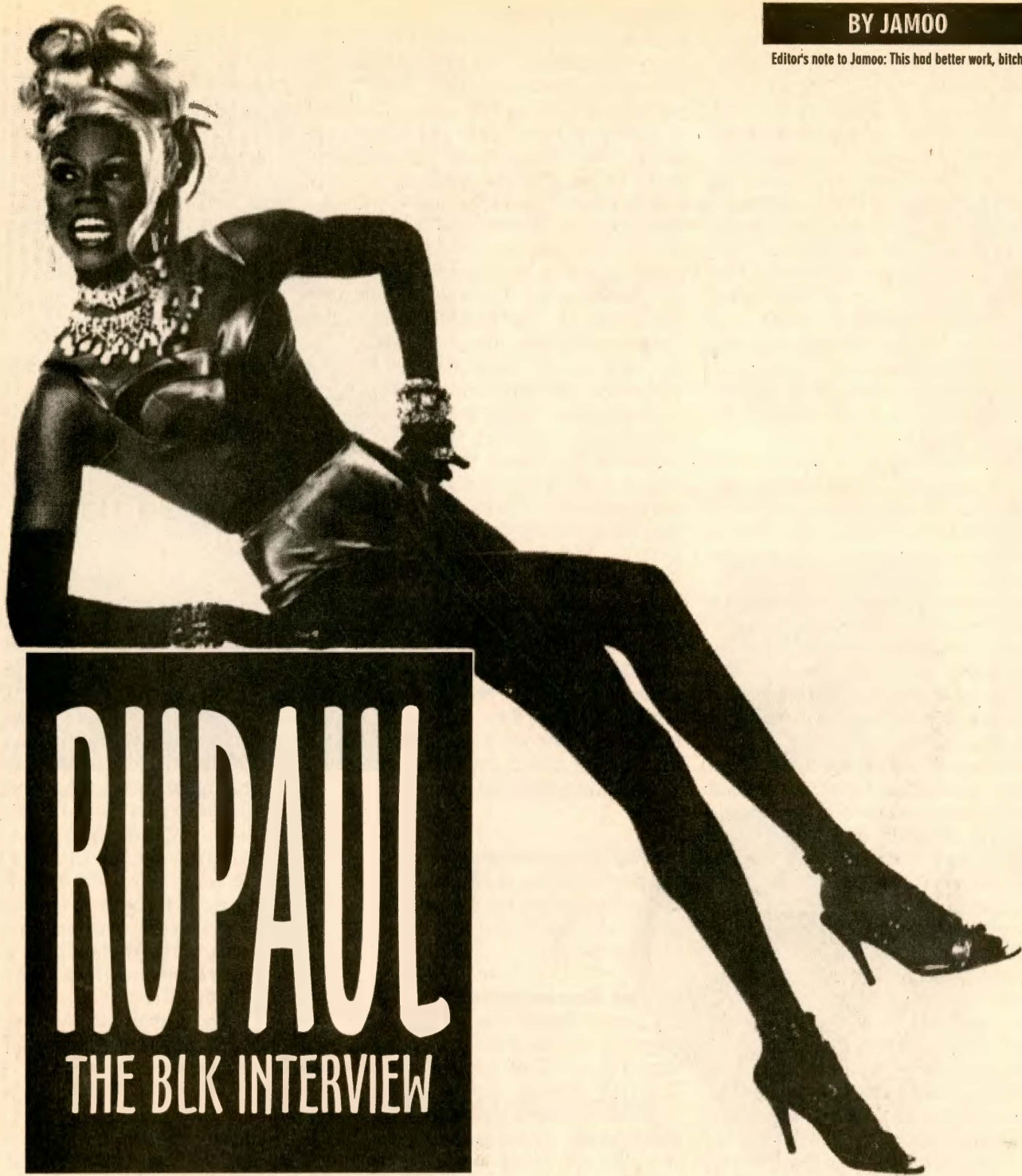


BY JAMOO

Editor's note to Jamoo: This had better work, bitch!



RUPAUL

THE BLK INTERVIEW

A little over a year ago, a six-foot five black, blonde drag goddess blasted onto the *Billboard* dance chart atop a hit homage to the glamorous girls on the runway. With "Supermodel" as his ticket, RuPaul has travelled through a score of mainstream publications like *The New York Times*,

Vanity Fair, *Esquire*, *Newsweek* and *The New Yorker*. On television, he has taken rides on BET, MTV, CNN, CBS, *Joan*, *Geraldo*, *Arsenio* and is the subject of an upcoming profile on *NBC Now* with Tom Brokaw. As a result of shrewd marketing tactics employed by his management and record company, RuPaul has become drag's fierce reigning diva. With the rise of RuPaul, packaging a

product and selling it to middle America has taken on a whole new meaning.

