

Ecki and his dad's estrangement, one of the leather queens deprived of seeing his son by his hateful ex-wife, Ecki's attempts to find romance, to name a few. But there's no confusion—or depth—in the storyline of this relentlessly propelled, clichéd-drenched narrative. The gay characters are stereotypes of the "we're people underneath so love us!" variety, the



The saccharine sports drama *Guys and Balls* is filled with empty calories.

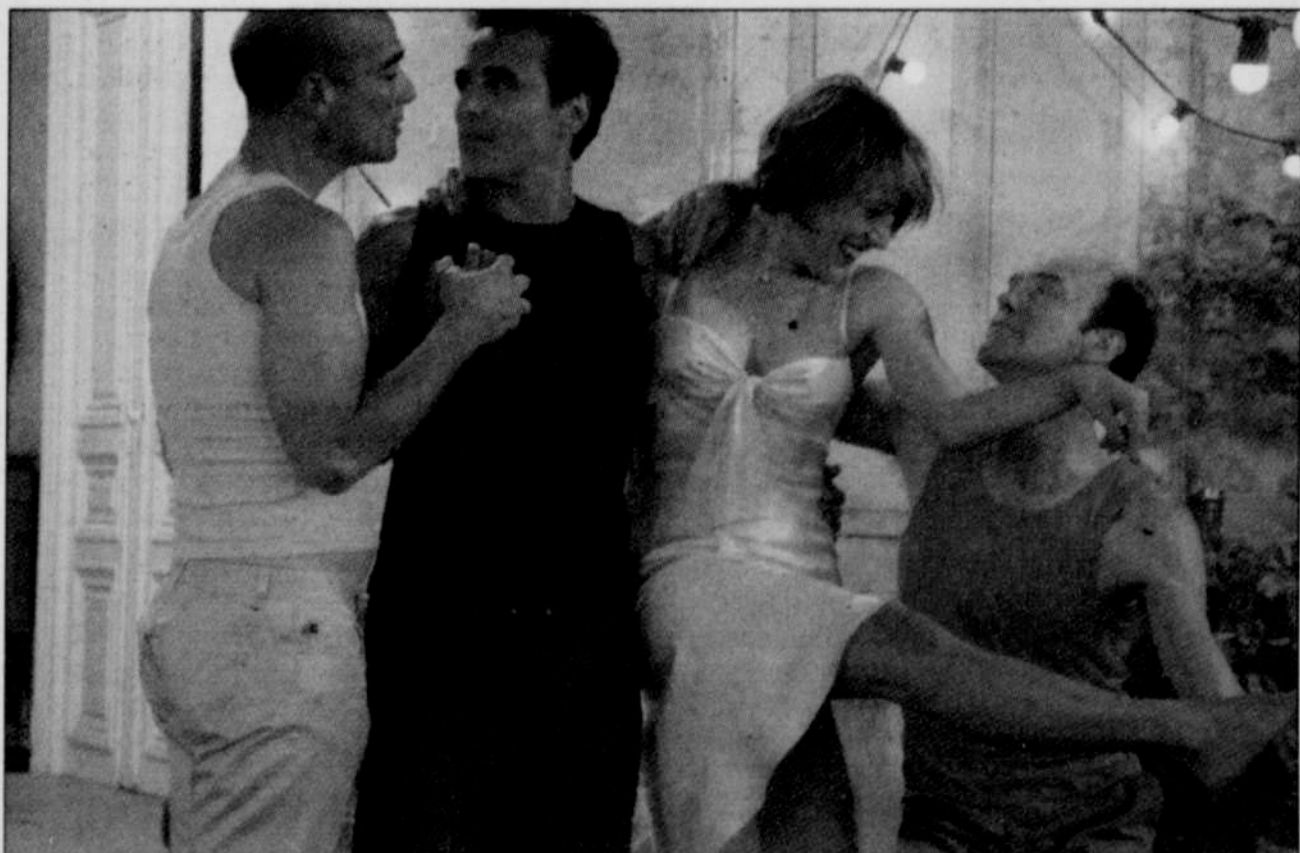
homophobes are cartoons, and the situations are predictable. Still, the action is fast, and the manipulations here work well enough to hold viewers' interest as the story hurtles to its inevitable conclusion. Just expect to feel at least a little guilty afterward for enjoying it.

Considerably more engaging—and with a very different take on the closet—is *Côte d'Azur*, a charming confection that expertly blends the holiday revelation drama and the sex farce, with a few musical numbers thrown in for good measure. Directors Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau are known for two previous festival favorites, *Jeanne and the Perfect Guy* and *The Adventures of Felix*. This lively film is a worthy successor to those, following uptight Marc (Gilbert Meliki) and his liberal wife, Béatrix (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi), with their two kids to a seaside villa where Marc spent his childhood. As in all such stories, this one has a "house of secrets" theme, with Béatrix cheating with her lover, and Marc having a Big Secret of his own. Both obsess over the sexuality of their teen-age son, Charly (Romain Torres), a long-haired ragamuffin who invites his definitely gay best friend, Martin, to visit them. The film takes its motifs to hilarious heights—Mom's lover popping up from a bush, the endless problem of the cold shower and what goes on in there and, best of all, Mom's certainty that Charly is gay as she tries to tease him out of the closet she thinks he's in. She speculates on how he'll tell them ("Maybe he plans a more theatrical coming out?"), oblivious of what's really happening with him. Clever dialogue and a couple of musical numbers keep the tone light, but the film's subtle argument for sexual and personal freedom rings true. It doesn't hurt that the actors, male and

female, are both endearing and sexy.

Some of the films this year are post-closet. One of the best is Craig Chester's *Adam & Steve*. Chester is one of the pioneering actors of the New Queer Cinema, with parts in such '90s breakthrough films as *Grief* and *Swoon*. It's not often that actors successfully transition to directing, but Chester shows real talent in this funny and touching story of the misadventures of a contemporary urban gay man. The film opens in the 1980s with Adam Bernstein (Chester) and best pal Rhonda (indie perennial Parker Posey) in full Goth drag, as Adam picks up hunky disco dancer Steve. Steve introduces Adam to coke during lovemaking, at which point something exceptionally gross occurs that ruins their relationship and traumatizes Adam. Fast-forward to today, and Adam is a neurotic wreck while Steve has become a shrink. A casual meeting at which neither of them recognizes the other triggers their renewed romance, which seems perfect at first glance. Chester's script hits bull-eyes on a number of targets, from the recovery movement ("I'm a bipolar crackhead!") to crazy Christians in the form of Steve's parents (Adam says woefully, "I feel I have a sign around my neck that says, 'I eat your son's ass!'") to the queer bourgeoisie ("My friends Jeff and Jeff are bringing their foster child.") Comic window dressing comes from *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Chris Kattan as Steve's straight roommate, and Posey excels as the extra-neurotic thin girl who tells fat jokes about herself. But this is mostly Chester's show. His mood shifts and facial tics and body language as he reacts to his life crumbling around him are a marvel to see.

Continued on Page 27



A "house of secrets" is revealed in *Côte d'Azur*.

Valley of the GLBT Dolls

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who wants a
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The Transsexual
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