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FILM

Men on a mission

The director gets lost, but the boys of *Latter Days* stumble upon heaven

BY LISA BRADSHAW



Mormon boy Aaron (left) and party boy Christian fall in love in *Latter Days*, playing April 30 to May 6 at Cinema 21

"When I first came to Los Angeles, it looked like just this mass of dots," narrates the vulnerable hero at the very start of the film *Latter Days*. "All jumbled and disconnected."

It's a lovely way to begin, and it's a metaphor that returns to great effect for several characters in this story of a gay Mormon who falls in love during his mission. Regrettably, jumbled and disconnected are also terms that describe most of this film.

Writer C. Jay Cox (who also wrote *Sweet Home Alabama*, which explains a lot) makes his directorial debut with *Latter Days*, an indie that has been making waves and getting a lot of press, particularly when its January premiere in Salt Lake City was canceled because of pressure from the Mormon church (the Mormons having learned quite well from *Independence Day* that when you infect the mother ship, you infect the whole fleet). It was screened several weeks later, thanks to the Salt Lake Film Society.

Now opening April 30 in Portland, the setup for *Latter Days* is promising and beguiling. Young and achingly cute Aaron, along with his goofy, shallow (and, of course, homo-

phobic) roommates, moves in to the apartment next to out-and-proud party boy Christian (who wears tiny gym shorts circa 1982 boardwalk roller skater, which is convenient because even sheltered Mormon boys from Idaho can immediately peg him as gay).

Christian, a renowned player among his peers, bets his restaurant co-workers, including roommate Julie (Rebekah Jordan), that he can bed the cute Mormon. But how will he prove it? He'll bring them his underwear!—a plot device that apparently hasn't gotten old since we saw it 20 years ago in *Sixteen Candles*.

Underwear aside, Aaron (played by Steve Sandvoss in his film debut) and Christian (played by Wes Ramsey, who co-stars in the TV sitcom *Luis*) steam up the screen—even in simple getting-to-know-you conversations. The sexual tension is manifest, touchable—you get turned on just thinking about what these boys should be doing to each other.

Coupled with Aaron's innocence and quiet explanations about his culture—"we're not allowed to do a lot of things," he confesses in a series of simple, humbled tones—and Christian's realization that there might be more to life than

go from this...



to this...



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