

**O**ne would imagine that eight local gay and lesbian independent filmmakers would have a lot in common. But meeting up with them just prior to the madness of the 20th Toronto International Film Festival, it's clear that this is one very diverse bunch of auteurs.

Midi Onodera wants to turn gender politics upside down. Her debut feature *Skin Deep* — which she wrote five years ago — is a film, says Onodera, “made for an audience who is tired of seeing really soft, romantic and safe little films.”

“It’s a matter of the rest of the world catching up on what I was into then,” she says, referring to the film’s fascination with the art of tattooing. Onodera rebukes those who might conclude that she and the film’s lead character, the Japanese-Canadian filmmaker Alex, are similar. “It’s interesting that most people who look at Alex think that’s me. Why is that? Because she’s Asian? A woman? A lesbian?” she asks, challenging us to look past what is only skin deep.

Daniel MacIvor stars in the feature film adaptation of his own play, *House*. “There’s nowhere to go but down from here,” says MacIvor, ever droll. “Obviously, it’s about elements of me. There’s a scene where my character tells his mother he’s divorcing his wife and her hair starts uncurling and steam comes out of her ears. That’s me coming out to my mother; she did hit the ceiling, her head spun.”

For *House*, the film, MacIvor, a cerebral performer with near cult status in the theatre community, has teamed up with director Laurie Lynd. “Laurie has this kind of lighter than air, beautiful vision. He’s very tender. I’ve got this kind of growling, arrgh. I mean, I’ve been depressed since 1976. It’s a nice mix.”

Lynd, who cast MacIvor in his two previous films, also wrote the screen version of *House*. “Filmmaking is so hard,” says Lynd. “I can’t imagine doing it no matter how much money is involved, unless I care about it.” While *House* has only a peripheral

**Toronto’s  
gay and  
lesbian  
filmmakers  
are fast  
moving  
to the  
forefront of  
Canadian  
cinema**

**Story by Nik Sheehan  
Photo by David Hyde**

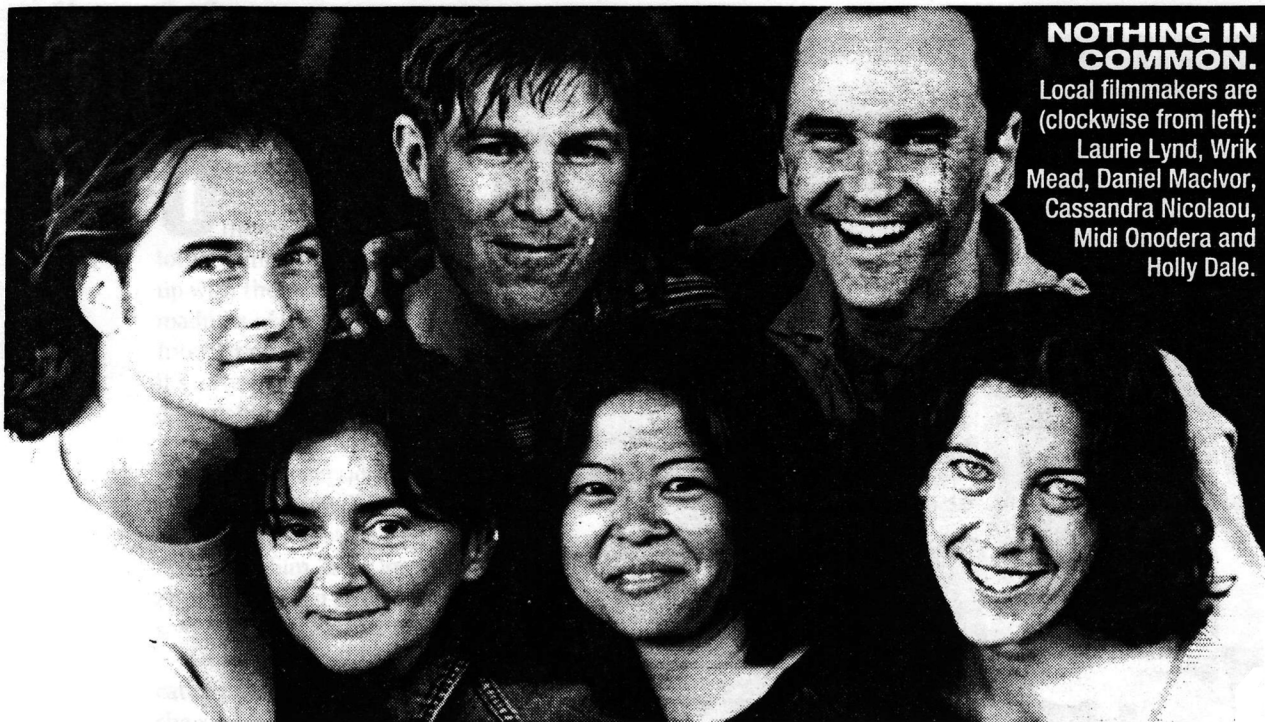
# Lights, camera, diversity

weepy. I wanted to make a boy’s film.”

Dale is pleased to have expanded her horizons by directing a genre film. “I’ve spent 20 years trying to strip labels from people, to put a human face on people. What I am is irrelevant. What is important is what I have to say. Who I am comes out of my work.” Dale and longtime partner Janice Cole — collaborators, not lovers — are currently working on an AIDS documentary and a TV movie for the CBC.

Experimental filmmaker Mike Hoolboom might agree with Dale’s sentiment about labels. Of ambiguous sexuality, he has been drawn closer to the gay community through both his art and his HIV-positive status. His new feature film, *House Of Pain*, promises to be an explicit exploration of “the body becoming an arena of play.”

A major section of the film details the role reversals in two men’s extreme SM play. Other scenes, lovingly filmed with his “fetish cam” explore coprophilia (shit loving) and dildo worship. He financed the film, in part, through awards won for his superb gay elegy, *Frank’s Cock*. But Hoolboom



## NOTHING IN COMMON.

Local filmmakers are (clockwise from left): Laurie Lynd, Wrik Mead, Daniel MacIvor, Cassandra Nicolaou, Midi Onodera and Holly Dale.

gay theme, Lynd's previous and future work is directly concerned with the gay experience. "First and foremost, I'd like to reach a gay audience. That's my perspective."

Damon D'Oliveira, producer of the much anticipated *Rude*, is intensely proud of his role in encouraging director Clement Virgo to include the moving story of a gay boxer in the film. "Certainly for the black community, a film that involves active three-dimensional gay characters is a breakthrough," says D'Oliveira. Also an actor and writer, D'Oliveira was seen last year playing a gay man in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica*. "Being black and gay is a double opportunity."

Holly Dale calls her feature film debut, *Blood And Donuts*, "tastefully bloody." Her longtime fascination with vampire stories drew her to what, at first glance, seems an unlikely choice for the veteran, social-issue documentary filmmaker. "I didn't want to make a 'woman's film' — soft and warm and

worries that the arts council money invested in *House Of Pain* might provoke outrage among conservative critics. "Maybe I should just project [the film] onto the Ontario legislature building."

Cassandra Nicolaou is premiering her first film, the 10-minute *Why I'll Never Trust You (In 200 Words Or Less)*. "It's a snapshot of a moment in a relationship," she says. "We see two naked women in bed for 10 minutes, and it's not a typical representation of gay women — no grainy black-and-white skinheads. It's girls with long hair."

Experimental filmmaker and visual artist Wrik Mead has two short films in the festival: *Closet Case* and the co-directed (ab)Normal. "All the subject matter in my films and art is gay," says Mead.

"There's not a hell of a lot of gay imagery out there, so I'm making a conscious effort to put gay images on the screen. We need all we can get."