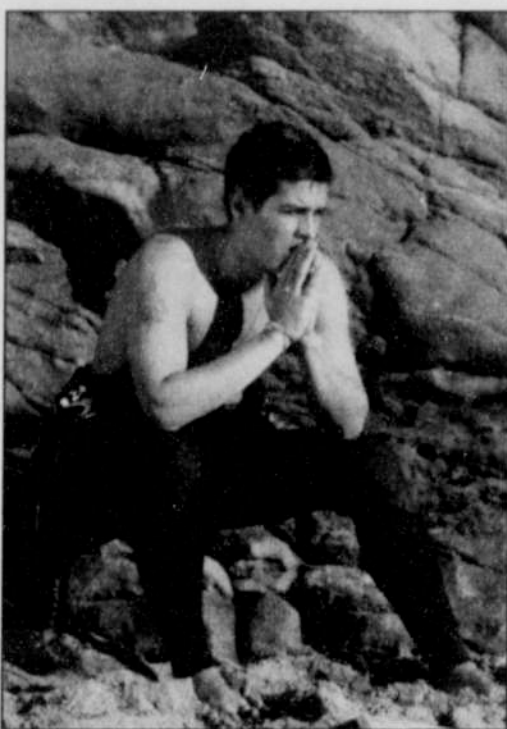


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(Trevor Wright). A cute, depressed, gifted artist a year out of high school working as a short-order cook, Zach is weighed down almost to immobility by family baggage, forced to forgo an art career to play

**Shelter**

surrogate father for his dysfunctional family as well as for his slacker sister Jeanne's (Tina Holmes) fatherless kid, Cody. The only time he feels free is when he's exercising his artistry by tagging walls throughout his port town of San Pedro, south of Los Angeles. That is, until Shawn (Brad Rowe)—the gay older brother of Zach's best friend, Gabe—reappears after a long absence. Shawn is hunky and, best of all for Zach, who's just broken

up with his girlfriend and is struggling with his sexual identity, an out gay man. They reconnect, to the horror of Jeanne and the mocking surprise of the surf crowd they all run with.

Writer/director Jonah Markovitch's background is mostly as an art director, so *Shelter* looks quite polished, with beautifully shot scenes of the blighted industrial landscape of San Pedro and the gorgeous ocean waves just beyond it. But the film is well-directed, too, full of dramatic tension (will the boys' romance work?) and fine performances by the principals, especially Wright. There's also an effective class angle (Shawn is rich) that's not overplayed. Eagle-eyed viewers might recall Holmes as the fucked-over fag hag in the gay coming-of-age drama *Edge of Seventeen* and Rowe as the dream stud in *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss*, scruffier and in some ways sexier here, almost 10 years later. Both give sharp, credible performances.

Some viewers might complain about the lack of serious kissing (no tongue, kids!) between the boys in their sex scenes. Both are beautiful; why shouldn't they get down and dirty, especially in an indie? There's barely even a butt shot here. This is an occupational hazard when straight men play gay; they simply can't be as free and enthusiastic about such things as actual, practicing homosexuals. Then, too, this film was made for the Here network, so perhaps they're hedging their bets, hoping to appeal to a wider crowd with more delicate sensibilities than the gay viewers *Shelter* was clearly made for.

Speaking of restrained kisses, Pratibha Parmar's *Nina's Heavenly Delights* (7 p.m. Oct. 19 at Cinema 21) suffers from a similar case of cinematic gay panic. This superficial but diverting drama centers on the return of prodigal daughter Nina (Shelley Conn) to her Indian family in Glasgow, Scotland, upon her father's death. It seems,

**Nina's Heavenly Delights**

Nina left her (male) fiancé at the altar and disappeared for three years. Now she's back and determined to vindicate Dad by winning a "Best of the West Curry Competition" and saving the family restaurant. In addition to reconnecting with her family, feisty Nina meets up with equally gorgeous Lisa (Laura Fraser). Although the chemistry between them is palpable, the film chooses to show them in shadow when they kiss, or to cut quickly from such scenes. Bad director!

