

BEDROOMS & HALLWAYS

First Run Features

A lesbian director helming a British gay sex farce? Count me in!

This twisty comedy begins at the end, then flashes back to fill in the gaps of the story, centered around the love lives of two gay roommates in London. Unhappy Leo joins a New Age men's therapy group, falling in love with a hot Scottish straight guy, while sassy and bitchy Darren gets involved with a closeted real estate agent who likes having sex in the houses he is hired to sell.

The charming cast doesn't contain any high-profile names (although Hugo Weaving was the star of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*), but the actors are vivacious and fun, and the story is inventive and clever. New Age therapy takes the most knocks, with the hilarious result of turning most of its femme devotees into lesbians.

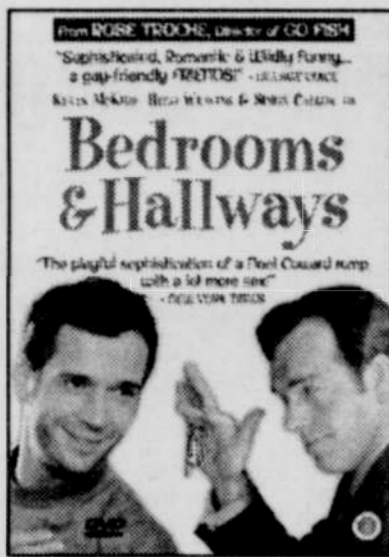
Once the film is over, go back and watch the beginning to catch the fun twists you'll know about by the denouement. The DVD features a bonus interview with director Rose Troche, but it's a recycled piece from the *Go Fish* disc and doesn't even mention this witty film.

SLAVES TO THE UNDERGROUND

Image

Nothing like a good modern rock 'n' roll movie to make one feel old. Even though it's dated just a bit, *Slaves to the Underground* is still germane to the "riot grrrl" movement and should be welcomed by breast-baring dykes and young radical lesbians from pride party to pride party.

Shelly, a pretty young musician in a four-girl rock band, is involved with butch, man-hating (and slightly menacing) lead singer Suzy. All seems to move on a forward course until—with a recording contract just around the corner—Shelly gets bisexual with her old boyfriend, a young male zine writer.



Through a lens, dykely

Four female-directed gay films are available on DVD

BY ANDY MANGELS

The resulting breakup might destroy the band and the two women's lives, but I won't even hint at the resolution. I will say that the bittersweet film is full of some raw, nerve-jangling emotions, lots of loud and raucous music (by Ani DiFranco, Joan Jett, Red Five and others) and a good ensemble of fledgling actors.

Directed by a woman, it also contains some pretty steamy sex acts and a few politically charged scenes that might give some viewers anarchistic ideas. Unlike the video, the DVD features the film in widescreen along with two trailers for other gay-themed flicks.

ALIVE & KICKING

Image

Third in this quartet of female-directed gay films is this wonderful romantic dramedy, also set in London. Blond Tonio (Jason Flemyng) is a narcissistic ballet dancer who rarely thinks anyone is good enough to talk to him, much less have sex with him.

Short, bearded and burly Jack (Anthony Sher) is a therapist who crosses paths with Tonio. Their unexpected courtship is not without its pitfalls, however, especially concerning Tonio's declining health and Jack's alcoholism.

If you ever had told me I'd see a film about a twink and a bear falling in love, I would have thought you were joking, but *Alive & Kicking* is not only that, it's a damn good film. The actors are note-perfect, the dance performances are inspiring, and more than once, tears—of joy and sadness—welled in my eyes.

There's much to admire in the film (for the prurient, there's even a surprisingly bold bottoming scene by Sher), and it's one you likely will want to watch more than once. But like *Longtime Companion*, you'll want a few tissues alongside for the weepy parts. The DVD and video contain the same version of the film and a pair of trailers.



BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER

Universal

Our final feature of the female film foursome is this recent comedy, which I really wanted to like but just didn't quite make it. Natasha Lyonne plays Megan, a teen-age cheerleader happy with her suburban life but whose recurring fantasies involve her pompom-shaking sisters more than the football players.

Her parents send her off to the True Directions camp for rehabilitation, where she meets a gaggle of other young gay boys and girls who are being taught to conform to the straight and narrow. Unfortunately, the combination of a camp counselor (singer RuPaul Charles, out of drag) and a sadistic camp chairwoman (Cathy Moriarty, channeling Kathleen Turner in *Serial Mom*) does little to turn the beat around, and the gay pride begins to bloom among the youthful cast.

Full of candy colors and good ideas that aren't fully realized, the film feels like a diluted John Waters flick, not quite naughty enough to offend or bold enough to excite. More biting fun should have been had at the ex-gay movement's expense, and more care taken to ground the characters outside the sitcom reality in which they live.

Still, this would be a good party video, if for no other reason than to inspire salacious stories about you and your friends' real camp experiences. The DVD features the widescreen film plus a trailer.

IN THE FLESH

Wolfe

Cop Philip Kirsch (Ed Corbin) is put on an undercover stakeout at a gay hustler bar in Atlanta, but his superiors don't know he secretly is dealing with his own gay



impulses. He meets 21-year-old Oliver Beck (Dane Ritter), a call boy by night and a Tower Records employee by day.

Slowly, the two men navigate the boundaries of trust, all while trying to figure out who framed Oliver for murder. As pulpy as any crime drama gets, it's nice to see a gay detective/bad boy love story rather than the usual straight ones we've seen in the past.

The mystery isn't really fair—you don't get the clues in any meaningful way—but the rawness of the characters' psyches does show clearly. The DVD features director commentary, a few deleted scenes, plus some theme songs and still photo galleries.

FLAWLESS

MGM

Talk about walking into a personally loaded movie. I sometimes like writer/director/superqueen Joel Schumacher, except when he's directing the *Batman* films.

I loathe Robert De Niro, who plays Walter, a homophobic ex-cop who suffers a stroke and loses some motor and speech capability. But I always like Philip Seymour Hoffman, the zaftig character actor who is beautifully quirky and staunchly, unapologetically fierce as Rusty, a flamboyant gay musician and costume designer.

Like an episode of *The Odd Couple* gone very wrong, Walter must get help from Rusty to learn to speak again. But there's menace in the air with murders, missing money and pissed-off gangsters.

A strongly acted and nicely directed gay pulp crime movie, *Flawless* doesn't quite live up to its title, and the anti-gay epithets are troubling (although Walter, of course, does come to love gay people). The DVD is no-frills, with a trailer and multipage booklet giving some production notes. **J**

To find these queer DVDs and others, ask at Portland's Gai-Pied or Movie Madness, or order them through gay-owned Wolfe Video at 800-GET-WOLFE or TLA Video at 800-333-8521.

ANDY MANGELS is a media hound who has co-written the novel *Star Trek: The Next Generation "Section 31: Rogue"* in the midst of reviewing DVDs, movies and live theater for Just Out. Visit him at www.andymangels.com.



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NIGHTSPOTS

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