

LOVE INJECTION FANZINE 065

A New York Music & Culture Fanzine
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musclecars
Connie Fleming & Richard Alvarez
Vince Aletti Remembers Tony Smith
quest?onmarq

A high-contrast, black and white close-up portrait of a woman with long, dark hair. Her face is the central focus, with her eyes looking slightly to the right. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows on the left side of her face and forehead. She is wearing a patterned garment, possibly a floral print, visible at the bottom right. The overall mood is intimate and artistic.

connie fleming



richard alvarez

Interview by BARBIE BERTISCH & PAUL RAFFAELE Photos by JULIUS FRAZER Transcript by NIK MERCER

In 2021, the shoe company VANS launched a platform called Channel 66 with studios in Brooklyn, Chicago, LA and Mexico City. Love Injection was invited to produce six episodes for them over the course of the year. We came up with six very broad themes relating to dance music, and invited two guests per show that would allow for inter-cultural, inter-generational, inter-sexual perspectives on topics like The Remix, The Rhythm, The Party, The Record Store, The Drugs and The Door.

Our episode about "The Door" took place on Friday July 16th, 2021 with Richard and Connie. We discussed nightclub door policies, politics, and their approach to curating a crowd. It was broadcasted live, but never archived.

CONNIE FLEMING

Born in Jamaica, she and her mother moved to Brooklyn when she was five. By the late 80s, she was performing as one of the Boy Bar Beauties at the famous Boy Bar on St Mark's.

By the early 90s, she was being photographed by Steven Meisel and caught the eye of Thierry Mugler. She walked for five seasons in Paris for visionaries like Mugler and Vivienne Westwood. She walked alongside superstars like Linda Evangelista and Julie Newmar in George Michael's music video ode to haute couture and haute drama, *Too Funky*. In 2012, she starred as former first lady Michelle Obama on the cover of *Candy Magazine*. On top of all that, she's also one of NYC's revered and most legendary door guards.

RICHARD ALVAREZ: I first saw Connie when she walked into Patricia Field and I immediately thought, 'who is this person that looks like Grace Jones?' Because back then, Grace Jones had an army of people that looked like her. There was Angelo [Colon], and there would be these clones of Grace, and you came in, and I was like, Oh, my God, you're one of those Grace Jones [clones]. But I think it took us a minute to really start communicating with one another.

CONNIE FLEMING: Because I was petrified! I walked by Patricia Field for two years, just looking in the window. Don't let them see you looking. Keep walking. I would go around the corner a couple of times so I could get everything that was in the window, and then I would go home.

R.A.: Eighth Street was a completely different world. Years later, gay guys would come up to me and say, "I came to New York and I saw you." I was out there. I'm older now, but they would tell me, "You gave me so much courage," and I was such a scared kid, figuring it out myself. What am I? What is desire? All these questions. It was definitely hard, and being a person of color, being queer, and always feeling less-than to begin with because I was always laughed at. It's so interesting to hear about how I gave these people courage when I was just figuring it out myself. I had the walls up; I looked fierce, and I was ready to attack. Completely ready to jump.

C.F.: Because fashion—and your expression—was your armor. You went about in the world with your armor and your mouth to protect you, and to keep people not only in their place, but to let them know that you weren't gonna be a pushover.

R.A.: I would go and hang out in the Lower East Side, which was abandoned buildings, and I didn't feel at all... I mean, you pick up a hot piece and go into an abandoned building and do a show, and there would be junkies, but, to me, it wasn't scary. I mean, I was a teenager, jumping on the train and coming downtown, and hanging out in the piers and abandoned warehouses on the Westside. This old man came up to us and said, "You two need to get out of here," and he was telling us to leave, but we were just transfixed by the energy. There was a raw feeling that felt comfortable.

BARBIE BERTISCH: I lived in Miami for eight years, and that's where I started partying, at, like sixteen. I remember moving to New York and being like, Oh, I've never felt safer.

R.A.: Because you found your tribe.

B.B.: Precisely, and it seems like, through fashion, both of you found your tribe.

R.A.: Fashion and music, I think. It definitely was a certain sound, and fashion... It was kind of like anti-fashion. We were the anti-fashion kids; we were not in fashion. People would look at me and laugh, and I was fierce. You couldn't tell me shit. Laugh all you want, but I'm on the cover of a magazine, and I'm in Europe. It felt very—

C.F.: It was very ahead of the trend. At that time, the East Village was at least ten steps ahead, and they would laugh today, but then you would turn around, a year, two years later, and they'd be in your look. It was very ahead of the curve, and you could not be

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RICHARD ALVAREZ

Born and raised in the Bronx by his French Canadian mother, a practicing santera, he grew up in New York surrounded by rites from New York's unofficial "second religion". Feeling the pressure to become a santero himself, he rebelled, changed his look and headed downtown to the clubs. He was encouraged to flourish, to be himself and moved about the club world as a fierce half Dominican teenager, later going on to style for the one and only Patricia Field for years. He began painting, hints of his santeria upbringing showing through his art. Figures and deities from his life making his way to his pieces. He is ever evolving and a staple in the most beloved dance floors, and today, he can be seen guarding the entrance—and beyond—at today's most important nightclubs.

seen outside of your look. If you were seen outside of your look, you would be pegged as a poser, and then you would be dead in the water. It's like, I saw you at approximately nine-thirty-five AM, and you had on sweatpants. I'm sorry. You're excommunicated. We can't. I'm sorry.

B.B.: The anti-fashion that we're talking about is Grace Jones and Siouxsie Sioux, which became the cultural blueprint for everything that came after—and clothes were a big part of that.

PAUL RAFFAELE: Patricia Field seems like it was such a petri dish. I recently interviewed Tina Paul, the photographer, who told me it was Patricia Field who encouraged her to paint on top of her photography, for instance. It seemed like it was a place where creativity was encouraged. There's stories of Larry Levan going into the store, too. You worked with Patricia Field, Richard?

