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**Title:** Lily White & Company Calendar Survey Report

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## CALENDAR SURVEY REPORT

For one reason or another, I am told, people in LW&Co are 'afraid' to express their opinions to me. I have never understood this sentiment, have tried to combat it and to find ways to eliminate it. On such attempt was the production of the 1995 Calendar Survey, a document which was developed, generated and distributed at my personal expense. I wanted to contact and to elicit responses personally from the people associated with LW&Co. The survey with a letter was prepared and either hand or mail delivered to every board, supportin and performing member of this Company. Of the 75 that were produced, 3 remian undeliverable for one reason or another. I apologize to those three people and regret not allowing them the chance to give their imput.

I requested that surveys be completed and returned by Monday 7 August, allowing most people at least 10 Days to fill it out. To allow for the inevitable late returns, Eric and I waited until Tuesday evening to begin the tabulation process. Each response was reviewed for each question on each survey. Similar responses where then grouped together while Eric and I then proceeded to develop a summarized response to each question from all the alike answers. The same question, quite often, elicited widely divergent responses and we attempted to present all the major views expressed on a particular issue. After this summarization process, we then went back trthrough all the replies, selected and have printed in italics one or more direct quotes that we felt best encapsulated the prevailing thoughts on the specific issue.

When the tabulation process was finished, we utilized the guidance we were given and proceeded to develop a Calendar of Events for LW&Co which rums from Sept. '95 to Dec. '97. The extra months covered are to make the performing calendar coincide with our new fiscal year calendar

The following pages of this document present our survey compilations, calendar recommendations and my personal observations on all of this. All the original surveys returned are on file and available to anyone to peruse. I did request that all this information would be formated into a special edition of the LilyGram and it will be sent to all 75 recipiants of the original survey before the end of the month.

# Lily White & Co., Inc. 1995 Calendar Survey

## Demographics

- 75 surveys printed
- 73 mailed or hand-delivered
- 2 undeliverable due to lack of address
- 1 returned for wrong address and too late to be remailed
- 18 total returned (24% of those handed out)

Because most people signed their survey or mailed them with return address attached, it could be determined that there was an equal split between performing company members and community members (9 and 9) responded.

## Survey Results

Many did not specifically answer questions in some cases. Therefore, answers presented are from those who did.

### 1. How do you feel about the overall quality of presentations over the past two years? What were our strongest points? Weakest points?

- 2 did not specifically address issue
- 6 felt quality has remained the same or has improved a bit.
- 10 feel quality is on a steady decline.

**Strengths:** Variety of material, choreography, comedic material. Hotel shows and plays are of a higher caliber than anything else.

**Weaknesses:** Poor lipsynch, poor homework, performers appear not to know what they're doing, and lack of commitment.

**Other concerns:** Major shows too long.

**Suggested solutions:** (Shared by many ) *I understand the philosophy of everyone getting their fair share (and I know that is an oversimplification), I just don't agree with it in an artistic production. Opportunities for everyone? YES! Fair share? NO! Perhaps one answer is to have people audition for numbers before a casting committee. No one...automatically gets a number. A little motivation never hurt anyone. it also serves to bring some people back to earth...*

### 2. How do you feel about the quantity of presentations over the past two years? Was it too much, too little or Just Right!

5 did not specifically address issue

6 - "just right"

*I think we did just the right amount of shows; could have used more cast and committee members to make it easier and more fun. Maybe if a member opts not to do a particular show, they then should be on tech or help produce.*

7 - "too much"

**General comments:** Cast burnout, lack of time for rehearsals and tech rehearsal/preparations, volunteer shortage

### 3. What types of shows/entertainments do you feel work best in terms of A) Fundraising, B) Audience appeal, C) Personal Enjoyment?

- 2 did not specifically address question.
- 5 thought Paper Moon/Strawberry cabarets and/or Carriage House shows worked well overall (ABC)

8 feel major hotel shows are best venues overall (ABC)

**A) Fundraising**

13 consider hotel and cabaret shows are our best efforts

**B) Audience Appeal**

It's an equal split between plays, hotel shows and cabarets

**C) Personal Enjoyment**

All three vehicles were equally split once again with 4 strongly expressing hotel shows being their favorite. Many felt, however, that no matter the vehicle, the better the production, the greater the pleasure.

**4. What would be the ideal show/entertainment/event to do if you could put the whole thing together start to finish?**

- Many suggested smaller cast shows, mainly of a variety nature,
- Multimedia or shows that combine drag with live music venues would also be desirous as well as
- Comedy live theatre e.g., Charles Busch, Ridiculous Theatre Company, etc.

