

**POP! or Slow Drag**

**A solo performance of my own design**

André G. Brown

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Committee:

Tim Bond

Valerie Curtis-Newton

Jeffrey Fracé

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**Abstract**

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Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

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POP! initially titled “Slow Drag” came from a series of old therapy sessions I had. It was birthed from an assortment of questions. The main one being – “what if who you are, isn’t who you want to be, but what if that’s what you’re supposed to be?” Although the narrative centers around a drag queen who suffers from the trauma of years of conversion therapy and homophobia – the main focus is hatred turned inward. I explored what happens to an oppressed person when the voice of their

oppressor is silenced. What happens to a person, a life, a soul constantly crushed under the weight of heavy burdensome oppression? I surmised that it wasn't *if* but when the pressure became more than their soul could bear – they would undoubtedly do, as we can all anticipate and, *POP!*

## POP! Or Slow Drag

A solo performance of my own design

André G. Brown

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to take a class with Anna Deveare Smith. She's made a career of performing identities of others and what she terms as, '*the broad jump to the other*'. Simply put – Smith interviews and researches a personality, famous or not, and from those notes she performs verbatim excerpts. During my second year at the School of Drama in solo performance class – we were given an assignment to create a 10-minute solo piece. I thought deeply about whose stories interested me. I thought about topics and subject matter that moved me so much that I wanted to 'walk a mile in their shoes' and perform a clip of their life. Maybe I should pick Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or some other black iconic preacher, my father even? I had never imagined that my own story was worthy of sharing. I always thought the more dramatic a thing – the more audiences would be moved. I knew that in the development of my solo piece I wanted audiences to be deeply engaged. Yet as the creator/performer I would only engage at a distance. I learned in the process of my first solo show that in order for this *art* to resonant with audiences, I needed to *own* my story.

See, I'm an entertainer. Growing up I loved watching Sammy Davis Jr. do guess spots on primetime TV shows. I loved the variety shows of the 70's. I liked the glitter and glitz. I loved to hear when Ed McMahon would announce, "And Hereeeeeeeee's Johnny!" on the Tonight Show. I liked the big personalities. I loved the live singing and big make up and tap shoes and tap-dancing numbers on those shows. I liked when the performers made it look it *easy*. Variety show performances were thrilling to watch, and

I too, dreamed of getting up on a stage and improvising and making *it* look easy. Even if it never was. There is something I'm enamored by and that's magic. But does magic exist? Is there ever a such thing as a flawless performance? Do seasoned professionals miss steps? And if they do, will the audience ever know? These are questions that have marked my graduate school career at the University of Washington. Furthermore, they were some of the seeds of my work as a solo artist. As a director, I was always concerned with how a performance looked. *And* if the story was clear and an audience could follow. Additionally, I was always moved by the sensations that audiences may encounter during the performance. But as a generative artist, my fears to create something worthy enough to share kept me in procrastination mode.

It has always been an easy thing to see the intrinsic worth and value in human life. However, finding the intrinsic value and worthiness in my own lived experience felt like a super human challenge. My solo show work chronicles the life of a drag queen, Ms. Cherry, who is about to commit suicide. (I'm not sure where that story line came from.) Although our lives, (Ms. Cherry's and my own) parallel and intersect in several ways – why a drag queen? Why not a stand-up act? Why not a cabaret show? Why not some fantastic multimedia experience? Why a lowly but fabulous drag queen backstage with a tape recorder? I can't answer, *that* but I can tell you that often the greatest journey of humanity is the broad jump *inside*. The journey into one's self. The scary place of truth, where we don't use a filter, there are no shades and all we are is laid bare for all to enjoy, cringe, or run. For this solo show, this sparring wasn't with a character – it was with myself.

POP! initially titled “Slow Drag” came from a series of old therapy sessions I had. It was birthed from an assortment of questions. The main one being – “what if who you are, isn’t who you want to be, but what if that’s what you’re supposed to be?” Although the narrative centers around a drag queen who suffers from the trauma of years of conversion therapy and homophobia – the main focus is hatred turned inward. I explored what happens to an oppressed person when the voice of their oppressor is silenced. What happens to a person, a life, a soul constantly crushed under the weight of heavy burdensome oppression? I surmised that it wasn’t *if* but when the pressure became more than their soul could bear – they would undoubtedly do, as we can all anticipate and, *POP!*



