

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Grey Mizrahi

Interviewed by Joseph Plaster

January 17, 2019

GM: Grey Mizrahi (GM)
Interviewer: Joseph Plaster (JP)
Date: January 17, 2019
[0:00:00]

JP: Start. We are recording. So why don't you just by, you know, telling us what your name is, the name you want to use, where we are, what the date is.

GM: Okay. Right now – well my name is Marquis but – my name is Grey, Grey Mizrahi, and right now we're at the Peabody Library in the Bridal Suite, okay?

JP: [Laughs] Okay. And today is January 17, 2019, and maybe do one more introduction where you just use your artist name.

GM: Okay. My name is Grey Mizrahi and today is January 19 – oh, shucks. [Laughs] Okay.

JP: I'll do one more later, but that was good.

[0:01:00]

So maybe – I usually just start out with a little bit of background, so where you were born and raised, a little bit about, you know, your childhood, high school, kind of before Ballroom.

GM: Yeah. Okay, so I'm Grey. When I grew up, I grew up in Baltimore City, Park Heights Avenue, [laughs] like Park Heights area. I'm a fashion designer, so I graduated from BCCC for, like, fashion, the little program that they have there.

JP: Is that a high school or...?

GM: Well, high school I went to Forest Park and I went to Ace. I transferred high schools, so I went to, like, two.

JP: Okay.

GM: And...

JP: Can you say maybe a little bit about your family, your neighborhood...

GM: Oh, yeah, growing up –

JP: Memories of growing up.

GM: Okay. I grew up with my mom.

[0:02:00]

It was just me and her for a long time, then my brother and sister – I have a younger brother and a younger sister. Me and my little sister are, like, very close. So growing up – I just basically kind of like raised them, take them to school back and forth while, like...sneaking, drawing and stuff and going to balls and everything, and...growing up was kind of, like, fun for me because I had a lot, a lot, a lot of friends, lots of friends. So they would, like, come to my house, like my house was the house on the corner so usually the house on the corner has the most going on.

JP: So you were popular.

GM: Yeah.

JP: Okay.

GM: As a kid I had, like, lots of friends, lots and lots and lots of friends.

JP: Just as a kid?

GM: As a kid – well, now I've kind of like – I'm over the friend thing, so...

JP: Okay.

GM: Not now. Not as much, but I'm still as social as I was then.

[0:03:00]

JP: Do you remember the first time you heard about ballroom?

GM: Yes. My uncle, Miss Tony, rest his soul, was like a big name back then during like – in like the Baltimore scene. Not really the ballroom scene but Baltimore in like the club scene, DJs and – it was, you know, their own group that they had, and she was, like, big, so I would, like, see her go up as Miss Tony – or go up as Tony and come down as Miss Tony, so I'm like, whoa, what the hell?

JP: Tell me more about that. What does that mean that she went up as Tony and –

GM: She would, like, go up as, like, regular guy Tony and, like, come down as, like, Miss Tony in, like, full drag, full feathers, everything, hair all the way up, and it's just like, whoa. And then –

[0:04:00]

JP: When you say go up, she went up like in the house?

GM: Upstairs, yeah. Like I would be downstairs in my grandma's house and she would be like – she would come over and she'll, like, prance through and everything, we would talk and everything, we'd all laugh, and then she'll go upstairs and then, like, after everybody's kind of gone I'm like, waking up, not supposed to really be up, and I would, like, see her come down, and she'll be like in full gown and makeup and all that, so I'm like, whoa.

JP: How old were you?

GM: Like, six, seven, so I always – it was a world that, you know, happened and at that time I just – my eye was peeled forward so I would, like, see different things, and then *America's Next Top Model* actually introduced the Ballroom scene in a way to me because I seen like the Ninjas, Benny Ninja, and then I found *Paris is Burning*.

JP: Wait, wait, wait, go back. The first thing that you said was what?

GM: *America's Next Top Model*, kind of like I saw, like, competition ballroom.

[0:05:00]

JP: Okay.

GM: So, like, people going against each other, things like that and, like, television introduced it to me.

JP: Okay. And so your cousin, did you ever talk with your cousin about ballroom?

GM: At a young age, like I could remember, like, keep trying to sneak and get like a peak of what's on behind, like, this door, because I know – I hear like the music so loud and I'm like, oh my god, like

it's something real fabulous going on behind this door and I gotta see. And this one day, like, he saw me kind of, like, trying to sneak a peek and was like, "Come in," and, like, I could remember, like, singing to the music along with him and seeing the process, so I would, like, watch my mom after that, like, put on makeup like for church and stuff, and we'd go places. I would, like, watch her do certain things and, like, oh yes, okay, yes, and I just – I always got a taste for that after that.

[0:06:00]

JP: And so was your cousin actually going to ballroom competitions or–

GM: I didn't know.

JP: You didn't know, okay.

GM: I didn't know. I thought it was like some underground something that he went to that, like, was – until I started seeing – I knew Miss Tony, like, on the radio, like certain songs that were out that was him, and I'm like, okay, but I never really saw the whole where he went, what was going on, until I got into it and that was – I was like – when I came to a ball –

JP: Wait, wait, wait. Hold on a second, because I just realized that somebody just introduced me to Miss Tony, so Miss Tony is –

GM: My uncle.

JP: Oh, okay. So that –

GM: [Inaudible comment]

JP: Yeah, so she's – yeah, yeah.

GM: Yeah.

JP: So she's like a legend in the ballroom scene here, yeah.

GM: I never knew that.

JP: Okay.

GM: I just seen the process of her making herself into the one, and I'm just like, okay.

[0:07:00]

And I wasn't around her a lot, a lot. Like my grandma would – my great-grandmother would babysit me some days and I would, like, see Miss Tony on those days so, like, usually it was months in between each other and I would just have – I was dying for that. Like I always wanted to go back, like can we go over to grandmother's house? Can we go over to, like, Miss Doris house? Can we keep going over there? Can we keep going over there? My mom's like, "Why you want to always go over there?"

And I'm just in my mind, like, I want to see this again, so after that I got into, like, fashion and drawing and stuff like that, so now I really got into TV. So then *America's Next Top Model* had Benny Ninja and like, what is this? Like posing in the middle of the street, like the old-way style, and I'm like, oh my god, what is this? I had to find out.

JP: How old were you then?

GM: Twelve, thirteen.

JP: Okay.

[0:08:00]

GM: And then I heard this one time on Myspace – okay, okay, bring it back. On Myspace this girl had this song on her page and it was *[starts singing]*, Jay Pendarvis, and I'm like, what the hell is this? He's saying some crazy – it was like a chant, it was a chant of somebody's that they did, and come to find out that's like one of the big songs. I'm like, yes, and I know this song to this day, but I looked it up on YouTube and stuff and like, you know, suggested videos and –

JP: That's one of the big ballroom songs?

