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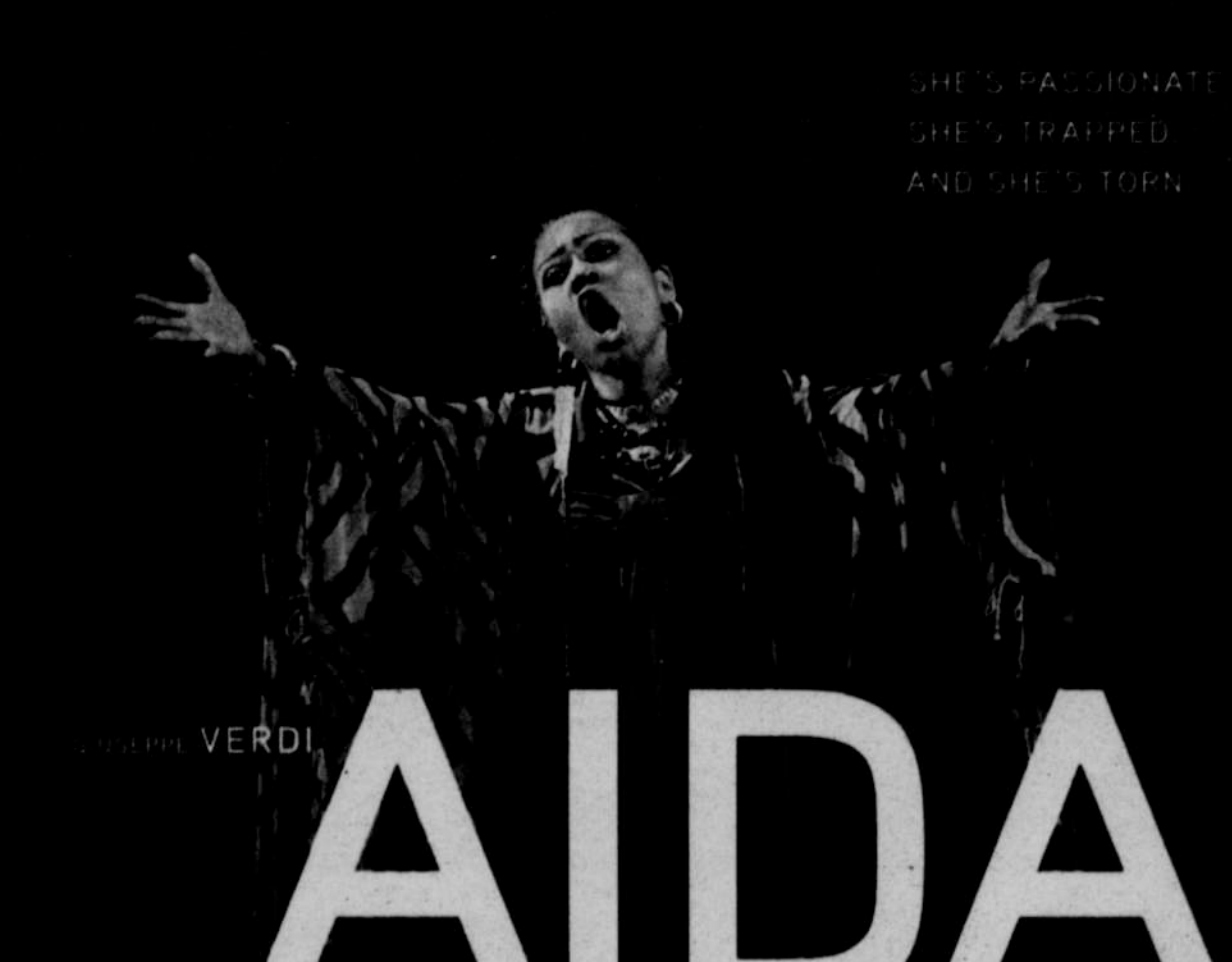


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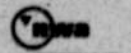
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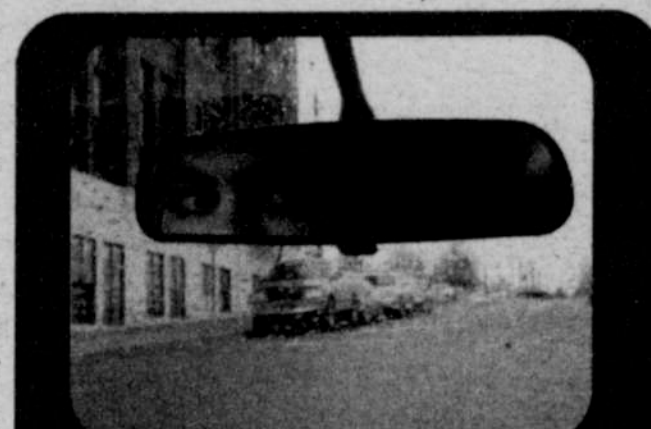


Wag the Bulldog

Frasier actor makes directorial debut with political mockumentary

Dan Butler isn't afraid of a challenge. After all, this is the actor who bravely came out of the closet in 1993 while stealing scenes as "rabidly heterosexual sportscaster" Bulldog on *Frasier*.

