

female fyi

July 2002

LESBIAN ANIME & MANGA
Yuri & Shoujoai

COMEDY SPOTLIGHT
The Notorious C.H.O.

TRAVEL
Southeast Asia

POWER UP
Linda Fusco

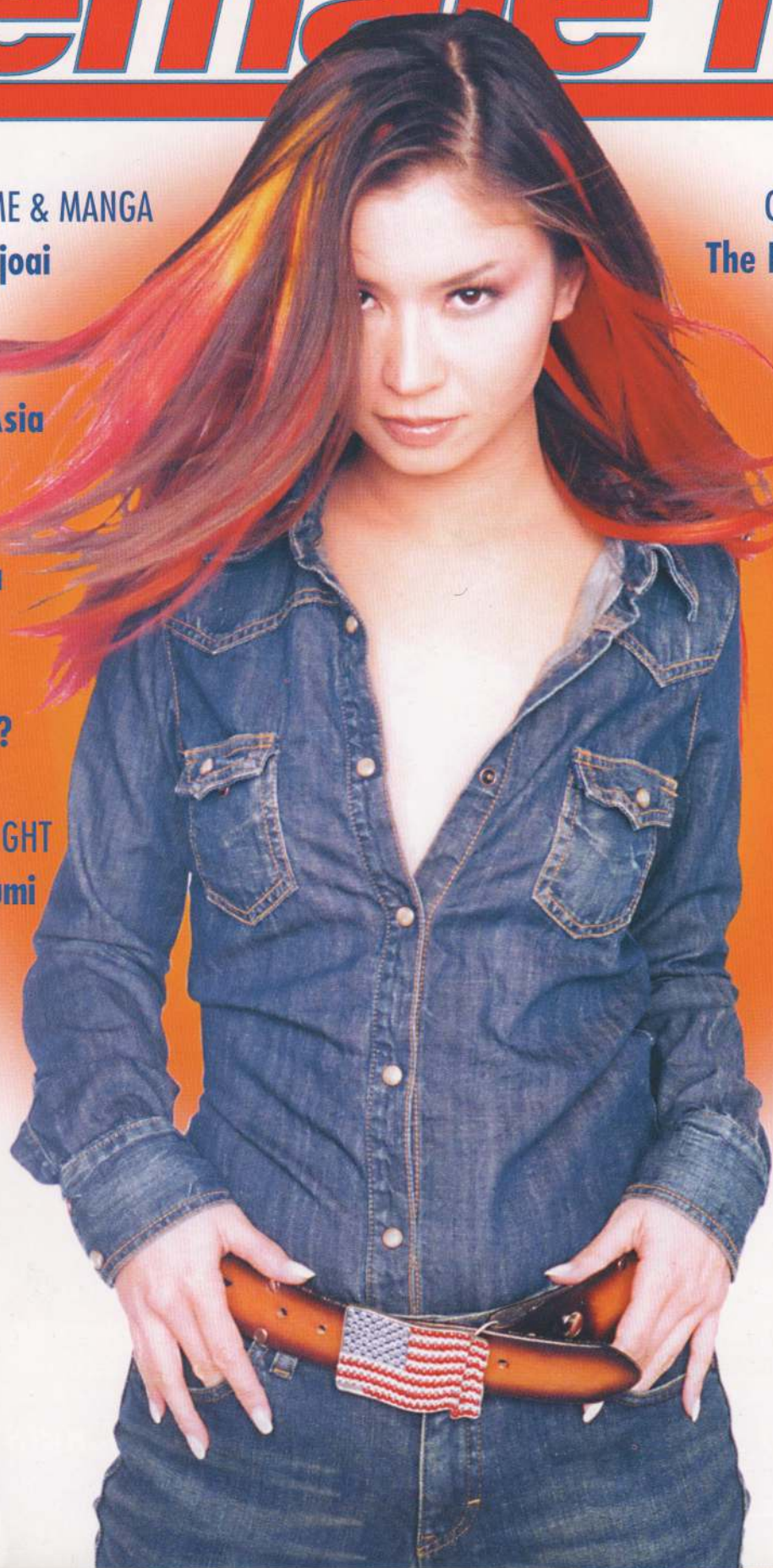
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MUSIC SPOTLIGHT
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By Candace Moore

