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DRAG IN PHILADELPHIA: THE BOLD, THE BEAUTIFUL & THE BRUNCH
Philly Drag History, Current Shows & Queens To Follow

PHILADELPHIA, March 25, 2019 – Philadelphia’s drag scene dates back centuries—and thrives to this day. Contemporary Philly drag queens most often perform in the bars and clubs of the Gayborhood, part of Center City’s Washington Square West neighborhood. But a growing number of venues beyond the neighborhood host drag brunches, game nights, variety shows and kids’ story times.

Philadelphia men have been costuming in ruffles and feathers since the 1600s, when Swedish immigrants began a raucous New Year’s tradition that, in 1901, officially became the Mummers Parade. Modern Mummers’ costumes are bold, bright, sequined—and blue collar. Women were permitted to join their ranks in the 1980s. In 2012, the Philly Drag Mafia became the first official queens to strut in the parade.

The city’s drag nightlife dates to at least to the 1950s, when the The New Forrest Lounge—now **The Bike Stop**, in the Gayborhood—required reservations for drag shows such as *The Fabulous Fakes*. Other drag hotspots **Miss P’s** at 18th and Lombard streets and ’90s dance club **Shampoo** helped broaden the audience for local drag culture, while dive bar **Bob & Barbara’s** emerged as a once-a-week base for performers.

Today, drag personalities replete with tongue-in-cheek names and spectacular style make their marks at nearly every queer bar in the Gayborhood, including **Tabu Lounge & Sports Bar** and **Voyeur Nightclub**, known for hosting frequent performances by both top-tier local talent up to nationally known queens from “RuPaul’s Drag Race.” So-called straight scenes that have gotten into the act include Northern Liberties’ **Bourbon and Branch** and Fishtown comedy club **Punch Line Philly**, hosts of brunch-time drag shows. There’s also a growing trend of drag queen story times, where queens read books aloud to rooms full of little ones.

Drag Shows:

- **Bob & Barbara’s** – The South Street dive is as loved for its shot-and-a-beer special as it is for Miss Lisa Lisa, the teasing, raucous host of the bar’s Thursday night drag show. With a diverse rotating cast of new and seasoned queens, the event has the distinction of being the longest-running drag show in Philadelphia. 1509 South Street, (215) 545-4511, bobandbarbaras.com

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- **Boxers PHL** – Iris Spectre and VinChelle perform in a Gayborhood sports bar on **Turn Out Tuesdays**. Their variety show features local talent, tunes from DJ Drootrax and cocktails made with Philly-based Stateside vodka. Iris also hosts a live “RuPaul’s Drag Race” viewing party here. 1330 Walnut Street, (215) 735-2977, boxersphl.com
- **Franky Bradley’s** – The Gayborhood’s self-described “house of weird,” presents Farrah Thorne’s **Get Hype** showcase on the third Wednesday of every other month and hosts drag-boosted burlesque performance **Honeygasm** on the first Sunday of every month. The shows take place upstairs in an area complete with a corner stage and modern sound system, all bolstered by a funky ’70s-hippie vibe. 1320 Chancellor Street, (215) 735-0735, frankybradleys.com
- **FringeArts** – This performing arts venue attached to brasserie La Peg presents queer cabaret **Get Pegged** about once per month fall through winter. The Bearded Ladies Cabaret founder John Jarboe hosts the series, which features diverse queer musical and burlesque artists from Philly and beyond. The venue also hosts a variety of drag shows as part of the fall Fringe Festival. 140 N. Christopher Columbus Boulevard, (215) 413-9006, fringearts.com
- **GayBINGO! at Congregation Rodeph Shalom** – For 20 years, **GayBINGO!**, a fundraiser for Aids Fund Philly, has been one of Philadelphia’s most in-demand Friday night events. Every month in the fall and winter, drag hosts dress according to a theme, interact with audiences, perform numbers and call winners. 615 N. Broad Street, (215) 731-9255, aidsfundphilly.org
- **Knock Restaurant and Bar** – Iris Spectre hosts **All-Star Karaoke** every Wednesday at Knock, a Gayborhood restaurant and bar known for its gentlemanly clientele and expertly made cocktails. 255 S. 12th Street, (215) 925-1166, knockphilly.com
- **L’Etage** – The dimly lit, Paris-inspired performance space above Bella Vista creperie Beau Monde hosts one of Philly’s most popular monthly drag shows, the **Martha Graham Cracker Cabaret**. The line stretches around the block for the performance, which features covers of beloved pop songs by the self-proclaimed world’s tallest, hairiest drag queen. The space also hosts a regular lineup of drag shows, including an amateur drag night on the first Sunday of every month from Philadelphia producer John Burd. 624 S. 6th Street, (215) 592-0656, creperie-beaumonde.com
- **The Raven Resort** – New Hope, Bucks County has long been an LGBTQ destination, and every visit must include a stop at this sprawling piano bar, restaurant, motel and pool, whose legacy stems back to the 1970s. The Raven has played host to notables such as local legend Tinsel Garland and drag big-timers Paige Turner and Sherry Vine. The current roster includes **Lipstick Mondays**, when Cyannie Lopez hosts trans and queen performers on the first and third Monday of every month. 385 W. Bridge Street, New Hope, (215) 862-2081, theravennewhope.com
- **Tabu Lounge & Sports Bar** – Home to a wide-range of queer performance art, Tabu is perhaps best known for its drag variety shows, constantly being reshaped to fit with the goings-on in pop culture and cravings of local audiences. The nightclub holds competitions, cabarets, drag queen-hosted karaoke and, on the first Saturday of the month, “Christian” comedy queen Bev’s popular drag show, **Bev’s Bitchfest**. 254 S. 12th Street, (215) 964-9675, tabuphilly.com
- **Tavern on Camac** – Staying true to its reputation, the atmospheric piano bar tucked away on Camac Street hosts two regular live singing-focused drag events. Every Thursday, it’s **Gay Bill**, a night of showtune sing-alongs with host Cleo Phatra and her closest friends. On the third Saturday of every month, ukulele-strumming bearded lady Eric Jaffe hosts **The Eric Jaffe Show**, spotlighting some of the area’s fiercest musical talents. 243 S. Camac Street, (215) 545-0900, tavernoncamac.com

