

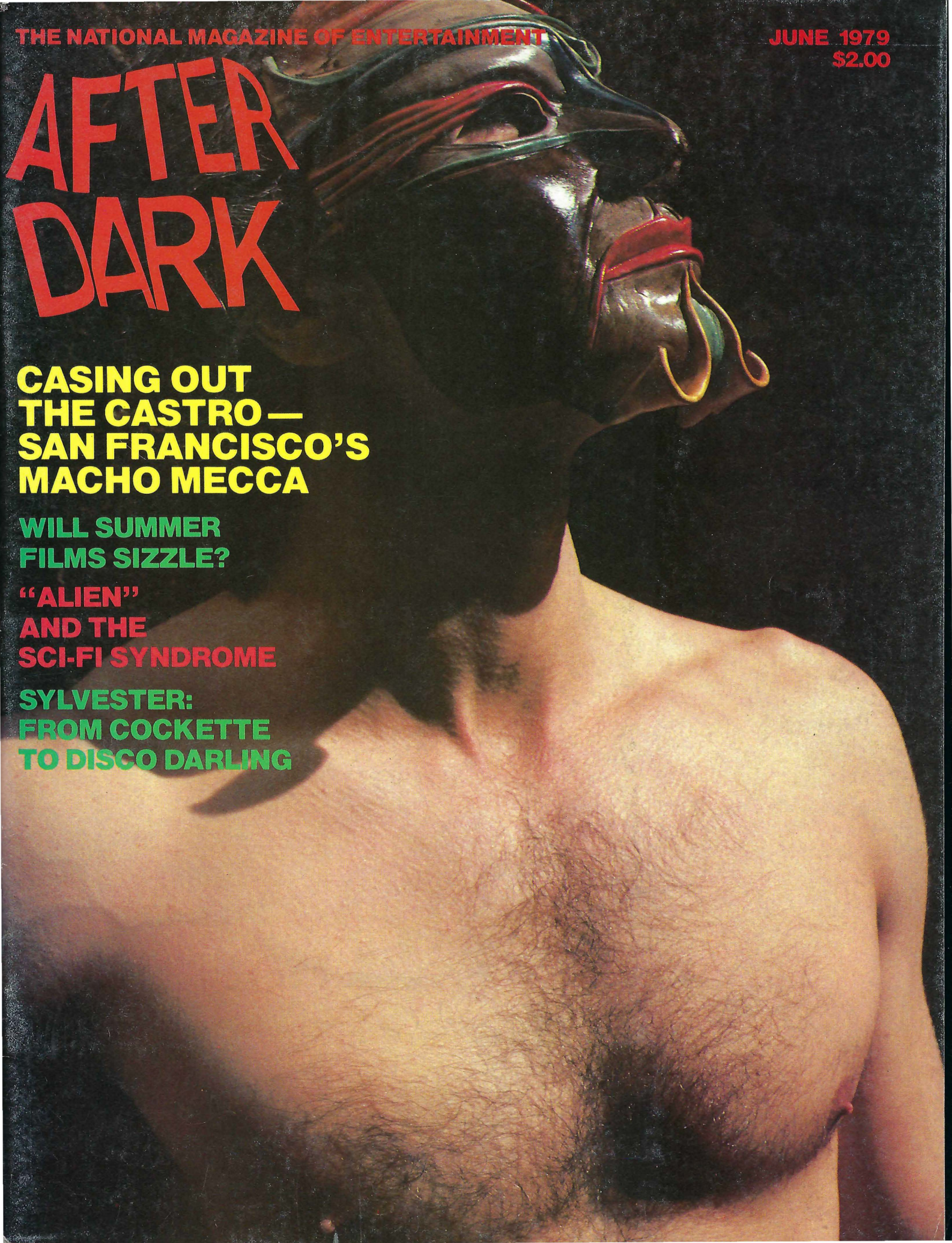
AFTER DARK

**CASING OUT
THE CASTRO —
SAN FRANCISCO'S
MACHO MECCA**

**WILL SUMMER
FILMS SIZZLE?**

**"ALIEN"
AND THE
SCI-FI SYNDROME**

**SYLVESTER:
FROM COCKETTE
TO DISCO DARLING**





ON THE COVER:

Jack Chuites' leather masks, particularly when donned by a well-sculpted model, conjure up the mystery, magic, and humdly sensual atmosphere of San Francisco's Castro Street, the subject of a lavish, color-splashed, and multifaceted feature, "Casing Out the Castro," beginning on page 38. (Photo by James Armstrong)

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Steve Shapiro/Syigma



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Barbra Streisand goes for the jugular and other things as witnessed in this scene with Ryan O'Neal from the forthcoming Warner Bros.' film, *The Main Event*. The highly anticipated Barwood production is part of the movie saturation that floods the country each summer. Stephen Schaefer takes a detailed look at the mixed seasonal bag coming our way in "Movies in Heat: Summer Hits or Summer Bummers?" beginning on page 60.

Volume 12 No. 2 June 1979

AFTER DARK is published monthly by Danad Publishing Company, Inc., 10 Columbus Circle, New York, N.Y. 10019. Jean Gordon, President. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 1979 by Danad Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Contents of the magazine may not be reproduced in whole or part without written permission. Printed in U.S.A. Subscription prices: United States and possessions, 1 year \$18.00, two years \$34.00, three years \$48.00. Foreign and

Canada, 1 year \$21.00, two years \$40.00, three years \$57.00. Single copies \$2.00. Unsolicited manuscripts or photographs must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return. Danad Publishing Company will not assume responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or photographs. © by Danad Publishing Company, Inc. Recorded on Microfilm and Microfiche at Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich., and Bell & Howell Micro Photo Division, Wooster, Ohio.



