# **Interview with Liam Laughin**

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Interviewer: So, I have a few questions and it’ll be about 20 minutes total. So I'm ready to start when you are.

Liam Laughin: Alright I am ready.

Interviewer: Okay so, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Liam Laughin: So my very first experience with drag, I was maybe 5, and I saw RuPaul on VH1 and I asked my mom, “who was that?” and she said, “that's RuPaul; she's a drag Queen.” and I said, “what's a drag Queen?” and she said, “well it is a man that dresses up as a lady” and I said, “oh, OK” and so that was like the end of the conversation and I was like cool, cool! And I've been in theatre for my entire life so drag has just been in my life, a very natural thing. The art of it is beautiful and so I've always known about it since consciousness.

Interviewer: Okay, well when did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Liam Laughin: I started performing as a drag artist March of last year. The reason why I started performing…My origin is in cosplay and dressing up as characters was something that I enjoyed doing. But with the sparseness of cons and everything, it just wasn't enough to really express myself. You work on a look, you become somebody else for a day, and then six months later you do it again with somebody else and that's cool. Drag is a little bit more. You can do it in your bedroom, you can do it in public, you can do it wherever you want to anytime you want to, and so that's the reason why I started drag, was I enjoy putting on a character and sharing that character with other people.

Interviewer: Awesome! Where does your drag name- oh I'm sorry, wrong question. How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Liam Laughin: For my friends, my chosen family, they were very excited, and they said, “well obviously because you're male presenting cosplay characters always hit better than your female presenting cosplay characters.” So they were like obviously this is going to be a lateral move for you. Awesome! We’re excited! My parents were a little bit concerned at first. They were a little bit worried for me, and I think it's just because of where I live is a very conservative town with very closed-minded people. They were worried, especially since I just became a drag artist at the age of 32 and I'm a small business owner, that it would be frowned upon in the community and, you know, it is what it is, but I said I'm going to do this because this is what I feel is good for me, and, you know, be damned if my business goes down in flames. I don't want to work with those people anyway. I don't. So now, now that I've been doing it for a year, my parents are supportive. They're loving it, they're sharing my stuff, they're my biggest fans. And actually, we were wrong about how the community would receive what I do, and the community has actually banded around me and they're also incredibly supportive, so it's kind of an exercise in humanity in and seeing people be so lovely and accepting even in the conservative town. It's beautiful.

Interviewer: That's great! So where does your drag name come from?

Liam Laughin: My drag name is a pun because I love a good pun, Liam Laughin. When I started, Liam is a side of me cuz me, Morgan, in every day, I don't--like I was taught certain things that you don't do. You don't make jokes, you're very strait-laced, you are yourself, but what you want everybody to perceive you as being normal and so Liam is my cut up character. He's funny, he has no problem talking to people, he'll crack a bad joke, and so that's the reason why I call him Liam Laughin. It’s a pun of “leave them laughing” and so that's where Liam came from, and yeah [laughter]. I might change my name in the future, but so far so good.

Interviewer: Do you have any ideas of names in the future if that becomes an option?

Liam Laughin: Ah, I don’t at the moment, but every now and then, just to pass time, my husband and I will come up with funny drag names, and I've seen a lot of really good drag names out there. I think I have a running list, but no I don't have something nailed down just yet [laughter].

Interviewer: Okay. So, there are a lot of terms and styles of drag from drag queens to drag kings, to glamour queens, male impersonation, comedy queens, bearded queens, the list goes on and on. Are these particular labels—are these particular labels something you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do and what's your style of drag?

Liam Laughin: Okay so we’ll just break this down a little bit, so I don't go off on a rambling tangent. Okay so I am okay with the term drag king, but I'm now starting to go towards drag artist or drag performer because when you section yourself off like that, not only does it set you off from the drag community as a whole because you are separating yourself from the queens, which I don't like to do. I love the queens. The AFAB queens or AMAB kings, I think they're just as valid, and I think when we start to section ourselves off like that, it becomes a ranking system. But that's not to invalidate anybody who likes to call themselves that, so I prefer drag performer or drag artist. It just, it works for me because sometimes I don't want to put Liam's face on. Sometimes I want to be a monster, sometimes I want to be an alien, and that's kind of where I am there. Okay so what was the second part of that question?

