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TV SAYS 'THE L WORD' AT LAST

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

December 2003

girlfriends

EXCLUSIVE REPORT
FROM THE L WORD SET



JENNIFER BEALS



PAM GRIER



MIA KIRSHNER

The L Word's
"heartbreaker"
Katherine Moennig
(right) and openly
gay Leisha Halley

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L IS FOR LESBIAN

CANDACE MOORE tours the set of Showtime's historic drama *The L Word*, develops a crush on Mia Kirshner, and gets roughed up by *Flashdance*'s Alex.

Let's get this clear: Showtime's new lesbian drama, *The L Word*, is not *Queer as Folk* repackaged for dykes. In fact, creator Ilene Chaiken pitched the idea of a TV show about a group of West Hollywood girls-who-like-girls to the cable network before *QAF* premiered: "They didn't go for it. Then I went back, and there was a safety net because they already had evidence that *Queer as Folk* was working. It was clear that there was,

after all, an audience, and this seemed intriguing, promising, provocative."

"*Queer as Folk* has paved the way for this show's existence," acknowledges *L Word* actress Jennifer Beals, "but I feel this show is more like *Sex and the City* if the women slept with each other. It has a little more gravitas [than *QAF*]." Beals, famous for her role as the steel-worker-by-day, exotic-dancer-by-night in *Flashdance*, stars as Bette, a biracial, type-A personality art curator, whose seven-year-long relationship with

girlfriend Tina (Laurel Holloman, *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*) becomes more complicated when the two decide to seek out a sperm donor.

The L Word centers on Bette, Tina, and their close-knit circle of queer friends: Shane (Katherine Moennig), a swarthy hairdresser who is quite the girl magnet; Dana (Erin Daniels), a semi-closeted tennis pro; and Alice, a bisexual journalist (ultra-cute rocker Leisha Hailey of *Gush*). There's also Bette's straight half-sister, Kit (Pam

Grier), a musician struggling with booze addiction; and next-door neighbors Jenny (Mia Kirshner, *Exotica*), a struggling writer, and her fiancé, Tim (Eric Mabius), a college swim coach. Jenny and Tim aren't engaged for long—everything goes awry when Jenny arrives, fresh from finishing the Iowa Writer's Program, and falls for a well-read female coffee bar owner, Marina (Karina Lombard) at one of Bette and Tina's parties.

The new series, which debuts in January with a two-hour pilot, is anything but derivative. It stands to raise the bar a notch for Showtime's

vision and complete the thirteen episodes. Renowned writer-director Rose Troche (*The Safety of Objects*) directed three episodes, wrote for two, and co-executive produces. Out staff writers include Guinevere Turner (*American Psycho*) and up-and-coming scribe Angela Robinson, whose short film *D.E.B.S.* is being expanded into a feature in production by Sony's Screen Gems.

The L Word has a very contemporary, up to the minute hip feel. The show's dialogue is buttered with wit but doesn't make light of the women's experiences. It explores its characters

trailers—at 9 a.m. Most of the first morning I am waiting: Jennifer Beals is shooting an "emotional moment" in the next studio on a closed set. I mill about in the darkened gallery spaces of the fictional "California Arts Center," where her character, Bette, is curator. I swivel in the lobby's desk chair, marveling at the small touches. The museum, supposedly housed at Santa Monica's arty Bergamot Station, has its own C.A.C. stationary and meticulously logo-labeled binders. In Bette's office, a huge canvas leans against one wall; there are colored vases of various shapes and copies of

"I FEEL THIS SHOW IS MORE LIKE SEX AND THE CITY IF THE WOMEN SLEPT WITH EACH OTHER."

— Jennifer Beals



Hailey (above left), Holloman, and Moennig's characters toast the art gallery set. Opposite, Pam Grier and Jennifer Beals (first and second left) lead an *L Word* cast of sapphos.

"groundbreaking television" campaign by being the first of its kind. *Ellen*'s "Puppy" episode trailblazed the way for a lead lesbian character on television, but *Ellen* was not per se a gay show. *Buffy* explored a lesbian relationship between supporting characters Willow and Tara for several seasons. *ER*, *Queer as Folk*, *Popular*, and *Dark Angel* have all developed lesbian characters into their story lines, but as side dishes. Finally, it seems, dinner is served.

