SOC 380 Drag Artist Interview-Becca Diamond:

00:01 I: Okay, so first question, when were you first introduced to drag?

00:05 P: All right, so I was first introduced to drag. I was a um junior in college, a sophomore junior in college. My friend, um, I did a lot of theater. My friend suggested that, said I would be really good at it, and I was kind of, like, very afraid of it, because I know that it's not something that people want to, like, promote, that they do or they definitely didn't, in 2003

which is when this was, um, so I did as a surprise on her birthday, and, um, won the competition that night. Never really looked back, and just always use it as an opportunity to explore creativity and like express myself.

00:41 I: Mhm. Um, how, so that's like when you started when you were in college?

00:44 P: Yeah.

00:45 I: Okay. Um, and then, is there a specific reason that you chose your drag

name?

00:50 P: Um, I wanted to be something unique. I actually, like initially, the name I go by now is not the name I started with…

00:57 I: Okay

00:58 P: …Um, because I got really anxious and I did not have a, like, legitimate drag mentor, like, I had somebody who helped me get into makeup a couple of times, but I was pretty much on my own, and I didn't really know what was going on, and didn't have a mentor until, like, 10 years later, really. So, um, I didn't really have a house name to pick on or anything like that. But, um, I did drag for about five years when I first started, and I ended up taking a little bit of a little bit of a break because I was working full time, and it was just like a taxing schedule. And then when I started doing drag again, I wanted a different name, and so that's what I found, Becca Diamond. And Becca is inspired by the character from Confessions of a Shopaholic. At the time, my partner and I and my brother, we all lived together. My brother's also gay, and we watch that movie intensely and very often, so Becs just kind of became a nickname for me and Becca, and then diamond is my birthstone.

01:48 I: Okay, very cool. Um, do you have any like big influences on your drag persona?

01:55 P: Absolutely. Um, not only am I like influenced by like history and people have come before me. You know, so maybe people who like, not the normal person may not even know, but Becca likes to attach herself to artists and people that she, you know, identifies with, and things of that nature. So when I first started, it was a lot of Christina Aguilera. It was a lot of Britney Spears. It was a lot of Kelly Clarkson, anything, a lot of musical theater. because I was, I minored in performance, and I got my major in arts management, but since then, she's heavily inspired by Taylor Swift. And all the other everybody stays, it's just like I add to the collection of people I end up identifying with. If that makes sense.

02:41 I: Yes, it does, it does. Um, so other than like celebrities, are there any drag artists that you kind of look up to?

02:51 P: I think with every person that you can look up to, there's always could be somebody that could say, are you sure or do you get that? So for me, I based my experiences and the people that I look up to and like the things that I hold positively based on my own experiences only. Um, I’m not suggesting that anybody that I might mention might have something to say, but I just like to say that, but Tomorrow Morning has been a really great influence on me, and she's kind of been like, more of a maternally figure for me as like, kind of my drag mom, but then my name is blinking right now, don't put this in there. It's um, Michelle McCausland, and so I don't know if you have any done any, like research on the area, or like drag artists or whatever, but um, she, and I'm going to butcher the story, but she basically, there was a clause or a law or something in St Louis had said that you weren't allowed to dress in clothing of the opposite gender. And she, I can't, I really can't. I can't even think right now about what the clause, the name of the act is going to come to me, and I'll tell, I’ll blurt it out later. But basically, in order to fight that for the St Louis area, she ended up going to court and had to sing a song live in drag to prove that drag was art and not provocative, which really very much translates to what's going on today. And it's kind of annoying, because it's like, we've already done this, and so that's a little bit frustrating. But if you actually go to the Missouri History Museum right now, there's a gateway to pride exhibit. You can see some, she's passed, but you can see some of her costumes and things and the impact that she had on the community, which was really cool.

04:28 I: Yeah, that is, I actually didn't know about that, so that is really cool.

04:31 P: It's there till next June. I was, I helped with some of the, like, thought process on how to display different performers’ things, so kind of a focus group for it. But it's a really cool exhibit.

04:40 I: Yeah, that is cool. I'll make sure to shout it out in class. Um, okay, so you said you started drag in college. Did you go to college in this area?

