

ONLY MAKE-BELIEVE: POP PROFILES

The Grammy Awards do not celebrate the radical edge of pop music or culture. Critics' faves R.E.M., X, Prince, New Order, King Sunny Ade, U2, Malcolm McLaren, Afrika Bambaataa and Los Lobos never got a mention at the February fete, but what did was almost as surprising.

There was Michael Jackson, a model of androgynous arrested development so radical that Freud (and most of the crowd) would probably lay money that he is sweet on boys, prominently posed in a preposterous version of a nuclear family: flanked by Brooke Shields and black child actor Emmanuel Lewis.

There was begowned Boy George bantering with dish-queen Joan Rivers, who cracked, "You look like Brooke Shields on steroids." Annie Lennox of the Eurythmics performed "Sweet Dreams" in an inspired Elvis Presley drag that put Lily Tomlin's soul singer impersonation to shame.

The show-stopping Act 1 finale to *La Cage aux Folles* was performed in full: a middle-aged drag queen refusing to play it straight, bellowing, "It's one life and there's no return and no deposit. One life: So it's time to open up your closet."

Never before have the Grammys been so shot through with the trappings and implications of homosexuality. As author Armistead Maupin guffawed, "Just astonishing: Everyone is cross-dressing, and there's not a queer in sight." We are still the invisible pop phenomenon.

The irony of all this is that often the most outlandishly camp performers are not gay. If cross-dressing toys with homophobia, it is a coy flirtation. When unquestionably nongay performers dress up in versions of drag, they make cross-dressing no longer an emblem of homosexuality but a ploy adopted by heterosexuals, disarming its radical implications.

In this issue *The ADVOCATE* talks with some prime movers in androgynous pop. From England, Boy George checks in: the cuddly phenomenon, all cheeky, gay and delightful. Marilyn, Boy George's former housemate—touted as the lad who would eroticize Boy George's safe flirt—has yet to assault the United States. With one reasonable hit in England, he is weighing the liabilities and assets of being openly gay in pop music. Specimen, decked out like transvestite ghouls, pushes Billy Idol's gothic bad-boy act a step further: From Alice Cooper to Motley Crue, such dress-up outrage has been a staple of teen-rock, but the members of Specimen claim they're no heavy-metal poseurs, but self-made savages bent on bringing humor and sex back to a cool and harmless pop scene. Is that gay? Are they? Pose the same questions to heavy-metal heroes Motley Crue and consider the people and impulses behind the poses.

In 1984, all of this gender-fuck theatricality is ironically distant from current gay styles, which are increasingly crisp, conservative and flamboyant only in their restraint. Vince Aletti, openly gay rock critic, later a disco A&R man, and currently soul and dance music buyer for Tower Records in New York, provides some perspective on the role of discos and gays in the current explosion of dance music. If gays could once claim disco as their own, what could they claim today? It is a question implicit in these interviews. In an upcoming series we hope to bring you interviews with Frankie Goes to Hollywood, the British group, headed by two openly gay lovers who are into the leather scene, which has a surprise smash hit with its debut single, "Relax"; with Tom Robinson, an artist who found that being "out" was very temporarily fashionable and whose soon-to-be-released LP will follow "War Baby," a Top-10 single in the United Kingdom last year; and with other artists plunging into radio and video. If you have any suggestions, please let us know. Our culture is what we make it.

—Adam Block

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