

Students 'Come Out' to Celebrate *Drag Show Highlights Week of Gay Pride*

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Men dressed as women, singing and dancing provocatively in the Student Union Wednesday, was an integral part of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Alliance's plan to inform as many people as possible of National Coming Out Week.

The idea behind Coming Out Week is to put people thinking about coming out more at ease with their sexuality, according to its founders. The week is also a celebration of pride, freedom and acceptance for straight, as well as gay, people.

Traditionally, "Drag performances brought the (gay) community together for entertainment, while the drag queen's humor defended a community under attack," said Heidi Ravenel, LGBA secretary, in her speech at the start of the performance.

"No tongue was sharper than the drag queen's, and this aptitude for biting humor was used both as a defense against harassment and a method for restoring the atmosphere after a police raid," Ravenel said. "Drag queens could turn oppression into humor — a vital tactic for survival in an extremely hostile world."

As art was essential in the fight for black civil liberties, freedom of expression is seen as essential in the continuing struggle for homosexual rights.

"Butch lesbians also practiced a form of drag that was essential to the survival of the gay community," said Ravenel. "What the butch lesbian lacked in theatricality she more than made up for in her ability to defend

against physical violence."

The drag show was a huge draw, and students came to watch the performers for various reasons. Udi Ofer brought his

see **DRAG QUEENS** page 8



Andy McLeod/The Spectrum

Drag queen, Fantasy Island, entertains and educates the crowd in the Union Wednesday during National Coming Out Week.

Drag Queens

from front page

men's studies class down to see the show.

"We study American masculinity; what makes a man a man and a woman a woman," Ofer said. "Drag queens are an example of the ambiguity of masculinity," he explained.

The greatest number of students and onlookers were probably not watching for any academic reasons. Almost everyone was having a good time, laughing, clapping, whistling and cheering on the courageous performers.

"This is pretty good — there's a lot of people," said Fred Williamson, a UB student.

But not everyone there was having a good time. Some people stuck around to watch even though they were admittedly "disgusted" by the show.

"This degrades women," said UB student Joanne Lewis.

"Women should be women and men should be men," Lewis continued, disagreeing with Ravenel's statements that cross-dressing is a way to combat traditional gender roles and sexism, and is a source of empowerment for women.

Amy Smith, a friend of Lewis', supported her remarks. Smith said, "I don't understand why they come out and show their sexuality like this; it makes me sick," referring not only to drag queens but homosexuals in general.

When asked why they were watching when they indicated disgust with the whole concept, Lewis said, "My friends were here, it's something to laugh at." Smith added, "It's curiosity, you know; curiosity kills you." Another female student in the group commented, "It's like seeing clowns dressed up at the circus."

While performer Asia Black danced and lip-synched to a RuPaul song, Smith, Lewis and other friends stood in the balcony sneering and making rude gestures.

Asia Black had a few things to say about criticism. She gets a lot of it, she said, especially from black women.

"A lot of (black) girls come down to my shows, take me aside and ask why I do this," said Black. "I tell them it's just a job — I'm not trying to steal their man."

Black feels that "a lot of black women don't like what (black drag queens) do. Nowadays (black women) wear a lot of baggy pants, sweatshirts, hoop earrings — they dress like men. We bring glamour," said Black. "They're mad because we look better than them."

Black shrugs off any negativity — it doesn't really bother her. She says drag is a good way to make money and that "being a woman is easy to me." She is very convincing as a woman — she recently stepped down as Miss Gay Buffalo, an honor bestowed upon the city's greatest drag queen.

Despite scattered hostile reactions, including a rumor that "some girls in the audience were giving Asia Black the finger," the show struck a chord of solidarity in the gay community.

Ravenel concluded her speech by saying, "Drag continues to be an integral part of gay culture and our most visible enactment of resistance to forced heterosexuality. Drag is one of our most important sources of pride and community celebration."

Gay Community Celebrates

NANSEN NG

Spectrum Staff Writer

A celebration of the inalienable right of all humankind to life, liberty, justice and the freedom to love and cherish individuals of their own choice received attention on campus this week.

Today is National Coming Out Day, dedicated to gays, lesbians and bisexuals who want to reveal their homosexuality. The day commemorates a march for gay rights that took place on October 11, 1987 in Washington, D.C.

This year, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Alliance expanded National Coming Out Day to an entire week. Events to raise awareness of homosexuality included a panel discussion on sexual and women's right. Later in the week there were films and a drag show.

On Wednesday, Gay Jeans Day, the LGBA reached out to the entire UB community, asking people to show support by wearing blue jeans. Tim Allen, co-president of the LGBA, said, "Gay Jeans Day is an easy way to show support. . . . It demonstrates that queer people are among the population everyday and that you cannot tell by looking at people that they are not straight."

Heidi Ravenel, secretary of the LGBA explained that wearing jeans is something people take for granted every day.

"Another idea behind Gay Jeans Day is that every day straight people take for granted their safety by not having to think about their sexuality or its implications, and that gay peo-

ple do think about it everyday," Ravenel said.

However, some people wore blue jeans without realizing the day was Gay Jeans Day.

A UB student who wished to remain anonymous said, "I forgot it was Gay Jeans Day this morning. I was too busy trying to get out the door to think about what I was doing."

Some members of the UB community were not in favor of Coming Out Week.

"I believe that the behavior of homosexuality is wrong but I don't hate homosexuals and I don't believe the Bible teaches that Christians should hate homosexuals," said Jennifer Bliss, a full-time worker for UB's chapter of Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

"People who call themselves homosexuals have a problem when Christians speak against homosexuality because they feel that that's who they are and they don't distinguish it as a behavior," she said.

"I guess it bothers me that a behavior that I consider sinful is being celebrated," said Bliss.

Outside the Student Union, chalk-written messages covered the path to Founder's Plaza and up Putnam's Way. Messages to promote National Coming Out Week covered the ground with statements such as, "UB Gay?!" and, "Queers are fabulous."

Freedom Rings were available at the LGBA table. They are string necklaces with different colored rings with an explanation attached that explained, "The colors of the rainbow have been adopted by the gay com-

munity to symbolize the support of diversity in society. Freedom rings were designed by David Spada and have become an icon of gay culture."

After the performance, the Drag Queen Show featured various drag queens from Western New York, including a UB student.

Drag Queen Kendall Kelly, a.k.a. Orgasmatron, said, "I've been in bands for years, and I just wanted to keep performing. I went to one of the shows at the Club Marcella in Rochester, and I thought it looked interesting. I just did it and it took off."

Sitting at one of the LGBA booths, Eugene Abrahamson gave his view on drag. "They're visual role models. We do describe ourselves by our sexual orientation . . . gay or straight. Some do drag because it's an artistic form, to raise money or bring recognition to the gay community."

Roy Klein, a senior majoring in communications, said, "The fact that there are so many people here today goes to show that people really support gay rights in the university, and I think it's real nice what we're seeing here."

Although many people watched the show, not each individual had the same attitude as Klein. "It's scary. I've never experienced anything like this before," said Wolletta Scott, a senior majoring in English. "I don't support them. God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve."

Twelve members of the LGBA will be going to Washington, D.C. today to represent UB at the Gay Youth March.

When you can _____