R.A.: I was seventeen years old when Pat came up to me at Danceteria and told me she wanted me to work for her. I had been in the shop before, and I remember walking in the shop, and she was sitting on the counter, and she looked at me, up and down. A Bronx kid, very insecure, not knowing anything. When she asked me to work for her, I went to my friends and I was like, Who!? And they were like, Girl! Go and talk to her!

It was this one period when Pat started doing this younger, cutting-edge [thing]. She had Mitchell Viau and it was more about the people of color. It was more about the street kids. It was street culture, and I guess I was a street urchin, so I fit the bill.

I started working there, and, worked it, I started bringing it!!! I thought this was a great place! She allowed us to be ourselves. It's funny because I always tell her she's like the grandmother of so many queer, trans [people], and she minimizes it. She says it was more about what you brought to the table. It wasn't just any ol' queer; you had to bring something to the table.

C.F.: She's a great spotter of talent and potential. She wants to foster it and see it grow, and she takes pleasure in having a hand in that.

R.A.: How long was it before you started working?

C.F.: She came up to me in Area, in the bathroom, and said, "Oh, my gosh, you're so interesting-looking. Would you like a drink?" I was like, "Okay," and we hung out for that evening. I didn't know anybody; I'd just gotten in by the skin of my teeth to Area that night. I'd bought some vintage affair, and I was sort of accepted in this world, and I was like, Oh! I found it! I found the way in! I'm in Oz! Toto—get outta there!

It was a couple of years, when I put two and two together, that she was Patricia Field, and that [she owned that] store I would walk by and was afraid to go in. The next time I was at Area, it was Lysa Cooper and I think you, too, and Mitchell? And I saw them all together, and I was like, It's them! The people from that store! And then I think I went in, maybe a couple of months later. I went in, I kept my head down. I didn't see Pat, so I ran out.

Then, I think when Steven Perfidia got a job there, he was also now Boy Bar Beauty, and he invited Pat, and that's when we kind of reconnected. She would invite me to fashion shows, and then she started to ask me to model for her. That's how the relationship started.

I started to work there, I think in '88, '89. That's when I started work at the 8th Street store.

R.A.: It was definitely a magnet. People would come into New York and that would be one of the spots. Paper magazine. It was all so connected! Downtown, there were, like, five hundred people. Danceteria had the downtown five hundred. It was a small community; we all knew each other. It was a meshing of fashion and art, like a renaissance—a modern, contemporary renaissance. When you're in it, you don't realize that's what it is. You're hanging out with Keith Haring, and Keith is Keith. You're hanging out with all these people and they're just your friends.

B.B.: I think it's important hearing from you that you couldn't tell that it was happening. We look back at these situations, movements that changed history, but often the key players didn't have a sense of how important it would be as they were living it.

R.A.: It changed the world, girl. The kids of color were, like, ruling the airwaves. The fashion was all about the kids of color. It was all about the Bronx. It was all about kids of fucking color ruling the world. Like, Fuck the establishment. Taking samples of music, taking samples of fashion history, taking samples of art history. It was a blender. We were very fortunate, but you're in it, and, as a teenager, I thought this was the way life was, like it was never gonna change.

C.F.: You create because this other world that seems so far away, that doesn't want you... you kind of don't need them when you have it within yourself to create and make. They don't care about you, so why should you care about them? They've taken everything from you, as a community and as a person, so we're just going to take the scraps and make something out of it.

B.B.: Well, you built a whole world around the things that you had available to you—and with your tribe. It set the tone for every artistic discipline, and that rippled across the world and its felt to this day.

P.R.: You also built this whole world with no institutional support. Things like healthcare. Connie, you mentioned International Chrysis as a mentor to you. Could you talk a little about her and how she helped you?

C.F.: Nightclubs were our kind of Instagram Stories and our YouTube information [channel]. For the trans community, we spoke in those spaces: What doctor do you go to? Okay, you go to this doctor on Thursday afternoon. If the nurse is black or asian, walk out, go get a cup of coffee, and come back, and if there's a little white lady there, come in. Chrysis taught me to navigate the world as a trans woman. Everything from medication to dealing with how the world treats you. It was an invaluable education

that I'm thankful for and that I take from this day. I just don't feel like now, because of our devices, that we take into consideration the human kind of interaction that I got sitting backstage at Escuelita and listening to things like, No, you don't take that shot. If you do take that shot, take some vitamin E with it. If your leg goes numb, go to the emergency room. The trans community was sort of the test dummy for plastic surgery. You're welcome, Nicki Minaj. You're welcome, Cardi B. Those girls did the grunt work for the look of today, and, sitting in those spaces and listening to the trials and tribulations of those trans women, a lot of [whom] aren't here now—

R.A.: Most of them are gone.

C.F.: Yeah. But they paid the price for the look and the world that we're living in now, and I hope that their contributions and their sacrifices are known and appreciated and acknowledged.

PR: Unfortunately, Chrysis passed away from complications with her implant.

C.F.: Which I kind of went through. In 2018, I discovered a lump in my right breast. Kevin McHugh, a great artist and friend of ours, a couple months before I discovered [it], said, "Just sit down at the computer and see if you can get [health insurance through] the Affordable Care Act," and I did, and I had health insurance, and then I found the lump, and I was lucky enough to come across the clinic at Mount Sinai. They referred me to the Dubin Breast [Center of the Tisch Cancer Institute] at Mount Sinai, and they took me in hand, and I had a team of five doctors, and I survived. A little scarred, a little bumped, a little bruised, but—

B.B.: You're here.

C.F.: And I'm now so thankful because there've been so many people who have contacted me and are like, "I'm afraid." I'm like, "Don't be afraid. Don't look the other way. I did, and it almost killed me." Knock wood, everybody that has reached out to me has been good, and I've told them to get up off their arse, and go and get mammogrammed and see about themselves. You are your own best advocate.

