Interview with Cyller, March 12, 2021

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*Transcript:*

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

Cyller: Oh man, I first heard about drag was I was like 18 years old, so probably a long time ago. I hadn’t been out yet and I was just exposed, you know, through some friends of mine to the drag community and that’s kind of where I first was exposed. Yeah, about 18 years old.

Natalie: Okay, awesome. So then, when did you start performing as a drag artist?

Cyller: Um, I probably, I was performing in 2010. That’s… yeah, that’s when I first started performing was in 2010.

Natalie: Okay, and what made you want to do it?

Cyller: Um. So there was a bar called Novak’s back in the day in the Grove, and every Monday night they had a drag king show. And so once I became legal, um, and was 21, I you know would just go out there, and I had some friends that attended Monday night king shows, and they knew folks that were in the shows and friends with some folks in the show, so I just kinda tagged along and went and watched, and I just kinda fell in love with it and that spark just… it just kinda took off.

Natalie: That’s awesome! Um, and you’re not doing drag anymore?

Cyller: I am not.

Natalie: Okay, when did you stop?

Cyller: Oh man, well, I stopped performing… probably, oh man… oh man, um, probably five or six years ago? It’s been a little bit of time but yeah, I was going real strong for a while and then um, you know I kinda just started focusing on my career and teaching, and the drag scene had changed quite a bit, so I kinda just you know, decided to just take a step back and um, you know… Again, things changed and then career, so I just kinda decided to give it up.

Natalie: Yeah, you said that the drag scene changed, was there something about it that you didn’t like so much anymore then?

Cyller: Well, um, in St. Louis, we kinda go through our waves of drag, and drag kings are a lot different than drag queens. And so it’s a lot more difficult to find venues that will allow kings to perform because, you know, they aren’t seen on the same caliber and the same level as drag queens and the entertainers that they are, and, you know, all the greatness that they bring to the stage, you know, the perception of kings, you know, went really went downhill for a while. And some of the bars closed, and there was just, there was no money allotted to have kings and queens perform. So slowly the amount of drag king venues just kinda withered away and there was nowhere really to go perform and have that outlet anymore.

Natalie: Gotcha, that’s unfortunate.

Cyller: Yeah.

Natalie: Okay, um, so when you did start doing drag, how did your family and friends and other loved ones react? What did they think of it?

Cyller: Well, um, I never officially kinda told my family because my family’s very religious, so um, you know I kinda, kinda keep some things from them and don’t really divulge everything. But my family—or, my friends, you know, they were really supportive and really helped me out and I relied on them to kinda help form my persona and, you know, they would come out on drag nights or, you know, performance nights and, you know, bring some people out with them and just, it was really supportive and a huge amazing time. Um, yeah, they were just really great and happy and supportive so…

Natalie: That’s good to hear. Uh, so your drag name is Cyller? Uh, where did that come from?

Cyller: Uh, well, my childhood street name was [Cyller], and so I spelled it a little differently. But that’s just kinda how I came up with it. I had a friend when I lived in Tennessee for a while, I went to college down there for a couple years. I really, that’s when I had really gotten into the gay scene and the drag scene, and I started running with a couple of queens down there, and they were just being funny and random and they’re like, ‘oh yeah, if you decide to come up with your drag name, it’s your street that you grew up on and then your animal growing up.’ And I was like how about we just, let’s just go with the street name. And that’s just kinda where everything evolved from.

Natalie: Nice. Okay, so, you know in drag there’s a lot of, a lot of terms, like, you know, drag queen, drag king, glamour queen, camp, all those things… um, are there any of those, any of those labels that you would use to describe your own drag, the style or the… anything like that?

Cyller: No, and you know I will say since I have been out of the drag scene for a good five to six years, at least performance-wise—I’m still involved in like the Pride, um, the Pride royalty committee and things like that every so often, but I don’t perform. Um, so I think in the last five or six years that’s really when I noticed the scene has changed, and a lot of those terms came into play because of everybody’s originality and what each individual might have brought to the table. And so it just kind of at the same time—it’s kinda weird—because at the same time the king scene was leaving St. Louis, the drag scene in general was just like blowing up and new performers were coming out of the woodwork, bringing to the stage their own spin on things, and I think that that, you know, is kinda where all these terms came up and originated and I, you know like I said, I kinda left the scene before that happened so I… Yeah, I don’t really put myself in any of those categories from what I did.

