

Astrologic Capricorn

Written October 1977, this feature essay was published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977.

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I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written April 23, 2007

Astrology, Comedy, Scofflaws, *The Advocate*,
and the *Drummer* Bloomsbury

Written October 1977, this feature column was published in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977). The LA author Aristide had invented "Astrologic," but warfare and attrition inside *Drummer* caused me as editor in chief to step up and take over the writing of "Astrologic" for seven issues (plus one): *Drummer* 19 (December 1977), *Drummer* 20 (January 1978), *Drummer* 21 (March 1978), *Drummer* 22 (May 1978), *Drummer* 23 (July 1978), *Drummer* 25 (December 1978), *Drummer* 26 (January 1979), including a reprint of my work pirated by John Embry and John Rowberry in *Drummer* 41 (December 1980).

To write this *Drummer* history I searched out eyewitness Aristide who revealed for the first time his role as a charter member of the original LA *Drummer* salon.

During "The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius" in the 1960s and 1970s, the most common pick-up line in bars was "What's your sign?" Spinning that joke, Aristide Joseph Laurent, a French Creole-Irish-Cajun whose birth sign is September 15, 1941, created "Astrologic" for the original-recipe of *The Advocate*.

Marking the fortieth anniversary of the founding of *The Advocate*, Aristide wrote in an email on September 19, 2007:

After Dick Mitch was arrested in a bar raid and charged with lewd conduct in the late 1960s, he became a fired-up activist;

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and, with his lover, Bill Rau, and friend Sam Allen, they bought the *Pride Newsletter* and changed the name to *The Advocate*. Since it was dangerous to be a “pervert” prior to the liberation movement, you didn’t use your real name for fear of reprisals, not only from harassment by the LAPD but the ever-present possibility of losing your day job, family and friends. Dick Mitch became “Dick Michaels,” the editor; Bill Rau became “Bill Rand”; and I became “P. Nutz,” jack of many trades....I provided the so-called “humor” of the early *Advocate* in a monthly column titled “*Mariposa de la Noche*” (Butterfly of the Night). When I look at those columns in my mature years, I shudder. What a flamer I was! (No rebuttals, please). The defining purpose of the early *Advocate* was to unite and inform the gay community of what was happening in their closed society. When David Goodstein purchased it and took over, it evolved into a glossy fashion/celebrity magazine.

Aristide chose “P. Nutz” because in the United States Air Force his nickname had been “Peanuts.” He also wrote for *The Advocate* as the Anglicized “Joseph Laurence” because the publisher wanted to list more names to make the staff seem larger.

Moving “Astrologic” to *Drummer* at the invitation of editor in chief Jeanne Barney because the humorless investment banker David Goodstein had bought *The Advocate*, Aristide wrote without benefit of byline when he penned his first eleven “*Drummer Astrologic*” columns ending in *Drummer* 18 what he had begun in *Drummer* 8. By *Drummer* 18, the magazine had moved to San Francisco, leaving behind in LA many original contributors including Jeanne Barney who had credited Aristide not specifically for “Astrologic” but more generally on the masthead list of “Contributors” under his third nom de plume “Aristide Laurent.”

Having filled in for Aristide for seven issues, and having over-ruled the objections of LA office-boy John Rowberry, I negotiated his open return for forthcoming issues beginning with *Drummer* 27 in which I gave him his first byline in *Drummer* as “Aristide.”

I was personally grateful because I needed him back. At that time, I was editing and producing *Drummer* as well as writing much of each issue and hadn’t time to write “Astrologic.” Deadlines had caused me to omit it from *Drummer* 24. In fact, in *Drummer* 23, I had “cheated” by writing no more than a simple astrological limerick.

Why Aristide had never been bylined on the *Drummer* contents page or at the top of “Astrologic” before I listed him remains a mystery to both Aristide and his longtime pal, Jeanne Barney.

- At the beginning of *Drummer* before Aristide's debut in *Drummer* 8, each astrology page in *Drummer* issues 2 through 3 consisted of a text-free illustration by the artist Bud who had drawn the cover of *Drummer* 1 in which there was no astrology page.
- In *Drummer* 4 and 5, the drawing by Bud was accompanied by quoted text from *The Gay Book of Astrology* by Jay Perry.
- With *Drummer* 6, the astrology page was renamed "It's All in the Stars" with a byline by "Ken" and with an illustration by the artist "KT."
- In *Drummer* 7, Bud returned to illustrate the second and last appearance of "It's All in the Stars."
- In *Drummer* 8, the column "Astrologic" first appeared minus a byline for Aristide.

