

# A CONVERSATION WITH MR AND MR FORD

## SWEATBOX OPEN EVERY DAY

THE RECENT WEDDING OF MARK AND JASON FORD OWNERS OF SWEATBOX WAS THE TALK OF THE TOWN AND IT WAS MUCH MORE OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT THAN MOST WEDDINGS. IN THIS EXCLUSIVE CONVERSATION THE NEWLY WEDS EXPLAIN THEIR MOTIVATIONS AND MUCH MORE.

**Hi Mark and Jason, congratulations on your recent wedding, it seemed much more than a modest ceremony, was there a message behind the event?**

**Mark:** Yes we went for it in a big way. Jason doesn't really do 'modest'.

**Jason:** I think the starting point was when we would listen to the likes of Michelle Obama, Hilary Clinton and David Cameron making their arguments for gay marriage. They always seemed to be friends with a gay couple who had been together for years.

**Mark:** We would call them 'The Good Gays'. They tend to come in matching knitwear, get involved with good causes, adopt cute Asian babies and go for long walks in rural areas that are not mentioned on Squirt.

**Jason:** We are not those gays. We are 'The Bad Gays'.

**Mark:** We enjoy being bad and don't feel any reason to surrender our wicked ways just because we wish to get married. Our wedding was a deviant celebration of the gay culture that Michelle, Hilary and Dave conveniently overlooked when they defined us as loveable, sexless, munchkins in order to squeeze us through the gates of acceptance.

**Jason:** With lots of feathered outfits,



entrances on white horses, naked boys reading, David Hoyle, Dusty Limits, Tina C and DV8 on stage. We had butlers in the buff, cottaging workshops in the toilets, Christian pizzas served as canapés oh, and a service held in a deconsecrated church because, you know, why not?

**Can you tell us about the duvet?**

**Mark:** One of the centrepieces was an art project. In the lead up to the wedding we decided to have anonymous sex with 144 guys who we found off Grindr and similar apps.

**Jason:** The piece is called Gross Indecency. Which is the crime that gay men used to be prosecuted for. 144 is a gross. We had a duvet printed with a life size image of Mark and I lying there in our jammies holding hands in domestic bliss and we had all the guys cum on the duvet. On the back we printed anonymous excerpts from the conversations we had with them.

**Mark:** It sounds gross but actually the finished piece is really quite powerful and, to us at least, surprisingly life-affirming. Most guys stayed to chat, quite a few became friends and a whole bunch of them even came to the wedding.

**Jason:** A lot of people beat up on Grindr and saunas because they're still obsessed with slut-shaming, themselves as well as others but we found it a really fun, enriching

experience.

**Mark:** I think that we've begun to forget that, historically, way before the apps, we've always fucked to make friends. It's a crucial part of what defines gay culture and we shouldn't be ashamed of that.

**Why do you think it's difficult for some people to accept your views on sex but it's easy for them to accept rampant chemsex?**

**Mark:** That's such a hard question to answer without coming off as a smug dick. I love Jason, we've been together for eight years and I'm grateful for every single day of that time. I think for a lot of guys sex is different to love. It certainly is for us and we're lucky enough to be enjoying both. I have intimacy with Jason and we have had intimate moments with other guys. I hear guys talking about the 'intimacy' of barebacking and it makes me want to go look the word up in a dictionary, make sure I got it right. For me, intimacy is how you engage with the whole person not just with their genitalia.

**Jason:** I think with chemsex it's easier to process because there's something to blame for doing things that you may still have issues with.

**The owners of most saunas tend to stay behind the scenes but you two operate more like club promoters, is that a deliberate move?**

