**Interview with Mercury M. Poisoning**

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Madison Lammert: I think we’re good. I’m going to record on my phone, too. Okay, so we're going to go ahead and get started with a few questions that are more specific to your personal story with drag. So I want to know first, how did you first hear about drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, well, I was first introduced to drag when I was 18 when I came to college, I went to Lindenwood University for my undergrad, and some of my friends wanted to go to The Grove in St. Louis and that was back when Attitudes was open, and they were 18 and up at the time. So we were able to get in because we were 18. And so we went there, like, 'We're going to a drag show!' And I was like, 'Okay,' and I was terrified, because like, I came from a small country town, I'd never seen drag before. And it was, I mean, it was scary at first to me, because it was way out of my comfort zone, but then I like kind of enjoyed it, so I kept going more and more, and then I, you know, finally was just like, 'Well, this is wonderful. I love this.' And then I was like, 'You know, maybe I should do this sometime?' But that was kind of a joke at the time.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. So how did you end up getting to the point where you were wanting to perform drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. So I actually started a drag show at Lindenwood. I was kind of in charge of our GSA, and somebody was like, 'Hey, all these other schools do a drag show like you should definitely do a drag show, like, that'd be amazing.' and I was like, 'No, no, like, I don't think anybody here would want to see that. Like, we're in St. Charles. It's very conservative, like, I don't think the school would let us,' and then they did. And so I was like, 'Well, I'm not gonna do this show and not perform.' So I decided to perform, and I loved every minute of it. And I was like, you know, 'Maybe I'll just do this for Lindenwood shows like, I'm not gonna do it any other time. Like, I'll just do drag for this.' And then we had another show, I did it, and then Pride St. Charles was getting started up around the same time. And they were like, 'Hey, we're doing this show. We're looking for performers. Would anybody from the show be interested?' And I was like, 'Well, I mean, I would,' and nobody else was, and so then I just kind of started doing it there and just kept going, and six years later, here we are.

Madison Lammert: Awesome. That's so cool. So you did answer the next question 'When did you start performing as a drag artist?' but can you elaborate, sorry [phone started ringing and would not stop], a little bit more on why you started performing?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I mean, like, it's kind of at the time, it was more of a joke, and so I was like, 'Yes, I just want to do it because, you know, we're doing it for the school, I want to like, we kind of, we've started turning into a fundraiser, so I'm like, anything I can do to help raise money for, you know, a different organization that's in need or, or whatnot. So it was kind of as a joke, but also kind of as a fundraiser side of things. But then I just started enjoying it, like, I really liked the feeling. So after that first performance, like, I felt so powerful on stage, because I was a whole different person. And like, granted, you know, all of my friends were there, so everybody knew who I was. But it was like, I could be a whole different person and I could be like, 'Oh, well, that's Mercury, so like, she's different from Ethan,' you know, like, things like that. So, it's funny, but like, I don't know, it was a good feeling and so I just wanted to keep that feeling up and be like, 'Yeah, I have the ability to transform, if you will, into a completely different person,' that she can get away with doing more things, she can be more confident. And, you know, it's okay, because she's a drag queen. It's not, 'Oh, Ethan's being more confident, he's just a terrible person,' you know, or something like that. So, I would say kind of those are the big reasons.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, how did your loved ones perceive you coming into doing drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: So, um, my parents, like, I told my mom, I was just like, 'Hey, just in case you see pictures like this is happening,' at least, you know, for the first time and she was like, 'Okay,' and then, you know, I slowly did it, so it was kind of like easing her into it. And her and dad, like, don't fully understand it necessarily. I've tried to explain it more in terms of that -- even though this is not a very good representation of it at all, it's not -- but for them to understand this is what worked: So what I told them was, it's like theater, essentially. It's me playing a character where I lip sync to other people's songs and you know, people tip me for it. And so that was how it was, that's how it was, or that's how I was able to explain it to them. It's a little bit easier to explain it that way rather than 'Oh, you know, I feel more confident. I feel like it's not just drag, it's about expression, like drag's not theater, per se. You can use drag in theater, but you know, it's not theater. My brothers: One of my brothers thinks it's completely weird. My oldest brother has come to shows and supported me, him and his wife, my, the brother closest to me in age, we live together, so he's used to it. But he also comes to a lot of the shows, well, before COVID came to a lot of the shows and everything. So they were all good with it. But like my parents are still, like they won't come to a show, but they did come to like the Pride Parade that we did for Pride St. Charles because I helped host that, so they have met Mercury, they've just never seen her perform.

Madison Lammert: That’s cool.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: Yeah and then what about your friends? What did they think?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, all of my friends love it. Like when people find out, even like new friends, when they find out I'm a drag queen, they lose their minds and get so excited. And they're like, 'Come do my makeup, come, you know, do whatever else.' And I'm like, 'Okay, like, if you want to look terrible I'll do your makeup. Like I can do my makeup, but doing makeup on other people is very challenging.' But it's fun, they're supportive.

