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## moments in gay new orleans history

by Frank Perez  
E-mail: [f.perez@sbcglobal.net](mailto:f.perez@sbcglobal.net)

### “My O My! The Most Interesting Women Are Not Women At All!”

One does not normally associate West End/Bucktown with the transgendered community but for decades the Orleans/Jefferson Parish line at Lake Pontchartrain was home to one of the world's most famous female impersonation venues: Club My-O-My. For nearly twenty-five years the My-O-My hosted three shows a night (four on Saturdays) and attracted not only celebrities such as Judy Garland, Alec Guinness, Bob Cummings, Carmen Miranda and mobster Frank Costello, but also busloads of tourists from Middle America eager for a glimpse into the transgendered world. Since it burned down in 1972, the My-O-My has been the subject of academic dissertations, documentaries, articles and it has even inspired a musical production. Ephemera from the club (post cards, match books, etc.) sell regularly on eBay and pictures from the club's heyday in the 1950s abound on the internet.

The origins of the club date back to 1935 when Emile Morlet opened The Wonder Bar at 125 Decatur Street. The bar featured female impersonators and was often the subject of police raids. Frustrated with police harassment, Morlet tried to get an injunction to stop the raids but city officials denied his request because his club was a “menace” to morality. Fed up, Morlet moved the bar to the lakefront and renamed it the Wonder Club, which subsequently became the Club My-O-My under the stewardship of Pat Waters in 1949. Because the club itself sat on pilings over the lake and straddled the parish line, police raids were no longer a problem. A fire destroyed the club in 1948 but it was quickly rebuilt. After the 1972 fire, the club re-opened in the French Quarter on Burgundy Street but didn't last long.

A typical show consisted of a four piece band (which once included Al Hirt) and five or six performers. Performances usually included exotic dancing, singing, comedy and perhaps a novelty act. Performers employed a variety of props including ropes, umbrellas, and even a huge python. It was also not uncommon for the club to feature guest performers from out of town, typically regular stars at other female impersonation clubs like Finocchio's in San Francisco, Club Jewel Box in Miami, and Club 82 in New York. Sometimes international stars made appearances at the My-O-My such as Cuba's Gene La Marr and London's Louis Hayden, billed as “England's Red Hot Mama.”

Presiding over the shows was the legendary Jimmy Callaway. Callaway moved to New Orleans from Birmingham, Alabama, in 1948 to perform at the Wonder Club. Shortly thereafter, he worked briefly at a club in Florida before returning to Club My O My in 1950, where he remained as Master of Ceremonies until the club's demise in 1972. In addition to working the My O

My, he also had a contract with Planet Records.

In a 1996 interview with Don Lee Keith in *Tribe*, Callaway recalled what it was like working at the Club My O My: In between shows, performers table hopped and mingled with guests. For Callaway, the schedule was rigorous because he wore a different outfit to introduce each act. After an act, the audience would toss money on the stage. Part of Callaway's duties included collecting the money for the performers, who, in turn tipped him. The regular pay was around \$100 a week but that income could be supplemented by B-drinking (performers enticing patrons to buy cocktails for them and then being served ice tea in exchange for a cut of the profits). Tricking with audience members was also an option.

While some closeted men went to the club in order to solicit sex from the performers, the audiences at Club My O My were, for the most part, straight. For the young among us, it may be difficult to truly appreciate how shocking drag was in the pre-Stonewall era. The notion that gender is not fixed was (and to some extent still is) a radical idea that challenged straight society's core beliefs about sexuality. In her 2004 dissertation entitled *Vintage Drag: Female Impersonators Performing Resistance in Cold War New Orleans*, Thomasine Bartlett argues that clubs like the My O My demonstrated that gender is socially constructed and provided a means for exploring new social orders. This may explain the straight fascination with drag.

The fact that times have changed so much may also explain some of the differences between female impersonation then and drag shows now. In an interview with *Times-Picayune* theatre critic Dave Cuthbert, Bartlett notes, “The difference between the drag acts of today and the impersonators of the My O My was that these earlier per-

formers didn't go over the top. There was no pretense that they were women . . . To them, the highest achievement was to pass themselves off as beautiful women, the ‘girl next door,’ a ‘lady.’ So their make-up was much more subdued than what you see today. They were never more pleased than when they heard someone at a table say, ‘That's got to be a girl’.”

In addition to the performers being less flamboyant in dress and make-up, there are, of course, other differences between the drag shows of today and the female impersonation performances of yesteryear. At Club My O My, all performances were live; recorded mu-

sic and lip-syncing were unthinkable. Also, distinctions within the transgender community which we take for granted now were largely unrecognized then. And the title “drag queen” was considered a pejorative term among female impersonators in the 1950s and 1960s.

The term “female impersonator” is passé now and it seems almost every gay bar has a drag show. The fact that the novelty of drag has worn off is ultimately a good thing—a tangible sign that public attitudes have shifted in the right direction. And yet one wonders how the drag shows of today might be different if the stars of Club My O My were still performing.

## real estate

### 8 Tips for Choosing the Right Agent to Sell your Home

Are you looking for a realtor to represent you in the sale of your home? A good realtor can make a significant difference in selling your home. This article will provide you with 10 valuable tips that will become useful for you in choosing the right realtor.

1. Select a professional with some experience. Selling a home is not considered an easy task in many parts of the country in today's market. Therefore you need to select a professional who has experience in listing, marketing and selling homes ~ not a “buyer's agent” but a selling agent.

2. Look at their past. You need to examine the past of the realtor and check whether he has maintained an excellent customer reputation within the past few years. At sites like [GayRealEstate.com](http://GayRealEstate.com) past client comments are posted on realtor profiles. This will assist you to analyze the realtor with less hassle.

3. Have an initial conversation with more than one realtor. Again, with sites like [GayRealEstate.com](http://GayRealEstate.com) it's easy to choose a couple of different agents based upon their profiles, areas of specialty and past client feedback.

4. Interview realtors in a proper way. Most realtors hate this tip. You need to meet with more than one agent and have them do a full listing presentation for you. This usually consists of their marketing plan, background, background on their brokerage and a valuation of your property.

5. Don't go for the biggest producer at all the times. Don't assume that the highest producer is the best Realtor or gives the best service. Therefore you need to analyze the realtors and go for the most reputable one, and the one your gut tells you to get a hassle free service.

6. You get what you pay for. The market decides what a Realtor can charge as the service charges. If it is too much, people will not tend to use them. Discounted realtors don't have the ability to maintain their business for

a long period of time, or spend the massive amount of money it takes to market your home properly. Therefore you need to use your common sense and don't pick based upon the lowest commission... after all, if the house doesn't sell, you'll have a really low commission... zero.

7. Don't allow the realtor to buy your listing. It is common for a home seller to list with the realtor that gives them highest asking price. You should not do this and you need to have your realtor defend any price they come up with ~ the numbers are black and white, make sure you understand them, and price your home to sell.

8. Ask for past client contact information. Tell both agents your interviewing you'd like to speak with at least three people whose homes he/she sold in the past 12 months. Actually call them and see what the feedback is.

All these tips will assist you to sell your home with less hassle with the help of a professional realtor ~ happy home selling! Author Jeff Hammerberg is the Founding CEO of [www.GayRealEstate.com](http://www.GayRealEstate.com), [jeffhammerberg@gmail.com](mailto:jeffhammerberg@gmail.com).





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Chef Byron and Chef Thor did the honors for Rawhide's annual salute to Black History Month at the last Wednesday Meat Night of the month preparing mouth-watering southern classics in New Orleans.



Irish Mike hosted the 14th annual Crack Whore Ball at Oz New Orleans raising over \$5,000 for New Orleans Society for Infectious Diseases Awareness (NOSIDA) and crowning Johnny Eubanks Crack Whore Queen XIV. (Photo: Irish Mike, CWQ XIII Duane Parrish & CWQ X Frankie Fierce)



celebrazzi

Easter Grand Marshals XIII Darwin Reed and Rhonda Roget present Easter Grand Marshals XIV (center) Tommy Elias and Starr Daniels with their official EGM pins at the 3rd Sponsorship Party hosted by bar baron Mac McAll at Cutter's in New Orleans. The event raised \$6,725 for the 14th Gay Easter Parade benefiting NO/AIDS Task Force Food For Friends program. Sponsors were treated to complimentary well cocktails, wine, domestic beer, as well as homemade chicken pot pie, Italian salad and sourdough bread courtesy of Jimmy Kilgour.



Emcees Opal Masters and Tony Leggio flank the cast of the 5th Eggstravaganza including Michael's On The Park's Cookie St. Ann, Queen Amon-Ra XLVIII Deja Deja-Vue', Easter Grand Marshal XIV Starr Daniels, Rhonda Roget, Barbara Ella, and Marquis Marcell for the annual Gay Easter Parade fundraiser bringing in \$2,217 for NO/AIDS Task Force Food For Friends program. In addition to great entertainment, there were nine incredible auctions, a 50/50 raffle and a buffet including white beans with pulled pork, deviled eggs, salad, bread and dessert prepared by bar baron Michael Cookmeyer.



The official portrait of Easter Grand Marshals XIV Starr Daniels and Tommy Elias was created by the talents of Larry Graham, [GrahamStudioOne.COM](http://GrahamStudioOne.COM).





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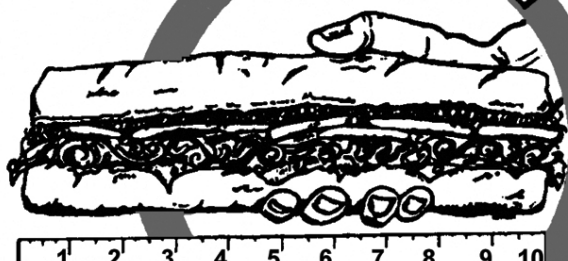
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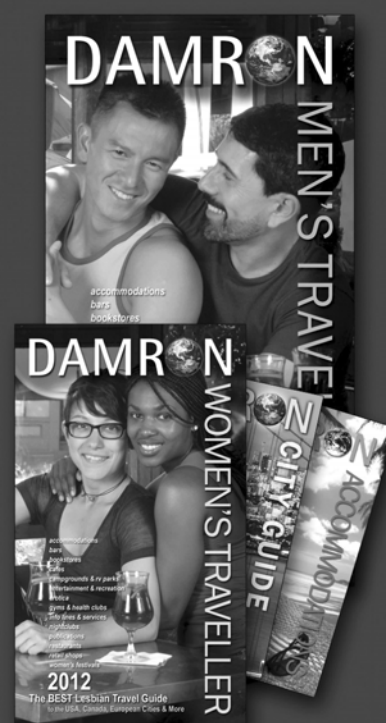


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