Icon Enrique Allure St. Laurent

Interviewed by Joseph Plaster

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Interviewee: Enrique Allure St. Laurent (EL)
Interviewer: Joseph Plaster (JP)
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JP: Okay, so we’re starting. Today’s date is March 12, 2019. We’re here at the George Peabody Library and why don’t you just start out by telling me your name, your house, and what categories you walked?

EL: My name is Enrique. My house is St. Laurent. I’m known as Enrique Allure St. Laurent ‘cause I started out as an Allure and then we transferred over to St. Laurent, so.

JP: And what categories have you walked?

EL: I walked runway, European and all-American, as well as body.

JP: Okay. And give me just a little bit of background before you came to ballroom – when you were born, where you grew up, that kind of thing.

EL: Well, I was born in Baltimore City. I was an army brat, so I kinda traveled all around the United States. We landed back into Baltimore and lived there until I went away to school, which is West Virginia State.

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Graduated from West Virginia State. Then I moved to Ohio. And then, from Ohio, I just came right back here, to Baltimore.

JP: Can you say a little bit more about your family and what it was like growing up in Baltimore?

EL: About my family, I had a very – had a stern father, but I had a really accepting mom. So, long story short: I took my mother to a ball in New York and then come to find out that everybody there knew who she was and she was actually in a house before me, which I think it’s funny. So she was actually an Ebony, and, when she walked, everybody was screaming, “Brenda Ebony.” And then she goes runs up to the mic; she goes, “No, no, no, I’m an Allure now – my son’s an Allure – so it’s ‘Brenda Allure,’ “ so the guy says, “Okay, Brenda Ebony Allure,” so that was the running joke they made.
JP: So your mother walked in the ball scene before you were into ballroom?

EL: Yeah, before I was born. Right.

JP: Before you were born.

EL: Mm-hmm.

JP: So when would that have been? What –

[0:02:00]

EL: Well, I’m 52 now, so that had to be – I don’t know – maybe when she was in her teens ‘cause, you know, my mom’s a big fag hag. In fact, in Baltimore, down at Bunns, she’s like open ceremony – ‘cause she’s also a preacher as well, so she did opening prayer for Bunns quite a few times.

JP: Okay.

EL: Mm-hmm.

JP: So she was walking balls, what decade?

EL: I don’t know, what – early ‘60s?

JP: Wow.

EL: Early ‘60s, ‘50s, yeah. Early ‘60s. She would have been around that Pepper LaBeija time, I’m thinking, ‘cause people knew who she was and ‘cause, when I was in ballroom around later ‘80s, early ‘90s, so she had to be before – of course, she had to be before that.

JP: Okay. So ‘60s and ‘70s. Was she walking in New York then?

EL: She was in – yeah, she was from Brooklyn.

JP: Okay.

EL: Right.

JP: Wow.

[0:03:00]
Okay. But you only discovered this after you became part of ballroom?

*EL:* Right. I only discovered it after, like I said, after we took her to a ball in New York, that we discovered – that I discovered what she was about. My mom’s a pretty cool lady.

*JP:* It sounds like it.

*EL:* Right. Right. She’s …

*JP:* Do you mind turning off the light? It’s kind of – just pull the –

*EL:* Okay.

*JP:* Thanks.

*EL:* All right.

*JP:* Okay. So that’s interesting. Tell me a little bit more about how you first learned about ballroom?

*EL:* Well, my cousin Kiki, when I went away to college, he became a Milan, so when he became Milan, when I came – I would come back and forth, and he was telling me he was a part of a house and he was telling me the logistics what this was about, like a alternative family type thing, and the categories he would walk. And I became interested, so.

*JP:* And this was your biological cousin?

*EL:* Mm-hmm.

[0:04:00]

*JP:* Okay. Do you remember what interested you about it at that particular moment?

*EL:* Just excitement. The fun, excitement – it was something different – and the competition.

*JP:* Do you remember the first ballroom you went to?

*EL:* The first ball that I went to was on North Avenue, was at the old club, Odell’s, and that’s actually when I first realized what house I
wanted to be in as well. So it was on North Avenue at Odell’s and it was a small function, but it was impactful for me because it made me wanna join right away.

**JP:** And what is Odell’s?

**EL:** Odell’s is a club. It used to be a club.

**JP:** Okay.

**EL:** That’s on North Avenue. It’s a legend – well, a lot of older people, around my age or maybe older, would know about that because Odell’s was the kind of club that they had this woman named “Jackie,” and Jackie was like – she was selective who she would let in ….

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So Odell’s was known for that and Jackie ‘cause Jackie would either let you in or she wouldn’t let you in. So everybody was trying to be on Jackie’s friends or whatever the case may be. But, on particular ball night, Jackie didn’t care ‘cause she likes balls, so she just wanted to have fun.

**JP:** And so when was that? Was that your first ball?

**EL:** I would say middle to latter part of the ‘80s, so I would say like ‘88, just about. About ‘88, ‘90 – around then.

**JP:** And, at that point, was Bunns open as well?

**EL:** No.

**JP:** Okay, so Odell’s preceded Bunns –

**EL:** Odell’s preceded Bunns at that point, mm-hmm.

**JP:** And I think the other club people have mentioned is something like “Pyramid” or –

**EL:** Paradox.

**JP:** Paradox.

**EL:** Mm-hmm.
JP: Was that around?

EL: Well, no, because Wayne Davis, who owns The Paradox, actually owned Odell’s, so Odell’s was owned by Wayne Davis and Jackie was an employee of his.

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So, yeah, that preceded that.

JP: And was Odell’s similar to Bunns or Paradox?

EL: No. It was a straight club, but, of course, it was Baltimore’s own version of Studio 54 – everybody just came and had fun – so it was a very eclectic crowd. So Odell’s turned into Fantasies. Fantasies turned into The Paradox. And then you have Bunns will come into play because then you have The Last Stop, which was an offspring of Odell’s, so, you know, Odell’s will be where the eclectic group goes. There’ll be other clubs, like Godfrey’s or something, where the straight people go; The Last Stop would be where the gay kids will go. And that was another way you can learn about ballroom, but, at that point, it was this six-foot-one ex-Colt player named “Pebbles” that owned the club.

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And Pebbles was associated with the whole ball thing, so, back then, [ballroom] was about feathers and beads and all of that stuff, and she was a part of that. So you kinda got a little taste of that, going to The Last Stop, because a lot of people from New York will come down and then you can practice your craft or just play around, like runway or old wave, which was how vogue femme is now. So that’s how that would work.

JP: And Pebbles was in the House of Revlon?

EL: I’m not sure what – I don’t think Pebbles was in any house. Pebbles was kinda on her own thing, but I really can’t speak to Pebbles ‘cause I was kinda scared of her, so, you know – but I do know that she kinda did her own thing. I’ve never known her to be associated with any house. And you have to remember, when this is going on, the House of Revlon wasn’t even around yet.

JP: Okay. And so around how old were you when you went to the first ball?
[0:08:00]

EL: Oh, wow. Unlike a lot of people now, I kinda started my ballroom career a little late. I think I was 19, maybe 20. Nineteen? Twenty? Between 18 and 20 –

JP: And that’s considered late?

EL: Well –

JP: For ballroom?

EL: Well, yeah. Well, no, actually, I was 20, 21, but, yeah, ‘cause you have people who’s into ballroom as young as 12, but I would say the normal age will be 14, 15, 16. But you have to remember, I was kinda doing this in between college too, so that’s where I was kinda at.

JP: Okay. And did someone bring you into ballroom or did you just hear about it from your cousin –

EL: Well, I heard about it from my cousin and I just wanted to be a part. Then, when I actually – like I said, when I actually went to Odell’s and saw what it was actually about, I instantly wanted to be a part.

JP: Can you kind of paint a picture of that first ball?

[0:09:00]

EL: So perfect – picture. Okay, so, when I walked into Odell’s – okay, I’ll give you the story of how I wanted to be an Allure. How about that? Because, you know, I think my cousin was trying to get me to be a Milan or was asking me about Milan and it was between Milan, Mugler, and I didn’t know about Allure. So I go to this one ball I go to, in Odell’s – the mother of the House of Allure, Monica – with Monica, Erica and it was this trans-man or butch ‘cause there weren’t really trans-men back then – it was butch – named “T.” So, when I saw Monica, I’ve never – you know, when I saw transgenders, I would see people that look like Pebbles – you know, very big, kinda “clocky,” meaning you kinda –

[0:10:00]
knew what was going on, but very rarely would you see people like Monica and Erica and Miss Charmene. They were transgenders that totally look like women, like you had no – ‘cause I had no idea. ‘Cause I’m sitting at the ball, so, you know, this is all going on and I again an outsider ‘cause I didn’t really know anybody ‘cause I knew people in Baltimore, but I didn’t know that particular sector of Baltimore. So I’m sitting at the bar and I’m watching all this and I was like, “Oh, she’s really pretty.” Erica was really pretty – she had this long braids and stuff like that – and so you have all these people. And then they call categories, so they called femme queen realness. So I’m like, “Okay, femme queen realness.” I’m like, “I don’t know what that is.” So femme queen realness and then you see Monica walking and then, behind her, Erica’s walking behind her.

