

## SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER

Don't look for Portland's queer film festival until fall, but step up now for a few morsels to tide you over till then

by Kelly M. Bryan

The event formerly known as the Oregon Gay and Lesbian Film Festival has a new name: Sensory Perceptions. It has a new attitude: An energetic and imaginative volunteer group of queer film lovers, supported by a "host committee" of community celebrities, will be out in the streets and in the clubs to promote the festival and pump up the volume. And it lays claim to a new calendar page: This year the festival moves from June to

### Cinema

September, specifically Sept. 18-21.

The venue, on the other hand, remains the same. The festival will play out on the screen at Cinema 21, the straight-owned and emphatically queer-positive establishment that inaugurated the event in 1988. Reel Proud is what the festival was called back then. It ran for seven days, bringing us *Parting Glances* and *Mala Noche*. Attendance was good, so the theater kept up the tradition, missing only one year along the way. (*Just Out* was cosponsor of the festival for its first three years.)

By 1996, Advocates for Gay and Lesbian Equality had held the cosponsor reins for three years, and the event had had a name change. The length of the festival, which fluctuated over the years, was 10 days (in 1994 it ran almost two months, albeit nonconsecutively). But for reasons that perhaps only a psychic could decipher, festival attendance was thinning—in fact, that year it dropped by about half. AGLÉ decided to bow out.

Some people, Cinema 21 owner Tom Ranieri among them, felt that the tradition of having the festival during or near Pride celebrations was actually a hindrance to its success. As Pride festivities have blossomed to two or more days of dances, parties and events galore, the vying for queer attention has become fierce. Plus, as any Portlander knows, the beckoning, balmy days and nights of June are just too few and too precious to spend indoors in the dark. But another kind of competition makes that month less than ideal: mid-June is when cities like Boston and San Francisco hold their queer film festivals. Even in

these days of mainstream product aplenty, small independent features, whose makers often have trouble scraping up funds for multiple prints, comprise most festival fare, and Portland was missing out on some of the best work.

It seemed that change was in order.

In the Aug. 2, 1996, issue of *Just Out*, then ad rep and theater writer C. Jay Wilson Jr. wrote a guest editorial speculating on the fate of the festival in the wake of poor turnout and AGLÉ's abdication. He called for community action. The appeal inspired film editor Amy Duddleston, who placed a notice in the Announcements section of the paper looking for others who would rally to the cause. Their numbers swelled to around 12 open film buffs, who bring a variety of skills to the group. There are artists, activists, writers and, luckily, PR and fund-raising wizards.

Duddleston says the group approached Ranieri about cosponsoring the festival: "Tom said, it's all yours, as long as you make it interesting."

If the pre-festival buildup is any indication, interesting it will be. The kickoff fund- and community awareness-raiser is the June 9 Queer Nite at LaLuna, from which a portion of proceeds will benefit Sensory Perceptions. Festival organizers will be on hand at LaLuna to sell tickets to the first festival event, benefit showings on Friday, June 13, of *Boys Life 2*, a quartet of short takes on growing up gay. Then on June 21 at Portland Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride, the Sensory Perceptions committee will march in the parade and have a booth at the Pride Festival grounds afterward. There, for a nominal fee, you can have a Polaroid snapped of yourself with your favorite Hollywood closet case (or rather, a cardboard facsimile thereof). Choose from Tom Cruise, John Travolta, Jodie Foster and more. Another warm-up event is slated for Aug. 22: a benefit

showing of Cheryl Dunye's *Watermelon Woman*, at which Dunye may well be in attendance. Come see the movie that kicked up yet another congressional flurry over National Endowment for the Arts funding.

The lineup for the festival itself has yet to be inked in. Sensory Perceptions volunteers will scour the big festivals this summer for hot prospects, and have already begun screening potential films. Host committee members such as Thomas Lauderdale, Kristy Edmunds, Rupert Kinnard, Rose Bond and Scot Nakagawa will put in their votes, and will act as community ambassadors to round up the faithful come September.

And there's the rub: Are people still interested? Are queer film festivals going the way of the record player and the dial phone? Do we really need them anymore, now that you can see overt queer content in many a matinée at the Lloyd Mall?

"Gays and lesbians do have more recourse to films of interest to them than they did 10 years ago," Ranieri says. "Festivals may no longer be as essential as they were. If we do everything right and nobody shows up—we're going to have to look carefully at whether we're filling a need."

Doing everything right. That means proper timing, getting the word out and programming an exciting roster of films, with an accent on the latter.

"A festival shouldn't be mandatory or like taking medicine—it should be appealing," Ranieri says.

And the Sensory Perceptions crew aims to deliver on that count.

That's why a September run is such an improvement they say, and they point out that, along with the feel-good films and big-name vehicles, festivals are natural venues for the sort of work that just wouldn't play in the 12-plex at the Mall

of America. Work that comes from a frankly homo perspective.