Natalie: Gotcha, that makes sense. So what did you, what did you do as a drag artist then?

Cyller: Um, I really tried to play to the audience. And back in the day, kings and queens, mostly kings, made their money and their, yeah, their money from performing by tips. And so for me, I did a lot of observing and watching what the queens did and what some of the kings like in different cities did that were famous and that were just huge and fantastic. So what I kinda tried to do was play to the audience, and it depended on what type of show it was. If it was a Monday night all king show, the song choices and the outfit I would do and come up with would kinda be geared a little differently towards my audience versus a Saturday night at a bar where it was mostly straight folks coming to see the drag queens. I kinda had to be more popular in the song choices that I made and I kinda had to think about, okay what’s gonna make some drunk folks excited, wanna dance, and give me their money! So I had to perform and become someone that kinda catered towards that, that person. So I was just kind of all over the place and you know I would do a variety of different songs from different genres you know if anybody requested a song then awesome, I would totally do that. Uh, I also was married at the time, not to my current wife, but she’s my ex now, but my wife at the time was very creative, and she would just come up with amazing costumes and outfits and then so she would have this idea and come up with an outfit, and then I would turn around and try to match that outfit with a song. And so that’s kinda how I came up with some of the song choices and outfits that I, you know, kinda put forth.

Natalie: Okay, that’s fun, that sounds fun. Um, did you, I guess you already went into this a little bit. Did you take influence from any other drag artists?

Cyller: Yeah, there’s a lot of drag artists out there. Not only in our city but, you know, across the nation that I would follow and I would meet through pageantry, so that’s another added layer to who I was as an entertainer. I started performing in bars just like on the little Monday night shows or Saturday night shows, and then I met some folks and I was able to get into pageantry. So through pageantry, I mean, the amount of kings that I met that were just amazing and had so much talent was, I mean it’s mindblowing. So I met a lot of great folks through pageantry, and they kind of, you know um… kinda helped me form who I was and kinda where I went from there.

Natalie: Mhmm. Cool, um… sorry. (laughs)

Cyller: Totally fine

Natalie: It’s okay. Um, do you consider your, well, did you consider your drag to be political?

Cyller: No, I didn’t get into the political-ness. I used drag as an outlet to have fun and to, you know, bring something different to the table. Yeah, I never used it politically or to make a statement. It was all just fun, and again, back in the day, in 2010, it’s been a while but you know it was a different kind of perception as far as drag was concerned. So we really didn’t see a whole lot of political drag back in the day when I first started, so, you know I just, I definitely, I didn’t touch that at all.

Natalie: Gotcha. So it was just more of a fun thing for you I guess?

Cyller: Yeah! Yeah.

Natalie: It does sound like fun.

Cyller: It was fantastic.

Natalie: Um, so can you tell me about what your life was like at the time, as a drag artist?

Cyller: Um, I mean it kind of, I kind of had a separation and you know some folks blend their drag lives with their real lives, some folks have separate drag lives from their personal lives. And each is to be respectable. You know, I tried to make a disconnect between my drag persona and my day to day life because I’m a teacher, and a gay teacher at that in East St. Louis. So I’ve got all the odds stacked against me, so I definitely didn’t want that perception being brought into my career. And so I tried to keep that as separate as possible. You know, but there were some things that kinda flowed together. I, you know, I was one that didn’t like to be called by my drag name unless I was in drag. And that was something that, you know, when I went out to the bar the more I start you know the more I performed, the more popular I would get, and people would recognize me. And so if I would be out on a Saturday, out of drag just out and about in the Grove, people would call me by my drag name, and I wouldn’t, like I wouldn’t make that connection because I wasn’t used to hearing it, you know, other than being announced on the stage. So it was a lit-It was kinda weird to be called by my drag name instead of my real name, so. But yeah, I just tried to keep my life separate because to me that was the point of drag at the time. Was to be someone or something that you wouldn’t normally do or be in your regular day-to-day life. So I tried to have that separation.

Natalie: No, I think that makes a lot of sense, that definitely sounds like something that… you know, from what I’ve heard a lot of drag artists like to use drag for that sort of reason.

Cyller: Right.

Natalie: So when you were doing drag, were you part of like a drag family or collective or anything like that?