Keeping with the humor of Aristide who was wrongfully fired after my December 31, 1979, exit from *Drummer*, I mixed satire for my seven "Astrologic" columns out of my experience with leather and with the occult. By chance, I had both academic and street credentials. In 1968, I had begun researching gay magic, astrology, leather wicca, and S&M rituals on Folsom Street for my book *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch's Mouth* (1972, 2005). Investigating the psyche of pre-Stonewall leather, I had also worked up the texts of leather author William Carney who pioneered his "S&M Way" as spiritual ritual in his epistolary novel *The Real Thing* (1968).

Popular Witchcraft featured the first American interview with the gay witch Frederick de Arechaga, and, according to *Fate Magazine*, a pitch-perfect interview with the straight Satanist Anton LaVey. The pagan de Arechaga was the founding Pontifex Maximus of the Sabaeon Religion in Chicago. LaVey was the legendary founder of the Church of Satan in San Francisco.

While LaVey and I bonded as subject and journalist in his gorgeous diabolically decorated Black House at 6114 California Street, Frederick de Arechaga's El Sabarum sanctuary was a wondrous and campy Babylonian temple as imagined by the art department at MGM. Aristide would have loved it. Of course, de Arechaga and I smoked grass. Of course, we had sex. Of course, the doves in his cages cooed. It was the 60s.

Aristide played his part in the *Drummer* salon and on the *Drummer* Blacklist.

As editor in chief, I tried to maintain the "Astrologic" column which Aristide had written intermittently for *Drummer* from 1976 until he was

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fired in 1980 through the machinations of sometime *Drummer* freelance writer and fulltime queen John Rowberry who finally erupted in a character-revealing jealous rage because one of his lovers had a fling with Aristide.

That firing by Rowberry was typical of the spite and revenge inside the *Drummer* office where in the 1980s Rowberry and Embry created their Blacklist. The petulant Rowberry had “control issues” against everyone in the *Drummer* salon and the *Drummer* office who in the 1970s had dissed and dismissed him. For thirty-one months as editor in chief (1977- 12/31/79), I had to hold Rowberry in check as he oiled his way across the floor. It was like pinning a snake with a forked stick. He had arrived on the door step of San Francisco *Drummer*, hat in hand, looking for work. He had quit, or been fired, from his oleaginous career as the night porter at the tacky Ramada Inn on Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood.

Considering the famous 1974 cult film *The Night Porter* (starring Dirk Bogarde trampling Charlotte Rampling), I think life was imitating art insofar as night-porter Rowberry’s lover—who hit the sheets with Aristide—had a Nazi fetish.

Rowberry, who had Embry’s ear, had written a couple of non-erotic murder-obsessed pieces for *Drummer* that had been heavily retooled by editor in chief Jeanne Barney. (I knew that Rowberry never really understood that *Drummer* was a sex magazine for one-handed reading; he always wanted it to be something more like *The Advocate*.) That gave Rowberry “motive” to hate Barney the way that Rowberry’s puppet master Embry impugned Barney in *Drummer* 30, page 38, for knowing the secrets of Embry aka “Robert Payne.” Allegedly because of Embry’s problematical mail-order practices, Barney reported that the artist Sean dubbed Embry and his alias “Robert Payne” as “Robert Rip-off.” See *Drummer* 1 (June 1975) for the “Robert Payne Leather Emporium.”

The staff at San Francisco *Drummer* giggled and dismissed “Highway Rowberry” as the “office boy.” We ignored him because in the 1970s tops rarely spoke to bottoms even out of scene. He was also one of that caste of men who likes young men of legal age who can pass for fourteen. When he took up critiquing videos for *Studflix* magazine, I told him if sperm could act, he’d give it a good review. For the thirteen months after I exited *Drummer* on December 31, 1979, Rowberry acted as “assignments editor.” It was only with *Drummer* 40 (January 1981) that “assignments editor” Rowberry metastasized into “editor.”

(Please re-set all the leather timelines regarding *Drummer* including the “DeBlase Timeline” of record at the Leather Archives and Museum.) John Rowberry was never “editor in chief” of *Drummer*.

