

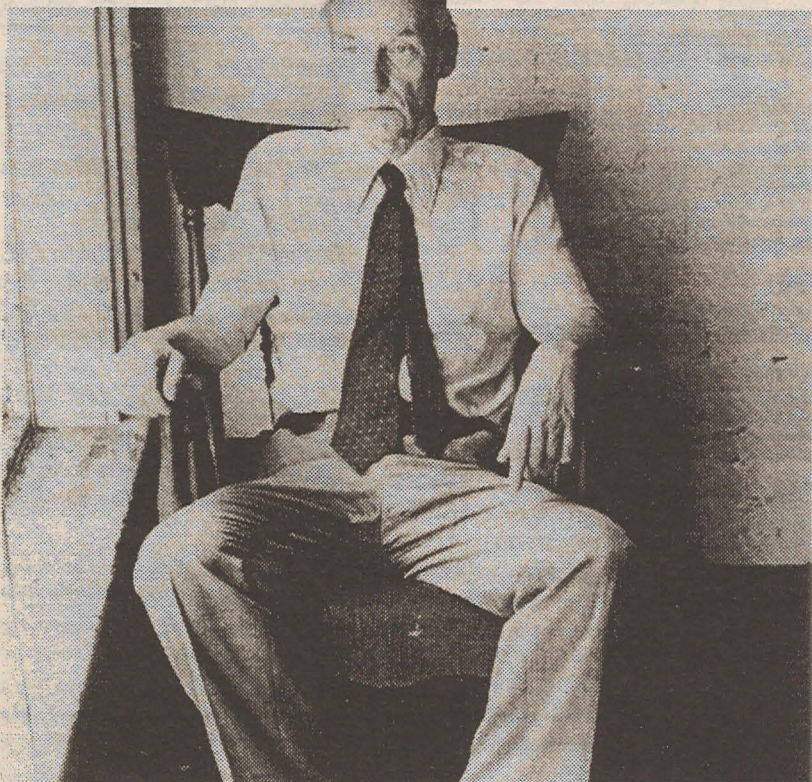
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VOLUME 1, NUMBER 34

THE GAY AND LESBIAN NEWSPAPER

NOVEMBER 11-17, 1988



William S. Burroughs, the author of such seminal books as *Naked Lunch*, in 1959 predicted the emergence of a deadly venereal virus that would spread throughout the U.S. His perceptive and prescient writing changed the face of contemporary literature with its frank and direct discussion of homosexuality. Joe Marohl reviews a new biography of the original Beatnik, page 6. —FILE PHOTO

1989 Southeastern Conference Set for Dallas

By **JEFF ELLIS**
Managing Editor

Delegates attending next spring's Southeastern Conference won't be vying for playoff berths, but will instead be formulating a strategy for lesbian and gay activism in the region.

Dallas will be the site for the 1989 Southeast-

ern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men next March, according to Nashvillian and SEC board member Sam Adams. The Texas conference will be the 14th annual event.

Organized in 1976 by students and concerned members of the Chapel Hill/Durham, North Carolina, lesbian and gay community, the SEC (not to be confused with the athletic conference) is the oldest regional gay conference in this country.

"This conference is Tennessee's greatest connection with the other 14 southeastern states," Adams said. "We are a strong region of states with strong needs. Just look at the map regarding sodomy laws — it's a solid south against us as lesbians and gay men."

Long active in Nashville's lesbian and gay community, Adams recently was elected to the Conference's Board of Directors, following the 1988 meeting in Atlanta. He has been instrumental in efforts to establish the Tennessee Gay and Lesbian Alliance (T-GALA) and has actively participated in Pride Week festivities, as well in fund-raising efforts and street demonstrations.

"After three days of seminar study last spring, I felt like Al Gore probably did the day he won the election on Super Tuesday," Adams noted. "I believe the Southeastern Conference is a good beginning for smart strategy in our region."

Ampligen Trials Volunteer Criticizes Vanderbilt Study

By **STUART BIVIN**
Editor

Tony Kane, a participant in the Vanderbilt University study of the anti-AIDS drug Ampligen, has charged the program's administrators with neglect of and callousness toward volunteers in the study.

The 47-year-old Kane, a 20-year Air Force veteran who moved to Nashville in January specifically to participate in the study, accused the program's coordinator, Brenda Barnes, R.N., and director Lewis Lefkowitz, M.D., Vanderbilt professor of preventive medicine, of improperly treatment of participants in the study and of failing to fulfill the terms of the program's contract with volunteers.

