

ANTARCTICA
SLGFF 2008

In two days, Omer will hit a milestone: his 30th birthday. Shy and studious, he's still looking for that elusive spark (but without the passionate hookups everyone else is having). On one of his blind dates, he meets Danny, an enthusiastic 20-year-old aspiring dancer. Danny lives with his ex-boyfriend Ronen, a handsome journalist who befriends Omer at the library where he works. Ronen is also dating Omer's best friend Mickey, who thinks he might be "the one." Might Danny or Ronen be able to ignite the flame that will melt Omer's frozen heart? Shirley, Omer's little sister, wonders if her lesbian relationship with her boss Michal means settling down and giving up her long-held dream of traveling to Antarctica. A momentous birthday meal given by the siblings' "Jewish mother from hell" (drag artist Yoam Huberman) brings matters to a head.

With a collar-grabbing montage of male nudity and a subplot about alien abductions, ANTARCTICA pushes the bounds of Israeli cinema. It also brims with border-crossing truths about lust, jealousy, disappointment, and taking a chance on real intimacy, capturing the ecstatic lightheadedness of making a connection that could be the real deal, and the quiet sadness when a potential good thing slips through one's fingers.

It turns out, though, that writer-director Yair Hochner is more of a romantic than a provocateur. The overriding impression one gets from his ensemble film about oversexed, underloved young gay Israeli men (and one lesbian couple) living in Tel Aviv isn't rebelliousness or outrage or even activism, but a pervasive wistfulness.

ARCTIC SON
SIFF 2008

In the tiny native village of Old Crow (population 250), 80 miles north of the Arctic Circle in the Canadian Yukon, a father and his son get a second chance after almost 20 years apart. They share a name and a bloodline, but the lives they lead are worlds apart. Stanley Sr. is a rugged hunter, steeped in native traditions. Seattle-raised Stanley Jr. immerses himself in hip-hop music, fast food, video games, and drunken nights.

Stanley Sr. hopes to instill some sage advice and so invites his son to Old Crow, a place of raw beauty: there are no chain stores, restaurants, movie theaters, or roads in or out. Taking his son out into the unforgiving arctic wilderness, Stanley Sr. teaches him the skills he needs to survive – how to shoot a gun, skin a rabbit, make a fire, catch a fish – which he believes hold lessons that will help his son make wise choices in any environment.

Stanley Jr.'s transition is by no means smooth. At first he misses the conveniences and pace of life back home and seeks solace in art, phone calls to his friends back home, and the local home brew. But he thrives – learning, growing, and even enjoying having a father to rely on or complain about.

Then this moving story switches gear when Jr. returns to Seattle to visit his mother. As Jr. struggles to decide where he belongs and what he values, it becomes clear that the Stanleys' story is a metaphor for larger issues of identity, choice, redemption, and the ties that bind to us all to family and place.

A haunting score complements the gorgeous cinematography in Andrew Walton's beautiful, engaging and intimate documentary about the complex relationship between tradition and modernity, old and young, nature and pop culture, addiction and independence.

BIGGER, STRONGER, FASTER*
SIFF 2008

We play to win in America—but at what cost? Why are some performance enhancements (Lasik eye surgery, beta blockers, even Viagra) given a pass? How does our drive to be the best vie with our desire to do the right thing? First-time feature-filmmaker Christopher Bell's intensely personal documentary blends investigative work, interviews, home video, news pieces, retro-styled animation, and clips of the bulgy '80s trinity of Stallone, Schwarzenegger, and Hulk Hogan into a sophisticated and entertaining argument that asks the tough questions about the roles of body perception, performance enhancement, and competition in contemporary American culture. Wrenching and revealing moments with his mother and steroid-pumping siblings ("Mad Dog," consumed with self-loathing that he hasn't achieved pro wrestling stardom; and "Smelly," a football coach who tells his students they don't need steroids, but makes no apologies about his own use of them for weightlifting) are weaved together with disarming, no-nonsense interviews with doctors and scientists, academics and athletes, including Carl Lewis, Ben Johnson (who lost his 1988 Olympic gold medal over steroid use), and Arnold himself. Subtitled "The Side Effects of Being American," the film examines how American culture and heroes (Rocky, Rambo) ultimately brainwash adolescent males to strive towards a certain type of competitive physical perfection. Moreover, surprising, solid testimony supports the view that steroids might not be as bad as we think. **BIGGER, FASTER, STRONGER*** plumbs politics, science, and pop culture to explain what's behind that pesky asterisk.

