**Interview with Crystal Clear**

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Interviewer: I am Alizeja Gipson and it is the 10th of April.

Crystal Clear: 9th of April

Interviewer: I'm sorry the 9th of April, and then you are?

Crystal Clear: I’m Drake Stevens, AKA Crystal Clear, and yeah.

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

Crystal Clear: Um, I actually first heard about drag I was on- I was browsing like reality television sites and all of that. And they talked about like RuPaul's Drag Race and I didn't really know what that was, I thought it was actually racing and all of that. So I started looking it up and started watching episodes and then I just fell in love because I didn't know this world was open. And what was the second part?

Interviewer: Uh, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Crystal Clear: Oh yeah, I forget, I already answered that.

Interviewer: And um, another question for you is, how did you feel the first time you did drag, compared to now?

Crystal Clear: Umm, the first time... the first time I did drag I uh, I just absolutely loved it because it I finally got a chance, like, pull out, like, all the pent up energy that I had. Since I just loved moving around, dancing and lip-synching and all of that. And I just love to perform and this was a great way for me to just perform on stage and just be myself.

Interviewer: Were you scared at first?

Crystal Clear: It was more of an excited nervousness, it wasn't really scared. The thing that really scared me was… the first time I got into drag was actually last semester, because they were having this like lip-synching competition, Drag amateur Drag battle. And what happened was that they needed a last-minute replacement. And I, I had no idea that they were actually taking like students and stuff like that from campus. And so, I went to the host of it and he was like " Yeah, do have a wig, do you have a dress?" and I was just like " No, I don't have money for that. And so me, but I didn’t- my parents gave me some money and I went to goodwill and bought, bought like a cheap dress and nice accessories and the host gave me a wig. And they, they hired a professional makeup artist to do makeup

Interviewer: Wow, so I know that you recently just started doing drag, so you're not professional at it yet. But would you like to become professional in the future?

Crystal Clear: Um, I mean, as a freshman here at SIUE being a theater performance major, that is also a part of performance. And like I would love to do drag professionally, but I am still keeping my options opened at the moment because I don't know what I want to do. As I'm still exploring the world of theater and drag at the same time, which really is, they can go hand to hand sometimes but they can be vastly different.

Interviewer: Okay, umm so there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag queen and drag king to glamour queen, to male impersonator, comedian queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen and camp queen. Among others. Are there any particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Crystal Clear: I would say, I at, at the soul root of it, I am a performer. I love performing, I just love dancing. I definitely, and not- I may not be the greatest dancer, but I can just love giving a show to people and all that. I do like, I do find myself being at comedy at times. Like just naturally because, I can just be naturally funny, when I'm in like normal conversation and all of that, or I can I can just I can do other things that like, I don't even realize I do those. It's kind of like umm Alyssa Edwards one of the more well-known drag queens. She is funny, but she doesn't know that she's funny. And like when I say something or do something funny. And people laugh, I'm just like "Wait, that was funny? Yeah! Haha." I don’t- like I'm terrible at stand up and all of that but I am naturally just exert funniness and all of that. And I also, like looking... being a look queen and looking nice because that was just the way I was raised. I always look nice if I can.

Interviewer: Um okay, I’m sorry this seems repetitive, I’m sorry so what is your style in drag? Even though, I think you just answered the question. Do you have a style at all or do you just...

Crystal Clear: I don't necessarily have a style yet, I’m trying to still figure that out because right now, I’m trying to learn how to base makeup because you saw the pictures of my first time of me doing my own makeup, it was decent but not that good. So, I am still trying to learn how to, contour correctly and highlight correctly and to make sure I don't look a mess.

Interviewer: Who or what has influenced your Drag?

Crystal Clear: umm, Obviously RuPaul's drag race with all of the queens on there have influenced my drag. Uh, I have learned a lot of moves from people like Shangela, uh Monét X Change. All those people that are like drag alumni's from drag race, but I also find interest in like queens that aren't on the show. uh I’m just trying to, I always just look up YouTube videos of like how to do things and how to do this and most of the time its um drag queens that are not on the show. I’m also in a lip-synching community like a competition community that have a lot of drag queens in there and I always ask for advice there and they are very supportive of me, trying to get into drag and all of that and they gave me a list of what to buy and all of that. And its honestly, just a combined effort because once you do drag you kind of have to reach out to people that have, cause you need help or if you need help, or else you're not gonna go anywhere if you don't, can't reach out.

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

Crystal Clear: Um, Well I prefer me to be a male and when I’m out of drag. But when I’m in drag, I don't care if you call me a he or she or all of that because I’m fine. Crystal is very gender fluid. There's a part of me that knows that I’m dressing as a female to perform as a drag character. But part of me is like "No I’m just a man in a wig" and heavy makeup and that's like kind of also why in theatre, I kind of learn that too. Where I’m, not this character but I am this character and so I don't, so I’m really flexible when it comes to being in drag because. Because of I... I don't care but when I’m out of drag, it's definitely male.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced your gender and sex identities? and how?

