

FILM

Head of the class

DVDs depict determined students who stood up for their rights

BY STEPHEN BLAIR

The word "inspirational" summons thoughts of evangelists, New Age poetry and TV movies about cancer survivors. But two new DVDs earn this description without resorting to phony fervor or hokiness. *Prom Queen* and *Out of the Past* portray queer teens who refuse to keep quiet and stay hidden in the margins of high school life. They go to the prom in all their gay glory, and they battle bigotry all the way to the courtroom.

Prom Queen

All Marc Hall wanted was to take his boyfriend to the prom. But the principal and the school board at his Catholic high school said that hell would freeze before two fellows swapped corsages. To the administration's dismay, the audacious teen brought his case to the Canadian Supreme Court, which ruled that he had every right to escort his

queer member of the cross-dressing comedy troupe, plays Hall's lawyer, a smug and pushy gay man who puts his own thirst for victory before his client's needs. Dave Foley, another *Kids* alum, is alternately hilarious and maddening as the rambling school principal.

Prom Queen has a hip soundtrack, with songs by Erasure and New Pornographers. The breezy film will please queers of all ages, but its message is clearly aimed at teens. Take some pointers from this queer Canuck if you want to paint your prom lavender.

Out of the Past

If you want know for sure that Utah and homosexuality don't mix, look no further than this fascinating documentary that won an audience award at the Sundance Film Festival.

Linda Hunt, who won an Oscar for playing a man in 1982's *The Year of Living Dangerously*, narrates the story of Kelli Peterson, a 17-year-old lesbian high school student in Salt Lake City. When she formed a Gay Straight Alliance at her school, the reactionary school board squelched the perceived threat to decency by banning all extracurricular activities. The national media lambasted the absurd ruling, and Peterson's club ultimately regained the right to meet at the school.

Out of the Past (Ardustry Home Entertainment) is ambitious, placing Peterson in the context of other deci-

sive figures in U.S. gay and lesbian history. Gwyneth Paltrow and Edward Norton narrate these profiles. First up is Michael Wigglesworth, a 17th century Puritan minister who tried to atone for his queer cravings by writing fire-and-brimstone morality texts. The next sequence depicts the long-term "Boston marriage" between Maine writer Sarah Orne Jewett and a female socialite.

Moving into the 20th century, the film highlights Henry Gerber, an activist who tried to launch a gay rights movement in Chicago in the 1920s. And there's Bayard Rustin, a gay black man who helped orchestrate the rise of Martin Luther King Jr. and organized the March on Washington in 1963. Though Rustin played a key role in the civil rights movement, King once sidelined him because of his sexuality.

Out of the Past is an intricate, engrossing and thought-provoking history lesson. It proves that the queer rights movement in the United States still has a long way to go and, more encouragingly, that the long distance we've traveled so far is a cause for celebration. **B**

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Marc Hall (Aaron Ashmore) and his lawyer (Scott Thompson) meet the press in *Prom Queen*.

sweetie to the dance.

This true story unfolded three years ago in Ontario. Now it's the basis for *Prom Queen*, a lively and entertaining movie that aired on Canadian television last year. Wolfe Video has released the DVD version just in time for prom season, complete with a documentary on Hall.

Prom Queen is like an after-school special that amuses and moralizes without ever challenging us to think very hard. It may not stick with you for long, but while it lasts it's so peppy and warm-hearted that you can't help but cheer for the blue-haired boy who adores Celine Dion.

Criminally cute actor Aaron Ashmore leads an excellent cast as Hall. He portrays the queer teen as a confident yet humble rebel, supported by working-class parents who stand by their son at the risk of being ostracized by their homophobic community.

Two *Kids in the Hall* veterans have meaty roles in *Prom Queen*. Scott Thompson, the only



Kelli Peterson earns extra credit in *Out of the Past*.

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