

Seven Days of 'Scene'

The stars of Portland's gay night life? The people.

It came right on cue: 5:32 p.m., early Wednesday night, the loong-short-short-loong buzz of the hip-pocket cell phone.

The text message read, in its entirety: "10 PM HAPPY HOUR TONIGHT, BITCHES. Jake's, 10th and Stark. Clothing not optional—sorry, I don't make the rules. LOL."

Cheap booze and food, gaggles of buzzing gays, inevitable high school theatrics...ah, yes: another "night out" in Portland! And since I was about to bask in a languorous week off from *Just Out*, why not engage in something truly outrageous? Why not see what might turn up by hitting the Portland gay bars, oh, seven nights in a row? I crunched on the thought with my carrot-filled spring rolls at Jake's.

The question first was one of simple plausibility: Is there enough action to be had in this town seven nights running? Bar and club action, I mean—*scene action*, baby. I've been as disappointed with Portland's "scene action" as anyone else who's moved here from a larger metropolis. Cue the track: "Tell me where the party at? Tell me tell me where the party at?" I was on my way.

Thursday nights offer an obvious answer: C.C. Slaughters' two-buck wells. Rusty Nail in hand, I ran into a friend at the back bar; he introduced me to a klatch of young guys. I talked with one of them, a slight bottle blond with piercing eyes, about masculinity: He called himself "kind of a queen" and laughed with his friend, spilling his drink on his perfect white Adidas sneakers.

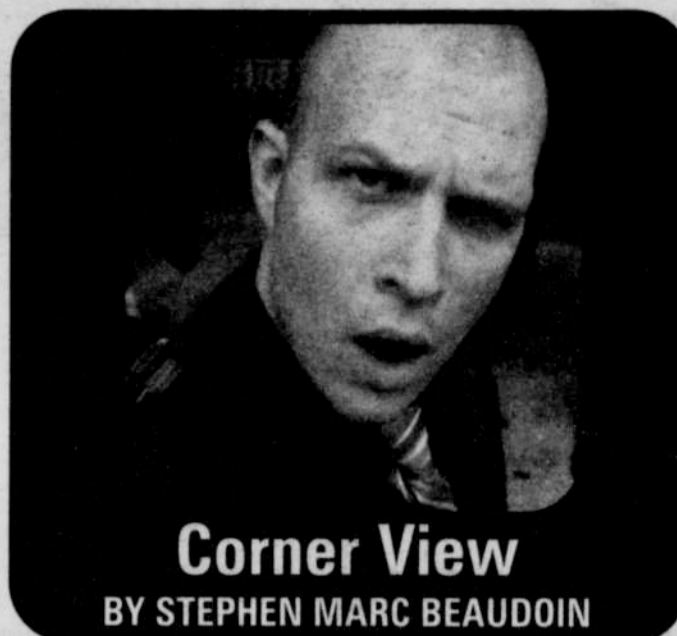
Friday nights in Portland have an air of nothing-doing about them—we may, for example, be the only major U.S. city in which our major symphony orchestra does *not* perform on Friday nights. Exhausted from the week, I rode the No. 4 home along Division, determined to reach my solo destiny unimpeded: Pad Kee Mao take-out, long shower, bathrobe, beer. A sort-of work acquaintance caught me on the bus, sitting with a cute friend. "We're going to Crush tonight," he offered. The cute friend smiled broadly; how could I say no?

Four hours and three IPAs later, the gang had grown to six, all of

us swilling "cheap dates" (whiskey gingers, five bucks, aptly named) in the Crush lounge and talking in the overanimated style (big gestures, small words) that such imbibing encourages. The cute friend and I made out, exchanged numbers, headed outside to hail a cab. The youngest of the bunch, an outrageous character I think named Joseph, gyrated on the sidewalk and hollered fragments of an R. Kelly rap to nobody in particular: "After the show, it's the after party, then after the party it's the hotel lobby, then...." Then he shook his ass at a pair of Latinas crossing the street. They giggled and asked for a cigarette.

