**Interview with Charlotte Sumtimes**

To cite this interview please use the following:
Mickelson, Hayle. 2020. Interview with Charlotte Sumtimes. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 23, 2019.

*Audio available at* <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/charlotte-sumtimes/>

Interviewer: Hi! This is Hayle.

Charlotte Sumtimes: How are you?

Interviewer: Good. How are you doing?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Well, thanks for being so accommodating on the time. My days are always so weird. I never know minute to minute cause I’m always on call. So…

Interviewer: That’s fine. The first question I’m going to ask you, where did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Charlotte Sumtimes: The first. My first time experience ever being exposed to it was when I went to my first burlesque show, and I was 40 when I found my first burlesque show, and it happened to be at a bar downtown, and it was a show that integrated drag into the burlesque. The queens weren’t stripping, but they were featured entertainers, and I never seen anything like that at all, and there were fire performers, and I just thought ‘oh my gosh is this really happening in Saint Louis? How have I never seen this before?’ Now, I was fascinated by the burlesque, of course, because they had all the shapes and the sizes.

Interviewer: I can see that in your drag.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah. Oh, for sure. And I saw, like there was this beautiful plus size woman and she was stripping, and I went ‘oh my god I wanna do this too,’ and that was the night my career began, but I went on to do burlesque, just burlesque, and I missed the drag so much that that’s why I became a producer because I wanted to work with drag queens and kings, but I wanted to take it to the next level. I wanted to challenge them to do burlesque. If you’re going to be in a burlesque show, let’s strip. And your illusion is hiding. Now I am making you show. How would you do that? And so that, that was it. That’s really my first exposure was. That night and bam I wanna do shows with you.

Interviewer: That’s great. I love it. Yeah, I’ve seen a couple of your shows and when I’ve seen you host I, and now that you say this to me, I can see what you were talking about how you’re wanting to add the burlesque to the drag. I’ve seen some of these drag artists use burlesque in their shows and it’s fantastic. It really is.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It is, and it was completely unheard of at the time, and so when I would try to hire these queens I would just be roaming around Attitudes like ‘Hey I really dig your vibe. I’m starting a new show would you do it’ and there like ‘Sure, honey, but it’s gonna fail. No one’s gonna wanna see this.’ And so, you know, the odds were so against me, but I said ‘I think you’re wrong. I think this is going to be a hit.’ And now, especially in Saint Louis, it’s very common for a drag entertainer to strip. I mean back when I started at Attitudes, there was a rule in the shows, ‘no stripping.’ A king could not strip, a queen could not. None. No, no, no, no, no. I came along and they’re like ‘Well ok you’re not doing it in *our* show, you can do it in Charlotte’s show, but not our show.’ There was such a bias. And now, I mean, you can’t go to a show without watching a king take his jacket off and there’s nothing underneath. You know, it really had a huge impact on the performance community so, yes.

Interviewer: When did you bring this idea to, to Attitudes, or in Saint Louis, or other drag shows, I guess around Saint Louis?

Charlotte Sumtimes: This was in 2012. And yeah that’s when I pitched the idea to Attitudes.

Interviewer: Ok. I was just trying to get kinda a timeline, in a sense. So how did you family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist or producing drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: They thought it was just normal. I’ve always been the creativity wackadoodle of the family, and you know at the time I left my career to be with my kids cause it was really hard for me to have babies and when I finally got all my babies I didn’t want, my career was so demanding. It was in radio, television, and acting and a lot of travel and being away. I wanted to be with my kids, so to have a part time job, doing something in theater, which is what I think, I mean, it is theater. My family thought ‘hey this is fun,’ and no one even flinched even when I had to say, ‘Yeah and I will be stripping on stage.’ There like ‘Okay, of course you will be. It’s just who you are.’ But no one said ‘Oh, well, you know, you’re in your forties, is that a bad idea?’ Mhm. And my kids were younger at the time, but they loved it. My daughter had an imaginary friend named Danger Diva who was a drag queen, and she would design outfits for Danger Diva. You know? How many kids have an imaginary friend that’s a drag queen?

