

1979

Droves and drag greet Rocky Horror

Chris Ball
February 13, 1979

Even an extremely unobservant person would have known that something was up at the Apollo Theatre last weekend. Large masses were gathering in anticipation of bizarre rites. Out of the woodwork, out of the closet, out of touch with reality, out of the blue, they came in droves, and in drag.

And nothing less could inspire this madness other than the return of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

Spurred on by its unusual success all over the country, *Rocky Horror* made its appearance in two midnight showings over the weekend at the Apollo, and indications are it might be around for sometime to come. As long as business is good, the Apollo will put up with the rice and toast throwing audiences, many of whom joyfully followed the tra-

dition of imitating the transexual tastes and behaviors of the movie characters.

Rocky Horror last appeared in Oberlin 27 months ago, in an on-campus showing sponsored by Knish Film Series. According to Probyn Gregory, who saw it back then, the main difference was that "the audience wasn't the main attraction."

Eric Hollander, then Chairman of Knish, offered as his explanation of the phenomenon, "Look, what can I say? I'm always two years ahead of my time."

Ahead of its time is an apt description of *Rocky Horror*, which failed miserably when it was originally released in 1975. Then it found its home as a midnight movie and has been playing as such on weekends in many places for over a year.

Endemic to its mad mystique are dedicated fans who keep coming back for more. Without

their crazed antics, it's generally accepted, the movie experience wouldn't be at all as exciting.

Fortunately for Oberlin and the Apollo, enough extroverted Oberlin rockers are in the know about *Rocky Horror*, which took first place in last semester's campus poll of the College Film Series. In two showings last weekend, nearly a thousand people saw it, and easily 90 per cent of them were College students.

The line began at the box office Friday before 11:30 and the movie didn't begin until 12:20 when everyone was seated. This gave the more artistically dressed members of the audience plenty of time to parade and show off their finery.

Fred Bragdon chose a stunning long pink chiffon dress, white beaded necklace, and appropriate facial make-up.

Ben Brody and Gale Connors featured black briefs and sump-

tuously fishnet stockings, while Sid Kemp came wrapped in chains.

Meanwhile the audience warmed up by yelling "LIPS" followed by a round of "Happy Birthday Rocky." This reporter was seated toward the front and made the mistake of attempting to speak to a person seated to the left. His response was an unintelligible language which I had never heard before.

Predictably, as soon as I gave up trying to communicate with him, someone else came in speaking the same language. Gratiified to be able to at last talk, he rattled on at some length with her. "Ewee, ee-wee," they squealed.

Then the show began. In true Obie fashion the audience booed the coming attraction short. They wasted no time getting into the spirit of things, throwing rice at the opening wedding scene. Other projectives that appeared included toast, playing cards, water

and rolls of toilet paper.

Neckless

Group chanting alternated with individual yells. One particular recurring theme involved a certain neckless character who each time he appeared would be greeted with "Where's your neck?" It was evident people had seen the film many times before as they were able to warn characters about dropping objects, among other things. Of course, the warnings never seemed to do any good.

Saturday's crowd was somewhat larger than Friday's, although less people were dressed for the occasion. It featured less rice and more toast. It took four people four hours to clean the house Sunday morning, but the owners of the Apollo aren't complaining.

Oh, yes, and before we forget, there was the movie to see also. It had lots of jokes, sex, singing and other violence.

2002

Alt-Cartoonist Comes Home Alum Cartoonist Alison Bechdel Returns to Oberlin

Douglass Dowty
March 15, 2002

"It's so weird to be back here!" exclaimed cartoonist Alison Bechdel (OC '81) to the nearly 100 Obies during her cartoon slide-show in the new Science Center last Thursday. The artist spoke candidly for nearly two hours about her work as well as politics and social trends, while leafing through over 50 slides from her comic strip "Dykes To Watch Out For." Her return to Oberlin was organized with the help of sophomore Rebecca Tinkelman, the Women's Resource Center, the Dean of Students, and other College organizations.

While Bechdel calls herself a gay artist and her characters reflect the focus in her work on gay and lesbian issues, she is also undeniably part of mainstream cartooning. Over the course of two decades Bechdel has published nine collections, one anthology and received many awards for her work. "Dykes To Watch Out For" has been in continuous publication since the early '80s.

"I think I try and squeeze more content into a strip than it can reasonably hold," Bechdel said, chuckling. "It's some kind of grandiose aspiration disorder."

Bechdel added that her comics have followers beyond the gay community because of the humanistic emphasis in her work that allows it to transcend sexual barriers. Her characters have everyday problems such as finding jobs, raising children, discovering love or simply coping with life in suburban America. Because her creations live in the present day, Bechdel, like all American artists, has been recently adjusting her



Illustration courtesy of
www.lambiek.net

work to respond to Sept. 11 and its results.

"It's been an interesting time. I was pretty stumped with how to proceed," Bechdel admitted while flipping through a series of post-Sept. 11 slides. While she tries to balance both sides of the argument, her views on the current situation are clearly evident. In one frame, the text reads "How can dissent be un-American?" while in another, "[Patriotism] also makes people stupid. Chanting 'USA, USA!' doesn't exactly give people an intricate understanding of politics." Yet in the end, Bechdel's cartoons are never antagonistic because her humor often overwhelms the political issues discussed in her work.

Bechdel is wary of disassociating her comics from lesbianism, however.

"When I came out [at Oberlin] in 1980, either you were straight or gay, or maybe you were bi, but that just meant you were afraid to admit you were gay," Bechdel said. "I desperately wanted my humanity to be confirmed." Bechdel explained that in the 80s, lesbianism was invisible, that is, it had no impact on mainstream culture. Her cartoons, she believed, helped her break out of that invisibility.