Interviewer: The second part of question is what type of drag do you do?

Liam Laughin: Okay. I do a very heavy storytelling drag and I have not performed live a lot. If you do the math, I started doing drag right when--when shutdown happened, so a lot of my content has been virtual, digital content. But with a lot of that I started realizing that what I enjoy to do most is story tell through either acting or lip syncing and putting together a video that way. So that's-that's Liam's shtick, is he loves a good story telling. Okay So what was the third part?

Interviewer: The third part is a little bit similar to the second part. It’s “what is your style of drag?”.

Liam Laughin: Okay, and my style of drag is very concept heavy, driving, storytelling drag, and sometimes I don't even have to have makeup on for it, don't even have to have a costume. And some of the best drag that I have seen has been the artist being themselves out of drag, and it's beautiful! So, I go for more—more for concepts and actually delivering a message or a story than just throwing a face on and doing a song.

Interviewer: OK! Who or what has influenced your drag?

Liam Laughin: Ah, namely the kings, of course. Have to pay homage to the reigning king himself Landon Cider. He's phenomenal. That's how I found out that AFAB performers could actually perform in the drag space in the 1st place; him winning really opened it up for a lot of us, and I mean there's--it opened up this world that I didn't even know existed. But the classics Mo B. Dick. He's phenomenal, OG, has been doing this since the 90s, holding it down, still looking good. Other influences, my dear friend Kreme Inakuchi, who is from Canada. They are a drag performer that has a male presenting character and a female presenting character, and sometimes they will mesh that together and it’s beautiful. So, Kreme Inakuchi is a big influence for me. And pretty much every single drag performer that I have come into contact with inspires me in some way. They all give me something, and that's the cool thing, is that the basic public perception of drag is we're in competition with each other all the time, but really even in a competition setting, at least in my experience, it's been a community, it's been supportive, it's been loving, and a place where you can be yourself. So, everyone inspires me. Anybody that I've met inspires me, and I will go on ahead and say my drag mother as well, Anya, inspires me. She's helped me a lot break out of my shell, and she towers above me, probably about 2 feet, 3 feet above me in heels and looks down and she goes, “It'll be okay” [laughter].

Interviewer: That's great that there's a lot of influences that I go into it. That it helps build and build and build. So, do you consider your drag political?

Liam Laughin: I’m trying to think, and I don't think my drag is political so much as it is a critique on the human condition. I struggle a lot in my day-to-day with depression and anxiety, so I use my drag to show others that it's OK to feel these feelings that you do, and here's how you can tell a story with that and touch others that way. So, I haven't really done anything political with my drag. If something calls me to do that, then I might in the future, but for now, no.

Interviewer: Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

Liam Laughin: It is a mess. It is a mess. In fact, I don't know- I know you're gonna just- you're recording it for just oh I'm guessing note taking, but I'll just-- I'll give you a little tour. There is a wig head on my kitchen counter surrounded by masks and art supplies. My drag room is a green screen with a black sheet over it because I'm too lazy to take the green screen down; and I got lighting equipment; I got wigs on the wall; I have my makeup desk that I have not cleaned. It's awful. And this is my closet. That is all Liam’s clothes, and yes Liam has more clothes than Morgan does. It's chaos. It’s organized chaos. I know where everything is, I got a mannequin on the floor from a short that I did, and sh’se still been there a month later- I don't want to pick her up. So, that's my life is this an organized mess and I love it!

Interviewer: That's—that’s great that you're having a ball while doing it even though there's a lot of moving parts to it as you've shown me. Are you part of a drag family, a house or a collective?

