

VERA!



VERA (They/Them) is an Armenian, trans, and queer drag king from Oakland, CA and also the lead volunteer trainer on the national LGBT hotline. They have lived in California since 2005. Instagram: @veritas_22

Transcript: Filmed in Oakland on 3/26/23

0:00

Vera:

Hello. My name is Vera. V-E-R-A. All caps with an exclamation mark. And I am a drag king.

0:20

Alex:

So I want to know about how your drag style develops over the years and how it connected to your gender?

Vera:

Yeah! And how it develops. And gender. Yes. Yeah. So I came to California in 2005 for grad school, and I started going through the Rebel Kings Drag King show. And I started out as a tip collector. And then I was a backup dancer. And then for a while, I was a femme duet partner. And then I joined the troupe. And I realized that I really wanted to king. So then I was drag king all the time. My style started out kind of plaid dad, which I still evoke, definitely. Dad with a backwards cap and like, very kind of bro-esque. And then I really kind of honed my style to be more like I would take things from my Swana culture. I'm Armenian-Assyrian. So sometimes I'll be into jingle bell. And I found that I like shiny bodysuit things and there's just there's so I still kind of do the athletic clad dad looks but I have so many things that I really love and shiny fabrics training materials and I really kind of discovered my gender through drag as well.

1:34

So through drag, I figured out that I'm non-binary and, you know, it was so beautiful to hear my child, King Lotus Boy, talk about how I was an inspiration for them. They were really an inspiration for me and ze really helped me see that I wanted to use they/them pronouns. And so now I identify as queer, non-binary and trans and just having that space to play with gender expression through drag was really just a powerful, beautiful thing and enabled me to come to this beautiful realization for myself. I was at a gig one time and we were just joking, [interview interrupted by screams from friends and blowing kisses] Yeah, we're in a gig one night and I was joking on the mic about not wanting to take my my beard and my mustache off and as I was leaving, I'll never forget this.

2:28

The security guard was like, Don't take it off. And I was just like, Oh, don't take it off. Don't take it off. So, you know, I do drank enough that I don't feel the need to get into face during the day, but just kind of that gender wise, I don't have to take it off because it's me all the time. And that's part of the reason that I use my name. My name is actually Vera. So my drag name is my name.

2:54

Alex:

So was that kind of like the first time you had gender euphoria?

Vera:

Sure. I think through drag. Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Alex:

Can you talk about why gender euphoria is so important to you and the trans community?

Vera:

It's everything. It's really everything. You know, in my other life, I'm the lead volunteer trainer on the LGBT national hotline, so I spend a lot of time talking to people who are coming out or thinking they might be trans and about gender euphoria and gender dysphoria and everyone just deserves to feel comfortable and safe and joyful in their gender expression and feeling that way and feeling good when you look in the mirror is just so powerful and shouldn't be taken away from anyone at any time for any reason.

3:36

Alex:

You say that, but then there's like so much anti-trans bills going around. And I just think it's so, like, frustrating that no one's talking about it. I know we're switching topics really quickly, but I just want the audience to know what the anti-trans laws will do to trans youth and just everyone.

Vera:

Yeah. You know, I think about that a lot. It's funny you say, people kind of in general aren't talking about it, which is not good. But I feel like my communities, it's like all we're talking about because it's so important. So I also have my role at the Hotline and I'm also the co-director of Drag Story, our Bay Area. So there's so many and everything is interrelated, you know, so banning drag near children and creating this narrative, which is also, I think to me, all about the fear of letting people view their own gender and have that freedom of expressing their gender.

4:48

It's all related to me. So the anti-trans bills, the anti-drag bills, there's also like an anti sex worker, you know, thing in there too. It's all one. And especially thinking about the youth who are already doing their transition and these bills that would make it, you know, impossible for them to continue something they've already begun. It's just so painful for me to think about.

5:16

People who may—youth, who may be hopeful, who then hear these things and then may delay them feeling safe enough to come out, it may delay them starting a transition process they might want to start. It's unfathomable really to me and it's just it's something that's really scary. And I hope that we as a community can rise against it.

