

San Francisco's women firefighters profiled in *Some Real Heat*

Women's Lives, Women's Art

Windham County Women's Film Festival to Benefit Women's Crisis Center

By MEK

Celebrate Women's History Month and enjoy Brattleboro's 12th annual Women's Film Festival, which this year runs from March 7th through the 23rd. With over twenty films from all over the world, the Women's Film Festival is a major fundraising event for the Women's Crisis Center of Windham County, now in its 25th year of service to the county. Last year, the festival raised \$6,000 for the Crisis Center.

The festival aims to entertain, educate, and perhaps even inspire the audience with the realities of women's lives, women's art, women's dreams and aspirations. Best of all, there will be opportunities to meet some of the filmmakers as well as participate in discussions about the images and stories they bring to life on the screen.

Just to mention a few of the films: in *Uphill All the Way*, troubled teenaged girls find strength in a bicycle trek along the continental divide; *One In Nine* follows nine breast cancer survivors as they compete in the Head of the Charles Regatta; and *Cowards* explores the reality of a couple locked in a destructive relationship. There are award-winners, such as *Georgie Girl*, a portrayal of a Maori transsexual's journey from farm boy to cabaret singer and member of New Zealand's Parliament; *Mai's America* documenting a young Vietnamese exchange student's

home in cracker Mississippi; and *Connie and Ruthie: Every Room in the House*, which acquaints us with two Jewish lesbian grandmothers who took a huge risk to find each other and paid a high price to be themselves together. There's also a mini-festival of classic and recent films by Agnes Varda, considered the grandmother of modern French cinema.

Concurrent with the film festival will be *Visions and Voices*, an exhibit and silent auction of artwork by local women and girls at the Hooker-Dunham Gallery. Three venues – the Latchis Theater and the Hooker-Dunham Theater in downtown Brattleboro and the New Falls Cinema in downtown Bellows Falls – will host the events.

I had the good fortune to review three films – *Cowgirls*, *Some Real Heat*, and *Reno: Rebel without a Pause* – for the upcoming Women's Film Festival.

Cowgirls gives us a glimpse of western women who love their horses, their hats, the excitement and the skills they've learned to compete on the rodeo circuit. These cowgirls are trick riders – riding upside down on their horses, standing upright with hands-in-the-air kind of tricks – barrel racers, and Stampede Queens (sorry guys, just for women). Women invented these events because they were banned from participating in the rodeo's regular events – the roping and steer wrestling and bronc and bull riding.

Some of the interviews are insightful, with one cowgirl

talking about how young girls identify and connect with horses, but then when they mature, they're supposed to give all that up for men, but men are still connected to horses. There's some good feminist outrage about women still not being able to vote in the rodeo riders' association.

This movie, although a bit slow, has wonderful vintage clips of cowgirls in motion, and the soundtrack is fun. It's a wonderful glimpse of cowgirl history from girls and women, ages seven to 70, and breaks down stereotypes of the "wild west." On a four-star scale, I give it a two and a half.

Another film about women in a nontraditional situation is *Some Real Heat*, a compilation of thoughtful and insightful interviews with women firefighters in San Francisco. They are turning gender roles upside down as they deal with a conservative white heterosexual male majority among their colleagues and a dangerous workplace. The women are physically and emotionally strong, confident, and they love their tools. At a Kate Clinton show, they'd be in the "Black & Decker" section. One firefighter's favorite is the chainsaw; another loves her axe.

All of the women talk about the excitement of fighting fires, the action, their fears and emotions in dealing with life-and-death issues. One woman talks about being a bigger woman and how her physical strength and size is such an advantage in this profession. Another firefighter

characterizes herself as a social worker with an axe, someone who's there to help. The women are proud of being role models and their introspection, humor and conflicts are real and forceful. This film rates three stars.

Reno: Rebel without a Pause is not about Janet Reno. It is one woman's very funny, insightful, intelligent, politically astute, energetic, outrageous, compelling and mesmerizing monologue about the events of September 11th. Reno (a one-named comedienne) lived a few blocks away from the towers and went from scene to scene both live and in her head, asking, "What do I pack for my life?" Being a little vindictive, she wonders, "Why didn't they get that guy with the BIG SUV?" She explores in a non-stop burst of energy the resulting patriotism and the teary conflicts when Celine Dion (a Canadian no less!) sings "God Bless America." Reno is a great storyteller whose New York Italian pizzazz gives her credentials to make us laugh at 9/11 in a way that no other humorist has been able to do. This entertaining, wild tour de force rates four stars.

There are many more films, not all of them documentaries:

Bend it Like Beckham is a British romantic comedy about an 18-year-old bending the rules imposed by her tradition-bound East Indian parents who are trying to prevent her from playing her beloved soccer.

Green Cold captures the

life and art of Forough Farrokhzad, the greatest Iranian poet of the 20th century, who was killed in a car accident at 33.

Bernice Abbott: A View of the 20th Century was filmed during the famed photographer's 91st and 92nd years.

Portrait of Imogene profiles photographer Imogene Cunningham, based on audiotapes the filmmaker's father had made while working with her.

Journey to Kafiristan is set in 1939 and follows the journey of two Swiss women to explore the mysterious Kafiristan valley in Afghanistan.

Someone Sang For Me profiles the critically acclaimed African-American singer and music educator Jane Sapp. Filmmaker Nora Jacobs will be present at the showing of her film *Nothing But Dreaming*.

Personal Velocity explores decision points in the lives of three different women.

Rounding out the bill are *Interview with My Next Girlfriend* and *Vendredi Soir*, in which a woman in the process of moving is tied up in traffic only to have a night of unexpected surprises where frustration and boredom lead to excitement and infinite possibilities. For more information about the film festival, a list of showtimes and locations, and more detailed descriptions of the films, call 802-258-9100, or check the website at www.womensfilmfestival.org. ▼

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