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# Comics Come Out With a Laugh

By TOM BIVINS

In such a diverse group of people as the GLBT community, coming out is the single common emotional thread that holds our community together. Everyone has a story to tell, whether sad, happy, mundane, or funny. Regardless of the telling or the outcome, the stories all are tinged with fear, stress and anxiety.

So what a relief to watch the film “Coming Out Party,” produced by Howard Bragman and Greg Miller for Creative Light Entertainment and Uncabaret Multi/Media, scheduled for release on National Coming Out Day. In the film, seven American comic actors tell their coming out stories and joke about being gay. The comics represent a broad spectrum of “gayites,” a term coined by comic Rene Hicks to describe the “chosen people of God.” Hicks explains that as the chosen ones, “gay people are part of every segment of society.”

The other comics include Daniel Renzi, best known for being himself on *The Real World: Miami*, Bob Smith, comic and author of *Openly Bob*, drag ‘empressario’ and actor Jackie Beat, out loud lesbian Sabrina Matthews, TV writer and comic John Riggi, and finally, TV writer, producer and SNL alum, Terry Sweeney. All show off their individual talents, generational perspectives and backgrounds with real sensitivity to the underlying goal of the film, which is, of course, coming out loud and proud.

Most of their stories are funny, but like most coming out stories, there is always that underlying note of sadness, anger, or parental disappointment. As John Riggi says in his story of telling his first-generation immigrant Italian mother about his “roommate” (seventies parlance for lover), “afterwards, we went shopping at Target ... maintaining that frail reality we call a family.”

One of the interesting comments made by Bob Smith is that we are always “coming out to everyone, it’s endless.” As an out man for the past 27 years (that long, WOW!), I can attest to the truth of that statement. I just assume that everyone knows, but I still have to handle questions about wives, kids, and marriage, and with good humor come out yet again to new friends, workers or just curious acquaintances. I still feign indifference to the “frail reality” of my family’s acceptance. Ultimately, coming out is about persuasive perseverance.

Easily the strongest performance of the film is by Terry Sweeney, the very first out performer on network television as a “Saturday Night Live” company actor. He performs a great comic riff on caring for his lover’s mother who was living with Alzheimer’s. Every night at dinner for two years, he and his lover came out to her all over again. Talk about excruciating!

Sweeney talks about gay pride in New York in the early seventies and its seeming demise with AIDS in the eighties. I liked his performance best as he

reminded me of every nelly country boy who ends up in the big city, makes it by anyone’s standard and manages never to lose his sense of humor, compromise his integrity or lose his sense of self-worth. He’s funny and tells the truth, ugly as it may seem. My one criticism of his comments is that he ends his segment – and the film – with the comment that if you’re being teased, tormented and disrespected in your small, country town, “you come to the big city, spread your wings and you fly.”

I’ve come from the big city (at least, bigger than all of Vermont) and it’s here in Vermont that I’ve spread my wings and flown. While in Vermont I’ve met people who make a difference in their small towns everyday just by being themselves, openly and honestly. “God’s chosen people” really are in every segment of society, and not just where our city cousins live.

It’s great to see gay comics joke about being gay, and I would highly recommend *Coming Out Party* for 80 minutes of laughs and gay humor. Its underlying message is the same whether you are in L.A. or Vermont: coming out is okay, it’s the single most powerful and important thing you can do for visibility and owning your gay self, and you are going to be okay once you do it. So you just spread your wings and you fly! ▼

Tom Bivins is an instructor at the New England Culinary Institute and lives in Bethel with his partner.

# Lambda Lit Lights Up P-town

By PEG COLE

Sharpen your pencils, students and would-be queer novelists and scribblers. Buy new pens, and charge up your laptop batteries. The famed Lambda Literary Festival is lighting up Provincetown, the gay capital of the Northeast the second weekend of October.

And, of course, all the literary high- and low-lights will be there, including Edmund White (*Art of Biography*), Andrew Holleran (who just got a second place award from the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists’ Association), Nancy Bereano (*Fate of Gay & Lesbian Book Stores*), Maureen Brady (*Short Story to Novel*), Samuel Delany and Cecelia Tan (*GLBT Genre Fiction*), Leslea Newman (*Getting Your First Book Published*),

Minnie Bruce Pratt (*Poetry*), and Karla Jay (*GLBT Memoirs*), among many others.

Most of these authors are signed up for more than one workshop, but there’s the flavor of the thing. Plus, scriptwriting for television, lots of master classes (including how to promote your writing), Southern gay writing, writing for change, readings, poetry slams, musical events, fashion shows, the bars, the beach, the fall colors ... what more could the literati want?

The Lambda Literary Foundation sponsors the festival and, of course, the Lammies, its own awards for literary excellence from the lgbtq community. Its mission is, according to its web page, to “support and further the creation and dissemination of writings by, for, and about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.” It notes, “Literature has long nurtured hope and

inspiration for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and has provided an avenue of understanding.”

Ann Bannon, the pseudonymous (at this late date!) author of a handful of lesbian pulp novels in the 1950s and early 60s, writes on Lambda’s web page: “It is our writers – our poets, scholars, historians, humorists, and storytellers of all stripes – who give voice to our remarkable community. They create us in all our wonderful colors as they recount us both to ourselves and to the wide world.”

So watch some writers bloom (or turn into blooming ... nevermind) if you’re inclined to head for Provincetown. More info: [www.lambdalit.org](http://www.lambdalit.org). ▼

Peg Cole reads a lot in her cabin in the woods, but thinks writers usually are better on the page than in person.