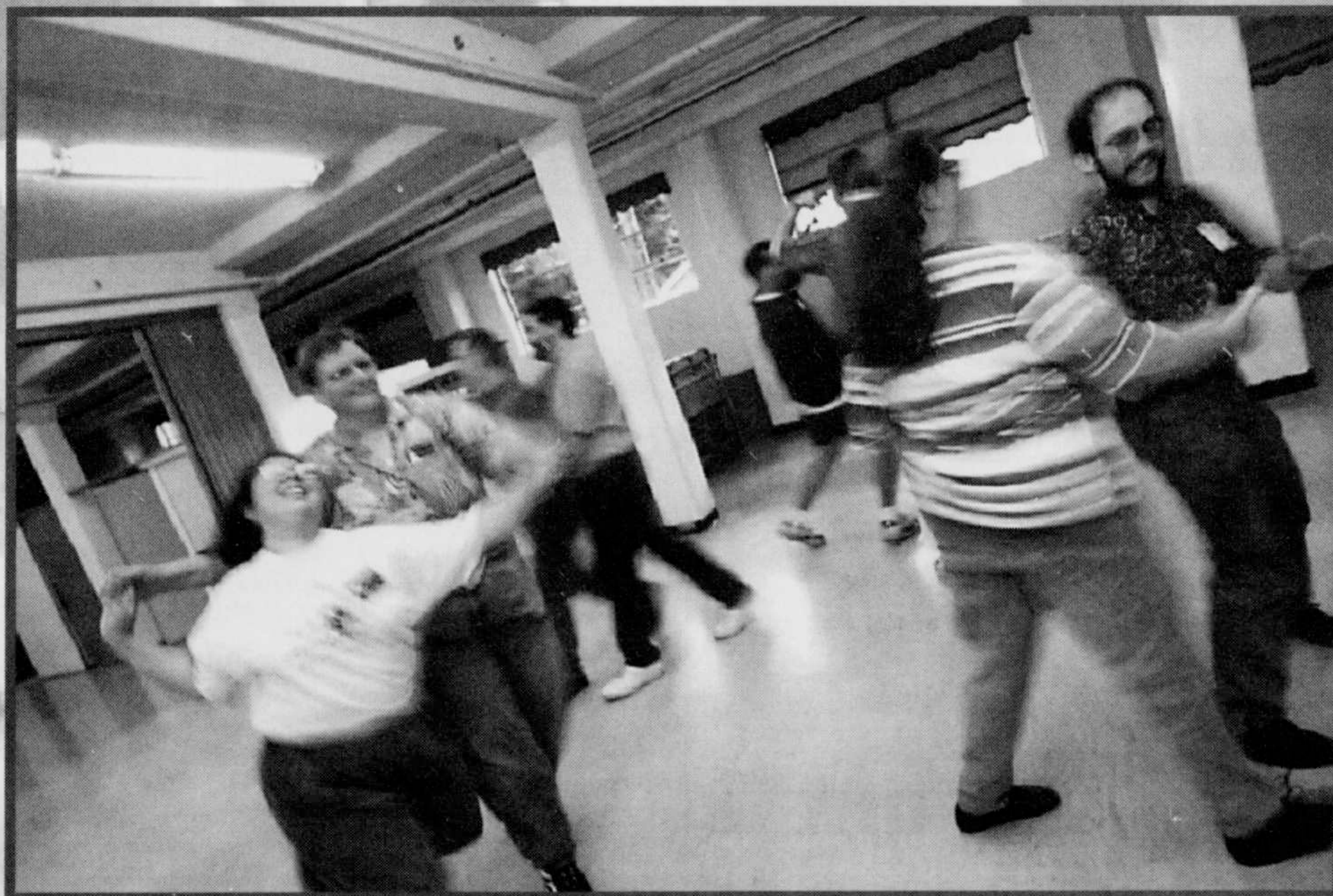


WEAVE THE ROSE:

Friendship Set to Music

Queer square dancers from near and far kick up their heels in the City of Roses

BY PATRICK COLLINS • PHOTOS BY LINDA KLIEWER



Rosetown Ramblers swing their partners in the basement of Trinity United Methodist Church

On a gloriously sunny late-June afternoon in Portland, eight dancers are tucked neatly among the drag queens, the leather folks and the baton-twirling men with sparkling hot pink boots inching up Broadway.

Some of the dancers are wearing shorts, T-shirts and sunglasses. One wears a frilly hat and a long skirt. Some are men, some are women, but nobody seems to be counting genders. The procession pauses and the group begins executing a series of steps that are certainly precise but which appear, in the dizzying onslaught of the 1998 pride parade, spontaneous.

"What in the hell is this?" someone mutters.

Nearby, a young man in a white tank top and a pair of tight khaki shorts begins doing step aerobics off the curb, crooning, "Don't break my heart, my achey-breaky heart..."

From the back of a truck, a man shouts the calls into a microphone, the dancers dance their dance and take their bows, and the parade moves on.

What do you think of queers and square dancing?

"Does it matter who dances the male part or the female part?" asks a grandmother in her early sixties.

She holds a Nordstrom shopping bag, waits for a break in the parade through which she can cross, and confesses quietly that it's the more practical logistics—not the sex—that have always aroused her curiosity about homosexuality: "Do they switch?"

"Hmm," says a young man dressed in a lime green button-down shirt. He pauses, as if the question reveals yet another knot in the ever-expanding grain of queerness. "I've never really thought about it."

For the past four years, Scott Philips hasn't had a lot of time to think—just plan. Throughout the July 4 weekend, Portland will host the 15th annual convention of the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs. As co-chair of the convention, Philips is up to his ears in the nuts and bolts of bringing an estimated 1,300 queer square dancers to Oregon for a three-day extravaganza of movement, music and color.

A square dancing convention is no small feat. The Portland contingent, which played host to the convention in 1987, made its bid for this year back in 1993.

In 1995, it became official: the Rose City would be the site of the 1998 gathering. Since then, Philips and an intricate net-

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