

NIGHT ON THE EDGE

MANFRED LANGER

FOREWORD

BEP MOUS

GEERT-JAN KUIJPERS

GEERT VISSERS

ALSO KNOWN AS HELLUN ZELLUF

MARCO DE KONING

ALSO KNOWN AS COBY GENEZIJDE

CHARLES LÜCKER

ALSO KNOWN AS VERA SPRINGVEER

BY PAUL VERSTRAETEN

BY BOBBIE

BY MAYDAY

BY LEO SCHENK

BY HOWIE GETMAN

ANTOINE TIMMERMANS

ALSO KNOWN AS CYBERSISSY

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BY ROBIN VAN ZUTPHEN

SANJAY GANPAT BROUWER

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**TIMELINE OF THE QUEER HISTORY OF
AMSTERDAM & THE NETHERLANDS:
1927–2026**

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

MANFRED LANGER



Manfred Langer was born on 13 May 1952 in Vienna. His mother left her alcoholic husband when Manfred was four years old and found a job as a packer at a printing works. She wanted Manfred to become a teacher and sent him to grammar school. However, he neglected his studies and was eventually allowed to leave. He then transferred to a vocational college for the hospitality industry.

Langer was gay and had his first sexual experience at the age of 15 with an older man in a swimming pool changing room. This was followed by several brief relationships with wealthy men. Eventually, he began a relationship with a Dutch man and moved to Amsterdam in 1972, where he initially worked as a receptionist at the Hilton hotel.

Langer threw himself into Amsterdam's nightlife. It was there that he met Ad van Besouw, the owner of the Amstel Taveerne at Amstel 54.

This was a popular, traditional gay pub where many Dutch schlager songs were played. They began a relationship and Manfred started working at the Amstel Taveerne. Together, they also set up the Amstel Taveerne Club at Amstel 178.

Chez Manfred also became popular because Langer was one of the first to introduce a so-called 'happy hour' there, where customers could get two drinks for the price of one. About a year after the iT opened, Langer sold Chez Manfred; it reopened on 29 March 1990. Chez Manfred was still in business when Langer died in November 1994.

After Chez Manfred, Langer opened the Wiener Café and the gay bar Moonlight in Amstelstraat 43. In 1982, he also bought the gay café MacDonald on Reguliersdwarsstraat and had it converted into the Traffic. However, this proved unsuccessful, and he subsequently handed the business over to his ex-boyfriend Dirk Dol, who did manage to turn it into a success.

In 1989, Langer opened the iT at 24 Amstelstraat. The iT was a gay disco, featuring plenty of drag shows, leather parties and male strippers. However, straight people also flocked to the venue, which was considered hip. The original clientele did not take kindly to this, whereupon Langer decided to reserve Sunday evenings exclusively for straight people. Celebri-

ties such as Grace Jones, Julio Iglesias, Richard Krajicek and Marco van Basten also visited this disco, bringing the venue international fame. Despite much scepticism, the iT became a resounding success. In 1993, Manfred Langer wrote a booklet about his successful nightclub entitled **Alle Geheimen van de iT** (All the Secrets of the iT).

When Club Chique opened, Manfred was quick to get involved. He understood that part of the queer scene found his venue too commercial and wasn't yet impressed. He first asked Bep to become a 'Candy Girl' at the iT. This led to a weekly public performance with him and Geert-Jan Kuijpers and their friends Charles and Jan Gort, as well as organising many themed parties such as Halloween, Fitness, Carnival, Jungle Party or the New Year's performance 'Gays in Space', a Balloon Party, tableau vivants and styling the dancers. Mous and Kuijpers were given free rein, which they eagerly made use of, giving their creativity a huge boost. Manfred made that creativity possible. All the more reason to dedicate this book to Manfred in loving tribute. Without him, Amsterdam would never have had its very own Studio 54.

FOREWORD

by Bamber Delver



THIS BOOK IS FOR THOSE WHO STAYED, FOR THOSE WHO VANISHED

This book tells the story of a generation of queer performers, artists, clubgoers and activists who lived, loved and created during one of the most devastating periods in queer history, in the 1980s and 1990s. While the AIDS crisis destroyed lives and society all too often looked away, what arose was precisely an explosion of creativity, solidarity and visibility. *Nacht op Scherp* ('Night on the Edge') is more than a look back at Amsterdam's nightlife of the nineties. It is a story about resilience. About people who kept dancing while the world around them changed. About art as a survival strategy. About

community as an answer to loss. What AIDS was then, the new repression is today — and that is why this book matters so greatly now: we have been here before. It is our community above all that has known countless times of dancing on the volcano, because the volcano erupted and threatened to engulf us.

The questions of today are not new. And perhaps it is precisely in the stories of those who came before us that an answer lies waiting for a new generation that is once again confronted with resistance, exclusion and uncertainty. A generation that will dance on the volcano once more.

Sometimes I think of the silence. Not the silence of an empty nightclub after the lights have come on. Not the silence of a city asleep.
But the silence that remains when someone is no longer there.
The silence of an empty chair at the table.
The silence of a telephone that no longer rings.
The silence of a name now spoken only by the people who remember.
While making this book, I heard that silence constantly, in between the stories.
In between the photos.
In between the costumes.
In between the bursts of laughter as we looked at the photos and reminisced.
The memories of nights that seemed to last forever.
Because this book is about glamour. About performance. About creativity. About the iT, the RoXY, Mazzo, De Trut. About costumes that were larger than life itself. About people who reinvented themselves beneath the disco and house beats and the harsh strobe light.
But this book is also about loss.
About a generation that learned to dance while death was constantly present.
Bep Mous said it almost in passing, the way only those who truly lived through it can:
"By day we stood at the graves of our friends. In the evening we went out partying."
That sentence won't let go of me.
Geert-Jan put into words how we responded to all that misery:
"We were crazy enough to be able to do anything, and to do it."
We didn't duck away — we stood our ground, and how.
Because anyone who didn't live through it might think it was escapism.
But the opposite is true.
It was resistance. Or pure survival instinct.
It was a refusal to surrender your humanity to fear.
It was a refusal to let yourself be reduced to victimhood.
While the world looked at queer people with distrust, disgust or pity, they — the performers — made art.
While politicians stayed silent, they made costumes.
While headlines spread fear, they built stages.
While friends fell ill, they kept on creating.
Not because they were naïve.
Not because they denied reality.
But precisely because they faced it fully.
They did not dance despite the volcano.
They danced on the volcano.
And perhaps that is the most important lesson this book leaves us.
Because once again we live in a time when rights are under pressure.
Once again we hear voices saying that visibility goes too far.
Once again we see politicians using queer lives as a plaything.
Once again intolerance is growing.
Once again many people feel the need to make themselves smaller than they are.
Once again we are told we should be grateful for the space we are granted.
But we know this story: We have been here before.
Not the same.
History never repeats itself literally.
But we recognise the mechanisms.
The exclusion.
The fear.
The attempt to make people invisible.
And that is why we also recognise the answer.
Creativity.
Solidarity.
Humour.
Imagination.

Love.

All of it born from our stubborn belief in a future that does not yet exist.

That is what Bep and Geert-Jan showed me. That is what the performers in this book have shown. That is what the people of the dance floor, the dressing room, the stage and the bar leave us.

Not only memories.

But tools.

A manual for survival.

When the world turns dark, make light.

When people try to reduce you, create yourself anew.

When they want to erase your history, tell stories.

When they want to frighten you, seek each other out.

When they want to make you feel alone, build community.

That is what those before us did.

That is why we are still here. Just look around you: we are still here,
and we remember all the names that have already fallen away.

That is why we exist.

That is why we can read this book today.

BEP MOUS

by Bamber Delver



“How wonderful that I’ve managed to escape the bourgeoisie”.

Bep Mous (1950) and Geert-Jan Kuijpers (1963) formed, in the 1980s and 1990s (together with Hellun Zelluf) the face of a wild camp performance culture. Mous had already been performing theatre work in the late 1970s with De Softies, a group of gay men who blended politics with poetry and activism. They performed in community centres, cultural venues and during Pink Saturdays. Their themes: shame, desire, equality, male love. At that time, De Softies were in close contact with related groups in London, Berlin and New York, such as Hot Peaches and Bloolips, and were part of an international wave of queer theatre. Bep and Geert-Jan met at

Club Chique in the Mazzo, which gave rise to the Gay Dating Show, later leading to performances at the iT commissioned by the owner Manfred Langer, and subsequently at the Roxy and De Danssalon Eindhoven. Their theatrical performances took place during the AIDS crisis. What they leave behind is more than a memory: it is a cultural archive of courage, visibility and queer resilience, born in Amsterdam and with an influence reaching far beyond. The way in which Bep and Geert-Jan used theatre and music to respond to threats such as AIDS and repression can today be regarded as a valuable and not to be underestimated source of inspiration.

AMSTERDAM AS HOME

Joost Mous is originally from Haarlem, but Amsterdam has always been his city. As a young man, he worked at Nieuw Dennendal with Carel Muller, an institution for people with intellectual disabilities. On Thursday evenings, he would head into Amsterdam: to the Schellinkje, upstairs, with the disco De Schakel at the COC on Leidseplein downstairs, to the premières of Hans van Manen, Rudy van Danzig and Toer van Schayk. It was the time that the Netherlands was awakening from its rigid, strict bourgeoisie, with Amsterdam as city of freedom, where you headed to discover and experience yourself. Going out, drinking

and dancing until the wee hours of the morning. The city of free-thinking spirits such as Ramses Shaffy, Mathilde Willink and, of course, the young Joost, who soon changed his first name: Bep. We talk in his flat in the Jordaan, surrounded by many Buddhist statues. In any case, with Bep it is important to plan an appointment properly, as he spends every six months in Thailand with his husband. Bep recalls memories which sometimes make her eyes shine but also bring tears to her eyes. Many names come to mind; he has lost half his friends, many to the consequences of aids. The days of dancing on the volcano, but they did dance.

LATE 1970S, EARLY 1980

“Amsterdam was the place to be. I lived in a small attic room on PC Hooftstraat as my first address. But the first few times I tried going out, it was quite awkward, just like for any young newcomer. I discovered the city by going out, getting to know new people. I come from the hippie era: individual freedom, that was what it was all about. In terms of sexuality too, without the need to see your sexuality as an identity as we do now. Homosexuality didn’t really appeal to us, because we had more the idea that we were all bisexual. Some a bit closer to straight, others closer to gay or lesbian. Transvestites and transgender people – nobody cared what or who you were, and everything just mingled

together and found each other in the nightlife.

