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PRIDE '95

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P L U S :

LARRY KRAMER • ISAAC JULIEN • BOBBY CRUSH
RAQUEL FROM CORONATION STREET

PRIDE '95

THE MARCH

THE organisers of London's annual Lesbian and Gay Pride festival have hailed this year's march through central London as the biggest and best yet, with an estimated 60,000 lesbians, gays, children and dogs taking part.

Even the absence of the promised heatwave and the constant threat of rain, did not deter the crowds who gathered, whistles and sound-systems blaring, at Hyde Park on Saturday June 24th for the two and half mile march to Parliament.

The front of the march left Hyde Park on the stroke of noon. Setting an invigorating pace were the Scottish lesbian drumming band, **Sheboom**, followed closely by a phalanx of people with disabilities under the banner of **Regard**, the disability rights campaign. Activist and sociology lecturer, **Tom Shakespeare**, was there with his daughter, Ivy, aged 7. And the first disabled Sister of Perpetual Indulgence, **Sister Dominatrix of the Divine Tongue**, had come all the way from Nottingham. She was later to be seen racing round Parliament Square in her wheelchair, much to the bemusement of the serried ranks of bored and surly police officers.

As planned, the disabled posse led the way for the **Visibly Lesbian** banner which proclaimed this year's much-talked about and anticipated theme: Lesbian Visibility, designed to increase the profile of lesbians within Pride, the gay community and the outside world. Marching under the Visibility banner were hundreds of dykes who were joined by a large and rather vocal group of Lesbian Avengers with their bomb-logo banners and the familiar black and white "We recruit" T-Shirts.

A host of dyke groups followed, from the **Older Lesbian Network**, through the **lesbian mothers** and their children, to the women from Dyke Road, Brighton, marching in uniform under the **DIKEA** banner.

Gliding gracefully into the march at the end of Park Lane to lead the whole procession down to Parliament Square, via Piccadilly, Trafalgar Square and Whitehall were the floats headed by the Lesbian Visibility lorry covered in red balloons, rainbow banners and dressed up dykes. More eye-catching though was the Gay Men Fighting Aids (GMFA) **pink tank** trundling along behind. Other equally ostentatious displays included the floats belonging to the nightclubs **Fist** and **Heaven**.

Making their colourful presence felt among the rainbow flags and banners were a variety of drag queens, lewd nuns, and drag kings. Marching alongside these were gay Buddhists, leather dykes and gay men, not to mention the dancing sailors, rubber queens and what appeared this year to be a larger amount of lesbian and gay parents with their children.

A large contingent of **black lesbians and gay men** brought a touch of carnival to the

parade. Dressed by designer, Cyprian Decoteau, 30 men and women followed in the wake of the carnival king and queen, Reutheven Roberts and *Gay Times* very own Denise Worme.

Sadly the **dykes on bikes** were fewer in number and quieter than most hoped for or wanted, and the chilly climate no doubt put a stop to so many semi-nude exhibitionists who were out in force during last year's scorcher. And in contrast to the 1994 march, with the age of consent debate still fresh in people's minds, there was also a distinct lack of protest, placards and pandemonium outside either Downing Street or Parliament although there were a couple of kiss-ins in Whitehall and some chanting by the **Stonewall Immigration Group**. (John Major was not at home, having other fish to fry...)

It was also very noticeable that the political groups, such as **OutRage!** and **Stonewall**, were largely towards the back half of the march. **Chris Smith MP** was seen early on upfront, only to disappear into the throng shortly after. It was a far cry from the days when the parade was led by a motley crew of politicians and celebrities. In fact, the real change this year came from a somewhat unexpected quarter. For the first time, **lesbian and gay police officers** marched openly under the banner of LAGPA, the Lesbian and Gay Police Association. Officers from London, Bristol and Birmingham were joined by two men from GOAL (Gay Officers Action League) New York and one from GOAL New Jersey. The response this section of the march got from onlookers was remarkable. People applauded, whooped and blew whistles to show their support.

