

ONE Omega

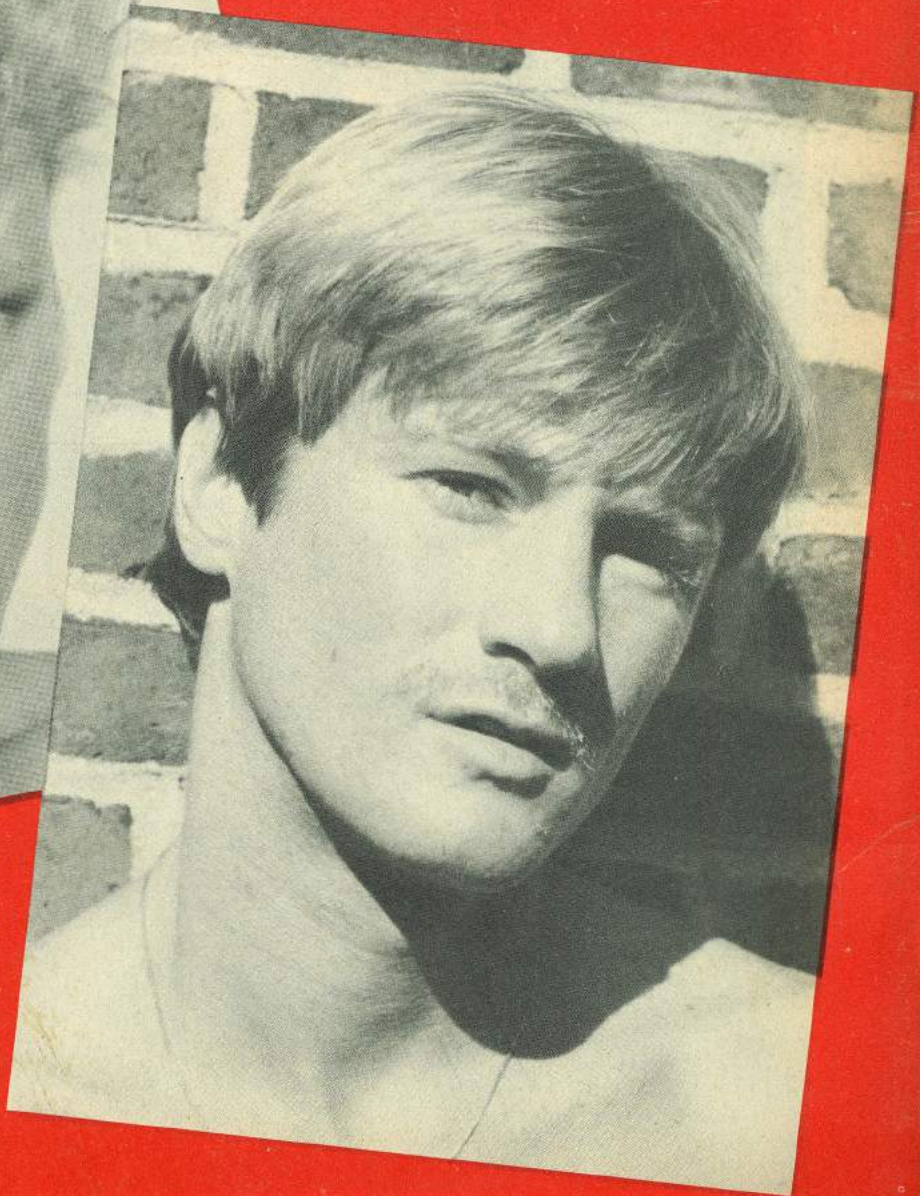
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Men in Furs
Charles Ludlam
Melba Moore



Rock Schizophrenia:
The Two Faces
of Jobriath



The return of the first 'true fairy'

