

Big Eden relates the case of one Henry Hart (Arye Gross of the original *Ellen* cast), an up-and-coming painter who, after receiving an urgent call back to his idyllic hometown to care for his ailing grandfather, frets about the problems he left behind when he moved to the big city.

Will he finally be able to tell his grandfather he's gay? Will the torch he's been carrying for star football player Dean Stewart (Tim DeKay), with whom he had a discreet fling in high school, finally blaze forth from the closet?

Further complicating matters is the presence of Pike Dexter (Eric Schweig), a quiet but solicitous Native American who runs the local convenience store. Pike's crush on Henry is apparent to everyone but Henry, who's too busy attempting to rekindle things with Dean—now the divorced father of two and still merely flirting with homosexuality—to notice all the random acts of kindness and senseless beauty Pike subtly is directing his way.

Before this foray into filmmaking, writer/director Thomas Bezucha was, according to the production notes, a corporate image consultant and "visual director" for Ralph Lauren boutiques. This is telling. His vision of small-town life and interpersonal relationships unmistakably reflects the best-case-scenario reasoning one would expect to find in a Polo print ad campaign set in someone's elaborately idealized, freshly-ironed-flannel fantasy of "small-town America."

Despite several technically present conflicts (Henry's painting career vs. his commitment to his family and hometown, his delusional near-obsession with Dean vs. Pike's genuine, undiluted feeling toward him), the almost relentlessly serene (read complacent), well-intentioned tone of the film never allows us to feel like anything is on the line, like anything ever really

Where the boys are

Gay men pop up in three new films

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

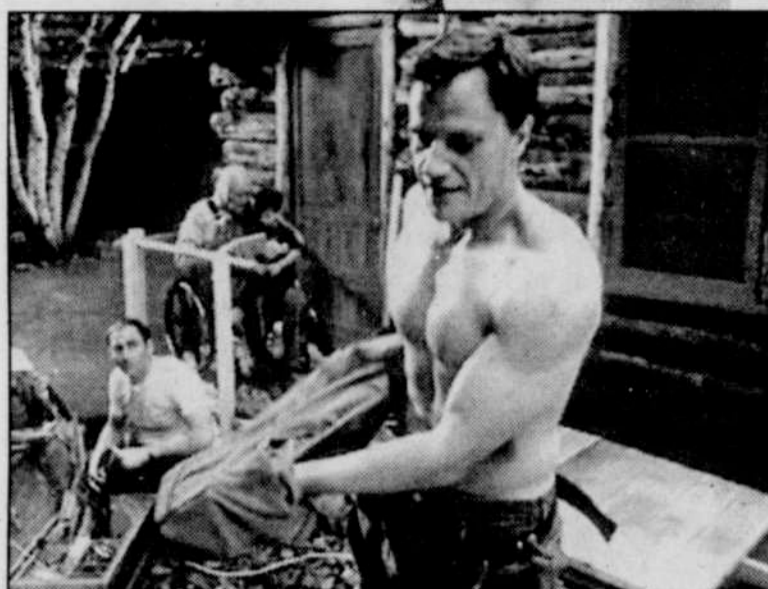
could go wrong for these people.

Although *Big Eden* has a few very nicely acted and well-written scenes—particularly the ones with the grandfather and an emotionally charged confrontation between Henry and Dean—it has a palpable lack of tension or anticipation throughout. Nothing lends the obligatory happy ending a sense of genuine relief or satisfaction.

It would be unfair to insist Bezucha include, for verisimilitude, the fundamentalism, racism, homophobia or simply isolation faced by many gay citizens of small towns. This is fiction. (Escapist fiction, given every resident of Big Eden, Mont., seems to consider gay romance beyond reproach and exactly comparable to the straight variety.) But in creating an unrecognizably just, imperturbable world, Bezucha sacrificed too much momentum and interest to let the film develop into anything more than a cheerful, perfunctory greeting card.

The indie comedy *Haiku Tunnel* makes much self-referential ado of the fact that writer/director Josh Kornbluth is playing a professional temp named Josh Kornbluth. Tongue-in-cheek autobiographical overtones aside, the film's overconfident conceit that it's astutely satirizing the typical temping experience and the world of office anxiety is a major flaw.

Like the *Dilbert* comic strip, *Haiku Tunnel* is



Big Eden

at once oh-so-knowing about corporate hierarchy and neutralized by its overly insular, benign take on it. A trace of undeserved smugness manifests in Kornbluth's occasional descent into pedantic, self-impressed mugging.

He and his brother Jacob (the other half of the writing/directing team) more adeptly strike the funny bone when they're exploring the exaggerated peculiarities of the characters who populate their movie: the clueless attorney boss; the middle-aged, icily pleasant office manager with a robotic personality; and Josh's fellow secretaries (a ditz, a curmudgeonly realist and a chatty, helpful gay man who's attracted to security guards), most

Haiku Tunnel

of whom are given enough shading to push them beyond mere "types."