That was his leather “glass ceiling.”

It burned him. In 1982, in the crowded lobby of the Castro Theater at the premiere screening of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Querelle*, Mark Hemry and I nodded hello to John Rowberry who fizzled like he might explode. He spit out: “*You* like Fassbinder?” I said, “Ich mag ihn auf Deutsche—aber er ist sehr ausgezeichnet auf Englisch—okay?—mit Brad Davis und Franco Nero. Hahaha.” It was enough high-school cuntinental German to end that conversation!

[I said, “Actually, I prefer Fassbinder in German, but he’s brilliant in English—okay?—with Brad Davis and Franco Nero. Hahaha.” See a similar theater scene in *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, Reel 6, Scene 3.]

During 1980-1984, Rowberry and Embry drove *Drummer* into a tailspin—by dumping talent such as Aristide and others—that caused Embry to sell the magazine to Chicagoan Anthony DeBlase who, during very early negotiations in the viral-death summer of 1985 made certain that Rowberry was “gone” from *Drummer* as a condition of the oncoming sale in 1986. By autumn 1985, Embry had eased Rowberry out the door.

Earlier, in 1973, two years before Jeanne Barney started up *LA Drummer*, she had worked with Aristide at the original *The Advocate* founded and owned by publishers Dick Michaels and Bill Rand who sold ownership of their *LA Advocate: The Newsletter of Personal Rights in Defense and Education (P.R.I.D.E.)* to New York investment banker David Goodstein.

At *The Advocate*, Aristide, as mentioned, had begun writing his “Astrologic” column. When Goodstein fired most of *The Advocate* staff, Jeanne Barney invited Aristide and his “Astrologic” to *Drummer*. In 2007, I queried Jeanne Barney about her eyewitness of that early history of *Drummer* in Los Angeles in 1975-1976. In the zero degrees of separation, she contacted Aristide for his eyewitness. On February 4, 2007, Aristide wrote:

....First off let’s get this completely clear: John Rowberry did NOT like me [Aristide] and I did not like John Rowberry. Rowberry had a fleeting mini-affair with a good friend of mine at ABC-TV, Bob McWilliams. Bob was as much “in love” with Rowberry as Bob was capable of caring about anyone other than Bob. Bob had a Nazi fetish (Nazi flags in his bedroom; photos of Adolf, etc.) and would only fellate uncircumcised penises....Since Rowberry was see-through white and uncut [he had a translucent Aryan foreskin]...not to mention “easy”

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(OK—so that was strictly *opinion*), Bob thought he had died and gone to München.

Since I am presently suffering the debilitating effects of what is commonly known as “chemo brain,” my memory for details is a bit sketchy, but, it seems like when the 3 of us [Aristide, Bob McWilliams, Rowberry] were together there was noticeable tension. I don’t know if it was the fact that Bob had one of the civilized world’s largest uncircumcised cocks (pix available upon request) and Rowberry wanted sole possession of it, or the fact that John [Rowberry] & I just disliked each other because, given our clash of personalities—I had one; he didn’t, it was doomed from the start. Finally, Rowberry & his lover (I forget his name [Charles Musgrave]—I wish I could forget Rowberry’s) moved to SF and I had Herr gross und unbeschniten [Mr. Big and Uncircumcised] Bob [McWilliams] all to myself....

Naturally, when personality-challenged Rowberry wound up at *Drummer* [as assignments editor, following Fritscher, in 1980], it was his great opportunity to exert his final act of dominance over me by canceling my [“Astrologic”] column (regardless of the excuse in his letter to me). Well, this was actually a total relief to me because I had long since burned out on having to be creative when I was long burned out on doing it. After all, I AM a fickle kween. For some reason, Embry was always on my ass to do it every month and, like with everything else in my life, I would eventually say “ohhhh, alllllright” and send one in. If you look at the last dozen or so you can easily see that my heart was not in them. ©2007 Aristide Laurent

In 1980, Rowberry’s unprofessional response to this sex triangle at *Drummer* proved he had no clue regarding the gentlemanly code in our 1970s *Drummer* salon where everyone was sleeping with everyone but him.

