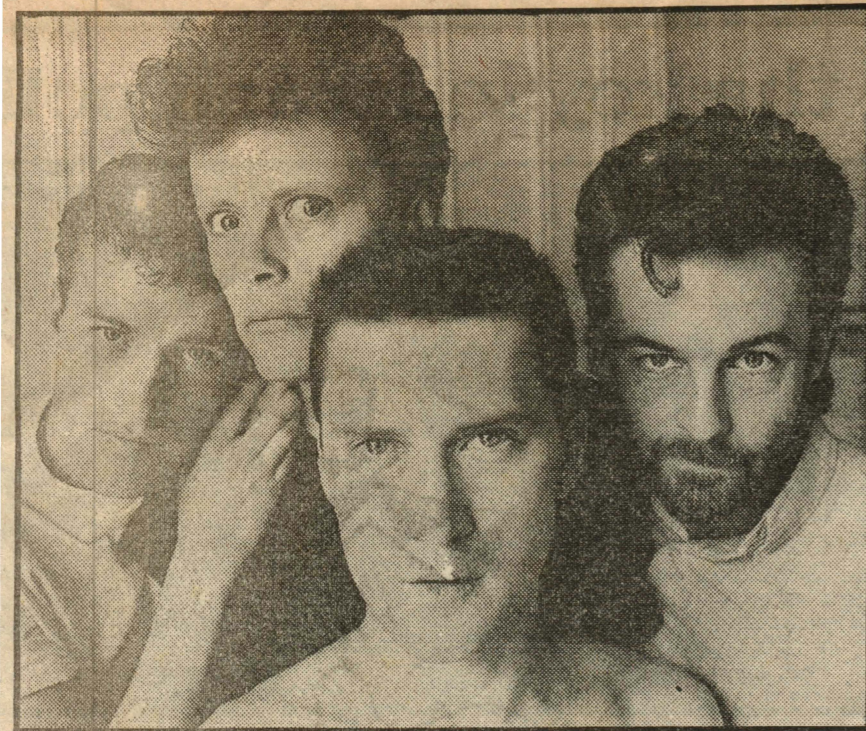


Pictures of the Joeys (left) by Frank Martin.
Pictures of Graham Flander by Mike Abrahams

Graham Flander dresses as a woman and becomes a waitress. The Joeys theatre/rock group are all male but their act takes the mickey out of macho. Between them, Flander and the Joeys, as these reports show, share the unusual experience of men meeting entrenched male attitudes head on

A night out with the boys



ON A busy night Graham Flander has his bottom slapped 30 times. Men pinch him as he walks by and say, "Hello, darling, what are you doing afterwards?" Or they wonder what a nice girl like him is doing in a place like this.

These are everyday aggravations for many women but they are not the sort of remarks that men are used to receiving. But then, not many men earn their living as Graham Flander does. This 20-year-old son of a Portsmouth security man works as a waitress at The Hippodrome, London's latest mega-discotheque.

The job has given him a unique insight into female experience. Nightclub waitresses are hired for their looks. They must smile prettily, serve drinks and ingratiate themselves to the men who pay the bills and leave them handsome tips. A more perfectly sexist situation it would be hard to imagine.

"I've got a lot more sympathy for women since I started working here," says Graham. "Feminists hate the patronising way that men treat them. I think some of them are extremists but a lot of it is true. I don't blame girls for not liking being harassed at work. I get it all the time. You have to get used to it. You learn things to say. You laugh it off."

Graham has been in this extraordinary position since the night he and some friends — all dressed with fashionable androgyny — turned up to a party night at the club. He asked one of the staff if there were any jobs going — for a man — and the request was passed on to the Hippodrome's owner, Peter Stringfellow.

Stringfellow, who has a taste for the profitably

bizarre, said he could only give him a job as a waitress. It was not a possibility that had occurred to Graham, but he accepted for the same reasons as any girl just up from the provinces; the job was glamorous, well-paid and offered the chance to meet famous people. Clearly he has unusual predilections, but he says he is not a transvestite, simply — *a la* Boy George — a man who chooses to dress in clothes not conventionally thought of as male, just as a woman might choose to wear a mannish look.

