

University of Louisville

ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

Faculty Scholarship

12-17-2020

Brian Reynolds, Public Visibility, and Gay Stardom

Finley Freibert

University of Louisville, finley.freibert@louisville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/faculty>



Part of the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Original Publication Information

Finley Freibert (2020) Brian Reynolds, public visibility, and gay stardom, *Porn Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/23268743.2020.1844591](https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2020.1844591)

ThinkIR Citation

Freibert, Finley, "Brian Reynolds, Public Visibility, and Gay Stardom" (2020). *Faculty Scholarship*. 465. <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/faculty/465>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact thinkir@louisville.edu.

Brian Reynolds, Public Visibility, and Gay Stardom

Final Accepted Version Prior to Copyedits

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Porn Studies*. It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The Version of Record was published online by *Porn Studies* on December 17, 2020, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2020.1844591>
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23268743.2020.1844591>

Finley Freibert

Department of Comparative Humanities, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA

Contact:

Finley Freibert

ffreiber@uci.edu

Department of Comparative Humanities

University of Louisville

2211 South Brook

Louisville, KY 40292

Bio: Finley Freibert is currently a part-time Senior Lecturer in Comparative Humanities at the University of Louisville and an adjunct Lecturer at the Kentucky College of Art and Design. In 2019, he completed a Ph.D. in Visual Studies from the University of California, Irvine. Finley researches and teaches at the intersection of media industry studies, critical legal studies, LGBTQ+ histories, and cultural studies. Finley's current research tracks how queer cultural productions have been tied to commercial structures, and how such media exist in a complex relationship with economic and cultural systems of regulation. His work has been published in scholarly venues such as the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies* and *Film Criticism*; as well as, for a general audience in *The Advocate* and *Washington Blade*.



Brian Reynolds, Public Visibility, and Gay Stardom

Abstract:

Once gracing the covers of numerous gay newspapers and magazines, Brian Reynolds was a key figure of Los Angeles' emergent gay adult film industry of the late 1960s. He had all but disappeared from gay adult film historiography until he re-emerged as a cover model for a scholarly journal in 2012, to illustrate pioneering scholarship that initiated contemporary Pat Rocco studies. This article puts the story of Brian Reynolds in dialogue with critical star studies in order to offer a recovery history of Reynolds. Reynolds' rise to celebrity and sudden relegation to obscurity underscores the historical instability of gay pornographic stardom; in this case an instability that resulted from interpersonal relationship shifts, performer turnover, and the industry's profit-oriented dependence on economic inequality.

Keywords: gay history, star studies, film history, Brian Reynolds, media industry studies, gay pornography, Pat Rocco

Introduction

Paging through the May 1974 issue of *Physique Pictorial*, an attentive reader may notice that one photograph stands out among the Tom of Finland drawings and Athletic Model Guild photographs. The photograph is a still from *A Breath of Love* (Rocco 1969a) in which the setting is notably not a private studio ('Brian Reynolds' 1974, 3). It features Brian Reynolds nude on the Hollywood Freeway, a pack of cars approaching while he holds a contemplative ballet stance on one leg with arms outstretched above his head. The still is accompanied with symbols from Mizer's famed 'Subjective Character Analysis' code, a symbolic system that on the surface conveyed models' personality characteristics, but that also allegedly held hidden meanings about their sexual personae. As described by the official cipher, Reynolds is an 'early riser' with an 'agreeable personality' who 'likes to dominate,' is 'aesthetic,' and 'tends to form lasting friendships' (Mizer, no date). However, according to an unofficial sexual glossary of symbols, Reynolds 'will suck' and 'can be fucked.'¹ Given that the Reynolds photograph was taken by gay activist-filmmaker Pat Rocco rather than Bob Mizer, the reason for its presence in *Physique Pictorial* is unclear. However, the fact that this is perhaps the only Pat Rocco photo to have ever appeared in Mizer's magazine reflects both *A Breath of Love*'s status as representative of Rocco's work and Brian Reynolds' eminent star stature in gay adult media from the time.

In notable distinction from Bob Mizer's studio aesthetic structured by private space, Rocco's photograph of Reynolds exudes publicness in that a recognizable public place is occupied by the photograph's subject. The still of Reynolds was taken on the fly, diverging from typical AMG photographs that appeared noticeably staged—outdoors on Bob Mizer's property or in one of his studio sets where highly perfected lighting schemes made well-oiled muscles glisten. While Mizer usually photographed his models in a private context where the main mode of performance was the static pose, the Reynolds photograph conveys public activity both in its setting and the presence of cars imminently approaching Reynolds mid-dance. The still also connotes the contemporaneous fad of 'streaking,' a spontaneous act of running through a public space in the nude for shocking yet comical effect. Yet rather than farce, in the context of the entire film the freeway dance is meant to be taken

sincerely as a spectacular extension of a larger modern dance piece choreographed by Lynn McMurrey. The nude dance alternates among a private studio setting, a rocky wilderness ridge, and the streets of Los Angeles. Rather than comical in the mode of the ‘streak,’ the public street sequences are meant to convey defiance in representing the practice of gay public place-claiming associated with gay liberation politics (Strub 2012, 25). Reynolds could even be said to epitomize the performance of gay place-claiming since early promotional flyers for *A Breath of Love* simply referred to the film with the tagline ‘Special New Film of Brian Dancing Nude on Hollyw’d Freeway’ (Flyer ca. 1968).² The name ‘Brian’ appeared twice the font size of any other word in the tagline emphasizing the actor’s identity as the film’s most important visual feature.

