

FILM

View your history

Homosexuality is seeping into mainstream cinema. The following filmography shows how we got there.

BY ANDREW PREIS

The Golden Globe Award nominations have been announced, and gay themes did OK indeed. (See Page 41 for a rundown.)

In years past, however, we might not have seen as many of these nominations as we would have liked. This didn't stop filmmakers, of course, from creating dozens of quality documentaries and features exploring the formation and development of a unique yet extremely diverse queer community.

These films offer a compelling way to explore a history that has only just begun to be appreciated. To that end, don't forget the following the next time you visit the video store. Your history on film awaits.

THE "GOOD OLD/BAD OLD" DAYS

eta Schiller's 1985 documentary *Before Stonewall* traces the development of a gay and lesbian community throughout the 20th century, from 1920s lesbian bars in Harlem to



drag shows during World War II to Mattachine Society picket lines of the 1960s. Narrated by Rita Mae Brown and filled with historical footage and interviews, this film became an instant classic and a model for documentaries to come.

Also recommended: *Coming Out Under Fire*; *Out of the Past*; *Silent Pioneers*; Academy Award winner *The Times of Harvey Milk*; *Victim*.

MODERN TIMES AND POLITICS

BS originally broadcast *The Question of Equality*, a 1995 four-part series exploring issues facing the sexual minorities community. "Out Rage '69" traces the beginnings of the gay rights movement from Stonewall through the Anita Bryant attacks. "Culture Wars" explores the anti-gay backlash sparked by the AIDS crisis (such as attacks on National Endowment for the Arts funding), while "Hollow Liberty" traces the struggle for legal recognition in the bedroom and the barracks. The series ends with "Generation Q," an



A Question of Equality traces 30 years of queer rights

inspiring depiction of today's queer youth.

Also recommended: *After Stonewall*; *Nighthawks*; *Stonewall*; *Tongues Untied*; *Wigstock: The Movie*.

THE AGE OF AIDS

and the Band Played On—HBO's 1993 star-studded dramatization of Randy Shilts' book on the early years of the epidemic—is both historically comprehensive and emotionally riveting. Filmed as a dramatic thriller, the story focuses on those first involved with the virus and the battles they fought with fear, indifference and bias. Among the cast are Alan Alda, Phil Collins, Richard Gere, Angelica Huston, Steve Martin, Ian McKellen, Matthew Modine and Lily Tomlin.

Also recommended: *An Early Frost*; *Life and Death on the A List*; *Longtime Companion*; *A Virus Knows No Morals*; *Zero Patience*.

HISTORY RE-CREATED

With the rise of independent filmmaking came a surge of historical dramas involving both real and fictional gay charac-



ters. Among them was 1997's *Bent*, an adaptation of Martin Sherman's devastating play that follows one gay man from the decadence of German night life to the horrors of a concentration camp. The film features Rupert Graves and Mick Jagger in supporting roles and pre-

sents one of the most heart-wrenching male love stories ever filmed.

Also recommended: *Aimee & Jaguar*; *Edward II*; *Maurice*; *The Midwife's Tale*; *Wilde*; *Wittgenstein*.

HERSTORY

The 1989 closing of Maud's Study, a 23-year-old lesbian bar and institution in San Francisco, is explored by Paris Poirier in *Last Call at Maud's*, an engaging 1993 minihistory of modern lesbian life. Many longtime patrons are interviewed, nostalgically recalling their first experiences in a lesbian bar and the role that Maud's played in their lives.

Also recommended: *Fiction and Other Truths: A Film About Jane Rule*; *Gertrude Stein: When This You See, Remember Me*; *Nitrate Kisses*; *Ruth Ellis at 100*; *Stolen Moments*.

AND IN THE ARTS

The role of gay people in the arts has been documented frequently on film. *Looking for Langston*, a 1989 offering by Isaac Julien, is a pensive yet celebratory meditation on poet Langston Hughes and the 1920s Harlem Renaissance. The film incorporates re-enactments of Cotton Club shows, sensual imagery



Looking for Langston explores notions of history and identity

of two lovers in bed, Mapplethorpe photography and the lyrical poetry of Essex Hemphill and Bruce Nugent into a story of an evolving black gay consciousness.

Also recommended: *Before Night Falls*; *The Celluloid Closet*; *Dancemaker*; *The International Sweethearts of Rhythm*; *The Silver Screen: Color Me Lavender*. j

ANDREW PREIS is a free-lance film writer.



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The Fantasy Creature Store



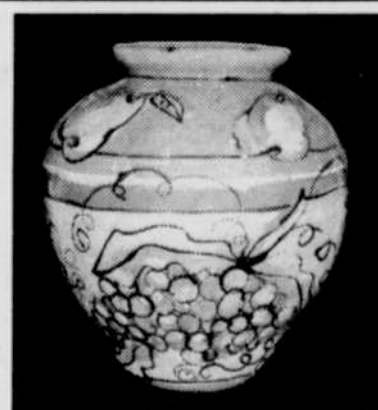
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