



# REEL AFFIRMING

An LGBTQ2+ Film Series

Each film followed by **discussion**

Friday Evenings 7:00pm

Jan 26: Pride

Feb 23: Pariah

Mar 23: My Life in Pink/Ma vie en rose

Apr 27: Cloudburst

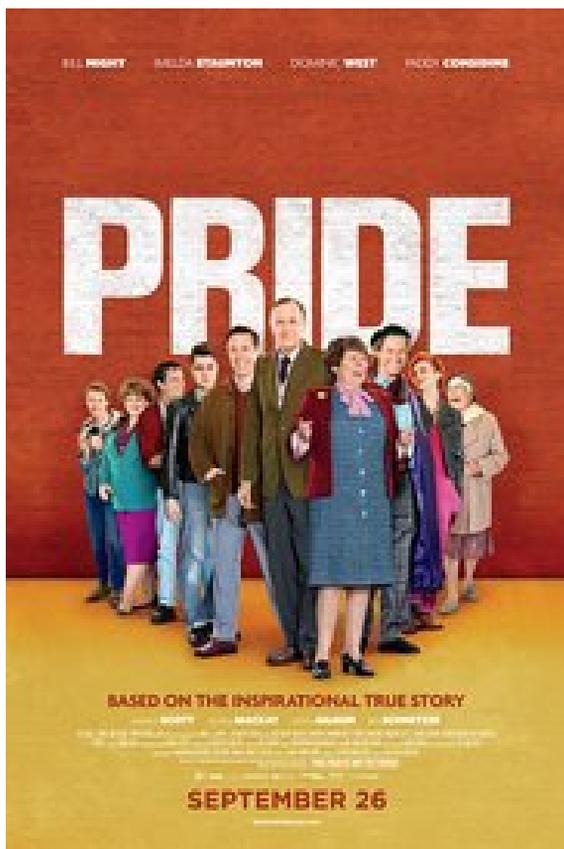
May 25: Two Soft Things/  
Two Hard Things



## EMMANUEL UNITED CHURCH

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## Pride

Cards on the table: having been actively involved in the banner-carrying, badge-wearing, internecine bickering of student politics in the early 80s, I am predisposed to embrace any movie that celebrates the rag-tag allegiances that sprang up across class and gender boundaries during the miners' strike. A fondness for cute quiffs, turn-ups, and Dexys hats helps too, along with nostalgia for the time when playing Bronski Beat

records really loudly could be interpreted as a political act. Add to this an enduring love of British films such as *Brassed Off* and *Made in Dagenham*, which blend hard fact with sentimental fiction, and frankly *Pride* had me at "Hello." Yet even taking all the above into account, I can still say with my hand on my heart that this boisterous tale of the unlikely union between striking Welsh miners and out-and-proud gay Londoners is one of the most irresistibly uplifting films of the year – for any audience.

George MacKay is Joe, a just-turned-20 mummy's boy on the brink of coming out who finds himself shaking a bucket for the miners in 1984 at the insistence of gobby Mark Ashton (Ben Schnetzer) and his friends at London's Gay's the Word bookshop. Insisting that anyone demonised by Thatcher is a comrade-in-arms, Mark launches the inelegantly named Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners ("it's a support group, not a skiffle band") and heads off to Onllwyn, a

mining village in the Dulais valley, which seems to view “gays” and vowels with equal suspicion. Cue much La Cage aux Folles-style culture-clashing between the macho miners and metrosexual activists, mediated by theatrical luvvie Jonathan (Dominic West), who busts some outre disco moves with oddly unifying results.

While politics today may be 50 shades of grey, actor-turned-playwright Stephen Beresford’s feelgood screenplay reminds us of a time when things were more black-and-white – when the venality of Thatcher’s government asked everyone Which Side Are You On? Yet *Pride* not merely acknowledges but embraces the fact that the opposition were riven with divide-and-rule disagreement. When Mark demands allegiance to the miners, his Gay Pride comrades angrily recall being “beaten up every day” by the very people they are now asked to support. Despite hefty donations, many of the miners and their wives remain frostily hostile to the incomers amid growing anxieties about Aids (these were the days of Greater Manchester police chief constable James Anderton’s “human cesspool of their own making” tirades, and apocalyptic “public health” campaigns more concerned with stonemasonry than safe sex). Yet for all the factionalism, the tone here is conciliatory and celebratory; when a breakaway lesbian separatist group (all three of them) emerges within the ranks of LGSM, we laugh with them rather than at them: Beresford and director Matthew Warchus (who helmed *Matilda* on stage, and will succeed Kevin Spacey at the Old Vic) opt to respect and empower anyone willing to fight the good fight.

