



Alexandra Billings

"...if you're going to ask me what the most important thing is, what I couldn't live without, I couldn't live without [Chrisanne]..." (excerpt from Gregg Shapiro's interview)

Alexandra Billings is an award winning actress and singer. Her Father, Robert Howard Billings was Musical Director for the Civic Light Opera House in California, and head of the music Department at Harbor College for over 20 years where he directed and helped create over 200 musicals. Her Mother, Eloise Nelson Knight, remarried after their divorce, and was a teacher in both Southern California, and Schaumburg Illinois, then later retired to Laguna Hills. Alexandra married her high school sweetheart Chrisanne Blankenship on December 4, 1995 at the Bailiwick Theatre in Chicago. They live on the north side of Chicago with their 3 cats.

"Acting is very simple really, all you have to do is stand in front of an audience totally naked, and turn around...very slowly." -- Rosalind Russell

Alexandra's first play in Chicago was in 1987, starring in Charles Busch's campy classic "Vampire Lesbians of Sodom", which premiered at the Royal George Theatre, and won her an After Dark Award for Best Actress in a comedy. Afterward, she made a string of comedies including "Hamlet- The Musical" (which would run forever, over and over, and over, and became known as the Musical That Wouldn't Die), "Cannibal Cheerleaders on Crack" at Torso Theatre, which she starred in for almost 5 years, and many others to twisted to mention. Then, in 1983 she offered a play to Chrisanne Blankenship called "Gertrude Stein and a Companion". Her first dramatic role won praise from the critics and brought her and Chrisanne closer in their personal life as well. David Zak, Artistic Director of the Bailiwick Theatre then asked her be a part of a new musical called "Son Of Fire" written by Christopher Moore, and star as a 40ish Japanese painter, dying of cancer, and in love with a young gay man. She then performed in "Death Defying Acts" (After Dark Award for Best Ensemble) and, prompted by a suggestion of David Zak's, (what a guy) and with the help of Mary Beidler-Gearen, her one woman autobiographical piece "Before I Disappear" was produced, and eventually toured to Boston, and to The Producer's Club Off-Broadway. She went on to star as Joy in "Shadowlands" (again directed by Ms. Blankenship), Marion in "I Came To New York To Write" at the Organic, The Mother Abess in "The Adventures of Herculina", at Next and Frederico Lorca's "The Public" for Streetsigns at The Chopin. She also appeared in "Tour De Farce" at both Wisdom Bridge and The Apollo, and one of her favorite roles; "101 Dalmatians", as villainess Cruella DeVille. Soon after, in late 1996 she landed a pivotal role in Charles Mee's "Time to Burn" at the Steppenwolf Theatre. Her close association with director Tina Landau was a relationship that would endure for many years to come. She was also cast in "Space" and "Berlin Circle" both written by Mee and directed by Landau and playing opposite such Steppenwolf notables as Amy Morton, Irma P Hall, Mike Nessbaum, Maryanne Mayberry, and the delicious Tom Irwin. In 1997, along wit her fellow cast, she received a Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Ensemble for Time to Burn. All 3 shows went on to appear in Time magazine's Top 10 Shows of the Year. She then landed the role of Mrs. Lynde in Ingmar Bergman's version of "A Dolls' House" called "Nora" which co starred Kate Collins and ran at The Court Theatre. In 1999 she met, and hooked up her wagon to the delightful and buoyant Mr. Larry Kramer. She then starred in his play "Just Say No" playing Nancy Regan to Gregg Louganis' "Jr". It was a love fest all the way around.

She shared the cover of The Advocate with Mr. Louganis, had a feature in POZ magazine, and was chosen as one of the Chicago Tribune's Top 10 People of the Year. She then appeared in the Spotlight section of Entertainment Tonight.

In 2000, Ms. Billings starred in a live stage version of "Xena" called "Xena! Live!" at the About Face Theatre in Chicago. The piece ran for almost 6 months, and was successful enough to spawn a second part, in which she joined later. She then lived out a childhood fantasy, and was cast as Rose in "Gypsy" directed by her old pal David Zak, and performed at the Bailiwick Theatre.

