**Interview with Trina Diamond**

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Amy: "Let me set up my phone real quick."

Amy: "How's your morning been?"

Trina: "It's been good, just working. Ugh."

Amy: "Yeah."

Trina: "It's been a morning, but it's all good."

Amy: "God, I feel that."

Amy: "Ok, I'm going to go ahead and start recording on my phone."

Trina: "Ok."

Amy: "Ok, so I have a list of lots of questions to ask. Some of them are more, like, general questions about drag in itself, and then some are more targeted towards your personal story with drag. So, I'm going to go ahead and start off with the more general questions about drag, so I'm just going to go ahead and jump right in. How do you define drag?"

Trina: "Um, to me drag is any type of, um, expression. It's really about freedom and being able to be yourself and, you know, not just putting on a wig and makeup. It's really just art.

Amy: "Mhm, absolutely. Awesome. And then, what do you think the purpose of drag is? Do you think that kind of goes into what you said about it's more than just dressing up?"

Trina: "Yeah, I definitely feel that it's more than just dressing up. It really allows you to, um, kind of create this alter ego where you get to live in a fantasy for, you know, a few short minutes, or however long your performance is. And it allows you to be creative and artistic and you know even some of the most sensitive who are, you know, super shy, they get into their character and it's like, something just takes over them and they're able to light up the stage and entertain."

Amy: "Awesome, awesome. Sorry I'm kind of bad at, like, responding because drag is extremely new to me. Not extremely new, like I've always known about it, but like, I've only known about it through like social media. So, taking this class, my mind is so open to it and I love it. It's an awesome class, a lot of this is just super new to me, but I love it."

Amy: "How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?"

Trina: "Ohhhhh."

\*Both laugh\*

Amy: "We're watching it in class right now, so."

Trina: "So I love the fact that it has really allowed drag to go mainstream. Um, and it's really giving, you know, these artists - it's giving them a chance to showcase their talent to millions and millions of people. Um, and they're able to live their dreams and make careers off of it. Um, I definitely would like RuPaul to be more open-minded about the type of performers she allows, um, to be on the shows. Um, right now it's very, you know, centered around cis-men. Um, this year, or this season, season 13, is the first openly trans-male who is a female drag impersonator and I would like to see more of that. RuPaul definitely has the platform that, you know, she could showcase a lot more talent, um, than just the - what people are used to, as far as you know, assigned male at birth performers dressing up like women.

Amy: "Right, right, absolutely. I totally understand."

Amy: "If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be and why?"

Trina: "Um, 100% it would be making drag shows more inclusive. Um, not just having your standard type of drag queens and every show there is a lot of assigned female at birth performers and non-binary performers and people of color that are incredibly talented, but often get overlooked for the bigger shows and things like that. There's a lot of room for improvement, but I do feel like it is getting better."

Amy: "Awesome, awesome."

Amy: "What do you think are misconceptions that people have about drag?"

Trina: "I think one of the biggest misconceptions, especially for I would say the quote-on-quote straight community, that is not really surrounded by gay people in general, the misconception of drag is that drag queens are men who secretly wish they were women. You know, there's a huge difference between being transgender and being a drag performer just because you know, we put on the wig, the makeup, it's hard and it's not, it doesn't have anything to do with gender."

Amy: "Right, right. Absolutely."

Amy: "If you chose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would that be?"

Trina: "Um, drag is art. Drag is, you know, not just - it's not just putting on a wig and makeup. Creating that alter ego and going on stage and entertaining people, it doesn't have to be your standard what you see on RuPaul's Drag Race. There's huge umbrella of artistry that is under the term drag that - I like the fact that they're finally showcasing that."

Amy: "Right, absolutely."

Amy: "So, these questions are more targeted towards kind of your personal experience with drag. So, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?"