04:47 P: Yep, I went to Lindenwood University.

04:49 I: Okay, okay. And then do you plan on staying in this area or would you like to like try out different cities?

04:55 P: I would love to move eventually, but I say that knowing that I'm, like, fully plugged in here in St Louis, and have a really great performance opportunity, and I don't have to, like, claw my way back up in a drag scene or, you know, open my own bar just so I can get performance credits. So I think that if I were to leave, ever were to leave, it would be kind of like a so long Becca or like a definitely an afterthought. But I could also see, I could see myself leaving, but at the same time with my husband has just moved here in the last two years, and so he's getting his foot, feet wet with work, and doing really well. And so just doesn't, doesn't make sense. And I have a bunch of nieces and nephews. So will we leave? Probably, but it'll probably be like, 10 years.

05:37 I: A while. Alright.

05:39 P: If so.

05:39 I: Yeah. Um, how would you describe the drag scene in St Louis? And like, what makes it unique from other cities?

05:48 P: Um, oversaturated is a good word for it, and not in a bad way. And so I don't, I don't like, everywhere you go, you can see drag, which is cool, but it's also like, catch 22 of like, is that what people want, and then it gives the opportunity to become very cliquey and very self-serving at times. And it's, everybody wants the opportunity to, you know, produce a show or to be in the show, but there's a lot more that goes into it. So, I would

say the drag scene is oversaturated. And at times it can be it can be volatile, but at the times, it can be like the most wonderful group of people to be a part of or to be included in. So it just kind of like any job there are good days and bad days. If that makes sense. And there are performers that you love working with and the performers that you have to work with, and there are performers that you choose not to work with. If that makes sense, but it's not like a reasoning. There's no reason why behind it, if that makes sense.

06:42 I: Yes. Um, so would you say, like, the oversaturation is the biggest challenge of St Louis drag or is there something else?

06:52 P: It's generational. I think, I think part of the part of an issue or a problem. You know, if we were to pick, like, to pick one moment is, yes, it's oversaturated, but it's oversaturated because bars or venues are creating opportunities that may not necessarily like pay what an artist today would be want to get paid to do their art, but back in the day when they were doing their shows and opening their bar, it wasn't really customary to pay somebody unless they were on cast, you know, and then they kept their tips, and that's what was it. So the times just haven't evolved with it and so there's a lot of shows multiple nights a week at places, but the but with budgets that barely support, you know, to replenish someone's makeup that they're using for that night and does provide a really great opportunity to learn. So that's a pro of being oversaturated, but it also can kind of diminish the quality of drag that you're seeing. And so then you associate that with that place or that location, and then you think maybe, like, that's not it. And so it just becomes, then again, it can become very volatile of where, like, oh, that's where new girls go to start. And this is where girls go, who are the best, and it's like that's all based off of someone's interpretation versus like, somebody's like experience or what they do. Because I think the other thing that would, to go back to your question that might make St Louis different or unique is we have it, because we're oversaturated, we have a very extensive community when it comes to drag, and I will probably not say the most current, up to date description of the types of performers, but people who, you know, there's people who are born as the role they perform as, and that is a thing in St Louis that’s widely accepted that is not widely accepted other places. But it's still a struggle for them to get, you know, booked in visibility, the same with like, drag or drag kings versus drag queens. So like, that's why I said St Louis can be a little bit more traditional, yeah, and not really want to give those opportunities. But there's also a lot of really cool groups that have like, or houses or families or whatever you want to call them, that have come together, that have created their spaces. And I think that's what my friends and I have done, and that's what feels really cool about what we do. Because, yes, we work at a bar, but we don't, we work with people, we don't work for people. So that feels good.

09:10 I: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Um, okay, so you talked about kind of like a sense of community. How do you think the drag community in St Louis has like, served as a sort of support system to you?

09:24 P: To me? Um, most, I mean, most of the performers are willing to teach you something if they know how to do it. There's not that sense of, I would agree that in St Louis, there's not, like a mentality of, we don't want them to do that, because then they'll know how to do it type thing. I use the phrase a lot, ‘everybody can eat’. There's just, we gotta get creative, you know, about how we're gonna get people to our venues to make sense for us to be doing X amount of shows a week. Um, but the question was, how does the, how has it supported me?