Madison Lammert: That's awesome. Yeah. And where does the name Mercury Poisoning come from?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, so the name was a bit of a journey. When I started, which you probably saw in my email, when I started, I was Mercury Jones, and so that's why my email is the way it is because I created it back then and I don't think you can change it without just creating a brand new email, which that's fine, I don't care. But I started out as Mercury Jones, and so Mercury came from Sailor Moon, the, which is, you know, like anime manga. So it was a show, though, back in the 90s., and I was born in the 90s., but I I grew up watching reruns when I was a kid. Since I loved Sailor Moon, like love the show, and I ended up liking, like Sailor Mercury was one of the sailor scouts. This sounds so nerdy, but she was one of the sailor scouts and she was always one of my favorites, and so when I would pretend, like when when you're a kid, you know, you play pretend, so I would always pretend and she was one of the ones I was always like, I was that scout so I had her powers and whatnot. So I loved that, so [that's] Mercury, and then Jones, I don't really know where that came from at first. I don't know if I saw it somewhere or if I'm just like, 'Well, this has a nice ring to it, whatever.' And then about four years ago, I guess, I think, I'm not sure how long ago was, but I ended up getting adopted. After I started performing in the city a lot more, I ended up getting adopted by Scarlett Syanide, who is also a drag queen. She's retired now, but her last name was Syanide, and so we were like, 'How can we know, you know, like how can we do something so that like people know I'm in her family but not changing my last name to Syanide?', which is a very popular thing to do, like when you get adopted into a drag family, you change your last name to match theirs. She and I agreed that it would be better for kind of like my own individuality to either change my name, but not to Syanide. And so then we kind of stuck on Mercury Poisoning because it tied with Syanide, which you know, it's poison, but so it tied to that, but it wasn't using the exact same last name. So it's like, 'Okay, we're part of the same family, we just, you know, have our own individual styles,' because Syanide just didn't fit me so.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. So can you describe for me a little bit how you characterize your drag? For example, do you use particular labels? And, like, do you have a particular style?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I know I specifically in drag like my pronouns, I use she/her pronouns, but I'll answer to any so it really doesn't matter to me. I'm flexible in that sense. As far as different labels, I always—I don't know if I have any other labels like I, I guess kind of on to like your second point, I classify myself as a hot mess. But aside from that, I always, when people ask me like how I would categorize, that's hard to say, my drag I, I don't know, I would almost say that I'm more of a I kind of say like a pop princess, I do a lot of pop music, but I'm pretty versatile as far as like genres because I co-produce a show in St. Charles with my drag mom, Roxxy Malone, and she and I tried to have a lot of different themes and everything for those shows. So like we've done country, we've done rock and roll, we've done 80s, we've done 90s, we've done Broadway, you know, whatever it may be, like, whatever you can think of, we've probably done it. So I can do a little bit of everything. So I'm definitely versatile in that sense. But I probably stick at home more with like pop music and things. So I would consider myself a pop princess. But I'm definitely like, as far as if you go into like, you know, you have people in the drag world [who] you consider them looks queens, so like their makeup is what they're best at. I'm not -- like I'm good at makeup, but I I'm not like up-there amazing. I'm definitely not a full comedy Queen, but I'm kind of funny. So like, that's mixed in there. But I would say where I shine at is my lip sync specifically with ballads. So I would almost call myself a ballad queen. I don't know, I'm just really good at it.

Madison Lammert: Um, you said 'hot mess.' Can you tell me a little bit more about what that means?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, I just say that to myself probably because I'm a very like, self-deprecating person. You know, just to kind of make a joke, that's kind of how my humor goes. But I always say hot mess because like, I'm not super great at styling hair. So like, I can make my hair look presentable, but it may not look the best. So it's kind of like one of those situations where I'm like, 'Eh it's good.' But it is something that I'm actively working on to try to get better at so that I won't say I'm a hot mess anymore. But there's just little things that like I'm super nitpicky, because I'm a perfectionist when it comes to certain things, and so in drag, I've had to really like be like, 'I can't fix some of these things' or you know, 'whatever,' so then it just kind of falls under the hot mess category.

Madison Lammert: Okay. So, who or what has influenced your drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh um, that's such a good question. Also, sorry, I just changed my name on my [Zoom] I realized it was still my name from a previous trivia night I was a part of so anyway, so I changed that. But, um, who has influenced? Um, I don't know. I mean, I feel like a lot of my influences come from things I see on Drag Race, because even though like, you know, there's a lot of things that have happened with Ru Paul, you know, and comments that she's made towards different communities, or, you know, different populations. So like, [she's] not--maybe not the best, but I watch it for the fashion and for the queens that are using their platforms to change and make a difference and things, but like, I really, really enjoyed, like Raven when she was on her season, who has gone on to do so much in drag, and like Bob the Drag Queen who's a comedy queen but does so much like activism and things like that. But it's like, as far as performance styles, I would say I probably lean more towards like, kind of how Bob the Drag Queen does it or even maybe, I don't know, I'm not even sure who else but, I mean, as far as like celebrities go, I always, I mean, I enjoy, like I do a lot of Dua Lipa, so I feel like her music specifically, and probably her you know, because it's her music, has influenced me a lot, because I love performing her music. Or I just look at some of the like old like, I don't know, like maybe some of the like, artists from the 90s maybe because I don't do a lot of 90s but like I like that style, so I don't know, that's always a hard question for me to answer, so I'm sorry it's not a super great answer.

