

The look that says:

Isn't HE cute?

A DEEP breath, a little expert help with a zip fastener . . . and the blonde is ready to face the audience. HIS audience.

For Laurie Lee, daring dress, high heels and all, is a female impersonator.

As "The People" reported in the start of a fascinating series last week, Laurie is just one of a growing number of men with an act that is big business all over the country.

In pubs and clubs, "drag" packs in the audiences. Men love it. Women love it. And Laurie's biggest fan is his girl friend, Jean Raeburn — that's her in the picture.

She says: "It's the best comedy I've seen. I think women like it more than men because they find the clothes and make-up enthralling."

"Many even ask Laurie how he does his eyes so well. And that bust of his gets them all."

Laurie, who has fooled smart London hotels by wearing his women's clothes, says: "To me, it's just a job that involves dressing up as a woman. It's no more than that."

What's the secret of his success — and the "bust that gets them all?"

The series that has set everybody talking delves more into this social phenomenon — and the dangers to the performers — on Pages Two and Three.



THE PEOPLE
19 JAN. 1969

Terry Durkin
(Times Place, Bristol)

The injections have already had two side effects.

Soon after he started the injections Terry, a former invoice clerk for Wimpeys, started to lose his hair. "Luckily it has started to grow again," he said.

The other effect: "I lost some of my sexual urge. Something that always happens I was told. It is more difficult to become sexually excited once you have had the implants."

Terry added: "I'm still a man and like the ladies, though."

Terry earns between £12 and £15 a night if he works near home; more if he travels. He expects to make at least £80 a week and is booked up, apart from one or two dates, until the end of the year.

AIDS

Are the deprivations, are the risks, really worth it?

Although many drag artists say that a hormone-induced bosom undoubtedly helps to publicise an act, they prefer to use physical or mechanical aids.

Manchester's Bernard "Bunny" Lewis wears a specially moulded "breast-plate" which he straps on his chest and wears under a see-through blouse.

"I got it in Paris," he said, "although a lot of artists there were having injections."

"Bunny" has a girlfriend, but "I keep her in the background."

Londoner Laurie Lee (38-26-38), ex-electrician's mate, ex-chimney-sweep's assistant, does special exercises "to keep my chest flabby and my waist thin."

He added in way of explanation: "It's wonderful what you can do with a tight corset and a lot of pulling."

Would he ever take hormone injections? He replied with an emphatic "No." And he added:

"If you take these injections, I don't believe you are a female impersonator any longer. You are a sort of in-between... a freak."

Men like "Bunny" Lewis and Laurie Lee see no harm in shopping in women's stores for their showbusiness clothes. Just as Terry Durham does not worry about his induced bust.

Such complacency and confidence by these men or any other drag artist is open to challenge.

STUDY

Professor John Cohen, Professor of Psychology at Manchester University, who has been making a special study of the subject, told David Farr in an interview:

"It is a general rule, especially in Hollywood, that if an actor plays certain parts and acquires a certain image over a period of time, then his real self is gradually merged into the image."

"Even for a celebrated female impersonator it would be dangerous to play the role too long."

"He would find himself living the part he acts so that his life WAS the impersonation."

"No matter how rational or normal artists are at the beginning, the image will in the end conquer them. The better the artist, the greater the danger."

"The longer his career goes on, the more difficult he must find it in his normal everyday non-stage life to behave as a normal man. He must eventually be living this impersonation in every fibre of his being."

"His real self is going to

fade out and his impersonated self is going to take its place."

Professor Cohen also warned artists who resorted to drugs and surgery to "feminise" their figures.

"Once you start injecting powerful hormones you upset the whole body system," he said.

"People who say that they can simply take another course of hormones to revert back to their male state are misleading themselves, because no one can be certain how the body will react."

Professor Cohen also answered a question asked by scores of readers:

WHY IS DRAG SO POPULAR IN THE NORTH?

His answer should give some consolation at least to those Northcountrymen who were beginning to doubt their tough image.

"I don't think there is anything terribly significant in this," Professor Cohen said.

"Because of TV and many other factors, the North has been opened up to a very cosmopolitan way of life."

"If you go to Blackburn or Burnley you find that they are quite as advanced as any place in the South."

He was not able to say how popular drag was in Wales.

But the team of "People" reporters who carried out our survey found that it was almost as popular there as in the North.

MAIL

"After I toured mining areas like Ty-bryn and Tre-harris in Wales, I got a tremendous mail from the district and more than 20 letters from Welshmen who wanted to become impersonators," said "Bunny" Lewis.

But it is in Yorkshire and Lancashire the clubland that it is most in demand.

Take the typical scene at

the Rose and Thistle Club, Yorkshire Street, Burnley.

