

Renaissance News



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September 1987

AIDS Benefit Show Plans Are Firm

It's Showtime For A Good Cause

That's right it's showtime. Well, almost. September 29th is the big night; the Travelling Trash & Talent Tuesday makes its grand debut. This talent/variety show is our way of contributing to the fight against AIDS and is an effort to show support for our brothers and sisters in the gay community. This show is something for us all to be excited about. It will be the first time that a non-gay aligned, grass roots, group has performed such a benefit in this area. So, help spread the word to make the show a success. I don't mean that you have to stand on street corners and shout about it, but do tell all your friends, crossdresser or straight. It's also an opportunity for us all to get out wearing a nice dress and pretty jewelry and get away with it! (You know how show biz people are.) The cocktail hour from 8:00 pm 'till 9:00 pm will give us an opportunity to mingle with the crowd and should be lots of fun.

At this point the confirmed acts for the show include Mecale St. John, Mr. Wayne, comedian and Master of Ceremonies Fred Anderson, comedian Ralph Harris Jr., Heart impersonators JoAnn & Trudi and yours truly. Negotiations are underway with the undergraduate Mask & Wig Troupe and I will be contacting both the *Evening Magazine* dancers and the *Pulsations* dancers. Unfortunately, Greg Thompson's Ladies of Burlesque have a scheduling conflict and cannot appear. Of course, our Special Guest Star, Stella, from KYW's Saturday Night Dead, will be there.

We are working on a production number involving The Famous(?) Renaissance Andrews Sisters impersonators with Mr. Wayne as Bette Midler. If it works it should be a production number to rival anything the Muppets ever did.

Speaking of the Muppets, I'm beginning to feel like that harried producer Kermit The Frog. We still need some technical personnel for behind the scenes activities. Volunteers, so far, include Emily, Therése, Alison, Sheila and my friend Chris from Chester. Backstage, makeup and hair will be handled by Donna Miller, Nikki [redacted] and a friend, Joey. JoAnn and Robin have been working on various aspects of our printing/art needs and even as I type this, member Joeline [redacted] is printing our tickets. Paula Sinclair has turned her public relations talents to promoting the show and another friend, Barb [redacted], has donated her Macintosh computer, LaserWriter and her considerable design skills to help JoAnn put together invitations to be mailed out to the general public. But, we still need help on the day of the show.

Another way you can help is by selling ads in the program. Ad rates are \$50, \$85 and \$160 for a quarter, half and full inside page. The inside front and back covers are \$175 and the back cover is \$200. If you know any merchants who are sympathetic to crossdressers or who would care that we are having an AIDS benefit, then please approach them about buying a program ad. We will also accept individual contri-

butions. Encourage your acquaintances to donate any amount to become a patron of the show. We will publish a list of these patrons in the program and send each patron a souvenir copy if we get their address.

Tickets are \$25 per person and are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. Tickets may be ordered by mail from Renaissance, or see JoAnn or myself at the next meeting. Let's all have fun in our finery and help a very good cause.

Garden Party Is A Hit With Members

Miss Paula Sinclair was our hostess for the August 22nd meeting at her home in Philadelphia. The theme for the gathering was a Garden Party and judging by the attendance, the party was a great success. Nineteen members and friends of Renaissance enjoyed themselves from 8:30 pm until well after midnight.

Seven or eight new faces were apparent in the crowd. (This observer is still amazed at the number of people attending meetings, considering that it is summertime.) It is hoped that they will return in September at our regular meeting location.

Paula spared no effort for this event. She provided arriving guests with a valet parking service and the food and beverages were dispensed to the party-goers by a butler! This lady knows how to throw a party. Thank you Paula for opening your home to us.

Renaissance Is In The Media's Eye

Renaissance members have been popping up in various media all over Philadelphia lately. JoAnn Roberts and Kate B. appeared on the "Talk with Anita" show on WCAU AM radio, July 30th. Anita Gevinson, the show's host, treated them with respect and sensitivity. She mentioned our AIDS benefit and gave our representatives time to talk about it. Several inquiries have been received as a result of the show.

