

# Drag: The Musical

**Tomas Costanza, Justin Andrew Honard, Ashley Gordon** music, lyrics, book  
**New World Stages, Off Broadway** 30 September 2024 – 30 March 2025  
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Open your mind: The queens Jan Sport, Jujubee, Nick Laughlin and Alaska Thunderfuck; Yair Keydar and Joey McIntyre in the presence of Luxx Noir London

Forget about lip-syncing for your life. In *Drag: The Musical*, the queens must deliver actual vocals backed by a live five-piece band. This Off-Broadway production is polished and surprisingly wholesome. The show defies expectations in other ways, too, with an original score (credited to Tomas Costanza, Justin Andrew Honard and Ashley Gordon, who also all co-wrote the book) that's heavily influenced by guitar-forward pop-rock as well as contemporary Musical Theatre.

Honard, a *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars* champion best known by their drag persona Alaska Thunderfuck, also stars as Kitty Galloway, a drag queen whose club is located directly across the street from one run by her ex, Alexis Gillmore (Nick Adams). 'Two drag houses. Both alike in their lack of dignity,' Kitty quips at one point. Both venues are struggling: Kitty's Cathouse is threatened by an avaricious real estate developer hoping to gentrify the block (J Elaine Marcos), Alexis's Fish Tank by an IRS agent (Marcos again) whose arrival reveals the proprietor's complete disregard for keeping financial records. 'Some people do numbers... I do numbers!' she explains, flashing jazz hands to indicate that creative types ought not be distracted by the cost of tequila, wigs and ostrich feathers.

The story is glorified panto, with protracted exposition scenes to set up the many, many

characters and subplots. Each drag house has a trio of starlets who include *Drag Race* alums like Jan Sport, Jujubee and Luxx Noir London, whose roles suit both their personas

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and skill sets, whether it's to deliver musical riffs or bitchy asides. We also meet a chatty patron dubbed Drunk Jerry (Eddie Korbich); Alexis's very straight and straitlaced brother,

Tom (New Kids on the Block's Joey McIntyre, with hints of grey in his temples); and the widower Tom's son, Brendan (Yair Keydar alternates the role with Remi Tuckman), a shy 10-year-old who comes into his own in the presence of boas, rhinestones and glitter. Brendan is gifted the show's best song,

'I'm Just Brendan,' a plaintive ballad about exploring your identity in a world that typically prefers to see things in binary terms. 'Pretty clothes and make-up are like toys, but not for boys,' he sings. Keydar delivers the number with unshowy finesse, starting from a tentative place before gaining strength in his final notes.

Despite pedestrian lyrics (there are a lot of 'oh la las' and rote 'play'/slay' rhymes) and director-choreographer Spencer Liff's *Pose*-lite synchronised dance routines, the numbers are often elevated by Marco Marco's garishly over-the-top costumes, which generate some of the show's best laughlines. (At one point, Kitty balances a black hat with a four-foot brim atop her foot-high bouffant hairdo for a funeral scene.)

There's an admirable spirit of generosity at work, of playing to each performer's strengths. Honard has given Adams,

## Production credits

**Cast** Alaska Thunderfuck, Nick Adams, Joey McIntyre, Eddie Korbich, J Elaine Marcos, Jujubee, Jan Sport, Lagoona Bloo, Liisi LaFontaine, Luxx Noir London, Nick Laughlin *et al*

**Direction, choreography** Spencer Liff

**Music direction** Andrew Orbison

**Set** Jason Sherwood

**Lighting** Adam Honoré

**Sound** Drew Levy

**Costumes** Marco Marco

**Make-up** Aurora Sexton

**Projections** Aaron Rhyne

PHOTOGRAPHY: Matthew Murphy





**Below** Nick Adams's Alexis shows off some serious biceps **Above** 'Demure' Alaska and the Drag company



a Broadway veteran, the flashier role and the more demanding musical numbers, while reserving for themselves a few cabaret-style tunes that suit Alaska's very demure, very mindful drag persona. That kind-heartedness can also blunt some of the bitchiness. Sure, the dialogue is seeded with digs, about everything from Alexis's seriously bulked-up biceps to an inexperienced queen's mangled eyebrows ('It's fine. If you wanna wear bangs'), but anyone coming for an epic roast battle is liable to be disappointed. (The harshest insult paid to McIntyre's straight dude is calling him 'Turbo Tax on legs'.)

But it's hard to fault a show that embraces inclusivity to preach the gospel of drag – whether to the choir or potential converts.

The queens include a bearded newbie (Nick Laughlin), a trilling Latina who goes by Tuna Turner (Lagoon Bloo) and a straight assigned-female-at-birth woman (Liisi LaFontaine, a vocal dynamo) who takes a romantic shine to Tom while schooling him in drag subculture.

The lesson, McIntyre's Tom soon learns, is to throw on a boa and dance. And if you can't open your mind to allow for the liberating spirit of drag, then just sashay away.

Thom Geier

★★★★☆

Your guide to...

## Drag: The Musical

Everything you need to know, at a glance

**Concept** The show began back in 2022 as a concept album featuring many queens from the popular *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Later that year the show was workshopped shortly before its first run at the Bourbon Room in Hollywood in September 2022.

**Producer** This Off-Broadway production boasts the legendary Liza Minnelli as a producer, who also provides a voiceover introduction.

**Life's a drag** The art of drag has a long and rich history. Since the revolutionary *La Cage aux Folles* (1983), we have seen a surge in musicals featuring drag: *Hairspray* (2002), *Kinky Boots* (2012) and *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* (2017).