

Arias says he is "channeling, not impersonating, Billie Holiday."

BY ADAM BLOCK



"Madonna is kicking open the doors. She's making it easier for all of us," said Joey Arias with a grin, batting two-inch lashes as he talked about the sublime Miss M's recently banned video.

It was Christmas night, and the New York downtown legend was finishing a two-night stint at Seattle's Re-bar. On Xmas eve he had mounted his jazz set (backed by an impeccable acoustic combo)—appearing in red jodhpurs and black boots, his hair swept back and dyed white. He looked like a cross between Cesar Romero and Bart Simpson, with makeup by Gloria Swanson.

Arias billed the set as "channeling, not impersonating, Billie Holiday," but his spooky renditions owed as much to Mahalia Jackson and Sarah Vaughan. He regularly departed from Billie's catalog—reinventing "Michelle," "A Hard Day's Night," and "California Dreaming" as warped, woozy blues. His standout number was a sepulchral, set-closing rendition of "Silent Night," draped over Angelo Badalamenti's *Twin Peaks* theme.

The next night, Arias appeared as Justine and the Pussycats, sporting a torpedo-titted leather bustier and a massive red wig—looking like Peg Bundy doing Tina Turner on Quaaludes. Whipping a foot-long double-headed dildo overhead, backed up by singers in B-girl Santa drag, Arias lashed out Led Zeppelin's "The Immigrant Song" and a hilariously filthy version of his upcoming dance track "Make Me Wanna Dance."

That track will be released (unfortunately sanitized) in Japan, where Arias already has a CD out, *Jazzo-Lozo* (Spiral); he's looking for a U.S. distributor. His acoustic blues set is due this spring on Seattle's Swedish Housewife label.

Danielle Willis turned in the standout performance at the Klubstitutes' Xmas All-Star AIDS Benefit show in San Fran-



GARY BEDELL

Joey Arias

A New York legend goes west, highlighting his Seattle set with a sepulchral "Silent Night."

cisco—as rad as Madonna and much funnier. The sometime singer with the Vaguelles (in their Dead Partridge Family show) slugged cough medicine and recalled her teen obsession with Andy Gibb and masturbating with stick deodorant, only to be sidelined by Jesus before coming of age as a lesbian who discovered in transvestites "beautiful girls with cocks." Willis's book *Dogs in Lingerie* beats Charles Bukowski and Kathy Acker with brevity and brute, queer wit. (To order, send \$7 to *Dogs in Lingerie*, P.O. Box 2703, Santa Cruz, CA 95063).

When she recently was interviewed by L.A.'s *Village View*, k. d. lang casually struck a bold blow. Asked if she would accept a role as a "spokesperson for the gay community," lang replied, "Yeah—sure I do."

The singer is wrapping up acting chores on an Eskimo coming-of-age film by Percy Adlon (*Bagdad Café*), who directed her stunning Sapphic video of "So in Love" for ABC's *Red, Hot & Blue* special. That performance may hint at a new direction for the lesbian with a lariat, who was stunned recently by the virulent response in the country-and-western community to her ads denouncing meat eating. Wonder what they'd make of a few public-service announcements for Queer Nation?

Jimmy Somerville could be counted on to

cut one. It's great to see that, at year's end, his anthology *The Singles Collection, 1984-1990* (London/U.K.) was sitting at number 5 on the British pop charts.

Giorno Poetry Systems, whose recent releases have featured David Byrne, Cabaret Voltaire, Laurie Anderson, Sonic Youth, Debbie Harry, and William Burroughs, contributed \$258,669 to the AIDS Treatment Project, which offers direct aid to artists.

The Names Project found an unlikely ally when Beach Boy Brian Wilson flew to San Francisco to perform five numbers on a baby grand (with bassist Rob Wasserman) for an intimate group of people who'd each paid \$125 to attend. The occasion was a benefit sale of Garry Trudeau's original *Doonesbury* panels featuring his gay character, Andy Lippincott—who succumbed to AIDS. *Pet Sounds* had been Lippincott's favorite LP, and Wilson closed his set with that disc's "God Only Knows."

Bill Coleman, Deee-Lite's gay manager, is trying to conquer club land again with the group Basscut, whose first single, "Say You Love Me," is headed toward a dance floor near you. The follow-up disc will feature the cut "Sylvester," paying tribute to the diva who made all of our lives a little bit fabulous.

Syl would have loved Madonna's video. ▼