

The Cinema of Sexual Disorientation

Bent, a review by Hugh Coyle

Nearly 20 years after it was first produced on Broadway (starring Richard Gere, no less), Martin Sherman's play *Bent* has been transformed into a cinematic experience as provocative and unsettling as the original. Though it enjoyed only a limited run in arthouse theaters throughout the US, the film is now available for rent and purchase through Orion Home Video.

Set in Berlin just before and after the "Night of the Long Knives," when Hitler purged his government of undesirable elements such as homosexuals, *Bent* follows Max and his lover Rudy as they are left homeless by the violence and subsequently transported to a concentration camp. During the train ride, Max is forced to take part in the murder of his partner and then, in an effort to disguise his sexuality and earn a yellow star (for Jews) rather than a pink triangle (for gays), forced to make love to a dead woman.

From there, the movie becomes even more somber and depressing. Max spends his days in the concentration camp moving rocks from one pile to another and then back again. Eventually, he bribes a guard into providing him with company — a gay man named Horst whom Max encountered on the train ride. Through their words alone (the two never touch until the very end), Max and Horst develop an intimate relationship, and in the course of their own dwindling sanity, speak to the nature and expression of gay love itself in a time of unspeakable oppression.

Despite the crumbling grandeur of its opening scenes, during which Mick Jagger offers his own gender-bending take on the cabaret, *Bent* quickly devolves into a filmed stage performance. Sherman's original dialogue, once stunning in its minimal simplicity and reminiscent of the Socratic dialogues, sounds contrived and forced in the cinematic context. Even the play's most famous interchange — a scene in which Max and Horst achieve orgasms solely by talking about sex — lacks authentic spirit or spark on film. It's a prime example of where theater triumphs over cinema; in performance, one can almost

smell the sweat of the actors as they struggle back and forth across the stage. On the screen, it seems sanitized, a mere distillation of the actor's physical presence.

Heavy symbolic overtones eclipse the passion at the heart of the play. The barren

the countless gay men who were imprisoned along with the Jews and gypsies in concentration camps — and subsequently left there to die even after the Allied forces "liberated" the camps. It forced its audiences to grapple with graphic sexual con-

"A LIFE-AFFIRMING FILM
OF RARE POWER AND PASSION!"
— REX REED



rock pile (set in an ironically stage-like place in the movie) drains the color and life out of Max and Horst too quickly; when they are finally forced into moving snow, the transformation has already taken place: they have become corpses too soon.

Even so, the movie labors on, making its points in bold and bludgeoning gestures. As both playwright and screenwriter, Sherman could have expanded the scope and vision of the play, offering a rare glimpse at the societies of gay men imprisoned in the concentration camps. Instead, he remains focused on the isolated duo of Max and Horst, asking them to stand for all gay men. What results is a movie in which the ultimate deaths of the main characters hearkens back to the dark days of gay representation in the movies, when the only good queer was a dead queer.

As a play, *Bent* was a milestone work. It demanded that we consider the lives of

tent. At the same time, the play brought into the light the symbolic pink triangle, and transformed it from a badge of criminal shame into a symbol of hope and freedom by the end of the story.

In the movie, these points are hard-won. Though it earns high marks for its depiction of an often overlooked historical fact, *Bent* suffers from its own bleak consideration of sexual orientation and, by its conclusion, will probably leave most viewers feeling uncomfortably dis-oriented. ▼

Bent

Available on video in May

DIRECTED BY:

Sean Mathias

STARRING: Lothaire

Bluteau, Clive Owen,

Brian Webber

SPECIAL APPEARANCES

BY: Sir Ian McKellen

and Mick Jagger

RAINBOW CATTLE CO.

BRATTLEBORO, VT

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

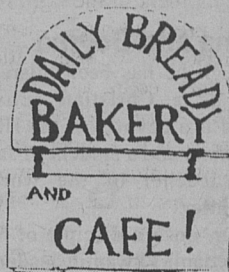
DANCE TO LATEST CLUB MUSIC FRIDAY & SATURDAY

LEVI-LEATHER LAST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH

OPEN AT 8PM WEDNESDAY THRU SUNDAY

940 US RT. 5, BETWEEN EXITS 3&4 OFF I-91

www.together.net/~cattleco 802-254-9830



WE'RE ON THE STREET!

Come See the New Digs!

- Bridge Street Entrance
- Increased Seating
- Expanded Menu
- Wheelchair Accessible

Bakery: Mon-Fri 6-6, Sun & Sat 8-1

Breakfast: Mon-Fri 6-11 Brunch: Sun & Sat 8-1

Lunch Every Day

BRIDGE STREET, RICHMOND • 434-3148

Local Legends

LOCAL ACOUSTIC MUSIC IN A RELAXED SETTING

5/6 POETRY NIGHT WITH PAUL GAGNON &
Special Guest followed by Open Reading

5/13 DON RHODES & THE BACK PORCH PLAYERS —
Original Bluegrass from the Mad River Valley

5/20 TAMARACK — Wicked New England traditional
tunes from Rick Kovacks, Angie Oliver, Mitch Barron,
& Doug Riley

5/27 Open Mike with RRRROY

DOORS OPEN 7, MUSIC 7:30-10, FOOD SERVED 'TIL 9

THE VERMONT RAINBOW CONNECTION

THE T.V. SHOW BY, FOR AND ABOUT VERMONT'S L/G/B/T COMMUNITY AND OUR SUPPORTERS!

Sit back and enjoy our May program filled with news, resources and an informative interview with Robert Simpson, from Vermont GLBT Pride

— PROGRAM SCHEDULE and VIEWING INFO —

Adelphia (CH. 15) (Greater Burlington area) Fri 9pm

Adelphia (CH. 15) (Montpelier, Waterbury, Randolph)

2nd & 4th Fri 7:30pm

Lake Champlain (CH. 2) 1st & 2nd Mon 11pm and

1st & 2nd Wed. 10pm

Helicon (CH. 7) (Barre) 2nd & 4th Mon 8:30pm

BCTV (CH. 8) (Brattleboro) call 257-0888 for air days/time

MCTV (Middlebury, E. Middlebury, Weybridge) 388-3062 for airtimes

MMCTV (CH. 3) (Richmond, Jericho, Underhill) call 434-2550

for air days/time

WENO (CH. 15) (Enosburg, Berkshire, Richford) 1st & 3rd Sun at 8pm

CA-TV (Bennington, Pownal, Shaftsbury, Woodford, Hoosick Falls)

call 442-8868 for air days/time



Extensive Selection

Over 200,000 book, music and video titles

Over 2,000 periodicals

Most Extensive Music selection in Burlington!

30% discount on current New York Times bestsellers

10% discount on most other hardcovers

Over 500 listening stations to preview CDs

Mon-Sat 9am-11pm
Sunday 9am-9pm

Too far out? Visit
www.borders.com



BORDERS®

BOOKS • MUSIC • CAFE

29 CHURCH ST • CHURCH STREET MARKETPLACE • 802-865-2711

