



*A Debutante's Guide
To The Evening*

*April 22, 1989
Starlight Roof Ballroom
Waldorf-Astoria Hotel
New York City*



The Imperial Court System

One of the gay community's oldest and largest charitable organizations, the Imperial Court System is a 28-year-old network of over 50 state and city courts across the United States and Canada. Its more than 10,000 participants, both men and women, have raised millions of dollars to benefit a wide range of service organizations in the local and national gay communities. Carrying the humanitarian ideals of past royalty into modern society (not to mention their grand sense of fashion), these dedicated dukes and duchesses, courtiers, and queens of every title also reach out beyond that circle to the elderly, the handicapped, the hungry, and the homeless.

The Imperial Court System has provided seed money for the Gay "Olympic" Games in San Francisco and the National March on Washington in which N.Y.'s Court was the largest contributor. In Idaho, the Boise Court initiated the state-wide AIDS Foundation; San Diego's Court operates a Children's Shoe Drive; and Reno supports that city's AIDS Hospice. The Imperial Court of New York is one of the newest, but it has already benefitted numerous charitable and political groups.

In addition to fundraising, the Courts have formed a meaningful bridge to mainstream political leaders, many of whom have been introduced to their gay and lesbian constituents at major Court functions. Public officials learn from the Courts that our community is a significant voting bloc of hardworking and concerned individuals — who also have a sense of style and fun. "Night of a Thousand Gowns" will demonstrate once again the Courts' unique combination of doing good and looking fabulous.

Greetings from the Imperial Household

Dear Courtiers,

We are delighted to announce the 3rd annual "Night of a Thousand Gowns" national charity ball. Following the precedent of last year's fabulously successful (and successfully fabulous) inaugural cotillion, the ball will again be held at the Historic Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Our venue will be the glamorous Starlight Roof Ballroom overlooking the Manhattan skyline, the very chamber where royalty, heads of state and industry, and many debutantes and celebrities have danced the night away for over half a century.

As those of you who were lucky enough to attend last year's Coronation Ball still fondly remember, the evening epitomizes grandeur, splendor, and story-book fantasy in the most famous social setting in the country. Resplendently clad kings and queens, dukes and duchesses, princes and princesses, and other lovely people from all across the United States and Canada will make their formal debuts to Imperial society.

A full orchestra will play for those who wish to dance till midnight, then with the magic of a live D.J. till dawn, for your pleasure. There will be a complete Casino, with exciting gaming tables for those who enjoy keeping their eye on the cards, the dice, the roulette wheel, or the other participants. The ballroom stage will be the scene of a ceremonial presentation of the Imperial Slipper Award.

A highlight of the evening will be the Coronation of Emperor III and Empress III of New York.

Dreams are made of nights like this, and this will be a night to help make many more dreams come true. We would be most pleased to have you make your debut at "Night of a Thousand Gowns."

Empress Champagne I

Emperor Roux-Vaine I

Attire

Extremely formal attire is *de rigueur* for Imperial functions. Full court dress is preferred: elegant gowns with tiaras, orders, and family jewels, and/or white tie and tails (knee breeches with silver buckles, for those with the legs for it). Black tie is acceptable, through there is always the possibility of your being mistaken for a waiter. Military personnel may wear dress uniform with full regiments; swords are optional (but dueling is prohibited).

Members of the nobility are advised that strict protocol governs the insignia granted each rank of the English-speaking peerage. Dukes and duchesses may wear a velvet robe trimmed with four rows of ermine tails and a train measuring three yards, plus a coronet bearing eight gold strawberry leaves; marquesses and marchionesses, 2½ yards, 3½ rows of ermine, and coronets with alternating leaves and gold balls; earls and countesses, 2 yards, 3 rows, 16 gold balls; viscounts, barons, baronets, and female equivalents, 1 yard, 2 rows, 8 balls. Equivalent ranks from Continental realms may observe their local custom; for members of royal and imperial dynasties, crowns are expected, but orb and scepter may be clumsy on the dance floor.

Arrivals

Unlike many elegant affairs it is never appropriate to arrive late at a formal Court cotillion. The proceedings at the top of the evening are a resplendent display of imperial protocol. Arrivals at the Waldorf-Astoria should be timed accordingly. As your limousine, horse-drawn carriage, or taxi sweeps up to the hotel's posh park Avenue entrance, you and your entourage will be greeted by the inevitable crowd of *parapazzi* from local and national media (always check your mirror before alighting at the curb). You will then join the procession of notables through the ornate, block-long lobby, where throngs of curious and devoted subjects await your gracious recognition. A smile and a simple wave will do; you might wish to prepare the requisite wrist motion by polishing a newel-post. Once you have arrived at the special elevators to the Starlight Roof, you can shed your sometimes wearying public facade along with your wrap.

Escorts

Unescorted debutantes are heartily welcome, although if you arrive unescorted, you are certainly not required to depart that way. You are sure to find many a lord or lady eager to add their names to your dance card.

Conversely, a debutante may have more than one escort, or even an entourage. Under no circumstances should you be less polite to one escort than to another.

It is proper for escorts to mingle with other debutantes. Your escort should help you check your coat, see that you get drinks and dance the first and last dances with you. He/she is otherwise responsible for dancing with other debutantes, entertaining old married couples, and avoiding being sick on the premises.

Your Formal Introduction

Your actual debut can be unbearably exciting; please bear in mind that introductions will take place only from 9-10 at the gates of the Starlight Roof Ballrooms by the Imperial Chamberlain.

