# **Interview with Mick Douch**

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Interviewer: And then were you able to take a look at that participation form I sent you?

Mick Douch: Yep

Interviewer: Did you have any questions or anything?

Mick Douch: No, all good there.

Interviewer: Awesome, okay so my first question is when did you hear about drag – for the first time I’m sorry-?

Mick Douch: I mean, I watched The Birdcage when I was a kid. So, if we go to like when I first heard about it, I suspect I heard about it then, when I was like first watching The Birdcage in the 90s.

Interviewer: When was like the first time you, like, witnessed or experienced drag that –

Mick Douch: Wasn’t a movie?

Interviewer: Yeah –

Mick Douch: Probably, gosh, that would have been back in. I think October of like 2009. So, it was back when I lived in Utah, and it was a Halloween show at one of the LGBTQ bars out there. And it happened to be Halloween, they had drag queens performing.

Interviewer: Okay, what was your initial reaction to it?

Mick Douch: I mean, it was pretty cool because they were all doing very classic villains. I didn’t really think too much in depth about it. So it was one of those things where it was just kind of fun and exciting to see I had not ever seen anything like that before in person, and that night they were actually overshadowed by like the fire performers and the aerial people they have there. So, the drag queens didn’t even look that cool when you put them in that context with those other entertainers there.

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag artist?

Mick Douch: I didn’t start until, would have been January, 2015 I tried my first time. And then I think I did another couple times in 2015. And it was December 31st, 2015, that I feel like I really started because that’s when I actually started trying with makeup versus just generic cross-dressing. And that would’ve been like the first show show I did.

Interviewer: And why did you start performing at that time?

Mick Douch: I started – I started going out to one of the local, like, gay bars and I really just was trying to find a group of people to spend time with and I started talking with different drag queens and they started encouraging me to try drag, and so that’s really what sparked it for me was that I was just seeking a community and drag queens were encouraging me to try doing drag king stuff. So, I figured give it a shot.

Interviewer: And how was, did you want to maybe go into a little bit more detail about your first experience? Do you remember that?

Mick Douch: Um, I mean, I vaguely remember it. It happened to be an all drag king show that was set for New Year’s Eve, and it was going to be before the regular queens show, as like a way to try to bring in more bodies into the bar. It was – I mean, it was a lot of fun. It was a lot of us who hadn’t really done much for drag before. So, it was a bunch of very, very new entertainers. So yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. How did your family friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Mick Douch: At the time I was married, and my wife was pretty like, neither here nor there about that situation. My mom was pretty against it. But my mom is usually against everything at first and starts to come around a bit. My dad couldn’t care less. Most of my friends were classmates at the law school that I was attending. And they were my biggest supporters especially early on. They were the folks who are coming to my shows and cheering me on as I was trying this new thing

Interviewer: And where does your specific drag name come from?

Mick Douch: I was looking for a drag name and I, I was really having a hard time coming up with it. And one of my guy friends suggested that I use Mc-Douche because a few weeks prior to that I was mad at him and in a fit of rage as an insult I called him Mc-Douche. And so, my drag name became the random insults that I’ve picked out for one of my friends when I was mad at him.

Interviewer: That’s awesome, so there are a lot of terms for types of styles of drag, so there’s you know, comedy queen, queer artists, bio queens, and so on, what kind of drag do you do? How would you characterize your drag?

Mick Douch:  Yeah, side note, bio queen is now becoming an unfavored term in the drag community, because it draws a line of biology being a dictation of gender and your identity. When in a space that’s so queer, bio is becoming increasingly irrelevant. You’ll still see it in some places in the south, but vast majority of areas prefer hyper queen now. Mostly because it’s addressing the fact that there are trans men who are drag queens, and where do they fall in this spectrum? And then the idea of like, well, if a trans woman is a drag queen, is she now a bio queen? Is she a hyper queen? Is she a drag queen? What is she? And so people have found hyper queen to be just a little bit safer cuz it doesn’t go into that biology concept. And like my partner, now, who’s assigned female at birth, who’s a drag queen. She just wants to be called the drag queen because she was like, “What does my vagina have to do with my drag at all?”   
  
