

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Icon Marquis Revlon Clanton

Interviewed by Joseph Plaster

March 20, 2019

Interviewee: Icon Marquis Revlon Clanton (MRC)

Interviewer: Joseph Plaster (JP)

Date: March 20, 2019

[0:00:00]

JP: Okay. So, starting out the oral history. My name is Joey Plaster. The date today is Wednesday, March 20, 2019. We're here at the George Peabody Library, and can you start out with just your name and your title and the house that you're part of?

MRC: Well, my name is Marquis Revlon Clanton, and I am in the Iconic House of Revlon, and I am an Icon in the ballroom scene.

JP: Okay. I'm gonna have an audio note. Don't try to get close to the microphone. I'll just kind of like –

MRC: Okay.

JP: Yeah. So, I'll follow you.

MRC: Okay.

JP: Yeah. So, let's see. Oh, and then can you also mention what categories you walk?

MRC: Okay. I walk Legendary Iconic Performance between Voguing Fem. I walk Hand Performance, Runway, Performance as a House. Those are the categories I walk, but I am known for Vogue Fem.

JP: Okay. Those are a lot of categories. Do most people walk that many categories, or are you unusual?

MRC: Well, Vogue Fem is one of my main categories. Runway – I play with Runway here and there. Performance as a House and Runway as a House is sometimes when it calls for a group members from your house, a couple members from your house to come together as a team. So that's sometimes, but that's not really all the time.

JP: Okay.

MRC: Once in a blue moon.

JP: Okay, and I'm gonna ask you to introduce yourself one more time, just your name, title, what house you're a part of, you know?

MRC: My name is Marquis Revlon. I am from the Iconic House of Revlon. I am a Legendary Icon.

[0:02:00]

JP: Explain what that means because I've had people introduce themselves as Legends and then people introduce themselves as Icons. Is Legendary and Icon different?

MRC: Well, so the way ballroom is set up it's either you're a Star – that's the beginning. Then you become a Statement. Then from a Statement, you become Up and Coming. Then after Up and Coming, you become Legend, Legendary. After Legend and Legendary, then you go to Icon status.

JP: Okay.

MRC: Yeah.

JP: So, you're now an Icon?

MRC: Yes, I'm now an Icon.

JP: Oh, so that was recently?

MRC: I've been an Icon for at least about three years now.

JP: Okay. So, that means that you have been part of the scene for more than 20 years or –

MRC: I've been part of the scene for almost 20 years. I have been working consistently, I have been working, winning. I have been doing stuff for my community. I have been teaching. I have been giving back. I've been uplifting the youth. I've been a public figure. So, I've been doing a lot more than just on the floor.

[0:03:00]

JP: Okay, I definitely want to talk about that as part of the interview. So, I'm gonna go more or less kind of chronologically. So, can you talk about – give a little bit of background; when you were born, where you were born, what your family was like?

MRC: Okay. I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, on the East side of Baltimore in the John Hopkins area. That's where I was

born. My mother is still living. My father passed away. My family, I'm a real close-knit family. So, my grandmother and my grandfather installed in my family for everybody to be together, always together. So, we do holidays. We always do stuff together. We do a family trip every year where we go out the country and stuff. I'm just with my family all the time. If I'm not home, I'm with my family.

JP: Okay. Can you describe, I guess, your neighborhood growing up, what your neighbors were like? How would you describe the neighborhood that you grew up in?

MRC: Well, I grew up in the projects. So, my neighborhood was super lit. *[Laughs]* I love my neighbors. I love my friends. It was kind of like my family. You know when you growin' up in sub-culture, the project area, your neighbors become your brothers, your sisters, your cousins and stuff like that, even though they're not your birth cousins, but y'all just grew up from babies to adults together. So, you just like, "Oh, that's fam." Yeah, so.

JP: Are you in the same neighborhood now, or have you moved?

MRC: I'm in the same area, but – yeah, I'm in the same area, but not the same exact location, but I'm in the same area.

JP: Okay, and so growing up, what did you feel – what were your feelings about Baltimore? What were your feelings about your neighborhood?

[0:05:00]

MRC: One thing about Baltimore that I kind of – my feelings about it was always that people say everything was like a crap. Like, it was either nobody wanted to see the next one do good. Everybody want to tear each other down, and I was the one – was one of the ones that felt like we all are talented here. We all can get along. If we uplift each other and motivate each other more, we can get further than trying to pull each other down.

JP: What do you think it was about your life that made you think that way as opposed to another way? What were your influences, I guess?

MRC: Oh, I think from every day after school I used to go to the after-school program at Ralph. J. Young Rec, and that's where I learned dancin' and stuff like that at, because I used to always go there after school and do activities, do my homework, learn different

type of dances, interact with other people. Going there every day after school, it just showed me a better outlook on life, and then I had people around me that motivate me to be a better person in life.

JP: What kind of people?

MRC: I would always say the lady, Mrs. Joanne, because she was one of the ones that actually showed me that I'm more than just my neighborhood.

JP: Was she a teacher or –

MRC: She was one of my dance teachers.

JP: Okay.

MRC: Yes, because I wasn't really – I'm not a trained dancer, but I used to go to the after-school program, and I would learn different stuff from her.

JP: How old were you when you started?

MRC: I had to have been in elementary school. I started going to the rec center in elementary school.

JP: Okay, so you've been dancin' since you were –

MRC: Yeah, since I was young. I actually – my mother told me that I came out of her dancing. *[Laughs]* My mother said I came out the womb dancin'. So, I can always remember that I always danced. I always brought people together in my neighborhood, and we would come together, and I would teach everybody routines. Before I know it, I had everybody in the neighborhood dancin'. All I did was dance. When people think of me, when people mention me, the first thing they say, "Oh, I know Marquis, the one that be dancin'." *[Laughs]* So, I always dance.

JP: What were some of your other influences growing up? I don't know, schools or churches or family members or, I don't know, books that you read or whatever?

MRC: I always liked fashion, so I always had magazines. I always loved magazines. I always love – I love everything about fashion. So, I had magazines. I always watched shows that was about dancing or

fashion shows and stuff like that, and I loved Beyonce. So, that's one of my big inspirations.

