

Bushwick Resident Lisa Haas Stars in “The Foxy Merkins” and We Think You Should Go See It

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Image by courtesy of The Foxy Merkins

On the Friday before Pride Day (and just in time for Bushwick Pride this coming weekend), I had the enormous pleasure of seeing the New York premier of an indie comedy about lesbian prostitutes working the streets of NYC and the clitorises of some mild to severely deranged Republican housewives. It was called *The Foxy Merkins* and it is as hilarious as it sounds.

The Foxy Merkins premiered at Sundance this year and it is the second film by director [Madeleine Olnekto](#) feature longtime Bushwick resident [Lisa Haas](#) and stand-up comedian [Jackie Monahan](#), both of whom helped write the screenplay. The previous film was the well-received *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same*, another comedy set in NYC.

In a Q&A after the screening, director Madeline Olnek said that the *Foxy Merkins* is a “loose remake” of the indie classic *My Own Private Idaho*, which is about two gay male prostitutes making their way in the Northwest. There are also definite borrowed scenes and themes from *Midnight Cowboy*.

Although some critics at Sundance felt that *The Foxy Merkins* was not as well executed as Olnek’s previous film, the audience at the [BAM Cinema Festival](#) did not seem to share their opinions.

From the opening scene- where we are introduced to Margaret (Haas), a portly, new-in-town, anxiety-ridden, inhaler wielding, lesbian prostitute meeting her first client- the audience at BAM was in hysterics. Whether it was Haas’ hilarious Bambi-esque portrayal of a lesbian hustler, or the perfect comedic timing and effervescent grin of Margaret’s straight, suburb-escapee partner Jo (Monahan), the film carried the audience through some of the most delightful taboos with an ease that bordered cheekiness.

The amount of irreverent one-liners that had the whole audience laughing was practically unbelievable. From “I can count on one finger how many legs my neighbor has,” to “I can always tell someone is Republican if they prematurely ejaculate” (speaking of the routinely ridiculed Westchester housewives that make up the majority of the Jo and Margaret’s clients), the charm of the two stars and the absurdist humor of the writing carry this film through its minor, but noticeable, flaws.

These flaws come out in the form of typically inconsequential but time-consuming scenes that are meant to pay tribute to *My Own Private Idaho* and occasionally *Midnight Cowboy*. Unfortunately, these scenes- such as one where Margaret and Jo go on a brief road trip in search of Margaret’s long lost mother- provide little to the plot and also detract from the otherwise very original characters of this film.

Haas and Monahan are not Voigt and Hoffman, or Reeves and Phoenix, with some slapstick and a few quips. Their characters exist in their own realm with jokes and situations that are best handled by these two women, one straight and one gay. And their abilities are a delight to watch on a big screen with an audience that is not used to such a duo.

The Foxy Merkins depicts gay and straight women in a way that is not often seen in bigger films: that they are just as funny as everyone else and have the jokes to prove it, no matter what the situation. It also shows the spider-web of invisible conventions that gay-straight friendships are sometimes forced to maneuver through, which were perhaps the most thought-provoking moments of the whole film.

In the end, its uniqueness, its memorable lines, and its shameless charm as a true indie flick make up for what this film is lacking in terms of plot and pace (and occasionally good sound). That it takes place in New York City has little relevance to the story, but Margaret is one of the best newbies to this town that I have ever scene on film, which is reason enough to see it. I will certainly keep an eye out for the next creation from this crew.