In dramatic terms, the strokes could hardly be broader. Playing to the widest possible audience, *Pride* employs a reassuring cast and familiar Ealing comedy tropes in fine, broad-church fashion. The

soundtrack too wears its heart on its LP sleeve, blending songs of solidarity (Billy Bragg's mighty rendition of There Is Power in a Union) with Greek chorus pop (from Shirley & Company to Frankie) culminating in a Pits and Perverts benefit at the Electric Ballroom.

Meanwhile, down in the valleys, the miners' wives stand and sing Bread and Roses, leaving nary a dry eye in the house. Holding it all together is a strong thread of Full Monty humour, Beresford taking a leaf out of Simon Beaufoy's book and giving all the best lines to the working-class women whose indomitable spirit equals and outdoes that of their embattled menfolk. Imelda Staunton is magnificent as Hefina, making the most of her heavily trailed declaration that "We're just off to Swansea now for a massive les-off!" and leading her drunken cohort through the gay bars of London with game aplomb. Nor does Warchus shy away from the sex which so often dare not speak its name in mainstream movies – what snogging there is knows no gender boundaries, and a sprinkling of dildos and unzipped centrefolds ("God, that takes me back!") ensures that this pays more than coy lip-service to its equal-ops mantra. It's significant, too, that Joe's first kiss coincides with the climax of a rousing speech about solidarity, ensuring that the personal and political go hand-in-hand throughout.

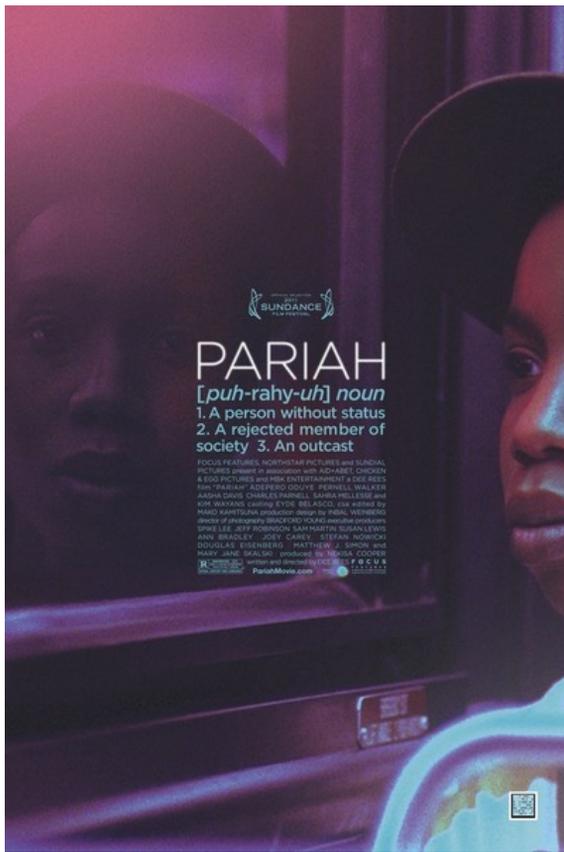
And there's so much more to love: Paddy Considine as enlightened striker Dai, arguing the case for unity; Bill Nighy, beautifully understated as old-school stalwart Cliff with his not-so-hidden history; Liz White reminding us why we all fell for her in Life on Mars. OK, so it may not have the toughness of Brassed Off or the fleet-footedness of Billy Elliot, but what it does have is spine-tingling charm by the bucket-load. I laughed, I cried, and frankly I would have raised a clenched fist were both hands not already occupied

wiping away the bittersweet tears of joy.

Courtesy of The Guardian Newspaper:

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/sep/14/pride-film-review-mark-kermode-power-in-unlikely-union>

# Pariah



Alike is 17 and never been kissed. A bright Brooklyn high school student, she dreams of being kissed by a girl. For years, she has accepted her lesbianism, it appears, but hasn't come out to her parents, her sister or really anyone except her gay friend Laura. Yet everybody sort of knows. She lives in a condition familiar to many families, where something has long been sensed but never acknowledged. Home life is a process of evasion. Words take on more than one shading.