But for me, I consider myself a drag king, and anyone who performs on stage who has a character that’s masc of center, I see as welcome to use the label of drag king. So, it’s one of those where you could have been assigned male at birth, you could be assigned female at birth, you could be intersex, somewhere in between. and as long as your onstage persona is masc of center, I feel drag king is a label that’s available to you.

Interviewer: Definitely. So how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression outside of drag?

Mick Douch: I was assigned female, a female at birth and I identify as non-binary, but I’m also trans masculine. So, it’s kind of like a big ol’ puddle of stuff.

Interviewer: So, what pronouns do you use? Outside of drag and then inside of drag?

Mick Douch: In drag I use he/him exclusively, outside of drag I’ll use they/them or he/him. A lot of folks will still use she/her, but some of that is just course of habit. And then there are some spaces like my workplace is wonderful and they’re trying to hold the they/them thing people are really, really working hard on it. But because I still use the female restroom at work, it leads to some like crossover for people. So, for the folks who especially aren’t closer to me, or don’t work with me regularly, they still default to she/her and, you know, it’s just part of what happens.

Interviewer: So how does drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

Mick Douch: I definitely think that – that drag, and more so the drag community itself, gave me permission to explore who I am and to know that there are people like me out there. Without drag, I don’t know when I would have met my first non-binary person to know that there are some people that are like ‘Well, I’m not a guy, but I’m also not a woman.’ And – and I think that’s been the biggest influence has been suddenly having people who are more similar to me who are visible. It’s definitely the biggest influence that drag as had

Interviewer: And then has drag influenced how you think about gender as a whole?

Mick Douch: I think in the same way that that it did with my own is a lot of it comes down to I’ve met more people that fall outside of this cis-normative script. And so meeting people who are like big, hairy bearded human beings, who still don’t identify as men and, and it just helps kind of skew the perception a little bit that there’s much more freedom and fewer boundaries than I would have ever known existed if I hadn’t been meeting drag artists who, outside of drag, identify in all these wide variety of ways.

Interviewer: Has dragged impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Mick Douch: Oh definitely. I think Mick has done wonders for helping me learn to interact with people better and learn to talk with folks better. There’s a lot of us who are drag performers who also are on autism spectrum. And so, figuring out social interaction can be very challenging. And so, I think drag just put me in situations where I’ve more and more often had to practice like when – when a random stranger walks up and wants to talk to me like figuring out what to do. And being in spaces where you kind of discover that, you know, it’s perfectly okay to just nod your head through an entire conversation, and people will go along with it. So, I think it’s definitely created opportunities for development that I wouldn’t have had otherwise.

Interviewer: And then, who or what has influenced your personal drag?

Mick Douch: Honestly, my personal drag has been heavily influenced by other drag kings as well as some queens. When I was starting out in drag, I didn’t know that many drag kings just a few folks that I worked with, no one very established. And so folks like Mindy Bellwood, Roxy Mask were drag queens that I would see, were a big influence for me as a performer along with Muffy Rosenberg in Des Moines and Ginger Snaps out in the Quad Cities because these are all queens kind of took me under their wing and helped, helped me see how drag is done in the abstract with the exaggeration, with the over the top costumes. And so, I definitely think those queens were a major influence on my development. And then as I got more into drag and I discovered the world of the internet, I now moderate one of the biggest drag king Facebook groups out there. Actually, probably the biggest, we have over 5,000 kings from all over the world. So now I think my influence comes from so many other kings, big names like Landon Cider, you smaller names like Oedipussy Rex who’s overseas and seeing the stuff that he’s creating. So being, being in a group like that, where we’re all sharing what we’re creating, talking about ideas, talking about different issues in a space, it, it definitely has a huge influence on the choices that I make.

Interviewer: And then do you consider your drag to be political?

