

Continued from Page 24

political mode, she lists three bizarre tortures (including putting a bra and panties on men's heads) the Bush administration has agreed not to do, then adds, in the voice of a Bush functionary, "Otherwise you're good to go." Good stuff.

Moving further geographically brings us to Australia's *This Kiss* (7 p.m. Oct. 15 at Cinema 21). Dyke director Kylie Eddy's first feature is a short (65 minutes), sincere, sometimes moving chamber play about two high school friends, both women, who reconnect years later. Such dramas always bring plenty of emotional explosions, and this one is no exception.

*This Kiss*

Juliet (Mel Lockwood) has become a successful businesswoman but, razor-thin and plagued by panic attacks, eventually seems far from the together, "important" personality she tries to project. Lucy (Tamsin Gatewood) is an overweight, unhappy wife and mother who lives in her dreams and whose husband is in the process of leaving her.

What sets the film apart and makes it work is the careful way these personalities are constructed and interact, not the contrived storyline. Australian films often feature a kind of unpretentious, realistic acting that rings true, and that is the case here.

Excellent acting is also the hallmark of *The Witnesses* (6 p.m. Oct. 21 at Cinema 21). This is not unexpected from André Téchiné, the director of *Wild Reeds*, but it's especially noteworthy in this fast-paced, emotionally intense AIDS drama set in France, circa 1984. The filmmaker has said he wanted to chronicle the pandemic as it began in France, and *The Witnesses* does so admirably.

Manu (Johan Libéreau) is an alluring gay youth ready to experiment with his sexuality, a plan that doesn't exclude anonymous sex in the city's parks. He's picked up by a charming older doctor, Adrien (Michel Blanc), who becomes obsessed and introduces him to a married couple. The husband saves Manu from drowning, and the two begin an intimate relationship that Manu brutally ends when he comes down with "the disease" and tries to shut himself off from the world.

This is the core plot of the film, but it fails to capture the mix of beauty and terror that pervades it. Several vivid subplots, a kind of candor with characters that presents flawed people nonjudgmentally and a disturbingly realistic picture of the confusion and trauma of those early years of AIDS make this a superior addition to Téchiné's filmography.

On a more upbeat note, *Out at the Wedding* (6 p.m. Oct. 20 at Cinema 21) updates all those 1930s screwball comedies where a small detail (read: lie) spirals out of control until all parties concerned—and the audience—are confused but also, the filmmakers hope, amused. Such works take a delicate hand, and director Lee Friedlander's isn't always that.

The star of the story is New Yorker Alex (Andrea Marcellus), a beautiful blonde who, convinced her South Carolina family is too racist to accept her black fiancé, Dana (hunky Mystro Clark), tells Dana that her family is dead. When Alex returns home, her wacky queer best friend, Jonathan (Charlie Schlatter), "accidentally" convinces everybody she's a lesbian. To add to the madness, Alex's super-competitive sister, Jeannie (Desi Lydic), who's just gotten married, has a history of stealing Alex's boyfriends. Fascinated by her sister's supposed lifestyle, she comes to New York to meet Alex's "lesbian lover" Dana, a character invented and hired by the scheming Jonathan to continue the deception. From there events become increasingly crazy, with multiple masquerades and a series of events that are unexpected, and not always believable, even for a farce.

Some sequences like a lesbian batting-cage seduction are memorable, but others—like Alex's speech about being "like one of those Disney animated heroines"—feel labored and false. Still, the film's bright cinematography and occasional successes in this challenging genre might make *Out at the Wedding* worth seeing. If you need further motivation, John Waters' legendary star Mink Stole, of *Pink Flamingos* and *Female Trouble* fame, appears in an amusing cameo as Dana's mother.

One of the best films of this year's fest is Eytan Fox's *The Bubble* (9 p.m. Oct. 16 at Cinema 21). The title ostensibly refers to a nickname of the city where it's set, Tel Aviv, but it's soon apparent that it also symbolizes the fragile existence of four friends of mixed ethnicities and sexual orientations who try to live meaningful lives in an impossible situation.

The Bubble opens at an Israeli checkpoint, where a pregnant Palestinian woman's water breaks and her baby is born dead, starting a chain reaction of violence that will reach far beyond the checkpoint. Among those watching this grim event are two handsome young men: Israeli reservist Noam (Ohad Knoller) and Palestinian Ashraf (Yousef "Joe" Sweid). Noam is gay and works at a record store;

*The Witnesses**Out at the Wedding*

his roommates in Tel Aviv are gay cafe owner Yali (Alon Friedman) and straight female T-shirt designer Lulu (Daniela Vitzler). Into their lives stumbles Ashraf, without identity papers. Because of their leftist politics and anti-Occupation activities, they take him in, renaming him "Shimi" to sound more Israeli and giving him a job at the cafe.

Ashraf and Noam fall in love and engage in some steamy sex that the film doesn't shy away from. In one telling sequence, the camera moves down Lulu's body as her boyfriend gives head to her; when the camera moves back up, it's Noam and Shimi, engaged in a similar act, that we see.

The Bubble meticulously examines these relationships as they evolve and face frustration and potential catastrophe. Noam and Ashraf are the most threatened, with Ashraf living two lives, both unsuccessfully. As a Palestinian, he would be reviled if he came out; in Tel Aviv, he must pretend to be his enemy, a Jew, in order to survive.

There is so much that is worthy about this film it's hard to know where to start. It's a love letter to Tel Aviv, dwelling on the city as an atmospheric backdrop for the lives of the friends. It also contains riveting cinéma vérité sequences (complete with hand-held camera) of the Occupation and the tragic events it can trigger in seconds. There are moments of exuberance and wit throughout, too, from the "Rave Against the Occupation" the friends orchestrate on the beach to Noam's and Lulu's inspired attempt to see Ashraf in the Occupied Territories disguised as French journalists—a romantic ruse that, like much of the film, triggers bitter consequences.

Supremely, *The Bubble*'s heartbreaking portrayal of the relationship of these devoted friends shows exactly what's most threatened, and most at stake, in a conflict of states that claims innocent victims on all sides. *The Bubble* is one of those films that flies, and could end up staying, under the radar, which would be a shame. That it's being made available on the big screen to audiences that might otherwise miss it is more proof of the continuing value of a festival like this. 10

The 11th annual PORTLAND LESBIAN & GAY FILM FESTIVAL runs Oct. 12 to 21 at Cinema 21, 616 N.W. 21st Ave.; Hollywood Theatre, 4122 N.E. Sandy Blvd.; and Living Room Theaters, 341 S.W. 10th Ave. For a complete schedule visit www.plgff.org.

GARY MORRIS edits and publishes Bright Lights Film Journal, located online at www.brightlightsfilm.com.

Six Intimate Theaters

The Best in Foreign
and Independent FilmGourmet Cuisine
and Full BarLIVING ROOM
THEATERS

No Minors after 3:30pm

Cinema Has Come to its Senses™

341 SW 10th Ave at the corner of Stark | www.livingroomtheatres.com | 971.222.2010Connecting the spectrum of
Portland's LGBTQ community

CENTER

69 SE TAYLOR (AT WATER AVE.)