



BEST NIGHT HIKING

"WALK WHEN THE MOON IS FULL" AT THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

Use the moon—and a professional interpreter courtesy of Three Rivers—to guide you as you venture into the area's best park system after dusk (which is when the really cool stuff happens, of course). August is "Moth Moon," a night hike devoted to sphinx moths and predators who eat them (think: bats!). Reservations required. [threeriversparks.org; Moth Moon: Aug. 24, 8 p.m. at Lowry Nature Center, North Mississippi Regional Park and Silverwood Park.]

BEST SPOT FOR STARGAZING

ONAN OBSERVATORY

This observatory—run by the Minnesota Astronomical Society—is close enough to the city to be convenient (it's located in Baylor Regional Park in Norwood-Young America) but far enough away to cut through all that pesky light pollution. You missed their "Camping with the Stars" overnight event (it's held annually in July), but they have bi-monthly "Star Parties" that are a perfect family night out. [10775 County Rd. 33, Young America; 952.467.2426; mnastro.org; Star Parties: Aug. 14 and 28, 7 p.m.-10 p.m.]

THE ONLY SITUATION IN WHICH WE'D RECOMMEND DRINKING AND BIKING**THE PEDALPUB**

Pub-crawling got a whole lot more fun when the PedalPub came to town a few years ago. In case you haven't seen this human-powered party bus meandering through your neighborhood: It's a bar unto its own that is propelled from bar to bar by up to 16 raucous pedalers. Available till 10 p.m. on routes throughout the Twin Cities. [pedalpub.com]

BEST WAY TO GET PADDLED AROUND THE ST. CROIX RIVER BY A GUY WEARING A STRIPED SHIRT AND A LITTLE HAT WITH A RIBBON**GONDOLA ROMANTICA**

Bring a bottle, a snack and your sweetie, and let Gondola Romantica spirit you away on an authentic Venetian rowboat. [cruises depart from downtown Stillwater and run until 1 a.m. on weekends; 651.439.1783]

King Fancy

The weird and wondrous life of Fancy Ray McCloney.

BY CHRIS CLAYTON

Fancy Ray McCloney and I are watching a rather robust topless dancer perform at Augie's Bourbon Street Cabaret in downtown Minneapolis. Although to describe what she's doing as "performance" is sort of like Augie's billing itself as a New Orleans-style cabaret (aside from the bare breasts, nothing about the small, black-lit gentleman's club even whispers "The Big Easy").

The showgirl is really just shuffling about like a bored cheerleader. Were it not for the brass pole supporting her ample frame, she would likely lie down onstage and take a nap. In an effort to jumpstart the party, the DJ/bartender plays some puffed-up hip-hop at a level that can best be described as "strip club-loud." But the topless shuffler is unfazed and continues swaying to the beat of her own drowsy drum. It's 4 p.m. on a Wednesday and—save for Fancy Ray and me, and a couple old-timers at the bar getting worked on by women in g-strings and fishnet bodysuits—Augie's is empty.

It's not the most inspirational scene, so you can't blame the entertainment for lacking pizzazz. But Fancy Ray doesn't seem bothered. He's a one-man pizzazz machine, after all, a bombastically outrageous pitchman and comedian who lights up rooms for a living. Upon further contemplating the heavyweight dancer, he leans over and deadpans: "If she gained 25, 30 pounds, she'd be just my type." Then he grins, throws back his jheri-curved cranium and emits a James Brown-like "Ha!"—and for one glorious flash, Augie's lights up like a slot machine.

Fancy Ray lives for moments like this. But you know that already because you most certainly know *him*. Even if you don't recognize his name, you've seen his face—endorsing porn shops and used car lots on late-night TV; mugging onstage at comedy clubs and nationally televised talent shows (an unusually lucid David Hasselhoff once buzzed him off of *America's Got Talent*); smiling ear to ear atop his towering "penny-farthing" bicycle, which he pedals around Lake Calhoun. Remember that cat who ran for Minnesota governor in 1998 under the "People's Champion" banner? That was Fancy Ray. How about the colossally-coiffed cable access king from the 1990s? My man.

It's tempting to play the "famous for being famous" card when explaining Fancy Ray's ubiquity, but to do so would imply that he's talentless, which is hardly the case. He's a born salesman ("I could sell sand in Saudi Arabia!"), a brilliant self-promoter (it's no coincidence that he rides an extraordinarily tall bike) and a decorated standup who once opened for Richard Pryor at the State Theater. But his true gift to the world is his carefully crafted persona—a post-modern mash-up of Little Richard's wigged-out androgyny, Muhammad Ali's jive-poetry and James Brown's horny energy. Add a few Henny Youngman-style one-liners and the primping arrogance of Morris Day in *Purple Rain*, and you get the man who, in a past commercial he wrote and produced for a used car lot, crowed, "Deals so good, I could kiss myself!" (And yes, he followed that line by smooching himself on the hand.)