**5. What have we done that, in your opinion, was our most successful event? What made it so successful? What was our worst or most disappointing event? Why was it so? (Please consider all the aspects—type of show, style, audience reaction as well as funds raised.)**

Most successful:

2 did not answer specifically

13 say hotel shows in general

2 cite *Lily in La La Land*

4 cite *Hystery of the World*

*Loose in Paradise, Into the Woods and A Quiet End* each received one vote as most successful

1 *Into the Woods*

1 *A Quiet End*

**Most disappointing:**

*Poodles, Parking & Pigskin Preppies*

*Broadway Angel*

*A Quiet End* (due to lack of audience turn out.)

*In terms of money, hotel events are best, plays are worst. In terms of theatrical integrity, plays are best, (current) drag—the worst*

*(Though 6, 7, 8 were not specifically related to the calendar, they were inserted for general feedback on issues affecting the company as a whole - P.F.)*

**6. What can we do that would attract new performers to the Company?**

- Auditions for new performers
- Utilize the Strawberry shows as an audition vehicle and work performers into larger shows.
- Regain the quality in Lily shows.

*Word of mouth and great shows will produce new people.*

**7. What can we do that will attract new audiences to our events?**

- Comprehensive advertising plan utilizing mainstream vehicles.
- Broaden repertoire and maintain professionalism.

*We should be more concerned about getting back the audience we used to have. Produce shows which are consistently*

*high quality events and the audience will find us.*

**8. What suggestions/ideas do you have to increase our general Supporting Membership?**

- a. Stronger personal outreach to organizations such as SCAAN, hospices, AIDS units and well as other gay and lesbian service orgs.
- b. Closer follow-up more timely on mailings and stronger communication with existing membership.

*Get over being gay. Just be the people you are and promote yourselves as AIDS fund-raisers who also have a lot of fun. Maybe some gay people would prefer to be supportive of less flamboyant productions.*

**9. It has been proposed to rework and restage *BROADWAY ANGEL* for this Christmas. How do you feel about this idea?**

- 9 did not express a solid pro or con  
5 - "dump it"  
4 - "do it"

*I am personally not interested in being in the show, but if the decision is made to do a Christmas show, I feel that doing *B'way Angel* would be a good idea. Producing an already proven piece will save valuable time and will hopefully free up some people to begin planning the next show (which hopefully won't be until next summer.)*

**10. It has been suggested that we are too overextended for our size and our wisest course of action would be to restrict ourselves to one major event or at most two large events in any season. How do you feel about this idea?**

- 4 - did not specifically address the issue  
1 - schedule is fine  
7 - over extended  
6 - offer specific suggestions that would tailor our situation:

- a. Holiday show, summer show and one cabaret per year,
- b. Splitting performing company into smaller casts with each performing smaller shows,
- c. Using parts of previous shows and touring them in one show,
- d. One major event, a play and two bar nights/shows per season.

*It would be frustrating to think that we're overextended when we're the only group that extends ourselves anyway. our purpose though, is to make a difference and without pressing onward, I don't see how that can happen.*

**11. It has been suggested that a greater diversity of project is needed to stimulate the Performing Company's growth—projects like a prom night, celebrity auction, live music reviews, etc. How do you feel about this idea? Is there a pet project that you have always wanted the Performing Company to do? Give us the details!**

- 3 - issue not addressed  
15 - in favor of diversifying

Many thought prom night a good idea other suggestion included

- a. Live music review
- b. Dance review
- c. Country Western Night
- d. Sock hop
- e. Stand up comedy show
- f. Dance marathon

*Lip sync Contest*

*I think a mix of such events with two or so performing productions per year could attract wider participation due to the variety of options.*

*I've always wanted to see a prom night. However, with any activity..we need volunteers to aid in its success. Volunteers: Big Problem! Ideas that come across the table are fine, but membership has no concept of the work involved nor are they willing to get their hands dirty.*

**12. What do you perceive are the biggest problems/difficulties/challenges facing Lily White & Co. at present? How can these areas be addressed? What insights can you offer for the development of our next two year calendar? What should definitely be included and what excluded? Please add any particular gripes you may have and suggest solutions for them so the situation(s) will not occur. Feel free to say anything!**

—More people need to be involved in the planning of productions—from theme concept through final product.

- Better discipline at rehearsals.
- Shows are more than the performance, it's the reason why we do what we do that seems to be forgotten by performers.
- Present a new original (perhaps a commissioned piece) and seek funding for it.
- Greater outreach to the women's community.
- Make the size of the shows fit the available performing company.
- Better utilization of volunteer time and talent.

