

Who Are You Wearing – Joe Black

KIRI PRITCHARD-MCLEAN: Hello, welcome to the Who Are You Wearing podcast with me, Kiri Pritchard-Mclean. This week I'm chatting to cabaret icon and 'RuPaul's Drag Race' star Joe Black. Joe's aesthetic on stage is a flawless sort of haunted Hollywood glamour and offstage he's very tailored, um, with a lovely side serving of Tim Burton, I'd say.

Now I think Joe's approach to repurposing and adapting clothes as they were is really great and quite inspiring. And just the excuse I need to hang onto every battered sequin top that I own. 'Honestly, I promise I can't get rid of it, babe. It's going to be something beautiful one day.'

Now Joe and I first met properly in 2019 whilst we were filming Suzi Ruffell's episode of the Comedy Bus. But in my previous life as a producer I worked on shows that Joe was a part of and I've obviously been a long-time admirer of his skills on stage. But mainly his style just always looks absolutely incredible. So put together.

Now you might hear a few sniffs from Joe. They're ticks. To quote him, 'no, it's not a glamorous coke habit. It's just my Tourette's.' This interview was recorded in April 2021. Joe was at home in Brighton, and I was, as ever, in my cupboard. So kick back and enjoy me asking Joe Black, 'who are you wearing?'

JOE BLACK: I always got obsessed with villain – villain dress. For me it always comes back to – to villains. Um, you know, I couldn't tell you what a protagonist wore in something but I can tell you what the villain wore. Um, it's – it's even as a kid, like I just think it probably says a lot about me, is I was really obsessed with the late

80s Tim Burton Batman. So the Jack Nicholson Joker. And I used to, um, recreate his death scene by jumping off my bed. So I used to paint my face up like the Joker and jump off my bed and pretend Batman pushed me off a building. Um, that – so I remember that.

But also, you know, the, okay, like the Cruella de Vils and the, you know, the Ursulas and the kind of campy thing. But that didn't reflect in what – I didn't really find an enjoyment of dressing – I enjoyed dressing up at school. So when you have like the dressing up box. So we – you know, I would always dress as a witch and they'd tell me, you know, 'you can't dress as the witch.' Um, and I would dress as the witch. Um, you know, I enjoyed dressing up for that. Um, and for like school plays and stuff.

But it didn't really – on a personal level I think I was maybe 14 when I really like started enjoying, well, or – at least thinking about what I was wearing. I remember like going, 'I want to be goth,' right, at like 13, 14. And what I, you know, my – I mean my – I come from like a very kind of working class council estate Portsmouth, um, family. So my, you know, my mum had no idea what it was. So as far as we were concerned, it was just wearing black. So I just had the same polo shirts and trackies that I was wearing as a teenager, but in black.

Um, so that was the first step. Um, and then kind of at like maybe 14, I kind of discovered your, uh, you know, your kind of tacky goth brands of like, you know, the Living Dead Doll's jackets and stuff. So it was like pinstripe jackets with loads of zips on them and spikes and – and stuff like that. And it was – I enjoyed that kind of, um, it – to give that kind of outward appearance of – of who you are.

And that obviously develops as you get older. Like I think now, you know, I might be wearing a – a double-breasted suit that's like very dark orange and dark blue, but, uh, I feel like I – I'm more kind of goth and alternative than I ever was as a teenager. Um, it's – and you find a right to develop that style into something you like. Like I still – I still managed to look quite alternative and dark while wearing a – just a nice suit, I think.

Um, it was wearing black. Yeah, wearing black is how it began and then – and then looking like I was in Cradle of Filth. Um, kind of like start seeping in a little bit. Then I really got into the Dresden Dolls, which was kind of the main kind of realisation that I liked cabaret stuff, is that. Because I was in alternative crowds, you know? 'We listen to heavy music. We listen to punk music. We listen to' – you know, that sort of stuff.

And then discovering the Dresden Dolls, where it was like punk but with a piano and drums. And then realising their influences were, you know, cabaret and – and music theatre and – and all of that kind of stuff. And then, you know, I started wearing stuff like bowler hats and, you know, I was like 15, 16 wearing bowler hats. It's – I'd wear them to school. Um, you know, and I also – I like grew out my nails, um, because I didn't understand the – the concept of false nails. So I grew out my own ones and filed them into points.

KIRI: Amazing.

JOE: Pretty fucking scary to be honest. When I think about it, I was like – I was going – I was going to like the roughest school in – in Portsmouth. Terrifying but with like sharpened nails wearing pinstripe suits and bowler hats. But because I was a good student, the teachers let me do it. You know it – I wasn't rebelling. I was

still doing all my work and being polite and nice and things, so they let me – they let me get on with it. It would be over my school uniform though.

KIRI: Of course.

JOE: So I'd have like the school like polo shirt, but then with all that stuff over the top.

KIRI: What a little icon.

JOE: I once wore a gauntlet to school. I've just remembered this. I had like a – like a leather gauntlet covered in spikes. And I bought it in like – I think I – I either bought it in Camden market on like a day trip with friends or like Brighton on a – on a day trip with friends. Because Portsmouth wasn't that far from, um, Brighton, where I live now, but, um, I can't – it was either Brighton or Camden. And I got this like leather gauntlet and can you – going to like the scariest, scariest school in like a fairly rough city at the time. Um, wearing like leather spiked gauntlets. I mean it sounds like a weapon but it wasn't. It was a fashion statement.

KIRI: [laughs] I love that it's so like again like high camp glamour, even though it's – like you've not looked at it and thought, 'I'm going to – I'm going to beat someone up with that.' You're like, 'well that is going to look so good.'

JOE: Yeah, I was like, 'well this is – this camp. Isn't this camp?' And that's – it's – and like – you know, people talk about fashion being armour. I look at armour and go, 'oh, that's fashion.'

[Kiri laughs]

JOE: It's – I do. I – that's why I like – I like the Marvel films because some of the armour – the armour that people are wearing. Cate Blanchett is – is the goddess of death. I'm like, 'that is – that's some nice armour. That's some nice armour. Love it.'

KIRI: So what about when you were a little kid, then? Did you – did you have a sense of style? Like who – who was dressing you? Were you doing your own thing or were you just wearing what everyone else wore?

JOE: I think I was just wearing what everyone else wore. I don't think, you know, it's strange looking back and like suddenly – I mean I think a lot of people do this. If you look back and realise they didn't have a lot of money as a family. So I think I probably, you know, I probably had like hand me downs and stuff. I have no – I've seen like pictures of myself and stuff in like little dungarees and t-shirts and stuff, but I've got no recollection of – of dressing.

I remember I had this one shirt that was, um, my mum's still very much one of those 'save it for best' types. And best never comes. And she's just got this thing that she refuses to wear because it's saved for best. And she'll wear it once to someone's wedding or something. Um, I had this like Ben Sherman shirt that someone had given us. And I – that was my shirt for best. So I wore it to family parties. That's the only kind of like younger like really specific dressing memory I had.

Um, and my mum – my mum's still the same now. She has all these things. And that's why I stopped. I used to buy her like clothes and shoes and stuff for Christmas and her birthday. And like – or like handbags. I decided then to try to buy handbags and purses because I thought, 'oh, she'll use those in the daytime.' But when you hand her a fancy purse, she puts it in a box. And she'll

put her stuff in it when she has it for best, which I don't, um, which I try to combat.

