

**CONFLICTING CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES
ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY**

A Film Discussion Series Co-Sponsored by

**University Living
&
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the UM**



Table of Contents

Introduction...3

Schedule and Summaries of Film Presentations

<i>Before Stonewall...</i>	4
<i>After Stonewall...</i>	4-5
<i>The Celluloid Closet...</i>	5-6
<i>If These Walls Could Talk 2...</i>	6
<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof...</i>	7
<i>Some Like It Hot...</i>	8-9
<i>Suddenly, Last Summer...</i>	9
<i>Advise and Consent...</i>	10
<i>The Detective...</i>	11
<i>The Sergeant...</i>	11-12
<i>Silkwood...</i>	12
<i>The Times of Harvey Milk...</i>	12-13
<i>Milk...</i>	13-14
<i>The Color Purple...</i>	14-15
<i>And the Band Played On...</i>	15
<i>Philadelphia...</i>	15-16
<i>Coming Out UNDER FIRE...</i>	16
<i>Boys on the Side...</i>	17
<i>The Birdcage...</i>	17-18
<i>Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil...</i>	18-19
<i>American Beauty...</i>	19
<i>The Laramie Project...</i>	20
<i>Family Fundamentals...</i>	20
<i>Angels in America...</i>	21-22
<i>Brokeback Mountain...</i>	22-23
<i>Capote ...</i>	23-24
<i>TransAmerica...</i>	24-25
<i>The Kids Are All Right...</i>	25-26

Introduction

Prior to the 1980s, Hollywood portrayed homosexuals as “one-dimensional characters, alien to the American dream”¹. The journey to and beyond that turning point closely parallels still evolving societal attitudes about lesbians and gay men. Our discussion series examines feature and documentary films which capture the ongoing culture war, as well as the evolution of attitudes, within contemporary U.S. society. Participants will include members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Michigan and residents of University Living, an independent and assisted living facility that is dedicated to lifelong learning. Sources of information include the indicated series of DVDs and assigned readings. The recommended texts for this discussion series are *The Celluloid Closet*¹ and *Brokeback Mountain*². Professor Richard C. Adelman³ will present the DVDs and lead the discussions in the 2nd Floor Cultural Center at University Living⁴. All information in the present syllabus is quoted or paraphrased from www.amazon.com, www.wikipedia.org, and/or DVD jackets/brochures. The illustration on the cover page was downloaded from <http://gaycliparts.com>.

¹ *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Vito Russo, Harper & Row Publishers, 1987, back cover

² Annie Proulx, *The New Yorker*, October 13, 1997, pp. 74-80, 82-85

³ University Living Director of University Relations and Emeritus Professor of Biological Chemistry and Past Director of the Institute of Gerontology, University of Michigan Medical School (radelman@umich.edu) (Home Address: 651 N 5th Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104 and Home Telephone: 734-995-1303)

⁴ 2865 S Main St., Ann Arbor, MI 48103; Telephone (734)995-1303; Website www.univliving.com

Schedule and Summaries of Film Presentations

Monday, September 12, 7:00p

1985 Documentary Film, *Before Stonewall* (87 mins.)

On June 27, 1969, police raided The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City's Greenwich Village. In a spontaneous show of support and frustration, the city's gay community rioted for three nights in the streets, an event that is considered the birth of the modern Gay Rights Movement. The award winning film *Before Stonewall* pries open the closet door, setting free the dramatic story of the sometimes horrifying public and private existences experienced by gay and lesbian Americans since the 1920s. Revealing and often humorous, this widely acclaimed film relives the emotionally-charged sparking of today's gay rights movement, from the events that led to the fevered 1969 riots to many other milestones in the brave fight for acceptance. Experience the fascinating and unforgettable, decade-by-decade history of homosexuality in America through eye-opening historical footage and amazing interviews with those who lived through an often brutal closeted history. (Product Description)

Tuesday, September 13, 7:00p

1999 Documentary Film, *After Stonewall* (88 mins.)

The companion film to *Before Stonewall*, *After Stonewall*, narrated by Melissa Etheridge, explores gay history in the U.S. from the 1970s through the 1990s. Like its predecessor, *After Stonewall* attempts to cover much ground in a short amount of time; however, with only three decades to span, the assignment is more manageable.

