

CHEECH MARIN • GLENN CLOSE • DAVID LYNCH • JOE FRANK

NOVEMBER 1999

THREE FIFTY

L.A. STYLE



AROUND THE HOUSE

THE EAMES LEGACY

EASY BRUNCHES

THE NEW HEIRLOOMS

L.A. ARTISANS





THREE'S COMPANY

FOR DAVID YOUNG, LIFE WAS A LOST WEEKEND—OF dames. In a word, he was a love lush. He could fake out the boss on most hangovers, until “one too many” happened to be a client’s wife. And then it was go on the wagon or else. But how, when a guy can’t break the habit? And then the club came to the rescue. . . . *BACHELORS ANONYMOUS*. A well-stirred yarn about man’s worst vice—women—and the only sure way to take the cure. . . . —Back cover of a 1956 pulp novel entitled *Bachelors Anonymous*.

More than three decades after the publication of Vivian Connell’s novel *Bachelors Anonymous* comes a trio of mostly confirmed bachelors ready to take on the mantle of the fictional club. Today’s Bachelors Anonymous is a musical group that got its name from a gay men’s organization founded in the 1940s. The first Bachelors Anonymous was formally known as the International Bachelors Fraternal Order for Peace and Social Dignity.

But this reverent history strays from the subject at hand—three Los Angeles musicians whose work combines a tongue-in-cheek, sleaze-novel sensibility with gay political observations. Our story started five years ago when Robert Berg, a fresh-faced Canadian who’d just spent six years meditating as a Vedanta Society monk, forsook the light and plunged back into the murk of civilian society. While in the monastery, he and his band, the Razor’s Edge, had produced an album called *The Only Way Out Is In*. Still the music lover and music maker, Berg joined a Catholic choir.

Enter David Hughes, another non-Catholic imposter attending choir practice. His previous musical tenure was with Age of Consent, a trio that achieved local notoriety in the early ’80s delivering sharp cultural observations in the then unheard-of format of rap.

“One day he showed up and sat beside me,” Berg remembers. “He was the only one that had bleached blond hair and a cross in his ear.”



Bringing a sleaze-novel sensibility to today’s music—ready or not, here come Bachelors Anonymous.

Executives exchange business cards; Hughes and Berg did the musician’s equivalent and exchanged tapes. What blossomed wasn’t romantic love, but a good second—musical collaboration. For some mysterious reason, press coverage of the Bachelors keeps getting that romance part wrong, prompting them to gently correct an inference in an article in *Music Connection*. “Contrary to popular belief,” they wrote, “we are not, nor have we ever been, a ‘couple.’ We remain eligible bachelors.”

Well, almost. Enter Del Mar Richardson, the newest Bachelor, who joined up last year. Bisexual, he pleads guilty to having a girlfriend, but the other Bachelors are tolerant. When the group is asked to speak up so that their voices can be recorded clearly, it’s Richardson who blurts, “I knew I should have taken my testosterone today!”

The Bachelors describe their largely electronic music as “techno-fag” or “nerd music.” Musical influences were Lennon and McCartney for Berg, Peter Gabriel for Richardson, and for Hughes, David Bowie.

“It wasn’t until I heard *Ziggy Stardust* that I knew popular culture had anything to offer me in terms of the way I felt,” says Hughes. “I remember hearing that record played twice straight through on this station in Colorado. It was such an amazing creation. It only reinforced my feelings that I had to get out of town, and I went for the nearest big city.”

Ziggy Stardust may have been an inspiration musically, but there’s no particular attraction to the Ziggy Stardust look. (Although on the cover of a 45 the band produced, containing two new takes on old Christmas carols, Berg and Hughes re-create *La Pieta*, with Berg doing a saintly turn as the long-suffering virgin mother.)

