

*"I'm a whole package. The same way you're a whole package. You can't just chop up the people you love and only keep the bits that you like"*

When I first encountered Aunty Ben it was at a symposium on gender and sexuality within TYA (Theatre for Young Audiences) at an international conference in Birmingham, UK. Sian Ni Mhuiri was one of the presenters speaking about a show she had written "Auntie Ben". As she began to talk about the show it rang very personal to me and in this moment I knew I had to bring this show SOMEHOW to the US.

When I returned back from the conference that year, I was invigorated to make a difference and to help kids who may be going through the same thing I went through when I was younger and what many of my students are going through currently. Sometimes parents do not know how to talk to their kids about some of the social issues happening today. A show such as Aunty Ben creates an open dialogue between parents and children. Even if this is not personally happening to your child, your child may have a friend who is struggling with their identity and it is important that not only the child struggling feels accepted, but also that they have a support system around them.

Growing up I was never the stereotypical "boy." I liked things that "normal" boys didn't like. I liked dressing up and becoming someone else, I liked the arts, and was not all that into sports, even though sports surrounded me in every aspect of my life. I was just drawn to something different. Society puts so much emphasis on what is ONLY for boys and/or ONLY for girls that if you don't fit into this mold you are viewed as different or weird or a "Freak". It wasn't until I grew up and learned to accept myself for all the things I am, as opposed to beating myself up for being all the things I'm not, that I was able to feel like ME. Was this easy? No; but, *"it's worth it"*. We will always have bullies; we will always have someone who does not agree with our views and/or opinions. But at the end of the day, struggle you may, you will find strength in staying true to yourself.

Enjoy the show!

Chad Parsons – Director

*"It takes a lifetime to become the best that we can be. We have not the time or the right to judge each other. It's one life and there's no return and no deposit. one life, so make sure you like what's in your closet"* - Gloria Gaynor