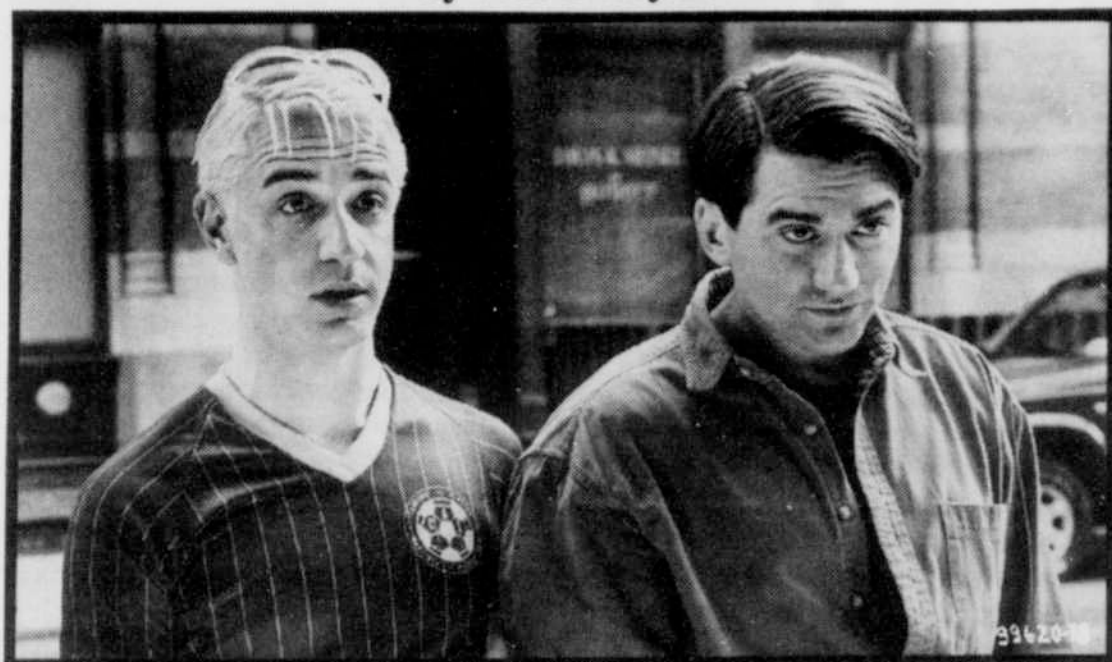


ATSA MORE LIKE IT

Pucker up for the airy, near-queer confection
Kiss Me, Guido—it tastes great and it's less filling

by Will O'Bryan



Craig Chester (left) as Terry and Anthony Barrile as Warren in *Kiss Me, Guido*

The premise seems ridiculous: Gay Manhattanite places a shared housing ad that's answered by a buffed, naive Bronx Italian American who thinks the label GWM translates to "guy with money." Yuk, yuk. Doesn't that sound like a million laughs?

Yes, this sounds very clever, very witty. Sounds like a barrel of monkeys. Where's Dom DeLuise when you need him?

Cinema

But wait. While *Kiss Me, Guido* is light—it nearly floats off the screen—and predictable, it's also funny. In the queer universe, it may qualify as the best "feel-good comedy of the year," if for no other reason than that it was the only contestant. After all, despite Rupert Graves' best intentions, *My Best Friend's Wedding* doesn't count.

Kiss Me, Guido is the fluffy piece of candy that rarely rolls down the aisles of queer movie making. Controversial queer-community hot buttons are off limits. The most serious issues tackled in this movie have probably already been covered by Goldie Hawn and Chevy Chase.

Tony Vitale, who wrote the screenplay for *Kiss Me, Guido*, is a veteran of the mainstream, hetero movie business. He won't confirm his own sexual orientation publicly, so whether *Kiss Me, Guido* genuinely meets all the criteria of Queer Cinema is debatable. In the same vein as "I can talk about my mother that way, but you can't," the community can laugh at jokes made at our expense when they come out of the community, while the same joke from elsewhere is unwelcome. Thankfully, everything about the finished product feels like an inside job, especially Guinevere Turner's (*Go Fish*, *The Watermelon Woman*) cameo appearance as the "Indignant Lesbian."

Vitale also made his directorial debut with *Kiss Me, Guido*. It shows. Some edges are rough where they should be smooth. The film, for all its potential mainstream appeal, feels very much like an independent. That feel doesn't come from an artful grittiness, though. It comes from some production flaws.

Some of the editing is choppy. There is a lot of great disco on the soundtrack, but for a silly movie, this one is painfully quiet at times—distractingly so. The acting also escaped Vitale's control. He can be excused for using stage actors (Anthony Barrile as GWM Warren, and David Deblinger as prima donna "#"), though their training in exaggerated mannerism looked a little garish next to the screen actors.

Nevertheless, the film's faults are too minor to dwell on. And Vitale's status as novice director grants him the benefit of the doubt. His own

acting, as a pizza-eating Bronx homeboy (in two brief scenes), tasted as genuine as a slice of Sicilian. Unfortunately, he hasn't learned to hone his director's to the same degree.

The largest roles are filled by the aforementioned Barrile and by Nick Scotti as Frankie, the Guido (as label, not name) from the title.

Scotti, a Queens native, has been in front of a camera since he was 19, either as a model or as an actor. He seems comfortable there, oblivious to the probing lens. One would almost hope that the law of averages would prevent someone so attractive from being a decent actor, but that's not the case. While Frankie steals scenes by simply walking around in a towel, he steals a few others while speaking and fully clothed. It's damned unfair.

Barrile's résumé includes television and film, but his heart definitely beats on stage. His body is animated, as though he's aware of all the language it's capable of, from his arching eyebrows to his crossed arms or prancing gait. As though the screen were a stage, Barrile's instinct seems to be to use all the space available to him and to ensure that the back row can see the emotions on his face.

The difference in Barrile's and Scotti's acting roots shows. The contrast benefits the picture in that it emphasizes the differences between the two characters, underlining that they do indeed come from different worlds, one being the gay theater scene in Manhattan, the other being the Bronx.

As Warren and Frankie convey the heart of the *Kiss Me, Guido* story (tolerance, acceptance—nothing heavy), Terry, Warren's queeny friend and neighbor, conveys nothing but himself. Craig Chester's Terry is an infinitely more likable character than the diabolical child-murdering teenager Chester played in *Swoon*, the part for which he is most remembered. Vitale wrote the best lines for Terry, and Chester made the character worthy of them. Not even Scotti in tight white jeans could upstage Chester as a gloriously brazen drag queen in a midriff mini-dress, pounds of blonde hair and hideous make-up.

Another actor worth mentioning is Anthony DeSando, who played Frankie's sleazy bother, Pino. Cruising around in his Cadillac, Binaca breath freshener in his sweat suit pocket, a mint's worth of gold around his neck and a blown-dry hair helmet, who could've remembered that this was *Party Girl*'s gay pal from the movie of the same name? Impressive range.

Kiss Me, Guido ignores a lot of what we've come to expect in queer cinema. There is no death, no unrequited love, no politics; there are no tears. It is to film what Hanson is to music: pure bubble gum. Of course, there's nothing new about going to a movie to forget your troubles instead of facing them. If Vitale is trying to put a new face on gay cinema, as farcical as it may be, good for him. The queer community has certainly earned a couple hours of escapism.

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