

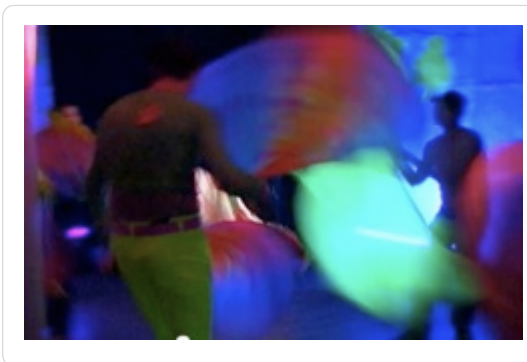
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New Film Documents History & Artistry of Flagging

by Jim Hauck

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One of my first experiences in a dance club exposed me to the magic of the flow arts. I watched the mesmerizing art form as the colored silk fabrics were being manipulated by handsome, muscular, sexy men, who whirled and danced on the stage in the glow of black light.

Totally infatuated with the art form, I was intimidated to even try it. However the flagging bug bit me and it would only be a short time before I found the courage to ask someone to show me how it was done. Unlocking that moment, I found the door to a unique and wonderful tribe.

My experience is not unlike many others; in fact most flow artists (people who flag, fan dance or spin poi), would tell you that that is exactly how they found their way into this esoteric sub-community

within the gay dance world. The way knowledge is imparted from the experts to acolytes is a crucial part of "Flow Affair," the first full-length documentary film about flagging.

Director Wolfgang Busch, is a gay social activist who had already received several awards from various film festivals. as director, producer and cinematographer for his first documentary, "How Do I Look." Released in 2006, it was meant as a follow-up and homage to Jenny Livingstone's groundbreaking documentary about the Harlem ball scene, "Paris Is Burning."

His self-proclaimed goal is to "bring social empowerment to the underserved gay communities". As a grass-roots community organizer, Busch hopes to use his films to help close the gaps between communities and break down stereotypes, racism, sexism and homophobia.

10 Years Chronicling a Tribe

Premiering in San Francisco on Friday, July 29, at the Metropolitan Community Church, this labor of love and storytelling pays homage to a history that is often hard to piece together due to the lives and stories lost to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Add to this the challenge of a division in the community about whether or not even to share this art form in any way other than a tribal knowledge versus recorded stories and you can start to see how difficult documenting this art form has been.

These stories captured in this documentary only scratch the surface of the difficulties Busch had getting this film completed. Busch would end up spending 10 years on this project.

The film includes commentary from such well-known flaggers as Xavier Caylor of San Francisco, George Jagatic of New York, and poi spinner Isa Isaacs (Glitter Girl) of San Francisco and the Temple of Poi. These artists, or "shamans," as Busch calls them, give depth and range to the story. Missing are some key members of the flagging community who may have added some additional depth and color to the conversation, but according to Wolfgang, "chose not to participate."

Explaining how the legacy and art of fanning was historically passed down from Leather Daddy to Leather Boy, creating a flag or fan daddy, Busch pieces together how this community developed a unique language and culture. He details the history, with a large focus on the New York scene, as this art form grew out of the Downtown

Manhattan club scene that flourished in the decade after Stonewall.

Fan dancing originated in the Far East, most likely China. Busch weaves a tale about early artists in clubs like the Anvil in New York, a famous leather bar where club goers spun t-shirts or the ubiquitous handkerchiefs. Going deeper, Busch explores the differences in the West Coast flagging scene, with the silk creations of Xavier Caylor and flagger boy Phillip Bryan.

According to Busch, "There is some missing sense of community on the East Coast", which he was able to find in San Francisco, "where he feels the heart of the flagging community is today".

Remarkable & Touching Stories

In talking with Xavier Caylor, it is possible that the biggest difference between the East and West coast tribes may lie in the "struggle between performance and personal focus". Caylor speaks of his flagging experiences as mediations and talks about how "you can be in a room with 1,000 or 2,000 people, yet spend time with just yourself." Speaking to the dichotomy of the flagging experience, Xavier references how these "opposite experiences" are part of weaving the rich tapestry of this art form.

"Flow Affair" provides touching moments as well. The interview with Jeannette Torres who taught her son Ryche to flag is one such moment. Ryche talks about flagging like a veteran, referring to his mom lovingly as the "angry lesbian." Ryche shows off his flagging skills and talks about how he communicates with his mom's friends through the common bond and language of flagging.

