also had a large queer influence. Right. But we don't always talk about it in those terms. We've had a lot of advances in LGBTQ rights in the last 10, 20 years. Right. But it's also important to think about what communities are we inadvertently leaving behind when we focus on certain issues. You know, we you have an epidemic of violence against trans women, for example, and trans women of color in particular. So we have very vulnerable communities still that are not necessarily having all of their needs addressed by mainstream LGBTQ movements. So I think it's really important that bounce music is for everyone. Everyone should enjoy it and we should all go support the artists, but it's also important to think about what kind of inequalities might we be perpetuating if we can take this music and enjoy it, but not think about the social circumstances in which these artists have created them.

SM Lauron, thanks for talking with me today on With Good Reason. Can you take us out on a piece of bounce music you especially enjoy?

LK Well, we're thinking about bounce in particular. I have to go to Big Freedia and I really think her latest album or E.P. Third World bounce is really going to do it for us.

SM Lauron Kehrler is a professor of ethnomusicology at Western Michigan University. She's published research about Beyonce and Macklemore and is writing a book about queer and trans artists of color in the hip hop scene.

[00:42:25]

SM We close with an artist whose dance moves aren't just for the club. Al Evangelista has danced on professional stages all over the country. He uses choreography to tell complex and personal stories about race, sexuality and empire. Al is a professor of theater and dance at Oberlin College and Conservatory in Ohio. Al, you studied at the University of Michigan where they had a wonderful dance program called Daring Dances. How did that shape your choreography?

AE Well, I'm a performer and a choreographer who's invested in social justice and how performance can incorporate social justice themes and ideas. I identify as Filipinx American. So my family's from the Philippines. And I realized, hey, there aren't a lot of parts or stories that are like mine. This was also at a time when *In the Heights* just started getting popular. And Lin Manuel Miranda, who started to make that work, who also made *Hamilton*, said that he made that work because he also didn't see his Puerto Rican community in the arts. So I thought, oh, I wonder if I can do that, too, with Filipinx American identities. The work I'm trying to do is not just the work of representation. It's not just I want to see Filipino American people on stage, because I don't want to say that my experience is the same experience that all Filipino Americans go through. Of course, I want to see more Filipino Americans in various art forms, but I want to also make sure that it's not saying that this is what it means to be Filipino American, this one popular showing. Not that my work is popular, but like a *Crazy, Rich Asians*, if I see one character from that movie and think that that's the type of Asian that's ideal.

SM How important is it for you to represent being Filipino American and queer?

AE I just came from a conference in Detroit called *Creating Change*, and it's led by the LGBTQ+ task force, and they had a day where it was led by NQAPIA, which is a national organization for Queer Asian and Pacific Islanders. And they had a day where they brought together a room that was specifically Asian. If you identified as Asian Pacific Islander Queer, you were invited into this space. There were a group of, I would say at the most 40, at least 20 people, but there was a group of us in the space and the energy of having all of us in that room together, talking about being queer and being Asian Pacific Islander, Filipino. You ask me why it's important to me. It's because spaces like that is extremely rare. And if I can give a glimpse into that space with the work that I do, then I think I'm doing my work correctly and I try and think of sometimes when I'm really tired. And like, for instance, today I started with an 8 a.m. faculty meeting, and now a couple hours later, I'm doing this interview and trying to think of ways to talk about my queer identity and Filipino identity that sounds somewhat intelligent. I'm trying to do it for them, for the other people in that room. Yeah, that's why it's important to me.

SM So are there performers and performances you've seen recently that have been inspirational to you in terms of how others are trying to express this identity?

AE Absolutely. So there's this drag queen artist named LaWhore Vagistan, who is also a queer scholar at Tufts University. I don't know if you know the song, *Sorry* by Justin Bieber, but they do an interpretation and it's on YouTube, you should totally watch it called *Sari, S-A-R-I*, and it's a music video that explores this queered diasporic identity as a drag queen. And they were actually one of the inspirations for the dance work that I can do, at least the art that I can make can be both very rigorous and insightful, but also joyful and hilarious and fun to do. So LaWhore Vagistan was also the M.C. of a queer dance festival that I was a part of in Brooklyn, New York. It was called *Explode: Queer Dance* and LaWhore Vagistan amazing, amazing M.C. And then I got back to my second year of grad school and thought, how can I do something equally as joyful and equally as rigorous? And I started to think about my own identity and how hard it was for me to try and even

think about Filipino American history. So it took a slightly dark turn. This theme of missing or hollow or emptiness started to emerge as a theme that I wanted to explore in a queer way. I guess it's something that I wanted to explore through movement and dance.

SM And so you came up with a dance choreography that you call Hallow Hollow.

AE Yes, it came from, there's an amazing scholar at the University of Texas, Austin, named Deborah Paredez. She wrote this book called *Selenidad*. And in the introduction to that book, she writes about Selena, the pop culture singer who tragically died early in her career. She talked about the costumes that Selena wore and how people see the emptiness of the costumes because the costumes are displayed in a museum, how people can see the hollowness of it, but also have such high regard for it. So had the hallow part of it. And so from that wordplay, I started to think of the emptiness of this missing Filipino American history and how it could be held sacred and how I could honor it through movement. Part of this work was projecting on this 70 foot projection screen, old home videos of me dancing with my family in various places. One of them was for my grandma's 80th birthday and we had this huge celebration where we learned traditional Filipino folk dance. And it was me at like eight, nine years old with my cousins. And we're in traditional Filipino wear, performing this dance. And I wanted to portray this relationship to young Filipino me and current Filipino me. And so I had the projection of me dancing with my cousins. And then I also was doing the dance at the same time, live in front of the audience. That was one of the ways we signified and called back to my Filipino culture. Also with my work, I hope it invites conversation. So I guess I'm asking or I would like my work to instigate, to have people ask difficult questions and have difficult conversations.

SM Al Evangelista is a professor of theater and dance at Oberlin College and Conservatory in Ohio. You're hearing the original music for *Al's Show, Hallow Hollow*, composed by Douglas Hertz and Nathan Badger. Major support for *With Good Reason* is provided by the University of Virginia Health System. Pioneering treatments to save lives and preserve brain function for stroke patients. uvahealth.com. *With Good Reason* listeners, we want to hear from you. Join our Why I Vote V.A. Campaign and tell us, why did you vote? Call and let us know at 434 253 0396. And we might share your voice on the air. *With Good Reason* is produced in Charlottesville by Virginia Humanities, which acknowledges the Monacan nation, the original people of the land and waters of our home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Our production team as Allison Quantz, Matt Derroch, Lauren Francis and Jamal Millner. We have production help from Aiden Carroll. For the podcast, go to withgoodreasonradio.org. I'm Sarah McConnell, thanks for listening.