

As You Like It:

Body, Belonging, and Liberation

Production Concept & Project Overview

emBODY Project Theatre · Fall 2026

Project Lead: Corinne M. Mason

Methodological Frame: The emBODY Performance Method

Stage Combat: Sarah Flanagan

95 Washington Street, Canton, MA · embodyprojecttheatre.com

1. Project Overview

As You Like It: Body, Belonging, and Liberation is a Fall 2026 theatre production created by emBODY Project Theatre under the direction of Corinne M. Mason. The production stages Shakespeare's As You Like It as a physical theatre reimagining grounded in the emBODY Performance Method, investigating how body culture shapes performing identity and what the body reveals when those constraints are suspended.

The production is set in a composite queer and cultural world — a dramaturgical frame built from two specific traditions of embodied identity navigation: drag culture and code-switching. Both are practices in which bodies negotiate between authentic expression and required performance within patriarchal social structures. Both live simultaneously in many bodies in the room. Together they give this production its specific visual language, its political grounding, and its direct connection to the lived body culture experience of queer and culturally diverse performers and audiences.

This production is the first of emBODY's Year One season productions and is designed to be experienced in conversation with the spring production of The Bacchae. Where As You Like It investigates individual bodies discovering what becomes possible when required performance is suspended, The Bacchae investigates what happens when those liberated bodies surrender to collective practice together. The season is one arc: personal liberation in the fall, collective surrender in the spring.

The production incorporates stage combat practice developed with collaborator Sarah Flanagan, integrated into the production's physical dramaturgy from early rehearsal.

2. Artistic Frame & Rationale

Shakespeare's As You Like It has always been a play about the performance of identity — about bodies required to be something other than themselves, and what happens when those requirements dissolve. The court of Duke Frederick is a world of enforced body culture compliance. Gender is worn correctly or punished. Cultural identity is suppressed or penalized. Social belonging is contingent on how well the body performs what is demanded of it. The forest is where those demands dissolve and the body discovers what it actually knows.

This production places that dynamic in direct conversation with two specific traditions of embodied queer and cultural identity navigation:

Drag Culture

Drag is the art of making visible what body culture tries to naturalize. It takes the performance of gender — the specific way bodies are required to move, present, dress, and inhabit space — and holds it up to the light. Drag says: this is constructed. Anyone can do it. The body that performs femininity in a ball gown and the body that suppresses that same femininity in an institutional corridor are both performing. Drag just admits it. The body culture of drag is physical and specific — how the performer moves differently in drag than out of it, how the clothing changes the body's relationship to gravity, gesture, and gaze. Drag is celebratory, theatrical, and explicitly artificial. It doesn't hide the construction. It revels in it. Rosalind's transformation into Ganymede is, in many readings, exactly this: a drag performance that makes the construction of gender visible and turns that visibility into liberation.

Code-Switching

Code-switching is drag's more exhausted sibling. It is the practice of shifting language, behavior, presentation, and body culture to navigate different social contexts — and unlike drag, it doesn't get applause. It gets survival. Code-switching is fundamentally a body culture practice: not just language but how you hold yourself, how you initiate movement, how you make eye contact, what you do with your

hands, how much space you take up. The body navigating a white institutional space, a heteronormative professional environment, or a culturally assimilated social world is a body performing. The body in its own community is a different body — or rather, the same body doing something completely different with its own conditioning. Code-switching applies across multiple identity axes simultaneously: race, queerness, culture, class. The specific exhaustion of performing multiple suppressed identities at the same time is one of the body culture experiences this production centers.

These two traditions are not separate. They live simultaneously in many bodies. The queer person of color who code-switches in institutional spaces and performs drag in queer community spaces is navigating both in the same body — the body that makes itself invisible to survive and the body that makes itself spectacular to celebrate. That body knows more about body culture than almost any research framework can fully capture. This production asks the ensemble to bring that knowledge into the room and into the work.

The production does not claim either tradition. It draws from the through-line both represent: bodies negotiating between required performance and authentic expression within a patriarchal world that demands compliance on multiple fronts simultaneously.

