Interview with Ivy Tabou

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**Claudia:** Okay, so the first question I have is, what did you... or when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

**Ivy:** So, I... it's going to sound really lame, but, like, I just saw an ad for RuPaul’s Drag Race, and I was like, “Oh, like, that looks, kind of, cool.” Like, I don’t know, I’ve never really been, like, the person to, like, be judgmental about anything like that. So, I just kinda was like, "Oh, that’s cool." Then I, like, kind of, got into it more and, like, started doing research on it and yeah.

**Claudia:** Cool. And then, what was your initial reaction to it?

**Ivy:** Um, probably just, like, amazed because there was a lot more to it than people think.

**Claudia:** Yeah. Yeah, we lear... like, in this class I’ve, like, learned so much about it. I was like, “Wow, I did not know it was that intense.”

**Ivy:** Yeah, it’s a whole, like, project.

**Claudia:** Yeah, definitely. And then, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you get into it?

**Ivy:** So, I’ve only been performing since January because of quarantine. There hasn’t been really any, like, amateur nights available. Um, I’ve been practicing, like, drag makeup, that’s what I picked up during quarantine, like, whenever it first started. So, I just was, kind of, building up my makeup, getting all of that down, getting some things before I started. Um, yeah. I forgot the other part of your question, I’m sorry. [Laughs]

**Claudia:** And why did you start performing?

**Ivy:** Um, I started performing because I like... I’ve always liked performing. Um, I used to be in, like, choir and, like, theatre and drama, and I just, kind of, was like, "I need..." Like, I missed performing; I missed the outlet that it gives me, and yeah.

**Claudia:** Awesome. And then, how did your family, friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

**Ivy:** So, my mom is very supportive, like, her side of the family is very supportive of it. My mom comes to a lot of my shows. She tries to come as many as she can. Um, my dad is from a very conservative town, so it, kind of, took him a little bit to, kind of, like, educate him and get him around to the idea.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** But he’s definitely gotten a little more receptive to it, he’s a little better with it.

**Claudia:** That’s good.

**Ivy:** Um, my friends, on the other hand, they just, kind of, were like, "Okay," like, “when’s your show? I’m coming.”

**Claudia:** Yeah. [Laughs]

**Ivy:** Like, “You can’t stop me.”

**Claudia:** That’s good that you have a good support system for it, though.

**Ivy:** Yes, definitely. I feel very lucky to have a support system.

**Claudia:** Um, and then... so, you told me your drag name is Ivy Tabou, which I love, but where did your drag name come from? Like, how did you come up with it?

**Ivy:** I’m gonna be honest, I looked up on Google, like, a drag queen name generator...

**Claudia:** Really? [Laughs]

**Ivy:** Which I didn’t even know existed, but it popped up. And first, I was going to be Phoenix Monroe, but I didn’t really like that. So, one of the other names was Ivy Taboo, but I just had to change the name around because of social media because it wouldn’t let me keep Taboo the same word, for some reason...

**Claudia:** Oh.

**Ivy:** Because they said it’s not a real person, so...

**Claudia:** That’s weird. That’s cool that you did that, though, 'cause I know a lot of, like, bands say like, “Oh, I just went on random band name generator,” or something, and like rappers do that too. So, that’s, kind of, cool.

**Ivy:** Yeah.

**Claudia:** Um, and then, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag from, like, drag queen and drag king to glamor queen and, like, male impersonator, comedy queen, like, all those. Are there, like, particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

**Ivy:** Um, I definitely identify with just drag queen. I don’t really like to use, like, AFAB or bioqueen because to me, personally, it’s, kind of, not as inclusive as I thought it was whenever I first was starting out. So, I try to be as inclusive as I can. I... I’m still trying to find, like, my persona, so I don’t really, like, use campy queen or, like, glamor or anything like that, I’m just, kind of, figuring out who Ivy really is and, like, building on it.

**Claudia:** Yeah. Since you’re so... yeah, since you said you started in January, so I’m sure you’re like... still trying to, like, figure what kind of drag you want to do, 'cause my next question was, what kind of drag do you do, or, like, what style? But are you, like, still trying to find that?

