

resource

queers, art and satire • volume eight number twenty-six • issue 204 • december 18-december 31



queer directory

SERVICES

Lesbian and Gay Community Switchboard
234-2752

Lesbian Resource Center
2121 S. Mill #108
Tempe 85282
966-6152

ORGANIZATIONS

ASU Coming Out Discussion Group
892-5771

Alternative Young Adult Alliance
Box 1075
Mesa 85211
255-9001

American Gay Atheists
3003 N. Central Ave. #121
Box 121
Phoenix 85012
548-1155

Arizona Gay Rodeo Association
Box 16363
Phoenix 85011
938-3932

Camelback Business and Professional Association
Box 2097
Phoenix 85001

Desert Overture
Box 16454
Phoenix 85011
840-6911

Feminist Lesbian Activist Coalition
968-1757

Gay Alliance of Northern Arizona
Box 183
Flagstaff 86002
525-1199

Gay and Lesbian Discussion Group
392-3198

Gay and Lesbian Seniors
241-1604

Lesbian and Gay Academic Union ASU
Tempe 85287
966-6671

Lesbian/Gay Public Awareness Project
Box 60881
Phoenix 85082
351-3080

Parents and Friends of Lesbians/Gays
Box 37525
Phoenix 85069
843-0661

Phoenix Gay Pride Committee
Box 26139
Tempe, 85285
352-7165

Team Arizona
Box 36431
Phoenix 85015
279-2838

US West EAGLE
Box 36702
Phoenix 85067

Valley Career Women
Box 33393
Phoenix 85067
275-3383

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Arizona Power Exchange
5821 N. 67th Ave.
Ste 103-276
Glendale 85301
491-1009 ex 2739

Arizona Wranglers
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Phoenix 85010
866-9988

Copperstate Leathermen
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Phoenix 85064

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Phoenix 85011
831-6432

Desert Adventures
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Phoenix 85001
957-3476

Desert Valley Squares
Box 34615
Phoenix 85067
968-7184

East Side Social Club
Box 7681
Mesa 85216
984-6592

Lesbian Breakfast Club
833-2293

Los Amigos Del Sol
Box 27335
Phoenix 85061
848-8436

Our Gang Bowling League
Box 62971
Phoenix 85082
946-4909

Southwest Men at Large
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Tempe 85285
730-8171

Southwest Frontiers
Box 9751
Phoenix 85068
996-4696

POLITICAL ACTION

ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power
Box 13274
Phoenix 85002
433-4966

Arizona Committee For Progress
Box 40374
Phoenix 85067

Arizona Democratic Party
254-4179

Arizona Republican Party
957-7770

Coalition For Immediate Action
Box 33233
Phoenix 85067
246-8277

SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATIONS

Affirmation: Gay Mormons
Box 26601
Tempe 85285
967-4032

Brethren Mennonites Council
Box 5613
Glendale 85312

Christian Science Group
Box 893
Phoenix 85001
371-1102

Dignity/Integrity: Gay Catholics
Box 21091
Phoenix 85036
258-2556

Lion of Judah Evangelical Ministries
997-5372

Lutherans Concerned
Box 7519
Phoenix 85011
870-3611

Mishpachah Am
Box 7731
Phoenix 85011
966-5001

Presbyterians for Lesbians and Gays
Box 61162
Phoenix 85082
275-0506

CHURCHES

Boundless Love Church
431 S. Stapley #23
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439-0224

Casa de Cristo
1209 E. Turney
Phoenix 85014
265-2831

First Unitarian Universalist
4027 E. Lincoln Dr.
Paradise Valley
85253
840-8400

Gentle Shepherd
3425 E. Mountain
Phoenix 85046
996-7644

Healing Waters Ministries
225 W. University
Tempe 85281
894-8681

Oasis MCC
2405 E. Coronado
Phoenix 85008
275-3534

Restoration Church of Jesus Christ
1-800-677-RCJC

NEW AGE WORSHIP

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Phoenix 85068
277-5745

Goddess Womyn's Network
Box 17312
Phoenix 85011
258-2388

House of the Dawn
2141 E. Palm Ln.
Phoenix 85008
267-1203

Mecca Center
2602 N. 7th St.
Phoenix 85006
285-0006

Moon Goddess Coven
Box 48918
Phoenix 85075

AIDS SERVICES

AGAPE Network
Box 32778
Phoenix 85064
243-7480

AIDS Information Line
234-2752

Arizona AIDS Project
919 N. 1st St.
Phoenix 85004
420-9396

Community AIDS Council
506 E. Camelback
Phoenix 85012
265-2437

Community Care Center
333 E. Virginia
#108
Phoenix 85004
340-1111

Flagstaff AIDS Outreach
Box 183
Flagstaff 86002
525-1199

Gay Men's Sex Project
265-AIDS

HIV Health Group
265-2437

Malta Center
2000 N. 7th St.
Phoenix 85006
340-1881

The Names Project
National Headquarters
1-800-USA-NAMES

Phoenix Shanti Group
1314 E. McDowell
Phoenix 85006
271-0008

Planned Parenthood
5651 N. 7th St.
Phoenix 85014
277-PLAN

Veterans Administration HIV Educator:
Lee Hood
277-5551

Volunteers in Direct Aid
Box 5689
Phoenix 85010
938-3932

ALCOHOL ABUSE ASSISTANCE

Adult Children of Alcoholics
375-8637

Al-Anon
6829 N. 21st Ave.
Phoenix 85015
249-1257

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266-4047

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955-4554

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Phoenix 85014
274-4570

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Scottsdale 85253
991-6999

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Phoenix 85014
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274-9120

