

El Paso Wrecking Corp.

Written October 1977, this feature essay was published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977.

- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written April 18, 1998
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I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written April 18, 1998

How Movies Shaped *Drummer*

Written October 1977, this tiny feature essay was published in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977) because *Drummer* readers loved movies and *Drummer* created itself publishing photographs from movies, as well as printing movie reviews and erotic scripts for plays and films. (For film list, see below. For plays, see entry for *Crimes Against Nature*, *Drummer* 20, January 1978.) When *Drummer* was new, Ed Franklin was the monthly movie reviewer (1976-1978), and Allen Eagles' on-going column "Movie Mayhem," detailing the history of S&M in Hollywood movies, debuted in *Drummer* 8 (August 1976).

I was eager to showcase in *Drummer* the filmmaking Gage Brothers who were a perfect fit with their homomale trilogy: *Kansas City Trucking Co.* (1976), *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* (1978), and *L.A. Tool and Die* (1979). The Gages were narrative story tellers of episodic sex featuring the picaresque escapades of actors like Jack Wrangler and the mature Richard Locke who was *Drummer's* first "Daddy" — at age 37! In content and style, the Gage *mise en scene* embraced technique, material, eros, and casting that were a revelation embraced by fans of the new genre of homomale action movies.

There is a back story of how the Gage Brothers arrived on the film scene, and there is a back story of how cinema built an audience for *Drummer*.

Parallel to the emergence of gay bars as the first gay art galleries, gay movie theaters were film galleries screening the moving image of newly liberated homosexuality. In the Titanic 1970s, gay movie theaters were erotic performance-art spaces. Movie-palace sex (on film and live in the audience) was a gay community social phenomenon that went extinct with the 1982 arrival of VCRs and HIV that emptied the theaters, sent everyone home alone, and destroyed the high concept of group sexuality celebrated on screen and in the seats, aisles, and toilets. A man hasn't lived until he's had orgy sex on the stage behind the giant screen in a gay porn theater with the dots of Technicolor light flickering through making him and his partners shimmer as if they themselves were glimmering on celluloid. That's a "gay film festival"!

Live sex also occurred on stage. Continuing a sexed up version of the G-rated vaudeville tradition that was very much alive in first-run family movie theaters in the 1930s and 1940s, gay film theaters often included erotic stage shows between features. It was a kind of performance art of male burlesque. See my article, "Pumping Roger: A Night at the Nob Hill Theater," in *Drummer* 21 (March 1978) and my review of the live show starring Colt model Clint Lockner and Dan Pace, the star of the Gage Brothers' *L. A. Tool and Die*. (Because I was exiting *Drummer*, my article, "In These Last Days of the American Empire: Dan Pace & Clint Lockner Together," was published as part of my "Virtual *Drummer*" collection in the premiere issue of *Skinflicks*, Volume 1, Number 1, January 1980.)

Anthropologically, gay films of the 1970s are lightning caught in a jar. They were *Mondo Cane* "documentaries" anticipating "reality TV" showing the way we were. When anthropologist Margaret Mead died in Manhattan in 1978, was she headed to the Adonis Theater to add one more culture to her *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*? The gay film genre of the 1960s and 1970s was a kind of educational *cinema verite* that taught newly uncloseted primitive audiences the new ways to self-fashion gay identity and have more exotic sex. The Gage Brothers shot primers of masculine-identified eros.

Most gay movies of the 1970s were scripted silent films with music added. Not until the advent of the video camera did silent gay cinema find it could talk; but by then it had nothing to say except the unscripted "Yeah. Uh-huh. Give it to me. I'm gonna cum!"

That decade's cinema silence is one reason the 1970s is often misinterpreted by latter-day revisionists who don't "get" the Titanic 70s and the original-recipe sexual revolution before it was turned into gay politics. They wonder about us survivors whose memory of the 1970s is akin to William Wordsworth who wrote of the joys of the French Revolution: "Bliss was it that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven."

Unfortunately, 1980s video moved 1970s film away from art and into business. Instead of gay movies with forward momentum of plot, eros, and character, the video “grind formula” devolved to eight guys in four scenes with eight cumshots in eighty minutes. Gay video of the 1980s and 1990s (with no art roots) was a travesty of the gay art-and-eros films of the 1970s with their pedigree in the wonderful world of 1960s experimental and underground cinema in which Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, the Kuchar Brothers, and Jack Smith created the gay film esthetic.

In a direct line of homomasculine descent, film DNA shaped *Drummer*. In the Swinging 60s, American culture had been swept up into the “experimental cinema” of underground films, and many foreign films, and some Hollywood movies which, in fact, created a ready-made audience for experimental *Drummer*.

