

Tearing Down The Walls of Identity With...

Diane Torr



BY MICHAEL C. ALBERO

Lifting the tattered sleeve of my red checkered flannel shirt, I once again glanced at my watch and felt the aggravation, which I had taken great strides to hide throughout the evening, suddenly threaten to make itself known. Despite my reputation as a patient person, I found myself becoming extremely irritated, having waited over forty-five minutes for the performance, "Drag Kings and Subjects," to commence. Silently, I began to stare intently at the thin, yellow backstage entrance, willing it to open and allow admittance to the small congregation of students that had formed. As if upon command, a harried theatre assistant magically appeared, unlocked the door and quickly herded us into the dressing room. The procession continued up a small staircase and onto a darkened stage, made stranger by the odd sounding rhythms of a New Age selection, flowing through the theatre like a delicate dove in flight. The weird sensations pervading my body were furthered after arriving on stage and viewing three glass

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bottles, each possessing a bubbling solution and a wiggling, human tongue. Taking a seat in the audience, I realized that the organs on stage had been moving in perfect harmony with the futuristic music. Preparing myself for what proved to be a truly unique performance concerning gender in the '90s, I finally relaxed and allowed myself to enter the world of a provocative artist, Diane Torr.

A native of Scotland, Torr first arrived and began to perform in the United States after graduating from England's Dartington College of the Arts in 1976. An accomplished dancer, Diane possessed a vast array of skills, as well as a unique interest in exploring "the self (her physical being)," but was forced to go-go dance in order to survive. Even

though she was basically dancing for dollars, Torr made the best of her opportunities, continually using her work as a process for self-exploration. "Go-go dancing allowed me to make... studies of my own erotic possibilities as a mover. When you are dancing... you're on the line. You have to come up with the goods; you have to find out what you're made of and what you're resources are. I quickly learned the go-go formula... fingers down the inside of the leg, circling the nipples, bending over and looking between the legs—simulating sex or whatever. You have to do those moves in a way that you feel like they have some kind of flavor to them, but at the same time also make your own moves."

With the assistance of

drama

Aikido, a Japanese martial art form in which Torr holds the rank of Nidan, a second degree black belt, she began to design her own movements and show within the confines of her job as a go-go dancer. Her interest in martial arts, as well as yoga enabled Torr to develop physically and she believed, "A lot of men didn't actually think I was a woman. They all thought I was a transvestite and that I had a penis taped up under my scrotum...." Consequently, Diane did not conform to the typical dancer stereotype and decided, "I'm just going to make my own exploration. And I started to bring in toys like rubber snakes and objects to amuse myself, and to improvise with, and it became a go-go dancer/performance art/sex experiment.... In fact, I made my own erotic piece.... Some of the men really appreciated it, though a lot of them wanted the same old, same old. But for myself, it was really an interesting experiment, and I decided to make a performance with that."

The performance that evolved, "Go-Go Girls Seize Control," was a true representation of the artist, Diane Torr, a product of physical knowledge, critical thinking, investigatory performance and something that defied all systems of labeling. When the show debuted in 1981 at the Women's One Theatre Festival in New York City, many of the audience members were aghast. For much of the performance, Torr and her dancers masqueraded in costumes designed as

caricatures that overly exaggerated their chest and vaginal areas, while performing erotic dances complete with sound effects for the viewers. Critics of the show believed it exploited women and other dancers found the performance too sexually explicit. They did not see it as the research experiment, for which Torr had hoped. During one performance at a women's festival in Amsterdam, a riot occurred as bottles were thrown at the performers and women arm-linked themselves across the front door of the theatre, forcing Torr and other artists to flee through the rear exit. Many in the audience believed Torr was performing only for men and were appalled.

In sharp contrast to the criticism concerning "Go-Go Girls Seize Control," attitudes toward Diane Torr's most recent endeavor "Drag Kings and Subjects," as well as her cross-dressing workshops, are surprisingly positive. The show centers around Silvia, a rich, middle-aged woman who enjoys dressing as a man. The alter-ego created is a middle-class, hard-working, Pittsburgh native named, Danny King, who establishes an "American Society of Men," through which he instructs other males on issues such as, masculinity and the role of men in society. His views conform to the typical, heterosexual male stereotype, but are shattered when it is later revealed that Danny possesses a secret, a desire to dress in women's apparel. The personality created is Dolores, a sexy, cabaret singer with a sultry voice and dynamic movements who concludes the

A KING, p16

Burlington's fabulous live-performing drag duo (8 p.m.), to benefit the Project's Gay & Bisexual Men's Program. Michael's Seafood & Steak Tavern Route 103, Ludlow VT. \$10 donation cash bar & complimentary hot & cold hors d'oeuvres. FMI, call Carey (802) 254-8263 or Michael (802) 228-4479

Full Moon ritual, potluck, and Burlington UU Circle meeting. All who support the Covenant of UU Pagans' mission are welcome. Wear garb if you like, and bring something for feast, a musical instrument, and a cushion to sit on. HC accessible. 6 p.m., First UU Society of Burlington, 152 Pearl St. FMI Dian 658-9689.

12 MONDAY

Book Night, Gay And Lesbian Literature Discussion. We will discuss Andrew Holleran's now classic gay

novel, *The Dancer From The Dance*, which highlights the fast life in pre-AIDS New York and the rewards and punishments of life in the gay ghetto. The novel thrives on an intriguing and convincing cast of characters ranging from the recently out to the "born out". Is this a comedy or a tragedy? You decide and we'll discuss it amongst ourselves. 10% off at Chassman & Bem if you mention Glitter. The Rhombus Gallery is located at the intersection of College & Church Sts. in Burlington. 652-1103. Enter on College St. Gallery is on the second floor. For more information, 802-434-5653 or email: GLITTERvt@aol.com

Potluck at Kelly & Lynn's Town Hill Rd Marlboro, 7 p.m.. FMI Lynn or Kelly (802) 258-2518 Directions Coming from Brattleboro (get off Exit 2 if you're coming from I-91), take Route 9 west to Marlboro. Traveling about 10 minutes, you will pass the Spiral Shop

on your right, with its world-famous sculpture garden. About 5 miles later, just before Route 9 curves sharply to the right, you will pass "Applewoods" woodshop on the right and a sign that tells you to veer left to Marlboro College. Don't veer left, go 1 mile further along Rte 9 and turn left onto "Town Hill Road." Kelly & Lynn's is the 2nd house on the left. Jan. 17 - Winter Fun and event planning with Women of the Woods. 1 PM, Williamstown, VT, Pizza at 5. FMI: 802-433-5990.

The Burlington Women's Council, in cooperation with the Burlington police Department, is sponsoring a self defense/rape awareness workshop for women. The workshop will be taught in a series of two 3 hour classes meeting Monday the 12th and Monday the 19th, from 6:30 to 9:30, at the Fletcher Allen Hospital Campus. FMI or to register call 865 7200.

Rutland CAN meeting 6-8 at High School.

Rutland HIV+ group meets. call 775 5884 FMI.

14 WEDNESDAY

Rainbow Business Assn. mixer. 6:30. \$10, call 658 7023 FMI.

15 THURSDAY

15-18: Theater Factory Presents, *Tons Of Money*, a delightful 1920's farce adapted by Alan Ayckbourn. Tickets are \$6.50 and are available only at the door. FMI 872 2738. Staring Cherrie Tartt.

St. Johnsbury, Men of the Kingdom, Caledonia Home Health. 7-9pm



"ton's of money"