Lefkowitz denied that volunteers were mistreated during the program or upon its termination. "If he [Kane] said that someone was neglected, then certainly I can't agree with that," Lefkowitz said. "We have not had any formal complaints from any of the participants."

The study, conducted by Vanderbilt under contract with HEM Research, Inc. and DuPont, Inc., was abruptly terminated in October when the drug's manufacturers decided that data from the trials indicated the drug would be ineffective in fighting the effects of AIDS.

Kane has charged that two of the 17 volunteers in the study suffered worsened conditions because Barnes and Lefkowitz did not pull them out of the study quickly enough. In one of the cases, Kane said that the patient was allowed to deteriorate "at an alarming rate to the point of losing all feeling in one leg, extreme weight loss, swollen lymph nodes, constant fever, diarrhea, and disorientation problems before Dr. Lefkowitz and Brenda Barnes took the proper action to pull him out of the study."

"It was then done only at the insistence of his personal physician," according to a typewritten account of Kane's charges received by *Dare*.

Another participant "was allowed to deteriorate very much the same way as the second. There was a tremendous weight loss, low grade fever for 2-3 months, and lung problems... Also, this person's T4 cell count fell below the inclusion criteria to be in the study two months prior to being hospitalized and yet he was not pulled out of the program until his physician demanded it," according to the statement.

Lefkowitz, asked to comment on the allegations, said that he could not breach the confidentiality of trial participants, but said that he knew of the two cases cited by Kane.

"We were aware of the condition of the patients he's talking about, and we watched them very closely. We insisted that all the

patients have their own physicians in order to avoid the very conflicts of interest that Tony is talking about," Lefkowitz said.

Lefkowitz added that T4 counts, the measure of the blood levels of infection-fighting white blood cells, were criteria for entering the program, but were not the basis for discharge from the study, as Kane had implied in his statement. A potential volunteer's T4 count was required to be between 60 and 200 for admission to the Ampligen trials. A change in T4 count was not sufficient to bring discharge, although it would have been cause for concern and added caution about the patient's health, Lefkowitz said.

Sandee Potter, Ph.D., executive director of Nashville CARES, the AIDS service agency, said that she was not familiar with the details of the study and its administration, and so could not comment on the allegations.

"It is unfortunate that Ampligen didn't fulfill its promise — it did not prove to be effective against AIDS. And that is disheartening, because when the study was terminated by DuPont, it took people's hope. It left people angry and frustrated," she said.

Lefkowitz said that he, too had been "very disappointed when we heard about the termination," and that he hoped that the complaints would not damage community confidence in the researchers.

"I wouldn't want people to think that we were not competent to do decent, compassionate work," Lefkowitz said.

"There will be another study beginning soon after Thanksgiving, testing a combination of AZT and acyclovir," he said, adding that the new study would involve pills rather than intravenous injections and could accommodate up to 50 volunteers.

INSIDE

Riding the rollercoaster with Romanovsky & Phillips, page 4.

Circuit's Irma Vep: This is what theatre is all about, page 7.

NOW President in Tennessee Today

By **JEFF ELLIS**
Managing Editor

National Organization for Women (NOW) President Molly Yard tonight will be feted with a reception as part of the opening night program of the Tennessee NOW Conference.

The reception, held at the Park Suite Hotel, located in Century City just off Elm Hill Pike, is one of several events planned for the two-day Tennessee conference. Kim Gandy, national secretary for NOW, delivered the conference's keynote address today at a noontime luncheon at the Park Suite.

Yard has come under fire from some lesbian members of NOW because of her reluctance to discuss lesbian issues or to include lesbian topics in NOW's national agenda.

Delegates to NOW's Tennessee conference will take part in a variety of seminars and workshops during the weekend event.

Tonight's reception is set for 7 p.m. •

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Dates

Memphis

Mondays

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Tuesdays

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30 and 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Wednesdays

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Thursdays

P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
Support group, St. John's Episcopal Church, 322 S Greer. 1st Thursday only. Info 901 761-1444.

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30pm. Info 901 272-9459.
Into the Light (Women's Alcoholics Anonymous)
Meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 276-7379.