**Ivy:** Um, I do know that, like, Ivy’s a little bit alternative and really likes musicals, that’s about as far as I’ve gotten.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** But I definitely try to keep people, like, on their toes, like, not perform the same number more than, like, three or four times unless it goes over really well.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** Yeah.

**Claudia:** Yeah. So, do you have, like, a favorite, like, kind of songs that you do? Like, what are some of, like... is it usually, like, the same genre? You said you like musicals, so you, like, stick with musicals?

**Ivy:** Um, I typically try to do musicals every now and then because audience perception is such a huge thing with drag, and a lot of audience members don’t know musicals that well.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** So, I try to do, like, top 40 or, like, throwback songs, like Avril Lavigne I’ve tried doing.

**Claudia:** Oh, okay.

**Ivy:** Um, I've tried doing some, like, Ashnikko recently...

**Claudia:** Okay.

**Ivy:** And it’s, it's gone okay.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** But, yeah. [Laughs]

**Claudia:** [Laughs] So, do you, like, usually, um, base the next song you're gonna do off of the crowd’s reaction to it?

**Ivy:** Yes, in a sense. Um, I... luckily, like, I performed... or before I started performing, I was able to go to, like, a few of the bars I’ve performed at. So, that way, I can see what songs go over well, like, what kind of music. So, I, kind of, just pick and choose like, "Okay, like, this goes over really well at this bar, whereas at this bar it doesn't go over very well at all."

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. Okay, that’s interesting. And then, my next question was going to be, does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist, and if so, how?

**Ivy:** Um, I definitely don't think it does, I felt pretty welcomed coming in. The only thing is, some... like, some people will try to tell me to, like, really overaccentuate every aspect, which I'm not personally a huge fan of. Like, that's just not for me. But I’m definitely, like, overaccentuating what I can and what I can do. So, it's just, kind of, like, you pick and choose what, what advice is given to you.

**Claudia:** Yeah. And going off of that, I was gonna ask you... 'cause I know you're a woman dressing in drag as a woman. So, have you ever received, like, backlash for that? 'Cause I know that is, like... sometimes happens in the drag community since, like, some people see it as an advantage, although I don't personally think that way, but do you think...?

**Ivy:** I have... I have definitely, like, been lucky. I haven't gotten really that much, like, backlash towards it. The only thing I have been asked, really, is if I was transgender, which I'm not, but I just, kind of, said, "No, I identify as a cisgender woman, like, this is just what I do."

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** Um, I've had somebody try to reference my kind of drag as, like, stripper. Like, I told them I did drag, and they said “Oh, so kind of like a stripper because you collect tips.” And I was like, "No, it's not like stripping at all."

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. So, you, kind of, get, like, labeled? Do you think you get labeled more for it as becoming... as being a cis woman going into drag?

**Ivy:** I can definitely see it that way, yes. But I try to not use any labels, but I will just kind of be upfront, and I’ll be like, “I'm a cisgender woman. Like, this is just what I do as a hobby.” Like, yeah.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. Okay. And then, do you have any, like, influences for your drag? Like, any one, like, person or thing that influences your kind of drag style?

**Ivy:** Um, definitely. There's this one queen in St. Louis, her name is Roxie Valentine. I really like her because she’s, like, alternative, and she’s kind of the first person I ever talked to, like, about drag and, like, to get advice. So, it definitely, like... she’s definitely a big part of it. I try and do anything in pop culture and just, kind of, make it a little bigger and, like, add my own taste to it. So, that way at least, like, the audience will somewhat know what it is.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. Okay. Um, so, like, going off of what you said, like, Roxie Valentine, is she more like... has she, like, guided you through the process, like, of all of your drag performances then?

**Ivy:** So, um, we talked during quarantine, and then she started getting booking for shows, like, a lot. So, it, kind of, like, fizzled out, which there isn't any drama, nothing happened, just both of us got busy, so...

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm,

**Ivy:** But I’ve definitely talked to her and, um, a few other queens I've talked to, and they've really, like, guided me through, like, “Hey don’t do this,” and, “Hey, maybe do this, like try it.”

