



# HOT ARTIST: OLGA BARSKY

by Sherry Hucklebridge

**“Ladies and Gentlemen, let me present to you a tale of two drag queens who didn’t know the rules. Queens can fall in love with a woman, they can fall in love with a man. They can fall in love with your mother, but they can’t ever, ever fall in love with each other.”** So goes the opening passage of *A Draggled Out Affair*, the Canadian short film written and produced by Olga Barsky, Clair Lowery and directed by Sonia Hong.

At only fifteen minutes long the film is witty, visually stunning and capable of transporting the viewer into a unique world, with unique rules. It stars Heaven Lee Hytes (Derek Gravelle) and Donnarama (Vince Pincente) as two drag queens from opposite sides of the track, who fall in love watching each other from afar. Heaven Lee performs with Miss Conception (Kevin Levesque) at the upscale ‘Velvet Curtain,’ while Donnarama and Daytona Bitch (Dustin Redshaw) work at the run down ‘Rusty Box.’ Eventually the protagonists’ more seasoned co-workers catch on to their forbidden affair and chaos ensues.

Olga Barsky explains the peculiar taboo of a love affair between queens as “the idea that two artists can’t really get along, or two performers might have trouble getting along because they don’t want to share their rightfully deserved spotlight. It is often referred to as kai kai love.”

A York University Film School graduate, Barsky decided to write and produce the piece as a tribute to the performers in Toronto’s drag scene. “I’ve been around artists my entire life, and now I work in film, so I am constantly around incredibly creative people. But when I was first introduced to the drag scene, I just couldn’t believe it. I’d never met people who had so many skills,” she reflects. “My mind was blown and I really wanted to come up with something that showcased drag as this beautiful art form that almost happens behind closed doors in the village. So many straight people don’t really know about it, and I wanted to use my knowledge and skill set to bring it to a much larger audience.”

This was a task that would prove difficult to achieve, or even fund, due to the nature of the subject. “When we were first approaching funders we got rejected a lot because drag is such an uncanonized art form. Some of the more bourgeois granting agencies didn’t really understand what we were going for, and didn’t really see the art in it. Actually, at one point, someone suggested that we use ballet dancers with wigs and make-up. We got quite upset, but finally Ontario Arts Council and Reel Asian helped us out and we were able to fund the film,” Barsky recalls.

Once funding was in line, they began the year-long process of turning their idea into a reality. “The writing process was really organic,” she says. “It essentially took place over two nights and a lot of booze at Fran’s. The lyrics just wrote themselves—it is probably the shortest amount of time it has ever taken any three people to write a short film. What is interesting about our process is that we didn’t write it and then cast it, we cast it WAY before. Everyone just had such a strong persona that they brought in, that it was so easy for us to just write



the entire film around them.”

Filming took place over the course of four days at one location, with the art-department converting the stage into seventeen

different scenes. “We were humbled by how supportive the community was during the entire process, from helping with fundraisers to donating their time as extras,” Barsky relates of her time on set. “DJ Alex, who actually DJs at Asian Express, did our sound mixing, Daytona did all of our choreography and Donnarama did all of the costumes.

“By the end there were forty-seven costumes that were not only incredibly beautiful, but also helped with the story telling. They were all really literal. In one scene Daytona is setting fire to one of the bars and not a detail was left out: the hair was in the shape of a flame, the bra was made out of match-sticks and there was a lighter incorporated. It was so amazing!”

*A Dragg'd Out Affair* has already received positive reviews from its screenings at Reel Asian and Inside Out Toronto film festivals. “We’re getting quite a bit of interest,” she reveals, “so hopefully it will have a pretty long life in the festivals and, I mean, the whole point is that we would love to make a feature, it’s just so difficult to fund in Canada.” For now they are focusing on promoting the short in the hopes that it leads to funding for a full-length film.

Unfortunately, *A Dragg'd Out Affair* has yet to secure distribution. “We are working on getting copies out to sell. We have a website, so if people are really interested and want to see it they can email any one of us and we’d be happy to help out,” assured Barsky.

For those of you interested in viewing the film, you can contact the producers at [www.adraggedoutaffair.com](http://www.adraggedoutaffair.com) or view the teaser trailer at [www.youtube.com/adraggedoutaffair](http://www.youtube.com/adraggedoutaffair).

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Main photo: Olga Barsky. Inset photo: Amy McConnel