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Sea Change

With a meaty role on *The L Word* and a budding film career, gender-bending style icon Daniela Sea is poised to become a queer household name

Photography by AARON COBBETT
Styling by NOLÉ MARIN
Story by CAROLINE RYDER

"All my life I've used clothes to express myself," says The L Word's chisel-cheeked resident genderqueer, Daniela Sea. The impossibly handsome 29-year-old, dubbed "the female River Phoenix" by L Word creator Ilene Chaiken, made history last year playing the role of Moira, a Midwestern stone butch who morphs into Max, television's first recurring female-to-male transgender character. Playing a transman wasn't much of a stretch for Sea, who was already toying with her gender presentation when she was just 10, dressing like a mini 1950s greaser or fopping it up like a preteen Chaucerian gentleman.

A former punk guitarist, fire juggler, goat herder, and citizen of the world (she lived as a man in India for eight months), Sea has run the queer style gamut, ricocheting between medieval rebel boi and green-haired punk princess. "Right now, I think I'd describe my style as princely," says Sea, who lives in Brooklyn with her girlfriend of five years, queer performer Capital b (formerly Bitch from folk duo Bitch and Animal).

Sea was working at a restaurant in New York City when the makers of *The L Word* flew her to L.A. to read for the part of Moira (her friend was a writer on the show and had given the producers Sea's reel). They hired her almost immediately—great news for Sea, bad news for the show's costume designer Cynthia Summers, who had just five days to come up with an entire wardrobe for Moira/Max. Summers and Sea worked together to develop Moira's androgynous rebel look, inspired by the cult teen movie *The Outsiders*. Later on, Max—complete with facial hair and biceps—would start wearing more conservative office shirts and slacks as he attempted to assimilate into mainstream life as a straight man.

Playing TV's first regular FTM character was a "huge honor," says Sea, who had only appeared in one film prior to *The L Word* (a small role in John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus*). But her relative newness to acting was counterbalanced by her ultra-bohemian life experience, which equipped her better than most to play the role.

Sea was born in Malibu, the daughter of artist/surfer intellectuals who met on a sustainable farming community. Her father came out as gay when she was 3. "My mother didn't see it as a betrayal," says Sea. "They were really in love so she said, 'OK, let's see what this is all about,' and they went to a gay bar in Hollywood. They tried to go through it together." The couple eventually parted ways when Daniela was 5. "I don't think it was a simple decision for my father, but I'm glad he did what he did," says Sea. "It taught me about the importance of being true to yourself, at any cost."

When she was 16, Sea left L.A. and moved to San Francisco to join the Gilman Street Project, a punk-artist feminist collective. She came out as a lesbian shortly after, and all her "significant relationships" since then have been with women. She played guitar as "Dan-yella Dyslexia" in queercore bands Gr'ups and Cypher in the Snow, touring with big-name hardcore acts like Fugazi and Rancid. "I had a green mohawk, and sometimes I'd wear this crazy ripped-up prom dress with wings on stage," recalls Sea. "It's funny, looking back." She then traveled through Europe, working as a circus performer and hitchhiking her way around while learning to play the accordion and penny whistle.

"Music is very important to me," she says. "When I met my girlfriend, one of the first things we did was play music together." Sea and Capital b have a music project called the Exciting Conclusion, an edgy, political freak-folk combo scheduled to perform at Club Skirts' Dinah Shore weekend in Palm Springs in April. The biggest annual gathering of lesbians in the world, "the Dinah" has developed a close and natural affiliation with *The L Word*, with cast members known to attend and mingle poolside with the ladies.

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This year Sea is also starring in *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*, a coming-of-age tale by lesbian director Jamie Babbit (But I'm a Cheerleader) which takes a wry look at the lives of a young group of womyn activists calling themselves "Clits in Action" (aka C.i.A.). "The film looks at the good and bad sides of being in a group of people trying to change the world," says Sea, who stars alongside Guinevere Turner, Jenny Shimizu, Melanie Mayron, and Melonie Diaz. "And we get a chance to laugh at ourselves, which is great; people always think of feminism as being so serious."

And Sea is, of course, looking forward to playing Max in another season of *The L Word*—although sometimes she secretly wishes he would ditch the suits and ties for some funkier threads. "Fashion-wise, I'm not a big fan of what I would call his boring office clothes," she admits. "But it's been a trip feeling him become more and more comfortable in his skin. Playing Max is an adventure, every day."

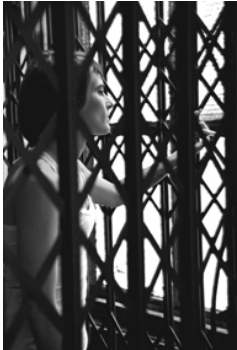
THE DISH ON THE DINAH

Capital b and The Exciting Conclusion is scheduled to perform at Club Skirts' Dinah Shore weekend, part of a long-running annual lesbian event in Palm Springs, taking place this year from March 28 to April 1. Last year featured performances by the Pussycat Dolls and Joan Jett (Carmen Electra



Photography by Aaron Cobbett • Styling by Nolé Marin • Grooming: Clare Read for b.i.g., nyc (www.bigcinc.com) • Stylist Assistant: Messiah McNair

Tank top by CALVIN KLEIN, pants by JEAN-PAUL KNOTT. Tie by CHARLES TYRWHITT, ring by D.C. STYLE LAB. Vest is Daniela's own, originally worn by her grandfather.



Tank top by JEAN-PAUL KNOTT.



Tank top and boxer shorts by CALVIN KLEIN. Shoes by ALLEN-EDMONDS.



Tuxedo jacket by JEAN-PAUL KNOTT, shirt by ACME JEANS, pants by LORIS DIRAN. Necklace is Daniela's own.



Jacket by THE BREED, shirt by TOWNCRAFT, pants by JEAN-PAUL KNOTT. Bow tie and scarf by CHARLES TYRWHITT. Shoes by CAMPER.

reputedly hooked up with Jett afterwards). Founder Mariah Hanson, who started the weekend in 1991 with a party in the Palm Springs Museum ("We had girls dancing on the roof—they didn't invite us back," she says) gave Frontiers the lowdown on this year's lineup.

"We've booked India Arie for Friday night's White Diamonds party, and she's bringing a 14-piece band to perform at midnight. She's a Dinah Shore newbie, as is Sandra Bernhard, who will be performing her stand-up comedy and cabaret earlier in the evening.

"Saturday day we are doing an event called Be Scene. Preselected teams will be invited on stage to act out their favorite L Word scenes in front of judges Leisha Hailey and Kate Moennig, who star on the show. How cool is that?" (To enter the contest, visit www.thedinah.com.)

"Saturday night is our Milan party, featuring Dinah Shore's first-ever fashion show. We are sending celebrity models including Jenny Shimizu and Honey Labrador down the runway showcasing the new L Word apparel line. Amanda Bearse is hosting, and other special guests include Kim Stolz, who is an MTV veejay and was on America's Next Top Model, actress Michelle Bonilla, and MTV reality stars Rachel and Veronica. At midnight Crystal Waters will perform her hit '100% Pure Love' and more!

"Sunday we have our exclusive L Word pool party with performances by Betty [the band that performs the L Word soundtrack], Capital b and the Exciting Conclusion, and Kirsten Price—she is on the L Word soundtrack. Her music is really sultry, and she is very beautiful."

Visit www.thedinah.com for more information on the Club Skirts and Planet Out 2007 Dinah Shore Weekend.

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