

Gay City NEWS

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Queer World on Film

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Ernesto Palma and Nikolai Shpakov in Gail Freedman's "Hot to Trot." | CURT WORDEN

BY GARY M. KRAMER | This year's edition of NewFest: New York's LGBT Film Festival features more than 100 shorts, features, and documentaries that showcase international perspectives on queer life.

"Hot to Trot" (Oct. 22, 4 p.m. at Cinépolis Chelsea) is a lovely, graceful documentary featuring two same-sex ballroom dancing couples. The film, directed by Gail Freedman, showcases Costa Rica transplant Ernesto Palma and his Hungarian dancing partner, Robbie Tristan, in New York City. The men are poetry in motion, but a health issue sends Tristan back home, which prompts Palma to find a new partner: Nikolai Shpakov. Meanwhile, across the country in the Bay Area, Emily Coles and Kieren Jameson are winning top prizes in the April Follies, a same-sex ballroom dance competition.

Freedman captures the beauty and energy of the dancers as they prepare for the 2014 Gay Games. They practice and push each other to perform. They also deal with conflicts that arise. Palma describes the relationship with his ballroom partner as being "like a fucking marriage — without the fucking."

Freedman wisely allows viewers to get to know — and therefore care about — all her subjects, who discuss their coming out and family life, as well as health challenges they face. There is thankfully little emphasis on the competition until a nail-biter of a finale for one of the teams at the Gay Games.

"Hot to Trot" shows how dancing provides inner strength to these men and women. Each developed a sense of pride and self-confidence that allowed them to become not just better dancers, but better people, as well. And that's why this fine doc is such a crowd-pleaser.