There, another Lewis, no relation, made a great hit with a noisy, good-natured Lancashire audience with a series of risqué jokes and impersonations of Shirley Bassey.

The men in the audience argued volubly as to whether or not the high-heeled figure

in the evening gown was or was not a man.

Only when he took off his auburn wig at the end did they learn the truth.

What Jack Lewis, a 38-year-old Yorkshireman, did not tell them was that he took a history degree at New College, Oxford, until he went on the stage.

There he made such a hit as a pantomime dame he went into the drag business.

"I still work as an actor but I get more drag jobs nowadays. I do it because it pays," he said.

"Ten years ago drag was looked on with a jaundiced eye. Now it's respectable."

Certainly the highly res-

pectable audience thought so.

"I think he's great entertainment," said Mrs. Isa Martin of Parliament Street, Burnley.

Comment from Kevin McGuire of Grove Street, Ashton in Makerfield: "A real good turn."

And Mollie Ashworth, of Colne Road, Burnley, said: "I don't see anything wrong with men dressing as women. After all, women dress like men nowadays. If the enter-

tainment value is good that's all that matters to me."

One person who is not too sure about the benefits of the drag boom is attractive brunette Mrs. Brenda Steel.

She says frankly that she

is passionately jealous of her husband. But it isn't other women that bother her.

It's the men she is jealous of!

Brenda, who lives with her 34-year-old husband, Roy, and their two children in Yew Street, Audenshaw, Manchester, said:

"It's ridiculous, but since Roy started his drag act I have become really jealous."

"But it's the men who watch his act and try to make passes that get me furious."

"I would know what to do if it was women flirting with him, but what can you do when it is a man who fancies your husband?"

Roy, who works in a bakery, started as a female impersonator three years ago, although he had been in showbusiness as a comedian much longer.

'WONDERFUL'

Drag began with him jokingly impersonating Carmen Miranda at a show.

Now his act includes full dress impressions of Lena Horne, Shirley Bassey and Eartha Kitt.

Roy's wife makes most of his dresses and helps him choose the gowns and wigs.

Brenda said she knew that people in audiences just assumed her husband was homosexual. "I certainly know he isn't. We have been married for 13 years."

"I know there is nothing wrong with him so I don't mind him doing his act. In fact I love watching him. I think it's wonderful."

Her two children—Joyce, 10, and John, eight—have on occasions provided uncomfortable moments.

Perhaps the most embarrassing occasion for her was when her little girl brought her composition book home from school.

Said Brenda: "On one of the pages she had written: 'Daddy bought a beautiful pair of high-heeled shoes on Saturday.' I don't know what the poor teacher must have thought."

Roy himself sees nothing at all wrong with being a drag artist. "I make a lot of money," he said. "Drag has given me a nice home and a car and a lot of other luxuries I wouldn't have."

"I know people think I am 'queer' just because I dress up to do an act. Let's face it, if I wanted to be queer I could be without putting women's dresses on."

Roy said it was not unusual for customers in pubs and clubs to try to get a date. "It really is fantastic how far some of them get carried away."

"But I have never had any nasty experiences, no matter how rough some of the bookings have been. Even the real toughs are always extremely well mannered."

"You might say they

treat me like a lady," he said with a laugh.

An unbiased and fascinating view of drag in Britain came from American Ricky Renee, who had the temerity to set up a drag show opposite Danny La Rue's club in 1966.

It didn't last. But Ricky has no regrets. He met his wife, Sylvia, when she was working as a showgirl for Danny. Now Ricky makes no secret of the fact that he respects Danny.

"Until he became very well known it was still a taboo subject outside the West End," said Ricky.

"In the past year or so I've been doing clubs in the North and it is quite astonishing how well it is received. I don't really know why."

His wife interrupted to say there had been a widening of moral outlook in the country and "People will now accept Ricky not as an impersonator but as the talented artist that he is."

Ricky then took up the point.

"I was amazed when I first came to England to see the way people thought of impersonators."

"In America, they are completely accepted as artistes and there is even a theatre named after one impersonator."

"England was the only country where they didn't treat the impersonator with respect."

BAD NAME

"I know there are a number of homosexuals doing drag acts."

"But I'm not a drag act—I'm a female impressionist. I do impressions of women, like Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, Mae West."

"It's the people who go around in drag during the day and then do an act at night who get us all a bad name."

"I don't even want to be associated with that sort."

"Danny has given us a certain amount of respectability, but it could all be ruined if these so-called drag acts carry on."

For the moment, though, Ricky sees no sign of a weakening in the popularity.

"Five years ago I'd go into a club where families were having a night out and the women would quit in disgust."

"Not at my act but at the thought of my dressing and acting like a woman."

"Now they love it."