Fridays

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30 and 10pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Saturdays

Twisted Sisters (ACOA)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. Noon. Info 901 276-7379.
Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Sundays

Into the Light (Women's Alcoholics Anonymous)
Meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. Noon. Info 901 276-7379.
Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Nashville

Mondays

Nashville CARES
AIDS/ARC Support Group. 6:30pm. HIV Education Support Group. 6pm. Family Support Group. 6:30pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Lambda Group
Closed Alcoholics Anonymous meeting for gay men and lesbians, Unitarian Church. 8pm.
MAGNET (Married and Gay Network)
Support group for married gay men. 1st & 3rd Mondays only. MCC. 8pm. Info 615 320-0288.

Tuesdays

Vanderbilt Lambda Association
Meeting for gay and lesbian Vanderbilt students, faculty, staff and alumni. Vanderbilt Divinity School, Room G 23. 5:30pm. Info 615 298-9931.
AI-Anon
Open meeting, MCC. 6:30pm.
Nashville CARES
HIV Education Support Groups. 7pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Sober Sisters (Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous)
Closed meeting, MCC. 8pm.

Wednesdays

Sex Addicts Anonymous
Closed meeting for gay men and lesbians. MCC. 5:30pm.
Nashville CARES
AIDS/ARC Couples Support Group. 5:30pm. AIDS/ARC Support Group. 6:30pm. HIV Support Group. 7pm. Info 615 385-1510.
MTSU Lambda Association
Meeting for lesbian and gay Middle Tennessee State University students, faculty, staff, and alumni. 7pm. Info 615 890-3787.

Thursdays

Nashville CARES
HIV Support Group. 6:30pm. Visualization group. 6:30pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Alternatives (Alcoholics Anonymous)
Closed meeting for lesbians and gay men. MCC. 8pm.
Lesbian Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA)
Meeting. 8pm. Info 615 385-4776 or 615 352-5823.

Fridays

Sexuals Anonymous
Closed meeting, MCC. 5pm.
Gay Parents Support Group
Meeting, MCC. 1st Friday only. 7pm. Info 615 292-0817 or 615 320-0288.
Alcoholics Anonymous Program Study Group
Meeting, Belmont United Methodist. 7:30 pm.

Saturdays

Nashville CARES
AIDS/ARC Support Group. 4pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Metropolitan Community Church
Mortgage Meal, all you can eat. 7:30pm. \$5.
Gay Cable Network
Cablecast, Nashville Viacom Channel 35 (Community Access Television). 8pm.

Sundays

Metropolitan Community Church
Worship services, 11am and 7pm. Info 615 320-0288.

Your nonprofit event can be listed free in *Dates*. Just drop a postcard or letter to *Dare*, Box 40422, Nashville, TN 37204-0422, or phone 292-9623 and leave a message. Please include information about time, location, cost, sponsor, and a contact person's name with address and/or phone number for verification.

SPECIAL Events

Friday, November 11

Reception Molly Yard, president of the National Organization for Women, will be honored at a reception for delegates to the Tennessee conference of NOW. Park Suite Hotel, 10 Century Place (near Elm Hill Pike), Nashville. 7pm. Info 615 298-2499 or 615 297-0216.

Benefit Show *Music of the Night*, musical revue benefit for Nashville CARES. Presented by Rave Reviews at World's End, 1713 Church St, Nashville. Midnight. \$5. Info 615 329-3480.

Sunday, November 13

Feminist Book Circle Meeting. Discussion of *Going Out of Our Minds*, by Sonia Johnson. First Unitarian Universalist Church, 1808 Woodmont Blvd, Nashville. 5-7pm. Free. Info 615 298-9931.

Thursday, November 17

Lecture *Supporting Healthy Sexuality*, author Ellen Bass. Sponsor: Gay Women's Social Group. YWCA, 766 South Highland St, Memphis. Refreshments. \$5. 7:30pm. Info 901 324-6949.

Film *Maurice*, Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 220 Garland Hall, Vanderbilt, Nashville. 7pm. \$1 donation.

Monday, November 28

Aid to End AIDS Committee (ATEAC). Open meeting. 689 Melrose, Memphis. 7pm. Info 901 458-AIDS.

Tuesday, November 29

P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
Open organizational meeting of new Nashville chapter. Location and time to be announced. Info Jean Floyd, 615 662-0332.

Thursday, December 1

Film *Lianna*, Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 220 Garland Hall, Vanderbilt, Nashville. 7pm. \$1 donation.

Thursday, December 8

Brown-Bag Lunch *Writing Fiction About AIDS*, Franklin Brooks, Vanderbilt professor of French and Italian. Lesbian and Gay Studies Lecture Series, Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 12:10-1pm.
Film *The Berlin Affair (Interno Berlinese)* Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 220 Garland Hall, Vanderbilt, Nashville. 7pm. \$1 donation.

