

ELLEN DEGENERES • LIZ PHAIR • MICHELLE CLUNIE

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

October 2003

# Girlfriends

## THE THIRD COMING OF ELLEN

ALL ABOUT THE ELLEN  
DEGENERES SHOW

PLUS: HOW ELLEN MADE  
WILL & GRACE POSSIBLE

### TRIMMING THE FAT

5 Dykes Who Got  
Gastric Bypass

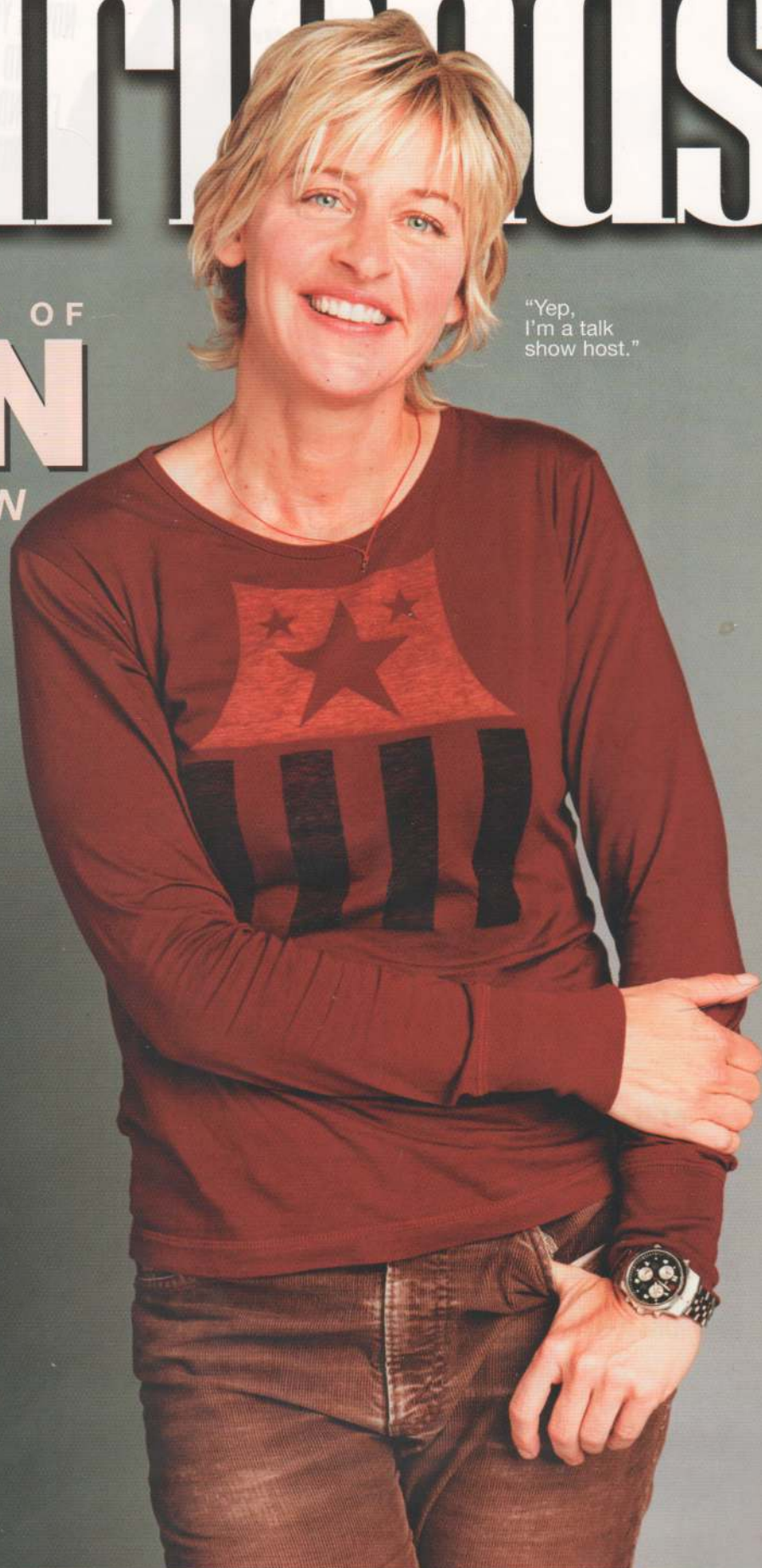
### QUEER AS FASHION

Michelle Clunie  
Opens Her Closet

### NOT BUTCH, NOT FEMME

But Pissed Off!

