**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 kind of 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 learn—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 really been really any like amateur nights available. Um, I’ve been practicing like drag makeup, like that’s what I picked up during quarantine, like whenever it first started. So I was just kind of like 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.

Claudia: 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 to 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: Mhm.

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.

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 Taboo, 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, 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. Because they said that’s not a real person, so.

Claudia: That’s weird. That’s cool that you did that though because I know a lot of like bands say like, “Oh I just went on random band name generators,” 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 of those. Are there like particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Ivy: Um, I definitely identify with just a 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 my persona so I don’t really use like 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, because 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: Mhm.

Ivy: But I definitely like try to keep people like on their toes, liken ot perform the same number like more than 3 or 4 times unless it goes over really well.

Claudia: Mhm.

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: So, do you have like a favorite like kind of songs you do? Like, what are some of like--Is it usually like the same genre? Like 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: Mhm.

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

Claudia: Oh okay.

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

Claudia: Okay.

Ivy: And it’s gone okay.

Claudia: Mhm.

Ivy: But yeah.

Claudia: So do you like usually like, um, base like the next song you're going to do off of the like, the crowd’s like 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 like 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 where as at this bar it doesn't go over very well at all.

Claudia: Mhm. Okay, that’s interesting. And then, my next question was going to be, is 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 over accentuate every aspect which I'm not personally like a huge fan of. Like that's just not for me but I’m definitely like over accentuating what I can and what I can do so it's just kind of like you pick and choose what advice is given to you.

Claudia: Yeah and the going off of that I was going to ask you, because I know you're a woman dressing in drag as a woman. So have you ever received like backlash for that? Because I know that is like-- sometimes happens in the drag community since some people see it as an advantage although I do not 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 am not but I just kind of said no like I identify as a cis gendered woman, like this is just what I do.

Claudia: Mhm.

Ivy: Um, I have 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—

Claudia: Mhm.

Ivy: at all.

Claudia: So you kind of get like labeled? Do you think you get more labeled for it as becoming--as being a cis gendered 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 am a cis gender woman. Like, this is just what I do as a hobby.” Like, yeah.

Claudia: Mhm. 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 Roxy 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 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 the audience will somewhat know what it is.

Claudia: Mhm. Okay, so like going off of what you said like Roxy 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: Mhm,

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

Claudia: Mhm.

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

Claudia: Yeah.

Ivy: Especially since I'm so new still.

Claudia: Mhm, 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 to be political at all?

Ivy: I do not. I try to not do anything too political right now, I am 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. So typically I... Like are you just wanting like the process of just like getting ready?

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

Ivy: So I um, I am not a part of a drag family as of right now. I used to be a drag child to a drag queen named Brianna Burns. But we kind of realized that we are a little too similar so she is 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 am 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 so I just work around it. Uh, how I get ready… I typically do my make up 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 in the dressing room from there. Not very exciting.

Claudia: 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, like tights, and putting on the actual outfit [inaduble] takes about 30, 45 minutes.

Claudia: Okay, and so when you go out and perform are you usually just performing like one like 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: Mhm.

Ivy: Although any one that I have done now has been two which isn't really that bad, so.

Claudia: Okay that's cool. And then I was going to ask how covid like affected like your drag but I know you started like in covid so you have never been in the scene like when it’s been normal. So that kind of interesting.

Ivy: Yeah:

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

Ivy: A lot of queens are like, “Yeah,” like “I kind of miss like not performing with like the face shield, or like the clear face masks that we have to wear.” I mean, I’m used to it because that is all I have ever done is just perform with a clear like face shield or face mask or whatever the case is, so.

Claudia: Yeah, I noticed that in your like selfie that you sent me it was like a clear mask which is honestly good because I feel like that would be so like annoying to have to wear one that covers your face when you just like 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 am very lucky that I got that like face mask because I can at least somewhat see where I am going. I look so blind..

Claudia: Yeah. Um, and then I was going to ask...You said earlier that you identify as like a cis gendered 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 like 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 perse. Like, I do identify as cis gender but I’m-- its going to sound really weird-- but like I’m fine with like any pronouns. Any pronoun is good with me but, I prefer like, women. I prefer to be a cis gender 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 has definitely educated me on like transgender rights and like 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 was not educated on transgender rights. And that’s really kind of like opened my eyes to it and like the discrimination against it.

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

Ivy: It has definitely made me a little bit more confident in some of the things I do. Like I am a little bit more confident to like stand up for what I believe in and not really back down quite as much.

Claudia: Yeah, so do you find like drag to be like a more like 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, like I can go and like perform like a ballad or perform a song then I just feel better.

Claudia: Mhm.

Ivy; I take it as more as, like I said, as an artform or as 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 like one like specific purpose?

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

Claudia: Mhm. 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 me, like a woman that just does drag. I would prefer if they had that and wasn't as solely set on like, “okay like you’re just a drag—like a drag queen” Like, I would love to see drag kings on there but not my show, so. Yeah.

Claudia: Mhm. I was curious to see what you had to say about that because I know that 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; 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--that the show is 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 is kind of baby steps. I will say though, there is a show on Netflix called The Boulet Brother’s Dragula and they are awesome with being inclusive. They, um, they’ve had drag queens, they’ve had non binary 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 set rules are in place.

Claudia: Huh, I didn’t know-- I have never heard of that show, I need to watch that then because that seems interesting.

Ivy: Yah, it’s really good. Very good. It is a little like—it’s gory, I will say that.

Claudia: Oh really?

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: Um, and then, if you could change one thing about drag, or like the drag scene, or like 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 it 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. I know that like wasn’t your question, I’m sorry.

Claudia: No, no. Literally answer it however you want. I like to hear like your opinions on everything so that is good. And then, so going off of that, do you think--what do you think are like misconceptions that people have about drag? Cause I know like, Ru Paul’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 just like 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 like the rep--do you think like the representation, like that is in the media, has like 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 I’ts just kind of not educated perse. So I guess, yes.

Claudia: Okay I I think I have one last question. 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 not scary; we’re not scary people. You can come up to us and say hi or tell us that were pretty; things like that. We won’t bite you.

Claudia: 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 question; 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 do 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: Mhm.

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 will like probably like want to 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. Well when’s you like next drag show?

Ivy: My next drag show is tomorrow.

Claudia: Oh really?

Ivy: Yeah, I’m traveling to Columbia, MO.

Claudia: Oh, okay wow. Well good luck.

Ivy: Thank you

Claudia: Is that your first time going to Columbia then to do drag?

Ivy: Uh, it’s my second.

Claudia: Okay, well awesome. Well thank you so much, that was super interesting.

Ivy: Yeah not a problem.

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

Ivy: Okay.

Claudia: Okay, have a good day.

Ivy: You too. Bye.

Claudia: Bye.