**Interview with Roxie M Valentine**

Koeller, Maggie. 2021. Interview with Roxie M. Valentine. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE.* April 2nd.

Maggie Koeller: Hello, my name is Maggie!

Roxie M Valentine: And I am Roxie Valentine!

Maggie: Thank you so much for being here Roxie, um, I guess-

Roxie: Absolutely, baby!

Maggie: -my question is where does your drag name come from?

Roxie: So like most queer homosexuals, I started doing drag because I was a theater baby. I was actually about to go to school for theater and let’s be real with a theater degree you ain't getting anything from it except an expensive piece of paper that means nothing to people! Sorry not sorry.

Roxie: So literally the day I was going to go to college I decided to drop, and I just started crossdressing for a living and I basically had to do what I was gonna pay a school to tell me to do! So then I got my drag name from the movie Chicago obviously. So it’s Roxie, ya know how she’s Roxie Heart? I changed the Heart to Valentine and changed the spelling. But then it also plays on my favorite horror movie “Bride of Chucky”. The main character is Tiffany Valentine. So it plays with my love of horror movies and everything horror, and my love of theater.

Maggie: Oh awesome I love that! That kind of makes me wonder how would you describe your drag? I know you talked about, like, horror and obviously Broadway and theater!

Roxie: Right! So my drag is very like, I would consider myself a very VERSATILE queen. Yes ladies and gentleman, she’s vers!

Roxie: Because, I don’t like to be stuck in one box. That gets very stale and very boring real quick. I have things that I excel in. I excel in doing conceptualized, very freaky, very horror drag– doing that very well. But I can also be a pretty glamorous women at the same time! So I just do everything.

Roxie: So this is the thing, if you’re not versatile, you’re not gonna work! You have to be able to work for the audience that is at a specific venue. Like Attitudes (nightclub)– the people coming to Attitudes were all punky, emo rock style. Verses Gray Fox, they’re the older type of crowd. So they like hearing that good throwback 70’s 80’s 90’s music. So you gotta be able to do everything.

Maggie: Okay wow, yeah, thank you for sharing that. I didn’t know different clubs had different vibes, different crowds I guess you would say?

 Roxie: And see that’s the thing too, is that it’s our job as drag entertainers to push the boundaries of what is “the norm” of these places but also making sure you’re entertaining them with what they want as well.

Maggie: Yeah. I know you kind of said you don’t really like labels, but one of my questions is are there labels that you do use to characterize your drag? Or are you like “I’m versatile! I can give you what you want!” [laughs]

Roxie: So I always say I am a glamourous, spooky punk bitch. My friends always call me Elphaba’s little bitch niece cousin!

Maggie: [laughs] I love that!

Roxie: Cuz she’s spooky but she also has a heart of gold!

Maggie: That’s brilliant. That probably makes you a great performer.

Roxie: Exactly. I’m not afraid to cut you with a knife from the back of my leg but also I’ll be \*nice to you\*!

Maggie: Oh let’s see, I lost– I was having so much fun I forgot what question I was on!

Roxie: You’re like “oh my god I’m gonna have to cut out so much of this interview!”

Maggie: No, no, keepin’ it in! Keepin’ it in! Ya gotta give the kids what they want.

Roxie: [laughs] Oh lord!

Maggie: So how often do you perform and where do you perform? Where can the kids find you?

Roxie: So I’m normally always either– since Attitudes closed sadly– well that was my home bar! For a while, it was hard to get into being a part of a specific group because every bar has their own main cast.

Roxie: I for a while was very much just floating around Gray Fox, Rehab. Most recently I’ve been working with Jade Sinclair. She’s basically adopted me in as her little drag family at this point! She claims me as her drag grandchild at this point, because she’s stunning and sweet. Yeah but literally, I am all over the city! All the gay bars. If you can suck a dick in the bathroom, I’m probably there.

05:00 *[lost audio cut! Roxie was talking about how she works full time as a drag artist. She shares that you make great money but that money goes very quickly!]*

Roxie: … literally the cost of two wigs right there! On top of the fact that you don’t have credible income because everything’s under the table. So trying to be like “Hey give me this lease for this apartment” is a CHALLENGE! They either think you’re a stripper or a drug dealer. And you go “No I’m a drag queen, sorry!”