"Amsterdam looked very different from the yuppie city of today. The city was a bit of a mess. Canals and buildings in disrepair, streets full of junkies, cars that were slowly taking over everything. Suriname had only just gained independence; the white city was coloured mainly by Surinamese, new residents. Everything was yet to be

could dance there. Because how many gay dance halls were there in Amsterdam? Simply none. Everyone was there at the DOK (De Odion Kelder, Alias, De Oude Kring-spier). The local leather-clad drag queen, the social worker, the ballet dancer, the chemist, the tram driver and the professor. It didn't matter at all who you were, rich or poor, famous or not. We all had to free ourselves from the burden of guilt: from the

More radical, louder, more confrontational. And in their wake, The Softies, the theatrical wing of the movement.

Gay men performing together, writing songs, designing costumes and taking singing lessons from Lex Goudsmit's wife, Ans, where we learnt to sing three-part madrigals to train our voices. Movement classes with the American mime artist Bear Capron: "We loved the confusion. Because confusion makes people think. Why can't I wear a skirt? We simply wore dresses and soldier's boots. Because we wanted the questions to be asked."

**"Why can't I wear a skirt?
We just went out wearing dresses
and soldier's boots. Because we
wanted the questions to be asked."**

discovered; officially, there was little to be found. There was chaos, but also energy. Provo had introduced the word 'provoke'. No one knew what it meant, but everyone felt that something had to change. The Maagdenhuis was occupied, the hippies left, the squatters arrived, the punks arrived, and amidst that turmoil a new consciousness emerged. During the day you either slept or went to work, only to meet up again in the evening when going out. The weekend was one non-stop party.

"The meeting place was the DOK, a small, stuffy cellar, a tiny dance hall; you really had to ring the bell and, through the little hatch in the door, you were scrutinised and vetted before you were allowed in. Small, stuffy, but unforgettable. Why did people come? Because it was a meeting place. Because you

Judeo-Christian yoke that everyone carried with them.

When it came to organised homosexuality, there was the COC, but that organisation was firmly on the line between tolerance and being tolerated. Bep understood its function but also felt its limitations: "The COC had to be the link to politics. To the bourgeoisie. Not all gay people are born into gay families. We're not a demographic group in that sense. We all must reinvent the wheel, generation after generation. A lot has changed, but that remains the same. We all must do it on our own, so it's important that you find your community. What's nowadays called your chosen family."

In the late 1970s, the Rode Flikkers emerged, an action group and theatre collective formed as a direct reaction to the COC's cautious politics.

The name said everything and nothing. The Softies named themselves after the soft, feminist straight men who used to flirt with gay men back then. A nickname, just like 'Red Faggots'. Bep's mum didn't get it: "She said: why do you have to have blue or pink hair? Why are you parading it about like that? I can't explain this to the neighbours. Just act normal. Gay is fine, but why go over the top?" But being normal was exactly not what Bep wanted. Even as a child, he'd worn one of his mother's skirts as a cape; he'd grown up in the theatres of Haarlem. With a CJP card, children could go to the Stadsschouwburg for just 2.50. He'd seen all the great actors: Mary Dresselhuys, Co van Dijk, Ank van der Moer, Caro van Eyck, Joop Admiraal. Theatre – he loved it.

THE SOFTIES

But it was more than just art: "For me, it was also very much about looking for a new circle

of friends. With like-minded people, with people who were progressive and active. So that was a real welcome for me. And so much fun, getting creative together."

Between 1979 and 1983, De Softies, featuring the actors Jules van der Veld, Michiel Bollinger and Bep Mous, performed a new show with a band every year. 55 performances a year, all over the country. From the Melkweg

Their final performance was called Amicitia '83, written and directed by Juan C Tajes. They converted the COC theatre auditorium, put the audience on stage and performed themselves on the bare floor. Amicitia'83 was an invitation to anyone who wanted to take part in queer theatre. A way to say goodbye with a bang: "We didn't have to be perfect actors. We did it out of passion, because we had something

dead within two years." A wonderful documentary has been made by his brother, Koert Davidse, called "MY BROTHER". Fear was ever-present, but sitting still was not an option. Bep started working at the GVO (Health Information and Education), later the SAD Schorerstichting, to provide information about safe sex in the queer scene. In venues with a darkroom Sex Cinemas and the Sauna. The places where gay men had sex. Not using fear as a weapon, but from the ground up, person to person: "You shouldn't just instil fear, because then it becomes unmentionable again. We went into the saunas. We had a Safe Sex Guerrilla that manifested itself in nightlife and clubs. We had open conversations. What do you struggle with? When does it sometimes go wrong? Those we spoke to were happy to participate because they were being heard. While the COC advised against having sex at all in the beginning, we proclaimed a more hopeful message of solidarity: Safe sex. Use condoms.

"Club Chique was transparent party-wrapped package of misery. We all knew there was misery. We didn't know how to deal with it. Culture was, and turned out to be, the only answer."

Around that time, Club Chique emerged at the Mazzo. A gay night that began as a cultural salon and grew into a phenomenon. Hellun preached safe sex like a diva. It turned into a wild scene.

At Easter, a nice lad was running around naked as a

"During the day we stood at our friends' graves; in the evening we performed."

circuit in Amsterdam to Groningen, The Hague, Rotterdam and Eindhoven. But they were also invited by the CPN for the Hannie Schaft commemoration. They went to festivals and sex fairs in the Netherlands and beyond. They performed at the Oval Theatre in Vauxhall, London. They shared the stage with international acts such as Hot Peaches and Bloodlips, who came to play in the Netherlands at events like Pink Saturdays. Connections were maintained internationally through their own newsletters, letters, printed telephone numbers and simply by travelling. "We were mainly in contact with London, Paris, Berlin and with Rome in Pasolini's day. We set out to explore all of that. We had Campeggio Gays in Italy. We went to festivals. I spent a lot of time in London and Paris. And we talked to one another. There was a broad international gay network; you'd visit each other, perform, and sleep on each other's sofas and floors."

to say. I believe there were as many as 37 of us on stage for this production. It was the end of an era.

Then AIDS broke out in the early 80s. Slowly at first, then inevitably: "We saw it as an American hype at first. 'Gay disease', give me a break. That's just not possible. But it slowly began to sink in that it was serious. In 1986, it started creeping closer. "In the squat where my friend Bobbie lived, 'De Kleine Prins' on Prinsengracht, a close friend, Bart Davidse – for whom I'd organised an exhibition of his work at my home – contracted AIDS, though we didn't know that at the time. Nobody called it that. Not until his death: "The hospitals didn't know what to do with it. At first, he was just in the wards, then suddenly he had to be completely isolated. Everyone was confused and afraid. Every day you'd look at your own body. If you saw something you didn't recognise, you'd think is this the start, because then I'll be

rabbit with a basket of eggs strung to his cock from which you could grab an egg. The prim transvestite, the exuberant transvestite, the heroin-addicted transvestite, the leather boy – everyone was welcome.

Vera Springveer once just walked in: “Hi, where’s the changing room?” Nobody knew her. She could sing, act and had everything it took to make a huge contribution. Club Chique was a transparent party wrapper

stenbosch and Guus Vleugel saw potential and wrote the script and songs. This gave rise to the Ware Liefdesshow, an ode to the late Hellun Zelluf, which was performed at venues including the Kleine Komedie.

His friends also organised themselves to support the sick. Marco de Koning raised money for multi-purpose baths at the AMC, such as ‘Geen Woorden maar Baden’ (No Words, Just Baths), the campaign for whirlpool baths

dam’s biggest and most flamboyant gay club, was looking for someone for the Saturday nights. Bep said yes, but on his own terms: “He gave me free rein straight away. I said: I want to get more people involved. He said: well, go on then. Manfred sat there like a Caesar in his dance palace and wanted to be entertained, but he was also generous. If we had a meeting, you’d get fifty guilders and a bottle of poppers. He thought that was the most normal way to interact with each other.

“Come in, dance with us, it doesn’t matter who you are!”

for misery. We all knew there was misery. We hardly knew how to deal with it. But culture was the only answer. From Club Chique grew the Gaydating show, which ended up on local television and became very popular throughout Amsterdam. VHS tapes were swapped by taxi drivers... Bep held everything together, Geert Vissers took on the persona of Hellun Zelluf to spread the word theatrically, and the troupe expanded to include people such as Bobbie Hamwijk as Mollie van Fleppen, Geert-Jan Kuijpers as Greta Secreta, Heinz-Gert Roes as Mopsie, Charles Lückner as Vera Springveer, Freek Jalhay as Beestje Freek, Ivo Raar as Violá Voilà, Richard Dreisen as Agnetha Immergeil, Marco de Koning as Coby Genezijde, Klaas te Holt as Sister Carla the Boer from De Pijp, Koos van den Berg as Coco Coquette and me as Hellun’s mother Ma Bep van Zelluf, and many others”. Ton Vor-

for people who had become so emaciated from AIDS that floating weightlessly was a relief. Buddy groups were set up and coordinated by the Schorer Foundation. “There was an enormous sense of community. Constantly going to the hospital, taking friends into our homes, organising funerals. Geert (Hellun) moved in with me and wrote the Christmas show, and then he lay on my sofa for six months before he eventually died in hospital. We couldn’t manage at home anymore. He looks away for a moment: “Half of my friends died within a few years.” Even now, years later, Bep is still moved by how tough those times were: “During the day we stood at our friends’ graves; in the evening we performed.”

IN THE EARLY NINETIES AT THE IT

Around 1990, Manfred Langer asked him. The iT, Amster-

For eight years, Bep and Geert-Jan Kuijpers were there every Saturday. Always dressed up, always a new theme, always something to talk about afterwards. They’d turn up as two Amazons or as Aliens, for example! They were reporters with a notebook and camera, interviewing everyone for the imaginary back page of Privé. “We loved the confusion. People thought yes, that could well be true. Everyone was happy to play along.”

The iT was for everyone and very diverse. You could feel at home there and shine. The apprentice, the Asian, the drag queen, the social worker, the Dutch celebrities such as Nelly Frijda, André van Duin, Patty Brard, Miep Brons, Anneke Grönloh, Fong Leng and famous sports stars – too many to mention. “I loved that so much, that it was such a mixed crowd.”

The celebrities of the time loved to be seen at the iT. The iT even had its own back page in the Gay Krant where gossip columns chatted about what had been happening

at the iT and who had been there. From Grace Jones to Gert and Hermien, from Andre Hazes to Right Said Fred to Karel Appel.