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And then I’m like, “What is that?” They was like, “Femme queen realness. That’s women that used to be men.” And I was like, “You’re fucking lying. That can never have been a man, ever.” And it was like, “No, no, for real.” And then so I’m amazed by that, so I was absolutely amazed by that. So –

JP: Why did that amaze you?

EL: Because, you know, not only was Monica real, she was very pretty and she just had a magnetic personality. She was just so – she’d draw you to her, you know what I’m saying? Erica drew you to her. T, who I found out was actually Monica’s boyfriend or husband, drew – ‘cause, you know, that was – the next category was butch realness and T walks.

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And I’m amazed ‘cause like, “Wait a minute, that can’t have been a woman now it’s a man ‘cause it looks –” you know. So all of that kinda excitement – so the reason why – and what made me become Allure because I was like, “What house – “ it’s like everybody ‘cause I knew was Revlon. Revlon’s, at that point – wait a minute, Revlon, at that point, was going on, but was Revlon and all that, so they was like – it was like, “They’re House of Allure.” And I’m thinking, “Oh, I like that name.” So I was like, “Allure?” And I was like, “But it’s fitting because, like I said, Monica and Erica kinda drew you to them, as well as T.” And then, when I met Al, the father, who had a – I mean, his personality is on ten, so, when you met these people, the name was so fitting because it allured
you to them. So, when I said, I was like, “That’s the house I wanna be in.” So, when I told my cousin Kiki, I said, “Hey, Kiki, I think I finally found the house you wanna be in.”

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He goes, “Oh, lord, don’t tell me it’s gonna be Revlon.” I was like, “No, it’s actually gonna be Allure.” He goes, “That’s over ’cause that’s the D.C.-chapter version of Milan,” because they were kinda pair Allure and Milan together. And so they would say, “Oh, that’s over because that’s the black version of a Milan.” And I was like, “The black version of Milan?” Because Milans had a lot of Hispanics, lighter and stuff, where Allure was more darker melanin type of more ethnic-looking house. But they were still a bougie set – where Milan was a high-bougie set, we considered a bougie set – and that kinda stick with us to this day. And what I like about that is because – what I like about Allure because it gave me a whole new person, you know what I’m saying? Because I went from Eric to Enrique, and then Enrique kinda just took a whole new form within itself.

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So it was like “Enrique Allure,” and how I got the name “Enrique,” because, when I finally joined Allure and how I got into Allure was – which happens at the Odell because they said, if I wanted to be in house, then I had to walk a ball first. So I was like –

**JP:** So you approached house members –

**EL:** Absolutely. Uh-huh. I believe I approached Monica. She directed me to Al and Eric.

**JP:** Who were the house fathers.

**EL:** Al is the house father.

**JP:** Okay.

**EL:** Eric was kinda his right-hand man.

**JP:** And they said, “In order to join, you have to walk a ball”? 

**EL:** I had to walk a ball. So I did. I walked – but, see, I walked runway prior anyway because I did runway semiprofessionally, here in
Baltimore, for Earl Banister, other people, other designers and stuff like that.

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It was just this whole, let’s say, chitlin’ circuit, per se, of models and stuff like that. And I was a part of that. So I knew what I was doing, so, when they said you had to walk a ball, I was like, “Oh, I got this,” you know? So, at Odell’s, one night, they had European runway. And then I was like, “What? I don’t wanna walk like a girl because that’s not what I do. What I get paid for is walking like a guy.” So they was like, “Well, you know, they have all-American as well too,” so what I’ve learnt to do – so, when I walked the ball that night, I walked all-American, which is a masculine version of runway. So I walked all-American. I actually won that night, so –

*JP:* And was that the first time you walked a ball?

*EL:* The first time I walked a ball.

*JP:* Okay.

*EL:* So, the first time I walked a ball, I won. So that’s how I got into the House of Allure. And so my runway has always been kind of a mixture of all-American and European ‘cause I could switch it up, depending on who I was competing against.

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*JP:* And what is European?

*EL:* European is like – it’s like Naomi Campbell. It’s very feminization of runway. People would mock Naomi Campbell and Evangelista. Back – these are – I’m naming the models back then, so people might not – Lisa Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, Tyra Banks, you know, so people would kinda mimic their walk. And that would get a lot of people through or people have their own signature walk. And that’s what I like about runway back then because we all kinda had our own signature walk. You knew where it was based off of, but it was yours, coined as yours, whereas, nowadays, kinda, everybody kinda walks the same and everybody kinda – what’s that? Everybody kinda walks the same and then it’s not too many people who has a staple walk.

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I had a staple walk. Aura St. Claire has a staple walk. London has a staple walk. London, I think, out of a lot of people walk, when she was a butch queen, walk was imitated a lot in a lot of ours because she was – London, to me, when she was her other person, was on a blurred line. So people like that blurry line and she executed that well. Anyway, so –

**JP:** When you say “blurry line,” you mean in terms of gender?

**EL:** Yeah. She would do – she would walk as a boy, but she will walk like a girl, but she would do stunts, meaning London would have a walk where she will stand – you can probably see it at the ball – she will stand and then she’ll – like she’s walking while she’s standing still. And then she just goes off any minute and she would just walk.

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And that was amazing. So my stamp was the slide-blend. I didn’t have a hard-blend, but you knew I was walking all-American, but it kinda was an all-American with flair, so to speak.

**JP:** I wanna get back to that, but let’s go back to you mentioned you changed your name from Eric to EL. So how did that happen?

**EL:** Okay, so we’re at the meeting in D.C. because Allure is a D.C.-based house. So we were at the meeting. And then I was like, “Well, we already have Eric here.” And I was like, “Okay, which” – ’cause I told you Eric was his right-hand man. So I was like, “Oh, yeah. Right.” He goes, “So I’m gonna call you ‘Enrique.'” Well –

**JP:** Who said –

**EL:** Al.

**JP:** Okay.

**EL:** But his – I wish I can mimic his voice like other people do ’cause he had a very distinct voice. “I’m gonna call you ‘Enrique.’ I think that fits you well ’cause I already have Eric, so ‘Enrique Allure’ is gonna be your name.”

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And I was like, “That could be hot,” you know? So I was like, “Okay.” And it was hot – he knew what he was doing – because Enrique Allure became hot at that point. People coined it. I was walking balls the first two years and then, after two years of walking balls, I was judging balls. I was on of-the-years. I was on the list for of-the-years. So, until I got into an accident with my ankle – that’s why I stopped walking and kinda went to leadership, but, at that point, I was doing my thing. I really was.

**JP:** And so, at this meeting, the house father just decided what the name was gonna be.

**EL:** Uh-huh. But a lot of people do that because I did that with my daughter, Tyra. You know, the one that – Tyra’s on *Pose* and all that. I did that with Tyra because she was walking and I was like, “You’re fucking amazing,” you know what I’m saying?

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So her walk was just like a model, was just like, so you had people, like London, who was kind of on the blur and you had people, like my daughter Tyra, that walked just like she was on the runway. So, yes, people give people names. I was given that name.

**JP:** Why “Tyra”?

**EL:** Why did I give Tyra – because “Naomi” was already taken and we were saying, “Hey, Naomi, Tyra. She says she likes Tyra.” I was like, “All right. Tyra –” cause I remember we were in my apartment and my ballroom wife, Aria Allure – may she rest in peace – was also – she was a butch queen in drag ‘cause Tyra was a butch queen in drag at first. So Aria was a butch queen in drag. Rock Socky, butch queen in drag – she won a lot. And she also had a distinct walk. I’m gonna be venturing off. I’m sorry. ‘Cause –

**JP:** That’s fine.

**EL:** – every time I think of something, it’s gonna – but it leads back to each other, okay?

**JP:** It all comes back on the chronology.

**EL:** Right, it leads back. So we’re walking in my hall, in my apartment, and Tyra was Dominic – I’ll call him “Dominic” ‘cause, at that point, he was Dominic – Dominic was walking back and forth in the hall.
And Eric was like, “Oh, he’s turning it. You’re giving me Tyra right now.” And so we was like, “Oh, that should be your name – ‘Tyra.’ “ And that kinda stuck. So, yeah, people do have a habit of giving people names and names sticking.