Also making their mark were the **Lesbian and Gay Firefighters**, whose banner proclaimed them to be United and Proud. Joining them were colleagues from the London branch of the **Fire Brigade Union**.

At Parliament Square, some of the founders and leading activists from the **Gay Liberation Front**, without whom much of the modern Pride event would not be possible, greeted the march. Then, the parade simply petered out into the back streets and the desperate scramble for means of transport to Victoria Park began. Not for the first time, voices were to be heard protesting the faint absurdity of a march which ends with the marchers stranded on the wrong side of town from the day's other main event, the festival.

But despite that and the mainstream media confusion as to the exact number of marchers (the *News of the World* put it at 3,000 "near-naked homosexuals"), the Pride Trust reckon the march took four and half hours to finish and was more successful than even they imagined.

● Photographs by
**BILL SHORT &
SUZANNE RODEN**

Vicky Powell and Colin Richardson



PRIDE '95

BLACK DIVERSITY.

FROM humble beginnings in 1991 – a small stall and a sound system which Pride stewards mistook for a straight invasion – the **People of Colour Focus** now consists of a large tent which stages guest PAs, scene DJs and live acts.

This year, Pride allocated a budget of £1,600 which was managed by **Black Diversity**, a core group of black lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who spent an average of 25 hours a week in the run-up to the festival, producing leaflets, making costumes, booking acts and DJs.

I was fortunate to be elected **Carnival Queen** so on the day, myself and the **Carnival King**, Reutheven Roberts, got decked up in **traditional Trinidadian carnival costume**. Our outfits were made by Black Diversity member, Cyprian Decoteau, who is designing costumes for this year's Notting Hill Carnival. He also made 30 red and white outfits for other people of colour to don. The effect was spectacular: with our wild dancing and eye-catching costumes, we were the centre of attention.

The number of black people on the march this year was down from previous years. Many stayed away for fear of being racially attacked in or around Victoria Park, an area notorious for the activities of the British National Party and other fascist groups. These very real fears were tragically borne out later in the day when Bruce Tomlinson, one of the leading organisers of the people of colour focus, was savagely assaulted by a gang of white men.

Those who did make it to the people of colour tent were treated to sounds from DJs Biggy C, Chris McKoy, Dionne and Michelle, Merran and Funky G, Supa Don and Sista Culcha, The Rude Boys, and Ritu and Rizwan. The music was an **eclectic mix** of ragga, swing, hip-hop, rap, soul, funk, Hindi, bhangra, garage, house, Latin, calypso and soca.

For the first time, the stage was also used for **live performances** from the likes of Isigi, an all-female African dance troupe, MC Juice, a raunchy female ragga and hip-hop artist, and vocalists Yana Jenson and Steven Granville.

The people of colour tent was enjoyed by people of a diversity of colours – contrary to the widespread belief that it is exclusively a black person's space.

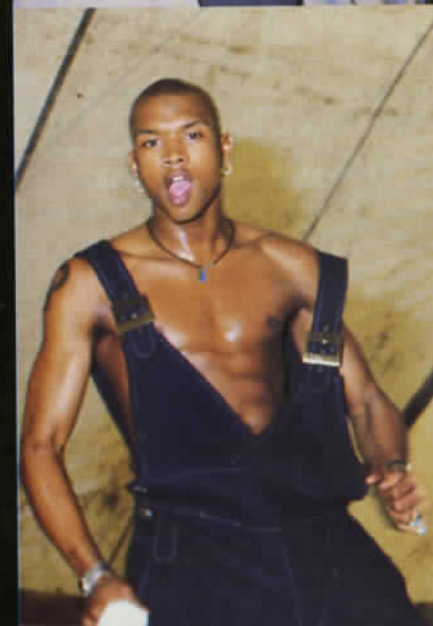
Meanwhile, black performers featured strongly in other parts of the festival. At the Wow Bar Stage, compered by writer and TV presenter **Valerie Mason John**, songstress **Adeola** made her second appearance of the day (she also performed on the main stage). And the main stage line-up included *Gay Times* cover boy and out gay pop star, **McAlmont**, soul diva Jocelyn Brown, Sybil and the incomparable Chaka Khan. The day's proceedings were brought to a close by **Labi Siffre**.

