

IN TOUCH

FOR MEN

NUMBER 183 • \$5.95

CANADA & OTHER COUNTRIES \$7.95

UK £4.50

**RADICAL
RODS**

5 MEN WHO
DARE 2 BARE!

**NINA
GLASER**

UNCOMPROMISING!

**ROMANOVSKY
& PHILLIPS**

POLITE - NOT!

EXTREME!

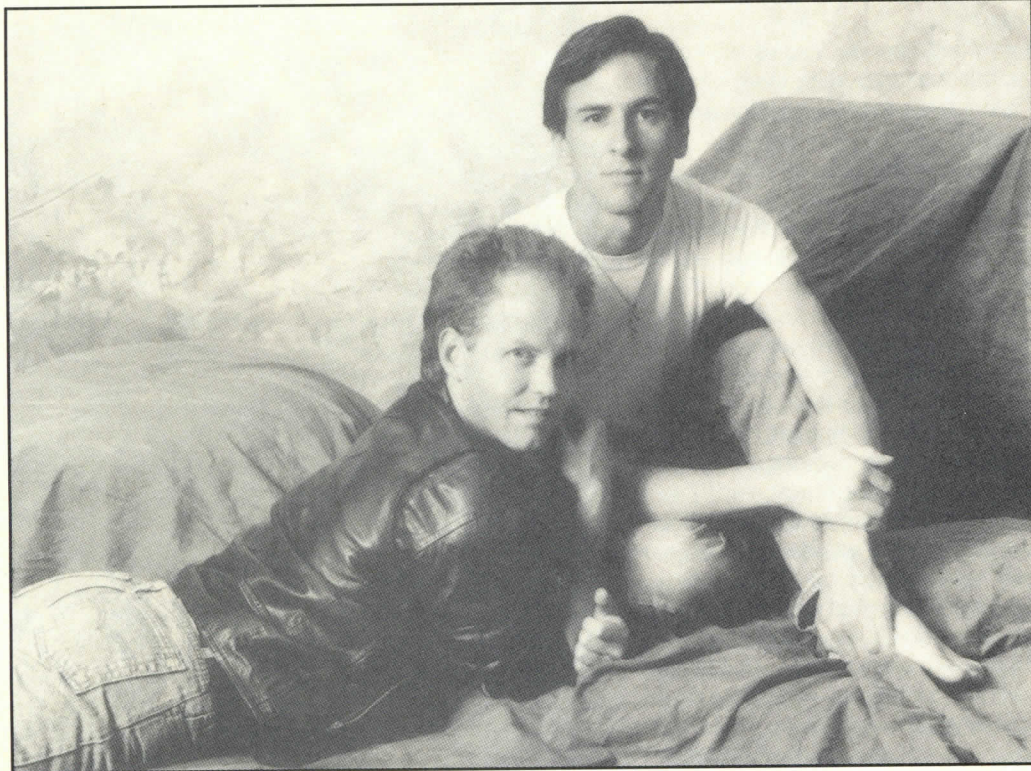
DESTINATIONS
FUN 'N' GAYMES

LETTERS
TOUCH & GO

83



7447073725 4



PHOTOS BY IRENE YOUNG

ROMANOVSKY & PHILLIPS: POLITICAL AND POLITE

Interview by
Behr Briar

Ron Romanovsky and Paul Phillips met in San Francisco's infamous Golden Gate Park, and soon began making beautiful music together. A midnight rendezvous among the shrubs and shadows, perhaps? Hardly. Their initial encounter was actually rather charming.

As Ron was cycling through the park, his eyes locked with Paul, who was leaving the park. They were both intrigued, yet shy. Paul thought that Ron, who was twenty-two at the time, was "maybe sixteen" and did not approach him since the word 'jailbait' kept flashing through his mind. Ron was attracted to Paul, but didn't know how to get around the awkwardness of introducing himself. Paul walked out of the park to wait at a bus stop. Ron crossed the street to a gas station where he "pretended to add air" to his tires. As the bus pulled up, Ron rode towards the bus stop and Paul let all the other passengers

board ahead of himself. Paul finally boarded the bus, and watched from the front stairwell as Ron followed on his bike! Paul disembarked a block later, and introduced himself to Ron. Over the next three days, they did laundry and ate pizza together – then "finally kissed."

