

A GAY BAR WITH SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Moira Muldoon

Publication Date: August 19, 2004 Page: 11 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

I've been reading lots of Oscar Wilde lately, and laughing a good deal, as he was the master of the riposte. Announcing that he could speak well on any subject, Wilde was asked to speak about the queen. He immediately responded, "The queen is not a subject." How I wished I had Wilde's fleetness when, at a wedding reception a few weeks ago, a woman inquired "what I did then," since I wasn't married. Shocked by the question not kindly asked, I could only reply with the truth: I wrote. Wilde would have done much better. Indeed, most of my friends would have done better: They later came up with excellent responses I'm unable to print here.

Perhaps I should have also asked some of the folks at Oilcan Harry's for a good comeback. Guaranteed that at least a few of them have encountered rude questions about being married. Oilcan's is, of course, a gay bar.

One of the few gay bars in Austin, in fact, Oilcan Harry's has been around for years and is a hopping joint, rather than calmly cool like the 1920s Club. Although it does have a quieter room, most of the bar is loud and crazy on weekend nights. The entire space encompasses about 6,900 square feet: outdoor patio with bar (great in the early evenings for a quiet drink), big central bar, dance floor with a mirrored ball.

Even so, Oilcan's is often full to the gills on weekend nights. Women are welcome (there's even a women's bathroom, though men have been known to use it too).

Overall, men, and mostly young attractive men, dominate.

Nights are themed. Fridays are "Boys and Buffet" -- scrutinize the Manwatch dancers and nibble on hot sandwiches or quesadillas and the like. Sundays are "Pride" with \$1 mimosas (as well as other specials) 2 to 7 p.m. and a cookout 5 to 8 p.m. (I've heard the burgers are exceptional.) Pun-ingly, Wednesdays are "Malebox" nights; men wear numbers and if they like what they see, they can send a message to someone's "malebox." And Mondays offer giant \$5.50 martinis. Dance music ranges from camp classics to house and techno -- with djs such as DJ Bang and DJ Licious.

Drinks tend to be on the sturdy side and service reasonably good, though if you open a tab with one bartender, you have to close it with that bartender. Which means, unfortunately, that you can't simply jump to the guy with the shortest line if you're ready to get out of Dodge.

Selfishly, I like to dance at Oilcan's because no one pays attention to me (I'm a rotten dancer). I'll admit to feeling a little odd the couple of times I've gone in with just a girlfriend, without even the pretense of meeting one of our gay friends, but it's such fun to dance there.

And I love to chat with folks without being hit on. Not that I talk to lots of men while I'm there -- they're mostly interested in talking to and spending time with each other; Oilcan's

is definitely a great place for gay men to meet men. (Notwithstanding the recent arrest of men charged with assaulting a gay customer after picking him up at Oilcan's.) But as they're chatting each other up -- or just chatting -- I imagine there must be relief in those conversations; no one is likely to ask pesky wedding questions that invite incivility.

"Some cause happiness wherever they go; some cause happiness whenever they go." Ah, witty Mr. Wilde, if only you'd been my escort.

bargirl@covad.com

(box)

Oilcan Harry's. 211 W. Fourth St., 320-8823.