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TIVO MY LESBO

RED CARPET

by Candace Moore

It's May, which means it's time for sweeps—and lesbian kissing on primetime. The trend started back in 1991 when *L.A. Law* featured the first kiss between two women on TV; *Ally McBeal*, *Party of Five*, and *Friends* all followed. Gratuitous girl-on-girl action brings in the ratings and delivers a titillating tidbit of controversy, but it's also short-lived. The girls who do the lip-locking typically go back to being straight right after their sweeps-timed, sapphic experimentation.

During the last sweeps period in February, lesbians—or at least two women making out—were all over primetime. The WB's *Jack and Bobby* delivered a classic example of sweeps lesbianism when two straight girls kissed each other on a dare in front of their boyfriends. Some TV shows have upped the ante by stretching out a lesbian storyline over several weeks or years—but don't be fooled. It's still a sweeps stunt if (as in *Jane Wiedlin* of the *Go-Go's* and *Adrienne Curry* of *America's Top Model* on this season's *The Surreal Life*) the lesbians don't get to come out once sweeps are over. *The O.C.* claims it wasn't playing *Marissa's* relationship with *Alex* for ratings, but have we seen *Marissa* being gay outside of sweeps? *ER* trots out its token lesbian, *Dr. Kerry Weaver*, for a couple episodes every year. Is it just coincidence that those episodes usually occur during sweeps?

What has changed is that two women kissing on primetime is no longer a huge controversy. Scripted lesbian kisses don't generate a right-wing backlash anymore, although real-life lesbians still do. On ABC's *Wife Swap*, a liberal lesbian mom traded families with a conservative Christian mom, who promptly called her replacement "depraved." Just goes to show that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

For three-dimensional lesbian characters beyond *The L Word*, you'll have to keep your eyes open for a new, as-of-yet unnamed sitcom featuring *Melissa Etheridge*. The pilot features the rock star as a gay teacher, and the antics between her and her straight male roommate have earned the show the moniker of a "reverse *Will and Grace*." —*Malinda Lo*



Will The OC's Marissa stay gay?



Regular cast members Leisha Hailey, Jennifer Beals, Mia Kirshner, and Sarah Shahi eagerly joined the festivities.

STEVE COHN, BERLINER STUDIOS/BEIMAGES

WWith 70 percent of lesbians reporting they watch *The L Word*, it's not surprising the Showtime series also dominated this season's lesbian nightlife in Los Angeles. At a premiere in February at Hollywood's Director's Guild of America, regular cast members *Jennifer Beals*, *Mia Kirshner*, and *Erin Daniels* paraded through a red carpet gala in styles appropriate to the drama's new emphasis on high fashion. Shaggy-haired *Kate Moennig* wore her signature thin black tie and button up; *Leisha Hailey* was radiant and ever-cute in mint green. But new cast addition *Sarah Shahi* (*Carmen*) stole the show in her smoking-hot red dress.

At the screening, the packed theater let out a mass "hooray" when they first saw *Tina's* (*Laurel Holloman*) pregnant belly, and sighed a joint "ick" when suspected cat-killer *Tonya* (*Meredith McGeachie*) who inexplicably always wears white, sat down to a toffee-nut-caramel-soy *Far Out Frappe* with the rest of the gals. Showtime's chief

exec *Robert Greenblatt* was visibly pleased with the indicators of the show's continuing success.

The real fun to be had was at the exclusive after-party at West Hollywood's the Abbey, where quickly-distributed hot pink *L Word* cocktails made everyone smiley, and the cast hung out on couches near the back, chatting with friends and visiting celebs. *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl's* Honey Labrador was making the rounds. (Labrador was also sighted at the first *L Word* screening at the Falcon, a weekly Sunday event that seems to be becoming LA's new femmey girl party. Hundreds of gals lined up in the rain to get in to the 350-person-capacity screening.)

Although sources can't tell us much about what to expect next February for super-secret season three, we do have some regrettable news. Writer *Guinevere Turner* (*Go Fish*, *American Psycho*), who also played *Alice's* ex *Gabby* in season one, will not be adding her pen to 2006's plotting. Turner's swamped with a few other projects in the mix, including a film about *Betty Page*.

