

The People's Joker

The People's Joker is a 2022 American parody superhero film directed by [Vera Drew](#), and written by Drew and [Bri LeRose](#). The film premiered on September 13, 2022, at the [2022 Toronto International Film Festival](#), but planned screenings of the film were canceled due to "rights issues".^[1] The film unofficially parodies characters from the [Batman](#) comics, and the main character is a transgender woman based on the [Joker](#), played by Drew. The film also features [Scott Aukerman](#), [Tim Heidecker](#), [Maria Bamford](#), [David Liebe Hart](#), [Robert Wuhl](#), and [Bob Odenkirk](#) in supporting roles.

Plot

In a dystopian world monitored by [Batman](#), a young child grows up in [Smallville, Kansas](#) idolizing the performers on a sketch comedy program, *UCB Live*. The protagonist's mother is disturbed when her child asks, "Was I born in the wrong body?" and immediately books a session with [Dr. Crane](#) of [Arkham Asylum](#), who prescribes [Smylex](#): a drug that forces its users to put on a happy face, even if they feel depression, anxiety, or [gender dysphoria](#).

Fifteen years later, our hero has grown up and moves to [Gotham City](#) to join the cast of *UCB Live*, dedicated as a [Jokeman](#) by a computer, who will be allowed to have an individual identity in the cast, unlike the women, who are all assigned to be nameless [Harlequins](#) that serve as back-up dancers. The process to become on-air talent includes paying \$15,000 and enduring [improv comedy](#) classes from *UCB* cast member [Ra's al Ghul](#). The hero strikes up a friendship with [Oswald Cobblepot](#), another struggling comedian who cannot afford the entrance fee and the duo decide that they will instead make their own comedy troupe. To avoid rules that outlaw unapproved humor, they will call their act "[anti-comedy](#)".

They set up in an abandoned warehouse at a dilapidated carnival and are quickly joined by a number of [law-breaking comedians](#) with their own deliberately unfunny and uncomfortable acts. One of these is [Jason "Mr. J" Todd](#), who dresses as a [Joker](#) of his own and tells Marxist [observational humor](#). Mr. J and the hero immediately strike up a bond and go

The People's Joker



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Vera Drew
Written by	Bri LeRose Vera Drew
Produced by	Joey Lyons
Starring	Vera Drew Lynn Downey Christian Calloway Griffin Kramer Kane Distler Nathan Faustyn Phil Braun David Liebe Hart Scott Aukerman Tim Heidecker Maria Bamford Bob Odenkirk
Cinematography	Nate Cornett
Edited by	Vera Drew
Music by	Justin Krol

on a date that includes Mr. J's revelation that he is a transgender man who recently left an abusive relationship. This helps encourage the protagonist to articulate that she is a transgender woman and the two plot to have her dive into a vat of estrogen to gender transition.

As the duo evade guards at the chemical plant, a retired Batman appears to stop them and it leaves Mr. J shaken. While the protagonist finally feels happy for the first time after emerging from the chemicals, Mr. J reveals that his ex is Batman. The crime-fighter adopted orphan Carrie Kelley who was trained to be his sidekick Robin. He later assisted with a gender transition to the identity of Jason Todd, but their relationship became toxic and sexual, in spite of their large age difference and the fact that Batman was a father figure to the seventeen year old.

	Quinn Scharber Danni Rowan Elias and the Error
Production company	Haunted Gay Ride Productions
Distributed by	<u>Altered Innocence</u>
Release dates	September 13, 2022 (TIFF) April 5, 2024 (United States)
Running time	92 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English

Batman continues to make public appearances, participating in a reality dating show contest, masquerading as a straight man and hosting *UCB Live*, enraging Jason. The protagonist takes the name of Joker the Harlequin: a woman with a comedic identity of her own who is trying to be happy but is stuck in the abusive and self-sabotaging patterns of Mr. J.

When Joker's mother comes to visit and explain that she wants to apologize for how she raised her child, it comes when Joker is breaking up with Mr. J and decides to take on the comedy establishment by hacking into a broadcast of *UCB Live*, daring producer Lorne Michaels to let her host instead of Batman.

Michaels agrees, seeing it as a way to get good ratings. Batman tries to intervene, but the entire anti-comedy troupe fights him off, with Pamela Isley's enormous venus flytrap eating Batman. Joker manages to make peace with Mr. J before setting out for a grueling day-long training session with Ra's, who reveals that there is a prophecy of a people's hero who can liberate comedy from its constraints and believes it to be Joker the Harlequin.

On the night of the show, Michaels pumps Smylex into the crowd to ensure that they laugh no matter what Joker says and she finally has a moment of "supersanity" where she understands what she needs to be happy and how it cannot come from validation from outsiders. She materializes in the Fifth Dimension alongside the powerful Mx. Mxyzptlk who offers to rearrange the time stream for Joker. She asks that her old friend Oswald be given the fame and power of Batman. For herself she only asks to have one happy memory from childhood: she has a vision of 1992, riding in the car with mom, as they sing along to "The Joker" and laugh.

