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1.5: NOVEMBER 2004



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**NAUGHTY
OR NICE?**

1.6: DECEMBER 2004

PRIDE, RALLY, PRIDE!

by Robin Leigh Kessler

EQUALITY = JUSTICE
JUNE 25 26 27 2004 THE ATLANTA PRIDE CELEBRATION

Equality=Justice. A mantra. A battle cry. A call for action. A theme for the 2004 Atlanta Pride Celebration – poignant and relevant in light of the current political and social climate that threatens the freedom and liberty of every gay individual as well as the principles of democracy and morality that define the spirit and origins of America. This year's Atlanta Pride Festival, June 25–27, transcends our annual celebration of diversity and unity, becoming a community-empowered challenge to defeat the impending federal and state constitutional amendments that seek to deny the right to same-sex marriages and gay unions.

“Pride 2004 is a collective opportunity to commiserate, communicate and formulate a plan of action to defeat SR595 and the constitutional amendment that denies our right to same-sex marriage,” said Donna Narducci, executive director of the Atlanta Pride Committee since 1995. “There's still cause to celebrate the victories, but we need to stay focused on the struggle that remains. Pride is a forum to bring our community together for soul searching, understanding and empowerment.”

According to Narducci, there will be a greater activist presence throughout this year's parade, entertainment and speakers addressing ways to fight constitutional discrimination – including Marriage Equality Georgia, the Human Rights Campaign, and Allen Thornell, former executive director of Georgia Equality. “We should all walk away with a personal plan of action,” Narducci asserted. “With every year, we see an increased participation from the various constituents of our community, and this year our entertainment and political agenda bring something for everyone.”

While political motivation will spark the gay masses, the music of Pride 2004 will be as passionate and diverse as the activism. The scheduled talent ranges from Janis Ian – feminist folk icon – to Lisa Jackson & Girl Friday – “trannie-rock hellion” leading a lip-glossed punk/pop band – accompanied by two days of harmonic convergence to strike reverberant chords into our hearts and heels. Other highlights include an opening night with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra; Doria Roberts, singer/songwriter/activist who belts out a bohemian blend of folk, jazz and pop; the Daemon Records Artist Review, featuring musical and spoken word artists courtesy of Amy Ray's non-profit label; Three5Human (formerly Stereo Popsicle), a guitar-grooving rock band fronted by mesmerizing lead singer Trina Meade; and impassioned pop-rocker Robin Leigh wailing on the acoustic stage.



Janis Ian, who achieved superstardom in the 1970s with the song “At Seventeen,” headlines the Coca-Cola main stage Saturday night. For more than three decades, Ian's vital music has brought her wide acclaim as one of the great American troubadours. Last summer, she married her partner of 14 years, Patricia Snyder, in Canada because they could not marry in the United States. “As a couple, we wanted the same rights and the same social recognition our heterosexual friends have. We also got married because, just like coming out, public figures need to do that to make the rest of the world aware ... because at the end of the day it's a civil rights issue. It's the right to marry who you want to

marry regardless of color, regardless of religion, regardless of gender. How can you arbitrate someone else's right to civil rights?”

After schedule conflicts prevented her from performing at last year's Pride Festival, Ian's appearance comes at the perfect time. “We are introducing her to a new generation of women who never had the exposure to activism that prevailed in the '70s,” says Pride Entertainment Coordinator Jennifer Sheffield. “Women have been fighting for gender equality for a long time, and Ian brings the anthem of equality and justice full circle.”

For lesbians, gays and the entire colorful spectrum of our community, the hymn of equality is an inspiration to sing, chant, dance and cheer a collective call. “It's important that people come to Pride this year and encourage others to join with the community,” said Narducci, “energized, empowered and together to defeat the anti-gay marriage resolution.”



Boy Georgia to Girl Friday

Lisa Jackson, a transplanted Georgia native who transitioned in New York City to pursue a music career as a rock-n-roll woman, has taken the notion of being “labeled” and thrown it to the wind. Lisa Jackson & Girl Friday are one of NYC's most buzzed-about acts, brandishing a unique mix of punk rock energy a la Deborah Harry, playing to packed houses at the legendary CBGB and venues around the country.

