

ENCORE!

The Oregon Daily Emerald's Entertainment Guide

Impersonator brings politics to spotlight

By Kelvin Wee
Encore Editor

David is an entertainer, a winner of beauty pageants and a former princess.

However, when the lights shine on the EMU Ballroom stage tonight at the *Baubles, Bangles and Beads* show, they will focus on Mr. Sable Odessa, David's other persona.

Sable is one of Eugene's own female impersonators who has traveled far and wide for the last three years, perfecting his performance and earning titles on the local, regional and national drag circuit.

Sable began performing on stage three years ago, a short while after he moved to Eugene from central Oregon. The act, which he said is all it is, lies mostly in the attitude.

"I'm an artist, and like an actor I have to psych myself up for the part," he said. "I do not do this because I desire inside to be a woman. I do this because it's a form of art that I am good at."

Sable said his attitude must change on the day of the show because a great deal of it requires him to transform himself from David, who he is most of the time, to Sable.

"Unlike what many may think, I'm not schizophrenic," he said. "I am a man, but at the same time I am a performer and an actor. And this is my act: that's all it is, it is an act. I'm always David, and sometimes, I'm Sable."

Preparing for a performance takes a long time, Sable said. Make-up application alone takes more than two hours, while the wigs take an additional hour and a half to two hours, he explained. And that does not include time spent in rehearsals or designing and building costumes.

Rehearsals are not done in "face" — the term female impersonators use for being in full drag, with make-up, wigs, the whole shebang. Sable said his usual rehearsal dress consists of a pair of sweats and a baseball cap, not a bouffant hair-piece and a sequin dress.

"Rehearsals are very rigorous," Sable said. "But I think that's good because it makes the finished product look tight and clean to the audience."

As for the costumes, Sable said he has a majority of them custom-built by his own tailor because everything has to fit perfectly. In addition, because he is a man, his costumes have to be built in a manner to create the illusion of cleavage.

"Being a female impersonator means using as much of your manly attributes as possible to create an illusion, and then playing off of those parts to make them look feminine," he said.

Up close, once Sable is done putting on the make-up, wig, costume, and other accessories, everything looks larger than it would on a real woman. He said female impersonators, like actors, have to do this because of the intensity of stage lights and the difference in distance that separates the audience from performers.

"Up close, it may look ridiculous," he said. "But on stage, it looks different."

One thing that Sable said saddens him is that many people do not realize he is not portraying his idea of a perfect woman but is actually mocking what American society deems her to be — tall, blond and stupid.

"A perfect example of what some people may view as society's perfect woman or a mindless individual would be a sorority woman," he said. "But



Courtesy photo

Sable Odessa, a local female impersonator, will perform at the *Baubles, Bangles and Beads* show, a benefit for GALA, tonight at 8 in the EMU Ballroom.

perhaps a lot of people just don't realize that many of these women are overachievers. They're incredibly smart. But just because they are tall and pretty, they're immediately categorized that way."

The organization Sable works and performs with, the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Emerald Empire, does not support this sexist idea but tries hard to work against it, he said.

Yet, Sable said he has been approached by several people who have questioned him about his act, thinking he is actually trying to perpetuate stereotypes of women.

"What they don't seem to understand is that this is a political statement that I'm trying to get across," he said. "They see me idolizing that kind of woman but that's not true."

ISCEE holds two major fundraisers each year — the Prince

and Princess Ball and the Annual Coronation — and also sponsors other events to raise funds as they are needed by other organizations, he said.

"We are a non-profit organization and we pride ourselves in doing a lot of benefit for the community," Sable said.

The group has raised funds for organizations such as Shanti in Oregon, Inc., Rape Crisis Network, Ruby House (an AIDS hospice in Roseburg), the Willamette AIDS Council and many other service organizations in the Eugene area.

In addition, Sable said many women work with ISCEE because "they see this is a very viable organization," he said.

While ISCEE does raise funds for various organizations, much of the contributions go to help local AIDS service and support groups.

This, Sable said, is because

the government itself is just not doing enough. He said the only way to overcome this shortfall is to go out and do something about it.

"If the straight and gay communities would straighten up, so to speak, we may have a better chance of combatting this disease," he said. "I find a great deal of anger in myself when I see all this ignorance. AIDS is not a gay disease. There are thousands of heterosexual people who have died from it."

Stereotyping goes beyond just saying that AIDS is a gay disease, Sable said. Unlike what many would like to believe, there are many female impersonators in the world who are not gay, he explained.

While Sable does not deny his sexuality, he said it saddens

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James Newton...

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