

Fashion is Such a Drag: Three RI drag queens discuss what drag fashion is and what it means to them

While it has gained some more notoriety in recent decades, the culture of drag is still a mystery to many. Despite what some might think, drag is far more than a man putting on a dress and makeup: There are many layers to each outfit, and each carries a different meaning.

I sat down with three RI drag queens: **Avery Goodlay**, **Claire Annette**, and **LaDiva Jonz**. Each of these queens brought a different perspective to what drag fashion is all about, and some of their answers were surprising.



Claire Annette

Who are some current fashion inspirations for you?

Claire: It's a combination of Squidward, Ms. Piggy, Fran Drescher's Nanny from the '90s sitcom and Patrick Nagel, who was a painter in the '80s. He painted the *Rio* album cover. I always love anything

that tells a story.

To be honest, I'm not a fashion guru, but I feel that I'm good at putting things together that look good and I know what I like. I stick to '80s - '90s era looks, and I try to stay consistent with my aesthetic and style, my outward vibes and appearance, whatever you'd call it. If you want to have a viable brand, you have to stick with something.

How do you decide what to wear for each event? What is your process?

Avery: I tend to grab inspiration from different things. Sometimes, I'll google runways for different designers and base it off of that. My outfits often consist of lots of recycled things that other people have used. That's really what drag is: pulling from things that already exist and making it your own. Rhinestones are a common feature in drag, especially when people perform at night, and I wear a lot of those.

What are some of your favorite drag events to take part in?

Claire: I would say drag shows! I love a good brunch, and on any Saturday there's always going to be shows going on- though if you wanted to go out every day, you could. Some weeks I'm out every single day. Being relatively new to the Providence drag scene, I've been fortunate to have a lot of bookings in town at various venues (Dark Lady, Alley Cat, The Stable, EGO, Mirabar). I think as far as the drag community goes in Providence, there is a strong sense of togetherness, and there is always a place to perform if you want to get involved.



Avery Goodlay

I've started to think about doing my own karaoke or trivia show within the next few months. I just beta-tested my first karaoke show where I would play my clarinet along to a backing track. There's a bar opening in Riverside called Union Bar, which is where I will be hosting trivia and karaoke. The goal is to get things up and running by September.

Where are your favorite places to shop for outfits?

Avery: If I'm not having something made for me, I'll try to find stuff that's really cheap and kind of pizzazz it a bit and make it more elevated. With rhinestones, I find \$6-10 ones on sites such as Shein, as well as different crystal things online. That way, it's not just a plain dress or swimsuit. At the end of the day, however, it depends on people's budgets. Drag is expensive.

What is the easiest part of assembling a drag outfit and what is the hardest?

LaDiva: What is the easiest? I think in general with women's clothing, there's a lot more freedom of expression than with men's clothing, so there are a lot more options than with men. If you're a man going to a formal event, you're going to wear a tuxedo or a suit. So picking the women's clothing is the easiest. But fit can definitely be challenging. You need to have a good seamstress in your back pocket because women are all shapes and sizes. Women are big where men are small and women are small where men are big. This is also where custom pieces come in handy.

Do you show your outfits to a small group before showing them to everyone?

Claire: I don't usually workshop my outfits with other people. I'm not the kind of person who's going to show their cards. It's going to be very strategic in all areas. If anyone's going to see my outfit, it's going to be my partner, who I live with, and my cats. My partner's very good about giving honest advice, and I usually trust them with the final word. People typically like what I wear; I usually get good feedback.



LaDiva Jonz

How would you say drag fashion has changed since you started taking part?

LaDiva: It's changed tremendously. Even when I started, it was in the process of changing tremendously. I've just seen an evolution over time. As I traveled through the South and the Southwest, pageantry was very big and influenced what people wore. It was never as big here, but it was still an influence. When I started, I had a group and we performed together. We wore club clothing, which was very new, though now I feel like it's more common. Pop culture informs people a lot more now as well, whereas back then, fashion was more informed by Hollywood. There is also a lot more freedom now; people can dress how they see themselves in their mind's eye.

For people who are trying to become drag queens or kings, what is your advice to them about how to get started?

Avery: Definitely save your money and experiment a lot. Don't spend a ton of money just because something looks grand. It doesn't always cost a lot of money to make something shine. Also, take the

time to figure out what you like. Try a lot of things while spending the least amount of money.

Claire: Know yourself. The best thing you can do is know who you are and what you want to communicate - not only to yourself but to those around you. No two people are the same, and it doesn't do any good to try to copy someone else. If you want to stand out, take some time to really understand the things that make you happy creatively, and maybe some things that you don't like either. The most fun I have watching someone is when they do something different. Knowing yourself is the best thing you can do. **LaDiva:** Just get out there and do it. Get out of your bedroom, get out of your basement, just get out and show the world who you are. You have to be bold. At the end of the day, drag is still very subversive, so you have to be creative. Not everyone does this. Drag is weird. We're men in dresses driving around town. On Sunday morning at 10 AM, there aren't a lot of people who are doing that (laughs). If you're just starting out, you have to find out what appeals to you. You have to let your own voice speak.