"Dykes to Watch Out For" centers around the lives of three lesbian couples and close friends. Mo, a worker at a struggling feminist bookstore, and Sidney, a university professor, both share a house, a bed and an outrageous infatuation with Martha Stewart. Clarice and Toni have one son and recently moved from the queer inner-city circuit to the straight-edged suburbs. Sparrow, Lois and Ginger represent the diversity within the lesbian community through their starkly different personalities, while Ginger has added a new element to their lives by bringing her male companion, Stewart, to live with them.

Bechdel spends a great deal of time making sure her cartoons are visually realistic and not iconic like Garfield. Her style has evolved dramatically over the last 20 years, and she admits to being inspired by blockbuster strips like "For Better or For Worse" and the political strip "Doonsbury."

"I try to draw the readers into the cartoon," Bechdel said. "I go to ridiculous lengths to incorporate realism into my work. It's a way of



Photo courtesy of the 1981 Hi-O-Hi

being in the cartoon's world."

Her drawing technique is extremely precise: all frames in her cartoons go through a rigorous five-step drawing process, which includes copying and recopying on three sheets of tracing paper. Words are always placed on the page before illustration since text dictates the available space. Bechdel rarely has room for ambient scenery, which she laments greatly. What background settings she does use, though, are based on places that she is intimately familiar with, such as her home in Minneapolis.

"Facial expressions are a whole universe of their own," Bechdel said, pointing out that since her comic takes place in present time her characters have to age like real people. Two decades ago these characters were born as adults and many now have lines under their eyes and other subtle changes in their appearance, most notably, different hairstyles. Bechdel says as she has grown older she has found it difficult to keep the strip's content and look fresh.

"Sometimes I don't know how new my ideas are anymore," Bechdel said, though her most impressive triumph, her first anthology, came out just recently and her cartoons are still selling well. Her strip has been running over ten times longer than the average television series.

Bechdel stayed at Baldwin House during her visit to Oberlin, her first time back to the College since graduating in 1981.

BHM Fashion Show 2024 Pays Homage to *The Wiz*

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ry Month, so having shared time together is truly special. Being around so many Black writers, designers, musicians, and artists is especially amazing. I often found myself being a part of deep conversations about our lives outside the fashion show, creating a bond built on trust, community, and love, not only for each other but for the show we were building with one another.

Before I could even blink, it was almost Feb. 17. The day before, I helped the committee drag all 90 of the fashion show outfits to Hales Gymnasium. There, we set up makeup stations, accessories, wigs, fitting rooms, and more to ensure the show ran smoothly. At that point, we were all starting to feel the toll from working so hard, with some of us even falling ill as a result. Because of this, I was asked to sing "Ease On Down the Road" with College third-year Ezra Pruitt — something neither of us expected, especially on top of walking and helping out with other lines. To say I was nervous would be an understatement, but

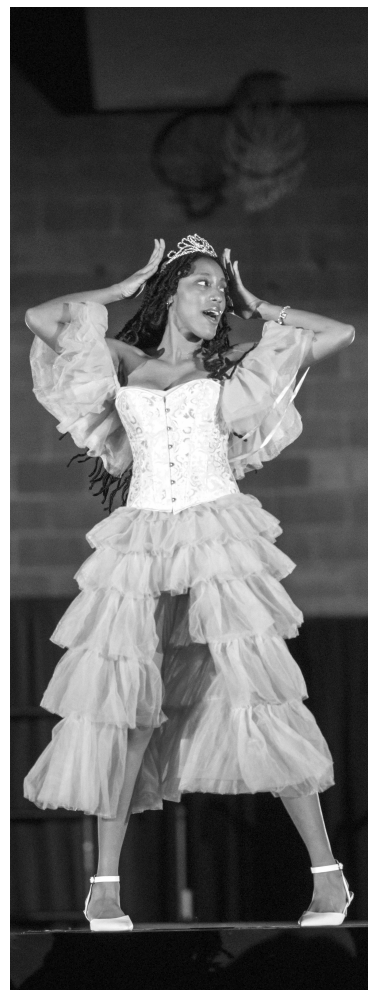


Photo by Abe Frato, Photo Editor

I did not hesitate to leap in and help. By the time the chairs had filled up, we had practiced for about 10 minutes before racing to get into costumes. All of the models and the committee members watched from the Cat in the Cream TV as the chairs filled up with our peers, parents, professors, and even President Carmen Twillie Ambar herself. I got text messages from my grandma in Washington, D.C., and alumni in New York City wishing me good luck as I stood in line waiting to walk in the March of the Dorothis line, dressed in a sapphire-colored gown.

There is nothing as enjoyable and exhilarating as being out on stage. To be fair, this is coming from a former theater kid, but the rush you get from walking down the runway is unforgettable. It was amazing to experience the audience's screams and claps while walking down the aisle. Then, just like that, it's over. It's a peculiar feeling when months of work come down to only seconds on stage. When looking at the legacy of the fashion show and how many people show up every year to support us, you come to realize the importance of the work that goes in.

I don't have enough space to write about all of the things the Black History Month Fashion Show accomplished: for one, Dae Williams, OC '20, and another group of students worked on a documentary showcasing the entire process of the Fashion Show and the Black students who worked on it. I wish I could go in depth to talk about the Fashion Show After Party, where the costumes worn were sold, and the proceeds were given to the Sickle Cell Association of Antigua and Barbuda.

The Black History Month Fashion Show has always been about the power of Black art and culture. It spotlights how Black people at Oberlin express themselves. That expression serves to empower the Black community on campus, who do so many wonderful and amazing things every day. Even as a first-year, I was inspired by my peers' work. It gave me the confidence to try new things and create my own work this year. I hope that the first-years who were in it this year continue to uphold this legacy, and I indeed will next year.