

Glam Slam

New York's Toilet Boys Bring Back the Rock

By Ian Drew

When John Cameron Mitchell's cinematic opus *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* opened in movie theaters a few months ago, it brought to light a few influences on gay culture that might not often be thought of in the same stereotyping breath as Judy Garland or Barbara Streisand.

Such icons as Nico, Lou Reed, the New York Dolls, David Bowie, and Blondie have all had a lasting impact on many gays and lesbians who came of age in the rock era.

These icons were wittingly incorporated into Mitchell's portrayal of Hedwig, the East German, transsexual lead singer of a down-and-out rock and roll band with a botched operation and a passion for all that glitters.

Another offshoot of the glam rock period is the New York City based outfit the Toilet Boys, fronted by its own gender bender, Miss Guy.

The group was originally formed in the late 1990's out of the enduring lower Manhattan gay rock and roll subculture. Including such hangouts as the Rock and Roll Fag Bar, the Pyramid and the Cock, the unchallenged mainstage for the scene was the popular Friday night party Squeezebox, located at the venue Don Hill's.

Every Friday night, Squeezebox created itself as an anomaly among a gay culture overcrowded with disco queens, shirtless muscle men, and pumping dance music. These queens set themselves apart with safety pins, tattoos, Ramones and Motley Crue trimmings, and an acute sensibility for the deviant and the hard

rocking.

Hosted by drag legend and host Mistress Formika, the nightly show was a rip-roaring, old school hard rock jam that brought the crowd to its knees and kept the club packed to its graffitied rafters for years.

Ironically, Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig* was partially inspired by and honed at the venerable nightclub.

As the club grew to legendary status, a slew of celebrities came to join the party and perform on-stage each week. On any given Friday night, the audience was treated to impromptu appearances from the likes of Marilyn Manson, Jane County, Michael Stipe, and Debbie Harry, accompanied by Squeezebox's own house band.

It was from one of Blondie frontwoman Harry's celebrated performances that the Toilet Boys were born.

After several times of backing the famously blonde rock legend, singer Miss Guy, guitarists Sean and Rocket, bassist Adam Vomit and drummer Electric Eddie decided to keep the chemistry brewing by forming their own outfit, drawing largely on the personal influences that also made Squeezebox a hit.

After showcasing their distinctive brand of '70's glam and punk rock mixed with '80's heavy metal at such events as New York's annual Wigstock drag festival, the Toilet Boys garnered a cult status among the downtown scene that also spawned many of their inspirations, including Blondie, the Ramones and the New York Dolls.

The group was signed to Roadrunner Records in 1998, which led to two years of



the typical marketing and creative hassles that have hurt many artists with an alternative edge.

Released from their recording contract in 2000, the band immediately went to work by pulling an Ani DiFranco-esque move towards creating their own label. Masterplan Entertainment was created and released the group's long awaited self-titled debut album, *Toilet Boys*, which arrived in stores last month.

The group is currently on a worldwide tour with rockers The Damned promoting

the effort. Upcoming Florida stops include Orlando and Tampa.

One first single off of the album, *Another Day in the Life*, is featured in the big screen smash, *American Pie 2*.

Performing on the road, along with exposure in such mainstream fanfare as *Metal Edge* magazine and *Rolling Stone*, has given the group – along with its androgynous frontman, Guy – a new following.

"I don't think there is any 'typical' fan of the Toilet Boys – it's not like they're all drag queens, fags, or girls," Guy said in a recent interview. "I get a lot of metal guys at our shows taking pictures with me and shaking hands, and at first I thought they may have been going back to their friends and making fun of me, but they're not... I think people that are really into rock and roll can see beyond what I look like."

Despite the band's origins, they try hard to publicly maintain an identity only as true rock and rollers, and do not specifically link their members to any sexual orientation.

In this way, they steadfastly hold up to the artistically focused posturing taken up by many artists, from Little Richard to Michael Stipe, Bowie and Lou Reed.

Regardless of identification, the Toilet Boys promise to keep the rock tradition alive while carving out their own distinctive following.

All That Glittered

Jobriath is Still Not Forgotten

Although it has now become de rigeur for music stars to out themselves in the mainstream media, with artists such as Elton John, George Michael, Melissa Etheridge, and Judas Priest's Rob Halford coming forward and new acts like Rufus Wainwright and Pansy Division carrying the torch, it continues to be a struggle for these acts to continue to ensure high record sales numbers and mass appeal after their coming out.

