



BAYVIEW
Daniel Ruth

A sultry extravaganza of the banal

Until last Friday night, the most abysmal entertainment event to ever take place in the Tampa area occurred in 1978 when Charles B. Pierce produced a movie here called "The Norseman," a Viking epic starring the former Mr. Farrah Fawcett — Lee Majors.

In addition to its dreadful performances, a script straight out of a matchbook cover and paper mache sets, the film was notable for things like jet vapor trails in the sky, silhouettes of condominiums in the background and tire track marks in the sand — a neat trick for a movie supposedly set in 1006 A.D.

However "The Norseman" will have to step aside for "Sultry Sondra," who may have set back the cause of live theater to the days of the Roman Coliseum with a performance last Friday at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center that would have made the lions go on a hunger strike.

If you're a regular grazer across cable television public access channels, you may have stumbled upon Sultry Sondra (aka Sondra Prill) from time to time in between that guy with that pig hat and Jim Clements' "Lifestyles of the Up and Coming" — that video ode to the wonders of cellulite.

In the cable television industry, the phenomena of public access is best remembered by an incident during the 1970s called "The Puppy Snuff Film" where some guy video recorded blowing a beagle's brains out and then sued to have a New York cable system air the tape — an argument that the pervert actually won.

The The-a-TER

However, compared to Sultry Sondra, "The Puppy Snuff Film" comes off as a National Geographic Special. This is a singer who about the only time she comes close to being on key is when she starts her car.

But that's the beauty/curse of public access — anyone can go on the air and pretty much do, or say, or be as silly as they want.

Sultry Sondra though had greater aspirations. She yearned for The The-a-TER. So a few months ago, Prill and her mother Regina attempted to put together a live show that would be presented at the Tampa Theatre. But there were a few problems.

Aside from the fact she can't sing, dance or perform comedy, the show also was hampered by a bounced check to rent the facility for \$2,000. "She fell short a couple hundred of dollars," said Regina Prill.

And so Sultry Sondra took her show over to the 900-seat Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center Playhouse Theater, where she could rent the facility for \$1,000. But this time, unlike the promotion for the event at the Tampa Theatre, Friday's show, billed as "A Musical Fantasy," was hyped as a charity event in which "portions of the proceeds" would be donated to Miami hurricane relief efforts.

However when asked before the show just how much of a portion the hurricane relief people would benefit from, or who would actually receive funds, Sultry Sondra breathily whispered she had no idea, admitting she hadn't contacted anyone involved in the relief work.

When pressed, Sultry Sondra said she planned to send \$1,000 from the show's box office receipts to Miami. But that would have meant that Sultry Sondra is a magician too.

Hair on fire

Ticket prices for her show ranged up to \$50, a testimony to a rather intriguing assessment of her talents considering recent (and slightly better known) TBPAC performers such as Al Green and Patti LaBelle charged a maximum ticket price of \$25.

Of course Green and LaBelle lack Sultry Sondra's unique way of handling a melody — a cross between the dulcet sound of setting one's hair on fire and sticking one's hand into a garbage disposal.

Friday night's show was not without its highlights. First, it started about 20 minutes late and in an inadvertent gaffe much to the delight of the audience, Sultry Sondra's microphone failed during one of her songs, which meant we were all spared from having to listen to her.

Fortunately for the rest of the city, there weren't that many of us in the audience. Only 41 tickets were sold to Sultry Sondra, a commentary on the good sense of the populace. Of course they did miss that dramatic moment during the performance where Sultry Sondra had honey poured all over her for no particular reason. Say, That's Entertainment!

Needless to say the victims of Hurricane Andrew won't be benefiting much from Friday's extravaganza of the banal.

But then again, perhaps the folks down in Miami could send Sultry Sondra a few bucks — as a professional courtesy from one disaster to another.