

Candid Camera

Gay director Darren Stein has been ready for his close-up since childhood

BY GARY MORRIS

Put the Camera on Me documents the "oeuvre" of Darren Stein, a now grown-up gay boy who, during the 1980s, made amateur short films in suburban California on surprisingly sophisticated topics from age 8 to 15.

Stein used neighbor kids (mostly boys) for mini-dramas about zombies, death camps, child abuse and Vietnam, but all are infused with the sensibility of a budding drag queen—especially "Gay as a Whistle!" The documentary samples all these works and interviews parents, siblings and actors, most of whom are straight but recall their early "careers" with affection.

Gary Morris: It's unusual for a kid in his preteens to assemble a "stock company" of neighbor boys and make movies, but more so for a gay kid to do it. Did you know you were gay on any level?

Darren Stein: I always knew I was different. And yeah— attracted to boys. I don't know if I'd call it "gay." I was definitely in denial about the whole label thing—as a kid, that was sort of admitting defeat. To be gay was to be an outsider. And who wants to be left out when you're a kid?




Darren Stein's early films touched on adult subjects such as jealousy, cruelty and sexuality.

GM: What particularly inspired your "diva boy" persona, both in front of the camera as actor and behind it?

DS: That's just the way I'm wired, I guess. I've always been pretty theatrical and outspoken. I was always a big fan of Tim Curry in *Rocky Horror*. My brother was playing with his *Star Wars* and *He-Man* action figures, and I was dancing around in my mother's control top panties, singing "Sweet Transvestite." I was a sweet and sensitive kid, but also a bit of a child tyrant.

I've definitely mellowed out with age.

GM: Did you feel at the time that you were pushing the envelope with efforts like the Nazi film or the child abuse film?

DS: I was just telling stories about the things that I had the need to express or work through... doing what I loved. It wasn't until I watched the films as an adult that I realized I had a pretty major body of work.... If only I could match that output now! 

DARREN STEIN will answer questions after the screening of *Put the Camera on Me* 7 p.m. Aug. 13 at

Clinton Street Theater. Stick around for his 1999 film *Jawbreaker*, which is fast becoming a cult classic.

phers, too. They have access to a talented pool of dancers who are willing to try anything. And since the project places no expectations on the choreographers, they have the freedom to be truly creative. That is a rare gift in these days of funding crunches, when choreographers are often pressured to complete full-length pieces and, above all, to fill seats.

Slipper isn't aware of any other program like

this in the country. Between a slew of gifted choreographers, vibrant organizations and receptive audiences, Portland is becoming known across the nation as a dance community, she says. So it seems fitting that the Rose City is home to what Slipper calls a "unique, extraordinary project."

The NW Professional Dance Project will have a public showing 8 p.m. Aug. 12 at Portland State University's Lincoln Hall, 1620 S.W. Park Ave. Tickets are \$15 at the door or \$12 in advance from 503-421-7434.

—Rebecca Ragain

Girls on Gay gets goin'

Where is a 30-something, full-time student, mother of two and active volunteer advocate for abused and neglected children going to meet a nice woman for dating and romance? Surely not at a bar, thought Rochelle Sprunk, co-creator and president of *Girls on Gay*, the 6-month-old promotional company behind *Speed Dating, Lesbian Style*.

"We wanted to give back to the community, and we wanted to be able to have some fun," says Sprunk.

Girls on Gay took off quickly. It has organized social events at several metro locales and plans to add more venues, some outside the city limits, and gay male-themed events, too.

"We try to switch the venue around because we know different women go to different types of places," she says.

Sprunk describes herself as the face of the company, while her business partner, Karen Hooper, is the pen. Sprunk controls much of the promotion, and Hooper handles technical and business matters such as the Web site and bookkeeping.

The group also plans to organize summer and winter getaways for gays and lesbians.

Despite the success of *Speed Dating*—the next one planned for 4 p.m. Aug. 7 at Vitis Enoteca—the group's first large-scale event flopped before it ever got off the ground.

Girls on Gay had planned *A Black & White Affair*, a fund-raising night of gourmet dinner and top-rate live entertainment at Crystal Ballroom, carrying a weighty ticket price of \$55. According to Sprunk, the price was justified by the quality dinner and high cost of throwing the party. She had hoped to raise money for Basic Rights Oregon, in line with the company's philanthropic philosophy. When ticket sales had not crested the double digits, *Girls on Gay* cut its losses and backed out.

"We just decided maybe we tried to do the grand finale a little soon," says Sprunk, who expressed disappointment about not having the opportunity to wear a tuxedo at the event.

The group continues to judge its success by how much fun its *Speed Dating* participants have, though it plans to revive *A Black & White Affair*.

"If we can get together as a community and be proud and meet our neighbors, that's awesome," she says. "If everybody really enjoys themselves and makes some connections, that's a success."

To register for *Speed Dating, Lesbian Style*, visit www.girlsongay.com.

—JRC

Field day

The 20th annual *Lesbian Community Project Softball Tournament* will be held from Aug. 5 to 7 at Prairie Fields, 13599 N.E. Prairie Road in Brush Prairie, Wash.

"It's women together playing softball at Brush Prairie Fields for 20 years," says tournament organizer Nancy Zimmer about the significance of the event.

The continued popularity of this event has been so great that the 2005 tournament was opened up to 36 teams. Softballers from Oregon and Washington will compete in four different divisions ranging from recreational to A level. The first two days will consist of a round robin format, with the finals to be held Aug. 7.


Although registration for this year's event is already full, spectators can expect to have a ball (pun intended).

"I've attended a lot of the tournaments," says Debbie Caselton, LCP co-chairwoman. "They're very spirited; everyone gets along."

Through the years, as many as 500 people have shown up to cheer on and support the teams in the summer sun. In addition to watching the games, spectators can enjoy other activities such as live music, raffles and lots of prizes—and, as those of you who have been in the past know, the after-dark Slip-n-Slide is a crowd favorite.

The Oregon Breast and Cervical Cancer Program, one of the event's title sponsors, will also be on site reaching out to inform the lesbian community about this important issue.

For more information call 503-227-0605.

—CP 

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Multnomah County Health Department 



Andy Stout adjusts the filament on his chair in preparation for the third annual St. Johns Window Project.