

"America's Hottest All-Girl Band" opens film series

by Eve Sicular

The International Sweethearts of Rhythm: America's Hottest All-Girl Band tops a triple bill as Filma's "Woman's Eye View" opens on October 30 at the Irvington Theatre in an eight-program series through November. The *Sweethearts* chronicle was made by Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, the



Vi Burnside, tenor sax sensation with Tiny Davis, 245 pounds of jive and trumpet

● CINEMA

team who directed and researched last year's festival hit, *Before Stonewall*. In this new film, a sixteen-woman multi-racial jazz band swings again, bringing their music and their story alive after nearly forty years of obscurity in film and record archives.

Some readers may be familiar with the International Sweethearts' music through the Rosetta Records' re-release of their vintage cuts a few years ago. Photos and anecdotes on the album cover whetted my curiosity about the group. Seeing the movie gave me a livelier understanding of who they were. As with earlier woman-themed documentaries though (*Union Maids*, *Rosie the Riveter*), my questions about lesbian existence in these times and places were answered only

by listening between the lines. Here, for example, the group's lead trumpeter, Tiny Davis, tells an interviewer why she once turned down Louis Armstrong's big-money offer to join his band: "I told him, 'I just love them gals!' Seeing her sparkling eyes widen as she mimics Armstrong's response, you know just what she meant (and that he did, too).

The stories of the band touring in the South, (where segregation laws prohibited blacks, whites and mulattos mixing), of eating and sleeping on the bus because they were barred from restaurants and hotels, of white members wearing dark makeup to 'pass' in public, all testify to the institutionalized bigotry of the recent American past. Fortunately, the Sweethearts were very popular and made

many records and movie appearances for the 'race' market. Seen today, the film clips dispel any notion that the group made it as a novelty act, yet the "all-female" packaging is a quaint precursor to girl-group promotions that have followed. Footage of the band playing, couples swinging and crowds jamming the front of major clubs around the country show beautifully what a hot act the Sweethearts were.

The film places the group as a phenomenon in its historical context, the late 1930s and early '40s. The group's break-up soon after World War II — before the demise of many other big bands, but after women were being again discouraged from "men's work" — was certainly no coincidence, with band members leaving music behind for marriage;

however, this is not the filmmakers' focus. Most of its half-hour length is upbeat. At the end, I wanted more, especially of the women playing.

The International Sweethearts of Rhythm and two other new documentaries, *Women of Summer* and *The Flapper Story*, is the first of eight Tuesday and Thursday evening programs in the fifth annual Women's Eye View festival, through November 25. The series is produced by Filma, the Portland Women's Film Forum. For more information write Filma at P.O. Box 15143, Portland, OR 97215, for a complete festival schedule. The Irvington Theater is located at 1333 NE Broadway, just down the block from the new Woman's Place Bookstore which carries the Sweethearts' album.

"Strange Snow," a delightful surprise

by Douge Martin

It was with some trepidation that I went to see "Strange Snow," currently at Artists Repertory Theatre. Despite the good things

● THEATER

that I had heard about the production and the abilities of the people involved, I was not looking forward to another "Vietnam Vet" play; I had always found them over-indulgent or inadequate to the subject or both. I was delightfully surprised by "Strange Snow."

"Strange Snow" is a well-drawn story of three lonely people who make a start, through reaching out, at breaking their insular ruts. David is a vet who was once full of promise but now spends his time driving a truck or drinking. Martha is his sister, a spinster schoolteacher who has that oh-so-common problem of believing herself to be so unattractive that she goes out of her way to make herself more so. Enter Megs, a rather crazy old war buddy of David's who pops back into his life.

Megs is the catalyst. In his bumbling way he does not see that Martha is supposed to be

homely, and so becomes the first person in her life to treat her as a woman. He forces David to look at their war experience, and face the guilt that he harbors from it.