Mick Douch: Inherently no, it’s not political, but I have some political routines and some – some ways that I use drag for activism, like I, I help host the debates here in Chicago at Berlin Nightclub for the Democratic primaries. And so while my drag itself is not always political, it gives me a platform to talk about politics in a way that people listen, because I’ve found that people are like, so this is this is crazy, almost tangential. But I’m an attorney by day I have all this stuff I know about. But no one wants to listen to an attorney talk about how the world works. Ironically, I slap on a pound of makeup and a few rhinestones. And suddenly people will listen to me say the exact same thing I would have said out of drag. So, I it’s one of those words of Spider Man moments like drag performers have so much power to influence the world around them because we’re icons of the queer community. And so, whether we want to be political or not, we are with everything that we do and calling for social justice is almost a duty that we that we have, and some people buy into it more than others.

Interviewer: Definitely. So, are you part of a drag family or drag house or collective?

Mick Douch: No, I’m not I’m I am a free agent. But I, as much as I would love to say that I’m not because I’m really not a part of an organized drag family or anything like that. But with my partner being a drag queen, it’s almost like we’re a drag family by default. And then something that I always tell all the young kings as they’re trying to find drag parents is like, drag parents are kind of an outdated idea. It’s something that played a lot bigger role in life before the age of the internet, when you needed mentors who are local to help teach you the tricks of the trade or to let you watch them do makeup. And in today’s world of YouTube and Instagram, you can pull up anyone and use them for inspiration or for ideas, or figuring out how to do X, Y and Z.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes definitely makes sense. So how often do you perform?

Mick Douch: Usually about two to three times a month is where I cap myself. I don’t really have a requirement as to how much I perform. Since I’m a lawyer during the day, my career takes priority, of course, because that’s your ethical obligations as an attorney, but I still try to get out there at least a few times a month

Interviewer: And then do you perform in any specific place or do you go to different places?

Mick Douch: Yeah, you can – I do go all over the place in Chicago, you can find me at most of the bars off and on here and there, usually more often at places like Berlin Nightclub or Scarlet Bar, since those are both venues that are highly committed to casting diversity. So those are two bars where you’ll always see trans people, always see people of color, always see AFAB people. And so, I- I’m more frequently at those bars, The Call up in Andersonville is also another phenomenal one for casting diversely, but they’re further from my house. So, I tend to go up there less. Same with Hamburger Mary’s in Andersonville, it used to be very like, your traditional drag queen where it’s a trans woman or a cis-het gay man. And now they’re progressing into having more events that are more inclusive, more diverse. So those are usually the spots that you’ll find me around town. And I love to travel for drag. So like, at the beginning of February, I was out in Los Angeles and had the opportunity to perform with a group of kings that I met through the internet and fashion. In April, I’m going to be out in Salt Lake for work, and I’m going to do some shows while I’m out there. So, it’s a lot of fun.

Interviewer: That’s awesome. I’ve always wanted to go to Salt Lake City. So pretty.

Mick Douch: I would say if you go there, though, you should go south for the pretty, the city itself – eh.

Interviewer: And then, so what goes into getting ready for a performance for you?

Mick Douch: Well, some of it depends, because some shows are going to be submission driven, in which case you have to like, look at their theme and come up with your act well in advance at least a vague idea of it to submit. Other ones, you can kind of just pick your number after you’ve been booked and figure out where you want to go. But usually the first thing is coming up with either a song or an idea or a character that I want to do and figuring out where to build from there. And so, there’s all these things of like learning your song. Do you want to do choreography? Do you want to do a gag? Do you want to do a reveal and planning all that out. As far as creating costumes go, I don’t sew for myself, on occasion, I’ll get my partner to sew for me. But usually, it’s me finding readymade things that I can add accents to a lot, usually a lot of rhinestoning sometimes other modifications to them. And as far as makeup goes, it’s – it’s usually a two hour or more process depending on what I’m doing. If I’m doing prosthetics, it could take god like four hours sometimes to do makeup, especially if it’s a new prosthetic. So, there’s – there’s a lot more that goes into the makeup for it that people don’t think about. So – because I’ve had people before be like, ‘Oh, yeah, wow, you made that much for a three minute song?’. And I’m like here, you don’t get it though, the hours and hours going into the costume and the money going into the costume and hours going into makeup, you’re making way less than minimum wage per number.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, then what would you say is the biggest challenge to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Mick Douch: Honestly, the financial is a huge barrier for many drag performers. And especially when you’re new, you’re expected to work for free essentially, to do open stages and to do competitions. And so particularly when you’re doing competitions, you might be turning out a new look every week. And so, you’re – you’re losing money as you do drag. And that can be a major, major hardship on some folks, especially folks who don’t have very stable day jobs and that’s, that’s increasingly common for like transgender people it’s been something that’s always been an issue but now we’re talking about it more and more.  And so that financial barrier is a big challenge, I think another one is figuring out how to network and who to network with. Once you figure out who show producers are, it’s a lot easier. Once you figure out how Instagram works, it’s a bit easier. But if you’re just starting out the gate, like my first Instagram post, I didn’t use any hashtags. I had no idea what to do on Instagram. And so, it’s, it’s a learning curve to figure out how do you use social media to connect with other people and get your name out there and figure out who’s booking things who can help you get shows.

