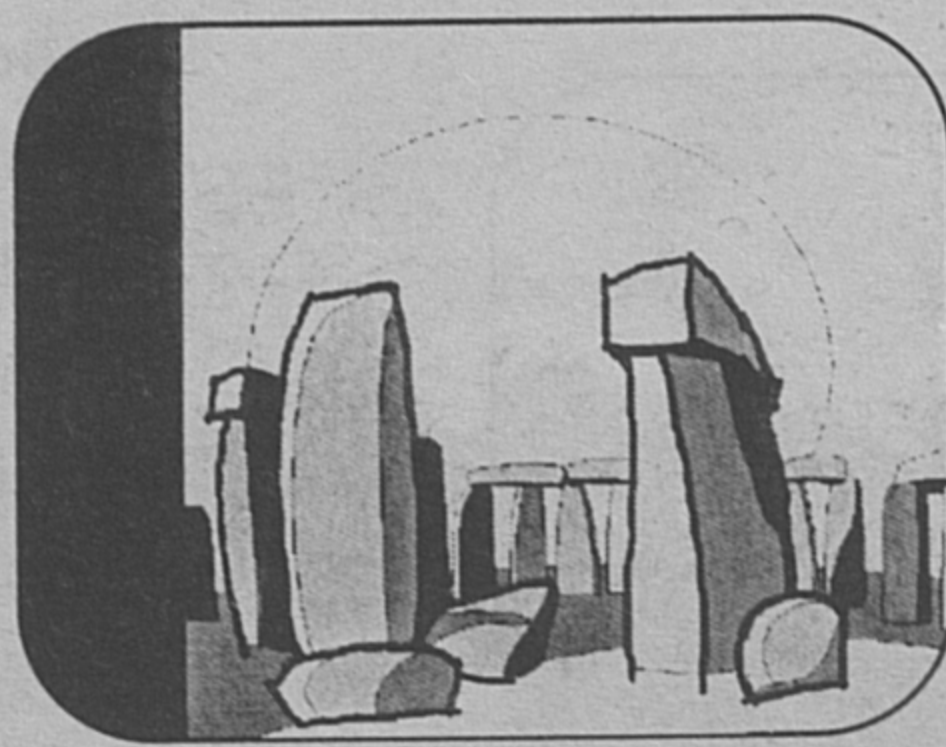


feature

STONEHENGE TO STONEWALL
by charlie emond

Cowabunga, Girlfriend!

Today we will look at four very famous guys on every gay list, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, and Donatello...and no, I am NOT talking about the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles!

However, you will never look at those heroic cartoon turtle icons in exactly the same way when you realize that they are all named after gay Renaissance artists. (Wait until Jerry Falwell hears about this one!)

Michelangelo (1475-1564) was so into men that he even used male models for his sculptures of women. His female statues for the Medici chapel look like Arnold Schwarzenegger with boobs.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) is famous for painting the Mona Lisa, which has been revealed as a portrait of himself in drag. (Now we know the reason for the smile!)

Raphael (1483-1520) painted a lovely "Jupiter Kissing Cupid," among other homoerotic works.

Donatello (1386-1466), like all of these guys, "chose his disciples more for beauty than for talent." Donatello's greatest work is his androgynous "David" wearing nothing but a flowery hat and a faint smile. With his hand on his hip, he appears about to swish off, carrying the head of Goliath like a handbag!

It's Raining Naked Men!

Renaissance artists loved themes that allowed them to do – in the artistic sense, of course – naked men. There are countless depictions of St. Sebastian studded with arrows. Narcissus and Hyacinthus were very popular, and there are all those Cupids and Apollos.

Then, of course, there are the Ganymedes. So popular was this Greco-Roman legend of Zeus/Jupiter/Jove grabbing up the pretty shepherd boy that the term "ganymede" came into common use to mean the object of homosexual desire.