The production holds the following questions at its center:

- What does body culture do when it is required to perform compliance simultaneously across multiple identity axes?
- What does the body reveal when code-switching is no longer necessary?
- When does drag as survival become drag as liberation — and what does the body feel like at that threshold?
- How does liberation look different across different bodies when each body was suppressing something different?

3. Research Question

Season Question:

The relationship between body culture and identity in ensemble performance, using the method to investigate how cultural conditioning shapes the performing self — and what becomes possible when that conditioning is disrupted, surrendered, or transformed.

Production Question:

The relationship between body culture and social constraint in ensemble performance, using the method to investigate how cultural conditioning shapes performing identity and what the body reveals when those constraints are suspended.

Season Arc:

As You Like It asks: what does each individual body reveal when it stops performing compliance? The Bacchae asks: what happens when those liberated bodies practice together collectively and surrender to something larger than individual expression? The season moves from personal liberation to collective surrender — two answers to the same research question about body culture, identity, and what becomes possible when the performance of compliance finally stops.

4. The emBODY Method & Approach

The production is grounded in the emBODY Performance Method, centering three core principles:

Freedom to Choose

Both drag culture and code-switching are negotiations with freedom — one claims it spectacularly, one defers it strategically. The Freedom circuit is the primary tool for building the forest's world: what does the body do when it finally has the option to choose how it moves, presents, and occupies space? What does freedom feel like in a body that has been code-switching for its entire professional or social life? The production investigates how freedom manifests specifically and differently across different bodies rather than as a uniform or generic experience.

Presence to Listen

Code-switching requires hypervigilance — a constant reading of the room to know which version of yourself is required. That vigilance is Presence weaponized against authentic expression. The production investigates what happens when that vigilance is redirected toward genuine ensemble listening — when the performer is reading the room not to comply but to create. The court's watching is surveillance. The forest's watching is witness. The shift between them is a Presence shift the ensemble builds through the method.

Authenticity to Act

The central authenticity question of this production is: what is the body's authentic expression when it has spent its whole life performing? Drag asks this question joyfully — the authentic self might be the most spectacular performed version. Code-switching asks it painfully — the authentic self has been systematically suppressed. The Authenticity circuit invites each performer to locate their own answer through physical practice rather than intellectual decision, and to bring that answer into the ensemble work.

5. Production Concept & Aesthetic

The production is set in a composite queer and cultural world — a world built not from a single historical moment or subculture but from the shared body culture experience of navigating between required performance and authentic expression. The court and the forest are not different locations. They are different body culture environments, and the ensemble builds both entirely through physical practice.

The Court: Multiple Simultaneous Performances

The court is not one uniform experience of suppression. It is multiple specific forms of required body culture performance happening in the same space simultaneously. Some bodies code-switch — suppressing cultural movement, performing assimilation, making themselves legible to the dominant culture's standards. Some bodies perform gender compliance — suppressing queer expression, performing expected femininity or masculinity. Many bodies do both at once. The court's body culture is visually specific: bodies performing the expected version of themselves, wearing compliance, taking up exactly the right amount of space. The cost of that performance is in what each body holds back.

The Forest: Each Body's Specific Liberation

Liberation in the forest looks different for every body because each body was suppressing something different. For the body that code-switched, liberation is cultural reclamation — the return of authentic movement, cultural physicality, the specific way the body moves when it is home. For the body that performed gender compliance, liberation is drag as play — gender performance that is chosen and

celebratory rather than required and strategic. For many bodies it is both simultaneously. The forest is not a uniform explosion of freedom. It is a series of specific individual discoveries happening collectively — each body finding its own authentic expression in the presence of other bodies doing the same.

Rosalind's Ganymede: The Intersection

Rosalind performing as Ganymede is the production's central physical argument. Her transformation holds both traditions simultaneously: it is a code-switch (performing a different identity to navigate safely) and a drag performance (gender made visible, theatrical, and self-determined). In the court that performance is strategic survival. In the forest it becomes play and discovery. The physical shift between the two is not a costume change — it is a complete transformation of body culture: how she initiates, how she takes up space, how she holds weight, how she makes eye contact. What the body discovers about itself through that transformation is the research question made visible in one performer's arc.

