

Bring out the kink

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Toronto the good - and kinky?

Tonight's 10th annual Decadance fashion show and dance party at The Docks will welcome thousands of poseurs, players and voyeurs of all ages, genders and orientations.

In fact, the party has been declared by London's Skin Two Magazine, a sort of fetish version of fashion magazine Vogue, as the largest of its kind in the world, bettering Londontown's own Rubber Ball and San Francisco's renowned Fetish Ball.

"Who would have thought, staid old Toronto - kink capital of the world?" laughed George Giaouris, owner of Northbound Leather, which sponsors the event and whose company is celebrating its own 20th anniversary as a purveyor of leather and fashion accoutrements combining style and stimulation.

In fact, the fetish/kink scene is far from new to Toronto. Northbound Leather hosted its first leather/fetish dance party at the St. Lawrence Market north building in 1979 and has held regular events at bars - gay and straight - throughout the city ever since.

Denise Benson, an Eye Weekly columnist and radio host, deejayed at numerous such parties throughout the 1990s and said the former "underground" scene - while never likely to be mainstream - is certainly bolder than it has ever been.

"There's a huge, huge fetish community here. People who tend to think perhaps we don't have that kind of scene just aren't looking for it or choose not to look for it. The fact is it's here and it's just grown larger and larger as people have ... chosen to be more public," Benson said.

The fetish/kink scene has also been important in the past few decades in creating an enormous cultural crossover between all kinds of music and nightclub scenes, bringing together goths, gays, industrial music lovers and others, she added.

But for Giaouris, a straight man with three children who married his high school sweetheart, Anna, getting behind the leather/fetish/ kink scene has simply been a matter of carrying on the family business which began in Greece in 1961.

LeatherCraft in Yorkville was the family's first Canadian store, opening in 1969 before moving to various locations along Yonge St.

At that time, Giaouris's parents regularly toured Rust Belt cities like Cleveland and Pittsburgh accompanied by a couple of models. They would attend leather bars and events and pull out client order books.

"My parents were very liberal; they never judged anybody's morality. The only thing that they were worried about was that they were not breaking the law," Giaouris said.

They consulted clients, including judges, lawyers and police officers for advice and "everybody would tell them, 'well, basically you're offering costuming,'" he said.

The Giaouris spun-off a new business because of the "oil and water" clash between conventional leather aficionados and those whose applications went beyond motorcycle jackets and outerwear.

Giaouris and his wife have become part of the leather/fetish scene themselves over the years.

When his children were younger, they were well used to seeing their parents going out at night in provocative attire, he said.

"When they (kids) saw us dress up and go out, they thought, 'Oh, mom and dad making a living,'" he added, with a laugh.

Giaouris and Viktoria Kalenteris, a sex educator from Montreal in town for this weekend's Everything to Do with Sex Show in the Automotive Building at Exhibition Place, agree that there are huge misconceptions about the kinky crowd.

Far from being on the edges of society, the great majority tend to be "average" people with college or university educations and medium to high incomes, Kalenteris said.

"The majority of people ... who get involved in this particular realm are looking for something more in their bedroom repertoire, they want to expand. You can only do so many positions then you have to add a little spice in your life, Kalenteris said.

That includes experimenting with materials as exotic as lace and leather or as mundane as corduroy as well as role-playing, sensation play and bondage/discipline.

"I don't care who you are, everybody has a kinky side. Fetish is up to each individual; what turns you on, what stimulates you, what arouses you is your personal fetish," Kalenteris said.

"I have been convinced - and no one can tell me otherwise - that everybody on this planet has a fetish; everyone," Giaouris added.

Another misconception is that events such as tonight's are indiscriminate orgies, said Giaouris, noting there is an established code of conduct.

"There's a lot of sexual undercurrent and tension (but) you'll find a woman running around in her underwear, stockings, corset and high heels is a lot safer and treated with much more civility than a fully-dressed woman in a regular entertainment district bar. People know to be civil at these events," Giaouris said.

"You have a really amazing positive energy. People will compliment you for whatever outfit you're wearing and whatever look. What you're going to see is an adult masquerade ball," Kalenteris added. What: Decadance

Where: The Docks Entertainment Complex, 11 Polson St.

When: Fashion show begins at 11 p.m.; dancing until 6 a.m.

Tickets: \$45 in advance, \$55 at the door, 416-972-1037

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