Not just for lesbians (Showtime hopes to reach a wider audience), the show is by quite a few lesbians, too—still, sadly, an industry rarity. Chaiken attracted members of Hollywood's lesbian "A" list to help flesh out her

with sincerity and adult seriousness, delving into their friendships, problems, work, family, and the life between their bed sheets.

DAY ONE: SISTER FOXY BROWN

Vancouver, British Columbia boasts the third largest film industry in North America; shooting in Canada is just plain cheaper. A crisp, green, friendly city, Vancouver's downtown is full of towering, shiny skyscrapers and tall hotels, surrounded by bridges like a futuristic, waterfront utopia. It's also home to the set of *The L Word*.

I arrive at the studios—renovated warehouses that take up a few city blocks hemmed in by a maze of

Art News stacked up on chrome, Danish-looking furniture.

Finally, I'm interrupted by Pam Grier, who plays Bette's half-sister Kit. Grier is engagingly chatty, with a slightly wild quality, as if electrical currents are buzzing through her bones. It feels like a release to talk to her, as if one has just been given the gift of a spectacular sermon.

I ask this 1970s cultural icon (most famous for her roles in *Foxy Brown*, *Sheba Baby*, and, more recently, Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*) if she feels that this type of programming, by promoting the cause of gay rights, is part of a chapter in the larger fight for civil rights.

"Absolutely," she affirms.

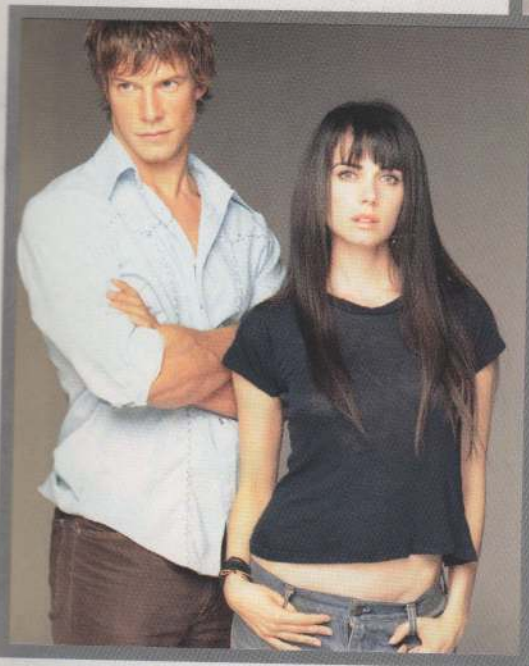
I follow quickly with, "What do you think about gay marriage?" It's been in the air, you see, in the *Vancouver Sun* on the plane ride over, and again in today's local paper: Canada's recent decision to make gay marriage legal shares the front page with the forest fires tearing up the local hills.

"For me, it's between two people who are honoring each other," says Grier, who admittedly is a fan of men with hairy backs and horses. (She has two adopted equine family mem-

them in frames everywhere; Tim's house next door, with a starker, messier bachelor pad look; and Jenny's dark-wood writing studio (which Jenny moves into when her sapphic affair estranges her straight relationship). Also built indoors, on set, is a full-sized swimming pool. There is the sprawling, couch-filled coffee bar, The Planet, where the gals will be seen gathering, hanging, and gabbing. And Southern Californian plant life is recreated to a tee—the

so obviously out-articulates them. Beals has called her "smart, intuitive," a quality tangible in conversation as well as in her work.

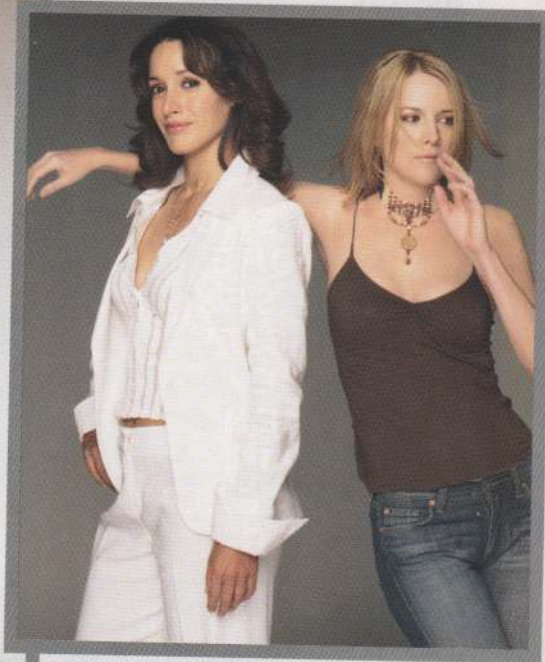
We've met before, at a Power UP roundtable discussion, when the project was still tentatively called *Earbblings* and Chaiken was taking suggestions for a new moniker. We talk about the birth of the fledgling show's name: "Who finally gave you the suggestion of *The L Word*?" I ask. "*The L Word* is something we came



Eric Mabius's Tim guards his girlfriend, Mia Kirshner's Jenny.



