

**Stonewall National Museum & Archives**  
**LGBTQ Theater and Dance in the United States Timeline**

**Introduction**

The United States has had a long-standing discomfort with the transgression of sexual and gender norms. Influenced by religious ideals, society viewed people who had same-sex desires and engaged in same-sex practices to be immoral and sinful. As such, the US has long enacted laws to control and condemn those who betray sexual and gender norms. Since the nation's earliest days, federal, state and local laws punished those who betrayed sexual and gender norms, often as a capital offense.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, commerce and industry flourished, causing people to move from rural communities to more developed urban areas. As a result of these social transformations, same-sex practices increased, as did organized efforts to suppress them. Accordingly, our examination of LGBTQ history in the United States begins after the Civil War and the growth of industrialization and urbanization. Despite insistent homophobia and transphobia in politics, culture, and society over the past 170 years, LGBTQ people have remained resilient, creative, and dedicated to the fight for rights and visibility. Rather than a comprehensive overview, this timeline is intended to provide a snapshot of significant moments in LGBTQ history so as to encourage further engagement and exploration.

Check out other LGBTQ history timeline selections that specifically explore visual art, music, literature, film and television, AIDS, sports, and more in this series.



**1899** After her relocation to London, Isadora Duncan rose to prominence as a modern dancer across Europe. [More](#)



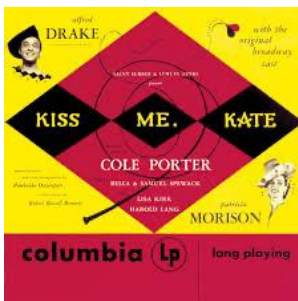
**1926** American ex-pat Josephine Baker performed her “danse sauvage” in at the Folies Bergères in Paris, immediately becoming a celebrity. [More](#)



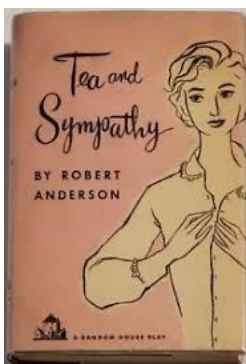
**1934** Written by Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour* was about two headmistresses accused by a malicious student of having a lesbian affair. [More](#)



**1944** Jerome Robbins developed and performed in *Fancy Free*—a ballet inspired by Paul Cadmus’ homoerotic painting *The Fleet's In!* (1934). The work featured a magnificent score by Leonard Bernstein. [More](#)



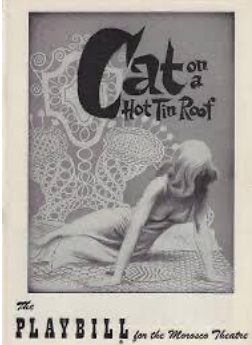
**1948** Cole Porter’s musical *Kiss Me, Kate* was a huge hit, winning the Tony Award for Best Musical. [More](#)



**1953** Openly broaching the topic of homosexuality in preparatory schools, *Tea and Sympathy* premiered on Broadway. [More](#)



**1953** During his time at Black Mountain College, Merce Cunningham founded the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. [More](#)



**1955** Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* explored familial obligation and homosexual desire. [More](#)



**1956** With a libretto by Lillian Hellman, Leonard Bernstein's operetta *Candide* premiered on Broadway. [More](#)



**1958** Alvin Ailey started the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, a path-breaking Black modern dance troupe. [More](#)



**1959** After her landmark play *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway, Lorraine Hansberry became the youngest playwright, the first African American, and the fifth woman to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play. [More](#)



**1962** *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee invited queer interpretations. [More](#)



**1964** Lanford Wilson's *The Madness of Lady Bright* and Robert Patrick's *The Haunted Host* premiered at the Caffe Cino in the West Village, boldly foregrounding gay stories and characters. [More](#)



**1966** With music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb, the musical *Cabaret* brought to life the queer underbelly of 1930s Berlin. [More](#)



**1967** Charles Ludlam founded his Ridiculous Theatrical Company, which became a hub of queer experimental performance. [More](#)



**1968** Mart Crowley's off-Broadway play *The Boys in the Band* was a turning point in American theater because of its heart-warming and heart-wrenching portrayal of contemporary gay life. [More](#)



