

# Standing Up to Trans Tyrants

The choreographer who refused to dance to the transgender beat.



by Bruce Bawer

Now 46 years old, the British choreographer Rosie Kay founded the Rosie Kay Dance Company in 2004 and, to [quote](#) the BBC, “has been making challenging, socially committed and political work for decades.” She’s the kind of artist, in other words, that the left-wing media love to celebrate. In August 2020, for example, when she premiered *5 Soldiers* – for which she’d prepared by embedding herself in an infantry battalion – the *Guardian* reviewer summed up his [verdict](#) as follows: “The life of a soldier is already full of choreography, and Kay works with that to make dance that feels rooted in reality.” In May 2021, the *Guardian*’s critic [described](#) her dance piece *Adult Female Dancer*, about “a woman’s struggle to define herself, inside and out,” as “superb.” And in September 2021,

her *Romeo + Juliet* was praised by not one but two *Guardian* writers, both of whom [used](#) the [word](#) “brilliant.”

Then, quite suddenly, Kay’s star fell. On the evening of August 28 of last year, she held a dinner party at her home for the *Romeo + Juliet* troupe, which skewed very young. It began well enough. The wine, by all accounts, flowed. But when Kay was asked about her next project, an adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s 1928 novel *Orlando*, the conversation entered what is, in high-culture circles in the year 2022, exceedingly dangerous territory. Since *Orlando* is about a man who changes sex mysteriously, it was no surprise that mention of it led to a discussion of gender. Two of Kay’s dancers, as it happened, identify as “non-binary.” She asked them about that.

“Initially,” one of the dancers later told the BBC, “I was OK with her asking about why we identify as non-binary. It’s OK to be a bit curious. But her repeated questioning stepped into micro-aggression territory, then into something more potent. If you’ve seen as many YouTube videos by self-identified transgender people as I have, you know that asking questions about their pronouns and the like is more than welcome until, suddenly, it isn’t. There’s a fine line between the unearned attention that they live for and the “microaggressions” they claim to experience when they’re given even the slightest bit of pushback. “She was asking us,” the dancer continued, “to justify our existence, asking people to confirm their genitalia, as if that was evidence of who somebody is.” Note that last bit: in a society that’s been captured by transgender ideology, it’s offensive to suggest that a person’s sexual identity can be identified by taking a look at his or her genitalia.

Kay’s own version of what happened that evening is this: after she mentioned *Orlando*, one of her guests maintained that the lead role could only be played by a transgender dancer. This, of course, is the new orthodoxy. In 1993, Tom Hanks played a gay lawyer in *Philadelphia*; in 1999, Hilary Swank plays a

trans male in *Boys Don't Cry*; in 2008, Sean Penn played a gay activist in *Milk*. All three won Oscars, at least partly because they were considered brave to have crossed that gender line. In 2022, however, the PC view of such casting is that it isn't courageous but contemptible: how dare a straight actor take such a role?

After her dinner party, Kay assumed the tensions would "blow over." *Au contraire*. One dancer quit. Six dancers filed a complaint with the dance company's board. One of them, Iona McGuire, who is "non-binary," has been described as being "at the centre of the row." "We weren't striving to cancel Rosie," McGuire later insisted. "I was hoping for acknowledgement of her blatant transphobia and an apology for her constant refusal to use my correct pronouns." Kay denied that she'd dismissed McGuire's chosen pronouns – even though she should have felt entirely free to do so. As for being "transphobic," it's not enough these days to live and let live; if you aren't willing to admit that, say, a person can actually be "non-binary," you're a transphobe.

The dancers' complaint triggered an "internal grievance process." Kay was exonerated. She apologized for having caused offense and "stressed the importance of respecting different viewpoints." But she declined to knuckle under to totalitarian ideology, leading the dancers to conclude, as one of them put it, that she hadn't truly owned "the fact that she made transphobic remarks." In other words, it wasn't enough for Kay to be sorry for hurting their feelings: she was expected to do nothing less than embrace in its entirety an aggressive totalitarian fiction that considers the statement of objective biological facts as an expression of bigotry. So some of the dancers appealed to the board. Another investigation ensued, this one by "an external HR company." Deciding she'd had enough, Kay resigned on December 7 of last year. Emotionally battered and robbed of the business that still bears her name, she licked her wounds, recovered, started a new dance company

called K2C0, and eventually went public with her story. Whereupon the dancers complained about *that*: by telling the media about their effort to bring down her career, they charged, Kay was endangering *their* careers.

Such is the mentality of today's spoiled young wokesters. It's not just that they expect you to march in lockstep with them – as evidenced by the brats at various publishing houses who've kicked up fusses (in some cases successfully) over their bosses' plans to put out books by intellectual and cultural titans of our age like Woody Allen and Jordan Peterson – monumental figures whom these entry-level nullities are dumb enough to disdain. To such young people, raised in privilege by indulgent parents who eschewed discipline and “educated” by teachers and professors who were more interested in inculcating knee-jerk leftist attitudes than in shaping rigorously analytical young minds, the idea of having a boss, and obeying his or her orders, is utterly alien. Kay expected that her dancers would be grateful to her for throwing them a nice dinner. But their sort expects no less. Consider Eric Frohnhofer, the numbskull Twitter engineer who [tweeted](#) disrespectfully on November 14 about his new boss, Elon Musk, only to be surprised when Musk fired him (in a tweet, of course). Then there's the recent [outrage](#) over Musk's decision to ban free lunches – estimated cost: \$400 per meal – for Twitter employees.

As Claire Allfree noted in *The Telegraph*, one of the many ironies of this tale is that Kay, who “has experienced serious sexual assault and nearly died while giving birth to her son,” has made a point of “explor[ing] perceptions of gender in her dance.” *5 Soldiers* “challenged gender stereotypes within the army” and *Adult Female Dancer* pondered misogyny. But none of this is enough for the woke mob. In one of her podcast interviews, Kay discussed the fact that dance is by definition preoccupied with the body, and with performance; but she insisted that the place for performance is on the stage or

screen, and that the rules of real life cannot be altered in order to embrace the essentially performative phenomenon of men pretending to be women.

*Bravissima.* How is it, you may wonder, that a woman who in many ways is obviously a standard-issue member of the British cultural elite refused to bow to the gender police? The answer lies in her family history. As she told Allfree last August, and explained to Laurence Fox in a YouTube [video](#) posted last month, Kay is the granddaughter of Polish refugees. As a child, she heard from them about the intellectual tyranny they'd experienced under the Stasi. Shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Kay herself lived and worked for a while in her ancestral country, where Communism had ended but freedom had yet to fully establish itself. "You speak too much," she was told by anxious colleagues. "You speak too loudly." It was unsettling; she was happy to return home. But now, she says, the atmosphere in Britain – and of course this applies to much of the West as well – is eerily reminiscent of her Polish interlude. Meanwhile, of course, the Poles, who for obvious reasons recognize despotism when they see it, have made clear their total unwillingness to compromise their post-Soviet freedoms in the spurious name of "tolerating" transgenderism. Funny, isn't it, how these things work?

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