



From top, Karen Black (*Five Easy Pieces*) narrates *Brand Upon the Brain!*—an acclaimed silent film with orchestral accompaniment—7 p.m. Oct. 13 at Cinema 21; "BugCrush" is part of a shorts program 9 p.m. Oct. 17 at Cinema 21; H.P. Lovecraft's novella "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" inspired *Cthulu* 10:30 p.m. Oct. 13 at Living Room Theaters; and Jamie Babbit (*But I'm a Cheerleader*) directs *Itty Bitty Titty Committee* 7 p.m. Oct. 18 at Cinema 21.

## Portland Lesbian & Gay Film Festival provides a subculture snapshot

by Gary Morris

**R**ecently it's been a question in the gay community why—nearly four decades after Stonewall—we even need our own film festivals. After all, isn't this the era of two cable networks (Logo and Here) devoted exclusively to queer programming? And all those HGTV-type shows that happily showcase gay and lesbian couples trying to "flip that Castro Victorian" or "remodel that dowdy dungeon"?

Mainstream film, too, remains quite preoccupied with all things homo, whether blatantly in films like *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* or more subtly in casting lesbians like Jodie Foster in a film like *The Brave One*, which in earlier times would have been the province of the bloodthirsty, revenge-seeking hetero male hero. Let's face it: We're damn near everywhere, representationally speaking, which is as it should be.

That said, it's still important and, in fact, fun to measure our progress via the kind of subculture snapshots provided by queer film festivals, a sort of cinematic summary of what we're doing and thinking right now—not just locally but globally. In this regard, an event like the Portland Lesbian & Gay Film Festival is both entertaining and educational. It doesn't hurt that on the big screen a good film is better and a great film can be a powerful experience, without all those cell phone and bathroom breaks to kill a carefully crafted mood.

PLGFF isn't a superficial glance at queer culture found in a single film, nor is it the overwhelming behemoth that is the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, with more than 230 films and countless related events. Like Baby Bear's porridge in the "Goldilocks" fairy tale, with 19 features and three shorts shows spread over nine days, PLGFF is "just right." This article looks at some of the high-, medium- and lowlights, although the former unquestionably outweigh the latter in the nine features I sampled.

**G**ay people have long had a reputation for taking risks, and understandably so given the suffocating confines of the closet and the pleasures of stepping out to catch our breath. It's certainly risky to make a film musical at a time when—*Chicago*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and a few other recent entries notwithstanding—the form is considered dead.



*Colma: The Musical*

*Colma: The Musical* (6 p.m. Oct. 13 at Hollywood Theatre) in fact riffs delightfully on the concept of "dead" with this bittersweet tribute to the infamous San Francisco suburb that has the nation's most curious population figures: about 2,000 living souls and another 1.5 million or so stiff. Written and scored by H.P. Mendoza, who also plays one of the three leads, Rodel, this engaging mix of post-teen angst, roller-coaster romances and catchy songs opens with a witty musical portrait of this "town that's really dead."

The film sympathetically tracks the antisocial antics, artistic aspirations, and relationship and family calamities of gay Rodel, straight Billy (Jake Moreno) and fag hag Maribel (L.A. Renigen). All three are in transition but don't seem to know where they're going or why, and all that angst comes out in some tuneful, emo-boy songs, most of which seem to center on how to escape the fate that awaits in a town consisting mostly of burial plots. Along the way we get some raw jokes ("How do you tell if your roommate's gay? His dick tastes like shit.") and surprisingly tender scenes as the trio connect, disconnect and generally portray with panache the difficulties of being grown up chronologically but unprepared for the rigors of the real world.

A similar sense of angst drives the main character of the excellent *Shelter* (8 p.m. Oct. 20 at Cinema 21). This serious story with flashes of humor follows working-class Zach

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