10:01 I: Yes.

10:03 P: Yeah. So I think that there's so much passion behind, first and foremost, why somebody would want to do drag. It's, in my opinion, 90% of the time, not about being famous or being on a TV show or looking the prettiest. It's about expression and representation and history. I think that drag performers are really like pillars of the community. And I think that when they get on stage and they grab a mic and they take, start taking dollars and tips, and are getting paid, you know, they, whether they like it or not, become a role model. And I think that's something that's really cool. And I think that if you looked at a lot of people in St Louis, they just have these legacies of just being really sweet people. And so that's, that's something that I would say, that's like, I definitely have way less beef or negative experiences with people than I have at my, at a regular job? If that makes sense.

10:58 I: It does, it does. Alright, you kind of touched on this earlier, but with the recent bans and the legislation going on, that's like targeting drag artists or performances, how have these personally affected you?

11:11 P: Um, I think it's been more, I don't know if I'm gonna use the right phrase here, but like, mental or psychological that has affected me, versus actually affecting me, because

we're lucky enough to live in a blue bubble in St Louis and knowing that there are the right people or the right business owners are there, you know that are going to make sure that like, we're not going to have an issue of being like targeted to that extent. But the on like the psychological or like the mental side of things, like, I don't feel as safe doing the same things I used to do five years ago. You know, I used I live close, and I used to love getting into drag and walking down the street and my tennis shoes and my backpack and walking to a bar that was 10 minutes away, and now that's something that, like, I don't really feel comfortable doing, or I don't feel comfortable throwing a party in the street, you know, for 10,000 people to come to because I don't know who's gonna show up. Yeah, and so I think that is, if there was one major affecting part, it would be that. It's like, the ability to feel safe in doing something that is creative to me, that was just kind of plucked out of thin air for someone to scapegoat.

12:26 I: Yeah. Um, do you think there's any strategies that we could kind of implement in order to combat this type of legislation, or like the laws putting, being put into place?

12:36 P: You just got to vote local. We got to make sure our friends are registered to vote. We got to make sure that when we vote, we're taking five people with us and then they're turned around and taking five more people with them. That sort of mentality. Because if we don't have the people on the ground that are willing to stand up to a higher ranking politician, even in our own state, how are we ever going to get anywhere? Because we could have a higher ranking official in office that says this is what needs to happen but if our local officials that are elected, our elected officials, don't see it the same way, then we're doing ourself a disservice. So I think the biggest way to combat it is to vote, which is the easiest answer. But I really do believe in that.

13:17 I: But it’s important.

13:18 P: I really do believe in that, because it's something that like, if you don't tell somebody how you feel about something, you know, and by voting for somebody, you're saying I support this person's ideals, or at least enough of them that I feel like I'm going to be fine, you know, protected, or whatever. I think that's helpful, but.

13:37 I: Um, how has your drag evolved and changed throughout the years that you've been performing?

13:46 P: Um, I've been lucky enough to be able to buy things off of the rack, which means I don't have to have a designer or learn how to sew, but it also means my clothing can look very pedestrian at times if I'm not careful, or if it's not intentional. So my drag has definitely progressed into, I think, what people would call, quote, unquote “drag”, versus someone who dresses in women's clothing. My, like um, skill set and just things that I can do on my own, whether it's just styling my own hair and doing my own makeup and changing up my makeup. Um, one of the biggest hurdles I have in drag is, on the personal side, is I have an eye condition, and it's degenerative, so it's consistently getting worse. It's called Keratoconus, and so my eyes are shaped like cones, which means I wear a special contact, it's a glass contact, and once it's in, it's in. And if I get makeup on it, there's makeup on it and there's, you know, or if there's makeup underneath it, I feel it, you know. So that has been a struggle, and in the medical process has gotten better over the years, so my makeup skills have improved, but that was definitely a huge hurdle when I first started, especially not having a mentor to teach me how to like muscle memory paint my face or put makeup on, and having to learn it, but also with the disadvantage of being blind and not being able to when I first got diagnosed, I was already doing drag, which meant I was trying to put makeup on while wearing glasses and at the same time. So that didn't work. And then when I got them, I wasn't able to put like makeup on anywhere near my eye, or my eye would, my contact would pop out and I would lose it. So that's been an interesting progression. I've definitely felt a little bit more comfortable, but I also think that I am way more comfortable in the, the, my performance voice. I'm not afraid to be silly or funny, but I also like to be a little bit Poppy and fun, you know. And it's, it's, I think that you know what you're getting yourself into when you're coming to see me, or at least when you see the theme, you're like, Becca probably could do something crazy and dress up like a cat, you know, like, versus being like, oh, expected Becca’s, Becca’s gonna do a Britney Spears number, a Taylor Swift number and a Christina Aguilera number. So I think it's been, the creative expression has been the best evolvement.

