

DRUMMER FEATURE ARTICLE

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How you can do “Saturday Night Live” in San Francisco:
Comes a Horseman...

Grand National Rodeo Blues: Cowboys and Mounties Who Always Get Their Man by Jack Fritscher

- This entire feature article "..." is also available in Acrobat pdf.
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AUTHOR'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT INTRODUCTION



DRAFT VERSION



With original Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) photographs shot October 1977, written November 6, 1978, and published in *Drummer* 26, January 1979. In the fall of 1977, Tony Perles took me to the annual “big game” between Cal-Stanford. It was college football with the Royal Canadian Mounties “Ride” performing at half-time. No way did we go into the stadium to watch the football when we could freely mix with the Mounties who had no problem with my shooting them, as they were on parade for public relations.

While David Sparrow is noted as the sole photographer, he actually was not with me at the game in Palo Alto. However, the eight photographs of the cowboys taken on “Cattlemen’s Night” at the “Grand National Rodeo 1978” held at the Cow Palace, were shot by David Sparrow as we roamed the halls of the Cow Palace picking our targets and shooting as candidly as possible. The photo of the cowboys holding onto bars on page 12 was a shot I had in the *Drummer* files, probably from Target. The cowboy drawing opening the feature article was by A. Jay.

From the same Stanford shoot, another of my RCMP photographs, “Mountie in Boots,” appeared earlier in *Drummer* 21, March 1978, page 27, to illustrate a practical advice feature article, “Congratulations...You’re Under Arrest!” This “Mountie in Boots” photograph was always one of my favorites, because I fell in love with the Mountie as I moved in closer and closer to shoot him. To me one of the greatest excitements in the world is stalking men with a camera, seeing how close, and then how much closer I can get, without disturbing his natural look, because the moment a photographer asks a gorgeous man for permission to take his picture, he loses his natural unguarded allure, and freezes like he’s caught in the viewfinder of a

family snapshot. This Mountie's image is one of the specifically contributing images of the Platonic Ideal that I fed into my concept of the character "Kick" in *Some Dance to Remember*.

Behind this photograph is a terrible little accident that occurred in the *Drummer* offices. My longtime friend, art director A. Jay, Al Shapiro, accidentally destroyed the negative of the original, as well as the only original print, when he was creating his page design. He was ever so apologetic and tried to re-create the photograph mechanically, but, of course, that was not the same. So this favorite black-and-white photograph exists today basically on page 27 of *Drummer* 21.

Art is so very, very fragile. So are friendships. Al and I let nothing of all the accidents and shenanigans played around us at *Drummer* ever divide us—which was something publisher John Embry seemed to want to do, because he thought together Al and I had abducted his love-child *Drummer*, yet he couldn't create the magazine without us, especially during the six months' period when illness took him away from *Drummer*. We weren't about a "take over." Actually, neither Al nor I were ever possessive or proprietary about *Drummer* which we both genuinely loved. Our interest was creating a "hot" magazine that would wow our friends and acquaintances each issue, and get us laid by even more guys.

Jack Fritscher, June 6, 1999

**The feature article was written in November, 1978,
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**How you can do "Saturday Night Live" in San Francisco:
Comes a Horseman...**

Grand National Rodeo Blues: Cowboys and Mounties Who Always Get Their Man by Jack Fritscher

San Francisco. Cow Palace. 34th GRAND NATIONAL RODEO. Thursday: Cattlemen's Night. The 4WD trucks and horse vans stand empty in the foggy parking lot next to hot steaming piles of manured straw. The night wind breeds a chill. Inside the Cow Palace, working cowboys have shelled out up to eight bucks a head for box seats to watch the show cowboys strut their stuff in the annual Grand National.

Over the Cow Palace entrance, a huge inflated bull rocks gently in the Bay breeze, tugging at its silver guy-wires. A San Francisco cop, stepping out for a smoke, sets his high-polished boot down in the middle of a horse clot. He says, "Shit" and doesn't give a fuck who hears. He's a City cop, after all, and he's watched over these cow-jockeys running their own slick show for over a week.

COWBOY FIGHT NIGHT

On top is at all, tonight, Thursday, Cattlemen's Night, is COWBOY FIGHT NIGHT. That's all the City cop needs: cowboy fights. That's what sound real revved up

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to me. So I head off to a special concession stand to check out the two charity boxing bouts.

“Sounds unsanctioned to me,” I say to the cowboy behind the Magic Marker “Cowboy Fight Night” sign that says “Two Bucks.”