Haiku Tunnel fails to be as incisive as the Kornbluths obviously pictured it; more funny and perceptive cubicle-bound comedies, like 1996's *Clockwatchers* and 1998's *Office Space*, come to mind. The brothers do, however, have a smart ear for comically banal workplace dialogue, providing enough sufficiently amusing moments to make the film a modest pleasure.

As some friends and I left a suburban showing of *Zoolander* recently, where we had laughed considerably louder and longer than most of our fellow moviegoers, we idly speculated the film might get more mileage from a gay male audience than the (presumably) mostly straight audience present that night. Is it overgeneralizing to postulate that a gay viewer would find *Zoolander's* fashion world and Frankie Goes to Hollywood references more amusing than a straight one? No matter.

Although trailers make the film seem dull-witted at best, writer/director/star Ben Stiller brings an entertainingly manic absurdity to the story of Derek Zoolander, a vapid male model saddled with saving Malaysia's underage sweatshop employees from an evil fashion industry plot to forestall international child labor laws forever. Some wearisome bits are broad and overlong, but zesty, inspired direction and skewed parody, not just of the fashion biz but of our entire celebrity and consumer culture, make *Zoolander* more worthwhile than it looks. **JM**

CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Portland writer and filmmaker.

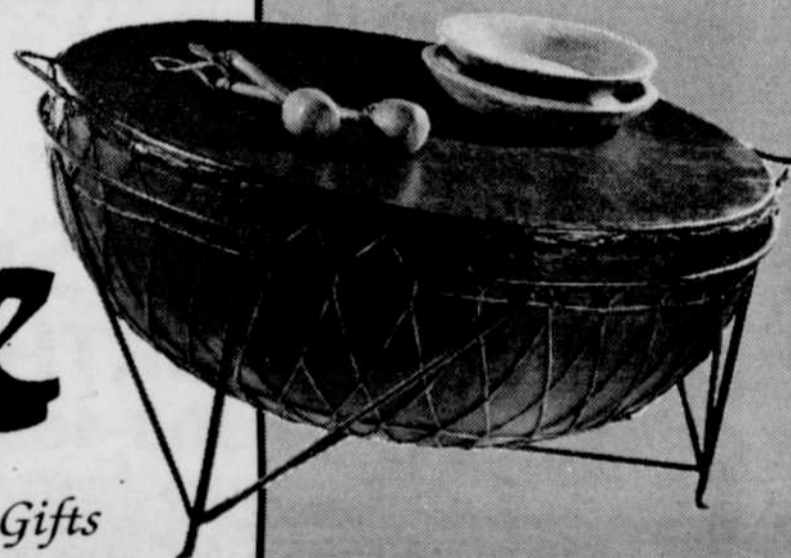
Join us...
GRAND OPENING
November 3 & 4
Saturday 10-8
Sunday 10-6
DOOR PRIZES!

Inspired by nature
and cultures of the world

Wild Life

Home Furnishings and Gifts
Opening Soon

3962 B SE Hawthorne Blvd • Portland • 503-236-3862



Clogs 'n' More
Quality European Footwear

Two Locations to Serve You

717 SW Alder Street
Portland, OR 97205
503-279-9358

3439 SE Hawthorne Blvd
Portland, OR 97215
503-232-7007

Hundreds of Clogs to Choose From
www.clogsnmore.com

Dharma Rain
Zen Center

2539 SE Madison Portland, Oregon 97214
503-239-4846 Fax: 503-239-5217
E-mail: Staff@Dharma-Rain.Org
www.Dharma-Rain.Org

Dharma Rain Zen Center is a Soto Zen Temple for Lay practice, bringing people together to build community and wisdom through practice. DRZC offers retreats, classes, introductory workshops, and sesshins. The Zendo space is shared with groups in the Vipassana, Tibetan, & Zen traditions, creating a unique atmosphere and opportunities for learning about Buddhism and its daily application.

Kyogen and Gyokuko Carlson, resident teachers.

All Natural Foods • Herbal & Homeopathic Remedies • Books • Treats • Toys

Healthy Pets
Northwest

Pet Health Seminars Sponsored by Healthy Pets NW
(Donation at the door benefits Indigo Rescue & Adoption)

Resolving Pet Behaviors with Bach Flower Essences by Dr. Gaia Mather, ND • Saturday October 27th at 11 am
Natural Joint & Hip Recovery for your Dog with Dawn Rankin from In Clover • Saturday November 17th at 11 am
Call Healthy Pets NW (503)236-8036 for details and to sign up. (Limited space is available)

The Natural Alternative for Pet Foods and Supplies

1402-A SE 39th
(39th & Hawthorne)
Portland, Oregon 97214

503-236-8036
www.healthypetsnw.com
Lesbian Owned & Operated

HOURS
Tue-Sat 10-6
Sun 12-5