3CR Binary Busting Broadcast
Sunday 21 March 2021, 4.30-5pm

*Category Is: Drag and Gender*

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*[An edited version of Beyoncé's 'Flawless', featuring a spoken sample of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie interposed with computer-derived speech:]*

"We teach [**AFAB and trans queens**] to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to [**AFAB and trans queens**] you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful, otherwise you will threaten the [**cis gay man**]. Because I am [**AFAB**] I am expected to aspire to [**less than a cis male queen**]. I'm expected to make my [**career**] choices always keeping in mind that [**white cis gay men are**] the most important. And [**the drag community**] can be a source of joy and love and mutual support, but why do we teach [**AFAB and trans queens**] that they cannot be [**successful drag queens**] in the way that boys are? Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes."

*[Other vocal samples of drag queens weave in and out of the song:]*

"And I haven't even talked to you guys about me being a transgender guy drag queen." "My gender dysphoria, like, took over my soul, which so isn't like me." "And how we want to self-identify isn't up to anyone else. It's not up to anyone to have a debate about it, about how we feel inside."

*[song fades out]*

**Megan:** Hello, hello, hello. You're tuned to the Binary Busting Broadcast on 3CR. That was a little mix put together by Betty Rosé with a few extra voices pinched from the current seasons of Ru Paul's Drag Race and Ru Paul's Drag Race UK and added by me. Shout-out to Priya Kunjan and DJ Simona for the insightful discussion, and before we get stuck into it, I want to pay my respects to the elders of this land. We're being broadcast across the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung lands of the Kulin nation via 855 AM, and if you're listening online, take a moment to acknowledge the land that you're standing on. For the next half-hour of this special broadcast for trans visibility, we are going to examine the intersection of gender and drag. I've got interviews with three fabulous performers lined up for you on this journey. My name is Megan Williams, but in honour of this special day, I want to try out my drag name – Murray Codpiece – and we're going to start with a club scene.

*[Club sounds: dance music and crowd noises]*

**Megan:** The Rainbow House, to be exact, where I met Muse for the first time in the courtyard out the back, where they told me a bit about their drag.

**Muse:** As a drag performer, I specialise in areas that I grew up in the performing arts, which is point ballet, violin music, cello – a multitude of areas. Specifically, my drag performances are quite dark, quite involved with witchcraft and Gypsy culture, as I have had lots of influences growing up with those areas. So I am quite a part of a niche environment within the drag culture itself, as well as being a nonbinary person. So yeah, my performances are quite dark, quite methodical, quite contemporary in messages and technique and in performance variations as well.

**Megan:** Now, Muse has got these curly dark locks and sharp features, and as they're sitting across from me, I'm wondering how their drag persona has helped them explore the way they express their gender.

**Muse:** A lot of my drag persona is quite feminine, but there are times where I use that to access the feminine parts of myself, but also to kind of show the masculine parts. Like, I try to keep myself being – walking along that fine line of being a drag queen but also being a queer performer. Like, though I put across a very feminine persona, a lot of my performances and a lot of the art I do, I try to – unless I'm directly trying to portray feminine ideals, as it were – ideally, like, my favourite thing to do is to truly look questionable. Like, 'Is it male? Is it female? Or is it directly in the centre?' Like, someone that is able to exist within both the male and feminine energies at the same time, and just embody that full creative and powerful energy.

**Megan:** And given we're talking about drag, a pause to think about what drag actually is. So I got Muse to define it.

**Muse:** The primary understanding and primary explanation of drag is, like, 'dressed as girl', which I think these days has really come forward as being more 'is dressed as opposite gender'. But with a lot of nonbinary queer artists coming through and really showing, like, you know, gender is a construct that we can really play with, to me now it's more of a queer art form. The word 'drag' has specifically just been used as a way to just describe it in an easy format that most people can understand. Like, for example, there's those who are known as bioqueens, who are those who are born female who – or identify as female, who are accentuating their feminine side by using drag, but there's also the AMAB persons who use drag as to express their own femininity. But then those nonbinary artists who use it – who may use their own born gender as a way of being able to identify which side of drag they want to go. Do they want to be a drag queen or a drag king? For me, it's literally using it as a queer art form, so though I do drag, I identify my art as a queer artist rather than a drag queen or drag king. It allows me to have more freedom in what I want to do, but it also allows me to express my ways in different ways, depending on how I'm feeling or the particular energy I want to put into that look or that performance.

