

FILMCLIPS



QUINCEAÑERA

Named after a Latino festivity celebrating the 15th birthday of a girl, the point at which she is said to become a woman, *Quinceañera* is a quietly observed story of life in a community of Mexican-Americans in the Echo Park area of Los Angeles. The film opens with one such celebration for a girl whose parents can afford an above-average party, and we see it through the eyes of her cousin Magdalena (Emily Rios), who is dreaming of an even more ostentatious celebration of her own. Her dream says Hummer limo, but the family budget says hand-me-down-gown. The discussion seems to hit a brick wall when she is discovered to be pregnant and her god-

fearing father refuses to believe her claim that she is still a virgin. (Which she technically is.) She runs away to the house where her great-uncle lives, a ramshackle but comfortable place that is also refuge to Magdalena's cousin Carlos, who has created the even greater sin of being gay.

Quinceañera was written and directed on a short schedule and minimal budget by directed by Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, who by all indications are gay. (Westmoreland's experience has been in gay porn; the duo collaborated previously on the gay-themed drama *The Fluffer*.) They based the film on their own experiences living in a primarily Latino district of Los Angeles, and I mention their sexuality only because it forms such a large subtext of the film. The neighborhood is being gentrified, largely by gay couples who seem as interested in the roughish trade of "Latin boys" as they do in cheap real estate. It's an unflattering portrait of a milieu they can be presumed to know, although propaganda of any sort is the furthest thing from the film's mind. *Quinceañera* recalls the "kitchen sink" realism of early 1960s British dramas like *A Taste of Honey*, and the films of Ken Loach, albeit lighter in nature. It's nothing earthshaking, but offers a likeable glimpse into another way of American life.

—m. faust



HOLLYWOODLAND

On June 16, 1959, actor George Reeves, star of the hit television show *The Adventures of Superman*, was found shot to death in his Los Angeles home. The coroner's verdict was suicide, probably caused by depression due to career setbacks in an industry that saw him only as the comic book superhero. But did he really kill himself, or was he murdered?

With a case like this, even if the evidence of suicide was watertight rumors of murder would still spring up: It's just too juicy a story. Even more so when you add that Reeves had carried on a long-time affair with the wife of Eddie Mannix, MGM's vice president in charge of security. A job like Mannix's involved keeping bad news

of the studio's stars out of the papers. Mannix was rumored to have mob ties, and to have arranged the automobile death of his previous wife, but in Hollywood rumors tend to be more popular than the truth.

So as either history or biography, *Hollywoodland* doesn't have much going for it. The script gets enough minor points wrong (Reeves's role in *From Here to Eternity* was not cut out; the *Superman* show was shot in New York, not Los Angeles as the movie implies by omission) that it's hard to give much credence to its theorizing on larger points. And in the end, it seems to imply anyway that Reeves most likely killed himself if for no other reason than that the Man of Steel was no match for LA angst.

As neo-noir, *Hollywoodland* plays pretty much by the numbers, with Adrian Brody's scuzzy detective skirting perilously close to the edge of self-parody. Director Allen Coulter, whose work has primarily been for HBO series like *The Sopranos* and *Sex in the City*, gives every indication that he expected this one to debut on pay cable as well.

The one element that isn't likely to be forgotten in two weeks when Brian DePalma's adaptation of James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* opens is Ben Affleck's work as Reeves. It's not entirely complimentary to say that it's a perfect match of star and role; still, to the extent that Affleck crafted his performance rather than embodying it, it might be a signal for him that he has a brighter career in character parts than as a leading man.

—m. faust

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