

Pride TO – Black, Queer and Trans Excellence Podcast: S2E1

Twysted Miyake Mugler

LENGTH – 48:03

SPEAKERS: Hollywood Jade, Twysted Miyake Mugler

Hollywood Jade 0:00

You're listening to pride Toronto's Black, Queer and Trans Excellence podcast, where we honor and celebrate the black experience through the lens of the LGBTQ+ community with honest conversations about embracing Black joy. I'm your host Hollywood Jade (music plays.)

Coucou, bonsoir and welcome back to our podcast, The Black Queer and Trans Excellence podcast presented by Pride Toronto. I am once again your host Hollywood, Jade. And we are kicking this season off with a very special guest, a pioneer in the queer black community. Please welcome Twysted Miyake Mugler to the podcast.

How are you doing? How have you been?

Twysted Miyake Mugler 1:06

I've been good. I've been good. I've had some really high highs and some low lows since the pandemic has begun. But it's like getting into a place where momentum is picking up in the right direction, things are just looking very hopeful right now. So once I have that kind of feeling inside of my body, I just go with it. So I'm feeling really, really good right now and hopeful.

Hollywood Jade 1:27

Yes, we love, we love momentum. That's such a great word, especially coming out of flash entering into another wave of this pandemic, that, that's a great word and a great place to be. I would like to give you the opportunity to introduce yourself. I think one of the things that has become really important to me is hearing how people speak about themselves, because that's how we teach people to speak about us. And how they relate to us. Yeah, I like to give you the floor and give you the opportunity to give the listening public a quick intro to who you are.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 2:07

Alright, yeah, let me control the narrative for a second....hahaha... So my name is Justin Miyake Mugler. I'm primarily known as Voguer, and a community leader. I've been voguing since I was 16, which is like half my lives hustling...haha...by this point. I've always had a passion for community ever since I was a product in church. So as an adult, I'm kind of like living all of my passion, all at the same time. And trying to combine them into being one being. So I have a passion for teaching, I have a passion for community, a passion for arts, passion for legacy building and stuff like that. So I think that I'm able to, well, what I'm doing is kind of like creating my own narrative through with my life. And I've been doing that, how would I say like, on a whim, essentially, but learning as I go, so nothing is like perfect at all... But I'm like always learning, always growing, always evolving. And always like reflecting on the way that I am and

the way that my work is being seen and done. So yeah, I'm just an evolving artist, that's also a community leader, quote, unquote. I wouldn't call myself a pioneer, but we're bringing - we are with the TKBA and with the Ballroom like House Monroe era, we have brought Ballroom into Canada. So in that regard, yes, we are pioneering So shout out to that. But like, I still feel like I'm still working on my story in that way. So I don't really try to get caught up in my, in titles, or anything. I just tried to continue doing the work. And that's kind of what, that's who I am, that's who I am and that's what I do kind of thing.

Hollywood Jade 3:44

No, I love that. And I think it's important that you acknowledge that, you know, you don't consider yourself a pioneer, but you are part of a legacy that has brought Ballroom to where it is presently, within not just Toronto, but within Canada, a few of the things that..

Twysted Miyake Mugler 4:04

Shout out to the House of Monroe girls, original House Monroe girls!

Hollywood Jade 4:08

A few of the things that Twysted hinted at but might not have outrightly said is in addition to everything he's listed, he is a House founder. He is a House Father, he is a teacher. He is an activist and an advocate for Canadian Ballroom. Yes! You mentioned the house of Monroe. And I think that's a relatively good place to start having the conversation surrounding how you got involved in ballroom and how ballroom has become sort of like your calling card within the black queer community.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 4:46

Absolutely. When we got started in the scene, in the black community, we were well like I said, I was 16 and I was like, back then the community looked very different. Back then we had I want to say black Exclusive spaces, but when it came to coming out or going out, we will be seeking out our community spaces. And that really was the club's, the club spaces, the dancing spaces, the Blockorama Pride spaces and stuff like that. That's kind of what we had back in the day. And there was a group of us that a lot of us had started out as dancers that were together or, you know, dancing their own kind of things back in the day when actually, I also have to shout out Seven was the first person that I saw floating in the club - Seven, Cedric and Little Tony. And we saw them and then because of coming in through street dancing at the time, which was really battle heavy, I started to mock somebody to Seven, and then through mocking him falling in love with the dance because I'm seeing how it's embodying all these things that I have never been able to do together. So like this, like Battle Rage, but Battle Rage, but being feminine and still being acrobatic and being strong and being like, flexible and all that stuff. Like I was actually able to put it all together with voguing. And I think that that's what it was not just for myself, but for a lot of people in that quote, unquote, pioneering era for House Monroe. A lot of us never really had a place or even felt so right in our bodies. And so right in our art form and expression that when we first started voguing, when we first started voguing, it felt like oh my god, this is the tea for us. So from that, we basically tried to build a community where that is accepted, because even though we found it in the club, what we noticed is that it was at the

