

Shmanners 266: Drag Performance

Published 18th June, 2021

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Travis: Hey, Teresa.

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: Which mythical creature is the biggest fan of drag shows?

Teresa: I don't know, which one?

Travis: Drag-on!

Teresa: Aw! It's *Shmanners!*

[theme music plays]

Travis: [through laughter] That was really tough— That—

Teresa: I had— I had a feeling that it might be dragon, but I wasn't sure exactly where you were going with it? So...

Travis: Drag-on!

Teresa: I was playing in the space with you.

Travis: You did great, yeah! Now you're floating in space by the look of your hands.

Teresa: In space!

Travis: Woo! Hi, everybody.

Teresa: Hello!

Travis: Hello.

Teresa: Say your thing!

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners!*

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear. So glad I can keep you on task.

Travis: Well, I— That's the thing, man.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You know how there's that urban legend of, like, if you put a penny on the train tracks you can derail the train?

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: That's— My brain is that easily derailed. Where all I have to think is, like, drag-on's so dumb. Where are we? What's happening? Who am I?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right off the bat, just wanted to say sorry we missed last week. So, this conflagration of events, if you will, of Teresa mysteriously injured her

foot and so her foot was in a cute little boot. And she— a cute little booty. And she had to rest. And I got a vasectomy, so I had to rest. So we were both like, "Oh, no, kids!" And so it was just— [laughs]

Teresa: It was...

Travis: ... a tough week.

Teresa: But we're back!

Travis: But we're back and just very excited. The second half of this episode, uh, we've already recorded and it's absolutely great. We were joined by an amazing guest, Lady Phaedra, who answered all of your questions about drag show etiquette and just drag shows in general. Basically, anything I could think of.

Teresa: Because that's what this show is about!

Travis: Drag shows!

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Teresa, have you been to many drag shows?

Teresa: I have been to a couple drag shows. There was a really awesome club in Dayton, where I grew up, where I saw several drag shows. It was loads of fun.

Travis: You know, you might be surprised to learn there was also a great club in Huntington, West Virginia where I saw a couple great drag shows growing up.

Teresa: Awesome!

Travis: You know, these days, haven't made it downtown as not our two shows. But you know, Lady Phaedra was saying that she does a show twice a month at the Cabaret, which I think is at Below Zero?

Teresa: I'm not sure.

Travis: We might have to check that out, go down and support her and all the performers.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Um, we'd also like to thank our listener Sarah M., uh, who sent a very kind email and suggested drag shows.

Travis: Also, happy Pride Month, everybody!

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: From your internet husband and wife, your internet... parents?

Teresa: [giggling] No.

Travis: No? Just from Teresa and Travis, happy Pride, everybody. Okay.

Teresa: So, we're gonna talk about drag and if you want to learn more, there's some really great things you can check out. Alex recommends the movie *Paris is Burning*. Also *Kiki, I am Divine*, and *Mala Mala*. You can also read the work of Joe E. Jefferys, um, a theater teacher and historian at NYU Tisch. And I mean, there's loads of books here.

Travis: And I'll say right off the bat, because Lady Phaedra mentions it in the questions, right, but this falls into a category of things where I think this is something a lot of people think that they know a lot about, even if they've never, like, looked into it or gone to shows or anything because they've seen it on TV or in movies or they've watched reality shows.

Teresa: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm.

Travis: And the thing is, as is true of a lot of things, that is at best an accurate but small, like, view of it and there's so much history and world to it and that's if it's even accurate, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: There's a lot of times where it's like, oh, no, no, no. This is just kind of a dramatic, dramatized version of it for [crosstalk].

Teresa: Yeah, yeah, an exaggeration perhaps.

Travis: Exaggeration, yes. Thank you.

Teresa: Yeah. So, Jonathan David, Catherine Chermayeff, and Nan Richardson are the authors of *Drag Diaries* and here is a little bit of their interpretation of the breakdown of drag, okay?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, so there's two main starting places. The first place is a lot of the ancient ceremonies conducted by Native Americans, ancient Egyptians, and indigenous South American cultures had elements of drag in them.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: So it was part of, you know, it was evoking the gods or religious incantations or warding off evil spirits. In fact, there are widely documented accounts among the Aztecs and the Incans and the Egyptians and— I mean, name an ancient civilization and there was drag involved in their religious practices and their entertainment.

Travis: Well, I'm sure— This is probably jumping ahead, but I mean, pretty famously, if you look at Elizabethan England...

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: Right? Women were not allowed to perform on stage, so if you had a female character, it was a man...

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: ... playing that female character. And one of the things I think is interesting to keep in mind about that, is unless it was specifically a comic character, it was not played for laughs, right?

Teresa: No.

