

# LA FEMME SILHOUETTE

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## SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

We can go for months without any inquiries for help or support. But then we can get hit with a flurry of activity... and the coming of spring seemed to do it this year - three different cases, one out of state, two somewhat local. We don't turn people away. We don't tell them we know how to solve their problems. If it's appropriate, we suggest they might learn something by joining AO. And otherwise we answer questions and suggest other questions for them to think about.

I'd like to thank **Sherry, Abby, Gloria** and **Kathleen** who all pitch in when we provide support for people. You're all great. Take a bow.

*Diane*

## ON THE TOWN

*Diane S. Frank - out and about in Cleveland.*

WANDERING around the Larchemer district I noticed a poster for an open joint meeting of two women's book clubs to see a presentation about the how alleged early goddess worship was supplanted but patriarchal god worship. Well over 40 women, mostly middle-aged, attended the book clubs' meeting. I found three women there I knew from temple, and one of them grabbed a folding chair so I could sit next to her. There were introductions about the two groups, one a women (womyn?) only, and the other less restrictive. I'm not quite sure of the details, but by the end of the evening I'd been invited to attend both in the future. I greatly enjoyed the presentation and discussion, not because I necessarily agreed with everything presented about humans originally having

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## MEDITATION ON MAHLER

*Diane Frank: One theme that I address from time to time directly, and always indirectly - by sharing what my life is like, is now that you've accepted that wearing skirts and makeup isn't the end of the world, and now that you can go out to an Alpha Omega meeting... now what? Is that all there is? Our guest author got kind of blue about this, and this is what she wrote (btw... I think the book club reference is in fact based on a comment I had made elsewhere in the forum... and for the record... I like Mahler too).*

## Late Evening Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's First Symphony

Well, it was a hell of a week.

I was sleep deprived through most of it, and deprived of darling wife at the end of it.

I'm also a little burnt out on gender right now.

I went out twice in two days. That's plenty enough to trigger the sensation euphemistically called "gender euphoria" by trannies, "self-absorbtion" by others and "really, really scary" by our spouses.

You see, you cross-dress a little, you start wanting to cross-dress a lot. And that's got me kinda down.

I am convinced I am not on a transition track. I've met transsexuals and I've read their heart-rending stories. I don't have that level of discomfort with myself. I don't want to change myself that way. I am convinced that transition would be a personal disaster for me. I really want to remain who I am.

Unfortunately, who I am is a man who when he was a little boy, wanted to be a little girl.

I think a lot of crossdressers have a great reluctance to rule out transition authoritatively, even when they know they won't ever do it. Part of that is because there have been a lot of "late-transistioners," people who undergo reassignment surgery in their 40s and 50s. I think we will see less of that phenomenon as years pass, however. My generation has been able to be out in a way that was simply unthinkable to many of the previous generations. I've been publicly crossdressing for ten years now. I've had a chance to do a lot of

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experimentation and I've hardly repressed myself during that span.

I think for crossdressers of my generation, refusing to completely rule out transition stems from two things: first, doing so feels like denying a part of yourself. If you don't feel "like a woman" on the inside--at least not enough to live your life permanently as a woman--then what's left? The clothes, the vanity, the public spectacle of a man in drag?

The other reason is that like all human beings we desire resolution. And it seems like there are only two possible resolutions: to stop crossdressing, or to transition. Either one finally ends the ambiguity. Otherwise you're left trapped in the middle again. And the middle is a really painful place to be.

So I'm choosing to stay in the middle. I choose to moderate my crossdressing, because I want to have a professional life unencumbered by my transgenderism, and more importantly because I love my wife and want to give her some of the life she expected. This isn't necessarily such a big sacrifice. I'm not sure I like myself when I dress up too much.

You would think that crossdressing would relieve my transgendered feelings and allow me to cool off and handle things until the next time I crossdressed. But it doesn't work that way at all. Instead it can feed them and make my confusion even more acute.

Like this weekend. I got to dress up twice and spend some time in public. People were very nice to me. If they didn't treat me like a woman, they at least treated me with respect. The hostess at the restaurant Lucy and I ate at complimented us on our outfits. I felt pretty, even if I wasn't. All in all, it was very nice.

So why did I want more? Why, when I was out doing the laundry this afternoon, did I look around, into the early evening that is my favorite time in New York City, the late spring evening with its cooling warmth and gusty breezes that is my favorite season in New York City--why did I look around at all that and think that it would be vastly improved by smearing grease on my face, cramming my feet into shoes that would make me a cripple in a few hours, and exposing myself to public ridicule?

Some people say that they crossdress because women's clothing feels more comfortable to them. This is of course absurd. The underwear binds, the architecture needed to simulate cleavage and breast projection is as about as ridiculous as you would suspect, and wigs are uncomfortable to wear. Obviously, it's a psychological comfort we're talking about; a way of publicly showing

the world "this is how I think of myself, in some way" and demanding to be treated that way, ludicrous as it sounds.