**1971** Stephen Sondheim's *Follies* opened on Broadway. [More](#)



**1971** Wayland Flowers' erotic puppet show *Kumquats* premiered in New York City. [More](#)



**1976** For his visionary direction and choreography of *A Chorus Line*, Michael Bennett won two Tony Awards. [More](#)



**1979** Martin Sherman's *Bent* examined the oppression of gays in Nazi Germany. [More](#)



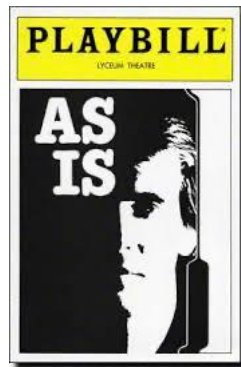
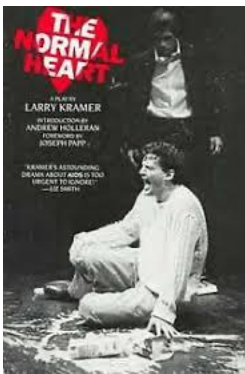
**1980** Jane Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* became a touchstone of lesbian drama. [More](#)



**1980** Split Britches, a lesbian feminist theater company, was founded in New York. [More](#)



**1982** Harvey Fierstein's off-off-Broadway play *Torch Song Trilogy* told the story of a gay Jewish drag queen and torch singer. [More](#)



**1985** Two of the first plays to address the urgency of the AIDS crisis, William M. Hoffman's *As Is* and Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* opened in New York City. [More](#)



**1987** Influenced by the aesthetics of film noir, Holly Hughes' *Dress Suits to Hire* told a lesbian love story. [More](#)



**1988** BD Wong won a Tony Award for his performance in the play *M. Butterfly*. [More](#)



**1989** Kate Bornstein developed her first play, *Hidden: A Gender*. [More](#)



**1990** Centered on the Black queer experience, the Pomo Afro Homos, an ebullient theater troupe, was founded in San Francisco. [More](#)



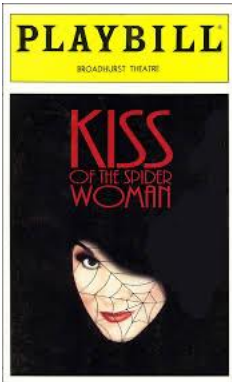
**1991** Titled *Millennium Approaches*, the first part of Tony Kushner's masterpiece *Angels in America* premiered to immense critical acclaim. [More](#)



**1992** William Finn's musical *Falsettos* attended to the intersections of gay and Jewish experience. [More](#)



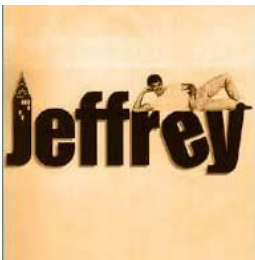
**1992** Tim Miller performed *My Queer Body*, a theatrical piece about queerness, HIV/AIDS, and homophobia. [More](#)



**1993** With music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, and a book by Terrence McNally, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* had a queer storyline—and won the Tony Award for Best Musical. [More](#)



**1993** World-renowned ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev died of AIDS-related illness at age 54. [More](#)



**1993** Paul Rudnick's play *Jeffrey* focused on the comedic aspects of HIV/AIDS. [More](#)



**1995** Cherry Jones won her first Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play—*The Heiress*—and came out in her acceptance speech. [More](#)





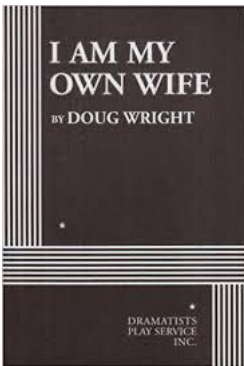
**1998** Alan Cumming won a Tony Award for the role of the Master of Ceremonies in the revival of the musical *Cabaret*. Joel Grey, who originated this character, won the same award in 1967. [More](#)



**1998** With music and lyrics by Stephen Trask and a book by John Cameron Mitchell, the musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* opened off-Broadway. [More](#)



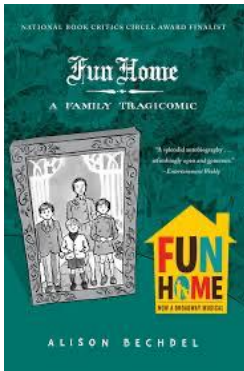
**2000** Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* revolved around the aftermath of the murder of Matthew Shepard—a monumental anti-gay hate crime—in Laramie, Wyoming. [More](#)



**2004** Doug Wright was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *I Am My Own Wife*, a one-person show about Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, an East German transgender woman who collaborated with the Stasi. [More](#)



**2008** Known for his performances in *The Producers*, *Guys and Dolls*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Nathan Lane was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame. [More](#)



**2013** Based on Alison Bechdel's graphic novel, *Fun Home* premiered as a musical developed by Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron, becoming a critically acclaimed Broadway hit. [More](#)



**2015** Paula Vogel's *Indecent* brought lesbian themes to the fore in her exploration of Yiddish theater. [More](#)