R.A.: But a lot of this is all brand-new in terms of trans healthcare. If you went with your ID and it was different from what you presented... There are people who have died, like you said, who paved the way, so women of trans experiences can get healthcare, because doctors didn't wanna see you. Doctors did not wanna see you. They thought you were cuckoo and you were just trying to get hormones.

C.F.: Or they would take as much money as they could from you and leave you in the dust. It was like being backstage at Escuelita! Go on a Thursday if the nurse is asian or latina, go for a walk around the block and wait for the white nurse because otherwise, you will not be seen.

R.A.: Imagine! To get fucking healthcare, this is what you had to do.

B.B.: If you've studied a little bit of history, you must know, at this point, that it's a sort of insurmountable challenge. Today, did it feel like the care you received... Was it leaps and bounds away from your prior experiences?

C.F.: Yeah. I went in, expecting to be misgendered, be disrespected, be just tossed aside and told that [I] deserve this, that [I] put myself in the way of this, and that [I] could go over there and lay in the corner, and maybe [they'd] throw me an aspirin every now and then. That's what I was expecting, and that's what I thought was going to happen to

me. But it wasn't. And there was care, and there was a want to see to me, not only as a patient but as a person, and not to separate me out, and to speak to my circumstance as a trans woman—and a trans woman of color.

Even now... you know when you wanna look back and go, Did that really happen? Was I really treated like a person? Because for most of my experience, it wasn't that. I was super lucky to have Chrysis, and to transition with Cody Ravioli. Back then we'd be in the dressing room listening to Chrysis and I found something or Cody found something or Chiclet found something, we took it back to our little collective. We forged our way and found people back then who weren't going to kick you under the bus. But it was always super daunting to go in there and take that chance of being laughed at and kicked out, and to then [be told], "Give me your money," on your way out.

R.A.: There's still more work to be done.

P.R.: Yeah, I think it's important now for young people to understand that, as nightclubbing has evolved, morphed, ballooned, etc. It was once a small community of people of color, of gay people, of trans people that looked to it as a place of safety and of refuge.

R.A.: Yeah, it's the queer and trans people of color that created the scene that these DJs—It comes from a place of looking for safety. Trying to find where you can get your true queerness out and be yourself.

C.F.: A space of safety, and a space where it was congratulatory, and you were not put down, and it was—

R.A.: Oh, we put each other down! [laughs] I mean, we basically helped each other develop these skills of this quick—

B.B.: Fierceness.

C.F.: Yeah, but because the world was against you, and you needed to sharpen your claws and your tongue in order to traverse the spaces, the space where you were accepted and loved... to get to the other space, you have to go through the world that does not want you, and thinks that your existence doesn't matter.

R.A.: So, Connie, you were participating, and now you're kind of manning the scene. How does that feel? Now, you're controlling and creating the vibe.

C.F.: I feel a responsibility to make the space safe, and to impart to the patron that this is kind of a sacred space, and we have to honor it and be respectful of it because the last year has taught us that it can be taken away like that. What I hope we come out of this time with is an appreciation for these spaces, and for these places that we, as warm-blooded beings, need to connect and to feel each other, and to be in a space, and to, like, commune and experience together. So... I feel like—

R.A.: The directress.

C.F.: The curator, like you already said. You're curating. You want prettiness and quirkiness, and smart and dumb, and—

R.A.: Tacky.

C.F.: Yeah! All of it. As Karl Lagerfeld said, high and low. You need that to have it ferment and to have it become something.

B.B.: What would be an example of something you'd put as you were getting ready to go to work?

C.F.: I'm sort of in this early disco space now. That tipping point of, like, Teddy Pendergrass, early—

R.A.: Is it the Philadelphia sound?

C.F.: Yeah. the O'Jays, "I Love Music." Rufus and Chaka Khan, "Any Love." Barry White—

R.A.: "Let the Music Play" is one of my favorite songs.

C.F.: You like the song? It's so cinematic.

R.A.: He was abusive to the backup singers! So many of the great female singers have had these men managers who abuse them.

P.R.: Going back to door policies, on one hand there's the idea of exclusivity like the kind associated with the door at clubs like Studio 54. The superficial exclusivity that excluded people based on class, race. But then you have exclusivity like at David Mancuso's Loft, which was private for the safety of everyone. Every member who invited someone was responsible for the people they brought, and to invite someone meant your membership was on the line. How do you think about exclusivity? Could you give some examples of "good" exclusivity and some "bad" exclusivity from your history?

C.F.: For me, magic time was being able to perform at Boy Bar, which was kind of more of a predominantly white but mixed, gay crowd, but they started to welcome women. After working, I would go to the Paradise Garage, which was predominantly black and latin, women, trans women—

R.A.: But the women, in order to get into the Garage, had to have a passport. They were fierce with the women. On Friday night, it was straight, so it didn't matter. On Saturday night, if you wanted to hang out with the queens and you were a female, you had to come with a passport.

B.B.: Like the Excelsior Pass of the time. [laughs]

R.A.: When I started going to the Garage, there weren't a lot of women, and then it changed. Just like when the Japanese kids and then the white kids started showing up. When I first started going to the Garage, it wasn't that at all. It can be said that the whole Pat Field crew brought that element, where it was fashion-y to go there. Prior to that, it wasn't very fashionable. In my opinion. There are people who will tell you a different history.

B.B.: Would you say that there were other clubs that were more fashion-leaning, maybe the Mudd Club?

R.A.: The Mudd Club wasn't fashion-y. It was more about "cool." Chi Chi [Valenti] would work the door, and it really was about "cool." When we're curating, it's not about having any one thing. Like Stephane [Vacher], who I love and adore, and who runs the Standard, always says, it's like a salad: you need crunchy, you need soft, you need salty, you need sweet, you need savory. It's a melange of flavors, and that's what the night should be.

