

Moving Pictures berlinale

A Bit of Scarlet

For those who came of age in the mean old days before gay liberation, here's a little trip down memory lane. Andrea Weiss, who has earlier been represented at the Berlinale with collaborations on such memorable documentaries as *Before Stonewall* (1985), *Tina & Ruby: Hell Divin' Women* (1988) and *Paris is a Woman* (1996), now makes her solo directorial debut with a look at the lighter side of early British cinematic portrayals of gay stereotypes. Any minority craves images of itself, and this compilation of clips from Britain's post-war cinema archives is a testament to the closeted appearances of gay characters and sentiments from filmmaking's earliest days. Following gay characters as they go from being the butt of jokes to full-blown leading characters, Weiss has captured a playful, occasionally melodramatic, insight into on-screen homosexual characterisations. With Ian McKellen as narrator and witty graphics to bridge the thematic sections, *A Bit of Scarlet* reveals to what lengths the film industry went to include and yet ridicule gay characters. Both well-known portraits – like John Hurt's performance as Quentin Crisp in the groundbreaking BBC biography – and more obscure finds, make for a telling look at British cinema's postmodern queer soap opera. **Owen Levy**