**Interview with Diana Tunnel**

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Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, so I grew up in a really like, conservative, small town in Kentucky. Um, I never really like... I guess I had a concept of what drag was, but I didn't really have any interaction with it until I was a freshman in college. Um, and a lot of my friends were going to Nashville because we lived about two hours outside of Nashville. Okay. So, they were all gonna go to this nightclub and it was 18 and up so I could get in. Uh, so I hopped in a car and went down with them and it was the first time I ever saw a drag queen in real life. Um, and it was actually Sara Andrews, uh, who used to perform in Chicago and just recently moved back to Nashville.

Interviewer: Awesome. Wow. Awesome. When did you first, when did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, I started performing about two years ago. Uh, it was April 2017. Um, I had a really big appreciation for a drag, but I actually moved to Chicago with my partner. Um, just out of college. Uh, I was looking for work in theater as a wig tech or hair and makeup artist and I just wasn't finding any work. Um, so this was just kind of a way for me to use my skills and I was just kind of, you know, if I wasn't getting a job in theater then I was going to make my own theater. Uh, so it, kind of just started as, uh, me going to a competition down the road and putting on some elf make-up. Um, um, it was not a cute moment. I can verify if you scroll thought far enough down on my Instagram, there's a picture of me that night and it's absolutely terrible.

Interviewer: Do you find it difficult for you to like, was it hard at first to like, get all the makeup right and stuff like that?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, yeah, even being trained as a makeup artist, like there was just such a disconnect of doing something so specific really well. Um, luckily Chicago is such a tight knit group of performers and um, in my experience, the drag scene here has been so welcoming. So, a lot of people were willing to impart some wisdom or um, yeah, give some advice or you know, I was getting ready next to somebody and I saw them using a product that I hadn’t seen. Um, people were willing to tell me about that product or you know, let me know how it worked for them so I can go get it and try it out.

Interviewer: All right. Um, how did you family friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so my sisters told my biological mom, so my sisters and my biological mom know. But my parents, I was raised by my dad and my step-mom, they, uh, do not know that I'm a drag queen.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Diana Tunnel: So, they have not received it.

Interviewer: Very interesting. So why don't they know?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I was raised in a really conservative, uh, environment. Okay. So, while, like my parents know that I have a partner and they love him and they're very open about me being gay. Uh, that even took a long time to get around. So yeah. Um, I think, you know, taking the step between “I’m in a long-term relationship with another man” to “My job is dressing up as a woman” might be a big step for them to accept.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, this is a fun one. Um, where does your drag name come from?

Diana Tunnel: So, um, I kind of planned out like my first night in drag. It wasn't anything that was super impulsive. Like I knew that I was going to um, do this competition. I decided like a week before that I was going to do it. So, like I was planning on stuff and I hadn't settled on a drag name and I was like down to the night before and I was like, I don't have a drag name to like, tell them when I get there. And I was talking to somebody, um, just outside of Berlin smoking a cigarette and I was talking about like how I had no idea it was actually my drag name was going to be Margot Rita. And he was like, no, that's terrible. That's an awful name. And he was like, here's one for free. Um, and he told me, and he said the name Diana Tunnel. And I thought it was so kind of shocking to hear the for like when you originally hear it, it's kind of a little bit of a shock because it's so kind of inappropriate. Yeah. But I love politics. I love conspiracy theories. Um, and I love a good political assassination, I guess, so… but it was so funny, and it has kind of a double meaning, so I can, I joked that I can always tell when you're born based on how you hear my name. Cause most people will say, oh, it's like “die-in-a-tunnel”. And I'm like, I mean, yeah, like that's part of it. I was like, but if you're from the 90s, like it's like the princess and where she died. Mine’s really dark.

Interviewer: I love it (laughs).

Diana Tunnel: But it's fun, various people don't like it at all.

Interviewer: Uh, that's, that's hilarious. Okay. Um, there are a lot of terms, for types and styles of drag from drag queen and drag king to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist's, bioqueen and camp queen. among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do?

Diana Tunnel: Well, so when I started, I was can, I was going to be the next Alaska or Adore or someone like that, um, which I didn't really have a name for that type of drag. Um, I think I jokingly call that trashy drag. Um, and that didn't actually like go away. But, um, now I have referred myself as a cowgirl princess. Um, all my, all the music I perform is primarily country music unless I just really want to perform something else.

