

The Underpants
 By Carl Struheim
 adapted by Steve Martin
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culture

Sissyboy Bows Out

Portland's punkest drag queens are throwing in the lipstick-stained towel

by Julie Sabatier • Photos by Xilia Faye



Eddie



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Jualdo

After three years of tantalizing and terrorizing audiences in Portland and beyond, the notorious Sissyboys are calling it quits. This troupe of self-described "drag monsters" have blurred gender lines and created a subversive alternative to traditional drag performance through their politically charged, over-the-top monthly shows.

The guys are apparently ending things on amicable terms (for the most part), and they're pulling together one final performance before going their separate ways. Appropriately titled *Sissyboy Goes Away*, the plot of this finale will show what might have happened if the Sissyboy tour van crashed and sent all aboard descending through nine layers of hell. Sissyboy co-creator Mark "Zebra" Thomas says the troupe will go "full monty" on the last number.

In reality, the boys' spring tour of northern California, San Francisco and Seattle might have been the beginning of the end.

"I was hoping that some unity would form [on the tour], but it only reinforced the idea that we were falling apart," says Lee "Splendor" Kyle, who helped start Sissyboy in 2004 with Thomas. "For me, I did as much growing as I could within that realm, and then it became stifling. In the end, it literally just fell apart."

Thomas identified the tour as a turning point for him as well. "I do a lot of the booking and pushing and the mommy stuff, and I wanted to see what it felt like to be on tour with these guys," he explains. "It was really fun, but it was exhausting for me. I don't feel negative about that tour, but I knew very clearly that I didn't want to take Sissyboy on tour."

Thomas says once he came to this realization, he started to lose interest in performing with the group in Portland as well.

"We helped in creating a queer identity for Portland, and I certainly don't mean a gay identity," he says. "When I say queer, I'm including anyone who feels that they don't fit inside the social norms, whether they be straight or gay.... That message is out there, and we pushed forward with that idea. Sissyboy is not needed as much anymore."

Of course, there's more to the story than simply running out of steam. Like many a rock star before them, Sissyboy succumbed to a combination of internal drama and drug addiction.

Members came and went as the guys moved in and out of relationships, according to Thomas, but one major breakup had a profound effect on the troupe. Kyle and fellow Sissyboy Devan McGrath ended their longtime romantic relationship during the tour, although Kyle says they continue to maintain a friendship.

"They went on tour and I was like, 'I don't know—13 drag queens in a Winnebago just seems like something disastrous to me,'" says Xilia Faye, a freelance photographer who has captured many images of Sissyboy during the past three years. "They're like a family. When they're together, they're like brothers and sisters. They have catty moments, screaming at each other just like a family would."

Garrett "Kaj-anne" Winter joined the group two years ago, shortly after relocating to Portland from California, and says he learned a lot about dealing with interpersonal conflict. "The thing about drag queens is they love to pick on each other," he says. "We worked out our personal demons onstage, and that's what drag queens do. Then when there's no love and support beyond the party, it's not going to last, and the demon's going to eat us if we don't have enough love to combat it."

Although he joined the group a year or so after its inception, Winter quickly became an easily recognizable figure with his homemade unicorn costume, fashioned out of a full-body Lycra suit with a horn made out of duct tape and toilet paper. He was among the first to leave the group, quitting a few months before the spring tour because of what he describes as creative differences.

"I'm totally relieved, and I think it's wonderful," he says of