Dear Editor:  
  
Here’s an interview with Murray Hill. Photos are available. Please credit B Sharp.

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**More Than a Crown: Murray Hill Fights for Drag Kings to Be Seen**  
From queer nightlife pioneer to HBO breakout, Murray Hill reflects on laughter as resistance and the fight to put drag kings center stage  
By Chris Azzopardi

If you’ve spent any time around queer performance, alt-cabaret or downtown New York City nightlife over the past few decades, chances are you’ve come across Murray Hill — the iconic drag king, comedian, actor, emcee and now TV host, known for his razor-sharp wit and impeccably tailored suits. A true drag trailblazer, Hill has been commanding stages since the 1990s with his signature mix of old-school vaudeville, gender-bending brilliance and biting satire — in fact, when I called him, I could practically hear the wink as he exclaimed, “Showbiz!”  
Audiences might recognize Hill from his scene-stealing role as Fred Rococo in HBO’s tender found-family drama “Somebody Somewhere,” or touring with legends like Le Tigre and “Somebody” co-star Bridget Everett. In 2022, he starred in Amy Schumer’s comedy-drama "Life & Beth," then hosted the 2023 Hulu comedy competition "Drag Me to Dinner," which saw teams of successful drag queens go head-to-head to throw the most fabulous, drag-inspired dinner parties of all time. Most recently, he’s the host of Revry’s “The King of Drag,” the first-ever reality competition series focused entirely on drag kings — giving long-overdue visibility to trans masc and nonbinary performers in drag. In a moment when drag and LGBTQ+ rights are increasingly politicized, Hill is helping carve out spaces where drag kings can be seen and celebrated on their own terms. That includes writing his own memoir, slated for release in 2026 by Simon & Schuster’s Gallery Books imprint.  
Recently, Hill opened up about the fight to bring “King of Drag” to TV, embracing trans visibility, rejecting cattiness in drag culture and why, for him, it’s never been about the crown — it’s always been about the community.

**How are you surviving this challenging political era and also, at the same time, killing it?**

I really don't have a choice, especially as an elder. I'm still recovering from Sunday night, honestly. I just started seeing some of the photos from Sunday night’s finale of “King of Drag,” with most of the kings and the winner's first performance as the king of drag. It was something I personally needed, but so did all the kings and the community, and I'm telling you, it was a love fest.

**You all leaned so hard into creating such a joyful experience during a traumatic political era.**

That's what gay people have done to survive forever. We can wallow or we could just show each other what community means and take care of each other, have a safe space, and then go out and keep fighting.

**Tell me about a moment from the show that truly embodies that spirit of perseverance for you.**

I've always believed that there will be the “hate voices.” The only thing that's different is that they're louder. And I think when this administration tries to isolate us, tries to erase us, tries to divide us, it's very easy to get in that frame of mind because if you're only looking at social media, if you're only looking at the news, all you hear is hate, hate, hate, hate. And I really do believe that there's more good than hate and that hate’s the loudest.   
So when I see the “King of Drag” show, the actual TV show, the six episodes, and then the show from Sunday night, with 500 people in there — so loud with joy and love — it felt like everyone in that audience, including the kings and me, were so desperate to feel safe. So because of social media and the way our society is right now, we're not always gathering in such strong numbers. And the only time that we do is for a protest. So this wasn't a protest, it was a celebration. It kind of recharged my hope, which I needed, and I know a lot of the kings and the audience felt seen and accepted, and they were desperate for that.

**This is a great reminder to gather not just to protest, but also to be together and show love to each other.**

Well, and also the C word: Community. There's been a lot of feedback about the show saying it's not catty. The contestants weren't bringing each other down, trash talking; they liked each other.

**It almost felt British, honestly.**

Well, I wanted “The Great British Bake Off” version of a drag king show.   
  
**Did you want it to feel more lighthearted and warm than “RuPaul’s Drag Race”?**

Well, first of all, the drag queen and the drag king scene, it's apples and oranges, right? It's not a catty environment; it's just different. I think my philosophy, which is not everybody's, is that things are hard enough. This community is already disenfranchised and underrepresented. So, they're not going to battle each other because they're just trying to fight to survive and to fight for representation. So it's not like, “I'm going to win. I'm the best.” It's like, we need this. I think everybody understood that the competition aspect of the show is entertainment.   
  
**I noticed there wasn’t a strong sense of one being pitted against the other.**

Because why do that? There's plenty of that in the world. And I think when I read comments — and they were very similar comments on Reddit and socials regarding “Somebody Somewhere” — they were about showing authenticity, kindness and three-dimensional characters. It wasn't just the artifice of drag. It was, you really learned about the whole person.

**The casting was open to trans masc people, cis women, drag of all kinds. How does that reflect how drag has evolved and where drag might be heading?**

I think that's something that's unique to our show too — that we really did, and I was part of the casting, to make a point to try to represent as many different types of drag as possible. I am an old timer, so I started in the ’90s. And to watch the show and see, first of all, anybody, any drag person, talking about their art, their history and how it impacted them, and the vulnerability that the kings showed and the trans men, I was blown away as an old timer. This is going to sound crazy, but people didn't say transgender when I was starting for the first 15 years. So to see these guys embracing their transness, and we all accepted them, it was beautiful.