Thursday, December 15

Film *Caravaggio* Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 220 Garland Hall, Vanderbilt, Nashville. 7pm. \$1 donation.

Briefs

Poll: Les/Gay Republicans Not Totally Conservative

From STAFF REPORTS

Polling conducted among some 50 gay and lesbian Republicans nationwide revealed generally conservative viewpoints with some distinct exceptions.

Some 62% of those responding to the poll, conducted by Republicans for Individual Freedoms (RIF), one of 11 gay/lesbian Republican groups in this country, said they supported aid to the Nicaraguan contras. Sixty-eight percent said they supported the death penalty, while 73% supported women's right to abortion.

Some 53% percent of those taking part in the poll said they were against economic sanctions directed at the apartheid government of South Africa.

Among those polled, 42% labeled themselves conservative; 45% said they were moderate; and 13% accepted the label of liberal.

RIF, organized just last year, said its goal is to foster "better understanding between the Republican Party and the gay/lesbian community so that they will be more supportive of each other." •

Lesbians Disappointed with NOW Support

From STAFF REPORTS

Lesbians hoping for recognition of their issues by the National Organization for Women (NOW) left last month's National Lesbian Agenda Conference in San Diego with their hopes dashed.

Among those attending the NOW-sponsored conference were several former NOW members who were involved in a controversial walkout at the 1978 Los Angeles NOW Conference. They came to the Agenda Conference, sources report, ready to embrace NOW after a decade-long absence.

However, those same women termed themselves "outraged" when they learned that NOW President Molly Yard failed to use mainstream media time to promote the San Diego Conference. Yard refused to comment on the charges and would only respond to questions about the Equal Rights Amendment.

"It took a lot for me to attend this year," said lesbian civil rights activist Martha Jones, one of those who "walked out" in 1978. "It was clear to those of us who were listening then that NOW was homophobic and did not want lesbians in leadership roles. Here we are, 10 years later, and nothing has changed."

"It's a shame, because I don't believe NOW can survive without lesbian energy." •

"No Promo Homo" Law Challenged

From STAFF REPORTS

Attorneys for the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit in New York last month to challenge the constitutionality of the so-called Helms Amendment.

The Helms Amendment forbids federal funding for AIDS educational material that "promotes or encourages homosexual activities."

The suit, filed by a coalition of AIDS education groups from around the country, alleges that the amendment violates the first amendment rights to free expression of AIDS educators.

Plaintiffs in the case are Gay Men's Health Crisis, the Hetrick-Martin Institute and the Fund for Human Dignity, all of New York; Horizons Community Services of Chicago; and the San Antonio Tavern Guild AIDS Foundation. Named as defendants in the suit are the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Approved overwhelmingly by Congress in October, 1987, as part of the HHS budget for last fiscal year, the amendment was introduced by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.). In August of this year, members of a joint House-Senate rejected a similar amendment, again introduced by Helms, in favor of a compromise package co-authored by Sens. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.).

The compromise, which will take effect in 1989, stipulates that AIDS education and other programs cannot be "designed to promote or encourage, directly, intravenous drug abuse or sexual activity, homosexual or heterosexual."

The suit filed last month by lawyers from ACLU, as well as from the Center for Constitutional Rights, seeks to remove any and all restrictions on AIDS educational materials. •

New Les/Gay Parents Support Group Formed

From STAFF REPORTS

Law student Laura Tek, organizer of the newly-formed Gay Parents Support Group in Nashville, has proclaimed the group a success after its first meeting last Friday.

"The parents in attendance were surprised by this initial turnout. This meeting was a landmark because many support groups in the past have tried to get off the ground here in Nashville and have failed. This group, however, feels that they will succeed because of the gay and lesbian community's growing visibility and acceptance," she said.

The group discussed such topics as dealing with ex-spouses and protection of children from anti-gay-and-lesbian harassment.

The group will meet on the first Friday of each month at the Metropolitan Community Church, 131 15th Avenue North, in Nashville. Information about the group is available at (615) 292-0817 or (615) 320-0288.

