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# Student wins awards, fans as drag queen at Columbia club

staff writer **DIPKA BHAMBHANI**

Often in college, students try to find that niche in their lives that will make them different, that will make them individuals, in the hopes of not getting strange reactions from their peers.

Senior Clint Spires seems to have found that very niche. With people bowing at his feet after performances, tipping him one after another and throwing him flowers during the encore, Spires has made his mark, as a drag queen.

Although Metropolis, a local dance bar, is his home, he regularly travels to bigger markets like Atlanta and Charlotte.

"I started going out there [to Metropolis], and I saw the drag queens, and they sparked something in me," Spires said.

Spires is a theater major and said that he already liked to perform and entertain. However, he revealed an underlying motive that goes beyond performing a Shakespearean play or comedy improvisation.

"I think it's fun in my mind if I could pull off being a woman."

And he does, almost every Thursday night at Metropolis. Spires has been performing at the bar since May 1995, and has won several drag shows and pageant titles like Mr. Red Ribbon at Metropolis.

"Columbia doesn't really take too well to drag queens," he said. "They think it's some kind of sick something

or another. They warned me that I might not have any friends after it, but I don't know what happened, because that's not the way it worked," he said.

Spires is talking about audience response, which for him is incredible.

"The first time

I saw him, he was really good," said senior Jamie Sheffield. "He was really into the outfits being the show rather than the performer being the show." Sheffield remembered when Spires came on stage with "a really groovy tablecloth and an afro."

And Spires' supporters and fans have done everything but dwindle. During every show, he offers something different—a different costume, song or dance that continues to make fans go crazy and even attracts others who are just curious. "It's certainly improving because it's trendy," Sheffield said. "There are loads of straight people that go to gay bars to see drag queens."

Spires said he didn't know that his shows would turn out so well, but he thinks that his varied style is the key to his success. "In the past, I was doing things like Whitney Houston," he said. "And that's really generic."

Now, Spires doesn't aim to look like any famous personality in particular.

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Clint Spires  
USC senior

However, Spires does think he resembles Annie Lennox. "I know I have sort of her nose, her lips, like her top lip, maybe a little fuller upside down," Spires said. "But, for the most part, we have the same features."

Spires said he owes most of that and his success to his "drag mother", Nicole Roberts. "She was the main person, as well as Brittany Brooks, who is my drag sister," Spires said. "They really helped me out, got me started and still to this day help me out."

A drag mother normally fosters the development of a drag queen in a close friend or an acquaintance. There are different drag mothering styles in the scene, but an attentive and concerned drag mother will motivate her "drag princess" until she becomes a queen. Spires said his mother labored to not only get a realistic look, but to develop a suitable persona. "You have to have a gimmick to really get anywhere," Spires said. "That's why when I did An-

nie Lennox, and I saw how people responded to it, I tried to stick to it."

Annie Lennox is Spires' developing persona, which he said enhances and compliments the show. "It's a mental thing too," he said. "As far as Annie Lennox goes, you have to sit down and think of what she's like."

Even though Spires has the motivation, desire, interest and ideas to do the shows, he must still work out, stay fit and have enough make-up in his vanity. "Make-up is what will make you look like a woman or not," he said. "People tell me all the time that I look very realistic, very feminine when I'm in drag." Applying make-up is often an important task that the drag mother and/or sister may be called upon to handle. Spires said the first time he went shopping for his dress, he told the sales associate it was for his cousin. Now, he said it is easier. He tells them the truth, and so far, they have all been amused but helpful.

Nonetheless, Spires said that just because he does drag does not mean that he wants to be a woman. "Because I'm gay and I do drag does not mean that I can't be masculine," he said. "Everyone has a definite masculine and feminine side. You just have to know how to channel those parts."

During performances, though, Spires said he would rather think of himself as Ashley, a part-time gender illusionist.

## ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

► **BEST PICTURE:** "As Good As It Gets," "The Full Monty," "Good Will Hunting," "L.A. Confidential" and "Titanic."

► **BEST ACTOR:** Matt Damon, "Good Will Hunting"; Robert Duvall, "The Apostle"; Peter Fonda, "Ulee's Gold"; Dustin Hoffman, "Wag The Dog" and Jack Nicholson, "As Good As It Gets."



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

"The Full Monty" captured three nominations including Best Picture.



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

Helen Hunt received a Best Actress nomination for "As Good As It Gets." The film got seven other nominations.

► **BEST ACTRESS:** Helena Bonham Carter, "The Wings of the Dove"; Julie Christie, "Afterglow"; Judi Dench, "Mrs. Brown"; Helen Hunt, "As Good As It Gets" and Kate Winslet, "Titanic."

► **DIRECTOR:** Peter Cattaneo, "The Full Monty"; Gus Van Sant, "Good Will Hunting"; Curtis Hanson, "L.A. Confidential"; Atom Egoyan, "The Sweet Hereafter" and James Cameron, "Titanic."

► **ORIGINAL DRAMATIC SCORE:** "Amistad," John Williams; "Good Will Hunting," Danny Elfman; "Kundun," Philip Glass; "L.A. Confidential," Jerry Goldsmith and "Titanic," Jerry Homer.

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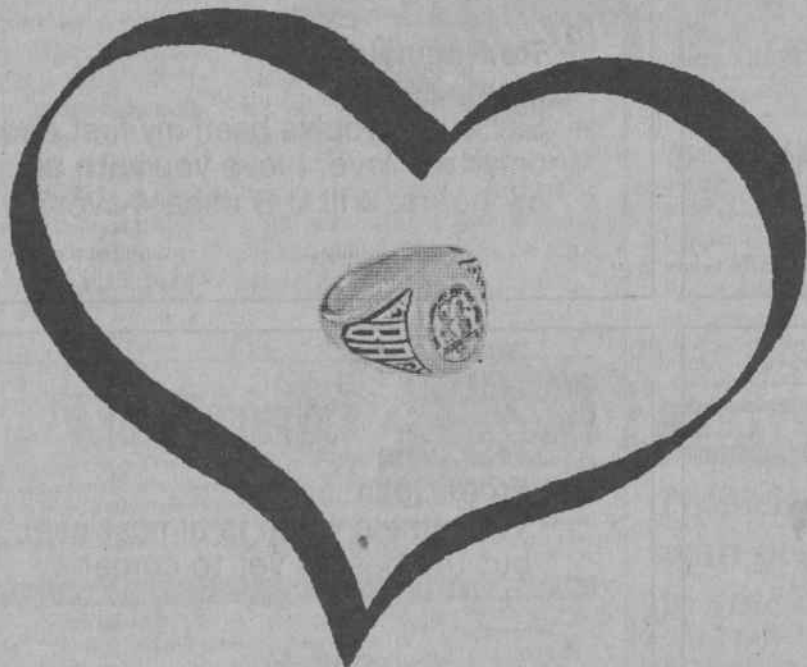
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