

Twice a year in a studio near downtown Portland, men shed their clothes and their inhibitions in order to learn erotic ways to connect with other men. But what might sound hedonistic is instead an intimate, hands-on workshop designed to engender kinship and brotherhood.

"Celebrating the Body Erotic" is two-day exploration of the senses conducted by the Body Electric School of Oakland, Calif. As many as 24 men are expected to attend the upcoming session, which presenters say will teach them how to connect with deeper centers of pleasure in their bodies.

Northeast Portland resident Al Waddell has attended the workshop several times and serves as local coordinator. For him, the experience has been profound, even spiritual.

"I found new ways to connect with men," he says, "new ways to connect with myself through learning about conscious breath, through learning about touch, through exploring different ways of being with other men beyond what I identified as gay sex."

Although much of the workshop is conducted in the buff, a significant part of the first day involves simply getting participants comfortable and relaxed. When it does come time to disrobe, it's done with honor and ritual.

Through various activities—some in large groups, some with just a partner—participants have the opportunity to practice two main techniques: conscious breathing and erotic massage. Conscious breathing, or rebirthing, is about finding a rhythm of breath that is not how one normally breathes.

The intent is to create a new awareness of one's body, Waddell suggests. "It opens us up and allows us to feel more life in our body. It's a path-

way to take us from where we are to someplace different. And that someplace different is usually pretty undefined, because it will be unique for each individual person."

The interpretation of erotic massage depends on the individual, too. An important distinction is that ejaculation is not the goal. Instead, techniques are taught to help men redirect orgasmic energy throughout the body rather than focus on the genitals.

"Celebrating the Body Erotic" methods provide men with an opportunity to experience this powerful aspect of their body in a way they never have before, according to Waddell. But that's as much explanation as he is willing to offer in concrete terms. Sessions follow a fairly set routine, but the particular dynamics of each group are unique, depending on its participants.

Waddell says no one stock experience can be described because each attendee comes looking for something different, from different points in their lives. Which means the guys who show up are just as varied as the experiences they might encounter.

The Body Electric School has presented

Erotic education

Men get a charge out of Body Electric workshop

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE



Gay men at this workshop share a desire for deeper connections

"Celebrating the Body Erotic" workshops in Portland for more than 10 years, and along the way the student roster has included men of all ages, body types and characteristics. But they all share a desire for a deeper connection

to other men, and they see value in exploring erotic education.

"American culture as a whole is touch-starved. Men aren't given permission to touch other men, and they want it," Waddell observes. "I find that the more awake my body is, the more open it is to receiving touch and to receiving pleasure from touch. If my body is asleep and somebody is touching me, I'm really not getting a lot of pleasure out of it. So it's about getting the body awake and the mind awake. It just really expands the ability to get pleasure from touch."

The next "Celebrating the Body Erotic" session in Portland will be held from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 3 and 4. Leading the workshop will be Matthew Simmons, a teacher, performer and massage therapist with a private practice in San Francisco. He has a background in dance, movement and music and experience as a midwife to the dying.

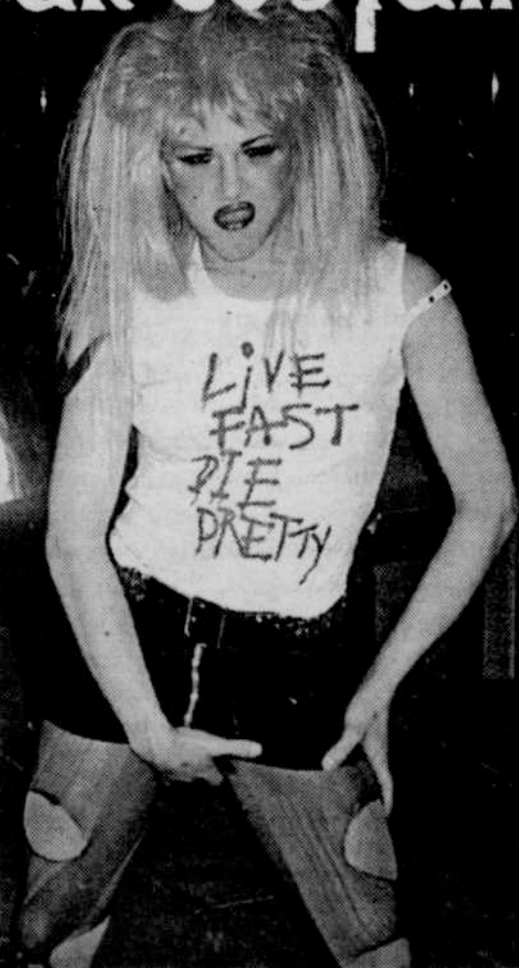
Workshop tuition is \$325, and limited financial assistance is available. Because of the healing nature of the Eastern approaches to erotic energy, men living with HIV or in recovery from substance, mood or behavior addictions are especially welcome.

The Body Electric School will return to Portland in May. Other sessions, such as those for women and couples, are held across the country, including many in Seattle. **JM**

To register for CELEBRATING THE BODY EROTIC contact Al Waddell at 503-288-6624. Class descriptions, schedules and other information can be found at www.bodyelectric.org or by calling 510-653-1594.

TIMOTHY KRAUSE is a writer and editor in Portland.

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