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THE BEST-SELLING LESBIAN MAGAZINE



America's Funniest Lesbians

Suzanne Westenhoefer Comes Out On Top

Funny girls (from left): Dana Goldberg,
Westenhoefer & Bridget McManus

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B-B-B-BAD TO THE BONE

Hello, network execs? Please fund this TV show. ★ By Candace Moore



Skyler Cooper, who plays Bone



Melange Lavonne, who plays Jaden

THE PILOT OF Amber Sharp's sassy serial dramedy, *Don't Go*, which focuses on lesbians of color in Los Angeles, has been wowing audiences and winning awards on the LGBT film festival circuit over the last year. The diverse cast, includes butch stage actor Skyler Cooper, who heats things up with her très foxy female masculinity; lesbian film veteran Guin Turner (*Go Fish*); *Chutney Popcorn*'s director and star, Nisha Ganatra, who plays a rebellious Indian American; and new talents Yaniv Moyal, Janora McDuffie and musician Mélange Lavonne. *Don't Go* combines the best elements of a *Melrose Place*-type prime time soap and a contemporary lesbian series like *The L Word*. Let's hope it gets scooped up by a queer-friendly cabler, just as it deserves.

SKYLER COOPER

Tell us about your character in *Don't Go*.

Bone's a drifter. She's Jaden's best friend and very protective, for reasons revealed later. The most I can say without giving much away is that they're tight. Bone doesn't come from the same side of the tracks that Jaden came from. Jaden is privileged and it's interesting that they become friends.

How would you describe Bone's gender?

I think [Bone] knows about the concept of genderqueer. She can be many things. It will depend on what the writers do with the character. But she's butch, good old-fashioned butch.

What are the prospects for *Don't Go* getting on TV?

It takes up to a year for most pilots to get picked up. A lot needs

to be negotiated. It would be a travesty to not see a show like this on television. I applaud the creator for this concept. We had *Queer as Folk*, which called to the white, gay male community, *The L Word*, which represents the white, female L.A. community, and then we have *Noah's Arc*, which is mostly for the African American, gay male community. I'm glad that it's the women of color who are like, "Let's unify it all." I'm hoping that that's the next step for the queer community.

What was it like to work with your costars?

We were such a tight-knit family. Guin Turner—I'll tell you, when I heard that she was cast as the resident intersex character and read the script, I thought, Oh no, I don't want to have to hate on her! I remember watching *Go Fish* and thinking, She's so cute. You know how the kid who likes the girl in the cafeteria always teases her? I think there might be some of that going on for Bone. I played with it a bit—how would I act out if I had feelings for my buddy's girlfriend and there was some jealousy.

You're going to be on a series on JengoTV.com called *First Take*. Could you tell us about that?

Shortly after we did *Butch Mystique*, Deborah Wilson wanted to follow me around as an out African American actor looking to break into Hollywood. Lo and behold, I got my first pilot, *Don't Go*, within three months. There are things out there for me. Butch is sexy. It's when you come out as butch or genderqueer—however you feel most comfortable in your skin—when the world really accepts you. When you try to put on something you think you should be—that's when you're uncomfortable. I

Photography by Rebecca Sanabria



Nisha Ganatra, who plays Shanti

thought, If people are going to stare at me, I'll give them a reason. I'll go on screen. I'll go on stage. I'll perform in a forum. There's far more acceptance when you can accept yourself.

Your physique is impressive. How much do you work out?
I'm a physical trainer. I've always been in the fitness industry. I used to compete when I was in the military for four years, which is how I established my physique, and everything after that has just been maintaining. Gosh, I've been accused of using steroids and all that and I've never touched it in my life. Does my physicality define me? Absolutely not. Is it a part of me? Yes, it's a part of me and always will be.

MÉLANGE LAVONNE

What are your character, Jaden's, motivations?

Jaden is a butch lesbian who owns an apartment unit with her partner of four years, Melody, who happens to be a hermaphrodite. Jaden loves her woman and they've been living together for a while. Jaden's a strong-minded woman, rough around the edges, and she likes taking care of her woman, who's feminine. However, she has her pride, and when she finds out that she's pregnant...

She's not too happy right away.

Yeah, she feels betrayed. My character's pretty pissed off about it. I can relate to the character in real life because being a butch woman, you have this persona, or image, you have to maintain, and being pregnant is not something you would imagine happening to you. I wouldn't be opposed, in my real life, to being pregnant. It would be a blessing.

