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Gay '70s Live in The Village! A Disco Daydream

By Winnie McCroy





Writer, performer, collector, author, and archivist **Nora Burns** of **Unitard** fame remembers fondly the New York City she moved to in 1979. This month, she brings a bit of that wild world back to life with the Dixon Place staging of her tight, colorful comedy *The Village! A Disco Daydream*.

Directed by Adam Pivrotto of *Shondaland*, the show features a cast of ten diverse actors and dancers enjoying high jinks, low kinks, and go-go boys galore.

Gay '70s Live in "The Village! A Disco Daydream" |...



Winne McCroy: It's been a little bit of time since the Unitard days when I first met you back in the early aughts in the city. And I know that you always kept yourself busy. And obviously this is one of the things that has sprung from that. So, I wanted to talk a little bit first about the play and how it came into existence. Tell me a little bit about what sparked this creativity.

Nora Burns: We still do Unitard, we're still performing, and I love doing that. It's my wonderful release. Then in like 2017, I did a show called *David's Friend* at La Mama

and got really good reviews. It ran for a while, and I traveled with it afterwards and we actually did a film version of it right before the pandemic. It was a comedy, but it was about my best friend, and disco, and New York. I always like to have the idea of, “Okay, what's my next thing?” So that was still very much in my mind and like I always do with all every show I'm like, “Okay, what do I want to see?” I like seeing things that are short, fast, funny, sexy, and probably involving New York, queers, and disco.

I got to New York in 1979 so it's this pivotal year for me, and my favorite play is *Our Town*. So, I thought, let's take all these elements of my friends from back in the day, the music, the time and *Our Town*. But I like things to be kind of meta and weird and funny. I'm not musical as far as singing and I'm also not a dancer, but I love dancing. So, I teamed up with my friend, the choreographer Robin Carrigan, and I was like, “Listen, I have this idea for a disco musical based on *Our Town*, and she's like, “I'm in. I'd love to do that with you.”

WM: So how did the play develop from that point? Did you have folks in mind or just hold auditions?

NB: The way I work is very... I don't audition people. And I don't have specific ideas. I love to find people who have the same sensibility and they're just gonna bring what they bring. I kind of started writing the script and I gave it to her, and I was like, “I totally trust whatever numbers you want to put in, and whatever songs you want to use.” So, we did a reading of it in 2019 at Dixon Place and were all set to open in May of 2020. But this crazy thing happened, which as far as the show went was actually a good thing because I was a little bit rushed. I put the show on the shelf and really didn't even know if I was going to do it again. But a few people who came and saw were like, “Do it; it's good.”

And all that time, Robin had been thinking of more ideas—she is just so hilarious. What's great about her is she has these funny, creative, crazy ideas. And then in the meantime, my friend Adam Pivrotto—this brilliant kid—I brought him in as director. This gave me time to revamp it. Then we talked to Ellie at Dixon Place, and she was ready to put a show up this fall so we're like, “Let's just do it just to do something post pandemic,” you know, even if we get it up and it bombs or whatever. But it went well, people really liked it, it sold out, and we extended it.

WM: Yeah, Ellie Covan at Dixon Place really knows how to get the crowds in to see a show.

NB: Oh yeah. She had faith in us and was like, the theater's free in February, the cast is available, and we wound up having the chance to tweak the script with both Adam and Robin's new ideas. We've all become very much like a family. And I just love the cast and the creative team so much. It's been really fun.

WM: That's so wonderful! I see from your notes that this is set in New York City in 1979, which you just said was when you got there. Did you lift any experiences from your early days of New York City and bring them to the pages of this play?

NB: Nothing's direct but everything is like little excerpts from what I lived. It centers on this hustler who lives with his john but can do his own thing and he's got friends and boyfriends. And a lot of the characters are loosely based on people that I know and there are certain moments in it that are taken from my experiences.

WM: That's fantastic! I see in the notes that you say it's a Valentine to New York City. And you mentioned Donna Summer is the musical vibe you're really focusing on for that disco-era soundtrack of the play.

NB: Oh yeah, a hundred percent. I mean, I don't actually think there is any Donna Summer in it, but there's everything else. So, you know what I loved about Robin, was she and I completely share this love of old disco—I've been listening to it since it was just disco, and that's literally all I listen to still to this day.

“Sandra Bernhard was there, and we went up to the lounge and were all dancing ‘til 1 a.m. You can't not have a good time with disco.”

WM: Wow, you're the last holdout, Nora!

