

# Lead with the belly, live with the breasts

Annie Sprinkle and her partner in love, art and surviving breast cancer

## SEX GURU

Allan MacInnis

**a**NNIE SPRINKLE'S many fans can breathe a sigh of relief. The famous sex guru, filmmaker, and PhD sexologist has not only successfully had a lump removed from her breast, but is in typically good spirits about the whole experience.

Though cancer of any form is never welcome, Sprinkle's diagnosis may have seemed a singularly cruel fate: for years, the former porn star has used her breasts as an asset and objet d'art. To this day, Sprinkle supplements her income with "tit prints" produced by coating a fulsome boob in paint and pressing it to paper.

Sprinkle's successful recovery is in part due to the efforts of her primary caregiver, partner and collaborator, Beth Stephens.

Described on the couple's website as a "sexy dyke playboy," Stephens is an educator and an artist in her own right. Her artwork features, among other things, a series of bronzed, used undergarments designed as a "homage and a wink to the bravery andchutzpah of porn stars and adventurous academics who are physically and intellectually stimulating, be it in the classroom or on the silver screen."

Sprinkle and Stephens are currently touring their show *Exposed: Experiments in Love, Sex, Death and Art*, which they describe as a "performance art show about our relationship, exploring artificial insemination, breast cancer treatments, queer weddings, art experiments, aging, sexuality and more."

Over the course of a three-way phone conversation in May, Sprinkle and Stephens talked about their experiences overcoming cancer, and provided a bit of background on their current work. They had just held a "big fat queer wedding" in Calgary—the first *legal marriage* of the three they've undertaken thus far, thanks to Canada's progressive legislation. It's colour-coded as the Yellow Wedding, corresponding with the third chakra and a focus on "Courage and Power." (Each year has a colour, a chakra, and a theme: 2005 was the Red Wedding, featuring *Security and Survival*; the Orange Year, 2006, focused on *Sexuality and Creativity*).

**Allan MacInnis:** What was your impression of Annie Sprinkle when you first met her?

**Beth Stephens:** Oh, I thought she was just as hot as could be.

**Annie Sprinkle:** Aww!

**Beth Stephens:** My first impression was, like, I got totally wet panties.

**Annie Sprinkle:** It was lust at first sight.

**Allan MacInnis:** When did you meet?

**Beth Stephens:** When I first met Annie Sprinkle, she lived in New York City. I was in graduate school, and then we met again later in San Francisco. I moved to the West Coast and then she moved to the West Coast and we got together for a date out here.

**Allan MacInnis:** Were you at all intimidated by Annie Sprinkle's background?

**Beth Stephens:** No, I think it's great that she slept with all those people, so that she'd have a lot of practice for me! They got her ready.

**Annie Sprinkle:** Not too many lesbians could handle, y'know, their lover having had thousands of lovers—

**Beth Stephens:** But I just say, "Bring it on!"

**Annie Sprinkle:**—so it was very nice. She's very open-minded. And very sex-positive. Of course I'd have to marry someone sex-positive.

**Allan MacInnis:** Beth, are you from New York originally?

**Beth Stephens:** No, I'm originally from West Virginia, which is a little redneck state in the Appalachian mountains.

**Annie Sprinkle:** She's a rodeo girl.

**Beth Stephens:** I'm a hillbilly.

**Annie Sprinkle:** A very smart hillbilly.

**Allan MacInnis:** You have a thing for, like, lawyers and straight types, right Annie?

**Annie Sprinkle:** Yeah, well—particularly academics.

**Beth Stephens:** This year (laughs).

**Allan MacInnis:** If I can ask about finances, do you get royalties from your old porn stuff?

**Annie Sprinkle:** No. I own a few of the movies I produced, but of the old movies, no. But I do sell some porn movies on my website.

**Allan MacInnis:** Those are the ones you actually have the rights to?

**Annie Sprinkle:** No, I buy them wholesale and sell them. But I get a good deal, so I still make money on them.

**Beth Stephens:** But we're good Americans, so we're really in debt. We're working to get out of it.

**Allan MacInnis:** What was Calgary like?

**Beth Stephens:** We loved it. The people were so generous, and so enthusiastic about our wedding—we had a beautiful wedding, and all these artists, all these Calgary artists came and performed

and did beautiful pieces.

**Annie Sprinkle:** We only knew four people, out of 250 people, at our wedding—but it was a big happy family. In fact, my maid of honour was Victoria Singh, who used to run the Western Front there in Vancouver.

