

The Court Circular

*“You should study the Peerage, Gerald...
It is the best thing in fiction the English
have ever done.”*

Oscar Wilde
1854-1900

A Woman of No Importance

C N Y

A ROYAL WELCOME FOR EMPRESS X RAN-DEE & EMPEROR VI STEVEN

The staff of The Court Circular joins the entire general membership along with past and present Monarchs of the Imperial Court of New York in celebrating the Coronation of Empress X Ran-Dee and Emperor VI Steven. In lieu of your editor's regular Teatime, we offer this Coronation Special Interview with our incoming Monarchs, to whom we wish blessings for a fun-filled and productive reign.

KAY SERA: Thank you both for your time in this particularly hectic period. What with Court functions, professional obligations and preparations for April 20th, I know Steven has been a man possessed. Ran-Dee, on top of everything else, is once again doing choreography and rehearsing the opening number for *Night of a Thousand Gowns*. Ran-Dee, how long have you been a member of the Court?

RAN-DEE: I've been a member for five years, but *Night of a Thousand Gowns* 1996 will be my sixth Ball. I wasn't yet a member that first year, though Johnny and I worked on the decorations and actually supplied the Court banner. We knew of the Court and the Ball through Phil and Bill.

KAY SERA: How long doing have you been doing drag?

RAN-DEE: Oh, I began doing it out on Fire Island – not as much of a serious thing – more as a camp thing. Very few people did drag out there. But I've always been a performer, and on the Island it was Panzi (Thom Hansen) and Randy, Panzi and Randy.

KAY SERA: Do you mean...that is to say...as...

RAN-DEE: No! No. As a performing team – Panzi and Randy. Panzi did drag and I was the straight man, so to speak, the guy. Then about ten years ago, we did an act that required us to switch roles by the end of the number, so I found myself in Panzi's dress, and I loved it! We went on to do our



The Court Circular

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of the Imperial Court of New York



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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To raise funds for Gay & Lesbian Community and social service organizations; to provide a safe, social environment for people with the same interest as those of the corporation; to create and promote positive Community awareness of the ideals of the Imperial Court System.

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The Executive Board of the Imperial Court of New York meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month. The General Membership meets on the first Wednesday of each month at The Center, 208 West 13th St. at 8:00pm.

Lennon Sisters act— that was my first real drag performance — and so, there I was, sort of in the middle of things. I found it to be a great creative release. What I enjoy most is performance, becoming a different person, the show business aspect. Whether it's at a party or onstage, it's all a performance, creating a character who is not *me* anymore.

KAY SERA: Steven, have you ever done drag? You look so well in proper gentlemen's formals.

STEVEN: Once. For Hallowe'en. There were several of us — Ann Tique, Kitty, Vesta Buhle, Fred (or rather, Lita), and me. We were the Shop-Rite Can-Can Girls (it was Hallowe'en) and we won best costume at Splash.

KAY SERA: Surely, you must have enjoyed that.

STEVEN: Up to a point. The shoes were a killer. Drag is not normally my thing. Vesta was fond of saying I was "drag impaired".

KAY SERA: How did you come to The Imperial Court, then?

STEVEN: I came here from Washington, DC, a repressed little town, really, where there's a lot of drag but it isn't really out. I had a friend who'd moved to Iowa and joined the Court out there who said there were men in the Court who didn't do drag, but I thought it was unique to Iowa, or something. I'd only seen the New York Court at, say, the Aids Walks, where the girls were highly prominent. I just didn't know there were men "doing" men, so to speak, here in New York.

KAY SERA: How charming.

STEVEN: But I liked the people in the Court, and Marjorie (Dunne) asked me to join during Coco's reign, as escorts were needed for the upcoming Coronation of Ron and Billie Ann.

KAY SERA: What's important to you, in your role as a Monarch?

