



**FITTING IN:** Legless Xenia is one of the 11 special needs children adopted by Susan Tom, the subject of Jonathan Karsh's "My Flesh and Blood."

Continued from previous page  
seeming selflessness. Even so, pic offers conclusive evidence that she's the right woman for a difficult job, a tough-loving, straight-talking Samaritan with a tart sense of humor and a near endless capacity for empathy.

Andrea Micheli's nimble videography provides an intimate, fly-on-the-wall p.o.v. One leaves "My Flesh and Blood" with admiration for the lenser's craftsmanship, and for her ability to remain an unobtrusive observer during moments of extreme emotional turmoil. Just as importantly, one appreciates her obvious courage under fire: More than once, Joe angrily threatens: "I'm gonna break your camera!"

## BROTHER OUTSIDER: THE LIFE OF BAYARD RUSTIN

(DOCU)

A Question Why Films production in association with Independent Television Service, National Black Programming Coalition. Produced by Nancy Kates, Bennett Singer. Executive producer, Sam Pollard. Co-producer, Mridu Chandra. Associate producer, Heather Seldes.

Directed by Nancy Kates, Bennett Singer. Camera (color, HD video), Robert Shepard; editors, Veronica Selver, Rhonda Collins; music, B. Quincy Griffin; sound, Wellington Jon Bowler, Sekou Shepard, Caleb Moore; archival research, Prudence Arndt. Reviewed on videocassette, Houston, Jan. 12, 2003. (At Sundance Film Festival — Documentary Competition) Running time: 82 MIN.

By JOE LEYDON

**A** largely unsung hero of the Civil Rights movement gets overdue recognition in "Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin," a well-crafted and evenhanded documentary set to air as a "P.O.V." offering Jan. 20 on PBS. Pic should attract attention — and, perhaps, spark debate — during post-broadcast exposure at niche festivals and nonprofit venues.

Co-helmers Nancy Kates and Bennett Singer take an admiring yet unsentimental view of Rustin (1912-87), an eloquent and engaging African-American pacifist who was inspired by Gandhi, and in turn inspired Martin Luther King. "Our power," he notes while helping to organize the 1956 Birmingham bus boycott, "lies in our ability to make things unworkable."

A self-described "troublemaker" who insisted that struggles "can be won without brutalization," Rustin

began his socially conscious activism during his youth in West Chester, Pa., where he was arrested for politely but firmly declining to vacate a whites-only restaurant. Later, during World War II, he was a traveling spokesperson for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and served jail time for refusing induction into the U.S. military.

Using archival material and fresh interviews — including testimonials from at least two of his former lovers — Kates and Singer underscore Rustin's matter-of-fact courage and self-effacing pragmatism. He was openly and unashamedly gay at a time when even many nominally progressive activists of all colors were reflexively homophobic. To prevent his sexuality from becoming an issue that might undermine his noble causes, he remained scrupulously circumspect, maintaining a deliberately low profile while working in King's shadow.

Even so, "Brother Outsider" shows how Rustin's sexuality — not to mention his refusal to fight in WWII — was exploited by rivals and enemies. When Democratic Party leaders wanted to avoid possibly embarrassing civil rights demonstrations led by King and Rustin at the 1960 party convention, Rep. Adam Clayton Powell was drafted to play the gay card: Powell threatened to spread rumors of a possible King-Rustin romance if the demonstrations weren't curtailed. King buckled under the pressure.

Three years later, however, Rustin served as behind-the-scenes organizer for the 1963 March on Washington. King refused to dislodge Rustin from that position even when Sen. Strom Thurmond (among others) publicly accused Rustin of sexual perversity.

To their credit, the filmmakers are too honest to attempt a canonization of their subject. Indeed, pic reveals that, in order to maintain valuable contact with President Lyndon B. Johnson, Rustin took great pains to avoid open criticism of the Vietnam War. In later life, however, Rustin returned to his roots as a troublesome proselytizer for pacifism and human rights. "Brother Outsider" shows him at his happiest when he glories in being included on Richard Nixon's White House enemies list.

