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curve

THE BEST-SELLING LESBIAN MAGAZINE

Jamie Babbit
Carly Pope
Daniela Sea

Itty Bitty Titty Committee

The most anticipated
film of the year

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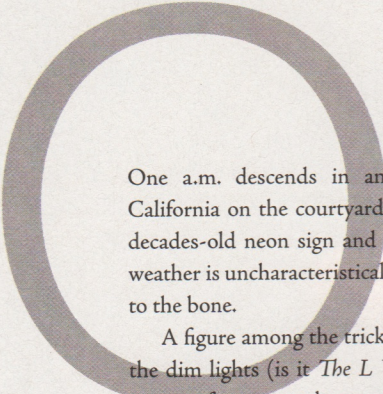
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SEPTEMBER 2007 VOLUME 17#7



Stylist: Faranak DaCosta
Makeup artist: Jon Hennessey
Hair stylist: Shannon Hoover

From left: Jamie Babbit, Carly Pope and Daniela Sea
Jamie is wearing an Alexander McQueen cardigan from Holt
Renfrew, and pants by Mandula. Carly is wearing Alexander
Wang, skinny jeans by Paige both from Holt Renfrew, and
Miss Sixty ankle boots. Daniela is wearing a Japanese
hand-died T-shirt by Mandula, pants and trainers her own.



One a.m. descends in an industrial stretch of Southern California on the courtyard of a seedy motel, the type with a decades-old neon sign and a Bates Hotel-ish anonymity. The weather is uncharacteristically freezing, a cold that goes straight to the bone.

A figure among the trickling-down mist and moths circling the dim lights (is it *The L Word's* Daniela Sea?) juggles three oranges from a snack cart with a kind of Zen aplomb. Off to the side, crew members huddle around a heat source; cords and a trail of film equipment lead to a curtained-off hotel room. Through headphones, I hear warm sounds from inside that contrast with the outside scene, small moans and the intimate mouth-on-flesh sounds of two women beginning to negotiate sex. A third woman's voice delicately interrupts to breach questions of position, how the actors will look on camera and how they feel in the scene.

No, this is not the set of *The L Word*. I haven't overheard any mid-bliss references to Shane or Bette. The film being shot late into the night, *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*, is the first feature-film release from POWER UP, and it boasts a bevy of female talents and lesbian icons. Likely to be the next big queer thing, it's helmed by Jamie Babbit, director of 1999's super cute and sarcastic teen flick *But I'm a Cheerleader*.

Centering on a feminist group that stages radical actions and the love affairs that ensue while they feverishly protest misogyny guerilla-style, *Itty Bitty* offers us riot-grrl redux, restyled for the new millennium.

"I've been wanting to make this movie since 2000, about

that we had at college, were really platforms for lesbians to meet other lesbians and hit on them. That's where the comedy came into play."

Guinevere Turner (*Go Fish*, *The L Word*) concurs, "I think there's a process we have to go through to be extreme in order to find out what really matters. I was in ACT UP and Queer Nation and at that same age was very much in the streets, chanting 'We're here, we're queer,' and participating in kiss-ins. The things we would do in the name of politics! Like pose naked for T-shirts and all kinds of things. [This film] is definitely making fun of those kinds of politics, but I think that it's also pointing to being political, what that means and what the subtleties of that are."