CHEN UP

REVIEWS

by Candace Moore

“I love first-time directors,” says Joan Chen of Alice Wu, who directed her as Ma in the new lesbian comedy *Saving Face*. “Alice wrote a great script and her heart is in the right place.” Coming from a veteran actor who’s worked under Oliver Stone (*Heaven & Earth*) and Bernardo Bertolucci (*The Last Emperor*), that’s high praise. Chen’s own directorial debut *Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl*, about an urban Chinese girl assigned to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, was itself a critical success.



JEFF VESPA/WIREIMAGE.COM

Joan Chen adds a role to her lesbian portfolio.

It was refreshing to see you in a comedic role. What was taking on comedy like for you?

I've always played deeply tragic characters. Asian people, I think, are into tragedies. It's in our blood, you know? But everybody loves to laugh, and of course Asian people do too. This movie comes at the right moment in my life. Ever since I've become a mother, there's this whole maternal feeling—some real joy in

loving your children and being loved by your children—that if I didn't have children I wouldn't know.

I love the scene where Ma's in the video store and ends up renting a porn movie!

Ma always wanted to look like and behave like that stereotypical woman, because that's expected of her, but she's by no means really that way. In her soul there is this passionate woman that wants to burst out. I like it when it gets messy.

Your character needs to be pushed by her daughter to see that she should just except love for love.

It is both of them coming out! [laughs] I think her daughter helped her basically to accept her own desires and feelings. I am very moved by Alice's love for her mother. This is written for her.

In *Saving Face*, your character goes on all these blind dates with men who don't work out. Didn't you meet your husband on a blind date?

I had made a New Year's resolution: I said I needed to marry myself off when I was still thirty. I went on all kinds of blind dates just like Ma did. A lot of wrong people too. [laughs] It was like I was on a casting call. Every Friday, every Saturday, every Sunday for lunch. All of them were wrong. Then one day my girlfriend called from San Francisco and said, “I have your husband for you.” Her boss had a heart attack and this doctor saved his life. The boss's wife said that [the doctor was] extremely good and also extremely handsome. So I said, “I'll fly over.” I was that desperate. But it was a good match!

At Sundance, a journalist joked that between *Wild Side* and *Saving Face*, now you've been in half of all the films with representations of Asian American lesbians, ever.

There are just so few! *Saving Face* is light; it's a romantic comedy, so I hope that it'll be more easily [accepted]. It has a crossover power as well as having a lesbian theme.

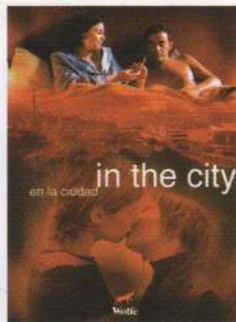
How do you feel about working on films with lesbian content?

With Anne Heche [in *Wild Side*], I act with a beautiful woman. In here, my daughter has a beautiful girlfriend. It's really ultimately about feelings. **9f**

IN THE CITY (ORIGINAL TITLE: EN LA CIUDAD)

Dir. Cesc Gay
(Wolfe Video, 2004)

When Irene (Mónica López) unexpectedly and inexplicably bursts into tears in the middle of her birthday dinner, everyone pauses, mid-bite. Irene retreats to the restroom. Moments later, she reemerges, all smiles. Dinner continues. This is how it goes in *In the City*, a movie—thoughtfully directed by Cesc Gay—spilling over with largely unexplained emotional outbursts. Irene is the fetching mother of one, whose wistful glances settle on Christina (Leonor Watling) and lead to an affair as lovely as it is fleeting. María Pujalte is compelling as Sofía, Irene's gal-pal whose lust for a married man leaves her chronically unsatisfied. Slinking in and out of locked rooms and hushed conversations, every character has a secret to share—but only with us. In Spanish with English subtitles. Grade: **B** —Sarah Dahlen

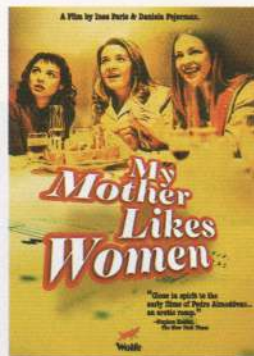


MY MOTHER LIKES WOMEN

Dir. Daniela Fejerman and Inez Paris

(Wolfe Video, 2004)