Liam Laughin: Yes. And now we don't all live together but my drag mother Anya she has several children and I have my grandma Eileen Don Dover [laughing]. I love these these puns. So there's Eileen, there's Anya, there's me and my brother Will, and I also have a drag son Earnie and yeah. So, we are part of a collective, we just kind of adopted each other and it works well.

Interviewer: OK. How often do you do you perform? I know you said that, you know, we are in the COVID era so it's very difficult to physically go somewhere, but how often do you do like, online--online gigs, I guess?

Liam Laughin: I would say I try to do a live show at least once a week with my work. Kreme Inakuchi is up in Canada [and] they have a drag house called House of Tequila Mockingbirds, and we-I've been doing their weekly Tuesday night show from the past year every couple of weeks or so. So, I try to do drag at least once a week to keep my skills sharp, but also that way when I do perform again, I'm not [a] deer in the headlights, and I think that's pretty healthy. I feel like if it did this all the time, it becomes--it takes over your life. It becomes an obsession, and that's not healthy. It becomes a coping mechanism as opposed to therapy so, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you verbally describe what goes into getting ready for a performance exactly?

Liam Laughin: I have to, I have to bind my chest if I am doing, and it just makes me feel a little bit more euphoric when I do bind my chest 'cause I like to commit, or at least Liam's a bit more euphoric. It just doesn't feel like I’m completely in drag unless I do that. And there are performers out there that, you know, they identify as a drag King, but they will perform with their tits out, and it's cool! And I, you know, that’s great for them. It's not something for me, so I bind, I put on my makeup in that process. If it's a quick makeup will be about 30 minutes. If it's a big make up for a competition, three to four hours. I do my hair and that I can either just do my hair the way it is, or I can put on a wig. I prefer my natural hair and so that process from start to finish can take anywhere from an hour to five-to-six hours. It’s a very intricate process, and of course, then I have to get my lighting equipment set up and get the music ready and all that, yes.

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

Liam Laughin: The biggest Challenges to doing drag, for me, has been letting go of Morgan while I'm in drag 'cause Morgan has the fear. Morgan has the “well maybe you shouldn't do that because you're going to look stupid.” Where-- so that's been the biggest challenge for me is separating who I am day-to-day from who Liam is and who he can be, so I'm still working on that part. It's a bit of an adjustment but it's getting better. So, and what was the second part of that question?

Interviewer: Just what's the challenges that come with being a drag artist?

Liam Laughin: Oh yeah. And being assigned female at birth, there's still a lot of misogyny in the drag community, and there's not enough representation for AFAB artists and there needs to be and it's-- I'm starting to see it, my last gig that I did live, and it was actually in a room full of people, is that at the end of it all the crowd goes to the queens and then me as the AFAB performer, I'm kind of stuck in the corner; nobody really wants to talk to me. I'll branch out, they're kind of like “yeah, yeah.” And then that's it. It's just-- I don't know why and maybe there needs to be a study done on it, but that is the biggest challenges. Because I was assigned female at birth, the general population is still trying to catch up to that idea of there are other drag performers out there than just what you see on RuPaul. So that's a challenge, but we're breaking down the walls a little bit Landon CIder won Dragula, Tenderoni won Drag Queen of the Year, Adam All is killing it, Hugo Grrrl is killing it; there's all these great AFAB performers out there that are getting after it, so we're getting there.

Interviewer: Yep, little--little baby steps.

Liam Laughin: Yes.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other placesi in the country or the world that you can think of?

Liam Laughin: I'm not quite 100% sure. I just know that there is very limited venues here. They're very exclusive and, again, a lot of the producers are still not-that they have their favorites, and they book them, and that's cool. I understand; if you know where the money is, then you know where the money is. But not being more inclusive of the black, indigenous people of color; not being more inclusive of AFAB performers is just very cookie cutter, and I see other communities where they are starting to incorporate that and they're holding each other accountable, and so hopefully the scene here. And my mother is doing a very good job of that, is making sure that performers that would not normally get that limelight are getting the limelight, and I'm seeing a lot more drag performers the producers starting to pick up on that, but it's a little bit slower here from what I've seen.

