

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Kareem Khubchandani

JVN [00:00:04] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness, and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. I want everyone to pause for a moment and think of a drag artist. Who comes to mind? What do you imagine them wearing? What are they doing? Where are they? If you thought of a Ru Girl or RuPaul herself, we get it. But there's a whole world of drag out there beyond the Drag Race main stage—and beyond drag queens! This week, as part of our Pride Beyond Borders series, we're celebrating global drag culture in all its capaciousness. Kareem Khubchandani is an associate professor in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at Tufts University. They are the author of *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife* and *Decolonize Drag*, out later this summer. They also perform in drag as LaWhore Vagistan. Ah! We're asking today: what are the global politics of drag, comma, honey? Kareem, how are you?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:01:08] I'm so good. I'm so happy to be here!

JVN [00:01:11] Also, you guys. Everyone, pay attention, because you need to, like, get on Instagram and look at Kareem's hair on this—no, because this hair, you are just, these waves and this beautiful color distribution of this salt and pepper on this beautiful bronzed fucking skin. And these goddamn cheekbones and fuckin' brows, honey. You're gorgeous!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:01:34] You're making a brown person blush. And I don't blush so this is, this is the most.

JVN [00:01:38] Ah! No, no. But seriously, like, your hair is, like, the most. Do people just, like, stop you in your tracks about it all the time?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:01:44] It's been known to happen.

JVN [00:01:46] It's the curls. It's a really pretty, did you, you didn't set that with an iron, that's just, like, your natural curl pattern.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:01:52] Yeah. This is, it hasn't been touched for three days.

JVN [00:01:56] Outrageous, I swear I'm going to focus, y'all. I just, yes! Okay. So I think a lot about in my writing and my just approach to, like, life that, like, trauma doesn't make it so that joy can't happen and so that, like, healing can happen. Like, it's all these, like, universal truths. And I think right now drag has so much vilification. We have all this legislation. There's a lot of things that we could be sad about, but there's also so much joy and so much amazingness in drag. And so I want us to celebrate the breadth of joy and culture that is drag because it's just amazing. Also, LaWhore Vagistan? We need to know, Miss Vagistan—it reminds me of, like,

Beyonce and Pretty Hurts—Miss Vagistan, where did your name LaWhore Vagistan come from?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:02:44] Well, she's Dr. Vagistan!

JVN [00:02:46] Ah, Dr. Vagistan!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:02:48] But, so my drag name came from all kinds of places, but it's part of the Decolonizing Drag project. And, you know, my, my family is from what is now Pakistan, but because we're Hindu we were displaced out of Pakistan. So LaWhore is a gesture to the city in Pakistan. It has a W because I'm here to work, and because sex work is real work, and Vagistan, like, Pakistan or Afghanistan or Hindustan, it's just a, a more capacious way—if we're being capacious on this episode—it's just a more capacious way to think about the subcontinent. And, you know, I didn't grow up in the subcontinent. I grew up in West Africa, in Ghana, and so I needed a bigger container that could fit all of me. So yeah, that's where the name comes from.

JVN [00:03:34] Can I call you Dr. Vagistan, for the rest of forever? Like, it's, like, the most amazing.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:03:38] That's the way it's supposed to work. My students call me Dr. Vagistan.

JVN [00:03:41] Yes, Dr. Vagistan, hunty! So I'm obsessed with where LaWhore Vagistan comes from. But Vagistan is, like—

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:03:49] Sometimes you have to invent your own place, you know. So she likes to say, "After the British and the French and the Dutch cut it all up, I—like a good post-colonial queen—like to sew it all back together as a big, beautiful vagistan."

JVN [00:04:03] Ah! Okay also, you grew up in Ghana?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:04:06] I'm from there, I have done drag workshops there for a queer theater group there. There's, I mean, there's just it's fantastic. It's a special place. I don't get to go there that often anymore because my parents moved away. But I grew up in Ghana. I was born in Gibraltar. I'm a big post-colonial mess. Yeah.

JVN [00:04:26] Okay, Dr. Vagistan! I'd love to know some artists who come to mind for you in that opening, what are their performance styles?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:04:32] There are lots of very different folks that come to mind. But the first one is Papi Churro, who's an Austin drag king and now lives in California, but who does, like, punk and gore but using Chicx and Indigenous costuming and style. So

it's not what you expect when you think of, like, punk and, like, "filthy" drag. The other person who really blew my socks off when I saw her is this Black South African queen named Odiviva, who did a solo show that I saw in Cape Town, who for 2 hours performed in, like, I don't know how many different languages and just kept us, like, giggling and laughing and talked to every person in the audience, the entire show. And it just was magnificent. And then I—because it's so close—I think about my students who are, like, 18 to 25 year olds who are doing drag on college campuses and are really learning a lot about themselves and, and the world through drag. And that drag is their access to life and beauty and, and then I think about my aunties and my mom, who in Ghana, when I was a kid, I would watch them do drag and they would do it at community festivals. And, you know, the men wouldn't dance at, at festivals. And, and so the women got into drag and they were, like, really sexy Bollywood stars. And it was this chance for them to play with masculinity and to flirt with each other in the context of performance. So, so I know it's not, like, LGBTQ drag, but it is drag. They wore, like, mustaches and beards and short hair.

JVN [00:06:10] So the ladies would, would do, like, drag king work?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:06:13] Fully, like, suits and all, binding, like—it was hot. I thought my memories were tricking me. And then I went back to, like, find these VHSs. And yeah, it was full on drag, it was really great.

JVN [00:06:26] Oh my gosh, I love that story.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:06:30] Yeah.

