

Artist Rubyyy Jones hosts Lip-Sync Work Shop



By Bill Kilpatrick

Rubyyy Jones, has been described in many ways, artist, actor, director, choreographer, "a glittering force of nature," and the "queen of queerlesque," according to their wixsite biography. Rubyyy has performed their unique brand of neo burlesque, and queerlesque performances all across Europe, Las Vegas and Toronto. Their biography describes Jones' work as "a balance of dance, queer performance and neo feminist activism," but on Oct. 1 Jones came to Bancroft to apply their skills by teaching a lip sync workshop. The event was put on by Roy Mitchell, Ken Fraser, and The Hybla Residency in partnership with the Bancroft Village Playhouse. The Hybla Residency, according to Mitchell, is run on his 100 acre homestead and supports artists and queer artists who, "are bringing a different way to look at art and think about art," and Mitchell is always looking for artists for the residency. Mitchell began the workshop with a short speech where he thanked those present and those who came in support for being so caring and compassionate. Mitchell admitted that, what with all the anti-2SLGBTQ+ protests that have been happening and all the hatred and homophobia his post received online, he was worried that their might be a protest for the event, but there was not. According to Mitchell, some community members who are allies decided to organize and they came out in support of the workshop so that Jones and any others who attended the workshop would feel safe in the event that there were protestors. Artistic director for Tweed and Company Tim Porter, also spoke briefly adding how happy he was to partner with The Hybla Residency and "how the goal is to make this space as much of a community hub as possible and a safe space for everyone." Jones began their workshop with an introduction stating that, "lip-syncing is a super flexible art form that is available to everyone." Jones then did a brief history of lip-syncing pointing out that they believed the first use of lip syncing on film was 1929 and the first recorded use of lip syncing being used in a performance capacity was 1959. Jones pointed out that lip-syncing has a prominent place in queer history. Jones said that one of the tactics that were used in an attempt to destroy the queer community during the 1950 was to hike up the prices of big bands so that queer clubs could not afford to hire a band for their performances. According to Jones, the way that queers got around this was by "innovating" and putting together their own bands and orchestras and "used lip sync as a way to still put on a full faceted show." Jones then showed the participants numerous examples of lip syncing by numerous artists. Lypsinka, was the first artist Jones showed the audience. Lypsinka, according to an article in Vulture about the history of lip-syncing, is the creation of artist John Epperson and a legend in the drag world. Her style and what the article describes as her "meticulously lip-synced performances" combined "songs and dialogue from iconic cabaret acts, films, and television shows of the twentieth century, often moving wildly from voice to voice, song to song, and phrase to phrase at breakneck speed, creating an experience that became a scathing

commentary on the mediated image of the twentieth-century woman. Jones then showed another fabulous example of lip-syncing done by Sasha Velour, who gained fame from her performance on Ru Paul's Drag Race. Many people think that lip-syncing is only done to music, but this would be a misnomer as it has been done to comedy acts, speeches, and to other forms of communication. The next example of lip-syncing that Jones presented to the participants was a piece done by artist and performer Dickiebeau, who did a particularly moving lip-sync to Judy Garland's audio diaries that she recorded from 1964 to 1967. Jones described the piece as, "a very hard piece [to watch]; it's amazing; it's incredible; it's one of my favorite things that has ever existed." But Jones also added a trigger warning due to the graphic nature of the performance which discussed abuse, drugs and alcohol, which, unfortunately, were all too familiar to Garland. The participants were deeply moved by the performance that was a very powerful example of the impact the lip-sync can have using genres other than music. Once the example portion of the workshop was over Jones then led the participants through a series of exercises designed to help hone the skills of a lip-sync performer, such as facial expressions, mannerisms, body movements, annunciation, and interpretive dance movements to the Tom Jones song "What's New Pussy Cat." The final segment of the workshop had the participants perform in front of one another and then give feedback to help improve their performances. What became clear for the participants was that there is a lot more to lip-syncing than just moving your lips to the lyrics of a song. Lip-syncing is a performance art that can be comedic, tragic, moving, creepy, and beautiful, and it involves a lot of choreography, practice, and proper execution to master this art form.