***POP! or Slow Drag by André G. Brown***

*Setting –*

*One dressing table and a cabaret chair, one wig on top of a wig head with photo of Miss Cherry's parents. Mind you that photo– needs to be faced away from the audience. A few pairs of deliciously worn heels, and a wardrobe rack with at least four sparkly dresses hung. Oh and a tape recorder. Note – in all this, the stage should still feel empty.*

*(lights up)*

*Miss Cherry enters—*

**Miss Cherry:**

my name is chaz, well, Charles  
but **cherry** is fruity  
and I always been, always will be

the snap crackle rock sizzle pop  
til you don't stop  
the wham bam boom cherry bloom  
til you cant drop

**Miss Cherry:**

Caleb always told in me in our late-night therapy sessions

**Chaz:**

*your inner child needs healing Chaz...*

So I hump- hugged him and hugged him and we went to bed and I humped and humped him until I came.

**Miss Cherry:**

Caleb also used to make me pray. We'd pray for hours.

**Chaz:**

you have to pray the scriptures chaz, you have to say what God says about you

**Miss Cherry:**

And I would.

**Miss Cherry as Chaz:**

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

**Miss Cherry: (she squints on her knees)**

Our father which art in heaven  
Homosexual is thy name  
Thy dick will come  
Thy fag be done  
On straights as it is on queers  
Give us this **gay** our daily **fag**  
And forgive us our buttoholes as we forgive those who fuck us  
And lead us not into homophobe land  
But delivers us from closet case conservatives  
For thine is the cock-ring  
And the gloryhole, forever and always  
Amen

**Miss Cherry:**

Caleb tried to make me straight.

**Chaz**

Chaz, your inner child needs to grow up

**Miss Cherry:**

hunney, men? Men men men, some strick tops, some DL bottoms and everything in between

what can I say? Sometimes a bitch wants to be strangled, hollering and gasping for air with in one inch of her life. Caleb would say,

**Chaz:**

Surround yourself with three types of men...

**Miss Cherry:**

And shit, sometimes she wanna cuddle. She wants it all. And why can't she have it? I went thru my white phase – very *very* short. It was a short phase but it was cute. Very cute. But I stays black. I don't need a slave master. No sir no maam. And who wants pink anyway? I've done drug dealers too. Yes, I've fucked them. Hollering like bitches in shit. Now that shit is a mind FUCK. They're actually softer than you think, isn't that interesting. (beat)

I always like to live on the edge of danger. You know, in gentrified areas? Where crack heads still roam about n shit, but yuppies and hippies alike r walkin they dogs and populatin newly established bars and old white lesbo's on every corner? (beat)

Yes yes... tis true, I'm an enigma. For the lame and stupid, a mystery. Yes bitches, im learn-ned. Our world needs to categorize a bitch. And I don't want all them labels n shit. Im sick of it. Im like popeye bitch: I yam what I yam and that's all I yam.

**Miss Cherry:**

I do love men. I do. especially the ones that don't know they fine. They my favorite. And then the ones that know they fine. Shit, Honey its spilt down the middle.

(beat) and I love a man with a cute face and facial hair. Them my favorites. Im a sucka for a pretty smile. (beat)

What? Im a soft bitch. A soft bitch who likes it hard sometimes. Shit. That's how me and my mama are different. She likes a hard man. With muscles, like a malik yoba lookin nigga. Shit, a terry crews, lookin motherfucka, Shit a ving rhames lookin nigga. Ooof. Im good. I just need a cute face. (beat)

And that's why I be so attracted to thugs. Now this may sound a lil peda--phill-lee-a—liff-ficck but, when I see a thug, I don't just look at that tough exterior that says “nigga, I'll fuck you down and bang them walls out,” I mean, yes I *see* it first but then I look at they face and deep in their eyes n shit, and see their childhood innocence. Which is sweet to me. it's like I know he'll bang these walls, but he'll do it with care, and more

importantly with skill. Come thru stroke game!! But niggas wanna do roles. They wanna bitch to cook *and* clean. What in the entire 1950's, ball and chain, slaves and shackles, kinda bullshit nonsense is that? Right. You need a real bitch fuh that.

**Miss Cherry:**

She needs variety... I actually can't do roles. I do them on stage I don't wanna do them in life. I need a cute and healthy flow. A bitch needs a cute and healthy flow. A cute relationship where we bouncing back and forth n shit. I fuck him he fuck me. he do the laundry, I order take out. Shit like that. 69/31type of relationship. I'm just kidding. Nothing like my mama and daddy.

