

FILM PROPOSAL

Submitted by Elizabeth Bouiss

SYNOPSIS

Decadence, Death and Brilliance is a story of risk-taking, creativity, rebellion and survival as told through the personal experiences of the gender blending, gay, straight, and bi patrons, performers, and workers who were part of the underground performance, art, and music explosion in New York City's Pyramid Club in the 1980s.

PROPOSAL

"On the night of April 12, 1984, Ethel Eichelberger, was shaking his ass for tips on the Pyramid bar. He wore three platinum wigs piled into a pompadour, a fifties poodle skirt with multiple stiff slips, black opera gloves, diamond bracelets, two pairs of diamond earrings glued to each ear and six inch, red vinyl, platform Maryjane shoes. Ethel had a lavender neon sign that glowed near his feet, which simply read, Ethel."

~Phoebe Legere, The Pyramid Club: Crucible of Creativity

Decadence, Death and Brilliance weaves the personal experiences of those who were part of the early Pyramid Club scene into collective story of an underground mecca for art, music, performance, love, grief and survival in 1980's New York City. Performers, Pyramid employees, and club-goers recount a time like no other, personally and historically, a flourishing of creativity and clinging for dear life, set in the repressive political era of Reagan, AIDS and rampant drug use. Through their entwined lives, a story of the rise, fall and ongoing impact of the creative explosion of the Pyramid Club unfolds.

The overall style will reflect the gritty scene that emerged from the downtown scene. Using stock footage, news clips and headlines, the viewer will be transported back to the burned out and abandoned buildings that dominated the East Village, where Tompkins Square Park was known as tent city, and needles and drug paraphernalia littered the streets. The interviews will serve as the narration and narrative for the film, blending the interviews with footage and stills of them and their art from today and back in the day.

As we follow their intimate journeys, we hear where they started, how and why they ended up at the Pyramid Club. They talk of belonging, finding a place that felt like home and getting the most amazing education possible in this small gender-blending, everyone is accepted bar. They talk about asking to perform and being told yes, even if they didn't know what they would perform. They share how they learned from the amazingly talented mish mash of misfits that were the Pyramid Club players.

They talk about the toll that AIDS, drugs and depression took on them and their friends – how they kept going in the face of it all. Some share the intimate details of their journey into the hellish nightmare of addiction, and of finding a small speck of hope to keep them going.

They take us into the present, sharing the ends of their time at the club and their reasons for leaving. They tell us what they went on to do when the era ended, and how the Pyramid legacy lives on in their own lives and in the culture as a whole. They examine

how as a result of their involvement in the Pyramid scene, they feel they are part of changing the way we look at gender and art in all its forms.

Since some of the important characters are lost early on--to drugs, suicide, the street, and a mysterious, deadly illness, later to be known as AIDS. Those left, tell the stories of their fallen friends serving as voices long ago silenced. They share about being the midst of such profound and rapid loss, and how they used creativity to transform those devastating experiences into something meaningful.

What emerges through their narratives is a story of close interrelated and lasting relationships, and the enduring impact on their lives of the Pyramid's nurturing of creativity, through rock 'n roll, performance, rebellion, dancing, laughing, crying and loving. These angry punks, art rockers, drag queens, transsexuals tell how they all fit and mixed in this small space nestled in the crumbling East Village. (There are incarnations of every anti-establishment art endeavor, as well as political organizing--particularly around the death of Pyramid patron and street artist Michael Stewart, who lost his life at the hands of the New York Police Department.)

The theme is creativity and togetherness in the face of adversity and repression. Whereas the hardcore scene was male dominated and gays and lesbians largely separated themselves into their own respective bars, The Pyramid Club exposes a whole new model. The film's main interviews include gay and straight men and women, transsexuals and those who are now, years later transitioning. We look at the disintegration of the scene due to AIDS and the changing neighborhood and discuss how the legacy of the Club lives on and is still thriving and influential today.

The film relies heavily on the amazing b-roll shot in the '80s that I am fortunate to be privy to. We include experimental films that screened at The Pyramid, and video and Super 8 film footage of performances. We are fortunate to have access to a vast reserve of footage shot in the 80s at the club and in the neighborhood. Much of this will be incorporated as b-roll clips, while some of the shorter performances will play, almost in their entirety. We are planning to shoot a scene at the actual Pyramid Club using actors to portray those who are no longer with us. We have stock 16mm footage from 1980s New York City that we will use to contextualize the story. We will also use our plentiful supply of street art, posters, photos and news clips for additional b-roll to bring to life the DIY ethos that pervaded the art scene at that time.