

D.H. Lawrence writer • Jeannette Winterson writer • Josephine Baker entertainer • Pedro Almodovar director • Berenice Abbott photographer • Clive Barker writer • Rainer Werner Fassbinder director

Fran Lebowitz writer • Thomas Eakins artist • Shakespeare playwright • Thomas Mann writer • Vincent van Gogh artist • H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) writer • Isaac Mizrahi designer

Colette writer • Isadora Duncan dancer • Radclyffe Hall writer • Liberate entertainer • Simone de Beauvoir writer • Marlene Dietrich actor • Socrates writer • E.M. Forster writer

# QUEER BEHIND THE SCENES

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to express... Maybe one of the reasons we are creative is because we suffer. I don't know. Maybe one's gay identity gives you this added dimension. Your feelings have been so strong."



So, how might the queer community educate the larger society and battle homophobic misinformation? Should we build a float for the pride parade that exalts our history?

Dress up as Socrates and Nureyev, blare Tchaikovsky in the streets, hold placards with quotes from Wilde and Whitman?

"Unfortunately, even if we did that," responds composer Eric Lane Barnes, "the media would probably just ignore that and focus on what they always do."

Nevertheless, Barnes does believe it's important to be out. "If every single actor, for instance, would come out, it would be like an earthquake!" he quips.

Yet for some arts professionals, being out is not an issue because being gay seems irrelevant, and they maintain that their sexuality is not central to their creative process.

Portlander Jon Kretzu, one of Artists Repertory Theatre's artistic directors and a nationally sought after director, is adamant on this point. "I've never called myself a gay artist," he avers. "I don't think it's a fair thing to do. Every artist is completely different."

By way of explanation Kretzu adds: "But I always knew our history as a homosexual community. It's right there in history books. I think it's a shame that people are more interested in people who are famous for five minutes than in the historical scope."

It's true that more honest biographies can

help. In recent years, biographers have dared to do sexual detective work and ferret out long-censored letters and other evidence that paint fuller, queerer pictures of many noted historic figures.

At a recent reading in Portland, Susie Bright, bisexual author of numerous books on sexuality, challenged her audience to broaden their definition of what is considered erotic. She includes the making of art as erotic. Indeed, Bright claims our sense of the erotic is an ever-present factor in everything we do and feel.

