

CHLOÉ CRAWFORD-ROSS

Drag Queen/Entertainer - Houston, TX

@chloecrawfordross

* * *

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

DATE: October 21, 2021

LOCATION: Online via Zoom.com

INTERVIEWER: Amy C. Evans

TRANSCRIPTION: Rev.com

LENGTH: 23 minutes

PROJECT: Houston in 2020: Self-Employed Black Artists

* * *



FUNDED IN PART BY
THE CITY OF HOUSTON
THROUGH
HOUSTON ARTS ALLIANCE

Amy C. Evans [00:00]: All right. Here we are on Thursday, October 21st, 2021. I am—this is Amy Evans here with Ms. Chloe Crawford-Ross one year later for our follow-up interview for the Houston in 2020 documentary project. *[Laughs]*

Chloé Crawford-Ross: Definitely. *[Laughs]*

ACE: And so, welcome a year-plus later—a year and some change. Thank you for coming back to visit with me on Zoom once again.

CCR: [00:33]: Definitely. It's been—it was such a great project, initially, so I'm glad to do a follow-up. So, yeah.

ACE [00:40]: It's nice to kind of have a bookend, you know, a start, because some—everything was so crazy a year and a half ago. Like, I know that we're all kind of wearing some marks from the past eighteen months—

CCR [00:55]: Marks. Weight. Uh— *[Laughs]*

ACE [00:56]: *[Laughs]* In this case, yes, the Covid-30 [*referring to pandemic weight-gain*]. Covid-19 or the Covid-30. It's been really great to revisit all the artists from the project and just kind of catch up and see what the year has meant for them, what it's done to them, how they've survived. So, I'm here with you today to ask my first question, which is, you know, last year we were talking about just the first few months of Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter movement—the

whole world was on fire and continues to smolder a little bit, but it was really on fire in the summer of 2020. So I wonder how that time influenced or impacted the work you're doing now.

CCR [01:41]: Well, at that time, it was a little crazy, so we weren't performing in public. We were doing, like, video shows. I've actually won an award [for Best Virtual Drag Show] for doing a video with *OutSmart* magazine. So we were doing videos. Basically, they would see the video, and our virtual information would be at the bottom so that they can tip us, virtually. I'm now the director of marketing and public relations, events, and entertainment for Charles Armstrong Investments [the parent company of Meteor, JR's Bar & Grill, South Beach, and the Montrose Mining Company] now. So we have quite a bit of a cast, like show cast on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and so, basically, I coordinated getting all of the different shows to basically put on a virtual show, as well. They would basically do the same thing: each cast would have like maybe five videos as a cast, and then we would broadcast it on the JR's [social media] pages so that they could make money and at least be getting exposure because with this entertainment—and most entertainment—out of sight, out of mind. So it was basically just being able to keep their names out there during that time period and giving everyone an outlet to entertain and reach their audiences.

ACE [03:11]: Yeah, so do you think that now that everybody has really acclimated to the online thing, is that going to be something that's added to these kinds of shows going forward? Are people going to—

CCR [03:22]: To be honest, I hope it doesn't.

ACE [03:25]: Tell me why [crosstalk 00:03:26].

CCR [03:25]: We're back to normal now for the most part, we're performing in front of audiences. As far as show casts are concerned, it is pretty much the same schedule that it was before. Some things have been canceled or like altered in the way and how they reach people because of the [Covid] Delta variant now. So we haven't gone full throttle with a lot of ideas and programming that we normally would be because of that. But we still have shows, like live shows in front of audiences and stuff, so.

ACE [04:09]: Tell me how the audiences are receiving that.

CCR [04:12]: They love it. And, to be honest, I feel that the whole time period when they were locked down, it's been an adverse effect that they're wanting to party even harder. They're, like, super excited. It's like the roaring twenties all over again. They had Prohibition, you know, and now they're just trying to party. *[Laughs]*

ACE [04:37]: Right.

CCR [04:37]: It's like Covid didn't exist. Delta variant doesn't exist. But, you know, I guess that people are feeling a little less stressed out because—that there is the vaccine and so forth. Some people are still precautious with the mask and so forth, which we—we encourage masks, but we don't—we're not like giving out tickets or anything if you don't wear your mask. But we do encourage masks. We do encourage safety, six feet apart kind of thing. But we aren't making it a mandate as we were during the early Covid days.

ACE [05:29]: Yeah. And I remember during the early Covid days you were wearing face shields and a lot of—

CCR [05:33]: Yeah, we don't do that at all anymore. But we do have a Plexiglas up at some of the venues, so there is some blocking off, you know, because sometimes you get so excited lip syncing that some spittle may come out *[Laughs]* or sometimes somebody may have had too much to drink and their speech is slurred and, you know, so. But yeah, we have some Plexiglas at some venues, but I think that the practice of using the shields is kind of like gone.