RuPaul Andre Charles wasn't always 6'5", nor has he always been in a dress. Born and raised in San Diego, the only boy with three sisters, RuPaul at the age of five found himself in his mother's bedroom trying on an outfit and singing along with Diana Ross on the radio.

"I especially loved Diana Ross," recalls RuPaul, "she's the epitome of the poor black girl who finally makes it."

At age 15, RuPaul's mother packed him up along with his sister Renetta, and headed for Atlanta, the Drag Capitol of the USA. Atlanta for RuPaul was doing hair in the beauty shop by day, and drag in the bars at night. In the city that has always been rightfully proud to claim him as one of their own, RuPaul developed the first in a series of personas for the stage. His first look, underground characters he created would now be considered "grunge," a far extreme of the big hair look he now sports.

Out of sequins, RuPaul is still gargantuan, but somewhat shy and nervous, surprisingly unsure of himself. He is a well-built man and rather goodlooking with his freckles, child-like smile and what down south they call "good color." With a jaunty cap covering his shaved head (to accommodate the big hair), he is able to slip out for a few precious moments of simple peace. Outside of his persona, RuPaul can go anywhere, do anything.

Inevitably it's time to start the three-hour ritual to become RuPaul the Supermodel, with trusted stylists Mathu Andersen and Zaldy assisting in the process. There's a spiritual transformation that comes over RuPaul with the wigs, heels and sequins. An assuredness comes over her, she is calm, in control and emanates cool. There's something about having your chin six feet off the ground that seems to bolster self-esteem. When she glides onto the stage in her confident way, the children recognize the shaman-like connection. It's like she becomes a fairy godmother for the 90s.

Life may not have always been good to our Miss Ru, but he's smelling the roses now. In an odd twist of life imitating art, the magazine covers in the "Supermodel" video that show RuPaul's rise to fame have now been surpassed by the very real media (including this magazine) that clamor for him. RuPaul set out to prove that even a drag queen can conquer America if she gives 200 percent and it worked.

After circling the country working virtually every gay club in

America, the first wave of the promotional assault propelled RuPaul onto the cutting edge of popular American culture and the waves just keep on rolling. With *Supermodel of the World*, he's racked up three consecutive number one *Billboard* dance singles and won two *Billboard* Music Video Awards for both best new and best dance artist. There's the hot new duet with Elton John covering John's pop classic "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," and his inclusion on the *Addams Family Values* soundtrack album covering the soul classic "What You See Is What You Get." He's also tackling the big screen with a featured role in Spike Lee's upcoming *Crooklyn*.

Not to be missed this holiday season is *The RuPaul Christmas Special* with guests Elton John, Eartha Kitt, Boy George, Naomi Campbell and LaToya Jackson. Produced by Britain's Channel 4 for broadcast in the U.S., U.K. and Germany, the show's nativity scene finale features RuPaul warbling his version of the Christmas classic "The Little Drummer Boy." "I relate to 'The Little Drummer Boy' because the message of the song is to spread love. I feel like I am him," says RuPaul. Everybody say love.

-Don Thomas

So you're six-foot-seven?

I'm six-foot-seven sometimes. Without my shoes on, I'm six five. Then with hair, heels, and attitude I'm through the roof.

Like an Amazon queen.

It's totally Amazonian. When I see myself in photos with other people, I go, "Oh, my God!" because I know how tall they are and what they look like. When I see myself with someone else it's like crazy. I did the Joan Rivers Show and after my number she came out and gave me a hug. She stood next while we posed for pictures and she is the height of one of my legs with heels on. The top of her head comes up to my hip. It's so funny.

You're from San Diego, right?

I was born and raised in San Diego, but I'm really from Atlanta. I left San Diego when I was 14 years old and I went to high school in Atlanta. That's the age when a child is

becoming an adult, so I feel like I'm really from Atlanta.

You've said that you find a lot of racism outside of the South.

Oh, yeah. But I find that racism is more damaging on the West Coast and in northern regions because in the South people are more up front with it. If someone is a racist in the South, you know immediately how to deal with them. But elsewhere, they're sort of hidden. It's scarier because you can't really tell.

And you marched in defiance of the Klan?

Yeah...years ago...in drag. In the press kit, it says Birmingham, but it was actually Forsythe County, Georgia.

I heard about that. Where Oprah went.

Yes, that's it. At the exact same time.

Oh, God.