GM: Yeah, songs. So when I got on there I saw other songs and other videos and other things, and then people voguing, which I always knew what voguing was 'cause of Madonna, of course, but I thought it was like you pose and you – you know? But I got introduced into like the ballroom-ballroom, how you really supposed to be doing it and –

JP: Through those videos?

GM: Yeah.

[0:09:00]

JP: Yeah.

GM: And then like, you know, the Ninjas – like seeing it again, and I'm like, okay, it's real. I can go here. Then I found out it was here at Bunns. Then I'm like, okay, let's get here. So at this point I'm, like, 16, so I go to –

JP: And how old are you now?

GM: Twenty-two.

JP: Twenty-two, okay. So that was – can I do the math? – six years ago.

GM: Something like that.

JP: Okay. Great.

GM: So I, like, went to the Paradox –

JP: Well, so how did you find out that it was at Club Bunns?

GM: Here – but that was here. No, it wasn't Bunns first. It was the Paradox. I went to the Paradox this one day, me and my good, good, good girlfriend, and I just saw people going around like the side, 'cause the Paradox is kind of like a maze almost. It's a big room and there's a side room that you can go into, so I go turn into the side room and I see people vogueing and everything and it's like the ball's going on.

[0:10:00]

And of course I went out, I got chopped. *[Laughs]*

JP: You performed that night?

GM: Yeah. Like, I'm like, okay, I know how to do this, I've seen this before, and I tried to go out and I'm like – I got chopped, but it made me want to keep doing it like, okay, it's here. So I would go to, like, the Dox, then I found out, like, A-list Tuesday was at

Bunns. I'm like, "What the fuck is Bunns?" So I, like, go to, like, find it, and I get in and they're voguing again.

JP: So I mean if somebody's listening to this that has no idea what Bunns is, explain –

GM: Bunns is – okay, Bunns is a club, a gay club, behind – next to Market. That's how I found it. And it's kind of like a hole in the wall but it's the place of – like if you don't walk at Bunns, like, you're nobody.

[0:11:00]

The legends of the legends had to win at Bunns because, like, it's one of the big ones. Like Paradox, Bunns – I don't know, like, the names of the other places. I know, like... Vogue Nights, Vogue Nights is a big one, but Bunns is like one of those, like the Pantheon, like you have to walk here, like the Olympics almost. So, like, I walked there this one time and I got through. I didn't get chopped this time, and I got a little far – and this is – I was walking virgins, mind you. Now virgins is like, you know, you are – you're new to this, you're not a seasoned performer in the ballroom scene, so you don't walk runway all the time, you don't vogue all the time, you're new; we've never seen you before.

JP: And that's a category? Virgin?

[0:12:00]

GM: Virgin performance, virgin runway, virgin this, virgin that. So I walked virgin performance and I was like, mixing like old way with vogue fem. Now old way is the more posy – it's the Madonna way. You -- face and you pose, pose, pose, and vogue fem is you're voguing like a lady, you're moving like a lady. It's very feminine, it's very touch your titties, it's very, you know, dainty. So I was kind of like doing that and they was living for it, I guess, and I got through. I got way through, and after that I'm like, okay, I can do this, and I was, like, addicted.

JP: So before we go forward, back to – you know, right before you went to – what was it called? The Pendulum?

[0:13:00]

GM: The Paradox.

JP: Paradox. What – I mean what was it that appealed to you about ballroom and vogue? Like why –

GM: The looks. It was like I was in – I don't know. I loved my fashion my whole life and I love, like, trendy things, I love, like, over-the-top, gaudy extremeness, so when I went to the Paradox itself, the club, it was like I saw the gayest of the gay and it, like, made me – okay, it's – okay, I understand what's going on now, like I can kind of be more flamboyant, if you will. So when I would go – when I went back the next time I was, like, crazy. I had some fishnet thing on, like – because I knew it was okay, it was acceptable at the Paradox.

JP: And what do you mean when you say the gayest of the gay?

[0:14:00]

GM: Like, okay, 'cause you can't just wear certain things on the street, you know? Like you can't just wear anything. It was, like, fur coats and fishnet things on men, like very androgynous, very playing on the lines of gender, very – before all the wave came and before the trend wave came. It was just over the top.

JP: So it was like it gave you permission to be –

GM: Be as over the top as you wanted to be. Like in seeing it, kind of like, okay, and it was like very beautiful too to me to see, like, a society almost that we made.

JP: Can you – I mean for somebody who might be listening to this who's never been to a ball can you kind of, like, paint a picture –

GM: Of a ball?

JP: – of what it looks like? Yeah.

GM: Okay, okay.

[0:15:00]

Usually before a ball starts it's like a – it's a time. People are dancing and then the lights come on. When the lights come on you clear the floor, you go like, you know, around the corridor of the venue, clear the space. Usually someone – well, all the time somebody will get on the mic and start to call out LSS. LSS is legends, statements, and stars. So that's like a different – okay,

legends are people who are legends. They have been deemed legendary, have been doing this shit for years, whatever. Statements are more like... Okay, if you're a statement you are – you're known. People know you. You're a star, you're popping right now. So legends, statements, stars. So they call that out, and then he's like, you know – he says it in a very way. He, like, chants it, like, into a song and you gotta kind of listen for you name.

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[Starts singing a beat] And he'll call someone out, like the legendary this, and they'll come out and they'll vogue and everybody give them life and they're like snap and everything, and then, like, he'll call – randomly he'll call a virgin. So I remember my first LSS. Oh, it was like the – one of the peaks of my vogueing career, 'cause I felt so fab that night. 'Cause if you're called out it's like this – that's you, like they're calling you out. So legends, statements and stars is first –

JP: Wait, wait, wait. Before you go forward, tell me more about that, like what does that mean that they're calling you out? Why is that important?

GM: Because they have noticed you. They have noticed you. You have vogueed, you have done, you have walked, and they see your talent so they call you and they want to see that before and display that before the ball actually starts. So you come out and you get your LSS. So after LSS, you know, usually they'll open up the categories, which is like so many I can't even name.

[0:17:00]

But they'll call out for your 10's. So when you go out and get your 10's this is your audition to compete, if you will. You have to go out and get your 10's. If you don't get your 10's, okay, you come out and you vogue or you walk runway or you walk realness.

JP: What does that mean to get your 10's?

GM: You come out and you walk – and the judges are picked already, so during LSS they kind of, like, filter out who's in the place and they pick the judges for the night, so the judges are already on the panel. So when you – so when 10's – like it's time to get your 10's, you walk out, you vogue, if they don't like it they chop you. You didn't get your 10's, no, sorry, not tonight. Or you get through – okay, 10's across the board; every judge on the panel has liked

what you have done so you get to stay and compete against the rest of the girls who also get their 10's.

