



Peter Burton (centre) and his sister Pamela and friend Stevie posing in D'Arblay Street, 1967

Pip Morgan circa 1966



do you come here often?

Haydon Bridge's history of gay clubbing in London

Part 1 of 5: The 60s. In which queers shift their traditional allegiance from prostitutes to the black community; Italy and France influence the style of the secretly queer mod movement; and the partial legalisation of homosexuality makes no difference to the London queer scene – or does it?

where we went

ARE you ready for the story of gay clubbing in London – more than 50 years of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll? Yes, we really have been partying for that long - even before the first discothèque opened in 1960. "There's a great myth that gay life didn't start until 1967," says Peter Burton, who ran the gay mod club, **Le Duce**, which writer Alkarim Jivani calls "one of the trendiest places to be seen in London." "Amber", now 71, arrived in Soho in 1948 at the age of 13. He can reel off a list of queer bars in Soho in the 50s: "**The Alibi**, the **Huntsman**, **Take 5**, **The Apple**, **No. 9**, the **Casino**. You didn't have to go 100 yards. We had more places then than now." Most of the bars were in basements and attics. They were tiny, but some had a juke box and people would dance. Amber reminisces about the **Mambo** in Greek Street. He must have been there in 1956 because Fats Domino's 'Blueberry Hill' was on the juke box: "It was the pits. When they all started jiving, you could see the floor going up and down." Ironically, the Wolfenden Report, which recommended to the Government in 1957 that "homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence", made life more difficult for queers. Homophobic police stepped up raids on queer meeting places. They rarely made arrests, but intimidated everyone by taking names and addresses. Corrupt cops also took cash and booze from bar owners. Queers took refuge in illegal drinking clubs. Gay activist, Claire Andrews, remembers, "They were usually run by black people, who were sympathetic to lesbians and gay men who didn't have a place to go." In 1964, when homosexual law reform had become inevitable, the Director of Public Prosecutions warned the police to ease up. But by that time gay life in Soho had been decimated. It wouldn't recover until the late 80s.

In a double irony, the renowned **Le Duce** was co-owned by an ex-cop, Bill Bryant. In 1964, he and his partner, Geoffrey Worthington, had opened a discreet queer bar, **The Lounge**, in Whitehall. It didn't work, and the pair

moved to Soho's D'Arblay Street, where they got the formula right with their queer version of the nearby straight mod club, **The Scene**. Like their hetero counterparts, queer mods wanted to dance non-stop (and had the drugs that enabled them to). **Le Duce** was open all night every Saturday. The basement room had a door policy that kept the club fashionable (and predatory older men out). Working class poofs and straight dolly birds danced to black music – Jamaican blue beat, Tamla Motown. "They spoke directly to us," says Peter Burton, who was in charge from 1966 to 1968, when he moved on. By then Soho had been carved up by East End and Maltese gangsters, who were getting rich from hetero strip clubs and clip joints.

The queer scene moved to West London, where it was to thrive in the 70s. Incredibly, a prototype back room operated at the **Gigolo** in King's Road, Chelsea, from 1967. "It was a long cellar and everyone would cram up the far end," recalls gay historian Dr David Lawrence. "The lights were dim. It was like a scrum. Nobody ever came up and stopped anything." Alan Jones, co-author of disco history, *Saturday Night Forever*, is more explicit. "The first time I was ever given a blow job was in the **Gigolo**," he reveals. Meanwhile, in 1967, homosexuality was made legal according to the Wolfenden recommendations. It was little more than a rubber stamp. "It never changed my life in any way," declares Amber. "It didn't provoke a rush of new clubs," agrees Peter Burton. But drag legend Pip Morgan feels that after 1967 there was a subtle change. "You used to keep an eye open for people who were in trouble," he says regretfully. "But when everyone could do what they wanted, people stopped being nice to each other."

what we wore

"GROWING up gay and realising that one is different means a constant questioning of who you are," says "John", interviewed by the Victoria and Albert Museum's Shaun Cole. "Experimenting with clothes is a way of



Outside Le Duce, 1967

exploring this difference, a way of showing or accepting your difference.” Aged 15 in 1960, Peter Burton “favoured shirts in delicate pastel colours (lilac was a firm favourite)...a bouffant hairstyle and a tortoiseshell cigarette holder.” This dandy look, popular since Quentin Crisp’s heyday, was superseded by the Continental style, promoted to London queers by Bill Green, a former physique photographer, who opened **Vince Man’s Shop** in Soho in the 50s. On a trip to the South of France, he noticed such novelties as black jeans and tight swimming trunks. Rome’s ‘Dolce Vita’ period at the turn of the 60s was the next big influence. Within months of the film’s premiere, Vince marketed “bum freezer” jackets, drain-pipe trousers and winklepicker shoes. Green’s sales assistant, John Stephen, left to open **His Clothes**, around the corner in Carnaby Street. Stephen

developed his own style, accentuating the male form even further by lowering trousers from the waist to the hips and minimising underwear (“hipster briefs”) accordingly. This sexy and essentially queer look was appropriated by the mainstream rag trade to dress the mod era, big from 1963-6, when The Beatles helped to make London the most swinging city in the world. By 1967 mods had been replaced by hippies with unisex clothes and shoulder-length hair. For the rest of the decade it was often difficult to determine gender, let alone sexuality. But this situation began to change around 1969, when some working class lads reacted to hippie androgyny by shortening their hair and wearing braces. Were these first skinheads as gay as the skins at Hard On? “They were always gay!” laughs Alan Jones. “Braces! Even then it was a gay code.”





what we listened to

FOR decades working class queers and female prostitutes formed a natural alliance against the authorities that wanted the trouble makers off the streets and into jail. But from the early 60s, when the legalisation of "discreet" prostitution and homosexuality became imminent, working class queers began gravitating towards the immigrant community from Jamaica. This defining relationship between outcast societies can be traced through to the present day (and makes the homophobia of some Jamaican dancehall stars all the more preposterous). From 1963, both straight and gay mod clubs played danceable records by Jamaican blue beat stars like **Prince Buster** and **Desmond Dekker**, music which became part of the soundtrack of the mod era. But queers also liked the whole package – the beat, the lyrics and the camp image – of US soul groups like **The Miracles**, **Martha and the Vandellas** and especially **The Supremes**. At Le Duce the only white music played was "blue-eyed soul" by the likes of **Dusty Springfield**, who also happened to be gay and made-up like a drag queen. Although 'The Green Door', a hit for both **Frankie Vaughan** and **Jim Lowe** in 1956, allegedly refers to a queer bar, the first unequivocally queer song, 'See My Friend' by **The Kinks**, reached number 10 in the British charts in 1965. For the rest of the decade queers generally ignored protest songs and flower power in favour of bubblegum music, the camp fun of **Tiny Tim** and **Harpers Bizarre**, and stuff promoted by gay radio jock **Kenny Everett**. Incidentally, all records played in gay clubs in the 60s were on juke boxes. London's first disco, **La Discothèque**, and its more successful rival, the **Whisky-a-go-go**, were in Wardour Street from the early 60s; but there was no openly gay club night in the capital until **Tricky Dicky** (Richard Scanes) began at the **Father Redcap** in Camberwell in 1971. (See QX 616).

"coming down off speed" in Hyde Park, 1968



how we danced

THE **jive** and its variations, introduced to the UK during World War II by American GIs, retained its popularity throughout the 50s, but mainly with straight kids. Queers preferred the rare luxury of dancing arm in arm. Everything changed in the early 60s, with the arrival of the **twist**, first popularised in New York's Peppermint Lounge, "a gay hustler joint, frequented by sailors, lowlifes and street toughs in leather jackets," says DJ historian Bill Brewster. The first dance in which partners didn't hold each other, the twist was perfect for queer bars. When the police arrived, dancers quickly turned towards a person of the opposite sex. Unfortunately,

this didn't work when the pretty police were on the floor. In 1962, David Browne, manager of the **Kandy Lounge** in Gerrard Street, was hauled into Court because the club had been "visited by plain clothes policemen who observed men dancing the twist with each other." Browne's counsel maintained that the men concerned were dancing the **madison**, in which people of the same sex formed a line. It didn't wash. Browne was found guilty. The twist spawned several variations – the **fly**, the **mashed potato**, the **locomotion**, the **pop pie** – whose names were more familiar than their steps. (When Kylie revived the Locomotion in 1988, nobody could be found who remembered Little Eva's original dance). In 1963, despite the continuing success of the twist, its prime exponent, Chubby Checker, turned his attention to the **limbo**. The next major development was the blues, the first of the "standing still and twitching" dances, supposedly invented by Dave Clark as a publicity stunt for his record 'Do You Love Me?' (1963). It became the mods' favourite dance, and was later "mod"ified into the **hitch-hiker** and the **shake**. The latter superseded the twist, but by the end of 1965 it had evolved into the **frug**, which became the staple dance of the late sixties.

how we got wasted

AS QX said in 1998, "Queers are always first to discover a new drug." And so it's always been. Most of the queer bars of the 50s and 60s didn't serve alcohol. **Cocaine**, which had virtually disappeared before World War II, hadn't returned. Therefore queers went in search of new excitement. A popular destination was the branch of Boots on Piccadilly Circus, which stayed open all night. Here you could buy a tube of **Preludin**, a slimming drug, which delivered a nice buzz for quite a few hours, or

a tin of ten **amyl nitrate** capsules, intended to treat angina. (You snapped or "popped" the capsule into a hankie and inhaled. Poppers weren't widely available in bottles until the late 70s). Queers and Jamaicans bonded not just because of music but weed. **Cannabis** was unknown in the UK until Jamaicans brought it here in 1948. At first it was used only among jazz musicians. The first drug bust was in Soho in 1952, and this alerted the local queer community. Amber used to buy four ready-made "reefers" (spliffs) for £1. **Amphetamines**, notably Benzedrine, were widely used as stimulants during World War II; and under their street names – **purple hearts** and **black bombers** were most common – "uppers" became the mods' favourite drug. Sleep became difficult without **barbiturates** ("downers").

