

History, Herstory, Our Story

QDoc returns with vivid, vital portraits of lives lived queer

by Gary Morris

These may be the most tumultuous, and confusing, times yet for queer folk, with the stakes increasingly high as we push ever harder for our rights. Supposedly progressive California voters, manipulated by the Mormon and Catholic churches, overturn marriage equality, while in supposedly backward Iowa, it's approved. Some gay teens succumb to social, religious and family homophobia by killing themselves; others are happily slamming the closet door shut and taking to the streets. Nothing is predictable these days; even supposed allies, like President Obama, ask for our patience, but really our silence, in pursuing full equality.

This year's QDoc festival, programmed by Russ Gage (operations director for the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival) and David Weissman (director of the 2002 documentary *The Cockettes*), captures some of this chaos in a kind of mosaic portrait of queer culture, past and present. As the only film festival in the United States devoted exclusively to queer documentaries, QDoc is uniquely positioned to draw this picture. Over the course of a long weekend (Thursday, June 3-Sunday, June 6) and a dozen features and

shorts, the fourth annual fest surveys the political scene (8: *The Mormon Proposition*, *Other Nature*) and the sometimes unlikely heroes (*Out in the Silence*, *Topp Twins*, *Sylvester*) who show how much richer society would be in a world where all of us could be ourselves.

Being oneself is the lesson of the two opening night entries, screened along with the rest of the program, at the Clinton Street Theater. *Forever's Gonna Start Tonight* offers a simpatico portrait of Vicki Marlane, a drag artiste who, at 72, continues to perform at Aunt Charlie's in San Francisco's rough-and-tumble Tenderloin District. That's an appropriate venue for someone like Marlane, who went from Minnesota farm boy to roller-skating tranny to highway whore to prison inmate and on to an illustrious career as the tranny "Toast of the Town" in early '70s San Francisco. There's plenty of performance footage here, as well as helpful beauty tips for the cosmetically challenged, but some of the most fascinating moments come from Marlane's long stretch as a "Hoochie-Koochie" dancer in a Minnesota carnival, where she rubbed elbows with such notables as "Alligator Woman" and "The Girl in the Iron Lung." Her choice in boyfriends wasn't always the best—she had a penchant for rough trade, ex-cons and "straight" married men—but she survived emotional abuse, drug use and desertion and wears the scars with pride.

Second on the bill is *Get Happy*, a brief but charming sketch of Emmy Award-winning makeup artist and fashion designer Mark Payne. Payne's childhood backstory is, in some ways, more intriguing than his adult success. At the preposterously early age of 11, he perfected drag mimicry, doing dead-on impersonations of Liza Minnelli, Shirley MacLaine, even Diana Ross in blackface. A compassionate mother



Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls

Even when they're being themselves, Topp Twins Jools and Linda are real characters. Below, a few from their stable of wild-and-crazy alter egos.

- Belle and Belle Gingham, the Topp's oldest creations. Belle was born in a hay barn, her sister a few minutes later, between the barn and the cowshed. Belle has been a champion spoon player in New Zealand for 21 years. As for which Belle is which, we have no idea.
- Camp Mother and Camp Leader, the folks behind the Happy Valley Camping Ground. Camp Mother's signature style includes a pink velour jumpsuit, turban and handbag. Camp Leader prefers jelly sandals.
- Ken and Ken, the country "bloke" and the city folk. One's a sheep farmer (in

love with Camp Mother), the other a TV sportscaster. Hey, it could happen.

- Raylene and Brenda, two lowbrow gals with hair as high as their heels (natch). Ever searching for a "hunk of spunk," they dream of their own hair salon, Cuts for Sluts.
- Prue and Dilly Ramsbottom, really unreal housewives with old money, a new litter of purebred puppies and an always freshened-up cocktail.

Jools and Linda will be in attendance for the Sunday, June 6 film screening, and will also perform at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 8 at the Mission Theater (1624 NW Glisan St.). Tickets for the June 8 show are \$12 advance via Ticketmaster, \$15 at the door.

—Amanda Schurr

and grandmother, who recognized his particular genius and encouraged him with money, materials and love, abetted Payne. Nothing could stop him—a friend recalls that even after he set the house on fire during one of his drag recitals, they moved to the garage and Payne began doing a Minnelli routine. To the young

performer, every object was a potential stage, though as his mother says with mock regret, "The thing with the hood of cars is they don't withstand high heels too well." Every theatrical queen deserves a mother like this.

Friday's double bill begins with 8: *The Mormon Proposition*, directed by Reed Cowan and Ste-



Forever's Gonna Start Tonight

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