

DRUMMER GOES TO A SLAVE AUCTION AT THE ARENA

Written March 19, 1978, this Feature Essay was published in *Drummer* 22, May 1978

- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written _____
- II. The feature article as published in *Drummer* 22, May 1978

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[Written March 19, 1978; published in *Drummer* 22, May 1978, with 22 photographs by Bob Hefron. The San Francisco Arena advertised as "A Leather Bar with a Masculine Attitude." 399 9th Street at Harrison.]

II. The Feature Essay as published in *Drummer* 22, May 1978

**"DRUMMER Goes to a Slave Auction at the Arena"
Gay nights of fun, days of straight-world jobs...**

SLAVE AUCTION

CONCEPTUAL ART AT THE ARENA BAR 1978

Slavery hasn't been abolished. It's been improved upon. Used to be on the ol' plantation, a master had to care for his slave to maintain him in top fucking condition. Nowadays, factories and companies work men like donkeys and when day is done, dump them. Who cares if workers drop in their tracks? Meat is cheap. Scabs are plenty. Call them replaceable.

THAT'S THE STRAIGHT WORLD FOR YOU

Gay men on the other fist, rarely let reality slip. Like Shakespeare's fool, who always knows the truth of what's happening more than any other character in the play, gays act out fantasies that straights themselves nurture into middle-class, Middle-West nervous breakdowns. Gays know exploitation when they sniff it, and gays can better endure the straight business world by day because we live the gay actualizing world by night. If your boss acts like a second-hand Simon LeGree, what better balance than to go off to San Francisco's Arena Bar on Wednesday night for a first-hand actualization—if not downright exorcism—of playing slave and playing master.

PETER PAN UBER ALLES

If gay men have anything, it's the sense of play and fun that most straights lose at puberty. That may be, after all, the essential difference between straights and gays. Gays rarely lose that wonderful childlike quality of make-believe play.

That gives us an edge.

Straights often know the price of everything and the value of very little. Gays know prices, but we also know the value of humor, ritual, and therapeutic sexplay. Unlike the women's movement and other movements, we have a sense of humor about ourselves.

Many straights, and here we grossly overgeneralize because after all "some of our best friends are straight," take like literally. Too literally. One guy plus one guy always adds up to a couple of three-dollar bills. A slave is a slave is a slave. The word *slave* conjures up visions of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Marquis de Sade. Symbolically, former LA police chief Ed Davis, the fascist who would be governor, thinks of slaves by legal, literal definition. Has Ed Davis never knelt in romantic fealty before his wife, adoring her whatever-she-has-to-adore?

And would those straights who condemn slavery ever recognize that they are 8-to-5 slaves Monday through Friday, with their wives and kiddies held hostage by their boss who says, "You must work overtime every night this week and I know you won't mind since your kids need the orthodontist and you need me to pay you to pay him and if you don't like it, there's a hundred people outside the door who want your job.

That's the essence of straight slavery as perfected in the world today.

GAYS WON'T EAT CERTAIN SHIT

There is some crap up with which gays will not put. Having wives and kids and the whole two-car catastrophe held hostage by terrorist bosses is one of them. That's why we can play sensually with the very slavery that straight earn their keep by.

BE THE FIRST ON YOUR (SLAVE) BLOCK

Sensual play is the Name of the Game at the Arena Bar. On the block, stand hot bodies "sold" for *play* money to the highest bidder. Are you a Top in search of a new Bottom? Bid the world as your limit. (That's how Ari got Jackie!) Are you a Bottom who's always wanted a Top you've been afraid to approach? So there he stands, dripping with chains and attitude, in full leather, up for auction to the Bottom who bids the highest.

The auctioneer, schooled in the erotic patter of the old Folsom Prison [an early San Francisco bar, which was the scene of my "Leather Christmas" feature in *Drummer* 19, December 1972] auctions, displays the wares of the slaves with a spiel to harden your cock, not your heart; and that's an essential difference between gay slavery and straight. The essence of real straight sexual slavery is most currently exposed in Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby* where the young virgin is sold without feeling. The Arena's gay slavery is a theatrical ritual acted out over a mutual bond of consent. And with a sense of humor.

PRIME MEAT

Nobody forces a guy to strip naked and kneel in oiled bondage on a block, displayed to a group of drinking, smoking, bidding men.

Nobody forces a blond bodybuilder to come to the Arena, sweaty from the gym, wearing a torn white teeshirt over his pumped pex and veined biceps. Nobody forces hm when he asks to be hung from a beam, hooded until some merciful master bids high enough to take him home to the foot of his bed.

Nobody forces the leather-biker Top to drive his Harley Sportster into the Arena where he sits, legs spread wide, waiting for the Bottoms to bid his Top play-money price.

COLLEGE MIXERS

The Arena slave auction is the gay-world equivalent of the best of college mixers. The auction action breaks down the isolation of guys too shy to talk to tone another and allows matches to be made, if not in heaven, then at least at the corner of 9th and Harrison in San Francisco. The crowd of bidders parties together surveying the meat. The boys on the block overcome their own shyness or parade their exhibitionism or act out what needs they feel free enough to act out in the wonderfully permissive world of gay sociability.

BIBLE BELTING

Sometimes play is the world's best therapy. And the unfun straight world, so afraid of us in the Dade's, St. Paul's, Eugene's, and witch-hunting Wichita's—all the places of current, active persecution of gays, could take a cue from us. Everybody in America ought to play more. Thursday mornings, after the 11 PM Wednesday Arena auctions, a lot of gay men go smiling off to their responsible straight-world jobs. And don't those certain smiles just kill the unsmiling, unplayful, jealous straights who long ago, listening as usual to the literal word of that 4,000-year-old folk document, the Bible, and to the words of that closet-case St. Paul who deserved to be knocked from his high horse, "Now that I am a man i have put away the things of a child."

"Well," as Annie Hall [whose name is a direct reference to the psychiatric condition, anhedonia, the inability to feel pleasure in anything] would say, "La dee da!"

LOVE FOR SALE

As one slave at the Arena put it as he oiled his washboard belly, "How am I different from Arnold Schwarzenegger or any other bodybuilder in a Mr. America contest? All my life I've liked playing with other boys, and now with other men. You can't imagine how good I feel up there on exhibition in that hot spotlight, listening to those bids going up. What the fuck do you think I spend so much time every week at the gym for? To show off my body. I like guys and I

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want to sort out the ones who really want to get at the part of me that right now is the part I want to parade around. We'll mutually satisfy each other. Yin. Yang. I'm not a slave to anybody or anything, not even to my cock. Hell, this slave auction is just a bar promo gimmick. It's like bingo night at St. Philomena's Catholic Church [my grade school]. No money changes hands. We all get into it because it's a good show. It looks good and feels better. In a sense, the Arena slave auctin is an evening of conceptual art."

And it sure beats jacking off at the Louvre.

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