**Megan:** So 'drag' is a broad term, accepting of all kinds of creative expression. But Muse has touched on a controversial term: 'bioqueen', used to describe people, particularly those assigned female at birth who accentuate their femininity with drag. Malibu Stacey is a nonbinary person with a strong presence, and a drag queen often seen at the piano bar in Geelong. They have a firm position on the term 'bioqueen'.

**Stacey:** No, I've never liked that term, and I think that it's very trans‑exclusionary, because when you have a trans woman that does drag, they were calling her a drag queen, but when you have a biological woman that identifies as a woman – so a cis woman – when you have a cis woman doing drag, you're calling them a 'bioqueen'. So you're just taking trans female drag queens and pushing them into a box with men, which I think is really trans‑exclusionary and transphobic to do so. And I remember putting up a Facebook status one day saying, 'Okay, well, I'm nonbinary. If you want to call me a drag queen and you want to label me as a bioqueen, I might be biologically female but that's not how I identify.' And you also don't know my chromosomes, so let's not get too personal here. But you've made an assumption, and you want to call me this term that doesn't apply to me. So I'm nonbinary; what do you want to call me? And all these people are like, 'No, you're a drag queen!' I'm like, 'Then call me a drag queen. And call all these AFAB performers and all these female drag queens – just call them a drag queen and take all the hassle out of it.' I just think that it's really important just to be – have one term. Just call us drag queens, because it makes it all so much easier, and then you're not gonna offend anyone, honestly. Or 'drag performer', that's a really easy one to talk about, where you're inclusive of everyone regardless of their gender identity.

**Megan:** And they shared with me what brought them to drag. In a world where gendered rules are established at a very early age, they found a pathway to break through.

**Stacey:** So I was absolutely fascinated by a Melbourne drag queen called Art Simone back when I was freshly 18 and I'd just watched a bit of Ru Paul's Drag Race, as part of the way that I was educating myself on the queer community and trying to find a way to connect with it, when I was living in a small regional town in the middle of nowhere and I didn't have any queer people around me to talk to. So I watched Drag Race, fell in love with it, and immediately was like, 'Where can I find this in Melbourne?' Or in my state, or around – somewhere accessible, rather than just watching it on TV. And I found Art Simone was working at the Greyhound at the time in St Kilda, so I jumped in my car, travelled the, like, two hour drive up to see her, and just, in a room full of a show called 'Boylesque' with all these hot male dancers, it was little – at the time lesbian – me standing at the front of the stage with my phone camera, just staring at her absolute beauty.

And I remember saying to her one night when we were just having a drink, I was like, 'I wish I could do that. I wish I could do what you do, but I was assigned female at birth, so people' – just that I didn't think that was an option. And Art just turned to me and she was like, 'Well, why don't you? It's makeup and wigs and some sparkly clothes. Like, you can do it too.' And that just blew my mind at the time, that I was like, 'Oh, I can do this! Like, my favourite drag queen in the world is supportive of this idea that I have, so I guess I'm gonna do it then.'

So I started doing drag, and it was kind of an outlet for me to be able to just push the boundaries and to, in drag, be hyper-feminine, but at the same time, that gave me the space that I needed to kind of step back and to play with my gender expression outside of drag as well. And I kind of felt more comfortable presenting a little bit more masculine at the time, and I came to terms with myself as identifying as a nonbinary person, and that kind of gave me the chance to play with gender more and gender expression more, and find how I was most comfortable.

**Megan:** And I find the personal stories of how people come to understand their gender just really beautiful and inspiring, so I got Malibu Stacey to elaborate.

**Stacey:** I feel like I had this very internalised idea of what femininity was and the way that I was meant to express myself, because of the way that the rest of the world perceived me, because they looked at me and they were like, 'Oh no, that's a woman.' And I was sitting there like, '… Is it? I don't – I don't think it is. I don't think so.' But by being able to kind of fulfil that role in drag that I'd assumed people wanted me to be in, I could kind of push back and be like, 'Cool, here is all of the dresses and the sparkles and the glitter, and I'm gonna do it just in one day, and then I've ticked that box for the week. That's done.' And I could just kind of sit back and be like, 'Okay, what do I *actually* feel comfortable in?' Because it's not corsets and foam hips and foam tits. That's actually not comfortable for me outside of this gig and outside of these clubs, so what do I want? And I discovered that it was a lot of different things, and it kind of gave me the way to, like, actually sit and think about, like, 'how do I actually want to express myself,' not the way that I feel I need to express it to appease the people around me.

**Megan:** In one way or another, we're all pressured to conform to gendered expectations. But how does it feel when you *really* don't fit the box?