end of the night plan and a lot of the people who are in the black club that time really, we're not even featuring it, because that's why it was at the end. So we had Black Cat, was always, Black Cat came into the DJing thing shout out to Black Cat who celebrated 30 years. But Black Cat, his, his story is that he came in through it through house music. So Black Cat had always had a deep love for house music. So he wasn't actually even playing the music for the Voguing girls. He was playing the music for himself and his friends who actually enjoyed that music, so but at the end of the night, you'll see them taking up space, like a lot of space on the floor, the few of them who were there, and the voguing girls, right. So we started to see that happen. And then we realized that a lot of people really didn't respect. voguing, let's just stay because of you know, being new to them, and whatever. So we had to actually create a space even within the black community that understood the the nuances of Ballroom and the nuances of trying to balance the feminine and the masculine energies and the nuances of you know, dancing with bent wrists and slamming it back on the floor, I blah, blah, blah, because to a lot of black, to a lot of black people. That's what it looked like. So we had to form a community where we basically didn't have to break things out all the time. And it took a lot of years for that to happen. A lot of ups and downs, like I said, but now we are there at the place where all that all that time that we spent trying to build a scene that's really paying off right now, because we're seeing that there is a whole generation after us that also is coming into it into the community directly through the ballroom without having to come in through the club scene or through different spaces. They're coming in through the Ballroom, which is, which is wonderful, because it would have been really nice if we were able to come in through, you know, art form and community. But back in our time, it was like that, but it wasn't the safest way for young people to come into adulthood, especially into this queer adulthood, it really wasn't the safest ways. So at least now we have created a legacy that brings in younger people into the community in a safer way, if that's what they want. So that...

Hollywood Jade 8:44

I love that.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 8:45

Yeah, that's a little history of like House of Monroe, how we started, and the trajectory of you know, going through that to get to where we are now. And the world's also more understanding of masculine and feminine than whatever. So we're just at a good place. And we did the work to get here.

Hollywood Jade 9:01

Yeah, I think you mentioned a lot of really important points, one of them that I want to touch on quickly, because it directly feeds into my next thought is, you mentioned having to educate the Canadian black queer culture on Ballroom culture and etiquette and, and you talk about it not being seen as accepted. And it was something that was done at the end of the night. And when do you think or not when sorry, why do you think it was met with so much resistance? And do you think that resistance that you guys are met with is part of what has made the process of getting to where you are now, so much of a fight and so long?

Twysted Miyake Mugler 9:44

Yes. I think that what I attributed to is really, us being so traditional as a community at that time. And I wouldn't say traditional and like being old school, it's just that we had our ways. We were into our things and we were not moving from that right. So like you have dancers, even with us, right? It took us so long to even be interested in even like looking and respect it. But because we were taught that dance should look like "this," men should act like "this." Feminine should act like "this." This, there's no blurring the lines to do "this" and whatever, whatever. So I think that because of the way that we were socialized as black queer people, and not just as black queer people, but as black queer people come to me from Jamaican and Caribbean and African descent, specifically in Canada, like first generation, right, so we're still the, for lack of better word, we've grown up with so much depression that has been inside of us that it just comes out sometimes, like that internalized oppression that we give to each other. Right?

Hollywood Jade 10:41

Absolutely.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 10:41

There's no, there's no real, there's no real reason behind it other than that, that's how we were brought up to be. And I feel like we got to an age where we started to, first we were just doing, then we started thinking about what we're doing after a certain age and why we were doing it. So a lot of people started to - their mindset to shift. And not to mention they're seeing ballroom not just grow here, but grow the worldwide. So there must be a reason why they're there must be a reason why all these people around the world are doing it, right. So I think that that also helped to solidify stuff. Because we know that Toronto - I don't, I hope we're changing with this, I kind of feel like we are but Toronto really was a follower city, right? We would never be a city to put stuff on or try to do stuff before it was really, really hot. Right? Or even encouraged the girls who are eating it in their thing, until there was some form of validation from people on the outside. So even with us and House of Monroe we were not walking in the States and you know, actually becoming part of Ballroom and known in Ballroom. I don't think that the respect will even come the way that it is. But we kind of took on that challenge. Because you know, we're coming from that dancing era where we were into the challenge and trying to let people know it. So we took it on as our challenge. And I think that having that resistance, although it was very un motivating, it was also very motivating for us coming from where we come from. A lot of people would have seen that and been like, oh my god, you know, maybe it's not for us. But we come from a background and place where we always had to fight to prove ourselves and fight to prove stuff. So it was just another layer or another little notch in proving yourself.