The film covers the predictable highs and lows of the last 30 years of the 20th century. On the side of triumph, it explores the declassification of homosexuality as a disease; the growth of gay presses and writers; gay wins in political office (notably Harvey Milk and Elaine Noble); and the formation of a national gay lobbying presence in the Human Rights Fund. On the flip side, we witness the antigay hysteria evoked by Anita Bryant; the rise of AIDS, the blind eye of the federal government; and the growth of the Christian Coalition. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this film is its mapping of a gay presence within popular media. Through TV shows such as *South Park* and covers of *Newsweek* and *Time*, as well as "out" popular performers like k.d. lang and Ellen DeGeneres, the case is made that gay culture has "arrived" in America--a huge leap from the days before Stonewall when the common idea of a gay person was someone to snicker at or otherwise dismiss as a lunatic. --Katy Ankenman

Monday, September 19, 7:00p

1996 Documentary Film, *The Celluloid Closet* (102 mins.)

Author Armistead Maupin (*Tales of the City*) wrote Lily Tomlin's narration for this superb documentary, based on a book by the late Vito Russo, about Hollywood's treatment of homosexual characters in the 20th century. Never pointing a finger at anyone in the film community, *The Celluloid Closet* presents clips from more than 100 mainstream features (including *The Children's Hour*, *Advise and Consent*, *The Boys in the Band*, and *The Hunger*) that speak loudly in their respective images of gays and lesbians. The film makes a persuasive case for patterns of sexual mythology in Hollywood, such as presenting homosexuals repeatedly as tragic, helpless figures redeemed only through death or as back-street monsters cavorting in the shadows. Things

change, of course, and clips from more recent films by gay and lesbian filmmakers suggest a more vital, diverse, autobiographical approach. There are lots of great interviews with screenwriters (Gore Vidal), filmmakers (John Schlesinger), actors (Tom Hanks, Whoopi Goldberg), and others to enunciate the major themes. --
Tom Keogh

Tuesday, September 20, 7:00p

2000 Short Films, *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (96 mins.)

HBO caused a stir when it aired *If These Walls Could Talk*, a portrait of three women from three generations (all who occupied the same house at various times) who had unwanted pregnancies. HBO utilizes the same gimmick in the sequel, this time telling the story of women who love women.

...Far and away the most powerful and moving story is the first, taking place in 1961, starring Vanessa Redgrave as a woman "widowed" when her partner of 50 years suddenly dies. Redgrave is phenomenal, and her piece alone makes this sequel worth watching. The 1972 portion stars Michelle Williams, who finds dealing with the sexual politics of the gay community increasingly more complex when she falls in love with a boyish woman (played by Chloë Sevigny). The most modern piece, taking place in 2000, portrays a contemporary lesbian couple (Sharon Stone and Ellen DeGeneres) determined to have a baby...HBO once again proves itself on the cutting edge of moviemaking, with this rather daring film that will both provoke and entertain. --*Jenny Brown*

Monday, September 26, 7:00p

1958 Feature Film, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (108 mins.)

Elizabeth Taylor has never been sexier than as Tennessee Williams' hot-blooded Maggie "The Cat" Pollitt, prowling around her boudoir in a slinky white slip. That's how you know her alcoholic, ex-football-player husband, Brick (Paul Newman), must have more than just his leg in a cast. It's the 65th birthday of wealthy (but dying) southern patriarch Big Daddy (Burl Ives), and his sons Gooper (Jack Carter) and Brick have come to suck up to him for \$10 million in inheritance money. Gooper is a family man and father to a brood of "no-neck monsters"; youngest boy Brick is papa's favorite (as if you couldn't tell from the fellow's names), but hasn't sired progeny. Maggie is definitely in heat, but Brick refuses to sleep with her because he suspects her of being unfaithful with his best friend, who recent committed suicide. Although toned down for the movies, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is vintage Tennessee Williams. The film was directed by Richard Brooks (*In Cold Blood*, *Blackboard Jungle*, *Elmer Gantry*). --Jim Emerson

"I'm not living with you," Maggie snaps at Brick. "We occupy the same cage, that's all." The raw emotions and crackling dialogue of Tennessee Williams' 1955 Pulitzer Prize play rumble like a thunderstorm in this film version whose fiery performances and grown-up themes made it one of 1958's top box-office hits. Paul Newman earned his first Oscar nomination as troubled ex-sports hero Brick. In a performance that marked a transition to richer adult roles, Elizabeth Taylor snagged her second. Her Maggie the Cat is a vivid portrait of passionate loyalty. Nominated for six Academy Awards including Best Picture and also starring Burl Ives (repeating his Broadway triumph as mendacity-loathing Big Daddy), Judith Anderson and Jack Carson, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* sizzles. (Product Description)

Tuesday, September 27, 7:00p

1959 Feature Film, *Some Like It Hot* (2 hrs.)

Maybe "nobody's perfect," as one character in this masterpiece suggests. But some movies are perfect, and *Some Like It Hot* is one of them. In Chicago, during the Prohibition era, two skirt-chasing musicians, Joe and Jerry (Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon), inadvertently witness the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. In order to escape the wrath of gangland chief Spats Colombo (George Raft), the boys, in drag, join an all-woman band headed for Florida. They vie for the attention of the lead singer, Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe), a much-disappointed songbird who warbles "I'm Through with Love" but remains vulnerable to yet another unreliable saxophone player. (When Curtis courts her without his dress, he adopts the voice of Cary Grant--a spot-on impersonation.) The script by director Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond is beautifully measured; everything works, like a flawless clock. Aspiring screenwriters would be well advised to throw away the how-to books and simply study this film. The bulk of the slapstick is handled by an unhinged Lemmon and the razor-sharp Joe E. Brown, who plays a horny retiree smitten by Jerry's feminine charms. For all the gags, the film is also wonderfully romantic, as Wilder indulges in just the right amounts of moonlight and the lilting melody of "Park Avenue Fantasy." *Some Like It Hot* is so delightfully fizzy, it's hard to believe the shooting of the film was a headache, with an unhappy Monroe on her worst behavior. The results, however, are sublime. --Robert Horton