Interviewer: Oh, Okay.

Diana Tunnel: But, um, no, I change, I don't know that I can put myself in any of those boxes necessarily. Um, I know a lot of performers find comfort in that, um, and being able to define what they do in a specific way. Uh, like a lot of queens will call, you know, specifically say that they're pageant queens. Um, even if, you know, I mean, you can still catch them in the club preforming, but that's primarily what they're interested in. Um, I never really had like a specific thing that I wanted to fall into. Like I can't really call myself campy, cause, I don't like, have a character around what I do. Um, I would not say I'm glamorous. I'm not poised enough to be glamorous uh, but yeah, I don't, I don't know if I specifically have a label, but, um, I do know a lot of people who do prescribe those labels and it's a way for them to kind of explain what they do. I hope that answers that question.

Interviewer: Oh, it does. Yeah, you're good. Okay. Uh, we may have covered this, but who or what has influenced your drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I originally, like I said, I wanted to be like this idea I had of Alaska or, you know, yeah. It's kind of the funk trashy persona. Um, but that changed a lot. I got really homesick because I had just moved to Chicago, and it was the farthest I had ever been away from my parents. Um, but I went to college, it was just a town over so I could always just drive back home and see them if I wanted to. So, um, I got really homesick and I was raised on country music. I was never really super interested in it, um, but it listening to country music and then performing country music reminded me of my mom and maybe feel closer to her. So that's kind of what really influenced.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Diana Tunnel: What my drag is currently is, uh, it's a lot of my mom.

Interviewer: All right. Um, do you consider your drag political?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I don't consider my drag political too often. I think, um, one of the best influences have on that as Dolly Parton who refuses to discuss politics around her art. (laughs) But not that I'm not a political person. And if you scroll through my Facebook, you can definitely find some opinions.

Interviewer: Alright

Diana Tunnel: I tried to leave that out of the club. I think everyone's out to have a good time and sometimes it's just not necessary to make a statement.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. Okay. So, are you willing to talk about, these might be more, a little more personal questions, um, as your life has a drag artist? So, yeah. So, like this the first, the first question here is, are you part of a drag family, house, or collective?

Diana Tunnel: Um, No I did have a... I guess I do or did have a drag mother depending on how you look at it. Um, there was a person [name illegible] who was helping me uh, who really helped me out when I started drag and um, everything from getting me dresses and jewelry or um, helping me with my makeup. So, I mean I did have a guiding influence. Um, and I refer to her as my drag mother essentially moved in. Um, we don't see her as much anymore, but I do definitely appreciate everything. She did help me get started out, cause I started with one dress and one wig.

Interviewer: How often do you perform and where do you perform?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so I have a weekly booking as a stage manager for a competition here. Uh, that happens every Monday night. Um, and that's at like 2 am. So that’s one of my weekly bookings. I also host a RuPaul's drag race viewing party for Hamburger Mary's Chicago, which is also weekly. And then I have a new monthly they show happening in Mary's Attic, which is called The Hoe Down. Um, And so that's my new monthly country show. So those are my like regular bookings. And then just whenever somebody wants to book me a yeehaw around their stage.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, what goes into getting ready for performance?

Diana Tunnel: Um, depending on the show, some shows have like a specific theme that you really have to take time and figure out what you're doing and, uh, conceptualize a performance. Um, so sometimes a show may take me weeks to prepare for uh, where I'm really trying to cater a performance to that and cater a stunts and tricks that I'm going to do. Yeah. Whereas usually Monday nights, it's kind of on a whim. Uh, so it takes me about two hours to get in makeup and hair and everything. And then, um, I'm usually picking a song like 20 minutes before or we get on stage.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, what are you biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I think the biggest challenge for me is definitely, um, getting stale. Uh, and what I'm doing just kind of, I go through a period and I think this happens to a lot of artists were um, doing it every week. I just kind of get an inspired are there those days where I just, I don't want to do the makeup and everything. Uh, which those are the most important days to do it. Is when you don't want to.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or the world?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I don't have too much experience in a lot of other drag scenes. Um, but I do know a lot of people, uh, around the country who do drag. And I think what makes Chicago so unique is that, um, there really is a lot of upward mobility. There's opportunity to succeed. Yeah. It's not this No one biting and scratching at each other to succeed here. Um, there's room for everyone to find their place and to do well as long as you want to put in the work to do well.

