

Chicago Lesbian & Gay International Film Festival

The 19th Chicago Lesbian & Gay International Film Festival runs Friday, November 5, through Thursday, November 18; screenings this week will be at the Music Box. Advance tickets can be purchased at Chicago Filmmakers, 5243 N. Clark, between 10 am and 6 pm on weekdays, and between noon and 5 pm on Saturday; same-day tickets can be purchased at the venue box office only. Tickets are \$7, \$6 for shows before 6 pm, with discount passes available. Tickets for the opening-night program at 7 pm on Friday, November 5, are \$15. For more information call 773-293-1447 or the festival hot line at 312-409-4919. Commentary by Jonathan Rosenbaum (JR), Ted Shen (TS), Lawrence Bommer (LB), Jack Helbig (JH), Adam Langer (AL), and Albert Williams.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5

Bedrooms and Hallways

Set in the trendy quarters of London, Rose Troche's lighthearted comedy tracks the budding gay romances of wry, reserved, and endearingly befuddled Leo (Kevin McKidd of *Trainspotting*) and his loud, flamboyant flatmate, Darren (Tom Hollander). As in her debut feature, *Go Fish* (1994), Troche shows a knack for capturing the bonhomie of tightly knit groups (her lampoon of Leo's heterosexual New Age men's group is transparent yet devastatingly funny), and most of her actors know how to enliven Robert Farrar's glib, occasionally precious dialogue. Insistently cheerful and nonjudgmental, the film steers clear of deeper or more complicated emotions—as did *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, which it resembles in some ways. With Hugo Weaving (as Darren's naughty boyfriend), Jennifer Ehle, and Simon Callow. (TS) Troche will attend the screening. (7:00)

Beloved/Friend

Spanish director Ventura Pons clearly intended this to be a moody meditation on love and friendship. It references every kind of love imaginable—young love, old love, parental love, unrequited love, love between old friends, lust disguised as love. Yet it's remarkably cold; Jesus Escosa's slick cinematography turns every frame into a fashion spread, and even a scene of a lonely old man getting clobbered by an angry hustler looks glamorous. Josep M. Benet Ijornet's screenplay, adapted from his play *Testament*, is



Cecil Williams

heavy with long, digressive conversations and heartfelt but tiresome monologues. The story revolves around two old friends, one straight and one gay, and the straight one's pregnant teenage daughter, but Ijornet's disjointed scenes never quite add up. The acting is strictly soap opera, some of the players turning in passable performances while others chew the scenery with an intensity verging on camp. (JH) (9:45)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Les Girls

Andrew Sarris has called this 1957 semi-musical, adapted by John Patrick from a Vera Caspary novel, George Cukor's version of *Rasbomon*. As in the famous Kurosawa film, flashbacks relate alternate versions of the same story—which

involves the relationship of three show-girls (Kay Kendall, Mitzi Gaynor, and Taina Elg) to hoofer Gene Kelly in a Paris setting. Nicely handled, and one of the better examples of Cukor's flair for 'Scope framing (after *A Star Is Born* and *Bhowani Junction*), although the Cole Porter songs aren't very memorable; Kendall is a particular delight. (JR) (Noon)

Baby Steps

A program of shorts about the pressures facing gay people who want to raise children. Geoffrey Nauffts wrote, directed, and stars in *Baby Steps*, playing a nervous but dignified schoolteacher who discloses his homosexuality during an interview with a quietly exasperated adoption agent (Kathy Bates); the preachy script is softened by the expert performances. George Camarda

respectfully portrays the gay gentry in *The Olive Tree*, as a gay photographer and a lesbian desperate to have his child explore such heart-wrenching subjects as legal rights and HIV testing. In Greg Sirota's *Two Point Five* a man ponders whether he should betray his boyfriend with heterosexual intercourse in order to conceive a child but the laconic script and the actors' pointing suggest a J. Crew ad. (TS) On the same program, Lisa Udelson's *The Party Favor* (with David Schwimmer), Ferné Pearlstein's *Raising Nicholas*, and Maureen Brownsey's *True Blue*. (2:30)

Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train

Patrice Chéreau (*The Wounded Man*) directed this 1998 French drama about a dead painter's friends, students, and ex-

The Man Who Drove With Mandela

White, British-born Cecil Williams was a well-known stage actor and director in South Africa following World War II, but he played his most important role in the backseat of an elegant automobile, where he sat, the embodiment of complacent white privilege, while exiled African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela posed as his chauffeur. Williams actually flubbed his performance—he couldn't resist taking the wheel as he and Mandela drove down dusty back roads, an act of courtesy that drew unwanted attention from sharp-eyed cops. The pair were arrested in 1962; Mandela went to prison, but Williams was held under house arrest in his fashionable high-rise apartment until he fled the country, embittered by the hopelessness of reform. Though Williams spoke out against racism, he was discreet, even furtive, about his homosexuality, aware that his private life as well as his politics invited harassment by "Priscilla," as South African gay people referred to the police. (His straight fellow radicals were unaware of his orientation until he was bashed by thugs.) He died in London in the late 70s, but as this 1998 British-South African coproduction suggests, his legacy lives on in the fact that, under Mandela, South Africa became the first nation to give explicit constitutional protection to homosexuals. Directed by Greta Schiller (*Before Stonewall*) and written by South African journalist Mark Gevisser, *The Man Who Drove With Mandela* is a sensitive, technically assured blend of documentary and dramatization. Interviews with people who knew Williams (including Mandela, ANC veteran Walter Sisulu, and film actor Ken Gampu) and period-evoking home movies and newsreel footage (including unintentionally campy wartime clips of seminude servicemen frolicking) are juxtaposed with monologues by Williams, portrayed by Corin Redgrave as a soft-spoken, slightly dandified fellow who ruminates from beyond the grave on topics ranging from his adolescent affair with a scoutmaster to the injustices of apartheid and the crushing restrictions on speech, travel, and association that enforced it. This leisurely paced but tightly constructed film is a fascinating blend of individual and historical narrative, using Williams's personal journey to mirror South Africa's transformation from a British imperial outpost to a fascist republic to a multiracial democracy with a remarkably progressive policy toward gay people. Music Box, Sunday, November 7. —Albert Williams