

UMass Students Bring Drag Performance to Campus with Comic Book-Themed Show

By Colin Harmer

AMHERST, Mass. — On Feb. 24 at Bartlett Hall, UMass Amherst students demonstrated their skills in UMassisaDrag's second show *Comic Conundrum*, a comic book-themed drag show. Drag is a performance art centered on the exaggeration of gender through heavily stylized fashion.

The show followed the organization's first-ever production, *Creature Feature*, a Halloween-themed performance held in October 2023. These events give UMass students the opportunity to participate in a growing drag community. Before UMassisaDrag was formed, there were no formal student groups on campus dedicated to drag performance.

UMass sophomore and head of UMassisaDrag, Ary Lazar, established the group on July 13 in response to this gap. Lazar said, "This past summer I decided to start UMassisaDrag and create that missing group myself. And so many people have joined saying that they either had been looking for a drag group on campus or that they're freshman or incoming freshman and are so glad that this group exists now."

Drag shows outside of UMass can be largely inaccessible to students. Performing off-campus typically requires a car and prior experience. Lazar said making community and performance accessible is a priority.

"These shows build community and support for creative and gendered expression among both experienced and aspiring drag performers," Lazar said.

Drag performer Mis Andrie, a women, gender, and sexuality major whose legal name is Mick Devose, said the organization also supports discussion through its Discord server. She said, "It allows people to sort of talk about like 'how are you doing contour? Mine gets like super muddy' or 'I don't know how to cut my face in the right way' or like 'this is what I'm planning for a look' or 'I wanna do this song, is anybody else doing this song?'"

"It's a great place to sort of just test out ideas and know that you're going to get an honest answer from people who wanna see you do well and are also doing the same thing as you."

Another drag performer, Marina Garconne, aka linguistics major Aidan Sankowsky, said he appreciates the support that comes with having a local drag community.

"It makes me want to make my looks perfect, and it makes me want to make my face and my hair look perfect. And it makes me want to have well thought out numbers with a beginning, a middle, and an end, peaks and valleys. And really get the whole fantasy and the whole

experience, because that's how you get people to really remember your name and to like you and to capture the magic of what drag can be," he said.

Lazar said queer students often use drag to explore gender identity. Devose added that drag enables experimentation.

"Gender's fake, it's made up, it's-eheh-it's not real. So play around with it. If we're given all these like ridiculous roles and standards to follow, bend them at your will, morph them into what you need them to be. It's so much more fun that way," she said.

UMass has more than 400 student-led groups, making it challenging for UMassisaDrag to find and secure a venue. The organization is not yet registered, so Lazar has handled much of the work alone. They reserved venues for both shows, reached out to performers, and promoted the events via Instagram and flyers.

"In terms of other things like the technical aspects, I showed up hours early to connect my laptop to the speaker and video system, which was a nightmare to try to figure out by myself, no instructions," Lazar said.

Lazar hopes UMassisaDrag will become a registered student organization by the fall semester of 2024.