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New Saloons and Vaudeville

Saloons had not always been metaphors for evil. As historian Norman Clark noted in his account of Washington's Prohibition movement, there had been a time, before George Cotterill and Mark Matthews, when American lawmakers thought saloons were "dedicated to the values of fellowship, equality, and euphoria" and had even mandated them in every town. Clark adds, "It was a warm and quiet retreat where men could explore the pleasures of friendship . . . a place where one could lift the burdens of caste, of status, and of the more restrictive social inhibitions, and thus freed, could grasp for the dim image of his own individuality." Even as late as the 1890s, a national committee of lawyers, clergy, and teachers concluded that saloons were "meeting the thirst for fellowship, for amusement, and for recreation."[1]

After 1916, saloons officially disappeared in Seattle when state voters banned the sale of liquor in them. Seattle's citizens still found plenty of ways to drink, but as a social institution the public saloon had to wait until 1933 for its return, after the repeal of national Prohibition. When that happened, the first traces of a public community of gay men and women in Seattle started to emerge. In the new saloons, the city's homosexuals would grasp for Clark's "dim image" of individuality, defining that in their terms—not in the rhetoric of law or psychiatry. For a quarter-century, from about 1933 until 1958, the community that was slowly forming found its center in saloons below the Deadline.

The end of Prohibition did not mean the end of restrictions, however. The new Washington Liquor Control Board had to approve all names, so it prevented any establishment from advertising itself as a "saloon," so powerfully negative were the connotations attached to the word itself. Instead, the replacements were restrictively licensed as taverns or, if they offered entertainment, as cabarets, or as after-hours clubs that operated once the taverns were forced to close by a curfew. The new regulators could dictate percentages of food to be sold in proportion to liquor. They could set restrictions on whether an establishment could sell beer, wine, or liquor, and whether it could be sold by the glass or the bottle. The inspectors and the city councils dictated how bright the new saloons had to be, how far inside pedestrians could see to ensure that behavior stayed respectable, whether there could be entertainment, what types of language the entertainers could use,

how they had to dress. Sexual suggestiveness in particular could be controlled—the way entertainers or customers dressed. There were, in short, plenty of new rules that police and state inspectors could use to control the reemergence of the red-light district and the new homosexual subculture that gradually formed there. That meant there were also plenty of ways for the police to make money from tolerating violations of the rules, continuing the payoff tradition begun in John Considine's days.

Perhaps not surprisingly, among the first corners back in action was the one at Washington and Second. During the depression, the old People's underground had been converted into a dance hall called the Casino, possibly in association with the Casino Hotel located just across Washington. A marquee with the name "Casino Dancing" had been erected over the wide staircase that rose up to the avenue. Just a block away, according to city directories, a man named Joseph Bellotti was selling soft drinks and running billiard games at the Northwest Cigar Store. Once Prohibition ended, Bellotti appears to have seen an opportunity. The city directory indicates that by 1933 this man (who for several years listed his address simply as a hotel room) had taken charge of the renamed Casino Pool Room; by 1937, with the help of a bartender named John DelleVitti, he was also running a tavern upstairs.[2] Forsaking the old saloon names, he called it the Double Header, a clean-enough sports term to pass the liquor board's surveillance. Those who quickly filled both Bellotti's upstairs and downstairs could hardly have missed the either intended or unintended pun's reference to oral sodomy.

One gay man, going by the drag name of Vilma, remembered arriving at the Casino's staircase in the 1930s. "We could hardly wait to get down those stairs," he told local writers Don Paulson and Roger Simpson for their book *An Evening at the Garden of Allah.* Vilma had grown up in Minneapolis, enjoyed dressing in drag, and had heard about the Casino from two friends who had visited it. "That's all I heard," he said. "Seattle, Seattle, Seattle and this fabulous place called the Casino and all the neat kids there." On a whim, he hopped on a boxcar and headed west.[3]

The initial decorations in what seems to have been Seattle's first gay Shangri-la were spartan: a few Coca-Cola signs and a photo of Franklin Roosevelt. But it was the refuge and the people that mattered the most.

"John [DelleVitti] wouldn't let anyone mess with the queens," Vilma told Paulson and Simpson. "They protected us, and we loved them for that. They'd do anything for you if they liked you, even bail you out of jail. . . . The Casino was the only place on the West Coast that was so open and free for gay people." For the next three decades, one gay man or woman after another would find that all-important staircase on Washington Street, go down into the underground, and begin the process of both coming out and finding a new family.

