

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

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A Salute To Craig Russell

On Tuesday October 30, Craig Russell died in a Toronto hospital from a stroke resulting from AIDS. Russell's impersonations of great lady stars like Mae West, Judy Garland and Barbara Streisand in the semi-autobiographical 1977 movie *Outrageous* catapulted him from Toronto's gay club circuit to such prestigious venues as the city's Imperial Room and New York's Carnegie Hall.

"Craig was a warm and generous person who was just unable to cope with the question: Who is Craig Russell - a man or a woman?" said Gino Empry, his publicist and manager. "He had no discipline. If he had harnessed his talent, he would have been a world star. It was his lack of discipline

defeated him."

Craig Russell had a voice that ranged from Louis Armstrong to Barbara Streisand and unlike most female impersonators, he used it. He also had the ability to convey his affection for the ladies he was playing. "Once when I was doing all my jokes, a friend said: 'You're not big enough to put down these people who are the reason for your professional existence. At that point, I stopped doing put downs and started doing send ups. The important thing is that the ladies know that I really dig them.'"

Apparently he always really dug them. Of his school days, he said: "I preferred hanging out with the girls. They dressed better and smelled nicer. I was only 13, but somehow I knew that's where my future was." It's sad that the person who, in his own words, was "too cute to be a boy, but not cute enough to be a girl" never did find his peace of mind.

Writing in *Toronto Life*, critic Martin Knelman observed "Russell's act is a kind of tribute - a fond, witty commentary. He doesn't merely mime, and what he does goes way beyond female impersonation. It's inspired and original...When Russell is at his best, it's clear that what we are witnessing is some weird and wonderful show business form of possession. He orchestrates his own pandemonium, and he gives the audience a good time."

Notes from the Underground
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An accredited chapter of the Society for the Second Self.

"Some people strengthen the society just by being the kind of people they are."

John W. Gardner

On The Subject Of Magazines

Reading "Mulling over the Magazines" (NFTU Nov/Dec 1990) left me with an uneasy feeling. Although I had no difficulty accepting the final conclusion, I did find myself disconcerted over the reasoning used to reach it. It directly opposed the manner in which the new group name was arrived at, and described in such glowing terms on the previous page. It fails to recognize the diversity of the world of crossdressing, and implies a hidden belief that problems can be solved by enforcing some standard of uniformity. Since we've all experienced this phenomena from society's attitude towards crossdressing in general, it is disappointing to find that the same thing may be happening "in house."

The magazines referred to which contained depictions of sympathetic aunts, heavenly orgasms and TV's male sexual organs are pornography. Please note that as I write the dreaded word PORNOGRAPHY that the ground is not shaking, lightning bolts are not striking me down nor is there a smell of sulphur in the air. Pornography has only one aim, and that is to stimulate sexual arousal. Period. It was not created to educate, or to display opinions of integrity, or to prove to TV's that they are men. At its root, pornography is about sex, and sexual fantasy; nothing less, nothing more. It is a fact that pornography has been misused, and has been relied upon to be the primary sexual educator of puritan Western society. It is also fact that the cause for this is ironically linked

to the hysterical reaction to anything sexual from ostensibly well intentioned people.

Then again, kitchen utensils have also often been misused. I have no intentions of eating with my hands.

Sex of course is one of the long standing taboos of society. No matter how one tries to intellectualize sex, it is, for most, a highly personalized affair. Therefore it should come as no surprise that people react in an emotional, not necessarily rational manner when confronted with sexual subject matter, especially if it depicts activities which run counter to one's own inclinations. Unless one was bi or homosexual (and there are a few crossdressers so inclined), then the sight of a male in lingerie and see-through panties is strongly distasteful, if not downright nauseating. Then again, there are lots of people who are not too impressed with what makes me tick either.

This reaction is dangerous if not understood properly. Too often this sensation of disgust to what is someone else's sexual tastes carries over to a judgement of that individual's moral standing. It is this reaction that causes people to quite guiltlessly beat up gays in the park, and ridicule their attempts to build relationships. Contempt for those that are different can come into play, and in my mind contempt is nothing more than a self-defeating method of justifying oneself. I disagree completely with the author's comment,

"Crossdressing is not about sex at all." Please. Our sexualities do not necessarily pack up and leave the instant we put on women's clothes. The simple truth is that a significant number of TVs have incorporated crossdressing into their sexualities, diverse as they are, or at least, have fantasized about it. Crossdressing is about emulating the female gender. I think it's safe to say that a component of gender is sexuality. It should come as no surprise that many crossdressers would enjoy being treated as a lady by a man, taken out to dinner, or a night of dancing. It should come as no surprise that some would take it further, and the nuances and variations possible are almost infinite.

I feel a more accurate sentence would have said "crossdressing is not all about sex". There are so many facets to what we do, it is almost impossible to fully develop one's potential through only one's own perspective, which is so heavily influenced by our experiences through puberty. The very name of our club acknowledges this diversity. Can you imagine how absolutely boring the club would be if everyone dressed the same way, and had identical approaches to emulating their femme selves? Can you imagine how boring the world would be if everyone was the same? Society would stagnate. Nearly every destructive period in history has been accompanied by some latent desire for uniformity. Hitler and the Klu Klux Klan are extreme examples of this phenomena, but it does not

take a genius to see it working at every level of human interaction.

