

MEDIA STUDY

THE ADVENTURES
OF PRISCILLA,
QUEEN OF THE
DESERT

STEPHAN ELLIOTT, (AUSTRALIA, 1994)



TERENCE STAMP HUGO WEAVING GUY PEARCE BILL HUNTER

THE ADVENTURES OF
Priscilla
QUEEN OF THE DESERT



PLOT

- 'Tick', a professional drag queen, persuades his friends Adam - another drag queen - and transsexual Bernadette to join him on a journey across the Australian Outback from Sydney to Alice Springs in order to put on a performance. However, it soon becomes clear that Tick has another reason for making this journey...
- *Priscilla* was lauded on release for bringing "everyday" LGBT issues to the public's attention. It was one of the first "mainstream" films to exclusively feature gay lead characters.

FILM DETAILS

DIRECTOR/WRITER:

- Stephan Elliott

CAST:

- Hugo Weaving ('Tick')
- Guy Pearce (Adam)
- Terence Stamp (Bernadette)
- Bill Hunter (Bob)
- Sarah Chadwick (Marion)
- Mark Holmes (Benjamin)



FILM DETAILS

AWARDS:

- 1 Oscar (Best Costume Design)
- 2 Golden Globe nominations (Best Comedy/ Musical; Best Actor)
- 7 BAFTA nominations (2 wins)
- 9 Australian Film Institute nominations (2 wins)

MUSICAL:

- Sydney, West End, New Zealand, Broadway...



MEDIA

STUDYING THE FILM



SOCIETY

To understand the importance of "*Priscilla*" within a **society** context, you need to understand:

- the public's perceptions of homosexuality in the years before and after "*Priscilla*";
- the impact of the media's representations of homosexuality.

SOCIETY: BACKGROUND

PERCEPTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY
FROM 1980S TO THE PRESENT

PRE-1980s

- Homosexuality was illegal in the UK until 1967.
- Gay men and women lived secret lives, or completely repressed their sexuality.
- Regarded as “freaks”; shunned by society.
- Musicians first to pave the way for LGBT in the mainstream:
 - David Bowie; Freddie Mercury; Liberace
- The gay community was underrepresented in film and TV... if it was represented at all.

1980s

- The **LGBT** community became more openly active.
- Gays now featured in films, but as gross **stereotypes**; often made other characters uncomfortable.
- cf: *Police Academy* (Hugh Wilson, USA, 1984)
<http://bit.ly/blueoysterbar>
- Some "arthouse" films featured more realistic lifestyle
- *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, UK, 1985)

BLUE OYSTER BAR SCENE:
POLICE ACADEMY (Hugh Wilson, USA, 1984)



AIDS Epidemic

- First cases reported in 1981.
- Widespread public fear and ignorance.
<http://bit.ly/bullquarry>
- Public didn't really know how it was transmitted.
- Known as "Gay Cancer".
- People distinguished between good and bad AIDS.
- Was deadly in those days.

AIDS: BULL QUARRY P.I.F.* (UK, 1986)

*P.I.F.: public information film

1990s

- *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1993)
- Groundbreaking Oscar winner.
- Forced sympathetic view of gays and AIDS victims.
- Key casting of Tom Hanks.
<http://bit.ly/philadelphiatrailer>
- Made characters speak their prejudices aloud.
- Equated homophobia with racism.
- Opened floodgates; Hollywood started to address the world's homophobia.



PHILADELPHIA (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1993)
(TRAILER)



1990s

- Post-*Priscilla*, more films featuring “regular” gay characters in lead roles.
- Seen as “brave” for straight actor to take on gay role.
- *The Birdcage* (Mike Nicholls, USA, 1996)
<http://bit.ly/1KO51D6>
- *Jeffrey* (Christopher Ashley, USA, 1995)

Gay romantic comedy.

- *The Object of My Affection* (Nicholas Hytner, USA, 1998)

Gays are shown as valuable part of modern family unit.

- *Will and Grace* (TV) (USA, 1998-2006)

Single gay lifestyle; welcomed into home every week.

