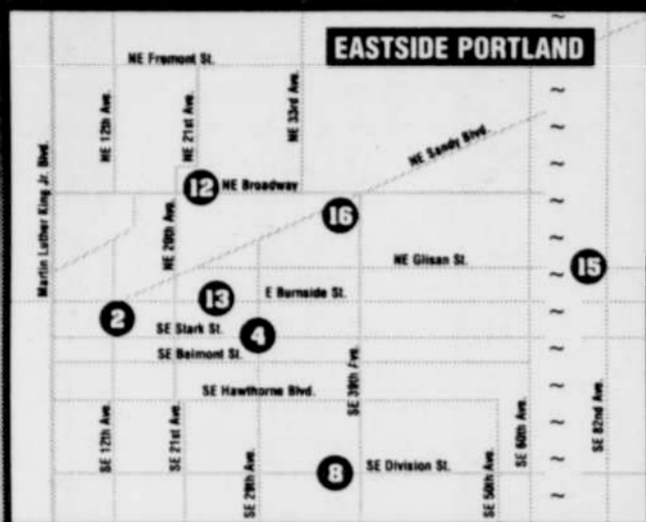
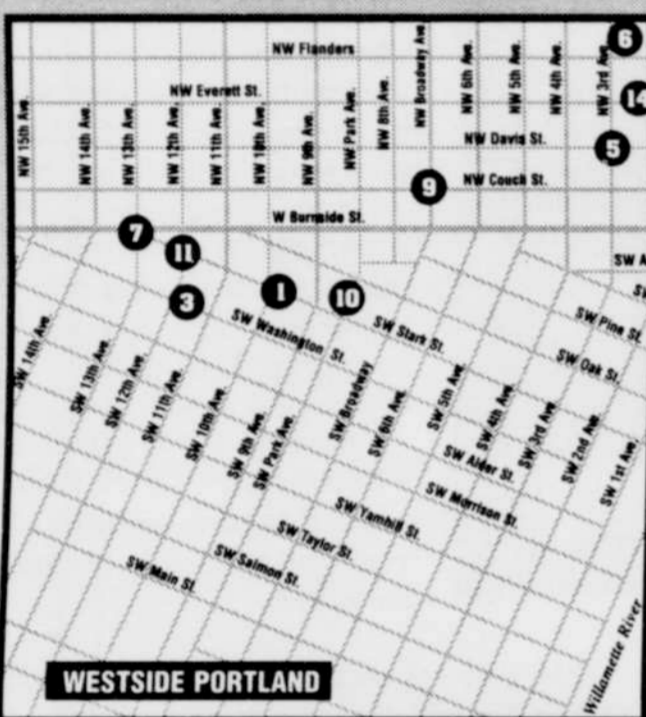


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FILMS

Film festival feedback

Sensory Perceptions organizers reflect on another successful year

BY JIM RADOSTA

Anyone who attended opening or closing night of last month's queer film festival already knows it was a smashing success. Lines snaked out the door and around the corner, empty seats were nowhere to be found, and the receptive audience was loud and energetic.

But just how successful was Sensory Perceptions? Let us count the ways.

Attendance grew by about 30 percent over last year, hundreds of feedback cards were filled with overwhelmingly positive responses, and three shows sold out—a festival first. Not bad for a 4-year-old operation.

"I think in some ways we've grown into young adulthood as an organization," festival director Maura King says. "We've certainly gotten our feet wet and learned how to swim."

The only gripe turned out to be something that's beyond the festival organizers' control. Some audience members thought Hollywood produced a particularly weak crop of films this year.

"That's one of the interesting things about a festival," Sensory Perceptions publicist Gabriel Mendoza says. "They seem to attract a wide variety of people with wildly diverging tastes."

And the audience is getting more diverse every year. King was delighted to see all types—gay and straight, artsy and mainstream—converge at Cinema 21 from all over: southwestern Washington, Eugene, Portland and the suburbs.

But therein lies more room for improvement. For all the progress that has been made in attracting new festivalgoers, the audience remains segregated.

"As has always been the case, the gay films were almost 100 percent men, and the lesbian films were almost 100 percent female in attendance," says Mendoza, who finds this trend unfortunate. "I think as a community of lesbians, gays, bis and transgendered folks, we wait and expect recognition from mainstream culture, yet we aren't quite able to extend that courtesy to the other sex in our own community."

Festival organizers realize you can't please



Produced and shot in Oregon, *Eban and Charley* was among the festival favorites

everyone, but they sure do try. This year's slate included eight gay, seven lesbian and three transgendered programs.

Among the tossups was the Japanese film *I.K.U.*, a last-minute addition Mendoza says should've appealed to gay, lesbian, straight, bi and even trans

audience members alike. Instead, it was the festival's least popular entry.

"*I.K.U.* is a provocative, well-fashioned, beautifully made film by a talented, uncompromising, up-and-coming lesbian director," Mendoza says. "There were very angry reactions to the film with comments that it wasn't gay enough or that it was even insulting."

"Once again, people want films to directly reflect their experience. *I.K.U.* is an exploration of, not a validation of, alternative sexuality."

As for financial success, Sensory Perceptions continues to struggle to break even. But because it is a nonprofit organization, the main money matter is to build a strong support base.

"Financial success can always be defined in different ways," King says. "We continue to receive support from our community both locally and nationally, and without this support we really wouldn't even be able to book our films."

"Are we getting rich? I'd have to say no."

One way Sensory Perceptions stays afloat is by holding events throughout the year instead of concentrating solely on the festival. King promises several screenings as well as one or two programs of short films that didn't make the cut because the field of possible selections was so crowded.

The remedy to this congestion could come as soon as next year. Mendoza says the festival might expand from two weekends to a week-long event.

"I'm really confident that our motley crew is up for the challenge," King says. "We're all the type who are happiest when busy doing things we love."

To volunteer or to become a member of SENSORY PERCEPTIONS, call 503-449-8772 or visit the Internet site www.sensoryperceptions.org.



Maura King