“Fight went to 3 AM last year,” he smiles.

The blonde cowgirl on his hip is all teeth and Dentine. “Ah lahked hit,” she says.

“So what’s the card?” I ask.

“First bout’s between a rodeo cowboy and a working cowboy. The second’s between a rodeo cowboy and one of them Royal Canadian Police.”

“Till 3 AM?”

“Ah luuvved hit,” Blondie says. “A-corse hit went on way tchew long. All that sweat ‘n’ blood.”

“Two bucks, huh?”

“They jes’ beat the bejesus outta one ‘nother,” she says, “but hit’s fer a real guud cause.” She pops her Dentine. “Cancer.”

“Terrific,” I say. Would a man trust those big white teeth anywhere near his dick?

“Ya wanna buy a bumper sticker,” she says.

Her good old boy is taking aim at the floor with a good thick hawk of Red Man Chew.

I read the stickers. They’re good index of cowboy head: “When I Grow Up, I Wanna Be a Cowboy”; “Team Ropers Get It Together”; “I’m a Rope-A-Holic.”

“Ah lahk this ‘un,” she says. “Ain’t hit kewt?” She holds up a red-on-white label: “It’s Cuddlin’ Cowboys I Like.” “Which ‘un yew lahk?”

I had her a buck. “This one,” I say.

“Oh, that’s real kewt,” she says.

It’s a bumper sticker for my ‘66 Ford pickup: “Only Cowboys Are Tough Enough to Get Enough.”

Young Del just spits off a hefty brown spurt.

“Which way’s the Royal Canadian Mounted Police?” I ask. *Royal Canadian Mounted Police*. I like saying those words. They roll easy off the tongue.

“Yew jes’ folla the whatt lahn, darlin’.”

COWBOY PISS

The hall circling the Cow Palace is jammed with milling cowboys and their bandana women. These guys are authentic: working cowboys. Every direction’s a sea of

cowboy hats. Tall fuckers. Straight as sticks. A different DNA structure: taller than average, weathered WASPs. This is their place. Good faces. Hands cracked dry. Nails split. They cup the matches instinctively against the non-existent wind to light the Winstons stuck in their mouths. Marlboro may have the image, but these cowboys prefer Winstons.

They stand in groups, shuffling their scuffed pointed-toe boots. New jeans, unwashed, hang baggy and stiff off their butts. They favor western shirts tucked into tooled belt. They move their big bodies easy inside their down-filled quilted jackets. And on top of everything rides the peacockery of straw and felt and feathered cowboy hats.

I hit the toilet.

Seven white porcelain troughs, eight feet long, hang on the walls around the room busy with cowboys. The men smoke, very intent on their business in hand. Talk stops when cowboys piss. Piss is serious business that a man works out alone standing shoulder to shoulder with other men. Caught in the middle of all this handheld pissing cowboy meat, I develop peripheral vision wider than a walleyed pike.

I pretend I'm pee-shy and hang onto my dick pulled out of my 507's through a hole cut in the pouch of my jockstrap. The cowboy on the right pisses like a horse. The cowboy on my left stands cupping his joint, waiting to piss a good healthy piss tanked up from matching his buddies beer for beer. All around us in the cold tile room is silence: only boots shuffling into place to piss; only the sound of zippers and button-flies being opened and closed; only the insistent splash of hot beer piss streaming golden down the urinals, lengthy enough to lay a man back into; only the occasional hiss as a burning butt lands in the streaming piss, turns soggy grey, then brown, then disintegrates down to its filter tip, swirling in the vortex of cowboy piss circling down the bubbling brass drain screen.

Above my head a sign reads: WATER CONSERVATION. THE FLUSHING OF THESE URINALS IS CONTROLLED BY TIMERS.

God! How do you get a job as a timer?

Cowboy dicks are bigger than average. Must be the natural selection of men who survived heading West generations ago. These boys have got good genes in their jeans.

Finally, with me playing pee-shy, two cowboys, one after the other, have pissed out on my right. The cowboy on my left is still straining at his single shot. I figure I better let fly when a third cowboy sidles up on my right. He's a big fucker. His cock is proportionate: thick, long, and uncut. No disappointment in that department. He's a big man and he pisses a big man's piss.

I have to salute that.

I stream out golden with an aim directly into the froth churned up by his flowing cock. My leak primes the cowpoke to my left who finally releases his piss load. He breathes a huge sigh of relief. I finish, stick it back inside my jock, and button up my jeans.