Hollywood Jade 12:20

Absolutely. Do you feel like that has changed a lot? In terms of not necessarily, I mean, you have been in the Ballroom scene, both here and in the States for going on a decade. Right. So you've got you've definitely earned your stripes, and you've got the recognition over there. Do you think that's what's helped advance you here? And do you think that now people locally are now putting respect on your name?

Twysted Miyake Mugler 12:48

Yes, I feel like that definitely has a part to play. Not to mention, I don't really get to compete much here because I'm usually hosting or teaching or whatever. So that also really helps to like really solidify, "Oh Twysted Miyake Mugler is Twysted Miyake Mugler because he is da-ra-dun? Right? Cause I AM da-ra-dun!...haha...

Hollywood Jade 13:09

Like, it's not just, it's not just a title that's been given to you. It's something that you've actually earned.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 13:14

Yes, I had to get up the years for that I had to grand prizes for that in many different States. So it is, it is earned. And that's why, you know, I think people even respect it more because it's like I said, it's a connective; people just doing their own ballroom that's not really connected to the real source of it all doesn't really show that truth to it. Right. So I figured that...

Hollywood Jade 13:36

Right. How did you, well let's keep it focused on you. How did you get connected with the International Ballroom scene?

Twysted Miyake Mugler 13:45

So originally, because of the way that Ballroom works and being so underground, they had a website directly, specifically for Ballroom that people would have to go on to actually access anything Ballroom. So Seven, taught us about walking Wednesdays, and I went on there and I would basically keep in touch with the Ballroom and keep and keep up to date with what's happening. And then we found out through like one of the chats that they were having Ballroom in Buffalo, right. Sorry, back it up, House of Monroe, before we even started walking in Buffalo we walked in New York City we had performed in New York City at Jack Mizrahi's Ball because when we found out that Jack was having a Ball, I actually sent him an inbox saying, can we perform because me, Vixen and Snoopy we're doing a lot of dancing together at that time. So I felt like it would have been a fad representation of Canada if us three went to perform and introduce you know, Ballroom from Canada, like introduce our Canadian Ballroom participants to the world because you know, we're not we're not nothing yet. But at least now people wouldn't know that we're a part of the scene. So that yeah, that happened in January 2009...

Hollywood Jade 14:57

Yeah!

Twysted Miyake Mugler 14:57

January 2009 - that's when we had performed - or was it 2008? It was really, really early on before we had our first Ball that we had performed there. And that's how we got connected originally to the Ballroom scene, but it wasn't really like they were fucking with us like that. But just recognize that we are part of the Ballroom scene. International Ballroom scene really started fucking with us, sorry for this language, but international Ballroom scene really started

recognizing us when the Kiki scene started. And that's because they gave us the role that was directly attached to American Houses. We were always going to be House of Monroe, House of Monroe, House of Monroe. We were so strong about it. We were a Canadian house. We don't want no American help, blah, blah, blah. And that, when we had our Kiki scene, when we joined the Kiki scene as pink ladies, which is from New York City, and an extra extravaganza started with New York City house, and then Louis Vuitton, and all these new Houses that are directly connected to New York and Ballroom there, that is really when the connection was building now we started making friends and family in that regard. And with that, that's when people started really, really messing with us and like really recognizing us because now we're really a part of their scene and part of their community versus Canadians doing it.

Hollywood Jade 16:12

So the Kiki Ballroom scene is really what build the bridge between the Canadian Ballroom scene and the International Ballroom scene.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 16:23

Absolutely.

Hollywood Jade 16:24

So can we talk a little bit because you are one of the one of the founders of the TKBA, which is the Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance? And so when did that form? And, and how has that played a role in evolving the ballroom community here?

Twysted Miyake Mugler 16:43

That started in 2010 with a message on MySpace...haha.

Hollywood Jade 16:46

Hahaha...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 16:50

I think that people like don't understand how simple some of these things start how some, simple some of these things started and how like the great impact they have. But it really starts with something so small. They were just having their second House Ball, the pink, House of Pink lady because Pink Lady was having a second House Ball and they just wanted to make it hot...Haha... They heard that people were coming from Canada to participate in New York City so they actually sent out a message and were like, "we just want to be the first Kiki house to have an international chapter. So would you guys come down in like two or three weeks to be a part of the grand March at the Pink Lady Ball?" And we said, "Hell MF'N Yes!"..Ha!.. So that is how that bridge originally started with that message on MySpace. And then from there, they allowed us to really build our own scene. But they were not just letting us do that they were really recognizing what we were doing. They were paying attention to us. And that really changed the game for Ballroom in Canada with the Kiki scene. So the Kiki scene started in 2010 with that message, and then we started having our own Kiki balls because we came back, it was still that core House of Monroe group and 007 that we had a our mainstream Ballroom scene.