Like I – I try to get nice things and wear them, but there's still that weird ingrained thing in my head from my mum going, 'save it for best.' So there's stuff that I need to like tease myself out by wearing a few times before I get like properly invested in like, 'no no no. I can just wear this. I can just wear this.' And I start like – if I'll buy – if I'll do like some big event or something and buy myself one really nice splashy thing, I'll then be too scared to wear it. Because I'll go, 'well that was – that was a lot of money.' And then I won't wear it. And then I realise that I have this thing I spent money on that has not been used. So I'm trying to fight that.

KIRI: Wow, that's so interesting. It's amazing that stuff that stays with us as kids, isn't it? That takes us all the way through. So you had your Ben Sherman shirt for best. I love it. I imagine it had a button-down collar.

JOE: Oh, yes.

KIRI: Of course. Um, and then what – do you remember being given or being made to wear anything that you hated? That you're like, 'this is – I hate being in this.'

JOE: No, I don't. Do you know what? I don't, actually. Um, my – I mean my mum's always been, uh, super supportive of everything, especially as I got older and I started doing other things. She never once said, 'Joe, what are you doing?' She'd just go, 'well, you know, you're happy, aren't you, love?' Um, no, I have no recollection of being made to – to wear – to wear things I didn't – I didn't like.

KIRI: That's amazing.

JOE: I mean I – I'm sure I've had a few hissy fits in my life, but um, yeah, I can't remember having any particular explosive moments about, um, clothes. Because I'm sure I would've said something as well. I think I was that kind of, um, that kind of child.

KIRI: Well did – so did you have an outfit that you would put on and you would just feel great in? As – as a kid or as a teenager? That you were like, 'this is it. This is me.'

JOE: Well I do – do you know what? I do remember going on holiday to Blackpool, um, which is a very different experience as an adult, I must say. But as a child going to Blackpool, and I remember my mum bought me this Darth Maul from Star Wars Episode 1 fancy dress costume. And I used to wear that quite a lot. Including like a big scary rubber mask and everything. But it was mostly about the capes. Uh, the capes and the robes. And I remember wearing that quite a lot. And I don't know if I went out in it, but I remember going around Blackpool, um, in the – in the cape and stuff. And going around this B&B, um, we stayed in, um, wearing this Darth Maul robe. Um, yeah. That's – that's a good one. Remind me what the question was again because I just started thinking about Darth Maul and Star Wars.

KIRI: I was saying was there an outfit that you put on that you just felt – like you had a favourite outfit that you felt great in. And to be honest a cape is a great answer.

JOE: Yeah, a cape – a cape is a good – I mean I still have that now where I have like, um, in fact this outfit is one that I do if I – if I'm doing something that's like I want to look nice and presentable and like comfortable. This, what I'm wearing right now, is my – my

go to one. So I – I'll often – people often when they see screenshots from – from podcasts or interviews, I am often wearing this because I feel like really nice in it. I feel like I am both ready to do business and look stylish.

KIRI: Yeah. Oh, I love it.

JOE: That's the – that's for that. And as a teenager and stuff, I think probably there was that pinstripe suit with like loads of zips and chains on it. I remember putting that on and feeling fantastic. And I'd wear it all the time. And thinking back to it, it was probably like the most cheaply made, nastily made thing that you could've possibly gotten. I remember it had no lining, um, and it was probably really ill-fitting. But at the time I loved it because it was my goth thing, you know? It was for me being a goth.

KIRI: Yeah. I think it's great that you, um, because obviously what you're wearing now is gorgeous. But I think it's good that you're saying like, 'oh, if I – you might see me on podcasts with it on.' Or, you know, if you – if you need something where you feel like you but you want to look presentable but it's not also like hours and hours of getting into drag or – or, you know, like putting together, you'll wear this. Because also I think there's this weird pressure – it's on comedians as well in terms of telly appearances, um, and it seems in drag of like not wearing the same thing twice or not being seen in the same thing twice. And it's – the culture it – it contributes towards is – is really unhealthy.

JOE: I have opinions about this. I have opinions. Are you ready?

KIRI: I'm ready, babe.

JOE: I – I, uh, like you said, the – I think, um, the culture it – it makes is – is really, really unhealthy. And it means people don't – they're not passionate about it. Because once it's done it's done. And what – what is the point in putting energy and time and love and creativity, you know? You wouldn't do a show and do it once, would you, you know? I mean maybe like for like a special one off event, but then that's a – a thing, you know? People put time and effort. Then that is like an item of clothing that can be used. It can be – it can become part of your – your fibre and your being.

I like the idea of having like uniforms to be honest. For – for drag like I'll have a rotation of things I wear a lot because they feel really me. And when I put them on it's not changing my identity, because that's – they've been made curated to my identity. They reflect me. I'm not – it's not wearing me, I'm wearing it. And it's a – it's a part of me.

So also I think there's something really lovely about, you know, you see something online and then you go to see someone in person and they're wearing the thing and you think, 'oh, I like that. That's really nice.'

And also – and the other point, it's just wasteful. Um, and I think – I think it sets an un, um, unrealistic expectations of, 'you always have to – it's the next thing, the next thing, the next thing.' And that's like the social media content, you know? Someone can put weeks, months into say one image. Put it up on Instagram and the next week it doesn't matter anymore. Like it all contributes to – to that.

I love the idea of having this beautiful thing that you – you keep wearing again and again until it's – I've got things that just keep being repaired because I really like them. And the reason I have

them is because I really like them. And if I really like it, why wouldn't I keep wearing it, you know? I'm – I'm quite lucky that no one really says to me, 'oh, you wore that again.' Um, for some reason I seem to, you know, never get pulled up on it. But you know, when someone does, I'm going to – I'm going to say, 'you know, time and love and money was spent on this. Why wouldn't – I'm going to wear it again and again and again because it makes me feel good.'

And if you keep churning stuff out, eventually also you're going to have a load of shit as well. You know if you – if you have to have a new idea every week, some of those ideas are going to be terrible. Some of those executions will be terrible. Why not, you know, make use of these – these beautiful, wonderful things you have? Um, or re-home them. Do a swap with someone. Change for their outfit that they wore last week if you want to – if you want to like have a new thing. And they can wear the one you wore the week before.

KIRI: Yeah. Also the planet's on fire. So –

JOE: Yeah, well that as well. Um, it's, you know, you've got that fabric, use it. And then like I – I'll collect these things to, you know, take them apart and put them into other stuff. Like I've got loads of old costumes that maybe didn't feel very me anymore or maybe, I don't know, I decided I don't like the fit anymore. And I'll like cut them up and put them on other stuff. Like I've made headpieces out of, you know, old broken jewellery and a cape that had some appliques on it. And you know, and make them into something else and give them a new – give them a new life.

KIRI: That's so lovely. Because also there's so much thought and love and creative – like that – that headpiece isn't just a

headpiece that you've just bought from someone. It's like – it's a piece of art you've made that's had a journey and it means it things like – because I love – one of the reasons I love vintage clothes is you can – I feel like you can feel the story. And so you – that thing doesn't die and go to landfill or, you know, be shredded down and weighed in somewhere. It becomes something – it evolves into something else beautiful to be worn for another 50, 60 years. It's great.