ACCORDING to the locals, Queen Victoria was so taken with the architecture that she stopped her carriage and said: "Cor, what a smashing new pub," and that is why it is called The ROYAL Vauxhall Tavern to this day.

Well, whatever the Old Lady said 100 or so years ago, it would be most interesting to hear her comments on the same pub now.

Especially if she were to pay a regal visit while a man dressed as a pregnant girl danced on the bar counter singing: "There's always something there to remind me. . ."

The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, which stands sootily in the shadow of the railway bridge in Kennington Lane, its once striking pillars painted brown, is typical of a new trend in pubs in working-class areas of London.

At one time it was hard work making the barn of a place pay.

Nowadays it is packed nearly every night. Because drag artists—female impersonators—put on a show every night.

And what a change it has made to the old place.

FIGHTS

"In the old days we used to get a rough Guinness mob here," said Mrs. Peggy Ritchie, 39-year-old wife of the tenant, Mr. Robert Ritchie. "There were usually three fights a night, and blood everywhere.

"Then I realised that the one night we put on a drag show it was trouble-free. Now we put a show on every night—and a lunchtime special on Sundays—and the crowds love it. We've trebled our business."

DRAG, it seems, is what the working man and his wife want.

The team of "People" reporters who investigated this phenomenon found that it was undisputed as a top attraction in clubs of the North and in Wales.

In London, it is the publicans, especially those in big Victorian houses, who are cashing in.

And although drag audiences in pubs are predominantly curiosity value, attracts all sorts of people.

The night Ada Clump danced around the beer-engines at the Royal Vauxhall there were deb-type dollies in cuddly coats drinking rum and coke, there were matronly ladies sipping stout, large gentlemen drinking pints and one or two groups of "gay" onlookers consuming a variety of drinks.

"Gay" is the way in which homosexuals prefer to describe themselves.

SEWING

Ada Clump is the stage name of 28-year-old David Bishop. He used to do a lot of bit-parts and backstage work. Then he started in drag.

"If I went out there in a dinner jacket to sing and to tell a few jokes, I would not get anywhere," he said. "In this outfit, I'm halfway there."

The Royal Vauxhall is the first pub David has worked in.

"It's a full-time business . . . sewing and knitting during the day, shows at night," he explained.

David shouldered his way through the crowd, ignored one grossly indecent suggestion and mounted the mini-stage.

He wore bell-bottom trou-



Behind the scenes at a London pub: Pussy and Bow (Alan Amsby and Jeff Claridge) get into their undies before going on stage where part of the performance (left) includes stripping a member of the audience — by "previous arrangement."

sers, a full-length silver coat with red velvet cuffs, matching silver gloves and shoes, a feather boa, glittering jewellery, blonde wig, false eyelashes and lashings of make-up.

Moving cautiously on to the bar top, which was at the same level as the stage, he told a few jokes while expertly side-stepping the glasses and odd elbow.

After singing "Everything's Coming Up Rosy," "What a Rare Mood I'm In" and "Bye, Bye Blackbird" he departed to cries of "Put her down, you don't know where she's been."

Later he did a strip, the climax of which came when he flung off a full-length blue coat with a clumsy flourish to reveal "Miss Clump" clad in a white body stocking and black leotard.

"It could only happen in England," said a 19-year-old blonde Swedish au pair girl who had been taken in by her boy-friend to "see the sights."

"It's great entertainment . . . different," commented George Crawley, a 61-year-old car park attendant who

lives around the corner. "Most of the performers are better dressed than women."

A double act that night featured "Pussy and Bow."

Pussy is 22-year-old Alan Amsby, who used to earn £30 a week as a wigmaker.

Bow is Jeff Claridge, who could be seen until recently cutting cod fillets in a Mac Fisheries shop.

They decided to go in for drag a year ago, after criticising a show. They thought they could do better.

FULL-TIME

For a time they kept up their old trades during the day and did drag at night.

Now they are full professionals and even employ Jeff's fiancée, 21-year-old Roberta Turfrey, as their dresser.

When Roberta first set eyes on her fiancé she was convinced he was a woman.

After she realised it was only an impersonation, she thought he was a homosexual.

Now, she says, she knows better.

"I can vouch for the fact he's not that way at all," she said. "I wouldn't want

to know if he was. Believe me, he's all man."

Roberta added: "There's no doubt a lot of men fancy him before they realise he is a bloke in drag. He's very good-looking.

"I wish I looked half as good as he does when he is dressed up.

"I don't have to worry about the men—he's friendly with them, but that's all. It's the girls, if anything. They really go for him. They follow him everywhere. And Alan."

Confirmation came from Alan, with the comment in frank Cockney tones: "I've had a few birds in my time. Too bleedin' true I have."

THE Royal Vauxhall

Tavern is south of the Thames. But the fascination of drag applies to both sides of the river.