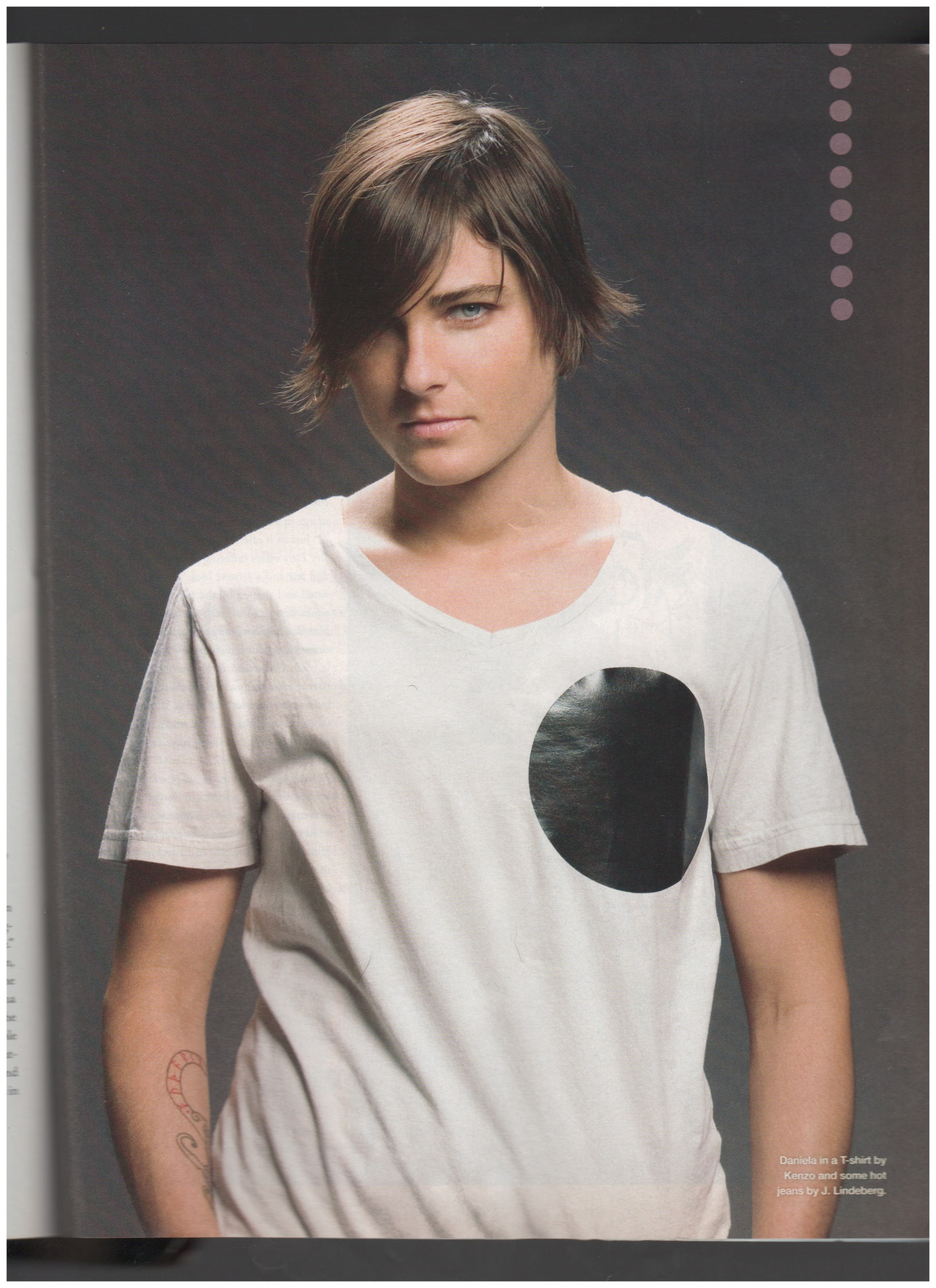
Babbit's new coming-of-age comedy boasts a great ensemble cast that includes Sea, Turner, model Jenny Shimizu, Melanie Mayron (*Thirtysomething*), Carly Pope (*Popular*, *Dirt*), Nicole Vicius (*Half Nelson*, *Last Days*), professional skateboarder Lauren Mollica, Melonie Diaz (*Raising Victor Vargas*), and Deak Evgenikos (*Hung*, *Hummer*). Face it, it's been a while since we've seen so many ladies starring in one lesbian-themed film. Not since 1994's *Go Fish*, perhaps, has there been an amusing, refreshing portrayal of queer-female community on the bigger, rather than the smaller, screen. Lately cable TV seems leaps and bound ahead of independent filmmaking in terms of depicting our lives in edgy and honest ways. Chalk it up to lackluster funding and support for LGBTQ material in an industry focused on box office returns. POWER UP, the only nonprofit, gay women's film production company and educational organization, seeks to correct some of that discrepancy, by putting money and concerted grrl power behind this queer, feminist vision, producing the organization's first feature-length film.

