Trans Heroes Coloring Book

Illustrations by the wonderful, amazingly talented Emmett Stone <3

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~October Edition~
Sylvester was born on September 6th, 1947 in Los Angeles, CA. Many may recognize his voice from the song “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real).” He was a crucial influencer of the disco scene and became known as the Queen of Disco. He was also a huge trailblazer for gender nonconforming expression in mainstream media. She was very open about her genderfluid identity, though did not have that specific terminology at the time (along with nonbinary, genderqueer, etc). When speaking to folks who questioned her “timeliness” of openly expressing herself, he would famously reply that folks would just have to catch up! Hell yea!

Sylvester’s musical journey began at his childhood church, where he sang in their gospel choir. However, he left after the church condemned his queerness. She then found and joined a group of Black trans women, drag queens, and gender non-conforming people who called themselves the Disquotays. In 1970, she moved to San Francisco and joined a mostly white drag-theater troupe called the Cockettes. He soon had a falling out with the Cockettes after upstaging the rest of them at a New York show in 1971 because, while Sylvester poured himself into his performance, the rest of the Cockettes often blew off rehearsals to trip and goof off. Luckily, their sloppy behavior did not affect the impact of Syvester’s performance, which garnered her national press as an up-and-coming blues-rock star. From there, he regularly opened for big-name acts and ended up outshining stars like David Bowie and Billy Preston. In the 80s, Sylvester’s recording of “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)” reached No. 1 on Billboard’s dance music chart. Syvester, and this song, became an icon for queer freedom and liberation as she traveled internationally on tours.

Along with his culture-shifting music career, Sylvester was also a huge advocate for folks who live with HIV/AIDS. After his boyfriend, Rick Cranmer, tested positive in 1987, Syvester knew he was next. So in his final years he used his platform via media interviews to talk about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as well as performed at some of the earliest benefits for folks who live with HIV/AIDS. Sylvester passed away in 1988 and, as quoted by NPR, left “his share of future royalties for ‘You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)’ to two San Francisco nonprofits: the AIDS Emergency Fund and the meals program Project Open Hand” (NPR). May she Rest In Power.
Dorian Electra is a genderfluid, queer pop star that is known for their ultra-synthetic, cartoonishly masculine pop performances, along with their signature pencil mustache. Their music and music videos test the boundaries of pop performance by showing off their ability to create a “chaotic-yet-controlled” environment to deliver their messages. One of their most popular songs, “Flamboyant,” is an ode to all that Dorian is and feels and demonstrates how they utilize pop to present their true, unapologetic self. Furthermore, they find it important to reclaim the word flamboyant as an historically derogative word pointed towards “an obvious gay, effeminate person.” They do so by using the term’s original definition from French gothic architecture, to describe flames in stained glass, in their fiery music video. Dorian draws their “flamboyant” inspiration from Liberace, Oscar Wilde, Alice Cooper, Prince, and Austin Powers. Though a fictional character, Austin Powers is actually the first figure Dorian remembers being exposed to (at age 6) who had a lasting impact on who they are today. As stated in an interview, they definitely draw on Austin’s over-the-top, clown-like sexuality for their point of reference to their personal masculine idea.

Dorian grew up in a pretty accepting household in Houston, TX. In an interview with Ben Beaumont-Thomas from The Guardian, they are quoted:

“As a kid, they felt ‘really androgynous: I wasn’t into the things girls were into, but I hated sports, or playing with GI Joe. I always identified with the word kid more than girl or boy.’ In high school, they would have crushes on boys, ‘but I didn’t feel like a girl liking a guy. Love stories in movies were very alienating to me.’”