Trina: "I first heard about drag, probably would have been - I was like fifteen or sixteen. And just being in high school I had friends who had older siblings that were in the bar scene and as I started getting into my adulthood, like 18/19, that was my first experience with drag. Um, not to put my age out there, but the internet started being more useful as far as social media, the MySpace days were rolling around. It wasn't just AIM chat anymore, and so, that's kinda where I started getting exposed. And then a I started getting into adulthood I was like oh my god, this is - we have this right here in my own hometown and had no idea. Thankfully, with social media, it's a lot more accessible to younger people who can't go to bars and now we're moving into the direction where we're doing dinner shows and all age brunch shows and so - it's definitely a lot easier to be exposed to it now a days than the mid-2000's when I was kind of coming into my own sexuality and just finding out a lot more about the gay culture and drag and how it all started.

Amy: "Right."

Trina: "Sorry, I'm a rambler."

Amy: "Oh my gosh no the more the better. Trust me, even aside from my class I love learning about this stuff. It's like a whole new world to me because I grew up in small town Illinois, so I didn't really hear much about drag at all unless it was through social media. I wanna know more but there's not opportunity to learn about it. So then I saw this class and I was like, yes! Finally, I get to learn about it. So trust me, the more the better. I love learning about it."

Amy: "Um, okay. When did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?"

Trina: "So, I started performing in 2014. My now drag mother - there was a bar in Des Moines called Loko Bar and it was kind of centered off of RuPaul's Drag Race. There was a competition called Tiona's Drag Race and, a very similar concept - just for our little town, with a bunch of local artists. One of the entertainers that was competing in the competition, there was this competition where they had to put people who don't do drag in drag and then we basically had to put on a show and do a performance and that was the first time I had ever actually performed in drag and it was supposed to be a one time thing and I caught the bug. It was all down and up from there."

Amy: "That's so fun. So where was that at again? It was your hometown?"

Trina: "Yeah, in Des Moins, Iowa."

Amy: "Gotcha, gotcha, So was it fun? Did you have a good time doing it?"

Trina: "Yeah, it was such a blast and that's kinda where I was going back to the whole, you know, being kind of shy. I was never really a shy person but I do have a lot of social anxiety and just being in front of people - I was never good at public speaking. Before doing drag, I would have never been able to do an interview like this. And then, it really taught me how to be in front of a large crowd and just entertain and talk and all of those things. So, drag definitely is the reason why I'm able to - I can stand in a crowd of 100,000 people and just talk talk talk, and it’s totally fine."

Amy: "That's awesome. I can tell - I noticed this from the get-go, you're very well spoken and I'm jealous. I need to practice drag or something because I need to get better at that. I get anxious too and I don't get anxious in situations like this but I can just tell you're very well spoken and I'm so jealous."

Trina: "Thank you! It just comes with practice."

Amy: "Right, right."

Amy: "How did you family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?"

Trina: "Um, I think it always seems like everybody has similar stories. It's harder for the male figures in your life - just being gay, trans, non-binary, things like that - it always seems like it's harder for like your dad and people like that. My mom was very receptive from the get-go. And, the rest of my family was completely fine and I am thankful that I have had a very good experience because I know a lot of people, they don't have, you know, the support system. For me personally, my family took it just fine. They come to my shows."

Amy: "Good, that's awesome. I'm so happy to hear that."

Amy: "Where does your drag name come from?"

Trina: "Trina Diamond is my drag name. Trina is a rapper and literally one of my favorites. But back then, before I even started doing drag, she was always one of my favorite artists and I would listen obsessively and anytime we'd go to a party and we'd put on a Trina song and it just hypes you up and you're just ready to rage. So, my friends were already calling me Trina just because I was so obsessed with her as an artist. So, when I decided that I was going to do drag, I was like, well obviously people already called me Trina so it's a natural fit. In the drag community, you have like, drag families. And the first family when I first started, the person who put me in drag, their last name was Michaels. So I was Trina Michaels. And my current drag mom is Tiana Diamond and she's the one who ran the competition show and just from my growth doing - I actually went back and competed for season 2 of that competition and I did well and she saw the potential in me and then I became Trina Diamond."

Amy: "Awesome, I love it. I absolutely love it."

Amy: "There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drags, from drag queens, to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queen artist, bio queen, and camp queen, among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag and what kind of drag do you do?"