DEAR PYONGYANG
SIFF 2006

DEAR PYONGYANG is a touching and up-close portrait of a family divided between two different worlds. As a teenager, the filmmaker's father, Mr. Yang, emigrated from South Korea to Japan. His experiences of Japanese occupation, Korea's subsequent division, and the Korean War molded him into a Marxist, dedicated to the vision of a unified, Communist Korea. In 1971, in the ultimate ideological sacrifice, and hoping to spare his three sons the severe prejudice that befalls Koreans in Japan, he sent his three sons to Pyongyang, North Korea, forever.

Thirty years later, Yonghi, his youngest child, raised in modern Japan, searches for the secrets of her past by visiting her three older brothers in North Korea. Her trips to Pyongyang offer unprecedented access to daily life in that shrouded and dreary place, and insight into the painful realities of familial separation. Her brothers lead a happy home life, but avoid hunger and illness thanks only to Mrs. Yang's generous, regular care packages.

Back in Japan, Yonghi lovingly probes her father about his radical and devastating choices, revealing a man at once rigid in his beliefs and surprisingly accommodating to change, remorseful over having sacrificed three sons to a seemingly failed society, the same one that paradoxically shaped his own identity and principles.

Unafraid to confront complexity, Yang crafts a gentle and poignant father-daughter story of geographic and spiritual diaspora, and of political and personal devotion.

ELEVEN MINUTES

SIFF 2008

Two years after fashion maven Jay McCarroll's big win on the first season of "Project Runway," filmmakers Michael Selditch and Rob Tate go backstage to chronicle the yearlong journey of "the next great American designer" preparing for his first independent show at New York's Fashion Week. Why, everyone wants to know, is it taking him so long to show his first collection? After all, he made a new dress in every episode of Project Runway! It should be easy, right? Wrong!

Documenting the design and production of a line of clothing from sketch to sales, this entertaining exposé weaves together the drama, humor, stress, and contradictions implicit in turning out high fashion on a low budget (not to mention getting friends to sew dresses, make shoes, style hair, design jewelry, deliver invitations, and provide publicity—all for free). A bitchy but resilient McCarroll pours sweat and tears into his life's passion as numerous disasters threaten his moment in the spotlight—a show lasting eleven minutes. The high stakes of proving himself contrast with the absurdity of the fashion world, challenging our notions of art and industry, innovation and conformity, fame and talent, salesmanship and success.

FLOW: FOR THE LOVE OF WATER

SIFF 2008

Water is the essence of life, sustaining every creature on the planet. But the global water supply is in crisis. More than a billion people still lack access to clean water. Water profiteering is at the center of a global healthcare emergency that kills more people than AIDS or malaria. Meanwhile, in the West, the bottled water industry pulls in billions—three times as much money than it would take to solve the world's water problem—on an unregulated product that is more contaminated than what comes out of the tap (not to mention the mountain of empty plastic bottles that poison the environment). Irena Salina's urgent and unflinching documentary focuses on the role of politics, pollution, corruption, and human rights in the often-invisible and underreported global water crisis. Interviews with community leaders, activists, experts, and water company executives in Asia, Africa, South and Central America, and the US illustrate a graphic and grim story about corporate water piracy: Developing nations sell their water to companies who get sweetheart deals to offer substandard, overpriced service, at a terrible cost to human life, especially the poor. But local activists all over the world are fighting back and winning public, non-profit ownership of their waterworks. Infuriating, insistent, and inspiring, FLOW is a wake-up call that the precarious relationship between humanity and water can no longer be ignored.