JOBRIATH REVISITED

by Charles Herschberg

photos John Michael Cox

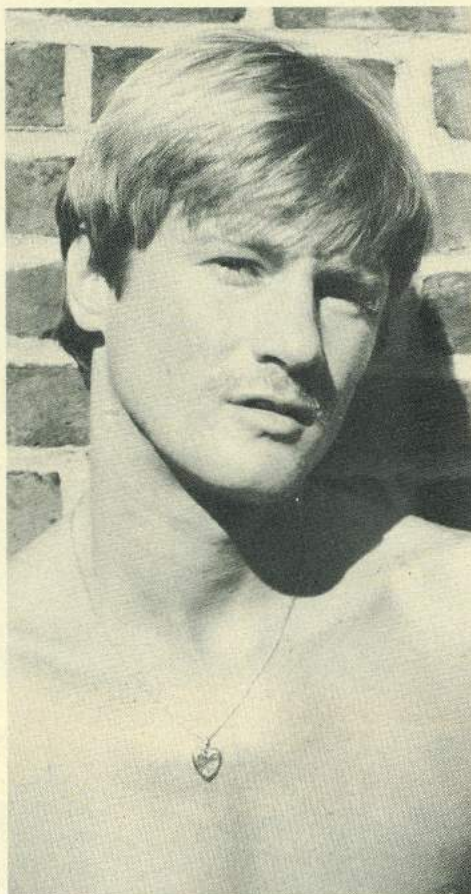
It was 1973 and the public was hungry. The man who discovered Carly Simon and brought the Rolling Stones to America psyched out the mentality of a generation turned off to war and on to drugs, and fed them a billion of the sweetest promises ever kissed from a Svengali's lips. The impresario, one Jerry Brandt, presented Jobriath.

Not fond of understatement, Brandt simply described his new find as the superstar of the Seventies and the biggest artist in the world. "It's Sinatra, Elvis, The Beatles and now Jobriath," Brandt announced. "Jobriath is a combination of Dietrich, Marceau, Nureyev, Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Nijinski, Bernhardt, an astronaut, the best of Jagger, Bowie, Dylan, with the glamor of Garbo. He is a singer, dancer, woman, man."

Brandt said he believed the energy force of 1973 came from homosexuals and Puerto Ricans. Jobriath, who was not Puerto Rican, wore magenta lipstick and pancake make-up hued robin's egg blue. Elektra Records signed Jobriath for \$300,000 down, and he became the first and only pop/rock artist to describe himself as "a true fairy" in *Newsweek* and *Rolling Stone*. *The New York Times* called Jobriath "a brazen parody that celebrates outrageousness for the sake of outrageousness and heralds transvestism and pseudo-homosexuality as one's most cherished idiosyncrasies." Naturally.

Jobriath and his idiosyncrasies assaulted New York City from a 41 x 43-foot billboard high above Times Square, the billboard being a reproduction of the nude cover photo of his first album, *Jobriath*. The haunting freeze frame of him floating in space, his lower torso crumbling like a plaster statue at the snapped-off thighs, gave the record album its collector's item status.

They talked about the Paris Opera House for Jobriath's performing debut. And Radio City Music Hall at Easter. As Jobriath envisioned it, the 45-minute entrance would be a difficult opening to



follow. "I'll be dressed like King Kong and I'll swing from a rope onto a replica of the Empire State Building. We're trying to work it out so that the Empire State Building will turn into a squirting penis which will feature a piano and stairs for me. As I descend the penis, I'll turn into a Marlene Dietrich lookalike."

On all frontiers, Jobriath promised too much, too soon. He did record several songs of homosexual love and a tribute to the movie queens he always wanted to be, but the music never came close to the type. Even Andy Warhol's *Interview* put Jobriath down with the critique, "Being a 'fairy' these days just isn't enough."

While the Warhol set rejected his decadent excesses, Jobriath received fan mail from twelve-year-old girls, a response he neither understood nor

cared for. He and his band The Creatures ("beautiful and talented creatures with fabulous bodies who throw me about the stage") continued on Elektra with light to moderate sales. Peter Frampton dropped by the recording studio one day so they put him on a record. Things like that.

In the midst of recording their third LP, the artist accused the manager of sinking the advance money into a personal venture called the Erotic Circus. This take-off on Brandt's own once-successful New York rock club the Electric Circus, folded in virtually one night. Jobriath, who had refused to perform for the opening, vanished completely from the music scene.

Independently, his Creatures have gone on to other things. One wrote a piece of mood music for a sex scene in a bisexual porn film. Nobody remembers the name of the movie but "More, More, More" as breathed by Andrea True, became a classic disco hit for Gregg Diamond whose Diamond Touch Productions also brought former Creatures Jim Gregory and Steve Love to TK Records as musicians on the *Star-cruiser*, *Bionic Boogie* and *Hot Butterfly* LPs.

As for Jobriath, there was a rumor that he'd become a Jesus Freak. Or a guru in India. Some said he'd gone to Europe for a sex change and was living in Paris as a wine and dined showgirl.