Vilma remembered a gay man nicknamed Wilhelmina, who was still in high school. "She came down the stairs to the Casino," he said, "paused on the landing trying to look pretty and someone spoke to her and she fled up the stairs. Five

From the 1930s through the 1960s, gays and lesbians sought refuges and established social networks by meeting in rundown saloons or bathhouses, most often in Seattle's Pioneer Square. The oldest and two most famous bars were situated at the nondescript corner of Second Avenue South and South Washington Street, the location of John Considine's old underground People's Theater. The stairway to the underground (far left, behind pedestrian) led to the Casino, as did a smaller arched entrance (middle). The Double Header (right) provided aboveground drinking. *(MSCUA, University of Washington Libraries, UW18859)*

minutes later, she got nerve enough to come down the stairs only to fly up the stairs again. When she came down the stairs again, someone just grabbed her and said, 'It's okay, honey' and took her by the hand and introduced her to all the kids. Wilhelmina came out."

World War II provided a significant impetus for a more visible gay presence in Pioneer Square. As the conflict unfolded, the war first brought thousands of men to work in Seattle's airplane and shipbuilding industries, then packed the men away to military camps all around Puget Sound and replaced them with thousands of women. Women's roles in particular were altered. Boeing, for example, employed more than fourteen thousand women in its factories by 1943, and Miss Boeing of 1942 told her aerospace union's newsletter that she "liked men's work better because it doesn't seem so trivial and sissified."[4] After the war, many of the migrants stayed, and some found the mudflat. Pioneer Square began to take on a distinctly gay flavor—for those who knew where to look.

That was when Rose Bohanan made her way there. "Pioneer Square. That was

the only place at the time," she recalled in a later interview. "It was full of gay people, walking from one place to another."

"Felt like a carnival."[5]

Bohanan was not a war worker; she was still a teenager from south Seattle when she hit the streets on the mudflat a few years after the war ended. "I walked past the Double Header once when I was around thirteen [in the early 1950s] and I saw this flaming drag queen standing on the tables, dancing, throwing toilet paper up into the air. I knew I was home."

Later, when she was fifteen, she turned the street corner and went down the stairway to the Casino. "You went down, and you didn't come out until the sun was coming up the next morning on Sunday. And the eighth step up from there was a different size than all the rest of the steps. Of course, you'd been drinking all night. And you hit that step and there's very few who did not bust their nose on that upper step.

"The place was huge. And there were all sorts of depravations going on in every damn corner of that place. It was great when you were fifteen, you know." She laughed. "Yeah, like fights. This woman here who's been married to this woman here for the past two years is looking at that woman over there, over her shoulder. The fight ensues. Or she gets her in the bathroom, in some dark corner for sex.

"The women were very sexual. Under the tables." She laughed again. "I think in a lot of ways they were much more outrageous than the men down there.

"But I didn't get to know the women very well, because they were kind of standoffish [with] a child of fifteen. They'd pat me on the head or something. That's as far as I could get with the women."

In these new saloons, Seattle's homosexuals began to take care of one another and teach one another the rules of relationships that were seen by the rest of the city as perverse. Drag queens who frequented the two bars sometimes took those who were just coming out under their care. Bohanan, for example, remembered a man named Dee as "one of them that raised me." The older lesbians also helped her, in particular one named Cat who worked as a supervisor for Boeing. "She was a beautiful older woman with white, bright hair, and she wore powder-blue suit jackets. I was mouthy and streetwise. [She told me] 'Sit on the floor. Keep your mouth shut and just listen.' It was good advice. I learned from the older ones by doing just that."

"I learned what was okay to treat a woman as, and what was not. You do open a car door. You do light that cigarette. You do treat her like a lady. You never hit a woman. That kind of stuff."

There were other rules peculiar to the need to hide. "You should not openly come on to each other," Bohanan said. "That's why all the gay bars had a mirror behind the bar, because you can make eye contact through a mirror and you could not do it face to face."