JVN [00:06:31] So when we think about, like, your students, 18 to 25, what does it mean to you being, like, an educator and being a thought leader and being a queer performer and a drag artist yourself? And what's at stake for drag performers here and worldwide?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:06:46] So I used to live in Austin. I lived in Austin for two years, and that's where I learned a lot about drag. I was in a drag competition in a bar there, and I started in Chicago and, and in Boston and Chicago and Austin, but also in Bangalore and Hyderabad and Delhi and Bombay, where I've done drag. Drag is, drag is to me, everyday artistry, right? It teaches us that people have access to creativity and expression and don't need millions of dollars to do it. They can feel celebrity and they can feel important, especially in a world that is always trying to minimize us—us being LGBTQ people, plus. But all kinds of gender and sexual dissidents, right, people who just disobey the rules of that. And I think that drag is our, our access to feeling important when the world doesn't want us to. And so all this legislature we're seeing, too, is part of that is, is really trying to minimize who we are, our excellence, our beauty. And, and, there's, there's a lot more there, too, that drag as work, drag artists who are in nightclubs every day, every night are actually holding our histories for us. They're reminding us of what used to happen in those spaces, that our arrival at this, like, hard moment isn't the first one, and that they've experienced it over and over again. So I think

drag artists really hold our histories and take care of our memories for us, even when we're, like, "Oh, I'm too old to go to the bar." Drag artists are still going to the bar and taking care of the community. And so they remember for us.

JVN [00:08:23] In *Ishtyle* you write, "Nightlife is not outside of politics. Politics are inside of it." Ooh! What do we take with us—and leave behind—when we enter a nightclub?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:08:34] So I think when we enter a nightclub, we think we're escaping the world. And nightclubs are built that way, right? You go into a dark tunnel and you don't know what time of day it is outside. And, and there's this desire to lose the world. And we go in and we want to be desired and we want to make friends and we want to have fun. And there's always this intention to, like, have some magic and love and maybe even some sex. But I think that we also take our, our baggage, right? We have our values of what is classy, what is moral, what is good. So we, we judge people for how they posture and pose inside of a nightclub. It's in nightclubs that I've perhaps experienced the most blatant forms of racism. You know, people, again, are taking their values of what they, what they think a good or bad body is. They, they judge people by their smell, by their look, by the way they taste, right. There's all these senses of judgment, we're taking in all of these senses of judgment are actually informed by race, class, gender. So, so power is playing out in nightclubs in ways that we think, like, "It's the great equalizer. We're all dancing to the beat." But then we judge those people who can't catch the beat, too, right? So, so, they're, they're just all the things that we thought we left behind are showing up, including femmophobia and racism in nightlife spaces that have been built by people of color, that have been built by gender nonconforming folks.

JVN [00:09:59] Hmm. Yes. As Celeste Watkins Hayes, says—like, who's our expert on the HIV social safety net who we're obsessed with—she says that, like, the American medical system is like, you know, they say, like, "Oh, we're all in this together." She's, like, "Okay, well, if we're all in this together, we all have, like, very different boats. Like, we're not all on the same boat. Like, some of you guys have got yachts, some of y'all are on that freakin' Jack and Rose Titanic thing." Very different boats. So, same thing with experience of a nightclub, like, drag performers are going to navigate this experience really different than other people are going to. But how do drag artists navigate the political spaces around the world—and in nightclubs? Because it's kind of an interesting dichotomy, like, the idea of, like, doing drag during the daytime, honey, and then versus, like, what it's like in a club.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:10:41] Yeah, I mean, you talk about daytime drag and you think about the explosion of drag brunches that are catering to suburban ladies. And, and so I think drag artists are really smart about thinking about their audiences and who they're catering to. And they get to know their audiences, and they learn how to read cues about who's arriving at what time, what does that say about them, etc. So, you know, in India, where I've done a bunch of my research, I've found that the drag artists there are making very clear choices about what they're going to perform depending on the crowd. So if they know that

they're getting the kind of young queer folks who are really excited about being a global subject, right, and want techno and they want a kind of quote unquote "Western" experience in the club, they're going to do Lady Gaga and they're going to do Madonna and they're going to do Nicki Minaj. But if they know that there's, like, a little bit of an older crowd or—where I do my research in Bangalore, that it's a distinctly South Indian crowd, they will choose South Indian music in order to appeal to those folks, right. But it's this really sensitive attunement to who their audiences are to be able to take care of them and make them feel seen, but also make their point at the same time. And I think that that's really important because they're, they're balancing work and money with the kind of service they're doing for our community to make us feel good. And so I think that those are still politics, right? How you manage money and how you manage desires are still about power and being able to exert a little bit of power in those contexts.

JVN [00:12:19] Yes. And I was also, my brain went on a little bit of a, like, well, I actually don't want to talk about cis het people, they get enough, 'cause it's about us, which I love. So how do drag artists stage political dialogues with their audiences when they're getting attuned to, like—how do drag artists, like, stage that political dialogue?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:12:41] So I think drag artists are the ones who are on stage—everybody's watching them, they've got the mic—are really powerful in a, in a space. And so one is that they tell us how to be there with each other. They tell us to be kind to each other. They tell us what the politics of the space are. So when they tell the audiences about tipping and that drag is expensive, they're making labor really explicit. When they tell them not to touch their bodies without consent, they're teaching people how to not oversexualize trans bodies. But, but then there's also these moments where drag artists are actually staging the politics of coloniality in the club. Chanel Mercedes Benz is a Chicago performer who I saw do this number where she's performing "Breakaway" by Kelly Clarkson and she's dressed as a slave and she's got a stick of cotton. And every time someone tips her, she gives them a piece of cotton. And you're, like, "Oh my God, what are you doing? Like, this is, it's wild," right? It's really a strange thing to see in the club. But then the chorus comes on and she starts running. She's, like, "breaking away." And and then, like, out of nowhere, she, like, pulls a baby out, and then she, like, pulls another, like, a husband out. And then she just, like, runs away through the club and disappears. Right? Like, she becomes the fugitive slave in the club. And this was really a moment where I was, like, "Oh, like there's room for this in a nightclub," right? It's not, it's not like a sweet ballad about, like, feel good, blah, blah, blah. It's really, like —

JVN [00:14:24] Honey, the performance art!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:14:27] Yeah! And there's room for that, right? And that to me was, was a real, really important moment to be, like, "Oh," and everybody got it, right. That's the thing. People are here for it. And I think that we, we think that the nightclub can be a kind of apolitical space, but actually there's, there's a thirst for it. The other, my other favorite

example of this is Miss Shu Mai, who's an Asian-American performer in L.A.; first she lip syncs to Ali Wong, and then she does Britney Spears's "Womanizer." But instead of singing "womanizer, womanizer," she sings, "colonizer, colonizer, colonizer, you're a colonizer." It just, like, everybody loses their mind. And, and it, and I just think it's, it's really exciting that drag artists are able to teach us that we actually want this, right? We want critique in the nightclub. We don't want to just quote unquote, "lose ourselves." We actually want to be there inside of history. And it can be really sexy and fun and exciting.

