

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Ayesha Kazan

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 19 July 2005

Location of interview: Kings Cross

Reason for interview: Early venues

Restrictions: N/A



Time	Summary	Keywords
000030	Born 29 th July 1944 in Hurstville and was adopted by Dorothy and Stanley Best. Of mixed heritage background. Hurstville was semi-rural at that time.	Hurstville
000130	A. was 6 ½ when her mother died. Grandmother and father raised her.	
000240	Father remarried when she was 11.	
000250	Loved school. Didn't notice any racism.	
000357	Scholarship and went to Sydney Boys High. Teachers College Scholarship and went to Newcastle Teachers College.	Sydney Boys High Newcastle Teachers College
000545	Growing up with stepmother and father. Learned piano and singing. Enjoyed going to the Tivoli with Grandmother when 8 or 9. Fabulous! Showgirls, Roy Rene, George Wallace. It was another world.	Tivoli, Roy Rene, George Wallace.
000757	No feelings of being different until molested when 10.	
000900	Describes fun activities as a child. Romps around with local kids.	
000914	No special friends at High School. Only kid from Hurstville.	
001000	When at Newcastle realized that there was a gay community. Met Monique St John who was a boy then. They would go out to the Great Northern Hotel and the Star and the Orana. But didn't mix with the mainstream gays and they weren't as obvious.	Newcastle Monique St John Great Northern Hotel, the Star, the Orana
001055	Had each other for support. Both would come to Sydney on weekends and stay	
001142	Monique and A. discovered drag at a party one night in Haberfield (famous venue) after hotels closed. Met Carlotta and Lombard one night in semi drag.	Haberfield, Carlotta, Lombard
001223	Lombard was probably at Jewel Box and Carlotta just starting at Les Girls.	Jewel Box, Les Girls
001245	Went only to venues where it was cool – Chevron, Jewel Box and Les Girls.	Chevron, Jewel Box, Les Girls
001330	Jewel Box was the roughest of all the clubs. Purple Onion was 90% gay; Les Girls mainly straight.	Jewel Box, Purple Onion, Les Girls
001435	Went to Purple Onion nearly every Sunday, then did a guest spot. Won a prize of £10 in an amateur hour.	Purple Onion
001529	Then asked to stand in for someone who was sick. The shows weren't especially choreographed.	

001600	Dawn O'Donnell opened a place called Karen's Castle on Cleveland Street. She gave A. her first job. Worked Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday and taught at school Monday to Friday. Got to be a bit much and gave up teaching.	Dawn O'Donnell Karen's Castle
001705	Taught at Blakehurst. Kids knew A. was gay. Didn't like sport. If she could have worked in a dress she would have been happy.	Blakehurst
001900	Financial impact of performing – shithouse wages – but she said she was doing something she wanted to do.	
001933	Lived with Bob and Cor (?) in Annandale. Moved out when drag got too much for Bob, because it drew attention to the house.	Annandale
002032	Karen's Castle named after Karen Chant the compere. Was Dawn's first commercial venture.	Karen Chant
002200	Jimmy Fishburn put the show together and Maggie Martin did the choreography. Jimmy would find the material, get tape together, theme, find the solo numbers.	Jimmy Fishburn Maggie Martin
002155	Already a performer. Since 6 participated in Eisteddfods and Mayor's Charity Concert in Hurstville.	Eisteddfods
002255	The name Ayesha comes from Rider Haggard's book "She". A goddess who doesn't age. Was Ayesha at Karen's Castle.	H Rider Haggard "She" Ayesha
002355	Ray Wilson made the costumes	Ray Wilson
002427	Dawn sold Karen's Castle to Lindy who owned a brothel. Became "Lindy Lou's". Suzanne LeGay came to work. Lindy could not manage money and the place closed.	Lindy Lindy Lou's Suzanne Le Gay
002533	Elektra who was working at the Jewel Box had a spare room and she stayed there and Elektra suggested she do a guest spot at Les Girls. Sammy Lee and Shiela Cruz saw her perform and she was asked to start rehearsals.	Elektra, Sammy Lee, Shiela Cruz
002612	Lindy Lou's/Karen's Castle were BYO, possibly with sly grog on the side, but not sure.	
002725	When stopped teaching father dropped by the place at Annandale and she slammed door in his face, because she didn't know how to tell him – he wouldn't understand. Didn't contact him.	
002830	Les Girls was the ultimate place to work and Sammy Lee had wanted her to work there some time.	Les Girls, Sammy Lee
002930	In her first 12 months it was difficult. She would find a voice that no one else was using. Simone was Della Reese, Carlotta Shirley Bassey. Then Peter Kane came in with a number for Holly Brown who didn't want it. "Black, Black, Black" by Laine Kazan. Hence Kazan as A's surname.	Simone, Della Reese, Carlotta, Shirley Bassey, Peter Kane, Holly Brown, Laine Kazan
003130	Met Lainie Kazan at Chequers.	Chequers
003209	Other Les Girls performers were, Suzanne Le Gay; Josie Judd, Holly Brown, Stan Munro, Peter Moselle, Monique St John, Simone, Elektra and they were the main cast for 2 or 3 years.	Suzanne Le Gay; Josie Judd, Holly Brown, Stan Munro, Peter

