

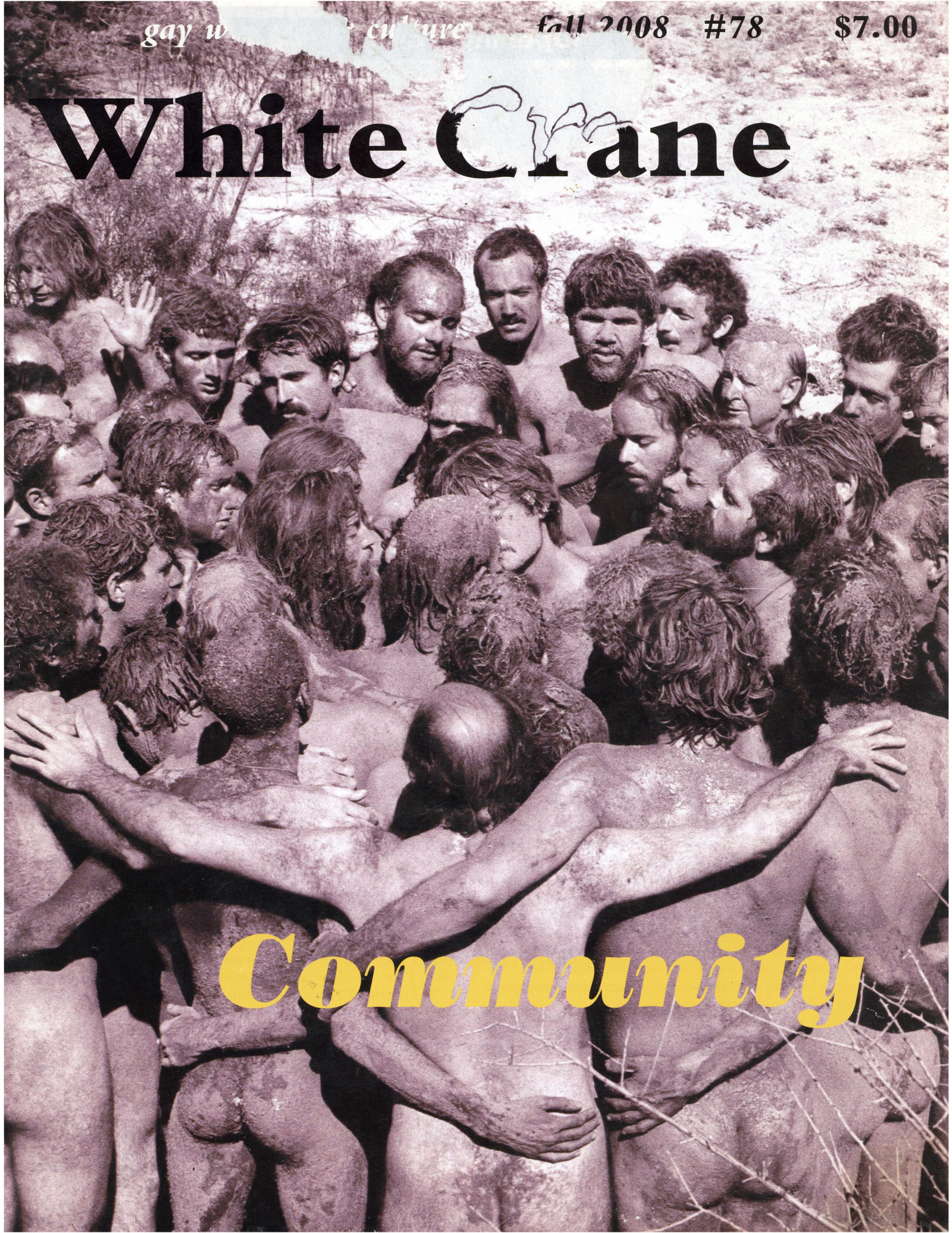
gay & lesbian culture

fall 2008 #78

\$7.00

White Crane

Community



EXPLORING GAY WISDOM & CULTURE
ISSUE # 78  FALL 2008

Community

Columns

- 2 Opening Words *The Editors*
- 42 Updrafts *by Dan Vera*
- 47 Owner's Manual
"Stocking the Cellar" *by Jeff Huyett*
- 49 PRAXIS "Community Trust"
by Andrew Ramer

Departments

- 4 Call for Submissions
- 6 Subscriber Information
- 41 A few word about Fulfillment
- 48 Contribution Information

Taking Issue

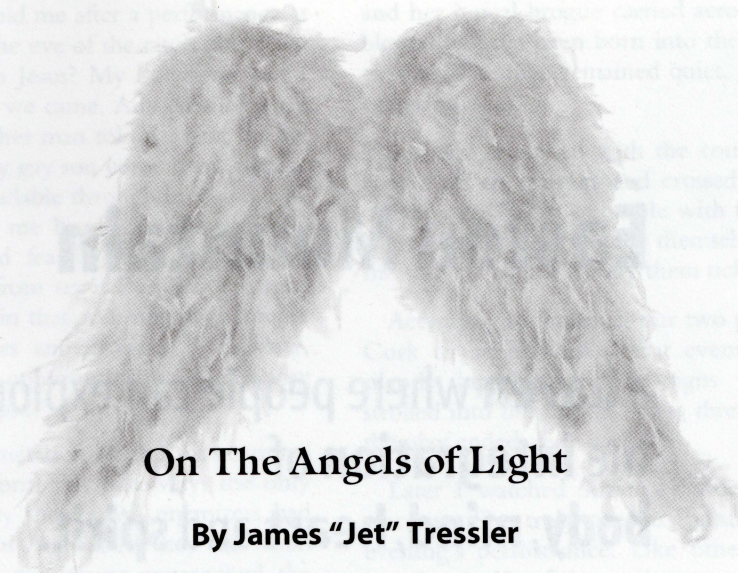
- 5 Circle Voting: A White Crane Conversation with Murray Edelman
by Bo Young & Peter Montgomery
- 10 Queering Community: A White Crane Conversation with Chris Bartlett
by Christopher Murray
- 13 The Gay Community In Crisis: Commentary on "Gay People at a Critical Crossroads: Assimilation or Affirmation" Thirty Years Later *Don Kilhefner*
- 17 On Transnational Community Building *Debanuj DasGupta*
- 19 The Resurrection of Corpus Christi *Steve Susoyev*
- 22 On The Angels of Light *James "Jet" Tressler*
- 23 Speech And Debate *Bill Siksay*
- 25 Building Community Through The Arts *Bob Barzan*
- 29 In Search of Gay Community *Bryn Marlow*
- 33 With Death As My Witness *Timothy J. Kelleher*
- 37 A Community of 2 *Malcolm Boyd*
- 39 Welcome Home *Brian Gleason*

Culture Reviews

- 43 Steven LaVigne on Mark Matousek's *When You're Falling, Dive*
- 43 Jay Michaelson on Eliezer Sobel's *The 99th Monkey*
- 44 Steven LaVigne on by L. B. White's *Tales of a Zany Mystic*
- 44 Steven LaVigne on John Simpson's *Murder Most Gay*
- 45 Chris Freeman on Aaron Raz Link and Hilda Link's *What Becomes You*
- 46 Bo Young on Theo Bleckmann's *Las Vegas Rhapsody and Songs of Love and War, Peace and Exile*

On the cover and above:

Detail of photograph from the first gathering of the Radical Faeries held in 1979 in Arizona. Courtesy of Mark Thompson/Drkrn



On The Angels of Light

By James "Jet" Tressler

In any culture there are aesthetic secrets, evidences of what seems to pass as an alien or spiritual event. We cannot explain these always and sometimes refer to inspiration or actual religious experience to communicate to subsequent generations what happened. We, the first whole generation fueled by Lysergic Acid and magic mushrooms, began to transform our every aspect, clothing, food, literature, music and clearly, theatre into tenets of a new religion, invented by us for us.

