Mighty Reels

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A vibrant, new cultural intersection made the map from November 30 to December 2, when the first San Francisco Black Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Film Festival unspooled 32 films, with a special double bill to commemorate World AIDS Day.

In the bleak documentary *Shouting Silent* (2001; 60 min.), South African filmmaker Xoliswa Sithole films young girls who, like herself, have lost their mothers to AIDS. One 17-year-old orphan, Ntombi, worn down caring for eight siblings as well as her own 4-year-old, says, “Maybe I have the germ. It’s too late to use condoms.” Somewhat unpolished and lacking a strong narrative voice, the documentary shares only fragments of subjects’ stories.

In slick contrast, Michael Joyner’s *The Naked Truth* (2000; 60 min.) weaves interviews with six African-American men -- gay, straight and bisexual -- who candidly discuss the conflicting sexual messages they confront daily. The film casts a skeptical yet provocative eye on the lascivious imagery of hip-hop and doesn’t shy away from addressing “rawdogging” (sex without condoms). Singer/actor Tyrese coolly advises, “Upgrade to your size if the condom’s popping.” Oh, and by the way, he says, “I use Magnums.”

The festival also offered a 10-minute sample of Tim Smyth’s documentary-in-progress, *Sylvester: Mighty Real*, a look at the life of the late disco icon and longtime San Franciscan. The teaser, which boded well for the finished film, is characteristic of the diversity and energy of the festival, which will return in 2002.

-- Bill Hayes is the author of Sleep Demons: An Insomniac’s Memoir *(Washington Square Press) out in paperback this month.*

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