

CHAPTER 19

VIRTUAL DRUMMER

How *Drummer* Influenced Other Magazines and Publishers

- **Some Virtual *Drummer* Magazines:** *Man2Man Quarterly*, *California Action Guide* (San Francisco), Patrick Califia's *Newsleather*, Tony DeBlase's *DungeonMaster*, Harold Cox's *Checkmate*
- ***Drumb and Drumber*:** Fritscher's Satiric, Special "Mad Magazine" Issue of *Drummer* (Issue 138)
- **Desperate DeBlase Dumps *Drummer* on Dutchman and Davolt**

Among such company as the best *Drummer* owners, Dr. DeBlase and Dr. Charles, did I ever really care that this Dr. Fritscher was on that Mr. Embry's Famous Little Blacklist? Did Hester Prynne not love her Pearl the way I loved *Drummer*, and did she not turn the vicious shame of her Scarlet Letter, Embry's Blacklist, into a red badge of courage and honor?

Anyone who worked with John Embry quickly learned to demand payment for their work and to defend their copyrights and reputations. Knowing I needed an exit strategy even before I finished editing *Drummer* 30, the same Anniversary Issue in which Embry cruelly trashed Jeanne Barney, I slipped into the pages of *Drummer* my own "declaration of independence." I'd had enough of office politics and delayed pay days, but not enough of the *Drummer* material I loved, and which I wanted to raise to a more far-out "edginess" without being ripped off financially, and without being abused in that gay sort of way that has no verbal definition.

Planning to publish an alternative *Drummer*, a "Virtual *Drummer*," I wrote my declaration in *Drummer* 30, page 18:

MAN2MAN QUARTERLY. Tits, Pits, Fists, Hard2Find Fetish Trips. Your sensual ad free with 1 yr. Sub. \$5 check. *MAN2MAN QUARTERLY*, 115 Haight, Suite 2, San Francisco 94102. Must state over 21.

Man2Man's Haight Street address was the apartment of my longtime ally from the 1970s, Old Reliable David Hurles, who also divorced himself from *Drummer* and contributed dozens of photographs for covers and center-folds in *Man2Man*. Many of those shots were so erotic, esthetic, and popular upon their first publication in *Man2Man* that the artist Rex reprinted many of them in his photo book, *Speeding: The Old Reliable Photography of David Hurles* (2005). In fact, Rex's cover for *Speeding* was the same photograph I had published twenty-four years earlier on the back cover of *Man2Man* 6, the first *Man2Man* Anniversary Issue, 1981.

In the comparative timelines of Origin Stories, in 1977, Al Shapiro and I shut *Drummer* down for a four-month hiatus to create San Francisco *Drummer* out of LA *Drummer*. In 1979-1980, while I was editing *Drummer*, it took Mark Hemry and me four months to create *Man2Man Quarterly*. The phrase *man-to-man* was never used by Embry in *Drummer* until after *Man2Man* debuted.

The first issue of *Man2Man*, with blond bodybuilding champion Jim Enger on the cover, hit the bookstores, was a mail-order hit, and was denounced, and imitated, by a pissed-off Embry who almost immediately added this tag line to his "Leather Fraternity": "More Man-to-Man Personals Than Any Other Magazine." In fact, in the June immediately after the January 1980 debut of the first promotional copy of *Man2Man*, Embry published his own first "Drummer Super Publication," the "Virtual *Drummer*," *Malebox*, for the 1980 International Mr. Leather (IML) Contest in Chicago. Because I put my lover, Jim Enger, on the premiere cover of *Man2Man*, Embry—in some kind of very personal slap-down feud—put Colt model Clint Lockner, Enger's former lover and my good friend, on the cover of *Malebox* which trumpeted across Lockner's thighs: "More Man-To-Man Malebox Personal Classifieds Than Ever Before!" As sampled in later *Drummer*, such as *Drummer* 60, Embry continued to hawk his classifieds as "Drumbeats: Hot Man-to-Man Contact for a Cool 35¢ a Word!"

