

Homosexual "wonderland" fails as a film

by Jim Russell

Longtime Companion directed by Norman Rene produced by The Samuel Goldwyn Company

Hollywood . . . the folks who brought us *Gone With the Wind*, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Beverly Hills Cop* and other flights of fantasy, now presents . . . *Longtime Companion*, a squeaky clean excursion into a sort of homosexual "wonderland" populated by really nice, caring, funny, intelligent, handsome, muscular, sensitive, clean living, clean cut, generous, loving, WASP males who, unfortunately, are dying, one by one, of AIDS.

Shot on Fire Island, a homosexual community in the New York area, and Manhattan's Upper West Side, *Longtime Companion* is

supposed to be an "uplifting tale of courage and personal heroics," but is, instead, a depressing hour and a half of on-screen hand-wringing and navel gazing.

"What do you think happens when we die?" asks one man. "We get to have sex again...I hope," answers his friend in a downtime between visiting their friends in intensive care and standing in front of the bathroom mirror looking for "moles."

Longtime Companion, the euphemism used by obituary writers to describe surviving homosexual mates, traces the lives of a group of homosexual lovers and acquaintances from 1981, when the *New York Times* first reported the outbreak of what was then called "Gay Cancer," to 1989, when the story ends.

The lovers and friends, all men except for Mary-Louise Parker, try at first to ignore the growing onslaught of AIDS ("Let's not even talk about it"). But, as the years pass and the disease gains momentum, their attitude gradually changes from denial to the delusion of attributing AIDS to too much "sun" or "drugs" or "negative thoughts."

Nearly four years pass in the lives of these men before they are able to reach even a grudging acceptance of the realities of AIDS and its implications on their former lifestyle. These "longtime companions," worn by the pain and suffering of their lovers and friends, and frustrated with the medical profession's inability to find a cure, cling desperately to the hope that very soon the nightmare of AIDS will be vanquished from their lives.

The next-to-last scene of the movie, a dream sequence in which a great crowd of people, including their now dead homosexual

friends, run through sandy dunes, singing and dancing to the news of the defeat of AIDS, is so hokey it's embarrassing. Which brings us to the script.

Craig Lucas, an award winning playwright (*Three Postcards*, *Reckless* and *Prelude to a Kiss*) has filled *Longtime Companion* with soap opera dialogue ("I reallilly like hairy men"), cutesie homosexual jokes (for example, a classical music performance of the disco song "YMCA") and heavy-handed bursts of liberal morality ("It's nobody's business whether we return to our former lifestyle once a cure for AIDS is found and we no longer have to be careful," my paraphrase).

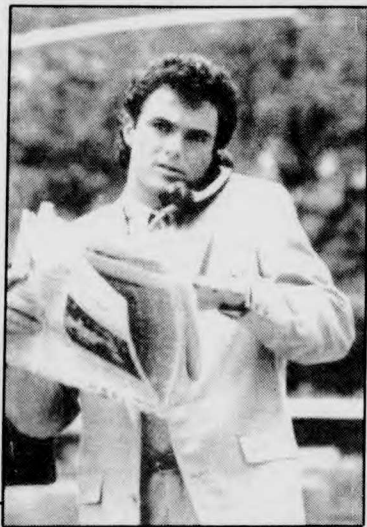
To the credit of all those who worked on this low (\$1.5 million) budget film, it looks remarkably big budget. Tony Janelli's cinematography is good to excellent, as is the lighting, which only stumbles occasionally in a few under-lit indoor scenes. Much of this "big buck" quality can be attributed to

generous corporate donations by the likes of Adidas, The Futon Shop and Panavision, which made it possible for American Playhouse Theatrical Films to shoot *Longtime Companion* on 35mm stock, a superior format to 16mm or video.

The producers also cut corners by enlisting lesser known actors. Newcomers to film, but veterans of stage, like Mark Lamos and Brian Cousins, were willing to work for small salaries "because they felt the movie was important and needed to be made." None of the ten main characters, however, with the possible exception of Bruce Davison, managed to put in more than a creditable performance.