Interviewer: And then building off of that, do you think that there are some implications either for yourself or just in general regarding like, intersections of gender, class, race, things like that.

Mick Douch: Oh, what do you mean?

Interviewer: So, I’m curious if your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice versa?

Mick Douch: Oh definitely. You’ll find that vast majority of drag kings hate RuPaul. Because RuPaul has made so many statements about how drag kings or AFAB drag or transwomen who do drag are not the same as traditional drag queens. And you find a lot of cisgender gay men who hold a lot of the same values as RuPaul, because they’ve heard what he’s said about it. And so, like stuff like that does become a major issue. And it’s sparked things like the hashtag #AllDragIsValid, that one of my friends Paradox Rei started and now the world is kind of starting to run with, which I find funny because I started it a couple years ago, just as a rejection of some of the stuff that drag kings and non-binary creature type drag encounters. So, there’s – there’s a lot of that. And people of color point this out all the time that there’s so many drag shows that are all white cast, even in diverse cities. And so, there’s now becoming a call, especially among minority members of the drag community, that if your show doesn’t have a person of color, if your show doesn’t have a trans person doesn’t have an AFAB person, are you really booking an inclusive cast? Is it really a show that we want to support? So those issues are becoming more and more talked about, and there’s still definitely a predisposition to cast a lot of the traditional drag queen versus the broad diversity of drag.

Interviewer: So, what do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag?

Mick Douch: That it’s about sex, being the number one. Especially when you hear about drag queen story times people all up in arms that it’s pedophilia. And it’s like drag is not, not sex guys. It’s not sexual. It’s they’re – they’re mixing concepts because drag is really just about entertainment, and entertainment that involves the exaggerational performance of gender. And so, I definitely think the idea that drag is sexual is a misconception. Like sure, some people do like the dirty sexual humor or like sexy routines, but you’ll find that anywhere you go in any medium. Like, I think that’s one of the biggest ones. One that drives me nuts is when people say that drag kings are just not as entertaining. And then my favorite game to play with these people is – “Well name three drag kings you’ve seen.” they usually can’t name a single one. And then when I’m like, “Hmm,” they tell me it’s and then they’ll usually respond to “That’s because drag kings are less entertaining.” They can’t remember any of them. And then I’m like, “Really?” And I’m like, “Well, have you tried to look at drag kings on the internet? I’m sure you’ve looked at tons of drag queens,” and usually folks haven’t. And so, there’s these assumptions that inherently AFAB drag or drag kings will be less entertaining. Oh, and that’s the other one that drives me nuts. The assumption that drag kings are only appropriate for lesbian nights is one of my pet peeves. Because you’ll find that yeah, maybe half of drag kings are lesbians or once upon a time considered themselves lesbians, but there are straight drag kings and there are trans men who are drag kings and there are cisgender straight men and cisgender gay men and the whole spectrum of people. So, the – that idea is silly.

Interviewer:  Where do you think that these type of misconceptions come from?