Travis: That was just the way that it was done.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Which is why it's always funny to me, by the way, in the Pyramus and Thisbe bit, in *Midsummer Night's Dream* that they play it as a joke that Thisbe is played by, uh, Flute, I think?

Teresa: Well, that— The Mechanicals are the joke.

Travis: Right. But it's kind of like a joke on a joke.

Teresa: Yeah, well...

Travis: Like, you know, it's just like, "Well, that's the convention, why is he being weird about it?"

Teresa: Shakespeare!

Travis: That guy, so meta. That person? That many people? Who knows?

Teresa: Who knows?

Travis: That invention, that ghost, that alien?

Teresa: We are derailed again.

Travis: You're correct.

Teresa: In Japanese theater, um, drag divides the Kabuki and the Noah—Noh, dramas, excuse me. The Noh dramas. Uh, so, Kabuki is a little more popular at this point, um, just because it's a little less ritualistic than Noh drama. But both of these are kind of, like... it's like almost like a folk dance, right?

Travis: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Teresa: It's very stylized, the moves—

Travis: Very representational, too.

Teresa: Yeah, very representational.

Travis: One of my favorite effects in theater is the, like, red ribbons as blood, right?

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Oh, I love that. It's so cool and beautiful when it's done right, especially in a dance scenario.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Ooh, love it.

Teresa: Um, and we already mentioned, uh, English theater. I mean, also like, church theater pageants were the same.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, and there is a point where religion and entertainment divide, not because religion didn't want it, but because they needed a bigger production value.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: [laughing] They just wanted it to be bigger and better and awesome.

Travis: And remember, man, for a long time, especially when we're talking about Cromwell, right? Like, this idea of—

Teresa: Well, even before that. I mean, most of the people who attended church couldn't even read, so the way that— Other than, you know, people talking at you, was to act it out.

Travis: But it— Then theater was, like, barely happening. Like, you had to be very careful...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... if you had a theater running in, like, Elizabethan England that you weren't getting shut down left and right. And people were, right? They had like— There were theaters popping up all over the place because, like, one

theater would get closed down and they would move to a different theater because, basically, theaters operated because the church let them.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And so there was a lot of restrictions to it. Anyways, that's a different story. We can talk about Elizabethan theater in a different episode.

Teresa: Right. Um, so the history is complicated, as it sounds, yes. And the origins of drag also have a bit of a sexist component to reckon with, right?

Travis: Sure, sure.

Teresa: So the church, obviously, didn't put men in dresses as, like, advocacy for trans rights or anything, right? Rather, just like you said, women...

Travis: Weren't allowed.

Teresa: Weren't allowed.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: They were omitted from performing entirely. Um—

Travis: Because it was improper, right? Like that was their view, is like— Or that it was— I can't remember. It was illicit in some way for women to perform or just that they weren't allowed to. Do you know?

Teresa: Uh, I'm not quite certain. I think different religions and cultures have different reasons, but generally, they just weren't.

Travis: See, I need to remember. This is something I need to research because I can't remember if it was just, like, theater as seen as debauchery and so having— Inherently debaucherous?

Teresa: Hmm...

Travis: Anyways, having a woman there is bad or is it just, like, "Oh, no, women shouldn't be allowed to do what they want!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It's probably a combination of both.

Teresa: [through laughter] It's probably a combination. Um, so, like you said, boys would— Young boys would join acting troupes exclusively to work as female characters. Um, and so this is why, you know, plays of the era tend to usually have maybe one or two females in them, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: So let's go back to *Romeo and Juliet*. If you have a young boy playing Juliet, then you can cast an old man as the nurse.

Travis: And as Lady Capulet and, yeah, Lady Montague, and that kind of thing.

Teresa: Right, yeah. So that's where those tropes kind of come from, right? But there aren't as many female characters because there weren't as many people who were adept at doing it, is the thing.

Travis: [simultaneously] Yeah. Well, and once your voice changes...

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: ... right? Like, then you get—

Teresa: Well, there's falsetto.

Travis: I mean, sure, but not for, like, the entire show. Not for a part as big as, like, Juliet. Eh, it's not important.

Teresa: Does this make them drag queens, though?

Travis: No— Well, there is an interesting debate in...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... when you talk about theater and men playing female characters, right? One of them that gets brought up a lot is Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And I think that there is something to the c— you mentioned the nurse, is a great example, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Where the nurse is a big, broad character, right? That is— She is a zany character that does have some dramatic moments but, like, she has so many scenes with Juliet where the jokes are she is so big and dramatic and—

Teresa: And she's typically big bosomed.

Travis: Big bosom, she references it a lot, right? And so then, the question is is it funny because it's a man dressed as a woman or is it funny because it is being well-done in a huge overly dramatic way?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? And that would be where I would lean into there is an element of drag where it's not necessarily just that it is someone in drag, but also that they are big and brassy and campy and bold and that's part— I don't know. That's where the debate is.

