

## Cultural divide

Portlanders disappointed with Mormon depiction in *Latter Days*

Even with being excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Steven Fales thinks C. Jay Cox's depiction of the religion in his new film *Latter Days* is harsh. "It didn't represent the culture," explains the gay Portland artist, whose one-man show *Confessions of a Mormon Boy* will enjoy a run next month at Hollywood Theatre.

"Having been excommunicated," he continues, "his church court and my church court did not look the same at all. He really vilified the Mormon culture."

His sentiments are echoed by Jason Lloyd Giles, member of the Portland gay Mormon social and support group Affirmation. "There would have been much more sadness and compassion on the faces of the brethren, and they would have talked a lot about repenting and working to one day get rebaptized."

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Both men note that many of the lead character's actions on his mission would be very difficult, if not impossible. "As I watched the film—and I served a two-year mission—I kept repeating the phrase 'possible but unlikely,'" continues Giles, who says Aaron would not "have been alone with [the character] Christian again and again—missionaries have rules about being together with their companions."

Absolutely, agrees Fales. "Having served in Mormon missions, there were some very implausible scenarios there...some chance meetings I don't think would have happened... knowing how regulated the culture is."

Still, both men are glad Cox, who is a former Mormon, made *Latter Days*. Fales points out that Jewish playwright Tony Kushner (who represents Mormonism in *Angels in America*) "took a whole culture [and] did whatever he wanted to make his political points."

Cox, he says, "was brought up LDS; he did do a mission. I think it's really great that Mormon writers are telling our story."

"I really did like it overall, and I'm glad it was made," says Giles. "It certainly brings to light...the struggles that gay Mormons face still today.... Plus, the two leads were hot."

—LB

one-night stands, what possibilities lie here. What a bummer so few of them materialize.

We can't blame the actors, who also include a well-cast Jacqueline Bisset as the restaurant owner and Mary Kay Place as Aaron's mom. It's all about the script and the directing—or the lack thereof. It's all about C. Jay Cox.

Having been a Mormon missionary himself before he left the church, the director says he wanted to put his two lives—his former and his current self—in the same room and see what they would say to each other. One wonders, then, if Cox's life is made up of silly, impulsive dialogue, contrived "miracles" and confusing changes of style.

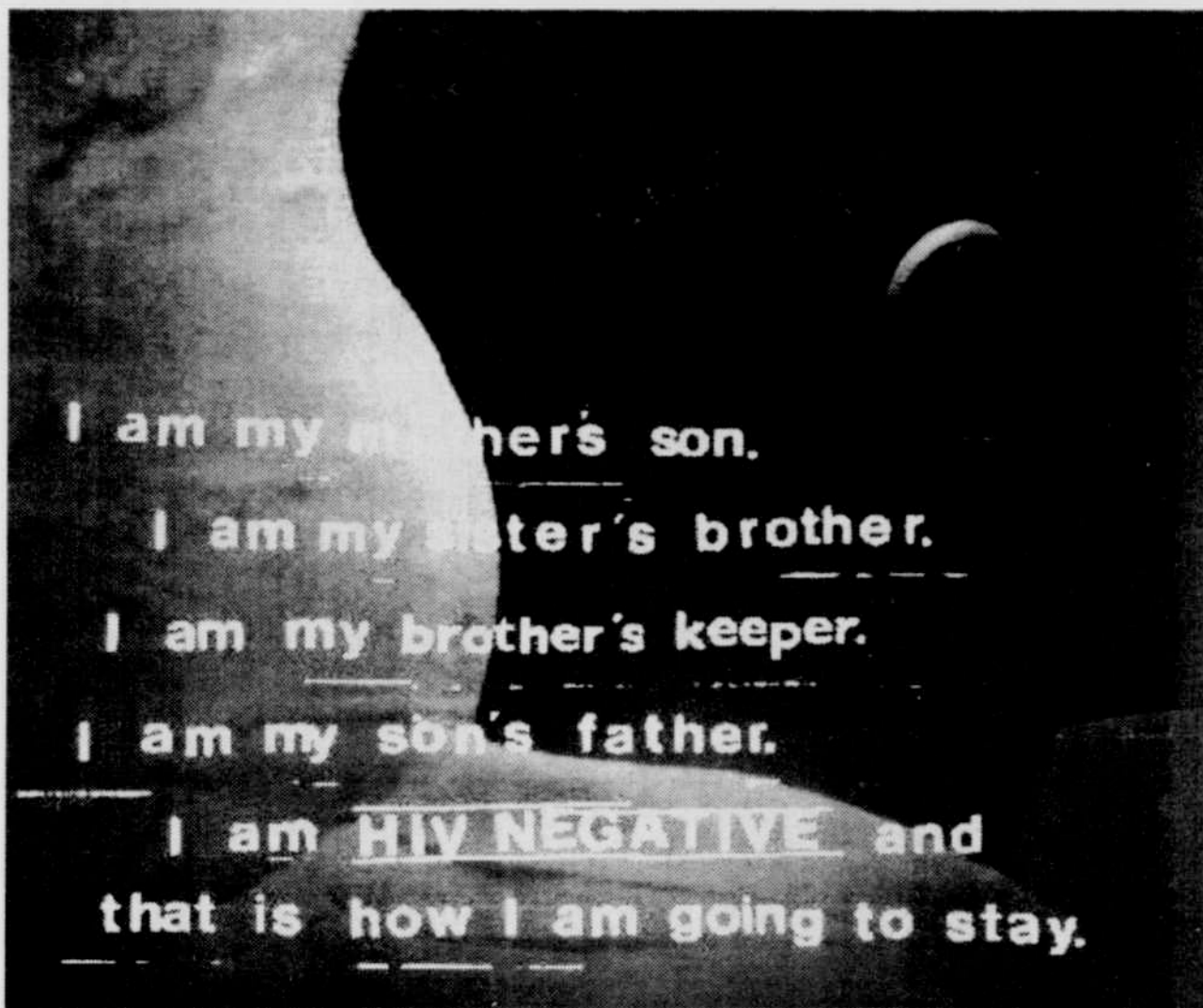
Despite the chemistry and some genuinely amusing exchanges—as when Christian, referencing the other Mormons' negative reactions to catching him and Aaron kissing, laments "We didn't even get to use our tongues"—not a one of the characters in *Latter Days* is fully realized. Aaron comes the closest to real character development, but he is found out, shuttled home, excommunicated and placed into reparative therapy so quickly, the movie seems to for-

get about him—focusing instead on the maudlin Christian, who is finding himself with, of course, a wise-beyond-his-years AIDS patient (*ER*'s Erik Palladino, who really does give his all).

The artifice just piles up from there, culminating in a sudden surreal shot of Aaron having visions of himself crucified and bleeding down onto himself in bed à la the rehab scene from *Trainspotting*—which actually would have been effective had the film given us any precursor to this kind of imagery and not simply seem to have injected it in a "This is so cool just like in *Trainspotting*" kind of way.

Cox does apply a beautifully spiritual meaning to Aaron's theory that the closer you are to a situation, the more difficult it can be to comprehend, but he fails to illustrate the very real conflict within the Mormon church over homosexuality and changing generational attitudes. He also fails to give Christian more than a Band-Aid approach to healing and change.

The good news and the real success of *Latter Days* is the introduction of Sandvoss to the movie industry. It's hard to believe this is his first film, and I can't wait to see him onscreen again. **J**



Brother to Brother is a support and advocacy organization for African American gay and bisexual males and their families living in the Portland metro area.

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