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EDITOR'S PICK

Steam

(FenceSitter Films):

Using a steam room as a meeting point where women of different ages, races and sexual orientations exchange intimate conversation about love, life and pleasure was not director Kyle Schickner's original idea. "I first thought of a yoga class and realized that wouldn't work," he says. *Steam*, now in theaters, introduces three women: Doris (the amazing Ruby Dee), who, after losing her husband, grows older and lonelier and questions whether she will be happy again; single mom Laurie (scene stealer Ally Sheedy), who tries to raise a son while enduring her ex-husband and his new trophy girlfriend; and Elizabeth (Kate Siegel), a college student who struggles to reconcile her desire for a female classmate with the values of her religious family. Between plotlines that thicken with the steam, we get to view each woman as she grows. Look for comic relief from Laurie's soccer mom friend (Chelsea Handler).

(fencesitterfilms.com)

— Colleen M. Lee

Cinema Goes Global

The latest lesbian films have international origins and reach. | By Candace Moore

Patrycja Ziolkowska (left) and Nurgül Yesilçay in *The Edge of Heaven*

From the swimming pools of France, to the coast of the Black Sea, to the beaches of Japan, the latest lesbian films chronicle lust, love and politics across cultures and generations.

Water Lilies (directed by Céline Sciamma): Dunking audiences into the singular world of girls' synchronized swimming, this film takes puberty and pubescent bodies to an extreme that is as unsettling as it is captivating. "I want to watch," says 15-year-old Marie (Pauline Acquart), whom we first see poolside, her brooding eyes and full-lipped pout receptive to every twist and splash of teenage team captain Floriane (Adele Haenel, a ringer for *Swimming Pool's* Ludivine Sagnier). As a favor, Floriane sneaks Marie into team practice, so she can swim around the bodies as they lift up into the air, watching them from below. In return, Marie must serve as wingperson to Floriane's constant sexual experimentation with boys and men, a role that becomes excruciating because of Marie's unspoken, insatiable desire. She steals Floriane's trash and performs a carnal ritual—smelling tissues, eating an old apple core and unraveling scrawled notes. But the attraction seems increasingly reciprocal as Floriane, after facing the threat of losing her sidekick, begins teasing and tempting Marie, pressing her more developed body against Marie's and holding her lips a breath away from a kiss. This French coming-of-age story by young director Céline Sciamma has an eye for

the explicit female sexuality of a Catherine Breillat film and the character complexity of early Jane Campion. The camera revels in growing breasts, slender arms and even armpits lined up for inspection by a swim coach wielding a razor; but, while the framing marks our gaze as perverse, we are welcome to watch, just like Marie.

The Edge of Heaven (Strand Releasing): Filmed on location in Bremen and Hamburg, Germany, and Istanbul and Trabzon, Turkey, and presented in Turkish, German and English, this transnational tour de force by Fatih Akin (*Head On*) deserves the best screenplay awards it has won at Cannes and the European Film Awards. *The Edge of Heaven* feels both literary and political. Resembling an epic poem that builds resonance and rhyme, sadness and beauty as it unfolds, the film experiments with narrative and the folding over of time. It opens with a scene at a gas station that seems meaningless at first, but gains significance when replayed, shot-for-shot, near the story's conclusion. Throughout, we follow one fallible character after another, but the effect is never superficial or jumpy. Nejat (Baki Davrak), a professor of German at a Hamburg university, searches for a twenty-something Turkish revolutionary, Ayten (Nurgül Yesilçay), hoping to repay his father's debt by offering to foot the bill for

Going Global continued on page 62

DVD PICKS



Kiss Me Deadly (here!): Aided by experienced TV thespians, this gay spy thriller sustains its suspense. *Queer as Folk*'s Robert Gant plays retired NATO operative Jacob Keane, and Shannen Doherty has left the 90210 area code—she's all grown up as a former spy, and Jacob's former partner Marta, who loses access to her own memories while trying to figure out who wants her dead. Marta pulls Jacob into a confused life on the run, decades after their last botched assignment. In the process, Jacob's boyfriend, lesbian best friend and daughter all fall in harm's way. This is an accomplished genre film set throughout Europe, with characters who happen to be queer. (*heretv.com*) — CM



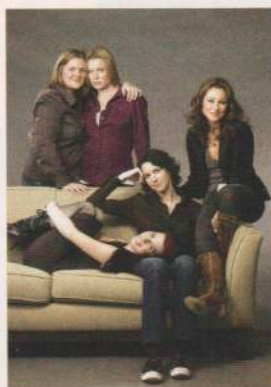
Finn's Girl (Wolfe): While riding her motorcycle home from the abortion clinic she runs, a sexy butch doctor narrowly avoids getting shot, prompting a police protection team to go into overdrive. Dr. Finn Jefferies (Brooke Johnson) is unharmed, but undercover cops, including Diana (Yanna McIntosh)—an otherwise focused officer who develops a crush on her watch—secure Finn's Toronto

home and guard her and her 11-year-old daughter Zelly (Maya Ritter) day and night. This quirky, lesbian version of *The Bodyguard* centers on how Finn can't admit to her protector that she's vulnerable. Usually strong, Finn's still mourning the death of her long-term partner, Nancy (Gail Maurice), and learning the challenges of single parenting. Zelly's coping badly with the loss of one of her moms and acting out like only a preteen can. Directors Dominique Cardona and Laurie Colbert successfully handle the many elements involved in their plotline. (*wolfevideo.com*) — CM



American Drug War: The Last White Hope (Sacred Cow Productions): Director Kevin Booth combines his own personal narratives about addiction in his family with interviews with convicted crack cocaine entrepreneur Freeway Ricky Ross, former drug czar General Barry McCaffrey, actor Tommy Chong (of Cheech and Chong) and assorted drug users, dealers, medical marijuana activists, prisoners, wardens and politicians. This documentary exposes the implicit racism, classism and hypocrisy of the United States' drug policy. From recounting Nixon's war on drugs in the late '70s, to linking present-day drug use to the support of terrorism, Booth traces the

institutionalized fear mongering and private profiteering surrounding drugs, and constructs a convincing fiscal, political and social argument for their decriminalization. (*american-drugwar.com*) — CM



Exes and Ohs: The Complete First Season (Logo): Thank goodness Logo just announced a second season for this hot dyke comedy, because the six episodes of director Lee Friedlander's delightfully watchable first season are too brief. Star (and creator) Michelle Paradise is the lesbian everywoman: a smart, sexy documentary filmmaker named Jennifer who breaks the fourth wall of TV to tell viewers the de facto rules of lesbian dating with a combination of snark and sincerity. Plus, there's her ex-turned-BFF Sam (played by the "my God she's sexy, where has she been?" Marnie Alton), the matching couple (Kris and Chris—don't tell me you don't have a matching couple in your friend circle), the musician Crutch (played by openly gay Heather Matarazzo) and an ever-present ex, Sienna (who left Jennifer for their couples therapist and at whose lesbian wedding Jennifer gets stuck in the hilarious first episode). There's pole dancing and psychotherapy and lesbian baby lust and about every other cliché that is so true in my world. (*logoonline.com*) — DAM

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