

They may be Weird, but that's the point

BY MISHA DAVENPORT
Staff Reporter

'Sissy' Dauphin Concertina Jr. III has it easy. One-third of the popular comedy/cabaret group the Weird Sisters, Sissy is brash, bright and not the least bit shy.

Brendan Kelly, the Chicago-based actor and singer who embodies the character of Sissy — the cross-dressing, androgynous, gay chanteuse — often admires his creation's will and determination.

"He's so comfortable about himself, he doesn't understand why people would be shocked by his appearance," Kelly says of his stage character.

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It's especially true when Kelly finds himself dressed as Sissy, walking in full make-up and costume to a noon gig in the Loop.

"Sissy tends to strut," Kelly says with a laugh. "I'm not a strutter, but Sissy has allowed me to strut as Brendan."

So night and day are the actor and the character, that people familiar with Kelly's work in various shows at the Noble Fool Theater, at Mark Smith's poetry slam at the Green Mill, or his performances with the Swing Shift Orchestra, don't even realize that Kelly is the "he dressed as a she" in the Weird Sisters.

While Sissy and her "Sisters" hail from the Carpathian Mountains, Kelly, 39, grew up in Omaha, Neb. He moved here in 1991 as part of the Irish folk group Beyond the Pale.

His background in Irish music and culture landed him a role in the long-running comedy "Flanagan's Wake." He performed in "Wake" for six years until he was approached by Bonnie Shadrake and Amy Binns-Calvey, who were putting together a new act for Noble Fool. It was called "The Psychic Cafe" and the Weird Sisters were to serve as the comic relief for the evening, which included psychic readings.



The Weird Sisters include Countess Ludovica (Bonnie Shadrake), "Sissy" Dauphin Concertina Jr. III (Brendan Kelly) and Abel Concertina Guaca-Danz (Amy Binns-Calvey).

"We ditched the hags from literature and decided to go for glamor," Kelly says. "Our Weird Sisters are fabulously urban."

The trio take popular standards from the American songbook and infuse them with sexual innuendo and comedy.

"We're all about booze, sex, drugs and stand-up," Kelly says.

For the Halloween shows, Kelly says the Sisters will present spooky songs appropriate for the holiday.

"Audiences are in for a treat," Kelly says of the Halloween show. "Unfortunately," he adds with a laugh, "Sissy was hoping for a trick."

The Weird Sisters will perform at 12:15 p.m. Friday at the Chicago Cultural Center's Randolph Cafe, 78 E. Washington. Admission is free. Their Halloween performance later that night will take place at 9 p.m. at the Noble Fool, 16 W. Randolph. Tickets are \$5. Call (312) 726-1156; www.noblefool.com.