

OUR 2006 **SAPPHIRE MOVIE AWARDS**

'D.E.B.S.' • 'Brokeback Mountain' • 'Transamerica' • 'Saving Face'

the word on lesbian lifestyle

girlfriends

Special **06**
FILM
Issue

**SHOOTING
FORWARD**

12

Trendsetters

Weigh In on
Lesbian Film

**BETTER LOOK
SHARP**

Real Dykes,
Real Date Clothes

**MY FRUGAL
VALENTINE**

5

Strategies For a
Great Cheap Date

**CAMERA
READY**

Get Your **Film**
Into a **Fest**

Cyndi Lauper • **Skiing With 'Family'**
Michelle Tea's New Novel • **Austin's Derby Queens**
Sundance's Queer Yield • **Emmanuelle Chriqui**



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GIRL GUIDE

FILM AND DVD

Park City's Gay Aisle

A preview of the queerest films at Sundance.

by Candace Moore

Sundance, the largest American independent film festival, kicks off each year in late January (19–29 in 2006) high in the snowy crags of Park City, Utah. It's the venue for breakout indies, so traditionally the festival has served as a launching pad for many a little queer flick with a big heart.

Films with lesbian content this year? There are two: Shari Cookson's documentary *All Aboard! Rosie's Family Cruise* follows Rosie and Kelli O'Donnell and hundreds of other vacationing families on the maiden voyage of the R Family cruise that the O'Donnells designed for gay and lesbian families. The second is director Maria Maggenti's screwball comedy *Puccini for Beginners* starring Gretchen Mol. The film concerns a New York writer who, freshly broken up with her long-time girlfriend, now balances two new unwieldy affairs.

A few other promising films to look out for: *The Night Listener* (dir. Patrick Stettner), written by Armistead Maupin

and Terry Anderson. Robin Williams, Toni Collette, and Sandra Oh star in this film about telephone calls between a radio host and a young boy. Director Freida Lee Mock's documentary *Wrestling with Angels: Playwright Tony Kushner*, is a look at the life of the award-winning author of *Angels in America*.

Sundance is often the place where new films land distribution deals. So, if you're not huddling with Hollywood types in Utah this year, cross your fingers that these flicks will hit a theater near you in 2006. If you are, the nonprofit Queer Lounge offers a haven for gay and lesbian festival attendees to peel off their mittens, network, and attend panels featuring important queer filmmakers; directors Don Roos (*Happy Endings*) and Alice Wu (*Saving Face*) answered questions there last year. Queer Lounge also hosts some of the most delightful after-parties in Park City, especially if you're into celebrity sightings or want to pick up a luscious film geek.

REVIEWS

GYPO

Dir. Jan Dunn
(Wolfe, 98 minutes)

Gypo is the first British-made film "certified" by Lars Von Trier's Copenhagen-based film group Dogme 95. It is also the first official Dogme film directed by an out lesbian (independent filmmaker Jan Dunn) to center on a lesbian romance.

Established in 1995 to promote bare bones-style filmmaking, Dogme 95's "Rules of Chastity" include the central tenet, "Props and sets must not be brought in." Even the text titles which announce *Gypo's*



Chloe Sirene as Tasha in Jan Dunn's *Gypo*

Courtesy of Wolfe Releasing

Elizabeth Reaser (left) stars in *Puccini for Beginners* as a writer who pines for her ex-girlfriend, played by Julianne Nicholson.

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three different narrative sections (three characters have differing points of view of the same events) are made from materials found on location.

Opening with a shot of the Kent coast, *Gypo's* handheld camera wanders from undulating waves to the word "Helen," spelled out in beach stones along the sand, announcing the first narrative. For the beginning third of *Gypo*, we descend into Helen's small domestic hell. Helen (Pauline McLynn) is a greasy-haired, oft-exasperated young grandmother, who is constantly changing her teenage daughter's kid's nappies when she's not pulling extra-long shifts at the supermarket. That or she's busy suffering the verbal abuse of husband Paul (Paul McGann),

when the sullen man-of-few-words actually speaks to her. Helen thankfully finds distraction in her daughter's friend from school, an intelligent, eighteen-year-old Czech immigrant, Tasha (Chloe Sirene), who faces hateful comments from the locals, including Paul, for being a gypsy. (She lives with her mom in a caravan.)

