

INTRODUCTION

**Hundreds of People Created *Drummer*
Millions of People Read *Drummer***

**CHASING *DRUMMER*
In the Golden Age of Leather,
It Took a Village to Raise a Magazine**

“My Heart’s a Drummer!”
—Barbara Streisand,
“Don’t Rain on My Parade”

This book of investigative journalism is an eyewitness oral history about a soon-to-be-lost generation of a once-important subculture of gay pioneers.

This is a gay Origin Story.

Drummer helped create the very culture it reported on. *Drummer* was a revolutionary idea in motion. In our leather archetribes, *Drummer* vicariously portrayed our desires to organize our thoughts to inform our practices. *Drummer* published 214 issues from June 1975 to April 1999, and quit business on Folsom Fair weekend, September 30, 1999. A stack of 214 issues of *Drummer* is a coffee-table sculpture 3.5 feet tall weighing 120 pounds. Laid flat, top-to-bottom, *Drummer* stretches sixty-four yards: two-thirds of the length of a football field.

Drummer was an autobiography of us all. At a rough ninety pages per issue, *Drummer* comprised a total 20,000 pages of advocacy journalism created by hundreds of writers, artists, photographers, and designers including even more thousands of grassroots Personals ads written by readers, with advertisers displaying their own wares as pop-culture signifiers of the times.

As its founding San Francisco editor-in-chief for nearly three years and its most frequent contributor of writing and photography during twenty-four years, I survived backstage access that made me one eyewitness of its institutional history under the three publishers, John Embry (1975-1986), Anthony DeBlase (1986-1992), and Martijn Bakker (1992-1999). Had I snapped a *Drummer* group photo, it would look like the cover of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT

What rollicking fun...to reopen old friendships and even some ancient hostilities of that golden age. To be a bystander to those vibrant talents and hear again those voices.... Can you imagine the pleasure in being able to put one's arms around some of those people, just like you maybe should have done back then when they were still around and available?

—John Embry, *Drummer* founding publisher, 1975-1986,
Manifest Reader 33

With a 42,000 copy press run for each issue in the 1970s, and with a pass-along rate of at least one reader in addition to the subscriber, approximately 80,000 people handled each issue of *Drummer* for an estimated total nearing twenty million people. The mobbed Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco hosts 100,000 leather guests every September. Even if publisher Embry, the self-appointed antagonist in this history, exaggerated his claim of 42,000 copies and did a press run of only 21,000 copies, each issue of *Drummer* would have passed through the hands of nearly 40,000 people. In gay book publishing, 5,000 copies sold is considered a best seller.

More people have likely read one issue of *Drummer* than have read any one book by any deeply established GLBT author on the top hundred list of best-sellers in the gay literary canon, including James Baldwin, John Rechy, Rita Mae Brown, Edmund White, and Larry Kramer. A book is published once while a magazine renews its lively connection to readers monthly. That's why, having been a founding member of the American Popular Culture Association in 1968, I added the tag line to the masthead of my *Drummer* 23 (July 1978): "The American Review of Gay Popular Culture."

Drummer was a home and a home run. For thirty years, among the millions of leatherfolk in the Western world, there was hardly a person alive who had not heard of or read *Drummer*. Years after *Drummer* closed, readers continue to celebrate that as teenagers they had managed to find *Drummer*, even in Iowa and Arkansas, and that the assertive primer that was *Drummer* had mentored, shaped, and emboldened their masculine identities. There was political empowerment in erotic representation.

MARCHING ORDERS

PRINTED ON THE CONTENTS PAGE IN EVERY ISSUE EXCEPT ISSUES 4-12

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music

which he hears, however measured or far away.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* (1854)

The liberal beauty of *Drummer* was its social permissiveness anchored in marching to one's own beating heart. Independence was the *Drummer* philosophy. *Drummer* was descriptive—not prescriptive—about leather behavior. Descriptive *Drummer* was non-judgmental in simply reporting how grassroots leather lives were actually lived without rules. Even though the *Drummer* editorial voice was a “Top” seducing subscribers who mostly liked to read from a deliciously overpowered “bottom” point of view, *Drummer* was no domineering Dutch uncle demanding, “Thou Shalt” or “Thou Shalt Not.” *Drummer* never prescribed that there was a politically correct way to live leather because while there may be rules around sex, nobody's sure what they are.