JP: Okay. And sometimes it’s just the house father but sometimes – I mean, in the case of Tyra, it’s kind of a group activity –

EL: It was a kind of group activity, right. Right.

JP: That’s cool. Okay. So then you’re almost taking on a persona, when you go to ballroom.

EL: No, not almost. You do take a new persona on. Right. It’s kinda new, but the fun part about it is because that persona that I took on in ballroom kinda elevated me when I was walking runway outside of ballroom, you know what I’m saying? Because what I liked about ballroom was because it was closely – well, for me, ‘cause I walk runway, it was people would hear about me in ballroom and then they want me to do shows or it was easy to get bookings because of Enrique.

So I went from Eric Jenkins to Enrique Allure, so Enrique Allure was kind of like my brand name.

JP: Okay. No, that’s interesting because, I mean, some people, when they describe ballroom, they call it a family. Some people seem to kinda call it a corporation, in a way, with CEOs. I don’t know –

EL: Mine’s was a family. I don’t – I didn’t wanna be in a house where it’s like a corporation because – and that’s why I picked the family or house that I was in, because Allure was very small. We were a very small, bougie, powerful set. It’s just like we were with St. Laurent – very small, very powerful. Back then, it could be 5, 6 of us, to where you have other houses that have 30, 40, 50.

And we would win. Whatever category we walk, we’d win. So, to me, that speaks volumes because I’m sitting ten of your people and it’s one, maybe two, of me. You know what I’m saying? So that’s
why I kinda like – it was more of a family unit because it was like, back then, it was Al, Monica, Lynne, Erica – I’m trying to name – my ballroom wife, Aria, and then, later on down the line, more people came, but that was kinda the core, the core group. So –

JP: [unintelligible] –

EL: Go ahead.

JP: What made it a family?

EL: We did things together. It was – we did things together. We just hung out together. But, unlike a lot of houses nowadays, nobody really lived together – everybody had their own little thing going on, as far as housing or something like that.

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And what I liked about Allure, it was kinda a grown and sexy house, you know what I’m saying? It was like everybody did their own thing, but we were still a family once we came together. You knew we were together. You know what I’m saying? It wasn’t a dependency of sorts, like it is nowadays. Then, it was just we all hung. Like I told you, the ball that I took my mom went, we went – Al, the father of the house, took his mom to the same ball, so we actually incorporated our real families with our secular families, so it just created a whole nucleus too, you know what I’m saying?

JP: What’d you call them? “The secular families”?

EL: Secular – well, that’s what I call ballroom signs because, unlike a lot of people, I have a great relationship with my family, so I know a lot of people don’t, you know what I’m saying? You know, I’m not saying there weren’t any struggles with my family because, of course, in every family, there’s struggles, but my relationship with my family was very good.

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They was very accepting of who I was. I’ve never had a problem. When I was younger, it was known that, if you mess with me, I would get my real brothers, not my ballroom brothers, you know what I’m saying? So I would – the Meat Rack, which is up the street. The Meat Rack up the street, it was this one dude that just kept harassing me ‘cause that’s where everybody would come out and hang out, was at the Meat Rack, which was around Read Street
and Park Avenue. So everybody would hang out in there, but I would get harassed by this Miss Tan and Dirty Kevin. Anyway, that’s just – that’s a – now these were the names, honest to God. It was Miss Bernard, Miss Tan, Miss Dirty Kevin, Miss Howard. And they were always circling, would try to beat us up or whatever the case may be. And I came from – mind you, they were hood rats and I’m coming from Pikesville-slash-Randallstown, you know what I’m saying?

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So I was already considered whitewashed, Oreo cookie, whatever the case, whatever handle you wanted to give me. But, so, one day, I was one of the few people that kinda drove my own car – it was just a red Chevette, so I – red Chevette and then, one day, they kept hitting my car, like throwing stones at my car. So I was like, “Stop.” I’ll be like, “We’ll beat your ass up,” blah, blah, blah. I’m like, “Okay. Whatever.” So I go get my brother.

JP: This was here in Mount Vernon?

EL: Meat Rack, right. You know where the Meat Rack is?

JP: Yeah.

EL: Okay. So around there because that was the place everybody hung out at. You have to understand because – okay, we’ll get back to that. So I went to Randallstown, got my brother, and I put him on the corner. So I knew that Tan and them would try to hit on him, so each one, he would take in the alley and beat ‘em up ‘cause they were trying – so, at that time, when they – and so I got out my car and said, “Come on, Cory, “ who’s my brother, “Come on, Cory, let’s go.” And everyone’s like, “Wait a minute, that’s your brother?” I said, “Yes. When I say I’m gonna get real brothers, I’m gonna get my real brothers.”

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You know what I’m saying? Because I don’t feel like I needed that mess, you know what I’m saying? But the Meat Rack was a – I kinda miss it because it was a fun place because everybody would go to The Last Stop. After Last Stop, either, the Meat Rack, it was before or after the Last Stop. So that’s where you kinda figured out everybody. That’s where cliques were formed, houses were – some houses – not formed, but you kinda knew who was going to what house, you know what I’m saying? By the people they would hang
with, you know what I’m saying? Like, “Oh – “ you’ll say, “Okay, that’s a Milante,” or, “That’s a Mugler,” you know what I’m saying?

*JP:* Before they were part of the house?

*EL:* Before they got in ‘cause of the people they kinda hung with. You know, if you’re hanging with certain _____, I’d be like, “Okay, I know what that is.” But that was later on, so, yeah.

*JP:* And tell me again where the Meat Rack was?

*EL:* The Meat Rack was right – okay, it’s kinda like the School of the Arts. You know where the School of the Arts here?

*JP:* MICA?

[0:28:00]

*EL:* School of the Arts.

*JP:* The School of the Arts, okay.

*EL:* The Baltimore City School of Arts. So it’s Baltimore City School of Arts and it was at that perimeter, so it was part – it was like a square. It was like let’s go School of the Arts up to Howard Street. Go up to Howard Street – you know where the Rite-Aid’s is?

*JP:* Mm-hmm.

*EL:* Down. It was literally a block, down and around. So it was kinda like there’s the start of Howards. So it’s Howards here – you’re going up to where the Rite-Aid’s is ‘cause it wasn’t there at first. Rite-Aid’s there. Then you’d walk down to where The Drinkery is, all that stuff, so all that area was called the “Meat Rack.”

*JP:* Okay. And so, sometimes, when people refer to the Meat Rack, they mean a prostitution district; sometimes, it’s a cruising district. What –

*EL:* It was a cruising-slash-prostitution-slash-hangout, so it was a – it was just a gumbo of everything. It was. I mean, you had people who made money.

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You had people who just hung out ‘cause it was just fun. I mean, I have a million stories about the Meat Rack, but it was just fun, you know what I’m saying? I mean, some of it’s tragic; some of it was laughable, but it was just a learning experience, you know?

**JP:** And this is one of the locations, when -- maybe some of the ballroom houses came together, where people met one another --

**EL:** Where people met one another and kinda figure out what house they were going to, right. Correct.

**JP:** Okay. And this is maybe an obvious question, but why was it an important – and why is it still important – what house you’re a part of?

**EL:** ‘Cause it kinda – I wanna – okay, it kinda defines the type of person you are, I guess. You know? I think it’s kinda more prevalent back then than it is now, because, nowadays, people would switch houses at a drop of a dime.

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Back then, it was kinda – I will equate it to a sorority or a fraternity because different fraternities have different values and different signature. And, back then, that’s what the houses were like – every house had a different look, feel, and just a signature to it.

**JP:** When you first joined Allure, did you learn about the history of the house?

**EL:** Yes. I was told that, you know, Donne was original mother. Al started a house – it came from House of Aviance. They wanted to do their own little thing, and so they formed Allure. And that was the birth of it.

**JP:** And how did you – I guess I’m asking because I’m really interested in how history gets passed down in ballroom, so how did you hear about the history? What did you think about it at the time? Why were they telling you?

