

# Movie waffles in taking stance on AIDS



Courtesy of Tri-Star Pictures  
Tom Hanks plays Andrew Beckett, an up-and-coming young lawyer who has just been fired, in "Philadelphia."

Director accurately portrays prejudices homosexuals face



"Philadelphia"



In his effort to make everyone happy, director Jonathan Demme misses the mark in making "Philadelphia" the first mainstream AIDS picture.

Tom Hanks is Andrew Beckett, a young hotshot corporate lawyer. When he is fired from his Philadelphia firm, he moves to file an anti-discrimination suit. Beckett believes he was fired because his firm found out he was gay and afflicted with AIDS.

But Beckett can't find a lawyer in Philadelphia who believes him or wants to represent him — another example of discrimination against gays.

Then he goes to Joe Miller (Denzel Washington), a TV-advertising, ambulance-chasing, macho lawyer.

Miller also refuses the case, initially. He's a man's man — none of those "fairy queens" for him. But his homophobia gives way to his belief in justice — the belief that regardless of Beckett's sexual orientation,

he deserves equal and fair treatment under the law.

Of course, in movieland the law takes a few unbelievable turns. "Philadelphia" contains countless courtroom scenes that are merely moments for opposing viewpoints on homosexuality to be shared. A great deal of grandstanding goes on, none of which addresses the most important issue at hand: Beckett's right to the same respect and treatment granted all others.

Washington is terrific, as always. He has tremendous screen presence, even when he is espousing the typical, narrow, homophobic American attitude.

Hanks has some truly compelling moments. But one of the problems with the movie is that he is not allowed to be anything more than a composite sketch of a gay man in contemporary society.

The audience is not allowed to care about who Beckett is. Instead, Demme skirts the issue and attempts to coerce the audience into caring about Beckett simply because he is dying of AIDS. He doesn't ask the audience to care about Beckett because he is a human being who has been wronged.

Demme, to his credit, truly gives an accurate picture of the prejudices homosexuals face today. But he waffles in taking a stand. That waffling makes "Philadelphia" little more than a hodgepodge of social commentary.

However, Demme deserves recognition for tackling such a controversial and emotional topic as AIDS. What hinders him most is his desire to placate all aspects of society — a presupposition that makes taking a true stand nearly impossible.

— Anne Steyer

# Unique Omaha Magic Theater not for couch potatoes

Role of TV examined

theater  
review



Combine a Kurt Vonnegut novel, Andy Warhol painting, and a long subliminal dream from Sigmund Freud, and you'd have this powerfully bizarre dramatic experience called the Magic Theatre.

This weekend's performance of "Belches on Couches," at the Omaha Magic Theatre on 325 S. 16th St., attacked me from all angles of the stage as I started to feel my mind imploding.

"Belches on Couches," written and performed by Jo Ann Schmidman, Megan Terry,

and Sora Kimberlain, was a surrealistic look at society's relationship to the television.

It examines the myths behind America's deep-fat fried couch potato. Is television the proverbial social killer it's made out to be or is it actually an example of "reflective thinking?"

Schmidman said television allowed us to safely travel to areas of the world without placing ourselves in danger. Television helps us keep track of what is happening in our society, she said.

She said we couldn't blame television for creating an evil society we created ourselves. Art imitates life.

If "Belches on Couches" was an imitation of life, I still have some hope for creativity and ingenuity in our society. I could have run screaming from the theater shouting, "My God, that was incredible! There is a theater beyond dead poets and lost lovers stranded in Siberia!"

The box theater was set up so the two sides of the audience faced each other across the

"stage." The stage was actually the floor covered with shredded video tape, which I shrewdly interpreted as TV static. There were no conventional props, unless you'd count the three antique vacuum cleaners and toasters.

A large television screen was affixed to the wall, and anything from CNN footage to lost episodes from "Lassie" and some weird psychedelic patterns were broadcast on the screen.

The dialogue incorporated everything from Waco, cockroaches, Watergate, General Hospital, Jeffrey Dahmer, Quantum Physics, Biker Mice from Mars, Madonna and anything else you'd see on the idiot box. Even Barney the demigod was in there.

The actors were working as a unit but remained individuals. This paradox made the production incredibly four-dimensional. It's wild. It's spontaneous. It's funny. It's better than television itself!

When the Magic Theatre was founded in 1968, (appropriate time, I believe) avant-garde

theater was infiltrating the nation.

Twenty-five years later, after political correctness set in, there were only 100 avant-garde theaters left in America. Unfortunately, as the number of theaters decreased, so did their funding. The OMT, which receives most of its funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, is in need of additional support.

It's a dying species that needs to be revived because it is so incredibly different and thought-provoking at the same time. "Belches on Couches" wasn't entertainment; it was an experience.

If you're a die-hard Shakespeare fan, please don't go to the Magic Theatre because I think you might die or something. But, if you're a dangerously normal human being, a little magic can go a long way.

"Belches on Couches" will be performed again on Jan. 21 & 22 beginning at 7:30 p.m. Admission is \$12 for the general public and \$7 for senior citizens and students.

—Paula Lavigne

# Shatner's 'Tek' series still fast-paced, good alternative until TV version ready



William Shatner  
"Tek Vengeance"  
Ace Science Fiction

William Shatner's "Tek" series comes to television later this month, and while waiting with baited breath for its debut, you might want to check out the books.

Between taping episodes of "Rescue 911," Shatner is keeping his hand in the SF business by penning books described as "fast-paced action." The

fourth entry into the series, "Tek Vengeance," is no exception.

Jake Cardigan, the series' protagonist, is a private detective and ex-cop framed for murder and then exonerated. His wife left him after his incarceration and became involved with a leading dealer of Tek, a powerful hallucinogenic combination of drug and computer chip. Cardigan took up with the daughter of the murdered scientist working on a cure for Tek.

"Tek Vengeance" opens with Cardigan seeking out the daughter of a dead friend who had become a Tek addict and was near death. She tells him, via videotape, that her father is still alive. The scheme turns out to be a ruse, as Cardigan and his partner are lured down to Central America. There, Cardigan's girlfriend is murdered by the unacknowledged son of the Tek

lord Cardigan killed. Showing a remarkable lack of emotion over the whole affair, Cardigan tracks down the killer.

Convuluted and soapish, with someone pulling out a laser gun and blasting away every few pages, "Tek Vengeance" is indeed fast-paced, but it lacks depth. Character development is practically nonexistent, and much of the dialogue consists of negotiations with seedy characters over the price of information.

"Tek Vengeance," like the first three books, reads almost like a parody of all those old '40s detective movies, with a little "Miami Vice" thrown in. Lots of gratuitous violence, little depth — it should translate fabulously to television.

—Sam Keplefeld



James Mehling/DN