Madison Lammert: What about Bob the Drag Queen? You said her performance style? Can you describe that a little bit to me?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes, she's always like, she's a comedy queen, so it's kind of like, there's like a funny aspect to it where she's just very, she makes a lot of expression with her face and with her mouth, because she, like she does really well with her lip sync. So I feel like I do similar things. She can dance and things, but she doesn't always do that. Like sometimes she just does a little bit of, you know, movement or expression with her hands, and I definitely do that because I am not a dancer, by any stretch of the imagination, and I'm aware of that, and it's okay, I try but like, it's, it's not some of those, like, you see people that are like, kicking and twirling and what not; I just can't do it. It just looks awkward when I try to do it. The best I can do as a cartwheel. But, Bob the Drag Queen does that expression and like really knows her lip sync, so I that's why I like to think that I'm a little bit like her in that regard. But definitely very just like, overexpression, that's kind of the main point of hers.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Okay. Um, do you consider your drag to be political?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I would like to say no, because I hate politics, I keep up with it enough to be knowledgeable, so I know what's happening and can make my own informed decisions, but drag in itself is kind of a political move, I would say, because it is something that's challenging the binary as far as, you know, trans rights go and, and nonbinary rights and things like that. It is challenging that binary of 'Oh, it's just male and female,' which is not the case. You know, it's showing that people can be fluid, or, you know, they can be solid and their identity, whatever whatever that identity may be, but they can still be fluid enough that they can express their gender in different ways if they want to. Because, you know, for drag, like, for a lot of people, drag is just expressing a different gender, but for other people, it is a full exploration of their identity because some people get into drag and then you know, later on realize, you know, 'This feels right in drag,' like 'This feels like who I should really be' and a lot, you know, a lot of trans people go through that journey, not all of them by any means, but I've known several trans people that have gone through that journey of [when] starting out they're like 'Oh yeah, I am just doing drag because it's something I'm interested in' and then, you know, that interest came from the fact that they are trans and maybe didn't know it yet and you know, [they] kind of go on that journey and figure that out. So, so yes, probably, it is whether I want it to be or not.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, that's something we've been talking a lot about in class. So, I mean, these questions are all given from the professor because it's like a research study, you know, um, but I was particularly excited to see your response to that one.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. So, um, you have mentioned being part of a drag family and can you tell me a little bit more about how that works?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. So I've been a part of two different drag families. You know, my first one was Scarlett Syanide and we were part of what we called the House of Defiance because none of us say, or none of us have the last name, but normally, you know, everybody will have the same last name or, so like, I don't know if you watch Drag Race at all, but like, this most recent season, that's still happening, there was, I can't think of her first name but her last name was Iman, so there was the house of Iman so all of her children, their last name is Iman or Iman is in their name somewhere, and that's how you know they're all together and that happens a lot too with, you know, other families, so it might be like, I don't know, or in St. Louis like the House of Control, there are a ton of Controls, they all change their last name, but we didn't do that. So we all kept our own last names, if we had one, and just named the house a different name, and then I left that family; Scarlett I still consider to be my drag mom, but I have another drag mom who's Roxxy Malone who, she is very, you know, she's very well known in St. Louis and everything and so I added like to my name. Just like a side note, I added an M into my name, so I'm Mercury M Poisoning, so that way it kind of has the Malone feel. So I'm tied in there, but didn't change my last name to Malone or anything, so I didn't want to change my name again, and she was fine with that as well. And so in that house like we call ourselves the Dynasties, so we're the dynasty. But basically, kind of how it works is when, a lot of times when in a situation when you have a drag mom, it's because they saw something in you -- they see promise, they see, you know, something, and want to either help you reach your goals, or they want to give you advice. Or, it may just start out where they're just giving you advice and then it slowly comes and then you make it official, or you may never make it official. But, you know, a lot of times it comes from a place of mentorship, so a drag mom or a drag dad or whatever it may be would mentor you -- give you tips, give you advice, or help you out. You know, we're lucky because Roxxy has, her fiance also sews and does very well, like does a very well job at it, so we're able to, you know, work with him to get new costuming and things like that, and have a little bit better access to it than, you know, other people aren't always able to, so we don't have to order it from somewhere we can have a completely custom piece made, you know, as long as he's willing to do it, which that's fine, because it's his, you know, it's his right to say yes or no because I have some crazy ideas sometimes, they're a little out there every now and again. But, when you're in a drag family, like I have drag siblings, and so you know, so I have Roxie Valentine as my drag sister, Lucy Couture is my drag sister, then I was adopted. So I'm the third. And then Brother Daniel was adopted, and so he is a drag king, and I consider, I just call him my drag sibling, because out of drag he uses they/them pronouns and in drag, he's fine with they or he pronouns, and so I always just call him my drag sibling, and we're considered the twins, him and I are. So it's very much like a real family dynamic, because like we all hang out, we have a group chat, we all help each other, but Roxxy's are our mother, you know, the main reason, kind of the part that ties us all together, then we each have our own relationships with each other and, and still help each other and give advice, whether we want it or not, to each other. It's very [much] like a regular family dynamic. We even hang out, like we do Christmas every year and do like a little gift exchange. We try to get together every now and again as a family and things like that.

Madison Lammert: That’s so cool. So you said that you switch families? Is that something that like most drag artists will do?

Mercury M. Poisoning: No, it was very, it's a weird situation, really. But it's not something that's super common. It may happen. And it may happen more than I'm aware of, but I don't think it's something that is super common. Just, it was, when I did it just like, I don't mind talking about it, so like when I did it, it was very much I just didn't feel like I fit in anymore. In that family it was all kings, and we had Scarlett who [was a queen], and not that there's anything wrong with that, because I can learn a ton from kings, but they also don't know female drag necessarily because that's not what they're doing. Like, you know, they're presenting as male or a more androgynous look just depending on which performer it was. It was like, I didn't feel like I was growing and I didn't feel like I was being pushed, and so then I just decided I didn't, and Scarlett agreed, I was like 'I'm gonna leave the family' and you know, talked about it, and they all took it very personally and thought it was something they did, which it wasn't, like it was all very much, like it was something I needed to do, and I'm glad I did it. You know, to this day I'm still glad I did it. I love being part of Roxxy's family I love still having Scarlett as an influence and, you know, a mother in my life, but it was definitely a better choice for me and it's worked out for me.

Madison Lammert: So where do you and your family perform?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, so the show that I coproduce with Roxxy is at Leo's Pub & Grill in St. Charles. It's, we we're actually celebrating our three year anniversary in April, so we have a big to do [that's] gonna happen for that, you know, brand new costumes and I'll let you in on a little secret: We're doing a little photoshoot soon to change kind of our branding for it, so that's, that's gonna be exciting. And then Roxxy has a weekly show at the Grey Fox in St. Louis called "See You Next Tuesday," so it's every Tuesday, so I'm sometimes there, you know, the family is sometimes there. Some of us perform at Rehab every now and again. Roxxy also coproduces a show on Fridays and Saturdays at Bar:PM in St. Louis, so we are all there every now and again as well. You know, if they need people, we get cycled through because you know, there's a ton of people in St. Louis that do drag, so it's, you got to cycle through who is doing that, but not everybody's performing right now because of COVID either, so like, you see a lot of the same people right now. But once COVID is hopefully over, fingers crossed, we will, you know, that'll, that'll spread out to where we have more performers coming through. But they also, I guess it's just other random one off ones. You know, there's other days at Grey Fox that will perform. Brother Daniel hosts the Monday Night Show, which is drag karaoke. So a lot of Gray Fox performances, a lot of Bar:PM, a lot of Leo's performances. I think there's a place in Soulard, oh Bastille, which is on Monday nights, they occasionally perform then as well, I haven't performed there yet, but maybe one day.