Interviewer: Never.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah. There’s mom with all the costumes and this and that. Everything – my look, my style, the way I performed – I was not accepted in the burlesque community, because I was lip syncing, and I was embraced by the drag community. So, that’s where I found my home. That’s where I found my people.

Interviewer: That’s really interesting. Did you wanna elaborate further on being a bioqueen. I know you were wanting to talk about that before when I talked to you. While we’re kind of on the subject.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. Sure. I didn’t even know what a bioqueen was until I started going to Attitudes Nightclub and I was there just went I started burlesque just because everyone said ‘you got to see the drag show. They’re so innovative at Attitudes.’ And in the drag shows I noticed that there were women, biological women, cis gender women, and I went ‘What are they doing! They’re just like drag queens lip syncing and they’re having fun and the crowd loves them? And they’re accepted?’ and I couldn’t believe that it would be accepted because of drag culture being about the impersonation of another gender. So, I had to investigate that further, but I found that, I loved that style of performing, more than just standing there quietly and taking my clothes off, you know? I wanted to see if I could do both, so I would watch the top bioqueens in Saint Louis, and actually approached them for my show, and the top bioqueen said she would do it, and I loved it. Just watching her – her boldness and her confidence on stage. Oh, I was blown away. Just as much bravado as any drag queen I ever seen. That’s what made me say ‘I wanna do this. I think I can do this. I think I can pull this off.’ But I did the extra step in saying ‘Alright, there’s already these amazing bioqueens. I wanna be bioqueen burlesque because nobody does that.’

Interviewer: Yeah. I say, I loved your performance at Attitudes.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thank you.

Interviewer: It’s really unique and great. I love how you mix the two so well.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thanks. I miss it. I don’t do a lot of it anymore.

Interviewer: Oh, you don’t? I haven’t seen you in a while, so I…

Charlotte Sumtimes: No.

Interviewer: I haven’t been to Attitudes in a little bit. I just recently went back just a month or so ago, but before then I hadn’t gone in almost a year.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah. I left. I don’t work there anymore. I started getting offers from mainstream theatrical productions, so yeah, and to be MC, you know, so I really don’t perform and do routines very much. I do have a show at a comedy club. And of course, there’s drag.

Interviewer: Of course.

Charlotte Sumtimes: I mean yeah oh, God. It’s a blast. And there’s drag. I had to have drag. I argued for that. I don’t, if people say, ‘Go produce a burlesque show,’ I say ‘No. I gotta have drag queens in every show because that’s just what I believe in.’ So, I only produce one show now, but it’s one of those shows that it’s you know thirty-five to fifty dollars to get in to. So, my demographic has changed. My audience has changed. The people I’m reaching has changed. Where at Attitudes I could reach the young people and give them a positive message. Now, it’s people my age, and it’s a lot of straight people from the county because the comedy club is in Clayton. So, I work there. I work at The Boom Boom Room. That is a straight up burlesque show with no drag.

Interviewer: Wow.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you like that more than working at Attitudes?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I miss Attitudes. I missed, it was such a great time for drag because you know they had the three top show directors there, and it was always packed and innovative and fun. And honey I miss working with the young people. I really do, but I love the frequency of having twenty-two shows a month. I love that this is all I have to do. I don’t have to have another job.

Interviewer: Right, I mean you’re a mother. So, I mean it balances well I’m sure.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It does, I just, it’s just at least I get my show at the comedy club. At least then I get my drag queens, but I only get two of them. It’s sad, but I keep up with it still, and there’s been a lot of progress in the industry especially for kings. So, it’s all changed, and changes so quickly in the drag industry.