Teresa: I mean, we're going to say that Elizabethan boy actors were probably not quite drag queens.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: The drag queens we think of today didn't really emerge until the 19th and 20th centuries. So in the late 1800s, the act of dressing as a different gender took on an entirely new form. So there were female impersonators, right? Which I think is different.

Um, and that was a standard vaudeville trope in the late '30s. 1930s, excuse me. And, you know, again, these were based on commedia dell'arte, almost. So you have, like, the prima donna...

Travis: And we're talking exclusively about the on-stage side, right? Because there were people—

Teresa: [simultaneously] Right, yeah, vaudeville.

Travis: There were— There was a real-world side of this that goes into, like, nonbinary and transgender...

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: ... where it was, for some reason, way more acceptable that it was done on stage and if you did it off stage it was, like, "Oh no. People better not find out or you are in serious danger." And it was— Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. No, this is all about on stage. Um, and you know, the things like the wench or the nagging shrew and...

Travis: Right.

Teresa: ... and things like that.

Travis: These caricature parts, that was the point of it...

Teresa: [simultaneously] Yes, that's what it is, caricatures.

Travis: ... because the point of commedia dell'arte was someone could see it and immediately know from the way you were dressed or the props you carried, like, "Okay, great, I know everything I need to know about that character.

"I don't need to be educated in theater, I don't need to think about their motivations or whatever. That's Pantalone, I know everything about that dude just from looking at him." I played Pantalone in a bunch of stuff.

Teresa: Um...

Travis: And I was good at it!

Teresa: [laughs] Great job.

Travis: Thanks, babe.

Teresa: So, the first true drag queens probably performed in bars, okay?

Travis: Makes sense.

Teresa: Um, in the 1950s, uh, is an early example. José Sarria at San Francisco's Black Cat, is a bar in there. Um, and so, you know, performing at places like the 82 Club in New York or a largely... heterosexual audience. And, you know, they would probably be— They didn't call themselves drag queens. They were still performers, right?

Travis: Right. Well, because this was all masked and covered. Like, that's the thing...

Teresa: Right.

Travis: ... is that we say primarily heterosexual audience. Who knows during that time, right? Because, like, it was so, like, taboo, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: That you had to be very careful about how you worded your thing and how you presented yourself and, like, the environment and all of that stuff.

Teresa: Right. So, the 20th century is when the art of drag queen actually evolved into a means of self-expression.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Right? And people started populated these, like, mostly gay spaces, right? Quote, "gay bars" or whatever. And so it became less of the performance and more of an embodiment. Does that make sense?

Travis: Well, yeah. I mean because— Here's the thing. I am not a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. But it makes sense to me as we're talking about— You know, this is Pride Month, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And so for a long time, if you existed in those spaces, if that was who you were, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: There was not a lot of opportunity to be yourself in public, right? And so it makes sense to me that there is then this, uh, performance that is, you know, primarily personified in, like, flashy, brassy, campy, big, like, proud performance, because it was this, like— Here is, like, three and a half minutes on stage where I can be as big about who I am as I want to be, right?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: And so in that moment, you're gonna make the most of it, right? So of course it's gonna be big and flashy and brassy and everything, right? Because of how restricted you're gonna feel in the rest of your life. So it makes complete sense to me how the art form evolved out of the oppression.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Um, so let's talk about some, uh, emerging at this point in the '80s, iconic drag artists, drag queens. So there is, at this point, largely due to the experimental East Village, like performance scene in New York, there are Lourdes and Divine.

Uh, we want to talk specifically about Divine. She was a legendary drag queen out of Baltimore who collaborated with the, um, awesome director John Waters.

Travis: Oh, yeah!

Teresa: Yeah! Divine was plus-sized, loud, bold, could sing, and a drag queen that thrived on attitude and shock value. Divine made drag queens cool and punky, right?

Travis: Yeah! [more emphatically] Yeah!

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: You know, it's interesting too, because you mentioned the '80s and it just kind of clicked for me, it also makes sense why so much of, like, drag culture I think today we associate with, like, certain divas too and there was so much of, like, the impersonation of people like Cher and Madonna and Tina Turner and this kind of thing.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Because these are— This is a time period, right, in the 80s and 90s where a lot of female singers were flashy and campy and big and brassy and, as we say, divas, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Where it wasn't just about, like, I'm gonna sing a sad song very quietly about my man leaving me. It was like a celebration of, like, this is who I am. I am powerful, I'm doing this thing. And it's like, you could see very easily how that thing connects to drag culture.

Teresa: Exactly. And as what we now think of as drag queens emerged, mainstream media did continue to produce jokes about men dressing as women, but this is where we start to see a noticeable shift.

The drag queen becomes less of a punchline, less of a garish creature who should be feared, right? And I want to specifically point out *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, right? Um, you start to see media showing drag queens as, like, people.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: These are people, not just a mask that you put on. Um, and so there are lots of incredible drag documentaries. *Paris is Burning*, like I said, is often hailed as the most iconic. Uh, in this documentary they talk about the Harlem Drag Balls, competitive and intricate subcultures, and this is where the safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community begin to express themselves.

Travis: Um, the one that I want to look into more that Lady Phaedra mentions in the questions...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... is Spooky Drag?

Teresa: Ooh.

Travis: I would like to find out more about this, please. That sounds straight up my alley. I love that idea very much. Yeah, anyway— I bet there's a lot of Elvira influence there.

Teresa: Oh, yeah!

Travis: Um, can't wait to find out more about it. I'm betting... You know what? We have some friends in New York that I bet if I said, "Hey, if I came around, uh, around Halloween, could you take me to some really fun spooky drag shows?"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I bet the answer is, like, "Uh, do we have time to hit all of them?" Um...

Teresa: So let me, real quick then, run down some etiquette for a drag show.

Travis: Oh, please!

Teresa: Please be aware of where the performance takes place. Don't walk where someone is performing. Um, a lot of drag performances include the entire room, right? It's not just a stage or a runway anymore.

Travis: Phaedra talks about that as well. Crowd work is very important. Especially since— we talk about it in the questions, too— tipping is a very important element of that. It's how a lot of performers are able to afford the things that they need to continue doing it.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And so the crowd working and moving throughout the room is a big part of that.

Teresa: Um, drink responsibly. Everybody wants to have a good time, but please, you know, make sure that if you're in a bar where you are imbibing alcohol, you know, be cool.

Travis: This is true of just about any performance you'll attend.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: One of the important things to remember is it's not about your experience. It is a collective experience that everyone is having at that moment.

And also, no matter how, uh, big and brassy, as I've said many times, and crowd-worky and, uh, kind of, like, spur of the moment, seat of the pants the show might feel...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... that is usually something that the performers worked really hard to make feel like it's spur of the moment...

Teresa: [simultaneously] Yeah, to cultivate.

Travis: ... while being very rehearsed, right?

Teresa: Right, right.

Travis: So don't make the show about you.

Teresa: Yes, absolutely. If—

Travis: But feel free to participate if invited.

Teresa: Yeah. If, you know, you go, uh, with whatever you're celebrating, I think that a lot of performers are very happy to kind of, like, include you in the show, give you a moment. Maybe sing happy birthday, but then, you done. Okay? It's not your show, it's theirs.

Travis: And tip well for feeling special.

Teresa: Of course.

Travis: That's just a good general rule. Tip well for feeling special.

Teresa: You can, uh, cheer as much as you like. Get loud, clap, whistle, whatever, you know. Whatever the room is doing, go for it. Go for it.

Travis: [simultaneously] Yeah, read the room. Yeah, yeah. I assume it's probably not going to be a very somber drag show, that would be very strange. But if you end up at one of those, be respectful?

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Uh, don't— No booing.

Travis: No. No, no, no.

Teresa: No booing, no heckling.

Travis: Once again, man, that feeling of, like, "Oh, this is so, like, wild and seat of the pants and chaotic!" That is a cultivated energy and does not

mean, like— That person is not your friend. Don't give them a hard time like you would your buddy or whatever.

Teresa: Yeah, yeah.

Travis: And don't do that to your buddies, either. Just a side note. Just be nice to everybody.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Do not touch the queens. They are performing. They're not asking for a date, right?

Travis: And— And—

Teresa: And same with your tips. Hold your tips out in your hand. Let them, the performer, come to you. Don't, like, put it in your mouth or anything.

Travis: And also, even— Even if you're, like, "Well, I didn't touch them, I just touched their outfit." You don't know how expensive those outfits are!

Teresa: It's true!

Travis: Don't get your fingerprints all over and tear at stuff, come on. Grow up.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, and, you know, like any other performer, I would say the only performer who accepts coins are street performers, when they're, like— Or buskers. Right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Don't throw coins at people.

Travis: No!

Teresa: That's not good.

Travis: No!

Teresa: Support the bar! Uh, even if you just get a soda, tip your bartender too. They are working hard as well. And, you know, be cool.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Just be cool, you know?

Travis: Be cool, come on, nice. [crosstalk]

Teresa: [laughs] Don't talk things too seriously. Support your queens and, you know, remember that these are safe spaces for people from every spot in the galaxy.

Travis: Yeah, Lady Phaedra talks— And we'll get to that in just a second, I promise. Talks a lot about, like, wanting... That she, specifically, wants to create a space where people feel welcome, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But I will also say, hey, take it from me, uh, someone who's not in the LGBTQIA community, go support!