Living is all about learning, and learning means being aware of other people's perspective. This is not always easy, in fact it can be downright scary. It's not pleasant to realize that you may have been missing out on something, or your own personal hang-ups are really groundless in the eyes of others. This is a fear however, which must be overcome. This is the fear which exaggerates surface differences, and sets people against each other. This is the fear with which society's institutions (and some individuals) regard crossdressers. This is a fear which caused our club some of our own growing pains, and if we are not careful, it can still separate us each into our own cliques. It can also act as a barrier between us and some of the other clubs which we have just forged some links to. Despite all that we have in common, everybody has a different approach to things. It is what makes us individuals.

It is one thing for a crossdresser to expect negative reaction from a misinformed public; it is quite another when they have to wonder if other crossdressers will judge them to be the right "type". Coming out of the closet to me, means gaining one's freedom. In particular it means freedom to make choices about all the facets of crossdressing which had previously been unknown to me, and deciding which ones I wish to incorporate. A club which

The Value of Women

A California doctor has patented an ultrasound technique that he says can determine the sex of a fetus at 12 to 14 weeks. Dr. John Stephens has promoted his service recently among Vancouver's large East Indian community where, according to Dr. Stephens, there is still a belief that male babies are more desirable. "We know that if the sex (of the fetus) is not the one they wish, they will go off and have an abortion," he said in an interview from his ultrasound clinic in Palo Alto. Dr. Stephens operates three clinics in California and another just across the Canadian border in Blaine, Washington, about 50 kilometres southeast of Vancouver. He said he would have preferred to have a clinic right in Vancouver, but was unable to obtain a licence to practise in Canada. Establishment of the clinic and Dr. Stephens' marketing of it caused a furor in Vancouver. "He is trying to make money in a way that is despicable and unethical," said Raminder Dosanjh, a director with the India Mahila Association. "He's doing his best to cash in on some of the values that unfortunately still exist in our society. It's a total abuse of technology." Dr. Stephens is seeking a New York medical licence in order to open a clinic in Niagra Falls, N.Y. "That would attract business from Toronto. I'm told there are enough East Indians there to make it commercially viable." Diane Marshall, a therapist with the Institute of Family Living in Toronto, said the current Royal

World Watch



Commission on New Reproductive Technologies should call for a ban on practises such as Dr. Stephens'. "He has a marketing campaign aimed directly at groups in society which value a male child more than a female child," she said. "And he administers a technology which can lead to abortion of a female fetus. I think that's disgusting. People's morality should be based on more than what sells in the marketplace." Dr. Stephens said he doesn't condone the attitude that a family must have a male child, but "if I don't make money, I don't survive. As a businessman, I need a competitive edge."

Priests and Sex

A psychiatrist, family therapist and former Benedictine priest has written a book on priests and sex called *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*. A. W. Richard Sipe based his book on psychiatric counselling sessions and less formal talks that he held from 1960 through 1985 with 1,000 priests and 500 lay people who were lovers of priests or were victims or "otherwise direct observers" of sexual behaviour of priests. Some of his conclusions: about 50% of

priests practise celibacy; 20% are or have been involved in heterosexual relationships; 10 to 13% are actively homosexual; 6% are sexually involved with children or minors and 1% practise transvestism. A spokesman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington has criticized the study because it relies not on a random sampling of priests but rather on clergy who went to Sipe for counselling.

Washroom Problems

A Houston policeman who arrested a woman charged with using a men's restroom during a concert said he was unfazed by her presence in the bathroom. Steven Andrews, a vice officer for almost two decades, offered his testimony for the state, which rested its case against Denise Wells. The 33 year old legal assistant is accused of entering a men's room without permission in a manner calculated to cause a disturbance. She admits to using the men's room at the Summit arena during a July 7 concert by country music star George Strait because the line at the women's room was too long. She was arrested and removed from the concert, for which she paid \$125 to attend. Two police officers have testified Wells left the stall in the men's room and announced: "There - I left the lid up just like y'all like it."

Crossdressing and High I.Q.'s

Noted in a recent issue of the Mensa International Journal: "Crossdresser would like to

correspond with other Ms who have similar feelings or any females who are understanding/interested. Statistics show tv's, ts's, etc., to be generally above average in intelligence. There must be more of us. Please write. Privacy and discretion assured. Denise, P.O. Box 116635, Carrollton, Texas 75011-6635, USA."

Items compiled by Alison T.

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limits, or enforces by peer pressure, the choices which can be made by its members, is nothing more than a roomier closet. Keeping ourselves blissfully ignorant of any aspect of crossdressing for the sake of image is to me the most efficient method of ensuring that we continue to victimize and alienate ourselves. Let's not let a little squeamishness foul things up.

Belinda Doree

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TVO Responds



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A Letter to TV Ontario

Dear Sir or Madam,

Some weeks ago, I sat down with my Saturday morning coffee, turned on the television and stumbled across your kid's program "How Do You Do?". What I saw annoyed me as a great deal, and as my irritation does not seem to be diminishing, I am finally sitting down to air my objections.

