



Lady or the Tiger: The dangerous drag of Taylor Mac

The first thing to understand about a Taylor Mac performance is this: the dividing lines between categories — where people and ideas are conveniently whittled down into fine niches, indexed and sub-indexed for convenience — are gone.

"At the top of the list are always masculine and feminine," the ukulele-playing, costume-party cross-dressing Mac says. "If [the audience] is not used to seeing what a lot of people would call 'freak drag,' it can be a little shocking at first. I'm allowing the audience into an emotional place with me. Hopefully, they start recognizing aspects of themselves in me that they didn't necessarily even know they had."

When his songs and monologues go political, he doesn't want us to reach for familiar reactions that have always made us feel secure. By slightly disorienting us, taking us out of the comfort zone, he hopes that we will gain something altogether new from the experience.

An honest narrative on Taylor Mac would have to be divided into bits and pieces — some rectangular, others star-shaped and sequined — and scattered about. Perhaps a diamond-cut chapter slipped into Current Events, a few bar napkins with notes scribbled on them over in Fiction, some glossy black-and-whites suspended from the ceiling in the coffee shop, and a top hat and billowing cape combo, à la Captain Fantastic and the Brown-Dirt Cowboy, slung over the section on Folklore and Mythology.

To get the total picture, we would have to wander, meander, do anything besides stand in one place. In other words, thinking about how many facets — many directly contradicting one another — play into the makeup of any individual person, to say nothing of cultural ideas.

"I hopefully create entertaining theater, and sometimes it's frivolous, and also funny, but it's not escapist," he adds. "My point is not to take the audience away from themselves but actually to remind them that they're sitting in a theater with other people having a shared experience. One of the ways I do that is by showing, up on stage the range of a human being."

Taylor Mac has been called one of the best performance artists in New York by the *Village Voice* and has made the rounds through London's Soho Theatre, the Opera House

in Sydney, Dublin's Project Arts Center, and the Bumbershoot Festival in Seattle, just to name a few.

That alone ought to be enough to draw the curious toward his upcoming Spoleto performance in genteel Charleston. This is definitely going to be an outside-the-box-drag queen-social commentary-comedy-ukulele extravaganza.

This year marks Mac's debut performance in Spoleto USA as well as his first gig in Charleston.

"I'm really looking forward to performing in the South," he says. "I've never been to Charleston, so this will be a chance for me to see the city and hopefully also to catch some of the other shows at Spoleto."

Mac, a playwright, songwriter, visual artist, and activist in addition to his performance work, is especially fond of exploring the interplay of contrasting aspects, kind of a yin and yang approach to the beauty and ugliness of the world.

"It's not shock for shock's sake, but for surprise," he adds. "People respond emotionally when surprised by something, and the goal of a theater artist is to get people to respond emotionally."