Drummer shaped gay culture.

For thirty years, among the millions of leatherfolk, there was hardly a person alive who had not heard of or had not read *Drummer*. With its 1970s press run of 42,000 copies per issue, more people have read one issue of *Drummer* than have read any one book by any deeply established GLBT author on the top hundred list of literary best-sellers in the so-called “gay canon.” That’s why I added the line to the masthead of my *Drummer* 23 (July 1978): “The American Review of Gay Popular Culture.” This makes *Drummer* worth study and research in GLBT culture.

The Gage Brothers’ DNA comes from this lineage: Kenneth Anger’s leathery *Scorpio Rising* (1963) and butch-fetish *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965); Andy Warhol’s long-take *Blowjob* (1963), *My Hustler* (1965), and chatty *Lonesome Cowboys* (1969) which was connected through Joe Dallesandro to the 8mm films of Bob Mizer at Athletic Model Guild; Wakefield Poole’s actioner *Boys in the Sand* (1971) and muscular *Bijou* (1972); Fred Halsted’s MOMA features *L. A. Plays Itself* (1972) and *Sextool* (1975); Roger Earl and Terry LeGrand’s leather-cherry popper *Born to Raise Hell* (1972); Peter Berlin’s auto-portrait *Nights in Black Leather* (1973); the uncredited fisting classic *Erotic Hands* (c. 1975); and Michael Zen’s leather-occult *Falconhead* (1976) usually double-billed with C. Michael McCullough’s gorgeously sleazy, smokey, and primitivist *Tattoo* (1975).

Beginning with the first issue, *Drummer* was always illustrated with movie stills: *Sextool* photos appeared inside *Drummer* 1 (June 1975), and on the front and back covers of *Drummer* 2 (October 1975); *Born to Raise Hell* on the front cover of *Drummer* 3 (October 1975); and full-page ads for *Falconhead* inside the front cover of *Drummer* 7 (June 1976), and for *Kansas City Trucking Co.* inside the front cover of *Drummer* 11 (December 1976). Publicity stills from mainstream features such as *Mandingo*,

Deliverance, and *Salo* appeared repeatedly. In the 1980s and 1990s, photographs of men I lensed for Palm Drive Video, such as Keith Ardent, Larry Perry, and Donnie Russo, appeared on the covers of *Drummer* 118 (July 1988), *Drummer* 140 (June 1990), *Drummer* 159 (December 1992), and *Drummer* 170 (December 1993). A further supply of film stills to *Drummer* happened in 1989 when Mark Henry and I shot six films in Europe for Roger Earl and Terry LeGrand, the helmers of *Born to Raise Hell*. *Drummer's* love affair with film embraced also the Super-8 films and video features of David Hurles and his Old Reliable studio. For details of film and video photos in *Drummer*, search the "Timeline Bibliography" of *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*.

From its first issue wherein "Sidney Charles" reviewed *Sextool*, *Drummer* included film reviews written regularly by Ed Franklin aka Ed Menerth aka Scott Masters. *Sextool*, forbidden by the LAPD, premiered simultaneously in San Francisco at the fratricidal Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theater and in New York at the Lincoln Art Theater on June 4, 1975, three weeks before the first issue of *Drummer*. Eschewing straight theaters, the Gage Brothers booked their films into San Francisco at the Nob Hill Theater where their friend Wakefield Poole directed the legendary stage show for the Colt model Roger in 1977.

Because readers responded to film coverage, I added op-ed cinema features such as "Pasolini's *Salo*" in *Drummer* 20 (January 1978), and my interview with *Boys in the Sand* film director Wakefield Poole, "Dirty Poole," in *Drummer* 27 (February 1979), and made humor with movie stills in "Steve Reeves' Screen Test" in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977) and "Nobody Fucks Lex Barker Anymore" in *Drummer* 26 (June 1979).

When Ed Franklin wrote me that he was quitting reviewing movies because publisher Embry fell in arrears paying him, I turned to reviewing significant films such as Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane* in *Drummer* 22 (May 1978) and the homomasculine *The Deer Hunter* in *Drummer* 28 (April 1979). Covering films was natural to me because I had been reviewing movies since 1953, and my love of film led into my 1960s career as director of a museum film program and as a university professor in the 1960s and 1970s teaching courses such as "History and Esthetics of Cinema" and "Women in Film." I assigned other movie reviews to my protégé, John Trojanski, a former Catholic seminarian whose photographs appeared in *Drummer* 25 (December 1978) and other issues. Had I still been teaching when the Gage Brothers debuted, I would have invited them to speak in my classes and at my museum film program where during the 1960s and 70s I screened gay underground films and hosted filmmakers from the National Film Board of Canada.

