

DISH AND DATA

Queer Notes and Queens

The holidays are history, but some folks are still agog over **Pee-wee Herman's** Christmas special. "It was the queerest thing I've ever seen on television," gushed critic Barry Walters. After the hapless, "heterofied" big-screen bomb *Big Top Pee-wee*, Herman returned to his roots with a reckless celebration of the gay-pop sensibility. His gender-warp lineup featured **k.d. Lang** caroling "Jingle Bell Rock," **Grace Jones** intoning "The Little Drummer Boy," the **Del Rubio Triplets** demolishing "Winter Wonderland," and cameos by **Cher**, **Frankie and Annette**, and the indomitable **Little Richard** — beyond camp!

If Elvis Presley was the sultry, well-mannered King of Rock, Little Richard is its screaming, unhinged Queen. After repeatedly renouncing rock and roll and homosexuality in the name of Jesus, Richard appears to be waxing regal once again.

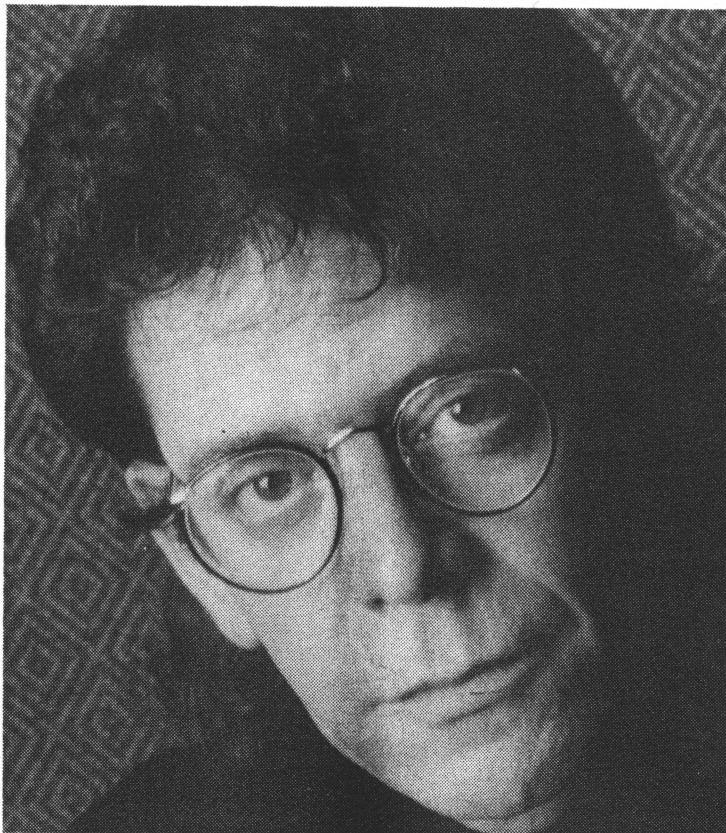
First he showed up on Arsenio Hall's new talk show.

Hall had already raised a ruckus by suggesting that the Godfather of Soul, **James Brown** (recently jailed after a maniacal police chase amid rumors of PCP abuse), had become the "sweetheart of cell block 5." Hall asked Richard about his admission in his biography *The Quasar of Rock* that "whenever he'd made love with a woman, he'd always fantasized that it was a man." Richard responded, "That was because my girlfriends were all so ugly!" Then an audience member bellowed the suggestion that Richard ought to pay a visit to Brown. Stomping to the edge of the stage, Richard squinted at the heckler and hollered, "You're uglier than James Brown. So shut up!"

Still flaming, Richard appeared at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's fourth annual induction ceremony to eulogize the late **Otis Redding** — uncontrollably praising himself even more than Redding. A friend who was there reported, "The final 'jam session' was a mess — over 30 hams up on stage — but Richard cowed even **Mick Jagger**, continually screaming, 'Lucille!' like such a maniac that the assembled finally kicked into the song just to shut him up."

Little Richard may be ready to rampage through his salacious rock-and-roll repertoire once again. It looks like he has taken ACT UP's slogan to heart: Silence = Death.

Over in the U.K., **Morrissey** reemerged with his first live set in two years. With precious perversity, he announced a free show at a small hall in the obscure suburb of Wolverhampton, with those arriving wearing **The Smiths** T-shirts getting in first. Two thousand fans were left standing outside in the rain. The show reunited Morrissey with **The Smiths'** original rhythm section (Roryke and Joyce), while **Craig Gannon** (ex-Aztec Camera) took over for lead



Lou Reed: returning to the turf he knows best

guitarist **Johnny Marr**. (Marr has left **The Pretenders** and has been working with Matt Johnson on the upcoming *The The* LP.)

Morrissey crooned an eight-song set that included "Sweet and Tender Hooligan," "Death at One's Elbow," and "Suedehead" while scores of dreamy young men successively leaped onto the stage to kiss their suffering hero or drape themselves over his shoulders.

Sire Records has purchased a film of the Wolverhampton concert, and plans to release it on video later this year. A new three-song single with the promising titles "Last of the International Playboys," "Lucky Lisp," and "Michael's Bone," complete with a cover shot of a young boy wedged in a tree branch, should be on sale now. A four-song EP is due to follow. I'm yearning for the day when Morrissey signs on for a Pee-wee Herman special. What a team. . . .

Wondering what's become of seminal gay rocker **Tom Robinson**? A year ago, after having lashed out in song, "It isn't the bride that I want to kiss!" (recounting his former drummer-boyfriend's wedding), he told Ireland's *Hot Press*: "I continue to count myself as gay, though, as it fell out, I've happened to settle with a woman." I'm still waiting to hear more — like an LP, for instance.

Former homo **Lou Reed** has a new LP, *New York* (Sire), that is not only earning rave reviews but is outselling anything he has released in the last decade. Returning to the turf he knows best, Reed has sketched a savage, dispassionate indictment of urban atrocities, including AIDS. The song "Halloween Parade" is a chilling, understated account of divine drag celebrants on Christopher Street and the aching absence of those laid low.

Attempts to launch a gay radio station in Manchester, England, have been opposed by Tory MP Tony Favell, who seems to believe (delicious fantasy) that radio can turn a straight listener gay. Said Favell: "They say they want to emphasize the good points of being gay, but I don't see how they can do that without seeking to influence people."

Erasure has a massive U.K. hit with their *Crackers Int.* EP. A U.S. version with two additional cuts is slated for a March release. The duo have been invited to perform at this year's gay pride parade in New York and are tempted to accept.

I say — **Marc Almond** for Manhattan; **Erasure** for San Francisco. I love them both. How about Pee-wee Herman for grand marshal? Or Little Richard? Pick your city; it is 20 years after Stonewall, Lucille.

—Adam Block