



Rose Empress XV Darcelle and Crown Prince Roc leave the stage at Darcelle's in 1972.

Crowning Achievement

Drag court enters its 50th landmark year

by Nick Pell • Photos courtesy of Scott Seibert

The Imperial Sovereign Rose Court's 49th annual Coronation kicks off this month when candidates declare their intention to claim the oldest drag title in all the land—or at least in all of Oregon. The event is known for its pomp and pageantry, easily outdoing all other titles in the state in both scope and spectacle.

But are traditionalist drag competitions still relevant to 21st century audiences? The world of 2007 and the world of 1958 could not be any more different. Gone are the days of ongoing legal repression for wearing the wrong clothes in public, being at the wrong bar at the wrong time or simply just getting busy with the person of your choice. National dialogue both within and without the queer community has shifted from the most basic issues to arguably secondary questions like whether queer men and women have the right to marry, join the military and adopt children. Drag and transgender performers have spent the past 10 years steadily creeping their way into the mainstream via movies, HBO specials and pop music. The queer community is becoming more pluralistic, and the older, more traditional expressions of queer identity are being questioned, attacked or discarded.

In this climate, an event such as Coronation can seem anachronistic and even quaint. In an age where one can simply turn on the television (or visit YouTube, for that matter) and see Eddie Izzard, Miss Understood or the Korean pop group Lady, why bother leaving the warmth and comfort of your house to see something that's been done 49 times already? How does an organization as firmly rooted in tradition as ISRC maintain its relevance in a world where everything is rapidly changing, including queer identity?

While the court can fairly be called traditionalist or even conservative, charges of irrelevance quickly fall flat. This is more than some warped version of a Jean Benet-style pageant for queers. The community-minded should be roundly impressed by the broad roster of charities the court supports. ISRC is active in promoting fund raising for breast cancer research, several scholarships for various levels of post-secondary education and, of course, the requisite HIV/AIDS charities.

Meet Pearl – Feline Friend and Survivor.

“Our Siamese cat, Pearl, is a cancer survivor. She has been coming to Northwest Veterinary Specialists for over 2 years, and although now in remission, she continues to see her oncologist at NWVS every month. Pearl was 13 when we got the cancer diagnosis. Having never been sick a day in her life, we were stunned when we got the news. We had just lost our dog to the same disease a year prior, so we were bracing ourselves for the worst and fearful that her time with us would be short. Her weekly chemo treatments went well and we were thrilled each time we could extend the weeks between visits. We celebrated with balloons and flowers every month, and it was a huge milestone when we reached one year and then two. We owe her longevity to the quality care she has received from NWVS.”

— Pearl's Owners: Emory & Rebecca Richardson, Vancouver, Washington



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