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When all the 10's – they call a category, they go one, one, one, two, two, two, one, two, three, category's closed. Oh, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, categories are done. If somebody don't come out during that countdown then it's done. After that you compete. They start to pair the girls up. Usually the commentator does this. The commentator pairs the girls up to vogue against each other.

So the commentator usually is like almost in control of the floor. It's like the MC. That's the person who is conducting and make sure that everything goes smoothly. A ball would not work without a commentator, like, period, because while saying these chants and being catchy they have to, like, keep everything in order.

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So while – when 10's are got, the commentator starts to pair up the girls and they vogue with each other, so maybe two girls don't like each other, maybe my talent kind of like matches your thing that you do, so we want to see how y'all bitches come in the middle, you know, like...or...it's a lot that goes into it.

JP: It's like a production and – yeah.

GM: Definitely a production. It's – to see it happening it's like, wow. To see it happening is literally like, wow, and that was one of the things that kind of sold me too, because like to see it running smoothly through all of that chaos and business and glitter and feathers and shit, it was just like, whoa, and it was moving like – how are they doing it? How do they know how to do this? How do they keep it going? That was one of the things that kind of, like, sold me too. So back to it.

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After you get your 10's you battle, so it's like process of elimination. I battled you, you lost, I stay. Two other girls battle, she stays, so now it's me and her and more people battling. So maybe they'll put me and her against each other and then we vogue and then they'll count it down one, one, two, two, hold that pose for me, and we'll stop and we'll say – and then the judges will say

who they like and who stay, so whoever gets the more votes stays. So then, you know, that gets catty too because, you know, I did it better than her or I feel like she shouldn't have won, and then you have like, you know, usually the house mother or house father – or they'll go to their house father and they'll say like, "I didn't agree with that," and they'll, like, get them to speak on their behalf to the judges, 'cause you can't just approach the judges' table. That's just like, no. You just don't do that.

[0:21:00]

JP: I guess – you know, I'm starting to learn more and more about ballroom, but the more I learn the more I know that there's, like, all this stuff that I don't know and it seems to be like really highly structured and hierarchical.

GM: People don't really under – no, people don't really acknowledge the fact how strategic it is, how deep and rooted – it's like there's laws. There's a whole law system, but it's unsaid, it's unrecorded. It's just certain things that you know that you just don't do and that you just do. So with 10's or with, you know, battles you can't just say, "I don't like that, I'll go to the judges panel and I'll dispute them." You can't just do that 'cause that's like, no, disrespectful, 'cause these people have walked, they're legendary, they've got their titles, so they feel like who – how dare you approach me, and shit like that. So then you have people who are like, "I don't care who you are, I'm gonna approach you if I want to," and it's like some people don't have houses at all – 007s – who are like, feel like I should've won that.

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And they approach by themselves 'cause they don't have anybody to back them. That's when you get the houses involved and it's very, very, very, very deep, it's very deep. People don't acknowledge how deep it is. It's very deep.

JP: Well, so to go back to the first time you walked in a ball, it sounds like you just showed up. So is that how – that's how you entered the ball. You didn't have to be invited? You just showed you and competed.

GM: I was a 007.

JP: Okay.

GM: I was just me, Grey. People didn't really know – people had seen me before but they didn't really, like, know my name, they didn't really know who I was, stuff like that.

JP: And you learned how to perform by watching videos?

GM: And seeing it, like my whole life. Like seeing people vogue, seeing, like, TV, like Madonna and certain house music songs I would know.

[0:23:00]

My mom is, like, big on club music. She loves club music. Oh my god. All types. She, like, jazz house, church house, like...all types. So she loves club music and I've heard all those songs a million times, but I just – okay, I'm just dancing like I see my mom dance, so I'm dancing like I see my family dance. You know what I'm saying?

Like I don't really – I'm not doing – I'm not voguing to it. But then when I seen voguing to those songs it was like, hold up, let me try this, and I just got taken away by it. 'Cause I'm classically trained in dance, actually, like, ballet, tap, jazz, and I danced as a kid, so I can, like, pick up just about any dance.

JP: Just by looking at it.

GM: Easily, just looking at it.

JP: Okay.

GM: So that's kind of like how I got into voguing.

JP: And how long did it take you to become part of a house? Like, how did that happen?

GM: Oh my gosh. I was 007 for a long time.

[0:24:00]

I didn't have a house at all. And then I joined Dior'e because of, like...I forgot how I even got a part of Dior'e, but I joined the House of Dior'e, so that was my first house. I was Grey Dior'e at that point, 'cause when you join a house you take their last name, you take their house name as your last name. So like House of Dior'e I would be Grey Dior'e at that point.

JP: So tell – again, for somebody who’s listening to this, they don’t know – I’ve been telling people, “Oh yeah, there are houses that are part of ballroom,” and they’re like, “Oh, where can we go to this house?”

GM: It’s a figurative house. It’s a family. They probably live different places. Some people actually have real houses I think *[laughs]* because – it’s different and it’s not like a said thing almost, so you don’t really know.

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Say if I’m in this house and they have a house that I go to, you wouldn’t really tell ‘cause then maybe you’ll be ashamed because you don’t have anywhere to go. You know, like you don’t really know. Everyone – every house is exclusive so they have their own house business, if you will. So I don’t really know if they have a house or not. I know at my house, our gathering house is Tiana’s kind of house. It’s like we gather all there every time.

JP: And when you first came into – what, the Dior’e House?

GM: House of Dior’e. They didn’t really have a house. It was just called a house because... So, like, it was just called a house because it was a family that we had that was the last name, Dior’e.

JP: And what – I mean what did it mean to come into a house? Like how would you become a part of it?

GM: Okay, so the process is a whole process.

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You have to vogue at something. You talk to a Dior’e person or a house person, a person who’s like in charge of a house, like any house, and you tell them I want to be a part of your house. Okay, so come to a house meeting because there are, like, meetings monthly at each house. So you come to a house meeting, you meet the mother, you meet the father, you meet everybody, you introduce yourself, then they tell you, “Okay, you have to walk a ball so we can –” even sometimes they say, “Walk right here, right now in front of all of us,” in living rooms, basements and cramped spaces; all types of shit, because they want to see you right now and not, like, at a ball. So you’ll vogue or you’ll walk and they’ll

be like, “Do y’all see it?” And, like, you’ll vote like, “Yeah, we see it.”

JP: Because they want the best performers and that – yeah.

GM: Yeah. ‘Cause you can’t just let anybody into a house. Like if you’re coming to compete or vogue, like, you can’t just let anybody in.

[0:27:00]

They have to be, like, up to caliber, like of the – so we have to see if you say – if you do what you say you do. You know what I mean?

JP: Yeah, yeah. But what’s the benefit of being in a house versus being just 007?