Madison Lammert: So like St. Charles/ St. Louis, areas is where you guys are?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, that would be the main place, and then every now and again, there's different gigs. Like I've been booked to work at Illinois College, I think it was, I've been booked to work there before, so like, you know, maybe different, like school shows that are in different areas, but then like I do, I'm lucky enough that I got to do, that I've been hired to do some different like bingo nights and trivia nights. So like, I'll get all dolled up in the drag, and then I'll host a bingo night for different schools and, or trivia nights for different schools. So that's a lot of fun, too.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, that’s really awesome. So can you tell me a little bit about what goes into getting all dolled up in drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, there's a lot. Um, so you know, kind of my routine [is] I always like to shower before I get ready because I have to shave my face and everything. And so I shave as close to possible because I am one of the unlucky queens where I have a lot of, or I have like thicker facial hair that grows pretty quickly. So I always have to shave like as close to possible as like, as I'm getting ready. And then I also actually shave off my eyebrows which you can kind of tell but there's light from a window happening right now, but so I shaved my eyebrows off completely. I used to not and I just found that it saved me at least 30 minutes, if not more time, getting ready if I just shave them off because otherwise you have to glue them down with like glue sticks and everything and it just takes a lot to do that and make sure they're covered and don't look chunky, and I was tired of that so I was like 'Yep, you're gone.' And then after that of course it's just getting ready. So for me I can do it in about an hour / hour and a half if I don't have time. If I do have time, I like to take a little bit longer and usually it'll take me two or two and a half hours but yeah, like brief, like how I do is you know I shave everything and then I have to color correct my beard so it doesn't show through and then foundation and then from there I do my eyes. I powder everything, or no, actually powder everything and then I do my contour, so I powder contour to make my lines on my cheek, my forehead darker, and like under my chin. And then I go through my eyes and so my eye shape is usually the same. My drag sister Roxie Valentine recommended like with my eyes shape, I should try a different style, so I've been trying something new lately where I'd cover my entire eyelid in eyeliner, and then my like crease of my eye is a little bit higher, kind of on like my brow bone almost and so that's how I do that. So I do all my eyes and then once my eyes are done really the only thing left I have is blush and then my lips. And so I, I do all of them. My eyes are, of course are what takes the longest because that's what you see the most probably, and they're the most detailed part of the of the drag. So I, I do that, like I said, I can do it in about an hour. If I'm new, it definitely takes longer because I don't want to mess up and I want it to look pretty, and then I usually end up messing up and panic a little bit, but we get it sorted out in the end.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. I feel like that's like every time I do my makeup, I feel like there's one thing.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Exactly.

Madison Lammert: You know, I feel like that's just like everybody goes through it. What would you say are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I guess I didn't finish, I have one thought about the other one: After I do drag, like I do my face at home and then I go to the bar, and then I actually wear five pairs of tights. So I have pads, so think like a couch cushion, on either side of my hips to give me bigger hips and a bigger butt, and then I have four pairs of tights over top of that, I have a corset, and then I have a pair of tights that are like netted that are like fish nets, but they're nude so they match, like make it look more like by skin tone, rather than shiny. Like ballet tights make your legs shiny, so it kind of cuts down on that shine. And then I have a bra, and then I stuff my bra with like Beanie Babies basically, like it's the stuff from inside Beanie Babies, so that's what gives me the volume there, and then I put a shaper on over that. And then it's my costume. So there's a lot that's happening underneath the costume to kind of give you that, like, for me, I'm all about like, I want that like hourglass figure. Not everybody does, but I do, and so that's why there's so much. But anyway, back to your next question, which was, hold on repeat the question, I lost all train of thought.

Madison Lammert: The biggest challenges?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes. Okay. So the biggest challenges, of course, I want to say are staying current. So a lot of queens and I mean, I'm still bad at this too, but and not even just queens, but a lot of performers, once they find something they're good at, they tend to stick with that. So like, once I started doing cartwheels, I was like, Oh, I can do this,' so I would do it every single show, so like my drag mom is like, 'Hey, do you realize that you're doing this all the time?' And I was like, 'No, I didn't at first, but now I definitely do.' So like trying to find other things I can do so I'm so like, maybe once every three or four shows I'll do a cartwheel instead of doing it every single show, like yes, everybody loves it, but like it gets boring after a while, like, 'Oh, she's gonna do a cartwheel.' Like, you know, you don't want to be predictable. And then it's also like staying current with songs. So like, everybody, you know, a ton of people do like old songs, like they'll do classic songs; there's songs that are specifically like, you know, this is a drag song. You know, and a lot of people do those, but also trying to stay current where you're doing new music, but not overdoing it and like you're keeping up like building up your library of performances. Like I have, I use Apple Music and so I have an entire playlist of all of the songs that I've done before, and then you know, if it is someplace new, I made bring out one of those instead of learning a new song. I'll bring out one of those and be like 'Oh yeah, I've done this before, and you know, usually still have the costume or whatever and so I can cycle through all of that and so I'm still showing either new things or old looks, but I haven't worn them for a few maybe months or a few weeks or however long. So that way you keep up the variety and it doesn't get boring. You never want to bore your audience. So that's I want to say the biggest challenge. Of course, you always also deal with a lot of people that are stupid, in my opinion, of like, you have people that don't know drag that are just like very judgmental of the fact that you do drag, or you have people that like, like my personal big [thing], like the thing that I always struggle with is like I'm single which whatever, but I find a lot of people that when they find out I'm a drag queen don't want to date me after that point. And so that's a bigger struggle for me as well that not everybody faces, but it's definitely something that I face and like have to work through all the time.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Why do you think that is?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I don't know. I've never figured it out. Like the thing I always hear is like people are like, 'Oh, well I want to date a man that's a man,' which is like, that's super toxic.

