

➤ GAY POWER ON THE STRIP ➤

Nomads in a desert, we deal from freakshow to tentshow, through psychodrama and shock theater to the theater of cruelty and the streets. Last Thursday was a socko doublebill. At the Municipal Auditorium we were left to imagine Delaney & Bonnie and Hangers-on back at the Holiday Inn, petulantly watching Teevee movies; but Norman Greenbaum stayed to play and spread peace of mind in front of us.

The Really Real show, as often, was on the corner of Eleventh and Peachtree, only this time it was indoors, too. Our invitations were to a preview bash at the "Unicorn Club," but the sign in the window read "Centaur Club." Well, pick a mythical beast, either the phallic virgin-bait or another fantasy, the stallion stud-humanoid. Neither occurs in Nature, and after all, isn't role confusion the source of ART?

"There's no business like Drag business!" sings Phyllis Killer on the showcase stage; behind her, swags of curtain looped through golden towelrings conceal a world of entertainment. A transvestite knight in shining silver lamé, boots and tunic, she gestures with the mike and tosses a helmet of brittle spunglass angelhair teased out and curled like the tips of ocean waves. Oh baby, hairdos and costumes in a Real fantasy world. Free booze and a buffet. Everyone loves it. Decor, a specialty of the house, in the style of Apocalyptic American, Eclectic Decadent. The old Beauty College (guide my pen, Burroughs; inspire me, Viva!) metamorphosed fittingly into a butterfly showbar. Square pillars carry traces of Roman columns. A fresco of Renaissance medallions curves around the base of the balcony, and dully gleaming shields (what period, what land? no matter; Sir Walter Scott, maybe) grace the balcony rail as it defines the upper level of the intimate amphitheater. Two staircases (Drag Queens' Delite) make traffic a pleasure; one winds down next to the stage for stunning entrances. Empire chandeliers light the spectacle. Oh Beardsley, Oh Wilde, the Savoy was never like this. The glow of good makeup lights our faces. Beautiful Drags glide perfectly from group to group—total theater—everyone can see everyone.

Happy couples drink in the euphoria, the success of the whole creation. Mothers, aunts, and girlfriends in lesser beehives and short evening gowns tinkle with oh-so-many youngmen in gleaming brass-bound blazers. Below us, near the stage, a dark-haired youngman hunches between two colossal mounds of blonde: Real women. From time to time he lurches forward to make a conversational point across the table. Later they allow as how they came down all the way from Baltimore.

