

From K-State to the nightclub circuit

Kathryn Waller
kwaller@themercury.com

Despite being 5-feet 10-inches tall with a curvaceous figure and even bigger personality, K-State alum Arriane Alexander never felt comfortable in her own skin. After rediscovering her love of the stage and taking a chance on a new career, however, the self-professed blonde bombshell is singing a different tune — literally — and Hollywood is beginning to take notice.

In a place known for its idealization of perfection and the petite, feminine form, Alexander has struck a cord with Tinseltown's night club audiences through her one-woman cabaret show "Big, Blonde and Beautiful," a music and comedy act that tells her story of a buxom beauty searching for Mr. Right.

"I'm just making fun of my own neurosis," Alexander explained with a laugh. The show, which features a three piece band of piano, bass and drum, includes a mix of music that ranges from pop to country to jazz. "It's a lot of fun and I feel at home on the stage, but if you would have told me 10 years ago that I would be doing this as a living, I never would have believed you."

While her jump into the entertainment industry was, by all measures, quick — a mere six months from the time she quit her 12-year job in fashion to opening her own,

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self-composed show — Alexander admits that it took her years to accept herself for who she was.

Growing up in a suburb of Wichita, riding horses and living what she described as a typical country life, Alexander explained that she was always energetic, easy to get along with and excelled in school. Yet, despite her boisterous personality, the Andover native said that she "always felt out of place" because of her size. Then, after high school, her insecurities heightened even more when she joined a sorority at K-State.

"I had body issues all my life," Alexander, now 38-years-old, explained. "I remember feeling so undesirable, like men wanted something other than me, that I wasn't OK... I thought that if I looked more like the other girls then I'd be more accepted."

While struggling to cope with a negative self image, Alexander went on to complete a degree in life sciences from K-State, after which she decided to take a job in the fashion industry with Brighton Collectables. Over the next 12 years, she was transferred to Oklahoma City, Chicago, and finally Los Angeles before realizing she needed a change.

Then, during a fortuitous trip to Cancun with a group of friends, she rediscovered her love of singing when her friends encouraged her to jump on stage for an impromptu performance with a local band. When Alexander returned from Mexico, she quit her job with Brighton and set out to follow her dream of performing on stage. Two weeks later, she met a man who directed cabaret shows and within six months she was starring in her own show.

While she was finally happy

in her career, Alexander soon realized that she also had to change how she perceived herself.

"Everything about me is big: my personality, my smile, my hair... But at some point I realized that I had to quit beating myself up over it. I could either stop living my life or I could accept that this is the body I've been given."

Now, Alexander says that she sees herself differently and compares her body to the healthy, strong, buxom beauties of old Hollywood sirens like Mae West, Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe.

"I don't have to love myself any more or any less depending on my pant size," she said.

Since "Big, Blonde and Beautiful" opened in 2007, Alexander has received acclaim from some of the industries top performers and critics, including Elliott Zwiebach (a writer for Cabaret Scenes Magazine) and Dana Meller (who recently played Eponine in Broadway's rendition of "Les Miserables"). She has also been cast in several commercials and made numerous TV appearances.

To date, however, the former K-Stater might best be known for her role on the television reality show "More to Love," which aired nationally last year. The show was produced by the makers of "The Bachelor" and featured a 6-foot-3, 330-pound man choosing among women who wore sizes 14 to 22. (Alexander was sent home during the second round of the show, but says that she was fine with it, since she says that she felt no "chemistry" with the bachelor. She does, however, continue to keep in contact with many of the women she met on the show.)

Now, the K-State beauty is working on taking her show to Las Vegas this summer and just received a role in an Indie film, "The Troublemaker," set to be released next year.