

AIDS Walk 02

presented by PGE

a 5k walk to benefit HIV prevention, services and advocacy

Register today
www.cascadeaids.org
or 503.223.WALK



it's not over

Saturday, September 21
PIONEER COURTHOUSE SQUARE



Portland General Electric



CareOregon



Azumano

EL HISPANIC NEWS



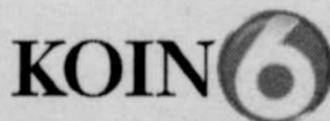
PG&E Corporation

Norm Thompson
escape from the ordinary

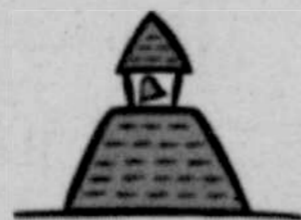
Regence
BlueCross BlueShield
of Oregon



Washington
Mutual



WILLAMETTE
WEEK



KinderCare



Danny Glover
Honorary
Chairman

FILM

Notoriously average

Margaret Cho fails to live up to her own previously set golden mean

NOTORIOUS C.H.O.
Cinema 21, Aug. 2 to 8

If you go into Margaret Cho's new concert film, *Notorious C.H.O.*, expecting it to live up to the brilliance of *I'm the One That I Want*, you're bound to be disappointed.

This latest show simply doesn't compare to the 2000 hit, which amply demonstrated that she is rivaled perhaps only by Chris Rock as the Woody Allen, the Lenny Bruce, the Richard Pryor for a modern, post-feminist, post-gay, post-P.C. audience. It was an authentically towering achievement, representing a cathartic, triumphant comeback for Cho, who was returning to an official standup career after a failed TV sitcom and a floundering stint as an actress and screenwriter.

To be fair, it would be an unenviable project for anyone to live up to such an accomplished piece of work. In *Notorious* Cho seems to have taken it down a notch, lowered the bar and settled for telling a handful of raunchy, somewhat disconnected stories, most of which work on a comedic level, though nothing resonating quite like the previous show's rich, often profound material.

Even the visual presentation—digital-video-taped at Seattle's Paramount Theatre, whereas *I'm the One* had a textured, filmic quality—betrays the comparative creative laxity. There's also a dispensable montage of fan tributes to Cho,



Cho contemplates fisting

which belongs in her personal video scrapbook, not on the big screen for an audience to wade through patiently.

She does wring a few laughs out of conventional standup subjects like colon hydrotherapy and menstruation, and she parlays an S/M bit into a perceptive, hilarious screed on our culture's contradictory, patronizing messages about women's sexuality. She also has well-considered things to say about the billion-dollar beauty industry's manipula-

tion of women and gay men with images of unrealistic physical perfection.

But even these pearls of wisdom feel inserted, like afterthoughts; they're not integrated into the scheme of things nearly so seamlessly as they were in her previous act. The prevailing tone is choppy, episodic, merely amusing in a topical way where the more risky, personally invested *I'm the One* was engaging on every level.

The frequently hearty but largely empty laughs in *Notorious* feel distancing when one knows the star is quite capable of more.

The laughs, however, are definitely there, which is why, despite its flaws and deficiencies, missing *Notorious C.H.O.* would not be recommended. It's enjoyable even if a bit far-reaching and even though artistic wholeness is missed.

Notorious is half successful; you'll laugh, but you won't cry.

—Christopher McQuain

OUT ON VIDEO

THE NIGHT LARRY
KRAMER KISSED ME
TLA Releasing

The 2000 film version of *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, recently released on VHS and DVD, is really a flashily shot and edited 1999 revival stage performance of the show originally produced off-Broadway in 1992.

Written and performed by David Drake, it ran for more than a year, making it the longest-running New York one-man show ever. Its topical, George (no W.) Bush-era themes must have seemed compelling and relevant at its cultural moment, in the wake of an AIDS crisis that had decimated an entire generation of gay men. It was enthusiastically, even ecstatically, received.

In retrospect, though, *Kramer* plays like an unironic anthropological snapshot of the way gay men (specifically young, NYC gay men in the theater) saw themselves and their community circa 1985-91.

Its issues—including AIDS, queer lib and the physical and spiritual state of gay men (which here means the old amalgam of body issues and narcissistic sexual neuroses that frequently distorts, on stage and screen, the actual much more diverse and interesting gay male population)—are too complex, too slippery, to be captured and conveyed effectively through Drake's autobiographically reminiscent narrative and sentimentalized tone. They've changed



Best watched cheaply at home

in so many ways in the past decade that it's difficult at times to grasp what exactly he's talking about.

For instance, in the late '80s Drake was a member of ACT UP, which did, indeed, play a vital and fascinating part in the community's response to AIDS and in gay history as a whole. As he relates it, though, we don't learn much about the controversial activist organization; the experience

comes across as some sort of sexy, all-boy slumber party with "avant-garde" erotic interludes and a sappy melancholic undertone counteracted by Bette Midler mix tapes and the future hope for a Ben Affleck/Matt Damon queer remake of *The Way We Were* (apparently signifying final and complete gay liberation).

Paradoxically, the actual value of *Kramer*—what makes it required viewing for anyone interested in an artistically vibrant and viable queer culture—is as an example of how a fairly shallow, pseudo-provocative work can, through spin (the accompanying press kit is full of the exclamatory acclaim that surrounded the show's original run), be made to seem like an Important Part of Our Cultural Heritage.

The vigilant viewer will appreciate the option of renting *Kramer*; this is something best studied cheaply, in the hype-free comfort of one's own home.

—CMJ