

Gil Block aka Sadie Sadie the Rabbi Lady

By Gilbert Baker July 11, 2010

Goldie Glitters had a lovely garden at her flat in the Castro. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence held teas there every Sunday. You had to come dressed as a nun to get in. This was way before the Sisters became a corporation, in fact it was just barely a name and there was some debate about whether or not to be an actual organization or sail the limits of anarchy in high heels.

I think that's where I met Gil Block. He'd come down from Montreal in the early 80's and wanted to be a sister. Sometime later he showed up at the Convent on Ashbury, a loose communal household of sisters. He was determined to be a part of the outrageous guerrilla street theatre emerging from the very fertile and blasphemous imaginations of drag queens and he chose the name Sadie Sadie the Rabbi Lady, a Jewish drag nun.

He wanted help with his look. When I probed him about his vision, who is this Sadie; her backstory? He told me, in

perfect Brooklynese, in a way that left no doubt "Barbra's mother."

So I got him right away, having every Streisand record on my shelves.

And like the great artist we both admired; Sadie pushed it. All the way. Right from the get-go half the sisters hated her because she had real talent and an almost vulgar ambition.

I made her many costumes. A lot of them played on the 6-pointed star. All of them were political cartoons, sartorial satire, and Sadie used it all brilliantly. But she was more than a mannequin.

Sadie wrote songs, or rather rewrote them with bawdy political lyrics. She could do it spontaneously and developed a whole medley of these "diities." Even her critics had to admit she had the stuff; an original, who never gave up and got better and better, refining her character to become second nature.

The two of us went to Hollywood for the Academy Awards in matching Sister Chanel 2001 skintight black sequin nun

gowns. We had a little can, done up like the March of Dimes, taking donations for Eddy Murphy's disease, homophobia. I think he was nominated that year after making some hateful comments.

We rolled up to the Dorothy Chandler Pavillion in a beat up pink and lime green taxi, paid cash and headed towards the Red Carpet. A wall of police came right for us and when they stopped us asking "Are you the Sisters?" We froze, waiting to be arrested, and they said "Right this way"

We couldn't believe it. Suddenly supermodels strutting in our 6 inch stilettos, gliding thru the aisles of red jacketed valets and the limousines, getting a big hello from Jack Nicholson in a vintage Packard, getting tangled up in Debra Wringers 30 ft white fox stole, the crowds in the bleachers screaming our names, cameras everywhere. All the while we're getting closer and closer to the doors in the VIP line - and then here's Amy Archerd, the Master of Ceremonies, and probable closet case, coming towards us with panic all over his face, snapping his fingers and instantly we were lifted up and carried across the street. It was actually better because we got even more attention. Then ABC sent out a beige and tan chorus line of people who

stood in front of us trying to stop our glittering in the golden rays of tinsel-town dusk.

It was so incredible a few years later we went back with our friend Scarlot Harlot. This time we got dressed right in the bleachers having arrived at dawn to secure a front row seat. We put on heavy pancake make up and finished it off with a coat of hair spray to keep all the eyeliner and lipstick in place under the blazing sun. Then, right in front of everyone, we corseted our selves into the elaborate French revolution ball gowns I'd sewn up with 100 yards of gold metallic lame'. It was all in honor of "Dangerous Liaisons". Appropriately political, we had signs; "Come out Hollywood" and "Alan Carr fan Club." We got bigger fashion coverage than Cher and Scarlot made a movie about the whole adventure.

Sadie loved the limelight almost as much as I did. The ethereal blue/white glow of constant flash bulbs, the art of image making, the fresh ink in press. The attention got us banned from the gay newspapers, but we never stopped. Act up demonstrations, Queer Nation kiss-ins, the Exorcisms in San Francisco's Union Square and in Dallas at Dealey Plaza, getting arrested when the Pope came to San

Francisco, and finally excommunicated from the Sisters for being too fabulous...

Ultimately we drifted apart, creative differences. I had not seen or spoken to him in more than 10 years. When we finally reconnected in 2003 at the Ft Lauderdale Gay Pride it was all water under the bridge, estranged yet forgiving brothers.

But we stayed apart, he never came to New York and I rarely left it. He worried his best days were behind him, that we'd had our moment. Sometimes bitter and often lonely like everyone who is an outsider, Sadie dreamed of love, the illusive elixir that cures all.

We were older and more philosophical about the consequences of our youthful indiscretions. we'd made history then watched it quickly erased. They say artists suffer, perhaps the knowledge of irrelevance is the most impossible burden, some of the greatest have taken their leave too soon.

Too soon.