JVN [00:15:25] Yes. And can club goers perform, like, drag labor in the absence of drag artists?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:15:32] Yeah, You know, I—when I started doing my research, I wanted to meet drag queens. It was my first time living in a big city, I had moved to Chicago, and then I went to, to big cities in India like Bombay and Bangalore. I wanted to meet drag queens, and I wasn't meeting them. And, and the thing about drag queens is that they're the ones who, who would ground me in spaces. And I was looking for any kind of drag artistry. And I found that I, you know, the kind of work, that grounding work that they, that drag artists do I found on the dance floor and I found with bartenders and I found with people who invited me in, right, and said, "Come dance with me." Right. Who showed me different ways of dancing. And then I wanted to pay that forward. So, so early on, people were asking me, "Who's your diva? Who's your diva?" And I was, like, "I didn't know I was supposed to have a diva." But they taught me about these Bollywood divas and their dance moves, and it really expanded my choreography. It taught me how to be in the nightclub.

But then there was this moment in Bangalore, and I was with, with our common friend Alok, and they were, like, watching me do research. But there's this moment that a song came on and everybody started doing the same step, and they were, like, "How does everybody know the choreography?" And I was, like, "You don't know this choreography, you don't know this diva?" And they're, like, "Yes, teach me, mother!" Right? And then I pulled them on the dance floor and we started doing the choreography with everyone else. But, but it's, it's these moments of, like, care and pedagogy that can happen in the club that sometimes the drag artist is not doing, but that people are doing for each other to say, "We can be here together. And these are our histories and memories that we share or can share," that become, I think, really valuable, right? And so they make us want to go back to the club despite all the bad things, right? Despite the femmephobia, racism, or classism that we might experience, we actually keep wanting to go back to the club because there are some very special moments where people teach us how to be with each other and be good to each other.

JVN [00:17:35] Okay, sidebar. So when you're doing research, like, at the club, like, do you just like, type on your notes or something or do you, like, are you there with, like, a legal pad or something? Like, how do you, like, or do you just, like, remember it and, like, write it when you get home?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:17:49] There's never legal pad but—

JVN [00:17:51] But wouldn't that be cute if there was? If you were just, like, giving, like—

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:17:55] I'd be giving, like, schoolboy realness. Yes! But no, I mean, I take notes on my phone. I go home and I write it all up. I talk to friends who remember things for me and tell me their stories of the night and, and, like, fill in, fill in details and things like that.

JVN [00:18:11] Y'all, we can literally, like, this scholarship is—I'm obsessed. I just am obsessed. I love your work, I love your book, I love you. I'm obsessed. Cannot get enough. So we were just talking about Alok. We love Alok. Can't even stand how much we love Alok. I was actually, like, just literally FaceTiming with them earlier today. So, when we think about queer nightlife, how does gender work as a colonial tool in queer nightlife? Because, you know, we think of it as like this free space and yet at the same time. No matter where you go, there you are. And queer spaces especially, you know, there's still colonialism all up in this country. So tell us how that can show itself.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:18:53] Yeah, So, I mean, when we understand gender as a colonial tool in general, it's, it's this kind of ideal that is working to restrict and discipline us and tell us that this is the way we're supposed to be. So there's this moment when I was a grad student in Chicago and I was teaching a queer studies class and invited my students to come watch LaWhore perform. And, and they had to, like, write responses to the show. And it wasn't just LaWhore, but it was, it was at a queer South Asian night, and there were a bunch of other South Asian performers. And my student, in their response, but also in talking to me, said, "You know, after your performances, I was clapping," the student's white, "and a white man, older white man put his hand on top of mine and said, 'Don't clap for them. They're not real drag queens.'" But this is, this is one of the ways that colonialism works, right, is to tell us what is and isn't proper or good or appropriate.

JVN [00:19:51] Who the fuck was that guy! Who the fuck was he!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:19:55] There is this idea of what "good drag" is, right? There's the right songs, the right canon of songs. There's, there's our understanding of what is "beautiful." And the ways that whiteness has been able to actually tell us, like, "Doing binary gender is the best drag." But it's not just what we see, but it's how we perceive it, right? It's those people who are telling us, "This is what, what makes it good, and we should praise it or we shouldn't clap for it." And not clapping for it means also not tipping, not giving money, not booking these folks, right. There's actual material consequences to those people who we think are not doing drag "well." And I think that that's one of the ways that colonialism, racism, classism are compounding, to, to regulate drag.

JVN [00:20:41] I hate it when I know the answer to a question, but then I'm, like, "I have to ask it anyway for the people who don't know." So just so you know, like, I feel like I already know this one, but what do we miss when we see drag only as gender performance?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:20:54] Everything, right? I mean, there's so much going on that isn't just gender, right? And drag artists are so smart and funny and creative and we're, and if all we're doing is, like, "Did they do gender right?" We're missing the full story. But one of the things is that gender isn't done just through white masculinity or white femininity. So someone might actually be doing a particular kind of ethnic or Indigenous gender performance, but we're not seeing it as that because we don't know how to see gender in those ways. But there's, there's, also my, one of my drag children, Alisha Boti Kabab in Chicago, who, when Alisha was living with her parents, she couldn't, you know, own a lot of drag paraphernalia. And in fact, her dad threw some out at some point. So when she does drag shows, she's wearing, like, a stolen skirt from her mom's closet and no makeup and no wigs, maybe a piece of jewelry. Right. That looks like, quote unquote, "bad drag." But actually, her storytelling in drag is so complicated and she's telling these stories about the evils of the skin lightening industry and about women being abandoned by their husbands who have gone off to war. And, I mean, she's just, she's so creative and she's, like, digging from the archives of Bollywood films from the seventies and eighties and nineties. And if all we focused on was, "Oh, like, she's not actually trying with her, her, her look," we're really missing out on how smart and brilliant and, like, what a deep researcher she is to, to be able to tell these stories, historical stories and political stories in those ways.

