

'Tamara Tonite'

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Tamara Tonite



By Yorick Smaal

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a locally produced program on community television took the GLBTIQ community by storm. Running for seven years on channel Briz31, Tamara Tonite appeared in, and produced, 365 episodes, interviewing many locally based and national personalities. The success of the show has not been matched by any other privately produced show on community television in Australia. Tamara initially took on the show to promote her own 'dial a drag queen' business, but *Tamara Tonite* took on a form of its own towards the end of 1997. While the show drew a few detractors — with some charismatic church leaders calling her an 'evil cross-dressing transvestite' using airwaves to spread her wicked message — Tamara remembers being absolutely floored when she threw the show open to a studio audience one night. Over 60 people turned up, and some had to huddle around TV cameras due to a lack of space.

In mid-1999, Tamara used her new-found popularity to declare her candidacy for the 2000 Brisbane Lord Mayoral election. The announcement started off ostensibly as a joke and publicity stunt: 'I hate to say it started as a joke,' she says, 'but I guess [if it hadn't] it would never have started at all.' Tamara's intentions quickly turned serious, however, as she began fielding calls from constituents who supported her campaign. With a campaign budget of approximately \$1,000 and a pledge 'to tell the truth at every level', Tamara astonished political commentators by claiming over 3 per cent of the vote. In the following year, she ran for the central seat of Brisbane in the 2001 Queensland state elections on a platform advocating human rights, euthanasia and access to fertility treatments for all women.

While Tamara has officially retired, she is currently compiling footage for inclusion in the National Film and Sound Archive. Tamara believes her show would never have worked in the southern states where there are so many competing personalities. 'In Queensland of all places!' she remarks, reflecting on a drag television program that drew broad community support and launched two runs for political office.

Acknowledgment

This piece is based on an interview conducted by Yorick Smaal with Tamara Tonite, 7 September 2007.

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