

# VOICES

With the voices of:

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1. What does pride mean to you?

**Um, Pride is community to me**

**Acceptance**

**A self-assurance**

**It means inclusivity**

**Well, pride is a feeling**

**Pride for me is happiness**

**It means freedom to be yourself**

**A comfort that you are enough**

**Um it's a space where everyone feels included, and everyone feels loved, and are recognised for who they are**

**So I think it's being seen for who you are for like the truest form**

**Being visible, being proud, being there**

**It reminds me of how far, er, we've come I suppose**

**I have a bit of my own personal journey related to Pride still ahead of me**

**Cos I think you know you try to conform, and Pride just kind of eradicates some of those, like, conformities and boundaries**

So I just think it's all about er, family, love, community

2. Are you happy to talk about how you identify?

I identify as a lesbian woman, er she/her pronouns

I've kind of been questioning about how I identify more and more

Er, so I'm learning about how to identify myself because it wasn't ever anything that was discussed before, you know

Who am I? What am I comfortable with being identified as?

This is interesting for me because it's something that I'm still working out

So I identify as a bisexual person because I've had relationships with both girls and boys

Oh she's a girly girl, she's a tomboy, oh he's very athletic, or he's quite feminine - it's really interesting to see how those lines can become blurred

I think the best description I've found for myself so far is pansexual

However I definitely lean towards the gay end of bisexual spectrum

Even though I'm heterosexual, queer, because I feel most comfortable in that, you know I love the word queer

I don't feel as though I need to give a label, but I think that's a very privileged position that I'm in

And so in a way I was just myself I didn't think about my identity as a gay man or teenager

I personally don't know if I like giving myself a label, but I can understand why people do it

So yeah I would say I'm queer. I'm queer!

3. Please can you describe when you have seen or felt Pride in somebody else?

I've seen Pride in some of my non-heterosexual friends back in Poland. Sometimes they do experience hostility and even physical aggression, friends who kind of went through it and, well, survived in a way. Yeah it takes guts to do that

Er so I was married last year, myself and my wife. This was such a huge moment for her to realise that she is just herself, she is loved by all of these people around her, her family adore her, and it's normal, and I think that's the most important thing, is that we are just existing and loving together in front of all these people.

4. Please can you describe when you have felt Pride in yourself?

**I feel Pride in myself every time I hold my girlfriend's hand, every time I tell people that she's my girlfriend, every time I correct someone when they say 'oh your boyfriend' and I say 'no actually I have a girlfriend', or if I say 'my partner' and they automatically say 'he', I'll correct them. And I think – I think I feel proud because for a long time I didn't do that.**

**The first stages I was frightened to do that. And so I feel very proud now that I have real confidence to do that, and know the importance of doing that, because people need to hear that people are different, that people live their lives differently and we don't all fit into this quote-unquote "normal" way of being**

5. Where do you feel Pride?

**I feel pride when I walk through London with my boyfriend hand-in-hand**

**It would be mostly at home**

**Probably in my chest – it's a calm feeling, it's basically the opposite to feeling anxious**

**I'm not yet actively trying to like break the chains, I'm just trying to feel more confident and build this confidence so that maybe in the future I'll become more of an, I don't know, an activist, an advocate, someone who really kind of helps others to feel proud**

6. What does solidarity mean to you?

**Being empathetic and understanding of each other and being patient**

**Standing up for each other, sharing a lot and having this sense of community**

**Everyone comes from a different background, they've had different upbringings, you know we've got to really take time for everyone**

**We all need to be together, and respect each other**

**Helping each other, understanding each other**

**Not turning away because somebody's having a different experience to the one that you're having**

**We are one community, whether you like it or not, and we have all faced some sort of, you know, repression or whatever it is, and so we all need to be together and love each other, and I'm a bit fed up of people getting on each other's backs about being themselves**

7. How does seeing the pride flag make you feel?

It makes me feel very good, it just means, well I'm not alone, right, so there's people out there who are either like me or support me and want to show their support

As a symbol it's gorgeous

**It makes me feel welcome**

Again it's about solidarity, we've got to stop leaving every group out that feels that they are excluded from a flag

When I see it on people, like on a badge, or in an actual queer-friendly space, if it's there absolutely, that deserves to be there and it really is representing and that's what they believe in - but big institutions, I think they need to do more than just stick a flag up

It's just the fact that it's visible, you know, which is a positive thing. I remember my mother-in-law went

"Tut, you know I don't mind gay people but why on earth do they have to make such a fuss?"

and I became quite angry, and I said that for so long being a gay person was hidden, and illegal, and then after it became legal it was ok to be gay as long as you didn't you know, make too much of a fuss kind of thing. And so I think it's important that we outrage people as much as possible, because otherwise these things remain unseen

8. How do you value others?

**I'd like to think that I value others as I value myself**

Valuing others is huge, you can always be a better person by learning from everyone else