Interviewer: I did want to ask, where did you get your drag name from?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh, my goodness! My name actually came about; I was a popular blogger in the early 2000s and I blogged under the name of Charlotte Sumtimes. So, when I went to perform, I just kept that name cause, I was known around Saint Louis for the blog so why not just transition. But Charlotte is because the first play I ever did was *Charlotte’s Web*. Also, because you know I love how people are so afraid of spiders. Something they could just kill in a second, and yet they have such power over people, and I’m fascinated with power dynamics. And I got spider tattoos all over me. I just think they’re amazing, dangerously, beautiful creatures so. And then Sumtimes was the song Charlotte Sometimes by The Cure, and it’s just kinda, to me the song is about someone who’s trapped inside of her head and her imagination, and it just needs to be set free so I can relate to that. So, I changed the spelling to s-u-m because sums are numbers and I get paid to be Charlotte so that’s how I came up with it. And my life, when I’m not Charlotte is a stay-at-home mom. So sometimes I’m Charlotte, sometimes I’m not. I thought that one through.

Interviewer: No. That’s very creative. I thought the Charlotte Sumtimes was something about being a mom and doing burlesque. I assumed that was probably part of it, but I didn’t know there was a whole back story to it.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. You’re absolutely correct because the lives are so different and the people like when I’m on stage. And honestly, doing bioqueen burlesque is my favorite way to perform. Straight burlesque, I still do because I don’t know. I try to represent that body positivity and age positivity, but I miss lip syncing. I miss being a bioqueen. I miss dressing that way cause, where I work now is more grand madame burlesque. So, I miss the innovation. Like right now drag is the most innovative it’s ever been. And I see the pictures and I want to dress like that, but if I went into work like that, they would be so upset with me. They told me when I got the job, ‘Tone it down.’

Interviewer: You talked about that one bioqueen that influenced you. Do you remember her name?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Isis Amore.

Interviewer: Isis Amore. Ok. It was question of who or what has influenced your drag, and we know like we said before we’ve talked about bioqueens and burlesque, but I was just curious, you know you were talking specifically about one.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Sure. And it was her performance style. It was her confidence. It was the way she commanded the stage and the room. She was never anyone’s smoke break. It was ‘I can’t take my eyes off of her cause she won’t let me.’ And that was a big influence on my style as far as a performer. My style in dress had to be the Attitude’s queens at the time, you know, glitter bomb. The things I was seeing there because it was all so, it was taking items from the mall or thrift shops and turn them into these runway looks, and I was in awe of it. And it was such a fun time. Now, there’s a lot of pressure on queens to look like the RuPaul girls who have you know a lot of money and serious designers who work for them. I don’t know how the local queens do it, but they do it and it’s just getting better and better and better. People enter the game looking like pros. And when I started, we all looked a little rough, but we eventually got there. Now, they enter looking flawless. So, drag performers have a lot more pressure on them now then even a few years ago when I entered the scene.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Speaking of RuPaul, we do, I do have a question about RuPaul. I mean how do you feel about the show, about RuPaul’s Drag Race?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I liked it in the beginning because it seemed more honest. It seemed more about just finding the right representative, but the show became popular. The stakes grew. The star had to represent the brand. And then everything in a reality show, when you get a few seasons in, everything becomes a lot more structured and a lot less real because they have to keep upping the ante. So that’s what I’ve seen as it’s changed. I liked it in the beginning. It seemed like it was hometown queens in there being innovative doing their best. Now these queens are just these top designer pros and it’s beautiful to see, don’t get me wrong. It’s just evolved into something I think is slightly unattainable for most local queens that don’t have access to big entertainment cities. Like the New York City queens, maybe your boyfriend’s a costume designer on Broadway. Well that’s going to be a huge help for you.

Interviewer: Right. I mean Alexis Michelle in Season 9. We watched Season 9 in our class. And yeah you had people like Alexis Michelle who was already doing Broadway. I mean there was Shea Couleé from Chicago. I mean there was a lot of girls from a lot of big cities. And Los Angeles, you know. So, it’s, I mean I understand where you’re coming from in a sense.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Right. It’s still entertaining.

