

DRESSED AS A
GIRL

The Story of London's Alternative Drag Community





DRESSED AS A GIRL

Synopsis

London's alternative East End drag phenomenon gets its moment in this fabulous account of six years in the lives of its most celebrated performers. See Jonny Woo, John Sizzle, Holestar, Scottee, Amber, Pia and Ma Butcher dazzle, surprise and outrage audiences with their antics on-stage and behind the scenes.

Following in the tradition of *Paris Is Burning* and *The Cockettes*, ***Dressed as a Girl*** paints a compelling London portrait that pulls audiences beyond the performances into a mesmerising and previously inaccessible underworld.

There is enough eye make-up and sequins on display to sink a battleship but at the heart of this surprisingly intimate portrait is the dark side of their lives. The relentless quest for glamorous originality often comes at a personal cost.

The film is both a record of a fascinating style of hyper-costumed performance and an insight into the fragile personal lives of these artists. This is truly the frockumentary of the year.



Overview

Following a near death experience, **Jonny Woo**, the ringleader of East London and a founding member of the area's unconscious 90s explosion, decided to pull his life together and became the self-elected commander of a new drag army.

Shaking Shoreditch in a cloud of killer heels, glitter and duct tape, Woo and his cross-dressing clique became the McQueens of the night and a point of focus for the fashion press. A sextet of alternative stars were born: **Jonny Woo**, **Scottee**, **Holestar**, **Pia**, **Amber** and **John Sizzle**.

After a brief introduction to the history of London's alternative drag phenomenon from the key players ***Dressed as a Girl*** showcases its carousel of principal performers – and it quickly emerges that each sequinned clutch bag comes with its own array of secrets.

Director Colin Rothbart rubs away the makeup to reveal the personal demons the paparazzi cannot capture.



Overview

For the next six years, in his feature film debut, Rothbart is given never-before-granted access into the private lives of East London's elite, from boob jobs and breakdowns, to religious battles and rape convictions, public sex and private rows - all that glitters is not gold.

We meet the cast's parents too, the quiet unassuming cul-de-sacs that gave birth to London's wackiest party animals.

But, as unlikely as its cast, the film is a fast-paced comedy and audiences are treated to a barrage of fun and raucous frolics at Lovebox Festival, Glastonbury's notorious NYC Downlow and momentous events at The Royal Opera House, Hackney Empire and "The Shed".

Dressed as a Girl is an inspirational and important documentary, occasionally heart-breaking, casually shocking, completely rocking and ceaselessly entertaining.

Not only does the film's insight give instruction to satellite gay communities, but it sends out a message to all creeds that when the party's over - peace lies in being true to yourself.



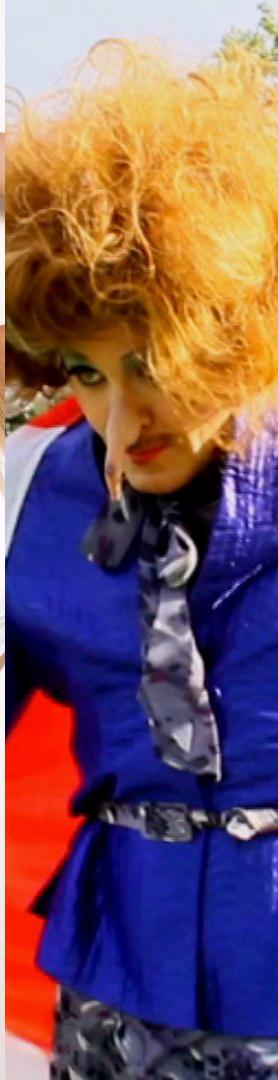


Director's Statement

As RuPaul says - 'it's all drag.' Drag is often about creating an alternative persona which frees you up to do/say things you might not feel comfortable doing in daywear. It's about dressing up and having fun - being the person you want to be.

Seven years ago, I was on holiday with Holestar (one of the stars of the documentary) discussing the vibrancy of the East London scene, when she pointed out there had never been a British PARIS IS BURNING - even 25 years later. Why didn't we make one? Or at least attempt to document the lives of the fabulous performers of East London both on stage and off. And so the idea was born - though I think I've made a very different documentary with that British twist of self deprecation, pathos and humor.

I didn't want this doc to just be a 'puff piece', it had to be a film full of universal truths – love, desire, insecurity, ambition, community, personal demons, family and familiar life experiences. And anyone who knows me knows I'm prepared to ask the difficult questions to get to the heart of the matter! I was brought up in an Orthodox Jewish family in NorthWest London where being gay wasn't ever an option.



Director's Statement

Once I came out in my early twenties, I felt I could truly be myself. When I started going out on the gay scene, I'd always had loads of fun when I'd gone out in drag. Everyone should give it a go. Though, up until the age of 30, if you'd have asked me if I could flick a switch and be straight, I'd have said 'yes', as I wanted to do what my straight friends were doing - get married and have kids, etc. But now I wouldn't change it for the world and really do view it as a gift.