**Miss Cherry:**

But in all seriousness I aint never wanna be a faggit. It *pains* me to say the word. It does. When I was a kid my mama ain't want me to be a sissy so bad. She'd tell me stories...

**Mommy:**

You know men turn lil boys out right? They steal lil boys off corners and put them in sex rings.

**Miss Cherry:**

And then we'd dance.

**Mommy: (said over the music)**

come on, boogie with my baby

**Miss Cherry:**

Baby, was serving law and order plot before dick... wolf. That bitch. Little did she know. I get off on a black thug gang bang video on myvidster, pornhub any day of the mother fuckin week. Can you say #backfired? Shit, if tha bitch only knew she was serving up premium trailer to my current life.

**Miss Cherry:**

Yea, she knew I was gonna be a fag but she **know** she aint want one. She was committed. I used to hold my hand like this - and she have my brother and sister slap it down. If the bitch wanted me to stop **she** shoulda stopped doing like this! But bitches be backwards. Bitches be on some, do what I say and not what I do –as a means to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness shit. (beat)

But for me, it wasn't about dick. It wasn't. I always just wanted to be held. You know - kissed and shit. My dad used to kiss me. I wonder if thas what made me this way? (beat) Nah, but I'm a soft bitch. I ain't no power bottom (looks around) and certainly don't feel like strokin all nite long – but I do like a cute passionate session that ends in cuddling...post shower, if shit is extra-sticky or extra --! i've had my share. but truth is I'm tired

**Miss Cherry:**

I'm fit to be tired. shit. you'd be tired too. if you walked where i've walked and perched where I've perched, seen what *she's* seen, and sucked what i .... figuratively speaking, of course.

**Miss Cherry:**

(she takes in a picture of him)

My father, he just knew i was gonna be a preacher.

i tried i really did. enrolled into Philadelphia Bible University and everything...joined a big ole church and i knew I was on my path. Even started the University Gospel chorale. sho nuff. and i had them birds squawkin and squeakin' — from the black preps to those lil dumpy white girls, hunney we was tearin' up round town. And hunney we would sinnnnnngggggg.... (she demonstrates)

**Miss Cherry:**

vibrato for days. yes baby, switching all up and down that altar. well, i mean i'd cover it. yknow butch it up a bit. don't nobody like no obvious ass Sissy traipsing around directing no choir. especially no gospel chorale. i mean we all KNOW they sissies but we'd never admit it. because gays is going to hell. oh lordt, you know it's an abomination and shit. oh and it is. cuz the bible says it. baby, in the same book and chapter it says not to mix fabrics and eat shell fish. well honestly, i hate a rayon blend so that was easy. and god knows i love me some deep fried soft shell crabs but hunty my pressure was through the roof and I'm trying to do better... i wanna live longer, stronger and shit before (Beat) I go to meet jesus/so

(beat)

i met this fine chocolate man in the chorale. omg tall. big feet.

i love a long footed man. Like long feet

and long fingers. it just makes me happy. inty-way...oh and he could sing... chile. all the girls in the choir wanted him ..

his name? lets just call him ...”calvin” yea, he was such a lovely friend. and hunney the crush i had on him?

### **Miss Cherry:**

i was a virgin. yea i had had lil girlfriends but I wanted calvin in a way i never wanted anyone before. i wanted him deeply. deep in me. you ever want someone inside you? it’s a new level of intimacy y’know? anyway, after several months of craving him, i got what i wanted.

### **Miss Cherry:**

(act this completely out)

it was a lot to feel all at once tho. a lot of pressure. now as many times as i had played the tape of my first time: we were in his room. and i was singing this new song i wrote to him. and this nite he kept punching me. punching me like my older brother would punch me. but he wouldn’t stop. i was saying stop calvin, calvin stop. and i’m singing the first verse of my song. and the punching is turning into wrestling. and our bodies are getting intertwined and my heart is racing because his long-fingers are tearing my shirt. and his long feet. are holding my feet down. and then his **man** hands are covering my mouth and at the same time pulling my pants down. and I’m pinned down. its happening so fast. and its not the way imagined it. but it’s happening. and somehow my song is still playing but only in my head. and somehow calvin gets me on my stomach. and somehow he rips my underwear. and somehow he begins wedging his penis in between me and inside me. and there is pain. and confusion. cuz see this IS what I wanted. but it wasn’t the dream. it wasn’t the dream. but it became my nightmare. calvin never heard my song.