Volume 12 No. 2 June 1979

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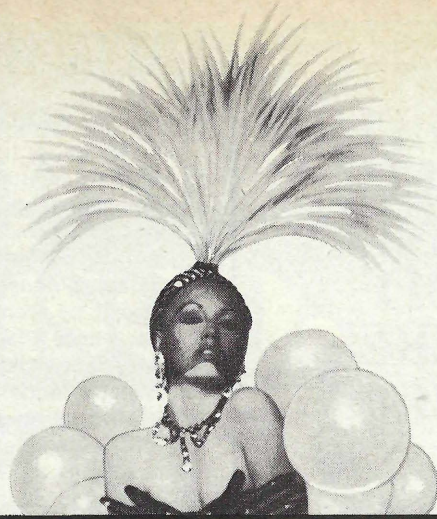
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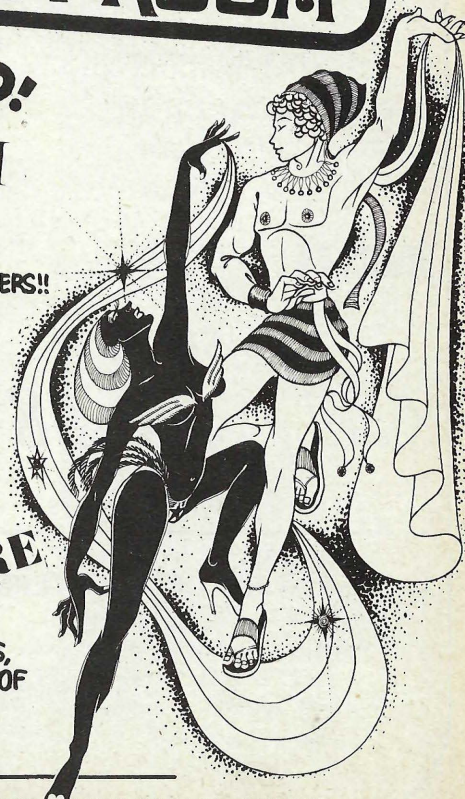
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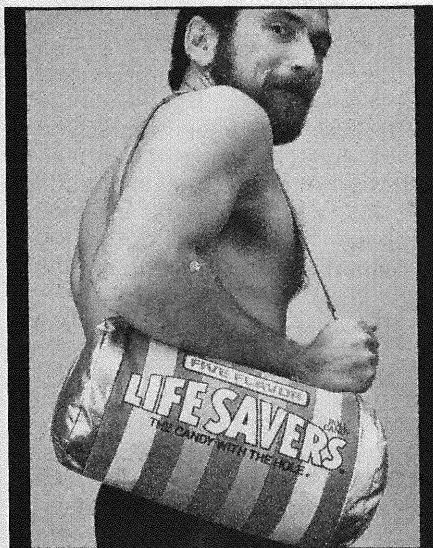
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At the Marines Memorial Theatre, A.C.T. presented another triumph, Fionnula Flannigan in Joyce's *Women*, written by herself and directed by Burgess Meredith. It was perhaps too feminine for some of the men, but we survived it nicely. Flannigan gave us the essence of six of Joyce's women, three real, three from the novels, ending with (who else?) Molly Bloom naked in a lovely bed. I went, by design, with a lady who is Irish, and she surfaced with shining eyes. "It was like my grandmother, my mother, my cousins, aunts, sisters—like myself," she said with a lilt. "It was the ultimate evocation of the spirit of Irish women."

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The ad in the tabloid Bay Guardian read: "Wanted: Nude string quartet to play Wednesday nights. Apply at Sutro Bath House, 1015 Folsom St. No fatties, wierdos, or dopers. Must be well strung." And by jingo, on the evening of April 4th there did indeed appear in Frisco's famous indoor resort for mixed (ahem!) bathing (hal!), a reasonably pulchritudinous quartet of players. Perched on a red velvet covered platform over a bubbling jacuzzi in a bower of potted verdure, they zipped through a well-considered program ranging from Vivaldi to "Over the Rainbow" for the edification, delight, and diversion of a towel-clad, packed house.

San Francisco Two

by Richard Gorman

Girls, Girls, Girls

Lord Byron wrote of Milton: "A little heavy, but no less divine." The same could be ascribed to the actor playing the lead role in *The Neon Woman*, the latest outrage for the stage by Tom Eyan. Originally mounted as a disco diversion at Hurrah in New York, the production premiered here at the Alcazar Theatre as a bona fide stage play. After a successful 10-week run here, *The Neon Woman* closed to travel to Paris for a brief stint at Le Palace disco. It tours to Toronto, Los Angeles, and Sydney before returning to San Francisco.

The Divine who grossed-out millions on

film (and helped *Pink Flamingos* gross some \$5 million) is now the Divine who keeps 'em laughin' on stage. Sure, as Flash Storm, Divine delivers degenerate diatribes with sleazy conviction, but the 300-pound star of gutter glitter by no means depends on four-letter epithets to get a laugh in *Neon Woman*. This emphasis on more or less classic comedy technique will no doubt be invaluable to Divine's performance in his next venture, another John Waters film entitled *Polyester*, which will be shot in Baltimore in the fall. "I play a character who is a cross between Donna Reed and Farah Fawcett," Divine said backstage at the Alcazar. "And there will be not one dirty word in it—not one. The film will still be in John's style, but I think he wants an R rating."

Is Divine cleaning up his act? At least a little. But then, how could he do otherwise after that final scene in *Pink Flamingos*? "I'm not sure if I should lie about that scene or not!" Divine said with a shit-eating grin. "Sometimes I'm sorry I did it, and sometimes I'm not. I'm sure I haven't gotten some jobs because of that. But yes, it was real, and it was wonderful. But I'm not into that; it's not my scene."

Without abandoning his successful persona as Queen of Sleaze, Divine would like to expand his horizons. "I'd love to play male roles, too," he said. "I'd like to do Charles Laughton or Sidney Greenstreet type roles." But that will have to wait until after the return engagement of *Neon Woman*, then *Polyester*, and then a musical revue which is already in the offing.