"Nashville, whether it likes it or not, is now supporting a gay parents group," Tek noted. •

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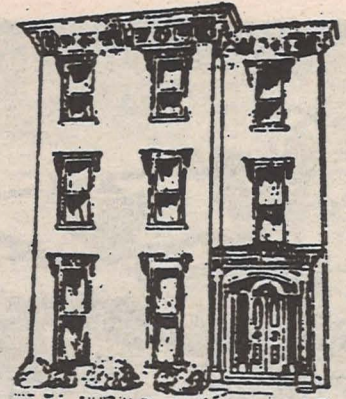
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R&P Riding the Rollercoaster



Songs

Osiel + Romanovsky & Phillips = Fun and Feeling

By JEFF ELLIS
Managing Editor

When you consider that Nashville was the next-to-last stop on a 20-city tour by America's gay troubadours, Romanovsky and Phillips, you realize that Sunday night's performance by the pair was not only good.

It was great!

If you weren't in the audience at Sunday night's concert, presented at the Unitarian Universalist Church by the Tennessee Gay and Lesbian Alliance (T-GALA), you missed a musical night of fun and games not before seen in Nashville.

Nashville's own Marianne Osiel, who has one of the best voices in this town of good voices, opened the evening with a set of songs that included several self-penned tunes that could well become hits — and deserve to.

Osiel, whose "twin sister" doubled as sound technician, provided a splendid opening for the evening with a wonderful performance that evoked the angst of our lives without being maudlin or sentimental. Rather, her lyr-

ics were heartfelt and poignant — and enormously entertaining.

Opening their set with "Give Me a Homosexual" (a biting attack on those among us who long for "straight" men, with the wonderful line, "How straight do they look when they're down on their knees?") from their *Emotional Rollercoaster* album, Ron Romanovsky and Paul Phillips were given a warm, down-home welcome by their Nashville audience, most of whom were R&P neophytes.

Although R&P dislike comparisons to other singing duos — they've been called "the gay Smothers Brothers," "the gay Sonny and Cher," "the gay Donnie and Marie," perhaps even "the gay Roy and Dale" — it's inevitable. Try as you might to describe the pair, you find yourself hard-pressed not to refer to other acts you've seen before. They are an amalgam of all the singing duos who've come before them.

But believe me, you've never seen anyone quite like Romanovsky and Phillips! They are the personification of "professional homosexuals."

By **JEFF ELLIS**
Managing Editor

Imagine finding yourself right smack in the middle of Music City USA on the next-to-last stop of a 20-city tour and not even knowing where the Ferlin Husky "Wings of a Dove" Museum is located.

But right here is exactly where Ron Romanovsky and Paul Phillips, the traveling troubadours of the gay experience, found themselves Sunday night as they strutted their stuff before a Nashville audience.

"The hardest thing about touring, besides actually being on the road for an extended time, is killing time between cities, when you have four days off between concerts, finding a grocery store, the post office, things like that," Romanovsky said.

And after a two-day layover, the duo found themselves headed for New Orleans as their *Emotional Rollercoaster* tour — or as they now refer to it, "The 'Breaking Up is Hard to Do' tour," due to their own recent break-up — draws to a close.

Did Romanovsky and Phillips see themselves as musical pilgrims in the birthplace of country music, as Muslims come to Mecca?

"Not really. But we wanted a country and western song to do since we were playing Nashville, but we couldn't seem to come up with one," said Romanovsky, the dark-haired, brown-eyed half of the pair.

"I really love the *Trio* album, with Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt. I think Dolly Parton is great. She's definitely her own woman and has really had some good things to say," offered Phillips, the blond, fair-skinned half of the pair.

"And k.d. lang is a favorite. Now you know who she comes to for fashion tips," he said, twirling his "petticoat from hell" and showing off his Dale Evans-inspired fringed jacket.

"Our music is something we can do for the community," Romanovsky said. "Sometimes I think we're activists, not singers."

But while their brand of music cum activism doesn't exactly compare with "Walking the Floor" or "Your Cheatin' Heart," Romanovsky and Phillips nonetheless are possibly more akin to their country cousins than they realize.

"The most important thing in our music is the lyrics," Romanovsky said.

Critics and writers alike agree that what makes country music unique is — you got it, lyrics.

And when those same music critics attempt to label Romanovsky and Phillips as folk singers, Romanovsky bristles: "I have mixed feelings about being labeled folk singers. Lyrically our music is like folk, I suppose, because it is music about a culture of a people. But musically, I think our material is more interesting."

Performing before predominantly lesbian and gay audiences, both Romanovsky and Phillips find they are not only entertaining their fans with their music and caustic quips, but are also able to express their political opinions as well.

"Homophobia will always keep us out of the mainstream," Romanovsky said. "But I wouldn't be where I am now if I had not decided to come out professionally."