You couldn't have anything more "Gorblimey" than The City Arms in West Ferry Road in the East End dockland area known as the Isle of Dogs.

About 200 customers were jammed into the pub when ex-merchant seaman Keith Mills appeared wearing a figure-hugging gold brocade dress.

The audience included three members of the executive of the National Union for Insurance Workers sitting at reserved tables, and a "People" reporter.

Our representative, for-

merly a foreign correspondent, stated in his report:

"If I had not known that it was a man I would have sworn it was a woman and a pretty seductive one at that."

Another scene, in which Keith Mills, who disclosed later that he was engaged to be married, wore an orange satin dress split up the right leg, was described by our representative as "unbelievably feminine."

After noting the "blue" jokes which accompanied the performance, "the one about the Eskimo boy and one about the Archbishop of Canterbury," our reporter concluded they were equal to "anything I have heard in Hongkong or Singapore."

CAREFREE

Two women who were watching (they stated their husbands were at home baby-sitting) did not appear shocked, however.

This was a reaction which blended into the pattern which emerged during our survey of The Drag Boom—women were prepared to accept "blue" jokes from drag performers which they would not have taken from an ordinary male comedian.

Ribald jokes were also accepted in a good-natured, carefree way.

At the Loughborough Hotel, South London, a female impersonator fished inside his low-cut, ankle-length dress, extracted his false breasts, two tennis balls, and threw them to a customer at the nearest table.

He then asked that they should be thrown back "one at a time, love."

Thereupon he opened the neckline of his dress, leaned forward, let the tennis balls fall neatly into place, and carried on with his act.

The drag artist in this particular case was Roy Alvis, 38-year-old partner in a double act he puts on with Danny O'Dell, aged 31.

Danny and Roy are followed by drag fans from pub to pub, and collect around £15 for a show, depending on the size of the house.

Both said they had plenty of girl-friends.

It was their first appearance at the Loughborough Hotel when "The People" reporters saw them, and they made quite a hit.

Mr. Michael O'Byrne, the landlord, said that £4,000

had been spent on decorating the pub's big lounge.

"I saw Roy and Danny perform at another pub recently, and there was a crowd of about 600 people watching. If they draw an audience of that size here, I will be showing a profit in no time," he added.

Mr. O'Byrne agreed that one or two men in the audience might possibly be of a suspect nature but that he had seen no indications of any misbehaviour as, indeed, was the case in all the pubs covered in our survey.

Pubs are not the only places where Danny O'Dell and Roy Alvis do their act.

They said that they had also spent three tours of a month entertaining American troops in Germany, with all expenses paid.

ONLY a bus-ride from the Loughborough Hotel is the Union Tavern in Camberwell New Road.

There Lee Sutton, aged 46, put on an act in which he portrayed a woman in her thirties.

A crowd of about 500 people clapped and cheered as he cracked one joke after another and admonished the dozen young men sitting at a table in the centre of the pub, trying to interrupt him, with the words:

"Will the queer, mixed-up bunch in the centre keep quiet?"

The audience was composed mainly of respectable married and courting couples and obviously enjoyed themselves.

PERFUME

Lee Sutton started his professional career only last January.

Until then he was a clerk in a theatrical booking office although he had been an amateur female impersonator in the R.A.F. during the war.

"I have shown no profit till now," he said.

Since last January, when the Great Drag Boom got under way, he has bought some 30 female costumes and dresses in addition to imitation jewellery, wigs, shoes, stockings, brassieres and false bosoms, not to mention eye lashes, perfume, powder and lipstick.

Outside his show, he said, he had more girl-friends than he could cope with.

Several of the people who attended the show insisted



DAVID BISHOP



LOVEY AND BOWY

that Lee Sutton was a great artist.

Mr. Charlie King and his wife, Doris, who visit the Tavern three times a week, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, when Lee Sutton performs, said that on Sundays people queued up outside the Tavern at 5 p.m. although the performance does not start till 9 p.m.

The Union Tavern's owner, Jim Hayes, said he had never had it so good since he started drag shows.

The pub which looks like the lounge bar of the Queen Mary in both size and shape, is at present being redecorated from top to bottom at a cost of several hundred pounds.

The four-man band is good and the barmaids are pretty and good-tempered.

"What more can one ex-

pect for the price of a pint of bitter?" remarked the pub's manager, Mr. Bill Gill.

However, there are a few people who go to the Tavern who refuse to watch Lee's show, free though it may be.

Two coloured men from Barbados who drank alone said of the show: "There is no future in it, man. We know that the performer is a man dressed like a woman, so our imagination cannot imagine."

His friend added: "No future in it at all."

NEXT WEEK: The psychology of the drag man through the eyes of a medical expert.

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