Rowberry’s co-dependent in destroying the salon around *Drummer* was publisher Embry who in the 1970s failed to make timely payments to such talent as Aristide, Fred Halsted, and other LA contributors including book and movie reviewer Ed Franklin aka Ed Menerth aka Scott Masters. When the talent ran screaming for the exits, the sucking vacuum necessitated that I not only had to write material such as “Astrologic” to fill *Drummer*, but I also had to find new contributors.

Historians might note that from “day one” *Drummer* suffered even as its founders fought over control which defaulted to Embry. In “Astrologic” in *Drummer* 17, Aristide took a shot at the 1975 fight that destroyed

the other *Drummer* founders' magazine *NewsWest* much to Embry's glee. In addition, when the LAPD busted the *Drummer* "Slave Auction" in 1976, Embry fled LA and *Drummer* lost what LA talent base it had left. To build a San Francisco salon around *Drummer* I hit the "re-set button" and changed *Drummer* from an LA bar rag into a San Francisco magazine with international appeal.

I regretted that LA personality Fred Halsted, whose best friend in life was Jeanne Barney, had stopped contributing his columns and photographs to *Drummer* and had begun his rival magazine, *Package*.

Unlike Halsted, LA writer-photographer Robert Opel—famous for streaking the 1974 Academy Awards—followed *Drummer* to San Francisco where he was murdered.

Details of this wonderful "Titanic 70s" Bloomsbury salon of writers, artists, and photographers who gathered around my *Drummer* can be found throughout this series: *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*. During the first post-Stonewall decade which let all kinds of sexuality—including masculine-identified homosexuality—out of the closet, I was fortunate to be in the right place with the right friends at the right time.

During that wild golden age of gay liberation, my "Astrologic" column honored the style that Aristide had invented: tongue-in-cheek humor satirizing leather foibles.

Before my editorship, and during and after me, codependents Embry and Rowberry stopped at nothing. The monkey business they had done in LA, they repeated in San Francisco. They created that Blacklist of contributors "who had done them wrong." Through sins of commission and omission, they became scofflaws of copyright, and their unlicensed reprinting of intellectual property disrespected individual authors, artists, and photographers.

For instance, after he fired Aristide, Rowberry and Embry pirated my "Astrologic" column from *Drummer* 21 (March 1978), page 30 and reprinted it in *Drummer* 41 (December 1980), page 63.

Trying to cover up the loss of Aristide, Rowberry and Embry coluded in this direct violation of my copyright for which I was neither contacted for permission nor paid. They also falsely assigned my byline to "Aristide" and, most deceitfully to consumers, set out to dupe the *Drummer* readership by rearranging the line items within my "Astrologic" for my original "Aries 1978" so that they could recycle and resell what would appear as if written for "Sagittarius 1980."

Playing with language in "Astrologic" (*Drummer* 19), I introduced one of the several words I had coined around *Drummer*. It was *perversatile*. In the decade after Stonewall, to write about newly uncloseted sex for the

first time in the 1970s required a new vocabulary, including the word for masculine-identified homosexuality: *homomascularity*.

See *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer* for “Homomascularity: Framing Keywords of Queer Popular Culture in *Drummer Magazine*” from the Queer Keyword Conference, University College Dublin, Ireland, April 2005.

II. The feature column as published in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977)

Astrologic Capricorn (New Year's 1977 Becomes 1978)

CAPRICORN S: (Dec. 22 - Jan. 20): You're a cold fucker whose sun sign, bridging one calendar year to the other, indicates slaves by the pair for the New Year. Your executive-executioner ability will keep them sufficiently servile, so your domestic scene should keep quite scrubbed up unless you prefer to live like the raunchy goat you are. On the first day of Christmas, budget some cold cash for the tattooing of at least six M's this coming year with your capricious birth sign.

CAPRICORN M: In the New Year, expect competition. Be everything your S desires. Be the genuine reflection of your Top's affection. If by February you fall lax from his top style, get yourself together. Maintain. After all, your supportive imitation of him is not only the sincerest form of flattery, it's also the fastest free lunch in the West. Beg him to tattoo you for Valentine's Day.

AQUARIUS S: (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19): On the second day of Christmas, tie your M to a tall pine in a cut-it-yourself lot. Pull out whatever ax you have to grind. Yell “Timber!” Take bets on which way he will fall.

AQUARIUS M: Read Kilmer's “Trees.” Tell your Top you're pining for a good needling. Try to land on your face.