Brian Reynolds’ Star Image

Public visibility and identity affirmation were two of the key tactics of American gay liberation politics of the 1970s. At the same time, Los Angeles’ emergent gay pornographic film industry commodified these tactics in advertising gay adult films to gay counterpublic enclaves. Yet in counterpoint to visibility and identity politics, the vast majority of those involved in the production of gay adult films—both on and offscreen—eschewed public identification, either working without credit or under pseudonyms. This is largely because 1970s Los Angeles was notorious for anti-gay policing and those involved in the production of gay pornography were subject to prosecution under anti-gay obscenity laws (Self 2008; Strub 2008). Brian Reynolds—onetime lover of the more remembered Pat Rocco—is a significant yet overlooked figure who worked under a pseudonym in the emergent Los Angeles gay pornography industry of the 1960s and 1970s. His centrality in Pat Rocco’s public advertising instantiated contemporaneous gay claims for a right of publicity, reflecting the movement toward legitimizing gay film as a media format that could exist in public (Wuest 2017, 83).

Reynolds’ star persona was a mix of attributes that are accentuated differently based on the contexts in which he appeared. He does not epitomize any particular idealized persona in contemporaneous gay erotic media—trade, beefcake, surfer boy, etc.—but rather, he aligned with mixed aspects of differently idealized personas. His celebrity attributes seem to have shifted over time, forged before the more hypermasculine norms of gay pornography that emerged in the 1970s. At least two phases of his star persona can be identified: a youthful androgynous stage and a more ruggedly masculine stage. In the earlier stage, Reynold’s trim frame, identity as a dancer, shaggy bangs, and slight five foot seven height conveyed a youthful almost epicene look, prompting one female fan to quip, ‘I presume it is a he’ (Smith 1969). This trim slightly androgynous look is what we see in *A Breath of Love* and *Screen Test* (Rocco 1970): in the former he prances through outdoor spaces with ballet-like movements accentuating his dancer persona, and in the latter he is portrayed in a passive sexual role as he is pursued by the buff and assertive Jim Cassidy. In the opening shot of *Screen Test* the six-foot Cassidy towers over the seated Reynolds who looks nearly childlike in comparison. Reynold’s youthful appearance was also a component of this stage of his stardom. With his doe-eyed straight-faced gaze into the camera, Reynolds exuded an innocent seriousness that was present even in the most candid photographs; one is hard pressed to find any image of Reynolds smiling. While he did not look as youthful as some of Rocco’s other models—such as Marco—he was often mistaken for being underage and was described as having ‘impish dimples’ and an ‘exquisitely petit masculine body’ (Strickland 1970, 76).

Around 1970 there was a shift in Reynolds' image with the release of the hardcore *A Boy Named David* (Pierce 1970a), constituting what one writer dubbed 'the new Bryan (sic) Reynolds' (Harrell 1970a, 62). This stage was marked by Reynolds' newfound focus on developing his acting craft. Photographs of him from the time register a shift in his presentation such as the presence of mustache stubble, a difference from his youthful clean-shaven look. Pictorials in gay adult magazines from this phase position Reynolds in stronger alignment with the iconography of trade—straight-presenting masculine-looking male sex workers—in that he is frequently photographed in an erect and commanding posture in a poolside context that implies a straight-identified worker or pool boy.³ The shift in Reynolds' star identity suggests a star studies approach attuned to biographical details that could account for changes in self-presentation. Notably, this shift coincides with Reynolds' breakup with Pat Rocco and exit from direct involvement with Rocco in film productions.

Historiographic Intervention and Star Studies Methods

Other than star popularity, pornographic stardom in gay liberation era Los Angeles was dependent on three components: gay liberation politics, industry considerations toward addressing markets, and relationships within gay community enclaves. An overemphasis on popularity prompts the tendency toward identifying Casey Donovan as the 'first' gay porn star, and thereby initiates a logic of scale that elides those who came before him. Linda Lovelace performs a similar function in the memory of heterosexual hardcore, overshadowing earlier stars such as Tina Russell and Fifi Watson. While certainly box office numbers should be taken into account in star historiography, political, industrial, and interpersonal matters should be considered as well. Politically, Los Angeles-based gay filmmaking was created by and for the gay community; as the screenwriter for *A Boy Named David* stated in *The Advocate*, Rocco and his local competitors were 'simply trying to provide a more interesting, entertaining, more legitimate film for the homophile community' (Harrell 1970b, 15). From an industry standpoint, *Boys in the Sand* (Poole 1971) premiered to wide acclaim at a theater that previously catered to the elevated 'art house' market (Connolly 2017). Yet, all of Brian Reynolds' films premiered at venues with a ghettoized market identity, sexploitation and pornographic theaters that had since transitioned to 'all male' policies, including numerous venues in the Continental Theaters chain. It could even be argued that Wakefield Poole's famous aim to differentiate his first feature (2000, 147–48) from Tom DeSimone's *Highway Hustler* (1971)—a film produced specifically for the Continental chain—was as much a rejection of DeSimone's aesthetics as it was a rejection of the diminished market status of Los Angeles' gay-targeted filmmaking. Whereas crossover appeal was built into *Boys in the Sand's* distribution strategies and marketing campaign (Connolly 2017), such tactics were not deployed for any of Reynolds' films. Nevertheless, Brian Reynolds reportedly achieved crossover recognition, albeit on a smaller scale than Donovan,⁴ with particular evidence of Reynolds' reception among audiences of women.⁵

The triangulation of politics, industry, and interpersonal relations to excavate the story of Brian Reynolds is a historiographic intervention for the study of gay pornographic stars because it offers a critical consideration of a star's historical significance outside of hierarchical measures of box office receipts or ticket sales. I do not intend to firmly assert that Brian Reynolds was 'the first gay hardcore star,' although he predates Donovan in that regard. Instead, I aim to show that Reynolds

exists as an overlooked counterexample to Casey Donovan's vaulted status. Indeed, there were significant stars generated in the *Highway Hustler*-milieu that Wakefield Poole so despised (2000, 147–48). Industrial infrastructures allow for the extraction of value from stars like Reynolds—as his image circulated widely in print, on television, and in his films—as well as stars' swift casting aside once that extraction appears no longer profitable. In this light, recovering Reynolds' story helps to adjust the historiography of gay adult media stardom, while also heeding the field's calls to critically interrogate the industrial star making apparatus (Mercer 2006, 145–60; Escoffier 2009, 289–324; Rowden 2011, 80–99; Nguyen 2014, 29–70).

