

Transcript of Q&A with Jamie Babbit and Clara Bradbury-Rance  
Lesbian Camp weekender, Rio Cinema x Club Des Femmes, 5th June 2021

**Clara Bradbury-Rance**

Hello to Jamie Babbitt, the wonderful creator of *But I'm a Cheerleader*. We have a wonderful Dalston, Hackney, London crowd here who've just seen the film, and absolutely loved it. So can we just have one more round of applause for Jamie Babbit.

Jamie, thank you so much for joining us and for bearing with us. It's really great to have you beamed in from the States. To get going and to start quite simply: how does it feel to you now, watching this film, indeed working on the director's cut? In many ways, it feels like we've come a long way from the 1990s in terms of queer and trans representation, but we've also contended with Trump and his allies, etc, etc, etc. So this still feels like a film that shows us how to seek out joy in the face of violence. I wondered what you feel about twenty years on?

**Jamie Babbit**

It was really fun. I actually was working on the director's cut in COVID. So just when everything shut down in March, Lionsgate contacted me and said: 'Hey, we are interested in re-releasing the film, do you want to put some of the old scenes back in. And do some Zoom reunited groups with the creative team: the actors, the composer, the production designer, the costume designer. So it was a really fun March, when the world was falling apart? But no, it's been wonderful how the movie has stood up over 20 years. And you know, I was a young lesbian when I made the film in my 20s. So 20 years later, looking back at who I was, I mean, I'm very much the same person. But the world has changed. And at the time, I think the movie was more radical, although it's funny, because I always thought the movie was like a Disney movie that was like a sweet, kind of *Clueless*, romantic comedy for queer people. And the first time I screened it, people were like, this is so radical, how dare you make jokes, where you're laughing at the community. And it was kind of poorly received. But I'm happy that 20 years later, people understand that it was meant to be a movie about joy in the midst of a lot of pain.

**Clara Bradbury-Rance**

Thank you so much. Yes. [Audio feedback] I'll try again. Joy and laughter right, in the face of in the face of pain,

And actually though, about being a young lesbian, making this making film, one of my favourite lines in the film comes from Lloyd Morgan Gordon, "There's not just one way to be a lesbian." And that message seems even more important now, in some ways, than it did in 1999. So I wondered how that kind of question of lesbian identity has, has changed in your filmmaking and your approach to filmmaking in the last 20 years.

**Jamie Babbit**

I mean, I think when I made the film, I was – just wanted to kind of shout my voice, my artistic voice. And in the last 20 years, I've done a lot of different kinds of projects. I'm actually working right now in Pittsburgh, which is in the middle of our country, and was a big battleground state between Trump and Biden. But anyway, I'm making *A League of Their Own*. We're doing an eight episode series for Amazon. So that will be out next year, based on the 90s movie *A League of Their Own*. And one of the things I'm excited about this project is when I saw that movie in the 90s, which was when I was making *But I'm a Cheerleader*, I thought 'God, these women seem so queer, why aren't they talking about

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that', and it kind of pissed me off. So I'm excited that 20 years later, we're making *A League of Their Own*, with still the same joy and comedy and fun of the original film, I hope, an— But also addressing that a lot of these players are queer women and getting romance, and also talking about all the Black women who were trying to get into the league and telling their stories. So it's like the people who are left out of the margins of the original film, but still making people laugh and entertaining. So yeah, I think, you know, my mission was always as a filmmaker, and it still is, to bring queer stories to the front. And also to entertain people. So.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

Well that's very exciting about *A League of Their Own*. I'm a, I'm a huge fan of the original film, and always thought the most lesbian film ever. So I'm very excited about the remake. So you've spoken before about kind of the importance to you of retaining Megan's femininity. You know, even if she comes out as a lesbian or discovers how to kind of name her lesbianism, that her femininity is really vital, and it's such a kind of vibrant part of her character. And it's interesting to me now that we have kind of teenage protagonists in films like *Booksmart* declaring that just because a girl wears a polo shirt to prom doesn't mean she's a lesbian. But that's just her kind of gender performance rather than her sexual orientation. Do you think that when you made *But I'm a Cheerleader*, it was more difficult or maybe even, as well, more important to kind of radically intervene in those assumptions about the relationship between sexuality and gender?

