

"Even if you win your revolution, I'm still an outlaw"

Kate Bornstein's art and reality as a writer/actor/playwright transsexual lesbian

By Rebecca Kaplan

It is rare that you're lucky enough to meet a person who helps you rethink your assumptions about humanity. San Francisco-based writer/actor/playwright Kate Bornstein is one such person. Her current play, *The Opposite Sex...is Neither* is the latest of her creations that helps to facilitate such rethinking.

Her last show, *Hidden: A Gender*, was a depiction of the lives of two transsexuals from different times and cultures that powerfully rendered their experiences with sex-reassignment and the discrimination they faced. *The Opposite Sex...is Neither* is a one-woman show that explores the lives of seven people who have non-traditional gender identities. I saw it March 7 in Hartford, Conn., where the show was presented by Real Art Ways, a production company that strives to present quality alternative theater, including a large selection of lesbian-, bisexual- and gay-related events. (Real Art Ways brought the "NEA Four" to New England shortly after their funding was cut.)

Most of the characters in *The Opposite Sex...Is Neither* are based on real people. Kate's first character is a Goddess-In-Training who must find seven people who are willing to challenge identity and help them transcend their gender roles. Only by helping these people reach their higher awareness can the G.I.T. advance to the next level in her training. In this sequence we meet several different characters, including Ruby "Love my breasts, love my cock" Tuesday, and Billy, a female jazz musician who passed as a man for most of her life after having been told, "Honey, swing is for men." One deeply religious character finds legitimization of her gender identity in the bible, quoting Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bound nor free,

there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

As the characters go through their conflicts and resolutions, we see that gender is not a simple either/or division. Bornstein shows us how gendered images are taught by the media, erotica, advertising, religion and our peers. But the reality is that gender involves a whole range of fluid and changing characteristics, and in one way or another, few of us fit into expected societal gender roles.

After the performance, I accompanied Kate and an entourage of friends and fans to a local restaurant, where we had the opportunity to talk more about *The Opposite Sex...Is Neither*. Certainly some of the show's ideas come from Kate's own life as a male-to-female transsexual lesbian, but there is no shortage of analysis. In her work, she asks us to question our assumptions about gender roles, and with that comes questions about the binary traits that we are taught to believe in; man/woman, gay/straight, black/white, rich/poor, can all be seen as artificial dichotomies. Bornstein also points out that when traditionally oppressed groups rise up—but continue to believe in the dichotomies—many people's experiences are discounted. As one of the show's characters, a male-to-female transsexual named Kat, says of the women's and gay rights movements: "Even if you win your revolution, I'm still an outlaw."

I enjoyed seeing the glimpses into the lives of the characters in the play, and I found myself wishing to get to know some of them better. Perhaps the play could be lengthened to allow more depth. But whether or not that happens, there's little doubt that Kate Bornstein will explore these issues further in her future work and she'll continue to shatter people's preconceptions about gender. □