Just as it began, in the old DOK. Come in, dance along, it doesn't matter who you are. "But slowly, the iT changed. Manfred Langer passed away in 1994 and the flame faded. Manfred, the unifying force, the flamboyant entrepreneur, was no more, and the iT bled dry of creativity. It was precisely that creativity that made the disco special and why everyone wanted to go there. Budgets were frozen. Drugs took over. "After eight years, we called it a day. To be honest, we were completely knackered. It was time to say goodbye, to start a new life, to choose for yourself rather than just for others."

Reflection, loss, friendship and play: "These days, I've been discovered."

Bep is now 76. He travels a lot, lives partly in Amsterdam, has a husband in Thailand. When he looks back at the

a performer and toilet attendant; I'm part of the whole, I'm a host and I always try to contribute, in whatever form that may take."

The common thread running through his life is playfulness. As a child, he already played "King Patat" at primary school. Later, he became Ma Bep, the mother figure who held everything together. These days, Bep gives many interviews about those times. The time when AIDS tried to put an end to all freedom. When dealing with your sexuality became a risk. AIDS wasn't just a medical issue; it became political because homophobes seized upon the disease to isolate and cast suspicion on gay people. That era proves instructive for today's LGBTQ+ community, as evidenced by the many enquiries from, for example, students who want to know what it was like back then. It is also one of the reasons why this book is being published: how the community dealt with the dangers of that time offers lessons for how we deal with the dangers

real answer when things go wrong in society. If we don't do it, then nobody will. That was always the case. That is still the case. I am glad to see that this tradition is being continued, for example, in Club Church, where Jennifer Hopelezz (Richard Keldoulis) is the driving force, as a contemporary diva of our time who fights for our freedoms and rights. My advice to the new generation is: "Create your own little alternative!"

"Playfulness is a survival strategy, as politics, as a form of resistance. It's the only real answer when things go wrong.

photos – and there are many, many of them – Bep can name a special memory for every single one: "How wonderful that I was able to escape the bourgeoisie. I always treat everyone equally. Whether you're famous or rich, I couldn't care less. I've worked as everything from a barman and social worker to

of today. Bep is clear on how emancipation must not be lost: playfulness is the right response – play and humour, theatre and culture. Playfulness as a survival strategy, as politics, as a form of resistance: "Playfulness is severely punished. It is smoothed over in middle-class upbringing. But it is the only

GEERT-JAN KUIJPERS

By Bamber Delver



"We threw things, we smashed things, we ran about. Causing disruption was very important."

Geert-Jan Kuijpers never stood on the barricades. He left that to the Rode Flikkers, to the generation before him, to Bep, who is a few years older. Geert-Jan's politics were in his charisma, in his costumes, in the acts he devised for Club Chique at the Mazzo and later for the iT, the legendary Amsterdam club where Manfred Langer gave him and Bep Mous carte blanche to disrupt the audience. For seven years they did just that, every Saturday night, with two hundred and fifty different costumes and acts. They were police

officers, opera singers, Hare Krishnas and reporters. They sang tearjerkers a cappella during the thumping music. Outside, an AIDS epidemic was raging. Inside, everyone kept dancing.

"I HAD TO LET OUT WHAT WAS INSIDE ME"

Geert-Jan Kuijpers says it calmly, but what had to come out of him left a mark that reached far beyond Amsterdam. Trained at the Vogue Fashion Academy and later the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, he became the creative driving force behind Club Chic at the Mazzo and the legendary Saturday nights at the iT, Manfred Langer's club where queer Amsterdam gathered weekly. Together with Bep Mous and Hellun Zelluf, he devised acts, costumes and performances that transformed nightlife into theatre and theatre into survival. He is the artist, performer and costume designer, but above all a creative outsider who had to carve out his own place.

We meet in his studio in the Jordaan, surrounded by paintings. It is an oasis of calm that shuts out the city. Geert-Jan comes across as a quiet man, yet he is the very person who brought colour to Amsterdam's nightlife with his outrageous outfits. Growing up in a village in Brabant, he made his way to Amsterdam. He remembers it clearly: he was standing in the playground of his primary school; nothing out of the ordinary

was happening, and yet he suddenly thought this isn't my life. He was ten years old at most.

"I DON'T BELONG HERE"

"He can remember that feeling of not belonging from a very young age, and especially the feeling: 'This is going to change one day'." He stuck it out in that village environment until he was eighteen: "In a large Brabant family of eight children, you don't talk about these kinds of things at the dinner table. I was still at secondary school when I became increasingly extravagant. Sunglasses, dyeing my hair, ripped fur coats, pink shoes. I never came out; I didn't see the need! I was obviously gay, as they called it back then, and a rebel so I saw no need to come out of a closet I wasn't in." His brothers and sisters didn't have to announce that they were straight, so why should he do anything different?

LATE 1980S: WITH HIS BROTHER TO DOK

Together with his brother Piet, he went to DOK: "We were known as the brothers from Nijmegen who dressed rather eccentrically. My brother Piet turned out to be gay. He was five years older and had a car, and then things moved quickly; he opened the door to the outside world. We went everywhere together; he showed me the world, always knew where the action was!

Saunas in Paris, exhibitions in old factories in Belgium, gay campsites in Italy, parties in Ibiza, the underground scene in Berlin: we went to them all. There was a new gay club in Nijmegen called Keizer Karel, or KK for short; we went there, and I was soon doing drag performances and acts with Piet at parties and parties and festivals. We were known for literally turning the place upside down.

houses on the islands. A sound system, a DJ, a factory hall. No decor, no lighting: always cold. But we thought it was fantastic.” Hagen, David Bowie, Iggy Pop: “Everything had to be black. The entire wardrobe was black. For ten years. Black, not grey.” His great inspiration in those years was punk singer Nina Hagen, who hurled her talent into the world with screams and shrieks. Wild, punk, over

Amersfoort, the infamous march that got completely out of hand! So much aggression from bystanders and youths; it was terrifying and ridiculous, and it only made me stronger in my resistance to the ugly bourgeois world. We were escorted by police in our drag to the cars and gave the middle finger to the crowd.”

RIISING ABOVE BOURGEOIS LIFE

“I really let my creativity run wild.”

And of course, we went to Amsterdam together.” When Geert-Jan first stepped into DOK, the legendary gay basement on the Singel, he knew straight away: “I felt that this was my place. I wanted to see the wider world, and Amsterdam was the first step.

THE REAL FASHION COURSE WAS THE CITY ITSELF

The Vogue Fashion Academy in Amsterdam became his chosen place of study. He took the course seriously; his parents were paying, so he had to see it through. He studied for four years, discovered his inspirations and developed his eye for form. But the real school was the city itself: “I cycled around here for ten years with my head in the clouds. That’s how much I loved it.” Amsterdam was dark and neglected. The Zeedijk was a no-go area. There were empty buildings, a housing shortage, squats. But it was precisely in that emptiness that all sorts of things happened: “Parties were held in ware-

the top, costumes that defied everything. He performed drag shows as Nina Hagen in clubs, roamed the city with his brother, designed costumes and acts.

Berlin also drew him in. The Wall was still standing. Bowie and Iggy Pop had worked there; Romy Haag had a club there. It was grey and gloomy and vibrant all at once. But he didn’t like the fashion world itself. Too closed, too hierarchical. ‘Little worlds’, he calls them. The theatre world later, too. Structures and ideologies he didn’t want to fit into. ‘I found that fashion too frumpy at a certain point. I’ve always remained a bit of an outsider. I also always watch from a bit of a distance.”

“We went to gay pride marches. The first was in 1981 in Den Bosch, so many like-minded people, a celebration of recognition. ‘We are here, we are queer, get used to it!’ we sang, a fantastic atmosphere despite being pelted with objects by groups of youths. The second was in 1982 in

“I wanted to go out into the wide world and show them what I was made of. I also felt a bit above bourgeois life; I thought I was a free spirit who transcended it, arrogant too, of course, with that ‘move aside, here we are’ attitude, but that’s just part of being young! Freedom was the most important thing to me, starting afresh every day and discovering yourself—that’s what I valued, not wanting to fit into any box. Also, being able to decide at any moment, for example, ‘tomorrow we’re going to Paris’, and then we’d just do it – no obligations, freedom. I still live like that.”

Through Marco de Koning, with whom everyone from Brabant stayed in a small flat on the third floor—attic room included—he got to know the people who would shape his world. Geert Vissers (Hellun Zelluf), who also used to visit Marco, and through him: Bep Mous. On Sunday afternoons, at gatherings organised by Bep and others, people would perform singing, piano, small acts. Geert-Jan and his brother Piet got involved: “We threw things, we threw things, we ran about. Causing a ruckus was very important.”

EARLY NINETIES: CLUB CHIQUE AND THE GAY DATING SHOW

He had known Geert Vissers, Hellun Zelluf, since he was seventeen. He was also from Brabant, near Breda. When Hellun opened Club Chique at the Mazzo, a gay night that was an instant hit, Geert-Jan was there from the very start. Every night was different, every night chaos and fun. Every week we put on a completely different show. We had to let off steam. I couldn't be crazy enough."

Club Chique was unlike anything else that existed. The Warmoesstraat and the Reguliersdwaarsstraat, worlds that never mixed, came together on a single dance floor. The transvestites and transsexuals (T&T) from the NVSH also dropped by, as did the leather scene and well-known Dutch people who hadn't had a job for years, all coming to perform." "Transvestism had actually almost disappeared between 1982 and 1989. Then came Hellun, and that was something new." Club Chic gave rise to the Gay Dating Show, broadcast on Salto. Due to the urgency of the AIDS epidemic, visibility and prevention were essential. Cheerful, colourful, with adverts about safe sex in between to keep it less heavy yet still serious. We didn't really talk much amongst ourselves about what AIDS meant to us, because what were you supposed to say? AIDS created the need, but it wasn't all doom and gloom; we also laughed a lot because it was often hilarious!"

THE NINETIES: THE IT

Eight years of acts and costumes, "We were crazy enough to be able to do anything and everything". Manfred Langer spotted them at Club Chique and being the entrepreneur, he was, he knew what he was looking at. He was in the process of opening a club that could rival the RoXY, which had already been hosting notorious Wednesday nights. He didn't want an ordinary disco. He wanted entertainment. He thought of Studio 54. Bep was first asked to be a candy girl, walking around with a tray full of lighters, condoms and sweets. Bep lasted two weeks at that. He wanted to put on acts. Manfred gave him free rein, and Bep asked Geert-Jan. "I was searching for my path. I needed to do something with my life. I wanted a job, but not just any old job. So, I thought we'll see where the ship ends up." For eight long weeks, they were there every Saturday evening. Hundreds of costumes and acts. They would start as early as Tuesday or Wednesday, thinking about what they'd do that week. Then off to the shops, looking for wigs, sorting out make-up, picking up hire costumes. By Saturday afternoon, everything was ready. The act itself was sometimes thought up in the dressing room an hour beforehand. "We hired opera costumes, with all the trimmings. Then we'd stand in the dressing room, and only then did we figure out what we were going to do. Sing opera, yes, but how? It turned into a dramatic death scene where the audience threw roses at us at the end!"