It was good to see that people of colour were visible, and not just in the people of colour tent. In future, it is to be hoped that black people will be represented within the Pride organisation in the same way that women have recently been included. At the same time, it must be recognised that Black Diversity did a commendable job this year, especially considering their limited resources and the problems with this year's venue.

Denise Worme



DEBBIE SMITH
from
Echobelly



ADEOLA



CAROL LEEMING
(left) and
SISTA CULCHA



Carnival King & Queen – RUETHEVEN and DENISE



BRUCE TOMLINSON
(left) and
friends



THE FIST FLOAT

SUZIE (right) and JACQUI (in mask)

PRIDE 1994, and Suzie Krueger – promoter of London SM club, *Fist* – is looking at the floats assembled in Park Lane. "I can do better than that," she says scornfully, and the idea for this year's *Fist* float is born. In May 1995, the idea starts to become reality as Suzie and I trudge through the traffic fumes along York Way in Kings Cross, looking for BRS Truck Rental's greasy depot. "This'd better be worth it," I thought – and lo, the hire clerk turns out to be a queen and slips us a 20 per cent discount. Scaffolding, Suzie decides, would be very in. So scaffolding, by hook or by crook (don't ask!) it is. Rolls of barbed wire and black PVC are bought, and the night before Pride, friends are roped in to build the float in the yard at Denmark Place (*Fist*'s old home). At 8.30am on Saturday, Suzie's eyes light up when the sound equipment arrives. "Just how loud is it?" she demands. At 10.30 there's a panic when the truck won't fit back through the gates and someone has to saw two inches off the scaffolding. One of the boys later admits: "I was apprehensive about being up there in front of all those people, but as soon as we pulled out of Denmark Place and people started waving, I knew it we were going to be fierce." By 11am we're freezing and desperate for the toilet; one of the boys has padlocked himself into his leather shorts and left the keys at home. A bemused policeman eyes up the sling. "Do you want a go?" he's offered. "Ooh no, more than my job's worth!" he smiles (disappointedly?). At noon when we hit Park Lane, the techno goes up several notches and the onslaught from photographers begins. It's constant for the next two hours; they shove each other out of the way to get shots of leather and rubber, tits, arses and crotches. TV crews run alongside the float and end up jumping on board with their cameras to get better angles. "That sea of faces, all smiling," says Suzie, "it was such a positive vibe. You could spot the cool queens because they were the ones into techno! When we came round Piccadilly Circus it was perfect: the music was really hard and we just went for it. What an adrenalin rush – the high was better than any drug. Whether people were into SM or not, you could tell by the look on their faces they appreciated it. All the effort and money [£700] was well worth it. I'd do it again!"

