

Fashion at CONVERGENCE 10

event

By Constance Rodenbarger

Each year, starting in 1995, *Convergence* committee members debate and discuss the perfect place to bring hundreds of net Goths together. This year's event was hosted by the famous 'Windy City' Chicago, Illinois, also site of the first *Convergence*. The three days set for *Convergence* were jam-packed with events to appeal to a broad spectrum. In addition to official events, the planners also promoted several "unofficial" events meant to introduce Chicago to newcomers.

Thursday marked the unofficial start of *Convergence 10*. Goths, punks, ravers, and fetish fans from all over the world descended upon Chicago, Illinois to meet up, many for the first time, and enjoy the fruits that the culture has to offer. Thursday's festivities were held at Vision Nightclub and featured dancing, drinking, and a fashion show by Chicago's **Black Market Fashions**. As the party raged on throughout the 3 level club, models downstairs readied themselves for the intense fashion show. During a slight lull in the frantic pace that accompanies any fashion show, **Monica** of Black Market took some time out to chat about the gothic scene in Chicago and how her store fits into that.

"When it all flew off the shelves in 3 weeks, I knew I found my niche", she says about her store's transition from a traditional lingerie shop to one of Chicago's premier stops for S&M and bondage gear.

Friday's official start took place in the gilded Florentine Room of the Congress Hotel. Against the backdrop of gold leaf, ornate columns, and murals of gods and warriors, convention goers mingled, met, and picked up their official weekend goodies. Included in the weekend ticket price of \$55 was a t-shirt

friends and new ones, C10's planners focused Saturday on introducing newbies to the lifestyle and helping the old pros round out their collections.

Some could say that Saturday night at The Metro was simply a repeat of Friday, whereas the dancing and general aura of enjoyment continued on. Saturday's bands brought new dynamics to the event. The Brides rocked out in typical fashion - humorous for some, immature for others - while **Lisa of Black Tape for a Blue Girl** took time away from mingling with friends and fans to take her place on stage with her bandmates. Saturday also introduced Chicago to 2 bands from across 'the pond' - *Manuskript* and *Passion Play*.

Sunday's focus was fashion- a fact that delighted many attendees. *Psymon*, a fashion design student and new transplant to Chicago, found the morning shopping trip helpful in introducing him to the clothing culture outside of downtown stores like *Wet Seal* and *Marshall Field's*. Others took the time to enjoy the famed *Magnificent Mile*- home to standards of Chicago architecture and commerce. With a wide variety of stores, no purchase was surprising when shown off to friends and strangers in the lobby. Though two men's 100-dollar shopping spree at the *Lego Store* brought on a few laughs, everyone understood their boyish glee. One could say that a few onlookers were even jealous of the simple joy that plastic blocks could bring.

Convergence again descended upon the *Wrigleyville* neighborhood as night brought everyone back to *The Metro* for a last blast. Foregoing the bands of previous nights, Sunday's show was all about glamour and glitz. Taking a break from dancing, the packed house crammed around the stage to ensure a good look at the new fashions from some of the top gothic and fetish designers.

First on the stage was **House of Vamp**. The owner and designer, **Leigh Ann Hopkins**, started a year ago on her own but is already known as a designer for **Subculture Array**. *House of Vamp's* fashions are custom made for any size, but specializes in clothing for what Leigh Ann calls "real women". Using C10's fashion show to debut the new 2004 designs, *House of Vamp* showed that they aim to please many different women with many different styles. Next up was **Branimira**, a high-end couture design house and winner of the **2002 Driehaus Award for Fashion Excellence**. Their showpieces took inspiration from the Victorian era yet remained sinister with deconstructed, angular lines and a slight play of androgyny. Third on the stage was **Azrael's Accomplice Designs**. Their clothing further showed a balance of light and dark, deconstruction and perfection. *Azrael's Accomplice* showed a diverse style that complemented that of the audience. As one onlooker commented, "this is the first fashion show I've been to where we looked as good as the models!"

Shumit Basu's Underground Aristocracy next showcased the custom fitted work that

was being sold in the *Vendor's Bazaar*. Though featuring women's fashions onstage, *Underground Aristocracy* does not believe in confining fashion to gender roles and encourages men to also get in on the fun. To the delight of all, the fifth designer focused on the often forgotten sect of the culture- what they call 'volupugoths'. **Wysteria** from the U.K. chose to place their fashions against the musical backdrop of Queen's "Fat Bottomed Girls". After *Wysteria's* models took the stage and showed how beautiful, playful, and sensuous the plus-sized woman could be, *Freddie Mercury's* assertion that "fat bottomed girls make the rockin' world go 'round" was not denied! Following *Wysteria* would be a tough act, but **Original Sin Designs** found no problem in wowing the crowd with their diverse mix of club and fetish fashions. Modeled by nearly-Amazonian women, the long, crisp lines of *Original Sin's* clothing were highlighted. Anyone could see that the designs were made for fun but were

serious, quality pieces as well. Finally, crowd favorite and **2003 Gothic Beauty Fashion Award Nominee**, **Kambriel** took command of *The Metro*. Culling models from the weekend's bands and C10's staff, *Kambriel* wrapped up the weekend with a poetic performance. Met with raucous applause, each model, and the clothing worn, had a moment in the spotlight so everyone could take in the design from elaborate headpiece down to the flowing trains of the gowns.

Before the DJ's once again commandeered the PA system, *Convergence's* designers took one last curtain call and soaked up the

applause. The party resumed with some dancers filling up the empty stage while others said last goodbyes before running off to prepare for early morning flights home.

No matter what the *Convergence 10* planners had expected for this year's event, there are few that could call it anything more than a success. *Convergence* brought together different countries, different styles, and different focuses. The attendees were treated to the best that Chicago had to offer and Chicago was treated to the best that gothic culture could give. As *Lake Michigan's* coast was swathed in black vinyl and trod upon by platform boots, walls were broken down and stereotypes flew out the windows. Everyone at *Convergence 10* presented themselves in a respectful manner and in turn Chicago would be pleased to host everyone again.

Though 10 years running, *Convergence* shows no sign of losing steam. Next year's event quite possibly could top C10. Want in on the action? Visit altgothic.com and get ready for next year! ♦

Black Market: www.blackmarketchicago.com
House of Vamp: www.houseofvamp.com
Branimira: www.branimiraivanova.com
Azrael's Accomplice: www.azacdesigns.com
Underground Aristocracy: www.bway.net/~sbasu
Wysteria: www.wysteria.co.uk
Original Sin Designs: www.originalsindesign.com
Kambriel: www.kambriel.com

Gothic Beauty 17



photo by Kambriel



photo by Kambriel

and a 'goodie bag'. The goodie bag was filled with things to get your blood pumping for the weekend: the official program and schedule, advertisements and coupons for local stores and *Convergence* vendors, and 3 mix CDs that even pop fans could love.

After picking up their weekend laminate, first-timers could take advantage of a special meeting held by the *Convergence* veterans. Again in the *Florentine Room*, 'Convergence Virgins' could learn about the history of the festival and be introduced around to new friends. Meanwhile, those already in the know were free to roam around the hotel, relax in the lobby, or see Chicago's *Michigan Avenue* sights.

Saturday's events kicked *Convergence* into full swing. With everyone having already met up with old



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