

WHY IS SOUTH AFRICA HOT? OUR LUXURY GUIDE

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

April 2003

# Girlfriends

OUR 5TH ANNUAL LESBIAN MOVIE AWARDS

## THE SAPPHOS 2003

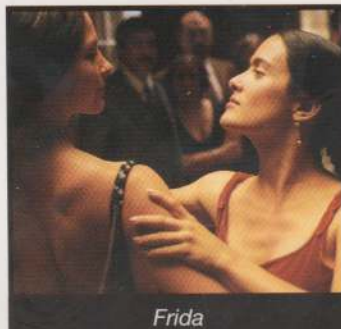
featuring: **FRIDA**  
**8 WOMEN**  
**THE HOURS**  
**FAR FROM HEAVEN**  
**RUTHIE AND CONNIE**  
**THE POLITICS OF FUR**  
and other dyke films  
that Oscar forgot!



*Far from Heaven*



*Ruthie and Connie*



*Frida*

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*The Hours*



## Filming Between the Lines

Book-based films bring literary loves to life.

by **Candace Moore**

### Based on Brit-lit luminary A.S. Byatt's

flowery novel, and penned for the screen by David Henry Hwang (*M. Butterfly*), this piecemeal romance elegantly mirrors the torrid affair of two nineteenth-century poets with the present-day flirtations of two scholars exhuming their overlooked love letters. Neil LaBute, who has a reputation for brutishly smart, bordering-on-misogynistic films like *In the Company of Men*, weaves a bright fable in which an English-blooded feminist professor

**Possession**  
dir. Neil LaBute  
Focus Features, 102 min.

(Paltrow) meets her cocky, fellowshipped American prince (off-beat Aaron Eckhart) in the present, as a Victorian bohemian leaves her long-time lesbian lover for an adulterous fop with a quill. How romantic. Grade: **B**



Gwyneth Paltrow  
as a love-lorn  
feminist professor.

### Further Tales of the City (Showtime, 2001)

The third film-adapted segment of Armistead Maupin's addictive series follows our favorite fictional San Franciscans into the early eighties, reveling in Showtime's mantra of "no limits." Mary Ann (Laura Linney) and beau Brian talk sweaty, and gay gardener "Mouse" happily spreads his seed in a number of full frontals. Queer, straight, bi, and trans; old and young; dirt poor and filthy rich—everybody's a little horny or loveably nutty in the utopian Bermuda triangle of Barbary Lane. The plot thickens as dyke "DeDe" returns from Cuba sans girlfriend, having just saved her biracial twins from the clutches of Jim Jones' cyanide suicide cult. Grade: **B+**

### Henry & June (Universal Pictures, 1990)

Excerpts from Anaïs Nin's true-to-life diaries are more apt to wet your whistle (and other orifices) than her published erotica. Director Philip Kaufman collects all the NC-17-rated goodies from Nin's Parisian flings with an assortment of high-cost brothel girls, writer Henry Miller, and his succulent wife June (Uma Thurman at her smokiest, batting kohl-traced eyelashes and undulating in sultry Brooklyn purrs). Actress Maria de Medeiros renders Nin a delicate, wide-eyed aristocrat's wife, who gives in to her loins' hunger for both sexes with the same passion she affords the arts. Grade: **A**

### Julia (20th Century Fox, 1977)

Based on late (and great) playwright Lillian Hellman's memoirs (*Pentimento*), this wartime drama opens in the 1930s with Hellman (over-dramatic Jane Fonda) throwing typewriters out of windows. Girlhood flashbacks hint at the Jewish writer's more-than-best-friendship with spirited and brave Julia (Vanessa Redgrave), who drops out of medical school to study in Vienna with Freud and becomes an anti-fascist freedom fighter. As World War II looms, Hellman's debut is the toast of New York's Broadway. En route to a Russian writers' conference, the newly famous scribe aids her love Julia by smuggling cash through Berlin to buy, and thus save, Nazi prisoners. Grade: **B+**

Candace Moore is an editor at the UCLA Center for African American Studies.



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# Lesbians in the Dark

It was a great year for lesbians at the movies. Two of this year's



FRANI GOEL

Me and associate editor Jen catch a flick at the historic Castro Theatre.

most prominent contenders at the Academy Awards are very queer, as Judith Halberstam (who's celebrating her ninth year as our movie critic) will explain to you on page 22. Along with *The Hours* and *Far from Heaven*, we were entertained during 2002 by Salma Hayek as the sensuous painter in *Frida* (I loved director Julie Taymor's tableau featuring the naked Hayek intertwined with the jet black limbs of the actress playing Josephine Baker); Rebecca Romajn-Stamos as the omnivorous jewel thief in *Femme Fatale* (I'm still stunned that film's opening homosex scene wasn't nominated for a Sappho); and Margaret Cho as the world's favorite fag hag in *Notorious C.H.O.*

Most of the lesbo action we got on screen in 2002 was *Made in Hollywood*. Of course that's a good thing: gay women everywhere actually got to see the darn movies, and big stars at the Oscars will be handing gold statues to actresses who helped bring representations of lesbians to multiplexes everywhere. But it's also a bad thing. Note, for example, that all the lesbian content in the movies above is on the level of the subplot (e.g., Meryl Streep's relationship with her lover Sally in *The Hours*). Or, in the case of *Frida*, we have the biopic of a woman whose love affairs with women the film certainly does not overlook, but definitely does not dwell on.

To get more than a lesbian subplot or a bisexual nod, lesbian viewers had to retreat from Tinseltown into the dark of a retro theater. Three fantastic films that hit the queer film fests last year are duly rewarded in this year's Sappho awards: the dreamy African riff on the Carmen myth, *Karmen Gei*; the endearing documentary *Ruthie and Connie: Every Room in the House*; and the postmod Czech drama *Guardian of the Frontier*. In all these films the heroines' queer sexuality, whether it's a six or a three on the Kinsey scale, is front and center.

I'm excited about this year's Sappho winners. But I'm very aware of how they differ from last year's, when Cheryl Dunye's *Stranger Inside* won Best Film. In contrast, this year is definitely a mainstream triumph. Next year, I hope full-time lesbian characters come back out of the dark and into the spotlight.

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

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