"Yep,  
I'm a talk  
show host."



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# Close Encounters

A stylish kung fu import has serious sapphic appeal.

by **Candace Moore**

## In a telling scene from *So Close*,

the surprisingly sexy Hong Kong import opening in U.S. theaters this month, we get an eyeful of female assassin Lynn (Shu Qi) and police-woman Kong Yat Hong (Karen Mok) handcuffed to each other in the lobby of a wet parking garage. Hardly

hampered, they flip one another back and forth, a fury of flying kicks and elbows, tearing off each other's blouses in shredded strips. Ravaged

down to their bras, the opponents topple about like two lovers fighting over the first orgasm.

The appeal of *So Close* lies in its premise that intimacy is implicit in the violent rivalry between capable women. Director Cory Yuen, a veteran of the Hong Kong action genre (*The Transporter*, *The Enforcer*), transforms a cat-and-mouse game between two female criminals and a lady cop into the stuff of a lesbian crush.

The film centers around two killers-for-hire, Lynn and her sister Sue (Zhao Wei), who use a state-of-the-art device called the World Panorama to crack into global surveillance systems, pinpoint prey, and plan escape routes. The super-sharp detective Hong is hot on their trails. *So Close*'s skyscrapered financial district looms with the futuristic presence of a *Blade Runner* cityscape. The film is so saturated in hues of pristine white and sun-shining steel that occasionally the light-colored subtitles are illegible. No matter. The key language of Yuen's film is its slick imagery.

We first catch Lynn (gorgeous in a stark white bodysuit) in a high-rise

suite, mid-mission: to poison a crooked businessman with a pair of cyanide sunglasses. Her long hair swishing in slow-mo to the tune of "Close to You," she hangs from his office ceiling by stilettos, shooting his minions in the shins as glass shards fly around her. She's a rogue Spiderwoman, complete with cable that shoots out of her pumps and allows her to leap out of buildings unscathed.

While Lynn's a jaded-but-precise killing machine, her bubbly younger sis Sue likes all gadgets digital. Spying through the World Panorama, the tomboyish twenty-something becomes entranced with a slender new officer at the poisoning scene. Officer Hong pokes at the hole left by Lynn's heel in the wall, identifying the spike that made it as "one of the finest on the catwalks this year." Hong is a tough, smart cookie: she sleuths hard, fights hard, and washes it down with a Carlsbad. Sue can't help but want her. After following her to a Tower Records outlet, the young techie rollerblades in circles around Hong like she's a confection; she anonymously sends her a birthday cake, which Hong stuffs seductively in her mouth in front of a security camera. A flirtatious chase ensues.

When Sue and Hong must take up arms together against corporate scumbag named Chow Nunn, they dance around their mutual attraction. Sue boldly asks about Hong's assistant, "If I was a police officer instead of an assassin, would you

choose him or me?" After a bloody gun, sword, and bamboo stick battle with Nunn and his henchmen, a parting kiss between the two victors tells all.

Full of comic relief, pop music, lesbian subtext, and action choreography as exquisite as ballet, *So Close* is technically beautiful and fun to watch. The English translation has some stomach-churning dialog. (An exception is a wonderful scene where Hong mock-interrogates her assistant about his masturbation technique.) However, it's possible to



Top cop Hong and assassin Lynn square off (top); criminal sister Sue prepares an endgame.

forgive Yuen and his writers a few cheeseball lines because everything visual in his film seems weighed against a meticulous aesthetic. Grade: **B**

*Candace Moore edited Revolutions of the Mind. She lives in Silverlake, California.*

video & dvd

## Movies with Bite

Vamps and ladies of the night dig into female flesh.

by Candace Moore

### Vampyres is a schlocky creature-feature with scoops

of soft-core porn courtesy of the 1970s. The premise is that two gothic-cape wearers were murdered (presumably for being lesbians) and now haunt a few-mile radius. The two sapphic blood suckers hitchhike near their country

mansion, luring men who think kissing is shoving their tongues in so hard they miss and trail slime down girls' cheeks. It's difficult to feel sorry for these schmucks, even as we watch them being sliced by scabbards and devoured half-alive by Fran and Miriam, who sip and slather their own tongues in the blood like disoriented iguanas. Grade: **C**

#### Vampyres

dir. Joseph Larraz  
Blue Underground, 88 min.



Lesbian vamps are literally hungry for men.