Alike (pronounced a-LIE-kah) is played by Adepero Oduye, in a performance so natural and touching that she does what every director hopes for, she brings the character into being without the need of explanatory dialogue or obligatory set-up scenes. She is an A student, being raised by Arthur (Charles Parnell), an affectionate policeman, and Audrey (Kim Wayans), a churchgoing mother. It's clear that both parents know their daughter is gay, but that's never acknowledged and is consigned to that category of family realities that are either (1) behavior the girl will outgrow and correct, or (2) is somehow the other parent's fault.

Situations like this are not uncommon in many families, and apply not only to homosexuality but to any area in which a teenager has entered a realm of her life that parents choose to remain blind to. Alike shares a room with her sister, Sharonda (Sahra Mellese), who

like many siblings, knows the story, thinks it's no big deal and goes along with the official family denial. Alike's best friend is the butch Laura (Pernell Walker). They go to a nearby lesbian club, which Alike visits with sweet shyness, making wardrobe adjustments between home and destination so she can pass in two roles.

Her mother knows the story on Laura and wants Alike to stop seeing her. She encourages a friendship with Bina (Aasha Davis), the daughter of one of her church friends. Ironic: Laura has never made a pass at Alike, but Bina wants to cuddle and kiss, and Alike at last acts on her sexual feelings. But Bina is the solution to no problems.

"Pariah" is probably too loaded a word to be the title of this film. Alike lives in a world where homosexuality is far from unknown, and her problems will grow smaller in a few years as she moves away from home. This story, so tellingly written and acted, is about the painful awkwardness of that process. What makes it worse is that there's repressed hostility between her parents, and Alike's sexuality becomes the occasion for tension with deeper sources.

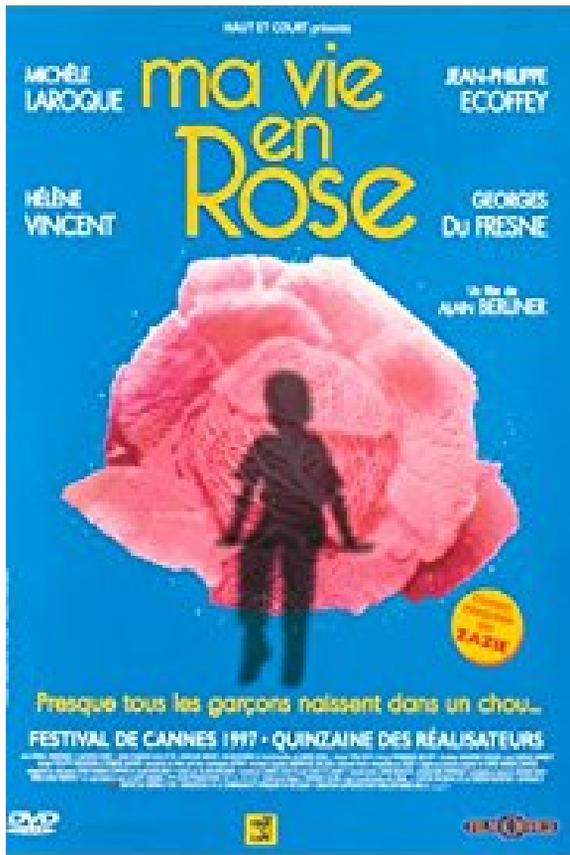
The film is an impressive debut for writer-director Dee Rees. It's said to be somewhat autobiographical. It began as a 2007 short subject, was brought to maturity at a Sundance laboratory, and one of the film's producers is Spike Lee, whose presence in Brooklyn must have been an inspiration for Rees. On a low budget, she takes advantage of the vibrant photography of Bradford Young, who also shot the original short subject.

So what we're seeing here is the emergence of a promising writer-director, an actor and a cinematographer who are all exciting, and have cared to make a film that seeks helpful truths.

