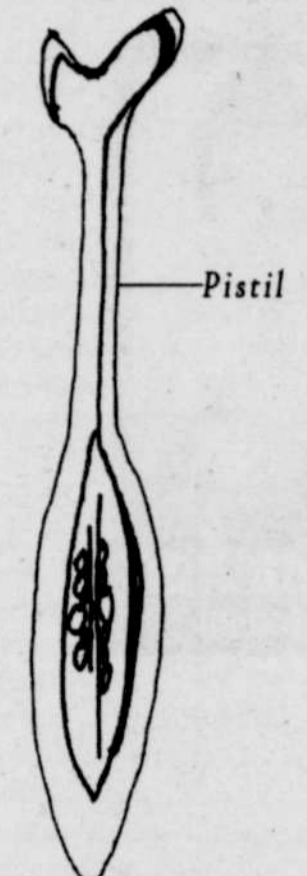


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CULTURE

The royal treatment

Continued from Page 1

and "Imperial Pretend Boyfriend to Rose Empress XLIV." It can be challenging to take seriously an organization that spends so much time lip-syncing to Liza Minnelli. But it's not quite that simple. It's not all about titles, drag and attitude. It's about community, involvement and raising money. And that, despite (or perhaps because of) the makeup and costume jewelry, they do very, very well.

A layperson's guide to the monarchy

Although you may not know who your state representative is, any self-respecting queer needs to understand how an Empress and Emperor ascend to the throne and exactly over whom they reign.

"The Emperor and Empress are the spokespersons for the organization," says soon-to-be former Empress XLIV Poison Marie Waters (known by day as Kevin Cook). Like other nonprofits, a nine-member board of directors governs the Rose Court and is responsible for the legal and technical aspects of running the organization. But, notes Poison, "as far as who is responsible for making sure things happen...it's on our shoulders."

Once someone has held a title and met other requirements, such as length of residence, he or she can run for Empress or Emperor. And here is where it can get confusing. The Empress and Emperor reign over the court, which includes the Princess and Prince, both selected by the reigning monarchs; Mr., Miss, and Ms. Gay Oregon; Mr., Miss, and Ms. Gay Portland; and the White Knight and Debutante. The Rose Court also recognizes other titles.

"Like at the end of the Mr. Oregon Leather pageant, the Emperor and Empress come out and say, 'We hereby recognize you Mr. Oregon Leather,'" explains Poison. "Even though they're not part of the Rose Court, we are recognizing them, and just by using that language, it qualifies them."

So Emperor, Empress—exactly which is which? Outgoing Emperor XXVIII ShelleY (Shelley Hutchinson) identifies as a "fag trapped in a dyke's body," and Poison as "a man in a dress," but both Chloe Stone (Cameron Poole) and Josef A. Foxx (Josef Buchel), who are running unopposed as Empress and Emperor, respectively, live their daily lives as men.

Poison offers the assurance that titles are "outfit specific," allowing for the occasional reign of a female Empress and a male Emperor and essentially offering either title to any gender.

And, although it's good to be Empress, Poison sniffs at those who would take the whole thing just a little too seriously. "These people need a shot in the arm of reality. We are just all men in dresses...you don't really have any power. So just get over yourselves," he laughs.

Goodbye Poison and ShelleY

Poison Waters and ShelleY have the distinction of ascending to the top of the monarchy at the same time after having been Prince and Princess together. This has given them a lot of time to hone working as a team. Making the most of their time as reigning



Poison Marie Waters and ShelleY: The man in the dress and the fag trapped in a dyke's body step down after one mesmerizing year

monarchs, Poison has attended 16 out-of-town coronations and ShelleY 17. But most of their attention has been local. According to Rose Court treasurer Ray Snively, they, along with the rest of the court, raised more than \$36,000 this year for various Portland organizations, including Esther's Pantry, Camp Starlight, Bradley-Angle House and several gay and lesbian scholarship funds.

"He and I are both very quick on a microphone...but he is quicker...where those zingers come from is beyond me," ShelleY muses about her co-star. "We came into this with a six-year working relationship, so I knew how to set up the fat ball so he can knock it out of the park."

While ShelleY admits playing the "straight man" in their comedic duo, it's clear the two have worked wonders together. She states, "I know that I do a good job and we do a great job."

Drag shows that raise money are the bulk of royal duties, but sometimes need takes other forms. "I went to Friends of People with AIDS, and I said, 'What do you need?'" recounts ShelleY. Turns out they needed volunteers. In pragmatic style, she stepped up to the challenge. "I said, 'Well, I got bodies, court members I got.'"

Her simple question led to a gift collection, wrapping party and holiday meals for kids with or affected by HIV/AIDS and Easter baskets stuffed full by the same folks a few months later. "People who wouldn't give you \$5 to come into a party would go out and spend \$35 on chocolate bunnies."

It's good to be Queen, err, Empress

As Cameron Poole steps up next weekend to become Rose Empress XLV Chloe Stone, he will begin working to achieve some of his own goals for the court. "I'm hoping with my reign to bring the youth a lot more into the court. Klub Z holds the titles of Rosebud and Thorn...they're one of the oldest junior courts in the country...I really think that the youth are our future."

An understandable statement coming from a man who works by day as an advocate for abused and neglected youth. Joe Buchel, the new Emperor XXIX Josef A. Foxx, is a kindergarten teacher, making this team's reign one that has a huge potential of bringing attention