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Tawny Tell Me True

by Winnie McCroy

EDGE Editor

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After a summer spent being the toast of Provincetown, Tawny Heatterton, the delightful, irascible "niece" of '70s starlet Joey Heatherton, is back where she belongs, in the big city. In **"Tawny Tell Me True,"** she regales the crowd with more madcap tales of her zany, misguided adventures.

Tawny, known en mufti as playwright and actor David Drake (best known for having written and starred in the one-man theatrical memoir "The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me,") spent the summer in Massachusetts profitably, becoming more comfortable with his onstage persona. The show is the more solid for it.

This critic, who came to know Drake while we were both living in Baltimore in the '90s, can honestly (and somewhat apologetically) admit that she likes Drake better as Tawny than as David. It's hard not to find a soft spot in your heart for this whimsical, blonde soul sister.

Bounding onstage in a full-length fur coat with a tiny suitcase, Phyllis Diller wig askew (but not a little like that "other" Heatherton), Tawny disrobes. Revealing a short metallic cocktail dress, she tentatively croons the Carpenters' "Sing a Song" with accompaniment by her handsome and wildly game pianist and music director, Lance Cruce. Let's say she does the material justice.

Tooting on a plastic horn while Cruce plays and sings along, Tawny deadpans, "Oh hey, the Mayans were wrong, huh? Here we are, together again." Her deadly funny deadpan patter somehow segues to aliens and AFOs, or "angels flying overhead," as her mother calls them.

Tawny, you should know, has first-hand knowledge of aliens. As she tells us, she was abducted at the tender age of nine while sleepwalking in the Black Hills of South Dakota, in a scene that somehow managed to work in plastic pants, knobs, tickling and lots of probing.

Of course Jesus was an alien, what with the "cosmic molecule reassignment procedure" changing the water to wine, not to mention that walking on water routine. Tawny brings the crowd back to Provincetown as she recalls her recent dalliance with a man who fell from Outer Space with a splash onto the Race Point Beach, with dark hair and sexy Keanu Reeves eyes, all the while gibbering in the lost language of the Incan tribes. Tawny just called him Jesus.



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At some point, Jesus gave her a hickey, which served to remind Tawny of her love with ill-fated aerial balloonist and park ranger Buck, whom she left with a part Sioux/part Czechoslovakian nurse. In some way or other (you have to be there), she bursts into a rendition of that ode to small-town hypocrisy, "Harper Valley PTA."

After that, Jesus magically transforms into the chicken that served as Tawny's co-star during her stint on "Hee-Haw." The patter moves on to recap Tawny's star turn in the '80s as a European one-hit wonder. Of her song "Run Crazy Man," Tawny quips, "This thing about being a one-hit wonder is, you can always keep the wonder."

These tongue-in-cheek musings create a persona of Tawny as a well-meaning but wildly misguided party girl. It is hilarious and endearing at the same time, underscoring the fact that, despite her world travels, va-va-voom sex appeal and, shall we say, experience, Tawny is, underneath it all, a girl with a normal upbringing in the Long Island suburb of Rockville Centre, where she was raised (as did Joey Heatherton.)

This new show shows how much Drake has worked on his material. Tawny shies away from repeating bits that went over so well in his first show almost exactly a year ago at the same theater, the Laurie Beechman (which has become to drag in New York what Carnegie Hall is to orchestras). There are only the briefest glimpses of such treasured bits as Tawny pre-school pyromania and her spiritual experience in the parking lot of Mohegan Sun.

This being cabaret, between the laughs there must be songs, and they proceed apace, from James Horner's "Somewhere Out There" to Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams"; from the B-52's "Roam" to the Talking Heads' "Burning Down the House." They are sung well, if a bit too earnestly (a common fault among such faux-female acts), which leaves Tawny vacillating a little uneasily between serious interpretation and hilarious parody.

No matter. The crowd eats up each number and takes the vulnerable Tawny into its collective embrace. Given the affectionate send-up of all things show business, it's no surprise that some bona fide bold faces would turn up. At the show I attended, Jerry Stiller (father to Ben and one of the great comic actors) and daughter Amy were on hand to share laughs and post-show hugs with Drake, or Tawny, or Drake.

Meanwhile, we can all revel in Tawny's stories about her escapades, like the one where Burt, at a party in the Hollywood Hills, walked in on her and Loni in bed. "Tawny goes every which way!" Burt exclaimed. It's a fitting description of the inventiveness of David Drake's doppelgänger.

"Tawny Tell Me True" runs through Jan. 27 at the Laurie Beechman Theatre, 407 W. 42nd Street, under the West Bank Café, just west of Ninth Avenue. For information or tickets, call 212-695-6909 or visit www.westbankcafe.com/beechnan_theatre.html

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>

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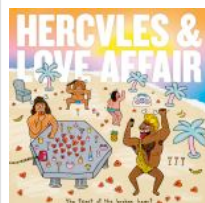


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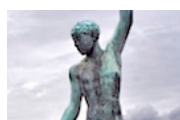
 



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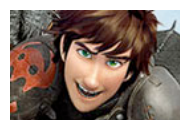
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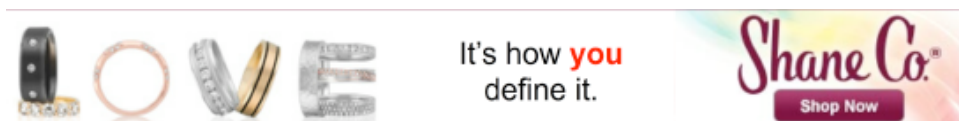
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