

UPON A TIME THERE WERE NO GAY MOVIES

Terry LeGrand
(1939-2018)

Pioneer film producer Terry LeGrand died at his Hollywood home April 18. The Tom of Finland House hosted his memorial in its garden in Los Angeles on June 3. As the founder of Marathon Films, Terry produced the leather classic *Born to Raise Hell* (1975) directed by Roger Earl starring their discovery, Val Martin, whom *Drummer* editor Jeanne Barney featured on the cover of issue 3. At the violent police raid of the “Drummer Slave Auction” on April 11, 1976, the foursome of friends (Terry, Roger, Jeanne, and Val) were among the 42 arrested—partially because fascist LAPD Police Chief Ed Davis knew *Drummer* was promoting *Born to Raise Hell* which Davis decreed could never be screened in Los Angeles. Davis was a fuckup. He knew how to entrap fags and bust fairies. But he couldn’t stomach the new breed of homomasculine leathermen who looked more authentic in cop uniforms than did many of his officers. When his late-night stormtroopers cuffed the straight Jeanne Barney, they asked if she were a drag queen, and she snapped: “If I were a drag, I’d have bigger tits.”

Banned in LA, Terry moved the world premiere of *Born to* San Francisco at the Powell Theater where we first met in 1975. Terry and Roger, never lovers, were dear friends to each other for forty-four years, and Terry was the sole owner of Marathon. They met while Roger was working at NBC in Burbank in 1974. Roger was a guest at one of those ever-so patio parties in the Hollywood Hills where the talent stood on one side of the pool and the wallets stood on the other. It was the kind of backstage mixer

described by party host Scotty Bowers in his book, *Full Service: My Adventures in Hollywood and the Secret Sex Lives of the Stars*.

At that soiree, Roger's erstwhile leather-bottom George Lawson, who had gotten him his job at NBC, introduced him to Terry who needed a director for his new S&M leather picture. Lawson who was originally slated to direct the film told Terry that Roger would be a better choice. Remembering that night, Roger told me that driving back to his West Hollywood apartment where he has now lived for more than fifty years, "The title *Born to Raise Hell* just came to me. I pictured a motorcycle guy with a tattoo. I needed a really dynamic guy to carry this movie. Otherwise it was going to be the same old shit. Terry couldn't have agreed more. I thought of the Colt model Ledermeister, but he was not into the scene. I was lucky to find Val Martin tending bar. He scared me, and I'm a top, so I knew he was perfect for the part of 'Bearded Sadist.'"

CASTING authentic leathermen made *Born* like a transgressive play-within-a-play by Genet. Terry cast non-actors role-playing themselves as characters who are themselves. Existentially speaking: Is gay porn fiction or documentary? This ambiguity alarmed Davis, who feared it was real, and charmed Terry, who knew it was. The 1960s cultural revolution was in the 1970s air. Shot in the style of *Mondo Cane* and *Scorpio Rising* (both 1963), *Born* is the backstory of *Cruising* (1980). The LA press called Davis "Crazy Ed" after he went on TV demanding a portable gallows to hang skyjackers on airport tarmacs. He had recently arrested the Manson Family for torture murders, and had shootouts with the Black Panthers and the Symbionese Liberation Army that had kidnaped and tortured newspaper heiress Patty Hearst who later starred in John Waters' films *Cry Baby* and *Serial Mom*. Terry led gay resistance. He dared produce his realpolitik documentary in LA despite Crazy Ed raiding leather bars, tapping phones at *Drummer*, and freaking out over the two "cops" in *Born* and ads for *Born* in *Drummer*. Like the politically correct gays who ran screaming "rape" from the Powell premiere, he confused the film's consensual S&M with violence. He feared being played a fool by fags. Because some pills make you larger and some pills make you ironic, gay nemesis Davis inspired gay resistance.

As birthday twins of a certain age in 1989, Terry and I joked with Roger Earl and my husband Mark Henry one June evening when Terry kissed me partying on a little supper boat cruising the canals of Amsterdam. Terry was born thirteen days after me in summer 1939, and like an existential punch-line two months later, Hitler invaded Poland. The joke was on us. So was the violence we had to process. Born into a world dangerous to everyone, and always more risky for gays, we teen boys grew up in the 1950s well aware there were no gay magazines or movies. Then came Stonewall. By the 1970s in our thirties, Terry was the producer of *Born* and I was the editor of *Drummer*. It was war babies who empowered the 1970s culture of liberating resistance.

Marathon's films were charted but unscripted. "Terry and I preferred to let guys do their own thing on camera to keep it real." Roger remembers Terry as a mindful producer. "I give a 1000% credit to Terry. He was the one with the guts to dare go out and hire the cast. I'd say 'I want this one' and he'd go convince the guy. Remember: this was back in the day when gay men feared cameras as tools of blackmail, and nobody had yet really seen a gay S&M leather movie. We worked wonderfully together."

That production summer of 1974 was a key moment in the birth of the gay porn industry. Terry wanted to earn big bucks at the Box Office because money and fame empower visibility. He was an opera buff who dreamed operatic porn dreams after watching *Deep Throat* break through to make millions in 1972. As a marketing activist, he was keen to fill gay gaps and silences. He fused trends. He saw an unserved audience of leathermen standing in bars. He saw the red-hot popularity of Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* and Fred Halsted's *LA Plays Itself*. Why not produce a film to reveal and "out" bondage, fisting, and S&M for that audience wanting authentic identity entertainment on page and screen? For the same reasons at the same moment, Terry's frenemy, John Embry, founded *Drummer*. That film and that magazine suddenly gave leathermen visions and voices. In perfect synergy, the producer needed *Drummer* to publicize *Born*, and the publisher needed *Born* to fill *Drummer*.

