

Cinematic Mecca

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Best Actress plume because of the strong feelings this film engendered. Still, it is work that sticks with you. Haunting.

On the other end of the spectrum was the world premiere of Patricia Rozema's feel-good crowd-pleaser *When Night Was Falling* (Canada). Fans of Rozema's earlier outing, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, will perhaps welcome this new effort. *Night* follows heroine Camille as she strays from her Calvinist boyfriend/preacher into the arms of circus performer Petra. Like *Mermaids*, this is both quirky and simple. Whenever the picture concentrates on its visual elements, particularly the magic and sensuality of the circus setting, it soars. When the two women finally get it on, the results are utterly delicious. However, when the action shifts to dialogue, the movie itself falls. The performances ultimately suffer under a sophomoric script. *When Night Was Falling* tries much too hard to be fresh, life-affirming, whimsical...blah, blah, blah. However, perhaps the final word should go to the audience, which gave the film a rousing reception.

The Forum

The Forum of Young Cinema—one of the two alternative sections of the festival—presented a smattering of queer films and videos, making up a small percentage of its overall programming. Traditionally, the forum's offerings are a mixture of social-issue documentaries, cutting-edge cinema, and pretentious claptrap. This year was no exception.

On the plus side was the European premiere of Deborah Hoffman's brilliant *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (U.S.). This highly personal exploration of the director's relationship with her mother now suffering from Alzheimer's disease is a multifaceted gem—softly humorous, quietly moving, and filled with a deep humanity. A must-see. (Historical note: the queer highlight of the 1995 festival came shortly after Valentine's Day, when both Hoffman and her life partner Frances Reid were nominated for Academy Awards in separate categories—possibly the first lesbian couple to be so honored in Oscar herstory. Go girls!)

The jury is still out on Steve McLean's *Postcards from America* (U.S.), based on stories by David Wojnоровicz. This mood piece mixes spectacular visuals with an equally disjointed narrative. Audiences are split—some find it poetic and profound, others dismiss it as inflated and distant. See it for yourself and decide.

Don't bother seeing *Roy Cohn/Jack Smith* (U.S.), Jill Godmilow's utterly inept rendering of Ron Vawter's acclaimed performance piece of the same title. I won't comment on the worth of the piece itself (other than to say, enough with the Roy Cohn already!). Some friends assure me that on the stage it was extremely affecting. On the screen it was a complete bungle—lousy camera angles, endless audience cutaways, poor editing, no direction.



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEIVER

Sierra Lonepine Briano (left) and Kathleen Saadat share a welcome moment of levity in *Ballot Measure 9*

Finally, in the forum's video section, Berlin media mogul Jürgen Brüning scores with *He Is Bold and He Is a Racist*. A clever treatise on gay skinheads and their everlasting pursuit of masculinity, it was awarded the first prize for Best Video of the Festival.

The Market

The European Film Market comprised over 300 films not accepted into the festival proper.

By far the highlight of this section was Nancy Mecler's stunner *Sister, My Sister* (Britain), starring Julie Walters, Joely Richardson and Sodhi May. Set in the 1930s and based on a real-life incident (which also inspired the Genet play *The Maids*), this over-the-topper is a wild combination of high camp and high drama. We all know the story: the icy Madame and the subservient sibling servants. However, this version bares all as sisterly affections rapidly turn into the love that dare not speak its name, with murderous results. Walters (*Educating Rita*) gives new meaning to chewing up the scenery as Madame, and, in both manner and intensity, Joely Richardson bears an uncanny resemblance to Vanessa Redgrave—her real-life mother. Meticulously crafted and orgasmically entertaining—this one's a queen's dream and a dyke's delight.

Panorama

Helmed by openly gay Wieland Speck, this section is by far the most gay and lesbian friendly—over 20 of the 52 feature-length works and half of the shorts deal with issues relevant to our community.

The shorts this year were hit and miss, with one title dominating the pack. *Trevor* (U.S.), by Peggy Rajski, proved the most popular title in the festival. This Academy Award nominee follows an overweight teen obsessed with the theater, San Francisco, and Diana Ross. Sounds familiar? Yes, he's one of us! Hitting every gay nerve imaginable, director Rajski is a fresh new talent to be reckoned with. She could not attend the festival because she is now working on a feature with none other than Jodie Foster (wouldn't you like to be a fly on the wall on that set!).

Portland audiences will welcome Panorama's documentary *Ballot Measure 9* (U.S.)—this year's Sundance Audience Award winner. Heather MacDonald's well-crafted, highly emotional film chronicles the fierce battle to defeat an initiative discriminatory to gay men and lesbians that appeared on the 1992 Oregon ballot. Presenting both sides without the pretense of objectivity, this film is a textbook on how the religious right is organizing, sometimes with deadly results. *Ballot Mea-*

sure 9 is a must for television audiences—call your local PBS affiliate and demand that they air this important work.

Two documentaries by and about African American artists were presented. Marlon Riggs' *Black Is...Black Ain't* (U.S.) contains many brilliant moments: a weakened Riggs' fever-pitched bedside medley, Bill T. Jones' stunning *danse macabre*, and a host of interviews, each done with dignity and respect. But, like the gumbo that is the main motif of the piece, the ingredients never quite come together—the cinematic stew suffers from an awkward structure, thematic repetition, inordinate length, and the absence of Riggs' guiding hand (he died before he was able to complete the film).

Michelle Parkerson and Ada Gay Griffin's *A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde* (U.S.) profiles the great African American poet's work and her struggle against cancer. Lorde's love of the spoken word shines through, and glimmering archival footage is woven together with haunting sound montages. However, the film sometimes suffers from lesser craftsmanship and occasional rambling about issues not germane to Lorde's life.

Three pieces dealing with the underground rounded out Panorama's documentaries. Jochen Hick's *Menmaics* (Germany) delves into the leather



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