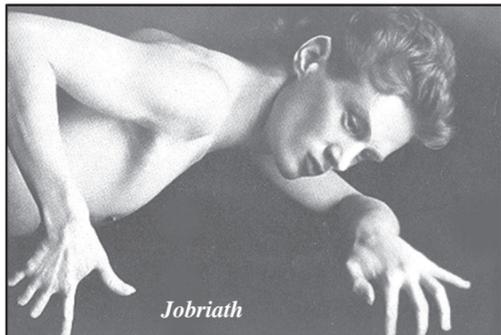
In 1973, before even Sylvester and the Village People were blips on the airwaves,

vocal talent of limitless proportions when he played Woof in the L.A. production of *Hair* and appeared as the frontman for the Decca-signed band Pigeon in the late 1960s.

By the time Jobriath and his band the Creatures had their first post-signing appearance at the Bottom Line Nightclub in New York City before the release of their debut album on Elektra a few years later, it became clear that the label simply didn't know how to market this new artist at the time.

Press agents, record executives, and Jobriath's own manager, Jerry Brandt, were not even present at the under-heralded performance despite the attention Jobriath received in the press due to the precedent he set.

While acts such as David Bowie, T-Rex, and Gary Glitter were climbing the charts with an ambiguous sexuality and strong label support, Jobriath, who was one of Elektra's first Glam rock acquisitions, seemed to be too



Jobriath

another artist, who has unfortunately been largely forgotten by many today, had to contend with even greater struggles.

In an unprecedented move that year, Elektra Records became the first major record label to sign an openly gay rock star to what was then the biggest recording contract in history to date.

The artist's name was Jobriath, and he emerged at a time when glam rock itself was a new pill to digest and the rock world in general was almost entirely heterosexual.

Born Bruce Wayne Campbell in 1946, Jobriath Salisbury was considered a genuine

much.

After the hushed release of two LPs, *Jobriath* and *Creatures of the Street*, and the careful quieting of a star, Jobriath was shortly dropped from his label.

Jobriath spent the rest of his life trying to rebuild the career that barely was, mostly camping it up in the lower Manhattan cabaret scene under the pseudonym Cole Berlin.

He unceremoniously passed away from an AIDS related illness in 1983, unknown and penniless, in his room at the Chelsea Hotel.

Only recently has tJobriath's career

Get Hed

Hedwig Comes to VHS and DVD; Trask Joins STP



film in 5.1 Dolby Digital and DTS surround sound, commentary from

Hedwig and the Angry Inch, winner of the Audience and Best Director awards at last year's Sundance Film Festival, will be released on VHS and limited edition New Line Platinum Series® DVD on December 11.

The film was based on the off-Broadway smash musical and received rave reviews when it was released in theaters this year. Director, writer, creator, and star John Cameron Mitchell, along with composer/lyricist Stephen Trask, have become instant stars due to the popularity of the vehicle, which has included the hit play, the play's Atlantic Records soundtrack, a book, and the separately-released soundtrack for the film.

The new DVD of the release will feature a widescreen version of the

Mitchell, a feature length original documentary entitled *Long Story Short: The Forging of a Cult Legend from Stage to Screen*, cast and crew filmographies, and the format's Select-A-Song feature.

The Glam rock epic is the story of an East German transsexual who fronts a struggling rock band in the face of several adversities. Comedienne Andrea Martin costars as the group's manager.

In further *Hedwig* news, the Stone Temple Pilots' lead singer Scott Weiland introduced the openly-gay Trask as the new member of the famous rock outfit during Howard Stern's radio show on October 26. Trask becomes the latest gay artist to work with a band whose members are otherwise heterosexual.

even been touched on. On August 8, VH1 aired a special entitled *From Below the Waist: Men, Women and Music* featuring a short section on Jobriath.

The marketing and promotion of gay artists by the music industry still has a long way to go, but it has greatly improved from the days of Jobriath's brief notoriety. The new acceptance has already led to the creation of a gay Lollapalooza-like traveling summer tour.

The brainchild of the Pet Shop Boys' Neil Tennant, a noted Jobriath fan, the Wotapalava Festival was loudly touted as the first "openly gay" music festival and was slated to begin on July 13 of this year.

With the Pet Shop Boys, Rufus

Wainwright, Soft Cell, the Magnetic Fields, and DJs Junior Vasquez and Danny Tenaglia on the bill, the tour was abruptly cancelled after headliner Sinead O'Connor bailed out. Tennant promises that the tour will instead be inaugurated in 2002.

Despite the cancellation, the tour would have been unheard of at the time that Jobriath. Still, fans remember him across the world. A campaign has been unleashed to get Jobriath's LPs released as CDs, as well as to make a documentary focusing on his short life.

Anyone having information, footage, images or recollections of Jobriath are asked to e-mail Rob Cochrane at jobriath@geocities.com.