Phillips agreed, saying that their warm reception here in the Bible Belt was not unexpected.

"I grew up in West Virginia, so there are a lot of the same attitudes there as here in the south. I wasn't nervous about touring the south at all," Phillips said.

"I regret the world isn't more accessible because we're a 'gay' act," Romanovsky said. "But the good thing is that we don't have to water down our politics." •

Their songs chronicle gay life with wit and charm. Their lyrics are right on target (almost too much so at times) and their melodies are engaging.

From their *Emotional Rollercoaster* album, came "Straightening Up the House" (a song about Mom's impending visit); "Living With AIDS" (an anthem for these troubled times); "The Sodomy Song" (a musical look at *Hardwick v. Bowers*, the Georgia sodomy case); and, of course, the title song (a '50s-style bebop song which chronicles an up-and-down relationship).

From their *Trouble in Paradise* album came "What Kind of Self-Respecting Faggot Am I?" (a gay man's lament about not fitting in, which features the line, "Don't own a single record by Barbra, Bette or Judy."); "To Myself" (Phillips' own song about love that touched and provoked); and the calypso-tinged "Don't Use Your Penis for a Brain" which featured some rather saucy, almost raucous audience participation.

And while I enjoy the pair's albums, nothing

can compare with their live performances. Both men are witty, charming and so cute you'd just love to take 'em home and make 'em sing for you! (And I've never wanted to take Tommy or Dick Smothers home — or Roy and Dale, for that matter — thank you very much.)

But amid all the laughter and music, R&P are political activists at heart. Their message is one of dignity, hope, perseverance and pride.

They manage to wrap up all the nasty issues of the day in neat little songs you find yourself singing on the way out of the auditorium. And that's no small feat.

Sunday's audience was receptive, almost boisterous at times. They came to be entertained. And they were. But they also got a good dose of activism. And that's great!

R&P are obviously entertainers who care. When they left Nashville for the tour's last stop in New Orleans, they left knowing that we care about them, too.

So, all I want to know is: When are they coming back?

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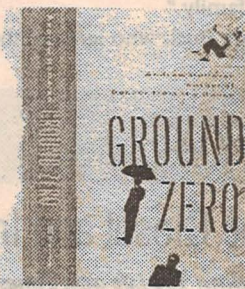
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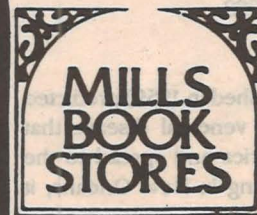
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From the Heart of the American South

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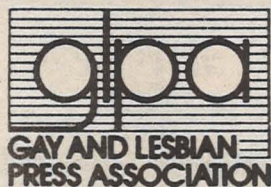
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Views

Shame

Hereafter, we will call it Terrible Tuesday.

Tuesday, November 8, will be remembered with shudders as the day the American people elected George Bush president of the United States. And more frighteningly, elected Dan Quayle vice-president.

But what is really scary is the knowledge that Bush and Quayle were elected with the help of votes from many gay men and lesbians.

Despite warnings about what a Bush/Quayle administration may mean to the lesbian/gay community, many among us still voted for them. We consider this a reprehensible action.

The candidacy of Michael Dukakis was endorsed by most gay and lesbian groups.

He was not the ideal candidate. He did, however, represent our best hope for the future.

It was Michael Dukakis who firmly pledged to work for a lesbian/gay civil rights bill.

It was Michael Dukakis who vowed to muster all the forces necessary to combat the AIDS epidemic, which may well be the greatest tragedy of our lifetime.

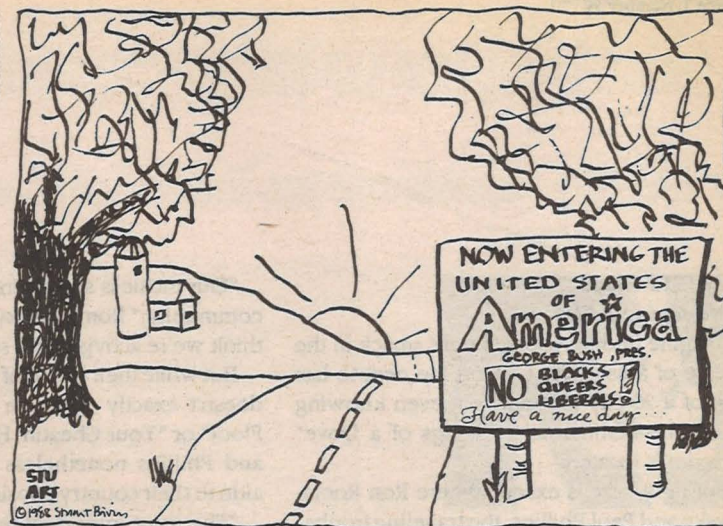
It was Michael Dukakis who decried acts of violence and discrimination directed toward gay men and lesbians.