**Beth Stephens:** And she was just extraordinarily lovely.

**Allan MacInnis:** Tell me about the chakras and colour coding—how do they apply to this year?

**Beth Stephens:** Well, we're going to forefront the colour yellow in our lives, and we'll also really concentrate on projects that have to do with courage and power. So it'll be a guiding theme for our work throughout the whole year.

**Annie Sprinkle:** Our wedding was yellow, so it's called Yellow Wedding Three. It was part of the One Yellow Rabbit High Performance Rodeo in Calgary.

**Allan MacInnis:** This sounds like LaMonte Young named it.

**Beth Stephens:** We did one of his pieces too!

**Annie Sprinkle:** We did a LaMonte Young piece?

**Beth Stephens:** Yeah, we did. "Zen for Head" was actually LaMonte Young, but Nam June Paik made it famous.

**Allan MacInnis:** So, pieces centering on courage and power. What sort of things are you planning to do?

**Annie Sprinkle:** Get arrested.

**Beth Stephens:** Yeah.

**Allan MacInnis:** Get arrested?

**Beth Stephens:** Well, we really use the Love Art Laboratory as a platform to speak out against things like the war. We make comments on a lot of the sort of newsworthy items that are happening around the world. We're trying to counteract some of that stuff. So we're hoping this year to be really courageous and to make a really big political statement at some point, which in the United States can get you arrested very easily.

**Annie Sprinkle:** We believe we're living our lives as art, so it's very organic. It's like, whatever we go through in our life, we make into art.

**Allan MacInnis:** On the topic of making life art, is there anything you hold back, or is everything made public?

**Annie Sprinkle:** We try to hold our bellies in, that's about it (laughs). We're all for people showing their bellies, but we hold ours in.

**Beth Stephens:** Well, we don't hold ours in very well. But this being the year of power and courage, the power and courage chakra is located right about in the belly, right in the solar plexus.

**Annie Sprinkle:** Yeah, we're gonna let our belly OUT.

**Beth Stephens:** Yeah, we're



**FROM TIT PRINTS TO CHEMO:** Annie Sprinkle likens her recent brush with breast cancer to her porn career: she came out of both ahead, she says. Now she and her partner are touring their latest production, *Exposed: Experiments in Love, Sex, Death and Art*, which they describe as a 'performance art show about our relationship, exploring artificial insemination, breast cancer treatments, queer weddings, art experiments, aging, sexuality and more.'

gonna lead with our bellies this year.

**Annie Sprinkle:** So actually we might even show our bellies. That would be about the most courageous thing we could do (laughs)!

**Beth Stephens:** We decided to make work about love. It's a very simple strategy on our part. And people have responded. I mean, these weddings—who would think that anyone would want to go see two middle-aged lesbian ladies putting on this sort of crazy wedding ceremony? But we sold out days before the wedding happened, and people really enjoyed being someplace that was just dedicated to love, y'know? And I think there's a real need for that in the world right now. I think people are burned out, really, on all the violence, all the scandal, all the political muckraking.

**Annie Sprinkle:** A lot of negativity. And people want more hope. Y'know, I think there's so many churches. And Hallmark! We're offering an alternative to Hallmark cards and church.

**Allan MacInnis:** (laughing) We need that, very much... Um, if I could ask you about cancer, that's another big theme in your work lately. Annie, you're totally okay now?

**Annie Sprinkle:** Mm hmm! I mean, I have both boobs, and I'm a year out of treatment now. And Beth helped me get through it together, 'cause Beth took on the cancer—we took it on as a couple, and took it on as artists. So we made art out of our experience. I

can look back and go, that was a worthwhile experience because of what we made, you know?

**Allan MacInnis:** How sick did you get?

**Annie Sprinkle:** I was never, ever sick. I just got sick from the chemo and from the radiation.

**Beth Stephens:** She was very tired.

**Annie Sprinkle:** I was just Phase One, but the treatments definitely made you kind of sick. But the actual cancer, it was just a hard spot in my breast that I felt. It was never an issue really, but if you leave it there, you can grow.

**Allan MacInnis:** What were the reactions to your Chemo-Fashion Show where you dressed up on ward in various funny costumes? Were other cancer patients seeing that happening?

**Annie Sprinkle:** Yeah. We had a wonderful doctor, and you go into this room—and it's like a beauty parlour, with ladies sitting in chairs, attached to these IVs... They were very supportive, and we were pretty disruptive, doing this.

**Beth Stephens:** But I think that the patients liked it, even though, I mean—we heard some really sad stories, because there were people there that obviously were not going to be cured. But it wasn't just about death and dying or being sick. We were really doing something else, being creative.

**Annie Sprinkle:** It was about love. That room, where all the ladies were getting chemo, it was a very loving place, and so Beth Stephens and I were really inspired by that. We made what we