

because they'd been coming over for years, and they're not shy."

The editor agreed, and it went so well that he and his friends began a recurring gathering of watching a video and critiquing the actors, the costumes, the scenery, their own lives and each other—all during the movie. It's something of a modern-day Round Table and, like a fly on the wall, the reader hears their clever barbs and scabrous comments worthy of the famous Algonquin regulars.

(For his Portland reading, Hensley will be assisted by local wits Margie Boulé of *The Oregonian*, Marc Acito of *Just Out* and Thomas Lauderdale of *Pink Martini*.)

The list of movies in *Screening Party* is unexpected. They range from *Armageddon* to *Taxi Driver* and include gay favorites such as *A Star Is Born*, *Flashdance*, *Saturday Night Fever* and *The Sound of Music*.

The common thread among them is that they

all had a huge cultural impact at the time they were released. "Sometimes they were good and sometimes they weren't," says Hensley, "but they all had something that was part of the zeitgeist of the time. You could imagine them on the cover of *Time* magazine, not just the movie magazines."

Hensley loves the idea of groups of friends across America emulating his screening parties, and his Internet site (www.dennishensley.com) even has a page on "How to Host a Screening Party."

"I hope people can relate to [us] and think, 'My friends are just like that,' and then maybe sit down with their friends and say what they really think of Sharon Stone." ■

DENNIS HENSLEY and friends perform a screening party 7 p.m. April 24 at the Lloyd Center Barnes & Noble.

FLOYD SKLAVER is a Portland free-lance writer nearly as catty as Dennis Hensley.

REVIEW

SCREENING PARTY

by Dennis Hensley; Alyson Publications, 2002; \$16.95 softcover

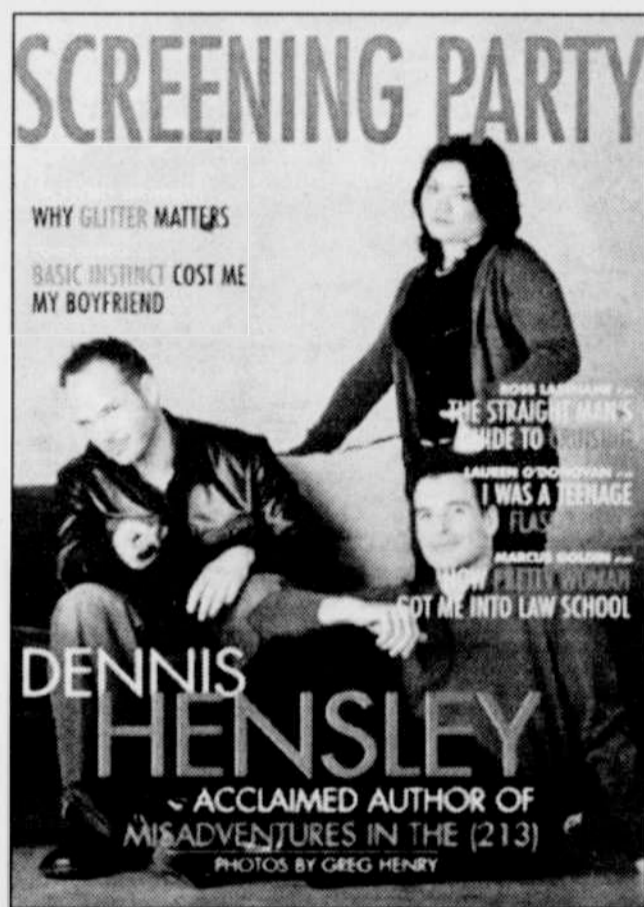
For the delightful *Screening Party*, Dennis Hensley brought together a group of friends each week to watch movies in his living room. He recorded their running commentary (imagine watching *Sing-a-long Sound of Music* at Joan Rivers' house) and then synthesized it into articles for the now-defunct magazine *British Premiere*.

The beauty of the conceit is that Hensley has taken a rotating cast of 12 or so friends and distilled them into just six characters, his screening party regulars, whose stories provide a thorough narration that keep the reader moving from one essay to the next.

The movie selection represents a wide range—mostly from the '70s and '80s—beginning with *Jaws* and including *St. Elmo's Fire*, *Cruising*, *Glitter* and *Pretty Woman* (the absolute funniest essay). The screeners also have a marathon showing of five James Bond flicks in order to evaluate which actor was the best Bond. Score cards rate the actors in three categories: Interview, Evening Gown and Swimsuit (which included fitness, physique and chest hair).

Hensley seamlessly marries fact and fiction in this condensing of his array of friends into six living, breathing characters, three of whom are gay. Their lives are as much a part of the book as the movies, and their barbs reveal as much about themselves as about the 22 films.

And so we meet sweet, gay, HIV-positive Marcus, who has what Hensley calls "a St. Olaf



story for every movie" (like the ones Betty White always told on *The Golden Girls*). Those kind of comments prompt Hensley's neighbor, shrink Beverly Beaverman (who the author invites for the psychological insights she can provide) to say, "I don't want to hear about your fucked-up life."

Screening Party will soon be released in an audio version starring Hensley, comedian Kathy Griffin (*Suddenly Susan*) and film director P.J. Castellaneta (*Relax...It's Just Sex*).

—FS ■

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