Madison Lammert: Yeah.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Because I'm like, you know, I still identify as a man I'm a cis, you know, cis gay guy. So I, you know, identify with the gender and the sex I was assigned at birth. I do identify with that, I just enjoy getting dolled up and like looking pretty and having people tell me I'm beautiful, and, you know, I enjoy that. But that doesn't mean I'm trans. It doesn't mean I identify, you know, any other way, because I'm not trans. I don't identify as trans. Like, usually, that's what it comes to, they're just like, 'Oh well, you're too feminine for me' is like how it usually comes to. Like, I don't see that, like, yeah, I'm a feminine person, but like, I embrace it, or I try to at this point, just because otherwise, I'll go crazy.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, we read something about that, too. So, I guess if you thought you're the only one, you're not, like, that's like a phenomenon or something. We were all trying to figure it out in class. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I mean, I would say St. Louis is very different in the fact that we have a lot of drag kings, as well. So, I would say, I can't speak on, you know, behalf of other populations, maybe they do have more kings and I'm just not aware of it, but St. Louis has a lot of kings that do really well. But they are also very under appreciated I would say, because for whatever reason, which I also think this is stupid is that, people don't appreciate drag kings the way they appreciate drag queens, and I'm like, I don't know why, because, you know, they still have to have makeup skills to you know, make themselves look more masculine, and I don't know if it's just because they don't typically wear the big hair, or maybe they don't wear, you know, like the big costumes, they, you know, they wear more like suits and, or, you know, vests and things like that. But like, they're still doing every, you know, they're still doing all the work and not getting the same payout, which I don't think it's fair. So I know we always try to like with the shows I do, we always tried to, you know, incorporate drag kings, so that way we can have that representation and that variety, because it's not fair. But I would say we're lucky, though, in that sense, but we do have a lot of, of kings represented, that other places don't necessarily have that.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Okay. Um, and I think you touched on it a little bit, but can you explain a little bit more about how COVID-19 has impacted your life as a drag artist?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I mean, a year ago is when kinda you know, the shutdown happened. And at that time, all shows were canceled everywhere. And so we didn't start back until I want to say sometime in June, and so St. Louis opened up enough that they started having shows, but they were at earlier times, so we bumped up our show times, and so we're done a lot sooner, which is nice, because we get to go home sooner. But it starts sooner, so it's harder for people that work, that may work like a day job. Not everybody has a day job, or they have different ones where they're able to get off sooner. But like I work until six, so an earlier start time means I don't have as much time to get ready, which is fine, we make do with it, but so that's been an impact. But you know, to try and still do drag, we would try to do virtual performances, which were good, but I don't know how well they went because people found it awkward to like, tip you, like, 'Oh, I'm gonna just tip you $3' which is, you know, a lot of people just have $1 per performance and then you do three performances at a show normally, so you would make like $3 a person essentially. And so it's really awkward to just be like, 'Oh, I'm just gonna send you $1' or people didn't have excess money because COVID and like, didn't have jobs or whatnot. So that made it difficult. But then I mean, as soon as we started up like other things that made it difficult is like in St. Charles, there are no mass mandates. You know, everybody's encouraged to wear their masks. The businesses can have a mass mandate if they want to, but it's not required like it is in St. Louis. And so like in St. Louis in the bars, you have to wear masks, you have to be, you know, six feet apart, you have limited capacity. St. Charles just in limited capacity, but not necessarily anything else, and so, you know, the bar I have she doesn't have to regulate it the same way they do in St. Louis. And so like, we don't have to wear a mask if we don't want to, we encourage all of our patrons to wear masks, but it's not enforced because the city doesn't have anything saying they have to. And so we get a lot of issues with that because people think they know better and I'm, like, I understand we're in a pandemic, and we're doing our best, but like, we also have to have a show because sometimes this is the only way some people are surviving, like, you know, this always supplements the rest of my income to make sure I have enough for my bills. And so like we deal with that of people thinking they know more about our show than we do and making comments that they think they know better, but really, they're just irrelevant, and they're bitter about that fact, and so they're just trying to make it problematic for everyone else. But like, we always tell our performers they can wear their shields if they want to, and we encourage them to wear their shields, but if they choose not to, you know, they don't have to, because they're we're not in a place that it's required and so we're just following our own rules and regulations, but we are giving that option. I mean, of course, now that people are starting to get vaccinated, less people are wanting to wear them anyways, so I mean, there's only so much we can do. But, it's definitely different, performing with a face shield is hard because it gets fogged up or you get makeup on it, or you can't see depending on the type of one you have, and so it's just made it more challenging, but we're still able to do it, and, you know, still have a good time. So one day maybe we won't have to wear them again, which I hope because they rub my makeup off all the time, but like, other than that they're manageable.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. I feel like that would be really interesting. But, so you guys won't be in like, you won't be performing in like an actual mask, right, that covers your [mouth]? Is that even possible to do that?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I would say no, that's probably not possible because you wouldn't be able to see our face. So we have face shields, so they have some that are like a headband that cover your face, it's just like, you know, a thing of plastic. I have one right now that like, do you know Hannibal Lecter, like the little mask thing he had over his mouth? Do you know what I'm talking about?

Madison Lammert: Sorry, I muted myself because my sister is playing music, even though I told her not to. Um, so if it bothers you could just tell me to mute me.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, no, you're good.

Madison Lammert: Um, but like, Are you talking about the ones who he couldn't like bite people?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes.

Madison Lammert: You have one of those?

Mercury M. Poisoning: So it's kind of like that but it's clear, essentially. So like it hooks over your ear and then it just sits over your nose and your mouth, but it's clear so you can see everything. But we always joke and call it like the Hannibal Lecter mask because that's kind of what it looks like is that one so he won't bite people.