"There's this universal experience where girls come into feminism and either reject it or get excited about it that usually happens in the early 20s. ... It's important to show that just because you're a lesbian, doesn't mean that you know one single thing about feminism."

a girl that becomes political," Babbit says of *Itty Bitty*. "There's this universal experience where girls come into feminism and either reject it or get excited about it that usually happens in the early 20s. [The main character] Anna is a 'Dinah Shore weekend' lesbian who just likes to party and go to GirlBar, because I think it's important to show that just because you're a lesbian doesn't mean that you know one single thing about feminism. She works at a McJob as a receptionist in a plastic surgery office and meets a very political Smith graduate named Sadie, who has this micro-action feminist group."

Babbit explains that she wanted to capture the radical turn common especially to dykes new to adulthood, without losing a sense of humor in the film. So she played up the "hooking up" that often happens alongside the consciousness raising: "I wanted to explore the idea that a lot of the political groups that people became a part of, like the 'Take Back the Night' rallies

Turner, who cameos as TV personality Marcy Malone in the movie, picked *Itty Bitty Titty Committee's* title, after the sing-songy name "we called girls who had no tits in seventh grade." The message of the film's radical girl group, Clits in Action, aka the CIA, however—and an underlying message of the film itself—is to appreciate all types of women's bodies. Anna becomes inspired to join the girl gang after the CIA tags the windows of the plastic surgery clinic where she works. Nicole Vicius (who plays Sadie, leader of the gang) described executing the CIA's mixed-media methods: "The CIA goes out and defaces property and takes action through art. We'd go to film in



Daniela in a T-shirt by
Kenzo and some hot
jeans by J. Lindeberg.



Jamie in her own T-shirt, jacket by Olmar and Mirta, pants by Mandula and necklace by Shereen Derouseau.

places like the city mall, so we'd literally be running around and doing it the way they would. We were carrying these papier-mâché huge statues under garbage bags and running into stores and changing the whole mannequin display. Changing these mannequins in bikinis to all different shapes and sizes of women, that was fun!" The gang's home base and crash pad is a downtown L.A. loft where the CIA's resident artist, Meat (Deak Evgenikos), works and rooms with comrades Shulamith (Carly Pope) and Aggie (Lauren Mollica). Evgenikos describes Meat as fearless. "We all are fear based, and that kind of goes out the window with Meat. She's based on her passion, not only as an artist but in the way that she loves. Meat is having this coming of age in learning that love is very fluid."

Just as it offers assorted characters to relate to, *Itty Bitty* offers differing portrayals of lesbian love and sex and a sincere look at relationships motivated and shaped by the perceptions (and sometimes hangups) of each individual involved. The film also depicts intergenerational love. While age differences between coupled women are not a topic often covered in most queer films, Babbit says that she "wanted to explore that because I think it is a very typical lesbian thing. We've all heard the stories about Rita Mae Brown and all these amazing women in our community, and a lot of them do date younger women."

Melanie Mayron, who portrayed a woman with a younger boyfriend in *thirtysomething*, again gets to play the hot older woman, a feminist figurehead named Courtney. Says Mayron of Courtney, "Like Patricia Ireland, the head of NOW, she's the head of a feminist organization that's active in Washington and very by the book, working the political arena the way it has to be worked. She's got a younger girlfriend, Sadie, who's involved in a radical, younger group, and she's critical of how her girlfriend is doing things." Drama also hinges around Sadie's conflicting feelings of security with Courtney and her new interest in Anna. "Courtney was a guest lecturer at Sadie's school," Vicius says. "She really looked up to her. Sadie's vulnerable underneath that strong façade; she's still trying to find her way. She gets confused because she gets involved with this other girl [Anna] and yet she's still really tied to Courtney."

