

OBITUARY

Melba Moore

(July 14, 1955 – June 11, 1999)

By JASON MICHAEL

DETROIT – Melba Moore, 43, succumbed to her long-time battle with Lupus and died in her sleep in the early morning hours of June 11.

She may have been born Robert Bruner, and known for a brief period as Elaine Ferguson, but she lived the majority of her life, and will be remembered, as Melba Moore.

A presence in Detroit's LGBT community for nearly three decades, Moore was only in her teens when she started performing as part of The Billy Joe Review at Foster's. Quickly crowned Billy Joe's Entertainer of the Year, Moore went on to win the Performer's Awards of Detroit's Entertainer of the Year as well, and earned the titles of Miss Michigan USA and Miss Michigan Continental, which she won no less than three times.

A masterful illusionist, Moore perfected the personalities of such stars as Chaka Khan and Tina Turner in "Mirage," a La Cage au Faux-style show than ran for several years at the Premier Center.

"We all got a big break when we worked with Jennifer (Foxy) at the Premier Center, the largest nightclub in the state. It was for straight audiences and they just loved the show," recalled April Summers, Moore's longtime friend and frequent performance partner.

"Her ability to take a character and learn and know every mannerism, to contour her face just with a slight twitch, was absolutely amazing," said Nickki Stevens, production coordinator at Gigi's Cabaret. "She was like a chameleon."

And though "Mirage" eventually closed, the titles and accolades never stopped. Moore racked up dozens of them, including Miss Bookies, Miss Famous Door, Miss Todd's, Miss Gigi's and, most recently, Miss Gigi's Classic. In addition, Moore was a regular cast member at such clubs as Bingo's, Gold Dollar, the Iron Hinge, Sam's Tiffanys and Zippers.

"Her main reason for living was entertaining," said former WDRQ personality Trixie Deluxxe. "She had a stage presence like no other."

Burdened in recent years by health problems and financial difficulties, Moore was an entertainer's entertainer, who friends say never let her personal struggles reach the stage and always greeted you with the same cheerful smile.

"She was a person that never had an unkind word to say about anyone," said veteran entertainer Fantasia. "No matter what she was going through, she always had something positive to say to everyone."

"As long as I've known her she has never, ever said anything bad about anyone," echoed Michael Sweazey, co-owner of Gigi's. "Melba was all about love. She was the kindest person I know."

Fans will recall her trademark quote: "I just want to entertain you, you and only you," Moore would say. And she did.

