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Queer Eye For L.I.

A SLICE OF CINEMATIC SEXUALITY COMES TO HUNTINGTON

BY SHAWN THORGERSEN

From *My Best Friend's Wedding* to this summer's version of *The Stepford Wives*, Hollywood producers have long given us their safe, stereotyped rendition of the celluloid homosexual—always the sidekick, always quick-witted and charming, and ever devoted to the heterosexual lead's dilemma. In Hollywood, it seems that being gay is a gimmick.

Thankfully, independent filmmakers are offering a breath of fresh air to Long Islanders tired of stock characters via the Long Island Gay and Lesbian Film Festival (LIGLFF). Enjoying its seventh year, the LIGLFF began as a small fundraiser for Community House of Long Island.

"It wasn't even a film festival," director Steve Flynn recalls. "Basically it was a double feature, and in between, everybody had lunch." Since then, however, it's evolved into a popular and influential event, attracting larger crowds each year. "We learned the film festival business," Flynn says, adding it now draws filmmakers from around the world. "This is an event I would like to go to. If I wasn't running it, I'd want to attend."

The depth of this year's entries supports his claim. In addition to approximately 65 short films, the festival boasts several features focusing on some aspect of homosexuality, bisexuality or transgenderism. Jennifer Uihlein of Hicksville, whose documentary, *Saying I Do*, premieres on opening night, feels strongly about using the media to expose and eliminate social inequality. *Saying I Do* explores the homosexual community's right to marriage, and Uihlein hopes to promote change for the better on a large scale. "If just one viewer is



Surge of Power's gay superhero

swayed...the challenges faced in producing *Saying I Do* will be futile," she says. "Women were once regarded as property, and interracial marriages were once outlawed, but time does spark change, and now is the time for change."

Other filmmakers are seeking to tell previously unexplored stories about their community. Kyle Schikner of Los Angeles feels that "queer filmmaking is stuck in a rut. Queer film consists of really two stories told over and over again. Coming out and the AIDS epidemic. Now, both of these issues are very important stories...but we tell them over and over again.... The queer community is so rich and diverse and we have so many stories to be told. We need to start reaching a wider audience if we want to see queer film grow." Schikner's film, *Strange Fruit*, tells the story of a successful, gay New York lawyer who returns home to the bayou after the rape and lynching of a childhood friend.

Some of the films barely focus on homosexuality at all, but just happen to feature lead characters who are gay. Paul Etheredge-Ouzts of Dallas, for instance, has created the self-proclaimed "first gay slasher film" with *Hellbent*, but considers fright factor to be the focus.

"I wanted to make a gay film that wasn't about being gay," he asserts. "*Hellbent* is a horror film; the sexuality of the movie's characters is incidental." In light of this, he shares his perspective on the status of gay filmmaking. "LGBT filmmaking is no longer subversive," he explains. "It's mainstream, inheriting all the aspects—good and bad—of mainstream filmmaking."

Similarly, Vincent J. Roth's



(Above) The cast of Sonia Slutsky's Drag Kings on Tour

(Right) A scene from Marissa King's My Father's Church



Surge of Power, a comic-action film about a gay superhero, spotlights action and fun for audiences of all ages. "My movie is very gentle, no sex, no drugs, no vulgarity," Roth says. "In fact, some parents have brought little children to see *Surge of Power*." He does, however, hope his movie will leave a mark on society. "I am hoping that by introducing a gay superhero to the many superhero movies that have been coming out," he continues, "straight people will become a little more comfortable with gay people." Interestingly, Roth's film enjoys a measure of Hollywood support in the form of cameo appearances: Lou Ferrigno of TV's *The Incredible Hulk*, Nichelle Nichols (Lt. Uhura of the original *Star Trek*) and Noel Neill, who played Lois Lane in *The Adventures of Superman*, all make appearances.

Casper Andreas of Sweden seems to echo Etheredge-Ouzts and Roth's sentiments on placing entertainment before social commentary, highlighting the idea

that these movies are, by and large, no different from your average mainstream Cineplex flick. Andreas wrote and directed *Slutty Summer*, a "somewhat" romantic comedy about a waiter who turns to sex as an antidote for his broken, betrayed heart. "First," says Andreas, "I'm hoping it will entertain.... I hope that the film will make people laugh, but also evaluate their own beliefs on love, sex and relationships." ❖

The Long Island Gay and Lesbian Film Festival will take place at the Huntington Cinema Arts Centre, 423 Park Ave., Huntington, from Nov. 10-14. Patrons can find a schedule of the festival's events at www.liglff.org. Tickets can be purchased by calling the Cinema Arts Centre's box office at 631-423-7611.