



INTERVIEW

Interview: 'Canada's Drag Race' Winner Priyanka Wants Viewers to Support Local Drag

by CHELSEA BRIMSTIN

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Since her start in the Toronto drag scene, *Canada's Drag Race* season one winner Priyanka has been a force to be reckoned with. From her fun-loving on-stage persona to her beloved catchphrase – “What’s my name?” – Priyanka has worked hard to establish herself as a must-see queen, not only in Canada, but around the world.

Despite making a splash in the Canadian spinoff of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and becoming a household name, Priyanka still stresses the importance of supporting local drag.



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“Obviously *RuPaul's Drag Race* has changed the way that people look at drag,” she says. “And everyone’s coming out of the pandemic with a limited amount of funds because everyone wants to go out again. So they’re buying concert tickets and they’re buying *Drag Race* girl tickets to go see like Alyssa Edwards and Shea Couleé and pay these big-ticket prices, which they deserve. But local drag, I think, deserves and needs more attention right now. Especially because Church Street just simply is not the same anymore, because people are forgetting that it’s there and forgetting where the *Drag Race* girls have come from and what the heartbeat of being a queer person in Toronto is all about.”

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**“It’s how a lot of us feel comfortable
in our own skin for the first time.”**

Priyanka Love encourages ‘Drag Race’ viewers to learn more about their local drag scene

Priyanka wants people who watch *Drag Race* to expand their reach beyond the show and look to the drag scene in their own town. Not only does she believe it's important to support such a thriving art scene, especially within the LGBTQ2S+ community, but she also stresses that it's often how performers learn to embrace their true identity.

"It's important [to support local drag] because it's how a lot of us feel comfortable in our own skin for the first time," she continues. "It's how a lot of amazing performers like myself and Tynomi [Banks] and Jada [Shada Hudson] and [Miss] Fiercalicious, all these *Drag Race* girls got their start. It's a place where you can discover *Drag Race* girls, drag queens or drag entertainers who haven't had the chance to be on TV or haven't applied. And maybe they don't want to be on TV, but that talent and entertainment exists. I think that people are so trained to only think about and watch things that they only see on TikTok or YouTube and stuff. But there's so many hidden gems out there that need attention and have bills to pay, too."

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Priyanka reveals how she started doing drag

After finding comfort and community at gay bars in The Village in Toronto, Priyanka started doing drag herself.

“I moved into The Village at Church and Wellesley, and I was like, ‘I’m near the gay bars’ – especially because I just came out of the closet and started to feel more comfortable with myself – and so I was like, ‘Oh, I actually think drag queens are great. They’re a little bit scary,” she says through a chuckle, “but this seems like a really fun art to support.’ So, every week, my friend Amanda and I, we would look forward to seeing the local drag queens. We were like, ‘Oh my god, we cannot wait to see Ivory Towers on Saturday perform her Gaga mix or we can’t wait to see Xtacy Love perform her Britney mix or we can’t wait to see Farra N Hyte perform ‘Look At My Body’ from *Empire*, that TV show.”

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As she'd revisit the same bars with her friend time and time again, Priyanka explains that eventually the local drag queens would become like "celebrities" to them.

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"Drag queens, local drag queens especially, are the closest you can get to a cheap concert ticket, right? And so, for me, I found a lot of freedom and self-realization while watching drag and coming up in this scene. And I booked Xtacy Love to perform at my birthday party. And then that's when she had suggested I should start drag. And then I entered Crews and Tangos Drag Race."

"The minute *Canada's Drag Race* happened, it was like I just knew my life was going to change."

As a driven person, everything skyrocketed from there. "The minute that I decided to do drag, I'm the kind of person who like hits the ground running and just works really hard to make my goals and intentions come true. It just blew up."

"Then – once you kind of become the it girl – people are like, 'Oh, you should be on *Drag Race*', and this is before *Drag Race* was even in Canada. The minute *Canada's Drag Race* happened, it was like I just knew my life was going to change. Local drag did that for me and even when I go back to those bars, I see a lot of the people that used to watch me grow up in local drag."

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The hardest part about coming up in the local scene was establishing a name for herself

When Priyanka first started out, people confused her for other, more established queens. "I think that naturally humans want familiarity, you know? People called me Sofonda Cox or Tynomi Banks. And I think that was tough because I didn't know how those queens felt about it."

Out of that struggle came her quintessential catchphrase.

"That's where the whole 'What's My Name' tagline came from, because I was like, this is my one opportunity to let people know what my name is and stuff and it caught on," she adds.

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From there, Priyanka rapidly climbed the ranks of the Toronto drag scene before making her way onto *Canada's Drag Race* season one, which changed everything for her.

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***Canada's Drag Race* changed her life**

When Priyanka would perform at local bars, she'd have fans who would come to her shows on the regular, knowing her cues. But, after appearing on the show, more and more people would come and expect her to perform the same numbers they saw on TV.

"When you were the local girl, two fans would come and be like, 'Oh, we're excited to see your set today.' It would almost be an inside joke with those people that would always come and see you, right? They know your cues. They know what shots you like to drink; they know what songs they want to hear. It's a really fun experience to share with people."

The post-*Canada's Drag Race* performances were different.

**"I wouldn't be where I am today
without being a local drag queen."**

"When I was on this show and the 'I Drove All Night' lip sync went viral, I was kind of like, 'Oh my God. There's so much pressure to be exactly how I was on TV.' And that's scary because when you go viral for a performance that's splits and cartwheels and high kicks, you want to make sure you nail it every single time, right? And I would say that was a hard adjustment for me because I would have severe – not severe. I was able to get out there – but I would have mild to moderate anxiety about having to perform."

