

## Bar Girls in Vermont: A reflection on the film, directed by Marita Giovanni

Moira

**SOUTH BURLINGTON** -- For those of you lucky enough to catch the Friday to Thursday showing of *Bar Girls* at South Burlington's Century Plaza in May, I wonder if you felt as I did -- filled with sheer joy at the prospect of watching a "real" lesbian film in a "real" movie house! I know, I don't get out much, but wasn't it really something? And afterwards, I wasn't even let down. *Bar Girls* does present a snapshot, and possibly a dramatically different version than our Vermont variety of dyke life, but hey, it was scintillating.

*Bar Girls* may have been filled with cliché, familiarity and stereotyping, yet I found its endearing qualities far outweighed those aspects. I know what you are thinking -- she's only saying this because this was a "real" lesbian film in a "real" movie house, and those are all too rare to rip apart. But besides that given point, here is a slightly-Hollywoodized but nonetheless heartfelt view of a love affair that anybody could relate to. Moreover, here is Hollywood speaking to me! How could I not be thrilled about it? I mean, all we hear about is the growing collective right-wingers crushing gay rights, right? Yet, I sat in a movie house with my sweet partner within a measurable distance from the Mall, and I thought, "This is radical. This is growth. This is a huge step in a wondrous direction, even if the viewing only lasted seven days."

So, does the film speak to all lesbians? Of course not, but what Hollywood snapshot of life ever does? I found the characters to be an interesting blend of myself and scads of women I know. The basic plot revolves around the beginning relationship between Loretta (Nancy Allison Wolfe) and Rachel (Liza D'Agostino). Of course there is a tangle of other characters who either make the relationship possible or do their best to screw it up. Sounds about right so far? We all have a few friends that fall into such categories, don't we? I found the language to be believable, and sometimes hitting nerves close to my bones.

As the web between the ensemble weaves in a myriad of twisted configurations, one finds our heroines to be learning all of life's hardest lessons. As in life, as in Shakespeare, "These violent delights have violent ends, And in their triumph die; like fire and powder, Which, as they kiss, consume ..." So it is with movie characters as well. Even with all the clichés surrounding lesbians about their rush to the commitment counter, many of us are still ensnared by the promise, the passion, the fire, in and out of the movies. And many such liaisons have violent ends ...

I was curious as to why all the women wore makeup, and not just the kind that stop a shine under lights but, you know, pink glossy lipstick and matching eye shadow. Do lesbian women everywhere else paint their faces? And cleavage? Again, I really haven't noticed a night at 135 Pearl when every woman in the place has her shirt half unbuttoned and tied up with her torso revealed. Don't miss my meaning. I am a femme woman myself, but it is suspect when ALL the women are portrayed in this manner. Am I just showing my rural roots?

I wondered if the director made these choices to make the film more appealing, more marketable in the mainstream. There is a subliminal form of thinking that goes on in our culture, like it's okay to be a lesbian if you look like those Penthouse fantasy girls or those in straight porno films (those that invariably display two women who, out of boredom or absence of a male, feign love for each other). I am not saying this is what *Bar Girls* presents, but perhaps it lost some of the grit and fiber that *Go Fish* gave us while selling too much L.A. gloss.

I have stopped asking Hollywood to bring me great moments of truth, and I am sort of over my artsy film stage. Mostly I want to be lulled. But the desperate scenes between Loretta and Rachel, which come quick on the heels of their realizing they haven't even had an argument (yet they have already moved in with each other!), were filled with honest dialogue and hard hitting truth. Later, staring into her mirror, Loretta shows her brave spirit and faces herself with all the pain of dark soul searching. After this point in the film, I forgave all shortcomings.

For those of you who missed the film, well, you missed it. And for those of you who saw it, wasn't the straight-girl-turned-femme-fatale in the coffee house a riot? And what about the kidnapped troll? ▼



(photo courtesy of VOX)  
*Bar Girls'* Nancy Allison Wolfe, left, and Liza D'Agostino

## NGA Not NGAY:

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(Photo: Paul Olsen)  
President Clinton greets the crowd at Burlington International Airport

program budget cuts, and proposed changes to welfare.

While issues of specific concern to lesbians and gay men were not on the NGA's agenda, *OITM* did have an opportunity to ask questions of some of the nation's leaders. Here's some of what *OITM* learned.

**OITM:** How do you think the Supreme Court will rule in Colorado's (anti-gay) Amendment 2 case? Do you think the boycott of Colorado will continue if Amendment 2 is upheld?

**Governor Roy Romer, (D) Colorado:** It's before the court. I personally opposed Amendment 2 but felt we had to pursue it in court. I feel it (the boycott) is over.

**OITM:** What is your position on hate crimes legislation proposed in Wyoming?

**Governor Jim Geringer, (R) Wyoming:** Due process is sufficient in Wyoming. The way the bill is written it would provide for enhanced penalties for narrow types of crimes. We deal with crimes based on merit and do not need enhanced penalties.

**OITM:** Studies have shown that the suicide rate for gay and lesbian teens is higher than that of their peers. Will the NGA's Campaign for Children address g/l/b youth issues?

**Governor Tommy G. Thompson, (R) Wisconsin** (incoming NGA Chair): You'll have to talk to Howard Dean about that.

**OITM:** What is your position on the ballot initiative campaign targeting families with lesbian and gay parents in Washington?

**Governor Mike Lowry, (D) Washington:** That ballot initiative has been proposed but doesn't have the necessary 181,000 signatures. It addresses the issue of whether same-sex couples can adopt. I am opposed to that initiative. It represents government entering into private decisions. The decision should be based on the care and love of the child and not sexual orientation.

**OITM:** Will the NGA's Committee on Human Resources take a position on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) which would prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation nationwide?

**Governor Christine Todd Whitman, (R) New Jersey:** I haven't heard that there will be discussion of that bill. I personally have taken a consistent position opposing discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

**OITM:** What is President Clinton's position on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA)?

**White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta:** President Clinton has indicated that the Employment Non-Discrimination Act is something he would support.

**OITM:** Has legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation been proposed in Arkansas?

**Governor Jim Guy Tucker, (D) Arkansas:** Currently there is no gay rights legislation pending in Arkansas. I'm not sure it (discrimination) is a problem in Arkansas ... I have no position on the issue.

**OITM:** In light of a spate of anti-gay attacks and murders in Texas would you support hate crimes legislation proposed in Texas?

**Governor George W. Bush, (R) Texas:** We'll apply all of our laws consistently regardless of the origin of the motive. Texas has the death penalty and will apply it evenly in all capital cases.

**OITM:** What is the status of the anti-gay ballot initiative in Maine?

**Governor Angus S. King Jr., (I) Maine:** It's on this fall's ballot. It is designed to repeal Portland's gay rights ordinance and prohibit others from enacting them. I am very much against the initiative. It's going to be close. It is an emotional issue. I hope the people of Maine will decide that the issues of employment, credit, and housing should not be based on individual status and private behavior.

**OITM:** Did *TV Nation's* Michael Moore hug you?

**Governor Howard Dean, (D) Vermont:** Not here ... he got me in Aspen.

In spite of the fact that many of the nation's states will be addressing issues impacting lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, issues of specific concern to lesbian and gay Americans were not addressed at the NGA conference. In a recent interview with *OITM*, Governor Dean indicated that he didn't feel the NGA would be inclined to address lesbian and gay issues "in any kind of constructive way." After the close of the 1995 NGA conference, it is easy to conclude that he was right. ▼

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