Cyller: Um, I was for a minute, and then some drama went down, because you know back in the day some, most of us were, you know, female, so drama, drama, drama. Yeah, I did become part of a family in the beginning, and then as my journey continued and I met different folks and became friends with different drag aritsts in the community, my family—my drag family didn’t really get along with my other drag friends, and so I made some bad choices, I made some bad calls, and decided to abandon my drag family. But again, I’m an adult, I can you know, take ownership of things, and so I made amends and ,you know, would I say now I’m still part of the family? Eh, I think that perception has kinda changed throughout the years, especially with the older generation of drag people. But yeah I’ve, I was for a minute and then I just kinda yeah, I just dropped out.

Natalie: Gotcha. So how often would you perform?

Cyller: Ooh. Back in the day when I first started, I could pull… Monday-probably two shows a week sometimes, so probably within a month I could pull anywhere between five and six shows. And again at that time, kings only had Monday nights at Novak’s, well Mondays and Saturdays at Novak’s, and Saturdays were king and queen shows, so you had to be invited as one of the two king spots to perform on Saturdays. So yeah, like back in the day I could pull like quite a few shows, and if people called out then, you know, I was kinda like on standby, and if I needed to show up and throw together some numbers for a show, then yeah I could throw some shit together, so um yeah, yeah. About five or six maybe in a month, sometimes more, just kinda depended.

Natalie: Uh… what places? I know you said some of the places had, you know, closed down. Any that are still around?

Cyller: Uh, so Grey Fox used to do drag kings and queens, so Grey Fox was a good one. There was, um, Rehab, we did Novak’s, Attitudes, Bar PM. Some of them are still around, but some of them have switched owners and they don’t really do drag shows, and especially no king shows. Um, yeah. And then like there would be some like events, oh definitely Pride, because as a former King of Pride, you have to attend certain Pride functions in drag, out of drag. So, you know, sometimes wherever Pride would hold like some kickoff events, you know, I would go hang out or perform over there. But yeah that was just kinda dependent on where they were. Or like festivals, oh like uhm oh, uh Grove Fest! Where it was like in the middle of the street, I’ve got to perform at Grove Fest. That was freaking awesome, yeah that was so cool, but definitely different, different spots that I got to perform at all over the city, and I traveled a little bit to do some pageants, so yeah, lots of different places.

Natalie: Cool. So tell me a little bit about what goes into getting ready for a performance.

Cyller: Oh man, well there’s a whole lot that goes into getting ready, you know back into like weeks or months, even down to the day, down to the minute. You know, you really gotta start thinking about song choice, and you know your outfits, that’s kind of where everything begins. Who you are as an artist and how that aligns to your song choices and your outfits and down to your props or anything you’re going to use. So you know, that’s kind of where you have to start and think about what you’re going to perform and what you’re going to wear. And then you have to, you know, you have to buy all the binding things, and every king and every entertainer is different as far as what they buy and how they bind and, you know, putting facial hair on. Like for me, for the facial hair part of it, I would get a haircut and I would have to keep my hair, and so I would sit, I remember so many times I would sit in front of the TV and just cut my hair until it was like a powder consistency. And then like the day of you would have to buy spirit gum—or, not the day of, but you would have spirit gum, and you would put it on your face as well, so I did like some shadowing and you know, some like base foundation and things like that, so I did a combination of makeup and real hair. But I mean it, it definitely takes quite a bit. It’s a lot of thinking and a lot of, you know, back planning. What am I going to do, what do I need. Um, so yeah, it could start weeks, months ahead of time down to like the day of. And then yeah, just like right even, even during performances you’re still kind of changing things. You’re changing your outfit, sometimes you want a different facial look from song to song to song, you know. So people will go in the dressing room and change that up. I didn’t, I was like ‘y’all, that’s too much, that’s just… if that’s what you wanna do then okay, but that’s not me.’ So yeah, I mean, it definitely takes a lot of preparation and knowing who you are as an artist and connecting to your outfits and to your song choices.

Natalie: Mhmm. Yeah, I feel like I didn’t really know so much about how that went as a king. I—we hear a lot about queens, but… (laughs)

Cyller: Hoo, yeah. Being in a dressing room with a queen is just mind… eye opening, like you would not even believe! I mean, it was, it was great times though. Yeah.