### **Miss Cherry:**

oh shit. what am i doing? I’m in here with you and i got fans out there. yes hunney. fans. tons. entertainer of the year. several years in a row. it’s because i don’t bring this shit out

there with me. ms. cherry is for the people. she's for the people. she's an inspiration. she's a hero. yknow. that's how i want to be remembered. oh hunney, i was born for the stage. i've been on stage since i was 11. even at eleven i was out there shining. ha. i remember when i was in this little talent show they started my track and I'm out there singing to the people and the spotlight is damn near blinding me, i say,

**Lil Chaz:**

can yawl get that damn light out my eyes?

**Miss Cherry:**

they do...and tell them to start my song over and then KILL it. shit. always been like that. and don't let me get started, at church? oh baby, i could turn a church out. yes hunney. my daddy would have me sing solos all the time.

**Miss Cherry: (singing)**

“if i can help, somebody as i travel along, if I can cheer somebody, with a word or a song, if I can help my brother to learn how to get along, then my living...shall not be in vain...”

**Miss Cherry:**

truth is, i just wanted to help myself first. see, i aint never wanna be gay. never, ever. I wanted to be a bus driver, a radio dj, a ceo, but not gay.

**Miss Cherry:**

But, Tonite is special. Tonite aint about dick. Tonite is about coming together. Tonite is about the audience. Tonite is about me. tonite is about my reunion. (beat)  
Im gonna see mi papi tonite. Yes he'll see me up there in all my gloray. Sashaying and flaunting, and singing and dancing. Strutting hunney. Werking, slaying for the people, boom kat boom kat kat bitch yaaaassssss for the kidzzzzz..... and what will he say to these things??

**Miss Cherry:**

So yes, babies this night is different.

He will see me and have no choice but to embrace this ole queen. Because Ms. Cherry has not time for games. Reindeer and otherwise. She's stepping out.

**Chaz:**

(flashback)

But chaz, what you really need to do is reconnect with your father. You need to get the affirmation from him. Let him affirm you. Reconnect. Get the validation, the acceptance, the love you were missing as a boy, get that from him now...and you will be free delivered and HEALED. Chaz you can do that. You can be delivered and Healed.

**Miss Cherry:**

Shit. Things be so fuckin tough in life. Make u go mad. Fuck. Make you go fuckin mad. Make you go out ya fuckin mind. make you wonder who the fuck you are and if you ever really knew. If you ever really knew who you were in the first fuckin place. Cuz people just cant let a mothafuckin bitch be. Let a bitch be 'sall im sayin. Let a motherfuckin bitch BE. Before she go off on a motherfucka. Before she go the fuck off on a motherfucka. Let her be. She's doin the best she fuckin can and niggas push her to the motherfuckin edge. Yall niggas wanna make me go off fa real fa real, motherfuckas, trying to tell me who the fuck I am. I know who the fuck I am. And I know what the fuck I want. And when I see daddy tonite im gonna say it to his mothafuckin face. Aint nobody gonna stop me from being me motha fucka. Not you, not you, not you. I'm miss cherry mothafucka and watch me bitches, because this cherry, this mothafuckin cherry, this mothafuckin cherry is about to fuckin—

(lights out)