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Tempe 85281
966-0203

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Phoenix 85002
255-0668

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254-9651

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263-8313

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867-2463

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267-8707

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248-0065

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277-9373

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258-9477

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253-3376

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5002 E. Van Buren
267-9959

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2120 E. McDowell
244-9943

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138 W. Camelback
266-0875

Charlie's
727 W. Camelback
265-0224

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222 E. Roosevelt
252-0001

Club 155 West
155 W. Camelback
274-8505

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4620 N. 7th Ave.
279-3033

Trax
1724 E. McDowell
254-0231

BAR AND GRILL

Country Club
4428 N. 7th Ave.
264-4553

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Flex Complex
1517 S. Black Canyon
Phoenix 271-9011

published by
RADICAL PHAERIE
MARKETING, INC.

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aka Communications, Inc.
213-650-6223

Resource is a
member of the
Associated Press.

©1992 Radical Phaerie Marketing, Inc.
P.O. Box 5948
Phoenix, AZ 85010
602-256-7476

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It is four-thirty in the morning, and I am driving through the desert at unlawful speeds, listening to the hum of FM static and struggling to stay awake. Asleep next to me is a man I sometimes refer to as My Boyfriend; he is wearing an enormous sweater and snoring quietly.

I am carefully fingering the tuning knob on the car radio, determined not to wake my companion. He's had little sleep, and his hand resting on my thigh is as close to friendly as we've gotten in recent weeks—I don't want him to remove it.

There is no music in the desert. The only radio I'm picking up is an evangelical station and an all-night weather report. I'm less interested in the

resurrection of Christ than I am in the wind-chill index, but Pat Robertson is more entertaining than climate reports and funnel clouds, and I figure maybe I'll pick up something I can use on *Jeopardy*.

"We've forgotten the true meaning of Christmas," Pat laments in FM stereo, listing the greedy evils we've substituted for the glorification of Christ: Shopping, Christmas trees, gift-giving, eggnog. Pat's list goes on and on; by the time he gets to fornication and homosexuality, my head has begun to nod and my eyes are drooping. A

jackrabbit gets caught briefly in my headlights; when I swerve the car to avoid flattening the animal, my pal awakens, startled. "Driving," he mumbles,

adjusting his pillow and removing his hand from my thigh.

The rabbit's stunned expression stays with me as I listen to Reverend Pat blather about virgin birth and "the true meaning of Christmas." I think about the city I'm driving away from, where my friend and I attended an annual holiday party with a lot of other gay men. Many of the guests were dying; they looked shocked, like rabbits caught in the headlights of automobiles.

We were stunned, too, realizing that many of these men would not join us there next Christmas. Unable to overlook our friends' fate, we have left the party early, driving fast toward home and the evil comforts of Christmas: shopping, lighted trees and, I hope, fornication.

—Pela

On the cover: Joan Crawford in Queen Bee, 1955. Tinting and separations by M. Miles Minter.

1992

the queer year in review

What is significant to some is irrelevant to others. 1992 was a mixed bag—some good news, some bad news; some of it worth noting—for both the gay community and the reactionary goons of the far right. The goons got their agenda into the platform at the National Republican Convention, then lost the White House and two U. S. Congressional seats here in Arizona. On the other hand, Republicans now control both houses of the Arizona legislature, as well as the governor's office. And it's on the state level that issues such as abortion and gay and civil rights in general will be decided—a legacy of the Reagan-Bush era and its appointments to the U. S. Supreme Court, which has decided that the states, not the federal government, should be calling the shots regarding the rights of women, gays and "individual states and communities." But despite Sandra Bernhard's finding love in the arms of Morgan Fairchild on *Roseanne*, you'll find no gossip here about the secret gay sex lives of famous people. Happily, that sort of thing is less newsworthy every day. **Text by Chuck Hadd Jr.**

January 30: A handful of people gather with signs and a list of demands in a vacant lot across from the Phoenix Shanti Group, an AIDS care facility at 16th St. and McDowell. The protest group, calling itself the HIV Action Committee, is urging a boycott of the Shanti facility. The committee turns out to consist of spokesman John Bahr and four others, and makes its position known by chalking graffiti on the facility's sidewalks and distributing flyers to passersby. No one—including the patients and staff at Shanti—appears to be aware that the protest is taking place. Bahr demands answers to questions that are already a matter of public record. "This isn't a protest," one protestor remarks. "It's a stunt."

February 3: A group calling itself Colorado for Family Values announces a drive for a ballot measure that would prohibit city councils and other government agencies from banning anti-gay discrimination. Meanwhile, a similar group in Oregon has launched a drive to prohibit homosexuals from being "portrayed in a positive way" at any educational institution, including colleges and elementary and high schools.

