

# Our Paper

Maine's Lesbian & Gay Newspaper

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## Why does she do it?



By Alan Stearns

Photos by Kara La Lomia

◆ "If you ask people in Portland who they think stands out, who's really Wow, then a lot of people will mention me. I'm respected in Portland like Hollywood royalty, whether I go out as a man or a woman." I looked up at Dennis skeptically, scribbled these words down, and swirled some tea around in my mouth.

If Hollywood royalty were ever to descend on Portland, they would certainly look more like Dennis than me. If Michael Jackson and Madonna and the old David Bowie and Boy George were all to waltz into Zootz in full regalia, surely everyone there would scream and froth and dance all night long. If Michael and Madonna were dancing next to me, I would definitely feel a little repressed, and perhaps fumble with my button-down collar to see if I could make it look a bit less uptight.

Dennis continued talking, painting himself into vivid pictures of the New York and London club scene, where androgyny and drag and high fashion blend to form what he calls visual art, the AIDS era's "look but don't touch" reformation of the disco decadence of years past. He explained trends in fishnet, the problems of dancing in heels, and the time and energy it takes to get made up for an evening. The lack of alternative clothing stores in Portland does not let him find creative clothes, but he knows

how to use what he can find to make his torso more feminine or to add that extreme edge to his chosen image for the evening.

"I only go out as a woman when I'm in a good mood. When I go out all dressed up it's definitely not for sex. I do it for a high, to get attention, to get off on the energy I generate in other people. It's to glorify a feminine part of myself and to break all of the rules."

And he is not the only one. On an average Saturday night in Portland's bars there may be six or seven men dressed as women. Every month or so, drag shows at the Limelight in Portland will attract as many as twenty participants. The culmination of these annual Miss Gay Maine pageant at the Limelight with one contestant from each of several gay bars across the state. Of the men who go to bars in drag or participate in pageants and shows, some are campy masqueraders, some are breaking rules, and others are self-professed drag queens, transvestites, or transsexuals.

What are the boundaries in this world of made-up make-believe? How can I tell when I'm in the presence of a drag queen or a transvestite? Self-definition often conflicts with the labeling done by observers, sociologists, and writers of newspaper articles. As I listened to Dennis, I tried to squeeze him into one of my own

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# NEWS

## Why does she do it?

Alan Stearns  
Photos by Kara La Lomia

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### LESBIAN AND GAY AWARENESS WEEK ON CAMPUSES

Area colleges and universities will be holding Lesbian and Gay Awareness Week this month. The University of Maine at Orono will hold its Awareness Week from April 6th through April 11 and the University of Maine at Farmington will hold its from April 5th to April 10th. The University of Southern Maine will hold its from April 13 through April 24th. A number of special events and appearances have been planned.

At the Orono campus of UMaine, Karen Thompson, who recently won a court battle for the custody of her disabled lover, will be the keynote speaker. She will speak on April 11th at 8:00 at Neville Hall, Rm. 101. A reception for Karen and her lover, Sharon Kowalski, will be held after Ms. Thompson's lecture.

USM will host Jenifer Levin, the lesbian novelist, and Lynn Lavner, a nationally known comedienne. Panel discussions on gay and lesbian studies and on bisexuality will also be in USM's program. Queer Nation will hold a recruiting tea.

UMF will bring to Maine Lea Delaria, a comedienne/blues singer, whose award-winning style, it is said, is not for the timid or easily embarrassed. Delaria will appear on April 9th at 8:00 p.m. at Thomas Auditorium in Ricker Hall. Other events for the week include a talk by Diane Elze, a former president of the Maine Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance. Elze will speak on April 8th at 7:00 p.m. at Lincoln Auditorium at the Roberts Learning Center. Ryan Scott, a Lawrence high school student, will speak on April 7th at 7:00 p.m. in Lincoln Auditorium on his experiences of dropping out of school because of gay-bashing by other students.

For more information about these programs and those at other colleges, readers should call the gay and lesbian student organizations at the various colleges. These events are usually free and open to the public.

### BIKE FOR HOPE BIKE-A-THON

A 22-mile Bike-A-Thon to benefit people living with AIDS in Maine will take place Saturday, May 2, 1992 starting at 10:00 a.m. (rain date: May 9). The Bike-A-Thon is sponsored by the People with AIDS Coalition of Maine. The ride is a 22 mile journey from Portland to Cousin's Island. Details of the route, a route map, and pledge sheet will be sent to you when the Coalition receives your completed registration form and fee. Please ask your friends, classmates, neighbors, and co-workers to either join you in the ride and register, or to pledge you. Prizes will be awarded to the top pledged riders and top finishers. T-shirts will be given to riders who turn in over \$100.00 in pledges. Sweatshirts will be given to riders who turn in over \$250.00.

The People With AIDS Coalition of Maine represents people across the state of Maine living with AIDS and HIV infection and works actively with other AIDS and community organizations to increase services already provided and to present AIDS with a human face. For more information call 773-8500.

categories. He only goes out dressed as a woman seven or eight times per year, so he doesn't fit very well into the transvestite category. Other labels were just as elusive. "I'm not camp. Camp is tacky. I'm not a drag queen. Drag queens are fat men with pancake make-up in prom dresses; they're a mess." He kept returning to the term "visual artist" as his preferred descriptive term. When I pressed him he would use the words "whee" and "wow" to try to describe his extreme and avant garde style which didn't fit into any of my categories and seemed to short circuit both of our internal thesauruses. I guess "whee" and "wow" were good descriptors.

I tried to label him to get a grasp on what he is all about and then figure out how I should react to him. As do so many good New Englanders, I struggle with two contradictory moral imperatives: to accept everyone for whom they are, and to keep people at an arm's length if they are in the slightest bit weird. So with Christian breeding in one hand and a healthy dose of internalized phobia in the other, I continued firing questions at Dennis to both broaden my mind and justify my prejudices at the same time.

Despite my hang-ups, I got immersed. I interviewed Dennis at his trendy shop in the Old Port, sitting on a comfortable couch with neo-disco music adding mood and attitude. Surrounded by magazines with glossy spreads on New York drag, we talked casually about *Paris is Burning* and *La Cage aux Folles*. I

listened as he revealed the finer points of etiquette of dancing on sound speakers at the Limelight, and I mellowed as his soothing voice talked about Europe's perceived lack of hang-ups on gender and dress. The more we talked, the more relaxed I became in exploring topics of style, of masculinity and gender, and of "wow" and "whee."

"Last year I went to London and saw a lot of gay men with shaved heads. It sort of scared me. When I got home I shaved my head. I did it to confront my fear. Anyone who's afraid of something should try it... because they might like it." Did he mean me?

Ouch. I snapped back into reality; well, maybe perhaps into rigidity. I got too comfortable which made me uncomfortable.

OK. I have my own "drag" story: When I was in kindergarten there was a corner of the room that had all sorts of clothes. During play time, I used to put on the dresses. I wasn't afraid

of dressing up then, but I'm afraid of it now. I paused, pulling my wits together, trying to figure out how to escape Dennis' call for me to confront my dragophobia, not to mention my baldophobia. I wanted to leave this interview informed and with understanding, but not bald and with garters.

I found my escape by patching together a politically correct rationalization for my masculinism. Drag is misogyny.

Drag is men copying. It was the perfect answer, and excuse. I grabbed the tenets of feminism to pull myself away from the brink of femininity on which I teetered. How refreshing it was to use feminism as an excuse to be a male conformist. I furthered my escape by rationalizing that Michael Jackson and Madonna have never been to Zootz and if they did show up incognito everyone would think they

continued next page



Photo by Kara La Lomia

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# NEWS

## Why does she do it?

were weird anyway. And who ever said the New York club scene is anything to emulate? I reminded myself that my jeans and oxfords blend in is okay when I go out dancing in Portland, even if I don't get treated like Hollywood royalty.

The relationship of drag to feminism is complex and my semantical escape from dragophobia fails through the oversimplification of "masculine" and "feminine". Just as I am careful not to go too far justifying macho images through sophomoric reductions of feminism, feminists must also be wary of dismissing drag through the convenient accusation of misogyny. In simple English, cross dressing is much too complex to be written off as self-deprecation or humor at the expense of feminine or queer stereotypes. Those who dismiss cross dressing as misogynistic must consider the parallel judgments against women who dress as men. They must also evaluate the broad range of reasons why people cross dress.