So I noticed that that was one of the things we were lacking that we really needed to amp up in our Kiki scene. So we split up at House of Monroe. So I had Pink Ladies, TKO had um, me and Vixen sorry, you had the Pink Ladies. Mother TKA Monroe opened up the House of Giselle. Cash Xtravaganza. Marvel started Polaris. And there was one more House, oh its slipping my mind right now. But we split up. And that also showed that also showed people that we were really in this to have fun and to learn because we're not battling each other. And people have never seen us do that. So that really helped so we started recruiting 007 to forming these kiki houses. That is what really changed the game in the Canadian bottom culture because now we're seeing actual Balls now, five houses competing against each other, even though they're Kiki houses, versus just House of Monroe and 007. So we're seeing Ballroom and like happening in front of our eyes. And yeah, and it happened. And it's happening on an easier scale at an easier level that people could actually join in on its not like these big grand stages are these late night Balls. It's like afternoon Balls, evening bBalls at Sherbrook Help Center at the 519 at BlackCap. So all of these places helped to make it feel like we were just in a community space. So that feeling a lot of people want from ballroom to feel like they're a part of it or to feel it to express themselves but in a community way is what turned the card for us that really made people like, I want to be a part of this.

Hollywood Jade 19:34

That's the word that like you touched on it. I said like you saying it being at the 519 and Blackcap. And like it really now has gone from being this underground nightclub thing to now becoming a community thing.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 19:49

Yes.

Hollywood Jade 19:49

And and we talk about in a previous conversation that we've had we've talked about there being a serious lack of community at the at the beginning of when You would have started this. And now, this past summer, having witnessed all the great things that you guys did at the underpass and, and just seeing how it's grown. Well, let's, let's hip everybody to game - basically what happened with the pandemic and the TKBA and the underpass and you can jump in at any point in that...ha...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 20:22

So yeah, like, it's so funny. So the pandemic hit us at a time when we thought we were about to do some mother-effin things. My God, can I tell you, we had a meeting March, I want to say March seventh, before I went to New York City, I'm sorry, to Chicago. We were in the 519. About 20 of us, like, we couldn't believe how if you were at this town hall, okay, picking big, big plans for 2020 that effing weekend! They announced the world was getting shut down. Literally. I we're there like, Okay, fine. You know, a couple months, you know, we're mad, whatever, we're gonna wait,

Hollywood Jade 21:01

They told us 2 weeks initially...haha..

Twysted Miyake Mugler 21:06

Right, two weeks, sorry. So, were like okay, you know what. Okay, we're gonna have to push it back two weeks, whatever, fine. You know, the dates kept getting longer and longer and staying inside, because you know, we're Canadian, and nobody wants to break the law. Because Oh, my God, we're Canadian, I don't want to go to jail. Me jail. Oh, my God. So whether they're inside waiting, waiting, weeks, turned into months, waiting, waiting, waiting, oh, my God, this is real, we're not gonna be able to do anything. Right. And then we started getting into the summer months and noticing that all the festivals were canceled, Pride was canceled, Caribana was cancelled. Everything started getting really like, it started really hitting us that we are actually moving into a pandemic. We're still gagging though, right? So we're not really able to do anything at the very beginning of the pandemic. And that's literally, I mean, we had nothing to do other than like applying for some emergency funds that people can get individually and go to the grocery store. And that's all that we were able to do for like so many months, when we got to the summer now, we've seen that, but before the summer actually, I want to say that maybe June ish, May June, we know we seen that the zoom thing was popping, and everybody was doing their classes on Zoom and whatever, whatever. We're finding a new way of communicating as a world. So we jumped on, we jumped on that bandwagon. I started doing something called a Summer Virtual programs, right. So that's the first thing we started doing, which was offering zoom workshops. We allowed, like, we got like 20 youth into TKBA to teach 20 different things from like politic conversation, because you know, a lot of protests and stuff were happening at that time. So we had like conversations on politics, we had conversation about financing, we had conversations on gender and stuff like that. And then we also had workshops, and this is how we first started engaging with each other. Then we started realizing that we can start to do stuff that was outside in smaller numbers. So we started to do stuff like at the beach, we had Maltita's baby shower bar, which was a Kiki Ball that was outside at the beach. And this stood before the police that it really like hounding down on people that were outside at the beach that we were able to kind of do stuff. We had Kiki, we had a Kiki Ball on Labor Day weekend even was at the Bentway that was like our first Ball because we're okay, we're outside, it's warm outside, we can do stuff. So Labor Day weekend, September 2020, we had a great Ball! People came out, police saw us and stopped and watch the ball and everything. Everybody was looking for the Ball. And then the next weekend, they announced that they're going back down into old lockdown again, and people can't even be outside anymore. So we thought the world was coming for us again, because we found a way we find a way and then low and behold, family gagged so much because we can't do anything.

