

INDIECOLLECT



Two Exciting IndieCollect Restorations at PIONEERS OF QUEER CINEMA

A COMEDY IN SIX UNNATURAL ACTS by Jan Oxenberg
March 14, 7:30pm
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BLACKSTAR: Autobiography of a Close Friend by Tom Joslin
March 20, 7:00pm
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Billy Wilder Theater, Hammer Museum
10899 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90024



Pioneers of Queer Cinema continues this month with screenings of two fabulous IndieCollect restorations.

A COMEDY IN SIX UNNATURAL ACTS (1957)
March 14, 7:30pm
In-person introduction by Jan Oxenberg
Screening with *The Watermelon Woman* (dir. Cheryl Dunye, 1996)

Jan Oxenberg writes:

"A COMEDY IN SIX UNNATURAL ACTS was my second film. Each vignette was filmed in the style of a different kind of Hollywood movie – the primary purveyor of stereotypical images at that time. It was fun to experiment with genre styles – the gauzy romanticized close-ups of the 40's melodrama; the jerky rhythms of the silent films, the special effects spectacle (we made the ocean split), the teen rebel movie, and a Busby Berkeley dance number in and around a steaming jacuzzi. It was the heady days of liberation. I had just come out as a lesbian feminist; changing the world was our agenda."

"But I didn't want to beg for acceptance. I made an in-your-face satire of the images that had caused me and generations of LGBT people shame. It is also a celebration. We get to define ourselves and we're not afraid to do so. This is entertainment for us, though the wide world is invited."



Casting Highlights

Jan Oxenberg cast herself in the film, showing off her juggling skills. "I cast the roles from among friends. Paul Reubens, who became very famous as the beloved Pee Wee Herman, has a cameo. It was his screen debut."

Attempts to Suppress the Film Failed

"A COMEDY was shown all over the world, at festivals and colleges and women's centers, in classrooms and living rooms. It was part of a cultural moment in which lesbian, gay, dyke, queer women were creating community and demanding freedom to live openly."

"The film was even going to be broadcast on television as part of Independent Focus, on the nation's premiere public television station, WNET — a big deal for a queer film. Then, suddenly, they couldn't program the movie after all. Something about "the lighting," they said. It was apparent to a group of angry and militant activists that the problem with the lighting was that it lit up a bunch of lesbian characters. We protested! We picketed! And, we won! WNET reversed course and showed the film after all."

"I want to thank IndieCollect, UCLA and the Pioneers of Queer Cinema who opened up the possibilities of freedom and documented our lives."

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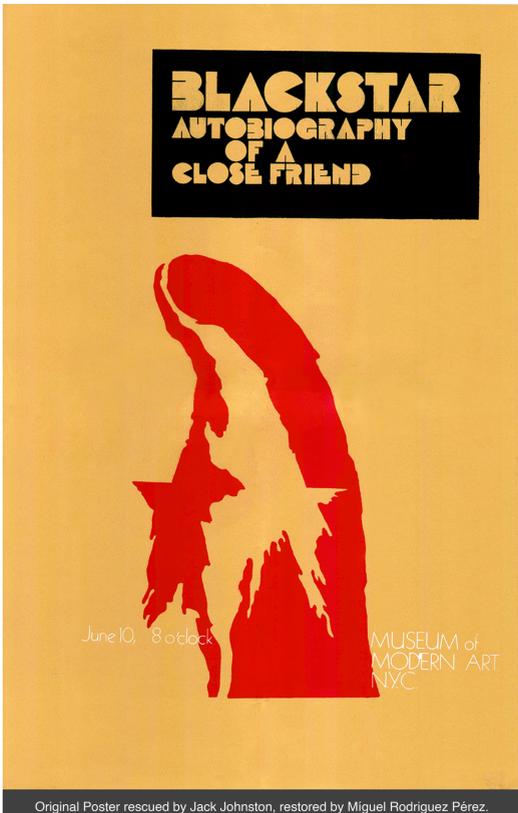
BLACKSTAR: Autobiography of a Close Friend (1977)
March 20, 7:00pm
Opening remarks by Sandra Schulberg
Screening alongside *Choosing Children* (dir. Debra Chasnoff & Kim Klausner, 1985)

Peter Friedman writes:

"In a single screening, Tom Joslin's film BLACKSTAR radically changed my life in two critical ways. In 1976, at the age of 18, I left deepest darkest suburban New Jersey, for Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. Hampshire was, and still is, a progressive "alternative" liberal arts college. I was deeply closeted, even to myself. I did not even know out gay people existed. I had grown up internalizing all of society's homophobic beliefs of the time. I had grown up in fear, shame, and self-hatred. I desperately tried to make myself straight for years, without success, and considered suicide. I just saw no way forward, until I saw BLACKSTAR."

"One day in Tom's film class, he invited us to a screening of his new film that evening in the main auditorium. He did not say what the film was about. The room was packed. For the first time in my life I was seeing gay-positive imagery and discussion, and on the big screen, featuring my professor! The screening ended with a standing ovation, and my life would never be the same."

"BLACKSTAR showed me that there was a way forward after all: that gay people could be out, accepted, in love, and lead happy, productive lives. But the film also showed me that being an artist involved a constant dialogue between one's inner life and one's daily work. My inner life back then included a GREAT deal of torment, which my science classes weren't addressing. So not only did that BLACKSTAR screening start me on the path to self-acceptance as a gay man, it also led me to choose a career in filmmaking."



Original Poster rescued by Jack Johnston, restored by Miguel Rodríguez Pérez.

"BLACKSTAR is not a conventional documentary, it is also a work of mixed-genre film art. I see it as an example of how a film's impact is maximized not just by politics but by artistry and craftsmanship. Tom was not only deeply involved in the gay movement but he also had an expansive view of film as art. He had deep respect for Jonas Mekas' diaries but also for a vast spectrum of filmmakers from the American Avant-Garde to Hitchcock to Fellini and many in between."

"In 1980 Tom & Mark moved to LA so Tom could pursue his dream of a Hollywood directing career. Despite a decade of tenacious labor in Hollywood, he was not successful. Instead both Tom and Mark got infected with HIV, years before effective medications existed. Tom, knowing that HIV had ended his dreams of becoming a Hollywood director, returned to his autobiographical/experimental roots, this time by making a camcorder video diary about their daily lives with AIDS. He called the film SILVERLAKE LIFE: THE VIEW FROM HERE, but he did not live to complete it. Tom died of AIDS in 1990, and Mark died a year later. I completed SILVERLAKE LIFE in 1993. In retrospect, I see SILVERLAKE LIFE as a sequel to BLACKSTAR."



Peter Friedman, co-director of Tom Joslin's last film, *Silverlake Life*, in Gerry Herman's Paris CineCave, Feb 13, 2022. (Photo by Sandra Schulberg)

"I toured extensively with SILVERLAKE LIFE, but the most emotional moment for me was when I showed it at Hampshire College, in the very same auditorium where I'd seen BLACKSTAR fifteen years earlier. Once again the room was packed, because the film had already had a high-profile release and also because Tom, though long gone, was still a Hampshire legend. He had changed the lives of many people, by his example, by taking personal and artistic risks."

"BLACKSTAR was, among other things, an unusually frank portrayal of what gay life was (and could be) in the late '70's, but unlike SILVERLAKE LIFE, it has not been widely shown — until now. Thanks to Indiecollect, the UCLA Archive, Bob Hawk and the Andy Warhol Foundation, this restored 4K version can give the film the exposure and recognition it deserves, so it takes its proper place in independent and queer film history."

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We hope to see you there!
Sandra Schulberg & The IndieCollect Team



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