"He's not there as a freak," Stringfellow remarks. "He just happens to look like a very beautiful woman. I consider him as a friend. I'm hoping to push society into greater gentleness and tolerance."

So, five nights a week for the past four months, Graham has turned up for work in his jeans, gone upstairs to the ladies' changing room and spent two hours transforming himself into an approximation of womanhood. A blonde wig and two-inch fingernails and a lot of make-up are followed by a pink leotard and tutu, stockings, suspenders and stiletto heels.

The real girls in the room seem to have become used to his presence; "The first time I walked into the changing room it went very quiet and I got a few looks. Now it's fine. I go up there to get dressed and I chat to the girls. I'm Graham and they're Nanette and Julie and so on. It's just people rather than a man and seven girls."

The public, however, are not to know that once Graham gets down to the business of serving drinks. As he says: "People see my long hair and my outfit and they assume that I'm female. I get chatted up an awful lot. If I speak they know I'm a man, but you can

get away with just smiling and laughing. If men see a blonde they don't expect any intelligence."

That is one of the lessons that girls learn just by growing up, but Graham has chosen to take a crash course in the compromises and accommodations that are made when men become the



'It's almost like being two people instead of one. I sometimes lose track'

opposition: "You start thinking of men as a separate sex and treating them as women do," he says. "You learn when to laugh, when not to. You have to be more modest if you're a girl. You tend to let men hold the conversation and you just return it. You give opinions, but you don't hold them too strongly — you tend to take second place to a degree."

Then there are the occasional outbursts of violence. "A guy walked past one time and he slapped my arse really hard. I asked him to stop so he did it again. It gets to the point where it's sadistic and not done for fun."

"But I don't want to sound as though I hate men because you also get treated nicer if you're a girl. If you're a man they slap you on the back and say, 'Allo mate.' But if you're a girl they're more gentle and give you compliments."

"Men will tell me I look sexy or gorgeous. If I look like a girl I like it, but I'd hate it if they said that when I was dressed normally. People say: 'Why don't you have an operation?' But that's not the reason I'm doing this. Underneath it all I'm still a man and I don't feel like a woman even if I'm treated like one by the customers."

So he says, but there are clearly times when distinctions can become blurred: "We'll be in the changing room for an hour after work chatting about tips and the girls' boyfriends. It's girls' talk, things like, 'Oh my God, did you get the creep on the corner table?' I have the same experiences they do, so we talk about the same things. If I was working behind the bar with the guys I'd say, 'Did you see that gorgeous number in the mini?' but it seems strange telling the girls that, so if an attractive man has walked in we'll talk about that."

"The problem is that I'll go downstairs to a situation where I've got to be a man and it can be very hard to adjust the way I think and act. It's almost like being two people instead of one. I sometimes lose track."

In the end, however, reality always intrudes. Once men know that Graham is a fellow

man they tip him less well than they do the girls. After all, there's nothing in it for them: "If they flirt with a girl they think that she might say 'Yes' and go home with them. If they flirt with me they know that's all they're going to get."

And he knows that the means of escape of which the other girls in the club dream — a visiting film producer or rich husband — are closed to him. He pays the same penalties they do, but without hope of a payoff. "As soon as I can't carry this off I'll stop," he says. "At 35 I'll be wearing classic male clothes and I'll have short hair. I don't want to look like mutton dressed as lamb."

He says he is happy, but he must sense that he is trapped in a sort of limbo. "Two squaddies came in one night and one of them took a shine to me. He was really nice and I didn't tell him the truth because I didn't want him to be nasty to me."

"They came back a couple of times, and on the third night his mate clicked and told him. He cut me dead from then on and it really hurt because he'd have talked to me if I hadn't been a guy. That's the only time I've wished I was a girl."

Every night before the club opens Graham Flander plays his favourite song on the jukebox — Marilyn Monroe singing I Just Want To Be Loved By You from Some Like It Hot. You may recall a line of Jack Lemmon's from that film; "I tell you," he says to Tony Curtis as a real woman walks past the two stars, who are in drag, "It's a whole different sex."

Some time later Lemmon is talking to himself; "I'm a girl," he says. "I'm a girl. I'm a girl. I'm a girl..."

David Thomas

