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Girlfriends

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

August 2002

NOTORIOUS MARGARET CHO

Stands Up
For Self-Love

KINGS OF THE MIDWEST

Drag Troupes
Tour the Heartland

Queer As Folk's

MICHELLE CLUNIE

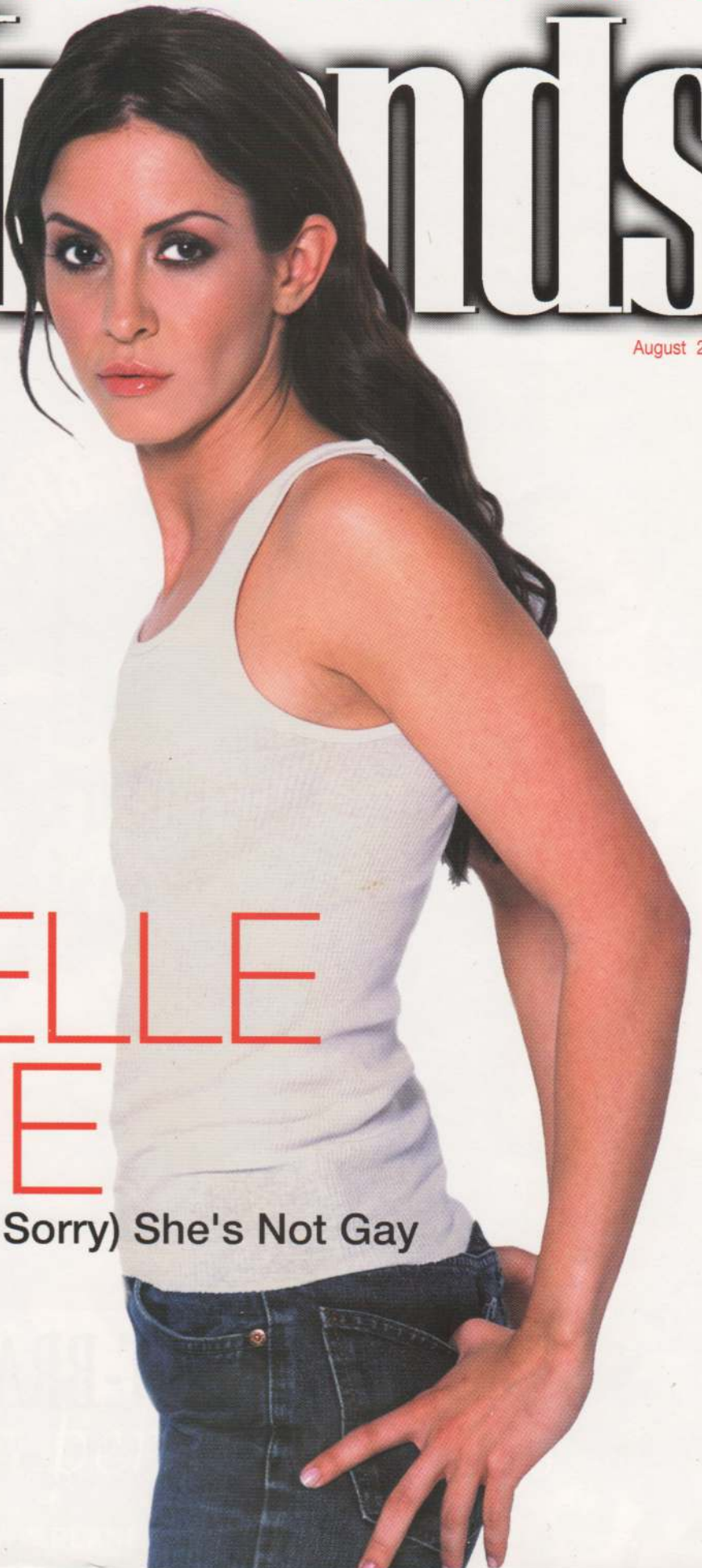
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Notorious Pro

Margaret Cho's new stand-up movie places her in the pottymouth pantheon.

by Candace Moore

"I'm going to succeed as myself, and I'm going to stay here, and rock the mic until the next Korean American, fag hag, shit-starter, girl comic, trash-talker comes out and takes my place!" —Margaret Cho, *I'm the One That I Want* (2000)

Comedienne Margaret Cho has made good on the promise. *Notorious C.H.O.*, a film version of her recent one-woman tour taped live in Seattle by director Lorene Machado, offers up a titillating, sidesplitting queen of confidence. Cho more than rocks the mic; she practically gives it head.

