

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

Sarah McConnell: 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.

Bar Patron 1: 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.

Bar Patron 2: Almost like finding a little bit of southern hospitality in your local gay bar.

Bar Patron 1: Hospitality in a gay bar, yeah.

Sarah McConnell: 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.

Bar Patron 1: Like, we met Corey who works here and like I was just out here having a cigarette and I'm just by myself but he comes over to me and he's like, "What's your name?" And I'm like, "I'm Claire," And then he grabs me, pulls me over to his group and it's like, "This is Claire everybody." And I didn't say any ... and like from that second everybody in the group and me were like, we've been best friends since we were 10. You know, like that was the dynamic.

Sarah McConnell: But these days, spaces like The Park are increasing 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.

Sarah McConnell: 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 we take a closer look at this once-thriving LGBTQ club scene.

Don Muse: There we many bars and clubs and speakeasies where you can get yourself into all kinds of trouble after 11:00.

Sarah McConnell: But first, madison moore. Moore is Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women 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 way to connect with each other and be themselves in unwelcoming environments.

Sarah McConnell: Madison, you're writing a book called, 'How to Go Clubbing', how did it come about?

madison moore: Well, actually, it came about when I was in graduate school and 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 look at club culture, look at dance music history as a way of also teaching students about gender politics or changes in social values and changing approaches to the home.

madison moore: 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.

Sarah McConnell: What kind of news, how did that make the news?

madison moore: The course had guest speakers so we had amazing people like Vjuan Allure, who's a great DJ on 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 Page Six and I think I was maybe naïve and thought, "Oh it's just going to be like a 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, 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.

madison moore: So I started getting emails from Yale alums saying, shame on me for dragging Yale's name into the mud. How can you teach such rubbish to students? Or so, I thought I was going to get out of my program 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.

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

madison moore: Well yeah, and 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 the gay clubs, queer clubs, were not even legal until 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.

Sarah McConnell: How did gay culture really inform and almost create this whole club culture?

madison moore: 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.

Sarah McConnell: Really?

madison moore: Yeah. And so this is a space where folks would go-- vogue balls-- because they were able to create it on 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 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.

Sarah McConnell: What is a ball in this context?

madison moore: Yeah, so a ball is a hybrid party performance, so every ball is themed to around a particular, kind of, theme. And then there are categories and you basically dress 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 Black Panther, Wakanda looks, you know let's say.

Sarah McConnell: Sounds great.

madison moore: Yes. I would love that. Or another category that's ... you will find at vogue balls is hand performance. And so that category might be, tell us a story with a sickening sequin glove, so everyone has to wear sequin gloves, fabulous gloves and tell a story through their hands in that moment. So that's a ball.

Sarah McConnell: How did what started this way in Harlem Renaissance, translate to today?

madison moore: 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'd 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 highly publicized trial in this period. And you know one of the things Eugenia kind of said in kind of her testimony was, "Well if I don't go at least six cabarets a night, I'd lose my social standing." and then she writes all of these kinds of op-eds for 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.

madison moore: 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 queer nightlife 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 ever 10 years ago but that has been happening for like a hundred years or more.

Sarah McConnell: 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?

madison moore: You know it's really interesting when you do work on style and fashion because people think that, you know a lot of people say, "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 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 those people who can walk down the street and get a sandwich. You know this is what I'd say, it's really as simple as that.

madison moore: Some of us are able to go on a lunch break and go to Panera or whatever and that walk there might be totally smooth, no turbulence at all. But for others, those who might perhaps be outside of the norm, those might perhaps have chosen fabulousness as 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 those two groups to get a sandwich, is either precarious or simple. And so that's the ... one of the examples I use to kind of get it across the point of fabulousness as a politic.

Sarah McConnell: 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 who decides to be fabulous? Is it something that you're born with or something that you don?

madison moore: 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, 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's doesn't value them in their body. And also, it reflects how people choose kind of themselves at last.

madison moore: 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 where there still misogyny and transmisogyny and white supremacy and anti-blackness and so folks who choose fabulousness, essentially are giving up on norms that are not made for them any way. And so for me this is what fabulousness really is about.

madison moore: I often get asked 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 open yourself up to other possibilities of circulating. And that's what I'm really interested in, is kind of critiquing these norms and also helping people realize what are the ... or think about even, what are the ways you might be suppressing ourselves every day to make other people feel comfortable. And how do we give up on that and kind of choose our own path.

