**Interview with Paris Starz**

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Kealie: Alright, so the first question I have for you is when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Paris Starz: Um well, I used to have a friend who was doing drag and he was just honestly super obnoxious with it and me and my friends said we always said would never do that. Because, I have like a group of friends that I have been with since the beginning, and um I can remember like we would go to um the gay youth group that was here at the time in Evansville and sometimes we would dress up but we never really called it drag, and then down at the river front we used to always listen to music and just kind of dance and lip sync, but we never called it drag. We always still thought it was repulsive.

Kealie: Okay, alright, so when did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Paris Starz: Um I was—I was 20 years old and I had went to Indianapolis one time cause someone I went to beauty school with introduced me to a club there and um I told my friend at the time who was a drag queen, and she actually became my drag mother, but I was like “Ohy eah I know how to do my makeup,” cause we were gonna go out dressed as girls. And I did my makeup the way I did it and she was like, “Oh no, honey, that’s not how you do makeup.” So she did my makeup and um we like went around like downtown Indianapolis just dressed up like, kind of like making music videos, in downtown Indianapolis and that was—that was the first time. But my first time ever actually performing on stage, I actually borrowed someone’s ID and um I snuck into a show and did basically my performance underage with someone else’s fake ID.

Kealie: Okay, alright so, how did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you when you started doing drag?

Paris Starz: Well at first, like my distant family weren’t like really cool with it, like they would kind of like make fun of it, they would call my—they would call my actual parents and just be like, “Did you see what Billy is doing?” just all this stuff and, so they weren’t really supportive. But my mom has never been not supportive and she has always come to my shows, every once and a while. But my dad he’s never, we’ve never talked about it.

Kealie: Okay, um so were your friends supportive whenever you started doing drag?

Paris Starz: Oh yes, of course.

Kealie: Alright, where does your drag name come from?

Paris Starz: Well at first my drag name was Briana LaQueer and um there was already a Briana at the time in the town, in Evansville, so my best friend was like you need to come up with something else. And my senior prom theme was a Starry Night in Paris, so that’s kinda where I came up with Paris Starz.

Kealie: Okay, alright, so there are a lot of terms for drag and styles of drag from drag queen and drag king, to glamour queen, male impersonator comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bio queen, camp queen, and among others, are there particular labels that you would categorize yourself underneath?

Paris Starz: Well technically now, I’m a bearded queen cause with my job it’s easier. I feel like guys take me more serious when I do like the [inaudible] and stuff, if I have a beard. So, and plus it’s like—it’s like contour for men. So I do like bearded queen now, but I honestly go by any of those. I don’t really like, labels are just labels to me.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: So…

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

Paris Starz: Oh um, yeah people definitely turn their nose up to it, like the old school girls are just like, you know you were way prettier before and all kinds of stuff like that, but. I know I’m still that girl so I can’t be bothered.

Kealie: Alright, who or what influenced your drag?

Paris Starz: Um, I don’t know like. Um when I first started there was always like the dancing queens, like there was some girls up there like Annastacia DeMoore. There were just different names. Like people who were like always into like bucking, which we call dancing, or stuff like that, but really there was like no mainstream people that really influenced me. I would say now someone who’s kind of mainstream, like Roxxxy Andrews, I definitely pay attention to her like just really big glamour.

Kealie: Okay

Paris Starz: And things like that.

Kealie: Alright, so do you consider drag to be political?

Paris Starz: Uh, I think it could be political.

Kealie: Okay.

Paris Starz: Um I definitely think that drag queens are like almost like the lighthouse for the community. We like, we can like help people and also we like we do benefits or different things, like raise money for different issues and I feel like that could somehow be political.

Kealie: Okay. Alright, so I’m gonna ask you a few questions about your life as a drag artist, and I know you mentioned it before that you had a drag mother, can you tell me more about like your drag family?

Paris Starz: Sure. I have two different drag moms. I have one drag mom who I told you about earlier that put me in drag for the first time. That’s technically your drag mom is like the first person who like did your makeup and stuff, but she was very new when I first started, so we actually met like another drag family and her name was Annastacia DeMoore and she actually, she was more like into like the stuff that I liked, like dancing, very dramatic contour, and makeup. So, I honestly got mixed in with them, but I don’t even know if that family even claims me, but basically a drag family is just like your extended family and your chosen family that you choose and like you just kinda like lean on each other. And even if—even though we aren’t always around each other, like when we talk to each other, we never skip a beat.

Kealie: Okay, um, how often do you perform?

Paris: Um, since COVID, well from 2012 until COVID hit, I performed every single weekend pretty much. I mean there were-- of course there were weekends off, but now we always perform once a month, here in Evansville. But also there’s places around if you wanted to perform you would just have to like do an open stage or something like that. But it’s so cut throat causes there’s so many girls out there, by girls I mean entertainers. There’s so many entertainers out there, it’s just hard to get places, but Evansville I for sure perform once a month.

