Cultural Daily

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LGBTQ Rights 1972-2017

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, January 18th, 2017

When We Rise is a television miniseries (ABC-Disney, February 27-March 2) chronicling the history of the LGBTQ rights movement from 1972 to the present. Partially inspired by the 2016 memoir by Cleve Jones, *When We Rise: My Life in the Movement*, it was written by Dustin Lance Black and Gus van Sant directed the 2-hour premiere episode. Not coincidentally these two openly gay filmmakers had also written and directed *Milk* (2008) with Sean Penn as Harvey Milk and Emile Hirsch as Jones.

Emily Skeggs as Roma © ABC

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The story starts in 1972, when several people pick up the *Life* magazine issue "Best Pictures of 1971" with the words 'Gay Liberation" printed on the cover. One is Ken, an African-American Navy sailor from New Jersey fighting in Vietnam; another is Cleve, a teenage boy in Phoenix Arizona, who comes out to his psychiatrist father, and is told that homosexuality is an illness that can be cured; the third is Roma, a lesbian girl from Boston, member of NOW, National Organization of Women. All three move to San Francisco, only to find out that the Summer of Love is long gone, and violent repression of gay men, drag queens and women by police is commonplace. Stonewall is mentioned as the first time that gay, lesbian and transgender people stood up to police, when they raided the Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village on June 28, 1969. An amusing episode is the Lavender Menace protest, which took place at a 1970 meeting of NOW in New York. Lesbianism was recognized by NOW as "a legitimate concern for feminism" in 1971.

When We Rise © ABC

Guy Pearce (who had played a drag queen in the Australian film *The Adventure of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, 1994) narrates as the older Jones, Mary-Louise Parker plays the older Roma, Rachel Griffith her wife Diane, Michael Kenneth Williams is the older Ken. Rosie O'Donnell plays Del Martin, Whoopi Goldberg is Pat Norman.

After the premiere screening Saturday January 14 at the Los Angeles County Museum, Lance Black said, "I would give anything in the world for this to be less topical," referring to the sad

reality that a homophobic, racist, misogynist Donald Trump would be inaugurated as President of the United States January 20.

Cleve Jones, still a gay and labor activist in San Francisco at age 62, said to *Mother Jones* magazine, “When I was young, all of us viewed the LGBT struggle as a broader struggle for peace and social justice. To be for LGBT rights required one to also be actively in opposition to war, to racism, to poverty, and to understand those connections.”

Just like the Civil Rights and the Women’s liberation movements, the LGBTQ rights movement has come a long way since the 1960s, but there’s still a long way to go to fight discrimination and reach equality.

A group of volunteers organized a Women’s March on Washington for January 21. They have the support of NOW, Code Pink, MoveOn and 100 other organizations. *Ms. Magazine* founder Gloria Steinem is honorary co-chair. The first issue of *Ms.* in 1972 featured Wonder Woman on the cover, so did the 40th anniversary issue in 2012. I was a Radical Feminist in Rome when I moved to San Francisco in 1972, so it felt that I was in the right place. You may participate in this event in Los Angeles, meet at Pershing Square at 9am, take the Metro. Included in this demonstration are “Immigrants, Muslims, LGBTQ, Native, Black and Brown people.” The march aims to “send a bold message to our new administration on their first day in office, and to the world, that women’s rights are human rights.”

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