The late 80s gay man: DJ Colin Peters

Colin Peters fails to look out of place amongst the young and hopping crowd who regularly fill his very popular clubs in the Capital. He fails at little else. Currently running three nights at Busby's, Charing Cross Road (namely *Bang* and *Propaganda*), *Benjy's* in Mile End as well as *Palm Beach* in Streatham, he has seen his successes spiral over the past fifteen years and has become one of the most respected club hosts on the gay scene. Amazingly he's still only twenty-nine and appears, even with close examination, to be nearer twenty-two than thirty.

Naturally, Colin has suffered some criticism from somewhat envious competitors, criticisms that usually include some reference to the type of night-owl supposedly attracted to his clubs, namely 'the hairdresser set' and other 'prissy queens', but a visit to one of the above mentioned clubs soon knocks that idea on the head. His security staff have yet to report an incident of a customer attempting to smuggle in a bottle of peroxide or a selection of multi-coloured *Benders*. His punters are, on the whole, simply out for a good time, dancing and drinking until the early hours, preferring the dance floor to the dark corner, the chat to the heavy cruise. Colin Peters gives them what they want and they keep coming back for more.

Not long out of short pants, Colin began to DJ. As soon as he left school, at sixteen, he spent most of the night hours spinning discs, and the daytime in full employment: "When I left school I went into hairdressing, and also I was DJing with a mobile set-up. That job only lasted six months because one day, when I was walking past Debenhams in Croydon, I saw that they wanted a Display Junior. I'd passed my Art exam in school, so I applied for it, and got the job. All the time I was there, I kept at my mobile disco, doing wedding receptions and twenty-firsts. I was also working for Mecca at straight clubs like *Cinderella Rockerfella's* and *Scamps*.

"I got myself promoted to Assistant Display Manager, but by then the disco work was coming in more and more and I had to be in at 9am every morning; it was doing me in. I mean, I had to organise window displays, Christmas grottos and the staff. Anyway, one day the Director of the store called me up to his office and asked why I was always looking so tired, why I was slacking. I decided there and then that my future lay in nightclubs and I walked out. I cried my eyes out and thought 'Oh my God! What have I done? I've just left a secure job, with a secure income, tax and NI paid for me, what am I doing?' I'd been there seven years and I was scared. Since then I've not looked back".

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Since then, Colin has only looked forward. He has presented a lunchtime programme for a pirate radio station, Skyline, based in South London, worked for Radio Jackie, compered an hotel party for London Weekend Television and has presented Israel's equivalent of *Top Of The Pops*, interviewing such luminaries as Midge Ure and Matt Johnson of *The The* fame. "That's what I really enjoy, interviewing people and compering, talking to people about their lives in front of cameras or on radio. I'm not scared of crowds or of microphones. I'm more scared of something like that (*indicating my tape recorder*) than if I had it in my hand. The microphone that is. I just enjoy making people happy. If I could have a wish come true, I would be a radio presenter on a good station, who's a celeb for old girls and goes around opening supermarkets. That's what I'd really like to do."

Meanwhile, Colin has *Bang* on his plate. The club, held at present at Busby's in Central London, has recently expanded. Monday nights proved so popular that, as soon as *Discotheque* ran its course (a club run by Steve Swindells), he snatched up Saturday nights, which are now equally packed with good-time-boys. *Bang* has a lengthy history: "It was started in 1973 by Gary London and ran for ten years. Then the Hippodrome opened up and he went straight out of business. One week he had seven hundred people in, then the next there were fifty. I was working for him at that time, that night, and it was so depressing. It was a great shame.

"Last year I decided to bring *Bang* back. I negotiated a deal with Gary, bought the copyright to the name and opened. Gary's very pleased. He was sad that he'd lost *Bang*, but he's happy it's been resurrected. He came along to see it open and was very impressed. You know, it's funny how things have gone full-circle, with us doing so well now. The Hippodrome has lost its touch. It's not dead, but I hear it's not doing as well as

This month sees the fifth in the series of interviews entitled 'The Late 80s Gay Man'. Who is the gay man of the late 80s? Does his lifestyle, and do his attitudes, reflect the heterogeneity of today's society?

it should. It's too pretentious. You've got to be on the same wavelength as the people in the club, otherwise they get offended by you."

Colin thinks he has got it right: "I try to play the music that the kids on the gay scene want now. I'm not saying I'm 100% good at it, but I do try to keep in touch. And I listen to what they want to see there, like French and Saunders, rather than, bless her heart, Norma Lewis or Angie Gold who we've seen a hundred times. They are good artistes, but they can be vastly overused. I'm out to get acts for gay people that they can't see anywhere else on the scene. I'd snap up *Bananarama* or *Dead or Alive* if I could. There's such a nice family atmosphere at my clubs. I have my brother on security on *Propaganda* nights, Jamie, my brother, DJing and my Mum, Sheila as Cashier. She used to do the bar, but on the opening night of *Bang* she fell down the stairs and damaged her foot, so I put her on the till . . . I think people like that family atmosphere."

There are rumours flying around about redevelopment of Busby's, that *Bang* will close in the next few weeks: "That, at the moment, is rubbish. Obviously I'm going to tell you the truth, because it's in *my* interest. It's my bread and butter. Having three nights there, I'm the one who knows everything that's going on. Yes, the site *is* up for redevelopment, but not for a long time; it could be months or years. When it *does* happen, I'll have enough notice to sort something out. In fact, I already have done in case something unexpected happens. If *Bang* closes though, it's Busby's that will close, not *Bang* itself. It'll be held at a different venue. *Bang* will survive."

