

*Taylor Mac: Coming Together While Falling Apart  
Unmaking/remaking American History*

Although Taylor Mac is best known as a queer performance artist based in New York City, the spark that ignited *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* can be traced to San Francisco in 1987. As an adolescent, he attended an AIDS Walk in the City by the Bay. Aside from this event being the first time that Mac was surrounded by other LGBTQ+ people en masse, he notes that it was especially poignant to be welcomed into a community that was coming together, through grief, kinship and activism, as it was falling apart, in a period when thousands of gay men succumbed to the AIDS epidemic. This process of unmaking and remaking is the model for *A 24-Decade History*, plumbing the depths of America's past to remake trauma into stories of representation, humor and joy, resurrecting the voices of forgotten individuals who helped to build this nation. Since 2011, Mac and his arranger, Matt Ray, have been working on *A 24-Decade History* in close collaboration with executive producer Linda Brumbach and her creative production team at Pomegranate Arts. This culminated in a one-time, 24-hour marathon performance at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, October 2016. Continuing to tour in various formats (two-hour, six-hour or twelve-hour) the show transforms with each iteration, highlighting Mac's talent for improvisation and a passion for reflecting the time and place in which he appears as "judy," the gender fluid, stage-worthy pronoun used by Mac in performance.

New England provides a particularly fecund ground for Mac's alternative exploration of our history. On the cusp of celebrating its 400th anniversary, with the founding of Plymouth Plantation in 1620 and the bicentennial of Maine's 1820 admission to the Union as the 23rd state, the region, perhaps more than any other in America, has a reputation for Puritan tenacity, revolutionary spirit, liberal discourse, Yankee thrift and social progress. Mac's approach of unmaking and remaking historical narrative challenges the singularity of this perspective, reminding us that New England's present is built on an ivy-covered foundation of genocide, settler colonialism, witch hunts, slavery, intolerance, classism and an inherited tradition of sweeping anything deemed uncouth under a proverbial antique rug.

While the colonial origins of the states that comprise this tour, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, might conjure up visions of Hawthorne-style folklore, revealing a venerable New England sensibility, Mac reorientates the audience to acknowledge just how recent immigrant culture is to the ancient land that indigenous Americans have inhabited for millennia. In fact, the broad historic/geographic scope of *A 24-Decade History* (reflected in Machine Dazzle's fabulous costume designs) demands that New Englanders consider how we fit into the larger concept of post-1776 America as an ideological construct. In pushing aside traditional patriarchal history-making to focus on shared stories of diversity, Mac challenges us to reexamine where we have come from and how we might collectively process trauma and guilt to determine where we hope to go as a nation. In other words, this show is a new queered interpretation of the American experiment as an inclusive and collaborative experience of active unmaking and remaking.

Following Mac's commitment to performance as activism—the very same kind he experienced at the 1987 AIDS Walk, *A 24-Decade History* extends the notion of queerness from exclusive to inclusive. When the term queer was reclaimed in the early 1990s and was transformed from a

homophobic pejorative into a rallying cry for visibility, it was primarily associated with the gay and lesbian community. Today queerness may be read as fluid umbrella term for those who refuse to live in the confines of the status quo. Embodied queerness, as demonstrated by Mac, is another form of unmaking and remaking, allowing individuals and subsequent communities to live life beyond societal and temporal boundaries, while remembering that New England and America are full of people who must be given the authority to tell their own stories on their own terms.

Mac actively makes new work as a performer and playwright including the recent Tony Award-nominated play, *Gary*, on Broadway; *Holiday Sauce*, a festive sequel to *A 24-Decade History*; and, his *Dionysia Festival*, an ongoing four-part project intended to mirror the all-day ritual theatre festivals of Ancient Athens.

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