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- **Toasted Walnut Bar & Kitchen** – Cleo Phatra hosts **Totally Toasted Trivia**, a game night every Tuesday at this friendly, lesbian-owned bar. During “RuPaul’s Drag Race,” comedy queen Bev hosts viewing parties followed by karaoke. 1316 Walnut Street, (215) 546-8888, toastedwalnut.com
- **The Victoria Freehouse** – A British pub named after one of history’s most outspoken queens hosts one-Saturday-a-month drag shows with themes that have been inspired by *Harry Potter*, “Game of Thrones” and *Bettlejuice*. Two or three times a year, hilarious Aunt Mary Pat, perhaps the most Philly queen of them all, performs sold-out standup. 10 S. Front Street, (215) 543-6089, victoriafreehouse.com
- **Voyeur Nightclub** – The Gayborhood’s fiercest drag fans head to this after-hours club once a month to catch **Philly Drag Wars** hosted by local “RuPaul’s Drag Race” alum Mimi Infurst. Described as “RuPaul’s Drag Race” meets “The Voice,” the competition follows a similar format to both shows, including a the lip-sync-for-your-life contest and a rotating cast of high-profile local judges. 1221 St. James Street, (215) 735-5772, voyeurnightclub.com
- **Woody’s** – Drag diva VinChelle hosts a “RuPaul’s Drag Race” viewing party every Thursday during the show’s regular season. The night features drink specials and boisterous banter directed at the screen. VinChelle also hosts karaoke on Woody’s second level on Wednesday nights. 202 S. 13th Street, (215) 545-1893, woodysbar.com

Drag Brunches:

- **Bourbon and Branch** – On the fourth Sunday of each month, this Southern restaurant in Northern Liberties hosts a troupe of local drag queens in **Babes of Bourbon and Branch**, making the restaurant and music venue one of few surefire spots to enjoy live drag with a side of grits. 705 N. 2nd Street, (215) 238-0660, bourbonandbranchphilly.com
- **L’Etage** – French toast, crepes and mimosas are part of the **Ladies of L’Etage Drag Brunch**, when queens come together for an afternoon of song, wowing death drops and, on occasion, a naughty puppet show. 624 S. 6th Street, (215) 592-0656, creperie-beaumonde.com
- **Mifflin Tavern** – Drag brunch arrives South Philly-style every fourth Saturday of the month, when comedy queen Brittany Lynn sings and jokes as diners chow down on pub grub and throw back beers. Lynn also hosts a game night at the Pennsport pub every Wednesday. 1843 S. 2nd Street, (267) 273-0811, mifflintavern.net
- **Punch Line Philly** – Each Saturday, this comedy club and restaurant charges a flat fee for brunch and an all-ages drag show—with a dash of raunchiness—hosted by two-time “RuPaul’s Drag Race” contender Mimi Infurst. The weekly performance also features longtime Philly queens such as Cleo Phatra, Brooklyn Ford and Sutton Fearce. 33 E. Laurel Street, (215) 606-6555, dragdivabrunch.com
- **SouthHouse** – Tater tots may be the star attraction at this unassuming neighborhood bar in South Philly’s Lower Moyamensing neighborhood, but drag queens Brittany Lynn, Navaya Shay and Crystal Electra try to outshine them during a drag brunch every first Sunday of the month. 2535 S. 13th Street, (267) 457-3682, southhousephilly.com
- **Tabu Lounge & Sports Bar** – A rotating cast of queens that includes Onyx Black, Sasha Magnolia and Patty Spaghetti hit Tabu’s sports bar two Sundays a month for the **Ladies of Tabu Drag Brunch**. 254 S. 12th Street, (215) 964-9675, tabuphilly.com
- **The Victoria Freehouse** – Old City’s atmospheric British pub gets wild on select Saturdays, when comedy queens host drag brunches with themes from *Alice in Wonderland* or Disney, and diners dress the part. 10 S. Front Street, (215) 543-6089, victoriafreehouse.com