Trina: "So, yeah, and there are all of those terms. Nowadays, there's a big push because drag is about art and we have really been wanting to showcase it as that. So, there is a push right now to focus more on the terminology of drag performers or drag artists because it really is an umbrella term. You don't have to be a cis-male to do drag. But, obviously everybody is - they can use the labels that they wish and for me personally, my style of drag is more female impersonator. When I am performing, I want you to look at me and feel like damn, that's a whole ass woman on stage right now. I don't do , you know, the big eyebrows and over exaggeration, which I love that style of drag, but for me personally, I prefer the more female impersonator style of drag."

Amy: "Right, awesome."

Amy: "Does the type of drag you do affect your life as a drag artist?"

Trina: "Um, not really so much. My life has definitely, at this point, you know with the years I've been doing drag and developing and growing as an entertainer, my personality’s pretty much the same, whether I'm in drag, out of drag. It's not so much that I'm having to create an alter ego anymore, so it's all just very intertwined."

Amy: "Gotcha, gotcha."

Amy: "Who or what has influenced your drag?"

Trina: "Um, I would definitely say my drag mother, Tiana Diamond. Literally one of the most stunning drag queens I've ever met. Nowadays, it's like, the younger generation is what keeps me pushing and wanting to do more and grow. I really stopped looking at the, you know I love learning about drag and the gay community and things like that from the older generation but it really is the young queens that are popping out and slaying the game. That's who I look for for inspiration and ideas and motivation to want to keep going. And you know, they look up to me - you know being a little older and having the years of experience. So, yeah, definitely would say the younger generation."

Amy: "Awesome. Do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?"

Trina: "Not necessarily in the performances itself. But, I do - as I've been growing a quote-on-quote fan base or followers and things like that with social media - I've always been an opinionated person. So, I wouldn't consider myself a social justice warrior, but when it comes to Black Lives Matter and LGBT rights and things like that, I'm very opinionated."

Amy: "Right, right. As you should be."

Trina: "And it's not like that's my goal and it's the purpose of me doing drag per say. It just so happens that I'm a very opinionated person and I have somewhat of a platform and it is what it is."

Amy: "Absolutely, I totally understand."

Amy: "This one's more of like a broader question. It says can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist, and then there's other questions - things you can pinpoint. Are you part of a drag family - which we kind of hit on - how often do you perform, what goes into getting ready for a performance, what are some challenges of doing drag, and is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or the world?"

Trina: "Yeah, so I'll start with what's unique about our drag scene here. We're very open and welcoming. At least here, in Iowa, I'll focus more specifically on Des Moines but you know, it goes into Iowa City and Cedar Rapids and we have a bunch of smaller towns that are even starting to do drag shows at their local bars. It's not as cliquey as a lot of other scenes are in different cities, especially larger cities. Des Moines not a tiny town and knowing you have your groups that just click better together, but we book different styles of drag. It's not so focused on what you would see on RuPauls' Drag Race, we have artists and they go on stage and you know live singers, so it's a very open community and very welcoming. As far as what I do, I work for the Garden NightClub. We're in the middle of transitioning to a new building right now. I am the show director of the - it was Black Opulence with the former person - but I'm switching the focus to a decadence show where it will showcase artists from different perspectives, not just black performers but people of color in general - asians, hispanics, black people, people of color in general. So, I will be the show director for that show specifically, so that will be every 2nd Sunday. Then, just performing on Friday's and Saturday's throughout the month. I also perform at the Blazing Saddle. I'm still part of their Black Opulence shows. As far as, sorry I'm jumbling because I'm thinking of the questions as I'm speaking. As far as what it takes to get ready, it doesn't take me as long now a days, I would say about an hour and a half. Just getting in the mindset that I got to put on makeup and then put on tights and hip pads and figure out what outfits I'm going to do and what songs I want to perform and things like that. So I would say the whole process for me is about 6 hours. Just getting in the mindset, figuring out the outfits, the songs. If I'm hosting that night, going through the lineup - whose performing. Making sure that - cause when you're on the microphone, nobody wants to hear you just standing up there saying coming up next to the stage - so it's nice to know who is in the show with you so that way you can kind of banter back and forth and talk about the artist. So, the whole process is about 6 hours to do, you know, 10-15 minutes worth of drag."