Mick Douch:  I think the less entertaining thing comes from like I said, RuPaul’s influence heavily. And I think good old misogyny plays a major factor in the idea that people who are not men are less funny. And people who are not cismen are less funny because you see the same thing within the comedy industry. Yes. Or*Birds of Prey* is one of my favorite examples. How like, because that’s so timely right now people talk about how it was a flop. I go and look at the box office numbers and compare it to one where it was my male cast recently, they were praising a male cast that had the exact same box office numbers as being a hit. So, there’s stuff like that that I think is a huge factor. And I think the idea of drag kings belonging on a lesbian night is largely driven by gay men saying that they don’t want to see a woman with a beard drawn on their face, because they don’t realize that being a drag king is so much more than that. So yeah, it’s, it’s, one of those where I think just a lot of prejudices that exists outside of drag are just so present, they don’t go away.

Interviewer: What do you think can be done to help change these misconceptions?

Mick Douch: Fire RuPaul. But honestly, I think that’s one of my biggest things is how can you put someone like Miley Cyrus in drag to judge RuPaul’s Drag Race, while simultaneously saying drag kings don’t belong on the show? Like there are certain things like that that need to change. I think one of the biggest things that can happen and should happen, and this is one where it actually takes the control outside of the usual drag producers, is if a university is booking a drag show for the university, they should require that they have a diverse cast. Because that’s one where it’s silly because you can really sway it all. So that’s like Aurora Gozmic, who puts up a lot of the bookings for Scarlet, she makes sure that every Saturday night she has AFAB people, or trans people, or people of color. She doesn’t book very many guests each Saturday, so you might get one out of three or two out of three. But it’s still it’s a – it’s a commitment to diversity that she’s undertaken as a producer. Same with Abhijeet here in Chicago has taken on this commitment to diversity and will always book a diverse cast. And at the university shows it’s especially important because oftentimes, those are the most high paying shows out there for drag entertainers. So making sure you’re booking people of color and trans people and drag kings, the people who usually don’t get high paying opportunities is super, super important to helping sway the dynamic and you’re catching the most the most young drag fans largely, by swooping into the university shows.

Interviewer: So, would you say that there is no anything unique to the drag scene in Chicago compared to other places in the country or the world?

Mick Douch: Oh, yes, I think Chicago is actually a place where we’re kind of on the forefront of being more accepting of all types of drag than many, many places. Chicago is a place where yeah, we have our traditional drag queens. But we also have a lot of beautiful trans people and non-binary people and AFAB people who participate and are fully welcomed on the same level as cisgender men. It’s also a place where you can see people who are more like creatures inside drag like Hinkypunk is kind of a drag queen, but also kind of a creature and having it be normal. And so that’s really nice. You can go to a show and see a total horror number that’s gory. And then 10 seconds later, someone could be doing a routine that’s clowning or acrobatics. Yeah, it’s just such a diverse scene. The most part, a lot of the venues are really open to diverse casts and ideas from diverse people. And I don’t know I’ve, I’ve not seen people try to, like relegate drag kings to having to be just with other drag kings or on their own nights. We have some all drag king shows, but it’s not because someone forced us there, it’s because we chose to create an all drag king show to try to amplify other drag kings. Which I think is very unique because in most cities, it’s the other way around where a bar is like, “You’re not bookable for the regular main show so here’s a Wednesday night, good luck filling the bar. If you can manage to do it, eh, maybe we’ll move you to the weekend sometime.” Versus in Chicago, like Dan McMahon approached Hamburger Mary’s and was like, I want to do a king show and right out the gate, they gave him a Friday night. So, it’s just a place that’s much more willing to give us the same opportunities no matter who you are.

Interviewer: Yeah that’s awesome. So, if you could change one thing about the entire drag scene, drag community what would that one thing be?

Mick Douch: Stop with the shade. What drag queens and some drag kings and drag beings call shade is really just being an asshole and bullying. It’s not, like, okay, haha, you might get a chuckle out of it, but you’re, you’re being a jerk. And if your humor comes with a price of being a jerk, why, why do it? It’s one of those where I think it comes out of the misperception that women are catty. And so, drag queens are catty to each other and like, they joke about cutting someone’s wig or tripping them, you know, to get ahead and I’m like, “Why? It doesn’t have to be that way.” So that’s the one that I’d really like to get rid of, is the idea that, that everyone’s in competition with each other because we can all succeed together. Doesn’t have to come at a cost to somebody else.