I. Organization of Human Resources. *Delegating tasks or jobs to the competent people available*

II. Planning Activities based solely on the demonstrated abilities (not potential)

III. Direct the proceedings—not doing it yourself—training in all levels

IV. Control - Reporting up and down. *None of this "right hand doesn't know..." business.*

and *Problem/challenge - developing a mission statement for the performing company: should it be open to everyone, regardless of talent, who wants to be on stage, or should it be selective in order to present a more polished appearance attract more audiences? Could a prom night or holiday ball fill the need of some to "strut their stuff" rather than participation in the shows?*

*As a faithful audience member for the past four years here are my observations...*

*...Regardless of the fact that the cause in a worthy one—no one wants to see a bad show—it's an insult to the company and to the audience to see performers who haven't even bothered to learn the words. A man in a dress does not a "female illusionist" make! I would suspect that like any theatrical or volunteer group the culprit would be spreading yourself too thin. I would suggest fewer and better and only cast those willing to make the professional commitment necessary.*

*I feel that we have too few workers...If you want to perform you (should)...work on a committee. Check up on progress of committee to see that they are doing their job.*

*The quality has steadily deteriorated from the days of the first hotel show but audiences seem to keep coming. So what else do you want? The goals are being achieved aren't they?*

#### **Comments specifically about the Board:**

- Four view the board as a useless entity.
  - a. Not responsive to the company
  - b. Board members inexperienced and do not adequately perform job.
- 501(c)3 quest should be terminated.
- Board meetings a waste of time that could be spent in rehearsal
- Not representative of the company.
- Board is ineffective.

*Have the whole board at all functions.*

*You must listen to your performers they are the backbone of the company and without them you stop to exist. Make sure the board members know that they are here for a reason...to govern over the company as to make it better and to see that more money is raise(d) to help in the fight against AIDS or just helping out other gay groups as well. The Board is a group of people not just one, two or three people. The whole board has to make the rules; working together makes a big difference.*

**One final thought:** *...there's no need for separating ourselves as gay or straight. We're all in this together and there('s) nothing special about anybody that can't be said of all of us. Isolation is just that and will keep us automatically from including everybody who wants to support AIDS patient care and research through our creative efforts. I know some people who are incredibly hateful and hostile to gays. But I know a lot more kind and loving people who would support a cause that promotes humanitarian causes and not their personal ends. Get over being gay. Be creative, artistic, philanthropic, etc.*

**P.S.** *You should be able to tell who the dedicated members are by how many return these surveys.*

## MY OPINIONS

Allow me to begin by thanking those people who chose to help Eric and I with this project. In reading the surveys, it is very obvious that the participants really took their time in answering the questions. No one seems to have just "knocked it off". Also, with very few and those being minor, exceptions, I cannot really disagree with most of the response at their heart. I found somethings a bit too extreme in their suggested solutions to problems, but the underlining concerns expressed shared a true commonality.

On the other hand though, I find it particularly disheartening that we received only 18 responses. I am infuriated by the fact that there was not even 100% participation by our own Board of Directors. What these odd demographics tell me is that people, including our own leaders, are either A) completely discouraged/disenchanted with the company and/or B) simply do not care anymore. Everyone is busy with 1001 things to accomplish. In order to do what we need to we prioritize - most pressing to least important. Obviously the concerns of this Company are very low, perhaps not even making it onto, some people's lists.

When I read through the survey results, I found several recurring themes - quality, commitment, diversity, and, the one I think says it all, "get back to basics." Let's cut to the quick of all this. Why are we here? Why does LW & Co exist? To raise money for other people's needs. That is it - period - the end. To accomplish that goal we do the one thing that we all are, with more or less skill, good at: we put on a show. We give people something to enjoy and make them pay dearly for it. That is our raison d'etre in a very Anglo-Saxon nut shell. All the work, the angst, everything is done for that single purpose. We are our brother's/sister's keepers and we have to exercise our responsibility to one another. All the fun, learning, applause, public notority, dresses, wigs, make up, even the ability to 'strut your stuff', maybe winning some title and a rhinestone crown, the ego boosts and fans - they are all by products of our actions, not the reasons for our actions. When the by products are allowed to become the reasons, you end up in the situation that this Company is in today.

Commitment is the first thing to go in this situation. There is no longer a sense that we are in this together and are doing it for one simple purpose. When a group is committed to a certain goal, they work together, doing whatever it takes to achieve it - endless hours of rehearsals, the tedium of envelope stuffing, giving up that hour of free time they finally got because posters need to be gotten up or a booth needs volunteers, or a set put up. "I only perform in major shows", I don't do tech or committee or office work, "let somebody else do it, I put in enough time." Commitment goes away when the 'I's' start taking over where the "we's" used to be.

Naturally, when the group's commitment goes, the quality of the work they try to do has to decline. It's like trying to bake bread with old yeast - it may puff up but you know it's gonna fall flat later. Without the commitment a group is no longer a group - it is a bunch of "I's" who will make sure they come off OK but will let the rest fend for themselves. "I don't have to rehearse, I know my stuff. It's the others", "So what if I don't get this routine, I'm in the back, I can fake it", "I'll learn this for the next time", "I did what I was supposed to, if they didn't it's not my fault". The personal agenda has taken over here and just being on stage has become more important than anything else. Who care what the rest of the show looks like as long as your numbers are good. Gee, I wonder why there aren't as many people attending any more?