NB: Well, there are few of us and there are some new converts. It's funny; my 21-year-old daughter has a little radio show now at her college, and that's what she plays, because that's what she grew up listening to. And I think there are people who discovered that there was such heart and soul in that music and the lyrics and voices were amazing. And then, if it was also the music of your youth, that kind of gives an added punch to it.

WM: Absolutely. And you put this within the construct of *Our Town*, which I know relies on a narrator to move some of the action along. Does your play also have a narrator in that same capacity?

NB: Yes, we have a stage manager who's played by Glace Chase, who's wonderful. She does a brilliant job with it.

WM: And you said in your description that you wanted to be fast and fun and queer and exciting. Do you hit the benchmarks that you wanted to hit?

NB: I think so. I mean, me and Robin and Adam all share a similar sensibility. I just love watching what they do, and I'm very not precious about what I write. I'm like, if a

joke isn't landing, get rid of it; if some monologues are too long, get rid of it. I think we've cut the show down to an hour and 10 minutes, but you know with incredible, fun dance numbers.

WM: That's going to be really attractive to people who want to see a show and still have the rest of the night to go out on the town.

NB: That's me. I'm like, "Am I committed to this for a whole evening?" I like plays to be shorter, faster, funny. You can say everything you need to in an hour.

WM: It takes a lot of discipline as a writer to be able to cut things short and put your ego aside like in deference to the show succeeding, so kudos on that.

NB: Thank you. Yeah, I think it's self-indulgent to think that you need something to be two hours long.

WM: So, as a disco musical, there's got to be some great costumes for this show. Can you tell folks a little bit about what they are going to see as far as '70s apparel?

NB: Well Paul Alexander's my friend, and he's a fabulous musician and performer himself, but I brought him in to make costumes. The thing is, it's 1979, but we didn't want to be a caricature of 1979. It's also very meta. So, things are in the current day, but we will make a reference to *Only Fans* so, you know, we're definitely wink wink, it's 1979. And then there's a whole period of the show that takes place in 1994 and the present. So, it had to be sort of just fun costumes that would kind of bridge all those things. I didn't want some costume that looked all *Saturday Night Fever*.

WM: So, no glad-rags hokum from you?

NB: Not really. It's fun and sexy but I didn't want to look like the '70s were literally yesterday. For example, one guy was just too preppy, like textbook and it was just like—it's a real person, not a caricature.

WM: I hear that. Now since you mentioned sexy, I noticed that this play is running from February 2nd to 24th at Dixon Place and Valentine's Day is right in the middle of the run.

NB: Yes, but we actually don't have a show on Valentine's Day.

WM: Maybe it would be a good date for Galentine's Day?

NB: We have kind of a funny schedule because we're on for Thursday and Friday. But then something else was booked there, so we're not on until the following Thursday and Friday. So, we moved that week's shows to Sunday and Monday, which is kind of nice. We have one matinee, and we have one Monday night for any Broadway folk who want to come. And then on for the next two Thursdays and Fridays, but we skip over Valentine's Day so you can go have a romantic evening, but I think that date falls on...

WM: Maybe on Monday this year?

NB: I think it's Tuesday.

WM: Okay, everybody knows Tuesday is for romance.

NB: Exactly. I think the 14th is a Tuesday but you know—it's a sexy show. We have lots of inappropriate touching. So...

WM: That sounds promising.

NB: Yeah.

WM: Should people embrace this and put on their own disco garb to come to the show and be part of it?

NB: We wind up with everyone being a part of it. The nice thing about Dixon Place is there's that lounge upstairs. So everyone goes to the bar upstairs afterwards. In the fall, Sandra Bernhard was there, and we went up to the lounge, and we were all dancing 'til like one in the morning because the music is on and it's fun.

WM: That sounds like a damn good time.

NB: It is! You can't not have a good time with disco.

WM: I hear you! So, as we roll our interview up to a close, I want to ask in parting, what comes next for Nora Burns after this achievement?

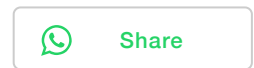
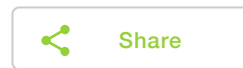
NB: Oh my God, that's such a good question. And I've really been thinking about that because usually I have my next thing but now, I'm not sure. I'm just hoping that I get a little spark. I of course want to be doing another Unitard show. But after working

with a cast of 10 and a big crew, it might be something that's more pared down and solo-ish again. I'm just hoping that the spark hits. So, if you have any ideas, let me know.

WM: That I will, and I hope that you break all of the legs.

NB: Oh, thank you so much. I hope you get to come see it. [Q](#)

The Village! A Disco Daydream runs through Feb. 24 at Dixon Place, 161A Chrystie St., NYC. \$20-28. Dixonplace.org



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