

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Jean Paul Gaultier highlights resilience of LGBTQ+ community with podcast

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French writer Anthony Vincent and burlesque artist Allannah Starr in a recent episode of Les Enfants Terribles. Image credit: Jean Paul Gaultier

By KATIE TAMOLA

French fashion label Jean Paul Gaultier is spotlighting how the creative community faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic through a new podcast series.

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Jean Paul Gaultier is celebrating Pride Month and the LGBTQI+ community through its new podcast, which is available on IGTV, Spotify and YouTube. The "Les Enfants Terribles" podcast features several conversations with LGBTQI+ creatives and leaders, including burlesque artist Allannah Starr and singer-songwriter Bilal Hassani, about their unique pandemic experiences.

"As we're all eager to re-emerge back into our flows, it's also important to speak to what has taken place over this 15-plus months that have changed how people have interacted, gone about their work, etc.," said Kimmie Smith, cofounder and creative director of [Athleisure Mag](#), New York. "Every experience is shared by the greater impact, but how we got through it is as varied as the people you would ask.

"It's great to see the collection as a backdrop to this conversation which allows you to oscillate between the glamour and the reality of the discussion taking place," she said.

Pushing past the pandemic

The podcast named for the provocative designer's nickname "l'enfant terrible" is part of what the brand is calling "The Pride by Jean Paul Gaultier." The conversations are in English and French, depending on the participants, with subtitled translations provided on YouTube.

The most recent episode features Ms. Starr, a trans woman who was born in Cuba and raised in the United States. She has been in show business since she was 18 and currently lives in Paris.

In an intimate discussion, French fashion journalist Anthony Vincent asks Ms. Starr about disparate consequences of the pandemic, especially those related to the community of entertainers in France. As someone who has worked in various arenas, Ms. Starr reflects on her long and personal connection to nightclub culture.

Ms. Starr talks about her career in show business, struggle and hope for the future.

"In my youth, nightclubs were essential for me because they were a space that I could finally relate to other people like me, I could be as creative, I could be what I wanted to be, and I didn't feel that judgment that I felt in society," she says.

Mr. Vincent offers the context that France has experienced several lockdowns due to the pandemic, leaving no theaters, bars, restaurants or other venues for art lovers and performers alike. For more than a year, the people who worked at these venues had nearly no income.

As Ms. Starr found belonging and acceptance in her youth through nightclubs and performance art, other members of the LGBTQI+ community are often about to find safety and belonging in these arenas as well.

"[With the pandemic] queer people and places have been severely fragilized," Mr. Vincent says in recollection.

When Mr. Vincent asks if she was prepared as an artist to experience this kind of loss of income or opportunities, Ms. Starr says she was absolutely not. The pair does however discuss how the show can go on.

Ms. Starr describes her act as difficult to define, as it includes several elements, including burlesque and comedy. She says she enjoys presenting images and ideas that people may not be used to.

The burlesque artist elaborates on the struggles she experienced during the pandemic in having all of her projects cancelled, then starting an Instagram talk show but not being able to sustain it financially. She said her mental health declined drastically and was barely able to function due to severe anxiety.

The burlesque star says that for her, the year was a culmination of stresses, uncertainty and past mental health issues, which she is sure other people can relate to. Since then, she has sought medical help and therapy, changed her lifestyle and is trying to live "day by day."

When the pair discusses how nightclub performers and cabaret artists may have been ostensibly neglected by government prioritization or consideration during the pandemic, Ms. Starr explains that even though performance art can be disregarded at any point in time, it is still meaningful.

"Maybe our society doesn't recognize it as something that's important, as other art or other performance or classical art, when it turns it's really all the same, isn't it," she says.

When Mr. Vincent asks if the pandemic has taken away safe spaces from the LGBTQI+ community that already has faced great marginalization, Ms. Starr speaks of the community's resilience. She foresees better times ahead, for performers and consumers alike.

"What I really do believe about queer people through history is that they're extremely resilient and they survive, and they've survived a lot of things," she said. "And even though it's been very challenging, I think that it will definitely get better."

[#BilalHassani](#) talks twisting gender codes and using fashion as a liberation tool in our [#LesEnfantsTerribles](#) podcast.

Soon available on IGTV, Spotify and Youtube. [#JPGLOvesPride](#) [#JeanPaulGaultier](#)
pic.twitter.com/sD3DGPXchb

Jean Paul Gaultier (@JPGaultier) [June 27, 2021](#)

In another episode of "Les Enfants Terribles," French singer Bilal Hassani talks about expression and emancipation through fashion with Mr. Vincent. Marie Cau, the first transgender mayor in France, discusses the struggles and progress of the LGBTQI+ community in an interview with Habibitch, a queer dancer and artist.

Fostering places of belonging

For Pride Month and beyond, brands are making continuous efforts to show their support for the LGBTQI+ community, supporting those who buy their products as well as their own employees.

Beauty group Estée Lauder Companies and its LGBTQIA+ employee resource group, wELCome, developed the ELC Pride 365 Program, an internal initiative designed to advocate for LGBTQIA+ equality beyond Pride Month. Through this, wELCome has presented a series of intersectional events to highlight firsthand accounts and reflections from

LGBTQIA+ people about their experiences ([see story](#)).

U.S. jeweler Tiffany & Co. celebrated Pride Month this year with a personal campaign starring New Yorkers who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

"Stand for Love" asks individuals and couples what they stand for and how they stand for love. The vignette encapsulates how the jeweler has closely been associated with different forms of love ([see story](#)).

In the midst of recovering from a devastating pandemic, brands including Jean Paul Gaultier will continue to make efforts to illustrate empathy and inclusivity, values that seem to be more appreciated than ever.

"This video is a way to assess whether the complicated feelings we have had or shared with those in our circles is also felt by those that we don't know," Ms. Smith said. "When you think of the pandemic in terms of work whether that meant being able to do it or modifying the way that it was done, it's a number of stories that's essential to know so that we have a better knowledge base and to have the resources available should we have to deal with this again.

"For the label to bring this conversation out shows that there is a sense of humanity and that regardless of the demographic, this was and is a shared experience," she said.

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