

Spotlight on sex at Fringe Festival

Hot topic in the eclectic lineup for TL's main event

BY PAUL DUNN

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT SEX. But it's not about the birds and bees, to which Mom and Dad may have alluded. This is a story about sex on both sides of the fringe ... the good, the bad and the brutal. And it's a story about the 22nd annual San Francisco Fringe Festival — whose spotlight this year shines on the subject.

At first glance, Oakland residents Regina Evans and Siouxsie Q seem po-

lar opposites. A sex trafficker victimized one of them; the other loves being a sex worker.

Evans, 51, spent part of her adulthood kidnapped, raped and terrorized by a monster, the scars from the nightmare still menacing her in ways minute and profound.

"Do I know what it's liked to be kidnapped and raped? Yes," she said recently. "Do I know what it's like to be brutalized? Yes."

Though she won't offer lurid details — she has told her story many



PHOTO BY PAUL DUNN

Siouxsie Q digs sex and enjoys getting paid for it. But her 45-minute "Fish-girl" mermaid fantasy says a lot more than that. "52 Letters" and other takes on sex will be staged during the 158 performances at the 22nd S.F. Fringe Festival.

times, she said — Evans doesn't hide from the topic. She embraces it.

And that's the essence of "52 Letters," her one-hour Fringe Festival show that dramatizes sex trafficking primarily through the eyes of two girls, 8 and 15 years old.

"I want people to open their eyes to this social justice issue of our times," said Evans, who taught herself performance skills. "People don't believe that it's happening, or they think it's in Asia or Russia. But it's happening right here."

For Siouxsie Q, 28, a vibrant sex industry is happening right here, too. And she digs it. The bubbly, full-figured woman who does not disclose her real name, is a full-time sex worker, she emphasized — not a "dabbler."

"I've done almost all of it, except phone sex, which is on my bucket list," she laughed.

But there's a deeper side to her professional activity, an intellectual consciousness she seeks to publicize.

"My entire goal as an artist is toward the humanization and destigmatization of sex workers and the sex industry," said Ms. Q, who for two years strutted her stuff on stage at the just-shuttered Lusty Lady in North Beach, singing and strumming a ukulele. "I believe that when sex workers have the chance to tell their own stories, it moves toward the goal of humanization."

So, enter stage left ... "Fish-girl."

That's the name of Siouxsie's 45-minute Fringe play. It centers on the mermaid Sirene, who just happens to be a sex worker, and her on-stage client played by Siouxsie's longtime theater

accomplice Sean Andries.

"Sirene doesn't like her work," said Siouxsie. "She's sort of a composite character who resembles me when I'm with a client I'm not really into."

The mermaid myth offers Siouxsie a convenient way to discuss her industry.

"Mermaids and whores are dangerous, mysterious, half in one world, half in another, stigmatized," she explained. "It all felt so relatable, and all of these feelings I was having about being in the sex industry translated so perfectly into the myth of mermaids. It was a great way for me to process a lot of that information in a creative, fantasy way."

"Fish-girl" — which will show five times — premiered in January at the Fertile Grounds Festival in Portland, Ore.

"Fish-girl" is short, it's high-octane, it's high drama," Siouxsie said. "Music, mermaids and murder!"

Evans — who uses poetry to tell "52 Letters" — has presented parts of the show twice, but this will be her first full go. She'll stop her four Fringe shows after 45 minutes so audience members can question on-hand experts about sex-trafficking issues.

"The show is very intense," Evans said. "Survivors (of sex trafficking) have had their lives controlled. These kids are kidnapped from everywhere, even in the 'burbs."

Tinged with humor, "The Women of Tu-Na House" continues the festival's sortie into the underbelly of polite society.

New York City resident Nancy Eng delivers this 55-minute play about an Asian massage parlor, which she pre-

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'Never know what you're going to get'

It's that time again, folks, when all things wildly creative descend on EXIT Theatre — the 22nd annual San Francisco Fringe Festival with 36 companies from around the country presenting 158 performances, Sept. 6-21.

There will be musicians and storytellers, clowning and drama, high-tech hijinks and stand-up comedy, even a bus ride around town.

"It's like Forrest Gump's box of chocolates," Fringe Festival publicist Gary Carr explained. "You never know what you're going to get. It's always a great experience and fascinating to see the wealth of ideas people are willing to experiment with."

Performances take place at 156 Eddy St.: EXIT Theatre's 80-seat cabaret-style venue, EXIT Stage Left's 49-seat black box and EXIT Studio's 40-seat black box.

Christina Augello, EXIT artistic director and Fringe producer who founded the festival in 1992, emphasizes there's something for pretty much everyone: "People who don't necessarily go to the theater might take a shot at the Fringe, and it will open the door for them. For others, it will reinforce their theater experiences."

Performers are chosen by lottery, the luck of the draw. This year, Fringe officials received 120 applications for 36 spots, placed the names in a plastic bucket and drew names until they filled all spots. The majority of performers are from the Bay Area, though some are coming from New York, Atlanta, Wisconsin and Texas.

"These are artists reflecting their times and the world," Augello said.

— Paul Dunn

Tickets: Advance tickets are \$12.99 or less, depending on the show. At the door the night of the show they're \$10 or less, and a Frequent Fringer Pass is five shows for \$40 or 10 for \$75.

Garrity remembers big cases from the Tenderloin



1984 Murder of a 9-year-old Vietnamese girl at 765 O'Farrell was unsolved for years. DNA evidence later proved Satanist and "Nightstalker" murderer Richard Ramirez was her killer.

1990 Garrity receives meritorious conduct award for investigating a drug gang drive-by shooting when 4 victims were mowed down from AK-47 fire.



1991 The Tenderloin Task force kicks off from its basement HQ in the old Hibernia Bank building. The Force made 5,000 felony arrests in the first nine months.



Late 1990s Mummified remains of a missing person are discovered in a rolled up carpet stowed in the rafters of the Road Runner Club at 177 Eddy Street.

2003 John Bravard, a "ticking time bomb," kills 3 and self in a Dalt Hotel shooting rampage.

INFOGRAPHIC BY LISE STAMPFLI

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er arrested and convicted. "I ID'd all four guys," Garrity says. "They all had guns and shot three people. Nobody died. It was narcotics-related, crack. Drive-bys were popular then. They still come over with guns." Garrity received a Meritorious Conduct Award. Three years later he arrested one of the men involved for gun possession.

4. Late 1990s: The "mummified" body. The Road Runner Club and bar at 177 Eddy was renovating in the late 1990s and a man's body wrapped in carpet was found in the rafters. Garrity was a beat cop who got the call. The decomposing body really stunk up the place. "People smoke cigars to get over that or put Vicks under their nose," Garrity says. "They rolled the body out and it was a missing person. Not a pleasant

smell. I don't know if the case was ever solved. No DNA back then."

5. 1991: The Tenderloin Task Force swings into action on April 1. Headquarters was in the basement of Hibernia bank and all the personnel were hand-picked volunteers — Capt. George Kowalski, two lieutenants, seven sergeants and 60 officers that included John "Joe" Garrity and his brother James. "We made 5,000 felony arrests by the end of the

year," Garrity says with pride. He made the first arrest, too: an ex-con with a gun. The task force celebrated its 20th anniversary with a bash April 1, 2011, at the Parc 55 Hotel. More than 2,200 attended. "I saw that guy I first arrested this month (July) in West Portal," Garrity says. "He said, 'Hey, you've got gray, you're getting old.' I said, 'You are, too.' But," he adds with that smile again, "no snow on the roof." ■