Natalie: So what would you say are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Cyller: Um… boobs. If you don’t have tiny boobs, that’s your biggest challenge. *How* in the world am I going to tape down my tits if they’re this big? How can I tape those down and get those to look like they’re not boobs! So that to me was number one the most difficult thing ever. Because before, before I had two breast reductions, it was insane. I, I don’t know if that’s too much information but, like my boobs are large and they were hard, and so to try to like tape ‘em down, I would have to take a roll of duct tape and tape my boobs, and tape ‘em like—And you have to not tape in the middle, because you’ve got to breathe here, so you gotta tape from your boobs all the way underneath your armpits, back around to the back. So I would have tape all the way from one side, all the way around my back to the other side, and I would only have this spot right here left to breathe. So I would wrap and wrap and wrap, and then I would have, like, suspenders right here so I would duct tape from suspenders so like from my boobs across my shoulders to my back. And then I would put on a binder to hold everything in and down, because when you get to going and sweating and moving and stuff, you’re gonna pop your tape, you’re gonna come out, and your boobs are gonna get like, ‘here’s my boobs!’ So it was definitely a learning curve on how to tape big boobs. Other than that, I don’t—I mean, that was really like the challenge for me, yeah. That was awful.

Natalie: (Laughs) That sounds like a lot!

Cyller: Yeah, yeah. So thankfully, breast reduction worked really well so it’s just a binder these days, whoop! If that happens, just the binder, boom, and gone.

Natalie: Mhmm. So is there anything unique, you think, about the drag scene in St. Louis compared to other places?

Cyller: Um, I definitely think it’s more of a family orientation. You know, we tend to stick together a lot. We tend to fight and argue within the drag community, but I think that that’s what draws us so close and makes us a good family. I know—again, from my experience, it’s been a long time—but being in the, in the drag scene, I was able to connect and make, you know, bonds and relationships with drag queens and female entertainers of all sorts. And I think that that was a really great way to connect and any time we would see every, you know, anybody out, in drag, out of drag, you just have this sense of family and love, and you would always speak to them. You know, it was almost kind of like sometime politically correct where there were just those certain entertainers that you *had* to speak to because otherwise, it was going to be like, ‘nope, I don’t know you, I’m gonna give you a hard time.’ But, I think yeah, St. Louis is just known for its uniqueness and you know, everybody loving each other and knowing that drag is the art form of our community! Like that’s our art. You know, everybody else has something that they do, but drag is our art for the gay community, and so I feel like that brought us together in a, in a different way than the outsiders or somebody in a different state or city. But I don’t know, I love the folks in St. Louis, they’re just, they’re amazing.

Natalie: That sounds fantastic! It sounds like a really tight-knit community.

Cyller: Yeah, we really relied on each other and like, we could call each other for help or, you know, message each other if we needed some stones, or I needed to borrow some duct tape or… it was just that kind of community to where if I needed something or somebody needed something, they could just reach out and they were there for everybody.

Natalie: Mhmm. Alright, so this next question isn’t so much for you, because you’re not performing anymore, but you said—you did say that you were still pretty involved with the community. Um, do you have anything to say about the way the Covid-19 pandemic has affected drag artists?

Cyller: Um, I think it’s really sad the way that it has affected drag, but I also feel like a lot of the artists have been resilient and creative in the way that they want to bring their art form still to people during Covid. You know, and again I haven’t been involved a whole lot, I’ve only seen a few things happen on Facebook, you know, but like I said, the way that, that it affected everybody, it… It was always a happy experience when you could go to a drag show. You know, like out in the Grove or out and about and get to see folks and share that experience with people out, you know, in the community. And so you know when Covid shut everything down, I think a lot of folks got stressed out and they were like, ‘I need this outlet, I need to be able to do this,’ and so that’s when I started to see, you know, the online virtual drag events and the shows being held online, which was really awesome, you know, that people can come together and be creative with, with how they still were able to get their art out there and perform for people.

Natalie: It’s definitely adapted, for sure. So how, outside of drag, how do you identify in terms of your sex, identity, and gender expression?

Cyller: So outside of drag I identify as a gay female. I don’t really like the term “lesbian.” I’m older generation I guess, so to speak. To me, it carries a negative connotation and it’s just a personal opinion, personal preference. I don’t prefer that word. So I just call myself gay or queer, you know, and I just tend to live my life as who I am and, yeah. I live as a female.

Natalie: Gotcha. That makes sense. So then what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Cyller: She/her.

Natalie: She/her out of drag?

Cyller: Mhmm.