GM: Okay, so that’s my – that was my thing. I felt like I kind of needed a house because I was getting trod as 007. Now trod is like when I’m saying – I mean I felt like I was getting overlooked as a 007 because I felt like I didn’t have the backing. If I wanted to say something to the judges I couldn’t really – ‘cause there’s so many people and so much stuff, so I didn’t feel like I could approach on my own, so I felt like I needed a house to tell – like, do y’all see this, do y’all see this? Can y’all help me right now, you know? So that was why.

JP: Okay. And I mean are the houses just about competing at balls?

[0:28:00]

Is it –

GM: No.

JP: What else is it?

GM: There’s more to a house than just, like, competing at balls. It’s like a sense of a family, like a sense of a belonging somewhere in a way. Like ‘cause I know for me personally I didn’t – I always lived with my mom and I always, you know, had places to go, but I know people who, like, didn’t have anywhere to go and didn’t – you know, like fell on hard times, and people in certain houses would reach out to them and, like, help them and help them with their, like, transitions and stuff like that. So it’s way more to a

house than just vogueing or, like, runway. It's way more to it. It's very deep.

[0:29:00]

It's very beautiful to, like, see it happening, like houses and how people can – you can see somebody, like, down on their luck. You take them in to my house – come to my house – and you see their actual – then they'll end up vogueing and they'll end up doing runway. You're like, what? I didn't know she could do that. They probably didn't know they could do that but they see it and they feel that belonging so they want to, like, do that too.

JP: So sometimes people who haven't performed before will be –

GM: Yeah, I've seen that too, like I've seen people who, like, don't vogue, who don't walk runway, and you're like – and they'll, like, play around with it and they'll walk virgin or something and you'll be like, okay. Yes! We didn't know you could do that. So it's a lot of different ways that you can get into a house, but me personally I had to go to the house meeting, meet the father. He said, "Well, you have to –" well, he seen me vogue before, but like, "We want to see you vogue," in a competition setting.

[0:30:00]

So I walked, I got through – I think I won... virgins or something, and they was like, "Okay, you're in the house."

JP: How did that feel?

GM: It felt good, but I still – okay. I don't want to say that for the camera but... [Laughs] I felt like honestly – okay. I felt like – I'm in a house, so I got, like, a backing, but I didn't have the house that I wanted, honestly. So I – because in ways certain houses, certain kids, like, are better than other ones, honestly.

JP: Better performers or...?

GM: Better everything.

JP: Okay.

GM: Like, better. So you be like, okay, I want this house more than that house. I want to be in this house more. So you'll, like, join a house

just to have that, but you'll still want to, like – bitch, I wish I was at Revlon or, bitch, I wish I was in Mizrahi or I wish I was a Ninja.

[0:31:00]

Because, like, they have more perks, they're more known, like that name is more known. It's like the woman who marries into the family for their last name. You know what I mean? Like, so I wanted to be a Rothschild more than I wanted to be a damn Jones. You know what I mean? Like...

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you –

GM: 'Cause that's just better.

JP: So did you switch houses then at some point?

GM: Yes. So I left Dior'e, 'cause I was like, no, this is not for me no more, because there was – they wouldn't take them seriously as competitors. So I left Dior'e and I joined Mizrahi and that's where I've been, because I feel like Mizrahi really opened up the door for me to get more exposure as a performer in the ballroom scene because it's about – I feel like it's of a higher caliber in a way.

[0:32:00]

Sorry, Dior'e. *[Laughs]* Sorry, Dior'e.

JP: And so probably I'm gonna interview somebody from Dior'e and they're gonna say the same thing about Mizrahi, right?

GM: Yeah. So – and that's the thing; with the being in the house comes a sense of pride, and that's the thing I liked about Mizrahi too because, like, when at a ball, right, you'll hear *[makes cheering sounds]* – you'll hear outside because, like, we love our house that much. We love our members that much. We have this sense of, like, yes, bitch, I'm a Mizrahi so...

JP: And Mizrahi, the house isn't just in Baltimore, it's –

GM: Chapters. It's very wide – it's even in Tokyo, it's even in Greece. It's in Paris, Belgium...

[0:33:00]

Oh my gosh, Poland... Yes, there's a lot. 'Cause Kopy's [sp?] from Tokyo.

JP: I mean do you ever have, like, conference calls with people in Tokyo?

GM: Oh, I wish. *[Laughs]*

JP: Like how –

GM: I'm pretty sure, like, the higher-ups in the pyramid of Mizrahi have those, but like, no, not me. We meet them during balls, like they'll come. Like certain people from, like, out of town, out of the country, they'll come to a ball and we'll, like, meet them, like, "Hey, I'm Mizrahi too, like, what's up, how's it going?" You know, so that's – it's good for, like, networking, too.

JP: It's like an extended family.

GM: Yeah, extended, extended, extended family.

JP: Yeah.

GM: Like you've never seen the people before but, like, we're in the same house.

JP: So if you're part of that house does that mean you necessarily have a father, mother? Like how does that work?

[0:34:00]

GM: Everybody has a father and mother. It could be even, like, outside of houses. Like...I know people who have a – like my father is in Mizrahi and...my mom is a Balenciaga or something.

JP: And so what is it – what makes a person your father or your mother?

GM: It's who you choose. It's who has that connection to you. It's who you grow that connection with, that fatherly or motherly connection with, and some people use – some people it's father or mother. It's, you know, kind of like strategic who they pick as their son, who they pick as their daughter, who they pick as their father or mother or whatever, because this is the hot thing or this person is this or this person is talented and I want to, like, have them on

my team type thing or, like, in... It's different ways, it's different ways.

[0:35:00]

But sometimes people adopt the father or mother that's of their house that they join. So like if I want to be in the house of _____ I'll join Mizrahi and the house – the father or the mother of the house at the time, that'll be my father, that'll be my mother, 'cause I didn't really have one. You know what I mean?

JP: No, tell me more.

GM: Okay. Certain kids don't really – they're becoming fresh, raw, like green. They don't have a father, they don't have a mother, they don't know anything about this. They just know how to vogue. They just know how to walk, they just know that I could do this. So they come in and they don't have anybody. They adopt the father or the mother of the house 'cause, like, that's what they call anybody, like, daddy or, like, mom, stuff like that.

JP: Can you talk a little bit about your dad and mom, like what your relationship looks like?

GM: I'm different. I don't really have that.

JP: Okay.

[0:36:00]

GM: Like I really never had like a mom, dad, type of those things.

JP: Okay.

GM: I had, like, a person I was calling my father, but that's different. That's a different situation for a different time.

JP: Wait, are you talking about your biological father or your –

GM: No, my ballroom father.

JP: Oh, I'm sorry. Talk about – I meant your ballroom –

GM: Yes, I know.