Jacqui Gibbons



PRIDE
'95

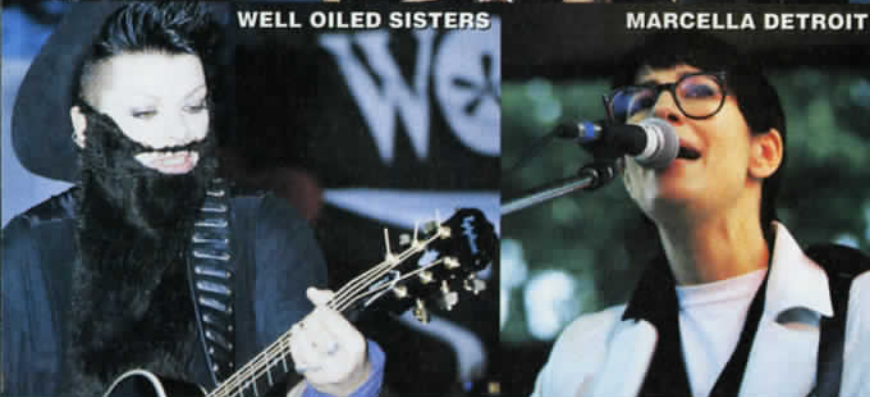
LESBIAN VISIBILITY

VISIBLY
LESBIAN



WELL OILED SISTERS

MARCELLA DETROIT



It was much talked about and the planning had been going on for months, but now that the celebrations are over, did Visibly Lesbian, the theme of this year's Pride, really work?

The focus was decided on by the Pride Trust after criticisms last year by lesbians that very little of Pride was directed at them, especially the festival's entertainments. Visibly Lesbian was also a way of showing the world, gay men included, that lesbians are a part of Pride.

So this year the pre-Pride issue of London listings magazine *Time Out* dedicated pages to the theme of lesbian visibility. There were also a number of lesbian plays and productions as well as *Diva's* Lesbian Cheek photography exhibition in the month-long Pride Arts Festival (PAF). And the procession through London was lead by dyke floats and marchers all under the Visibly Lesbian banner.

Also for the first time at Victoria Park there was the **WoW Bar Women's Stage** compered by former *Word* presenter **Katie Puckrick**, lesbian drag queen **Amy Lamé**, writer **Valerie Mason John** and GLR's **Rebecca Sandles** with guests including **The Brendas**, former Shakespeare Sister singer **Marcella Detroit** (who must surely be popular enough to play the main stage), **The Well Oiled Sisters** and **Rhoda Dakar**. Aside from this, most of the performers in the Cabaret Tent, according to the Pride Trust were dykes, including the dyke rock band **Atomic Kandy**.

However, many lesbians still feel that there was very little difference in this year's Pride to those held over previous years. The Planet Venus Women's Tent, run for the second year by London club Venus Rising, was increased in size to allow more women in but many dykes felt it would have made sense to put this tent near the WoW Bar Stage to increase lesbian visibility in the Park.

As Angie Hillcoat, a 32-year-old designer from London, said: "There were no big lesbian celebrities again on the main stage this year apart from Sandi Toksvig, and to be honest there must be some others they could have got. I'm sure Visibly Lesbian was a good idea, but apart from the Wow Bar stage there was nothing different about Pride this year, nothing that shouted lesbian visibility at you."

Talking to women after the event, *Gay Times* found this sentiment shared by many lesbians including Frances Williams, editor of *Diva*, our sister lesbian lifestyle magazine. She believes the expectations many lesbians had about the day might have been too high, and that to some the event was a let down. There was, she says, insufficient motivation on the part of lesbians themselves, although she admits the weather might have played a part in this.

"I don't blame Pride or anyone for the fact it was a bit of a damp squib," she says. "Ultimately that's up to lesbians at large. But it was lack lustre at the beginning of the march, there weren't as many women heading off colourfully as expected, and many dykes in the crowd were left asking, 'is that it?'"

One of the most visibly lesbian parts of the march was that headed by the Scottish **Sheboom** drummers, but yet again, they led the procession last year too. Maybe lesbians are right and there was nothing new about this year's Pride.

Alex Cole, Pride's women's co-ordinator in charge of the Visibly Lesbian focus, like the **Lesbian Avengers** and organisers of the WoW Bar Stage, disagrees. Alex believes the event was every bit as successful as organisers had hoped, and as far as she is concerned any increase in lesbian profile, however small, is an improvement on previous years.

"It was wonderful to see so many women coming together that day. I think we reached a whole lot of lesbians that hadn't been reached before and it was a much-needed show of strength."

