

## Violet's Café



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Portland

## culture



SARAH HULL

With several members going back to school, DK PDX has decided to call it quits.



## Kings Close Court

Esteemed drag troupe DK PDX reflects on its influence in queer culture

by Jaymee R. Cuti

**W**hen the ladies of Portland drag troupe DK PDX trotted out sailor hats, facial hair and story lines that ranged from subversive to inane, they inevitably changed the face of queer entertainment in the Rose City.

Today, the term "drag king" is as household as Darcelle herself; Holocene, the troupe's home venue, is revered as a queer hot spot; and Sissyboy will carry on the tradition of genderfucking long after DK PDX's last show Feb. 18.

But when the troupe began in 2003 at Skervy, a now-defunct queer night, founding members say the city's queer social scene was at a lull.

"People wanted to see a drag show here, but they didn't want to be the one to do it," recalls DK PDX founder Ali Cotterill, aka Tommy Torpedo.

She had been introduced to the art of drag in college, when the International Drag King Extravaganza performed at her Ohio school. After starting a troupe there that continues today, called Packing Heat, Cotterill introduced Portland audiences to the irreverence, fun and significance of gender performance.

"I wanted a drag and gender performance with a lot of queer and pop culture where people could question their gender and it could be humorous. I wanted to tour and do multimedia stuff, all of which we've done," she says.

Besides meeting goals by performing in front of thousands of people—in dozens of local venues, in four states and Canada, at several Oregon Pride festivals, working independently and with the International Drag King Extravaganza—another force is calling the 10 core performers from the stage: college and graduate school.

"Almost every one of us is back in school," says Cotterill. "When enough of us felt that way, DK PDX as a troupe had to break up."

She and DK PDX director Myriah J. Day, aka Gigi Bang Bang and Oliver Easy, quickly softened the blow of the troupe's breakup by promoting side projects and upcoming collaborations.

"I don't think any of us want to give up performing. I have a lot of side projects brewing in my head," says Day, who has performed with the troupe since



ANI MONTELEONE

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seeing the first show at Skervy. She is particularly interested in growing Glam Star Burlesque and incorporating hip-hop dance into her performances.

Cotterill, a film student, plans to branch out into digital video and incorporate that medium into her art.

DK PDX has lent its talents to several community organizations including the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center, Basic Rights Oregon and In Other Words bookstore, raising money through benefit shows and leading drag workshops.

DK PDX members say accomplishments, both personally and within the community, are measurable and powerful.

"We hope DK PDX has changed what gender means, does and what it morphs into," says Day.

The troupe was also responsible for inspiring other cities to start their own drag king companies.

"I'm going to miss blowing people's minds through performance. I love showing people a form

of queer art they've never seen before," says Christa Orth, a DK PDX performer known as Trixie Vixen. "That has been especially powerful in places like Boise that didn't have a troupe and do now because they were inspired by us."

"One started in Eugene, too," Day and Cotterill chime in.

Despite a presence in international drag communities, DK PDX has never competed for awards because members say their style of gender performance does not fit in the confines of competitions.

"We all cross genders in these quirky, queer ways," Day explains. "My character is a woman dressing up as a man dressing up as a woman."

Cotterill adds, "We have some members that identify as genderqueer or trans, so what's the opposite of that?"

Within those gender-bending characters, the troupe has shed light on issues including same-sex marriage, where they rejected the heterosexist confine of traditional matrimony, the Patriot Act and military recruitment in schools. DK PDX also has taken a strong anti-war stance.

Rounding out the performance lineup for the final show are Mason Munson as Randy Fiasco and Dixie Belle; Jodi Kansagor as Jodi Bon Jodi and Joe D Vice; Katie Kusmaul as Dick Blick and Pillowcake Pumpkinpants; Henry Renfrow as Octopussy Jones and Vince Vega Bond; Stephanie Merton as Venus Envy; Soox Ornt as Ace; R.E. Szego as Benny Brucha and Bettie Rage; and Maryanne Cassera as Johnny Mozzarella.

Couched in warnings that mascara will run, DK PDX promises its last performance to be its best.

"It's action-packed, emotionally driven. There's a lot of passion going into everything we're doing," says Day.

The performance promises more of the choreography, multimedia and energy that loyal fans have come to love.

Cotterill says, "Expect to be blown away." 

Holocene presents DK PDX: THE FINAL FRONTIER featuring Nicky Click, MC Marie Fleischmann and DJ Sappho 9 p.m. Feb. 18 at 1001 S.E. Morrison St. Admission is \$5. For more information visit [www.dkpdx.com](http://www.dkpdx.com).