Tech values are first-rate. Pic's only questionable stylistic flourish: Hokey faux-noir sequences in which a faceless FBI agent types reports and views slides while describing "incriminating evidence" gathered against Rustin. Much more effective is a snippet from "Boycott," an acclaimed 2001 made-for-cable movie in which Erik Dellums — the infamous Luther Mahoney of TV's "Homicide: Life on the Street" — enjoyed a change-of-pace role as Rustin.

## COMANDANTE

Continued from page 33  
charismatic and intellectually formidable figure who can in no way be dismissed as a buffoon or a mistake of history. Although, at 75, the "maximum leader" may not have the physical stamina or political zeal he once had, he seems utterly alert (excepting his instant amnesia when it comes to the names of his former paramours) and mentally engaged.

This is a man so concerned with time and work that he credits not shaving with having saved "months of my life." And he's so preoccupied with his mental processes that, after parrying Stone's proposal to bring him some Viagra with the joke that the director could end up decorated by the U.S. government for giving Castro a heart attack, seriously queries of the drug, "Yes, but will it help me to think?"

Surrounded by a team that includes at least two cameramen, assorted other crew, Castro aides de camp and his lightning-quick female translator, Stone, who boiled 30 hours of footage down to a little more than 90 minutes, first alights upon the comandante in his office. Looking thinner in his olive military uniform, Castro is subjected to a barrage of questions that amounts to a verbal Rorschach test of subjects political, historical, biographical, philosophical.

No, Castro has never considered seeing a psychiatrist because he has plenty of self-confidence; he still admires longtime Cuban resident Ernest Hemingway; he is convinced the world's problems must be solved "soon," that rationality will "probably" prevail so mankind can survive, but that "life won't be worth living if things aren't fixed"; he now believes in "change" rather than revolution; he thinks illegal drugs are an ineradicable scourge the world will always have to live with; he is pleased the number of prostitutes in Cuba declined from more than 100,000 before the revolution to "very few" today; he always loved Charlie Chaplin and was smitten with Sophia Loren and Brigitte Bardot as a young moviegoer; and he views literacy and education as two of his regime's "greatest accomplishments."

When, over lunch, Stone asks about JFK's assassination, Castro pleases his fellow conspiracy theory advocate by saying, "I have never believed in the theory of the lone gunman."

Surrounded by admiring students

at an international medical school, the presidente says he went decisively over to the Soviet side when the U.S. cut off his sugar market, admired Khrushchev as "a shrewd peasant," considered Nixon a "hypocrite" and didn't like the idea of Russia placing missiles in Cuba in 1962 because it put his country in "such a precarious position. The Soviets did it, he says, because of "secret information" that the U.S. was planning a major invasion of Cuba in the wake of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, which Castro also discusses. In the end, Castro calls the Soviet Union an "erratic ally not well acquainted with conditions in the Third World, better at putting on impressive parades of military might than at managing it."

As the setting changes from the back seat of the leader's aging Mercedes sedan to various restaurants, rooms and even Old Havana, of which he gives Stone a tour, Castro visibly and audibly tires, his voice growing raspy and hoarse at times, but he remains accommodating. He never blanches or becomes angry even at Stone's most prickly questions, among

Castro is so concerned with time and work that he credits not shaving with having saved 'months of my life.'

them his inquiries into Castro's alleged falling-out with Che Guevara and the persecution of gays under his regime, something he explains away as the residue of Latin America's culture of machismo.

Anyone who has studied Castro knows his mental and verbal dexterity is such that he can deflect, deflate and redirect any question. Stone puts any number of knotty propositions on Castro's plate, albeit in the manner of intellectual challenges rather than

hostile rebukes; it is pointless to complain that the filmmaker was not sufficiently confrontational, since Castro is ready for anything and can't be caught off-guard with any query. He flatly denies, for instance, the existence of any police repression or torture during the entirety of his rule, and of any covert Cuban involvement in Vietnam.

With his son and grandson at his side, Castro becomes an old-school gentleman when asked about his private life, saying this is something he has never chosen to "publicize." On the subject of religion, he is surprisingly even-handed, given the revolution's historical restrictions on observance; he admits religion may legitimately be a comfort for some, just as it may be an opiate for others. And the one relatively contemporary figure political figure with whom Castro admits to feeling a kinship is Eva Peron, in that he believes both of them enjoyed a genuine connection to their people and received their love in return.