It was Michael Dukakis who promised to guard against a prohibition enacted to keep lesbians and gay men from other countries from emigrating to this country.

And it was George Bush who refused to even say the words "gay" and "lesbian."

It was George Bush who only referred to AIDS in terms of "protecting the American family."

It was George Bush who ignored the report of the President's AIDS



Commission.

It was George Bush who ran on a platform that ignored completely our very existence.

And yet many of our own voted for this man.

Why? Because they preferred the coddling of a Republican administration whose main concerns will be those of the wealthy. Because they cannot or will not see the dangers in continuing policies that oppress people because of their sexual orientation. Because they do not yet care that thousands are dying from AIDS and from government neglect of people with AIDS.

Some day, like the homosexuals and Jews who supported Hitler in the Twenties and early Thirties, they will realize what they have done. Because it will be too late.

In voting for George Bush, they completely ignored the concerns of our community and the cries of the suffering.

And we are ashamed. •

Pages

Out of the Closet and into the Library: William S. Burroughs

Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs. By Ted Morgan. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1988.

By JOE MAROHL

Staff Writer

Naked Lunch (published in 1959) predicted the advent of a viral venereal disease that would originate in Africa and spread to the United States (beginning in New Orleans, it said).

There would be, writer William S. Burroughs predicted, no treatment for the disease.

"Males who resign themselves up for passive intercourse to infected partners," he wrote more than 30 years ago, "may also nourish a little stranger."

It would not surprise me that critics of the present era may now turn to Burrough's writings for some insight into the social politics of apocalyptic viruses and power-addicted, dumb bureaucrats. Rarely has a writer been as perceptive and prescient about his culture as Burroughs.

Be warned, though, Burroughs' novelistic vision has been pessimistic from the beginning. Anti-humanist, "homosexual" not "gay," and magical in the blackest scariest sense, his comic (yes, comic!) sensibility is best described, in words borrowed from someone's description of Burroughs' personality, as a happy dead man's.

Now Ted Morgan presents us with a narrative of Burroughs' life as grim, gray and ironic as any of the writer's respected novels. Certainly, Burroughs is a unique figure in con-

temporary American literature. Openly homosexual in the 1940s (long before it was fashionable or even safe), Burroughs has been only uneasily claimed by the gay press as a gay writer; his mordant presence precludes huggability or easy admiration.

An influential personality in every incarnation of the counter-culture since World War II (the only person, I suspect, of whom this can be said), Burroughs has refused to endorse any of it whole-heartedly.

One of the three founders of the Beat Movement (along with Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg), he is the only one to survive and not to buy into literary respectability, even though he was the most conservative-looking one of the group.

He was admired by the flower children and turned-on radicals of the 1960s, his face appearing among 65 others on the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, and in the punk movement of the 1970s, he co-wrote a song with Patti Smith and was visited by fans like Talking Heads, Lou Reed and Debbie Harry.

In the 1980s, he has been the subject of a documentary film, appeared as "America's greatest living writer" on *Saturday Night Live*, and performed with Laurie Anderson on her *Mister Heartbreak* album and tour. All this while not actively pursuing the limelight and maintaining an intermittently brilliant career as a novelist.

Morgan's biography conspicuously lacks any apology or defense for Burroughs' life,

especially unusual given Burroughs' full cooperation in the project. The writer's phlegmatic calm is contrasted with his querulousness and what has to be a reputation as one of the world's least fit fathers: shooting the boy's mother between the eyes and then largely ignoring him throughout his childhood and youth. The book traces the unlucky personal life of a genius. (As Morgan states toward the beginning, "This book has more corpses in it than *Hamlet*.")

The book covers Burroughs' early coming-out as a child, his 30-year-old unrequited love for boyhood friend Kells Elvins, his Van Gogh gesture of cutting off his finger for love of a pretty boy, his friendship with the Beats, his addiction to heroin, and his ill-fated marriage to Joan Vollmer (unlike others, his was not an attempt to deny or conceal his homosexuality). His experiments with mind-altering drugs and sorcery are also described in some detail, and the agonizing short life of his son Billy is given as a sort of Nemesis in Burroughs' later years.