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** So, it's definitely been very helpful to get, like, a more experienced queen’s advice...

**Claudia:** Yeah.

**Ivy:** Especially, like, since I'm so new still.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. Well, that’s good that you have like a good support system behind you.

**Ivy:** Yeah.

**Claudia:** Um, and then, do you consider your drag, like, political at all?

**Ivy:** I do not. I try to not do anything too political right now. I'm hoping to do a little bit more political in the future, but as of right now, no.

**Claudia:** Okay. And then, um, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

**Ivy:** I can. [Laughs]

**Claudia:** [Laughs]

**Ivy:** So, typically, I... Like, are you just wanting, like, the process of just getting ready?

**Claudia:** Um, I guess more like, like where... are you a part of more like a specific, like, drag family and more, like, how often do you perform, how do you get ready? So, yeah, I mean, you can go through, like, the entire process if you’d like.

**Ivy:** So, I, um, I'm not a part of a drag family as of right now. I used to be a drag child to a drag queen named Breanna Burns. But we, kind of, realized that we're a little too similar, so she's now one of my best friends, and we just... we give each other advice, not as, like, drag mother and daughter, and it is a lot better that way.

Um, typically I will do... I have, kind of, cut back because of school, and I'm trying to get good grades. So, I only try to do, like, three to five shows a month. But, if I get booked more, I get booked more, and I just work around it.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** Uh, how I get ready, I typically do my makeup, like, at my house, and then I pack all my stuff in a suitcase and get everything in my car, and then drive to the venue, and then get ready, like, in the dressing room from there. Not very exciting. [Laughs]

**Claudia:** [Laughs] How often... or how long does it usually take you to, like, get ready for each show?

**Ivy:** Typically, the makeup is about an hour, hour and a half.

**Claudia:** Oh wow.

**Ivy:** And then... like, actually doing, like, hip pads and tights and putting on the outfit, things like that takes about 30, 45 minutes.

**Claudia:** Okay. And so, when you go out and perform, are you usually just performing, like, one song usually per night?

**Ivy:** It depends on the show. Some of them book you to do three. Like, I know I'm booked at a show at the end of April. and they are wanting me to do four different numbers.

**Claudia:** Oh wow.

**Ivy:** So, it is really just what the show director is wanting.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** Um, any [unclear] that I've done now has been two, which isn't really that bad, so...

**Claudia:** Okay. That's cool. And then, I was gonna ask how COVID, like, affected your drag, but I know you started in COVID, so you don't...

**Ivy:** Yeah.

**Claudia:** So, you've never been in the scene, like, when it’s been normal. So, that, kind of, interesting.

**Ivy:** Yeah:

**Claudia:** Has anybody told you, like, how it’s been before then compared to now?

**Ivy:** Um, a lot of queens are like, “Yeah, I, kind of, miss not performing with, like, the face shield or the clear face masks that we have to wear.” I mean, I’m used to it 'cause that is all I've ever done...

**Claudia:** Yeah.

**Ivy:** Is just perform with a clear, like, face shield or clear face mask, whatever the case is, so...

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, I noticed that in your selfie that you sent me, it was this, like, clear mask, which is honestly good 'cause I feel, like, that would be so annoying to have to wear one that covers your face when you just did all of your makeup.

**Ivy:** Yeah. Um, it’s really not that bad. The only issue I have as of right now is, like, the face shield, I cannot see hardly at all with it on. So, I'm very lucky that I got that face mask because I can at least somewhat see where I am going [laughs], not look so blind.

**Claudia:** Yeah. [Laughs] Um, and then I was going to ask... you said earlier that you identify as, like, a cisgendered woman, correct?

**Ivy:** I do.

**Claudia:** Okay. And then, when you’re in drag, you also identify as a woman?

**Ivy:** Yes.

**Claudia:** So, has drag influenced, um, how you think about your gender at all?

**Ivy:** Um, not really. Um, it’s just made me a little bit more open to pronouns, per se. Like, I do identify as cisgender, but I’m... it's gonna sound really weird, but, like, I’m fine with any pronoun. Like, any pronoun is good with me, but I prefer, like, woman.