Interviewer: and then they had like Eureka from, where was she from? Georgia? Somewhere from the South, you know. They tried to have, they tried to have some type of diversity in the regions of where they picked these drag queens from. So…

Charlotte Sumtimes: It is about ratings, and it is a multi-million dollar brand now so you know if the stakes are so high to get people to keep watching, these queens have to be more and more and more outrageous with their looks, so they have to get top professions. On the coast they’ve got access to not only to the best designers, but you know the shops that sell the best material. I don’t know where in Saint Louis where we would go to find some of that material the make their gowns from. We just don’t have that. You can’t get that at Joann’s Fabrics. So again, I applaud the local queens who manage to. They do make it work.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Yeah, no, I really agree. Just from all the shows I’ve seen at Attitudes. It’s great. I do wanna ask you, do you consider when you were doing drag, did you consider it political? Why or why not?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I did. I felt that most, a lot of the shows we did, and the ones we would get in trouble for, really pushed it. Like right after Ferguson, Aiden Control did a number where he represented the police, the victim, and the protestors. And it, oh my God, it caused so much ruckus, but it was such a beautiful performance and a great statement. And I know when I was out there, I was definitely doing that. I would push boundaries, but the boundaries I was pushing was about rights, LGBTQ rights. It was a big time of transition. Marriage wasn’t legal yet. It was, we were still fighting for so much and we put it out there in our art and the injustices that we felt. And a lot of the acts I did, man I did, I definitely pushed boundaries because I felt like it needed to be said, but not just for the community, but also for women – you know for plus size women, for older women, and for all women. I just felt like ‘Hey we need to be heard on certain things and so this is how I’m going to try to get you to listen.’

Interviewer: Right. No. I agree with you with your message, because I minor in Women’s Studies at SIUE as well and I mean we seen like when you look at actors, like female actors, like even in Hollywood, you know by the time they hit 35, 40 they’re being represented as grandmothers and the lesser parts. But then when you look at males they almost gain more as they age.

Charlotte Sumtimes: As they age. Right.

Interviewer: Right.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Right. It’s just that inequality that I, you know, that I really try to fight. I’m so very, very lucky being based in Saint Louis and I think it is because I’m in Saint Louis that I’ve had the opportunities I’ve had. Would have I been as successful in another entertainment destination where the pressure is on for how to look and your age? Maybe not. And it is tough, and I do fight it, but I’m lucky. I’m so lucky I’ve had to transition more to being the MC, and that’s because my body, it just can’t keep up. It with the rehearsals and the demands of being a dancer anymore. So that’s the one thing I don’t like. But I still perform, just not as hard as I used to. I can’t drop it like it’s hot and get back up again. Those days are done. So, I try to put the message out through the MCing. When I started at Boom Boom Room, they didn’t do, their MC didn’t do that, but I did and wow has it had a positive impact. And the whole show structure has changed and the types of women they’re hiring now has changed. And you’re seeing more diversity and you’re seeing more of the body types and that’s good, but that’s who I am. I go in and shake things up. And I often pay a pretty hefty price for it, but I can sleep well at night so.

Interviewer: How often were you performing at Attitudes and was Attitudes the only place you were performing?

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. I had, it started once a month, then they gave me a weekly show “Kitty” in addition to “Black Saturday Strip.”

Interviewer: I remember.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. You remember “Kitty?”

Interviewer: Yeah. I remember.

Charlotte Sumtimes: “Kitty” was just fun. God that show was, I miss that one. I miss “Black Saturday Strip” the most, but “Kitty” was, I don’t know, everybody just got along. It was peaceful one, but you know when “Last Saturday Strip” became successful, other bars started calling. So, pretty much I worked at, I would say every drag bar in Saint Louis with the exception of Hamburger Mary’s.

