



Fierce Love. (Josie's Cabaret, San Francisco, California)

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POMO AFRO HOMOS

For months, Brian Freeman tried to get a black, gay show produced in San Francisco. A local gay theater turned him down, as did an African-American theater. Finally, Josie's Cabaret opened, and put on the first production by the Pomo Afro Homos. Freeman, a former member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, put together twelve sketches about black gay life with Djola Bernard Branner and Eric Gupton, and delivered the first performance of *Fierce Love* to a sold-out audience. Since then, the group has toured the United States and Europe, and made a guest appearance on National Public Radio's Morning Edition.

Much of the Pomos' work deals with the relative invisibility of gay, black men. One skit is a spoof of the television show *Living Color*, and its stereotypical portrait of black gay life. "In a way it's good to see those images out there at all. On the other hand, my roommate was assaulted and fag-bashed by a group of men shouting, 'I hated it' -- the line from the *Living Color* skit," says Freeman. "In mainstream culture, we've gone from zero images of black, gay men to three -- but they're all the same. It's the flaming snap queen."

On their tour, the Pomos have caused considerable controversy, most notably in Alaska, where the Anchorage city council attempted to ban advertisements for *Fierce Love* from city buses. "We appealed to the mayor, and the mayor said the space is only for [family oriented] material. I said, 'That word! No, no -- we need to take this to court.' The mayor, who is this evangelical Christian, fought it all the way, and we won." When the Pomos showed up in Anchorage, they were greeted by a large cheering crowd. "The other day I got an editorial in the mail, talking about the controversy. The Archbishop got involved, and the debate is still raging in the city council. We had no idea we'd have such an impact."

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