



The Main Feature

Season 38 - Issue 15

screening 26.4.18

US
120 minutes

1988
Certificate 15

Director Paul Bogart
Writer Harvey Fierstein (play and screenplay)
Music Peter Matz and Allan K Rosen
Cinematography Mikael Salomon

Cast:

Anne Bancroft – Ma
Matthew Broderick – Alan
Harvey Fierstein – Arnold Beckoff
Brian Kerwin – Ed
Karen Young – Laurel

Notes (in 3 parts!) by Gill McGlashan – that follows the stage play where the names of the three acts are titled "International Stud", "Fugue in a Nursery", and "Widows and Children First!"



In this adaptation of his own hit Broadway play, Harvey Fierstein stars as drag queen Arnold Beckoff, who yearns for acceptance in a world in which he somehow seems not to fit; but who also knows that he is not prepared to be dishonest about who he is in order to win it. In that regard, it's in marked contrast to the portrayal of Liberace in *Behind the Candelabra* (shown by WNCC in October 2014).

Arnold knows from an early age that he's gay - his mother knows that he's 'different' but prefers to pin her hopes on him conforming to the role of loyal, hard-working and reliable son who will fulfil his duties as a good Jew. A career as a drag queen going by the name of Virginia Hamm certainly wasn't what she had in mind.

The ups and downs of Arnold's relationships with his mother provide a backdrop to his quest for love, first with Ed, a teacher who is not as certain of his sexuality as Arnold is of his; then with Alan, who seems to be Arnold's ideal match as a life partner. Their happiness is cut short, leaving Arnold to raise the son they had adopted.

Set in the 1970s, *Torch Song Trilogy*, like *Tales of the City*, portrays the years of gay pride and promiscuity. Later plays and films (*Angels in America*, *The Inheritance*) are informed and influenced by the advent of AIDS and find it hard to recapture the combination of flamboyance and defiance that characterised the gay lifestyle in earlier decades. The bars and bathhouses that were so much a feature of the gay scene in San Francisco and other cities stopped being pleasure palaces and became symbols of decadence and destruction. That said, every tourist guide now has a section on Gay and Lesbian Berlin/Paris/Rome (delete as appropriate!) and every major (and many a relatively minor) city has its Pride march, showing that the closet door has not been slammed shut again.

What is a “Torch Song”?

It's a song about unrequited or lost love, based on the idea of carrying a torch for someone. Famous exponents of the torch song include Roy Orbison, Billie Holliday, Ella Fitzgerald and even Frank Sinatra. Torch songs are more about the lyrics than the music so, although jazz lends itself particularly well to the torch song, it's not restricted to any one genre. *Careless Whisper*, *Tracks of My Tears*, and *Take Good Care of My Baby* could all qualify. Strangely enough, Judy Garland is not generally included, though her popularity among gay men led to the euphemism “a friend of Dorothy's” in the days when it was unwise to be too direct about a man's proclivities!



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Why does Arnold's mother get so angry about the family grave?

Jewish funerals are simple and stark, although gravestones can be somewhat ornate, featuring the Hebrew and civil names of the deceased.

Flowers are not brought to the funeral nor laid on the grave: a visitor will place a small pebble on the gravestone as a mark of remembrance and respect.

It is the duty of a son to recite the kaddish, a prayer, in memory of his father. Each week at sabbath service in a synagogue, the names of those who have died

recently are read out and the congregation acknowledges the family in mourning.

Further reading

7 people who changed gay rights <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/item/1f4c71a6-1359-4241-9f91-7b0a1b5ac9a0>

Professional football still ‘in the dark ages’ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-40703037>



Diversity symbols telling pedestrians it is safe to cross were installed in London for the Pride event in June 2016.

