

Gay (though not generally out at the time) director John Schlesinger scored an X in 1969 for *Midnight Cowboy*, with Bob Balaban and Barnard Hughes playing pathetic queers, and an R two years later for the upscale bisexual drama *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, in which Peter Finch and Glenda Jackson were rivals for Murray Head's affection.

That was the era of bisexual chic and the sexual revolution, when even U.S. filmmakers, with varying degrees of enlightenment, attempted to tell our stories: *The Boys in the Band*, *The Fox*, *Something for Everyone*, *The Sergeant*, *Myra Breckinridge*, *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* and *The Killing of Sister George* appeared between 1968 and 1970, followed two years later by *Cabaret*. There was also a wave of lesbian vampire movies (e.g., *The Vampire Lovers*, *Daughters of Darkness*) in this period.

John Waters practically created the midnight movie circuit in 1972, because when else could you watch *Pink Flamingos* and his other pre-Polyester films? *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), with its pansexual gender bending, became the ultimate midnight movie, still running to this day in some cities.

In 1973 *A Very Natural Thing* attempted to tell a gay love story, independently and unapologetically, for perhaps the first time, as *Desert Hearts* would do for lesbians 11 years later.

Folles play

La *Cage aux Folles* (1978) remains one of the top-grossing non-English-language films of all time, in part because its gay lovers are nonthreatening (i.e., not physically demonstrative) and the story is really about family values, though allowing that gay men can be part of a family. Mike Nichols is scheduled to direct a U.S. remake, *Birds of a Feather*, possibly with Robin Williams and Nathan Lane.

The backlash against the sexual revolution be-



Hector Babenco (center) directing William Hurt (left) and Raul Julia in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

gan in 1978, when *Halloween* ushered in the age of the slasher movie, in which anyone who had sex was bound to meet a grisly end. AIDS added fuel to the fire. As Mangin points out, "any deviation from the sexual norm," be it adultery, homosexuality or whatever, is shown to be potentially lethal in such films as *Fatal Attraction*.

Through the '80s and into the '90s we could usually rely on foreigners (e.g., *Doña Herlinda and Her Son*) and American independents (*Parting Glances*) for positive gay and lesbian images, while the major Hollywood studios—except for the *Making Love* experiment—used us primarily for cheap laughs in comedies (*Robin Hood: Men in Tights*) and murderers in thrillers (*Basic Instinct*),

and occasionally as good neighbors (*The Butcher's Wife*, *The Prince of Tides*, *Single White Female*).

It was business as usual in 1994, except for *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Threesome* presented a nominal bisexual triangle, but heterosexuality proved more equal than homosexuality. *Backbeat* was similar, but at least had a historical basis. *Reality Bites* was about four friends, but the queer one remained in the background. *Desperate Remedies* had a twist—the two women wound up together—but it was barely released. *Ace Ventura, Pet Detective* was full of fag jokes but too stupid to be truly offensive. In *No Escape* one prisoner was betraying all the others in the camp: *cherchez le queer*. *Quiz Show* insinuated that cheater Charles

Van Doren was gay. And, of course, Gus Van Sant bombed big time with the lesbian comedy *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, which was as bad as *Go Fish* was good.

Then came the transgender explosion. It was too soon to be a reaction to *Mrs. Doubtfire*, as all the projects were underway before that sleeper hit the box office bull's-eye, but suddenly the screen was awash with transvestites (*Ed Wood*, *Just Like a Woman*), transsexuals (*I Like It Like That*), or both (*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*).


There have been lesbian and gay filmmakers as long as there have been films, but most are hidden in the closets of history. We may never be sure why William Dickson filmed those two men dancing in 1895, but we have a pretty good idea. We also know—or think we know—about George Cukor, James Whale, Dorothy Arzner, Mitchell Leisen, Jean Cocteau, Kenneth Anger, Pier Paolo Pasolini and, in the newer crowd, Schlesinger, Waters, Van Sant, Franco Zeffirelli, Rose Troche, Todd Haynes, Gregg Araki, Paul Bartel, Jennie Livingston, Joel Schumacher, James Ivory, Marc Huestis, Nicole Conn, Pedro Almodóvar, Norman René, Rosa von Praunheim, Christopher Münch, Tom Kalin and the late Bill Sherwood, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Arthur J. Bressan Jr. and Derek Jarman.

Yet some of the best films about us are made by avowed heterosexuals: Stephen Frears (*Prick Up Your Ears*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*), Hector Babenco (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*), Jonathan Demme (*Philadelphia*), Mike Newell (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*), Sidney Lumet (*Dog Day Afternoon*), John Sayles (*Lianna*) and Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game*, *Mona Lisa*). And a special mention to Paul Mazursky. In his underappreciated *Scenes From a Mall* (1991) the sight of two women dancing romantically was the spark that triggered a reconciliation between Bette Midler and Woody Allen.

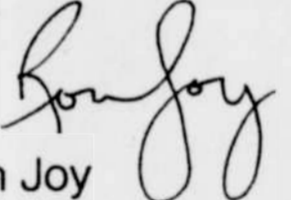
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