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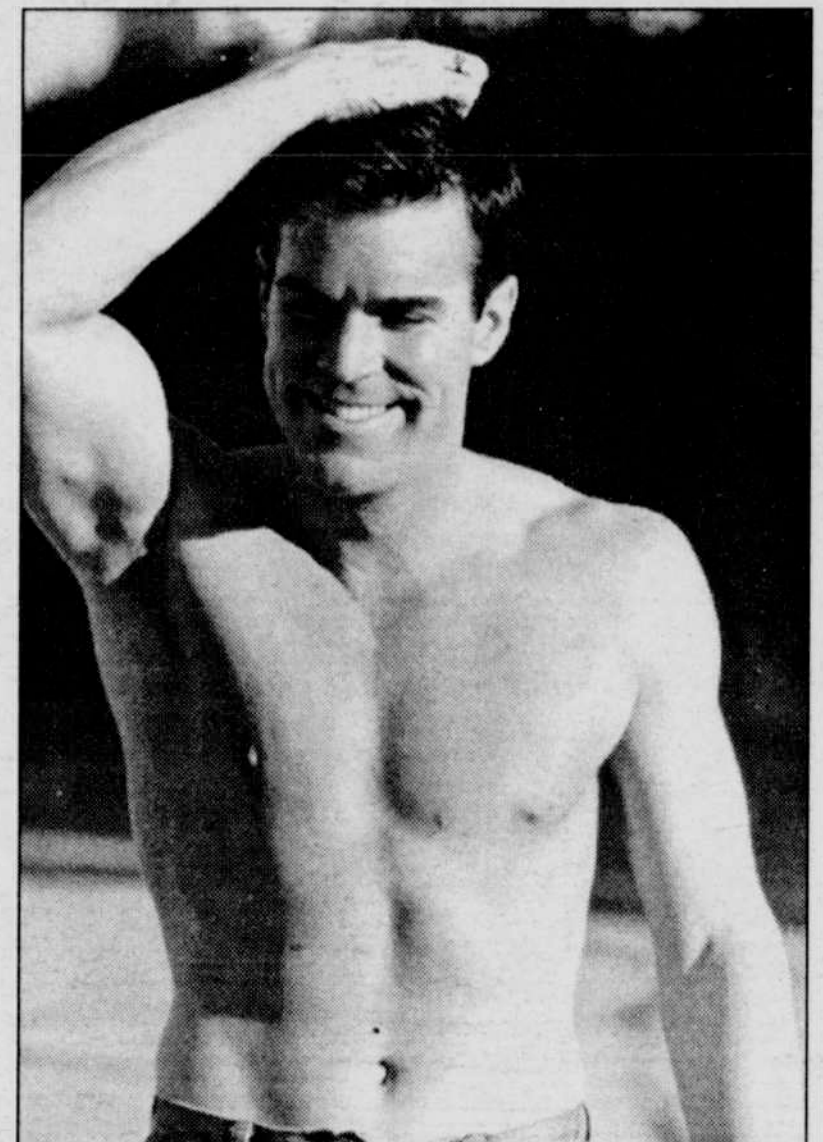
FILM

Trippy

Former Portlander Miles Swain opens this year's film fest

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

Portland-born gay filmmaker Miles Swain moved to Los Angeles in 1996 to pursue an acting career, which then led to film school and, now, *The Trip*, a feature he wrote and directed, which has been selected to open this year's Portland LGBT Film Festival. In anticipation of his Sept. 20 return to the Rose City, he kindly submitted to a grueling e-mail interview with *Just Out*.



Just Out encourages audience members to yell out the phrase "Hey, take off your shirt!" when Miles Swain talks about his film *The Trip* Sept. 20 at Cinema 21

Christopher McQuain: Reportedly your screenplay was inspired by an urban legend about an incident of AIDS discrimination by an airline that forced a gay man and his friend to take a road trip in 1984.

Miles Swain: I was in film school around the time this story was told to me. I decided to write it as a short and film it as my thesis.... I loved the story so much that I decided to write...an entire feature-length script.

CM: Much of the film is set during the '70s and '80s against the backdrop of the burgeoning gay rights movements and AIDS crisis. Where did you get the specific sense of time and place?

MS: I talked to a lot of activists, watched a lot of documentaries and read a lot of books. I was only 3 in 1973, so I got really involved when I started learning all of this gay history.... I'd call some of my friends up and asked them if they heard about the White Night Riots. ("Is that a circuit party?") Or if they knew that the American Psychiatric Institute classified homosexuality as a mental illness in the early '70s. Everyone was like, "What?"

Ask a black person who Martin Luther King is and you'll get an expeditious response. But what about our gay heroes and the people who shaped the world we live in? We need to know who these people are. I tried to incorporate as much of it as I could in the story...with-out it taking away from the love story.

CM: How do you feel *The Trip* fits into the spectrum of queer movies?

MS: I hope it's a film someone who's attempting to come out will take their parents/friends/loved ones to. I didn't really have anything like this film when I came out. I think *The Trip* covers all the right areas: our history, two regular guys as our leads and a strong message of being true to yourself—something a lot of gay people have struggled with.

CM: Did you worry about alienating the audience with a story and characters that could seem like they're too black-and-white or preachy?

MS: I was very cautious of the audience, more so than I'll probably ever be in the making of a film. I made this film for everyone, but, if we're going to be specific, then to the under-30 males. That's why you have all the cutesy humor and no long, boring, in-need-of-a-major-edit scenes. The film entertains; the film will hopefully educate.

CM: What has the response been to *The Trip* from audiences at other queer film festivals?

MS: We had our North American premiere in Miami to a crowd of about 800, and we got a three-minute standing ovation! Most of the festivals we played in have been high-lighted positions—opening/closing/center-piece.... We recently won Best Film at the Honolulu Gay/Lesbian Film Festival. While winning awards isn't a goal, they're certainly nice. Especially when you don't have to suck anybody off to get it. I'm much too old to do that anymore anyway.

CM: What thought or feeling do you hope will be paramount in the audience's experience?

MS: The story's message is to be true to yourself and live each moment to the fullest. I had kind of a "Tommy" in my life and made some mistakes, which I didn't own up to. I ignored them and wished that they would kind of just go away. The problem didn't go away, but he did. I regret that, and I hope that people who see this movie are at least encouraged to speak up, speak out, be themselves, not be afraid of taking risks and say: "Hey, I'm sorry. I messed up; please forgive me."

CM: Where does your career go from here?

MS: I'm currently working on turning this movie into a television series. It's being considered by HBO.... I also have another script I wrote about a trailer park family in Portland, Oregon (yes, it's my family), who move to Los Angeles to pursue their dreams and end up on their own reality television series. It's like *The Beverly Hillbillies* meets *The Osbournes*. Wish me luck. 