

Interviews

Bendovah Plenti

1) When did you start doing drag?

I started doing drag recreationally in 2009, but I started performing as Bendovah in 2014.

2) How did you find out about/start getting into the drag culture? Was it a slow process or an overnight decision?

Like many youths, I started getting into drag culture through *RuPaul's Drag Race*. I should have been a drag queen a long time ago, but it took the fundamentally accessible *RuPaul's Drag Race* to win me over.

3) Did you have to build up confidence to go out in drag or did your drag persona have enough confidence already?

I definitely had to build up confidence to go out in drag! Even today, there are spaces I don't consider 'safe' in which for me to do drag.

4) Would you say that before you started drag/when identifying as male that you have any 'typical feminine' qualities?

When identifying as male, I have effeminate qualities, sure. I used to be ashamed of those qualities, but now they actually give me an edge in my female illusion!

5) What does drag mean to you?

Drag in Shakespeare means 'dressing as a girl.' I take a note from RuPaul on my definition of drag, which is that drag mocks identity.

6) How do you feel when dressed in drag?

I feel great! Compliments are magical.

7) At what occasions do you identify as your drag persona? Is it all the time?

No, I assume the Bendovah persona only when the makeup and pads go on, through the night, to when they come off. Of course, other queens call me 'Bendovah' at times, but it's a nickname and not a mundane identity.

8) Do you perform? Does *she* go to clubs?

She is on cast at The Back Door, Bloomington and makes appearances across the state of Indiana at bars, at benefits and at Pride events. Bendovah has also traveled to the states of California and Georgia.

9) Who or what are your biggest inspirations for your drag persona? (Does not have to be another drag queen!)

I grew up on movies and music of the 1990s. I find myself especially drawn to the enigmatic Breathless Mahoney (*Dick Tracy*), Nomi Malone (*Showgirls*) and the fembots from *Austin Powers*.

10) Would you say that your drag persona is extremely feminine or does she have some 'masculine' traits too?

I come from a family of old-school female impersonators. There may be a man driving the car, but Bendovah is head-to-toe female illusion.

11) How far does your drag persona differ from you in everyday life?

My boyfriend would say it doesn't!

12) How important is expressing femininity in drag?

You will get very different answers to this question. Drag is a lot of things to a lot of people. For my style of drag, it's especially important to capture the female illusion through features commonly associated with the ideal woman: long fingernails; beautiful, long hair; tall stilettos; and an hourglass figure achieved through padding. If I identify another queen is expressing her drag giving priority to the female illusion, I will evaluate her drag based on how well she achieves it. If I see another queen whose drag is nothing to do with femininity, I don't compare apples and oranges.

14) If you perform in drag, are you making a commentary about gender binary or is it for another reason?

I perform because I was born to perform. I performed in church, at school, at karaoke night... If I'm making any kind of comment on gender, it's through the rote transformation from man to wo-man.

15) Please let me know about your drag performances: do you lip sync, perform live, sing own songs, and dance?

I sang "Skyfall" by Adele for the talent portion of Miss Gay Evansville (which I won!). I mostly lip sync. My dancing has been compared to the wacky waving inflatable tube man, so I'll let you draw your own conclusions about my "dancing."

16) As a form of art, what's your message you are trying to put across when performing, or is it just for fun?

I perform for fun.

17) How does your family feel about you in drag, or do they even know?

My bio family knows I do drag. My aunt and uncle were the first to see me perform as Bendovah (at Miss Gay Indiana 2016). They loved it! I was overwhelmed by their support at an event that was so important to me.

18) Have you faced any discrimination in and outside of the gay community?

As Bendovah, I have not faced any discrimination, as of yet, in and outside the gay community. I don't know if that was the answer for which you're looking!

Cassidy Fellows-Summers

When did you start doing drag?

I started performing in November of 2004.

2)How did you find out about/start getting into the drag culture? Was it a slow process or an overnight decision?

After attending my first drag show in September of 2004, I knew that I wanted to try performing. It was both a process and a quick decision. I was very large at the time, over 400lbs in fact, and I wasn't sure that I would be accepted as a performer. After a few weeks of consideration, I decided to give it a shot!