Crystal Clear: umm, not really... I mean I've always found myself, found myself being umm, male and all of that. It's just that I’m a little bit more fluid with that, but not technically gender fluid but like I... I really don't care.

Interviewer:  And how has drag impacted you or changed you?

Crystal Clear: Umm, it really opened myself up to love communities that I never thought I would get into. I've always been stuck in this like reality television community that's kind of very toxic. Umm, at times and people are always more caring about the games and all of that but like when I get into other communities that are about drag and are about people who have similar interest other than reality television, it’s actually a lot close. I have found my closest friend through drag and it’s always fun to just talk about other things other than stressing about if this person is going to betray me. Um, and a lot, I have a lot of online friends and all of that. But I always get involved with people in real life. Like the GSA and all of that. With people who do drag or go to Attitudes or all of that and just make those connections and they also think it's maybe caused me to be more open to people. And just be more open about who I am, this is me. And all of that, because without drag when I didn't know that drag was a thing, I was kind of closed off, kind of pushing people away. Because I was afraid that they were going to hurt me. But now that I’m just unapologetically me because I was able to release the drag side of me, it was very uh, I’m trying to find the words, it’s... it’s just very relaxing to know that I don't care about people because I accepted myself and what I know what I like and what I don't like.

Interviewer: Um, if you could go back in time as your drag queen self, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Crystal Clear: Start earlier, I honestly know some people start as young as 16 and stuff like that, like, start as young as 16 and do like online competitions or just do or just post on Instagram and all of that. And I just wish I found it and started it early like during the summer or like even earlier than that because I could learn more and I could actually have more courage to reach out to more places too actually perform there and all of that. Cause now I’m kind of feel that I’m behind a little bit, I know that some queens are on the show that are like a year into drag and that's like crazy when they when they have those beautiful looks and all of that. But I’m still, I’m just trying to learn with college and all of that. With college and theatre life and trying to balance that out and sometimes I have to cut time out from knowing drag stuff. And kind of sucks

Interviewer: So how do you define drag?

Crystal Clear: I define drag as a performance for uh a lifestyle in a way, it’s... it’s... literally a lot like theatre it's kind of too hard to explain because there's so much of it, there's culture, there's history there's all of that. And at the core root of it, it’s just people being themselves. People pursuing what they love, and if then it means not getting knocked down because of it so it’s kind of the way to define it is that it can be anything you want it to be. And I know that... that sounds cheesy and not like theatre um but like, drag can literally, you can literally do anything with drag it's just a base. And that base can cover a wide variety of things.

Interviewer: And what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Crystal Clear: See that's... that's a tough question because one purpose is very political obviously because you see queens that have very political  meanings to what they do and just try to push the anti, but I think also, it also pushes just people having fun and people enjoying- and doing stuff that they enjoy because um I- I don't really do it for political purposes I do it for umm, I just do it because I like it and if it makes you happy, you should really do it. Uh what was the... Can you repeat the question?

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

Crystal Clear: Oh yeah, I was just ranting, and I didn't know when to stop.

Interviewer: \*chuckles\* No, you're fine

Crystal Clear: umm, I think I was ranting and lost the question. So yeah, there is the political side of purpose, there's just doing what you want to and there's just a performance aspect that's an entertainment aspect. There's always the purpose of another way, another thing to keep people entertained. And people loving just keeping people open and loving and all of that and just keeping people hooked. And all of that, it's like a movie, like what’s the purpose of a movie? can be political, can be for fun and it can be for fun for the actors and all of that and can also be fun for the people watching and you just watch these people. And do things and its really quite, I had the perspective it’s just really interesting to dove deep into what they want

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Crystal Clear: It can be, I will not deny that it's not. There's defiantly a lot of people who do drag in a sexual fashion, or at least when like they have sexual songs. And it's kind of like a strip show, and all that, like burlesque and all that. But I don't think that its mainly trying to focus on being sexual it's just the character they are doing is very sexy, is very sexual. Or in other words, you’ve seen season 9. There's a lot of queens that rely on their body a lot more, versus queens who rely more on their dancing, versus queens who rely on stuff. It just all depends on the queen and what they do, or the king or whatever. It just depends on the individual who does drag. It also depends on people’s views of drag. Um, some people find it, for a lack of a better term, arousing to have drag queens uhh but some people also don't and just want to watch them perform and not be uncomfortable in an intimate setting. So, it’s, so yeah it honestly can but, it's not the main focus of it.