It isn't difficult to recognize the relevance of sex to art. Can we



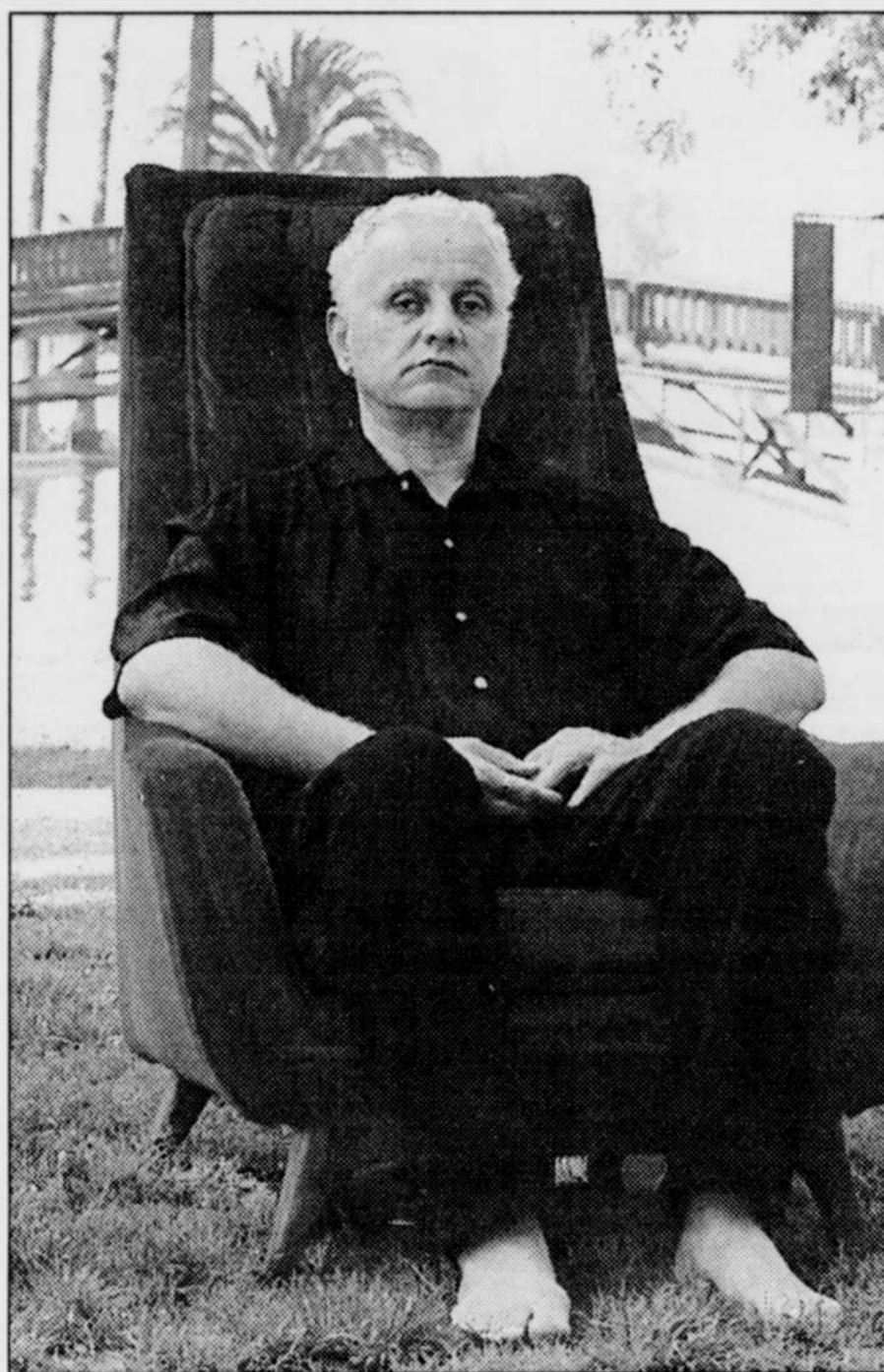
believe that da

Vinci's exquisite drawings of the male figure were not informed by his passion for men? Can we

conclude that the tragic compositions of Tchaikovsky owe nothing to his tortured personal relationships? Or can we disbelieve that the emotional sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay were emboldened by her love of women—and the camouflage of marriage?

As an acclaimed author, the very out Felice Picano has long been an advocate for queer visibility—and has paid a price. "I was a finalist for the Ernest Hemingway Award for my first novel, and yet it took a long time before I was taken seriously for any grants," he says.

But isn't the usual path to attain success



Felice Picano author



first, then write what you want? "Closeting to succeed is just deeply creepy to me. Artists are not supposed to give a damn, they're supposed to be 'out there,'" Picano says with the clarity that comes from decades of being just that.

On the subject of why the younger generation seems to want to "make nice" with the establishment, Picano answers: "We're under attack by younger gay writers who feel the need to back down.... Maybe it's so they can deal with being like everyone else.... I think it's incredibly boring!"

But then he adds: "This is the second generation of a revolution. And what's hap-

pening is exactly what happens in any successful revolution—the first generation is devoured by the second. Gen X's homophobia is manifested in 'just don't flaunt it.'"

As for people who do hide in the closet to climb the professional ladder, Picano passionately asserts: "They've sold their soul. I only hope they got a good price."

He continues sadly, "After you've sold out, what do you have to tap for your artistic creation? How is that going to be of any value to anyone?"

So how can queers affect public perception in deep and meaningful ways? Picano believes that first we need to affect our own perception of ourselves. "The problem," he says, "is not just the mainstream press—it's our gay press! They cover irrelevant people—a soap star who once had a gay friend—I'm talking about *Out* magazine, *Genre*, *The Advocate*. Why do they have someone on the cover because they're in a show with a gay character? What's that?"

Then he issues a call to action: "We need to teach people...that's why I write gay fiction and that's why I am unflinching. I had a substantial loss of income when I went from straight to gay writing."

Ultimately for Picano it comes down to this: "To tailor our art is our way to hell."

Regardless of how you feel about these debates, peruse the long list of artistic achievers printed here, and see if you don't feel a proud connection to this queer pantheon. In time, perhaps the rest of the world will be proud with us.



Lesbian poet Adrienne Rich made a visceral statement about queer visibility and acceptance when in 1997 she declined to accept the prestigious National Medal for the Arts from President Clinton. In a letter to him she wrote: "A president cannot meaningfully honor certain artists while the people at large are so dishonored."

James Baldwin writer • Sandra Bernhard actor • Sappho writer • Freddy Mercury singer • Ann Bannon writer • Sophie B. Hawkins musician • Katharine Lee Bates writer • Merce Cunningham choreographer

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