At least a dozen other gay men are here tonight, all decoyed appropriately for a straight rodeo. Men acting out their best behavior so ast to "pass" without hassle, in order to get an eyeful no up-front liberationist is ever gonna be privy to.

As I go out the swinging double-doors to the hall, old Blondie with the Dentine is giving Del a bad time. “Whyn’chew,” she says, “jes’ go vaccinate a dog or something.”

Del looks at her, spits a wad of juice on the asphalt, and head where she can’t follow: into the can to take his dick in his hand and piss his troubles away.

Heterosexuals don’t always have it easy.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Still an hour before the Grand National big show starts. The halls are a mass of men. They stand and drink. Most of their women have tired of the mantalk and have gone inside to plop their fannies into the wooden seats. Their men wander, beer in hand, from group to group. Cowboys, like steers, travel in herds. The trick in this hall tonight for all the gay men here is to cut a choice cowboy loose from the herd, and blow him. The cowboy voices rise to a deep roar in the covered hallway.

A young Mountie walks by. He is handsome, groomed, aloof. He is on show. He is somehow superior to all of this. The hall full of men is here for relaxation. The Mountie is here on serious drill. He is a member of the “RCMP Ride.” [The “Ride” is a traveling troop of perfectly groomed uniformed Mounties who perform precision drills on horseback, with flags and lances.] He orders coffee. Black. He is covered with his blue jumpsuit. A piece of straw clings to his quality rump. His seat is shiny black with horse grease and with polish rubbed off his burnished leather saddle. His eyes focus on mid-distance. He is part of the Grand National, yet he is untouched by it. He sips his coffee and strides off in his brown boots with the silver spurs hiked out below the jumpsuit legs.

I follow him.

The barns are open to the public. Inside the barn, forty-some young Mounties bunk on cots in stalls with their horses, grooming them, and themselves with sets of brushes. Nearly all are handsomely moustached. They wear white teeshirts, flared trousers, knee-high boots. Their red uniform jackets hang, perfectly tailored, on hangers on hooks on the wooden posts of the gate of the stall.

He heads for the RCMP stalls. His walk is slow, easy. He moves the moves of a man accustomed to being watched. The RCMP Ride is always “on parade.”

A little country fart, in a quilted green-down jacket and straw cowboy hat, runs out from ENTRANCE BOXES 42-52, and spits a white hawk. Spitting is the cowboy past-time. He almost hits the imperial RCMP.

Neither man notices their near collision. Straight guys seem to be invisible to each other. Either one of these men is worth a study-grant funded by The Bike Athletic Supporter Foundation.

I follow the Mountie. We take a right cut out of the hallway crowd down a corridor to the RCMP stalls. The RCMP has hung Canadian travel posters on the grey walls. TRAVEL ALBERTA, one says. Another, more telling, reads: CANADA—SO MUCH TO GO FOR.

With that last one, their tourist bureau ain’t just whistlin’ “Dixie.” (If Mounties always get their man, do men always get their Mounties?)

THE LOOK: MEN GROOMED LIKE MEN

Back in the stalls are nearly forty young mounted cops. Working. Grooming their horses. The cops are mostly sandy blonds. They nearly all have clipped regulation moustaches. Their arms are muscular straight arms, made muscular from hard RCMP training, athletics, and real work more than from a titty-pump gym membership. They are singularly handsome. Selected. Handpicked. Half of them look like Jan-Michael Vincent [a blond, well-muscled USMC-like Hollywood actor favored by gay men] on a very good day. Any public-relations group, and these Mounties are meant to represent the best of a strong, healthy Canada, always comes down to the bottom line of THE LOOK.

These forty Mounties have THE LOOK together the way Mounties should present it. The cowboys in the hall have perfected *their* LOOK. Men are diverse and different and one LOOK is no better than another, just as one sexual preference is no better than another. Diversity is, especially in men, simply interesting.

Straight men should never object to gay men who are out standing on the corner watching all the straights go by. Straights ogle girls in ways no gay man would ever stare at straight men. Every one agrees that you can't go to jail for what you're thinking. Besides, any straight man who has his own masculine shit together, considers a gay glance tossed his way as the compliment it is meant.

