**Interview with Breanna Burns**

Stieb, Cory. 2021. Interview with Breanna Burns. *The Art of Drag, SIUE,* March 30. Available URL (ezratemko.com/drag/Breanna-burns).

Cory: So, when did you first hear about drag? And what was your initial reaction to it?

Breanna: When I first heard about drag, I was in uh Miami, Florida. And it was with, it was when I was a professional tennis player at the time. So I um, we were going down Ocean Drive, and you know, I had a friend I was going out with. And he told me he's like, Hey, uh, you know, I looked at-- I looked down the street, and there's a lot of people, so many people, I was like, what the hell is going on over there? So, um, so he's like, oh, they're drag shows. Like, I was like, “Oh, awesome. Like, let's check it out.” And we like pulled up to it. And there was a color, a people of color queen. She was hosting the show. She was hilarious. And I was like, ‘Oh, this is like a whole new, different lifestyle.” Like, like not lifestyle, night--nightlife. That's what I meant to say. But um, I was, I was like, you know, I was very straight acting at the time. So, at first I was like, hmm, you know I was like, I don't know if it's my cup of tea. So, I went to Clarksville, and I like, went to another drag show, and I loved it. And I was like, Okay, this is, this is very much like, something I can do. And that's how I started. Anyway, I probably went really deep into that question.

Cory: No, that's good. That's what we want. That was a great answer.

Breanna: Thank you.

Cory: Okay. So next question is when did you start performing as a drag artist? And why?

Breanna: Okay, when did I--okay, so, this was kind of the part I was getting to and I was like, I have a feeling you’ll ask that question. So, um, so when did I--okay, what was it? It was when did I and why?

Cory: It was when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Breanna: Okay, I started. So, about over five, like five and a half years ago, I actually just came out as gay. And I was like, you know, and that's when I went to the uh, to the show in Clarks--the drag show in Clarksville. So I was like, so I watched it, and I was like, damn, I could do that. And, you know, like, because I just knew it. Like, I knew I could do it. So I was like, let's do this. And, you know, I had a few supportive gay friends at the time. And they walked me through, like what to get. And you know, I actually turned to my mom. And my mom was like, she was a little bit unsure about doing drag with me. So I was like, “Come on, let's do the show.” So, I brought her to a show with me. And I embarrassed the hell out of her. I paid one of the queens there to do a lap dance on her head. I kid you not. It was great. It was great. And so she was, she kind of understood where I would want to do that. And she helped me. So I started drag about five years ago in Clarksville, Tennessee. Why did I start doing it? Um, because I knew I could do it. Like it's, it's very, like the dancing in it is very athletic. I myself am a very athletic person. I played Dance Dance Revolution to work out. Isn't that the craziest thing?

Cory: That's awesome.

Breanna: My god. Um, so yeah, and I was just like, and it just looked fun. Like I love interacting with people. I love theater. I love all of that. So, I'm gonna do all that. It's just a different way to express it. I felt like I connected to that art form very well. So that's why I chose to do it.

Cory: Good.

Breanne: Like a big pageant answer, but.

Cory: Um, going off of your mom, um, how did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Breanna: Oooh, oh, we get a little deep here. Well, okay, it's kind of funny. So, you know, like my mom. Uh, I came out to my mom as gay first. So she was very onboard with everything. She's supported me 100% of my life like, so. Yes, she was boom on board. Um, so my family, my fam—um, not my dad's side, my dad's side, I don't really know about my dad's side, honestly--but my mom's side of the family. Like I started posting, like, I'm doing drag now, like, look at me posting all that on Facebook. And, and then I was like, and uh so I posted all that and, you know, my mom would talk to my aunt or my uncle and they'd be like, “Yeah, I don't know, kind of unsure about that. It's not my thing.” Um, they weren't like totally like, disown like rude about it. So I'm thankful for that. Um, trying to think. But um, I actually told my dad, I did drag about two, no about like, a year and a half ago, I told him, I actually came out and told him I did drag in the same day. So two, two for the price of one. He really got a lot of information that day. So I told him about that. And he was like, okay, you know, as long as you're making money with it, and I was like, “Oh, yeah, about money….” [laughing] So, um, so yeah, I told him about that. And I was just like, Okay. Yeah, he was, he was okay with it. But, um, I don't really know if my dad's side of the family knows too much about me, in general. So.

Cory: All right. Okay, next is where does your drag name come from?

Breanna: Oh, okay. So, Breanna, Breanna Burns. Okay. Um, Breanna, I was--so Breanna is like a twist on my boy name like Brian. Almost like the girl name for Brian, if that makes sense.

Cory: Yeah.

