



Midnight at the Palace: My Life as a Fabulous Cockette

Pam Tent

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David Weissman and Bill Weber's 2002 documentary, *The Cockettes*, wowed audiences at the Sundance Film Festival and shined a bright new light on the Cockettes. Now one of the founding members of the legendary troupe takes us inside this flamboyant ensemble of countercultural radicals, who decked themselves out in drag and glitter for a series of legendary midnight musicals at the Palace Theater in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco. Arriving in San Francisco in 1969 from suburban Detroit, Pam Tent met Hibiscus, a New York actor who had dropped out. One night, in burst of LSD-fueled spontaneity, Sweet Pam took to the stage in a cellophane hula skirt, when Hibiscus and a group of friends commandeered the stage of the Palace during The Nocturnal Dream Shows, a weekly midnight eclectic film series, to perform a chorus line dance to "Honky Tonk Woman." The Cockettes were born! Pam Tent's account recalls the heyday of the rebellious, gender-bending troupe, the inevitable infighting that accompanied fame, and finally how a Rex Reed column raving about the Cockettes led to a disastrous New York opening where the audience—which included John Lennon, Gore Vidal, Angela Lansbury and Anthony Perkins—walked out in droves. The Cockettes gave their last performance in the autumn of 1972. But despite their short life, the Cockettes' unique burst of cultural experimentation and artistic outrageousness continues to influence the worlds of theater, music, fashion, gay politics, gay spirituality, and urban club life.

After leaving the Cockettes, **Pam Tent** moved to New York City for a brief stint as a blues singer. Then it was back to the West Coast for a new career in film distribution and finally her current livelihood as an accountant. She still lives in the Bay Area, sharing her house with a small menagerie of animals.

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