Through music, they were able to explore their gender and sexuality more and realized that music was also a great platform for trying to expand people’s minds and conceptions of what gender and sexuality looks/feels/is like. They resonate with the term genderfluid, “But the core of my being is not gendered at all.” They recognize their desire for the world to abolish boxes and labels, while at the same time acknowledging the importance of and empowerment through folks being able to claim certain labels that they’re not allowed to be in or that may not be accepted by cishet systems at the moment. You can check out their website at dorianelectra.com and follow them on insta @DorianElectra. They also just released a new album titled “My Agenda”!
Shea Diamond was born on March 17th, 1978 in Little Rock, AR and grew up in Flint, Michigan. She did not grow up in a trans affirming household and thus ran away at the age of 14 and got registered into the foster care system before being able to get emancipated at age 17. As a young person with hardly any support, she did not have the means to pay for medical transitioning. Fuck the transphobic Medical Industrial Complex! Therefore, at age 20 Shea tried robbing a convenience store at gunpoint to pay for gender affirmation surgery. She was locked up for 10 years in men’s correctional facilities. Fuck the police! So to help stay sane, she began writing music and sent some of them to the Library of Congress. Her time in prison was also when she wrote her first and most famous song, “I Am Her.” She even sang it to the men in prison who became the first fans of her first song. After being released in 2009 she traveled to New York where she currently works out of as a singer/songwriter, with a focus in R&B and Soul music.

Shea’s first connection to stardom was in 2016 when pop songwriter Justin Tranter heard Shea sing “I Am Her” and was blown away. Justin immediately connected with her and they started recording music together. Since then, Shea has put out some fire hits! She has such a talent for conveying deep felt emotion through her broad vocal range. And her music is all about her experience as a Black trans woman, loving her darker skin, self-care, and challenging our racist, transphobic society. In an interview by Gabrielle Barnes from Changing Womxn Collective, Shea is quoted:

“There are more [trans folx] waiting for their opportunity, but you would never know it ‘cause the music industry is toxic and transphobic as hell! Understand we must work ten times harder just to be seen and a hundred times harder to be celebrated and a million times harder to be paid our worth and amplified to the level of our cis counterparts. [But also,] Because my Trans experiences differ from boring tales of cis straight normalcy, I feel like I have the freedom to tell stories unique to my own experiences.”

Shea is also very involved in protests; changing policy; tackling the stigma around, and apathy towards the murders of, trans sex workers; and raising funds to support trans persons with limited to no resources. To keep up to date with Shea, you can follow her on instagram/twitter @IAmSheaDiamond and bump her music!
Laura Jane Grace was born on November 8th, 1980 in Fort Benning, GA, but currently lives in Chicago, IL. She is one of the first highly visible punk rock musicians to come out as transgender. In fact, she came out later in her career after she was already a big hit as the founder, lead singer, songwriter, and guitarist of the Florida punk rock band Against Me!. She found the strength to come out in 2012 after she met a big fan of Against Me! who happened to be an out and proud trans woman. In a Rolling Stone article by Paula Mejia Laura is quoted:

“‘The cliché is that you’re a woman trapped in a man’s body, but it’s not that simple,’ she said then. ‘It’s a feeling of detachment from your body and from yourself. And it’s shitty, man. It’s really fucking shitty.’”

A sentiment many trans and gender nonbinary folx feel. Wouldn’t it be cool if our nuanced experiences could be respected instead of used against us and our “realness”?

After Laura confirmed that many of her songs from Against Me! contain references to her experience with gender dysphoria, she felt that that’s all her audience heard from then on. Which is why she started another band called Laura Jane Grace & The Devouring Mothers in 2016. And after about 6 years of her personal trans life being in the spotlight, she released Laura Jane Grace & The Devouring Mothers’ newest album: Bought to Rot (2018). In Bought to Rot, Laura steers clear of discussing gender dysphoria and politics and focuses on playing with other kinds of music away from pop-punk. Against Me! is still together after 23 years, but Laura also wanted to start a separate band to break away from the expectations her fans have of Against Me!.

2016 was a big year for Laura because she also published a book titled Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock’s Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout. Tranny is Laura’s autobiography, based on her journals, which she started in 3rd grade. Reflecting on these journal entries, Laura weaves her journey of self discovery with the historic upcoming of Against Me!. You can follow Against Me! on twitter @AgainstMe or visit their website at https://www.againstme.net/. To follow Laura Jane Grace and & The Devouring Mothers, visit their Facebook page @LJGATDM. And to just keep up with Laura Jane Grace herself, you can follow @LauraJaneGrace on Insta, Twitter, and Facebook.