

Q+A

Ky Dickens

As a Michael Moore-style documentary crusader, Ky Dickens is taking religious leaders to task in her new film, *Fish Out of Water*. Bolstered by Bible-belt interviews and fun animated sequences, Dickens seeks to expose the perception that gays and religion should not mix. — *Melany Walters-Beck*

How did you get interested in filmmaking?

I got a camera for my 12th birthday. It was a pink disc camera. They only had 15 shots per roll and I'd go through those so quickly that my parents gave me a video camera. It kept me entertained for hours. Then a close friend of mine died in high school, and all this footage of him became invaluable. It taught me how powerful film can be in preserving human beings in matters of time.



Your newest project, *Fish Out of Water*, deals with the relationship between homosexuality and religion. What led you to examine this controversial topic?

After the moral values debate in 2004 that determined the presidential election, I became very interested in "the others," the boogeymen from the red states that are portrayed in the media as basing their views solely on religion. That bothered me as much as someone assuming [that] just because you're gay you're going to be one way or the other. Having the gay community as the group that galvanizes people around certain causes I think makes us a part of something bigger than ourselves. For the film, we went to Texas, Chicago, New

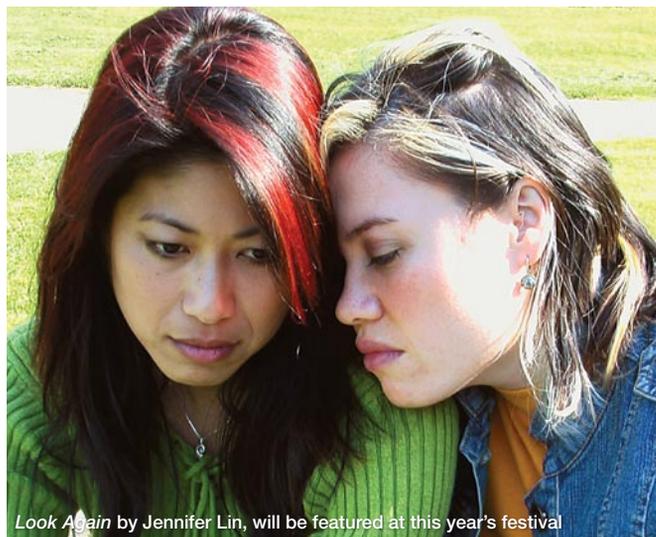
York, Florida, Iowa and many other places to talk about what they thought the Bible said about sexuality. Talking to people, [I found that] our experiences with religion are very individual, but as a community our experience surrounding religion is unified.

Have you met with much resistance?

When I started the film, I really thought it would be gays versus the church, but what ended up happening is that there are ministers and preachers and rabbis in every part of the country that are just as devastated and enraged about how their faith has been used to validate discrimination as we are. The Bible has been used as a weapon, and religious leaders feel that they have to be silent or they could lose their congregations.

When will theatergoers get a chance to see the film?

We want small-town folk who wouldn't normally see the film to watch it, so we plan on touring in a pink van, hoisting up screens and stirring things up next summer. We'll also do a special director's cut [in] Chicago, then the festival circuit this fall and next spring. ■



A Rare Kind of Festival

From the lovelorn innocence of a little girl finding her sexuality to the woman trying to discover what she wants in life after a string of breakups, these films paint a picture that audiences rarely get to see.

The Queer Women of Color Media Art Project presents the fourth annual Queer Women of Color Film Festival in San Francisco from June 13 to 15. Festival manager Kebo Drew says such festivals are necessary because they are ways for queers of color to express themselves.

The festival is a place for such artistic expression to flourish. What initially began as a celebration of queer African American women has grown to include all queer women of color.

"When we did the Queer Women of Color Film Festival, because it was focused on queer black women, queer women of African descent, you would not believe the response," says Drew. "It was just like, people were so, so hungry. So hungry for the images because they're not like the ones that are out there." Back then, she says, people were "still watching *Set It Off* with Latifah and taking anything we could take."

Drew says the event today attracts diverse crowds. "At our film festival, all these different groups of people end up mixing. It's an amazing feeling."

This year's festival features four categories with eight films each and covers the spectrum of queer life: spiritualism, family, sex, sexuality and culture. There is even an entire category devoted to the lives and loves of queer Asian Pacific Islander women.

Drew says that film festivals are a great place to celebrate queer women of color and their lives. Queers of color often find themselves categorized by either their sexuality or their race, but almost never by both.

"There's a tendency to think that people lead single-issue or single-identity lives and we don't. Especially for queer folks of color, it's like we're not just concerned about sexuality, our sexual orientation and gender identity," says Drew. "We're also concerned about class issues, [and how] the rest of our community is doing."

The film screenings (clocking in at 60 to 77 minutes) are free; however, tickets for the 90-minute panel and retrospective screening by featured directors (including *Nina's Heavenly Delights'* Pratibha Parmar) range from \$10 to \$20. — *Kory Tran*

ELIZABETH NIELSEN (DICKENS), KEVIN RUSS/ISTOCK (CAMIERA)