"Jobriath committed suicide in a drug, alcohol and publicity overdose," says the one who should know—the person who was once Jobriath. "That whole hype just drove him crazy," he says over the telephone when finally reached for his first interview since dropping out in 1974. "He was meant for hype. If he'd had multiple sclerosis, he probably would have been the MS poster child. His lifestyle was hotel suites and limousines and enough drugs to get him from one to the other. He struck back by disappearing in thin air. Jobriath is dead, but he had a reason for being. He was a vaccination for the rest of us."

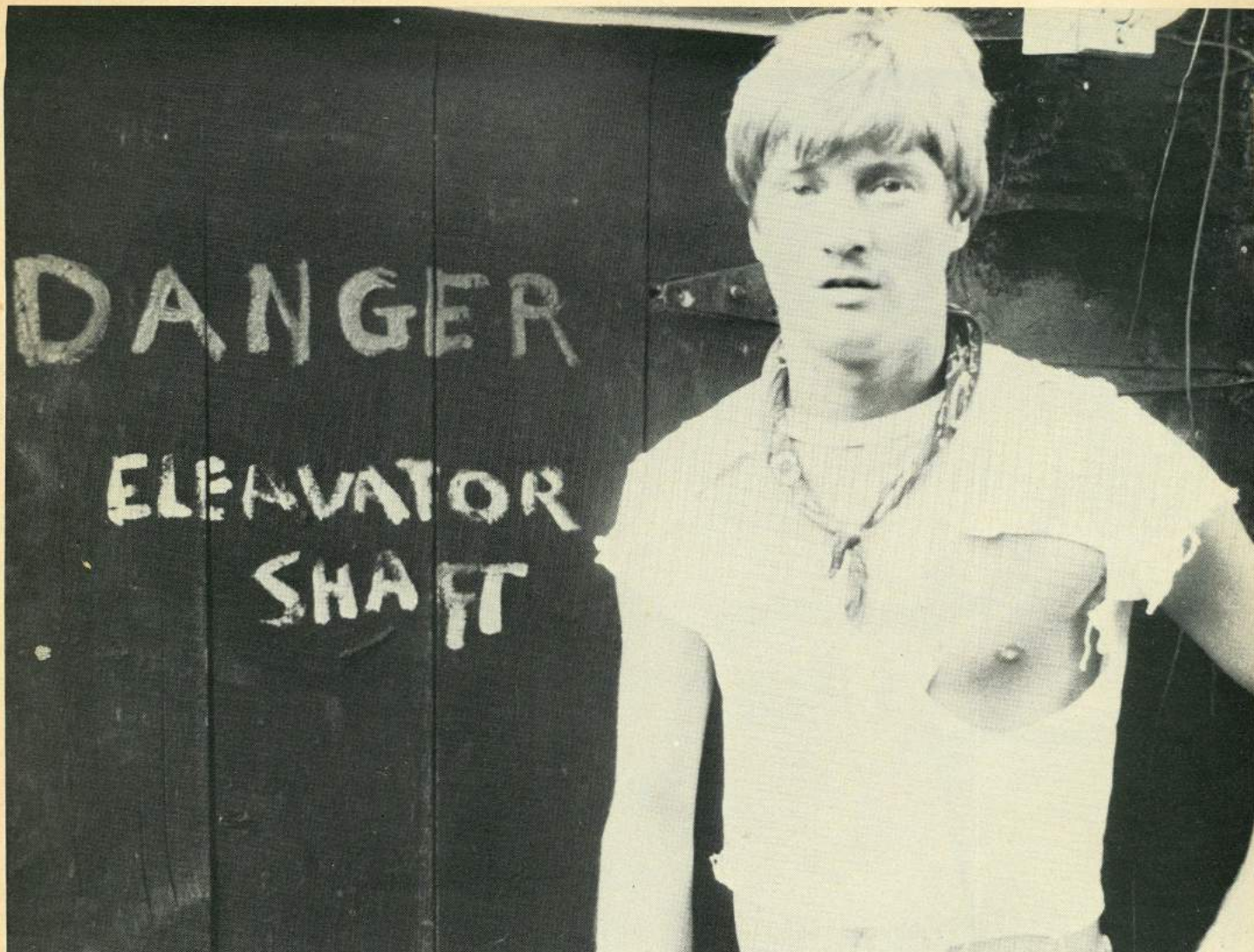


The rest of them are active fantasies dwelling inside the body which was once Jobriath's. "Schizophrenia is my lifestyle. I think everybody is schizophrenic but they'll all fighting it. I, or should I say we, are not fighting it. Come over," invites one of the personalities. "I'll ask some of us to come out and play."