STEVEN: An active, visible Emperor will help people see the Court as a varied, vital fundraising entity. The Imperial Court must often fight the public perception that we're just a bunch of rich drag queens who will spend a hundred dollars on a dress to make ten dollars at a fund raiser. Drag does make us unique, but as Emperor I want to say "Look at me, I play here — you can play here, too." One of my wishes would be to step down at the end of my reign to *another Emperor*, that this not be just a sometime role to the Empress, but a tradition in its own right. It's me this year, it can be you next year.

KAY SERA: So, kids, what changes do you foresee during your reign?

RAN-DEE: Oh, changes. I would like to create more public awareness for us. We attend many events, individually and as a group, but we don't often make a big enough statement. Every time we make an appearance we should create enthusiasm, interest, awareness for our major fundraiser. People must begin to know who we are. It would be wonderful to see us do more things as a group — I love an entourage, and it makes an impact.

STEVEN: I'd like to see a focus, some goal-setting in our fundraising work, a way by which we can measure our progress through the year. We do many events, but I'd like to see them more clearly directed toward a cumulative goal. And we should be more public. People should know who we are and what we do. Suppose, for example, one morning you opened *The New York Times* to find an article on the Court's coronation of new Monarchs on the Society page? Or a piece about *Night of a Thousand Gowns* — how would we feel about that? Would we want that? And, we must transcend the culture's fondness for a "flavor of the month." We've got to be a continuing presence, not "oh drag, that was in the '90's."

RAN-DEE: I want to do everything I do to the fullest extent possible. This Coronation is allowing me to bring two things important to me — fundraising and performance — together in the extreme. In Ran-Dee, I've created what I hope will be a memorable character who will make a difference. I want to raise a lot of money, and have a really good time. For me, that makes it worthwhile. It's not just putting on a dress, that's not good enough. You gotta be out there, making a difference.

KAY SERA: Thank you both — may you reign peacefully and set an example to us all. 

NY TAKES SNOWBALL BY STORM

Hartford, February 24 — Twenty-four of New York's finest men and women attended *Snowball IV: Carnival Night in Rio* at The Nutmeg Empire's third Coronation. The Imperial Court of Connecticut's Coronation was combined with the annual House Of Pleasure event, and drew over 700 people from all points of the Empire and beyond. ✓

The Imperial Court of New York was

asked to perform, and as usual, brought the house to a wild frenzy of excitement. The New York Court's simple, funny and very effective production number was choreographed by the fabulous Fabu LaRue. The Court took an award at the Victory Brunch for Best Walk.

Empress IX Philomena was awarded the Empress pin by Mucha Mucha. Trixie was given a plaque by Empress I, Lola, on behalf of the Court for her work as Ambassador. The new Empress, Jessica, graciously welcomed and gave thanks to all the Courtiers from New York.

What was the most fun was the "togetherness" of the New York group, and it radiated out. The Connecticut Court learned that New York is not stuffy nor snobbish, but a lot of fun.  by Howard Hadley

SAN FRANCISCO CORONATION

Brian and Donna's Excellent Adventure (A Musical Journey Through Time). The Out-of-Town show was held on Friday evening in the Peacock Court Ballroom of the Mark Hopkins We performed our smashing "Crazy For You" medley and they loved us!

The Coronation was held at the Gift Center Pavilion, and celebrated the stepping down of Empress Donna Sachet and Emperor Brian Benamati. Shortly after midnight, a new pair of Monarchs was crowned: Empress Cocketelia, and Emperor Steven.

Following a late night of festivities, we barely awoke on Sunday to board the bus for the annual trip to honor Emperor I Joshua Norton at Woodlawn Cemetery – at 8:00 a.m.! (Who knew there was an 8:00 in the morning as well as at night?) After a lovely catered continental breakfast on the lawn of the cemetery, the procession began up the hill to the grave site, with a brass band leading the way. We were thoroughly entertained by the Raw-Rahs (professional cheerleaders), the Gay and Lesbian Chorus of San Francisco and many more wonderful surprises, including the blessing of the site by the Vestal Virgins of San Francisco. The rain held off just long enough, and then we all proceeded back to the bus and on toward the Victory Brunch back at the Mark Hopkins' Peacock Court. The food was excellent and the place was S.R.O.! Among the special presentations, the NY Court received one to Empress Philomena as attendant to the Monarchs, and another to the entire Court for Best Court Presentation. We were a sight of true glamour and chic

couture. Let's face it, darlings, we are an elegant bunch of swells! 

by Countess Fabu LaRue.