JVN [00:22:40] I think we've talked about this a little bit, but I do, I want to, like, spell it out a little bit more because I think we were getting in there, but, like, because we've already established that you don't check yourself at the door, we bring all of our opinions, we bring the fullness of ourselves into all these spaces. So, like, how does colonialism shape what we think of as "good drag"? And you already did say some of these things that just, like, elaborating on that more.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:23:07] So, I mean, I think we want drag to be binary, right? But we want to *look* expensive. We want drag to look like it's been heavily rehearsed. The other thing is also that I think it, it grants white people neutrality so they can perform all kinds of numbers and genres and look "right" doing it. But people of color are expected to perform in certain genres. And if you're not serving that, you're not doing the drag that the audience wants. And so Asian-American performers, I find, are often really restricted in what they perform because people don't know about Asian and Asian-American culture, so they, like, don't know how to read our performances. So yeah, we're often sort of stuck in, in what's the right, quote unquote, "culture" to perform. But white, white, white folks can sort of move across genre and culture and style in, in this kind of neutral way.

JVN [00:24:01] Because you see these dynamics play out on Drag Race. I'm just saying, like, you do see this, like, remember in, like, did you see the UK season with Tia Kofi and she was,

like, "I stand by my cultural frizzy moment," people were coming for her hair and I loved her fucking hair they were coming for. And then when Bimini was, like, "So you're going to clock my drag because you say that my tuck isn't tight enough, but like, what? Like, this look, these hoes could never." But I did think it was fierce that World Of Wonder included that in the edit. It does lend itself to, like, a wider conversation, which I think is, like, cool. But you do see these like opinions come up in, like, these, these ways that, like, you know, just internalized misogyny, homophobia and, like, colonialism and, like, whiteness has, like, so informed what people think is, like, cute or not.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:24:44] 100%, 100%. And it's, you know, it's it's really worrisome when drag artists also participate in that, when they you know, when a drag mother is disciplining her children to be, like, "You have to aspire to this kind of binary or you have to tuck tighter," or when judges of pageants are replicating that. So, so I think there's some work to be done in the drag community, too, about undoing some of these things and, and making drag more capacious for, for more people.

JVN [00:25:15] Ah! I have a confession to make. Erica, our producer, wrote the word capacious and I just wanted to play along and be, like, "I know what capacious means this whole time," but...

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:25:26] Capacious like capacity, right? It just takes more, right? And it allows for more. More, more, more. Yeah.

JVN [00:25:34] Yeah, yeah! So it's not super fun. That's what my guess was. I was like, "Oh, like, does capacious just mean, like, 'Oh, you're so fun.'" Kareem, I'm so glad I asked. Okay, thank god. Okay, so in *Ishtyle*, you follow, quote, "gay Indian nightlife from Bangalore to Chicago." Honey, I love it in, like, an alphabet when we go from, like, a one thing to, like, another thing, like, or when it's, like, random cities, too. I just love, like, when we go from, like, a place to another place in a sentence. Like, I just love that. Just, like, ah! Come on, Bangalore, Chicago. Like that flight, is there, like, a direct from Bangalore to Chicago?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:26:07] No, direct.

JVN [00:26:08] Too long, damnit. Okay, well, whatever. Doesn't matter? Can you take us through some of the clubs and parties that you spotlight in the book?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:26:16] Yes. So, I mean, there's, there's sort of a really wide range of what nightlife looks like. So I, I start by talking about house parties and. And how we often don't think of house parties as nightlife. But also in Bangalore, there was a, it wasn't a gay bar, it was never—it never labeled itself as gay. But on the third floor of this one bar in central Bangalore, just the third floor, it was gay and it was gay for as long as the management would allow us to be there and be our, live our best lives and then, like, got a reputation and and we, the queer folks were asked to leave. But I focus on, on this one floor of a bar. There

were also these weekly parties that happened and in the book I call them Heat Wave in order to protect the folks that still party with, with Heat Wave. But over there, there was always this contestation of, "Does the crowd want, like, techno, dubstep, 'nts nts' music or do they want Hindi and South Indian music?" And, and I talk about the cultural contestations over global or local culture there. There were these much more specific parties called Koothu Nights that played only South Indian music and brought in a very different kind of crowd who weren't, like, "I want 'nts nts,' I want," they were, like, "I want to feel my culture. I want to feel the beats that I know that I danced in my house." So these were some of the Bangalore parties that I wrote about.

In, in Chicago, there is a party called Jai Ho!, and it's a party that I helped start. And it was a fundraiser and we played primarily Bollywood music and some South Indian music. But again, it's diasporic folks. It's people who migrated to the US who wanted to hear their sounds in the club when they used to, just sort of us pop divas and Jai Ho!'s one of a whole sort of, like, network of queer South Asian clubs in, in North America and Europe. There's Rangeela and Behsaram in Toronto, Kulture Kulcha in San Francisco, Sholay and Yuva in New York City. And so all of these, all of these nights also make it, make it into the book. But they, they don't happen every month, necessarily. Some—one of them does—but, but they're sort of spread out and they're usually run by volunteers and they don't have the same kind of consistency. But, but none, none of the places I write about are actually like "a gay bar," you know? And I think that that's what we think about when we think about nightlife as a place where people keep coming back to. But in fact, all of these parties move location and time. They're kind of unpredictable in a lot of ways.

JVN [00:28:57] It's more giving, like, on your feet, kind of, like, switching it up, like, finding the place, like, getting in where you fit in, like, making it work. Whereas, like, a night in Chicago, honey, Like, you're going to that. Like, what's the night in Chicago? Like, in your, in your experience.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:29:11] The Chicago Queer South Asian Nights are once in a while, but people wait for those once in a while. And I remember the friends that I would interview were, like, "When I know that there's a Jai Ho! party, I put in my calendar, like, months in advance so that I can go," because it's, it doesn't happen really often. And, and people really, like, live for these moments where they can dance to the songs that they dance to with their parents and they can dance the most recent, like, sexy Bollywood songs, but they can feel fabulous in this kind of, like, super brown way. That's really different, right? You're doing a whole different set of steps and you're lip syncing to different kinds of music. And, and that means that your body is interacting with others in different ways. So, like, at, at Jai Ho!, we got a dhol player, so, a drum player, a live drum player once. And so even though the music was English pop at the moment, he was drumming to the dhol with English pop and people started doing Bhangra, which is this Punjabi dance, and they made a whole circle and they were like sweating. And it was just a really different vibe than if you're just, like, at a rave or in, you know, at a pop dance floor.

