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OUT

(although not very engaging) romp through outrageous diva behavior and "A Pocket Guide to Queer Moments in Opera." One chapter, the book's keenest and most complete, concentrates on the idolatry thrust on Maria Callas and ponders why gays feel a bond with this kind of onstage/offstage superstar.

According to Koestenbaum, the true opera queen, while he may admire many singers, swears a total allegiance to just one—nearly always a soprano. The author's own favorite is Anna Moffo, but he recognizes that Callas lived more as a true diva-queen in both life and art, and better illustrates his points.

What disappoints most with *The Queen's Throat*, however, is not so much what Koestenbaum has included, but what he has left out. Gay men have always been drawn to larger-than-life female celebrities, but readers looking for the reason behind this phenomenon will find very little here. Neither is there much about the gay influence in opera, which is odd considering the enormous presence of gays in the field, especially in 20th century American opera.

Ultimately, *The Queen's Throat* is one of those books that will appeal to fanatics who read every word written about grand opera, to those "baby fans" who haven't yet reached that level of all-consuming passion and to fairly ordinary readers intrigued by the novelty of examining the combination of opera and homosexuality. —K.C.

## AIDS poetry heartfelt

*A Journal of the Plague Years: Poems 1979-1992* by Walter Holland, Magic City Press, \$9.95

Walter Holland's first collection of poetry, *A Journal of the Plague Years*, explores such subjects as cruising rituals, Sen. Jesse Helms and the sights and sounds of various places including Spain, Turkey and Greece.

Holland is at his best, however, when he speaks from the heart about his personal experiences and observations of friends and lovers who have lived with and died from AIDS. Constituting the major portion of the collection, these poems ache and breathe with the sadness and rage the epidemic has caused.

"To the Hospital" describes Holland helping a loved one get dressed, packed and taken by taxi to the hospital, only three blocks away, because the man is too weak to walk:

I have held in my hands  
the dim contents of that day,  
a plastic sack stuffed with your coat, one crumpled  
suit, one folded tie—these are the vestments  
of the dead, the raiments that we carry back  
through empty lobbies after dark.

"For A.B." is an exceptional poem about a friend attempting to write down his stories, no matter how long that process may take, in order to leave behind a record after his death. "On the Beach" is a perceptive poem that finds parallels to the AIDS crisis in an old movie and "Season Opener, Fire Island" contrasts the spectacle of gay men carrying out their societal rituals with the pain that lies below the surface:

Grief is a studied stillness,  
the place you freeze the frame,  
a beautiful torso on the beach,  
sculpted out of sand.

Though the subject matter may be somber at times, Holland repeatedly inspires by showing the tenderness, compassion and bravery of a wide variety of people. Interspersing pop cultural references to people like Andy Warhol, Ken Kesey and Tracy Chapman, Holland has expertly interwoven the common threads of humanity that connect us all. —N.K.

Author William Haywood Henderson richly describes the western landscape, human and otherwise, in *Native*, his incredible first novel that is more than a coming-out story in today's wild west.



When the narrator looks back and recounts the explosion through his subjective recollections. Though frustrating for the reader at first, the style quickly becomes an effective device.

*Native* counterpoints rough-hewn, small-minded country men and women with detailed, poetic descriptions of spectacular landscapes untouched—unspoiled—by human hands. Dirt and blood and mud comprise essential elements of this world behind the long-gone Marlboro-man mythology.

*Native* details the abrupt disruption of the life of a young cowboy named Blue when his "friends" suspect he might be gay. Stopping briefly at the local dance bar, Blue reacts with curiosity to an overtly effeminate Native American named Gilbert. Creating an immediate public spectacle and scandal, Gilbert draws Sam, Blue's friend and ranchhand, into a dance. When a homophobic attack follows, Blue's loyalties become evident. What ensues next are scenes of violence, dislocation, isolation and soul-searching.

Avoiding clichés, Blue does not go to San Francisco or any other gay mecca. Not even Denver. He stays in the country of his birth and fights it out. Unfortunately, the ending is maddeningly ambiguous.