More Girls

It was ladies' night at the Showcase Theatre as the One Act Theatre Company of San Francisco (nee Berkeley One Act Company) again featured works by women playwrights. The first was an amusing but predictable chuckler, *The Workhouse Ward*, by Ireland's late Isabella Augusta Gregory, delivered nicely in thick brogue. The last was a much too broad attempt at comedy, Julie Bovasso's *Standard Safety*, which concerned life in the lunchroom of a big insurance company. But sandwiched in between was a nugget of pure gold, *The Ex-Miss Copper Queen on a Set of Pills*, in which Catherine Willis and Barbara Oliver rendered the roles of two old garbage salvagettes aptly kooky. However, the strength of the production must be attributed to Maureen Coyne who played the strung-out, has-been beauty queen with a rare balance between humor and poignancy that would have done playwright Megan Terry proud.

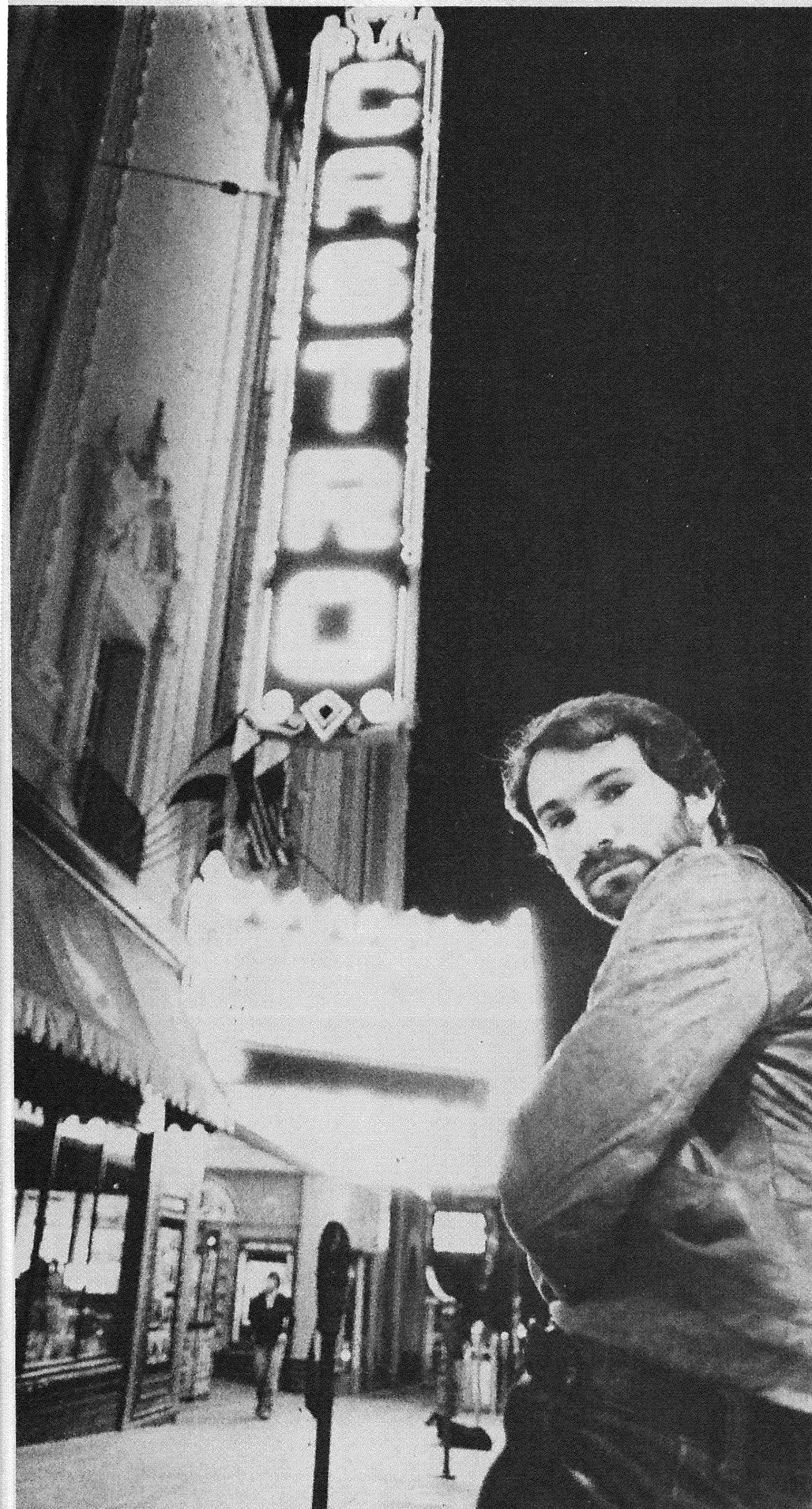
Megan Terry flew here for the West Coast premier of her *Hothouse* at the Julian Theatre. The Obie Award winner should have stayed in Omaha where she is playwright-in-residence at the Magic Theatre. Part of the problem with Julian's *Hothouse* is Terry's own fault; she wrote lines for the young Jody which were much too mature and downright purple for a high school dropout to utter. And although the ostensibly autobiographical work was supposed to be of '50s family intensity, there was too much shouting as a guise for real acting.

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Most Saturday afternoons in the 1930s found Madeline Dahlman catching the cable car down Castro Street to the neo-Moorish movie palace that was the Castro Theater. She would collect her freebie dishes that the theater gave out as come-ons. Between features the Eureka Valley ingenue would flirt with the boys in Frank Gavin's Band who played for the stage shows.

The Castro Theater still stands as the grand, gilded landmark of San Francisco's Eureka Valley, thanks to loving restoration commissioned by Mel Novikoff. Today the Castro double-features many of the same movies that thrilled Grandma Dahlman with wonderful interludes piped from a magnificent organ. Fairly frequently there are live shows on stage with a band, and there is plenty of flirting, too. It's just like the matinees in the old days, with a few exceptions. The Castro Street cable car is long gone. Depression-glass dishes aren't given away any longer, but they fetch fortunes across the street at Guided Age Antiques. And nowadays, it's the boys in the audience at the Castro who flirt with the boys in the band—likely the Gay Freedom Band.

