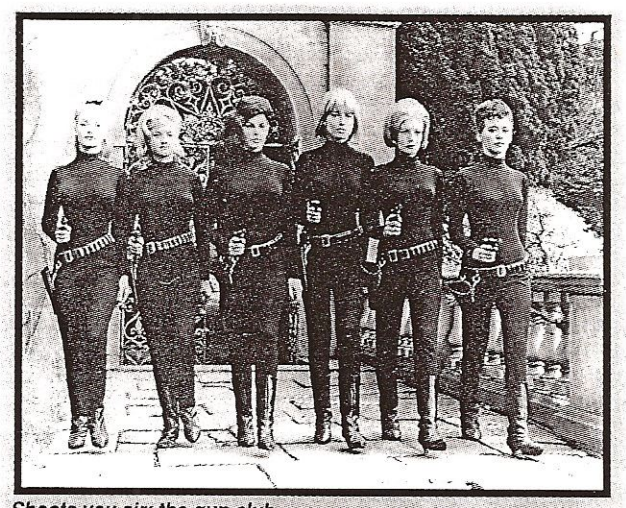
NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

28 June 1997



Shoots you sir: the gun club

A BIT OF SCARLET

DIRECTOR: **Andrea Weiss**
STARRING: **The entire history of British cinema**

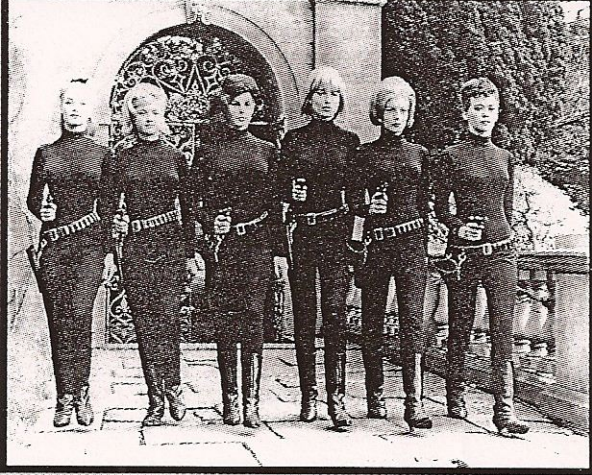
IF THE prospect of an art-house appraisal of lesbian and gay film has you yearning for the glorious inanity of a Jim Carrey all-nighter, then this all-singing, all-dancing affair might come as a bit of a surprise.

This is essentially a new take on that formulaic BBC Bank Holiday special where Terry Wogan bumbles his way through old clips of elephants shitting on a *Blue Peter* presenter's trousers. Except Wogan rarely includes cuts from *Scrubbers*, *The Importance Of Being Earnest* or *Black Narcissus*. Ian McKellen provides the wry tones, exposing the obvious contradictions and stereotyping gay characters have endured over the years.

More often than not, though, he plays it for laughs. So what you get is plenty of *Carry On* campery, an array of public information films containing more homoerotic imagery than your average Pet Shop Boys video and a host of John Hurt one-liners from *The Naked Civil Servant*. Top marks, by the way, to the archive researcher who stumbled upon a starch-collared documentary from the '60s on the sexual corruption of Britain, fronted by a rather self-conscious Dirk Bogarde.

But what does it all mean? The film tries its best to manufacture a happy ending for all, but with America getting an attack of the vapours over Ellen coming out and Tony and Simon off *EastEnders* behaving with monastic restraint, things don't really appear to have changed all that much since Watson first gave Sherlock Holmes the eye in *The Hound Of The Baskervilles*.

Iestyn George



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