Interviewer: Would you consider Chicago your ideal place to do drag?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, yeah, I definitely do. Um, like I said, I know people in other cities, so like, um, a lot of queens in Denver have really good relationships with a lot of the queens in Chicago for whatever reason that is. But I always joke about the romance between Chicago and Denver. I love performing in other cities and getting to know people and getting to meet new people. But, um, I'm really glad that Chicago is my home because everyone here is just a part of each other and, um, a lot of the more successful or established queens also like show support and try to help newer queens.

Interviewer: That's cool. All right, so this is going to get a little more personal. Um, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression out of drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, out of drag, I do identify as a cis male, but as far as pronouns, um, when I'm asked, I generally prefer he/him, but also, um, it really doesn't matter to me. A lot of drag queens, even out of drag refer, like address each other by our drag names or she/her pronouns. So, um, I've learned a lot about gender since doing drag and since moving to Chicago. Um, as far as my idea of what gender is or how strict of lines there are for that I guess, I definitely think I have a lot more fluid or comfortable, um, with my gender than I was before I started experiencing this world.

Interviewer: Interesting. Okay. So, we already covered pronouns, um, has drag influence your sex and gender identities?

Diana Tunnel: Um, yeah, I think I has, um, like I said, not to say that I don't identify as a cis male, um, but my comfortability in wearing more feminine clothing and daily life, um, or just the way I view myself, um, isn't so much that, you know, I have to show off and ask you run it again public or anything like that. I don't have to be society's idea of what a man is. I can be my own type of man.

Interviewer: Okay. And then this is like the opposite. Have you have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Diana Tunnel: um, I don't know that it has. I think Diana is definitely a creation of like what I think, if I were a woman, what I think I'd want to be as a woman. Um, which is, you know, delightfully unrefined.

Interviewer: How has your drag impacted or changed you?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, I've learned so much from doing drag. Um, I think it's made me so much more comfortable talking to people. Um, and it's definitely helped me stand up for myself. Um, you deal with a lot of people kind of invading your personal space when you're in drag, And it's a kind of different type of vulnerability because even though like most of my body is not actually my body, a lot of pads covered by a lot of tights people still will and have tried to, you know, grab my ass and like my ass is made of foam. I start miles beneath there. Just the sentiment behind it or the action of somebody doing that to you is so… puts you in a really vulnerable place. So, I've really learned to stand up for myself, um, and make sure that I'm being heard and make sure I'm coming through clear and that definitely transfers over into my everyday life.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, if you could go back in time as you're a drag persona, what advice would you give yourself? Like your younger self?

Diana Tunnel: Oh, spend the money on good makeup and blend. (laughs) Um, no, I honestly wouldn't change anything. I taught myself to be confident and uh, put myself out there. It takes time to learn to do drag. And I don't think anybody started out pretty. Um, but yeah, I think I'd be more confident in my faults. Um, and let those improve over time.

Interviewer: Okay. There's another question that we may have covered, but, um, can you share about how one of your more social identities such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and or the interaction of those social identities have impacted your experience of drag, I know, or how your drag was impacted. Um, how has impacted your experience of this social identity? You get that?

Diana Tunnel: Yeah. Okay. I think so. Yeah. (laughs) So like I said, I primarily do country music and I'm from a very conservative area. Um, but when I tell people where I'm from, it's always not what this like sympathy I guess. Uh, you know, people have immediate responses always. When I say I'm from Kentucky, they're like, oh, I'm so sorry. Um, and I'm not like, I, um, in my experience, people are accepting of things when they, realize they know somebody who connects with it. Um, okay. Plenty of people hate gay people until they realize they know gay people and that's transferred over because listening to more country music and familiarizing myself with it. Um, I think there's this idea that it's a bunch of intolerant Republicans picking banjos. Um, and when I can definitely tell you is at least with female country music, there's so much power and feminism that goes into that. And um, the songs are really about taking control of the woman and taking ownership of yourself. Um, so there's a whole different side of this southern ideal of living, um, other than just the conservatism that we automatically think of. So, I think it's really changed the way I think of where I'm from and uh, the people I grew up with.