2000s

- Homosexuality is still illegal in 70 out of 195 countries.
- Far greater number of mainstream representations of LGBT lifestyles.
- Problems faced are more universal.
- ***Kissing Jessica Stein*** (Charles Herman-Wurmfeld, USA, 2001)
- ***Brokeback Mountain*** (Ang Lee, USA, 2005)
- Gays an accepted part of family unit, including children.
- ***Modern Family*** (2009-)
- ***The Kids are Alright*** (Lisa Cholodenko, USA, 2010)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdDSqgZ87fM>
- Previous attitudes now almost historical.
- ***Dallas Buyers Club*** (Jean-Marc Vallee, 2013)

HAVE ATTITUDES REALLY CHANGED?

Yes

- Fewer stereotypes.
- Greater number of high-profile LGBTs.
- Shows like "The New Normal" produced.
- More open dialogue about LGBT issues.

No

- Still plenty of stereotyping.
- Some actors still afraid to come out as gay (can hurt career).
- Productions exclusively about gay relationships still seen as art-house, not mainstream.
- Actors still "brave" to take on gay role.

“He’s enormously talented... best talent American Idol has had... but I think he killed his career because now the conversation is not about his talent but about his sexual preference. You’re forcing people to deal with issues they may not be interested in. Life is unfair, and the masses don’t all live in L.A. They live in Wisconsin and Nebraska, and you’re on crack if you think the same rules apply there.”

–GENE SIMMONS ON *AMERICAN IDOL* RUNNER-UP
ADAM LAMBERT COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET

PRISCILLA AND SOCIETY

- Think again about the attitudes towards homosexuality in the 90s, as well as before and after.
- In what ways does "Priscilla" reflect the more **backward-thinking** attitudes of the 80s?
- In what ways does "Priscilla" point the way forward to a more **modern**, accepting way of thinking?
- Think about **key events** and **characters**.

PRISCILLA AND SOCIETY

- The media has the power to change society's perceptions of something, for example, a group of people or an issue.
- Thinking about **key events** and **characters**, how has Stephan Elliott attempted to change the society's perceptions of homosexuality in "Priscilla"?
- How might casting have had an impact on this?

CATEGORIES

PURPOSE

- What do you think were Stephan Elliott's **purposes** in making "Priscilla"?
- Which do you think was the **main purpose**? Why?

tone

- What is the **tone** of "Priscilla"? How could you identify this?
- Does the tone **vary** at all? When? How?

GENRE

- What are the traditional **genres** "Priscilla" fits in to?
- How do you know? What are the **conventions** of those genres?

CATEGORIES

- A new **genre** that *Priscilla* could fit into is **New Queer Cinema**.
- These films challenge and subvert **cultural assumptions** about identity, gender, class, family and society.
- Plot/theme conventions of this genre are:
 - human identity/sexuality is constructed by society and so fluid and changeable;
 - sexuality is something chaotic, which alienates dominant heterosexuality and so is brutally repressed;
 - explicit and unapologetic depictions of same-sex sexual activity;
 - same-sex relationships that reconfigure traditional ideas about family and marriage;
 - examples of the diversity of humanity;
 - the AIDS crisis and the social stigma experienced by the gay community.
- **In what ways does or doesn't *Priscilla* fit into this genre?**

CATEGORIES

- Another **genre** that *Priscilla* fits into is that of the **road movie**.
- Road Movies generally consist of the **themes** of development of journey, purpose and character.
- Plot/theme **conventions** of this genre are:
 - Characters often change depending on events that occur along the way;
 - most take a personal 'emotional' journey themselves;
 - Character change is usually shown through dialogue, interaction with other characters and/or costuming;
 - The over-all purpose of the trip can/may change or become less important;
 - In road movies, the characters themselves tend to be social 'outcasts', with something to either change or accept;
 - The technical codes or camera shots used in this genre help to either:
 - emphasise the idea of mobility/make the viewer feel part of the journey, or,
 - show the passing of time or length of the trip (P-O-V shots/Montages can show this)
 - Panoramic open shots of the vehicle on the road in contrast to the empty landscape show the vehicle is a confined space whereas the landscape is free and open;
 - Mid-shots of characters within the vehicle also help the Character feel part of the journey and emphasise traveling in a confined space;
 - Shots of signs used to establish new locations/travelling;
 - Meet interesting people who affect the main characters.
- **In what ways does or doesn't *Priscilla* fit into this genre?**

LANGUAGE

- How does Stephan Elliott use **mise-en-scene** to create an impression (and **representation**) of the characters?
- Look closely at the mise-en-scene of:
 - **the club in Sydney**
 - **the bus**
 - **the bar in Broken Hill (Shirley)**
 - **Bob's home**
 - **Cooper Pedy (the video store, the restaurant, the "boy's club")**
 - **the desert**
- Remember to look for as many little details (or lack thereof) as possible, from **props** to **colours** to **costume** to **sets**.