JVN [00:30:25] Okay, sidebar. When Dr. Vagistan went to perform and invited the students to come watch, what did all the students say? Were they, like, “Dang, you really turned up?” Like, what were all the people's comments?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:30:36] I mean, I was giving them a grade, so they had to be nice! No, but, but now, now, like, my students regularly see me perform, actually. And I think that they, they're learning—this is, this is where you started today—but they're learning that drag isn't just what you see on TV. And, you know, when they get to see a close up, when they get to see the transformation of “Professor Me” to Dr. Vagistan, they're, like, “Oh, there's actual work here going on.” It's not just, like, someone who's really good at, like, getting on stage and working the crowd, but that there's a lot of thought. There's lots of things attached to my body that don't usually—

JVN [00:31:14] How do these hoes not fucking know that? Like, how do people just not see drag and not know how fucking much work it is?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:31:20] Because I think that we, like—I mean, I think they know that it's work, but I don't think they get to see the closeness of the artistry until you're seeing live performance, until you're let backstage and you see the, like, mess of stuff, you know, and you're, like, “Oh, there's all.” And, like, when you show up to class with, like, glue still in your eyebrows, they're, like, “Oh, you've been working.”

JVN [00:31:38] I guess I was just, like, so lucky to be exposed to drag culture. When I was, like, in college when I was, like, 17 and 18, like, I just was, like, really lucky to be around, like, such cool people for, like, over half of my life. Like, I just can't even, like, like, you try making a butt pad! Like, Michelangelo sculptures out of couch cushions. Like, try to do that, Lauren Boebert! Anyway, we're not talking about straight people, I hate 'em.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:32:00] No, but I had I had a drag mother who, like, took me to her friend's house to go sit and sculpt butt pads because she had that electric knife that, like, and, you know, you cut out the butt foam in the, in the, in the shape of Africa and, like, yeah. Did it all.

JVN [00:32:14] And you've gotta mold to your butt and like, your hips. It's like a whole thing.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:32:17] And it was a revelation. When I, like, found hips, I was like, “I'm stunning.” It was really special.

JVN [00:32:37] So how, so—and you were just speaking to this—like, for, like, a Jai Ho! night in Chicago, like, that's a way that, like, drag can connect diasporic communities, like, in the United States, like from different cultures, like, but in this case, like, Jai Ho!. But, like, there's, like, I mean, I'm sure that happens, like, in other cultures, in different queer spaces. That's,

like, amazing. I love that. So can you tell us more about, like, LaWhore's backstory and how she's evolved over the years and how inhabiting LaWhore, honey, has changed how you see drag?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:32:55] Yeah, so, so LaWhore came because we were doing Jai Ho! the first time. It was a fundraiser for our queer South Asian organization—little new baby organization. And we needed—

JVN [00:33:07] What year is this?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:33:08] 2009.

JVN [00:33:15] And so this is the LaWhore's literally birthing story.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:33:12] Birth story. Yeah.

JVN [00:33:14] It was Obama's first year in office.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:33:17] Mhm.

JVN [00:33:19] Wow.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:33:20] It was a moment. Yeah. I got to Chicago and it was election time. And in Chicago it was really, like, the city was electric. It was also the first year of Drag Race.

JVN [00:33:31] Oh, my god. Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:33:34] So a lot of things built me.

JVN [00:33:35] Ongina!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:33:36] Oh, god! Ongina and Ongina's vagina gave us Vagistan! I mean, but, but really, that first season of Ongina and BeBe and Nina Flowers, right? These, I mean, these three, again, diasporic queens really shaped—

JVN [00:33:53] Yes, BeBe Zahara Benet, love her!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:33:56] Yeah, yeah, I went to Roscoe's to see her live after she won. I was really obsessed because, again, I'm from West Africa. And so, like, she, she meant a lot. She meant a lot to me as the winner. But, but I didn't know anything about how to do drag. I just, we needed to, we were doing a fundraiser and we needed a performer. And I was like, "Sure, I'll do it." And I made up this name and I bought some really cheap makeup. I've,

I've learned otherwise that it's not great to use that. Shake-and-go wig, thrift store clothes. But. I was performing songs that the crowd wanted to hear. So I did this mix of a song called Chamma Chamma, which actually is in Moulin Rouge.

JVN [00:34:37] I know that song.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:34:38] Yes. Yeah. And MIA'S "Paper Planes."

JVN [00:34:40] I know both of those!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:34:43] Yes. You should have been there. So that was my first performance. And funny enough, like, I blacked out, you know? But there was another researcher in the space that day who filmed it, so there's actual footage of it that exists. And the fundraiser kept happening, so LaWhore kept performing. And she then, like, went to Austin and entered a competition and learned a lot about how to do hair and makeup and pads and how to, how to dress for her new body. Over the years, you know, I've been doing this for ten plus years, and now I'm sort of the older South Asian queen on the scene. So LaWhore likes to say she's "everyone's favorite auntie" and she's really embraced the role of an auntie. And, and I made this music video called "Sari" that is a riff on Justin Bieber's "Sorry" about wearing saris as an auntie. And, and that's just her signature look now.

JVN [00:35:46] Oh, my God. Does LaWhore ever, like, still do, like, tits out sari? Like, do you like, because, like, not to challenge your style, but I'm just saying: just because you're an auntie doesn't mean you can't be, like, a sensual auntie with, like, tits out. Like, the people wanna see the tits out, like, in aunties.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:36:01] She's a sexy auntie.

JVN [00:36:02] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:36:05] Yeah, yeah. So I don't know if you know, but there's a whole category of South Asian porn called Auntie Porn, and it's usually women in saris who are like, "Here's the sexy way I take off my sari and undo my, undo my bra."