Drag's conflict with feminism comes in part because these men dare to assume both genders and thus affront some very sacred rules of society. Feminism, in turn, is intricately linked with gender imaging, and thus the two will inevitably be forced to square off. There is a fine line between

self-expression and self-contempt. One man may truly be trying to make fun of himself as he parades in a ball gown. The man next to him in a similar ball gown, however, may be trying to escape society's rigidly imposed masculine role,

**In simple English, cross dressing is much too complex to be written off as self-deprecation or humor at the expense of feminine or queer stereotypes.**

exploring his feminine needs as best he knows how. Not all men who try to break the stereotypes of society will arrive at an appropriate balance of androgyny and sensitivity as defined by the gender police.

Gender is too often simplified in a manner that excludes the possibility of variation. Words like effeminate, feminine, butch, femme, macho, and masculine that describe gender often have insurmountable connotations attached to them which scare men and women into confining but socially acceptable roles. What do most men do when they are told by a "visual artist" to express their femininity? We squirm. And we squirm just as much when a feminist tells us to get over our oppressively patriarchal

ways. What do we do to stop all this squirming? Dennis' observations on dealing with fears and confronting issues are actually quite on point. He recognizes that a lot of the hostility toward drag is that many women and men are afraid to be feminine. One way to deal with this fear, he says, is to "put on a skirt and a little eyeliner and go dancing." If you need more, try some fishnet and a lot of eyeliner. And if that works really well, climb up on a speaker. Just make sure that it's not Dennis that you're pushing off.

I sometimes describe life to myself as a continuum. On one extreme are those of us who are bullied into conformity through guilt and paranoia. Others are born balanced and mature; and some of us are born to be different. On the other extreme are those of us who are born to be different but go through life basically fucked up and weird.

As you might have guessed, I am balanced and Dennis is different. I sometimes saunter toward repressed and he sometimes promenades toward outrageous. After talking to him, I decided that he is definitely within my comfort zone, or perhaps I expanded my zone a bit so that it now includes him. Dennis' zone already include me. This article asks you to question yours.

"If someone is offended when I go out, they can leave or go to the other side of the bar. There are many side streets in life. Not everyone has to go down the

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## UNIVERSITY OF MAINE TRUSTEES VOTE AGAINST ROTC BAN

A U.S. Department of Defense policy banning gays from military service will not be protested by the University of Maine, according to 6-5 decision by the system Board of Trustees.

The faculty, professional, and student senates at the University of Southern Maine had asked trustees to protest the military's practice because prohibiting gays and lesbians from joining ROTC violated the university's anti-discrimination policies.

Bennett Katz, who was among five board members who supported protesting the policy on March 23, compared discrimination against homosexuals to the military's discrimination against blacks during World War II.

"I am going to vote for this because it will make me feel good," Katz said. "If you can't have a basic statement of humanity in the midst of the humanities, where can you?"

But Dr. George Wood said sexual preference was not the same as race or religion.

"Your analogy is not appropriate to the issue," Wood said. "Sexual preference is something that can be seen as behavioral, genetic, or whatever."

In a 1991 letter to the USM faculty senate board Chairwoman Patricia Collins said federal laws require the university to give ROTC access to the campus, emphasizing the university's obligation to protect the opportunity for military training on campus.

The board had the option of directing the chancellor to protest the military's policy in a letter to defense Secretary Richard Cheney, but Collins and Harrison Richardson said the move could be a step toward eliminating ROTC.

"I do not feel we should endanger the status of ROTC on our campus and what it provides," Collins said.

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# NEWS

## Why does She do it?

### APOLLO SOCIETY TO FORM

A new organization, called the "Apollo Society", designed to address the social and political needs fo New England's lesbian and gay atheists, free thinkers, ethical humanists and Hellenists has been formed, according to Alexander Wallace of Portland, Maine.

"There are plenty of gay churches and synagogues and assorted social, activist and lecture societies and organizations around that claim to be apolitical but that still cling to the Judeo-Christian political tradition and status ladder," said Wallace. "Many of them may not even realize that they are religiously political. While atheists and Hellenists can still argue the value of "religion", both groups recognize that, from Day One, the organized Western Church has been antagonistic to gays and lesbians-and women and native Americans and many other persons and minorities that won't 'bend the knee'. Wallace also said, "Everything you've heard about our Saturnalias and Bacchanalias is true."

Persons interested in the Apollo Society can contact Alexander Wallace at 773-5726 or at P.O. Box 5301, Portland, Maine 04101.

