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# Actions Speak Louder Than Words

A Broadway legend comes to town

**W**hen I heard that 85-year-old Carol Channing was replacing 96-year-old Kitty Carlisle Hart as the guest at Pink Martini's New Year's Eve concert, I wasn't sure if I should pay more or ask for my money back.

Channing has been a musical theater star since breaking out as Lorelei Lee in 1949's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. But during the ensuing 57 years, her persona barely changed a whit—big eyes, big lips, big smile, big wig. Her appearances often descended into a caricature (think bad drag) that was sometimes painful to watch.

On top of that, last November she had a fracas in the gay press. When asked why she had such a loyal gay following, she replied: "I'm grateful that they seem to like me. They're terribly loyal to me. But I'm knee-deep in the Bible, and you know what it says about that."

Queers were shocked. Channing had been at the forefront of the AIDS crisis, raising money for underfunded social service agencies from the very start. She sang with the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus; she was the grand marshal of the West Hollywood Pride Parade. She couldn't be homophobic, could she?



**Out Going**  
BY FLOYD SKLAVER

the past half-century, and the possibility that her advanced age makes her reach for religion as she prepares for her final curtain call (a very common occurrence), and I, for one, am willing to forgive.

So, as she sang, "Look at the old girl now, fellas" during a rousing version of "Hello, Dolly," I thought, "It's so nice to have you back where you belong."

Another performer who definitely belongs on the stage is **Wade McCollum**, who made his final appearance as Berlin's most famous transvestite in Portland Center Stage's *I Am My Own Wife* (or, as my workout buddy **Mike Long** calls it, *Tranny Get Your Gun*). Wade is now off to New York City with

boyfriend **Noah Jordan** (who appears in the Oregon Lottery's print campaign targeting gambling addiction) to take a bite out of the Big Apple.

In the audience was *Just Out* film reviewer **Yvonne Behrens**, a native German speaker, who praised Wade's pronunciation and accent as impeccable. She sat with **Ann Smith**, who's busy designing a Web site for her antique business. Portland Art Museum chief curator **Bruce Guenther** was there with boyfriend **Eduardo Vides**, who is finally moving to Portland from Tri-Cities, Wash. Also in attendance were **Will Knuths** and **Zurain Imam**, who's fea-



Floyd meets Carol Channing backstage.

So, you can imagine my misgivings as Pink Martini leader **Thomas Lauderdale** introduced her. Yet, on she strode confidently (although a bit feebly), the smile just as broad as ever. She greeted us by saying: "Hello, Portland. I'm so glad to be your disappointment act." And while someone who'd never heard her before might think, "Please get Grandma off the stage before she embarrasses herself," I was hooked.

And not disappointed. Her voice may rummage in her purse searching for the right note, and she loses her place as her stories ramble on, but she has an unmistakable energy that comes across the footlights, and she projected a vulnerability that made the audience embrace her.

Sitting in the theater (thank you, **Jason Mitchell** and **John Brodie** of Pink Martini) I realized that I was finally old enough (and mature enough) to appreciate an entertainer for the memory of the joy she brought me. Couple that with all of the good Channing has done for the gay community during

tured as a submissive spy tied up and tortured by a female dominatrix in a music video banned on Pakistani TV.

There were gays aplenty at **Drew Lee** and **Bob Stoico's** holiday party, including **Oscar Clark**, a massage therapist who's studying health administration at Portland State University. **Vikram Reddy** told tales of the White Party in Miami, where he danced all night in his underwear. **Ryan Howe** told me about his collages that incorporate his inner thoughts and feelings with contemporary pop culture references, and **Kevin Gervais** talked about the Sufi Secrets of Life.

Which brings me back to Carol Channing, who told me that her secret to staying young is "doing what I love." I'm making that my new year's resolution. Life is short, and pretty soon, we'll all be Out Going. 10

FLOYD SKLAVER wants to know about your event. E-mail him at [floydsklaver@comcast.net](mailto:floydsklaver@comcast.net).