

The Front Page

Taxi zum Klo director Ripplloh makes waves

by Steve Warren

Kwik Kwiz: Who said, "I'm completely fed up with gays"?

- A. Anita Byrant
- B. Jerry Falwell
- C. Frank Ripplloh

While the answer may well be (D) All of the above, your reporter heard the words from the least likely and (temporarily) least famous person on the list, Frank Ripplloh.

Ripplloh is the self effacing narcissist whose first feature film, *Taxi zum Klo* (Taxi to the Toilet) has achieved such notorious respectability that it's forcing surveyors of the entertainment scene to consider relocating the line that separates art from pornography.

This largely autobiographical movie was written, directed and co-produced by the dark, bearded, 33 year old Ripplloh, who co-stars with his lover Bernd Broaderup. Though employing wry humor it is unflinchingly honest and well-, frank-both about Frank and our subculture in general. In just over an hour and a half it touches on tea rooms, baths, parks, glory holes, leather, porno, drage queens, drugs, hepatitis and other STD's, pederasty and "golden shower."

Having thus exposed us in a way that will shock the shit out of the middle Americans who were becalmed by *La Cage aux Folles*, the German filmmaker has largely dropped out of the gay scene himself, as his opening comment suggests. "It's so on the surface," he continues in broken English, "and only based on bodies and talk about sex and 'My cock is greater than your cock.'"

He describes San Francisco's Castro Street as "a terrible, luxurious gay ghetto-very boring," explaining that this kind of "paradise" makes us irresponsible. "In a way it's nice that (finding sexual partners) is so easy, but in another way..." He goes on to detail the difficulty of forming a lasting relationship, which takes too much energy when it's easier to just have sex with a stranger whenever you want it. "inflation sex" is his name for this atmosphere of surfeit.

Made in Berlin for \$50,000, part of which Ripplloh borrowed from his mother, *Taxi zum*

Klo is the story of a gay schoolteacher, his sex life and loves, his one story but lasting relationship, and how he ultimately becomes an ex-schoolteacher.

While it's true that Ripplloh no longer teaches school, how he lost his job is fictionalized in the film. He's seen coming to school in costume after an all night drag ball, and letting the kids make a shambles of the classroom to teach them a lesson about the need for structure in their lives.

The truth, while less cinematic, is hardly less interesting. In 1978 Ripplloh was one of 600 gays featured in a photo article, "*Wir sind Schwul*" ("We are Faggots") in the magazine *Stern*. He was fired under a dictum that said, according to Ripplloh, "It is not allowed that a German teacher publish his sexual attitudes." He went to court and won reinstatement, but was fired again after a physical examination declared him 70 percent handicapped because of a bad liver. He laughs at the absurdity: "Seventy percent-that's to have no arms and no legs!"

This time he didn't fight-"I'm not a gay martyr"-but accepted his freedom as an opportunity to go into creative work on a full time basis. "I always had one leg in the arts," he says, referring to his acting for such underground filmmakers as Rosa von Praunheim and producing his own multimedia shows, all under the name of Peggy von Schnottgenberg, while he was still teaching. Friends address him as "Peggy" in *Taxi zum Klo*; but now, he says, "It's all over with Peggy."

It's not over with Bernd, however, as incompatible as they appear in the movie. Ripplloh stresses that they meet, in the film, outside of the gay subculture. When they start living together, Bernd is the domestic one who cooks dinner and dreams of buying a farm while Frank spends every spare moment cruising.

The writer-director discusses his character in the third person: "Frank is very schizophranic in his mind. He tells you more about his fantasies than about life. Bernd is afraid of life but also afraid to let go and fantasize. I think it's important to show the

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Taxi Seized in Norfolk

NORFOLK, VA (Our Own)- *Taxi zum Klo*, which will have its North Carolina premiere later this month at the Carolina theatre in Durham, ran into serious censorship problems during its showing in Norfolk. Attorneys for the distributor of the film, which was seized by the local police, were expected to file suit against the city of Norfolk sometime in the first week of January.

The film was seized October 5 after one scheduled showing at the Naro Expanded Cinema on Colley Avenue in Norfolk. It was confiscated by the local police on the grounds that it may violate the city's obscenity law.

Naro manager Tench Phillips, Jr. told *Gay Community News* that he brought the film to the Naro, a general cinema which plays second-run films and classics, "because the community requested. . . . But there's a small town atmosphere here and I knew they might make a case of it and I have to live in this town and run my business. So I brought it for just one night. Well, that was enough." Naro later cancelled the showing of another X-rated film, saying that "we're steering clear of anything of a sexual nature."

Over 500 people attended the show on October 5, the anniversary of the film's opening at the New York Film Festival.

Corporal L.R. Barnard of the vice squad and Chief Magistrate R.H. Carawan were among the 500. After seeing the film, they wrote an affidavit authorizing the search warrant which was used to confiscate the film.

According to the affidavit, the critically acclaimed film is graphically obscene and has as a dominant theme "a shameful, morbid interest in homosexual love affairs" that contains no serious medical, artistic or literary material and [goes] beyond the limits and candor of social acceptability."

Phillips disagrees, pointing to the fact that "film critics and those who judge art. . . say it has artistic merit. I wouldn't have risked bringing it here otherwise."

He added that while the 92-minute film does contain a few minutes of "explicit sex," the segment does not "reduce the film to pornography. . . because it has artistic value."

Nevertheless, Phillips believes that it is the explicitness of the sex, not the gender of the participants, which city officials object to. Several films with a gay theme have played at the Naro in the last few years, he said, including *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Victor/Victoria*, *Personal Best*, and *The Consequence*, a film about gay men in Germany.

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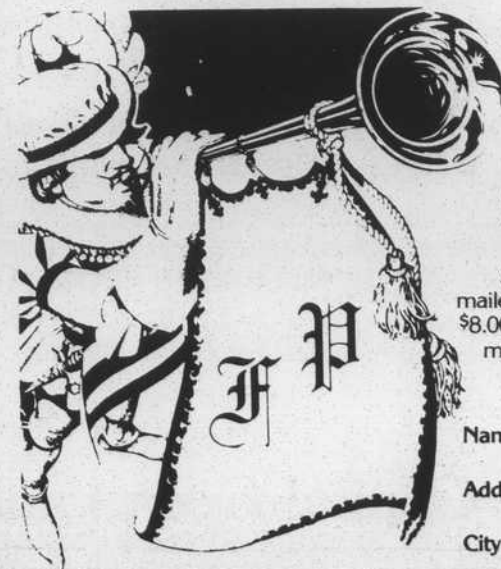
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