

VARIETY

MAY 8 - 14, 2000

LIVE NUDE GIRLS, UNITE!

(DOCU)

A Query? production. Produced by John Montoya, Julia Query. Executive producer, Gini Reticker. Co-producers, Sarah Kennedy, Avilla Peterson.

Directed by Julia Query, Vicky Funari. Camera (color; vid-to-16mm), Query, John Montoya, Sarah Kennedy, Funari; editors, Funari, Heidi Rahlmann Plumb; music, Alison Hennesy, Kali and Alex Kort, Blaise Smith, Dale Everingham; art designer, Isi Rodriguez; sound designer, Jennifer Ware. Reviewed at San Francisco Film Festival, April 26, 2000. Running time: 70 MIN.

By DENNIS HARVEY

The long line of pro-union activist docus gets a racy, if no less earnest addition in "Live Nude Girls, UNITE!," Julia Query and Vicky Funari's bemused, amusing chronicle of a San Francisco strip joint's talent strike. Very much an insider's view, with protagonists who consider feminism and sex-industry work quite compatible, pic may get wider play than most such labor-struggle documents for its salacious surface appeal — though auds will more likely leave pumping their fists in solidarity than wolf-whistling.

At the start, female performers at S.F.'s Lusty Lady emporium already have it better than dancers at most similar venues — biz is part women-owned/managed, the pay decent, industry's typical pressure toward illegal contact (from lap-dancing to actual prostitution) absent. Serious grievances arise nonetheless, notably lack of sick leave allowances, arbitrary salary reductions and ethnic-minority dancers' less-than-equal shift scheduling. (As in porn flicks, customers still prefer 'em blonde and buxom.)

They're also irked that a few one-way mirror windows onto the peep-show dance floor encourage patrons to secretly videotape the workers — whose gyrations might then show up anywhere without their consent, on the 'Net or commercial cassettes.

Their demands, however, land on deaf ears, so the staff — this being S.F. they're largely lesbian and steadfastly leftist — agitates for the Lady to become the nation's first unionized strip club. Management digs in its heels; negotiations drag on for months. When one ecdysiast is fired in retaliation, they all go on strike, engaging loyal customers' support with the memorable picket-line chant "2-4-6-8, don't go in to masturbate!"

At road's end, labor emerges triumphant (allowing for a few contractual compromises), and there's an immediate ripple effect — strippers from Philly to Anchorage, Alaska, call begging help for their own unionizing efforts.

This primary conflict is engrossing enough, but "Live Nude Girls" cleverly pulls us in further by paralleling the union efforts with co-director (and stand-up comic) Julia Query's more personal struggle. Daughter of Dr. Joyce Wallace, an esteemed physician and crusading educator/activist on behalf of NYC streetwalkers, Query has long been "out" to her mother as a lesbian — yet has kept her day job a secret, fearing an explosive response.

Her cards are forced when both women are asked to speak at a So. Calif. national conference on prostitution. Query's mother is duly shocked, then angry; an old-school feminist, she sees "the smut business" as innately exploitative and her daughter's happy employment therein as misguided. Both women are so articulate, personable and headstrong that this running subplot adds considerable drama. As with the unionizing effort, it ends in reconciliation — albeit with some issues still unresolved.

Cannily paced, docu manages to discuss larger sex industry issues and ethics in passing without losing focus. Brief, simple animated segs add to its good-humored, yet still serious-minded tenor. Tech aspects are solid, occasionally rough sound recording aside.

Live Nude Girls UNITE!

A Film by Julia Query and Vicky Funari