Know any straight people who like to reward themselves for their “tolerance”? Are they prone to playing out their psycho-sexual neuroses at your expense? Let me introduce you to the filmic equivalent: Daniela Fejerman and Inés Paris's *My Mother Likes Women*, a caustic romantic comedy from Spain. After a mother comes out and introduces her young Czech girlfriend to her three grown-up daughters (who are too liberal to be pissed and too catty to be pleased), the film zeros in on the middle daughter, Elvira (Leonor Watling, from Almodovar's *Talk to Her*) and her innumerable “issues.” This film might be compelling if read, *a la Freud*, as a daughter's wish to kiss/kill her mother, or at least, her mother's girlfriend. Grade: **D+** —Alison Hoffman



A new director breaks through with a cute Asian American tale of gal romance.

by Laurie Koh

Sweet and earnest—much like the film's main character Wil—*Saving Face* marks a first in lesbian cinema: its cast and story are almost completely Asian American. The film is even more notable for being a not-too-shabby romantic comedy. Writer-director Alice Wu is a first-timer (her inexperience sometimes shows) but that doesn't dampen a genuine spirit that shines throughout the film.

Workaholic med student Wil (Michelle Krusiec) knows little besides the operating table and a weekly jaunt from New York City to Flushing for a community dance and dressing down by Ma, her traditional Chinese American mother, played by the ever-graceful Joan Chen (*The Last Emperor*, *Wild Side*). Here the veteran actor is a single mom trapped between generations: old enough to buy into old-fashioned ideas of behavior, yet young enough to get pregnant, as, well, she does. Refusing to reveal the father, Chen's character is kicked out of her parents' home and moves in with Wil. She butts heads with Wil and stirs up requisite, somewhat campy trouble, including over-the-top Chinese restaurant-style home decor. As Ma balloons, nourishing herself on noodles and Chinese soap operas, Wil is seduced into a closeted romance by a saucy ballet dancer named Vivien (Lynn Chen), whom she first meets at that dreaded Flushing dance.



Irresistible Lynn Chen (right) inches Wil out in *Saving Face*.

LARRY RILEY

Maybe it's Wil's adorable button-down shirts, or her anxious sidelong glances, but Vivien immediately senses Wil's persuasion and does her best to inject some passion into the young doc's tunnel-vision life. The two women are ridiculously attractive—Wil rocks a straightish tomboy look, while Viv is all modern dancer glam—and share a hot and playful love scene. Problems in the chemistry occur when Wil's awkwardness or Viv's petulance gets out of control. Then a vague inkling that these two would never get along in real life creeps in.

The get-to-know-you period goes pretty smoothly, except that a) Wil never spends the night for fear Ma will find out and b) she works crazy hours in the same surgery department that Vivien's dad runs. A fluffy subplot puts a tad more oomph into Viv's frustrations—she must decide whether to join the Paris ballet or pursue her true love, modern dance—but this speak-now-before-I-move-away-forever device recalls every sitcom's season finale. The story definitely belongs to Wil and Ma.

Krusiec and Chen have a great mother-daughter dynamic. As Wil gradually tunes in to the fact that Mom is depressed, she decides that perhaps grandma and grandpa are right: the lady needs a husband. Plus, maybe she will finally frickin' move out. Mom grudgingly embarks on a bunch of blind dates with older gents. Yeah, we could all gag on this kind of sequence, but not when it stars Joan Chen, who tolerates the shenanigans with the same sense of futility that Hope Davis so deftly brings to *Next Stop Wonderland*. And don't worry, things look up for Ma later.

Some scenes flow beautifully—including the love scenes, thankfully—but others have a jerky momentum that made me think *Saving Face* might have been cut down from a longer, more expository version. Wu's inexperience also shows in a couple of scenes—for example, Wil and Viv process their relationship via some strange remarks about meat-eating pigeons. What about dance metaphors? The operating room? Even some stereotypical Chinese themes would have felt less incongruous.