The day after the WCAU appearance we were contacted by KYW-TV3 and asked to appear on *People Are Talking*. JoAnn Roberts, Angela Gardner and Donna Miller (GG) agreed to do the live show on August 14th. The show went reasonably well, although we were not that pleased with how the questions were asked by the show's hostess, Nancy Glass. We should have supplied her with appropriate questions. We learned a valuable lesson for

the next time members appear on television.

And appear they will. We spoke with Ms. Glass about appearing on her Lifetime Cable Network show *Attitudes*. We will be in touch with her producer very soon. AND, as a direct result of the KYW appearance, we have been asked to be on *People Are Talking* originating from WWOR, Channel 9, in New York. This is a unique opportunity since Channel 9 is distributed nationally through cable networks.

Last but not least, JoAnn and Dr. Bill Stayton appeared on the Carol Seline Show on WDTV, Talk 900 AM radio on August 21st. JoAnn reports that the show went very well and had about 9 callers, all very interesting. But the BIG news is that Ms. Celine is also a writer for Philadelphia Magazine and she will be doing an article about Renaissance in a coming issue.

Stay tuned for more info!

Outreach Efforts Are Underway

One of our members recently joined the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex (commonly called Quad S). As a member of Quad S, she was able to get a note about Renaissance in the society's newsletter. Because of that, Renaissance members Angela Gardener and Trudi Henry will be travelling to Ohio to speak before two classes in Human Sexuality.

Dr. David Pryzbyla, Associate Professor of Psychology at Denison University, Granville, Ohio, has invited them to address his classes on the problems associated with transgendered behavior.

Angela and Trudi will travel to Ohio to speak on September 21st.

On an international front, the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Toronto, Ontario, has a Gender Identity Clinic which receives many requests each year from U.S. citizens seeking information and help with gender problems. They do not, however, accept U.S. citizens in their program. The Clarke people saw our notice in the Quad S newsletter and asked for more information about us for their files. They will direct any U.S. inquiries to Renaissance.

Mona Lisa: Symbol of Unity

Mona Lisa, the adopted symbol of our group, is now available as a pin. This beautiful piece of jewelry was custom designed by Henri David of Halloween, in Philadelphia, exclusively for JoAnn Roberts. JoAnn is having Henri reproduce the piece for members of our community. The Sterling Silver pin is oval shaped (approx. 3/8" x 5/8") and is very detailed. Each one is hand finished by Henri himself, so each one is somewhat unique.

Members (full & associate) of Renaissance may purchase a pin for \$25, non-members \$40. If you are interested in displaying your transgendered unity and wish to obtain a pin, see JoAnn at a meeting or write to her at the address on the masthead.

Business Report For August

There were 19 people in attendance at the Graden Party. Funds collected totalled \$60. Income from sales of show ads & contributions are \$207. Funds expended were \$25 to the Parking Valet, \$25 to the Butler & \$12 for stationery. The treasury starting balance was \$30 and now stands at \$235.

Coming Events:

September

11th. Renaissance meeting
18th thru 20th, Pocono Fantasy Weekend
29th, AIDS Benefit Show

October

4th, Cha-Cha AIDS Benefit
17th. Renaissance meeting
30th, Henri David Halloween Ball

November

21st. Renaissance meeting

ERRATA

In the last issue we said that Henri David's Halloween Ball was to be held on Sat., Oct. 31st. It is on Fri., Oct. 30th. We regret the error.

The next meeting will be **FRIDAY, Sept 11th**, in King of Prussia

The Opinion Page

Too Few Happy Memories, By Paula Sinclair

I was re-reading a delightful book the other day, a very witty and entertaining volume called *Men in Frocks*. It is about the British drag scene from World War II up to Boy George. Much of the book consists of interviews with girls who have been crossdressing for ages. Although the book is full of wonderful one-liners, one in particular caught my eye this time, "Quite honestly," Belle says, talking about some of her adventures over the past 20 years, "you can go anywhere in a frock if you are bold enough."