Gay landmarks in the arts and society

1533	The Buggery Act is the first civil (as opposed to ecclesiastical) law in England to prohibit sodomy. It is repealed in 1553 but re-enacted in 1563. (Different laws applied in Scotland.)
1861	The Offences against the Person Act removes the death penalty but imprisonment remains the standard punishment for homosexual acts.
1885	The Criminal Law Amendment Act tightens up laws on sexual behaviour,
1895	Oscar Wilde sues the Marquess of Queensberry for libel after Queensberry left a calling card on which he described Wilde as a sodomite. Wilde withdraws the suit but is then prosecuted by the crown for sodomy and gross indecency. He is found guilty and serves 2 years in various jails, during which time he writes one of his most celebrated pieces, <i>de Profundis</i> .
1952	Conviction of Alan Turing on the charge of gross indecency. Turing agrees to chemical castration instead of jail but commits suicide in 1954.
1954	The Wolfenden Committee is set up to look at the laws on homosexual offences. Its report, published in 1957, recommends decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults in private.
1956	Liberace sues the Daily Mirror for libel and wins. Other lawsuits follow in the US.
1961	Dirk Bogarde stars in <i>Victim</i> , the story of a barrister who decides not to give in to a blackmailer who could destroy his career.
1967	The Sexual Offences Act decriminalises sex between 2 men over the age of 21 in private.
1969	June 27 - police raid the Stonewall bar in Greenwich Village, New York. June 28 – LGBTQ people riot in response.
1970	June 27 - The first Gay Pride march takes place in Chicago on the anniversary of the Stonewall raid. The marches spread across the world over the next few years.
1976	Armistead Maupin begins writing <i>Tales of the City</i> for The San Francisco Chronicle.
1984	Chris Smith comes out at a Labour rally in Rugby, the first openly gay politician in Britain.
1985	Rock Hudson dies of AIDS. His homosexuality had been a closely guarded secret (from the public if not fellow movie stars) during an acting career spanning over 30 years.
1986-9	Michael Cashman is a series regular in <i>Eastenders</i> as a gay graphic designer. Coronation Street, Emmerdale and Hollyoaks later include LGBTQ characters.
1991	Freddie Mercury confirms that he has AIDS and dies the following day.
1993	Tom Hanks plays a gay lawyer who has AIDS in <i>Philadelphia</i> . It's not a career-killer.
1994	Film release of <i>Priscilla, Queen of the Desert</i> , followed by the stage musical (from 2006).
1999	Russell T Davies's <i>Queer as Folk</i> - By a happy coincidence, the series première aired on the day the House of Lords was discussing the Sexual Offences Bill 1999. The age of consent for homosexual couples is reduced to 16.
2004	The Civil Partnership Act introduced legal recognition of same-sex couples in the UK.
2006-11	<i>Torchwood</i> , a spin-off from Dr Who, features a 51 st century pansexual adventurer who can't die (Jack Harkness), played by gay actor John Barrowman.
2013	The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act is passed and comes into force in England and Wales in March 2014. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act follows. Alan Turing given a Royal Pardon after activists petition prime minister Gordon Brown to put things right.
2017	Radio 4's <i>Front Row</i> asks gay writers & performers to nominate their Queer Icons. Sir Anthony Sher talks about the significance of Torch Song Trilogy in his career and personal life http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08wmk92 At the same time, Radio 4 has 'The Years of Anna Madrigal', the 9 th book of the Tales of the City series, as the Woman's Hour serial. LGBTQi+ now covers Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and others. The rainbow flag with brown and black stripes added (to signify the contribution of minority ethnic people in the struggle for equal rights) adopted in Philadelphia, though it's a controversial move.

Comments and reactions to: **Casque d'Or**

Seats much better!

Well worth a showing

Very French

Much better than I thought it would be

Pleasantly primitive

You could never accuse the French of being coy!

Tres amusant!

A nice film that reminded me of French cinema post war

What a good film

Excellent film – Simone Signoret at her best

Excellent

Although dated it was easy to follow despite the sub-titles

Excellent

Thank you. Marie and Manda were a beautiful pair. Injustice is complex and frustrating.

Film helps to explore that. Here's to more justice! Nicely honest/up-front.

Thank you for the opportunity to see a French film d'epoque. Well made, crime passionel not quite my thing

Romantic, tragic; un film excellent! Suspenseful plot, realistic and shocking violence.

Brilliant cakes!

Very evocative of the period. Our first time at the club - very enjoyable, especially the interval refreshments

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Number of reaction slips received = 31

Average Score = 7.1

Position	Film	Average Score
1 st	Lion	8.46
2 nd	Hidden Figures	8.4
3 rd	A United Kingdom	8.28
4 th	I, Daniel Blake	7.78
5 th	La Famille Belier	7.7
6 th	Coming Home	7.31
7 th	Romeo and Juliet	7.24
8 th	Fuglene Over Sundet (Across the Waters)	7.19
9 th	Casque d'Or	7.1
10 th	Hell's Angels	6.03
11 th	Moonlight	5.97
12 th	Nora Inu (Stray Dog)	5.74
13 th	La La Land	5.61
14 th	Mediterraneo	5.47

Our next film on 10 May 2018:

The charmingly offbeat *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* unites a solid cast, a talented filmmaker, and a poignant, funny, deeply affecting message



It has all the makings of a new childhood classic: it's got wonder and adventure and loads of humor, and ultimately winds up on the side of optimism - but it also has moments of genuine tragedy and danger.

I can't remember the last time I laughed this much at a movie. This wacky adventure set in New Zealand's wilderness is outrageously funny. It is filled with quirky, compelling characters and witty dialogue.