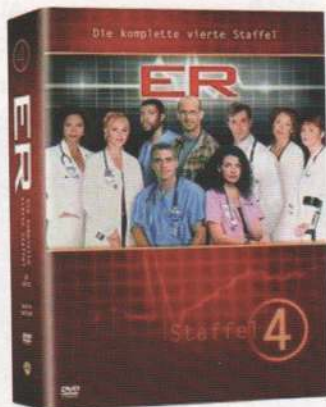
During the second portion of *Gypo* we see things from Paul's point of view. He's a guy who mixes beer with his bigotry, visits local prostitutes, and lays carpet for a living. We learn during his part of the film that he desperately wants out of his financial responsibilities, that is, his family. Our "intimate" visions of Paul are mostly him listening to his football games in the van or getting a blow job.

Although each section of *Gypo* replays the same events in vérité-style, they are seen from different angles and in different lights (figuratively, that is; the filmmakers use natural lighting in accordance with Dogme rules). Decades apart in age, Helen and Tasha "click" while peeling potatoes together in the kitchen, and Tasha's section (the third and final) reveals their love story. In it, Helen's eye bags are less obvious, her tired wisps of hair appear transformed, and she wears a push-up bra when the two go out for wine. Through Tasha's point of view, Helen is beautiful and vulnerable (as well as a force to be reckoned with), and the camera pleasures in Tasha's wide-eyed attempts to seduce the older woman.

Gypo is more than a creative exercise in minimal technology and on-location shooting. The lesbian love story at the core of the film is provocative and almost dreamy, even if the way information is revealed is matter-of-fact. The unpredictable nature of the romance, given Helen and Tasha's large age difference, becomes more believable as our understanding of the characters deepens. The complexly layered plot, spot-on acting, and social realism of the script and imagery create a lovely film devoid of conventional camera tricks. **A**

—Candace Moore

ER: THE COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON
(Warner Home Video, \$49.98)



Since its premiere in 1994, NBC's hit medical drama set in a Chicago trauma unit has featured both guts and melodrama that are, more often than not, the oozing kind. Doctors casually dislodge items from bodies using metal tools, and the sound of heart monitors flat-lining or crash victims screeching is ever present. The doctors are overtired, overworked, always caffeinated, and mostly crabby, but they still manage to get horny between all of the drama, leading to romances both tense and hokey. Seasons before Laura Innes's sapphic Dr. Weaver became head honcho and came out at work, ER featured another, less-central, lesbian in scrubs, Dr. Maggie Doyle (Jorja Fox). Introduced in season three, Dr. Doyle's lesbianism only gets a snippet of mention in season four. **B+** —Candace Moore

THE ULTIMATE LESBIAN SHORT FILM FESTIVAL
(Wolfe, \$24.95)

This compilation DVD features ten fine new lesbian shorts, fresh from the festival circuits. Cumulatively, the films touch on first love, generational differences, sex work, homelessness, hate crimes, pride, domestic abuse, and the healing nature of touch. Tomboys, rebel girls, and adult dykes have mysti-

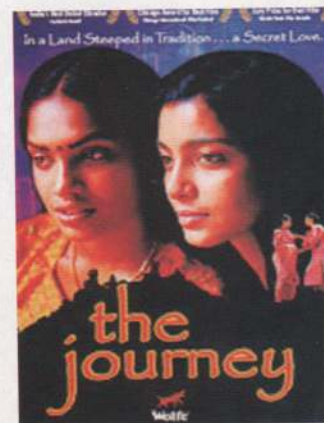
10 short films full of **INTRIGUE!** **FANTASY!** **SUSPENSE!** and, of course, **SEXI!**



cal experiences in haunted nether-realms, boarded-up churches, and under each others' fingertips. A lonely female traveler pays for a sensual night in Amsterdam in *Everything Good* (dir. Elizabeth McCarthy), while in *Dani and Alice* (dir. Roberta Marie Munroe), a beaten woman (Yolanda Ross), supported by her friend (Guinevere Turner), files a police report against her lover. This eclectic collection of drama, documentary, and comedy features great rising talent, including directors Silas Howard (*By Hook or By Crook*) and Chris