Also, very importantly, "I didn't even know anybody's last name, and they

didn't know mine. Last names were a no-no. What did you do for a living was never spoken of, never in casual conversation. Your best friend might know, but that's it." What was discussed instead was "what kind of beer you liked, what kind of woman did you go for. That kind of stuff. But never any personal stuff. That just wasn't safe."

Harassment could be a problem. "Quite often," Bohanan recalled, "we had sailors come up from First Avenue [who] would try to crash a bar for women. . . . We had a bar full of lesbians and dykes. Toughies [and] real feminine girls, too, with high heels. [The sailors] came in and before the night was over the fight had begun. They [the women] weren't going to be pushed, they weren't going to be talked back to, they weren't going to do anything. And you couldn't call the cops. So, all the fixtures were torn off the walls. Women were dragging those men out on the sidewalk, just beating them to death."

Sometimes the harassment was directed at the different clothing homosexuals might wear. "[Heterosexual] men picked up some of the [drag] queens," Bohanan said, "the real small ones that are so effeminate—stabbing them, raping them, tearing them open. [The drag queens] couldn't go to the cops, they couldn't go to the hospital." If they did go to the hospital, they ran the risk of being harassed for not wearing the appropriate clothing—much as Bohanan and some of the more masculine-appearing women were for wearing male clothing. "Male impersonation, that was a cover-all [charge] for everything. They'd throw us in the men's tank, because we looked so manly they would say, [and they would] push you in there with the drunk men."

The Double Header and the Casino were pickup places too, both for the homosexuals in Seattle willing to be seen there and for those not willing—but who still knew about the corner at Washington and Second. When she first went to the Double Header, Bohanan said, eight women used to wait in the bar until "someone's chauffeur would come and pick one out and take them out to the lady's home." "Now, I hate to call them prostitutes. They're probably more like gigolos." Bohanan joined the group as its youngest member. "Off we would go in this chauffeured thing over to Bellevue. And usually there would be a note at the door as to what this lady [who had sent the driver] would want and what she would expect of you and what you were to be that evening . . . what kind of sex she liked, what kind of scene she wanted to play."

By the 1950s, then, John Considine's corner had become its own underground urban center for resisting the definitions of acceptability that had been created by Cotterill, Matthews, and the psychiatrists.

As homosexuals moved out of their individual isolation into loose social settings in Seattle, new forms of communicating became important in forging a sense of belonging.

Drag was most noticeable. Academics have written tomes trying to interpret

its use among homosexuals throughout the world, but perhaps the best explanation, at least of gay male drag, was offered by anthropologist Esther Newton in her 1970s book *Mother Camp*. She argued that "the drag queen symbolizes all that homosexuals say they fear the most in themselves, all that they say they feel guilty about: he symbolizes, in fact, the stigma" of not being masculine enough. Parodying the stigma that gay men are not masculine is one way of directly challenging sex roles that do not fit, Newton contended. Presumably her argument might also be extended to lesbians, like Rose Bohanan, who enjoyed male clothing. Yet the symbol is complex. Depending on how a homosexual felt about himself, Newton noted, the drag queen could easily be despised as embodying everything bad about homosexuality or, alternatively, be embraced as a powerful resistance to the expectation that everyone behave and dress a certain way.[6]

Other academics have suggested that there is a psychological reward to assuming the different personalities adopted as part of wearing drag. There is also the theatrical explanation: a mediocre performance given in gender-appropriate clothing may become a truly memorable extravaganza if acted in a spectacular gown. There is also the sheer play and clubhouse sense of belonging with others who are pursuing the same hobby of cross-dressing.

Whatever the explanation, two traditions in male drag quickly established themselves in Seattle, as elsewhere: that presented in respectable theaters, and that presented as part of vaudeville. In 1898, in the same month that John Considine was reopening the People's after its temporary closure by anti-liquor crusaders, the upscale Seattle Theater was staging *1492,* a dramatic as well as farcical reenactment of the discovery of America. It featured one of the country's most noted female impersonators. Both the *Seattle Times* and the *Post-Intelligencer* printed a sizable sketch of him with coiffed hair, his "breasts" delicately concealed, and his arms covered by a dress with puffed sleeves. His real name was Edward Stewart, but he was called "Stuart, the Male Patti," a reference to Adelina Patti, a well-known coloratura soprano. Stuart sang in an operatic falsetto voice and sometimes traveled to Europe to buy the latest Paris dresses for his act. In its review, the *Post-Intelligencer* noted that *1492* had opened to a packed theater, and then assured its readers that "Stuart, the central figure in '1492,' is inoffensively articulate in his female impersonation."[7]