Morgan does not ignore artistic growth. Burroughs' early autobiographical novels, his experimentation with the cut-up method in the 1960s, and his later, especially brilliant surrealist novels of the 1970s and 1980s are analyzed as processes of imagination and composition. In choosing to fictionalize his actual life in the form of popular pulp fiction (synthesizing the detective story, science fiction, and the Western), Burroughs brought together distinct American traditions in literature: the pilgrim confession and escapist fantasy. Morgan performs a needed service to the reader by presenting the writer's life apart from the context of his writings, thus emphasizing how interdependent they really have been. •



William S. Burroughs

Curtains

Circuit's *Irma Vep*: Theatre Like It Oughta Be

The Mystery of Irma Vep, by Charles Ludlam. Presented by Circuit Playhouse, Memphis. Directed by Ken Zimmerman. Oct. 7 — Nov. 6.

By **JEFF ELLIS**
Managing Editor

Mark Chambers and Ann Marie Hall are two of the finest actors currently to be found on mid-south stages.

Their recent performances in Circuit Playhouse's production of Charles Ludlam's *The Mystery of Irma Vep* were a blend of deft characterizations, rib-tickling humor, almost-vaudeville slapstick, bone-chilling horror and mind-boggling versatility.

Circuit Playhouse continues its tradition of presenting one of the mid-south's most widely varied season of plays with its production of Ludlam's gender-bending farce about the troubled inhabitants of Mandacrest.

Isolated Mandacrest, situated appropriately on the fog enshrouded English moors, is home to Lord Edgar Hillcrest and his new bride, stunning stage actress Lady Enid. But it appears that the ghost of Lord Edgar's late wife, Irma Vep, is busily wreaking havoc among the Mandacrest habitués.

Irma's not alone in her spree of terror — there is also a werewolf lurking amid the bogs. Then there's the pesky business of the vampire who attacks Lady Enid.

And what of the mysterious housekeeper, Jane, and the gamesman with a wooden leg, Nicodemus — what's skeletons are lurking in their closets?

All in all, *The Mystery of Irma Vep* is a ripping good entertainment. But it's also a comedy that keeps its audience gasping for breath between the belly laughs and guffaws. There are a few chuckles, but *Irma Vep* is not a comedy to be viewed quietly and politely.

The credit for this must surely go to Chambers and Hall, who perform all of the eight roles cast in the play.

Two people in eight roles? He plays the men, she plays the women? Right? Don't bet on it!

Hall, who's been seen in the past in *House of Blue Leaves*, *Nickolas Nickleby*, *The Women*



and *Top Girls* among others, is nothing short of amazing as Jane (the mysterious maid), Lord Edgar, Irma Vep herself, and as the vampire seeking to put the bite on Lady Enid.

Chambers, whose past stage successes includes roles in *Torch Song Trilogy*, *Chicago*, *The Elephant Man*, and *Mr. Roberts*, is nothing short of stunning as Nicodemus, Lady Enid, Alacazar (an Egyptian tour guide) and Pev Amri (an Egyptian mummy come to life).

To say that the two are amazing and stunning is still not enough. They endow their characters with so much personality, you really found yourself believing there were eight different people on stage, instead of the two.

To say they are multi-talented is cross the border into cliché. They both attack their roles with a zeal and an ardor found all too rarely on local stages.

Ken Zimmerman's direction is just right for a Ludlam farce. His guiding hand is seen in Hall and Chambers' performances and in the ease with which the play progresses.

Special notice should be given to Henry Swanson's set design and Angela Seymour's costumes which perform as admirably as the play's two stars. •

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Spotlight

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P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is a group designed to provide support for family and friends of gay men and lesbians. The group has chapters nationwide, and now has two Tennessee chapters, in Memphis and Nashville.

Chapters were started in both cities in the fall of 1987, and the Memphis group has operated continuously. After some organizational difficulties, the Nashville group has begun again. Organizer Jean Floyd, whose son, 32-year-old New York architect Brad Floyd is gay, is coordinating the Nashville effort, and has invited the community to attend the revamped group's first meeting Tuesday, November 29. Contact her for time and place.

P-FLAG Memphis meets monthly on the first Thursday at St. John's Episcopal Church, 322 S. Greer. For more information, contact the group's leaders at the number and address above.

Both groups will provide peer counseling and suggestions for coming out to loved ones. •



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