

The guy's a doll

R1943 5

Winning combination of cabaret and theatre by Atkins

For gay men determined to get in touch with their "inner woman," the quickest route to their femininity has often been through the wardrobe — their mother's, their sister's or Victoria's Secret.

And so drag was born.

Playwright, performer and raconteur Damien Atkins, however, is not your typical gay man. So when Atkins

sets out to get in touch with his woman within — actually, he describes her as a "little girl" — he leaves the crinolines and waist cinchers in the closet (or uses them for set-dressing) and turns to the songbook instead.

The result is



John Coulbourn
Stage

Real Live Girl, which opened last night in a limited run on the main stage of *Buddies In Bad Times*, moving on up from an earlier workshop production in Tallulah's Cabaret.

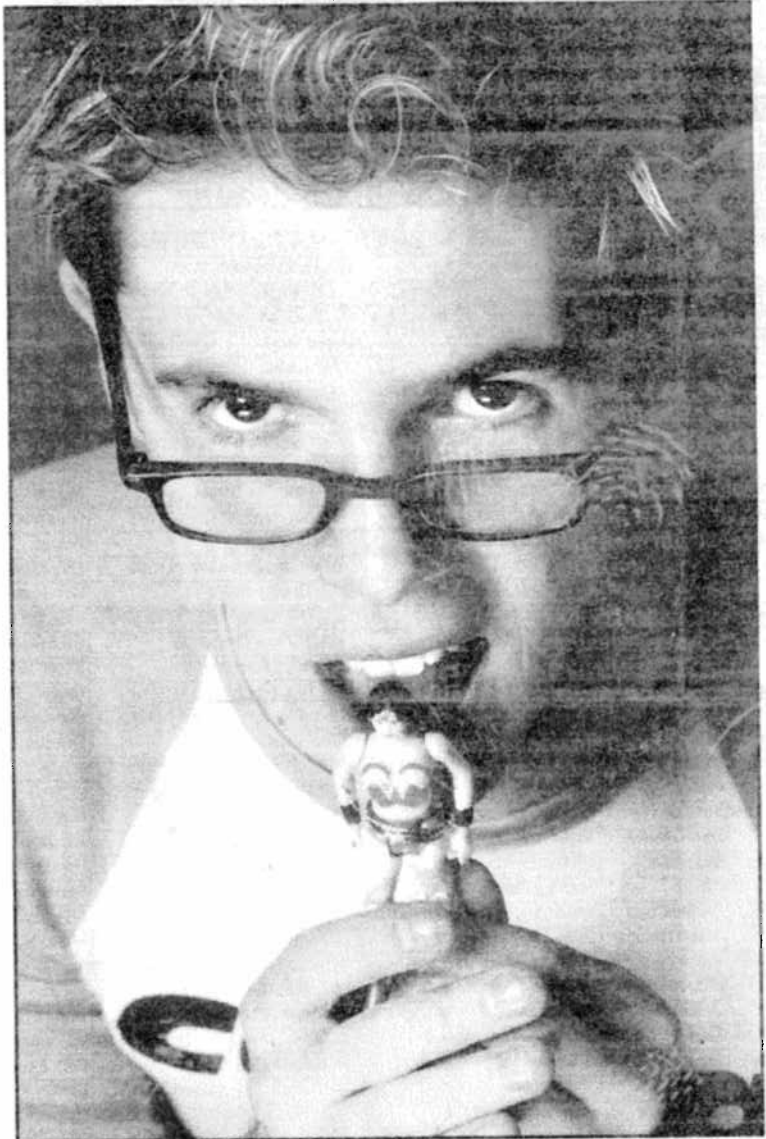
Reviewed here in its preview performance, *Real Live Girl* is a whimsical combination of cabaret and theatre, stretched tautly over a skeleton of songs most often associated with women's voices, fleshed out by Atkins' remarkable talent.

For aficionados of drag, there's probably nothing new about seeing a man perform such heretofore female anthems as *I've Never Been To Me*, *Gonna Wash That Man Right Out Of My Hair* and *I Enjoy Being A Girl*, and that's Atkins' first departure from gay tradition — but certainly not his last.

When he tackles 'em, there's not a hint of mascara, not a single bouffant hair-do in sight. Under the direction of David Oiyé, all you get is the lean and lanky Atkins in street clothes, his puppy-dog awkwardness masked but not hidden by the costumes of designer Sarah Armstrong and the moves of choreographer Jane Johanson.

As Atkins first takes the stage, deftly accompanied on the keyboard by musical director John Hughes, it all seems a little strange — and Atkins plays to every ounce of camp in the aforementioned *Never Been To Me*.

But before his audience can settle into the smug comfort of *Been-There, Done-That*, he starts throwing in strange, wonderful and highly personal twists. When he was a child, he informs us, he quite in-



DAMIEN ATKINS gets in touch with his "inner woman" in the delicious, often delirious stage show *Real Live Girl*.

tle girl inside of him. He then sets out to demonstrate that that little girl and several of her sisters are still inside him — and they've grown into an impressive group of women. And they've all done their part in helping Atkins become the man he is today. *Gonna Wash That Man* takes on new meaning when it's sung, not to a potential lover, but to a shallow guidance counselor, while *Georgy Girl* resonates with a whole different life when its sung by a young man struggling with the effeminate label.

In an evening of often delicious, more often delirious humour, Atkins still makes a telling point. In a world where true humanity is the subject, words like "masculine" and "femi-



out of 5

'Girlz2Men-orable'
— JOHN COULBOURN, SUN

Real Live Girl

Director: David Oiyé

Starring: Damien Atkins