In spite of some gimmicky costuming, the Bachelors dress like regular Joes, with an occasional exotic touch thrown in. Hughes is darkly handsome again now that the blond has grown out. Berg remains the real blond. Catching sight of his reflection in a *Continued on page 210*

In Character

Continued from page 73

mirror—jeans, black T-shirt topped with white dress shirt, a silver pentagram necklace pulling the whole look together—Richardson snickers, “Ah, the trendy satanist!”

Regarding the group’s fashion statement, Berg points to Hughes.

“I used to know what we were doing, but now I’m bewildered,” laughs Hughes. “We used to be going for an upstanding young bachelor look. Sort of ‘Dad,’ mid-sixties.

question ends.

“People who’ve been arrested for sodomy. Anybody who’s been arrested for small amounts of drugs, I don’t think that’s such a big deal. That antinuclear activist who dismantled the computer at Livermore Laboratories, she should be let go.” Hughes joins in: “Every single undocumented worker who’s been arrested for that being their only quote-unquote crime should be let go and allowed to work, period. Open the borders, let’s put bridges across their stupid troughs.”

What blossomed wasn't love, but a good second— musical collaboration.

We watched all those documentaries—*Eyes on the Prize*—that sort of look. The civil rights worker look, shirtsleeves and ties.”

Elaboration on the fine points of fashion is interrupted by a phone call, and Hughes gets up to answer it. Although they are not, repeat, not a couple, Hughes and Berg live together in an unassuming Pasadena duplex. Their home is like that of many a gay artist-type, with droll touches everywhere. A case in point is the centerpiece of every home, the living room fireplace mantle. Vivian Connell’s immortal novel is proudly displayed there, along with a tableau of small, diverse figures that falls somewhere between a shrine and a peep show. Our Lady of Guadalupe mingles with Oz dolls, He-Men, the kneeling prince from Disney’s *Cinderella*, and every gay household’s patron icon, a Pee-wee Herman doll. Two of the male dolls are copulating with abandon.

“Robert,” Hughes calls from the phone, “it’s the handicapped people. They want to know if we want to buy a package of light bulbs. Two bulbs for forty dollars. They say they last forever.”

“Forty dollars is a roll of tape,” he replies, with the calm simplicity of the longtime monk.

Hughes turns the caller down, then remembering the reporter, gasps in mock horror, “Oh, no! Will this story say we don’t want to help the handicapped?”

Not wanting to capitalize on this I veer the dialogue to a hypothetical situation. Who would the Bachelors pardon from prison if they could? Berg’s answer begins before the

“James Brown,” Berg interjects.

“I’m waiting now to be asked who should be in jail,” Hughes says slyly, prompting Richardson’s nomination: “Everyone in the Senate.”

Dead historical figures they’d like to conjure up? One vote for Jesus Christ, two votes for Ramakrishna and Hughes’s wistful, “It’d be Laurence Harvey, and I’d ask him if he’d go out with me.”

When it’s time down the road for Hollywood to make *The Bachelors Anonymous Story*, the subjects want Dennis Potter to write it and either Stephen Frears or Wim Wenders to direct it. And the cast is selected: Ben Kingsley to play David Hughes, Daniel Day-Lewis would be Berg’s “idealized version of me,” and Richardson turned down a suggestion of Rob Lowe to play him in favor of his choice, River Phoenix.

Bachelors Anonymous has performed its highly theatrical, though not campy, act around town at venues like the Lhasa Club, Club Lingerie, BeBop Records and the Anti-Club. (“We don’t have that campy gene,” Berg notes. “We can’t force it.”) They’ve also hit the stage at UCLA, the Sunset Junction Street Fair, the *L.A. Weekly* Rock Against AIDS benefit and the Gay Pride Festival. Their debut cassette entitled *Bachelors Anonymous* and their Christmas 45, *Mr. Wenceslas/God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*, are available at Silver Lake’s A Different Light Bookstore. The Bachelors are currently hard at work on an album, *Looking for You*, recording segments as their funds permit. Guess the handicapped people will have to wait a little longer. □