

## Nothing sexy about lingerie TV

Continued from page 1B

ed that he was paying homage to the title of his new CD, "Sacred Love," as well as sending the subliminal message that although he was participating in Thong Fest 2003, he was not of it. Later, when he performed with Blige, the two made an incongruous couple. The svelte Blige, in a ruffled, moss-colored minidress that showed off her tattoos, was ready for a cocktail party; Sting was still dressed for vespers.

The audience mostly stared, slack-jawed, first at the ceiling and then at the stage, failing to produce the cheering and whooping that spectacles such as soaring models and live musical performances are intended to stir up. Even when Sting gamely began the rock star clap, with hands slapping rhythmically overhead, the audience stubbornly refused to play along. Some of the enthusiasm may have been blunted by the pre-show cocktail party, where bartenders served a sugar-rimmed red drink called the "sexy flirt" — a stinging concoction involving vodka and pomegranate juice. But the more likely explanation is that the show, now in its ninth year, simply isn't as titillating as it once was. After so many powdered butts and boobs, the novelty of all that high-priced flesh eventually wears thin. Now, it's all about the feathers, the diamond-studded bras and the wings.

Guests spent the cocktail hour drinking on red velvet beds framed with canopies and fringed draperies. The pre-show bordello-style seating afforded the opportunity to catch sight of famous faces — Ivana Trump in chinchilla, Sean "P. Diddy" Combs without his Mohawk, David Copperfield without a raison

d'etre. It also gave barrel-chested men time to get puffed up with anticipation and for overdressed women to preen about in pushup brassieres.

In the show space, with its gilded chairs and phalanx of photographers — standard issue for any runway production — one couldn't help but consider how a fashion show featuring top models in skimpy, mid-priced underwear differs from designer fashion shows of more expensive products in which the same nether regions are exposed.

With its 10-foot costume wings, flying models, interludes of Busby Berkeley dancing girls and Bob Fosse hip-thrusting, the show owes much to Las Vegas, the Broadway musical, Cirque du Soleil and the traditions of burlesque. It was a \$6.5 million production, although the company's spending record was set in 2000, with a \$10 million show in Cannes.

In its theatrics, the Victoria's Secret production is similar to any number of fashion shows that have been produced in Paris over the years in which high jinks overshadow the clothes. But there was a high-priced strip club vibe at the Victoria's Secret show as well. As the models strutted about in their "V-strings," patent leather lace-up boots and marabou, one got the feeling that the polite thing to do was to have the boys in the front row — Denzel Washington, Pharrell Williams, Donald Trump — tuck a few \$100 bills into the lace-trimmed panties.

Instead of the usual fashion crowd of gentlemen in a state of boredom and women in the throes of hunger, this audience was packed with business-suited men who sat with their legs splayed open in that defiantly mannish way and who spent their front-row time concentrating on the velocity of boob jiggle rather than checking their watches to see if they were going to make it to the trendy Schiller's Liquor Bar before the kitchen closed.

The models smiled and blew kisses at the camera,

rather than glaring haughtily into the middle distance. It would never do to have this buffet of pert minxes intimidating the red-blooded boys in Middle America who are expected to fantasize about nibbling the necks of models Heidi Klum and Tyra Banks. Even Naomi Campbell's typically predatory expression was softened so that she looked like the sort of girl who'd think it was a kick to go bowling on a first date.

The models walked rather than stalked down the runway, with less of the high-stepping equine strut and more hip swiveling. Jacquetta Wheeler made the mistake of stomping out as if she were showing off couture — her tiny thighs jiggled from the reverberations of her feet crashing down on the catwalk.

The garments — scraps of lace, bits of latex, swatches of satin — neither smoldered nor sizzled. Any sex appeal they afforded was of the Elly May Clampett variety. There was an undeniable hick sensibility at work in dolling up a model in several yards of powder blue tulle ruffles as though she were a bride being married by an Elvis impersonator.

The show tried, unsuccessfully, to recall the days when pinup girls were idolized by ruddy-cheeked boys with buzz cuts. But those women were sexy because of the possibilities that their knowing smiles suggested, because of what was unseen beneath their full-coverage briefs and underwire bras. What's being offered now is a pricey lounge act. All that was missing were Celine Dion and Penn & Teller.

The models made an honest effort to exude sensuality, but their plastered-on grins going out to Middle America were at odds with any suggestion of the erotic or suggestive or even sophisticated. The Victoria's Secret fashion show isn't sexy — unless one finds something compelling about a woman dressed up like Big Bird. It doesn't have to scorch one's sense of decency, but at the very least it should sting a little.

## Fewer AIDS babies being born in America, but worldwide transmissions

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The World Health Organization estimates that about 800,000 infants become infected with HIV each year around the globe, mainly through mother-to-child transmission, which can occur during pregnancy and labor or after delivery through breast milk.

The problem is most acute in developing nations, where mothers have little access to AIDS treatment. Health experts say such transmissions could largely be prevented by drugs administered before, during and immediately after birth. That's backed up by a dramatic decrease in the number

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## Kids advocate for other children and themselves

Every child wants a home," says 12-year-old Cronetta. "So help the children in the world because everybody needs a parent."

Cronetta and her brother Robert, age 10 are spokespeople for children in foster care who are waiting for adoptive families in Mecklenburg neighborhoods. They know what it feels like to be waiting — they are waiting for parents to adopt them.

"Cronetta is insightful, engaging, and outgoing — she has a strong sense



Cronetta and Robert are two of many children waiting to be adopted in Mecklenburg County.

of responsibility, appreciates guidance, and has a positive outlook on life," says long-time friend Evelyn Dillard. "Robert has an engaging

smile, pleasant personality and has a special interest in music." Both Cronetta and Robert sing

in the church choir together.

"I love my brother, he's always been part of my life," states Cronetta. "I want to be adopted into the same family with Robert."

If you are interested in finding out more about Cronetta and Robert or other children awaiting adoption, call Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services at 704-336-KIDS (5437).



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