Amy: "Right, that is crazy."

Trina: "But, a big thing for me is I like to be ready an hour or two before the show starts, so that way I can go mingle with the crowd and other patrons in the bar, to try and get them pumped up for the show."

Amy: "Right. This is a personal question of mine because I'm thinking of myself getting ready and obviously I'm not getting ready for a show but once I hit an hour, I'm like, ugh I'm done. I don't care what I look like. Do you like that it takes a long time to get ready or is there some days where it can feel more like a chore?"

Trina: "Yeah, definitely done a lot of shows where it felt more like a chore and usually on those nights the focus is more on let's just get a quick mug on and the nice thing about doing drag is, you know, I always try and do fresh numbers and things like that but usually once you start learning songs, if you are having an off night and you're like you know what I haven't performed this number in a couple of months - I'm going to pull out a couple of old numbers - and just make it a fun night."

Amy: "Yeah, gotcha."

Amy: "What has the COIVD-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?"

Trina: "Um, so with COVID, I personally just took a step back from drag. Our bars were closed down, sorry if you can hear my Roomba going off. Um, I kind of took a step back. I mean the bars were closed and even when the bars first started opening back up, I think they were closed for about 3 months., majority of summer for sure. Once bars started opening back up, I just wasn't really interested in performing. I had kind of - you know we had gone so long where I was show, show, show - nothing. During that time, I kind of just lost motivation to do it and you know, obviously, we're in the middle of a pandemic, so it just wasn't an option. Other artists, the local bars here, virtual shows started becoming extremely popular and I toyed around with the idea of doing virtual shows and instead me and my old roommate - my old roommate was doing virtual shows - and so I had just kind of come to the decision that I didn't want to personally do the virtual shows and so I became more of a - we're gonna turn the house into a stage and our close friends that were performers could come over and perform on the deck. I'll help record and set up sound and so I came more of like a backstage type person and I was completely fine with that. But I just had no interest in performing."

Amy: "Is it still kind of - cause even drag aside, I know a lot of people have been feeling that low motivation kind of thing for the past like year to year and a half - has that motivation slowly started to come back or is it still kind of lingering a little?"

Trina: "I would say New Year's was weirdly a reset for me. That's when I was like okay, I'm back in the headspace - drag, drag, drag, drag - and so, now I'm back to doing shows again and I honestly feel like the reset helped me fall back in love with drag where it's no longer a chore to go out and perform. It's that I actually want to. So, I'm actually really happy about that. My state of mind has kind of reset with COVID but we're getting back in action, more people are getting vaccinated, so it's nice to see bars and entertainment venues in general being able to bring drag back."

Amy: "Right. Ugh, it's like a breath of fresh air. Things are finally starting to feel normal again. Sorry my dog is barking like crazy, I’m sorry."

Amy: "How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?"

Trina: "So, I identify as gender non-conforming. I'm going to watch how I say this - it's a very personal thing for me. I would say I identify as gender non-conforming or male. I obviously wear nails, I do drag, I don't really think about my gender a lot. But I would say gender non-conforming - I can switch it up depending on how I'm presenting. But, I just don't really care for the labels. So, for me personally, that is the best way that I could identify."

Amy: "Sure, absolutely."

Amy: "I'm sorry, I'm going to step out and calm my dog down, she's going crazy. Give me one second."

Trina: "You're okay!"

Amy: "Sorry, she was barking at a squirrel."

Trina: “No worries.”

Amy: "How has drag, if it has, has drag influenced your sex and gender identities?"

Trina: "Mmm, I definitely feel like drag - it allows you to kind of play around and being trans or non-binary - it allows you to really toy around with drag by performing: putting on the wig, putting on the makeup, things like that. I personally feel like it makes it easier to transition and kind of come out as gender non-conforming or transgender or non-binary. You don't have to - I feel like it kind of takes away the shock, you know, when you are a drag artist and you start, I wouldn't say it really has to do with your sexuality but you know your gender for sure. It kind of helps you feel more comfortable when your friends and family, they're already getting a taste of you putting on the wig, makeup, it becomes more normal for them. And I feel like it's less shocking to them, you know, if you decide to come out as trans or binary or gender non-conforming, really anything else. For me personally, I feel like it makes it easier."

