

STUDENT ACTIVITIES BOARD

FANCY DRESS 1982

'A Diamond Jubilee'



The Fancy
Dress Ball,
1948

A DIAMOND JUBILEE

by John Wells

Washington and Lee's annual Fancy Dress Weekend, still considered one of the country's premier college party weekends, rears its glittery head this year on March 4, 5 and 6.

This year's extravaganza is marked by two distinctions: the 75th anniversary of the first affair in 1907, and a move from the Student Center to the original site, Doremus Gym, and the more spacious environs of Warner Center.

This really isn't the 75th Fancy Dress — they nixed it during World War II and for three years in the decidedly radical early 70s. But the Diamond Jubilee is a good reason to get excited, and it appears that the SAB has spared no expense to make the weekend a truly memorable one.

An honest celebration of past Fancy Dress Balls would require the expensive and uncomfortable custom of renting elaborate costumes designed to coincide with a gala theme. Students can be grateful for the comparative convenience of black tie and the elegant gowns; of their dates. It is the ball itself that has come to define Fancy Dress, and it is perhaps the last remnant of Old East Coast collegia in existence, a touch of class in a world of double knit and designer jeans.

The Ball in recent years has become chiefly notable for the elaborate decorations executed by busy SAB members. The move to cavernous Warner Center will understandably cut down on some frills, but excellent lighting is expected to help create a splendid, highly-charged illusion.

The theme being Diamond Jubilee, SAB officials have strived to put together an evening that will truly dazzle.

Mr. F. D. Arrives

Drawn to Warner Center by the two glamorous searchlights (which have prompted claims of UFO sightings by local residents), Mr. Fancy Dress and his date will glide up the steps to the modern Warner facility. There they will glide through the glassed-in hallway on plush red carpet and be confronted with so many alarmingly exciting choices of venue as to induce frustrated euphoria.

So, before choosing, they may gaze around the Entrance Hallway, which will feature "The History of Fancy Dress." Through an array of posters, anecdotes and reviews, the couple can pause to trace the history of the Fancy Dress Ball from the spartan effort of 1907 through three quarters of a cen-

The Ball



tury. Once thoroughly informed, the F. D.'s may then resume their dilemma of deciding where to go.

Diamond Jubilee Ballroom

To their left, the ecstatic couple will find not Warner gym but a fabulous Diamond Jubilee Ballroom decorated with exotic draperies, spectacular backdrops and the aforementioned Fab Lighting which, according to the SAB press release, will "transform the basketball arena into a bona-fide Celebration Hall."

Lester Lanin

Amid all this finery, classic dance lovers will swoon to the very high class strains of Lester Lanin and his orchestra. Lanin has made an excellent reputation on the debutant circuit and it said to be a favorite of

TICKETS

Tickets and memorabilia for Fancy Dress '82, "A Diamond Jubilee," will go on sale Mon., Mar. 1, one week after the W&L undergraduate body has returned from the Washington holiday.

Tickets for the Friday night ball will cost \$25. Tickets will also be available at the door for \$30. Grain cups can be purchased at the rate of three for \$1, and Fancy Dress posters will be available at the cost of \$1 apiece.

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First Partiers Ronnie and Nancy. And he's perfect for this nostalgic occasion, having F. D.'s upon a number of other balls including the Golden Jubilee back in the late 50s.

Lester has been preceded by

some pretty awesome performers — notably Benny Goodman, Frank Sinatra, Count Basie, Eddie Duchin, and his son, Peter Duchin, who was here just last year.

Champs d' Elysee

Hot rug-cutters may seek refuge by sweeping up the Ballroom steps into — not the upstairs balcony, but — yes! The famed *Champs d' Elysee du Paris!* The major tourist attraction and vital Parisian *rue* will be reproduced to capture an outdoors atmosphere with a cafe, a real-life mime, a quick sketch artist and a portraitist from Andre Studio to capture forever that special evening that is Fancy Dress.

Themes of the Past

From *Guy Paris*, Mr. and Mrs.

F. D. may venture into the next special chamber — classrooms done out in some of the finest F. D. themes from the past (in keeping with the retrospective theme, you know). Step into "Monte Carlo Night" (divine!) and "The Roaring Twenties" (hoop-boop-a-doo!). Tunes for this fabulous arena will be provided by the Rock-n-Roll-Rhythm-n-Blues sound of Eight to the Bar. The SAB invites one and all to "trip the life fantastic, or try their luck at some games of chance in its recreation of a prohibition period speak-easy."

Nostalgia Without Shame

After their fill of fun and games the merry couple may once again stroll down *les Champs*, glide through the ballroom and check out the other side of the Entrance Hallway. There, in Doremus Gym, where dear Miss Annie held the first small-potatoes masked ball in 1907 (an event to be surpassed in historical significance only by the fact that Vice President Alben Barkley succumbed there in 1956) the couple can initially soak up the nostalgia without shame. Huge posters will bring back memories of past Fancy Dress Balls as will an appropriately attired 1921 F. D. couple along with earlier themes, bands and decorations.