15:57 I: Okay, very nice. Um, you mentioned, like, you never had a mentor. Have you kind of acted as a mentor for anybody else? Or?

16:05 P: Yeah, so the people I spend my time with and the people that I want to be with, I'm not saying that all of them are mentors, but if I'm working with someone, it's like always a collaborative environment. But there are a couple performers that I have accepted the mentorship, if that makes sense, because another really big challenge for me when it comes to drag is imposter syndrome. Of, is my makeup good enough because I know I have a handicap there. Is my costume good enough because I feel like I have a handicap there, you know, and all my insecurities come out, and it kind of destroys me. And so who am I to think that I could teach somebody how to do drag. Um, that's changed in the last couple of years, I've kind of been able to say, like, this is what I can teach you, this is what I'm willing to teach you, but I can't promise you anything. Or I can teach you everything that I know and when we realized that, like, we need to fix this, we can elevate together and learn how to do that skill set together, versus this is the way you do it, and the only way you do way you do it.

17:03 I: Right. Alright. Um, are there any memorable highlights or, like, favorite moments that you've had throughout your career?

17:15 P: Um, the year I rode in the pride parade with the balloon brigade was pretty sweet. They built a float. It was the first time ever they had a float, and I would always wanted to ride in a parade in drag. So I got to do that, um, without a title, because I don't own, I don't have a title at all. I, um, am the queen of not being able to win one. But that's okay. That's my nerves and my anxiety. That was pretty cool. Recently I did trapeze and aerial stunts in drag with somebody that we perform with, and that was like, that felt really cool. But also like, the fact that, like, my parents have seen me in drag and come to my shows to support me, like that's a whole level, different level of accomplishment. And a lot of my accomplishments, and the feeling of accomplishment comes from what I do like with Prismatic, the company that we work with, you know that we like as a team, do, you know? And so that's, that's giving me the most pride, you know, I took extra steps to, like, get us LLC-ed, to make sure that we have the right bank accounts and that, you know, we're functioning correctly as a company, you know, so we can say yes to higher paying gigs that are out of town, that somebody doesn't have to funnel their, the money through their own personal accounts to make everything happen. So that's been cool.

18:29 I: Yeah, very cool. Um, okay, what would you say is the most challenging aspect of doing drag?

18:43 P: How do I say this without sounding ungrateful?

18:47 I: Go for it.

18:49 P: I'm very grateful for the opportunities in drag that I have and the things that I get asked to do. I love to be invited to things, but I don't always want to be there. And that goes for if you're asking me to dinner or if you're asking me to be in a show. And so I have to know, I've learned, I have to know, like, what do I have going on in that week? I, you know, what I'm going on, if I'm going to be in the mindset to want to do drag, because that is a huge struggle for me, because sometimes, and even after covid, and as I was saying, with like, the bills and anxiety and all of that, like, it just kind of stacks on top of each other. And sometimes it's like amping yourself up to do something that you love, which feels crazy. So that has been a huge obstacle outside of obviously my eyesight.

19:27 I: Mhm. Um, how do you see the future of drag evolving over the next few years?

