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NOW AND TO BENEFIT CHICAGO HOUSE



September 13, 2012

Gregg Shapiro GoPride.com columnist

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Screen Savor: Floor shows

Sheldon Larry's "Leave It On The Floor" joins films such as Casper Andreas' "The Big Gay Musical," HP Mendoza's "Fruit Fly" and Wendy Jo Carlton's "Jamie and Jessie Are Not Together" in the fresh new trend of the original gay movie musical. Dedicated to gay and trans kids escaping from oppressive circumstance, the movie narrowly avoids being a "High School Musical" for the drag ball community.



Gay teen Brad (Ephraim Sykes), kicked out by his single, homophobic mother Deondra (Metra Dee), is forced to live on the street. After Brad sings "Loser's List," the first of "Leave It On The Floor"'s dozen or so songs, he gets his pocket picked in a convenience store by Carter (Andre Myers). Pursuing Carter into a night club to get his wallet back, Brad is introduced to the world of the vogue ball.

The House of Allure's queen bee Christina (Lady Red Couture) rules the roost. Once Princess (Phillip Evelyn), of the House of Eminence, stops drooling over Brad, he sings a song about balls ("Ballroom Bliss") and Brad and Carter come face-to-face again.

Princess offers Brad a bed for the night at the real house of Eminence and there he meets Duke (Cameron Koa), protective house mother Queef Latina, a.k.a., Franklin (Barbie-Q) and the movie's primary comic relief Eppy Dural (James Alsop), a drag queen who thinks she's preggers. Franklin, who gives the movie its JHud factor, sings "I'm Willing," a song about his DL man Caldwell (Demarkes Dogan), who is getting out of prison in a couple weeks.

Meanwhile, Princess' big dreams, including being Justin Timberlake's choreographer,

movie, "Leave It On Down." action values, as is evident during the bowling alley meeting and dance number, "Knock Them Mothaf*kk**'s

With only two weeks until the Imperial Mini Ball, Brad convinces Queef Latina to let him walk as a member of the House of Eminence. Carter offers to give Brad private lessons, which

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Local Dish

only serves to piss off Princess. After Brad admits to Carter that he is suicidal they dance a pas de deux (and Brad can definitely dance!) to the song "Don't Jump Baby." A battle for Brad begins between Carter and Princess and the drama is unleashed.

A flurry of activity follows, ranging from ball prep and Caldwell's release to Princess' attempted seduction of Brad under the House of Eminence's roof and a shift in loyalties. The night of the International Mini Ball arrives and you better fasten your seat belts. Carter and Caldwell make their personal statements in "This Is My Lament." But it's not long before everything begins to unravel.

Cheating, challenges, apologies, car chases, collisions, casualties, arrests and more songs only serve to heighten the spectacle. It all comes to the funeral scene, at which the main characters come face to face with the parents who threw them out of their respective house leading to the gospel-inspired number "His Name is Shawn." At a loss, Brad stands on the ledge of a tall building, ready to end it all, until Carter talks him down. There's a big finish lurking in the wings, beginning with Carter and Princess making peace and ending with Queef Latina's triumphant return to the floor with Brad as her Sex Siren. DVD bonus features include a music video and cast member interview.



Boston-based drag king performance troupe All The Kings Men are the subject of "Play in the Gray" (Planted Seeds), a doc by filmmaker Kaitin Meelia. The title refers to the "gray zone" of gender occupied by most of the six member group.

All The Kings Men have a straightforward, if you will, mission to make people "think in a fun and open way" and to show "the world a different view." ATKM's shows feature skits, lip synching, choreography and a wide variety of genders and characters.

Constantly reinventing what themselves, the six women do something that they'd never thought they'd do, opposing who they are in life. ATKM is more than a pastime for them. They are people who have sacrificed aspects of their lives to pursue the gamble of success. The doc follows ATKM from their early days participating in the Drag Slam at the Midway Café in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts (2002) to performing at New England's first Trans Pride Rally (2008) to hawking their show on Commercial Street in Provincetown to attending the Northeast LGBTI conference and their spring tour (both 2009) to speaking at the True Colors LGBT Youth Conference at University of Connecticut. Throughout, ATKM's members' commitment to the success of the troupe is evident.

More than just a doc about performance, "Play in the Gray" is at its most revealing and intimate when the members of the troupe share details about themselves with the viewer. Julee Antonellis talks about having had "moments" when she was "girlie" and how much she loves to make people laugh. The interview with Rosemary and Tom, Julee's mother and father, about Julee's coming out is especially moving. Jill, at ease with not identifying with one gender, is well-spoken on the subject of being "in the grey." Jill is married to troupe member Karin Webb, who shares her struggles with members of her fundamentalist Christian family, represented by a letter from her grandmother.

Katie Allen, who is comfortable when mistaken for a boy, but less comfortable in the grey zone, says she feels like a drag queen when she puts on a dress with cleavage, puts on make-up and a wig. Maria's situation is similar to Karin's in that her Russian Jewish immigrant family (parents Alexandra and Gennady) is less accepting of who she is. This is especially exemplified by her grandmother Leonora. Ultimately, like many in the LGBT community, these women have created their own families, with spouses, friends and fellow performers. The "Play in the Gray" DVD bonus features consist of more than a dozen outtakes.

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