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stake and what these women are losing on a daily basis. That they are as brave as they are in trying to build a community based on who they are—the film shows a secret lesbian wedding sequence complete with crying, simpatico relatives—is near miraculous. *Keep Not Silent* deserved the Israeli Oscar it won for Best Documentary.

On a happier note we come to *The Lady in Question* Is Charles Busch. Busch is a well-known New York writer and actor whose gender-bending camp, based on old Hollywood divas, lit up Broadway, off-off-Broadway and movies. This documentary (premiering 9 p.m. June 19) is a valentine to the star of *Die, Mommie, Die!* and *Psycho Beach Party*, an amusing and upbeat mix of facts, interviews, rare footage from his stage work, fake movie trailers and even a vignette of a nonexistent silent film in which he's an overwrought "lady" in distress. We learn about

Busch's eccentric upbringing as a suburban New York kid blessed with movie-obsessed parents and his own Auntie Mame; his practically forensic study of camp movie goddesses like Joan Crawford and Bette Davis; and his early struggles to create a ragtag theater company of drag queens, muscle boys and fag hags, enacting hothouse melodramas like *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*, *Pardon My Inquisition* and *Theodore, She-Bitch of Byzantium*.

Watching the generous footage of these works sampled in *The Lady in Question*, it's easy to see where Busch's ideas came from, but the road wasn't easy. He had a near-death experience with a ruptured aorta, and the company lost members to AIDS. (Busch describes how one of his actresses insisted on finishing the show despite being gravely ill and was taken by ambulance from the theater to the hospital. Footage of her performing that night is particularly poignant.)

But the successes trumped the tragedies as Busch won acclaim for his often hilarious, nuanced incarnations of the strong, stylish, long-suffering woman who veers from the straight and narrow but eventually redeems herself. Most recently he's starred in his play *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, in its second year of a successful Broadway run. As his other vocation as a writer suggests, the Busch seen here is highly articulate, and quite endearing, in discussing his life and work, supported by a loving network of friends, family, lovers and fans that includes Rosie O'Donnell, Boy George, Kathleen Turner, Jason Priestley and other queer and queer-friendly icons. 10

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Pink Fink

One of the more distressing episodes in queer history occurred in 1960, when three professors at Smith College—close friends and gay—were harassed, humiliated, tried, fired and more or less destroyed when their sexual orientation was revealed. The case is laid out in *The Great Pink Scare*, an excellent (though disappointingly short at less than 60 minutes) documentary that links the event to the anti-communist witch



A witch hunt targets three gay college professors in *The Great Pink Scare*.

hunts of the McCarthy era. Fortunately, two of the trio were alive at the time of filming, and much of the story is told through their vivid, still bitter reminiscences, along with those of other professors and students who were there at the time.

Newton Arvin, 60, had just won the National Book Award: Joel Dorius, 41, was a loved and respected English professor. Ned Spofford, 29, was a well-regarded classics teacher. Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, none showed the slightest romantic interest in his students, preferring deep friendships with each other and trysts with men outside Smith.

As the film shows, they shared intellectual qualities but were different in other ways. Dorius delighted in engaging with his students; Arvin was brilliant but emotionally remote—and, as it turned out, a tortured closet case. Spofford was a well-adjusted gay

man until his arrest and exposure.

The lethal combination of a snoopy post office, an aggressively homophobic police captain and the professors' naive assumption that living quietly, under the radar, would save them conspired to ruin these men. When the police learned that Arvin was getting "obscene material"—actually, tame physique magazines like *Tomorrow's Man*—in the mail, he was arrested and, apparently without

hesitation, ratted out his friends. Dorius and Spofford were rounded up and sent to trial.

Despite wide support by an appalled faculty, Dorius and Spofford were fired, and Arvin, who seemed to view his arrest as deserved punishment for being queer, was allowed to retire at half-salary. Arvin (who had a long affair with Truman Capote) died in 1963, followed by Dorius in February 2006.

The Great Pink Scare (premiering 11 p.m. June 6 on OPB) clearly sketches the multiple dark forces at work in this perilous time for gay people. But it's most impressive as a character portrait of two incredible men who devoted their lives to teaching others and hoped only for a secure private life in return. Arvin's brutal betrayal, as recounted here, remains a shocking event and an object lesson in the many ways the closet has victimized those who live in it.

—GM 10

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