On the other hand, the tradition of drag in vaudeville can be detected in the court records of that sodomy prosecution against Frederick Evans in 1910. Part of Evans's defense strategy had been to hire a private detective to follow his accuser, Dan Paxman, and to document what Evans probably already knew: that Paxman worked as a drag queen at one of the vaudeville shows on the mudflat. The court records do not say which theater Paxman acted in, but the detective reported that he had observed Paxman "singing and dancing in the low dives and vicious theaters in the underworld district." Paxman, the detective said, would "assume the garb of a female, greatly abbreviated at both ends, his face, neck and bosom rouged

and painted in the highest degree." Combined with the defense attorney's argument that doctors believed such persons were not credible as witnesses, the tactic of demeaning Paxman's reputation because he was an impersonator saved Evans from going to jail. No one believed the accusations of a drag queen.[8]

How extensive a role the early vaudeville theaters in Pioneer Square played in helping establish drag as a paying stage role in Seattle has not yet been well researched. For establishing vaudeville itself, though, John Considine played the protagonist, insisting on hiring real actresses and actors, leaving the drinks to be served by others, and employing an eventual stock company of twenty-five members. Considine touted it as "the grandest, greatest and best vaudeville and dramatic show ever seen in Seattle," and at one point, the People's even staged a presentation of *Damon and Pythias,* which its advertisement called "that soul-stirring four-act drama portraying brotherly love between man and man." Unfortunately, the advertisements the People's ran in city newspapers do not make clear how many of its acts may have included men or women dressed in drag, and so far the histories written about vaudeville in the city have focused on theaters more respectable than the People's.[9]

Vaudeville itself included two different types of drag queens: the glamorous prima donna who actually tried to look and even sing like an elegant woman, and the campy and often awkwardly costumed role of the "bitch." Unlike highbrow theater, vaudeville relied on improvisation, with both types of queens sometimes telling jokes, baiting audience members, and keeping control of hostile drunks or overly friendly admirers through the power of words alone.

Also unlike more formal theater, vaudeville audiences participated, creating their own role in the theatrical ritual, whether by catcalls, applause, or simply heading to the bar for a drink, something they could never do in a regular theater. In 1906, *Washington Magazine* portrayed why, by the 1940s and 1950s, vaudeville and drag could become an important method for constructing a new community among Seattle's homosexuals.

> The time is, say, 8:30 o'clock on any night of the year; the scene, one of the scores of playhouses scattered throughout the Northwest . . . where you hear the clapping of hands, the heavier stomping of feet, and the whole-souled laughter. . . . Inside the four walls of the ten-cent show, you may see the most democratic show on earth . . . rich and poor, old and young, looking only for pleasure, asking only to be amused, to forget for a while the strife and bitterness and pain of the outside world; to live for a while in a bright, painted, beautiful world of tinsel and brilliant lights and gaily dressed actors. . . . Long live vaudeville, democratic vaudeville, fascinating, cosmopolitan, generous, joyous vaudeville![10]

Similarly, historian Albert McLean argued that this particular form of theater helped assimilate waves of immigrants pouring into cities like Seattle at the end

of the nineteenth century, wanting ways to spend their new leisure time after leaving work and wanting new urban myths that promoted a sense of belonging. Vaudeville was ultimately about aspiring to success. "That surge of magical power evoked by brassy rhythms, the staccato wise-cracks, the poised charm of the 'star' . . . were all more immediately assimilated by the mass audience than were the legends of Horatio Alger and his imitators."[11]

By the late 1940s, the type of vaudeville promoted by individuals such as John Considine was officially dead in the mainstream, and the immigrant needs for stories about romance and comedy could be moved to the movie screen instead. However, that was not possible for those whose language or romance had no access to the screen. For them, vaudeville was still king in the saloons.

In December 1946, two gay men, Fred Coleman and Frank Reid, opened a new venue. Coleman had already invested in a tavern called the Spinning Wheel, located a few blocks north of the Deadline near the corner of Second Avenue and Union Street. The bar attracted both heterosexuals and homosexuals and sometimes offered cabarets featuring drag queens. Coleman and Reid envisioned a new partnership that would create a full-time moneymaking vaudeville with singers, performers, comedians, and—most important—the drag queens.

