



Making Dad Band really moved something within me about my dad. There was an exchange that happened, in the performing of the piece, and in my dad witnessing the performance. Psychologically, our history was integrated. His voice in my body, and in my head, was both released and affirmed somehow.

—Sacha Yanow

Dad Band

Svetlana Kitto

YOU COULD SAY that my childhood home was a living monument to the things my dad liked. There was an old organ in our living room that he would gather us around to sing old American songs like “Jimmy Crack Corn” and “Buffalo Gals.” (He loved organs; he loved Americana.) And he always had an album going on the record player; I would ask for “Roxanne,” or the record with the gold emblem so I could sing along to “You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me.” (He loved the Police; he loved Motown.) There were duck objects all over the house, and his business cards and stationery were emblazoned with a shiny black mallard. (He loved ducks.) To know my father was to know what he liked.

In *Dad Band*, Sacha Yanow’s most recent solo performance, she explores fatherhood by becoming her dad for the night. The show opens with her in silhouette, sitting in a chair with her legs outstretched and her face self-serious; she is engaged in the no-nonsense Dad business of reading the newspaper. With button-down shirt, square glasses, moustache, parted hair, jeans, undershirt, and practical shoes, she is an icon of everyday, white American Dadness. She gets up. “Hey,” Dad says shyly. And then: “Here we go!” The Beatles’ “Magical Mystery Tour” blares as Dad encircles the audience with arms outstretched, legs kicking in spectacular, stilted Dad style. Just for tonight, Dad is a showman – he is a star. “I don’t usually move like that,” he explains later. Indeed, those adorable, culturally fluent, spontaneous micro-movements could belong only to the younger Yanow, a longtime queer performer who’s worked in theater and dance. With her physical body, Yanow enters into a dialogue with her dad, both to find the Dad within her and to give some of herself back to him. Less an impersonation than a complex homage, *Dad Band* veers from tearfully humorous to pained.

We begin with a medley of Beatles songs that ends with “I Wanna Hold Your Hand.” “I bet you’re wondering why I’m laughing,” Dad says after shaking his hips and shoulders in a self-amused boogie-down to the music. “I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking, he only likes the Beatles. Not true. If you want to get to know me ... well then, you have to get to know me. You have to solve the mystery.” The audience functions as his captive child: here for this monologue whether we want to be or not. Throughout the show, we will become familiar with many things he likes and holds dear: Roy

Orbison, the Everly Brothers, L. L. Bean shirts, stocks, the nightly news, newspapers, fruit (especially chocolate-covered cherries), the racehorse Seabiscuit, his thirty-seven-year-old belt, and Agatha Christie novels.

When he forgets what comes next in the show, he spends five minutes looking at his set list, tickled pink by the notion of a “set list.” He isn’t aware that he might bore you – for he is a dad – and yet he gets irritated when he thinks people aren’t listening: “I’m not finished. You said you wanted to get to know me.” He loses his concentration, he forgets what he was telling you, he laughs, he gets mad, he starts again. He is EveryDad. “I always wanted my name to be Hercules. But it’s Richard. People call me Dick, like detective. And like every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Everyman, I’m like your Everyman Hercules,” he concludes.

As a person with a dad, I felt instantly familiar with this presentation of fatherhood: verbose yet monologic, charming yet remote, present yet onstage. Indeed, the show’s most powerful and relatable moment occurs when we see fatherly alienation play out in real time. Just as Dad is about to play his favorite song, he notices that “someone” left the light on in the hall and loses his temper. We watch as he stands there raging silently, ruining a moment that was meant to be about togetherness, about sharing and connecting with us over something he loves. As the song “Only You” begins, he finds himself unable to sing it. “I’m just not in the mood,” he says. We all know what it’s like to be on the inside and outside of rage, to feel disappointed, or to be told that we are disappointing; seeing it performed brings compassion to the sting of both sides of the experience. It brings compassion to ourselves and to our dads, helping us to recognize the Dad within all of us.

Writing this piece pushed me to recall a memory of my own dad. I’ve always taken offense at his crude and bumbling reaction to my telling him I was gay. “What do you guys do?” he’d said smugly. But thinking about it now, I can see it from his perspective. He had spent my whole life introducing himself to me, trying to influence and shape me with all that he knew. And now I was introducing myself to him as something he didn’t know anything about and could not help me with. There was crudeness there, but real alienation and confusion, too. What is fatherhood if not a failed experiment? Why would anyone know how to be a dad? Or a daughter.