ACE [06:14]: Yeah. That can really mess with your look. I can—I understand.

CCR [06:16]: Yes! But I mean, like I said, I think the vaccine and just staying—following healthy practices, which most performers do, you know, I think that they're kind of policing themselves, you know. So it's not so much as having to wear them because, let's be honest those shields weren't really doing anything. I mean, literally, it's *[Laughs]* you know—but I guess it was more of a—trying to be cautious of things like that. So. Because most people are—most venues have required people to be vaccinated for other entertainers' safety, as well as, you know. to the patrons. So. Yeah.

ACE [07:13]: Well do you think with—when you were doing all the virtual shows, do you think you gained a new audience because the shows were virtual, or has that changed at all?

CCR [07:24]: It's possible, but there's no way to truly gauge that. It is definitely possible, but I know it has been—you've been able to reach audiences that you haven't possibly been able to

reach before because some people just don't go out—aren't club or bar people anyway. Then there have been, like, virtual shows nationwide that they, like, use guest entertainers from other cities, so you get to be seen in that audience. Yeah, I guess I would say, yes. How much of an effect? I don't know but, yeah, definitely, we've been able to reach audiences that we hadn't reached before. So.

ACE [08:10]: Yeah. Was it still a struggle just financially and keeping bills paid when you were doing virtual shows or—?

CCR [08:20]: I've just been blessed to have been able to—to do that. I'm not really big on being nosy and finding—getting at other people's business like, are you paying your bills? You know, I really just focused on me at that time. During that time period, when we first talked, I had just started transitioning, and I hadn't even really officially talked about it, but now it's been almost a year and a half, two years in March, that I have transitioned and lived my life as a woman. I know you didn't ask that, but I'm just bringing that up because that whole time period I've just been selfish so—with my time. So I don't know how I was able to manage it, but I did. And it wasn't easy, but I still managed through it. I don't know how. *[Laughs]*

ACE [09:29]: Well, and here we are, not quite on the other side but getting there.

CCR: Yeah.

ACE: But then—then I wonder too, though, if Covid and the lockdown and kind of having time to yourself made your transition a little bit easier.

CCR [09:47]: Oh, yeah. That definitely was the case. Trying to assimilate into regular—not regular—into everyday society can be tough at first. So having to wear the mask in public sometimes was a plus. But yeah, it definitely did. Like I said, it's hard initially going—I mean everybody's transition is different but, for me, I guess being in the whole seclusion made it a little bit easier. So, yeah.

ACE [10:32]: Well, with dealing with your transition and Covid and the world being on fire, was there any particular way that you were able to kind of tap into some joy or some self care that has—

CCR [10:47]: Well, just being able to finally live my truth was the joy in that. Also having familial support, having a solid support system to help me through things, that was a plus. So, yeah. Definitely.

ACE [11:12]: Is there anything about this past eighteen or so months that you think that you'll—that was a surprise that you had to kind of pivot to make do or figure something out that you're going to keep? Something that you did because it was a necessity but that you might carry with you going forward. Or an attitude.

CCR [11:36]: Saving. Saving money. Not always immediately spending it when I get it. But yeah, saving. I literally—I don't know why it took me so long, but I opened up a savings account, and I put money in there, daily. I think there's more of just thinking about what if something happens, you know, or what if something like that happens again? Am I going to be—*[sneezes]*
Sorry.

ACE [12:15]: Bless you. You're fine. My allergies in October have been through the roof, myself.

CCR [12:20]: Are we going to be prepared for that, you know. I don't know—I mean there's always a way, and I believe that He will definitely help me find a way, but it doesn't hurt to help *[Laughs]* myself and be more prepared than I was in the past.

ACE [12:49]: Definitely. Well, I wonder if there is a performance or a new song that you perform or a new outfit or anything related to your performances that you've done that stands out—that is a very memorable moment from the past year and a half.

CCR [13:08]: *[Short pause]* To be honest, it's going—it's probably the first performance back from doing—from being in lockdown in Covid, I think that was more of a just, ahhh, we're back kind of situation. I can't remember. There hasn't been anything yet. Like I said, a lot of events that would normally happen didn't necessarily happen this, you know, season back because people were still canceling, they were still doing a lot of corporate things, were still, like I said, canceling stuff, and they were doing more virtual things. So things hadn't gone back to their regular programming yet. But I think that the first time being back in front of a live audience was definitely something.

ACE [14:15]: When and where was that? For you?

CCR [14:19]: Oh, wow. Let me see. I think it's at—I'm going to say it was at JR's. I'm going to say it was on a Sunday because that's the start of our rotation. So I'm going to say Sunday at JR's.