A DECADE OF HUMANITARIANISM

Ten years ago, George Dudley and Vivian Shapiro decided to throw the most fabulous drag ball ever seen in New York City. With their friends, they transformed the ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria into a fantasyland, hoping that New York would show up. Little did they know that this seed of a brilliant idea would grow into a tall jewel-bearing tree, and New York would never be the same again. *The Night of a Thousand Gowns* had arrived.

Vivian Shapiro remembers: "George and I never imagined the Ball would be such a success. In the mid-1980's, we were desperately fighting for AIDS funding... Much of the community was appalled by the idea of a drag fundraising event. They wanted the gay community to have one single identity, that of the grey suit. George and I believed that the breadth and the beauty of the community had every right to be portrayed to the media. The International Court System had done extraordinary work across the United States – New York needed to be part of this world".

That first year, over 700 royal guests witnessed the crowning of George Dudley as The Eagle Emperor I, and well-known drag celebrity Sybil Bruncheon as the Atlas Empress I. The event drew royalty from all over the country, including Empress Nicole from San Diego, who was named Queen Mother of New York. The ball not only drew unprecedented publicity in the major media, but also raised a lot of money for five lesbian and gay organizations. Everything about that first Ball was *excess*. Big hair, big gowns, big boas, big shoes, and *very* big girls.

In the following years, the royal subjects came back for more. *Night of a Thousand Gowns* became one of the most anticipated charity events of the season, raising money for many organizations, creating awareness of the drag community, and giving all those butch boys an excuse to put on a gown. But as often happens, the core group of volunteers began to burn out, and a little hair pulling resulted. After four years, the Imperial Court of New York was on the verge of entering Never-Never Land.

The turning point for the Court came in 1990 when the then reigning Forbidden

Empress IV Camille Beauchamps (Ben Freeman) got together with Razor Sharp (Empress V), Sal Galano (Empress VI, Saleen) and Charles Ching (Empress VII, Coco Lachine) to reorganize the Imperial Court into the membership organization that it is today. With absolutely no money in the bank, the group of four set out to do the impossible. With each digging deep into his own pocket, a loan from the Community Center, and a show at the Roxy for gay fashion designer Anthony Wong put on for a fee, the new board set out to revitalize the Court and put on the best drag ball ever. They were convinced that with a good idea and a sense of fun, the community would come back. That year, after starting over from scratch, the reconditioned Imperial Court of New York raised \$11,000 for the Lesbian & Gay Community Center.

Today, the Imperial Court of New York is a proud and strong part of the gay, lesbian and transgendered community. It is the oldest court on the east coast, a proud member of the sixty-five chapter-strong International Court System, in itself the largest transgender organization in the world, possibly the largest gay organization in the world. The Court has raised awareness, increased visibility, educated and entertained countless people from all walks of life, in the process raising over a hundred thousand dollars for many lesbian and gay social services and AIDS organizations.

Ten years ago, Vivian & George had an inspired vision. Six years ago, Ben, Razor, Sal and Charles had a dream. Today, over eighty active members of the Imperial Court of New York keep both the vision and the dream very much alive in the heart and soul of New York.  by Charles Ching

VICTORIA'S SECRETS

Welcome to the dish on what's up and coming in the paint and tease world!