Drummer was never Old Guard or New Guard.

Drummer was always Avant Garde.

SINGING SONGS FROM A TIME SOME DANCE TO REMEMBER

For those aching with a sweet personal nostalgia for the Auld Lang Syne of Leather, think of where you were when you first read *Drummer*.

For those born in 1980 as the Titanic 1970s sped into the iceberg of HIV, you were only nineteen when *Drummer* closed; but if you have intellectual or emotional or erotic curiosity about the way we were, and how high we flew, during the last twenty-four years of the twentieth-century, consider how the “black-box flight recorder” I have recovered from the take-off, cruising altitude, and crash of *Drummer* may reveal how *Drummer* shaped the gay popular culture of leather for the twenty-first century.

David “Trooper” Vargo
Mr. Florida *Drummer* 1992, and
International Mr *Drummer*, First Runner-Up

Drummer was my bible, my textbook for Life. I still have every issue in my possession (safely tucked away in an air-controlled storage unit). Yes, there are pages that are covered in notes, and some pages are still sticky. Some pages have tears and rips and holes. But so do I. I learned how to be a Man from *Drummer*. I learned how to “play” from *Drummer*. I learned how to conduct myself as a Leatherman from *Drummer*, and most importantly I discovered who I was and who I continue to be from the pages of *Drummer* magazine. It came

at a time when I was just coming out not only as a gay man but as a Leatherman. It all happened at once. I was young and impressionable, and *Drummer* resonated deep within my psyche, a mystical union between a boy and the printed page. I followed it to the letter. And when it died, I mourned its loss like the death of a best old friend. Thank you, Jack, in many ways, you raised me.

—David Vargo, Mr. Florida *Drummer* 1992, International Mr. *Drummer* First Runner Up, June 20, 2012

Richard Hunter,
Owner, Mr. S Leather Co.
San Francisco

Most of us may never have had the introduction to this Leather scene had it not been for John Embry and the Original *Drummer* Magazine....I know it's how I first realized I wasn't alone in all my perverted fantasies. Finding that *Drummer* magazine on a news stand in New Orleans in 1981 changed my life....and you can see where it all led for me. Tens of thousands of guys worldwide read *Drummer* every month and felt a bonding connection to each other because of it.

—Richard Hunter, Mr. S Leather Co. Newsletter,
October 13, 2010

Erotic writing begins with one stroke of the pen and ends with many strokes of the penis. Paying my dues as editor-in-chief, I had by the end of 1979 contributed 147 pieces of writing and 266 photographs. Estimating that each ninety-page issue of *Drummer* equaled a nearly four-hundred-page trade paperback book, I edited exactly 942 pages of *Drummer* 18-33, the equivalent of a 3,778-page book.

Following the popular style of the New Journalism of American writers Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, and George Plimpton who immersed themselves in a subject or an experience to write what they knew with authenticity and authority, *Drummer* created, coached, confirmed, and outed the authentic voices of many leathermen who as eyewitnesses inside the BDSM scene reported what they knew in their grass-roots and first-person you-are-there articles, stories, drawings, and photographs.

“The *Drummer* Salon”—named by member Samuel Steward/Phil Andros who was part of Gertrude Stein’s Salon—included variously, among many other talents, Robert Mapplethorpe, Tom of Finland, Jeanne Barney, Larry Townsend, Etienne, Anthony DeBlase, A. Jay, Rex, Chuck Arnett, Mark I. Chester, Joseph W. Bean, Lou Thomas, Bill Ward, Mikal Bales,

Aaron Travis (Steven Saylor), David Hurles (Old Reliable), Domino, Jim Kane, Roger Earl, Patrick Califia, Guy Baldwin, Jim Wigler, Olaf, Rick Leathers, Judy Tallwing McCarthy, The Hun, Fred Halsted, Robert Opel, George Birimisa, Tim Barrus, Rick Castro, Mr. Marcus, Rick Leathers, Jim Stewart, Wickie Stamps, and Robert Davolt.

