

LIFESTYLE 

Sex and the sjambok: tough talk with seasoned BDSM mistress

Professional disciplinarian Mistress Baton talks about the right way to get into BDSM, the ethics of desire, and the trouble with "whorarchy"

12 December 2021 - 00:03

BY PAULA ANDROPOULOS



Mistress Baton poses at a bar in Melville, Johannesburg

Image: Gerry Pelsler

Here is what I think you should know about Mistress Baton:

She's strikingly beautiful in photographs, with sculpted features and an imposing mien. She's funny and kind over the phone, acutely self-aware with a deep, throaty laugh that detonates explosively, gloriously, several times over the course of our conversation.

She's a wellspring of niche knowledge, with a bent for social-justice work. And for the past seven-and-a-half years, she's enjoyed considerable success as an adult entertainer, a professional disciplinarian, and a BDSM film producer.

Human beings are deeply, strangely squeamish about their own sexual proclivities. The world of kink and pain play has evolved into a (profitable) culture unto itself, but is still consigned to the shadows, laden with taboos, freighted with the weight of our heteronormative, mainstream misconceptions; our unkind prudishness, our ignorance.

I spoke to Mistress Baton — who is, incidentally, nothing short of an idol in the local BDSM community — about the ethics of desire, the practicalities of entering into BDSM relationships, and the importance of combatting "whorarchy" (the idea that one sex worker is better than another) and advocating for the rights of sex workers in SA and abroad.

WHO AND WHAT

Mistress Baton is a disciplinarian, which she characterises as being "similar to a dominatrix, but more disciplined, and corporal-punishment orientated. It's more formal and high-protocol." Within the world of BDSM, it's important to be clear about one's roles and appellations: Mistress Baton identifies as a dominant sadist. "When I first put cane to bum, I knew this was going to be a very large part of my life," she recalls. "I immediately loved, *loved* it."

About seven years ago, she was outed without her consent, a deeply traumatic occurrence that has since, fortunately, “set her free”, and enabled her to take up her cane in a full-time professional capacity without worrying about compromising herself, her friends or her relatives, all of whom are now in the know. Her specialties include sjambok work and a very specific style of judicial caning, among other things.

Ms Baton films content with other dominatrices and disciplinarians all over the world. In order to protect herself and her clients, collaborators, and playmates, she maintains strict professional and ethical standards. “I prefer high protocol: I’m very formal in my manner with clients and with my own stable of slaves and submissives. That protects everybody. Otherwise, the nature of my job means that people can try to get over-familiar, sometimes,” Mistress Baton says.

“You can just imagine the setting: it’s always naked people in front of me, and if you’re naked and vulnerable in front of somebody like me – or in front of anybody – it usually facilitates intimacy, an intimate feeling in the brain, much more quickly than normal [or everyday sexual] situations.”

Mistress Baton likens the phenomenon to what sometimes happens in techno or rave settings: “The fact that people are dancing together and taking drugs together forces them to be much more intimate and friendly with people than they would in other situations. It’s similar.”

Indeed, according to the Mistress, feelings of closeness and trust are essential, valuable components of a BDSM session, not least of all because people are often “bondaged” or bound in front of somebody else. Needless to say, thorough communication and transparency are essential to a healthy and positive encounter.

ON VIOLENCE AND CONSENT

“I have a very thorough questionnaire that I send to people who want to session with me. There are medical questions, there are questions about their expectations, their limits, and their preferences,” Ms Baton says.

“This way, I weed out any unsuitable or incompatible people, and vet people who are going to expect services from me that I don’t offer. [In that case] I just say to them that I can’t see them, because it won’t be a pleasant experience for either of us.”

Misconceptions about pain play and BDSM are still abundant and pervasive in 2021.

“People often think that it’s violent, but it’s the complete opposite of violence,” says Mistress Baton, “because violence is never consensual. [What I do] is *absolutely* consensual, and people have a desire for it. Masochists exist, and they really just love receiving pain, for many different reasons.”

“Ethical masochism does exist. When I do a session, I am never, ever upset. It’s sort of like a meditation – I make sure that I’m completely calm, I’m never mad at the person I’m going to beat, because then it would not be ethical anymore,” she says. “It’s actually a very calm and gentle environment. Obviously, there’s the pain and the corporal punishment part, but what happens in between every set of six strokes that I administer, is I go to the person, and I stroke their shoulder, I stroke their hair if they want to be touched, of course – and I make sure that they’re okay and that they want to continue.”

POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS

Some of Mistress Baton’s clients are in their 70s and early 80s.

Some are heterosexual men who only feel comfortable exploring bi-sexual scenarios with Mistress Baton, under threat of duress in a role-play setting.

It’s clear to me, in talking to Mistress Baton, that one of the main, unsung roles of the disciplinarian or dominatrix is creating and holding a (safe) space for people’s desires and fantasies, regardless of what’s typically expected from them in sexual and/or romantic contexts.

"I also wish that people knew that BDSM is not always sexual. I think people assume that, because there's a naked person in the room, it must be," she says. Indeed, Mistress Baton's own sadism is completely non-sexual: "I don't get horny and I do not allow any sexual [behaviours] in sessions or perform any sexual practices. So even though, yes, I am a sex worker, it does not mean that there's any sex involved," she says.

