

# NOT IN A FROCK!

» Keeping up with outrageous Trevor Ashley – or trying to! Interview by Matthew Myers.

**DNA: You're referred to as the busiest man in Australian showbiz and Mardi Gras royalty. How does that sit with you?**

**Trevor Ashley:** I like it! I'm very lucky that I've worked for so long and it's incredible what I've managed to do in my career. I've loved my association with Mardi Gras over the years, and it's one audience that has always been there for me. **Do you have a new show up your sleeve?** There's a *King Kong* slash *Lion King* slash *Jurassic Park* panto that I have the whole concept for. It's all in the works.

**You did a tribute to Shirley Bassey with *Diamonds Are For Trevor*. What is it about her?** Bassey is one of the first people I saw live in concert at the Sydney State Theatre, and it was extraordinary. Her recorded voice is amazing, but seeing her live just blows it all out of the water. She's always been one of my idols, so to hear her live was one of the highlights of my life! I've heard she knows about the show but I don't know what she thinks.

**Better to not know?** It's like when I was in New York earlier this year and met Liza Minnelli's publicist. He said, "I know who you are. I don't like you and I don't like what you do." I'm not sure how I'd cope if one of the people I impersonate met me... I think I'd rather not know. But you know people will impersonate me – to me! They'll do my voice and I'll say, "That's not what I sound like!"

**If you had the chance to perform a Bond theme, which one would it be?** A toss up between *Diamonds Are Forever* and *Skyfall*. I'd also love to do Conchita Wurst's *Rise Like A Phoenix* from this year's Eurovision. I thought it sounded like the perfect Bond theme.

**You landed the role of Master Of The House in the new Australian production of *Les Misérables*. Was that a pinch yourself moment?** I saw *Les Mis* as a child and was in love with it. I definitely wanted to be part of it one day. Sir Cameron Mackintosh came to see me in *Little Orphan TrAshley* and the next thing I'm being rung to say come and audition for the role of Thénardier. So I went through the process and was told I got it by Sir Cameron himself – in my dressing room on the London West End, while I was doing *Liza On An E!* Being handpicked by him, yes, a pinch yourself moment.

**What do you think makes *Les Misérables* so enduringly popular?** More than

anything else, it's the music, but the show also draws you in emotionally. It takes you on such an enormous journey. I got to see it on Broadway a few weeks before rehearsal and there were tears!

**Of all the productions you've done, has there been one favourite?** Everything has been special in its own way. One of the best moments in my life was doing *Diamonds Are For Trevor* at the State Theatre in Sydney. I had seen Shirley Bassey there, and to be on the same stage Mardi Gras Eve in a sold-out concert with 2,000 people... it was the first

**"I was in New York earlier this year and met Liza Minnelli's publicist. He said, 'I know who you are. I don't like you and I don't like what you do.'"**



time I'd done something on that scale and it was very special.

**Most theatregoers would say that *Hairspray*'s Edna Turnblad was an exceptional role. Would you agree?** I

loved it! They didn't want her to be a sort of man-in-a-dress parody. They wanted a real woman with heart, even though it was being played by a man. Because my whole career had been playing women, it felt very easy for me. I felt very natural doing it, because I didn't take the piss out of her and didn't make fun of the fact I was in drag.

**Is there one particular future role you have your heart set on?** There are actually two. I'd love to play Albin in *La Cage aux Folles* and a big dream of mine is to play Mrs Lovett in *Sweeney Todd*, which is really odd, but I want to do it. And I'd also love to do the MC in *Cabaret*, but I don't think I'm physically right for it. I'd have to go on a great big diet regime to get to the right state! I've even thought it would be great to do *Cabaret* as Liza doing Sally Bowles! It would be a lot of fun, but maybe just for a one-off gala or something like that.



Trevor in the current Australian production of *Les Mis*. He's not the one in the frock. Shock!

**What about a more dramatic role, say guest starring on a TV drama?** Anything like that would be great. I've got a couple of TV projects that I'm working on, but I'd like to do some more acting. Doing *Les Mis* will hopefully make people realise that I can actually act – and play a man!

**The big question is, who is Trevor Ashley's diva?** I have so many... it's so hard to pick, but it'd probably be Bette, Liza and Shirley, but I'd also add in Rhonda Burchmore, because I absolutely adore her. We're good mates and getting to work with her was fabulous!

**What has been your most embarrassing wardrobe malfunction?** The worst ever was in *Priscilla* when I was one of the cupcakes in the *MacArthur Park* fantasy. So I'm a giant cupcake and I tripped over the patty that was hanging around like a skirt, and landed face down in front of the orchestra pit! And I couldn't get up!

More: *Les Misérables* is playing at Her Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne.