



People

Pucker Up

Behind Jim and Artie Mitchell's *Behind the Green Door*

Parsing a splendid, lurid memoir of life at S.F.'s O'Farrell Theater

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Brothers Jim and Artie Mitchell are sex-industry legends. They're best known for producing several porn films (including *Behind the Green Door*) and running the infamous strip club, the O'Farrell Theater. Opened in 1969, the O'Farrell occupied a unique place at the center of a burgeoning San Francisco sexual subculture. It featured rooms with different themes, live girl/girl action, and stage shows, some of which were less standard striptease and more avant-garde performance art. Nina Hartley, a house dancer at the O'Farrell in the mid-'80s, says it was freewheeling, open, and laid-back: "What made it special was that there was live, hardcore lesbian sex. . . . I loved that it was so easy to get some action each week. All I had to do was ask one of three or four women if they wanted company onstage. . . . At least one woman per week would say yes, so I was like a kid in a candy store." Behind the scenes, the brothers hosted outrageous private parties where special guests were treated to fisting, bondage shows, and orgies. The theater attracted celebrities, rock stars, politicians, artists, and writers, including Hunter S. Thompson, who spent a great deal of time there during Hartley's era researching a book called *The Night Manager* that was never published.

The brothers constantly pushed the envelope when it came to how much contact dancers could have with customers. It was one of the first clubs to offer live sex shows—without glass separating the dancers from the audience—and also nude lapdancing (until both were outlawed). The San Francisco mayor and district attorney repeatedly attempted to shut down the Mitchell Brothers, conducting stings, raids, and arrests. The two spent a fortune defending themselves and won more than they lost. By many accounts, Jim and Artie were both inseparable best friends and frequently warring siblings.

In 1991, Jim shot Artie to death. He claimed that Artie had threatened his family, and that he was only trying to scare Artie into getting clean from drugs and alcohol. With the help of important connections and a high-priced lawyer, Jim was convicted merely of voluntary manslaughter and served three years in San Quentin. The story has been told in two books—*X-Rated* and *Bottom Feeders*—but there has never been a firsthand account of the decade leading to Artie's murder by an insider who had intimate knowledge of the brothers, the club, and their world. In her new memoir, *9½ Years Behind the Green Door: A Mitchell Brothers Stripper Remembers Her Lover Artie Mitchell, Hunter S. Thompson, and the Killing That Rocked San Francisco* (greendoorbook.com), Simone Corday shares her story of a decade with an infamous sex mogul.

She admits that she waited until Jim Mitchell died (of a heart attack in 2007) before self-publishing the book. "I had not felt comfortable publishing my story while he was still alive, because I was afraid of him," she admits. "After all, he had been convicted of killing his brother, and he had not been happy when I spoke out on TV and went to the prosecution during his murder case."

Corday's book is a delicious page-turner that captures her incredibly stormy relationship with Artie from 1981 to 1991, and the frenetic, rambunctious, rebellious world he built. Shortly after she

began stripping at the theater, she met Artie and was immediately drawn to him. She writes: "If I ever get a chance to make love to that man, I will, I decided. I had never wanted anyone so much." She got her opportunity shortly thereafter, when they had sex on the floor of his office at the theater, then again a few hours later. She recently told me: "He had the assured style of an outlaw, a charming recklessness, an Oklahoma drawl. He had a warm sense of humor, sensuality, that bad-boy magnetism, plus a rare reverence for sex mixed with detachment that gave him a brilliant instinct for it."

Corday's life was enmeshed with the theater. Life at the O'Farrell was like living in another country, with its own distinct inhabitants, culture, rituals, and rules. With vivid stories based on her journals from the time, she paints the picture of a strip club like no other: one that nurtured her creative spirit, inspiring political and satirical performances. Corday was best known for two acts in particular: one where she portrayed then-mayor (and the brothers' nemesis) Dianne Feinstein and stripped to "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," and another where she fucked a girl with a strap-on while dressed in a full-body gorilla suit. Not only is her tale an important piece of sex-industry history, but it's refreshing to read a memoir of stripping in which sex work is neither romanticized nor demonized. She tells it like she saw it, period.

Especially juicy are the tales of being part of the sequel to *Behind the Green Door*. Since the original 1972 movie was one of the most successful and well-known porn films of all time, the brothers decided to shoot a follow-up in 1986, which would be a safe-sex extravaganza in response to the AIDS crisis. Corday gives an account from the set where, in an attempt to outshine Artie's current flame (and the film's leading lady), Corday gives a memorable mouth-numbing blowjob to a guy wearing a Nonoxynol-9 coated condom on his cock.

Corday's portrait of Artie Mitchell is lovingly reverent and larger than life. Their sexual connection was undeniable—and often the one thing that remained constant between them. She characterizes their on-again/off-again relationship as sometimes tender and stable, but mostly crazy and tumultuous. Mitchell was fond of playing psychological games that included dumping her temporarily for younger women and repeatedly drawing her close, then rejecting her. The inner workings of this oddball love story eventually became frustrating for me as a reader, but I appreciated how brutally honest Corday was about people's behavior, including her own, even when it wasn't particularly flattering or noble. She makes no excuses for Artie's increasingly irrational conduct and destructive drug and alcohol abuse; at the same time, she sheds light on a side of this headline-snaring fratricide drama that hasn't been covered. "I wanted to write an authentic, truthful account," Corday says. "I had my fill of the inaccurate stories that came out about the Mitchells and about myself. I had some very good advice early on not to cut the balls off the story."