[0:31:00]

**EL:** Well, you wanna know about the history of your house ‘cause you need to know for later on, in years, like now, I’m sitting in front of a mic and you, telling you about it. So, of course, they’re gonna – first, it’s bragging rights, you know what I’m saying? “Well, you
know, I started this house in 1987, ‘88 – no, ‘85. And we were
tired of being Aviancees and we were just hot in Aviance anyway,
so let’s start our own little thing.” And, when they started their
own little thing, they started out very small in the D.C.-Baltimore
area. Then we ventured out to New York and we made a big
splash.

**JP:** So I guess it’s part of branding your house, in a way–

**EL:** Absolutely.

**JP:** –you tell the history. It’s kind of like –

**EL:** You tell the history. But what I like about it, you can tell a history
of a house, but what others will tell you about the house, to me,
stamps it, you know what I’m saying?

**JP:** What do you mean?

**EL:** So I could tell you my house was phat. You know, we’re probably
the bougie set.

[0:32:00]

But then you have other people, like, “Well, tell me about Allure,”
you know, and if they can tell you exactly the same thing I said or
if they can say, “Oh, that was a bougie set,” or, “You can’t sit with
them,” ‘cause that was our tag, like, “You can’t sit with us,” you
know what I’m saying? If they can tell you, you know you did
your part. You know that not only do you know your history, as
your own house, other people know who you are as well.

**JP:** Mm-hmm. So how would you – I mean, I think, at the late ’80s,
early ’90s, what other houses were around Baltimore and how
would you characterize them?

**EL:** Well, it was – let’s start with the House of – this is before I joined
a house, so the House of Face was one, but then the House of Face
turned into the House of Revlon. And then, when I found out
Revlon – ‘cause Kiki, I believe, was a Revlon, so Revlon. Then
Ebony’s because, when Tony came down here, –

[0:33:00]

with Garnet and a couple of others, they kinda started – it was
Garnet, Neil, Lau, it was John. They were kinda like, to me, they
were kinda like the pioneers of Baltimore because they started the House of Baltimore. Like people will call it Tony Revlon kinda starting it, but, to me, Garnet was the – Miss Lisa, they called her, was to me spearheaded the hardest, you know what I’m saying? She had the biggest impact when it came to Baltimore ballroom to New York. To me, she had the biggest impact. Well, Tony did too, but Tony was from New York, so, when I say “start of Baltimore,” I like to pinpoint people here in Baltimore, you know what I’m saying? Neil, Garnet AKA Miss Lisa, Miss Lau, all of them was part of that Odell’s crew. Remember I was telling – referencing back to the Odell’s group, part of that eclectic, fashionable set.

[0:34:00]

They were into fashion, doing hair. Neil was a big hairdresser, Lau was a big stylist, and stuff like that. So they were all a part of that set. So it was, to me, it was Face ‘cause I was asked to be a Face. Then I went back to school. It was Face, Revlon, and then other houses just kinda came in. So you had houses that were coming from New York, like Ebony came in. Chanel came in. Milan’s came in ‘cause Kiki became a Milan – Milan’s came in, but Milan was like a force to reckon with a little later than that, so, if we’re gonna go in guidelines, then I would say – I would give Face honorable mention because that never really got off the ground, so Face was the Idea. The Idea turned into Revlon. And then, from Revlon, then that’s when houses started coming in, filtering, in Baltimore.

JP: Okay. And then Dior’e would have come later?

[0:35:00]

EL: Dior’e would have came around – Dior’e was a D.C.-based house ‘cause Mysterious Dior’e was from Philly – no, I think it was from Philly, New York. Mysterious Dior’e made the house. And I think he was from Philly, New York, but, yeah, that came a little later, not much later. ‘Cause I know that Sandy was an Ebony, at one point, right? She was an Ebony. And then she became a – her and Mysterious, I guess, started Dior’e. So, yeah, that’s how they came about.

JP: Okay. This is an aside, but I think it would be really cool, at some points, to kind of map that all, almost like a family tree, you know?

EL: Exactly.
JP: Okay. So can you tell me a little bit more about the categories you walk? So how did you learn how to walk the category? Why did you feel connected to the category? And it sounds like you started runway before you even came into ballroom –

EL: Right.

[0:36:00] Before I came into ballroom, I was doing fashion shows, so that was “If I’m gonna join something and if they have what I do in that sector, I’m just gonna go right into what I do already.” So I’m walking runway already for shows, so I just continued on in ballroom. So that’s how I picked that. And then, when I started, I was very thin and then I started working out, so, when I started working out, you get more attention because you got body and stuff like that, so I was liking that. And so that’s where the whole body thing came in. But my main category was runway.

JP: And so how did you have to do runway differently in a ballroom context?

EL: Well, in a ballroom context, because it’s competitive. In different fashion shows, you’re just walking. In ballroom, it’s like, “Who has the best walk? Who can command the most attention?” So that’s the thing – it’s a competition, so you kinda knew that you had to put a little salt and pepper on it.

[0:37:00] You couldn’t just be vanilla ‘cause, you know, certain designers just want you to be vanilla; certain people will want you to put salt and pepper on it. But, in ballroom, you had to put all kind of seasoning on it. You had to storm if you wanted to win. At the end of the day, you wanted to win.

JP: What did that look like? What did the seasoning look like?

EL: It’s just like clothing, outfits, attitude, and walk, so your effect had to be on point, your walk had to be killer. Just your aura had to be right. And I think what did well for me, I had a good aura because people knew I was a runway thing, you know what I’m saying? I was liked a little bit. People just found you attractive, you know what I’m saying? So that kinda helped a little bit. And that was it. That’s why my house name fit me so well. Allure fit me so well
because that was it. That was the thing, you know what I’m saying?

**JP:** You had that same “it” factor?

**EL:** I had – yeah, I did. It was a “it” factor, absolutely. And that’s why it was funny – if you’re coming to Baltimore back then, for runway, you had to see me, you know what I’m saying? And you had to see Glen, my child-slash-friend. You had to see Glen. You had to see Aria. These are people that were in my house, so there’s other people, but, when you came to Baltimore, you had to see me. It’s just one – there’s one story: this guy named Tevon – may he rest in peace – Tevon Mugler could never beat me. And then he set out his child – he had his child, his son, who was very attractive and could walk and considerably younger than I was. And he’s like, “I’m gonna get you tonight. I can’t get you, but my child is gonna get you.” I was like – and I looked at him. I was like, “Oh, he might will,” you know what I’m saying? Like, “He just might.” So I’m like – Earl Banister, who I would model with, he had a outfit.

**[0:39:00]**

I was like, “Earl, I need you to make me this shirt,” or something. I don’t know what it was. And it was $500.00, I think. Like, “I need you to make this shirt.” No, not – it was not that obscene. It was maybe $200.00, whatever – whatever amount. I was like, “You make this for me and I’ll split the money if I win,” you know what I’m saying? So we make the shirt and I show up at the ball because he was like, “I bet you he won’t show up.” So I showed up at the ball and then they called the category and then the guy walks first. So the guy walks and everybody’s going crazy. And I’m like – I’m looking at Tuan. I was like, “Is this your child?” He goes, “Yes. This is him.” I said, “Okay.” So I walk up on the stage and he was like, “Yes, EL, blah, blah, blah. Blah, blah, blah.” Long story short, I beat him, you know what I’m saying? So, at the end of the day, they give me the money and I said, “Tuan, you can’t get me and neither your little dog too.” [Laughs] So that was the whole aura.

**[0:40:00]**

It was just like, back then, you turned out to be one of the people to get, you know what I’m saying? And then, when you felt as though
you couldn’t do it anymore, you got others that could do the same thing. So, in my case, when I felt like – when I had to injure my ankle, when I couldn’t walk anymore, I had other people. I got Glen. I got Tyra. You wasn’t sitting Glen; you wasn’t sitting Tyra. And then Derrick came along. Derrick was a Revlon, but he came over to our house because he just liked the feel of Allure, you know what I’m saying? So I think that goes with regression of ballroom – when you feel as though it’s time to sit back, you always get somebody that’s on the same level and on the same feel and tact of what you are. To me, that was Glen, Darrius, and Tyra.

[0:41:00]

**JP:** Okay, I wanted to turn to that a little bit later, but one of the things I’m asking people is just “What did it feel like to walk your category?” So, when you were walking, late ‘80s, ‘90s, whenever, what did it feel like to actually be on stage? What did you have to kinda channel in order to win the category?

