





... THAT IS, IF **STEVE BERKE** CAN CONVINCe VOTERS THAT HE'S THE MAN FOR THE JOB. BUT WITH AN ARMY OF HALF-NAKED HOTTIES AND A PRO-POT, PRO-GAMBLING, ANTI-TAX, PRO-PARTY PLATFORM, HOW COULD THE GUY LOSE?

by **CHOIRE SICHA** photographs by **TURE LILLEGRAVEN**

**IT'S A
TYPICALLY
BALMY NIGHT
AT KARMA
IN MIAMI
BEACH,**

with a tropical wind blowing through the palm trees, Rihanna banging on the sound system, and a small army of barely dressed beauties onstage flaunting what the good Lord gave them. Drew Rosenhaus, NFL superagent to Chad Ochocinco and T.O., storms the club's runway. "This is an awesome night," he bellows into the mike. "My clients say to me: Show me the money. I want you to show me the money tonight." He's auctioning off the final item at a benefit for the After Party, a new sort-of political party. Previous items were dates with really, really hot young women in tiny outfits. It makes sense: Stunning women are the going currency in Miami.



MIDNIGHT

Berke's campaign takes off. Looks more responsible than most elected officials.

12:35 A.M.

Meeting core constituents. Pretty sure this falls under campaign expenses.

12:47 A.M.

Berke's pledge: "A bottle in every cupboard, a tongue in every mouth!"

One date with a pair of giggly girls went for \$1,250. "She's only had two drinks," yelled the night's host, Steve Berke. "One more and she puts out!" Beyond the free-flowing booze, hypnotic dance beats, and scantily clad cuties everywhere, Berke is the reason we're all gathered here. A party-boy tennis stud turned comedian, Berke is the After Party's first, and so far only, candidate. He's running for mayor of Miami Beach.

The last of the ladies is Nina Agdal, of a recent Victoria's Secret campaign. With her wide-set eyes, pouty lips, and amber complexion, she looks like some sort of superhot space elf. Bidding rises steadily to \$5,000—until a not-so-secret admirer shuts it down with a perhaps hallucinatory offer of 10 grand. Sold!

But Rosenhaus is getting set to auction off all the girls: a day on a yacht called the *Hot Mess*, with "30 models at your leisure, for your pleasure," he says. "I'm single. I've been single my whole life. This is how you

meet the woman of your dreams." The sell gets hard. "Come on, this is why you work so hard. *Show me the money!*"

In the end, an afternoon with the model army on the *Hot Mess* goes to two of Rosenhaus' players for eight grand. The NFL guys fist-bump. "I'm going to get you so drunk," Berke promises.

But now it's pushing 1 A.M. and Berke is late for work. Well, kind of late. Technically his best buddies, Michael Malone and Marko Gojanovic, are the ones who are late. Part of their job running the VIP hosting and event company Your World Entertainment includes keeping a gang of exquisitely beautiful women dancing on banquettes in nightclubs through the metropolitan Miami area. You could say Steve just likes to help. It's part of his role as community ambassador. When your platform is pro-nightclub, anti-tax, pro-pot, pro-gay marriage, pro-gambling, pro-fun, there are a lot of late nights...and a lot of mishaps.



If you wanted to pitch a series to the networks, one that would appeal to the 18–34 demographic, you might try a reality show about 30-year-old Steve Berke. He's a reasonably good-looking, endearing, kind of nice, kind of naughty, so it'd be like a Gen Y *Seinfeld* mashed up with the lovable haplessness of *Three's Company* and a healthy dose of the *Jersey Shore*'s sex- and booze-fueled bad behavior.

In the span of a few weeks, Berke has had the following sitcom-worthy misadventures: He's gone to trust-fund penthouse parties in Miami with 50 Cent and chipped a front tooth on a magnum of Dom Pérignon. Not long after, on a night he hoped to get laid, he was shaving his balls (with a Mach3 razor, if you care) but radically underestimated the sharpness of the blade. He lost his wallet. And he was escorted by police out of a gig at the South Beach Comedy Festival; he was just supposed to intro

some comedians, but he did a little shtick of his own, and some powers-that-be had him booted for the second show.

Fortunately, Berke already spends much of his life with a camera tagging along. “We have been shooting everything, OK? Everything. I don’t know what’s going to happen,” he says. The guys behind the cameras have pitched and sold reality shows before, so there’s that possibility. “At the very least I’ll have a very cool documentary.”

Berke already has one of politics’ can-

helping of Hasidim and Orthodox scattered throughout. That’s good news for a nice Jewish boy like Berke. His father, Dr. Berke, went to high school here and has promised to canvass his old neighborhood door-to-door. For the non-chosen voters, Berke is considering adopting a Latin middle name. He’s joking, at least for the time being.

Michael and Marko, Berke’s sidekicks, won’t really help him in the electoral demo, but they’re here to help get out the vote just the same. Berke crashes at their

only a few nightclubs are super-profitable; the rest are just hanging on. They’d all like a license to print money, so they’d like to have a pal in the mayor’s office.



At some point in talking to Berke, you think, Could he actually be elected? It’s not impossible. His campaign manager is one of the most notorious political operators in history: the infamous



1:15 A.M.

“Now pull the lever marked Berke!”
“Wait, this isn’t the polling booth...”



1:36 A.M.

Pounding the pavement. “Ma’am, have you considered the impact of glaargl!”



2:03 A.M.

Break out the chlorine—this think tank may need disinfecting.

niest operators running his campaign (a Nixon, Reagan, and Bush vet); a real shot at election (he only needs 6,000-odd votes); and in the nightlife mecca of Miami Beach, the perfect backdrop for it all. A sun-soaked sliver of land just off the coast of Miami proper, the community provided the swishy setting for *The Birdcage* and has been home to Al Capone, Meyer Lansky, and Howard Hughes. Once upon a time, FDR’s son Elliott served as mayor. Miami Beach has everything: elderly Jews; Italian playboys; overtanned, over-the-hill gay couples; South American families sitting down to dinner at 11:30 P.M.; sun-burnt American tourists; Russian oligarchs strolling Lincoln Road with their near-naked trophy wives. And those are the ones without an actual vote. The official residents—the ones Berke needs to win over—are another thing altogether. There are poor people down in the party zone of South Beach, rich people on the canals and on the beach, and a big

house a few nights a week because it’s close to the clubs and he hates driving at 4:30 A.M. As Michael and Marko’s business has grown over the past year—now it’s about hanging with star athletes and entertaining clients—they rented a new place in a sleepy part of town north of South Beach, and in some of the rooms they put in bunk beds so a rotating cast of girls could crash there.

The three have a good synergy. Michael and Marko’s nightclub clients are bristling at not being able to have outdoor parties. The whole city outlaws “noise” after 11 P.M. Although: “Seventy-five percent or so of noise complaints are resident to resident,” says Jerry Libbin, city commissioner and president of the chamber of commerce. “I hear quite frequently that it’s very difficult to do business with the city.” Libbin also notes that much of the day-to-day work of city politics is potholes and parking tickets. Many hotels have had a rough few years, more than a few are in receivership, and

Republican hatchet man Roger Stone. Plus, Berke says he has paid all his previous years’ taxes; never spent the night in jail; never been in a bar fight; never been accused of sexual assault. He has never employed a noncitizen. He has probably had about four parking tickets in the past year. As for drugs? “I’ve smoked so much weed that I don’t remember smoking it at all,” he says. But he’s never tried any other drug. “I’ve never even done a bump of coke,” he boasts. “But I almost did mushrooms once in Amsterdam!” So he may have hosted a home poker game or two, which would be a misdemeanor in Florida. And, OK, he did once get pulled over for drunk driving, but he dropped a name, and cops told him to get someone to pick him up, then made him do 10 minutes of stand-up on the side of the highway to entertain them while they waited. Now he takes cabs if he’s going to be drinking, which is often. In these times that’s not bad for a politician.

And it's not as if his platform is all that outlandish—even the gambling. Florida has crept ever closer to gambling over the decades: The lottery came, the Indian casinos came, and then slots. Multiple gaming bills now circle the capitol. According to the massive gambling lobby, it's only a matter of time before casinos dot the shore. Big-league organizations with outposts in Las Vegas are prepared to jump in, and Berke is ready to advocate to put them in the mid-

It's fair to say that, so far, no one in local politics takes Berke that seriously (Commissioner Libbin says he's never met him). At least not yet. But the electorate is pretty well in line with his platform. A large number of people *do* support the decriminalization of marijuana; they *like* being left alone; they do *not* enjoy paying taxes; many even support gays' right to marry. They also dislike potholes (even as they do not like to pay the taxes to fill them). Of course, very few of

negative attention in this age. There's only attention. And attention results in profit, whether for a beach resort town or a comedian's career—or both at the same time.



A man asks questions about what to do with his life as he rockets into his 30s. In Berke's case this comes some years after a promising tennis career was ended by



2:09 A.M.

"Hey, baby, how would you like to be First Lady? No? Second?"



2:42 A.M.

It's an ass-roots campaign: "Ask not what your lawn can do for you..."



2:52 A.M.

If you want to win an election, you need to get behind the voters.

dle of Miami Beach: He'd like to replace the convention center with a much-expanded version, complete with a 1,000-room hotel and blackjack for all. According to Berke, if you lease this chunk of downtown to such an operator, suddenly, and relatedly, everyone's property taxes plummet. (So too might everyone's property values, but that's another story.)

these things are actually in the purview of the mayor, but Berke, not incorrectly, sees the role as brand ambassador for Miami Beach and agitator within the city. Stunts like unleashing bikini-clad babes on the streets or performing illegal gay marriages wouldn't directly effect policy change—but they might get media coverage, and anyway, Berke knows there's no such thing as

injury shortly after he graduated from Yale. (Berke's tennis technique was marked by intense trash talking: He would insult his opponents viciously as a tactic to make himself fear losing: "I hate losing more than I love winning," he says.) It also comes after his appearance on a reality show, Richard Branson's *Apprentice*-like *The Rebel Billionaire*, plus a taste of mini-fame on

CITIZEN CRAZY

STEVE BERKE ISN'T THE FIRST WACKY CANDIDATE TO RUN FOR OFFICE. SOME EVEN GOT ELECTED!

