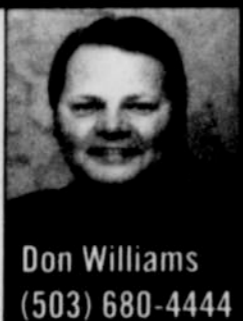


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film

American Scary

"Our show was so cheap that I would buy inflatable dolls at the porno shop, and it was like an extra actor," says Karen "Stella" Scioli in this unexpectedly touching homage to the bygone era of the late-night horror movie host. The documentary, composed entirely of interviews with former and current horror hosts interlaced with vintage clips, traces the phenomenon from its inception in the '50s with Zacherley and Vampira, through the '80s heyday of Stella, Joe Bob Briggs and Elvira, to its scrappy resurgence and survival in the age of cable access and the Internet. "Nobody stopped us, so we were the kids in the candy store," says Bob Billbrough, aka Hives the Butler. "We got away with murder." Opens July 7 at Hollywood Theatre. **A-**

—Tony Le Tigre

Best of the Northwest

The Northwest Film Center screens highlights from the 33rd Northwest Film & Video Festival 7:30 p.m. July 12 and 9:15 p.m. July 14. One of the highlights is "Scaredycat," a 13-minute documentary by gay Portland director Andrew Blubaugh ("Hello, Thanks"). One night in September 2004, a gang of five men attacked Blubaugh as he crossed the Steel Bridge. Although impaired by fear, some racial prejudice and a lifelong bout with obsessive-compulsive disorder, he contacted his assailants in jail to try to make sense of the situation. Even with the expert input of a Portland lawyer and a Portland State University psychology professor, some of the findings are a little simplistic. Still, the skillful combination of interviews, dramatic re-enactments and animated sequences makes for compelling viewing. **B+**

—Stephen Blair

Boy Culture

This woefully pedestrian film vacillates between heartwarming and funny to stereotypical, annoying and downright stupid with frightening speed. "X" is a hustler living in Seattle with a skanky twink and a newly out man entering his own phase of sluthood. *Boy Culture* quickly goes to the most predictable place possible: exploring the limitations of X's lifestyle and his desire to move into a more emotionally fulfilling relationship with his roommate. X's existential crisis is brought to a head by a new john, whom he calls "the Geezer," an elderly gentleman who only wants to talk.

The film has moments of tenderness and humor, but these are promptly washed away by the banality of the script and the limitations of the cast. Observational humor about gay life has its laugh-out-loud moments. However, the characters, as interesting as they might be, are unlikely to be anyone you actually know—unless you know high-priced hustlers on Ducatis with enough cash to keep a house boy in tow. The only significant female character, a poor caricature of a lesbian, does little but exclaim in profanity.

X's roommate melodrama begins to wear thin after the first

half-hour. Geezer's tale of his lifelong lover, teased out over the entirety of the film, is far more titillating and debauched than the uninspired, *Real World*-style retread of the old "I'm in love with my roommate" tale. Still, even X's interactions with the Geezer seem tacked-on and prefabricated. The film has trouble making any move without telegraphing it an hour in advance.

Opening July 13 at Cinema 21, *Boy Culture* celebrates the most childish aspects of the contemporary gay male. While the three roommates form a family, the depth of their relationship is short-circuited by dialogue culled from prime time soap operas. The standard-issue melodramatic conclusion with all the factory settings attempts at redemption and personal growth, but it's all too little, too late. The film is not without its merits, but if you need something to put on in the background while making out, stick with your *Queer as Folk* DVDs. **C-**

—Nick Pell

Evening

Based on the novel by Susan Minot, adapted by Michael Cunningham (*The Hours*) and directed by Lajos Koltai (*Being Julia*), this timeless romantic drama is an extraordinary family affair about memories, secrets, love and life with a stellar cast of multigenerational actresses (Vanessa Redgrave and daughter Natasha Richardson, Meryl Streep and daughter Mamie Gummer). Deeply moving, great dialogue, beautiful cinematography. **A+**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer

Although I'm one of those who was mildly entertained by the first *Fantastic Four* film, this second outing is a definite improvement. Although it features more of the same—including hot Chris Evans shirtless again as Human Torch and vapid Jessica Alba in horrid makeup and bad contacts/wig as Invisible Girl—it's really the Silver Surfer who steals the show. With pumped-up special effects,

more humor and more of a feel of returning to its comic book roots, *F4: Rise* is an enjoyable diversion for an evening. **B**

—Andy Mangels

Introducing the Dwights

Anyone who grew up in a small family that struggled to stay alive and thrive in a tough world will find this beautiful and human film very affecting. Brenda Blethyn, in a vulnerable and victorious performance, portrays a single mom with a diva complex who works days as a cook and piano teacher while moonlighting as a bawdy comedian on the lowered-expectations circuit. Her overweening love has a crippling effect (literally, in one case) on the independence of her two sons. *Dwights* boldly spotlights and humanizes people who many urban snobs would dismiss, and its occasional trailer-park moments are more than made up for by its honest and awkward tenderness. **A-**

