

The Legend of Georgia McBride

Dramaturgical "Packette"

Additional dramaturgical materials (including multimedia elements like playlists and videos) are available at krt18dramaturgy.weebly.com!

Questions about any of the information in this packet or on the website? Is there information you wish you had that isn't available? Contact your dramaturg, Lusie Cuskey, at lusiecuskey@gmail.com, 502.657.8352, or a rehearsal room near you!

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Play and Playwright



Matthew Lopez, born in 1978, is the nephew of Priscilla Lopez (the original Diana Morales in *A Chorus Line*). Originally from the Florida panhandle, Lopez' writing combines echoes of his own life (particularly his identity as a gay man and as a multiracial individual of Puerto Rican and Russian/Polish descent) with historical exploration.

Best Known Plays to Date (date is first performance):

2018: *Zoe's Perfect Wedding*, a comedy about a wedding gone wrong.

Premiered at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

2018: *The Inheritance*, a two-part play exploring the intergenerational relationships between gay men and the impact of AIDS on the queer male community. Running through May 19 at the Old Vic in London.

2015: *Reverberation*, a play about contemporary ideas and expressions of intimacy.

2014: *The Legend of Georgia McBride*

2011: *Somewhere*, a play with dance about art, Latino identity, and gentrification in 1959 New York. (Formerly *Tio Pepe*.)

2006: *The Whipping Man*, a play just after the Civil War when a Jewish confederate soldier returns to his childhood home to find it occupied by former slaves.

The Legend of Georgia McBride was developed at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Iterations of the original production played in Denver (2014), New York (2015), and Los Angeles (2017) with Lopez present, with all three productions directed by Mike Donohue, set designed by Donyale Werle, sound designed by Jill BC DuBoff, and featuring Matt McGrath as Tracy Mills. Paul McGill choreographed in both New York and Los Angeles. The play is currently enjoying a robust life in regional theatres.

On the Site: Links to additional interviews with Lopez and articles, clips, and reviews of his former plays and regional productions of *McBride*.

Glossary

Some references may seem obvious, but I tried to cast the net wide so as not to make assumptions about anyone's prior knowledge or lived experience. If I've missed a reference in the script you don't understand, please let me know and I'll track it down for you!

PgNumber. **Reference:** explanation.

13. **Miss Daisy:** A reference to *Driving Miss Daisy*, an Alfred Uhry play adapted into a movie about an elderly Jewish woman and the relationship she develops with the Black man hired as her chauffeur.

16. **Versatile:** A term for a queer (usually gay) man who enjoys both topping and bottoming in his sexual relationship(s).

17. **"More Graceland than Ed Sullivan":** Graceland is Elvis' home - now turned memorial - in TN. It hosts an annual "Elvis Week" featuring, among other events, a contest for Elvis tribute artists. The Ed Sullivan Show was a variety show on which Elvis himself appeared on multiple occasions.

19. **Winn Dixie:** A family grocery chain (like Dillon's or Hyvee).

23. **Édith Piaf:** A beloved French singer, actress, and cabaret performer and frequent inspiration for drag acts.

24. **Barbara Streisand's "Jingle Bells":** "Jingle Bells"...as performed by Barbra Streisand. (And lots of drag queens.)

24. **Zima:** A lightly carbonated lemon-lime clear beer popularized in the 1990s. Think alcoholic Sprite.

25. **"Skate towards the light, Carol Ann!":** A reference to a scene in the movie *Poltergeist*.

28. ***Tracy raises the wire hanger and does her best Faye Dunaway:*** A reference to a scene in the movie *Mommie Dearest*.

28. **Janet Reno:** the first female Attorney General of the United States. Also the wearer of a short haircut.

29. **"Padam Padam":** An Édith Piaf song sometimes also just called "Padam." There is a video recording that includes English and French lyrics.

34. **"Watched the movie?"**: Tracy is probably referring to *La Vie En Rose*, a biopic about Piaf.

36. **The Pharaoh number in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat***: Refers to "Song of the King (The Seven Fat Cows)."

36. **Tallahassee vs. Panama City**: Tallahassee is the inland capital of FL and has a population of over 190,000. Panama City is a coast town and has a population of under 40,000. They're about two hours apart.

38. **"Et tu, Brute?"**: A reference to Shakespeare's *Julius Ceasar*, but the phrase also has plenty of traction in popular culture.

39. **"It's raining men!"**: A reference to The Weather Girls' song, a drag staple.