In a stroke of genius, he plays his naughty alter ego with goofy, winking innocence, à la Benny Hill or Pee Wee Herman. Once, in a spot for local sex shop Lickety Split, he parodied *The Crocodile Hunter*, running around the store in khaki shorts yelling "racks and racks of adult videos!" in an awful Australian accent. He made the dildo dealer look about as harmless as a candy shop. This ability to soften life's seedier edges with campy *joie de vivre* makes Fancy Ray the Twin Cities' cult hero number one. Folks yell out his name when they see him in the streets. Businesses rely on his huge personality to push product. Magazines can't help but write stories about him. Fancy Ray isn't famous for being famous; he's famous for being Fancy Ray.

After bidding our sleepy showgirl adieu, Fancy Ray and I retire to the club's dressing room. A stack of lockers, presumably for the dancers' personal effects, leans against the back wall; opposite that sits a long makeup table and a mirror framed in fat, yellow light bulbs. Curiously, there are no chairs. "We used to have seats in here, but the dancers would just sit around and waste time," explains the manager of Augie's as he wheels in two office chairs.

Fancy Ray is a prodigious town-painter (he claims to go clubbing five nights a week), so when I set up our interview, I asked that we meet at his favorite late-night haunt. Augie's is a fitting choice. It's a long-time client of his—he writes, produces and stars in its delightfully low-brow commercials—and for him to schedule a press interview here just makes good business sense. A less jaded explanation for our locale: A strip-club dressing room is the perfect place to interrogate a guy who loves the ladies almost as much as he loves himself. (continued on page 46)





Iconic night owl Fancy Ray McCloney holds court on Hennepin Avenue in downtown Minneapolis.

↑ The self-proclaimed “best-looking man in comedy” is decked out in dress slacks, a billowy black button-down and a gold star necklace. He has a pencil ‘stache and wispy eyebrows, both of which are actually tattoos (he’s a fan of unique body art: the “As Seen on TV” logo is inked onto his right arm). Like his tutti fruttiest idol, Fancy Ray prefers his hair big and his eyeliner plentiful. “Prettiest-looking man in comedy” might be a more apt moniker.

As if on cue, he hops out of his chair, gazes lovingly at himself in the mirror and delivers a boisterous monologue: “ME, ME, ME, 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK! I AM THE BEST-LOOKING MAN IN COMEDY, THE WORLD’S MOST FLAMBOYANT COMEDIAN, ONE OF A KIND, I’LL BLOW YOUR MIND!” Then, as if trying to gauge the tenor of the interview, he sits down and dials back. “What’s up?” he says, his voice slow and steady, suddenly free of its signature preacher’s bark. And in this way he preemptively answers my opening question: No, he’s not always Fancy. Like the best performers, he can flip the “on” switch at will.

Just plain Ray is a thoughtful and decidedly un-Fancy man in his mid-40s, a lover of philosophy, which he studied briefly at a small Texas college, and Jayne Mansfield memorabilia. “She’s over the top and created what she became,” he says of the iconic blonde. “I identify with that.” Ray is also an avid weightlifter and shares a passion for unicycles with his 14-year-old son, Trevón. He’s never been married, and, naturally, he has a joke about that: “I’ll get married when they change ‘I do’ to ‘I’ll try.’” When asked if he has a special lady in his life, he grows coy: “I have friends.”

Just then, a topless dancer walks in and covers her mouth in embarrassment. “Sorry, I’m naked,” she says, which is a funny remark for a stripper to make. “Oh, you don’t have to apologize,” responds Fancy Ray, snapping back into character like a champ.

Once upon a time, there was a semi-pro boxer and basketball player named Fancy Wade. Fancy Wade was whip-smart, a sharp dresser and cool with the ladies. He loved to dance and socialize, and was the

“There are two kinds of people in the world: Fancy Ray and everyone else.”

life of the party. When Fancy Wade passed, his teenage grandson, Ray, carried on his beloved grandpa’s legacy by wearing nice suits and walking with swagger. In the ultimate tip of the hat, he popped “Fancy” onto his name. One day, Fancy Ray was flipping through Fancy Wade’s old music collection and found some tapes by a singer named Little Richard. He was mesmerized by the wild-looking dude on those album covers and by the wild-ass music on those tapes. Someday, he thought, I’m going to touch people the same way that Little Richard and Fancy Wade touched me.

So goes our subject’s creation myth. In the early

1980s, Fancy Ray gave his new persona a test-run in downtown Minneapolis’s bustling club scene. Retro-kitsch was the aesthetic of the day, and it didn’t take long for a Little Richard look-a-like like Fancy Ray, then in his early 20s, to become a nightlife celebrity. On a whim, he began entering lip-sync contests (all the rage at the time) and discovered that he was not only great at mouthing the words to his favorite tunes, but he could caricature a singer like no other.