Eureka Valley has become something of a national gay capital. Estimates range from a too-conservative third to an exaggerated eighty percent for the proportion of gays residing in the valley bounded roughly by Market and Church Streets on the north and east respectively and by Twenty-first and Eureka Streets to the south and west. Most

CASING

of Eureka Valley's old-timers view the change to gay predominance as beneficial. They point out that empty storefronts have given way to smart, new shops. They point with pride to once-ramshackle frame houses that now line the steep streets as Technicolored gingerbread delights. They aren't much concerned about the gay influx, because, first of all, San Francisco has always been a city distinctive for its concentration of liberated—even libertine—people. And this new wave is regarded as just another genre of the avant-garde, more blithe than gay.

There really hasn't been any upheaval to get excited about. And what little trouble that has arisen with the gay tide has come from outside the valley. About five years ago there may have been police harassment of gays. But, in San Francisco's spirit of live-and-let-live, hardware-store owner Cliff Asten led a movement to quash any official animosity

The Castro Theater, the grand, gilded landmark of San Francisco's Eureka Valley, plays host to a far different clientele today than it has in its varied and glorious past. The hirsute cloning of gay America is dominantly expressed on these streets, as is a vivid sensibility that is transforming a once-depressed area into a technicolored delight.

R. Heffron

toward gays on Castro Street. Back then, cars full of toughs from the outlying avenues or from ticky-tacky Daly City got their kicks by throwing eggs at male passersby and yelling "Faggot!" while speeding down Castro Street. Sometimes they would pile out of their glass-packed, low-rider cars to roll a queer or two. Gays countered the torment by organizing a vigilante group, but the Butterfly Brigade rarely sees action these days.

The "revolution" around Castro has been quiet. While the ilk of Anita Bryant wage sociosexual civil war elsewhere in the country, the gay liberation camp has become not so much headquartered in Eureka Valley as ensconced there, and Castro Street has not so much exploded as it has blossomed from a neglected, almost shabby byway of blue-collar America into a national Gay Way. Actually there is little that is gay about that way; it's more a state of mind. It's hard to discern anything predominantly gay about Eureka except along Castro's little two-block-long strand of stores and bars. Even there the gay influence doesn't become noticeable until after dark, especially on weekend nights and on Sunday afternoons. Then the neighborhood metamorphoses into a macho mecca of myriad muscled, mustachioed men convened to enjoy themselves and each other.

Otherwise, the area remains a mellow Main Street, U.S.A., replete with children going to school and grannies in hair nets with shopping bags. The especially perspicacious might perceive that men outnumber women

downtown and the bay. Like anybody else, they were also attracted by the quick, easy jaunt from Eureka Valley to downtown San Francisco's shops, jobs, and cultural attractions via Market Street, the city's prime avenue. Until recently, however, if a man from Eureka Valley wanted to spend gay dollars, he would have to travel to the sprinkling of show bars downtown and in North Beach where the beatnik era had long since waned; or he would have to venture into the seamy warehouse district along Folsom Street. But most businesses catering to gays were across town along Polk Street.

Polk Street remains fairly gay, but passé and déclassé. Hard times have brought tawdry types up from the adjacent Tenderloin area. Punk rock has brought adolescent part-time punks in from the avenues, and teeming Chinatown has surged over Nob Hill into Polk Gulch, alienating much of the neighborhood. At no time has the demise of Polk Street been more evident than at Halloween, traditionally San Francisco's gayest festival. This past October, hordes of rowdy, mostly straight people converged on Polk Street to gawk and feebly emulate the gala gays. What had been in years past a colorful street party turned into a sloppy circus without much of a show. Good times went out with glitter on Polkstrasse, the would-be but has-been Gay Way.

As Polk Street began to decline, the grand plan for Market Street's improvement gradually saw fruition, bringing a carriage

plush collars over plaid lumberjack shirts. The more affluent might sport a leather motorcycle or bomber jacket.

Another variation on Clone outerwear is the faded denim jacket over a hooded, zippered sweatshirt, both of which are left agape to reveal a ribbed-knit tank top or the bare chest, preferably hairy. The truest hallmark of the Castro Clone, however, is a little open-mouthed alligator appliquéd over the left pectoral on an ultrasnug, all-cotton pullover shirt with three-button placket and collar. It's gotta be genuine Izod Lacoste, or one might as well be back in Omaha wearing doubleknit polyester. And there are absolutely no John Travolta disco duds here.

Moustaches are *sine qua non*. No self-respecting, self-esteeming habitué of Castro Street would dare go cleanshaven. But while a hirsute face is *de rigueur*, lots of hair on the head is decidedly out. No more hippie longhair, no more blow-dried coiffures, and certainly no up-dos. Only short-short haircuts will capture wistful stares, especially if there is a bit of baldness, too. The image is all man, real man, he-man.

The Clone uniform is painstakingly casual, calculated to show off a trim, toned body to fullest advantage, and weather approximating anything milder than blizzard conditions is excuse enough for the Clone to doff his shirt. And the least hint of sunshine will warrant applications of body oil, which just so happens to highlight the musculature. Of course, muscles are very, very desirable, and two new gyms, the Pump Room and more recently the City Athletic Club, have opened in Castro to help provide the Clone with brawny bulges in just the right places.

Is subtlety coming to Castro? Perhaps. A certain refinement, a vague wholesomeness seems to be in the offing. There is a new juice bar on Castro Street called Oasis which features all kinds of healthful concoctions. And the men in the "bachelor bars" are ordering white wine and Perrier more and more these days, although that certainly doesn't mean that "boozin' with cruisin'" is moribund.

Max Corl, upstairs at 563 Castro, is selling and designing more gold jewelry than ever; look for masculine, heavy-link chains against all the tanned chests this summer. Robert Bradshaw's collection of gifty accouterment has never been classier; the Obelisk has been so popular that he's had to move to larger quarters at 489 Castro. L'Uomo at 4141 Eighteenth Street has eclipsed Rugby (also on Eighteenth across Castro) as *the* shop for menswear. The new L'Uomo is by no means extravagantly elegant, but with silk shirts and snakeskin boots, it's a far cry from the traditional Castro fare of jeans and T-shirts at All American Boy (463 Castro).

