



EQUALITY SIGNS

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photo: Katarzyna Roniek

Drag as an art

Nobody needs convincing that flamenco isn't easy. It definitely takes more than five lessons to be able to go on stage and dance well enough to capture the hearts and souls of the audience. The phenomenon known as drag (which possibly comes from the phrase "dressed as a girl") is similar. Originally this word only referred to male performers who impersonated women. They wore gaudy dresses, monstrous wigs and garish, almost caricature makeup. However, not just any daredevil who dons high heels, a wig and a colourful shimmering dress can call himself a drag queen and keep a clear conscience. Like flamenco, drag is an art that requires hard work. For artists who do drag it's almost a philosophy of life.

The origin of the art form known as drag isn't entirely clear. Men who impersonated women were known in ancient times, as well in Shakespeare's theatre and Italian opera. In those days no one was surprised by male actors impersonating women. A change in how this was perceived occurred during the so-called progressive era in the United States (at the turn of the 20th century). During this period drag as an art form became associated for better or worse with the LGBT community, and this close relationship has survived to this day.

Interestingly, in Poland artistic performances which these days we would consider to be examples of drag first appeared during the inter-war period. In the 1937 film "A Storey Higher" Eugeniusz Bodo dressed up as Mae West and sang the song "Sex Appeal". The work that was begun before the war is continued by the artists of Poland's only permanent Drag Queen Revue, founded at the beginning of 2015 by Henryk Pasiut – a producer and the owner of the Entertainment Agency Faro. He describes his motivation for setting up the Revue as follows: – All over the world drag queen performances attract masses of people. Why shouldn't this be the case in Poland too? I became interested in the idea of a revue just to be different, so to speak. I wanted to show everyone that drag as an art has enormous stage potential. In drag queen clubs drag is normally a side dish that supplements the fun. I wanted to stage a full-scale show, with appropriate scenery, which wouldn't be just a side order, but the main course, served tastefully and exquisitely from an artistic point of view.

One of the stars of the Revue is Paweł Rupala, who has been associated with it since it was founded and performs under the stage name Papina McQueen.

// Mateusz Gędźba

Too young for Villas

"Performing makes us incredibly happy", says Paweł Rupala, known to theatre and television audiences as Papina McQueen.

Mateusz Gędźba from Signs of Equality Federation talks to drag queen Papina McQueen aka Paweł Rupala.

Where did Papina McQueen spend last New Year's Eve?

Papina McQueen spent that special New Year's Eve in Paris with Paweł Rupala. She was invited to France by the director of Paris's Théâtre Elisabeth Czerczuk, who had seen Papina performing before at the Theatre Barakah in Krakow. Performing on New Year's Eve, Poland's only Drag Queen Revue, which Papina belongs to, was in good company, because that night the legendary Moulin Rouge and Lido were also putting on shows. The revue's performance was the culmination of intensive

preparations, not infrequently in a hectic atmosphere. One of the many surprises of the evening came at the end of the first half when it turned out that the audience at the Paris theatre knew Maryla Rodowicz's song *Niech żyje bal* (*Long live the ball*) really well and joined in singing it with the performers. We finished the revue 20 minutes before midnight and it was followed by the next surprise of the evening. The French customarily wait calmly at their tables for the clocks to strike midnight, while the impetuous Polish artistes started their noisy countdown to midnight in the exuberant manner typical of Poland. At midnight Papina leapt on to the bar and, sometimes hitting the amused guests with a slipper, she danced and led the revelry until 4 am.

Let's leave travel aside and hear about how you started. How long have you been performing as Papina McQueen?

I've been dressing up for six years and professionally, in the sense that I earn money from it, for three years. The stage name Papina McQueen was my own idea. The surname McQueen is a sort of add-on that seems to me to figure in drag queens' stage names in practically every country. When I chose it, I had no idea that a fashion designer called Alexander McQueen even existed. Papina, on the other hand, is a name that I heard on the radio station. Papina's career started at actors' auditions

at the Theatre Zagłębia in Sosnowiec. When I got there, it turned out that I was up against performers who already had diverse acting experiences behind them (they had worked, for example, with the film director Wojciech Smarzowski and the actress Krystyna Janda). Despite this, the producer Jacek Bunsch offered me the part of a drag queen in one of his shows. I agreed, even though at that time I didn't really know what a drag queen was.

It wasn't until I started working on the show that I understood how much effort an actor must put in. At the same time, I began to delve into the subject of drag. I watched *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *The Birdcage* for the first time. I started to read books about it. The next step was when I went to a Halloween party in Katowice in drag. There I met some other drag queens, who invited me to a festival in Warsaw. I went, and out of 24 contestants I came third.

