

The U.S. of Gay

Exclusive Oregon Public Broadcasting premiere explores LGBT community, one story at a time

BY AMANDA SCHURR

The queer American experience takes center stage in *OUT in America*, a new PBS production helmed by Emmy award-winning director Andrew Goldberg. The hour-long documentary is set for a national premiere in June, to coincide with National Gay & Lesbian Pride month, but local viewers can catch a special presentation Thursday, February 24 on Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Spanning coasts, careers, religions, eras, ethnicities, classes and genders, *OUT* examines personal narratives of belonging against the public milestones of the past 50 years in LGBT history. Figures famous and influential, "average" and extraordinary recall the coming out process—and how the decision has intersected with other aspects of identity.

For some, owning their outness meant a journey toward reconciliation with faiths that haven't traditionally welcomed queer folk. Singer Chely Wright, who made headlines last year as the first openly gay country music star, describes a change in prayer, and the beginnings of unlearning "the old habits of compartmentalization," of "the skill set and tools of hiding."

The Reverend Peter Gomes believed that the best "evidence" he could present to a programmed and prejudiced congregation was simply that of his own life. "The strongest argument I could make is myself, so I did," says Gomes, explaining his speech on the steps of Harvard's Memorial Church: "In your presence, in your face, I [say] I am terribly happy, I am a functioning Christian and I am a homosexual."

Elsewhere, a West Point graduate and former captain in the U.S. Army remembers signing an enlistment document assuring that she was straight—even though the thought of being otherwise had not yet occurred to her. Bravo TV host Andy Cohen reveals the ter-

ror—and truth—of a childhood friend's taunt: "My mom said you're gonna be gay when you grow up."

From a gay rancher to a Latino rapper, Puerto Rico's first openly gay and HIV positive political candidate to a Muslim lesbian, these individual tales of discovery are united in their collective

truth. Says a San Francisco police lieutenant who transitioned while on active duty: "Really what I have ultimately learned is that whatever we are, we are. And it will eventually percolate back up to the surface. ... I am no longer a lesbian, I really am a transsexual man."

OUT in America touches upon the turning points in LGBT history—and the importance of coming out, and stepping up. As such, it's an overwhelmingly positive, inspirational collage, heartwarming, heartbreaking and heavy on the heart-tugging music cues. From the Stonewall riots to the women's movement, marriage equality to the repeal of "Don't ask, don't tell," the documentary isn't about headlines—nor does it attempt to be.

Goldberg's lens is never more focused—or affecting—than when focused on subjects such as psychologist Dr. Patricia Hawkins, who helped HIV/AIDS patients during the early days of the epidemic then referred to as the "gay cancer," and *Tales of the City* scribe Armistead Maupin, who tearfully credits the lesbian community for "[coming] forward in scores to care for dying gay men. It made a difference."

The folks most likely to stick with viewers,



Mike Hartman, of Eagle Creek, is one of the "locals" profiled in the film.

though, are the ones who've stuck together—folks like Ruthie and Connie, two retired grandmothers. They cook, they dance, they tease, they quilt. They recall the "freedom" of coming out, they work with nursing homes to ensure dignity and equal rights for LGBT seniors and, yes, they love.

So, too, do "The Harolds," a biracial couple of octogenarians still very much taken with each other after five decades together—and joyous in what one half of the charming duo describes as having "arrived." A half century of labels and codes, stigmas and struggles later, "I feel that I am as open as a book," he says. Filmmaker Goldberg's tidy "The End" is unnecessary—if inaccurate here—but it's difficult not to envision a happily ever after with gratitude and pride like theirs so *OUT in America*, and onscreen. **JO**

OUT in America airs on KOPB at 8 p.m. Thurs., Feb. 24 (encore at 9:30 p.m.). Following its exclusive screening in the Portland market, the program premieres nationally on PBS in June.

Lens is More

They're OUT in America. What about you? Two film fests—one salacious in tone, one serious—in the Portland Metro area need your help to happen. Indulge your inner auteur and get involved.

Shorty Shorts

The brainchild of Fannie Mae Darling and Gula Delgatto, this queer showcase promises—nay, encourages—an NC-17 free-for-all. You *can* do pretty much anything, web cam or cell cam, high def or low def, regardless of genre or theme. The only deal-breaker is a strict "no penetration (on film) rule"—that, and the clip must be under 10 minutes. Registration closes Sunday, March 27, with plans for an (im) proper fest come fall. Register by emailing shortyshortspdx@gmail.com, with a \$10 entry fee via PayPal (e.sellers@comcast.net) or money order to Eric Sellers, 47 NE Thompson, Portland, Ore., 97212. Registration is final when payment is received.

Q Center Film Screening Series

The Q is soliciting cinema by local Northwest filmmakers, to be presented in April. The center (4115 N. Mississippi) will also host the selected filmmakers for a discussion session following each presentation.

Feature- and short-length narrative and documentary films are welcome, with a preference given to queer-focused or "culturally significant material." The deadline for submissions is Monday, February 28. Submit your masterpiece to Q Center, Attn: Sally Hansen, 4115 N. Mississippi Ave., Portland, Ore., 97217, or send a link to an electronic version to sally@pdxqcenter.org. For more information, visit pdxqcenter.org or call 503-234-7837.

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