JP: Okay, and so dance was really at the center of your identity from a really early age, and it sounds like it was also a way for you to interact with other people and bring people together in community?

MRC: Mm-hmm, and that was always my happy space.

JP: Tell me about that.

[0:08:00]

MRC: When I always – you know how sometimes when life can have so much up and downs, and it could be so much going on, but you always gotta find something that makes you happy within life, that makes you just be able to get through day to day? Dancing was one of those things that just helped me get through day to day.

JP: Can you remember when you were in elementary school and going to this rec center and learning how to dance, how that felt to you?

MRC: At first, it felt different because all of the boys from the neighborhood wasn't really dancing. It was more of the girls. So, I had to be comfortable with myself to feel that I didn't care what nobody say. This is what I like to do. This is what I enjoy doing, and if you like me, then just respect what I like to do. So, it went from there, but then it just was what I just love to do, actually. I don't know. I get nervous. I get quiet sometimes when I think about it. Because it just – ever since I could just think about dancing, I just know that's all I was doing. Even when it came down to the neighborhood, any time I had free time, I was dancin', and I was dancin' in school plays, school competitions, talent shows, yeah.

JP: So, when – maybe fast forward a few years. Do you remember the first time you heard about ballroom?

MRC: Yes, I was in the marching band. I was in New Edition marching band, and that was a community marching band. So, a lot of people that was in the community from different areas of Baltimore was in this marching band. This was the fabulous marching band that was out.

JP: Oh, really?

MRC: I was in middle school about – my mother used to always take me to the parades, and then I was in middle school when I got in the marching band. I was maybe like 14 or 15. In between 13, 14, and 15 when I joined the marching band. It was just so much fun, and as I got older within the band, I started come more into my sexuality. I also started to be open more of meeting more people that was in the lifestyle. Then from there, one day they took me to [Club] Bunns, and when they took me to Bunns –

JP: Who was “they”?

MRC: It was my friend Snoopy and Jivad, Peanut, Diva, Brown-haired Tony. It was all Revlons. They was all Revlons.

JP: Were they all in the marching band?

MRC: Yes, they was all in the marching band, yeah, and they was all Revlons. So, that was another reason how I ended up being a Revlon because I knew about the ballroom scene through them. So, when they – I was trying to be grown when I should have been going home and getting ready for school, but they wanted to go to [Club] Bunns. This was on a Thursday night. So, I went out. Still had to get up Friday morning and go to school because my mother or my grandmother wasn’t having it, but I went out, and then I see – and I just was so amazed when I seen voguing. I was just like – you know how a kid in a candy store, you just in a daze like...
[Laughs] I was in a daze in the same voguing. I just was like, “Oh, I wanna learn that,” and I just kept watching it and watching it, and then playin’ around with it, playin’ around with it. Then over time, I got better and better.

JP: Okay, so take me back to that first night at Bunns, first time you saw vogue. Why were you amazed? Why did it kind of call to you? Why was it different than other dance forms?

MRC: For one, I loved the energy of it. I loved the energy. I loved the excitement. I loved how the beat and the commentators and everything was all cohesive together. So that what made it so different to me than just actually hearing songs and dancin’ to song. It was more of like a live show when it came to watchin’ the vogue because you had the song, but then you also had somebody on the mic that was chantin’ that made it feel alive.

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Then you –

JP: So the whole production?

MRC: Yeah, the whole production, and then you had the crowd that was interactin' with it and stuff like that. So, I just felt like it was Hollywood. It was just like, "Wow, they're on their own red carpet." *[Laughs]* Everybody that they was callin' was on their own individual red carpet. So, that just was one of the things that just made me fascinated with it. I just liked – I was so young when I first learned it because I was so rusty.

It was just like – I ain't really know nothin' about it. I was really nervous. I'd never – I told myself I wasn't gonna walk a ball because I was so nervous. But I always would practice to get my moves together, and then one day I just was like, "Just go for it," and I had fun with it. Then the rest is history.

JP: Okay, so I'm gonna – you gave me a lot there, but I'm gonna take you back again to that first night at Bunns.

MRC: Mm-hmm.

JP: So, you liked it because it was participatory, and there was a production.

[0:13:00]

But I remember at your Peabody Workshop, one of the things you said was that you could kind of be more feminine. You could be more flamboyant.

MRC: Yeah, you could be – one thing that I like about voguing is you could be whatever you want to be because within the outfits and within the different categories and the different personality – and you could be yourself. So, with voguing, I just felt like you could be free.

JP: Can you talk a little bit about how voguing allows you to kind of play with gender too? Do you think it's true, first of all?

MRC: Well, voguing, the only reason why I'm a voguing fem is because voguing fem is voguing femininity. So, you kind of have to vogue in like a woman. So, when I first started voguing, we wasn't inspired by butch queens that vogue. We was more inspired by fem queens and transgender women. We watched them vogue - because

it was voguing fem. So, if you wanted to vogue, you had to find some type of inspiration, and most of the inspiration came from the transgender girls.

JP: Can you tell me why that appealed to you, just personally, that kind of style of flamboyant or kind of effeminate dance?

MRC: Probably because when I seen – when I first seen voguing, I seen the old way first, and then I seen voguing fem, and then when I had to pick out which to – and I also seen new way. So, I knew I wasn't really – I didn't have a lot of stretch, and then old way was a little bit more structure. So, voguing fem was just more of relaxed and it was just more of feeling emotion stuff, and I just felt like I could connect with vogue fem more than the other styles of vogue.

JP: Okay, and I'm just gonna ask another question about your friends who brought you. So, you went into this marching band.

MRC: Mm-hmm.

JP: You met all of these people there.

MRC: Yes.

JP: So, a lot of them were gay, right?

MRC: Mm-hmm.

JP: Then do you remember what they told you about ballroom before you actually went to Bunns?

MRC: Well, it more of like big brother, big sisters, I'm the little brother, stuff like that. It was more of they were showing me the ropes of the scene. They were showing me the ropes of the lifestyle. They were showing you the dos and the don'ts, kind of like a family figure to help guide you. So, that's what made me more comfortable with being a Revlon. That's what made me more comfortable with coming ballroom and more comfortable with being myself because I was around people that were showing me the way.

