

# Taking Up the Camera

Editor's Pick

Two docs for women, by women. **By Candace Moore**



**Wanda Sykes: I'ma Be Me (HBO):** In her first TV special since coming out as a lesbian in 2008, Wanda Sykes continues to dominate the world of stand-up comedy with *Wanda Sykes: I'ma Be Me*. Covering everything from entertaining on a gay cruise to the metric system, no topic is spared, or sacred. While there is much of the outspoken, unflinching Sykes here (remember when she spurred controversy with her appearance at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, where she called to task everyone from Rush Limbaugh to Sarah Palin?) Now out on DVD, *I'ma* also shows Sykes' softer side, particularly when the new mother talks about her twins and her wife. Hilarious, raunchy and insightful, Sykes commands the stage in this no-holds-barred show. Don't miss it—but do make sure the kiddos are tucked into bed first. ([hbo.com](http://hbo.com))  
[Rachel Shatto]



Cheryl Dunye (inset) and Monika Treut in *Lavender Limelight*

Two very different documentaries remind us that our stories are best told through our own lens.

**Finding Dawn (Women Make Movies):** Director Christine Welsh takes on a challenging, harrowing and ultimately healing project: bringing to light the story of some 500 missing or murdered Canadian aboriginal women. Because such a task is overwhelming—if not impossible—Welsh starts with the search for one woman, Dawn Crey, who disappeared from Vancouver's downtown East Side and whose DNA was later discovered at a mass gravesite in a farmer's field.

Rather than focus on her murderer, John Crawford, one of Canada's grizzliest serial killers, Welsh instead focuses on telling the story of the victims and their families. Her camera captures the Women's Memorial March organized each Valentine's Day to mourn the sisters, mothers, lovers and friends who are on Canada's missing women's list. Welsh's initial exploration of women who disappeared from Vancouver's poorest neighborhood expands into a larger topic: how Native women—stereotyped as "squaws"—are targeted as victims throughout the

country and how the authorities tend to be slow to act on their behalf. This is a moving documentary in which the victims seem to haunt the open expanses and craggy terrain that Welsh travels in search of answers. ([wmm.com](http://wmm.com))

**Lavender Limelight: Lesbians in Film (First Run Features):** This award-winning documentary provides wonderful insight into the inspirations, aspirations and major aesthetic and content-based concerns of seven groundbreaking lesbian filmmakers. Featuring interviews as well as carefully chosen clips from each of its subjects' films, *Lavender Limelight* is an outstanding introduction to the work of our finest queer auteurs. Jennie Livingston reveals that she was introduced to voguing—the inspiration for her first film, *Paris Is*

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CRAIG BLANKENHORN (SYKES)

## Crystal Chappell



In the final season of the long-running soap *Guiding Light*, Olivia Spencer, played by Crystal Chappell, surprised herself and millions of fans when she fell in love with Jessica Leccia's character, Natalia Rivera. The duo went on to become one of daytime's most beloved super couples and, like other favorite entertainment couples, were known by their combined name—"Otalía." When the show went off the air in late 2009, neither Chappell nor the fans were ready to say goodbye to the lezzie duo. Chappell heard the cries of lesbian soap fans and created *Venice*, a steamy new web soap that reunites Chappell and Leccia as the star-crossed lovers Gina and Ani. Though only in its infancy, *Venice* is already one of the most buzzed-about new Internet shows.

**How did you react when you learned your character was going to kiss a girl—and like it?**

Oh, I was thrilled. [*Guiding Light* co-head writer] Jill Lorie Hurst and I had kicked the idea around for years. We always thought that Olivia might end up with a woman...I hadn't been that excited about a story line in a very long time.

**How did you prepare for the story line?**

I have a huge gay friend base, so I didn't feel like I had to do a great deal of research. It was mostly, for me, a love story. I've had a love story in my real life, and I've certainly played them on television, so I really didn't feel I needed to do too much research to tell a love story. I did talk to some of my gay friends, and they told me about how they came out and when they realized they were gay and what that felt like.

**Is *Venice's* lesbian story line inspired by Otalía fans?**

It was totally inspired by them. I was completely invested in Otalía and always will be. I couldn't quite let it go. [Jamey Giddens]

frankly about how her small budget and short shooting schedule influenced the love scenes in *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love*; and Heather Lyn MacDonald contextualizes her film *Ballot Measure 9*. The clips included from experimental filmmaker

Su Friedrich's *Hide and Seek* and *Damned if You Don't* are beautiful to behold, and director Cheryl Dunye caps off the film with a history of the Dunnymentary and clips from her early shorts and her first feature, *The Watermelon Woman*. Theatrically released in 1996, this recent DVD release is a must-have for the lesbian cinephile. ([firstrunfeatures.com](http://firstrunfeatures.com)) ■



*Burning*—by chance, while walking through Washington Square Park; Rose Troche describes her fascination with experimental narratives and art house cinema, interests that drove the construction of *Go Fish*, one of the most successful independent lesbian features of the early '90s; Monika Treut discusses her S/M-inspired works, both fictional and documentary; Maria Maggenti speaks

**Other Picks** By Rachel Shatto



**Exes & Ohs: The Complete First Season (LOGO)**

With season two set to air this spring, it's the perfect time to catch up with these Sapphic Seattleites by watching season one of Logo's *Exes & Ohs* on DVD. This cleverly comic series centers on Jennifer (Michelle Paradise), a single dyke looking to get back into the dating game—after a particularly heinous breakup—with the help and support of her “fabulous” friends. ([logoonline.com](http://logoonline.com))



**United States of Tara: The First Season (Showtime)**

Created by Academy Award-winning writer Diablo Cody, who brings her patented voice and humor to this female-centric award-winning series, now out on DVD. *United* explores Tara and her family's attempt to both live with and find the root of her multiple personality disorder. The divine Toni Collette brought home an Emmy last year for her portrayal of Tara in this brilliantly witty and touching series. ([sho.com](http://sho.com))



**Bored to Death (Showtime)**

Freshly dumped and stricken with writer's block, Jonathan Ames (Jason Schwartzman) posts an ad on Craigslist as an unlicensed private detective and madcap adventure and sleuthing ensue. While it's primarily a boy's tale, the bevy of fabulous female guest stars, from Parker Posey to Sarah Vowell, make this a fun watch. There is a lesbian side story, but unfortunately it is painfully rote—sperm theft, le sigh. ([sho.com](http://sho.com))



**Bitch Slap (Freestyle Releasing)**

In a desolate desert, three lethal lovelies who've teamed up to shake down a notorious crime lord uncover more than buried treasure. Intrigue, girl fights and lesbian love (including a sizzling Sapphic sex scene) abound in this '70s throwback, starring *Dante's Cove's* Erin Cummings, Julia Voht and America Olivo. And, keep an eye out for cheeky cameos from *Xena's* Lucy Lawless and Renee O'Conner. ([bitchslap-movie.com](http://bitchslap-movie.com))