"It's great that people go to see movies like *Bound* and *Chasing Amy*," Duddleston says. "That helps people get comfortable with queer images. But they're not made by queer filmmakers. A film like *The Birdcage*: I don't consider that a queer film."

Perhaps it's one of the symptoms of broad-based acceptance: We are included more in Hollywood fare, and for many that may be enough, that means we've made it. But we may lose something if we believe that our multifaceted lives will ever be accurately reflected by the mainstream movie screen. We are a rebel culture and, no matter how much things loosen up, that will not change. It's good to check in every now and then, to connect with our difference—to revel in and celebrate it. Isn't that what Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Pride is all about?

### Boys! Boys! Boys!

Is Calvin Klein's influence seeping into the queer cinema? His stamp is certainly emblazoned on these shorts. Well, three of them. *Trevor*, which earned a 1994 Academy Award for best live-action short, is the only film in the grouping known as *Boys Life 2* to dare to portray an adolescent gay man as anything but a chiseled, cooler-than-thou Adonis. But don't hate them because they're beautiful—these little films are not as lightweight as they might seem.

The four views that make up this scrapbook of queer youth are well-matched and well-ordered. *Must Be the Music* leads off with pulsating dance club rhythms and a bevy of very pretty young L.A. boys looking for love and sex; maybe actually in that order. *Nunzio's Second Cousin* follows with a tale of a would-be gay-basher whose actions bring consequences he could never have imagined: Vincent D'Onofrio and Eileen Brennan star in this gritty comedy that will keep you off balance until the final punch line. Next up is *Alkalai, Iowa*—a breath of fresh farm air tinged with musty family secrets that shows off striking filmmaking technique and fine performances. *Trevor* is deservedly last because, while perhaps not really best, it is heartfelt, uplifting and sends you out of the theater shaking your groove-thang. Brett Barsky is remarkable as one who learns the hard way that this world is not yet ready for a 13-year-old boy who wants to go as Diana Ross for Halloween.

All of these shorts offer a fresh perspective: from the gay utopia of Los Angeles, where the straight boy is the odd man out, to the yearning of a future farmer of America stuck in the bean field on the Fourth of July to find other men like himself. There is humor here to feed your head, heart and hormones.

Kelly M. Bryan



Travis Sher (left) in Nickolas Perry's *Must Be the Music*



Brett Barsky stars in Peggy Rajski's *Trevor*

### Trevor's Diary

Peggy Rajski may be the last person you would expect to have directed the Academy Award-winning live-action short film *Trevor*. Rajski says she is "not gay, at least not yet," and her film is about a 13-year-old boy who is having trouble dealing with the fact that he is gay.

*Boys Life 2*, sequel to the popular 1995 package of shorts, has been making its way slowly around the country since March. *Trevor*, the last of four segments, has been receiving the most praise and applause.

What else would one expect from a film that deals with gay issues in such a touching and comedic way? The title character, Trevor, is first seen dancing to the tunes of Diana Ross, and

goes through all of her albums, it seems, in less than 20 minutes.

"The emotion of the story in *Trevor* touched on a lot of things in me. The time of my life when I was young and felt alone and like nobody understood things that were going on in my head," says Rajski.

The film was not written by Rajski, it was found by her. "*Trevor* was part of a one-man show that James Lecesne had written. It was entitled *Dear Diary*. It had me laughing and crying equally as hard. I came out of it feeling as if it was one of the best pieces I had ever seen. My business partner Randy Stone was with me, and we decided that we needed to make a movie based on that 10-minute segment."

Rajski had not planned on directing the film; her forte is producing. She has produced many

mainstream Hollywood films, including a couple with Jodie Foster (*Little Man Tate*, *Home for the Holidays*).

"We expanded the story for the screen. It obviously was going to be a little different with a real 13-year-old boy playing the lead role instead of a 33-year-old.

"I got a letter from a man in L.A. whose 16-year-old cousin killed himself playing an endless loop of his favorite songs [as Trevor tries to do in the film]. He wrote that he thought if his cousin had seen *Trevor* he may have changed his mind and realized that he was not alone. That letter broke my heart, but at the same time was one of the highest compliments. Now if we could just get the film into every school."

Tim Nasson

*Boys Life 2* opens June 13 and plays for one week at Cinema 21, 616 NW 21st Ave. Shows are nightly at 7, 8:45 and 10:15 pm, with weekend matinées at 1:45, 3:15 and 5 pm. Advance sales for the Friday night shows, from Gai-Pied, Jelly Bean and Queer Nite at LaLuna on June 9, go in part to Sensory Perceptions: The Portland Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. Tickets are \$6, and will also be available at the theater, but only advance sales benefit the festival.

Call the Sensory Perceptions hot line at 242-0818 for info or to volunteer for events.