Could it become a blessing for Jaden?

They're in limbo trying to figure out: What's the next step? Her best friend, Bone, is real butch and Jaden doesn't want her to know how she got pregnant. I mean, if your girlfriend's a hermaphrodite, does that mean you like penetration?

This was your first time acting. What was that like?

Amber Sharp [the director] found me on MySpace. I'm a hip-hop musician and she ran across my music page and liked my image. She asked me to come down and try out. I brought my best friend [with me]. I've never been so nervous in my whole life. I tell my best friend, "I can't do this. Let's leave." So as I'm getting up, here comes the producer, who says, "OK, are you ready?" I decided, if I suck, I suck—at least I tried. I knew the gist of the story but was so involved in trying to memorize the lines. [Amber] knew it was memorized. You have that robotic character. So she says, "Mel, just come here for a second." I had the script in my hand and she threw it. She's like, "OK, now improv!" I improv-ed and it just felt right.

What did you think about the script when you first read it?

I thought, This is going to be something huge!

Did you go to a few of the festivals where it screened?

Yes, I think the best thing about it was seeing people's responses to the film and how much they supported it. Seeing yourself on the big screen still blows me away.

NISHA GANATRA

Have there been any post-pilot episodes of *Don't Go*?

No. Amber is running into that crazy problem where people are like, "Nobody wants a show with all black people." It's insane.

That's what's refreshing about the show. It shows women of color who are queer in a realistic way, more so than anything that's been on TV.

Amber's incredible...It has authenticity that's lacking [on TV].

Describe your character to us a little bit.

I play Shanti, who's Indian American and grew up in a very conservative family. She decides to just move out of the house. The place she rents, unbeknownst to her, is a lesbian *Melrose Place*-type building, so she gets a taste of different things and has feelings she never knew she had before. She's definitely coming out. I think she's the only one in the whole pilot who is not already gay.

What did you think about when you were playing her?

My life. I think that being an Indian American, you're already aware of living a dual existence. When I got to college, I realized, Oh, there are lesbian clubs, and I can go to them. I was already used to splitting up my identity, so it didn't seem hard or wrong. It's sad but kind of interesting because you've already dealt with it culturally, so it was like sexuality is just another aspect of my life that I can only express in these settings.

Have you bridged that gap with your parents?

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"Butch is sexy. It's when you come out as butch or genderqueer, however you feel most comfortable in your skin, when the world really accepts you."