**Claudia:** Yeah.

**Ivy:** Like, I prefer to be a cisgender woman.

**Claudia:** Yeah. But, like, if someone... so, you don’t mind if someone were to, like, identify you in a different way?

**Ivy:** No.

**Claudia:** Okay. That’s interesting. Um, and then, how has drag impacted or changed you?

**Ivy:** It's definitely educated me on, like, transgender rights and just the transgender community in general. Because coming into it, and at least just, like, going to shows before COVID, I was not very educated on the whole, like... the whole scene, and I wasn't trans... I wasn't educated on transgender rights. And that’s really, kind of, like, opened my eyes to it and the discrimination against it.

**Claudia:** Okay. And then, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

**Ivy:** Um, it's definitely made me a little bit more confident in some of the things I do. Like, I'm a little bit more confident to, like, stand up for what I believe in and not really back down quite as much.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, so, do you find drag to be, like, a more empowering, um, form of art for you?

**Ivy:** Oh, absolutely.

**Claudia:** Okay. And then, hmm... Let me see what I want to ask here. Okay. And then, I want to ask how do you personally define drag?

**Ivy:** I personally define drag as an art form and however the person wants to display their art form is valid, it’s expressive, it’s a way to get anything... like, any frustration out. Like, I know if I’m frustrated with, like, school or anything like that, I can go and perform a ballad or perform a song, and then, I just feel better.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** So, I take it as more as, like I said, an artform or like a therapeutic approach.

**Claudia:** Yeah.

**Ivy:** Some people define it as, like, a job which it, kind of, is but, yeah. I prefer to think of it as an artform.

**Claudia:** Okay, cool. And then, what do you think is the purpose of drag? Or if there is one, like, specific purpose?

**Ivy:** I think the purpose is to entertain people but as well as, like... as well as entertaining, just to, kind of, like, get people's attention and really, like, have them forget any issues that are going on in their life, like, just for a little bit. Like, they’ll have a show to at least be at.

**Claudia:** Yeah. Okay. And then, do you think drag is... I know, like, you said, coming in as a woman, people, like, assumed like, “Oh, so it’s like stripping.” So, do you see, like, drag as a sexual thing?

**Ivy:** Um, not all the time, no. It’s just... it depends on... like I said, it depends on the person. Like, some queens like to be sexy and like do burlesque and things like that, but that's totally just up to them.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. So, it just depends on the drag queen?

**Ivy:** Yeah.

**Claudia:** Okay. And then, I know you said, like, when you got into drag, it was more like... you saw, like, RuPaul’s Drag Race. So, how do you feel about that whole show?

**Ivy:** Um, I, I think it’s a good way to, at least, show off drag queens. I would like if they would include... like, they have gotten a little better because of this season. They have Gottmik, which is a transgender male who is a drag queen. But I personally would like if they had, like, an AFAB queen, if that is how you identify, or just like, like me, a woman that just does drag. I would prefer if they had that and wasn't as solely set on like, “Okay, you’re just a drag... like, a drag queen.” Like, I'd love to see drag kings on there but not my show, so...

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, I was curious to see what you would say about that because I know... 'cause their representation on the show is sometimes, like, limited to the amount of drag. And for me, going into this drag class, like, that’s really what I saw it as, is just what I, kind of, saw on RuPaul’s Drag Race, just, like, men usually dressing up in drag as women. So, do you think it... like, the show is, like, a little closed off in that way of representing the drag community?

**Ivy:** I do think it is a little bit closed off, but like I said, they are getting a little bit better with it, but it's, kind of, baby steps. I will say, though, there is a show on Netflix called, uh, The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula, and they, um, the are awesome with being inclusive.

**Claudia:** Oh.

**Ivy:** They, um, they’ve had drag queens, they’ve had nonbinary performers, they’ve had all kinds of different drag artists on the show, and I just think it is really awesome that they, kind of, see drag as more of an artform. Whereas I think RuPaul’s Drag Race sees it more as a competition and, like, the set rules are in place.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm Huh, I didn’t know...- I have never heard of that show. I need to watch that then 'cause that seems interesting.

