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film

The Glory (Hole) Days

Survivors fondly revisit *Gay Sex in the 70s*

Gay Sex in the 70s

Fundamentalist types love to compare queer culture to the last days of decadent Rome, an opinion that's easy to dismiss given how little fundamentalists actually know about history, homosexuality or anything outside their crazy cult. But, surprisingly, some of the gay men who participated in the nonstop orgy between Stonewall (1969) and AIDS (1981) make the same comparison in Joseph Lovett's short (71 minutes) but intriguing documentary *Gay Sex in the 70s*.

Many of those who played hardest in—and presumably would have known the most about—that scene are dead. And not only from AIDS. This scene was so wild (OK, *decadent*) that a few mad queens engaging in gymnastic blow jobs on the upper floors of abandoned buildings plunged to their doom in the Hudson River. (No report if this was before, during or after orgasm.) Of course, most were in fact hit by HIV, but a few survived, and some of those few are interviewed here.

Gay Sex in the 70s features a wealth of revealing photographs of queer sex hounds busy at their work in the many impromptu venues New York City thoughtfully provided: empty trucks, "the piers," sex bars, sex theaters...any alley or alcove, really. And the dark cover of night wasn't necessary, either. One of the queens here wistfully recalls the times he had sex in broad daylight on construction sites, with the straight workers eating their lunch nearby and either laughing at the activities or joining in. Ah, the glory days!

The documentary interweaves amusing period porn vignettes and scenes of screaming gay protesters with big hair, long sideburns and elephant bells into this loose history of a time almost unimaginable today. But most compelling are the comments of the queens whose devotion to the orgy dominated their lives. They revisit those days as only New Yorkers can—mock shock and excitement at how blatant and over-the-top it all was, sadness at the massive casualties that followed, regret that a killer disease put a bitter end to what looked like the long-awaited gay sexual revolution finally happening.

Plays 10:30 p.m. Jan. 6 and 7 and Jan. 13 and 14 at Cinema 21.

—Gary Morris

Pick Up the Mic

"Queer rap," aka "Homohop," sounds as oxymoronic as "jumbo shrimp" or "presidential

integrity." But, shocking to say, hip-hop is no longer the exclusive property of homophobes and misogynists, or so says the new documentary *Pick Up the Mic*.

Queers and rap have a tortured history at best. Along with women ("bitches and hos"), queers ("faggots") have been the target of some of the most venomous verbal assaults in any medium, up to and including murder. Of course, just because rappers own the airwaves doesn't mean queers need to take this lying down. And they haven't. Mostly in major urban centers like San Francisco and New York City, but also in less hospitable venues like Minneapolis and Houston, queer rappers are taking on the homophobes with their own version of this music.

The results, as seen in *Pick Up the Mic*, might ultimately be more impressive as activism and community building than as music. The documentary showcases the leaders of the genre—queer boys, dykes and trans people—with catchy, sometimes campy names like Katastrophe (a San Francisco FTM), Dutchboy (a bi guy), the Deep Dickcollective (black queens from Oakland, Calif.) and God-Des, a Wisconsin dyke who might be the most talented of this bunch. She's certainly the most doggedly ambitious, risking poverty in Brooklyn and a breakup with her girlfriend to achieve her dream. More typical is Johnny Dangerous, a hunky hottie who spends most of his onstage time bumping and grinding.

The question of talent in this group is key. Director Alex Hinton gives us plenty of time, and reason, to get to know these people. We see them performing (too often to small audiences), relaying their personal histories and struggling to find a voice and, more elusive, a career. Most of them are smart, engaging and highly articulate in telling their stories. But anyone looking for superior examples of hip-hop per se may be disappointed. They're recycling the same kind of rhyming and rapping we've heard for the past 25 years, just adding queer motifs. As a portrait of a subculture struggling to reappropriate an identity stolen from them, *Pick Up the Mic* is compelling viewing. Just don't expect the "rainbow flava" sounds to scintillate.

Plays 7 p.m. Jan. 6 at Guild Theatre to kick off the Northwest Film Center's 23rd Reel Music Festival.

—GM

The Producers

Broadway history is chock full of musicals based on feature films, but few are the films made from a Broadway musical that was made from a film. Fewer still is a project that stars the characters who made the Broadway show a hit. Welcome to *The Producers*, in which flop Broadway producer Max Bialystock (Nathan Lane) uses his romantic wiles to get money out of old ladies to back his shows. He meets accountant Nathan Bloom (Matthew Broderick), whose fondest dream is to stage a musical. The pair scheme to open the worst Broadway show ever, as a way to



Gay Sex in the 70s documents the sexual revolution between Stonewall and AIDS.

bilk investors when the show flops.

Trolling through scripts, they find their winner in *Springtime for Hitler*, a revisionist romp written by Franz Liebkin (Will Ferrell), whose desire to clear the name of Der Führer is only surpassed by his love of pigeons. Bialystock and Bloom also take on Swedish hottie Ulla (Uma Thurman) as secretary, love interest and lead singer/dancer in the show. And they book übergay director Roger de Bris (Gary Beach) to direct *Springtime*, knowing he won't disappoint their low expectations by turning it into an utter campfest.



The producers of *The Producers* wisely opted to "Keep It Gay."

Originally filmed in 1968, *The Producers* was written and directed by Mel Brooks then, and he scripted the Broadway show and this new feature. The show's Broadway director, Susan Stroman, helms this movie as well. The effect is interesting; rarely has a musical hewed so closely to its roots, from stars to songs to staging. The effect can be disorienting at times, as you can almost see Lane and Broderick pausing for audience laughter or applause, and pratfalls that work well on stage look sub-sitcom on the big screen.

Lane tries mightily to play it straight but, like Harvey Fierstein, can't quite pull it off. Broderick is less showy, but the comfort level both have in their characters is evident. Ferrell steals every scene he's in, while Thurman is acceptable, but her scenes drag on and on. And speaking of drag, there's de Bris, who spends his time in drag at a home replete with prissy lover Carmen Ghia (Roger Bart, aka the murderous pharmacist from *Desperate Housewives*) and a Village People-like entourage. His few scenes are absolute standouts, and his take on Hitler is priceless.

Gay audiences will find much to like in *The Producers*, although it might not weather multiple viewings, as there is no such thing as subtlety.

—Andy Mangels 10



JenRo, one of the featured performers in *Pick Up the Mic*, will perform during *Swine*, a new nonsmoking weekly dance party with DJ Puppet, 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. Jan. 7 at Porky's Pub, 835 N. Lombard St. Cover is \$5.