Near the end of the show, Dad says, “Isn’t it neat that I’m alone up here but we are still together?” *Dad Band* is an act of love that attempts to make Dad a little less alone up there. In Yanow’s tender care, Dad becomes



top: Richard and Sacha Yanow, 1981
above: still from Richard Yanow’s winning appearance on television game show *To Tell The Truth*, 1975
opposite: *Dad Band* performance still, New Museum, New York, 2015. Photo by Amanda Ryan

human, flawed, lonely, relatable, sad, charming, and hilarious. In becoming her father for the night, Yanow does more than get to know him and all the things he likes – she finds the spiritual generosity to blend him with her Self. By the end, it’s obvious that he’s been softened by the risk and vulnerability involved with being a father. “This has been a really sweet time,” he says. “I’m gonna think about it all the time.” In this moment both Yanows seem to be speaking, and with tears in their eyes.

SVETLANA KITTO is a writer and oral historian. She was raised in Hollywood and now lives in New York, where she co-curates Adult Contemporary, a reading and performance series. Her fiction and nonfiction have been featured in *Salon*, *VICE*, *Art21*, *Columbia Journal*, and the book *Occupy*. This winter she was Danspace Project’s Writer-in-Residence for Platform 2016: A Body in Places. She is at work on a novel called *Purvs*, which means “swamp” in Latvian, and is the name of the country’s first gay club.

SACHA YANOW CHERIE DRE

September 9 – October 9, 2016

Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College

Public reception with the artist:

Friday, September 9, 4:30 – 6:30 pm at the Cooley

CHERIE DRE

The Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, is proud to present *Cherie Dre*: New York-based artist Sacha Yanow's immersive new installation. The exhibition is part of a larger solo performance project about Cherie Dre, the show-girl alter ego of Yanow's grandmother who suffered from bipolar disorder before modern diagnoses and treatment.

Developing the performance at the Cooley, Yanow transforms the gallery into an environmental stage set: a psychological, social, and physical landscape. At times, visitors may encounter Yanow working and rehearsing in the space.

Yanow embodies her own imagining of Cherie Dre through covers of Yiddish pop songs by the Barry Sisters, dance routines, monologues, and conversations with her grandmother. The space is simultaneously her grandmother's bedroom in the Bronx in the 1950s, Cherie Dre's ballroom stage at the Concord resort hotel in the Catskills, and Yanow's own research area.

As in Yanow's previous work, *Cherie Dre* weaves together personal experience with broader queer and feminist social histories. Specifically, *Cherie Dre* excavates the artist's relationship to gender and femininity, magical thinking, gambling, and performance, alongside the history of the Borscht Belt and Jewish entertainers in America.

Written and performed by Sacha Yanow
Dramaturge: Morgan Bassichis
Costumes: Signe Mae Olson

Cherie Dre is curated by Stephanie Snyder, John and Anne Hauberg Curator and Director, Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College.

DAD BAND

West Coast Premiere

September 15, 7:00 pm

Black Box Theatre,
Performing Arts Building, Reed College
Part of The Portland Institute
for Contemporary Art's 2016
Time-Based Art Festival
Free with reservations: pica.org

Dad Band is an intimate psychological portrait of Yanow's father, her internalized dad, and patriarchy in general. "Dad" covers and lip-synchs to his favorite songs from the 50s and 60s, shares footage of his 1970s winning appearance on the *To Tell the Truth* game show, presents motivational speeches, and more. Dad's button-down shirts become his costumes, his yellow notepad – usually reserved for stock market details – contains his set list, and his Agatha Christie novel collection and Wall Street Journal become his props. Over the course of the evening, we get to know Dad as he dances, sings, screams, and lectures. *Dad Band* and *Cherie Dre* are companion pieces, part of Yanow's ongoing investigation of personal and social histories through queer embodying.

Originally commissioned by The New Museum, New York in 2015, *Dad Band* was conceived and premiered during Wynne Greenwood's *Kelly* exhibition at The New Museum; *Kelly* was curated by Johanna Burton, Stephanie Snyder, and Sara O'Keeffe.

SACHA YANOW

Sacha Yanow is a New York City-based artist and actor. Her solo performance works include: *Dad Band*, New Museum, New York (2015); *Silent Film (In development)*, The Lab, San Francisco, Pieter, Los Angeles, and MAPP/Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY (2015), Dixon Place, New York (2014), and Movement Research Festival, New York (2013); and *The Prince*, Dixon Place, New York (2013). Her residencies and awards include: LMCC Process Space (2016); SOMA, Mexico City (2015); Dixon Place, New York (2014); Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, New York (2012); and The Field, New York (2011). She was creative consultant for Elisabeth Subrin's feature film *A Woman A Part* (2016), and co-director and dramaturge for Dynasty Handbag's performance piece *Soggy Glasses* (The Broad/REDCAT 2016, Brooklyn Academy of Music 2014). Yanow received a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and is a graduate of the William Esper Studio Actor Training Program.

cover image: Shirley Gould/Cherie Dremond circa 1951

overleaf: The oysters of New York Harbor

below: Bird prints

COOLEY

Douglas F. Cooley Memorial
Art Gallery, Reed College

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