

GAYS AT THE MOVIES

As a topic in motion pictures, homosexuality ranks somewhere below sharks and possessed children, while most movies about love deal with the affairs of heterosexuals. So it was a pleasure to see Rainer Werner Fassbinder's "FOX AND HIS FRIENDS" recently at Chapel Hill's Alternative Cinema. This caustic and entertaining tragi-comedy used a homosexual affair as the basis for a Marxist-oriented warning, a demonstration of how the upper class always manages to screw the lower, figuratively speaking. In the movie, Fox, a working-class gay, is swindled out of his lottery winnings by his cultured upper-class lover, who then abandons Fox. While some gays find this plot a downer and others object to the political elements, it is refreshing to see a movie that does not show gays as noble sufferers, but as human beings motivated by lust and greed, frequently just as stupid and rotten as straights. The somewhat predictable plot is given a fresh, witty impetus by the inclusion of gay elements, not unlike the way some tired old adventure movie plots and TV sitcoms can be improved by re-telling with black characters--that one twist adds new meaning to the plot. Fassbinder fans take note: the Alternative Cinema will present his acclaimed film about lesbians "THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT" on November 12-13 in Greenlaw Auditorium.

Of course, movies are more sexually explicit today than they once were. "FOX" showed nudity and men in bed together; in contrast, a gay subplot is handled more subtly in a 1962 film, Otto Preminger's politically topical "ADVISE AND CONSENT," scheduled for November 11 at the Alternative Cinema.

Still, the years have not exactly brought a plethora of pictures about gay men. There was Alan Bates as the bisexual professor "BUTLEY." There was Peter Finch carrying on with Murray Head carrying on with Glenda Jackson in John Schlesinger's "SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY." There was "A VERY NATURAL THING," a cheapo attempt to combine explicitness and respectability.

Then came "DOG DAY AFTERNOON," a box-office smash that made gay respectable in Hollywood. At any rate, something has inspired the studios to make two new movies about gays. Both are being released this fall; both have theatrical origins.

Richard Lester's "THE RITZ" is based on the hit Broadway comedy by Terrence McNally. In "THE RITZ" Jack Weston hides from the Mafia in a Manhattan bath. Hilarious complications ensue, among them Rita Moreno as a no-talent would-be Bette Midler.

George Schlatter's "NORMAN . . . IS THAT YOU?" is based on a flop Broadway comedy. It tells of a man who discovers that his son is living with a roommate who is more than just a roommate. For the movies an interracial aspect has been added to the plot. Redd Foxx and Pearl Bailey play parents;

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