Gay pornographic star studies are situated within a broader field of minoritarian star studies, which can be divided into at least two branches: one rooted in Hollywood star studies and the other in the study of stars from marginalized media industries. On the one hand, gay film studies have played a significant role in the development of Hollywood star studies because of the centrality of the Hollywood star in historical gay reception practices (Dyer 1986; Robertson 1996; DeAngelis 2001). Specifically, gay camp—a historical sensibility based in reception—has been studied with respect to how Hollywood stars of the past can be repurposed against the grain by gay audiences ironically or even as figures that resonate allegorically with gay struggles. Camp studies' focus on documenting counter-readings and subcultural histories of stars within the dominant Hollywood system has in many ways outstripped the study of stars outside that dominant system; that is, despite one of the first camp studies listing stag movies as part of the camp canon (Sontag 1964, 517).

On the other hand, analyses of star making and star reception in minoritarian contexts outside of Hollywood hegemony provide crucial frameworks that gay pornography star studies might fruitfully engage. This observation is particularly important to gay pornography because it raises questions about citational ethics. Should gay pornography star studies exclusively cite dominant star studies with their basis in Hollywood, or could studies of non-Hollywood minoritarian stars provide generative frameworks that suggest structural similarities to the workings of other non-Hollywood media industries, like gay pornography? I would argue that in the spirit of minoritarian alliances against hegemony, gay pornography studies should aim to cite and engage star studies outside of Hollywood contexts. For example, Philippine film studies have generated a significant body of star studies literature with a particular focus on Nora Aunor, as an icon whose reception marked a popular divergence from dominant classed and racialized components of previous film stars in the Philippines (Lim 2009; David 2015; Flores 2015). Philippine star studies offer rich local histories, while also intervening in the larger field of star studies to disrupt Hollywood-centrism and underscore the importance of critical performance and reception practices. Star studies in the gay pornography sector might do well to further engage with insights from the abundant literature on Aunor to interrogate how gender, class, and race might intersect in institutional star making processes. As an example, Bliss Lim (2009) argues that Nora Aunor's nearly unprecedented rise as a brown-skinned populist star broke with the traditional Philippine filmic embodiment of the so-called *mestiza* star, and subsequently Aunor's star mythology of overcoming class stratified oppression was appropriated by the more fair-skinned and class-elevated Sharon Cuneta. Such an example shows that conflicts around identity construction and embodiment can generate star sensibilities that affect shifts in industrial hiring and production practices. Structurally similar conflicts in industrial practices might be traced in gay pornography, for example, the class differential between college-educated stars—like Casey Donovan or Jack Wrangler—versus the

vast amount of socio-economically precarious stars—like Brian Reynolds—that did not achieve equivalent places in gay memory.

Star analyses in pornography studies have been a significant branch of star studies that are not Hollywood-centric. On the one hand, Linda Williams (1989, 134-136) detailed early on in the field, overt star-making registered the development of the hardcore narrative feature, which structurally paralleled the production and publicity mechanisms of star-driven Hollywood musicals. On the other hand, informed by intersectional feminist methods, recent studies of adult media stars have underscored performers' precarious status as workers situated within social and economic conditions of labor. In her groundbreaking book on black women in pornography, Mireille Miller-Young has detailed how black sex workers confront an industry structured on resource extraction and worker disposability, where stardom functions as an 'unattainable reality that nonetheless has a valuable meaning for how these performers wish to understand themselves and carve out a new world of possibility' (2014, 224). Darshana Sreedhar Mini (2019) has incisively shown how the precarious stardom of softcore Malayali celebrities like Shakeela precipitated not only a genre, but also an entire local industry with specific modes of production, distribution, and reception.

In 2005, José B. Capino (2005, 63) called for scholarly work on gay pornography to engage the framework of star studies to analyze how historical shifts—such as shifts in dominant media formats—affect star circulations. Since that time, gay pornographic star studies have proliferated. John Mercer's (2006) early intervention positioned Ryan Idol and Jeff Stryker within a larger genealogy of gay porn star making. Terry Rowden (2011) has asserted that a synthesis of formal analysis and autobiographic considerations bring to light the complexities and contradictions in the public life of black gay star Bobby Blake. Hoang Tan Nguyen has offered a negotiated approach to understanding the rise of Asian American gay porn star Brandon Lee, which was dependent on his 'racial packaging' (2014, 33) while also offering a space for oppositional modes of Asian American reception. In sum, these interventions all have sustained a critical interrogation of the gay pornography industry's star making apparatus, which has been informed by inequities rooted in social differences of gender expression, race, and class positioning.

An expansive program of microhistorical documentation could be the most promising route toward recovering overlooked and forgotten figures of pre-1980 gay pornographic celebrity, a synthesis from previous scholars' proposed engagements with methods of biography and microhistory (Rowden 2011; Gorfinkel 2018). Brian Reynolds is a significant overlooked figure calling for microhistorical recovery for several reasons. Reynolds' local—and eventually national—celebrity by 1969 embodied the development of gay narrative cinema as an interstate industry, mirroring the ways that other adult media figures have come to emblemize their local industries (Mini 2019). Significantly, his appearance in the early nationally distributed hardcore narrative feature *A Boy Named David* (1970) predated Casey Donovan's more remembered rise to fame a year later with *Boys in the Sand* (1971). Reynolds' story from a sharp rise to an abrupt decline into obscurity underscores how professional success can be swiftly stymied due to shifts in interpersonal relationships, profit-oriented employment turnover, and capitalist dependence on economic inequality. A critical history of Brian Reynolds can thus contribute to the work of historicizing and interrogating mechanisms of celebrity profit extraction in the gay pornography industry.