Kealie: Okay how often did you perform like before COVID?

Paris: I performed every weekend.

Kealie: Every weekend, okay, and then where do you normally perform at in Evansville?

Paris: Before COVID, I performed at Someplace Else Nightclub and that was where I performed most of my, most of my career. I used to perform at like Alter Egos in Owensboro, Equals in Owensboro, but now it's just like here in Evansville, at most at Boka Lounge. We are called like the Dolls of the District and its just like four girls and basically we’re a cast and we perform at both venues. ‘Cause we are like super supportive of each other.

Kealie: Alright, so what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Paris: A whole lot. Well for the night of, it's just doing your makeup and then some girls don’t have to but I personally have to wear hip pads and that's just to make my body look more womanly. So I literally use couch cushions that I once found, I cleaned them of course, and you just cut out the shape of like your hip and what you want your butt to look like and you trim it down and put pantyhose over it so it smoothes out like your real legs. And that is the hardest part. Like yesterday when I performed I literally was like, my mom was here and she saw me getting ready and I was like, “Ugh this is the worst part, you're so lucky that you don’t have to put hip pads on.” But honestly preparing up to that we just have to like listen music and lip sync and honestly I’m sitting in my bedroom and usually I have two big mirrors in here and I’ll just like kind of perform or just dance in the mirror and just see what I look like. So.

Kealie: Okay. I’ve never heard about like using the couch cushions as hip pads that’s definitely really interesting and neat.

Paris: Oh yeah, it’s like--and some people nowadays like they actually manufacture hip pads into pantyhose--there more so dance tights-- and all you do is just pull them up, but they are literally like a hundred dollars and I just, even though I’ve done drag for so long, I’ve never invested in those.

Kealie: Yeah. Okay what are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Paris: I honestly, it--it is challenging, but really it's not challenging at the same time. Like I would say like mentally it's challenging ‘cause thinking people wouldn’t like the songs you choose or just not fitting the stigma, but other than that I feel like it's not really a challenge. Maybe… Maybe it could seem challenging not being able to find a venue to work at and stuff like that, but for me I’ve been very fortunate, but I know like people who are coming into the scene, you really have to work up to get into the scene. It was never easy at first, it took me a long time.

Kealie: Yeah. How long did it take you to get to like where you are now?

Paris: I was 20 when I started and it literally took me probably I would say two years to get like the solid foundation, just because like when like the older queens when you first come in they, they never want a new girl and you always like have to earn your spot. So, it just—it just took a lot of time of like doing shows, taking a lot of back talk, like people talking bad about you, and just doing things like that, but I rose up.

Kealie: Alright, is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world?

Paris: Without a doubt. Like we are like a little like hole in Evansville where we don’t really, like some of the girls don’t really advance like if you were to go to Louisville and then come back to Evansville, our drag scene is completely different. Like we’re very old school. I wouldn’t say like all of us our old school, but some of them just like they never progress with their makeup and different things like that so like it’s just very like stuck in the 80’s or 90’s.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris: So I mean we’re a little bit—we’re a little bit unique here for that, but also honestly everyone is pretty much like music wise and like performance value kind of the same.

Kealie: Okay, so, if you were giving someone advice who is specifically in the Evansville scene, what would you tell them to do to progress further in their drag career?

Paris: To definitely watch all the videos of all their favorite queens and watch YouTube videos of people they don’t even like too because they’re gonna learn from them. But go to different shows and honestly travel and do open stages cause I’ve done open stages like even over in Ohio just like for experiences. So like, as much as you can perform to practice, practice, practice. And then, find a drag mother.

Kealie: Mmkay. So, where did you say your drag mother was located?

Paris: She lives in Indianapolis.

Kealie: Indianapolis, okay and do you have like any drag siblings that are like supportive and like there to help you and helped you progress?

Paris: Honestly no, no drag siblings. Most of my progression came from my friends and just always watching them and like just learning from them and asking them like “Oh girl what did you use to do that?” and different things like that.

Kealie: Okay, so what has the Covid-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Paris: It definitely taught us how to perform on a camera.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris: Because we had to adapt to doing most things online or virtually, and now I would say now it’s definitely—it’s more acceptable now to do a quick online show than it ever was before.

Kealie: Okay, and then so now we are gonna talk kind of about like sex, gender identity and gender expression, which we kind of touched on before. So you talked about your pronouns in and out of drag, you go by he or she or whatever just feels right?

Paris:Yes.

Kealie: Okay. Has drag influenced your sex or gender identities, and if so how?

Paris: I would say like honestly drag opened my eyes to everything. This is like a- this is gonna be like way over the question but I have to tell a quick background story.