They did a live jukebox: people could submit requests for a guilder, after which Bep and Geert-Jan would sing a tearjerker a cappella amidst the blaring music from the iT. They'd walk through the club dressed as police officers with torches, just after raids at the Mazzo and the RoXY, and frisked visitors in a slightly too thorough manner. They'd take to the dance floor as Hare Krishnas with a boombox. As architects, they'd come to take measurements for the car park that would never be built. "Manfred thought everything was fine. He wanted something happening everywhere. It had to start at the door. And that's what we did at the start of the evening to welcome the crowd."

MANFRED PASSES AWAY IN 1994

Manfred Langer passed away in 1994. Geert-Jan and Bep carried on for another four-years. In his memory, Manfred had always remained with them, even after his death. "Somehow it really did live on in him, in those early years. Strange as it may seem."

When it stopped, it really stopped. They had pulled out all the stops. Leaving bustling Amsterdam behind, they set off on a long journey to Asia. They needed a break from the exhausting nightlife. There had been some warning signs, but suddenly it was all over. The city had changed and so had the nightlife. Drugs were flowing freely; it was time to step back. Dancing on the volcano takes an awful lot of energy. Dancing in the clubs, looking after sick friends and having to

say goodbye to so many had taken its toll.

After iT, Geert-Jan organised nights at the Supperclub, now converted into a modern restaurant-club. Three nights a week in the basement: one night of live music, one night with Vera, one night of Japanese food, one night with DJ Sunny. After that, for six years, he worked as a production manager and tour manager at DOX, a young theatre group in Utrecht. He toured the Netherlands and Belgium.

"WHAT HAVE I LEFT UNDONE?"

At the age of forty-five, he asked himself: what have I left undone? The answer was clear. He rented a cottage in the South of France, spent a month drawing and painting, and discovered that someone wanted to buy his work. That man became his agent. Since then, he has been painting and exhibiting his work at the Open Ateliers Jordaan, in Paris, and in Bangkok. When he looks back on it all – the village in Brabant, the Vogue Fashion Academy, the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Club Chique, iT, DOX, and painting – he feels he has made the most of it all.

A SOCIAL CREATURE

Does he feel he belongs, after all these years? He pauses to think. "I'm a terribly social creature. Someone drops by here every day. As a painter, you naturally work alone; you must draw everything from within yourself. That was difficult at first, but I really needed it. Fortunately, I also have a rich social life. When

we stopped working, we both went our separate ways but supported each other and eventually found our way back together. In recent years, in terms of performances, we've only done things for Erwin Olaf's openings and festivals, often for a good cause. Bep and I moved in together as neighbours in the Jordaan. Bep with his Buddhas and me with my painting. Bep keeps me on my toes; he's a constant source of motivation. I follow his acquisitions and development and help him where I can. We also exhibit together every year in our homes. Two very different disciplines come together there and reinforce each other: modern art and antique Asian art. We enjoy setting up the exhibitions together. That feeling of not quite fitting in – that's part of who I am. But I do feel more connected to the world now than I did when I was young."

GEERT VISSERS

ALIAS HELLUN ZELLUF



Faith, Hope and Lo-Lo-Love

In 1989, Hellun Zelluf and Mizz Mopsie founded the drag disco WigWam, located at 4–6 Koggestraat, in the premises that had previously housed, amongst others, the gay disco Steps. The WigWam was an underground venue run by and for drag queens, featuring performances that were rather risqué and scandalous even by Amsterdam standards. Out of a final major disco night at the WigWam emerged Club Chique, which Hellun Zelluf organised and presented at the Club Mazzo nightclub, featuring performances by Nickie Nicole, Agnetha Immergeil and Vera Springveer, amongst others. From 1990, Vissers presented the Hellun Zelluf Show – later renamed the Gay Dating Show – as Hellun Zelluf on the Amsterdam cable channel Salto. The programme

was a parody of the dating show **Op goed geluk** and aimed, amongst other things, to raise awareness about AIDS.

In 1991, Vissers founded the Hellun Zelluf Foundation together with Marco de Koning (alias Coby Genezijde). This organisation sought to improve AIDS awareness by dispelling the image of the pitiful HIV victim and the tragic AIDS patient, and, amongst other things, raised funds to pay for a special bath for the AIDS ward at the Academic Medical Centre. Plans to broadcast the Gay Dating Show on national television did not go ahead because Vissers himself became too ill. He died in 1992 at the age of 31 from complications of AIDS.

Vissers rose to prominence in the 1980s as Hellun Zelluf through performances at the Anthony Theatre in Amsterdam. In 1989, Hellun Zelluf and Mizz Mopsie founded the drag disco WigWam, located at 4–6 Koggestraat, in the premises that had previously housed, amongst others, the gay disco Steps. The WigWam was an underground venue run by and for drag artists, featuring performances that were quite daring and risqué even by Amsterdam standards. From a final major disco night at the WigWam emerged Club Chique, which Hellun Zelluf organised and presented at the Club Mazzo nightclub, featuring performances by Agnetha Immergeil and Vera Springveer, as well as

Imca Marina and Cary Tefsen, amongst others.

From 1990, Vissers, as Hellun Zelluf, presented the Hellun Zelluf Show on the Amsterdam cable channel Salto, later renamed the Gay Dating Show. The programme was a parody of the dating show **Op goed geluk** and aimed, amongst other things, to raise awareness about AIDS. In 1991, Vissers founded the Hellun Zelluf Foundation together with Marco de Koning. This organisation sought to improve AIDS awareness by dispelling the image of the pitiful HIV victim and the tragic AIDS patient, and, amongst other things, raised funds to pay for a special bath for the AIDS ward at the Academic Medical Centre.

Plans to broadcast the Gay Dating Show on national television did not go ahead because Vissers himself became too ill. He died in 1992 at the age of 31 from the effects of AIDS. He was buried at Zorgvlied Cemetery in Amstelveen. In his memory, the Hellun Zelluf Foundation released the CD **Hellun's Geloof, Hoop En Lu-Lu-Liefde** in late 1992, featuring contributions from Vissers himself and, amongst others, the trio **Zang Voor Vriendschap** and the singer Jan Rot.

MARCO DE KONING,

ALSO KNOWN AS **COBY GENEZIJDE**



role of Siegfried van Zelluf, 'Father of Hellun', in the Christmas Show at Paradiso.

Later, he played Coby Genezijde in 'De Ware Liefde Show' in memory of Geert, alongside the entire Club Chique crew and the trio Zang voor Vriendschap!

Marco died of complications from AIDS on 23 November 1995 at the age of 47.

At Marco's house, there was a constant coming and going.

Marco de Koning was chairman of the Hellun Zelluf Foundation.

The foundation promoted gay culture and was established following the death of the activist and drag artist Geert Vissers, alias Hellun Zelluf. This foundation raised money to install special baths for AIDS and cancer patients in fifteen hospitals. He managed to inspire everyone. For example, the board game 'Homopolis' was launched at the iT, featuring performances by Nelly Frijda, Jacques Herps and Dolly Bellefleur, with all proceeds going towards the bath campaign.

A lovely booklet about Club Chique was published and a CD was released. Marco was involved in the founding of Club Chique and played the

CHARLES LÜCKER

ALSO KNOWN AS **VERA SPRINGVEER**



Charles was born in De Pijp on 7 March 1965 and grew up in Bos en Lommer, as the only child of Nel Korndörffer (1932) and Koos Lücker. As a teenager he ran away from home and found shelter with the actress Nelly Frijda. Later he ended up in the squatters' movement and joined an artists' collective around Diana Ozon and Peter Pontiac. During this period he performed at parties for the first time as a cross-dresser. Lücker made his debut as the nightclub singer Vera Springveer during Club Chique at the Mazzo.

He played Hellun's neighbour in the Christmas Show at Paradiso in 1991.

In 1993 he performed again in 'De Ware Liefde Show' ('The True Love Show'),

written by Ton Vorstenbosch and Guus Vleugel, at De Kleine Komedie — a tribute to the by then late Geert Visser — where he sang "Hellun, waar ben je nou gebleven" ("Hellun, where have you gone now"), which he had written himself.

He also performed as Vera Springveer at the Homomonument, a duet with the carillon of the Westerkerk featuring songs by, among others, Johnnie Jordaan, or at the ArenA with the Smartlappen band at the opening of the Amsterdam ArenA.

In 1994 he created the programme 'Tranen en Tissues' ('Tears and Tissues') about AIDS and grief, which was performed at the Westgaarde crematorium, where Vera appeared as a deranged funeral singer!

In 1997 Lücker, together with Geert-Jan, Bep and Pieter Voeten, started a club night called Factor 30 on Wednesday evenings at Seymour Likely 2 (formerly de Koer). The most bizarre club night ever. Even though the initiators had the greatest fun with absurd themes — such as an SM leather evening combined with a school reunion night featuring pupils from the Barlaeus Gymnasium, or a factory-farming evening with slaughtered cows' heads hanging from the ceiling combined with the chicken dance and feathers thrown from the balcony — it was not a success, and after six editions they had to stop.

In 2000 Charles played a season at the Supperclub with the band Pink Martini's, each time with a different guest singer, where he sang 'My Sunny Valentine' for the first time.

In 2002 Vera Springveer presented Strapless in Soho, a weekly programme at Panama, with Monique Klemann (Lois Lane).

In 2003 he created the programme The Days of Ziggy Stardust — A Glamrock Experience at the Panama Theater, also directed by Eddie Bal.

Lücker, as Springveer, was also part of the girl band Girls Wanna Have Fun. He collaborated with organisations such as SAD/Schorerstichting to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS. At the Thermos sauna he sang above the swimming pool with guests including Mieke Stemerink and Manuela Kemp, in the context of Safe Sex. He also presented the PinUpClub every month at a different venue, with a Darkroom.

From around 2000 onwards he also performed as a singer under his own name. In 2002 the documentary Charles, by director Eddi Bal, was released, in which Lücker was followed over a period of two years.