Madison Lammert: That is so interesting! You can make a costume out of that.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Honestly, I mean and I'm sure somebody has. I probably should do that, that'd be fun. But yeah, then other ones they have are like little goggles, or not goggles, but they're glasses. So you put glasses on, but it's still the plastic, those ones are really hard to see out of because the lights glare off of it. So some people have started cutting out like the eye portion so you can see out without any problem but you still have the rest of the mask covering, or the shield, covering your nose and your mouth. So I don't know if it helps, but you know, we definitely wear them to make sure that we're not like spitting on anybody.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, that is interesting. So switching gears now into more of your personal identities. So what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, so in drag I use she/her pronouns, out of drag I will use he/him pronouns, but I really will answer to pretty much anything. So I mean, if somebody wants to use different pronouns for me, like I'll answer to them, because like out of drag, even when we're with our drag family, we still refer to each other as our drag names. So like, you know, I may not be in drag but like, I'm gonna go hang out with Roxxy and then later I'll still call her Roxxy, she'll still call me Mercury, and we still use like, the pronouns we use for them and drag, we still use those pronouns. So they, when they refer to me, they use she/her pronouns, like, I don't care, like it doesn't bother me any. You know, I'm solid enough in my own identity that like, I'm flexible and I don't mind that. But you know, there are some people that it is particular, or maybe not particular like I don't want to seem like it's a bad thing because it's not, because like Brother Daniel uses they/them out of drag, but in drag is okay with he/him. But they don't necessarily like it out of drag per se because they are going for, or not going for but they, you know, they identify more with the they/them pronouns. So it's kind of knowing, knowing your person and asking what's comfortable. So like, it's different for everybody. But like I said, mine are mine, I'm flexible, I don't care, whatever, whatever you want to call me.

Madison Lammert: Perfect. And has drag influenced your sex and gender identities in any way?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, not for me, I would say, I mean, the only way it's kind of like what I touched on as far as like relationships, but not my own personal identity. I mean, if anything, I've come out of my shell a little bit more, but other than that, I would say no, it didn't really change anything.

Madison Lammert: Okay. Um, has it influenced the way you think about gender?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Definitely. Because, I mean, like I said, I grew up in a very small town that it was very male and female, people aren't different, predominantly white, like, zero diversity. Like the most diversity we had, we did have some Latinx families and we did have some other families of color, but we didn't necessarily have -- It was mostly white people that are farmers and we had some Amish as well, like, we had a big Amish community, but still, again, the Amish are predominantly white. It was just a different, like, religion, essentially. So I wasn't exposed to a lot. So I was very much stuck in that, like, yeah, it's male and female, there's nothing else and so it's really helped open my eyes and meet a lot of different people that are exploring their genders and their sexualities and stuff in different ways for me, so then I am able to ask, or, at least if I hear about it be like, okay, I don't want to be offensive, necessarily, and ask them, because they probably get asked questions like this a lot, like, I'll go educate myself and if I need clarification, I know I have people that I can ask clarification questions on, you know, for something, so I would say yes, it really has opened me up to a lot more that I wasn't aware of and I'm glad that I am, [that I] have that knowledge now.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Yeah. And on the like, kind of flipping it around have your personal and sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, I mean, I don't think so. I don't think so. I mean, I always, you know, when I'm on the mic hosting, since you know, I coproduce [and] I host that show as well with Roxxy, we both host it, I mean, it definitely comes out at that point because like, you know, I always make jokes about, even though I'm dolled up and you know, presenting more feminine I always you know, still make jokes as like a gay guy would but you know, so I guess a little bit but I don't think it does like to a great extent I would say.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, okay. So these are more fun questions in my opinion. How has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, so I would say it still hasn't, I would still say it has influenced me but not like completely, but my confidence is definitely a lot higher. Once I started doing drag, I came out of my shell a little bit more, I do speak up a little bit more for myself. I can still be very timid and shy and afraid to do things but like as Mercury I feel like I can do anything. And I don't know what the difference is, I don't know if it's just because I'm in makeup so I do look a little bit different so not everybody always knows who I am which is nice. But yeah, I would say I'm definitely, I'm more confident than I was previously, so I have seen a difference.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, awesome. And if you could go back in time as Mercury, what advice would you give her?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I would say to Mercury, I would tell her to start doing her own makeup sooner. I didn't start doing my own makeup until like two years in or so. Start performing sooner and the city, start doing your own makeup sooner and learn how to sew. This would be back in like high school, like go back to high school, learn how to sew starting in high school and start getting there so when you get to college, you can just do it for fun. And because now I'm in that mood, like, I mean, I'm 27, so like, now I'm in the kind of that place where I'm like, 'I don't want to learn a new skill.' I would say learn how to sew, start doing your makeup sooner, and don't care what anybody says like Mercury is going to be amazing and people are going to love her, so just keep letting her grow.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Awesome. Um, are there any other ways that you would say it has impacted you or changed you?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I mean, I would say it's just given me a really amazing chosen family that, you know, I'm very (not understandable) my blood family and so it's very, like, I'm lucky in that sense. I do have, even though, you know, my parents don't come to shows like, my mom still asked how my shows are like, she'll still look at pictures, watch videos, they just don't want to see it in person necessarily, which I can, you know, I can handle that, like, at least she's been supportive and asking. It's not like she's being negative about it. So I would say like, I have a great blood family and support system there. But I've come to the realization that I can have a really great chosen family that, like I love and I care for, that is supportive, and we act just like my blood family would act with each other. And so I've, you know, been very lucky in that. So I do have this amazing support system, like throughout my entire life, that I have so many people that I can go to, when I have issues or I have questions and you know, and if they're able, they'll drop everything in that moment, and come help me out with what I need or give me advice in that moment. Even if it was just a quick FaceTime, like Roxxy gave all of us keys to her place, to her and Ryan's place, and so if we ever needed to just get away, all we have to do is call or text and say 'Hey, I'm on my way.' And they're like, 'Yep, you let yourself in. like you're good.' And so like we have that place to go, which is amazing.