REPRESENTATION AND SOCIETY

- REMEMBER: what was the filmmakers' purpose in making "Priscilla" in terms of society?
- Consider the characters overall in "Priscilla".
- Can they be grouped at all in terms of the film's purpose/a society context?



REPRESENTATION - "TICK"

- **Who** is being represented? **How**? What **codes** are used?
- Does this representation present a **particular group in a negative way**?
- What **judgements** do we make?
- Does this representation **change our views**? How?
- Is this character a **stereotype** at all? **Features of the stereotype**?



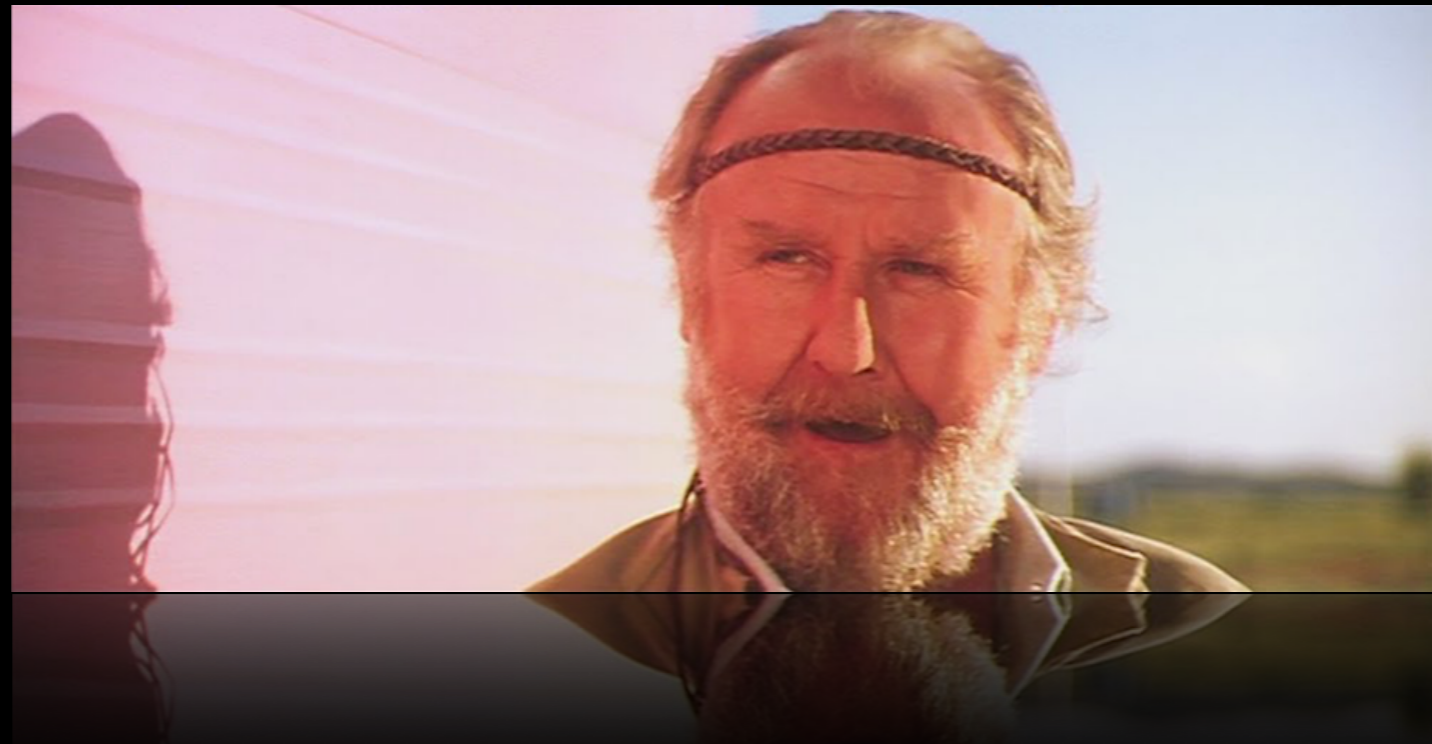
REPRESENTATION - "ADAM"