JP: Can you say a little bit more about what's the connection between – you mentioned you were exploring your sexuality and telling more people that you were gay and coming into ballroom. Did those both kind of –

MRC: That's the funny thing. I never really told people I was gay.

JP: Okay.

[0:16:00]

MRC: It was more of see what you see, judge what you judge, label what you label. I was just being myself.

JP: But what about the Revlons that took you to Bunns?

MRC: It was the same way. It was the same thing. I didn't really actually come out to nobody and be like, "I'm gay." It was more like I'm just being myself, and if this is what I like, you just have to respect it.

JP: Did that change at some point, or is that kind of how you approach it now as well?

MRC: That's kind of how I approach it as well now.

JP: Okay.

MRC: That's actually how I actually approach it with my mother when that conversation came like, "Are you gay?" and stuff like that. That's exactly how I approached that conversation as well.

JP: Just like how?

MRC: I'm just Marquis. Imma be me, and just like me for me *[laughs]* and accept me for me, whatever comes with me.

JP: But I would also imagine that ballroom is a really accepting place for all different kind of genders and sexualities.

MRC: Yes, mm-hmm.

JP: Okay, okay, so and tell me what year was it that you went to that first Bunns?

MRC: It had to be like 1998.

JP: Okay.

MRC: Because my first ball was 1999, and it was in New York City.

JP: Okay, so tell me, take me to your first ball. How did you prepare for that first ball? Had you already joined Revlon at that point?

MRC: Yes, I was – my first ball I was comin’ out as a Revlon, and I was so nervous at my first ball that I started with as a house category because I was kind of –

JP: What’s that mean?

MRC: The house was with multiple people doing the same routine but everybody lookin’ like one person. So, I was walking as a house category. That’s kind of because I was so new, so fresh, and so scared.

So that was kind of like my icebreaker. I felt like I needed the training wheels on a little bit, like, okay, I’m on the runway, but I’m with y’all for my comfort zone, just to get me through there. Once I got through there, after that, it was, “Okay, I don’t need y’all to take me through. I’m pushin’ through myself.” *[Laughs]* So that’s how that went.

JP: Okay. I’m gonna jump back just a little bit. Tell me how you joined the house of Revlon. What did that actually look like? Did you have to audition?

MRC: So, how I joined the house, I had to go – even though I was cool with everyone, some of the ones that was members of the house, it still was other leaders and stuff that I didn’t know. So, I had to go to a house meeting. I had to fill out a little registration form, stuff like that, your name, your age, and all that stuff just so they can know a little bit about me. I had to also say what I was coming to the house for, what category did I want to walk and stuff like that. Then after I told them all of that, I remember I had to showcase in front of everybody. It was in the house, like maybe like an apartment. So, the size of this room we in now, this is about the room as the meeting room. So, I had to showcase what I wanted to come to the house for in front of all these people that was already looking at me like, “Who is this child? What this child wanna come to this house for?” Some smiled because they already knew me, but overall, I thought I was a fish in a fish tank.

JP: How old were you?

MRC: I was 17, 18 because I was in my last year of high school.

JP: Okay.

MRC: Yeah.

JP: What did it feel like to – I mean, I imagine you had to go vogue fem for them?

MRC: I did vogue fem and I did runway because they're kind of like – it was more of, "We wanted you to walk one category, but we wanted you to be open to do other stuff. We don't want you to be just in one box." So, I was comin' for runway, and then I played with voguing, so then I stopped.

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But I really – my first category was runway because I didn't know nothin' about voguing, and then I learned about voguing. So, I kind of did both of them at the meeting, and they made me go out the room. So, I think I was like in the kitchen or something so they can deliberate. [*Laughs*] I remember I was in the kitchen. It was a couple of us, and we were just in there, and then I was like, "I wonder did I get voted in?" I was like, "I wonder did I get voted in." I'm just like – we were just all talking with each other because we felt like we didn't connect with each other because we wasn't in the house. We was just all coming to try out.

So, even though we didn't know each other, we still felt like we cold conversate because we was here for the same thing. So, it was just – it was nerve-wrackin'. It was kind of like going on a job interview or somethin' like that. It was just nerve-wrackin'. And I was told that I was a part of the house.

JP: So, I guess for a house, they were looking for people who are gonna do well at the balls, who are gonna win prizes?

MRC: It's not all about winning. It's about this individual that's going to represent the house in the best light because I always tell people, if you could take a ten, be able to take a job. If you could take a win, be able to take a loss. It was just about just the family aspect about it, and also just showing that this is the organization that you wanted to be a part of because it was so many other houses. So, you have that when people come. Loyalty is one of the things. So, you have to make sure people genuinely want to be there.

I guess because I already had friends that was already in the house, they wanted to make sure that I wanted to be there because I

genuinely wanted to be there and not because I was only comin' because of my friends that invited me. Even though when I got there, that was the reason why I was there, but when I got there, I genuinely – once I seen what was going on, I genuinely wanted to be there.

JP: Can you talk a little bit more about the family aspect of houses? What do you mean by that?

MRC: Being the family aspect because I feel like all of them that brought me to the house was the ones that introduced me to the scene, was the ones that kind of got me through the scene. So they became my family outside of my family, certain stuff that I couldn't have a conversation with my mother or my father about, the lifestyle I could have with my Revlon family.

JP: When you say the lifestyle?

MRC: The lifestyle just being gay or dealing with certain stereotypes in life or dealing with certain stereotypes within the ballroom scene within the culture, just in the lifestyle period. I went to my house members for their education and for their guidance and stuff like that.

JP: Yeah. So, it is kind of similar to before you were talking about in the projects, all of your neighbors become kind of your family? Is it kind of similar in ballroom?

MRC: Mm-hmm, yeah. It's kind of similar in ballroom.

JP: Okay.

MRC: Then it's like now in the ballroom it's so big and with social media, everybody kind of know each other, and then when you in ballroom for so long, you kind of create friends with other cities and other states and other countries that you never probably would have met if it wasn't for ballroom.

JP: Okay.

MRC: So they also became family and friends.