People misunderstand drag performers as seemingly superficial drama queens, but they often have something important to say and aren't afraid to say it. Let's not forget that the Stonewall riots were started by drag queens and trans people! While performance is a huge part of these people's lives, I wanted to find stories that everyone could relate to, diving beneath the wit and banter to unveil the human side behind the glitter spray of East London's vibrant alternative drag scene.

As one of the performers states in a show: 'Behind the flawless maquillage, a broken facade.' I'd definitely like to make more films about counterculture movements, give a voice to people who often don't have one and dive deeper into the important issues of our times - hopefully with a touch of humor. Fundamentally, I hope this film appeals to gays, lesbians, trans and straight people everywhere – even my parents – an inspirational story of survival and being true to yourself. - **Colin Rothbart**

Meet the Artists





Jonny Woo

The Ringmaster of this big old glittery circus

Agent provocateur, drag artiste and legendary performer, Kent-born Jonny Woo is one of London's most prolific entertainers and co-founder of the hugely popular *Gay Bingo*. Honing his craft in New York, Woo was a founding member of the NYC Downlow – Glastonbury's first queer party tent. His show *The East London Lecture* documents the 90s explosion of Shoreditch, of which he was instrumental.



Scottee

The youngest of the group and definitely the most ambitious

East Londoner Scottee has broken his high heels, he's been questioned by police and his brash and obnoxious approach leaves audiences confused. After facing his personal demons we see Scottee grow into the confident performer that he is today, presenting on Radio 4 and touring the world.





Amber

She's outrageous and the life of every party

A transgender woman from Manchester and natural comedienne, Amber is currently working on her pop music career. In *Dressed As A Girl* we follow her transition from Day 1, when she enters the film as Dean on a tour bus to Glastonbury.



Holestar

She calls herself a 'Tranny with a Fanny'

An openly queer woman and former serving soldier, Holestar challenges perceptions of gender by being a London's foremost "bio" drag queen. In March 2015 she won "Best Drag Act" at the London Cabaret Awards, the first woman to do so.





John Sizzle

Our DJ extraordinaire

A talented DJ and sardonic wit, Sizzle is a domestic goddess whose day job is upholstery. He can often be found at his local church stuffing pouffes. "The drag DJ du jour" Sizzle shows the viewers what it's really like to work on the scene.



Pia

"There is a third sex of people predisposed to be different from everybody else"

Pia is a transgendered girl who works in a bike shop by day and as a showgirl and model by night. Pia is a one of a kind personality whose dangerous intelligence threatens to be her demise.

The Crew

COLIN ROTHBART - Director

Colin Rothbart is a London-based producer and director of documentary programmes and prime-time factual entertainment with nearly 20 years experience. He has worked for the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, Sky, Bravo and Living and many independent production companies including Two Four, Talkback, Love Productions, RDF Media, Betty, IWC, BBC New York, Tiger Aspect and Granada. His projects include *Michael Portillo's Great British Railway Journeys*, Alan Cumming's *Urban Secrets*, *The Apprentice*, *Celebrity Wife Swap*, *Splash!*, *World's Strictest Parents*, *Make Me A Christian*, *Unreported World*, *Extreme Fishing*, *Airport* and *Weekend Escapes* with Warwick Davis. *Dressed As A Girl* is his feature documentary debut.

Christopher Amos - Producer

Christopher has produced and directed independent short films, promos and documentaries. In 2015 he made his feature-length documentary debut by producing the cult film *Dressed as a Girl*, which premiered at Sheffield Doc/Fest. Christopher originally graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Film & Television from Queensland University of Technology and studied a Masters in Scriptwriting from the London School of Film, Media & Performance. In 2021, Christopher makes his feature documentary directorial debut with *Hating Peter Tatchell*, following the remarkable life story of one of the world's most famous human rights activists, and featuring film stars Ian McKellen and Stephen Fry.

Fenton Bailey & Randy Barbato - Executive Producer

Fenton and Randy have worked as a producer and director with success in both film and TV. Together in 1991 they founded World of Wonder is an international media production company based in Hollywood and London, the company creates reality and documentary television. Some of their documentaries and films include the films *Hot Property* (1997), *The Eyes of Tammy Faye* (2000), *Party Monster* (2003), *Tori & Dean: Inn Love* (2007) and on television the phenomenally successful *RuPaul Show* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*.



Critic Reviews



"It is wonderful to meet these people and to hear fragments of their stories. Given the length of time that Rothbart filmed for, it's also clear that he has done a thoughtful job in collating his strongest footage."

LITTLE WHITE LIES

"Director Colin Rothbart handles the material sensitively and keeps the tone light, while the lack of a narrator ensures a sense of intimacy and authenticity, allowing the subjects to speak for themselves."

TOTAL FILM

"The film matures startlingly as it progresses, skillfully picking out what's most fascinating about its central characters and their contrasting journeys through adulthood"

SIGHT & SOUND

"The footage Rothbart returns, lit up like a dance floor and energised with Hi-NRG beats. The film is affectionate, insightful and often very funny. And you can bet any afterparty will be a blast."

THE GUARDIAN



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