- **Who** is being represented? **How**? What **codes** are used?
- Does this representation present a **particular group in a negative way**?
- What **judgements** do we make?
- Does this representation **change our views**? How?
- Is this character a **stereotype** at all? **Features of the stereotype**?



REPRESENTATION - "BOB"

- **Who** is being represented? **How**? What **codes** are used?
- Does this representation present a **particular group in a negative way**?
- What **judgements** do we make?
- Does this representation **change our views**? How?
- Is this character a **stereotype** at all? **Features of the stereotype**?



REPRESENTATION AND SOCIETY

- Consider the characters of:
 - **Benji**
 - **Marion**
 - **Alan** (*the aboriginal*)
 - **Shirley in Broken Hill** (*from the bar*)
 - **Frank in Coober Pedy** (*who attacks Adam*)
- Who/what is being represented? How?
- Consider them briefly in terms of the rest of the deeper thinking questions.

REPRESENTATION: SUMMING UP

- Choose one character from "Priscilla".
- Choose two or three signs from your mind maps.
- Write about 100 words, explaining how that representation has been created by those signs/codes.
 1. Outline **who/what** the character is representing.
 2. **Describe** the sign/code.
 3. Explain **how** that sign/code creates the representation.

REPRESENTATION: EXAMPLE

1: Outline who/what the character is representing.

- The character of Elle represents very feminine women.

2: Describe the sign/code.

- The codes of Elle's costume show this, as she is dressed in a tight pink skirt and jacket and has long blonde hair.

3: Explain how that sign/code creates the representation.

- The colour pink has connotations of femininity and "girliness" – like a Barbie doll – and the fact that her skirt and jacket are both quite revealing, connoting sexual attractiveness, making her appealing to the male characters. Long hair is seen as more feminine and attractive, and its blonde colour has connotations of beaches and fun, again suggesting Elle is attractive to men and therefore more feminine.

NARRATIVE

- “Priscilla” can be said to follow a **journey narrative**.
- These films follow a character on a physical and metaphorical journey.
- What other films can you think of which follow a journey narrative?

Lord of the Rings

Into the Wild

Stand By Me

Boys on the Side

Planes, Trains and Automobiles

The Wizard of Oz

NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS

The **conventions** of a **journey narrative** are:

- Protagonist is seen as dissatisfied with their life;
- Protagonist is spurred into going on a long journey, often unwillingly, and in order to do some “noble” deed;
- Others met along the way either help or hinder the protagonist;
- The protagonist will learn from these others and/or impart their own wisdom;
- Once at the destination, the protagonist must confront someone and/or something, often seeking redemption;
- Protagonist returns home a wiser, more satisfied person.

NARRATIVE: THE JOURNEY FILM

1. Does a journey film follow any of the three **narrative structures**? Explain using that structure.
2. Does "Priscilla" fit into that structure? Are there any ways it does not fit?
3. Look at the usual **narrative conventions** of a journey film. Does "Priscilla":
 - A. **use** any of these conventions?
 - B. **subvert** them at all?

AUDIENCE

- The **target audience** is considered by the filmmakers, principally the producers, and influences the decisions made in terms of production.
 - You can identify the target audience from **textual features** such as **language, genre, content, style** and **tone**.
- The **actual audience** is who actually watches the finished production. This will vary depending on **individual, social** and **cultural backgrounds**, and so the reactions to the same text will differ due to these factors.
 - Backgrounds include: **individual character; experience; taste; education; textual knowledge; ethnicity; age; gender; nationality; local identity; class...**

AUDIENCE

- Who do you think the main **target audience** for “Priscilla” is? How can you tell?
- “Priscilla” was a bigger hit than anticipated. Considering backgrounds, what kind of people do you think made up the **actual audience**? Why do you think this audience responded to this film?
- What was **your response** to the film? What elements of your background do you think influenced your response?
- **All answers need to be as detailed as possible.**

INSTITUTION

- There are several different institutions that can be explored.
- You are going to focus on:
 - casting
 - production
 - distribution (and marketing)
- Remember that here you are assessing the **outside controls** that have an important influence on production, usually based on profit-making.