They located their new club in the basement of an old Victorian-style hotel not far from the Spinning Wheel, where the club could attract a clientele that might have been reluctant to venture into the mudflat's red-light district. The hotel, the Arlington, had opened in 1894, and with its proudly advertised "electric lights, baths, elevators and steam heat," it was rated first class at the time. One end of its basement had been turned into the Arlington Cafe, with an arched entrance and a white marble staircase. When, after two decades, the hotel business declined, a billiards hall and then a speakeasy replaced the cafe. The speakeasy's owner christened the space the "Garden of Allah," likely a takeoff from a New York stage production that had become a movie. Even after Prohibition ended and the speakeasy became a honky-tonk, the name stuck.

Seattle's gay men and women began making their way through the arch and down that staircase into the underground. The acts were predictable—comedy skits, sentimental songs, one-line taunts, sexually suggestive lyrics, drag, even a snake dance or two. But for the gay men and lesbian women who went there, it felt, as one said, like "our secret place"—even though it was often packed.

The story of this particular saloon/theater has been well documented in Paulson and Simpson's *An Evening at the Garden of Allah,* as well as through additional published and unpublished interviews with gay customers and with one of Paulson's key sources, Skippy LaRue, a man who entertained at the Allah and later worked in one of the underground gay male bathhouses in Pioneer Square. All the accounts agree: It was the drag and vaudeville actors at the Allah that made it a special place in Seattle.[12]

There was Francis Blair, for example. He had been born just a year earlier than Frances Farmer, in the same West Seattle neighborhood. Like her, his tastes ran to performance, but he never made it to Broadway or Hollywood. Instead, during the depression he began sharpening his comic taunts and singing in Seattle's vaudeville halls. Even as a slender young teenager he enjoyed wearing dresses with a girl friend as they rode the city's streetcars. By the time the Garden opened, Blair was already a bit old at thirty-three to be considered truly sexy as a gay male actor, but as a woman he was stunning—an example of that magical ability of drag to transform the quality of a performance. According to Paulson and Simpson, the syndicated columnist Walter Winchell saw one of Blair's acts and called him "the boy with the million-dollar legs." Blair let his hair grow long and styled it into coquettish curls, and then accented his long slender body with tight white gowns and gloves. To contrast his glamorous prima donna performance with comedy, he pulled on black high-button shoes and ripped stockings to become one of "Two Old Bags from Tacoma."

Another star was Hotcha Hinton, who had gone on the vaudeville road when he was sixteen. His mother had been a circus aerialist, and Hinton had met most of the big circuit names such as Gypsy Rose Lee, Sally Rand, and Mae West. Heavyset, he perfected a campy and crude burlesque queen personality that included a snake act. One photo in *An Evening at the Garden of Allah* shows him at Christmas, wearing a wildly frilled dress with a tinsel star on his head and 168 light bulbs circling his ample body, the extension cord fully visible down his belly. He always insisted on being referred to as a woman. One Garden-goer told Paulson and Simpson, "When she came out on the stage, everyone said, 'Oh my God! What a hussy! What is this?' But by the end of her performance the audience loved her." Hinton once told an interviewer, "Honey, you got to love life and it'll love you back."

The biggest star at the Garden was appropriately named Jackie Starr. He had grown up in the Midwest, studied ballet, acting, and voice, and then began playing the burlesque circuit in the 1930s. For a while, he was with a traveling company called the Jewel Box Revue, which played throughout the United States and Canada. By the end of the war, Starr was aging, and his agent signed him into the Garden of Allah. He headlined for a decade, Seattle's best-known drag queen of the day. His personalities included both a prima donna role and a stripper.

Then there was Skippy LaRue himself, a Texan who migrated to Seattle during World War II to work for Boeing. He had started dressing in drag as a young boy of about nine. "I had to live, I had to survive," he said in an interview. "I'd be working in some places where people would grab my tits to see if I was a boy or a girl." He traveled the carnival circuit as a female stripper and, in states that had laws against female impersonation, was repeatedly arrested. He worked at Boeing for two months, then was hired on at the Garden, where he sang his own numbers in three shows a night and a finale.