And of course it is ludicrous. I don't become a woman by wearing a skirt (or even high heels). I don't gain a deeper understanding of women's lives and women's souls. As much as I try to be sensitive to the many wonderful women in my life, to help them and to help myself know what they need and want, when I crossdress I remain a fellow in a frock.

And so that's all. That's all I am. And what the hell kind of a life is that?

Sometimes it really gets me down. Yes, sure, I like the pretty outfits and the cool shoes. I like to wear makeup (sometimes). I like all these things; I'm sad when I don't get to do them, and happy when I do. But how is this a life? Am I doomed to toddle from bar to bar in my fancy shoes, a drink glued to one hand?

But what else can I do? Join a book club? Why would I go to the trouble of wearing a skirt to go to a book club? Would anybody really treat me differently? Would it make me "more of a woman" or less of a man? Wouldn't I just be a kind of joke? Why would anyone go to all that trouble if they're not living that way?

And I don't want to live that way. But at times I think it would be nice. Because some part of me is always going to be attracted to the feminine, and not in a creepy way. Or maybe it is creepy. I dunno.

And I know I view all this through the warped mirror of my transness, that intersection of my vanity and my sexuality. I know that for me being pretty is fun, not necessary; if I sometimes feel restricted by the gender conformance required of me as a man, I have no real understanding of the vastly more oppressive and difficult demands society makes on women.

Still, when I see two women casually but prettily dressed, out just walking with each other and sharing that intimate-yet-casual friendship that is so hard for men to attain, my heart breaks because I'm forever on the other side of the world from that. And I don't know why it should break. But it does. And it makes me feel a bit of a joke.

### **Michelle from NYC**

With author permission

Original post:

<http://michellenyc.blogspot.com/2005/05/late-evening-thoughts-on-listening-to.html>

# PASSING UNSEEN

## The yin and yang of passing among friends

By *Diane S. Frank*

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The idea of stepping out the door is for us like the light of a flame to a moth. For those who don't or haven't the idea holds great fascination. For those of us who do, the problem is being singed or burned. Perhaps the most common dread is being recognized by people we already know. But little is said about the opposite problem, interacting with people we already know and not being recognized. And there is the contrary problem as well - of seeing people who know me as Diane in an unfamiliar form. In either case, I do miss the freedom of being able to say "Hi", and catch up on doings and events in people's lives. At the same time, I fear that if I could, it would subvert my image in people's minds. Some people have difficulty with duality. So is what I'm doing dishonest? Perhaps.

I go back to a story and my answer to it.

Kym recalls when a twenty-something gent with a set of Lexus keys who was ahead of her in line at the Thrifty Drug turned and said "You're not fooling anyone, you know." Kym replied, "Good. That wasn't the point."

My reply is that I'd tend to say "But the sad thing is that when I'm dressed like you, I do fool people". So it doesn't really matter which side of my dual nature I present...people aren't seeing the whole picture either way. So passing unrecognized is no greater deception one way than the

other. I pass unrecognized all the time.

There is a selfish part as well, as the tenor of relationships with people who do know me both ways. I think there's a tendency to want to reduce things and make them simple. To figure me out. I was talking to a friend at a dance concert this weekend, and made my remark about not being too sad about our awful weather because it gave me another chance to wear my full length fur coat this season. The conversation ran on about how I bought it as a reward for getting paid for some consulting work and she asked me if it was real fur. I said no, that I didn't think I'd buy real fur even if I could afford it. Did she think I'd buy real fur? She remarked that she simply didn't know what to expect of me anymore. I don't have this problem of being unpredictable to people who know only one facet. I guess in some cases it can make you more interesting to people. But in other cases it can be disturbing.

A case in point happened last month. I attended a meeting where there were a number of women I knew, one of whom I would pass unseen with unless I approached her. This woman is someone I know and like from a variety of arts venues. We've had long discussions after some, when I'd walk her to her car. For most people I see when I'm out, passing unseen is simply part of life... but with some people it hurts not to say hello, not to catch up. So when things settled down and I had

a chance I walked up to L and said hi. I have to say, I'm sure I did this all wrong, but that I don't know how to do it right either. L was upset, and her first questions were about how Z was. While I reassured her that things were fine, and also had to explain that no, I didn't have SRS or hormones, wasn't planning on it and yes it was damn unusual for someone not on that track to do what I do, her concerns really were for my partner. I had to say, well really you have to talk to her. I can't put words in her mouth. We finally got off the topic of "me" and just caught up on other stuff, but I have this intuition that I should really put her in touch with my beloved spouse. I don't see long term harm here...but I'm upset that I apparently upset L. Z did call and leave a message...but the rest of the story remains to be written.

