



## En Vogue

### THE HAUS OF EMERSON AT EMERSON COLLEGE IS HAVING A BALL

Vogueing is back, well, in vogue.

These queer-rooted dance and drag competitions, which are organized as “balls” by family-like “houses” of performers, have been enjoying a renaissance in cities across the country. A movement born in the queer underground, where it was pioneered primarily by people of color, voguing is currently permeating mainstream pop culture in a way it has not since Madonna encouraged America to “strike a pose” alongside members of the iconic House of Xtravaganza.

Today, “Pose,” the FX Network television show about the early days of NYC balls, is a Golden Globe-nominated hit. References to balls permeate “RuPaul’s Drag Race” (“Category is...!”), sparking new interest from those born well-after voguing began. And the 1990 documentary about the culture, “Paris Is Burning,” has now spawned a million gifs and memes for sharing on social media. An entirely new generation is discovering the dance and its history.

Now, according to campus organizers, Emerson College has become the first US university to be home to a vogue ballroom house: The Haus of Emerson.

“I thought it would be great to educate people, and show them where this comes from,” says Christopher Henderson-West.

Last year, Henderson-West became the new president of EAGLE (Emerson’s Advance-ment Group For Love and Expression), the student-run LGBTQIA+ organization. As



Haus of Emerson in competition. PHOTO courtesy Christopher Henderson-West



a “black bisexual gender-fluid male from the Midwest,” Henderson-West imbued EAGLE with a new focus: to raise visibility of queer and trans people of color at the university.

Establishing a college vogue ballroom house seemed the perfect way to do that. The Haus

The Haus of Emerson. PHOTO courtesy Christopher Henderson-West

of Emerson made its voguing debut last fall during the school’s annual Queer History Month celebrations in October. The series typically ends with a week-long “Drag-Tober Fest,” and Henderson-West made this installment a much more robust affair: There was a workshop with competitive voguer London Escada, makeup tutorials from Boston drag legend Mizery, and more. It all culminated in the first House of Emerson ball, cohosted by Henderson-West (who, as Selane DeHeaux Darling, serves as “mother” of the house) and Boston native Jujubee, an all-star alum of “Drag Race.”

The event was a smashing success, and it was followed up in April with a Vogue Kiki Ball. Kiki balls are a newish phenomenon that function almost as junior balls; they often have roots in community health centers and other queer-youth-serving organizations, and engage younger participants than the larger, nightlife-oriented affairs.

It certainly helped Henderson-West, who plans to take the Haus of Emerson on the road in the future, further his original mission: to elevate awareness of a culture that speaks to the unique experiences and contributions of queer and trans people of color. April’s outing attracted members of other houses from across the country, and participants with cash prizes in a range of voguing categories—from catwalk to duck-walk. Proceeds benefited Emerson’s Student Assistance Fund, which helps students pay for textbooks and other needs, as well as Boston GLASS, an organization supporting queer youth of color.

Showing that support goes to the heart of vogue ballroom culture, which is all about “the sense of family, and how important that is,” says Henderson-West.

In the world of balls, every house is a home. [x]