

# Happy New Year

MARK GILES

I was sitting in a well-known gay bar, having a brandy before leaving for a GLF meeting, when I met a very nice gay guy who started rapping about being in the publishing business. Since I have an extensive background in this field, and am presently barely getting by on a very small salary as a proofreading supervisor, I immediately asked him if he had any openings.

I turned out that he was a manager for one of the largest publishing houses in New York City, and needed an assistant. It seemed like a great opportunity, but I was apprehensive about the office atmosphere. Would I have to dress "straight"? He assured me that was no problem, as all the girls wore slacks anyway, and he was pretty far-out-looking himself. Not only that, but his boss was gay, too.

It seemed too good to be true, but I went for the interview the following day, walking thru plush corridors which began to make me uneasy. I didn't know why I'd worked in several "prestige" office jobs before. Then I remembered... The national television magazine in HOLLYWOOD I'd worked at for two-and-a-half years of my life (falsely straight - but everyone knew anyway). I was seventeen years old then, and the youngest editor to be in charge of two editions. The reason was simple: I worked harder than anyone else there. I had to, because they were constantly looking for reasons to fire me. I was a disgrace to the company because I was different, and very possibly, slept with girls! (I think I should mention here that I'm a girl also.) Most of the people I worked with were future old maids from Indiana or Ohio who were terrified - or perhaps lulled - by the possibility that I might make a pass at them in the LADIES ROOM. They would titter & gossip behind my back,



WOMEN... went so far as to complain to the regional manager about the way I dressed. I was constantly harassed, to the point that one day I finally walked out of TV GUIDE, the BIBLE of the SILENT MAJORITY. And NOW, LIVE, and in BLACK AND WHITE (but mostly WHITE), from the people who brought you "DEATH VALLEY DAYS" and "THE PEOPLE'S PARK" in Berkeley... RONALD REAGAN! They're not silent; the commercials are just too loud.

For several years, I worked in the nightclub business, managing clubs, traveling, & spending lavishly on the girls I dated. I figured if had to prostitute myself, I might as well get something out of it. Of course, all I got was a lot of money that I spent as soon as I made it. And the girls I dated didn't really want me - they wanted a good time, & presents. I left Los Angeles, & lived in New Orleans, then Hawaii, & finally San Francisco, where I began to turn out, to other possibilities - other life styles. I was turned-off by the nightclub business, phony people, phony girls, phony me. I split from my \$800/month job & house on Telegraph Hill to come to New York.

So here we are in 1970. And times have changed. Or have they??

The interview was a bust. My friend's boss asked him if there wasn't some beautiful girl he could talk me to... "too bitch." He liked me, & felt I was very capable. But after all, it's one thing to have the office know you're gay, and another to LOOK it, right? My friend said he hadn't realized things were so uptight there, & he felt very sorry. Would I compromise, he wanted to know.

### COMPROMISE??

Well, you know... wear a dress.

Na one else does, why should I?? If I wanted to "compromise" that much, I'd sell out all the way & go back to the bar business, where I REALLY make some bread.

I can't understand. He's all for BLACK POWER. It's very pleased when I hired a black woman...

WHAT ABOUT HIS OWN PEOPLE? DOESN'T HE CARE ABOUT US?? It seems to be very responsible to hire a "Negro" these days - but it just isn't "IN" to hire a "Queen," is it??

Well, look. I've been able to make it all this time. And I REALLY carry on - swishing & all - at the office. Of course, I kind of toe the line - I don't overstep the boundaries... But I figure one day, when I'M boss, in about 20 or 30 years, then NO ONE will be able to tell me what to do, & I'll be able to hire anybody I like.

That's GREAT. But that's TOO LATE for me. I.I. BE 53 YEARS OLD THIRTY YEARS FROM NOW - I want to live my life & enjoy it NOW. I'm not going to wait.

for that. Neither are the blacks - or ANY of the oppressed people.

Well, I'm doing what I can...

ARE YOU??

THIS IS A NEW YEAR of your life.

Stop apologizing for what you are.

Come together.

COME OUT!!!

## Random Notes: MUSIC

Jim Jordan



I wish I knew how it would feel to be free  
I wish I could break all the chains holding me  
I wish I could say all the things that I should say  
Say them loud, say them clear  
For the whole damn world to hear

I wish I could share all the love that's in my heart  
Remove all the walls that keep us apart  
I wish you could know what it means to be one  
Then you'd say and agree that everyone should be free  
I wish I could give all I'm longing to give  
I wish I could live like I'm longing to live

The above song was written by Billy Taylor (jazz pianist). As performed by Nina Simone (RCA LSP3837) it becomes a probing plea of the mixed feelings of pain, frustration, and hope voiced by the oppressed blacks for freedom - freedom to live.