HINEINI

SLGFF 2006

Shulamit Izen knew she was a lesbian in ninth grade. As a student at a Jewish high school, her sexuality put her at odds with her school administration and, in her own eyes, with her religion. Rather than give up her Judaism, which has sustained her, Shulamit questions it (a Jewish act if ever there was one) in her quest to reconcile being Jewish, gay and "holy."

The head of the school is, to her surprise, unreceptive; thus begins a dramatic clash between this confident, charismatic young woman, other students (with diverse opinions) and the administration. But Shulamit's courage in coming out also creates a domino effect of change, prompting three teachers to wrestle with coming out as well.

Director Irena Fayngold was banned from filming in the school, yet Shulamit's earnestness and conviction keeps the film compelling. Using interviews with all sides of the story, the inspiring HINEINI (Hebrew for "Here I Am") chronicles a Jewish community's attempt to embrace tradition and pluralism.

HOLD ME TIGHT, LET ME GO
SIFF 2008

Writhing, hitting, and spitting their way through their blighted childhood, the four troubled but surprisingly charming boys at the heart of this unflinching, heart-wrenching film have one more chance to turn their lives around and re-enter the regular school system. The Mulberry Bush boarding school for emotionally traumatized, violent children has a staff-to-student ratio of 108 to 40, but it hardly seems enough. Virtually uncontrollable, feral anger makes the work of the skilled, dedicated, and impossibly patient teachers and counselors seem positively heroic. Trained not to raise their voices, the staff never punish the children, but rather safely restrain and console them until they regain composure. Witness to the tremendous influence that adults have—for bad and for good—on growing children, the film is a breathless ride through a frighteningly unhinged world where hope is just over the horizon. Director Kim Longinotto, one of the most acclaimed, prolific, and perceptive practitioners of cinema vérité, spent a year superbly capturing the humanity of the pupils, their families, and the teachers with her steady, unobtrusive camera. Harrowing at one moment and heartwarming the next, her combat-style cinematography combines uncompromised integrity, sensitivity, and compassion with edge-of-the-seat drama. **HOLD ME TIGHT, LET ME GO** is an intimate and unforgettable tale of the human capacity to hurt and to heal.

IN SEARCH OF KENNEDY
SIFF 2008

Forty-five years after his assassination, John F. Kennedy still inspires admiration and argument. His hold on the public imagination is strong at home and around the world: pictures of him adorn bars and homes from Boston to Berlin, and his name is invoked even today by presidential candidates of both parties. Often ranked among the best presidents although his tenure was short, his legacy borders on the mythic. Debate still rages on how the world might be different today had he lived longer, in light of the intervening years of disillusionment and failed presidencies.

Academy Award-winning director Chuck Workman takes a twenty-first-century look back at the most charismatic and controversial president of the twentieth century. Through a great amount of archival footage, this documentary explores Kennedy's supreme achievements and tragic failures, his style and charm, his precarious health, his scandalous private life, and the trauma of his premature death. Interviews with ordinary people and notable personalities (including Martin Sheen, Norman Mailer, Tom Hayden, Ted Kennedy, Clark Clifford, Garrison Keillor, and Arianna Huffington) cast light on Kennedy's enduring influence on politics and people's personal lives. The film is supplemented by dramatic readings by Alec Baldwin and Elizabeth Peña, and it features portions of a faux documentary ostensibly made at the end of Kennedy's second term in office. In this surprising political season, the bittersweet **IN SEARCH OF KENNEDY** echoes with particular relevance.

