

Glamming the System: Maxi Glamour, "Demon Queen of Polka and Baklava," Is Going Global

By Chris Andoe

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This past March, Maxi Glamour eluded questions about their plans. The St. Louis-based entertainer, guru, event planner, designer and self-proclaimed "nonbinary queer demon" was set to be honored with a 2019 Influence Award at a splashy *Out in STL* awards party overlooking the Arch. The award was in recognition of Glamour's work and influence in the drag community, holding drag workshops and mentoring emerging performers.

But when asked if they planned to attend the gala, Glamour was noncommittal. "I'll likely be out of town that week," they posited.

"I told everyone I was going to Paris for an artist residency program," Glamour later reveals. "And I'm so bad at keeping secrets."

Secrecy, however, was contractually required. Glamour was actually flying to Los Angeles to film season three of the hit reality show *Boulet Brothers' Dragula*, vying to be "The World's Next Drag Supermonster."

The Making of Maxi

As a rule, Glamour doesn't reveal their age — not because they've got a complex about it, but because nurturing the mystery is an investment in their future intrigue. However, they drop a few clues. They explained their public life began as a fourteen-year-old club kid, once mentioned being "in the scene" for fifteen years and said they've got a milestone birthday next year which they plan to spend in Norway. Their Facebook page also reveals they graduated from Fort Zumwalt South High in 2008.

"I started off just going to parties and concerts wherever they were — basements, clubs, warehouses, trailers, et cetera — the more people the better," says Glamour. "But not just people — the weirdos, the freaks, the broken, those were the people to whom I was drawn. We would congregate at shows and even malls in our most outrageous costumes that we thought were so fly.

"You remember the scene-kid days when the goth aesthetic was vibrant and glamorous, when malls were still busy and the war between preps and punks raged on? These were the days when Mississippi Nights, Creepy Crawl and Cicero's were still around. It was a different era of St. Louis nightlife culture," Glamour says. "That was my youth." And during this time, their Myspace page was lit.

"Myspace was the newest, coolest thing in the music scene, and you *had* to make one. Being yourself was antiquated. You needed a new identity so

people online thought you were cool. There were the Jeffree Stars, the Scotty Vanities, the Lexi Lushes — it was all about being someone, someone unique, someone you created, someone cool enough to be in your friends' top eight."

Glamour went by several aliases during this time, including Rumpelstiltskin, Alex Shaw and Xander Wright.

"So I created Maxi Glamour. It was my way to create a new identity to make coming out of the closet easier. It was my superstar identity to lose all inhibition and join the ranks of Sid Vicious, Boy George, Marilyn Manson, Walt Paper, James St. James and all of my other icons. I wanted to be a club kid. I knew that's what I wanted in life."

The 2003 movie *Party Monster*, based on the true story of club kid Michael Alig, who bragged on television about killing his drug dealer and roommate, further fueled Glamour's interest in club culture.

"After seeing *Party Monster* five-thousand-too-many times, I read up on club culture and knew I wanted to create events. Parties that were for freaks like me. For the people that couldn't fit in with the rest of the world or didn't want to. It was centered around sex, drugs and that rock & roll lifestyle. It was an escape from the reality of the time we lived. Queer folk had no rights — we couldn't get married, we were barely in the media in the

early 2000s, and it was a depressing state," they explain. "Especially in the middle of the country where time moves slower. The underground club scene shouted loud messages that enticed my young heart. Messages like PLUR — Peace Love Unity Respect, from the rave scene — really resonated, as it created a sense of welcoming. In addition, the imagery of punk and electro musicians really helped make their concerts a way to feel comfortable as a masc-ish person to be hyper-flamboyant in makeup and in weird clothes.

"I can say that music hasn't had nearly the same impact on me as it did in these days. Maybe it was the drugs. But all I knew is that I wanted to help create a space for weirdos to be and exist to show off cool costumes and rejoice in each other's presence while enjoying some art form. At that time it was all about the music, knowing the coolest bands, the most underground things going and being original."