LJ&GF take the stage Sunday at 6:35PM.

background photo by Al Pellenberg

The music business seems to be one of the few avenues where women have always enjoyed equal footing and respect with men. For every Frank Sinatra, there was a Judy Garland. For every Bob Dylan, there was a Joan Baez. For every Run DMC, there was a Queen Latifah. And the good news is that women continue to stand and deliver in genres other than the lesbian-cornered folk-pop.

singing their own tune

by Dale Dean

Take Athens Boys Choir. The duo of Katz and Rocket spout a distinctive brand of social and political spoken-word commentary that pulls no punches. They're currently riding high on their first CD, *Rhapsody in T*, which was released on Indigo Girl Amy Ray's Daemon Records label in August.

"It's been received well," says Katz, 24. "It was the perfect time to release a CD where two homos get to be mad at the state of our country, then talk about sex to relieve the tension."

But *Rhapsody in T* isn't the only distinctive thing about Athens Boys Choir. Although the duo, who met in 2001 when they were students at the University of Georgia, are biologically female, Katz and Rocket are a pair of "jeans wearin', sailor swearin', bend and tuckin', gender fuck-in' dudes," according to their bio. By making this statement, they are being honest with themselves and the public about how they see themselves fitting into society's scheme of things.

"This wasn't something we identified as until a few years ago," says Rocket, 21. Rejecting strict definitions and characteristics of sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bi), Rocket felt more in sync with looser definitions of gender and sexuality.

"We're what I call 'gender queer' because I think it's more ambiguous, and I slide around the spectrum," agrees Katz.

Michael J. Fox for President?

Gay issues, especially gay marriage, have certainly been a hot topic this past year, both in Georgia and in the U.S. Given their convictions on sexual, social, and political affairs, Athens Boys Choir have understandably been keeping a

close watch on the candidates' positions. On the eve of the Presidential election, both guys admit to feeling a heightened sense of passion and purpose in their work.

"I'm feeling like I'm sitting around waiting for Armageddon," says Katz. "We've been preach-

ing at all our shows."

"We're continuing to speak our minds as far as politics goes, and hopefully it will make an even bigger difference," says Rocket.

In the hotly contested race for the White House, they paid particular notice to the televised debates.

"I felt like the vice presidential debate was a bad rerun," Katz says. "I think Kerry is headed in the right direction, but it's hard to trust a politician these days. It's too bad we can't get that *Back to the Future* car as Air Force One—then we could just erase the whole mess."

Leading by example

With their candid, in-your-face opinions on such a wide range of issues at such a young age expressed through their outside-the-mainstream medium, Athens Boys Choir could be called groundbreaking. They downplay that label, however, citing such spoken-word maestros as the Atlanta group Cliterati and CC Carter, Nikki Patton and Alix Olson, and hip-hop musical groups like Digable Planets, Jurassic 5, Juba Kalamka and Blackalicious as influences on their content and style.

Katz and Rocket's out, proud, strong personalities and the tracks of *Rhapsody in T* might be an empowering

breath of fresh air to today's GLBTQ youth.

"We do try to throw it all on the table, and talking about our discomfort as young teenage queers definitely sheds some light on a general feeling that many queer teenagers are still dealing with right now," says Rocket. "So though I don't think that either one of us started out trying to empower youth, if that's what is occurring, or if we are reaching younger people, then it makes me proud."

Not your average belly-dancer

"Groundbreaking" can also apply to pop-dance diva Deeyah. The 27-year-old singer was born and raised in Oslo, Norway, by parents of Pakistani, Afghani, and Persian descent. Despite strong cultural prejudices about females of Muslim and Southwest Asian heritage, she was determined to overcome that discrimination. Her will to make great, positive music has helped her forge ahead as a strong, confident woman.

Deeyah's training for the music business commenced early. "When I was 7, [my father] heard me belting out a song on the playground," she says. "He called me inside and told me to sing it again in front of him. I did. The very next day, he wrapped up all my toys and Barbie dolls in a black garbage bag. The day after that, he brought home a one-octave Casio keyboard for me."

For a couple of years, she resented the subsequent exhaustive battery of musical studies and practicing, which prevented her from fully enjoying many of the typical childhood pursuits like birthday parties and playtime with friends. "However, once I started performing, I quickly realized that I loved it and very soon music became my passion," she says.

For 12 years, Deeyah received classical Indian vocal training from Ustad Fateh Ali Khan and Ustad Sultan Khan, who had earlier instructed George Harrison and Tina Turner. While growing up, she listened to American R&B artists

Athens Boys Choir: Rocket (top left) & Katz (bottom right)
www.daemonrecords.com • photo courtesy of Daemon Records



THE FIRST LADIES OF GEORGIA

The calendar is not Karla Drenner's friend. As the Southeast's first openly gay lawmaker, some of her days during the legislative session can drag on forever.

But not now. Now the clock has sped up.