19:36 P: Um, I think there's going to be less of a line on gender. I don’t know if that sounds weird, because I think there will always iconically be great, you know, like drag queens, drag kings, you know. But there's also, like a, and especially in St Louis, which is why I said the saturation is good for some things, there's a lot of gender fluid performers or queer performers. One performers I work with a lot their name’s, Aiden Control, they have coined the term “quing”. They live their life as a trans man, but they have not, I’m no going to speak much on their life, but when you see them perform, sometimes you’re like, what's going on here, you know? But I think people, because they've been working with us for almost two years now with our brunch show, I think they’re able to see past a gender and more into that, this person is really entertaining, and I don't really need to know what their gender is outside of the show, because I like knowing. But with that being said, you know our, the crew that we normally perform with, there's myself, which cisgender white man,

you know, there's, we have somebody who is, you know, trans identified, non-binary. We have a trans man in the cast. We have a biological man in the cast that performs as a man, you know, so at any point in time, creatively, too myself or other performers could be like playing with gender, because that's something that we kind of established. So that's been cool.

21:01 I: Um, are there any messages or themes that you like aim to convey through your drag?

21:10 P: Um, like, yes, is there? I'm trying to, I don't want people to feel left out. I don't want people to feel like they don't belong somewhere. I believe that there's a right place and time for somebody creatively. And not everybody fits into every mold, but I want somebody to be able to look at me and say, well, if she's doing then I can do it. Like, whether it's me learning how to do aerial stuff, or playing with gender lines, or really diving into what is quote, unquote, “classic drag appearance”, you know, and like doing that, you know. So I'd like somebody to be able to see a little bit of themselves in me, if possible, or if not, inspired to live that way, you know, or be inspired to be themselves.

22:30 I: Okay.

22:31 P: Did that answer that question?

22:31 I: Yes, I think you did. Alright, um, if you could, what's one piece of advice that you wish you could give to your younger self?

22:40 P: Stress way the fuck less. Like, when I started, the advice that I got was you have to claw your way up, because I wanted to be on a show, cast somewhere, I wanted to be a host. I know I'm funny on a microphone. I know I have the talent, I know the skill set, and I know that's what every performer thinks. Um, but care less about what other people think about you. Try less. Don't try as hard to fit yourself into a mold that you can't do. And just express yourself I think would be the biggest thing. Or do it for you, don't do it for other people's gratification. Taylor has this quote where she says she garnered her self worth based off of applause. You know, and I definitely identified that when I heard her say that that made a lot of sense to me, especially as a performer, and like getting praise and recognition. And I say, like, don't live for that, live for your own personal accomplishments, you know. So now for me, it's a, if I put my makeup on and I'm like, okay, like we're finally happy with this, because for the longest time I wouldn't even take pictures of myself in drag. What drag queen doesn’t with their picture taken? Doesn't make sense. So, worry less.

23:50 I: Yeah, that's good. Okay, last question. Is there any, like, last bit of information that we didn't cover, that you wish people knew about you, or just about drag in general?

24:02 P: Um, drag is more than what's on TV. And with you know, we have to pay tribute to the people who came before us, and like made, gave the opportunity for us to be on TV.

You know, as great as RuPaul is, she was not the first person, but we appreciate it, and that has given great visibility, you know, and given a strong voice to drag performers. And then about me or something we didn't cover. Um, I don't know. I wear my heart on my sleeve. It's pretty obvious to know if I'm upset, angry or mad about something, but I don't

Know, I just think that the coolest thing for me that, like, lets me do drag is, like, the drag that I do is at the request from somebody else, but because, like, my cool friends and I, you know, called Prismatic Events, like, came together and, like, have a package. Yeah, you know, our friends, they own all the lighting, they own all the sound. We do, all of our own marketing and ticketing and all that stuff, you know. So we created our own opportunity. And there are other performers or groups and things that you know are given, not necessarily given an opportunity, because everything is earned, but you know, the show's gonna happen one way or the other, and they just have a seat versus us creating the space, creating the environment, selling the seats, and doing all that stuff, you know, doing all that stuff. It feels harder. Harder, but also more rewarding at the same time. So I think that's just like a difference between, like, the type of drag that I do is not normally at the request of others. It's at the request, it's at the like, planning of me, and then I'm asking other people to do it with me.

25:42 I: Yeah. Alright. Well that is all my questions. Thank you very much.

25:45 P: Yeah.