When I exited *Drummer*, Embry did not ask, nor did I offer to sign a non-competition agreement; and there was little I could do to stop him from reheating my ideas, or from repeating my themes in his 1980s *Drummer* that I had originated in my 1970s *Drummer*, most especially "cigars" and "daddies" which both, so inviting once reported on, turned into lifestyle fetishes on their own strength.

Years later, he was still cracking on about *Man2Man* in his letter to *Drummer* 108, because *Man2Man*'s code of ethics was quite the gentlemanly opposite of Embry's infamous "Robert Rip-off" character. When publisher Mark Hemry and I closed down *Man2Man* due to the new

no-fluid-exchange behavior around AIDS as well as due to the typing-and-layout workload required before computers, we shocked Embry, the mail-order king. Mark Hemry wrote a check to each of our subscribers personally refunding whatever amount remained on his or her *Man2Man* subscription.

What an upside there was to the wild popularity of our very high-concept title of *Man2Man* in 1980. It prompted Embry and queerstream culture to focus, really focus, for the first time outside *Drummer* on gay men as men, on gay men who liked men masculine, on masculinity, and on homomascularity. The only downside was a bit of static from some female-identified gay men, but not from women. At that time, there still existed the gay liberation unity of the 1970s before Marxist separatists broke that accord into the politically correct 1980s civil war over gender that continued as homomascularity men remained effectively excluded from gay culture in publications such as *The Advocate*.

To Embry's undying chagrin, one of the first fans of *Man2Man* was Anthony DeBlase who had in Chicago, 1979, begun publishing his *DungeonMaster* magazine, as his own "Virtual *Drummer*," to compete with *Drummer*. DeBlase had written a letter to that effect to me, the editor of *Man2Man*, on August 24, 1980.

Sixteen years later, on December 26, 1996, DeBlase, already morbidly ill with congestive heart failure, sent another note (handwritten in red ink) to Mark Hemry and me. He specifically requested a complete "leather heritage" set of *Man2Man* for Chuck Renslow's Leather Archives & Museum in Chicago. With that beatifying letter from DeBlase, the little grass-roots *Man2Man* entered the canon of gay magazine culture.

Other early fans and subscribers of *Man2Man* included generational pioneers such as Thom Gunn, Larry Townsend, Arnie Kantrowitz, Robert Mapplethorpe, Elliott Siegel, A. Jay aka Al Shapiro, Alan Bennett, Wakefield Poole, Jim Kane, Mark I. Chester, Domino aka Don Merrick, Artie Haber, Charles Herschberg, Ed Menerth, David Lewis and Peter Fiske of the 15 Association, Steve McEachern of the Catacombs, Jim Olander of *DungeonMaster*, Don Morrison and Frank Olson of the Anvil Bar in New York, Lou Thomas of Colt and Target studios, David Stein of GMSMA, and Patrick Califia.

Thom Gunn told *The Sentinel* newspaper in San Francisco of his love for the underground genre of dirty little zines like *Man2Man* when he said: "Personally, I have been far more influenced by the wit and style of *The Manhattan Review of Unnatural Acts* than I have been by the tiresome campiness of Ronald Firbank, who is usually taken as one of the chief exemplars of

the...gay sensibility.” (Quote found in Boyd MacDonald’s peerless *Straight to Hell: The Manhattan Review of Unnatural Acts*, Number 44, page 7, c. 1978.) Gunn was also a fan and supporter of our quirky and underground boutique studio Palm Drive Video.

David Stein represented the “Gay Men’s S&M Association” in New York. In a letter dated October 30, 1983, he requested permission to reprint two of my articles from *Man2Man* #7 in the *GMSMA Newsletter* and for the magazine *Christopher Street*. My features were “Why Bondage?” and “Other Hands, Other Intentions: 48-Hour Bondage Trip.” This was another leather-heritage endorsement of *Man2Man*, because *GMSMA* had never approached *Drummer* for reprints.

