



MEET MARKET

VADIM LIBERMAN goes on some Urban Outings and discovers that—gasp!—you can find gay men outside of the bars and gyms

Why do I always meet handicapped men? At bars I'm frequently encircled by guys who are blind to (or blinded by) my stunning looks or deaf to my vibrant sense of humor. And the worst are those who don't talk to me because they're obviously mute. Yet, until a pill (besides E) cures these impaired individuals of their inability to appreciate my countless splendors, I remain the one who's sick... of not meeting anyone worth meeting. How will I ever capture a cute boyfriend to match my Prada belt, incite envy in lonely homos, or make past boyfriends jealous? Saddened by my single-itis, the good folks at *Instinct* prescribed some medicine.

A date with Justin Timberlake? Not quite. Instead I get set up on a blind date with Urban Outings (UO), which describes itself as, "Not a dating service, support group, or singles club, but, rather, an innovative activity service that plans and organizes casual get-togethers for groups of outgoing professional gay men with common interests." Although UO promises "more meet, less market," I fear that I'll only meet men who perpetually whine about their boyfriend-less existence, (God, aren't those guys *so* annoying?) but I proceed to urban-out myself.

INITIATION

Before I start socializing, Richard, UO's cute membership director, screens me to ensure that I'm participating for the right reasons. I guess "Because Editor Ben forced me to" isn't a good enough excuse. After convincing me that UO's members aren't socially-challenged, unattractive, boring queers, Richard explains that the 800-plus members joined simply to meet new people. Some had just relocated to the city, come out, or broken up with a boyfriend; others feel uncom-

fortable in bars and clubs. Still other misfits mistake UO for a sex club. But I'm not looking for members to stroke my member—unless Mr. Britney Spears is a member.

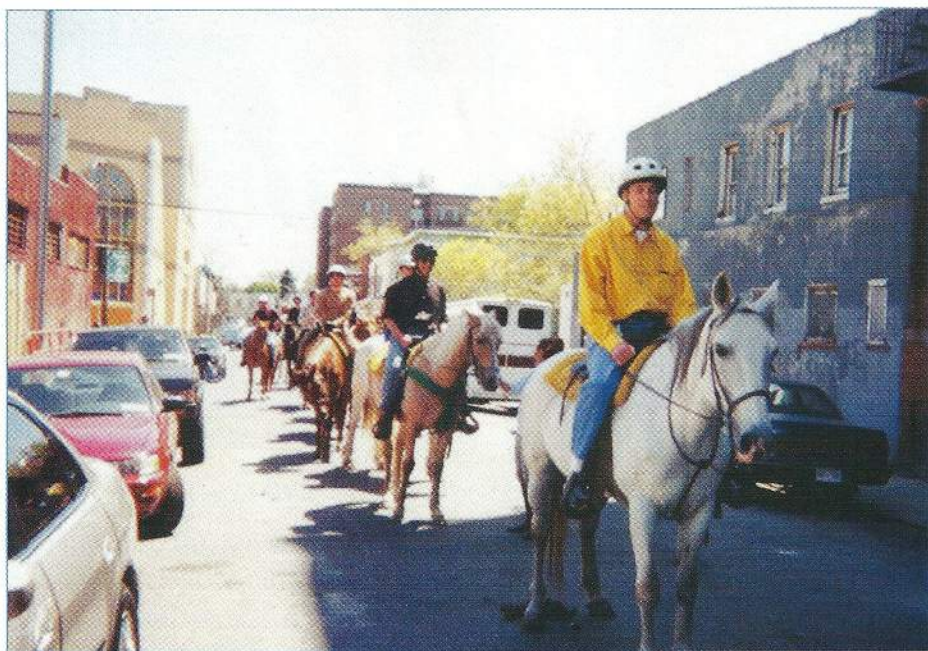
Richard tells me that UO's event planners organize more than 360 activities a year. Yeah, come on Richard, cut to the numbers that really count. The age range: Late-20s to 50s. And since ages aren't the only important digits, I'm told that the average UO member—like the average worker—earns more than I do. Good, I need more designer belts.

I then chat with Brian, UO's director. He's 24, he's cute, he's friendly, he's my next boyfriend. He just doesn't know it. I only hope that he'd date me for my model physique rather than because I'm writing about his company.

I'M GAME

At my first activity, board game night, I'll be playing *Time's Up!*, which is basically celebrity charades. I've also seen this cruisy game played at bars where guys pretend to know celebrities ("No, no, she prefers Deborah to Debbie Gibson now"). Wearing a shirt covered with what resemble cum stains ("No, no, it's part of the design"), I arrive at the restaurant, nervously smiling as I greet the 20 (all older) members. I repeatedly remind myself: "I'm an adult. I'm an adult. And adults don't panic in these situations." Luckily, everyone is friendly and, after a few drinks, I'm explaining why I prefer 'NSync over the Backstreet Boys.

Horrible at playing the game, I eventually cheat. Not that my 50-something teammate cares. Transfixed by my beauty, he asks, "What's a cute guy like you doing here?" Gosh, I'm sooo Drew Barrymore in



Never Been Kissed, since I, too, am undercover. I reply, "To meet other cute guys." He then compliments me on my (fake) blue eyes, as if I'm not aware that, "I'm not Josie Grossy anymore."

