

—Slug:.....COMM-0849.arts.Rev\_Yolanda  
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—For section.....The Arts  
—Format.....Column  
—Dateline.....Windham  
—Article Number:.....42936

**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 The power of loving one's self

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 'My hope is that we will connect with compassion for  
3 each other's stories/lives, as we move forward together in creating  
4 a society based on liberty and justice for all,' says Rev. Yolanda, a  
5 trans genderqueer musician, actor, and performer who now lives  
6 in Windham

#####END SUBHED#####

7 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

8 REV. YOLANDA and The Circle of Love offered a benefit  
9 concert for the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont in early  
10 November at the First Congregational Church in Dummerston.

11 A moving, upbeat show of originals and covers, a wide  
12 range of sound and intentions, it was the first local appearance of  
13 the Windham-based trans femme genderqueer  
14 singer/songwriter/performance artist/interfaith minister.

15 Word is she'll be back there in February, again with her  
16 band: Freddy Freeman, Jay Freeman, and Tyler Wansley.

17 Before then, audiences can see Rev. Yolanda in the Rock  
18 River Players' (RRP) No Kings Cabaret this weekend when she'll  
19 perform "I Pledge Allegiance to My Self," 10 minutes of music  
20 and spoken word, about the "power of loving oneself  
21 completely."

22 The new performance piece "shares personal stories of  
23 my life starting in fourth grade in Alabama where I came out of  
24 the closet; learned about slavery and about the genocide of  
25 Native Americans; was bullied by the principal and students at  
26 school; and decided to pledge allegiance to My Self."

27 That commitment "has carried me through a life of joy  
28 and grief that includes becoming HIV positive in 1980s New York  
29 City, finding the love of my life in Rev. Glen Morton Ganaway,  
30 and enduring the extreme grief of his passing in 2024," she said.

31 "I'm sharing these stories now as we deal with a threat to  
32 our country and world that I have never seen in my lifetime," Rev.  
33 Yolanda continued. "My hope is that we will connect with  
34 compassion for each other's stories/lives, as we move forward  
35 together in creating a society based on liberty and justice for all."

36 \* \* \*

37 REV. YOLANDA, formerly of Burlington and New York City,  
38 has been making music/theater/TV/film/performance art for well  
39 over 40 years. With nine CDs of originals to her name, she's won  
40 a host of awards and honors from OutMusician of the Year to  
41 induction into both the New York Blues Hall and StoneWall  
42 Society LGBTQAI+ Halls of Fame.

43 From Muscle Shoals, Alabama, "the hit recording capital  
44 of the world" where luminaries like Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin,  
45 the Rolling Stones created iconic albums, Rev. Yolanda recalls

46 that her father, who worked in radio and television, associated  
47 with such recording artists. "So I grew up learning to sing and  
48 play instruments."

49 After college in Alabama, Rev. Yolanda spent time in  
50 New York City in the 1980s. Growing up "a pretty wild kid," she  
51 "tried to get my thing going there. And that was quite a ride."

52 She soon met a New York-based group, the Radical  
53 Faeries, which was starting a commune in Vermont, and she  
54 eventually migrated to Burlington, where, in 1994, she came out  
55 as transgender.

56 There she soon grew a following, becoming deeply  
57 involved in queer communities and in the Burlington music  
58 scene with her band, Yolanda and the Plastic Family. She started a  
59 drag ball, too, "which is still going on — a 30-year fundraiser for  
60 Vermont Cares."

61 "At that time in Vermont — the '90s, you know — the  
62 LGBTQIA community was becoming visible, very out," she said.

63 She and drag queen Cherie Tartt started a public access  
64 cable TV show that was "wildly popular and affected a whole  
65 bunch of folks — a generation of young folks who grew up  
66 watching us."

67 It was in that stage of her life that Rev. Yolanda, already  
68 holding an M.A. in theater, specializing in the oral interpretation  
69 of literature, earned a MFA in performance art at Vermont College  
70 of Norwich University in 1995.

71 In 2001, after roughly eight years in Burlington, Rev.  
72 Yolanda returned to New York City, where she developed her  
73 original musical blend of rock, pop, country and jazz with her  
74 band.

75 The band, she recalls, "became so popular that I was  
76 getting invites from CBGB," the infamous music club.

77 The band would go back and forth between Burlington  
78 and New York City and to play those gigs, "but then I decided I'm  
79 just going to move back to New York and see what I could do as  
80 Yolanda, because when I lived there before, I wasn't Yolanda."

81           She met Glen Ganaway the year she returned, and he  
82           would soon become her husband.

83           “He was a real grounding influence on me,” she said.  
84           “And literally he was the son of a preacher man. Glen was a  
85           guru, a teacher. He was an incredible spiritual being.”

86           She described his influence as “wonderful.”

87           “I really loved church when I was growing up and I  
88           always felt a connection to spirit,” Yolanda said. “When I was  
89           young, my goal was to be a music minister. That’s what I wanted  
90           to do when I was 16.