Lücker passed away at the age of 43 from the consequences of AIDS and was buried at Zorgvlied.



“AIDS had given an enormous boost to a thriving queer community.”

**GAY DATING SHOW –
BY US, WITH US, FOR US**

By the end of 1990 there had been around a thousand AIDS deaths in the Netherlands and a multiple of that in HIV infections. Statistically that was not really shocking, certainly not when set against the mortality figures of other diseases. But that is not how we experienced it in the queer community, and certainly not in Amsterdam. The men and boys, mostly in their twenties and thirties, were dropping like flies. They were our lovers, friends, or familiar faces from nightlife. Often we stood at a hospital bed in the AMC or OLVG, holding the hand of

a loved one who looked at us with the dull eyes of death.

It hurt so much, beside that unrecognizably emaciated body covered in blotches, to still hold on to the image of the beautiful boy who had celebrated life with you at the RoXY, the iT or Cockring. Our reality in those days was also that we could stay seated in the crematorium because the farewells for two friends happened to take place one after the other. And there was great fear of the death sentence of a possible HIV infection, because there simply was no medicine. Sex between men was loaded and tainted.

ZEEUWS MEISJE

This small genocide unfolded in silence; the vast majority of society barely noticed. We had to find support among ourselves, within our own community. Perhaps that is why we danced and partied all the more fanatically in our own clubs and bars.

In the Mazzo a few friends had started Club Chique. The weekly honky-tonk theatre of full and part-time transvestites around Mizz Mopsie (Heinz Gert Roes) and Hellun Zelluf drew a circle of in-crowd devotees. They revelled in a Zeeuws Meisje pageant or the yodelling of Olga Lowina while enjoying a glass of Kellergeister (a very cheap, sticky German sparkling wine). Camp in optima forma: theatrical zaniness and irony to cope

with the daily gravity. We needed this.

ACT UP!

In 1990, as (co-)organizer of the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Amsterdam, I was sent off to San Francisco and New York to look for films for a new edition. I was able to make that trip thanks to the generous sponsorship of Benno Premsele, who cannot be praised enough for his efforts on behalf of our community. It was the time when ACT UP! was at its peak in the US. A curious paradox revealed itself in those cities, because the activism around AIDS had given an enormous boost to a thriving queer community in which young and old joined forces. At Act Up it was all ‘happening’, even if you wanted to pick up a cute boy.

Someone pointed me to a dating show for gay men on a local cable channel in New York. From a Lower East Side club, a local drag star hosted the Gay Dating Game Show every week, in a shabby set and with an audience of wildly enthusiastic queens. It turned out to be the same formula as Op Goed Geluk, the dating programme that Carry Tefsen was presenting on Dutch TV at the time. But not just with straight people – exclusively with male contestants who needed little encouragement to advertise their qualities, whether verbally or by undressing. It was as simple as it was hilarious and sexy.

STIFF DICKS

Surely this had to be possible in Amsterdam too! After all, we had the local cable channel Salto here, which was open to all sorts of small providers of TV productions, with hardly any restrictions on content and little concern for ratings.

Back in Amsterdam it was actually settled quickly. Club Chique in the Mazzo was the obvious place for the show, and the deliciously haughty superqueen Hellun Zelluf the dream hostess. The Mazzo's management was enthusiastic and was willing to sponsor it.

Club Chique in the Mazzo, with its cosy intimacy and the unconditional enthusiasm of the audience, was the obvious place for the show. For the hosting we did not have to look far. Hellun Zelluf was flamboyant, quick-witted, funny, catty, charming, intelligent, vulgar and sometimes even sweet. That gave her the qualities to take on the challenging task of hosting.

DISCOURAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

We felt it was important to give attention to safe-sex education, because once you are on air anyway, you may as well confront the viewer with an urgent message. Not to warn and sow fear again, as was then customary in campaigns, but precisely by showing how you could (once again) take pleasure in sex.

At that moment – it was the autumn of 1990 – the worrying trend was emerging that the number of HIV infections was rising again, especially among young gay people. At the same time, the national AIDS policymakers kept persisting in an anti-fucking campaign. The simple, life-saving message that you fuck with a condom was politically unfeasible with the CDA in the cabinet; imagine the government paying to promote gay sex! So instead, in a Postbus 51 campaign, they preferred the superfluous announcement that a little understanding would not kill you.

showed, in a titillating and explicit way, how you could have sex that was not only safe but also fun. Men's sex and stiff dicks on screen – that would be a breath of fresh air for Dutch TV, and of course we were going to show it uncensored. We would also invite experts from our own circle who could explain it all. The demonstration of the dental dam by a female expert has always stayed with me.

DISARMING WOMEN

As contemporary queers we felt it should not become an exclusively male affair, so women too would get a place, to be matched with a woman on the show. That turned out to be a stroke of genius. The women threw themselves eagerly into the Gay Dating Show. This showed in their input into the organization and in the large turnout of the female audience. But most of all in the surprising performances of the female contestants, who had little trouble with embarrassment in putting their erotic motives into words. Queens may have the reputation, but in the spotlight of the Gay Dating Show the bravado often melted away and the contestants preferred to present themselves as nice, timid boys. The exhibitionism of the Lower East Side gays was nowhere to be found here, and the disarming revelations of the women would save the game more than once. It broke through a pattern of expectation and showed how unusual it was back then to hear women speak so publicly, so frankly and so wittily about their appetite for seduction.

We felt it was important to pay attention to safe sex education.

The casting of the lovely Viola Voilà and the rugged Beestje Freek (the Venus and Apollo among the show's assistants) made for the perfect picture to carry the show: a holy queer trinity. The Mazzo's management was enthusiastic, gave us free rein and was willing to sponsor it. Together with Geert I worked the concept out further.

GAY DATING SHOW

Was there a better setting imaginable for an unvarnished safe-sex message than a convivial show about love, relationships and sex? We had the material for it, because through the submissions for the film festival I had a stack of videos by foreign filmmakers who

THIRTY VOLUNTEERS

It took little effort to gather women and men from our network who took on tasks for the show: for the editorial team, recruiting contestants, securing sponsors, make-up, outfits, etc. Many worked in the hospitality industry, were staff at the Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals, or knew each other from De Trut or the Huyschkaemer. Floris Vos, one

Langer and other gay hospitality entrepreneurs. Shops sponsored outfits, such as Rob's leather atelier, which supplied Beestje Freek's – admittedly minimal – leather ensemble.

ABUZZ IN THE CITY

Between the autumn of 1990 and the spring of 1991, the Gay Dating Show managed six monthly broadcasts. It

case. A telling example was a conversation I overheard between two older women from the Jordaan who, at the baker's, were saying that they thought Hellun was a star, that they were finally seeing handsome naked men in action on TV, and that it was all very instructive.

More than a few people must have had to revise their image of queens and dykes. The correspondent of the Reuters news agency admitted in the VPRO Gids: '(...) the Gay Dating Show was a revelation to me. At first I watched with the wrong motives: just to have a laugh at the fags and lesbos. But in the end I found it an enjoyable programme.' The Guardian's correspondent called the show in his newspaper – in all seriousness – the best thing he had seen on TV in ages.

INTENSELY ENJOYED

Queues formed outside the Mazzo to attend the show. It forced us, for the last, final show, to move to the Rode Hoed, because more people could fit in there. One of the guests of honour was Carry Tefsen herself, who let slip that she had intensely enjoyed the show from her own sofa at home. Research showed that more than a third of Amsterdam's TV viewers had seen the Gay Dating Show at some point. It eventually became the most-watched programme Salto ever had. We received an award from the umbrella organization of local broadcasters as the best local programme of the year. The show was then also

The ladies' revelations would save the game multiple times. The policy of discouraging sex was called into question.

of the Netherlands' best film-set designers at the time, created and built the imposing set; fashion designer Prince Charming (Tycho Boeker) provided a new, outrageous outfit for Hellun Zelluf for every show; Jan Carel Warffemius was the regular set photographer. In addition, numerous performers offered to appear on the show – often amateurs, but also well-known professionals.

The men of RobotnikTV – hardened anarchists – were willing to make room in their broadcasting time on Salto. The crew that recorded the interviews with Thea van Gogh could be hired for a reasonable fee for the TV recording. Thanks to the efforts of some thirty, mostly volunteers, the show could be made on a very low budget. The money came – besides from the Mazzo – from the community, with contributions from the Aids-fonds, the Trutfonds, Manfred

was not TV as we knew it then (nor, really, as we know it now). We did not want to play at being Hilversum, and we also did not have the money, the technology and the experience to attempt that. The show was broadcast in full; only the sex-education videos were edited in afterwards. No attention was paid to timing – it could easily run two and a half hours. We had no rigid format, nobody rapped us on the knuckles, and we did not have to please a broad audience. It was TV by us, with us and for us. And that was that.

That is precisely why it is striking how much response the show got, including from a broader audience. Right after the very first broadcast, the city was abuzz. At the Albert Cuyp market the broadcast was the talk of the day. The comments were not indignant or negative. Rather the opposite was the

shown on the local channels in other cities and, in the years that followed, repeated many times on Salto.

DISGUST IN HILVERSUM

Word of this, and of the show's success, had reached Hilversum too. I got a call from Joop Daalmeijer, who was then the director of Veronica, which billed itself as the broadcaster where anything was possible. Would I just send him the tapes, so he could judge whether it was something for Veronica? So that is what I did. Not long after, he called again and ranted at me that he had watched it with disgust, that it was the worst and most idiotic programme he had seen in ages, and that he therefore was not going to do anything with it. He made it seem as if I had forced the programme on him. I had to laugh at that arrogance, because we were not waiting for the approval of the Daalmeijers of this world.

DENTAL DAM

Thanks to the Gay Dating Show, the dental dam became a household term for Amsterdammers, and the technique of making love with a condom held no more secrets for them. No safe-sex campaign in the Netherlands has ever had such an impact, without a single cent from any government whatsoever. The anti-fucking policy was put up for reconsideration, and according to insiders at the time the Gay Dating Show gave it a good shove.

LOVE SWEET LOVE

Not long after the run of shows, Geert fell ill and

died. The popularity of the show and the prominent role he had played in it translated into the wide attention his death received in the media.

He was not the only one who worked on the show whom we lost in the years that followed. I am convinced that the Gay Dating Show was a bright spot for Geert and all the others, that the joy we got from it strengthened them to get through that period. I myself, at any rate, experienced it that way.

