

Love is a battlefield: the weird saga of 'Kurt & Courtney' pg. 4

SPOTLIGHT

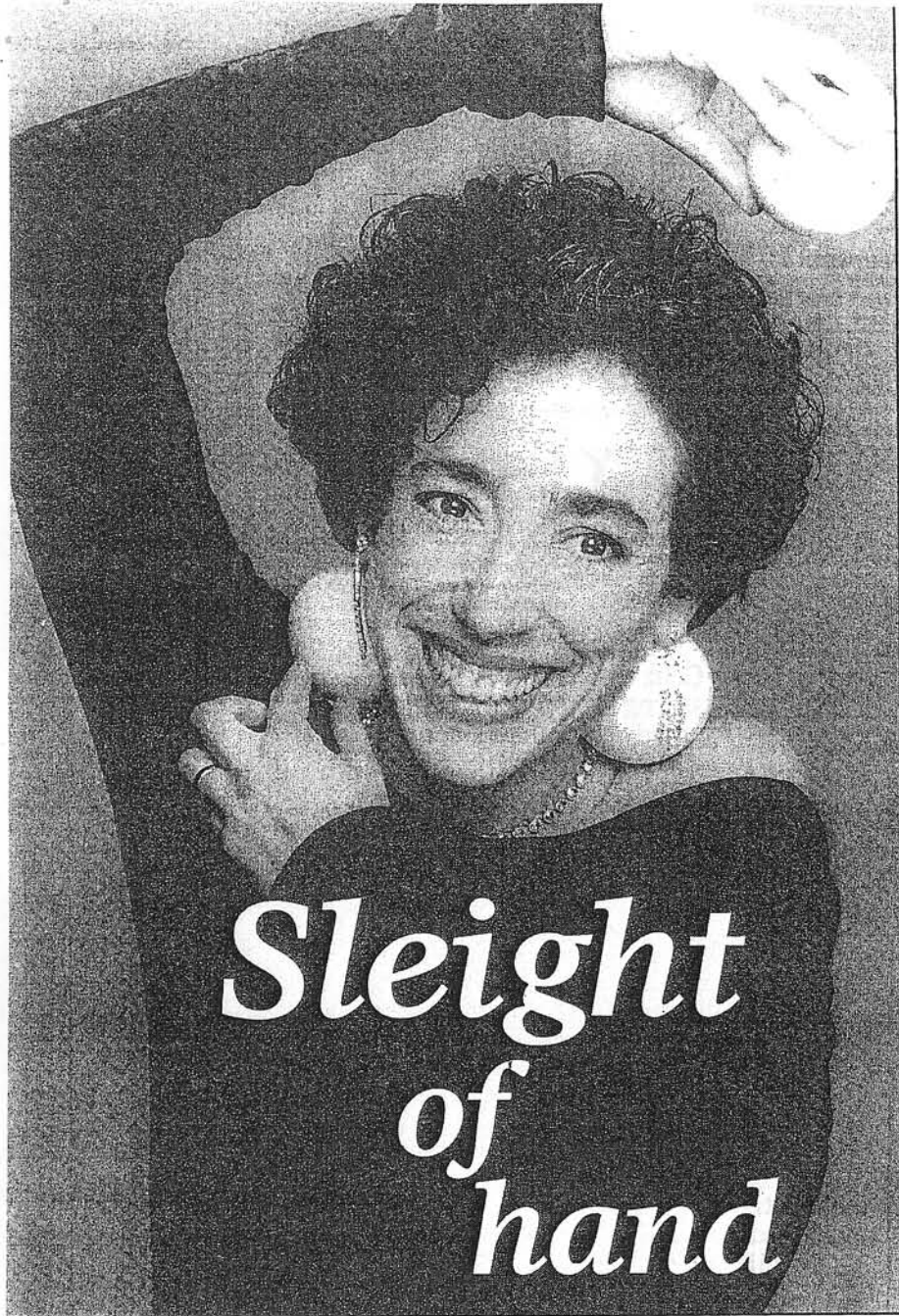
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Santa Cruz
County Sentinel

Is 'June Bride'
Sara Felder the

GREATEST

Jewish lesbian juggler
in

**THE
WORLD?**



Sleight of hand

Performance artist Sara Felder
deftly juggles satire and
tradition with
'chutzpah up the wazoo'

—COVER STORY—

by
ADAM SANDEL,
Sentinel arts writer

Juggling is my best language," says Sara Felder, "it's beautiful, it's dangerous and it's fun."