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Go tip! Go donate! Don't make it about you! Okay. We're gonna be right back with your questions, but first, how about a thank you note to our sponsors?

Teresa: Yay!

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hey there, friends. Let's talk about socks. Believe you me, they can make all the difference. Because, listen, workouts are hard and sometimes just, like, getting up, having the energy to walk around and do things is hard. So why not have a sock that's not only comfortable but also supportive?

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Now, speaking of feeling great, let's talk about Quip! You brush, you floss, and then what? You might, you know, I don't know, sing a song to yourself, make a smiley face in the mirror, but if you didn't say rinse, then you might be getting the complete clean.

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That's \$5 off a mouthwash starter kit, which includes the refillable dispenser and a 90-dose supply of Quip's four-times concentrated formula at getquip.com/shmanners5. That's the number 5. So it's spelled out G-E-T-Q-U-I-P dot com slash Shmanners and then the number 5. Quip: the good habits company.

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[MaxFun ad]

Tre'vell: Hey, there beautiful people. Did you hear that good, good news?

Jarrett: Something about the baby Jesus?

Tre'vell: Mm! He's coming back! [laughs]

Jarrett: Or do you mean the fact that Apple Podcasts has named *FANTI* one of the best shows of 2020?

Tre'vell: I mean, we already knew that we was hot stuff, but a little external validation never hurts, okay?

Jarrett: [laughing] Hosted by me, writer and journalist Jarrett Hill.

Tre'vell: And me, the ebony enchantrress myself!

Jarrett: [laughs]

Tre'vell: Tre'vell Anderson.

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[MaxFun ad ends]

Travis: Everybody, I'm so excited! Uh, Teresa isn't able to join us for this part because she is, uh, attending to other *Shmanner*-ly duties. But joining

me today, drag performer of great renown, based in the Cincinnati area, the Lady Phaedra. Hello, Lady Phaedra!

Lady Phaedra: Hello! Welcome! Hello, thank you for having me!

Travis: Thank you for being here! We have so many great questions, but before we get to the questions, I did want to ask, will you tell us a little bit about yourself? Uh, like what kind of shows you do, what your favorite part of doing drag is, how you got started, all those things.

Lady Phaedra: Oh, goodness. How long have you got? [laughs]

Travis: As long as you need!

Lady Phaedra: Oh, well, brace yourself, darling! [laughs] Um, well, I perform in Cincinnati mostly. I produce my own show, which is referred to as *The Side Show* and it is a drag variety show. So I like to think of my show as not your mother's drag show.

You can go to any club on any night of any week and see drag queens doing, you know, Top 40 hits and bucking and twirling and doing all those things on stage. And that's wonderful, but I like to keep things interesting. So I introduce elements of burlesque, of live music, of comedy. Like, you never really know what we've got up our sleeves until you get to the show.

Travis: And where can people see *The Side Show* here in Cincinnati?

Lady Phaedra: They can see *The Side Show* at the Cabaret, which is downtown on Walnut Street, 1122 Walnut Street.

Travis: Perfect.

Lady Phaedra: Yeah, twice monthly on Thursdays.

Travis: So how did you get started? How did you get started doing these shows?

Lady Phaedra: How did I get started doing the show or how did I get started doing drag? [laughs]

Travis: I mean, both really, yeah.

Lady Phaedra: Both? I actually started doing drag on a dare. It's actually kind of amusing. Um, when I was studying in college, and I studied, you know, theatrical arts. No big shocker there, shouldn't be, anyway.

Travis: [laughs]

Lady Phaedra: One of our fellow students was celebrating their 21st birthday and we asked them what they wanted, and he said that he wanted a stripper to jump out of a cake.

Well, being a bunch of broke college kids, we certainly couldn't afford that. So we decided to put our own spin on things and they just dolled me up and had me jump out of a giant gift box. And that's how Phaedra was born.

Travis: And you've been doing it ever since. Excellent!

Lady Phaedra: Yes, much to the dismay of everyone. [laughs]

Travis: [laughs] Okay! Well, we've got some questions...

Lady Phaedra: Wonderful!

Travis: ... from our listeners. First, Sarah Wells wants to know, "So, I've never been to a drag show before and I don't have any friends who would be willing to go with me." You need to make new friends.

Lady Phaedra: Correct.

Travis: "Any advice for someone who wants to go to a drag show alone?"

Lady Phaedra: Uh, step one, get new friends.

Travis: Yes.

Lady Phaedra: Step two, don't be afraid to do things by yourself, darling. It's okay to be a party of one. Now, trust me, like, I'm sure that you'll have a fantastic time no matter what. And if you need to, I mean hell, come to the show by yourself and I'll introduce you to new friends. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah.