A Micro-Biography of Brian Reynolds

The history of the development of gay pornographic stars originates in a context of ‘stars without movies’ (Freibert 2018) congruent with the heterosexual-oriented still photography industry for pin-ups. During the post-war era, a handful of male physique photography studios and publishing firms rose to prominence including those of Bruce Bellas, Dick Fontaine, Bob Mizer, Chuck Renslow, and H. Lynn Womack (Johnson 2019). Each firm began to develop their own stable of star-models, and those models hired by multiple companies were often renamed without regard for star continuity across company lines.⁶ It was only later, by the 1950s, that some physique photography companies began to develop a consumer market for small gauge short films, which consisted of physique posing sessions and short skits shot without sound. By the mid-1960s, arthouse and grindhouse movie theaters in large metropolitan areas began to publicly exhibit physique films.

Pat Rocco, entrepreneur and gay activist, was a transitional figure in this scene. He was originally hired to take physique photographs for the company Victor Associates, but with a background in showbusiness and film exhibition he soon began producing shorts and then features. Rocco’s films were initially self-distributed for private consumption, but in 1968 the Park Theatre on Alvarado Boulevard in Los Angeles began exhibiting his films publicly. In some ways he extended the physique film tradition, but he also infused his films with a contemporaneous homophile sensibility that explicitly emphasized love and tenderness between men (Strub 2012; Wuest 2017).

By 1969, Rocco had his own stable of popular stars including Jim Cassidy, Ron Dilly, Brian Reynolds, and Voldemar. Images of these stars circulated in the gay press for the promotion of Rocco’s name and company, Bizarre Productions. According to a newsletter put out by Pat Rocco’s community group SPREE (The Society of Pat Rocco Enlightened Enthusiasts) there were at least twenty-four stars that Rocco had allegedly ‘made’ (‘Rocco Star System’ 1970, 1), and he was likened to a Hollywood producer accumulating and developing a roster of performer-icons akin to the star-studded studios of the classical Hollywood era. While the capitalization on iconic personas was widespread in the physique photography field, Rocco broke ground by transitioning his photography operations to primarily focus on filmmaking and thereby fusing audience appreciation of the static physical appearance of his stars in photographs with the stars’ unique performances captured in motion pictures. Additionally, what made Rocco different from his other filmmaking contemporaries was his sense of showmanship that centralized him as the producer-creator through branding his and his company’s name on glossy promotional materials, emblazoning his name on theater marquees, and developing event-releases of his films that included appearances of his stars in person.

Rocco’s earliest star to gain widespread acclaim was Brian Reynolds, a young man who was also his lover at the time. Profiles of Reynolds in the gay press nearly always aimed to generate a mythological perception of Reynolds through a typical rags-to-riches narrative: orphan to star to movie producer. However, the ‘to-riches’ component of the narrative was always speculative, never to become a reality. Despite this typical move to present Reynolds life as a teleological success story, gay reporting on Reynolds is generative because it included interviews that are perhaps the only extant firsthand data from Reynolds himself. Notwithstanding his celebrity status from 1969-1970, Reynolds was marginal from a social and industrial standpoint. Reynolds’ precarity appears to be a function of his pauperized background and the breakdown of his relationship with Rocco by 1970. His decline into obscurity

in the mid-1970s was an effect of that precarity. Rocco's authorial claims on the creative decision-making of both Reynolds performances and Reynolds foray into filmmaking has conceivably contributed to the lack of both primary sources and scholarly analysis of Reynolds. Because of Reynolds' industrial, social, and historiographic marginality, trace particularities and biographical details are key to assembling a history (Rowden 2011, 81; Alilunas 2016, 30). With this in mind, a capsule biography of Reynolds can be triangulated from profiles in the gay press ('Mr. Chuck Robinson' 1969; Strickland 1970), genealogical findings ('Charles Herbert Robinson' 2015), and other trace sources.

Brian Reynolds was born Charles Herbert Robinson on July 16, 1948 in Lakeland, Florida. From a young age he was effectively orphaned and came to live with relatives on the East Coast, as one reporter put it 'he never knew who would be his new family or what school would be his new home' (Strickland 1970, 76). Between 1963 and 1967, Reynolds moved to New York City, then to Dayton to complete high school, and finally, back to New York. While in New York, Reynolds bartended between his entertainment industry endeavors, which included appearances with the Ice Capades and the Broadway musical *Happy Time*.

In 1968 he moved to Los Angeles County, initially living with a relative in Chatsworth before moving in with his employer, Pat Rocco.⁷ It is unclear how Reynolds met and came to be employed by Rocco in Los Angeles. In one interview a reporter gathered that Reynolds 'had only been in town a couple of weeks when he met Pat Rocco' (Strickland 1970), and according to another paraphrased interview with Reynolds, 'His first employment in Los Angeles was with Bizarre Productions in the office. Commuting from Chatsworth, though, proved unfeasible, so he moved in with Pat Rocco, and while continuing to work in the office, posed as a model and worked in films' ('Mr. Chuck Robinson' 1969, 8). The precise nature of Reynolds' initial work for Rocco's Bizarre Productions is unclear, but archival evidence shows that his job at least entailed secretarial work.⁸ A romantic relationship between the two came to fruition by November, and Reynolds appeared in Rocco's first smash hit short *A Breath of Love*, which was available for mail-order and exhibited in public by April 1969. Rocco allegedly was inspired to transition to feature films due to the phenomenal popularity of Reynolds in *A Breath of Love* (Strickland 1970, 76). In mid-1969 due to a confluence of rising gay militancy in response to police bar raids and local enthusiasm for Rocco's films, Reynolds cofounded an activist-community group The Society of Pat Rocco Enlightened Enthusiasts (SPREE) with homophile activists Jim Kepner and Dick Summers (Kepner 1985, 27-33). Reynolds personally filed the fictitious business name statement on May 12, 1969. SPREE operated as not only a fan club for Rocco's work, but also a local film production community that included filmmaking workshops and networking events with local gay talent. From its inception, Reynolds was the organization's vice-president and he authored most of SPREE's group mailings into late 1969.

