

DRAG,

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Hudson credits Linda Baker, a former teacher and drama department director, as the primary reason for not dropping out.

"I was terrified of her and I loved her and I wanted her to like me. She believed in being out of the ordinary and I am so thankful for that," Hudson said. "It only ever takes that one adult who believes in you."

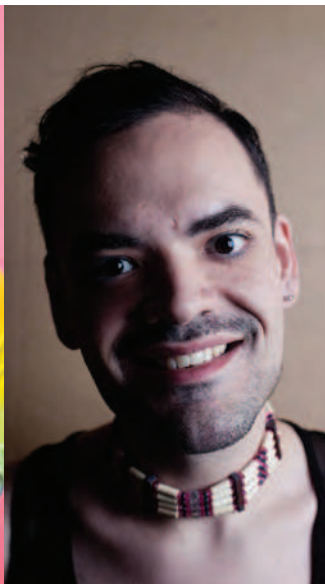
With a dream of going to school at the Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland, Hudson hoped to leave Keizer immediately after graduation, but it took a while longer to launch. After spending a few more years in the area than anticipated, Hudson made the leap to Rose City and still struggled to find an authentic voice.

"I lived a small life because I was conditioned to live such a small life here. Then I met Jinkx Monsoon," Hudson said. Fans of *RuPaul's Drag Race* may recognize Monsoon's name as the winner of the show's fifth season.

Watching Monsoon on stage, and getting to see the work going on behind the scenes, gave Hudson a glimpse of a world worth inhabiting. Lip syncing is too often seen as the end-all of drag performance, but Hudson was equally drawn to the possibilities for comedy, drama, acting, directing and anonymity the form put within reach of a single performer.

Still, Carla Rossi's debut was a ways off. Hudson had to dabble with the form first. With a friend, Hudson attended a party in drag and donned Long Island accents that preserved their true identities.

"We dressed up and nobody



Anthony Hudson as alter-ego Carla Rossi and Hudson sans make-up.

knew who we were and everybody wanted to know more about us," Hudson said.

When Carla evolved into a regular presence in Hudson's life, she became a fixture at Portland-area parties and drag shows. Carla's first-ever feature show was titled *Carla Rossi Sings the End of the World*. Hudson's goal was to draw comparisons between the U.S. of 2014 and the Weimar Republic that led to Nazi rule in Germany through live singing and monologue.

While the traditional term for male performers who dress as women is drag queen, Hudson said that was never the intention with Carla. Carla is a clown who strives for the ideal of white female beauty and always manages to fall short, mostly due to her own misguided plans.

After several years of drag-only performance, however, Hudson wanted to tell a new story.

"No one knew who I was for the first five years of my career and that was fine, but I got tired of that and wanted people to know more about me. That's when I started developing the

solo show," Hudson said.

By that time, Hudson had started taking illustration classes at PNCA and professors there encouraged the further evolution of the show.

"They said, 'You're doing illustration, but we keep hearing about you doing stuff in the clubs and you're coming to class covered in make-up stains,'" Hudson said. "They encouraged me to bring Carla into school and make her the focus of my study. That's how I figured out how to use Carla as a way to talk about gender and sexuality and race and that helped me understand where I fit."

Looking for Tiger Lily, a nod to the Native American cultural appropriation in the tale of Peter Pan, was the result of that work. For several years, the show only lived in Portland, but attention to cultural issues while using drag as a vehicle began to draw attention elsewhere.

In 2018, Hudson was invited to Dartmouth University to perform, and the show proved to be an incredible hit with the Native American audiences it drew. Then Hudson performed it in Vancouver, British Columbia, and got invited to Australia. This year, the show will be Las Vegas, return to Vancouver and be a part of the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's TBA Festival in September.

"One of my biggest fears was who is going to relate to this. Growing up fat and queer in Keizer, half-native and half-white, there were so many things I thought people would have to be to enjoy the show. After the first full run it was amazing to hear from friends who had different ins to the story," Hudson said. "It made me step back and say, this is really about growing up, it's about discovery and coming to consciousness."

Over time, Hudson came to realize that the show intended for an adult audience, was more a message for youth. When it's performed now, Hudson also puts on a drag workshop to create a space for other kids experiencing the unique confusions of teenage years.

"Drag is a mask, like armor," Hudson said. "What draws me to drag is not trying to perform as a woman, I think drag is more fun when it's confusing everything. All of

our gender identities are drag — something we step into and perform and inherit. If that's the case, let's choose how we want to present."

In 2020, Hudson and Carla will close out the season of the Portland Repertory Theater at Portland Center Stage with a new evolution of the show as a multi-actor play.

"The solo show is very much about my youth and growing up. The play is more of an imagined future for myself and coming to a place where it's okay not to choose an identity yet still feeling the need to choose," Hudson said.

There's a distinct line between Carla's life and Hudson's own, but there are occasional moments when "the horrible clown demon" manifests without warning. Even in those unsettling times, Hudson

keeps doing the work because it serves a purpose beyond either entity: creating a space for the people who find themselves questioning the things so many others take for granted.

"Drag is a mask, like armor."

— Anthony Hudson

"Doing this show let me meet people and become comfortable with not knowing. I think the best way to be is questioning," Hudson said. "I think back to starting the GSA at McNary and how much more fearless I was then than I am today. I was brave and I was a brat, but I really respect that person and I feel like I owe it to that person to continue the work."

Individual tickets for the 2019 Portland Repertory Theater production of *Looking for Tiger Lily* go on sale in August. Season tickets are on sale now.

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