Natalie: And then he/him in drag?

Cyller: Yeah pretty much. Most people would just call me by my drag name if I was in drag. Sometimes I didn’t realize that, you know, he/him if I was in drag. I didn’t really kind of put that together and answer when that happened because I would just kinda do it. But yeah, I mean, I’m not easily offended so if somebody called me “he” outside of drag, it is what it is. It’s no big deal but, you know.

Natalie: Gotcha. So has drag influenced your sex and gender identities at all, or how you think about gender?

Cyller: No, it didn’t really and it hasn’t affected how I think or live, you know. Like I think it’s set up before drag was kind of an outlet for me to just have fun and be somebody that I wasn’t normally in my regular day-today life. So, I had that separation and that’s just what worked for me.

Natalie: So, I guess in that case I already know a little bit of the answer to this but have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Cyller: Not really. I just wanted to be somebody that I wasn’t and just put on, you know, dress up and entertain folks that wanted to come out and see a good show. To me, it was more about entertainment versus, you know, this is who I identify with and how I live my life as this person. It was all straight up entertainment for me.

Natalie: Has your drag influenced your confidence as a person, when you’re out of drag?

Cyller: Yeah, I would definitely say it has. I started doing drag in 2010 and I had been out for about 10 years, and so it really did help me kind of come out of my shell because I was, earlier in life, a shy person and I was very keep-to-myself, I don’t want to go out. I wasn’t outgoing, so by doing drag and being in the community and having that network of people, you know, it was rally eye opening and, yeah, really shaped who I became and the confidence I had moving forward. It was really, really, really great.

Natalie: That sounds like it was really good for you. So, I think this is a fun question. If you could go back in time as Cyller, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Cyller: What advice would I give myself… Be cautious of people in the community and the scene. Sometimes, you know, people will mislead you. Also, have fun. Do what you want to do. Make drag an outlet for whatever you want it to be. Don’t put yourself in a box. If you want to make a statement and be political about it, do it. Use your platform for whatever you feel it’s good for and what can help people and just the outlook, you know. So, I would definitely say just have fun. Make your character what you want it to be.

Natalie: So here’s another question that I feel like we’ve already touched on a little bit, but we’re expanding it to other things. We’re talking about more of your social identities now, so like gender, race, age, religion, that sort of thing. Have the interaction of those social identities impacted your drag or how you’ve experienced drag, or vice versa?

Cyller: Yeah, I can really talk on the religion part because I was raised Assemblies of God Christian from the time I was bored until I left the house, and in college it was church, church this, church that, church all the time. It was lots of religion. And so, when I came out, I really struggled and even to this day, I still struggle with my religious aspects and beliefs, so I won’t even lie about that. Coming out was an issue and also going into drag religious-wise, it, you know, I didn’t tell my parents even though my dad is super supportive of me being out and just making myself happy. It was just kind of one of those things I wanted to do for myself and I wanted to kind of not think about religion. Religion was a huge influence on my drag and it just kinda made me think and question things. I didn’t bring religion into my character or my entertainment. It was something personal that was going on in my life at the time, you know. I still struggle with that. Is it right, is it not right, you know, so really I mean other than that, race didn’t really play a factor in my drag except for the fact that I was one of those people who, I wouldn’t do a song if it had, you know, bad words or words that white people shouldn’t use. I really steered clear of that and always try to stay true to only performing songs of Caucasian artists. I also though that it was kind of, you know, not right if I wasn’t a person of color, why would I be doing a song of a person of color. So, you know, I might find a different version of that song if I liked it. But yeah, I’m an old soul and so I tended to kind of do some of the popular stuff but also some of the older stuff.

Natalie: So I want to hear a little but about your thoughts of what drag is to you. How would you define drag broadly?

Cyller: I would say it’s the art form of our people. It’s the art form of the gay community, and I think I mentioned that last time but I really truly think it is. I owe Siren, if you know Siren. A former queen in our community who has move to New Orleans. I love Siren, she’s great, but that’s the one thing that I take from her and I really really truthfully believe that that’s the art form of our people and we can make it what we want to make it because it’s perception. It’s fun. It’s our platform to get our lives out there and show the community and people outside of the LGBTQ+ community “this is us, this is what we do for fun, this is part of our people.” Every other subgroup of folks have their art and art form and what they do, what makes them happy and their traditions. I feel like that is for us, and that’s just us. It’s only for us, and I feel really strongly about that. It’s how we express ourselves. We’re free to, you know, I’m free to be a female every day today, but I also am free to step in and put some hair on my face and tape my tits down and do a guy song and act like a guy on stage if that’s what I want to do because that’s who I am and that’s what our community allows us and opened up for us to have is that platform to be who we are and express ourselves as who we want to express ourselves.