With the mentoring of the more experienced vaudeville players like LaRue, Blair, Hinton, and Starr, some of those who came to the Garden were drawn into supporting roles in the cast. The Garden encouraged amateur nights, with the winners receiving small cash rewards or, if acting was an aspiration, the possibility of a job.

Robin Raye, for example, was twenty-two and had been in the navy. After the war, he pursued his interests in sewing and enrolled in costume design courses. In 1948, on a dare, he went to amateur night ready to do his first striptease. Tucking in his genitals, he stripped to a song called "In a Persian Market," winning first prize: cash and a week's booking at the Garden. That debut set him onto a new path that was to last for two decades. As he recollected in an interview for Paulson and Simpson's book, "Female impersonation was the farthest thing from my mind, but after one show it became my career."

Of course, most who walked down the staircase to the Garden and paid a dollar to enter stayed in the audience, but in a communication ritual like vaudeville, they were always more than just spectators. Every step, from the act of entering to the closing, triggered emotions. It meant joining a group of characters on the margins of civic life in Seattle. "You had no illusions about the Garden of Allah," one man who used to go, Bill Parkin, told Paulson and Simpson. "The Garden was very earthy, a real underground decadent cabaret straight out of Toulouse-Lautrec, and you loved it. . . . The finale of the show might be everyone on stage singing 'We don't care, we don't care, we don't care what happens to us. We're happy go lucky.'"

Pat Freeman was underage and still attending high school when she made her first visit in 1947. She told Simpson and Paulson about a Halloween party at the Garden when she and a male friend rented costumes: she went in top hat and tails, he wore a gown and heels. It was a way to practice a flowing sense of gender and to challenge the return to traditional sex roles then being encouraged at the end of World War II. Freeman said that at the Garden, "We met gay people, we got to know Jackie Starr, Francis Blair, and the other performers. We went to their parties, we were accepted, and they became our family."

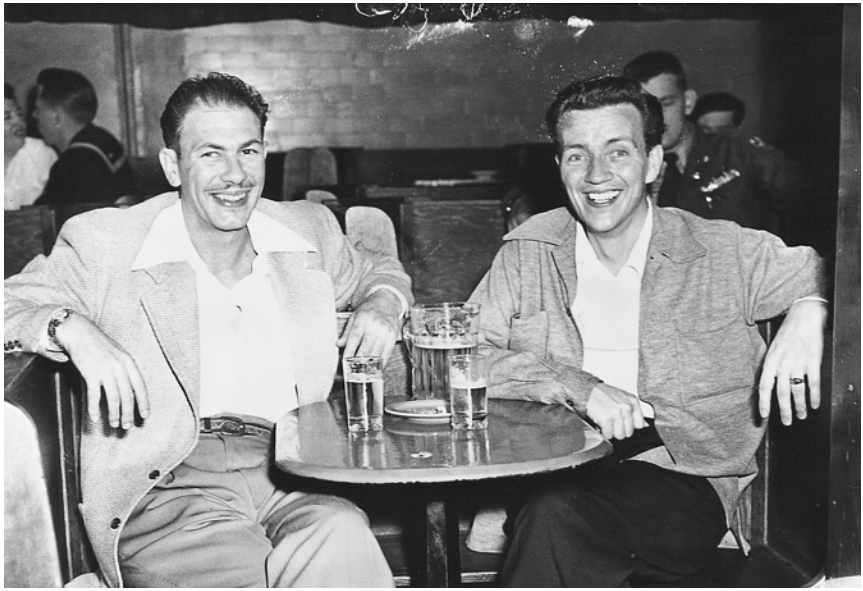
"The Garden was our entree into the gay world; it was our support group."

Stephen Blair, a Seattle man who went there after World War II, told Paulson and Simpson that the Garden had helped him heal from the emotional wounds of the war. "It released some of the hurt," he said, "because you could laugh. It was one of the few places gays could laugh at themselves."

Like the Double Header and the Casino, the Garden was a point of arrival.

During this time, another form of drag also emerged as communication in Seattle, both for stage performance and for claiming gender identities within the group of homosexual women willing to be seen at the new public gathering places.

