

# RUPAUL IS ONE 'FOXY LADY'

## THE DIVA SPEAKS IT OUT

by Janice Layne

Supermodel of the World RuPaul is coming to Chicago, with a show Nov. 23 at Fusion, formerly Vortex, 3631 N. Halsted, (773) 975-6622. A portion of the proceeds from the show will benefit the Stephen Brahill Foundation.

Given his very tight schedule these days, RuPaul couldn't sit down for a phone interview—but he did answer our questions by fax.

**BLACKLINES:** What kept you performing through the early years?

Destiny.

**BLACKLINES:** Being able to move between cultures, classes and countries, what are some of the things that resonate loudest to you? What do you keep noticing—what keeps coming back to you?

What keeps coming back to me is that we are all the same. That we all have the same wants and needs and fears. I may be a Black queen but I'm just like you or your next door neighbor.

**BLACKLINES:** The gift that you have of being able to move between impersonating a woman and being a man—What words of wisdom could you share, particularly, with the Black man in his understanding of self and the embracing of the feminine (be it his feminine self, women in his life, the nurturing of himself or his "brother")?

Well, that's a biggie. First of all, I do not impersonate women. How many women do you know march around in 7" heels, 3-foot wigs and skin-tight outfits? Women don't wear that, *drag queens* wear that! The public persona of RuPaul is just a fabulous, eye-popping celebrity package designed to work well in front

of the camera. Having said that, I have always been in touch with my feminine side, and I think it's important not just for Black men but for all men to get in touch with their

am no politician. My package is the extent of my politics. My basic philosophy is to do whatever you want to do as long as you don't hurt nobody.

RuPaul



feminine side. We all have a bit of both and the more we understand and explore that, the better we are to ourselves AND to one another.

**BLACKLINES:** Are you following the political issues impacting the transgendered community. If so, what are your opinions about the transgendered movement, its goals, etc., and do you consider yourself part of that movement?

I gotta tell you like TIS—I

**BLACKLINES:** So often, men who crossdress as women, or who are going through "the change," are more victimized than others in the lesbigay/trans community (being killed, losing jobs, being refused healthcare, being kicked out of the home). What do you think can be done to help out this most vulnerable part of the community?

Most of us know what it's like to be a member of a

minority group. It's important for those who know what it's like to help protect others and to be champions of tolerance.

**BLACKLINES:** What direction should Black gays and lesbians be taking—working within the white gay community for change, or working within the straight Black community for change? Or both?

Everybody should be working together.

**BLACKLINES:** What are your goals for the VH1 show?

Have a good time, turn out some fierce TV, and have Dolly Parton on as a guest!

**BLACKLINES:** What is the bravest thing you've ever done?

This interview!

**BLACKLINES:** What or whom do you think of when you need courage?

Probably my mom. She was the first and fiercest drag queen I ever knew.

**BLACKLINES:** What is the prayer that you meditate on most?

Dear God.

**BLACKLINES:** What do you see yourself doing in four years: writing, consulting, performing, directing, etc ...

The same thing I'm doing now, just more of it. I really want to produce more music. My new album, *Foxy Lady*, was really a labor of love and I really rolled up my sleeves and got involved in every aspect of the production and songwriting. You can really hear me in that album and I would like to be doing more of that!

**BLACKLINES:** One hundred years have past. Two people are having a conversation, remembering RuPaul—what are they saying?

Queen No. 1: Girl, she was one Foxy Lady.

Queen No. 2: Uh huh, you got that right, she was totally snatched for the gods.

**BLACKLINES:** Thanks very much—and Chicagoans are looking forward to your show.



# ONE STEP BEYOND

## Transitioning by Lynnell S. Long

When I first heard the term "transitioning," I found that although I disagree with a lot of terminology that's used in the transgendered community, that term best describes the journey I went through just to be where I am now.

When I was born, the doctors slapped my buttocks and said "it's a boy." I'm sure at that time they had no idea they made a mistake. It wasn't until my mother noticed I wasn't as tall as the other kids that she decided to take me to the University of Chicago for tests. It was there I saw my first endocrinologist.

After years of blood tests, brain scans, x-rays, etc., my doctor diagnosed me with several "hypo's": hypothyroidism, hypoadrenalism, and hypogonadism. I found out after several years of hospitalizations that I was born hormonally intersexual. Meaning that although I was born with the genitals of a boy, hormonally I was a girl.

When I was 14, my beloved doctors thought I would be hap-



pier if they injected me with testosterone. They said I could never be a man if I didn't take the testosterone, because my body didn't produce it. I knew I was a girl, and having to be fed testosterone just proved my point. I think I was about 16 when I discontinued the testosterone, against the orders of my doctors. I started to use drugs to help me forget that I am a woman, and to live with the facade of being a man. I used drugs from the age of 17 to 29. It wasn't until February of 1993 that I signed myself into rehab.

Through the grace of goddess I've been drug free and sober ever since. Although 18 years of my life is a blur, I know that it was 18 years of me trying to live as a man and being very unsuccessful. It was like wearing a permanent mask. A mask that served its purpose by preserving

the woman in me until it was her time. I can't say for sure what day it was when I stopped pretending to be a guy and finally accepted myself as the woman I am, but I can say it wouldn't have happened if I was still using drugs and alcohol.

