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The Boys In Berlin

Mark Finch files notes from this year's Berlin Film Festival on the new gay films to be seen here soon

FILM

BERLIN is traditionally fond of Britain and boys. The two came together rather awkwardly at this year's film fest in a special programme of new (and old) shorts, absurdly tagged 'Young British and Gay'. It seemed to be in the spirit of anti-Section 28 - last year, Berliners booed Richard Attenborough - but without context: in a lesbian-less limbo, the films confused a sympathetic audience.

It's weird being British in Berlin; others automatically expect a kind of cultural progressiveness borne of Thatcher's oppression. Nevertheless, next to other international entries, queer Brits like Paul Bettell, Constantine Giannaros and Richard Kwietniowski do seem in the vanguard of an authentic gay aesthetic.

So Berlin is where the British get picked up; it's where other international gay film fests get most of their new movies from. This year though, most programmers were brooding over their schnapps and strudel because - despite Jarman et al - 1989 looks short of good new gay-authored movies. Amidst Hungarian homophobia - *Before The Bat Ends Her Flight*, in which a homosexual courts a widow in order to seduce her son - and Portuguese posturing - death in Venice, and Rome, and Lisbon, and ... - there were only three stand-out features: *The Deserter*, *Fun Down* and *The Long Weekend*.

The Deserter is an atmospheric acting out of what may be one of life's biggest problems: straight men who flirt with us. Christos from Athens falls in love and follows big-time loser Manolis back to his homo-hating hometown. Sadly, Christos isn't familiar with a byword at The Bell - Treat 'em Mean to Keep 'em Keen - and plays puppy while his beau goes from bad to worse. What stops *The*

Ben Ellison and Matthew Baldo star in *Looking for Langston*

Deserter from being maudlin is the social observation - how do you get off with a Greek boy who lives with his mother? - and the integrity of Christos' character.

Roger Stigliano's droll *Fun Down* There follows a New York State naif on his first trip to the city, and had everyone talking about how good it is to see erect cocks back in gay cinema. (Back? Do you recall any hard-ons in *Hello Dolly*?) Unlike *Fun*, Gregg Araki's *The Long Weekend* issues from the West Coast, and the difference shows. *Fun*'s protagonists are too dumb to talk and just want to fuck; the boys of Araki's witty mall-side melodrama -

sub-headed *Oh Despair!* - are too drugged to fuck and just can't stop talking.

Long Weekend is about 20 year olds who can't decide whether they want relationships with the same sex, the opposite sex, or their analysts. Droll and undetermined, *Weekend* also ushered in this year's Major Theme in Gay-Made Movies: bisexual melancholy. In Austrian Andreas Riedler's first feature *Breakfast For Three* Canadian Lea Pool's *Strain Heart*, none of the three know what they're installing - we "

More bad news. With a bewildered bisexual boys, lesbians don't stand a chance. Lea Pool, Chan Ottinger h not ab Ottinger