PISCES S: (Feb. 20 - Mar. 20): On the third day of Christmas, prepare your New Year's party. Buy imported champagne. Avoid using the cliché of a rented bubbly fountain.

PISCES M: Douche thoroughly.

ARIES S: (Mar. 21 - Apr. 19): On the fourth day of Christmas, fill glass ornaments with piss. Hang them through the tits of an especially green M.

ARIES M: Buy your S a pellet gun. Prepare to be decorated. Stand very still.

TAURUS S: (Apr. 20 - May 20): On the fifth day of Christmas, buy a roll of barbed wire and a “how-to” book on macrame.

TAURUS M: Begin to empathize with hanging ferns. Remember: a plant never speaks unless spoken to first.

GEMINI S: (May 21 - Jun. 21): On the sixth day of Christmas, become a toker and a taker. Buy a year's supply of macho cigars.

GEMINI M: Learn the niceties of storing cigars in dark places where the air is properly humidified.

CANCER S: (Jun. 22 - Jul. 21): On the seventh day of Christmas, clip your nails, practice your ambi-dexterity, and insert both fists at once.

CANCER M: Fall on your knees and hear the angel voices.

LEO S: (Jul. 22 - Aug. 21): On the eighth day of Christmas, invite a surgeon specializing in circumcisions over for a threeway.

LEO M: Cross your legs, hit your amy, and kiss your smegma goodbye.

VIRGO S: (Aug. 22 - Sep. 22): On the ninth day of Christmas, bike out to the local lovers' lane. Make your M collect the scumbags. Take them home to the microwave he insisted on for Christmas.

VIRGO M: Pretend you're Barbara Hale. Punch your Amana and learn how to hum "Green Sleeves" with your mouth full. [Reference to actress Hale who made a last stand in her career as a TV pitch-woman for Amana kitchen appliances.]

LIBRA S: (Sep. 23 - Oct. 22): On the tenth day of Christmas, reserve the bathtub at the Mineshaft in New York City. Buy beers for the house.

LIBRA M: Since you hardly ever have any fun, beg Santa for scuba gear and a straw. Even recycled, boycott Coors.

SCORPIO S: (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21): On the eleventh day of Christmas, resolve to live your 1978 life in the fast lane. [This is a reference to the Eagles' *Hotel California* and their song "Life in the Fast Lane" with its line "Everything all the time." At this time, I was writing *Some Dance to Remember* whose title is a line quoted from *Hotel California*.]

SCORPIO M: You are insatiably perversatile. Your answer to any S is "Everything all the time." (Also stop trying to turn Virgo S's into M's.)

SAGITTARIUS S: (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21): On the twelfth day of Christmas, pump up an even heavier sweat at the gym. Save water. Don't shower. Go directly home.

SAGITTARIUS M: Ditch your color-coded handkerchiefs. Stick a yellow washcloth in your right rear pocket. Wait at home. Then tongue and groove.

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

Top: John Rowberry displaying his notorious attitude in his office on Folsom Street, 1986. Photograph by Jack Fritscher. ©Jack Fritscher. Bottom: "John Rowberry, Night Porter, L.A. Clawing His Way to the Top." Rowberry typically acted like he was starring in a student production of *Sunset Boulevard*. Publicity kit photograph given by Rowberry to *Drummer* art director, and longtime intimate of Fritscher, Al Shapiro. Photographer unknown. Used with permission of the Estate of Al Shapiro administered by Dick Kriegmont.

John W. Rowberry, the night porter from the Ramada Inn on Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, looking for a job in San Francisco, became editor—never “editor in chief”—of *Drummer* with *Drummer* 40. Almost single-handedly in the 1980s, he dismantled the reader-reflexive grassroots erotic photography in *Drummer* so much in favor of corporate video companies’ photographs that there were whispers of “Payola” kickbacks of cash. Eased out under first publisher John Embry at the insistence of new *Drummer* publisher Anthony DeBlase, Rowberry moved on to work successfully in tandem with Fritscher throughout the 1980s on half a dozen other gay magazines.

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In the interest of free speech, *Drummer* publisher John Embry decided to accept advertising money from the National Socialist League. Fritscher objected, and insisted on the deletion of the Nazi ad that played seductively with a song title from the popular 1972 Kander and Ebb musical *Cabaret*.

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