JP: Okay.

- GM: [Laughs]
- JP: Sorry.
- GM: I mean, like, yeah, I'm different. I don't really have that.
- JP: Okay.
- GM: I'm a motherless child, if you will.
- JP: [Laughs] Okay.
- GM: So, like, I just don't really have that, acknowledged a person in the house or like the house mother, house father as father of my house, mother of my house, it's gay mother, gay father type thing. I don't have that.
- JP: Okay. When you became part of the house did people talk about the history of the house? Do you learn about –
- GM: Yes, you learn about everything, 'cause, you know, there's so many conversations, so many dinners, so many game nights and stuff and, you know, sessions that you have, like little practice sessions. Like they'll call, "Oh, we're having a practice over at Tiana's house, or we're having a practice down here."
- [0:37:00]
- And you'll come and they'll – during that they'll talk, and they're like, "Oh girl, I remember this ball that this person walked and they did this and they did that or did you know that Jennifer Lopez was in Mizrahi or –" you know, it's stuff like that, like just craziness. You'll be like, what? And then you're like, "Girl, I heard this, I heard that," stuff like that.
- JP: So what have you pieced together, like, kind of over the years about the history –
- GM: Mizrahi is one of the oldest. Mizrahi is one of the veteran houses. In the beginning it was so many, so many, so many, so many because everybody wanted to have a house, everybody wanted to make one, but it was one of the houses that really stamped its name as a legitimate house, like this is a house of performers of –
- JP: Do you know where it started?

GM: Probably New York, 'cause that's where Jack is, right?

[0:38:00]

Yeah, New York. Andre. Andre is the founder of the House of Mizrahi, Andre Mizrahi. That is who I want to vogue like. When I saw like old way, the levels of it, I wanted to, like – I took, like, stuff from him. So I was like, I want to be in Mizrahi because of Andre, because of people like Jack, because of people like Leiomy, stuff like that.

JP: And that's just from seeing them at the balls, at the competitions.

GM: Yeah, and seeing how their caliber of performer, like how good they were.

JP: And then –

GM: How seriously they were taken.

JP: And you have these sessions where you kind of hone your art together. Is that the point?

[0:39:00]

GM: Yeah, sessions, and you'll see – like practice sessions or, like, you'll vogue at home, turn on the music, and practice, practice, practice and, like, oh, I didn't like that, I probably would've got chopped, but it's good to have another person there to say like, "Oh no, ew, chop."

JP: So why old way? Why is that the category that appeals to you?

GM: Because it's more glamorous. I'm telling you, just to see people just like – like you're out of a magazine. I just loved it and I love all that positions, like people put – contorting their bodies I think is beautiful, so I just was intrigued by that, and that's the way that I first learned how to do – like I first learned how to vogue the old way.

JP: When you were watching, like, all these videos and everything?

GM: Mm-hmm.

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

GM: I would see that but I was looking at Ninjas, 'cause Ninjas are mostly old way.

[0:40:00]

JP: And that's another house that –

GM: Mm-hmm.

JP: Ninjas, okay.

GM: I was looking at all the Ninjas – Ninja, Ninja, Ninja, Ninja, Ninja, Ninja, Ninja, Ninja, Ninja.

JP: And what is it – I'm not a dancer at all. Like what does it feel like to actually perform that at a ball, like to be dancing?

GM: It's exhilarating. It's, like, exhilarating, like it's like a – that adrenaline. It's like kind of the unleash of the – like your alter ego. It gives you opportunities to be a lot of different things, like express yourself artistically. Even though you wouldn't do this in real life it gives you opportunities to, like, push the boundaries of who you are. It gives you – like when you're dancing you feel – like when you're doing old way – I know I could do a thing that I was not even planning to do and I'll be like, oh bitch, you just ate that. [Laughs] Like, okay, keep going. You know what I mean?

[0:41:00]

So you feel yourself open up, you feel yourself doing more things you didn't – or you master it and people know you and people, like, clap and people, like, love it, that is like – there's no feeling like that. It's like – I don't know. It's like...exhilarating. That's all I can say. It pumps you up, it lifts you up. You feel that yes, yeah – and you hear – feel a little _____ fort the dip and when you feel like – it's like when you do – like some people, like, go into a dip. That's a dance move in voguing. You go down into – you feel those arms go down or when you feel like – I don't know. You get your 10's, you feel that. It's a boost of confidence. It's like, yes, I did this.

JP: Well, 'cause I went to A List – Keith invited me to go there – and I saw the dips. Like that seemed to be – you know, people would dip and then everybody would, like, put their arm down –

GM: It's a placeholder, it's a placeholder for the measurement, like it's like a measurement, like a metronome.

[0:42:00]

[Snaps] Bam – that's the dip, the bam. Bam. It's like – that's to hold the place – it's the rhythm. It's like a kick on the drum.

JP: And then the audience gets involved too, right?

GM: So with the arm down, yeah. So when you –

JP: What is that about?

GM: I don't know. It's the transfer of the energy. That is just – it's the like, yes, we love that. Okay, yes. Or that was a good one, like that was a good dip. [Laughs] Like, okay. It's different ways – like what makes you do – like what makes you put your arm down. Like you might've liked that, you might've been like, no, we didn't like that. It's just a thing. I can't – it's like it just goes with it.

JP: So you said it feels like you get to test the boundaries of who you are.

GM: Yeah, like –

JP: Tell me more.

[0:43:00]

GM: Because, like, I know times where I've been, like, hurting, like what you can do physically, what your mind can do mentally, it pushes you to a place of, like, how did I just do that? Because I've seen people, like, get – be – literally have broken legs, like literally have broken, like, a knee and still be vogueing down, and then after everything's done they're like, "Girl, you gotta take me to the hospital; I think I just broke something." Because, like – and then actually win, like win but be vogueing – like I broke an ankle or something. I'm telling you it pushes you. Me – I noticed one time I, like, messed my knee up so bad and I still was vogueing, I still was vogueing. It pushes you. It takes you somewhere past where you think you could go.

JP: So how does that have an impact on your, like, like?

[0:44:00]

GM: Artistically.

JP: Like how does that change you as a person?

GM: Artistically.

JP: You know, not just –

GM: It makes me know what's possible. I can just really almost do anything, like anything. Because, like, when you – sometimes I had to really, like, pull it out. Like for certain balls, like making stuff and – 'cause I'm a fashion designer, so I usually make my own effects, I make people's effects for balls, and that kind of, like, helps me too 'cause it's practice for, like, when I get to my next point. You know what I mean? Like...people have come to me and wanted to become an angler fish.

You know what I mean? Like it takes you somewhere – like how am I going to make you an angler fish and really make it into it? And you see it come to life and you're like, okay. It's just that pat on the back, like, that people want. People want that.

