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Utah Film Center Damn These Heels 2021: More historical testaments of activism in Raw! Uncut! Video!, Rebel Dykes, Genderation

By **Les Roka** - July 15, 2021

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In addition to *Cured*, *No Straight Lines: The Rise of Queer Comics* and *P.S. Burn This Letter* as outstanding testaments of archival activism, three other documentaries in the [Utah Film's Center's](#) 18th annual [Damn These Heels Queer Film Festival](#) shine for their use of historical materials. They include *Raw! Uncut! Video!*, directed by Ryan A. White and Alex Clausen; *Genderation*, directed by Monika Treut, and *Rebel Dykes*, directed by Harri Shanahan and Siân A. Williams. These films are available for streaming on demand, with purchased tickets, through July 18.

Raw! Uncut! Video!

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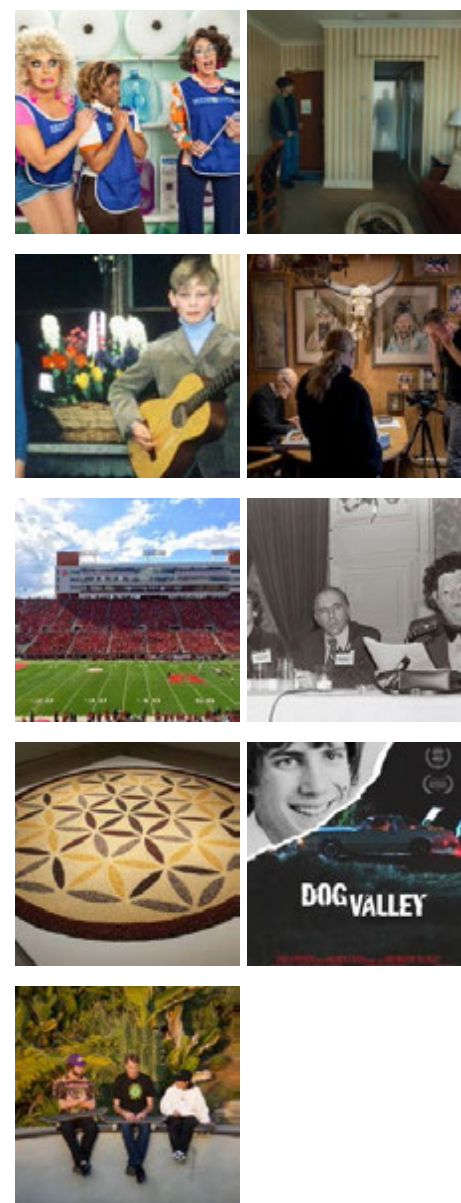
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The public conversations about pornography have been so unbalanced that they preclude any consideration of its potential value in developing behaviors and attitudes emphasizing sex and body positivity and activism in the community. Self-proclaimed moral guardians lambaste pornography for undercutting the dignity of the individual, by looking at it solely from their own prurient and dirty-minded perceptions. Fortunately, the subject has garnered more attention for research across numerous disciplines, as evidenced in peer-reviewed international journals such as *Porn Studies*, which has published several times a year since 2014.

Meanwhile, as demonstrated in the 2021 Damn These Heels slate, documentary filmmakers are carving out enlightening paths in their work, which augment the development of a professional quality body of queer historiography.



Raw! Uncut! Video!, directed by Ryan A. White and Alex Clausen.

For example, more than 250 hours of film footage from the homegrown gay porn studio Palm Drive Video became the

center of *Raw! Uncut! Video!*, directed by Ryan A. White and Alex Clausen. The film is a fascinating documentary about sex and kink positivity in the 1970s and 1980s and the development of safe sex practices as the HIV/AIDS crisis became more prevalent.

The film resonates with positive affirmation from many angles. This includes Jack Fritscher and Mark Hemry, the Sonoma County, California couple who have been together for more than 40 years and were the entrepreneurs behind Palm Drive Video. Fristcher also was the founding editor of *Drummer* magazine, which focuses on leather sex fetishes. Incidentally, the two men met in 1979 at a birthday party for Harvey Milk.

