

The Court Circular

"These sort of boobies think that people come to Balls to do nothing but dance; whereas everyone knows that the real business of a Ball is either to look out for a wife, to look after a wife, or to look after somebody else's wife."

Robert Smith Surtees
1803 - 1864
Mr Facey Romford's Hounds

CNY

NIGHT OF A THOUSAND GOWNS

From the Notebook of The Countess Natasha.

"...just a few close friends for dinner...six or seven hundred...I never thought it would be so grand!...This is a fund raiser? A Charity Ball?? And you people have been doing this for *ten years*??

Saturday afternoon, hugs and laughter. The hospitality suite is a busy place, with a steady flow of out-of-town guests and local courtiers mingling and visiting, renewing friendships, visiting with the Widow Norton (who sat knitting), doing business with our court jewelers, talking about Friday night's out-of-town show at Rome's, noshing on bagels, pasta, coffee, crudites, crackers and champagne.

Early evening in the hotel lobby. Cameras and video recorders everywhere. Tourists survey the "local color," and are (as usual) astounded, impressed and thrilled. Someone (a media type) interviews several courtiers and guests: "Do you think drag has gone mainstream? ("no"). Is this a lifestyle for you, or just a hobby? ("yes"). What about 'To Wong Foo'? Is it a metaphor for the fundamentally illusory nature of gender in a postmodern civilization?" ("Huh? Are you Terri Gross from National Public Radio?")

Upstairs, bows, hugs, court'sies, air-kisses and laughter. And sequins and attitude for days, jewels, glitter, and music, music, music. And more photographs. Particularly for newcomers and guests, it's kind of like art appreciation during a performance piece, with the opportunity to participate (to purchase a title and be presented "at Court").

Not an ordinary drag show by any means, nor for that matter a mere formal dinner—our Coronation Ball is a stylized, ritualized pageant rooted in the elegant ambiance of Europe's ancient royal courts, interpreted through the lens of North American Drag cultural history and our own New York Court, and guided by the vision, personal style and peculiarities of our dear founder, the Widow Norton.

Ritual, poetry and dance nourish the soul, just as much as love, sex, food and water sustain the physical and emotional aspects of our lives. And so it was that course followed course, act followed glorious act, and we all—courtiers and guests alike—came away the richer for having participated.

The Victory Brunch is not only a celebration of our newly elected émonarchs, though certainly it is that. But more, it bespeaks our victory over despair, boredom, isolation, convention, banality and bad taste. The Victory Brunch is in many ways the final act, the curtain call, or perhaps better, the entr'acte, the bridge. It proclaims our exhilaration and our pride in having once again produced an unique and memorable evening. And we proclaim together that our community and our Court returns significant personal, emotional and financial support to the agencies which serve and support us all. We proclaim our deepening and strengthening sense of vitality, unity and community. *RS*

The Court Circular

The Official Newsletter
of the Imperial Court of New York



New York, NY 10003

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.

IMPRESSIONS FROM NOATG-1996

Reporting by Viscountess Tori Adore & Lady Tammie Recine

One of the blessings of springtime after a long, dreary winter is glamour! The Imperial Court of New York's *Night of a Thousand Gowns*, held at the Sheraton New York on April 20th, represented just that. The tenth annual fundraiser proved to be a spectacular that surpassed the wildest expectations of the Court's newest members.



Festivities began on Wednesday evening prior to the Ball itself with an event hosted by Princess Kitty Fouché at the club *Pieces*. Performances by Victoria Weston, Tami Wynotte, Kitty herself and Empress Philomena brought us all together and raised needed dollars for AIDS research. Next, we were off to *Barracuda*, to meet many of the girls visiting from out of town. After a round or three of cocktails, we were off again to *Rome*, for an evening hosted by Fiona and Victoria Weston. Performances by former Empresses of Rhode Island B.B. and Lee

Daniels, our own incoming Monarchs Ran-Dee and Steven, and an additional fundraising auction held by Victoria rounded out a splendid "out-of-town" event.

Finally, we all made it to Saturday at the Sheraton! The magnificence of the evening was apparent from the moment one stepped into the Imperial Ballroom, which had been set for over a thousand guests. Hundreds of handsome men in evening dress were surrounded by a dazzling array of gorgeous creatures in the most beautiful evening gowns – chifons, lace, brocades, satins – beaded, sequined and feathered. After mingling at cocktail hour, the national anthems of Mexico, Canada and the United States were played, and the opening number began.




More than thirty Courtiers appeared in the opener, which featured Empress Philomena's spectacular performances from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and the show-stopping "Le Jazz Hot" from *Victor/Victoria*. The ovation from the audience was a testament to the hard weeks of rehearsal and the choreography of

Empress Ran-Dee, to whom we owe many, many thanks for making it all seem so effortless. The evening continued with welcoming remarks by President/Princess

ciousness, dignity and beauty of which we were all so proud.

