

# Craig Mitchell

## Releases his *Soul-Freeing* CD

Interviewed by  
Michael C. Albero

It was Halloween night, and as one might expect, the patrons of 135 Pearl were dressed for the occasion. Drag queens and kings, topless women, and jock strapped men were all present adding additional fuel to the already thick atmosphere of barely repressed sexual energy. For an under-age Craig Mitchell, who was visiting the club for the first time, the combination was a little unnerving. "I was freaked out. There was a guy behind the bar with his jeans ripped from top to bottom. He kept buying me drinks, and I thought he was just being nice."

Despite his initial fears, Mitchell quickly adapted to the alternative surroundings and even secured a job within the club as a d.j. Now the environment which provided his first glimpse of the queer community is serving another role — launching pad for his latest endeavor as lead singer of Craig Mitchell and the Orange Factory.

For Mitchell, whose youth was

spent with family enjoying the outdoor wilderness of his home in Saginaw, Michigan, finding self respect has not been easy. The oldest of three, he never really knew his father, George, and only spoke with him on a couple occasions. "My mom sort of made a conscious decision never to get married. She met George in Tennessee one summer and stayed with him," said Mitchell. Rather than visiting him on school vacations, Craig preferred to go fishing with family and often spent the majority of each week in the solitude provided by local waterways. "We lived to fish, but I never ate them. I felt a sort of brotherhood to fish and even today I get really sick when I smell them."

In contrast to the carefree days of summer, the autumn and winter months in school were some of the worst Mitchell has ever endured, causing a sense of self hatred to arise. The butt of many jokes and ridiculed as a "faggot," Craig was never able

to understand his perpetual role as an outcast. "I was beaten up in the first grade and in the second grade by a girl. At the time I didn't know why. Now I know it's because I'm different," said Mitchell. Although he made several attempts to conform to the standards of his classmates, he met with little success. "I tried to play their game," he stated. "I tried to be tough, but I just couldn't do it. Every time I did they just saw right through it."

Despite the agony he experienced at school, Mitchell was able to find some solace in the music of Prince, which was introduced to him by his grandmother. In listening to the music, he discovered a place where he could "run and hide" from the verbal and physical abuse of his classmates. While the music seemed to state the feelings and emotions which he could not, the artist himself began to serve as a role model. "I started wearing a trench coat, eyeliner, [and I] grew my hair long. Instead of ev-

erone saying, 'There is Craig, that fag' it was, 'There is Craig, who looks like Prince.' Every move he made, every word he said, I was on top of him."

Nevertheless, Mitchell's lowly status remained intact throughout school, finally causing him to act out. "In high school I was viewed as a fag. People loved what I did (work, projects, musical events), but I was still viewed as a fag. While being who I was, doing the things I was doing, I was verbally and physically abusive toward gay people. I thought if I just kicked gay people out of my face, then I'd never have to be gay."

While these actions brought more personal comfort than popularity, Mitchell found new friendships through participation on the basketball team, including a special relationship with one star player, D.J. In addition to daily practices, they frequently spent more time in each other's company as a genuine bond began to develop. "D.J and I would get together every three days or so. That was exciting.

That I enjoyed. Eventually he stopped talking to me... right in the middle of me still wanting him," said Mitchell. Feeling a need to vent his emotions, Craig began to write, a practice first initiated many years before as an outlet from family problems. Unlike his earlier works though, "Forever Doesn't Seem So Long" spoke of an interrupted love affair and the disappointment which was prevalent throughout Mitchell's life. After writing the song, it was recorded and mailed to various record companies before eventually being purchased for one thousand dollars by Rainbow

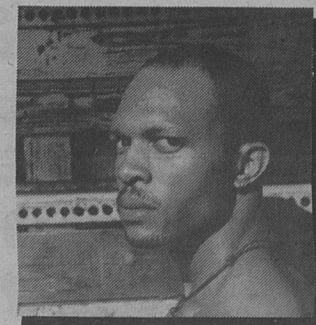
Records. Although it was poorly recorded by an unknown country singer, Cathy Cox, selling the song was Mitchell's first significant victory within the music industry.

