

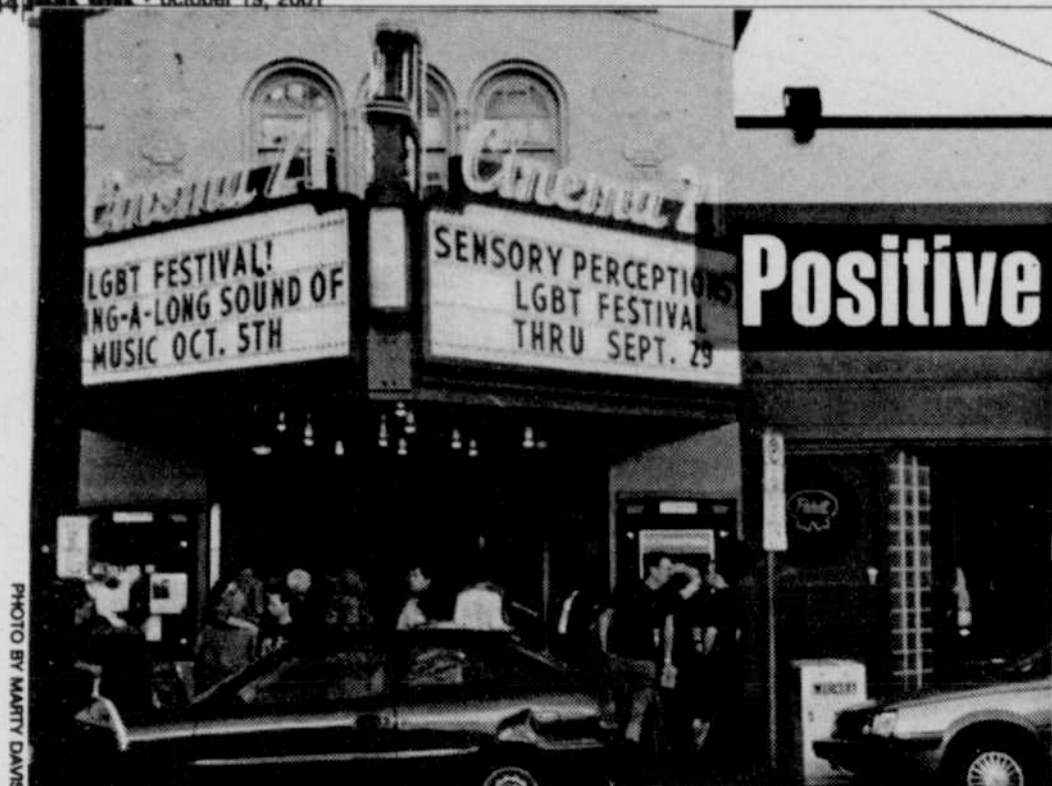


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Positive perceptions

This year's film fest was a big success

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

ple found confusing, and films starting sometimes 20 to 25 minutes late. One participant complained that fewer outlets sold

passes and tickets than last year.

John Campos, Sensory Perceptions operations director, was in attendance at the meeting and addressed some of the criticisms. "Last year, some venues didn't sell many tickets, and we were spread a little thin," he says. "We had Web sales this year, and passes and tickets were available at the Cinema 21 box office."

He attributed the delays at some screenings to their popularity. "Getting 500 people in isn't easy."

However, the people at FilmTalk were more than enthusiastic overall. One man particularly appreciated the relatively intimate quality of the proceedings, saying, "I've been to similar festivals in San Francisco and New York, which were much bigger, with lines around the block, but I appreciated what I guess you would call the 'human touch' here." The increase to nine days was roundly applauded, with strong approval for continuing it next year "as long as the quality of films is maintained."

Although women were invited to and showed up for the FilmTalk festival preview in September and again were invited in October, none came to this meeting—perhaps a reflection of the limited number of lesbian films booked by Sensory Perceptions.

Notably, when the time came to discuss specific movies—the male-oriented *L.I.E.* and *All Over the Guy* were favorites—almost no one had seen this year's "women's films," such as *Julie Johnson*, *Desi's Looking for a New Girl* and *Girls' Shorts*. Although proportionately fewer lesbian-themed movies are available from distributors and film-

makers than those aimed at gay men, demographics also play a part in festival programming.

"This is something we've addressed over and over again through the years, that whatever event we're putting on, whether it was

our film series in June or this festival—when we look at the numbers, the attendance by men far exceeds that of women," Mendoza reveals. "Though it probably wasn't completely conscious, part of that worked into how we booked this film festival."

In what seems to be an ongoing gender impasse, *Iron Ladies* came to the rescue. The true story of an underdog Thai volleyball team—with a lesbian coach and mostly gay and transsexual players—that overcame formidable obstacles to make the national championships, it easily had the most diverse audience of the festival.

"Initially, we had thought about it for an opening night film because we've been trying for years now to find a film that is mixed in gender so we could have just a single, inclusive opening night film," King says. *Iron Ladies* ultimately was chosen for closing night.

It's worth noting that although the men's film *Big Eden* won this year's CITV Viewers Choice Award and response cards again indicated most festivalgoers were men, only *Iron Ladies* and *Julie Johnson*—films featuring promi-



All Over the Guy was a big hit with attendees

"If, indeed, *Iron Ladies* wasn't going to open and it opens because of us and it's a big hit, clearly that's something people will look at," Mendoza says.

King adds: "Basically, as you begin to establish yourself as a viable event that draws a crowd and creates word of mouth for these films, there's a momentum that builds. We've reached a new level, and I think it's going to start snowballing."

Unfortunately, King won't be around to see the growth she anticipates. After six years of inspired hard work on her part, the festival will be losing this articulate, visionary 24-year-old to the Bay Area.

"I've been in Portland for almost seven years now. I came here for college and haven't left since then. I'm a little antsy, ready to do something new. There are four people [running the film festival], and when one person walks away, that's a quarter of the work that has to be picked up. I feel horrible about that," she laughs. "Seriously...we've been planning for it for a couple of months now, and things are looking good."

King says that Campos and Mendoza will take on most of her responsibilities and that Debbie Caselton will continue as development director. "Not to belittle the work I've done or the work they'll have to do, but we all know how it works now, and I think these guys are going to be able to maintain it and better it."

The title of festival director will be passed on to Campos, who is confident that Sensory Perceptions will continue to grow and prosper. "My goals during the coming year are to take this incredible success that

Maura has gifted to Gabriel, Debbie and myself and ensure that we have the foundation ready to network out, to meet people, to make sure we're able to make it as successful, if not more so, as Maura left it with us," he says. "Just to make it rock solid and make it kick ass." [J]



Film festival organizers (from left) Caselton, King, Mendoza and Campos are thrilled their hard work paid off

nent lesbian and transsexual characters—sold out their screenings.

Iron Ladies will return to Portland in February for a regular run, thanks in no small part to the festival. This could increase Sensory Perceptions' chances of obtaining higher-profile films and even national attention in the future.

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