Felder is a theater artist whom the San Francisco press has called "a local performance treasure" and "a master of comic timing" with "chutzpah up the wazoo." "June Bride," the theatrical piece that Felder wrote and performs, opens tonight at the Actor's Theatre in Santa Cruz. Produced by Santa Cruz impresario Brion Sprinsock, the show is billed as "solo theater about a traditional Jewish lesbian wedding."

It's tempting to describe Sara Felder as the greatest Jewish lesbian juggler in the world. It's even more tempting to describe her as the *only* Jewish lesbian juggler in the world — but hey, it's a big world out there. Suffice it to say that by playing to her strengths, Felder has carved out a very specific niche for herself in the world of live performance. Even among description-defying performance artists, Felder stands out as an original. Lean and appealing with a graceful, easy manner, Felder is a master storyteller and social satirist whose gentle but incisive humor recalls Lily Tomlin or Jerry Seinfeld — if they could juggle.

"June Bride" tells the autobiographical story of Felder's struggle to marry musician Devra Noily in a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. Through music, humor and some wonderfully theatrical physical images, she leads us along her challenging journey — with her evolving relationship in constant counterpoint to joyful and poignant childhood memories. Sara effortlessly weaves juggling into her storytelling with unexpectedly powerful results. As her character's conflicts become increasingly difficult, so do her feats of juggling. Her graceful manipulation of a gleaming crystal ball during a conversation with God becomes a moment of nearly transcendent elegance.

While many solo theater artists impress audiences with their chameleon-like ability to portray many different characters, Felder avoids impersonating the people in her life with one notable exception — her mother. With a healthy blend of generosity and self-deprecating humor, Felder gives her sardonic mother some of the show's best lines: "Do you ever listen to yourself speak," her mother asks, "or do you just rattle away until it becomes performance art?"

"The strongest clowning is when you make fun of yourself," admits Felder. "I wanted the audience to identify with this person who's involved in a very noble fight, yet the character has tremendous biases" (including objecting to her mother bringing her much younger boyfriend — a handyman no less — to her wedding).

While the play's most obvious conflict appears to be the struggle of two women who must defy a deeply patriarchal tradition to evoke a holy presence in their union, Felder sees the play's major conflict as an internal one, between herself and her tradition. "How do you reconcile your faith with living a contemporary life?" she asks. Although the questions raised in "June Bride" are all serious, powerful, important issues, Sara wins her audience over by nimbly avoiding anything resembling a preachy or didactic tone. "The comedy and the juggling help keep the serious issues light," she observes, "and they also make for good theater."

"When I first started performing I knew that I had something to say," says Felder, who was politically active in the anti-nuclear movement. Like many jugglers, she began her career as a street entertainer and soon discovered that, "As long as I'm juggling, people listen to what I have to say."

On stage, Sara still maintains that casual, intimate sense of street corner performance, along with the feeling that you're in someone's living room

PREVIEW

- ◆ "June Bride" by Sara Felder
- ◆ Actor's Theatre, 1001 Center Street, Santa Cruz
- ◆ April 24 - May 10 (Fri., Sat. & Sun.) 8 p.m. show
- ◆ Tickets are \$14 advance; \$16 at the door
- ◆ 469-4302

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hearing a really great story.

Gay and lesbian audiences will undoubtedly get a big kick out of "June Bride" — Jewish gays and lesbians are likely to enjoy it even more. But what about everybody else? To Sara Felder's delighted surprise, audiences of all ages, religions and sexual orientations — from New York's Catskill Mountains to Anchorage, Alaska — have found things to enjoy and identify with in the show.

"As a child growing up in New York, I just loved seeing Alvin Ailey's dance company perform," she recalls. "We went every year and I just loved them, I related to them, I identified with them. Their dances were all about being black — and Christian — from the Old South — nothing that I could literally identify with. But what I really learned from Alvin Ailey is that if you tell

your story in the best way you can — then everyone will find their story in it."

The only problem that Santa Cruz audiences are likely to face in seeing this multi-faceted, multi-talented performer is getting in to see her. "June Bride" only runs through May 10 and tickets are going fast.