If I worked in a bank, I wouldn't want to go to a club where it's all bankers, but most of the people nowadays... that's what they want!

C.F.: They want familiarity and they wanna listen to Britney and Lady Gaga. You're not at home, though.

B.B.: When I started going out, when I was underage, there was a sense of, like, I'm going somewhere and it's gonna be an adventure.

R.A.: And it's special. You dressed up. You didn't go in your gym clothes. I think this whole thing of

standing in front of the DJ booth and looking at the DJ... it's like, Go and dance! Go talk to a boy or a girl or whatever it is you like! Interact with people! If you're standing there and either taking selfies or looking at the DJ, what are you bringing to the space? We don't need another zombie.

c.f.: The devices have kind of turned you into a spectator witnessing, and in that space, how do you interact? You're going to miss it if—

r.a.: What are you going to miss!? The DJ putting another record on? And I love DJs. I adore DJs. But watching them is not paying them homage! Dancing to their music is paying them homage! Lose your fucking mind! Show them you enjoy what they bring! Instead of standing there like a plastic mannequin.

b.b.: **Connie, you bring up a good point when you mention the devices. The phone takes our mind and emotions away from the space in which we are present, but also, the phone has turned us into ourselves more. I can see myself on camera; I am the star of my own show. I may have spectators—they're just not here. It takes you away from—**

c.f.: The moment!

p.r.: **Other people have worked hard to create an atmosphere for you, and you're missing it. You've been selected to enter a space with a mixture of people that includes you, the DJ is trying to build a narrative and to rile you up, but you're completely in your own virtual world.**

r.a.: Taping the fucking DJ! Girl! But earlier you were talking about this Soft Cell song and I remember hearing Feelin' Feelin' by Inya Day at the club, and I was dancing and watching a dancer near me and now, everytime I hear that song, it doesn't live in my cell phone, it lives with Nita [Aviance], twirling and turning it out. And now I associate that song with Nita.

p.r.: **Like Brooklyn Dreams, "Music, Harmony, and Rhythm" which I associate with Mark Rivas at 718 Sessions, during early hours, when there's not a lot of people there yet. Eyes closed, dancing. And everytime I hear that record, I think of Mark.**

r.a.: And that's the beauty of our scene, I think. And what we try to create.

There's clubs that make money—it's about making money—and they're great. I don't go to them. I'm not interested in them. That's what it is. There's the whole bottle crowd, and we're gonna see what happens with that. And then there's the clubs that I like to go to, where it's like, I wanna dance, I wanna sing, I wanna act out the lyrics. There's this performative quality, where we're all performing and we're not spectators. It's like, I didn't get dressed up to go fuckin' look at a DJ. I got dressed up to feel fabulous and move and groove, and sweat and be admired.

c.f.: Yes, yes, yes.

b.b.: **And the spirituality behind these places. They're special, they're sanctuaries. Places where we can experience joy and be ourselves, wherever you come from.**

c.f.: Whatever floats your boat, whatever musical genre you like, whatever tickles your fancy. Go and do it. The dance floor and everything in the club isn't a backdrop, and everybody isn't a walk-on backup prop for you. Everybody isn't a bit player in your personal music video. If you do think that way, what are you enjoying? Do you enjoy

watching it once you get home and go, Oh, I got that choreography right! Did you enjoy the moment? Did you like the song you were listening to? Or was it all for a Like? And what is being liked? It's not you, it's not your experience of being there. It's just that you filmed it. Whoop-de-do.

r.a.: Needless to say, go out and enjoy yourselves, everybody, in whatever capacity. Just to hear some of these kids and their joy... I mean, people who are happy, even if I don't get it and you're on your phone... Whatever makes you happy, just do it. I'm not here to tell anyone what to do or what not to do. I'm here to question and maybe shake you up a bit. Be uncomfortable. That's how we grow, that's how we learn who we are and what we like, what we don't like. Staying in that comfort place doesn't challenge me. I wanna continually challenge and be challenged. I mean, we didn't live... I don't live sitting! It's all about walking on a tightrope and figuring it out as you go.

c.f.: And widening your experience!

b.b.: **I have to play this song now, Yoko Ono "Walking on Thin Ice"**

c.f.: I mean, what more do you want? It's beauty, complete beauty.

r.a.: It's so out there, you know. And François K remixed it—he's such a genius.

b.b.: **He was our first guest [in our Vans Channel 66 series] with Yvonne Turner! It was an amazing show and really enlightening because, much like you two, they had shared history – Yvonne used to manage François' Axis Studios. It's amazing to see the ebb and flow, the overlap of people, like you two had at Pat Field.**

r.a.: We all are a tribe. We know each other. It's not that different from back in the day. We're a tribe, a small sect, and we like the same things and we do the same things, and we honor and keep a safe space for each other. If I ever saw you guys on the dance floor and something was going down, I got your back!

c.f.: Like it should be done!

b.b.: **Richard, you mentioned Unter earlier as a party that's very much thematic and well-organized and all-out and still very respectful. I'm grateful that within a lot of the spaces that we've been to, we've never had any issues.**

r.a.: No disrespect, but you're heteronormative, and I love that you go to where you're at, and I see you in some of these spaces, but when you're different, it's a bit different. What I love about Unter is that the house rules are very clear and they accept no bigotry and if there's an issue, you come to us.

b.b.: **Right. How do you two see, now that there is a sort of notice at the door... Do you see people responding well to it?**

r.a.: Well, they think [Connie]'s a bitch, FYI, I have to say. I'm like, No, she's really one of the nicest people. But, at the end of the day, she's doing her job, and why did she have to serve you? What did you do?

c.f.: They don't understand. I shouldn't say it that way. It's about making sure that the patron knows that their behaviors won't be tolerated, and some want to challenge that and see what they can get away with.

