

Square One: The Journey to bernie

by Bernadette McKinlay

Presenter Pack



Photo by Naz Muller Photography

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Bernie

Bio

Bernie (she/her) lives and performs on Yuggera Turrbal Country as a proud queer singer, songwriter, storyteller, writer, and performer in Brisbane. Her work blends creativity, authenticity, and compassion with wry humour and an abundance of music. Bernie is passionate about helping mature-aged creatives rediscover joy, connection, and inspiration through music and storytelling.

Her repertoire spans heartfelt ballads, soulful folk melodies, vibrant musical theatre, and timeless jazz standards. Drawn to narratives of love, hope, loss, and life, she captivates audiences at renowned Meanjin venues, including the Brisbane Jazz Club, CYKAS, ISAS, New Tricks, and The Bearded Lady.

A highlight of her journey is “Square One: The Journey to Bernie,” a one-woman show that debuted at the 2024 Melt Open Festival at PIP Theatre. The production chronicles her evolution from a shy, closeted teen to the confident, proud queer woman she is today, inviting audiences to embrace self-expression and resilience.

Bernie believes that touring this show in regional Queensland will create spaces for reflection—allowing audiences to revisit experiences of discrimination and the historical challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. Her purpose is twofold: to validate shared experiences and to inspire others to live authentically and follow their passion.

Creatives

Bernadette McKinlay

Writer, Performer, Producer

Square One: The Journey to bernie

Synopsis

In the days of Joh Bjelke-Petersen and within the confines of Catholic Education, a young woman realises she's gay. Square One: The Journey to bernie tells the story of a girl growing up in Brisbane's 1960s and 70s, struggling to accept and reveal her true identity. Coming out in the conservative Queensland environment of the 1980s, bernie experiences rejection, but also finds her tribe. Now, standing proudly on stage, bernie invites us to witness her transformation from self-rejection to self-acceptance. It's a journey back to Square One, where bernie embraces her true self with courage, pride and humour. Classic popular songs from the times and woven into a story that is original and yet will be familiar to many.

Artform

- Cabaret
- Live Music (Contemporary / Popular)
- Music Theatre / Opera

Target Audience

The target audience is general, LGBTQ+, young adults, senior adults.

Performance History

2024	PIP Theatre	6 performances
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Touring Information

Availability to Tour

Bernie is available to tour this show from mid 2025 onwards.

Duration

60 mins with no interval

Suitable Venues

- Theatre - Proscenium Arch
- Theatre - Arena / In-the-round
- Theatre - Black Box / Flat Floor
- Concert Hall
- Local Hall
- Found Spaces (i.e. temporary venues. converted rooms, bowls clubs)
- Cabaret (i.e. small theatre, bar, club)
- Outdoors

Touring Party

2 pax

Maximum Performances

3 performances per week

Minimum Break

24 hours between performances

Audience Engagement

Overview

Bernie's engagement activities extend far beyond the stage, offering unique opportunities for community connection and lasting cultural impact. Bernie is available to speak in community centres, libraries, schools, and regional LGBTQ+ gatherings, where she shares her personal journey as a lesbian navigating a conservative world fraught with the fear of rejection. In these presentations, she candidly recounts experiences of discrimination while offering messages of hope and empowerment for those confronting similar challenges and validating the experiences of older lesbians for whom bernie's show will resonate strongly.

Bernie also offers an in-depth presentation on the creative process behind her show. Bernie details how she transformed personal struggles and ideas into a compelling performance, sharing insights into the evolution of her narrative, the practical steps taken to develop the show, and the resilience required to embrace authenticity on stage. This behind-the-scenes look not only demystifies the artistic journey but also inspires audiences to explore their own creative potential.

The cultural legacy of the tour will be its enduring influence—a renewed dialogue on identity, acceptance, and the transformative power of art. Bernie's story leaves behind a blueprint for overcoming adversity, inviting communities to foster inclusive spaces where true selves are celebrated and creativity thrives.

Post Performance Presentation

One-Hour Presentation Outline: "Square One: The Journey to Bernie"

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome and thank you
- Brief overview of the presentation's purpose
- Establish a safe, open, and respectful space for dialogue

II. My Background and Early Life (10 minutes)

- Growing up in a conservative, Catholic-influenced Queensland
- Early feelings of difference and the challenge of self-acceptance
- Key personal anecdotes that set the stage for the journey ahead

III. Experiences of Discrimination and Rejection (15 minutes)

- Candid recounting of personal encounters with discrimination
- Impact of societal rejection on identity and mental well-being
- Stories from the 'Pig City' era: challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals
- Reflection on the cultural and historical context of the time