BRIDLES AND GROOMS

The sound system in the RCMP barn plays country-western: "You Don't Bring Me Flowers Anymore." From the main arena, the sound of the Big Band warming up floats brassy out over the horses the cops are grooming in their individual stalls. The best sound is the smooth wipe of bristle brush moving in a fast Aerowax buff over the heavy brown leather gauntlets held in one Mountie's hand. Each stall is a little movie of a man preparing himself, his uniform, and his horse.

Another Mountie has his horse in the aisle between the stalls. He is bent over, holding his horse's hoof tight against his own thigh. He polishes the perfect hoof with dark oil. His coveralls are dropped to his tight waist and secured by his knotting the arms around his belt. On his white cotton teeshirt, over the left pec, the RCMP motto reads in blue: "*Maintiens le Droit-Royal Canadian Mounted Police.*"

Stall to stall, each scene is a crib of pre-rodeo activity. With a dark curry comb in each hand, one darkly handsome RCMP double-strokes his horse. The combs are held to the palm of his hands by brown leather straps that cross the back of his hands. The rich brown leather rides tight over the gristle and veins pumped up by his heavy grooming. I'd like to be his horse.

Another cop moves by, pushing a green wheelbarrow topped by a pitchfork stuck in fresh straw. Another follows him carrying the red-and-white guidon flags that fly at the end of their seven-pound battle lances. Another cop sits talking to cowboy tourists while his horse, already groomed and waiting in its stall, splays out all fours quite neatly and pisses a heavy horsestream into the hay.

No one normal seems to notice!

The Mountie stands up, puts his brown boot up on the blue tack box. His boots ride up to his knee where a yellow striped runs up the outside of his dark-blue riding breeches. His uniform is wool, with a tongue-twisting weave to its surface. His red tunic hangs inside-out on the stall to keep it clean from leather polish, horse sweat, and the dust of the barn.

“On the Ride,” he is saying to a group of cowboys and cowgirls, “as long as you’re single, you’re cheap and easy to transport. One of the men is getting married next month. I’ve been on the Ride for five years.”

He has his cowboy audience webbed into his easy spiel. This guy is some kind of genuine.

“Anywhere you go in Canada, you just have loggers and miners. Some days it’s so nice that, before I was with this detachment, I’d take off for the day. I was stationed in a small town, a zilcho town, so I jointed the Ride to be out where there was some life for a change. I figure I’ll go back, when this is all over, to British Columbia. A nice little fishing town.”

“Let me borrow your towel a second.” Another Mountie is wiping his horse-wet hands. On his tack box is a sticker: ALL CANADIAN DRINKING TEAM. I keep looking for the RCMP who looks like he might be the fighter ready to take on the boxing cowboy. Not one of these young cops with faces right from an RCMP recruiting poster has a mark on his perfect face.

The blue tack boxes are stenciled with each horse’s positively Freudian name: Gaston, Lancer, Lusty, Jock, Fanny, Eros, as well as—no kidding—Gay.

“This is a tough section to get on.” The Mountie talks earnestly to a lady with lips slightly parted in a socially acceptable signal of lust. “The cream of the crop is here. The work is hard. We’re all into sports. We’re more athletic than your average guy. What the Ride boils down to is a lot of physical labor. Some guys ride for pleasure. The average guy never had much to do with horses before coming on with this detachment. Horses are my hobby. Always have been. Ever since I was a kid.”

The lady likes his voice.

I like his voice.

He sounds uncircumcised.

MAMAS DON’T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE COWBOYS

Back in the main arena, the live show-tune orchestra busts out into “June Is Bustin’ Out All Over” for no particular reason other than the melody is uptempo and the 12,000 crowd shifts expectant in the stands. Broadway follow-spots sweep the chip-covered dirt floor of the Cow Palace arena. John Kennedy, I think, was nominated here. Tonight, men in Levi’s and leather are prepping to wrestle it out with bucking broncs and runaway calves.

Below in the chutes, cowboys move among the big red-and-white Winston carry-all bags like gladiators restless to enter the Colosseum. Some stand patiently. Other stretch nervously like any athlete before a competition. A couple of cowboys move through isolated exercises with the grace and flexibility of dancers. One pulls his dusty boot, with his hand, up tight behind his chaps-fitted butt.

A frenetic, hot little bearded cowboy, sits on the chip-covered turf in a dusty saddle that he rocks wildly back and forth on the solid ground. His legs stretch straight out to his boots hooked in his stirrups. His feet rise higher in the air than his head. Both his wiry hands hold fast to the horn in his crotch.

