



## LGBTQ+ History Blog

### Q & A with Ben Hodge– 16/02/2021

GYRO's LGBTQ+ History Month project continued with award winning filmmaker, activist and comedian Ben Hodge.

Ben has performed stand up at the Edinburgh Festival and is a member of Comedysportz Manchester. We were very thrilled to have Ben and his Comedysportz colleagues Kate and Amelia (beaming in all the way from the U.S.A) to perform some live improvised comedy over Zoom. This was the craziest and funniest session I think that we have ever had (and that is saying something)!!

Below you can enjoy Ben's interview (but sorry we did not record the the comedy performance)!

#### **Q1. Asked by Alix**

##### **How long did you attend GYRO for and what's your favourite memory of your time at GYRO?**

Good Question! I first attended GYRO in 2016, but I had known about it from around 14 years old because I knew someone else who went. I had always wanted to go, but I'm from a little village that didn't leave very often and didn't fully know what my identity was at the time. I didn't know I could explore this at GYRO and I felt like I needed to figure out who I was and how I identified before I could join – which I know now isn't the case at all. Anyway, I went to college and began to feel more like an adult and started to better understand and work out what I wanted for me. So I reached out to the support group, with Rachel being one of the first people I used different pronouns with - and this was off the back of me being head girl in highschool – and I began to use GYRO as a place to explore my pronouns and my name, Ben. I went to University at 18 but still like to keep close connections with GYRO.

Favourite memory...hmm...I talk about it all the time actually, from about 17 I was really working out who I was and my family didn't really know what was going on and we were still trying to figure everything out. But I came to GYRO and I was in the little kitchen, cooking the pasta and I looked over at Chris, at Paul and at all my friends and I remember thinking, this is a family, not by blood but a chosen family. That it is a safe space, a community and I am so lucky to have this, all these people

here to support me. Even now, whenever I'm cooking pasta I still associate it with them and these memories! I just want to be sat in a colourful space, with sofas that don't match and people sat everywhere having a sing along to the guitar! Top tier memory guys!

## **Q2. Asked by Ben**

### **Why do you feel it is important to use comedy to raise the voices of those who are under-represented?**

For me, comedy is all about self-deprecation. You still see that in the media a lot of comedy, things like sketch shows are often based of stereotypes, like Little Britain, I used to think that was funny at the time. But I think, making jokes about yourself helps to reclaim these aspects about yourself. So if people try and use comments like 'What's in your pants,' I like to take this and twist it into a joke and make it funny, this way it gives me the power back. It means you can heckle me all you want, I have the power to turn those negative comments around and I then control the rooms reaction. I've gigged in places where you don't think they'll be on board with you, because a lot of my sets are based around being gay and trans. One time though, in one of these places this older man came up to be afterwards and shook my hand and thanked me! I think taking the power back and making things funny can help to facilitate an environment for people to open up, some who wouldn't normally.

## **Q3. Asked by Ben**

### **When did you first realise you were funny?**

Tough one! I've always been a delight! Well, in school I started doing more drama, probably around 15 I started taking on more comedy parts, one of these me and my friend did a routine of Ashley and Pudsey, where I was the dog! When I went to college I started to become more of the class clown – my poor drama teacher! - I would get up on the table and start a rendition of "We hear the people sing!". It was a place of constant joy and laughter though, and then for University I chose Salford because they had a comedy department. I started doing gigs, and my first five minute set in November 2018 was...terrible! I have thankfully come a long way from there with it though, changing until I had a solid set, learning more and more as I went. Last summer I joined ComedySportz an improv group and just kept seeking out more to do. I performed at Edinburgh Fringe, almost two years ago now, which was two weeks of pure tiredness but worth every second, I loved it!

## **Q4. Asked by Salem**

### **What advice would you give to younger Ben?**

So, I did a whole film about this, reading out a letter to my 14 year old self and I also worked with BBC sounds last year talking about The Proud Trust. The main advice being, the same thing I say to everyone and I know it sounds a bit cliché, but things do get better. Things get better and there are

people out there to support you, whether that's GYRO, a different club, your school, there will be someone there for you. Another thing I would say is that it does take time, I'm three years on now, I've been on Testosterone, I've had top surgery, but it takes time. Again with family, I discovered who I was and I wanted them to be okay with everything immediately – Now! – and some families would be, but others it does just take time to adjust. So, it's just about being confident of who you are and getting the support you need. I know that so often I felt like I was on the brink of telling someone what was going on with me, who I was, but then I would just hold it on. I wish I'd said it sooner, don't be afraid to come out and say it, go get that support and get that positive outcome for yourself. Keep holding on.

#### Q5. Asked by Salem

**We know that activism isn't always easy so looking after your mental health is important! What item will you place in the time capsule that supports your mental health?**

Okay, so there's a story with this. Originally, I was going to make rainbow pasta art, representing the community and love within it. But, I had no time, lots of pasta but no paint anywhere! So, I'm choosing the Fringe flyer – being almost 2 years ago it still helps to look back at it. I still have a lot of down days, but trying to find the lightness, the positivity, finding the funny in things helps me. I've had some awful experiences as a trans person, people say terrible things. But looking at the flyer helps me realise that I have the power to twist it and find the light, that I can get over any hurdles. Take control, Twist it, Find the Funny in all forms. That helps me.



#### Bonus Question: Alix – What's your favourite joke?

Ben – A man walks into a bar with a newt on his shoulder. The bartender says, "What an interesting pet, what's his name?" "Tiny" the man replies. "What an odd name, why do you call him tiny?"

Because...he's my-newt!