

A FEW GOOD DYKES—Press Report

Director/Producer: Mocha Jean Herrup
NotAToughGuy Productions
1172 Pandora
Austin, TX 78702
512-472-5464
herrup@realtime.net

29 February, 2004

For Immediate Release:

After five years in the making, *A FEW GOOD DYKES*, Mocha Jean Herrup's first feature length documentary about the unique and controversial Dyke Uniform Corps, makes it to the screen. On the heels of just completing her PhD in Radio-TV-Film (Dec 2003, University of Texas), Herrup is excited to complete another milestone in her career and premiere the film at SXSW this March.

While the project only took a year to shoot, the biggest obstacle to completing the film was the editing process. "It took a while for me to find the right editor," Herrup explains, referring to 4 years of working on the project with five different editors. She retains a sense of humor about the ordeal. "Apparently, most editors don't like working with controlling, asshole directors. Go figure!"

After working with several different women editors in Austin those first few years, Herrup finally teamed up with Dan Janos of Yep Films. The two had met while working together on *LESBIANFILM*, a 10 minute short currently screening on the Sundance Channel. "Dan was co-directors Evie Leder's and Gretchen Lee's "straight friend" whom they hustled into shooting and editing the project. We had a blast working together as the "lesbianfilm collective" but after shooting that one weekend in San Francisco, I never saw him again until it screened in that city over a year later." After calling it quits with a fourth editor, Herrup racked her brain trying to come up with someone new to approach. "Then I remembered Dan and the wonderful sense of humor and timing he brought to *LESBIANFILM* and I thought, why not?" Herrup had reservations about working with him at first. "Dan does not identify as queer nor does he have an extensive background in gender theory, which I thought would be critical to being able to cut a film about the intersections of female masculinities, body image, and militaristic desires, but Dan is so skilled at what he does and we have such similar comic tastes, I thought it might be worth a shot."

The two spent the next year and a half working on the project every other month when Herrup could get out to San Francisco. In between those meetings, Janos sent her tapes in the mail for reviews and discussion. Interestingly enough, the roles each took in the process pretty much broke down according to gender lines. "Dan was always focused on keeping the plot moving, on making sure the film flowed and was well paced throughout.

He kept the action moving, always interested in making sure there was a narrative thrust to the story that maintained momentum.” Herrup tended to want so focus more on character development, to take time out to “just let things meander a bit,” and to explore some of the gender themes present in the film—to pursue what they referred to as the “theory threads.” Says Herrup, “Dan would often ask, ‘How does this fit into the narrative arc?’ and I’d say, ‘I don’t know, it’s just interesting. It feels right to put this here.” Herrup explains that it’s just a matter of knowing that two colors work together even though they don’t match, or that you should say a particular word for an effect even though it’s not the ‘correct word choice.’ In the end, Herrup and Janos learned a lot from each other and produced a keenly original film of which they are both proud. “I really like this document,” says Herrup, “it’s well put together, thought provoking, and fun to watch. The biggest comment I get from people who see the films is, ‘It’s never boring, I’ll tell you that.”

Although the film is quite entertaining, it was not made with the primary goal to make money. “Let’s just say that a documentary about the Dyke Uniform Corps is not the most commercial project I’ve ever dreamed up,” says Herrup. Asked why, then, she has spent so much time working on the film, she replies “I wanted to be part of a conversation... a conversation about gender expression, about genderqueer. I wanted to contribute something to this great big, confusing, evocative, sometimes perilously important mix, (known in academic circles as the ‘discourse.’) I wanted to help create community.”

Herrup is no stranger to playing this role. In 2002 she co-founded with K. Bradford Kings ‘N Things, Austin’s preeminent drag king troupe. “K and I had an ‘If you build it they will come’ attitude. We each looked around and couldn’t find the queer community in Austin that we wanted, so we decided to help build it.” Kings ‘N Things, whose shows every other month at Elysium and other popular Austin venues regularly bring in crowds of over 400 people (and also featured on Comedy *Central’s* *Insomniac* and named “Best Drag King Troupe” by the *Austin Chronicle* newspaper) has become somewhat of an Austin phenomenon. “Our fans are so great,” says Herrup. “They often come to our shows all dressed up, in outrageous outfits, and they come ready to have a good time. We bring in really big crowds, and we love how mixed it is. Lots of amazing queer identified women come to our shows, as well as “straight folks,” gay boys, and people from the whole transgendered spectrum. After each show all of us Kings get together and exchange stories about how many people came up to us and thanked us for putting on a kick ass show and for being so inclusive. It often goes the same way, someone approaches and says ‘You know, I didn’t know what to expect,’ or, ‘I wouldn’t have thought to come out to a drag king show but my friends brought me and I have to tell you, I freagin’ loved it!’ We tell everyone at our shows that they’re all queer. We’re in a queer space because of the people in that space right now. Enjoy it.”

Herrup is hoping for the same kind of audience for A FEW GOOD DYKES. “I’ve always made my films with a queer audience in mind. I need something specific in my head when I’m making a film so I know who to talk to. If I don’t have someone in mind, it’s not as much fun for me.” To her continued delight, Herrup’s films have consistently played to broad audiences. LESBIANFILM can be seen on the Sundance Channel and

POM won audience awards at both queer (Toronto Gay & Lesbian) and non-specifically queer festivals (Cinematexas) and was purchased by Northwest Airlines. “I would imagine those first class passengers en route from North America to Asia [the route chosen to screen the film] were quite surprised and intrigued to find a documentary about a grunge dyke trying out for the University of Texas pom pom squad available to screen” says Herrup about the acquisition. Also as a teacher, Herrup taught at the University of Texas and is currently a full time professor at the Austin Community College, she is able to show her work to her classes from time to time. “You know,” she says, “it’s always those cute, rowdy, straight guys who come up to me after the screening and say things like, ‘Man, that film was the shit! That film totally rocked!’” Herrup imagines, “I think they see powerful, humorous characters on screen, often doing things they shouldn’t be doing, and they respond to that.”

A FEW GOOD DYKES is as unique in what it explains onscreen as it is in what it does not explain. Says Herrup, “The film experiments with taking things for granted, with not explaining everything.” Some people who have seen the film have said they would have liked to learn more about the characters’ outside lives. That’s a valid point, but it alludes to precisely what I wanted to avoid. I didn’t want to set up the Dyke Uniform Corps as something secondary, or outside, these women’s true lives. The D.U.C. is their life, at least in terms of who they experience themselves to be, gender-wise. And I wanted the audience to accept the D.U.C on the corps’ own terms, and to roll with it.”

Greatly influenced by BY HOOK OR BY CROOK (Harry Dodge and Silas Flipper), which features a cast of differently gendered characters and never stops to explain things like why Valentine has a beard, or why Shy is referred to as “he,” Herrup explains that “that’s how you fashion something new... something out there but not fitting into a pre-existing language to describe it. It’s like with a new word or name for something, all of the sudden it gets used, and people just know what it means. They feel it. And both the word and to some extent, the thing itself, come into existence at that time. The Dyke Uniform Corps and the women in it can’t really be described using the language I have available to me. Just there, I use the term women, and that’s not quite right. Sometimes you just have to do it, and then it makes sense. So, I tried to do that in A FEW GOOD DYKES. I tried to present something new using the language available to me, while not letting that language fully control my expression” A FEW GOOD DYKES is quintessentially queer. It is queer in both content and form, and it is well poised to create the kind of audience it seeks to find.