

Johnny Gets His Hair Cut

Written and produced March-April 1977, this photo-feature paragraph was published in *Drummer* 16, June 1977.

- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written March 22, 2002
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I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written March 22, 2002

Producing both this Jim Stewart photo-feature squib in *Drummer* 16 as well as the Jim Stewart photo feature in *Drummer* 14, I was connecting *Drummer*, after its arrival in San Francisco, with new local talent (such as photographer Jim Stewart) and into established local talent (such as author Sam Stewart). Reducing the six degrees of separation among potential contributors was what publisher Embry had hired me to do to fill *Drummer*. Through naming me "founding San Francisco editor in chief," the newly arrived Embry meant that I was to be his San Francisco talent scout discovering a new group of contributors, ideas, and themes for *Drummer* orphaned in LA.

Jim Stewart and I had been friends since 1973. When he moved from Kalamazoo, Michigan, to San Francisco in October 1975, he lived with me and my lover David Sparrow at our home on 25th Street.

Out of the Folsom Street leather culture of the 1960s which focused on motorcycles and bars, in the early 1970s we began fashioning a kind of SoMa salon around art in which the motorcycle changed from transportation to icon, and our leather chaps and jackets morphed from safety clothes to fetish gear. In the early 1970s, beer was 15-cents, pot was \$5 a lid, and a comfortable room for rent cost \$20 per week. I was thirty, happy, and in love with David Sparrow who became my photography partner at *Drummer*. It was our leather *Bobeme*. South of Market was glorious. Our new scene was the end of beatniks and hippies and the beginning of gay men. Peace, love, and granola gave way to sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll. By 1977, our decade-long sex-orgy fraternity of leather easily flowed into our *Drummer* salon.

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In 1971, David Hurles was the first gay photographer to live South of Market; he managed a workingmen's set of flats on 10th Street at Mission Street across from the Doggie Diner. In May 1976, Jim Stewart introduced me to David Hurles aka Old Reliable Studio who was casting his photographs from the straight and bi-sexual hustlers working Polk Street and the Tenderloin from hangouts like the Zee Hotel at 141 Eddy—which was the hustler hotel of the Tenderloin—and from the Old Crow bar on Market Street, thirty feet from South of Market.

As editor in chief of *Drummer*, I had the opportunity to be the first to publish Hurles' photographs (*Drummer* 20, January 1978, pages 70-71). In early 1976, Jim Stewart moved South of Market and opened his homomasculine Keyhole Studio. In the fraternity of our intimacy, I produced his photographs for *Drummer* 14 (April 1977) and *Drummer* 16 (June 1977) because publisher Embry had already hired me in March 1977 as editor in chief of *Drummer* in charge of recruiting new talent. In that same *Drummer* 14, page 65, was a half-page display ad for Stewart's Keyhole Studio.

Jim Stewart was a fixture of our *Drummer* salon in March 1978 when *Drummer* writer and photographer Robert Opel, having moved north from LA, helped establish the South of Market identity of art and eros. Jim Stewart, who was also a carpenter, helped Robert Opel remodel a storefront at 1287 Howard Street into the first gay art gallery South of Market, Fey-Way. At the March 1978 opening, the underground of leather met the underground of art. Our *Drummer* salon came out in full force. It was like "old-home week" for all us friends. The baths and the bars had been the first gay art galleries, and suddenly we had, at this emerging stage of gay liberation, our own unqualified gay art gallery dedicated to leather, S&M, and transcendence.

A mega-hit from the moment Opel opened it, Fey-Way Gallery showcased Jim Stewart, Robert Mapplethorpe, Rex, the Hun, A. Jay, Lionel Biron, Lou Rudolph, Larry Hunt, Tom Hinde, Robert Opel, and Chuck Arnett, the first and founding artist of Folsom Street.

March 3, 1979, was the first and last anniversary of Fey-Way because Robert Opel was murdered in his gallery on July 8, 1979. To spare repetition of this eyewitness history of Opel, see *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera* and *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, Reel 3, Scene 1 and Scene 9. For details on Chuck Arnett, see my essay "Chuck Arnett" in *Drummer* 134 (October 1989) or in the anthology *Leatherfolk*, edited by Mark Thompson. For information on David Hurles, see *Man2Man Quarterly* #8 and any issue of the *California Action Guide* as well as the fictitious character, the video-porn mogul Solly Blue, in *Some Dance to Remember*.

The photographs for “Johnny Gets His Hair Cut” were shot during a real event at Jack Haines’ Slot Hotel (979 Folsom Street) where cameras were usually not permitted. Permission was arranged with the Slot manager, my longtime friend, Tony Tavarossi. The 35mm camera and film belonged to Jim Stewart who shot all of the frames except for the few I shot of him during the scene. Jim Stewart told me on October 9, 2007:

Dear Jack,

The Slot Shoot—sometime in the spring of 1976—was I think April. The occasion? Sheldon Kovalski shaved both my head and John E.’s. It was planned in advance. I believe we let the management know what we were planning. The door was left open. Guys would come and go. Some stayed for the action. Major players, beside the three mentioned above: Jack Fritscher, and I remember that you called David Sparrow at home and he came over. Russell Van Leer is in the pictures too, as well as Steve Prokaski in the cap. I’ll send you a few more pix to help set the scene. The room number is forgotten but it was the second room back from the stairway on the second floor. —Jim [See Jim Stewart quote in the introduction to “Men of SoMa” in this book.]

