

'82 A Year For Mainstream Film Entries



Photo Courtesy Joe Martinez

Julie Andrews carried off her title role in *Victor/Victoria* with her customary aplomb and flair, making Blake Edwards' film one of 1982 audiences' favorites.

by Ken Letner

If 1982 failed to be the Year of the Homosexual Film, it did (on the evidence of three films) make a passing grade as the Year of the Homosexual in Mainstream American Cinema.

1982 began rather too smugly and self-portentously with the Cosmopolitan-slick, totally unbelievable "Making Love." Not that the basic characters and situations were not based in reality. Far from it.

But writer Barry Sandler and director Daniel Melnick strove so hard for commercial values acceptable to both gays and straights, that they spread their ideas too thin.

Further, they underestimated the sophistication and intelligence of the very audience which they sought to impress.

"Making Love" was so squeaky clean that, as L.A. Times critic Sheila Benson wisely remarked, it made one almost yearn for the feral raunchiness of "Taxi Zum Klo."

("Taxi Zum Klo" does not qualify as a 1982 film, but it's still the homosexual film to beat for sheer audacity, honesty, creativity and artistry.)

"Personal Best," which was released at roughly the same time as "Making Love," but without its self-trumpeting claim to messianic breakthrough, is probably the best film about homosexual relationships

And Towne makes no attempts to "justify" either the older athlete's lesbianism or the younger woman's bisexuality-in-flux.

Also, Towne is not afraid to luxuriate in his characters' sensuality, whether it be in competitive racing or in sexual dalliance.

One would think that sheer sensuality would be a "given" in films about relationships gay OR straight, but it seldom is. Pauline Kael remarked in the New Yorker that the sexual openness of "Personal Best" make it a viable dating film.

This wonderfully executed comedy starts with the assumption that each of us is both masculine and feminine.

Any date to see "Victor/Victoria" will result more in laughter than in closeness, but "Victor/Victoria" succeeds in making sexual diversity into a popularly acceptable notion.

Not that "Victor/Victoria" is particularly daring, honest or factual, but it succeeds at being what it was intended to be, an expansive, farcical comedy accessible to a mainstream audience.

I disliked writer/director Blake Edwards' decision to have James Garner spy on Julie Andrews to get proof of her sex, and I believe the film could have gotten away with having Garner and Andrews keep up the pretense in the heart of mobster-ridden Chicago.



Mariel Hemingway (l.) and Patrice Donnelly fused athletic believability with acting capability in **Robert Townsend's** *Personal Best*. Photo Courtesy Joe Martinez

But by allowing Garner to be willing to do just that, by allowing Garner's beefy bodyguard to be quite comfortably gay, and by allowing Robert Preston to create such a memorable, older gay man, Edwards redeems himself.

No redemption is necessary for the

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to be released this year.

(One might argue that in our society female-female love and sex are more easily portrayable than male-male, but that has no bearing on the merits of "Personal Best" as an artistic entity unto itself.)

Director Robert Towne treats his two sportswomen as real human beings, farts and all. They're good and bad, occasionally stupid or vengeful, as which of us is not?

writers or director of the current "Tootsie."

While not, strictly speaking, a "gay" film, this wonderfully-executed comedy starts with the assumption that each of us is both masculine and feminine, and then goes on to show us a man becoming more a man by expressing his "feminine" qualities in drag.

"Tootsie" does more for the cause of freedom from sexual role-playing than any commercial film in recent memory.

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