Even the bars are looking snappier in a laid-back, Castro sort of way. By definition, a gay bar was once a dark den, inscrutable from the street. Following the lead of the picture-windowed Twin Peaks Tavern at the important Seventeenth-Market-Castro crossroads, many of Castro's bars, if not most, are opening up with large expanses of

OUT THE CASTRO

by Richard Gorman

here, but that could be dismissed as an inevitability of the wild West, as in Alaska, and no more questionable than the overwhelming majority of women in Washington, D.C. Granted, the proportion of people who happen to be gay is significant in Eureka Valley. But the focus on gay, per se, in the Castro area has been largely a political force and a media creation growing out of the mercantile renaissance of Castro Street.

Since about the Second World War, gays have lived in the hills around Eureka Valley. But then, gays seem to have settled all over San Francisco. Nobody knows why San Francisco has attracted gays any more than sociologists know exactly why Montreal, New York, or Berlin are gay magnets. But conjecture would have it that among the countless servicemen thronging through the gateway to the Pacific, there were many of a particular sensibility who were so enchanted by San Francisco's beauty and freedom that they decided to stay and revel in the liberal lotusland far from familial scrutiny.

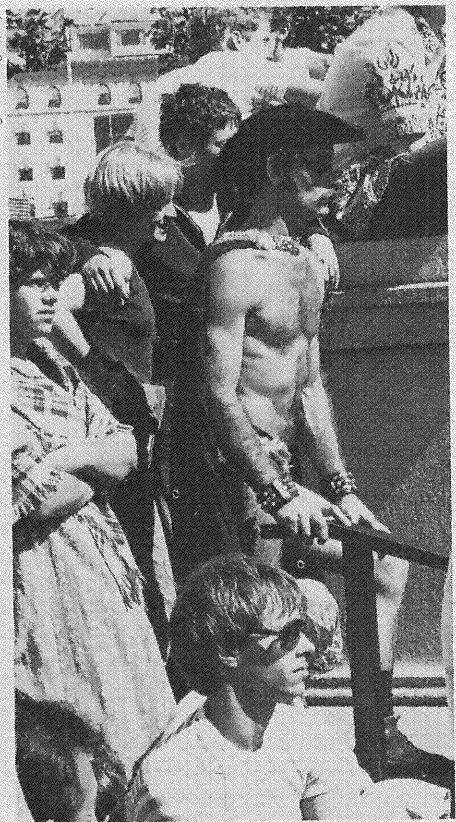
It was only natural that gays, like anybody else—if perhaps a bit sooner—would forsake the congestion of apartment-house living in foggy neighborhoods for the relatively reasonable rents of apartments and flats in cozy houses perched in the warm and sunny hills around Eureka Valley, with fine views of

trade up the tree-lined brick sidewalks to the boulevard's terminus at Castro Street. Coincidentally, many of the people who live in the Eureka hills began pursuing the American dream by going into business for themselves until virtually every business in Eureka Valley's tiny commercial zone became owned by people who lived there. Uncoincidentally, most of the businessmen were gay, because they could afford to open up shop as the area's financially-strapped, blue-collar family folks could not, and because they understood the idiom of their single, independent neighbors. Today, four out of five of the businesses on Castro Street are gay.

The Castro Street brand of gay is remarkable. There is nothing effeminate about trendy Castro Street, and "flaming faggots" are few and far between. Polkstrasse "bitches" have given way to Castro Street "butches" to the extent that a new gay stereotype has been engendered: the Castro Clone. Any night or weekend afternoon, the Clones crowd the area in their properly faded, shrunk-to-fit Levi 501s. Up and down Castro Street, they amble in construction-worker boots, Topsisider deckies, or Adidas joggers. When the chilly fog rolls in, they don zippered "Golden Fleece" navy-blue nylon flight jackets with acrylic-pile