I remember first reading that three years ago and thinking to myself, "Yeah, honey, easy for you to say. England is full of eccentrics. One more on the street wouldn't raise an eyebrow. But I live in very proper Philadelphia (at that time I was actually living in very blue collar South Philadelphia). The only time I can imagine going out in a dress would be Halloween or New Year's Day."

Funny how time and practice change things. Now, I go out dressed at least once a week and don't think twice about it. I don't worry about what other people will think or say when they discover that I am a man wearing women's clothes. And, interestingly enough, people who have seen me dressed many times no longer seem to notice that I'm in drag. My neighbors, for example, are just as friendly no matter if I am wearing slacks or a skirt. Belle's statement is more true now than I thought possible. Reading it again has made me think about how I have come to understand its veracity. My journey to this understanding has been unique to my personality. But I offer it as an encouragement to you who may wish to make the same trip.

Other people often think that crossdressers have a messed up sexuality. They call us fetishists, at best, and perverts most of the time. But as we know, crossdressing has many more pleasures than those we feel between our legs. Let us call those pleasures "freedom of expression". Only a few people are comfortable with openly expressed sexuality, except in some very special settings. But most people accept other forms of personal expression. I started my journey by compartmentalizing the erotic feelings, reserving them just for my bedroom. In other situations, I decided to express only the non-sexual facets of my personality that are satisfied by wearing women's clothes: glamour, elegance and beauty, all things that I do not have as a man.

On my first excursions in public, I have to confess, I didn't express these very well. To be blunt, I was an ugly creature without sexual allure (except, perhaps, to the visually impaired or terminally desperate). Although people did not compliment me, neither did they throw stones at me and chase me from the street. If there were rude comments, I didn't hear them.

How is it, then, that an admittedly ugly drag queen could avoid being driven away in shame and actually have an editor of the *New York Daily News* buy her a drink? The answer, I firmly believe, is comportment and attitude. Although I was shaking inside, outside I tried to present a cool — perhaps aloof — appearance. Instead of seeming to apologize for wearing women's clothes, I projected this question to others; "Why aren't you in drag too?" The Lord only knows what those people said behind my back, but who cares? At the end of the evening I

felt better about myself because not only did I survive, I blossomed.

That was the first time in nearly 30 years of crossdressing that I had ever gone out in public, but I promised myself it would not be the last. But, I did not want to merely duplicate that first time; I wanted to stretch my boundaries, to try things that would define the limits of my acceptance and my courage. My next step was going out to friendly restaurant regularly in drag. My weekly visits were surprising at first, but soon became expected. After awhile, the only comments about the gender symbols I wore came on those occasions when I was *not* in drag. My next step was to go to drag shows and hang around with the girls. I wanted to see if these people, who earn money based on the image they create, would be accepting of me. They were, and my self-confidence soared even more. After that goal, I set others; a fashion show at Wanamakers and lunch in Center City with friends, for example.

There are, to be sure, things that I would like to do that I still don't have the courage to do. And there are things that others do in drag that I can only hear or read about and wonder. Some of that wonderment is like what I felt when I read Belle's statement in 1984. But, then again, it isn't totally the same. Three years ago I didn't think anything was possible for me. Now, I not only know things are possible, I have done many of them. Thanks to the support I have received from friends and especially sisters, I have found my way out in the open. My only regret is that I have had only a couple of years of this wonderful freedom. If I had started working earlier, I would have many more happy memories.

Who Me? Do What? , by JoAnn Roberts

Four years ago this month I went to my first Joyce Dewhurst Pocono Fantasy weekend. I had been working on developing my image for about three years but had never been out, nor had I ever met another TV, ever! Scared, you ask? Hell, Yes!, I answer. I kept asking myself, "What if I look silly. What if they don't like me. What if somebody tries to put the "make" on me. What if..., What if..., What if..." I kept creating barriers.

