



Gay News At Home And Abroad

by Roy Liebman, Publications Chair

FLORIDA

A judge has ruled that Florida's law blocking adoptions by gay couples is unconstitutional. She stated there was no legal or scientific reason for sexual orientation alone to prohibit anyone from adopting a child. It has been the only state so far to ban gay adoption outright but Arkansas now bans any unmarried couple from adopting.

IOWA

In a unanimous decision the State Supreme Court overturned a voters' ban on gay marriage, stating that courts need to protect minority rights even when a majority of public sentiment is against them. It is now the first Midwestern state to have granted same-sex couples equal marriage rights.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

The legislature has narrowly voted to approve same-sex marriage but additional steps need to be taken if it is to become official.

NEW JERSEY

A state commission unanimously concluded that the state's civil union law does not go far enough in granting same-sex couples the rights of heterosexual couples. It recommended that the legislature pass a law permitting gay marriage.

NEW YORK

Governor David Paterson plans to introduce legislation to legalize same-sex marriage. The state already recognizes marriages performed in other states. He stated that there is a problem when gays and lesbians in civil unions are still denied civil protections like health care and survivors' pension rights.

VERMONT

By a two-to-one margin the state house overrode the Republican governor's veto of gay marriage, thus making Vermont the first state to legalize gay marriage via a vote of legislators rather than a court decision. The state already allows civil unions and is now the fourth state that currently permits same-sex couples to wed, after Connecticut, Massachusetts and Iowa.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The city council voted to recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere in the United States.

THE CHURCH

A task force of the Evangelical Lutheran Church has recommended that same-sex unions be recognized by the church and that GBLT people in "committed" relationships be allowed to serve as clergy. Currently only those gays who are celibate can serve as clergy. A church wide assembly is expected to vote on these recommendations in August.

The twenty year struggle of a lesbian woman to become a Presbyterian priest has been thwarted again. After the San Francisco Presbytery approved her candidacy, a Church commission issued a decision denying her ordination on a technicality. Even though there was a 54% to 46% vote by the Presbyterian General Assembly last year to allow such ordinations it has yet to be approved by a majority of the nation's regional presbyteries.

The Bishop of the Los Angeles Episcopal diocese officially "came out" in support of same-sex marriages. Hundreds of conservative Episcopal congregations have already broken with the church over the ordination of Gene Robinson as the first openly gay bishop.

POLITICS

For many years the Log Cabin Republicans have been the best-known gay Republican group. Now a more conservative organization, espousing the principles of Ronald Reagan and calling itself GOProud, is seeking the spotlight. Since an estimated 1.5 million gays voted for the McCain-Palin ticket, the new group sees the need for a rightward turn in gay GOP ranks.

ITALY

When Brokeback Mountain was shown on Italian television the one sex scene (very chaste by current cinema standards) and a kissing scene were cut out. Gay groups cried censorship and the state television agency claimed it had aired the cut version by mistake. Some politicians are demanding that it be discussed in parliament.

L.A. Asian Film Festival (April 30 – May 7) gives Tribute and Film Retrospective to Filipino filmmaker Lito Torres *by Oliver Carnay*



Celebrating its Silver Anniversary, Visual Communication's Los Angeles Asian Film Festival, which runs April 30 through May 7, 2009, will be holding a Tribute and Film Retrospective to Filipino Filmmaker Lito Torres for his contributions to the annual festival and the Asian American community, on Friday, May 1st, between 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. at the Directors Guild of America (Atrium), located at 7920 Sunset Blvd., L.A., California 90046 (corner between Crescent Heights Blvd. and Fairfax Ave. in Hollywood).

Southern California's largest and most prestigious film festival of its kind launches the celebration of Asian Pacific Heritage Month at the Directors Guild of America. From comedy and drama to documentaries and shorts, the 25th anniversary of this week long festival shares the stories of Asian Pacific's in America and abroad (please log on to www.vconline.org for

films shown during the 10-day festival).

The works of Lito as a filmmaker and his contribution to the Asian American community of Los Angeles will be commemorated in a two-hour program headed by Festival Director, David Magdael, in cooperation with the entertainment group – A Company of Friends, founded by Lito Torres, together with Karina Samala of the Imperial Court of Los Angeles and Hollywood. The event will be hosted by Richie Selva.

A civil engineer by profession and a former part-time model from the Philippines, Joselito Torres, well-known by everybody as Lito Torres, graduated Filmmaking at the New York University in New York. He attended and continued his curriculum at the Los Angeles City College in 1995 and graduated in 2002. Lito has done several short films which were accepted in different film festivals around the world. Influenced by filmmakers, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Filipino filmmaker Lino Brocka, Lito's films are usually dark and tackles the human experience. Among his notable films are:

"A Box of Cookies" (2000), a story about what choices can be made when faced with a terminal illness. The film was the official selection at the Palm Springs International Film Festival, Uptown Whittier Film Festival, San Francisco Filipino Facine Film Festival, Columbia University Arkipelago Film Festival, Cucalorus Film Festival of North Carolina, Santa Monica Moxie Film Festival, Cinemafest of Los Angeles, Big Bear Lake International Film Festival, Turin International Film Festival of Italy, Barcelona Film Festival of Spain, Asian Film Festival Smithsonian Museum, Washington DC and the Pride International Film Festival.

