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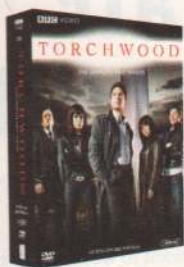
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OCTOBER 2008 VOLUME 18#8



EDITOR'S PICK

Torchwood: The Complete First Season and Torchwood: The Complete Second Season (BBC America):

What's more exciting than the second season of *Torchwood* being available on DVD? How about the first season being released concurrently on Blu-Ray? BBC America's highest-rated show ever, *Torchwood* is deliciously sexy—filled with adventure, mischief and homo (and lesbo) eroticism. Each disc set lets you follow the daredevil adventures of Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) and his alien-fighting team, especially Gwen (Eve Myles) and Tosh (Naoko Mori). Season two offers up freaky new aliens, plenty of temptation and groovy guest-star appearances. Bonuses include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes and outtakes. (bbcamerica.com)

—Diane Anderson-Minshall

Bearing Witness

Three new films on discrimination, disease and radical revolt. | By Candace Moore



Dram-o-rama in *Fine Dead Girls*

Threats come from all sides in film this month: sinister neighborhood gossip, a deadly and unfathomable virus, a hyper-involved government, conservative families and long-distance relationships. These features will move you, frighten you, thrill you and call you to action.

The Terrorist She-Freaks of Texas (Hybrid Vigor Productions): Mixing found footage and grainy film of Andy Warhol-style queer female superstars run amok, this mock-homophobic propaganda film is introduced by the title card "Department of Homeland Security Presents..." while a monotonous voice quotes faux-patriotic, conservative slogans. Catchphrases like "amber fields of grain" echo in white subtitles on the screen and flicker in and out in subliminal jerks. The images, which ostensibly exhibit "deranged," "deviant," "perverse" transfolks and femmes in "dirty" embraces, are utterly captivating—a pure cinematic pleasure. The most fun is an orgiastic scene in a diner with dildos sucked through glory holes, a high femme holding her heel to a hungry mouth and a romp over chairs and tables. Featuring genderqueers, FTMs, drag kings and queens, butches galore and sweet and strong femmes prepped to start a revolution, this Austin, Texas-centered short, directed by Bug Davidson and Holly M. Lewis, pokes great fun at censorship, fear and all things puritanical. Cartoons and retro documentary

clips are spliced with cuddling dykes in the park, ravenous sex in the workplace and women in wedding gear. The drone of the queer-hating voice-over becomes ever more desperate as the film progresses, and is duly undone by the visuals of grrrl-powered punk delight. A film to rally and entice the troops. (shefreak.com)

Fine Dead Girls (First Run Features): Young lesbians Iva and Marija move into a Zagreb building full of nosy, bizarre and just plain sadistic tenants in this Croatian drama, and soon find themselves at war. While the couple is for the most part tenderly occupied with clothing-optional matters in their warmly lit flat, odd ducks abound outside: the gossipy and cruel landlord's wife, the mentally impaired young man swathed in the colors of the Croatian flag, the wife beater, the old man who keeps his wife's corpse upright in a chair, the priestlike stranger, etc. Packed together in a tenement near the train tracks, this community is always in each other's business: overhearing private fights, blasting music and walking in on each other's secret and intimate acts, all punctuated by the sounds of the passing freight trains. *Fine Dead Girls'* main tale is delivered via flashback with two extra characters—Iva's butch lover and the landlord's cocky son—so we know who's due to go missing in the future, but the suspense rests in finding out why. Dalibor Matanić's first feature brings *Breaking the Waves* or other Lars von Trier fare uncomfortably

Pioneering Women

Gay, lesbian, and transgender

cinema, with a special focus

to mind: Women tend to get punished—in this case, for being queer. (*firstrunfeatures.com*)

The Witnesses (Strand Releasing): André Téchiné's modern epic begins in 1984, as Manu (Johan Libéreau), fresh from the country, acclimates to city life by cruising Parisian parks for pickups. He also befriends an older doctor, Adrien (Michel Blanc). Adrien is smitten with the handsome young boy but refrains from seducing him right off the bat. Instead, he brings Manu vacationing with his dear friend Sarah (Emmanuelle Béart), a wealthy children's book writer who is suffering from postpartum depression, and her hunky husband, Mehdi (Sami Bouajila), a cop. A swimming accident entwines Manu and Mehdi who demonstrates that he's rough trade with a soft side, and transforms all four adults into a slightly dysfunctional alternative family—a family challenged when news of a mysterious new virus surfaces. Adrien joins the war against AIDS, setting up a relief fund and clinic, while HIV affects everyone close to home. In keeping with his best work, Téchiné's characters, camera-work, music and *mise-en-scène* are precise throughout this piece and, just as in *Wild Reeds*, evoke his signature emotional flourish. But, *The Witnesses* has one segment too many; the final 15 minutes could have been shaved. Yet even with its extraneous footage, and Béart playing an especially cold fish, it will move you to tears, perhaps because of how bottled up the characters are and how excruciating that seems. Adrien, Mehdi, Manu and Sarah are stubborn and don't beg, make excuses or often ask for what they want; they are drained of sentimentality and yet are all the more emotionally effective. (*strandreleasing.com*) ■

Endless Love

Searching 4 Sandeep provides an up-close and extremely personal look at lesbian online dating.



Three-plus years and several continents after Poppy Stockell and Sandeep Virdi met on a lesbian dating site, they are a happy couple living in Sydney, Australia. Their journey to happiness and togetherness was a long and arduous one, fraught with family tension, geographical

distance and long separations. Stockell captured it all on film, after she recovered from another relationship that began in her early 20s and lasted about six years (seven, with the attendant dyke drama breakup stuff). That lengthy relationship came with the whole nine yards—purchasing a house together, adopting a dog, combining bank accounts—of two lives intertwined.

By the time Stockell, then 28 and single, returned to the Sydney dating scene, things had changed dramatically. As Stockell herself put it, "The girls were so young, had razor sharp modern haircuts and a different attitude and vibe than I was both used to and looking for."

So, as with many lesbians looking for love in the Internet age, Stockell turned to the online dating site, Gaydar. Not happy with the quality of the women she was meeting there, she found a more interesting and appropriate woman on the lesbian site, PinkSofa. Almost immediately Stockell, whose handle was LaughingWave, met Shola, the perfect woman in so many ways. But several issues needed to be addressed. For example, Shola, who turned out to be 31-year-old Sandeep Virdi, was a closeted Indian woman living with her Sikh parents and three sisters in the British Midlands, while Stockell was an out and proud lesbian in the cosmopolitan city of Sydney.

What to do, what to do?

Stockell, who'd worked in television and film already, had the idea to document her online dating—"a strange but fascinating experience of creating immediate and intimate connections with virtual strangers." But it was clear that Virdi was her main interest and best prospect. So, Stockell asked Virdi if she could record their conversations, film herself and also send a camera to the other side of the world, so Virdi could record her experiences. The result is *Searching 4 Sandeep*, a moving film encompassing all the nuances of lesbian online dating: transcontinental relationships, culture clash, family drama, dyke drama. You get the picture.

The genesis of Stockell's idea is "the way in which new forms of communication like the Internet and texting have changed the way our generation relates to each other. In *Searching 4 Sandeep*, the theme of how technology can help us find other people, but also can hinder our intimacy, is what I started out with." The film ends up being about all that plus a whole lot more: both the drama and the desire for love and acceptance. Stockell says that in the end it is really a kind of love letter to Sandeep. — *Stephanie Schroeder*



Emmanuelle Béart plays it cool in *The Witnesses*