After the credits, we are told that Joker will return in *The People's Nightmare: Freddy vs Joker* and the glove of Freddy Krueger appears on screen.^{[1][2]}

Cast

- Vera Drew as Joker the Harlequin/Vera, a trans woman from Smallville trying to break into the world of stand-up comedy.
 - Griffin Kramer as a young, pre-transition Vera, whose deadname is bleeped.

- Lynn Downey as Vera's mother
- Kane Distler as Mr. J, an emotionally manipulative trans man who is a composite of Jason Todd and the Jared Leto incarnation of the Joker from Suicide Squad.
- Nathan Faustyn as The Penguin, Joker's slacker friend and another aspiring comedian.
- David Liebe Hart as Ra's al Ghul, the emcee of UCB, Gotham City's only comedy showcase.
- Phil Braun as Batman, a closeted gay man with far-right politics, who was Mr. J's abuser.
- Maria Bamford as Lorne Michaels, the controlling producer of UCB. Saturday Night Live star Sarah Sherman originally voiced the role but asked to be recast following the Toronto Film Festival premiere.
- Christian Calloway as Dr. Jonathan Crane, who prescribes the young Vera with Smylex, an ineffective antidepressant with grotesque side effects.
- Trevor Drinkwater as The Riddler, another aspiring comedian.
- Ruin Carroll as Poison Ivy, a non-binary aspiring comedian.
- Tim Heidecker as Perry White, a belligerent Alex Jones-style political commentator.
- Scott Aukerman as Mr. Freeze
- Bob Odenkirk as Bob the Goon
- Arden Hughes as the UCB Computer
- Robert Wuhl as himself, an actor in superhero films appearing via a Cameo
- Alec Robbins as Mr. Boop
- Cricket Arrison as the Creeper. Film critic/bartender Mike Vanderbilt originally appeared as The Creeper in early versions of the film but was recast after sexual assault allegations were made against him.^[3]
- Mia Moore Marchant as The Huntress
- Ember Knight as Mxy
- Sandy Honig as Mr. Boop's Wife
- Eliot Glazer as Lil Timmy Too Times
- Denali Winter as Clark Kent
- Bambi Belle as Lois Lane
- Rome L. Davis as the Social Worker

Production

In late 2019, co-writer Bri LeRose encouraged Vera Drew to re-edit the film Joker. While working on the re-edit, Drew began to think about how the characters reflected her own life, stating "I knew I needed to do some sort of big creative project around gender, comedy, and mom issues".^{[4][5]} Drew originally planned to re-edit "every single Batman movie" along with other films to make the film,^[4] but those scenes were later edited out.^[6] Drew crowdsourced both the budget for the production and the artwork; more than 100 artists provided backdrops and character animation for the film.^[4] In the process, the final film became a coming-of-age story^[7] and not merely a parody pastiche.

Release

According to Drew, "a media conglomerate" sent her "an angry letter (misreported as a 'cease and desist') pressuring to not screen" shortly before the premiere.^{[8][5]} Some media outlets assumed this to be Warner Bros. Discovery, the parent company to DC Comics, but neither Drew nor Warner Bros. have confirmed this.^{[1][9]}

On September 14, 2022, a day after the film had premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, subsequent screenings of the film were canceled. The website for TIFF stated, "The filmmaker has withdrawn this film due to rights issues".^[10] The film has attempted to receive copyright exemption under fair use for being a parody,^{[7][11][12]} and a title card displayed before the film began stated "Any copyright or trademark infringement was not done intentionally", among other things.^[9] In a statement to Variety, Drew said: "We're looking for buyers and distribution partners who will protect us and make this film accessible to trans people and their families everywhere".^[9]

On September 21, Drew also pulled the film from other film festivals where it had been slated to screen, although it was unclear whether this was motivated by another copyright infringement threat or simply to help the film gain a distribution deal.^[13]

The first American showing occurred for the 2023 Outfest film festival in Los Angeles on July 15, 2023.^[14]

The People's Joker was released theatrically in the United States on April 5, 2024.^[15]

On May 6, 2024, Vera Drew confirmed in an X.com post that *The People's Joker* would release on physical media and streaming platforms by the end of the year.^[16]

Reception

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 95% of 73 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.5/10. The website's consensus reads: "*The People's Joker* uses classic characters in impressively inventive ways, working within a familiar framework to tell an invigorating story of self-acceptance."^[17] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 76 out of 100, based on 17 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[18]

Peter Debruge of Variety described the film as "reflect[ing] the deliberately outrageous, ironically distanced variety found in internet memes and Adult Swim series" and as "using millennial meta-irony ... to critique the institutions [Drew] once held dear".^[19] Katie Rife of Polygon stated, "in an age where corporate IP has become a de facto religion in global cinema culture, *The People's Joker* is a blasphemous Molotov cocktail of a movie, with a unique and valuable point of view. And it's hilarious, too".^[1] Jude Dry of IndieWire gave it a B+ and wrote: "Underneath the satirical madness lies a genuinely moving story of self-acceptance, self-love, and the inspiring act of an artist stepping into her power. All jokes aside, the people deserve to see it."^[20]


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External links

- [Official website \(<https://www.thepeoplesjoker.com/>\)](https://www.thepeoplesjoker.com/) 
 - *The People's Joker* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/vm14145050305>) at [AllMovie](#)
 - *The People's Joker* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21651430/>) at [IMDb](#)
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