Wu's strengths emerge in moments that are perhaps closest to her own experience, such as quiet moments of affection between the harried Wil and her worry-laden mother. Other nice touches include sequences in English and Mandarin, translations courtesy of Wu's own mother. All in all, a solid and entertaining entrance into the dyke cinema genre. Grade: **B** *gf*

APRIL'S SHOWER

dir. Trish Doolan
(Regent Releasing, 98 minutes)

Good ensemble cast films use secondary characters to build interest in the principles. But in Trish Doolan's first feature—which opens in theaters this month—it seems a new neurotic, nympho, or bitchy supporting role gets tossed in every time the script falls flat. After a while, *April's Shower's* twenty-seven characters come off as an overstuffed team of paramedics trying to restore a heartbeat. With one-third the players and three times the development, *April's Shower* might have had a coherent story. Instead, everyone in this film speaks—pardon me—wails, as if mere decibels will supply the drama lacking in the plot.

The center of the noise is Alex (Doolan), who is throwing a bridal shower for her "friend" April (Maria Cina) but suspects she's been named a bridesmaid only 'cause she cooks gourmet. Alex agonizes over what to wear (her gay boy pal pans one look as "Chef Boyar-don't") and then mysteriously upchucks in the toilet. A Paleolithic Era passes before we find out why: she and April were lovers for five years until April left to find the first man willing to put a ring on her finger. Alex lets the cat out of the bag in front of the whole wedding party, and yet somehow there's still a happy ending.

On the upside, if lesbian and bisexual content is all you're after, there's plenty here, most notably *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy's* Honey Labrador, who co-produced and stars as jilted dyke artist Sasha. Sasha ends up kissing the pizza guy and decides she's met the love of her life since he, like her, likes to eat figs with prosciutto. Ah well, at least Labrador makes for good eye candy. Grade: **C-** —*Candace Moore*

OPEN MY HEART

Dir. Giada Colagrande
Strand Releasing, 2004

Is a spoiler still a spoiler if the outcome is this predictable? When it's revealed early on that Italian *sorelle* Maria and Caterina are also lovers, it's only a matter of time before they transmute à la Jean Genet into murderous maids. The flat visual style that gives digital video a bad name hardly flatters the two sinnin' sisters and the school caretaker/Lothario who comes between them. Nothing to get huffy about if it were the least bit erotic, but director Giada Colagrande (who also wrote the screenplay and plays lil' sis) spoils the fun by cutting to images of Renaissance icons during the good bits. It doesn't help that Colagrande is channeling *The L Word's* Mia Kirshner, that other waif everyone loves to hate. Grade: **D-** —*Maria San Filippo*



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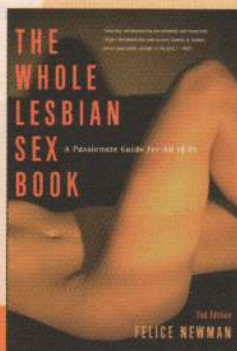
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GIRL GUIDE

film

THE 'TIME' SHE FILMED

IFC-award-nominated indie director Jennifer Reeves may be our next big thing.

At last year's queer film festival in Los Angeles, I was astonished by the poetic precision of Jennifer Reeves' experimental feature *The Time We Killed*, which centers on an agoraphobic writer. I wasn't alone: Reeves' film won one of the fest's Audience Awards, as well as laurels in Berlin and Tribeca. This year she's been nominated by the IFC's Independent Spirit Awards as "Someone to Watch." I called her in Brooklyn while she was doing her taxes.

I found *The Time We Killed* stunning, yet you've had trouble securing theatrical distribution.

High profile distributors were telling me how much they loved it, but then someone on their team would shut it down. There's no famous actor in it. It's black and white. In the film industry, everything has to have been tested before.

Did poet Lisa Jarnot, who stars, collaborate with you on the voiceover at all?

She didn't collaborate with me on the overall writing, but I was shooting her sitting at a typewriter and she started typing these free-associative poems that fit the film's concerns.

The main character is holed up inside her apartment for six months, intimidated by what's going on outside. So, the landscape shots are her imaginings?