When Chicago musicians Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon) accidentally witness a gangland shooting, they quickly board a southbound train to Florida, disguised as Josephine and Daphne, the two newest and homeliest members of an all-girl jazz band. Their cover is perfect...until a lovelorn singer (Marilyn Monroe) falls for Josephine, an ancient playboy (Joe E. Brown)

falls for Daphne, and a mob boss (George Raft) refuses to fall for their hoax! Nominated for 6 Academy Awards, *Some Like It Hot* is the quintessential madcap farce and one of the greatest of all film comedies (The Motion Picture Guide).

Monday, October 3, 7:00p

1959 Feature Film, *Suddenly, Last Summer* (114 mins.)

This black-and-white film adaptation of Tennessee Williams' Southern gothic play is perhaps more famous for the rumored off-screen shenanigans of its stars than for its over-the-top repressed sexuality (only Williams could pull off that paradox, and pull it off he does). Supposedly, stars Katharine Hepburn and Elizabeth Taylor battled for screen time; Hepburn warred very publicly with director Joseph Mankiewicz; and a post-accident Montgomery Clift relied heavily on painkillers and support from friend Taylor during the grueling shoot. Even this, however, cannot top the events of the film itself, revolving around the unseen playboy Sebastian and his mysterious death, which has something to do with young boys, a decadent European vacation, and Taylor in a provocative wet, white bathing suit. To give away the plot would spoil the fun, but suffice it to say that what Taylor saw was so horrible it drove her nuts, and Sebastian's mother (Hepburn) wants her to have a lobotomy in order to keep it from coming out; Clift is brought in to do the procedure. It's all a hoot and a holler, but as played by the two leading ladies (both of whom nabbed Oscar nominations), it's also compelling, chilling, and utterly gothic. Taylor gives a fierce performance, as the climaxing monologue that reveals Sebastian's "secret" rests entirely on her shoulders, and Hepburn plays brilliantly against type as Sebastian's manipulating, overbearing mother. Only Clift, saddled with a dreary character in charge of plot exposition, fails to deliver. Adapted by Gore Vidal. -
-Mark Englehart

Monday, October 17, 7:00p

1962 Feature Film, *Advise and Consent* (139 mins.)

Otto Preminger expanded his vision in the 1960s with a whole series of ambitious, expansive dramas with huge casts and big themes. *Advise and Consent*, an examination of deal making, party politics, and congressional diplomacy in Washington's legislative halls (based on the novel by Allen Drury), is one of his best. Preminger broke the blacklist with his previous film, *Exodus*, and it rings through in this drama about a controversial nominee for secretary of state (a confident, stately Henry Fonda) accused of being a Communist. The nomination process becomes the center ring of the political circus, with fidgety accuser Burgess Meredith in the spotlight; devious, silver-tongued Charles Laughton cracking the whip as a southern senator with a grudge against Fonda; and party whip Walter Pidgeon lining up votes behind the scenes. Arm twisting and diplomatic hardball turns to perjury and blackmail, and a melodramatic twist gives this lesson in party politics a salacious soap opera dimension. Preminger's style has been hailed as "objective," but it's really a matter of attentiveness: he gives all the character their due and their say, eschewing heroes and villains for an exploration of people clashing over opposing goals. In fact, the weakest elements of the film are the unscrupulous populist senator played by George Grizzard and the badly dated caricatures that populate a notorious underground club. The video preserves the handsome widescreen black-and-white photography, keeping Preminger's careful and measured editing intact. --Sean Axmaker

Tuesday, October 18, 7:00p

1968 Feature Film, *The Detective* (114 mins.)

Frank Sinatra's 1968 film *The Detective* was a serious attempt at a social statement sandwiched between the chairman's two lighthearted detective films *Tony Rome* and *Lady in Cement*. Directed by Gordon Douglas (who also directed the Tony Rome films), the plot centers around Detective Joe Leland (Sinatra) and his investigation of the murder of a prominent businessman's gay son. The film was notable at the time for openly depicting the gay community; however, it still falls back on the same tired stereotypes. Rounding out the cast is Lee Remick as Sinatra's nympho-wife, Robert Duvall as a violent homophobic cop, and Jack "the Klugster" Klugman as Sinatra's only honest ally on the force. Off screen, the film was notable for causing the irreparable rift between Sinatra and then-bride Mia Farrow, when she opted to star in *Rosemary's Baby* instead of this film. Obviously a wise choice, but *The Detective* is still a solid effort, with a great Jerry Goldsmith score and solid performances from all involved. Interestingly, this film could be considered the unofficial prequel to *Die Hard*. Both films were based on the same series of detective novels by Roderick Thorpe. --*Kristian St. Clair*

Monday, November 7, 7:00p

1968 Feature Film, *The Sergeant* (108 mins.)

Master Sergeant Albert Callan (Rod Steiger) is one tough G.I. During World War II, he killed an enemy soldier with his bare hands. Now in postwar France, he wrests control of his army post away from an ineffective superior. But another Sergeant Callan lives behind the snarl and the stare: a man overwhelmed by his repressed attraction to a handsome young private (John Phillip

Law). In this insightful exploration of homosexuality made in an era of widespread intolerance, Steiger (*The Pawnbroker*, *In the Heat of the Night*) gives a stunning performance - one both volcanic and nuanced - that illuminates Callan's tragic, tormenting battle with his true nature.

Tuesday, November 8, 7:00p

1983 Feature Film, *Silkwood* (131 mins.)

Meryl Streep is stunning (The New York Times) in this shocking true story about one woman's struggle against a huge corporation. Nominated for five Academy Awards, including Best Actress (Streep) and Best Supporting Actress (Cher), this daring, provocative and critically acclaimed drama just shouldn't be missed (Newsweek)! Karen Silkwood (Streep) lives a free-spirited existence with two friends (Kurt Russell and Cher) who work with her at an Oklahoma nuclear facility. It's only when she discovers she's been exposed to radiation that Karen's conscience awakens, and soon she is digging for evidence of wrongdoing at her company. But her sudden zeal for safer working conditions may come at a high price as she alienates friends and possibly even puts her own life in peril.

Monday, November 21, 7:00p

1984 Documentary Film, *The Times of Harvey Milk* (90 mins.)

A devastatingly skillful and emotionally compelling documentary, *The Times of Harvey Milk* charts the political rise and brutal slaying of the first openly gay city official in the United State, Harvey Milk. Ironically, the same election that brought Milk to the board of city supervisors of San Francisco also elected the

man who killed him, a former police officer and fireman named Dan White. After White shot both Mayor George Moscone and Milk, his defense lawyers convinced the jury that White's judgment was impaired by depression and junk food, resulting in a conviction for manslaughter instead of murder--a verdict that prompted riots. With care and conviction, *The Times of Harvey Milk* captures not only Milk himself, but also the political and social landscape in which these events took place. The interviews--with friends, politicians, and journalists--are articulate and heartfelt, expressing the impact that Milk had upon this historical moment. --Bret Fetzer

Tuesday, November 22, 7:00p

2008 Feature Film, *Milk* (128 mins.)

When a famous person, like the nation's first openly gay male city supervisor, inspires an acclaimed book (*The Mayor of Castro Street*) and Oscar-winning documentary (*The Times of Harvey Milk*), a biopic can seem superfluous at best. Taking over from Oliver Stone and Bryan Singer, Gus Van Sant, whose previous picture was the more experimental *Paranoid Park*, directs with such grace, he renders the concern moot. Unlike Randy Shilts' biography, which begins at the beginning, Dustin Lance Black's script starts in 1972, just as Milk (Sean Penn, in a finely-wrought performance) and his boyfriend, Scott (James Franco, equally good), move from New York to San Francisco. Milk opens a camera shop on the Castro that becomes a safe haven for victims of discrimination, convincing him to enter politics. With each race he runs, Harvey's relationship with Scott unravels further. Finally, he wins, and the real battle begins as Milk takes on Proposition 6, which denies equal rights to homosexuals. He does what he can to rally politicians, like George Moscone (Victor Garber) and Dan White (Josh Brolin). While the mayor is willing, the conservative

board member has reservations, and after Milk fails to back one of White's pet projects, the die is cast, leading to the murder of two beloved figures. If Van Sant's film captures Harvey in all his complexities (he was, for instance, a very funny man), *Milk* also serves as an enticement to grass-roots activism, showing how one regular guy elevated everyone around him, notably Cleve Jones (Emile Hirsch), the ex-street hustler who created the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial. Released in the wake of Proposition 8, California's anti-gay marriage amendment, *Milk* is inspirational in the best way: one person can and did make a difference, but the struggle is far from over. --*Kathleen C. Fennessy*

Monday, December 12, 7:00p

1985 Feature Film, *The Color Purple* (2½ hrs.)

Steven Spielberg, proving he's one of the few modern filmmakers who have the visual fluency to be capable of making a great silent film, took a melodramatic, D.W. Griffith-inspired approach to filming Alice Walker's novel. His tactics made the film controversial, but also a popular hit. You can argue with the appropriateness of Spielberg's decision, but his astonishing facility with images is undeniable--from the exhilarating and eye-popping opening shots of children playing in paradisiacal purple fields to the way he conveys the brutality of a rape by showing hanging leather belts banging against the head of the shaking bed. In a way it's a shame that Whoopi Goldberg, a stage monologist who made her screen debut in this movie, went on to become so famous, because it was, in part, her unfamiliarity that made her understated performance as Celie so effective. (This may be the first and last time that the adjective *understated* can be applied to Goldberg.) Nominated for 11 Academy Awards, including best picture and actress (supporting players Oprah Winfrey and Margaret Avery

were also nominated), it was quite a scandal--and a crushing blow to Spielberg--when it won none. --*Jim Emerson*

Tuesday, December 13, 7:00p

1993 Feature Film, *And the Band Played On* (141 mins.)

A superior, made-for-cable film, this Home Box Office adaptation of Randy Shilts' chronicle detailing the emergence of AIDS in America and the fight against bureaucracy and society for a cure is a taut, outrageous, and affecting true-life drama. Matthew Modine (*Birdy, Married to the Mob*) is featured as a doctor with the Centers for Disease Control at the time when the first reports of a disease plaguing the gay community were heard. Modine and his colleagues embark on an investigation that resembles a compelling detective story as they try to track the source of the disease and discover a cure. Their efforts are thwarted by an ambivalent government and a turf war between French physicians and a celebrated American researcher (Alan Alda) who seems to place his own glory above the dead and the dying. Featuring heartfelt performances from a stellar cast including Richard Gere, Glenn Headly, Anjelica Huston, Steve Martin, Ian McKellen, Saul Rubinek, and Lily Tomlin, this impassioned film stands as an impressive and important document of one of the darkest eras in modern human history, and a tribute to the spirit of those who sought to save lives. --*Robert Lane*

Monday, January 9, 7:00p

1993 Feature Film, *Philadelphia* (135 mins.)

Philadelphia wasn't the first movie about AIDS (it followed such worthy independent films as *Parting Glances* and *Longtime*

Companion), but it was the first Hollywood studio picture to take AIDS as its primary subject. In that sense, *Philadelphia* is a historically important film. As such, it's worth remembering that director Jonathan Demme (*Melvin and Howard*, *Something Wild*, *The Silence of the Lambs*) wasn't interested in preaching to the converted; he set out to make a film that would connect with a mainstream audience. And he succeeded. *Philadelphia* was not only a hit, it also won Oscars for Bruce Springsteen's haunting "The Streets of Philadelphia," and for Tom Hanks as the gay lawyer Andrew Beckett who is unjustly fired by his firm because he has AIDS. Denzel Washington is another lawyer (functioning as the mainstream-audience surrogate) who reluctantly takes Beckett's case and learns to overcome his misconceptions about the disease, about those who contract it, and about gay people in general. The combined warmth and humanism of Hanks and Demme were absolutely essential to making this picture a success. The cast also features Jason Robards, Antonio Banderas (as Beckett's lover), Joanne Woodward, and Robert Ridgely, and, of course, those Demme regulars Charles Napier, Tracey Walter, and Roger Corman. --*Jim Emerson*

Tuesday, January 10, 7:00p

1994 Documentary Film, *Coming Out UNDER FIRE* (71 mins.)

This film examines the attitudes toward homosexuality in the United States Armed Forces during World War II.

Monday, January 23, 7:00p

1995 Feature Film, *Boys on the Side* (115 mins.)

This female-bonding film takes your basic soap opera and twists it inside out. Although director Herbert Ross draws superb performances from his actresses, he occasionally wallows in that maudlin, Hollywood melodrama in which close-ups are crucial. Remember, this is the man who directed *Steel Magnolias*. However, Ross also does something you don't expect: he makes you fall in love with his characters. Whoopi Goldberg is a down-on-her luck singer who hopes to start over in Los Angeles. Mary-Louise Parker is the realtor whose life is going nowhere. After Goldberg answers Parker's ad in the paper for a companion to drive to LA, these two completely different women grudgingly find themselves emotionally involved. Drew Barrymore enters the picture on the first leg of the trip when Goldberg insists on visiting her. After battling with her drug-dealing boyfriend, the flighty, sexy Barrymore throws in with them. During their trek west, the women learn to take life as it lands on them while recognizing true friendship. The film is enlightened in that it accepts the complications and blurred family ties of the '90s. At the heart of the story is the realization that people can expand past expected boundaries. The movie gels in other areas as well. The all-female soundtrack is powerful and works to underscore, not overpower, certain scenes. The same can be said of the supporting cast, specifically Anita Gillette and James Remar. --*Rochelle O'Gorman*

Tuesday, January 24, 7:00p

1996 Feature Film, *The Birdcage* (117 mins.)

The great improvisational comedy team of Mike Nichols and Elaine May reunited to (respectively) direct and write this update of the French comedy *La Cage Aux Folles*. Robin Williams stars as

a gay Miami nightclub owner who is forced to play it straight and ask his drag-queen partner (Nathan Lane) to hide out when Williams' son invites his prospective--and highly conservative--in-laws and fiancée to a meet-and-greet dinner party. Gene Hackman and Dianne Wiest play the straight-laced senator and his wife, and Calista Flockhart (from television's *Ally McBeal*) plays their daughter in a culture-clash with outrageous consequences. May's witty screenplay incorporates some pointed observations about the political landscape of the 1990s and takes a sensitive approach to the comedy's underlying drama. Topping off the action is Hank Azaria in a scene-stealing role as Williams' and Lane's flamboyant housekeeper, "Agador Spartacus." --*Jeff Shannon*

Monday, January 30, 7:00p

1997 Feature Film, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (155 mins.)

Readers of John Berendt's bestselling novel were bound to be at least somewhat disappointed by this big-screen adaptation, but despite mixed reaction from critics and audiences, there's still plenty to admire about director Clint Eastwood's take on the material. Readers will surely miss the rich atmosphere and societal detail that Berendt brought to his "Savannah Story," and the movie can only scratch the surface of Georgian history, tradition, and wealthy decadence underlying Berendt's fact-based murder mystery. Still, Eastwood maintains an assured focus on the wonderful eccentrics of Savannah, most notably a gay Savannah antiques dealer (superbly played by Kevin Spacey), who may or may not have killed his friend and alleged lover (Jude Law). John Cusack plays the *Town & Country* journalist who arrives in Savannah to find much more than he bargained for--including the city's legendary drag queen Lady Chablis (playing "herself")--and John Lee Hancock's smoothly adapted screenplay succeeds in

bringing Berendt's characters vividly to life with plenty of flavorful dialogue. --*Jeff Shannon*

Tuesday, January 31, 7:00p

1999 Feature Film, *American Beauty* (2 hrs.)

Noted theater director Sam Mendes, who was responsible for the acclaimed 1998 revival of *Cabaret* and Nicole Kidman's turn in *The Blue Room*, made his motion picture debut with this film about the dark side of an American family, and about the nature and price of beauty in a culture obsessed with outward appearances. Kevin Spacey plays Lester Burnham, a man in his mid-40s going through an intense midlife crisis; he's grown cynical and is convinced that he has no reason to go on. Lester's relationship with his wife Carolyn (Annette Bening) is not a warm one; while on the surface Carolyn strives to present the image that she's in full control of her life, inside she feels empty and desperate. Their teenage daughter Jane (Thora Birch) is constantly depressed, lacking in self-esteem, and convinced that she's unattractive. Her problems aren't helped by her best friend Angela (Mena Suvari), an aspiring model who is quite beautiful and believes that that alone makes her a worthwhile person. Jane isn't the only one who has noticed that Angela is attractive: Lester has fallen into uncontrollable lust for her, and she becomes part of his drastic plan to change his body and change his life. Meanwhile, next door, Colonel Fitts (Chris Cooper) has spent a lifetime in the Marine Corps and can understand and tolerate no other way of life, which makes life difficult for his son Ricky (Wes Bentley), an aspiring filmmaker and part-time drug dealer who is obsessed with beauty, wherever and whatever it may be. *American Beauty* was also the screen debut for screenwriter Alan Ball.

Monday, February 27, 7:00p

2001 Docudrama Film, *The Laramie Project* (96 mins.)

Even though *The Laramie Project* has been edited down from almost three hours (the original length of the play) to a lean 96 minutes, the harrowing nature of the subject matter--the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard--and the clarity of the voices of the inhabitants of Laramie, Wyoming, give this film a remarkable emotional power. *The Laramie Project* was created from over 200 interviews conducted with Laramie residents before, during, and after the trials of the two boys who killed Shepard; the interviews create an amazing cross-section of American views on homosexuality, religion, class, privacy, and so much more besides. Even though it features an all-star cast--Steve Buscemi, Janeane Garofalo, Christina Ricci, Peter Fonda, and Laura Linney are only a few of the recognizable faces--the material has not been glamorized and the performances are both honest and intimate. Even abbreviated, it's a remarkable piece of work. --*Bret Fetzer*

Tuesday, February 28, 7:00p

2002 Documentary Film, *Family Fundamentals* (75 mins.)

This film views the private, and sometimes very public lives, of three conservative Christian families with gay and lesbian children.

Monday, March 5

2003 Feature Film, *Angels in America* (part 1, 3 hrs.)

Tony Kushner's prize-winning play *Angels in America* became the defining theatrical event of the 1990s, an astonishing mix of philosophy, politics, and vibrant gay soap opera that summed up the Reagan era for an entire generation of theatergoers. Post-9/11 would seem to be too late for a film version--philosophy and politics don't always age well--but this 2003 HBO adaptation, ably directed by Mike Nichols (*The Graduate*), provides a time capsule of the '80s and reveals the deep emotional sub-currents that will give the play lasting power.

The story centers around Prior Walter (Justin Kirk) and Louis Ironson (Ben Shenkman), a gay couple that falls apart when Prior grows ill as a result of AIDS. But cancer is not the only thing invading Prior's life: He begins to have religious visions of an angel (Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility*) announcing that he is a prophet. Louis, who doesn't cope well with disease and suggestions of mortality, leaves and starts a relationship with Joe Pitt (Patrick Wilson), a closeted Mormon who works for Roy Cohn (Al Pacino, *Dog Day Afternoon*)--the real-life right-wing lawyer, notorious for his ruthless behind-the-scenes machinations. Add in Joe's depressed and hallucinating wife Harper (Mary Louise Parker, *Fried Green Tomatoes*), his determined but open-minded mother Hannah (Meryl Streep, *Adaptation*), a fierce drag queen/nurse named Belize (Jeffrey Wright, *Basquiat*, reprising his celebrated performance from the Broadway production), and you've still only begun to discover the wealth of characters and storylines in Kushner's ambitious work...--*Bret Fetzer*

Tuesday, March 6, 7:00p

2003 Feature Film, *Angels in America* (part 2, 3 hrs.)

Monday, March 12, 7:00p

2005 Feature Film, *Brokeback Mountain* (134 mins.)

A sad, melancholy ache pervades *Brokeback Mountain*, Ang Lee's haunting, moving film that, like his other movies, explores societal constraints and the passions that lurk underneath. This time, however, instead of taking on ancient China, 19th-century England, or '70s suburbia, Lee uses the tableau of the American West in the early '60s to show how two lovers are bound by their expected roles, how they rebel against them, and the repercussions for each of doing so--but the romance here is between two men. Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) are two itinerant ranchers looking for work in Wyoming when they meet and embark on a summer shepherding job in the shadow of titular Brokeback Mountain. The taciturn Ennis, uncommunicative in the extreme, finds himself opening up around the gregarious Jack, and the two form a bond that surprisingly catches fire one cold night out in the wilderness. Separating at the end of the summer, each goes on to marry and have children, but a reunion years later proves that, if anything, their passion for each other has grown significantly. And while Jack harbors dreams of a life together, the tight-lipped Ennis is unable to bring himself to even consider something so revolutionary.

Its open, unforced depiction of love between two men made *Brokeback* an instant cultural touchstone, for both good and bad, as it was tagged derisively as the "gay cowboy movie," but also heralded as a breakthrough for mainstream cinema. Amidst all the hoopla of various agendas, though, was a quiet, heartbreaking love story that was both of its time and universal--it was the quintessential tale of star-crossed lovers, but grounded in an ever-changing America that promised both hope and despair. Adapted by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana from Annie Proulx's short story, the movie echoes the sparse bleakness of McMurtry's *The*

Last Picture Show with its fading of the once-glorious West; but with Lee at the helm, it also resembles *The Ice Storm*, as it showed the ripple effects of a singular event over a number of people. As always, Lee's work with actors is unparalleled, as he elicits graceful, nuanced performances from Michelle Williams and Anne Hathaway as the wives affected overtly and subliminally by their husbands' affair, and Gyllenhaal brings surprising dimensions to a character that could have easily just been a puppy dog of a boy. It's Ledger, however, who's the breakthrough in the film, and his portrait of an emotionally repressed man both undone and liberated by his feelings is mesmerizing and devastating. Spare in style but rich with emotion, *Brokeback Mountain* earns its place as a classic modern love story. --Mark Englehart

Tuesday, March 13, 7:00p

2005 Feature Film, *Capote* (114 mins.)

Bolstered by an Oscar-caliber performance by Philip Seymour Hoffman in the title role, *Capote* ranked highly among the best films of 2005. Written by actor/screenwriter Dan Futterman and based on selected chapters from the biography by Gerald Clarke, this mercilessly perceptive drama shows how Truman Capote brought about his own self-destruction in the course of writing *In Cold Blood*, the "nonfiction novel" that was immediately acclaimed as a literary milestone. After learning of brutal killings in rural Holcomb, Kansas, in November 1959, Capote gained the confidence of captured killers Perry Smith (Clifton Collins, Jr.) and Dick Hickock (Mark Pellegrino) in an effort to tell their story, but he ultimately sacrificed his soul in the process of writing his greatest book. Hoffman transcends mere mimicry to create an utterly authentic, psychologically tormented portrait of an insincere artist who was not above lying and manipulation to get what he needed. Bennett Miller's intimate direction focuses on the consequences of Capote's literary

ambition, tempered by an equally fine performance by Catherine Keener as Harper Lee, Capote's friend and the author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, who served as Capote's quiet voice of conscience. Spanning the seven-year period between the Kansas murders and the publication of *In Cold Blood* in 1966, *Capote* reveals the many faces of a writer who grew too close to his subjects, losing his moral compass as they were fitted with a hangman's noose. --Jeff Shannon