By June, 1984, Pat/Patrick Califia, publishing her-then-his *Newsleather* out of Richmond Hill, NY, requested a complete run of all the *Man2Man* issues (particularly issue 8) for the Califia leather-heritage archives.

In a very long letter, dated June 20, 1984, my forty-fifth birthday and *Drummer*’s ninth, Califia, perhaps sensing how I had been battered at *Drummer*, kindly wrote soothing words that show a writer’s empathetic “take” on what Embry lost in the 1980s after I divorced him. In 1984, Califia pre-figured DeBlase’s 1996 nomination of *Man2Man* to the canon of gay magazine literature in this excerpt:

Dear Jack: I was very excited receiving the package of *Man2Man*, and also the envelope full of your newspaper [*California Action Guide*]. You are one of the finest gay porn writers around (I hope the word “porn” does not offend you.) I think you write a “dirty-talking” story better than anybody else I know, somehow managing (while using all our favorite four-letter words) to transcend the clichés of the genre. In every single publication you’ve produced, there’s something that hits me right between the eyes....It’s pretty clear to me that *Man2Man* was wildly successful...*Drummer* has sold out, sort of a “Mr. Colt in Bondage”....I hope I can finish up my book manuscript of short stories, *Macho Sluts*.... This may sound silly to you, but I’d like you to know that if it wasn’t for your work, I’d feel impoverished. There were a lot of times when I felt hopeless about managing to establish a life as a sexually active sadist that a Jack Fritscher story renewed my optimism. —Pat

DRUMB AND DRUMBER: A SPECIAL DRUMMER ISSUE;
1989 EARTHQUAKE DESTROYS *DRUMMER* OFFICE

How tempting it was to fantasize publishing a photo of Embry's face, morphed with *Mad* magazine's mascot, Alfred E. Newman, on the cover of the special "extra issue" of *Drummer* titled *Drumb and Drumber*.

In the way I created my *Son of Drummer* (1978), I spun the concept for a new "extra" issue off the pop phrase, "dumb and dumber," which four years later in 1994 Jim Carrey also did for his movie *Dumb and Dumber*. In March 1989, I pitched my spoof to DeBlase as the *Drumb and Drumber 1990 Annual*. He busted his gut laughing at the pun, and we began our slow take-off to production.

DeBlase was an authentic leatherman who, while creating his own iteration of *Drummer*, also created and designed the Leather Pride Flag which he introduced at the International Mr. Leather Contest in Chicago in May 1989. Displayed since as an instant tradition at thousands of leather events, the flag, as DeBlase described it, "is composed of nine horizontal stripes of equal width. From the top and from the bottom, the stripes alternate black and royal blue. The central stripe is white. In the upper left quadrant of the flag is a large red heart. I will leave it to the viewer to interpret the colors and symbol." DeBlase truly loved *Drummer*. When I asked him over coffee about the exact symbolism of his design concept, he said, "The red heart stands specifically for the leatherfolk who love *Drummer*."

Months later, in October, while DeBlase and Charles were vacationing in England, the Loma Prieta earthquake changed all the plans in Desmodus's South of Market Street office. The building at 285 Shipley was destroyed and there was no earthquake insurance. To fundamentalist religionists it was the right-hand of God knocking down the left-wing walls of Sodom in San Francisco. To DeBlase and Charles, it was the straw that broke the camel's back.

October 17, 1989, was a watershed moment in *Drummer* history.

Psychologically, the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake collapsed DeBlase's umbrella over Desmodus Publishing in the way the LAPD Slave Auction arrest in 1976 had broken Embry who was undone a second time when AIDS in 1984 changed nearly everything in his business model, including the contents of *Drummer*, forcing him to put *Drummer* up for sale.