I love everyone the same and treat them I hope, that I always treat them the same

If they are total strangers, I like to think that we share humanity

Every human being is such a universe of everything, of experience, of traumas, of emotions, of everything, and I just try to see this in every person

9. How would you like the ROH to celebrate Pride during Pride month and for the rest of the year?

We have this kind of arena which is really quite public and it should really be used for change and to kind of pave the way

Honestly I think as much as Pride happening once a year is gorgeous, it shouldn't just be one moment in time it should be year long, as with every other group of people that needs to feel validated

Since I first became aware of Pride, it is changing and growing and developing and becoming more inclusive, it isn't just now any longer about one's sexuality, which is good I think

They're definitely becoming more open in terms of their support for queer art but I think it could be more. I think they could look a lot into new works they make and how they can represent everyone in making new work

I suppose by throwing a big party

Be big about it

Just more,

more performances, more installations

Bring more people in the building

more advertising that that's what they're doing

identify yourself as an institution that really knows what Pride means

10. Do you feel recognised and supported by ROH?

Oh yes, 100%

Absolutely, yeah.

Yes I do, I do

The opera house is where I truly truly feel like I am just myself, I didn't have to come out again. It just is an organisation that's very open and proud

Recognised yes, because it's absolutely never even come up as an issue, sexuality, it really hasn't. I think maybe somebody who, let's say who's transitioning or who identifies as something historically outside of the norm, they may answer that differently, but I think us oldies, I think we're learning more about their experiences and how we can help understand each other better and move forwards together

I've had many conversations of saying to them, you know, I don't always feel like a ballerina, or the typical mould of a ballerina, and it's been quite difficult at times because I know that, you know coming from a, might not look it, might not sound it, a very low working class background, and then that's also difficult because you're quite in a middle-class world, if not an elitist world, so trying to navigate that, and obviously I have tattoos and I have piercings, and people will be like 'oh nice, another one' and I'll be like 'YES, this is my skin, this is how I like to express myself, if I could chop all my hair off, I would love to', and I've had many comments actually when I have died my hair, or done

something, 'oh well your hair's purple so you can't act like that' or 'you can't say this' or 'you can't do that' and I'm like - ok, so now I don't feel comfortable where I should feel safe which is in the studio, but I'm also not in a position where I can walk out because I'm treated like a child, so how do I navigate that myself, kind of shut up and take it a little bit, and then be quite upset

To really learn from it and to actually like understand the gravitas of how it affects you mentally, as well as like the everyday physical things of how you might mute your authenticity. Yeah, you have to be willing to crack that outer shell, so yeah, be reborn through the trauma

So we're getting there, and I think now I do feel more recognised and seen as a person as well as a dancer in this company, but I think it takes time and unfortunately it takes people going through what we go through to be the epicentre of change but it's also very difficult because you're having to be a voice always

11. What do you think children can learn from Pride?

All the positive things really, accepting each other, loving each other, not judging each other, er, we're all the same really

Just embracing the diversity I think. There's rarely ever the one default way of doing things, and all the rest is just a margin

I remember at school, you know, and I remember feeling really isolated

Kids need to read it and hear it and see it from an early age because, you know, it would have just eased up so much of you just feeling so much more comfortable in your skin earlier on

We should be having those conversations with children

Just all these words, and you're like, these are ok, these are just words, you don't have to understand what they mean, but this is just like that playfulness of it, so how you feel, and you don't have to understand what that feeling is, because there's such beauty in the curiosity of it and the unknowing of it, isn't there?

To be completely themselves, and to value all the feelings that they feel, and understand that you don't have to follow a path. You can find whatever you wanna find in life and be whoever you want to be

12. And what do you think adults should learn from Pride?

It should make everyone feel positive and wonderful because it's a message of positivity really, you know, of pride in yourself, in others, in your relationships, and pride in being together and having empathy and love and understanding for each other

Pride isn't for one cluster of people. It should be for all of us. Just understanding that you should be more open to hearing stories, to learning about what people have had to go through

It's so easy to judge people, like 'why do you have to date a boy?'; well what kind of a question is that?, or 'why do these people make all this fuss about changing sex or being transgender'. Like, people just don't really understand it as a real thing, and Pride can show them that you know, it is a real thing, it's not an illness, it's not a fashion, it's not a trend, it's just how the world is. This is how human beings are

**Shift and just drop what they deem as quote-unquote "normal" because it's quite damaging to people when they don't feel recognised and when they don't feel understood**  
It's as fundamental in adulthood as it is in childhood, and it's never too late to be Proud or to have Pride is it, you know, even if you learn it at 60, 80, doesn't matter, it's such a beautiful way of living, and even if it comes at the last moment, at least you had that time to explore and to express, really pride is expression isn't it as well. So I think it's such a joy to feel, and it's like a light

**You're allowed to be different**

**You're allowed to change your mind**

**You're allowed to be whoever you want to be**