**Themme:** Have you ever had an item of clothing that fitted really badly but you didn't realise how badly it fit until you tried on a different jacket and you were like, 'Oh, my shoulders don't hurt when I wear this one'?

**Megan:** Themme Fatale, our third and final guest today, shared with me the process of navigating gender, and how people and drag were part of that story for them.

**Themme:** I feel like the best way I can describe it would be that, where it wasn't something that I always knew about myself, but there was always a discomfort there, that it wasn't until I met other people who have kind of been my inspirations in one way or another that I started to realise that that could be applicable to me as well. You know, it wasn't until I had something to compare it to that I noticed that something was uncomfortable, and I think drag was actually a really fantastic part of that. I think performing was a really great process for me in terms of identifying what I was comfortable with and what I was uncomfortable with with performance. Getting to perform gender *intentionally* rather than automatically, under my own terms rather than terms imposed upon me – subtly or not-so-subtly – by, you know, patriarchy, cissexism, all of the wonderful various forms of oppression that we live under. It was that distinction, of getting to choose my own terms for it, that made me realise that I could do that for myself off-stage as well. It created a nice distinction, yeah, and that really helped me find a sense of calm and comfort, which I think would be a way of describing the place that I'm sort of getting to with that.

*['I'm Coming Out' by Diana Ross begins to play]*

**Megan:** And you know, as I'm listening to this, I'm just finding it all too relatable. I don't know who these inspiring people Themme Fatale is talking about, but my guests on the program, they're inspiring me. So this might not come as a surprise to anyone that's read the pronouns in my email signature lately, but for this Trans Day of Visibility, I'm gonna say it out loud. I'm nonbinary too.

But that's enough of that.

*[The song cuts out with a record-scratch]*

Let's get back to our drag performers.

**Themme:** In many ways I am a professional fool. I think that's one of the threads that kind of connects through a lot of what I do. I make performance art. As Themme Fatale – you know, it means 'a dangerous them', so I like to play with dangerous things, both in terms of the stunts that I do, whether it's hanging from a trapeze spinning around really fast, or laying on a bed of nails having bricked smashed on my belly, and I also like to play with dangerous ideas, like the notion of gender itself.

**Megan:** To me, as an audience member and a consumer of performance, that playing of the notion of gender has always been what's attracted me to drag. Themme Fatale explains how they do that with their acts.

**Themme:** So I think in terms of the way that I do drag, I just like to challenge people's notions of what femininity means and what drag itself means in the way that I go out there and perform. So a lot of people see feminine-coded things and automatically ascribe ideas of womanhood upon them, and so I think what I like to do is be quite overt about the fact that I am not performing womanhood. I am performing 'shiny' and 'fabulous', and that those can be two quite separate things, and actually have a bit of a clearer conversation about that. So I do some comedy onstage, and so will often quite directly address people's misconceptions about that. I kind of lull them into a sense of making assumptions about me, and then directly kind of do a 'gotcha!' moment.

In terms of other feminist ideas that I explore on stage, I have an act where I perform as a showgirl, and I start quite a classic sort of burlesquey strip routine that gets interrupted by my fake boyfriend, who then dumps me onstage, quoting a bunch of unfortunately common ideas about strippers, showgirls, anyone who takes off their clothing in public, or really anyone who is not afraid of sexuality. Which I then respond to by burning off all of my clothes in a sideshow piece and crying into a pile of money and stapling it all over my body. So really trying to – yeah, trying to challenge those SWERFy kind of ideals, using some fun stunts and some silly comedy.

**Megan:** And for people that deliberately confront these social norms and deconstruct gender expectations in front of an audience, I wonder: is there an ongoing process within themselves, or is it created from a place of peace?

**Themme:** I think I've reached a certain level of comfort with myself, and I definitely believe that it's an ongoing process as well. I think both are true, where I don't see a huge distinction between getting to know myself in terms of my relationship with gender and getting to know myself in any other aspect of my life. You know, like, we all are in a constant process of becoming, and understanding ourselves on different levels, and changing over time. And I see my relationship with gender as kind of absolutely mirroring that as well, where it's – there's a deepening and a shifting that happens, but I'm really glad to have at least gotten to a point where I can start to kind of have some terms to describe it. So that would be, I guess, a comfort that I've gotten to, but it is a perpetual process of unravelling.

**Muse:** As of this moment, I feel incredibly empower.

**Megan:** That's Muse again, speaking out back at Rainbow House club.

**Muse:** Incredibly self-understanding. A lot of what I do is, like, I – a lot of what I do is I push myself forward, knowing that I am who I am. I am a nonbinary person. I am a person that exists along a spectrum of many, many different facets of gender. And being able to expand myself has truly been one of the most empowering experiences in my life.