The morning after the earthquake, October 18, DeBlase telephoned from London saying he and Andy Charles had re-booked their first-class return flight to San Francisco. He immediately stopped the press on all his Desmodus magazines: *Drummer*, *Mach*, *Foreskin Quarterly*, *Sandmutopia Guardian*, and *DungeonMaster*. In the prescient last issue before the earthquake, *Drummer* 132 (August 1989), page 6, a depressed DeBlase, already down at heel from the ongoing financial bleeding of *Drummer*, had felt it

necessary to write an editorial defending—to a complaining reader—his proportion of editorial copy to commercial advertising, concluding, “I wish we were making ‘mucho bucks.’”

In *Drummer* 135 (December 1989), page 38, the desperate DeBlase began begging for contributions for *Drummer* via the “Desmodus Earthquake Relief Fund.” *Drummer* may have been the Leather Bible of the leather community, but very few fans were interested in bailing out his personal business, and he was forced to sell. Nevertheless, in 1993, the ever-enterprising DeBlase, having sold *Drummer*, and having founded the Leather Archives & Museum with Chuck Renslow, risked re-starting his discontinued magazine, *Checkmate*, which he had begun years before in Chicago before he bought *Drummer*. This time his publishing efforts at documenting leather history on the fly were supported by the distinguished leather elders Harold Cox and Bob Reite, founders of the *DungeonMaster Newsletter*, and the annual Delta Run leather weekend hosted by the Delta Brotherhood International. DeBlase and Cox dubbed their new hybrid magazine with the awkwardly blended title: *Checkmate (Incorporating DungeonMaster)*. *Drummer* 160, page 23.

Drummer nearly died in the 1989 earthquake. Its main life support was its new hire, Joseph W. Bean, who, at the moment of the quake, was at work on only his second issue as managing editor of *Drummer*. As eyewitness, I met with Joseph Bean standing in the collapsed bricks South of Market, and watched him soldier on like a medic triaging the bits and pieces of *Drummer* most likely to survive for whatever new issues we could salvage.

Still dedicated to producing *Drumb and Drumber*, I figured a little gallows humor might help release the tension around both the earthquake and AIDS. Turning disaster into a laugh that keeps a person calm enough to carry on, I proposed that the earthquake might inspire, among other features, a satirical two-page cartoon strip of the kind that Al Shapiro created for *Queens Quarterly* and continued in *Drummer*, and that Mort Drucker created to make *Mad* magazine wildly popular. *The National Lampoon* had a comic-strip hit with *Queen Kong* (May 1977) satirizing both that film and the hateful Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Better Homes and Closets*.

Like Max Bialystock in *The Producers* (1968), I envisioned the group of us creating *Drummer*'s own version of *Springtime for Hitler* as a farcical send-up lampooning, with lyrics and photos, the leather history and in-house shenanigans of all us *Drummer* publishers, editors, and contributors trying to survive the roof falling on our heads. The camp reference would be that like singer Jeannette McDonald in *San Francisco*, the 1936 movie about the 1906 quake, Tony and Andy and Joseph and I, in caricature, would stand

in the rubble to sing the survivalist title song “San Francisco.” I would have titled the strip “Trouble in the Rubble.” We needed *Drumb and Drumber*. *Drummer* needed to lighten up.

Years later in June 1997, Joseph Bean told me in interview that he, rather like the young and unformed Los Angeles *Drummer*, had spent his early coming-out years cruising Ventura, California, “almost in drag..., the sweaters, the teased hair and make-up, the fingernails.” What comic relief to have known that tidbit about him back in 1989-1990. Our dear departed art director Al Shapiro would have rejoiced in drawing a sexy cartoon of the butch, bearded Bean as Judy Garland spoofing the camp Jeannette McDonald.

Judy Garland: I never will forget..(long pause)...Jeannette McDonald [Joseph W. Bean]...how that brave Jeannette [Joseph] just stood there in the ruins and sang, a-a-and sang: San Francisco, open your Golden Gate.

