

**THEATER**

**W**omen—what does your hair say about you? Your fingernails (or lack thereof)? How about the way you walk down the street? Lesbian author and performer Kimberly Dark navigates the murky waters of sexual and gender identity in her groundbreaking work *Butch/Femme Chronicles: Discussions with Women Who Are Not Like Me (And Some Who Are)*.

This is one of two shows aimed at women as part of the triangle productions! Summer Pride Series. The show runs just three nights: June 28, 29 and 30.

The dynamic performance combines stories from a variety of women and takes the audience on an emotional journey that explores many issues surrounding lesbian identity. Dark is also an educator, and her ideas are offered in a way that provokes discussion and re-evaluation.

Part poetry reading, part performance art, part sociology lesson, *Chronicles* builds layer upon layer of shared experience until a rich texture is created. "My goal is to write the experiences of women I know so that their voices can help illuminate issues which have arisen in my own life," Dark reveals but hastens to add, "This text differs from autobiography in that, for the most part, it is not about me. It does, however, highlight my position and sometimes my discom-

fort with the interactions I describe."

Dark claims: "This approach to gender presentation is radically different than most writing and performance on the theme. It yields a different analysis than much other writing about lesbians regarding the butch/femme experience."

Dark wants to point out cultural stereotypes and help us re-examine our self-images. "People experience their lives based on the way they look," she asserts.

She's also sensitive to the many women who reject the butch/femme dynamic and labeling, something she has struggled with herself. "I focused a lot on women who had a

problem putting themselves in the category 'butch' or 'femme,'" she says, railing against a society that only seems to know one model—the man/woman het mind-set.

She contends that butch behavior does not automatically equate with a desire to be male. In fact, she views sex and gender as completely separate aspects of an individual, which

feeds into the trend in younger generations to veer away from traditional labels of any kind.

*Butch/Femme Chronicles* surely will inspire much great post-theater debate.

**F**or a more tongue-in-cheek exploration of lesbian life, look no further than *The Dyke and the Porn Star*, a two-woman play about Chance, a bashful San Francisco dyke, who falls hard for Tara, a well-known porn star. (OK, so it's not likely to happen to you, but it should make for entertaining theater.)

Once the two women meet, the story unfolds in scenes of both reality and fantasy, until that distinction blurs toward the end of the play. This is about sex and desire and their roles in a relationship. (Now who can't relate to that?)

As with Dark's piece, this material looks at the butch/femme dynamic. Chance tells the audience her costume—a dress worn with fetching Army boots—is "femme icing on butch cheesecake."

Full of witty dia-

logue and intimacies from playwright Bayla Travis, *Dyke* also investigates community through the characters. "I don't just write for a lesbian audience, though I write about lesbians," she says. "My heroes are artists on the edge who don't clean up their acts."

Travis, who also has worked in film and television, where she felt like a hired hand, is delighted to be writing plays. "Theater is where writers are respected," she explains.

Clearly, though, Travis has a genuine funny bone. Acknowledging the autobiographical origins of *Dyke*, she describes herself as "recently released on parole for stalking some of the adult industry's sexiest stars...this play represents a last-ditch effort at rehabilitation."

Explicit and honest yet also tender and funny, *Dyke* is at its heart a love story about a woman with a gargantuan crush. (Now who among us hasn't gone through that torture. Hands?) **JM**

**BUTCH/FEMME CHRONICLES** plays 8 p.m. June 28 to 30 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. **THE DYKE AND THE PORN STAR** plays 8 p.m. July 5 to 28. Tickets are \$19 at the door or \$17 in advance from 503-239-5919 or Fastixx.



Kimberly Dark chronicles her femme side



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