Did you have to build up confidence to go out in drag or did your drag persona have enough confidence already?

I probably FELT confident at the time, but I can safely say now that I was not confident. It took a good while for me to adjust to performing in drag.

3)Would you say that before you started drag/when identifying as male that you have any 'typical feminine' qualities?

That is tough to say. I think in many ways I have more manly characteristics, but obviously there are feminine qualities as well.

5)What does drag mean to you?

Time, heartache and money. Lol No, drag is wonderful. It is the gay man's version of quilting...styles and techniques are passed down between generations. There is a definitely culture of drag, doing your makeup together in a dressing room, making costumes together, gossiping....its who I am.

6)How do you feel when dressed in drag?

Drag is both miserable and wonderful. Being dressed in drag means wearing lots of undergarments, head pieces, large/heavy jewelry...none of that is fun stuff. But getting to play the character you have made for yourself is wonderful...I almost feel invincible. You are able to do, act and say so many things you wouldn't normally be able to do.

7) At what occasions do you identify as your drag persona? Is it all the time?

When I first started performing, I wondered if people would ever see me in public and call me by my stage name. Now I can't get away from it! Lol Among friends who also perform I feel like I am always my drag persona, regardless of how I am dressed. For the general public though I think that there is more of a separation.

8) Do you perform? Does *she* go to clubs?

I don't perform as much as I once did. I decided last year that the schedule was becoming too hectic and I needed to take a step back. I do many charity events and about one booking a month just to keep my name out there.

9) Who or what are your biggest inspirations for your drag persona? (Does not have to be another drag queen!)

I named myself after Cass Elliot, because she was a large woman with a beautiful voice that I admired. I also love Jane Lynch quite a bit. I do an impersonation of her that seems to go over quite well. I like strong, powerful women in general.

10)Would you say that your drag persona is extremely feminine or does she have some 'masculine' traits too?

My persona is very bawdy. I think that many people associate me being more ladylike, but I also have a crude masculine side of my persona that frequently emerges.

11) How far does your drag persona differ from you in everyday life?

It depends. I think that the drag persona is definitely close to the real me.

12) How important is expressing femininity in drag?

When on stage, I always try to be a lady. I think that is VERY important. It goes back to the classic idea of female impersonation. Being smooth and refined is a learned skill that takes practice. Off stage I think people should act and be who and how they want.

13) Would you say your drag persona is a representation or more of a parody of femininity? Or is there even a difference between the sexes?

I would definitely identify more with a representation of femininity.

14) If you perform in drag, are you making a commentary about gender binary or is it for another reason?

No

15) Please let me know about your drag performances: do you lip sync, perform live, sing own songs, dance?

Lip Sync

16) As a form of art, what's your message you are trying to put across when performing, or is it just for fun?

The classical art of female impersonation.

17) How does your family feel about you in drag, or do they even know?

My mother has known about me performing since I started, but she didn't take it very well. Only over the past few years has she been less-cold about the idea.

18) Have you faced any discrimination in and outside of the gay community?

Absolutely. There is a lot of stigma associated with drag, and many other aspects of life. Being a bigger person was also a struggle, both in and out of drag in the gay community.

Pollyanna Parker

1) When did you start doing drag?

TECHNICALLY DEC 2015. I DID A FEW SHOWS IN COLLEGE IN THE 90'S AND THE BAG LADIES BUS TOUR STARTING 2013. MY RUN FOR QUEEN THIS YEAR WAS MY OFFICIAL START.

2)How did you find out about/start getting into the drag culture? Was it a slow process or an overnight decision?

IT WAS A SLOW PROCESS FOR ME. I WANTED TO GIVE BACK TO OUR COMMUNITY SO I CHOOSE TO RUN FOR BAG LADY QUEEN. BEFORE I MADE THE DECISION, I PRAYED, TALKED WITH FORMER QUEENS, MY SPOUSE, AND MY FRIENDS.

3) Did you have to build up confidence to go out in drag or did your drag persona have enough confidence already?