Almost ten years later, Mitchell has returned to the field. However, with the recent release of his deeply personal debut album, *Naked* (Orange Factory Records), it is possible he may find a more lasting respect. From the beginning, it is clear this CD will not be the typical "gangster's paradise" which has seized the musical world by storm. Rather it is a confessional piece that speaks directly from the musician's heart, promising "all my intentions, contemplations and secrets/in you I must confide." Throughout the work, the listener is confronted with visions of Mitchell's life created with the aid of mature lyrics and pulsating melodies. The combination provides a unique glimpse into Mitchell's thoughts on spirituality, a troubled younger brother and the special relationship he shares with his mother.

Another topic candidly discussed on the album is the artist's near overdose on heroin as a student

at Saint Michael's College. "When I left my room I was smiling and happy, but behind closed doors I was punching holes in the wall," stated Mitchell. Complex in substance, these feelings are relayed vividly throughout "Heroin," a confessional piece that reflects the motives of many youths. By itself, the song lends support to the album's hype as "a trip without the enhancing concoctions" that is guaranteed "to set your soul free." However, after listening to the words and music, it is evident that it is

Craig Mitchell's soul that is finally flying free.



**"I tried to play their game, I tried to be tough, but I just couldn't do it. Every time I did they just saw right through it."**

### 28 FRIDAY

**Orange** - Women of the Woods pizza and planning at Sue's. Bring your drink of choice. FMI 225-0109

### 29 SATURDAY

**Essex Junction** - Through Sept. 7, Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force volunteers will be staffing a booth at The Champlain Valley Fair. If you are interested in helping VFMTF be visible to thousands of people contact Beth Robinson 388-6356

### 31 MONDAY

**Burlington** - BLT (bisexual, lesbian, transgender women's) Health Network will be meeting at the Peace and Justice Center at 7:00 PM. Come visit

us, join us, participate in the development of health information and help for the health of BLT's in the state of Vermont. For further info: phone: Lanny 899-4588, or Joy 848-7037.

## september

### 6 SUNDAY

**Burlington** - UU CIRCLE: Full Moon ritual, potluck, and 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. First UU Society of Burlington, 152 Pearl St., 6 pm. Donations. Info: 658-9689.

### 12 SATURDAY

**Ferrisburgh** - BIKE FOR THE RIGHT TO MARRY. Fundraiser for Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force. Ride in scenic Champlain Valley. All experience levels welcome. FMI Call Nancy, 453-5420, or Susan, 877-3165

**Danbury, NH** - Fifth Annual NH Women's Music Festival, at the Ragged Mountain Ski Area. FMI: 603-224-3501, or email nhfc@nh.ultranet.com. This year's concert is dedicated to the late Suky Grover, with net proceeds going to the NH Breast Cancer Coalition.

**Plainfield, NH** - 4pm, Cook-out, games and Bonfire at Kim & Carolyn's: 603-675-6865.

**Williamstown** - Dusk Women of the Woods End-of-Summer Bonfire. Bring the usual snacks and something to drink. Hot dogs, buns and fixings provided. Bring a lawn chair. FMI 229-0109

### 13 SUNDAY

**Montpelier** - Vermont Gay Men's Chorus general meeting. UU Church, 4-7pm, This will be an informal meeting to talk about music, make suggestions, have a professional there to listen and make recommendations and actually sing!!!

### 16 WEDNESDAY

**Battleboro** - Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force meeting. Planning for future panels and Gay Bingo. 7pm

**Battleboro Savings and Loan Assoc.** Community Room, 221 Main St. FMI Bari Shamas 387-5788

### 22 TUESDAY

**St. Albans** - Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force representatives will be guests for their The Rotary Club meeting at noon.

### 27 SUNDAY

**Burlington** - The First Congregational Church, 11am, Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force representatives will be speaking following the Church's regular service. FMI Wendy Beinler 802 652-0723