—TL

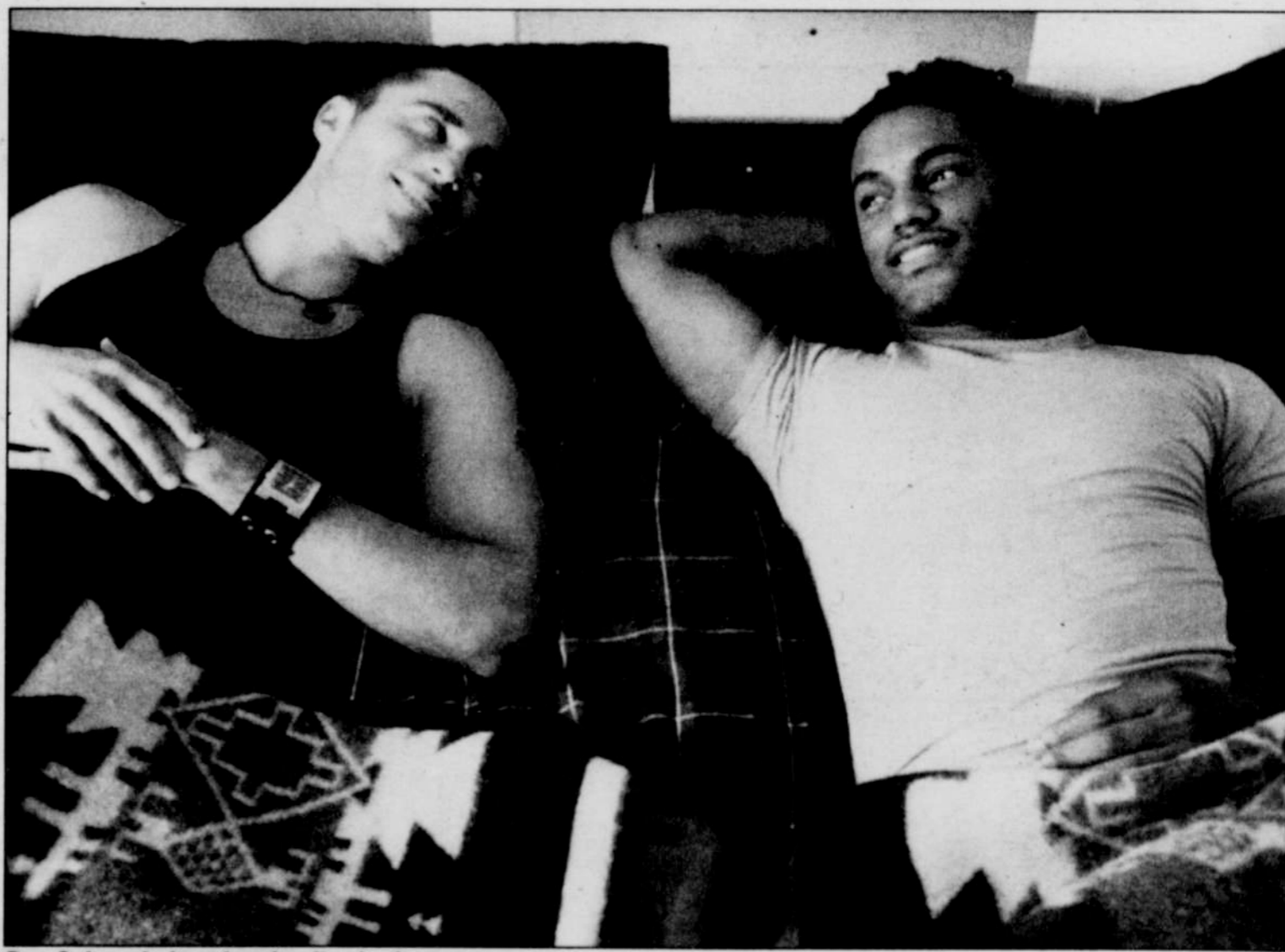
Live Free or Die Hard

John McClane (Bruce Willis) is still alive and kicking! The fourth installment of the *Die Hard* series is as breathtaking as the first one in 1988. Len Wiseman (*Underworld*) directs this action-packed thriller about an Internet-based terrorist organization that's trying to shut down all systems in the United States, and McClane is again in the wrong place at the wrong time. The movie keeps you on the edge of your seats, and the humor is just right. **A**

—YPB

A Mighty Heart

You never know what to expect from Michael Winterbottom, the British director who tackles everything from Thomas Hardy adaptations (*Jude*) to graphic sex films (*9 Songs*). His latest is a gritty—although awkwardly sentimental at times—docudrama about the kidnapping and beheading of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in Pakistan in early 2002. Thankfully, Winterbottom



Boy Culture is banal and uninspired.