

SONGS OF PRAISE AND MYSTERY

Celebrating Sylvester; the Church Comes Home

Sassy, incomparable—**Sylvester** ranks as gay pop's seminal hero. Soaring beyond gender, he lighted up the dance floor, treating disco as a radical call to freedom. Now an upcoming series of tributes promises to give the peerless performer the due he has long deserved.

In late July, Sylvester was honored at San Francisco's Dreamland disco. The singer chatted with friends from a balcony as the crowd danced deliriously to his decade-old classics "You Make Me Feel" and "Dance-Disco Heat." Suddenly, the lights dimmed and a single spot fell on Syl. The crowd turned, roaring its gratitude and affection. Syl waved in shy yet regal recognition as one fan suggested approvingly, "just like the Queen Mother."

San Francisco PR pro Ken Maley is currently spearheading a far more ambitious celebration. He explains, "I met with Rick Slick to plan an AIDS benefit for this year's 15th anniversary of his Castro Street Fair. It was the day after the gay pride parade where Sylvester had joined the PWAs' contingent, courageously announcing his condition. I decided and Rick agreed that we should stage this benefit as a tribute to Sylvester."

Maley contacted the brass at Warner Bros. Records. They were hashing out plans of their own for a tribute but agreed to help Maley as well. At press time, artists were yet to be contacted, but Maley hopes to attract a strong roster from among Syl's friends and fans: disco and gospel divas he has worked with and young English dance acts that revere him.

For its part, **Megatone Records** will honor the event with the release of a double LP featuring a dozen of Sylvester's 12-inch mixes culled from his influential first three LPs for the label. Sylvester has penned liner notes for the timely collection.

Slick is planning a ceremony and celebration honoring Sylvester on Oct. 2 at 2 p.m. (in the midst of the Castro Street Fair's entertainment program). He notes, "My greatest hope is that Sylvester will be able to appear; my *dream* is that he will be able to perform." That night should see the tribute concert, with all proceeds going to "minority AIDS education and care." For details call (415) 467-3354.

- The Minority AIDS Project in Los Angeles received \$150,000 toward its \$400,000 annual operating budget from the proceeds to a single sold-out gospel show on Aug. 4 that drew 6,500 people to the city's Shrine Auditorium. **Dionne Warwick** and **Rev. Carl Bean** organized the concert, titled "Coming Home for Friends."

Some may remember Bean as the man who sang Motown's bolt-

from-the-blue gay pride disco hit "I Was Born That Way" back in 1977. Ordained as an openly gay, black minister, Bean created his outreach program (confronting AIDS in the black community) in 1985, slowly but surely gaining the respect and support of black churches that had long ignored the problem.

The churches turned out in solidarity and in force for this blowout. The curtain rose to cheers for a massive gospel choir, with locals harmonizing with such stars as **Al Jarreau** and **Freda Payne**. Emcees **Taurean Blaque** (*Hill Street Blues*) and **Holly Robinson** (*21 Jump Street*) ushered in the wonders: **Dionne Warwick's** old gospel trio (with her sister, **Dee Dee**, and **Myrna Smith**); **Natalie**

Cole, dancing up a storm; and **Thelma Houston** in an African-gospel duet with **Patience Dabney**.

And the four-hour show raged on, with **Cissy Houston** followed by **Linda Hopkins**, singing the epochal "Amazing Grace," and timeless turns by legends like the **Rev. James Cleveland**, **Tremaine Hawkins**, and **The Caravans**. Finally, **Patti LaBelle** strode out in a blinding red dress for a show-stopping tear through "I Believe." Only one thing could follow that: the whole cast crowding the stage for a celebratory "That's What Friends Are For," chorusing to awestruck ovations.

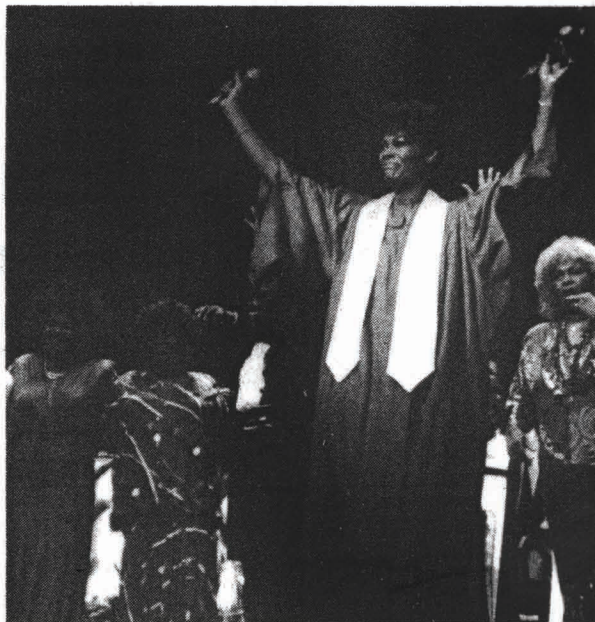
Of the artists advertised, only **Gladys Knight** and **Luther Vandross** missed the show. Rev. Bean explained that both were locked into previous commitments at the Budweiser Jazz Festival but said, "I expect to have them next year."

Bean is already envisioning a reprise of the event. In the meantime, editing is proceeding on a video of the concert, which Bean and Warwick hope to see broadcast nationally before the holidays. Hallelujah!

- On a smaller scale: San Francisco's indomitable comic and iconoclast **Jon Sugar** has finally released his pithy, provocative white-rap single "Gay Type Thang," a litany of homophobic bummers. The self-described "big hairy dude with a baby dick" sings his body eclectic: "Living nuts to butts/And asshole to belly." Count on the dude to startle your turntable. Just send a \$4 bribe to J. Sugar, 48 Brentwood, San Francisco, CA 94127. Be the first on your block.

If you're desperate for a new LP, my current find is a disc I missed when it came out last year: the unappetizingly named **Foxheads Stalk This Land** (Enigma), by the Scottish pop group **Close Lobsters**. Find rich, ringing melodies, shambling enthusiasm, and vocals poised between promise and regret. Kiss the summer good-bye.

—Adam Block



A triumphant Dionne Warwick and other members of a Los Angeles gospel concert that raised funds for a minority AIDS project.