Interviewer: All right. Thank you. Um, how do you define drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um Before I started drag, I would have defined it kind of how what we see on RuPaul’s Drag Race, its men who dress as women. And that's for a long time, that was what I really thought staunchly. Um, and there's still is some disconnect on gender identity and doing drag, um, which I'm sure you've seen a lot of people have seen in the news. RuPaul's refusal to, uh, allow post-op trans queens or AFAB queens assigned female at birth queens. Um, since I've started drag and I've really become part of this world, I can tell you that there is no definition of drag. There's no definite you have to be this or that to be a drag queen. Um, there are so many performers do I think our that are on a whole other level that I am like, they're incredible. Um, I think drag is just an expression of gender or an exaggeration of gender. Um, in whatever way you want to perceive that.

Interviewer: All right. Um, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I think primarily its purpose for entertainment, especially in our society. Um, going back through history, women have been posing as men since we've had recorded history. Yeah. And you know, in the past it's been sort of necessity, or, um, either to hide or save themselves, uh, sometimes for survival. Uh, and then of course I think men dressing in drag is always widely then, for entertainment purposes or just self-expression. Um, but currently I'd say it's definitely just for entertainment and having fun and expressing yourself in a way that maybe you can't in everyday life.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Diana Tunnel: I think drag can be sexual, but, um, I don't think that's its main purpose. Um, I've actually had the opportunity to do drag queen story times and

Interviewer: that's cool.

Diana Tunnel: a lot of my friends doing shows that are specifically geared towards children. Um, and I think the great thing about that is showing these kids that, you know, and I think also showing adults, that there can be two sides of something. You know, the way I perform in a nightclub is definitely going to be different in the way I perform for children. But I can do both and just like, we can make sitcoms for kids and we also have sitcoms for adults. It's often sometimes the same actors on them.

Interviewer: Um, do you think drag is political?

Diana Tunnel: I definitely think drag is political. Um, especially in the political climate we currently have. Um, we have an administration that is so hell bent on keeping the status quo what it is and creating a narrative of LGBT people as depraved and as lesser than. So, I think doing something like drag and so important right now because it's something conservative people in general can't wrap their head around or they have this terrible notion. And I think the more we put it out there, the more we show people that this is just entertainment. This is just someone's art and it's not something to be afraid of. It's not something to be angry about. Um, but the more we create that conversation the more it's being had, and the more mind clutter changed. Um, staying quiet about an issue is never going to change anything.

Interviewer: Have you ever faced any hostility in drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I've been fortunate enough not to face hostility in the sense of people being angry that I was doing drag or, um, people thinking that me doing drag is wrong. Um, other than on the Internet. I mean there's always going to be a troll who wants to pop in your comment section. And I just had to let that go. But as far as in person, I think the worst thing I've dealt with is just sexual harassment. Um, I hope that answered that question.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so before I started doing drag myself, uh, I was a super fan. I mean I would go to Nashville every time a drag race queen was in town to meet them. Um, I mean I was a huge fan and what was crazy is some of the first friends I made when I moved to Chicago were girls who had been on the show. So, it was kind of this weird, surreal moment of becoming friends with somebody that you are a fan of, which is kind of crazy. Uh, as far as the show itself, I think it put drag out there. Um, and depending on when you started drag, like I know some drag queens who have been doing it long before RuPaul's Drag Race aired kind of have a more negative opinion because it made it so mainstream and like there's a new queen every five minutes. Um, so I think it definitely over-saturated the market. Um, but you still, I mean you have people who are doing drag as a hobby or may not be doing drag in the next two months. Yeah. Um, and you have people who are really dedicated to it. Um, I dedicated and making it their career. So, I think even with the popularity, um, and the hype, you quickly learn what did you have the stuff for it or not? Um, I'm grateful to the show. I think it has its flaws. Yeah. Um, but it does put this art form in the American living room and it, like I said earlier, it creates that conversation that maybe people wouldn't otherwise have. So, I think it's a really important thing still that, you know, we're on mainstream television and conservative families are having these conversations and young LGBT people are seeing representation on television. So, they know that like, you can live your life this way. You can live your life as a gay person out here doing full ass drag and society will for the most part, accept you.

Interviewer: Um, you touched on like a couple of RuPaul's controversial opinions. How do you feel about RuPaul?