Along with a their affection for each other, they quickly discovered their mutual love for music, tight vocal harmonies, and albums by The Roches. They began writing, recording, and performing in San Francisco, and later moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Three years ago, Ron and Paul cut their romantic ties but remained professionally connected. Their latest effort, *Be Political Not Polite*, is a thought-provoking treasure trove of memorable melodies, incredible harmonies, and inspirational lyrics. Just days after a three-month, forty-city promotional tour, Ron and Paul stopped by the In Touch offices for a stimulating chat...

IN TOUCH: As your first recording in three years, do you see this album as something of a milestone?

PAUL PHILLIPS (PP): "I do. I mean, I've seen all of them as milestones in their own way."

RON ROMANOVSKY (RR): "It's a milestone in that it came out exactly the way we wanted it. I can't say that about any of the other albums."

PP: "This is the first album I have played over and over and over again. It's funny because the whole time we were making this album, we kept calling this *Ron and Paul: The Manly Album*. And the reason we did that was because...it is the first album that we have co-produced with a male, for one thing. We've worked with women [on our past albums]."

RR: "Well, the first album..."

PP: "No, the first album...I'm sorry...the first album was with a man, a straight man."

RR: "He wasn't that involved in the arrangements."

PP: "And not only did we work with a male – a gay male – he did almost all of the instruments on his keyboard. It's much more of an electronic album."

PP: "One of the things we chose that was a very..."

RR: "Conscious..."

PP: "Conscious decision about this new album was the fact that we know that we're ten years older than when we started doing this. And we have always suffered from a 'cutesy' image. And I think part of that is because we would walk on-stage and talk about being lovers. We also both looked like we were 18 at the time. And we're not anywhere near that age. I haven't seen 18...I mean, I'm double that and then some! I wanted this to be an album that I felt good about, that represented me in my life now. I feel that our act has matured. I feel like the writing has matured, I feel like Ron's musical abilities have matured greatly and his writing has matured. I wanted an album that really exposed that...rather than going for 'cute.'"

'Inquiring minds' always want to know: Are either of you romantically involved right now?

PP: "I'm not."

RR: "I'm dating."

PP: "It's not that I'm not interested [in dating]. It's just that my need right now is to take care of me, and to work on myself. My lifestyle isn't real conducive to a normal dating relationship. It's gonna take somebody pretty special to be able to deal with the fact that I leave for three months [to tour]."

RR: "Anybody who's really into their work and really married to it, probably finds it hard to be married to a person also."

Has your romantic breakup changed your live performances?

PP: "We used to talk about being lovers on-stage all the time. People would come up afterwards and say, 'So, are you guys really lovers?' So then when we broke up – and even now, three years later – we talk about it, we say that we broke up three years ago. And people still come up and they say, 'C'mon, you guys are really lovers, right? This is just an act.' I'm convinced it's because we're so conditioned as people in this country to believe that anything we see on-stage isn't reality, isn't necessarily true."

RR: "There are some times when you're really glad you broke up and some times when you really regret it. There are some times when you get along and some times when you don't. In many ways, we are still more married than a lot of people who are married because of our work."

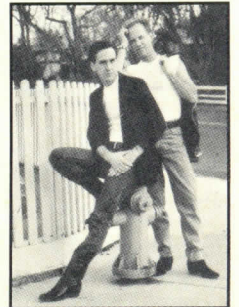
PP: "I was thinking about it and realizing that in those seven years that Ron and I were together, we spent more time in each other's presence than my parents spent together in thirty-some years."

RR: "Now we're together more than most married couples still. Of course, we're also still roommates."

You founded your own record label, Fresh Fruit Records. Would you like to sign with a major mainstream label?

RR: "For distribution, yes. Of course, we would like to reach more people. I suppose the desire is there but it's not actually a goal. It's not important enough for us to actually pursue it. We're doing a lot of other things, and that takes a lot of energy and we've always felt that energy could be better spent elsewhere. I also am very doubtful whether or not it's even possible. Even with what I've seen around me, and what I've seen around me is The New York City Gay Men's Chorus being signed to Virgin Records – I see Two Nice Girls signed to Rough Trade although

PP:
"The best thing about it is that we have total control."