**Megan:** Another thing I really wanted to know was what kind of experiences our performers had had that made them really proud to be who they are. Malibu Stacey had a heartwarming story to share.

**Stacey:** I've had some really beautiful – so I work mostly for Piano Bar Geelong, and I'm the events manager for all the Piano Bar venues across Colac, Ballarat, Bendigo, and Geelong, so I have a lot of interactions with crowds that are a safe space for queer people, but a lot of straight people as well, and I will remember being in full drag, standing out front of the venue in Geelong of all places, and this woman came up to me and she's like, 'You're just beautiful. Are you – what *are* you?' And I was like, 'I'm a drag queen, but I'm nonbinary. I'm a they and a them.' And she was like, 'Oh good, because I've got questions.' And I was like, 'Oh, here we go. This is – no, I don't want to talk about what's in my pants.' But then she grabbed my hand and she looked at me and she said, 'Now, my – my son, he's just told me he's a boy. And what can I do to make him happy? Or what can I do to look after my son?'

And I sat down with this woman and spoke to her for about 30 minutes about my experiences as a nonbinary and as a trans person, and advice that I had for her on how she could make her son feel more accepted, and deal with things like bullying in the schoolyard, and how she could educate – especially – her parents, her son's grandparents, on what this meant.

And that was the kind of moment where I felt really proud to be an out nonbinary person, especially in a regional town where there was so much homophobia, and where there's not a lot of knowledge around what it is to be nonbinary or to be trans. And I just remember that as one of the best days at work I've ever had, because that woman was able to help her child, her son, to kind of accept himself a little bit better, and her questions got answered in a way that was respectful. And she was honestly so sweet to me, and so lovely and accepting, and I didn't expect that from someone that's coming up asking me, 'So what are you?'

**Megan:** You are listening to the Binary Busting Broadcast on 3CR, where we've been talking about drag and gender with three very fabulous nonbinary drag performers. Today we've heard from Muse, who you can follow on Insta at [mx.muse](https://www.instagram.com/mx.muse/). We've also had Malibu Stacey, who you can follow at [malibustacey\_](https://www.instagram.com/malibustacey_/), and Themme Fatale, who you can follow at [themme\_fatale](https://www.instagram.com/themme_fatale/?hl=en). You can also catch Themme Fatale flying on the trapeze at Honcho Disko on the 3rd of April. And while you're at it, why not give me a follow too at [ginger\_nomad\_oz](https://www.instagram.com/ginger_nomad_oz/)?

I would like to say a very special thanks to all of my guests today, and to Betty Rosé, who supplied that Flawless mix at the start of the show. I want to give a shout-out to the Rainbow House Club for letting me record on premises and for introducing me to Muse and Malibu Stacey. And of course, last but not least, a very big thank-you to 3CR for this special day of programming. Radical radio, creating spaces for our voices. So get out there, support our venues, support our artists, and support our community radio stations. My name is Murray Codpiece, a.k.a. Megan Williams, and I have consulted with the judges, but the final decision is mine to make. Shantay, you all, stay tuned to this Binary Busting Broadcast.

*['Girls and Boys' by Blur begins to play]*

**Themme:** An idea that plagued me for a really long time was whether my feelings were enough to warrant looking at, or enough to justify, like – and I'm saying this with, like, little quotation marks around it – like, whether I "deserved" to, like, take up space with transness or queerness or any of those things. Like, if I was enough. And I think if you are somebody who is finding yourself asking those questions, like, that in itself is, like, one of the queerest things you can do, you know, is ask if you're queer enough or trans enough. Like, there is no such thing as 'enough', and also, yes, you are enough. Like, both things are true at once.

 Like, we get to speak the world that we want into existence in those moments as well, and I think that trans joy and queer joy are really powerful agents of revolution, as much as sharing our pain and sharing our trauma is as well. I think both need to and deserve to exist. I think we can't always dredge up our trauma for other people. I think we also get to show off our joy and our celebration and the wins in our lives as well. That's what I ultimately want more of.

**Muse:** There are no rules. There is no set way to do drag. Like, it's so hard to limit drag to just a specific set of rules. It literally exists as a rebellious element to culture itself.

**Stacey:** How far I could push that before it started being a complete parody of itself, where my hips are ridiculous in comparison to my tiny waist which I was corseting down, and then putting foam tits over my tits to really see if I could push that, and *at what point* was it ridiculous?