

The Trip's people are pretty; the film isn't

THE TRIP
9:30 p.m. Sept. 20

The Trip, a film by ex-Portlander Miles Swain and the opening night selection of Sensory Perceptions' film festival, begins in 1973 and ends in the mid- to late 1980s. It recounts the rise and fall of two young men—one a conservative named Alan (Larry Sullivan) who's writing a book about the evils of homosexuality, the other an activist named Tommy (Steve Braun) who's involved with the burgeoning, struggling gay rights movement. The two become unlikely lovers and Alan renounces the book, but their idyllic relationship is destroyed when his publisher decides that, in the time of Anita Bryant, homosexuality is a "hot topic" and releases it anyway.

A second act involving a jealous, sinister, closeted older gay man (Ray Baker) feels like all of the characters have stepped into a very complicated but entirely unbelievable soap opera. The film's final third, wherein Tommy and Alan take an impromptu road trip through Mexico and are beleaguered by thieving peasants and corrupt lawmen, is so unreal, I was rubbing my eyes.

If The Trip fails artistically it's because of a certain ill-conceived, careless overambition and a manic, distracted tone that leaves the viewer exhausted and ungratified. Maybe this hodgepodge could have been pulled off by filmmakers of a certain comic, consciously artificial sensibility (the Coen brothers come to mind),

but Swain doesn't seem to have a clue. It wants to be a vibrant realist epic of gay life in the late 20th century, but, as it stands, it's one of the least organic films you'll ever see.

—Christopher McQuain

LAN YU
7 p.m. Sept. 21

Director Stanley Kwan is a rarity in Hong Kong cinema—a master of the weepy genre and queer to boot. His early successes were atmospheric women's pictures like *The Actress* and *Rouge*, but increasingly he's been making queer variants. The exceptional *Lan Yu* is the latest.

The title character (Liu Ye) is an impoverished country boy who's come to Beijing to study architecture. Forced to prostitute himself, he hooks up with Handong (Hu Jun), a hunky, slightly older businessman who prefers a fuck buddy: "We'll stay together as long as it feels right."

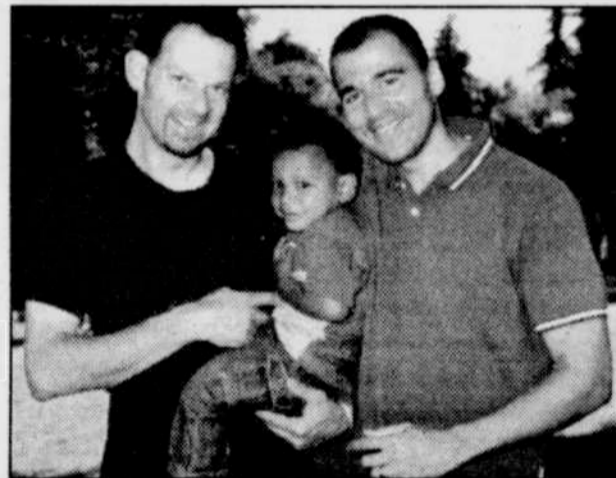
Over a period of eight years, Handong gives Lan Yu a villa (and lots of money), cheats on him, gets married, divorces and is threatened with jail for corruption before the two of them reconnect.

If this sounds like an old Hollywood melodrama, it should—at least on paper. But Kwan's treatment makes it something else entirely. The film is beautifully shot as a series of intensely intimate tableaux that's both romantic and sexually frank. Hu Jun (an eminent stage actor in China who also played the sexy cop in *East Palace, West Palace*) and Liu Ye

expertly convey the complexities of characters who bring such different agendas to a seemingly hopeless affair.

Based on the 1996 Internet novel *Beijing Comrade* (slang for "Beijing Gay"), *Lan Yu* was shot illegally in Beijing, as homosexuality remains a criminal offense in China.

—Gary Morris



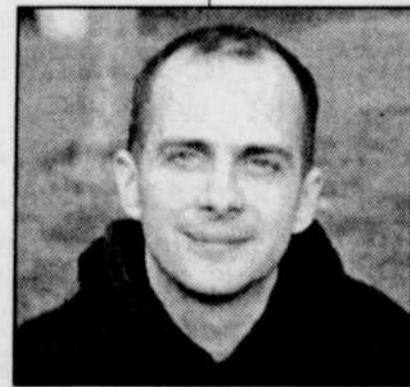
Sweetly comic moments in *Daddy & Papa*

DADDY & PAPA
4 p.m. Sept. 28

"For my gay friends and me, kids were an alien concept," says *Daddy & Papa* director and star Johnny Symons. But that didn't stop him from adopting a son.

This one-hour documentary, which deserves the accolades it's received at other festival screenings, explores a pocket of gay life that's received mostly unwelcome attention via right-wing attacks and, surprisingly, a queer community that remains skeptical of gay parenthood as an unappealing mirror image of heterosexuality.

Symons compounds the complexities by being white with a biracial lover and adopting a black child. The doc paints a warm picture of this loving



Gay seminarian Macky Alston is *Questioning Faith*

family along with several others who are not only helping themselves and the kids but also performing a public service in adopting children who might otherwise be lost in the gulag of foster homes.

These guys' obvious deep caring wins over doubting grandparents, Christian foster moms and biological parents, one of whom turns over a second child to Symons when she sees the kind of life he and his partner can offer her baby.

There are some sweetly comic moments here, as when one dad laments a future of sports events when it becomes clear he's raising a little jock. And the beginnings of a gay male parenting community can be seen in events like a suburban picnic for gay dads and their kids.

But *Daddy & Papa* isn't unrealistic about the hurdles in these unconventional families. Nine-year-old Fanny suffers visibly when her two dads break up, but, as one of them points out, "Being divorced is a bigger deal for her than being gay."

—GM

QUESTIONING FAITH
3 p.m. Sept. 29

This uneven documentary follows filmmaker and gay seminarian Macky Alston in his search for religious belief after his friend and fellow future preacher Alan Smith dies of AIDS-related complications. This leads him through a number of encounters of varying interest, from Smith's still-grieving mother to Alston's feisty, atheist grandma to a country preacher who spends equal time making bizarre artwork and studying the Bible.

These encounters offer a variety of responses to Alston's question of how to reconcile belief in God with such traumas as AIDS, but mostly they're not all that enlightening, being too often of the "You can't question God" variety. Part of the problem is Alston's somewhat grating presence throughout the film. Much of the energy here is spent on shots of "Macky" looking wistfully at a picture of Jesus or hyperdramatizing ("And yet look, behold! A senseless tragedy!") or literally begging irritated strangers on the street to talk with him about his quest.

There's a very intriguing story in here, though, that survives the filmmaker's ego tripping, particularly in powerful sequences devoted to a teenage girl who turns to Buddhist rituals to escape unbearable violence in her life as well as a woman who survives brain surgery partly through an unshakable faith. **J**

—GM

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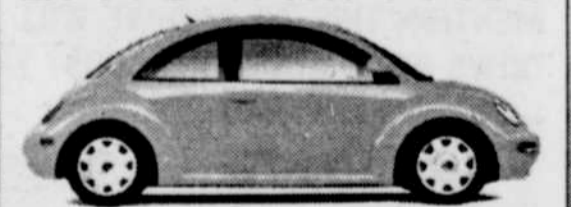
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