This whole business carries us to the notion of what a person is, what a personality is and what being authentic is. At this point in my life I've become about equally self conscious either way. In my daily mode I have more understanding and assurance in my presentation than I ever have in my life, because I have a clearer idea of what the meets and bounds are. But being self-conscious and being "stagy" are two different things. And since the greatest value to me is to get at those things outside the meets and bounds of my regular life I don't announce every change or event in my life to every person I know. So at the end, while I don't like passing friends unseen, it seems no worse an offense than the other parts of my life that are unknown to them. ■



what I'll call matrifocal, egalitarian societies that were over run by patriarchal horse-barbarians, but because this was clearly a sanctuary where women could discuss ideas and follow them as they saw fit without having to concern themselves with what men might think or how they might react.

There were two men present, and both seemed impelled to make comments. It was dramatic how different the tone and styles were. It was a great demonstration of the observations that Deborah Tannen makes. Women's comments were shorter, and disagreements weren't pushed. The male comments were long, structured, forceful, authoritative and in ways confrontational.

I take relish in noting the following in paraphrase form: "This is all very interesting but why do we care about Goddess versus God anyhow, all these religions are just the source of the problem, we should sweep them all away". (the words sweep them all away were used). The comment was passed by until C. spoke up (C. is internationally known and notorious). She rebuked the man, saying that it's not religion per se that's the problem it's the categorical attitudes expressed as and through religion, the totalitarianism of addressing things with statements like "sweep it all away" that was the problem. We need more of just let things be. That exchange alone made my evening, but all of it was comforting. Just to hear things discussed this way instead of that way.

After the presentation a woman came up to me and reminded me that we'd met after a panel discussion I had been part of at the Cleveland International Film Festival a few years back. She invited me to the non-exclusive women's book club, which would meet at her home the next time.

THE FOLLOWING NIGHT I was supposed to meet a gay-couple from CT at one of our prospective charavah temples. Forgetting that those two guys are ALWAYS late, I arrived exactly on time for services only not to see them there. But I was already in...and then two people, a straight couple who support CT and are on the board of this alternate temple (V. and D.) were called to the beema (the main podium) for opening prayers. Sigh of relief. My friends showed up later. Afterwards it was very nice that V. gave me a very public hug. We had good discussion with the Rabbi and the Cantor but had no chance to meet any of the other congregants. But no one threw stones or went out of their way to question me or challenge me...so far. I suspect I'm still passing for transsexual...but I have to wonder if it's anyone's business, really. ■

#### **ANTHROPOLOGY:**

Exploring the variety of human groups and cultures that have developed across the globe and throughout time. Anthropologists hope that by seeing ourselves in the mirror of alternative cultural and historical possibilities, we can come to a better understanding of our own assumptions, values and patterns of behavior.

[Transvestism]

#### **AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STATE OF MIND**

*Elaine Suede: Hey, our local college's summer session has begun and we've diverted from our normal art history immersion to delve into "magic, witchcraft and religion." The course description:*

#### **Anth 230: Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion:**

Focuses on anthropological approaches to the study of cultural beliefs in the sacred: analysis of what is "religious" in many cultures; covers a variety of anthropological topics related to these practices, including myth, ritual, totemism, magic, and shamanism. Examination of the role that the study of religion, magic, and witchcraft has played in the theoretical development of anthropology.

*So now I see everything through anthro colored glasses. I present the following anthropological facts (including, possibly, a few factoids) regarding transvestism that are documented in a dusty old volume entitled *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. (See the end of this piece for book details.)*

**WHEN MEN** began to seek a share of religious and magical knowledge, formerly the property of women, their original objective was to make themselves resemble women so the spirits would find them acceptable. A common method was to put on women's clothes.

Transvestism is found in a majority of ancient priesthoods. Tacitus said the priests of Germanic tribes were muliebri omatu, men dressed up as women. Norse priests of sunrise and sunset rituals in honor of the Haddingjar (Heavenly Twins) were men whose office demanded that they wear the dress and hairstyles of women. Even Thor, the thunder god, received his magic hammer and was filled with power only after he put on the garments of the goddess Freya and pretended to be a bride.

At the ancient Argive "Feast of Wantonness" (Hubritska) men became women by wearing women's dresses and veils, temporarily assuming feminine powers in violation of a specific taboo.

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The original Hubritska was an Argive "Feast of Lechery" featuring transvestism. Men broke a specific taboo by wearing women's veils and assuming women's magic power.

Christianity later condemned as devil-worship all forms of transvestism, because of its implication that men acquired power through connections with women, whether it was a sexual connection or a masquerade.

Cretan priests of Leukippe, the White-Mare Mother, always wore female dress. So did priests of Heracles, ostensibly in memory of their god's service (in female dress) to the Lydian goddess Omphale, personification of the omphalos. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides said men in his day put on women's clothing to invoke the aid of the goddess Venus.