**EL:** Fright? I was always scared to walk ballroom ‘cause walking in a fashion show was different than walking balls, like I described earlier. Walking a fashion show is just walking a fashion show. Walking a ball, you had people either could cheer you, boo you, chop you, so you’re getting graded on or you’re getting scored. So fear would be my number-one thing, at first, whenever I walk, ‘cause I’ll always feel fear when I walk. But then I would channel it because, in my head, when I walk, before I walk, –

[0:42:00]

I’m always talking to myself, always talk to myself, and I was like, “Okay, Eric, see you later. Hello, EL.” And then, when Enrique came, it was just a whole ‘nother person. And it was funny, though, because the father of my house was like, “Oh, I see Enrique’s here,” you know what I’m saying? ‘Cause it’s a whole different personality ‘cause EL, you couldn’t talk to me that much. I was kind of a shady set. And then, you know, when it’s time to walk, I would just – when the runway – ‘cause, usually, people stand in front of the runway and they would just walk. I will always come to the side and come like – so, if you’re about to walk, I will always come and just walk ahead of you, you know what I’m saying? So that was my thing.

**JP:** To like psych –
EL: Right, to psych people out. ‘Cause that’s the thing, is you want to psych people out, you know what I’m saying? So that was my thing, like, “I don’t care. Win, lose, or draw, I’m gonna be first.” You know what I’m saying? So that was my kind of move, so that’s why it kinda rubbed me the wrong way when Tuan’s child went ahead of me, but that’s another story.

[0:43:00]

Anyway.

JP: Can you tell me a little bit more about that? The difference between Eric and Enrique?

EL: The difference. So Eric – smart, you know what I’m saying? Street wise. Enrique was just a supermodel, was a star. He was arrogant. He was an asshole. He was just not a people person. Where Eric is a people person, Enrique wasn’t a people person. Enrique was just all about himself, where Eric was more of a – I’m more of a nurturing person. As you see, I’m more of a nurturing person. I like to take control of situations, as you see in meetings. If I see something else – or you see in a chat box, if I see it, I like to take control, wrap it up in a bow, and send it on. Where Enrique would be the one who spiced that up a little bit, you know what I’m saying? Or come at you sideways or whatever the case may be.

[0:44:00]

It was just my alter-ego.

JP: Okay.

EL: My good angel, red angel.

JP: So what – I mean, that’s really interesting to me. So why is that important to you? What does that do for you in your just everyday life?

EL: Why is it important that Enrique?

JP: Yeah, I mean, that you have this alternative persona, that you have this persona –

EL: Well, it was important back then because not so much important now because Enrique and Eric are the same person today, but it was important back then because it helped me win. It helped me
get the notoriety that I got. It helped me develop my talent in ballroom, you know what I’m saying? Because you had to be extremely thick skin in ballroom, you know what I’m saying? And you just can’t worry about – you know, nice people never really win, you know what I’m saying? So, you know, so you can be an asshole and win, but then, soon as you come off the runway, Eric will come back.

[0:45:00]

I will walk around, say hi to everybody, but I was an Allure, so it was known, as an Allure, that I’m not gonna talk to you that much, you know what I’m saying? So people kinda knew who we were, so that kinda helped me out as well too because Enrique Allure was an Allure, so you kinda already knew what that brand was about. So I was slightly unapproachable.

*JP*: But what did having that persona, the Enrique persona, accomplish for you in your life outside of ballroom? I mean, do you feel it did?

*EL*: Well, yeah, because it garnered me more confidence in things that I wasn’t confident in. I tend to be outspoken. And then, where Eric will be – I’m a nice guy and I kinda take things to heart and stuff like that, very nice and sensitive, where Enrique kinda gives me an armor, like, “You’re not gonna make me feel some type of way. You’re not gonna come at me. I’m not gonna always be on the defense.” When we were in group chats, I just want to light into someone, but then I have to balance it out, you know what I’m saying?

[0:46:00]

So I’m Eric-slash-Enrique, but it’s a balance now, where, back in the day, it wasn’t a balance. It was “This is who this was and this is who that was,” so now it just kinda confidence builder.

*JP*: Mm-hmm.

*EL*: Point-blank.

*JP*: Yeah. I guess that’s what Sebastian talked about too. I mean, he walks runway – or he did – and he talked about how runway enabled him to build confidence out in the real world.

JP: Okay. So you think that’s common?

EL: That’s absolutely common, yeah.

JP: Okay. Okay. So, yeah, so I wanna return to what you were talking about in terms of mentorship. So, first of all, I don’t know if you talked about this before, but who were your mentors when you were first coming into ballroom? And then maybe we could talk about how you became a mentor.

EL: My mentor in ballroom was Al, of course, ’cause he’s the father of my house.

[0:47:00]

Eric Adonis because, at that point, in my category, he was the person to beat in my category, so I looked up to Eric. Al. And then who else? See, that’s the thing. Let me reiterate: I was an older set, so I didn’t really look up to a lot of people because a lot of people were my peers, so to speak. But, you know, I had – a lot of people I looked up to were outside. My gay father named Tim was outside of ballroom, so that’s who I looked at – he owned a Jaguar; he owned a beautiful home; he had a steady nine-to-five or whatever the case may be; and he kinda put me on that path to do the same thing. So – I’m sorry – so my mentor was outside of ballroom.

[0:48:00]

In ballroom, it would be Al because of the whole personality, the name; Eric Adonis because Eric was the epitome of my category at that time. That is who I would look up to.

JP: And then when was it that you felt like you became a mentor yourself?

EL: When I started bringing in kids. When I started – when I mean bringing in kids, when I brought in Glen, Tyra, Derrick, Darrius. When I started bringing kids to the family, to the fold, so when I started bringing my own clan, so to speak, you can’t just bring people in and let ‘em just hang out to dry. You kinda have to give advice, let ‘em know what it is, what you’re doing. And that’s where it kinda went from there. So, when I wasn’t able to walk anymore, that’s when I kinda went into the whole mentor, guiding people, tell ‘em what’s right, what’s wrong, or being part of the coalition, trying to be the reasonable voice of the coalition, so that’s where it came in.
[0:49:00]

JP: Okay. And the injury happened what year?

EL: It happened mid-'90s.

JP: Okay.

EL: Mid-'90s, yeah.

JP: And so tell me – give one example, a story about one person you brought into the family. What is it you were looking for? And then what did you tell them specifically? What advice did you give them?

EL: The good thing about advice is [that it’s] advice so people’ll take it or leave it. So I’ll use my daughter, Tyra, ‘cause she’s well-known, so I use Tyra. So Tyra was not really accepted in her family, so to – you know, she came from a, I believe, a African-descent family and they don’t view homosexuality really well at all. So she was having a lot of hardships and stuff, so she would stay at my house. We would chitchat. She was hanging with the wrong sort of people, like she was just out there.

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So, you know, you want to reach out, kinda mentor them, kinda like, “This is what you should be doing. This is what you shouldn’t be doing, but, if you do wanna do that, this is how you carry that,” you know what I’m saying? So, “If you still wanna be … with these people, just don’t get caught up. Do this and this and that and that.” So I kinda got her to walk her first ball. Tell her what avenue she should take, as far as her career and stuff like that. But that was my child. But the thing about children or giving advice, people will take it – there’s some people will take it and some people take a little bit of it and some people just – my daughter got hot. And so, when she got hot, she was off the ceiling, you know what I’m saying? So, you know, I always tell people, “You can give people advice, but don’t be mad when they take a different route because they usually will turn back around.” And she turns back around and was like, “You know what? You was absolutely right. I appreciate you being there for me,” you know what I’m saying?

[0:51:00]
So she’s one.

*JP:* Do you remember where you met her or how you met her?

*EL:* Baltimore. Met her in Baltimore. We were down at Bunns. It was like Bunns has a courtyard, so to speak, this concrete courtyard. And she was there. It was her, Shateera – may she rest in peace – her, Shateera, Miss Benny, and just a – I mean, back then, Bunns was just a lot going on. And it’s funny because it’s a lot going on now, but I was a part of that lot going on, so it’s kinda different. So it was a lot going on and I remember seeing her ‘cause she was a funny-looking boy, but he was a really attractive boy. ‘Cause she was coming to walk face, as a boy, so sometimes he’ll chopped; sometimes he would get through.

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It’s like, “Well, what can we do to kinda fix that? Blah, blah, blah,” because runway became a accident. She kinda fell into it accidentally. So I was like, “Well, maybe – I don’t know what to do,” because, one ball, she kept walking and she was getting chopped than he was winning. So I was like, “We gotta figure out what it is ‘cause you’re a very attractive boy, but they’re just not using you.” So we’re at my house one day –

*JP:* Was he in another house at that point?

*EL:* No, he was never in a house.

*JP:* Okay.