Hollywood Jade 23:07

Hahaha...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 23:22

Haha...Okay!

Hollywood Jade 23:50

All of us!

Twysted Miyake Mugler 23:52

Bitch! okay, we were gaggy-gaggy-gaggy...

Hollywood Jade 23:53

They said you can be in our little pods. And they then they said you can have your circle then they said, Okay, you can have three different households. And then it opened up to like 25 people and then the fall hit. And they said no more, no more..

Twysted Miyake Mugler 24:07

No more. So we gagged and so we're like, back inside, again, trying to figure out how we can continue this momentum because at this point, we were having a lot of like, a lot of energy, because people were gagging having done anything for months. And we were having that Ball. So we did another session of the virtual programs because we're moving into winter. And last winter, we even did some more stuff like we had, we had done a GoFundMe fundraiser, and we raised like over \$10,000 on that fundraiser. So we were able to like, I was guided, but this was because people seeing what we were doing it the summer and whatever and supporting what we were doing online. All community, by the way, so shout out to all the people who supported us because it really is the community seeing what we're doing and validating it with their support and then moving into 2021 now we see like, what, it felt like things were kind of getting better Right. So going towards the summer, even though there was, you know, the Pride was still canceled and whatever it was seeming like we were able to do our own thing outside, right, so you've noticed that people were gathering again, and we just took it on ourselves to try to do another outdoor Ball, right. And this time because we were gonna go back to the Bentway, but one of the youth in the community said that, shout out to Roderick, they said that there are people that do these, you know, dance classes or whatever, at the underpass. So we might want to check that place out because it's a really sickening spot. And there's art already spray painted on the wall so it has a nice backdrop blah, blah, you know we live for that stuff because we just want it to look good on video.

Hollywood Jade 25:40

And it creates a creates an environment, it creates a feeling and, and yeah, Shout out to Roderick for that suggestion, because it really felt like grassroots, it's sort of, it sort of reminded me of like, what the pier might have felt like in New York.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 25:54

Right! It really gave us that feeling like we are tucked away underneath the underpass. And we're able to like get get away with it, because the police came even from the first Ball as well, out at the underpass, and they stopped it, they watched, they love that they had like, the group of them that were there. And they were even helping to defuse some of the situations that were coming up with the people that were in that area. So we we really landed on something that really hit. So we thought of getting the generator, the bigger generator, the bigger speaker system, every ball, we started seeing that there was even more and more people showing up to

this underpass. Like, the first one was a cute like, couple 100's like, but we'll still spread out because the underpass is so big. And then by the second Ball, it was like, Whoa, the third Ball, whoa, Fourth Ball, whoa, like, this is getting out of hand! Like there's so many people here. And I realized, I guess that kind of must have been by somebody called 311 cops on us because we didn't have a permit. We didn't have any, we were not given any permission to be there. But we were just allowed to be there. We, just you know, that apparently people say that, you know, when they see black people succeeding and stuff, and they're not able to do the same thing at the moment that you know, they're gonna be gagging, they're gonna wanna end smash a tub because that's what they are. So somebody called the 311 on us and they stromed us at that Ball...

Hollywood Jade 27:21

Aye...That's such a terrible, such a terrible way for the narrative of what a beautiful thing you guys did all summer long, not just for yourself, but for the community, and the fundraising that resulted from it. And like, it really sucks that somebody would go purposely out of their way to try to mess up something that was benefiting so many people.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 27:45

SO many people.

Hollywood Jade 27:47

But you guys got the last laugh because it ends up moving to somewhere more fab. And now you have a relationship with this venue. So shout out to Stackt Market for...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 27:58

Shout out! Shout out! And shout out to James Milkshake for connecting us there because like, once again, the youth just like, they blow my mind the way that they get on stuff. And they're like, they're serious about it. They take that ownership, and they're like, Yo, what do you mean the Ball got cancelled, so we're gonna find somewhere like everybody, and their mom was trying to find somewhere for us to have the ball even that day. Like even though it was raining, still and everything people were still trying to like, and that's why I love what you just said, that wasn't really just for us, like, so many people took this Ball, like take these Balls, so serious, like they really really have nowhere else where they can get wet like that and the hundreds of people that were coming to see them, like on! Like, literally there to see them.

Hollywood Jade 28:42

The generations, the intersectionalities of sexuality, the nationalities, like...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 28:51

The pioneers to the babies in the same space safely...

Hollywood Jade 28:54

It was really beautiful! It was really beautiful. And I'm glad that I was able to see, again, I've known you and I've known most of you from the TKBA for a really long time...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 29:08

The beginning! From the beginning, yeah..

