

“Art should provoke, disturb, arouse our emotions, expand our sympathies in directions we may not anticipate and may not even wish.” JOYCE CAROL OATES

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ONLEVELGROUND.ORG



LEVEL GROUND creates space for dialogue about faith, gender, and sexuality through the arts and festival programming. Our hope

is to cultivate a better way of speaking with one another across our differences and disagreements. Level Ground works with artists and communities, curating art that tells stories and fosters reconciliation.

The name Level Ground comes from a prophecy in the book of Isaiah. The name embodies a space where we descend from our mountains and climb out of the valleys to meet one another on sacred, though likely uncomfortable, level ground.



FRIDAY NIGHT

MIDDLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH
112 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10003

6 PM PARIS IS BURNING FILM SCREENING + DIALOGUE

Dialogue moderated by Sarah Pullman Bailey about how we can serve and support NYC's homeless LGBT youth population.

9-11 PM OPENING RECEPTION WHY DRAG?

It's a world different than you may imagine. Join us for storytelling with Jeza Belle, a world-class photo exhibit by Magnus Hastings, and live music by Adam Bastien.

SATURDAY

MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH
1 W 29th Street, New York, NY 10001

11 AM ON GENDER CONFORMITY DIALOGUE

A mixed media program including short films and live performances by Mac Shannon and Larry Darnell Penn Whitfield. After we will discuss the assumptions and fears we bring to gender expression and embodiment.

12:30 PM LEVEL GROUND INFORMATION LUNCH

Come learn more about the vision of Level Ground and how you can join us in our mission to create safe space for dialogue through art.

2 PM IN GOOD CONSCIENCE FILM SCREENING + DIALOGUE

Dialogue moderated by James Rowe with Barbara Rick, Sister Jeannine, and Sister Carol about advocating for LGBT people and unity in the Catholic Church. Also, be sure to visit the Shower of Stoles exhibit at some point over the weekend.

7 PM JENNIFER KNAPP CONCERT (\$10 tickets)

An evening of music and storytelling with Grammy nominated, Dove Award winning musician, Jennifer Knapp. She will be playing songs from her recently released album, Set Me Free.

SUNDAY

MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH
1 W 29th Street, New York, NY 10001

1:30 PM THE LAST ONE FILM SCREENING + DIALOGUE

Dialogue with director Nadine Licostie about remembering lives lost and the ongoing efforts to end AIDS.

2 PM BOOK SIGNING DIALOGUE with Jennifer Knapp

4 PM LISTENING FOR GRACE THEATRE PERFORMANCE

Jane Clementi will host an evening of listening to a parent's journey, a church's struggle, and a search for commonality and grace.

All tickets are donation based unless otherwise noted.
RSVP to ensure your seat at ONLEVELGROUND.ORG/NYC.

CREATING DIALOGUE THROUGH ART



PARIS IS BURNING

How does a marginalized community respond to oppression?

Some communities lash out in anger. Others hide away in fear. One unexpectedly joyous response comes in the form of creative celebration.

Paris Is Burning (1991) follows a current of the mid-to-late 1980s minority gay, transgender and drag culture in New York City. Neglected, threatened, and abused, this oppressed subculture has no observable reason for joy. At least from the perspective of the outside world. But in this award-winning documentary, Director Jennie Livingston shows a community brimming with celebration, manifested by the raucous and competitive “balls” they hold filled with dancing, modeling, and music. These jubilant events are the focal point of the documentary, which profiles the competitors in their lives both in and outside the competitions.

What makes someone dedicate time, energy, and money to a drag show with almost religious fervor? How does the identity formed within a community like this bring strength to someone who is devalued outside that community?

The people in Paris Is Burning did not lead uniformly happy lives, but the documentary shows their unrestrained participation in joyous community despite being marginalized. This complex community, which birthed vogue dancing and widely impacted popular culture, should not be stuck in a time capsule. We should engage this documentary with as a living testament to the vitality of the drag community’s creative response to misunderstanding and oppression.



THE LAST ONE: UNFOLDING THE AIDS MEMORIAL QUILT

What is AIDS?

In the documentary The Last One: Unfolding the AIDS Memorial Quilt, Director Nadine C. Licostie shows how difficult it is to respond to questions like “What is AIDS?” with one-dimensional answers.

The film follows the history of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, a decades-long international project composed of stitched sections, each memorializing an individual who lost their life to AIDS. The quilt, which started in 1987, currently has more than 48,000 3-by-6 foot memorial panels. It is, as described by one subject in the film, the world’s “largest mobile cemetery.”

The quilt is not monotone, and the colors and contours of this piece of art are a powerful symbol of the complexity of the devastating impact AIDS has had on people around the world.

The film raises a myriad of tough questions. How can communities stay intact in the midst of a pandemic? How does fear shape the way we treat other people? What is the loving response in the midst of physical and emotional suffering?

The Last One offers glimpses of hope, both by looking to the inspiring efforts of the past and the continued work taking place in the present to fight this disease and the stigmas associated with it.



LISTENING FOR GRACE

Led by veteran actor Ted Swartz, Ted & Company uses humor and storytelling to talk about issues of faith and social justice. Listening For Grace is a funny, powerful, and poignant performance which gives voice to our fears and hopes when a faith community engages in questions around same sex-relationships. A father’s journey, a church’s struggle, a search for commonality.



10th Anniversary Screening IN GOOD CONSCIENCE: SISTER JEANNINE GRAMICK’S JOURNEY OF FAITH

Are there times when it is right in the eyes of God to disobey our spiritual leaders in the name of a greater good? How do you stay in communion with a church that does not officially accept you or the people you love? Can Christians of goodwill on opposite sides of the fence experience unity in spite of their differences?

