

Getting real with Sandra

Continued from Page 24

Meg Daly: Your show in Portland is just a few days before Valentine's Day, and I imagine a lot of people will be taking their dates to see you. What's your ideal valentine date?

Sandra Bernhard: Somebody that you're hot for and madly in love with!

MD: And what would you want to do on the date?

SB: Go out for a fabulous dinner, with lots of fun conversation. It would be somebody with 100 percent cotton sheets and all the accouterments you want for a hot date.

MD: Any valentine's faux pas that queers should avoid?

SB: Being cheap. Money, girls...pick it up!

MD: What's the worst valentine you ever received?

SB: I don't think I have one. It's not a big thing for me. I appreciate the day for other people. I always look at it as a Hallmark holiday when they jack up the prices of flowers.

MD: As a public figure, are you even able to go out on a date, or do you get mobbed?

SB: Well, I'm involved with somebody, so our relationship is one long date.

MD: That's so sweet! I don't suppose you want to tell me about this person?

SB: No. I like to respect my relationships.

MD: OK, and I can respect that. How's it going being a working mom?

SB: It's tricky. It's a little harder than it used to be. I think twice about doing certain gigs and traveling as much. The person I'm involved with is really on the scene, and my little girl is very comfortable staying home with that person. That makes it a lot easier. But still, I'm her mommy and I'm responsible for her. So it takes a bit of juggling.

MD: Your daughter is in kindergarten now. How is she doing?

SB: [Laughs] She's an original! She's sweet and funny and tough and has a mind of her own. She's wonderful!

MD: Sounds like her mom!

SB: She is!

MD: So, tell me about your current show.

SB: I've been working on it for six months. It's gone through a lot of evolutions and changes. My work's been more political since 9/11, and this show is more directly political



Sandra Bernhard says she's ready for Portland—grrr!

than ever. We're up against the obvious and didactic cliché of the Bush administration. And it's a lot of fun to talk about, shed light on and be funny about. At the same time, I want to be thoughtful and considerate about where we're headed as a culture and how we [Americans] are perceived in the world.

The show also includes some of my personal journeys and funny stories that have happened in my life that day, or two weeks ago.... I tell stories about raising my daughter and weird, noncliché stories about being a mother.

And it's all interwoven with music. I'm accompanied by Mitch Kaplan on piano and Pam Adams on guitar. So it's very acoustic, evocative, haunting, sexy, rock 'n' roll—all the things people expect from me, and more!

MD: Who is your audience? Who do you think of when you're writing new material?

SB: I have in mind an ageless group of people, teen-age to older folks. People who are thoughtful, compassionate and have the same goal in mind, which is to live on peaceful, beautiful, ecologically minded planet where we accept and embrace other people's cultures.

MD: You make me think of that notion that there are two Americas right now becoming more and more divided.

SB: Yeah, there's the frightened, paranoid America. And there's the really optimistic, accepting America. We'd like to bring more people over to our side.

MD: You've had a large African American following in your career. Why is that?

SB: Because I'm very real. It's all about realness in the black community. And, y'know, I'm not afraid to get down with my brothers and sisters.

MD: They don't feel threatened by you?

SB: No, because I don't think I'm black. I'm not doing that fake rap shit. I just am who I am, and inherently they just get it. There's some kind of a soul link.

MD: Have you been supporting any of the Democratic presidential hopefuls?

SB: Yes. I performed for Howard Dean about month and a half ago, and I really loved him. So I'm very disappointed he fucked it up.

MD: So you think he fucked it up for good?

SB: Yeah, it's over. He's finished. He lost his cool. He's too reactive and he blew it. He has terrible Scorpio anger and he hasn't learned how to harness it yet. So this will be a great spiritual lesson for him.

MD: Sounds like he could have used some advice from someone like yourself.

SB: I tried to talk to him a little afterward, but it was too hard. He should have listened a little closer.

MD: I've got to ask you one vapid pop

culture question: What did you think of Britney Spears' kiss with Madonna?

SB: I just thought it was not very sexy. I mean, they really should have gone for it! But it didn't quite cut the mustard.

MD: I don't think Britney truly swings that direction.

SB: Well, I don't think the other one truly does, either. They're both a little bit silly.

MD: Have you been watching *The L Word*?

SB: Oh sure, I've seen both episodes. It's like *Sex and the City*—it's crap but you can't help but watch it.

MD: Would you ever want to be on it?

SB: Noooo! Absolutely not.

MD: It seems like America has an affection for bi and lesbian one-woman performers, if I can lump you into that category....

SB: You can't.

MD: ...Women like yourself, Lily Tomlin, Ellen DeGeneres, Margaret Cho...why do you think that is?

SB: Women who are independent are usually the funniest and most honest with emotions. I think people like that and respect it. For straight chicks it's not such an easy row to hoe—you've got to be pretty ballsy.

MD: I really liked what you said in an interview several years ago about being "nice" being bullshit. Do you have thoughts on ridding oneself of false niceness?

SB: I think if you're really connecting with people and you really care about people, you're going to another level. It's about going deeper than being nice to being genuinely present and concerned.

I mean, it's good to be nice to people. It's better than being a bitch. [Laughs] But really taking that extra moment to really connect—in a world that's pretty disconnected—is kind of my motto.

MD: Are you looking forward to coming to Portland?

SB: Oh yeah! I love Portland. I love the Northwest. I love the whole sensibility there—the brisk, beautiful outdoors vibe, the hardness of the whole vibe. I needed a little Northwest fix and I'm looking forward to it. I hope everybody comes out and enjoys the shows. I'll be thrilled to be there. [F]

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