Grier gets rowdy as Kit.



Beals (left) as Bette supports an LTR with Laurel Holloman's Tina.

bers.) "Who cares about all this religious doctrine—[the religious right doesn't] come to your house when you're sick, they don't do anything when you're down." What are Kit's feelings about Tina, her sister's long-term lover? "She adores Tina," says Grier. Sure, "Kit would love to have a [straight] relationship that mirrors theirs. With honor, passion, and support of one another."

The intense, no-reporters-allowed scene has wrapped, and Grier accompanies me on a tour of the set digs. The main studio area contains three fully constructed houses: Bette and Tina's tasteful home, peppered with art books, deliciously modern furniture, and pictures of the two of

set designers even import large, floppy fully-alive palms that wouldn't survive normally in Vancouver's climate.

2:00 PM: MAMA MIA!

I leave make-believe WeHo to squeeze into Ilene Chaiken's impacted schedule. In her office on the back cork board, pinned up next to production info, is a darling picture of the eight-year-old twin daughters she raises with partner Miggi Hood. Chaiken is small in frame, with dark, chin-length hair. She smiles at you as if she sees right through to your motives. But she's in no way condescending; a gracious host, she treats others as peers, even as she

up with around the table. Guin Turner had a lot to do with it," Chaiken recalls. "It was a classic brainstorming session. Someone told a story about a routine k.d. lang does: 'I'm a Leh, I'm a Lehhh'... like she can't say it, and someone else said 'Oh, she can't say the L word.' We thought *The L Word* was a great title because it means all of those unsaid things."

Minutes after meeting with Chaiken, I'm outside getting fresh air, balanced with a cigarette, and Mia Kirshner, who plays Jenny, tentatively approaches. Do I mind accompanying her to the hair and makeup trailer to interview her as she's being prepped

—continued on page 43

Katherine Moennig

The *L Word* cast's secret weapon may be this actress with a taste for pants roles.

Girlfriends: Shane breaks hearts, but she's portrayed basically as a good person.

Katherine Moennig: The relationship that Shane has with her friends, in comparison to the women that she does this to, is very different. She looks at her friends like gold, as I think people do in real life. Shane just doesn't focus on the evil aspects of [being a seductress]. It's like a subconscious thing that she doesn't realize she's doing.

Girlfriends: Later in the season, there's a character introduced who, it seems, might come to mean something to Shane.

Moennig: Up until then, Shane hasn't had substantial relationships. Nothing of meaning—just fun and debauchery. With this girl, some feelings come from Shane's end. You never know who you're going to be attracted to—

Girlfriends: It just happens.

Moennig: It's the one thing in this world you have no control over.

Girlfriends: What was it like to work with Tammy Lynn Michaels (*Popular, D.E.B.S.*)?

Moennig: Tammy came in like a hurricane in the most positive way, and I dug her, instantly. She's so funny.

Girlfriends: Her character has an affair with Shane, feels burnt, and puts posters up slamming her all over town, right?

Moennig: Yeah, there are a few episodes where she goes a little ape shit and wreaks havoc on Shane's life.

Girlfriends: Do you think that Shane ever starts to feel a little guilty for her effect on girls?

Moennig: Absolutely. But there are just some things that you can't control, and if someone likes you, no matter how much you push them away, sometimes they just *don't* get it. You know what I mean?

Girlfriends: Are you talking from experience?

Moennig: [smiles] Well, life imitates art, art imitates life...

Girlfriends: I was asking the publicist if the strut that your character has is your character's or yours. I think it's yours.

Moennig: [In mock disbelief] Is there a strut? Holy shit! You know what helps? These boots I wear are like cement blocks, and by the end of the day, you're just so over wearing them. But you get the best cardio work out! My cousins have always kind of made fun of the way I walk.