So if you're that bold, why not make your directorial debut with a mockumentary sporting the instantly creepy title of *Karl Rove, I Love You?* Butler stars as himself, intrigued by the idea of portraying President Bush's morally bankrupt former adviser, until he gets deeper and deeper into the role and the whole thing spins into a "tale of romantic obsession."



Jim's Closet
BY JIM RADOSTA

Jim Radosta: Who conceptualized this bizarre idea?

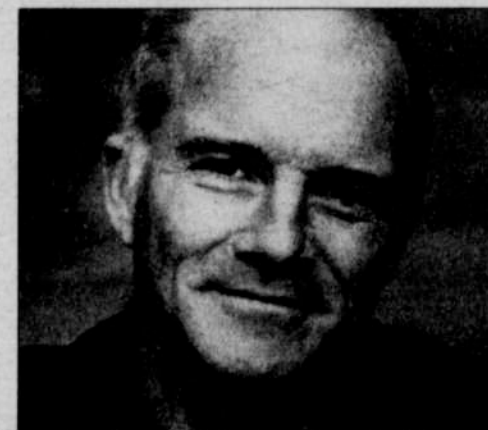
Dan Butler: As we kept experiencing through every stage of this, I can't really compare it to anything I've seen. It's not really a documentary, it's not really a mockumentary, it sort of hovers in between.

I was in the midst of learning about Karl Rove because I was so fascinated by his character. I just felt, as with any project, write what you know, and sort of poked fun at myself. All of the travails I go through, about feeling unseen as an actor, have been things I've gone through.

After we were under way and shooting already, a friend of mine who was very disheartened at the outcome of the 2004 election said, "The

main people who survived the Dark Ages were the court jesters, so why not do that?" I really do think humor and love are the big things that help people think and see things a different way.

The whole thing started a little bit as a lark to get some political frustration out in the air in a creative way, instead of being in your head, and arguing and all this sort of cyclical bullshit stuff. Then we realized we had something and we started scripting it, so there was never ever a structured shooting plan.



Dan Butler, 53, lives in Newbury, Vt., with his partner of 14 years, acting teacher Richard Waterhouse.

JR: I don't think a mockumentary has messed with my sense of what's real and what's fake this effectively since *The Blair Witch Project*—and your subject matter was just as terrifying. Has this led to confusion among audiences?

DB: As an audience member or as an actor, one of the things I cherish most is to be surprised. I like when a story is ahead of me, when things take twists I don't expect. So when people get specific in the Q & A's saying, "Well now, did this scene really happen?" I really don't want to answer it. Why do you want to drain the mystery and the fun out of something?

JR: You had a brief but memorable role in one of my all-time favorite films, *The Silence of the Lambs*. What was that experience like?

DB: It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience from the audition on. [Director] Jonathan Demme is an incredibly magnanimous human being, and everyone was so excited to be a part of it, even down to the person who was on the walkie-talkie

parking cars. There was something about it—you could just feel it in the air that it was gonna be something special.

The two bug scientists that Paul Lazar and I play—we had the benefit of being able to do so much research, and we met all these incredible bug scientists that travel the world. In the script, they had these two guys playing chess with a bug being the timekeeper, but we said, "Let's have bugs be the chess pieces!"

JR: You came out of the closet at a time when no other network television actors—except for maybe Amanda Bearse from *Married with Children*—were openly gay. Was that a scary time?

DB: I never really thought about it. I may have been incredibly naive, but I wrote a one-man show called *The Only Thing Worse You Could Have Told Me*, and that happened to be just starting a long run in Los Angeles when I got the role of Bulldog on *Frasier*.

I think the hardest thing is not being frustrated and getting concerned with how other people are living their lives—i.e., why other celebrities weren't coming out at the same time. It's understandable, but it's also [pauses] really easy to start judging someone else and thinking you know what's right for their lives, and it's none of my business, really.

JR: Are you referring to David Hyde Pierce's decision to stay in the closet until *Frasier* was off the air?

DB: Well, I was really happy recently when David did come out. The difference between David and others was David kept *all* of his private life private. It was his choice, and David is an incredibly generous, wonderful person. I was on my journey, he was on his. 10

The Salem Film Festival opens with KARL ROVE, I LOVE YOU featuring a Q & A with directors Dan Butler and Phil Leirness 6 p.m. April 18 at Elsinore Theatre, 170 High St. S.E. Followed by a Filmmakers' Party 8:30 p.m. at J. James Restaurant, 325 High St. S.E. Tickets are \$8 (general admission) or \$45 (party) from www.salemfilmfestival.com.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. E-mail him at jim@justout.com.