



What We Do Is Secret profiles Jan Paul Beahm, who reinvented himself as Darby Crash, the closeted gay lead singer of seminal Los Angeles punk band The Germs. The biopic, which was not reviewed by *Just Out*, opens Nov. 7 at Clinton Street Theater.

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 as part of *Shorts Program III* 7:30 p.m. Nov. 9 and 9 p.m. Nov. 12 at Whitsell Auditorium during the 35th Northwest Film & Video Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B**

—Stephen Blair

Save Me

There's a doozy of a minister at the center of *Save Me*. This low-key but effective film features Judith Light as Gayle, the domineering head of an ex-gay ministry, Genesis House. *Save Me* opens with a wild sex 'n' drugs ride, with bedraggled party boy Mark getting down and dirty with, and then robbed by, a trick at a cheap motel. Headed for death or at least a psych ward, he ends up instead at Genesis House. Initially chafing at the rules and religious dogma, Mark soon becomes a True Believer. He accepts Gayle as a kind of surrogate mother, a role she's a little too willing to fulfill. Of course, you can't easily take the party out of the boy, and Mark soon finds himself drawn to hunky fellow resident Scott, whom Gayle vehemently dislikes. In a startling sequence, she causes a huge scene at a dance in which hapless Christian girls are told to dance with Genesis House's "ex-gays." It seems Mark and Scott are eyeing each other a bit too closely. Gayle's obsessiveness and control-freak-ism make her increasingly unhinged, and her beloved Genesis House threatens to slip out of her control.

Light makes Gayle a fascinating study in repression as she dispenses smug clichés ("I know when I have doubts, it's the Lord testing my faith") while offering her distinctive brand of smotherlove. The film suffers from a television (well, cable television) look, with actors mostly familiar from TV. And its emphasis on the complexities of its characters, rather than a straightforward condemnation of the whole ex-gay ministry scam, may cause some viewers to wince. But *Save Me*'s powerful emotional tableaux, driven by

Light and by actors Chad Allen and Robert Gant as the troubled couple, save the film from bathos.

Now playing at Living Room Theaters. **B+**
—GM

The Secret Life of Bees

Gina Prince-Bythewood's adaptation of Sue Monk Kidd's bestseller should be called *The Secret Life of Mumbler*. Touching on issues of child abuse and racism, there's far too much earnestness from all, especially Dakota Fanning. Yet the film has some touching moments that will satisfy the need to cry at the movies. Queen Latifah is the best of the bunch. **C+**

—Floyd Sklover

She's a Boy I Knew

This documentary is a bittersweet record of the transition of filmmaker Gwen Haworth from Steven, a straight male, to Gwen, a gay female. Haworth adroitly mixes comical cartoon images, old magazine ads riffing on gender roles and homemade special effects with frank interviews with the family and friends affected by the decision. His wife, Malgosia, was shocked but supportive. His father laments the "death" of his son and struggles to come around. One particularly evocative sequence shows footage from one of Steven's student films, in which he's walking down a path and gradually disappearing, an apt metaphor for his transition.

She's a Boy I Knew is refreshingly respectful in its treatment of the people in Gwen's circle, encouraging them to be candid even when it shows the filmmaker in a bad light. Malgosia, who makes a superhuman effort to stay with Gwen despite the personal toll it takes on her, is especially articulate in this respect: "I didn't want to love what you didn't want to be."

Dour moments of focusing on the complex system of losses and gains that surround transitioning are balanced by the warmth and openness of friends and by Gwen's sardonic humor. Her hormone treatments, she says, made her feel like she was "cramming a lifetime's worth of PMS into a few months."

The film's tagline is "A highly subjective documentary about love, family and transsexuality." Just as accurately, it could be called a moving tale of love, loss and personal transformation.

Screens 7 p.m. Nov. 12 at Whitsell Auditorium during the 35th Northwest Film & Video Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **A**

—GM

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