

'This Film is Not Yet Rated' explores anti-gay bias of MPAA ratings system

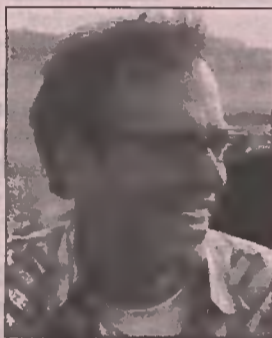
by Bart Smith

The IFC Original Documentary "This Film is Not Yet Rated" opened in limited release Sept. 1, and will roll out in select markets across the country through October. The film is an unprecedented investigation into the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) film rating system and its profound influence on American culture — including its impact on representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in film.

Directed by Oscar-nominee Kirby Dick ("Twist of Faith"), the film asks whether Hollywood movies and independent films are rated equally for comparable content, and whether sexual content involving LGBT characters faces tougher scrutiny by the MPAA. The MPAA is the trade organization of the six major film studios, which indicates age-based content classification using the letter grades G, PG, PG-13, R and NC-17.

"Films with gay or lesbian sexuality are

rated more strictly than films about straight sexuality," says Dick. "After our film premiered at Sundance, Kori Bernard, the spokesperson for the MPAA, was asked about this bias. She replied: 'We don't set the standards. We just reflect them,' which I found very revealing. What if this society's standards were racist? Would the MPAA rate films about African-Americans more strictly? What if the standards were anti-Semitic? Would they rate films about Jews more harshly? Her response was a tacit admission that a homophobic bias is built into the ratings system."



Oscar-nominee Kirby Dick directs 'This Film is Not Yet Rated.'

"This film provides a valuable opportunity for people to acknowledge and confront the double standard the MPAA places on films with gay content," says Damon Romine, entertainment media director of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). "We hope this leads to an overhaul of a system that has compromised honest depictions of gay people and relationships for far too long."

While Dick says he had no trouble finding stories of filmmakers who had first-hand experience with the MPAA's "often arbitrary and clandestine ratings system," getting filmmakers to speak on camera was another matter, as some feared being penalized in the future. Others,

however, were willing to have their stories told. Jamie Babbit, director of "But I'm a Cheerleader," tells Dick she felt discriminated against by the MPAA for making a film about gay teenagers. Director Kimberly Peirce is interviewed about the process she went

'We don't set the standards. We just reflect them.'

— MPAA Spokesperson
Kori Bernard on the reasoning behind the MPAA's harsher ratings for films with LGBT content.

through to get the MPAA to lower its initial rating of "Boys Don't Cry" from NC-17 to R.

Directors John Waters ("Hairspray"), Kevin Smith ("Clerks"), Matt Stone ("South Park") and Atom Egoyan ("Where the Truth Lies") also share their experiences with the ratings board. In addition, a key figure in the film is openly gay detective Becky Altringer of Ariel Investigations, who helped the director research the MPAA.

The MPAA gave "This Film is Not Yet Rated" an NC-17 rating. Because this rating can greatly inhibit the distribution and success of a movie, IFC Films will release the documentary as unrated. It will premiere on IFC TV in January 2007. ▀

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