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the word on lesbian lifestyle

# girlfriends

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# GIRL GUIDE

FILM AND DVD

## REVIEWS

### She's Not the Man

To make this gender-bending comedy into pablum, the suits behind *She's The Man* cast a lead who is way less-than-but.

by Candace Moore



Viola (Amanda Bynes) tries out different looks to take on her twin brother's identity.

There's no question why sweet-faced Amanda Bynes (*What a Girl Wants*), who resembles a Cabbage Patch Kid aged and starved into a midriff-baring teeny bopper, was cast into this cross-dressing comedy: she absolutely cannot, for the life of her, butch it up. Bynes plays Viola Johnson, a soccer-obsessed high schooler who disguises herself as her runaway twin brother Sebastian by donning a moppy wig and stick-on sideburns so she can make first-string on the boys-only Illyria Prep soccer team. Passing as male seems beyond both Bynes and her character, yet we are asked to believe that the privileged mini WASPs (okay, there's one token black guy) in this *Twelfth Night*-inspired teen comedy buy Viola-as-Sebastian.

To achieve acceptance from the clefted studs of Illyria, especially the team's star, Duke, Sebastian's hard-bodied, inarticulate, and sensitive roommate, Viola does what many guys do to prove their manhood: she makes misogynistic comments and neglects to shower. But Bynes's girly intonations are always audible in the

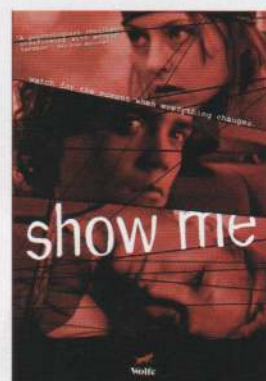
hip-hop inflected, woman-hating lingo she tries to puff out in baby-macho starts and stops. In the end, she looks like an Olsen sister with facial hair. The only high school sports star Bynes might pass for would be Corey Haim's shrumpy, baby-faced footballer in *Lucas*.

It's for a hetero-friendly purpose, I fear, that Viola's poorly played bad boy is always visible as a girl. Having seen this film in a theater full of UCLA fraternity and sorority types lured to the trough by a free preview, I heard the giggles and snorts that accompany the kind of flirty cross-dressing that red-blooded breeders (or young people posing as them) find funny, the kind that reinforces stereotypes about what makes a man and what makes a woman.

Bynes delights viewers with her acting job, precisely because she's good at playing a girl who absolutely cannot act like a boy. Queer possibilities abound when the hot girl in Sebastian's biology class, Olivia (Laura Ramsey), develops a serious crush on Viola-as-Sebastian. But these moments are always closed down before they lead to anything more than quick physical humor—humor, I might add, with a homophobic aftertaste. Viola is constantly trying to ditch or squirm away from Olivia's imminent lesbian kiss with a look of "Oh my God! *Ick!*" on her face. Bynes's Viola isn't convincing at all as a face-shaver, but Bynes's performance in this film does certainly pander to The Man.

**SHOW ME**  
Cassandra Nicaloau  
(Wolfe, \$24.95)

This debut from Canadian director Cassandra Nicaloau may be worth watching if the cat-and-mouse genre is your thing. Pretty and pinched-looking yuppie Sarah (Michelle Nolden) is on her way

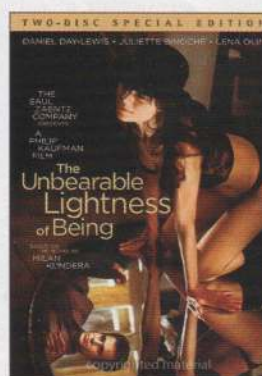


to a romantic getaway outside Toronto when she tries to help out two squeegee kids. Street urchins Jenna (Katharine Isabelle) and Jackson (Kett Turton) wield a knife and unconvincing threats until all three end up at Sarah's cottage. Before two not-so-shocking deaths, Sarah is tied up, nearly escapes, and makes out with both teens. While the characters' vulnerabilities draw you in, the ludicrous plot devices used to keep

the psychosexual tension simmering are at times cringe-inducing. If you want to watch kidnapers and their captive go tête-à-tête, *Manny and Lo* is a better bet. **B-** —Stephanie Miller

The Unbearable Lightness of Being  
Dir. Philip Kaufman  
(Warner Brothers, \$27)