After watching guys depict "celebrities" whom I've never seen in *Tiger Beat* magazine, the group disperses, and about six of us head to a nearby bar. William, UO's group leader for this activity, explains that bonding often occurs after an event—and there's nothing like queers bonding over liquor and a drag performance. At night's end, I meet a cute 20 year old, bid the UO fellas farewell, and engage in a different bonding experience at the boy's place.

GETTING PLAY

No longer a UO virgin at my next event, *Bent*, an off-Broadway play portraying the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, my anxiety still persecutes me. Nonetheless, I'm an adult, I'm an adult. I'm an adult who enters the playhouse wearing electric orange pants and a tight, blue, spandex shirt. "Hi, I'm Vadim," I maniacally exclaim in an attempt to mask my discomfiture. "Hi Vadim, you look really flaming tonight," the two dozen (again, all older) members quip.

Okay, no one actually says that, but they probably think it, so I justify my wardrobe to one member: "Blue and orange go really well together; they're complementary colors, you know." He agrees. After taking our seats in the tiny theater, a gregarious guy explains that he joined UO after moving to New York and knowing no one here. "Without Urban Outings," he says, "I wouldn't have anyone to do these kinds of things with." We then chat about the Holocaust, life, death, and, naturally, the eventual focus of every queer conversation: sex. No, not with each other—but how he gets action and I don't. Then the play begins.

After the play, my new friend and I exchange contact information. In an e-mail the following day, he writes that he enjoyed my company (well who wouldn't?!) and relished my unbelievably gorgeous looks (he may have worded that

differently). I e-mail him back, agreeing with everything he wrote.

STUPID CUPID

The only thing more tragic than you being single on Valentine's Day is *me* being single on the most significant day to flaunt a relationship. Although Cupid is shooting blanks to ensure that my love life remains blank, I refuse to watch Jaclyn Smith long for love in yet another lame Lifetime movie based on some Danielle Steele novel. Besides, my future boyfriend, Brian, waits at UO's Voyeuristic Valentine's Mixer. By now, we've exchanged several flirtatious e-mails (perhaps only on my part), so I'm excited to live out my own romance novel.

I arrive at Remote Lounge, where you can control cameras to zoom in on members' crotches (I would never!) and use the

bar's telephones to call other patrons, informing them of their huge packages, (Never, ever!) As usual, I wear what some label inappropriate but what I call fashion: a clinging black shirt with three rubber penises coming off the chest.

Hiding my anxiety behind a strained smile that I've been told resembles a constipated look, I mingle with about 100 Urban Outers, including some I'd met at previous events and, to my horror, Eric. To make a short story shorter, he and I met months ago at a club, had lunch, and I never responded to his subsequent e-mails (I was holding out for Justin). Happily, we maintain a lively dialogue about how I must think he's a loser for joining UO. "Not at all," I reply. "You're a loser for many other reasons." Okay, so I don't say that, but I do explain that besides the three penises on my chest, Big Daddy has a fourth, longer one lurking down below. (Clearly, that's the vodka talking.)

POKING AROUND

There's nothing I enjoy more than sticking men and having them stick me with their long swords. With that in mind, I enter the Metropolis Fencing Club, ready to engage in some heated swordplay for my final activity: Fencing 101. Tempted as I was to don my >>



Richard Simmons headband, I instead arrive with tousled hair, sporting a T-shirt and trainer pants—you know, for that just-came-from-the-gym look.

I wave a big hello to about 14 guys as we wait for instruction to begin. “God, this looks like a real workout. And I just came from the gym, too,” I lie to a cute member as we watch experienced fencers jab each other. It turns out that I’d met this guy some time ago in a writing class (yes, I had to learn how to write the fine literature you’re reading now), so we start discussing how he’d like to write about his UO experience. “What a terrific idea,” I exclaim. But before I break my cover, our lesson starts.

After learning basic positions, poking techniques and blocking methods, I’m ready for one-on-one action. But with so many guys anxious to prick each other, first we need to slip into some protection. I don a vest and helmet, a tight, uncomfortable headpiece that forces sweat to saturate my face, restricts my hearing, impedes my vision, makes us appear identical and, worst of all, blocks everyone’s view of my striking looks—very *Taliban chic*.

We finally begin jousting. Apparently, with the help of some International Male catalogues and my Internet AdultCheck pass, I’ve been training for this moment for years, for it seems that I’m quite proficient at handling a pole. By the time we’re done, I’m soaked in sweat, exhausted, drying myself with paper towels—you know, for that just-had-sex look.

Has UO cured me of my affliction? No, I’m still the same single, desperate fag who’s just as immaculately hot on the outside as on the inside. “Dude, it’s the clothes,” a friend rationalizes about my singlehood. Urban Outings, on the other hand, suggests that I first get to know people as friends and *then* date them. How come nobody ever suggested that before? Anyway, while I befriended a few UO members, I’ve yet to experience the same ending that Drew does in her movie. She gets the guy. I, however, have never been kissed by Brian. ■

If you live in the NYC area and are interested in finding out more about Urban Outings, you can call 646.437.1090 or visit

www.urbanoutings.com. As you can tell from our random array of pictures, they have a ton of activities from which to choose, from “Bitchy Bingo” to Broadway shows to daytime ski trips to social mixers. So get the hell out of your apartment and meet some new people (whose names you’ll remember for a change).



PHOTOS: BRIAN STEIN X 1; JAY GORDON X 1; ERIC SCHNEIDER X 1

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