He, or they, play in a pyramid on the roof of the Chelsea Hotel, New York haven for avant-garde creative types from Dylan Thomas to Bob Dylan, although it is Sid Vicious and the ghost of Nancy Spungen who roam the Chelsea halls now. After an elevator ride and a secret stairway, we enter the quarter acre of private roof garden through a door marked Emergency Exit Only. Cole Berlin is in the pyramid playing a white piano.

Since this self-proclaimed amalgam of Cole Porter and Irving Berlin used to be Jobriath, it is a bit startling to find him physically closer to Robert Redford than David Bowie. Dashing, tan, seemingly





broad of build in a white tuxedo, Cole taps the keys and speaks of himself in the third person: "If sex, sugar and plutonium are too excessible; if rape, terrorism and hypoglycemia are all too rampant; if imperialistic pigs are destroying the world and if people are drinking too many pina colodas, then Cole Berlin the piano lounge artist doesn't want to know it."

Between melodies he describes this self as a magnum of champagne. "Pop his ivory cork and let his eighty-eight nostalgic bubbles tinkle away your memories of Apocalypse. Throw an inflated buck or two into his tip jar and select any escape from 'Stardust' to 'Star Wars.' However, you must remember this...as time goes by...there is a limit to the depths of rum-soaked Muzak to which anyone can sink. Even Cole Berlin, human jukebox though he is, refuses to play 'Feelings'."

Cole, it is explained, has an unfathomably corny repertoire because "he has to support the rest of us. He's the on-

ly one of us who actually works for a living, maintaining us in the manner to which we are accustomed. Jobriath squandered hundreds of thousands of dollars in record advances and Joby Johnson has always been kept."

It's a segue-way. Moving behind a screen, Cole emerges moments later as Joby-less Cole Berlin, more Peter Berlin, filling out a pair of red shorts and a t-shirt ripped to expose at least a nipple.

Introducing himself as the boy nymph within us all, Joby narrates his own story from the objective point of view. "You can find Joby on Christopher Stret trying to buy mustachioed clones with his looks."

Joby is the blond brat who's always getting mail from the public health clinic. "Sometimes the rest of us think he goes out and gets us all in trouble just for the punishment," one of the characters adds. "He's the only one who doesn't know that sexual fulfillment is the banana life dangles in front of us just to keep us running."

Joby is at first reluctant to reflect upon Jobriath. "Her? Do I have to talk about her?" he groans. Even though there are still a few Mary Quant crayons lying somewhere around the pyramid, this one is much more into "Macho Man."

"Disco is perfect," he grins. "It's such bullshit, I love it. 'Macho Man' is such a funny record. Jobriath sang 'I'm a Man' (I'm a Man) in drag. That was retarded, wasn't it? His music is confused, eclectic and debauched. It seems like a long time ago. Jobriath was an insane genius unstructured for the pop industry. Clive Davis who discovered Patti Smith and Barry Manilow said that. So much for sanity and structure."

Joby slips into his origin when asked to explain Jobriath's failure. "Mr. P.T. Barnum Brandt was so busy getting his name on posters and buses, he neglected to get me on tour or get my album played. They used a mannequin's ass for the poster and it wasn't as round as Jobriath's. That is probably why Jobriath didn't make it, even though in 1973 he



Jobriath and The Creatures: Jim Gregory, Steve Love, Jobriath, Hayden Wayne and Gregg Diamond

came up with 'World Without End', one of the first disco tunes. That opulent Broadway and disco influence paved the way for the new character, the composer of the new depression who's the composite of all of us.

"Even Joby stays off the streets when the new one is at work. It practically kills us, but we don't care because all of us are ready to die for this new one."

When Joby Johnson is not playing at embodying the Fire Island and Christopher Street chic; when Cole Berlin is not plunking away at the world's most requested and retarded songs; then Mr. Broadway writes escapist music for people who can no longer make their grocery bills. If the budding Mr. Broadway happens to use those lush, liturgical chords once used by

someone called Jobriath, the explanation is simple. It was from Jobriath's ashes that the rest of them were born.

Mr. Broadway's just-completed first musical can not deny the collaboration. It's called *Pop Star*. "It's about a pop star, and about hype, and," he pauses, "it's about America."

