

# LIBERATE



## 2021 Channel Island LGBTQ+ Writing Awards

### (Sing if You're) Glad to Be Gay by Siobhan Fogarty

I remember the first time I heard Tom Robinson's iconic protest song, (Sing if You're) Glad To Be Gay. How could I not? It was only a few weeks ago, on one of those endless, mindless scrolling sessions that have kept me comfortably numb throughout covid times. However, although I may only have heard it a few weeks ago, it is one of those songs that sank straight into my brain like a stone into underwater silt, buried deep as though it had been there for years. Because I recognised it, you see, and the song, strange as it sounds, recognised the core of me too. It's the anger, you see. The sheer fury that we have all bitten back at some point, when we've been asked to join in the laughter at our own degradation, or been blamed for making our friends feel uncomfortable when we talk about some injustice or aggression we've recently faced. The anger when we're asked to accept the unacceptable notion that it is somehow inevitable that people hate us.

I love that anger. I love it with a fierce and protective love, just like I love us, all the gays and bis and trans people. It's the anger of self-love. It's that internal voice that reminds us that we deserve better, that we don't have to put up with shoddy treatment. It's the anger that refuses to take on homophobia and transphobia as 'our' problem. It's not, and it never was, though they've tried to make it ours for centuries. Yes, centuries: because we have a rich and proud history, even if we have to dig like archaeologists through the dirt of shame and dust of prurient moralisation. We have been and are and will be, always and everywhere. We have been shamans and healers and spiritual leaders, and we have taken on the work that requires one to step outside family life, and we have taken on care roles for our oldest and youngest, and yes, we have taken on the hardest roles of all, which is to say that we have hidden in plain sight in marriages and parenthood, all the while it was too unsafe to be seen. We have the best music. We make the finest art. We create the most heart-rending theatre, set the most sophisticated or popular fashions. The centre does not know how much it is defined by the margin, but of course the margin has no such luxury of ignorance. We know oppression and rejection and suffering, of course we all do, both collectively and individually. But we also know joy, that wild exaltation of the spirit when we are out of our minds and drunk on love and music and movement, that peculiar freedom that can only exist as an act of defiance, and which springs from pure love.

And I do love us. I love all of us in a way that made me realise at some point that 'to feel one's heart swelling in one's breast' is not merely a pretty turn of phrase. It's the literal and slightly uncomfortable feeling that someone is blowing up a balloon inside one's ribcage, that one's emotions are suddenly too big for one's physical self to possibly hold. I love those sparkling little twinks, who pass through like comets shedding stardust, enamoured with each other's beauty and consequently their own. I adore the sturdy middle-aged butches, who say little and feel much, who often have some gloriously WI-type hobby like jam-making, and who looks as though they'd be as comfortable laying you across their knee for a spanking as they would pulling a pipe out of their pocket and putting a foot up on the hearth. I worship the tall shy trans girls who stand by the wall, wondering why they're even at a club which would as soon as collectively reject the pleasures of the flesh as it would play some decent metal. I am smitten with those leather daddies who see my very presence as a sign that the place is no longer 'for them', who have borne more pain and loss than most of us will ever know, and who despite or because of this dedicate themselves to pleasure. I am absolutely mad about the fat femmes whose hearts are big enough to hold the whole world, and who are surely the whole reason that polka dots were invented. I idolise the genderless and genderfluid, dressed head to toe in black, sweeter and softer than their piercings and tattoos admit, and who by their very nature oppose a system that doesn't make space for them even as it capitalises on their aesthetic. I even love the ones who certainly don't love the noisy, glitter-filled ones like me, who just want to be invisible and unremarked upon. When visibility is so often a threat, who can blame someone for just wanting to live their life without being a symbol or a cipher for some greater struggle?

It's probably not politically correct, and it's certainly not very kind or polite to say this, but I actually feel sorry for straight people sometimes, for the very reason that they are not us. But fuck politeness! Where does politeness get you? Rage gets things done; but love is the reason to do those things. Sing if you're glad to be gay