

drag after I'd been Emperor," he recalls.

He's still active with the court; he mostly appears as Cicely, but he will step into the spotlight as Harold to mark his 30th anniversary as Emperor. What keeps him coming back? "New challenges brought in by new people," he replies without hesitation. "The court to me is a very viable organization...there's always something to make it interesting."

Five years after Cicely ruled, the court made history again by crowning the first woman monarch, Rose Empress XXXVI Maria. She and Emperor XX Babalou marked the only all-female reign in court history. But Maria was no newcomer to titles—or to the concept of a woman playing a drag queen.

She gave her first drag-style performance at Darcelle's in 1985 and was crowned Ms. Gay Portland II the next year. Other titles soon followed, including Princess XXI in 1990, culminating with her election as Empress in 1993.

"Princess is usually a drag title," she says, explaining that her everyday look is short hair, glasses and no makeup. "There were very few women who tried to portray a drag queen...for the longest time they didn't know what to do with me—the only lesbian drag queen!" she notes with a hearty laugh.

Working as a hostess at Embers Avenue, she let audiences assume she was a drag queen. "I felt really comfortable. It's like a mask when I'm dressed up...I'm more flirtatious, and when



"The Legend of the Rose," Lady Elaine Peacock

I'm not dressed up I barely speak."

Although Maria had to overcome resistance to a female Empress, she eventually was elected and royally feted in San Francisco. "The street leading to the location of the Portland party was literally lined with roses, and I walked in and finally said to myself, 'I am the flippin' Empress of Portland—I'm holdin' the stick!'" She refers, of course, to the massive and impressive royal scepter.

"It's honestly still like it was yesterday. But now I'm an adviser to Poison, and I don't let her forget it—I call her every day! If it wasn't for the Rose Court, I wouldn't be the person I am. It gave me a sense of purpose. I'm able to help people, and that makes my heart feel good."

Kimberlee Van Patten, who was Maria's partner during her reign, also remembers the year with much fondness. "Maria is the only one who has held every Rose Court title except Debutante. What a ride that year was.

We traveled and had a blast. She was on fire! Maria's so well loved in the community," she says of the woman who now puts on Peacock in the Park with her every year. Since 1994, Maria has been the hostess and Poison Waters has been the master of ceremonies—what a combo!

And since then, more than \$65,000 has been awarded to gay and lesbian students seeking higher education.

And last but surely not least is the newest black goddess, Rose Empress XLIV Poison Marie Waters. As she says (only half jokingly), "All the pretty ones are black!"

Her coronation last October was made extra special because her supportive family was there, and her mother was the first to give her a rose after she was crowned. "I try to share her with friends who don't have that," she confides. "I feel like I have a charmed life."

Waters won her first title, Rosebud, when she was just a tender 20, but in the beginning she was hesitant. "When I first saw a drag queen it totally threw me. It never occurred to me that a man would dress as a woman! I was actually repulsed! Until I saw a black person in drag, I thought they were all ugly. For some

reason minority drag queens come across a lot softer," she says.

As soon as she came of age, Waters started working at Darcelle's. "That was a great training ground," she says. "So now I don't even think about it. I can walk up to anyone, look them in the eye and start talking. It's second nature."

So how long does it take to turn himself into her fabulousness? "I've done it in 30 minutes, but normally it takes an hour. I like to take my time, have friends over, serve drinks and make it social," she reveals, describing what must be the best cocktail hour floor show in town. First-timers stand in the bathroom doorway and watch the whole process with jaws dropped.

A coronation is being held somewhere almost every weekend, and that keeps Waters on the move. As Empress she already has been to Tacoma, Bellingham and Everett, Wash., plus Las Vegas, which seems like the ideal place to sashay around town in drag. Her voice rages with enthusiasm when she describes it.

"It's a free show, and the tourists just camp around the entrance...often the foreign tourists want a picture. I get to do outreach and educate: 'No, it doesn't turn me on...no, I don't want to have a sex change.' When it's over, I just want to get out of my dress ASAP and go play the slots all night."