It was just a town. Most people really don't feel that way. People are people. People love other people. I looked over to the other side of the barricade between me and the National Guard. The people on the other side...you could tell they liked Michael Jackson just how I liked Michael...and they loved...you know...Captain Crunch with Crunchberries the same way I do. We all have feelings. Everybody wants to be loved, respected and feel like they belong somewhere. If they don't get that somehow from themselves, then they'll try to put other people down to make themselves feel bigger. You know what that's all about.

Right.

So I understand their ignorance. I understand their fear. But they just have to get over it...they really do. Everybody does. I've been discriminated against by gay people. I've been discriminated against by black people. I've been discriminated against by everybody and what it all boils down to is this: You have to learn how to love yourself.

Exactly.

Because if you don't love yourself, then you can't love anyone else. You can't give to anyone else.



Do you find greater acceptance as a black woman or as a black man?

I find that people are kinder to me when I'm in drag.

It's always been easier to deal with black women?

I'm not real a black woman, but somehow the fact that I'm in a castrated form, dressed up almost like a clown makes it somehow less threatening to them.

Right.

Whereas black men have been labeled a threat. People are afraid of black men, and I'll tell you why: Because black men are so goddamn angry.

Uh-huh!

Black men in our society have very little as far as the totem pole goes, so they have very little to lose. That's why they're scared. People are threatened by me in drag until I open my mouth and they realize I'm just like anybody else. I'm very accessible because I'm very familiar to people. They may be startled by the image, but it's funny 'cause I get to see life from this interesting perspective: First, in my Banana Republic drag, and then as this drag queen extravaganza. And in drag, people bend over backwards to try and accommodate me because everybody loves RuPaul. But the same people see me out of drag and treat me like shit.

Yeah.

It's an interesting perspective. It makes me realize how much importance people put on personal appearance. It makes me think about how much importance I put on personal appearance. And it makes me try to snap out of it. This is so cliché, but you can't judge a book by its cover, but at the same time you have to really feel a person out. You have to give every person an opportunity to be their

own person.

Is RuPaul a vain person?

Sure I am. I think everybody is. I mean RuPaul, the product, is...

That's a package.

RuPaul's a package. Sure I'm vain, and I feel a little guilty about that. But sure I am.

What's your favorite movie?

The Wizard Of Oz. I love the message of someone going through this life finally realizing that they had what they needed with them all along. They just needed to learn how to use it. That's so true. I love that. I love the movie for that reason. I tell people all the time, "You look at me on the stage, and who would have thought that a big old drag queen would be signed to a major record deal. Nobody would have. Nobody would have thought that."

Would RuPaul ever do *The Wiz*?

I would love to do *The Wiz*, but I think I would have to play the good witch, I don't think I could play the ingénue.

Well, if you had your own dream project, what would it be?

A television variety show that has a mixture of *Wheel of Fortune*, *The Cher Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, an infomercial and *The Home Shopping Club* all mixed into one. (laughs)

And only you could do it. Tell me about Supermodel of the World. When did you sign with Tommy Boy?

About a year ago, and they have been wonderful.

Weren't they a little skeptical at first?

No, they weren't. You know, after my reign as Queen of Manhattan, I decided to take time off and focus myself, get myself together and figure out what my next step would be and what I wanted to do. I hooked up with my partner Jimmy Harry and wrote songs like about 60 songs. From those we took the ten best and made a demo tape and sent it to all the labels with my image in tact. You know, big drag queen and all of that. The next day Tommy Boy called up and said,

"We're very interested. Let's have a meeting." And Monica Lynch later told me that she'd followed me through years and when she got the tape she was very skeptical. But she thought, "Hmmm. Well, let's put it on." And when she put it on, she was literally blown away. Ever since then, they've been with me 250 percent. You can't ask for more than that. They're behind the project and they're going to see it through. I love that.

How did LaWanda Page come into all this?

When I signed the deal and we started doing the record, I got to make a wish list of anybody in the whole wide world I'd want to be on my record. At the top of the list..

...was Aunt Esther.

...was Aunt Eshter, honey, 'cause I've loved her for years. My mother had her comedy records around the house for a long, long time and I've always loved them. They're like triple X-rated. And I've been a fan of hers from Sanford and Son so it was a natural. She was a joy to work with. In fact, her comic timing and her delivery of lines was just perfection.

So it was like the icing on the cake.

It was icing on the cake. You know, my whole thing is a sassy talkin' thing and she's the queen of sassy talkin'.

You also did a film recently called *Inferno*. Has that come out yet?