March 26: More than 1,000 people pack a hearing sponsored by the Phoenix Human Relations Commission, held to consider a proposed ordinance that would ban discrimination against gays in the workplace and most establishments open to the public. The ordinance would make it illegal to discriminate because of military status, martial status or disabilities. After the public hearings, the commission will make a recommendation to the city council.

April 4: Retired tennis champion Arthur Ashe announces that he has AIDS. Ashe says he was infected during heart surgery in 1983 and had kept quiet about it for reasons of family privacy. He goes public about his condition, unknown even to several close friends, when confronted by a reporter for *USA Today*.

May 12: Bill Green, chairman of the Arizona chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, invites the gay community to help with his organization's efforts to legalize marijuana. Green cites the plant's medicinal value to AIDS and cancer patients and the issue of "freedom of choice."

June 11: Hewlett-Packard Corp. announces a revision in its corporate anti-discrimination policy that will forbid anti-gay bias and harassment. The California-based firm has about 92,000 employees.

June 16: The Phoenix city council votes 5-4 to place a proposed ordinance prohibiting anti-gay discrimination in employment and public accommodations on the September, 1993 election ballot. More

than 3,000 people attend the public meetings at which the council considers the ordinance. (On the advice of police, Mayor Paul Johnson wears a bulletproof vest.) The council can enact the ordinance without putting it to a city wide vote; council members refuse to discuss reasons for not doing so.

July 8: The Phoenix city council votes 6-3 for a citywide ban on anti-gay employment bias, reversing its earlier decision to put the measure up for a popular vote. The ban applies only to firms that hold city contracts and have more than 35 employees. At a news conference, Barry Goldwater, former U.S. Senator and titular spokesman for Republican conservatism, urges the council to adopt the measure, stating, "Under our constitution, we literally have the right to do anything we want as long as the performing of those acts doesn't hurt anybody else. I can't see any way being gay causes harm to anyone else."



July 13: The three-day Democratic National Convention begins with the official party platform using the phrase "gay and lesbian" for the first time, and calls for passage of

federal gay rights legislation and an end to the ban on gays and lesbians in the military service.

July 15: In Flagstaff, Arizona, Coconino County Sheriff Joe Richards approves an application for a gay music festival because, he says, he feels legally obliged to do so. "To have this type of activity in a public park where citizens and their children will be enjoying family activities violates my sense of ethics," says the sheriff.

July 23: Air Force staff sergeant Tom Paniccia, stationed at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base near Tucson, Arizona, discloses that he is gay on ABC's *Good Morning America*.

August 1: Air Force officials recommend a discharge for Sergeant Paniccia after his appearance on national television. Paniccia, an 11-year veteran once named Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, says he's not surprised by the recommendation and will fight being discharged before a review board and possibly in federal court.

August 13: U.S. Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) calls on the Pentagon to drop its ban on gay and lesbian service personnel, "unless an independent study concludes that the ban has a rational basis."

September 19: The state board of the National Organization for Women (NOW) passes a resolution to establish a task force on gay and lesbian issues.

September 25: Basketball player Earvin

"Magic" Johnson resigns from the National Commission on AIDS, accusing President Bush of "dropping the ball" in the fight against AIDS. Johnson, who tested positive



for the HIV virus last year, had been appointed to the panel by Bush in January.

October 11: Gay men and lesbians "take the next step" in commemoration of Fifth Annual National Coming Out Day.

October 27: Canada lifts the ban on gays and lesbians serving in the Canadian military services.

November 3: Colorado voters approve a ballot initiative that bars governmental bodies from preventing anti-gay discrimination. But Oregon voters defeat a measure that would ban positive portrayals of gay or lesbian persons in schools.

December 1: Fifth annual World AIDS Day, designated by the World Health Organization, is observed.

January 1, 1972: A recent study, published in *Science* magazine, suggests that male homosexuality may be determined in the womb as a result of certain kinds of chemical or hormonal stress endured by the pregnant mother.

January 27: The New York City Council vetoes a proposed gay rights ordinance that would have prohibited discrimination against gay men and lesbians in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

March 4: The California Department of Motor Vehicles reports that while an overwhelming majority of the sixty-five thousand personalized license plates in the state have presented no censorship problems for state officials, a few messages—including HOMO, GAYLIB, EAT ME, and LOVE69—have been banned.



March 7: East Lansing, Michigan, becomes the first city in the U.S. to ban discrimination in city hiring on the basis of sexual orientation.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE TWENTY YEARS CAN MAKE

March 22: The Equal Rights Amendment, banning discrimination on the basis of sex, passes the U.S. Senate. Detractors immediately claim it will destroy the nuclear family, give broad civil rights to homosexuals, and even mandate "unisex" rest rooms in public places. Still, by year's end, twenty-two of the necessary thirty-eight state have ratified it.

June 19: The first officially proclaimed "Gay Pride Week"—decreed by the city council several weeks earlier—gets under way in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

October 8: Nearly a hundred gay demonstrators disrupt the sixth annual convention of the Association for the Advancement of Behavioral Therapy in New York City to protest the continued use of aversion therapy to "treat" homosexuality. "Aversion therapy is Clockwork Orange!" shouts one outraged protestor. Other demonstrators condemn it as "torture" and "a cruel joke on gay people."