*[Phone connection abruptly cut out, and then continues]*

Interviewer: You were talking about where you were performing and how often you were doing that.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. Oh. At the time of Attitudes or?

Interviewer: Yeah, or. I mean, it’s just to kind of give the idea of the person who is going to be listening, like how often you were performing. Like if you weren’t doing it that often than some of your judgement or like your perspectives or you know things like that might be a little different than someone who does it almost on a daily basis.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. Gotcha. Yeah, I was doing, let’s see, [counting five, six, seven] about seven shows a month that I was producing. Then guessing in additional ones here and there.

Interviewer: So, what goes into or what went into getting ready for your performance?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Ugh. God. That’s the worst. The worse thing with burlesque was getting the pasties on which is usually first, and that’s a lot of glue and a lot of prayer to get those things to stay on. And then it would be you know the face. You paint your face the same way a drag queen does, only you’re challenge, I never went to the extreme that other bioqueens do – blocking the eyebrows. I just presented a more, a more of a burlesque face, but heavier makeup. And then, as I progressed, I watched those queens and then I would say I don’t makeup myself as much as bioqueens do. Uh, always a wig! You know that helps with the fantasy. It’s, you know, you’re not going out there as yourself. You’re going out as character and Charlotte was a character that never looked the same twice. So, it would be that. It would be figuring out, you know, the whole look head to toe which is what drag queens taught me; from the tip of your head to the tips of your feet. Everything needs to be thought about and perfection. So, what wig goes with this dress? What jewels? You know. It’s packing. Packing is also the worse because you don’t drive to gig dressed like that. Definitely not in the summer. Especially in the Grove where you’re trying to find parking. It just doesn’t do that. So, packing, I would say, is one of the worst, because you don’t want to forget anything and especially if you’re doing a bioqueen strip. It’s not just the exterior, but it’s all your under things. It’s all your props. You know, it’s such a pain in the ass to do that, but it’s part of the job. So, I would say the getting ready process, the makeup took at least, at the time, it was about two hours. Now I’ve got it done to about forty-five minutes.

Interviewer: There you go!

Charlotte Sumtimes: I can fly through my face at this point, but again it’s not as elaborate. You know it’s not like I’m doing the whole drag look, but I’ve adapted, and I borrow heavily from the look I used to have for my look now. So, I guess in a way, my bioqueen self has been a big influence on my new MC look.

Interviewer: Alright. What were the biggest challenges of doing drag or being a drag artist?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Talent challenges. I would say getting the lip sync right. You know I think that’s a big judgement being a cisgender woman. There really looking at your carefully, and they wanna make sure that you can perform at the same level or better. The pressure’s higher on a bioqueen. You have so much to prove. So, I would say, for me it was the lip sync. I had no problem structuring a routine. No problem telling a story. And no problem with stage present. But damn some of those lyrics. And as you get older it is so hard to memorize. It’s harder to remember things. I’m not even kidding. So, like these young kids could, on their way to the club, memorize the song in hearing it maybe three or four times. To me, it would be weeks. I would watch the lyrics, and I would still forget. Like there would be moments of panic. I’d forget my first line always. So, I think that is the huge challenge. If you want your mouth to move like the singer does, and you wanna make it look like you’re actually singing.

Interviewer: Mhmm. Right. Right. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Out of drag, cisgender female.

Interviewer: Ok. So, you would use the pronouns she.

Charlotte Sumtimes: She.

Interviewer: Ok. Ok. Just checking.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. For sure.

Interviewer: I try to use that every time I meet someone instead of just assuming what their gender is.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No, and you have to these days. It’s important.

Interviewer: So, has drag influenced you sex or gender identity? Like at all?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I would say…hmm. I think it made me more feminine. I think it made me feel like a more powerful feminine woman and appreciate my femininity and my curves and my body. Just all about enjoying being a woman and dressing up. Being an exaggerated version of a female. You know I can liken it to anyone who’s on the *Real Housewives* franchise. That reality show. They’re exaggerated looking women. And they have the money to do it, and so I sort of felt that way as a bioqueen and I feel that way now. And that’s nice because in my everyday life, it’s quiet plain.