Roman priests of the Magnus Mater dressed as women, and transvestism figured prominently in Roman rites of Lupercalia and the Ides of January. The custom was still prevalent in the time of St. Augustine, who inveighed against men who clothed themselves in women's garments at the feast of Janus. He said such men could not attain salvation, even if they were otherwise good Christians. Before his conversion to Christianity, St. Jerome even participated in ritual transvestism, though his biographers tried to pretend that he had worn women's clothes by mistake.

Despite Augustine and other church fathers, ritual transvestism continued. Men dressed in women's clothes at religious festivals at Amasea in the 5th century, and again - or still - at the Kalends of January in the 10th century. Balsamon said in the 12th century even the clergy participated in pagan rites in the nave of the church, wearing masks and female dress. Gregory of Tours, bishop of Auvergne in Merovingian times, was forced to give up his church to a crowd of "demons," their leader dressed as a woman and seated on the Episcopal throne. The inquisitor Jean Bodin asserted that male and female witches actually changed their sex by changing clothes with one another.

Men's transvestitism seems to be rooted in the ancient desire to practice female magick. It has also been argued that it was perhaps most likely that shamanism was originally a profession of women, and for men to enter it, they had to become as much like women as possible.

In the Celebes, religious rituals remained in the hands of women, assisted by an order of priests who wore female dress and were called tjalabai, "imitation

women." The same word was applied in Arabia to the robe that men copied from women, djallaba. Among the northern Batak the shaman is always a woman, and the office is hereditary in the female line, because there was no transvestism.

In Borneo, magicians are required to wear female clothing. Siberian shamans often wore women's clothing. In Malaya, the manang (shaman) puts on women's clothing after initiation and remains a transvestite for life. Almost all the spirits invoked by a manang are in the name of Ini (Great Mother).

Similarly, American Indians viewed the Berdache as a gifted medicine man. He claimed to receive an order from the Moon-goddess in a dream, to the effect that he must turn female and become one of her own. He was accepted by the tribe as the woman he wanted to be, was allowed to wear women's clothes, joined the women's craft guilds and dance societies. Eliade says, "Ritual and symbolic transformation into a woman is probably explained by an ideology derived from the archaic matriarchy."

An observer in Malaysia said it was "more than likely that manangism (shamanism) was originally a profession of women, and that men were gradually admitted to it, at first only by becoming as much like women as possible." The manang or shaman put on female clothing after initiation, and remained a transvestite for life. A Dyak manang still wears women's dress and follows women's occupations.

"This transvestism, with all the changes that it involved, is accepted after a supernatural command has been thrice received in dreams: to refuse would be to seek death. This combination of elements shows clear traces of a feminine magic and a matriarchal mythology, which must formerly have dominated the shamanism of the Sea Dyak; almost all the spirits are invoked by the manang under the name of Ini (Great Mother)."

The Krishna cult as currently practiced in India still demands ritual transvestism for men who adore the feminine principle by identifying themselves as Krishna's Gopis. They wear the clothes and ornaments of women and even observe a "menstrual period" of a few days' retirement each month. According to their theological doctrine, "all souls are feminine to God."

**Resource:** *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, Barbara G. Walker Harper San Francisco; 1st edition (1983).

[The 70's]

## A CULTURAL DIVIDE

*Diane Frank: While visiting Boston recently I picked up The Boston Phoenix - a local weekly free paper/ arts paper and found this article:*

**30 years ago: June 3, 1975**

Dave O'Brian questions Boston Police chief of intelligence John Doyle about his department's policy of keeping reports on innocent transvestites.

Doyle said "the purpose of these records is to keep track of the areas they frequent. They seem to attract a lot of weirdoes that like to assault them and so forth." Asked if "drag queen's could be written up for doing nothing illegal- just standing around" -- Doyle responded "That's possible."

"Regardless of how one reacts to the presence on the street of men dressed as women, the mere act of transvestism is not illegal, and an apparent policy of keeping surveillance records on those engaged in practice, therefore, comes perilously close to penalizing a lifestyle."

[Last Laugh]

## THE NAME GAME – REDEUX



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The Alpha Omega Society is a non-profit social support group for heterosexual crossdressers and their wives or partners. Our membership is open to all who share this focus. Also, members from related organizations, helping professionals, and approved guests are welcome when cleared through Alpha Omega's officers may attend meetings.

Meetings are the second Saturday evening of each month unless a special event is scheduled that takes the place of the regularly scheduled meeting. The location of the meeting or event is only released to members or others with the approval of an officer. Members and visitors must be 18 years of age or older. We will exchange newsletters with any other similar group. Send all correspondence to The Alpha Omega Society, P.O. Box 2053, Sheffield Lake, OH 44054, or email us at [officers@aosoc.org](mailto:officers@aosoc.org)