



Paulina Porizkova (left) and Tilda Swinton in *Female Perversions*

OSCAR'S QUEER FRIENDS

'98

Now that the celluloid closet has become a celluloid campground, there are plenty of films to consider for our own awards show

BY RAYMOND MURRAY

This was a mixed year for gay men and lesbians in film. Hollywood offered a few notable productions (In and Out, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*), and there was a certifiable deluge of minor gay characters in many straight-themed films, but the studios virtually dropped lesbian characters, lesbian chic apparently forgotten. (Accordingly, there is no category this year for Best Mainstream Lesbian Film—there weren't any.) Independent cinema picked up the slack, however, offering audiences a vast array of stories and characters. So, in homage to the huge event that is the Academy Awards, I present below my nominations (and winners) for the second annual Queer Oscars.

Best Mainstream Gay Male Film:

S Love! Valour! Compassion!

Terrence McNally's tragicomedy about friendship and sex among eight gay friends is alternately funny, touching, maudlin, sad and uplifting. It is also unapologetically gay. The film played in many suburban multiplexes, where straights became witness to men kissing men, full frontal nudity and frank discussions of gay life in the time of AIDS.

S Kiss Me, Guido

Paramount Pictures, hoping to cash in on the "gay craze," picked up this independent film and released it both theatrically and on video. A broad comedy, it's filled with familiar gay and straight stereotypes and follows a naive Italian beauty from the Bronx who ventures down to Greenwich Village—only to be thrown into a world of homosexuality, gay bons mots and Julie Andrews films!

S Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil

Clint Eastwood's adaptation of the acclaimed novel is simplified and heterofied, but the film retains its gay core. Kevin Spacey is appealing as the flashy Southern closet case accused of murdering his sexy but excitable boy-toy (Jude Law). The Lady Chablis (who plays herself) is equally transfixing as a hard-as-nails transvestite who gets caught up in the intrigue.

S Bent

This British-made adaptation of Martin Sherman's harrowing play on the life of gays in Hitler's concentration camps is a tough sell to any audience, let alone a mainstream one. But it stylishly opens up the action, features fine performances from Clive Owen and Lothaire Bluteau, and is a hard-learned but important lesson in queer history.

And the winner is...

® In and Out

A box office smash and critical success, this rollicking fairy tale about one man's discovery of his true sexual orientation is a gem. Great acting by Kevin Kline, as a gay man so closet-

ed that even he doesn't suspect himself; Joan Cusack, as his frantically frustrated fiancée; and Tom Selleck, as a gay television news reporter. The famous leg-lifting kiss between Kline and Selleck was a surprise for gay and straight audiences alike. Written by the gay Paul Rudnick, the film does not attempt to be political or even-handed, just plain fun.



Debbie Reynolds, Joan Cusack and Kevin Kline in *In and Out*

Best Independent Gay Male Film:

S Johns

Lukas Haas and David Arquette star as two gay hustlers in this lyrical-if-sobering tale of self-respect and friendship amid L.A.'s seedy underworld of male prostitution. Haas is especially touching as the doe-eyed gay teen quietly in love with Arquette.

S Latin Boys Go to Hell

Definitely the best title of the year and the film featuring the most unabashed images of hunky male nudes. Director Ela Troyano infuses her improbable soap opera with torrid Latino passions, sexual confusion, violence and much bronzed flesh. It makes for cheerfully cheesy fun.



Ela Troyano

S Flipping

A Tarantinian gangster flick that features what is surely is the oddest gay couple of the film season: David Amos is a tall, handsome and violently ambitious thug who is secret lovers with David Proval, a Ratso Rizzo-like undercover cop. This gay angle in an otherwise straight and bloody hoodlum yarn makes for a real curiosity.

S Lilies

Canada's John Greyson has created an impressively complex and beautifully crafted gay drama. Set in a prison and utilizing theatrical artifice and flashbacks, the story's tale of jealousy, love, revenge and redemption among young students (and later when they are older men) builds to a powerful conclusion.

And the winner is...

® Beautiful Thing

The innocence, tentativeness and joy of first love is celebrated in this delightful British-made romantic comedy. Two teens—stuck in a London housing project and mired in tumultuous family situations—find happiness in each other's arms. A fairy tale tonic for the jaded. Interestingly, like *Latin Boys*, the film was directed by a woman, Hettie Macdonald.

Best Independent Lesbian Film:

S All Over Me

The Sichel sisters' debut film (Alex directed and Sylvia wrote the screenplay) is a painfully tender and knowing story of a girl's emerging lesbian sexuality. We watch as a gangly teen (Alison Folland) learns of same-sex love—first in an unrequited longing for her best friend and later in a fulfilling affair with a fellow student. Tough, tender and romantic.

S Chasing Amy

The most contentious film of 1997. Was this droll romantic comedy an insightful look into the fluidity of sexuality and sexual orientation, or was it a straight white male's wet dream, in which a New Jersey yahoo, "blessed"

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