

SURELY YOU FEST

by Kelly M. Bryan

All summer long Oregonians have been soaking up sunlight and warmth—like camels sucking down water before a long, cross-desert trek. This late in the season, even shade worshipers like myself have ventured blinkingly into the blaze now and again, because we know that we're not likely to see much of *The Radiating Orb* during the coming months.

Yet despite autumn's onrushing feet, now is the summer of our content. Queer content, that is. It's time to soak up some culture, for *Sensory Perceptions: The Portland Lesbian and Gay Film Festival* is coming to town.

Put on this year by a new committee, the festival has already shown us its energy. There have been benefit parties and screenings (*Boys Life 2* and *The Watermelon Woman*), but now we're headed for the heart of the matter. Not much was available to the press for preview, so I'm as eager as anyone to see how it all turns out. Features slightly outnumber documentaries this year, and there's a parade of shorts—three entire programs are devoted to them and most full-length films come with a short in tow. Six programs will be graced by filmmaker visitations (see below). The festival runs for four action-packed days, Sept. 18-21, at its accustomed home, Cinema 21, 616 NW 21st Ave. Tickets are \$6 per program, or you can purchase a festival pass for \$75. Either can be purchased in advance at *In Other Words*, *Gai-Pied*, *Jelly Bean* or *It's My Pleasure*.

In addition to all the films, the festival pass grants you entrée to the opening night gala next door at Muu-Muu's from 9 pm to 1 am. There you can nibble and sip (it's a no-host bar) in chromatic splendor and mingle with guest filmmakers, festival sponsors and the illustrious local lights of the host committee. For \$15 you can take in one of the opening night films (*It's in the Water* or *Lilies*) as well as see and be seen at the gala; reportedly, cinephobes can attend the gala alone if they must, ask at the door for the price of admission.

Below: *It's in the Water*



WHAT'S ON THE BILL— SCREENED

THURSDAY, SEPT. 18

7 PM—*It's in the Water*

Picture a sleepy Texas town where people have bumper stickers that read: Gun Control Means Using Both Hands. Now picture such a town after the invasion of a carload of characters escaped from a Pedro Almodóvar movie (imagine them white). Welcome to Azalea Springs.

And as if that's not enough, it seems that practically the whole town is gay or headed that way—and it's something to do with the water, or so a hot rumor goes. The son of the publisher of the town newspaper is gay, the minister who leads the "Homo No Mo" support group is (secretly) gay, the wealthy young society wife turns out to be gay—hell, the town's male interior decorator, Bruce, is gay. Who knew.

Have you anticipated that the humor in this picture—and there is quite a bit—is painted in broad, broad strokes? You bet your faux finish it is. Come to think of it, the pathos goes on pretty thick, too.

This film may be a first, in that it features love angles of both the female and male persuasion. The former concerns the society lass, Alex (Keri Jo Chapman), and her recently returned high-school bud, Grace (Teresa Garrett), who reveals to Alex in a convincingly awkward scene that she left her husband for another woman. Plink, goes the eventual light bulb over Alex's head, no wonder I only dated gay guys in high school—I'm a lesbian too.

The guy story focuses on the newspaper heir, Mark (Derrick Sanders), who's trying hard to be straight on demand to suit his father's wishes, but has to give it up to Tomás (Timothy Vahle), an earnest and easy-on-the-eye house painter/artist.

While you can spot most of the plot developments careening down the pike a mile off, the acting and filmmaking are generally good. It's amazing to see how a line that really shouldn't work can, in the right hands, be made to work by timing and inflection. But not always.

The most unfortunate trap the script falls into, is molding and flattening its characters to fit a neat story line, instead of letting them be themselves. This stands out boldest for the film's characters of color. The black maid doesn't get to do anything that would tweak the perceived stereotype of her role—she's jolly, motherly and tolerant of her white employers' foibles. The Latino who brings the white newspaper man out of his closet is underlined by his ethnicity. When Mark decides to call Tomás, Spanish guitar chords flood the soundtrack. Oh, please.

That aside, if you go into this movie with your sights set on farce, you should hit the target. (Director Kelli Herd)

WITH THE SHORT: *dinner party*

Too bad this *dinner party* is short, because just when things get interesting, the host takes your plate away. (Director Lisa Cholodenko, with Erin McMurtry and Sarita Choudhury)

FRIDAY, SEPT. 19

7 PM—"Girls in Shorts"

Top of the World

A girl-meets-Trouble story, where an apparent sweet thing (Laurie Ciarametaro) refuses to be warned away from a smoldering leather/flannel-clad butch (A. Rosser Goodman). Some effective moods are created—as when the innocent stays late to help the bad-girl clean up the coffee shop. The best performances are Jan Lee's (in a dual role) and Shonen Knife's (singing the title track, a cover of the Carpenters' classic hit). (Director Marjorie Kaye. Filmmaker appearance.)

Other shorts that were unavailable for advance screening are: *Two or Three Things, But Nothing for Sure* directed by Tina Di Felicianantonio and Jane Wagner and featuring a reading by Dorothy Allison; *Dike* directed by Lisa Hayes; *My Pretty Little Girlfriend* directed by Jennifer M. Gentile; *Two/Doh* directed by Michelle Mohabeer; *Swim...Swim: Talkin' to Sperm* and *Other Desperate Acts* directed by Wendy Levy;



Above: *Some Prefer Cake*

Why I'll Never Trust You, In 200 Words or Less directed by Cassandra Nicalaou; and *Dear Mom* directed by Diane Bonder.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 20

2:45 PM—*Surviving Friendly Fire: The Making of a Street Kids Theatre Project*

Four years ago in Los Angeles, homeless kids staying at the Gay and Lesbian Center youth shelter got involved in a theater project that helped them take the difficult stories of their lives and turn them into art and a way to communicate with others. Seventy young people helped write the material that went on to be performed on stage by 10. As one commentator puts it, they traded stories around so that it wouldn't come off too much like *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

The resulting play was called *Friendly Fire*, after the phenomenon of being shot at by the people who are supposed to be on your side, in this case your family. The youth tell—in the theater pieces and in interviews for this film—what life in their families of origin was like and how they ended up on the streets. *Friendly Fire* was the third in a trio of plays co-created by homeless queer youth. It was performed in a four-day run at the Los Angeles Festival, an annual arts event, and then toured area high schools.

The young people are bright, funny, intense, irrepressible and very astute to the ways of the cruel world. Most of them, in working together intensely over the five to six months of preparing the show, seem to have found a real bond and a place to relax some of their hard-earned defenses.

Continued on page 21