

# Fantasia Fair '94: An Event to Remember

by Dallas Denny

For those unfamiliar with the geography of New England, Cape Cod is a finger of land which curls into the Atlantic Ocean somewhere to the south of Boston. It is a vacation paradise, with miles of unspoiled seashore, rugged dunes, and picturesque towns.

If you think of Cape Cod as a flexed arm with a slightly opened fist, then on the inside of the hand, just opposite the nails, lies Provincetown, once a booming whaling center, then a sleepy Portuguese fishing village, and now a cherished destination of gay and lesbian vacationers. Every summer, the town's population swells, the many bed and breakfasts hang out "No Vacancy" signs, and the shops and restaurants on Commercial Street are packed with visitors and cars with rainbow flags. But by the end of September, the pace begins to slow.

It is at this time, after most of the

tourists have gone home, but before bad weather hits, during that transitional time when half of the leaves are on the trees and half are on the ground, that Provincetown becomes a temporary home for transgendered persons from around the world. They come to participate in Fantasia Fair, a week-long event which just celebrated its twentieth anniversary, making in the longest continuously running event in the community. They come to shop, to eat fine food, to dance at the A House, to attend Fantasia Fair's many luncheons and banquets, and to participate in the FanFair Follies, the Fashion Show, the Fantasy Ball, or the other events. They come for the late night house parties at Chicago House and the Fair's other inns, for the spontaneous wine and cheese receptions. They come to see old friends, and to find new ones. But most of all, they come for the chance to be themselves

for seven glorious days, to stroll down the street without fear of harassment. They come for the freedom which FanFair provides.

Unlike other gender community events, Fantasia Fair is not held in a large convention hotel. Rather, FanFair takes place throughout Provincetown: in the many shops, inns, and restaurants; in the Unitarian Church; at the Provincetown Arts Center; in the bars; and on the streets. FanFair is a group of crossdressers talking earnestly with townies on the street, running into a friend while shopping at Bradford's drug store, joking with the bartender at the Crown and Anchor. It is an impromptu late night jazz trio at Roomers, or an earnest conversation with Virginia Prince over clam chowder at the Lobster Pot. It is Gary M., lugging hundreds of pounds of video gear in order to film a luncheon pre-

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## FanFair...

sensation by JoAnn Roberts, sweating, but grinning from ear to ear. It is folk singing on the patio at the Fairbanks Inn, or a trio of significant others off on a tour of the dunes. It is sharing the street with 7000 lesbians, in town for women's week, on the first day of the fair. It is flying over the ocean at a thousand feet in a rented airplane, or braving the ocean's swells in order to see a whale, or walking quietly along the beach. It is a radiant smile on the face of Andrea Susan, as she is named Miss Fantasia Fair. It is 100 such things happening at the same time.

Imagine any gender convention you have ever attended, and then spread the magic out across space and time—across several square miles, and for an entire week. That, my friends, is Fantasia Fair.

### Snapshot I

It's Thursday night, the evening of the Follies, and I've just come off stage. In the impossibly small dressing room, there are at least ten acts, all of which are primping, plucking, and teasing themselves into their best approximation of femininity. I wind my way through a forest of arms, legs, and torsos and duck through a secret door into the back bar at the C&A; it is at least twenty degrees cooler, and the temperature drops another twenty degrees as I go outside. It is just starting to rain, and the gentle mist feels good on my skin. But I don't stop to enjoy it. I make my way to the front door, pass Joanne White, who is serving as Warden of Admissions, and mingle in the crowd at the back of the room. I buy a photo of myself from the many which Helen Strong, one of the official photographers of the event, has on display at the back of the room, and turn just in time to find out that the rumor is true: Angela has imported a mariachi band to accompany her rendition of **Cielito Lindo**. Here they come down the aisle, five of them, with big hats, trumpets, guitars, and instruments of unknown persuasion, their dark cos-

tumes the perfect foil for her beautiful white beaded gown. Aha! Carumba! The crowd, rowdy under the best of circumstances, goes wild.

### Snapshot II

I'm a judge for the costume competition, and I'm puzzled. Why are Mavis and Weslee in street clothes? But wait a minute! Since when did Weslee have blue eyes? There is a wrenching sensation as I begin to realize that they are "doing" each other. It's quite a task, especially when you consider that Weslee is Black and Mavis is not. But not only their clothing and skin color have changed — tonight, Mavis (i.e. Weslee) is "fabulous," and Weslee (i.e. Mavis) is all business and tight-assed walk. They don't break character all night.

The XXth anniversary Fantasia Fair was a complete success, with more than a hundred paid attendees and professionals and invited guests from around the country. Some of the notables present included Virginia Prince, JoAnn and Betty Roberts, Alison and Dottie Laing, "Lady Di" (Vernon of Vernon's Specialties), Wendy Parker, Nancy Nangeroni, Merissa Sherrill Lynn, Ariadne Kane, Betty Ann Lynn, Emily Sheldon, Eve Burchert, Dr. Sandra Cole, Dr. Marilyn Volker, Dr. Richard Doctor, Neila Miller, Dr. Roger Millen, Dr. Moya Andrews, and Mariette Pathy Allen. Every morning and afternoon there were two seminars to choose from, and there were two luncheons daily. Every evening had an event, and often two: the Town and Gown Supper, in which FanFair participants mingled with natives; the Fashion Show, full of costumes both corny and glamorous; the Awards Banquet; The Follies, the Fantasy Ball; the Fantasia Fair Banquet. And every night, the houses rocked with parties which sometimes lasted until dawn.

The accommodations and food were excellent, the speakers knowledgeable, and the camaraderie without equal. There were few complaints, and those were minor and easily remedied. In short, Fan Fair XX was a rousing success.

It was a remarkable turnaround, for the event had been in decline for several years; in 1992, when I was asked to join the Board of Directors of the Outreach Institute, the organization which sponsors the Fair, there were only 58 attendees, the Fair had a "thrown together" feel to it, and there was a lot of bitching from attendees and from vendors upset about the Fair's lack of organization and history of slow payment. This year, everything went off in an organized manner, and we left town with all bills paid.

The rebirth of Fantasia Fair is due to the reorganization of the Board of Directors, which took decisive action to save the Fair, but the bulk of the work was done by four people: Alison and Dottie Laing, Weslee Avery, and Marsha Heindl. Alison served as Director of the Fair, and Dottie worked very closely with her— an immense job, and one they should be congratulated for. Marsha is the Fair's Treasurer, and brought order to the financial chaos. Outreach Director Ariadne Kane coordinated the reunion and presided at the Awards Banquet. But it was Weslee who did the down and dirty, and generally thankless work, the people work; she processed registrations and fielded phone calls all year long, and, during the Fair, she worked long and largely thankless hours directing the FanFair office and a staff of volunteers.

The XXth annual Fantasia Fair included the full spectrum of diversity of the transgender community. There were young and old, black and white, gay and straight, transsexual, transgenderist, and crossdresser, newcomer and old-timer, male-to-female and female-to-male. The air in the little harbor village of Provincetown crackled with transgender energy. It was... it was marvelous!

Fantasia Fair XXI will be held in Provincetown October 14-21, 1995. Plan to attend an event that will change your life! For registration information, write P.O. Box 941, Southeastern, PA 19399-0941.