Interviewer: So, you would say as being a woman has impacted your drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. Yes. For sure.

Interviewer: Ok. You kind of touched on this already, but has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you’re out of drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. Yes. Yeah. Hundred percent. Hundred percent. Because you know it, my persona and I are two different people, but we’re starting to become closer to being the same person. When I started I was not Charlotte Sumtimes at all. She was just the girl on stage. So, what happened was those experiences have given me that confidence to be more like her all the time, and I love it. You know, since that happened, not the super chaotic part of my character, but the confidence, the self-assured part of my character. I like being her. Very much. You know I love the life that I’m living now is more Charlotte than it’s ever been, and this is eight years later. You know this is, yeah. Yeah. It feels so good. It really changed my life a hundred percent.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time and ask Charlotte Sumtimes any advice to your younger self, what do you think she would say?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. She would say ‘Stop thinking you are fat. You have a beautiful body. Stop thinking you’re not good enough, because you are. Stop going for less than because you deserve the best. Hold your head up high. Choose better people in your life. Choose better pathways cause you really are something special.’

Interviewer: That was really beautiful.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thank you.

Interviewer: I’m curious, if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or visa versa how has drag impacted your identity? Can you share about how one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and/or interaction of these social identities, have impacted your experience of drag? Wow that was a lot.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: We kind of talked about this already, but if there’s any more you would like to say.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. It, yes. I identified at the time I was married to a man. I was a, you know I just thought of myself very much of a mommy and seeing and being in that environment with a young crowd who was so open and accepting of gender, sexuality opened my eyes to what I had been missing. I mean it led to the end of my marriage and falling in love with a woman which I did not think was possible. I didn’t see that coming at all and you know throughout this journey then where I am now even accepting that my bisexuality that it really to me, and it’s more of pansexual, it’s really the person and I never ever thought that way before.

Interviewer: Until drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Until drag. Mhmm. Until drag and just being exposed to such open-minded people, you know that generation and now even the younger ones coming up it’s so freeing for them. They have the freedom and the choices that my generation didn’t and so I missed out and I guess I’m so lucky that I got to have it. Even late in life.

Interviewer: So, it seems that drag has impacted your children, your family.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It has completely impacted my family. You know they grew up with an open, tolerant environment. They are free to be who they want to be and love the way they want to love and to be able I think just to have them say ‘Mom, I’m having problems with this girl I have a crush on’ and not being afraid. I could have never said that to my mother. My mother would have probably accepted it. I just felt embarrassed or scared, so it’s changed the way I parent.

Interviewer: Wow. That’s really impactful then.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: In your opinion how do you define drag, or if someone would ask you on the street what is drag, how would you define that to them?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Theater. It’s theater. It’s theater. It’s entertainment. It’s, you know, evolved. It used to be about impersonating the other gender, now it’s just about self-expression. It’s so hard now to put it into words what drag has become and I may be the wrong person for them to ask because I’m not part of this new generation that has gone in there and said that ‘No, we make our own rules now.’ It’s not the drag it used to be, and I think that’s great. I think it’s open and I think more people are allowed to get into it.

Interviewer: Right. I agree.

Charlotte Sumtimes: But now there’s pageant drag and then there’s alternative drag and there’s singing drag and there’s so much out there and in Saint Louis, we’re lucky, we get to see one of everything. Like if you want a particular kind of drag, you can find it in Saint Louis.

Interviewer: Right. That’s true. I agree. Do you think drag is sexual?