BRIEFLY SANDWICHED IN BETWEEN LINDA FUSCO and her club-promotress partner-in-crime Michelle Agnew on the bench-style leather couch at their super-secret, name-not-to-be-revealed West Hollywood girl's night (which happens to be the new Lesbian Place To Be on Thursdays) the smell of assorted Asian finger food wafts by our heads. I'm babbling over the crowd's din at two hippped-out, smooth beauties in their element - Linda with her hair manufactured to unfurl in just the right places.

When Linda and I sit down days later at Felt to discuss her career in women's event promotion over cocktails, gone are the few loose tresses and out-all-night wear. Her ash-blonde do is pulled back tightly and she's all spiffy exec in a tailored black pants suit.

C: You have another look than last Thursday - you were all funky and now you're all professional.

L: (slyly) I have a few.

After running bars such as the Red Room in San Francisco, and living in the foggy city for ten years, Fusco moved to Hollywood three years ago and opened Felt as co-owner. She has since left the slick Santa Monica Blvd. restaurant (which caters to a cosmopolitan, mostly-gay night-crowd) to pursue promotion elsewhere, but you can tell she's still loved here.

C: So tell me how you and Michelle first met and masterminded Tuesdays at Felt?

L: Well... Michelle started the girl night at Muse, but she was the bartender not a promoter there. She just started inviting all of her friends to come and it took off and became infectious. When I wanted to do a night here I didn't want there to be any bad blood between the two restaurants so I approached them and said 'I'm planning on doing a women's night on Tuesday. Are you okay with that A, and B, can I hire your bartender Michelle to work with me?' At that point they were like, 'you can have the whole crowd.' The owner was a gay man who was older and tired of the business and didn't want anyone in there anymore. He wanted a fine dining restaurant. After a few weeks of trying to cajole Michelle into working here with me, she finally gave in. When she came over here on Tuesdays, Muse pretty much died at that point. That was in February of 2000.

C: I've heard innumerate news scraps about various celebrities being spotted here at Felt. Melissa Etheridge and Tammy Lynn Michaels met here for one. What's the scoop on that?

L: Tammy's got an amazing personality. She's full of life and she's fun and energetic, and I think she just walked up to (Melissa) and introduced herself and sparks flew right away. I don't really know them well enough to say how many dates it took after that to get together or anything but they always credit us with their meeting. You could tell right away they had a great connection.

C: Why do you think Felt has been a space that lesbians in the entertainment industry come to and are a part of particularly?

L: There really hasn't been an upscale restaurant within West Hollywood for women to dine at. And I think this really was a first where they not only had phenomenal food but the whole staff was female, predominately gay, really good looking women. Since they all had their own friends... the word of mouth got out quickly that it was going to happen.



C: What led you to decide to target the lesbian community?

L: Well I'm gay. We didn't have anywhere nice that wasn't a dance club- where you can just go and have a really great cocktail and eat really good food.

C: How different do you find your new promotion from Felt?

L: Michelle and I started doing Thursdays two months ago. It's not at a restaurant so it's completely different. You have to provide customer satisfaction because you're not...

C: Giving them a dining experience as well...

L: Exactly. If someone comes to Felt their minimum tab is going to be higher. People expect more and they'll pay a lot more. They want better service; they want a lot more attention. They expect the place to look immaculate.

C: Are you disappointed in working with strictly a bar?

L: Not at all - it's easier for one thing. It's not so exhausting. When I was here (at Felt) I was general manager, so I was doing everything.

C: I noticed you offer appetizers until 9PM at your new Thursday event. Are you going to continue that?

L: Every week we do that.

C: You seem to have a theme going on Thursdays - what with the Japanese manga characters on your flyers, the sake cocktail menu...