This was my first ever experience of lip-sync. After my success at the festival I started to send photos and recordings of myself to various entertainment advertising agencies – Papina likes showing off (laughter). The only one that got back to me was Henryk Pasiut's Entertainment Agency Faro. Years later (we're on friendly terms now) he told me that the recording of me that he watched was extremely amateurish and naive, but in all this he could see sincerity and determination, and that's exactly why he decided to start working with me. We started with monologues and invented a character *Air Hostess en Passant*, inspired by Pam Ann. She was subsequently well received at the Revue. ▶

Let’s meet en route to equality

Dorota Stobiecka – the vice president of the association My Rodzice – talks about the organisation created by parents who have experienced the coming out of their children or other members of their family and friends.

As an institution we appeared on the equality map of Poland only very recently. The association of mothers, fathers and allies of LGBT+ people has joined an already large group of societies, foundations and individuals for whomequality and the battlewithdiscrimination and exclusion are priorities. The organisation My, Rodzice emerged from the ranks of the graduates of the *Akademia Zaangażowanego Rodzica* (the Academy for Socially Involved Parents), which is affiliated to the Campaign Against Homophobia and currently operates independently. We attempt to carry the torch for education and provide support for the people we meet on the way. We offer our help and expertise to determined mothers and fathers. To mothers and fathers whose cultural models are collapsing as a result their non-heteronormative children coming out. To their allies and closest family, the broader

circle of their friends and relations. We all know plenty of people. Among them there are those who show their homophobia through irony, gossip and displays of aggression. Must we be helpless in the face of them? We don't think so. In our own lives we have lots of experiences. These experiences teach us to be humble, but strength grows out of them, as well as opposition to inequality. When their children come out, parents are left in a "grey" zone where this situation in the family is hushed up. The most logical arguments and the latest research won't help and won't break down the walls when they are experiencing shame and the need for the children to be accepted as heteronormative. For the older generation it is often we, the parents, who are the only bridge between mature relatives and our children. Often the responsibility for family ties falls to us alone.



We try to maintain them regardless, despite the lack of understanding, despite the stereotypes. Maintaining family ties is a challenge – that's why we take it on. It's certainly easier to have an aunt who tends towards a rather wild lifestyle or an uncle who's a slacker than a sister who's a lesbian. But easier doesn't mean smarter, it doesn't mean better for non-heteronormative people. The parents' association aims to support the activity of various non-predefined groups, milieux and communities that want to open

themselves up to diversity, for whom human rights are important. We, the parents, should be and frequently are their natural allies. Yet in order to become an ally within your family or among your friends you only have to want to understand, you only have to avoid talking behind closed doors, to avoid making sexual identity and psychosexual orientation a taboo topic. It seems that we are capable of being different in a positive way. Let's prove we're right and meet en route to equality. In Poland more and more NGOs are being

founded, thanks to which people are talking about the rights of minorities and excluded groups, including LGBT+ people. We have joined the community of associations and foundations that fight for equal rights because we want to stand up for the rights of our children. Together with them we are joining social campaigns and other initiatives to help the inclusion process become ever broader. We are convinced that our families' stories, the stories of how we overcome our own and social barriers, may be the greatest force we have. We're ready to talk to you, to meet and support you. We've been operating as an informal group for many years and have achieved a lot. You can find information about our work so far on our association's website in the section <http://myrodzice.org/archiwum/> (in Polish). We are not the first organisation of this kind. Those that came before us were more courageous, but we will definitely try to remain active in seeking the path to full equality. We hope that we will be an important landmark on the equality map of Poland.

My, Rodzice on Facebook: [@myrodzicesobLGBTQIA](#)

Too young for Villas

Continuation of the interview with Papina McQueen

Tell us some of the secrets of your craft. Do you design and make your own clothes?

To start with I bought ready-made dresses in chain stores. I tried them on at home with the curtains drawn. The second stage was creating a character. The costume I used couldn't be a normal dress from a shop. It had to be a stage costume, a little extravagant, a little over-the-top. Then came my first attempts at doing alterations and adding things with hot glue. I've had my own drag studio and clothing expert for four years. It was similar with my makeup. First it was Indian war paint, then there was a stage when I was experimenting all the time, sometimes also aided by YouTube. It was only after a while that I got a specialist makeup artist to help me who showed me how to do my own makeup, and today you can see the effects. The fact is I look fabulous!

That sounds very time-consuming. How long does it take you to prepare for a performance?

My makeup takes the longest. The "I'm just popping out to the shop" version takes around two hours, while makeup "fit for the stage" takes at least two-and-a-half to three hours. It must be possible to change costumes during a performance in two minutes, and at certain points during a show in just a few seconds. Sometimes preparing for a performance which will last ten minutes takes as long as three hours. To that you have to add the final rehearsal before the show. To sum up, we start getting ready for a show that normally starts at 7 pm six hours before.