MTV's *Sweet Sixteen* also inspired Glamour's desire to party like a rock star.

"I saw all these spoiled girls getting their own parties and booking B2K, Nelly and other celebrities for their sixteenth birthday party, so I decided I wanted to book something cool for my sixteenth. I reached out to local band Center Pointe and had them play at my mom's boyfriend's house. It came complete with hot-tub swimming pool, and on this night a band to play songs for me. The next party I threw was when I was seventeen and booked

Super Fun Yeah Yeah Rocketship at a mini rave in my basement. I say it was a rave, but it was just twenty people on ecstasy waving glow sticks in the dark. That party lasted a few days and changed locations multiple times. We'd go on these party binges where we'd just party every day for days on end, drinking, smoking, fucking. It was a mess, but it was romantic."

At nineteen, Glamour left for San Francisco to study fashion at Academy of Art University — but says their dad stole their student loan money, which resulted in being homeless by the second semester.

"I didn't have a home to do homework and had to party crash," they explain, "where you'd just crash at the places where you partied."

After a year, Glamour returned to St. Louis. I asked if there was ever any resolution with their father.

"I don't really chat with him. He's not really a part of my life."

By 2012, Glamour, who's fascinated by world cultures, adopted the moniker "Demon Queen of Polka and Baklava" — two things that transcend cultural boundaries — and graduated from house parties with the production of their first event, Glamourfest, which was held at Tower Grove South's venerable drag bar, Grey Fox Pub. "It was my birthday and I had a slew of shirtless twinkles hand-crush almonds for baklava for this epic event. It was

very crowded, even though six people in the cast of fifteen didn't actually come. There was drag, burlesque, music, belly dancing and of course baklava."

Maxi-mizing Their Impact

Today, Glamour is seemingly the busiest entertainer of their kind in St. Louis, and a big part of that is Qu'art (pronounced like a quart of milk), an organization they founded in 2014 aiming to promote diversity and inclusivity of queer artists. Qu'art's projects and festivals, which blend intersectional and multidisciplinary queer artists on the Crack Fox stage, draw applicants from across the nation.

Then there are the smaller, community-focused activities, including cleaning up the city in drag and the monthly queer round table where people meet to discuss problems affecting the LGBTQ community. October's topic, for instance, was making social advocacy more accessible to rural Americans.

While attending RuPaul's DragCon LA this past May, Glamour was surprised to meet artists familiar with their organization, even if those artists had yet to hear of Glamour. "When I was in LA and met people who mentioned Qu'art when I said I was from St. Louis, it validated the entire thing," Glamour says. (By the time Glamour attended DragCon NYC in

September, they were an A-lister, hobnobbing backstage with RuPaul's family).

Among Glamour's most intriguing projects is their monthly event Devil's Cabaret, which they describe as "Satanic, dark, hedonistic, self-loving, sideshow drag, aerial, focusing on the darker side of reality. Eroticism as an art form. Take it in. Use it."

Glamour calls themselves a satanist, a detail that has inflamed their army of "traditional values" detractors — especially around Drag Queen Storytime, an event in which drag queens read to children at the St. Louis Public Library.

The anti-LGBTQ group Missouri Mass Resistance seems to consider Glamour their top nemesis, and a member posted the following to Facebook, along with a fabulously insane photo of the blue-faced Glamour with a massive, ratted-out blue wig:

"THIS is the St. Louis drag queen who 'performed' last Saturday, September 28th, at the Schlafly branch St. Louis Public Library. He is a well known SATANIST who is reading to little, little children in a public library. The children are being psychologically damaged at such a young age, this should be a crime!"

With Missouri Mass Resistance vowing to protest Glamour, extra precautions were taken to ensure their comfort and safety. Glamour was handled like a head of state, — or a superstar.

"The library made me feel so comfortable and protected," Glamour says. "Becky from Carpenter branch picked me up with a security team and escorted me into the facility, driving me through a gated garage. It was lovely."

