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Sunday July 10th, 2005,

Door at 7:00 p.m. Pageant at 8:00 p.m.

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MUSIC

Material...guys?

Mandonna pays tribute to the goddess of pop

BY REBECCA RAGAIN

At first, Victor Cruz (aka Victor Couture) thought he was going to be auditioning as a backup dancer for Madonna. As it turns out, he ended up strutting the stage with Mandonna.

Yes, Mandonna. The all-male Madonna tribute band is becoming a not-so-underground sensation in its hometown of San Francisco and beyond. It even starred on the leading float in this year's San Francisco Pride parade.

Both reviews and word-of-mouth buzz suggest Mandonna shows are far removed from the usual cover band hack jobs. Sure, they're silly, but the band members are also experienced stage performers, dancers and musicians.

For instance, lead singer Mark Edwards has been performing all his life, from a cappella jazz to Black Sabbath covers. And before Cruz answered that fateful audition call, he danced as a showgirl in an all-male Las Vegas-style gig.

explains Cruz, the group's other gay backup singer/dancer.

"Being up on stage performing Madonna's music and conveying the spirit of her energy is so much fun," adds Groman.

You get the idea.

So when Mandonna brings *Dress You Up* to the stage at the Crystal Ballroom, expect the



Mandonna conveys the spirit of Madonna's energy in *Dress You Up*.



suspended floor to be bouncing all night to the tunes of the Material Girl, with a twist. The evening will also include '80s hits from the collection of DJ Gregarious, and Poison Waters will act as mistress of ceremonies.

Most of the 20 or so songs in Mandonna's repertoire are from *The Immaculate Collection*, with a few possible surprises. One of Cruz's favorites to perform is "Vogue," which he calls "ultra-chic." Groman, on the other hand, is particularly fond of "Holiday," because he gets to play the cowbell.

"When the keyboard starts the opening measures, it always makes me happy," says Groman.

Meanwhile, Edwards sings, dances and rips through more than a dozen costume changes. Wedding gowns, feather boas and priest's garb have all made appearances in previous shows. New costumes have been concocted recently, though, so who knows what's in store next? Edwards' first concert ever was a Madonna show. He noticed she was skilled at making the crowd feel like part of the performance, and he strives to follow in her footsteps in that aspect.

"I love it all: the band, the crowd. I love being silly, singing and dancing. I love rocking...out," says Edwards.

"It's all about being free, having a good time and having fun," says Groman.

And did they mention it's fun? ☑

MANDONNA performs 9 p.m. July 9 at Crystal Ballroom, 1332 W. Burnside St. Tickets are \$25 at the door or \$20 in advance from Ticketmaster or 503-241-3336.

REBECCA RAGAIN was thoroughly introduced to *The Immaculate Collection* when her younger sister brought the album home on tape.

Gay backup singer/dancer Hugh Groman has been with Mandonna for three years. In fact, he joined the group just three months after the project started. His best friend was the guitarist for the band, and they were looking to add a more theatrical aspect to the performance.

"It started out as a lark, but...it's such a great idea, the group has taken off," says Groman. "We appeal to women of all kinds, and gay men, and then the straight men who prey on the women who come to the shows."

Groman was not the only member who originally joined Mandonna with a healthy dose of skepticism, but now the performers are devoted to the project. In fact, they enjoy it so much that they seem unable to describe the group without the use of the word "fun," even when interviewed separately.

"This is absolutely the best project I've been in, in my life. It's wild, sensational, so much fun. We just have a blast," says Edwards.

"They're all really great musicians, really professional...they just have so much fun,"