(*When Sex Meets Art*: In a taxi leaving the New York Eagle or, maybe, the Spike at 3 AM in 1973, my new best friend who was taking me back to ball at his apartment introduced himself as “John Boundy, the U. S. manager of bookings for the National Film Board of Canada,” and I introduced myself as the professor-director who needed to fill my museum and campus film programs.)

In the zero degrees of separation in gay culture, Fred Halsted starred in *El Paso Wrecking Corp.*, and he was also a regular *Drummer* columnist published in this same *Drummer* 19, page 24. This was my first credited issue as editor in chief, and I believed everything was possible. I wanted to mix all these great guys and these great talents together in the salon around *Drummer*. In my brief paragraph accompanying the nine *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* photographs, I promised to interview the Gage Brothers for an upcoming *Drummer*. In the zero degrees, that opportunity never rose so that we could converge.

Nevertheless, Wakefield Poole made certain that Mark Hemry and I connected with Georgina Spelvin who was the star of Poole’s *The Bible* (1974), of the Gages’ *El Paso Wrecking Corp.*, and of the blockbuster porn hit by Gerard Damiano, *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973). (I featured one of Wakefield Poole’s Fellini-like color production stills from *The Bible* on the cover of *Drummer* 27, February 1979.) Fresh from exiting *Drummer* as editor in chief, in 1980, and with Mark Hemry carrying the cameras and the single red rose that warmed her heart, I interviewed the very bright and funny Georgina Spelvin on a bed in a pretty Sausalito motel for my feature article “The Devil in Ms. Spelvin” published in *Hooker* magazine (May 1981).

Having withdrawn from the warfare inside *Drummer*, and bruised by publisher Embry’s cancerous Blacklist of disgruntled contributors, I kept my writing moving forward—not in *Drummer*, but in the “Virtual *Drummer*” of other 1980s magazines *Honcho*, *Man2Man*, *California Action Guide*, *In Touch*, *Uncut*, *Just Men*, *The Target Album*, *Dan Lurie’s Muscle Training Illustrated*, *Skin*, and *Bear*, as well as in the straight *Hooker*, *Expose*, and *California Pleasure Guide* which published my fiction and features that could have been in the *Drummer*stream.

Editor’s Final Note and Film List

Scripts such as the following were frequently published in *Drummer*: George Birimisa’s *Pogey Bait* serialized in *Drummer* 12 (January 1977) and *Drummer* 13 (March 1977); Jack Fritscher’s *Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O’Malley* serialized in *Drummer* 22 (May 1978) and *Drummer* 23 (July 1978); Jack Fritscher and Old Reliable David Hurles’ one-man show *Ex-Cons: We Abuse Fags*, serialized in *Drummer* 24 (September 1978) and *Drummer* 25 (December 1978).

Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer, San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008](#)

Fritscher recalled, "In 1980, I co-wrote the script with filmmaker J. Brian for his vanilla porn film *J. Brian's Flashbacks*. Having fallen out with *Drummer* publisher Embry who had started his *Mach* magazine to steal thunder from his competitor *Honcho* magazine, I couldn't resist selling my novelization of the J. Brian film to *Honcho* where the six chapters were serialized as twin bills in three issues." Perhaps one future day a new young Kenneth Anger will come along and shoot several reels of film based on scripts published in *Drummer*.

II. The feature essay as published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977

Drummer Previews the Flicks

Richard Locke packs meat for Gage Brothers...

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Drummer presents an exclusive peek into what promises to be another hot, new film from director Joe Gage and producer Sam Gage, the brothers who excited us all last year with their *Kansas City Trucking Co. KCTC* was made with a professionalism generally lacking in gay male porn. We don't know yet the story line. But we do know the stars include: Fred Halsted; Richard Locke; and our *Drummer* 19 cover man Steve King [*sic*], with Jeanne Marie Marchand, Stan Braddock, Mike Morris, Jared Benson, and a hot new discovery Guillermo Riccardo. *Drummer* will feature an interview with the Gage Brothers and their dedication to the upgrading of male films in an upcoming issue.

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

New York artist Domino, profiled in *Drummer* 29 by Fritscher and Shapiro, idealized San Francisco erotic celebrity Richard Locke, star of *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* The cover of *Drummer* 19 was a still of actor Mike Morris from the same Gage Brothers film. Drawing by Domino. ©Domino. Used with permission. In 1988, Jack Fritscher directed and photographed the feature film, *The Domino Video Gallery*, produced and edited for Palm Drive Video by Mark Henry.