November 1: *That Certain Summer*—a much-publicized if generally inoffensive made-for-TV movie about a fourteen-year-old boy who learns the truth about his divorced father's homosexuality—airs on ABC. Despite mostly favorable reviews in the media (liberal critics call it "dignified,"

"sensitive," "intelligent"), it still draws the ire of some viewers, who demand to know why such "filth" is being broadcast into their homes. Meanwhile, there are reports that anxious ABC producers doctored the script at the last minute to avoid controversy. In the original ending, the boy—angry and confused—refused to say goodbye to his father, but then later regrets it and muses remorsefully, "I should've said goodbye to him..." In the more downbeat version actually aired, the boy displays no such regret, and the final shot is of the father—tearful and shamefaced—wondering whether he'll ever hear from his son again.

November 7: Jesse Helms—a fifty-one-year-old former Sunday-School teacher from Raleigh, North Carolina—is elected to his first term in the U. S. Senate.

Excerpted from The Gay Decades by Leigh Rutledge, copyright ©1992 Plume Books.

**Elves
In
Shock**

SADDEST NEWS

In Two Thousand Years

**SANTA
IS SICK
WITH
HIV-INFECTION.**



NO CHRISTMAS!

**IF ONLY REAGAN AND BUSH HAD TOLD THE TRUTH,
SANTA WOULDN'T HAVE TO DIE FROM AIDS.**

ACT UP

PHOENIX

AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power

art spaces

Phoenix Art Museum: "Masterworks of American Impressionism from the Pfeil Collection," opening on Saturday, December 19, consists of 86 superb oil paintings and works on paper by 70 of America's most famous Impressionist painters, including Mary Cassatt, Childe Hassam, John Twachtman and Theodore Robinson. The exhibit is augmented by a 30-minute video presentation, produced by the Smithsonian Institution, entitled "In Open Air: A Portrait of the American Impressionists." Also included are the first and second generations of American artists who traveled to Giverny in France to learn from Claude Monet, such as Lilla Cabot Perry, Theodore Butler and Frederick Frieseke. Through February 14. "1920s Capes and Cloaks" features 1920s ladies' capes and cloaks from the Arizona Costume Institute collection; through February 28. "Russian Boxes" includes more than 60 exquisitely detailed lacquer boxes decorated with Russian fairy tales; through March 21. Museum hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10am to 5pm, Wednesday until 9pm; Sunday noon-5pm. 1625 N. Central. 257-1222.

Tempe Historical Museum: "The Barrios," an exhibit telling the story of Tempe's Hispanic heritage, is on view through January. 809 E. Southern Ave. 350-5100.

Christopher Collection: A truly enchanting exhibit of vintage bottles and vases adorned with buttons, beads, chains and other materials by Arizona artists Rhoda Babis and Annie Hammer; through January 1. Biltmore Fashion Park, 2530 E. Camelback Rd. 955-3195.

Men Of Manhattan: The Alternative Theatre Company presents a cast of twelve actors in a series of vignettes depicting gay life in New York City—guppie lawyers on the east side, a stripper/hustler in an 8th Avenue porn palace, and hunky bodybuilders in a Chelsea gym. Performances Thursdays through Sundays at 8pm, January 8 through 31. Tickets are \$10 for Friday and Saturday shows and \$8 for

Thursday and Sunday. Reservations suggested. Black Box Theatre, 1202 N. 3rd St. 249-0380.

The God Of Isaac: Arizona Jewish Theatre Company's production of James Sherman's thoughtful comedy concerns a young man re-examining his roots as a Jew. Performances December 30 through January 17; Thursdays and Saturdays at 8pm; Sundays at 2pm and 7pm. Tickets \$11-\$19. Herberger Theater Center, Stage West, 222 E. Monroe. 252-8497.

The All Night Strut! The Arizona Theatre Company's production of Fran Charnas' high-energy musical revue features the classics of American popular music, like "In the Mood," "Fascinating Rhythm," "Lullaby of Broadway" and "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing." The show runs from December 31 through January 16. Tickets \$16-\$27. Herberger Theater Center, 222 E. Monroe St. 252-8497 or 678-2888.

The Roasting of Capricorns: An improvisational comedy showcase, "Boring Capricorns," presented by members of the Oxymoron Improvisational Comedy Group and students of its director, Louis



Christopher Wynn in a dress? Never! Wynn and pals Eleanor Hoffman and Warren Forsythe ogle footwear in PLT/Cookie Company's *The Elves and the Shoemaker*.

Main Street Cafe and Gallery: Photographs by David Cook and works on paper by Chris Winkler, presented in cooperation with Eleven East Ashland Independent Art Space; through December 27. 4426 N. 19th Ave. 265-5992.