Interviewer:  Yea and then you kind of mentioned a couple times, but just a general maybe elaborate more on it. How do you feel about RuPaul’s Drag Race?

Mick Douch: I giggle because someone the other night asked me if I’ll help cohost the viewing of it. I told them only if I can remind people every day how much RuPaul sucks. And they’re actually fine with me doing that when I’m hosting Drag Race. But ,the thing is, is I respect that it brought drag more into the mainstream and brought forth a whole new generation of people who are interested in drag. But I do think that Ru needs to realize that the time for what Drag Race used to be, it’s kind of changed – like it’s god, they’re on like season 14. And I’m like 14 years ago, we were a very different culture than we are today. Like they/them pronouns weren’t used 14 years ago and RuPaul was saying some very, very transphobic things and had like, there used to be a part of RuPaul’s Drag Race called she-male. And I’m like that, that when it came out for like, one year it was okay. And then it was no longer socially okay to have. And that’s part of it is I wish RuPaul and VH1 would realize that RuPaul needs to adapt to the times or it’s gonna die. And I think it’s pretty damn close to dead, honestly, because there’s less and less people who are interested in it and less people who are watching it or who want to be on it than there were 14 years ago just because it’s, it’s not getting up to the times and the fact that drag is more than just men in dresses.

Interviewer: So how would you personally define drag?

Mick Douch: I think drag is an art form that can be either visual or performance. And it’s characterized by the exaggeration of gender, whether that’s a lack of gender, or presenting hyper feminine or hyper masculine or anything in between. It doesn’t have to be cross dressing, although oftentimes it does involve someone portraying a gender that’s not their own. But it’s just playing with the concept of gender in one way or another.

Interviewer: And what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Mick Douch: Well, I think that’s one that really depends so heavily on the individual. I mean, for me, my drag, it used to be just about like me having fun and hanging out with other people. And now it’s become much more of a platform to find opportunities to talk about issues. Like I’ve sat on panels and I’ve spoken at universities in ways that as a drag king that I would never get as an individual and so for me, it’s – it’s a platform, it’s a chance to be hyper visible in a world where everyone is so much the same. But then there are other people who really do it purely for the joy of performing. Like my, my partner is, is, gosh, way better at performing than I am. And she really does it just because she loves performing and she loves how drag makes her feel beautiful. And then I know some people who are, some cis performers, but a lot of trans performers well that’s their primary source of income. And, and for them, the purpose of drag is a job, it’s a way to stay afloat. So, it’s a very diverse thing as to what the purpose is.

Interviewer: And then if you could go back in time, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Mick Douch: Oh, don’t perform toxic masculinity and not – and the worst part is, it’s not an intentional thing, many young drag kings fall into performing toxic masculinity. Because when you think about being a man or parodying a man, you fall into some of the worst of what it means to be a man. And so, I would honestly talk with myself about the idea that you can present masculine and present masculine concepts without running the risk of perpetuating some of the really bad behaviors that those who are men engage in.

Interviewer: Definitely, and then if you chose one thing that you want people to know about, or learn about drag from this, what would it be?

Mick Douch: I don’t know, I gotta think. I would probably say, if you are going to be at a drag show, at least cheer – cheering is free. And if you can afford to, tip people because the tips are how most people make money to like pay the cost of their costumes, and even if you can’t tip, cheer. Oh and then drag is non consent, do not touch me unless we talk about it.

Interviewer: And then, did you have any additional experiences or comments or anything you’d like to share?

Mick Douch: Not that I can think of.

Interviewer: Okay well thank you so much, Mick.

Mick Douch: Awesome

Interviewer: And I will email you and if you’d like – or send me pictures you’d like to include some for the posting that’d be awesome as well.

Mick Douch: Yeah, I can do that. Do you have a preference like size or headshot versus like body or whatever that you prefer –

Interviewer: Anything that you’re most comfortable with or you know, your favorite pictures. Anything like that would be, would be perfect.

Mick Douch: Okay, cool. Yeah. I’ll dig through those and send you some later today.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you so much. It was great talking with you.

Mick Douch: Yeah, thank you.

Interviewer: You have a great night, bye.