Madison Lammert: That's awesome. ((phone rings and message goes off)) Yeah, I don't know what's going on with my phone today. Um, I don't know why we still have a home phone, but apparently something got charged. It's probably a scam. I'm like sitting here and what this is twice in this meeting, like doesn't ever happen. Um, so yes. So you were talking about the chosen family, okay perfect. Um, this is a long question. Okay. I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa, or 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 experiences social identity?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I think I'm answering it the way it needs to be answered.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, it's such a mouthful.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, that's okay. Um, I, basically, where I'm at is, I think like, when I started drag, and even before I started drag, like I told you, I had a very, I had a very uneducated, narrow mind, because it was based off of the area I lived in, and I didn't realize there were other, like, there were other options, there were other people out there that were much different from me. I mean, I knew I did, but I didn't have as I didn't have quite as an understanding as I thought I did. And so you know, like doing drag has definitely opened my mind to various other identities and learning about different identities of different cultures, because there's so many different places that do drag and it looks different in different areas of the world as well. And so there there's, I would say, I have a greater understanding and that it has shaped me to be, I want to say, I want to think , a better person that is more knowledgeable of different cultures, different backgrounds from myself and then that I understand that I have privilege, you know, based off of the fact that I'm white, and I'm a drag queen, so in the drag community that's top of the food chain, unfortunately, because that's what people, like, I don't know, I don't even know why. But I understand that I have that privilege and that having a show of my own, you know, with Roxxy, that we're able to give, you know, opportunities to other people that don't always get the opportunities to perform because of either the color of their skin or because they're a king, which are, you know, for whatever reason looked down upon, and so we're able to kind of combat that and give opportunities to people that didn't necessarily get them at first.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, okay, perfect. Yeah, I think it answered it perfectly. Um, so now I have a few more questions that are more about your ideas of drag in general. So if someone were to ask you to define drag, how would you define it?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I would define drag as expressing gender in a way that may be different from how you, how you express it normally, and doing it in an exaggerated way to make everything bigger, better, brighter, more fun, and exciting. Plus, 10 pounds of makeup.

Madison Lammert: Yes. What do you think is drag's purpose?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I think that varies depending on the performer. So you know, for some people, it's a source of income, and it is the way they make their living. For people like me, it's a fun way to be a different person for a few hours, while also be entertaining and you know, stroke your ego just a little bit by having people tell you, 'you're great,' and 'you're pretty' and that they love you when you don't necessarily always hear that. But then it's also, like I said, supplementing my income. So while it's not something regular, I don't do it like super regularly, I mean, I have my, you know, the show every other week at Leo's, but, you know, it is kind of a nice little like supplemental income to help cover the rest of my bills that my day job may not cover. But yeah, so I would say it varies for people.

Madison Lammert: Yes. Do you think that drag is sexual?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, yeah. We have, in the community, what we call chasers. And they are, and I don't want to be stereotypical, but a lot of times they are like slightly creepy men that either think you're a real woman, because it happens a lot to drag queens. I don't know. I can't speak for kings, I'm not sure, I'm assuming that happens to them as well. But, it does happen a lot to queens where they'll just be like, 'Oh my gosh, you're so gorgeous' and they're in like, you know, they're in your DMS, whether it's on Instagram or with Facebook, if you have a Facebook page, and then of course, they started sending you inappropriate pictures, because they're just like, yeah, it's not fun. So yeah, that happens a lot, so I would say in that sense, yes, it is sexual to that point, because to that person is very sexual, but like with performances and everything, I, you know, a lot of queens and a lot of kings play up that like sex aspect of trying to make things a little bit more fluid, sexual movements, you know, messing with people, so I would say yes, it's very, I would say it's sexual.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, perfect. Um, and you kind of touched on it a little bit, but how do you feel about Ru Paul's Drag Race?

Mercury M. Poisoning: So I mean, I still like RuPaul's Drag Race. I may have different feelings about RuPaul. Like, she's gorgeous, and she does give a lot of opportunities to people that may not have had[them] and has really brought drag to the forefront. But, you know, some of her own views about trans individuals and, you know, different, other different performers hasn't always been the best, and so I'm hoping that she's slowly trying, or you know, that she's trying to learn and do better. You know, I don't know she is, but I hope she is, but I still I really enjoy watching it for the fashion because these queens have so many ideas based off of these different runway challenges, that like they take into places that I didn't think drag could go, and it's just getting those ideas and seeing like, being like, 'Oh, that's a really good idea. How can I take this idea and make that my own, so I'm not just ripping off what they did?' But I'm able to, you know, also express myself in a similar way because that matches my aesthetic or whatever. So I still like Ru Paul's Drag Race and I watch all the different variations, and so like right now, UK is on and the US, and so I'm watching both of those. But it is nice. I would say I like it. There could be better shows, but I still like it.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Do you watch like the Untucked episodes?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I should, but I don't. I just watch the regular episodes and then I don't watch Untucked, I'm lazy.

Madison Lammert: Okay. I mean, we, for our class, um, we get to watch season nine.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Okay.

Madison Lammert: So it's kind of funny because I have homework that's to like, go and watch the Untucked that pairs with it, you know?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes! I love that!

Madison Lammert: Like, this is my favorite homework.

Mercury M. Poisoning: That’s amazing!

Madison Lammert: Yeah, so I mean, that's why I've been watching Untucked because I didn't even know it existed before, you know?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, I support that. I love that.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, it is so fun. Um, I never imagined that we would have like college classes about some of the stuff we do now, and it's so amazing. You were talking about some of Ru Paul's own views being kind of problematic. You mentioned her views on trans individuals?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes.