Now, things have gotten a little easier. Since her time on the show and after a series of pandemic-induced lockdowns, Priyanka has established herself as a musician, with curated, choreographed sets.

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"But as the years go on and you go in and out of lockdowns, and now that I've become more of a musician, you curate a show to put on for people, whereas when you're a local drag performer, you kind of show up, you know? You plug your USB in, and you perform your four songs or whatever. So, it's changed a lot, but I wouldn't be where I am today without being a local drag queen because I've learned – even better than being on kids TV – I've learned how to entertain the audience better because of drag."

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Things have changed since she made her way through the local drag scene

As we chatted, Priyanka brought up how things had really changed since she started doing drag. After the viral growth of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and its international spinoffs, the local drag scene has also grown rapidly in response.

"I think it's tough because now the market's so saturated. So, it's hard to be the 'it girl' now, right? It used to be like the girl who won *Crews & Tangos Drag Race* or won *Queen of Halloween* would be the new girl that you booked on everything, but now there's so many new queens out there and it's exciting because there's so much more opportunity. But it is tough because there's so much more competition out there. But my whole rule is there's competition everywhere in every single job."

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She notes that things haven't only changed among the performers, but with the audience members as well. It seems that this intense saturation of the market could be having an impact on the audience's attention span.

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**“With supporting any local girl,
treat them like a *Drag Race* girl”**

“I’m noticing – having gone and watched, having gone having performed on the local stages and seeing the audience transform into what it is now – people need to remember that they’re going to go see a show. They’re not going to party, you know what I mean? I feel like a lot of people are treating drag and local girls as background noise. And I don’t know why that’s changed.”



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Priyanka makes sure to continuously support local drag herself

These changes are tough on performers, and Priyanka encourages viewers to make sure that they're paying attention to drag entertainers in the same way they would with someone from *Drag Race*.

"I think that, with supporting any local girl, treat them like a *Drag Race* girl. Be excited about them. Be excited about their looks, like their photos and comment because there's work for them too. That's what I try to do."

Ultimately, she's always looking to elevate other performers' voices.

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"If I'm hiring drag queens for a show, I'll try to hire local. I was at Crews a year ago now – whoa, time literally flies – it was my last local Toronto show except for Pride. I hired Eva King and Sanjina [DaBish] and [Baby] Bel Bel and Xtacy [Love] to open for me, because I remember when Brooke Lynne [Hytes] was on *Drag Race* she made it her mission every time she was in charge to always book me. Always, always, always, always. I'll always remember that of her – sharing a platform, you know?"

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"Local drag in each city is its own culture, its own thing."

Where can you find some amazing local drag performers?

The market may be a lot more saturated now, but Priyanka sees this as an opportunity – different performers from different places have different styles, and there are so many ways that you can learn about and involve yourself in the culture.

"It's one of those beautiful things because it was a culture that I realized that I needed to immerse myself in to fully understand. Local drag in each city is its own culture, its own thing. There's the key players, there's the way everyone talks to each other, which girl does what song all the time. It's its own world. It was so beautiful to learn about and to watch."

Plus, if you're looking to check out a local Canadian queen, Priyanka's got you covered.

"Right now, I would say that the most buzzworthy queen is Makayla [Couture] – everyone just talks about her. She's always being retweeted. I would say that she's the 'it girl' right now," the *Canada's Drag Race* winner explains. "Perla is doing her thing. She's come a long way from having to come from Calgary, settle into Toronto and then make a name for herself. I feel like all the odds were against her. And now she's a headliner here. It's really cool. I love Sanjina [DaBish]. I'm so obsessed with that chaotic b*tch. I love Angelina Starchild from Calgary. She's so fun. But I love Alma Be and Berlin [Saint Le Bon] from Vancouver."

"But there's so many queens everywhere now," she concludes with a smile. "It's so incredible."

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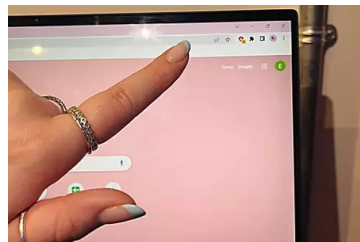
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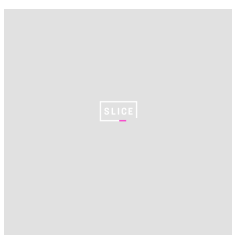


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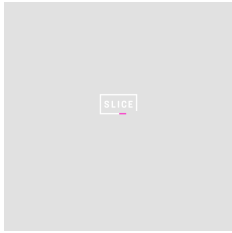
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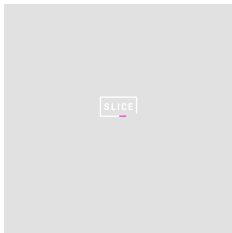
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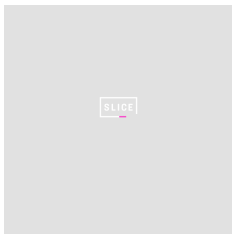
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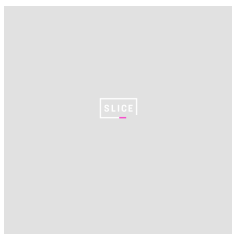
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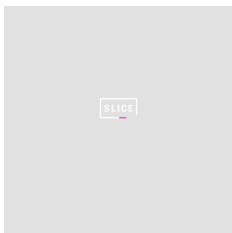
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