Spawned in the sixties, we ate neck-soup out of tin-cans in the Panhandle prepared by the Diggers; were clothed in their Free Stores, fed on the manna of their ideas, that gloriously, we could exist without cash, sharing our treasures with everyone. Not signing our egoless masterpieces was a start. The early Plato's of San Francisco in the late 60's, imagining a Free City, created the template we were following - heavenly and practical solutions for Earth's final day.

The theatre that grew out of our communal life embodied our dreams, our fantasies and wishes. We were so moved by the Cockette's *joie de vivre* that we wanted our own version, our own leap for the aesthetic brass ring. From the onset we were virtually script-less - big, scrawled pieces of white paper with the acts written down, the borders all floral and butterflies and palm trees, Hibiscus' signature drawings. We have survived all these decades since it happened as a supremely well-kept secret of the Bay Area - like certain secret films that exist in dusty vaults, unseen even though their existence might be powerful medicine for new generations. We keep secrets because we're afraid the Philistines will crush us with their facile criticisms, so easy to hide our love away.

In the beginning The Angels of Light was an anarchist experiment, to see if a gaggle of young, disparate artists could coalesce, and make obvious magic in public places. The war in Asia was raging but our theatre reflected none of the tumult of the times - we were free to go to Arcady, to sail up our own personal Ganges, unafraid to combine ideas and bodies with a generous dollop of glitter. In the beginning we dressed for every party, every venture out was a chance to wear something gorgeous or shocking. To consolidate our urge-to-costume we found the stage a home for our highest dreams, a place to manifest what we wished - Hibiscus as a delirious peacock or Rodney as a hybrid butterfly-cum-lion or Beav as a rainbow Poodle - we had no interest in the psycho-babble practiced by the bulk of the American Theatre, those grim O'Neill alcoholic epics or Shepherd's dysfunctional families were out of bounds - we just

wanted the fantastic or nothing. No clever convoluted scripts for us - Ionesco and Beckett had already given us the go-ahead to create a new form. The archives exist to show for subsequent generations the proof of our colloidal excellence, our jelly-like genius, held in the group's hands, this 1970 Hippy Theatre was as powerful in its majesty as any Renaissance Theatre - we turned garbage and rags into regal attire - cardboard sets, some designed by the brilliant Martin Wong, exalted us - brought the dreamy locations for us to dance in front of - a time machine - all the product of a communal existence, our home for 20 became a home for 30...meals were vast steaming vegetarian entrees - a rehearsal room lined with mirrors with a wall-sized Shiva looking down on us always benevolent.

It is my hope that our well-kept secret, that the grandest free theatre in the world existed in San Francisco in the early 1970's, it arrived, opened up its peacock-array for a few precious years, not just to affirm divinity once and for all, but to ascertain that our utopian dreams had become actual. We were at our best when working harmoniously together, almost trance-like, we knew our instincts were sound - we couldn't know that forty years later Cirque d' Soleil would take our formula and make millions. Beach Blanket Babylon robbed us outright. In our naiveté and innocence, we thought we lived in a glittered continuum that would never end - but end it did, playwrights emerged trying to tame our wildest free theatre into just another generic regional theatre, a sad, almost doomed exercise, unwatchable by the earlier cast members.

A film of those early shows, and why they happened, will be a light of hope for every disenfranchised art-kid yet born. To do the holy work and have some manic fun doing it gives flesh and passion to the spirit, making the un-seeable seen. We were psychedelic in all ways - this was our religion and these, our ceremonies, unicorn lay down with the lamb.



James Tressler, known as Jet, was born in Miami, 1944, was uneducated at FSU, cooked with the Diggers and for the Cockettes, co-created the Kaliflower Commune and the Angels of Light, ran numerous, vast theatrical soup kitchens in San Francisco - and now, quite fat and retired, assists Mary Jordan in making the definitive film on the Angels of Light. He lives in San Francisco.