Madison Lammert: Can you explain that a little more to me?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, um basically kind of what's happened, or not necessarily what's happened, but she just said, and it was a couple of years ago, but there were questions about like, 'Why haven't you had trans women or trans men or anything on drag race? Why don't you have drag kings?' And she basically said some things along the lines of that, you know, if you are a trans woman, and you're doing female drag, you're not a real drag queen because you've most likely, and this isn't always the case, but you've most likely had work done or something to kind of give you more of that feminine feature, because you know, if you havefully transitioned, you know, that might that might be the case. And so she thinks that's kind of giving a leg up to the, you know, the game, rather than being like a cis guy who does drag like I do, where you have to put on the pads and the boobs and everything. So she just said somethings like that about how she wouldn't ever really let trans individuals on there, and she has had some trans individuals in the past, but they weren't out on the show. They came out after the show. And so like one season, she did have Gia Gunn back for and so after her original season, she came out, and then they had her back. So then I think Ru thought that was fixing everything, but it wasn't. And then this season, the most recent season, they have Gottmik who is a trans man, and he does female drag, and so he does that. And so that, I think they also thought that was helping, which it is like, I mean, it's giving more you know, it's progress. It's just not necessarily the progress we want to see, and like, why don't you have kings on there? Like, you know, people love kings, and they can compete with the best of them, so why not? But right now they just don't. That's kind of where all that stemmed from.

Madison Lammert: Okay, perfect. Um, if you could change one thing about drag, whether it be in the drag scene, or the community, what would it be?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, let's see. One thing I would change. I would change all the, I don't know, I feel like there's just a lot of pettiness that comes from people. That if someone's successful, like why can't [we] just be happy for them? Why do we always feel like we have to tear everyone else down if they are successful? Because that happens a lot. If you, you know, if you see other people being successful, instead of being like, 'Oh my gosh, that's amazing. Congrats,' half the community is like against you for some reason. The other half may be supportive, but for some reason, like we like to turn on each other or turn each other against each other, and I just wish that didn't happen.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, that is very sad, especially since drag is such like an expressive art form, you know?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I agree.

Madison Lammert: Um, what do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Hmmm misconceptions. I think people think, you know, people that don't know a lot about drag, do think that people that do drag are trans, and like we've said before, not all people are, you know, some people are doing it just for the expression, or maybe it is the ability to have a little bit more of a performance, whatever it may be. So, I don't know. The big thing is that, like just assuming that because you dress a certain way, that that means you identify that way as well, and that's not always the case. The other, I guess, misconception is that, like, if you do drag, that means you're hyper feminine, you know, specifically on the queen side of things, that means you're hyper feminine and that you either want to be a woman or that like, out of drag, that also means you're super feminine. Like, don't get me wrong, out of drag I'm pretty feminine as well, but like, I definitely try to play it out more when I'm in drag. And so that's kind of where I'm at.

Madison Lammert: Where do you think that these ideas come from?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I think they are just preconceived notions that are based off of either where somebody grew up, or they, you know, people that just haven't been exposed to the drag community very much, and haven't had the chance to learn or haven't done the research themselves or talk to somebody about it. I think that's kind of where that comes from, it's just preconceived notions.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. And what do you think would help fix it?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I mean, I definitely think more education on drag, like, making it not, like, yes, making it mainstream can be scary, but also like, understanding like, I don't know, like giving people the opportunity to ask these questions or like, making it okay to correct people, if they come up, and they're just like, I will say and I made a joke about it earlier, but the biggest thing is when you're in drag, and you go up to somebody, they're just like, 'Oh my gosh, I want you to do my makeup.' Well, we're not all makeup artists, like, I paint other people, it doesn't look terrible, but it is definitely not my best. And so it's just assuming that because I can do my own makeup that we can paint everybody else, and we want to do that to you. And we don't, like I'm not lying and if somebody wants me to paint them, I'm happy to go on that journey with them, especially if they're gonna pay me to do it because a lot of times I have had offers to do that. But I, you know, I always tell them, like, it's not going to look the same, like, because your face is different from my face, so I have to learn how to do your face.

Madison Lammert: That's so interesting. Yeah, and if there's one thing that you want people to know about, or learn about, drag, what is it?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I would say that it's just a good time, like, go out and support your local performances, because a lot of people that love drag might have found out about it because of Drag Race, and so don't just go out and support those queens, because they're making a lot more money doing it. Not saying you shouldn't go support them at all, because you should, like, if you want to see your favorite Queen, go see her, from Drag Race, go see her, but you don't always, like you should still, like if you love drag that much, you should also be learning and knowing about your own drag culture, like in the area you live in, and go and support those performers. Because they're, you know, for a lot of them, they're just trying to make a living and have a good time. So go support them and, you know, go on that journey with them.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, that's, that's a great way to end this like, a cute little thing. Um, yeah. So those are all the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you think I need to know?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I don't think so. I think we've covered pretty much anything I could think of.

Madison Lammert: Okay, perfect. And, um, so as part of this project, we will also be collecting like, media of you. So like, if you have any favorite pictures, like or videos of performances, or flyers, like anything you're super proud of, I'd be happy to go ahead and put those in there.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Okay.

Madison Lammert: Do you have a drag Facebook?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I do, yeah, it’s just Mercury Poisoning.

Madison Lammert: Okay. And may I pull from that too?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, yeah, fully. Yeah. I try to post pictures on there. You can also, the page that I, or that you messaged me on, the Ethan Todd Miller one, you are welcome to friend me if you want, and then I post a lot of my pictures there too. But yeah, you can pull anything you need.

Madison Lammert: All right, perfect. Well, thank you so much. It was so nice meeting you and talking to you.

Mercury M. Poisoning: It was nice to meet you.

Madison Lammert: And maybe you know, after the pandemic clears, you'll see me in the audience or something, I'll wave to you or something.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes, come to it!

Madison Lammert: I will for sure. I’m so excited. Have a wonderful day.

Mercury M. Poisoning: You too. Bye!

Madison Lammert: Bye bye.