Itty Bitty also shows gender as a spectrum, portraying characters who are feminine, masculine, in between and transitioning from female to male. Daniela Sea plays Calvin, a bomb specialist who

recently returned from Iraq, whom the CIA gals pick up and recruit while she's hitchhiking. Sea describes her character as a tough girl who is "pretty boyish, but I don't think Calvin intellectualizes like I am genderqueer. Maybe she'd go down that road."

Skater Lauren Mollica takes on her first film role as Aggie, a transitioning FTM whom she describes as "super mellow."

"[The CIA is] hardcore, and none of it's his idea, but he's going with it. They're cool, and he wants to roll with them."

The CIA try to "raise the consciousness of the general public about how the public space is dominated by heterocentric imagery and male images of women," Babbit explains, "how all these images around us at all times are making us feel like shit about ourselves." She believes the film's lightheartedness and grungy, Super 8 aesthetic will keep things more comedic and upbeat, rather than didactic, in the spirit of queer and feminist punk rock. "If you look to bands like Le Tigre, they're able to be really funny and [play] dance music but [appear] hardcore feminist.

community seem to characterize *Itty Bitty*, both on screen and behind the scenes, especially given that the cast and crew were primarily women. POWER UP's mentorship program also provided support for talents new in the film industry to try on important roles in the making of the film. The script was written by Tina Mabry and Abigail Shafran, whom producers Andrea Sperling, Lisa Thrasher and Stacy Codikow found by posting ads at local universities looking for writing talent. As Babbit recalls, "We got a bunch of writers who were interested and weeded it down from the meetings and sample scripts they gave us. We gave them the treatment for *Itty Bitty*, had them each write three scenes, and picked two writers based on those

"I wanted to explore the idea that a lot of the political groups that people became a part of, like the 'Take Back the Night' rallies that we had at college, were really platforms for lesbians to meet other lesbians and hit on them."

The tone of their music is the tone of this film. The other genesis for the movie was my love of a record label called Kill Rock Stars [of Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney fame]. I wanted to make a movie where I could use all of that music."

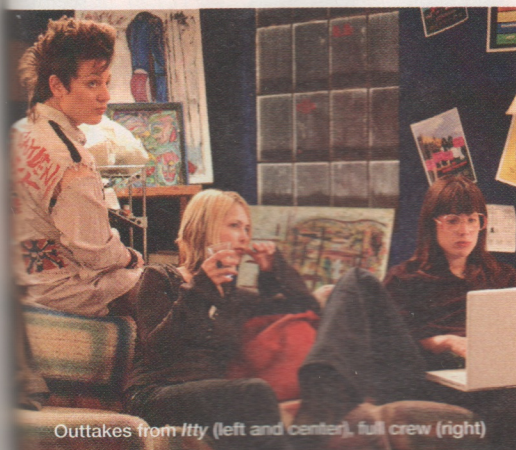
Itty Bitty's look is as much an homage to underground ideals as its sound is. While Babbit says the aesthetic of *But I'm a Cheerleader* was modeled after the pinks of Barbie's Dream House, this film draws its inspiration from a grittier source, Lizzie Borden's classic feminist film *Born in Flames*.

Sea, too, talks of her appreciation for the subversive, spontaneous feel of on-location shooting. "This one day we were shooting on Super 8, so we were loaded into this big van and driving around locations in L.A. We went to the Greyhound station and got kicked out because we didn't have a license. It was a stripped-down crew and felt very DIY."

Both a do-it-yourself ethos and a goal of cultivating female

scenes." Fresh voices were complemented by cast and crew members at various levels of experience and responsibility who arranged their schedules and traveled into L.A. to work on a film they could stand behind. Evgenikos remembers that "we had a lot of people fly in from out of state, who put themselves up to do the film and that reinforced what I was doing every day, the impact that I could make on other people's lives because they felt impacted by it."