In the final part of the evening, the time we had all been anticipating, Court system Founder Empress I Jose, the Widow Norton, made her appearance. The Ninth Empress of New York, Empress

greet their guests at the steps. Congratulations to all who worked so hard on this splendid event! In all, 1996's 'tenth annual *Night of a Thousand Gowns* brought in nearly \$100,000 from all its efforts. Substantial donations will be made to Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, In the Life, and POWARS. Cheers to Empress Philomena on an awesome reign! Long live Emperor Steven and Empress Ran-Dee – our wishes go to you both for an exalted reign! 

VICTORY BRUNCH CELEBRATION

by Johnny Cella

Our traditional Victory Brunch was held at the Sheraton only moments, or so it seemed, after the Coronation the night before. Three hours of sleep is not enough for anyone, especially Royalty. President/ Princess Panzi welcomed all and introduced Their Imperial and Sovereign Majesties Empress X Ran-Dee and Emperor VI Steven, preceded by the official Angel and La Scala Empire banner, carried by its creator, Duchess Brenda Starr. The barely awake new Empress, in leopard-print drag, asked "Is this the Bar-Mitzvah?", but was quickly shepherded to her seat by the new Emperor, who looked ready for anything in his red sneakers.

Coffee, cereal, coffee, eggs, coffee, bacon, coffee, juice (thanks to Pat Ieva at the Sheraton) made for a delightful brunch, and then it was down to business. Madame President introduced Empress IX Philomena to a foot-stomping, standing ovation. Her speech was gracious, eloquent and heartwarming – a truly emotional moment – in which she thanked everyone who had played a part in making this year's event so successful. Special thanks went to Empress Nicole de San Diego and Emperor Art and Empress Dusty of Toronto for their participation in the Coronation. "Keeping it for selfish reasons until the brunch," said Philomena, "my Empress-to-Empress Award goes to Ran-Dee." Hugs, kisses, tissues!

Empress Ran-Dee and Emperor Steven took the floor for the long-awaited elevations. They are as follows – Viscountess Tori Adore, Viscountess Billy Little, Viscountess Liz Taylor, Count Wolfgang von Busch, Count Gabriel Fratelli, Countess Fiona James, Countess Vivica Fairfax, Countess Tedi DeBare, Count Robert, Countess Natasha, Countess Fabu LaRue, Duke William, Duchess



Royale Thom Hansen, who introduced H.M.I.S.M. Empress Philomena, a tenth anniversary address by Celestial Dragon Empress Coco LaChine, and the Decade Walk by Empress I Sybil, the

Atlas Empress, preceded by her flower girl (and seamstress), Lady Gefil Tefish. After dinner, Emperor Ron the Lion Hearted was presented *a la* the King of Siam, and Philomena followed with a breathtaking "Shall We Dance", continuing the theme of *The King and I*.

The annual Imperial Diamond service award was presented to Lypsinka *in absentia*, and knighthoods were bestowed, including one to John Wolf, DDS, a former Chorus Butch of the NYC Gay Men's Chorus. In the "second act", Empress Philomena received her visiting Royalty, and The College of Monarchs was presented, with Emperor V Ron and the resplendent Empress VIII Billie Ann making triumphant Dowager Walks. In a touching tribute, our deceased Monarchs were saluted as their crowns were presented onstage.

At long last, the entire membership of the New York Court was presented in tableau (a great photo-op) for the first time as a body. Then each was presented to Empress Philomena by rank and title, each taking the long, cross-stage walk to demonstrate a long-practiced, full curtsy before Her Imperial Grace and Stateliness. Philomena greeted each member by name and displayed the standard she had showed throughout her reign – good humor, gra-



Philomena, made her final walk in a gorgeous white Empire gown and was joined onstage by Empress Nicole the Great de San Diego, Emperor

Art Tomlin and Empress Dusty of Toronto, followed by all the other Monarchs as the coronation began. Duke William carried the standard of our new Monarchs, followed by members of the Imperial Family walking in pairs, each gowned in a color of the Rainbow Flag, the symbol of Gay Pride. Princess Royale Panzi and Dame Dina Dynell, splendid in gold, bore the Monarchs' crowns.

Imperial Prince Steven made his coronation walk in a gold and black cape, high black boots and a most regal demeanor. Then Imperial Crown Princess Ran-Dee made her entrance to the strains of "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" in sumptuous black coronation regalia featuring pink roses and an endless black and pink train. Our raving photographer and Imperial Voyeur Tammie Recine had to lie on the floor to get the the whole effect in one photograph. After brief but comic and inspiring words, Empress I Jose, The Widow Norton placed the crowns upon the heads of The Grand La Scala Emperor VI Steven and The Opulent and Ethereal Broadway Angel Empress X Ran-Dee and the Tenth Annual *Night of a Thousand Gowns* drew magnificently to a close.


Cheers rang through the crowd as the new Monarchs walked down the ramp to



Brenda Starr, Duchess Blaise Patrice, Grand Duchess Mae Nicole, Princess Trompe L'oeil, Prince Tom, Princess Lita Austin, Princess Royale Panzi, Princess Royale Shonda Lear, La Grande Princess Royale Gianna.