Charlotte Sumtimes: If the performer wants it to be, but at its core no. I think there are people who fetishize it. Is that a word?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. I think if people do that and that’s not right, but I think that if it’s the right performer willing to get out there and give a very sexual performance what are they saying? You know what is the message of it? Is this a cis male who wants to show what she feels is the beauty and sexuality of the female? That fascinates me. How do you project to that? How do you tap into that? Same way for a king. You know, what is a king showing on stage if he’s up there thrusting? You know being machismo and it’s all part of the art and the community.

Interviewer: Are you still there?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok. Sorry. I thought I lost you for a moment. It’s been in and out, so I’ve been trying to find a good spot.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Gotcha.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, or the drag scene, or the drag community what would it be and why?

Charlotte Sumtimes: The one thing I would change is more money for the entertainers. It’s a very low paying job for such high demands on your looks and costuming. It’s just how it’s always been and it’s unfortunate. I would like that, and I would like to see more professionally produced productions, more theaters, more investors who would like to do things like *Drag Race* does it and how they have a big professional production. I would like to see more of that on the local level, because the problem that you have in this industry is that it’s peers controlling peers and peers controlling the access to stages of their peers and that’s dangerous and that’s why often you see the same people all the time and it’s harder for new people to break in. So, it would be great if there were professionally produced productions for these entertainers with a director who has no interest in the spot light. The director just wants the best show possible. It is very hard when a star doesn’t want anyone to outshine them in the production. So that’s the debate and that’s why there’s so many wars because here’s somebody who got a bar who let them do a show, now they’re controlling the culture of that bar and that community and I think that’s dangerous. I think in the hands of unbiased producer, I think things could change a little bit. I know once I started, I was my own director for years. Now I have a director and I have improved so much because of it and I would like to see a lot of these really talented entertainers have that opportunity. To have someone say ‘Ok. Here’s what you do on stage and let’s correct this. Let’s make this better or let’s hire the best person instead of your best friend.’

Interviewer: Right. Yeah. I see your point.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think there are any, sorry, what do you think are the misconceptions that people have about drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I think the worst is that it’s perverted. I mean there’s still people who think it’s perverted and disgusting and that’s just wrong. It’s terrible. I think they just think that…I also don’t like that there’s a lot of men who chase after drag queens because they want that whole fantasy and they’re not seeing them as artists. I would love to see more respect for the artistry.

Interviewer: What do you think would help that or change that?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I think more awareness. More exposure. You know things like *Drag Race* has done a lot, but there really does need to be a show for kings. Yeah. I’m sure you’re hearing that a lot if you’re talking to kings. It’s sad that that’s not represented. And you know I think there needs to be more…you know when you talk to people who work in television who try to get drag projects launched, they say executives constantly say RuPaul owns the space, meaning owns the genre. So, until executives open their minds a little bit and they’re open to other forms that would be great. I mean good for RuPaul, but I think we just need more exposure out there.

Interviewer: Yeah. I agree. We’ve talked about that in our class before too about this topic.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh, well you can bring it up to someone who’s connected to the television industry, but I have so many producer friends that get to that level that they’re talking to the networks and the networks tell them all the same thing ‘We can’t touch it. It won’t work. RuPaul had a lock on the market. We don’t want to take a risk going up against that franchise.’ So that’s why you’ll see a lot of things online. You know you’ll see…there was recently a drag movie that was straight to Netflix. Those platforms, very accepting, and I think that’s where we’re going to see more breakout things happening.

Interviewer: Yeah. I hope. I really hope so. If you could change one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Charlotte Sumtimes: That, at the local level, it doesn’t pay very much at all. Those artists up there sending more money on their look usually than their making. They’re up there because they love it. They love entertaining you. They love making you laugh and smile. It’s one place on Earth that most of them feel most accepted. Free. Anxiety free and loved. So, it’s so much more than a man prancing around in a dress. You know, just knowing financially, psychologically what goes into it and the rewards of the result, because none of these kids are paying, very few of them are paying their rent doing this. Actually, for most of them it cost more than it pays.

Interviewer: Yeah. It’s interesting.