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Drag Queen Storytime:

- **Free Library of Philadelphia** – Branches of Philadelphia’s public library get in on the drag queen story hour trend, where queens read aloud to a roomful of wide-eyed tots. Brittany Lynn is the Free Library’s most frequent storyteller. She has read at Lovett Memorial in Mount Airy and the Fumo Family Library in South Philly. Various locations, (215) 686-5322, freelibrary.org
- **Please Touch Museum** – One day during Pride month, Philadelphia’s hands-on kids’ museum invites drag queens to read tales of diversity and acceptance to audiences of hundreds as part of its family Pride Celebration. The daylong event also features a dress-up corner, runway show, interactive puppet skits and singalongs. 4231 Avenue of the Republic, (215) 581-3181, pleasetouchmuseum.org

Drag Queens To Follow:

- **Ariel Versace** – With a massive Instagram following and a closet to match, this self-described “life-sized Bratz doll” became the second local queen to nab a spot on the 2019 season of “RuPaul’s Drag Race.” Versace’s newfound stardom means she’ll now be performing around the world, but followers can still catch her around Philly. [@arielversace](https://www.instagram.com/arielversace)
- **Aunt Mary Pat** – She eschews expensive costumes and rocks a 5 o’clock shadow, but what Aunt Mary Pat lacks in glam she makes up for in hilarity. The beer-guzzling comedy queen is the epitome of Philly, entertaining audiences at her standup sets with anecdotes about her love for Wawa and “the Iggles.” [facebook.com/auntmarypat](https://www.facebook.com/auntmarypat)
- **Aurora Whorealis** – An Alaska transplant and Gayborhood staple, Aurora is primarily a comedy queen who performs at a slew of clubs and hosts “Trivi-YASSS” on Monday nights at Tabu. She was crowned “Best Lip-Sync Artist” at the 2017 Philly Drag Awards, an annual competition at Voyeur Nightclub. [instagram.com/aurorawhorealis](https://www.instagram.com/aurorawhorealis)
- **Bev** – Philadelphia’s self-described “premier Christian drag queen” is, intentionally ironically, known for her “Bitchfest” drag showcase at Tabu, when she presents other queens while tossing out quip after quip. Bev’s awards include “Best Comedy Performer” at the 2018 Drag Awards, “Miss Gulf Coast Comedy Queen,” 2017 and “Miss Northeast Comedy Queen,” 2016. [facebook.com/theoneandonlyBev](https://www.facebook.com/theoneandonlyBev)
- **Brittany Lynn** – Created at former gay club 12th Air Command in 1996, Brittany Lynn is a cornerstone of the city’s drag scene, constantly reinventing herself with new events: a talk show, standup acts, live singing, weekly showcases and story time at the Free Library, for example. In 2013, she ushered in a new era of drag-queen involvement in the Mummers Parade by establishing the Miss Fancy Brigade, an achievement Philadelphia City Council recognized by honoring her with her own, official holiday: March 15 is Brittany Lynn Day. phillydragmafia.com
- **Iris Spectre** – Every queen has her niche, and for this 2016 Philly Drag Awards “Drag Queen of the Year,” it’s costumes, costumes, costumes. The Parsons School of Fashion-trained designer’s costumes have been weird, fantastical and downright chic. She’s created pieces for big-name queens such as “RuPaul’s Drag Race” favorite Peppermint. [facebook.com/Iris-Spectre](https://www.facebook.com/Iris-Spectre)
- **Martha Graham Cracker** – Pig Iron Theatre Company co-founder by day, Dito van Reigersberg may be better known by his nighttime persona, Martha Graham Cracker, a hairy drag queen who skips the lip-syncing in favor of glass-shattering live vocals. Martha has been a regular on the drag performance circuit since 2005 and recently performed a one-woman show at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. [facebook.com/MarthaGrahamCracker](https://www.facebook.com/MarthaGrahamCracker)

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- **Mimi Infurst** – Notorious for competing on “RuPaul’s Drag Race” and “RuPaul’s Drag Race All-Stars,” Philadelphia-based drag performer and event producer Mimi Infurst hosts an all-ages Drag Diva Brunch at the Punch Line featuring a boisterous cast of local drag queens. She also produces theatrical events and national drag tours. mimiinfurst.com
- **Miss Lisa Lisa** – All-out with her charm offensive, Miss Lisa Lisa—“so nice, she was named twice”—is a local icon, strutting her stuff and touting her strong-as-steel personality weekly at Bob & Barbara’s on South Street. She’s also been known to introduce new queens and performers at-large to the scene with her freestyle slots during her shows. phillydragmafia.com/project/underboss-miss-lisa-lisa
- **VinChelle** – This Nashville-born University of Arts graduate, who also goes by the nickname Shea Better Werk, also refers to herself as a “tribal queen.” The “Drag Queen of the Year” at the 2017 Drag Awards and winner of the 2015 Drag Wars often incorporates African costumes, song and dance into her stage shows. facebook.com/SheaButterWerk

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