

Gay and lesbian Archives (GALA): Inventory

AM 2708

Mark Griffin Collection

1982 to 1986

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Summary

Title: Mark Griffin Collection, 1982 to 1986

Size: 2 videocassettes, 3 photograph albums; 60 photographs; 1 file

Locations: Document warehouse: VHS tapes in box 2067884 and 1 box of photographs and notes in box 2070035; mounted Boylesque poster in GALA storeroom.

Restrictions: None.

Source: Donated by Neil Starr and Spencer Pillai, 1998.

Description: This collection is named in remembrance of Mark Griffin, who died in 1987 from AIDS related causes. The material was donated by Neil Starr and Spencer Pillai, friends of Mark Griffin. Most of the material in this collection is related to the Boylesque shows - a successful drag mime that ran from 1984 to 1986. It includes video footage of the Miss East Coast Competitions held in 1984 and 1985. Mark Griffin was crowned Miss East Coast in 1984. There is also a mounted Boylesque poster. It also includes Graeme Reid's background notes to the collection, and background notes to the video recordings.

Special formats: videocassettes; photograph albums; photographs; mounted poster

Processed: April 1999, by Graeme Reid

Background note.

This is an edited version of Graeme Reid's background notes compiled at a meeting with Neil Starr in October 1998.

Most of the material in the collection relates to the Boylesque shows, which Neil Starr was involved with from 1982 to 1984. The show originated in a competition held at a club called Stargazer in the early 1980's. Some of the entrants got together and produced a show that was initially performed at Stargazers and later at the Rosebank Arena, as a fundraiser for the "boys on the border". The second Boylesque show took place at Le Parisienne in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, and also appeared elsewhere. The show was the "first big drag mime show in South Africa". A video recording of the show was made at SABC studios (although never broadcast) and this recording is included in the collection. Mark Griffin, who died of AIDS related causes in 1987, appears as a bride in one of the first songs in the video. The video is followed by two German drag performances, taped by Mark Griffin. There is also video footage of the Scruples performances that took place on Wednesday and Friday nights at the club Scruples (Pretoria). Also, two photograph albums depicting the Scruples Shows.

Series List.

- 1. Material donated by Spencer Pillai**
- 2. Material donated by Neil Starr**
- 3. Graeme Reid's background notes to collection and videos**

Container list.

1. Material donated by Spencer Pillai

30 Photographs (3 b + w; 27 colour)

- 1.1 Boylesque 2nd show at Le Parisienne.
- 1.2 Spencer (centre) Unknown
- 1.3 Spencer (centre) possibly at Scruples
- 1.4 Spencer as Tina Turner 1,2,3
- 1.7 Spencer as Grace Jones
- 1.8 Spencer as chorus girl
- 1.9 Opening of Le Parisienne
- 1.10 Show at Le Parisienne
- 1.11 Show at Scruples
- 1.12 Scruples
- 1.13 Scruples
- 1.14 Spencer at Miss Rio Carnival at the Dungeon
- 1.15 Spencer at another Miss Rio Carnival at the Dungeon
- 1.16 Spencer as Diana Ross at unknown function
- 1.17 Spencer as Diana Ross at unknown function
- 1.18 Neil Starr
- 1.19 Neil Starr
- 1.20 11 miscellaneous colour photographs of various shows and performances

2. Material donated by Neil Starr

2.1 Photographic Material

- 2.1.1 Photograph album (Sakura Album)
- 2.1.2 18 colour pics at Scruples (missing)
- 2.1.3 12 loose colour pictures of Scruples
- 2.1.4 Photograph album (mini album) 15 Scruples show; 1 unknown
- 2.1.5 Sail Boat Album (Page 1 Mark Griffin (extreme right); Viennese Ball in the JHB City Hall (Mark G (2nd from left).

2.2 Video Material

- 2.2.1 2 video cassettes, 180 minutes (given to Neil Starr by Mark Griffin)
- 2.2.1 Mark Griffin - "Drag" (Boylesque)
- 2.2.2 Mark Griffin - "Drag" (Miss East Coast \ La Parisienne)

Other

- 2.3. Mounted poster for Boylesque at the Arena Theatre, Rosebank. Poster depicts Marilyn Monroe with a moustache. Undated. (in storeroom)
- 2.4. Review - Star Tonite!
- 2.5. Letter from Val re Mark Griffin

- 3. **Graeme Reid's background notes to the collection and to the videos.**
Compiled on the basis of a discussion with Neil Starr on 26th October 1998.