Sarah McConnell: Tell me a little bit about the history of fabulousness.

madison moore: You know, thinking about the origins of kind of the word fabulous or 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.

madison moore: 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 state of duress. You know I think that marginalized bodies are constantly living in a state of duress or even emergency. And so thinking about how that state of emergency is transformed through beauty, through aesthetics into kind of a statement of agency really.

Sarah McConnell: You know decades ago, clubbing meant something very different. But has the culture changed since queer life has been come so much more mainstream and accepted?

madison moore: I think about spaces like Paradise Garage which I wish I could've had a chance to go to because you 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 through sound and through music and through track selection. You read about David Mancuso's loft in New York City which was just his loft apartment that he would use to have these 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.

Sarah McConnell: Sure.

madison moore: And what I think you see now, especially in the queer scene, are party collectives and party cruise such as Discwoman, such as Hot Mass or Honcho in Pittsburgh, so just even perhaps Opulence in London. These are cruises who are really trying to let's reunite dance music and queerness by throwing 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. And so really trying to expand the conversation and the dialogue so that DJs are not seen as only like straight white men.

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

madison moore: Oh 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 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 all these 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 about race, it should be about the music only. But you go to a gay club, let's say in DC 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 masc and cisgender then you are ... essentially don't exist.

madison moore: It's really sad, but I sometimes I don't really enjoy going to gay clubs any more 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.

Sarah McConnell: Yes.

madison moore: 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 that's why I love going to warehouse parties and particular parties in particular clubs because in those spaces it is ... you have less of that. I don't say that it's 100% immune or that it doesn't exist at all, but you have less of it. And I have 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 'cause that makes you feel uncomfortable. Or maybe this space makes you feel that way or maybe that space makes you feel that way. And so you create this space on your own terms.

madison moore: And one of the 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 'cause you will not be the only one.

Sarah McConnell: Are gay, trans, queer artists really getting their due now? Or are they still fighting for the light?

madison moore: I think that folks are still fighting for the light. We have artists, producers and musicians like Kiddy Smile, like Lotic, like Azure, who are really doing great things for club culture and electronic music. But I still 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 trans people would prefer to be centered rather than tolerated.

Sarah McConnell: 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'.

Sarah McConnell: 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 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 wanted to know what happened to urban Appalachia's forgotten gay culture. So he headed to downtown Roanoke to hear the story from people who've lived it.

Don Muse: You see where the stairwell is right there? The building was right there.

Cass Adair: That's Don Muse. He's pointing to what is now this tidy street corner in Roanoke Virginia.

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

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

Peter Thornhill: You really could have a wonderful seedy, fun, wonderful, seedy, I say it again, time.

Cass Adair: 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's six-- yeah, six-- gay bars and nightclubs that popped up during the disco era.

Don Muse: 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 [bleep] chain, okay. It was off the chain.

Cass Adair: One of those places that made Roanoke such a hot spot for LGBTQ nightlife it's still standing. Kinda.

Don Muse: We've been through this door on many a day, you see. This door is the same door.

Cass Adair: It's the same door?

Don Muse: It's the same door, take a look at this door.

Cass Adair: 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.

Don Muse: This is the Straw.

Cass Adair: The Last Straw was once one of Roanoke Virginia's most notorious gay night spots.

Peter Thornhill: And the best looking hustlers, oh my goodness. They were hot. It was like disco heaven.

Don Muse: When we would go to the club and they would cut onto, Ladies and gentlemen, this is first song for the night, and it's Sylvester, 'Do You Want To Dance?' Suicide.

Peter Thornhill: It was!

Don Muse: We killed ourselves on that floor. And Donna Summer would slow it down... and then Diana Ross would pick it up again. And I was just doing the white tee shirt and tight jeans and baseball cap and I was damn good looking at it, ladies and gentlemen. Don was a handsome Afro-American gay man. You trust me. I didn't have any problem with picking up anybody.

Peter Thornhill: And the pants were tight!

Don Muse: They were really tight!

Cass Adair: To be clear, these spaces 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.

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

Cass Adair: But Gainsboro, the African-American neighborhood where Don grew up, it was a really friendly place to be queer.

Don Muse: 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've never seen in a gay black man before, so you know that was good. It was just crazy.

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

Peter Thornhill: There was a big sign on the front door about the ABC laws. You can't serve known homosexuals, drug dealers, dah, dah dah dah da, right there at the front door where we walked into a gay bar.

Cass Adair: 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.