*EL:* So he was – a lot of us – see, that’s another thing about Allure. I didn’t like taking people that were in other houses, per se, because they have their own personality or whatever, and blah, blah, blah. I liked having people that weren’t in houses back then because you kinda can groom them into the way you want to be. So we’re in my hallway and we’re practicing ‘cause we would have runway sessions ‘cause, where I lived, they had a very long hallway and that was my little runway. So we were runway back and forth, so Tyra throws a wig on and starts walking.

[0:53:00]

It was like, “Bitch, that’s it. Butch queen in drag runway.” And it just took off from there. The first ball we did at Bunns, that she walked, she had a long Naomi Campbell wig and, by her being an
African, dark-skinned girl, she kinda looked like her. So, when she came in, people like, “Who the fuck is that? She is turning it.” And people’s like, “That’s Dominique. Now that’s Tyra.” So that’s what started that.

**JP:** And did she transition at some point?

**EL:** Well, yeah, she transitioned later on, down the line. I think what a lot of people do and a lot of transgender – and, you know, she might think differently or say differently, but how I see it is, as Dominic, she wasn’t being received well. But, as Tyra, she was a superstar. So it kinda, I think, transition, some people wanna do it, some people don’t, but a lot of people were kinda pushed into it because of the notoriety that you’re getting.

[0:54:00]

**JP:** Mm-hmm.

**EL:** Mind you, she did it smartly, though, because she – I always told her, “Whatever you do, you’re model, look like a model. Don’t get these size-double-D tits ‘cause that won’t fit your frame.” She’s very model, stay that course, so she listened that way. She stayed the course.

**JP:** Okay. I mean, so this is a related question, but I’m asking people just how does gender – what does gender look like in ballroom and how did your participation in ballroom make you think differently about gender? I mean, you had that story about going to the first –

**EL:** My first ball at Odell’s and what gender looks like? Okay, so, well, genders can look like many different things. Like I told you, gender could look like Miss Pebbles – 6’7”, ex-Colt player, that looked like she had – we used to call her “Big Bird” because she had this –

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the first time I ever saw her, you gotta understand, she’s like 6’7” and she has – when you come in the door, like, [lowers voice] “What you all doing here?” That’s how she talked. I was like, “Bitch.” So, you know, I was like, “What?” And she has all these yellow feathers on, so we would call her Big Bird ‘cause she had these yellow feathers. I was like, “Bitch, is she gonna let us in? Is Big Bird gonna let us in?” So you had that. And then, on the other hand, you had this other girl named Miss – oh, my God, what’s her
name? – you had Miss Charmene, who was this light-skin girl that was so real – she was so pretty – but she wasn’t in the ball scene. She was just – she was a twirler, which means hustling. She was a twirler. So it was like, “Oh, she’s real,” blah, blah, blah. So you just saw those two. But then, when you went to balls – you was like, “Oh, she just a rarity. That was an accident. I don’t know how you just turned out looking like that.”

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And then you have this and you have a lot of these and only see one of those, you know what I’m saying? So you go into ballrooms and you see a lot of those. And I so happened to been in a house where we were known for a lot of those.

JP: And by “those,” you mean –

EL: The realer femme queens. Allures were known for their femme queens. We were known to have the realer set. All our girls were passable and, when I mean “passable,” nothing was exaggerated. It was very normal – of the day, you can walk outside. Children wouldn’t clock ‘cause, you know, I’m sure you heard that. Children wouldn’t say anything. So you knew you was passable when kids wouldn’t point at you or try to figure you out. And I thought that was amazing ‘cause I’ve been with some girls that I thought they was real as fuck – kids were like, “That’s a man.”

[0:57:00]

But you can’t be mad at them because how you gonna punch a five-year-old? How you gonna punch a six-year-old? So, when I say kids, it’s kids around that age. Between five and ten is the danger zone, you know what I’m saying? I kinda base it on innocence ‘cause, you know, you’re innocent – you don’t really know what’s going on, but you see what’s in front of you. So, for some reason, a lot of real girls ________, kids will always call ‘em men. It was this one girl named Shannon who was real as fuck – she was in my house too. We’re on a bus – we was going to the thrift store; we’re on a bus – and this little boy just kept looking at her. And so we’re talking – I was like, “Why is this little boy looking at you?” and she goes, “Oh, he’s about to spook me.” I’m like, “What do you mean?” I was like, “What are you talking about?”

[0:58:00]
“He’s about to tell my tea.” And I’m looking at Shannon – nobody else would think Shannon was a dude, but this little boy just kept looking at her and kept looking at her. And then the mother says, “Stop. Leave that lady alone.” She goes, “No, that’s not a lady. What’s your name?” And she’s like, “Shannon.” “Nuh-uh. That’s a girl name. What’s your name?” I’m like, “[Gasps] You were right. Oh, my God.” So, to me, that’s kinda like the whole gender thing because it kinda gave girls, like a Shannon, a Monica, a Erica, where you had to be normal or passable in regular society. Well, you can actually go to ballroom and celebrate it and win trophies behind it because people applaud that, where you had people, like girls who wasn’t maybe as passable, that had awesome bodies, like T&A out the ass. So ballroom gave you a way you can win money or be celebrated.

[0:59:00]

So, to me, ballroom gave people a way of being celebrated, opposed to being mocked or bored to death and weren’t being normal, whatever the case may be, so.

**JP:** Yeah. And I guess a venue to also practice that realness, you know? So _____ _____ –

**EL:** Right. Oh, no, you practice the real –

**JP:** – like –

**EL:** No, you practice realness before you come into that set. Let’s get that straight. You were real before you came to ballroom. You know what I’m saying? And a lot of – nine times out of ten, because you were real, you came to ballroom. So you’re not gonna go to ballroom, practice to be real, and then to go on – ‘cause you’re not gonna get beat up before ‘cause, at the end of the day, you have to walk the streets. So a lot of people just did it for drag venture. A lot of people just did it because it was something to do. For the gender thing, London, to me, I love London to death ‘cause, when she was Juan, Juan and London are not different. They were the same person, you know what I’m saying? And that’s why I think it’s so funny ‘cause it’s same person.

[1:00:00]

To me, London is so pretty to me, you know what I’m saying? She’s so pretty, she’s so real, and stuff like that. Now, sometimes, she gets a little schizo and that gets on my nerves, you know what
I’m saying? But, to me, she’s a classic new version of the gender. She’s very intelligent, she’s very passable, but, at the end of day, she knows when to turn it on and she knows when to turn it off. And that’s what it – I think what ballroom was back then and it is now, you can turn it on in ballroom now, whereas, out on the street –

**JP:** When you say “turn it on,” –

**EL:** You could be extra. You can just be girly, gay, whatever the case may be; you don’t have to be that woman. You can come in ballroom and just be extra, you know what I’m saying? I think that’s what they liked about ballroom, like, “I can relax. Let down my hair. If I wanna talk in my baritone voice, I’m gonna talk in my baritone voice because I’m here with the people,” blah, blah, blah. So I think that’s what it was.

**JP:** And you’re gonna be celebrated for it.

**EL:** And you’re gonna be celebrated for it. Absolutely.

[1:01:00]

**JP:** How did you think about your own gender, though, in ballroom? What did that look like –

**EL:** Men? You mean guys?

**JP:** Well, your own gender presentation, like –

**EL:** I’m confused – oh, you talking about butch queens in general? Is that the term –

**JP:** Did you identify as butch queen?

**EL:** Well, yeah, I mean, it’s a category. I mean, yeah. I mean, everybody’s gender, butch queen realness, butch queen runway – so you kinda – I mean, after years after doing it, then, yeah, it’s funny because only the ballroom will say “butch queens,” so you kinda – so, if you ask a regular homosexual like, “You ______ butch queen?” like, “What the fuck is that?” You know what I’m saying? But, in ballroom, it’s butch queen, so, I mean –

**JP:** And what – I mean, what does that mean exactly? The “butch queen”?
EL: Butch queen, femme queens. Butch queens are the men or boys that go to balls. Femme queens are the girls.

JP: The trans-girls?

EL: The trans-girls or female figures, butch queen in drags –

JP: But butch queen, is that – does that just mean male or a specific–

EL: It just means male. It just means male, period, because you have butch queen in drag, you know what I’m saying?

[1:02:00]

So it’s just male. So it was just, as far as –

[0:00:00]

EL: That’s kind of an hard question because it’s you have many different things. I mean, my ballroom husband, Bam, walks realness, you know what I’m saying? But I walked runway, you know what I’m saying? So one will equate one being realer than the other, but it’s still a masculine form of what goes on in ballroom.