Lisa Rinna was one of the guest [judges] in the final episode. I don't think they put this in the edit, but she is obviously from a very different world in many ways, to put it nicely. And after the episode, she was flabbergasted by how much joy was in this community and acceptance because all everyone is hearing is hate. “These people are degenerate, groomers” — all this negative shit. She'd never seen a drag show before. So she walks into this community that she knows nothing about and has preconceived notions because there's no visibility. And then she was like, this is what everybody's scared of?

**Comedy can be disarming, and drag is often rooted in humor. How do you think that humor helped bridge the divide — especially in Lisa’s case, where experiencing it for the first time felt like a breakthrough?**

You said disarming. I talk about this a lot in my book: When I was a kid, I grew up in a religious-right, Catholic household. I can't even say people were homophobic and transphobic. They were just phobic of anyone who was different. So back then, I would say around sixth grade, I was made fun of a lot. I looked like a boy and I've always had a big personality, but I had developed a sense of humor to survive elementary school, junior high school and high school. I say in my act, you can't hate and laugh at the same time. It's physically impossible. So, to me, comedy and camp have always been a specific choice to disarm people and let everyone know that we're all the same. And I always lead with the heart, and with Fred on “Somebody Somewhere,” that was the same thing. I really led with that. And people see that first, rather than saying, “Oh, there's the trans person. I'm scared. I hate you.” So I think for me, it's just been a huge part of my career and my life strategy. And I think I tried to bring that to “King of Drag” too. It makes everything accessible to everybody.

**That makes me think of what you said when you opened the show: “Ladies and gentlemen… and I can say that again, since there are only two genders now, and I'm both of them.” Why did that feel like the perfect opening?**

Well, because it's saying we know what's going on. We know it's absurd and baseless and divisive. Queer people from the beginning of time have used humor to deal with really difficult stuff. A joke like that everyone gets. It points out the ludicrousness of it, and then we all come together and laugh at how stupid it is.

**Is it true that you had the idea for “King of Drag” for a long time, but it was a really hard show to get made?**

Oh, absolutely. I've been doing this for a long time, and the term “gatekeepers” is disintegrating very fast because of people making their own content for social media, like TikTok. But before that, even two years ago when I was pitching this, TV networks didn’t know what drag kings were. Everything's about money and numbers. “It's too niche.” I've heard that about me for my entire career. So from an economic standpoint, TV people, producers and networks are like, how can I make money off this? It's never been about community or any of that kind of stuff. And then they see “Drag Race,” which is a completely different world, but “Drag Race” started the same way. Nobody knew what it was. They didn't know what the show was going to be. It was on Logo. It was low budget like our first season, but somebody gave them a chance. But we didn't get that. I feel like I had to get to a certain place in my career for people to listen and be like, “Oh, wait a minute. Maybe there is an audience here.” I think it's just a matter of time before it bubbles up a little more.

**You mentioned Fred on “Somebody Somewhere,” which just ended with its third season. I’m going to miss it. With Fred, was it refreshing to play a character who wasn't really performing gender, but just living it?**

Well, it’s pretty much the first time ever that a trans guy got to be, first of all, a regular character and did get to just be himself. I think the character is based on me because I've been friends with Bridget [Everett] for 20 plus years, and I think she's always known my struggle: I never want people to say, “Murray Hill, trans, queer… blah, blah.” I just want to be Murray Hill.

They really adopted that with Fred and how it's written, because that's how trans people live. I just talk with the person at the coffee shop, and I have two little nephews I play with and babysit. I'm living in the world, and my whole life isn't about being trans.

I want to live just the way you do. That's my thing. So I think Fred had his own problems. He was part of that community. Nobody questioned him or asked him what he was. He had the same treatment as everybody else. And that went for Jeff [Hiller] too. Jeff wasn't like, “I'm gay. People are discriminating against me.” It was just a snapshot of people's regular lives. I think that's what made people respond to it so much. We're going to try to do a movie or something. We're trying to figure it out.

**Can we still expect your memoir this year?**

No one's to blame but myself, but it’s coming out next year. I finally finished the draft a month ago, and then I just got my notes. So I've got three weeks to get that in. It takes a long time for all the copy editing and the legal and all that fun stuff. So it'll probably be out in spring of next year.

**What would East Village-era Murray — fresh into drag, still building something out of nothing — say if he saw where you are now?**

Well, I would've said, I'm glad you didn't give up. And that's what I tell the young kids. I think a lot of people just see what’s on social media. It's the optics, right? But believe me when I tell you, I have been rejected and shut out for 25 years, still today. So what people see is the resilience to that. They don't see the hardship, but they see what happens when you stay the course. You keep getting out there in mainstream spaces and in the face of hate and discrimination.

*Chris Azzopardi is the Editorial Director of Pride Source Media Group and Q Syndicate, the national LGBTQ+ wire service. He has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.*