Judy was belting out a fundamental gay meme, teaching how Jeannette (Joseph), like all the gay men Judy sang to, just had to keep on keeping on come what may.

Why couldn't the *Drumb and Drumber* cartoon strip also spin out a caricature of John Embry exiting the bank where he bragged he had been laughing, with fistfuls of money, because he had unloaded *Drummer* on the “fools who bought it.” My satire was meant as a true homage to *Drummer* editor Joseph W. Bean who can dine out on his own “Trouble in the Rubble” stories forever.

Besides the ruin of the *Drummer* office itself, DeBlase's second brick-and-mortar business, the brand new retail shop, SandMutoptopia Supply Co., was destroyed. Disaster and debt crushed the plan of any separate “extra” issue of *Drumb and Drumber*. So, for *Drummer* 138 (March 1990), Bean and DeBlase incorporated my downsized *Drumber* parody into one of those stunts where a magazine flipped upside down and backwards has a “new front cover” on its back cover.

During the production melee in the ravaged ruins of the *Drummer* office, someone changed my original spelling design of *Drumb and Drumber* to the asymmetrical *Drumb and Dummer*. The pun referenced the zippy style of previous special issue titles: *The Best and the Worst of Drummer*, *Son of Drummer*, and *Drummer Rides Again*. In the stressed office, someone thought it amusing to write “Cover Photo by Bob Maple Thorp.” At least, he emphasized the proper pronunciation of Mapplethorpe who had just died.

Drummer 140, eight months after the quake, was a watershed issue (June 1990). As participant and inside survivor of the *Drummer* experience, I shot the cover of that *Drummer* 140 and several interior photographs.

More importantly, I witnessed up close the anguish of DeBlase who had, without irony, asked if Mark Hemry and I wanted to buy *Drummer*, or buy into *Drummer*, or fold *Drummer* into Palm Drive Video, or...

And we said: "Tony, is that any way to treat your friends?"

DeBlase confessed he was hoping the Mafia would come bail him out as it had so many other gay magazines that were his competition. He had arrived at the same corporate conclusion that I had in the late 1970s when I told Embry, whose long post-cancer recovery nearly bankrupted the magazine, that maybe we should approach the Mafia about underwriting *Drummer*. DeBlase ended his public "For Sale" announcement with a code—that was not a joke—spinning the tag line from *The Godfather*. He really did hope that some handsome Mafioso would make him an offer he could not refuse. Indicating the dollar value he put on the abstract social media value that was *Drummer*, the desperate DeBlase wrote:

DRUMMER IS FOR SALE

Own a Piece of the Drum...Or the Whole Damned Orchestra!

Problems stemming from the October 1989 earthquake are compounding, and Desmodus, Inc. is experiencing severe cash flow problems. We are taking many cost-cutting steps, but are in need of capital to continue producing magazines on schedule.

A loan of several thousand dollars could buy you a piece of a particular issue. A hundred thousand dollars could buy a partnership in the company. Or, for a few times that, you could own the nation's premier Leather magazine, as well as *Mach*, *Foreskin Quarterly*, the Mr. Drummer Contest, many associated names and titles, a huge reserve of back issues and a spectacular photo library.

DungeonMaster and the SandMutopia Supply Co. [his core businesses] are not for sale, unless, of course, someone makes an offer I cannot refuse.

Interested? Write me at PO Box 11314, San Francisco, CA 94101, or phone (415)252-1195. —Anthony F. DeBlase

Right there in *Drummer* 140, page 5, DeBlase acknowledged the accumulated treasure trove of "a spectacular photo library" which belonged to the photographers and was not really his or *Drummer's* to sell. It was that

“treasure trove” of photos and drawings and original manuscripts and letters that mysteriously disappeared in the 1990s, after Martijn Bakker bought it from DeBlase, and while Robert Davolt was its so-called “editor and publisher” who was dedicated to the pillaging of all things *Drummer* to fatten Embry’s files.