White and Clausen feature clips from the archives, some of which are accompanied by interviews with performers. They include porn actors Steve Parker, Mickey Squires, Steve Thrasher and Donnie Russo. A highly recommended scene includes an interview with Susan Shaw, Thrasher's mother. The opening scene comes from *Sodbuster*, a literal performance of a man becoming one with nature, as he revels in fucking mud in the outdoors. The couple's rural ranch became headquarters for their homegrown studio.

A project five years in the making, the documentary sprung from serendipitous circumstances, as relayed in an interview The Utah Review conducted with the directors. White and Clausen met the couple while completing a 2016 short titled *Cruising Elsewhere*, which used oral histories and phonographic visuals to document a former popular cruising area known as Wohler Beach in California's Russian River region, in the years before the AIDS crisis erupted in the 1980s.

When the couple talked about the history of Palm Drive Video, the directors were immediately hooked. “We started digging in immediately,” White says. “We said, ‘Holy Moley! This is amazing stuff.’ Because we already had gained their trust, they shared the unedited hard drive which included behind-the-scenes footage.” This included content from *Drummer* magazine, which Fritscher had started in 1977.

The directors, who were interested in exploring alternative forms of AIDS activism at the time, were struck by how Palm Drive Video, a boutique porn studio, became an important outlet for fetish and kink communities to step forward and encourage safe sex practices built on positive messages about sex, body and kinks. And, as Clausen notes, the constellation of thematic threads includes the durability of the relationship Fritscher and Hemry have enjoyed personally as well as professionally in being creative entrepreneurs. There is a refreshing, easy, comforting tone which envelops the film and seems right on pitch for the couple’s story as well as the memories the performers have about making content for Palm Drive Video.

Raw! Uncut! Video!, directed by Ryan A. White and Alex Clausen.

The historical value of the archives, particularly in a vulnerable time when sexual identity and sexual practices often were viewed as taboo and verboten, is priceless and enormously significant. The fact that Fritscher and Hemry had digitized and organized the company's entire catalogue of footage is one that the filmmakers are particularly appreciative of in making a documentary of major archival value. Of course, the content to edit was voluminous. But, within this contextual frame, the filmmakers succeed at showing how Palm Drive Video performers used their kinks and fetishes as cathartic touchstones to cope with the stresses amidst the expanding shadows of the AIDS crisis during the 1980s.

"There's not a lot of visual evidence of gay and queer culture from the 1970s and pornography fills that gap," White says. Today, queer cinema has branched out in many roots with solid results. And, pornography remains a good gauge of sexual culture in terms of images, attitudes, behaviors, identity expression and fetishes and kinks. But, censorship of pornography on social media has become more prevalent recently, which could complicate archiving purposes for future generations of queer historians when they explore what the environment was like in the earliest waves of social media activity. Tumblr clamped down at the end of 2017. Xtube,

which has been online for 13 years, will discontinue its present format in September. OnlyFans, an outlet for amateur as well as independent professional sex workers, is contemplating changing its format.

Raw! Uncut! Video!, directed by Ryan A. White and Alex Clausen.

As for White and Clausen, they have experienced censorship with Instagram, regarding the account to promote this film. "It has been deleted three times, and we had lots of followers and engagement, which is now gone," Clausen adds, at the time of the interview. Their social media accounts include Instagram (@wohlerfilms) and Facebook & Twitter (@rawuncutvideo).

Meanwhile, the filmmakers say audiences have responded positively to the film. The first public screening happened in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, a location that neither filmmaker imagined would have been possible for a film such as *Raw! Uncut! Video!*. "There were a few people who walked out which was understandable but overall the reactions were positive," White says. "We were not expecting women to be so responsive but they had a lot of interesting thing to say. Many commented about sex positivity and sexual exploration as well

as the AIDS angle.”

Rebel Dykes, directed by Harri Shanahan and Siân A. Williams.