IV. Turning Points and Embracing Identity (10 minutes)

- Moments that sparked change and self-empowerment
- How facing rejection led to finding a supportive community
- The evolution from fear to embracing a bold, authentic self

V. Messages of Hope and Empowerment (10 minutes)

- Key lessons learned from personal experiences
- Practical advice for overcoming discrimination and reclaiming one's identity
- Encouraging resilience, self-love, and advocacy for change

VI. Q&A and Open Discussion (10 minutes)

- Invite audience questions and reflections
- Foster a dialogue that connects personal experiences with broader societal change
- Summarize key takeaways and thank the audience for their engagement

Presentation Cost

\$25 per participant

Target Audience

The target audience for this presentation includes:

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community, both young people coming to terms with their sexuality and older people who have shared experiences of discrimination, and finding true identity
 - Anyone interested in the politics in QLD of the 1980s
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Post Performance Workshop

Workshop Title: Bringing Your Story to the Stage – Inspired by Square One: The Journey to Bernie

Duration: 2 Hours

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome participants and introduce the workshop goals
- Brief overview of Square One: The Journey to Bernie and its creative process
- Set expectations and outline the session structure

II. Discovering Your Story (15 minutes)

- **Presentation:**
 - Deciding what your story is about
 - Identifying key events and moments that have shaped your identity
- **Interactive Discussion:**
 - Invite brief sharing of initial thoughts and personal milestones

III. Integrating Music & Performance (15 minutes)

- **Presentation:**
 - Selecting well-loved songs or pieces that resonate with your experiences
 - Discussing how music can enhance storytelling
- **Examples:**
 - Insights from Bernie's process

IV. Editing and Pitching Your Show (15 minutes)

- **Presentation:**
 - Techniques for editing and honing your story to fit a specific timeframe
 - Crafting a compelling pitch for a venue and deciding on performance frequency

V. Staging, Costuming, and Collaborative Support (10 minutes)

- **Overview:**
 - Key considerations for staging and costuming that complement your narrative
 - Finding and working with experienced directors and performers

VI. Marketing and Promotion (10 minutes)

- **Guidance:**
 - Developing professional promo materials, including photoshoots
 - Strategies for marketing your show effectively
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VII. Hands-On Work Session (30 minutes)

- Participants work individually or in small groups to start developing their own story
- Facilitator support and guided prompts provided
- Drafting a preliminary plan covering story content, song choices, and performance logistics

VIII. Sharing and Feedback (10 minutes)

- Volunteers share their work-in-progress
- Group discussion and constructive feedback

IX. Conclusion and Q&A (10 minutes)

- Recap key takeaways
- Open floor for final questions and next steps for personal development

This workshop empowers participants to translate their personal journeys into captivating performances while offering practical insights from Bernie's own creative process.

Cost

\$50 per participant

Target Audience

The target audience for this workshop includes:

Anyone who is interested in bringing their story to the stage. Suitable for adults, young adults, seniors. This is a practical workshop, so participants need to be willing to work on their own stories and to share with the group.

Marketing Information

One liner

When a QLD Catholic girl breaks free, pride takes centre stage.

Short Copy

In the days of Joh Bjelke-Petersen and within the confines of Catholic Education, a young woman realises she's gay. *Square One: The Journey to bernie* tells the story of a girl growing up in Brisbane's 1960s and 70s, struggling to accept and reveal her true identity. Coming out in the conservative Queensland environment of the 1980s, bernie experiences rejection, but also finds her tribe. Now, standing proudly on stage, bernie invites us to witness her transformation from self-rejection to self-acceptance. It's a journey back to Square One, where bernie embraces her true self with courage, pride and humour. Classic popular songs from the times and woven into a story that is original and yet will be familiar to many.

Extended Copy

In *Square One: The Journey to Bernie*, Bernie invites us to join her, as she traces the arc of her life and the pursuit of her true self, through song, image and prose.

Her tale commences in early 1960s Brisbane, where a four-year-old Bernie dreams of becoming a go-go dancer, despite the influence of the era's gender norms and conservatism. Navigating the confines and confusion of being a girl in the 60s and 70s, Bernie arrives at young adulthood in the 80s to the realization that she is gay. This is the tumultuous era of Joh Bjelke-Petersen, police clashes, and the Fitzgerald Inquiry. This is the era when homosexuals are portrayed as deviants, paedophiles and criminals. This is the time of government driven discrimination.

Navigating this treacherous terrain within the confines of Catholic Education, Bernie becomes adept at concealing her identity. Driven by a desire for authenticity, Bernie breaks free from these oppressive forces, embracing newfound freedom. An opportunity in New York beckons, where she finds love, celebration of diversity and fulfillment.

Returning full circle, Bernie, the once-aspiring go-go dancer, now stands proudly on stage, celebrating her authentic self. She's back to Square One.