Reynolds was the central public fixture of Rocco's publicity machine from 1969-1970, often appearing as the main figure associated with individual films—*A Breath of Love*, *Pat Rocco Dares* (Rocco 1969b), and *Screen Test*—as well as Bizarre Productions more broadly. *A Breath of Love* and *Screen Test* specifically were produced in order to generate publicity. The making of *A Breath of Love* was covered by local television station KNBC, which extensively interviewed Reynolds and incorporated footage of the film and its making into a program entitled *Out of the Shadows* (Gavin 1970). *A Breath of Love* was also screened at the 1969 San Francisco Film Festival where it was introduced by Bette Davis (Rocco 1983, 23) in a moment

of notable convergence between gay film icons of two eras: Rocco's major star and a camp diva of classical Hollywood. *Screen Test* was developed at the request of *Time* magazine reporters who approached Rocco about the prospect of observing the gay filmmaking process. Like *A Breath of Love*, footage of *Screen Test* appeared on television and the film's kiss between Reynolds and popular model Jim Cassidy was claimed by Rocco and his friends as the first legitimate gay kiss on television ('ONE Adventure' 1973, 8). The gay press reiterated Reynolds' significance to this emergent gay film movement by profiling him in celebrity columns and frequently featured him as the cover model (Reynolds was featured on the covers of *Los Angeles Advocate* [May 1969], *Magpie of California* [June 1969], *Voice* [December 12, 1969], *Gay* [December 31, 1969], *Data-Boy* [October 21, 1970], and *Hombre '74: Adult Calendar* [1974]).

Perhaps due to this popularity, Reynolds attempted to enter the production realm by founding his own company C.R. Productions around the time of his and Rocco's first anniversary celebration in late 1969. By November, C.R. had produced a twenty-one-minute short directed by SPREE member Jack Pierce entitled *The Lonely Hunted* (Pierce 1969b). This short was incorporated into a C.R. Productions program of five shorts entitled *Let There Be Boys* (Pierce 1969a), which opened December 24 and received positive reviews in the gay press (Barrow 1969; Ross 1970). Each of the shorts in the program had Pierce as the director, SPREE member James Prestridge's cinematography, Reynolds as producer, and Rocco providing the scoring and editing. *The Lonely Hunted* starred Ron Dilly in an atmospheric twenty-minute encounter between a hunter and a traveler on a mountain. The second short, *Tools of the Trade*, was a humorous half hour short with a chase sequence involving a plumber. *A Free Soul* featured Chico Rodriguez in a twelve-minute dance number on a beach accompanied with a poetic voiceover by Pat Rocco. *Sunday Sundae* was a twenty-minute romp incorporating footage from a SPREE event that took place at the home of Eric—SPREE member and runner up in the 1969 Groovy Guy competition. The forty-minute long *Worlds Apart*, a still from which was featured on the cover of the January 1970 issue of *The Advocate*, offered a meta-narrative in which Ron Dilly is pursued by a fan while travelling to attend a Pat Rocco screening in San Francisco. In a gay press interview that promoted the premiere of the program, it was noted that Reynolds 'had no comment to make when asked what future plans were for C.R. Productions' ('Mr. Chuck Robinson' 1969, 76). By April 1970 the same magazine mentioned Reynolds had abandoned the company (Dover 1970, 56).

An observation about Reynolds by his friend Gerald Strickland was prescient: 'his entire life had been based upon having security snatched away just as it was gained' (1970, 76). Following the opening of *Let There Be Boys* there appears to have been a falling out between Rocco and Reynolds. On January 15, 1970, Reynolds signed an affidavit that relinquished his rights to the SPREE name (Robinson 1970), and going forward he became less and less involved with the group. These events suggest the question of inequitable profit extraction in relation to Reynolds celebrity image. Whereas all star-making initiatives in capitalist contexts are inherently based in profit extraction, the case of Reynolds and Rocco—while perhaps part of the status quo—should not be dismissed since it instantiates how a particular star was made then cast aside in the contexts of Los Angeles' gay media industries. Reynolds was fourteen years younger and undoubtedly less financially stable than Rocco. Reynolds first and perhaps only employment in Los Angeles until 1970 was through Rocco. These details manifest a power differentiated relationship between the two in terms of age, financial means, and employment hierarchy. This power differential would have

existed all the while Reynolds' image acted as one of the primary publicity engines that represented Rocco, Bizarre Productions, and SPREE. Following their breakup, Rocco held onto *Let There Be Boys* and continued to keep the film in release into the mid-1970s through his distribution network. It should be noted that no wage documentation, royalty agreements, nor distribution arrangement records are available in the archival folder on *Let There Be Boys* so we cannot get a clear sense of the degree to which Robinson was compensated for the film in relation to its distribution through Rocco.⁹ What is clear though is the continuation of this power differential that culminated in Rocco pressuring Reynolds to exit the production realm. Specifically, a letter from Reynolds to Rocco following their breakup indicates Rocco's aggravation at Reynolds' idea to continue producing gay films after *Let There Be Boys*.¹⁰ Due to Rocco's disapproval, Reynolds sent Rocco an untitled screenplay Reynolds had written and suggested that Rocco pursue the film instead of him,

Word has come back to me that you are displeased because at one time Pat Jordan and I had started to make a picture based upon this premise. I really did not think you would mind, since there was never a formal script for it. I always liked the story, and I really did not believe that you were planning to make any more 'nude' programs. Believe me, Pat, I would not purposely have tried to step on your territory. I hate to let go of this story, but I do not want to jeopardize our friendship any further than it already has been. (Robinson ca. 1970)

This is a sensitive and considerate message, but more importantly, it is also the voice of someone who is powerless, speaking to one with authority and influence. The letter implies that Rocco was more upset by the possibility of Reynolds being a competitor on his 'territory' than any proprietary claim on the film's premise. In the absence of monetary records, the letter speaks volumes about the extent to which Rocco—and Reynolds himself—considered Reynolds creative work ultimately expendable.