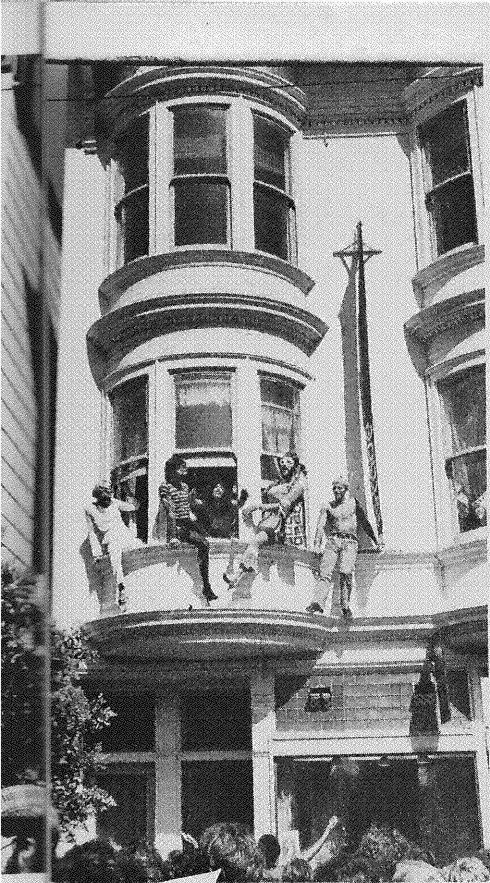
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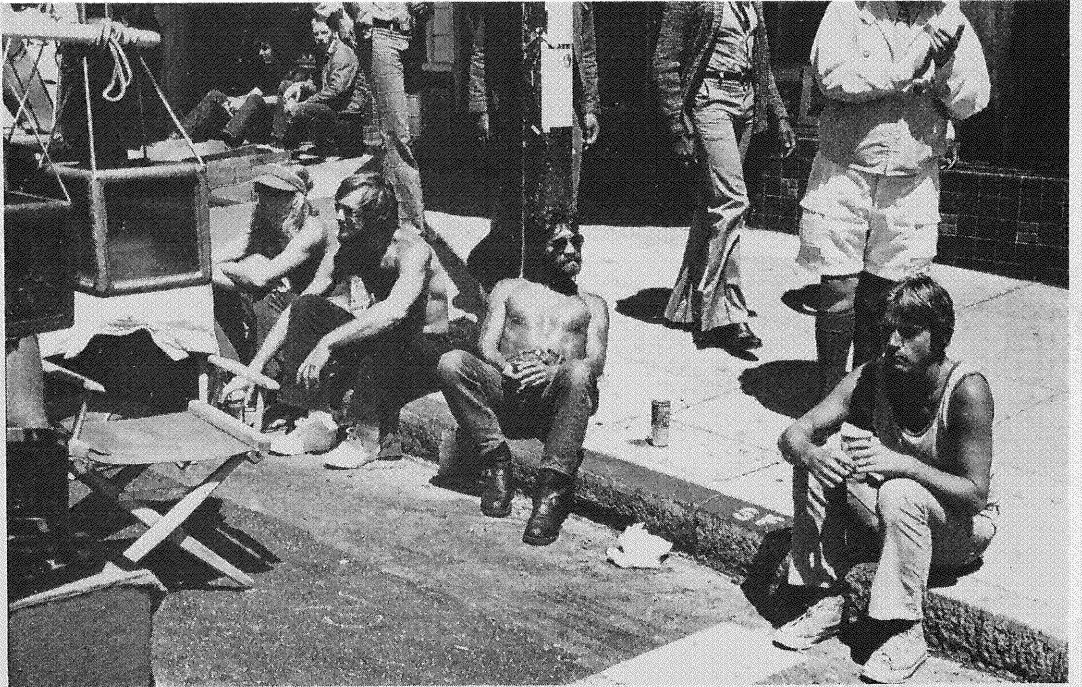
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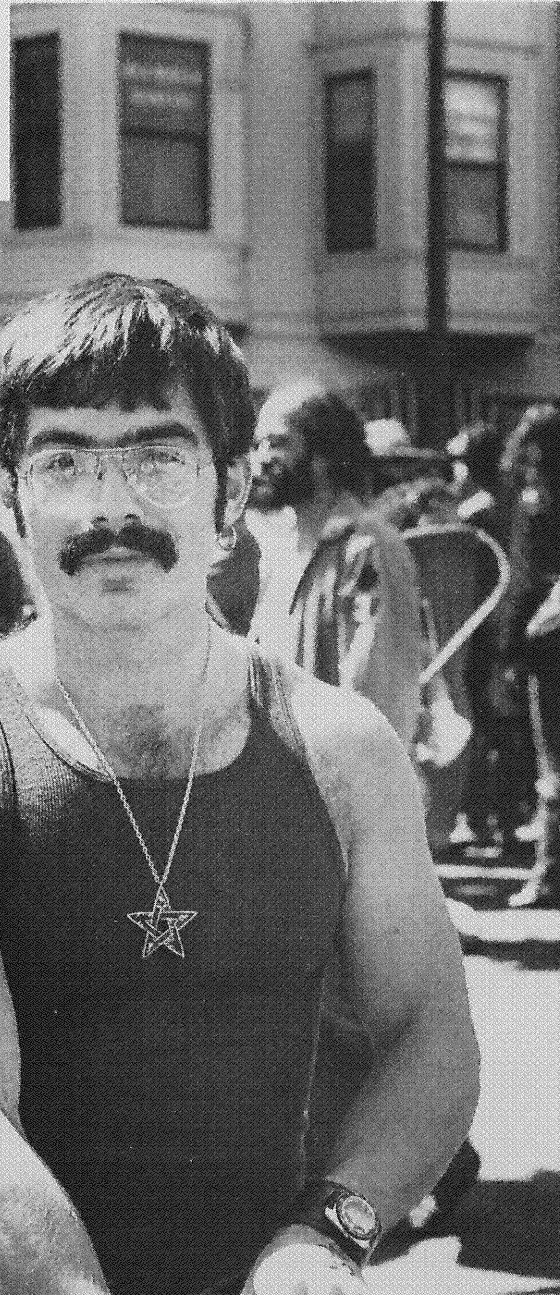




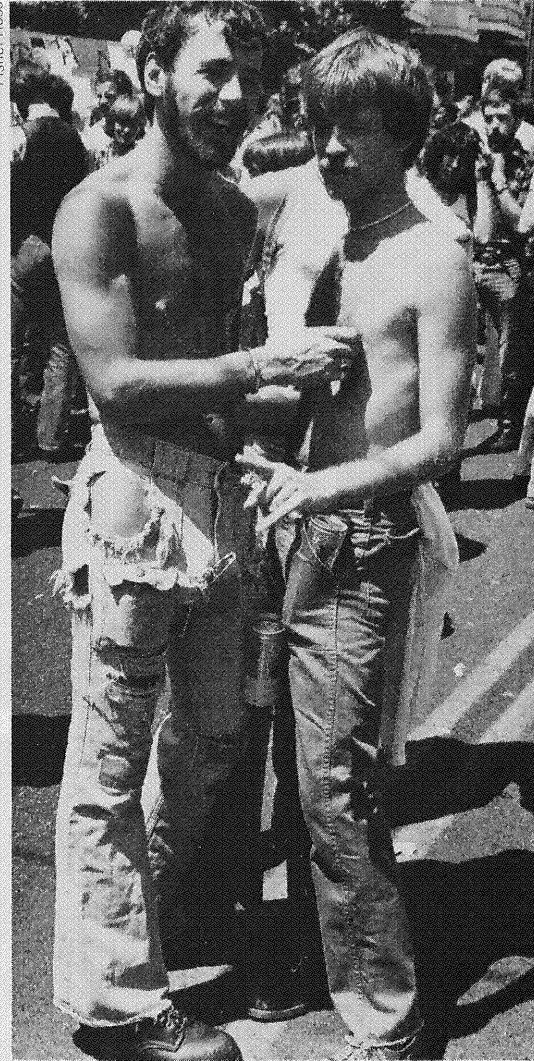
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The sheer number of gays in the Bay Area has been channeled into sociopolitical clout that has resulted in various unprecedented gains for the homosexual community, not to mention a uniquely liberated ambiance, as illustrated by these photos at the Castro Street Fair.

Once neglected and forlorn, Eureka Valley's gabled "Vickies" again stand as proud, painted ladies along the steep streets of Castro Village, thanks to gay refurbishment fever.