JP: But you said, when you were walking runway, you were kind of melding feminine and male, so that’s –

EL: Well, sometimes. I would blend a little bit, but it was still a masculine walk with a flair, you know what I’m saying? And that kinda helped me ‘cause, normally, when I was doing shows before, it was just a straight up-and-down, but it’s funny ‘cause, when I started doing runway as Enrique Allure, I got more bookings because of the flair. Yeah. So it kinda worked –

JP: Tell me more about the flair –

EL: The flair was just – it’s kind of walk, you know, just walk walk, but I would have a little – a bop to it.

[0:01:00]

And then, if I had long – for some reason, people liked seeing me in long coats, so, when I have long coats, I could take off a coat stand and the coat would move or I would take off a coat when I’m walking and I will turn and the coat will flair up and then it’ll be
on my arm, and then I would turn again and I would have the coat on. That kind of thing, where you have other people just like be masculine. At that point, when I started working out, it was the same thing, so.

*JP:* What do you mean it was the same –

*EL:* It was the same thing. I still did flair and people was like, “Oh, you getting thicker now so you can’t do that anymore.” I’m like, “Yeah, I can,” and I did.

*JP:* Would you describe that as flamboyant?

*EL:* Well, see, that’s the thing. I wouldn’t say “flamboyant” because I’m not a flamboyant type person. It was just a little flair. And that’s only way I can describe it – it was just flair – because it wasn’t flamboyant ‘cause there are people out there with flamboyant walks, but then that would be European. But then, remember, I said I did walk European at times too, so I could walk European and I could walk all-American as well, so, whatever the category I felt like walking, I could do.

[0:02:00]

But, see, my walk, when I walked all-American, I had a little bit of European in there, which, if you notice, a lot of people are doing that now as well. So a lot of people are walking all-American, they have a little taste of European in there. A little bit.

*JP:* It’s interesting. I went to Marquis’ workshop with the Peabody dance students and the first thing he said was that vogue is – oh, what did he say? – is telling a story through your body.

*EL:* It is.

*JP:* Which I thought was kind of amazing. Do you feel like the same thing is true for runway?


*JP:* Mm-hmm.

*EL:* Absolutely.

*JP:* So what was the story you were telling through your performance?
“I’m a bad bitch.” [Laughs] I mean, I don’t know what else you want me to say. I was just – I was the one to beat. That was it. And you can ask anybody who walks my category – at the end result, that’s what you wanna tell – “I’m a bad bitch. I’m the one to get. You came to Baltimore to see me.”

That’s what it was. “You heard that I was here. Tada, I’m here.” You know what I’m saying? So that was it.

So, I mean, ballroom obviously is about personality.

Absolutely. Big personality.

Big personality.

Right.

And that’s where you come into some of the conflicts too, right?

Right. Absolutely. I mean, you have rivals. Of course, you have rivals. You have conflicts with people – well, same as rivals. I mean, of course. But it’s all about how you handle it, it’s the type of person you are, so that’s the big thing.

But there – I mean, there definitely seem to be power conflicts and –

Well, you’ve experienced that recently yourself, so. [Laughs] I always thought that was like, “Okay, whatever.”

[Chuckles]

Okay.

Yeah. And, I mean –

I’m trying to figure out how–

– you don’t have to say anything about that if you don’t want to; it’s just –
EL: No, no, no, no. Okay –

JP: I think it’s interesting, you know?

EL: I think what happens with ballroom – you have certain people – okay, I know how to do it, know how to do it – you have certain people who do it for the community and you have certain people who do it for self. And that’s where the conflict comes in because, when you’re doing it for self, people know that the energy is bad. So, when they know that the energy is bad, people tend not to wanna be a part of that, that particular person that is known to do it for self. So I think the important thing that people start to realize is you want to do it for ballroom or you wanna do it for everybody else, as a myself, as a Marco, Sebastian, a Bam, a James, who I give big props to James because he reopened the Baltimore coalition, not the breakfast club, that type of thing.

[0:05:00]

So it’s just like you have people who genuinely wanna do it for the love of ballroom and for the love of the city, where you have other people who just wanna do it for self and the glory and “This is what I’ve done and this is all about me,” but, at the end of the day, you don’t do it by yourself. You can’t do it by yourself. And then, when you did do it by yourself, it completely failed. So what you wanna do, when it comes to Baltimore, is you don’t want things to continuously fail, so you try to take the reins and hold – you try the group of people, as a safety net. So we’re holding a safety net – whoever falls, falls – but, at the end of the day, we’re letting you know, “We’re not doing this for you. We’re doing it for Baltimore.” And I think that it’s getting to that point where people are starting to realize this is what happened, so this is a great thing.

[0:06:00]

The Peabody Experience – absolutely incredible. Even that – if I can keep it real funky with you, the health department, Phyllis – may she rest in peace – she was one of my idols. She wasn’t a mentor ‘cause I didn’t really talk to her, but I kinda idolized her because, you know –

JP: Who?

EL: Phyllis. Phyllis is Keith’s – was Keith’s boss. She passed away.

JP: Okay.
EL: So Phyllis, to me, is somebody that I idolized because, you know, white, heavyset lesbian doing her thing, but she was doing her thing, you know what I’m saying? She kinda bridged the gap between what they wanna do between the health department and the gay community, you know what I’m saying? So Keith, to me, was a – he kinda brokered the deal, so to speak, but, to me, Phyllis was the statue to that. And I miss her so much.

[0:07:00]

So Phyllis was, to me, was the statue to that because, when you thought of health department, you thought of Phyllis. Everything went through Phyllis, you know what I’m saying? So she would reel in Keith, every now and then, so. But, without her there, it is what it is. Life goes on – people pass away; life goes on – so, at this point, we’re just all try to reel each other in and let us know not one person is better than the other, you know what I’m saying? You’re doing this for the better of Baltimore – this Peabody Experience is absolutely phenomenal, so you don’t wanna do anything that’s going to cripple it with egos. Because we all know people with big egos or whatever the case, it will cripple a lot of things. That’s not what we wanna do. What we wanna do is we wanna continue with just being excellent, we wanna continue this to be a great thing, we wanna continue just going on, so this can be yet another flower in our basket of things, accomplishments we wanna do. And, later on down the line, we’re gonna wanna write grants and stuff like this and this is gonna be perfect for that, you know what I’m saying?

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For outside of Peabody, when we wanna do our own little thing, this like, “Hey, this is something that’s on our resume that we did. We collaborated, whatever the case, I mean, as a coalition.” So that’s where we at right now. That’s where I’m at right now. I think a lot of people are on board with that; it’s just have certain people who, again, is on their own little thing and I think that’s gonna harm them more than anybody else, personally.

JP: So tell me more about what you think about the Peabody Ballroom Experience. And I’m curious, number one, how it fits into this longer history of ballroom and, number two, just tell me more about why you think it’s phenomenal. What –
EL: Okay. How it fits into history is because it’s a great venue, it’s a great place. Peabody has a great history, a great reputation. And for us being linked with that, Baltimore ballroom to be linked with that, it’s astounding, you know what I’m saying?

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It’s like something else that we’ve done to the point where you have people from other states or cities hitting us up, telling us, “Guys, you are really doing it. I’m so proud of you guys. How did you guys do that?” and blah, blah, blah. Like, “How do you do that so we, in turn, can do that in our cities as well?” But that’s always been the thing about our ballroom, our coalition. Our coalition’s always been something that people kinda not modeled after, but inquire about – “How do you guys do this? How do you do that?” So, with the Peabody thing, I give Keith the credit for that. By all means, I’m not gonna knock anything that anybody does ‘cause you don’t do that, you know, so, “You brokered this and I under – kudos to that.” But, at the end of the day, it’s a group collab. And I think what makes Peabody phenomenal is because you guys are giving us a chance to display our talent in a wonderful place and we’re giving you guys a chance to see our talent in a wonderful place, you know what I’m saying?

[0:10:00]

And it also gives you guys to see us without the costumes, the makeup, just see us work as a group and to know what we’re about individually, as well as a group. So you guys get to know, behind the scenes, this is what goes on behind a ball ‘cause, when you see a ball, you never really know – people who’re not in ballroom, when they see a ball, they don’t know what goes on behind that. So it gives you guys a understanding of us, it gives us an understanding of you guys, and we can grow together. So that’s why I think it’s phenomenal, especially if this becomes a yearly thing and the buzz this ball is getting is great. My house don’t really go to that many balls; my house is definitely coming to this ball. You know? So it’s like you have houses that don’t really feature Baltimore because of certain people’s names or whatever the case may be, that are now featuring Baltimore.

