

film

Queens of Heart

Documentary takes a psychological look at drag

by Pat Young

Queens of Heart: Community Therapists in Drag, a documentary about Portland icon Darcelle, is nearing completion.

Directors Jan Haaken and Wendy Kohn are holding a special screening to raise money that will go toward final editing and marketing of the film, which takes a psychological look at drag.

"I often describe the project as going beyond the view that drag queens are funny, entertaining and that drag clubs are a form of tourist entertainment," says Haaken, a psychology professor at Portland State University. "The film draws out the serious, complex aspect of what they do that is not generally appreciated. And what they do requires a deep understanding of human psychology. This has been neglected in popular treatment of drag performers."

"The performers really do work with the anxieties, conflict and desires that people bring into the club. And that interested me early on in the project."

Haaken notes that the film—in a partly serious and partly campy way—plays with the idea that the performers are psychologists intervening and helping people with their anxieties and fears around sexuality and gender. But rather than keeping the camera focused on the performers, the film turns the camera onto the audience and examines what people find so "disturbing, exciting, pleasurable and funny about the performers."

At the heart of the movie is Darcelle along with

her relationship with Roxy. The movie covers where Darcelle grew up and how she met and courted Roxy. In one touching scene, they reminisce about their first date, correcting each other's memory of the event.

"Their love and the history of their relationship is inspiring," says Haaken.

Kohn adds: "Darcelle and Roxy are jewels [who] quietly go on with their community work, week after week, giving benefit performances, making guest appearances all over the community, opening up their home and their club and giving their all to make a difference in the world—and they do it with humor and style."

They were also generous and patient during the making of the documentary week after week, notes Kohn, with lighting being a significant problem. Because the audience was an important part of the documentary, the film crew needed to find a way to get enough light on the crowd without causing a distraction from the drag show. Kohn explains they found a low-tech solution by putting inexpensive battery-operated tap lights on the tables. Unfortunately, some of the patrons thought they were souvenirs, and "after the first performance where we tested the concept, half our lights disappeared," she says.

"We ended up having to super-glue a piece of strong ribbon to the bottom of the tap light and then safety-pin the ribbon to the tablecloth," adds

Kohn. "Another problem was that during the performance, audience members would turn the tap lights on and off repeatedly, in time to the music or just from the pent-up excitement, which kind of defeated the point of having the light on to film their facial expressions."

Kohn says Darcelle came to the rescue by joking with the audience to leave the lights on.

That was just one of the many challenges of filming in a nightclub. Others included filming in tight quarters without getting in the way of the performers or audience.

"It was a challenge to stay out of the way but to seize the moment," recalls Haaken. "The club is a very claustrophobic, intense place where things happen very fast in close spaces and the performers have their work to do. You have to not get in the way and trip over them, but you have to grab the moment. Over time they got used to us being there." **10**

A special 25-minute version of QUEENS OF HEART: COMMUNITY THERAPISTS IN DRAG screens 4 p.m. Dec. 10 at Cinema 21, 616 N.W. 21st Ave., followed by a reception hosted by Pink Martini's Thomas Lauderdale at Bluehour, 250 N.W. 13th



Queens of Heart: Community Therapists in Drag plays with the idea that Darcelle helps people with their anxieties and fears around sexuality and gender.

Ave. Tickets are \$10-\$25 from Ticketmaster. For more information visit www.queensofheartdoc.com.

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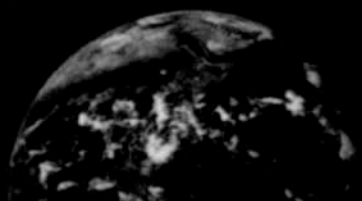
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