When *Longtime Companion* opened May 11 in New York City, one year and a few days after principal photography began in 1989, *Rolling Stone* called it "The best American movie this year." I disagree.

Give it a three out of 10.



Longtime Companion is too cute, with a too heavy-handed liberal message, to be a satisfying film.



Canadian movie will put you to Sleep

by Kim Yu

Deep Sleep written and directed by Patricia Gruben Festival Films

It is unfortunate that, as anticipated, *Deep Sleep*, another Canadian film, is a real snore.

Starring Megan Follows and Stuart Margolin, the story revolves around Shelly McBride (Follows), a 17 year-old girl who has been traumatized by her father's death. Shelly searches for the truth behind the mysterious circumstances surrounding his untimely demise. This is done, of course, while she is "on vacation" from the school/institution in which her staunchly religious family has kept her since the tragedy.

In a matter of days, Shelly manages to deduce that her father was involved in the Asian underworld. Enlisting the help of Angel, a Filipino musician (played by Damon D'Oliveira), she finds out the sordid details about her father's past,



How can you tell a film is Canadian? It stars Megan Follows, has the word "Deep" or "Sleep" in title and makes no sense.

and the effect it will still have on her future.

Margolin as Bob Bolden, Shelly's future stepfather and her father's partner, gives a convincing performance as a conventional nefarious type. Follows also manages to emote as the distressed, deluded victim. David Hewlett, playing Follows brother, Terry, comes off as an insensitive clod, considering he knows how much she had been through.

Deep Sleep tries desperately to rise above its inane script with pretentious camera work and bizarre dream sequences. The film's original intent seems to have been a journey into the subconscious

mind of a young girl struck by tragedy; but, director Patricia Gruben merely convoluted an already complex subject by constantly switching from the present to flashbacks to hallucinations.

There was ample opportunity to explore the theme of religion as shield, or issues of racism, pornography and poverty. Instead, the emphasis was on how visually appealing the film could be without much regard for the actual points it could have gotten across to the viewer.

Deep Sleep seems to drag on forever, especially after it hits midpoint. Fortunately, it only lasts an hour and a half.

Ghost Dad: dumb for the whole family

by Paul Gazzola

Ghost Dad directed by Sidney Poitier produced by Universal Studios

Somewhere between Philadelphia and his weekly Thursday night slot on NBC, Bill Cosby developed a sense of noblesse oblige.

So, with this heartfelt responsibility planted squarely on his

shoulders (or around his neck, depending on your point of view), Cosby has so far presented us with that wonderful sitcom, *The Cosby Show*, featuring the Huxtables as a black Brady Bunch, and three best-selling books, *Fatherhood*, *Time Flies* and *Love and Marriage*.

And, now, there's *Ghost Dad*.

It's too bad that Cosby has allowed his goal to create wholesome family entertainment to overshadow his talents as a comedian and an actor. *Ghost Dad*, where Cosby's character, Elliot Hopper, suffers an untimely death and then tries to set things in order for his neglected family as a ghost, could have been a disturbing, dark comedy.

The potential is there. The scene where Hopper tells his kids good night with a tape message and his son answers back with his own taped good night, the satanic cab-driver and the game of charades the mute Hopper has with his kids, the answer being "I am a ghost," worked.

But, aggressive comedy is very rarely family entertainment and that is the only kind of entertainment Cosby is interested in these

days. So *Ghost Dad* has a happy ending and Cosby and director Sidney Poitier, create a funny but harmless, cartoonish comedy.

The cartoonish criticism becomes especially ironic when one considers Cosby's recent comments about *The Simpsons*, the newest competition for *The Cosby Show*. It's a cartoon, Bill says, funny, but still a cartoon. Perhaps Bill should start videotaping *The Simpsons* and watch it more closely because that animated show is a helluva lot more real and less cartoonish than *Ghost Dad*.



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