Courtesy of Roger Ebert

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/pariah-2012>

## Ma Vie En Rose



Ludovic is a 7-year-old boy who likes to dress in girl's clothes, not so much because he likes the clothes as because he is convinced he is a girl. It all seems very clear. After he learns about chromosomes, he explains to his parents that instead of the female XX chromosomes he was intended to get, he received the male XY after "my other X fell in the garbage." Ludovic's parents have just moved to a suburb of Paris that looks for all the world like a set for "Ozzie and Harriet." Ominously,

they live next door to his father's boss. A barbecue is planned to welcome the newcomers, and it's at this party that Ludovic makes his dramatic entrance, dressed in pink. The adults, who would not have looked twice at a little girl wearing jeans and sneakers, are stunned. "It's normal until 7," Ludovic's mother explains bravely. "I read it in Marie-Claire." "Ma Vie en Rose" offers gentle fantasy, and a little hard reality, about Ludovic's predicament. He is convinced he is a girl, knows some sort of mistake was made, and is serenely intent on correcting it. Soon he's making the arrangements for a play "marriage" with Jerome, his best friend, who lives next door and is therefore, unluckily, the boss's son. Since the boss is a blustering bigot, this is not a good idea. Indeed, most of the adults in the movie seem like members of the Gender Role Enforcement Police.

The film is careful to keep its focus within childhood. It's not a story about homosexuality or transvestism, but about a little boy who

thinks he's a little girl. Maybe Ludovic, played by a calmly self-possessed 11-year-old named Georges du Fresne, will grow up to be gay. Maybe not. That's not what the movie is about. And the performance reflects Ludovic's innocence and naivete; there is no sexual awareness in his dressing-up, but simply a determination to set things right.

The movie is about two ways of seeing things: the child's and the adult's. It shows how children construct elaborate play worlds out of dreams and fantasies, and then plug their real worlds right into them. Ludovic's alternate universe is ruled by his favorite TV personality, named Pam, who dresses like a princess and has a boyfriend named Ken and flies about the houses with her sparkling magic wand. It also contains his beloved grandmother. In this world Ludovic is sort of an assistant princess, and we can see how his worship of Pam has made him want to be just like her.

Adults, on the other hand, see things in more literal terms, and are less open to fancy. No one is threatened by a girl who dresses like a boy, but the father's boss is just one of the people who sees red whenever Ludovic turns up in drag. This innocent little boy is made to pay for all the gay phobias, fears and prejudices of the adult world.

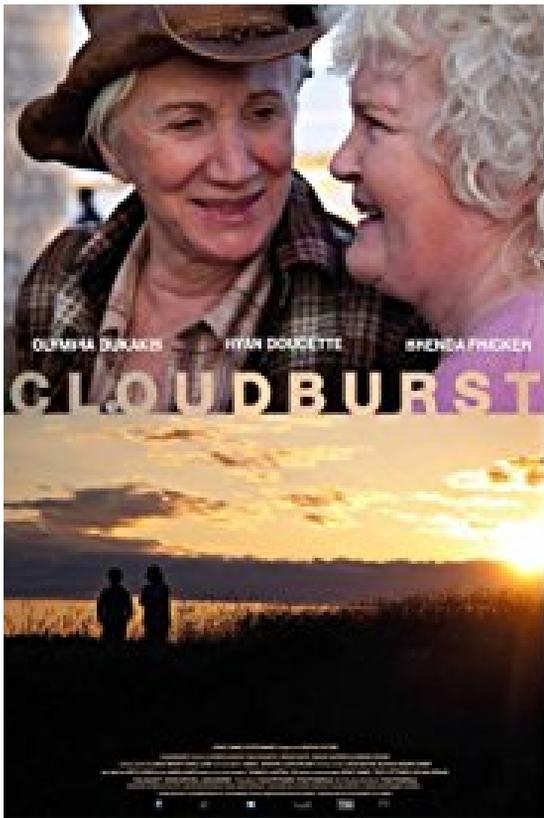
Because "Ma Vie en Rose" ("My Life in Pink") is a comedy, however, the going never gets too heavy. Ludovic is taken to a psychiatrist, he is shouted at by his (mostly sympathetic) parents, he is a figure of mystery to his three well-adjusted siblings and he is a threat to the stability of his neighborhood. Since it's one of those sitcom neighborhoods where everyone spends a lot of time out on the lawn or gossiping over the driveways, what happens to one family is the concern of all.