What do you enjoy most? Getting ready for a performance or the performance itself?

The whole process of preparation for a show is fantastic. You start by looking for inspiration in books, films and music. Next you have to have conversations with people and create your character. Then it's time to choose your costume and the right makeup. Additionally, you also have to get over your limitations to a certain extent. For example, you don't know how to do the splits and spend three months practising, you stretch as far as you can and, in the end, you manage to do it. The premiere finishes this process, it's successful (so far, we have always succeeded) there's applause and we even get standing ovations. However, I prefer the "cooking", the preparations for the show, it's the most creative time.

Is being a drag queen more an individual or a team game?

In the theatre there is never any such thing as an individual game, unless you're doing a one-man-show. People judge the performance as a whole, all the performers who take part are a team, aiming for the same goalsposts. When we're preparing for a show we watch each other, paying attention to who did what, and how. However, there is also more individual work

that goes into the preparations.

In drag queen performances the audience is key. How would you describe your relationship with it?

I must admit that I used to be really scared of people. The thing about stand-up is you never know how people in the audience will respond to you. During one show I asked a man in the audience "What would you like to drink?" He answered that he'd like a coffee. I responded by saying there's a bar over there, you can use it. This guy went up to the bar, ordered two coffees and came back with them. It ended up with us drinking coffee together on the stage. I actually suss out the audience within the first fifteen seconds or so. People's reactions show you exactly how far you can go. If you want to be on the stage, then your head must be screwed on and you must know in your heart why you're on the stage and what you're performing for. Sometimes you have to fight with the audience for applause, it isn't always obvious. As far as drag queen performances themselves are concerned, I should say that everything depends on where you're performing. In LGBT clubs you're more a side-order to the revelry, while in straight clubs you're a curiosity to some extent. It's interesting how much a straight audience opens up to drag. For example, you can see drag queen performances in disco polo clubs. At the Revue we play to audiences who have chosen this form of entertainment above all others for the evening, who have made the effort to leave their homes and have bought a ticket. You can't put a price on that, performing for them makes us incredibly happy.

Which music star features most often in your repertoire?

I like old-time performers like Tina Turner and Maryla Rodowicz. The songs I use are fast-paced, I prefer not to use lyric songs, I think I'm too young for them. When I'm 60 and have put on a bit of weight, I'll certainly be happy to sing Violetta Villas. But now I prefer quick, energetic songs, more suited to clubs.

What's the greater source of inspiration for you, Priscilla, Queen of the Desert or Ru Paul Drag Race?

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert is almost a sort of Bible for us. In this film, despite the fact that the main characters argue and clash with each other, they still go on an incredible and beautiful journey together. The teamwork shown in the film is sensational. As far as *Ru Paul Drag Race* is concerned, it's the first series that I find interesting. I have the impression that the subsequent series were more a money-making machine, but for this money, and mainly because of its artistry, I'd love to perform in it, it's the best drag show in the world.

Undetectable



Mr Bears Poland in U=U campaign, i.e. Undetectable = Untransmittable

Tomek Siara, Mr Bear Poland 2019, an LGBT+ activist and member of the Bears of Poland Association, is responsible for the grassroots HIV/AIDS social campaign "Undetectable" – he is its founder and its main face. Their work supports the struggle with the stigma attached to people living with HIV/AIDS and also sends out a positive message to everyone, whether HIV+ or HIV-. The main message of "Undetectable" is based on the results of the long-term research programme PARTNER2 published in 2018 which shows beyond any doubt that it is not possible for a healthy person to become infected from an HIV positive partner if he is undergoing regular ARV therapy and if the presence of HIV in the blood remains on an undetectable level. When he was in the process of coming out as a person living with HIV Tomek said: *I've been HIV positive for 16 years, and for 15 years my HIV has been undetectable. I'm enormously lucky that living with HIV has not prevented me from having a fulfilled personal life... I spent five years in a relationship with*

a healthy partner. I'm living proof that the results of PARTNER2 are accurate. The basic aims of the "Undetectable" initiative include educating people on the basis of current medical knowledge concerning HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Key people involved in the campaign include Jacek Gąsiorowski, M.D., Ph.D., Bartosz Szetela, M.D., Ph.D., from the Wrocław association Podwale Siedem (Ramparts Seven), Michał Pawłęga from the Warsaw AIDS Social Committee and dr Wiktor Łukasik. The work of the association is carried out through many channels, for example online, through social media and in the form of "POSITIVE CONVERSATIONS" – meetings held throughout Poland at which you can learn more about HIV/AIDS and meet activists and doctors involved in the campaign. Please support "Undetectable" and get involved actively in our events that will be taking place over the next few months.