RONALD REAGAN

PRE-ELECTION ROLE: Playing second fiddle to a mischievous monkey in *Bedtime for Bonzo*.

POLITICAL LEGACY: The former actor's political career never took off. (We failed poli sci, FYI.)

SONNY BONO

PRE-ELECTION ROLE: Playing second fiddle to a mischievous monkey on *The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour*.

POLITICAL LEGACY: Sadly, the ex-California congressman died while in office.



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

PRE-ELECTION ROLE: Playing freakishly muscled warrior Conan the Barbarian.

POLITICAL LEGACY: As Republican governor, Ahnold helped guide California to near bankruptcy.

JESSE VENTURA

PRE-ELECTION ROLE: Playing the flamboyant, feather-boa'd pro wrestler known as the Body.

POLITICAL LEGACY: Proving how hard it is to get shit done as an independent in a two-party world.

YouTube for his comedy music videos.

But mostly it comes after heartbreak.

"You know what's hard?" he asks late one night by the pool of the Fontainebleau.

"Models come and go. They don't live in this city. And I don't meet normal girls in the circle I run with. I meet these girls who are seasonal, who are here till March or April and then they leave, you know? I'd love to meet a girl who lives in Miami."

Because the last one was serious, al-

people and attending endless boring meetings are the heart and soul of politics, but this is the age of spectacle. And Stone has spent decades running aggressive campaigns via the media, from Nixon to Reagan to the Bushes. Stone may or may not have run the game in Miami to ensure the election of Dubya over Gore, using the media to make implied connections between Gore and Fidel Castro (a devastating charge in Miami) and assisting in shutting down the

just 5,768. This year will be her last run.

"The fundamental difference between Steve and his opponent is: Steve's interested in growth and making the pie bigger, and she's interested in cutting the pie in smaller and smaller pieces," says Stone.

"I have to build an army and get ready to fight, because it's war," Berke says. "I've seen what she can do to me. She has the image as this nice grandmotherly woman who is so sweet and naive. Meanwhile,



3:15 A.M.

Big tobacco just got a big boner. See, smoking has health benefits!



3:16 A.M.

This guy has a lot to learn. You are supposed to kiss babies, not babes!



3:38 A.M.

"So, got a hot friend who'd be into third-party politics?"

though, "she obviously didn't think so," he says. "That's what caused all this."

"Fell too hard, too early. It was a bad one," he adds. "I thought this girl was going to be my wife. I never thought that before. I turned down pussy for her! I'd never done that before, either. I turned down a model who was like, 'Fuck me now,' and I was like, 'No, I'm dating someone.' I'm still proud of myself. But it didn't work out."

Living well and running for mayor may be the best revenge, but he's also writing a cathartic song about her. Its working title is "[Name Redacted] Is a Whore."

Electionwise, 2011 is an off year, so I've agreed to help Steve, and, by the way, I'm a volunteer," says Roger Stone, Berke's campaign manager. "I'm doing this because it'll be fun."

People currently in political office will tell you that getting out the vote, talking to old

recount. So while Berke has plans to get out the vote, his campaign is currently all media. When the Sony Ericsson Open came to town, Berke was at the courts, collecting video endorsements from tennis player friends such as Roger Federer. Down the road Stone will surely find opportunities to use the media in a more hostile manner.

"Believe it or not, Roger Stone loves to party," Berke says. "I shot 10 campaign commercials in one night, and he was there advising. He kept drinking what we thought was water. He was drinking straight vodka! Not on the rocks, nothing. And he got wasted! It was great. He's a badass."

Now they talk every day: There are budgets and strategy meetings and polling to do. The metrics are so tiny as to be intriguing: There are slightly fewer than 100,000 residents in Miami Beach, and as of the last election, fewer than half were registered to vote. Mayor Matti Herrera Bower (the first female and first Hispanic mayor) won reelection in 2009 with 76 percent of the vote:

behind closed doors, she's a bulldog."

For their part, it would be fair to characterize the mayor's office as unconcerned, if amused, by Berke's campaign. (The office declined to comment.)

"The only thing worse in politics than being wrong is being boring," says Stone.

"When we have our budget, I plan on having a little hot line where people can call one of our models," says Berke, "and they'll come to your place and register you to vote, right there on the spot. Same thing for absentee ballots. It's gonna be cool. You don't have to leave your couch."

"There is one side benefit to all this," says Stone. "I get to socialize with Steve's entourage."

"I'm going balls to the wall," adds Berke.

"It'll probably end up costing both of us money," says Stone.

If it does, Berke doesn't seem too concerned. He bought the ticket, and he's doing his best to get elected, but you can be damn sure he's going to enjoy the ride. ♡