"Ma Vie en Rose" is the first film by Alain Berliner, a Belgian, who worked from the original screenplay of Chris vander Stappen, herself a tomboy who got a lot of heat as a child. There are clearly important personal issues at work beneath the surface, especially for vander Stappen, who identifies herself as a lesbian, but they skate above them. And there is a certain suspense: Surely Ludovic cannot simply be humored? Simply allowed to dress as a girl? Or can he?

Courtesy of Roger Ebert

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/ma-vie-en-rose-1998>

# Cloudburst



Cloudburst stars Academy Award winners Olympia Dukakis (Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Moonstruck in 1988) and Brenda Fricker (Best Actress in a Supporting Role for My Left Foot in 1990) as Stella and Dottie, a lesbian couple well beyond a certain age who embark on a road trip to Canada to get married.

Stella and Dottie have been committed to each other for more than 30 years.

In that time, both have aged and Dottie has gone blind. So when Dottie falls off their bed and injures herself, her granddaughter Molly (Kristin Booth) puts her into a nursing home without consulting her or the woman who loved and cared for her for most of the time she has been alive — and then gives that woman notice to move out of Dottie's house.

(It is at this point in the film and films like this where there are such forces coming against our protagonists, that you imagine different scenarios for a happy ending.)

The stubborn and spirited Stella puts up a valiant and hilarious fight — beating Molly's cop husband Tommy (Michael McPhee) with his own hat and then jumping on his back, but to no avail. Interestingly, there were no tears on the part of Stella when Dottie gets taken away — just anger. I took notice of this because a lesser writer and director than Thom Fitzgerald would have gone for the tears instead.

Then in a scene that would make Lucy Ricardo proud, Stella cleverly breaks into Dottie's nursing home and sneaks her out in the dark of night. Stella takes a hungry Dottie to a nearby diner – where she proposes marriage. They decide to go to Canada where it will actually be legal (this was about four years before the June 2015 Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage in the United States). Along the way they pick up a handsome hitchhiker named Prentice (Ryan Doucette), who is trying to get back to Canada to see his dying mother.

To thwart authorities who are certain to be on the lookout for them, Stella has Prentice drive Dottie across the border ahead of her while she hitchhikes the rest of the way. She gets picked up by a conservative-looking gentleman of a certain age, but in what we've come to understand as typical Stella, offends him to the point that he pulls over and asks her to get out of his car. Once over the border, Dottie, knowing how Stella is, tells Prentice to go back across the border and retrieve her. But whereas Dottie and Prentice made it past the border guard with no trouble, Stella's mouth gets her and Prentice into such trouble that he has to be stripped searched.

Once across the border, Stella and Dottie take Prentice to see his mother. Though she is very happy to see him, Prentice's mother warns him about his father – who for some reason that isn't explained in the film, is less than pleased to see his son. Stella and Dottie see this and where they were initially going to leave Prentice to spend time with his family, decide to take him back with them to Maine after they get married.

The day before they were set to get married, they all head to a bar where Prentice, who has realized that he has learned so much about

love from watching Stella and Dottie together, makes one of the most amazing toasts ever put on film (not to overhype it).

That night, Stella realizes that she can no longer take care of Dottie by herself and reconsiders her proposal. She shares these feelings with Dottie the next day and in the film's sweetest scene, Dottie tells her that she had convinced herself that she never wanted to get married because it wasn't a possibility when they got together. Stella tells her that she had always wanted to marry Dottie. Then Dottie tells her that if she had asked, she would have said yes because she could never say no to Stella.

At the courthouse, just as they're about to get married, Molly shows up with Tommy to interrupt the proceedings. It is discovered that she had committed fraud in terms of taking control of her grandmother's estate, which gets her arrested. She and Dottie iron things out, but on their way back to the courthouse to get married, Dottie has what appears to be a heart attack. Still, she asks Prentice to marry her and Stella – even if unofficially – before they go to the hospital.

After 31 years, Stella and Dottie are finally married – even if for that one day. When Stella and Prentice are back in Maine looking at the same sky that Dottie saw even in blindness, she tells him that that one day was “the best fucking day of my life.”

Cloudburst is a beautiful love story that, even if it didn't end as happily as I had hoped it would have earlier in the film, still ends happily because of the appreciation that Stella had for the time she had with Dottie.

