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Starr Booty Takes Manhattan

July 26 - August 1, 1991 Volume 7, Number 30

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ABOUT OUR COVER

RuPaul Charles (Starr Booty), former star of Atlanta's club scene, is now Queen of Manhattan. David A. Moore asked him on life then and now and reports on page 24.



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To many people in Atlanta, RuPaul Charles is somewhat legendary. For those who may not have been in Atlanta in the 80s, RuPaul was described by local radio station Album 88 as the "Master of Self Promotion." When the straight press took notice and Atlanta Magazine posed the question: "Is RuPaul for Real?" it became obvious that, yes, he was, and a successful career as a very unusual performer was destined to be born.

After appearing in several cult movies here, ("Mahogany II" and more notably "Starbooty") the six foot seven vocalist, actor, and fashion androgine left Atlanta to seek fame and fortune in New York. RuPaul came back for a visit recently, and took the time to share some of his thoughts, feelings, and plans for the future.

ETC: Where are you from originally? I know that you lived in Atlanta for some time, before you moved to NY.

RuPaul: Actually, I moved here in 1976. I was like 14 years old, and I went to Northside High School. One of my classmates was Jasmine Guy from "A Different World," she was in that same class, isn't that wild?

I'm actually from San Diego, but I felt like I really became myself when I started living in Atlanta. I felt like I was born again really, I mean San Diego was like this, oh I don't know, I felt like I was in this coma or something until I came here.

ETC: So you actually spent some pretty formative years here.

RuPaul: Right, I feel like I came out, as it were. I mean I never really had to come out of a closet because I've never been in one. I've always been a pretty flamboyant personali-

ty. I feel like as a human being I became more of the me that I am now.

The South has always been conducive to eccentric personalities. You're able to breathe and express yourself artistically, I believe, moreso than in republican conservative belts, or maybe it's the religion and the fact that it's Baptist and not Catholic. I don't know, there's a definite difference here.

ETC: How long have you been performing? I saw a tape on Cable Channel 12 called "Dog People." You had big blonde hair and you were performing with a band called Wee Wee Pole.

RuPaul: Yeah it was '83. I was living here in Atlanta with my brother-in-law and my sister and I had enrolled in Northside School of The Performing Arts. I always wanted to become a performer, but for the first five years I was here I worked for my brother-in-law's car business. I would travel all over the country selling and buying cars, and one day I was watching "The American Music Show" on Public Access (Cable Channel 12), and The Now Explosion was on that show. James Bond (Julian Bond's brother) and Dick Richards, who is, you know, FunTone Records, were on there too.

So anyway, I wrote in and met everybody and became part of the show, and they were my entry way into the Atlanta Club Scene because they were performing around town. So, I put together this band myself and I began opening for them and appearing as a special guest. My group was called RuPaul & The U-Hauls which later became Wee Wee Pole. In fact one of the U-Hauls was at Velvet when I performed there recently. She has a seven month old baby now!

But eventually Wee Wee

Pole broke up, and I started doing solo stuff, recording, doing little cult films. And, at the same time performing in New York. Actually I did move to NYC in '84, but I came back here in '85 to do "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" at this theatre. That was a big success and that led to my record. It was really a great time.

I left shortly after that, in November of 1987. Me, Larry Tee, and LaHoma packed up everything in the Now Explosion Van and drove to New York. On the way up there the van had a blow out and it spewed all of LaHoma's stuff out onto I-85.

ETC: How far up the coast were you when that happened?

RuPaul: I think it was Anderson, S.C. It was incredible. It was like our entry into the "belly of the beast," as it were. We didn't get hurt or anything, it just really shook us up, you know, and it's like nothing's ever been the same since. It was the beginning of all our new adventures! It's really funny how things like that happen.

ETC: What made you decide to move to NY?

RuPaul: Well, being human, I guess you just want more and more. Midtown started getting real conservative, you know? I mean they started tearing down affordable housing for us bohemians and building all these high rise buildings. I guess it was just the next natural thing. In fact, I think every artist, if he has big ambitions will go to the "big city," if he wants to sell his wares.

It's great here, though. I like Atlanta a lot. I feel more like a resident of this planet now, instead of a resident of one state, you know what I mean? Recently Larry Tee, LaHoma, and I went to Italy. It didn't seem that foreign to me. It's so far away, and I ex-

pected it to be so different, but it wasn't. I think the world has become such a global village.

ETC: Do you consider yourself to be a very spiritual person?

RuPaul: Oh yes! I think everybody is extremely spiritual, a lot of people just don't recognize it. I went back and forth between coasts back in '88, you know, just kind of looking for myself trying to find where I came from. While I was on the west coast I got to see those Joseph Campbell tapes, "The Power of Myth" on PBS. It was incredible. He studied myths and the plight of mankind through centuries. I learned a lot from that, and from Shirley McLaine books. She's great too. In fact, I'm writing a book of my own right now, called "Love Your Funky Self." It'll be out soon.

ETC: So we know a lot about where RuPaul has been since he left Atlanta. Where is he going now?

RuPaul: I've got a new single out, it's just come out, called "I've Got That Feeling" and it's on Cardiac Records, a subsidiary of Virgin Records. Additionally, Dee-Lite is producing a couple of singles for me on the new album. It's really wild to be on a label that's so accessible! I've always been on FunTone before, and it's an independent label, so it's not backed by some huge conglomerate like Virgin. But anyway, I'm going to be doing a sequel to Starbooty, possibly with La-Homa. I'd really like to get back into doing those cultish movies we used to do here. They were so much fun!

And, I hope to be back in Atlanta, real soon. The new record will be out at the end of the summer so I'll be all over the place doing one-nighters and hopefully, I'll get to come back here. ▼

STARR BOOTY takes MANHATTAN

DAVID A. MOORE TALKS WITH RUPAUL CHARLES

PHOTO:
NOLAN
1986