JOE: I mean Aaron yesterday – was it yesterday or the day before? He, um, he went on a trouser repair, uh, mission. For some reason he was just going through all his trousers and just doing some edits and stuff. And he made – we had these old curtains that we just liked the fabric, and then one day I came home and he was just – and he had made some trousers out of them. And he was like, 'well, they were really nice.' Like, you know –

KIRI: Like a Von Trapp.

JOE: Yeah. Yeah, um, but, you know, things can be put to use. And obviously like, um, there might be some people listening to this going, 'but Joe, didn't that thing happen to you on television?' And they'll go, 'that's very high street, isn't it?' Um, the, uh, you know, that infamous moment.

KIRI: The H&M moment.

JOE: The H&M moment. And do you know what? I got that because I was like, 'I'll wear that in the daytime.' That's what it was. It was like – it was a quick fix. I don't know how to dress for pop. I'd been told to do pop. That's a pink dress. Everyone else will have pink. Do you know what? They did have pink as well. I was right. And I was like, 'I'll wear that in the daytime.' And now I

can never wear it because I'm going to – well, because it's been, uh, raffled off for charity, but, uh –

KIRI: Oh, no because I was waiting to see what you turned it into.

JOE: Oh, no, it's, uh, no, we – so far we've raised £10,000.

KIRI: That's amazing.

JOE: For – for, uh, the Sussex Beacon in Brighton, which is a – a HIV, um, and AIDS support charity. Um, so yeah.

KIRI: Amazing.

JOE: We – I mean we raised £5,000 in like two days and then H&M, uh, donated £5,000 as well.

KIRI: That's amazing. That's so good.

JOE: But that's like – yeah, I – everything else I had for – for Drag Race and stuff was all – everything kind of had a story attached to it, you know? If things were made from old curtains or cereal boxes and – oh, I had this but then I found this person that did this and I thought if I combine this with this then, you know, everything had a story but obviously that was the, uh, that became the, uh, infamous moment, didn't it?

KIRI: Well not – I mean not – not to – yes, it did in terms of like memes and chat. But like I – I think – because I've known you for longer. So I've known you – we met doing the Comedy Bus, but before that I used to work and I would sort of have an eye over producing the brilliant Lily La Scala's Gilded Lily and another fucking variety show which you would appear in. So I have known

your work for many years and also just known that your – your aesthetic is incredible. You're like a – you're like a – a walking slice of like Hollywood glamour but that's trapped in a haunted house.

JOE: Yes! Yes!

KIRI: So it's like this –

JOE: That's – do you know it's – that's one of the things, is that a lot like – obviously with the – with the substantial like instant promo – like profile boost that came with Drag Race, people straight away went, 'right, you're the scary one,' you know? 'You're the goth one.' But then now people are starting to like clock on to stuff. And they're starting to see things and go, 'well that's very Joe Black.' And it's all not, you know, it's not horror and gore. It's like someone said, 'I feel like Joe Black lives here.' And it was a picture of like this weird, crooked house in the distance next to a railway track but it was on fire. Uh, and but it was like a nice glamorous house but it was just a bit wrong.

Um, and now people are starting to clock onto – and yeah, thank you. That's, I think, the best way to put it is, um, a glamour but in a haunted house. Um, but I also like the idea of glamour but just a bit too much. Do you know when it's – when it's to – to the point of like, 'I think you might have gone too far.' You know? You know like high, thin eyebrows were all the rage in, you know, the – the 20s, but I'll just make mine just a little bit higher. And a little bit thinner so that I just look a little bit off.

KIRI: But I love that.

JOE: Just a little bit.

KIRI: It reminds me of when I – I remember going up – I'd always see her in the Iceland in Bangor, saw a woman who was of that era and she had these, you know, very thin, still doing her own face even though she clearly can't see, and these very thin arch eyebrows drawn on and like, 'babes, you're not fooling anyone.' But like that kind of like – still putting on a face to go to Iceland, still got these thin – and then just like jewels over every finger, jewels, jewels, jewels, jewels. And you know like the whole of it.

JOE: This woman sounds amazing.

KIRI: She was great. She was really good.

JOE: I wonder what she's doing.

KIRI: I don't – I don't imagine she's still with us these – these days because this was when I was quite young. But yeah, I remember she was – certainly caught my eye and I just thought, 'you're doing – everything you're doing there is for you,' as well, which was such a nice thing to see.

JOE: I know, it's that – it's that Dolly Parton thing, isn't it? When Dolly says about how she saw the – the town tramp and – and that she found that the most inspiring thing.

KIRI: Yeah. Yeah, was it a local sex worker and everyone was like, 'oh, you know, like you don't look like her.' And she had these long, red nails and these big boobs and blonde, curly hair and she was like, 'I want to look exactly like that.' And it is, yeah, it's – it's inspiring, isn't it? I love it.

JOE: It's for you. It's for you.

KIRI: Totally.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: So when you were a teenager, what were the big trends? Did you go in for any of them?

JOE: No, I think it was probably shell suits, wasn't it? Um, no, I – yeah, no, I don't think I've ever owned one. Never owned one. Um, no. And then obviously there's the – I mean there was the kind of emo-y thing, which, uh, you know, I – I did partake in perhaps some skinny jeans and, um, colourful plastic bangles at some point. Um, you know, with – with a floppy fringe.

Um, but I – I – nowadays I don't really get the – the trends and stuff. I sometimes feel like old man shouts at cloud, do you know what I mean? Like I – I'm going, 'why are all you silly kids' – it's the – the one that gets me now is the sunglasses that don't serve any purpose of – as sunglasses. Do you know when people wear those tiny – the thin kind of like 90s kind of Charli XCX type thing. I don't – I don't know. I like my sunglasses to be functional but stylish. Um, but these tiny little thin ones, it's like, 'that's not protecting your eyes! What are you going to do when there's – you don't want to damage your eyes, you lunatics.'

That's the – well, I know you were talking about when I was a kid, but I guess that's like a repeat, isn't it? It's that kind of, uh, you know, Y2K, uh, you know, because I was born in 89. Uh, so yeah, it would've been the 90s, early 2000s would've been the – the fashion movements that I would've, um, been privy to. But that kind of Y2K thing I don't – I don't know. Because it didn't feel cool when I was there anyway. And now I'm seeing people younger than me doing it who everyone is saying is really cool. And again

I'm like – I'm over here in a suit going, 'what's wrong with you damn kids?' Um, not that I'll tell anyone how to dress. But, um, protect your eyes.

KIRI: [laughs] So, um, did you have a rebellious phase as a teenager? Did it – did it show up in your clothes or was that the – was that the bowler had years?

JOE: Do you know what? I don't think I ever really rebelled. Because I don't – there was no one trying to stop me.

KIRI: Lovely.

JOE: Um, and – and like close to me anyway. Obviously society, um, but, you know, obviously I'd get like shit in the street and stuff. Because it was, you know, it was in Portsmouth. It was, you know, 'men is men' type – type thing. So – but, you know, my mum never tried to stop me for anything, you know? I was well behaved at school. Teachers kind of let me get on with it. So, you know, I – like I said I showed up to school in eyeliner and black lipstick as well and no one said anything. I mean obviously the other kids were like, 'what the fuck is this?' But like, you know, kind of authority figures never – never really tried to stop me.