There are more "stay-put" lipsticks in the marketplace than "Carter" has pills, but do they really work? I've tried many brands of lipsticks in my time and until now I have stayed with MAC. It's always worked well for me, rarely needing touching up once in place and goes on very nicely though a bit too matte looking. Recently though, thanks to the kindness of the Ducesse Marjorie Dunne (who has the "IN" to Revlon and the latest Dolly Parton Wigs & Makeup line), I have begun to use the Revlon version of this new marvel of lip accoutrement. There are

now countless colors to paint your lips with, and so many brands to choose from – one can certainly find a familiar name to be comfortable with. Revlon goes on smoothly and stays that way, giving a creamy finish and works best when preceded by the Revlon Glosser Stick. However, I find unlike MAC the Revlon Stay Put Lipsticks give me a bit of caking in the corner of the mouth that must be repaired a couple of times throughout the evening. I would love to hear your input on any of these new phenomena.

Another breakthrough that's the buzz of makeup artists but hard to find in stores is something new from Maybelline. Makeup artists almost all without exception choose Maybelline Great Lash. It's very dark, covers well and doesn't cake the lashes but until now has lacked an applicator brush. Now Great Lash is packaged with a new brush that's much thicker than the old one and has bristles at varying angles to catch the lashes more efficiently. It comes in a sassy black & gold container – a relief from the old tacky pink & green.

Last on my agenda for this session is the entire makeup shopping package. I am certain there are many of you who are still running from store to store trying to find the endless needs of a drag queen. To you all, I have only one thing to say... Alcone. This is a wonderful little theatrical makeup store on West 19th Street in Manhattan between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. They are in a completely different league from the common drugstore. The staff is friendly, courteous and very accommodating. They publish a catalogue, and have a warehouse in Long Island City for you ladies on the flip side of the East River. When I was out of town recently and found myself in dire need of Bob Kelly, Ben Nye & Steines products, they provided rapid mail order.

Alcone has several brands of base cover that can hide a beard better than Bob Dole can hide his true persona from middle America. You'll find one that's right for you at a better price than any bronzer from the Clinique counter at Bloomingdales. You'll look fabulous, with the skin of an angel...and who's to know? Just you and me and I'm not breathing a word!

Well my sweets, that's all for now. I hope you like my "Secrets." I think we could go far together, but to do so, I need YOU. Your input is a must, so let me hear

from you. Write your comments and/or beauty secrets to "Victoria's Secrets", care of The Circular. Until next time...Ciao!

by Princess Victoria Weston

BRAS & (NEWS) BRIEFS

Belated Anniversary wishes go out to Duchess Blaise Patrice & Tony - April 17 and to H.M.I.S.M. Emperor VI Steven & Princess Lita Austin - April 27. Steven & Lita returned to the scene of the crime to celebrate their second anniversary at the Buffalo Coronation, where they were surprised with an anniversary cake. Who says you can't have your cake and eat it too?

Countess Fabu La Rue has been appointed to the position of "raving" reporter for the Court Circular. She will be covering the Court's events as they happen. So be aware, she *may* be writing about you! Interested in a weekend mountain retreat on 1.5 wooded acres, with private lake rights only 1.75 hrs from NYC for under \$30,000.? Talk to Princess Trompe L'oeil.. Cherry Grove, Fire Island Sublet - spacious 1 bedroom unit with nice deck. Available May 20 - 31; June 24 - 30; July 16 - 26. Call Tom & Wolf at 212-929-6478. *Do I Hear A Walsh?* 55 Grove Street, Upstairs at Rose's Turn, Thursday, May 23, 8pm \$10.

Randy Riggs Productions Presents

Miss Saleen's
7th Annual

Miss New York City Pageant

*for female impersonators
and the*

Miss Greenwich Village Pageant



Saturday, June 8, 1996
9:00 p.m.

at the

Community House
Cherry Grove, Fire Island
\$20. donation
Includes Open "Stoli" Bar

Scheduled to Perform

Victoria Weston - Miss NYC 1994

Kitty Fouché - Miss NYC 1992

Vanessa Diamond - Miss NYC 1989

Bianca Neffattari - Miss Greenwich Village 1994
and Special Guest - Bella

for Contestant Applications, Ticket Sales & Information
please call:
Randy Riggs Productions

This Pageant is a Benefit for:
PWAC/NY, The Imperial Court of New York,
& The Arts Project of Cherry Grove