		Moselle, Monique St John, Simone, Elektra.
003300	Les Girls was licenced. About 1966 it was still 1 storey. People had to queue in the street.	Les Girls
003420	Sammy Lee did a deal with the woman who owned the building to add a second storey. People could then wait in the cocktail lounge. Licensing hours got extended to 3am at the same time.	Sammy Lee Licensing hours
003500	When a customer came in there was the Maitre de. Waiters were real girls with big tits. They wore Leotards, fishnet stockings and little aprons. Meals were quite good. It was a nicely set up nightclub – not crammed as they were in the end.	
003600	There was the late show on Friday nights. Overseas stars would come after their shows finished. Cilla Black; Dione Warwick; Tom Jones; Jack Jones; Shirley Bassey. It was the place to go for a meal late at night. The late show started at 1am.	Cilla Black, Dione Warwick, Tom Jones, Jack Jones, Shirley Bassey.
003704	Staff members were Sheila Cruz – producer and director. Lilac Haze in the early years then Kenny Williams made the costumes. Kenny also was very good at lighting.	Sheila Cruz, Lilac Haze, Kenny Williams
003807	Les Girls was owned by Sammy Lee and Reg Boom. Sammy Lee was the typical gangster type, but had a kind heart. He could tell what an audience wanted.	Sammy Lee
004016	In 1968 Kevin Jackobsen approached Carlotta and she got a group together to go to Hong Kong. In December A. was asked to go. Les Girls didn't die.	Kevin Jackobsen
004116	Peter Moselle was then still compering, and later Stan Monro.	Peter Moselle
004128	December 1968 – September 1970 A. went to Hong Kong.	Hong Kong
004203	In HK: Better working conditions. Miramar Hotel. Upstairs was the huge room with showgirls and live acts, like Pat Boone and Johnny Matthis. Downstairs the playgirls den to fill up the room for tourists. Only drag show in HK. Chinese didn't allow it.	Miramar Hotel Pat Boone, Johnny Matthis,
004300	Carlotta left a month later and went back to comper at Les Girls, 1970.	Carlotta
004348	When the show closed in September 1970 A. came back to Les Girls.	
004403	Other overseas acts were the Carousel de Paris. But couldn't go. Because to prevent a recurrence of someone leaving, the performers' passports were confiscated.	Carousel de Paris
004519	American servicemen on rest and recreation was happening when A. came back. Things went American – The Texas Tavern, Bourbon and Beefsteak – geared up to take the dollars off the servicemen. Les Girls did not pander to this market. It was also not on the recommended places to go.	Rest and Recreation, Texas Tavern, Bourbon and Beefsteak
004635	Drug of choice was dope.	

004717	In 1974, Sammy Lee's health wasn't the best. Terry Boom and his mother refused to pay the higher rent and moved Les Girls to Oxford Street underneath the Academy Twin. "crammed into this dungeon". There was also a show at the Opera House	Sammy Lee; Terry Boom; Les Girls; Academy Twin; Oxford Street; Opera House.
004914	Left Les Girls in 1975. An offer from Manila. It was a restaurant. A debacle and only there for 3 months.	Manila
005014	Antoinette from Melbourne; Sinnamon Brown from Melbourne; A. was the compere; Tanya.	Antoinette; Sinnamon Brown; Tanya.
005109	Came back to Australia. No money and no job. Eric Dare had taken over Les Girls (1975). Stayed with Laura. Returned to the show in Oxford Street.	Eric Dare; Les Girls; Laura; Oxford Street.
005232	Guest spots at Capriccios on Sundays.	Capriccios
005250	Simone and Monique's Playgirls. Joined the show doing clubs, country tours, RSL's in NSW.	Simone and Monique's Playgirls; RSL's
005330	Went to Alice Springs, and that was the real Priscilla.	Priscilla
005400	Booked for 3 weeks. Simone couldn't go and so Carlotta did the compering. On tour were, Monique; Robbie Lang; Colleen Christie; Vivienne Cartier; A; Peter the male dancer (Monique's partner); Carlotta.	Carlotta; Monique; Robbie Lang; Colleen Christie; Vivienne Cartier; Peter; Carlotta.
005530	Venue was a Hotel with good sized function room, a stage. The dressing room was the beer closet.	
005555	First night comfortable seating but next night extra seats. It was a smash hit. Then traveled NSW.	
005655	Tour with Les Girls after they came back. They rehearsed the show to go to London, upstairs at Jools. Then opened the show at Jools.	Les Girls; London; Jools.
005752	After 10 days there was a fire at Jools. Simone had insurance. Resurrected the show from costumes from other shows.	Simone
005915	With so many venues in the mid 70's, there wasn't enough queens to perform. Simone and Monique said you couldn't do guest spots. A. did a guest spot at Capriccios and was fired. Tommy Brown and Lorraine Campbell-Craig took her on.	Simone and Monique; Tommy Brown; Lorraine Campbell-Craig; Capriccios.
010054	Eric Dare still owned the name "Les Girls" and that's why Les Girls became the Carousel.	Eric Dare; Carousel.
010144	Capriccios was different to Les Girls. Each show had a theme and played a character all through the show. "Tropical Nights" "Hollywood Wax"; "Vaseline"; "Star Whores"; "Aladdin"; "Didgery Drag", "Ballroom" (which lasted 15 months).	Capriccios; Tropical Nights; Hollywood; Vaseline; Star Whores; Aladdin; Didgery Drag; Ballroom.