[0:45:00]

JP: I can't remember who it was last night who was trying to explain a ball, and he said, "Yeah, the ball's about creating a fantasy and then living in it."

GM: Literally. Because like sometimes – like I said, like at the Paradox, for me and my crazy little artist mind it was like when Alice fell down the hole and she experienced all that, like, fantasy and all that – oh my god, this is here. Like it – to see people in effects, like – 'cause when you walk runway they'll call for something like, oh, come as a jailhouse person from Candyland, and you'll have, like, the Hamburglar and, like, all kinds of stuff, so you'll see all of that and it's just like a fantasy that you live in.

JP: So it's like a different world. So that's one of the things that I think is interesting. I don't totally understand it. It's like –

GM: What about it that you don't understand?

[0:46:00]

JP: Well, I mean there's the kind of, like, mainstream world that we have to kind of live in most of the time and there are these alternative worlds that we create, so I'm kind of wondering, like, what is the message of this alternative world that you're able to create through ballroom?

GM: And it's not just be yourself, it's be who you want to be. Like, seriously. If you want to explore who you are and if you want to, like, you know – if you have a character, if you have a certain kind of personality, you can display it and you can, like, really fine tune it in the ballroom. It helps you become the person that you kind of want to be. 'Cause maybe sometimes you don't have the courage or maybe sometimes you don't have the opportunity because real life society, like, kind of tells you, no, that's not acceptable.

[0:47:00]

But in, like, the ballroom scene a lot of things about just personality traits are acceptable and you feel, like, wanted, you feel like – so that gives you that outlet, and I guess the object of the whole ballroom game is to, like, be who you want to be. 'Cause I know people who are two different people. I know people who are, like, completely different in their real life, 'cause I was one of them for a little while. I have seen people who are, like – it's almost like I hope you don't get ____, like Beyoncé, Sasha Fierce. You know what I'm saying? Like it's an alter ego that you get to play out for some people. For some people it's really family. It's different. And that's what it is. You know what?

[0:48:00]

Scratch that. Ballroom is – it means different things to different people. Like some people are looking for family, some people are looking for a creative outlet, some people are looking for [laughs]...sex, some people are looking for sexy people. We have sex hour and you get to look at them and, oh my god. You know what I mean? Like some – it fills a void, whatever void that is.

JP: And for you it's about –

GM: Creative, artistic outlet. For me it's about creating art. Because some of those balls they challenge you, and then the categories, they get them really, really, really, like, specific, so you have to become whatever the category's calling for, and that is what I like. I enjoy characters, I enjoy actors and stuff like that, and performance art.

[0:49:00]

That's what it is to me, performance art. Because voguing and everything and making those outfits, like...it really is beautiful. People don't really acknowledge how beautiful it is, like I think that it's profound. We made this. Like we made a society, a way, a hidden thing that you can, like, be as crazy as you want to be for those few little minutes and get your 10's and everybody tells you, yes, you just did your thing, and you go home and then you're like, okay, society, let's face this. Because I know I can go to a ball and I can get it all out – really let it all out. That's like a chance – like sometimes you want to let it all out.

JP: Let it all out, like the stress of –

GM: Meaning, like, just let it all out. You want to vogue down, you want to be crazy, you want to dress fab, you do whatever, and that's what voguing is.

[0:50:00]

And that's what ballroom is. Sometimes you want to let it all out. Sometimes you need a place to be accepted. You need a place where everybody's not telling you you're wrong for being this or you're wrong for being that. Be that and vogue down, honey.

JP: And the I guess in ballroom too it's like be that and then you're recognize for being that, like you get the 10's.

GM: Yeah. And then you become – and then certain people get the fantasy mixed up. So you could be, like, really not like this in real life and then you get this fame and you get, like, this stuff and people start telling you you're this or you're that and then you embrace that part of your life and you go into real life with this – with the ballroom personality and, like, I've seen that too. I've seen girls down, down, down, and people start telling them, “Girl, you vogue down, we love you,” in a ballroom scene, and then they go into life like...I don't care about nothing because I vogue down at the ball.

JP: So it gives you, like, confidence.

[0:51:00]

GM: Yeah. Sometimes a false confidence.

JP: Right. Well, you said a few times we did this or like we built this. Tell me what that means. Who is we?

GM: We as black gay men, I feel like. We built this. It gives me pride. I feel like – because during so much division, so much, you know, cattiness, we really still have, like, made an empire really, because voguing has surpassed us. Not surpassed us, it like – voguing has went so far, farther than I guess the people who created it thought it would go. I know it has because it's like really – it's impactful. It's pop culture. It's become pop culture. You have to know what voguing is. You literally have to. Like, what? You haven't heard of Madonna Vogue? You haven't seen somebody hit a dip? Are you crazy?

[0:52:00]

Like, and then it gets integrated into everything.

JP: Well, that's another question I have for people, 'cause you were saying like we built this hidden thing, but now –

GM: It's not as hidden.

JP: – it's mainstream.

GM: And that's the problem for us because, like, people have kind of, like, franchised on ballroom culture and it hasn't been gay people.

JP: Tell me what you think about that.

GM: I feel like in society now, because we have become – because this secret society has been found, everybody has, like, took their interpretation and took their shit – and it doesn't need to be real because it's not even from a real person telling you, "Okay, this is what vogue is, this is what this is." So they franchise on what ballroom culture is and it's not even for the benefit of ballroom culture. It's for the benefit of them, selfish benefit. Like the people, they take our shit – stop appropriating gay culture.

[0:53:00]

That's how I feel. Because I feel like it doesn't belong to you, for you to take it and, like, use it for selfish gain.

JP: Where do you see that happening?

GM: Certain television. I feel like in ways – I don't want to say any names – but in ways people have taken – it's gotten so bad to, like, people have used words wrong on TV, and you're like at home, like in the ballroom scene, and you'll be like, "Bitch, that does not even mean that. Like, girl, you're using that word wrong," and then you cringe, you cringe, you cringe, because it's on mainstream – you can't just go out and call the people and be like, "Girl, that ain't right." It gets, like, kind of aggravating, 'cause like I said, we, as in us, as in the ballroom culture, as in the people who actually are voguing, actually are at the places, actually are making it, you know, still be a thing for you people to exploit – and not you, my darling.

[0:54:00]

But...it gets kind of aggravating because, like, you know, it's not coming from a genuine place.

JP: Has that had an impact on, like, ballroom scene, ball competitions?

GM: Yeah, because like, you know, it – when you come to the ball you want that attention, you want that acceptance, you want them to say, "Yes, yes, you did that," and just to potentially be a legend or potentially be an icon. An icon is like... That's what we all fighting for here. Everybody want to be known. Everybody want to be known for something. Everybody want to be stamped in pop culture, and this is out on pop culture.

