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MUSIC

FEVER

Carol Reise makes a
grown woman blush

BY KATHY BELGE

What is it about Carol Reise that makes a grown woman blush? Those who saw her perform "Beaver" at the Portland Gay Men's Chorus Adults Only Cabaret might be able to say, or they might, like one unnamed audience member, be too tongue-tied to respond.

Reise's performance of the campy, sexy rewrite of Peggy Lee's "Fever" stopped the show, according to chorus director Tony Stroh. Becky Bilyeu, owner of Touchstone Coffee House, was there and claims the women in attendance really enjoyed her number. "She was great—very sexy, very polished. She really ignited the audience."

Reise herself gives the crowd half the credit. "The energy from the audience was great," she exclaims. "The timing was right on, and I could just feel it. They were stomping the floors. If I can be naughty and suggestive, it's fun for me because I'm not really like that. It's like playing another person."

A born performer, Reise knows how to work a room. "It actually began when I was in kindergarten, and I performed for the church Christmas pageant. I was just a little thing with missing teeth. I loved it because the audience laughed." She's been hooked ever since.

Reise spent many years in theater, performing in high school and in community theater in Salem. But what she loves most is when she can combine that skill with singing.

When Reise was underage, she would don a cheap cocktail dress and sneak into piano bars. Sliding up to the piano, she'd knock out songs and have a blast.

"I'd have a couple of cocktails under my belt and get up and start singing. I'll still do that. I'll go anywhere there's a piano bar."

Reise regularly performs with Rose City Swing, a 16-piece subgroup of the Rose City Gay Freedom Band. She and the band perform the dance and variety show "Another Holiday Affair" Nov. 30.

Reise was "discovered" four years ago in a karaoke bar by Rose City Swing's then director Brenda Dworschak, who asked her to audition for the band.

"I fell flat on my face," she claims. "I trembled with fear. I couldn't sing my way out of a

paper bag. I was flat and sharp. My throat was so dry I could have spit cotton balls. I was so scared."

A week later she mustered up the courage to ask if she could try again, and Dworschak agreed. She nailed the second audition and has been with the band ever since. "She said she flubbed it up," smiles Dworschak, "but we thought she was fine."

It's clear Reise and the swingsters are a good match. "I love singing with the band!" she effuses. "I love the big-band sound. I feel extremely fortunate that I have the opportunity to sing with them and that they like me to sing with them. They're such a fun group of people. I respect them musically."

The respect is mutual. "There's a lot of great voices out there, but she's got such a great personality," asserts Dworschak.

A few shows back, Reise began bringing her theater background

into the act, and has turned what were dances into full productions. The November show will feature a plate spinner, a magician, a baton twirler and a professional dance team. Poison Waters will be the mistress of ceremonies.

Reise grew up in Hermiston, the middle child of a large family. Early influences were the Ink Spots, Nat King Cole and Peggy Lee. "I heard Peggy Lee, and I fell in love," she gushes.

But Billie Holiday was her biggest influence, she remembers. "How she would sing a song and slide around in it. It was as if she put this big blanket on and was so comfortable in the music."

Reise lives in North Portland with her partner of 13 years and a big fat cat. Her day job is as a unit secretary for Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital. But she thinks her true healing takes place at night.

"I hope that when I'm singing, I lighten somebody's life—that they forget about their own life for a period of time. I love entertaining and making people happy." ☐

ROSE CITY SWING performs "Another Holiday Affair" 8 p.m. Nov. 30 at the Portland Metro Club, 618 S.E. Alder St. Tickets are \$10 from 503-790-2170 or Gai-Pied.

KATHY BELGE is a free-lance writer who has two fat cats and a penchant for music. She can be reached at kbelge@pacifier.com.



Carol Reise shakes it for the crowds

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS