

WITHER QUEER CINEMA?

LOCAL YODELS

Gordon Bowness

"I think queer cinema changes over the years, according to context and the political climate," says local filmmaker Mido Onodera. "I've never subscribed to the notion that queer cinema has to have queer subject matter, or queer people on screen or behind the camera."

Most Toronto-based gay and lesbian film- and videomakers agree. It seems to come from a position of strength. Not only are Hogtown homos blessed with a huge gay and lesbian festival like Inside Out (offering 120 Canadian flicks in its 11th year), there is a strong queer showing in nearly every one of the numerous festivals in the city year round, from the down and dirty Splice This super-8 fest, to the big screens of the Toronto International Film Festival.

But if you start prodding about in their brains, something wild and wacky is evident in the ways these artists approach the question of queer cinema and in the films and videos they make.

While Onodera embraces an open-ended definition of queer cinema, she expresses frustration that some people only open one end of the definition. "My sexuality is only part of who I am; I am also a woman and Japanese. I feel the work of mine that focusses on race is sometimes dismissed by gay and lesbian audiences."

Onodera has two offerings in the fest. She calls her three-minute video **Slightseer**, "race politics at play;" it's an attempt "to see beyond the images prevalent in 20th century media." (The video



DIVA, BS. By Roy Mitchell.

screens in the Un[der]exposed? program, curated by The Got The Picture? Collective, at 6:30pm on Sat, May 26.)

Onodera's **The Basement Girl**, named Best Lesbian Short Film by Girlfriends Magazine, is "an experimental but comedic look at breaking up using lesbian icons like Mary Tyler More, Barbra Streisand and the Bionic Woman." (Love 'Em And Leave 'Em, 7:15pm, Wed, May 23.)

Queerest thing about her films? "If you see queer as wacky, outside or different, then I would have to say the technology I use in The Basement Girls — like toy cameras and Nintendo games — it's completely unorthodox."

★ Echoing Onodera, Keith Cole says: "I don't think there is anything as queer cinema — there may have been years ago, when Inside Out was still at the [now defunct] Euclid Theatre."

Cole describes **The Boys Next**

Door, co-directed with Michael Caines, as "beautifully shot beautiful boys who are open and fun."

The guys are all part of a local garage band, The Deadly Snakes. (Twisted, midnight, Sat, May 19.)

The 10-minute super-8

film is actually three shorts: Jack The Lad, made for Art Fag 2000, Prrr And Crackers, made for Splice This ("It's already a Canadian classic," Cole says, "like Going Down The Road"), and a new piece, Pinata.

The queerest thing in the film? "A skinny straight boy pushing out his hip as he's peeing on me."

★ "Identity politics don't really matter to me," says Robert Kennedy.

"I've been making short films for a long time and though they may have had some kind of gay content, they never were about being gay. Hi I'm Steve was the first with an explicitly gay theme. It did well at gay festivals, and then so did Dinky Menace, which has no gay content whatsoever.

"I'm really happy that audiences at gay and lesbian festivals embrace my films because there is a fluidity in the venue. Gay identity criss-crosses with so many other things. The audiences are more varied at gay festivals; it's much better than when my stuff just played in an art-film context."



BOYS NEXT DOOR.

By Keith Cole and Michael Caines.