5:42

And I just hope that, you know, families in those states know that they have sanctuary states available for them, even though I wouldn't want anyone to have to move. But I also know that, you know, gender affirming care is the most important, so every child deserves that. And I know you know, I just anticipate more and more youth calling the line and, you know, just people in general being more scared to be who they are. And that's a shame, that's a sin.

6:11

Alex:

And so you work for a hotline?

Vera:

Yeah, I'm the lead volunteer trainer on the LGBT national hotline. Yeah. And my son, Dragon King, is an operator as well.

Alex:

How do you help people through that?

Yeah. So, you know, on the hotline, we don't give direct advice because, you know, we can never know the full intricacies of any situation. But what we do on the hotline is we really uplift, comfort and safety coming first. And the wants and needs of the caller coming first and sometimes it's the first time someone has lifted that up for a caller. Oh, yeah. My comfort and safety do come first. My wants and needs do come first. And we also have a database of resources as well.

6:54

So if they need any kind of resources in their area, even if it's for a show, we can provide those. So people call to talk about all kinds of things being, you know, coming out, trans stuff. That's, really, anything like needing secure housing. So many different things. And I'm just so glad that we're there to take the call and really just have our callers feel heard and affirm them and who they are.

[...]

7:41

Alex:

Um, the final part is just talking about what it's like being trans in the Bay Area. Being in the Bay Area, how does it impact how people see you,

Vera:

I love being trans in the Bay Area. I feel like other places there's different levels of danger that may not be here, but there's still levels of danger here as well. I feel like the queer and trans community here is really supportive.

8:14

For me, being trans in the Bay Area is also being part of the drag community in the Bay Area, even though you can of course be trans and not do drag, do drag and not be trans, or be trans and do drag. But it's really that community's really enmeshed for me. And it's so many people who are just uplifting everything.

8:37

Exploration of gender, the art, exploration of your own personal gender. So that's been really beautiful for me. I'm currently in a T4T relationship, which is really beautiful. I think it's really special. And I feel like that is maybe more possible in the Bay Area because it is a sanctuary for trans folks. So more queer and trans folks are here, but that doesn't mean that they're in other communities as well. But I really, I love it. I love it. And I feel like and I'm really honored to be part of it.

9:16

Alex:

I mean, being T4T is kind of like on another level than a cis relationship, which I'd love to talk to you more about. I don't know how much time you have. But I'd love if you could talk about how it's different from being in a cis relationship. And by the way, can you explain what T4T means?

Vera:

Oh yeah. Yeah. So T4T is like trans for trans, like trans people who want to date and I'm, I'm like a queer and kind of pansexual, but I really, it is really beautiful to date another trans person because, there are, there is like a baseline knowledge of gender exploration and a deep insight into the fact that gender is a spectrum in and of itself.

10:02

And I don't know, there's something just really beautiful of being on a gender journey on your own and then being on somebody else's gender journey with them and loving them and being so excited for their different changes, your different changes. And it's just really sweet. It's really, really sweet. And a lot of queer relationships are sweet, many straight relationships are also sweet, but there's something really precious about that.

10:32

Alex:

One last thing, anything we didn't talk about that you want the general public or cis people to know about being trans?

Vera:

I would just say that it's a beautiful kind of iteration of self, and it's just like any other person in the way that there are so many things about us that make us beautiful. And I think it's something that makes me beautiful. And it should be viewed as such by everyone. And I think, I feel like we need to move from kind of a 'it's okay' to a 'it needs to be celebrated.' And I feel like with the backwards movement towards 'it needs to be demonized' is because our response is 'it needs to be celebrated.'

11:33

So I hope that makes sense. But it's a really beautiful thing. And we're really beautiful people and it's time to support us because things are really terrifying times.

Alex:

Can you repeat that? (Because of the noise)

Vera:

Yeah, you know, we're really beautiful people and we really need to be supported in these really terrifying times.

Alex:

All right. Thank you.

Vera:

Yeah, we did it right! Yay! Thank you both.