Fortunately, there are other virtues to a film that clearly aspires to be the "feel-good Indian Scottish lesbian foodie movie of the year." There's the obligatory quirky queen best friend, Bobby (Ronny Jhutti), all arched eyebrows and hauteur. Hearing this Indian sissy in ringlets speaking gaytalk in a Scottish brogue ("It's been a long time, girlfriend!") is one of the more amusing exercises in multiculturalism in recent memory.

Perhaps the film's most enticing aspect is its intermittent visual tour of haute Indian cuisine. In drool-inducing close-ups worthy of *Bon Apétit*, we see a fabulous array of Indian spices, foodstuffs and dishes being chopped, fried and baked. Even vegetarians might be tempted by shots of braised lamb smoked with cloves and cinnamon. All this prep and cooking is punctuated by Bollywood-style music; in fact, the spirit of Bollywood is never far from the film. In one startling sequence, dead Dad reappears to toss multicolored confetti on a stone path that Nina is walking on, a lovely symbol of his approval of her plan to win the contest that meant so much to him.

Nina's *Heavenly Delights* is also a kind of travel show about Glasgow, highlighting that city's uniquely smoky industrial look. Other films in the fest offer an equally intriguing peep at far corners of the world. Korea's *No Regret* (9 p.m. Oct. 15 at Cinema 21), directed by gay auteur Hee-il Leesong, presents a memorably atmospheric Seoul, with its foggy streets and majestic steel-and-glass skyscrapers. But the film goes further into a realm that few Westerners probably know about: the "host bars" that dot the city, offering working-class male prostitutes (including rough trade) to middle-class and wealthy clients in the guise of a karaoke bar.

The film opens with a shot of fetching Sumin (Lee Young-Hoon) swimming naked in a pond near the orphanage he, now 18, must leave. Arriving in Seoul, he tries factory work but winds up at a more lucrative host bar servicing a variety of clients, not the least being an equally handsome young businessman, Jaemin (Han Lee). Much of the film is a record of their tumultuous, sometimes violent relationship as Jaemin obsesses over Sumin to the point where he's ready to deep-six his family business and impending marriage to be with the gorgeous rent boy.

**No Regret**

Much of the appeal of *No Regret* is in the performances, particularly of Lee Young-Hoon, a terse, tormented soul who doesn't suffer fools—or anybody, really—gladly. But the film also gains from the details of life in the upscale whorehouse run by "Madame," a beleaguered queen who can barely control his rowdy boys. A surprisingly brutal development in the last third of the film arguably undermines this thoughtfully observed study of stalker-style love, but the emotions that drive these final scenes feel real and ultimately unsettling.

For those seeking some relief after the intensity of *No Regret*, *Kate Clinton: 25th Anniversary Tour* (6 p.m. Oct. 14 at Cinema 21) is a solid choice. Although she came out of the lesbian comedy tradition, and certainly has worked that territory with panache, it can't be said that she belongs entirely to us. Clinton's comic persona—a brilliant blend of mock-primness (she's a former English teacher) with outrageous cultural and political commentary, rendered ironically—has made her a major force in comedy in and out of the gay ghetto.

This shortish film (65 minutes) is both a valentine to Clinton and a record of her anniversary concerts. While some of the valentine aspect gets tedious—Cris Williamson's too-long interview and Lily Tomlin's forced and foolish rap tribute to Clinton could easily have been axed—the concert footage is often hilarious. Her monologues have an irresistible stream-of-consciousness feel that incorporates various voices and so-brief-you-almost-miss-it editorial inserts.

Thus we get, on her interest in getting on the gay adoption bandwagon: "We were thinking of adopting a fertilized egg. What's in the omelet, honey? Oh no...." In a witty history of the tampon, she imagines fending off a harassing man on the street by expelling a tampon at him. In the

**Kate Clinton: 25th Anniversary Tour**

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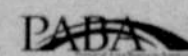
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