Well, all the "What ifs" never happened. Instead I met the most wonderful group of people that made me feel right at home. And many of them have become very close personal friends. People that I am proud and pleased to be associated with and call friend.

Two of these people, in particular, come to mind, Denise Mason and Madam X. These two, more than any others have had the biggest influence on JoAnn's development. And two people could not be more different. Denise is rowdy, boisterous and overtly friendly, while "X" is quiet, serious and intense, although she does have a warped sense of humor. What they share in common that makes them both so special, is that they care about the people they meet. By the end of that first weekend I knew that I had made two new friends that would make a difference in my life. I keep in close contact with both even though they are not nearby.

Being around these two crazies and observing how they felt about their crossdressing behavior made me feel so much better about myself. I watched as they made sure that they spoke to everyone that weekend. It was important for them to help the novices feel comfortable. Now why was that? Because it feels good! It is so satisfying to know that something as simple as the word "Hello" can have such a tremendous impact on another human being.

Denise is a go-getter. If she thinks something needs to be done, she finds a way to do it. She has been organizing a group in the Connecticut area through her newsletter *The connecticutView*. She writes to everyone who writes to her and her list of names and addresses would rival some mail order businesses. She has been a model for me in her willingness to share her experiences and knowledge with others.

Madam X introduced me to New York night life and the TV scene there. Through her I met Jaini, (my closest female friend, after my wife, of course), Lee Brewster of the famous Mardi Gras Boutique, Cindi, Vicki, Sherri, and Morgan. All of these people have shown me what it means to accept yourself as you are and enjoy life.

Through Denise, in a round-about way, I met Trudi Henry and Angela Gardner. And through Angela I met Alison Laing and Melanie Bryan. The chemistry that wrought Renaissance began to work its wonder. After a few meetings between the five of us we decided to take the chance and announce the formation of our group. The rest is history still in the making.

If anyone had told me four years ago what I would be doing today, I'd have said they were crazy. Who me? Do what? Start a TV/TS support group; not bloody likely! But it did happen. Every journey begins with a first step and my first step was to get out and meet other people. And when I did, there were Denise, Madam X, Trudi, Angela, Melanie and Alison to greet me.

There are lots of people out there who need to know that we are here. Will you hold out your hand to steady your sister as she takes her first step? Will you be the first to say "Hello" before she finds her voice? I hope so because that person may be the most important friend you'll ever make!

Incorporation Completed

Renaissance is now a legally chartered Pennsylvania Non-Profit Corporation. The Articles of Incorporation were filed at the Department of State of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on August 12th, 1987. This is a milestone for the group. There is still some additional paperwork to file, but the Articles were the first step toward corporate status. Renaissance is now a legal entity, with corporate and fiscal responsibilities.

The next step will be selection of a Board of Directors and adoption of By Laws. Under Pennsylvania law, the initial incorporators have the responsibility of selecting the board and ratifying the By Laws. Once that is achieved, the By Laws then take effect and the group may operate lawfully within the state.

Renaissance News is the monthly publication of the Renaissance Education Association. Subscription and Associate Membership is \$12 per year. Full Membership in the group is \$30 per year.

Renaissance is a non-profit corporation which has the purpose of providing information about transgendered behavior to the general public and professional counsellors.

Renaissance meets once a month, on Saturday night. The dates vary due to Holidays and other conflicts. Starting time is 9:00 PM in the late Spring/Summer, and moves to 8:00 PM in the Fall/Winter. Meetings serve two purposes, a time to socialize and get to know one another, and to conduct the business of the group. Regular meetings are held in the King of Prussia area. Occasionally, we will meet other places and these will be noted in the newsletter.

Please come out and meet us; it may just change your life.