**An innovative cabaret premieres at Vashon Center for the Arts,**

**featuring original storytelling, songs, and theatrical magic**

Vashon, WA — Drawing on the theatrical form of a cabaret, featuring original songs and stories laced with a bit of magic, two islanders, David Mielke and Thomas Hitoshi Pruiksma, have written and will perform the premiere of their innovative show, “Gaybaret,” on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, November 22, 23, and 24 at Vashon Center for the Arts’ Kay Hall.

After sharing their lives for close to a decade, last year Mielke and Pruiksma took the traditional steps to sanctify their partnership through marriage. Their wedding, however, was anything but conventional. As professional performers, storytellers, musicians, and writers, the couple told the story of how they met — honoring friends, teachers, and experiences that led to their meeting and readiness to commit to a life partner — and they did so using a cabaret-style form of story and song. They called it “Gaybaret.”

“‘Gaybaret’ sounds campy and frivolous,” Mielke said, “but at the wedding, it quickly became not just that as the guests’ emotions started being tapped into. The best part was afterwards, when so many people wanted to talk about what came up for them that had nothing to do with gayness or LGBT stuff.”

That’s when the duo realized what they had created might be meaningful to a wider audience. Because the first iteration concluded with their marriage, they had to write a new ending, adding other elements, to fashion a stand-alone performance. While the show is based on their lives, Pruiksma said, it is not just a work of nonfiction; it is also a work of art.

“The artfulness opens it to other people,” he said, “so it is not just a show about LGBTQ experience, rather the art allows the specific to become universal. It is both a work of art and how art changes us and helps us grow into who we are, along with people and mentors who help us.”

Though the show is like a cabaret, it also includes ritual. With Pruiksma on piano, each performer alternately tells their own story and sings songs — about letting go of old shame and acknowledging the mystery of life. As with many rituals honoring what is known but unseen, the show bows to the joyful play of what seems to be serendipity.

“There’s a thread running through the show of openness to wonder, to the poetry of lived life,” Pruiksma said. “Our experiences may appear to be chaotic and random, but often there is some more mysterious pattern we can see or help to create that leads to unexpected gifts.”

To metaphorically, visually, express the notion of these gifts, the performers construct a bridge. When the cabaret opens, random pieces of driftwood lie scattered about stage, each symbolizing a different life experience. As the show progresses, the duo fit the pieces together, eventually forming a bridge.

“It’s a bridge that connects us,” Mielke said. “The idea is that we could see our negative experiences as stumbling blocks to trip over, or we can find a way to reimagine them, turning them into something positive to serve as steps toward where we’d like to go. If nothing else, it gives us compassion.”

That transformation, Pruiksma said, has a healing power. It leads to changes in perception of ourselves and our world, which leads to taking new actions “and living more fully in line with our deepest hopes and highest intentions.”

A deep hope and intention of the couple is to keep offering the show to others, to take it on the road.

“It is a celebration of the gifts we’ve been given by cherished friends and works of art, so it is the passing along of the gift. The gift is given by passing it along,” Pruiksma said.

“The energy of this piece is different, like it has a life of its own,” Mielke added. “Again, it is the mystery of it. I try not to analyze but just say ‘yes.’ Where there is the presence of grace or the muses, it is so juicy. You are in the flow.”

That flow also brings unexpected things, Pruiksma said, like the opportunity to hold a preview panel discussion. Pruiksma applied for and was awarded a 4Culture grant, which together with VCA and the Vashon Heritage Museum exhibit, “In and Out: Being LGBTQ on Vashon Island,” will sponsor “Prelude to a Gaybaret: A Historical Panel on the Art of Transformation.”

Five distinguished panelists — Jami Sieber, Latosha Correll, Leo MacLeod, Matt Baume, and Timothy White Eagle — will discuss the art of transformation: how art helps us know ourselves more fully; how rituals like a marriage or theater offer possibilities of healing; and how we make sense of historical change in our own lives, acknowledging both the curses and blessings of the past.

The production is also hosting a drawing for an all-inclusive “Night Out on Vashon,” with a pair of tickets, dinner at May Kitchen + Bar, and luxurious accommodations at the Lodges on Vashon. Learn more and enter by November 15, 2019, at driftwoodbridge.com.

