



Play Mitzi for Me

There's no business like Gaynor's show business; under the big top at Hustlaball

By Michael Musto

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My movie club—oh, hush, it fills those empty nights—compulsively watches a DVD of a 1964 Ed Sullivan Show featuring the history-making rock phenom, the Beatles. But we never watch anything so obvious as the Beatles. We glory to another guest



star, Mitzi Gaynor, who shimmies and shakes her way through a medley of tunes from the American songbook, backed by four eager chorus boys, till the saints go marching in.

Over 7-Ups at the Regency last week, Mitzi remembered that when Sullivan told her she'd be on a show with the Beatles, she responded: "Rock and roll? Really, Ed!" "Well, I have a contract with them," the neckless host replied, sheepishly. Of course, by time the show taped, the Beatles were bigger than Jesus—and I assume they did OK—but moxie-ish Mitzi still got top billing!

The top girl was in town to promote *Razzle Dazzle!*, a DVD of her best TV-special clips, which has even more of her spinning and gyrating in sumptuously sassy Bob Mackie outfits. It's not what she had always envisioned. A native Chicagoan, Mitzi told me, "I wanted to be an ice-skating, ballet-dancing opera star." "Oh, that had been done," I said, smirking. "But not Hawaiian toe-tap hula with a lit baton!" she replied.

Even better, Mitzi ended up a bona fide movie star in films like the 1954 musical melodrama *There's No Business Like Show Business*, which had a formidable cast of potential explosives. Mitzi engaged my love of nostalgia by explaining, "Dan Dailey had married Donald O'Connor's ex-wife, so that was a little uncomfortable. Donald did not want to do this picture. Marilyn Monroe was going through a divorce and was trying to keep up with all these people who were from the stage. And Ethel Merman—who was my best friend—couldn't deal with Marilyn's behavior. You don't make Ethel Merman wait! Ethel would say, 'All right, where's the blonde?'"

Mitzi was dropped from Fox—in favor of the blonde—but in '58, she ended up right back there as the lead in *South Pacific*. Mitzi's version of what happened is that Liz Taylor, Susan Hayward, and Doris Day all wanted the part, but *she* was willing to test for it, she

was the right age, and she sang in the correct Broadway key. "I'm a Virgo, so I have to succeed," she told me, lit up like a baton.

At 77, the woman is still elastic—she works out to Chippendale's tapes—and she's bravely touring the country with her one-woman show. (The four eager backups are probably in traction by now.) I climaxed our chat with a discussion of female porn stars, and Mitzi generously played along and remarked, "They have torpedo breasts. Ouch!" Mitzi Gaynor is for real. Get the DVD, Britney, and learn it.

That night, Mitzi went to see *South Pacific* on Broadway—they went gaga—where, apparently, some new shows might tap down the turnpike someday, too. In fact, I recently went to a Carnegie Hall Notables panel discussion called "Revival, Broadway's Next Act," where they discussed just what new ballet dancing on skates lies ahead. When Duncan Sheik said *Spring Awakening* has been sold to the movies, director Adam Shankman (*Hairspray*) blurted, "I wanted it!" Later, Shankman told Lin-Manuel Miranda that a certain performer whose surname rhymes with Hopez (hmm, can't figure that one out) wants to be in his show, meaning *In The Heights*. "I thought you were saying that to Duncan Sheik," the MC, Ana Gasteyer, admitted, so Sheik shot back: "She can play all the adult female non-singing roles!"

In Miranda's future are two new songs he wrote for *Working*—one about his first job as a McDonald's delivery boy—but of course *Heights* remains his dream musical, with or without Ms. Hopez. "There's nowhere to go but down," he told the crowd. "Alcoholism is on the horizon. See you in the *New York Post*!"

With *Legally Blonde* having just shuttered (they got their pink slips, as it were), Tony-nominated Orfeh is smart to come out with a pop CD called *What Do You Want From Me*. But why isn't she accompanying her husband, Andy Karl, in the musical of *9 to 5*? "I would have loved to join him for a sixth go-round," Orfeh told me last week, "and in such a fun show. I'm also a 'ginormous' Dolly Parton fan. But those parts were pretty much on serious lockdown from the first reading with the ladies who are in it." And I'm sure those torpedo breasts are already firmly in place.

Other body parts were the stars of Rentboy.com's Hustlaball at Rebel, which brought together slithery 'hos with torpedo tits and wealthy entrepreneurs with swollen wallets, though the latter seemed less anxious to tip than usual. Fortunately, no hustlabrawl ensued—and there were pleasant diversions, like meeting a gay porn star whose teenage daughter asked him for advice on anal sex. Alas, he's a top! (Ah, the problems of today's complicated American family. Sarah Palin, you've got your hands full.)

There were even more body parts over at Lincoln Center's performing arts library, where they premiered a show of photographer Kenn Duncan's glamour portraits of nudes and celebrities from the '70s gay mag *After Dark*. A mole told me, "Hal Prince didn't want anything to do with this part of the evening because he thinks Kenn was sleazy." Really, Hal!

Speaking of princes and queens, Martha Stewart scandal player Peter Bacanovic has a live-in boyfriend who I hear works for *Us Weekly* and, even more scandalously, posed nude in the '80s for a campus issue of *Playgirl*. But I bet Peter has crossed *that* off the guy's ledger.

Let me now bare my soul and say that *Synecdoche* is an A-for-effort film that ends up pushing too hard for profundity, and as a result it could use all the press it can get. But socially striving zhlub/promoter Andrew Saffir wouldn't invite me to the premiere, even under pressure. Rather than guess whether I'm too old, arch, honest, or ethnic to land his approval, I'll simply wallow in the fact that *I'm* not self-loathing, and besides, I'm invited to everything else!

I certainly got swept into the *W.* premiere, and though a homeless-looking man was being escorted out of his seat not far from me, another one was being led right into it. (Turned out it was actually scruffy movie star Michael Pitt. Grunge lives!) After the movie, I asked writer Bob Morris who will star as his dad in the NBC-optioned sitcom of his book *Assisted Loving*, and he said Jack Klugman or Bob Newhart would be good—"some charming old guy that needs work and still has his marbles and people would turn on the TV to watch. Hey, maybe George W. Bush!" Perfect—except for the part about being charming, having his marbles, and being something people would want to watch.

One more invite: A Michael's luncheon for Richard Jenkins, who's getting an Oscar push for *The Visitor* (a/k/a "two illegal immigrants unknowingly squat in a disaffected professor's apartment and teach him the drums"). As we toasted the movie's DVD release, Jenkins told me the Prince of Belgium liked it, but insisted there should be 10 more minutes showing what happens to the young woman. ("I guess no one says no to the prince," Jenkins told me, laughing. Or *Harold Prince*.) The actor—who's also in everything from *Step Brothers* to *Burn After Reading*—told me he's enjoying getting older and looking back at a varied life. The downside? "You're gonna die soon!"