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a e MOVIES

Brokeback: More Riff than Review



BY PEGGY LUHRS

There seems to be some controversy about Brokeback Mountain. No, I don't mean the religious right wing-nuts, I mean within the LGBT community. I neither loved nor hated it. I liked it. It was a good movie, good cinematog-

raphy of the cowboy movie. And likely "I don't know how to quit you" will go right up there with "you know how to whistle don't you" and other bits of dialogue that have entered the American lexicon. It is also centrally a love story between two men.

What upset the religious right and made the likes of Chris

Straight men like to think all gay men are in the nancy boy category. Taking in the very essential masculinity of men loving men is too scary.

One objection I've heard within the glbt community is "oh no not another movie about gays where somebody dies." Yes, it will be truly liberating when gay-themed films just show us the character's successful struggles in life. But this is a quintessentially queer story. This is the first time the story has been told in such a big crossover movie. Homophobia still kills, if not outright, then in many slow deaths of addiction, depression, poverty and isolation.

Things have changed, but not enough and not for everyone. This story needed to be told. It makes all the sense in the world that where the tough guy ethic rules as it does in the west, a man might suffer the most for disloyalty to the code of masculinity constructed as laconic, undemonstrative cowboys.

Enjoy the scenery. Huzzahs to Ang Lee for breaking the mold. Heath Ledger was great but the Oscar goes to Phillip Seymour Hoffman for Capote.

But if we really want to see a story about strong men, let's see the one where the cowboys dare to come out and live feeling and ethically consistent lives. ▼

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raphy, terrific acting and excellent direction from Ang Lee. That I didn't love it probably has a lot to do with the fact that I'm a lesbian and it is hard to see the grunting and grabbing between these guys as a great love story. Yet by the end you do see it as a great love story. The repressed emotion is of a piece with the western life these guys are living and part of the genre to show men's feelings leaking out from their rugged facades. In fact that seems to be what defines acting for many in the US, a real macho man letting on to some feeling ala Eastwood, DeNiro, Wayne, Cooper, Stallone et al. Most of the elements of love and loss are shown through their deprivation of eachother rather than their connection. What I did love about the movie, what makes it a groundbreaking film is how it changes the iconogra-

phy of the cowboy movie. And likely "I don't know how to quit you" will go right up there with "you know how to whistle don't you" and other bits of dialogue that have entered the American lexicon. It is also centrally a love story between two men. What upset the religious right and made the likes of Chris Matthews, Don Imus and other straight men so nervous was the idea that cowboys could be gay. I know it's hard to summon up sympathy for these guys but its sooo distressing to have your surefire masculinity models brought into question. I first noticed this at the family Thanksgiving table when I talked about a gay pro football player. My father's business partner couldn't handle that. He simply refused to believe it. When Ellen's sitcom died, Bill Maher opined the show had gone too far trying to make people believe everyone was gay when they had a gay plumber. According to Maher, everyone knew tradespeople weren't gay, except just the lesbians.

One commentator even claimed the movie had raped the Marlboro man. If that's so, I'd say that as the quintessential American image of granite chiseled dominance, he needed it.

Woman-Stirred Radio

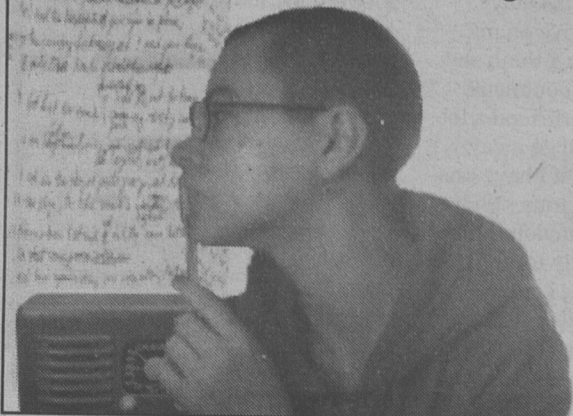
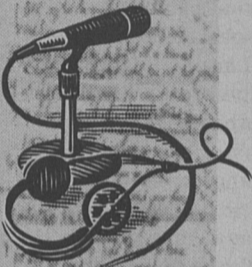
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➔ Peggy Luhrs is a lifelong activist and former instructor of film at Burlington College