When the Museum of Modern Art inducted *LA Plays Itself* into its permanent collection, that validation gave Terry a green

light more certain than the great Gatsby's to follow his passion. Politically, Terry had no question about his rights as a gay filmmaker. Nor did Roger or Halsted. "We would never have made it," Roger told me, "if it hadn't been for Fred putting out *LA Plays Itself*." In *Beyond Shame*, Patrick Moore observed in 2004: "What is being explored in both films is a kind of sex that depends not only upon erections and ejaculations, but rather on an emotional stretching that remains shocking today, but must have seemed nothing short of revolutionary in the early 1970s."

LeGrand-Earl helped grow that "emotional stretch" bonding men together in leather culture. In that post-Stonewall decade of emerging liberation, the new gay S&M porn, like sadomasochism itself, was roaring out of the closet. Producers and directors were educating gay and straight audiences into sadomasochistic literacy with international films like *The Night Porter*, *Salo*, *Seven Beauties*, and the camp *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*.

Because Terry and Roger made *Born* together as equals, they deserve co-star billing, but, as often happens in Hollywood, one name can outshine another, and reviewers and queer historians seem to side with French auteur theory which defines a movie by its director: a Truffaut film, a Hitchcock film. Terry and Roger deserved double-billing like Merchant Ivory, but self-effacing Terry, who produced 22 of their films, made Roger the star in their advertising, which buried Terry's name in Marathon publicity.

It was Terry who planned and coordinated the actual film production creating the safe environment they needed in order to work free from harassment by Davis. It was Roger who helped Terry finance this little gay art film with a personal loan of \$10,000 dollars from singing star Dean Martin while Roger was Martin's dresser at NBC. (Martin did not know what the loan was for.) Terry protected Roger—and the cast and crew Roger directed, including one of the pornstar Christie twins as sound recordist, and Ray Tomargo and Vince Trainer as the cinematographers. Terry managed their shoot on location outdoors in Griffith Park, and inside the old Truck Stop bar way out in the San Fernando Valley. With a half-dozen reels in the can, Roger spent four weeks in post-production guiding Trainer in cutting the 16mm Eastmancolor footage on a Moviescope set on Roger's

kitchen table. “It was dangerous,” Roger said, “Because we could not afford a work print, I was cutting original footage, and didn’t want to screw it up.”

In 1988, as a grand finale to refresh their life’s work in LA, Terry decided to use their international success with *Born* as a calling card to hire European leathermen and locations by traveling to London to shoot Marathon’s first three-film series, *Dungeons of Europe* with British tattoo and piercer artist Mr. Sebastian opening his studio for the first of the trilogy, *Pictures from the Black Dance*, after which they flew to Amsterdam to film *Like Moths to a Flame* and *Men with No Name*. At the height of the AIDS emergency, a new generation of film fans got hard on this safer-sex kink. Everything old at Marathon was hot again.

Wanting more of that European sex-magic in 1989, Terry hired Mark Henry and me as cameramen, because he liked the features we had shot for our Palm Drive Video studio. We also bonded because our mutual friend, Fred Halsted, had just committed suicide. Flying to Amsterdam, we four traveled on a wild month-long shoot for our six-film series, *Bound for Europe*, documenting Dutch and German S&M: *The Argos Session*, *Fit to Be Tied*, *Marks of Pleasure*, *Knast*, *The Berlin Connection*, and *Loose Ends of the Rope*. We two gave Marathon its first two-camera shoot, which Roger edited over the next two years. What is more erotic than being part of a film crew shooting leathermen on location in summer in Europe? That month, we eye-witnessed the efficiency of Roger and Terry working together.

In Amsterdam, Terry produced a location whose realism inspired the actors. At the dark hour of 2AM on a two-night shoot, we began filming *The Argos Session* inside the Argos Bar documenting that interior gay bar space that opened in 1957 and closed in 2015. I remembered that sex pit fondly from 1969 when I had slept in a room for a week backstairs at the Argos on Heintje Hoekssteeg, and some dude tattooed my taint. Leaving Holland, Mark drove our rented Mercedes van, speeding with six passengers down the Autobahn, to film in Dusseldorf and Cologne. In a straight mistress’s dungeon in Hamburg, we shot two films. We shot two more in gritty West Berlin bars, the Knast and the Connection. It was the last exciting and romantic summer in a

nervous West Berlin just ninety days before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Terry wanted to shoot in East Berlin; but at Checkpoint Charlie we turned around because no one on the crew felt it was safe for a Mercedes full of gay pornographers to cross over to East Germany. Instead, the last night in West Berlin, a hot young German on our crew asked us if we would like to go stand and scream under the roaring railroad bridge where in *Cabaret* Liza taught Michael York how to “scream anxiety away.” For Christmas 1989, Terry sent each of us a small chunk of cement from the Berlin Wall.

In 1991, Terry became the founding publisher of *Leatherman Magazine*, which he sold to the publishers of *Bear* magazine. He closed *Marathon* when he broke his hip in 2007. He then hosted his gay chat show, LATALKRadio, and did AIDS-support work. He was pleased that in 2017, Editions Moustache in Germany published my updated 1997 interview of Roger Earl talking about him and *Born to Raise Hell* in the book *California Dreamin': West Coast Directors and the Golden Age of Forbidden Gay Movies*.