A Leo by any other name

Leonardo Da Vinci was strikingly handsome and strong as an ox. He was also shy and sensitive. He was accused, at the age of 24, of having sex with a 17-year-old named Jacopo Saltarelli in Florence. Since the Florentines appreciated physical beauty wherever they found it, this was not at all unusual. However it upset Leonardo, and he moved to Milan, where he promptly picked up an apprentice. Giacomo Caprotti was "graceful and beautiful with fine curly hair" but he was also a troublemaker and a thief. Despite this, Salai (little devil), as he was nicknamed, stayed with Leonardo the rest of his life.

A young nobleman, Francesco Melzi, also became

Leonardo's lifelong companion and was left in charge of the incredible notes and drawings of this great genius. Of his best-known work, the Mona Lisa, historian Kenneth Clark says, "At least we can be sure that his feeling for her was not the ordinary man's feeling for a beautiful woman." Boy, did he get that right!

Doing David!

Michelangelo was quite a contrast to Leonardo, and the word is that they hated each other. He was rough, crotchety and aggressive – a "stunning personality" but not an attractive man.

He sculpted his ubiquitous statue of David in 1504. This youth is said to have been his sexual type (and whose isn't it)? For his next commission, he chose the subject of soldiers bathing in a river. Even though this painting was never carried out, his apparent obsession with "the naked male in many postures" created a great stir. Clark concludes that Michelangelo showed that the bodies of ordinary men could express "nobility, life-giving energy and Godlike perfection." That is precisely why David has become such an icon for gay men.

Michelangelo lived to be very old, and his love poems to his beloved Tommaso Cavaleiri are quite famous. In one, he wrote, "Woman is too

unlike and little does it agree with a wise and manly heart to burn for her."

Just like Michelangelo and Leonardo, Raphael never married. He was a beautiful, kind and charming man who lived with a couple of his pupils. One of them, Giulio (Romano) succeeded him and spent twenty years filling Duke Federigo Gonzaga's palaces with homoerotic paintings such as "Jupiter Embracing Cupid" and the "Rape of Ganymede."

Donatello's gay reputation rests largely on the stories that were rife after his death regarding his handsome young apprentices.

A Few More Good Turtles

If the producers of "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" are looking for the next generation, please take note that there is a veritable army of gay Renaissance artists waiting in the wings! From a huge list that includes such greats as Caravaggio, Botticelli, and Correggio, here are a couple of new names for you: Benvenuto and Sodoma!

Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) the renowned goldsmith, was smitten by the Ganymede theme. Apparently every time he came across a statue of a boy, he wanted to add an eagle and call it "Ganymede." One time he said this, the sculptor Bandinelli called him a sodomite!

Cellini was furious at this public "insult," which he denied, but added, "I wish to God I did know how to indulge in such a noble practice; after all, we read that Jove enjoyed it with Ganymede in paradise, and here on earth it is the practice of the greatest emperors and the greatest kings of the world... I haven't the means to meddle in such a marvelous

matter."

Though he so hotly denied it in public, he was arrested at least four times for sodomy (non-procreative sex) and was publicly known for sleeping with men. He describes his friendship with Fillipino Lippi, son of the famous painter: "We came to love each other so much that we were never apart, day or night... [we] went together for about two years."

But for captain of the heroic team, for sheer in-your-face bravery, I nominate Il Sodoma. No doubts at all about this guy!

His real name was Gianantonio Bazzi (1477-1549) and he's quite possibly the first man in history to shout, "I'm here, I'm queer, get used to it!" His "lifestyle" earned him this nickname and he insisted on being called by it. His paintings in the world's greatest museums bear this name, as do his wonderful frescoes, and "Il Sodoma" is the name you will find him under in your encyclopedia. He is known to history as "the Sodomite."

Next time: The Radical Faeries meet the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence

For More Information: This gay history column is the 15th in a series that began in prehistory. Much of my research for this column comes from two excellent books, James Saslow's *Ganymede in the Renaissance* and *Homosexuals in History* by A.L. Rowse, both of which I highly recommend. ▼

Charlie Emond has a bachelor's degree from Queen's College and master's degrees from both Dartmouth and Keene State. He teaches college history courses in Springfield and White River Junction.

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