Marketing Summary

Target Audiences:

- **LGBTQ+ Communities:** Especially older lesbians and those interested in queer history.
- **Arts & Culture Enthusiasts:** Fans of cabaret, jazz, folk, and musical theatre.
- **Community & Educational Institutions:** Schools, community centres, and libraries in Brisbane and regional Queensland.
- **Socially diverse:** Individuals who value diversity, inclusion, and authentic storytelling.

Marketing Notes:

- **Authentic Storytelling:** Emphasize Bernie’s personal journey from a closeted teen to a confident queer icon. Highlight themes of self-acceptance, resilience, and historical change.
- **Historical Context:** Leverage the backdrop of conservative Queensland and Catholic influences to connect with audiences familiar with the era’s challenges.
- **Press & Partnerships:** Develop a press kit with high-quality photos, biographies, and performance clips. Partner with local LGBTQ+ organisations, community groups, and arts festivals to extend reach.
- **Engagement Through Education:** Position Bernie’s appearances at community centres, libraries, and schools as opportunities for dialogue on historical and contemporary issues.

Social Media Ideas:

- **Teaser Videos:** Share short clips of Bernie discussing key moments from her journey alongside performance snippets.
- **Interactive Campaigns:** Create hashtags like #JourneyToBernie and encourage audiences to share their own stories of transformation.
- **Behind-the-Scenes Content:** Use Instagram Stories and Reels to give a peek into rehearsal sessions, costume designs, and the creative process.
- **Historical Flashbacks:** Post comparative content that juxtaposes historical photos with today’s vibrant performances.
- **Targeted Ads & Events:** Utilize Facebook events and targeted social media ads to promote shows in regional Queensland and engage diverse audiences.

This integrated marketing approach combines authentic storytelling with strategic community engagement and dynamic social media tactics to create lasting cultural impact.

Audience Reviews

“Fabulous! The Journey to bernie perfectly captured my experience as a gay woman in 1980s Brisbane. Bernie’s story made me laugh, cry and cheer. I loved every minute.” — **Louise**

“Such a courageous performance. Bernie took us on her journey and we were with her every step of the way. I love the way she wove the songs of each decade into her story. Great show! — **Kelly**

“The Journey to bernie was a highly entertaining and informative show. I didn’t realise just how much discrimination there was for the LGBTQ+ community back in the 70s and 80s. A timely warning for our times.” - **Michael**

“Great voice, great story, great images. I loved this show. I couldn’t help singing along with the songs and relating to bernie’s struggle to be her authentic self.” - **Celia**

Industry Recommendations

Jules Berry, PIP Theatre, 0413 466 205

Mel Lathouras, Fearless Singer, 0423 459 104

Archival

Promo Video: <https://youtu.be/CM0wSLiBnfM> Sierra Sweeny, Cosmic Pictures AU

Marketing Materials

- Promo footage of live performance at PIP Theatre
- Marketing copy
- Printed promo materials
- Professional photographs of performer
- FB and Insta ready digital assets

Technical Information

Overview

Standard technical requirements including lighting, sound, and audio-visual assistance - a PowerPoint of images is part of the show and need to be manually displayed on cue.

Example Schedule

Bump in one hour prior to performance. Limited props and stage set-up required.

Technical Staffing

Venue to supply

- Lighting technician
- Sound technician
- AV support - PowerPoint images manually displayed to cue from script

Staging

No special staging requirements. Stage size approximately 6m x 4m is ideal. No rigging requirements.

Lighting

This is a one-person show, so spotlighting and mood lighting is required. Use of light colour to complement the mood at various scenes. Venue to supply lighting and lighting technician.

Sound

There is a combination of speaking and singing in the show. The performer has backing tracks that accompany her vocals. Some songs and speaking happen at a microphone on a stand at the side of the stage. Some songs require the performer to take the mic to another part of the stage. At times the performer moves away from the standing mic and is still speaking, so a lapel mic or similar may be required.

Venue to supply

- Microphones/PA
- Capacity to play backing tracks

AV

A series of images accompany the performance and are cued according to the script. A technician will be needed to follow the script and show the relevant image at the correct time. The images file can be shared with the technician in a format as required by the technician.

Venue to supply

- Image projector

Wardrobe

There are basic costume changes which the performer manages herself on stage. The performer will provide all costumes and props.

Freight

The performer will bring all props with her. This includes a lightweight trunk, and a suitcase. Help might be needed to bring the trunk into the performance space.

Critical Notes

The main critical element for the success of the show is good prior rehearsal and communication with the sound, lighting and AV technicians. The show is tightly scripted and cues for the backing track and images need to be accurate and precise.

Contacts

Programming

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