ACE [14:43]: Yeah? Good. You've continued doing the Drag Brunch at Bar Boheme this whole time, pretty much?

CCR [14:49]: Yes. We—at first, during the first part of the Covid transition, we didn't do the full [drag] brunch. We were doing like a bingo kind of hybrid kind of situation, just so that we could—we would like perform two numbers and then we would do bingo because it wasn't as intense as our brunches normally are. Then after maybe four or five months of that, we gradually went back to our brunches. First, twice a month and then now it's moved up every Sunday. So, yeah. Two shows every Sunday.

ACE [15:38]: Oh, wow. Wow.

CCR [15:40]: One's at 11:30 and one's at 2:30.

ACE [15:44]: Wow. Wow. Congratulations on being back with that. That's exciting.

CCR [15:50]: *[Laughs]* It can be intense, but it's fun, reaching well over 400-plus, 500 people a week can be an intense and challenging experience to say the least.

ACE [16:06]: And exhausting.

CCR [16:07]: And—but the crowd's happy and the girls are happy that I work with, so.

ACE [16:17]: Good. Do you think there's anything specific about Houston during Covid or the way the arts community has shown up during Covid or anything that stands out in that area?

CCR [16:28]: I think that Houston is very—a very resilient city within itself. I mean, although we were closed down for Covid, I think that because of hurricanes and stuff in the past that we've had to deal with and, you know—that have been challenging with, I think that Houston just kind of rolled with the punches and then was able to bounce back, so to speak. I'm not saying it's the best situation as it is right now, but compared to a lot of other parts in the U.S., you know, Houston's doing pretty well—from my perspective and from what I see. I don't know. I don't have any statistics or anything, but it's just how I feel about Houston.

ACE [17:26]: Has the drag community or the performing community really been tight and supportive, or can you speak to that?

CCR [17:33]: Yes. They have. At one of the other bars they have something called—I'm going to mispronounce it, I think it's called The Pride Pantry. And what they have been doing is basically just—people have been donating groceries and stuff, and people that haven't been able to get back on their feet have been able to go by and just basically go shopping for free. Things like that have been made available, not just to the drag community, but just to anybody, you know. I think there's a lot—to be honest, a lot more shows than before Covid so *[Laughs]*. I don't think that, like I said, it's been different from before, but different isn't always a bad thing.

ACE [18:39]: Yeah. Well said. You mentioned that being like the roaring twenties, the roaring 1920s again in 2020, 2021. That's why I wonder when thinking about this project, Houston in 2020, maybe ten years down the road, how do you think maybe we can all reflect on the time that we have documented together for Houston in 2020?

CCR [19:08]: You know, something that I have learned since Covid is basically taking it day by day *[Laughs]* cause each day is different. And I don't want to stress or overwhelm myself to think about that. I used to have the whole five-year, ten-years planned out, but Covid kind like changed things. Some things that I thought that were important then aren't necessarily that important now. It's just been a little altering of my plans. To be honest, I don't know. And I don't want to necessarily speculate, and then ten years later it's totally something different. We have Covid variant fifty *[Laughs]* and it's—I don't—I just—there's no telling what can happen in ten years, it's such a long time period. Just thinking about it, that's well—I've been doing drag eleven—eleven years now. Just thinking about that span of time itself, I can't imagine what the next eleven years will be like, so. To be honest, I don't know. *[Laughs]* I can't answer that.

ACE [20:34]: No, I get that. And it's good to be in the moment. I think everybody is, like you said, everybody is more living in the right now than they ever have.

CCR [20:45]: Yeah. Yeah. Because you just don't know. I mean, I've lost some people because of Covid, and it's just like, wow. Or not even necessarily Covid-related but just their mental head space during the time period, and they just weren't able to push through. It's just been, you know, different things going on with different people that make you want to think about what's going on now, rather than making these plans. Not to say that planning is bad, but you do need to take the time to live for right—what's going on right now. Because you don't know what could happen tomorrow.

ACE [21:38]: Absolutely. Well, is there anything you want to add or a final thought for Houston in 2020 before we wrap it up? Or Houston now in 2021?

CCR [21:50]: No, just be good to yourself and good to others. I mean, there's so much bad and evil and things wrong with whatever's going on in this world that we need to focus on the positive and accentuate that and just spread love if we can. I know it sounds cheesy, but it's so easy to be negative about anything. It's just really easy to just be that kind of bad energy, so do the actual work needed to bring the good vibes, you know, that's—cause there's so much going on right now that we need to just, you know, focus on that.

ACE [22:42]: Yeah. I'm with you. All right. Well, I'm going to end our recording, but I'm going to—I want you to hang on Zoom for just another minute, okay?

CCR [22:49]: Okay.

ACE [22:50]: All right. Thank you so much.

CCR: *[Clears throat]*

[23:00]

[END]