Lynn R. Hoover



James Armstrong



Fisher, Ross

The Gay Freedom Marching Band (left) trumpets a liberated message that is the keynote of the Bay Area.

"Abie Baby" might have been somewhat surprised to find these two boys perched on his bronzed lap. Their paramilitary look is less of a call to arms than a gay chic that trumpets "Love the look, hate the war."

glass. The Village, Elephant Walk, the Badlands, and the very popular Moby Dick feature big windows to the sidewalk. Curiously, the Eureka Valley Promotion Association is pressing for a moratorium on new bars in the neighborhood. Most residents have little objection to the Jaguar Book Store with its back rooms (actually the second floor) for "whatever," much less any qualm about gay bars. However, residents fear that the area will become too commercial and its residential integrity ruined. Nobody minds a throng of strangers gathering in the neighborhood once in awhile; the annual Castro Street Fair, the tricycle races, and Gay Freedom Day celebration draw thousands to Eureka Valley each summer. But if left unchecked, commercial development could turn Castro Village into another plastic Pier 39 or phony Fisherman's Wharf.

The area is already congested. Since the Castro Theater was dubbed an historical monument, the tour buses have begun rolling down Castro Street. People of all stripes are drawn from around the Bay Area to the valley for top-notch productions mounted by the San Francisco Repertory Company and the Eureka Theatre. Folks of every persuasion come to Castro to sample the aphrodisia at the new Anchor Oyster Bar, the delicious fare at the Italian Sausage Factory, or the fine fowl at the venerable Neon Chicken. There is usually a wait for a seat at Cafe Flore, especially alfresco on nice summer days. The New York Deli on Market Street is reputed to be better than its theater-district counterparts, and the wide selection of wonderful pastries and liquored coffees keeps the charming Cafe San Marcos jammed till the wee hours.

Is it any wonder that parking places are impossible to find? And is it any wonder that Eureka Valley aborigines worry that precious living space will be sacrificed to business enterprise? Laissez faire be damned, the Promotion Association simply will not permit another Victorian home to turn into another shop or bar.

Citizens of the valley also insist on preserving the low-key homeyness of the community. The area already has become too slick for some, and it is getting expensive. Real-estate values are soaring all over "everybody's favorite city"; San Francisco runs a close second to Los Angeles as having the nation's most expensive housing. But the prices of homes in Eureka Valley are escalating especially fast, and rents aren't lagging behind selling prices any longer, according to Rob Tackes, president of Langley-Tackes Real Estate. "Castro is hot. It's been hot for two or three years. And it's going to get many degrees hotter before it begins to cool off," he says.

Probably the last inner-city neighborhood remaining for Castro-brand refurbishment is the Haight-Fillmore, a predominantly black, high-crime district just beyond Duboce Park from Castro Village. Real-estate broker Jim Cairnes left the Langley-Tackes company and its Eureka Valley focus to bellwether the

redevelopment of the new "Midtown," as the ultraviolet ghetto is facetiously called by determined realtors. Presiding over the Biltmore Company at Haight and Fillmore Streets, Cairnes concedes that blacks living in the Haight-Fillmore resent the prospect of blockbusting by gays with refurbishment fever. But Cairnes is right; the rejuvenation of the squalid area is bound to happen, just as the once-shabby Castro eventually was transformed by young, independent, single people with adequately disposable incomes.

Likewise, many merchants are being priced out of Castro Street. Rents have tripled or even quadrupled for some proprietors in the last year or so. With an understandable Little Red Hen sentiment, merchants who have improved Castro Street want to remain there to enjoy the fruits of their visionary labor. However, if a moratorium on new business is mandated, then business rents will certainly soar as demand for the limited commercial space on Castro Street becomes even fiercer.

One Castro merchant trapped in this eventuality is Tommy Zalewski. He recalls that when he moved to the valley eight years ago, "Castro Street was an amazingly different area. There was no idea then that it would become such a gay mecca. Only one bar had opened that was designated as gay. This was an area of peace-loving, mellow people, very mixed, very integrated."

Exactly a year later he opened Tommy's Plants, one of the first two non-florist, non-nursery plant stores in San Francisco to burgeon the house-plant fad. Wealthy matrons from Pacific Heights would visit his store until the congestion dissuaded them from coming down Divisadero into Castro Street. The influx of gays hasn't hurt his business, but neither has it been especially advantageous. Plants aren't a particularly gay commodity. "Gay-oriented bars do well here on Castro Street. Restaurants make out well, and so do shops that gear their merchandise to the single male," Tommy said amid his greenery at 566 Castro. "But for other types of businesses, it's rough."

Tommy is still able to meet the nearly trebled rent on his store and still turn an adequate profit. But he will have to work much harder and consider alternatives for the future. Indeed, he has already opened a second store in Haight-Ashbury. C. Ray Hill and John Mathias have established a second L'Uomo outlet there, too. And Twin Peaks veteran barkeep Art White agrees that although Castro Street is where it's at now, the Haight is where it's going to be. Despite a handsome new look to Haight Street near Golden Gate Park, the district seems to be just a little too turbulent, a little too volatile, whereas Castro is widely regarded as gentle and secure.

Artificially earthy, intensely relaxed, precisely casual, and frantically frivolous—Castro Street is an enticing paradox. It can be a wonderful place to play, if one doesn't play for keeps. And it can be a delightful place to live, if one is careful not to run away with the circus.





Castro street fairs are popular rituals for an exhibitionistic community that jumps at any excuse to trot out a color riot of plumage and outrageousness.





R. Hellfron



Lynn R. Hoover

Jackie Fish, the "Queen Mother of Castro Street" (aka "Miss Circus-Circus"), receives her gay subjects at the Star Pharmacy.

Helpful and attractive salesmen such as Harold Gates greet one at the popular, ever-tasteful Rugby Shop (above).

Lynn R. Hoover



Ulysses D'Aquila, James D. Autrey, Al Gaudit, Ronald Mahn, George Watson, and David Alessi clone around on the garden steps of Patio Cafe.