JP: Like and extended –

MRC: Extended family and friends, mm-hmm.

- JP:* Yeah? Did you take on a mother or father as part of the house?
- MRC:* Yes. I had a father position for about two or three years.
- JP:* You were a father?
- MRC:* Yeah, I was a Baltimore father.
- JP:* But when you were first coming into the scene, did you have a father or mother?
- MRC:* Oh yes, I have a – I would say Tanika [sp?] is my gay mother and Cody [sp?] and Vernon [sp?] is my gay fathers.
- JP:* Okay, and is that different from ballroom fathers, or is it the same thing?
- MRC:* There was my ballroom father and my gay parents. So, it was all together.
- JP:* Okay. Let's see, and tell me just a little bit more about what appealed to you about ballroom? I guess, the houses, the performances, the dance – what appealed to you about the whole culture and what kept you coming back?
- MRC:* It was, well, everybody say, we all say it's like gay Hollywood. It's our version of Hollywood, the glitz, the glamor, the sex, drugs, rock and roll, the royalty of it, the fun of it. It just is our own Hollywood.
- JP:* Yeah, so that's – well, I'll get to this later, but that's part of what I thought was interesting about the Peabody Library when I first walked in is just the opulence.
- MRC:* Mm-hmm, the royalty of it, the glamor of it, mm-hmm.
- JP:* Royalty, yeah. Let's see. When you joined the House of Revlon, did you learn anything about its history?
- MRC:* Yes, I learned, as I got in it, and as I've been going to meetings and going to different retreats and stuff, I learned about the founders, how the house started, the sister houses, some of the members that was before meeting that created the path for me and my generation and so on and so on. So, yeah, I learned a lot of stuff.

JP: What did you take away from that? Well, I guess I'm curious, how did the House of Revlon start?

MRC: The House of Revlon started through Tony Revlon, and at that point, I guess he was an Ebony. He was the House of Ebony, and he wanted to branch of and start his own house and that's how Revlon became.

JP: Did it start here in Baltimore, or in New York?

MRC: In New York City.

JP: In New York?

MRC: Then from New York, he had moved to Baltimore. So, as he moved to Baltimore, he created a chapter here, and then so as you go to different cities and stuff, you create a chapter. Like, I was Baltimore father, and I created a chapter here. We won House of the Year. We won Comeback House, a lot of awards and stuff. Then I kind of outgrew the chapter, and I became more of – more vocal to the whole house. I also started having the opportunity to go overseas. So then I started being more global. So then I started created chapters and putting members in the house in different countries.

JP: So, you would bring people in in different countries?

MRC: Yeah. At first when I was going, I was just more of teaching. I was teaching the stuff, but then some of the students and some of the people that I was teaching, I started bonding with. Then you start bonding with people, and then you start becoming more cool and just not your students, but they start becoming a family. Then I just thought that they can become my kids, and then from my kids, they became my house kids. *[Laughs]* So that's how that went. They became my house kids and stuff.

[0:27 :00]

So, I started a scene in Paris, and I had started by ballrooms, my chapter in Paris, and then from Paris, we went from there to London to Amsterdam to Finland, to Russia, to – I'm just a little blank because we in every country now. *[Laughs]*

JP: So, it's global?

MRC: So, at this point, it's a global family, yeah. At this point, we in every country.

JP: So, you would go over there to maybe give a dance workshop or something, and you would meet people. They would become your children, and then you would bring them into the house?

MRC: Mm-hmm, yes, yeah.

JP: Okay, and so when did you –

MRC: But the purpose of going wasn't really to go and recruit. It was basically to go and spread the history of ballroom and to spread the knowledge from my point of view and also teach the art of vogue. But in the process, I was connecting with people.

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I was bonding with people, and then they started saying, "Oh, I want you to be my gay father. I want you to be my parent," and stuff like that. Well, I just felt like the connection was there, and then it still always wasn't about just comin' to the house, but then eventually as time went on, I felt like they was – some of those them was a perfect fit for the house.

JP: So, tell me how was it that you started doing these international trips and international dance workshops?

MRC: Well, my first international trip was in Paris. That was like 2012. That was my first trip, and I met Fred at the Eubie Blake Center. He was doing some work there at the Eubie Blake Center, and that's where sometimes we would just go, and I would have my vogue classes. So, we would just practice and stuff. We're there. I met him, and we was just voguing, and he was takin' pictures as we was voguing. Then some of the pictures of his work got picked up at the museum, that MacDowell in Paris.

[0:29:00]

JP: Mm-hmm.

MRC: Then I was able to go and showcase vogue class at MacDowell. I was also staying there. I was also – my picture and everything was in the museum and stuff at MacDowell. From there, then my second trip that I can think of was Russia. That was my second trip, and then with Russia, it was more of one of my voguing

brothers had an opportunity to bring others, but we had to submit our video, and we had to submit our pictures and stuff like that.

Then they would pick which one of us they wanted, and I also – and I had got picked. So, from there, it just from those two countries, then it just been from country to country to country to country to country and country, country, country. *[Laughs]*

JP: And now the Peabody.

MRC: Yeah, and now the Peabody.

JP: Okay. So you mentioned that when you do workshops, you talk about the history of ballroom. Can you tell me – pretend this is a dance workshop or whatever – what would you highlight about the history?

MRC: One thing when I – because I know that everybody is so fascinated with voguing, and sometimes they just – some people are just more fascinated with the dip. They keep saying a death drop. Not a death drop. It's called a dip, but a lot of people are fascinated with that, and then they see it and then they want to learn it. Again, we teach it, but we want you to know what you're doing, why you're doing it so you can understand the dance style, you can understand the art form.

So, when I teach classes and stuff, I try to explain it, and I try to break it down to each other, to the students, so they understand a little history behind the movements. So when you understand a little history behind the movements, you can try to put more into the movements because you're trying to understand what it is you're doing.

[0:31:00]

JP: Okay, so break it down for me. Pretend that I'm one of your dance students. How would you introduce that history to me?

MRC: I would explain voguing. I would let you know that voguing is all five elements. I would break down the elements, with hand performance, with catwalks, with duckwalks, with spins, with dips, floor performance. Now, you add extra elements now because you gotta have personality. You gotta have character. You gotta be originality within your performance, energy.