Nina Simone has emerged as one of the strongest voices in music demanding this freedom, to say nothing of the enormous talent she possesses, and the ability to communicate, to electrify proportions, the full range of emotions which can only come through the experience of "living." I am not talking about the premeditated, "acted," planned-out emotions of a Barbra Streisand - Tom Jones kind of entertainment, which arouses the conditioned, Madison Ave. hyped, assured responses from audiences being "entertained." Nina confronts her audience to make them hear and feel themselves, each other and life on the most starkly honest terms, which, I might add, is not always "entertaining." Sometimes her mood will hit upon the anger, pain, frustration, bitterness and rage of the oppressed; understandable feelings and reactions to a situation created and controlled by the oppressors. But, if you happen to be there when her mood is an affirmation of love and/or life, you may find yourself weeping or shouting with joy at being alive at that moment.

I have seen Nina perform over a hundred times over a period of several years and I have watched her grow into a woman of fierce pride, and a creative, passionate artist. For me, she has no peer.

Having "hopefully" paid, in small part, a debt of gratitude to Nina Simone for being, I will try to carry further the idea I am trying to articulate here. Again, please read the opening lyric, but this time try to relate to it both

on a universal level, and in the personal sense of what this type of freedom to live would mean to you. At no point does this song address itself to the idea of black freedom only. There is a newly recorded version of this song by a San Francisco based group called "Cold Blood". (San Francisco SD200), which is quite moving due largely to the straightforward singing of the group's lead singer, Lydia Penz who is white. I can remember singing this song (and still do) many times, at times for myself, at times for others, but never without experiencing an emotional upheaval as a result of the lyric and the particular mood I've been in at the time. I suppose it may be easy to speak of freedom, but quite another matter to "feel" it, particularly when our daily lives are filled with so many time-consuming activities conflicting with such freedom. However, I personally feel that each of us must find within ourselves a sense of "personal freedom" to enable us to experience that we are "living" in the most "complete" meaning of the word, even under the most adverse, conflicting and oppressive conditions.

Another living example of one who is finding his own personal freedom to live is Don Burton, who has become known by those who appreciate and respect him as San Francisco's Gay Folk singer. At this time, I will not go into Don's background; Don accomplished that task himself with a beautifully written first-person article which appeared in the San Francisco Free Press. I will mention that Don started out much like most young singers, singing with a group while attending High School in Torrance, Calif., a small town about 30 miles south of L.A. However, fed up of place singing pop show tunes, Don turned to folk music as a means of musical self-expression. Joan Baez was his earliest, and strongest influence because of her integrity and honesty in choosing and singing songs which reflected her personal feelings about life. Don turned to songs of protest, particularly against the war, but though he would sing of peace, he felt no peace within himself, living in fear, frustration, and oppression because of being a homosexual.

He began to find an outlet for his feelings by writing songs which reflected his experiences. He decided one evening, 5 minutes before a concert he was giving at an Elks Club, that he could no longer continue to live his life as a lie. Taking the stage, he quietly announced that he was a homosexual and would like to sing some songs

of the "gay" life. After singing his first completely honest performance, this audience, which gasped at his announcement, gave him a standing ovation. At the urging of his lover, Leo Laurence (who started the Homosexual Liberation Movement in San Francisco), Don started singing his own songs to straight audiences as well as gay audiences. It is through their love for each other that Don has found growing within himself conviction about what he is doing. To express this in Don's own words, "Leo has made me feel the only way to freedom is honesty."

I have had the pleasurable and meaningful experience of talking to both Don and Leo (though I don't look forward to receiving this month's phone bill) and have learned of Don's oppression by the "media" agents who believe he is "too controversial", and by the nite clubs who believe he is "too political". Surprising but true. Don has experienced the indifference and apathy of homosexuals in gay bars such as the "Opera Club", who perhaps do not wish to discover the truth about themselves and their lives. This is apathy of much the same type that Nina Simone has experienced from a portion of the black audience (to say nothing of passive white apathy), who are not able to respond to their own oppression and needs to liberate themselves. Don told me that, for the most part, the straight audiences do listen, and listen attentively, responding enthusiastically. I wish I had been there to be able to relate to all of this experience personally. To my knowledge there is no one on the East Coast doing this type thing. (If there is, please let your voices be heard.) In the meantime, Don is certain of the direction in which he must continue despite current or future hardships and oppression. He will continue to sing of "our lives, our oppression, and mostly about love, as affirm" as he states "that love, all love, is beautiful and that all people must be free to love".

This writer hopes most sincerely that he will meet and hear Don personally, but for now, I am happy we are "brothers" united with our "sisters" to liberate "all people", with the hope that one day no one will say, "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free".

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