Girlfriends: One of your cousins happens to be Gwyneth Paltrow.

Moennig: True.

Girlfriends: What are some projects that you've worked on previously?

Moennig: My first job was on a TV series for the WB called *Young Americans*. I played a girl dressing as a boy—cross-dressing. I was in a film that just came out, *Love the Hard Way* with Adrian Brody. I had a bit part in *The Shipping News*—if you blink you'd miss me. I played a transsexual on *Law and Order*.

Girlfriends: Is androgyny a possible theme here? You also tried out for, but didn't get, the role of Brandon Teena in *Boys Don't Cry*.

Moennig: Yeah, I never planned it this way, but I think it's interesting. Honestly, the roles I've had with some substance have been characters such as a transsexual, a cross-dresser, a lesbian...



Word on the set: Moennig's Shane is the Brian Kinney of *The L Word*.

Girlfriends: About the whole heartthrob thing: What if you become this big lesbian icon? How do you feel about the fact that all these women are going to want you?

Moennig: I'm flattered that I got this character because I love it, it's a great character. No one considers themselves this stunning person, this perfect person. I know I don't look at myself like that. If people respond to the character, then that's this huge compliment. I don't care if they're gay; I don't care if they're straight.

Girlfriends: Is your style pretty similar to your character's?

Moennig: [laughs] I would like to think so. Actually, this is me; this is how I dress constantly. [Moennig is sexy-punk in a tight thermal she just threw on in her trailer.] We have a fabulous costume woman, Cynthia. She has great vision. We add our ideas and it just works. I think it's based off me—Shane and I have similar clothing. I don't wear as many leather garments as she does and I don't wear those heavy, clunky boots all the time.

Girlfriends: Do you think this show might change people's perceptions of homosexuality?

Moennig: I certainly hope so, I mean, considering the day and age that we're in, and all the crap that we deal with. Even if people aren't really initially open to it, I would hope that this would give them some insight, help them to realize that love is love, you know? It's an uncontrollable thing.

Girlfriends: Why don't you think that lesbians have been depicted in an accurate way?

Moennig: I think in some ways they have—but few. I think *High Art* was very well done. Or with *Bound*, for instance, it's not about being gay—it's about crime, a heist, but the chemistry between the two women is so powerful and so amazing that it became more about them. It's always easier to put someone in a little stereotypical box, where you can put them aside and say, okay, I know how to categorize that person. With our show I would love to think that we aren't like that. We're trying to make it as realistic as possible. We'd like to open people's eyes to it and have them realize that [lesbianism] is not some taboo thing. This is life and this is okay.

Girlfriends: That there are women who are together, trying to have children together—

Moennig: And they are beautiful and they have wonderful jobs and they have great lives and amazing souls. Who gives a shit if they're gay? I'm sorry—that's just highly irrelevant these days. — CM

for the next scene? No, of course not.

Kirshner, who comes from Toronto, is most notable for her art-flick roles as a dominatrix in 1993's *Love & Human Remains* and a stripper in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica*. She chews on Swedish fish, about which she comments, "these are pretty great. They look like little nipples." Kirshner describes herself as "a very private person," but engages intensely one-on-one—so much so that it seems, if I didn't know better, that she has an unusual set of boundaries. There's an intimacy to our Q&A—often the questions get turned around on me—that feels flirtatious (although she is adamantly against defining her sexuality) and, I learn, controlled by Kirshner. She's a modest siren of sorts, who has me trembling so much that I hit "pause" on the recorder during her most revelatory moments.

Since I can't ask about her own, I ask Kirshner her take on Jenny's sexuality. I mention that in Chaiken's mind Jenny didn't have bisexual experiences up until her encounter with Marina, who just blew her away, opened things up.

"Well I think that Jenny's a very, very, very sexual person so I'm sure that she considered women before and she had flirtations and the like, but primarily, she was always with men. For Jenny it's about meeting the right person, and she meets this woman who she just falls for completely. I think it sort of ... lights the trigger, just to implode her."

"Have you ever had that experience?"

"Yes..."

Mia's upswept hairdo is being cemented into place with aerosol. I'm imploding. "Lots of hair spray," I swallow. "It's so weird," Kirshner concurs. "It's alien."

