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MICHIGAN WOMYN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL SETS THE RECORD "STRAIGHT"

Hart, Michigan - Seeking to correct misinformation widely distributed by "Camp Trans" organizers, Michigan Womyn's Music Festival founder and producer Lisa Vogel released the following clarification:

"Since 1976, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival has been created by and for womyn-born womyn, that is, womyn who were born as and have lived their entire life experience as womyn. Despite claims to the contrary by Camp Trans organizers, the Festival remains a rare and precious space intended for womyn-born womyn."

The facts surrounding the interactions between WWTMC and Camp Trans organizers are as follows:

In the months preceding this year's Festival, held August 8 - 3, there was communication between a Camp Trans organizer named Lorraine and Lisa Vogel. Letters from Lorraine continued during the Festival, when they were hand-delivered to the Festival's front gate from Camp Trans, which takes place on Forest Service Land across from Festival property. On Tuesday, August 8th, Camp Trans organizers inquired at the Box Office about Festival admission. They were told that the Festival is intended for womyn-born womyn, and that those who seek to purchase tickets are asked to respect that intention. Camp Trans organizers left without purchasing tickets. They returned the next day and were given the same information. Lorraine at that point chose to purchase a ticket.

On Wednesday, August 9th, Vogel sent a reply letter to Lorraine which stated in part:

"I deeply desire healing in our communities, and I can see and feel that you want that too. I would love for you and the other organizers of Camp Trans to find the place in your hearts and politics to support and honor space for womyn who have had the experience of being born and living their life as womyn. I ask that you respect that womon born womon is a valid and honorable gender identity. I also ask that you respect that womyn born womyn deeply need our space -- as do all communities who create space to gather, whether that be womyn of color, trans womyn or trans men... I wish you well, I want healing, and I believe this is possible between our communities, but not at the expense of deeply needed space for womyn born womyn."

Vogel's written request that Camp Trans organizers respect the Festival as womyn-born-womyn space was consistent with information provided to Camp Trans organizers who approached the Festival Box Office. "Does this represent a change in the Festival's commitment to womyn-born womyn space? No." says Vogel. "If a transwoman purchased a ticket, it represents nothing more than that womon choosing to disrespect the stated intention of this Festival."

"As feminists, we call upon the transwomen's community to help us maintain womyn only space, including spaces created by and for womyn-born womyn. As sisters in struggle, we call upon the transwomen's community to meditate upon, recognize and respect the differences in our shared experiences and our group identities even as we stand shoulder to shoulder as women, and as members of the greater queer community. We once again ask the transwomen's community to recognize that the need for a separate womyn-born womyn space does not stand at odds with recognizing the larger and beautiful diversity of our shared community."

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In an effort to build further understanding of the Festival's perspective, answers are provided to questions raised by the recent Camp Trans press release (which contains misinformation):

Why would the Festival sell a ticket to an individual who is not a womon-born womon if the Festival is intended as a space created by and for womyn-born womyn?

From its inception the Festival has been home to womyn who could be considered gender outlaws, either because of their sexual orientation (lesbian, bisexual, polyamorous, etc.) or their gender presentation (butch, bearded, androgynous, femme - and everything in between). Many womyn producing and attending the Michigan Festival are gender variant womyn. Many of the younger womyn consider themselves differently gendered, many of the older womyn consider themselves butch womyn, and the dialogue is alive and well on the Land as our generational mix continues to inform our ongoing understanding about gender identity and the range of what it means to be female. Michigan provides one of the safest places on the planet for womyn who live and present themselves to the world in the broadest range of gender expression. As Festival organizers, we refuse to question anyone's gender. We instead ask that womon-born womon be respected as a valid gender identity, and that the broad queer and gender-diverse communities respect our commitment to one week each year for womyn-born womyn to gather.

Did the Festival previously refuse to sell tickets to transwomen?

The Festival has consistently communicated our intention about who the Festival is created by and for. In 1999, Camp Trans protesters caused extensive disruption of the Festival, in which a male from Camp Trans publicly displayed male genitals in a common shower area and widespread disrespect of women's space was voiced. The following year, our 25th anniversary, we issued a statement that we would not sell tickets to those entering for the purpose of disrupting the Festival. While this is widely pointed to by Camp Trans supporters as a "policy," it was a situational response to the heated circumstances of 1999, intended to reassure the womyn who have attended for years that the Festival remained - as it does today - intended for womyn who were born as and have lived their entire life experience as womyn, despite the disrespect and intentional disruption Camp Trans initiated.

Is the Festival transphobic?

We strongly assert there is nothing transphobic with choosing to spend one week with womyn who were born as, and have lived their lives as, womyn. It is a powerful, uncommon experience that womyn enjoy during this one week of living in the company of other womyn-born womyn. There are many opportunities in the world to share space with the entire queer community, and other spaces that welcome all who define themselves as female. Within the rich diversity now represented by the broader queer community, we believe there is room for all affinity groups to enjoy separate, self-determined, supportive space if they choose. Supporting womyn-born womyn space is no more inherently transphobic than supporting womyn of color space is racist. We believe that womyn-born womyn have a right to gather separately from the greater womyn's community. We refuse to be forced into false dichotomies that equate being pro-womyn-born womyn space with being anti-trans; indeed, many of the womyn essential to the Michigan Festival are leaders and supporters of trans-solidarity work. The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival respects the transsexual community as integral members of the greater queer community. We call upon the transsexual community in turn to respect and support womyn-born womyn space and to recognize that a need for a separate womyn-born womyn space does not stand at odds with recognizing transwomen as part of the larger diversity of the womyn's community.

What is Camp Trans?

Camp Trans was first created in 1994 as a protest to the Festival as womyn-born womyn space. Camp Trans re-emerged in 1999 and has been held across the road from the Festival every year since. A small gathering of people who camp and hold workshops and a few performances on Forest Service land across the road, Camp Trans attempts to educate womyn who are attending the Festival about their point of view regarding trans inclusion at the Festival. At times they have advocated for the Festival to welcome anyone who, for whatever period of time, defines themselves as female, regardless of the sex they were born into. At other times, Camp Trans activists have advocated opening the Festival to all sexes and genders.

What is the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival? It is the largest and longest running womyn's festival in the United States. Since the first Festival in 1976, tens of thousands of womyn from all corners of the world have made the pilgrimage to this square mile of land in Northern Michigan. The essence of the Festival is that it is one week a year that is by, for and about the glorious diversity of womyn-born womyn and we continue to stand by our labor of love to create this space. Our focus has not changed in the 31 years of our celebration and it remains fixed on the goal of providing a celebratory space for a shared womyn-born-womyn experience.