

SF Weekly

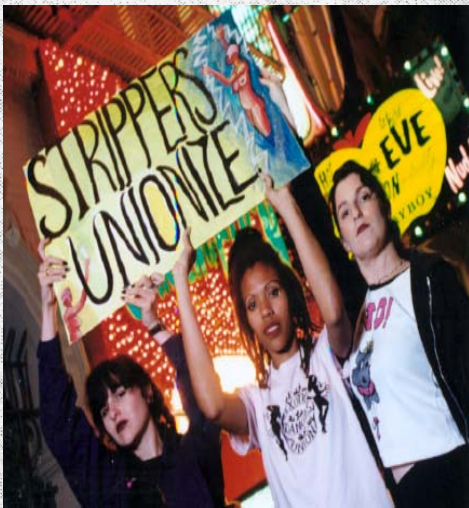
April 26—May 2, 2000

Film The 43rd San Francisco International Film Festival

Lusty Ladies

Sometimes you just can't get no respect. But desire for respect (and workers' rights) was just what drove a group of dancers at the Lusty Lady peep show in San Francisco to unionize. Though disdained by feminists and union organizations, they were undeterred, and the Lusty Lady is now the only such unionized club in the country. The meshing of sexual and power politics and the rough road to a negotiated contract are the subjects of *Live Nude Girls, UNITE!*, a low-budget documentary co-directed by Vicky Funari ("Paulina") and first-time filmmaker Julia Query, who still performs at the club. "When you're a young woman out in the world, you're sexually harassed and are often asked to do things that are sex work-oriented — to be emotionally available to men, to provide attention, to wear makeup, and look good," says Query. "If you have awareness of this, the obvious leap is to go ahead and get paid for it."

Shot on High 8 Handycam and 16mm, the \$120,000 film took four years to finish and was only completed last month, just in time to be shown at the SFIFF. (It won the Golden Spire for Bay Area documentary.) It manages to be an entertaining package tour of 1990s feminism, the sex trade, sociology, and a mother-daughter relationship in crisis. It's also an essay in perseverance. According to Query, the struggle was worth it. "We have much better working conditions at the club, as evidenced by the



fact that I can still work there and I'm 32," she says. "We still have no benefits, but we're not fired for getting up in the wage scale, and we're no longer classified by race, hair color, or breast size."

The emotional crux of the film, though, is personal, not economic. Query's mother — a pioneer in working with street prostitutes in New York — was not privy to her daughter's choice of profession. And the disclosure, necessitated when both women were invited to speak at the same conference, is painful to watch and more dramatic than

the crescendo of a Hollywood movie. "I would never tell my child she should have shame," says Query's mother, devastated at hearing the news. "But I think you went too far." Query says if she could have avoided having to tell her mother what she did for a living, she would have. "During the '60s, while other people were having the Summer of Love, my

mother was one of 10 women in [her] med school," says Query. "She tried very hard to earn respect from the masculine world, and she wanted me to be a success in a way that fits that model. The fact that New York MOMA is showing the film has thrilled her. She's throwing a party, but I don't think she's told anyone what it's about."



— Sura Wood

Live Nude Girls, UNITE! shows Wednesday, April 26, at 10 p.m. at the AMC Kabuki. It will open theatrically in the fall.

Live Nude Girls *UNITE!*

A Film by Julia Query and Vicky Funari