

This story shocked our lawyer. He didn't know such things go on in Britain, 1967. But they do. Which is why we print this story NOW

By Chris Somerset

“ Drag shows have reached such unhealthy proportions they should be controlled. The way they are being presented today could lead to an increase in homosexuality among men. ”

psychologist, said: “In some female impersonation acts there is artistry. Audiences admire it and are amused by it.

“But striptease by a man is perverted, stimulating to perverted types and likely to corrupt people who are borderline cases in their sexual make-up—people who are not homosexual, but who have leanings to homosexuality.”

In a London pub I watched a female impersonator singing suggestive songs, telling smutty stories and making rude gestures in front of about 100 men, women and youths. At closing time customers left, but I stayed to talk to the entertainer.

And seven other men who stayed were introduced to me as female impersonators who had come along to watch the show. Another four—two of whom looked in their late teens or early 20s—were introduced as friends of the entertainers.

We stayed in the pub, talking and drinking with the landlord till 3am. Then the entertainer who had been on stage drove me and a young man, who he said was his friend, to our homes.

He dropped the young man outside his house, blew kisses at him and called: “Good night for now, dear. See you shortly.”

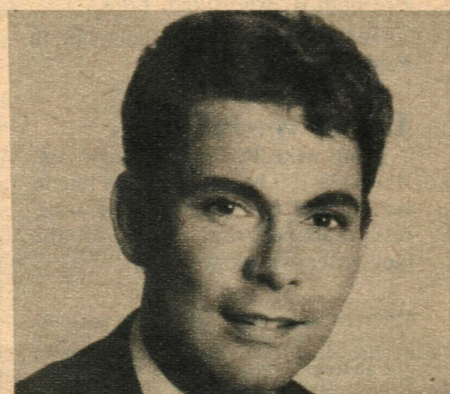
This outcome of a drag show horrifies most performers who are full-time professional female impersonators. They reckon the part-time entertainers—the man who drove me home was one—are dragging the profession into disrepute.

A pub at Notting Hill Gate, London, has been raided by police twice in the past year. Each time, a drag entertainer was told to stop his act.

Another pub in the East End was raided a few weeks ago and the landlord prosecuted and fined for allowing an obscene show.

But Manchester is even worse than London on the drag scene. There, groups of men dressed as women wander the streets at night, visiting public houses and shady clubs to follow drag entertainers.

A café in the city's Piccadilly is noted as a meeting place for these disreputable characters—they gather there in clusters of six or more every night after the pubs shut. They are not entertainers—just perverts who follow the entertainers.



Top: Danny La Rue, our cover “girl.”
Centre: Danny Odell and Roy Alvis.
Left: Ricky Renée. Together, they make a living out of dressing up



Ricky Renée dances and does a striptease, but he doesn't think his act is corrupting . . . “I have the figure to carry it off”

And some of Manchester's female impersonation actors are just as disreputable. At one pub near the city centre the most disgusting cabarets imaginable can be seen every night.

One of Britain's leading full-time drag men, 30-year-old Mr. Chris Shaw, who earns more than £100 a week from his act, said: “From the drag point of view, Manchester is a den of vice. Full-time professional impersonators don't want to be associated with it.

“I work there sometimes, but only in reputable hotels or night clubs, like the Del Sol.

“At a Manchester bus stop I met a 17-year-old boy dressed in women's clothes and asked him why he wore them publicly. He said he was having a sex change on the National Health. It's tragic to meet young people who have slipped so far into perversion.

“The idea of part-time drag entertainers trying to make ‘pick-ups’ is repugnant. I know it happens, but I wish people would realise not all female impersonators are like that.

“Nor do I like smutty shows. I do ‘blue’ performances at private stag parties, but never in front of a mixed audience.

“It's true that most female impersonators have feminine tendencies, but that doesn't mean we are all homosexual—nor does it mean the ones who are homosexual try to pick up other men.”

In a pub called the City Arms, outside the East India Docks in London's East End, the landlord, Mr. George Brownfield, said: “We do drag shows every night and at lunchtime every Sunday. A lot of it is suggestive, but I have seen no signs of it corrupting any of my customers.

“I reckon 75 per cent of female impersonators are homosexual, or what I call ‘queens,’ but I have never seen one trying to entice a customer here. Half of my audiences are women and they enjoy the shows as much as the men.”