I WAS NERVOUS GOING OUT IN DRAG, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE I WASN'T VERY PRETTY IN THE BEGINNING. IT WASN'T TOO BAD BECAUSE I WENT TO SAFE SPACES WHERE I KNEW FRIENDS WOULD BE. (HOUSE PARTY'S, GAY BARS, ECT)

4) Would you say that before you started drag/when identifying as male that you have any 'typical feminine' qualities?

WELL, I GUESS MY VOICE ON THE PHONE CAN SOUND FEMALE. OF COURSE, I CAN FLAME OUT WITH THE BEST OF THEM. HONESTLY THOUGH, I DO MY BEST TO KEEP IT MIDDLE OF THE ROAD. NOT TOO FEM NOT TOO BUTCH.

5) What does drag mean to you?

DRAG IS ONE SEX GIVING THE ILLUSION OF BEING THE OPPOSITE SEX (AKA: MALE TO FEMALE TRANSFORMATION OR VICA VERSA). I SEE IT AS A PERFORMANCE ART. IT'S USUALLY FUNNY, BUT SOMETIMES SERIOUS. IT CAN BE FOR FUNDRAISING OR A PROFESSION.

6) How do you feel when dressed in drag?

FAIRLY CONFIDENT NOW A DAYS. AGAIN, I TRY TO GO WHERE I'M IN A COMFORTABLE SAFE SPACE.

7) At what occasions do you identify as your drag persona? Is it all the time?

IT IS NOT ALL THE TIME. I IDENTIFY WITH POLLYANNA WHEN I'M PROMOTING AN EVENT OR SHOW AS WELL AS WHEN I'M PERFORMING.

8) Do you perform? Does she go to clubs?

YES TO BOTH

9) Who or what are your biggest inspirations for your drag persona? (Does not have to be another drag queen!)

THE MID-CENTURY MODERN HOUSE WIFE OR CARMEL HOUSE WIFE.

10) Would you say that your drag persona is extremely feminine or does she have some 'masculine' traits too?

ON A SCALE BETWEEN ONE TO TEN WITH ONE = MASCULINE AND TEN = FEMININE, I WOULD SAY I'M A 7. I DON'T LIKE SHAVING MY ARM HAIR OR CHEST HAIR, BUT I DO COVER MY LEG HAIR WITH HOSE.

11) How far does your drag persona differ from you in everyday life?

I TAKE A LOT MORE WORK TO TRANSFORM INTO POLLYANNA THAN IT DOES TO WALK OUT THE DOOR AS HOWARD

12) How important is expressing femininity in drag?

I THINK IT IS UP TO THE INDIVIDUAL PERFORMER. ONE OF MY DRAG FRIENDS DOESN'T TUCK OR USUALLY WEAR A WIG. I LOVE HIM AND HIS DRAG. IT'S INDIVIDUAL AND UNIQUE, LIKE ALL OF US.

13) Would you say your drag persona is a representation or more of a parody of femininity? Or is there even a difference between the sexes?

PROBABLY A PARODY. EVERYONE ROMANTICIZES THE MID-CENTURY MODERN GAL. I LOVE DOING IT, BUT IT'S NOT WHAT WOMEN ARE TODAY.

14) If you perform in drag, are you making a commentary about gender binary or is it for another reason?

I NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT BEFORE. MY DRAG IS AS A BAG LADY. I WANT TO LOOK PRETTY, FEMALEISH, BUT NEVER THOUGHT I WAS MAKING A COMMENTARY.

15) Please let me know about your drag performances: do you lip sync, perform live, sing own songs, dance?

I LIP SYNC, DO MY BEST TO DANCE, AND CHOREOGRAPHED ROUTINES (DANCES OR SPOKEN WORD CHARACTERS)

16) As a form of art, what's your message you are trying to put across when performing, or is it just for fun?

I'M DOING IT TO RAISE MONEY FOR CHARITY TO GIVE BACK TO OUR COMMUNITY. I ALSO WANT IT TO BE FUN FOR THE AUDIENCE AS WELL AS MY SELF.