Maggie: Oh my gosh wow. You guys don’t have health insurance either, right?

Roxie: No. If you hurt yourself you hurt yourself.

Maggie: Ooooh.

Roxie: If you keep going, hope you don’t fuck your shit up more!

[Roxie and Maggie laugh]

Maggie: I know you said you perform in person, I think I saw on your Facebook– do you perform digitally? Like over stream?

Roxie: At the beginning of the pandemic, when everything was closed down I did a lot more social media shows! Currently, I am doing an online drag competition called Supreme Drag Race on Instagram. It’s streamed every other Sunday on Twitch! [see attached links] And that’s what I’m doing now, with corona obviously, pageants aren’t as prominent. And a bitch is competitive and likes to win things!

 Maggie: I think it’s beautiful that there’s still these competitions going. I mean how has covid, other than moving online, how has it affected your drag life and mental health?

Roxie: The biggest effect that covid had on just performing live in drag, going back after shutdown- these face shields and these masks that you have to wear while performing. They are terrible! I’m a big girl, I already breathe heavy lookin’ at the refrigerator. So, whenever I’m over there twirling around death droppin’ and kickin’, ya get winded. And when you have these face shields that are made of solid plastic cuz you still wanna be able to see your mouth– it’s not great! As soon as I get off stage \*heaves\* HELP ME JESUS

Maggie: [laughing] Are those the kind that stick out a little bit or are they the kind that stick close to your face?

Roxie: So we have the one, that’s the face shield that’s just the clear piece of plastic and then there’s the one we call the “Hannibal Lector” that goes over your ears and mouth. We literally look like Hannibal Lector– it’s just a SOLID piece of plastic over your face.

Maggie: That’s drag baby! [laughing together] Giving me Hannibal Lector realness!

Roxie: Exactly! Every time!

Maggie: So when was the first time you performed in person again since covid? Do you remember?

Roxie: Whew. I know the first time I performed I think it was when Attitudes reopened. Huh, R.I.P. now. They’re gone. I think it was that. I really can’t remember! Here’s the thing, ever since covid stopped– well it didn’t stop. Ever since we were able to open up bars and everything, I’ve been running nonstop making this dream a reality any time I can.

Maggie: Yeah, I mean, you kind of have to keep going as a drag artist don’t you?

Roxie: That’s the thing. I don’t want to say to the people that took their break and aren’t returning to drag because they don’t feel safe… I don’t want this to come off as rude or a read, but you are so easily forgotten once you leave that stage if you don’t keep going.

Roxie: There are new drag artists coming in this scene every week trying to take your spot. And if you’re not promoting yourself, not performing, not at least putting out digital content you’re gonna be forgotten about. Someone’s going to take your place.

Maggie: Yeah. Does that seem like a new challenge? Is that part of the challenge now of being a drag queen or artist? Versus in the hay day.

Roxie: I think it’s always been that way. I know when I started, the girls, the older generation were scared of \*me\* because I was coming into the scene. That’s the thing. Babies are coming in and eventually they’re not gonna be babies anymore, and they’re gonna be the ones taking the jobs of the older generation who are starting to fizzle out. That’s threatening!

Maggie: Yeah. Wow. Huh. That brings up a lot of questions! It makes me want to ask– do you remember when you first heard about drag or when you learned about it? Is that something you can remember?

Roxie: I first learned about drag from watching the Rocky Horror Picture Show. I feel like that’s a bunch of people’s introductions to queer culture. Even seeing Hairspray and the character Edna being played by a drag queen. That’s their first introduction to seeing “oh! what’s this! this is kind of cool!” then you just blossom out into finding other things.

Maggie: Yeah! It’s so beautiful to see people find themselves through different pieces of queer culture. It’s so funny, I feel like I’ve heard a lot of people that have found drag through Rocky Horror Picture Show so I love that.

Roxie: Right! It gets ya. If you watch Rocky Horror Picture Show you WILL be a drag queen.

Maggie: Yes! When you first became a drag queen, is there anyone who you came out to as a drag queen that you can remember their reaction that you can remember so much in your head? Whether good or bad!