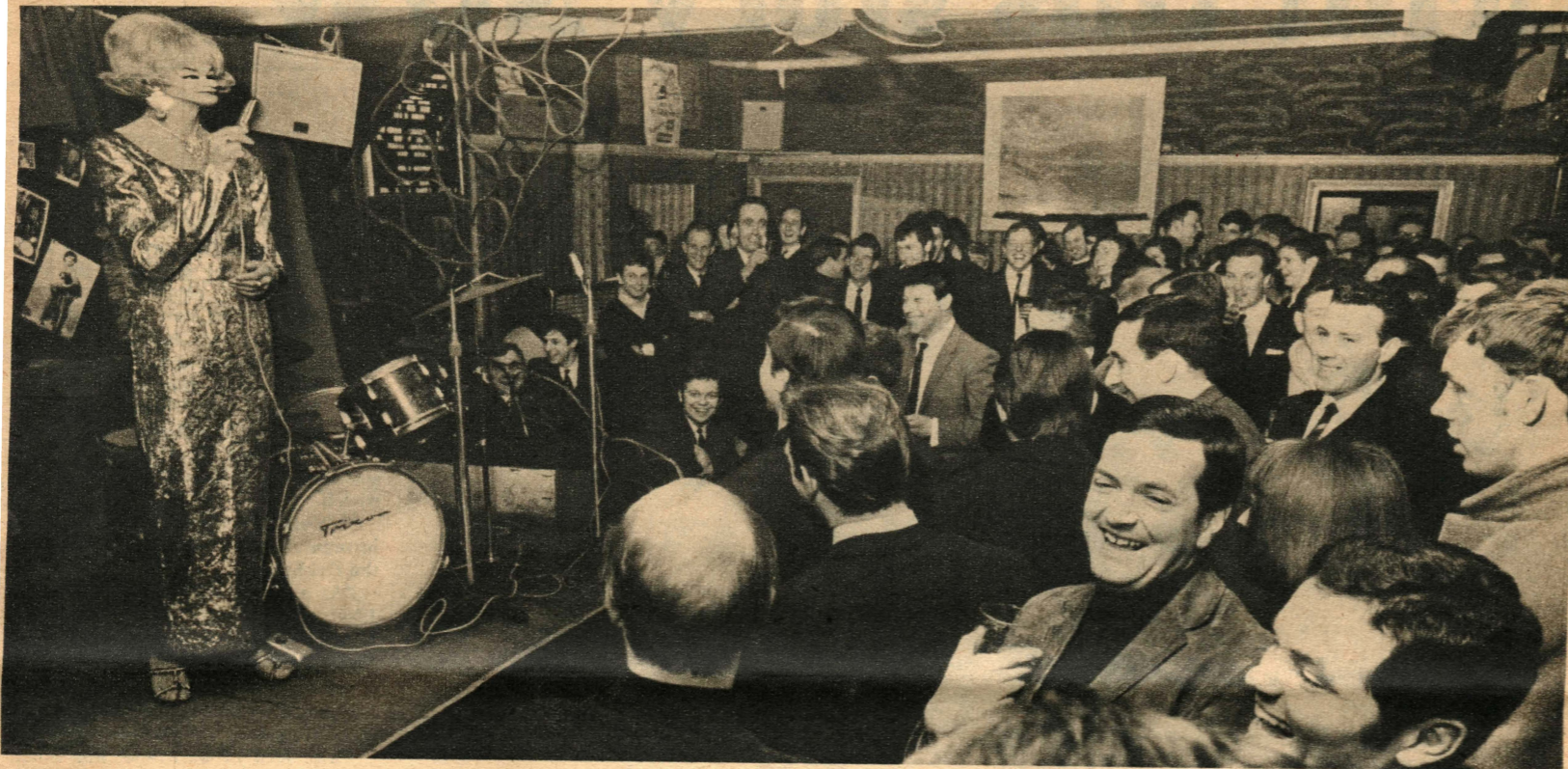
In the City Arms I watched “Phyl Starr,” 34, an ex-RAF corporal, do a drag act. He wore a blonde wig, necklace, earrings, rings and a long, slinky gown.

“My name is Phyllis,” he told the audience. “I'm known as the girl with a growth.”

Other blue jokes followed.

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These pictures may shock you, too. We think you're old enough to face facts



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He wouldn't tell me his real name. "I work in a shop during the day," he said, "and I keep my business life and my entertainment life strictly separate."

I asked why he dressed as a woman to entertain. He said: "Because I'm good at it and I like making people happy. But I don't like people telling me I look nice—I prefer hearing them say they enjoy my act."

"You need a little feminine streak in you to do this sort of entertainment. There are worse things than homosexuality."

There are fewer than ten full-time professional female impersonators in Britain, but there are hundreds of part-timers.

South Wales, Sheffield, Newcastle upon Tyne, Middlesbrough and Sunderland are keen on drag acts—mostly by full-time professionals or part-timers who are regarded in the drag world as respectable. Clubs, not pubs, are the venues.

The North is the home ground of drag—Sheffield has nearly 400 working men's clubs and other towns and cities are not far off this figure.

Few Northern clubs refuse to stage drag entertainment. If they do, business flops.

But Scotland doesn't go for drag much. "I think it might be the Church influence," said Chris Shaw.

The two biggest names in the busi-

ness are Danny La Rue and Ricky Renée. Their shows, widely acknowledged as artistic, are for adult audiences—they both perform at their own high-priced night clubs in the West End of London.

Danny, 38, who comes from Cork, Ireland, said: "I earn more than any other West End actor except Frankie Howerd. I'm an actor—Ricky Renée is a female impersonator and not a very successful one."

Like most female impersonators, Mr. La Rue made his first appearance as a woman when he was in the forces. Then his name was Daniel Patrick Carroll.

