

Trick's Fall guy

Director Jim Fall talks about his new film, *Trick*, and the rest of the queer film world

BY WILL O'BRYAN

Jim Fall made a name for himself directing on New York's stages with plays like *Blood Orgy of the Carnival Queens!*, which he co-wrote; *Zastrozzi—The Master of Discipline*; and *Cute Boys in Their Underpants Go to France*.

Recently, though, the stage lights took a back seat to the spotlights when Fall made his feature film directorial debut with *Trick*. The film is a gay romantic comedy starring two straight fresh faces, Christian Campbell and J.P. Pitoc. Comic relief is provided largely by Tori Spelling of *Beverly Hills 90210* fame.

While *Just Out's* review of *Trick* in the July 16 issue was less than complimentary, we didn't want to pass up the opportunity to speak to one of the industry's likely up-and-coming directors of gay films.

Apparently diving headfirst into the celluloid seaside, Fall says he's ready to say good-bye to New York. He took the time to speak with us from Los Angeles.

While you didn't write the *Trick* screenplay, you're still in a position to respond to critics who, like *Just Out's*—It wasn't me!—who find...

Did I get a bad review?

Well, he found it a bit saccharine. How do you respond to that?

It's interesting. I've found that people either sort of really like the movie or really hate the movie. How do I respond to it? I loved the movie. I think the movie's really funny. I think the movie's really heartfelt. So how do I respond to the negative press we've gotten?

Just in that particular vein. Relative to queer films of yesteryear, it's lighter fare.

I think that's kind of a stupid criticism. Who cares?! What does that mean? They all have to be nasty and dark? Personally, I was interested in *Trick* because, as a gay man and as a gay audience member, I felt I wasn't being served. I felt there wasn't enough variety—and, quite frankly, quality—in a lot of the gay films.

I kind of yearned to see a romantic gay film that's not issue-oriented. I thought, how great to just make a film that assumes there's an audience out there interested in seeing a romantic comedy that's about two gay boys. What's been nice is that the majority of the response, both critically and in all the audiences I've watched, has been really positive.

As a genre, do you think that queer cinema is going to continue along this trend, with movies like *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss* or *Kiss Me Guido*?

I don't know. What's funny to me when you talk about trends and comparing this to *Billy's* and *Guido*, which was directed by a straight guy—and *Billy's* is so completely different from my movie, that it's sort of weird; like apples and oranges. It's a little frustrating to have gay movies all sort of lumped together and then categorized and compared. You get compared and criticized in such a weird little vacuum. It's kind of odd.

Would you say that, as a group, the queer film-watching public's taste is evolving? Are we expecting different things?

I sense that a lot of the gay audiences are very savvy and quite honestly are sick and tired

of the quality of a lot of these films. As am I. It's amazing how as gay people we're supposed to be so creative and so smart—or that's the cliché anyway—and it seems a lot of gay movies lack some basic Storytelling 101.

The audiences are definitely expecting more and want variety. I certainly want variety. Back in 1980, when *Cruising* came out, there were no positive images of gay people at all. I hope there's just going to be variety. I hope we can see a gay super hero movie, action movies.

Movies like *Big Daddy* are being touted as so positive for having a gay couple. Frankly, I find that insulting. They were still sort of played for a joke. It felt very strained how they were weaved into the story. Even a lot of gay press praised that movie for having a gay couple and I thought, God, we're so desperate we're willing to take that piece of shit as progress? It doesn't feel like progress, it feels like a step back in a lot of ways.

Your résumé leads me to believe that you prefer working in comedy. Is that accurate?

I gravitate toward it because I really love it. I'd love to continue working in comedy. I love to laugh. I think my favorite sort of movie would be a drama with a lot of humor. Something maybe more serious than *Trick*, but with humor. Compare it to what James L. Brooks manages to pull off in his best films. Dramatic story with a lot of heart and humor is what moves me the most.

But I was weaned on Hollywood pop films of the '70s, which I think was actually a very exciting time in film. There was *Taxi Driver* balanced with movies like *Earthquake*. I'm kind of torn.... I'd love to make an *Earthquake* with a little more intelligence.

What other projects are you working on now?

The one that I'm most excited about is based on the true memoir of a gay man who was drafted into Vietnam in the '60s and his whole sort of adventure and coming home and literally stumbling into the Stonewall Riot.

Another one is sort of this tragic romance that takes place in the 1920s, about a man and a woman who meet in a tuberculosis ward and fall in love. It kind of works as an AIDS allegory. The irony of finding love while you're dying. It's a twisted, surreal tale.

Is there any dream project in your future?

The dream project is Jacqueline Susann's first novel. It's a space romance. [Laughs.] It's called *Yargo*. It's basically *The King and I* in space. It's about a woman who's abducted by a UFO.... It's just this insane love story. It would really be fun to do.

In *Trick*, what were the particular challenges with directing straight actors to play gay characters?

