

been there a long time, for one thing. I'm a very social person. I got there in the late '70s; I was there before Harvey Milk was elected to the Board of Supervisors. I was there for the first big explosion of gay urban community in the history of the human race, and it was an extraordinary time to be there.

But what followed that were the assassinations of Harvey Milk and [Mayor] George Moscone and the AIDS epidemic. So I've lived through just unbelievable, unbelievable queer experience. I mean there is no queerer experience I think than in having lived in San Francisco from 1976 until now just because of what's gone on politically, socially, health-wise, sexually. It's just been great, and it's just been awful, too.

TL: The sense of history and a past in this country is rapidly diminishing.

DW: The culture does not support an historic worldview. Everything that I try to do with in my work and my personal life is to try to find inviting ways to expand people's awareness and consciousness, and to not do it with finger-wagging or with polemics or with anything else, but to do it through fun and sweetness and being interesting.

I met this young guy who puts on big rave parties and stuff, and he found *The Cockettes* on the shelf at Blockbuster, and he said that it totally inspired him in relation to the work he does and the way he dresses. This is what I hope that both the movie and I and people of my ilk and my generation can do—to be constructive in terms of promoting that sense of personal liberation and broader aspirations for younger kids who have grown up in really restrictive, uptight environments.

TL: The great disco diva Sylvester got his start with *The Cockettes*. Didn't glitter glam rock really also begin with the troupe?

DW: Hibiscus certainly was the creator of the whole glitter look. Bette Midler was performing in the baths in New York, and she went with Bruce Vilanch to see *The Cockettes* in 1971, and shortly after that she was doing all of her big campy shows. Elton John, the New York Dolls, David Bowie, Lou Reed when he went through his glitter period—all of this was right after *The Cockettes*. I don't like attributing everything to *The Cockettes*, but I do think they were part of a zeitgeist, of a moment, and they exploded it out into the public eye with a kind of imagination that triggered other things.

San Francisco had something unique because of the acid and the free-spirited hedonism that lacked the cynicism and irony of New York. There was a pure fun-ness to it in San Francisco.

TL: And that's certainly articulated in the film. Their trip to New York is a huge disaster.

DW: Dusty Dawn from *The Cockettes* says, "It was counterculture, East and West, completely different." I think it's an accurate representation of New York vs. San Francisco in that era. San Francisco was by far the farthest-out place in the world at that time.... San Francisco still occupies a unique niche in the world because it draws a certain kind of a free-spirited adventurer.

TL: It's almost too beautiful, San Francisco.

DW: It's way too expensive, that's for sure. We were making the movie right during the dot-com explosion, and for me it was such a stark thing. I was making a movie about a time when San Francisco was the international beacon for the wildest, freakiest, most interesting young people who were looking for sex, politics, spirituality, drugs and experimentation. And during the dot-com period, San Francisco became the international beacon for young

The creation of beauty

Documentary on Yves St. Laurent transcends mere fashion

BY CHRISTOPHER McQUAIN



David Teboul's engaging documentary on Yves St. Laurent opens June 11 at Hollywood Theatre

Yves St. Laurent: *His Life and Times*, which opens June 11 at Hollywood Theatre, is a surprisingly accessible, down-to-earth study of the renowned designer, who is neither.

Like Karl Lagerfeld and the late Gianni Versace, St. Laurent fits a sort of cultural archetype: the gay Continental elder statesman of the fashion world, an enigmatic, chain-smoking, perfectionistic creator of clothes-as-art, someone whose wide influence, inimitable style and imposing personality enable him to wear sunglasses at all times without looking like a poser.

Director David Teboul uses present-day interview footage of St. Laurent, who's now pushing 70, as a narrative springboard. From St. Laurent's memories of his colonial childhood in French Algeria and his early years as *enfant terrible* of the Parisian fashion milieu of the '60s, the film segues into archival footage of fashion shows, magazine spreads, earlier St. Laurent interviews and—most fun of all—promotional short films that are subversive, funny and insouciant in the best '60s manner. (One features a cartoon heroine called "Naughty Lulu," while another, in minimalist black and white, has a young woman scandalously switching clothes with her boyfriend—an obvious precursor to those omnipresent Calvin Klein ads.)

These sections make for an excellent primer

on the fascinating, luscious evolution of St. Laurent couture through the decades—his Warhol-like transformation of high fashion into postmodern Pop, something much more rebellious, androgynous and egalitarian than it had been before—as well as that of the sophisticated, driven and complicated man who created it.

Though Teboul focuses much more on St. Laurent's work than his personal life, it's evident that the lines between the two were often blurred. Interspersed throughout the film are separate interviews with the designer's mother, his industry colleagues and his lovers, specifically the stoic and candid Pierre Berge, who was St. Laurent's business and life partner for many years and was indispensable in helping him start his fashion empire in 1962.

Also featured is an impressively stylish middle-aged woman named Betty Catroux, who philosophizes smartly on St. Laurent's presciently expansive attitudes on gender and sex while recalling their shared taste for danger and disreputability.

Even if you have little interest in fashion, Teboul's succinct, entertaining and frequently ravishing portrait succeeds as general interest. More than merely documenting the historical specifics of fashion celebrities and clothing trends, it compellingly explores the life and personality of someone exclusively, heroically dedicated to the creation of beauty. **J**

people who were looking to make lots and lots and lots of money—totally opposite.

It was very painful to be in the midst of that dichotomy. Me and my world and my circle of people—we were all delighted when the dot-com boom crashed because all those kids who came to San Francisco to make money and to get rich and to drink hundred-dollar bottles of champagne went back to live with their parents. Or else they got rich and bought million-dollar houses in working-class neighborhoods.

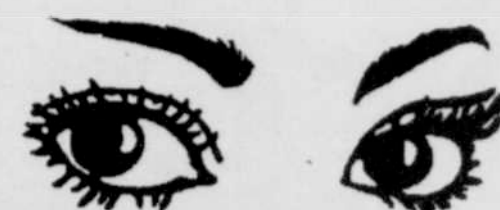
TL: And now?

DW: The underground has reasserted itself as it has in San Francisco over and over and over again. A lot of that energy I attribute to the Burning Man people because there are constant constellations of creative people in the city who are essentially Burning Man-driven and do stuff all year round. It's really, really cutting edge, totally in the tradition of *The Cockettes*—which is art for art's sake.

TL: And for those who don't know what Burning Man is....

DW: Burning Man is this great art festival that happens in the desert, and it's all about "be a participant, don't be an observer, be art in whatever that means to you, and do it all for the sake of being and doing art." It's not about money; you can't buy or sell anything. And that's totally in the tradition of San Francisco and *The Cockettes*, this idea of "I'm doing this because I'm hoping it will entertain you, and you're doing that because you're hoping it will entertain me." And that's a beautiful thing. **J**

Join Thomas Lauderdale, Howie Bagdadmutz, Tom Ranieri and Just Out in welcoming David Weissman to Portland with a free screening of *THE COCKETTES* 8:45 p.m. June 10 at Cinema 21, 616 N.W. 21st Ave. Post-screening Q & A with Weissman, followed by a party at Le Happy, 1011 N.W. 16th Ave.



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