Brushing aside questions about what will happen to Cuba when he dies by plausibly positing, "It depends on when it happens," Castro puts his old dreams of a new world order in perspective when he admits he sees the world today as "more ungovernable" than before. "The solution to the world's problems are not a military solution," the aging revolutionary opines, before personally escorting Stone and his crew to the airport for bear-hug farewells.

Stone keeps things popping visually with constantly roving camera-work, frequent location changes, jump cuts that allow his subject to keep talking while he's seen engaged in something else, rich archival footage and colorful glimpses of Havana. Music is abundant.

## PALM SPRINGS

### I CAPTURE THE CASTLE

(U.K.)

An IDP presentation of a Trademark Films/BBC Films production. Produced by Anant Singh, David M. Thompson, David Parfitt. Executive producers, Mark Shivas, Mike Newell, Keith Evans, Steve Christian, Bruce Davey. Co-producer, Mark Cooper.

Directed by Tim Fywell. Screenplay, Heidi Thomas, based on the novel by Dodie Smith. Camera (color, widescreen), Richard Greatrex, B.S.C.; editor, Roy Sharman; music, Dario Marianelli; production designer, John-Paul Kelly; art directors, Leigh Walker, Mike Stallion; set decorator, Judy Farr; costume designer, Charlotte Walter. Reviewed at Palm Springs Film Festival, Jan. 11, 2003. Running time: 111 MIN.  
Cassandra Mortmain ..... Romola Garai  
Rose Mortmain ..... Rose Byrne  
Simon Cotton ..... Henry Thomas  
Neil Cotton ..... Marc Blucas  
James Mortmain ..... Bill Nighy  
Topaz Mortmain ..... Tara Fitzgerald  
Mrs. Cotton ..... Sinead Cusack  
Stephen Colley ..... Henry Cavill

By ANDY KLEIN

**D**odie Smith, author of classic kid tale "101 Dalmatians" also wrote the very different "I Capture the Castle," a serious look at the complexities of love. For his first feature, director Tim Fywell (the TV movie "Norma Jean and Marilyn") has transformed this autobiographical novel into a perceptive, wholly engaging drama, infusing the proceedings with a light tone that almost qualifies the film as a comedy, yet never loses sight of the unpredictability of human emotions. Pic richly deserves an audience and, given careful art-house handling and certain critical support, should find one.

Romola Garai is teenage protagonist Cassandra Mortmain, who narrates an opening sequence in which she, at age 7, moves with her family to a remote castle in Suffolk so her father (Bill Nighy) can work on his second novel. (The vague similarity to the setup of "The Shining" is only strengthened when we finally get a glimpse of Dad's manuscript.)

But now, 10 years have passed, and nothing has gone as planned. Dad hasn't written anything coherent, Mom has died, the clan is two years behind on the rent, and wilder big sister Rose (Rose Byrne) — full of hormones and romantic yearnings — is going stir crazy. The one upside is Cassandra's new stepmother, Topaz (Tara Fitzgerald), a lovable flake. But the future looks grim.

Enter the Cottons, a family of wealthy Americans who have inherited the castle and the estate that surrounds it. The Cottons comprise a disarmingly frank mother (Sinead Cusack); her elder son and heir, Simon (Henry Thomas, saddled at first with a beard that appears just as hideous to Mortmain sisters as it does to us); and another, more roughly appealing son, Neil (Marc Blucas). A marriage to one of the Cottons would solve all the family's problems, so the already love-hungry Rose throws herself at Simon.

Cottonmania is not limited to Rose, however. Secretly, Cassandra is also infatuated with Simon. And Dad starts hanging out with Mrs. Cotton, much to Topaz's dismay.

Rose manages, not only to ensnare Simon, but even to convince herself — if only briefly — that she's in love with him. In addition, there is a tangle of flirtations and encounters in-



**WALKING THE WALK:** Civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, right, a key adviser to Martin Luther King Jr., was openly gay at a time when even many progressives were homophobic.