



Word Is Out, 1977

# Preservation NATION

THE LEGACY  
PROJECT SAVES  
ENDANGERED  
LGBT FILMS



KIRSTEN  
SCHAFER

**W**riter/director Bill Sherwood's 1986 film *Parting Glances*, a slice of gay life during the scariest years of the AIDS epidemic, has been a cultural touchstone for an entire generation. But if not for the efforts of Los Angeles' Outfest film festival and its Legacy Project, the film would soon itself have been history.

Outfest was founded in 1982 by a group of UCLA students to increase the visibility of gay and lesbian characters on the big screen; this year, Outfest celebrates its 30th anniversary with a festival unfurling from July 12 to 22. (Tickets at [outfest.org](http://outfest.org).)

Now, along with exhibiting films with gay appeal, the preeminent annual fest has turned its attention toward preserving them as well. Big movie studios, explains Outfest executive director Kirsten Schaffer, tend to take good care of their libraries of blockbusters, storing them in temperature- and humidity-controlled nitrate vaults to

The Legacy Project restored *Queens at Heart* to new condition, below.



## SECOND CHANCES

So far, the Legacy Project has rescued hours of film, including:

### **Word Is Out** ➡➡

(1978; restored 2008)

For this documentary about the diversity of gay life in America, filmmakers Nancy Adair, Andrew Brown and Rob Epstein compiled footage from 26 interviewees of all ages, races and geographic backgrounds.



prevent the crumbling of their celluloid and warping of their soundtracks. But independent films—often the ones featuring gay characters—tend not to get the same TLC.

“We hear stories from independent filmmakers that just kill me,” Schaffer says. “Many can’t afford to keep their film elements at the lab, and so they’re in their garage, or under the bed.” And while three institutions—the Library of Congress, the Academy of Motion Pictures and UCLA—all try to protect cinematic works, “they don’t have the capacity to take care of all the independents.” Before the Legacy Project, she says, “nobody was focusing on LGBT films.”

The Legacy Project got its somewhat inadvertent start 10 years ago, at the 20th Outfest. The festival screened the only available prints of both the documentary *Word Is Out* and *Parting Glances*. The latter, Schaffer remembers, “was pink and tattered. It was heartbreaking.” As Outfest’s executives looked deeper into the deterioration of LGBT films, “we realized the problem was a thousand times bigger than we had ever imagined.”

Now, courtesy of corporate sponsors such as CBS Corporation’s Showtime Networks, the Legacy Project has amassed a collection of 18,000 films—“Our goal,” Schaffer says, “is to have every gay movie ever made”—stored in a high-tech archive on the campus of Outfest’s partner, UCLA. Many have already been restored, through painstaking research and physical repair, which can take over a year and cost more than \$100,000.

The revitalized prints have screened at festivals worldwide, and are available for viewing, along with the rest of the collection, at the UCLA archive. That’s a boon to academics, journalists and audience members—and not just gay ones. After all, Schaffer stresses, “there’s always a need for good storytelling that reflects the complexity of our lives.” — *Jim Colucci*



### ←← **Parting Glances**

(1986; restored 2007)

This feature film, about how one couple’s breakup and another friend’s affliction with AIDS affects a group of New Yorkers, co-starred future *Drew Carey Show* star

Kathy Kinney and Steve Buscemi in one of his earliest and most powerful performances.

### **Choosing Children** ➡➡

(1984; restored 2009)

From Academy Award winner Debra Chasnoff and Kim Klausner, this groundbreaking documentary provided one of the first onscreen representations of lesbian families.



### **Queens at Heart** (1965; restored 2010)

A portrait of four male-to-female transsexuals, this documentary short film was the first to depict members of the transgender community.

### **Different From the Others** (1919) ➡➡

The Legacy Project’s current endeavor, this German silent film, made to oppose the Weimar government’s antigay legislation, is the earliest surviving cinematic work made explicitly about LGBT people. Directed by Richard Oswald and co-written by famed psychologist Magnus Hirschfeld, it is the only gay-friendly film from its era that escaped systematic destruction by the Nazis. With a fundraising goal of more than \$300,000, the Legacy team plans to reconstruct the film from elements including a 40-minute fragment recently found in Ukraine.