From 1975 when publisher Embry started *Drummer* to 1986 when he sold it, there was the constant low-grade friction of the “Credit War” and the “Reprint Controversy.” Contributors were often miffed that their photographs were not properly credited, or that they were reprinted, or both. Subscribers complained about the frequent recycling of stories, photographs, and drawings. Jim Stewart was disconcerted when Embry republished some of his “Johnny” at-the-Slot photographs in one of the special magazine series Embry aka “Robert Payne” had written: *The Care and Training of the Male Slave II*. Stewart was not credited for the photographs, and Embry, reaching for Mapplethorpe’s star, wrongly credited the Stewart photograph on page 26 to Mapplethorpe who by that time had refused to have anything to do with Embry’s *Drummer*. Jim Stewart wrote on September 22, 2007:

In *The Care and Training of the Male Slave II*, my photo at the top of page 26 was credited to Mapplethorpe. The other photo on that page, plus the photos on page 25, were not credited to anybody! The photo on the bottom of page 27 was correctly attributed to Mapplethorpe. All the photos of mine on pages 25-26 were previously published in “Johnny Get His Hair Cut,”

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Drummer 16, pages 64-68. The whole photo spread in *Care and Training II*, except for a photo by Dave Sands, gives the impression that these were all Mapplethorpe photos.”

II. The photo-feature paragraph as published in *Drummer* 16, June 1977

Johnny Gets His Hair Cut

We noticed an episode involving a hair cut (and shave) in San Francisco photographer Jim Stewart’s “Men South of Market” series. We set these aside when we were running that series in *Drummer* 14 and asked Jim about it. He came up with three more shots to tell the complete story.

Jim lives in the South of Market area and does much of his photography in that neighborhood and at various locations ranging from Mount Tam to the Slot Hotel.

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

“The Slot Hotel” was the gay *Hotel California*. The Eagles sang “You can check in, but you can never leave” in the best-selling album of the 1970s. The Slot, which was cheekily covered by a hotel license rather than a bath license was created *ex nihilo* to be a fisting palace by CMC founder, Jack Haines, and was managed by longtime Fritscher pal and Folsom Street legend, Tony Tavarossi, who had created the Why Not? leather bar in 1960. When the gorgeous orgies and outrageous sex acts at the Barracks baths began to seem like bourgeois vaudeville, ever edgier erotic performances were always in constant invention at the Slot Hotel where Fritscher from his customary Room 326 (first door on the left at the top of the stairs) drove *Drummer*. The Barracks and the Slot were four blocks and light years apart on Folsom Street. Photograph by Mark Hemry. ©Mark Hemry

On location at the Slot Hotel, 979 Folsom Street, April 1976, photographer Jim Stewart and Jack Fritscher produced an erotic happening that became the *Drummer* feature “Johnny Gets His Hair Cut.” Lensed with Stewart’s Nikon which Stewart and Fritscher traded back and forth while participating in the *verite* action scene, the photographs were mostly shot by eyewitness Jim Stewart. Top: John E., “Johnny,” gets his hair cut. Middle and right: Fritscher wraps the forearm of handballer Russell Van Leer, and then cradles a couple of “Johnny’s” face to face. Keyhole Studio publicity shoot for *Drummer*. Photographs by Jim Stewart. ©Jim Stewart. Used with permission.

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Before Stonewall, cameras were absolutely forbidden in gay venues because police and blackmailers exploited such eyewitness evidence. By 1976, cameras began to come out of the closet, thus breaking the kind of self-censorship that had made gay culture invisible. Fritscher wrote that “Mapplethorpe and Harvey Milk turned to cameras as power-tools of sexual liberation. Cameras gave us a face.” Above: The Slot, April 1976. “Johnny Gets His Hair Cut.” In a shot expressing how homomascuine men morphed their own self-fashioning identities during a disco era of Zapata and Zappa moustaches and permed hair and Afros, Sheldon Kovalski changes the received gay look of John E. Keyhole Studio publicity shoot for *Drummer*. Photograph by Jim Stewart. ©Jim Stewart. Used with permission.

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The Slot, April 1976. Top: "Scissors with Shadow." Catching the perfect moment and lighting, photographer Jim Stewart composed in action on location the same subjects and elements that intrigued Robert Mapplethorpe in the isolation of his studio. Bottom: "Hands." Sheldon Kovalski, John E., and redheaded Russell Van Leer. Keyhole Studio publicity shoot for *Drummer*. Photographs by Jim Stewart. ©Jim Stewart. Used with permission.

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The Slot, April 1976. Top: "John E. and Photographer Jim Stewart with Crisco Can and Clothes-Pin Bandolier." Photograph by Jack Fritscher shot with Jim Stewart's camera. ©Jim Stewart. Bottom: "The Kiss." Doubling the information in his frame using mirrors, Jim Stewart documented Russell Van Leer (left) and Steve Prokaski (right) leaning in over John E. (bottom center) kissing Jack Fritscher. Keyhole Studio publicity shoot for *Drummer*. Photograph by Jim Stewart. ©Jim Stewart. Used with permission.

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