LEATHER CHARACTER, GENDER, WOMEN, AND HOMOMASCULINITY

At Stonewall in 1969, gay character changed. At the founding of *Drummer* in 1975, leather character changed. In that first decade of gay liberation after Stonewall, homosexuality itself changed from not daring to speak its name to shouting out its erotic identity.

Drummer led the charge with transformational erotica. For the new sex and the new psychology emerging in the 1970s, we created new images and new concepts, and coined new vocabulary that advanced the gay cultural conversation with words like *homomascularity* with its complement *homofemininity*. *Drummer* was a gender-aware magazine celebrating leathermen and leatherfolk. Coincidentally, as women began founding their own feminist magazines, *Drummer* readers drove *Drummer* to be more pointedly masculine—although *Drummer* was never separatist.

Much of its early tone came from the generous heart and inventive mind of founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief Jeanne Barney whose testimony in this book is essential and honestly brilliant. Barney envisioned the Los Angeles infant *Drummer* as a kind of *Evergreen Review*. I thought of the San Francisco teenaged *Drummer* as the gay love child of the New Journalism in *Esquire* and the straight pulp S&M of men's adventure magazines in *Argosy*.

Barney edited eleven issues before parting with the contentious John Embry whose personal *Drummer* Blacklist bullied contributors, destroyed reputations, and triggered shameful partisan infighting that, to this day, causes covetous and abusive separatist elites to continue to duke out what leather persons or leather groups own leather culture which is too diverse to be claimed by anyone.

Even so, for many years, Pat Califia, who transitioned into bisexual transman Patrick Califia, was an associate editor and wrote a popular and educational monthly pan-sexual advice column. Cynthia Slater, co-founder of the female-driven Society of Janus, was often consulted, interviewed, and reported on importantly. Anne Rice, who, despite feminist fantasy, never wrote for *Drummer*, was represented three times with brief excerpts from her novels. Frequent contributor Judy Tallwing McCarthy, International

Ms. Leather 1987, wrote about the politics of gender in the landmark issue, *Drummer* 100, and her “gay birds” cartoons ran for more than a year. The second female managing editor and editorial director was gothic novelist and filmmaker Wickie Stamps who bravely fashioned *Drummer* issues 183 to 208 against all odds during its death by a thousand paper cuts in the 1990s.

Even as our core subscribers identified themselves in the Personal ads as masculine men whose point of desire was masculinity itself, *Drummer* continued to evolve with GLBT liberation to include leatherwomen and leatherfolk of diverse gender persuasions in our leather archetribes.

Susie Bright, founding editor of the lesbian magazine *On Our Backs*, wrote, “The gay men who edited *Drummer* were our mentors in many ways: John Rowberry, John Preston, and Jack Fritscher.” (*Susie Bright’s Journal*, “A Brief History of *On Our Backs*, 1984-1991,” November 15, 2011)

THE ALGORITHM OF THE MARLBORO MAN

Drummer changed the homophobic image of queers into the Platonic Ideal of the masculine-identified New Gay Man, and the algorithm of the new “leatherman” went viral in American popular culture, films, and fashion. The Tom of Finland Foundation, headed by Durk Dehner, declared that “*Drummer*, groundbreaking for its time, set precedence for all homomascu-line representation to come.”

Forty years ago when I was thirty-seven, I arrived at *Drummer* with seventeen years’ experience in magazine publishing. At one time, I had edited half the *Drummer* issues in existence. In the Swinging Sixties of Andy Warhol and Pop Art, I had taken my cue from one of the most successful and influential popular-culture advertising campaigns in history. I mindfully took scissors and cut dozens of Marlboro Man ads from magazines and glued the icons into studied meditation collages to reveal their masturbatory essence.

