

O, HOLY ORGASM

An insider's explicit, blissful account of what to expect at the first New Zealand Sexuality and Consciousness Symposium.

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IT'S FLESHY, GREY-PINK and has delicate zigzagged wings like an exotic butterfly. It's female genitalia — wide open and over dimensional on a screen in front of me. We are on day three of a Sex & Consciousness Conference, and this is vagina number five.

It belongs to the Fox Woman. We have just seen the Buffalo Woman, the Wolf Woman, the Deer Woman, the Sheep Woman. Small lips, big lips, all up close. According to the ancient native American teaching of Quodoushka, each genital anatomy represents a sexual archetype. And if you know your type, your sex life will never be the same again.

I am in awe. "So beautiful," I whisper to the man who is sitting next to me in the auditorium of the Byron Community Centre in Byron Bay, 165km south of Brisbane. He wears a long silk kaftan, has a smooth shaved head and a smile like the rising sun. Because this is day three, a butterfly-shaped pussy — or yoni, as they call her in the indophile world of tantra — looks nothing but just amazing to me. And so does the kaftan man. His hands, by the way, met my yoni on day one. Yup, amazing. I feel no shame or guilt, just joy. And nine erect penis types are coming up next on the screen. Beautiful.

But let's go back to the beginning. Slowly — this is what tantra is all about. Only two days earlier, I wasn't sure if I would last at a transman get-together of "sexual practitioners", of dakas and dakinis, of tantric teachers and "temple arts" instructors from Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

I don't speak New Age or wear flowing purple and patchouli. I am monogamous, I love my partner, I have kids and a normal job. Would I end up in an esoteric swinger scene among desperate old hippies?

I wondered about the men there. Were they all on their path to enlightenment or just hoping to find a spontaneous lover?

What brings most of us here, I assume on my arrival, is a yearning for deeper sexual fulfilment. From which will come

a happier life and a healing of our hang-ups and relationships. It all starts from the inside. Ommm.

TANTRA — WHICH HAS its roots in sufism, tao and 5000 years of Eastern mysticism — is not about sex, but it doesn't exclude it. It's about awareness, sensuality and emotional expression. That's why more and more therapists recommend tantra to normally dysfunctional or frustrated couples these days — it's the new yoga. In the simplest technical terms, along with breathing, touch and sound exercises, tantric sex means for the man to hold back his ejaculation and for the woman to become multi-orgasmic, Goddess bless her G-spot. Easier said than done.

HIS HANDS MET MY YONI ON DAY ONE. YUP, AMAZING. I FEEL NO SHAME OR GUILT, JUST JOY.

The Big O is what most of the presentations and workshops this weekend evolve around. "From the Orgasm of the Body to the Ecstasy of the Spirit" is the opening talk by Margot Anand, a renowned French New Age pioneer, who has come over to Australia from her home in Bali. She is the undisputed grandmother of Western tantra — a student of the controversial Indian guru Osho, a buddy of Deepak Chopra and the founder of "SkyDancing Tantra". Margot is a towering elegant figure, lean and sharp at 68, but dressed in batic lycra from silver blonde head (with fluorescent bandana) to pink towelling-clad toe (no shoes). "This is to make you laugh," she says, ridiculing her stage outfit before she elaborates on transforming lust into bliss. It's a good sign to see a spiritual authority not taking herself too seriously.

The same can be said for the man behind this line-up of unusual experts. Baba Dez Nichols, a polyamorous shamanic sex teacher from the US who has slept with more than

2000 women ("When I make love, I bring the magic"), is the father figure in the background of the conference, but not in a cultish way — the surfer shorts, long hair and tank top help. No guru costume, no diamond watch, but a big heart. Especially for the girls.