In addition, the Empress to Brother Emperor Award went to Art Tomlin of Toronto; Empress to Sister Empress Awards went to Empress XII Ruby Stone of Houston and Empress V Symphony Barr of Buffalo; Empress 10 1/2 Award (the highest honor a reigning Monarch can bestow) went to Empress Dusty of Toronto.

Two hours later, the elevations and awards were completed. But...one final speaker came forth. Anthony Colantino, our very gifted Court photographer, presented the new Empress with a "Ran-Dee Doll" in full mini-drag with a replica of her Coronation gown complete with long train and BIG hair – a true work of art thanks to a collaboration between Anthony and Court graphics whiz Brian Crede.

I would like to thank my co-chair Fred Frick (Princess Lita Austin), and a very special thank you goes to Victor Grosetti (Viscountess Tori Adore) for handling the brunch ticket sales. Love and thanks to all! 

IMPERIAL WEDDING IN BUFFALO


by Steven Frear

April 27, 1996- A delegation of members of the Imperial Court of New York traveled to Buffalo for an "Imperial Wedding"- the step-down of Empress V Symphony Barr Anderson and Emperor V Kevin Musor. The out-of-town show was co-hosted by our newly crowned Empress Ran-Dee and Empress VIII of Toronto, Mr. J.J. Murray. After their performance of a number from Sunset Boulevard, Emperor Steven was made Brother Emperor to Symphony Barr and Princess Lita Austin was honored as "Dress Designer to the Empress". Princess Victoria Weston brought the crowd to its feet with her live performance of a medley of Nelson Riddle arrangements of pop standards.

The night of the glittering wedding itself began with a production number whose sensational finale featured the Imperial Couple atop a giant wedding cake, which later transformed into Their Majesties' Thrones. Twelve New York Court members accompanied Empress Ran-Dee and Emperor Steven on their inaugural Walk, their first out-of-town walk as reigning Monarchs. ICNY members gave a special performance of

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes for the wedding couple. The evening closed with the Coronation of the new Buffalo Monarchs, Empress VI Vickie Vougue and Emperor VI Vincent Ricci, Jr. It was a truly memorable night.

At the Victory Brunch next morning, New York was awarded "Best Court Walk", Empress IX Philomena received the Emperor-to Past-Empress award from Emperor V Kevin, and Empress VIII Billie Ann was the first member inducted into Empress Vickie Vogue's Heart Society. Our Emperor Steven was made Emperor 6 1/2 of Buffalo by Emperor VI Vince.

What a great weekend! Many thanks to Vince, Vickie, Kevin, Symphony, David, Cara Mia, Chevon, Mimi, Mark and all of the Imperial Court of Buffalo for their wonderful hospitality. 

**The Court Circular
is now accepting
advertising.
Contact Steven Frear
for ad rates.**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JUNE

Sunday, June 23

- *Drag Sale* Cherry Grove, F.I., 11 am at the Ice Palace - contact David Mandel

Monday, June 24

- *Garden Party* at The Center, 6 pm \$50. - contact Coco

Tuesday, June 25

- *Opera & Broadway Benefit* at Rose's Tum, 55 Grove St. 8pm, \$10./2 drink min. - contact La Diva

Wednesday, June 26

- *ROME* - Midnight Show to benefit ICNY - contact Fiona

Thursday, June 27

- *Gay Men's Chorus* at Alice Tully Hall 8 pm, &\$40. - contact Tori Adore

Sunday, June 30

- *Gay Pride Parade* -11 am, 56 St (between 5th& 6th) - contact Empress Ran-Dee

JULY

Saturday, July 6

- *Invasion of the Pines* Noon, downtown Cherry Grove - contact Panzi

Wednesday, July 10

- *ICNY General Meeting*: Board Applications available - contact Panzi

Saturday, July 20

- *Coronation* - San Diego, CA at the U.S. Grant Hotel, \$50. - contact Empress Ran-Dee

Saturday, July 27

- *APCG Art Show & Sale*, Cherry Grove, F.I. - Noon - 2pm APCG Members only, 2pm - 5pm and 7pm - 10pm General Public. Artists wishing to exhibit contact Cathy 516/597-9315
- *White Party*, F.I. - contact Empress Ran-Dee

Sunday, July 28

- *APCG Art Show & Sale*, Cherry

Grove, F.I. - Noon - 4pm

- *Hearts & Voices* - St Luke's - contact Kitty

Wednesday, July 31

- *Board Applications* due into Panzi

AUGUST

Thursday, August 1

- *Rent Theater Party*, \$40. at the Nederlander Theater, 208 W 41 St. - contact Matt Baney

Wednesday, August 7

- *ICNY General Meeting*: Monarch Candidates Speak

Sunday, August 18

- *Morning Party*, Fire Island - contact Tom DeConza

Monday, August 19

- *Royal Review* at the Ice Palace, Cherry Grove, F.I. - contact Billie Ann