Itty Bitty Titty Committee, which won Best Narrative Feature Jury Award at the South by Southwest film festival (its American premiere) and Best Lesbian Feature Film Jury Award at the Q Cinema Film Festival, will be released theatrically in L.A. and N.Y. this fall. The flick is a rare breed indeed, a film with queer-female content that maintains its sense of humor while taking community-building politics to heart in its mode of production. ■



Outtakes from *Itty* (left and center), full crew (right)



Director Angela Robinson takes lesbians to the smallest screen.
By Candace Moore

ONE WOMAN'S TRASH

A SPIN OFF of a fictional Web site masterminded by *The L Word* character Alice, OurChart.com has quickly become a real-life contender, drawing more than 550,000 unique visitors a month to the lesbian social networking site. It's become a launch pad for experiments with new delivery formats for original creative material, as evidenced by *GirlTrash!*, Angela Robinson's cutting-edge girl gangster Web series. Frank, funny and ever friendly, success hasn't yet gone to Robinson's head. While she's worked within Disney-bankrolled budgets and practically nonexistent ones, she's managed to keep her wit and vision intact in both studio and indie production contexts. In fact, the successful director of *D.E.B.S.* and *Herbie: Fully Loaded* has practically carved out an action-packed, humor-filled, girl-powered oeuvre—in *GirlTrash!*. As in her previous work, women are the ones kicking ass and taking names (with a few kissing breaks).

It's great to see an A-list director adding content to a community site like OurChart.com. How did you get involved?

I was initially approached by Ilene Chaiken, the creator of *The L Word*, when I was working on the show last season. She, together with her OurChart partners—Hilary Rosen and Beth Callaghan—took me out to lunch and pitched me the idea of doing a Web series. I'd wanted to experiment with doing something on the Internet for awhile, so it seemed like a good opportunity. They told me I could do whatever I wanted, so I treated it as sort of a writing exercise. I'd always had the idea to do a down-and-out buddy comedy with chicks, and this seemed like a great way to tell that story.

There are plenty of actors we know from their queer roles on television involved on this project. How did you cast the series?

I treated the whole thing as kind of fan fiction for myself. I approached actresses I knew or wanted to work with and told [them] each the basic premise and that I would write a character designed specifically for them, if they agreed to be in the project. There are so many more parts for men, and women often find themselves being the girlfriend, or the babe, or the bitch. I wanted to write parts where the women got really beefy, complex roles that were funny and violent and immoral and heroic—so that you got a chance to see what all these women can do. A lot of times [actors] are only called upon to do about 10 percent of what they're capable of. I worked with Rose Rollins on *The L Word*. I'm a big *South of Nowhere* fan, so I met Gabby Christian and Mandy Musgrave at a party and asked them if they'd be in it, and they said yes. Gabby wanted to be "bad" because she plays a character who is always so good on her show. I've known Amber Benson for years—I tracked her down at Sundance a number of years ago, as I'm an insane *Buffy* fan. I also worked with casting director Rick Montgomery to find people through more traditional casting methods. He found Michelle Lombardo, who's incredible. And I could not find anybody who was right for Daisy, and I called my friend, Joel Michael, who I always call whenever I have a casting crisis, and he told me about Lisa Rieffler, who is the front person for the band Killola, and I checked out her videos on YouTube and cast her off those.

The aesthetics of *GirlTrash!* seem mixed in an exciting way: indie grit, action slick, with a feminist punk edge.

The gritty look of the series was born out of necessity. We were running and gunning with absolutely no budget and no time, shooting tons of pages a

day. My partner, Alex Kondracke, was the cinematographer, and she had shot a lot of documentaries, so we just piled the actors in a van, found a location, told them to get out and do the scene and she just followed the action as it developed. It lent an energy and an excitement to the acting, which was really fun. I'd never worked that way before, I am always doing really composed shots, so it was new for me. Also, we were shooting in DV on a Prosumer camera, which can look pretty crappy a lot of the time. But when we transferred the footage to black and white, it took the curse off the video, which we discovered. The decision to make it black and white happened very late in post-production. I was wracking my brain for what the *GirlTrash!* Web site should look like, and then Alex came up with the mugshot concept and designed the site with a company called "Most Postmodern in San Francisco." I loved the way the mugshots of the girls looked in black and white, so I tried transferring the first episode to black and white, and I found that the episode took on a totally different feeling. It felt really gritty and art punky, like early *Jim Jarmusch*. We decided to switch things up and go with black and white for the main action and color for the flashbacks. It doesn't really make sense, but it feels right when I watch it.

