



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 17, 2023

**CulturalDC presents *Never in Our Image*, a three-part Queer Gun
Destruction Opera by Stephanie Mercedes**

Through raw embodied rituals, this Queer opera composes music from the sound of recast weapons, reclaiming materials never made in our image. September 15, 16, 21, 22, and 23rd at CulturalDC's Source Theatre



To arrange interviews or for more information, contact Addie Moore at addie@culturaldc.org.

[Images of Stephanie Mercedes's ACT I and ACT II -
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mzj5mo9nlz9bc37/AAD7Sv5FXzhkg0Zwl1qhEQd0a?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mzj5mo9nlz9bc37/AAD7Sv5FXzhkg0Zwl1qhEQd0a?dl=0)

“How can we, the LGBTQ+ community take the tools of the oppressors and transform them into music and art?” was a question posed by Stephanie Mercedes, a local uncategorized Queer Latinx artist, after the horrific 2016 mass

shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. The gruesome event killed 49 people and left 53 wounded.

So how did Mercedes transform these “tools of the oppressors” into art? She purchased a Sig Sauer MCX rifle, the same type of gun used in the nightclub tragedy, and melted it. She used the metal to make 49 liberty bells to represent the 49 victims.

In her most recent project entitled, *Never in Our Image*, a three-part experimental opera where Mercedes explores the process of gun transformation through sound. In ACT I the singers, musicians, and dancers responded to various sounds of guns being cut into pieces. In ACT II Queer singers, dancers, percussionists, and metal workers respond to the sounds and process of guns being melted and re-cast into instruments and sonic sculptures. Singers chant "Cambia" (change) and "Queeremos" (queering). The techno music is composed with the sounds of the furnace. In her work, through cutting, melting, and utilizing instruments cast from weapons, Mercedes composes musical scores. In the final performance, ACT III, Mercedes will use the sounds and objects from the previous acts to create an opera that envisions a world without guns. The work forces the archetype of violence into its opposite: the beauty of music and art. “It's about trying to transform an object which has caused harm into something peaceful,” says the artist.

***Never in Our Image* - ACT III – Gun Transformation Opera**

September 15, 16, 21, 22, and 23, 2023 – 8 PM, performance expected to run approximately 60 minutes, doors open at 7 PM.

CulturalDC's Source Theatre

1835 14th St NW, Washington, DC 20009

The event is ticketed, \$1-50 with a Pay-What-You-Can model for general admission. Space is limited.

RSVP: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/never-in-our-image-act-iii-gun-transformation-opera-tickets-676095669347?aff=erelexpmlt>

Using the captured audio, instruments, and sonic sculptures created in the previous acts, Mercedes will compose and perform at CulturalDC's Blackbox Theatre in Source. Singing, dance, video projections, and the composed score

will imagine an ideal world in which all guns have been transformed into music and art.

D.C.-based arts organization CulturalDC is presenting this three-part series that invites the public to be a part of the cathartic gun transformation. "This performance series is extremely relevant and important because gun violence affects all of us," says Executive Director and Curator, Kristi Maiselman. "CulturalDC is proud to Make Space for Art that is timely and moving."

For more information on Stephanie Mercedes and CulturalDC, please visit www.culturaldc.org

Culturaldc.org/mercedes

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NEVER IN OUR IMAGE – A Three-Part Queer Gun Destruction Opera by Stephanie Mercedes

Past Event - ACT I - Gun Cutting Ceremony

Friday, May 19th -1360 Okie Street NE, Washington, DC

ACT I was the first step in the transformation process. Singers, musicians, and dancers responded to the various sounds of guns being cut into pieces. Pitches and tones were pulled from the raw sound of angle grinders, blow torches, and hand saws. The process of composition reflects the process of destruction.

Video: <https://vimeo.com/culturaldc/neverinourimageacti?share=copy>

Video use is available on request.

Mercedes performed the first step of the gun transformation process, the cutting ceremony in which she physically destroyed various guns, creating manageable chunks of metal to be melted in ACT II. Dancers and singers react in an improvisational performance with the pitches and tones of the angle grinder and compose a live musical experience.

Past Event - ACT II - Gun Melting Ceremony

Saturday, July 8th - 7-9 PM

Otis Street Arts Project

3706 Otis Street Mt Rainier, MD 20712

ACT II, a gun melting ceremony is the second step in the gun transformation process. Queer singers, dancers, percussionists, and metal workers respond to the sounds and process of guns being melted and re-cast into instruments and sonic sculptures. Singers chant "Cambia" (change) and "Queeremos" (queering). The techno music is composed with the sounds of the furnace.

Video: <https://vimeo.com/849122166?share=copy>

Video use is available on request.

Stephanie Mercedes (she/her)

Mercedes is an uncategorized Queer Latinx artist who choreographs large-scale performances and installations based in sound. Mercedes transforms weapons into musical installations and works of art. Mercedes has exhibited and performed at the Bronx Museum, the Queens Museum, the Smithsonian, the Kennedy Center, and the National Gallery of Art. She has been funded by George Soros' Open Society Foundation, Light Works, NALAC, The Foundation for Contemporary Art, WPA, The DC Commission for the Arts, the GLB Memorial Foundation, the Warhol Foundation, and the Clarvit Fellowship.

CULTURALDC

CulturalDC supports innovative artists across all disciplines and makes their work accessible to diverse audiences. We provide space for relevant and challenging work essential to nurturing vibrant urban communities. CulturalDC has made a name for itself by providing a platform for bold contemporary artists to interact with audiences in thought-provoking ways. Current and most recent exhibitions include *Bundlehouse: Ancient Future Memory* and performance art piece, *While You Sleep: An Excerpt from a Jouvay Dream II* both by CulturalDC's Capital Artist Resident, Nyugen E. Smith. In addition to presenting, CulturalDC has brokered more than 350,000 square feet of artist space since 1998.

CulturalDC owns Source Theatre and the Mobile Art Gallery, a 40-ft shipping container transformed into a gallery that has been shown in all eight wards of the city.

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