b.b.: **Like children.**

c.f.: Yeah. No, it's very... sometimes, when you're at

the door, it's very kindergarten class, and it's like, Okay, it's time for your nap, and we'll give you a cookie, and you will lie down, and you'll feel better after. Sometimes, you can't do that, and it comes off as your being unreasonable, and you're not taking into consideration their feelings when it's the feelings of the collective that is most important. There's a lot of entitlement now, so you start to take people out of that world and they kind of don't know how to react and deal with the fact that you're not going to kowtow to the way they want it to be. You're not at Target, buying something. You're coming to a space! You're being invited in, and we're just asking for mutual respect—that's all.

p.r.: **And I think that, not to keep going back to the devices, but they make us more individualistic. Everything we're seeing is curated for us. But you're entering a room with other people and there's someone telling you to be mindful of the most vulnerable around you, but instead of acknowledging and accepting that, you think it's an attack.**

c.f.: It's sad, but I think, once you come up against the bitchy one a couple of times, you kind of get it. Take your focus away from inside and maybe cast it outside. That's what I think is being asked, and it's going to take a while, and it's going to take a little bit of perseverance to let them know that it isn't bad and it isn't depleting of yourself and your view of yourself. It's being inclusive, and in a beautiful, healthy way.

r.a.: I also think that people wanna go to where they're not allowed into, so there's always this, like, I-wanna-get-into-the-hot-new-club [attitude]. One of the things about Studio 54 was that Studio 54 would have all these different sectors of society in there, so that's what would make it interesting. Everyone's always like, Oh, I'm not pretty enough! Oh, I'm not glam enough! Oh, I'm not rich enough! It's not ever any of those things! It's like, Your energy is fucked up—and you're showing your energy. When you go to a door, come prepared, look cute, [and] come with an open heart!

But, again, these are the kinda clubs that I work. If you're coming to a club with the black card, and you're gonna buy a table, that's a whole other set of circumstances, and I don't work those parties, I'm not interested in those parties.

The parties that we do work are more about—What's the energy? Are you gonna be a threat or are you gonna be an ally?

p.r.: **Promoters are being more thoughtful about the journey of the patron these days. What is your first point of contact, coming into my party? Is it a good one? Is it positive? Does it make you feel joy? Or does it feel like being shoved through airport security? I think more people are talking about that, more people are expressing that and spreading that idea, so more parties are inspired by that. And that's why someone would hire you. They know you'll take care of them, and you'll be a positive first point of contact.**

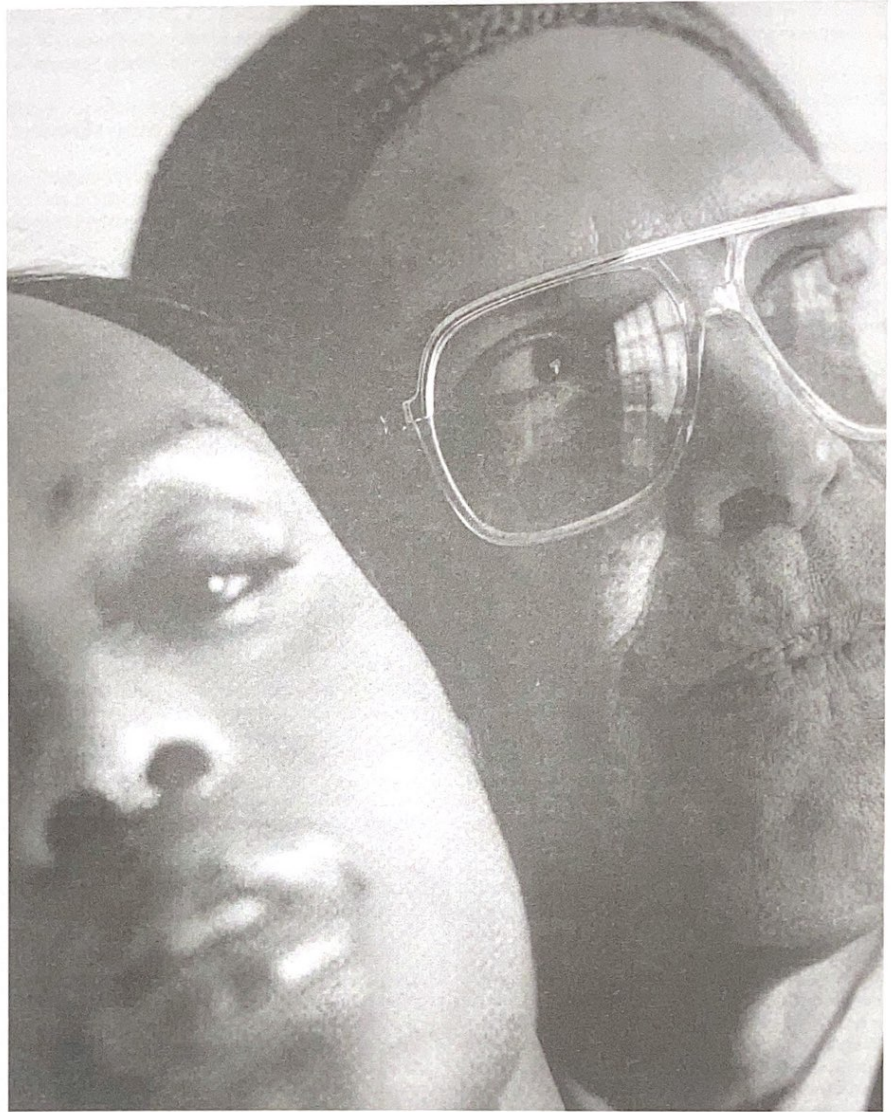
r.a.: Even Connie. No, Connie's a fierce door.

c.f.: I'm more authoritative, but it isn't in a bad way. It's just—

r.a.: You take no prisoners.

c.f.: Kind of, but it's about respect. Respect the space, respect who you're going to be sharing the space with. If you're going to be kind of flippant—

r.a.: With you! At the door! What are you gonna do past the door?