I do remember the first time Lynnell emerged—it was Halloween of 1994. I was dressed as Oprah and although most of my friends thought dressing as a woman was only a costume, my best friend Matthew knew it was the birth of Lynnell. It wasn't easy transitioning from 29 years of me pretending to be a guy to living as a woman. I was programmed from an early age to never accept being a woman. I still hear the voices of the doctors and my mother telling me that I am not a woman, telling me that I was just born different. I had to learn to accept that I am a woman, and to accept that some of my friends and family may never accept me as Lynnell.

Starting the female hormones was next. Since my body doesn't produce testosterone, when I started taking female hormones my endocrinologist told me that I would have rapid breast growth. I can proudly say he was right. Even after I started

my transitioning process, the person that was most critical was me. I had to learn to forgive myself for the mistakes I made, and realize that I had to go through everything I did to be where I am now. There are still times when I let fear of the future prevent me from living in today. When that happens I look in the mirror and remind myself of how far I've come. The Vaginoplasty, commonly known as the sex re-assignment surgery, costs almost \$10,000, and most insurance companies don't cover it. It will probably be much longer than I anticipated before I can afford the surgery, or before my insurance company, after numerous appeals, decides to pay for it.

As I look back over my life and the struggles I went through to be where I am today, I wouldn't change anything even if I could. All of this adds up to be an experience to write about. I hope I was helpful in helping someone find the courage to come out, and helping someone find acceptance.

Lynnell S. Long is a Chicago writer and activist on transgendered issues. Send e-mail messages: [redacted] and we'll forward them, or write [redacted]

## Sasha from 18

woman until I got my breast implants. I'm sure it was a shock to her; one day I'm her son and the next time she saw me I had breasts. My mother still doesn't agree with my lifestyle, but she accepts it because she loves me. Although my brother and sister occasionally call me by my boy name, I know they accept me as I am. Recently I met my brother's girlfriend, I was dressed very sexy. He introduced me to her as his brother—I wasn't upset or anything because I knew he wasn't ashamed of me and he left it up to his girlfriend to figure it out.

"Being a transsexual at first was very difficult. I lost a lot of friends that couldn't accept it. Today I don't call just anyone a friend, they have to deserve it. In fact, a lot of people get upset because when I thank people I

only mention a few names, they come to me later and ask why I didn't mention them. The ones I thank are the ones that have been there for me and I know are my friends. My friends respect and love me," she said.

"In the beginning there were many people that inspired me to become a female impersonator, the ones that I most remember are Cassey and Coco Chanel," said Sasha, who added that modeling in High School helped her career as a female impersonator. "Modeling gave me an edge because a lot of what I use to compete in competitions, I learned from modeling. When you're competing a lot of the categories requires modeling."

After winning her first contest, Sasha started doing shows and working at the Baton, where she remained for nine months. After leaving the Baton, Sasha started travelling around the world to

enter contests, and she started to win. She won these contests:

- 1993: Miss C.K.'s  
Miss Continental,  
3rd runner-up
  - 1994: Miss Midwest
  - 1995: Miss Chicago  
Miss Miami Florida  
Miss So. Carolina Universe  
Miss Envogue Continental
  - 1996: Miss Black Universe
- "Winning the crown for Miss Black Universe was special for me because they are dedicated to promoting excellence among African-American Female Impersonators," Sasha said.
- "I love to compete, I love the different categories. In 1995 I won the Best Talent category in Miss Continental, and since then a lot of girls asked me to help them with their talent. I think my purpose on earth is to use my experience to help others. I have what I call 'my children' that use the name Valentino, but because I

offer to help someone that doesn't mean that I am going to adopt them and for them to change their names. I try to show others the Do's and Don't's that I learned from competing around the world."

Sasha said one of her goals in life is to write: "I want to write a book, not an autobiography but a book that has the format of the movie *Waiting to Exhale*. In my book it would be about my life as a transsexual and female impersonator, but with different characters. I also want to make a positive movie about transsexuals. Some people think that transsexuals are sub-human and try to treat us as such. I am human—if you cut me I bleed, if you hurt me I cry. I am loved and I fall in love. I don't expect anyone to give me anything—I worked hard to build the name Sasha Valentino, and I worked hard for every crown I won."



# BLACK

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## RuPaul Goes to Town

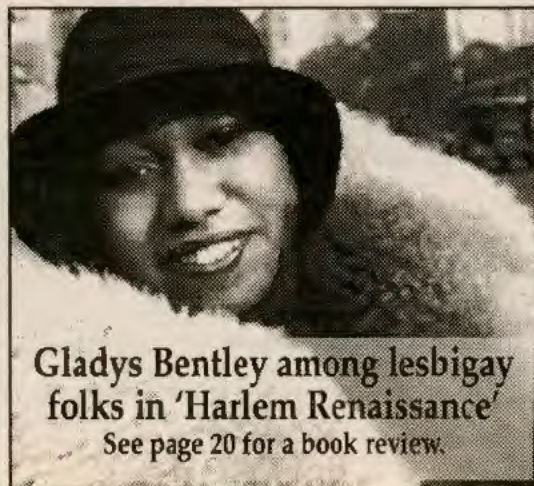
On TV ... On CD ...  
Modeling Cosmetics ...  
She *really* works it.

*Supermodel of the World*  
RuPaul Brings His/Her  
Stuff to Chicago for a  
Show at Fusion Nov. 23.

See page 29 for a  
Special BLACKLINES  
Q&A with RuPaul.



New book profiles gay  
choreographer Alvin Ailey  
(here with Lena Horne). See page 20.



Gladys Bentley among lesbigay  
folks in 'Harlem Renaissance'  
See page 20 for a book review.

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See page 12.

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