"This year for the first time, it really felt like Lesbian and Gay Pride not just Gay Pride. I think we've showed that this focus was necessary and what we can do. We grasped the opportunity and I think next year will be even better."

Vicky Powell



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Being a post-modern kinda guy I'm determined to sample a little bit of everything today. I've done the dance tents. I've wandered round the park waving at people I haven't seen in ages (because we don't exactly like each other anymore). Now I start stumbling through the crowds towards the main stage. It's half five or so and there's three acts I really want to see: **Sparks**, **JX** and **McAlmont**.

Sparks, the original weirdy synth duo, happily look exactly the same as they did 20 years ago. Sadly they only do new songs. And they're all rubbish. **JX** is introduced as coming "all the way from Holland". Which is a funny way to pronounce Camberwell. Little Jake's stayed at home but the dancers and singer jiggle about energetically enough through 'Son of a gun' and 'You belong to me'. **McAlmont** stalks on in a rather fetching crushed velvet skirty thing and belts through 'Yes' and 'Saturday' (from his *Gay Pride EP*) "a song I wrote specially for today". I think how nice it'd be if a few other acts bothered to do something a bit different or special for Pride. Instead, most seem happy to plug their new single and do a "golden" oldie.

Sybil comes on. "I'm glad to be here," she says. "Like you're getting loads of other bookings these days," we all shout back. I know lots of artists can't be asked to do Pride, but with some of those playing today I didn't feel particularly glad they were here, I just thought "Why are they here?" **Jaki Graham** comes on and says "I'm glad to be supporting Pride... here's my new single." Yeah, cheers, great, thanks a lot.

Next, Victoria Park fills with the sound of the bottom of the barrel being firmly scraped. Yes folks, it's **Toyah Wilcox**. As the sight of the varnish drying on the nails of the drag queen standing next to me becomes suddenly engrossing I ponder how funny it is that Toyah's old labelmate **Jayne County**'s in town with a new band and everyfink, but we get Toyah "bleeding" Wilcox instead. Jayne asked to play Pride a while back and was rejected. Oh yeah, and did you know **Kitchens of Distinction** have never been asked to do Pride?

Where was I? Oh yeah. Bored rigid. The main stage needs some quality control. Let's have more acts that mean something special to us, and less of those so far down pop's dumper their managers think only queens will have them. There are some great moments - from the dykes (**MC Kinky** and **Lippy Lou**), the divas both old and new (**Jocelyn Brown**, **Colette** and **Plavka** - 'Somebody else's guy', 'Cantgetaman cantgetajob' and 'Right in the night' are the gayest and best songs of the day) and the boy diva (**McAlmont**). **Dead Or Alive** are pretty cool too. The nation's favourite pervy midget does a great version of the crunchy HiNRG song 'Sex drive' and, but of course, 'You spin me round right round like a record baby right round round round'. 'Things can only get better' from one of last year's highpoints, **D:Ream**, is still rather apposite and moving. Then it's **Deuce!** Yowsah! Deuce are ace, aren't they? They nelly about to their two hits and do a new song about The Bible which is actually rather good. Then some people come on and do a horrid, horrid song about Mardi Gras. I finally snap. Ah well, time for another walk methinks.

