

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE?

(OR, DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON'T)

The celebrated notion of 'diversity' is a double-edged sword for event organizers seeking to please one and all

BY INGA SORENSEN

Thousands are expected to participate in Portland's 23rd queer pride celebration, slated for June 20 and 21.

"The big difference is the parade is going to be held on Sunday, rather than on Saturday," explains Kristan Aspen, a board member of Pride Northwest Inc., the group orchestrating this year's Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans Pride Parade and Festival.

She says the switch was largely made to honor requests from some in the Jewish community who adhere to the Sabbath.

Traditionally, the parade and festival have been held one day—a Saturday. This time, organizers have pulled together a two-day affair. Saturday will feature a full day and evening of entertainment, booth browsing, beer drinking, dancing, or simply hanging out at Gov. Tom McCall Waterfront Park. The parade, meanwhile, has shifted over to Sunday afternoon. It kicks off at 12:30 p.m. and will wrap throughout downtown Portland.

Organizers have previously made a stab at a two-day celebration, with little success. When that was attempted a few years ago, the parade—undeniably the main attraction—was still held on Saturday. By the next day, interest in queer pride had petered out big time, and the Sunday portion of the festival was essentially a flop.

"Obviously we're hoping that doesn't happen this time," says Aspen.

Other changes? Unlike last year, you won't be drinking Coors in the festival beer garden.

You may recall the beer brouhaha that ensued last June when Howie Baggadonutz took to the stage during the Portland queer pride rally. While there, the longtime queer rights activist publicly trashed Coors' corporate sponsorship of 1997 Portland pride.

In doing so, Baggadonutz, who was a slated emcee though not an official representative of Pride Northwest, also raised the question of why Pride Northwest selected Coors Brewing Company as a major sponsor in the first place.

For many years Coors has been under fire from members of the labor, progressive and queer communities partly because some Coors family members are linked to ultraconservative organizations, including the Heritage Foundation, which supports an outright ban on gay men and lesbians in the military, and the Free Congress Foundation, which has filed an amicus brief against same-gender marriage. (The brief refers to homosexuality as "repugnant" and "a violation of the laws of God and nature.")

This go 'round, Full Sail Brewing Company, an Oregon-based business that says it is "committed to watershed conservation and restoration" and regularly donates to the Pacific Rivers Council's Campaign for Coho, is the sole beer sponsor.

While the Coors controversy may be extinguished, other grumblings are churning.

Baggadonutz, who has participated in Portland pride in some capacity (as an emcee, board member and community contact) for nearly two decades, says there's a good chance he won't attend 1998 pride at all.

Part of what's agitating Baggadonutz is a Pride Northwest board member's suggestion to longtime community activist and pride performer Carol Steinel to keep her act clean—purportedly because the theme of this year's pride is "Family Matters."

Steinel is a familiar face, an out comedian and singer who, like Baggadonutz, has donated her services to pride efforts for several years.

During a pride-sponsored event the night before last year's parade, Steinel performed a

who was still slated to emcee as we went to press. (Baggadonutz was given no such invite, despite years of invitations.)

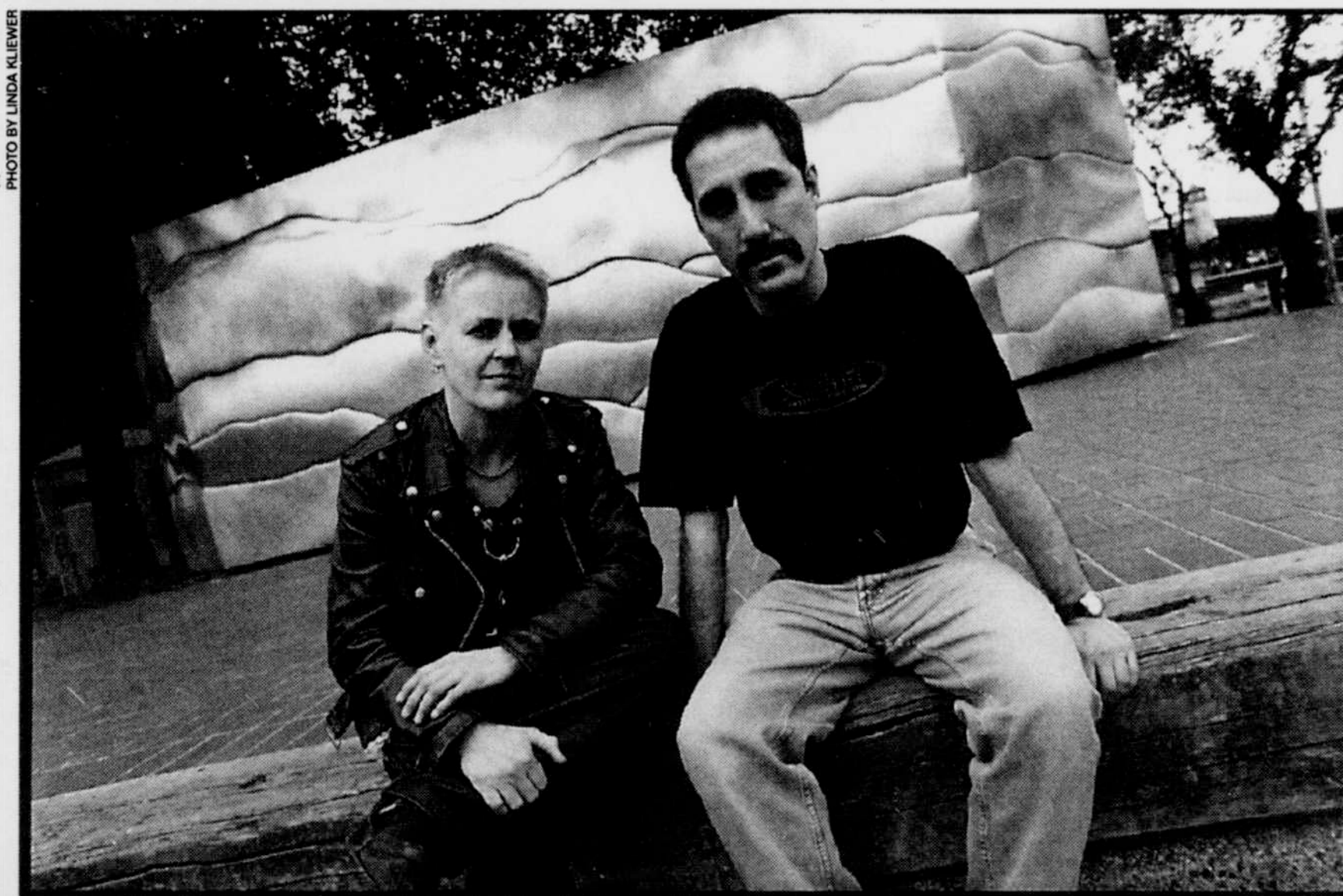
MacAuslan and Aspen concede they only received one complaint about Steinel's song—and that was from a male partner of another Pride Northwest board member.

