

Viva la Diva

Text and Photos by
Belle Frejillana Ramirez, Carmina Tang and Nicole Pun

It is 9 p.m. on a Friday night. Volume Bar in Central is unusually empty aside from the bartenders and a crew setting up a small stage. *Varsity* searches the place for drag queen La Chiquitta. We expect her to be dressed in a sequined gown, killer high heels and massive wig.

"Hello, I am La Chiquitta," says a medium-height man, extending his right hand for a firm handshake. He is wearing faded jeans, red T-shirt, flip-flops and a baseball cap. Can this average-looking man be a drag artist?

Yes, after two hours, she is in drag, a man dressed as a woman, with sequined gown, killer high heels and massive wig. La Chiquitta stands on the bar's small stage,

hosting the final in a series of drag queen competitions, aptly named Drag-It-On, Drag Queens in the Making. The three drag finalists, Joanna Inerva, Lady Kinky and Gigi Reyes, take turns flaunting their diva-like talents. Dozens of men and women cheer the ladies' barnstorming performances, holding cameras tight and ready to press the shutters.

"After we announce the winner tonight, we can only hope that the crowd will have more respect for drag queens," the feminine La Chiquitta says, addressing the eager crowd. "There's a lot of work that goes into appearing before you. It's not just about donning a wig and putting on lashes. It is transforming the whole being."

La Chiquitta drinks red wine with a straw to save her lipstick.





“

It's not just about donning a wig and putting on lashes. It is transforming the whole being.

”





Coco Pop, one of the judges, later adds: "A drag queen is a normal guy with a diva attitude. It is not just about having beautiful clothes or make-up, it is all about attitude." And this attitude, she says, is not about being all "cute and lovely", but exuding a "strong and fearless attitude which forces you to listen to whatever I say".

She has been a part-time local drag queen for eight years and has witnessed changes in the industry. She says around 2000 was the time drag flourished in Hong Kong, with some 10 to 12 foreign and local drag queens. Due to the small market for drag in Hong Kong, only a few stayed.



Coco Pop admits that although being a drag artist is fun, it is rather time-consuming. It takes her a month of practising dance steps, making wigs, designing costumes and deciding on the make-up to prepare for a five-to 10-minute performance. But she still makes the effort because she enjoys it and she gets satisfaction from looking beautiful and hearing the audiences' applause. She also uses the performances to convey ideas, such as animal protection and anti-war messages.



““

Emotionally, removing make-up is the most difficult part for me because it is when the glamour ends... It is like dragging a kid out of Disneyland.

””

La Chiquitta and four other drag divas dress up for their show at Rockscool in Wan Chai.

La Chiquitta, the host *Varsity* met before the show, says the first thing she considers prior to a performance is the wig because it dictates her whole look. “The bigger the wig, the simpler my make-up is. The flatter the wig is, the more elaborate my make-up becomes,” she says in a soft voice.

Although she has been a drag artist for four years, it was only last year that she gave it more serious thought. “Back then, it was just out of pure fun because sometimes it is nice to dress up as a girl. But since last year, my main motivation was to pursue the craft itself.”

She has personally set her mission to break stereotypes. “I want to break that wall between drag queens and normal human beings. Not that I am abnormal. But we won’t be able to earn respect if

people are not able to reach out to others. And we need this in Hong Kong.”

She adds that drag queens are not alcoholics or drug-users who have nothing better to do than put on make-up. It is a craft, although the straight crowd only treats them as a novelty.

La Chiquitta says drag queens should first win understanding from the gay crowd as it is harder for them to get acceptance from the straight crowd. However, many in the local gay community are not ready to come out yet.

After some small talk, holding a glass of red wine and daintily sitting on the stairs outside Volume Bar, she says: “Emotionally, removing make-up is the most difficult part for me because it is when the glamour ends. It is like dragging a kid out of Disneyland.”





“

I want to break that wall between drag queens and normal human beings.

”