



PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

Cowfish makes week's end Trai La Terrific BY JOHN LOCANTHI

Sunday. An exciting night on the town has never really been a Sunday thing. Many tuck in early to start their workweek well rested. Others stay home for lack of anything better to do. Sunday, boring Sunday.

Cowfish has a different idea.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 'Keep Your Clothes On Variety Show!'" says a tall blonde with a flower in her hair as she approaches the stage, sipping on "Mexican champagne" (a bottle of Corona). Trai La Trash then lists the drink specials for the night and welcomes in the first performer: a man synchronizing his guitar with a collection of random videos.

The variety show, which takes place 8-10 pm every Sunday at Cowfish, showcases an eclectic collection of local talent, running the gamut from lounge singers to dancers to instrumental experiments.

"I've wanted to put on this variety show from the beginning," says Cowfish co-owner Shawn Mediaclast. "There's a lot of performers who want to try out a short set in front of a crowd. We try to get a good mix of performers to make Sunday an interesting night."

Indeed. In just two weeks of attending this show, I've seen a ukulele player sing alternating comic and emo songs, a trio of singer-dancers thunderously stomping on the stage while singing "Big Spender," and a cantaloupe getting DP'd with bananas. The previously mentioned guitar-video performance seemed like the result of Wayne Coyne and Andy Warhol being locked in a basement with a guitar, a camcorder and a vial of acid... and yet it grew on me as it droned on.

"It's a great platform for local people to show off their talents in front of a comfortable crowd," says Michelle Sellers, a hairdresser by day and soulful lounge singer by night. After performing at the Actor's Cabaret of Eugene, Sellers has taken advantage of the opportunity to sing in a more relaxed lounge environment. Performing at the "Keep Your Clothes On Variety Show" has also introduced her to other musicians with whom she can collaborate.

The vivacious Trai La Trash (who is single) hosts the show on the first Sunday of every month. The professionally trained singer and voice actor is famous for putting on many underground shows in New York, including a street performance in an ice cream truck where she gave out scoops of Mister Frostee in Greenwich Village. Ms. Trash had to pay for the ice cream in the end, but she has no regrets. The comically profane host has raised money for many charities in both NYC and Eugene. She is a performance unto herself, with her singing, dancing, lewd stand-up shtick and audience-inclusive games. "I don't try to impersonate anyone, I'm Trai La," she responds to comparisons to Divine and RuPaul.

On the first Sunday of February, "Name That Tune!" was her game du soir. Trai La Trash brought two eager contestants onto the stage and urged both to bet on how long it would take the other to name that tune. The back-and-forth banter left one competitor with but a few seconds of the chorus. Ample enough time, as the winner shouted "'Express Yourself' by Madonna" in triumph. The prize: a drink on Trai La's tab.

"Make it cheap!" Ms. Trash joked.

The games, the jokes and the performances are all a part of an incredibly laid-back and relaxed atmosphere at the bar. It's just a group of people trying to have fun on a Sunday night.

On non-Trash Sundays of the month, Mediaclast hosts the variety show. Cowfish books more performers in the absence of Ms. Trash, and while there is less direct audience participation on these nights, the increased number of performers fills the void. Instead of the tall blonde singing and dancing to campy disco tunes, there might be a belly dancer or an extra acoustic singer-songwriter.

As can be expected from a variety show in a bar on Sunday night, the "Keep Your Clothes On Variety Show" draws an eclectic crowd: the college-aged and the middle-aged, laid-back music aficionados and austere hipsters. Most groups of Eugene's social milieu are represented in this night of revelry on the most melancholy day of the week.

The performers change every week. The only things remaining constant are cheap drinks, Trai La Trash's singing and colorful humor, and the fact that there is no cover charge. Should you ever find yourself bored out of your mind on a Sunday night, make a quick jaunt over to Cowfish at Broadway and Willamette for an exciting evening with some local singers, musicians and dancers.

Cowfish offers \$2.50 wells, \$3 microbrews and \$4 mid-shelf drinks. The variety show is followed by '90s Night, an interesting concept in a time when '80s nights dominate the decade-themed dance club scene. ■

