

FILM

A queer close-up

Gay erotic film director Joe Gage tells the story behind the sex

BY GARY MORRIS

Gay porn, like every other art form, has its canon, and the films of Joe Gage belong in that rarefied realm of early, pioneering porn also occupied by Wakefield Poole and Jack Deveau. Poole's work (*Bijou*) is lyrical and arty, Deveau's harshly urban and experimental (*Drive*). Gage could be called the porn poet of the queer working class.

Gage's most famous work was the trilogy that comprised *Kansas City Trucking Company* (1976), *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* (1977) and *L.A. Tool & Die* (1979). These were road movies with a loose narrative and loads of raunchy sex featuring some of the legendary stars of the day such as Richard Locke, Fred Halsted, Clay Russell and many others. The films' status as pre-condom works—the equivalent of today's barebacking subgenre—makes them particularly intriguing and, well, sexy.

Inexplicably—or perhaps rightly, fearing the overkill that comes when programming porn—the mavens at the seventh annual Portland Lesbian & Gay Film Festival are showing only the second and third films in the trilogy. (See Page 28 for schedule.) Gage, who was hunky enough to play in his own movies, will be on hand to discuss them.

Chatting with him by e-mail, Gage proved as engaging as his films.

Gary Morris: Can you say something about the circumstances of production for *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* and *L.A. Tool & Die*?

Joe Gage: The films were completely scripted...including all sexual situations and dialogue. There were only a few "professional models" around in the early days, but my producer, Sam Gage, and I sorted through those who were available and also sent word out into

the community that we were looking for performers. The sexual revolution was well under way, and the majority of men who applied wanted to appear in the films for political reasons as much as anything else.

GM: How do you see your films in relation to today's porn?

JG: The early films were made to mirror mainstream movies, with stories, characters, dramatic conflict and resolution. For the most part, today's hardcore features play more like living stroke magazine layouts. Not that there's anything wrong with that. I prefer something with a little more substantial to chew on, so to speak.

GM: How was it working with legendary stars like Locke, Russell Halsted, Jack Wrangler and Will Seagers?

JG: Richard Locke appeared in all three parts of the trilogy and was a blast to collaborate with. A real wild child—lived in a shack out in the desert, the last of the true live-and-let-live hippies. Halsted was a major filmmaker in his own right—some of his films are in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. A great combination of the butch and the sensitive, he required special handling on set to get the results I was looking for. Seagers left a lasting impression on celluloid, but I didn't get to know him well. Clay Russell was easygoing

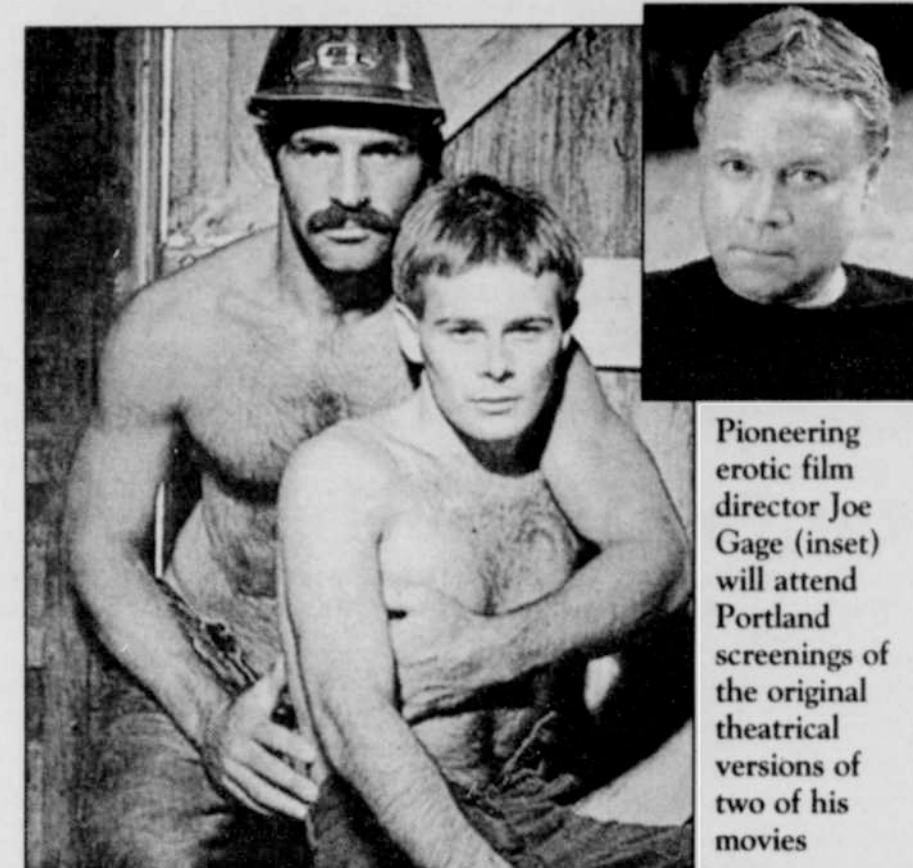
and cooperative. Locke and Halsted have gone on to their reward. Don't know what's become of Seagers, but I understand Russell is still around. And may I add that Jack Wrangler was a pussycat.

GM: Any thoughts on how AIDS has changed porn?

JG: Wakefield Poole (*Boys in the Sand*) declared on his great DVD interview last year that he would never work again until there was a cure; the introduction of condoms killed it for him. I was eroticizing rubbers before AIDS and continue to do so. It's sad to put barebacking off-limits, but it's more important to play safe and to encourage others to do so.

GM: Some fans have spoken fondly of your featuring more everyday guys rather than hairless gym bunnies.

JG: I never went out of my way to emphasize the butch or straight attributes of my guys. I always sought to portray them as representatives of the average, ordinary—for the most part—working-class citizen. On the other



Pioneering erotic film director Joe Gage (inset) will attend Portland screenings of the original theatrical versions of two of his movies

hand, I have no interest in documenting the by-the-numbers sexual routines of West Hollywood escort boys. There's no passion there, and the meter's always running.

GM: What are you doing now?

JG: I took a long hiatus, made or developed some mainstream films, wrote a couple of books, raised a family and then decided to start up again. I've made some movies for MSR and Odyssey and will start something for another company sometime after the first of the year. [E]

GARY MORRIS is a Portland free-lance writer who only watches porn to review it, he swears.

Party before the movie!

Thursday, October 9

A free movie, single women, party, prizes and fun!



All women seeking women are invited to join *Just Out* for a *singles* party at Zeba prior to the Sensory Perceptions Lesbian & Gay Film Festival opening night free screening of *Tipping the Velvet*.

Join us for a lesbian *singles* gathering from 5 to 7 pm at Zeba, 1222 S.W. Salmon. Enjoy appetizers, no-host bar, fun, frivolities and a drawing for free prizes!*

The film starts 7:30 p.m. at the Guild Theatre, S.W. 9th and Taylor.

*Submission of a free voice personal ad makes you eligible for prize drawings.

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