The Wrestling Match as Patriarchal Body Culture

With stage combat practice developed with Sarah Flanagan, the wrestling match becomes the production's fulcrum — the moment the court's body culture is most nakedly on display. Strength, gender, class, and cultural legibility all performing for a watching crowd. The combat choreography is developed to make that specific body culture visible and legible. What Orlando's body does in the match — and what it does differently in the forest — is the before-and-after of the production's research question in physical form.

Two Distinct Movement Vocabularies

The court and the forest move differently. The court's vocabulary is generated through the Authenticity circuit in reverse — what does the body do when it suppresses its authentic expression across multiple identity axes simultaneously? The forest's vocabulary is generated through Freedom — what does each specific body do when that suppression is no longer required? The vocabularies are not choreographed from outside but generated by the ensemble through the method. The shift between them is felt before it is understood.

The Ensemble as Living Environment

There is no forest set. The ensemble builds it. As characters cross into the forest, the ensemble physically transforms the space around them — with bodies, with textile, with spatial proximity and collective presence. The forest is alive because the ensemble makes it alive in real time. Performers not in a given scene are the environment. They hold the body culture of the forest — the collected authentic expressions of every body in the room — and the audience feels the difference the moment anyone crosses from the court.

Text as Score, Not Script

The text is cut by approximately one third. What remains functions as a score for physical action rather than dialogue to be delivered. Some speeches become movement sequences. Some exchanges happen in motion. Some lines are spoken while the body does something that complicates or contradicts them. The words carry weight precisely because the body is doing equal work alongside them.

A Framing Device

The production opens with the ensemble visible as themselves — queer and culturally diverse bodies entering a research practice that is explicitly about what their bodies already know. This transparency is not a distancing device. It is an invitation. The audience understands from the first moment that what they are watching is simultaneously *As You Like It* and an embodied inquiry into the specific body culture experience of performing compliance and discovering liberation.

The Songs as Physical Scores

As You Like It's built-in songs become full physical ensemble sequences — the moments when the forest body culture is most completely expressed. They are not interpolated musical numbers. They are the collective body of the ensemble doing what it does when code-switching is fully suspended and each body is exactly as it wants to be.

Aesthetic: Costume-Driven Transformation and Textile

The visual world is built through costume and textile rather than built scenography. In the court, garments are worn in compliance — buttoned, fitted, constrained, performing the expected version of each body. The relationship between the body and its clothing is one of suppression: the body shaped to fit what the clothing requires rather than the clothing shaped to fit what the body wants. As the action moves into the forest, the same garments transform. Things get unworn, reworn, reimagined. Fabric enters the space — draped, suspended, moved by bodies. Crucially, the transformation is not uniform: each body's relationship to its costume changes specifically and differently, reflecting what each body was suppressing and what it discovers when that suppression lifts. The drag body's transformation looks different from the code-switching body's transformation. Both are visible and specific.

6. Source Material & Adaptation Strategy

The production works from Shakespeare's As You Like It in the public domain. The adaptation strategy involves:

- Significant text reduction — approximately one third — prioritizing scenes with the richest body culture and identity content
- Ensemble-generated movement scores running alongside and sometimes replacing extended verbal passages
- The framing device as an opening that makes the ensemble's own relationship to drag culture and code-switching transparent and present from the first moment
- Development of the songs as full physical ensemble scores that are the forest body culture made collective and visible
- Possible incorporation of ensemble-generated text addressing the specific contemporary experience of code-switching and drag as survival and liberation

The result is not a museum-style restaging. It is a physical theatre production that holds the recognizable spine of As You Like It inside a composite queer and cultural frame that is honest about what these bodies know and what this text has always been about.

7. Process & Rehearsal Structure

Phase 1: Orientation, Text Constellation, and Body Culture Research

- Introduction to the emBODY Method and shared rehearsal ethics
- Group exploration of drag culture and code-switching as embodied practices — their specific body culture and physical language
- Physical investigation of the court body culture vocabulary: what does required performance feel like across multiple identity axes simultaneously?
- Each performer's individual body culture research: what specifically does your body suppress in compliance, and what does it do when that suppression lifts?

