

Student delves into the world of female impersonation

By Kathryn Reed

With each swipe of the tissue, a little bit more of the man behind the makeup emerged. "I am what I am" is all about going from a feminine woman to a masculine man – in appearance and mannerism.

"He did the finale, which is one of the hardest numbers to perform," said Dan Gore, producer of "Carnival Cabaret" at the Horizon in Stateline.



Edward Murillo ready to take the stage in 'Carnival Cabaret' at Horizon.

Photo/Provided

Gore was speaking about Edward Murillo, a senior at South Tahoe High School.

Delving into the world of female impersonation is what Murillo chose as his senior project. On Wednesday he will go before a panel of judges from the school and public at large as the final part of the project. He already received an A for the performance on stage and a B for his paper.

“It was a big jump for me. I’ve been in shows at high school, but I’ve never been someone you looked at right there. I was always in the background,” Murillo said.

For two nights in May he performed the final act of the female impersonation show.

“The makeup was the hardest part. It was an hour’s worth of makeup,” Murillo said. “It’s easy to mess up. Depending on how big of a mess-up you might have to start all over again.”

He watched the other performers apply their makeup and from there combined their styles to create his. Murillo said he learned the most from Kevin Wiley – especially his eyes.

“He was able to tell me how to make me look normal for my tone of skin,” Murillo said.

This was the first time Gore had a high school student in one of his performances. He would do it again.

“He was eager to be part of this. He was here many days when he did not need to be,” Gore said of Murillo.

Gore explained to the 18-year-old, “This project is about the art form and not the lifestyle. The lifestyle is something else. (The show) is the art form.”

It’s an art form that is not as robust as it once was where productions with 30 or 40 performers were on both coasts, playing to sold-out houses.

Not all men who dress as women are gay. Murillo said his research found 50 percent of men who dress in drag are heterosexual.

“They find some reason they are more comfortable in women’s clothing,” Murillo said. “I find it annoying guys can wear only tuxes and girls can wear all different colors, sparkles and express how they feel.”

He doesn't even think wearing heels is a big deal.

Murillo isn't sure where this experience will take him. He plans to attend Lake Tahoe Community College in the fall. He said his dad sees job opportunities in the world of female impersonation. He said his mom hated the project and would not tell her friends about it.

"I said, 'Why does it matter?' It's acting," Murillo said.

When his classmates found out what his senior project was he said most were supportive, and the ones who already didn't like him were the ones to talk smack.

Many were in the audience last month to watch his debut as a female impersonator. So was his teacher. Collectively he wowed them based on receiving an A for the performance.

Carnival Cabaret runs Wednesday-Saturday at 8pm at the Horizon. Tickets are discounted most nights in June, with Saturday being full price at \$31.85.