

SEPTEMBER 8, 1999

Cleveland Life

o's Largest Newspaper

Arts & Entertainment for the Multicultural Millennium



"The Man Who Drove With Mandela"

Most people are familiar with the story of Nelson Mandela (inset), who spent years in a South African prison in the name of equality. But Mandela didn't fight alone. Several people were on the front lines or working quietly by his side. One of those individuals was Cecil Williams (above), and his story is being told in the film "The Man Who Drove With Mandela."

In the early 1960s, Mandela traveled incognito across South Africa, organizing armed rebellion against the apartheid regime. Driving a gleaming Austin Westminster, he was disguised as the chauffeur for an impeccably-dressed white man. That man was Cecil Williams - a leading Johannesburg theater director, a committed freedom fighter, and a gay man.

The 82-minute, color movie is as much a documentary about the people and history of South Africa as it is Williams' story. A moving picture history tale, it takes viewers from the beginnings of the country, to British rule, through apartheid, and into

Reviews:
Movie

present day times when Mandela was elected president of a democratic South Africa.

The story of Williams is told through flashbacks, home movies and monologues (based on Williams' own writings) by actor Corin Redgrave. Williams journeys from Cornwall, where he was born the son of a blacksmith, to the political struggles of South Africa in the 1940s and '50s. Add to that the fact that Williams was gay at a time when the world of homosexuals was hidden. But Williams continued to use his status as one of the country's most well-known theater producers to break down barriers.

"He didn't treat us like boys and girls. He treated us like equals," says a South African actress in the film about Williams' impact.

The film, directed by Greta Schiller, is a heartfelt story. Williams becomes more than just a figure in history; audiences want him to overcome the obstacles in his life.

When Mandela and Williams are caught by the police, Mandela is sent to serve out his long prison term, and Williams goes underground and flees to London, where he died in exile in 1978. Mandela himself makes a cameo in the film, discussing the life of Williams.

- Kimyette Finley

"The Man Who Drove With Mandela" is showing at the Cleveland Cinematheque on September 9th at 8:35 p.m., and on September 10th at 7:30 p.m. The cinematheque is located inside the Cleveland Institute of Art, 11141 East Blvd. For more information, call (216) 421-7450. ■