Jamie Babbit

I mean I was definitely interested in the gender question just because, as a femme lesbian, when I first started coming out, I thought I had to be butch. And actually, my mom, when I came out to her, she was like, 'Oh, I have tons of gay friends. I don't care. I'm happy for you. But I'm just really surprised because you've always been terrible at sports. And I just would have never seen it coming.' And I was confused by it myself, too. Like, I was like, 'I don't, I don't get it. And maybe I like these things, but I don't know it?' And but then I was like, 'No, I really, actually, I'm just a girly girl. It's just who I am. But I actually really like women too'. So I was kind of exploring that in, *But I'm a Cheerleader* and learning to just embrace myself.

And I think 20 years ago, the trans community was so much more marginalized in the queer community. And I think certainly, there was a lot of different queer, non-binary people out there, but they just felt like they had to slot into a certain category. And I think one of the great things that's happened in 20 years is that all these boxes that we all had to put ourselves in just kind of – we broke free of them, in one kind of queer world. And I definitely was as much a product of the 90s when I made the film as anyone else in the queer community, that I thought in a more binary way, and I'm really happy that the queer community has changed.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

That's a really good answer. Thank you. So this film is part of the Club des Femmes programme on lesbian camp. So I wanted to ask you what camp means to you? It makes me think as I mentioned in my intro earlier, of your film *Addicted to Fresno*, the laundry bin of dildos comes to mind. But yeah, I wanted to know a bit what that idea of camp and that idea of lesbian camp means to you?

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Jamie Babbit

Yeah. I mean, I've always been a fan of campy movies, and I've always loved just having fun with [things that are] out there. But I always also felt that camp was defined by gay men and I was excited to kind of add to the canon and not only tell outrageous celebratory stories that kind of have fun with all of these stories, but also to let the movie have a real emotional undercurrent, which a lot of the gay male campy movies I had seen, they kind of just repressed emotion in a weird way. And so I was, I don't know, maybe it's just very lesbian [to include] these really emotional heartfelt moments. So I kind of, I don't know, I did both. And some people didn't like that, but I liked it. So that's what happened.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

We liked it, too. So the final question I'm going to ask before opening it out to the audience is to just ask you a bit about your influences. I mean, the film kind of first came out with the New Queer Cinema. And of course, you've worked with people like Guinevere Turner, but they are also nods in your films to pulp thrillers. So I was watching *Breaking the Girls* the other day, and couldn't, of course, stop thinking about *Basic Instinct* for instance. And then, of course, Riot Grrrl. You know, it's one of the things that I really love about your work, that influences and citation seems to kind of come from everywhere.

Jamie Babbit

Yeah, I mean, I've always loved pop culture. So I love *Basic Instinct*, and it was such not great movie, especially in the queer community because she was like the killer bisexual, but I loved it and, Tim Burton's work, like I was a big fan of *Edward Scissorhands*. And that kind of constructed reality was really interesting to me. But then I also always loved like, super underground queer photographers and filmmakers, like, James Bidgood who directed *Pink Narcissus*, which is an amazing movie, if anyone can get their hands on it. And *Pink Narcissus* was a big influence. If you watch that movie, you'll be like, 'Oh, she stole everything from that for *But I'm a Cheerleader*'. Not the nudity and glamour, like, you know, male erotica, but certainly the pink worlds and fantasy. So yeah, I'm always pulling from everything. I love movies, and I love all kinds of movies. And so they certainly influenced me in a lot of different ways.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

That's a great idea for the next double bill. *But I'm a Cheerleader* and *Pink Narcissus*

Jamie Babbit

Yes!

Clara Bradbury-Rance

[loss of audio/video while we switch to audience questions] So do you have any questions for Jamie? Be Brave.

Audience Question 1

Yeah I have one.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

Great go ahead, can you put your hand up so we can get the mic to you? No, ok, Shout and I'll repeat the question.

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Audience Question 1

When you were talking about camp it really struck me that what's camp in this film is heterosexuality, like heterosexuality is so camp in this film. So I wondered if Jamie had any thoughts on the campness of heterosexuality?

Clara Bradbury-Rance

Such a good question, Jamie, did you hear that?