No. I hear she's still editing it. But it was really fun filming it. I went to Italy last July and we filmed in Galipoli. It was so fun. It was like a scene out of Mahogany, another of my favorite films. At one point, I have to take this Alfa Romero and drive into the shot where the camera is, the lights, everything. I have some dialogue with this guy. He's hitchhiking and he jumps into the car and I drive off all in one take. During the take there were about 400 people watching the filming. It was like the scene in Mahogany where they're driving the car and everything and it was the most fabulous moment of my life because it

was just like one of those famous moments that you'll never forget and we filmed it over and over again but having all the people watching me and stuff. (breathless) It was great! I can't wait to see it. There are a lot of top models in it, like Kate Moss, and Ava, and Susan Holmes, and Shayna all those girls.

Let's talk about Paris Is Burning.

I thought *Paris Is Burning* was great because it was a microcosm of the whole world. I say that because everybody wants to be respected. Everyone wants to be loved. Everybody wants to feel like they belong somewhere. This film showed that despite the fact that these people were considered outcasts in society, they had created their own society. They had found a place where they could be respected, loved, shine and be a star. That's what important about the film. It shows that the human desire to belong and to feel loved is stronger than any oppression anyone can put on you. You're going to shine, the star that you are, no matter what. And you'll find the situation to shine in. That's what I loved about the film. But I'll tell you, it's no different from any other mini-society. It's just like the social register of New York. All those people are the same. They want to feel like they belong somewhere. It's the same as the Crips and the Bloods. Those little groups of people who want to feel like they're part of a family. What's important about the film is that every person who watches it can relate to it on that level. Every person who watches it knows they are Avis Pendavis or Venus Extravaganza.

Or Dorian Corey...

Or Dorian Corey...everyone of them. You relate to each character.

How does RuPaul feel about being the queen of all of this? You're the one who made it.

I feel very blessed and very lucky. I feel honored that the power that created me put me in this position, and I'm gonna serve the children with that position. There have been others before me: Sylvester, Boy George, Flip Wilson, Divine and there will be more after me. But while I'm reigning, I will reign

supreme and I will serve the children. I will give them what I have and will be honest with myself. Actually, if I can be objective about it, who better to be queen of it all than RuPaul? RuPaul is accessible and is familiar and isn't shady and will actually share with people. RuPaul is a perfect queen.

So she deserves her throne.

Hello!

So what do you think your biggest inspiration has been?

My biggest inspiration has been the fact that I have something inside of me that's dying to get out—a burning desire that wants to speak to people, to say things to people. People have inspired me throughout my life. Divas like Diana Ross and Cher, Oprah Winfrey and Whoopi Goldberg—people who, despite adversity, have made it through. I've always been for the underdog. I always love a rags-to-riches story, so I'm inspired by people like that.

How did you come up with the name RuPaul?

My mother gave it to me. It's my real name.

Really?

Isn't that weird? My real name is actually RuPaul Andre Charles. I always joke with people, I say my mother either wanted me to get into show business or become a hairdresser. It's true. It's my real name. She's from southern Louisiana. There are French Canadian black people...Creole people down there. So she has a big French influence in her background.

If RuPaul were a hairdresser and could do anyone's hair, who would you do?

I'd want to do Diana Ross's hair. I'd want to do Vanessa Williams. I'd want to do Dolly Parton.

Dolly Parton? So you're into Big Hair.

I'm into Big Hair. But I'd wanna do Berry Gordy's hair even though he doesn't have any, just so I could be with him and talk to him. I'd wanna do Barry Gibb's hair, too. I love him, honey!

So who is RuPaul's ideal man?

My ideal man is...Matthew Modine.

Why?

Because he's so fine! He's got this loving, nurturing quality about him that's not overtly macho...a very kind demeanor and I love that about him. It's very sweet. Plus, he's very tall and I love that. He'll fit great with me although I know he's married and I've actually met his wife. But he is just it to me. I just love him.

If RuPaul got married, describe the ceremony to me.

It would be lavish. It would probably take place at the Rose Bowl. And it would be a gay extravaganza! I'd invite all the queens from all the major cities to come and be bridesmaids. It would be a three-day celebration.

And who'll sing?

Luther Vandross, honey!

Luthah!

Luthah honey!, Luthah baby! I'd have him sing "Amazing Grace." You know that song?

Yes, of course.

Oh, I love that song! Oh, Luther! He just gets me crazy thinking about him.

How did you come about doing something with the Fabulous Pop Tarts?

I've been friends with them for years and years. They managed me. I knew that they had dealt with record companies before. And it takes someone who's been burnt to know how to deal with them...and they'd been burnt before. Two years ago when I decided to get my focus together, I went to them for advice. One thing led to another and we've been together ever since. They are fabulous and they are sharp! And they are hungry! They want it bad and I'm the same way, so we make a great combination.