L: Usually each place has a theme. Felt was all about using really fresh ingredients in cocktails and all the bartenders were expected to shake everything before serving it. If you look at the cocktail recipe list, all of the recipes are one of a kind.

C: What events do you promote other than Thursdays?

L: I have a Friday night starting at 7969 June 28th. I'm doing that with a gay boy promoter so it's going to be a little different than what I've done in the past... We're promoting it towards women with like a hint of gay men coming and we're promoting it to men as a really cool gay chick club to go to. So we'll probably start off a mix of like 70% girls -30% boys. We'll also be doing a specialty drink menu. That night is called Club Trash.

C: Did you want to talk more about Club Trash?

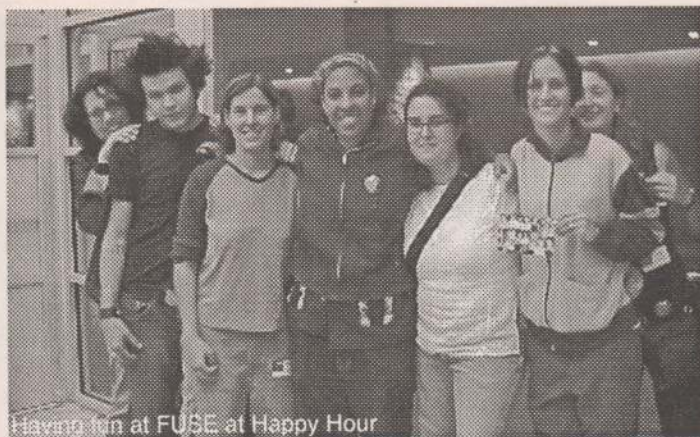
L: It excites me. We're going to have a whole Bond girl theme and the whole staff is going to be in sort of ripped up clothing and there will be trashy go-go dancers and really hardcore dance music mixed with fun eighties and pop. So I guess the theme would just be 'dirty'. (laughs)

C: How do you feel you set trends for women instead of merely following or reiterating them?

L: That's a good question. That's always so hard to know - what women want - they are probably the most difficult group.

C: You said teasingly the other night they were fickle.

L: (smiles) There are so many various tastes. At one club for women, every single genre is present. I actually advertise differently to get everyone to come. Knowing my audience,



Having fun at FUSE at Happy Hour

I'll have different looks for my flyers, because I really believe in having everybody in my space. You have women who like hip hop, who like r&b, who like disco, who like just pop... Meanwhile, if you go to a gay boy club there's often one type of boy there. So you could play one type of music and please everybody. You really can't do that with women so you have to keep things mixed.

C: That diversity is a good thing - people don't have to become pigeon-holed to be accepted by the community. Is there a DJ you work with particularly or music that you incorporate?

L: It depends on the type of night I'm doing. Thursdays we work with DJ's who can mix pop with R&B. Friday nights at 7969 is with a DJ who does progressive house and pop and a little bit of R&B in there, but mostly edgy, dancy things like Daft Punk and things like that. So it depends on the venue.

C: How do you advertise your venues?

L: FYI is a great example - we're buying a full page ad. We are members of POWER UP and they support our endeavors. Working with organizations like the Gay & Lesbian Center to inform their members what's happening, what's new... I've also worked with Click and Groove, an online dance site for gay music. And I've worked with the online site Gay Biz.

C: Do you attend many clubs or parties? How do you get your ideas?

L: I go to everything! Drag King bars, Drag Queen bars, eighteen and over clubs, you name it... I go to concerts... I try to hit everything personally so I know if people will like it and also so I can incorporate a mix at my own clubs.

C: Do you read the entertainment trades?

L: (nods) I think they're a very untapped source for advertising for gay clubs.

C: Completely. A large part of the entertainment industry IS gay. But basically the entertainment industry is still run by straight, white men. What do you feel about the part of the industry that is lesbian, that is gay, and doesn't get spoken for? How do you feel that's changing?

L: I wonder... because the people I know who work in the industry are all out at work, they're treated so well and they get domestic partnership benefits. Like my girlfriend works for Warner Brothers and they treat me like one of their own.

