

## It's Here: A Documentary About Drag in Bushwick, Sisters of the Wicked Wig Needs Your Help

Posted By : Henry Miller Posted Date : 9.02.14 In In The Hood 0

As the lofts fill out, and the condos go up, it's getting tougher to see Bushwick as the harbor of subculture and the avant-garde nightlife that has been part of its identity for the better part of a decade. Of course, this depends on what you are looking for and how hard you try to find it, but it is difficult not to get a slight sense of unease when that dude wearing a tie in the back room at [Tandem](#) tells you he works in finance... and that he [lives in a condo a few blocks away](#).



Elle Emenope aka Elliot Reiland

Yes, with rising rents in a neighborhood that really isn't nice enough to justify them, many members of the grungier artist community are starting to pick up and move shop. But before that exodus really kicks in, it is important to take time to consider what exactly *happened* here that was both unique to Bushwick and reflective of New York City's history of fostering experimental art scenes.

One part of the Bushwick scene that absolutely must be acknowledged, and is the subject of the upcoming documentary, *Sisters of the Wicked Wig*, is Bushwick's drag culture. This film is the product of two young filmmakers, Adam Golub and Gayatri Kaul, and focuses mainly on the performers and creators of *Bushwig*, a yearly festival that features some of the biggest names in Brooklyn drag and is celebrating its third year this weekend.

According Golub (who is a drag performer and whose drag career began with *Bushwig*), “the movie is about the drag festival as a resurgence of and a renaissance of drag culture that has exploded in this borough in the last five years, specifically in Bushwick.”

The film follows three major characters, including Matthew Mendoza, better known in the drag world as Horrorchata, who is one of the cofounders of *Bushwig*. The film covers Horrorchata’s experience as a Brooklyn star and also follows her back to her hometown in Texas, where she comes out to her parents as a drag performer.

**Merrie Cherry** (aka Jason Daniels), who mothered the **Brooklyn Nightlife Awards** and **Dragnet** into existence and great popularity, is another main character. So is rising star Elle Emenope (aka Elliot Reiland), who is a classically trained dancer and performed at the Metropolitan Opera before becoming a member of the drag scene, which is covered in the film.



Merrie Cherry aka Jason Daniels

Apart from the booming current-day scene in Brooklyn, *Sisters of the Wicked Wig* also examines key elements of New York City’s history with drag culture, including the *Playhouse of the Ridiculous* in the 60’s and *Wigstock* in the 80’s. As an extra special treat, the beloved and tough-love Penny Arcade of Andy Warhol fame has a cameo appearance in the documentary.

The film is currently undergoing the costly editing process (and has an **Indiegogo** page to raise funds), but its final cut will be entered in several film festivals this spring, with a rough-cut private screening happening in December.

As is presented in the *Sisters of the Wicked Wig*, Brooklyn’s rise as an artistic and cultural powerhouse in recent years has a great deal to do with its presentation of avant-garde performances that can be found in few other places. The drag scene has been particularly edgy and explosive, creating local celebrities out of fresh faces in a matter of a few years, and Bushwick has been home to many of them.



Horrorchata aka Mathew Mendoza

“In the year when we were doing the movie, you could go see a drag show in Brooklyn every single night of the week, and it would be weird and grungy and fringe. Blood pellets and cow tongues and weird shit, but very well thought out and very interesting pieces of art,” said Golub in a recent interview.

Unfortunately, a few of the requirements of this kind of scene are accessibility for newcomers and affordability for those who work hard on a craft that does not pay well (or at all). Bushwick’s rising rents and decreasing number of venues willing to host the raunchier shows has undoubtedly put pressure on both performers and audience members eager to see a new face screwing a watermelon with a strap-on dildo on stage.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the queens of Bushwick drag will vanish anytime soon, according to Golub. “(The Bushwick drag scene) just sort of whittled down to a core group. People that are really committed to performing have emerged, and they are the strong people on the scene. They find their platforms, and there are many of them, but it used to be that every week there would be a new queen showing up, and now it’s more like, if you go to the venues, you are often seeing more tried and experienced performers. Experience, I mean some of them only started a year ago.”

So it is still unfair to call the drag scene in Bushwick “over,” especially with events like *Bushwig* and venues like Bizarre Bar, but members of the audience are going to have to adjust to the reality that many of the performers are probably not from just around the block, but places where an artist can afford to be an artist. As is lovingly stated in the film’s preview, “people who are freaks will continue to make culture, no matter what.”

This is what will make *Sisters of the Wicked Wig* a film worth seeing (and certainly worth donating to!) for any diehard Bushwick resident: it captures a very specific moment and scene in Bushwick right when the neighborhood was making a cultural name for itself. This documentary features real performers who have

already had a considerable impact on the borough's nightlife at a point in their careers when they were perfecting their own styles.