Background notes

I met with Neil Starr on 26th October 1998 in his home in 86 7th Street, Parkhurst. These background notes were compiled on the basis of our discussion.

Most of the material in this collection was related to the Boylesque shows. Neil Starr was involved with Boylesque for two years, from 1982-84. The Boylesque show originated in a competition held at a club called Stargazer (run by a man called Rocky) in the early 1980's. Stargazers hosted a drag mime competition, and a French group judged the contestants. Some of the entrants got together and produced a show that was initially performed at Stargazers. After the Stargazer performances, the show was presented at the Rosebank Arena - as a fund raiser for the "boys on the border". Patrick van Blerk (owner of Zipps) organised the second show of Boylesque at Le Parisienne in Braamfontein. (Le Parisienne, a cabaret venue and restaurant, was located in the building where Champions is today. This site had previously housed the Academy Theatre, before becoming the Seigfried Mynhard Theatre, then Le Parisienne, then, following a fire (arson?), it became Champions). The Boylesque shows also appeared at Zipps and at the Dungeon as well as Scruples Club in Pretoria, the show was the "first big drag mime show in South Africa." Greg Reichmann arranged for the show to be videoed at SABC studios, (although this was never broadcast). The SABC video is included in the collection. The late Mark Griffin appears as a bride in one of the first songs in the video. Both of these videos are housed in this collection. Mark Griffin gave two video tapes of the Boylesque shows to Neil, before he died of AIDS related causes on 28th September 1987. Spencer Pillai can be seen rendering "New York, New York"; while Matthew Ronin appears as Bette Midler. The video is followed by two German drag performances, taped by Mark Griffin. After these two shows is video footage of the Scruples performances - these took place on Wednesday and Friday nights at the club Scruples (situated in a Pretoria hotel). "We all used to pile into a Reno 5 with wigs and sequins in the back and shlep off to Pretoria." There are also two photograph albums depicting the Scruples Shows.

Some background notes to the videos

Miss East Coast 1984

Miss East Coast 1984 at a club called Ronnies. (Night of Durban July) (c/f Viewpoint - Carole Charlewood video)

Mark Griffin (no 5), who grew his own hair for the competition, won the crown. "It was so important for him to win the competition that particular year because it was the year that he learned that he was HIV+." Matthew Ronan and Neil Starr performed as a duo at the competition, in the form of The Bunion Sisters. Neil appears in a green dress worn by the Lady Mayor during the 1947 Royal Visit to South Africa, and bought by Neil at the Zionist Women's League. Neil later "got a bee in his bonnet", packed up his entire wardrobe and gave it away. "Unfortunately there was no gay and lesbian archive then". Neil appears as Lumpy Latimer (Joyce Grenfell monologue called Old School Girls Reunion) a role for which he became well known.

Miss East Coast 1985

Cabaret Rene

Matthew Ronin - Big Bad Wolf

3 local Durban boys

Spencer in black and pink outfit (evening wear) wins the 1st Princess competition.

Le Parisienne Supper Club 1986 (after 1985 competition)

Before Mark got sick

Matthew; Spencer; Mark; Aron

Spencer - windpomp song. Spencer was most famous as Dianna Ross

Mark - Marilyn Munroe with fan. - Mark's absolute best. Worked and worked until he

perfected the fan. Mark died on 28th September 1987 in the Johannesburg General

Hospital - he died the night of the Durban floods. "He was the first of us to die from

AIDS" Neil made the arrangements to get his body to Durban, where his funeral was

held, at his request. His death influenced Neil's approach "to life, to AIDS". He was an

inspiration to us, the energy behind Boylesque.

To follow up - from conversation with Neil Starr 26\10\98

Other info

1978 After Dark (Benmore Gardens)

2001 (near Carlton Centre)

Stargazers

Mandy's

Zipps (became Mrs. Henderson's)

Scants (became Heaven)