

Danny Windsor Dies At 87

Fixture Of Gay Night Life In 1960s Detroit And One-Time Flying Monkey

BY TIM RETZLOFF

MUSKEGON – Danny Windsor, a world-traveled entertainer and emcee at gay night spots in Detroit in the 1960s and purportedly a flying monkey in the classic 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, died Jan. 19 at Muskegon's Brookhaven Medical Care Facility, where he had lived since suffering a stroke in 2009. He was 87.

In a career that spanned decades and continents, Windsor dazzled audiences first with comedic pantomime and later by portraying some of the top female stars of the day.

Windsor was born Daniel Boone in Santa Barbara, Calif. on June 2, 1925, an only child of vaudevillians.

Brought up by his grandmother, he caught the showbiz bug himself. He worked as a stock player and dancer for MGM at the height of the studio system in the 1930s. While at MGM, Windsor was tapped to play a dancing tree in a jitterbug scene from *The Wizard of Oz* that was cut from the final version.

As Windsor would later explain, when one of the flying monkeys showed up on the set with liquor on his breath, the 14-year-old stepped in as a replacement.

In World War II, he served in Guam. During his military service, Windsor met Willis Clark and the two created a pantomime routine and began performing as Doodles and Spider, with Windsor taking the stage name Danny Young. After their discharge in 1947, they were mainstays in San Francisco for three years

humor – a mix of double entendre, gender bending and wit – shaped many gay bars of an earlier era. “I think camp acts, that kind of act starts to draw the gay crowds because in those days, gay wasn't openly gay,” he said.

Since many bars also attracted a “tourist” trade, his act served as a bridge between gay and straight worlds. “If

with all of us as younger entertainers,” Bruno shared.

Bruno also noted that Windsor as Merman or Disco Dolly often got more laughs than Bruno did in his Joan Rivers persona. “The audience adored him, as did I,” Bruno said. “He was a pro, a veteran in every sense of the word. He taught me a great deal.”



Danny Windsor

Windsor recounted how an old style of camp humor – a mix of double entendre, gender bending and wit – shaped many gay bars of an earlier era. “I think camp acts, that kind of act starts to draw the gay crowds because in those days, gay wasn't openly gay.”



Club Ten Eleven

presents

Detroit's First New York East Side Revue

starring

DANNY WINDSOR

Comedy Star of Judy Garland's Palace Revue

DON EVANS AT THE PIANO

CONTINUOUS ENTERTAINMENT

1011 FARMER STREET

WO. 3-1075



A clipping promoting Danny Windsor at the Club Ten Eleven from the Michigan-based magazine “Guest” in the early 1960s. Photo courtesy of Tim Retzloff.

before hitting the road.

Doodles and Spider opened for Judy Garland at the Palace Theater in New York in October 1951 and in early 1952 – when television was still in its infancy – appeared on a live broadcast of Milton Berle's Texaco Star Theater.

When the act broke up, Danny Young became Danny Windsor and began his solo career. He played nightclubs from Toronto to Atlantic City to Hong Kong to Bucks County, Pa.

In the early 1960s, Windsor landed in Detroit, working for a time at the Ten Eleven on Farmer St. He later emceed wildly popular female impersonation shows at the Diplomat Lounge on Second Boulevard. "Our shows went on at nine, 11 and one," he remembered in a 2003 oral history interview. "We used to do three shows a night. We worked our asses off."

During the same interview, Windsor recounted how an old style of camp

something was slightly gay, people went to see it, especially the gay crowd."

By the mid-70s, Windsor began to perform predominantly in drag, impersonating such greats as Ethel Merman, Totie Fields and Judy Garland. He also created an outlandish character called Disco Dolly.

In 1977, he opened the Eagle's Nest, the first known gay bar in Muskegon. He originally had doubts about opening a gay establishment in western Michigan, but the club was a success for several years thanks to his troupe the Danny Windsor Revue.

Bobby Bruno, who has performed as the renowned Jennifer Foxx throughout the Detroit area and beyond since the mid-70s, worked with Windsor at Bally's in Atlantic City from 1988 to 1993. Contacted via Facebook, Bruno heralded Windsor's talent and professionalism. "Mr. Windsor had a strong maternal/paternal instinct

Windsor retired to Muskegon in the early 1990s, having discovered the town in the 50s when he appeared at the Northway Lanes bowling alley. Even in retirement, he loved to entertain and worked for many years as a greeter at Meijer.

Windsor last performed on stage at age 82 in a farewell extravaganza at the Frauenthal Center for the Performing Arts in Muskegon in Aug. 2007.

Windsor loved to regale audiences with stories of celebrities he had known, including Marlene Dietrich, who once borrowed a cup of sugar from him. Five years later they met again and she recognized him. "You're the one with the sugar!" she shrieked.

No memorial service is planned. According to the executor of his estate Debra Brown-Hendrickson, Windsor's body has been cremated and, per his wishes, friends will scatter his ashes near Palm Springs, Calif.

BTL 1-31-13 p.6

www.PrideSource.com