Rose Bohanan remembered that there were women who wore gabardine slacks, silk shirts, sweaters, and penny-loafers. The femmes, or as she called them, the "les-



The Garden of Allah became the most popular homosexual cabaret in Seattle in the late 1940s and 1950s. Regular vaudeville and drag shows gave a postwar generation its first sense of community. Stephen Blair (right) and an unidentified friend relax in 1948. *(Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project)*

bians." Then, there were the women in workers' uniforms and crew cuts. The butches.

Contrary to the heterosexual model, with the man supporting the woman, in the lesbian world of the 1950s it was often the femme who had to support the butch, according to Bohanan. "The dykes were pretty much unemployed," she said. "They couldn't get employment unless they were passing [dressing as women]. And that could only last a while before it knocked you in the head. . . . Mostly their femmes would have to support them because there was no work for them."[13]

Elaine Burnell, who grew up during the 1950s and arrived in Seattle in the 1960s from California, adopted the opposite role. "I liked to wear dresses and nail polish," she told an interviewer in 1995. "And I liked to cook. A butch wouldn't cook. You fit into one category or another."[14]

Some of the butches, like Shirley Maser, took to motorcycles; by the late 1940s she was riding with an all-women's group called "The Motor Maids of America" and had joined with five friends in their own small club, which they named "The Queen City Motorcycle Club." "We might have had the reputation of being gay—dykes on bikes—but it was more that we were 'tough women'. . . . We went to motorcycle races and to hill climbs."[15]

At the Garden of Allah, butch impersonators also claimed the stage, the best

Drag queen Paris Delair with two servicemen at the Garden in 1950. In the 1960s, the military would put most gay establishments in Seattle off-limits. *(Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project)*

known being one who used the name Nick Arthur and who became an emcee, singing in a tenor voice on weekends for four years.

In the decades before feminism would arrive, it was the butches who asserted that power belonged not only to heterosexual men but also to women, who could do things the same way heterosexual men could—violently when necessary. Pat Freeman remembered a butch named Big Bobbie, who always dressed in men's suits, leaving the Garden of Allah one night and drifting back to a gay bar in Pioneer Square. Freeman said, "She took exception to a straight male there and proceeded to knock his head against a wall."[16]

Rose Bohanan remembered the assertiveness this way: "I like to call it pissing in every corner. You go out and piss in every corner. Butch women do that. Mark your territory. I used to walk into the Double Header and, because I was single, I thought I looked tough. The butch women would grab their women and go, 'This one's mine!'"

"You'd know it was an exciting night when you'd see that."

By 1956 the drag queens and kings and vaudeville actors at the Garden of Allah ran into hard times, partly because—unlike the Casino and the Double Header—the Garden had tried to imitate Considine's approach of combining a theater and a saloon. The Double Header and the Casino had always remained neighborhood drinking taverns or, in later years for the Casino, an after-hours club. As had happened to the People's in 1894 with the barmaid ordinance, in the late 1950s the city moved against the saloons that combined drinking with live entertainment, this time by imposing a higher tax, according to Paulson and Simpson. The musicians' union then raised its price for hiring live instrumentalists—something that had also happened in Considine's day and had led him and other vaudeville owners to try to bust the union. This time, there were not enough vaudeville owners left to organize a response. Certainly, there were not enough gay vaudeville owners.

That was the end of the decade-long run of the Garden of Allah—although not of its impacts. Through the Casino and the Garden, gays and lesbians in Seattle had begun to form a public network and a sense of a new community.

It was not the end of drag or of drag's role in that new community either. "That's when lip synch started to come in," Paulson said, "because the girls couldn't afford musicians anymore." Phonographs became more portable, too. A good 45 rpm record could replace a live band, and, if anything, the portable phonographs would make drag performing even more accessible. Soon enough, drag and drag alone would be the act at a new set of downtown gay saloons in the 1960s and 1970s: the Mocambo, the Golden Horseshoe, the Golden Crown. By the 1970s, public drag clubs—called courts, with "emperors" and "empresses"—would be created in Seattle. Lip-synching would remove the need for singing talent and open the way to any man who could dance, quip, or even just costume. Performances would change, with ever-more flamboyant costuming, more energetic and choreographed dancing, and even laser shows.

For gays and lesbians in Seattle, the drag queen—and drag king—would be heroes, and the refuge provided by the saloons and by vaudeville would eventually embolden the next step in their journey. It was time to directly challenge the keepers of the city's morality.