

FILM

We want to demystify the gay relationship...to demonstrate that male couples are not so different from straight couples," says Portland filmmaker Aaron K. Douglas, who, along with co-producers Elaine Miller and Jim Tuchschildt, is at the helm of a new documentary focusing on male same-sex relationships.

"People focus too much on the differences rather than the similarities," Douglas continues. "This will explore those similarities at a time when educating people...can help them make informed choices as to whether they support gay marriage or civil unions."

The trio will begin shooting the as-yet-untitled project in the Portland area in the near future, with a release slated for next year.

Douglas, something of a renaissance man, has worn many professional hats—broadcast journalism (both radio and television), paralegal work, public relations, workplace and information technology consulting, record production and acting as well as producing musical theater.

His pursuits have taken him all over the Pacific Northwest, from Springfield (where he was raised and attended college) to Seattle, where he worked for a law firm through the mid-'90s. The frantic boom in the Puget Sound area inspired a relocation to the more laid-back Rose City in 1996, when he bought the houseboat he shares with his husband, David, a psychiatrist (which, he jokes, "comes in handy sometimes").

Douglas continued working in the legal field as a marketer, but, as he says diplomatically, "Lawyers are very challenging to work for." It was thanks to a particularly unpleasant boss that he decided to switch focus to his more creative side. "I'm grateful, because otherwise I may have stayed there many more years," he admits, "and I'm very excited about this new direction."

Douglas' new direction took shape during his participation in a digital media production course at the Art Institute of Portland, where he began to conceive and create short documentaries as class projects. One of these, the autobiographical "My Days of Awe and Grief, Part I: Dirk and Me," was screened this spring at Fifth Avenue Cinemas and as part of the Forest Film Festival at Clinton Street Theater, where it won Best Documentary.

"Dirk and Me" is the first in a five-part series of films Douglas plans that explore his relationships with the people and culture of Springfield. "It's a conservative place," he says of his hometown. "It was the first city in Oregon to pass an anti-gay law, and they all voted in favor of Measure 9. There weren't any Gay Straight Alliances."

Future parts of *Awe and Grief* include "The

Aaron Douglas' "My Days of Awe and Grief, Part I: Dirk and Me" won Best Documentary at Portland's Forest Film Festival

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS



Gay gaze

A trio of filmmakers will put Portland couples on the big screen

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

Outing" and "Scared Straight." "I think some of the most successful documentaries are personal ones," Douglas says. "It's easier for the filmmaker to communicate emotions or themes in words and pictures when the story...has elements of one's own life experience. Of course, it's also really great personal therapy."

Douglas is making the leap into longer-form documentary with his latest endeavor, for which he and his team are seeking supplementary public funding and screening couples through a "standardized, lengthy interview process."

The feature will explore the histories and experiences of three gay male couples of different generations and in different stages of their relationships. The 12 couples under consideration were culled from among Douglas' acquaintances and those who responded to an open call.

They all hail in large part from the Portland metro area, but some are from as far away as Central Point and Washougal, Wash. "We would like to have at least one couple from a rural area to get their unique perspectives," Douglas says. About half of the couples were recently married in Multnomah County.

Part of the documentary's purpose is to reveal the experiences and challenges most long-term relationships have in common. "I think both gay and straight people will see it," predicts Douglas. "We want Jane and John Doe watching it and

saying, 'Gee, my husband/wife does that, too! How irritating!' or 'Yeah, sometimes Jane or John won't put out!' or whatever."

But the movie will also showcase the queer community's neglected demographic. "Couples of different ages will help us to educate the public...that many of these relationships have beginning, middle and end-of-life stages just like legally married straight couples!" Douglas notes. "Middle-age and senior-age gay men are certainly underrepresented in all aspects of gay filmmaking. One of my personal goals...is to change that."

One of his other goals is to reach a straight audience in need of observations on gay lives. "There are lots and lots of books about the 'male couple,' but no movies," Douglas laments. "People are starting to be sensitized to the issue, so it is a good time to focus on educating straight people, [who] I'm hoping will be interested in watching this type of program and educating themselves instead of remaining ignorant." □

Couples interested in participating in AARON DOUGLAS' documentary about gay male relationships should contact the filmmaker at 503-407-0810. To view "My Days of Awe and Grief Part I: Dirk and Me" visit www.ifilm.com/ifilmdetail/2483130.

CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Seattle writer and filmmaker.

Transi-story

Showtime produces trans documentaries

BY LISA BRADSHAW

The network that brought us *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word* goes nonfiction with a two-part documentary series titled *The Opposite Sex*.

The intense and rather excruciating "Rene's Story" premiered May 11 and repeats May 22 and 30. Rene is an extremely distressed and overbearing 31-year-old female-to-male transsexual who has created a successful physical transformation but hasn't done the psychological or emotional work he needs to move into the next phase of surgery.

Although surrounded by a reasonably supportive family, Rene simply denies his birth past or that he is anything but a "real man," including to his wife of 12 years, who, astonishingly, has never seen him fully naked. Rene's verbal abuse of and lack of respect for his wife, who is trying to grasp a situation she never seems to have fully understood, alienates him from his closest ally and from viewers.

"Jamie's Story," airing June 23, will be more accessible to the general viewing public. This story of the male-to-female transition of a 47-year-old, good-old-boy type from Michigan is anchored in

the turbulent but amazingly strong relationship between Jamie and her wife, Brenda.

Jamie's family predictably splits into two camps: the supportive if confused mother and sister and the three brothers, none of whom accept Jamie and only one of whom agreed to be interviewed (but not show his face).

What's missing from both documentaries is any explorations of gender fluidity or expression beyond a very binary model. However, these are trans people from cities smaller and more conservative than Portland, which makes for an interesting comparison of how transitioning is dealt with in other parts of the country (but doesn't allow viewers nationwide variant gender representations to consider).

This problem is somewhat addressed in the not-to-be-missed after-show discussions with trans people, including Calpernia Addams, whose boyfriend, Pfc. Barry Winchell, was famously murdered by fellow soldiers, and trans advocate Jamison Green, who spoke at Portland Pride 2003. □



"Rene's Story" repeats May 22 and 30

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