

Week's "Queer Window" scribe. "It was the first time a really cool club gave it up to the queers."

In 1993, La Luna offered Monday nights to the sexual minorities community and drew an entirely new crowd out of Portland's rainy recesses: gays, straights and in-betweens who didn't want to be in mostly single-sex bars full of uniform gender, sexual orientation and style, but wanted to fuck the cleanly defined social boundaries and mix it up. In a single, beautiful word: queers.

It was an unprecedented success. "There were generally 150 to 250 people," recalls Haanraads.

But the numbers weren't as important as the novelty of a mixed crowd. "Queer Night melded different crowds together because it was in a rock club," explains Monlux. "You didn't have to make a statement about sexuality by attending."

With two rooms (one for dancing, one for drinking, both for cruising) and a different beneficiary every week (Brother to Brother, Gail Shibley for City Council and other nonprofits), "the crowd was always becoming more diverse," elaborates co-organizer Lauderdale, who once officiated a fruitcake-eating contest with round-trip tickets to Las Vegas for the most gluttonous queer.

The staff and customers filled the house with frenetic energy: Bartender Bridget O'Connor (now at Holocene) made boys dance for their drinks on the bar when things got slow, while surprise visits from luminaries such as raunch director Bruce LaBruce with Oliver Stone in tow meant continual surprises. Haanraads, Monlux and Bierbaum (who was brought in to control Lauderdale's self-proclaimed "anti-capitalist shenanigans") agree that the club was powered by the energy and spunk of an all-ages crowd and by events like Dyke Rock-a-Rama and cha-cha lessons.

"But Queer Night wasn't about the DJs, benefits and performers; it was about a group of friends, which was new," explains Beck. Most regulars say Monday nights at La Luna felt like a party in someone's living room—a testament to the success of branding, since "Living Room" was the name of La Luna's bar—where everyone was a guest and friend. A queer Cheers...if the theme song had a happy house remix.

"It was a different time," recalls Beck reverently. "The youth and freedom that Gus Van Sant [who claims to have never attended, although he was Haanraads' boyfriend at the time] captured in his films. Our own private Portland."

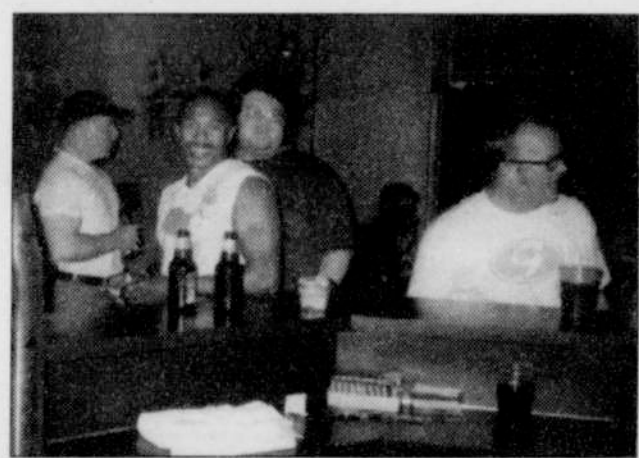
Queer Night ended in 1998, when its organizers moved or burned out. But its successful tenure proved Portland had a population of queers hungry enough for an alternative scene that they could make the quietest night of the week a raging success.

In the ensuing years, with the exception of a small Queer Night offshoot at Le Happy (owned by La Luna's ex-manager) that caters to art fags and a handful of Queer Night originals, the nights were quiet in queer land. Presumably enough couples had met at Queer Night that Living Room debauchery was replaced by living room trysts with Blockbuster videos.

Queer Nights Go Boom

Left again to conventional haunts with only a flickering memory of La Luna, by 2002 Portland's queers were suffering from a deficit of Vitamin Q. In this case, Skervy was the cure instead of the disease.

DJs Puppet and Zanne, fresh immigrants to Portland from San Francisco, were disappointed by the entertainment options. Unknowingly echoing sentiments from 10 years previous,



After Hours



Puppet says: "Portland seemed mellow and stereotypical. Guy bars and girl bars. It was difficult to break into an alternative scene because everyone stayed home or went to house parties. We wanted a place that was mixed and played music we wanted to hear."

Puppet and Zanne created Skervy at Billy Ray's. They promptly had to move it to the Cobalt Lounge when the second story got so crowded that the ceiling tiles below started falling out to the beat of the roiling crowd.



Queer Night drew a diverse crowd to La Luna during the 1990s; above, D-J Haanraads organized the weekly party.

Even more so than La Luna, Skervy attracted an edgy, alternative cast of hardcore punk, trans folk and genderqueers. "It wasn't stereotypical gay," says Puppet, "but more for genderqueers, punk-rockers and rockers."

DJ Stormy, who would become one of

Skervy's organizers, remembers going the first time and being blown away. "Who are these people?" he asked. "It opened my eyes to cool, freaky lesbians and the number of queers in Portland who are artists, activists, etc."

Under self-taught DJ Zanne's tutelage, Skervy was like a sleeper cell training queer DJ foot soldiers who would spread upon its demise like a virus to take over the city's night life. It also served as an incubator for queer performance artists, such as local drag king group

DK PDX and Sparkleheart's Burly-Q Underground.

The opening of Skervy was followed shortly by an

almost equally popular monthly queer night at Blackbird, which most agree catered more to the indie crowd than to Skervy's hardcore.

The success of both nights, reminding club owners of the success of La Luna's Queer Night, sparked a drunken queer night euphoria. Like trade sailors at port, new clubs East, Level and then Aura tried to cash in on the alternative dime with queer parties. Even the upstart hot spot Holocene tossed in its hat with Incubator and Fairchild. But most of these nights catered to a more polished, upscale gay crowd that was never successfully seduced away from the Stark Street juggernaut, and they all promptly fell to the wayside.

With unprecedented dating options, the newly coalesced alternative queer community seemed unable to commit. As trendy new nights came and went, the staples shuddered and fell. Blackbird went belly-up, and Skervy foundered at the end of 2003 from the business split of Puppet and Zanne.

Go Fast, Young Lady

Blissfully unaware of Holocene's unsuccessful attempts to cater to the queers, women in search of an elegant joint where they could wear fancy shoes, sip exquisite cocktails, listen to the best women DJs and flirt with ladies transformed the Southeast club into a queer wonderland.

Tart, started in November 2003 as "a swank soiree where the queer girls play," made a smashing Saturday night party out of a Sunday afternoon.

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