Natalie: I love that, I love all of that. So, what do you think is the purpose of drag? Is there a purpose?

Cyller: I don’t. I think I would have to say every entertainer’s purpose is gonna be different, so for me to generally say “here’s the purpose of drag” for everybody, I feel like I would be putting folks in a box, and, you know, I would have to say, this is my purpose as Jill, as Cyler. This is my purpose for drag and my purpose may be different from everybody else, and that’s okay because it’s expression. It’s our art form, and so I just feel really strongly about that, you know, because like we talked earlier, what I do with my drag is entertainment, and there are people out there that use it for political platforms and that’s fantastic, like, if that’s your purpose. However you get your message out there, fantastic. Go do it.

Natalie: Alright, so, my next question: Do you think drag is sexual in any way and why or why not?

Cyller: It can be. There were definitely, uhm, I will speak about kings that were more sexual, that were more promiscuous with their drag. But knowing them in and out of drag, it was that persona. They could step out of their day to day life and become this other person. That was one aspect that I saw, but I also saw, I know this person outside of drag and that sexuality and sexualness was still part of their being, and that’s what made it so great and broad, because you knew that Princea Machiavelli was gonna perform in his swag suit, dressed to the nines, and be all up on the ladies in the crowd and swoon them and have your swag. And then you had folks like me who just wanted to have a good time and bring smiles to people’s faces and entertain them. So, you know, I think it’s also up to, you know, who feels what and what their platform and purposes are for entertainment. I think drag queens are a lot more sexual.

Natalie: You think drag queens are more sexual than drag kings?

Cyller: Yeah. Oh yeah. That’s all they want to talk about when they are like hosting or whatever, and their songs tend to be more, like, risqué and more about sexuality and yeah, but it’s still great and I love it because it’s awesome.

Natalie: Okay, so, I’ve been waiting to ask this one. How do you feel about *RuPaul’s Drag Race*?

Cyller: Oooh, that’s a loaded question, because I’ve had that discussion with queens and kings of all different varieties of, you know, experience. Uhm, it’s been on for a while and I have watched it faithfully from season one all the way until a couple seasons ago, and I love the beginning seasons. I don’t really know if I am into it nowadays. I think it’s more, (sigh), dramatic and more for pageants folks. And I’m a pageant king, I love pageants, don’t get me wrong. You know, once I got started in the pageantry that was like the end all be all, and just great. But, I feel like they’ve catered to a certain type of person and certain type of crowd lately, and I don’t think that they’re holding true to what it used o be in the beginning. But again, having said that, times change. People change. Money talks. So if you want to keep your show running, you’ve got to think about the money aspect of things, and if you want people to watch your show, then you’ve got think about how can we keep it, you know, fresh and new and creative and still get people to watch it and have the ratings. So you know, I think it was a really great outlet. And my friend actually, I got to be involved with him when he wanted to, he actually auditioned for RuPaul’s Drag Race, a few years. He didn’t make it, but it was really cool to see like the audition side of it, and what you had to do to just submit your audition to be considered for the show. So, but yeah, I mean it’s changed so much over the years and I don’t know. I, the best thing about it is that it does get it out there for the whole world to see and like showcase the fantastic entertainment and the transitions that can happen from looking like a male in real life to full painted face, you know, dressed to the nines in these fantastic costumes that you’ve made. I think it’s a really good outlet and I really good way to showcase the drag scene and the drag community.

Natalie: Gotcha, I think I see what you’re saying. Alright, so I just have a few questions left, we’re right—we’re getting toward the end. So if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be, and why?