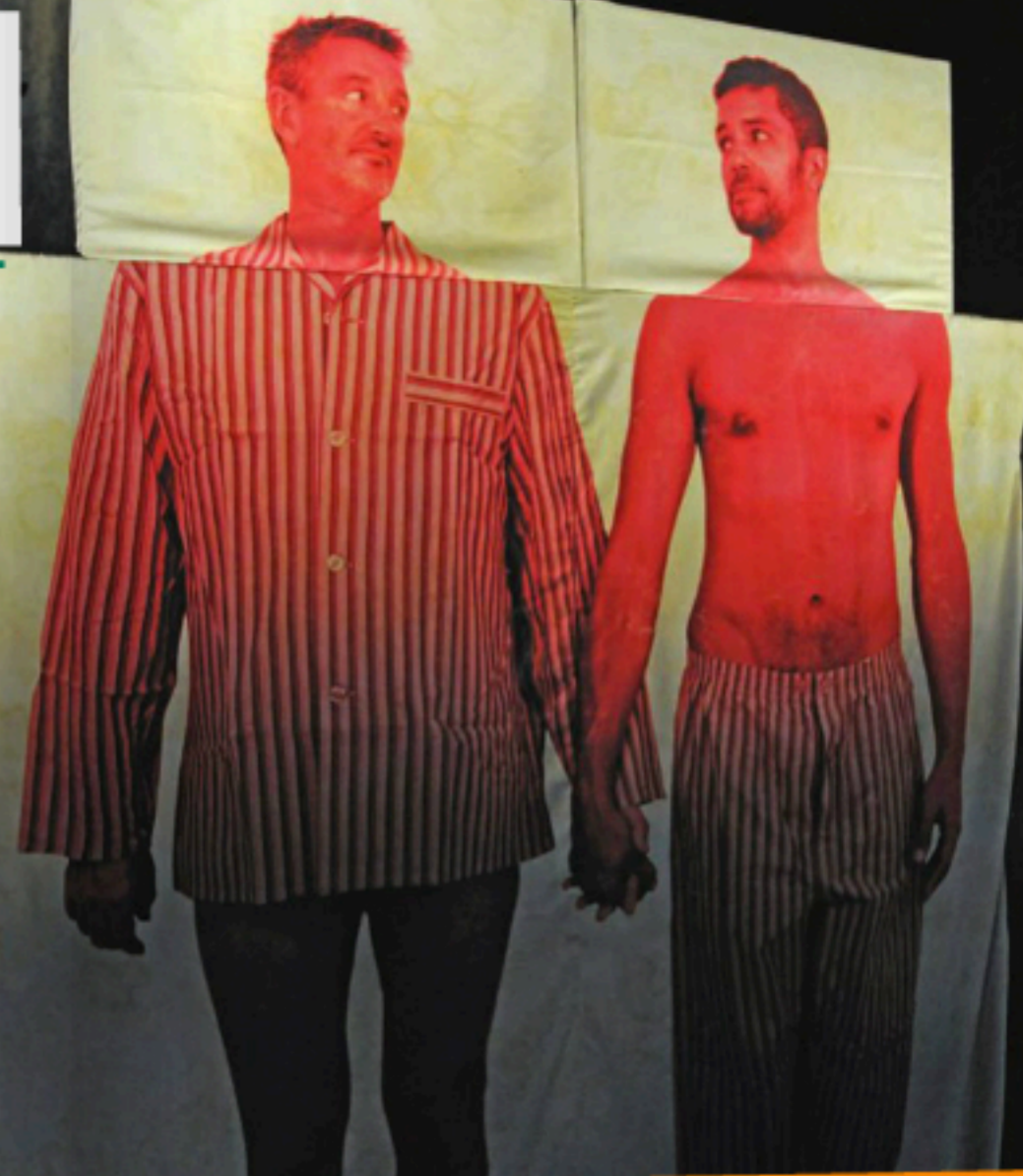
**Mark:** Not at all, we simply have too much ego to stay low key.

**Jason:** I don't think we define ourselves as gay sauna owners to be honest. I have an arts background and Mark used to produce TV. We just thought building and running a sauna would be fun. Which it is.

**Mark:** We like projects. Sweatbox is a project. Our wedding was a project. We're looking for something to do next.

**Sweatbox is both geographically and ideologically closer to Soho and the main gay scene than other saunas and spas, can you talk about this?**

**Mark:** Most other saunas offer themselves up as an alternative to



the scene. We always intended for Sweatbox to be more a part of the scene.

**Jason:** We're a great way to finish off your night.

**Mark:** As a result we tend to have much fitter guys. The boys you see in the bars are the boys you'll find at Sweatbox. You're right, it is ideological as well as geographical. Sweatbox is a reflection of our personalities. We don't believe in sheepish, furtive or shameful. We like sex, we think it's fun and should be treated as such.

**What plans do you have coming up both professionally and personally?**

**Mark:** There are plans afoot for The Sweatbox Group but we need to keep those close to our chest at the moment. For us, we're working on

several things including a gallery showing for all the work we put together and showcased at the wedding, a low budget gay vampire film and inevitably... Sweatbox The Musical.

**Sweatbox the Musical? Seriously?** Of course not seriously. When have you ever known us to do anything seriously?

■ **Sweatbox is open 24 hours a day at 1-2 Ramillies Street, Soho, W1.**