The episode that I found offensive was the one relating to clothes. The female host was explaining what she was wearing to the show's resident robot, who was male and the character with which the kids were obviously meant to sympathize. After she had finished, the robot announced that he too would like to wear a blouse, skirt and stockings, whereupon the woman laughed and told him that men wore shirts, pants and socks. She conveniently ignored the fact that women wear shirts, pants and socks also, because if she had mentioned it the double standard would have been obvious. Kids are not dumbasses. So rather than try to explain it, the writers just pretended it didn't exist. Indeed, the show made humiliation as its tool for condescension. It's boys and used kids should learn about crossdressing - it's suggesting that kids should learn about crossdressing - it's worth noting besides that in some cultures, men do indeed wear skirts - but it seemed to me that in your drive for conformity, you were simply perpetuating intolerance.

While I was contemplating your reluctance to deal with this issue intelligently, the scene shifted to a men's wear store where an appalling stereotype of a gay male - the sales clerk - was berating the poor robot for his ignorance in clothes. The sales clerk was a thoroughly disagreeable character, and since you were simply perpetuating intolerance.

Thank-you for your letter of August 19 detailing your concerns over an episode of "How Do You Do? Learning English" which you viewed. Your concern over the characterization of the clothing salesmen is shared by others. We have taken steps to assure that any excessive caricature or stereotyping is toned down wherever necessary.

In reference to your other concerns, I think there has been a misunderstanding about the nature and intent of the show. It is in fact aimed at adult immigrants and as an introduction to life in Canada. The producers were not attempting to justify or explain the way convention dictates the dress of one sex or another. We were trying in the simplest way possible and at a basic level of English to explain what people in Canada wear.

I hope this answers your concerns. Please excuse the delay in replying.

Yours truly,

Rob McBride, Associate Producer

Arts & Entertainment

Colin Campbell at the National Gallery

Video artist Colin Campbell's exhibition is currently on view at the Winnipeg Art Gallery and will begin a touring schedule which will include a stop at the National Gallery. Trained in painting and drawing, Campbell began working in video as early as 1972. In his gender oriented videos, Campbell explores the nuances of male and female stereotypes by having artists play their opposite genders. It's both an examination of gender and a reference to the history of crossdressing in vaudeville, which came to television in the guise of Milton Berle, for instance, and is still a staple of Saturday Night Live's Church Lady. Dates for the Colin Campbell exhibition at the National Gallery are February 14 to April 14, 1991.

TV Peaks

Further to crossdressing and television, Twin Peaks watchers witnessed the arrival of a new character in the last show of 1990. Denis Bryson, the special investigator sent by the FBI to investigate the conduct of Agent Dale Cooper, with whom he once worked, strolled confidentially into the sherriff's office wearing a smart jacket and skirt and looking very much the professional woman investigator. "Please, call me Denise," he said. Although there was considerable humour in the presentation, I thought it was pulled off sympathetically. It will be interesting to see how long the character lasts. The



Modern Love, 1979. Photo Winnipeg Art Gallery.

opportunity for character development is endless, but I find most television shows write out a crossdressing character from the story line when he ceases to be titillating or ceases to provide amusing situations. Television is not yet ready to let him exist as himself.

More Rocky Horror

The careful marketing of the Rocky Horror Picture Show video cassettes has proven immensely successful. Only a certain number of cassettes were released, and the run is all but sold out. I have heard so many talking heads expounding on why Rocky Horror is so popular, but I have never once heard anyone suggest that maybe, just maybe, the crossdressing might have something to do with it. It amuses me how people can convince themselves that they're not at all fascinated by crossdressing.

THE BACK PAGE

A Final Word

This month was to have witnessed the grand unveiling of the new look Notes from the Underground. As our regular readers can plainly see, it didn't happen. The reason for this, besides the mundane one of Christmas rush, was my inability to make my computer software do what I wanted it to do in the short time available before my deadline came due. After working at it feverishly for some time, the thought came to me in a flash, "What the heck am I killing myself for?" So, you'll have to wait a few more months. Anyway, it's always nice to have something to look forward to, isn't it?

Aside from my difficulties with my computer, the work we at Gender Mosaic have been doing in the background the last few months has finally manifested itself in some physical evidence. We now have a telephone line! We hope to introduce the phone number officially to the city in a few weeks by way of an advertisement in the paper. The new Gender Mosaic number is (613) 749 5203. Call us!

In anticipation of requests for information, Sharon has put together a pamphlet which dispels the common myths surrounding transvestism and transsexualism. It's a good, factual starting point for anyone who wishes to learn more about our culture, and we hope it will get wide distribution.

There has also been some basic discussion about membership. We hope to have all the details worked out and ready to be voted upon by the February 2 meeting. Please be there or phone me before if you'd like to participate.

It's never easy for a crossdressing group to be completely open, but with the improvements we've made we hope to reach more people and be more successful in 1991.

Greetings and best wishes for the New Year from everyone at Gender Mosaic.