I also would explain to you where it comes from. It comes from New York City. From my point, I know it came in the late '80s, maybe '70s. It started off with poses in the magazine. You know how models just pose? It went from pose.

JP: Wait, say it again?

MRC: You know models in the magazines, when they pose, it started with just poses first, and then the poses created movement and create flow, and then from there, it created the form.

JP: Okay.

[0:32:00]

MRC: Because it's a freestyle dance but it's with a lot of passion, a lot of emotions. It's a story behind it.

JP: Yeah. So when I went to that first dance workshop, you said that vogue was telling a story with your body.

MRC: Yeah, I do believe so because it's – you know sometimes when you teach – when you learn other dances, it's more of routines. This is this kind of dance. This is that kind of dance. Well, voguing is elements, but when it's put into elements together, it's more of a feelin'. So, when you voguing, you have to find some type of feeling. You have to connect with some type of emotion, and that creates your story, whether it is a happy place, whether it's pain, whether it's insecurity, whether it's aggression. Whatever it is, you have to just find that emotion, that feeling, and then put that in your vogue, and that will tell your story.

JP: Mm-hmm. So, when you're voguing, what are the stories you're telling? I'm curious.

MRC: My most of the time depends on what the category it is – what is the category calling for, what is I'm wearing, and I try to create a whole look. So, if it's all black, and I come like a black assassin, I wanna feel more of like I'm assassinating. I wanna feel more of like a cat woman. I wanna feel – I wanna embody so you can get the whole story, and then that can create your story and your vogue. That can create your movements. That can create some of the dance styles that you wanna do within your voguing.

JP: So, you're telling – I mean, the story is based on the category sometimes. You tell different stories?

MRC: Yeah. Mine is because I think all the way through. I think from my look as far as my outfit, what I'm wearing. Then I think those create my movements and those create my story.

JP: Okay, so go back again, and you were talking about the history of vogue, and you said that it started with the magazines. What do you mean by that? Tell me just a little bit more.

MRC: What I was saying is you know how when a model is doing a photo shoot, and the camera and the photographer saying "pose." So you pose, then you pose, and then you pose. But if you go pose, move, move, move, pose, move, move, move, then your pose become flowin'. It become movements, and then those be how you create your vogue story.

JP: Okay, and it's all kind of based on the magazines that you said you loved as a kid?

MRC: Well, that's always what I say, yeah, because I always seen the poses and then you see stuff that – you see poses that's like not the norm poses, outside of the box. You might see the body bend a certain type of way, kind of mixing dancing. If you mix dancing and a model together – you're not just gonna have a model just sitting there. You're gonna have a lot of movement within your body. So, it's kind of like mixing a model and a dancer together and creating the fabulous voguer.

JP: So, tell me, I'm trying to understand it because I'm not a dancer. How does it feel to you? I mean, when you're in that moment, when you're telling that story with your body, how does it feel? What does it do for you?

MRC: It's kind of like you clicked out, like you click out. Like when it comes to a ballroom battle, it's kind of like you check out. Like you know everything what's going on around you. You know the people are there, but you just check out to some type of fantasy world where it just all about you, and it is your story, your video, your movie, your life, and everybody just at the ball is just there to witness it.

JP: And I guess appreciate it.

MRC: And appreciate it, and well, if they don't like it, just respect it.
[Laughs]

[0:36:00]

JP: Let's see –

MRC: Because it take nerves and it take courage to walk a ball.

JP: I bet it does.

MRC: It does, and it take thick skin to be in ballroom.

JP: Yeah? Because if people don't like the way you're walking, they're not gonna sugarcoat it.

MRC: It's super shady. It's super shady, and they say ballrooms started off as shady, but I'm one of the ones that is kind of the nicer ones in the scenes, one of the nice one in the scene. I'm one of the humble one in the scene. So, I can deal with the shade, but me, I just leave it on the floor. I can't really deal with off the floor shade, social media shade because I'm not really a confrontational person. I want everybody to get along.

JP: Great.

MRC: I wanna find the beauty in everything. I wanna find the balance, and probably because I'm a Libra. I want everything to be even balanced.

JP: Have you always been like that?

MRC: Always been like that, mm-hmm.

JP: Okay. No, I mean, it's unusual because it does seem like shade is a big part of the ballroom scene?

MRC: It is, but sometimes that doesn't make the situation better. It kind of hurts it. Even though it's good to have the shade on the floor, that's like I can be battling one of my best friends, and I know at the end of the day, it's only gonna be one of us. So, I might turn my shade on for the battle, for that couple 30 seconds, but after that, I turn that back off because, at the end of the day, this is my friend. I'm not gonna let because I'm in this house and my friend is in that house – I'm not gonna let our house members make us not get along because were walkin' the same category.

JP: It seems also you were saying that you're not necessarily there for the win. You're there for the community as a whole.

MRC: That too, but you enjoyed the win, but you have to be humble enough to understand that you're not always going to win. So, if you're humble enough to know that you're not always going to win – when you win, you're okay with a win. When you lose, you are okay with that too because at the end of the day, you know you was being yourself. You was being your authentic genuine self.

JP: Tell me about Baltimore. What is specific about ballroom in Baltimore versus ballroom in other cities.

MRC: I'd say ballroom and Baltimore is something that's special to me and a lot of us that are from Baltimore because this is where we live at. This is our home. This is our baby. This is something that we can say we are a part of. Then also when I travel to other cities and other countries and stuff, the first question I always get asked is where you're from. So even if – wherever I go, I'm always representing where I come from.

JP: Okay, let's see. Okay, this is kind of a vague question, but can you tell me a little bit more about what ballroom just means to you? I think when we first started the interview, you were talking about – as a member of ballroom, you're interested in giving back to the community, education, all of that. Can you explain a little bit more about that?

MRC: One of the reasons why I love to teach, and I love to give my insight to other people about ballroom is because I know so many people are infatuated with it. I know so many people want to be a part of it. So, I try to give them the good part of it, also tell them the bad part about it, and also just want them to know don't make it your life. Keep it like an extracurricular activity. Know when the lights come on, know when they go off. It's also somewhat fantasy, so don't get so caught up in it. Don't make it all your life. Make it a part of your life but still have balance with reality.

