

# Conversations with Bobbi Starr

## “Solid Ground”

by Rich Moreland July 2011

“I am the person that I am. I’m going to do what I want, when I want to do it, for reasons that I have thought out over and over again.”

Bobbi Starr is chatting over a quick breakfast in the ground floor café of the Palazzo, one of Las Vegas’ plush hotels. We’re adjacent to the Sands Convention Center where her signing time at the *Evil Angel* booth is nearing. She programs her iPhone to alert us when our conversational minutes are running low.

Bobbi has inspired my research on feminism in adult film and I’m always grateful to have a few moments with her. Squeezing in some time around her schedule on this particular weekend—AEE convention and AVN awards 2011—is daunting.

As usual, she is most gracious.

“What does feminism mean to you?” I ask.

“It’s a personal definition,” she says, reflecting a point of view that dominates today’s feminist thought. “As a woman, I want to be everything I possibly can be, that’s why I call myself a feminist because I don’t want someone else’s opinions or someone else’s judgments to hold me back.”

Bobbi’s affable and artistic thirty-something boyfriend “Ssippi,” his Starbucks coffee in hand, listens quietly. He is the vital cog in her support network. He is bright and

unpretentious with a charm that lends congeniality to any situation. Also at our table is my research assistant Brandy who is manning the digital recorder and taking notes. She has a special question for Bobbi when the time is appropriate.

Make no mistake; Bobbi commands the interview. During a roundtable session a year ago at Toronto's Feminist Porn Awards, I brought up Bobbi's name among the feminist performers and directors present. Feminist porn model Dylan Ryan spoke for the group. "She's all about it," Dylan said empathetically.

I'm curious if Bobbi extends her feminism beyond adult film.

"It's about anything, including this business, absolutely anything in life," she responds. "Me being a feminist is not predicated on this business. I was before and I will be after." Adult film is her life now, she adds, but eventually she will "move on to do other things."

"I feel it's fairly simple for me." Bobbi is forthright. "If you *act* like you know what you're doing, people *believe* that you know what you're doing."

"I think that is the fundamentals of my feminism. It's not that I'm *acting* like I know what I'm doing, but I do *know* what I'm doing! I've thought about these things very carefully . . . my actions are very calculated. In my head, it's almost like I'm writing my own script, I am presenting a female empowerment."

The belief that porn girls are vacuous bimbos who fuck indiscriminately to finance a lifestyle of drugs and clubbing is fallacious at best. A single encounter with Bobbi Starr puts that myth to rest.

Bobbi giggles and reminds me that she's only had a few hours of sleep. We tried for two days to coordinate this interview—everything's a rush at AVN—but she's a sweetheart who genuinely treats everyone, especially her fans, with an attentiveness and

enthusiasm that is not always evident in other adult performers. In her defense, the conversation is probably a little heavy this early in the day. I'm aware it would be easier to ask her about her latest anal scene or her favorite co-stars and listen for potential sound bites that require little thought, but that's not why I'm here. That's best left to the entertainment reporters.

“How did you come to your feminism?” I want to discover who shaped Bobbi's belief system.

“My mom,” Bobbi says warmly. “She doesn't go around saying she's a feminist, but she is. My whole family is a very female powerful family, there are lots of women, very outspoken.” Bobbi mentions two aunts who are business owners and her grandmother, an independent woman exceptionally ardent about her interests. “I've been raised to believe that I should do what I want to do and what I'm passionate for,” she exclaims.

Family has given Bobbi solid ground and from our casual conversations, I am impressed with Bobbi's devotion to those close to her.

“I was always told as a child, ‘When you grow up just do what makes you happy,’ which is one reason why my family is okay with my job, because they know it makes me happy.”

Bobbi sets the pace of our session as I've come to anticipate from talking with her in the past. Sometimes interviewing women in the adult industry can become routine and vapid, but Bobbi is exceptional. She possesses an integrity that is not always found in a business that operates on the margins of American culture.