Cyller: Ooh… I wish there were more outlets, especially in St. Louis. I just wish there were more outlets for performing. I also wish, especially for the king scene, knowing and being involved in just the like little bar shows versus the pageantry. Because there’s a big gap in the quality of entertainment and, you know, costuming and things like that in pageantry versus bar shows, so I wish that there was more knowledge and more of a community of, let’s help each other. You know, I was, way back in the day I was part of a group that we tried to host some like master classes for drag kings. I think we were successful a couple of times, we held them at Novak’s back in the day. But it was great to be able to say, you know, the few of us that are seasoned kings: ‘Come in, let us show you how to tape your tits down, how to pick song choices, how to create your outfits, like just to create your persona.’ And so, I think that was a really great thing that, you know, would really be, you know, fruitful these days, with the amount of variety in drag, you know, and just more of a… non-catty feeling in the drag scene. It’s come a long ways, you know, from when I first started. It was very very very catty back in the day, but you know, it’s not so much these days. But I don’t, I don’t know, I just wish that, I wish there were more outlets, and I wish that more people were receptive. And, you know, one thing I wish is that the quote unquote straight people would kind of think about that when they come to show up for like a bachelorette party. And back in the day when we couldn’t get married, the straight folks would come to the drag show as part of their bachelorette party. Like, that’s a slap in the face because this is for us, like awesome, great for coming out and experiencing something new, but… not, not in that aspect. Like, that throws something in our face that you’re like ‘well, we can do this, and we’re celebrating this, but we’re in a place where you can’t do the same thing.’ So, I don’t know, that’s just something I wish a perception would change, you know.

Natalie: That’s, no I see what you’re saying there. And that, I’m actually uh… I want to know, what do you think are some misconceptions also that people have about drag?

Cyller: I think, I think it goes into like straight folks versus gay folks really. And their perception is, you know, well, if you’re a drag queen, you want to be a woman, and this is just how you’re going to get out there, and you’re just a freak. And, you now, the perception, I think, is let’s go—from straight people—is like, ‘oh, let’s go watch the boys dressed as girls, and you know, let’s see a freak show.’ And then, you know for the kings, the straight people don’t even, they don’t even give two shits, because ‘oh, you know, it’s a girl, they wanna be a dude, so this is just what they’re doing.’ So, I think that that is really disheartening, you know, looking at it as a straight versus gay kind of scene.

Natalie: What do you think would help change that perception?

Cyller: I honestly, I don’t, I don’t really know. I don’t, I don’t know because again, I think it kind of all snowballs. It’s all religion, it’s perception, you know, it’s a few of the outsiders or straight folks that maybe had some bad interactions with gay folks, and that puts a bad light on the gay community, you know, so they’re seeing it as that. You know, and the other things is, you know, gay people don’t really go out to straight bars. You know, you see the gay—er, you see the straight people coming to our bars all the time, you know, ‘wanna go out, have a drink or watch the show.’ But, most gay folks kind of steer clear of bars, and, you know. Why, why are you doing that to us if we’re not, you know, going into your spaces. This is our safe space, so. But I don’t really know what the, what the end result is or how to get for it to be more accepting. You know, I just, more exposure, I guess. I just , I don’t know. That’s a tough one.

Natalie: It sounds like there’s this disconnect between, you know, straight cisgender people and the LGBT community. This misunderstanding of the other side I guess.

Cyller: Right. And if you’re religious it’s a sin to be gay, so… There’s, there’s that thing in there too, religion, it plays a huge part in gay versus straight, you know.

Natalie: (Pause) Sorry, the dogs are barking and I’m waiting for them.

Cyller: (Laugh) Oh, you’re fine!

Natalie: Alright, this is my last question for you. If you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Cyller: To watch it with an open mind and be receptive to being entertained. It’s entertainment. Again, it’s the art form of our people, so come enjoy, watch us, be entertained, you know? Have a good time, learn something, learn about our community through the drag scene. Yeah that’s what, yeah, what’s what I would think.

Natalie: I, I really love that, and I really love the phrase you keep using, the art form of our people. I think that’s great.

Cyller: That’s all Siren, I, props to Siren for that, because yeah, Siren nailed that on the head. Yeah.

Natalie: Well, that’s all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else that you want to say, or want to share?

Cyller: No, I mean it’s been a great, you know, it’s been a great couple sessions, and I’ve really enjoyed this, and it’s brought back a lot of good memories, and, you know, it’s just been, it’s been really great. And I hope that, you know, this, whatever you’re going to do with this really helps folks out in the community and, you know, to just be more exposed and be more open to, you know, what happens in our community and how we have fun and how we entertain.

Natalie: I’m really glad you enjoyed doing this. I had a lot of fun talking about you and hearing all that you had to say!

Cyller: That’s so great, I’m so happy.