JP: Hmm. Why do you think people get caught up in the fantasy?

MRC: Because it's like a drug. It's like a drug. It's like once you get a taste of it, you just want more of it. You want more of it, and then it's a ball almost every weekend. There's a ball almost everywhere around the world. Then you realize you have house members everywhere around the world. So then it's kind of like, okay, you want to be in the mix. You want to be everywhere with this.

You want to be there so much you forget about what matter. You forget about that you still have to go to school. You still have to get an education. You still have to go to work. You still have to provide. You still have bills. You still have responsibilities. You still have life. You still have to go see your doctor. You still have to go worry about your health and all those things.

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So you still have to have a balance to understand that ballroom is ballroom and reality is reality, and know when to turn it on and when to turn it off.

JP: Mm-hmm, yeah, I guess that's true. I guess, so through ballroom, you're really creating this alternate world with its own rules and it's own everything, and you can kind of enter that as you want to, but some people maybe get kind of sucked into it and that becomes their reality.

MRC: Yeah, because sometimes you take on leadership roles and you take on positions and stuff like that. Those positions require a lot of time on individuals and sometimes it's really hard to balance it because it's like you want to balance it, but you realize that it's like – you realize ballroom is almost majority of your day, majority of your life because even when you want to take a break from it, it's somebody that have a question. It's somebody that might feel lost in it. It's somebody that you might connect with that you might can take a break for yourself. But then you realize you got to go some type of way back to ballroom because somebody else in ballroom might need you, or you might have a child that is new to ballroom that might need you, even when you want to be like, "Okay, I'm focusing on this right now." You know what I'm saying, just so you never can get rid of it, but you just always have to find that even balance.

JP: Okay. Let's see. What do you think – these are kind of wrap-up questions just to –

MRC: Mm-hmm, that's cool.

JP: – bring out the significance of ballroom. What do you think you were kind of looking for in ballroom when you first started, and do you feel like you found that?

MRC: I think when I – yeah, I do think I found it. I think when I first joined ballroom, the one thing that I really, really learned from ballroom is a thick skin, having a thick skin.

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Be able to be judged. So, when you get into reality and you go to certain stuff, you don't take it so serious because it's just like going to a ball. You're being judged.

JP: What would be an example of that?

MRC: If I go to a job interview, and they say, "Thank you for coming for the job, but the job is just not for you." Then if I can think about it as in the ballroom term, I'll be like, "That was basically one job." You know what I'm saying? But I have a thick skin, and I'm confident now to not give up, like, okay, you might have told me no, but I can go down the street or across the street, and they might say yes. So, it really helped me with confidence, a lot of confidence.

JP: When you were that first night at Bunns or when you walked your first ball, what were you looking for through ballroom? What kind of void were you hoping to fill, or what were you hoping to explore?

MRC: I just was always looking at it to have fun. That's why, as a lot of accomplishments that I've received within ballroom for my Legendary status or my Icon status with winning of the year, with winning trophies, with winning a large amount of money and stuff like that, I always had fun at the end of the day. I always remain humble in all the situations, and I just let God just know what's for me is for me.

JP: Hmm, okay. How do you think you've changed through ballroom, or have you, as a person?

MRC: I really don't think I have changed because I always remain my same self because I feel like your name is all you have, and first impression is your best impression. So, I always made sure that when a person meet me, they would get the same Marquis that they might of heard about. They would get the same Marquis that they might have seen. They would get the same Marquis they might have seen an interview about me or something. I try to always be the same person.

JP: Mm-hmm.

MRC: But I notice now as I'm getting older and also as I'm starting to be more of a voice for the community and stuff, I see that I'm starting to be a lot more vocal with my opinions about some stuff. I still don't be all the way vocal, but I feel like I'm starting to open my mouth a little more because a lot I was just going to balls and just go about my business. I was never really – never really had opinion about certain stuff because I just knew – I knew what it was. So, I just took the good with the bad, and just – I just knew what I should be around and what I shouldn't be around. Most of the time what I seen, it was bad, I would make sure I'm not around that because that wasn't the type of person that's me.

But as I get older in certain stuff, and then I see certain topics or I see certain conversations, and oh, I see certain things, It try to give my opinion about it, or I try to give it from my standpoint because I've been in it. I lived it, I know about it.

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So, I try to give it from that, but I don't try to come off as like I'm better than somebody. I don't try to come off as like I'm better because somebody else is shiny now. I just realize I have to work really hard. I had to go from making a whole bunch of nos turn into yeses. And that's within ballroom which – a lot of people think that when you come into ballroom, you just gonna instantly win. You gonna instantly get life. You gonna instantly get fame. No, it's a process.

You might start off as the weakest link, and then you end up being the plug, you know? So, it's a process, and when I say plug is basically the weakest link, it's basically saying nobody likes you. Then the plug is basically saying, "Oh, now everybody likes you and want to be around you."

JP: Okay, okay.

MRC: So that's basically what I was saying.

JP: Wait, the plug, is that ballroom?

MRC: The plug. No, plug is not really a ballroom term. That's just a regular term.

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Like, say for instance, if somebody come to you – say, for instance, I go to the security and I have to go through security to get in, but if I come to you, you push me past security. That’s basically saying you’re the plug. You’re the connect.

JP: Okay.

MRC: Yeah, so that’s what a plug is.

JP: You mentioned working hard. I imagine you must have worked really hard to get to where you are right now.

MRC: Yeah, but I was working hard but at the same time, I was also having fun. So when those moments came, they was more shock values. Like I wasn’t like, “Okay, they gonna call me Legendary January 1st, so let me get ready. Let me make sure when January 1st come, I’m ready.” Mine’s didn’t even know. I might have thought it was January 1st, but it end up being December 31st. You feel what I’m saying? It was more of shock values when certain stuff happen and because I was more of having fun and just walking, and I just was so competitive that I just was – this is what I wanted to do. I wasn’t thinking about, “Okay, I’m about to be a Legend. I’m about to an Icon, or they about to call me up for LSS.” I just was having fun, and all of that stuff came with it. So when it actually, those things was happenin’, I was appreciatin’ those things.