ONE NIGHT STAND UP

SLGFF 2009

From the people who brought you the LAUGHING MATTERS series (SLGFF 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008) comes the very first all-drag version of Logo's hit comedy series "One Night Stand Up." Filmed live just a month ago in Santa Monica and emceed by the amazing gender-bending Ongina ("RuPaul's Drag Race"), this flaming show showcases three fabulous, fierce, and funny performers. Drag superstar Jackie Beat has been entertaining audiences across the country and on Comedy Central, VH-1, and MTV for over 10 years with her razor-sharp comedy and hysterical song parodies. Miss Coco Peru has created and starred in award-winning one-person shows for nearly two decades; on screen she's been in TO WONG FOO and TRICK, and on TV's "Will and Grace," "Arrested Development," and her own Logo comedy special. Varla Jean Merman (Mary Sunshine in the Broadway revival of "Chicago") has filled concert halls and cabarets around the world; you may have also seen her on Logo and "Project Runway." Three stellar entertainers, one stage, one night only, one spectacular show (and maybe some behind-the-scenes dressing-room peeks, too)!

THE SECRETS

SLGFF 2008

Naomi (Ania Bokstien), the gifted, pious daughter of a prominent rabbi, faces a crossroads when her mother dies and she is expected to immediately marry her father's prodigy, for whom she has no attraction. Distressed yet determined, she convinces her father to postpone her marriage for a year so she might study at a women's religious school in Safed, the ancient center of mystical Judaism, in order to prepare herself for the sacrifices she will make as a wife.

Naomi befriends Michelle (Michelle Shtamler), an appealing, free-spirited, and equally headstrong fellow student. When the pair encounters a mysterious, ailing foreigner, Anouk (the iconic French actress Fanny Ardant), who may or may not be Jewish, and may have committed a crime of passion, they secretly lead Anouk through a series of kabbalistic cleansing rituals in the hopes of easing her suffering. This risky journey into forbidden realms leads to a growing attraction between the two girls and opens up overwhelming new horizons—the desire to be true to themselves, no matter the cost.

Refusing to settle for easy answers, director Avi Nesher elicits nuanced performances while exploring religion, youth, rebellion, and desire.

THE SENSEI

SLGFF 2008

Martial artist and veteran stunt performer Diana Lee Inosanto (daughter of martial arts legend Dan Inosanto and goddaughter to Bruce Lee) delivers a swift kick to prejudice and stereotypes in THE SENSEI, her powerful debut as director and writer. Inspired by Matthew Shepard and Inosanto's family and friends (and featuring Seattle actor Bryan Frank), this personal story resonates with today's headlines.

Gay teen McClain Evans (Michael O'Laskey), lonely and ostracized in his conservative Colorado town during the AIDS panic of the mid-1980s, is constantly harassed and bullied. Even the local martial arts dojo refuses to accept him as a student. After a brutal attack lands McClain in the hospital, Karen, the black-sheep daughter of the Filipino-Japanese family that runs the dojo (played by Inosanto herself), secretly teaches him how to defend himself, sparking an intimate

friendship that changes many lives. Family secrets are laid bare, punctuated by fast-paced martial arts sequences and dramatic flashbacks into Karen and McClain's pasts. In the best tradition of martial arts movies, the town's AIDS hysteria, religious intolerance, racism, and homophobia come face to face with fairness, leadership, honor, and family values.

"A film that will change hearts and minds and save lives." —Education Director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation

THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY
SIFF 2008

On February 12, 2005, Sister Dorothy Stang, a 73-year-old Catholic nun and environmental and social activist—known as “the angel of the Amazon”—was shot dead in cold blood in the Brazilian rainforest in which she had lived and worked for over 30 years. The motive: a dispute over ten square miles, part of a sustainable development project that allowed poor farmers to make a living while reducing overall deforestation. A shadowy network of ranchers who had been trying to intimidate Sister Dorothy are arrested, but they are well-connected in a corrupt political system where "justice" is often for sale. A mix of exuberant, impassioned speeches, naked perjury, and bureaucratic chaos, the trials are riveting, growing more outlandish as the prosecutors move higher up the chain (the defense team even attempts to portray Sister Dorothy as a rabble-rousing radical and a murderous agent of the US government, sent to Brazil to arm peasants with high-caliber weapons). Narrated by Martin Sheen and winner of both the grand jury and audience favorite documentary feature awards at this year's SXSM film festival, this powerful documentary uses interviews with those who knew her best, unprecedented access to the defendants and the defense team, and archival footage of Sister Dorothy herself to illustrate this profile in courage, determined to preserve the forest and help the poor, even at the cost of her own martyrdom.