Interviewer: And, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Crystal Clear: I’m going to say, I gotta admit that I admit that I enjoy it, but I don't think it’s clear black and white. At least now and days of what drag can be, because you look at the queens who, are like weird, umm, season 10 it was Dusty Ray Bottoms who put dots all over his face and they’d read him because they don't like that type of makeup style but it’s all creepy and crazy. You even look at Sharon Needles back in previous seasons who was creepy and crazy like crafty drag but it was still very pretty, very aesthetically pleasing, very combined. But that's not the true drag, because you see all the pretty stuff from drag. And that kind of affects too if you go to performances, and you see this queen who is a complete mess but purposely a mess. It's not aesthetically pleasing and its horrid to look at, but you can't look away. And you see that queen not getting that much tips because they are all RuPaul Drag Race fans. And it’s kind of like effecting the way people see drag, it’s like, and I like it.  I like watching it as a show and its really fun to watch the queens do get out and all of that. But there's a difference between drag race and drag itself. And that's the key differences being that it tries to encompass a certain type of style of drag when it should be open to all styles of drag. From the, from like the complete messed up side, that they actually had a spin-off series called Dragula to the campy side. They focus on like campy stuff, true but like not like overly campy, that was Camp Wannakiki. But then they also have a busted drag side that they never showed because being busted is apparently bad but sometimes it isn't if you're purposely trying to do it for a reason.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community. What would it be and why?

Crystal Clear: See, being like starting out in drag I can... I can't really, I haven't really gone out into the drag community to get to know people in like real life and all of that. The only thing of people that I have experienced were people umm, people who umm, people online who are in the drag scene and who aren't in it. And I feel like, I don't know, I can't really answer that to best of my ability. Because I don't know much about the drag scene right now as it is. Because like I said not been out there and so one thing I think I can change is maybe... I really don't know... it's hard for me to think when there's really nothing that I had a personal bad experience with yet. I’m thinking maybe a little bit less competition at times, I know some drag shows have competitions and all of that. But drag isn't supposed to be a competition. It’s supposed to be a performance for everyone to enjoy. And if you lose you might get discouraged to not do it again. Or, if you, or it could be influenced heavily on what you do and you're not being true to yourself and you're just trying to win. And I think that a good healthy competition is fine it's just, constantly doing it. Like the drag show last semester, it was very much a competition and they focused more on  the competition aspect of it and after everyone got out a lot of people were saying that like " I wish it was just a regular drag show for amateur drag queens, because that would have been more fun on us, for us trying to start out and that kind of puts bad taste in people’s mouths about when performers do drag. And you've seen normal drag shows, its completely great and everyone gets a chance to perform. Everyone gets tips and all of that, with the, competed competitive spirit coming up and with competitions its really, it really changes someone's views on things.

 Interviewer: Um, what do you think are the misconceptions people have about drag?

Crystal Clear: I think a common misconception is that there's drag queens that are transgenders, all drag queens are transgenders and they just denial and that's a very common misconception or like getting confused with the comments about like she-males, transgenders, transvestites, all the terms that blur into one about a man becoming a woman but like, drag is- drag transgender is very different. Transgender is um definitely um a man wanting to become a woman. Drag is a man becoming a woman in order to perform, but not wanting to make the shift. Some drag queens are transgender like Gia Gunn um, Carmen Carrera, all of those people and some drag queens are different genders- or just gen- \* sigh\*. Let me take a sip \*sips drink\* gender fluid and nonbinary, but like there's this very common misconception of everything blurring into one and they are just all the same and everything is the same, you're just in denial. It’s just, no... there is a just a different case for each individual who wants to become this woman and sometimes it permanently and sometimes it’s not. And you kind of have to understand that, the term transvestite is the umbrella term, and under the umbrella term it’s the difference of umm... like drag, transgender and all of that.

Interviewer: Okay, and if you could choose one thing you want people to know and learn about drag what would it be?

Crystal Clear: I want them to know... kind of to explore all types of drag not just the ones they see on the television. I want them to go out to the, gay bars and drag performance bars and all of that to watch actually performance and just the pretty queens, the comedy queens, the kooky queens, the horror queens like you see on Dragula just open your horizon a lot more because I want people to have that view of just being.. just saying “Oh that queen is really... I can see what that queen is doing, and not because I saw it on television”, And I also for upcoming  drag queens, do your research and figure out your character because I actually.. like I have done drag like online competitions using doll sites and all of that and just creating my own looks through there. And I always had issues trying to find who my character is and if you have issues trying to find a character, don’t find a character, just be yourself. Because being yourself is the best way you can enjoy your character. And you can use that yourself as a base to build off of that, for your drag persona.

Interviewer: okay so I only have like two more questions to ask you because I forgot to ask you this earlier. All of your answers were amazing, one question is, how do your family, friends, other loved ones received you becoming a drag queen or doing drag?