Hollywood Jade 29:10

So to see the growth and the progression from it being this thing that you guys had to explain to people in nightclubs to it becoming this huge community thing and I'm talking guys like TV executive producers and casting directors and, and documentary filmmakers like people, were at the Ball, which is what from my experience in talking to people from New York Ballroom scene, that's what it was in the 80s. It was like people came here to, I mean, a lot of it was culture-vulturing but...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 29:44

Right, right, right.

Hollywood Jade 29:45

But what's happened now is like these, these people know that there are narratives that need to be told, and they want to get the narrative from the source. They're not trying to get from a second hand in, word of mouth they're coming directly to the source. And I think it's so beautiful that that you have stepped into this leadership role, not just within the local community but being you know, appointed to one of the most prestigious houses internationally, I think it's so important that you are normally like you said, you don't get to compete, you're, you're normally the emcee, you're normally hosting, you're normally putting it on. So for these people to be able to come and hear an authentic voice, and us be able to connect with them in this way is vital, especially for it not to be what it was and no shade to, to Madonna, but to use those kids, you know what I mean? And, and they allowed themselves to be used, because if we're going to be accountable, we're going to be accountable. And the difference now is, you are one of the founders, and I know, being called a pioneer feels strange, but you are and they're coming directly to you. They're not going to the youth in order to get access to these they have to come through the founders. And I think that is another vital thing that didn't exist for you when you were younger. Because there wasn't there was no you before you.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 31:16

Right. Right. And I take that role very seriously because of like, my upbringing in church and my desire to always wanting to be like a pastor, a bishop kind of situation. That's like, that was my dream, right. So I feel like that really motivates the way that I work with people and like my heart for people. At the end of the day, it might not be in quote unquote, church, but I mean, if Jesus was alive, you wouldn't be doing evangelism at church either...hahaha...

Hollywood Jade 31:45

Very that. And I love that you you brought up your your faith and you mentioned even in our earlier exchange your life Hallelujah and Amen. I think it's important to acknowledge how, no, I think it's important to acknowledge how important your faith is to you, and how that

upbringing in church, and that desire to be a pastor and a leader has translated into this for you. So can we talk briefly about your journey to self, you know, I mean..

Twysted Miyake Mugler 32:20

Yes. It took a long time, because like, there was so much self hate, because I'm not lining up physically, like literally, internally, spiritually, with whatever reading and learning about the faith and stuff like that. So always really, it was a challenge growing up, like recognizing that I was gay. And usually what I had - well not usually, what I did was separate, like the gay and this mask show. Right. So I had this whole Twysted Alter Ego, that would basically be you know, who he is in the gay community. And then I have this mask show, of what it was like, at home or at church, and then starting to realize that living that double life situation wasn't really benefiting anybody, especially myself, even though I thought I really was, right. And it took some years, and it took some like, let's just say, embarrassment, and like some shameful moments to like, really understand that um, you're really only hurting yourself by not living in your truth, right? You, me not being, Sorry me, yeah, not being like the straight, you know, cookie, cookie cut mold of who a minister, quote unquote, might be like, it was very, very hard to like, get over, right. But it was like, I've always felt like my steps on my life has always been ordained. Because like, as I continue to live life, I start to see signs that oh, this is the way that things are supposed to be anyways. Right? And I think that this Ballroom scene, the TKBA literally is one of those things that kind of prove like, this is what it was supposed to be. Anyways, there was so many things that were supposed to like happened in my life, quote, unquote, or could have happened in my life. And it didn't happen because of the community essentially meetings, needing somebody to care for their souls kind of thing, right? And that's like, that is what, that's kind of what leads to work, because I'm still human, I still get angry, I still carry when I have to, and all that stuff, right. But like, there is a bigger picture for it for me and that is what has always guided me. And so even though like I left the church, you know, really getting into myself, I had to like, I feel like I had to leave the church and really understand myself, and all that. So even after doing all of that, it's kind of nice to feel like, we're still able to really get the work done and care for people that would really not have any, like, we didn't have nobody caring for us like that back in the day. So I just take that on. And that's kind of Yeah, that's kind of one of the things that I'm most proud of, if that makes sense. Like, knowing that so many people really feel safe in this community, right? People really come on here because they have nowhere else to really feel like the way they do in this community. That's what it is for me. They have no fake - people take their family and their Houses in this Kiki scene, like TKBA, they take their Houses so seriously. The connection that they have, they take it so seriously, like this is really their families. This is really people caring for them and loving on them. And that really like that is the goal. And that's the reason that that's the motivation. And that is, that is what keeps me going right like that people.

Hollywood Jade 35:22

I love that. And I think I've always found I've always found that the people who I know locally and internationally who are in houses, it does sort of feel not sort of it is family and it's, and beyond family, it's, it's where you feel safe, it's where you feel seen it's where you feel heard

and for me growing up in church prior to other people making my sexuality aware to me and everyone else, that's where I, I felt at home I felt safe...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 35:54

Literally, literally...

