

Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

A mix of seldom seen and spanking new



BY NOAH COWAN

In the world of film and video, thinking people agree on very little. But two aesthetic trends have become increasingly obvious.

One: gay men are making the most politically and aesthetically challenging commercial films around. If you didn't see Todd Haynes' *Poison* and Gus van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, you missed two of this young decade's most impressive cinematic spectacles.

If you miss the upcoming *Edward II* (Derek Jarman), *Swoon* (Tom Kallin) and *The Hours and the Times* (Chris Munch), don't even bother trying to catch up. It'll be too late.

Two: lesbians are making the most entertaining and politically confrontational video work around. Relegated to galleries and specialized houses (like the Euclid), video is a lot less accessible than 35mm motion pictures. Still, the tapes of Sadie Benning (*Jollies*), Jean Carlamusto (*L Is for the Way You Look*) and Cecilia Barriga (*Encounter of Two Queens*) are smart, sensationalist (in a good way) and deeply sexy. Miss 'em at great peril to your hip quotient.

Are we clear on this? Good. This isn't just eye's homo film writer making shit up — recent articles in *The Village Voice*, *The New York Times* and *Utne Reader* back me up on this, so, like, it's true.

But don't trust me. Come see for yourself. An impressive showcase of international lesbian and gay film and video work will be shown — of all places — at the 2nd Annual Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival, running until May 10 at various venues

throughout the city.

The program is a savvy mix of older features rarely or never seen in Toronto and spanking new short film and video work. Amazingly, there is very little crossover with the Images Festival, which recently showed a fine crop of gay and lesbian documentaries.

Three short programs are particularly strong. Hot and bothersome issues are addressed, attacked and deconstructed by a diverse bunch of filmmakers.

■ **Queer Kids** is about gay and lesbian teenagers. Now there's a hot potato! With one exception, the series is *not* a series of "this is what made me gay" confessionals, thank God. Instead, we get edgy and in-your-face expressions of sexual liberation. Bill Smartt's *QC Girls* is the funniest: Smartt, a gay man in his thirties, goes back to his home town of McMinnisville Tenn., only to discover that a section of the "main drag" is now unofficially designated "Queer Corner," where lesbian and gay teens hang out after going to the mall.

The soul of this program, however, is 19-year-old Sadie Benning. Her three tapes, shot with a primitive Fisher Price Pixel camera in her bedroom, are rich, honest tales of what it's like to be a lesbian teen in the burbs. But these aren't "cute" coming-out stories. Benning not only slyly integrates experimental film techniques into her work but manages to consistently convey

PREVIEW

THE LESBIAN AND GAY FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL

The Euclid Theatre, 394 Euclid Ave.; The John Spotton Cinema, 150 John St.; CineCycle, 317 Spadina Ave. Until May 10. Call 516-3880 for program information.



Annie Sprinkle: You were expecting maybe Greta Garbo?

the oppression, alienation and violence that society dishes out to those who are young and out.

The series is placed in context by the documentary *Who's Afraid of Project 10?*, a look at a pilot counselling program for gay teens in California. The videomakers found some extraordinary interviews — one with a mother who abandoned fundamentalist Christianity after her gay son killed himself in shame — that make the tape an emotionally powerful and gripping experience.

■ **Queer Subversion**, co-hosted by Pleasure Dome, is about perverting heterosexual culture.

Religion: Gus van Sant and William S.

Burroughs rewrite the *Thanksgiving Prayer*. Hollywood: Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich get it on in Cecilia Barriga's tour-de-force recut of the starlets' classics, *Encounter of Two Queens*. Other targets include home movies (in Jan Oxenberg's short *Home Movie*) and educational films (in Cathy Cook's hilarious 1950s sex-ed rewrite *The Match that Started My Fire*).

Best of the bunch, however, is Heather McAdams' extraordinary portrait of Bradley Harrison Picklesimer — Lexington, Kentucky's most famous and opinionated drag queen. I guess this film, *Meet Bradley Harrison Picklesimer*

is included because Picklesimer's club broke all stereotypes for gay/drag bars — being in the South, in the '70s and having a mixed clientele. But the joy of this movie is the man himself, a radical individualist who hates guppies and their stereotyped behavior.

■ **Caught Looking** is about cruising, a subject which can make even the most liberated heterosexual cringe. The program opens with a film of the same name by Constantine Giannaris. This is a big event for anyone who saw his remarkable *Trojans* at the 1990 Festival of Festivals. Here Giannaris looks at the Peeping Tom, spying on a history of shuttered homosexual behavior.

Also included in "Caught Looking" is Holly Brown's unbelievable Bette Davis impersonation (in Cathy Cook's *Bust Up*) and Montreal-based Steve Reinke's hilarious intercuts of gay porn and film classics. Reinke's *Why I Stopped Watching Foreign Films*, skewering both sexual cliché and cinematic aesthetics, might be the funniest tape I've ever seen.

There is much, much more on offer at the Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival than I can write about here, but here are some other films worth catching: Robert Favreau's *Nelligan*, about gay Quebec poet Emile Nelligan; *The Shuts and Goddesses Transformation Salon* where Annie Sprinkle and Maria Betty demonstrate how to become both a slut and a goddess; Marusia Bocuirkiw's short *Bodies in Trouble*; Jenni Olsen's compilation of Hollywood films with gay or lesbian themes, *Homo Promo*; and *The AIDS Documentary*, a collection of documentary shorts dealing with AIDS.

As a forum for some of the most exciting work being made today, the festival is worth checking out. ☺

Eye Apr 30/92 p. 21