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Camp Trans

Room for all kinds of womyn

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History



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Trans Inclusion in Womyn's Music and MWMF



1973: Beth Elliot was to perform at the West Coast Lesbian Conference but members of the San Francisco (S.F.) chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) identified her as a trans woman that had attempted to join their chapter. They then lead a group to push her off the stage. This is not to say that Beth did not have her supporters. In regards to the vote to deny Beth's membership in the S.F. DOB the editorial staff of the DOB newspaper Sisters walked out and offered this statement: "We are disgusted that any lesbian has the audacity to judge the sexuality of another sister. And so we resign." In Los Angeles, Jeanne Cordova wrote an editorial in the Lesbian Tide about this. She said, "Those who vote 'no' tonight vote with our oppressors, Those who vote 'yes' recognize that none of us is free unless all of us are free."

1976: First Michigan Womyn's Music Festival

1977: Olivia Records hired Sandy Stone to help them record their performers. Olivia Records was the only record company that would produce music with explicit lesbian/women-centered content, and as such was

struggling to break even financially. Protestors forced Olivia Records to fire Sandy Stone when it became known that she was a transsexual. The Olivia Collective was supportive, but in the end had to ask Sandy for her letter of resignation for fear of having Olivia Records shut down (it was the only women run record company at that time).

1987: Sandy Stone publishes [The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto](#) and advocates for an authentic trans identity.

I ask all of us to use the strength which brought us through the effort of restructuring identity, and which has also helped us to live in silence and denial, for a re-visioning of our lives. I know you feel that most of the work is behind you and that the price of invisibility is not great. But, although individual change is the foundation of all things, it is not the end of all things. Perhaps it's time to begin laying the groundwork for the next transformation.

1991: Nancy Burkholder comes out to others as trans within the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Festival security questions her about this and escorts her out to the road in the middle of the night and has to find her way back to town. The festival began for the first time to enforce a policy of allowing only "womyn-born womyn" to attend.

1992: A small group of women set up a table within the festival in order to educate other festivalgoers about this incident and to educate people on trans and gender issues.

1993: Nancy Burkholder returned with other trans women with the plan on conducting workshops on the inclusion of transwomen. She and the others were escorted out by festival security, but decided to still hold the workshops but do so in a clearing across from the festival.

Camp Trans

1994: Camp Trans begins. Until 1999, this is was the last time anyone actively met to protest the festival's anti-trans woman policies, except for a

small demonstration in 1995.

1999: “Son of Camp Trans” was initiated by Rikki Wilchins and the Transsexual Menace, with support from many members of the Boston and Chicago Lesbian Avengers. The events of 1999 drew much attention and controversy, culminating in heated tensions as a small group of transgender activists were admitted into the festival to dialogue with organizers and to negotiate a short-lived compromise allowing only post-operative transgender womyn on the festival land. While this event brought the issue to people’s attention once again, the actions used were criticized by other trans women.

In the years following 1999, Camp Trans shifted demographically to include more trans men and genderqueer individuals, and far fewer trans women. Festival attendees increasingly came to view Camp Trans as a transgender annex of the festival, rather than a site of protest.

2003: Camp Trans returns with new organizers and a desire to refocus back on the inclusion of ALL trans women within the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival.

2006: Lorraine Donaldson tries to buy a ticket to MWMF as an out trans woman, and is eventually sold a ticket and admitted after some confusion about a statement of the womyn-born-womyn policy on an older event flyer. Lorraine headed a new organization, the Yellow Armbands, to advocate for transwomen from inside the festival. Festival attendees had worn yellow armbands for the past three years as a symbol of pro-trans inclusion and solidarity.

Camp Trans issued a hasty press release stating that Michigan’s womyn-born-womyn policy had been withdrawn, and a video of the camp announcement found its way to the internet.

However, this was met with a correspondance from Lisa Vogel, which later came out as a press release. This defined that while the festival has supposedly never had a policy of trans exclusion, that trans women are expected to voluntarily exclude themselves:

I would love for you and the other organizers of Camp Trans to find the place in your hearts and politics to support and honor space for womyn who have had the experience of being born and living their

life as womyn. I ask that you respect that woman born woman is a valid and honorable gender identity. I also ask that you respect that womyn born womyn deeply need our space — as do all communities who create space together...I wish you well, I want healing, and I believe this is possible between our communities, but not at the expense of deeply needed space for womyn born womyn...If a transwoman purchased a ticket, it represents nothing more than that woman choosing to disrespect the stated intention of this Festival...As feminists, we call upon the transwomen's community to help us maintain womyn only space, including spaces created by and for womyn-born womyn.

2007: Despite the fact that the Festival organization has made it clear that trans women are not welcome on the land, they also will not interfere with trans women who wish to buy a ticket. Lorraine was admitted to the Festival again without conflict, advocating with the newly-renamed group [Fest for All Womyn](#) (formerly the Yellow Armbands).

Though trans women are being admitted to MWMF, Camp Trans will continue to be a place for trans people and allies to build community, share ideas, and develop strategies for change. Additionally they will keep working together with festival workers and attendees to make sure transwomen who attend the fest have support and resources.

In 2007, Camp Trans held elections for its organizers for the first time.

[Archive of 2008 Organizers](#)

An account of Camp Trans History also exists as a living, publically-editable document on Wikipedia.

Archives from Previous Camp Trans

- [Camp Trans Zine 2006](#)
- [2006 Camp Trans Schedule](#)
- [2007 Organizers](#)