Lady Phaedra: I'm not bashful at all, so I'll just drag you around by the wrist and be like, "Hi, everyone! This is Sarah Wells, she's fantastic, talk to her!"

Travis: That is a— Okay, so that's a good question. For Sarah, who's never been to one before, just like, in general, if Sarah's showing up for the first time, what are some ways to, like, immediately feel like you're part of the action and that you, you know, you're not just, like, an observer?

Lady Phaedra: One of my biggest, well I guess, one of the most important things that I can do as a hostess is ingratiate myself to my audience and I find that the easiest way to do that is to be out among the crowd before the show starts, greeting people as they come in.

Like, I will float around from— Like, the Cabaret is set up like a show bar, so there are tables where the audience sits and then a staging area. I'll walk around from table to table, introduce myself to people I don't know, ask them if they're celebrating anything special or if this is their first time visiting.

So, I find that ingratiating myself to the audience is a huge and important part of being a hostess.

Travis: And would you say that that's kind of a standard experience of that, like everybody— You know, you want people to feel welcome?

Lady Phaedra: I do. I want everyone to enter my space feeling that they are not only welcome, but they are safe and they can be comfortable and relaxed and have a good time.

Travis: That's wonderful. So, Reese asks, "How do new drag queens get invited to participate in drag shows? My drag has only been done in the context of professional wrestling, so I don't know how I would go about getting myself known outside of that sphere and into the mainstream drag sphere."

Lady Phaedra: That is an excellent question, Reese. Uh, in my day, when I was up and coming, and I'm, you know, older than dirt, so things have definitely changed. What we did was we would show up to drag shows, fully dressed and ready to go, with music on hand.

And you would just hope that the show's hostess would spot you in the crowd and say, "Hey, would you like to do a hotspot?" Which is just, like, a one-off unpaid appearance for tips. And you would have your music ready to

go, you would hand it to them, you know. We would carry around CDs in my day, I know, right? [laughs]

Travis: I can't imagine what else— Do people carry around thumb drives now?

Lady Phaedra: Yeah.

Travis: Links to Spotify playlists? What's happening?

Lady Phaedra: Right now, you can carry a thumb drive or you could, you know, if the DJ is able to plug your phone into their sound system, you can do it that way.

Travis: Oh, boy.

Lady Phaedra: Um, but you would just hope to get noticed and then if they liked what they saw when you did your hotspot, it would often result in a booking. Nowadays, there are a lot of what are called open stages where amateur drag entertainers can go and basically get their names out there.

Travis: Sort of like an open mic night kind of thing?

Lady Phaedra: Yes, precisely.

Travis: Oh, cool! Uh, let's see, speaking of tipping, Bonk asks, "Am I supposed to tip a drag performer at a night club, and when is the best time to tip a performer?"

Lady Phaedra: Um, yes. As the mother of all drag queens, Dolly Parton herself once quipped, "It costs a lot to look this cheap." We rely on the generosity of the audience to be able to keep affording what we do.

We take those tips and we reinvest them into our craft. So it helps us pay for new costumes, new wigs, new jewelry, shoes, the whole nine yards. And I can't tell you the number of pairs of tights I go through in a year's time.
[laughs]

Travis: [laughs]

Lady Phaedra: So all that money gets reinvested into the craft, so yes, absolutely. Always tip your drag entertainers. As I always say during my shows, when we're on stage, if you like what you see, tip us a couple of dollars. If you don't like what you see, tip us twice as much so we can afford to make it better.

Travis: There you go. When should they be tipping? Is it after the performance, is it, like—

Lady Phaedra: Uh, most drag queens move about the room in some way during the performance and can collect tips. So if you've got cash, which is the general accepted way of doing things at a drag show, when you're tipping cash, just hold it up high. Believe me, we can smell a dollar bill, we'll get to it. [laughs]

Travis: Now I have a question, as a fellow performer.

Lady Phaedra: Yes, sir?

Travis: Is it a— Are you paid for your appearance and tips? Like, if someone's getting started, right? Like, what's a good deal versus, like, them being taken advantage of by the venue?

Lady Phaedra: Excellent question. Most drag queens, when they are booked in a show, are paid what's called a booking fee, which is basically what we are paid to just walk in the door and be there. Um, often it is...

I don't know what the average is, it often varies from entertainer to entertainer, so I don't want to quote a number and sound like I'm lowballing anybody because there's a lot of ridiculous talent out there and everybody kind of, like, charges based on their experience...

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Lady Phaedra: ... and various other things. But, yes. We are often paid a booking fee and then we get to also, of course, keep the tips that we earn during our performances.

Travis: Okay! Yeah, so, young people getting started, if you're out there— I guess anybody getting started, if you're out there and you aren't getting a booking fee and you've been performing regularly, you need to ask about a booking fee, right?