Tell me about "The Return Of Starbooty." What's that all about?

Actually, this album started out to be that. Starbooty is a character I invented about five years ago. Starbooty was an ex-supermodel turned sort of vigilante crime fighter. Doer of good, helping people out.

And make them look beautiful too!

Yes! With a little Revlon. We started doing "Return of Starbooty" for this album a few years ago. As things went on, Larry, my old friend, said "You know Ru, you should do a song called "Supermodel." He gave me the idea for "Supermodel" which is sort of a prequel to "Starbooty." So he gave me a few lines and I went with my partner Jimmy Harry and wrote a song around it, and "Supermodel" was born, but it's a prequel to "Starbooty," which will be on the next album. This one is actually a feelgood record. It's the kinda record you put on before you go out to the disco...before you go out to do life. It's, "Let's party, let's have fun."

So what about your modeling career?

I don't model that much except for pictures and videos and stuff like that. It's so hard. I don't know how those girls do it. They deserve all the money they get. It's hard to concentrate and keep your focus and then turn on your energy. Turn it off. Turn it on. Turn it off.

Shanté, shanté.

Shanté, shanté, shanté! I model for my own thing and I do a lot of charity stuff with fashion shows. I did Suzanne Bartsch's Paris Love Ball and helped raise \$700,000 for people with AIDS. I felt very honored to be a part of that. I also did runway stuff for the Faith Organization, which is another AIDS organization. I've been approached by some agencies, but right now I don't have time to do my career and an extra career.

So how come we haven't seen Ru in any George Michael videos?

Because Miss Ru is too busy doing her own thing! I'd love to do all the children's videos, but I have to do my own. I think he's doing a good job using the queens because it's great that there is a queen visibility. The kids see options. That's the most important thing about my signing with Tommy Boy and being on MTV and BET. Young people see that there is a place for them, and that the place is somewhere you invent for yourself. You write your own ticket. The mere fact that I'm out there is a political statement. It says you don't have to conform to what your parents want or what society wants you to do. You don't have to do what I'm doing, but there are options.

How has AIDS affected your life?

It's affected me. Actually until there is a cure, everyone has AIDS. It's made me very sad, but it's also made me very strong. It's made me look at the positive side of life. It's made me think about life as a precious, precious thing...something to cherish.

What's the one thing you've done that you're most proud of for young gay people?

Talking to you right now, knowing that you're gonna take what I say and print it up and have it reach people. The thing I'm most proud of is my stick-with-it-ness. I've had doors closed on me. I've had doors fall on me. I've had doors thrown at me. But it never stopped me.

I bet you threw doors right back.

Yeah, I threw doors right back, baby. The thing I'm most proud of is that I've stuck with it, and I'm still here.

You're a survivor.

I am a survivor.

How old is RuPaul?

I feel like I'm ageless, like I've been around since the beginning of time.

Then how do you stay so fabulous looking?

It's all attitude and positive energy. If you feel good about yourself it will carry over into your life. Also, I

workout and do aerobics.

If you could give anyone a makeover, who would it be?

Whitney Houston. Because she's got so much to work with, but she doesn't do anything with it. There are some pretty pictures of her, but they are few and far between. And I'd love to give Whoopi Goldberg a makeover. She could be fierce, she really could be.

Would you like to share the screen with Whoopi?

Yeah, honey. I'm trying to pitch RuPaul starring in *Sister Act 3* right now. Could you see it? It could be very fierce!

Megabucks!

Hello! I'd love to do anything as long as it's comedy and it's fun. Actually, I'd love to do a movie with LaWanda Page.

I could imagine it. Can you ever see RuPaul winning an Oscar?

Oh, absolutely! I have my acceptance speech already worked out.

Do you have your dress picked out?

Yes. Yes! I'll be wearing Valentino to the Oscars, Versace to the Grammys and Todd Oldham to the MTV Awards.

Since you're so busy right now, is there anyone special in your life?

You know, there's not because I work. I better work!

You work it, girl.

I'm working it, but I'm young. Right now I'm still discovering all these things about myself, so when I find someone, I'll have something to bring to the party.

One last question Ru. What color toilet paper do you use?

I use exclusively white.

Exclusively white??

Yes, Charmin.

I want to thank you for the interview.

Thank you, sweetheart, and, oh, I have one thing to say in closing: You better work, bitch!

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BLK

RUPAUL: GAG ON THE GLAMOUR

North Pole →

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