Colin Peters must be one of the scene's most eligible bachelors. Successful, good-looking, with a fine physique, he is surprisingly single, but not out of choice: "I'd love a relationship, but I don't think I'll find anybody in the clubs that I run. Some people have said that I'm basically unapproachable. I'm not at all. I'd love some hunk or good-looking young man to come up and say 'Do you want a drink?' or 'How about going out for a meal some night?' And they never bloody do! I approach people when I'm a bit drunk. Sometimes I come up trumps but they don't turn out to be what you imagined, but you have to keep going on and on until you find the right one. Don't get me wrong, I'm not promiscuous. I don't care what gossip goes around. There's a lot of people who say they've had me, but they certainly haven't. There's no harm in having a cuddle nowadays. Sometimes, when you're sleeping on your own, you wish you had someone to cuddle and you sort of do that. But I'm not promiscuous. I've never done anything like cottaging or hanging around dark corners in clubs."

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Colin *had* a boyfriend, but he emigrated to Australia, much to Colin's dismay: "It was a perfect relationship because he understood the problems I was having with the clubs, when we went through a bit of a bad patch, and was very supportive. He wouldn't get jealous and ask 'Who've you been talking to?' And if I came in depressed, he would know exactly how to get me out of it. He'd do stupid things that made me laugh, like going around and opening all the cupboard doors, or turning the cooker on and leaving it. He made me laugh. It was just a brilliant relationship . . .

"He's an actor and couldn't get any work over here, so he went off to Australia. Of course I was upset. I went through a very bad six months when he went, two years ago. But he was very much into his career and he thought Australia was the place to pursue it. I went out there last year and I realised he was right. It was great. I was like a little celebrity in Sydney. People would come up to me in the bars and ask if I was the guy who used to work in Bolts or Spats. There was just no getting away! We still contact each other once a week. There may be the possibility of him coming back, and I might even go out there to live. Not at the moment because business is doing too well. I'm not stupid when it comes to things like that. You mustn't let your heart rule your head."

When he's not enjoying one of his clubs, Colin is either at home, a three-bedroomed house set in the middle of suburbia (Thornton Heath in Surrey), a house he has lived in all his twenty-nine years, or at the gym. When at home, he is planning ahead, working on ideas for the clubs, designing artwork for his advertisements or taking phone calls and making deals. "When I'm not doing all that, I try to go to the gym as much as I can, with a training partner, normally four times a week. When I was out in Australia, I must admit, I had a most fab body. But it's all gone now. There's still a bit of tit there, but it's mostly dissolved . . . I do read a lot of the papers. I even read the *Sun* because the star signs are so good. They're spot on. I'm a Leo by the way. And I do like to see what they're saying about gay people, because if there was anything in there that was horrifically awful, I'd ring them up myself and tell them off. I also read the *Mirror* and the *Sunday Sport*. I read them all: you've got to, so you can keep in touch with what's going on."

As well as having a very close family around him, Colin is lucky enough to have friends: "I've got many *straight* friends, and we go out for meals, or I have them 'round. Although I'm gay, I don't see myself as being any different from the next door neighbour. I haven't got to go to a gay restaurant just because I want to eat, or go to a gay gym to train. Just because what I do in bed is gay, why do I have to be involved in gay things 100% of the time? I don't think that's healthy. Don't get me wrong, I *am* supportive of gay things. I don't simply sit back and say 'Ive got my clubs. Good!' That isn't my attitude at all. Later in the year I want to do some big charity event for Aids research."

On the Political front, Colin Peters has very little to say, admittedly having no interest in either British or World Politics: "I'm not a Political person. I must admit I pick up gay publications and find all you get, a lot of the time, is Political stuff rammed down your throat. I don't think people want to hear that all the time. It pisses me off. I couldn't even tell you the definition of Socialist: that shows how much I know! I think the Parties are all as bad as each other, whoever gets in. Last time I voted for the SDP. I may not even have voted . . . I mean, Thatcher's done a lot of good things, but a lot of bad things as well. They all lie in the end. It depresses me. I hate it."

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Being gay in the late 80s won't be the same as it will in the year 2000, according to Colin: "I reckon in ten years time it'll be totally acceptable to be whatever you want, black, white, brown, yellow or gay. It's just there are a few old fuddie-duddies around, living in the past. I mean, my Nan couldn't believe it that I was wearing ripped jeans. 'Colin', she said, 'How can you wear ripped jeans in my home?' That's her Victorian values. She thinks I should go in there with neatly pressed trousers on. They were brought up that way; it's not their fault. My age group, the gay kids about now, are brought up differently, even straight kids. By the time we're middle-aged, the attitudes will be completely different. There'll be different people in the House of Commons. Look at the House of Lords! They're all half asleep in there. It's stupid, but things will change."

Colin has his sights set firmly on the Nineties, and on next year in particular: "I'll be opening up my own club. My own club, lock, stock and barrel! And *Bang* will be above that door. It'll be mine, without having to lease nights from people who own the clubs. Then I'll be able to have straights hiring *my* club for *their* nights, rather than the other way 'round, which is usually the case. I've got so many ideas for it, from decor to layout and lighting, and I want to put all those ideas into action. They'll all go into that one thing. And it'll be called *Bang*. The future for me means running a gay club. I'll always be doing that. It's what I love."