The special edition two-disk DVD set of Philip Kaufman's 1988 erotic and political epic seeks to improve upon the Criterion edition by adding a making-of documentary and the trailer—pluses for rabid fans. Certainly, there are reasons to foam at the



lip over this steamy, pseudo-intellectual drama about a love triangle in Russian-occupied Czechoslovakia. While



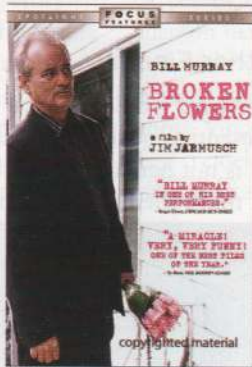
Daniel Day Lewis's sly eyebrow maneuvers can read as dorky now, the other performances keep their heat. The scene where young, soft-eyed Juliette Binoche's bookish nymph and Lena Olin's bowler-hatted sex goddess snap photos of one another nude—a formative one for many dykes—still sizzles. **A-** —*Candace*

*Moore*

**BROKEN FLOWERS**  
Dir. Jim Jarmusch  
(Universal Home Video, \$29.98)

The flowers crushed in Jim Jarmusch's recent flick aren't just the roses blackening in Don Johnston's (Bill Murray) lonely bachelor pad. A Don Juan

with a longstanding rep, Johnston has also lost his taste for



romance. This sad clown stays downbeat and lost as he journeys through America's badlands to discover which of five women wrote him an anonymous letter claiming he's a dad. Among Johnston's exes, Jessica Lange is the hot spot as new-agey "animal communicator" Carmen, blistering in a film full of

demeaned homemakers, ditzes, and hicks. When Carmen's leggy receptionist (Chloë Sevigny) saucily grabs her boss's behind to remind her of an appointment, Jarmusch relies on lesbian chic to boost his rather heartless film. Despite kudos from critics, this film is ultimately a disappointment. **C** —*Candace Moore*

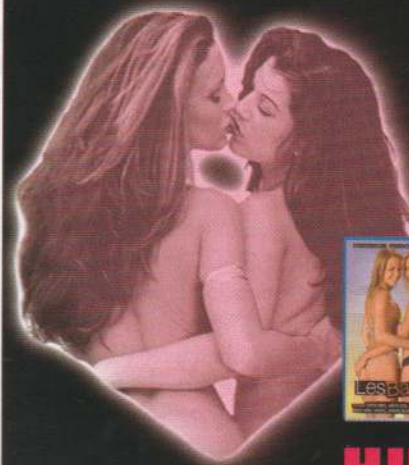
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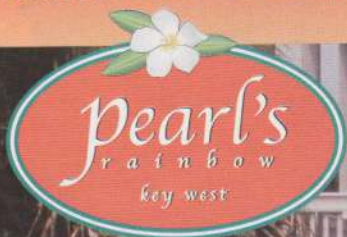
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INSIDE GIRLFRIENDS



**W**hen I was working on my women's studies degree in college, I took a survey course in American women's history. It was an eye-opening experience (and not just because of my powerful crush on my whip-smart tomboyish T.A., which caught me by surprise because up until then I'd dated boys). The goal of the course was to teach us how history isn't primarily shaped by politicians, business leaders, and the like, but by social movements made up of regular Americans—in this case, women.

The single essay I remember most from that class was by Lillian Faderman, on the rise of a lesbian subculture in women's and girls-only schools. I loved that essay so much I ran out to buy Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*, which taught me about the long and beautiful tradition of women's romantic friendships. That book was the first lesbian book to many women in my generation; I remember discovering it under my cousin's bed in 1984—further proof, other than her rugby problem, that I wasn't the only one in the family.

That's why I'm honored that *Girlfriends* is able to publish this early excerpt from Faderman's next book, tentatively titled *Gay L.A.*, which won't be in print until the fall. I hope it's not the only occasion you'll have this Women's History Month to think about how our lifestyle today wouldn't have much life or style without the brave actions and alliances of our foresisters.

Exciting announcement: As of the next issue, Suzanne Corson (above left), who's been managing the editorial for our naughty little sister magazine *On Our Backs*, will be taking over as executive editor at *Girlfriends*. So extend a hearty welcome to Suzanne; make sure you write her with your feedback on the magazine.

girlfriends the word on lesbian lifestyle

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