With this movie, I didn't know the actors were straight when I cast them. I assumed at least one of them was gay. J.P. Pitoc I found in a gay magazine advertising an underwear play. I jumped to the conclusion he was probably gay. But he's not.

It becomes very clear when you're directing an actor. No in-the-closet actor would be this clueless about how to touch another man. I had to choreograph a lot of how they touch in the movie and really walk them through it.

It certainly wasn't twisting arms. It was just making it safe for them to do what they needed to do to be authentic in the movie.

How many takes till they got the kiss right?

The kiss at the very end? That was actually take No. 1. I love the fact that it was actually them kissing for the first time. Take No. 1 was the best kiss. The first one had some passion. I wanted them to have that nervousness, which they used and I think worked really well.

■ *TRICK* plays at Cinema 21 in Portland, 616 N.W. 21st Ave., Aug. 6 to 12; call (503) 223-4515 for show times. Three Friends Coffeehouse, 201 S.E. 12th Ave. in Portland, is the site of a *Trick* promotional party at 7 p.m. Aug. 6.

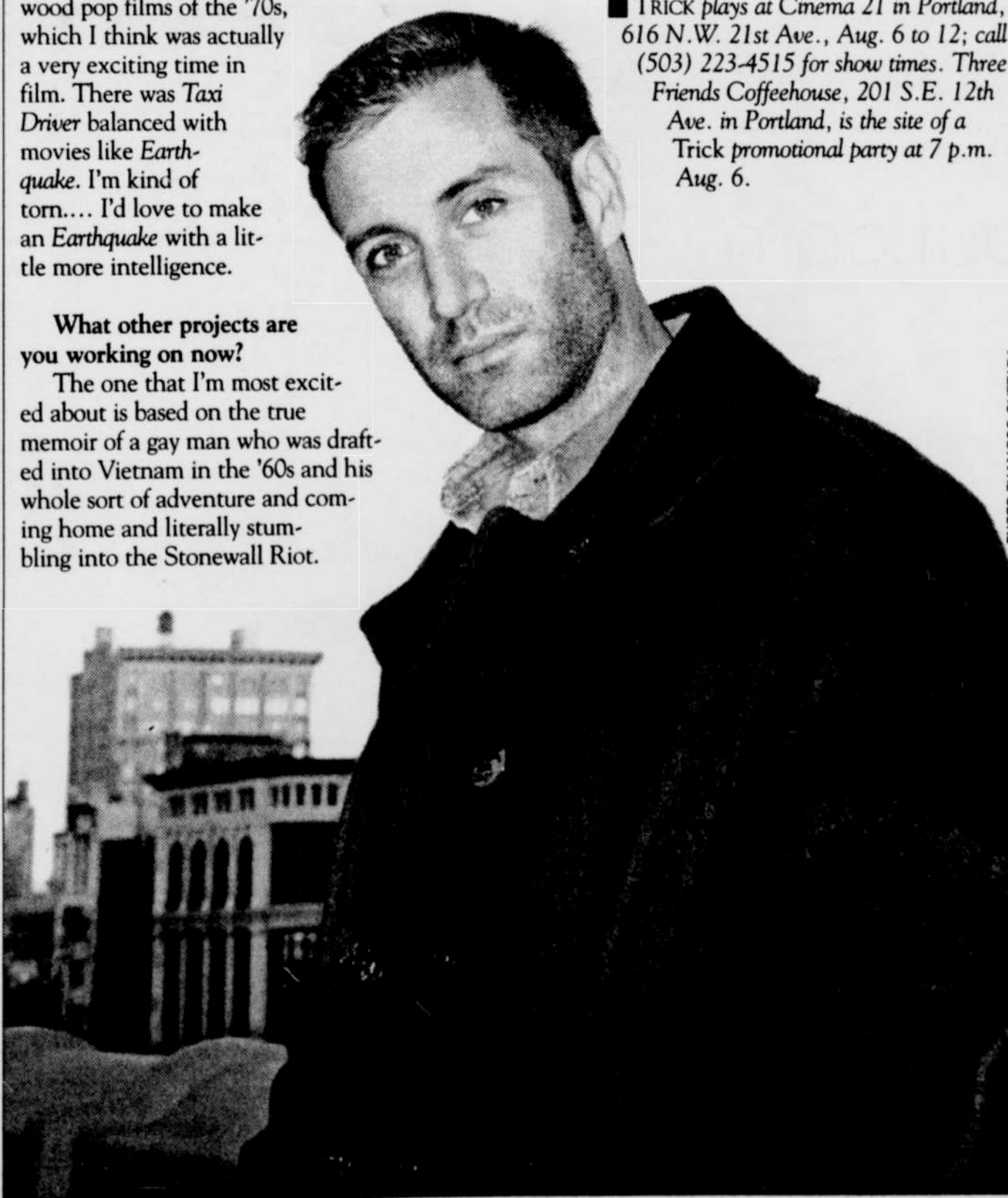


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