KIRI: Really?

JOE: Which I think it nice. And I'm really blessed. Really, I – I forget that not everyone has that. Um, so that's quite a – it's quite a privilege, uh, I – I think. Um, to have like – especially when – when my mum is that, you know, that – that is the person that I think typically would – you – people would rebel against, is the parental, uh, figures. The authority figure. But no, there was no – there was no push back. So she just kind of, you know, she was –

she was buying me tatty old waistcoats at Camden market if we went up to London for a weekend and, you know, my hair dye and stuff. My bowler hats.

KIRI: Oh, love her. Absolutely love her. So how you are now, because as long as I've known you and have been aware of you, it feels like you have – like your style has been locked in for a while. Like it's ever evolving and taking bits from everywhere, but like your kind of like iconic style to me I feel like has been present for a while. When do you think it turned up? Like when do you think you were like, 'this is me?' Like how many other hats did you try on metaphorically or physically before you got to be Joe Black that we know now?

JOE: I think it was when I moved from Portsmouth to Brighton and, um, tapped into my kind of queerness. Um, and that's when I – I became surrounded with more other queer people. Well in Portsmouth there was the, you know, there was the Hampshire Boulevard, which was fine. But it was still, you know, you'd go there and – and you'd get a few glares for wearing eyeliner as a – as a man. Um, at time, you know, it was, um, the – the places – I mean Portsmouth has – has transformed in the past few years. But like when I was there as a, you know, in my – my teens, well childhood, teens and, you know, very early twenties, it was a different place. Even with the kind of gay scene.

But I think it was kind of my – my queerness and then suddenly realising I can be, um, I can do whatever I want. I can be whatever I want. I – I live in – I live in this place now. Um, I live in a different city, um, I have these friends, I just – I'll just do what I want now. And it was realising, you know, because I didn't technically as far as I was concerned really do drag until maybe 2013, 2014. But

then looking back I was like, 'well no, I still had the makeup and the costumes, I just wasn't in a dress.'

But it was – it was realising that – because I know – I don't want to, and I still don't want to – I'm not trying to do female impersonation and that was never, never the intention. Um, and still isn't. So I, you know, I use my name. I don't wear breasts. Um, I don't make any attempt to appear a timid little bunny thing now for people can't see me, uh, femininity. Like it's – I just look like what I want to look like and the idea of, uh, you know, a male body in a fishtail dress with a – a finger wave wig, it really appeals to me. It's got that – it's got that element of the, you know, very traditional cabaret and that kind of – grotesque is the wrong word. But that element of subversion about it.

Um, you know, I, you know, I love nothing more than a monocle, uh, I'll use as an example with. And, you know, you know, if I think, 'well, what would be lovely – what would I like to look like?' And it's – it's, uh, you know, a fur coat over a nice dress with a monocle, you know, the elements of the masculine and the feminine, you know? I've got some claws on but also some chunky rings and, you know, I love – I love, um, like I love pencil moustaches. I mean I don't like it on myself, but pencil moustaches with lipstick. I just love that as an image. Um, just those combining the masculine and the feminine.

And I think there was a moment when I just went, 'fuck, I can do it all. I can combine these things. It doesn't matter. One time I can wear a suit, one time I can wear a dress. I'll just do what I want to do. I'll –' And it still – it feels cohesive still. No one – I don't think I confuse anyone with what I'm about. I think it kind of – no matter what I'm wearing I still manage to spell it out.

Um, and branding's always been really important for me because I think that conveys the sense of escapism with it for – for shows where I want people to come and they know – I mean they don't know what they're going to get in that they don't exactly know what the show's going to be, but they know they're going to go there. Are we going to have this wild cabaret, you know, smoky, Berlin, you know, 'oh, let's all drink martinis and fuck each other' kind of, uh, kind of vibe. Do you know what I mean? That kind of dingy, 'we're just going to escape the realities of the world' vibe.

Um, and as long as I can convey that and make people feel that they're escaping – and this is what I try to do visually, is that be like 'the other', um, you know? I don't want to just look like someone in drag, because they can see that anywhere. I want them – people to be intrigued on a choice, you know? 'Why – why this? Why that? Why that?' You know? Um, and – and not question it in a, 'what does that mean?' But just go, 'huh, that's fun.' Like, you know, a suit and then a dress. And – because they don't see drag people do that.

KIRI: It's really interesting because I – and this is the thing, is I knew you as Joe Black and yes, you're right, I – that's why I was like, 'do I remember Joe doing drag when I first came across you?' And I was like, 'no, I don't think – but I do – do remember there being like really I guess – there being like high glamour that existed in both male and female worlds of what you – worlds. And then I guess I – in my head I conflated it as soon as I sort of saw you were doing like Drag Race and when I met you through the Comedy Bus through drag queens. So yeah, but I guess the – the space you're inhabiting just has – and the cabaret is quite a free world as well, isn't it?

JOE: Yeah.

KIRI: So people can kind of create their own genres. You created your own genre. And where you are in the Venn diagram, it has a foot in so many different camps. You can kind of be a bit of everything.

JOE: Yeah.

KIRI: And it's – you've just built your own thing, I think.

JOE: Yeah, I – I mean I'm a bit of a fence sitter on genres. So I'm kind of welcome in a lot of places, which is really nice. As far as I'm concerned there are – there are no rules to drag, you know? There will be gatekeepers within certain things that go, 'no, it must be this and this and this and this.' And I'm like, 'well, why? Well, why does it need to be?' So I'm – I'm hoping in, you know, with, you know, uh, a more substantial platform boost, that – and I've had messages like it – already people going, 'oh, you've made me think that it doesn't have to be this one thing.' Because I still went on Drag Race and looked like me. I didn't not, you know? I still – whether it worked out or not is – is a different matter. But, uh, I didn't do anything else.

And I would've – and people kept saying to me, you know, 'would you have changed anything?' I'm like, 'no, not a thing.' 'Um, well why not, you know? Maybe you could've done this and this.' 'Well, no. I don't – I don't, you know, what was the – what would've been the point in – in going on this and not being myself?' Um, whether, you know, whoever's sat there likes something or not or gets it is – is irrelevant, because that's spoken to people that feel like maybe they don't quite fit in because they don't want to do this, this, and this with drag or this, this or this in cabaret or – or whatever. They can go, 'oh, it's not this one thing.'

Um, and that's what, you know, hopefully it does matter. In my opinion.

KIRI: Definitely.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: When you're putting together like yourself as Joe Black on or off stage, do you consider your hair and your makeup as part of the outfit as well?

JOE: So off – off stage, um, I – hair wise I tend to – no. I mean I had the black and white hair and I've just gone back to orange. But, um, I tend – my hair tends to be sort of a bit scruffy, curly, just kind of flopping there. Um, and I don't wear much makeup in the day anymore. I used to, but since I've started having to wear more makeup for work, and it's, you know, remembering what I actually look like as well.

Because if I spend my time in makeup that heavy and also makeup out of it, I think there's like an identity thing. Because I'm not so attached to it that I have to have it on. Um, so not only obviously there's the effect of, um, you know, keeping your skin nice and clear. Uh, but it's like a nice kind of break from it to go, 'oh look, there's a person here.' Because I share the same name with both, so it's – they're – I mean that's a whole other thing, is the subject of identity.