"But if there's one, we figure there are others out there," says Aspen, who confirms Steinel was indeed asked to "consider the audience" she'd be playing for.

ed everyone who offended one person at pride, I'd be willing to bet there would be no one left to attend."

On the flip side, Bonnie Tinker, executive director of Love Makes a Family Inc., whose primary purpose is to promote queer families, suggests enough isn't being done to make pride a family-friendly event.

Tinker says that although Pride Northwest has set aside a chunk of space at the festival for children's activities and child care, she'd like to



Carol Steinel (left) and Howie Baggadonutz

graphic lesbian sex song entitled "I Want to Put My Fingers in You."

As always, she issued a verbal disclaimer, letting the audience know the song included some frank talk about lesbian sex.

The ditty starts off like this: "Some people talk of filling up and spilling over, some people want you to light their fire. I'd say those things, but they wouldn't be true, cause I just wanna put my fingers in you. I like to squeeze your nipples, like to grab your ass. I like to go down on you...I like to take your clitoris with my tongue and manipulate it carefully until you come."

Steinel recently received a form letter from Pride Northwest which specified her emcee assignment. The May 13 missive, which was on organizational letterhead, included a hand-scribbled note to Steinel from group board member Janna MacAuslan, who wrote: "Carol—Last year we got a call from someone who was very offended by your 'I Want to Put My Fingers in You' song. The theme this year is 'Family Matters' so do what you think is appropriate to the theme. I don't want to be censoring you, but do what you can, OK?"

Steinel's initial response was shock.

"I definitely feel like they were trying to pressure me to censor myself," says Steinel,

Steinel tells *Just Out* she's willing to participate because of her commitment to the queer community. Still, the request to keep it clean has her steamed, and has raised questions about the meaning of pride. Who is it really for? Is it for queers celebrating their diversity, or is it designed to present a palatable face to straight onlookers? Who decides whose act or prose or dress is suitable for presentation? Does the embrace of diversity include performers, like Steinel, who celebrate their queerness in part by acknowledging the sexuality that comes along with it?

Steinel brought up some of those questions in a letter she recently sent to the Pride Northwest board.

"Whose definition of 'Family Matters' are we using to determine what is 'appropriate'? Sex is a topic of frank discussion in my family—that's the way I want it—I think it's healthy—and I, personally, am offended by prudishness and puritanism. So in the scope of my family values, people who blanch at frank discussion of sex are inappropriate for this theme," she writes.

Steinel adds, "If I am to be excluded for offending one man's sensibilities, do we not tread the slippery slope of exclusion that is the very thing that has oppressed us? If we exclud-

see more incorporation of families with children.

"[Pride Northwest] gave us some space, but what about making this a celebration of the overall queer community rather the more out-of-sight, out-of-mind thing we now have?" she asks.

To bolster her contention that children are basically an afterthought at pride, Tinker points to the cover of the official pride guide, which mentions the Family Matters theme on its cover but only shows photographs of adults.

"And there's nothing in the [on-stage] lineup specifically for kids," she says, adding, "No other community would plan a weekend like this and not have organizers say, 'What will we do for the children?' Children are just naturally included in other communities, but not in the queer community. I think as a community we need to talk about that."

■ PRIDE NORTHWEST will host a post-pride feedback session July 15 from 6 to 8:15 p.m. at the Multnomah County Library Central Branch, 801 S.W. 10th Ave. in Portland. All are welcome to attend and express themselves at the free event. For more information, call Pride Northwest at 295-9788.

PRIDE '98
Everything you need to know...