

**THEATER**

From left: Andrew Hodgdon, Pam Carsten, Amber Leigh Martin, Krispi Bacon and Marc Weaver are the House of Cunt

**Pushing your button**

The House of Cunt is back with a new late-night show

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

"Cunt is not slang, or any marginal form, but a true language word, and of the oldest stock. It is a derivative of the Oriental Great Goddess known as Cunti, of Kunda, the Yoni of the Universe."

—Barbara G. Walker, *Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, as quoted on a poster for the House of Cunt

If you'd told me on a recent Wednesday morning that by evening I'd be in the middle of the stage at Stark Raving Theatre playing a character named "Skippy" in a sketch called "Advertising Today" during the rehearsal of a comedy/performance/dance troupe calling itself the House of Cunt, I would have been slightly alarmed.

But there I was, on emergency assignment for *Just Out*, aiding a group of more-than-merry pranksters as they plotted the recurring act of audience participation. ("Skippy" will presumably be selected/coerced from each night's audience.) And I was having a blast.

It's hard not to feel giddy around these folks, and you'd have to bite your lip to keep from laughing at their loose, spontaneous humor, which frequently veers into the cheerfully offensive. The performance troupe's eyebrow-raising name belies its good-hearted approach.

Composed of a small constellation of comedically talented Portland-area actors/dancers/performers who orbit the centrifugal force of de facto ringleader Amber Leigh Martin, they're out to instigate laughter and entertain through lighthearted randomness and absurdity.

The red-headed, laid-back Martin recounts the group's roots in her mellow Southern accent. It all started in 1995 when she and her partner, Andrew Hodgdon, did some cable access skits and videos together.

"Somehow that turned into live performances using those characters," she explains. "It wasn't House of Cunt then, but it's what started the whole neurotic, crazy thing of creating scenarios and characters. Some of the cable access characters were in the last show, and a couple of them are going to be in the new show."

Shows are fueled by the group's love of their childhood pop culture experiences—the more '70s-centric the better, especially TV, and especially surreal variety/vaudevillian TV. It's all done with a strong whiff of postmodern eclecticism.

"I'm a singer first, then I'm a dancer—I have



PHOTO BY GABE ROBERTSON

a degree in that—and then I guess comedy fits in there somewhere accidentally, you know?" says Martin. "I guess it's my upbringing, watching *Saturday Night Live* in the '70s and Carol Burnett. Gilda Radner. *Soul Train*. *The Muppet Show*. Genius stuff. Norman Lear. So unafraid to be a little bit politically incorrect, not to

even know the words politically incorrect."

For his part, Hodgdon cites the revolutionary '70s sitcom *Maude* admitting, "I don't watch any modern-day television, but I've got all that old stuff plugged right in here, like in my veins."

Hence, the new show, *The Late Summer Replacement Special*, could be described as a live

**Sin is in**  
Liminal brings a smart and sexy show to the Panorama

BY MARC ACITO

Intense. Powerful. Sexy. Funny. Unusual. Twisted. Thrilling. Seven words to describe Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's music theater piece *The Seven Deadly Sins* as presented by the performance art company Liminal.

A modern meditation on what constitutes sin in a capitalistic society, the piece was the final collaboration from the creators of *The Threepenny Opera* but is every bit as timely today as it was at its 1933 premiere. Director Bryan Markowitz has made the inspiring choice of the all-night dance club Panorama to give his production the appropriate whiff of debauchery.

Singing in the original German with a projected translation, the young and enthusiastic ensemble works with a raw, heat-generating energy that is so palpable it practically hits you in the chest. The movement direction by Catherine Egan is particularly inventive and compelling. (Plus there's lots of very steamy girl-on-girl action.)

By presenting an endlessly fascinating array of gestures and tableaux in juxtaposition, the multi-



PHOTO BY AMANDA DANIELQUIST

Liminal Performance Group knows sin

layered stage images prove to be both provocative yet ambiguous, inviting any number of interpretations. Subsequently, the audience is left with more questions than answers, not because the creators have failed to present the show's themes but because they have succeeded so brilliantly in unearthing the richness of the work.

Fans of *Cabaret* and *Moulin Rouge* will delight in experiencing the real thing here in all its glorious decadence. Liminal's *Seven Deadly Sins* is an evening not to be missed. [A]

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS plays at 8:30 p.m. Thursday to Saturday with an additional 10:30 p.m. Thursday show through Sept. 28. 21 and over only. Tickets are \$16, which includes one drink, from Jackpot Records or 503-890-2993.

channel-surf. Some of the characters and scenarios I sneak-previewed: A hillbilly hoedown played like *Hee Haw* on speed. Martin, along with costars Krispi Bacon and Pam Carsten, as bizarre, eccentric, heavy-accented English Siamese triplets who ululate their way through Alice Cooper's "Only Women Bleed." Hodgdon as El Dink, an outrageously suave and funky TV host/ladies man. The deadpan Marc Weaver as Alzheimer Joe, a less-than-cognizant children's television star a la Mr. Rogers. Bacon performs a modern interpretive dance to Kate Bush.

Most memorable is Martin's ecstatically insincere lounge singer, who croons an incongruously impassioned "Morning Train" as a tribute to Sheena Easton after proclaiming the diva's vocal cords "the hottest in town" and breathlessly confiding: "When I met Sheena, it was actually on the morning train. That's when... the affair began." She's nothing short of a comedic performance artist who can be ironic as Sandra Bernhard, eerie as Miranda July and smart as Laurie Anderson.


The raunch, nudity and provocation factor at a House of Cunt show runs high, with plenty of against-the-tide political and social humor. "I enjoy pushing buttons, but I don't enjoy being an antagonist," Martin says. "I wouldn't want to be perceived as that."

Hodgdon agrees: "Anything that may have shock value is definitely in there with more of an approach of consciousness raising—giving you something to look at and think about rather than just react to."

Martin, who has had relationships with women, also believes an open-minded queer audience will find plenty to relate to in *The Midsummer Replacement Special*. "I'm not gay," she says, "but I've played around in that world, and it's not a bad place to be. I'm not into the stereotyping and separation of people into categories. I play men as much as I play women, and mainly that's from personal experience."

She explains how she believes all the people in her life make her who she is. "I was raised by the redneck men in my life as much as the Southern Christian Stepford-wife women, you know? I've got total dykes in my family, and I've got KKK in my family, so I really read the language of all types. Honestly, I feel like our show... would hopefully fit in amongst multi-ethnic crowds, multigender crowds and multi-orientation crowds. I feel there's enough stuff that everybody could relate to some degree." [A]

THE HOUSE OF CUNT performs *The Late Summer Replacement Special* 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday Sept. 7 to Oct. 5 at Stark Raving Theatre, 2257 NW Raleigh St. Tickets are \$12 from 503-232-7072.



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