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*With pride in yourself,  
you can appreciate the  
differences in others.*

main drag." Dennis announced as a perfect ending statement to the interview. When I go out now, I'll be less likely to cross the street to avoid the weird and the different, the "wow" and the "whee". ■



## Why I do it.



Eric dresses like a woman only when he performs in shows or pageants. Using the name Shivan, he has been lip-synching for the past two years. "I'm a female impersonator. I refuse to use the word 'drag queen'."

"The first time I ever did it was when I was in the navy." The Navy traditionally has an initiation for sailors when they cross the equator for the first time. The only way to avoid the initiation is to win a beauty pageant the night before the crossing. Dressed as Madonna, Eric won. "Why do I do it? -- A woman came up to me after a show at the Limelight and asked me why I don't just get it over with and have an operation. I don't want to be a woman. I just want to perform -- and performing dressed as a woman is what I do best."

"I do it for personal satisfaction and to get a reaction from the crowd."

Eric will appear in *La Cage aux Folles* at the Lyric Theatre in South Portland starting on April 24th.

# Planets

"A UNIVERSE OF GREAT FOOD"

**Dinners:** All dinners come with salad, rolls and butter. If you want a lighter meal, skip the salad and we'll take two dollars off.

Sauteed chicken breast with asian blackbean, garlic and scallions sauces. Served with rice and vegetable. \$9.95

Thai noodles with red curry sauce and assorted vegetables. with tofu \$7.95, with chicken \$8.95

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Frittata-Italian style omelet with tomatoes, mushrooms, onions, and provolone. Served with pesto and bruschetta. \$7.95

Focaccia with chopped fresh tomatoes, red onions, and olive tapenade dressing. \$4.95

Vegetarian potsticker with tofu, broccoli, bok choy, scallions, garlic and peppers. Served with soy-ginger dressing. \$3.95

Quesadilla with cheddar and cilantro. Served with blackbean salsa and sour cream on shredded lettuce. \$3.95

Cesar salad with fresh grated parmesan and bruschetta. \$3.95.

Southwestern-style fajita salad with grilled sirloin, salsa, cheddar, shaved lettuce and assorted vegetables. Served with flour tortillas. \$5.95

Lebanese salad plate with hummus, lentil-rice salad, red onions, chopped tomatoes and pita bread. \$4.95

Angel hair pasta with pesto cream and sundried tomatoes. Served with fresh grated parmesan and bruschetta. \$6.95

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**Music Review**  
**Be Political Not Polite**

Romanovsky and Phillips

◆ One look at the 60s shows us how important music is to political change. Thirty years later, music is still just as important in the motivation and encouragement of a group of people to continue their struggle for social justice. Romanovsky and Phillips' fourth record, *Be Political Not Polite*, could be seen thirty years from now as an important part of the musical heritage for gay rights.

*Be Political Not Polite* takes a look at many issues concerning the gay and lesbian community. The growing issue of gay parenting is dealt with in the song "Love Is All It Takes." Sung as a lullaby to a child by a gay parent, every word in the song deals with the fear that society will turn that innocent child's love for the parent into hate, using "prejudice and bigotry." "Good night my child/ So innocent, so young/ When they start teaching you to hate me/ I pray you won't succumb."

"Hymn" takes a look at the issue of the intolerant Catholic church, not only because of its views on gays and lesbians, but also because of its views of women, in relation to both the priesthood and abortion. "You deny all women the right/ To decide their bodies' fate/ Suggesting that their purpose here/ Is just to procreate." Also criticized is the church's condemnation of safe sex as a sin and the way it, as many churches do, "distorts the words to support your platform", referring to the Bible. The liner notes give the impression that the song does not criticize gay members, but instead "it is my hope that you will not compromise yourselves but will aggressively work towards bringing them into the 20th century."

"When Heterosexism Strikes" is a song dealing with the issue of the discrimination and oppression of gays by the homophobic society in which we exist. The song tells about Michael, who fought in the war, and was considered a good soldier "until a witch hunt of McCarthy style" in his room reveals love letters from another man, which in turn leads him to be on trial as a national security threat. The song also tells the tale of Sharon and Sue, who are kicked out of a restaurant "because they had the nerve to kiss." These are examples of heterosexism striking, and the song tells us that "we've got to stand up and fight when heterosexism strikes."