Cass Adair: Sex work was just part of the scene there. Trans and gender non-conforming 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 law-breakers, the quote, homosexuals and the quote, prostitutes-- it attracted the police.

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

GS Rosenthal: The policing was really stepping up in the late '70s in Roanoke, under the Roanoke Police Department.

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

GS Rosenthal: And a notorious sergeant of vice squad there, that was well known in the gay press. The gay people we talk to, they remember how vicious the crackdown on both gay cruising at Elmwood Park and sex work down at the Market was.

Cass Adair: However, their 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.

GS Rosenthal: In 1979, this new plan, the 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.

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

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

Ted Powers: 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. Hello.

Caller 1: Hello.

Ted Powers: Yes.

Caller 1: The proposal for the cultural center in downtown Roanoke is perhaps the most exciting proposal I've heard tonight.

Chad Floyd: You say you like the idea of a cultural center downtown. Is that right?

Caller 1: Right.

Ted Powers: Okay, and we're over here with another phone call.

Caller 2: I would really hate to see the library moved. I just think you'd be wasting a really good atmosphere, and a good thing, to move the library.

Chad Floyd: So I'll tell you about the library ...

Cass Adair: 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.

GS Rosenthal: 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's trying to push this population out of visibility. Gay cruising moves to other parks further out from downtown and sex work is also pushed out onto more marginal streets where according to the oral histories we've done, it becomes a lot more dangerous for the sex workers.

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

Don Muse: It was nothing for you to lose a hundred, two, three hundred people that you knew ...

GS Rosenthal: The impact of HIV/AIDS goes well beyond the individuals and the community who were suffering and carrying for each other. But it does impact the way that larger straight society sees LGBT people and increasingly sees them as a threat.

Don Muse: 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.

GS Rosenthal: Roanoke renews its crackdown on sex work in the late '80s, early '90s. We have just arrests, arrests, arrests in a couple year span.

Cass Adair: 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.

Cass Adair: For With Good Reason, I'm Cass Adair.

Sarah McConnell: 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.

Sarah McConnell: Welcome back to With Good Reason. From Virginia Humanities, I'm Sarah McConnell.

Sarah McConnell: These days, you don't have to go to a bar or nightclub to experience LGBTQ club culture. You can just tune into your local hip-hop station. Lauron Kehrer is a professor of Music at William and Mary. 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?

Lauron Kehrer: Absolutely. There's a lot of queer influences especially-- and 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.

Sarah McConnell: Is that new? Is it new that they're influenced by this culture?

Lauron Kehrer: 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 Elliot, Drake, and others in the mainstream.

Lauron Kehrer: Bounce is a dance focused genre that comes out of New Orleans that typically features very fast tempos and is 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 on stage, but we also hear some of those influences in things like Formation where we have samples of, vocal samples, from artists like Big Freedia and the late Messy Mya.

Beyonce: I got hot sauce in my bag swag.

Messy Mya: Oh yeah, baby. Oh yeah. I ... Oooh. Oh yes I like that.

Big Freedia: I did not to come play with you hos. I came to slay [b----]. I like corn bread and collard greens [b----]. Oh yes, you gots to believe it.

Lauron Kehrer: If you're not already familiar with bounce, and with Big Freedia in particular, there's not a lot to necessarily indicate who this artist is. But it does give us a clear example of a particular geographic place, right? "I like corn bread and collard greens," definitely referring to the American South, and in particular, African-American cultures of the American South.

Lauron Kehrer: But the problem with including samples by artist such as this and not being able to explicitly name them, as that these queer contributions often go unremarked upon, unnoticed. And there's not always a fair compensation for these artists contributing these ideas, these musical ideas, and their own voices.

Lauron Kehrer: 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.

Messy Mya: What happened at the New Wil'ins. [B----] I'm back. By popular demand.

Lauron Kehrer: So for the uninitiated, these two samples sound very similar, right? They could almost sound like they are the same artist. But they're two 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 it was a huge popular success, right? Everyone has heard Formation at this point.

Sarah McConnell: How do you think hip-hop came to be influenced by queer artists?

Lauron Kehrer: 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.

Lauron Kehrer: So we not 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 as 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?

Sarah McConnell: Is hip hop more homophobic, would you say?

Lauron Kehrer: 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.

Lauron Kehrer: There's still some challenges within the music industry, but I think if you'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's probably contributing to this.

Lauron Kehrer: 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 'cause they're afraid that'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 artist, that they're not going to want to support an openly queer or trans artist.

