

## **The 19th Annual INSIDE OUT TORONTO LGBT Film and Video Festival Starts Thursday May 12<sup>th</sup> 2009.**

Toronto's Inside Out Festival gets a new name. For those poor Torontonians unable to secure press accreditation for Cannes, an alternative video and film fest is present at home. Smaller in scope obviously, the film fest still provides fun in the dark. Yes, and I apologise if all this sounds a little sarcastic. But trust the gays to provide just as enough glamour.

The best bets are the galas. I have seen the opening night, centre piece and closing night galas. These are the best of the lot. The first is catered toward the male, the last toward the female and the centre piece exactly toward both. Be sure not to miss EL NINO PEZ (THE FISH CHILD), the Argentine sleeper directed by Lucia Puenza who also made the excellent XXY two years back.

For more information on showtimes, venue and tickets, check the Inside Out website at: [www.insideout.ca](http://www.insideout.ca)

Here are capsule reviews of a few films I have seen:

COMME LES AUTRES (BABY LOVE) (France 2008) \*\*\*  
Directed by Vincent Gareng

Totally contrite premise of a gay couple (Lambert Wilson and Pascal Elbe) hoping to adopt a child but having problems which include the difficulty of finding a surrogate mother or a suitable fixed marriage. The fixed marriage unexpectedly results in an Argentine girl, Fina (Pilar Lopez) falling in love with him. Though basically a comedy, the actors and director work extremely hard to fuel the story. The result is a film surprisingly moving and at times sad. The issues of having a baby without love (hence the English title BABY LOVE), meaningful relationships are a few of those that shift the mood of the film. The sex scene between Many and Fina is hardly believable but the final conclusion of the film thankfully is. It is a 50-50 chance whether one will like this movie or not, depending on what one expects from it. Still, the production values are excellent and the film still definitely worth a visit.

HALF-LIFE (USA 2007) \*  
Directed by Jennifer Phang

When the Inside Out program write-up says that it takes a while to sort out the characters in director Phang's ambitious feature film, it wasn't kidding. Not only that, but everything is disjointed and anything can happen in this OVER-ambitious piece of pretentious dysfunctional family drama. The story is told from the point of view of 8-year old Timothy Wu (Alexander Agate) whose mother (Julia Nickson) is having a fling

with a younger white man (Ben Redgrave). He seems really nice at the start but then he begins making advances towards Tim's sister. Or is it the other way around? The sister is supposed to be romantically involved with another Asian who turns out to be gay and sleeping with Tim's black teacher. Enough is enough! The film is made worse with nonsensical philosophical sayings highlighted by out-of-place colourful animation. Apparently Tim has the power to control objects. If only he had moved the film to end earlier instead of having the audience sit through to sort out of rubbish!

THE FISH CHILD (EL NINO PEZ) (Argentina/Spain/France 2008) \*\*\*\*  
Directed Lucia Puenzo

This closing night gala is a really good movie and should not be dismissed as just another lesbian flick. Writer/director Lucia Puenzo adapts her own novel and proves her first feature XXY to be no fluke. (XXY ranked as one of my best 10 films of the year.) In the FISH CHILD, Puenzo tackles a more ambitious tale of desperate love involving two young girls from highly different backgrounds. Lala (Ines Efrom from XXY), the rich teen from an exclusive Argentine neighbourhood falls for Guayi, her poor Payaguayan maid. Nothing is what it appears to be. Even Guayi hides a secret past. Things go terribly wrong when a robbery is botched with the two lovers separated. Though one can complain that Puenzo's film is extremely bleak with nothing going right, she does end her film on an upbeat note. Performances and Puenzo's storytelling and direction are terrific. The underwater photography is very well done – a mix of beauty and ugliness - which garnered cinematographer Rolo Puleiro the cinematography prize at the Malaga Spanish Film Festival. This is clearly the best bet for this year's INSIDE OUT festival.

THE NEW TWENTY (USA 2009) \*\*  
Directed by Chris Mason Johnson

Writer/director Chris Mason Johnson's debut feature charts the lives of five college friends who meet in their twenties. The film moves forward 10 years to see the group, a mix of straight and gay, suffering highs and lows (mostly lows) in the Wall Street world of New York City. The trouble with this film is that though it starts up bright and preppy, Johnson's film is full of incidents (heroin abuse; business start-ups; quarrel; relationships; marriage) but empty on character development. The characters are transparent and one can soon tell that the nice guys (like the HIV positive man; and the abused gay Asian) get what they want and the nasty ones get their come-uppance. Do we really care?

NEW WAVE (ARTE) (France 2007) \*\*  
Directed by Gael Morel

Two highly different students, studious Eric and rebellious punk Romain Valentin (Ducommun and Victor Chambon) are brought together as friends. They discover their mutual love for filmmaking and both start a bond of friendship that unfortunately leads to a tragedy. Director Gale Morel's (LE CLAN) film is unengaging and plods along as monotonously as the uneventful life of Eric's farm family. Morel never delves deeply into the reasons behind the troubled relationships between Eric and his parents nor Romain and the psychological troubled mother, Anna (Beatrice Dalle of 37'2 le matin). When the abrupt ending occurs too soon, the audience feels the shallowness of the film. Not that this is a flaw, but there is nothing gay about this film – only a hint of more of a friendship between the two boys by Eric's military brother.

PATRIK 1,5 (Sweden 2008) \*\*\*\*  
Directed by Ella Lemhagen

Sven and Goran are a married gay Swede couple who relocate to a small town or a village really, to realize their dream of adopting a child. They are approved for Patrick aged 1.5. But a typographical error gives them a homophobic teen thug aged 15. Director Lemhagen's gay crowd pleaser should not disappoint her target audience especially during the segment when a homophobe gets beaten up. Her message of 'all you need is love' sounds corny but works wonderfully in her the way she takes a totally unlikely situation and changes it to a fairy tale ending. Lemhagen shows that human beings do change for the better. Really? But this is the stuff movie magic is made off, which makes a superb choice for the opening film for the Inside Out Film Festival.

SEEDS OF SUMMER (Israel 2008) \*  
Directed by Hen Lasker

SEEDS OF SUMMER is a documentary that follows young 18-year old female combat trainers over the course of some 66 days and nights. Doc filmmaker Hen Lasker returns to her place of training where she fell in love with a woman commanding officer. Though she attempts to illustrate how these daddys' little girls grow up to be real women, her film is absolutely boring made worse by her personal touch which is totally out of sync with the rest of the film. Lasker hardly touches the political issues and training on hand and though the film is slightly more than an hour, it feels longer than boot camp training. She seems more interested in filming female flesh. There is nothing in this film that I have not seen here before as I went to boot camp and army training myself.