**Ivy:** Yeah, it’s really good, very good. It is a little like... it’s gory, I will say that.

**Claudia:** Oh really? [Laughs]

**Ivy:** Yeah.

**Claudia:** Um, and then, if you could change one thing about drag, or, like, the drag scene, or the drag community as a whole, what would it be, if anything?

**Ivy:** Um, I would change probably just, like, people’s perception of it. Like, a lot of people are accepting towards it, but I would like if a lot more people weren’t as, like, rude---not rude, but, like, homophobic about it, and only appreciate it during Pride month, things like that.

**Claudia:** Okay.

**Ivy:** I know that, like, wasn’t your question, I’m sorry, I'm so sorry. [Laughs]

**Claudia:** No, no. Literally answer it however you want. [Laughs] I like to hear your opinions on everything, so that's good. And then, so going off of that, do you think--what do you think are, like, misconceptions people have about drag? 'Cause I know, like, RuPaul’s like... I feel like even for me, even going into this class, I had a misconception of, like... I really just thought it was usually... I knew, like, women going into drag, I have seen them do, like drag kings, like, dressing as guys and, like... just women dressing as men. So, do you think that’s-- what do you think is, like, a common misconception for people?

**Ivy:** Um, I think a common misconception is, like, people just think it’s a man dressing up as a woman or a woman dressing as a man. Whereas, there’s... it’s really not, in my opinion.

**Claudia:** Yeah, there’s... going into this class I was like, "Wow, there is a lot more to this than I, like, really thought. And the rep-- do you think the representation, like, that is in the media, has had a negative impact on those, um, like common misconceptions?

**Ivy:** Um, not really. Um, I think, sometimes it can be a little negative, but typically, it’s not negative. It’s just, kind of, like, not educated, per se. So, I guess, yes. [Laughs]

**Claudia:** [Laughs] Okay. And then, I think I have one last question. Um, if you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

**Ivy:** That drag is very, like, inclusive, and it is not some underground scene like it was back in like... back... way back in the day. Like, it’s not. Like, we’re, we're not scary. [Laughs]. We’re not scary people. You can come up to us and say hi or tell us that we're pretty; things like that. Like, we won’t... we won't bite you.

**Claudia:** [Laughs] Okay. Well, thank you so much for answering all those.

**Ivy:** Yeah, not a problem.

**Claudia:** So, I guess I have one... a little more questions. So, you said that you usually, like, perform in St. Louis?

**Ivy:** I do

**Claudia:** So, is there... do you usually perform at the same clubs? Or you perform at, like, different clubs or what?

**Ivy:** Um, I perform at a few different bars, I am just now starting to get booked at different places, which is very exciting.

**Claudia:** Mm-hmm.

**Ivy:** So... but, um, I have traveled to Columbia, Missouri a couple times to perform.

**Claudia:** Oh wow. That’s awesome. So, do you think, like, as your drag career goes on, you'll probably wanna travel more places?

**Ivy:** Oh, definitely. I love to travel, so any reason just to travel in general, I would love, especially if I can, like, travel and do drag, that would be amazing.

**Claudia:** Yeah. Yeah, that would be so cool, I’m sure. Oh. Well, when’s you're next drag show?

**Ivy:** My next drag show is tomorrow.

**Claudia:** Oh really?

**Ivy:** Yeah. I’m traveling to Columbia, Missouri.

**Claudia:** Oh, okay, wow. Well, good luck.

**Ivy:** Thank you.

**Claudia:** [Laughs] Is that your first time going to Columbia, then, to do drag?

**Ivy:** Uh, it’s my second.

**Claudia:** Okay. Oh. Well, awesome. Well, thank you so much. That was super interesting.

**Ivy:** Yeah, not a problem.

**Claudia:** [Laughs] Well, I hope you have a good rest of your day. I’ll let you know how this whole project goes. [Laughs]

**Ivy:** Okay.

**Claudia:** Okay, have a good day.

**Ivy:** You too. Bye.

**Claudia:** Bye.