Charlotte Sumtimes: And prices have gone down, too. Breaks my heart that showcase has gone down since I started. That’s why I’m not doing as many shows because I have a level of this is how much I wanna make and this is what I want my entertainers to make and prices are so low that I can’t afford it. I can’t offer entertainers that insulting of pay. It’s just not right.

Interviewer: Yeah. We’ve also looked at some articles about is drag worth it you know? Is getting paid you know…some don’t get paid at all very well. Like you’ve already mentioned that a lot of them can’t even pay for their rent. They have to choose between their next costume idea or you know trying to pay rent or you know.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Without those new costumes and looks, you’re not going to get hired as much so, it is. It’s pressure so deep. Entertainers love it so much because right now many of them are only making thirty dollars to do three numbers. I just can’t believe how low the prices are. Ugh. It breaks my heart for these entertainers and if they’re even making more in tips than their show pay, I would be surprised.

Interviewer: I never knew exactly what it was like especially you know in our Saint Louis area what the prices and pay was like and things like that. I mean I know when I go to shows, if I like the performance I always tip. I’m not scared to.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. That’s wonderful. Yeah. That’s good.

Interviewer: I mean I feel like…obviously I can see that they put a lot of work into their performance, their outfit, their lip syncing. It’s a lot.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It is, and you know a funny place and the tips varied of course depending on where you’re performing some places just know you’re going to make a lot of money in tips. The one show I produce at the comedy club is a huge tip venue. You can make more in one song than your show case for the entire show and that’s a high paying show so it is worth it in some shows to get out there and really perform your ass off and then, of course you show do that every show, but there’s some where you can have this elaborate costume and incredible number and make three dollars in tips cause people just don’t tip.

Interviewer: Right. Right. Well that’s pretty much all of my questions. There was one question I missed where if you were part of a drag family, house, or collective.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. Never. I never wanted to be.

Interviewer: I didn’t think so because of the area, but I thought I should ask just in case.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. I specifically…people asked me to form families and I said ‘Oh god no.’ Being independent, being on my own island is just where I want to be and I sort of feel that it gets very mafia-esque with the families. Families at war. It’s fascinating from afar, but I don’t want to be tangled up in that drama. Nope. Nope. Nope.

Interviewer: No? You don’t want to be kinda like *Paris is Burning* with all the New York houses?

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. I don’t want to get in a battle especially with a control family. Oh my god. No. Never. Never. Never. Never. Never. Never. I mean I respect these families, but I can’t imagine having to control a bunch of people who are just as neurotic and crazy as I am. We are. We’re just a different breed of people so.

Interviewer: Well, you’re a producer and a mother, would you kinda see yourself as kinda like their leader or their mother?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I felt at Attitudes that people really did see me that way and that was both good and bad. I never had so many battles, wars, and problems with performers and they did in the Grove. Now it’s so peaceful so right now, like at The Boom Boom Room, when the burlesque girls call me momma I cringe. I don’t want that role. I don’t want to be that to anybody because that’s too much for me. It’s weird though. Maybe it’s because I’m getting older, and I just don’t want to be called mom except by my own kids. And plus, you know I date such younger guys like I totally have a cougar thing so they definitely can’t call me mama. Oh god no. Eh. No. Don’t say that word. That’s just getting weird.

Interviewer: Oh. That’s great. Well it was nice talking to you, Charlotte. I really appreciate it.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thank you. It was fun, I liked reliving this. It’s good times. Well, good luck with all of this. I hope my info helps someone.

Interviewer: Yes. It helped me.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh good. Good. I’m glad. Despite the phone alien that tried to break up the call.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Weird.

Interviewer: FBI was listening on our conversation probably.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah there like ‘We’re not into this drag at all. You two are done.’

Interviewer: Ok. Well thank you Charlotte again.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Your welcome!

Interviewer: You have a good day!

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thanks. Take care. Bye.

Interviewer: Bye.