Day Two: Moennig Sounds

The L Word is shooting outside today on a golf course (which will give my pores a little respite from yesterday's sauna caused by the indoor pool). I didn't have to arrive at the set until 11

a.m. this morning, and am therefore well-caffeinated, well-slept, and arrive before the truly dear publicist, which means I can stalk out my next interview, Katherine Moennig, without any whispers that the media is watching.

Moennig, who is slender as an African deer, with shaggy, retro-seventies-style dark hair, is waiting for the crew to finish up. She looks bored. She paces in designer brown corduroys, grabs a golf club, and starts putting. Aiming for a ceramic cup, Moennig continually misses. Frustrated, between chews of gum she says, cutely, to no one in particular, "I'd rather watch grass grow than play this game."

An intimate scene between Moennig's character, Shane, and a punky-looking blond girl (Samantha McCloud) under a willow tree is filmed in close-up, while extras push golf bags in the far distance. The two twenty-somethings talk, lean into each other, and start kissing. (Finally! Some action!) A second scene between Moennig and McCloud, who are working together for their first time, is shot on a miniature golf course full of giant cacti and snakes with lolling tongues. While they're preparing, Moennig, again goofing off, straddles a giraffe. Moennig is obviously rife with kinetic energy that translates on screen—she improvises often and seems to have her body language down to a science. After they wrap up, I steal Moennig away for a brief interview (see page 21).

Physical Engagement

The crew eats dinner and heads back to the studio, where Jennifer Beals is due to shoot a gallery scene. A troubling attack ad has been released by a religious right-wing group against a "provocative" art show curated by her character. The conservative group's leader is out for blood, and Bette must answer to the California Arts Center board members.

Before the shoot, Beals and I sit out on the back porch of Bette and Tina's house and talk about how she feels

she's connecting with her character.

"We had this scene. There are people petitioning, trying to get people not to see a show Bette has mounted. I memorized the lines, but I didn't feel connected. The cameras are rolling, and I turn, and see this [protester] there, and say, 'You're on private property,' and she doesn't leave. I was so angry that I physically pushed her, I was like, 'You'—"

She shoves me.

"Are—"

Shoves me again.

"On—"

Shoves me.

"Private property!" She finishes with a final shove.

"Ow. Wow," I respond.

"I got so mad," says Beals, and "all of a sudden I realized how—"

"—inside of the character you were," I finish her sentence for her, trying not to look as if I'm reeling in pain, since of course, it's an honor to get beat up by Jennifer Beals.

"Yes, it was like, *fazboom!* You may think you don't know what's happening, but as soon as the camera goes, you engage. In the beginning, I was so tentative about physical contact with Laurel (Holloman). You try to work out with the other actor, this coded thing—when can I touch you? Is it okay if I touch you in the middle of a moment that's maybe not scripted? It's not a love scene, but maybe I'm leaving to go to work and I just end up kissing her goodbye or something. Those sorts of things started coming up naturally and it was really nice."

My last night in Vancouver, I have the driver drop me at a lesbian bar in a seedy part of downtown straight from the set. I sip a Manhattan alone, exhausted, still feeling like I'm on set. No one is near me at the bar—all the girls are on the dimly-lit dance floor, swinging their hips and fists and butts to rhythm and blues, laughing, kissing. Some of them are taking off their shirts. It feels, for a moment, as if *this* L word, this life, this engaged beat is contagious, seeping outside the gay ghetto and into a large, large world. 

Suddenly *Sylvia*

Gwyneth Paltrow, surprisingly, makes a compelling Sylvia Plath.

by Candace Moore

The new biopic about poet

Sylvia Plath presents two obstacles: first, viewers must get past the fact that shiny, macrobiotic Gwyneth Paltrow is playing one of the twentieth centuries' greatest, darkest poetesses. Second, the film (directed by New Zealand filmmaker Christine

Jeffs of *Rain*) bypasses Plath's development as a feminist icon in order to focus painfully on her relationship with British husband and fellow poet

Ted Hughes. *Sylvia*, which should've stuck with its working title, *Ted and Sylvia*, depicts the forest-fire marriage of two exaggeratedly destructive souls (Plath toward herself, Hughes toward Plath) and its devastating end result in her suicide. But despite the stinging feeling that the intricacies of this literary great's life and death have been boiled down to her obsessive love of a man, all in the name of making it palatable for the increasingly poorly read moviegoer, *Sylvia* emerges an adroitly acted, deliciously depressing film.

Much the way Hughes (who served as editor-censor to his late wife's journals and *Complete Poems*) framed Plath's "serious" work as beginning in 1956, the year the two met, this film begins with the couple's first encounter at a Cambridge publishing party. They dance and kiss, and when Hughes excuses himself to flirt with another woman, the young Fullbright scholar bites him on the cheek, drawing blood—foreshadowing the adulterous and jealous intensities to follow.

Newly wed to her broody, wandering-eyed conquest, Plath comes down with a serious case of writer's block. The film shows her battling stuck words by baking sweet cakes like a good 1950s housewife. Domesticity quickly becomes a



Paltrow makes good use of her distant resemblance to Sylvia Plath.

quagmire for the poet-mom, true to Plath's lines in "Lesbos": "Meanwhile there's a stink of fat and baby crap./I'm doped and thick from my last sleeping pill./The smog of cooking, the smog of hell." How fitting that Plath chooses to take her own life in the kitchen, her head in the oven with which she was so familiar. Plath, it's clear, makes her last

metaphor. Jeffs portrays her death scene with exacting detail, down to the towels she twists to block the vents—even the toast and two glasses of milk she prepares for her slumbering children.

One of *Sylvia*'s strong points turns out to be Paltrow's evocative portrayal. Beyond the blond, Paltrow shows a resemblance-of-sorts and shares with Plath a blue-blooded poise. She plays Plath as a woman of extreme intellectual and instinctual potency, driven slowly mad in her hetero-normative cage while poetry-star hubby (Plath was never as famous as Hughes until post-mortem) is out chasing tail. "To play Sylvia," Paltrow commented, "I could read a poem and it would put me exactly in the frame of mind and the emotional space that I needed to occupy."

Speaking of the poetry, the film sparsely represents it, perhaps due to copyright issues with the estate. But we have visual citations when, for example, Plath burns her husband's love notes, making (as Plath wrote) "a fire; being tired/Of the white fists of old/Letters and their death rattle."

Sylvia is a mix of gimmicky moments (Plath spills the contents of a pill container into her palm, considers the needed dosage, and slides all but one pill back into the tube) and beautiful ones (she holds a glass of water under the sink, watching the water fill and spill over again and again). The color palate is transfixing: most everything (the apartment walls, a scarf Plath is wearing when she considers drowning) is a swatch of cerulean blue.

Sylvia never ambles along. It digs in, and Paltrow's performance recalls the emotional, dreary commitment of Jessica Lange in *Frances*. Yet it remains an amphibian: half labor-of-love à la *Iris*, half cater-waiter to audience-tested themes. Grade: **B**

Candace Moore recently edited the book *Revolutions of the Mind*.

video & dvd

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These DVD sets will win you major points.

by Candace Moore

A must-have for fans of gay auteur Rainer Werner

Fassbinder, this exquisitely designed four-disk set includes the three gynocentric films that make up the late director's stunning BRD Trilogy (named after the initials in German of the Federal Republic of Germany): *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979), *Veronika Voss* (1982), and *Lola* (1981). Added bonuses are *I Don't Just Want You to Love Me* (a full-length documentary about Fassbinder's life and work) and a rare forty-nine-minute



Fassbinder will please your *realpolitik* buffs.

interview Fassbinder did for German TV. Through portraits of women who prostitute themselves, literally and figuratively, the trilogy focuses on the messy 1950s economic rebuilding of the director's country. Grade: **A**

The BRD Trilogy

R.W. Fassbinder
Criterion Collection

The Osbournes, Season Two (MTV, 2003)

Season Two (filmed in part by lesbian director Katherine Brooks of *The Complex*) is more melancholy than the first. Sharon is battling colon cancer. Kelly, who is promoting her new rock album by playing on Top of the Pops, seems to be developing a Madonna complex. Jack is a serious, moody shell of the cheeky, playing-for-the-camera idiot we recall from season one, perhaps due to ingesting massive amounts of OxyContin. Ozzy is the same baffled, mumbling, wide-eyed, harmless creature—while trying to stay sober. Although there's still a postmodern pleasure in watching their dysfunction play out live, the family seems strained by its second year of media hype. Grade: **B+**

Sex and the City, Season Four (HBO Video, 2003)