Um, but on the stage my makeup always kind of looks the same. Like there'll be – there'll be – and it'll just be like a colour change or maybe a slight, um, maybe a slight, slight, um, shape change or maybe a lip or an eye. But it's always high eyebrows, generally a

red – a red lip of various tones, um, and I do these beauty spots and I've just moved one of them recently.

KIRI: Ooh.

JOE: And I feel like I've – I moved one of them and I – and I now look at myself and I'm like, 'I'm a changed clown.' Because I used to do – so it's like one above my left eyebrow, two dots under my right eye, and then I used to do one just on my left cheek. And now I do it on the left on my chin, which is the – the glorious Swanson beauty spot. Because that one – that one was feeling a bit more Marilyn over there, um, and I – I moved it here and I feel like a changed person. Like literally all it took – that's how – that's how like regimented I am with this – the makeup I do is that I move one dot and I'm like, 'wow, I'm new, I'm fresh, I'm ready.' Um, but I'll go through phases with, um, with colours. So at the moment I've been wearing a lot of kind of, um, bruisey purples.

KIRI: Ooh, lovely.

JOE: Um, but I – I've been thinking a lot about blue eye shadow lately. Uh, I do love blue eyes shadow. It's – I'd say blue is probably my favourite if I had to pick one colour to ever wear again.

KIRI: Wow.

JOE: Because I don't think anything says, um, kind of glamour, but clown, like a red lip and a blue eye shadow.

KIRI: Oh, okay.

JOE: I love – and I very rarely wear blue like outfit wise, but I love a blue eye shadow because it has that element of kind of – I guess clowniness about it, but also it's – it's a bit tacky. And it's garish but it's very theatrical.

KIRI: Well when you're in secondary school and they – they want you to do stage makeup, it's a – it's a red dot by the eyes and it's blue eye shadow and it's a – it's a red lip. That is literally like basic, you know, like school stage makeup.

JOE: Yeah.

KIRI: So totally. And when I think of a light, I think of that 80s light blue eye shadow as well. That is – it's got a sense of theatre to it. And yeah, clowns as well. So it is tying into all those references.

JOE: But it's – well I think of it as also that kind of Berlin cabaret thing. Where you've got someone with a big – big blue eye shadow and a small, dark red lip. And then too much blush. Uh, and there's just down, thin eyebrows looking very sallow. I love it. Makes me very happy.

KIRI: [laughs] When you did my makeup beautifully, and I still have the shots favourited –

JOE: Green.

KIRI: For Comedy Bus, and it – yeah, but it was – it was like whatever you did to my skin it made it look flawless with that filter. But also, um, the like – the eye was pure Cruella de Vil. Like I literally look like a Disney villain. I – and I – I loved it.

JOE: Oh, is it – is it the large – the large eyelid effect, right?

KIRI: Yes, it's so magic.

JOE: I – I love doing that. It's – it's when you put the – and then you put like a light in the middle. So it's – it's – I do it on myself a lot. It's to give the effect of, um, vintage cartoons where they have those really high, tall eyelids. Um, because it really changes the shape of the face. Really changes the shape of the face. But I love it. It's got that kind of – I guess the kind of Fleischner cartoon, Betty Boop-y kind of, uh, late 20s, early 30s animation.

KIRI: Loved it. Absolutely loved it.

JOE: Oh, that was such a fun time.

KIRI: It was so fun. I know. And for – I did it and I was like, 'this is how my makeup should be all the time. This is the best I've ever looked.'

JOE: I – do you know what? I remember about that is – because I, you know, I – up until recently I'd never been involved in any TV. Um, and obviously you were filming a – a comedy show. And I remember you said something, um, and I laughed. And then someone who was like on a camera told me off for laughing.

KIRI: What?

JOE: And I was like, [gasps] and then you went, 'it's TV, we're not allowed to have any fun.' Or something like that. Because obviously I was interrupting the – the line. It's for the audience at home to laugh. But I was like, 'hahahahaha.' Um, but of course we couldn't do that because it would've, you know, ruined the shot. Um, but that's – that's – I remember – I remember that. I can't

remember what you said, but it was, um, yes, I had a – I had a good chuckle.

KIRI: [laughs] Um, when you're, um, when you're putting together like looks now, is – is there any trend that's appeared that you've tried to have a go at and it's just not happening?

JOE: No. I mean I stay – I stay away from the trends. Uh, sometimes I'll like accidentally – like there will be something I'm into and I'm like, 'oh, this is available everywhere at the moment,' but I won't clock that as because it's really popular. Um, kind of tassel earrings was one. I mean that still happens. But you see them bloody everywhere. And I like them because I think that they – they make great appliqués. Like you can buy them – you can get them really cheap and put them like on all things and it just adds a little, you know, stick some stones on it, spray it a different colour, you have a gorgeous time.

Um, no I don't – yeah, because I'm not really – I'm not really – I'm kind of – I'm a bit – I'm stuck in how I like to dress. But I do this thing where I'll make up clothes and sometimes it's in trend. Where I'll go, 'I really think this would look nice.' And it's not – maybe I've seen it somewhere and it's like a subconscious thing, um, but I'll make up an outfit. And sometimes it just happens to be trendy right now and I go, 'oh, there it is.' But because I've seen it possibly like walking past someone and it's just embedded in my mind without me thinking. Um, but yeah, no, I don't really buy – I used to try and buy like fashion magazines and stuff to read on trains, um, and then I realised that I wasn't into what they were selling. I was into like contour-y stuff that had like a visual impact. But that's not what's in fashion magazines, you know? You assume it is, um, but it's – it's not, you know?

KIRI: No.

JOE: It's – there's only so many times that you can have a watch advert, you know what I mean?

KIRI: Yeah. [laughs]

JOE: It's, you know, especially men's – men's fashion stuff is, um, awful. Awful. Really like – men's – men's sections, um, in most high street shops is – is where creativity goes to die. Um, it's – that's why I like wearing women's clothes. And in fact I like the cuts better. Like I like – like more shoulder paddy and I like the way they sit on waists more. Um, I mean breast darts are the bane of my existence because I don't have breasts. But, um, finding, um, women's clothes is better because it's always just more interesting. For high street stuff, anyway. Obviously then there's like costume and stuff that you get made, but – and some men's stuff is – is nice. But that tends to be the kind of less affordable stuff.

KIRI: Exactly. Yeah. Totally.

JOE: You know? You go – going into your – your fancy, um, uh, designer places, um, and as lovely as that jacket is, I can't afford it. You know what I mean?

KIRI: Yeah, totally. Totally. Cost is such a big part of, um, it. Like in terms of – that's one of my biggest things with Drag Race, is I think that they should – it should be like – same with political parties. There should be a spending cap because it doesn't feel like a level playing field at all and I think some people can buy their way to, you know, quite far along the competition or even to

success. And it's not necessarily a, um, indicative of their creativity. Or their –

JOE: No, I – I absolutely agree. Um, I think it, um, it's like, 'oh, well you don't need things to look, you know, to look expensive and wonderful.' It's like, 'yeah, but you need time.'

KIRI: Exactly.