Following his breakup with Rocco and exit from SPREE, Reynolds experienced numerous employment shifts. For some months that year he was employed as the staff photographer for the gay magazine *Voice*, and in April Reynolds picked up a Monday through Friday position at the Centurion Bookstore in Studio City (Librarian 1970, 59). Despite plans for more films, Reynolds abandoned C.R. Productions and instead returned to a focus on acting roles. From 1970 to 1972 Reynolds starred in *The Fraternity* (Pierce 1970b), *A Boy Named David* (Pierce 1970a), *A Gay Love Story* (Unknown 1971), and *Devil in the Flesh* (Hall and Marks 1972).¹¹ All of these films are currently either inaccessible in private collections or no longer extant. Little is known of what became of Reynolds after 1972. As late as 1975, Reynolds was featured in the gay adult magazine *Rounders Annual '76*, though it is unclear whether the photos were recent to the magazine's release. Genealogy records register that Reynolds filed for disability on November 26, 1973, but the claim was denied ('Charles Herbert Robinson' 2015). Reynolds passed away on November 26, 1989 and his last residence was listed as Los Angeles.¹²

Conclusion

Following the important uptake of star studies in gay pornography studies suggested by José Capino, a primary focus in the field has been on stars that emerged in the 1980s and after. In histories of pre-1980 gay pornography, Casey Donovan has come to assume an originary position, cited in numerous scholarly articles and chapters as effectively the first gay porn star. While Donovan's celebrity status is

incontestable, the ‘first’ designation obscures the fact that stars of gay pornography have existed since the beginnings of mass gay pornographic media circulation. If we take seriously John Mercer’s assertion that ‘stardom is the product of a specific set of industrial determinations and is a mechanism that is deployed in order to manage markets,’ (2017, 172) it becomes clear that Donovan’s historiographic centrality is a function of his films’ expansive circulation, managerial decisions around the films’ marketing, and his films’ continued market accessibility. As Jeffrey Escoffier insightfully noted, the production of stars can be understood as a form of investment in human capital (2009, 293). Specifically, Donovan’s image remains widely recognizable both due to his films’ original circulation and their later restoration. At the time of its release, *Boys in the Sand* (Poole 1971) saw significant gay and crossover market successes. Subsequently, numerous movies from Donovan’s filmography have been among the most frequently restored, remediated, and recirculated among the corpus of pre-1980 gay adult media.

Brian Reynolds made a splash in Los Angeles’ emergent gay pornography scene when he streaked across Hollywood’s 101 Freeway in a media spectacle filmed for Pat Rocco’s *A Breath of Love* and documented by local news media. For this and subsequent starring roles, Reynolds visualized contemporaneous gay liberation ethics of public visibility and space claiming that were among Pat Rocco’s primary aesthetic innovations (Strub 2012). Notably, Reynolds was recently featured on the cover of a 2012 issue of the Duke University Press journal *Radical History Review* that included Whitney Stub’s pioneering article alongside other works on the intersection of public space and legal history. Gay film historiography should be adjusted to acknowledge the emergence of gay pornographic stardom through overlooked figures like Brian Reynolds. Beyond consumer popularity, stardom in the counterpublic context of postwar Los Angeles was a function of three major factors: political investments in gay liberation politics, industry relations within the gay pornography market, and interpersonal relations within enclaves of Los Angeles’ gay community. These factors explain Brian Reynolds’ rise to stardom and additionally account for Reynolds’ later displacement from gay memory, while Pat Rocco is preserved as the key memorial of Los Angeles gay film of that era.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Whitney Strub and Evan Purchell for generously sharing the research materials specified in the footnotes. The author also thanks the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and guidance.

References

- Alilunas, Peter. 2016. *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Barrow, L. Jay. 1969. “‘Boys’ Review.” *Voice* 93 (December 12): 32–33.
- ‘Brian Reynolds.’ 1974. *Physique Pictorial* 25 (May): 3.
- Brian Reynolds Photograph. 1970. *Hombre* 2 (2): 23.
- Brian Reynolds Photograph. 1975. *Rounders 76 Annual* (November): 25.
- Capino, José B. 2005. ‘Homologies of Space: Text and Spectatorship in All-Male Adult Theaters.’ *Cinema Journal* 45 (1): 50–65.

