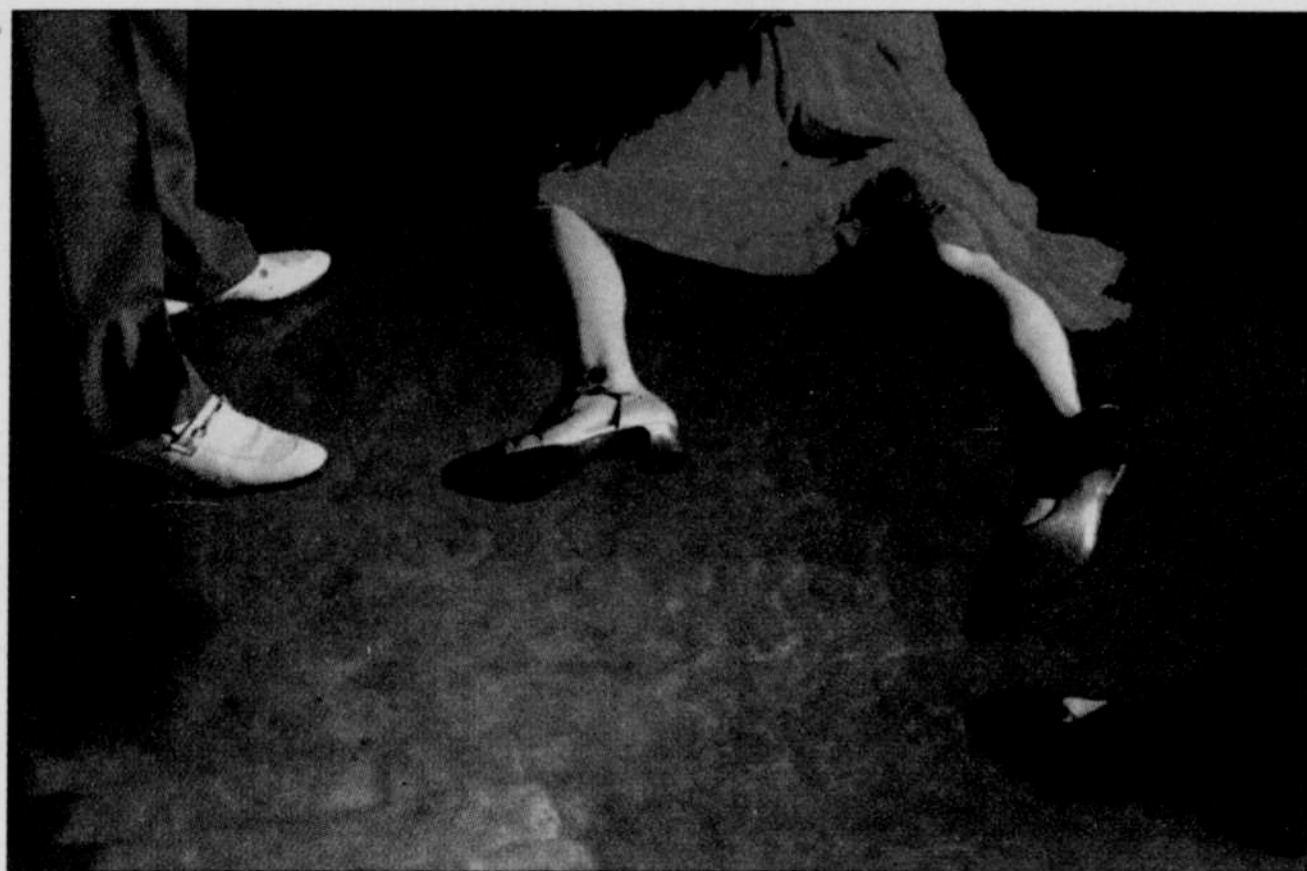


CULTURE

Seeing red

Everything's comin' up roses at the Red Dress Party

BY FLOYD SKLAVER



Red dresses are in vogue: In addition to the annual party April 2, "Red Dress" by sibling photographers Carlos and Jason Sanchez is on display this month at Gallery 500.