In November, 1959, the shocking murder of a small town Kansas family captures the imagination of Truman Capote (Philip Seymour Hoffman), famed author of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. With his childhood friend Harper Lee (Catherine Keener), writer of the soon-to-be published *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Capote sets out to investigate, winning over the locals despite his flamboyant appearance and style. When he forms a bond with the killers and their execution date nears, the writing of *In Cold Blood*, a book that will change the course of American literature, takes a drastic toll on Capote, changing him in ways he never imagined. Stellar performances from Hoffman and Keener, as well as Academy Award winner Chris Cooper (*Adaptation*) are why critics are calling *Capote* a "must-see movie." (Product Description)

Monday, March 19, 7:00p

2006 Feature Film, *TransAmerica* (103 mins.)

Felicity Huffman deserves every award she's received for her outstanding performance in *Transamerica*, a small but rich movie about Bree--formerly Stanley--a pre-operative male-to-female transsexual awaiting gender-reassignment surgery who learns she has a wayward teenage son named Toby. When her therapist (Elizabeth Peña, *Jacob's Ladder*) strongarms Bree into facing her past, she bails Toby (Kevin Zegers, *Dawn of the Dead*) out of jail and they end up on a road trip across the country. Such a premise could feel forced, but the script and performances make it

persuasive and natural. Bree wrestles with discomfort and compassion as she learns about Toby's own troubles, even while her own grow worse when she's forced to ask for help from her hostile parents (the superb Fionnula Flanagan, *The Others*, and Burt Young, *Rocky*). *Transamerica* doesn't push for any great catharsis, but instead slowly peels away the layers of Bree's defenses, laying bare her basic struggle for respect and a chance at happiness. In many ways it's a showy role, but Huffman (*Desperate Housewives*) keeps her acting simple, direct, and thoroughly compelling. --Bret Fetzer

Emmy winner Felicity Huffman (*Desperate Housewives*) won the Best Actress (Drama) Golden Globe Award for her "fiercely funny and deeply powerful" performance (Pete Hammond, Maxim) that is "thrilling to watch." (A.O. Scott, The New York Times) Huffman plays Bree Osbourne, a conservative transsexual woman, who learns she is the parent of a long-lost 17-year-old son (Kevin Zegers). The wheels of fortune take Bree and son on a cross-country adventure, including a memorable visit with Bree's parents, that will change both of their lives. A funny, touching, completely original look at the modern American family, *TransAmerica* will leave you in a state of movie euphoria. It's hilarious and deeply affecting." (Joe Morgenstern, The Wall Street Journal). "Felicity Huffman is incredible. One of the year's most unforgettable performances." (Stephen Mooallem)

Tuesday, March 20, 7:00p

2010 Feature Film, *The Kids Are All Right* (107 mins.)

If the relationships that anchor Lisa Cholodenko's warmly funny films appear unconventional, their problems--their pleasures--remain universal. In *The Kids Are All Right* (no relation to the Who documentary), she takes on a suburban Los Angeles

family with two teens, Joni (*Alice in Wonderland's* Mia Wasikowska) and the unfortunately named Laser (Josh Hutcherson, *The Bridge to Terabithia*), and two mothers, Nic (Annette Bening) and Jules (an atypically relaxed Julianne Moore), who conceived via artificial insemination. Now that she's heading off to college, Laser urges 18-year-old Joni to seek out their birth father, who lives in the area (her name comes from folksinger Mitchell). Though she hits it off with Paul (Mark Ruffalo, effortlessly charming), a motorcycle-riding restaurant owner, Laser has his doubts (troublingly, the 15-year-old's best friend uses "faggot" as an all-purpose epithet). After they introduce Paul to their parents, allegiances start to shift. While Nic, a doctor, serves as breadwinner (and disciplinarian), Jules, a homemaker-turned-landscape artist, provides the nurturing. Paul, on the other hand, lives free from attachments, inciting both curiosity and suspicion. Furthermore, Jules finds him strangely irresistible, which only expands the fissures in her loving, yet unstable union. As with *Laurel Canyon*, Cholodenko doesn't just create fully rounded characters, but entire communities. In the end, *Kids* isn't about children vs. adults as much as the family unit vs. the singular outsider. Though the story concludes on a relatively happy note, it's clear where her allegiances lie. --*Kathleen C. Fennessy*

Academy Award® nominees Annette Bening and Julianne Moore star in this funny, smart and vibrant portrait of a modern American family. Nic (Bening) and Jules (Moore) are your average suburban couple raising their two teens, Joni (Mia Wasikowska) and Laser (Josh Hutcherson), in Southern California. But when the kids secretly track down their “donor dad,” Paul (Mark Ruffalo), an unexpected new chapter begins for everyone as family ties are defined, re-defined and then re-re-defined. Fall in love with the big-hearted comedy that critics are calling “one of the best films of the year!” (Michael Phillips, *At the Movies*)