- ‘Charles Herbert Robinson.’ 2015. In *Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007*. Provo: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc. Accessed April 13 2020. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200413210013/https://www.ancestry.com/inst/discoveries/PfRecord?collectionId=60901&recordId=37086078&language=en-US&ahst=2019-04-21T18%3A05%3A54&ahsh=6fe29aeef5c317ce49f501d41078eb2a>.
- Cinémathèque 16 Advertisement. 1971a. *Los Angeles Free Press*, January 29, 70.
- Cinémathèque 16 Advertisement. 1971b. *The Advocate*, February 17, 21.
- Connolly, Matt. 2017. ‘Solidification and Flux on the “Gay White Way”’: Gay Porn Theaters in Post-Stonewall New York City.’ *The Spectator* 37 (1): 32–39.
- ‘Coronet Theatre—Report on Engagement.’ 1971. Coll2007-006, Pat Rocco Photographs and Papers. Bizarre Productions Series 2: Box 6, Folder 2: ‘Let There Be Boys’ Ephemera and Records. ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles.
- David, Joel. 2015. ‘On Nora Aunor and the Philippine Star System.’ *Kritika Kultura*, no. 25: 248–84. <https://doi.org/10.13185/KK2015.02513>.
- Dover, Bill. 1970. ‘Personality of the Month.’ *Voice* 98 (April): 26, 31, 50, 56.
- DeAngelis, Michael. 2001. *Gay Fandom and Crossover Stardom: James Dean, Mel Gibson, and Keanu Reeves*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- DeSimone, Tom, dir. 1971. *Highway Hustler*. USA.
- Dyer, Richard. 1986. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Escoffier, Jeffrey. 2009. *Bigger than Life: The History of Gay Porn Cinema from Beefcake to Hardcore*. Philadelphia: Running Press.
- Flores, Patrick D. 2015. ‘Fall of Grace: Nora Aunor as Cinema.’ *Kritika Kultura*, no. 25: 46–74. <https://doi.org/10.13185/KK2015.02515>.
- Flyer. ca. 1968. Coll2007-006, Pat Rocco Photographs and Papers. Bizarre Productions Series 2: Box 5, Folder 18: ‘A Breath of Love’ Ephemera and Records. ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles.
- Fontaine, Dick, dir. 1969. *Night Intruder*. USA.
- Freibert, Finley. 2018. ‘From AIDS-Era Queer Icon to Sanitized Nostalgic Property: The Cultural Histories of Bettie Page Merchandise Circulation.’ *Film Criticism* 42 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0042.203>.
- Friedkin, William, dir. 1970. *The Boys in the Band*. USA.
- Gavin, Mike, dir. 1970. *Out of the Shadows*. USA.
- Gorfinkel, Elena. 2018. ‘Microhistories and Materiality in Adult Film History, or the Case of Erotic Salad.’ *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58 (1): 147–52.
- Hall, Gorton, and Roger Marks, dirs. 1972. *Devil in the Flesh*. USA.
- Harrell, Jack. 1970a. “‘Freeway Boy” on His Way to Stardom.’ *Voice* 106 (September): 62.
- Harrell, Jack. 1970b. ‘Writer Replies to “Mizer-Freak,” Defends New, Gay Filmmakers.’ *The Advocate*, September 16, 15.
- Johnson, David K. 2019. *Buying Gay: How Physique Entrepreneurs Sparked a Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kepner, Jim. 1985. ‘My First 64 Years of Gay Liberation: 1968.’ Coll2011.002, Jim Kepner Papers. Series 2, Box 6, Folder 3. ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles.

- Legg, W. Dorr. 1968. Letter to Pat Rocco. December 3, 1968. Coll2007-006, Pat Rocco Photographs and Papers. Bizarre Productions Series 2: Box 3, Folder 2: Correspondence. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles.
- Librarian, Lavender. 1970. 'Lavender Library from the Centurion.' *Voice*, no. 99 (April): 59.
- Lim, Bliss Cua. 2009. 'Sharon's Noranian Turn: Stardom, Embodiment, and Language in Philippine Cinema.' *Discourse* 31 (3): 318–58.
- Mainaridi, Bob. 2009. Interview by Joseph Akel. *Butt Magazine*.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20090423141113/http://www.buttmagazine.com/?p=1920>.
- Mercer, John. 2006. 'Seeing Is Believing: Constructions of Stardom and the Gay Porn Star in U.S. Gay Video Pornography.' In *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*, edited by Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, 145–60. London; New York: Routledge.
- Mercer, John. 2017. *Gay Pornography: Representations of Sexuality and Masculinity*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Miller-Young, Mireille. 2014. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mini, Darshana Sreedhar. 2019. 'The Rise of Soft Porn in Malayalam Cinema and the Precarious Stardom of Shakeela.' *Feminist Media Histories* 5 (2): 49–82.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2019.5.2.49>.
- Mizer, Bob. No date. 'Subjective Character Analysis.' Coll2012-170, Studio and Distributor Marketing Ephemera Collection. Folder: Athletic Model Guild 65378. ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles.
- 'Mr. Chuck Robinson.' 1969. *Voice*, no. 93 (December): 8, 76.
- Nguyen, Hoang Tan. 2014. *View from the Bottom : Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Noto, Peter James. 1969. 'Next SPREE Meeting October 14th.' *SPREE News*, September, 1.
- Noto, Peter James, and Jim Redmond. 1970. 'Hot Line.' *SPREE News*, June, 5.
- 'Odyssey of a Sex Symbol.' 1974. *Quorum* 2 (12): 22–27.
- 'ONE Adventure.' 1973. *ONE Letter* XVIII (4): 8.
- Pierce, Jack, dir. 1969a. *Let There Be Boys*. USA.
- Pierce, Jack, dir. 1969b. *Lonely Hunted*. USA.
- Pierce, Jack, dir. 1970a. *A Boy Named David*. USA.
- Pierce, Jack, dir. 1970b. *The Fraternity*. USA.
- Poole, Wakefield, dir. 1971. *Boys in the Sand*. USA.
- Poole, Wakefield. 2000. *Dirty Poole: The Autobiography of a Gay Porn Pioneer*. Los Angeles: Alyson.
- Robertson, Pamela. 1996. *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Robinson, Charles H. 1970. 'Affidavit Relinquishing Rights to SPREE Name.' Coll2007-006, Pat Rocco Photographs and Papers. SPREE Series 3: Box 8, Folder 3: SPREE administrative records 1969-1978. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles.
- Robinson, Charles H. ca. 1970. Letter to Pat Rocco. Coll2007-006, Pat Rocco Photographs and Papers. Bizarre Productions Series 2: Box 3, Folder 2: Correspondence. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles.
- Rocco, Pat, dir. 1969a. *A Breath of Love*. USA.
- Rocco, Pat, dir. 1969b. *Pat Rocco Dares*. USA.

