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Frameline: Offerings from history to heartbreak

By Randy Myers

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Usually, I encounter a dud or two when pre-screening some films that will be showcased in Frameline, San Francisco's annual LGBT film festival.

Not this year.

Only one of the titles mentioned below is a wobbler on my "worth seeing" list. All others I can recommend without any serious reservations.

The 11-day festival kicks off June 17, but tickets are already being gobbled up for the 219 features in this year's lineup.

Can see only one? Make it "Undertow," this year's marvelous centerpiece film from Peru — another example of how Latin American filmmaking is producing some of the most accomplished LGBT-themed films today.

Here are my picks:

■ **"The Four-Faced Liar"**: In this sweet and spry comedy-drama, five appealing New Yorkers find their lives in upheaval after they meet one day at a bar suitably called *The Four-Faced Liar*. An unexpected attraction blossoms between a seemingly happy straight gal and a bed-hopping lesbian, a development that throws

FILM FESTIVAL

■ **WHAT**: Frameline, the GLBT film festival

■ **WHEN**: June 17-27, screening times vary

■ **WHERE**: Castro Theatre, 429 Castro St., S.F.; Roxie Theater, 3117 16th St., S.F.; Victoria Theatre, 2961 16th St., S.F. and the Rialto Cinemas Elmwood, 2966 College Ave., Berkeley

■ **TICKETS**: Most screenings \$8-\$10; www.frameline.org, tickets may be purchased by fax at 415-861-1404

friendships and partnerships into a tailspin. Director Jacob Chase and cast bring polish and wit to a romantic charmer. (6:30 p.m. June 20, Castro Theatre)

■ **"Stonewall Uprising"**: Award-winning documentarians Kate Davis and David Heilbroner not only vividly recount this "Rosa Parks" moment in LGBT history — when a group of bar patrons in 1969 New York fought back against cops — but powerfully evoke the era's anti-gay sentiments. Particularly eye-opening are unsavory snippets from Mike



Marja-Lewis Ryan and Emily Peck's sudden romance throws their lives into disarray in "The Four-Faced Liar," screening at the Frameline film festival in San Francisco.

Wallace's offensive special CBS report "The Homosexual" along with shocking testimony from patients about how the psychiatric community "treated" — more like abused — gays and lesbians. This is an important work; one that doesn't go down like medicine. (7 p.m. June 24 at the Roxie, S.F. Opens wider in Bay Area theaters in July.)

■ **"Trans Francisco"**: Is it necessary to have a big budget in order to make a decent documentary? Certainly not if you're director Glenn Davis. In just over an hour, the KGO-TV producer gives voice to an

eclectic, fascinating group of Bay Area transwomen. The candid interviews range from the film's co-producer and her female spouse to an African-American male-to-female transsexual and her female-to-male boyfriend. Davis obviously dedicated a lot of time in gaining his subjects' trust; the audience is the luckier for it. (11 a.m. June 19 at Victoria Theater, 2961 6th St., S.F.,)

■ **"William S. Burroughs: A Man Within"**: Frameline shines a spotlight on the colorful lives of two Beat poets this year. While Yony Lesyer's documentary isn't generating

a buzz like "Howl," with James Franco (the closing night film), it's still worth a look. The documentarian takes a studied approach in chronicling Burroughs' life, recounting how he shot his wife dead during a drugged-out "game" along with the firestorm over his scandalous writings. Through archival footage and insightful interviews Burroughs' genius comes across quite convincingly. Yet "A Man Within" tends to be hampered by a workmanlike approach to filmmaking — strikingly at odds with its obtuse and erratic subject. Nonetheless, this is an interesting film and Burroughs' is a life worth examining. (7 p.m. June 20 at the Victoria; 7 p.m. June 22 at the Elmwood, Berkeley)

■ **"Grown Up Movie Star"**: Director/writer Adriana Maggs executes, rather unevenly, an ambitious family drama about Ray, a rugged former hockey player (a strong former hockey player (a strong Jomy Harris) and his awkward attempts at raising two daughters while hiding his sexuality. There are some strong moments, but the writing can be too contrived, especially near the end when everything comes to a dramatic head. The best reason to see "Movie Star" is for Tatiana Maslany,

quite the discovery as Ray's sexually inquisitive daughter Ruby. (She received a special jury prize at Sundance.) Her character's flirtatious ways venture the film into disturbing terrain handled capably by Maggs. It's rough around the edges, but recommended with reservations. (9:30 p.m. June 18, Castro)

■ **"Going South (Plain Sud)"**: Take four attractive young adults with sexuality and familial issues, put them in a car headed to a beach and you've got the makings of a sexy bit of French fluff. While "Going South" does frolic in the sand and rewards us with flashes of appealing nudity, it's hardly a carefree road flick. Director Sebastian Lifshitz tells an engrossingly slight story about a man's trip to meet his estranged mum whom he hasn't seen in 20 years. Along the way, the handsome brooder picks up a pregnant sister, her gay brother and another hunk. Lifshitz imbues the taut character study with a foreboding sense of danger, a tone ably aided by the intense performance of Yannick Renier as the brooder who just so happens to be packin' a pistol in

See **FRAMELINE**, Page 5

Frameline

From page 4

his car. (9:30 p.m. June 23, the Elmwood and 4:30 p.m. June 27, the Castro)

■ **"Undertow (Contracorriente)":** It's not only astonishing, but downright exciting, that this import from Peru marks the first feature from talented writer and director Javier Fuentes-Leon. What an impressive and moving debut. Latin star Cristian Mercado brings a mix of vulnerability and conflicted machismo as Miguel, a married fisherman who is at odds with himself, his community, his desires and his obligations. When his male lover dies, and reappears only to him, Miguel must decide whether to deliver the body to a proper resting place or do nothing so he can enjoy the best of his two worlds. "Undertow" captured Sundance's World Cinema Audience Award for best dramatic feature. See this touching four-hankie picture and you'll understand why. (7 p.m. June 22, the Castro)

■ **"The Heretics":** Director Joan Braderman's personal documentary revisits a cadre of feminist artists who discuss their lives now as well as during the time when they launched the upstart magazine "Heresies: A Feminist

Publication on Art and Politics" in 1977. Braderman travels many miles to talk to these artists, who share stories about how important the publication was not just to them but to the male-dominated culture. The chauvinistic attitudes they recall can only make you mutter and shake your head — artist Mark Rothko told a writer she was "too cute to be an art critic." Braderman's off-the-cuff style (she worked on the magazine, too) gets intrusive at times, although that approach does make us feel like we are catching up with old friends. (11 a.m. June 26, the Victoria)

■ **"Baby Jane?":** If you really want to achieve the maximum pleasure while watching this silly drag version of the Bette-Davis camp classic "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane," toss back a couple of Cosmos beforehand. Bay Area actor Matthew Martin ("Christmas with the Crawford") is a scream as the divinely demented former child star: His slurry vocal inflections are dead-on as Bette. Just as good: J. Conrad Frank, who makes a gloriously vain Blanche/Joan Crawford. "Baby Jane" is shot on the cheap but goes down as easy as the aforementioned Cosmos. What more could you want from a parody? (9:45 p.m. June 22, the Castro)

F-96