



Rose Empress XVII Elsa Daniels chats with Rose Empress XII Lisa Jean.



However, fund raising—while far and away the primary concrete function of the court—is not the only way in which the court enriches the queer community. ISRC is the second oldest of its kind (after the Mother Court in San Francisco) and the oldest queer organization in the state and, as such, has forged a number of connections through the years with the courts of other cities. The court serves as a sort of unofficial Ministry of Queer Tourism Propaganda for the City of Roses, talking up Portland and giving it a positive image across the country. Not only does this provide for more communication between local nodes, it also allows the court to bring some rather rustic locations into the fold. (Little did you know that Missoula, Mont., has its own court.) Both sides of the equation cannot help but be enriched by cross-cultural pollination. In this aspect, ISRC has helped Portland establish an image as a cosmopolitan city bustling with queer nightlife and the arts, particularly in the Western states. Put simply: How many people do you know who moved here from Montana, Idaho or the Dakotas, and why didn't they go to San Francisco or Seattle?

Coronation has a long and storied history and has undergone many significant changes since its inception 50 years ago. However, the emphasis on glamour, class and more rhinestones than you can shake a scepter at is the one constant. Reigning Rose Empress XLVIII Dawna Creation embodies perfectly the aesthetic of the pageant with her glittering dresses and super-sized diva tiaras. If you're a patron of The Roxy (owned by Rose Empress XLIII The Lovely Suzanne, one of several bio-queens who have felt the tiara's weight on her head), you might know Creation's alter ego, Michael, a sharp-tongued but friendly waitress.

Like a lot of other veterans of the drag scene, Creation was born at the old City Night Club. But the inspiration for her conception is far more mundane than her glitzy appearance would have you believe. Michael was at The City "sitting around...bored out of my skull with nothing to do, so we all decided to play dress-up. We put on each other's clothes and makeup and"—she pauses as if searching her vocabulary for something far less diva-ish than what comes out—"now look!"

From those humble beginnings rooted in simple adolescent boredom sprung forth the bewitching queen who reigns over queers in the City of Roses. Like many drag queens, there is little difference between Creation and Michael besides the obvious. However, there is one noticeable difference that Creation is quick to point out: "I feel more vivacious and able to talk to people." Her voice drops a little as she restates this point more simply: "Dawn's more outgoing than Michael is."

It's hard to believe that the biological vessel that Michael and Creation share could ever be shy. Creation has held a number of drag titles beginning with the Sweetheart of Portland, not exactly the mark of social inhibition. Her interest in the Rose Court was prompted after meeting various Emperors and Empresses from other cities; when she talks about the court and the community, there is a sincerity in her voice that cannot possibly be ignored. The Empresses she met "were good representatives for their community, and I felt that I got to be a good representative for mine." Creation was also interested in shaking things up a little. "I could put a different face on the Rose Court."

However, the actual experience of being Rose Empress has been in stark contrast to her expectations when she first won. "You have expectations when you step into the title where things are going to go this way, and sometimes they don't and sometimes they do," she says, adding soberly, "A year isn't a very long time." But Creation is also quick to point out that the end of one's official reign is not the end of her title. Creation will be Rose Empress XLVII for the rest of her life.

So how does ISRC remain relevant in the year 2007? The queer community is not the ghettoized monolith that it once was, and drag shows have not really changed much to accommodate that. Further, alternatives to traditional drag now exist such as Portland's Sissyboy and the San Francisco/London axis of Trannyshack. These groups are known for their rejection of the glitz and glamour of classic drag, preferring instead the style known as genderfuck drag. (Count the beards on the stage at a Sissyboy show.)

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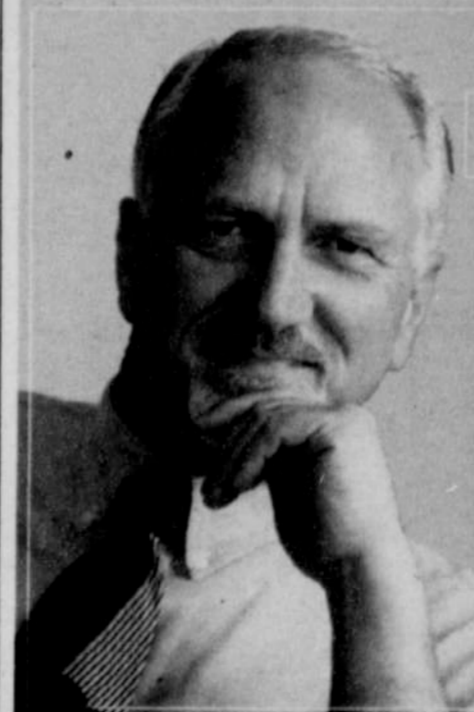
The Old Masonic Lodge (now Portland Art Museum) hosts Coronation 1968. This was one of the last years that "Queens" (now called Empresses) were elected twice a year and served for just six months. Today, titleholders are elected for one-year terms.



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