Pueblo Grande Museum: "Indian Market 1992 Poster Competition Exhibit" includes 22 art works by seven American Indian artists who competed to do a poster for the Indian Market, on view through January 2. Also displayed: "The Southwest: Past and Present," an interactive archaeology exhibit. 4619 E. Washington St. 495-0900.

theater

WWII U.S.O. Christmas Show: More than 80 popular songs from the 1940s including classic holiday songs are presented in this fabulous all-American musical revue. December 18 and 19, at 8pm; December 20, at 2pm. Tickets are \$10. Phoenix Little Theatre, 25 E. Coronado Rd. 254-2151.

A Christmas Carol: Playwright Richard Helleisen's and composer David DeBarry's adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic is enhanced with beautiful music. Performances Tuesdays through Saturdays at 8pm; Sunday

matinees December 20 and 27 at 2pm; Thursday, December 24 at 2pm; Saturday, December 26 at 2 and 8pm. The stage will be dark Christmas Day. Tickets are \$11-\$21. Herberger Theater Center, Center Stage, 222 E. Monroe St. 252-8497.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: Theater Works presents this production about the efforts of a woman and her husband to put on the annual church Christmas pageant, despite having to cast the Herdmans—the meanest, nastiest, most awful kids in town. Performances begin Friday, December 18, and run through the 30th. Tickets \$6.50, \$4.50. 6615 W. Thunderbird. 486-8636.

For The Time Being Players: This all-women improvisational group gives weekly performances exploring life and comedy from a woman's perspective. Admission is \$5. Saturdays at 8pm at Liza's Cafe, 1945 W. Baseline Rd. in Mesa. 838-7338.

Livin' Fat: A Judi Ann Mason comedy, presented by Black Theater Troupe, Inc. Performances Friday and Saturday at 8pm, Sunday matinee at 3pm, December 4-6, 11-13, and 18-20. Admission \$13, \$10 students with ID/senior citizens, \$5 under 12. 333 E. Portland. 258-8128.

culture club

by réy hoffman

Phoenix Museum of History: The latest exhibit, "Homesteaders to Hostlers—Black Pioneers in Phoenix," reveals a little-known segment of Phoenix history; through March 31. 1002 W. Van Buren St. 253-2734.

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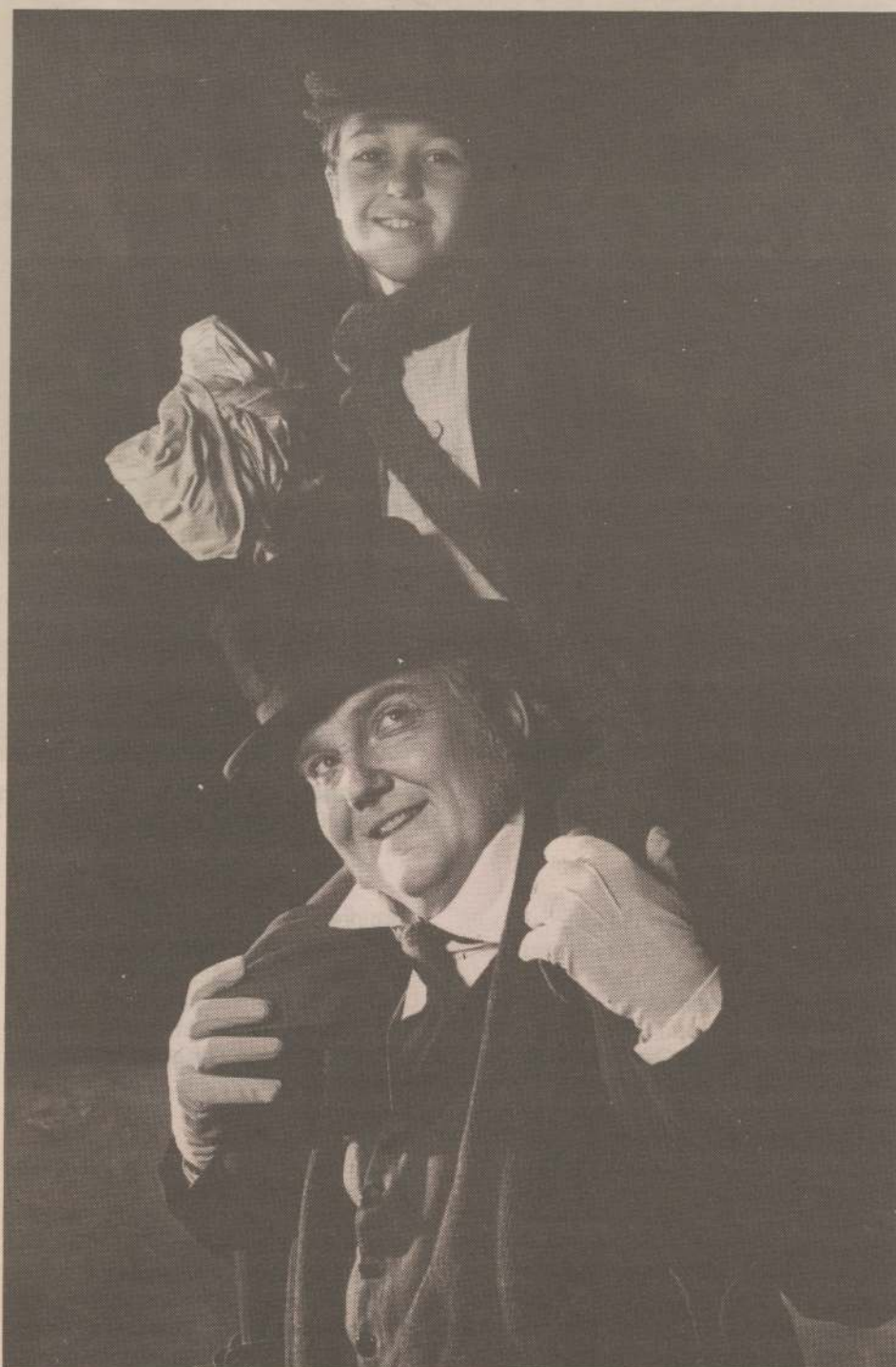
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Little Dickens: Lyndsay Martin as Tiny Tim and Gerald Burgess as Ebenezer Scrooge in ATOP's failed *A Christmas Carol*.