FEMME PICK

The Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency

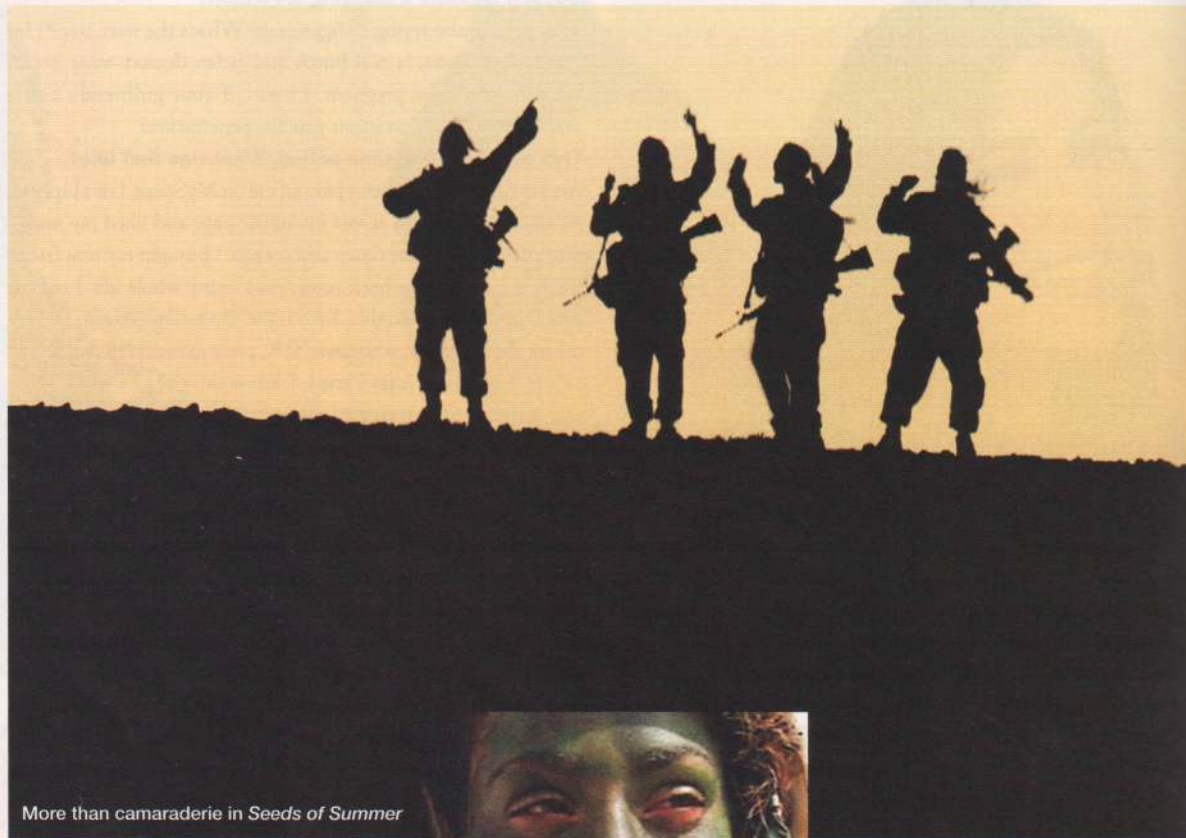
(Oxygen): The Self-proclaimed "world's first supermodel" (and Sapphic dabbler) Janice Dickinson returned to Oxygen for a fourth season of the trash-tastic *The Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency*. Following the split with her business partner, Peter Hamm, in season three, Dickinson is looking to shake things up and take her models to "the next level." The models find themselves shackled up with Dickinson in a palatial Hollywood Hills mansion, complete with a creepily voyeuristic command center hidden in Dickinson's bedroom, from which she can monitor her protégés' activities 24/7. Along with the Orwellian living conditions, season four sees Dickinson rolling out her new plus-size division. Dickinson's trademark insanity and nonstop squabbling of the beautiful people makes for a fantastically guilty pleasure.

(oxygen.com/janice)

— Rachel Shatto

Whose Truth? Our Truth.

Fresh, honest documentaries put it all on the line. | By Candace Moore



More than camaraderie in *Seeds of Summer*

The Sapphic screen drips with hot, sweaty action this fall—the fearless, independent, athletic type, that is. This month's picks explore the innocence of new love and celebrate the resilience of the human spirit.


Seeds of Summer / Zirei Kayitz (Eden Productions):

In her first documentary, twentysomething Hen Lasker revisits the place where she discovered lesbian love: boot camp. Her handheld camera journeys inside a fascinating area that the public is normally excluded from. At the Israeli Defense Forces training center for female recruits, Lasker captures the ambivalence, the gut-wrenching pain and the worried expressions of newbie "chicks." Here, teens who still send laundry home to Mom play at soldiering. As they sing and dance during battle enactments, their guns, swung casually over their shoulders, look absurd—like monstrous metal knapsacks. A love letter to girls learning regimented discipline, and featuring sit-ups and push-ups, confessions and punishments, rifle practice and, finally, graduation, *Seeds of Summer* also records the budding romance between the filmmaker and one of her subjects. From the moment Lasker hands a towel to a girl coming out of the showers, we realize this

is no fly-on-the-wall film. The director boldly includes herself as a character with perspective and desire—particularly for the recruits' commander, Smadar. When asked what they think of Smadar, a smoldering, dark-haired creature, the

new recruits fight to comment, calling her "hot," and "the cutest," claiming they are "crazy about her." Stern-faced with her troops, Smadar privately melts into a soft, flirty mess behind Lasker's viewfinder. Their growing affection is palpable in the camera's tender close-ups of the young commander as she makes bashful eye contact. And Smadar turns the tables on the documentarian, accusing her interviewer of "reactive looks" and begging her to answer intimate questions. The two acknowledge their mutual curiosity and the camera is eventually set down. In Hebrew with English subtitles, this adorable and intimate documentary offers viewers the vicarious experience of falling in love during combat training. (edenproductions.co.il)

Football Under Cover (Flying Moon Filmproduktion):

