

# Out on the Town



# With Liz and Sydney

by Liz Tracey and Sydney Pokorny

**Sydney:** She is known to most as **Robi**—a bartender and an institution unto herself in the gay night-life scene. This lanky blonde transvestite—*Married with Children's* **Kelly Bundy** come-to-life—isn't just behind the bar these days: You can also find her on top of it, hosting a weekly Sunday night party called "The Hunk Club," with **Matthew Kasden**, **RuPaul**, **Larry Tee** and all the **BoyBar Beauties** at (aptly enough) **La Palace De Beaute**. She also appears in two recently released films, *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and *Longtime Companion*. Liz and I spoke with her about film, her acting future and "club life."

**Liz:** **Robi Martin** was born a mere 21 years ago in **Caïro, Egypt**. At 13 she was working as a stylist with a modeling firm in **Colorado**—a stint that brought her to **New York** once a month on business. After high school, she moved here, planning to attend the **Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)**—"Fags in Training," she calls it).

Talking about drag, she says, "I always went out dressed [in drag], but I said, 'You'd never catch me doing that drag-queen performance shit.' Many are glad that changed."

**Sydney:** Having thrown her first party at the **Michael Todd** room at **Palladium**, **Robi's** "big break" came when the **World** reopened under **Steve Lewis** in **September 1987**. She began working as a waitress "in a **French maid's** outfit," requested a promotion to bartending and, mercifully, received it.

During the summer of 1988, **Robi** did her first performance at **BoyBar** with **Phoebe Legere** (whose song, "Marilyn," is a **Robi** favorite). Add working at **Mars** on the third/"drag" floor with **Perfidia**, where both they and any other drag queens who happened by would perform, and **Robi** the **Lip-Synch Bartender** was born.

**Liz:** Bartending was a steppingstone to the silver screen for **Robi** (not an unusual phenomenon—consider that **Bruce Willis** was discovered at **Kamikaze**).

"While I was working at the **World**, **James St. James** kept saying, 'You have to go down for these auditions.' I thought, 'Well, if everybody else has auditioned, I don't think I will.'" **James** was finally forced into dragging *Last Exit to Brooklyn's* casting director to the **World** one night. **Robi** was originally reading for the part of **Georgette**

all they play is **American music**." One club, **P1**, is connected to the back of the museum of modern art, with overhangs looking out into the club. "But people really don't go out much—they'd rather sit outside and drink **Weissbier** [a beer made with live yeast cultures that **Robi** reports is very potent yet leaves no hangover]."

**Sydney:** **Robi** had a few mishaps during the shooting: In the process of filming the rape scene, she was actually hurt, but the director, **Uli Edel**, only kept screaming "More! More!" A scene in which **Stephen Baldwin** drags her across the floor by the hair ended with **Robi** banging into a table and knocking over the lamp and lighted candle on top of it. Next the set caught fire, and shooting was delayed for hours while it was repaired. **Robi:** "I said, 'I thought they called this "acting.'" But when the film was finished, the director gave the cast presents: **Robi** received two dozen roses; the non-drag male cast-members were given passes to the best brothel in town (prostitution is legal there).

A documentary crew working on a film about *Last Exit* not only followed the cast around the entire time but also went out to a club one night and on the cast-trip to **Dachau**, the **Nazi** concentration camp.

**Liz:** **Robi** had returned to **New York** and was picking up her *Last Exit* paycheck when *Longtime Companion* was casting—next-door. Someone

asked her to read for the film, and she played the part of the transvestite. "Originally her name was **Paulina**, but you know how films are"—**Robi's** thespianatics ended up on the cutting-room floor. The scenes were filmed on the last day of production in an abandoned **New Jersey** hospital. "When I went to see the film, people were asking, as the credits were rolling, where the transvestite was"; it isn't very obvious unless you know her. At the premiere party for *Longtime Companion* at **Quick!**, **Robi**

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SCREEN GODDESS  
**Robi Martin**

Photo: Michael Wakefield

(subsequently given to **Lexis Arquette**); after the fifth (or was it fiftieth?) audition, she got a phone call, packed her bags and flew to **Germany** to play **Goldie**.

Shooting in **Munich** had its high points: "SAG (Screen Actors Guild) rules for U.S. actors abroad say you can only work 8 to 6, Monday through Friday," she explains. And its downside: Makeup call was at 6:30 am—so she really *did* start toiling at 8. "The producer would call up and arrange for us to go out. The clubs are smaller, with all these disco lights, but

was working the bar. "People would come from the film and say, 'Weren't you in the film? What are you doing here? Did they hire you for the party?' It's not like I'm rolling in money, or anything."

Robi "loved" *Longtime Companion* and thought it was an important film. Asked about future roles, she mused, "I would like to be a transvestite *and* work." The two seem to be mutually exclusive: "There were—what?—three transvestite roles last year, and I had two of them!"

**Sydney:** For those who frequent Robi's bars (she will soon appear at Zest on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays), her advice is an enigmatic "Criminey sakes, don't be an idiot!" She asks only for a little consideration: It seems Robi has become so legendary that people will just yell her name from the back of a room and expect service. Do unto your bartenders as you would have them do unto you (preferably with Red Devils).

Robi will continue to host "The Hunk Club," which features two main floor-acts per week, with the rest performing, not unlike the Mars setup, on the top floor. She promises great things for Gay Pride Day.

And for her acting...? "My agent hasn't sent me on anything normal." Which leads us once again to ask, "What's so great about normal?" ▼