After the event, Glamour requested to be driven past the protesters. Only about ten had shown up, and only a few remained. "I saw like five people that were sad and clearly misled. They were staring off in the distance with pathetic signs that said 'one man and one woman' and all that. There were a few counter protestors, and some I recognized their faces from the Occupy Wall Street days."

During my interviews I learned that Glamour is actually an atheist. When asked about their thoughts on Satan, they replied, "It's to shock people. He's not really real."

They are a member of the Satanic Temple, which they say is for people with similar views. "It's an activist organization fighting for the separation of church and state — many people in the queer community, including myself, were physically, emotionally and mentally abused by the church."

Den of Drag Monsters

Filming reality television means being secluded from reality. For six weeks, Glamour was holed up in exurban Los Angeles, dividing their time between their eighteen-hour days on set and nights in a sketchy motel complete with fighting drug users.

"It was very difficult at first," they admit. "It was a complete social media blackout, it was like detoxing. And there was a child lock on our phones, so no porn at first. But they fixed it."

The days of shooting began to blend together. "Staring at the walls, hurry up and wait," they recount. "Little sleep. No windows." Still, there were some perks. "It was so good not seeing straight people for six weeks, though."

Proving your mettle as "The World's Next Drag Supermonster" isn't a joy ride. Punishments included things like getting mystery tattoos and eating live spiders, and fellow contestants had very sharp elbows. "They were mean," Glamour, who arguably came off as the nicest contestant, recalls. But wigs were knocked back in episode four when Glamour came to the end of their journey and read everyone for filth — a read which surprised and inspired respect from the contestants.

Once the elimination episode aired, Glamour posted the following to their Facebook page:

"It's taken me a week to reprocess my elimination. I've gone through all the feelings of being cheated, not good enough, and hyper critical of my own art. I by nature am not a competitive person. When many people are fighting over the same thing I choose to find something else that pleases me. Maybe that's my nonconformist attitude that I don't want what everyone else wants. I didn't care about the crown and I didn't care about letting everyone know I thought my art was better than theirs. I went there to be me and use the show as a platform for social change. I went in the show with a non confrontational attitude with an attempt to diffuse any drama directed to me. Some behaviors on the show and many other shows were toxic attention seeking actions that replicate aggressive bullying found too often in our home communities. My point of being on the show was to demonstrate an outlet that deviates from that path. I wish I had thousands of dollars and sponsors to make my experience easier and get a bigger platform. I didn't, I just had the polka gods smiling down on me! And smiled they did! Looking forward to spending this next chapter with y'all and seeing where the roads take me!"

Marrying the Global & Local

With season three of *Dragula* broadcasting in more than 60 countries, a Boston-based talent manager lining up appearances

and their new jet-setting lifestyle, Glamour has a different perspective on their art and their work.

"We validate mediocrity at times," they assert. "We validate our own mediocrity. I know what level I can be on. What I should be on."

They're also less prone to accept the status quo in their own backyard. One of many topics Glamour has been speaking on is the lack of diversity on some local drag stages.

"If you're a producer and you're not putting black people in your show, maybe you shouldn't be producing," Glamour says, in what has become their oft-repeated mantra.

"I'd like to help use the fact that most St. Louisans that are registered voters are Democrat to help encourage those queer folk to not just be Democrat but also progressive. I think St. Louis can often find itself stuck in the past. It's that whole 'Show Me State' mentality that makes people afraid of new things. Honestly, I hear more people talk about the 1904 World's Fair than they do about the future of St. Louis. If more people talked about what could be, instead of what used to be, we wouldn't be stuck with things like that unfortunate trolley. This comes with acknowledging the fact that the NAACP put up a travel advisory warning for the state and how we process that. My vision of St. Louis is to lead the state and country with legislation

and a cultural attitude that embraces diversity to not only exist, but flourish."

Sitting in clouds of pot smoke at their south-city flat, Glamour explains they see themselves as a spiritual leader of drag through glamour, beauty and kindness. They also explain their mission: "I want to drastically change the St. Louis scene." Glamour pauses and considers their words. "I can definitely change St. Louis."