Last month, the four-year veteran state representative did what no one else in Georgia was both willing and able to do—she stepped up at the 11th hour and took over as campaign manager of Georgians Against Discrimination, a newly formed nonprofit group leading the statewide effort to defeat Constitutional Amendment 1. The amendment is an effort to not only change Georgia's constitution forever, defining marriage as strictly between a man and a woman, but also to prevent any legal recognition of domestic partnerships in Georgia, a move which could adversely affect many Fortune 500 benefits packages and those companies' ability to draw talented employees to the state.

With time fast running out between now and the Nov. 2 vote, Drenner is faced with the seemingly impossible task of finding the necessary 1.3 million Georgia voters needed to defeat the Christian Coalition-led effort. Most say it won't happen, but Drenner isn't listening. She's been here before.

"I've faced these odds before, and I've won," she said last month, sitting in the Avondale Estates home she shares with her two children and two cats, Faith and Hope.

"They told me women don't get two Ph.D.s and work in environmental safety. They told

me Georgians wouldn't elect an openly gay lawmaker. They told me you couldn't go up against some of the good-old-boy networks and win. They were wrong then, and I know in my heart they're wrong now. We're going to get this done."

Perhaps taking on the under-funded, hobbled-by-internal-strife effort isn't such a surprise for Drenner. She's come a long way from "that little girl in Charleston, West Virginia," and the road hasn't always been easy. Two years ago, she released a critically acclaimed book about her historic first campaign, *One: A True Story of Politics, Prayer, and the Power of One* written with Paul D. Clere.

During her first term in office, Drenner, a dedicated woman of faith, would show up at the Capitol's morning prayer meetings only to find they had moved the meetings without telling her. On more than one occasion when she got on elevators, everyone would get off—and not on the floor they had intended.

"A lot of my colleagues didn't make it easy on me that first year," she admits.

On particularly difficult days, Drenner says she draws inspiration and strength from many sources, at least one of which is highly public yet shrouded in mystery.

"When I walk in under the dome every day, I am well aware of who sits on top of it," Drenner said. "It's not one of the founding fathers, or one of our former governors or lawmakers. It's Miss Freedom—a woman. She's our Statue of Liberty. All of our state's best values are

embodied in her. I think that gives hope to every woman—gay or straight, or black or white or Latina, or rich or poor—who strives to make Georgia a better place. The fact that we aren't exactly sure who she is or where she comes from just makes her contribution that much more meaningful to me."

GLBT Roll Call

While Drenner boasts the highest profile when it comes to lesbian elected officials in Georgia, she is far from alone.

Cathy Woolard broke down the front door when she became the first gay woman elected to public office as a member of the Atlanta City Council in 1997. She is currently taking a break from politics after an unsuccessful run for Congress this year.

The ever-sassy Kecia Cunningham made them rewrite the history books when she became the first openly gay black elected official in Georgia as a City of Decatur Commissioner in 1999. She brought her constituents to their feet when she successfully spearheaded the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identification in Decatur three years ago, but sadly, Cunningham is still only one of two African-American lesbians currently in office in the entire nation.

Just a few miles down the road, Drenner upped the ante by becoming the first openly gay state lawmaker in the entire Southeast in 2000.

Anne Fauver led the "second generation" as the first lesbian to follow a fellow member of the GLBT community. She successfully ran for Woolard's vacated seat when Woolard moved on up to President of the Atlanta City Council in 2001.

Thankfully there are Karlas and Kecias and Annes getting elected all over the country these days. The past 30 years has seen a significant emerging trend in U.S. political history, according to Brian K. Bond, the former executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, a nonprofit group dedicated to electing qualified openly gay candidates nationwide.

HOW WOMEN ARE TAKING A SEAT AT THE POLITICAL TABLE

by Jennifer J. Smith

MISS FREEDOM

While Drenner and countless others take inspiration from the Capitol's leading lady, her origins may have been lost to history.

During the Great Depression, Georgia's economy was firmly rooted in agriculture, and the lean years hit farming harder and longer than any other sector of the economy, according to another Georgia leading lady, Secretary of State Cathy Cox. State government had to be very frugal with its expenditures during this time, and no funds were available for the Capitol's upkeep.

By the 1950s, Miss Freedom was literally falling apart, according to Cox. Her raised torch-bearing arm had loosened and swung back and forth in a stiff wind as though she were signaling for help. During the 1959 restoration of the Capitol dome, Miss Freedom was painted a pale gray and a light was installed in her hand. Today she is ensconced in scaffolding undergoing another renovation—with the hopes that she will inspire another century of Georgians.