In *Drummer* 141, page 8, DeBlase waffled and prevaricated, saying he was “no longer actively seeking a buyer.” But he was. In *Drummer* 150, he ran a full-page ad again announcing “*Drummer* for Sale,” page 4. In order to unload *Drummer*, he had to change his tune so that the magazine seemed valuable and successful even while he and Andy Charles in private were nervously plotting to dump *Drummer* and escape to Oregon.

In the end, is it wrong to put the “creative differences” of “gay business” (*Drummer*’s business) all on Embry? Publishing *Drummer* was hell for him too, even though his cash and censorship problems were mostly of his own making, whereas DeBlase was undone by the combined punches of the VCR and HIV. Embry’s gay publishing competitors, gay advertisers, straight printers, and venal distributors who drove him to distraction were in their own ways guilty of a kind of jealousy, envy, and greed that also shaped *Drummer*. They were all businessmen salivating to make money off the work of writers, artists, and photographers, paid or not.

As a main eyewitness of Embry and of my editorship of *Drummer*, Rick Leathers, author of “A New Mazeway for Homomascuine Men” (*Manifest Reader* 17, 1992), wrote me a New Year’s greeting, January 6, 2006. Leathers was one of Embry’s most favored and most published writers. The allegations and information are solely his eyewitness testimony:

...I worked for Embry and Andy Charles and Tony de’Blob [DeBlase] off-n-on over 19 years. I watched as *Drummer* become a parody of a self-parody. “Your” [Fritscher’s] *Drummer* died on the vine when you departed because you had the message and Embry only had the medium. John [Embry] only wanted to publish goofy photos with cutesy-poo dialog balloons for funzies. And suck the pee-pees of blondboyz). His whole approach came from his early imprinting of Judy and Mickey cleaning out the old barn so they could put on a show.

Embry never got over the LA cops’ raid on that silly “Slave Auction.” He showed me part of his autobiography once. It’s a pathetic tale of how EVERYBODY [*sic*] betrayed his vision and refused to build his dreams to his brilliant expectations. He calls it *Epilogues* [*sic*]. Though I’m not big on book burning, I do hope

they toss it on his funeral pyre. “Robert Payne” has spent his entire life wallowing in self-pity. And when Mario died, all business sense went with him. Embry’s net worth is only about [amount omitted by JF] (mostly in shabby real estate). Mario’s relatives [he alleged] came from Spain and ripped John off for most of the money Mario had stashed away. When Frank Hatfield died [after being mauled by a dog], John grabbed what little Frank had. The whole Embry bio is tacky and pointless.

Embry wasn’t the biggest prick in gay publishing.
All professions are the same.

Katharine Hepburn, who played her part in *Some Dance to Remember* (Reel 6, Scene 3), said about acting: “Most people in this profession are pigs.”

Cue the villains and violins.

One survives publishing the way one survives the circular firing squad of gay culture: sheer discipline.

My heart was tender in those days before I was hardened by Embry and the cruelty of the gay world which is no more cruel than other worlds; yet it was the gay world that was most cruel to me when my heart was tender.

But, like Joseph and Judy and Jeannette in the ruins, I was never defeated, and if I were, I’d never admit it.

All my writing is the story of that.

In my writing, most of the characters in my stories end as couples.

So do Embry and I couple: although antithetically.

I must confess that I enjoy a tad of *Schadenfreude* that in the pitched battle which Embry waged so jealously against David Goodstein, Goodstein won.

Embry must have cringed when on page 89 in *Drummer* 145 (December 1990), *The Advocate* paid for a full-page display ad with an order blank to subscribe to “*The Advocate*...the most influential gay and lesbian publication in the world!”

Drummer ended bankrupt.

PlanetOut.com announced purchase of *The Advocate* for \$31.1 million dollars in November 2005.

So much for laughing all the way to the bank.