Revolutionary Gays

by Michael Lassell

It was the brick New England autumn of 1969, just months after the Stonewall Riots changed the meaning of being gay in America. It was a man named Marsha Johnson who led the charge for gay rights in New York City. The Stonewall Riots were a turning point in the battle for gay rights, and they captured the imagination of the world.

But the fight for gay rights was not just about Stonewall. It was about the struggle for equality and justice. It was about the struggle for love and acceptance. It was about the struggle for a world where all people could live free from discrimination and hate.

The story of Stonewall is a story of courage and determination. It is a story of people who stood up for what they believed in, even when the odds were against them. It is a story of people who refused to be defeated by oppression and discrimination.

The legacy of Stonewall lives on today. It is a legacy of hope and inspiration. It is a legacy of fighting for what is right. It is a legacy that will continue to inspire us all to stand up for what we believe in, and to fight for a world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.
The Times of Harvey Milk

If you are looking for the American film about homophobia has been Won L.A.'s, a documentary by six filmmakers that took their lives in the lives of 26 gay men and lesbians who had "come out." One of those filmmakers, Robert Epstein, has now directed what is probably the best film in any genre ever made about an individual gay person, The Times of Harvey Milk. Harvey Milk was killed in 1977 in San Francisco Board of Supervisors, making him the first openly gay elected official in California. He held his post for 11 months before his assassination. The Times of Harvey Milk does what is not usually done in the history of gay films. It tells the truth. It begins movingly, tragically, with Diane Fenster's Voice of the film that San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk have been shot and killed. Their murderer was Dan White, who, until days before, an extremely conservative member of the Board of Supervisors. The night of the murder, 45,000 people stood in a circle around a candlelight vigil in front of City Hall in honor of the Mayor who signed the city's Gay Rights ordinance and the camera-store owner who wore it. Harvey Milk was not just a Jewish kid from Long Island who made good, he was a symbol of the growing respect with which gay men and women treated themselves and each other, and were beginning to demand from non-gays as well.

Harvey didn’t apologize. Harvey didn’t beg. He lived, he laughed a lot. He told bad jokes and worked his boss off for anyone who needed help. Epstein has taken an essentially chronological approach to Milk’s life, tracing his early days in New York (first as a stockbroker, then as an avant-garde theatrical producer), his relocation to San Francisco where he became one of the first gay men on Castro Street, and his three unsuccessful bids for public office from 1973 to 1977. Epstein manages a great deal of tricky political exposition in a deft, concise narrative, by an unusually adable Harvey Fenster. By intercutting footage with interviews of only eight people (culled from 75 pre-interviews), Epstein makes his points economically. Focusing on people who knew Harvey professionally as well as personally, the director simultaneously presents both the depth of Milk’s public life and the close friendship that he had with several of those interviewed. In one of the more revealing scenes, an elderly man talks about his love affair with Harvey. The interviews and the narration also tell of Harvey’s reputation as a grass-roots organizer, a reputation insufficiently known outside of San Francisco. What is not just "kill a queer for Anita Bryant?" he pumped two bullets into his own head. Even in the Castro, Milk could not be elected without support from the old-timers who lived there even before the influx of gays. In city hall, he formed alliances not with the rich developers who were treating the neighborhoods like fields of Donor & Bradstreet, but with other disinterested minority representatives. His first day on the job he opposed the election of Feinstein as president of the board because he thought hers too identified with the past. Henry Dreyfus, executive director of the Center for Affirmative Action, was surprised by Milk’s apparently deep convictions that all minority people must work together to win common goals and that inter-racial prejudices and bigotry among blacks, Latinos, Asians and gays would have to be dropped in order to establish social justice. Dreyfus says that Harvey didn’t have to ask what kind of voting machine would be best for the Asian community in San Francisco. Harvey knew. Machinist and union officer Jim Elliot, who thought of gays as "queers and fags," came to Harvey so much that Jim Elliot’s unique endorsed Harvey Milk for supervisor. Gay or not, Harvey Milk was a man of the people.