

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012
Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 70:

801 Bourbon Cabaret Bar
www.801bourbon.com
801 Duval Street
Wednesday 9/26, 11:30 pm

Heineken (bottle) \$5.50

Day 69, continued.



I decided to balance the scales and stroll up a few blocks to catch the drag show at Key West's most famous gay bar. Equal time and all that. I went from women offering insincere affection at Teasers to guys pretending to be women offering insincere affection at 801. Upgrade? Dun tink so.

801 seems to be the most famous (or notorious) of its ilk. It's the one that gets most chortled about (*Heh heh, yeah, send him up to the 801...*), joked about (*Why did the chicken cross the road? To find the big cock at 801!*), and insinuated about (*Don't put yer hand on my shoulder, Rocco, whaddythink this is, the 801??*).

And, in broader terms, people throw out the phrase "the 800 block" like it's a succession of same-sex bordellos, and a parade of mincing men and lascivious lezzies. It's not. The 700 block has more going on in that arena, but it's 801 that sets the rep.

Anyway, these shows are a hoot and a half. If you've never been to one, here's my take on it. There are pretty much three kinds of drag performers. First, there are the Show Girls, the really professional female impersonators – Randy Roberts and the like. They do their own singing and can mimic all the top divas. Their shows are really shows, and the admission reflects it. But they can knock you out with both vivacious voice and voluptuous visuals.

Second, there are the Show Girl Wannabe's. Their outfits, make-ups, moves, and music might be just about as good as the first category, but they just can't freaking sing. Not well enough, anyway. Their lip-syncing is usually spot-on, though, so if you were really drunk or pretty stupid, you just might be convinced it's real.

Third, there are the Sexy Sluts: tight, trim-cut bodies, shaved smooth, and outfitted to display it all. They're out to sell the illusion to the max. Bikini tops with bikini bottoms that leave you wondering, *OK, where did he hide it?* [I'm told that duct tape is a queen's best friend; that makes me cringe.] They strut with an if-you-got-it-flaunt-it brazenness borne of a birdish diet and 1000 ab exercises a day. And you just might get a former gymnast (not unlike the last Tour stop) who also makes you ask, *OK, how does he do that??*

Finally, there are the Komic Kweens. They may not have the looks, or the body, or the moves, or the voice, or even the money for quality outfits, so they compensate by exaggeration: garish clothes, outrageous hair, oversized body parts, kooky antics, and very often a soundtrack of ludicrous lyrics.

There are also the Bridgers, drag performers who can cross or straddle the above lines. They can be sexy, or they can nail a Madonna impersonation, or they can be a crack-up parody of their profession.

At a given show by the 801 Girls, you might get just about all of it – just not the actual singing.



The most renowned of 801's queens, though, is definitely Sushi (left), whose notoriety exploded a few years ago when CNN began to cover her descent across the street – in a six-foot-long, lipstick red, high-heeled shoe – from the rafters of the New Orleans House to the sidewalk on New Year's Eve.

Shortly after I moved to the Keys, I went to see a show here and ended up having a long chit-chat at the bar with Sushi afterwards. Very interesting life, and a very nice dude. A decade later, Sushi is about ten years older (go figure), but still keeping in excellent shape and still putting on quality shows.

The Night 69 show was already

underway by the time I reached 801. If you get there prior to showtime, you'll usually encounter a cluster of queens flirting with the passers-by, trying to drum up a bigger audience. You almost always see the people smiling or laughing after they pass by.

This particular night, though, the sidewalk was empty, and it was the JV team on stage. Makes sense: mid-week, late-September, the deadest month of the year for Duval. The Varsity squad was on vaykay. I don't recall the names of the three or four performers that I did see, but they were still a kick.

With the lesser echelon of drag performers, I figure they must have other employment in order to survive. I'm sure I've seen some of them around town in their male personae, or maybe even in my shop, and have passed right on by without any recognition.

That happened big-time when I lived in Rochester NY. One of my favorite haunts was a crazy place called GQ Club. It was an anything-goes place with bizarre people. It was immensely popular. So, the barkeep, Michael, waited on me regularly, and we chatted back-and-forth as barkeeps and semi-regulars will do. I commented that he never bartended on the weekends. He gave me a very weird look, paused, and chuckled, *I have another job on weekends.*

Weekends there included drag shows in one of the four big bar rooms, and they drew big crowds. The performers were very professional and put on a fun show. One Saturday night shortly after that aforementioned conversation, I adjourned to the bar in the brick-walls-and-big-sofas room between sets. The show's headliner, a Marilyn Monroe-ish blond who went under the name Pandora Boxx, came sashaying into the bar. As she walked by, she stopped, looked at me, and asked, *Figure it out yet?* Suddenly I got the voice and eyes up close and went, *Holyyyy shittt! Michael!*

The 801's upstairs show room was not even half-full as night 69 wound down. The crowd was small but pretty responsive, which had to make it more fun for the performers. They must hate it when they're up there all tarted up, trying to be unabashed and exciting, and have the audience just sitting on their hands.

My two high-priced Heinekens here, with a tip for the keeper and a couple of bucks for the pass-around bucket for the performers, had added to an already pricey night. I don't begrudge them the price, though; they don't charge locals a cover charge to get in to the show.

I stuffed one last buck in some dude's artificial cleavage, got an insincere slap on the behind as a thank you, and moseyed on down the stairs and into the almost-empty street.