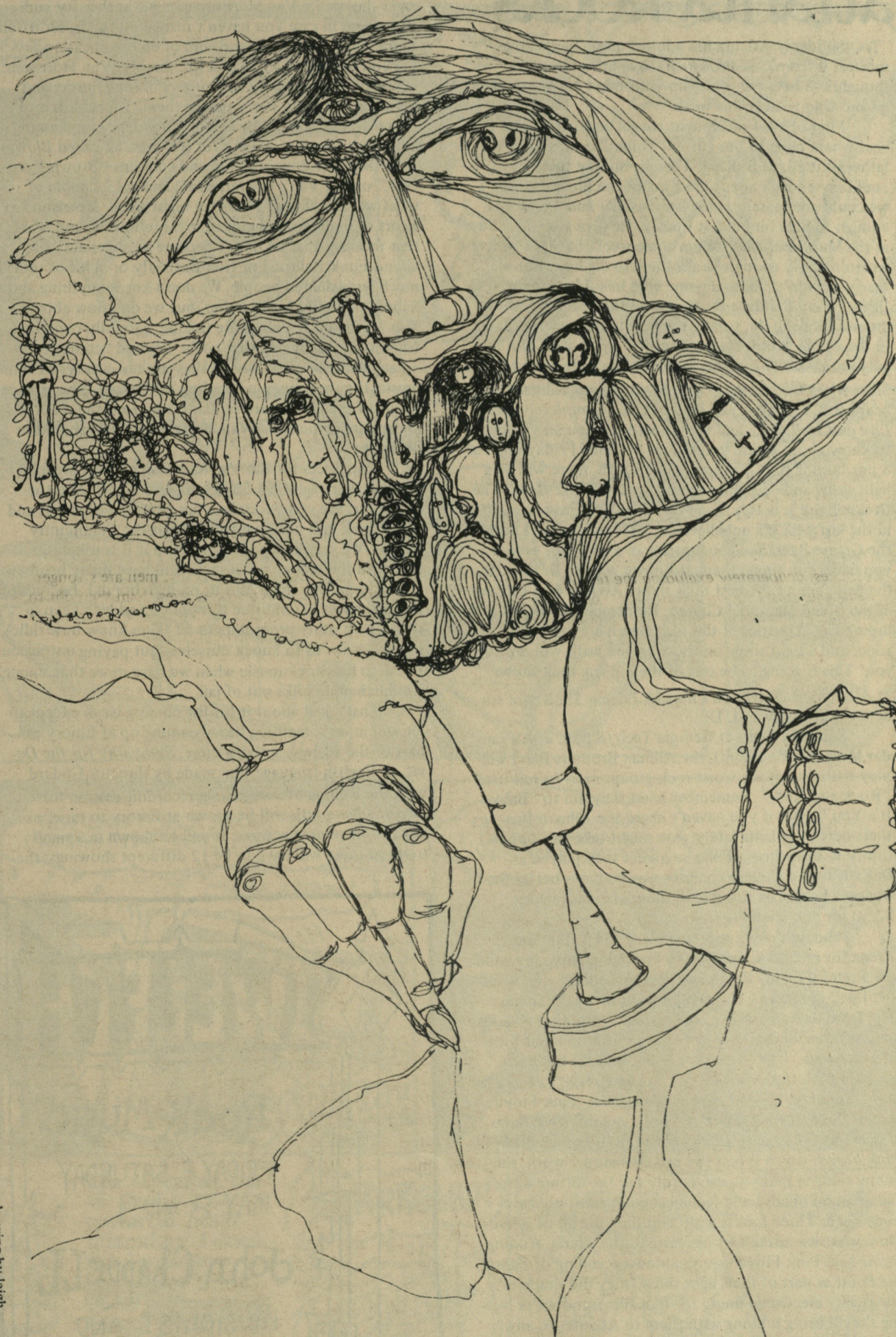
Quelle Trip, Genet! Oh Mimosa, Oh Darling Dainty-foot! In my mind I see Venus masturbating her pet unicorn with the milky smoothness of her forearm, just before breakfast. I haven't seen so much Supertalent since I played Dracula's Mother and Baybee Starr in New Orleans, in *Motherlove*. Drag is a real voyage. In New Yawk the Mafiamen pick up their dragchicks after the show in big black cars. And Oh, pearls are to wear, to clutch, and to chew. Finally Phyllis Killer announces our Superstar, Diamond Lil. Chandeliers dim to an orange glow. Monumental music—*The Lion in Winter*, strangely like Carl Orff—surrounds us and our illusions in the mirrors. Now we're really peaking. Up on the balcony a spotlight is allowed to bathe and thaw Lil, frozen against a railing. A ravenblack coif draped with ropes of pearls is enthroned on her head. Though still, her eyes and mouth seem to vibrate. Transcending a combination of Ann Miller and Roz Russell gowned as Scheherazade, Lil does some magic sweeps with her gauze-winged arms and descends the staircase, completely in control. We are all hypnotized; the place is hers now, and she struts possession, all arabesques and sly smiles. Silently, pure movement, she slowly strips off her veils in sophisticated bellyrolls and subdued grinds, her breasts outlined in sequins, her bella-donna eyes flashing like Carmen's, and her mouth closed because there's nothing left to say. Finally she's a statue again, and as the applause fades I wipe my forehead. Zonked. A hard act to follow.

Visions of Gay Power rallies stream through my mind. I think of Hogarth's etchings of pornographic wigs as the Drags float past in feathers and silk, heads held high to support monuments of curls and tendrils. And back in the Court of Louis the Sixteenth, bewigged ladies 'ay on the floors of carriages and crouched sideways to get through doorways: just before the Revolution.

Hollywood music beats around the room: *Doctor*

Zhivago, Exodus, colossal, colossal, all about revolution. Exhausted but still expectant, we sip cokes and wait for the next show, to see the Atlanta Supremes: three beautiful Black Drags in pink pants-jumpers. And they're into it too, as they end their set with a song from *West Side Story*: "There's a place for us." And there is, and they're proud of it. And it's Art. DRAG POWER! And we go back out into the street to think it all over.

—lance



drawing by Leigh