39. **[Casey] gives his best Sweeney Todd. "AT LAST MY ARM IS COMPLETE AGAIN!"**: A reference to the end of "My Friends," a song in Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*.

41. **"One for the money...two for the show..."**: A reference to Elvis' "Blue Suede Shoes."

42. **"We're gonna have to find a different way for you to 'express yourself.'"**: A reference to the Madonna song.

43. **Frances Gumm**: Judy Garland's birth name.

43. **"Judy, Liza, Barbra, Britney, Bette, Rhianna, Fergie, and Madonna"**: Pop icons and frequent drag targets Judy Garland, Liza Minelli, Barbra Streisand, Britney Spears, Bette Midler, Rhianna, Fergie, and Madonna.

44. **"Loretta Lynn, Emmylou Harris, Dixie Chicks"**: Female country performance artists. Loretta Lynn and Emmylou Harris are more traditional old-school country, while the Dixie Chicks are country-pop anticipating artists like Taylor Swift.

44. **"Baby, your Elvis act died on the toilet."**: Like Elvis. Elvis died on the toilet.

53. ***The Crying Game***: A 1992 film, one plot point of which is that a soldier falls in love with a woman he learns is transgender.

55. **The Von Trapp Family Singers**: A reference to a scene in *The Sound of Music*.

56. **"Lady Chablis, Hedda Lettuce, Lypsinka, Divine, Babette":** Famous drag queens addressed individually below. The list largely pays homage to early camp and comedy queens, as well as those who generate their own artistic work outside the context of conventional pageant performance or lip syncs.

56. **Lady Chablis:** One of the first drag queens to receive wide popular recognition after *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

56. **Hedda Lettuce:** A New York-based drag queen with several famous media appearances, including the film *To Wong Foo*.

56. **Lypsinka:** The drag persona of solo performance artist John Epperson, who's played Lypsinka in several solo shows and off-Broadway plays including *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*.

56. **Divine:** A famous drag queen who worked on several Les Waters projects, including the original film version of *Hairspray*.

56. **Babette:** A female impersonator and circus performer, particularly popular in the 1920s and 1930s, who would reveal he was a man at the end of a circus act performed in drag.

56. **Stonewall:** The Stonewall Inn in New York City was the site of the Stonewall riots, a 1969 uprising against a police raid of the gay bar. The uprising, led by drag queens (who might have identified as trans women or under the nonbinary umbrella today), is considered to be the inciting incident to the contemporary LGBTQ rights movement. (The 49 year anniversary of the uprising is June 28, during our rehearsal process.)

56. **Mattachine:** A reference to the Mattachine Society, an early LA-based gay rights collective founded by a group of gay men in 1950.

56. **ACT UP:** The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, a grassroots anti-AIDS advocacy group that protested government response to the AIDS epidemic with large-scale, high-profile protests. Chapters of ACT UP are still active today.

56. **Christopher Street:** The street in New York City on which the Stonewall Inn is located in New York's West Village.

57. **Montrose Mining Company:** A Houston gay bar that opened in 1978 and closed in 2016.

63. **Brooklyn drag:** The term apparently doesn't have a precise meaning, but it's understood to be messy and outside the conventional performance standards of Manhattan drag.

64. **Twink:** A queer (primarily gay) young man who is thin and conventionally attractive with very little body hair. Sometimes used descriptively, sometimes pejoratively, and sometimes to describe men who fit the "type" without knowledge of their sexual orientation.

65. **"It's like *Lord of the Flies* out there and I'm the pig!":** The pig is a recurring theme in the William Golding novel. The characters literally hunt and kill pigs, but they also ostracize Piggy from the rest of the group of older boys and plan to hunt former authority figure Ralph *like* a pig. Regardless, it's not ideal.

On the Site: Underlined portions are hyperlinks leading to film clips (both the referenced film clips and drag impersonations of some of the drag icons), music clips, and the occasional article.

Panama City and Florida Drag



Although it's a reasonably trafficked vacation spot, Panama City Beach has a mid-sized year-round population of under 40,000 (Panama City Beach, the neighboring coastal town, is under 13,000, which explains why it's small enough to have a locals' Facebook page you can visit discussing concerns from wacky tourist antics to lost dogs). There are bayous and state parks in addition to white sand beaches. City

Data reflects that the median age is just over 40, the median household income just under \$40,000, and the mean housing price \$226,974. Neighborhood Scout reflects that only 22% of Panama City residents are college graduates, so Jo and Casey's challenge to hold down jobs they feel they can live with and make enough money to keep food on the table is a realistic one.