Pip Morgan remembers that the dealers were often girls (they were good at charming prescriptions out of doctors). Peter Burton says that the fish in the tank at Le Duce kept dying because clubbers threw their pills into the water whenever there was a police raid. He also

saw clubbers removing the wadding from Benzedrine inhalers and dunking it in Coca Cola, and Samantha the transvestite cat burglar sniffing her wig cleaning fluid. Queers (or "gays" as we became known from about 1969 onwards) generally remained loyal to uppers and downers well into the 70s. **Lysergic acid** (LSD), which arrived around 1966, didn't suit queer club culture. The swirling patterns and dreamy, jangly music that contributed to the first Summer of Love in 1967 were pretty much a hetero thing.

Next week: The 70s. Disco! Punk!! Gay Pride!!! Heaven!!!!

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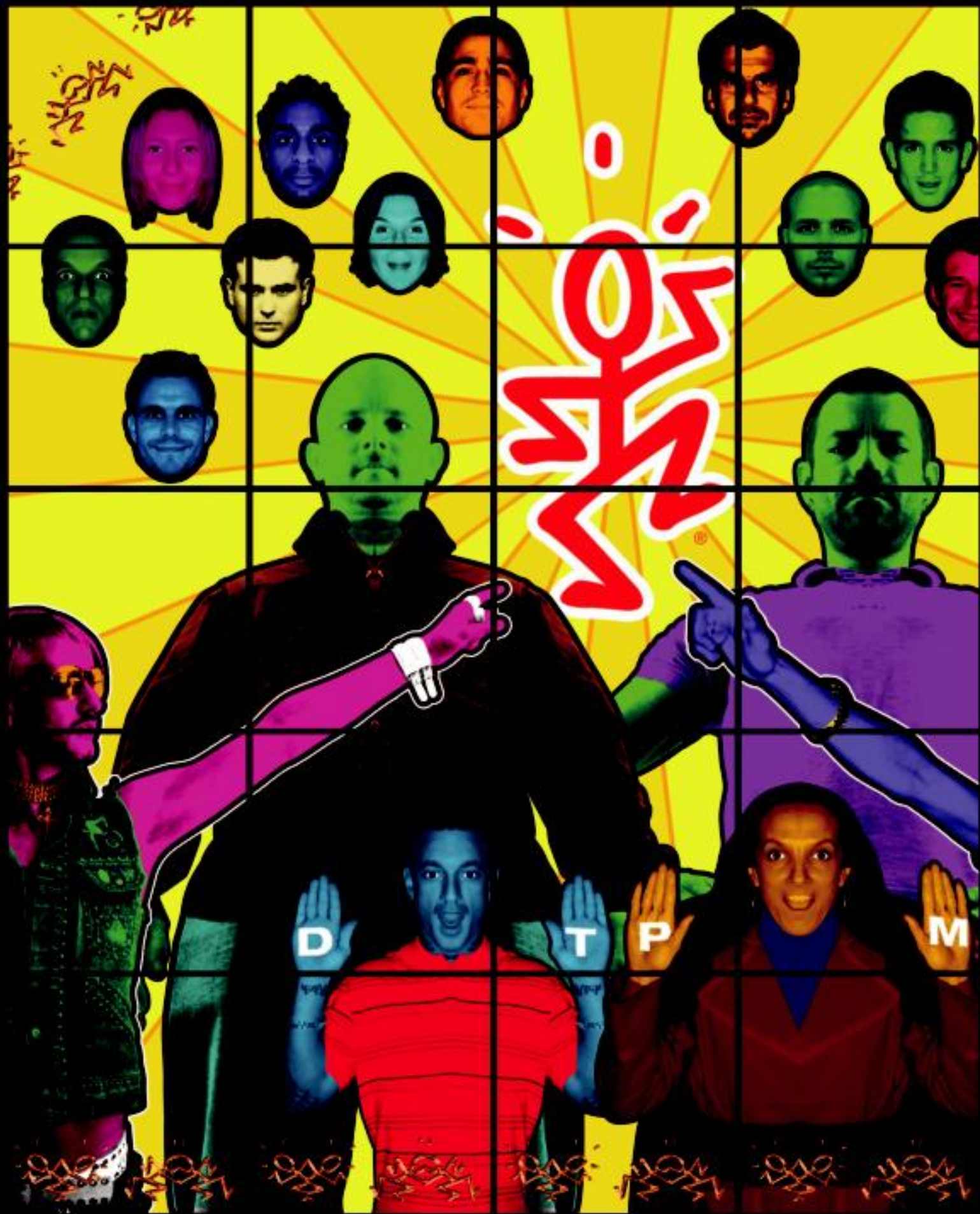
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edna eyes up.... dolly parton!

