



The Star-Ledger

Lots more than most would bare

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MICHAEL SOMMERS

The Sensuous Woman

Where: The Zipper Factory. 336 W. 37th St., New York

When: Through Nov. 3. 8 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays; 11 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays

How much: \$45-\$55. Call (212) 352-3101 or visit www.thezipperfactory.com.

NEW YORK -- Comedian Margaret Cho strips for comic action -- all the way down to a g-string and elaborate tattoos, in fact -- more than once in "The Sensuous Woman," her offbeat fling with burlesque entertainment which opened Saturday at The Zipper Factory.

Transgendered or otherwise, none of the performers on this 80-minute bill conform to what Cho denounces as the impossibly skinny and ridiculously youthful standards of ideal beauty forged by the mass media.

Remarking upon Britney Spears' unfortunate appearance at a recent MTV awards show, Cho disagrees with people who said the pop tart looked overweight. "She was high -- but she wasn't fat," notes Cho.

During her topical opening monologue, Cho typically cracks wise about, among others, Ann Coulter, Senator Larry Craig and O.J. Simpson, whom she proposes as the perfect guy to settle warring factions in Iraq "because he'd kill everybody."

Back on the issue of body images, Cho talks fondly of stocky gay men known as bears and notes how she wished everybody manifested their receptive sort of sexual nature towards others.

Too bad Cho's runway line-up features no bears. However, the zaftig Miss Dirty Martini satirically peels away red, white and blue patriotic trimmings to Dolly Parton's "God Bless the USA." A diminutive darling merely 3 feet 11 inches in height, Selena Luna emerges from a baby carriage to remove far more than just her bib.

Part-pirate and part-prima ballerina in appearance, lithe Ryan Heffington frantically lap-dances several spectators. A belly dancer known as Princess Farhana skips through a mischievous variation on Dorothy's trip down the Yellow Brick Road.

Garbed like a preppie boy, female-to-male comic Ian Harvie isn't so hilarious, but Liam Sullivan is droll depicting a snarky teen who rhythmically waxes lyrical about shoes -- pronounced "shuz" -- and provides other fashion notes. Diana Yanez crosses the stage every so often in the cheerful guise of Cho's Latina housekeeper to comment upon her boss' pan-sexual private life.

Having suffered in the past from eating disorders, Cho truly shows her mettle -- and practically everything else -- in several humorous turns as an ecdyasiast.

Waving a red banner and clad in Chairman Mao-style khakis, Cho spoofs communist-style ballet posturing that concludes with some impressive tassel-twirling. Manipulating feather fans as she slowly sheds a lovely antique gown during her finale, Cho flutters through an exotic interpretation of Wagnerian music that ends in a bawdy sight gag.

Cho's ultimate point to such frank disclosure, one supposes, is that individuals should feel free to be as sensual as they want regardless of their physical attributes, age, sexuality or whatever the current fashion dictates. It's a positive message.

Yet for all of its **louche good humor**, "The Sensuous Woman" needs to take a sharper satirical approach towards taste-makers and their dubious standards. The performers here appear to be having such a good time showing off their stuff, Cho included, that any significant social comment gets lost amid these **house party festivities**.

Michael Sommers may be reached at msommers@starledger.com or (212) 790-4434.

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