

Real to Reel

QDoc projects the queer experience for a fifth year

BY GARY MORRIS

"History's not made by great men," the punk group Gang of Four famously sang in the 1980s, and the line is just as true today as it was then. The queer community, quite accustomed to not relying on "great men" to address homophobia, racism and other social ills, has shown particular skill at changing history for the better. Most encouraging in this process has been the fact that so many of our heroes have been self-created, rising not through status or position or wealth but through sheer force of will or personality to present alternatives to the tired status quo. From drag queen performance artists to globally minded political activists, LGBT folk have contributed to bettering society in all kinds of ways far out of proportion to our numbers.

QDoc, Portland's groundbreaking queer-themed documentary festival, highlights some of these pioneers, and the mosaic portrait of a vibrant, ever-evolving community is an exciting one. The fest, which takes place at the Clinton Street Theater from Thursday to Sunday night, June 2-5, is as much a community event as it is a cinematic showcase, with many groups from queer youth to seasoned seniors represented both onscreen and in the audience thanks to the organizers' outreach. Many of the filmmakers and featured subjects will also be in attendance.

Social change is the goal, but every revolution needs its artistic diversions. Opening night film *Arias with a Twist: The Docufantasy*, directed by Bobby Sheehan (7 p.m. Thurs., June 2, USA, 88 min.), is a double valentine to two major queer talents in collaboration. Drag performance artist Joey Arias and master puppeteer Basil Twist (whose brilliant creations helped make *The Addams Family* a Broadway hit) worked together on the show that gives



Above: Director Bruce LaBruce on the set of *The Advocate for Fagdom*

Right: Archival footage from *On These Shoulders We Stand*

the movie its title, a dazzling romp through the Arias persona that includes such images as Arias, dressed in dominatrix drag, whirling on a neon gyroscope while serenading the audience and being attended by ghostly Roswell aliens courtesy of Twist's visual legerdemain. Arias is an irresistible personality, living his art daily while remaining sweet and rather humble. Twist, too, blends arresting art with humility. A generous selection from the show and interviews with friends and associates offer a multifaceted picture of two artists whose work reminds us of the kinds of transporting pleasures worth fighting for. (Arias will be in attendance; see interview on p. 21.)

Using archival footage and photographs and interviews with survivors, *[On These Shoulders We Stand]* shows exactly what life was like for pre- (and slightly post-) Stonewall gays in Los Angeles.

Friday evening, June 3, opens with a gritty doc on another kind of pioneer, David P. Ebersole's *Hit So Hard: The Life and Near Death Story of Patty Schemel* (7 p.m., USA, 101 min.). Schemel gained fame as the drummer for Courtney Love's group Hole at a time when female drummers were scarce enough to be on the endangered species list. Schemel began drinking at age 12 and eventually became a major druggie, which went along with the raging rocker lifestyle. The toll it took was



considerable, and the doc is unsparing in delineating the breakdowns, suicides and revolving-door rehabs. Many of her associates, friends and family are interviewed, including Love who, as in the group, threatens to overshadow the subject. But Schemel ultimately dominates her own story as a beautiful, charismatic, near-tragic, ultimately triumphant woman who survives homelessness, heroin addiction and street prostitution. (Ebersole and producer Todd Hughes will be in attendance.)

Next up is Marie Losier's *The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye* (9:30 p.m., USA, 72 min.). Genesis is Genesis P-Orridge, the highly influential inventor of industrial music, founder of Psychic TV and Throbbing Gristle,

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