[0:55:00]

We made our own pop culture – what do you know? – that influenced actual pop culture. You know what I mean? Like, it's very deep. People don't really see how deep it is but it's very deep. It's almost like – okay, so back to, like –

JP: Wait, wait, wait, but before you go there, it's very deep, tell me why. Like –

GM: It's very deep because it's very, very, very, like – it's us, like it's gay culture, raw, right there, no holds barred, like it's what it is. Like it's like the foundation of all gay culture right now almost.

JP: Is ball –

GM: Black gay culture is ballroom, and the things – and the influence from ballroom; voguing, runway, being real, being sexy.

[0:56:00]

Like all those things, people take them and, like, put it into life almost.

JP: What do you mean?

GM: Like those things, like you – in certain gay culture, you know, it's different stereotypes. You want to be sexy, you want to be artistic and fashionable, you want to be real, meaning real being like I'm this but I really, really, really look like that, and I want to be that and I'm gonna be that, so I'm real. Or you have, like, the want-to-be-in-charge types or you have, like, the not-want-to-be-seen types but I want to, like, dress you girls up types. It's so many different archetypes in the ballroom scene and stereotypes in gay culture that I feel like we are the foundation. Ballroom culture is the foundation of all that.

JP: And now it's, you know, not just influencing gay culture but –

GM: Mainstream fashion, makeup.

JP: – mainstream – yeah.

[0:57:00]

GM: Actual magazines.

JP: Well, so – okay, follow-up question. We're having this ball at the Peabody. That's, I would imagine, part of this kind of mainstreaming process. So how do you think about that? Like the –

GM: I think it's actually, like, great. I think this is, like...it's very cool and it's very refreshing that you give us...a kind of a commentary on it. Like you get outside of the story. You're not just coming here trying to do a Peabody thing. You know what I'm saying? Like, you're talking to us and stuff.

JP: But how – I mean how do you have a ball in the Peabody and still stay true to what ballroom is?

GM: Oh, easy. You can have a ball anywhere.

JP: Okay.

GM: You can literally have a ball in a basketball court. Literally they have. That's like one of the legendary things too. Back in the day – it's just – I don't know where that is. There's this place, it's like a basketball court. We can have a ball in a basketball court.

[0:58:00]

It'll still be real as long as you have the real people voguing and the real people who actually are in it doing it, not like some hired actors or not like some people that just –

JP: So it's the people, it's not the space.

GM: Yeah, it's the people, it's not the space. The space is kind of, like, fab actually. When the girls come in here and they see that library all the way high up like that, it's gonna give inspiration and it's inspired by books and history and...yes, very Edwardian, very gothic. It's the place – the place is really nice, so it's gonna be ovah, it's gonna be ovah.

JP: Yeah. Well, I was saying, like that – I just moved here six months ago. I walked into the library and I was like, oh...

GM: How can we do this?

JP: There has to be a performance here –

GM: Yes.

JP: – and like it's crying out – it's also like in the shape of a runway.

[0:59:00]

GM: I saw, like, the pictures of, like, where it could be, like what they do for weddings and stuff and, like, shows and whatever, concerts; that is gonna be epic. That's gonna be everything.

JP: Why?

GM: Because it's like – just the scale of it. I mean things on a grander scale – because this is a grand scale. Ballroom is a grand scale. So a grand scale at a grand venue... [Laughs] It's kind of grand. You know what I mean? Like –

JP: Tell me more about that. I think I know what you mean, but –

GM: Like, ballroom is a lot to see, like the looks is very over the top and the dance itself is very over the top and walking runway is very over the top, so this place is really nice so –

JP: And it's over the top.

GM: Yes, and it's, like, big. So it's deserving of ballroom. Ballroom is deserving of it because they're both big, you know? Like – so it's perfect for the thing, it's perfect for ballroom because it's already huge. *[Laughs]*

[1:00:00]

JP: Okay. Let me see. Have you taught other people – we have, like, 30 minutes left – have you taught other people how to dance or vogue?

GM: Yes and no. You pick up stuff. Everybody picks up stuff. So I know for me, 'cause I don't really vogue like a lot of people, I'm pretty sure the girls have picked up a thing or two, so I probably have taught somebody something.

JP: So is it usually that people learn by watching or is that just more you because you're –

GM: No, everybody learns by watching.

JP: Okay.

JP: It – but – yeah, everybody learns by – it's adaptation, like, for everyone. It's not like something I can be like have a book – how to vogue. No. No one teaches you anything. You pick it up. You adapt it. You kind of, like, soak it in.

[1:01:00]

You see – and then it's trial and error, too. Because if I come out and I'm doing something I think is right and I'm voguing and they chop me, and I'm like what did I do wrong? I come back again, I do the same thing and they chop me again, I'm doing something that's not something, like I need something else. So you have to look at people. Okay, this bitch is getting through; what is she doing that I'm not? So you look at her, first one who's got their 10's.

You're like, okay, okay, and you write it down a little bit and then you, you know, get that mental note, and you come back and then you try to do a little something like that but you put your own little twist on it, and then like, okay, we live for that. You get through. Yes, 10's. And that's, like, the process of it all. That's how everybody does it. Sorry. I don't care if nobody say – that's how they do it. Or you might see – now the kids – I'm so young 'cause I'm saying it's kids, but the people coming up, that – YouTube. YouTube, Facebook –

[0:00:00]

GM: ...social media. It's like making it easier to learn.

JP: And I guess too with any art form is has to change and evolve over time or it kind of dies, so I guess –

GM: No, it's been the same thing. It's been the same thing. It hasn't changed, it hasn't – it's been the same thing. That's what makes it so fascinating.

JP: But still, you put your own twist on it.

GM: Yeah. But it's just – it's about the same elements. It's really elements of vogue, too.

JP: What are those?

GM: Hands, catwalk – the catwalk is like you, you know, coming down – duckwalks, when you get down, when you bounce, and it's catwalk, duckwalk – *[Inaudible off-camera comments]* Hands, catwalk, duckwalk, spin, dip – spins and dips – and floor performance.

[0:01:00]

Floor performance is how you can, like, take over the whole floor but, like, not get up in a nice, over *[laughs]* – in such a way to the beat.

JP: So there are these elements and you can kind of improvise –

GM: Yeah.

JP: – but using those different elements.

GM: So it's how you do this element is – and some people have their favorite elements. So, like, I'm a hands person. I love hands, hands, hands, 'cause I'm good at it, but some people like floor, some people like this, so you will be – your vogue will be recognized by how much of this that you do more, so what you're good at. Like what element of it are you the best at, and then that'll be like your signature that you take on.

JP: So I kind of – I asked you, like, kind of how ballroom changed you but I'm also interested in how, you know, being involved in ballroom has –

[0:02:00]

Has that made you think differently about, like, gender or sexuality?