One of the reasons that we are prone to homophobic attacks is because we keep

our sexuality hidden. This issue is addressed in two songs, "One of the Enemy" and "Queers in the Closet." "I can't reach out/ To the ones who need a friend/ So I must pretend to be/ One of the enemy." The liner notes tell us that "the enemy is everyone, gay or straight, who passively supports oppression by their silence." "Queers in the Closet" berates the famous gays and lesbians for not using their stardom to help complete a cause that those before us have worked so hard for. "Queers in the closet in positions of power/ Doing a dance on thin ice/ Deals with the devil to be heros for an hour/ How long must we pay the price?"

A way of fighting oppression is suggested in the title song, "Be Political Not Polite." The song tells us that all hurtful words, expressions, and phrases are "every bit as deadly as a bullet tearing through the land" and that one way to solve these problems is to speak up whenever someone uses discriminatory terms against any group of people. This solution may seem small, but "silence keeps us all in darkness. We can't change it overnight/ But we can shed a little light/ Be political, not polite."

Among the political songs are the usual, yet refreshing, "lighter" songs of bad relationships, good relationships, and the trademark tango. Guest vocalists Holly Near, the Phillips Sisters, and Michael Callen (whose book "Surviving AIDS" inspired an especially uplifting song on this album, "No False Hope"), among others, make this a musically enjoyable album. The lighter songs appear almost like reminders that, no matter how serious some issues are, it is also important to enjoy some songs just for the music.

More political than their previous three albums, this album is a little political and a little polite. More than a source of entertainment, this album serves as a kick in the ass for those getting burned out from the daily oppressive struggle, and hopefully will give others the boost they need to get out of the closet. ■

• Malcolm K. Smith

**MLGPA Update:**

The MLGPA Board of Directors met 3/16/92 in a day long retreat to ensure the health as an organization be robust and filled with vitality. Over two dozen participants spent an enlightening day conversing and focussing on ways that MLGPA can work effectively to represent the concerns of the community. Betsy Sweet and Peaches Bass served as facilitators for the day-long workshop. Future visions of the organization included successful fruition of lesbian and gay rights legislation in Maine law, the establishment of a lesbian and gay credit union, and the establishment of support services for lesbian and gay youth. MLGPA thanks everyone for the great response to the recent survey. The results have been used in the development of a new mission statement and organizational structure/operating framework. Various working committees discussed fundraising, legislative, education, membership, entertainment, and regional concerns. MLGPA's next meeting date can be found in the Calendar section.

**MAINE WRITER  
FEATURED IN  
CHRISTOPHER STREET**

A short story by Portland writer Alfred DePew appeared in *Christopher Street* (Issue 174). The story, "Voici! Henri" is from DePew's book of stories, *The Melancholy of Departure* for which DePew won the Flannery O'Connor Prize for Short Fiction. He teaches composition and literature at the Portland School of Art.

**ALTERNATIVE MEDIUMS  
PRESENTS PERFORMANCE  
NIGHT AND ART SALE**

On Friday, April 10th, Alternative Mediums 1992 will present its 4th Annual Performance Night and Art Sale. Alternative Mediums is a group of local artists who pool their talents to create a forum for alternative art and raise money for a variety of AIDS organizations and AIDS-related work. Their goal is to integrate AIDS awareness into artistic expression; to bring together art and activism and have a good time in the process.

On the same day next door to Zootz, Warehouse will be hosting an art sale from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. All works for sale have been donated by the artists, so all money raised will go to Alternative Mediums 1992. This will be a great opportunity to view and purchase innovative and exciting works. Interested artists may donate pieces for sale at the event by dropping off their work at the Warehouse (29 Forest Ave.) on Wednesday, April 8th, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. or Thursday, April 9th, from 10:00 a.m. until noon. Contracts will be available then or by calling 799-0275. There is no admission fee for the art show, and there will be a gala reception from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Alternative Mediums T-shirts featuring original artwork by Cynthia Jabar will be on sale for only \$100.00!

Over the past four years, Alternative Mediums has raised over \$10,000 to fight AIDS. Now, in the midst of a recession, the need is greater than ever as most AIDS organizations are getting less funding from the state or none at all. Events like Alternative Mediums offer the chance to utilize your money twice—to invest in art and great entertainment and fight AIDS at the same time. Please join them and "fight that AIDS thang". For more information call 775-1514 or write to Alternative Mediums 1992, c/o 10 Pine St., Portland, ME 04102.

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