My thoughts return to previous a conversation we had about honesty. Bobbi mentioned the difficulty of finding an agent she could trust especially in an environment in which some girls “entertain” industry personnel to get bookings. She “landed” in Mark

Spiegler's stable, a perfect fit for her because she tells him what she will do. This is an assertive woman in an industry that can chew up and spit out careers in an instant. Her feminism plays a significant role in her ability to navigate the uncertain waters of an adult film career.

Bobbi's renowned for her classical accomplishments with the oboe and I wonder if she experiences any connection between her music and feminism.

Referencing her childhood, Bobbi stresses that as she "got older," her interests gravitated to the entertainment industry and she immersed herself in film—especially documentaries—and music. "I was always drawn more toward rock bands with female singers, art done by female artists because I could feel the power in that," she says.

At art exhibits, Bobbi would seek out female talent, regarding their work as "incredible." Ideas started to take shape, reconfiguring her social and political views. "When I got to college I started to find out about queer theory and feminism. I started to read feminist literature and thought, 'yeah, I do that. I already do that, that's awesome! I like these books, they make me feel good about myself!'" She smiles, reflecting a self-assurance characteristic of her personality.

Bobbi was in college during waning days of third wave feminism, often identified as the waning hours of feminist politics. I'm curious to know if her porn is infused with a political message, something other feminist performers have suggested is part of their view of the business.

"Yeah," she responds. "My beliefs are related to things that I've read and things that I enjoy. I've read a lot of feminist literature that has molded my actions today."

Dylan's words describing Bobbi keep popping into my thoughts. "She loves what she does. She's good at it. She knows she's good at it."

When did she first encounter porn, I inquire? Bobbi mentions she didn't know what pornography was until she reached her early twenties. Unlike many other performers who grew up sneaking a glimpse at Dad's stash of porn mags and vids, Bobbi occupied her adolescent years with academics, her oboe, and swimming. With college behind her and just short of her twenty-third birthday, she was introduced to the business via a test shoot for *Kink.com*, San Francisco's fetish porn company owned by British entrepreneur Peter Acworth. A male friend suggested she try it.

Success was instantaneous. Bobbi has shot for Acworth many times since and we chat briefly about a mutual *Kink* acquaintance, Madison Young, sex-positive feminist model and director who operates her own production company. Madison researches porn and Bobbi contrasts Madison's approach to the profession with her own. Madison "knows details about everything" relating to the business, Bobbi says. However, Bobbi takes a different path.

"I'm not in pornography to be a pornographer. I'm in pornography because I find it fascinating and I'm passionate towards it. It's something I want to experience. I don't relate pornography and research together." Bobbi doesn't perceive adult film to be that intellectually stimulating. Music is different.

"When I wanted to become a musician, I wanted to become a *scholarly* musician." Her voice is definitive. "I'm not going to be a pornographer at the scholarly level. I just want to *do* this. I think it's fascinating."

At this point in her life Bobbi is personified by adult film and her classical music, a seemingly odd combination. But the truth lies in passion. Adult film feminists appear on a larger cultural stage than they may realize. They are influencing how America views its own morality in a manner that is problematic for people who envision society's sexual values drifting into "pornificaton." Yet Bobbi and other adult film feminists are representative of the educated, middle class performer who is capable of taking charge of

her own sexual agency. In doing so, they have inched pornography near the edges of mainstream culture and acceptance.

Bobbi brings up the question everyone who has ever talked pornography for a single minute wants to know . . .

“I thought, ‘why do girls want to do this?’” her voice trailing upward as if a little incredulous. “It can’t be bad like everybody says if all these girls do it,” she declares. “People like Belladonna [a close friend] have happy, functional lives; she’s married and has a child. It can’t be bad if that is the case.”

I am persuaded to agree. My research supports Bobbi’s assertion. Adult performers are more “normal” than is generally assumed. They love, marry, pay bills, and live in middle class neighborhoods. The eventual birth of little ones, however, presents a dicey problem when the children get older.

Brandy’s patience throughout the interview is rewarded. She has a five-year-old and wants to know what can a mother say to her daughter if entering into adult film is something the girl wants to do when she reaches legal age?