***GirlTrash!*, as with *D.E.B.S.*, reminds me of Godard's redoing of the gangster genre in *Breathless*. There's a clear appreciation for the Hollywood action film in your work, and yet you work on a meta level, too. You reserve the ability to spoof some of the genre conventions.**

Most of my work plays on some genre conventions. I'm not sure why this is. Maybe I watched too much television as a kid—it's just how I think. I was always watching genre movies growing up and then re-writing them in my head, with girl heroes or the girls hooking up, so I think that now that I have the ability to create content, a lot of it is an attempt to remake all those movies I loved, the way I would've wanted to see them.

What does making Web episodes allow you as a director that working on film features or even on a television series, doesn't?

Creating a Web series is really a trip—it's been a very mixed experience for me. On the one hand, it's amazing because there are no rules and no oversight. When you work on movies or TV shows there is always a network or a studio who is looking over your shoulder and dictating from above. The most liberating thing about the entire process was that I wrote the script, then thought, who do I have to give this to for notes and approval? And then I realized: nobody. That was great. The other neat thing is the instant response from viewers in the forums and blogs. You put something up, and then right away people tell you what they think, and it's a really raw, interactive relationship with an audience that is different from sitting in an audience and showing people your work. It's weird that you can post something in Los Angeles and within seconds somebody in the Philippines can respond to it. On the downside, it's like the Wild West. Everybody is venturing out into this new space and trying to find an economic model that makes sense. It takes as much time, energy and thought to do this as it takes to make a movie, but people think that since it's on the Web that it is somehow easier to do, which is not true. I'm a real perfectionist, so I had to find and count on a lot of amazing people to help me make this for zero money, from production to post, which is difficult.

What are some of the constraints of working in this format?

The technology is cool but also kind of a pain in the ass. There's a lot of stuff I still don't understand. On the production end, it's pretty easy—we shot on DV, edited on Final Cut Pro, and I'm amazed with how fast you can shoot, cut and deliver content. On the delivery side, I'm still learning about the difference between Flash files and QuickTimes, and resolution

and bandwidth. It's annoying to have so little control over how people watch your work—if you have a souped-up computer, it's a great show, but if you have a bad connection, the image is steppy and slow. I'm a control freak, so I have to just be Zen and let that go—embrace that people will experience and respond to the work out in cyberspace.

It seems like now is the time that Web-based films and serial forms can really come to fruition because the technology seems to finally be working out some of its kinks. Do you think this is going to be a major format in the future?

I definitely think "Webisodes" and online delivery are going to be a major format for the future. For the longest time, the studios and networks have held the keys to distribution, and that is no longer the case. That is an incredibly exciting notion, that filmmakers might be liberated to create and distribute content directly to an audience and reap the benefits without a middleman. But it's also very scary because with the democratization of the Internet, content creators might not be able to get paid as much for what they do. There might be more stuff that you get paid less to make, which is disheartening. But the way I see it, the genie is already out of the bottle, so I'm just going to try and figure it out. It's my dream to make content for an audience that wants to see it and make a living doing it, and I think eventually, the Internet is going to be the place to be.

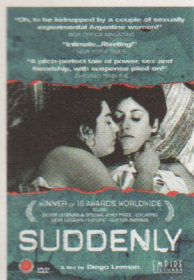
***GirlTrash!* is also going to be a comic series. Did you think of *GirlTrash!* as having a comic book component and having other merchandising options from the get go?**

From the get go, my notion is that *GirlTrash!* is an infinitely merchandisable and spin-offable brand. I see it as starting with *GirlTrash!* the series, which could spin off to *GirlTrash!: Miami*, or *GirlTrash!: Rio*, or *GirlTrash!: Supernatural*—the possibilities are endless. And it always bugged me that as an artist, you come up with an idea and when you sell it to a studio or network, they immediately own it, and you lose control of your creation from that point. The studio can decide to make it or shelve it, and unless you are a really big fish, you don't really participate in the exploitation and