**End of Play**

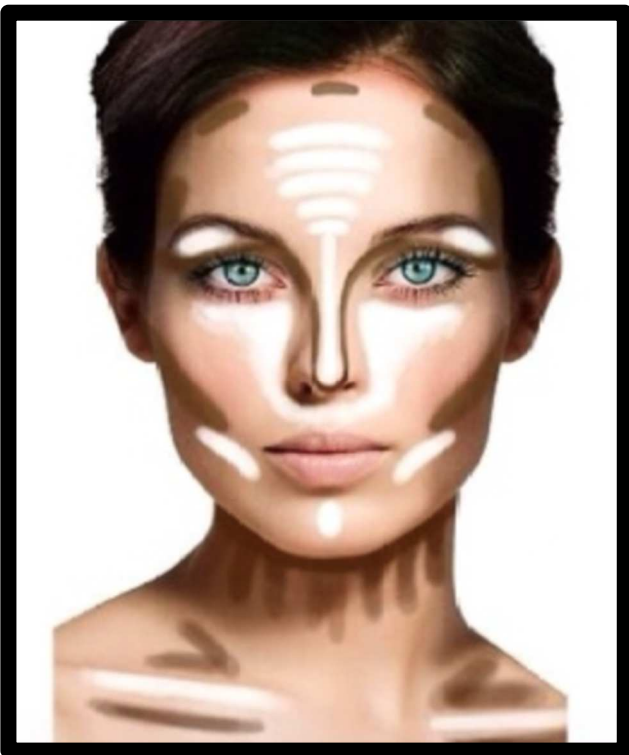
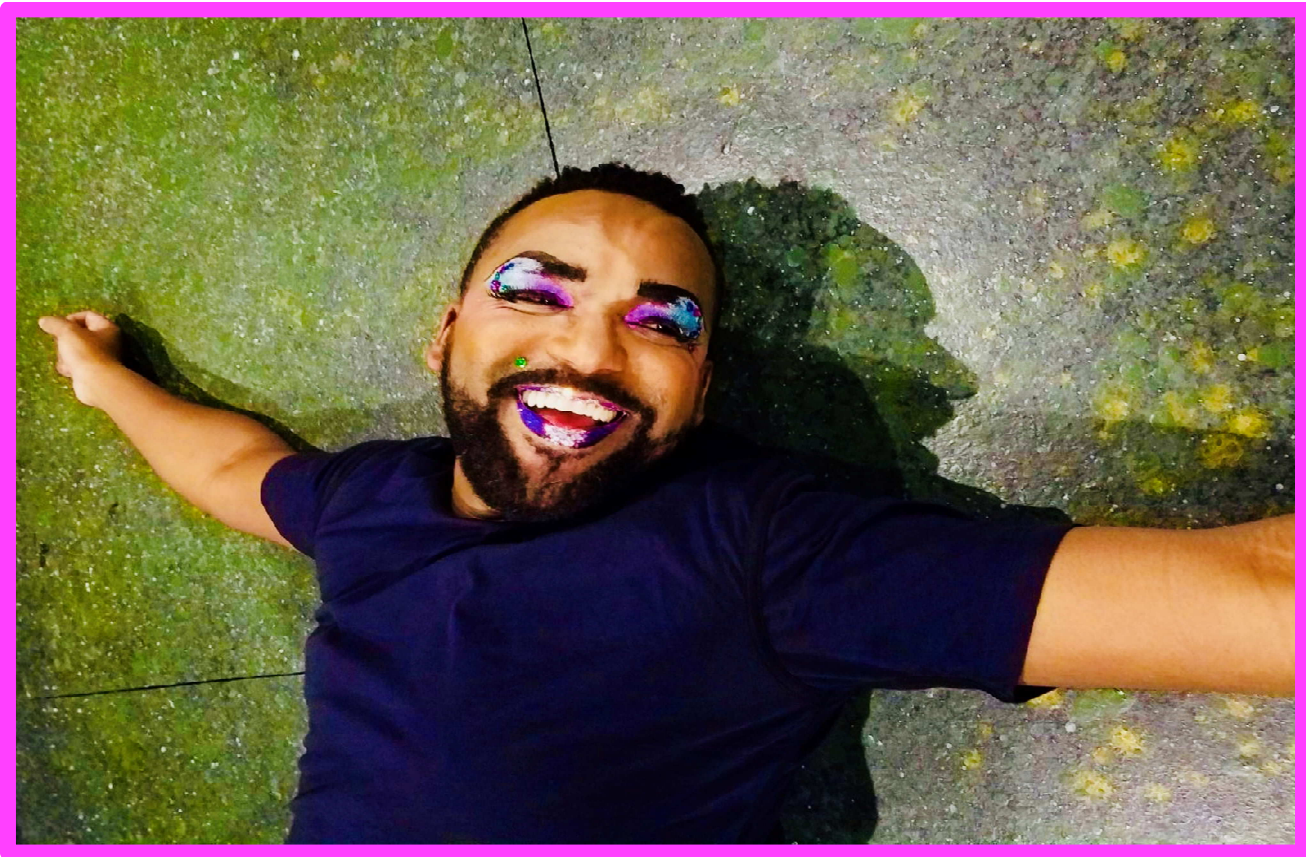


*Cherry – a sweet fruit.*



*Backstage – Dress rehearsal for 3<sup>rd</sup> year solo show –  
Penthouse Theatre UW, 2018*

*Photo by Brooklyn Jarrett Make Up Artist, Penthouse Theatre UW 2018*



*Photos for Inspiration*