

Dyke March draws 1,000 chanting women

by Laura Kiritsy
Bay Windows staff

Crowded into one of the large picture windows on the second floor of the upscale Four Seasons Hotel was a large group of well-dressed adults waving, smiling and enthusiastically pumping their fists in solidarity with the unruly procession passing before them on Boylston Street. Though their semi-formal attire and conservative appearance suggested they'd be more likely to display such unbridled excitement for a passing presidential motorcade — or maybe even the pope — what they were actually going wild about on

June 9 was the spectacle of roughly 1,000 lesbians, bisexual and transgendered women who took to the streets for the city's 7th annual Dyke March.

Despite the absence of the rattles, noise-makers, whistles and the many drummers that made last year's event a much noisier affair, this year's Dyke March was no less of a grassroots production, largely due to the increased turnout — last year's march attracted just about 600 participants. "There hasn't been this many people here in years," commented Lesbian Avenger Stacey Montgomery-Scott as the march snaked toward the Boston Common. The presence of eye-popping, oversized street puppets — the largest of which sported bare breasts big enough to make Lara Croft green with envy — also helped to create a more festive atmosphere. Support from the gay male community was more visible as well, in the form of male marchers carrying signs bearing such slogans as "We Love Our Queer Sisters," in addition to gay men who cheered from the sidelines.

And though the march's theme was "Celebrating Our Bodies," there was but one brave marcher willing to show some skin — and even she did so cautiously — shielding her bare breasts, complete with silver-painted nipples — behind a puppet as she passed by police. Dyke March organizers encouraged participants to cover up — at least "around the



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nipple area" — or risk arrest, as was the case recently when Boston police arrested several bare-breasted women on the Boston Common who were agitating for the right to go topless in public.

That's not to say the Dyke March is losing its political edge, as many of the participants turned out to support various issues of interest to lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women. The Dyke March is important, said Brenda Cotto-Escalera, coordinator of community programs for Theater Offensive, "to get the dyke community together, the queer community together, rallying around political issues. The Christian Right is very loud and we've been very quiet. We want to join groups like the Lesbian Avengers and have a voice together and have queer women's perspective. Not only on queer issues, but on issues that affect everyone" — issues she said include

housing, poverty, health issues and human reproductive issues.

Cotto-Escalera attended the march with Daggar, a direct-action street theater group recently formed under the umbrella of the Theater Offensive. As head of Daggar, Cotto-Escalera also had another motive for attending the Dyke March: drumming up interest in her new theater troupe. "Tonight it's purely recruitment — preaching to the converted and getting them to join us," she said.

The politically charged atmosphere also brought out 20-year-old Sky Smith from Danvers, a member of Boston's Lesbian Avengers. "I feel like the Pride march has become more commercialized," she said. "I don't think it's really about our rights anymore. It reminds me of 'gay day' at Disney



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Butch or femme? You have a choice.

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World. It's the whole assimilationist attitude of people thinking we have all our rights and we don't. I think we need to maintain a grassroots lookout because as soon as we stop fighting for our rights, people are going to start taking them away."

Others came simply for the view, such as Alicia Jillian, an MIT graduate student from Philadelphia attending her first Boston Dyke March. "Why wouldn't I want to be around all these beautiful women?" she said with a smile when asked what brought her to the march.

Though politics weren't necessarily on her mind, Jillian was asked why women of color have not traditionally turned out in large numbers for the march. "That's a complicated comment because I'd have to say, well, we're in an area where you're not going to find a lot of people of color anyway, and in those neighborhoods where there are a lot of people of color I'm not sure that the gay sub-population within that group is going to be very well supported. So there's not going to be a lot of support for people of color like myself to come out to something like this."

The energy of the evening did not dissipate when dyke marchers landed at the Boston Common Gazebo where activists Hanne Blank and Robin Ochs addressed the crowd with variations on the "Celebrating Our Bodies" theme. But it was local poetry slam champion Letta Neely who worked the crowd into a frenzy with a reading of her poem "8 Ways of Looking at Pussy."

An example: "When you're wet and waiting I could be lost six universes away without a map and sniff my way home," she said to the

roaring crowd's appreciation.

Transsexual activist, Lesbian Avenger and Dyke March organizer Montgomery-Scott also addressed marchers, recalling the first Boston Dyke March she attended some years ago. "I cannot tell you how scared I was," she said, recalling how she stood watching the march until the Lesbian Avengers contingent dragged her into the fray and made her feel welcome. "If this is your first Dyke March, if you were afraid to come here, if you're standing by yourself in a crowd thinking, 'Ugh, I'm not really welcome, I'm too much of something or I'm not enough of something else,' let me tell you that you are welcome here. We embrace you as our sister — or possibly something else," she said, drawing laughter from the audience. "Not just for the beauty of your mind or the brilliance of your soul. But for the messy, honest truth of your flesh and your bones."

As darkness closed around the Common, the Dyke March wrapped up with the Lesbian Avengers' traditional fire-eating ceremony, which dates back to the birth of the Lesbian Avengers in the early '90s. The ritual commemorates the deaths of Hattie Mae Cohens, a lesbian, and Brian Mock, a gay man, whose Salem, Ore., apartment was firebombed by white supremacists on September 26, 1992.

Jaclyn Friedman was among the handful of fire-eaters, each of whom downed a golfball-sized flame burning at the end of a kerosene-soaked matchstick, not once, but twice. She revealed that there are two sides to the practice of swallowing fire: "Actually there's a little bit of kerosene aftertaste, but other than that it's an incredibly powerful experience." ▼

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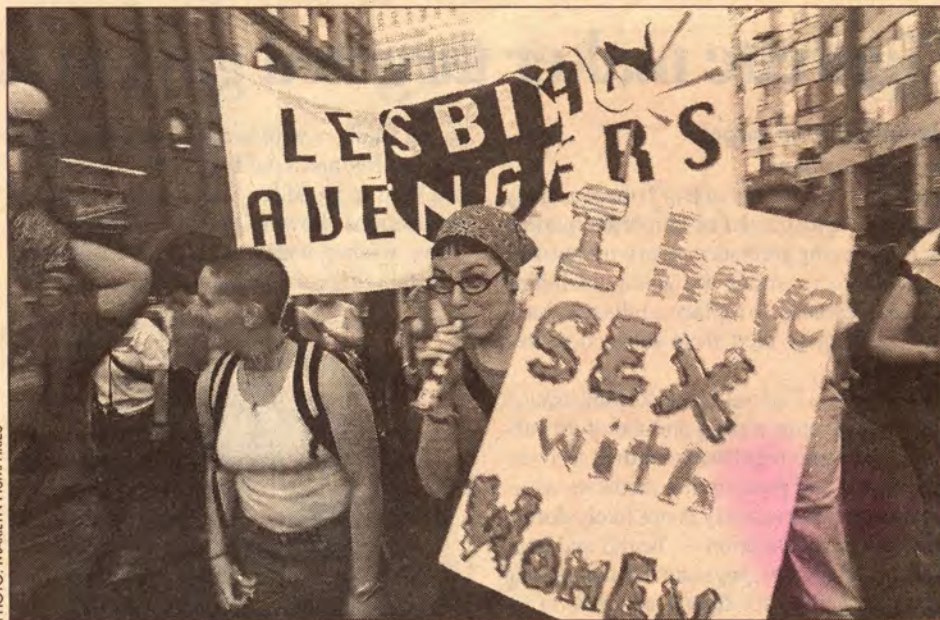


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