Rebel Dykes

With a post-punk musical score, *Rebel Dykes*, directed by Harri Shanahan and Siân A. Williams, chronicles the history from the 1980s when lesbians in London organized feminist protests, anti-Thatcher rallies and campaigns surrounding HIV/AIDS and the U.K.’s anti-gay Section 28 law.

Unlike some other documentaries in the Damn These Heels slate, *Rebel Dykes* does not have the same reservoir of archival footage to document the events of the 1980s but interviews with those who were active at the time provide wonderful oral histories. What emerges is a valuable chronicle of a politically and sexually energized substratum of queer culture in London. And, their involvement came amidst the enactment of the U.K.’s most strident anti-gay law in 1988. The outcry against the legislation reverberated in numerous ways. Songs by Chumbawamba (*Smash Section 28! Fight the Alton Bill!*) and Boy George (*No Clause 28!*) typified the outrage which exploded at the time. Section 28 only was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and three years later in the rest of the U.K.

One of the figures featured in the film is Lisa Power, who co-founded the *Pink Paper* weekly in the 1980s, one of the few published outlets for political engagement in the queer community at the time. What is clear in *Rebel Dykes* is how activists mastered the learning curve to organize strategically to fight for queer rights, even as it was a foregone conclusion at the time that Section 28 was going to be implemented. Clearly, the activists geared up for what they knew would become the long game strategy to secure the full spectrum of citizen rights for all segments of the queer community.

Generation, directed by Monika Treut. Photo Credit: Daniel
Blosat.

Generation

Generation, directed by Monika Treut, comes two decades after Treut's documentary *Gendernauts: A Journey Through Shifting Identities*, which was filmed in San Francisco. Treut returns to see what has changed with the transgender and non-binary subjects of the earlier film, which leads to fascinating longitudinal observations about what has changed and why the stories of the original gendernauts matter for 21st century generations. The film touches extensively, for example, on gentrification in the Bay Area and the loss of the adventurous cultural spirit upon which gendernauts had thrived upon in previous decades.

More specifically, the subjects also contemplate the trajectory needed to accept and affirm fully the cultural and social impacts of non-binary identities and transgender members of the queer community. This emerges as the most consequential pillar in Treut’s film, which makes one wonder what a follow up documentary would look like 20 years from now. The subjects Treut features in the film are unquestionably looking forward to a fully enlightened, emancipated perspective.

Longitudinal perspectives are essential to developing the body of queer historiography. And, the fact that Treut’s film was made during the most acrimonious days of the previous president’s administration, which went aggressively against the rights of the LGBTQ spectrum, will be informative for future generations as they prepare chronicles of queer history covering the first decades of the current century.

TAGS

Alex Clausen

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Harri Shanahan and Siân A. Williams

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Utah Film Center Damn These Heels 2021

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Utah Film Center Damn These Heels 2021: Five short films receive either world, North American premieres

Les Roka

I am a native of Toledo, Ohio, having received my Ph.D. in journalism and mass communication from Ohio University's Scripps School of Journalism in 2002. In addition to teaching at Utah State University and the University of Utah, I have worked extensively in public relations for a variety of organizations including a major metropolitan university, college of osteopathic medicine, and community college. When it comes to intellectual curiosity, I venture into as many areas as possible, whether it's about music criticism, the history of journalism, the practice of public relations in a Web 2.0 world and the soon-to-arrive Web 3.0 landscape, or how public debates are formed about many issues especially in the political arena. As a Salt Lake City resident, I currently write and edit a blog called The Selective Echo that provides an entertaining, informative, and provocative look at Salt Lake City and its cosmopolitan best. I also have been the U.S. editorial advisor for an online publication Art Design Publicity based in The Netherlands. And, I use social media tools such as Twitter for blogging, networking with journalists and experts, and staying current on the latest trends in culture and news. I also have been a regular monthly contributor to a Utah business magazine, and I have recently conducted a variety of editing projects involving authors and researchers throughout the country and the world, including Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Lebanon, Cyprus, the United Kingdom, France, and Japan. I'm also a classically trained musician who spent more than 15 years in a string quartet, being involved in more than 400 performances.



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