Russo (*Size 'em Up*). **A-**
—Candace Moore

THE JOURNEY (SANCHARRAM)
(Wolfe, \$24.95)



Two high school girls in rural India, longtime childhood friends, begin an affectionate lesbian love affair, much to the chagrin of their upper caste families, who threaten to marry them off. A rewriting of the Cyrano story in a lesbian and Indian context, *The Journey* heats up after a slow start, when shy Kiran's long-ing surfaces through the poetic letters she helps a male suitor write to her best friend and love interest Delilah. Best Film at the Chicago International Film Festival and critically acclaimed in India, director Ligy J. Pullappally's film has a breathtaking setting and enchanting soundtrack—both of which subtly inform its mystical edge. DVD bonuses include director's commentary, music videos, and audition clips. **B+** —Candace Moore

In with the New

The new year brings new family to the office.

It's always a pleasure to introduce fresh faces to *Girlfriends'* readers. It's a pleasure, too, to walk into the office and see my trusty "old" team—youthful and brilliant Laurie Koh and Stefani Barber,



Girlfriends' new sales team, with me (top, middle).

for example, who've been assisting me with *Girlfriends'* editorial for more than two years now—but I'm especially invigorated by new team members. Plus, all our new staff are in sales, so they're not necessarily folks you'll see represented by their bylines on a story. Instead, they are the true behind-the-scenes contributors to the magazine and the company. It's easy for editors and readers to forget, but it's because of our salespeople's labor that we get to show up to a queer-friendly office, do the jobs we love, and sustain ourselves and the business so that you can have the magazine you enjoy.

Our new national sales director Karen Shertzer (top left) comes to us from Primedia and the city magazine for San Francisco's East Bay, *The Monthly*, where she was advertising director. She's got more than fifteen years of experience selling display advertising and a long history in the community, as well as an interest in eastern philosophy and native cultures. Her yin is balancing the yang of our two new hot-blooded account managers, Simone Campbell (top right) and Courtney Griffin (front

left), who in their first two weeks have closed on record-breaking dollar-amounts in advertising contracts. Filing, invoicing, and handling the payments on all those deals will be sales coordinator Navia Byrd (front right).

In my mind, our new force is like the fear-naught, ass-kicking team in *D.E.B.S.*, our top-winning film of this year's Sapphie awards. Like our new staff, the D.E.B.S. agents are specially endowed, loyal to their mission, and in the end triumphant over their competitors. At the end of the voting rounds for our well-loved annual feature, *D.E.B.S.* conquered the hearts of our judges, who gave it Best Film over strong fellow-players *My Summer of Love*, *The Joy of Life*, *Saving Face*, and *Unveiled*.

Having overseen ten Sapphie awards now, I can say that two things jump out at me about this year's "lesbian Oscars." First, we had more quality films competing this year than ever before. And despite the still-problematic status of lesbian film at the box office (see "Shooting Forward," page 32), many of our nominees (including *D.E.B.S.*, *Saving Face*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Transamerica*) got substantial screen releases. Second, the trend among indie video companies (Wolfe, for example, who bought our back page this issue) toward financing limited screen releases meant movies like *Unveiled* and *Women in Love* actually moved from queer film fests into theaters. Finally, I was struck by how important it remains for us, as lesbians, to vote with our wallets when it comes to lesbian film. Going out to the movies, that is, may be the activism of the 21st century. Sounds better to me than holding up a picket sign in the rain. 

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