Jamie Babbit

No, if you could just repeat it, sorry.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

So the question was that in *But I'm a Cheerleader*, what seems camp is really heterosexuality and whether you have any thoughts on the campness of heterosexuality?

Jamie Babbit

Well, a lot of that was inspired by doing the research on the ex-gay conversion camps. And it was so absurd to me that they were basically trying to teach queer people how to be straight. And it was so laughable in the research, but taken so seriously that I just was excited to make fun of heterosexuality. And as someone who considers herself bi and beyond, pan, you know, whatever, many different labels, many different boxes, I was making fun of the queer community and the straight community, and just making fun of the binary basically.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

Yeah, that importance of making fun of all of it, right.

Jamie Babbit

Yeah.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

So, thank you Jamie. Any other questions? Yes, one at the back.

Audience Question 2

Hello, Thank you. I'm sure you've been asked this question before but I was just wondering how you feel about this film in conversation with *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* because there may be others but these are the only two films I know of that are about conversion therapy. Because tonally they are quite different but they do touch on a lot of the same experiences and I just wondered how you felt? I presume you've seen *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, so I just wondered how you felt about that film? Thank you.

Jamie Babbit

Yeah, I am friends with Desiree Akhavan. And she was really nervous for me to see the film. And I went to see it in a theater and I really enjoyed it. And I called her afterwards and I just said, you know, 'It's so flattering to see another movie that's exploring this subject. And there's no one way to tell the story about gay rehabilitation camps'. And as someone who grew up in a, in a rehab because my mother actually ran a rehab not for gay people, but for teen alcoholics and drug addicts, there's so many stories to be told and the way that *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* is told is so different than *But I'm a Cheerleader*. Mine was

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more like a constructed reality, fantasy, just kind of told very much through my imagination, and very influenced by my childhood as well, like growing up in a rehab. And her movie was more like docu-drama, and very well done. And I thought the acting was great. And I just really enjoyed it. So I hope there is a large canon of gay rehab movies I'm excited to see many different artists approach the subject in lots of different ways.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

Yeah, and I always love that the ending sort of *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* as they're driving off in the back of the truck, always feels like the best nod to *But I'm a Cheerleader* as well.

Jamie Babbit

Yeah, exactly.

Audience Question 3

I wondered what your favourite lesbian film is?

Clara Bradbury-Rance

So the question, Jamie, was what is your favourite lesbian film?

Jamie Babbit

My favourite lesbian film is *Heavenly Creatures*. It's so great. It's great acting. It's like obsessional. It's obviously high drama. It's definitely murderous lesbians. But I just feel like it captures that kind of insanity of first love, and Melanie Lynskey, who is in *But I'm a Cheerleader*, I just was blown away by her performance in that movie and was so excited to cast her in *But I'm a Cheerleader*, and have continued to be in her life and stalk her as the star of my favourite lesbian film.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

Amazing. Thank you. Any other questions? Oh, yes. This one here.

Audience Question 4

This is the first time I've seen this film and I really loved it. I wanted to ask you whether in the last few years, you've seen a change in how it's received by audiences.

Jamie Babbit

Can you repeat the question? Sorry, I couldn't hear.

Clara Bradbury-Rance

Yeah, sure. So the person who asked said it was the first time they've ever seen the film and loved it. And they wanted to know about the change in how audiences have received it in the last 20 years.

Jamie Babbit

I mean, when it first came out, it was very well received with young lesbians, but by young lesbians, I mean, like lesbians in their 20s, who had no power and were not film reviewers. So, that was unfortunate because the only people who write reviews were, like, men in their 50s. And so it got really horrific reviews. So I feel like if I'd had thin skin, I probably would

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have quit directing. So I'm so glad that I just kind of ignored them and was like, 'They're too old. They don't get it. It's fine.' And I was really energized by the 20-something... [Jamie's audio cuts and we lost connection with her]

Clara Bradbury-Rance  
Has she gone? Oh no!

Ania Ostrowska  
Maybe she'll be back, because it's her connection, not ours.

Clara Bradbury-Rance  
Yeah. We're holding on, Jamie.

Ania Ostrowska  
Okay.

Clara Bradbury-Rance  
I'm on tenterhooks. I think the moral of that story is more young lesbian film reviewers.

—Ends—