Bobbi isn’t certain she knows unequivocally, but offers an insight. She concedes that mothers form a “serious relationship” with her children “that will always influence their lives.” However, she adds that other outlets, like school, are significant in a child’s development. Bobbi believes that if young people are raised to be “healthy, happy, independent, and self-reliant,” they will be turnout to be good decision makers.

“My mom didn’t raise me as an exhibitionist. I was raised in a church, was home schooled and went to a private Christian school, then to public school. I was in a music conservatorium, a small program, there were twenty-five people just in my graduating class.” Bobbi is referencing her college experience at San Jose State University from which she holds a bachelor’s degree.

But she concedes that parents can go only so far. “My decisions about identifying with pornography and feminism came from external sources,” Bobbi claims, “not at all from my family.”

As an aside to reinforce her teenage innocence, Bobbi mentions a lesbian aunt on her father’s half of the family. “I remember my sister being like, ‘oh she’s a lesbian.’ I was probably fourteen and thought ‘what’s a lesbian?’” Granting that she “was incredibly naïve,” Bobbi had friends who eventually “exposed her to certain things,” giving her a street education of sorts.

Her mom was careful in raising her children, so Bobbi feels her upbringing was a balanced combination of significant influences from her family and the outside world. However, she has a warning for parents: control over a child’s ideas and behaviors can be tenuous, restrictive parental guidance will eventually be challenged.

“I think if you try to expose your children to specific outlets, it doesn’t work,” she says and adds that much of what a child absorbs about the world around her will be “just something that happens naturally.”

I understand. Children will create their own way. However, Bobbi had an advantage in her upbringing that not everyone experiences: *Solid Ground*. Bobbi’s mom is her rock, and mom’s little girl has her head screwed on the right way.

What about motherhood for Bobbi in the future?

“When I have children, I will no longer be performing,” she says with conviction, emphasizing that her days in front of the camera will end “a significant amount of time before” she becomes a mother.

And what of *the* inevitable question that is going to arise?

Bobbi knows her children will find out about her past and she will eventually have “to sit down and explain it to them.” But she is secure in a belief system that will bear the weight of those moments. She wants her children to pursue those things that “spark” their interest and she will respect their desire to experience whatever avenues they choose. She will proffer “motherly advise,” as she calls it, to seek out “the good people to talk to,” people who can help them “just as my mom did,” she says. Bobbi hopes her children will examine the risks of their actions and anticipate the “really bad things” that could result from their decisions. It’s responsibility and Bobbi never shies away from hers.

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What is on the horizon for her when her youthful looks fade and career endeavors must be channeled away from the camera?

“My mom supports me in my decision to be a business woman and to own and run my own business,” Bobbi proclaims with a sense of gratitude and reminds us, “no mother wants her daughter to take off her clothes and have sex on camera!”

Everyone chuckles.

“My mom would prefer that I do something else. However, she respects me as an adult and my ability to make my own decisions.”

In stating “that something else,” Bobbi adds a touch of irony. She believes her mom “would rather me be doing pornography than being a lawyer defending criminals who murdered their wives.” Moral decisions are often not clear-cut.

Supporting a daughter in her decision-making can sometimes bring up troubling issues. Bobbi and her mom have frank discussions—“countless conversations” as she describes them—about STIs and other health risks that pervade the industry. I know from

past interviews with Bobbi that her sensitivity concerning STIs is genuine, especially since she is reputed for turning in superb anal scenes. She believes that condoms promote safer sex.

“Has your mom’s encouragement influenced your decision-making?” becomes my final query.

“Yeah. Because I have her support I really don’t feel ashamed to go into any industry. She just wants all of us [there are four siblings in her family] to be happy, healthy, and not borrow money from her all the time!” Laughter again breaks out at the table.

Bobbi’s cell phone alerts us that we’re finished. “I have three minutes to head on over to the floor,” she declares, getting herself together.

As we prepare to go our separate ways, I make a quick note of what Bobbi mentioned off-handedly at the beginning of our conversation. “This is a chapter in my life and I did it the safest way possible,” she said.