Perhaps one of the more remarkable stories is that of Ryan Wilcox, who attributes flagging and flow arts to a remarkable recovery and comeback in his life. Living with AIDS for 30 years, Wilcox was reduced to walking with a cane. However, in 2010 he scored two Gold medals in the Gay Games in Cologne, Germany, incorporating flagging into his figure skating routine.

'Floguing' & Other Innovations

Wolfgang covers the emotions and expression of the art form and the expansion beyond traditional flagging and fanning, to "Floguing," an art form coming from Harlem that showcases the combinations of the in vogue dance forms with flags or fans. Aaron Enigma performs this new art form showing that this culture and art continues to evolve and grow.

A newer segment of the flow arts community, Floguing is far more performance focused, and still very much in an early stage of development. Is this the future of flow arts? This is a good question, and perhaps too hard to say at this point.

Wolfgang covers the early days in the Circuit party dance scene and clubs to recent innovations with choreography and performance, and even as far as a therapeutic exercise for the mind and body. "After you got bit by the flagging bug, the energy in your life will change," says Xavier Caylor. This writer would agree. As for Caylor, this is a "meditative and spiritual experience for him."

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When interviewed, Wolfgang Busch shared his one message would be to "record the artistic community in a respectful, artistic, and historic way. The spotlight should be on the community," not himself, he adds. He declares himself just a servant looking to record the history.

Documentaries by nature become our recorded history and now future flow artists and young gay people will have a way to hear firsthand about how flagging affected many lives, carried forward a community in crisis and set the

stage to unite the world in a colorful display.

Flow artists from all over the world gathered in San Francisco for the opening. As part of the world premier weekend, a series of festivities included a master's tie-dye shop at Xavier Caylor's garage, a special event, "Flagging in the Park," with DJ Susan Morabito, and flagging opportunities at most of the dance parties associated with the Up Your Alley Street Fair Weekend in San Francisco.

"'Flow Affair' elevated the reasons to come to San Francisco for the weekend," says Caylor. The addition of this premier to over 60 eager flow artists "validated the weekend experience," he adds.

As a community leader, Caylor has a key place in the San Francisco community, sharing his art. He teaches flagging classes at Gold's Gym and is a key organizer of the Flagging in the Park events and a voice to many promoters about creating flagger-friendly events.. (George Jagatik probably introduced flagging as an exercise routine at a Gold's Gym in Manhattan several years ago.)

Tribe members from New York, Los Angeles, Texas, Arizona, and even as far as Brazil came to be part of the gathering. The group ranged from those with little experience and just starting out to 20-year-veterans of flow arts. This is a diverse set of people representing all walks of life, and each with a different story to tell about the art form they love and how it was gifted to them.

Caleb Brundidge from Arizona, while participating in the tie-dye workshop, shared a story of his experience of flagging coming from Praise Worship Dancing, a more spiritually oriented, religious expression of this art form. Self-taught, Caleb came to San Francisco for the flagging weekend to meet other flaggers and learn more about creation of flags.

Also attending the weekend, Patric Nast of Texas learned a completely different version of flagging using wooden dowels rather than weighted silk. A 17-"year veteran of the flow arts, Patric learned from his "flag daddy" when the two went out clubbing.

San Franciscan Tom Lloyd was attending tie-dye session to learn how to create his own flags. He spoke of his love for the music and how he watched flaggers at parties he helped produce for many years until he decided it was time to learn the art for himself.

From the Heart

If there is one thing that can be said about flaggers, each experience resonates from the heart. A group that speaks a language of love for their art, a communal experience of care for each other, and an interest in sharing this within the gay community.

The entire flagging weekend and premier of "Flow Arts" proved to be a big success with flaggers and their admirers. Those who attended the world premier were excited to see "their" history and learn more about their own art.

"Flagging in the Park" raised over \$4,000 for charity. Gathering the tribe to celebrate and share time together was perhaps the biggest reward for the hard work of the San Francisco Flagging Community.

Some great resources exist for those interested in learning about flagging, fanning or poi. Perhaps the best resource is that flow artist you see at a club, on a box, or even in the park. Ask them about what they are doing, and you will find a wealth of knowledge and passion about the flow arts.

Learn More About Flagging Here

The Temple of Poi has [a website](#) site dedicated to poi spinning and classes are offered regularly in San Francisco for those interested in learning more.

Flagger Central, a site managed by Phillip Bryan of Texas, offers forums for discussion as well as simple instructions for creating your own silk flag creations.

Facebook has several groups to share experiences.

[Flagging in the Park](#) is based in San Francisco. [Flaggers USA](#) covers the rest of the country.

Check out [the film's website](#) for information on how to book screenings of this important documentary. You can also purchase a copy on [Amazon.com](#).

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