C: They love you?

L: Yeah. So I have a really positive feel for the way they treat gay women. The gay men I know are all out at work too, so I don't know that it's held anyone back at all.

C: Do you think there might be a disparity between the programming and the way gay people are treated in the workplace?

L: Yeah, oh yeah. And I don't know that that will change anytime soon. But I do think we've come so far since Ellen came out on her show. So much has happened in the last few years...

C: How do you think that body issues, weight, etc. particularly come into play at your clubs?

L: Oh that's hard.... They come into play TOO much honestly. People will say I have a really great night when I happen to have a lot of model friends that come in that night. And they

tell about how 'oh, there are cute girls in there' and then the next night is really busy. If I happen to have a night where there are a lot of bigger women the first thing they say is 'there are ugly chicks here'. And it's like hey, that's kind of shallow. Don't you think we could get beyond that? Women complain that the only place you meet people is in a bar, and then they go out and all they care about is eye candy. Yet if they were more open to meeting someone for their soul and their personality, they wouldn't care so much about the kind of people who are there and how they look.

C: How do you feel when people get absolutely wasted at your events?

L: It's kinda amateurish. That's why I really enjoy promoting events like what I did at Felt and what I'm doing now - it's an older crowd. It's about socializing with people. Not just getting wasted and throwing up in the bathroom.

C: Where are you from originally?

L: Long Island, New York. I lived there till I was sixteen. Then I moved to San Francisco.

C: So you've done the gambit of the big cities?

L: Yeah.

C: Did you know you were gay at sixteen?

L: (laughs) I knew when I was twelve.

C: How would you compare the different scenes in the different cities?

L: San Francisco is on the cutting edge of the lesbian scene - they tend to push the envelope... The drag king events in San Francisco are so much more wilder than they would ever be down here. The clubs in LA tend to be a bit more about what's shiny and bright and pretty. New York tends to be more casual. There it's sort of jeans and a t-shirt scene and you know everybody because you all hang out at the same places.

C: What do you do on your off time when you're not like hitting all these parties and clubs and meeting everyone?

L: I do all of my phone calls and emailing during the day, and then I garden and play with my dogs outside of that. I have a Sharpei, a Husky, and a mutt that's got Rotweiler in her. My dogs are going to be the end of me... They just got back from boot camp. I moved into a house with my girlfriend a year ago and I had one dog and one cat and she had three cats and two dogs. The dogs didn't get along very well so we finally sent them away to have them retrained together. (lovingly) My animal farm. I also perform with some friends of mine that are theatre actors. We'll produce a show and direct it and perform in it ourselves.

C: How long have you been with your girlfriend?

L: A year and a half now. I met her here. She was a customer before I started my whole girl night thing and she used to come in when we had just opened with all of her really good friends from work and I pretty much approached her. I invited myself to go to Paris with her. (smiles) She was complaining because she had to go for work and I sort of put myself out there as something to take along for enjoyment.

C: So what are the secrets of making a space that people can have fun in?

L: Music. You need to touch people's soul with the music you play. Hopefully you can play music that enough people like and they'll come once a week. The way the place looks and the energy of the people that work there. You need to have good personalities. The promoter should be on the floor meeting people personally. Enough times you don't have that happening. Easy Access. It's got to be a good location...

Linda Fusco's events surely incorporate all of her secrets. Her Thursday's are so bustling, by midnight I gazed out at hundreds of ecstatic girls while standing squished up against a tree planter. If you want to dance, if you want to have good cocktails, if you want to pick up ladies, if you want to hang with friends or maybe catch the eye of a celeb, check out her events. All of them.

Candace Moore, a Contributing Editor of Girlfriends Magazine, writes a monthly film review column and freelances on features focusing on Los Angeles entertainment and culture. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University and currently lives in Silverlake. Moore is also a Professional Member of POWER UP, Professional Organization of Women in Entertainment Reaching Up, the only national organization of its kind. POWER UP stands for unity, community, and empowerment. Feel the surge! www.power-up.net (310)271-4708.