Roxie: Not really. This is the thing! I was always dressing up in my mom’s clothes, heels, and shit. Putting on crappy dollar store wigs, just feeling my fantasy. I remember in high school for Halloween one year I went to school in drag. Booger down boots! [laughing] But it’s there! I wore a t-shirt under a dress, it was a choice. And a synthetic ass wig!

Roxie: That’s the thing. Because I’ve been such a weirdo my entire life, it wasn’t a shock to anyone. If anything, it was more of a like getting the acceptance for my family to be like “Okay this isn’t a hobby this is what you wanna do as your career”.

Maggie: Yeah, so do you feel like people take drag as a career seriously?

Roxie: Yes, and no. It really depends who you’re talking to. If you are not educated about the art of drag and how the industry works… cuz it’s just show business! It’s showbusiness for the queer culture. That’s all it is. It’s the same thing, it’s just people don’t take it seriously because they don’t know what it is. Because it’s not a part of mainstream straight culture.

Maggie: I guess what I’m hearing is that it’s delegitimized because it’s part of queer culture because it’s not the … straight heteronormative kind of showbusiness?

Roxie: Exactly. You’ll never look at a Broadway actor and be like “Oh they don’t have a real job!” But you’ll look at a drag queen and be like “Why aren’t they working at a bank during the daytime?” [laughs]

Maggie: Yeah, Exactly. How do you feel about RuPaul’s Drag Race? Thoughts, opinions, tea? All of it.

Roxie: Okay, so… you’re trying to get me in trouble, girl. Do I think RuPaul’s drag race has helped branch drag into mainstream society? Yes. Do I think it shows what drag actually is all the time? I do not!

Roxie: Because you’re seeing this dramatized version, like yes there are fights and everything that happens. At the end of the day, if I went out and cussed someone out like that how they do on the show, that’s not being a professional! In this industry, you have to have professionalism at all times. Just like in theater, you cuss one person out, or do something bad to one person, you blackball yourself!

Roxie:AND RuPaul needs to have a trans woman on the damn show cuz I’m sick and TIRED of not seeing any trans woman when trans women were the ones who pioneered the art of drag for queer culture! That’s just my opinion.

Maggie: Yes ma’am!

Roxie: And you can put that in bold!

Maggie: I will. Note to myself, put that in bold.

[laughing together]

Maggie: So you said it’s dramatized because we know that, because everyone loves drama, but I maybe wonder if you would watch it differently than someone who is straight?

Roxie: I would say I would! I feel like, as a straight person you’re watching it as a reality tv show. As a drag entertainer who does something similar– maybe not at the same level or caliber because it’s literally the Olympics of drag– you’re watching it and judging it based on “Oh I would do that better!” or “I could do this” or “Ooh they did that so well”. It’s that level of difference. Some fucking straight dude is gonna see a pretty man in a wig and go “I think they’re hot uhh”

Maggie: Yeah, I don’t know how much– are you a casual watcher, are you a fan, how would you classify yourself in regards to the show?

Roxie: So I at least think that since I am an entertainer that works very often it’s good to know what’s happening. We see Drag Race pioneer freakin’ memes, catchphrases that start to come into mainstream society. So I at least like to know what’s happening. I do make sure to catch up on it every week. I wouldn’t call myself a superfan.

Maggie: Okay.

Roxie: Obviously I was like “Oh my god Drag Race!” Then you get to start working with these girls and you realize they’re not much different than you, they just got their big break.

Maggie: Do you feel like there’s a hierarchy of drag queens?

Roxie: What do you mean by that?

Maggie: Girls who are on RuPaul’s Drag Race are seen as better than, um, local performing queens who haven’t been on drag race?

Roxie: YES 100%! Just because most people that are watching on the tv then only come out to that night that the performer is there. That is normally their first introduction to the local drag that is around them. So they tip and cheer for the drag race queens because they don’t know anything– any better. That is your job as a local entertainer to show them what they are missing! To bring them out to the bars when you don’t have a drag race girl there.

Maggie: Yeah, that was very well said. Do you ever travel for drag? Have you travelled for drag before?