Breanna: Um, so I was like, oh, Breanna, and I was like, I was like, let's think of a catchy last name because I want something when you say it, like rolls off your tongue. Something that sticks in your mind. So, um, you know, like, my current boyfriend at the time was like, he's like, “Oh, you should do something like French or something?” I'm like, “No, I don't want to sound basic. Come on now.” So, [laughing] Lacroix or something, I don't know. So I was like, so I was like okay, well, um, Burns. Let's do it. Breanna Burns and it just like it clicks so well to me.

Cory: It flows.

Breanna: Yes. I love that.

Cory: All right, so this one's a long one. So bear with me.

Breanna: Oh, my gosh. Okay.

Cory: Okay, so it says there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag from drag queen and drag King to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bio queen, Camp queen and among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? And what kind of drag do you do? And what is your style of drag?

Breanna: Okay, so to answer that yeah, I mean yes, I do believe there are labels in, um, the drag community, like as drag queen drag king, um, you know, femme queen/bio queens, you know what I mean? Um, you know and that's just to kind of tell you what kind of character we are kind of thing. If I were to identify--identify my drag, and this kind of supports my answer from before, it was like, you know, like somewhat, one queen can be multiple different types of categories. Because you have like your horror queen, like you said, camp queen, comedy queen. You know, like you that's what's the beauty about drag is you don't have to just stay in one lane. Drag is your art. So like one night like I'll do a camp queen number, the next I'll be a little bit funny. Or you know, the next number I'll uh dance the house down.

Cory: [Laughing]

Breanne: Like yeah, that's--that's my answer on that. Like, if I wanted to be, um, like if one night I wanted to go out in boy drag. Say Breanna Burns kind of like did like a more drag king look. You know, I could do that too. Like, drag is that valid. Drag is—drag goes in a big circle.

Cory: Mhm,

Breanna: Anyway, did that answer--

Cory: Yeah, that was good. That was very good.

Breanna: Thank you.

Cory: Okay, um, who or what has influenced your drag?

Breanna: Who or what has influenced my drag? Oh, you know what? Um, so, um, two things, actually is--actually three things because I got to, you know, include my favorite celebrity in that. First, I’m going to say local queens, because local queens taught me how the actual show is ran. Local queens have, you know, like, taught me how to behave in the back--in backstage or learn how to talk to people like in the audience or even go on the mic. Like, that's what local queens have taught me. RuPaul’s Drag Race has, okay, number two, RuPaul’s Drag Race has very much motivated, motivated me as well. It's kind of what made me jump into this, um, hobby. Like you know, I'm just like, I was watching RuPaul’s Drag Race season five with my ex. And, you know, I was just watching it. I was like, “Oh, my God, that looks like so much fun. I want to do that one day.” And you know, I'm trying to do that, living my best life right now. So we got--that's number two. And number three is Lady Gaga. Yes.

Cory: Lady Gaga.

Breanna: Yes, Lady Gaga. Like, if you ever go to one of my shows, like my outfits very much like, represent her. Like, um, I have been introduced once or twice as like the Lady Gaga of drag [laughing]

Cory: [laughing]

Breanne: But um, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It’s--have you ever been to one of my shows?

Cory: I have not. I have never been to a show in my life.

Breanna: Oh girl, you gotta come on over.

Cory: [laughing] Well banking off that, um, the next question is, can you talk about your life as a drag artist? And one of the points is how often do you perform? And where do you perform?

Breanna: Okay, so I try to perform at least once or twice a month, you know? Um, what is my life as a drag artist is preparing for the next show. Pretty much. Um, you know, you got work, obviously. But outside of that time to work. Like, outside of that time of work. I have to, um, I’m trying to think. You know, like, I listen to music, or I'm out with friends and I hear a certain song. And I'm like, “Oh my gosh, like, I think that song would vibe really well with, with an audience.” And I'll ask that song, get the song. And I'll sit there, learn the words to the song. And then I—I will literally try to think of a whole mechanic around that song. Like, I'm very, um-- when I perform, I want to make every song, like, um-- I want to make every song kind of stick in your head. And like I do-- I don't do my, uh--oh my gosh, how do I explain that? Sorry, it's—it’s hard to explain.

Cory: No you're good. You’re good.

Breanna: You know, yeah, that's--it's pretty much just preparing for the next outfit. The next show, you know, just-- it's very-- it's piecing it together. It's like a puzzle. So, yeah, I think--I think that's pretty much what I have for that answer.

Cory: Okay. Uh, what are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Breanna: All the different challenges? Well, since we're in COVID-19 right now, you know, bars are doing like less shows, and so it's-- it's a little bit tougher to get booked at the moment. Um, time constraints, I'm--okay. So I'm used to, uh, I'm used to starting the show around 10 or 11 at night, which now since the shows are the, some of the regulations are starting to be lifted, some of the shows are going back to that time. But, um, yeah, like right now during the COVID, it's—it’s hard. It's hard to manage time more, because the shows do start earlier right now.