Niloofer feels more comfortable in a baggy sports setup than in

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DVD PICKS



The Brandon Teena Story

(Docurama): The 10th anniversary collector's edition of the doc that inspired *Boys Don't Cry* is no less devastating, even 15 years after the crime. Why get the collector's edition? The new version includes never-before-seen footage from the original 1998 film, including important updates on the main characters. (docurama.com) — DAM



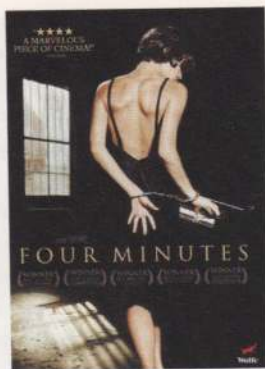
Shelter Me (Wolfe): Marco Simon Puccioni's character-driven melodrama opens at the Italian border as lovers Anna (*Henry and June's* Maria De Madeiros) and Mara (Antonia Liskova) return home from a Tunisian vacation. Searching for Mara's passport, Anna discovers a Moroccan youth, Anis, stowed away in the trunk of their car. Big-hearted and very well off, Anna immediately plays mother hen, sheltering the teenage immigrant from the authorities, bringing him to live in the couple's cozy nest (which she owns) and getting him an under-the-table job at her family's shoe factory (Mara also works there as a laborer, even though Anna

pays their bills). Anis, with his brooding, unrelenting charm and inability to comprehend that two gorgeous women are "together," draws out problems bubbling under the surface of their seemingly harmonious domestic relationship: class differences, family issues and molten resentments. The love triangle plot is saved from cliché by fine performances and sophisticated touches, though *Shelter Me's* tone tends to be a bit overly serious. (wolfevideo.com) — Candace Moore



Fight Girls (Oxygen): If you think you can take on a girl Nicole Richie's size in a brawl, you'd better make sure she doesn't know Muay Thai fighting. *Fight Girls* places 10 women in a Las Vegas mansion to eat, sleep and scrap in hopes of going to Bangkok, Thailand where female Muay Thai fighters await their American opponents. The Muay Thai trainer, Master Toddy, is the *Fight Girls* version of Clint Eastwood in *Million Dollar Baby*. He is responsible for training Lisa King (aka The Black Widow), a fierce vixen in and out of the ring, and Gina Carano, an undefeated Muay Thai fighter with a voluptuous girl-next-door hotness who also plays Crush on *American Gladiator*. Master Toddy shows these women how to open up a can of hot toddy with unconventional training methods like water resistance and jaw weights, while Lisa and Gina mentor the girls through

their training and bouts. (oxygen.com) — Natalie Bell



Four Minutes (Wolfe): A principled 80-year-old piano teacher and a self-absorbed prodigy meet in an unlikely place: a women's prison. It's unclear whether Jenny (the devastating Hannah Herzsprung) beheaded a man or not; what is clear is that she'll send anyone to the hospital who stands in the way of her passion for music. Herzsprung believably renders her rebel character as a girl who, having been brutalized, has become brutal, yet is both beautiful to behold and able to hear and capture the exquisite and the painful all rolled up in the piano music. Through flashbacks and references to SS documents, we also learn that during World War II, Jenny's piano teacher, Traude (Monica Bleibtreu), lost the only woman she had ever loved. She died in the concentration camps. Living with this immeasurable pain for decades has left Traude mean and cold. Together, Jenny and Traude make a broken but strong duo; they help each other bear their respective fates and transcend prison walls, if only for a short time. In German with subtitles, this riveting film is written and directed by Chris Kraus and has won more than 20 awards at various festivals, including the Audience Award at Frameline in 2007. (wolfevideo.com) — CM

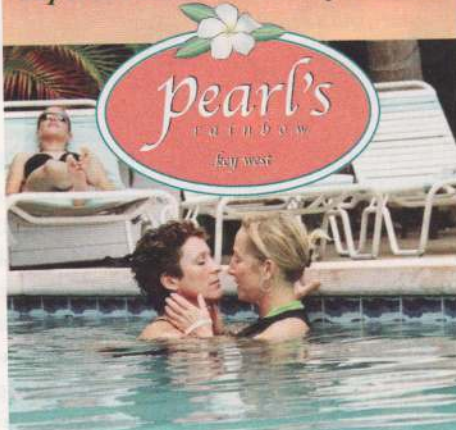
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