(continued on page 76)

(Above) Fancy Ray and his many fans.



SHOPPING + FASHION

BEST FASHION SHOW AFTER-PARTY

GLAMORAMA

Sure, Glamorama, Macy’s high-fashion runway/live music show at the Orpheum Theater on Aug. 6th, will be awesome, but we’re even more excited for the amazing food- and drink-filled post-party on Macy’s rooftop overlooking downtown. Tickets cost \$175 to \$750, and they’re worth every penny.

[700 Nicollet Mall, macys.com/glamorama, 9 p.m.-12:30 a.m., Aug. 6th]

BEST WAY TO BUY A FRED PERRY MESSENGER BAG AT MIDNIGHT

MARTIN PATRICK 3’S LATE-NIGHT SHOPPING EVENTS

Martin Patrick 3, purveyor of cuff links, valet boxes and other masculine accessories, understands that men of distinction often enjoy spending money very late at night. Enter its occasional late-night shopping events, featuring food, drink and discounts on ornaments for the modern

playboy. [121 N. First St., Mpls.; 612.746.5329; martinpatrick3.com; to receive info about upcoming late-night shopping events, join MP3’s email list at martinpatrick3.com]

BEST PLACE TO WEAR LOCALLY DESIGNED CLOTHES

VOLTAGE

Catch up on the latest and greatest in local fashion and music with Voltage: Fashion Amplified, First Ave.’s annual rock ‘n’ roll runway show in

April. Ten designers and five bands come together for a long night of canoodling with the Twin Cities’ most stylish scenesters. [701 First Ave. N., Mpls.; 612.338.8388; voltagefashionamplified.com; 8 p.m.-12 a.m., mid-April]

BEST PLACE TO WATCH A FASHION SHOOT

FIVETWOSIX SALON

Photography, fashion, music, beauty and art collide at “Go Live”—an interactive art

opening happening every couple months at FiveTwoSix Salon in St. Paul. Partygoers sip drinks, listen to music and peruse the gallery while stylists beautify a model for a live photo shoot. [526 Selby Ave., St. Paul; 651.222.3839; 526salon.com; 7 p.m.-11 p.m.; check website for upcoming shows]



Your Dining Destination for

25 YEARS!



19090 State Hwy. 371 North,
Brainerd, MN 56401

218.829.9872

www.ivensonthebay.com



Martini Bar
opens daily
at 4:00 PM

The Anchor



Fish & Chips

302 13th Avenue NE
Mpls, MN 55413

612.676.1300

The Real Deal Fish & Chips.
Locally Owned and Operated.
www.theanchorfishandchips.com

king fancy

(FROM PAGE 46)



"I stepped onstage and something magical happened," he says of those contests. "That's when I knew I needed to perform." Word got out about his unique skill, and one night he found himself in Hollywood, lip-syncing Screamin' Jay Hawkins' "I Put a Spell on You" on the nationally televised talent show *Puttin' on the Hits*. YouTube "Fancy Ray + Screamin' Jay," and you'll witness a devilish character in a cape and bald-cap staggering around the stage like a man possessed. He's Bela Lugosi meets black Elvis, and the crowd eats it up.

Fancy Ray gained even more exposure when he recounted his Hollywood adventures on a local cable access show. "I said, 'man, there's something to this cable access thing. People watch it!'" In 1989 he premiered his own show, *Get Down With It!*, on the Minneapolis Television Network. It featured short skits, Jerry Springer-style bits and chats with local and national celebrities, everyone from Weird Al to Al Green.

For a professional narcissist, Fancy Ray was a surprisingly attentive host. "I could go from wild and crazy, but then I could sit down and get these celebrities to open up and be themselves," he explains. "They were comforted by my crazy." Exhibit A: his interview with funk legend Bootsy Collins, in which the two of them gab and giggle like old friends (they'd just met). His show was delirious fun, but it also had a conscience, as evidenced by his nuanced discussions with the late Brian Coyle, Minneapolis's first openly gay City Councilman, and gang leader Sharif Williams.

Get Down with It! was a massive cult hit. When *The Maury Povich Show* did a segment about America's best cable access programming, guess who appeared as a guest? (At one point in the 1997 interview, Fancy Ray blurts out, "Maury, you are my hero. Why? Two words: Connie Chung!")

Get Down with It!, which aired until 1999, gave Fancy Ray the confidence to throw himself into other attention-grabbing pursuits, including politics (he didn't go far in that '98 election, but an equally adept showman named Jessie Ventura did); TV advertising (he runs an ad agency called Chocolate Orchid Pro-

ductions); and comedy, one of his true loves.