91           “But then life took over and all these other things  
92           happened. But Glen and I both had always wanted to be in  
93           ministry. So we decided to go to One Spirit Interfaith Seminary in  
94           New York.”

95           Ordained in 2011, the duo started a church in the New  
96           York City club scene.

97           “We called it ‘Church with a Two Drink Minimum.’ That  
98           was the way to do it because so many, especially LGBTQAI folks,  
99           have been damaged by religion. So this is not a religious thing  
100           that I’m doing. It’s an inward spiritual thing. It’s really about  
101           finding authenticity in you and in your own personal connection  
102           to what you may call spirit or God — or whatever.”

103           When Covid hit in 2020, Ganaway and Rev. Yolanda  
104           joined Awakening Together, which had already established an  
105           online presence.

106           “It was built as an online church. We knew those folks,  
107           we knew the founder, and we had a really great relationship. So  
108           we just merged our ministries,” she said.

109           “But again, it’s not a religion. It’s not Christian, Jewish,  
110           Muslim. What we talk about are truth principles. It’s what we call  
111           non-dual or interfaith: all are welcome. It’s not just an LGBTQAI  
112           following. No, no. We wanted to focus at the beginning on  
113           LGBTQAI because folks have been so damaged, but it’s much,  
114           much broader than that. People join in from all over. It’s very  
115           inclusive.”

117 YOLANDA AND GANAWAY had shared a love of Vermont,  
118 too, and so they decided to buy property in Windham in 2020.

119 "And then my husband unfortunately passed away in  
120 2024," she said.

121 The couple had previously planned to move that summer  
122 up to the lot they'd bought, "and so I went ahead and did that,"  
123 Yolanda said.

124 "He died in March, and I moved up here in July. I've  
125 always loved the Brattleboro area. I'm close enough that I  
126 consider this the Brattleboro area, and I've always loved it around  
127 here, so that's why I'm here," she said. "I want to spend the rest of  
128 my life in Vermont. I think of Vermont as really my home."

129 On the board of the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont,  
130 Rev. Yolanda seeks deeper community engagement and thus  
131 reached out to Rock River Players about performing in their  
132 annual winter cabaret. She embraces the RRP standard that the  
133 lively arts are essential in all times, especially in the tough ones.

134 "I really feel that standing strong with each other and  
135 connecting with each other is so incredibly important. And we  
136 will get through this. I've lived for — whatever — 69 years. And I  
137 grew up around redneck bullies in Alabama, so I've been dealing  
138 with this all my life.

139 "I know it's really horrible right now. This is probably the  
140 worst I've ever seen it be.

141 "However, I have a positive feeling as we're moving  
142 through this, that most of America does not want to live this way.  
143 And most people do not care who you love or who you're  
144 married to."

145 \* \* \*

146 "BEING HUMAN is a divine experience. That's how I see  
147 it," Rev. Yolanda reflected. "And the ego can certainly cloud our  
148 experience, as we're seeing right now in the world."

149 For her, that's "a perspective of ego way out of control.  
150 So what is important to me is to make sure I'm grounded, and

151 centered, and know that the truth of my being really is joy. And  
152 then that expression comes out in my music."

153 In talking with Rev. Yolanda, one couldn't help notice the  
154 complicated and intriguing paintings behind her.

155 She has been a painter of fine art, too, "since I was about  
156 5 years old," she explained. "That was my first expression." She  
157 grew up "wanting to be a famous artist."

158 Rev. Yolanda endorses the essential value of finding a  
159 vehicle for personal expression. With a brother who was a star  
160 athlete, she sought her own route, and her parents encouraged  
161 her: "When I wanted to start taking art classes, my parents were  
162 so on board, and I really appreciate that."

163 \* \* \*

164 REV. YOLANDA IS also a guest star role in *Beauty*, a new  
165 feature television series from prolific creator Ryan Murphy that  
166 will premiere this month on Hulu.

167 It'll be a sci-fi drama — "my favorite genre," Yolanda  
168 said.

169 "I don't show up until episode six, which is a little bit  
170 into it," she said. "But my role actually is pivotal to the plot,  
171 which is really cool. I'm playing a trans woman, and it was so  
172 beautifully written, and I'm really, really, really proud to have this  
173 opportunity."

174 She noted that she has worked in TV and film, "but not in  
175 this big of a feature role, especially not in prime time: it's really  
176 upbeat and really fabulous. So I'm pretty excited."

177 Rev. Yolanda will also release a new album, *single by*  
178 *single*, which is scheduled for release Jan. 26.

179 \* \* \*

180 For more info and to get her music, visit [yolanda.net](http://yolanda.net). For  
181 information and/or tickets for this weekend's Rock River Players  
182 cabaret, in which Rev. Yolanda will close act one, visit  
183 [rockriverplayers.org](http://rockriverplayers.org).

#####END TEXT#####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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184       **ANNIE LANDENBERGER** is an arts writer and columnist  
185       for *The Commons*. She also is one half of the musical duo Bard  
186       Owl, with partner T. Breeze Verdant.

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#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####
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