A promotional poster for the new movie portrays the former *All-American Girl* sitcom star with her short-trimmed nails bared in a cheetah-style claw. A voluptuous

Notorious C.H.O.

Dir. Lorene Machado
Taussig Productions, 95 min.

badass, decked out in a leather scoop-neck muscle shirt, her long black hair whips about as if she is facing a gigantic fan. It's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* meets a CK ad. The look she's going for is two scoops Lil' Kim, two Eve, with a big dollop of the original Cherry Bomb. *Notorious's* material fits the saucy attitude of contemporary female rap; it is X-rated, audacious, and sharp. She gives the classic Eddie Murphy or Richard Pryor pottymouth-type comics a run for their money—but she's one of the most sex-positive, pro-homo, feminist-thinking comics to date.

Cho's talent lies in her ability to transform the most icky, incidental, sexual, and heart-wrenchingly cruel moments of her life into public laugh riots. Her dexterity with intimate

details is matched by her mastery of the impression: she tends to repeat the zingers of her imitations until they adapt a new, sublimely funny meaning. (Mimicking a call from Video Hut, she punches an overdue porn's title for every laugh-dribble: "You did not return *Beaver Fever*... why you like *Beaver Fever* soooooo much...? Did you come down with *Beaver Fever*?") Cho makes you feel as if she's in the middle of your living room, gabbing on and making funny like only the most wildly entertaining of your best of friends can do.

Whereas memoir-based *I'm the One* dealt frankly with the sacrifices the young Margaret made for a body-obsessed, patriarchal, white-washed Hollywood—turning to drugs, alcohol, and food deprivation—*Notorious* serves as her post-recovery, adult, and unadulterated *Song of Herself* à la Walt Whitman. Except the bisexual (albeit admittedly straight-leaning) Ms. Cho doesn't exactly count blades of grass; *Notorious* is a reverie on fisting, SM leather daddies, drag queen guardian angels, and pussy mustaches. Don't worry, old time fans: Cho hasn't merely become a porn teleprompter. She still butters each raunchy tidbit with her trademark, face-twisted character impressions that make every anecdote alive and breathing.

Machado's choice to capture the concert-hall-style venue on digital video (the current indie format of choice) adds perceptible grit to the film, which takes on a rather free-wheeling quality as it follows Cho's gestures and frenetic movement. The audience's laughter is raucous and

compliments the ebb and flow between Cho's narrative glue and comic shrapnel. Its role in this performance is paramount; at times it feels as if the audience is pulling out the pin of Cho's grenade.

Cho's call for self-love near the close of *Notorious C.H.O.* is beautifully rousing: "When you don't have self-esteem, you will hesitate before you do anything in your life. You will hesitate before you go for the job you really want. You will



All-american girl Margaret Cho keeps it raunchy in *Notorious C.H.O.*

hesitate to ask for a raise. You will hesitate to report a rape... For us to have self-esteem is truly an act of revolution, and our revolution is long overdue!" Who knew crack-up Margaret Cho is such an intriguing breed of freedom fighter? Grade: **A**

Candace Moore, co-editor of the small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in L.A.

video & dvd

Classic Cross-Dressers

Women in slacks galvanized Hollywood way back when.

by Candace Moore

Male drag looks dang swank on Hollywood's

leading ladies. The shiny top hat tipped seductively over ingenue Marlene Dietrich's brow during a sultry number at The Blue Angel nightclub is only a crumb of crossdress in this tragicomic Josef Von Sternberg classic. Vixen showgirl Lola Lola (Dietrich) ensnares a

lovestruck, well-to-do professor into a bitter marriage and subsequent humiliation as her pathetic clown. The double-disc DVD includes the internationally

beloved German cut, an English-language version, and a fab 1929 screen test wherein Dietrich cusses out her piano player between clucky ditties. Grade: **A**



Marlene Dietrich steals the show (and men's hearts) in *The Blue Angel*.