The Gay Dating Show also showed how, with a small, enthusiastic group of creative people and with limited means, you can take charge and thereby form a counterforce by making no concessions to what is generally deemed acceptable.

Perhaps a lesson for these turbulent times. Because, as the show's regular closing tune conveyed as its message: 'What the world needs now is love, sweet love'.

Paul Verstraeten was the originator and producer of the Gay Dating Show.



“Bobbie founded the TRUT with a number of friends in late 1985”.

Bobbie is from Amsterdam, used to live in Rotterdam and studied at the Social Academy in The Hague.

Bobbie and Bep met when Bobbie was 17 and Bep was 28, and became best mates. Bep also gained the whole Hamwijk family as part of his life: his father Joop, his mother Riet and his younger brother Eric. Joop died in 1991.

Eric founded Act Up and died of AIDS in 1992 at the age of 29.

Riet was involved with the SAD-Schorer Foundation and

became a key figure in the HIV and AIDS community. She served as a carer and support buddy for 19 years. She was active in the mothers’ group, working with mothers whose children had died of AIDS to organise activities such as providing mutual support at gatherings, for example on World AIDS Day. Riet passed away on 14 September 2025. In late 1985, Bobbie and a number of friends founded TRUT in the Tetterode squat, a noncommercial Sunday queer disco that is still run entirely by volunteers. It is an important meeting place for people seeking an alternative and inclusive nightlife venue. The proceeds go to the Stichting Fonds De Trut, which distributes the money to small-scale LGBTQIA+ initiatives at home and abroad, often relating to HIV and AIDS issues and awareness-raising.

Bep and Bobbie worked together for over 10 years at Café de Huyschkaemer on Utrechtse Straat, an anarchist café frequented by a mix of squatters, gay people and artists.

Geert-Jan and Bobbie worked behind the bar at the Mazzo during the Club Chique nights, whilst Bep sat at the door selling tickets. Together, they took part in the performances and were involved in Hellun Zelluf’s Gay Dating Show. Bobbie has been travelling to Thailand with Geert-Jan and Bep for years. Bobbie and Bep also went to Australia to visit their friend Rex Lay.

Rex wrote the shows for the Bloolips and Sex Pays, in which Bep and Jolly Schuringa starred for a season in 1984. Bobbie was always there for the many performances at the iT. All three remain close friends to this day.



"The freedom, the togetherness and the special quality of the iT was a kind of Heaven."

I was just a little young girl from Muiden, a small town right next to Amsterdam. There, already at the age of six, I put on dresses and felt even then that Muiden was too small. I had to go to the big city, because after all that's where it was happening.

Because my parents were divorced, I was often left to my own devices, so I soon sought out the great adventure.

Plucking up courage, off to Amsterdam to seek out

the nightlife. And so, I met Manfred in his pub Chez Manfred in the infamous Halvemaansteeg. I then heard about the opening of a new club and was allowed to come by Manfred. I had never experienced anything yet, and when I walked into the Amstelstraat my life changed at once. I felt it in everything: this is where I was going to live, discover and develop myself. Because I didn't live in Amsterdam yet at the time and had no money except my pocket money, my very next time was only after the Madonna concert in Rotterdam. I had gone there with girlfriends, and we stood at the front. We caught wind that the afterparty was at the iT, and well, then you go.

My girlfriends didn't, they didn't dare, but I had to and would. Since then, the iT became my home... As often as I could, I was to be found at the iT, sometimes as many as 4 nights a week.

As a young child I couldn't believe my eyes. The feeling I got in the iT cannot be described by any pen. The freedom, the togetherness and the special quality of the iT was a kind of Heaven for me, but I think for everyone.

House had made its entrance, and drugs were there in abundance. Both the gays and the straights stood waiting in rows 3 men thick until they could dance away their misery of the week at the weekend. That one could be oneself so completely

there was unique. The extravagant I didn't know before that; the only Glitter and Glamour I saw were the album covers of Dolly Parton that I got from my mother.

I looked up to the dancers, the drags and the candy girls. Bep and Geert-Jan were the Enfants Terribles of the iT; it was always a matter of waiting to see in which special, larger-than-life outfit they would appear. The one who made the greatest impression was Percy, the most beautiful trans EVER, who set many a man's heart racing. Her Give me a Break show by the Ritchie Family is something that has stayed with me most from that time.

The nineties were really the best time ever. In my opinion no decade can compete with it. It was the rise of dance/house music, think of the big dance hits of my diva friends Robin S with Show me Love, Cece Peniston with Finally and Rozalla with Everybody's Free, To feel good!

It was also the becoming visible of the queer community, which before that was somewhat more behind closed doors, and as George Michael sang... Freedom.



“On the dance floor, we could collectively escape the harsh reality of AIDS”.

“WE CELEBRATED LIFE, WHILST DEATH WAS HOT ON OUR HEELS.”

“In the autumn of ‘89, I moved to Amsterdam for my first proper job. I’d come via Kampen, where I’d studied journalism, and before that via Urk, where I was born and raised. I was 23. Lil Louis’s ‘French Kiss’ was at the top of the Top 40, and the Berlin Wall was on the verge of collapse.

At Buro GVO — Health Information and Education —

I started work as an HIV prevention worker, a role that would later be taken over by the Schorer Foundation. AIDS was rampant in our community. Practising safe sex was, alongside total abstinence, the only way to protect yourself and your partner.

The prevention message aimed at gay men was ambiguous: it was better to abstain from anal sex altogether — but if you really couldn’t resist, use an extra-strong condom. My very first assignment? Writing an educational piece for the porn magazine *Marcel*, about the ‘no fewer than 30 different ways you could masturbate’.

I wasn’t allowed to hand out condoms in those early years. We promoted that ‘always safe’ message with passion and creativity, together with an enthusiastic group of volunteers — in precisely those places where men met: at work and in saunas, bars, discos and darkrooms. Bep was my colleague for a while and he brought his friends along as volunteers. I can still picture it: Bep and Geert-Jan, dressed up as two gruff-looking blokes, standing guard at the entrance to a darkroom. A playful protest against GGD director Coutinho’s plan to close darkrooms if they did nothing to provide information.

Amsterdam’s nightlife in the nineties was magical in a way that’s hard to explain. Places like the RoXy and the iT were

legendary. Discos on steroids. House music transported you, made you forget where you were. But going out was also necessary — almost therapeutic. On the dance floor, we could collectively escape the harsh reality of AIDS. We celebrated life, whilst death was hot on our heels.

I remember the premiere of the Guerrilla’s new act at the RoXy: *Saved by the Bell* — a steamy seduction on stage, where things only just end well and a condom appears at the last moment. Afterwards, I received a letter from a lad who’d seen the act. He wrote sarcastically that the performance was clearly not meant for him. After all, he already had HIV.

THAT LETTER REALLY STUCK WITH ME

In 1996, combination therapy came onto the market. A year later, I found myself in hospital with an AIDS diagnosis. I woke up the morning after the night Princess Diana had had been killed in a Parisian tunnel. During those first few days and weeks, shame dominated my thoughts. How could I have failed to protect myself? Why? Later, thankfully, I was able to put it into perspective: why not?

At the Thermos day spa, we used to have ‘Vera’s Lounge’ running at the time: Vera Springveer sang songs with a hidden meaning and performed duets with a different guest each time. When I went to watch one day, she’d

invited Manuela Kemp. Vera asked her what she thought of HIV.

"If you catch HIV these days, you're being really stupid," she said. It felt like a slap in the face to all the men with HIV who'd gathered round the paddling pool.

I came home in tears that day. Partly out of sadness, certainly — but much more out of a sudden, intense joy. I'd found my calling and was going to tackle the stigma, so that people like Manuela would no longer be able to make such painful blunders. Because people with HIV would no longer put up with this.

The fire at the Roxy in 1998 brought an end to Amsterdam's legendary nightlife. The emancipation of people living with HIV, on the other hand, had only just begun."

BY **HOWIE GETMAN**



set off to explore Amsterdam's gay scene!

I met lots of wonderful people who, despite AIDS, had found the courage to believe that we can heal ourselves through creativity!

I still remember the first time I saw Bep, Geert-Jan, Zu and Fabiola, who were celebrating life through their drag. That's when I knew I was HOME, and after a few months I returned to live in Amsterdam, inspired by these pioneers. I've been dancing and crying with these 'PARADISE BIRDS' for over 35 years!

DRAG SAVES LIVES!
It saved mine.

THANK YOU SO MUCH!

DRAG SAVES LIVES!

The first time I came to Amsterdam as a gay man with a gold card was in 1991, for the International AIDS Conference. In the US, I worked with babies with various mental and physical disabilities and was sent to the conference to give a talk on HIV and child development. I didn't stay at the conference for long and, after my session,

ANTOINE TIMMERMANS

ALSO KNOWN AS **CYBERSISSY**



“He was a very modest personality when he wasn’t in Drag”.

Antoine was a multidisciplinary artist who studied at the Art Academies’ in Den Bosch, The Hague and Breda. He was not an easy student. He went on to become a gifted painter, sculptor, costume designer, performer, shoemaker, wig- maker, fabric designer, furniture maker and drag queen.

Geert-Jan, Bep and Vera first met him at the Danssalon in Eindhoven, where he was leading the entertainment team: “He was a very modest person when he wasn’t in drag. He was very helpful with our performances. We started buying shoes from him. Stainless-steel frames as platforms with plastic bathing shoes, but above all he made very high platform soles for us to put under shoes and boots. After that, we also started hiring his costumes because we thought his work was fantastic and wanted to raise its profile in Amsterdam.

We were able to use various props from him. The beautiful mirrored dresses with red-lit breasts and plastic-encased LED lights to put in your mouth, with a stuffed peacock’s tail on your helmet. Also striking were the child-birth costumes, which allowed a pregnant woman to ‘give birth’ to a doll on stage. Vera Springveer also used his shoes and costumes, amongst other things, in her performances.

Antoine remained relatively unknown in Amsterdam but was a very inspiring artist who, in the south of the country, focused more on the German gay scene, including in Cologne, where he caused a sensation with BayBjane (Mourad Zerhouni). He was a great source of inspiration for us.

Antoine fell ill and chose to undergo euthanasia at the end of September 2025.



“In the late 80s, early 90s, it was almost impossible to keep up. They were tough times in which I lost a large part of my friends”.

“I was born on Damstraat, above a sandwich shop. I think that’s where my love for the hospitality industry began. After I’d decided not to go to university – I wanted to travel – I ended up in the hospitality industry. I worked all sorts of jobs, eventually becoming co-owner of a café just off Damstraat.