His early standup sets consisted mainly of Little Richard impersonations, but over the years he's developed a silly, self-deprecating comedic voice of his own. A favorite joke of his: "People look at me sometimes and say, 'When did Oprah get a sex-change?'" He credits his comedic evolution to studying famous funny men like Redd Foxx, Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy.

Toni McCloney isn't surprised by her son's scholarly approach to joke-telling, pointing out his inborn ambition and hunger for knowledge. "He was a nerdy kid," says Toni, who reared Ray and his two brothers on her own in North Minneapolis. "He would go to the library all day just so he could find out how everything worked." She remembers giving Ray a ventriloquist dummy when he was in second grade, and soon he was performing with it at church and even toured his act with Billy Graham's traveling evangelist circus.

Fancy Ray's brother Joe is more perplexed by his sibling's stardom, recalling, "He wasn't much of an entertainer when we were kids. He didn't joke that much. He was pretty serious." Which sounds like further proof that Fancy Ray, like his beloved Jayne Mansfield, worked damn hard to create what he became. The man of the hour concurs: "I'm a student of showbiz. My heroes are multi-faceted entertainers like Liberace. A lot of comedians say, 'You're a crowd-pleaser.' Call it what you want, but I set out to entertain, and people get their money's worth."

As our interview winds down, Fancy Ray mentions that he and his hero Little Richard are friends, a fact I find cosmically beautiful. The two met in typical Fancy fashion: While performing at Mystic Lake Casino ten years ago, Little Richard noticed someone impersonating him in the front row. He invited Fancy Ray onstage for a duet, and the two have been tight ever since. Fancy Ray describes the rock 'n' roll peacock as a spiritual advisor of sorts. They've attended church together, and Little Richard leaves him inspirational voicemails, spouting things like, "God bless!" and "Keep on keepin' on."

Spirituality is important to Ray. When he moved to L.A. a few years back to make it big, he discovered Religious Science, a sort of all-inclusive, non-dogmatic school of religious thought. He didn't exactly become a star (although he had some memorable moments on *America's Got Talent* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*), but when he moved back to Minneapolis last year, he says his soul felt refreshed.

He's working on a new joke that reflects his group-hug spirituality: "The Bible says homosexuality is an abomination, but it also says that eating shellfish is an

abomination. What if we got it backwards? What if God's up in heaven going, 'I don't care who you sleep with; put the damn lobster tail down.'" OK, it's rough, but it's still funny.

Is he worried about how his secular fans will respond to the God jokes? "I'm loved by all," he says. "I can do a tranny joke one minute and talk about God the next. That's the yin and yang of Fancy Ray."

But just how long will his yin and yang hold our attention? In some ways, Fancy Ray is a relic of the '80s and early '90s, which is arguably when he achieved the height of his fame. Back then, a true original like himself could get his 15 minutes and then some without much competition. Fancy Ray never left—he's still hustling, still making gonzo TV ads and doing stand-up—but these days, true originals clamor for your attention every second online. But maybe the YouTube Era is the right time for a Fancy Ray renaissance. He's definitely taking advantage of it, spreading his shine all over the popular video site—not to mention MySpace, Facebook and Twitter (unedited sample Tweet: "I'm Sweet, Sexy, Sensual, Sweaty, Salty, Scrumptious and sometimes Sassy!!!").

Whatever he does to stay visible—*Fancy Ray the Movie*? Fancy Ray action figures?—you can bet he'll do it with incomparable funky flare. It's like he says as we're leaving Augie's that night: "There are two kinds of people in the world: Fancy Ray and everyone else." +

living nightmares

(FROM PAGE 48)



To achieve a murder conviction in a U.S. court, the prosecution must prove both *actus reus*, or the "guilty act," as well as *mens rea*, the "guilty mind." But a sleepwalker is not conscious of his actions: no intent, no mens rea, not guilty. In 1987, a Toronto man named Ken Parks drove 14 miles in his car, stabbed his mother-in-law to death and attempted to strangle his father-in-law before driving to the police station to turn

BROADWAY MUSICAL THEATER TRAINING

Dance • Voice • Drama
CLASSES FOR ALL AGES & ALL LEVELS!

CORE CLASSES:

- Sing & Dance (ages 3 - 8)
- Performing Arts Workshop (ages 9 - 12)
- Broadway Arts Conservatory (ages 12 - 19)
- Private Voice & Private Acting (all ages)
- Ballet, Tap, Jazz, Hiphop, Broadway Dance
- Audition/College Prep (Teens & Young Adults)

REGISTER NOW!

Lundstrum Center
1617 N 2nd St
Minneapolis, MN 55411

612-521-2600

www.lundstrumcenter.org



LUNDSTRUM CENTER
for the Performing Arts

"Where Broadway Meets West Broadway"