- Introduction to stage combat practice with Sarah Flanagan

Phase 2: Composition, Score Development, and Physical Transformation

- Development of the two movement vocabularies — court and forest — through the method's circuits
- Building Rosalind's Ganymede transformation as a full body culture shift — the intersection of code-switch and drag performance in one body's arc
- Wrestling match and combat choreography development with Sarah Flanagan as a patriarchal body culture confrontation sequence
- Development of the songs as collective physical ensemble scores
- Textile and costume work integrated into physical rehearsal — each performer discovering how their specific body culture transformation manifests in relationship to what they wear

Phase 3: Rehearsal, Design Integration, and Performance

- Locking of production structure and full physical score
- Refinement of physical and vocal scores for repeatable performance
- Integration of lighting and sound design that supports the court and forest body culture contrast
- Technical rehearsals and public performances with optional facilitated talkbacks

8. Ensemble, Space, and Community Context

As You Like It: Body, Belonging, and Liberation is envisioned as a production whose specific artistic argument depends on who is in the room. The composite queer and cultural world is not built from the outside in — it is built from the bodies of the ensemble outward. Casting is approached with intentionality around queer identity, cultural diversity, and gender expansiveness, because the production's physical research requires performers who have their own lived relationship to code-switching, drag, or both.

The production is rooted in collaboration between:

- A cast of performers and movers whose lived experience with queer identity, cultural body culture, and the specific navigation of compliance and liberation informs the research from the inside
- A directing and dramaturgical team aligned with the emBODY Method's somatic, ethical, and justice-conscious commitments
- Stage combat collaborator Sarah Flanagan, whose practice is embedded in the production's physical dramaturgy from early rehearsal
- Designers and production collaborators who value body-centered, resource-conscious, and textile-driven aesthetics

Rehearsal and performance at 95 Washington Street, Canton, MA situates the work in direct relationship with a local community. The production's conversation with The Bacchae gives the season a sustained arc for audiences who attend both — and a complete, standalone experience for those who encounter As You Like It as their entry point.

9. Timeline

Pre-Production

- Finalization of production schedule and performance window
- Casting of emBODY ensemble for As You Like It with intentional queer and cultural diversity
- Auditions: September 3, 6–10PM · 95 Washington Street, Canton, MA

Rehearsal Period — September 10 through October 29

- Sundays 10AM–1PM
- Mondays and Thursdays 6–10PM
- Stage combat sessions with Sarah Flanagan integrated throughout the rehearsal period

Technical Rehearsals — October 31 and November 1, 6–10PM

- Integration of lighting, sound, and textile design
- Final physical score refinement

Performances

- November 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15
- Optional post-show talkbacks and documentation of process

10. Anticipated Impact

As You Like It: Body, Belonging, and Liberation aims to:

- Offer a rigorous, justice-conscious physical theatre reimagining of Shakespeare that centers queer and cultural body culture, code-switching, and drag as its specific artistic and research frame
- Demonstrate how the emBODY Performance Method transforms canonical texts into physical theatre that is grounded in the specific lived body culture experience of the ensemble rather than in generic or universal claims about identity
- Build the first half of a season research arc — individual liberation — that finds its completion and counterpoint in the spring production of The Bacchae
- Generate physical scores, movement vocabularies, and body culture research that contribute to the emBODY Method's growing body of practice and inform future productions, labs, and publications
- Create a production with long-term touring potential as a complete, body-centered, minimal-production-requirement piece that can travel to diverse venues and communities
- Speak directly to queer and culturally diverse audiences who recognize their own body culture experience in the work — not as representation but as research in which their bodies are the instrument and the argument

The production treats As You Like It not only as a story about one figure's escape into the woods, but as a lens on the specific body culture experience of navigating a world that requires performance of compliance on multiple fronts simultaneously — and what becomes possible in the moment that performance finally stops. The ensemble does not perform that argument. They live it.