Cory: Okay.

Breanne: Um, what else do I struggle with? Or what is challenging? Um, oh my gosh, learning--learning new songs sometimes is very challenging, trying to fit stuff in your schedule between work and when you're off work. Trying to think what else. So, what is--okay, the question was what is challenging?

Cory: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Breanna: Okay, and being a drag artist, okay. Let me touch on that. Um, being a drag artist is trying to figure out stuff that hasn't been done. And I mean, you know, a lot of stuff has been done as it is. Um, but just trying to think of what your next gag is going to be as your next show. That's, that's, that's a very challenging--that's very challenging as an artist.

Cory: Okay. Um, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression out of drag? What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Breanna: Okay, so I am uh he/him, and in drag, I actually--I prefer to be called she/her. But you know, if you know me, personally, you came up to me like, Brian, I'd be like, hey, Breanna right now. Um, I do I do, um, change-- I do definitely change genders when I am in drag. What are my views on it you said?

Cory: Uh, yeah, you can hit on that.

Breanna: I mean, not my view is like, you know, anybody is free to be who they want. That's why we're in America. And you know, this world is everybody's, so it's not just-- this world isn't just one political party or one democracy, or culture, you know? You know, people can be who the hell they want to be.

Cory: So would you say that drag has influenced how you view gender?

Breanna: Um, yes, I--yes, I would have to say that. Um, it's also taught me how to be more accepting about different types of people. You know, I've--I've had a lot of people. Okay, no, go back to gender.

Cory: You’re good.

Breanna: [laughing] But, um, okay, I'm sorry. It's hard. Um, because this is a very sensitive subject, but uh, I'm trying to think. It's, you know, it has taught me to be more accepting of like, others genders. For sure. You know, at first, like before I came out as gay, and before, like, when I was a tennis player. You know, I wouldn't understand why someone would want to refer their pronouns as they/them. But, um, when I got in drag, you know, I learned that people, you know, because that's-- that's the biggest one, I feel like that people have a speed bump to get over. And, you know, and it--and it took me, you know, someone that went by those pronouns to teach me why they feel that way. You know, why they prefer to be called those pronouns, but it was like, yes. I, you know, I understood and I definitely was a lot more accepting with that, and, yeah.

Cory: Okay.

Breanne: For sure.

Cory: Okay, so, um, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag? And if so, how?

Breanna: Oh, yes. So, when you're out of drag, you know, when you're out of drag with your hair just hanging down over your shoulders--I mean, my hair's not that long. But you know, when it's--when you don't have the attention that you--that you get from, um, like the audience, because when you're in drag, like, doesn't matter. Like the audience loves you because, because, you know, like, if, especially if you put a lot of hard work and dedication into your craft, the audience sees that and they love that. So, when you're not--when you're just in boy, you’re just working your job, and you're just like, wearing cargo shorts and a t-shirt. Like, you know, you're not--not everyone's gonna be like, Oh my god, you know, you're not going to get that total attention that you desire. And it's, it's hard being like a single-- it can be hard being like a single person, because it's like, you want that attention and you feel like that if you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, um, that you know that they can give all that attention to you, so, that you want. And that can make it kind of hard. So yeah, I think that can struggle with your confidence a little bit.

Cory: All right, this next one might get a little deep so.

Breanna: Ooh, okay,

Cory: Okay, so, if you could go back in time as Breanna Burns, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Breanna: Oh, I love this. It’s like the baby question on drag race.

Cory: [Laughing]

Breanne: Um, what advice would I give to my, my baby self? Um, don't change anything. Um, wouldn't--I wouldn't really tell her anything to change differently. Because, you know, I felt like, I feel like as a drag queen, like you're meant to go through different--different phases, I almost feel like, and it's very humbling, like the process of becoming who I am today. You know, um, it's taught me to, who to take advice from you know, take advice you know, people are gonna say that they--you didn't take the advice well, but you very much well did and that perfected--that's gonna perfect your craft, baby. That's--that's going to make you bigger and you're going to find out who your real friends are. Like you're going to meet some amazing people along the way like stick with them you know, the older queens are the best [laughing]. The older queens give the best advice and are by far the most intellectual. Always be supportive to your trans woman; they on an amazing journey themselves. And you're going to be there for, through a lot of people journeys along the way, because--and it's going to be, it's just going to be amazing. So okay, that's all I had to say to that bitch.

Cory: [Laughing]

Breanne: [Laughing]

Cory: All right, so this is another long one.