Drag

Cleo's in *The Legend of Georgia McBride* is obviously fictional, but it can be useful to glance at real-world counterparts. To the right is Splash Bar, Panama City's main (and, as far as I've found, only) drag venue.

It's a beachy bar around a tiki area. Panama City drag as seen on videos from this bar trends towards fairly realistic looks but also has a lot of tolerance for weird. Trixie Mattel, a Southern-inspired comedy queen, actually did a show here and has some interesting comments on how the particular kind of Southern culture in that part of Florida and drag culture intersected in a queen in *RuPaul's* drag race in an online video.



Drag style varies around Florida, with Ft. Meyers' Rascals preferring queens who are perhaps a little messy but have high-quality audience interaction over more polished but distant styles. Miami "is a lot more high-energy, there's a lot of samba and Latin music worked into the show, really bright colors as well," Joseph Brauer - a local I interviewed about the Florida drag scene - reflected. The style of drag most often seen on "*Ru Paul's Drag Race*" is closest to that found in Tampa and St. Petersburg.

On the Site: Video inside the bars capturing various local flavors of drag.



The drag scene as we know it today first started, particularly in the US, in the 1950s. It didn't flourish until the 1980s, when gay culture started to develop.

In the 1950s and 60s, drag was underground and criminalized. After World War II, national paranoia in America was rife. Led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, anything deemed 'subversive' was considered a national risk. In the 1950s the U.S. State Department decided that homosexuals were 'subversive'.

The FBI and police kept records of 'known homosexuals', and printed their photographs in local papers. Police performed sweeps of bars and nightclubs to 'rid' neighborhoods of gay people who were often publicly humiliated, harassed, fired from jobs, jailed or institutionalized in mental hospitals. The wearing of opposite gender clothes was banned and cross dressers were submitted to humiliating 'gender checking' and arrested.



The gay rights movement is thought to have begun in 1969 at the Stonewall Bar in New York. On June 28th, 1969, the police conducted a raid. However, it did not go as planned, and many, particularly the lesbians and drag queens, began to fight back. After drag queen Sylvia Rivera threw pennies at police, three nights of riots ensued. Another drag queen, Marsha P. Johnson, smashed a police car window with her hand bag. It was the first time gay people had come together as a community, and the events at Stonewall ignited worldwide LGBT activism.

Starting in the late 20th Century, groups of drag queens have come together under a unifying identity to perform a charitable or activist function in their communities. Some perform to raise funds for charities, while others protest for LGBT and civil rights. These groups include The West Hollywood Cheerleaders and The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. These groups are consciously reviving the ancient archetype of drag queens as shamans and spiritual leaders.

The most famous drag queen in popular culture today has to be RuPaul. Born in San Diego, he got his start in Atlanta and became widely known during the nineties. He acts, models, writes, sings and even has a Christmas album! *RuPaul's Drag Race* is one of the most successful television competition shows of all time, currently in its ninth season. Ru Paul once said, "I do not impersonate females! I don't dress like a woman. I dress like a drag queen! How many women do you know who wear seven-inch heels, four-foot wigs, and skintight dresses?"

What makes us laugh at drag and cross-dressing? The simple answer is there's something funny about one gender trying to imitate another. A lot has been written about drag queens and queer theory. One of the main books on the topic was written by Carole-Anne Tyler, called *INSIDE/OUT: LESBIAN THEORIES, GAY THEORIES* (1999). She notes that drag queens aren't always accepted within the gay community, as some believe that it reinforces sexist norms,



projects a limited and harmful image of gay people and impedes a broader social acceptance. This opinion is criticized for limiting self-expression and encouraging the idea that there are "right" and "wrong" ways to be gay. Many argue that drag queens aren't being mean spirited – it is just plain entertainment. Or perhaps the true answer is we are all pretty much alike. We are all one.

Some documentaries about drag:

- Paris Is Burning* (1990)
- Wigstock* (1995)
- Dragtime* (1997)
- Queens For a Night* (1999)
- Glitterboys and Ganglands* (2011)
- Danny LaRue: A Fabulous Life in Drag* (2013)
- The Art of Drag* (2013)
- Life's A Drag* (2014)

Sources include
<https://hashtagdrag.wordpress.com/2013/02/23/fabulous-history-of-drag-part-one/> www.advocate.com/drag;