#### The Hunger (MGM, 1983)

It would be unconscionable to write about lesbian vampire films without mentioning this 1980s classic. Opening to Peter Murphy hissing the creepy Bauhaus tune "Bela Lugosi's Dead," *The Hunger* stars insatiable Catherine Deneuve as an ancient-Egyptian vampiress who chooses lovers, male and female, to induct into perpetual life. The catch is that when she tires of them, they remain alive in boxes to rot out eternity. Deneuve's quickly decaying vamp boy-toy (blue-and-brown-eyed David Bowie) seeks the help of Dr. Sarah Roberts (Susan Sarandon), who's researching how to slow aging, but Sarah becomes the next inductee. A super-hot love scene between Deneuve and Sarandon features Sarandon's nipples perky beneath a sherry-stained T-shirt. Grade: **A**

#### The Addiction (PolyGram Video, 1996)

With more quotes from existentialist heavyweights than a Western philosophy primer, this black-and-white, hip-hop-soundtracked vampire drama from director Abel Ferrara (*Bad Lieutenant*) has a Nietzschean take on the nature of good and evil. Neck-drinking orgies are set against war-crime documentary footage, all the while weaving a metaphor between vampirism and smack addiction. It's a lot to juggle. But Lili Taylor—as the Ph.D. student who gets shoved into a dark NYC alleyway by toughed-out, short-shorn Annabella Sciorra and comes out with puncture wounds—lets her husky whisper inhabit character Kathleen Conklin, as the dracu-druggie goes from the syringe to O.D.ing on jugulars. Grade: **A-**

#### Daughters of Darkness (Blue Underground, 1971)

Countess Bathory, a 300-year-old vampire who used to drive hot pokers into the eyes of virgins and bathe in their blood, is out roaming Europe in a fancy black sedan, draining one here, one there, while looking for a new eternal girlfriend. Bored of Ilona, her mod-styled servant girl with bad teeth and a propensity for pouting, the Countess sets her sights on a freshly eloped Swiss innocent, Valerie, whose new hubby Stefan is a monster in his own right. Stefan's sadistic episodes drive the blond beauty between the Countess' sheets, where the seductive, Marlene Dietrich-esque demon gladly comforts her while making a mark in her neck. Grade: **B-**



### MY ROAD TO Microsoft

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by Soraya Bittencourt with Paula Martinac

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Woven throughout this memoir is her personal coming out story describing the love she has shared with her partner of 20 years

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BLUE UNDERGROUND

# Bosom Buddies

## Because October is national Breast Cancer

Awareness month and because lesbians (according to some studies) are more likely than straight women to get breast cancer, *Girlfriends* typically publishes lesbian health stories in October. Back in the nineties, we published an entire special issue on the lesbian breast cancer threat; in 2001, we ran a special report about corporate complicity in the breast cancer epidemic, proclaiming loudly on the cover, "Lesbians Deconstruct Breast Cancer Industry Month."

This issue is no exception, although cancer per se is not the topic. It's obesity and gastric bypass surgery (a.k.a. "stomach stapling"), the controversial new medical technology aiming to cure it. I highly recommend "Weighty Matters," by contributing writer K Kaufmann; our veteran feature writer spoke to five gay women who

opted to have the surgery and—so far—are happy about the results.

What's chilling, though, is Kaufmann's research on the brief and untested history of the surgery. Eighty-five percent of the people who are opting for weight loss surgery are women; it's my guess that's why the procedure has been widely implemented without the usual clinical testing and by surgeons who aren't necessarily specialists.



Michelle Clunie and me (left) at the fashion show.

Not all our coverage this month is so, er, heavy. Make sure you enjoy the beautiful photos by Michelle Blioux on page 35. Michelle Clunie and a host of volunteer models helped raise money for The Destination Foundation (an AIDS and cancer charity) with a glamorous fashion show. *Girlfriends* was there. Clunie took the breath away from writer Saira Quereshi, who said, "Clunie appears much softer and elegant than her hard-nosed on-screen character Melanie. I was floating on air chatting with this charming person."

Finally, don't miss Lauren Dockett's excellent primer on Ellen DeGeneres's new talk show, page 18. I have been a huge fan of DeGeneres since the days of *These Friends of Mine*. Since then, I've been feeding my DeGeneres addiction with quick fixes from *Ed TV*, her stand up, even my old copy of *Mr. Wrong*. Ellen is the lesbian nation's pop culture heroine; Dockett has my spirits up again after convincing me in "The Third Coming of Ellen" that the new talk show will be her most successful effort yet.

Enjoy!

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

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# Girlfriends

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