

# Just news

## Queens triumph at Waldorf-Astoria bash

"... for guppified New York, this was an historical occasion, in which drag was given its deserved place of honor."

BY SARAH SCHULMAN

It was billed as "The Night of a Thousand Gowns," a \$250-a-head fundraising event for selected gay organizations. But what made this party more fabulous than most was that the guests were invited to come in drag, and they paraded those gowns in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria. Now, in San Francisco, drag at the city's poshest hotel might be *de rigueur*, but for guppified New York, this was an historical occasion, in which drag was given its deserved place of honor. And the presiding queens made sure that we all realized that fact.

Crowds gathered outside the Waldorf's Park Avenue entrance to cheer the arriving queens as they stepped out of stretch limos and luxury automobiles. Couples arrived from Calgary, Ontario, San Diego, Dallas, Atlanta, and Brooklyn: he, crisp in tux and tails, sprinkled, perhaps, with a few old army decorations; she, always divine, whether as Catherine the Great, Dolly Parton, or a wide variety of tramps, debutantes, royalty and dance-hall girls. Their gowns ranged from a bar mitzvah polyester, to Robert Legere originals, to

one red plastic post-modern affair. The escorts ran the gamut from short, balding types in glasses, to studs, to nice boys, to greying, dangerous-looking wealth who could easily work for NASA or the CIA. It was an all-American event.

Yet, amidst all the glitter, the reality of the AIDS crisis and the need for a radical, visible gay movement, were never forgotten. Eagle Empress Nicole received the Lynn Carter award (named for the well-known female impersonator who died of AIDS) on behalf of the Imperial Court. She made a stunning, moving speech, the most radical that I have heard from the mouth of a gay leader in years. Nicole called the event: "an important chapter in our gay history as we recognize and pay tribute to the true pioneers of our movement — drag queens and female impersonators. Drag queens were Stonewall. They fought back and then others followed. They were the first to fight for our rights when others couldn't or wouldn't..."

Nicole also strongly stated that the goals of the up-coming lesbian and gay march on Washington, "Proud, Strong, United," could never be accomplished unless discrimination against people of color, women and seniors, was overcome in our

Photo by Abigail Child.



Queen in red plastic fantasy.

community, and she called for a return to the radical tactics of the early movement.

"It is time to march again, hold massive demonstrations. We drag queens of yesteryear long ago passed the torch to those of you more acceptable. But we have a message for you — DON'T BE AFRAID TO RETURN TO THE STREETS WHERE OUR MOVEMENT WAS BORN."

After the crowning of the new empress, Sybil, the festivities returned to fundraising for the evening's beneficiaries: the March on Washington Committee, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, AIDS Action Council, Human Rights Campaign Fund and the New York Lesbian and Gay Community Center. Quite a few celebrities were present including the dapper Vito Russo, Charles Busch in a white halter top, Rollerena on the arm of Steve Ault, Miss Gay Great Lakes, Miss

Connie Lingus (Trash Queen of the Poconos), Pandora Box, Clitoris Leachman, Rich Donovan, Cardinal Sin, Dora Jar, and Dolly Lama.

Miss Blaze Starr (Miss Gay America), summed up the feeling of the evening when she said, "AIDS is making us realize that every moment we have is extremely precious." After a perfectly rendered lip-synching of herself singing "The Impossible Dream," Miss Starr reminded us that "female impersonation is a gay art form, an art which all gay people can be proud of."

Yes, boys and girls, we can be our queer selves, once again. Even in New York.

Originally published in the *Gay Community News*, 62 Berkeley St., Boston, MA 02116.

# We're out for freedom... nothing less!

The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force is out for gay and lesbian freedom. Freedom to live our lives openly and proudly. Freedom from second-class status, violence and discrimination. Freedom to love. And nothing less than freedom will do.



Anti-violence Project  
Director Kevin Berrill testifies before Congress.

### The Task Force Lobbies

Congress and the Executive Branch to push for gay and lesbian civil rights and for a balanced response to the AIDS health crisis. NGLTF also lobbies at the state level, in the private sector, before professional organizations, unions, religious groups, and feminist and progressive groups.



Task Force staff at work

### The Task Force Works

as a resource center for over 2,000 local gay and lesbian groups, as a research and information hub on gay issues, as a nerve center for the gay liberation movement.



Anti-violence poster

### The Task Force Organizes

to end violence, to repeal laws that criminalize gay/lesbian sexuality, to fight stereotypes of gay people in the media, to press for the civil rights of people with AIDS and HIV antibodies, to push reproductive freedom, domestic partnership and much, much more.

NGLTF, 1517 U Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009 (202) 332-6483

Come out for freedom! Join us!

- I'm OUT FOR FREEDOM, and here's my membership fee at the OUTrageous rate of \$30.00!
- I'm already a member, and I know freedom isn't free! So here's my additional donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_
- Please send me more information about NGLTF and NGLTF membership.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
As a Task Force member, you receive:  a subscription to our informative quarterly newsletter  topical mailings on a wide range of subjects  Task Force publications for free  invitations to special events across the country, and  the chance to select and serve on our Board of Directors.  
Please make checks payable to NGLTF and mail to NGLTF at 1517 U Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. (202) 332-6483.