Hollywood Jade 35:54

I felt seen, I've felt heard. I've always drawn that connection and that parallel with Ballroom Houses and, and home and, and Church. You know what I mean? I've always been that. I definitely understand that and as queer man myself whose faith is vitally important to me and I know that God orders my steps and (inaudible) every day sometimes several times a day; I know that finding that balance was, was monumental to me being able to move forward in life and advance in my career. And I love that you, you found a way to maintain your spirituality and allow your sexuality to coexist.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 36:45

Yes, yes. Because I didn't know that they could have before...

Hollywood Jade 36:49

Same.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 36:49

I always thought that I had to separate that stuff. And it didn't live in the same body. It couldn't! Sorry not that it didn't, that it COULDN'T! Because I've always lived in the same body. But I took it upon myself to kind of separate that stuff. And that was what was hurting me is like, I was never really living in the fullness of who I am. I like when people say that stuff. It's like, I wonder if they really know what they're saying when they're saying that stuff. Because now that I've actually gotten into quote, unquote, "living in the fullness" of who I am like, it really makes sense to say that, right? And that meaning it's like the mental is in line with the body, which lined with the spiritual, right like that is when you start to live in your fullness, right? So yeah, I really, I'm so glad that I'm able to do that. Right. I feel like my life has a reason has a purpose, and that is being lived out. Right? So....

Hollywood Jade 37:41

Yeah. Yes! We talk about purpose. And I, and, and I couldn't agree more, I feel like the work that you have done and will likely continue to do is purpose work, which is why it's hitting differently now than it has before. And you, not only knowing not only knowing that it's purpose work, but seeing the purpose being manifested directly in front of you. When I think about your the House Siriano and I think about all the different representation and the platforms that the ballroom scene has been given over the last year. And, and with all the different TV specials and Arts Council things like it's like it's there's a very clear narrative, yes, there's a clear narrative that is being created. And that narrative is that we are here, and we are present. And we are worthy, and deserving. So here it is, before we wrap up, I want to know where do you see the TKBA and the Canadian Ballroom scene in the next decade?

Twysted Miyake Mugler 38:54

Honestly, guys, I feel like we will end up taking it a step further. And like we've because of like upbringing in where we were at when we started, we were not trying to be like a real nonprofit organization, we were not trying to do all that stuff. We were really just focusing on building community, and doing it in a way that's underground, so that it can be safe for the members. Because the majority of us at the time, we're not even out right? So now we live in now we live in a new era where the young generation, they're not holding back their identity for anybody, not their mom, not their father, not nobody. So we now have to be able to care for these people when they're 16 and 17 and whatever because they're going to be, this is who it's for now, what we were hiding to do, they're doing it in front of people's faces. So they're going to be facing more oppression than we would at that age. And so what I see for us really and truly like, I want us to be legit NPO with a building that we can actually have some like even for lack of a better word, like a homelessness program where people who like are interested in housing are able to stay while they're, you know, transitioning from with their parents to getting their own kind of support. And I see us having like, built it, built relationships, especially because considering the new generation of people that's going to be picking up all these jobs, right, and that are in all these careers and whatever, they are coming into their career, knowing about the TKBA and knowing about different community organizations that are tackling, that are hitting off certain things. So they're gonna be they're going to be hitting us up in a couple of years because now that they're in this position to do stuff for the community, they're going to know exactly where to go. Right. This is this is the dream this is what's gonna this is like 10 years from now. It's really going to be a really rethink all of this stuff because along as we continue to do this work, we will continue to reap because like everything that we've gotten so far was because of community saying they deserve this community saying here have this like, we apply for grants for so many years and we're not getting no grants. But doing people I say how are you guys not getting grants, look at the work you're doing? Look at the work you do look at the work you're doing. People are not really funding work like this, right. They're not funding work like we do because it's so nuanced, we don't fall into certain box and don't fall into certain brackets. So when community gives us support, we're able to do it in special ways. But like in 10 years, I really know that we're going to be continued to reap, like how we've been reaping like this underpass year, to me, is a reaping because of continuing to work through the pandemic. And people seeing us like, Oh, they're really about what they talk about. So let's go, let's support and support it. Yeah, that's kind of that's what it is. And I want people to continue to support it. So long as we continue to work, and we will continue to build, we will have our own space, we'll have our own building. And that's really the dream to have our own physical space for the TKBA, where we can have Balls, or we can have House practices, where we can, like I said, have some transition housing, but that's like, the first thing we just want to do is have a space to meet. That's ours.