The Blue Angel
Josef Von Sternberg
Kino Video, 1930

Victor/Victoria (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1982)
Famished soprano Victoria Grant (Julie Andrews) tries to escape a chi-chi bistro tab by planting a cockroach in her salad—a hilarious exploit which ushers her and equally broke Carroll Todd (Robert Preston) out into the Paris rain and into a fabulous partnership. A queer lounge lizard with connections, Todd transforms Victoria into fictitious female impersonator Count Victor Grezhinski. As Grezhinski, Grant dons female drag during her rapidly popular cabaret revue (music courtesy of Henri Mancini). A “woman-pretending-to-be-a-man-pretending-to-be-a-woman,” Andrews plays a scrumptious gender tease. Director Blake Edwards's darling musical comedy doubles as a pro-gay celebration of the gender spectrum. Grade: **A**

Sylvia Scarlett (RKO Radio Pictures Inc., 1935)
A lesser-known George Cukor flick, *Sylvia Scarlett* fits the gay director's pattern of featuring strong-willed women with gusto. It's tickling to watch young Kate Hepburn hack off her locks, put on trousers and a derby, and masquerades as a boy while on the lam with her gambler dad. The Scarletts' work cons with charming crook Jimmy (Cary Grant), and then minstrel their way through Europe. Dubbed a “crowing hen” for her difficulties re-becoming a girlie girl, Sylvia even smooches another woman while dressed as mustachioed Sylvester. Grade: **B+**

Queen Christina (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1933)
Lone heir to the Swedish throne during the Thirty Years' War, young Christina (sumptuous Greta Garbo) promises “to be a good and just *king*.” Her wording is no slip; the sovereign has purposefully been raised more princely than princessy. She's an avid reader, a fine hunter, and a policymaker. With pageboy haircut and riding gear, she passes as a man among her subjects. Rouben Mamoulian's stunning biopic, based on the bisexual monarch who ruled from 1626-1689, makes the polyamorous Queen's favor for a countess plain, providing the mouth-to-mouth kiss to prove it. By some happy accident, this landmark epic squeaked through the censors. Grade: **A+**

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Tainted Love

As a bit of nose-thumbing to the lesbian man-hater stereotype, *Girlfriends* publishes an annual "Men We Love" special feature. Each August, we dedicate a few pages in the magazine to covering men who have contributed something valuable to lesbian culture or politics. Because many men persist in misbehaving, we also publish a short list of "Men We Loathe," not because they're men, but because they're loathsome.

Whenever we do our "Men We Love" story, I'm reminded how our culture takes nearly every type of relationship a lesbian could have with a man and smothers it with negative stereotypes. Any lesbian pairing with a man is so bogged down with ideological static, it's hard, if not impossible, to decipher

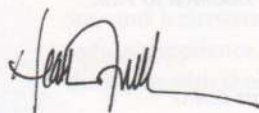
what it might really be. It's all the more shocking when you stop to think how varied, and sometimes easy and everyday, our bonds are with the men in our lives.

For example, at this moment in *Girlfriends'* history we have a record two men working at the magazine's parent company. Both Ethan Duran (our creative director of three years) and Anthony Gordon (our new account manager) have moved into our work culture so seamlessly, I don't do a double-take anymore when I hear their deep voices at meetings. They've adapted so well, I think, because they're really committed to *Girlfriends* and its readers. They're also serious about their own careers, so they're grateful to *Girlfriends* for giving them valuable experience. (They're also brave enough to risk their future jobs by working at a potentially résumé-killing gay

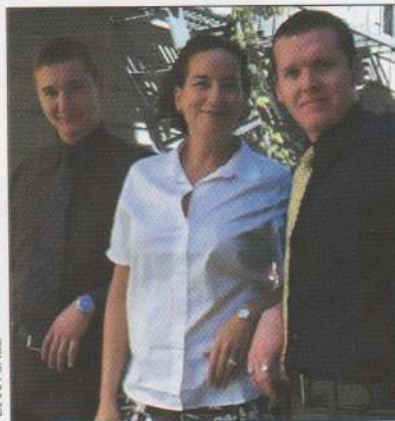
business.) But I also think Ethan and Anthony actually like working here: they enjoy having female bosses and dyke co-workers, and when they joke around with us they remind even me, sometimes, of how fun it is to be around lesbians.

In this issue, we're publishing some great stories about lesbian representations of masculinity, including Chicagoan Kathie Bergquist's report on Midwestern drag king troupes and Chloe Atkins's photos of herself as classic Hollywood leading men. We also asked J.R. Pratts, publisher of one of our favorite men's magazines, *Instinct* (you should check it out, it's like *Maxim* for gay guys), to write our Soapbox op-ed column this month.

These men: gotta love 'em. This issue: hope you like it.



Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief



Me with the brave men of *Girlfriends* Anthony Gordon (left) and Ethan Duran.

DIANA CAGE

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