Interviewer: Yea, It's growing though [as you] said it's starting to get a little bit better.

Liam Laughin: Yes.

Interviewer: So, how do you identify in terms of your gender, sex, gender identity and gender expression outside of drag?

Liam Laughin: Outside of drag, I am cis female.

Interviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: And I own it and I'm good with it. I heard a gender studies her name is Matisse-or sorry their name is Matisse-- DuPont-and they said, “if you are going to be cis, actively be cis, don't passively be cis,” and I love that. It’s like, you know, own it. Just do it. And so yes, I am cis female.

Interviewer: Okay! So, what pronouns do you use in and outside of drag if they are different?

Liam Laughin: And drag he/they in drag, she/they out of drag. So, and I mean my main thing is if, you know, if I'm in drag and someone calls me “she”, I'm not going to get upset about it, and same thing if I'm out and about and I'm not in drag and someone calls me “Liam,” I'm still going to go “Yeah?” So it's all good.

Interviewer: OK! Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities at all?

Liam Laughin: I think it's just strengthened that, and it really did. It made me think about it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: It was, it made me actively think about it, and yep.

Interviewer: So, has it influenced how you think about gender? Drag, that is.

Liam Laughin: Yes.

Interviewer: It has. How so?

Liam Laughin: Well now that I am actively participating in the drag community and in the queer community, I mean actively participating-I've always been a part of the queer community 'cause theater, but listening to my, you know, my trans friends, my nonbinary friends, and every single part of how you identify gender wise, there's a beautiful spectrum. And gender identity is something that's incredibly personal, and it's also, I feel, a right. So I, my thoughts on my own gender identity, and also my thoughts on everyone else’s gender identity, has only grown since becoming a drag performer.

Interviewer: Okay. Have your sex and gender identities influenced your own drag and in what way?

Liam Laughin: That is a very good question, because being a masculine presenting drag performer is almost like you have, there was like, when I first started, there was the set of rules, you know. You need to do this, you need to act more, you know, macho, and you need to have that you know rah rah rah. But also, as I was going through things I was like “that's not exactly Liam though”. Like Liam's own gender identity is on a spectrum. I haven't quite figured out his gender identity yet, but he's a little bit more fluid and does what he likes to do. [He] doesn't really like labels on his gender, I am learning that part. So, if he wants to, you know, talk with his hands like this or, you know, be-wear pink and do the soft curves or, you know, do his hair extra pretty, or his makeup, you know, super glam with glitter, that's what he's going to do 'cause his gender identity is super fluid, so I would actually say that Liam's probably nonbinary.

Interviewer: Okay, how has Drag impacted or it’s changed you?

Liam Laughin: Oh it has been the most wonderful experience. I-the running joke for me is that I will fall into hobbies and I'll fall out of love with them really fast. I'll go full in and then burn out on it in a couple of months maybe a year tops. With drag, it's so much different. Just the community itself, the people that I've met, this gorgeous world of different people with different stories, different talents, it's made my life so much better, and in some ways, it's destroyed my life because again my house is a mess [Laughter].

Interviewer: It's a good destruction, From the way you're talking about it, it's a good destruction.

Liam Laughin: Yes, very good.

Interviewer: So with that, how has drag impacted your confidence outside of drag?

Liam Laughin: I think it has boosted my confidence. Especially since finally coming out and saying, “I'm a drag performer” and not being scared of someone, you know, coming up to me pointing in my face and telling me I'm going to hell, which I've been told that before but that was before I was even a drag performer. So I, it's like, it's just taught me to be myself more than anything else and forget what anybody else says, because I'll always have my drag family, I'll have my chosen family. My family loves me; that's all that matters.

Interviewer: That's great! That’s really good to hear! So, I know you said that you are a little bit newer to dressing in drag or performing in drag, I'm sorry.

Liam Laughin: You’re good.

Interviewer: But if you could go back in time as Liam and you know talk to-- talk to them what advice would you give Liam to your younger self?