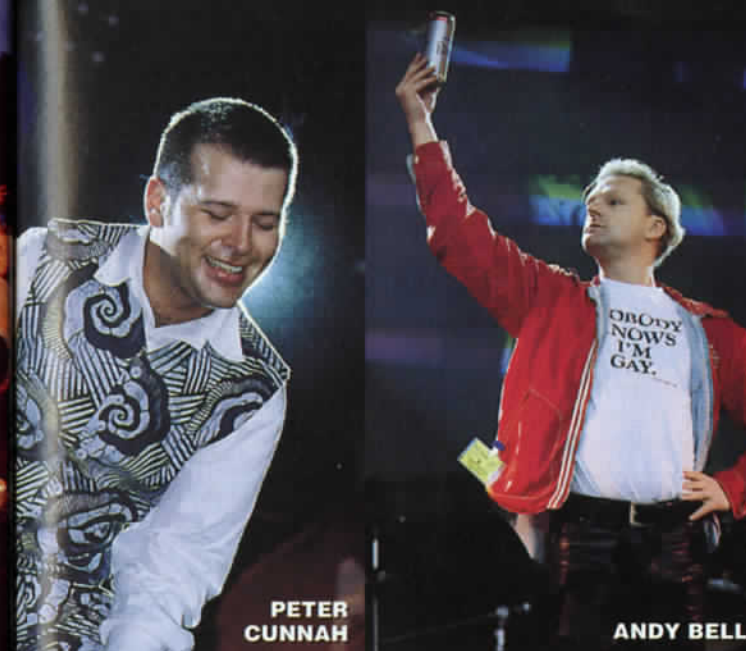
Richard Smith



LILY SAVAGE



BOY GEORGE



PETER CUNNAH

ANDY BELL



HALO JAMES plus dancers



SISTER BLISS



REGINA FONG



DANNII MINOGUE

ALISON MOYET

Remarkable as it may seem, there were some people who spent all day at Pride but never managed to find the main stage area in the vastness of Victoria Park. With so much space available and no natural amphitheatre as in Brockwell Park, the stage didn't necessarily provide the natural focus of the day, but the crowds were dense nevertheless with people warming and sheltering each other from the cold wind. And they were well served by the excellent new video screens.

Some of the biggest receptions of the day went - naturally enough - to the biggest stars. **Erasure** were the one big surprise, with **Andy Bell** doing his first Pride since 1988. *The Guardian's* music correspondent seemed to think they were upstaged by the original synth and singer duo from the Seventies, **Sparks**, who followed them on. But Andy and Vince did their level best to warm the crowd with spirited renditions of some of their biggest hits, including 'Blue Savannah Song' and 'Sometimes'.

There was a tremendous reception for **Alison Moyet** who sang almost the same set as at last year's Stonewall Equality Show, finishing with 'Whispering Your Name', one of the most well received songs of the day. **Boy George** strolled on stage looking for all the world like Nana Mouskouri MEP, and won the crowd over immediately by duetting with compere **Lily Savage**, on a glam rock version of 'These Boots Are Made For Walking'. This is the B-Side of his latest single, 'Il Adore', an Aids lament which he dedicated to all the people who couldn't be there on the day - like his late friend Stevie Hughes.

Jimmy Somerville failed to make an appearance, having been bloodied and bruised in a bike accident the previous day. The minute's silence in memory of those we've lost to Aids (organised by the Red Admiral project and supported by the Gay Exchange dating line) which he was supposed to preside over at 8pm was not a complete success. So under the direction of festival director **Teddy Witherington**, and with touching participation from comperes **Yvette** and **Sandi Toksvig**, it was repeated at 10pm to much greater effect. And **Sybil** touched everyone's heart with an acappella rendition of 'The love I lost was a sweet love...'.

By that time, the festival was drawing to a close, the firework finale was looming and time was tight. **The Drag Queen Extravaganza** was - disappointingly - no more than a quick introduction from **Sir Ian McKellen** for a score of pub and club cabaret artists, but sadly no performance of **Regina Fong's** theme song, Helen Shapiro's 'Tell Me What He Said'.

Then it was onward in search of the perfect anthem to sum up the day. **Chaka Khan** came close with 'Ain't nobody loves me better, makes feel good...'. And then the real revelation of the day. A folksy singer-songwriting star in the Sixties and Seventies, **Labi Siffre** has been in relative obscurity in Wales of recent years. But he was a big hit at Bristol Pride last year and this, and at Winter Pride in London in December. It wasn't exactly the Band Aid-style finale we'd heard rumour of, but his choral-backed rendition of 'Something Inside So Strong' was perfect.

David Smith & Terry Deal