INSTITUTION: CASTING

1. Whose name(s) was *Priscilla* **sold on**? Why? What reputations did they have?
2. What reputations do the **different actors** have? What were they known for at the time? What impact would this have had on the film?
3. What impact would *Priscilla* have had on these actors' **careers and reputations**?
4. Why are no **big names** in the cast? What kind of impact would this casting have on the film?
5. What would have been the **advantages and disadvantages** of casting big name stars?

INSTITUTION: PRODUCTION

- “Priscilla” was produced by Al Clark and Michael Hamlyn.
- **Research** their producer credits and assess their influence when it comes to producing a film.
- What challenging decisions/difficulties might they have had in terms of producing “Priscilla”?

INSTITUTION: PRODUCTION

Production Companies

- PolyGram Filmed Entertainment (presents)
- Australian Film Finance Corporation (AFFC) (in association with)
- Latent Image Productions Pty. Ltd. (producer) (as Latent Image)
- Specific Films (producer)
- New South Wales Film & Television Office (produced with the assistance and financial participation of)

INSTITUTION: PRODUCTION

Distributors: Theatrical

Gramercy Pictures (I) (1994) (USA)

Chapel Distribution (1997)
(Australia)

Rank Film Distributors (1994) (UK)

Roadshow Film Distributors (1994)
(Australia)

Distributors: Video/DVD

Columbia TriStar Home Video
(2001) (UK)

MGM Home Entertainment (2007)
(USA)

MGM/UA Home Entertainment
(2000) (USA)

PolyGram Video (1997) (USA)

Roadshow Home Video (Australia)

INSTITUTION: DISTRIBUTION AND MARKETING

- *Priscilla* – like many films - had a number of distributors, all for different countries and forms.
- Research **one** of the companies, looking for information about its **history** and **founders**, and its **biggest successes/failures**.
- Look briefly at the **marketing campaign** for *Priscilla* and **two** other films distributed by the same company.
- Can you spot any similarities/differences between:
 - the **type/genre** of film?
 - the **marketing** (e.g. posters)?

PULLING KEY ASPECTS TOGETHER

- Look at the six posters for *Priscilla* on the next three slides.
 - Make notes about the language used on them.
 - Think about who is being represented and how.
 - Consider the film's purpose and its target audience.
 - Explore the challenges the distributors may have had regarding marketing.
- **Try to pull these answers together into one long written discussion of the film posters.**

TERENCE
STAMP

HUGO
WEAVING

GUY
PEARCE



Finally,
a comedy that will change
the way you think,
the way you feel and,
most importantly,
the way you dress.

THE ADVENTURES OF
Priscilla
QUEEN OF THE DESERT

POLYGRAM FILMED ENTERTAINMENT in association with THE AUSTRALIAN FILM FINANCE CORPORATION presents a LATENT IMAGE/SPECIFIC FILMS production
TERENCE STAMP, HUGO WEAVING, GUY PEARCE and BILL HUNTER "THE ADVENTURES OF PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT" produced by OWEN PATERSON
with LIZZY GARDINER and TIM CHAPPEL directed by AL CLARK and MICHAEL HAMILTON
costarring SUE BLAINIEY, BRIAN J BREHENY, GUY GROSS, REBEL PENFOLD-RUSSELL
Produced by STEPHAN ELLIOTT