17) How does your family feel about you in drag, or do they even know?

OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS THAT KNOW, THEY ARE OVERALL SUPPORTIVE.

18) Have you faced any discrimination in and outside of the gay community?

I CAN THINK OF ONE INSTANCE WHERE I WAS REPRESENTING THE BAG LADIES AT AN INDY ELEVEN TAILGATE EVENT. IT WAS PROMOTED AS A PRIDE NIGHT. I WAS THE ONLY BAG LADY TO ATTEND IN FACE. A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER WAS SPOTTED AS WE WERE WALKING. I TURNED AND POSSE FOR A PICTURE AND THE MAN MADE AN UNPLEASANT FACE AND TURNED AND WALKED AWAY.

Candy Cain

1) When did you start doing drag?

I started doing Drag in December of 2015

2) How did you find out about/start getting into the drag culture? Was it a slow process or an overnight decision?

I found out about drag from working at Talbott street and getting to know the queens and who they really were. When I first saw a drag queen I was scared shitless and hid from them because I never heard of drag queens before. It was a slow process especially with me running for Bag Ladies, I cried in the mirror the first night I went out in drag, I wasn't prepared for the harsh words people would say and I did not feel right at first.

3) Did you have to build up confidence to go out in drag or did your drag persona have enough confidence already?

It took me a couple of shots to be able to build the confidence to go out and talk to people. As time went on it got better and better the more comfortable I felt as Candy.

4) Would you say that before you started drag/when identifying as male that you have any 'typical feminine' qualities?

I think every gay man has feminine qualities no matter if you are in drag or not.

5) What does drag mean to you?

Drag means so many different things, my drag is for a community purpose it is to teach a lesson to educate and to let the younger community get involved with non for profit.

6) How do you feel when dressed in drag?

When I dress as Candy I go into Candy mode I leave Quentin behind and I act just like I think I would as a woman. I feel powerful and confident sometimes. I am very shy as Quentin and as Candy I can hide behind the makeup and be a totally different person, and actually get to know people. Then people realize that I am actually a good person.

7) At what occasions do you identify as your drag persona? Is it all the time?

I only identify myself as drag when I am in drag or if someone calls me Candy.

8) Do you perform? Does she go to clubs?

I do perform with the Bag Ladies and at Zonies every once in awhile.

9) Who or what are your biggest inspirations for your drag persona? (Does not have to be another drag queen!)

My biggest inspiration as Candy is for people to see that I have or I am working on making a difference in our community, this was a way for me to get involved and to actually let the younger community have a voice and for me to listen to them so that they can achieve what they want to achieve.

10) Would you say that your drag persona is extremely feminine or does she have some 'masculine' traits too?

I would say my persona is just metro sexual not to feminine not to masculine.

11) How far does your drag persona differ from you in everyday life?

I live it in two different lives as Quentin I am very athletic and busy and uptight and shy where as Candy I am more carefree, social and lovable.

12) How important is expressing femininity in drag?

Doing drag you do not have to be feminine or masculine, I always say you can be whoever you want to be in drag. Just do you.

13) Would you say your drag persona is a representation or more of a parody of femininity? Or is there even a difference between the sexes?

I would say a representation I guess.

14) If you perform in drag, are you making a commentary about gender binary or is it for another reason?

When I perform in drag I just do what I want and how I feel basically its not to make fun of anyone or anything.

15) Please let me know about your drag performances: do you lip sync, perform live, sing own songs, dance?

I lip sync (I can't dance)

16) As a form of art, what's your message you are trying to put across when performing, or is it just for fun?

My message when I perform is do what makes you happy what songs can either move people or make them happy.

17) How does your family feel about you in drag, or do they even know?

My family knows its one of those things they are kinda okay with it since I do it for a charity.

18) Have you faced any discrimination in and outside of the gay community?

I have had a lot of people say some very rude comments to me while being Candy, especially people that I associated with. Its not easy at first and you have to get in the right mind and say this makes me happy the people that make the comments don't feed you, they don't fuck you and they don't finance you so who cares.