Kealie: No you’re good!

Paris: But I met, I honestly came from like the smallest of small towns and I didn’t even know like what a drag queen was. I remember finding Someplace Else on Facebook when I was younger, and I saw the drag queens on there but I honestly thought they looked scary just because like I wasn’t used to like that kind of a look. And then when I moved here, I met my friend who’s transgender and I honestly, I didn’t know she was transgender at first and I didn’t even know what that meant. We became like, like we slowly became best friends like and then when I found out it liked opened a whole new world. But I would say like just drag in general has like taught me so much and like made everything okay. Like it’s made me comfortable with anything. Like people tell me their crazy stories about the different things that they do I’m just like “Oh, girl, that’s nothing.”

Kealie: Okay have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Paris: I don’t think so. I mean of course like, no, but I wouldn’t say.. I was gonna tell you like I mean now sometimes, like sometimes there are, we call them “Tr\*nny Chasers,” but that’s like a really insensitive way to say it, like but basically just people who like want to be with a transgender or a drag queen. Like there are people out there who like want you to do things, like with them in drag, that’s kind of weird.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris: But that’s been a whole new ballpark, I was not--definitely not used to that, but that has happened.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris: But I’ve never done that. We don’t do that. That’s too much work! I always tell them, “Um, sweetie, I’m not a real girl, I have hip pads, there is no way that it’ll work.”

Kealie: Alright, um how has drag impacted or changed you as a person?

Paris: I think that it has definitely made me like more of who I am, like I am more comfortable. I was like so hidden in my shell before, and now that like I’m a drag queen, I mean everyone knows me, I’ve definitely, I’ve done so much more for like the community in more ways than I ever could have done it before. So I think it’s definitely made me a better person and more well-rounded and educated.

Kealie: Yeah, has drag impacted your confidence as a person, in comparison to when you are out of drag?

Paris: Um for sure, like as a drag queen of course I’m like super confident, like I was just thinking about my, ‘cause I just had a show in Louisville, like I could never dance or perform or do the things that I do without my face of makeup on. I mean it definitely has influenced me for sure.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris: And just made it easier to be me.

Kealie: Okay, so if you could go back in time as Paris Starz, what advice would Paris Starz give to your younger self?

Paris: As in before, like adulthood? Are you saying like when-- before I was like old enough to like go out go out?

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris: Okay, oh yeah for sure, Paris would tell Billy to stop being such a pushover and with all respect, beat their asses cause there was a lot of people who were haters. Oh like people used to push me into lockers, knock my books out of my hands, call me “fag,” all the different things. So I think if I had Paris then, she’d be more confident and honestly I would have a heel to shove up their ass.

Kealie: So, I’m curious if 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, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, or the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience as a drag artist?

Paris: Um, okay, girl.

Kealie: I know it was a lot, it was a lot.

Paris: One more time.

Kealie: Yeah so, basically, let me try to like word it better, because it's a wordy question. So how has your like your own identities, like race, size, religion, sexuality, where you live, how does that affect you as a drag artist, in comparison to other artists, who don’t maybe share the same identities as you?

Paris: I don’t really know, like I would say my size, like of course I’m a big girl, so, I don’t know, it’s like skinny girls they have it so much easier than us, cause they can just go buy something off the shelf and put it on, but there’s not much plus size things out there, I don’t know if I’m going the right way with this question?

Kealie: No, you definitely got it.

Paris: As far as like my music choice and stuff, I came from a small town so, I’m not so much into like more urban music, I’m-- I gear my performances more to like Pop-y sometimes like country music.

Kealie: Mmhm.

Paris: And so I mean I would say like the way I was brought up and like the area I was brought up in has definitely like influenced that, but other than that and like the skinny girls being everything, did I answer the question?

Kealie: Yes you did for sure, it was—it was a wordy question. Okay, so now we're gonna kinda get into like your views about drag overall. So, how do you define drag?

Paris: I would just definitely say it’s like it’s an art of expression. Like if I’m having a bad day or I’m not feeling myself, feeling it, and then I know I have a show coming up like, afterwards it's such a relief, like you just feel so much more liberated. It’s just always been like a way for me to just let it all go.

Kealie: Okay, what do you think the purpose of drag is?  
  
Paris: I honestly, I mean the purpose, I mean I really—I really don’t know if there is a definite purpose out there, but all I know is when I was younger, I used to dress up like in my mom's clothes when she wasn’t there and I would put a t-shirt on my head as my hair and I used to parade around as a 5 year old me pretending to be a woman. So, I think drag is like honestly a natural thing that drag queens just never pushed away.

Kealie: Mmhm.

Paris: Cause I know there’s lots of stories, about even straight men, who’ve dressed up and played with girl stuff, but here they are living their lives, and I don’t know if maybe they just pushed it away or it just wasn’t their interest, but for me it just kinda stuck.