Diversity in any form becomes the enemy when quality and commitment falter. "It's too hard we can't learn that", "That's not my type of number," "It's stupid - people will laugh", "I don't want to try this, I'm fine with what I do", "Why are we doing this, no one's gonna like it". It is so much safer to do whatever it is we are accustomed to, it requires less effort. You don't have to think about it. We can bluff our way through what we know how to do, the audience won't notice. They expect us to do certain things and if they don't always work well it's not the end of the world. They like us don't they? They'll still come back because it is for a good cause. Of course the overall attendance has been dropping since the last Hotel Show. You don't think it is because the audience has caught on do you?

I guess it is really just a house of cards - one weak level upon another upon the shakiest of all. When the bottom level collapses, when you lose your reason for being, all of the other levels that it supported have to start to fall apart and soon it's just a deck of cards scattered on the table and floor, just makin' a mess and not doin' anyone a whole lot of good.

So how does this rant get translated into a Calendar? Well, fasten your seatbelts! You want to get basic? Well we are.

- 1) Beginning Tuesday 5 September and for basically every Tuesday and Thursday thereafter we will be rehearsing. The focus will be on movement, motivation, lip sync and presentation. The numbers and the people who work on them will be asked to perform them when a show is slated. Nothing will be seen by the public until I think it is really and I can be very difficult to please. So we may have some very small casts and/or short shows if people aren't there to work.
- 2) There will be one cabaret per year - the Holiday show at the Paper Moon set for the first weekend of December. How big it is and who gets in it will depend entirely on what I just said in #1.



- 3) There will be one major show each year in a Hotel during the Summer. Planning and layout of that show will begin in November and all are encouraged to participate. Rehearsals will begin in January and numbers will be awarded on a demonstrated basis (Remember #1?)

And that is the Performing Calendar until December 1997. Anything else done by the Company will be a Ways and Means Committee fundraising event for production costs. As of now there are two dinners scheduled before the end of the year and a bar show at the Strawberry Inn. I want to retain the Strawberry performances in the years ahead as a means to 'tryout' new performers and to provide a venue for those people who want to perform but for one reason or another can only make a very short term commitment.

Eric and I recommend that as an additional means of raising money, LW&Co moves into a sponsorship role of other, non performing events. These could occur in March each year and for 1996 we suggest a St. Patrick's Day Dance Marathon at the Beatles while in 1997 we could try a Green and White Ball with live bands and possibly a headliner. Further work could be done by collaborating with other groups such as the Mens/Womyns Choruses, The Womyn's Theatre Guild to produce a short series of small scale entertainments or plays in the Carriage House Theatre.

We increase our diversity by becoming a promotor and colaborator. We increase our quality by increasing the number and intensity of rehearsals - and putting a bit of competitiveness into the process. We stimulate the commitment level by providing as varied a set of outlets for work as possible so that all will have a chance to give whatever time they want. Most importantly though we can refocus on our most basic agenda - to do a good show to raise lots of money to give it away to those who need it the most.

Thank you



Paul R. Foltz

# Lily White & Company, Inc. Two-Year Calendar

## 1995

- Sept. Joel's Spaghetti Western - All-You-Can-Eat Spaghetti Dinner to benefit Joel in SCAAN AIDSWALK
- Oct. 21: Strawberry Cabaret\*
- Nov. 5: All-You-Can-Eat Turkey Dinner\* - Paper Moon Restaurant
- Dec. 3: Christmas Cabaret - Paper Moon Restaurant

## 1996

- Jan. 14: Lily Annual Company Meeting and Dinner
- Feb.
- Mar 16-17: St. Patrick's Day Marathon - Dance marathon with proceeds to go to Lily White Patient Relief Fund
- Apr
- May 18: Strawberry Cabaret\*
- June
- July 21: Hotel Show
- July 28: Pride Festival - Lily Booth
- Aug.
- Sept.
- Oct. 19: Strawberry Cabaret\*
- Dec. 8: Christmas Cabaret

## 1997

- Jan. 19: Lily Annual Meeting and Dinner
- Feb.
- March 16: Green Ball - With live bands, perhaps one major headliner, etc. Funds going to LWPRF
- April
- May 17: Strawberry Cabaret\*
- June
- July 20: Hotel Show
- July 27: Pride Festival - Lily Booth
- Aug
- Sept
- Oct. 18: Strawberry Cabaret\*
- Nov.
- Dec. 7: Christmas Cabaret

\*To raise funds for production costs