An Evening at the Garden of Allah: A Gay Cabaret in Seattle, 1996, 167 pages, Don Paulson, Roger Simpson, 0231096984, 9780231096980, Columbia University Press, 1996

An Evening at the Garden of Allah tells the story of the community of gays and lesbians that blossomed around the cabaret during an age before the Stonewall rebellion in New York and other uprisings made gay consciousness a public issue. A wealth of arresting photographs from the collections of Jackie Starr, Skippy Larue, and other headliners at the club during the ten years it thrived, breathe life into the personal histories centered around this oasis of gay and lesbian culture. Through interviews with former patrons and performers, Don Paulson and Roger Simpson capture the joyful evenings where those on stage proclaimed to the gathered audiences, "Come out and be yourselves." Here are the lives of the female impersonators, the Prima Donnas and the Dames, singing ballads to the accompanying roar of the Garden's old theater pipe organ. Dressed regally or garishly as their stage personas demanded, their bravado helped others to affirm and take pride in their lesbian and gay identities. These precursors of today's drag queens blast many deeply rooted assumptions about gender as they detail the excitements, tragedies, and complexities of their day-to-day lives. Here too are the stories of lesbian and gay audience members who found a home at the Garden, the soldiers and sailors who patronized the club, the fashionable Seattleites slumming on notorious First Avenue, and the tourists who came to be photographed in the Garden's atmosphere of debauchery and abandon. In its moving portrait of a little-explored chapter in America's gay and lesbian past, An Evening at the Garden of Allah takes readers back in time with a vivid oral history of this special cabaret. Paulson, Simpson, and their informants present the story of a place where ideas about repression, identity, and resistance were beginning to be openly discussed, where hopes and dreams of liberation took shape.

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