Breanna: Okay.

Cory: All right. So I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa, how drag has impacted your identities. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities such as gender race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability etc., and or the interaction of the social identities, have impacted your experience of drag and or how drag has impacted your experience of this social identity?

Breanna: Okay, my mind is kind of blown with this. This question, so when you mean identity, like who I identify at the--as at the time?

Cory: So meaning like, the social identities that either you possess, including your gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc, and or the other, like that other people around you, how have those impacted your experience as a drag artists or has, how have those experience—or, um, impacted your social identity?

Breanna: Okay. It is a hard question for me. I'm very sorry.

Cory: No you’re okay.

Breanna: Um, ‘cause I’m just trying to figure out where to even start here. Trying to think. For some reason I'm thinking very much of like cultures right now. And I don't even know if that's like the right way to even answer this question.

Cory: Yeah.

Breanna: I'm gonna just kind of like throw it out there. But, you know, like, I think people when they like, yeah, I don't know, I'm just--this one’s a hard one for me.

Cory: Alright, we can skip.

Breanna: Okay. I'm sorry.

Cory: No, that is perfectly fine. All right, so those beginning ones were talking about your personal story, and then these final ones are going to talk about your personal ideas about drag.

Breanna: Okay.

Cory: Okay, so this one is how do you define drag?

Breanna: How do I define drag?

Cory: Yes.

Breanna: Um, you can uh be who you want to be when you want to be. That's how I define drag right there.

Cory: Okay. Okay, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Breanna: The purpose of drag is to take your regular ideal-type person and uh to completely change that, that person into a character.

Cory: Alright. Okay, do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not?

Breanna: Oh, um, I mean, if that's your character, um, that--that you know, like, I think it depends on your character, for sure. If you have a more sexually deviated character, then be sexual. Like, but you know, like, I--I personally like to be a little bit more classy at times. You know, I can be a little bit fun. I can be a little party girl at the moment, but hey. [Laughing] I do prefer a little bit more classy.

Cory: Okay, how do you feel about RuPaul’s Drag Race?

Breanna: Oh, um, I love RuPaul’s Drag Race. I'm very happy that um, I'm very happy that the show is giving people a chance to make this into a career. Um, you know, like people like me, hi, hi RuPaul [laughing] But, you know, a lot of you know, it's--it's giving people a chance to be a star. And that is what we need in this community.

Cory: Okay, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be?

Breanna: The one thing I think would change. Um, oh my gosh, where do I start?[Laughin] Oh, the one thing that would change. Okay, I'm gonna get a little bit rude with this. But you don't have to be a bitch to be a drag queen. There. That’s one thing I would change.

Cory: All right. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

Breanna: Um, that they're strippers. I hate that. Oh, my God. And that there's a difference between burlesque and stripping. So, um, yeah, that's--that's a big like misconception like no, we don't take our clothes off. I mean, we might take off a nice cape and call that a reveal. But that's not stripping baby. Yeah, that's a big one. I don't think people realize like, how hard it is to get up in front of a light and still dance your heart out while taking tips and while interacting with the audience [laughing]. I don't think people understand how that-- how hard that is. So um, yeah, I just I just don't think people realize like, how much dedication this-- goes into this.

Cory: Do you think anything could be done to help change these misconceptions?

Breanna: Um, if people will go to a damn drag show.

Cory: [Laughing]

Brenna: Just saying. Usually people that say this, I always--I always follow up with the question: Have you ever been to a drag show? Well, no. Okay, you need to take your ass to one and live your life a little bit, hello. Oh, you say you can't go out without your kids? Oh, there's kids drag shows. Oh you want to go out with your girls? Oh bar’s right down the street, pretty sure they're having a drag show. Like, yeah, go ahead. Anyway.

Cory: Alright, our final question is if you chose one thing you want people to know about and learn about drag what would it be?

Breanna: Know about and learn about? Um, that people uh just have different types of drags and you shouldn't, people--you shouldn't have to sit there and just support your friend when you go to a show. You should be able to expand--expand your--your small mind into other people's drags. Trying to think. And when was that they know about? I mean, I kind of like tipped off what they--I’m trying to think. They should just know how much effort it takes to get from one gender to another. I mean, not just gender but character to another. And I don't think people understand the amount of makeup it takes, the amount of--okay, I cinch myself with duct tape. So for me, the kind of duct tape I use. Yeah, just like what it takes to make the full illusion.

Cory: All right. Well, I just want to say thank you for taking your time out of your day and helping me with this. You did an amazing job and I'm so happy that you decided to help me with this.

Breanna: Oh it is not a problem. I was like oh interview. I was like let me let me step into this a little bit. Hello.