Cosmopolitan young gays—educated, traveled, articulate—might live in Portland, but I don't exactly meet them every week. That's why I was so taken with Christopher, a 22-year-old Nordic beauty with a blond soul patch and a Turkish boyfriend. Over Saturday night vodka-sodas at Scandals and the Red Cap, he lamented the "lack of vibrancy" in Portland and talked about his upcoming travel itinerary (Istanbul, Berlin, New York City). He said he has to get out of the Northwest a few months every year to remind himself what metropolitan gay living is like. (Do you blame him?)

Christopher's housemate is an amusingly direct retail sales queen—worn jean jacket and asymmetrical dark haircut—named Cory, someone I see out frequently, and usually alone. I ask Cory what he thinks of the scene in Portland: "I think this is, like, a banquet," he says, spreading his arms wide to encompass the entire company of men in the bar. "I take some of that, then I take some of that." But he adds that he's "tired of the gay bars" and wants to "try something different." Such as? "Like, I dunno," he says. "Maybe a gay church."



Corner View
BY STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN

Silverado has provided its share of religious experiences to Portland gays, and its new digs on Southwest Third were spilling over Sunday with beer-bust-happy guys, slices of (free) warm pizza in hand. Linger in a corner, I sipped on a Hef and scanned the room while a bald drag queen in neon getup lip-synced (rather poorly) to a recording of "Miss Otis Regrets." A stocky guy in Army fatigues, white wife-beater and boots catches my eye. He invites me over to talk. He has a killer smile, a great chest and a lip that becomes more pronounced with

each beer.

Mondays are dead here, no question; Tuesdays make up for it in an unusually lively way. Waiting for my HIV test results at the Men's Wellness Center on Stark, I chat up two fresh-faced guys who seem like fun—let's call them Jon (scruffy, smart, flamboyant) and Ken (the same). Both are new to town. They follow me over to five-for-five at the Red Cap. Jon humps my leg and compliments my eyes; Ken causes a scene near the dance floor, snapping his fingers furiously. "He's such a drama queen," Jon says, rolling his eyes at Ken.

Who are these people? They're the *scene*, the motley cast of characters populating Portland gay night life. This scene might not be dance-floor-packed like NYC or drug-addled like L.A., but we have something better here in Portland, and it's why I still go out: authenticity. 10

Staff Writer STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN writes about Portland arts and queer culture at fromeverycorner.blogspot.com. He welcomes feedback at stephen@justout.com.



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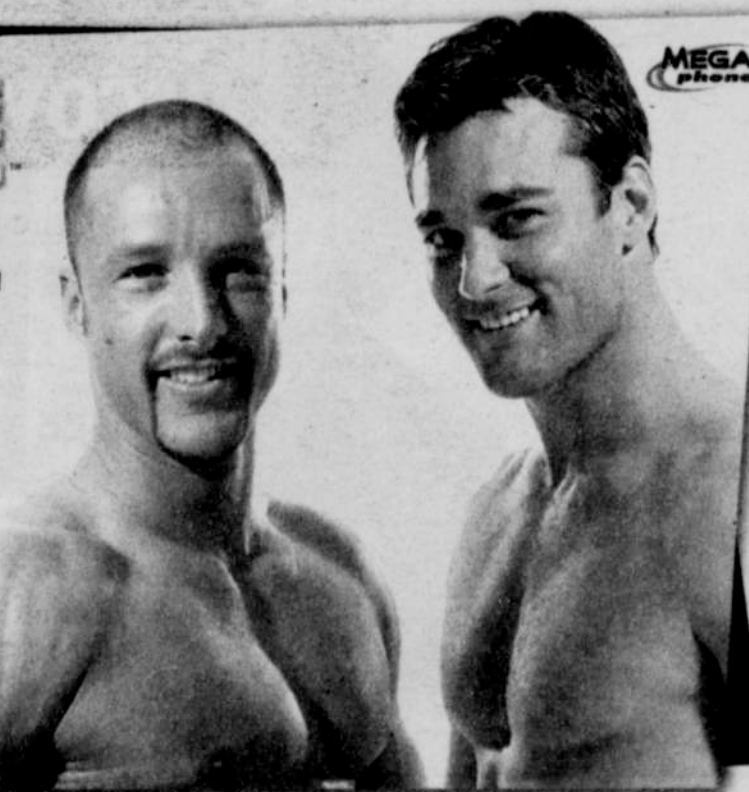
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