Another real Looker strides back and forth, kicking chips. He has tucked his gloves, soft and easy, into his chaps belt. The top glove folds pendulously forward under its own leather weight. It protrudes out over his fly like a five-fingered cock, crossed on the back of the knuckles with white chalk. His whole package flops as he paces, psyching himself up.

His eyes are the same light blue as 10 mg of Valium.

These are all men of heavy body consciousness. They project, in their moves, the moves and sizes of the animals they tend, brand, curry, train, mount, and ride. To the breaking point. They pride themselves on mastering beasts.

In minutes, they're riding bareback, hard against the animal, the clock, and the crowd. Hot fuckers. They hold on with one hand planted, by regulation, square in the crotch. Their spurs must stay higher than their shoulders to score. They lean back like high-divers on the bucking horses, holding the horn with one fist—like trying to carry a 1,250 pound leather suitcase that keeps jumping out of your hand.

RODEO PICK-UP MEN

When the Pick-Up Men ride near on horseback as the clock counts down, the bronc buster grabs the Pick-Up Man around the shoulder and chest, swings off the bronco, and climbs behind the Pick-Up Man's saddle. He holds for the briefest moment in the spot. Two men on one horse. Crotch to butt. Then he lets go, and drops easy to the dirt floor of the arena.

The triumphant spotlight hits him as he parades his attitude, loose and lean and mean, really rolling his legs and butt, shit-kicking through the applause to bend from the waist and retrieve his cowboy hat. His chaps accent the dark blue vee of his crotch.

CALF ROPING

When a man comes charging on horseback from a wooden chute to lasso a head-start calf, he jumps off his horse and runs his leather glove down the length of rope to the struggling animal. He picks up the fighting side of beef and slams it down, tying its hooves together with a four-foot length of rope.

Puts a man in mind of a Rollerball Rodeo with men running naked from chutes, chased by mounted cowboys who lasso them, wrestle them to the ground, and hogtie them down.

In twelve seconds flat, a good show cowboy can take off after a running animal, pick him up and lay him down, bound, and struggling in the middle of the dusty arena.

The announcer talks of "great beauty, strength, and endurance." He talks of the animals the way the crowd sees the cowboys: noble in the star-spangled Grand National night. But the Big Band swing comically into "Ragtime Cowboy Joe" and reduces nobility to honkytonk, third-rate romance, and low-rent rendezvous.

RCMP FREUDIAN FOLLIES

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police enter riding to the Big Band playing "Life is a Cabaret," oh chum, and dust up the arena with four-footed precision the Rockettes never knew. They drill in total discipline. They ride in stars, circles, figure 8's, wheels, and cloverleaf formations. They are beautiful in their red coats and yellow-striped blue riding

breeches, all formally trimmed off in brown leather. Each man carries a nine-foot battle lance topped with the fluttering red-and-white guidon.

No wonder the Mounties are the only police force in the world to be pictured on their nation's currency.

The Mounties form a large circle. All the horses' heads face inward to the circle. Each lance and guidon is raised erect, then as one, they stretch their right arms out in slow motion and the lance-tips meet in the center. A priapic merry-go-round. Then the lances dip slowly, point first, to the center turf inside the ring of horse's heads, inside the ring of Mountie backs turned on the silent, respectful, awed audience. The Mounties all face one another, intent in an incredible energy circle that then raises all the lance points all together, up, slowly, then faster and higher, rising into a blaze of light and music and cheering to a standing ovation.

This cowboy crowd appreciates a male-potency bonding show when it sees one.

RCMP LOCKER ROOM

Outback, behind the RCMP horse barns, the Canadians parked a heavy semi-trailer rig. Inside, the trailer is a fully equipped standard locker room. The beige metal lockers are kicked raw from boot scuffs at the bottom. Through the open door, I watch the Mounties return from the arena. They light up. They tip off their broad brimmed hats. They unbutton their red coats. They wear suspenders over a dark blue sweater whose neck shows only a vee of white cotton teeshirt. They flip the suspenders off and away, and pull their blue coveralls on over their breeches and boots.

Young girls ask for autographs.

I just write down the semi-truck's license plate: QUEBEC L23040, with the slogan, 'JE ME SOUVIENS.'

COMING ATTRACTIONS

From inside the Cow Palace arena, the announcer's voice can be heard in the cold night air. He is pumping for the *Junior* Grand National Rodeo to be held next spring. He asks for the support of the audience.

"After all," he says, "these are the people who put the meat on your table, and they should be encouraged."

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