In 2001 she played misunderstood and fabulously dressed Margot Channing in "Applause" for Healthworks Theatre at The

Apollo, and received an After Dark Award for Best Actress. She then portrayed Perry in Jamie Pachino's "Waving Goodbye" for Naked Eye and produced at the Steppenwolf Studio. Directly after, she was asked to tag along with Michael Thomas and Jeff Richmond in a remount of "Hamlet-The Musical" (see: The Musical That Wouldn't Die) to play at the Ars Nova Theatre for a 3 month Off-Off Broadway run. She then returned to Chicago, to portray Ruth in "Pirates of Penzance" for Light Opera Works, directed by Tony Award winning actor Lara Teeter. In late Fall of 2003, she filmed her first Television Movie for ABC- TV. It is a "prequel" to "Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion" called "Romy and Michelle-A New Beginning." She made television history by being the first Transgendered Female to play a Transgendered Female character on television.

"I sing the rage right out of me." -- Judy Garland

Alexandra's nightclub act has traveled from Chicago to New York, to Santa Fe New Mexico, to Palm Springs. Sometimes all in one evening. In her hometown she has sung at the Park West, The Cultural Center, Pops For Champagne, The Gentry (on Rush, State, and Halsted Streets), Piano Man, The Royal George Cabaret, Toulouse on the Park, Davenport's, Andy's, and at The Empire Room for the Chicago leg of Donald Smith's Cabaret Convention. She's shared the stage with Amanda McBroom, David Friedman, Stephen Schwartz, Hollis Resnik, Sue Conaway, Nan Mason, the vivacious Honey West, John Herrera, Julie Wilson, Audrey Morris, as well as the groovy, hip, and swingin' Karen Mason. In 2000, she won the After Dark Award for Outstanding Cabaret Artist of the Year. In New York she could be seen at Eighty Eights, Don't Tell Mama's, and at Arci's Place for Cabaret on the Record. In 2002, she received the New York MAC Hanson Award, for Most Promising New Cabaret Artist. She was thrilled to be over 40, and be called "new". Her first CD; Being Alive, was produced by Lampkin Music Group, recorded at Sparrow Sound Design in Chicago and released on Southport Records. It was in the top ten on Amazon.com for a record nine (9) months, and was up for Grammy consideration for that year. In August of 2003, she recorded her second CD live with two (2) concerts at Theatre Building Chicago. This was prompted by her producer, and friend of 120 years, the unstoppable Ralph Lampkin. The CD is titled "The Story Goes On" and is again produced by Lampkin Music Group, with musical direction by Russ Long.

"A writer is just a tool of what their life could be." -- Larry Kramer

Having not only penned her life story in "Before I Disappear", Alexandra had written a number of plays some of which have had successful runs in Chicago. "Amanda and Eve", which is a lesbian take off on the Tracey/Hepburn movie classic "Adam's Rib" was produced at the Bailiwick Theatre and directed by Chrisanne Blankenship. "Angels Among Us" a tribute to her late friend Ginger Spice, was produced at the Around The Coyote Festival, and again directed by Chrisanne Blankenship. She has finished "These Three Stay" a play about 3 characters, a gypsy girl of 23, a physically impaired man from Britain, and a 20ish gay transvestite, all meeting together in a box car during Hitler's reign, on their way to Auschwitz. She is currently working on "Killers", about a serial killer loose among a group of friends.

"A rose, is a rose, is a rose, is a rose...." -- Gertrude Stein

Alexandra is a Viewpoints Associate at the Steppenwolf Theater, as well as an Artistic Associate at the Bailiwick Theatre. Most summers, since 1999, she has been fortunate enough to teach Viewpoints alongside Tina Landau and Kim Rubenstein at the Steppenwolf School. As music has filtered through her life via her Father, so has her Mother handed down teaching. She also tends to think absolutely everything is too dirty, and needs to be dusted. She has taught Viewpoints at Louis University, The University of Chicago, Illinois University, as well as Act One, and various Master classes and workshops around the Chicago area. Living with AIDS for many years, she sits on the Board of Directors for Season of Concern, and she works extensively with Healthworks Theatre (an AIDS educational Theatre geared towards Teens) and the over worked, multi gifted Stephen Rader.

As an interesting side note, it is thought that almost every role played by her on stage, has been the only time they've ever been recreated by a Transgendered actress in the history of theatre. Won't it be nice when that statement is no longer true?

Visit Alexandra's website located at
www.Alexandra-Billings.com