Liam Laughin: Oh goodness. Cuz there are so many queens and kings and drag performers out there that are just babies. They're like 16, 14 years old they already know who they are. If Liam could go back, 33-year-old Liam could go back and tell even 18-year-old Morgan to go on ahead and start and be okay with who you are, then that would have changed a lot. Don't be afraid, just do it. You’ll be happier for it, I promise. I know it's scary, but do it. So, someone's cutting onions up in this piece.

Interviewer: Well it's, I mean, it's impact is, as you've expressed to me, it's impacted you a lot so it's good to be emotional. It's good to have that emotion with it.

Liam Laughin: Yeah.

Interviewer: But I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. Like how has drag impacted your identities overall? Such as can you share more about one or more of the social identities like gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, etc., etc., and have—and how have they impacted your experience of drag and how the drag impacted your experience of those as well. It’s kind of a lot, sorry.

Liam Laughin: Yeah, it is a lot. Long in the short, drag has impacted all my identities by calling forth and listening to ideas that I held about the world before I started. There's a lot of preconceived notions that I had in my head that are really, again deep ingrained based on where I was brought up, how I was brought up, and it's made me realize that a lot of what I was taught was wrong. A lot. And so, unlearning those thoughts, unlearning the self-hatred that I have, it's—it’s called action to be active every single day. Point seeing bad things in the world that, you know, wouldn't normally be a priority, but seeing that and knowing that it's wrong, and asking those who are being oppressed, “what can I do to help?” is what I'm learning from being in the drag community. And I'm, this isn't a self-improvement project, this is a just “shut up and listen; stop being a white girl.” Let's be real here. “Stop being a basic bitch. You're self-centered.” Like, it's like there's a lot of that that goes on in my head. You're self-centered, you're a white--white girl, you're like five steps away from being a Karen, just shut up and listen, and I’m thankful for that. So if anything, it’s just a call to action to learn and listen.

Interviewer: That's—that’s great! So, we're gonna, kinda shift gears a little bit about your overall ideas about drag. So, how would you define drag exactly?

Liam Laughin: Drag, actually, I don't think there's a standard definition. I think it's incredibly, an incredibly personal definition of what you define as drag, and everyone is going to have a different definition of that. My definition is just me being the most authentic version of myself that I'm not allowed to show because society won't let me.

Interviewer: Okay. What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Liam Laughin: I—Hmmm. The purpose of drag is to question. There.

Interviewer: Okay. That's an interesting definition. What do you, what do you mean by, like, to question exactly though? Like, what exactly are you questioning?

Liam Laughin: Questioning gender, questioning social class, questioning race, questioning religion, questioning politics, questioning, you know, does this look more valid than another, which always the answer is no, all drag is valid. There's just, it's just calling out a question, and then the drag gives an answer and every-- and the people that see that drag are going to have, I think, a different answer. So the artist asked the question and then the audience answers.

Interviewer: That’s really interesting! I've, honestly I've never heard that answer. That really opens—really opens the door of thought there so that's a really, really interesting answer. So, do you think drag is sexual and why or why not?

Liam Laughin: I don't believe so.

Intierviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: I don't believe so. I know there's a lot of, and by sexual are you meaning, like, sexy time?

Interviewer: Sexual as in, like, provocative or, like, it's focused on sex appeal, what like.

Liam Laughin: Oh no, no. Unless the drag performer chooses it to be, but there's a lot of drag performers out there I've seen like my friend Marty McGi. He, I'm sure he could slap on, you know, a daddy costume and do the whole thing with, you know, and make us all sweat bullets, but he hosts a drag story time for children and that's-that’s his thing. There's nothing to it that’s sexual. It brings him joy, it brings the kids joy. He's kept a lot of families entertained during the pandemic. He's—he’s a source of light. So no, I don't necessarily think that drag has to be sexual or provocative.

Interviewer: OK. So, how do you feel about RuPaul's drag race?