JOE: Doing Drag Race, you don't, you know, you're not – you're not afforded a great deal of time to – to prepare for it. Um, and there are – and also I think, you know, even if people do have the money, I don't think that level of risk and bankrupting yourself is – is, um, acceptable. You know just the – just it's, you know, the fact that if someone can throw £15,000 to get ready for a competition. But it might be really, you know, they might spend that £15,000 and then leave first. And then they might find themselves in a precarious financial position for the sake of pleasing someone else. I just – I find it really, really bizarre.

And I've spoken about this quite – quite a lot, actually. I think some – I think sometimes I start saying it and whoever I'm talking to starts like seizing up because they think, 'RuPaul is going to kill me.' Um, in starting this conversation. But no, I think – I think it's really, really absurd, is – is what I've called it before, is I – I don't think anything is worth that financial risk. Your, um, your life comes before that and I – I don't think anyone should be, um, putting themselves in the red, uh, to – to please, uh, a randomised panel depending on what day it is.

KIRI: Yeah, totally. Yeah, I agree.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: This, um, is a question I ask to everyone, but I feel like you're going to have two different answers here. So I normally ask people like what's the item of clothing that you've had that's the oldest that you still wear or love now. And I imagine that's one answer. And another one to you is what is your oldest item of clothing, because I imagine you've got some pretty – some old birds knocking around in that cupboard, right?

JOE: This suit, actually, I have – I have had for seven or eight years, which isn't a long time really, but it's again, uh, very sorry, RuPaul, it's from H&M. Um, and I bought it, I got it in the sale. I loved it. Um, and I wear it constantly. Because it's matching trousers as well. The day that this goes, I am going to – I have to – I'm going to have to take it to someone to get it remade. Like and they'll take it apart and do – do – recreate the pattern. I – I really, really love it.

In terms of my oldest – oh, no, actually, do you know what I do have? I have this Vivienne Westwood suit that Aaron bought me, um, because I spotted Eddie Izzard, um, in – maybe it was 2013, um, and Aaron bought me this suit because he had, you know, come into some – some sort of family money at the time. Not to out him as being rich because he's not anymore, um, because he bought this suit. Um, uh, he bought me this lovely Westwood suit then. So that would've been – that would be a little bit older, I guess. And, um, that's one I – I'm too paranoid to wear a lot because I'm worried I'll ruin it. Because I love it. But I wore it to the Eddie Izzard shows. Um, that was – that was – that's one of – I'm going to open this cupboard behind me to see if there's anything –

KIRI: Ooh.

JOE: Um, hang on.

KIRI: But I'm sure you must have pieces in there that are sort of 50 or 60 years old as well, right?

JOE: Oh, oh, I've probably got about – yeah, I've got a cape that's about 100.

KIRI: Wow.

JOE: Um, so it's, um, a 1920s, um, kind of – I don't know if this was the original colour because it's quite old, but like a sage green and black velvet, um, ruffle collar, um, 20s opera cape.

KIRI: Oof.

JOE: Yeah. No, that's about 100.

KIRI: I can't believe 100 years old. And you – and you wear it?

JOE: Very rarely. I've got that. And I've got – I've got loads – oh, not loads – I've got two antique top hats. I've got, um, uh, like a French opera, um, collapsing one. So I guess that would probably be – I mean those would've been like 1910, right? Yeah, so I guess that's like 110. It's – that is in – that's not in good condition. That's – it's like – because I got it for collapsing for travelling. Because top hats are really hard to travel with because they're big. Um, but this – yeah, collapsible silk one. And it's just – it's frayed but I still love it. I – I like the – the worse condition it gets, the more I love it. Not that I'm specifically fucking it up, but um, I've never had it repaired. It's like worn down. It's coming apart at

the top. And then I've got like a German – I'm looking around. Like a German, um, vintage German like moleskin top hat as well.

KIRI: Well is there an era that you – is it 20s, 40s that you wish you existed in just for the fashion alone?

JOE: 20s and 30s. 40s I'm not so keen on. Um, I – I like it, but 50s is like a no. That's a bit too like, you know, uh, clean for me. I like, you know, fur collars and capes and kind of those kind of beetle looking coats where everyone looks like they're in a mysterious shroud. Um, uh, and I mean I don't like cloche hats but they look great on people. Um, yeah. That 20s, 30s. Obviously a terrible time to actually be alive, um, but everyone looked gorgeous.

KIRI: [laughs] They did, they did.

JOE: Terrible – terrible economically, politically, um, you know. But god, they looked great.

KIRI: Is there an item of clothing you'll put on – it's probably the suit you're in – that you automatically feel, 'oh, I feel great in this.' Like, 'don't worry about anything else, I just – I just feel great. I don't need to worry about what I'm wearing or think about it.'

JOE: Yeah, I think it's this. Do you know what? I feel like this – this – I'm going to be absolutely devastated when this one – when this one has had enough or something happens to it. I'll probably keep wearing it even if it's like – it's like falling apart. But I've got that. And I've got this, um, there's another thing I've got here, which is like this – so it's – it's kind of like a velvet – kind of a sports jacket I guess. Well it's supposed to be, but it's got like puffy like Tudor shoulders.

KIRI: Oh yeah, I can see. Yeah.

JOE: Um, so it's kind of like – sports goth is the only way I can think of doing it. And this is one that I pop on occasionally. I'll put it over like whatever. It just seems to go with everything I have. It's slightly cropped, it's got like silk stripes that go down it, um, and it's again like falling apart but I just – whenever I put it on I feel nice.

KIRI: Oh.

JOE: That's a nice one.

KIRI: Yeah, it's lovely. It's beautiful. Just of a texture as well. Like I think you – especially with your looks for Joe Black's stage, there's always so much texture in there, do you know what I mean? There's always interesting fabric.

JOE: Oh I try, yeah. It's – it's not – it's like sequins, great. Because it's high impact and then you've got your faux furs. Um, you know, your kind of drapery velvets. And just something that you look and you can – the way things move or the way light hits them, um, it's – I'm not like – I don't really like dance costumes, you know? Your kind of lycra – stretched lycra kind of things because they're – I mean obviously they're very, um, what's the word I'm looking for? Um, helpful for, you know, existing.

But for me it just doesn't – it doesn't say anything for what I'm doing. It can say a lot for someone else, like circus people. Perfect, um, you know? Because it's like shiny and they can do all their tricks. But I'm just – I'm standing there, that's what I'm doing. I'll occasionally walk from left to right. I'll sway – sway gently, uh, totter. Um, yeah. I like velvets. Velvets, uh, kind of faux fur. Faux

furs and sequins. Uh, beads. I love beads, but I don't have a lot of things that have beads on it. Because they're heavy and they're expensive.

KIRI: They are.

JOE: But I just – I love the way heavy beaded fabric looks. Beautiful. And feather.

KIRI: It's – I've – I've got some capes that I got from this shop in Ireland. They're only capes but they're all completely beaded with a high neck and they just sit to about there. And they are so heavy to wear that I'm like – even if they'd had a top of it I wouldn't have bought it because it's exhausting.

It's like my brother has this incredibly macho vest that he puts on with weights when he runs. And it feels like the most glam, camp equivalent of that. You're getting this extra workout from all the beading. But it's got some real weight to it, hasn't it? And those, you know, those vintage pieces like you said with appliqué on them will have – there's weight to them. There's work gone in there that you can feel.