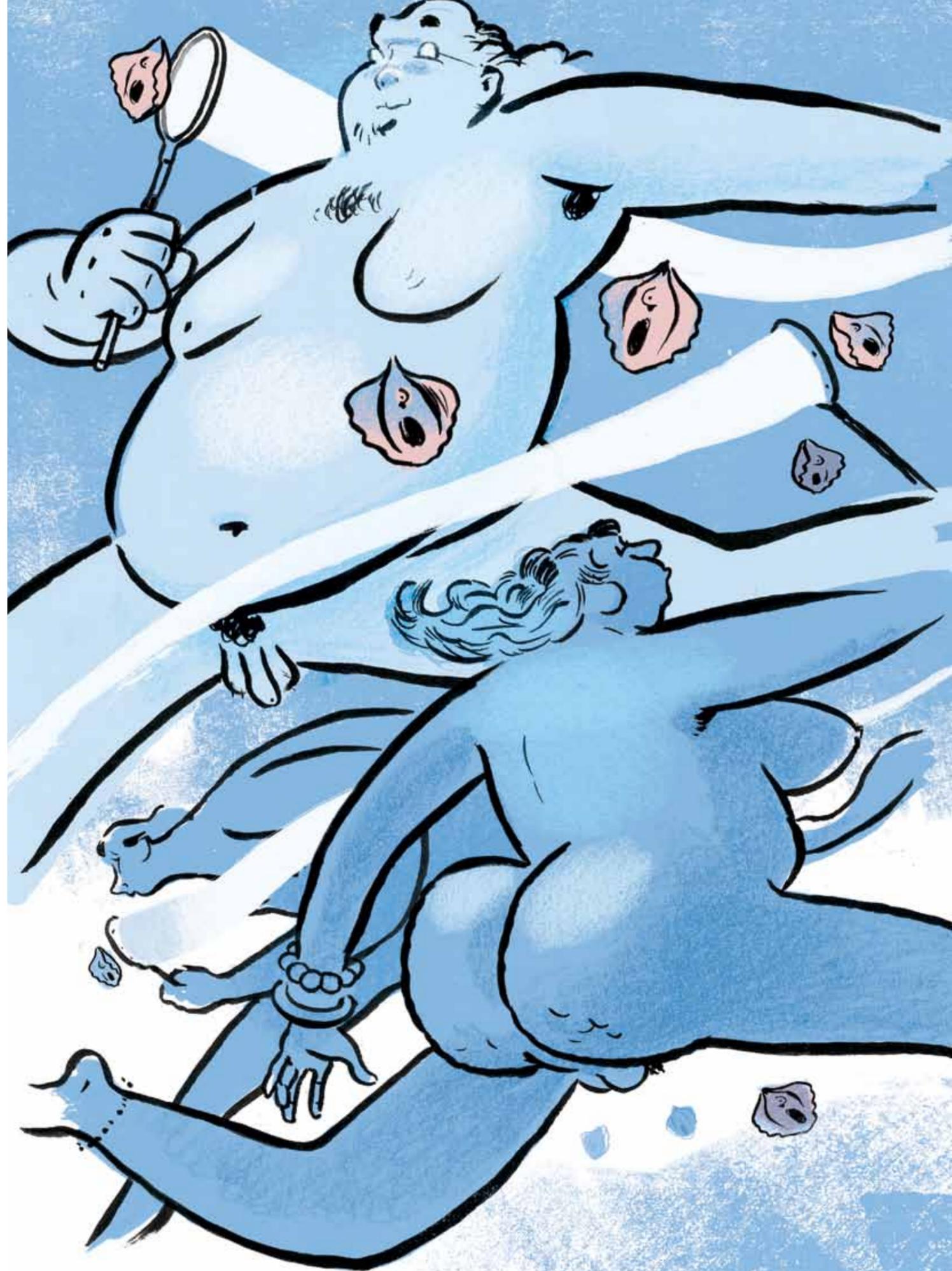
Goldie, one of my roommates in our Byron Bay flat, has done "the training" with Baba Dez, who will speak in Auckland in April. "It totally empowered me," she says. Goldie is sexy, in a natural way. "When we get the energy flowing in this part of our lives, then it affects everything else."

She now works at The Temple in Mt Eden where she offers sessions for men, women and couples, ranging from \$150-\$250: "They can experience with me how to be more conscious lovers, how to be fully present." These kind of services have led to police raids at Baba Dez's International School of Temple Arts in Arizona, where they don't have a liberal prostitution act as in New Zealand.

Our apartment soon looks like a girl's dormitory with clothes strewn everywhere, apart from a bottle of lubricant next to the toothpaste. Welcome to an awakened woman's world.

WHICH BRINGS ME to the next presenter of the first day (and there are 30 or more to come, excuse the pun): Cyd Saunders, a voluptuous multi-orgasmic mum with blonde curls who teaches women in night classes how to excel at her skill. Her account of a formerly low-lying libido is highly entertaining and hits a nerve with me. By lunchtime, I know that female ejaculation is the "nectar of the Gods" and that I can align my chakras to marry my feminine and masculine energy.

I make more eye contact with the shiny, happy people around me. No creeps so far. I start to throw words like "journey" and "transformation" into my conversations. I browse at the stalls with delicate "pussy purses" (pink satin with a little pearl) and handcrafted glass dildos. In the end, I buy a jade egg as a souvenir — not for hanging around my neck.



Goldie shares a hug with Baba Dez. There's a lot of "sharing" here, and it can mean a lot of things. Normally, sitting in a circle and summing up how you feel in this moment. I feel fine — just warming up. Over organic coffee, the charismatic American Quodoushaka expert tells me that I might be an Antelope Woman — just from the way I talk. "Soften up," she says. I will.

By evening, I have listened enough. It's time to interact. Other conferences might offer you a golf tournament as a social event — well, here they have an "intimate night". It starts with a big circle. The women outside, the men inside, move with the music, change partners. Then gaze into someone's eyes, say something nice to a stranger, do a little twist. A bit like speed dating, but without trying to impress — just attracting through radiance and openness. It's great fun. None of those micro-connections has to mean anything. There's no attachment, no pick-up plan. I notice the handsome man in the silk kaftan for the first time and just enjoy that his eyes linger.