Lauron Kehrer: The main concern for the artist, even if they are out, is that they don't want to be labeled as a gay artist. So for example, in New Orleans, a 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 a language that draws on what the artist themselves use, so for example, Sissy Nobby is a very popular performer down there.

Lauron Kehrer: So it's a reclamation of a 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 a part of their identity so that they can have an easier time navigating the music industry.

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

Lauron Kehrer: 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 basic speaker set up and a prerecorded track on your laptop and a microphone for the rapper, it's pretty easy to put together a show. So there was a convenience factor involved.

Lauron Kehrer: 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 in 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 the grief and to work through some of that trauma. So it was very important to them when bounce came back.

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

Lauron Kehrer: I think also New Orleanians pride themselves on being such an open culture. 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, there are still particular queer spaces and in particular black queer spaces and those are still very much a part of bounce culture. But bounce also crosses many different sort of social boundaries as well.

Lauron Kehrer: So part of bounce's moment post-Katrina I think was having these more mixed stages of different kinds of audiences, 'cause everyone was just looking for something to help them get through that recovery period.

Sarah McConnell: What was your favorite night spot?

Lauron Kehrer: Well, while I was down there, I went to a club that actually, there's scenes of it in the Beyonce's Formation video. I want to say it's like the edge of the Tremé, its 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, right? It's not going to be a fancy cocktail bar. But the thing that was amazing to me were the dancers. So shaking is sort 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 foot work.

Lauron Kehrer: 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 the these dancers are the most athletic, and the most fabulous shakers that I have ever seen, and they're all in this little hidden club that's kind of dingy, it's very dark, it's not fancy at all. And they really know how to work it.

Sarah McConnell: It 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.

Lauron Kehrer: Yes. And those two also had a large queer influence right? But we don't always talk about it in those terms. We had a lot of advances in LGBTQ rights in the last 10, 20 years. But it's also important to think about what communities are we inadvertently leaving behind when we focus on certain issues. We 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 movement.

Lauron Kehrer: So I think it's really important that bounce music is for everyone and 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.

Sarah McConnell: 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?

Lauron Kehrer: Well when we're thinking about bounce in particular, I have to go to Big Freedia and I really think her latest album, or EP, Third Ward Bounce is really going to do it for us.

Sarah McConnell: Lauron Kehrer is a professor of Music at William and Mary. 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.

Sarah McConnell: 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 now teaching acting and collaborative techniques in the School of Performing Arts at Virginia Tech.

Sarah McConnell: Al, you studied at the University of Michigan where they had a wonderful dance program called Daring Dances. How did that shape your choreography?

Al Evangelista: Well, I'm a performer and a choreographer whose invested in social justice and how performance can incorporate social justice themes and ideas. I identify as Pilipinx-American, so my family is 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 Pilipinx-American identities."

Al Evangelista: The work I'm trying to do is not just a work of representation, it's not just I want to see Filipino-American people on stage 'cause 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, in Crazy Rich Asians, if I see one character from that movie and think that, that's the type of Asian that's ideal.

Sarah McConnell: How important is it for you to represent being Pilipino-American and queer?

Al Evangelista: 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 this space, and the energy of having all of us in that room together talking about being queer and being Asian, Pacific Islander, Filipino... You asked me why it's important to me, it's because space 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.

Al Evangelista: And I try and think of... Sometimes when I'm really tired and... Like for instance today, I started with a 8am 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.

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

Al Evangelista: 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 queer 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.

Al Evangelista: So the LaWhore Vagistan was also the emcee of a queer dance festival that I was a part of in Brooklyn, New York, it was called Explode!: Queer Dance! And LaWhore Vagistan was this amazing, amazing emcee. 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.

Sarah McConnell: And so you came up with a dance choreography that you call Hallow/Hollow.

Al Evangelista: 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 that costume, 'cause the costumes are displayed in a museum, how people can see the hollowness of it, but also have such high regard for it. So have 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 it I could honor it through movement.

Al Evangelista: Part of this work was projecting on the 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 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 Pilipino 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.

Al Evangelista: 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.

Sarah McConnell: Al Evangelista teaches acting and collaborative techniques in the School of Performing Arts at Virginia Tech. You're hearing the original music for Al's show, Hallow / Hollow, composed by Douglas Hertz and Nathan Thatcher.

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Sarah McConnell: For the podcast, go to withgoodreasonradio.org. I'm Sarah McConnell, thanks for listening.