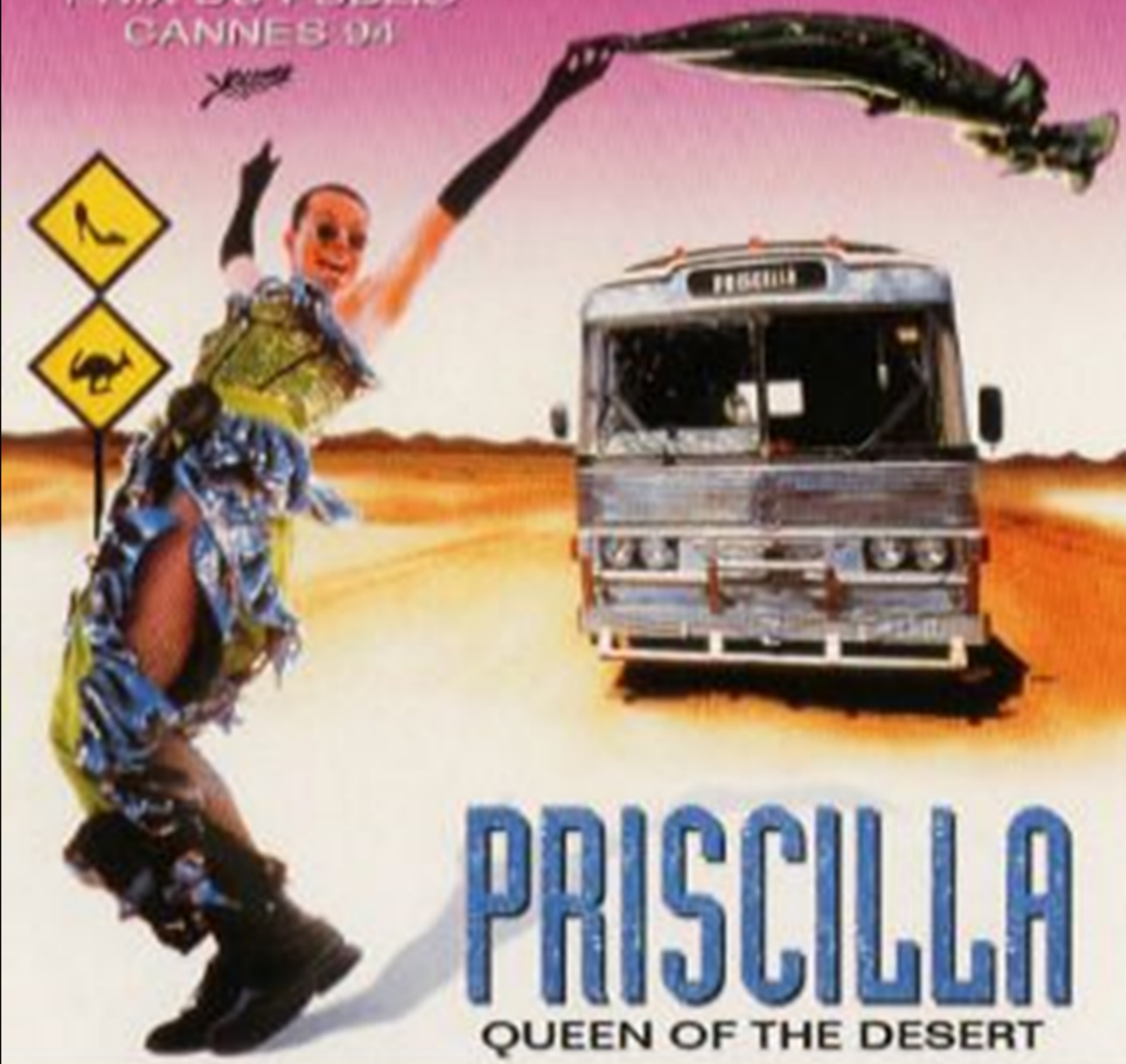
TERENCE
STAMP

HUGO
WEAVING

GUY
PEARCE

DRAG IS THE DRUG!

PRIX DU PUBLIC
CANNES 94



PRISCILLA
QUEEN OF THE DESERT

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THE ADVENTURES OF

Priscilla

QUEEN OF THE DESERT

Finally,
a comedy that will change
the way you think,
the way you feel,
and most importantly...
the way you dress.



WINNER

Audience Award "Most Popular Film"

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL • SAN FRANCISCO FILM FESTIVAL • SEATTLE FILM FESTIVAL

POLYGRAM FILMED ENTERTAINMENT in association with THE AUSTRALIAN FILM FINANCE CORPORATION presents a LATENT IMAGE/SPECIFIC FILMS production TERESE STAMP HUGO WEAVING
executive producers GUY PEARCE and BILL HUNTER "THE ADVENTURES OF PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT" producer OWEN PATERSON director STE BLAINIE director of photography BRIAN J. BREHNEY editor GUY GROSS
producer REBEL PENFOLD-BESSELL producer AL CLARK producer MICHAEL HANLEY director STEPHAN ELLIOTT
PolyGram GANEMBY

"ROARINGLY COMIC!"