Kealie: Yeah. Do you think that drag is sexual?  
  
Paris: Oh for sure!

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris: I mean, I wouldn’t say like me personally like I mean some of my songs are definitely sexual, like you just gotta make it that way sometimes, it’s part of the expression.

Kealie: Yeah, so why do you think drag is sexual?  
  
Paris: Um, just because like society is so-- like they just love to come up and touch your breasts, like that-- I don’t know like, in real life, if men walk up to girls and just grab their boobs, but men and women come up to us, they grab our fake boobs, and it's definitely a sexual thing. Like, people--I mean, we don’t just have an orgy fest, it’s not nothing yucky or anything like that, but not saying that’s yucky, I’m not trying to offend anyone.

Kealie: No, you’re okay!

Paris: Like just when we perform, I mean of course if it’s--I’m trying to think of a song, but if it’s a certain song, of course we are going to be sexual with it.

Kealie: Yeah, so you just kind of go with the vibe?

Paris: Yeah, just roll with the punches!

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

Paris: I personally, some drag queens hate it, just because it’s not real drag, but I personally love RuPaul, and I love drag race just because, I can remember actually when I picked my drag name watching the season one of RuPaul’s Drag Race and it wasn’t even as acceptable as it is now, and honestly a lot of people didn’t know about drag, but thankfully, RuPaul’s Drag Race has definitely brought such a light to our world. And even if it is a superficial version of what drag is, it definitely has some of the key points and some of the things we actually do and I feel like it’s definitely opened a lot of people’s eyes to our world and our community and without RuPaul, we might still be a few steps back, honestly. So I personally love RuPaul and drag race.

Kealie: Yeah. Okay, so if you could change one thing about drag, drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Paris: If I could change one thing, it would for sure be the drama and like the cattiness within people, but all I--I know that that’s just human nature, but a lot of times the drama is what like turns people off to drag, because everyone’s always so competitive and they always want to, they always think or want to be the best and so you have to have thick skin and confidence to get through all that, because people like literally will like murder your mentality, but you just have to keep it moving, and that’s the worst part, is just having to deal with all the extra drama.

Kealie: Mmhm. Okay, so what do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag?

Paris: Well, people think that we're all like, freaks or we’re, I don’t know like, like we don’t use… Last night for example, I went to a truck stop on my way back from Louisville and I was so terrified to use the bathroom, but I had to use the bathroom so, I went into the men’s bathroom and I still had a full face of makeup on and the guy said “Um, the ladies’ restroom is on the other side,” and I said, “Well, I’m fearful for my life and I’m really a man, so I’m gonna use this bathroom.” So, I don’t know if that was answering the question, but I just—I just feel like people are so afraid, but really, it’s just so different for me and my world because I see, a man wearing makeup as like “Yes, come on, b\*tch! Like you look, sick queen!.” I’m so like comfortable with like the gender fluidity of it, but some people aren’t and that’s the one thing that I just, I fear for the most. But I’m a big person, so if someone is gonna try to take me down, they got a fight on their hands for sure.

Kealie: So, where do you think some of this comes from, like people having these misconceptions about gender identity and stuff with drag?

Paris: Without a doubt, uneducated, just because they have just never been around it. Like even me for, example, like when I was young, I came from a small town, like Hamilton, Indiana, I actually even came from an even smaller town, but no one even knows where that is, so but like just not knowing, like that it’s out there and that, I mean I am sure they know that it’s out there, but just--just knowing that they are real people, and I don’t know. It’s—it’s just different, it’s just not being educated for sure.

Kealie: Yeah, what do you think that like could help change that like help people become educated on it better?

Paris: I think it’s already happening with things like RuPaul’s Drag Race, more things in mainstream media like, getting us out there more of course, like everyone is always like “Stop shoving your life down our throats,” like “It’s all your own agenda,” but really like just making us part of everything else.

Kealie: Mmhm. So if you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag what would it be?  
  
Paris: Oh God.

Kealie: I know, it’s a heavy one.

Paris: I have to think about it for a quick second.

Kealie: Yeah of course, take your time.

Paris: Literally we have drag pageants, and this is like on-stage questions times 20 questions, so I’m like, this is good practice for me.

Kealie: Good, I’m glad!

Paris: So, one thing I could, what was it again?  
  
Kealie: If you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag what would it be?

Paris: I would probably say that we’re just, we are all the same at the end of the day, like we take it all off and we’re—we still live normal lives and it’s a normal life anyways.

Kealie: Mmhm.

Paris: So I mean, I guess that would be it, like we’re still like, humans and we still bleed red at the end of the day.

Kealie: Alright, so I think that’s all the questions I have for you.

Paris: Mmk.