RR:
"Anybody who's really into their work... probably finds it hard to be married to a person also."

NEIL GODFREY SCULPTURES



"Boys In Bronze"

Sole US Agent
SINOS CERES
Suite 1390
2421 West Pratt Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60645
Color Brochure \$2

**ARE YOU
PLAYING
SAFELY?**
check out the
**Safer Sex
Guidelines**
on page 98

• RANCHO • CICADA RETREAT

EXPERIENCE "THE OLD SWIMMING HOLE"

- Where Clothing Is Always Optional.
- Private and Secluded Riverside Setting
- Swimming, Fishing, Hiking, Hot Tubs
- 2 1/2 hrs. from Bay Area, 1 hr. from Sacramento in the Sierra Foothills.
- \$50 Total per Person Friday - Sunday.
- Reservations 209 - 245 - 4841.

that just folded – Phranc on Island Records. First of all, the gay men's choruses don't sing songs like we do – our stuff is much more frightening to people, or threatening. And second, as far as the lesbians go, I think that women's music has broken the ice a lot more for them and I also think that there's more of a fascination with lesbianism whereas gay men are more threatening to Middle America. And I think it's gonna take a long time before [that changes]. If anybody does it, next or soon, it will be The Flirtations. I don't think it will be us, unless we drastically alter our songwriting...which we don't plan to do! We like to be able to produce our music the way we want to."

PP: "The best thing about it is that we have total control."

*On **Be Political Not Polite**, you cover a lot of ground over fifteen tunes...*

RR: "We felt like we really wanted to give our fans a lot of music on this album, because it had been so long [since the last one]."

PP: "It's definitely a more aggressive album."

RR: "It's provocative, I think – it's confrontational. A lot of the songs – *Queers in The Closet*, *Hymn*, *Be Political Not Polite*, *Heterosexism* – really fit together. It wasn't really intended that way, I didn't write with a concept in mind. I guess it's just a direction."

What sort of creative process do you go through when writing your songs?

PP: "It always amazes me when we hear about big name artists who...write the songs in the studio."

RR: "We don't work that way."

PP: "Or conceptualize albums. How do they do it? I have no idea! [laughs]"

RR: "We're always writing and thinking and talking. That's what we do when we drive across the country – we talk about things we want to write about."

So some of these potent lyrics might have started out as ideas scribbled on the back of a fast food bag?

PP: "I have pieces of paper all over."

RR: "I have written things on airline napkins, and things like that. I have a notebook, too. I have, like, ten notebooks at home from over the years and I go back sometimes and look at unfinished ideas."

PP: "Ron does a majority of the writing. I'm really kind of like a cross between an idea man and an editor. I just want to make sure he gets the full credit for that. Each song that we do is different. Some are songs that I suggested a way to go about writing it or I suggested a line. Other songs he does entirely on his own and brings them to me as completed songs."

Do you have groupies?

RR: "I guess you could say we have groupies. We have some people who come to see us when we're anywhere near, like a hundred miles of where they live. And bring us little presents and things. And sit in the audience and lip-synch the songs."

What artists influenced or inspired you musically?

RR: "I grew up listening to a lot of Post-Woodstock female singers like Carly Simon, Joni Mitchell, and Melanie, and Carole King and Janis Ian. Around the time I met Paul I was listening to a lot of women's music. I had just been turned on to Holly Near and Margie Adam and Meg Christian. And also The Roches were a big, big influence. I absolutely love The Roches. They influenced our stage presence, our clothes, our music, our harmonies."

PP: "I was at their very first indoor concert in New York City. I lived in New York at the time, and my roommate – my boyfriend at the time – had gone to school with Suzzy Roche. That was one of things that really opened a big door between Ron and me, the first day [we met]. I walked into his house and the very first thing I saw was The Roches' album...nobody that I knew on the west coast knew who The Roches were. They were still an east coast phenomenon back then."

RR: "I had also really fallen in love with vocal harmonies after getting into their music. That's why I was so eager to sing with Paul. If there had been a third person, we probably would have become a trio!"