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Shawna Virago. Photo by Lindsay Gauthier

Best of the Bay 2024 Editors' Pick: Shawna Virago

The groundbreaking 'fairy godmother' of trans country music is an outspoken voice for queer rights and local independent arts.

By MARKE B.

DECEMBER 11, 2024

48 Hills editors and writers are picking their favorite Bay Area things of 2024 (and beyond).

“Despite 2024 being the fifth consecutive record-breaking year of anti-trans bills to be introduced across the US, leading up to re-election of Trump, there has also been a burst of unmatched creativity and a spirit of resilience from nonbinary and

transgender people,” powerhouse musician and longtime co-producer of the SF Trans Film Fest, [Shawna Virago](#), [told us last month](#).

“Am I surprised by the outcome of the election? No. Am I surprised about the millions of dollars spent in anti-transgender campaign ads by Trump’s team? No. Am I surprised there are millions of people who supported a racist, misogynistic, anti-trans hater for President? Hell, no!” she said.

“Trans people have been experiencing unprecedented levels of discrimination and violence for years now. The new administration might turn the anti-trans hatred knob up to 11, but trans and gender nonconforming people are powerful, we’ve weathered a lot already. I have faith in us. We’ll survive. But we need our cis-allies to step up and have our back.”

One of the most outspoken transgender voices in San Francisco for the past several decades, groundbreaker Virago represents everything we need right now: strength, perseverance, community dedication.

Oh, and an incredible artistic legacy, augmented this year with the release of alt-Americana, punky-tonk album *Blood in her Dreams*, cementing her presence as [“the fairy godmother of trans country artists.”](#) The album vividly tells the stories of a collection of characters, mostly from the city’s pre-Internet age, drawing on Virago’s vast experience of living here.

“I’ve been performing as my authentic self since the early ‘90s and I’m shining a lens on the stories from that time, showing the vulnerabilities and the defiance we all channeled to live authentically,” she says of the release.

Together with her partner, equally essential local trans artist Sean Dorsey of Sean Dorsey Dance, Virago is keeping the political edge and independent spirit of San Francisco’s queer art scene alive. “I believe in the power of creative expression to uplift and fight for a more positive future. Trans and gender-nonconforming people are resilient,” she says.