

Transcript - Shine True

1. Please introduce yourself and give us a quick synopsis of your new series Shine True

Vanessa (SVP Studio Canada, Vice Media Group): SHINE TRUE is an 8-part documentary series celebrating the trans and gender non-conforming community by helping them overcome dysphoria and anxiety, and getting them to a place where they can freely and finally present in the way they feel.

2. Tell us about the show's co-hosts, Lucas Silveira and Richie Shazam.

Michelle (Series Producer, Director): Lucas Silveira is an internationally-renowned musician best known as the frontman for The Cliks and was the first transgender man in history to be signed to a major record label. He also works as an activist and life coach, focusing on trans and gender non-conforming clients. He is based in Toronto, Ontario.

Richie Shazam is a non-binary fashion influencer who works as a photographer, model and muse to celebrated designers like Valentino and Margiela. She has developed a huge instagram following and has appeared on the pages of Vogue, Interview Magazine and The New York Times.

3. You set out to create a makeover-style series featuring transgender people. How is the focus of Shine True different from more conventional makeover shows? How does your visual/aesthetic approach differ from the more conventional reality TV-style series?

Vanessa: Our goal was to create a completely unique but very necessary documentary series about transgender and gender non-conforming people. While a make-over is part of each episode, that element is a light touch to the overall journey of our 8 participants and their very personal transformational stories. Each episode structurally follows a ½ hour format structure, but the unique and very personal element of each participant's story allowed us to really amplify the documentary narrative, making each episode stand out individually from one another.

Michelle: What sets SHINE TRUE apart from a conventional makeover show is the individuals we are profiling and their unique challenges. The trans and GNC (gender non-conforming) community are not just dealing with a surface / external spiff-up, but instead they are in the process of an entire metamorphosis from the inside out. To that end, we worked as a

documentary unit to understand the subject's unique needs and intersections and provided guidance and experiences to gently guide them to become a truer version of themselves.

4. Your series explores the experiences of members of the trans and gender non-conforming community. Why is it so important to shine a light on the experiences of these individuals?

Michelle: While the fight for gay rights and equality is decades old, the struggles of the trans and GNC community are just emerging as a mainstream concern. There are still so many misconceptions, fears and prejudices that need to be addressed and the only way things change is by exposure. The hope is that the more we can get to know the trans and gender non-confirming community personally, as is the case when you are invited into a journey like this, the more we will be able to bridge this gap and develop understanding and empathy for this misunderstood group.

5. What are some of the issues specific to members of trans and gender non-conforming communities that you wanted to address on the show (for example, trans people from strictly religious families, how gender non-conformity and cultural ethnicity are sometimes at odds i.e. Quinceañera, going for a job interview, “finding their place within the queer community as well as outside of it”, etc.)?

Michelle: Inclusive casting is a huge part of why this series is so effective. We cast all 8 episodes with POC (people of colour) as subjects. As a result, we are dealing with intersections of identity - i.e. Azul is not just non-binary but also Mexican, which adds a different texture to their life and our story.

Throughout the season, we touch on everything from a religious Filipinx family to a Caribbean-Canadian family and many, many more. It's at this intersection of identity where we get to the heart of the person and get to know and respect them not just by their gender but by their entire person.

6. The series features members of the trans, queer, and gender non-conforming community who have already experienced navigating this space. Why is it so important to feature role models like these for young people still discovering their gender identity?



Michelle: The queer community is unique in that we often have to look outside of our birth families for support and guidance. Often times, one's birth family is not experienced and, therefore, not equipped to help a young person navigate a non-conforming gender identity. To that end, it is crucially important (and often life-saving) to have queer elders to turn to who can meet you where you are at, not judge you, and give you the guidance you need to carefully navigate these difficult transitions and moments in life.

It was important to us to introduce our subjects to individuals who understand their identities as closely as possible, in ways even our hosts couldn't relate. For example, we brought in Hunter Shackelford, a Black fat activist, to meet with Prism because neither of our hosts share those identities. We also introduced Azul to non-binary Mexican visual artist Vicente Ugartechea as neither of our hosts is Latinx or a visual artist. It is these mentors that queer youth desperately need to help ground them and make them feel like they're not alone.

7. Shine True will be airing on OutTV, Canada's only national LGBTQ TV network. What is it like to have the support of a network like this in sharing your series with the world?

Vanessa: From the early pitch, OutTV was a strong supporter of this concept. Their strong track record of producing original content with a very audience focused strategy felt like Shine True could be the perfect fit. It has been a true partnership from the beginning. They are strategically very involved while allowing us the creative freedom to explore these unique stories. COVID presented its challenges throughout production, but with their full support, we were able to pivot as needed and safely produce the best content for their linear and VOD platform.

OutTV and Vice Media Group share a perspective in speaking to underserved audiences. For this reason, we worked so well together on the production of Shine True.

8. Can you speak to the importance of institutions like the Bell Fund in supporting a series like this, and what it means as creators, and more specifically as trans/gender non-conforming individuals to get your stories out there?

Vanessa: Independent production funds like the Bell Fund provide critical financial support to Canadian productions. We could not have made this special series without the generous support we received from the Bell Fund. The LGBTQ2S community has told us how essential it is for young people to see positive and accurate representations of themselves in mainstream



media; that in some cases, this can be life saving. It is our mission with Shine True to promote understanding and self-acceptance, and to connect all viewers to the very human struggle of growing up and becoming your true self.