

# Welcome to the Drag Show!

By Christiana Mollrem Harkulich, PhD

This June the Pittsburgh Playhouse will play host to Dixie Surewood, a Pittsburgh local Drag Queen entertainer and 2018 National Miss Comedy Queen. With television shows like *Ru-Paul's Drag Race*, Drag performers are more visible today than ever before in contemporary society. While Drag might be a hot button issue today, the art form is quite historical!

## So, what is Drag?

Drag performance refers to entertainers dressing up in highly stylized ways that play with societies' ideas of gender. When we say someone is dressed up in drag, we often mean that a person is dressed as a gender different from their own. For example, most Drag Queens are men who are dressed up as a women in a very stylized way. One of the possible origins of the word Drag is as an acronym for Dressed As a Girl. Once in costume, the entertainer then performs an over-the-top character for an audience. Drag refers both to the performance and to the clothes the entertainer wears.

## A Brief History of Drag:

Drag is not new. Theatrical drag has been around for thousands of years! The Ancient Greeks only allowed men on stage for their performances of plays like *Antigone*, *Medea*, and

*The Trojan Woman*. This meant that performers, who were often also in the military, dressed up as women to perform on the side of the Acropolis in Athens. While they didn't wear fabulous makeup, they had full masks, they did have some of the first fake breasts. They called them "Prosterneda" and they had to be very exaggerated so that audiences would understand that the actor was playing a woman from very far away.

Many places where women were not allowed on stage developed theatrical drag practices. In Japan, the traditional Noh and Kabuki theatre traditions both involve drag practices. In traditional Chinese Opera both men and women performers would practice drag on stage.

Shakespeare famously wrote for an all-male troupe (no women were allowed on stage at the time), which means roles like Juliet and Lady MacBeth were written to be performed in drag! European Opera also had its fair share of Drag roles, with women playing pants parts (like Cherubino in Mozart's *Così Fan Tutte*). Drag in Twentieth and Twenty-first century owes more of its traditions to Vaudeville and variety entertainment, where male and female impersonators would make a living in 5-20 minute acts on stages across the country. Often those performers, like Julian Eltinge, were

singers and so song and Drag became intertwined. In 1939, in the midst of some anti-gay laws, a Drag troupe known as the Jewel Box Revue toured a cabaret of Drag Queens (and one Drag King) around the country charming audiences with lip-synchs and impersonations of famous actress like Judy Garland.

## Do you want to go to a Drag Show?

You may be excited by what you've seen on television, but you're not quite sure what to do when you go to a show. Today's Drag Queens and Kings often perform in nightclub or cabaret settings where stage and the audience area mix. This is not your normal theatre show! You are allowed and encouraged to vocally interact with the Drag performers- sing along with them, cheer them on, holler loudly for their dance moves, vocal stylings, and lip synch skills! This isn't a comedy show though, so don't heckle.

Contemporary drag shows come out of the bar scene where a performer may be paid a small fee to appear and expect to make up the rest of their income for the performance from tips. This is a fun part of the show and adds to the interactivity of the performance, so please remember to tip at the Drag Show (that makeup isn't cheap!).

Here's how you tip at a Drag Show: Come prepared with bills (\$1s are great, \$5s are



excellent, etc). If you're enjoying a performers number extend your arm with the dollar bill into the air towards the Drag King or Queen and they'll come over and get it. This is a fun interactive part of the show and Drag Queens and Kings build their numbers to make sure they can get out to you and engage with their audience.

While the Drag Artists will be so close to the audience you can touch them, please don't. They've worked very hard on their attire, please don't muss it up. Also make sure that in your enthusiasm to get a great view of the artists, you don't block the view for others behind you. Drag performers can vary, from singers, to dancers, to lip-synchs, to comedy Queens. They all have something fun to bring to offer an audience during a wonderful night out.

See Dixie Surewood at Inside/Outside on June 23rd.

# Inside/Outside Summer Concert Series

Hey Pittsburgh, we got a taste of summer in April, and it's made us thirsty for more. What better way to spend a bright, sunny happy hour than with live performances on the Forbes Avenue plaza at the Pittsburgh Playhouse? Did we mention the ticket price includes your first drink? Join us every Thursday and Friday starting June 15th through July 14th on the plaza from 4:30 – 6:30pm for sweet beverages and spectacular (and local!) live performances. All this is our Inside/Outside Summer Concert Series, featuring music, dance, and this year, DRAG.

And don't let rainy weather get you down—as the name implies, there is seating on our special outdoor plaza, surrounded by historical architecture from buildings past, where the Playhouse intersects with Pittsburgh history. But in inclement weather, we take the party inside our Highmark Theatre. Rain or shine, the show goes on!

This summer, our Inside/Outside Summer Concert Series features time honored traditions like our partnership with MCG Jazz for live jazz Thursdays, featuring a killer lineup of Ray Angry, Frank Vignola and his Birdland Trio, Jeff Kashiwa, Grace Kelly, and Badi Assad.

Our Friday concerts have a little something for everyone: from Chatham Baroque to Cello Fury, from Point Park University choreographers Jason McDole, Jesse Factor, and Marc Spaulding to local R&B legends Mani Bahia & The Mob, and our debut Drag revue show *Broadway or Bust*, hosted by Pittsburgh's very own National Comedy Queen Dixie Surewood.

We'd love to see you there! All tickets are a flat \$25 (and remember, that includes your drink!). But we'll also say, you're not going to want to miss a single event, and you get a discount if you become a summer subscriber.

[www.pittsburghplayhouse.com](http://www.pittsburghplayhouse.com) for more details.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

June 15 – MCG Jazz presents Ray Angry

June 16 – Evening of Dance featuring Jason McDole, Jesse Factor, and Marc Spaulding

June 22 – MCG Jazz presents Frank Vignola and his Birdland Trio

June 23 – Dixie Surewood's Broadway or Bust

June 29 — MCG Jazz presents Jeff Kashiwa

June 30 – Cello Fury

July 6 – MCG Jazz presents Grace Kelly

July 7 – Mani Bahia & The Mob

July 13 – MCG Jazz presents Badi Assad

July 14 – Chatham Baroque



Order Tickets Online  
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