Faster Forward

An LA HIVer’s Saturday-night speed-dating debauchery

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Like most folks, I loathe dating. All that “Could he be the One?” hysteria—in my case accelerated, despite HAART, by my HIV. I’m comfortable knowing my life may never be completed with a mate. But when Shanti, a chronic-illness support organization, hosted another West Hollywood Express Dating night for gay male HIVers, I thought, *What the hell*.

Speed-dating—pairing contenders in sound-bite encounters—has become as traditional as roses and chocolate. But Shanti is one of few that target positives. “Here, you don’t need to worry about a great date going sour the minute you disclose your status,” says emcee Jesse Pasackow.

So, here I am, 44, with 20 other guys. Some are looking for Mr. Right, some for Mr. Tight. (I want intellect, altruism and porno sex on demand.) Outfits range from preppie to sk8ter-boi wannabe. I’m given a number, name tag and rating sheet. We have five minutes to interview the person across from us, and no one gets dumped outright—mutual preferences receive contact info.

I’m now sitting before a 45-ish white guy in spandex shorts with a bleached-blond perm. “What’s your favorite movie?” I start. “*Beaches*.” Next! Here comes a Latino club boy. Endearing and cute, he looks only 23, and I’m wrecked that he’s positive. “What kind of music do you like?” I ask. “Mariah Carey.” How do I stretch “Really?” into three full minutes? Four men later, a seemingly mainstream guy replies, “Rock ’n’ roll—Patti Smith is coming to town on Tuesday.” *This* I can work with.

By the end of the evening, I’ve checked “yes” beside four names. A week later, Jesse calls: I have three matches. Uh-oh; that means “follow-up” and “commitment,” even if for only one evening. But at least disclosure isn’t an issue. My dates and I will have to focus on social graces and physical allure. You know, just like “normal” people.

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