Lady Phaedra: Yeah. Yes, you should ask about a booking fee. You should absolutely. It's important for every entertainer from any side of what we do, any side of the entertainment crafting world. Like, know your worth and ask for it.

Travis: There you go. So we got a couple questions, these are from Miriam and Taylor, both basically the same thing, which is, "What pronouns are best to use for drag queens/kings/performer in question?"

Lady Phaedra: Uh, great question. And if all else fails, ask that entertainer personally. Myself, when I'm not in drag, when I'm not on the drag stage in my daily life, I prefer masculine pronouns, he/him. When I am in drag and

on stage, I prefer feminine pronouns, she/her. However, I don't really make a fuss if anybody gets that wrong.

There are a lot of entertainers who I work with that don't know me in my daily life, they only know me as Phaedra, so they might use feminine pronouns all the time and I don't really raise a fuss about that, but we do have a lot of wonderful trans entertainers who might be a little more insistent on using the proper pronouns, as they should be. So if all else fails, just ask the entertainer in question.

Travis: A good rule in general.

Lady Phaedra: Yes.

Travis: Um, Gray asks, "I'm autistic and I love drag shows so much, but the element of audience participation really terrifies me. Is there a way I can signal to the performer that I shouldn't be interacted with that doesn't make me look like a total buzzkill?"

Lady Phaedra: [laughs] That is a wonderful question. And believe me, I can totally understand your reticence. You know, that really is an interesting question. As I said before, I like to get to know my audience a little bit before the show begins, so I'm out there.

If the hostess stops by to speak to you, if you're comfortable speaking with the hostess when she comes to say hello, um, it's absolutely okay to tell her that. It is 100% okay to be honest if you're comfortable being honest.

No one's going to think you a buzzkill. I promise. You're there, you're supporting us, and we are so happy that you're there and supporting us and want you to continue doing so. So it is our job to make you as comfortable

as possible and if that means leaving you alone, it's okay to say, "Please leave me alone."

Travis: Yeah.

Lady Phaedra: In the politest way possible, yeah. And also I will say that the nearer you sit to the stage, the closer you are to the hostess's, uh, quote unquote, "firing line."

If you're in my eyesight, I'm more likely to interact directly with you. Now, that doesn't really mean much because I have terrible eyesight, so once the spotlight's in my eyes, I don't see very far past the first table. [laughs]

But, you know, the further away you are from the hostess's sight, the less likely she is to, you know, call on you.

Travis: Um, and this is just, in general, if you don't want to participate in something, this is advice we give all the time, remember: a kind of playful, like, "oh, ho, no." Makes it seem like you do want to, you're just a little embarrassed.

Lady Phaedra: Right.

Travis: Whereas just, like, a "no, thank you." Right?

Lady Phaedra: [simultaneously] Right.

Travis: Just a very direct and clear, "no, thank you."

Lady Phaedra: Right. I mean, there are pleasant and polite ways to handle almost any uncomfortable situation.

Travis: There you go. Uh, Buzz asked, "What's the best music for a drag show? Has the music evolved over the years?"

Lady Phaedra: Ooh, see, that's a good question too, because every entertainer, every drag entertainer has their own style. Myself, I look to the classic divas. I love performing Shirley Bassey and I've done Eartha Kitt numbers and—

You know, all those iconic women who have just made these fantastic names for themselves and created fantastic art for us to interpret. Uh, but there are a lot of younger queens who stick to the Top 40 songs, the popular artists of today, like you know, like Lizzo and Cardi B and Beyonce. And that's wonderful, too.

It varies by entertainer. And also, a lot of times, it varies by production and by venue. It's really a question of, and this again, goes back to getting to know your audience. It's a question of being able to read the room and know what your audience has come to see.

Travis: So I have a question now. Because you— Just talking about that has made me think about this question. How would you say real life drag shows differ from or are similar to what you see, like, in TV shows and movies and that kind of thing.

Lady Phaedra: Uh... [sighs] That's an excellent question. We have a lot of people whose first exposure to drag culture has been through *RuPaul's Drag Race*. So they come to the show often with a misconception of what drag culture really is.

You have to remember that, you know, *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a television show and it's a semi-scripted reality show. Like, everything there is staged.

It's not a true, accurate representation of drag culture because it's a competition show, too.

Like, they're there to conform to whatever they need to conform to to take home the title. Um, real drag culture has many, many facets. There are entertainers out there who like to, you know, "pass," as they say. Like, no—

There are entertainers out there who rely strictly on camp to create their look and their material. There are spooky entertainers out there who are also wonderful. Like, there's just so many different facets to drag. It's hard to accurately represent it in a 30-minute television program.

Travis: Well, there you go. Uh, let's see. One last question here from listeners. Uh, Adam asks, "I'm a straight man. I have always been involved in theater and performance culture and I want to enjoy a drag show. I am always aware of not trying to put myself in spaces that I, uh, do not necessarily belong. Are drag shows for everyone or is it more LGBTQIA+ only?"

Lady Phaedra: Thank you for using the, uh, complete alphabet soup there. [laughs] Um, it is my job to make everybody in my space feel welcome. If you want to come to the drag show, I want you there.

Travis: Yep.

Lady Phaedra: Everybody is welcome. As I often say, and I do hear a lot of people in the community - and this is very sad - it breaks my heart when people say that they don't feel like straight people belong in our spaces.

My response to that is often, if you want to be included, you have to be inclusive. You can't cry discrimination and cry for equity under the law if you are going to turn around and tell people they can't come in your clubhouse.

You have to take equality in both directions. So don't ever feel like you don't belong in a space. And if anybody ever makes you feel like you don't belong in a space, you tell me and I'll go set them straight. [laughs]

Travis: And also, Adam, tip well.

Lady Phaedra: Tip well, yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Lady Phaedra: As long as you're there, taking good care of your bartenders - and always, always, always take good care of your bartenders - and taking good care of your entertainers and you're just there to relax and have a good time, no one's going to care.

I mean, it's not like we're, you know, checking your sexuality at the door. Like, if you want to come in, honey, come in. Have a good time.

Travis: Okay, so before we wrap up, um, first, any kind of, like, general advice or anything you want to say to the listeners before we finish?

Lady Phaedra: Just keep sparkling, darlings, be your authentic selves, do the things that make you happy, um, keep supporting local drag. Believe me, because of this pandemic, the entertainment scene as a whole took a very hard hit, and that includes your favorite drag queens.

So now that things are easing up, please go out, support your local girls. Without local drag, there would be no *RuPaul's Drag Race*. They all started off as local queens. Um, and just take care of each other. It's—

We've been through a rollercoaster in the last year and a half and we're all struggling because of it. Like, we've all taken a very hard mental health hit. So look after each other. Check in on people.

Travis: And question two, before I let you go, remind us where we can see your show, uh, if you want to plug any social media things or anything you want to plug, this is your chance.

Lady Phaedra: Sure, absolutely! Feel free to follow me on Instagram, my handle is statuesquemoose. Feel free to follow me @TheLadyPhaedra on Twitter. Um, you can also catch me twice a month at The Cabaret producing my *Side Show* and also just keep your eyes peeled because I've got lots of great projects in the works.

I've got my YouTube channel is up and running, *Phaedra's Side Show!* And there's lots of great material heading your way, so keep your eyes peeled.

Travis: And we'll include links to all that stuff in the episode description. Thank you so much, Lady Phaedra, for joining us, it was an absolute pleasure.

Lady Phaedra: And my pleasure, my pleasure indeed. Thank you for having me!

Travis: So, hey, it's us again.

Teresa: Here we are!

Travis: Uh, we want to say thank you, a big huge thank you, to Lady Phaedra. Make sure you check out *The Side Show*, twice a month here in Cincinnati at The Cabaret down on Walnut. Uh, which I believe is at Below

Zero, but anyways, check that out. Make sure you go. Thank you to Alex, without whom...

Teresa: Yes! Thank you!

Travis: ... we would not be able to make this show. Thank you to everybody who sent in questions. Uh, who suggested this topic again?

Teresa: Sarah.

Travis: Thank you, Sarah! And we also want to say a big thank you to James for doing a sensitivity consultation for us. We really appreciate it. Thank you Max Fun, our podcast home. Thank you to you for listening and telling a friend about this.

Go check out McElroy.family for all the other McElroy projects. You can go to [McElroy Merch](http://McElroyMerch.com) to check out— McElroyMerch.com.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Um, and we have a couple items there, a pin of the month and a t-shirt that the proceeds go to benefit The Trevor Project.

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art that's [@shmannerscast](https://twitter.com/shmannerscast). That's where we got all of the questions for the questions segment.

Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmanners* Fanners. So go and check that out if you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans.

Travis: And I think that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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Jo: Hi, I'm Jo Firestone.

Manolo: And I'm Manolo Moreno.

Jo: And we host *Dr. Gameshow*, a podcast where listeners submit games and we play them, regardless of quality, with a dozen listeners from around the world.

Manolo: We've had folks call in from as far as Sweden, South Africa, and the Philippines.

Jo: Here's an example! Uh, this is a game we played called Cotton Candy Chicken Nuggets where you have to sing any 8-syllable phrase to the tune of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. You have an example, Manolo?

Manolo: Yeah, here's one. [singing] Little baby turkey turnips.

Jo: Oh, nice.

Manolo: Thanks.

Jo: *Dr. Gameshow* has new episodes every other Wednesday on Maximum Fun. Check us out!

Manolo: Please?

[MaxFun ad ends]