

FILM

Trembling Before G-d

Sandi Dubowski's film is a must-see, if only because it admirably and thoroughly resists the documentary filmmaker's temptation to didacticism. No, *Trembling Before G-d* (in Orthodox Jewish law, one isn't permitted to write the word "God") is a true documentary, objectively and dispassionately recording the thoughts and experiences of its subjects and their often unsatisfying but resonantly authentic lives.

The film follows several Orthodox Jews who are torn between their homosexuality and their devotion to a fundamentalist religion—one that's interpreted strictly and with resounding finality by the culture in which they were raised. Any nonheterosexual orientation is inherently sinful.

Dubowski found a remarkable diversity of cases in a community that presents a united front to the outside world. Among the more hopeful stories is that of a young London man whose parents sent him off to Israel to rid him of his homosexuality, only to see him flourish in Jerusalem's gay community.

Then there's an elderly gentleman from New York who came to embrace his homosexuality later in life and whose charming crackpot eccentricities are loudly, happily defiant.

Since most influential Orthodox leaders see



Trembling Before G-d explores the conflicts of being a gay Orthodox Jew

Old Testament sexual prohibitions as judgments to be applied today as they were thousands of years ago, however, there's more than sufficient pain in many of these people's lives. It's hard not to feel anguished while witnessing a devoted lesbian couple—who won't allow the camera to capture their faces—tentatively verbalizing their anxiety that "the beautiful life we've created [together] won't be able to be brought into the next world."

Passionate lives

When religion is your art and art is your religion

It's that clear depiction of struggle that makes *Trembling Before G-d* so indelible, even profound. It's easy for outsiders to vehemently reject beliefs we might see as repressive or manipulative. Dubowski's film shows just how difficult, complicated and contradictory it is when an individual's sexuality conflicts with deeply held, very genuine religious beliefs. Which is more valuable, and which can be sacrificed?

Trembling's eminently empathetic subjects draw their own sometimes disheartening, sometimes moving, always truly felt conclusions.

—Christopher McQuinn

TREMBLING BEFORE G-D plays through April 11 at Hollywood Theatre, 4122 N.E. Sandy Blvd. Call 503-281-4215 for times. The director will attend a special screening 2 p.m. April 7 followed by a reception.

Pinero

Puerto Rican American Miguel Piñero is largely responsible for the modern slam poetry movement in the United States.

the country last year, the press were quick to trounce McGillis for how old and bad she looks. On the contrary, she's aged into an alluring femme fatale, perfectly molding the teacher/student sexual tension between her and the 20-something investigator. (And between her and the murdered girl, too, perhaps?)

The movie begins with a sultry and gritty film noir appeal, particularly Jill's catchy voice-over puns, recollecting the old gumshoe classics. Sadly, silly plot devices continue to get in the way of a promising story about the obsessive power relationship between two women who might be at opposite legal ends and the wild sex that ensues.

Desperate to be involved in multiple stories and places at once and looking chic while doing it, the movie loses its way, becoming a confusing collage of whodunit artifice. By the time all the lesbians in the audience are offended by Jill's uncharacteristic attraction to Professor Diana's super-creepy husband, you're pretty much beyond caring about the whole thing.

—LB

The Monkey's Mask

What starts out as a taught and sexy erotic thriller ends up a mess.

The Monkey's Mask stars Susie Porter as Australian dyke private eye Jill Fitzpatrick, hired to investigate the brutal murder of a young, bohemian wannabe poet in Sydney. One of Jill's first stops is the girl's college poetry class, where she meets steamy professor Diana Maitland, portrayed by Kelly McGillis.

When this film debuted at festivals across



Refreshingly, *Adventures of Felix* does not hit you over the head with "messages," yet messages seep into your brain nonetheless: that gay Arabs have more to worry about than some others; that France is not necessarily as progressive as we think; and the popular notion (yet still fresh here) that family is collected, not born.

—LB

Out on Video

Adventures of Felix

This completely charming French import from Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau follows a happily partnered and adorable young gay man (Sami Bouajila) on an impulsive journey to Marseilles to find his birth father, who he has never seen. Along the way, much of Felix is revealed: His dark skin is of Arab descent, which apparently comes from his absent father. The pills he pops are for HIV.

Because Felix's jaunt is on foot, it takes a while to travel the some 500 miles, particularly by his rules of "no large cities." This makes for endless opportunities to meet a bizarre and memorable cast of eccentrics. Unfortunately, two of them are men preparing to dump a dead body late at night; when they see Felix, the poor boy must spend a portion of his trip watching his back.

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