JVN [00:36:19] Ooooh!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:36:20] And, and so that is the auntie she aspires to. But one of the things you're asking is also, like, "What has this changed about how I see drag?" And, like, I mean it's really taught me that you know the things I didn't know, like, my students didn't know till they took my class. But that drag is work, that it's a craft, but also that, like, drag is our history, you know, and that I'm not the first one to do it. Actually there's such a history and centuries' old history to what we do that's, that's been about pleasure and joy and fun and critique. And then also you know, becoming drag auntie and having all these, these

babies through my classes and through the, through the nightclub is that drag is about care. Drag is about taking care of our futures and making a future for ourselves.

JVN [00:37:07] Fuck yes! Also, like, I feel like we're the same age. And I had a journalist that referred to me as a community elder, like, last year, like I just turned 36. Like, I feel like I was just sneaking into bars under my drag mother's, like, skirt, like just years ago. Like, cause she just wore these, like, really big Cinderella skirts and I would, like, pop a squat under there and I would just, like, waddle in underneath her skirt. Like, that's how I, like, snuck in the clubs and Phenix, like. And now we're, I'm a community elder. So I just, I guess I would just say, like, enjoy it, enjoy your twinkness, enjoy your early twenties-ness, like, and then you blink and next thing you know, honey, we're in different roles. And I like that for us. I mean, I have lower back pain, but I'm gorgeous, you know?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:37:52] Yeah, I mean, acid reflux sucks, but—

JVN [00:37:55] No, not the acid reflux!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:37:38] But I also have to say, like 40 years, this is the most beautiful I've ever felt.

JVN [00:38:03] Right? I like that.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:38:04] Well, thank you. But I feel it, right. I feel like drag has taught me to take, take possession of my body. Right. And I think that that's actually really important. I style it the way I want. Now I know that I have options and that gender doesn't just have to happen to me. I can do it, right. And that is what drag teaches us all.

JVN [00:38:25] Oh, so good! Take us to church. No, I gotta decolonize that phrase. What's, like, what's, like, Hindu—take us to temple, honey!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:38:35] I like take us to church. But, but take us to temple is good, too.

JVN [00:38:42] Yeah, they love that. Okay, so, okay, so you write that both gayness—I thought that's really interesting—so you write that both gayness and nightlife in India are seen as Western imports. Who in India holds these views?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:39:52] So, you know, a lot of people. But, but the way I'm writing about it is that there's this sudden anxiety due to globalization. So in the early nineties, India opens up its economic borders to Western investment and suddenly there's Coca-Cola and MTV and all of these “foreign imports,” quote unquote, that that, you know, people were bringing in and other ways. But suddenly there's this, this barrage of new products and, and visuals of, like, Baywatch, you know, coming in. So suddenly it's, like, people are like, “What is

this sexual impropriety that's coming with these kinds of white bodies and nightclubs and discos?" Mind you, there were discos in India before this, right. I mean, if you, if you see, like, 1970s and eighties Bollywood cinema, like, the disco shows up a lot. It's not like it's brand new, but both public forms of sexuality and the nightclub become these two places where they're, like, "Oh, it's globalization that brought them in."

And, and so that's, that's where, like, a real sort of hysteria around both of these things shows up. And so it's a variety of people who hold these views. But that's, that's how I'm writing about it is, like, the—and I'm doing my research 20 years, 20 plus years after this. So there's, like, a whole generation now. Now parents are seeing their kids who are participating in this quote unquote, "gayness" in this, like, "new," "suddenly new" nightlife scenes. And actually it does happen, like, in Bangalore. Bangalore is known as "pub city," because it's the tech city and people want to cater to these people who have newfound income. So they, like, bring in architects from the UK to build pubs that are—look like—British pubs. And so they are trying to cater to newfound Western sensibilities. But, but it's, it's not like these things weren't there before. It's just that there are more of them and people start to get anxious. In nightlife when you put them together gayness and nightlife, right, then it produces a lot of anxieties about like, "What are these gays doing? Why are they partying? Where are they so sexually explicit and illicit? Why can't they be less visible in those senses?"

JVN [00:41:07] So is, like, Bangalore and, like, India, more widely, like, regulating gender and sexuality in recent decades as a response to this, like, idea that nightlife and queer culture Western imports?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:41:17] Yes, but there are also some local things going on there as well. So globalization's happening. Migration is happening, not just into India but within India. And you find that, so one of the things that happens specifically in Bangalore is that migrant women are dancing in nightlife spaces. And they're not stripping, but they're dancing in maybe, like, sexy kinds of ways. And for, for men. And the city tries to police nightlife and there, there was a ban on social dance. They're, like, "If there's alcohol and or dancing or music, we will shut you down." And so, like, police were going to bars and, like, I was in a bar once and my friend was just sort of bopping his shoulders and the owner was, like, "Hey, the police are going to shut us down if you keep bopping your shoulders," like, it was that severe. But, but again, it's these anxieties about, like, people moving across borders suddenly and, and with that comes, like, things that look like women taking charge of their sexuality and queer people having too much fun. "And we have to regulate these things." And so these places were called dance bars, and a lot of the dance bars were closed due to that. I mean, even at karaoke, people, like people could sing, but they couldn't dance.

JVN [00:42:31] Is it still like that?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:42:32] No, no, no. This was like 2006 to 2012 ish. But it was, it was not cute, but. But again, queer people find a way and they would, like, party on the wrong

night of the week when the police weren't watching. They would party in the suburbs, like, far away from the city center in order to stay open later. So, so I think that, like, queer folks really found a way to navigate that time in a really careful way. Like, we need our fun, right? Especially when we're denied pleasure and joy every day. We, we found ways to have fun. And I really applaud the, the nightlife organizers and the creative ways that people just navigated that, that weird, funky time. But one of the things that—why I think it's really important to tell that story—is it reminds us again that, like, the policing of sex work and the policing of women's bodies affects queer people, too. You know, and that's that's this fascist moment we're in right now where the policing of people who have uteruses, right. And the ban on drag have everything to do with each other.

