



# THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Pulling together this year's film festival has been a bigger challenge than usual

by **Christopher McQuain**



This awesome foursome does it all: (from left) Debbie Caselton, Maura King, Gabriel Mendoza and John Campos

**E**ven under normal circumstances, orchestrating the Portland Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Film Festival is a daunting and complex task for the four core members of Sensory Perceptions who, along with a small army of volunteers, are responsible for bringing the annual event to Cinema 21 on Sept. 21.

As operations director John Campos says: "A festival that is planned and executed by a core group of four or five people makes for a very heavy workload. Many hats need to be worn by everybody."

But the tragic events of Sept. 11—only 10 days before the premiere screening of *The Monkey's Mask*—have caused a national ripple effect. Upon waking up to the frantic news coverage on that memorable Tuesday, the first reaction of festival director Maura King was shock.

"It was horrible," she says. "A bit of a haze washed over me for a couple of days."

Publicity director Gabriel Mendoza agrees: "It's so surreal thinking, 'My God, there are people in New York who we work with and they might be dead.' Obviously you can't really work, but you can't really stop either. I sent an e-mail to everyone saying, 'I'm just going to see who's alive right now.' It's the weirdest thing. It's been a very strange week."



Christina Ricci and Richard Ruccolo star in *All Over the Guy*, a comedic, bittersweet love story

Still, after recovering from the initial shock of the events, the Sensory Perceptions people—King, Mendoza, Campos, development director Debbie Caselton and volunteer coordinator Steven Sandrowski—began to regroup and assess the effects of the destruction in New York on the long (and carefully) planned festival. The main concern is "print traffic," the ability of distributors to get the films to Portland in time for their scheduled screenings.

King is guardedly confident that the potential disruptions won't occur. "It sounds like we're not in really bad shape," she says. "There are one or two prints that may not show up. We have four prints coming from Canada and, given that's international, I'm a little more nervous about that. It's boiled down to how well Federal Express is going to operate, how much they're delayed. Provided Fed Ex operates the way it's supposed to, we're in really, really good shape."

After an emergency discussion Sept. 11, it was decided that the victims of the terrorist attacks would be acknowledged by making collection boxes available at every screening for patrons who wish to make cash donations to the Red Cross National Disaster Relief Fund. King hopes the boxes, along with the perseverance of the festival

alongside the rest of America's day-to-day endeavors and enterprises, will give the gay and lesbian community a chance to deal in its own way with the events. "I think it'll be really good to have this opportunity...for the community to come together, whether it's a distraction, a little relief for a couple of hours or a chance for people to meet up and talk with each other."

But, as it must for the rest of the country, the show will, indeed, go on. "It'll be interesting to see," King says. "This year's festival will



*The Weekend* is an ensemble piece about a man who returns to the family home of his lover, who he lost to AIDS

have a flavor that we obviously can't necessarily anticipate, one that's not really intrinsic to the festival itself."

According to King, anticipation of this year's festival is higher than it ever has been. "Ticket sales are really good. People are looking at the Web site."

Mendoza adds, "There seems to be an interest that's stronger than usual to begin with, and in light of what's happened, it's an even more surprising interest."

## THE FESTIVAL

**T**he festival has been expanded from two weekends last year to a full nine days, an entire week of screenings bookended by two weekends beginning Sept. 21. That kind of large-scale event couldn't have been foreseen in 1996, when, in response to a *Just Out* editorial lamenting the defunct status of Portland's Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, Cinema 21 operator and indie film champion Tom Ranieri collaborated with film editor Amy Duddleston and a group of volunteers to revive it.

King, then a junior at Reed College, was a volunteer that first year. It was also her first experience with film exhibition.



*The Adventures of Felix* is a pastoral excursion into the vast, extended human family

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS