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OUTFEST: VOTE "YES"

It's a politically charged year for L.A.'s Gay & Lesbian Film Festival
BY DAVID EHRENSTEIN, ERNEST HARDY AND CHUCK WILSON
 Published on July 07, 2009 at 7:15pm



Against A Trans Narrative



Hannah Free

Entering its 27th year, Outfest remains an inherently political affair. No matter how much cultural currency the LGBT community accrues, or how much political progress is scored, the vibrant text and subtext of the festival is that it serves as a much-needed artistic and social outlet — because access and equality are far from the reality most queer folk live within. This year, in which “opposite marriage” entered the popular vernacular as a cringe-inducing marker of bubble-headed bigotry, the energy around Outfest is especially charged, irradiated by the political power emanating from acronyms: ENDA, DADT, DOMA, et al. Obviously, it's far too soon for the

world of queer cinema to have grappled with the volatile fallout from these issues this year, but it's difficult not to process almost everything in the festival through the prism of 2009's sociopolitical upheaval. Luckily, most of the fare doesn't need that crutch to make it worthwhile viewing.

One of the most noteworthy things about this year's lineup is the significant presence and prominence of work by and about people of color. The opening night film, **Peter Bratt's** *La Mission*, stars his heart-throb brother Benjamin (*Law & Order*) as a volatile, alcoholic Latino coming to terms with his son's gayness, while **Tina Mabry's** fantastic black family drama *Mississippi Damned* screens as the festival's U.S. Dramatic Centerpiece film.

Films about gender identity and building alternative families are well-represented amongst the usual homo romantic comedies and historical documentaries. A retrospective of the films of **Strand Releasing** (including **Isaac Julien's** *Young Soul Rebels* and **John Maybury's** *Love is the Devil*) offers a much-deserved tribute to the pioneering indie distributor, while longtime queer icon **Sharon Gless** will likely set hearts aflutter in her turn as a feisty, unapologetically sexual, elderly lesbian in *Hannah Free*. And if you get a chance to catch the revival screening of 1990's *Without You, I'm Nothing*, try to watch it not as a vehicle for **Sandra Bernhard** but as a tribute to the vast talents of the late queer writer-director **John Boskovich**, whose staggering vision it really is. Following is our guide to the best films made available for preview from this year's Outfest program. For more festival info, go to www.outfest.org.

AGAINST A TRANS NARRATIVE (USA) Directed by Jules Rosskam, this wittily innovative essay film mixes interviews, dramatic fragments, poetry, declarative statements and quasidocumentary re-enactments as it deals with the subject of transsexuality in a way that recalls Godard's famous quip that films should have a beginning, a middle and an end but not necessarily in that order. Instead of a prefabricated starting point, where the subject “realizes” they're “in the wrong body,” Rosskam's film views gender reconfiguration as a constant process. Whether the subject wishes to “pass” as male or female to the world at large, or desires a more personal sense of a regenderized self, is the principal issue. *Against a Trans Narrative* may not be quite as much fun as **John Cameron Mitchell's** kick-ass queer-punk musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, but it's enormously entertaining and enlightening on its own terms and is highly recommended to those who've never even thought about the subject. (REDCAT, Sat., July 11, 2:30 p.m.) (DE)

GREEK PETE (U.K.) “London Boy Pete,” whose real name is **Peter Pittaros**, is a gay prostitute who dreams of being named “International Escort of the Year” (yes, hookers have award shows, too), but mostly he wants to “make as much money as possible.” In a documentary that

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