

Borderline midweek

Step aside, queens of the desert...

Northwest drag performers take center stage at Saturday show



Imperial Princess #22 Chy a Little Smith performs "I don't want to be a star."

The new American Bandstand...



People came from as far as Boise to see the show at Xenon — which wrapped up Moscow Gay Pride Day. The audience danced and mingled for about two hours before the show began.



Trailer Vixen Frisky Buffett performs for the crowd. Buffett said she has been doing drag for two years

Staff photos by Andrew Wong

By Merideth Beasley and Julie Frank
The Summer Evergreen

When Katherine Sprague turned 30 in February 1995, she said she began to feel nostalgic for drag.

"When I first came out (of the closet) 12 years ago there were lots of drag queens in shows," she said. "So (for her birthday) I convinced a lot of my male friends to put on dresses. A lot of them haven't taken them off since."

Sprague has organized 12 drag shows, the most recent one held Saturday night at Xenon in association with Moscow's Gay Pride Day.

Returning fashionably late for their second Moscow drag show, were Spokane Imperial Court Princess #22 Chy a Little Smith and Kaitlyn Berenger.

The Imperial Court is a Spokane group that each year elects an Empress, said co-master of ceremonies Tim Brandt.

The Empress in turn chooses her princesses, he added.

Smith said once chosen the Empresses and Princesses keep their titles forever.

Smith said she loves the identity she has while performing.

"Drag is like Halloween whenever you want it," she said. "You become a different person."

Smith said she sometimes buys her outfits, but often she makes them, including a peacock feather headdress and a black velvet evening gown with turquoise beads which she beaded herself.

Berenger, who has been performing on and off for five years, said she has a friend who designs most of her outfits.

"It's not Oleg Cassini, but hey..." she said.

The toughest part of getting ready to go on-stage is her eyes, she said.

"So once in awhile I'll still desire some help," Berenger said. "But it's not really hard. Everybody's

willing to help everybody."

When the performers need help getting ready, Brandt, the self-described "one and only Imperial Court Jester" is there.

On Saturday he played John Travolta to Berenger's Olivia Newton-John in the "You're the One that I Want" number from "Grease," but Brandt said he has done drag as Kitt Marlowe on occasion.

"I find it really interesting too because from doing drag I know now why the men I know enjoy it so much," he said.

"You feel so free," he said. "It's like being in disguise."

Saturday's show started shortly after 11:30 p.m. with Brandt's opening number as the Genie in "Aladdin" singing "You Ain't Never Had a Friend Like Me."

Saturday was an important night for Smith's "son," Ken a Little Smith-in-a-breeze, who performed in front of an audience for the first time to the tune "Choke my Chicken." A rubber chicken played a key supporting role.

University of Idaho theater students Frisky Buffett, Verla Jean and Willamena performed next as the "Trailer Vixens" to "Turn the Beat Around."

While Buffett has been performing for two years, Verla Jean and Willamena said they are still pretty new to drag.

Buffett said her favorite thing about performing is the "total liberating feeling."

The most popular performer of the night was Melissa "the blond bombshell" — who was not a scheduled performer but rather was talked on stage by Brandt. While strutting up on stage to "Like a Virgin" a number of audience members took the opportunity to personally tip her.

After Melissa left the stage Kevin Keifer took the microphone and mentioned the GLBA youth conference that will be held at WSU Thursday through Sunday. He also mentioned that a drag show similar to

Saturday's will kick off the conference.

Then Smith came out to perform the safe sex tune "Love is a Dangerous Thing." She ended the number by throwing condoms to the audience and even giving a simulated demonstration of how to put them on.

"It was raining Tupperware all over the place!" exclaimed Brandt.

Former WSU student Audrey did not perform at Saturday's show but did at Sprague's 30th birthday party. She said she just recently moved back to the area and has been performing in drag since 1989.

In an earlier conversation with Brandt, he spoke of the need for a place for Pullman/Moscow gays to meet socially.

"I am really impressed at how the Pullman gay community is establishing an identity," he said. "It would be nice if they had a regular place where gay people could come together... and know that they were safe."

Keifer mentioned to the audience that a group for gays and bisexuals meet weekly at the Koinona house on Thursdays at 7 p.m. He said the group wouldn't be meeting this week due to the conference.

Smith mentioned that the Spokane Gay Pride Day is on Sunday and she encouraged audience members to drive up and show their support.

There were approximately 100 to 150 people in the audience.

Leilani James, who helps Sprague organize the shows said that after people have seen one show they can't wait for the next one.

"Everyone (comes to the shows)," she said. "It's just one big happy family event."

James said the next show will probably be in August or September in time for the start of fall semester.

One unnamed employee of Xenon felt the show was a change of pace.

"It's not everyday you experience this kind of stuff in Moscow," he said.