Liam Laughin: Fuck that show. Now I'm not saying anything about the queens. ‘Cause the queens on that show-- it is a very traumatic experience for them. I can't imagine. I cannot imagine. But it--it kills me that Ru won't acknowledge anybody, you know, outside of the cis male, and yes he has brought in Gottmik which is great. Trans masc trans man. That's cool, but Ru will not acknowledge anybody else outside of that mold and I think it's very problematic. It’s creating cookie cutter performers. I don't like it. The fanbase is toxic. It's really, it tears, I think it tears apart the community. I just, when you're putting yourself out there as a drag performer and there's people sending death threats or using racial slurs or coming for somebody because their favorite contestant didn't win, that's not, it’s not okay. So, and I don't know if Ru has actually come out and said anything about how her girls, “her girls,” are being bullied and how her girls are being attacked. Nothing as far as I can tell. It's been radio silence. It’s not right. The people that are being attacked shouldn’t have to be the ones calling attention to it. It should be her. So, that's my thoughts.

Interviewer: Okay. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the entirety of the drag community, what would it be?

Liam Laughin: There's not enough glitter in the drag space, there must be more glitter! No, I'm kidding. I look forward to a future where it doesn't matter who you are, where you came from, and that there's venues booked out with drag performers of all kinds.

Interviewer: Okay why would you change that per se?

Liam Laughin: Because there's just not enough. And inclusivity in the current climate is getting better, but just because you book one black queen as your quote unquote “token” --which is sickening--it doesn't make you woke, doesn't make you okay. You gotta do better, you gotta do more, because there's performers that are nine times out of ten better. You gotta, you gotta try. You gotta try. You gotta break free of that white, cis male mold. So.

Interviewer: Okay, what do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag overall?

Liam Laughin: What have I seen? Well most people don't even know what a drag king is, which is hysterical. You even say, “well you know what drag queens are right?”, and they go, “well of course I love RuPaul yes, yes, yes.” You say, “I'm a drag king,” they're like, “I don't understand. I don't get it.” So with yeah, that. That, that, that.

Interviewer: What do you think would help change that exactly?

Liam Laughin: I think it's just going to be starting in the local scenes being more inclusive of all types of performers, and then it bleeding out and getting to the mainstream either via social media, reality television, news reports, whatever needs to be done, whatever needs to be done. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, well similar to that, if you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about in drag, what would it be?

Liam Laughin: This is my joke response but how to do a cut crease properly. What would I want people to learn about in drag? I think it's just, I think that's the other thing, too, is that there's, again, being in the South, there's people out there that will clutch their pearls and demonize us, which is the most wrong thing ever. So, just more of, I, one of my very first things that I did before I started drag was I put guys who had never been in drag before, in the drag for a little drag race that we had in town. Pairing up the professional queens with just these everyday dudes, and the confidence, the sass, the “This is awesome,” not being ashamed of it. It was, it was really cool to see. A couple of guys, of course, did not like the eyeliner going on, their eyes watered up. But the overall, “I am here, this is me. I feel powerful. This is my armor, almost. Nobody can get me.” I feel like if everyone tried drag just one time that they would hopefully feel that.

Interviewer: Okay. That's great! Well that is all the questions I have for you. I really appreciate you accepting to do the interview again. I thank you a lot for it.

Liam Laughin: Thank you.

Interviewer: So yeah, this, so this is being presented in my class. I'll give a quick presentation about the experience. There is one more thing I can ask for you: I would like to include pictures of you. Are you able to send me pictures, or can I just use them from your Instagram account that I messaged you on?

Liam Laughin: I'll send you, yeah 'cause you sent me the email, so I'll send you those 'cause if I start sending through Instagram and all that, they get grainy it's just not good, the quality’s meh, so yeah I'll send you what I have.

Interviewer: Okay! That's great! That's all I need from you. That’s all the time I had, and again, thank you so very much.

Liam Laughin: Thank you, this has been a joy!

Interviewer: I'm glad!