Connie & Richard by Julius Frazer

C.F.: I'm sort of like the litmus test, so I have to be very blank and have you project onto me, and then I take that information and go with it—

P.R.: **And respond accordingly.**

R.A.: In seconds. We're fierce. We read you. That's what we do! People always ask me [how to get in]. You know, look cute. Put on an outfit. Look like you're fucking trying to impress someone.

C.F.: An effort.

R.A.: As a queer person, I had to come correct. If I wasn't correct, these kids would let me have it. I would get served. It wasn't—I wore a busted Brooks Brothers that had holes and that was ragged—but it was just right. It's not about wearing top of the line. Come with good energy and like you wanna have a good time. If you're giving the door person shade, that's not gonna get you in.

B.B.: **Connie, you mentioned when you finally got in at Area. What was the door like there?**

R.A.: They weren't shady, they were just ready to go.

C.F.: They were like alright you're up—Oh,

nevermind. Next. You, ah, nevermind. You, um, nevermind. They would cherry pick out of the people in the front, and then they were the regulars. And they were the people who were dressed to the nines, where the Red Sea parted and you're like, oh, your outfit and you.

B.B.: **You both overlapped at Vinyl?**

R.A.: Yeah, we were working together at Vinyl. I did everything at Vinyl, except maybe clean the bathrooms. I did decor. I did coat check. I would help with the DJ—

C.F.: VIPs.

R.A.: Pretty much everything there. Vinyl was Area. It was NASA. It was Shelter at one point. It was a bunch of different things.

B.B.: **And Connie, you were doing the door.**

C.F.: Yes. Not from the beginning. I think from middle to end. It was late nineties to early two-thousands, with a break in there during 9/11. It was, like, six years?

R.A.: But you were just doing the [Danny] Tenaglia

parties, right?

C.F.: Yeah. I was a Be Yourself whore.

R.A.: Which was Friday night, the place to be.

C.F.: Oh, my God—that door. I'd get there at, like, nine and leave at twelve.

R.A.: In the afternoon.

C.F.: In the afternoon.

R.A.: How much money did you make?

C.F.: That was a long, long shift.

R.A.: But we were making good money then, girl.

C.F.: Yeah, we were. But it would take you, like, a day and a half to get up out of the coffin. Rise, rise!

B.B.: **Can you think of a song that would summarize that Be Yourself era?**

R.A.: Celeda, "Be Yourself." That's Danny!

C.F.: I missed so much because I was at the door.

What happened!? What are you talking about!? I always missed everything because I was at the door.

R.A.: Danny did so many fierce remixes, didn't he? He remixed everyone.

F.R.: So Connie, you probably got to hang out at closing.

R.A.: That was the best hour. Glitter on the floor.

C.F.: Glitter, glowsticks, candy, pacifiers. It was insane but so beautiful. The dancing? It was incredible. Incredible, incredible, incredible dancers that went there.

B.B.: I think of Vinyl as the link between one era and a new one. Every person you speak to that has, in one way or another, worked in or been around nightlife... they talk about 9/11 as if it's a before-and-after. What and how did things change within the night spaces?

C.F.: I would say it began at 9/11, where there was a kind of palpable fear of collecting, but then Fashion's Night Out, people started to venture out again, and then it started to level off again, but there was still that little tinge of fear. And then the crash of '08—that's when it all sort of imploded, and people wanted to be self-protective, in a way, and not put themselves out there, I think. '08 was... YouTube was around, and then people kind of needed an outlet, and I think that's when the energy started to go into the devices. Making your way as a business or as an outlet for commerce and all of that... you could be away from the danger and from putting yourself out there—and make money. I think that's the starting of the tipping point of turning inward.

F.R.: I worked at Pacha in Manhattan from 2007 to 2014, so I was there for the 2008 crash, and, right after that dip, EDM happened, and it saved Pacha, but it totally changed the landscape. Clubs went from clubs as we know them, where people are dancing with each other, to a concert where a big crowd of people stared at the DJ. Rob Fernandez, my boss, would be on the phone with agents talking about this "show" and that "show" and I'd say, "It's not a show—it's a party!" That's what we always talk about: is it a show, or is it a party? And it became a show.

R.A.: I think it became more mainstream. It's always been huge in Europe, but more middle Americans started understanding there was this cool scene, and it became less queer and less people of color, and more mainstream and homogenized—and commercial! There's nothing you can do to stop that progression, that cycle.

F.R.: The first person I remember addressing devices in nightclubs was Danny Tenaglia. He would shine the light, stop the music, and go, "Cut that out. You tube me, I tube you," and he'd start filming them. He didn't like the idea that what was happening might be on YouTube the next day.

R.A.: You're not present and you're in another zone. And you're on your own, you with your device, and you're not being part of a collective.

B.B.: And everyone else is a spectacle and you're just the one documenting.

C.F.: Also, when EDM came and it became a show... when you're watching a show, you're kind of not participating, unless it's Rocky Horror Picture Show. Before, it was: you came, you danced, you participated as a collective. Now, you're spectating, and that takes away from you being part of the tribe and this communal gathering. It just became a gathering to spectate and look.

R.A.: Pay your way in. Again, in that situation, there's not really a door. There's someone who's got a list, but you don't got a proper door. If you can pay, you buy your way in and you're in.

F.R.: When you bought a ticket, you're a priority.

R.A.: I've worked where, even if you had a ticket, if you came to the door and you were wrong, we'll refund your money. You're not gonna enjoy yourself; this isn't for you.

B.B.: The word show pisses me off. The more you let it slide, the more it normalizes

R.A.: I also think that you have that sort of guest, client, patron. The people who come to hear you... you're beautiful to look at, don't get me wrong, but they're not here to look at you. They're here to hear what you've got. What're you gonna fuckin' bring to the table? What're you gonna wreck me with? I'm here for it.