Information about the campaign and useful dates: nowykrwalni.pl
Facebook: [@niewykrywalni](#)

Free and anonymous HIV tests
Department of Microbiology at the University Hospital, ul. Kopernika 19 (2nd floor)

The Krakow Association for HIV/AIDS Prevention and Support "One World" runs Consultation and Diagnosis Drop-in Clinics, which offer anonymous and free HIV tests. Testing is possible on Tuesdays and Thursdays (from 4pm to 7pm), and the results are issued on Wednesdays and Fridays from 4pm to 5pm.

TĘCZÓWKA

The Tęczówka Community Centre, based at 3 Morcinka Str. in Katowice, would like to invite you to their meetings.

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GRUPA SPOTKANIOWA
1. Do you like playing board games and watching films in a safe environment? Do you want to get to know interesting people and simply sit and chat? Join the Tęczówka Association **LGBT+ social group!** We meet regularly once a fortnight on Fridays.

Interested? Do you want to know more and sign up for a meeting? Write to us at lgbtgrupa@teczowka.org.pl and keep up to date!
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BABIE KATO
2. **Babie Kato** is a place for girls and les+ women where we can get to know each other, integrate and exchange experiences. Future events include

panel discussions, film evenings, parties, integration outings, sports matches and many others. Come and convince yourself that it's worthwhile!

Interested? Do you want to know more and sign up for a meeting? Write to us at babiekato@teczowka.org.pl and keep up to date!

3. **"Tęczówkowe RPG"** is a group that brings together people who like roleplay games and enjoy each other's company in a fantasy environment. There are places for a maximum of six people + one leader, who leads the gameplay with elements of Forgotten Realms.

Interested? Do you want to know more and sign up for a meeting? Write to us at agnieszka@teczowka.org.pl and keep up to date!

Tęczówka on Facebook: [@stowarzyszenie.teczowska](#)

Events within our organisations

FAITH AND THE RAINBOW WIARA I TĘCZA

The Krakow LGBT+ Christian group would love to see you at their **open meetings**. The next two will be held on March 28th and April 16th at the headquarters of the Polistrefa Foundation (3 Zakątek Str., Kraków) at 6 pm. Additionally, to mark International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, Faith and the Rainbow Foundation would like to invite you to a meeting for people of goodwill who are opposed to discrimination against LGBT+ people. The meeting will be held on May 11th at Club Re (4 św. Krzyża Str., Kraków), 7 pm.

Those wishing to take part in **Lenten retreat** (April 5th-7th) should contact us by email: warszawa@wiaraiteczka.pl

BEARS OF POLAND

Once a month, the Bears of Poland association organises **a social gathering for bears and their supporters** over beer and board games. You can find detailed information on our Facebook, Instagram and Twitter [@BearsOfPoland](#). When will you next have the chance to *bear* each other's company?

Wrocław – every first Saturday of the month.
Kraków – every second Saturday of the month.
Poznań – every second Saturday of the month.
Tricity – every third Saturday of the month.
Chorzów – every last Saturday of the month.

Additionally, on every last Wednesday of the month the association organises **Karaoke for Bears** (Lindo Bar, 23 Sławkowska Str., Kraków). Great fun, professionally organised, guaranteed!

You have time until the end of May 2019 to sign up for the Bears of Poland's biggest integration event: **XI Bear & V Fetish Camp**. The association provides 208 places in huts with a bathroom and fridge. The price includes breakfast and a late-afternoon meal. Like every year there will be a wide range of attractions. You can sign up and find all the additional information you need on our website: <https://bearsofpoland.pl/skowronki-2019/>

The event will take place June 20th-23rd 2019 in Kąty Rybackie.

KRAKOFONIA

The Krakow LGBT+ choir Krakofonia would like to invite you to a concert given by the choir Die Mainsirenen.

Syrens of the Vistula // choral concert
Dom Kultury Kolejarza
6 św. Filipa Str., Kraków
May 18th 2019, 7 pm

Die Mainsirenen, or Sirens of the Main, is a gay choir from Frankfurt am Main, founded in 1987. Two years ago Krakofonia had the honour of performing in Frankfurt at their 30th anniversary concert. This year we are returning their hospitality and are inviting our Frankfurt friends to Krakow. Die Mainsirenen will perform a programme of choral pieces arranged and choreographed by themselves which are guaranteed to impress and entertain you, even if don't know German!

Krakofonia is one of two LGBT+ choirs in Poland, which are constantly increasing their membership and repertoire. This autumn we will be proudly celebrating our fifth anniversary.

Admission is free, but we would be grateful for voluntary donations (suggested donation: PLN 10).

Krakofonia on Facebook: [@LGBTQkrakofonia](#)