In the 1970s, I based the algorithm of “the Platonic Ideal of the Leatherman” in *Drummer* on the quintessentially American image of the Marlboro Man whose rugged existential appeal was his cool independence because he marched to no drummer but his own.

Drummer was a first draft of leather history and gay popular culture. This popular culture dissertation about *Drummer* is a second draft. Because testimony is useless unless there is a second witness, this fact-checked investigative journalism is built on the testimony of dozens of eyewitnesses as well as on the internal evidence found in *Drummer* magazine, and in the

journals, diaries, letters, photographs, interviews, recordings, magazines, and newspapers in the collection of the Jack Fritscher and Mark Hemry Archive.

“I know what I have given you. I do not know what you have received.”

—Antonio Porchia, Argentinian poet, 1886-1968

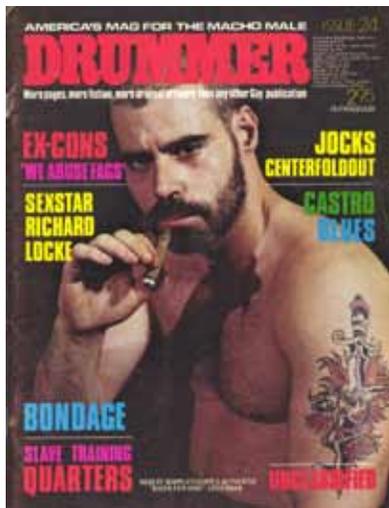
Knowledge accumulates. We each contribute our bit, and history selects what evolution needs to enlighten itself. During the twenty years of interviewing, studying, researching, and writing for this book, and its companion volume, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer* (2008), I found good company in *Interview* magazine editor Bob Colacello’s *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, Mark Thompson’s and Randy Shilts’ *The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, and the great Jim Kepner’s memoir about politics, philosophy, and personalities inside gay publishing at *ONE* magazine that led to the founding of the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives in the same way that *Drummer* led to the founding of the Leather Archives & Museum: *Rough News, Daring Views: 1950s Pioneer Gay Press Journalism* (1998).

My labor of love is not the last word on *Drummer* because *Drummer* is as mysterious a creation as the “Mona Lisa.” Both have penetrated cultural consciousness. We know La Giaconda’s enigmatic “look” and her creator the way we know *Drummer*’s “look” and its creators. Yet so many mysteries remain in its cultural use of journalism, fiction, poetry, stage plays and film scripts, art, and photography, that even I who have read every page, can only begin to introduce the *Drummer* Origin Story of who did what to whom where when, and, maybe, why.

Sometimes iconoclasm is a good thing.
 Sometimes a memoir is a portrait
 in a fun house mirror.
 Sometimes it pays to investigate
 where truth lies.
 Sometimes it’s wise to dare
 to wear one’s trousers rolled,
 and to eat a peach,
 because in the empty rooms
 the queerfolk come and go
 speaking of Michael and Angelo.

The thoughts and opinions expressed in this book are those of the individual contributors alone and do not necessarily reflect my views anymore than my opinions and allegations reflect theirs. To all of them, especially the founding editor-in-chief of *Drummer*, Jeanne Barney, I am most grateful.

Jack Fritscher
San Francisco



DUDE CONDESCENDING A STAIRCASE

“Who’d a thunk it? Who’d a thunk that one day back issues of *Drummer* would be displayed in glass cases at a library like this? [The John Hay Library at Brown University]”

—Eric Garber aka Andrew Holleran, East Coast literary establishment author of *Dancer from the Dance*, and co-founder of the Violet Quill, in “Making Sex Public,” *Christopher Street*, Issue 231, November 1995

In 2016, The J. Paul Getty Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art added *Drummer* to their permanent collections. The LACMA displayed *Drummer* issues, in a glass case, in conjunction with the joint Mapplethorpe exhibit, *The Perfect Medium*, March 16 - July 31. Pictured above: Robert Mapplethorpe cover, *Drummer* 24.

At the same time, *Drummer* was featured prominently and globally in the HBO documentary, *Mapplethorpe: Look at the Pictures*.