- Rocco, Pat, dir. 1970. *Screen Test*. USA.
- Rocco, Pat, dir. 1971. *S.P.R.E.E. on a Spree*. USA.
- Rocco, Pat. 1983. Pat Rocco Oral History Interview by Jim Kepner. UCLA Film & Television Archive, Los Angeles, CA.
- 'Rocco Star System.' 1970. *SPREE News* 2 (10): 1.
- Ross, Jay. 1970. 'New 3-Way Scores in First Films.' *Los Angeles Advocate*, February, 22.
- Rowden, Terry. 2011. 'The "'Top"' of the Heap: Race, Manhood, and Legitimation in My Life in Porn: The Bobby Blake Story.' *Black Camera* 2 (2): 80–99. <https://doi.org/10.2979/blackcamera.2.2.80>.
- Self, Robert O. 2008. 'Sex in the City: The Politics of Sexual Liberalism in Los Angeles, 1963-79.' *Gender & History* 20 (2): 288–311.
- Smith, Dot. 1969. 'Turning on With Dot... An Honest Straight Girl Speaks Her Mind.' *Gay*, December 31, 6.
- Sontag, Susan. 1964. 'Notes on "Camp."' *Partisan Review* 31 (4): 515–30.
- Strickland, Gerald. 1970. 'That Breath of Love - Bryan Reynolds.' *Voice*, no. 107 (August): 76.
- Strub, Whitney. 2008. 'The Clearly Obscene and the Queerly Obscene: Heteronormativity and Obscenity in Cold War Los Angeles.' *American Quarterly* 60 (2): 373–98.
- Strub, Whitney. 2012. 'Mondo Rocco: Mapping Gay Los Angeles Sexual Geography in the Late-1960s Films of Pat Rocco.' *Radical History Review* 2012 (113): 13–34.
- Unknown, dir. *A Gay Love Story*. 1971. USA.
- Williams, Linda. 1989. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible.'* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wuest, Bryan. 2017. 'Defining Homosexual Love Stories: Pat Rocco, Categorization, and the Legitimation of Gay Narrative Film.' *Film History* 29 (4): 59–88.

Notes

- ¹ The sexual meanings of Mizer's code are interpreted from an extended cipher posted and discussed in an interview with Bob Mainaridi (2009), one of the owners of The Magazine, a famous adult bookstore in San Francisco.
- ² I'm grateful to Whitney Strub and Evan Purchell for providing access to this flyer. Hereafter, I will use the shorthand 'Folder access courtesy of' followed by the interlocutor's name.
- ³ For representative examples of Reynolds in adult magazines from this period see photographs from *Hombre* (Brian Reynolds Photograph 1970, 23) and *Rounders* (Brian Reynolds Photograph 1975, 25).
- ⁴ *Boys in the Sand* was instrumental to the development of the 'porno chic' sensibility of the 1970s. The film's popularity exceeded its gay target market as it became a must-see film among those seeking to experience the 'chic'-ness of emergent hardcore narrative features. For discussion of *Boys in the Sand*'s popularity with straight couples see the *Quorum* article 'Odyssey (sic) of a Sex Symbol' (1974).
- ⁵ In terms of general crossover, Reynolds appeared on television several times for programs about Los Angeles gay life. Reporters for *Time* magazine documented the filming of *Screen Test*, and *Dance Magazine* reportedly ran extensive coverage of *A Breath of Love*. On female audiences' reception of Reynolds, one columnist wrote that she had added a still of Reynolds to her collection of 'turn on photos' (Smith 1969, 6), another columnist

-
- stated of *A Boy Named David*, ‘there’s a love scene that prompted some of the few female viewers who’ve seen it to say they forgot it was two men’ (Harrell 1969b, 15).
- ⁶ For example, famed Athletic Model Guild model Brian Idol (his name in *Physique Pictorial*) was credited as Lance Engel in issues of *Trim*, *Manuel*, and *Fizeek*, and as Lance Ingram in *Tomorrow’s Man* and *Muscles à Go-Go*.
- ⁷ Reynolds’ grandmother, Alice Dodge, is mentioned in SPREE coverage (Noto 1969) and Pat Rocco’s photographs place her in the vicinity of Los Angeles at this time. In one instance a mention of Dodge implies that Reynolds had stayed with her, ‘He spent most of his life an orphan until dear Grandma Alice Dodge became his only real family’ (Noto and Redmond 1970). In the short *S.P.R.E.E. on a Spree* (Rocco 1971), filmed between 1969 and 1970 and released later as part of a SPREE program, Brian Reynolds is shown pushing Alice Dodge in a wheelchair during a SPREE outing at Disneyland. Given these details it is conceivable she was the relative Reynolds stayed with in Chatsworth.
- ⁸ See for example a photocopied letter in the Pat Rocco Papers from homophile activist W. Dorr Legg to Pat Rocco pertaining to film adaptations of short stories. The photocopy contains a marginal comment from Rocco to Brian Reynolds that states ‘Chuck—Please answer this with “interested”—and give our phone no. for future get-together!’ (Legg 1968). Folder access courtesy of Evan Purchell.
- ⁹ The closest document in the folder is a breakdown of one theater’s ticket sales with advertising fees deducted for the period from December 30, 1970 to January 5, 1971 (‘Coronet Theatre—Report on Engagement’ 1971). The documentation does not state Reynolds’ share, if any. Folder access courtesy of Evan Purchell.
- ¹⁰ The letter (Robinson ca. 1970) is part of a folder in the Pat Rocco Papers that holds miscellaneous correspondence. Folder access courtesy of Evan Purchell.
- ¹¹ *A Gay Love Story* is perhaps the most obscure in Reynolds filmography. Advertisements indicate that Reynolds held the starring role and the film premiered in Los Angeles the week of January 29, 1971 (Cinémathèque 16 Advertisement 1971a, 70), which suggests that the film was not a retitled version of a previous release. Ad copy indicate the film was reviewed in the *Los Angeles Free Press* where it was compared favorably to *The Boys in the Band* (Friedkin 1970) (Cinémathèque 16 Advertisement 1971b, 21), however, I was not able to locate the *Free Press* review. The image used in an ad placed in *The Advocate* was a still from *Night Intruder* (Fontaine 1969), featuring the nude backside of Chuck Roy, a film in which Reynolds did not appear.
- ¹² Reynolds’ cause of death is not known. I have searched local gay publications such as *The Advocate* and *In Touch for Men*, but have found no obituaries. I gather that Reynolds’ was obscure at the time of his death and perhaps no longer connected with anyone in gay publishing.