Mick Hicks

Sylvester, Fantasy Records' gold disco artist, makes himself comfortable onstage at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House as City Supervisor Harry Britt (successor to the slain Harvey Milk) reads the Mayor's proclamation naming the SRO concert date "Sylvester Day." During the performance, the former Cockette electrified the baubled and bangled crowd with his dance-happy songs and bluesy ballads.

SYLVESTER: FASHIONABLY LATE

by Chris Huizenga

It has been a long and laborious route to the top of the record charts for L.A.-born and San Francisco-bred Sylvester James. Along the way, this new breed of disco artist has been a choir boy, a gospel singer, a transvestite chanteuse with the boisterous Cockettes, and a cabaret and cafe entertainer. He is featured in Bette Midler's much-delayed but forthcoming movie debut, *The Rose*, in which he sings a duet with Bette on the Bob Seger song, "The Fire Down Below."

Something of San Francisco's daring exuberance and innocent assurance is embodied in Sylvester's style, where voice and movement meet in perfect harmony and reflect a happy person who has found and conquered yet another niche in his particular music pantheon. The former glitter queen of the Cockettes Revue, whose spirited soprano invariably stole the show at the Palace Theatre during those outrageous drag events of the late sixties and early seventies, has graduated to the equally androgynous but



commercially and artistically more congenial venues of the disco scene. His most spectacular hit to date was last year's chart-topper, "You Make Me Feel—Mighty Real" on Fantasy Records, which combined just the right measures of light gospel, rhythm-and-blues, and formula disco in a frothy, irresistible sonic soufflé.

Sylvester and I first met at New York's Hilton Hotel after he had received three well-deserved awards at *Billboard's* fifth national disco convention. He had discarded the sequins and laces, those glad rags of drag, in favor of a cowboy outfit that suited his slimmed-down figure. He fixed me with a disarming glance as he lept over the couch saying, "I love to be fashionably late, but only by two minutes." From that point on, he talked volubly about his career, his music, and his ups and downs.

"One of the high points of my life was when San Francisco officially named March 11 Sylvester Day. That was the day of my opening at the Opera House with my new band. I believe I am the only disco singer so far to appear there—maybe the last, too. We had sellout crowds—very responsive. They had seen me in so many guises before that I think I was all the more astonishing dressed in simple sports clothes than in the most outlandish garb you could imagine. Sometimes you can really get typecast—I think most performers are—and it's a great feeling to know that you can take your fans along with you as you change."

Having worked so long on the more decadent fringes of the entertainment world, Sylvester tends to be wary of disco as his ultimate musical métier. "While disco has been very good for me, I don't think of myself strictly as a disco artist. I like disco a lot. I like to dance, like to move, but I really don't ever want to hear my own records at discotheques. When I do, I want to walk out quietly and disappear. I am forcefully reminded how much work and sweat went into the making of the record, and here I am trying to relax, but all I get are images of tremendously hard work. So, instead I listen to other singers, especially Dan Hartman, Patti LaBelle, Gloria Gaynor, because they free me."

Disco has its dangers. More often than not, a singer is submerged in the music, if not altogether drowned. It has become a producer's domain, where the special alchemy of a master mixer can turn the mediocre into something rich and powerful. Sylvester, however, has his own powerful instrument—

a supple, silver voice that weaves through all the musical registers. His predominantly falsetto sound is easily identifiable.

"I don't know how long disco will last," Sylvester admits. "New things are happening with some regularity, and that's the life of any movement—if it can keep its creative spark going. Gino Soccio is a good example of what's happening. The Casablanca sound is original and productive. Rock is moving into disco. It's an umbrella beat that gives you a lot of protective latitude. But on the other hand, it could degenerate into something strictly technological, and if that happens you will lose the surprise of human inventiveness. For example, I've heard singers go into a studio sounding really bad, but the product that emerges is really good. That's mixing, the new toy. It's also dangerous. Maybe the product will become too homogenous. The sign of that will be the mass exodus of gays away from the disco scene."

Singing is Sylvester's claim to fame so far, but he is more than a singer and a musician. Since childhood, he has always been fascinated by theater in all its manifestations, from set design to costumes, and he employs his knowledge in these areas to enhance his concerts. A thorough performer, he even co-produces his own albums with Harvey Fuqua.

Sylvester's is a new San Francisco sound for the rest of the world. His voice of considerable purity is set in a flashing, stylized medium, like a religious painting framed in garish enamels. He should be a major force in music for many years to come.

SHOCK-BOXER LES CUNNING

by James Armstrong

When a little old lady nagged the cops into requesting the Tyson Gallery to remove one of Les Cunning's boxes from the window display of his work, Les was delighted. "Shows what she's made of—and that I'm a success," he noted. Cunning is but one of the many unorthodox artists living and working in the Castro community in San Francisco, where the Tyson's exhibit and sale of his boxes, each containing a glittering, outrageous, sharply-etched personal cosmos, has caused a whole spectrum of comment and criticism since they went on display a few months ago.

Les calls his boxes "confession," and says, "some people confess out loud, some to themselves, and some not at all. I don't want to keep my confessions secret. I want to scream them forth and embellish them with glitter and blinding flashes that pierce the eye and soul. If my boxes could make sounds—and someday they will—you would hear pain and pleasure and the moans of fulfillment. I wish they could be even more. I hate to say one is finished. Probably none of them ever are. I've spent months and even years on some of them. There just isn't enough time."

Cunning was born in Lonoke County, Arkansas, in the living quarters behind his parents' country store on a dirt road eleven miles from the nearest town. Raised as a strict Methodist, for a time he became a shouting Baptist, full of "the Spirit." He came to California in 1966 to be an actor and worked in minor movies for a few years, sang with a band, and made a record. Around 1970 he came to San Francisco and made his first box.

The initial boxes were smallish and had hinged doors. The later ones are larger and completely open. All are three-dimensional collages of a myriad of things of all sizes, appearances, and textures—shells, bits of fur, tassels, artificial flowers, junk jewelry, cutout photographs from a number of sources (though sex magazines seem to predominate), mirror shards, and various unmentionables. Everywhere are sequins and small glass jewels, painstakingly glued on, one by one. All of them glitter, or at least glow. The boxes have, in fact, in their multiplicity of surfaces, planes, textures, and



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