The Distinguished Gentleman, starring Eddie Murphy, is a poor attempt to rip off *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Of Thee I Sing*, and dozens of other political comedies dating back to the thirties. If anything even remotely new or interesting had been added to the story, it might have been enjoyable (albeit mindless) entertainment. Instead, *The Distinguished Gentleman* is annoyingly simpleminded, especially when it gets sincere. Eddie Murphy exudes his usual warmth and charisma, reading such endearing lines as "You're not going to try any of that fag shit with me, are you?" The supporting cast (including Sheryl Lee Ralph and James Garner) is mostly wasted, especially Grant Shaud from *Murphy Brown*, who plays Eddie's put-upon assistant. If you think seeing politicians exposed as crooks is hilarious, this film is your cup of congressional tea. For the rest of us, I suggest *The Distinguished Gentleman* be impeached as soon as possible.

—Neil Cohen

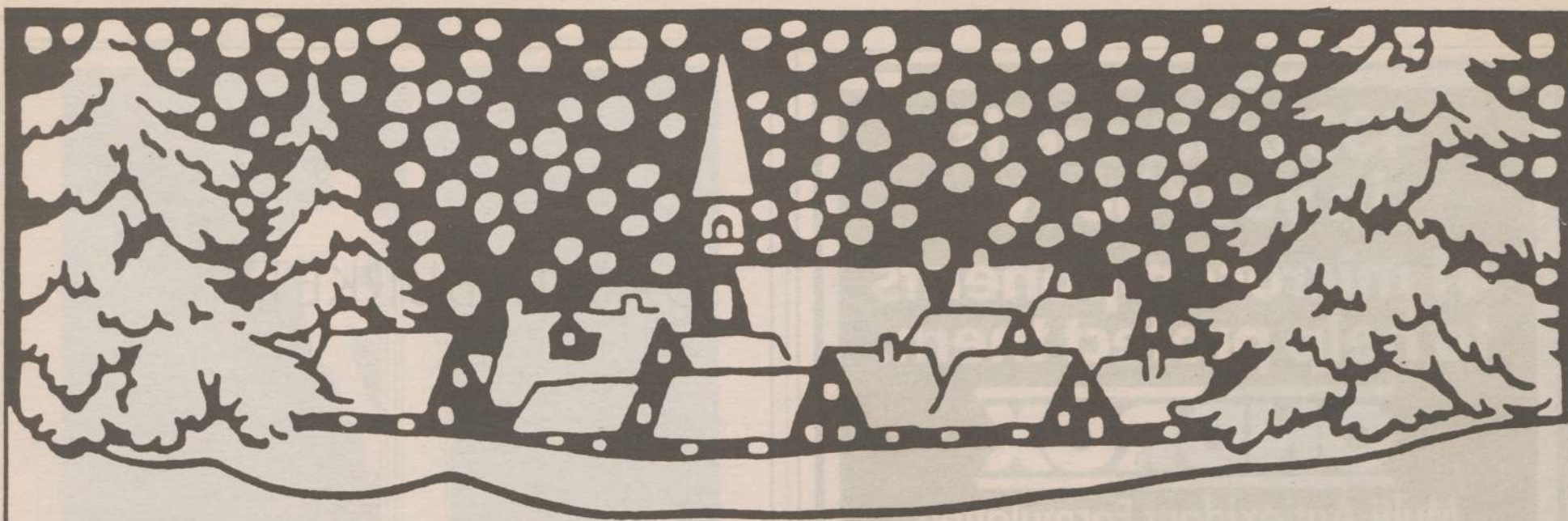
Actors' Theatre of Phoenix undoubtedly hoped their production of Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol* would fill the void left when Phoenix Little Theatre's Cookie Company chose not to restage their entertaining annual version. Unfortunately, this adaptation by Richard Hellesen, with dirge-like original music by David DeBarry, is as close to a lump of coal as you're likely to receive onstage this year. Lumbering and stilted narration takes the place of almost all action, and the performers are little more than puppets who do just what the story dictates, regardless of any apparent motivation. You'll not soon see such a huge waste of local talent than in this well-intentioned but ultimately somnambulist children's show. Gerald Burgess, a fine actor, is not allowed much material (or scenery) on which to chew as Scrooge, and his youth is evident almost immediately on his first entrance, as he shoves street urchins vigorously out of his way. Other accomplished performers like Heidi Ewart, Julie Shuster, Nicholas Glaeser, and Lesley Tutnick are given nothing of substance to justify their presence, and their untapped potential is never less than annoying. Elements of the staging are definitely innovative, but the spartan look of the show will turn off younger kids. Older children will be bored by the show's lack of humor, suspense, and decidedly unspooky ghost effects, as evidenced by the shell-shocked faces of the young audience at intermission. The costumes, lights, and elegant hairstyles by Rebecca Akins, James Lincoln, and Heather MacDonald are perfect, but do little to hide the fact that this *Christmas Carol* is a big holiday turkey.