The next bit is harder. We are asked to get naked. I hesitate for a long moment. Not because I am prudish. But this really means dropping your mask, your protection. It's a lot easier to be flirtatious with your clothes on. But I do it. "Truth is erotic," Margot Anand had said earlier. I ease into the music and move around the room, carrying on with these playful little dances. I am not quite sure where to look though.

My first and unsuccessful attempt at tantra was a long time ago, in a bleak gym hall in Europe. I was reluctant to hug total strangers on the spot. It seemed forced and artificial, too close for my taste. I quit the group after the first exercise, repulsed by the guy in red-rimmed glasses and a sweaty T-shirt next to me who was rolling his hips to Enya-style music while moaning loudly (come on, this was just after breakfast!) "How do these people do it," I wondered, "letting themselves go like this?"

Here I am, years later, letting myself go like this. Making sounds, rolling my hips — and enjoying it. Instead of yuck, it feels yum. Something inside me stirs, frees itself, wants to get out with a groan and moves through my body. Hello, kundalini energy, is that you? In any case, it's great "un-blocking", as they say in tantra-speak. And it's not just role play — this is really me, without embarrassment or shame. Tantra lifts the taboos around sex, but it's not pornographic. This "intimate night" feels like totally new territory. But never like an orgy.

It all ends with me giving a sensual full-body massage to the charming kaftan wearer ("You can touch me anywhere you like") and receiving one in return. We might never see each other again, but we treat each other as gently and passionately as if we were love-struck teenagers. I don't care anymore that I am in a room full of naked strangers. All I can feel is how I melt under the soft



BABA DEZ SHOWS UP WEARING A PAIR OF NAPPIES. PEOPLE KISS IN THE CORNERS. IT'S WONDERFUL, ECSTATIC AND WILD.

touch. My skin is one big receptor of, well, universal love. There, I said it.

DAY TWO, AND I am soul-washed by now, sparkling and shining from within. A woman named Jessica Galactic Butterfly — we are clearly in the rainbow region — offers a workshop full of Omms and orgasmic sounds. In the main theatre, an Australian practitioner explains how to identify and heal sexual abuse with tantra, while in another room, the "Youth Speak" forum starts — a panel of teens and tweens who "tell how it is" and clearly expect more from sex ed than just how to roll a condom over a banana. Brave stuff.

As my reservations fade, my respect for this sari- and purple-clad crowd grows. These are fun-loving people who are serious and passionate about helping the world, one orgasm at a time. They come in where conventional therapy ends. Or to say it in the words of MC Peter Thomas, who looks like a gracefully aged Jesus: "Millions of people walk around only half-alive. If we honour and express our sexual energy as our life force, we become more loving and more creative in everything."

Creative indeed. We are off to the "Lover's Mask Ball" that night, a fundraiser for the Youth Speak forum. Goldie, my Kiwi companion, covers her upper body and bare

breasts in metallic paint. I squeeze her into a lacquer corset. To top it all off, she lets a black rubber dick dangle from her crotch: "I want to embody my masculine side."

I taste a herbal concoction called Bliss Tea before dancing my socks off among some outrageous costumes. Baba Dez shows up wearing a pair of nappies. A lot of people kiss in the corners. It's wonderful, ecstatic and wild, and that's all I remember.

The next morning, I almost forget to put something on before I cross the road to the beach for an early swim. Oops. Two days in tantra land, and my inhibitions dissolve like sand in the waves. Which is a good preparation for what I am about to witness in the auditorium today. Something quite extraordinary. No, not the interesting-looking lips of the Fox Woman during the Quodoushka introduction. Nor Liana Galland, an impressive mountain of a woman from Byron Bay who praises "The Bottom End of the Business" and encourages us to have a more relaxed relationship with our anus (hint: Try a "rosebud massage" and stop calling someone an arsehole).

The highlight of my day is a pouchy bald man named Andrew Barnes, who looks like a friendly vacuum-cleaner salesman but is highly regarded not just in the world of sacred sexuality, but of conventional sex therapy as well. He has studied with Eastern masters and American experts, published a picture book about yonis (maybe not quite for your mother's coffee table), promotes "cuddle parties" and has specialised in a technique that he calls "body de-armouring" to help women experience "energetic orgasms".

We get a demonstration. The attractive conference organiser acts as guinea pig. She takes off her sarong and lies naked with her eyes closed on a table in the middle of the auditorium. When she goes into a kind of trance, Barnes starts to move his hands not on, but above her body like a magician, occasionally touching pressure points on her throat or knees. She soon heaves and moans, her body shivers, she doesn't stop, she clearly comes. Over a hundred people watch with utter reverence. No sniggers, no heavy breathing anywhere.

Dodgy? Nope. Dignified, yes. Divine? Who knows. What makes sex sacred is not the incense or the candles — it's your full presence. I am grateful that all this knowledge is out there, as exotic or shocking as it may seem. And that it's spreading.

Time to pack my bags. Goldie must have had a visitor at our apartment while I was conferencing. Next to her unmade bed sits a bottle of almond oil and a half-finished bar of dark chili chocolate. It speaks of pure bliss. M

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