

Gustav ascends throne for APL's Drag King Story Hour



A little bit of glitz and a whole lot of heart will descend upon the Aurora Public Library on Saturday, June 1, as Gustav hosts APL's very first Drag King Story Hour.

Story hours such as this have been a mainstay of APL's Pride Month programming, but this is the first time a Drag King rather than a Drag Queen will lead families in a morning of magic, love and acceptance.

It's also going to be a first for Gustav ? the alter ego of Sare Thorpe ? who is excited to host his inaugural story hour.

'I love doing kids' and family-friendly shows because the kids are so brutally honest they will let you know what they're thinking, especially if it's a very interactive show,' says Thorpe. 'I remember being a kid and I remember feeling really weird and different from than all the other kids I went to school with and Gustav is the same. He felt and feels different than everybody else. My thing is to show families and kids that it's okay to be different, it's okay to be yourself, and that should be celebrated.

'Everyone can be different together. That's what makes us all unique and that's what builds community: embracing each other's differences and respecting each other based on those differences.'

Thorpe has always been drawn to drag as an art form even before they tried their own hand at it. They would go and see shows in the city, became an ardent fan of RuPaul's Drag Race, and then began to think, 'If I did drag, I wonder what that would be like.'

'I came out as non-binary in 2020 and really found myself sort of figuring out who I was in a gender sense and exploring the feminine and masculine sides of myself,' they say, noting that Gustav had been 'brewing in my head' for a while before he made his debut at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre cabaret in Toronto. 'It was April of 2023 and I thought, 'Here's my chance.' It was figuring out his look, how to do the style of makeup and performance style. I just loved the process of it so much.

'With the drag queen story time events, I just really like the idea of a drag artist family-friendly events like this because there has been a lot of news and things online about people being in the more conservative end saying things like, 'Drag performers are trying to hurt children, indoctrinate children, they're not good people.' I think it is important to show that, like an actor, drag performers have range and can do work, acts and performance pieces that are geared towards adults, and they can also do something that is family friendly. To me, it is no different to an actor doing a Disney film and then doing a film for Quentin Tarantino!

'It's important to show drag performers?connecting with families and young people about the importance of being yourself and the importance of self-expression. It's okay you're different, everyone is different in some way. Our differences should be celebrated. That's important and that's why I was drawn to this story time event.'

Ahead of APL's event, Thorpe promises 'a lot of dancing and music ' and Gustav is going to have a great outfit with lots of sparkles.'

'It's going to be joyful,' they say. 'My main thing is, let's start our day with some joy and we're reinforcing this idea that it's okay to be yourself because who you are as yourself is wonderful. For anyone who is on the fence and is unsure whether a drag event is appropriate for their family or kids, I would say, 'Check it out,' and, like I mentioned before, actors, drag performers have a range and will tailor certain performances for a family-friendly children's event. We will tailor that to make sure it's appropriate. Because drag challenges gender norms and gender stereotypes, and ideas about gender and who can wear makeup and who can wear a dress and that sort of thing, I think it shows people it doesn't matter what gender you are, it doesn't matter who you are, if you want to wear a dress, wear a dress. If you want to put on some lipstick, put on some lipstick. It doesn't matter who you are. If that's what makes you feel alive, makes you feel like yourself, that's great.'

For more information about Gustav's Drag King Story Hour, visit www.aurorapl.ca.

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter