

adult Nong Toom and surveying his life through extended episodes from a tormented childhood through Buddhist school (where he insists on using lip gloss, to the horror of his mentors) to his ultimate fame. The fight scenes are riveting, particularly a harrowing one in which Nong Toom, weakened by female hormones, confronts a very scary female Japanese boxer in war paint and multicolored fringe. Thailand's official position on homosexuality is disapproving, but with this film and the *Iron Ladies* series, they seem to be pioneering the Asian-tranny-sports genre. Perhaps next season will bring pre-op football players or drag kings doing water polo.

Speaking of drag kings, the festival features an excellent documentary on this phenomenon, which has always existed in the shadow of the seemingly ubiquitous drag queen empire. Director Sonia Slutsky's *Drag Kings on Tour* followed the "Kingdom Come" tour, a quite varied group of DKs traveling the United States in a big RV, bringing gender politics, performance art, workshops, music, poetry and comedy to

gay clubs in the hinterlands. These gender-fluid gals don't have it easy—there's plenty of family rejection and inner questioning, not to mention internal squabbling that threatens to capsize the tour. But their fire and drive, and in some cases remarkable self-assurance, keep them going, even when they're falling apart. Especially moving is a sequence in which DK Pat Riarch performs a fabulous poetry slam called "Gender Game," attended by her mesmerized parents.

Another documentary of interest to culture vultures is *The Nomi Song*. Fans of punk will recall Klaus Nomi, the androgynous counter-tenor who briefly captivated punks with his Weimar Germany stylizations, painted face and unheard-of blend of operatic arias with machine-like rhythms. (Think Gary Numan in drag.) This was no small feat considering that so much of the punk era was homophobic. (Remember the "Death to Disco!" buttons that were de rigeur for that crowd?) Nomi's life is richly sampled in vintage clips (including an amazing one with David Bowie on *Saturday Night Live*) and interviews with contemporaries and friends. His untimely death as an early AIDS casualty is described but not dwelt upon, and does not overshadow what he achieved in his brief life.

No film festival would be complete without an AIDS documentary, and this year's fest includes a doozy. It's surely a sign of the maturity of the queer community that a challenging piece like this can be presented without too much hand-wringing. Robin Scovill's *The Other Side of AIDS* explores the still-controversial idea that HIV is not the cause of AIDS. Far from a crackpot piece, this is a measured treatment that looks at the question from many angles and includes commentary by respectable dissenters like Nobel Prize winner Kary Mullis and those who have gotten an HIV or AIDS diagnosis but have lived for years without meds. The film reminds viewers that questioning medical opinions and protocols—particularly regarding how drug companies and the medical establishment are benefiting from the equation of HIV and AIDS—is entirely

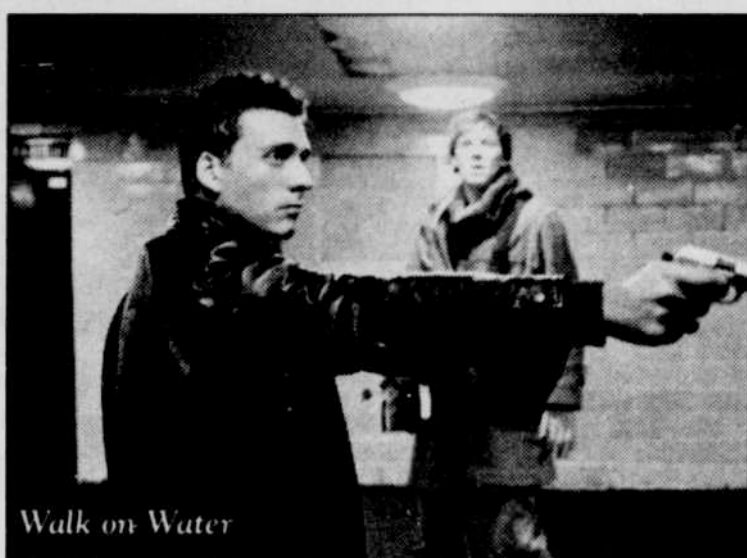


My Mother Likes Women

acceptable and indeed necessary.

Moving into less dicey realms brings us to *Goldfish Memory*. This romantic comedy set in contemporary Dublin features a cluster of couples moving in, out and sideways of relationships. Director Liz Gill juggles a slew of plotlines, beginning with lecherous 40ish literature professor Tom (Sean Campion), who beddops, or tries to, with as many of his younger female students as possible. But in this world, romance is unpredictable at best, so we have one of Tom's girlfriends soon taking up with one of his other exes, then one of that girlfriend's exes getting impregnated by her gay roommate, who's dating a straight man—well, you get it. All this metrosexuality is handled with a sure, light touch, and if it's not headed for perennial classic status, *Goldfish Memory* is a pretty

sweet divertissement. The gorgeous scenery of Dublin, shown in postcard-beautiful montages throughout, doesn't hurt.



Walk on Water

Perhaps the single standout of the fest, if one must be picked, is *Walk on Water*. Eytan Fox's previous film was the highly regarded *Yossi & Jagger*, but it would be a shame if only fans of that film saw this one. *Water* represents a quantum leap for the director. It's hard to imagine anyone wringing anything fresh out of the Nazi thriller genre, but Fox

manages to. Rigidly repressed Eyal (Lior Ashkenazi) is a hit man for Mossad on a mission to find an ancient Nazi being hidden by his family. In the process, he meets the war criminal's gay grandson, "German peacenik" Axel (Knut Berger), and granddaughter Pia (Caroline Peters), a kibbutzim who has suffered from her family's heritage and wants nothing to do with them. Eyal's pursuit of the old man by getting to know Axel and Pia becomes a process of awakening to his own humanity. Fox balances the suspense elements with striking characterizations, richly conveyed through fine performances by the three principals. Shot in Israel and Berlin, *Walk on Water* shows a major talent at work, and part of its success is due to the complexity of both its queer and straight characters. As in the rest of this fest, there are no killer dykes, suicidal transnics, arch sissies or even "sad young men" (unless he has a reason other than homosexuality to be sad) here. That's progress. **J**

The eighth annual PORTLAND LESBIAN & GAY FILM FESTIVAL runs Oct. 22 to 31 at Cinema 21, 616 N.W. 21st Ave. For a complete schedule visit www.sensoryperceptions.org.

GARY MORRIS is a Portland free-lance writer.

Portland director showcases shorts

David Weissman is a longtime filmmaker and former San Francisco resident well known in the queer arts community there but more widely famous for co-directing the 2002 documentary *The Cockettes*. He recently moved to Portland, and some of his well-regarded shorts are being featured in this year's fest.

GM: Can you give us some background on your shorts work?

David Weissman: First of all, making shorts is a hell of a lot cheaper than making features. Also, the short production time frame is appealing to me. I started making short films at San Francisco City College, mostly for fun, and yet I realized how much one can say in five minutes, or even 30 seconds. Some of my short films are goofy and fun; others pack an intense emotional punch.

GM: Probably your best-known, and I think most effective, short is 1988's "Song from an Angel," a tragicomic five-minute musical performance by a wheelchair-bound Rodney Price, who died of AIDS two weeks later. What can you tell us about that experience?

DW: It was probably one of the most inspiring performances I've ever seen. Rodney was a founding member of The Angels of Light—the offspring of *The Cockettes*—and a consum-

mate artist in every way. "Song from an Angel" was his last hurrah, and he was determined, despite—or perhaps because of—his declining health, that the show must go on. He never got out of bed again after we shot the film.

GM: Queer film festivals have exploded over the past decade or so. What do you feel is their significance, both from a filmmaker's and a queer's perspective?

DW: Things have changed so dramatically since the first festival in San Francisco in 1976, when a few Super-8 filmmakers showed their work. Those first pieces, as I remember, were very much in the tradition of John Waters, Warhol and the Kuchar brothers—kind of experimental psychedelic camp. And then things got much more political over time—with the classic documentaries *Word Is Out*, *Times of Harvey Milk*, *Before Stonewall*—many more works which dealt with queer history and politics, and the emergence of the first real "queer" communities in human history.

Now there's so much gay and lesbian filmmaking. There's a tremendous amount of fluff, which is fine, but there's still a ton of really interesting, provocative work that deals with things that weren't even being thought about 30 years ago. I think it's really important that these festivals exist, both for the audience and for the filmmakers. **J**



David Weissman

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