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Storytelling in Seattle U Drag Show Adds Personal Touch to Performances

Nicole Khudyakov , Staff Reporter

Seattle University's drag show aims to bring together the best of what the queer community has to offer. This year's event brings together glamorous makeup looks and exciting dance moves to celebrate Seattle U's 15th annual showcase after a year-long COVID-19 induced hiatus. The show included six performances with one student participant and five local drag artists, many of whom were also Seattle U alumni.

Seattle U graduate student John Luke Hawkins, also known by the stage name Bilella Fierce, was at the forefront of this year's show. They worked behind the scenes as the host and the drag show's coordinator.

"The process has definitely been a lot of hours, a lot of time, a lot of passion into making this all happen, but it's worth it," Hawkins said.

Hawkins' determination to hold a drag show this year inspired them to reach out to the show's usual hosts, the Triangle Club, at the beginning of the quarter. After an overhaul in the Triangle Club's leadership following a brief intermission, newly minted club president Tatiana Tomanek, a third-year math major, agreed to the opportunity. She was excited to collaborate with Hawkins and bring back their keystone event.

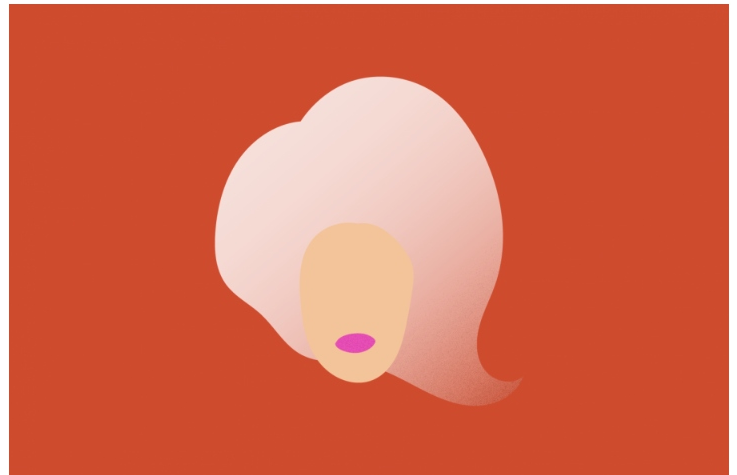
Part of the Triangle Club's duties included finding an organization to which the proceeds could be donated. That's when Tomanek learned about the Lavender Rights Project, a local Washington-based group that provides LGBTQ+ people with legal assistance.

"I thought, especially now more than ever, it'd be great to just give back to a such a large part of our community that I feel isn't getting the love and respect that they deserve," Tomanek said.

Second-year physics major Sarah Torset also got involved in the whirlwind of drag show planning. Her position as the social media advisor meant that Torset played a large role in advertising the event via daily posts on the Triangle Club's social media. Her strategy to spread the word and drum up excitement involved emphasizing the local artists who were performing.

"I know a lot of people get tired of going to Zoom events, but I think the more you make it accessible and exciting [the more] it really helps," Torset said.

The rapid pacing and planning involved eventually lead Tomanek and Hawkins to settle on 'Storytelling' as their theme of the year. Both had considered this idea individually, and the creativity that this theme promised cemented their decision.



Andrew Mori

“It really gives the opportunity for individuals that are performing to tell a story through their art form,” Hawkins said. “We thought, with everything going on, it could be a really good opportunity for people to use the platform to share a story or share a narrative that they’re wanting to express.”

The idea of a storytelling theme stuck out to Tomanek because she wanted to give the performers a chance to express themselves in an authentic way that reflected the premise behind the show.

“[These are] completely different people coming together and just realizing we’ve gone through a lot, and a lot of people need to get their stories out there and just let it be known,” Tomanek said.

The theme strung together a variety of interpretations from the performers, each of whom put their best foot forward. Hawkins interviewed each drag queen after their performance to discover what story they were telling through their work.

These varied immensely. For example, the drag duo Life with Luchi put together a Chloe x Halle cover, which was first performed during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests last summer. They also put on a live performance that served as a tribute to victims of police brutality. The first performer of the evening, Issa Man, chose to show a video of a pre-COVID-19 routine, which served as an homage to the most important women in her life: her mother and grandmother.

The show ended with a rousing round of trivia, hosted by Hawkins. Here, audience involvement was crucial and participants really got to shine by demonstrating their drag knowledge. The drag show didn’t let computer screens and miles of distance limit the impact of the high-energy atmosphere or personalized narrative woven together by each drag queen.