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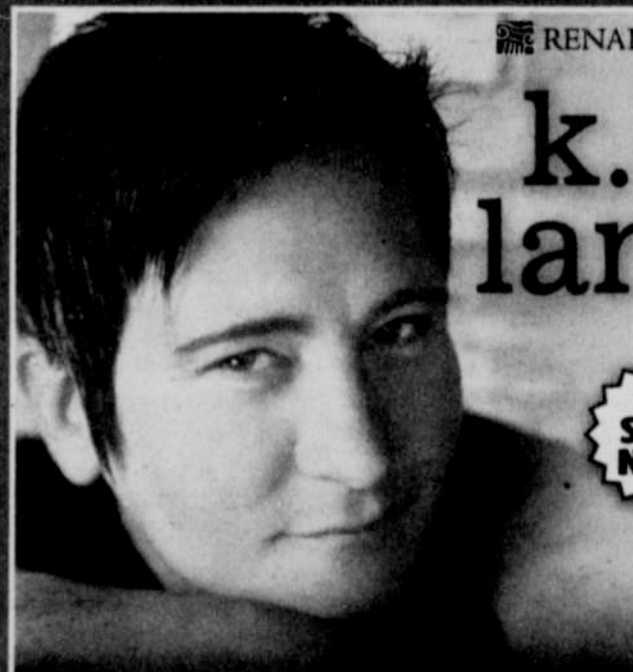
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film

Coming of Age

Portland makes history with the country's first queer documentary film festival

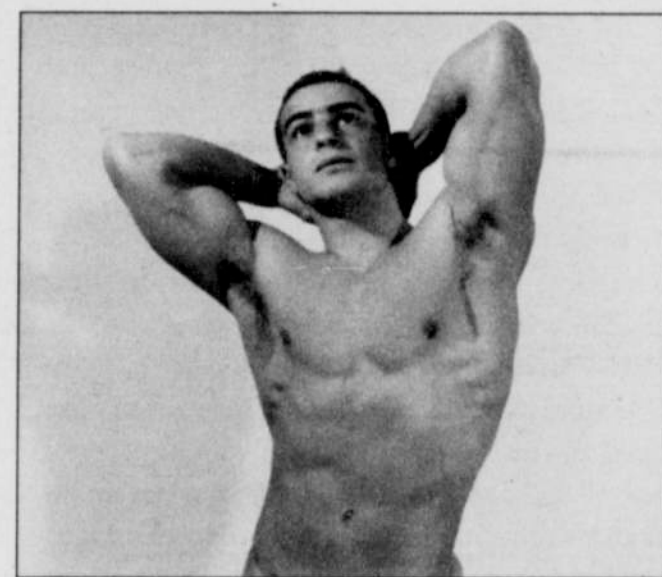
by Gary Morris

Queer documentaries have had a special place in our history at least since 1978's *Word Is Out*, a pioneering showcase for the kind of articulate, appealing lesbians, gay men and transies whose struggles (and existence, for that matter) the mainstream had spent decades denying. The genre has come a long way since then. Much of the focus today remains on the fight for rights as we set the bar ever higher, merrily pushing that famous "agenda" (read: equality) that so unhinges the haters. But increasingly there's cause for celebration, too, and the docs are reflecting that. Even sad stories have their balancing smiles as we air out those musty closets and pay tribute to our queer brethren and heroes, both famous and little-known, present and past.

Programmers Russ Gage and David Weissman have scored a coup in this area with QDOC: Portland Queer Documentary Film Festival, the first in the country. Spread over a single weekend, the fest comprises nine varied works along with a host of guests, panels and parties. Together these films create an inspiring group portrait of a complex queer community coming of age.

Opening night entry *Red Without Blue* paints an unforgettable picture of Mark and Alex (aka Clair), beautiful identical twins dealing with the after-effects of a joint childhood shattered by drugs, suicide attempts, rape and virtual exile in their small Montana town. Shot in a lyrical, impressionistic style that befits its subject, the film blends family photos, old home movies and in-depth interviews—most movingly with the twins themselves—to capture the life and times of this complex, charismatic pair. Now in their 20s, both are trying to carve out separate identities and other relationships, while remaining deeply connected. One of the most fascinating aspects of this dark but ultimately hopeful film is the evolution of the parents; particularly poignant is their emotional father's interplay with Clair, whose transition he not only supports but pays for. (7:30 p.m. June 1. Mark and Clair will attend the screening, along with two of the directors.)

Another pair of heroes, albeit more famous ones, are the stars of *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon*, a lively, loving tribute to the fearless duo, now in their 80s, who practical-



Eye on the Guy contains lots of fetching flesh.

ly invented the lesbian rights movement in the 1950s with their organization the Daughters of Bilitis. That was only the first of a dizzying list of groups they founded to hammer the homophobes and sexists. The documentary includes rare photos and home movies of early, secret dyke meetings, but what's most fun is the couple's droll sense of humor. On their relationship: "We were determined to last at least one year, even if it killed us! We couldn't figure out how to divide the cat." *No Secret Anymore* is a sheer delight—a casual history of the lesbian lib movement and a ripping bio of two of queerdom's goddesses. (2 p.m. June 2. Director Joan E. Biren will appear at the screening.)

"Every city has a hot spot for the DL scene," says one of the men in the intriguing *On the Downlow*. The "hot spot" in this film is Cleveland, where four gorgeous young African-American men reveal the many ways they interact with queerness, bisexuality and "straight" men. The director creates an atmosphere of intimacy and trust with these men, who turn a bright light on how they've customized their sexual identities without bowing to the usual social pressures. Like *Red Without Blue*, the film shows how far we've come from the closet in the men's dealings with family and friends. (4:30 p.m. June 2. Director Abigail Child will attend.)

In *Boy I Am*, three female-to-male transies from New York struggle with who they are and what it means, in the widest sense, to transition. The film tracks Nico, Norrie and Keegan through each step of the process. Along the way, it addresses some expected questions, such as the possibility of future regret,

but also examines some of the trio's less often heard fears, such as how much of their wish to change is based on "female self-hate" or their desire for male privilege. Activists, theorists, dykes and other transies thoughtfully weigh in, but ultimately it's the magnetic personalities of Nico, Norrie and Keegan that make *Boy I Am* a success. (6:30 p.m. June 2. Co-director Sam Feder will attend.)

Equally successful, but very different indeed, is *Jack Smith and the Destruction of Atlantis*. Smith (1932-1989) was an extraordinarily influential figure in the New York art and film scene starting in the late 1950s. A gay anarchist/artist who



A dying police detective fights for her partner's financial future in *Freeheld*.