

FEAST YOUR EYES

The Northwest Film and Video Festival offers a banquet of images and ideas

by Kelly M. Bryan

The Pacific Northwest, we keep hearing, is a pot bubbling over with creative cinematic juices. So who are these stump-town Sayleses, these art-school Arakis, and what are they up to? The Northwest Film and Video Festival presents the perfect opportunity to see for yourself. From Nov. 1 to 10 you can glimpse what film and video makers in this neck of the woods are thinking about and pointing their lenses at.

Cinema

Pretty much all of what I was able to screen was queer stuff. I didn't plan to be homocentric, it just worked out that way. But it won't be easy for you, the ticket-buying public, to narrow your focus. Striding boldly toward assimilation, you'll find the Northwest Film Center has laced the gay and lesbian titles in with all the others. Some may complain that they can't take in an all-queer evening, but look at it this way: Your "average" straight filmgoer is going to get a more complex insight into gay male and lesbian reality than that afforded by Hollywood or television. In terms of queer visibility, you can't shake a stick at this kind of publicity. Here's my take on the long and short of it.

In the first minutes of Ileana Petrobruno's feature *Cat Swallows Parakeet and Speaks!*, you might suffer the uncomfortable pangs of an attack

the continuation of the human spirit, as the grit that will help us survive the madhouse we all find ourselves in. (The film shows at 7 pm on Friday, Nov. 8; the director, from Vancouver, B.C., will be in attendance.)

Two of the most effective of the queer shorts are also the longest, at a half hour each: *Meeting Magdalene* by Marilyn Freeman and *Legacies* by Sean Weakland. *Meeting Magdalene* is a black-and-white tale of lesbian seduction, which blossoms from a somewhat improbable beginning into a steamy dance and stand-off between the two excellently realized principal characters. The sharp photography is by one-time Portlander Laurie Meeker. The film is part of Program 1 (see times below), along with *Life Support*, by Seattle's Michael Misrok, an unflinching look at the video maker's battle with AIDS and encroaching blindness as a result of CMV; and Gus Van Sant's *Four Boys and a Volvo*, based on his Levi's commercial.

Sean Weakland's *Legacies* earned a Judges Award for its alternately goofy and grim look at Mormonism and its attempts to root out the homosexuality within its flock. Interviews with gay men who underwent conversion "therapies" reveal the barbaric pseudo-science of the procedures, and the multifaceted torture they represent: One of the interviewees relates how as a closeted but sexually active gay man he himself helped to perpetrate the procedures on willing victims. *Legacies* is shown in Program 2 and in the "New Voices" program, along with Andrea Stoops' *Adam*, a wry animated look at a playground



Tara Frederick (above) and Rebecca Godin in *Cat Swallows Parakeet and Speaks!*

of the avant-garde. If your film diet has been running lately toward the easily chewed, facing a 75-minute plateful of oddly angled black-and-white posturing can be a jaw-tightener. But there's a wise and witty heart beating beneath the initial pallor this film presents. Tracing the increasing intimacy between two women incarcerated in a hospital—Scheherazade, a model with an uncertain malady, and Kore, a dancer with an ambiguous eating disorder—Petrobruno conjures an ethereal yet very earthly fairy tale that touches on tabloid sensationalism, the horrific undertones of health care, the narrow corridor of options society opens to women, and the power of sisterhood. The layers of meaning threaded through much of the story line can keep you thinking for days: The readily apparent reference to *The Arabian Nights*, where Scheherazade feels she must entertain her doctor with stories so that he doesn't lose interest in her and let her die, yields upon consideration a chilling comment on the situation faced by many with "difficult" illnesses under the specter of managed care. The nasty tendency of minds and bodies to be "out of control" or deviant—so lovingly and luridly reported by the tabloids—is elevated and celebrated in *Cat Swallows Parakeet*, as a hope for

conquest by a butch baby dyke. *Adam* also figures in the "Midnight Oasis" program, as do the engaging gay shorts *Boulevard of Broken Synch* by Winston Xin, and *One Night in Heaven*, a queer karaoke by Wayne Yung. (Program 1, called "All Sorts of Shorts," opens the festival at 8 pm Friday, Nov. 1; Program 2, a k a "Shorts of All Sorts," plays at 7 pm Saturday, Nov. 2; the "Midnight Oasis" program is unspooled (yes, at midnight) on Nov. 2; and student works, in a program dubbed "New Voices, New Visions," are shown at 7 pm Monday, Nov. 4. Each of the shorts programs repeats once during the festival.)

The 23rd Northwest Film and Video Festival has much to offer filmgoers, but it serves film and video makers, too: Check out a presentation at 2 pm Nov. 2, with producer John Pierson (who helped *She's Gotta Have It*, *Roger and Me*, *Go Fish* and *Crumb* to the screen), who will show clips and outtakes, answer questions and reveal an insiders' view of the independent scene, and other events.

Screenings are held at the Berg Swann Auditorium, 1219 SW Park Ave.; tickets are \$6 general, \$5 students and seniors. Call for schedule, 221-1156.

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