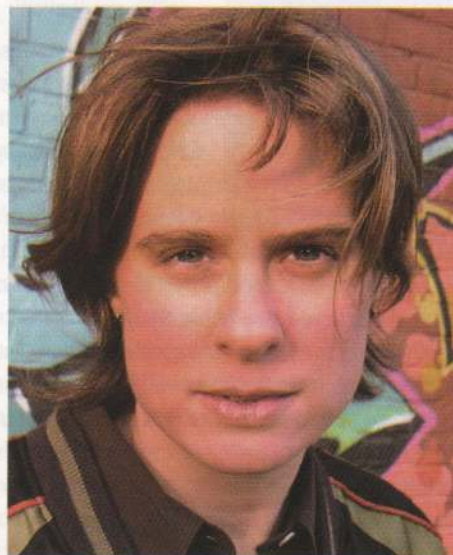
Yeah, all that stuff was shot in film, and the stuff in the apartment was shot in video.

What did you seek to express using both technologies?

I wanted to have an aesthetic delineation between the present time and the other footage. I thought the video was a good way to show that claustrophobic self-control and self-sufficiency. All the video is on tripod so there's this subliminal idea that she could be shooting it herself.

This is somewhat of a city film, but a depiction of New York within the confines of an apartment.

The film is about the split between city and country life and identity. In the character's imagination, for example, a bird comes to the window on 9/11 and says, "Let us in. New York has become America." I grew up in Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois. To me, New



BILL WU

York represented non-America, getting away from this close-minded country I had come from. But when 9/11 happened, there was this flag-waving sense of "unity," but really unity against another group of people.

There's a scene where we see out of the apartment window and the birds spread and there's darkening in the sky. Is that actual footage?

The day the planes hit, I had turned my phone off. I heard this loud crash. I went to the window and the sky was grey and dark and the wind was blowing towards Brooklyn. I grabbed my video camera and ran upstairs. There are a couple shots that I shot off the roof where it's snowing ashes.

***The Time We Killed* is also a letter to the protagonist's female ex-lover, who's died of cancer. The voiceover describes past relationships with men and women. How did you conceive of the character's sexuality?**

She's bisexual. The whole "problem" of bisexuality—of desiring both women and men in a monogamous culture—is how, if you're in a committed relationship, you're not considered bisexual anymore because you're with one or the other. If you're seeing both, you're a ravenous, horrible uncommitted person that's using everybody for your pleasure. I'm exaggerating, but you get a sense of her conflict, but also her nostalgia for this time where she was really active sexually.

—Candace Moore **of**

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INSIDE GIRLFRIENDS

JENNIFER HAGAN

Dr. Kate O'Hanlan (right) and me
at the Equality California gala.

Welcome to the second installment of the new *Girlfriends*. In honor of Mother's Day and the one-year anniversary of the legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts, we have an issue-wide focus on marriage and family. Be sure to read Canadian writer Jean Roberta's report on page 42 on four lesbian couples who took the big step during the marriage juggernaut last year: how did getting legally married change these women's daily lives? You'll find that being wife and wife—even now, as our national gay organizations are shying away from what used to be issue number one on the gay agenda—has deeply shaped the couples as a family. Even if it is “just a piece of paper,” and even if their government turned around and rendered their paper legally void, being legally married has altered these women's lives forever.

One organization that isn't afraid of the anti-gay marriage backlash is Equality California (EQCA), which held a formal fundraiser in February to mark Valentine's day and the one-year anniversary of our local same-sex weddings here in San Francisco. The picture here of Dr. Kate O'Hanlan and me is from that evening.

In the old incarnation of the magazine, we ran only one regular story on health: Beth Brown, MD's “Ask Doctor Dyke.” For ten years, the story was a mere two columns and consisted of a single question from a reader and then a pithy, smart, and open-minded answer from Dr. Brown. Despite its short format, it's been consistently the most popular story in readers' polls. Finally, we took the cue and—especially since it fits *Girlfriends*' new lifestyle focus—expanded our health coverage to a section with two stories: one on some aspect of lesbian health, different each month, and then “Ask Doctor Dyke,” supersized to twice its former length.

Enjoy your healthier *Girlfriends*—perhaps after you've been revitalized by this month's beautiful fashion models in bikinis and lesbian-owned Mooloolaba's surf wear.

girlfriends
the word on lesbian lifestyle

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