JP: Mm-hmm, okay.

MRC: I wasn’t takin’ it for granted.

JP: Let’s see. So, some people have told me that ballroom kind of prepares you for real life, and you mentioned that it gave you thicker skin, so you go to job interviews –

MRC: And confidence. Sometimes when you might not get – your parents show you certain skills to do in life, but they don’t actually show you how to have the attitude, how to have the confidence, how to walk in. They might say, “Oh yeah, always believe in yourself,” or something that like. See, but ballroom showed you, no, be ready for the unexpected and be ready for the cutthroat that life will give you. So if you can take that in ballroom when you get it, in real life, it’s already something that you kind of understand.

JP: Tell me more about that.

- MRC:* So, like with the shade that comes within ballroom, like that helps you so much in real life because it's kind of like whether you throw me shade, whether you shut the door on me, or whether you close it in my face, it's still a window. It's still a back door. I'm going to get in there.
- JP:* I guess you're saying that it's a recognition that the world, as a whole, is cutthroat –
- MRC:* Mm-hmm.
- JP:* – and you have to be fierce to survive it?
- MRC:* Yes, and never give up. Don't take no for an answer because turn that no into a yes. You can't go through the front door, go through the back.
- JP:* That sounded a little queer.
- MRC:* Go through the window. Just let them know that you're serious and that you're hungry and that you're here for it. When you come to ballroom, you walk balls, you have to let the judges know that you're hungry and that you're here for it.
- JP:* Mm-hmm, and I guess that's, again, it's about preparing you for a cutthroat world. You have to be hungry if you're gonna be successful in the world.
- MRC:* Mm-hmm. Yeah, they have thick skin because you're not going to get everything you want when you want it. You're not going to get – they're not going to tell you everything you wanna hear. So, you have to have – one thing about ballroom, they always told me is to have thick skin.
- JP:* Okay.
- MRC:* Real life is one thing to show you is wherever you go through, whether you lose a loved one, whether your bills get cut off or everything, whatever situation you go through in life, have thick skin. Pray, have thick skin, and eventually you will see a better day.
- JP:* So, ballroom is primarily gay, transgender, but there are other folks there.

- MRC:* Well, in the States. See, this is how ballroom in the States is. You either gay, bisexual, trans.
- JP:* Right.
- MRC:* But with women categories, you can use heterosexual women, and they don't have to be gay, but mostly the males, any of the males are a part of the lifestyle. But then when you go overseas, they have kids categories. So they have kids in the scene. Some of the – majority of a lot of the girls that's in the scene are not gay. Some of the boys – majority of the boys are gay, but they have some boys that are not. They just might fit the category.
- JP:* I guess it's also true for race. In the United States, ballroom is mostly black or Latino. In Europe, I think there are a lot of white people who are involved.
- MRC:* That's it, yeah and that's also – that's changing now because ballroom is so diverse now and ballroom is so large now. So, it started off with mainly black and Latino, but now it's everybody, everybody. One thing about ballroom, ballroom will open its doors with open arms and invite you in, but they won't let you come in there and think you can run it. That's one thing. They will let you in. They will invite you, but once you start feeling like you wanna start saying this and saying that, they'll let you know, "Baby, you are not Legendary. You are not Icon. You are not a Pioneer. You are not a Hall of Famer. This is our world. This is – sit in the audience, but you can't sit at the table yet."
- JP:* But when you're – so we have maybe five minutes left.
- MRC:* Okay.
- JP:* So, but when you were talking about, okay, the importance of knowing your history in ballroom, ballroom comes from '70s, '80s in New York, and it came from black and Latino communities. So, how do you think that had an impact and has an impact on ballroom as a culture? It being, having a history that's coming from black communities?
- MRC:* I think it's good to have a history because anytime you have a history, you have something to follow. You have something to look up to, and then you also have something to call your own if you are a part of that culture. At that point when it started, it was a place where we call it our own because other places we couldn't

call our own. So that was a place that we called our own, so you take that with pride.

JP: Do you think that's still true, or does that change now?

MRC: A lot of stuff is changing because a lot of stuff is getting more advanced, and a lot of stuff is rolling, a lot of stuff is getting bigger. So, the same way you might have your hands that you can control ballroom a little, we have more control over ballroom, now you doesn't have that much control because it's getting bigger and bigger, and then now it's going mainstream. So that's a number of reasons why when it's going mainstream, a lot of us that was a part of it when it was underground – it is good for us to let our voices be heard when it's going mainstream because if you want to use this culture, make sure that you hire people and book people that know what this culture is about. So that's when it comes to voguing and teaching or artists or people when they're in videos or when they're in movies or different stuff, their commercials and stuff – hire people in the ballroom scene. Don't just hire people to act like they're a part of the ballroom scene because then you're not getting the real.

JP: Well, so that feeds into kind of my last question, which is really about the Peabody Ballroom experience.

MRC: Yes.

JP: So, yeah, I'm curious what your thoughts are about the project, if you could talk about how you've been involved in it so far?

MRC: I'm super excited about the Peabody project because it shows – for one, it shows how far we have come in ballroom because eventually – At one point in time, we probably wasn't even able to come up in here, and then we might have come up here to see a book. Now, we comin' in here into havin' a event, and that is a lot of things that happen within ballroom. A lot of places that we are at now, at one point we wasn't able to be. So, it shows the growth. It shows that the light is on the ballroom scene, but we all have to make sure that we showcase ballroom in the best light possible because you never know who – we don't know who is comin' to the Peabody event. We don't know who gonna be here, but we know everybody enjoyed ballroom, so we have to show them the good side of ballroom Not the fighting, the drugs, the not getting along, the tearing the place down. No, we are talented. We are good individuals. We are smart individuals. We are people of color. Also, we are normal. We're just super-talented. *[Laughs]*

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JP: That isn't normal.