F.R.: Some people succumb to narcissistic itch that that behavior scratches. Do you give in to that? Do you let that get you drunk — all these people looking at you. Do you then behave differently, feeling like you need to perform for them? Do you do something visual, put on a mask, to invite them to look at you more? Or do you reject it and encourage people to turn around and dance with each other?

R.A.: When you spin, how long are you spinning for?

B.B.: Our favorite nights are ones where we can play all night from start to finish.

R.A.: A lot of these DJs, it's like they're just banging out, and it's not a journey. After you play, the next DJ comes on, and what are they playing? How are they following up? They're coming from a different place, more often than not. I mean, sometimes, there is a gel, but it doesn't seem—

C.F.: Organic.

R.A.: And you are not those kind of DJs, but... lemme ask you this, and now the shoe's on the other end: If you got hired to do a show where you would be one of five DJs, what would you do, say no? And it's a ridiculous amount of money.

F.R.: Maybe.

B.B.: Well you have to put things in perspective. Do I really need the gig? Who else is on the lineup, is it people I respect? Is there diversity?

I like Le Bain because they continue in that lineage of hiring DJs to play long sets instead of packing a bill and people play one hour. I've definitely been asked to DJ something where I've been offered a one-hour slot, and I was like, I really appreciate this, but can you give me at least two hours? And it's not about money but about having something to say, and you just can't do it in one hour. And they were very cool with it, totally receptive to it.

Going back to the chain of interactions when you come to the club: door, security, elevator operators, coat check, bartenders, bar backs, etc as long as everybody has a common understanding of the mission and values are. If someone comes in with a different idea, it might be something they brought from somewhere else and they might not have that information yet.

R.A.: Well we love a virgin. It's an opportunity to create community, which is why we're here. I'm not into excluding anyone, but I'm not into including you so you can block me out. More often

than not, that's what happens when the white, heteronormative comes into a space. Naturally, they take over because that's what they do. Colonize.

B.B.: I think that's where the door—and the message and the image and the coaching that happens—is so important. It's the first point of contact. Eh, this place might not be for you.

R.A.: And, more often than not, when you come to the door, if you see someone like either of us at the door, if you're not into it, you're like, Wait, this isn't [for me]. I'll even say something like, Hmm there's a lot of gay people here.

B.B.: What do they say?

R.A.: More often than not, they're like, Yeah, great, okay! But I've had women tell me they love to come where I'm working because they know they're gonna be safe, and that's fucking gold for me. I don't even know sometimes how it happens. I just do the best I can do. I'm not perfect; I fuck up, everyone does. But when you hear someone come back and say they felt safe... and it's primarily women because the DJ's with the guys, and it becomes that whole "brah" thing. Too many creeps. When the women say that they're not being abused, and they love it, and that's why they come to where you're working—

B.B.: Like Bush Tetras said it, there's too many creeps.

R.A.: I don't wanna!

C.F.: Who wants that to be the calling card of where you work? I'm not going to be safe; I'm going to be accosted; I'm going to be pinned up against a wall.

R.A.: There's people who want that, and that's cool, that's fine, if that's what you're into, wherever you fall on the spectrum, but we're not operating like that. You're coming out to get picked up at my place of work, I guess, but that's not why we gather.

B.B.: Sex is beautiful. And we've all gone home with people at the end of the night. But there are ways, and then there are ways.

R.A.: I've had women be like, Ah, there's no guys in there, and they're obviously looking for something else. The whole nightlife situation... there's so many different genres and subsets.

C.F.: Which is needed. We can't all be one entity. It's not the Suburbs. We can't all think alike. There has to be different experiences.

B.B.: Otherwise, it would be homogenous on our end of things. You have to have different ecosystems.

R.A.: I went to Plato's Retreat when I was young, when they started doing parties. And I just remember walking around and seeing people having sex and thinking, fuck, these kids are wild!

Just like the [Le Bain] hot tub. I could never, but it's fierce. My nephew brought his cousin, my sister. Her husband's... whatever they are. He ended up banging this girl in the hot tub, and my sister was holding his T-shirt because that's what he was worried about, and I'm like, Fuck his T-shirt! get his pants I'm like, Girl, that kid's gonna talk about this night for the rest of his life! Which is cool. I am appalled! But that's so cool, I thought.

F.R.: I think it's cool that at a place like Le Bain, which is in plain sight, that there's still places to hide. You can still find a nook and have fun.

R.A.: You can just do what you want.

It's also so different because you have to be careful about someone being inappropriately touched. We're being so politically correct, and we all need that, without a doubt, but... I fuck up all the time: I may use the wrong pronoun, I call you 'Girl' and you're heteronormative, and it's not to offend you, but we all have to give ourselves enough space to fuck up and to be ourselves and to be human. That's the beauty of it.

I work in a place where people go to get fucked up. My job is to make sure that you have a safe spot, whatever you decide to do. Drugs, sex, and rock and roll—that's what we're about.

C.F.: Partying like a rockstar, not counting your rosary beads. And we're trying to make a space like a shaman, to guide you on your trip, and to make sure you don't come into any bumps that will throw you off of your path.

B.B.: I definitely remember when I felt like I found my current tribe. And you know, you go through many tribes. I remember going to a party called Joy, and I remember thinking, No one's gonna hit on me here? Thank fuck. And not because I get people throwing themselves at me, but because I don't have to deal with anybody coming up to me saying shit I don't wanna hear? I never wanna talk at the club. Ever.

R.A.: Asking On the dance floor? That's the worst thing. How am I doing!? I'm trying to get my groove on!

B.B.: I hate yelling over music. I don't like straining my voice. I just like to go to the club and dance. I felt like something totally shifted the moment that I learned I could go somewhere and just dance the whole night.

P.R.: And there's no bar there, so there's no waiting in line for a drink, or stressing about having money to pay for this or that, or do I have enough cash for a tip.