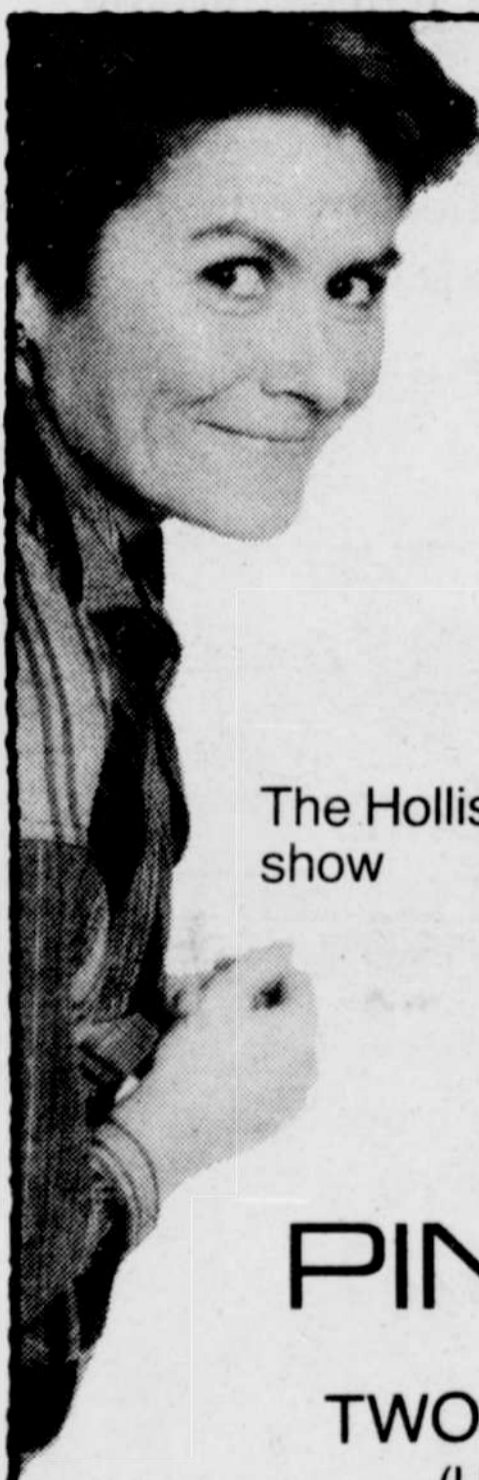
This rather basic story could be very trite indeed were it not for the abilities of the actors and director. Bob McGranahan as Megs is amazing.

Megs is full of nervous energy and fills every moment with sometimes pointless chatter. McGranahan manages to make every line fresh and alive; it is a stream flowing unchecked from a rather untidy mind. Megs could easily become a coarse, dumb redneck, but McGranahan has made him endearing.

Patricia Blem and Steven Clark Pachosa, as Martha and David, are also very good. The sparkle that begins in Martha's eye as she starts to bloom before Megs is delightful.

Stan Foote's direction is excellent. The blocking is natural and logical, and the dramatic moments are under firm control. There were a few overly indulgent moments, but they were few and did not detract from the whole. Special commendations are also due to set designer Mark Loring and costume designer Mary Chris Mass, for creating a comfortable and realistic lower-middle-class home.

"Strange Snow" plays Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00 and Sundays at 7:00 through October 25 at the Wilson Center in the YWCA downtown Call 223-6281.



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Photo by Irene Young

Friendly Coalition

Judy Grahn explains the Gay Tradition of ceremonial dykes and faggots as the healers, priestesses, shamans and nature-worshippers of any culture. In keeping, the Halloween Gathering at the Oregon Coast, has been named "Witches, Warlocks and Other



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Assorted Homosexuals." People who have participated in previous Phoenix Rising retreats (Women In the Woods, Men In The Woods & Men By The Sea) decided it was time to organize a retreat for both lesbians and gay men. Together. At the same time, at the same place. From the evening of October 31st to the afternoon of November 2nd, gay men and lesbians will be creating a self-respecting/other-respecting space for the sharing of differences and commonalities in a constructive way.

Meals, rustic lodging and incredible natural beauty will be provided at the Westwind YWCA Camp just north of Lincoln City. The time will be loosely structured but will accommodate whatever workshops the participants are willing to create. There will be a Halloween party on Saturday night and costumes/masks will be acceptable attire throughout the weekend. People of all ages are welcome. Segregated and communal sleeping spaces will be available. Fees are \$55-\$105 based on ability to pay; in case of financial hardship, contact us as early as possible. Registration must be received by October 21st, and information and registration forms can be obtained by calling, writing or dropping by: Phoenix Rising, 408 SW 2nd, Suite 412, Portland, OR 97204. Phone: 503-223-8299. Hope to see you there!