"In the Company of Friends" (2001) was the second film Lito Torres produced and directed. It is about a group of models striving to be successful actors in Hollywood. A poignant story about a friend's secret that forced his friend to re-evaluate his priorities and realize the importance of friendship and belonging. It stars Josh Duhamel (in his first acting debut), Michael Fragale, Jeff Lorch, Amy Laxineta, Marc Newburger, Damon Harman and Joe Nakamura. The film was premiered at Cinemafest of Los Angeles and was the official selection at the San Francisco Facine Film Festival, Visual Communications Asian Film Festival, Turin International Film Festival of Italy, the Cinema Indio Film Festival and the Pride International Film Festival.

"Mother's Love" (2002) The story is about a wounded family's history of violence, abandonment, commitment, sacrifice and love. It deals with the truth that some things can not be changed. The film premiered at the Visual Communications Film Festival at the Directors Guild of America in Los Angeles, Palm Springs International Short Film Festival, North Carolina Asian Film Festival, Toronto Asian Film Festival and the San Francisco Facine Film Festival;

"Mannequin Hands" (2003), the story of a boy's loss of innocence, was the official selection of following festivals: the Los Angeles Visual Communication's Film & Video Festival (also known as the Asian Pacific Film and Video Festival), Skyy Vodka Film Awards, San Francisco Facine Film Festival, Festival of Exploding Cinema, Cinema Indio Film Festival, Philadelphia International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Palm Springs International Short Film Festival, and the Big Bear Lake International Film Festival;

"Queen of Asia" (2005) is a 70-minute documentary film which focuses on "Vi," a veteran of Asian Beauty Pageants who always seem to come in as first runner-up, but not actually a winner. Producers and contestants were interviewed on the importance of the pageant scene and speculate as to why Vi never seems to be victorious, and why she is always a big loser. For her part, Vi intimates her own reasons for pursuing the crown, offering an insightful counterpoint to the otherwise catty and campy world of which she is a part of.

Other short films Lito produced were "His name is Cio Cio San" (2006); "Waiters" (documentary, 2007); "Why I Sued MTV" (documentary, 2007); "Dark Tomorrow" (2007); and the unfinished "Becoming A Man" (2008). Lito's drama masterpiece titled "Michael Angelo," a story about two brothers discovering the hard way and the evil that men do to each other, was also unfinished due to his untimely demise. Lito was diagnosed with "nasopharyngeal cancer" (NPC) in March 2008 and lost his brave battle last March 15, 2009.

Lito is an active volunteer and advocate of AIDS prevention and safe sex practice. In the Los Angeles community, Lito Torres is also well-known as the executive producer of numerous series of shows. In 1994, he formed the non-profit organization - A Company of Friends Entertainment Group, a group of Filipino professionals who have decided to make a difference in the issue of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome awareness and education. The group have specifically targeted their concern to the Asian community, but also wanted to reach out to the community at large.

Utilizing their experience in the entertainment field, they have set up events to help non-profit organizations. Among members of the group include Bernie D., Oni D., Ray Cruz, Carlos D., Angel Reguerra, Genaro Lagdameo, Reuben Datur, Beau Sumera, Nelo M., Lita P., Ofelia P., Alex V., Walter Garcia, David K., Bob L., Joel S., Oliver Carnay, Vito P., Ed R., Orly D., Jun P., Ross and David Wilkens, Ben Sampico, Ben Zaldivar, Clem V., Bryan K., Pedro C. Through the years, more members and friends have joined the group to help the good cause Lito started.

After the successful "Burst of Summer" swimwear fashion show in 1994 at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium (which ran for a couple of years more), it was followed in 1995 with the "Search for the Best Celebrity Impersonator of California." 1996 brought on the very successful "Best Male Exotic Dancer" contest, and in 1997, "A Night of A Hundred Gowns" was added to the line up of shows. All these benefited several organizations, including Bienestar: AIDS Latino Project, AIDS Project Los Angeles, Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team, among many others, venues at the El Rey Theatre on Wilshire Blvd.

Since its inception, A Company of Friends has developed a steady following of event viewers. Every year, they return to see what the next show has in store for them.

A few of Lito's short films showcased at the festival in the past years, and a personal footage will be shown. Friends are welcome to share their memorable moments with Lito. Everyone is encouraged to bring any memorabilia of Lito's works for display. The event is free. If anybody would like to donate food for the reception, or have any questions or concerns regarding this event, please contact event host and moderator Richie Selva at RichieSel@aol.com

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