Crystal Clear: I know my mom is very supportive of it. My dad was hesitant but he's also supporting me, he actually came to the drag show last semester with my mom. I just remember, anytime I looked up during "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" that lip synch, the second lip synch I did. I was being a little thotty if that's the proper term for it. I wasn't doing anything bad or anything, I wasn't like stripping or anything. But like I can just see my dad covering his face like this. And it was quite entertaining, and like I went up behind my parents because one of the lyrics is "My mother said whatchu gonna do with your life". So, I just went up to my mom and hugged her and stuff like that, and my dad was just like "What is he doing, what is he doing". so yeah, he's coming to terms with it, but he's very accepting. My friends all love me, and they are just like "Oh crystal is coming out" and all of that, because sometimes I just spontaneously dance or death drop or whatever, because like I said, myself and Crystal intermingle a lot. With personality because we are basically the same people. Um, I just don't know the reactions of my siblings because I haven't talked to them about it. I think that they would accept me, they all love me, and they will support me in whatever I do. So hopefully they do

Interviewer: And what does your drag name come from?

Crystal Clear: Okay, so I actually went through a lot of drag names. I first went into like an online um... I went into an online drag name generator because like I said I did drag competitions online with all sites. So, I needed like some type of drag name to participate because I’m not going to go by Drake, that's no, so uh I was first up Miss Hypnosis and I was just like mm that doesn't really match me, it seems very sultry and sexy and I’m not sultry and sexy. Um, and so I went through several suggests, I kinda went to one of my friends who did drag a show and also hosted some of these competitions. And I was think like Crystal Ball, Crystal Light, I like Crystal because it’s something shiny and I find myself like a diamond in the rough and once I polish myself up I see myself as kinda like shiny, a diamond kind of confident and all of that. But then something was like, uhh she mentioned Crystal Clear and I was like "hmm I could work with that" and then I started thinking that I could do my tagline like “My intentions are clear, crystal in fact.” And all that stuff and then like in that competition once I started finding myself, I started getting a lot further in the competition and became runner up, and that’s compared to someone who wore the same wig all the time and not bitter at all. So, I kinda stuck with crystal clear for my IRL drag name because, I just felt like, that kind of just gave me more confidence in myself and my drag ability. And I still really love the name to its self because it's not overly sexualized that some drag queens names are. And I’m not really a sexual person myself, so it kind of matches that. It's very, sophisticated and glamour, if that makes sense, and I kind of want to be sophisticated and I want to be glamour. I can also be a bitch when it comes down to it like, at the um, last semesters drag show, I ripped a queens wig off because they beat me with a phone. Okay, so basically it was like the semifinal round and my personal round I defeated the queen easily. I didn't have to do anything, the other queen tried to bump me down to the floor and I’m like no. The other queen had telephone by Sheena Easton. Probably never heard of that song, I never even heard of it so uh. So, She had this big comedy routine where she's pulling out phones and pulling out a flag that says call me and so she has wired phones stuck to her and hanging out of her… this area. yeah I don't know what it’s called because it was attached to her dress and so when I did the semi-final round it was also the Girls Just Wanna Have Fun lip synch, I came over and tried to like playfully flirt because I’m not actually flirting, it was one of my friends and that would be awkward um and so she saw me and came over and started playfully beating me with a phone because we are both theatre and we know how to not kill each other basically. And so, I was just like " Oh okay" and then ripped the wig off and everyone was just like shocked. I actually have a picture of that on my phone, I left in my dorm but yeah it was a very fun time but like just don't mess with Crystal, and each time I get into drag with Crystal I develop her personality more and more. I don't ever think I’m going to stop developing her personality because if I do that mean I’m the perfect drag queen and I’m never going to be the perfect drag queen. But I’m just going to have one hell of a fun time doing it... and I think I lost the question again.

Interviewer: it was where does your drag name come from?

Crystal Clear: oh yeah, I just lost the question, I just rant. But yeah that's how mostly my drag name came, and I don't think that if you were to ask me if I will ever change it I think that's no because I know that some queens change their names like, Miz Cracker from season 10 was originally Brianna Cracker and I don't why she changed, it just said she changed it, and some people drop or add to their name. Like we have Trinity Taylor, drop the Taylor and add Trinity the Tuck. Um some people just go by one word now, like there was Shangela Laquifa Wadley, people call her Shangela. All of that stuff that they feel like feel like they drop it, but I don't think I’m ever going to add to Crystal or drop Crystal or whatever. I think it’s a perfect name for me. because it matches me and my personality, it just matches everything that I search for when I perform as a drag queen.

Interviewer: Okay, well that concludes our interview. Thank you for your time.