In his cabaret he wears nylon eyelashes, foam rubber bust, stiletto heels, fishnet stockings and absurdly seductive gowns. He goes through his performance with a series of vulgar stories, exaggerated winks, rude cross-talk and sexy gestures.

"I have a query for you," says his stage stooge. "Well, you shouldn't bring him in here," replies Danny—and the crowd, including a sprinkling of young "blue-bloods," applauds loudly.

But Danny never tries to kid his audience he is a woman. "Gawd bless Dunlop," he says with a wink—as he pats his foam falsies.

In a burlesque sketch from *Hamlet*, a stage character says: "I'm thinking of sending Ophelia abroad." Danny replies: "I hope they will both be very happy."



Phyl Starr, top, and the Roy Alvis-Danny Odell partnership are always ready to serve up jokes and dances to beer drinkers. And when it comes to close-ups Dodo Sweet, right, has a "disguise" that is hard to penetrate

This is one of his many cracks about homosexuality.

"They don't do harm," he said. "And they certainly can't corrupt people—so long as I make sure the audience know I'm making fun of the subject."

Ricky Renée's act is totally different. He dances—and he does a striptease down to bra and G-string—but his jokes are not as vulgar as Danny's.

American-born Mr. Renée, 28, does not think his act is corrupting.

"My striptease," he said, "is a thing of art. I have the figure to carry it off—and I'm a professional dancer, which helps. But after every striptease I dress in men's clothes, return to the floor and make it clear to the audience I am not pretending to be a woman."

"The show is not designed to attract homosexuals or people who want to change their sex."

Another drag entertainer, 45-year-old "Dodo Sweet"—not his real name, because he has another job—said: "I do an act in pubs, clubs and pantomimes with my partner, Lee Sutton, mostly round London.

"Our jokes are all near the knuckle, but they are not offensive in my opinion. Example: 'Could you kill a man?' And the answer: 'Eventually.'"

"I do it because people think it's amazing how a man can make himself look like a tart.

"As far as homosexuality is concerned, I sex live and let live. It's only

a written law that homosexuality is unnatural. And I don't try to corrupt people."

Roy Alvis, 35, and Danny Odell, 30, do a double drag act all over the country. They did an eight-week show for American forces in Germany.

"American troops are not allowed to dress as women, even for concert parties," said Mr. Alvis. "That's their business, but it doesn't do any harm."

And a part-time drag entertainer who concentrates on the East Ham area of London, 52-year-old Billy Carroll, said: "During my act, if I notice any young 'nancy-boys' in a pub audience, I stop playing and ask the landlord to put them out.

"This sort of entertainment doesn't attract many people like that, but homosexually-inclined men who are discreet and don't bother people are no trouble. I don't object to them."

But the drag trade must take a keen look at itself, because there is evidence that people connected with it are becoming worried at the risk of spreading corruption.

A leading stage newspaper has stopped printing advertisements from part-time drag actors—they now take them only from full-time professionals.

The paper's advertising manager said: "We were receiving too many 'ads' from people who have no connection with the profession. These people were touting for homosexuality."

And a doctor warned: "In America and on the Continent, some drag actors even have injections to make their chests bigger. Here, they still stick to paint, powder and padding—but there is a danger that if the industry isn't watched closely it will become evil."

A French female impersonator called Bambi has a womanish chest developed by hormone injections. He is described by his publicists as "a curvaceous blonde bombshell with a pert bottom, slim waist and high, round bosom."

In America they have a pin-up magazine full of pictures of men dressed as women—many nearly naked.

This magazine printed pictures of Bambi in 14 stages of undress. One of the pictures even showed him fondling and kissing a cuddly toy.

Sets of coloured pin-up photographs of American female impersonators can be bought in New York.

One set shows a man in various stages of dressing as a woman and includes what are described as "cheese-cake" shots and pictures of him modelling "her exciting leather wardrobe."

In Paris there are nightclubs owned and staffed by transvestites and homosexuals—waitresses as well as chorus girls are men dressed up as women. And they don't admit they are men.

These places are blatant meeting places and picking-up points for

homosexuals seeking new partners.

In my opinion, controls on drag entertainment in Britain should be tightened immediately—before some of the degrading aspects of the business in America and on the Continent reach this country.

And before other towns and cities adopt the sort of reputation Manchester should already be ashamed of.

Pubs and clubs where drag shows are given should be visited by police after closing time, so they don't become meeting-places for homosexuals.

Landlords at these places should be ordered to take extra precautions against the possibility of youths under 18 being allowed in.

Men dressed as women in public should be put off the streets.

And many of the performers must be told to clean up their acts, because some of the jokes, cross-talk and gestures I saw, during a two-week investigation into the business, were so obscene I wouldn't dare describe them here.

The man who drove me home from a London pub is a well-known part-time drag entertainer, but in his car he put his hand on my knee. When I asked what he was doing he said: "If you don't like it you can push my hand away."

I did push his hand away, but if this middle-aged man dares make suggestions to somebody like me he is clearly a danger to younger and "prettier" men.