JOE: There's a particular kind of satisfaction you can get standing stage-side at a burlesque show. If someone has like a beaded outfit, that – if they take it off and throw it, there's that boom. There's a clang. As – and like a bang as it hits the floor and it's like, oh, that is like – and you know that they can – that's not done with a machine. Machines can't do that kind of beading. That's got a story. That's had hands. That's had hands involved and it's beautiful. Um, yeah, that bang. Oh, imagine it. I'm now imagining your brother in like a beaded vest.

KIRI: That's right. That's exactly what he wears, yeah.

JOE: Stunning.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: What's your relationship with shopping? Do you love it? Do you shop more online? Is it – do you – do you hate it? Is it, you know, what's your relationship with it?

JOE: I love, um, I like rooting through things. Um, I think I don't – I don't like buying clothes online. Um, because as much as something will look a particular way online and can look that way on me, um, it's not – I don't think you can really get a good vibe for something online necessarily. Though sometimes, you know, there's no choice. Or there's something that you know well, you know? You look at it and you go, 'that would be right for me. That would be right.' But like typically I don't like buying online because I don't feel like I've had a connection to like touch it and – and – or maybe it's not quite perfect or maybe I prefer one like this but if I went to a shop I could find one like that.

Um, so I've missed shops open – being open terribly because I love rooting through. And I love going through antique shops as well. Because that's where you'll get like, you know, like I've got, um, oh, I've got a 30s tuxedo, actually. So that's pretty old. Um, again also falling to pieces, but, um, that – and it was like the perfect fit and it was just – it's shoved in a corner in an antique shop. Just like a little bit worse for wear, but it was matching trousers, um, waistcoat and jacket. Um, and I love it. And it's when – so when I've done my Marlene Dietrich I wear it. Um, and it was like 30 quid.

KIRI: Wow.

JOE: But it – because it was in a shit condition. But also it was like obviously a very particular size. But then I put it on and it fit like a glove. Um, it was meant to be. Um, so I like – I like rooting through. Because you just – you can find something. Though I wouldn't think to look for a tail coat online, because I think, 'oh, I've got a tail coat.' But then you might see it in a – and it might just be quite – it might be just that little bit different and, you know, it might go, 'oh, actually the lining is this colour,' which you won't necessarily see on a picture or, um, you know, it might have a pocket hidden somewhere.

Uh, or the, I don't know, the pocket hole might be like asymmetric or – there's lots of little details in clothes that you can – you can spot in person, or you can spot what you can do to them, is – is another thing. You go, 'ooh, what if this had like – what if I just turned that up and – and put this on this or paired it with this?' You know? Like I've – so many times I've tried on stuff and I don't, you know, I'm not wearing a belt and I'll go, 'oh, this'll look nice belted.' And then if it's somewhere like Beyond Retro, just grab a belt and try it over it and go, 'yeah, great, perfect.' You can't do that online. There's no – you don't get that – that thrill as well, I think. You know? Of the – walking around like a – like an antique superstore.

Like in Brighton we've got Snooper's Paradise, which is massive. And it's just all these different stalls all done by different people that just sell any – any number of absolute tat, you know what I mean? Like one can have a taxidermy like baby alligator and the next one is – is selling like prosthetic eyes and then sunglasses, you know? It's like – it's just all – it's all like wildly different. And walking around, I love that when you find something and you're

holding onto it and you're walking around the shop still. And that's when you're deciding as well if – if you want it. I like that. But I always return it back to where I found it because I'm not a monster.

KIRI: What's your – you must love a charity shop then or a car boot?

JOE: Oh, I do. I got – there's, um, the Brighton charity shops – and I don't know whether it's like Brighton is actually like a bit posh, uh, you can get quite a lot of – I found quite a lot of designer stuff in charity shops for like no money. So I had two pairs of Vivienne Westwood trousers. They were like £15 each in a charity shop. And I had an Alexander McQueen shirt that was like £10.

KIRI: Wow. Oh my gosh.

JOE: Right? And my favourite charity shop find I've ever done was I found, um, an 80s Thierry Mugler suit for £40 from the Martlets.

W: Oh my gosh.

JOE: I guess they didn't know – they didn't know how to price it. So – because they were like, 'Thierry Mugler.' It's not like, you know, I'm sure they'd look at Gucci and go, 'oh, it's Gucci.' But, you know, the – the little old ladies that are doing the Martlets are probably not going to be that familiar with Mugler necessarily, you know? Um, or they just didn't care and they put it at that price.

But, you know, that's one of the posher charity shops when you get like, you know, a basic dress and they'll stick a really high tag price on it. But this one was cheap and I – I didn't even try it on. I

just panicked, grabbed it, because I was like, 'no one is getting this.' And I – I bought it. That was – I wore it on – when I came back on episode 5 of Drag Race. That kind of big, there was like a big pointy-shouldered snatched in jacket. That's the Mugler jacket with the – the big, um, asymmetric foldover. That was that. £40. Charity shop.

KIRI: Yes, wow. Absolutely love it. That has to be the best buy, right? From – from a charity shop?

JOE: That – I think that is – that is certainly one of – certainly one of my prizes. Aaron once got a, um, in an antique shop in like somewhere in the Midlands, he got, um, an Alexander McQueen Samsonite suitcase.

KIRI: Ooh, yes please.

JOE: For like £10 or something. It was not – I'm looking at it now. So it's like, um, like a weird kind of briefcasey looking thing but it's like Alexander McQueen collaboration with Samsonite, which I didn't even realise was a thing.

KIRI: Love it. Absolutely.

JOE: For like £10. But it was like filthy and he had to like scrub it up and – but it's got this lovely like scary looking – I say scary looking – I don't know how zebra print can look scary looking, but kind of a distorted zebra print lining.

KIRI: Love it.

JOE: Camp. Camp. Camp and goth.

KIRI: [laughs] So your style, which I feel like is so iconic now on and off stage, and I can see how one feeds into the other, but is this – do you see your style changing as you get older? Or you think like – because I can see what you wear on and off stage looking absolutely outstanding on an 80 year old. So like do you think this is you now?

JOE: I mean obviously there will be developments and – and evolutions, uh, but, you know, I think so. I cannot wait to be 80 years old looking like the wonkiest May West impersonator you've ever seen, you know? Still doing, you know, my scary, uh, George Fornby cleaning windows parody with a big bowler, like, 'ugh,' just barely – barely conscious. Um, but I always joke that I, um, that I'm – I'm going to look like Quentin Crisp in – in the daytime. I'll have like pink rinse hair, big – I mean big wide – I mean I've got bright orange hair and I wear big wide brim hats. Um, well I guess Quentin Crisp actually looks a little bit like modern day Ian McKellan, doesn't he? So he's not really that outrageous.

Um, but I do – and I'll see – I mean Brighton's obviously full of characters, um, quite the characters. Um, and, um, you'll see these kind of dottery old men in like loud print suits with big, fancy hats, uh, wearing like little round sunglasses and stuff. And I – whenever I see them I go, 'that is my future,' you know? They've got a – like a fancy walking stick, they're like hunched over, they're about 102, and they just – they – they're still look – trying to look jazzy, um, it's taking them a bit longer to get dressed. And I was like, 'that is what I want to –' and also when I see like you said about the old lady in, um, Iceland, uh, with all, you know, big eye shadow and thin eyebrows. Um, I – that. I want to do that. I look at – I love it.