In the mid-1980s, I owned the Pink Flamingos, a cocktail bar in the centre of Amsterdam, where we hosted lots of drag shows. The crowd was a mix of gay and straight people, all jumbled together. Those were

times when a lot was possible, and we were busy going out, having fun, enjoying ourselves and living life to the full.

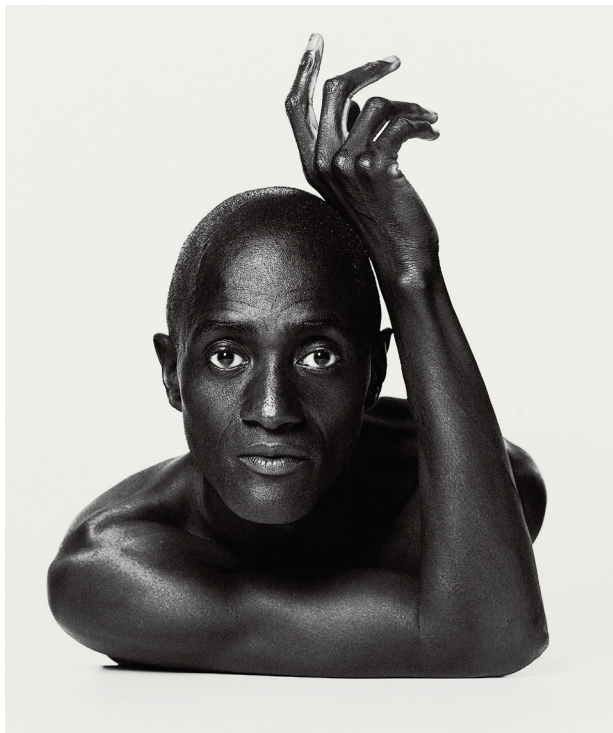
For me, that all changed in 1986 when my very best friend Robert contracted AIDS and subsequently passed away. I remember the shame and despair most of all. We saw each other almost every day, did lots together, knew everything about each other, and suddenly it all stopped. He didn’t want anyone to know. He just disappeared.

I can still clearly remember the funeral in England – the awkwardness and the fact that no one mentioned what he’d died of. For me, that was the moment I realised that life is temporary and that you have to make the most of it yourself, and get as much out of it as possible. In the late 80s and early 90s, it was almost impossible to keep up. Those were tough times in which I lost a large number of my friends.

The worst thing, for me, was not knowing how the disease progressed, with all the different symptoms and side effects. It was awful. We partied like mad. At the time, I was working at Café de Huyschkamer, where my friends also worked and lots of gay people used to come. We’d go to the RoXY and the iT. I remember the most outrageous outfits worn by Bep and Geert Jan, and above all those ‘don’t want to miss

a thing’ nights, which we’d spend hanging around long into the early hours. We were right in the thick of it, and we supported each other a lot. It was incredibly intense.

In 1999, I took over Café Saarein and turned it into a mixed gay café. I ran it for 25 years. Now the café has been taken over by a new generation. I’m incredibly proud that the café is still going strong, because if anything has taught me anything, it’s the importance of a place where you can get together with like-minded people. Everyone needs a local pub.”



“We danced on the edge of everything — danger, beauty, loss — and called it living.”

Dancing between discipline and decadence — “I stepped out of the club... and closed the door behind me.”

I’m Robin van Zutphen, born and raised in Amsterdam. When I think back to those nineties, what I see above all is an explosion of creativity. Everything was new, everything was allowed to exist. It was a time when people dared to show themselves — sometimes raw, sometimes shocking, but always real, or not at all! What has stayed with me most is how natural acceptance felt. In my world, everyone was taken just as

they were. No labels, no complicated abbreviations — you were simply there. Looking back, I realise it was perhaps a sheltered bubble, but a very beautiful one. How did I end up in Amsterdam’s nightlife?

I was at the ballet academy, in the middle of my training to become a professional dancer. My focus was entirely on that. Nightlife was something on the side for me — something that existed, but wasn’t my main world. Until classmates took me along to Club IT. I still remember it well: that evening, everything suddenly looked different. A dancer had dropped out, and before I knew it I was asked to step in. I remember thinking: I’m a classical dancer, what am I doing here among all these beautiful drag queens and dancers? But I did it. And that moment changed more than I could have suspected at the time. From then on, I was there. Every weekend, that was my place. And of course the parties, like Hollywood and the Swimming-pool Party, where the water was still a lovely blue at the start of the evening but pitch-black by the end of the night, haha. And I was one of the IT dancers, and I’m still proud of that.

The beautiful thing was: I could keep both worlds separate. The moment I stepped out of the club, the door closed and I was once again fully focused on my training. No chaos, no spillover, just discipline. And

honestly? It was all fairly innocent. I’d get drunk off a single nasty Apfelkorn. If you see what people use now... that was a completely different time.

THE IT — A KIND OF FAMILY

It was a group of people who were all in the process of discovering themselves — with their talents, their dramas, their growth. Sometimes intense, sometimes light, but always connected. It also had something of a ‘dynasty’. You belonged, but it was also a world of its own. For me, what mattered most was that I was part of something bigger, and yes: a family. That feeling of creating together, standing on stage together, putting something down together — that was priceless.

“AIDS existed, it was there — but honestly: in my immediate surroundings it didn’t play a role. No one in my family or circle of friends was confronted with it. Because of that, AIDS remained something abstract to me. You heard about it, but it wasn’t tangible. And when something isn’t in your immediate surroundings, you relate to it differently too. Only much later, in 2024, did I lose a dear friend to its consequences. That affected me deeply. The realisation that something once surrounded by so much fear can still haunt people for so long... that only really hit home then. I miss him every single day.”

SANJAY GANPAT BROUWER



“Sanjay was someone who could brighten up the whole room with his cheerful disposition”.

Sanjay Ganpat Brouwer (43) was a Hindustani Surinamese man who came to the Netherlands in 1992 to study Aerospace Engineering at TU Delft. Bep: “We met him fairly soon and a beautiful friendship grew. He came to Amsterdam often, and now and then I went to Delft, to the student house where he lived. Handsome, tall, slim, and an enormously sparkling, charming figure. Before I knew it, he had moved in with me and become part of my life. Sanjay was someone who could brighten up an entire room

with his cheerful disposition. He never shied away from anything, was a co-founder of the Safe-Sex guerrilla — a part of the GVO — performed a great deal in the club scene, and later we worked together at the Supperclub; he as a performer and I as host at the cloakroom and the toilets, and as photographer and VJ. Sanjay also worked there a lot with the artist Zjef van Bezouw.”

He was a beloved, colourful performer who was also, for many years, part of the artists’ community Ruigoord in Amsterdam. After having been in a relationship for more than 8 years, Sanjay married the multidisciplinary artist Johan Ganpat Brouwer in October 2013. He passed away in June 2016, in his sleep.

In memory of Sanjay, the Sanjay Ganpat Brouwer Foundation was established, which is dedicated to connecting people and organisations in Suriname and the Netherlands through art and creative entrepreneurship.

ERWIN OLAF



“Diversity, inequality and identity. Always standing up for vulnerable people in society”.

Erwin Olaf (Springveld) went on to become one of the most famous Dutch photographers to achieve international recognition, and was always a champion of vulnerable people in society. He received widespread acclaim for both his independent and commercial work.

Bep got to know Erwin at a young age as a photographer associated with SEK, the COC's magazine. Erwin also photographed the Softies as early as 1980. They often marched together in the first gay rights demonstrations.

When Erwin held his first exhi-

bition, 'Squares', in a book-shop on Leidsestraat, Bep swapped his leather aviator's jacket for the now- famous self-portrait 'CUM', featuring Teun's semen on his face. In 1985, he took a portrait of Bep for his 35th birthday. That was over 40 years ago.

Geert-Jan and Bep were part of the regular entourage at his openings in galleries and museums, and at the parties at Paradiso, Valtifest and the Milkshake Festival. They even travelled as far as Rome to attend the opening of his exhibition to mark World Pride 2000.

Erwin's body of work has been recognised internationally, including with a Lucie Award. In the Netherlands, he was awarded the Johannes Vermeer Prize in 2011 – the highest state prize for the arts – in recognition of his innovative contribution to photography. Olaf was appointed a member of the Academy of Arts in 2014.

On his sixtieth birthday in 2019, Olaf was appointed a Knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion. On that occasion, the Mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema, stated that he received this honour for “his pioneering photographs and his commitment to the LGBTIQ+ community”.

He was later presented with the Medal of Honour for Art and Science of the House Order of Orange, in recognition of his exceptional artistic

achievements and his exploration of diversity, inequality and identity. He photographed the royal family, and one of the portraits he took of Máxima was included in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

In 2011, together with the police network 'Roze in Blauw', he received the Bob Angelo Medal from COC Netherlands, and in 2024 he was posthumously awarded the Winq Diversity Award for his many years of dedication to the queer community.

Erwin Olaf died on 20 September 2023, a few weeks after a lung transplant. The artist was diagnosed with emphysema, a form of COPD, at the age of 36. He was 64.



“Besides all the sorrow, I also remember the warm feeling of solidarity that arose at that time”.

PREDATOR

In 1980 – Dolly wouldn’t be born into the IT world for another nine years – I moved to Amsterdam as Ruud Douma. Craving love – you’re young and you want a bit of everything – I went out a lot. I lived on cloud nine for a year. In 1981, I was brought down to earth with a bump, and the pink bubble burst cruelly. A mysterious illness

reared its head and swept through the city like a predator. At first, it seemed to be targeting the gay scene.

Peter Jansen was the first of my friends to die from this illness. Many more would follow. Young, kind, handsome, extraordinary and talented men such as Jan Mesdag, Michel Vassalucci, Jans van Laarhoven, Bert Verheul, Benno van de Akker, Jos Diemel, Frans Kellendonk, Guus Silverentand, Sjoerd Mobach, my uncle Abele Moll and Jaap Pieters, to name but a few. And the curtain also fell for colleagues such as Coby Genezijde, Dolly Dolfijn and Hellun Zelluf.

ALWAYS UNDER PRESSURE

I think the readers of this book could also name many victims. I remember how we used to do the same at gatherings on World AIDS Day or AIDS Memorial Day. Someone would start by naming a loved one who had died of AIDS. It stirred up a lot of emotions. Suddenly, it became so clear just what a huge hole it had left in our community. AIDS – those four letters became, for me, the abbreviation for ‘Always Under Stress’. Every morning I would wake up anxious, wondering whose obituary I would receive next. I was absolutely terrified of love.