MRC: Yeah, I mean, I'm just saying but we are normal. We are just, we are regardless of what we like or regardless of what our lifestyles are, we are normal when it comes to society. We are just like everybody else. We should be treated just like everybody else. We should have respect like everybody else. We should be respected just as well as everybody else. But this ball here, I just think that it's something good for our city. I think it's something good for the ballroom community, and I just think it's something good for Baltimore, in general.

JP: Why is it good for Baltimore?

MRC: Because, for one, every day is a fight to educate people about ballroom. Regardless of how mainstream it is or regardless of how popular it is, it's always a handful that don't know about it, that didn't heard about it, that might seen it or might look down on it. But you also have to keep reminding people, and you also have to keep educating people. So, this is something that is a good platform to educate people that might not know about it. In the same way have the opportunity to work with the Peabody Dance Company. Those are students that love to dance, you know? They dance and they train, but again, they still haven't heard about voguing. So, it was a challenge for me to educate them, to teach them, but it still was exciting because they were so open-minded and willing to learn.

JP: Can you say a little bit more about your experience so far with the workshops? You've had two, right?

MRC: Yeah, I had two workshops with them so far, and they are amazing. I haven't learned everybody name yet because sometimes I'm bad with learning names, but the students are amazing. At this point, I slightly wanna call them my kids. *[Laughs]* Because I kind of like them and the two times that I was with them, I truly appreciate them. So, yeah, they're my kids. I'm claiming them. *[Laughs]*

JP: How has it been different to teach them versus other dance classes, or is it kind of the same?

MRC: It's kind of the same, but the difference is if you are an advanced dancer, you can catch on fast. If you are beginners, it's kind of

slow. Even though they was beginners with learning vogue, they also was still advanced dancers. So, teaching them vogue, they would be able to catch it on, catch on to it faster because they are trained dancers.

JP: I was surprised about how quickly they picked it up.

MRC: Yeah, because they're trained dancers. So they might not actually know what they're doing, but because they already trained to dance, they can gasp as what's going on.

JP: What kind of feedback are you getting from the kids or from Dana [Bella]?

MRC: Dana is actually wonderful. Every time I text Dana, she responds back. Every time I call Dana, she respond back. Even though if she's – I mean, she is a busy woman. We all busy.

But the fact that she can be busy and still find time to respond back, I appreciate that.

JP: But what are they kind of saying about the workshops or what kind of feedback are you getting from the students?

MRC: I think they excited. The first class, they all thanked me for a wonderful class and stuff like that. So, the second class went smoothly. So, I'm just excited for the third and the fourth class and the performance, but overall, I don't have nothin' bad to say. All good.

JP: But being at the workshop, clearly there were some kids – all of them were excited, but some kids were really excited.

MRC: That's it, but when you a teacher, when you teach it, you find – you look and see who's not excited, who is excited, who is into it, and that's the beauty of teaching. You pushes, you motivate, you uplift, you encourage. You also let them know that this is a – classes are a safe place. Don't feel that you can't be yourself. Those are the best places where you can be yourself is at dance classes. Those are the best environments.

JP: Okay. So, last question, can you just tell me just a little bit more about your thoughts about the Peabody project as a whole? Why is it significant for ballroom specifically?

MRC: I think it's something fresh for ballroom. I think it's something new for ballroom, but I also think it's a step up for ballroom. So, I feel like on April 13th, I feel like, how is this going to push their numbers to come? Local and out of town. I also think that members are gonna bring their best – put their best foot forward with walking within the categories. I think people are gonna come here and gonna be on their best behavior because they already know zero tolerance for foolishness. So, I just feel that April 13th is going to be something that we can look back years later –

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and say, “Baby, do you remember that ball at the Peabody? That was key.” That moment, yeah. You know what I'm saying? A moment. Stuff like this is stuff when years down the line you might not understand it now, but later down the line, you can look back and see the growth of going from underground to mainstream because this is what we consider a little of mainstream. Because this is a mainstream – this is – and I was just telling my members the other day because we had a house meeting at my house Sunday. I was just telling them, “This is the first major ball for the new year, and this is the first big ball for Baltimore.”

JP: Are there any dangers to it being mainstream, or what would the dangers be?

MRC: Of it getting out of the hands of the ballroom community and getting into the hands of other peoples that's not really in ballroom.

JP: Mm-hmm, okay. So that's why what I –

MRC: That's the danger of it. That's why some people don't really care for it going mainstream. Some people are really okay with it being underground because when it's been underground, everybody that's in the ballrooms scene still has their hands in control of it. But as it go mainstream and stuff like that too, it starts to be to the mass. So, it started getting into people hands that's not from the scene. Sometime when it get in people hands that's not from the scene, you don't really know where it can go.

JP: So, that's why –

MRC: So that's the standoffish about it, like, “Okay, I'm open to it, but -” or, “I'm excited for it, but –” You know, it's always a “but” when it's going mainstream because it's like you want to be looked at in the public eye for what you're talented and what you're doing in

the community, but then you don't want them to take your – take what you have and turn it to something that you don't know.

JP: To steal it.

MRC: Yeah, to steal it, yeah to steal it or turn it to something that you don't know what it was.

[1:03:00]

JP: Yeah. So, that's why for me when I put this together, it was important that I put together a core planning group from ballroom, and that they are in control of the event.

MRC: That's why it's going to work, and that's why it's going to be a successful event because if you probably would have just did it and just took it upon yourself, then you wouldn't have really gotten no good feedback from the ballroom. Because it would have felt like somebody else trying to take from ballroom or somebody else saying that this is a come up now because this is what's popular, and let me get a piece of it. But when you use people a part of the scene to bring it, then it's kind of like, "Okay, let's make this work," because everybody want it to work.

JP: Okay. Is there anything else you want to add that we didn't kind of talk about, you wanna make sure is recorded?

MRC: I just would like to see everybody come April 13th. I would like to see everybody come with their best – put your best foot forward.

[1:04:00]

Come with lots of energy. Come with a lot of respect. Treat this venue like you would treat your mother's home. I can't even say like you would treat your own home because some people don't treat their own – like you would treat your mother's or your grandmother home. *[Laughs]* Then just have fun, fun, fun, fun, fun, fun. Never take it personal. Always have fun, and if you don't win on the 13th, it's always be another night. Don't be that girl. *[Laughs]*

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