“Gaybaret: An Offering of Story and Song” will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 22 and Saturday, Nov. 23, and at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 24, at Kay Hall. Tickets are $10-$23.

“Prelude to a Gaybaret” will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 21, at Kay Hall. Tickets are free for youth age 18 and under, with a suggested donation of $10 for adults. All proceeds benefit the Vashon Heritage Museum.

Panelist Bios:

**Matt Baume** is a writer, podcaster, and video-maker whose work focuses on queer culture, geeks, and all things strange and wonderful. He’s the co-creator of the podcast and live show “Queens of Adventure,” featuring drag queens playing Dungeons & Dragons; the LGBTQ interview show “The Sewers of Paris;” the YouTube pop-culture series “Culture Cruise;” and the LGBTQ news show “Weekly Debrief.” His book, *Defining Marriage*, chronicles the personal stories of people who fought for marriage equality over the last 40 years. He lives in Seattle with his partner James, and too many plants.

**Latosha Correll** is passionate about building community through the arts as well as creating and supporting sustainable, positive, and innovative solutions to issues facing LGBTQ+ community members and their families. In 2016, Latosha co-founded Mistresspiece Theater, a LGBTQ-centered community performing arts organization focused on supporting women and the LGBTQ community with opportunities in all theater disciplines. In April of 2017, she started volunteering with the City of Seattle’s LGBTQ Commission and was appointed to serve as a Commissioner in July 2017. Since June of 2018, she has been volunteering with Washington Technology Industry Association’s Ion Collaborator program. The group brings tech, government, and non-profits together to address community challenges. Currently, Latosha focuses her time working with the Alphabet Alliance of Color, an alliance of Queer & Trans Black, Indigenous, and People of Color organizations and individuals. Today, Mistresspiece Theater is working on a devised script focused on Trans issues and Women themes.

**Timothy White Eagle** was born in Tucson, AZ. His mother was White Mountain Apache. He was given up for adoption at birth and raised by a working-class white family in Washington state. He graduated from University of Utah with a BFA in Theater. White Eagle has worked extensively in the past two and a half decades exploring Native American, Pagan, and other earth-based Spiritual practices. In 1995, he began an ongoing mentor/protege relationship with Shoshone Elder Clyde Hall. In 2006, White Eagle began collaborating with photographer Adrain Chesser. Their work together has been displayed and published nationally and internationally, including their book, *The Return*. He dances at a unique cross road between art and ritual. In 2015, he was the indigenous advisor for Taylor Mac during the creation of “A 24-Decade History.” In 2016, White Eagle was one of the Dandy Minions in the 24-hour marathon performance of “A 24-Decade History” performed in New York City and has been on tour nationally and internationally with Taylor Mac as the Artistic Director for the Dandy Minions.

**Leo MacLeod** has lived on Vashon Island all his life. He currently attends the University of Washington and is working on a dual major in Marine Biology and Oceanography. He is a deeply committed student leader whose passion for social justice, activism, and education are foundational aspects of his life. He plans to use his experience in these areas to support queer individuals within STEM and make science more accessible for everyone. Leo was instrumental in the efforts of the Queer Spectrum Alliance in establishing a gender-neutral bathroom at Vashon High School.

**Jami Sieber** is an electric cellist, vocalist, composer and celebrated pioneer of her instrument with an inspiring and fearless style of performance that has been recognized internationally. Sieber creates her own kind of world music, boasting immediate emotional impact and conveying a visionary presence that goes beyond the gorgeous melodies and tribal rhythms. Her life-long commitment to the environment, social justice, and the healing arts is at the heart of her music, reflecting a deep dedication to the arts as a medium to express the interconnectedness of all beings. Since launching her solo career in 1994, she has performed her original compositions around the world, diving into dynamic collaborations with an extraordinary spectrum of dancers, actors, poets, visual artists, improvisers, vocalists, and instrumentalists. She has been commissioned to compose for film, and her compositions have been used in the popular video game Braid. Sieber has independently produced eight recordings on her label Out Front Music.

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