



Bebe Zahara Benet says her newfound fame is less about the title of America's Next Drag Superstar than it is the opportunity to be the voice of a community - from "all drag queens" to "all the teens in Africa who are suffering from HIV."

Bebe appears at RuPaul's Drag Race Portland Edition Thurs. June 11 9 p.m. at Red Cap Garage. 1035 SW Stark redcapgarage.com/dragrace.

and honestly throughout the "almost non-stop" three-week shooting schedule: "Every single character, whether you like them or you do not like them, we were portrayed how we are by nature. Obviously...everything has to be brought down to like an hour, things have to be edited, but they stayed true to each one of us."

She is quite obviously a glass-half-full kind of gal, even when it comes to the occasional behind-the-scenes drama that marked the *Race*'s debut outing. "Regardless of what happens, we will always be the first," she says. "We had a bond, and our personalities will always [clash] here and there, but regardless, that's how life is, and you just have to keep moving on and not really dwell on those things."

Benet appreciates the "one-on-one" interactions appearances like the upcoming Portland date afford her. Her advice to contestants is simple - despite its seeming contradiction: "Be true to yourself," she shares, "because what attracted us to be chosen as

the nine of the first season, we were not trying to be other people. It's very important because ... you can try to be faking somebody else, but it will show through."

"People always want to stereotype," she continues, "[but] at the end of the day, we are artists. When the night comes and the lights go up and the curtains go, we become who we are and how we were born, and people just need to be able to just understand that."

Benet, who draws inspiration for her craft from "everything and everybody" and "what's happening at the moment," envisions a day without prejudice - for the drag community and beyond. Ever the ambassador, she views her success as a means to educate, inspire and encourage others as they discover their own pride.

"It's supposed to be a chain reaction, that's what I hope, that people find that connection and keep helping one another," she says. "Truly being able to change, I mean, the focus has been made already, but we need to get there." 



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