Diana Tunnel: Um, like I said, think RuPaul has been a huge pioneer for us and then a voice, but, um, RuPaul does have some outdated ways of thinking about drag or about, um, identity. Uh, I think we have to remember RuPaul is well within his sixties. So, uh, things have changed. Our society has changed a lot in the last 20 years and it's a lot to adjust to. So, do I expect RuPaul to be a perfect enlightened person? No, none of us are. Um, but he has such an important and influential role in our society in the LGBT community that I hope and wish he would educate himself more and really take stock of the message he's putting out there. And what the repercussions of speaking on the exclusion of trans people, uh, what effect that has in our community. And the young people who are listening to that and thinking that may be trans people aren't as equal as cis people in the gay community. Um, so yeah, I just really would hope that RuPaul take stock of the message that's going out.

Interviewer: Have you seen season nine of RuPaul's Drag Race?

Diana Tunnel: I have seen season nine.

Interviewer: Okay, I ask that because we've watched all of season nine in class. And who's your favorite contestant on season nine?

Diana Tunnel: I'm a little bias. I love Shea Couleé.

Interviewer: Yeah, makes sense.

Diana Tunnel: I have a lot of mutual friends. I've never actually, I think I was in a conversation circle with Shea once and I was way too nervous to say hi, it was while season nine was airing. Um, but I know so many people who have been so deeply influenced by Shea's friendships. So, um, I love her. I think she's wonderful. Um, speaking after the show. I Love Trinity. I'm so glad she was one of the winners of all stars. I think she's a powerhouse performer. I don't know who I've met on that season. I’ve met Aja, um, and she can drink you under the table, but they're all really nice girls. I've met quite a few of them. Um, not a huge fan of Eureka but that's pretty much my only contingency on that season.

Interviewer: Why do you say you're not a huge fan of Eureka?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so I don't know if you personally have watched season ten of Drag Race.

Interviewer: I have not.

Diana Tunnel: Um, I'm going to give you some spoilers.

Interviewer: Go for it.

Diana Tunnel: Uh, so Eureka does come back for season 10. She had a leg injury and that's why she had to leave season nine. So, um, they do bring her back for season 10, um, a really good friend of mine, The Vixen, was also on season ten. They had some issues. They had some fights and Eureka has said a lot of really tone-deaf things about race. She comes from a very similar area, um, I was from, so, you know, I understand that, you know, there's no kind of being ignorant and sometimes you just really aren't educated about certain issues.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Diana Tunnel: But with that comes a responsibility of educating yourself and of taking stock of what you have done or said that was ignorant and taking ownership of that. And unfortunately, Eureka has not taken a lot of opportunities to own her ignorance and, uh, learn from it.

Interviewer: That's very interesting. Um, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I think, I just hope that it was more positive. Um, there is a lot of shade and oftentimes shade is fun. It's fun to throw shade at your friends and yeah, make little jokes. But I think, um, there's still so much negativity and, um, even just in giving unsolicited advice where, you know, people are trying to give a dig in a really passive aggressive way, um, whether it's, you know, going up to a new queen and just tearing her makeup down and uh, tell her everything she's doing wrong without building her up. I wish more queens were open to building each other up and I'm remembering that your words have effects on people. Um, and maybe it's not always the best thing to criticize before you really know who you're talking to.

Interviewer: Okay. What do you think, we may have touched on this, but what do you think are misconceptions that people have had about drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, for one, the whole idea that has to be a sexual thing and it's not definitely not. Um, and that we're all just men in wigs. Uh, there are a variety of different performers. Um, doing a variety of different types performance. So, I think, hopefully people learn, especially with RuPaul's Drag Race being so mainstream and shows like Dragula and Camp Wannakiki, uh, that are coming up. I hope people learn that there's so many different types of drag, there’s so many different ways you can do drag. Uh, and you know, it's not a perverse, weird thing. It's just something a lot of people like to do and uh, we just think it's fun.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, if you could choose one thing people should know about drag, what would it be?

Diana Tunnel: Um, it is uncomfortable. Uh, we may look gorgeous and put together, but that wig is glued on our head. Um, it is squeezing our heads. There's a thousand pounds of makeup on our face and we are squeezed into tights of corsets that to the point that we can't breathe. So, while we may look gorgeous, we are not comfortable.

Interviewer: Very interesting. So that's all the questions I have.

Diana Tunnel: Awesome. I hope I gave you good information or at least something to use.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've definitely learned a lot and it definitely helped.

Diana Tunnel: Good. Thank you so much for asking me. I'm really flattered