GM: It just – I don't really – I don't acknowledge it anymore. Like, you know, I think it should be a genderless society because, like, doing those things and opening up – opening yourself to certain ideas...changes you as a person because you're not exposed to it. When you call a ball and they're telling you to dress up as Mariah Carey or some shit and you come and you see yourself – some people – it's been some people who got into drag for the first time and they never got out. Seriously, and became women, because like, oh my god, I look amazing. [Laughs] Like, it opens you up. It really – it shows you the possibilities, the endless boundaries of fashion and art and all that stuff.

[0:03:00]

JP: I guess that's part of what you were saying about, like, it helps you to push beyond your boundaries.

GM: Yeah, yeah. It pushes the boundaries because, you know, I'm a man and society tells me I should dress like one. Well, how does a man dress or how does a woman dress? It plays on those lines. Like what is a woman? What is a man, actually? What is gender, actually? What is fashion, actually? You know, like it asks those questions. And if you've got a good person that's coordinating the ball they categories will give that. [Laughs]

JP: Wait, say it again.

GM: Like if you have a nice person that's coordinating the ball then they'll have good categories, so you get to kind of, like, explore those things.

JP: Explore, like, gender and –

GM: Yeah.

JP: Yeah, fashion and –

GM: Because some certain balls you go to it's just like, oh okay, it's very – it's not really calling for anything interesting, but certain balls you go to it's like, wow.

[0:04:00]

JP: So what makes a category interesting?

GM: How far you can go with it or how specific it is or how unspecific it is. It's different, it varies.

JP: Can you give us some examples of, like, categories you remember that have been, like, mind-blowing for you?

GM: Mind-blowing? _____ one year and you had to come as, like, arctic warriors, and the caliber of costumes that year was just like, whoa, like, whoa.

JP: Where was that?

GM: Brooklyn? New York. I remember one time here the categories were given, a sea creature that you never seen before, and I took – and I think – I tried to, like, redo like the angler fish on one of my friends. That was like one of my favorite categories I've ever seen. It was really good.

[0:05:00]

That ball was really nice. I don't remember what ball that was.

JP: Can you tell me more about the angler fish? Why did that appeal to you?

GM: I don't know. Because to see – I sketched it out. We talked about it, I sketched it out, we kind of, like, came up with the idea, and it really looked exactly like it. It came to complete life.

JP: Well, talk about, like, living in a fantasy, like you become –

GM: And that's kind of surreal, too. I guess that's kind of what makes the people crave it. It's a high almost. You crave that again. I want that again.

JP: You crave what?

GM: Like the – to bring something to life, where you sketch something and you see it come to life actually. Like, wow. That's a profound feeling.

JP: Now I want to have like a fish-related category here at the ball. I don't know. Well that's – okay, that's another question. Like when you see the Peabody Library, what categories do you imagine?

[0:06:00]

GM: Make it Victorian, like... Queen Elizabeth – and that's kind of trendy right now with the whole movies that's coming out about Ms. Elizabeth and Victoria. It should be Edwardian, it should be, like, gothic, like –

JP: That's what I was thinking, yeah.

GM: You know what I'm saying? It should be book-inspired. You know, da Vinci, Plato, Socrates, I want to see all of that. Like, Plato Symposium, bring it to life. You know, like I – that's what I'm looking to see, 'cause I want to see some next-level stuff, like a category where you have to make yourself into a cherub, like... I want to see some, like, New Age – like futuristic is where society is right now – futuristic takes on Edwardian things.

[0:07:00]

The Last Supper, Mona Lisa, the _____ Man; I want to see all of that shit, because it's a library. That's what – you just feel it.

JP: Like all the stories that are just around here.

GM: Yeah, you feel it, and then you see, like, Johns Hopkins outside and like the guy – you know, you just get that.

JP: What do you mean?

GM: Like you see – like it’s a picture of them on the side of the building and it’s like, okay. Yeah. You come in and you see, like, the ladies with their big bustles and things. I would love to see that. I would love to see some royal things going on.

JP: Okay.

GM: I think that should be like the theme of the ball. Royalty or, like, Victorian.

JP: Let’s see.

GM: That’s everything?

JP: I’m gonna see if we got everything.

[0:08:00]

Yeah, I guess – okay. Two more questions. Is there anything you want to add? Anything we didn’t cover that you think is important to record?

GM: About ballroom?

JP: Yeah, or your experiences in ballroom.

GM: I don’t know. Ballroom I guess has helped me just...be myself creative – like, creatively, and I think that’s what it is. I feel like if you’re looking for a way to express yourself and to explore parts of yourself that you don’t really want society to even see or you want to fine tune things, I feel like that’s the – ballroom is the place to get that. And I feel like I really want to speak out against people and things appropriating our culture.

[0:09:00]

I think that should be a – you know, that should be a thing that people look into, appropriating of gay culture.

JP: A criminal offense.

GM: Criminal.

JP: Last question. If you were interviewing folks in ballroom, what would you want to ask them, what should I be asking, what should I be recording?

GM: Ask them about the process, how do they do it, because everybody does it differently, and that's – the nuances in that would be interesting. Like how do you get ready for a ball or how – what does it mean you walk in a ball? What does it do for you, like what does it accomplish for you personally in your life? Some people look for – like I said, they look for things and they look for things through ballroom. You know, it could fill a space, like love, family, creative outlet, just to have a _____ and talk about people.
[Laughs]

[0:10:00]

All kinds of stuff. People look for these things and ballroom fills it right out. So I think you should ask them that, like what does ballroom do for you? Like what are you looking for to accomplish through ballroom?

JP: And not just at the competitions; what does it do in your life?

GM: Yeah, yeah. Like...more than just you win or you win the category, you get the money, you get the trophy. What does it do for you? That would be an interesting question.

JP: Can you answer that question real quick? I mean it sounds like you already answered that.

GM: What ballroom does for me? All of those things. Except for, like – yeah, that too. It gives me a sense of family, it gives me – what am I trying to get from ballroom, that was the question. A sense of – like to master who I am.

[0:11:00]

To master what I want to be artistically. That is what it does for me.

JP: It's like a proofing ground.

GM: Yeah.

JP: It's like a place to hone –

GM: Yeah, it's a practice space, if you will, for the bigger thing I'm trying to do, and it gives me that...reassurance that I'm doing it right. Like when I vogue down or something and I get my 10's,

they're like, yes, Grey's one of the best, and that gives me something.

JP: Okay, this is really the last question, sorry.

GM: *[Laughs]*

JP: What is the bigger thing you're trying to do?

GM: I want to take over the world with my fashion and with my visuals and be a performance artist of sorts. Not just be a recording artist, nothing like that – 'cause I can't sing – but performance artist and take fashion and pop culture to the next level.

JP: Cool. Thank you.

[End of Audio]