



Matthew Broderick, Brian Kerwin, Anne Bancroft and Harvey Fierstein.

## Arnold Beckoff hits the screen

*Not the story of all gay men, Torch Song Trilogy is a legitimate story of one gay man. All of us can find something to relate to in it.*

BY STEVE WARREN

**T**orch Song Trilogy, a landmark on the Broadway stage, retains that status on the screen. Harvey Fierstein has done a masterful, almost miraculous job of adapting his play, adding scenes while cutting the length by more than a third, yet leaving virtually nothing out.

The politically correct crowd will still find something to bitch about, and some gay men think their own story is the only one that belongs

## Cinema

on the screen; but as a picture of a specific person in a specific time and place, *Torch Song Trilogy* could hardly be better.

Fierstein wrote the semi-autobiographical play as a star vehicle for himself, and that it remains, with a couple of drag numbers thrown in to make it an even greater *tour de force*. Fierstein plays Arnold Beckoff, known to audiences at the Club East Fourth as "Virginia Ham." He's the marrying kind — "I want more out of life than to see a pretty face and sit down on it" — and is after the same kind of family his parents had — but with two husbands instead of a husband and wife.

Arnold meets Ed (Brian Kerwin), a handsome but dull bisexual who keeps his gay side hidden from everyone but his tricks. Arnold wants to build a life around Ed, but Ed can barely find room in his life for Arnold. One of Arnold's co-drag, Bertha Venation (Charles Pierce), comments, "Just once I'd like to see a bisexual who lived with his boyfriend and snuck out to see his girlfriend on the sly." Sure enough, Ed leaves Arnold for a woman, Laurel (Karen Young).

Another man then comes into Arnold's life. Alan (Matthew Broderick) is a 21-year-old hustler-turned-model who's tired of being treated like just another pretty face. He pursues Arnold, who finally gives in with two stipulations: "A) I want children, and B) if anyone asks, I'm the pretty one."

Arnold and Alan settle in and apply to adopt a child. Two years later they learn that David (Eddie Castrodad) will be placed with them. "He's 15, troubled, abused. He's also gay." The couple moves to a larger apartment in order to accommodate their new son. As they're moving in, Alan effectively commits suicide by trying to stop a fag-bashing. The scene isn't graphic, but its impact stays with the viewer.

Finally, Arnold's mother (Anne Bancroft) comes to visit. Ma has never approved of Arnold's homosexuality, and he's never allowed her the illusion that it's a "phase" he's going through. When she refuses to accept that his "widowhood" is as legitimate as hers, he finally tells her to respect him or get out. While

the story is set firmly in the pre-AIDS '70s, their argument resonates in this, our age of universal bereavement.

*Torch Song Trilogy* tells anyone who will listen that gay people can love and hurt like anyone else. It gets the message across with humor, as well as feeling. The film is not a public relations tool, but rather an unsanitized, uncompromising look at gay life in the '70s. The camera goes, albeit briefly and unrevealingly, into the backroom of a bar; and the gay characters aren't perfect or blameless, although none of them are villains, either.

As an actor Harvey Fierstein sews up an Oscar nomination before the opening credits, but at times director Paul Bogart should have made him tone down his performance for the screen. When your face is 30 feet wide, you don't have to do much with it to make a point.

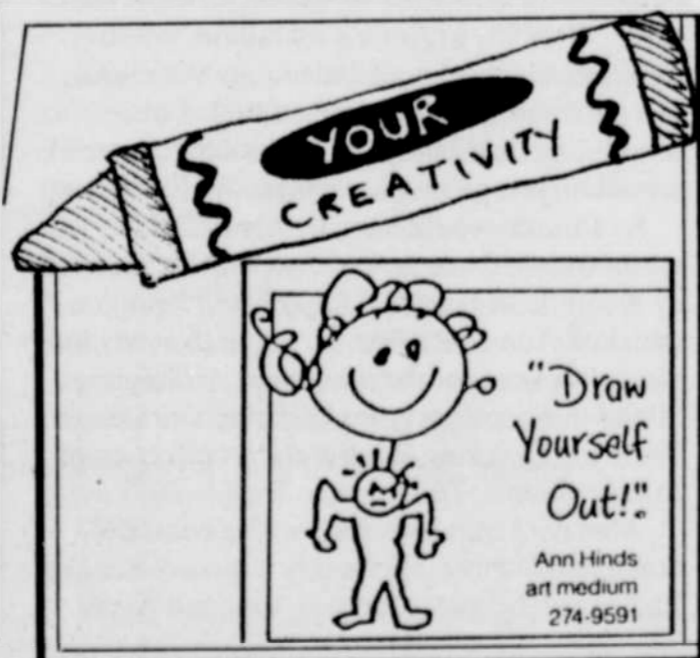
Anne Bancroft, a scenery-chewer from way back, rises to the occasion. I felt she was making the mother more hateful than necessary, but I was having so many flashbacks to my own mother it'll take a year of therapy before I can begin to evaluate her performance objectively. Let me plead the Fifth Amendment on this whole mother-son area.

Matthew Broderick, who went on to stardom after playing David on the stage, is well cast as Alan. Brian Kerwin, who looks like Nick Nolte's younger, slimmer brother, repeats his stage role as Ed. Like all the male characters they serve merely as foils for Fierstein, and they acquit themselves well.

Oscar-wise, Fierstein could repeat his Tony triumph with writing and acting awards. His scripting is better than his performance here, but I wouldn't quibble if he won for both.

Not the story of all gay men, *Torch Song Trilogy* is a legitimate story of one gay man. All of us can find something to relate to in it. If nothing else, it will make you hold your head higher as you leave the theater.

Calling a movie a "must-see" makes it sound too much like homework. Put *Torch Song Trilogy* on top of your "want-to-see" list. •



**Meditation and Chat with Ishvara**  
**Sunday 10 a.m.**  
**Wednesday 7:30 p.m.**  
**Private Chats (readings)**  
**by appointment**

ISHVARA,  
the spiritual leader of the center,  
speaks from the Oneness, assisting  
humanity in its unfolding process  
and bringing simplicity, humor and  
freedom to all those who share  
his teachings.

**Books • New Age Music**  
**Subliminal Tapes**  
**Greeting Cards**  
**• Jewelry and more •**

(503) 994-2488 Open Daily  
1644 N.E. Highway 101  
Lincoln City, OR 97367

## Presto Photo

Quality Full Service  
Photo Finishing

Reprints  
Enlargements  
Slides  
Black & White

One Hour Service  
available on most  
color processing

Celebrating new  
ownership  
Say you saw us in  
Just Out.

6362 SW Capitol Hwy  
in Hillsdale

245-0916

## SURVIVING THE AIDS CRISIS

A series of eight-week groups providing tools for dealing with the AIDS crisis. Led by Phoenix Rising professional counseling staff. \$80 per workshop. Scholarships available. Advanced registration and a \$10 deposit are required for each group.



### STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL.

The objectives of this series for gay men are to better understand what health is; help you explore how changes in key aspects of your life may affect your health; learn a planning process for implementing these changes; evaluate your personal risk for contracting AIDS and better recognize the threat of AIDS to ourselves and our community. Starts Tuesday, January 24.



**NOW THAT YOU KNOW  
WHAT SAFE SEX IS, WHY  
CAN'T YOU DO IT?** This is a common problem that many people face. This series provides a safe, supportive, non-judgemental environment and positive tools for behavior change. For men only. Led by Art Wilcox, M.A. Begins Thursday, February 2.

PHOENIX  
RISING

ORIGON'S LESBIAN/GAY SERVICE CENTER

For more information call  
223-8299.