—Neil Cohen



The Muppet Christmas Carol: Does the world really need another version of *A Christmas Carol*? After all, everyone from Gene Lockhart to Henry Winkler has played Scrooge on film, not to mention the countless children's theater productions that crowd stages this time every year. What makes this telling so entertaining and unique is the mirthful irreverence of the familiar Muppet characters, not seen on the big screen since 1984's *The Muppets Take Manhattan*. Setting this outing apart from previous *Carols* is the fact that the Muppets are playing actual characters (Kermit is Bob Cratchitt, Miss Piggy his wife, et al), not "themselves." Thus, the film plays like an expanded episode of the old *Muppet Show*, with special guest star Michael Caine as old Ebenezer. (Caine's performance is notable if only for the fact that he basically plays straight man to a bunch of foam rubber.) The sly kick to the film is that it's narrated by Gonzo the Great (as Charles Dickens), who relays the story to the audience, as well as his ratty companion Rizzo, as it is played out before us. This allows for zany Muppet antics throughout, while retaining the original language of the Dickens classic. You've seen *A Christmas Carol* dozens of times before, but think about it: What other version has been cheeky enough to present a couple of infamous hecklers as the twin ghosts of Jacob and Robert Marley?

—Kirby Holt



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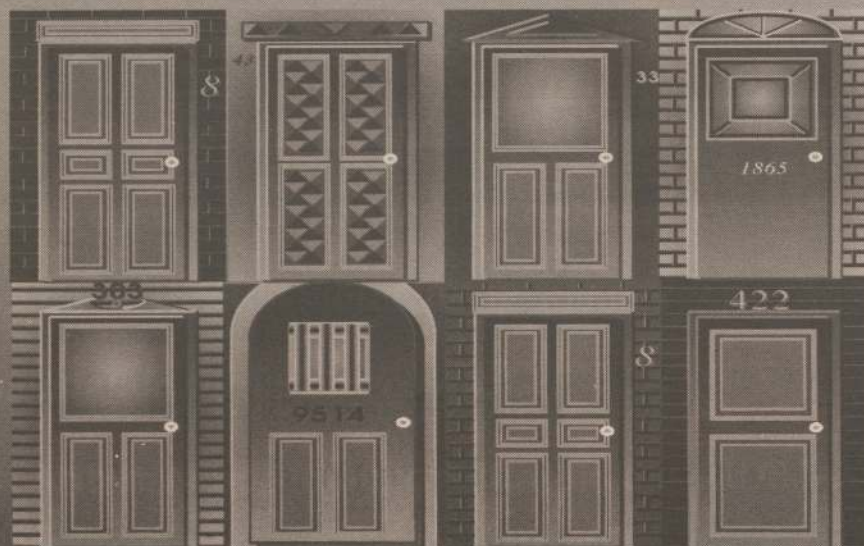
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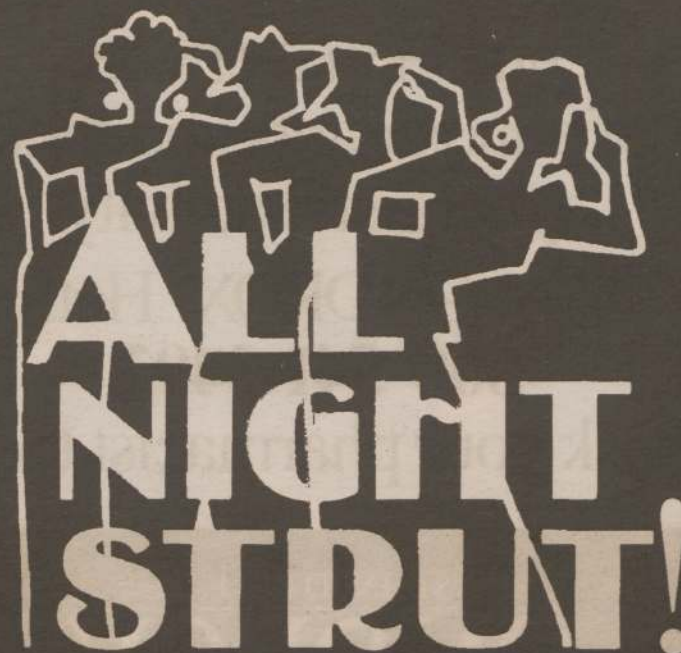
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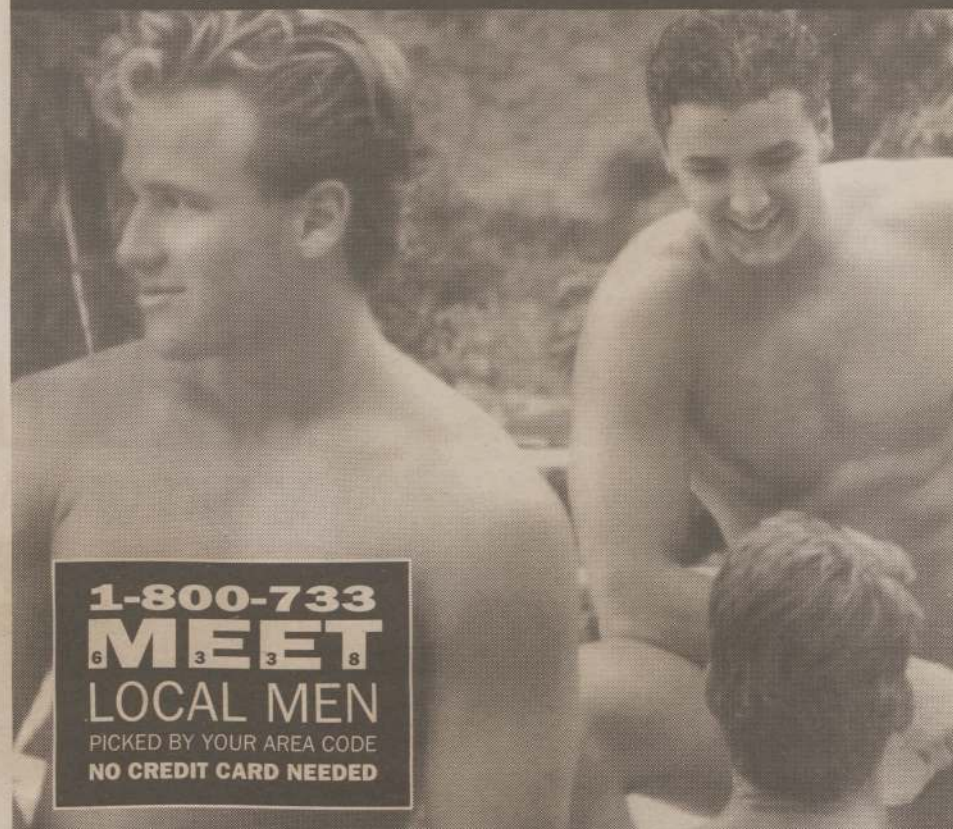
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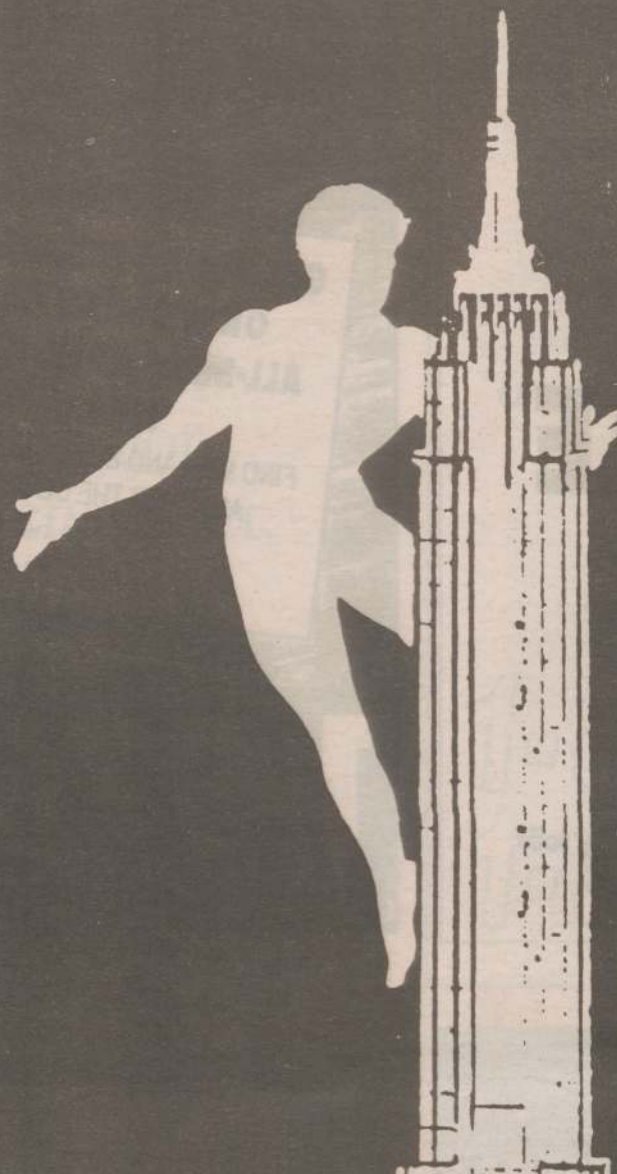


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