Beach and Soul

Nostalgia of another kind will follow, although it is considered standard contemporary W&L frat entertainment — alternating sets of Beach and Soul (get off, Muffy!) by Chairmen of the Board and the Voltage Brothers. Dancers who do not care to dip with Lester may shag until they literally drop.

Midnight Surprise

Back amid the grandeur of the main Ballroom, the evening comes to a scintillating climax when Lester unveils a surprise guest at midnight and the exhausted crowd can find new life and extend its respective peaks until the whole shootin' match shuts down (sometime in the "wee hours").

This single orgasmic night is just one, albeit the biggest, of several Fancy Dress events that should leave all participants numb with excitement or burned out from too much self-inflicted nirvana. But God knows we all love it.

Other schools obviously don't know what they're missing, it's almost here and after Washington Holiday...be ready.

Fancy Dress History

Seventy-five-year-old Tradition

by Kip Gordon

Take an energetic librarian, forty-seven dollars, a handful of students in costume, and you have all the main ingredients for Washington and Lee's first Fancy Dress Ball in 1907. Seventy-five years later the annual event requires the talents and efforts of 35 Student Activities Board members, six months of planning, a budget of \$55,000, and an expected turnout of 4,000 people.

Miss Annie Jo White, a W&L librarian, initiated the Fancy Dress tradition when she threw a costume party for a few of her student friends, providing her own initiative and the proceeds from a theatrical production. Aware of the possibilities for social stimulus during the doldrums of mid-winter, Miss Annie set out to make her February fete an annual affair. Her efforts were at first greeted with student indifference, but her persistence paid off and her masked ball soon gained the support and enthusiasm of the entire W&L community.

Each year Fancy Dress grew in popularity and prestige. By 1919 its extravagance and elaborate decorations were famous throughout the South. In 1928 the affair received national acclaim via The New York Times, "Fancy Dress, the South's outstanding collegiate social event." By 1938 the Ball had received coverage from publications such as Life and Look magazines.



Miss Annie Jo White

Some highlights of that era, as reported by the 1979 Phi, include: Van Hern brings his most elaborate costumes from Philadelphia, Walter Winchell introduces the Fancy Dress Ball over radio in 1932 on the Lucky Strike nationwide net-

work hook up, Miss Annie Jo continues to appear, and poses for a photo in Life in 1938...the biggest name bands are contracted to play — Benny Goodman, Eddie Duchin, Kay Kaiser, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jimmy Dorsey...hundreds of girls — from New Orleans, Atlanta, Louisville, Charleston, Baltimore — charter entire railroad cars to come to Lexington.

The annual event has been interrupted twice in its seventy-five year history. It was discontinued during the war years of the early 1940's, and abandoned for a three-year period beginning in 1971. As the New York Times reported that year,

"LEXINGTON, VA. — They're screaming bloody murder here because Washington and Lee University has given up its Fancy Dress Ball..."

"Perhaps (one student sighed) it can be resurrected."

Resurrection took place in 1974 with the newly formed SAB's version of Mardi Gras, and the revitalized tradition has been growing in strength ever since. In the past seventy-five years Fancy Dress has taken W&L to places such as the Kentucky Derby, Buckingham Palace, the Emerald City of Oz, Hollywood, Paris, Egypt, New York, and most recently, Broadway. This year's Ball will revisit some of these themes in a tribute to seventy-five years of an ongoing tradition.



Fancy Dress — A montage from the 1930s.



Lester Lanin

This year, the SAB has selected the Lester Lanin band for the Fancy Dress Ball as the headline act. This world renowned band will appear in Warner Center from 8:30 to 12:30 a.m. on Friday, March 5.

Lanin's music has been described as "the beat heard round the world." Indeed, in its over 30 years, Lanin's band has appeared before every President from Truman to Reagan at inaugural balls and other special occasions.

Lanin is a favorite of the British Royal Family, and was once given the Royal salute by the Queen Mother. Other world officials have sought Lanin for their banquets and debutante balls.

A factor enhancing Lanin's popularity is his practice of varying his program to suit any occasion. This means that the Royal Family might hear sets of continuous music suited to

their tastes, while the slightly less dignified guests at the Fancy Dress Ball might get, shall we say, a program suited for just about anything.

In 1956, realizing the rising influence of rock music, Lanin added guitars to his Big Band sound. A move which proved unheard of by other musicians.

Lanin was born into a musical family in Philadelphia. His father, founder of the first International Orchestra, gave Lanin much of his philosophy of music, urging him to develop a style that was "distinctive and recognizable."

His recordings include "Les at the Tiffany Ball," which was recorded in 1959 at the Vanderbilt estate in Newport.

The Lester Lanin Band will appear throughout the evening in the "Waldorf Astoria Ballroom" at the Fancy Dress Ball. The Band's cosmopolitan flair should create the perfect mood for this year's Diamond Jubilee theme.



Birds-eye view of the Fancy Dress scene in the late 1940s.