010244	The Capriccios style of drag was developed here – dialogue recorded for the show – Maggie Kirkpatrick, Jeannie Little did the voices.	Maggie Kirkpatrick; Jeannie Little
010330	David Mitchell and David Penfold would do the storyline and the dialogue and the numbers going into the show. There were production meetings involving everybody. [Continued on Tape TWO] Everything choreographed down to hand movements. Unlike today where rehearsals are for a couple of hours before the show.	David Mitchell; David Penfold.
010520	Only time in the world that this was done to this perfection.	
010550	Synthetics in the early 70's and Doris Fish. Came after Michael Mattou was doing "Flowers". Glamorous in a grotesque way. Nobody working today would have been employed by Sammy Lee in terms of ability or style.	Synthetics; Doris Fish; Michael Mattou; "Flowers"; Sammy Lee.
010739	Gay political changes in the 1970's wasn't really noticed by A. She lived in a twilight world. Not really accepted by the gay scene.	
010800	A. says that if there was a political fundraiser we would be there. But none of them were politically minded. Changes were done by others, but she and others helped pave the way by being figureheads.	
010835	Changes in the audience? More parents and lesbians.	
010920	After Capriccios had to leave due to back injury. Then worked with Les Girls on a tour of all states and territories bar WA for 3 years 1981-1983.	Les Girls
011021	Around 1982, heard a lot about what is now AIDS. Went back to Les Girls in 1983 after touring. In 1986 was given the bums rush.	AIDS
011205	A. male partner in the show was sick with AIDS. Wanda stood in for A. Then if they lost Wanda, they would lose the male dancer.	Wanda
011230	Lost a lot of friends to AIDS during the 1980s. Tallulah Bright, Legs Galore, Terry Underhill, Flange Desire.	Tallulah Bright; Legs Galore; Terry Underhill; Flange Desire.
011350	Performed for AIDS benefits until it cost her too much to continue.	
011427	Did some shows at Flinders with Pepper and Chase 1987-88. Played piano in restaurants in the Blue Mountains and then worked in a parlour for a while.	Flinders; Pepper and Chase; Blue Mountains.
011526	Karen Phaedra was working at Telstra. A. applied and got a job in paging, and worked there for 6 years, until too sick to work – with HIV and bipolar. Obtained a disability pension.	Karen Phaedra; Telstra; HIV
011709	Enjoyed working at Telstra. Treated as herself and paid more than on stage.	Telstra
011808	Worked with gays, lesbians, straights, sex change. If she had known about this before would have joined before.	Telstra

011914	A. doesn't regret the madness of those days however. All the madness forgotten when the curtain opened.	
012104	Has considered writing about all this. Police harassment in those days, not being able to use public transport, told not to come around to people's houses during the day.	
012231	A. expressed views about gay marriage. Marriage is about legitimizing children, no other reasons.	Marriage
012330	A. expressed views about drag in Sydney today. No one can afford to launch a drag show. The performers in the past put their own wages into the production because they wanted it to look good. No venues for a decent sized show – except RSL's. Young ones sell their bodies or do a normal job because of Equal Employment Opportunity and don't go into show business. It is the cross dressers who perform at night and work as straight during the day.	Drag today
012807	In the past it was a full-time profession.	
012941	A. draws distinction between drag and female impersonation. In the past they were female impersonators and as a genre it doesn't exist anymore.	