

HARPER STEELE

b. August 1961

TV COMEDY
& SCREENWRITER

“[T]here isn’t a trans person I’ve met who doesn’t have a sense of humor about themselves.”

She is an Emmy-winning comedy writer famous for her work on SNL.

Harper Steele is a comedy writer best known for her work on “Saturday Night Live” (“SNL”). After coming out as a transgender woman, she brought attention to trans-related issues in the acclaimed documentary “Will & Harper,” co-starring the comedian Will Ferrell.

Steele was raised by two University of Iowa professors. She attended Iowa City High School but struggled academically and socially until she discovered the theater department in her senior year.

Though she had difficulty with spelling and grammar, Steele aspired to be a writer. She enrolled in a writing class at the University of Iowa, where she learned there are many ways to write and that she might achieve her dream despite her shortcomings. She graduated in 1985 with a degree in English.

Ten years later, Steele earned a coveted position as a writer for the comedy sketch show, “SNL,” where she worked for 13 years. She was promoted to head writer in 2004.

Steele was nominated for four Emmy Awards and won a Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Variety Special in 2002. She left “SNL” in 2008 and took a position as creative director for the production company Funny or Die. In addition to TV, she has also co-written multiple films, including “The Ladies Man” (2000), “Casa de mi padre” (2012), and “Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga” (2020).

At 61, Steele came out as a transgender woman to her close friends. She struggled with gender dysphoria for much of her life but believed that coming out sooner—especially in the male-dominated field of comedy—would have damaged her career. Steele transitioned and publicly reintroduced herself in the 2024 documentary “Will & Harper.”

Steele and Ferrell have been close friends since 1995 when they began working together at “SNL.” When Steele came out to Ferrell, he wanted to learn about her transition. Steele, who loves dive bars, diners, and the American heartland, wanted to revisit the places she frequented while living as a man, but concerns over transphobia prevented her from going alone. Urged by Ferrell, the idea for the film was born. A meditation on belonging in America, it follows the pair on a cross-country road trip, providing a funny and poignant window into Steele’s journey and the duo’s friendship. Nominated for a variety of awards, the film was named one of the Top 5 Documentaries by the National Board of Review and won the Critics’ Choice Award for Best Documentary Feature.

In March 2025, the University of Iowa Lecture Committee presented Steele with its Notable Iowan Award.



© GETTY IMAGES

lgbt[™]
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2025 – A Project of Equality Forum