

DRUMMER REVIEW

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A Lost Our Lease.
Everyone Must Go.....

SEAMAN'S SEMEN'S END CMC CARNIVAL 1978 by Jack Fritscher

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AUTHOR'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT INTRODUCTION



DRAFT VERSION



Written November 18, 1978, and published in *Drummer* 26, January 1979. I wrote this little essay as a lament that the CMC Carnival was being ousted from the San Francisco Seaman's Hall. The twelve photographs were shot by David Sparrow, and in the credit and by-line struggle with John Embry on the opening masthead page, the article is credited only to photographer David Sparrow. I had written about the previous CMC Carnival (1977) in *Drummer* 20, January 1978. Annually, the CMC Carnival was the main leather event in the Fall. The reason the Seaman's Hall stopped renting to the CMC Carnival was because the once-small event had grown to a mob scene, always orderly, but huge, and sexual, with the first-floor parking area turned into a pissoir of wild sex on drugs.

The CMC Carnival was such a "high leather event" that in *Drummer* 3, November 1975, *Drummer* brags on page 46, that coverman Val Martin, star of *Sextool* and *Born to Raise Hell*, was voted "Mr Leather" at the Hawks' annual Leather Sabbath in Hollywood, and would be representing *Drummer* and "the Southern California Leather community at the even larger CMC Carnival in San Francisco in November." Val Martin became, by appointment and not by contest, the first Mr. *Drummer*.

In the actual *Drummer* article, I didn't detail the "Fellini-thon" *mise en scene* of the Carnival, because back at that time everyone took the wild accessibility of sex in public places for granted. The news story was not "wet, group-sex-on-drugs," but the changing facts of renting halls and paying insurance coverage for events. Insurance coverage was one of the reasons that the Pacific Drill Patrol, San Francisco's first uniform club, stopped throwing our annual uniform orgy parties as early as 1975.

I am connecting historical dots here that have gone unnoticed.

The CMC Carnival gave birth to the Folsom Street Fair.

Not until the annual CMC Carnival went out of business was the Folsom Street Fair established. In fact, the Folsom Street Fair, meant to be a leather alternative to the Castro Street Fair, did not become a wildly popular international draw until the late 1980s. In the way that David Sparrow and I had historicized the CMC Carnival with photographs and reporting, Mark Hemry and I began shooting video documentaries of the Folsom Fair in 1984.

What is interesting to see in our chronicles of these street documentaries is how, as the years go by, the Folsom Street Fair crowd evolves in numbers, attitude, and intensity. Every three years, or so, the videos show a generational change in the tenor of the homomale leather look, even though, over-all, the iconic look of a defined muscular man in chaps and stripped to the waist wearing a chest harness, his skin tanned like a saddle remains virtually unchanged.

The sociological value of these street documentaries, shot not helter-skelter, but with a big-game hunter's disciplined and controlled point of view, is that they collect outside in the sunlight actual the actual faces and bodies of men who are often only seen under the dim red lights of leather bars. The value of daylight events like the CMC Carnival and street fairs such as Folsom Street Fair and Castro Street Fair is the ability to check out, document, and analyze that part of the gay population that only comes out at night, exhibitionistically wearing gear and get-ups usually only worn at night. The Folsom Street Fair is the libidinous gay homomale Id parading itself proudly. I affirmatively capture diverse images ranging from trophy men to sexy trolls, because beauty is in the eye, and fast-forward/freeze frame, of the ultimate viewer of the documentary.

Shooting the CMC Carnival and shooting the Folsom Street Fair is a real test of an analytic photographer's steel—and theory. In all my photography, my camera style reflects my psychology. My angle anchors my point of view for the viewer. I cannot be detached and aloof from the subject because I must heat up the viewer to connect to the subject. This is not just documentary; it's erotic documentary. I must become the viewer. I must turn the ignition to engage the willing suspension of disbelief that comes when the viewer leaves behind his voyeurism—and his head and heart and cock leaps up and becomes one with the screen.

My photography is the same as my erotic writing: intentionally interactive. In my erotic art theory, on page and on screen, my intent—using standard literary devices—is to so connect with the readers or viewers that they experience orgasm. I like my art to start in their heads and work its way down. That connectivity is what distinguishes me as an artist who is a writer and a photographer from the other artists—the gay-genre writers—who are my unthawable peers, but don't, won't, can't compose orgasmic erotica; for instance—and this is not meant as a pot shot—Edmund White, Andrew Holleran, Felice Picano, and all the usual suspects who are the pale darlings of the increasingly bourgeois and totally corporate mega-business of the gay establishment. Who of them was writing and publishing erotica, popular or literary, back in the Titanic '70s when wide-open gay liberation would have allowed them to experiment any way they were clever enough to pioneer?

Writing is a solitary act and art. Photography is a cooperative act and art. One has to be sensitive to the men being photographed out in public, who because they are being outrageous in public, become newsworthy, and the more outrageous they dress or act, the

more newsworthy they become. Sometimes they do not know this legal distinction. Public behaviour determines whether or not a person can be photographed in public. The only two restrictions for such photographs is that in the photograph or caption the subject is not ridiculed, and that the subject shot in public is not used for advertising. A street documentary photographer must be ready to handle any response.

I have a relentless camera. As an artist, I have to have. To get meaningful footage, that is not the kind of “tourist footage” that most video cameras shoot at Folsom, one must be, well, actually, truly relentless and fearless of rejection—just like “cruising for sex.” I try to reinvent the public image of gay men with each shoot. I have to think my way into camera moments that tourist photographers coast through on autopilot. (The posed “snapshot” photo of three or four shirtless guys lined up is the unfortunate tourist-camera standard of street-fair and pride parade photography.) Not only must the sensitivity of the subjects about the camera be considered, but their sex-appeal for the viewers must be instantly judged: are they hot, and how can I suck that heat into the camera so it warms the viewer alone in an apartment on a winter night. All the while the “clock” is also ticking on the shoot. The Folsom Street Fair rises like *Brigadoon* for five hours one Sunday once a year. Actually, fewer than ten men in all these years have said “no, stop,” when I was shooting.

