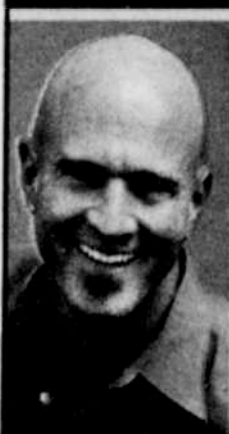


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Queens Be

Portland's reigning Superstar Divas
on their past, present and future

BY DANIEL BORGEN

Sunday night, Memorial Day eve, the now infamous Superstar Divas banter onstage after a rollicking, carefully choreographed group number. Honey Bea Hart steps forward, moving into a solo act, and the show's other two stars, Bolivia Carmichaels and Ginger Lee, exit gracefully, stage right. Strolls morph into outright runs as the duo head, as fast as their pumps allow, down a hallway, into and through a sprawling, awkwardly shaped kitchen, down a long flight of stairs and through a basement. They finally reach a shared dressing room—tiny quarters filled to the brim with gowns, jewelry, makeup and wigs. The divas' changing room seems as far from the stage as is physically possible.

Carmichaels, slated to perform next, must travel from stage to dressing room, change her dress and wig, and be onstage before Hart's five-minute Adele song ends. Lee enjoys a few extra minutes, scant moments that pass quickly, and she knows she'll soon be in the identical hurried position. Carmichaels returns to the stage in perfect time; Hart introduces her, and Carmichaels moves right into one of her signature Reba McEntire hits. The Superstar Divas Mega Show doesn't miss a beat.

And so the formula goes every Sunday night, since May 2007. Their solidly successful, weekly four-hour show typically includes at least a dozen solo numbers—each, along with group performances. The trio often enlist guest stars, ranging from first-time amateurs to seasoned veterans.

A lengthy run like theirs wouldn't remain a success without unique stars. Carmichaels, played by Daniel P. Elliott, is easily the show's most recognizable face, to which anyone who's ever sauntered into CC Slaughters can attest. Carmichaels is CC's five-nights-a-week house drag queen—a position she's held for several years. Elliott grew up a musician of sorts, playing the trumpet throughout junior high and high school. Elliott also tried his hand at acting and theater, a journey that continued through college. Then a spry 20 years old, he created Bolivia Carmichaels, CC's found and captured her, and the rest is Portland drag history.

A few years into her tenure at CC's, Carmichaels decided she wanted two talented co-stars for her weekly drag show. Pip Kennedy, who plays Honey Bea Hart, recalls the recruitment process.

**-PIP KENNEDY,
AKA HONEY BEA HART**

"I had been a guest at 'Carnival De Bolivia.' Bolivia approached me, saying, 'I want two other queens to star in a show with me. You in?'" Kennedy had been hosting show nights at The Embers Avenue, first with Summer Seasons, then alone, gigs that sneaked up on him. "One Halloween, I went to Embers and performed 'Bring On The Men' by Linda Eder," Kennedy says. "The artistic director wanted me on cast immediately." From there, Honey Bea Hart, the diva, worked her way up.

Kennedy's interest in drag piqued when he was younger, while playing Frankenfurter in a production of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. "It was then I decided to delve into drag,"

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