Cuisinart for Art’s Sake

February 1, 1996 By Erik Meers

Lucy Winer was telling an HIV positive friend recently about *Positive: Life with HIV*, the television series she co-produced. “He said, ’Is it up-beat?’ Because I won’t watch it if it’s not!” Fortunately for both, *Positive*, a series of four one-hour shows that is airing on 36 PBS stations this winter (check local listings), is positive. But don’t expect the usual public television drone. *Positive* mixes documentary segments in with music, dance and satire that meditate on the experience of people with AIDS. “We all know that there is a very high potential for people to die, but we wanted to show the reality of how people are living with the disease,” says Calogero Salvo, a series coproducer. “It’s happening more and more.”

The series, conceived two years ago by Janet Cole for the Independent Television Service, uses a variety of art forms to examine the vast sweep of AIDS. Including dance performances by David Rousseve and his company Reality and animated snippets from David Feinberg’s book *Queer and Loathing*, the shows span an emotional range from rage to hilarity. (A couple of examples from Feinberg’s book go a long way to explain why the series didn’t get picked up by cowardly PBS nationally. Included in Feinberg’s 100 ways to spend free time: “#62 Lynch Jesse Helms” and “#99 Cuisinart Jesse Helms”).

The diversity of art forms is mirrored in the variety of people presented in the documentary sections. The shows take viewers from the backstreets of Harlem to the suburbs of Kansas City displaying the very different faces of people living with HIV today. “The series looks at the issue from the inside the epidemic. As many different experiences are reflected back to the audience as possible,” says Winer. “If you watch the show, there’s going to be someone who you can identify with.” The producers contacted AIDS service organizations around the country and traveled to remote locations to capture intimate portraits of PWAs. Salvo, a Venezuela native whose previous credits include working with Antonio Banderas in the movie *Terra Nova*, initially worried about getting people in Middle America to open up about the disease. “I thought we would have problems, but we didn’t. People really wanted to participate and give you anything they could,” Salvo says. “There’s this amazing connection now that’s going on through positive America.”

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