JP: What do you mean by “featuring Baltimore”?

EL: Wanting to come to the ball.

[0:11:00]
Wanting to come to the ball. For instance, the health department balls – when people were doing the health department balls, a lot of people would come because it was coalition-based or whatever the case may be. Then the attendance just kinda flew off, dithered off. The testing kinda dithered off, whatever the case may be. But now the people know that – what they’re seeing this as, the Baltimore coalition strikes again. “We’re back. We’re coming back impactful. This is what we’re doing. We’re building this relationship. You guys are building a relationship with us and it’s just making it happen.” So, if we can do this yearly and do it successfully yearly, it’d be a perfect blend. I think it’d be perfect for everyone, you know what I’m saying? Plus, just ballroom look good for the city, period, you know what I’m saying?

*JP:* What do you mean?

*EL:* Baltimore City will look at it like, “Oh, so they’re not just a lot of thieves and blah, blah, blah. They’re actually doing good things.

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And I see it in a place – “‘cause I think a lot of people look at settings. They can see us in one setting and see you in another setting. Then it change people perspective of certain things, you know what I’m saying? You’ll see us in a Bunns – not taking anything away from nothing ‘cause I’ve won many a balls, I’ve walked many a balls in Bunns – so it’s just a whole different feel, but then you go to a Peabody or art museum, it just gives a different – it gets more people interest. “Oh, what is this really about? Well, that’s a nice venue. Oh, they must not be that bad. Let me go check that out or let me tune in,” you know what I’m saying? For people who don’t know.

*JP:* Right. And, I mean, I think it’s – it might be even better for the Peabody Library, to be honest –

*EL:* Absolutely.

*JP:* I mean, I think libraries are increasingly irrelevant ‘cause we have the internet.

*EL:* Right, have the internet. Right.
This space itself gets rented as a wedding venue, more often than not, so this is – I’m excited about the ballroom ‘cause it’s a way for us to –

[0:13:00]

feature the collections here and for a group of artists to interpret the collection in a completely new way.

EL: Absolutely.

JP: So, yeah, I mean, it does feel like a win-win.

EL: It does feel like a win – maybe ‘cause I think, like you said, people see us have a ball here, people are gonna wanna come and check out the place. Whether they just wanna check out just for the checking out – maybe they can discover a book or two or whatever the case may be – what I like about the ball is how you have – which is a win for us because, in the categories where it’s off books, people have to do research. So, when you’re researching, you’re doing what? You’re reading the book. You’re trying to read or doing research on what you’re doing and you’re learning. So you’re learning about us and we’re actually learning about the categories, like London’s category, for instance. The way she put it was phenomenal, when she was downstairs. She goes, “Henry had this demure wife. Then he had the side chick.”

[0:14:00]

That’s exactly what it was, but she put a today spin on it, so, when people go to research that, goes, “Oh, wait a minute, I didn’t know – let me read some more about this.” You know what I’m saying? So you have people like, “Oh, books? What books? Oh, let me read some more about this,” you know what I’m saying? So you’re having that now ‘cause you’re having people like, “Well, that’s why I think the library can be important,” but a lot of people are doing the – do research themselves. So, when you’re doing research and you’re reading, you’re _____ so you’re kinda learning, but by accident, so to speak.

JP: Mm-hmm.

EL: And that’s always important, you know what I’m saying?

JP: And it seems to me that ballroom is all about learning as well. It’s about –
**EL:** It’s about growth. Right.

**JP:** – passing knowledge down through the generations.

**EL:** Absolutely. Absolutely.

**JP:** Okay. Okay, just a few more questions and then we’re good ‘cause _____ _____ been going at this for an hour and 15 minutes.

**EL:** What time is it now? Okay, good.

**JP:** Well, okay. Baltimore.

[0:15:00]

What makes ballroom in Baltimore different than other cities, do you think? The –

**EL:** Oh, the talent. Oh, absolutely, the talent. I mean, the talent that came out of Baltimore is by – how do I have to say that without sounding like an ass? New York is a very resourceful place. Baltimore, it’s always say, “If we had a state-to-state ball, Baltimore will win.” We have the talent here. We have the drive. It’s just – I mean, I’m just gonna say talent, period. Baltimore has the talent. We have beautiful girls. We have the realer girls. We have – vogue femme is not to be played with. Our runway team’s astounding. It’s always been like that. It’s always been Baltimore has hidden talent – that’s what we would say. Hidden talent. So it’s funny ‘cause, like I said prior, people from New York and them will come down to Baltimore, thinking it’ll be a easy win. No, no, no, no, no.

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You have to meet me. You have to meet Tyra. You have to meet Aria. You have to meet Mike Milan. You have to meet Derrick Revlon Allure. You have to meet Mariah. It wasn’t an easy win because we had stern talent here.

**JP:** This is what other people have told me as well, but what is it about Baltimore that produces that talent, do you think?

**EL:** We’re just a resourceful city. We’re just – I mean, talent. We’re talented group of people. I mean, there’s no other way to say it. We’re very talented and we’re very driven, you know what I’m
saying? We’re very driven, talented people. There’s no other way I can say it. I mean, it’s just that you have a drive; you have the potential. And what I like about Baltimore is that we pump each other up, you know what I’m saying?

[0:17:00]

We pump – everybody can be in houses and stuff like that, but then, if a outsider from New York, it doesn’t matter what house you’re in – you’re there to pump Baltimore up, so like, “Bitch, I know you can do this. We do it all the time, so, bitch, you gonna go out there and do it.” But, shoot, that’s the thing. I mean, I can’t say no other way – it’s talent. We have the greater talent, the drive, focus. We’re just phenomenal.

JP: Okay. So Baltimore is gonna win the Peabody Ball –

EL: Absolutely.

JP: Okay.

EL: Of course.

JP: That’s what I wanna hear. Okay. Let’s see. What didn’t I ask you? I asked this in kind of another way earlier, but it’s important to me. I just wanna understand what each narrator feels is important about ballroom. So what have you learned through ballroom? How do you feel like you’ve changed through ballroom? Essentially, why is ballroom important? Why is it important to you?

[0:18:00]

EL: I think ballroom’s important because you have that child or children who are not really accepted by their families or … or in the system, in foster care, something in that way. To me, ballroom’s a way of you becoming a star, you know what I’m saying? It’s a way of you developing to something that you probably never thought you can do. You can be that runway model; you can be that great dancer; you can be the realest person; you can be that best-dressed person that you normally wouldn’t be able to do in “real life,” quote unquote – your regular life. So I think what ballroom does, it made a lot of stars out of people who didn’t think they could be stars. So I think that’s important. As far as, you said, to me?

JP: Mm-hmm.
[0:19:00]

EL: For me, again, it made me a star outside of [unintelligible] and outside of a region I didn’t think I could be a star. And it gave me a lot of confidence. And, most importantly, I met a lot of cool people. You meet a lot of people and you travel a lot, so I got to see a lot of different states because of ballroom.

JP: Mm-hmm. Okay. And I’d kinda asked this before as well, but people have – you know, I think Sebastian maybe told me that ballroom prepares you for life outside of ballroom. Do you agree with that? And if so, in what way?

EL: I guess ballroom can prepare you for life outside of ballroom because it can give you the tools of acceptance and the tools of rejection, you know what I’m saying? I think it’s kinda important in real life. And how to handle that constructively. It also – like I said, it can garner a lot of encouragement. It gives you the drive to do something you didn’t think you could do.

[0:20:00]

You didn’t think you could go into this interview and turn it, but you go into the interview and you get the job, type thing. Or you can apply to school – you didn’t think you had it in you. It just gives you that confidence that you can go to school, you can apply, finish school, and then go to get your doctor’s – it just gives you goals. To me, ballroom helps people with goals, you know what I’m saying?

JP: Okay, last question. What is one thing – actually, this is Marco’s question that he suggested – what’s one thing you would want the younger generation to know about ballroom? The younger ballroom generation to know.

EL: What’s one thing I’ll want them to know?

JP: About, I guess, the history of ballroom or, you know, what you’ve taken away from ballroom.

[0:21:00]

EL: Ask me that question one more time. I’m sorry.
**JP:** Well, again, it’s Marco’s question. What is one thing that you would like the younger generation to know about ballroom?

**EL:** That it’s a tool – again, I’m gonna sound like a broken record – it’s a tool to get strength, set goals, confidence building, and meet wonderful people. That’s what you wanna know about ballroom.

**JP:** Okay. Think that’s a good place to stop.

*[End of Audio]*