SOLIDARITY

Alongside all the sadness, I also remember the warm sense of solidarity that

emerged at that time. A feeling that we wouldn’t let ourselves be beaten down, however often that happened in a literal sense. We’re going to get through this. In the name of love, Love Balls were organised to raise money for the fight against AIDS; Hellun Zelluf presented the Gay Dating Show on Salto TV; and, at the invitation of the Schorer Foundation, I travelled around the country with people such as Vera Springveer to promote safe sex in men’s homes. I remember an emotional evening when someone, encouraged by the positive atmosphere that had developed as we were having fun, told me and the group that he was HIV-positive. He’d been carrying this huge secret around for a whole year. How powerless I often felt back then. So little was known about this disease, which we in the scene also sarcastically called ‘boys’ flu’.

Together with Karin Spaink, I wrote a song to impress upon passionate lovers above all: have safe sex! To the tune of ‘I Don’t Know How to Love Him’, we wrote a song titled ‘I Do Know How to Love Him’, which included a passage such as:

Don’t you think it’s rather silly?
He doesn’t decorate his willy?
We know by heart
How we should start
Be calm, be cool
No lover’s fool
Tell me why he’s still
undressed to kill?

LOVE BATTLE

I also remember the many performances I gave in the early 1990s at the Prinsengracht Hospital, which had a special AIDS ward, and at Huize IJsselvliedt in Wezep. The latter was a Red Cross holiday home where, at the time, AIDS patients spent their very last holiday together with their partners. I can still picture them lying there, connected to oxygen cylinders. They were often young men, many of whom I recognised from the nightlife scene. Just a short time before, they had been handsome, virile men, but now they looked a bit like shrivelled old men. Half of the theatre group I started performing with in 1989 have died of AIDS. To this day, I regularly feel guilty that I did survive this fierce battle for love. Let us never forget them.

DANCING ON A VOLCANO

In the IT world, I was able to let all my troubles fade into the background for a brief moment. Dear Bep and Geert-Jan, with your inexhaustible creative excesses, you have given me many unforgettable evenings. A thousand thanks for that. Let love reign!

High-heeled,
Dolly Bellefleur

TIMELINE OF THE QUEER HISTORY OF AMSTERDAM & THE NETHERLANDS: 1927–2026

1927

The first gay/lesbian café in the Netherlands: 't Mandje, founded by Bet van Beeren.

1946

Founding of the COC — the oldest still-existing queer organisation in the world.

1948

Anna Blaman writes about her relationship with Marie-Louise Doudart de la Grée in her novel *Eenzaam avontuur* ('Lonely Adventure') and is brought before the so-called 'Book Tribunal' because of the lesbian passages.

1949

Foekje Dillema wins the 200-metre race against Italy in spectacular fashion at the Feyenoord stadium.

1956

The first song about homosexuality, by Jaap van der Merwe: *Mensen zonder ringen* ('People Without Rings').

1956

Johnny Jordaan tries to take his own life by jumping out of a moving car. It later emerges that this stemmed from sheer despair over his secret homosexuality.

1961

Madame Arthur at Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 45, where professional drag performances for a straight audience take place until 1973.

1962

At Warmoesstraat 131, the drag bar Madame Arthur

opens, following in the footsteps of its predecessor.

1963

Gerard Reve is the first person in the Netherlands to come out openly as homosexual on television.

1964

Benno Premisela, chair of the COC, is the first homosexual to be identifiable as such on national television.

1967

The NVSH holds the Sekstant congress at the RAI.

1968

In Ja Zuster Nee Zuster, Dick Swidde and Albert Mol sing *De jongens van de reisvereniging* ('The Boys of the Travel Club').

1969

Binnenhof demonstration. Students demonstrate at the Binnenhof against Article 248bis.

Albert Mol reveals on *Het Groot Uur U* that he is gay. Second feminist wave: Dolle Mina.

1970

The NVSH publishes the groundbreaking book *Variaties voor de homoseksuele man en vrouw* ('Variations for the Homosexual Man and Woman'), at the time one of the few positive sources of information about "same-sex love." The Amsterdam branch was for decades one of the most active, with a counselling centre at Keizersgracht 714 for advice on sexuality

and pioneering work on cross-dressing and transsexuality.

1970

The wreath-laying by gay people on the Dam during the Remembrance of the Dead on 4 May is forcibly prevented.

1971

Abolition of Article 248bis. Morality legislation is now equal for everyone.

Founding of the *Vrije Relatie Rechten* ('Free Relationship Rights') foundation.

1972

Founding of *Paarse September* ('Purple September') by, among others, Maaïke Meijer. Publications in the *Alternatieve Vrouwenkrant*.

1974

A network of more than 60 gay hospitality venues, clubs and saunas in the city. Founding of the *Rooie Flikkers* (1975–1980).

Opening of *Saarein*, the first women's café in Amsterdam. The Netherlands becomes the first country in the world to abolish the ban on homosexuals in the armed forces.

Jules de Corte releases the song *Romeo en Julio*. Gerard Cox records it for his third album.

1976

Coos Huijsen is the first openly gay member of parliament.

1977

In the musical *Foxtrot*, there

is a song about Romeo and Julius, in the number Sorry dat ik besta ('Sorry That I Exist').

Miami Nightmare at the Concertgebouw, as a protest against Anita Bryant.

First 'Gay Pride' in the Netherlands, a protest march in Amsterdam in response to Bryant's anti-gay campaign. The protest would later grow into the annual Roze Zaterdag ('Pink Saturday').

1978

First gathering of homosexual and lesbian students and staff from both Amsterdam universities. Goal: to set up the journal Homologie and the Documentation Centre for Gay Studies. Utrecht would follow in 1982.

1979

First international gay disco protest song: Theo Vaness — As Long As It's Love. Publication of the Gay Krant, the first national gay newspaper.

Founding of the Roze Front to organise the annual gay demonstration — Roze Zaterdag ('Pink Saturday'). The front was a partnership of all the major lesbian and gay groups then existing in the Netherlands.

1980

Robert Long and Leen Jongewaard with their first show: Duidelijk zo!? ('Clear Enough!?').

Spetters, a film with scenes of a gay boy being assaulted.

From 1980 to 1982 the radio programme Ook Zo is broadcast. From 1982 to 1995 it

bears the title Homonos, and in 1995 it continues as Het roze rijk, broadcast on Hilversum II, Hilversum III and Radio 5.

1981

Zeg eens AAA, the first lesbian couple in a TV series.

1982

Start of Op je Flikker Gehad, the first helpline against homophobic violence in the Netherlands.

Roze Zaterdag in Amersfoort. Participants were attacked by youths.

First government policy for gay emancipation in response to the riots in Amersfoort.

Astrid Roemer publishes Over de gekte van een vrouw ('On the Madness of a Woman').

1983

Paul Haenen, as Margreet Dolman, sings about Billy: Buk nog een keer ('Bend Over Once More').

Marjan Sax founds Mama Cash. Sax's legacy is the seed funding for many women's initiatives.

1984

First official investigation into anti-gay and sexual violence within the army — a breakthrough in recognition and debate.

1985

The gay and lesbian disco De Trut is founded in the squatted building De Tetterode.

1987

Unveiling of the Homomonument: the first gay monument in the world.

AIDS spreads through the city like a stealthy killer.

Founding of the Aids Fonds and of the Hiv Vereniging (HIV Association).

1988

First Dutch solidarity demonstration against the British Clause 28.

Expreszo also appears, the first (later national) magazine for queer young people.

1989

Manfred Langer opens the iT.

Mazzo opens a gay night on Wednesdays: Club Chique, with Hellun Zelluf.

1990

Publication of Liefde zonder grenzen ('Love Without Borders'), the first international book aimed at queer young people.

1993

René Klijn sings Mister Blue on Paul de Leeuw's show on national television, in prime time.

1994

Manfred Langer dies.

Publication of the first digital Dutch book, written by a gay author.

AIDS is at its peak in the city and claims many lives.

Algemene Wet Gelijke Behandeling (AWGB — the General Equal Treatment Act). It becomes officially forbidden to discriminate against people on the basis of their sexual orientation.

EuroPride takes place in the city, from 15 to 25 June,

coinciding with Roze Zaterdag on 25 June.

1996

The very first Canal Parade sails through the Amsterdam canals.

1998

Annemarie Grewel dies. Even posthumously she still receives thousands of preference votes in her candidacy for the municipal council elections, as an openly lesbian, Jewish feminist.

1999

Café Leliebel opens, a meeting place for many cross-dressers and drag queens.

First national conference in the Netherlands on gay emancipation within the police, the starting signal for the Roze in het Blauw ('Pink in Blue') campaign.

2001

The first f/f and m/m marriages are performed. The Netherlands makes world history with the first opening of civil marriage to same-sex couples, after a 25-year lobby.

2002

The openly gay Pim Fortuyn is murdered just before his election victory.

2016

The Rainbow Dress is presented for the first time during the opening of EuroPride: at the Rijksmuseum, photographed in front of Rembrandt's Night Watch (photo below: in the city hall. By: Aad Meijer).

2021

Lisa van Ginneken is the first trans person in the House of Representatives.

2025

Founding of Queer Work, a project for the empowerment of LGBTI+ refugees in the Netherlands.

Founding of the Dolle Mina's.

2026

Opening of the Walk Of Pride.

Rob Jetten is the first openly gay prime minister of the Netherlands.

WorldPride — Amsterdam welcomes the world as the queer capital of the world.

AFTERWORD

By Bamber Delver

Just look around you, we're still here.
Every generation faces its own struggles. But no generation starts from scratch.
We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.
Of activists.
Of artists.
Of drag queens.
Of performers.
Of loved ones.
Friends.
Of people who died far too soon. Of
people who stayed.
Their legacy is not just sorrow. Their legacy
is courage.
That is why *Nacht op Scherp* is not a book about
nostalgia. It is not a monument to a bygone era. It is a
message in a bottle.
A letter from another time.
A reminder that queer history is not just about loss, but also about a zest for life. Not just
about
mourning, but also about imagination.
Not just of survival, but of living. To the full.
Loudly.
Unashamedly visible.
So when you close this book, I hope you don't just see the people in the photos. I hope
you hear their message.
Keep creating.
Stay visible.
Keep loving.
Keep finding each other.
And above all:
Keep dancing.
Even if the world is on fire. Perhaps
especially then.
Silence is not an option.
Disappearing is not an option.
Giving up is not an option.
We've been here before.
And that is why I am certain we will get through this too. Together.

Bamber Delver
Amsterdam, June 2026