ALRIGHT Dolly! – don't ya just love that name? I reckon us queers have a special place in our tired old hearts for anything "dolly". I mean – Hello Dolly Levi, Dolly Rawlins (and the much-loved and over used line from Widows – "Dolly, where's the diamonds?"), Dolly Skilbeck (who? – you know – old Emmerdale), Dolly you've got a willy!, Dolly the sheep (well, maybe not that one, but I just love the answer machine message at the Genetics Company that created it – 'Thanks for cloning, please leave your message after the sheep'). But the Dolly that stands heels and wigs above the rest is, of course, the Smoky Mountain Goddess that is... Dolly Parton.

She's in the UK this week for another sell out tour and I just feel the need to tumble outta bed and stumble to the typewriter to pay homage to the – (girl, she's camp) – Queen of Country. Anyone who says that she modelled her look on the town tramp deserves our undying respect. As the legend goes, there was a woman in Dolly's hometown who everyone said was trash – with her yellow hair, tight clothes, high heels and bright red lipstick. But our Dolly thought she was beautiful, despite her mother saying she was trash. Dolly decided there and then, that's what she wanted to be – trash! She was determined that's how she wanted to look herself and didn't give a damn what anyone thought. True to her word, she still doesn't – taking the piss out of herself, with the now famous quotes – "I just look like the girl next door... if you happen to live next door to an amusement park", and my favourite, "You'd be surprised how much it costs to look this cheap". God fuckin' bless her.

Following the release of her first credited country single 'Dumb Blonde', back in 1967, she was generally seen as such, but as she says herself, "I ain't dumb and definitely ain't blond". Nicknamed 'The Iron Butterfly' for

her keen financial sense – her business empire now includes the copyright for all her own music (clever bitch), her own film production company (credits include Father Of The Bride, Buffy, Angel and 'Common Threads – The Stories Of The Aids Quilt', the first thing the company produced, which went on to win an Oscar for Best Documentary) and, of course, her very own theme park, with 3 million visitors a year. (Isn't it every queen's dream to go to the fantastically vanity-driven Dollywood?)

A lot of this has been financed by the shed-loads of money she's made from writing and owning her most successful song to date – 'I Will Always Love You'. Dolly's released it three times herself (receiving two Grammy Awards), but they had to lay on special trains, planes and automobiles to transport the wads of cash she made from Whitney's 1992 cover. Now don't get me wrong, I love Whitney as much as the next faggot, but nevertheless, she was seen as sassy, sharp and smart and Dolly never was – yet which star used that cash, injecting it into multi-million pound deals? And

which one constantly used and owes multiple dealers millions, whilst injecting into, well...? To reiterate, she ain't dumb and she ain't blond. Our Dolly's certainly come a long way from her dirt-poor beginning, surrounded by 10 brothers and sisters in an old shack up in the Smoky Mountains, where 'Applejack' (the best song around) taught her how to play the banjo. Oh, and apparently they didn't have any shoes. Doesn't the heart just bleed?

Yes, it was hard but, down to earth as ever, Dolly just says "If you want a rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain"! Now she has three homes in LA, one at Dollywood, one in NYC and two in Nashville (one for her and the husband of 43 years and one for her 3,000 wigs and 12,000 bras – ok I made the last bit up). She's a true fairytale rags (of many colours) to riches story – the most successful female country star, ever and the fifth wealthiest female entertainer in the world (after Oprah, MTM, Barbra and Madonna – see where's old Whitney?). But she beats them all hands down when it comes to tits (yes, implanted, maybe – but as she says plastic surgeons are always making mountains out of molehills) and definitely her wigs (whenever asked how long it takes to do her hair, she always says she doesn't know as she's never there!). She's even been rumoured to be a lesbian – her best friend, Judy Ogle, is stated on numerous gossip sites as being around an awful lot. She denies this, but not vigorously. Dolly stated in her autobiography that she and Judy have slept together for years, apparently an innocent comment about actually sleeping in the same bed!

Dolly Parton, born January 19th 1946 – Locust Ridge, Tennessee, owner of a unique, beautiful voice, bursting with honesty, warmth and soul, we salute you and, oh yes, we're always going to fuckin' love you girl!

Love Edna xx

Dolly Parton is at Wembley Arena on Sunday 25th March



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