Even after late nights under the heavy tiara—kind of like Cinderella?—by 8 a.m. weekdays, Waters turns into civil servant Kevin Cook, who shows up 40 hours a week for his day job with the state Department of Environmental Quality.

And by the way, Cook is single. "But it's not for lack of people chasing me," he quickly adds. "I want to date as Kevin and meet people who are attracted to him."

Most weeks Cook is in drag at least four times, serving as master of ceremonies during the dance shows Sundays and Tuesdays at Silverado. "I actually like to be busy. When I do get a night at home, I just get bored and start moving furniture around," the overachiever says. "Before I used to think I was two different people, but now they're both the same. Poison has calmed down a little, and Kevin has come out a bit more."

Waters is excited about her upcoming royal visit to San Francisco and the gorgeous gown

she's having custom-made. Although she occasionally buys off the rack, she prefers originals because she doesn't want to show up at an event wearing the same outfit as another drag queen. "Even worse is to have a real lady show up in the same dress. A shapely petite woman and a huge monster man in the same dress—it's not pretty!"

Not to worry, Portland. Our reigning Empress will be stunning in a one-of-a-kind winter white number as she represents us in the City by the Bay. [E]

"When I first saw a drag queen it totally threw me—it never occurred to me that a man would dress as a woman! I was actually repulsed!"

—Rose Empress XLIV Poison Marie Waters

Catch Poison Waters at VALENTINES FROM HELL, a Pride of the Rose Scholarship fund-raiser, 8 p.m. Feb. 17 at Embers Avenue, 110 N.W. Broadway.

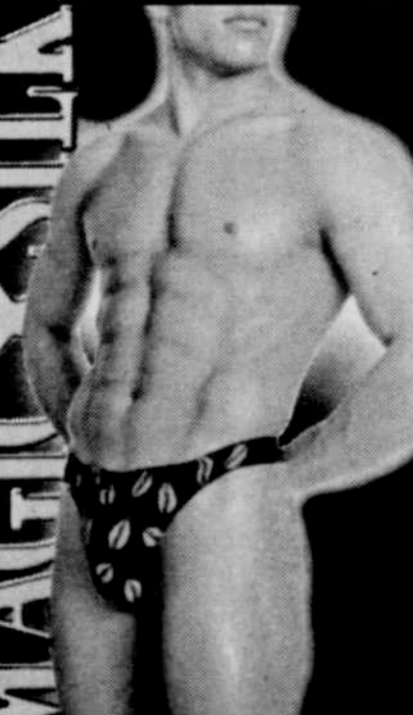
This will be "tough drag: no shaving, not really trying to hide the masculine, yet also going over the top with the glitz and glamour, muscles and marabou," she promises.

In her youth, ORIANA GREEN passed as a man on the streets of New York but, sadly, has never had her own tiara.

Gay and lesbian African Americans have held 26 Rose Court titles through the years and made countless contributions to our community. In addition to the aforementioned monarchs, the stars are:

- Princess II Lillian Carter
- Princess III Danielle August
- Princess XI Misty Marie Waters
- Princess XXI Maria
- Princess XXV Poison Marie Waters
- Princess XXVIII Krystal Lynn
- Co-Miss Gay Oregon VIII Misty Marie Waters
- Miss Gay Oregon IX Krystal Lynn
- Miss Gay Oregon X Rosey Waters
- Miss Gay Oregon XI Wanda Kentucky Jackson
- Miss Gay Oregon XII Debonique Richards
- Miss Gay Oregon XXVII Jerica Stephens-Hunter
- Ms. Gay Oregon VI Maria
- Ms. Gay Oregon XVI Lady Redd
- Miss Gay Portland XVIII Samone Ceray
- Ms. Gay Portland II Maria
- Ms. Gay Portland III TNT
- Debutante XXIX Savannah
- White Knight III Ty O'Dora

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