Why, then, I ask, does she characterise herself as a sex worker at all?

"Because of whorarchy," Mistress Baton says immediately. "Sex workers experience so much prejudice from people in the world, that to practice prejudice upon one another is just absolutely absurd. Historically, dominatrices used to be sort of in the middle of this hierarchy of sex workers. At the bottom of the hierarchy would be full-service sex workers who worked on the street and at truck stops; one rung up would be people working in a high-class brothel.

"But even though I don't offer sexual services, even though I'm never naked, I'm still a sex worker because I work with people's deepest fantasies," Mistress Baton explains. "For me it's not sexual, but for most of the people I see for sessions, it is a sexual experience. I work in the adult industry, and I refuse [to perpetuate] the whorarchy. I don't think I'm better than a full-service sex worker. I am the same. She is my sister," she says.



Mistress Baton says "look out for people who say 'anything goes'."

Image: Supplied

BDSM & KINK FOR BEGINNERS

"If somebody wants to see a BDSM professional (like a professional dominatrix) they should absolutely regard it as a red flag if the person doesn't have a website with their current information displayed," advises Mistress Baton.

"That is the most important thing. There are many types of BDSM and many types of BDSM professionals: you get sensual doms, you get scat doms, you get disciplinarians; so it's extremely important to research the person that you want to go to," she says. "I would be wrong for somebody who's looking for sensual domination, for example, because it is impossible for me to be flirty, or to be anything but strict. I am extremely strict and cruel."

Mistress Baton cautions newbies to "look out for people who say 'anything goes'. She also recommends that kink-curious individuals take advantage of Fetlife, a social platform that connects local and international communities and enables people to exchange information.

"You can always ask for references. Say you're a female submissive who wants to get a Master. You can absolutely ask for references before you have anything to do with them," Mistress Baton says.

The parameters of your relationships with your sexual partners are totally up to you, but almost every seasoned "kinkster" will stress the importance of "pre-play" negotiations.

"With my own stable of slaves and submissives, I resend them my questionnaire every year, in the beginning of the year, because one's fetishes also evolve over time, as do one's BDSM interests," says Mistress Baton.

ON ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY

"Ethical pornography, to me, should be representative of gender diversity and sexual diversity," says Mistress Baton. "I prefer porn where the performers are owners of the content, so I prefer indie porn where it's not [coming from] the big production houses; where people have more control over what they earn and what they own. Obviously, every participant needs to be of legal age," she says.

"People have this misconception that all or most people in porn do it against their will, and that's absolutely not the case. Many of us absolutely love what we do: it's a completely symbiotic relationship with our audiences. People in porn can make a lot of money, they are not [inevitably] there against their will, and the sex industry is not the hub of human rights violations that people think it is."

ON PROTECTING SEX WORKERS

"The only way we'll ever be completely safe is if sex work is fully decriminalised in SA," says Mistress Baton. If you want to learn more and lend your voice to the cause, you would be well-advised to familiarise yourself with (and donate to) SWEAT (Sex Workers Education & Advocacy Taskforce) and similar organisations, which aim to advocate for, protect, and unify sex workers."



Mistress Baton in her dominatrix outfit

Image: Supplied

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

“Most people know their partner’s preferences about everything: their favourite sports team, their favourite colour, their biggest fear. But most people don’t know their partner’s deepest sexual fantasies, and for me there’s something wrong with intimacy in relationships because of that. People expect their partner’s fantasies to be heteronormative, and monogamous in nature; and that’s not how most people’s fantasies work. People should be more frank with each other at the beginning of relationships regarding sex.”

In the course of doing research for this article, I briefly spoke to “Jinx”, a semi-professional sub(missive) who sometimes works in adult entertainment. She had the following to say about her relationship to BDSM culture and why she thinks people are so drawn to it, in spite of the judgment it elicits from the vanilla masses: “For the most part, people in the kink/BDSM community are very welcoming and kind. Kink and BDSM can be great ways to connect with people on both a psychological and physical level. It’s also a way to express vulnerability in a way in which I don’t feel comfortable doing in my ordinary or ‘vanilla’ life. It’s very liberating,” Jinx

emphasises.

“I think many people have this totally misguided notion that BDSM/kink/pain play are about an abuse of power (thanks *50 Shades of Grey!*), and that’s not the case – when done correctly, at its core, all of the above are about informed and willing consent. People who are properly educated in how to engage with the above understand consent and it forms the very basis of any “play” in which participants engage. Most kinksters I’ve met understand consent better than most vanilla people,” she says.

“There’s also a raging stereotype that people who engage in sexual activities that aren’t vanilla are inherently psychologically damaged in some way, and that’s just not the case. That’s not to say many people in the community are without trauma,” she interjects, “but kink and BDSM are often – perhaps seemingly ironically – a great way to heal from that trauma. It’s really a matter of ‘different strokes for different folks’ (pun intended), and I encourage people who are not familiar with the scene to have open and intellectually honest discussions with people who are, instead of taking cues from popular media which are, more often than not, total fabrications/misrepresentations,” Jinx says.

• Visit sweat.org.za to find out more about the campaign to decriminalise sex work in SA.

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