Several stories have been offered over the years on her origin, but the least colorful is considered the most likely. The statue is attributed to the Mullins Manufacturing Corporation of Salem, Ohio, but the exact date that she was perched on the Gold Dome remains unclear, sometime immediately after the turn of the last century. She remains a favorite tourist draw, and a replica of her is on display on the fourth floor of the Capitol building.

Victory Fund has poured approximately \$4 million into the coffers of gay candidates nationwide over the last decade, including many in Georgia.

Most gay activists can tell you that Harvey Milk became the first openly gay man elected into major political office when he took his seat on the San Francisco Board of Representatives in 1977. Perhaps less well known is that, three decades later, there are 275 GLBT individuals serving in 34 states. A great start, most observers agree, but that's still an incredibly small number compared to the over 511,000 elective offices that make up the nation's federal, state and local governments. Thirteen states have no openly gay office-holders serving at any level of government, according to Victory Fund.

The responsibilities of membership

Not surprisingly, being a political pioneer isn't all glory. "It's a blessing, but it comes with a price tag, too," said Cunningham, an executive with Wachovia Bank. "You represent an entire community to many people because you're visible. So you think about the fact that if you make a mistake, it could adversely affect people's opinions about an entire community. That's some serious responsibility, even if it is self-imposed."

On the other hand, a frontline concern of many openly gay politicians is that they will be pegged as a single-issue candidate, concerned only about gay issues and, consequently, run the risk of turning off non-gay voters. It's a tightrope, for what value is an openly gay candidate if he or she can't advocate for the gay community?

But each woman also brings her own issues to the table, too, Fauver stresses.

"I love who I am and what I've accomplished for my community," she said, "but I see my job as imminently larger than just advocating for gay issues. For example, I've worked for the past year with 45 citizens on revising our liquor laws in Atlanta—an issue that affects everyone equally." The city's liquor code has gone unchanged for 25 years, despite drastic changes in the industry and Atlanta's surrounding communities.

Fauver also put in hundreds of hours of effort into the Living Wage legislation last year, and works tirelessly on small business and environmental issues. She has

worked as a volunteer for Atlanta Public Schools, helped to found the Symphony for Tots Program and the AIDS Research Consortium of Atlanta, and has also been an advocate for child abuse victims and battered women.

All politics is local

In order to continue to do the good work they have accomplished, each of these women has to face another election every few years. "It definitely comes around too often," Drenner laughed.

As a state representative, Karla Drenner faces reelection every two years. She has been lucky—she's had no opposition in her first two reelection cycles.

Kecia Cunningham's term on the Decatur City Commission is four years. After being elected in 1999, she had her first reelection campaign last year—which she won without opposition—and will serve through 2007. But Cunningham is already looking to greener pastures, specifically the Georgia House of Representatives.

"It's no secret that I would like to continue to serve my neighbors on a state level," she said last month, and she could join Drenner by running for a House seat as early as 2006.

Atlanta City Council member Anne Fauver was initially elected in 2001 and will face her first reelection bid in 2005.

In addition to their official duties, personal lives and their own campaign efforts, all of the women are actively involved in getting progressive women—both gay and straight—elected.

"This is a team effort," said Drenner, who recruits neighborhood activists into running for higher office. "We can't do it alone. And as much as we need more openly gay elected officials in Georgia, the answer isn't as simple as just waiting for more gays and lesbians to win office. We have to reach out to those in other

communities and form alliances. You have to find candidates you support and trust across the board and help them out."

Indeed, all three women have endorsed Congresswoman Denise Majette in her nationally watched race for Zell Miller's seat. If she wins on Nov. 2, she would be the first woman as well as the first African-American representing Georgia in the U.S. Senate.



Karla Drenner



Kecia Cunningham



Anne Fauver

Bringing it home

"It's weird, really, how time speeds up and slows down during important points in your life," Drenner said. "The past four years that I've served my constituents have just flown by, but nothing like the past few weeks of working on this campaign. It's so much more personal. We didn't go looking for this fight—they brought it home to us. I don't think it's a stretch to say that we're defending our families and our quality of life. No one wants to fight a battle on their home turf, but that's what we've been forced to do."

"And it's all going to come down to the next 30 days or so," she said, quickly glancing at the calendar.

Jennifer J. Smith, volunteer coordinator for U.S. Senate candidate Denise Majette and a former political writer for Southern Voice, has worked on several local campaigns and is an activist for women's issues in Atlanta.