The ideal shot is to take candid footage of men simply being. The next most ideal is to shoot cooperative footage of performance art, such as, men being walked on all fours as dogs, set-scenes of intricate Japanese bondage, whippings, wrestling, boot-polishing, and displays of huge silicone-enlarged penises. When appropriate, I communicate with the subject I’m shooting by smiling, or while I’m shooting, with hand gestures that indicate “A-OK” or “thumbs up” or a hand gesture that obviously means “keep giving me more of the same.” Also when it does not break into whatever the guy is doing, I either say or mouth the word, “Thanks.”

The placement of the camera is as important on the street as it is in a studio video. Most videos are shot from a camera held on the cliché of a shoulder. I spend a lot of time at the Folsom Fair actually creating shots instantaneously so the angle will erotically interpret what I see to shoot, by both moving the camera intimately in on body parts, as well as on my knees, shooting up at the men who are enlarged and heroized and empowered by that angle. Guys think it amusing when I kneel before them in a position of subservience, reverence, and worship, but—it’s not personal. My camera goes where the viewer would like to put his eyes and nose. I’m kneeling for a diversity of viewers. (It’s the only thing I’ll kneel for.) In actuality, I am totally anonymous on the street, because I wear a hat as protection from the blazing sun, and the video camera covers two-thirds of my face, and I am just one of thousands of cameras shooting every which way. All this combines to give me the leeway to imprint the documentary with my own point of view, which, after thirty years of feedback from readers and viewers fairly understands the market of gay erotic taste.

While my camera seeks out archetypal leathermen, musclemen, fetish men, bears, and cigar smokers, the context around them reveals the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and other LGBT types also in attendance. This collection of homomale archetype is for me the erotic documentary point: to capture the essence of “Folsom” at the Folsom Street Fair the way, for twenty-five years I captured them for *Drummer*. I confess I love these intensely interesting men who dare to put their sexuality out so publically, and my relentless camera is my post-HIV attempt to save them all for posterity, to have them all on digital video to admire forever.

Years from now when there is a gay satellite network streaming 24/7 programming

to the Space Shuttle and Mars and beyond, my promise as a cameraman to these men I've shot will come true: "Want to become immortal?"

Sometimes, after editing the footage, and sitting back and watching an hour of all these men montaged together, I can only admire the Fellini-thon of men that gay culture offers to western civilization as an alternative to traditional ways of being a quiescently frozen male.

The journalism of this *Drummer* article on the CMC Carnival? And the video documentaries of Folsom Fair? This work is all about storing images in a time capsule. After all, the final thirty years of the 20th century was the first generation after Stonewall. The age was populated by men who grew up in closets and secrecy. Back then, all of us continued on in amazement that cameras finally were allowed in to chronicle the public image of a culture that once had dare not record more than one or two Polaroids of itself. In 1970, a camera in a gay bar started a stampede to the escape out the exits. At the end of 1999, a camera at a gay event makes men ready for their close-up.

Actually, I think one street South of Market should be renamed "*Drummer Way*" or "Leather Lane." (What a photo opportunity for tourists!) It must intersect Folsom Street between 6th Street and 12th Street. It need be no longer than one short block like Dore Alley or Hallam next to where the Barracks Baths were. Because gay culture traditionally has been so much a street culture, this is a significant way—to rename an existing street or, while remodeling the grid of SOMA, to create a new mews—to acknowledge all the style and character that *Drummer* culture and leather culture have introduced to San Francisco. From *Drummer* to Foucault (who tested his philosophy late night South of Market), such a dedicated street name is as legitimate as renaming other San Francisco streets for representing the contributions of Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez. —JF, December 29, 1999

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Everyone Must Go.....**

SEAMAN'S SEMEN'S END CMC CARNIVAL 1978 by Jack Fritscher

Everything must change. Nothing, not even the California Motorcycle Club (CMC) Carnival stays the same. So give us an *OI!* Give us a *VAY!* Gone are the CMC's of yesterday!

This season's bash at San Francisco's Seaman's Hall was the last ever in that sanctified location. And the change of place will inevitably change everything. Remember how London Bridge changed when moved to the U.S. southwest? Unbelievable! Remember how you changed when you moved your ass out of your cedar-lined closet in whatever Cedar Rapids or Cedar Falls? Even more unbelievable.

NO MORE MR. CMC?

The CMC Carnival, like every good show, must go on. After all, some events become institutions that resonate with an importance beyond themselves. Think of the Super Bowl. Think of the Academy Awards. Some events start out ordinary and end up as annual tribal rituals. The CMC Carnival, with proceeds donated to charity, plays in this league. The show must go, but shouldn't the show go on?

So where? Seaman's two floors of wall-to-wall wet, leathered bodies was the perfect ritual ground. The Cow Palace next? Too big—unless we either start to propagate or start to recruit. Somewhere there's a place for us.

Meanwhile, just keep clapping your hands and believing so Mr. CMC will continue to live.

FISTING FOR DOLLARS

In one stepped example of how wild San Francisco is, several carnivals ago, one inventive booth offered a willing ass propped up and ready to go (for charity, remember) at 50¢ per fist. Now, THAT'S entertainment!

Some CMC-ers may blush to remember, but any group up front enough to sponsor what turned from a simple beer bust into one of the world's wildest standup encounter groups, not only can't be bad at all, but must make sure their charity show goes on and on and on. CMC forever! No matter where!

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