TIME TO DIE
SIFF 2008

Living in a villa of faded grandeur in Warsaw, refined, independent-minded Aniela (91-year-old Danuta Szaflarska) and her faithful, clever canine companion Phila find themselves sandwiched between a rundown music club for children and a nouveau-riche couple in a McMansion who are in cahoots with Aniela's cold-hearted son to acquire her property. But from the first, it's apparent that feisty, spry Aniela is no pushover. Spying on her neighbors reveals their true intentions, so she is always ahead of the game. Although she is clear-minded about the future, memories of the past often intrude: Aniela remembers herself as a beautiful young woman dancing with her handsome husband and conjures images of her young son as a soft-faced lad with tender eyes. These reveries of impressionistic visual poetry are shot through the uneven glazing of the many glass windows in the house, blurring and distorting the images like the edges of a cloud. The film was created as a showcase for the extraordinarily accomplished Szaflarska, who gives life to its strong center in a remarkable performance of intelligence, grace, and beauty. Shot in luminous black-and-white with baroquely detailed camerawork, this charming and wise film also features Poland's best-trained, most photogenic dog.

TRU LOVED
SLGFF 2008

Sixteen-year-old Tru (Najarra Townsend) hates, hates, hates being uprooted by her lesbian mothers from diverse San Francisco to conservative Southern California. Surrounded at her new

high school by homophobic football players and Paris Hilton wannabes, she wins the attention of the star quarterback Lo (Matthew Thompson), but soon realizes that her new “boyfriend” has a secret. Fed up by homophobia at school and her reluctant “gentleman’s agreement” with Lo, Tru forms a Gay-Straight Alliance, causing a big stir, but also connecting her with handsome Trevor ([Jake Abel](#)), an open-minded hetero who is being raised by his gay uncle ([Bruce Vilanch](#)).

Strong performances from standout Townsend and an ensemble cast that includes Alec Mapa, Jasmine Guy, and Nichelle Nichols (and cameos by Jane Lynch, Marcia Wallace, and Dave Kopay, the first openly gay professional athlete) blend laughter and some humorous fantasies while addressing the serious challenges that still face many teens: school-sanctioned homophobia, small-town small-mindedness, coming out, gay marriage and parenting, and interracial dating. Writer-director Stewart Wade ("Coffee Date") stays positive, not preachy, moving, not moralizing with a winningly genuine film for audiences gay or straight, teen or adult.

VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR SLGFF 2009

VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR is an intimate, engaging, and very funny fly-on-the-wall exploration of the colorful and dramatic closing act of legendary fashion designer Valentino Garavani, whose opulent, royal ideal of feminine beauty has been largely untouched by trends. As he and his longtime business partner and companion, Giancarlo Giammetti, confront the end of 45 years at the top of the world's most glamorous and competitive game, we get a behind-the-scenes look at the world of fashion, featuring unprecedented access to the high temples of haute couture and Valentino’s famously imperial lifestyle. Documenting two years of work, shows, and decisions, the film shows us the creation from sketch to runway, and takes us to a three-day retrospective of Valentino's career. We're in Paris, Rome, and Venice: he's always in pursuit of beauty. Accepting the French Legion of Honor medal, he brings the audience to tears. Reporters ask when he'll retire: Is this his career's finale? The struggle of art against commerce is central to the film, however this story is ultimately not one about money or expensive clothes, but about love.