Roxie: I have. Yes that’s one of my favorite things about drag is that you very much, if you have your chances to travel, TAKE THEM. You are very much getting paid to experience different parts of the country and the world.

Roxie:Recently, I was lucky enough to go visit a sister in Terre Haute, Indiana to perform out there with her. It was amazing! I’ve done Chicago. I’ve done Wisconsin. I’ve done the Austin International Drag Festival before. If you have chances as a local girl to travel, do it.

Maggie: She’s a travelling girl!

Roxie: Yes, I will say I will- Oop. I had a low power mode come on I was like shit.

Maggie: Your good, it will probably be a few more minutes then we can finish. So I have a really fun question, and I’m excited to hear what your answer would be. If you could go back in time as Roxie M Valentine, what advice would Roxie give to your younger self?

Roxie: I would tell myself that you are not the shit, starting out. Because you think you are as soon as you step out. When you start drag, you automatically have this confidence that you don’t have as your normal everyday self. That can come off very arrogant and rude! So I would tell myself to be a nicer woman because I was a bitch when I started. I have learned to be a nice girl!

Maggie: You’ve said in your industry professionalism is key right? You have to know how to work with people!

Roxie: And so starting off, if you think you’re better than everyone, you’re not! You need to be able to learn from people. Cuz they’re the ones that are your employer. The girls that are there booking the show and the show directors– are basically your boss. So if you aren’t acting too good to them they’re not gonna wanna work with you.

Maggie: If you could change one thing about the drag scene or the community, do you know what it would be?

Roxie: That’s a good question. The first thing that comes to my mind would be to make sure we save these queer spaces. We are losing queer spaces at a rapid rate. Covid hit queer industry harder than it hit any other industry, let’s just be real.

Roxie:Without these queer spaces, queer children do not have their first opening to being 100% purely like themselves. As soon as I turned 18 I was at the bars, meeting people. If it was not for these bars, I would not have my chosen family. I don’t know where I would be right now.

Maggie: I wonder what we can do. Do you have any advice for people like me and you to keep queer spaces around? Or to do more for the queer community? What’s some advice?

Roxie: The most we can do is support these businesses. These businesses need your support. Whether it’s going and getting a drink, a soda, a piece of pizza, whatever they sell. If you don’t wanna drink you don’t have to drink! But do something to support these businesses. Go tip the girls for a round! Bring your friends. I guarantee– How do you identify?

Maggie: Bisexual, just cis woman!

Roxie: Okay. So you take your girlfriends out for a night on the town of fun– I guarantee the queer space, gay bar, is going to be more fun than the hetero/straight bar. Period!

Maggie: Period.

Roxie: It’s gonna feel safer and more fun! Once we lose that, it’s gone.

Maggie: Yeah, that’s great. I think people forget and they feel kind of small, like they can’t contribute, but really it sounds like every little thing counts!

Roxie: Exactly. That’s the thing! You might not think your 4 dollar drink counts, but 10 of your friends getting that 4 dollar drink is paying somebody’s bills that night.

Maggie: It all adds up!

Roxie: Exactly.

Maggie: Okay, last question here: if you could choose one thing you want to know about drag what would it be?

 Roxie: Ya got me in a stand still here! I feel like I’ve touched on most of the things I want people to know. I’m not trying to repeat myself.

Maggie: It’s totally okay, take your time!

Roxie: I want people to know that drag is an art form. It’s not a sexuality. There’s a difference between drag and transgender. Drag is the art form of gender expression. It does not have to be done in one way. Every single way you do drag is valid. Not all drag is good, but all drag is valid. [laughing]

Maggie: Put that on a shirt!

Roxie: #Merch

Maggie: Everyone go check out the link in bio!

Roxie: You think I’m joking? I got merch, I’ll sell it.

24:47 Maggie: Yes! I’ll link your merch for sure.

Roxie: Period!

Maggie: Well thank you so much for talking to me, I really appreciate it.

Roxie: Absolutely, thank you!

Maggie: Um I will send you the link to the blog post if you want to check it out and read it when it’s done.

Roxie: Okay.

Maggie: Alright, thank you so much have a great night.

Roxie: Thanks you too!

Maggie: Bye.