



An intersex teenager named Alex develops female sexual characteristics in Argentina's *XXY*.

There is no obvious queer content in the film, although Van Sant tosses in one ambiguous scene in which a male friend shoots Alex a couple of longing glances during a car ride.

Schedule permitting, Van Sant will attend a benefit screening of *Paranoid Park* 6:30 p.m. Feb. 18 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B-**

—Stephen Blair

The Pull

What happens when two men start a romance on the strict condition that they break up four months later? Gay Portland filmmaker Andy Blubaugh ("Scaredycat") and his ex discuss the pros and cons of this proposition in an eight-minute short that features tender shots of the couple spooning in bed, a heated dinner conversation about relationships and scenic footage of a bike ride in the country. Blubaugh certainly digs at some intriguing questions about the durability of love and physical attraction, but the rules of engagement seem so arbitrary that it's hard to muster an emotional or intellectual response to the material. Screens 2 p.m. Feb. 16 at the Portland International Film Festival as part of the program *Short Cuts IV: Made in Oregon*; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B**

—SB

The Spiderwick Chronicles

Fantasy films have been all the rage of late, but rarely has one been so scary, and dealt with issues of fractured families and infidelity so strongly, as *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. More self-contained and personal than the *Harry Potter* films and the *Bridge to Narnia's Golden Compass* of the *Rings* franchises, *Spiderwick* keeps its cast small and imperils the characters with great frequency. For parents, think twice before tempting childhood nightmares; for adult moviegoers, attend late shows to enjoy a rousing magic-and-monsters film without having to deal with terrified tots. **B+**

—AM

XXY

Even by queer cinema standards, transgender themes still represent a new frontier for filmmakers. Fortunately, the inevitability of controversy hasn't stopped directors from making a handful of intelli-

gent and memorable films like *Ma Vie En Rose*, *Boys Don't Cry* and *Transamerica*.

Argentinean writer and director Lucía Puenzo is the latest to try her hand at gender-bending material. Although it's not a flat-out triumph, her film *XXY*—winner of the Critics Week Grand Prize at Cannes 2007—is extremely gutsy, well-acted and frequently touching. Puenzo unflinchingly addresses gay and transgender themes, and it's hard to imagine that any member of the queer community will leave the theater unmoved.

That said, the film has a few pronounced drawbacks. Apart from a few charming and lighthearted moments, the tone feels excessively dour and, at times, a bit suffocating. In addition, some of the symbolism is heavy-handed to the point of being unintentionally hilarious. In a film that raises the topic of castration, it's just too much to watch someone chop up a carrot.

The plot centers on an intersex teenager named Alex, brilliantly played by young actress Inés Efron. Alex is brought up as a boy, but as a teenager he becomes a social outcast when he develops female sexual characteristics. Alex's perplexed but sympathetic parents move to an isolated island off the coast of Uruguay. The film opens as family friends arrive for a visit from Buenos Aires.

After a slow start, the story kicks into high gear as Alex develops a relationship with Alvaro, the introverted teenage son of the visiting family. Sparks fly, leading to a truly eyebrow-raising roll in the hay in which Alvaro—who is clearly questioning his sexuality—ends up on the receiving end of an anal interchange that makes the tent scene from *Brokeback Mountain* look like child's play.

Filmed in a palette of grays and steely blues, *XXY* exudes so much melancholy that we know there's not a happy ending in store. The developments in the second half of the film are realistic, but they're downers nonetheless, as Alex faces ostracism and violence from his peers and Alvaro discovers that his father has little room in his heart for a gay son.

But don't pop a Prozac just yet. Despite all the bleakness, *XXY* emerges as a hopeful and life-affirming portrait of a family that loves Alex regardless of which gender he decides to embrace.

Screens 6:15 p.m. Feb. 15 and 7:45 p.m. Feb. 17 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B+**

—SB jo

justoutpersonals.com

FREE. LOCAL. NOW.

Testing for Gay, Bisexual, and Trans Guys

Free
Thursdays 5-6:30 PM (drop in)
Rapid HIV Testing (same day results)
Oral Testing (two week results)
Hepatitis A/B vaccinations

3701 E. Fourth Plain • Vancouver, WA • 360-397-8098 for info

CALL • CRUISE CONNECT

SO MANY GUYS - Listen & Reply to Ads FREE!

Portland

503.299.9911

971.404.2544

Vancouver, WA

360.433.6100

FREE code 4553

MegaMates.com
VISIT US ONLINE

For other cities call
(888) MegaMates



24/7 Friendly Customer Care 1(888)MegaMates 18+ ©2008 PC LLC

TALK IS CHEAP, ACTION TALKS!

Portland: 503-222-6USA
Vancouver: 360-696-5254
Seattle: 206-753-2429
Everett: 425-405-2429
Tacoma: 253-359-2429

LIVELINE
CHAT, PERSONALS, FORUMS



FIND YOUR FLAME!
www.livematch.com

Unlimited VIP Subscription AS LOW AS \$1.77 per day! (8 weeks package \$99.00)

Live Long. Live Strong. Get Tested.

Free Walk-In HIV Testing ... and more!

Anonymous and Needle-Free
Results in one week or 20 minutes

Monday Nights 5:30 to 7:30
Washington County Health Clinic - Beaverton
12550 SW 2nd (between Hall & Watson)

Men's Nights
are Monday
Nights

For more information, call us at 503-846-4734
or check out www.co.washington.or.us/hiv

¡Se Habla Español!