Snogging *GirlTrash!* style

ownership of what you thought of it in the first place. It can be kind of a lame deal. So, *GirlTrash!* is a grassroots experiment. We're just going for it. We've struck a merchandising deal and are offering *GirlTrash!* clothing and memorabilia—I'm developing a comic book and will maybe spin it off into a TV show or a movie, depending on how things go. Or maybe it will just live on the Web—it's wide open. I'm seeing how far I can go totally independent. ... We'll see what happens. ■



EDITOR'S PICK

Suddenly (First Run Features): A lonely frumpled sales girl in Buenos Aires wants to escape her dreary life and, as with many of those “watch-what-you-wish-for” types of moments, lo and behold she’s kidnapped by a pair of butchy girls who steal a taxi and take her on an adventure she’s never seen. Resembling early indies from directors like Jim Jarmusch, *Suddenly* is captivating and unpredictable and rather mellow for an actual kidnap caper. But oh, we should all be abducted by hot Latin-American dykes. (*firstrun-features.com*) — *Diane Anderson-Minshall*

It's Time to Go Retro

Revisit the past through these campy queer classics. | **By Candace Moore**



Bam Bam digs Celeste

Bam Bam and Celeste savor the alternative aesthetics and underdog hero themes of the '80s, while Wolfe's new additions to its vintage DVD collection fill in—with flesh as much as content—the gaps in the representation of lesbian love.

Bam Bam and Celeste (Wolfe Video)

If there's one thing comedian Margaret Cho and longtime collaborator Lorene Machado (director of the *Cherry Bombs*' hit comedy concert films) nail in this nostalgic comedy, it's Cyndi Lauper chic. Like a glow stick that won't go out, the movie radiates the fun punk look and explosive emotionality of the thank-fully less material girl.

An '80s-inspired garland of character types, storylines and puffy hair, aerosol sprayed together and floated aloft with upbeat new-wave synth, *Bam Bam and Celeste* might well bring you back to when you were another ostracized high schooler waiting for the John Hughes movie soundtrack to kick in and save you. The film flits tongue-in-cheek through against-the-odds narratives, never fully digging its platforms in. It fast forwards in the lives of its outcast heroes to find gothed-out Celeste and divinely faggy Bam Bam in their early 30s, still pelted with slushies by the same ol' townies. He's gotten a job at *Fantastic Sams*; she's converted from pink to blue *Manic Panic*. It's in the stars for these two best friends to get out of DeKalb, Ill. and the movie's middle toys with a queer road trip through Hicksville,

with hats off to *Thelma and Louise*, before landing in New York City seen through *Desperately Seeking Susan* sunglasses. There the diva duo must confront sworn salon enemies on a live make-over TV show with the aid of an eyelash curler. Perhaps too much gets packed in; the film can't seem to decide which is more important: true allegiance to cheese, bitter social critique, campy hand-job jokiness, or the fitting in of cameos (Jane Lynch, Alan Cumming, Wilson Cruz). That doesn't make Cho's star vehicle any less of a ball to watch (excepting a few characters spouting not-so-funny Nazi mouth). (*wolfevideo.com*)

Just the Two of Us (Wolfe Video)

Perhaps the crowning achievement of hippie-era dykesploitation films, resurrected from the archival vaults and restored to its vibrant, earthy '70s look, this once “lost” lesbian flick from 1975 is now found on DVD as part of Wolfe's new vintage collection and is sure to satisfy the queer-film historiographer in us all. Barbara Peeters and Jaque Beerson's flouncy tale of two housewives who discover the joys of disrobing and rubbing atop each other while their hubbies are “off playing war games” offers unadulterated T&A, exaggerated dialogue, and a pot-inspired soundtrack to indulge in, chuckle at or give the occasional grimace. While the new lady lovebirds spend ample screen time rolling around in splendidly wallpapered domestic nests, they also find some time

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