Amy: "Has drag influenced how you think about gender?"

Trina: "I would say that in the beginning, no. But, as I'm learning about new terminology and you know - god, when I first came out, this was in the mid to late 2000's, you never heard of non-binary or gender non-conforming, but being in the scene and doing drag, I definitely think that it has helped start the conversations of -hey you know I don't really feel like a boy but maybe also I don't feel like a woman, you know? I think that it has opened up the conversation with the different styles of drag that different people do. It allows for more people to showcase who they are a lot easier."

Amy: "Right, gotcha."

Trina: "Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?"

Trina: "No."

Amy: “Gotcha, straight to the point” [laughing]

Amy: "How has drag impacted or changed you in any way?"

Trina: "I would say it's allowed me to be more vocal and find my voice and kind of going back to the whole social anxiety thing, it's really allowed me to develop those skills that I use in my everyday life. Even with my career outside of drag, you know being a people leader, it's helped me develop those skills that I probably would have never developed. I certainly didn't develop them going to school. Speech class did nothing for me."

Amy: "Right, I can relate."

Amy: "Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?"

Trina: "Oh, 100%. I would say that doing drag - and I feel like it's that way for a lot of people I know - that by doing drag you're, it's kind of like you're able to get your name out there and it's the recognition, it's the when you go out even people that you're like I've never met you in my life they're like oh my god! And things like that, it kind of allows you to be a little mini celebrity in your little hometown. Just like any other type of art would do but with drag you don't have to be a good singer, you don't have to be what you would consider the normal ways of becoming quote-on-quote famous."

Amy: "Right, right."

Amy: "Okay, I think this one is the last one. It's a bit longer. It says I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, etc. or the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience of drag?"

Trina: "Yeah, just being a person of color even - I have personally as well as with - we have it's called 'I own black drag council' - and last year, especially with the black lives matter movement and things like that going on, we've really been pushing for bars to have more diverse casts and not just your standard cis white male performers and not just poor people of color but for people with different gender identities, non-binary performers, trans performers, just really holding bars and event venues accountable for being more diverse and it is the way it should be, it's the way of the future. There is more to drag than just cis white male artists, which they deserve a platform for sure and nobody’s trying to take that away from them, but there's more to drag than just cis white male that puts on a wig. And you know, at least the bars here locally have been doing a really good job at making sure that the shows are more inclusive and that they're giving space to all performers and all types of performers and I really feel like it's really brought in a new crowd to come and see the shows as well. They're not just coming to see that stereotypical drag show, they're coming to a show and not even realizing that the next person on stage is a magician who is gonna pull birds out of a hat and just different styles of drag. I really think that it's been a breath of fresh air in the drag world and even other bars - I did a show last year in Ottumwa Iowa, it's a small town, mostly Republican, where you just would never think that there'd be a sold out drag show with 300 people. But yeah, it was sold out and they loved it so yeah, I think drag's becoming more acceptable and it's becoming more mainstream and now's the perfect time to start showing the more diverse drag and I also think that it helps fight the stereotypes when you're having a diverse cast. It helps fight the stereotype that oh you do drag because you secretly want to be a woman. By showing the different talents in that drag is more than just putting on a wig and makeup, it's really helping us show the world that it's really about the art form, not necessarily because we don't identify as cis, basically."

Amy: "Right. Well that's all the questions I have! I really appreciate you doing this, it was so fun and it's all just so interesting to me. I wish the class could last all year, I feel like we're just smushing too much in such a small amount of time, I wanna know more. But I really appreciate it, especially with it being such a last minute notice, I really appreciate it. And it was so awesome to meet you."

Trina: "Of course, nice to meet you as well and good luck!"

Amy: "Thank you! Have a good day!"

Trina: "Thanks, you too!"