Because like you said before, they – it's so – it's for them. Um, and also I'm sure they get to a point when you think, 'fuck it, I don't give a shit, you know? I mean I am going – if I'm, you know, if I'm – you'll go like, 'I'm 85, I don't give a crap,' do you know what I mean? 'I'm going to walk down Brighton seafront. If I want to wear a four metre wide brim hat, I'm going to wear a four metre wide brim hat. I'm going to have a – a cane that's in the shape of a goose and I'm going to wear a miu miu with it. I'll do what I want, you know?' That's – that's where I aim to be in life.

KIRI: Is there an item of clothing you can still see yourself wearing at that age?

JOE: Oh god, this suit's going to hopefully be with me forever, right? That and I'm – I'm hoping that opera cape, you know, holds on another 100 years. Because as I've – I've said many times, I'm not going to die out of spite. So when I'm 100 and – 132, uh, hopefully I'm still wearing that cape.

KIRI: I'd love to see that. Yes please. Um, are there any trends that you've seen pass through your – your years on this planet that you're like, 'I hope I never see you come back again'?

JOE: [sighs] Do you know those – those gelled fringes?

KIRI: Yeah. Yes, I do. [laughs]

JOE: Them. Them. Those – those – I mean, I'm sure you can still see them in modern day Blackpool, but, um, [laughs] sorry, Blackpool. Um, never had a nice time in you. Um, no, I have. But when I was a kid, when I was too young to know better. Um, sorry. Um, no, those gelled fringes. Those, uh, still when I see them I'm like, 'where have you come from?' Those – you know

the really thin little, um, I – is there – there is a level of effort that goes into making them that small and parted and pointy, right?

KIRI: They're horrible. And sometimes it's when people have got a – a curl as well. And so they have these strange curls that have just soaked with gel and yeah, absolutely. Yeah, truly awful. I'd forgotten about them, so, um, thanks for bringing them back into my life.

JOE: I'm sorry. Yeah, I'm sorry.

KIRI: Now I know you said you're not going to die out of spite, and I fully believe in your ability to not do that. But final question. Should you be buried, Joe, what would you wear?

JOE: God, I'm going to have to say it, aren't I? This suit! I love it. No, maybe I'll go in that Westwood suit that Aaron got me that I'm too scared to wear. Again out of spite. I like – spite fuels me. And then no one else can have it.

KIRI: [laughs] Like an Egyptian king being buried with everything. Yeah.

JOE: That's what I'll do. Yeah. That's what I'll do. And whether Klaus is, you know, Klaus is my cat, whether he's, uh, around or not, he's coming with me as well. He's got a nice Christmas jumper that I think looks really charming on him. He's got the Christmas jumper and he's got this grey one with a hood. He doesn't like the hood up, but I think it's very funny. Um, but, uh, you know, he doesn't like it when the hood's up. He kind of looks at you like you've like wronged, uh, generations of his family. Uh, you know? And then he will come for revenge. But it's got a little bauble on it. It's really cute.

KIRI: Well I'm going to have to have a picture of that, mate. Um – um, it's been so nice speaking to you. What a great chat about like clothes with someone who is a – genuine. I feel like you're a real custodian of – of like fashion and clothing. I think, um, yeah. It's – it's like your – I imagine your wardrobe is like a little jaunt through the V&A. And I love that when things, you know, get too damaged or whatever, that's not to be burnt or chucked away, it's like, 'right, what can you become?' And it's, you know, ever-evolving. I think it's a beautiful, really refreshing conversation and outlook. So thank you so much for chatting to me. I appreciate it.

JOE: Thank you very much for having me. It's been such a pleasure.

KIRI: Oh, I'm glad you did it.

JOE: I loved it.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Oh, I just love Joe. Do you know what? I've got a lot of time for anyone who wears a gauntlet to school. I've always said that. Um, make sure you have a nose at our Instagram, [whoyouwearingpod](#), as we'll be throwing up pictures of the outfits that we've talked about in the episode and I might even treat you to a picture of my face after Joe painted me in full Disney drag.

Oh, we had a really nice message about our Instagram, actually, from AJ saying, 'I'm loving the pictures that go with the pod. Really brings it to life.' Yes, I'm so pleased about that. I will get better at sort of describing. Because sometimes I'm just so excited

about what I'm seeing that I should describe it for people who aren't on the Instagram or looking at it at the same time. Because we can't always get pictures of everything anyway. But I think it's a nice little space. Because also just chatting about stuff that's been on the episodes.

Like we put up a great picture of Laura Whitmore and she was wearing – you know one of those cardigans? The small cardigans? And then we were chatting about like, 'oh yeah, do you remember how we all had tiny cardigans for a bit?' I absolutely love the nostalgia. Um, the messages and conversations I've been having about this podcast are so lovely. Um, I'm genuinely delighted that so many of you are enjoying it. It means an awful lot.

A great message from Heather. Um, she messaged after Laura's episode to say, 'what a fab episode. I love the discussions of ethical clothing and fashion. Wearing things more than once and the memories that come flooding back from being a skint youngster sharing clothes with friends, mixing and matching our outfits to make them look different.' Oh my god, I totally agree, Heather. That thing of like one massive collective wardrobe was so joyous and it's mad that we don't have that now. And I was like, 'why don't I have that?' And I think it's because I'm fatter than all my friends. Also I've got such like outlandish taste that I think people are like, 'I'm going to a fancy dress, can I see if you've got anything that I can borrow?' And you're like, 'absolutely. Oh, my day wear? Yeah, no worries.'

Um, so I'm going to take a little bit more of your time here to bang on about a small business that I love. So this week it's Let Us Pretend. It's owned by Susie and she makes really special items for adults and kids including capes and berets. All things that I can

absolutely see Joe pulling off with aplomb. The business is inspired by her kids and their endless capacity to pretend.

I bought my goddaughter one of, um, her capes for a birthday and seeing her singing 'Frozen' in it makes my heart just explode with joy. I've got a mid-length and a mini-cape myself because if you feel like a hero, why not dress like one? But genuinely I always get compliments on them from girls and gay guys, who are the only people I'm looking for approval for when I get dressed. Susie uses the off-cuts from capes to make all sorts of other bits as well like bunting and face masks and if she's not too slammed, she might even do you a custom order. So have a look at Let Us Pretend on Instagram. I think you'll genuinely love her stuff. Also her favourite films are 'The Wizard of Oz' and 'Rocky Horror.' What is not to love?

Thank you so so much for listening. Um, if you've enjoyed what you've heard so far, can you give us a nice rating? It'll help more people find us and I just want as many people to listen as possible. Next week I'll be chatting to musician extraordinaire Seye Adelekan. It's a particularly special and candid episode that I think you're going to love. It's not the easiest listen at times, but it's a really astounding conversation. So see you all soon.

[Upbeat electronic music]

Who Are You Wearing is produced by Jo Southerd, the artwork is by Mary Phillips, and the music is by Ani Glass. This has been a Little Wander production.