

Gay Film Comes Out

by J.N. Thomas

Until very recently cinema observed a rather strict taboo on the subject of homosexuality. For years it was either ignored or referred to as obliquely as possible. Suddenly the silence has been shattered. And as films begin to take a closer, more sympathetic view of homosexuality, we see society simultaneously organizing itself around such moral landmarks as Anita Bryant's crusade and the Briggs Initiative (Prop. 6).

"Six of One, Half-Dozen of the Other" is a film festival, organized by the California Outreach Group, which focuses on the homosexual issue. Seeing film as a medium that both depicts and creates popular attitudes, the Group has assembled an unusual

and entertaining array of films, selected expressly to provoke thought about gay images and stereotypes in the film medium.

Opening the series is *Sylvia Scarlett*, a 1936 comedy-drama with Gary Grant and (masquerading as a boy throughout the film) Katharine Hepburn. Unsuccessful on its first release and still rarely shown, it is one of the many excellent films directed by George Cukor, who is considered one of Hollywood's most sensitive and humane directors.

Another Hollywood curio is *Johnny Guitar*, a 1954 Western with Joan Crawford and Mercedes McCambridge in roles usually reserved for John Wayne or Charles Bronson. This crazed epic (one of Jean-Luc Godard's favorites) was directed by Nicholas Ray immediately prior to his masterpiece, *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Next up in the series will be *The Children's Hour*, the Lillian Hellman play not so much about lesbianism as about what happens to two people accused of it. Though the play was filmed in the '30s in a watered-down version, the series will show the 1961 version which has strong performances by Shirley MacLaine and Audrey Hepburn.

Also included in the series is John Schlesinger's *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, a study of a triangular relationship between a bisexual man (Murray Head), a heterosexual woman (Glenda Jackson, at her usual peak), and a homosexual (Peter Finch). The cast, direction, and Penelope Giliatt's distinguished script combine to make *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* a wise, touching parable of human relationships, as well as a landmark in the treatment of homosexuality on screen.

Another film from the series (and one recently shown on KQED-TV), *The Naked Civil Servant* is a barbed comedy about the life of pioneer queen Quentin Crisp, splendidly portrayed by John Hurt. Picking up where Oscar Wilde feared to tread, the film exposes the homophobic values that have pervaded British society throughout the century.

The final program is *The Mouse and His Child*, an animated feature by Fred Wolf and Chuck Swenson, tracing the attempt of two mechanical mice to become "self-winding." It is one of the most brilliant and original animated films to be produced in the U.S. since the days when Walt Disney represented the avant-garde.

Systematically avoiding the more conventional documentaries on homosexuality such as *Word Is Out* and *Gay, U.S.A.*, this series should help to define a wider area of discussion about homosexuality in films and society by tracing its development from the '30s to the present.

Theaters throughout the Bay Area are taking part in the series, all proceeds of which go to the campaign against the Briggs Initiative. For more information, call 626-2642.

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