

I arrived in Amsterdam a week after Marc Almond's departure. He'd performed his cabaret tribute to Jacques Brel, and locals were still abuzz about his grave and graceful camp: how he'd appeared with his famous tattooed torso sheathed in a red velvet suit, singing next to a single, small table, his only prop an elegant vase stuffed with 100 cut roses. Afterward, he returned to England to push his new single, "The Desperate House," and his upcoming LP, *enchanted* (EMI/U.K.).

Amsterdam allows for such extravagance, but it is an enormously civilized city, the only one in Europe that advertises both cannabis shops and boy brothels. At De Boy, one of the latter, a 21-year-old British "philosophy student" explained to me that where the girls charged \$30, he cost \$120. What services does he offer? "I don't fuck when I'm working." What sense of personal mission had led him to this job? "It beats working in a Burger Hut." I call that almost 100 civilized.

Photographer Marc Geller and I took a night train to Budapest, an extravagant old-world city spiked with a dose of 1962 elegance that would make an ideal setting for a James Bond movie. Of course, count on us to hook up with a singing duo of closeted lesbian lovers sporting contrasting pink-and-green hairdos that I last saw on troll dolls. The girls weren't performing, so Marc and I *Spartacused* over to a gay bar, which was straight out of Fassbinder hell. A lumpen businessman coyly groped a haggard hustler in white jeans while a boy with a freshly shaved head vogued in his seat under the possessive gaze of his dour boyfriend. In the corner, an immense lesbian snored into a tabletop. The next day we visited a Turkish bath out of *Midnight Express*, which a local assured us was 50% gay. Short of time, we fled.

In Prague we looked up Misha, the lead singer with Pulnoc (Czech for *midnight*), the best band in Eastern Europe. She was at home with her husband, their five-month-old twin boys, and Magor, a.k.a. Ivan Jirious, the country's most famous drunken dissident poet, who has been a mentor to the band since 1969, when the group was known as The Plastic People of the Universe.

After Pulnoc's brief tour of U.S. clubs last year, tapes of the band's performances topped several critics' year-end lists. Misha explained that the current band's first LP will be out in August on an Austrian label, Globus, run by a Czech expatriate, and the songs will all be in Czech. Neither the band's cover of the Velvet Underground's "All Tomorrow's Parties" nor its own "New York" will be included.

Magor explained enthusiastically, "They don't want to be a commercial success. They don't want to quit their jobs." Misha concurred, "Then I would be treating the music like a job, not like something I want to do."

The group plans another brief U.S. tour in the fall, so keep an eagle eye out for the LP or performance dates near you.

That's the way they and Magor want it. With a delighted smile, he made me a gift of a small candle in the shape of Lenin's head, explaining that a friend had gathered melted wax from the shrines that sprung up at sites where the police had attacked students and then poured it into molds to produce these melting portraits of the fathers of Soviet and Czech communism. The souvenir beat the hell out of *any* piece of the Berlin Wall.

In turn I gave Magor, the heterorebel, an ACT UP pin and a Keith Haring gay-lib badge, which he quickly pinned on his shirt. Taking leave of our hosts, he paraded past a posse of police; proudly adorned, he began singing old Fugs songs. In the new Czechoslovakia, they ignored the affront.

Over dinner, Magor instantly agreed to help us open a cheap gay pub in Prague, but only after he'd finished his quixotic campaign for a seat in parliament—running on the same fringe ticket as an openly gay candidate. Ultimately, neither won. I would've voted for both.

I got back to San Francisco a week after Madonna's departure and was greeted by an avalanche of agonizing praise for her incomparable show. I consoled myself that there'd be a killer video. Madonna has all the verve and panache of a downtown drag queen—along with the wit, talent, and clout to make a seductive, subversive stadium show out of them. Girlfriend!

I was in time to catch Sinéad O'Connor, though, in a rocky but riveting show. She appeared in a T-shirt with P.W.A. stenciled on the front that fluttered beneath her chemotherapy-trim shaved skull. The effect was unnerving: weird solidarity. In fact, the logo was a takeoff on rappers N.W.A.; the back read, PADDYS WITH ATTITUDE (adopting the term of abuse the Brits reserve for the Irish). But, no doubt well aware of the double entendre, she also sported a SILENCE=DEATH patch on her sleeve.

I caught the mighty Etta James at the Great American Music Hall on the eve of the release of her tough new LP, *Stickin' to My Guns* (Island), powering through a raunchy, illuminating set. She dedicated "Sugar on the Floor" to "all of my friends from the Stud—especially those who have passed on" and proceeded to scorch the stage with her rendition.

Take Me Home, Rock 'n' Road

Notes From Amsterdam, Budapest, Prague, And San Francisco

Dead Marilyn and Todd Rundgren headlined a benefit for Santiago Montandon and other sufferers of AIDS dementia at Townsend, where Rundgren debuted a new song, the country lament "Fuck You," addressed to Jesse Helms, Tipper Gore, and Pope John Paul II. "Thank God we're not in Florida," he grinned to the crowd's cheers.

Finally, Andy Bell called. Erasure had local shows the night before and after the San Francisco gay pride parade and are planning to record their version of Cole Porter's "Night and Day" while in the city. The song is for the AIDS benefit LP (finally!) titled *Red Hot & Blue*, organized by Brit Malcolm Gerrie and Chrysalis Records. They have 22 acts (including Sinéad O'Connor, U2, Annie Lennox, Deborah Harry with Iggy Pop, David Byrne, and the Neville Brothers) committed—each to cover a Cole Porter song; the LP is due in October. The follow-up TV special, planned for Dec. 1 (International AIDS Day), boasts a roster of notables (Derek Jarman, Jim Jarmusch, Wim Wenders, Nicholas Roeg, and others) slated to direct the videos.

David Byrne's wife is planning to shoot the video to accompany Erasure's contribution and intends to include footage from the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day Celebration. As we go to press, it looks as though Andy Bell might even take to the stage in San Francisco. Hey, it's not so bad being back. Get Etta and stay gay.

—Adam Block