ROLLING STONE

Priscilla

THE ADVENTURES OF
QUEEN OF THE DESERT

"IT'S TIME TO REJOICE, FOR 'PRISCILLA' HAS ARRIVED!"

SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

"ONE OF THE WILDEST MOVIES EVER MADE!"

NEW YORK OBSERVER

"WONDERFULLY FUNNY"

NEWSWEEK

"A FEEL-GOOD MOVIE OF THE YEAR."

THE BOSTON GLOBE



ALL-STAR ZELAND

ONLY FOR NEW ZEALAND HOME VIEWERS
HOWEVER, AVAILABLE TO SPAIN, AUSTRALIA

POLYGRAM FILMED ENTERTAINMENT in association with THE AUSTRALIAN FILM FINANCE CORPORATION presents a LATENT IMAGE/SPECIFIC FILMS production TERESE STAMP HUGO WEAVING
executive producers GUY PEARCE and BILL HUNTER "THE ADVENTURES OF PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT" producer OWEN PATERSON director STE BLAINIE director of photography BRIAN J. BREHNEY editor GUY GROSS
producer REBEL PENFOLD-BESSELL producer AL CLARK producer MICHAEL HANLEY director STEPHAN ELLIOTT
PolyGram GANEMBY

PRISCILLA BURNS
ON THE WANTS LIST
I'm representing gold mine
Priscilla joins in the face of what
I can do for
"I've been
"I Love the Tropics"
"Make Your Country Thing"
and more!

PolyGram Video

Printed and Published by the
PolyGram Video Group, Inc.

TERENCE STAMP

HUGO WEAVING

GUY PEARCE

BILL HUNTER



The Adventures of
PRISCILLA
Queen of the Desert



Polygram Filmed Entertainment presents THE AUSTRALIAN FILM FINANCE CORPORATION presents LATENT IMAGE / SPECIFIC FILMS presents
TERENCE STAMP HUGO WEAVING GUY PEARCE BILL HUNTER "THE ADVENTURES OF PRISCILLA: QUEEN OF THE DESERT"
MUSIC BY OWEN PATTERSON COSTUME DESIGNER SUE BLAINIEY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY BRIAN JOHRENY EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS GUY GROSS NEBEL PENFOLD-RUSSELL
PRODUCED BY AL CLARK AND MICHAEL HAMOVN DIRECTED BY STEPHAN ELLIOTT

'THE BEST FEEL GOOD SHOW SINCE MAMMA MIA!'

Sunday Express



I WILL SURVIVE

GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

STARRING JASON DONOVAN
PRISCILLA
QUEEN OF THE DESERT
the musical

HOT STUFF

FOUR

www.priscillathemusical.com

wmc.org.uk
029 2063 6464

ION 7 - 18 JAN 2014



FILM DETAILS

PRODUCERS:

- Al Clark
- Michael Hamlyn

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

- Polygram Filmed Entertainment (presents)
- Australian Film Finance Corporation (in association with)
- Latent Image (producer)
- Specific Films (producer)
- New South Wales Film & Television Office (produced with the assistance and financial participation of)

DISTRIBUTORS

- Gramercy Pictures (USA)
- Rank Film Distributors (UK)

DIRECTOR/WRITER:

- Stephan Elliott

CAST:

- Hugo Weaving ('Tick')
- Guy Pearce (Adam)
- Terence Stamp (Bernadette)
- Bill Hunter (Bob)
- Sarah Chadwick (Marion)
- Mark Holmes (Benjamin)

LINKS

Guardian Article: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/oct/24/gay-cinema-straight-audience-movie>

Guardian Article: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/03/out-of-past-gay-cinema-nostalgia-lgbt>

Guardian Article: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/sep/30/one-five-uncomfortable-homosexuality>

Stonewall: http://www.stonewall.org.uk/what_we_do/research_and_policy/2875.asp

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJyV85J1VhM>