Cardinal. Cerise. Crimson. Claret. No matter how you say it, red is the color for admission to "Red Light," this year's Red Dress Party, where the red carpet rolls out April 2 at the Meow Meow.

What started with 75 men in red frocks tossing back strawberry Jell-O shots in a North Portland basement now ranks among the most anticipated charity events of the social calendar. From its humble beginnings, the fifth annual event has grown to the red-hot Meow Meow, where DJ Mr. Mu Mu (of Saucebox and Doug Fir fame) will spin while guests twirl until the wee hours of the morning. More than 1,000 people are expected, with proceeds going to Our House of Portland and the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center.

"We're pretty darn jubilant about being a part of this year's Red Dress Party," says Joe Jefferson, Our House development director. "This will be my first, and I've found the perfect little red number."

Organizer Jeff Hawthorne, whose basement served as the party's first venue, says, "We've outgrown two spaces already." The Meow Meow sports a big dance area downstairs that Hawthorne says volunteers will decorate like Amsterdam's Red Light District. Dancers can show off on go-go platforms on an elevated stage; upstairs will be a more intimate experience ("with a coffeehouse feel") including giant beds for lounging and a cosmetics counter where ladies and gentlemen can touch up.

But, if you think the Red Dress Party is a giant drag ball, think again. The only requirement for admission is a red dress (and 25 bucks). No wigs, no makeup and no pantyhose are necessary. (In fact, no panties are necessary, either.)

Red parties have been around for almost 30 years. Columbus, Ohio, visual artist and entrepreneur Corbett Reynolds decided in 1977 to bring disco flash to Midwestern gays by choosing "red" as his theme and giving birth to the first circuit party. Through the years, gay and straight Portlanders have thrown a number of red dress parties, including a popular one at the home of gay author Tom Spanbauer.

Hawthorne is particularly excited about the music this year. "We're going with the fun side of club music," he says. "We'll put some camp

in there. We're looking for a lot of remixes of older songs so it's fresh but still familiar. We want all the queens to sing along while they're twirling in their red dresses."

Unfortunately, a large segment of the gay community ("some of our own friends even," Hawthorne says) sees red at the mere thought of putting on a dress, perhaps imagining the spotlight of Darcelle's.

"It's all about fun," Hawthorne says. "It's pretty devoid of attitude. You can't hold up the wall and pose when you're in a red dress. You have to participate because you can't help yourself. You just feel pretty."

So don't worry if you're embarrassed. Your beet-red face will match your dress.

For any of you blushing or bashful readers, here are some helpful tips for being in the red:

- **Find a ready salesperson.** Both Ross Dress 4 Less and Meier & Frank have a good selection of red outfits in a variety of sizes, and after four years, their sales staffs are pretty blasé about a fellow in a frock.
- **Skip the heels.** You can't dance in them anyway, and there's nothing sexier than a dude in a dress with hiking boots or sneakers.
- **Lingerie is always welcome** and an easy choice when you've got nothing to wear. The front window at Victoria's Secret features a cheery cherry teddy that'll look great with motorcycle boots.
- **The only accessory necessary is a purse.** Without the pockets we're used to, you don't want to be caught red-handed without keys, wallet and breath mints.
- **Borrow from a relative.** Two years ago, one of my friends filched a skirt from his sister and looked like Ruby Keeler.

Best of all, the Red Dress Party is affordable for those of us with hardly a red cent. Organizers insisted on keeping the admission low to ensure that any scarlet woman (or man) can attend. **J**

The fifth annual RED DRESS PARTY starts 9 p.m. April 2 at the Meow Meow, 320 S.E. Second Ave. Tickets, which include a hosted bar and food, are \$25 from www.reddresspdx.com.

FLOYD SKLAVER has been working out diligently in order to fit into his dress.

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