Despite all, what remains most important to Blue is maintaining his identity and his home. He initially downplays the night's violence by assuring himself that "bad things happen, and then you work at setting things right." He ultimately learns that life is not that simple. The seeming impossibility of returning to his previous life unchanged almost destroys him and the men closest to him.

Of particular interest to many readers is mention of the Native American "berdache." Gilbert explains the significance and responsibilities of this traditional figure:

"A man would take this berdache as a wife as if it were something special, a real honor, a real thrill in the crotch.... They were magic, the center of ceremonies, making rain, healing, spiritual power.... You light a fire and put this guy in the center of a circle and you bring out the warriors, start the drums, young warriors, and they start dancing around the berdache, and they screw the berdache to make the magic."

Interactions between Blue, Sam and Gilbert, in spite of themselves, are surprisingly romantic in an ultramanly kind of way. But there are no hot and steamy man-on-man sex scenes. Rather, the homosexual male bonding that does exist is more of a macho, extended prelude to a kiss.

Rich descriptions of the landscape of the human condition—its peaks and valleys—comprise *Native*, an overall simple story told with unparalleled elegance and style. More than just a nature story. More than just a "coming out" story. And more than just a finely-detailed travelogue of today's wild west. An incredible first novel by what promises to be a major voice in American literature. Keep an eye out for William Haywood Henderson. —T.W.K

## Sex book necessary but dull

*The Lesbian Sex Book* by Wendy Caster ill. by Julie May, Alyson Publications

*The Lesbian Sex Book* is designed as an alphabetized index, from "Afterplay" to "Who's on Top?," of lesbian sex terms, body parts and what to do with them, and general sexual information. Author Wendy Caster writes in her introduction that the book is primarily for women who are just coming out, the sort of "dyke handbook" that more experienced sisters joke about. Caster also says it is useful for those who have been out for awhile to learn new positions. With her goal in mind, I set about trying to read it from both perspectives.

There is something strange about a guide to lesbian sex that is arranged alphabetically. Although it does highlight the idea that lesbian sex cannot be defined linearly—meaning, that there's not a beginning, middle or end to intimacy between women; that there's more creativity involved—alphabetizing sex was too creative for me. It is funny yet disconcerting to go from "Mail Order" to "Masturbation," simply because they both begin with the same letter.

As a result, *Sex Book* isn't quite the tell-all, down-and-dirty handbook I expected. Caster interviewed seven women for her research, and includes an eighth lesbian voice that is a composite of "...all the women who've giggled and then whispered to me about all the wonderful experiences they had had." She was responsible in terms of

She knows her way around a bedroom. Syndicated columnist Wendy delivers a lesbian manual that is positive, nonjudgmental and goes beyond basics.

her sensitivity to sexual topics covered in survivors in mind; she that honor differences recommend this book abuse issues—which, those lesbians who w unable to come out.

*Sex Book* is illustrated the text. Most are of supposedly demon illustration of two w helmets on. As star women certainly reflect cartoonish feel about crayons and color the steamy sex photos I w

Caster's guide succeeds making intimacy between of us just coming out boring. The writing or The fact that such a understanding of our b. *Sex Book* makes it obvious done in defining how find erotic and what w together. So supplement Bright or Joanne Loula *On Our Backs, Bad Atti* for you. —C.M.

## Stories evoke

*Tahuri* by Ngahua T. Women's Press, \$11.95

These are delicious in lesbian—and Maori—in connects the tales is one who lives in a poor area her *kuia* (grandmother

Taken together, the create the feeling of m centered world being generation. Ngahua Te working class Maori life her aunties to "the p "flash" houses of t thoroughly intimidated home and into a world place her back into safe

The erotic moments remembered perfume of Atea says to the hot-che story: "Tahuri gulped. W The writing is skillfull language, keeping impre Each story, and even t page of myth, is lush evocative of a whole wor reader is introduced to a other she recognizes her —L.L.

## The Group fo

*Good Boys* by Paul Re

It had to happen—rewrote *The Group* for Paul Reidinger's new n Michael all attend an