Samantha (Kim Cattrall), the most ruthlessly man-seeking member of sex columnist Carrie Bradshaw's het group of best buds—and known for locating dick-for-a-night in any, and every, topographical locale—proclaims herself a “lesbian” in season four. But that's not as surprising as the fact that the monogamy-challenged publicist turns away several ready-and-willings and commits to an honest to God *relationship* with sultry Brazilian artist Maria (Sonia Braga). Maria, the first lover ever to tell Sam “It's not working for me” in the sack, shows the neophyte how to “connect,” pampering her with baths, gift-wrapped dildos, and long talks about feelings. Of course it doesn't last for long. Grade: **A**

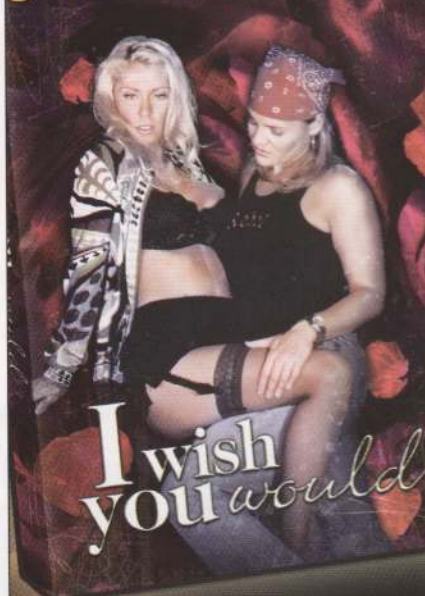
Sin Sisters (Seduction Cinema, 2003)

The director's cut special edition of this lesbian sexploitation flick isn't so special. The R-rated soft-core porno features real life sisters Misty and Chelsea Mundae as nasty Cynthia and painfully weird Morgana, two college-age siblings—although they both appear adolescent, which is stomach-turning. This disturbed dyad becomes trapped in a Courtney Love look-alike's cabin; they are forced at gunpoint to play sex games, which include mostly boring but intermittently hilarious sequences in which the girls name off more than sixty expletives for “breasts.” To top it off, a sorority girl whom Cynthia killed earlier in the film somehow pops out of the car trunk to join the dirty cum-fest-under-duress. Grade: **F+**

5

Explicit Lesbian Fantasies!

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Gift of Good Company

It really feels like the holidays around the office

these days—even though as I write this it's still early October. First of all, we have two new employees who are so talented, beautiful, and fun to have around, they feel like gifts from under a tree. Scott Wazlowski, whom we hired to run our advertising sales (you can see his handsome mug on www.girlfriendsmag.com) is very busy getting *Girlfriends* into all the major agencies' 2004 media plans. Selling advertising space in a lesbian magazine is no easy task. Despite the



Mignon (left) and I personally inspect Gift Guide candidates.

fact that lesbians seem to be chic again, many big advertisers are still working under the most woeful stereotypes about gay women. The typical *Girlfriends* reader, in their minds, looks like she stepped out of a *Saturday Night Live* skit: she doesn't wear makeup, can't dress, hates capitalism, and hasn't bought a CD since *Yes I Am*. Scott will do his utmost to open their minds to who we really are.

And then there's our new assistant editor, Mignon Freeman. Mignon comes to us from a sassy little magazine for dykes of color that first caught my eye because of its multivalent title, *Issues*. Mignon came out as a lesbian at just about the same time she came out with her first issue of *The Court Voice*, the subversive dorm newsletter that put her in hot water with her dean at Clark

Atlanta University. Since then she's been loving women and words alike, and promises to up the ante on *Girlfriends*' coverage of race and lesbians of color.

Another unexpected present came in the form of an announcement at our weekly staff meeting from our publisher, Erin (who also happens to be my mother), that starting with the January 2004 issue, *Girlfriends* will graduate to sixty-four pages. The bigger, better *Girlfriends* is our first step in celebrating the magazine's tenth birthday, a party that will rage on until June 2004, when we'll debut a huge new layout with plenty of brand new columns and regular features. Write Mignon and me and let us know what you'd like to see in the new *Girlfriends*.

In the meantime, enjoy our gift guide, writer Candace Moore's visit to the set of Showtime's groundbreaking *The L Word*, and Michelle Tea's powerful feature on three lesbians who are repairing the damage done to women's sexuality by abuse. It's inspiring.

Happy Holidays,

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

Sign up for our online newsletter at www.girlfriendsmag.com

Girlfriends

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Jen Phillips
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