Armed with an endearing smile and an endless supply of optimism, Sister Jeannine Gramick is an unlikely rebel with a cause who will make you believe that the answer to all those questions is a resounding yes! Through her New Ways Ministry, she has been tirelessly ministering to and advocating for the LGBT community for over 40 years. When her superiors tried to silence her, she risked being dismissed from her order by continuing to speak out for full inclusion of gays and lesbians in the Catholic Church.

Following in the footsteps of Michael Moore’s Roger & Me, Barbara Rick’s documentary follows Gramick in her efforts to seek a meeting with the once and now former Pope Benedict. Firm in her conviction that until church hierarchy and church members get to know gay people on a human level, their myths and stereotypes concerning the LGBT community will continue to prevail.

But Gramick is not out to angrily shake her fist at or cut ties with the Catholic Church. Instead she is doing something different; working from within to build bridges between gay Catholics, the church hierarchy, and the wider church community. As a devout Catholic, she sees the debates about same-sex marriage in her Church as a family feud that can only be healed by bringing the two parties together in dialogue.

She’s not all talk either. In one of the films most resonant scenes she approaches a Catholic man who is part of a group protesting gay priests and gently engages him in conversation. Though they do not see eye to eye on homosexuality, instead of fighting to get the last word in these fellow pilgrims join hands to pray The Lord’s Prayer together.

Here is an example of a peacemaker who breaks down dividing walls by being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. This film about Sister Jeanine has a Roman Catholic focus but the message could not be more universal: How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!



MEET THE PEOPLE WHO INSPIRE US

SARAH PULLIAM BAILEY is a national correspondent for RNS, covering how faith intersects with politics, culture and other news. She previously served as online editor for Christianity Today where she remains an editor-at-large.

ADAM BASTIEN is a NYC-based singer/songwriter and performs regularly with a high-end orchestra at luxury events and celebrity galas. Adam has had the privilege of performing for some of the most iconic people of our time, including Barbara Walters, Donald Trump, and Paul McCartney.

JEZA BELLE is a drag queen, comedian, celebrity columnist, regular contributor to the Huffington Post, and author of the new book The Harlot’s Guide to Classy Cocktails, a comedic twist on the coffee table cookbook.

JEFF CHU serves on the Level Ground Board. He is an editor at Fast Company Magazine and the author of Does Jesus Really Love Me?: A Gay Christian’s Pilgrimage in Search of God in America. The nephew and grandson of Baptist preachers, he’s a California native who now lives in New York where he is an elder at Old First Reformed Church in Brooklyn.

JANE CLEMENTI co-founded the Tyler Clementi Foundation alongside her husband Joe to ensure that our society learns the consequences of discrimination and bullying, as she learned all too personally through the loss of her son. A native of New Jersey and devoted mother of three sons, Jane speaks passionately about the need to embrace LGBT children as wondrous creations of God.

LARRY DARNELL PENN WHITFIELD is a NYC writer, singer, and aggressive mover who loves to use his Southern charm to tell stories of what it’s like to be a big gay in a skinny city!

MILTON GARCIA from The House of Ninja is an artist, voguer, dancer, choreographer and public speaker who defies conventional truths in society and depicts life through his artwork in an enjoyable, yet prolific fashion. In 1992 Milton was diagnosed HIV positive and has never lost his commitment to enlightening young adults through his life experiences and art.

SISTER JEANNINE GRAMICK is a Roman Catholic nun who co-founded New Ways Ministry, a Catholic social justice center working for the reconciliation of lesbian/gay people and the church. She is an Executive Co-Director of the National Coalition of American Nuns and is strongly committed to justice and peace for humanity.

MAGNUS HASTINGS is a Pioneer in Drag Photography, Magnus just completed a hugely successful 3 month show, “Why Drag?” at the Out NYC Hotel. A book of “Why Drag?” is also in the works. British born Magnus is based in Los Angeles where he is also a respected Celebrity portrait photographer.

JENNIFER KNAPP is a Grammy nominated folk rock, and formerly contemporary Christian musician. In 2010, after a seven year hiatus from music, Knapp shocked the Christian world with the news that she is a lesbian. Knapp’s memoir Facing the Music and new album, Set Me Free, were released in October.

NADINE LICOSTIE is a director where she focuses on creating stories that resonate politically and socially. Film and television projects include The Last One, The Good Mother of Abangoh, The GLAAD Media Awards (Bravo), True Colors Fund Give a Damn Campaign and numerous films for corporate and non-profit agencies.

SR. CAROL PERRY, SU is affectionately known by many simply as Sister Carol, she uses her extensive scholarship and imaginative storytelling skills to offer a fresh and innovative approach to exploring the Scriptures, bringing people and stories of the Bible to life.

BARBARA RICK is president and founder of Out of The Blue Films, Inc., an award-winning independent documentary nonprofit dedicated to the creation of exceptional films that explore, articulate, and celebrate humanity. A Peabody and Emmy-winning filmmaker and journalist for more than twenty years, Ms. Rick has produced, directed, and written a number of highly acclaimed films.

JAMES ROWE is the director of Believe Out Loud, an online network empowering Christians to work for LGBTQ equality. For the past nine years James has proudly served as the sign language interpreter for Philadelphia’s Anna Crusis Women’s Choir – the longest running women’s choir in the country.

TED SCHWARTZ is a writer, actor, and owner/artistic director of Ted & Company TheaterWorks where he has created over a dozen plays. Ted has been mucking around in the worlds of the sacred and profane for 20+ years. As theologian and thespian, Ted brings a unique perspective to his craft, creating a space where these two worlds can interact.

MAC SHANNON is a Sophomore at Hofstra University. He is getting a major in psychology and is interested in working with LGBT youth in the future.