



212 604 4557 | SAG · AEA · AFTRA  
www.shavonneconroy.com | shavonne@shavonneconroy.com

## Westchester Diva, Wife and Mother Shavonne Conroy Sings Out for Gay Rights

BY NELLY EDMONDSON GUPTA

This Sunday, Dobbs Ferry resident Shavonne Conroy will don a burnished silver mini-dress with a feather-boa bustle and head down to Manhattan's West Village to sing at the 18th annual Gay PrideFest. Conroy, a veteran singer and actor, will perform with a host of other artists following this year's Gay Pride March. Conroy says she plans to sing "songs I can do in my sleep – a fabulous Kandor and Ebb medley that includes 'Come in From the Rain' and 'Stormy Weather,' and Reba MacIntyre's 'Why Haven't I Heard From You?'"

Conroy, who has lived in the village [of Dobb's Ferry] for four years with her husband, Basil, a private banker, and their children, Alexandra, 14, and Sean, 6, says she is putting her talent on the line for gay rights in the name of friendship. "I've always had gay friends from the acting world," Conroy told the Enterprise during a recent interview at her comfortable, purple-walled garden apartment. Conroy has headlined at many New York venues, including Off-Broadway theater, and performed on television shows such as *The Guiding Light*, *Law and Order* and *The Late Show with David Letterman*. "Ten percent of the world is gay so we all have gay friends whether we know it or not. And the whole gay pride issue is not just about being gay – it's about being proud of what you are."

It was Conroy's mother who first taught her the importance of tolerance. At age 13, Conroy landed a small role in a community production of *Once Upon a Mattress* in her hometown of Huntsville, Texas. One day at the theater, she spotted a gay male couple. "I came home and said, 'Mom, there were two guys backstage holding hands and kissing!'" Conroy recalls. Her mother's reaction was neither shocked nor disapproving. "She said, 'Shavonne, if you want to be an entertainer, you'll have to get used to that—and furthermore, that's just two people who love each other.'"

**A 'REAL GIRL' WHO LOVES TO DRESS UP.** As Conroy grew up and became a professional entertainer, she developed close friendships with many gay people, including flamboyant drag queens like Ms. Trai La Trash, with whom Conroy has performed numerous times, most recently last October, at a fund-raising gala for South Church at the Master's School. "Through the years I've come to have a name in the gay community," says Conroy. "They know me as the 'Real Girl' who sings. They say, 'There's Shavonne the R-G!' I'm 150 percent accepted by my gay friends," she adds. "They're the most accepting, loving group of people I've ever been around."

Conroy says she has always loved to dress up and perform for an audience. "My whole life has been about costumes," she explains, adding that she designed the sexy gown she'll be wearing this weekend, and had it made

with help from Beyond Costumes in Yonkers. “When I was a little girl, if we went to a Mexican restaurant I wore a Mexican-themed outfit, and did the same if we ate Chinese. I’ve always been more comfortable in a gown than I am in khakis,” she confides. “So naturally I feel right at home among the glitz of drag queens. In fact, sometimes when I’m surrounded by a bunch of moms in sweats and frumpy clothes, I suddenly think, ‘Where am I and where are the boas?’”

Conroy, a tall blonde with a killer figure and a ready laugh, adds that clothing taste aside, she feels right at home on the banks of the Hudson. “I have a lot of support here in the River towns,” she says. “I see this as a place where people can be themselves because there are so many artists and so many people who think out of the box.”

**AN OUTSPOKEN SUPPORTER OF GAY RIGHTS.** That commitment to freedom of expression, says Conroy, is what has made her into an outspoken supporter of gay rights and of people with HIV and AIDS. “It is devastating to have friends whose lovers are on their death beds, and the families forbid them to see each other,” she says. “Or to see couples where one partner is left destitute and penniless” because many companies do not offer health insurance to gay domestic partners.

Conroy also disputes the notion—prevalent among many who oppose the idea of gay marriage—that homosexuality is a choice, and therefore something that a person could rid themselves of if they wanted to. “Why would anybody choose to be in minority that is so often shunned?” asks Conroy. “No one is going to choose that. But you are what you are.”

And being what you are, Conroy believes, should not limit a person’s right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, which is what she feels the Bush Administration is trying to do with its opposition to gay marriage. Defining marriage as a union that can only take place between a man and a woman, says Conroy, is “an amazingly narrow-minded view. I have gay friends that have been together for 30 and 40 years, and you cannot tell me that such a union is less special or less holy than any heterosexual union.”

Conroy adds that she is glad there are gay-themed television shows like “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” and “Will and Grace,” and that more celebrities, such as comedienne Ellen DeGeneres and Rosie O’Donnell, are coming out of the closet. “Rosie didn’t come out until the whole world loved her show, but then she came out. And ‘Queer Eye’ is one of the best shows on TV.”

Conroy says that after the Gay PrideFest, she’ll be ready to tackle something new. “I want a Broadway show—I want to play the funny, blonde mother in Hairspray,” she says. “I’d also love to do more TV; maybe get a part on a soap opera. My kids are old enough now that I could do that.”

She also has her eye on producing. Last year, in addition to producing and performing in the South Church gala, Conroy produced the musical, *Meet Me in St. Louis* at the Dobbs Ferry High School. “I loved putting all the pieces together: pulling the right personalities and talents to go with the project, and giving my friends work.”

But right now, she’s getting ready to put on the glitz for gay pride. Conroy says her family supports her efforts completely; her children, parents and husband are all going downtown to see her perform this weekend. “My husband thinks it’s great. I’m very anti-drug, and performing is my high,” she concludes. “Music is healing, and when you genuinely care about people you’re performing for, they know it.”

*Note: Shavonne Conroy and a host of other artists will perform on June 26th on Greenwich Street between West Houston and Clarkson Streets in the West Village between 3 and 8 p.m. For more information about Gay Pride 2005, visit the official website at [www.nycpride.org](http://www.nycpride.org). For more about Shavonne, go to her website at [www.ShavonneConroy.com](http://www.ShavonneConroy.com).*