Hollywood Jade 42:08

Listen, listen. And, and from your lips, to God's source, the universe, whatever you believe in's ears. And, and I don't see why not. Because even though in the past people might not have been funding niche and nuancey programs and things, that narrative has definitely shifted, you

know, so we shout out to, to people who have been on the frontlines advocating and making it be heard and seen, like Black Lives Matters, Toronto is always advocating for the community, because so many of the committee is made up of members of this community. And, you know, like, I've even seen, like the grant application language has shifted, so you will have your space sooner than you think...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 42:58

And shout out to Another Black Life too, which is like the junior version, the baby version of Black Lives Matter, Toronto, and they're like, they're the people that actually helped us with the grants that we actually are successful for. So you're talking about language and how the language has shifted, it's so interesting, because they teamed up with us because they know the language, right that they helped us. And they helped us to get our first grants that we've gotten in 10 years! 10. Years!

Hollywood Jade 43:25

YES! Well congratulations on that! And there's more to come for sure.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 43:29

There is more to come.

Hollywood Jade 43:31

Is there any thought that you want to leave us all with?

Twysted Miyake Mugler 43:36

Well, I guess my final thought would just be to like do it and don't do things for people. Right? You have - and this is like I guess not everybody's spiritual everybody's into like that stuff. But like Danger who we just lost 2020 year or earlier this year sorry, 2021. We - Danger will always say "you don't do things for rewards from man you do things for rewards from God" right. And that's kind of one thing that's always like, continue to drive because I know a lot of people when they do stuff and it's not being recognized they're really, unmotivates us right because it's like nobody's really seeing it for what it is nobody really cares for what it is right but that's why it's like even though people might not see it or care for what it is God is watching and he knows what he knows why you're doing things and he will reward you for it right, and sorry a I'm saying he is God for, for people who are listening, because if I see things whatever I was brought up like that, but it's not God at how it is like Hollywood says however you view your higher power where are your spiritual life, whatever, you know that you're not just doing things for that, for yourself, right? You're doing things so that God can bless you because that's the, it's do the right thing. Right? That's really what it is, so that's what I want to leave you guys with.

Hollywood Jade 44:48

I love that it's the whole idea and the whole concept of legacy building. Like if you don't pass it on it dies with you and the work that you're doing will live on like we are, are, are the people who they will make documentaries about in 30 years.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 45:08

Oh shout outs to Twysted Spirits! Oh my god, you guys, just Twysted Spirits coming out soon. Yes, God, we just got to support brand like yeah you just said that because we're working on a documentary and reached out to Gabrielle and yeah, like, yeah, we've been working on it for a couple of years now. But now it's time to get support and to get momentum too. So like, we just have to continue doing what we're doing. That's the point. You just have to continue like look at look at you, like look at YOU. Are you kidding me? Like it's so like, bro, the epitome of just keep on doing what you're doing, and it will come to you.

Hollywood Jade 45:42

And and I thank you. I receive that and I celebrate...

Twysted Miyake Mugler 45:47

Keep on doing what you're doing! Because it will come to you Hollywood. Like it's no shade shade like, Girl, the resume just does not stop getting like it doesn't stop growing. Right? It doesn't stop growing for you like what is going on...hahaha

Hollywood Jade 46:02

Haha...And And again, like it's bigger than just me. It's it's the lies that we're able to impact with the work that we're doing and I applaud your foresight and your fearlessness. And listening to you and watching you and observing a lot closer over the last year in particular, like it really is like foresight and fearlessness are the two words that I attribute to you and I think will will, will keep you going, you know, and like, you have no idea but you did because you're like, I want to do this thing and I'm gonna fight my own demons I'm gonna fight against a whole Church, I'm a fight against all of it, because this feels right to me. And that takes fearlessness and to have started and sent that that message on MySpace and reached out like you did that takes foresight. And I applaud that and I celebrate you and we celebrate you here at Pride and we look forward to seeing what this TKBA residence looks like...Cause it's coming!

Twysted Miyake Mugler 47:07

YES! Okay, residence! Ohh, ohhh baby!

Hollywood Jade 47:09

Cause it's coming...haha

Twysted Miyake Mugler 47:09

Yes, I receive that. Lets manifest

Hollywood Jade 47:17

Alright. Thank you so much for your time. Thank you so much for your words and thank you for sharing and we will be on the lookout let everybody know where they can find you online.

Twysted Miyake Mugler 47:26

Oh yes, honey, you can find me on Instagram @mrmappleleaf. But that's on everything by the way. Instagram and twitter whatever shout out to being the first one that has the handle. And you could also find the Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance everywhere as well. And on Instagram it is @torontokikiballroomalliance type right out. Same thing on Facebook same thing on YouTube. We're all over and we will have our website launching soon. So you can just follow us on our website.

Hollywood Jade 47:52

Awesome. Thank you so much for listening to the Black, Queer and Trans Excellence podcast. I've been your host Hollywood Jade and we will see you soon. Peace, love and hair grease.