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# REVIEWS

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A CRITICAL LOOK AT MOVIES, THEATER, MUSIC, ART, BOOKS, EVENTS AND CULTURAL PHENOMENA IN THE BAY AREA

## M O V I E S

### Pioneers of gay and lesbian cinema

EDWARD GUTHMANN

**TRIBUTE TO JAMES BROUGHTON.** Featuring *The Pleasure Garden*, *Testament*, *Together* and *Devotions*. At the San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival. Tuesday, June 21st, Castro Theatre, SF.

**SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN & GAY FILM FESTIVAL.** At the Castro, SF, Monday, June 20th through Wednesday, June 22nd; at Trocadero Transfer, SF, Thursday, June 23rd; at the Roxie Cinema, SF, Friday, June 24th through Sunday, June 26th. Also at Pacific Film Archive, Berk., Wednesday, June 22nd.

Visionaries and poetic idealists are as rare in popular cinema today as sci-fi slaughter and overwrought technoscapes are frequent. Even with so bleak a landscape, and with a financial climate that cripples many independent artists, James Broughton still prevails. Now 69, the granddaddy of San Fran-

Richard Oswald's 'Different From The Others,' a recently rediscovered German film from 1919, is thought to be the first movie to address gay issues.

cisco's postwar indie film movement is still pursuing his vision with stubborn cheerfulness. Broughton debuts his latest film, *Devotions*, as the San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival honors his career at the Castro next week.

Co-directed with his companion Joel Singer, *Devotions* is a sweet-natured, sexually frank challenge to belligerence. If men are born loving, Broughton asks, why do we settle for rivalry and aggression? Where do we lose the knack for comradeship?

An anthology of "friendly activities," *Devotions* features 45 male couples — mostly non-actors, all friends of the director — in staged situations. Men are filmed with snakes, with dumbbells, in swings and in kitchens, on beaches and piano tops. They caress, rub noses, cuddle, read to each other, shampoo each other's hair and make love. Though largely sexual and largely gay, there's also the occasional filial/paternal note: one father-son combo blisses out on a pasta machine.

Broughton's message is cheery and life-giving — almost in a '60s, hippie-goodness sense — and not always suitable for the very young or the easily embarrassed. One fellow is filmed with a razor and lathered brush, and proceeds to shave his genitals and chest. Another bold pair, covered by sand, are invisible except for their penises — cock cameos, if you will.

Preceding *Devotions* at the Broughton tribute are *Testament* (1974, a self-portrait), *Together* (1976, co-directed by Joel Singer) and one of the director's earliest, *The Pleasure Garden* (1953). Filmed outside London during Broughton's five-year European flight from McCarthy Era politics, *Garden* won a special jury prize at the 1954 Cannes Film Festival.

Like a larky *King of Hearts* where blithely acknowledged lunacy is the norm, *Garden* opens in a weedy, deceptively forlorn sculpture garden populated by a tribe of gentle loonies. The folly of being serious or glum in a world ripe with wonders — a theme that occupies Broughton even today — comes to life

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through his charmed menagerie. A jogger and bicyclist, two male wrestlers, a woman with a dog and a sculptor (director Lindsay Anderson) and his nubile model (Jill Bennett) are among the enchanted.

Routing around the edges is a sour-faced undertaker who decries wanton caprice, nailing fig leaves over the privates of male statues. The undertaker recruits a gaggle of his peers — alarmingly grim in their stovepipe hats and mourning suits — and announces plans to convert the garden into a cemetery. The mad-caps mass together for a tug-of-war with the gloom

squad, emerge victorious, and dedicate their garden forever to ecstasy.

Filmed in lovely black-and-white and played to a flute and harpsichord background, *Garden's* casually daffy charm is a fresh mixture of film school inventiveness and classical craft. Surprisingly, Broughton took a 15-year absence from filmmaking following *The Pleasure Garden* and devoted his time to playwriting, poetry and teaching — until returning with *The Bed* in 1968.

★      ★      ★

Another festival highlight is Richard Oswald's *Dif-*

*ferent From The Others*, a 1919 German rediscovery with Conrad Veidt (*Casablanca*) playing a blackmailed gay violinist. Produced at the time of the first homosexual liberation movement, *Different* is considered the first film ever to address gay issues. The pro-tolerance plot has Veidt seeking hypnosis to arrest his tendencies, only to be told by his specialist that his condition is "natural, just not the norm."

The Nazis attempted to destroy all prints of the film, but a print was recently discovered in the Soviet Union; the fragmented copy that survives is subtitled in Ukrainian. *Different* will be screened with a voice-over English translation and live organ accompaniment. (Castro, Mon/20, 7:30 pm; Pacific Film Archive, Wed/22, 7 pm.)

Also supporting the festival's emphasis on vintage European films is Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Mikael* (Germany, 1924), the love story of an artist and his young male model (Pacific Film Archive, Wed/22, 7 pm); and Jacques Deval's *Club des Femmes* (France, 1936), a comedy about a women's residence hotel, featuring a well-adjusted lesbian character (Castro, Wed/22, 3:30 pm).

**Worth noting:** Tuija-Maija Niskanen's *The Farewell* (Finland, 1980), a lesbian drama made by an all-women production team (Castro, Mon/20, 9:30 pm); Hans Stempel's and Martin Ripkens' *A Love Like Any Other* (Germany, 1982), the story of two latently bourgeois gay men in Berlin, which may be the flip side to the steamy *Taxi Zum Klo* (Castro, Tue/21, 9:30 pm); Lizzie Borden's *Born In Flames* (U.S., 1983), a future-fantasy of a cross-cultural women's rebellion (Castro, Wed/22, 7:30 pm); Eloy de la Iglesia's *The Deputy* (Spain, 1980), a post-Franco political thriller about a gay politician (Castro, Wed/22, 9:30 pm); and Wolf Gremm's *Rainer Werner*