R.A.: The better clubs, the better parties... they never had a bar. Maybe there was something in the fruit punch that your mother wouldn't be happy about.

P.R.: Vinyl didn't have a liquor license.

R.A.: No. And you could go on forever. The Garage, Choice.

Better Days..., they were selling alcohol. I mean, I wasn't drinking because I couldn't afford to, and I was jumping out of my window. I was a kid.

C.F.: I wasn't brave enough to do that.

R.A.: "I went to G. G. Barnum's, I went to Crisco Disco. I met this queen's hairdresser who fell in love with me, and he used to do my hair for free. I was the little twink.

Anvil wouldn't let me in on their regular nights. They had a new wave Tuesday night, where women were allowed to go, too, but women couldn't go in the back. I had this whole crew of girls that I hung out with, and their whole thing was to go into the back room. That was the reason why they went there.

There's always been that whole thing of exclusivity. Even within the gay [community], like if you were femme or fat or ugly... they didn't want you to be in a costume, whatever that costume was.

B.B.: I want to think that we are having more open conversations about not fitting the typical standards of beauty now. Body hair is more embraced now amongst straight women. Maybe

it's just New York, but I have definitely seen that the standards of beauty have been thrown out the window a little bit, and it's encouraging.

R.A.: But it also depends on your circle, it also depends on which pool you're hanging out with.

P.R.: Going back to visibility and not having role models, I think there's a lot more visibility in advertising these days, but you have to remember why. It's not because these companies are inclusive or benevolent, it's because they see the way culture is shifting and don't want to be cancelled or irrelevant. They don't want what their doing or not doing to affect their bottom line. In the end it's always about money.

R.A.: And, hopefully, it's not just the flavor of the month, especially in fashion, where it's like, Okay, it's the hot Dominican girl, or the hot black girl, or the hot Asian girl. The Emmys have nominated trans [people], and that's phenomenal, but there's still more work to be done.

But what do we want? Homogenization?

B.B.: Well, is it normalizing when it's the humanity behind our identities? Our differences bring us together.

R.A.: Right.

P.R.: Before I started going to clubs, I had never had meaningful relationships with people that didn't look like me. The first DJ I idolized was Jonathan Peters, and I first got to hear him at a club called Black, which he owned for a brief moment, formerly called Exit, now Terminal 5. I went New Year's Day in the AM, and there I saw Vivacious performing for the first time. Vivacious was (and still is) a star, and she would do these fierce performances for Jonathan's parties, and as she came down off the podium, she'd have her friends there that she'd greet and hang out with. After going to these more often, she started to recognize me and say hi. I felt so cool. As I moved through the nightclubbing spaces, meeting older people with history, being called "girl" or "Mary" felt like a badge of honor. Yes I am white and straight, and yes, they were half making fun of me, but it made me feel like I belonged there. And then I started working clubs, and that's all it was and still is.

R.A.: But working in certain settings, too, I have to sometimes remember that not everyone likes to be called Girl.

B.B.: Knowing Paul and his background, I never think he'd be offended if you called him Girl.

R.A.: But you know what else? Who cares if he wants to put on panties and a strap-on? It's none of our fucking business.

C.F.: It's like that religious thing, where your faith is over your bed, watching you, and the woman has to lie on her back, clutching the Bible, and only thinking about God. It's like that scene from Carrie: "I smelled the whiskey on his breath. Then he took me. He took me, with the stink of filthy roadhouse whiskey on his breath, and I liked it." It's like, Really!? Come on.

R.A.: Repression.

B.B.: There's a lot of repression. That's where a lot of anger and a lot of lashing out comes from, and members of the queer community have been the target of that forever.

C.F.: You're looking in the mirror, at what is unresolved within you.

R.A.: It's like the pendulum: Hopefully, it's not gonna swing back so far that a lot of the things that we fought for—

C.F.: The progression.

R.A.: In nightclubs, people were able to exist, where they can be comfortable enough so that they can go to a doctor, and they can be seen, and they can say, "I am this."

B.B.: I keep thinking about visibility and trends and fashion. Are we exoticizing where we should just be trying to come back down to earth and humanize each other? Instead of just making one another tokens.

R.A.: We need a Black, we need a white, we need a female, we need a this, we need a that.

B.B.: Do we have hope for it landing there eventually?

C.F.: [long pause] I do, I do. I think that we've come to a place now that we can't turn back, with #MeToo and "woke" culture, where—

R.A.: Which is privilege. Being "woke" is a privilege. That's privilege speak—let's be real.

C.F.: Okay. Thank you. There isn't room for making it a trend now. If you make it that, if the pendulum does swing back, you will be called out for it, so I think there isn't room for it to be just a trend any longer. How do you go back?

B.B.: Accountability being a huge factor. There's enough of us, and I think that there's a common understanding that standing by is no longer—

R.A.: Acceptable.

C.F.: That can't be a trend that you can go back on, without it reflecting on you and your internal sickness. I think there's room for it to swing back.

B.B.: Richard?

R.A.: The pendulum continues to swing back and forth, and we make incredible gains, but, I mean, black people are still being murdered in the streets. It's not like the civil rights era. It's gotten better, but black bodies are still being shot and killed.

There's the human condition, and I think it's naturally in us, to be constantly scared of the other, whether they're immigrants, whether they're Mexicans, whether they're brown, whether they're yellow. I honestly think that, until another species comes down and tries to take our humanity, we're [not] gonna come together and realize there's a common [characteristic]. We all separate. I mean, I stay with my people! I stay where the love is! That's what we're taught to do: go where you feel comfortable, go where you're loved, go where there's warmth. I don't wanna deal with certain people— Except to go and teach them. Go and learn. Be open.

It's interesting. We're evolving. To think that we're not gonna evolve is kinda insane, and we're gonna continue to evolve. Where we wind up is anyone's guess.

B.B.: On the dancefloor, hopefully.

R.A.: Hopefully on the dancefloor.

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