Ballroom Etiquette

If you are not royalty, do not be intimidated: they can be astonishingly warm individuals. You may bow or curtsey to any royal (or non-royal) personage you wish, as long as you don't grovel. Genuflecting is considered old-fashioned, and salamaming quite ridiculous. If you are royalty, you already know it is coarse to "pull rank" or otherwise act superior (regardless of what you do in the privacy of your own palace). You should never refer to yourself by your title, nor correct someone who addresses you incorrectly; have your footman do so later, and discreetly.

Speaking with royalty can be giddy fun. They are usually required to speak with other nobles, and a conversation with someone who leads a less restricted life will probably be a welcome change of pace for them. When making conversation, you quite simply must be spontaneous: not too personal, a good listener, and a frequent asker of questions. If you remember to interject and occasional "Oh, how interesting!" you will soon gain a reputation as a fascinating conversationalist.

Eavesdropping and gossip should be employed with discretion. Conversing with servants is permissible, and behaving courteously toward them compulsory.

Casino Etiquette

The Casino Royale, to be located in the glamorous Palm Room, will feature blackjack, roulette, and dice for your diversion. Besides the fun of testing your luck and skill, gambling tables are an excellent way to relieve the tedium of endless royal ceremonial, to transfer some of your vast unused wealth to the less fortunate, and to show off your best rings and bracelets.

Betting chips may be purchased in the casino from the Imperial Exchequer; personal checks will be accepted, and all contributions will be acknowledged for your tax records. Your winnings may be cashed in for a vast array of wonderful prizes, from dinners for two to fur wraps and a small chateau in the south of France; all gifts will be on display to facilitate your excited selection. While games of chance have long been associated with a certain carefree relaxation in public decorum, a few reminders are in order. Do not hog the tables, especially if you are only observing or advising others. Never powder your nose while playing blackjack — the mirror might be taken as cheating. Your hands simply must look their best; gloves may be worn at the table, but are awkward when picking up coins and cards. And remember: the expression "betting the crown jewels" is merely a figure of speech — even royalty may only wear them, not pawn them.

ON TITLES, AND HOW TO OBTAIN ONE

We invite all ladies and gentlemen of quality to become Members of the Imperial Court. Unlike many organizations open to commoners, the Court charges no dues; however, you must hold a formal title in the Peerage. For the appropriate levy, you will receive a Patent of Nobility (suitable for framing) inscribed with your Rank and Realm. Your name and title will be listed in the Program for all Court functions.

Remember that, in selecting your personal title, you are to a great extent assuming a public role. Consider carefully such matters as family background, geographic location, and financial resources. Taking on a Duchy if you cannot keep up the necessary style is considered both irresponsible and tacky.

Titles will be registered annually by our own Imperial Heralds according to the following schedule of contributions to the Crown (foreign-language equivalents of all ranks are permissible):

Imperial Titles: \$100.00

Grand Duke/Grand Duchess, Archduke/Archduchess
(Style: His/Her Imperial Highness I/M "H.J.H.")

These exalted Ranks, which entail membership in the Imperial Family, are lifetime titles, conferred at the discretion of the reigning monarchs. Nobles of this level will be publicly invested at the Coronation Ball.

Royal Titles: \$75.00

King/Queen (His/Her Majesty)
Prince/Princess
(His/Her Royal Highness)

Prince/Princess (His/Her Serene Highness) \$50.00
Duke/Duchess (His/Her Grace)

Marquess/Marchioness (The Right-Honorable) \$30.00
Earl (or Count)/Countess

Viscount/Viscountess \$20.00
Baronet, Knight
(Sir/Dame/Lord/Lady)

Imperial Court Governance

By Edict of Their Imperial Majesties, issued in benign acknowledgment of their subjects' desire for a modicum of participation in Affairs of State, the posts of Emperor and Empress are henceforth declared to be elective offices, each Imperial Couple to reign for one year. In order to avoid the unfortunate excesses that have historically befallen certain democratic regimes, the right to vote in Imperial elections is limited to members of the Nobility.

The Coronation Ball celebrates the reign of Roux-Vaine I and Champagne I, whose selfless devotion to the welfare of their realm has set our fledgling dynasty on its promising course. Tradition dictates that those courtiers wishing to express their especial esteem for the imperial couple may present a small token of their regard, to be offered at the moment of one's debut (after the curtsey and before leaving the platform). Such tributes are in no way a feudal obligation: your presence at their formal farewell is more than gift enough for Their Grateful Majesties. However, a more tangible offering is in order if you have received personal marks of Imperial favor, or hope to do so in the future.

The coronation of the new Emperor and Empress will be the emotional climax of the evening's pageantry, enriched by the august presence of visiting royalty from the far-flung capitals of the Imperial Court System. To witness Roux-Vaine I and Champagne I removing their glittering crowns and placing them on the anointed brows of their chosen successors will bring a tear of poignant solemnity to every eye (go easy on your mascara). During the ceremony, please refrain from talking or milling about.

A Special Message From The Emperor and Empress To Their Beloved Nobles, Commoners, and Serfs

"We are deeply moved by the suffering and deprivation that some of Our far-flung subjects have experienced as a result of the unfortunate events of the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and recent uncertainties on the Imperial Stock Exchange. Accordingly, we have decreed that the cost of attending the Grand Cotillion shall be reduced from last year's price. It is Our sincere hope that this will enable as many of you as possible to participate, however briefly, in the way of life to which We are already accustomed."

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