POZ Picks

Pick of the Litter

June 1, 1998 By Staff

Reality
Edited by Bill Barnes
Hi-Fy Press

Reality hits like a ton of bricks. This bimonthly national zine created by and for the under-26, HIV positive crowd is required reading for anyone who cares about the future of the epidemic. Twenty-year-old Bill Barnes presents not only razor-sharp articles by fellow young writers but also the latest lists of fun facts and resources. Slicker than most zines and sexier than most newsletters, *Reality* is simply the most exciting thing I've seen all year. Call 415.487.5777 for a copy—and quit whining about where the new generation of AIDS activists is. --Kevin O'Leary

BOOKS

Coachella
Sheila Ortiz Taylor
University of New Mexico Press

To get a fix on Sheila Ortiz Taylor's gift for fiction, take the magical realism of Marquez, add the soap opera quality of Armistead Maupin and dialogue so real, you'll swear Ortiz Taylor's a literary Linda Tripp.
Set in the Coachella Valley of Palm Springs, California in 1983, the novel explores the relations among those affected in the epidemic's early days. These valley people literally live on fault lines that—like AIDS—cross racial and sexual boundaries. In a less talented author's hands, such a large cast of diverse characters might be too daunting, but Ortiz Taylor's up to the challenge. The people she conjures are terrifically specific—each with his or her own distinct voice and motivation.

To ensure that her characters stay with you past the shattering conclusion, Ortiz Taylor allows you to glimpse the richness of their inner lives, a view rarely afforded in real life. Lose your tired self in this excellent novel, and you'll finish reinvigorated and wishing more writers of her caliber devoted themselves to recording the history of AIDS. --KO

Acts of Intervention
Performance,
Gay Culture and AIDS
David Román
Indiana University Press

Half history of theater, half chronicle of a community, this study examines the ways in which gay men have used the performing arts to make sense of the epidemic. A veteran activist who teaches English at the University of Southern California, Román shows how the ingredients of live performance in such rituals as fundraisers, street demos and memorial services transported a community's rage and grief right onto the legitimate stages of Broadway, Off-Broadway and performance art.

The book's sweeping, if selective, theatrical evaluation is as likely to include the grass-roots monologues of Michael Kearns and Ron Athey (*POZ*, December 1997) as it is the slick commercial offerings of Paul Rudnick and Terrence McNally. *Angels in America,* of course, gets its own chapter, as does *Rent*. But most refreshing are the sections that explore issues of race: The Pomo Afro Homos and Luis Alfaro's take on HIV get a long-overdue appraisal.

Acts of Intervention is academic literature, to be sure. But Román's clear passion for the work makes one thing certain: The role theater has played in educating, expressing and evaluating our experience of the epidemic has been one of our most vital and inventive sources of survival. -- David Drake

MUSIC

Until It's Over
Positive Voices
Sources of Hope Publishing

Positive Voices, the acclaimed all-HIV-positive chorus based in Dallas, Texas, recently took its choir robes back out of the closet for *Until It's Over*, its second CD outing. "This recording is a statement by the group that we are committed to holding out encouragement for everyone, infected or affected, until AIDS is over and hope has won," says Jackson Myars, the group's founder and director. Though it's hard to deny that sometimes the music takes a back seat to vocal sincerity, such tracks as the gospel-tinged "Celebrate" and jazzy, saxophone-infused "Mighty Love" prove that a little ingenuity goes a long way. And keep in mind that proceeds from the sale of *Until It's Over* go to people with the virus—so who knows, maybe you'll end up getting your money back. -- Robert Arthur Altman

MOVIES

The Sweet Hereafter

Atom Egoyan
Fine Line Features

This beautiful movie was all the rage on the indie scene this past winter, though you may have missed it while on line for *Titanic*. But the Academy didn't. Rent it tonight and see why Atom Egoyan's cool direction and nuanced screenwriting garnered him Oscar nods this past spring.

When its children are all lost in a horrific school bus accident, a small town is left stunned. The grief-into-anger cycle kicks into high gear when a lawyer with troubles of his own (Ian Holm) comes knocking on doors, scaring up dust and talk of retribution. His path crosses that of one young survivor, Nicole (brilliantly played by Sara Polley), who was given a new clarity by the crash.

More than any other character, it is Nicole who conveys a sense of the edifying effects of loss. She refers to herself and the townspeople as being "citizens of a different town now, the town of the sweet hereafter." "Sweet" because the experience has afforded them a second sight into their lives and the world around them. Now they know, as many HIV positive people may, that "whether others defend us, protect us, love us or hate us, they do it to meet their own needs, not ours." *The Sweet Hereafter* will resonate deeply for anyone who feels that AIDS has made them exceptional—that is, separate but special. --KO

Chocolate Babies
Stephen Winter
Frameline Films

"We are black faggots with a political agenda. We are your worst nightmare." This is the battle cry of *Chocolate Babies*, an independent feature about a fictional, not-so-merry band of activists of color who take on the New York City establishment. Their guerrilla tactics are aimed mainly at those who they believe keep secret lists of the names of the city's HIV positive. With snippets of TV soundbites describing their "reign of terror," director Stephen Winter takes a shot at the media's use of scare tactics to juice up the evening news.

Dudley Findlay Jr. turns in a standout performance as the unforgettable Larva, while the rest of the cast seems weighed down by the material. There are plenty of diva turns and hand-wringing about needle exchange, but righteous shouting by the actors too often substitutes for true emotion. The players are at their best when teasing one another or sharing a quiet mo-ment. It's those moments, when they're fleshed out as people rather than cookie-cutter sloganeers, that make *Chocolate Babies* worth a look. --KO

CYBER POZ

Heavenly Bodies

This Web is a virtual buffet of opportunities for info; you can have something filling and nutritious or you can nibble on a little eye candy.

The BODY is like the brainiac in class who raises a hand every time the teacher asks a question. Updated daily, this body of work covers everything from specifics about medications to financial issues, all in a clear manner that anticipates your needs and concerns. And just in case you have a question that needs personal attention, you can leave messages for some of the nation's foremost AIDS experts. Best of all, you can access issues of *POZ* through the BODY. Join our online cramming session at www.thebody.com.

When you're done with that educational feast, you've got to do the DISHES (Determined Involved Supermodels Helping to End Suffering). Stop laughing-- they're worried about the children, honey. At presstime the home page boasts a glamour shot of *POZ* August 1996 cover girl Raven Lopez modeling one of the DISHES benefit t-shirts. The smile on this 6-year-old does more to melt your cynical heart than the gushing letter from Bill and Hillary about the important work supermodels are doing in the fight against AIDS. Check out their summer-season makeover-- one way or another, it will make you smile. www.dishes.org --KO

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