JVN [00:43:38] Absolutely. So, in the aftermath of the city's dance ban, like what drag styles, What kind of energy has emerged from that era? And what risks do people still take on when they go to a queer nightclub?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:43:49] So drag has totally exploded post this kind of dance ban moment and also with RuPaul and of course, like, the handful of South Asian queens who've appeared in the world of Wonder franchise, like, props to them for for creating models for us to to to play with. But now there's, you know, where when I was doing my research there was parties only once a week—if that. And, and so now there's like parties 3 to 4 times a week and, and it means you don't have to, like, clear out your calendar and make sure your Saturdays are free. You could go on a Sunday night to, like, an evening thing. So, so that's just nice to have. But also with more parties means more opportunities for drag. And so you've got themed nights with Drag King only nights, you've got South Indian drag only, you've got nights dedicated to Bollywood divas. So, so there's much more variety. And, and it's, I mean, it's really exploded. I was in Bangalore twice in the last year, and there's just so many new performers. What's actually really lovely to see, also, in India is that drag artists are traveling around from city to city and performing for each other. And there's just a lot of variety, a lot of talent. And I'm amazed. I'm amazed every time I go, because there's more and more and more and I love it.

JVN [00:45:18] Ah, love! And I love that you've been there, like, to see that happen, like, in real time. That's so fucking cool. Okay, so you were just mentioning before, like, we're in this moment in the US, such a rise in anti-LGBTQ legislation, so many drag bans, so many fuckers just out there are doing the fucking most. And at the same time we're in this mode, we're like, the Drag Race Empire is more popular than ever in the midst of all of this anti-queer legislation. So how are you processing this wave of legislation?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:45:49] I think it's, it's a deeply anti-trans set of legislation. It's anti-sex. It's anti-sex work. And it's using really old, fake stories that “we have to protect our children,” right? There's no empirical evidence, right? It's just a bunch of myths that grooming is happening, that children are need, are in need of protection. And we've seen what happens in the US when we say it's children at risk, right. But children have often been used as pawns in

these in, in American politics, right. When we say white, young white girls are in danger and it leads to, like, attacks on Black life, right. When, when we demonize other people and create real material risks for them. So I think it's terrifying, but I also think it's completely unfounded. And this is not the first time that gender dissidence has been criminalized. And, and I think that it's really a consolidation of many forms of patriarchy that are trying to control bodies and genders and birth and, and young people as well, and make, and make young people scared about their desires and, and joys and pleasures.

JVN [00:47:06] There is so much to unpack there. I mean, I think if you're at this moment, if you after this episode, if you want to listen to, like, Dr. Jacki Antonovich on our history of abortion or if you want to listen to Jen Manion on, you know, our queer ancestors who were transing gender in the 1800s and 1700s. It is just so true that this is, it is not the first time we are in the midst of, you know, an upswing, but it isn't the first time. But I do think that this idea that drag performers are a risk to children, like, there are so many risks to kids that are happening, like between child abuse, sex abuse, not having enough food, not having enough education.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:47:46] Right.

JVN [00:47:47] I mean, there's serious issues that like we're not talking about and we're talking about I mean, we didn't have drag and queer performers on TV when I was little and I turned out gay as fuck, like, it was just because we are so ingenious. Like, I just made, like, figure skating and gymnastics, my queer expression, because we didn't, like, you know what I mean? Like, we're always going to find a way. You can't stop nature and we're natural. So what are you going to do?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:48:08] And, you know, I think straight people also love drag, and love doing it. And, and, and we've seen all these, like, cases of, you know, Republican legislators in drag. And they're, like, "No, it was just for fun. It's not real." But actually there's a real joy to playing with gender. Right. And getting to know ourselves through gender and gender expansion. And, and it's so it's, it's really sad that people, like, refuse that piece of them, themselves. And like I said, my aunties were doing drag, right. They, they taught me drag before drag taught me drag. And I think that we, we, we can't refuse all the multiplicity of drag and we need to own all of it to say, "Actually, it's everywhere all the time."

JVN [00:48:51] Hmm. So how can drag performers and audiences stay resilient right now? And also, how can fans of drag show up for drag performers, especially ones in, like, places like Tennessee, Texas, that are having their livelihoods and their, like, way of life be challenged?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:49:05] Yeah. So I think one, one of the things that the current moment has produced is to say everything that drag is not, right. "Drag is not sex. Drag is not dangerous." In fact, I think we have to start seeing what drag is. And one is that it is sexy and it is dangerous. And we need to, like, lean in to that danger and use that danger to critique the

violence around us. It's, it's—drag can be so smart and interesting and, and we just have to lean into that. So I think, actually, instead of trying to defend drag so hard and say what it's not, I think actually jump right into the, the weirdest parts of it and, and play with that, I think. Invest in beauty. And, and make drag for us—so the point of it is to make drag for *us*, i.e., queer and trans people, not for them i.e., those who don't want it, right. So don't censor yourself really, really make the drag that we need to see. And for those who are in the audience, just keep going. You know, I think if, if drag, if drag bans are being enforced and you can't go to shows, you know, venues for performers, especially local performers wherever you are because they need it. Drag is a livelihood, too. But also just keep going to shows, bring people. The thing is that when you go to a drag show, it becomes really evident that drag is not those things that people say.

JVN [00:50:34] It becomes very evident that it is joyful, and it is community-based—

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:50:38] Yes.

JVN [00:50:39] Super fun and inclusive and appropriate.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:50:42] And, and something happens. Like, when you, when you're in a drag show, like, even if it's, like, something that you don't understand, something happens to your body and you're, like, “I want to understand this and I want to be here.” And the other thing I'll say is like, take your kids to drag shows. My best audiences are kids. I love having kids in the audience. They're sitting at the edge of their seats. They, they, they fully lean into the magic in the fantasy that we're producing on stage. And I wish more adults could learn from kids how to watch drag actually, and lean into fantasy and joy and world making and all of those things.

JVN [00:51:20] So aside from you, because you're doing such a good job, honey, who's working to expand our understanding of “good drag”?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:51:27] So, so one is, like, let's throw out “good drag” altogether maybe, and like, let's just expand drag, period. But there are two moments on Drag Race where I was like, “Oh, they're teaching us onscreen what local drag looks like.” And that's Willow Pill's talent show where she, like, had the, the toaster and the, the bathtub and then Crystal Methyd performing as a bird in her home.

JVN [00:52:54] Ah! I love Crystal Methyd and she's one of my favorites ever. I think she's so fucking genius.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:52:01] But this is, so—I'm so used to seeing both of those kinds of genius, like, every week at a drag show. And I, you know, I think that that kind of weirdness and offbeat stuff is actually all over our quote unquote “local drag scenes,” so just, like, those two are teaching me that, like, just go see local drag all the time. But there's a

scholar named Shaka McGlotten who has a book called Dragging that is really about dangerous forms of drag that push beyond comfort and ease. My friend M. Leslie Santana, who's a professor at UCSD, is publishing a book about drag in Cuba and is celebrating all kinds of drag, from drag in the home to the really fancy club spaces that cater to tourists, to activism and protest. And it's, like, a really brilliant book. There's a curator in New York City named Emi Great who hosts an all Asian drag show called A-Plus. But it's that idea of the plus, right, that says, "I'm going to break the boundaries of what we think of as Asian or Asian drag and reach all the way from the Middle East to all the diasporas, including, like, Asian Caribbean diasporas, and have women queens and trans queens and kings and monsters," that just, like, it, it's not just pushing our idea of drag, but our idea of Asian and Asian diaspora. The artists who make, like, really janky mixes and perform, you know, just like you don't understand why these songs live together, but they live together and they, like, teach you something new that those are like my favorite kinds of performances to see if they'd, like, take me on a roller coaster drag swaps where like drag artists are just, like, "Come take clothes," and, like—

JVN [00:53:42] C'mon, mutual aid!

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:53:43] Mutual drag aid! It's, like, really special. And then the last place I would say is ball culture. Where, you know, ball culture is teaching us, like, all the extremes that, like, realness really matters and, like, realness, it has such value. And then on the other hand, you put on a dusty wig and you have some, like, beautiful, skillful moves but are not performing, like, a binary gender. And both of those are valid, have value in the space and can be actually measured and judged and thought about and critiqued, but all belong in the same universe. That, like, that is, that is really exploding what we know of as, as drag.

JVN [00:54:21] What's possible if we decolonize drag?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:54:24] Everything, I think if we understand that colonialism is this project of dispossession, extraction, privatization, then decolonial drag is then abundant and available and accessible, right? So to decolonize drag, I think you just, you make more available. So we acknowledge that we have predecessors and drag is not this new thing. And we make room for, for performers who don't look like "good drag" or don't look like drag at all, and who aren't using the gender categories that we're used to but are still invested in putting themselves on stage to create a world for us to live inside of and, and be fantastic and celebrate gender and sexuality in all of its magnificence. And, and I think at that point we just see that drag is everywhere all the time, and it's integral to our lives. And, and we, we don't question whether it's moral or not or it's good or not. We just, it just is. And it's part of our fabric and our DNA and our everyday lives. And, and for me, it is, right, I'm, I'm trying to live that by, like, going to drag shows as often as possible. And I'm, like, this this kind of is my life. And it's not just research. It really is, like, life-giving to me to see beauty as often and every day as I can. Oh.

JVN [00:55:40] Ah, yes! I mean, RuPaul says, "Honey, you're born naked and the rest really is drag." I mean, your job, the clothes you wear, how you present in life. Like, everything, everybody is. I mean everything. Think the way that we all present in our life like it, it really is true. I mean, this whole our whole society, our whole egos, like, everything we do are these, like, costumes that we put on and this expression of that, you know, not, like, a bad costume, but it's true. I mean, it's, like, our whole life experiences.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:56:04] And that's the thing is, like, costume is often thought of as fake. And I'm, like, "Screw authenticity." Let's be, like, let's have, like, lots of selves and let's be different kinds of authentic and different kinds of fake whenever we want.

JVN [00:56:19] So if you're just following the Ru Girls on Instagram, you're only getting half the story. I also would love for us to do just, like, a little beat when your episode comes down of, like, who are your favorite queens to follow on the 'gram, which needs to be, like, its own standalone piece for Instagram. So if you're listening to this episode and you're obsessed and you want more, honey, then you better go check that Instagram because we're going to put it all over there because we are not going to put Kareem on the spot like that right, like, now. But check our socials for that and we need to know because you're on the gram, right? Are you on the TT? Are you on the 'gram? Where are you real active?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:57:59] I'm really active on Instagram. There's @kareempuff, which is, like, my professor life, and there's @lawhorevagistan, that's my drag life.

JVN [00:57:57] Yes. Okay. Smash the follow on both. Okay, so but what's next for your work and for the work of Dr. LaWhore Vagistan, what's going on?

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:59:05] So I've had, like, a very exciting year, and I've been touring a solo show called Lessons in Drag, where LaWhore lectures about Kareem's research through lip sync and dance. But this summer I'm going to be a scholar in residence on Fire Island at the Fire Island Artist Residency. And as part of that, I get to host a big South Asian drag extravaganza on July 30th, and I'm really excited about that. And then in the fall, I start a fellowship that allows me to go back to school for a year, and I'm going to go to fashion school in New York, and maybe LaWhore will be able to make her own clothes after this. But I'm just really excited to, like, learn about South Asian fashions. And I wrote a song about saris. I need to be able to say more than just that song. So I want to learn about South Asian fashion and globalization and textile and fabric and touch it and feel it and sew it and all of those things.

JVN [00:58:00] Wow. Wow. You are busy person, hunty. I can't wait for your design school extravaganza.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:58:08] I know. I can't wait for it either.

JVN [00:58:11] Ah! Honey, I had so much fun. I feel like we learned so much, y'all. You need to be following Dr. LaWhore Vagistan yesterday, follow Kareem yesterday. We love you so much. Thanks for coming on Getting Curious.

KAREEM KHUBCHANDANI [00:50:24] Thank you. This has been a joy. I'm so happy to be here.

JVN [00:58:30] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guests and their area of expertise in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend and show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram @CuriouswithJVN. Our editor Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Chris McClure with production support from Emily Bossak and Julie Carrillo.