Dukakis and Fricker are as wonderful in the film as you would expect

two veteran and experienced actresses to be. You believe that these two women were a lesbian couple in a committed relationship. And any gays (or straights for that matter) who rebuff this film as just a lesbian drama are missing out on experiencing love portrayed on film that many of them wish they could experience in real life.

But if that is not enough, Doucette is really hot and we get two shots of his great ass – including one where he smacks it.

Review courtesy of Gay Essential

<http://gay-themed-films.com/essential-opinion-cloudburst/>

## Two Soft Things, Two Hard Things

You're probably familiar with Pride Toronto and other popular, long-awaited festivals and activities that happen during the summer. But have you ever heard of a gay parade in the Arctic? Well, it just so happens that an unusual pride event in the capital of Canadian Nunavut spurred interest among two filmmakers and was the decisive spark in igniting a desperately needed discussion about LGBTQ rights within the Inuit community. The two

directors set out to document and attend a small, but controversial pride celebration in Iqaluit and, in doing so, ended up uncovering the indwelling struggles and intricacies of indigenous life and telling a story whose disclosure was long overdue.

Two Soft Things, Two Hard Things focuses on the revolting and often overlooked effects of colonization, as well as how core beliefs and traditions have been abolished or wormed out of Inuit culture due to religious education. Collecting both informative interviews with non-Inuit experts and real, touching stories from persecuted inhabitants of Nunavut, the documentary provides a balanced perspective on the atrocious discrimination still present in the North. After witnessing the testimonies of former and current natives, it becomes apparent that parts of the Inuit past have been shunned or completely rejected as a result of Christian indoctrination – a term not used lightly, but candidly in order to accurately represent the reality of shaming an entire culture into negating and forswearing its roots.



“I knew that either I would just get to the point where I could no longer stomach the idea of waking up every day and would have taken my own life like so many youth in my community or one kid would’ve gone too far and just hit me too many times and then that would have been the end of it” – says Nuka Fennell, a former Iqaluit resident who was interviewed for the documentary. Although homophobia and prejudice are still widespread, most of us now live in an environment where same-sex marriage, pride parades and being openly pro-LGBT are relatively common and slowly becoming more accepted by society. But for Nuka, coming out was close to a death sentence in a region where queerness was taboo and all traces of homosexuality had been erased from history. As the film progresses, the urgency and necessity of discussing these issues becomes more and more palpable. Even within the LGBTQ community, knowledge of the Inuit past’s intersection with homosexuality seems to be scarce. And this is exactly why Mark Kenneth Woods’ and Michael Yerxa’s documentary is an imperative introduction.

The film’s title comes from what Inuit elders call “lesbian” and “gay” in their native language – translated ad litteram, the words mean “two soft things rubbing against each other” (for women) and, conversely, “two hard things rubbing against each other” (for men). The highlight of the documentary is the enriching interview with LGBTQ ally, Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, an Inuk producer and director who studies the life of her people prior to the colonization. Her dedication and heartwarming message truly builds up the movie’s foundation and was, coincidentally, what prompted and facilitated the film’s genesis. Yerxa and Woods heard of Alethea in their research and finally decided to get in contact with her. It just so

happens that the woman was in Toronto at the time, one block away from Yerxa's apartment. As she was leaving the city the following day, she met with the two directors in the morning and shot the interview which got the ball rolling for the whole documentary. Inuits were covertly taught that they have to make a choice – they could either keep their cultural identity or their sexual identity. Alethea was the first to openly take a stand and show her people that they can choose both.

Woods and Yerxa have taken up a difficult task – this culture's past and lessons are just breaking through the cracks of Canadian history and have only really been unveiled in the last two or three years. Despite its complex and poignant tradition, the heritage of Nunavut is still fresh and a complete novelty to the rest of the world. Due to this, the first half of the documentary resembles a history crash course at times and merely skims through the stories it lovingly attempts to convey. This is also due to the lofty travelling expenses required for shooting the film and the exceptionally short period of time the directors had at their disposal. As they put it – “We've got the basics and we're scratching the surface. We hope that this motivates youth and filmmakers to go out and speak to their elders before it's too late, to fill in the blanks, and find out more information”.

Two soft things, two hard things offered an enlightening and heartening peek into a world I knew very little about. Covering topics ranging from language and loss of cultural identity to the Human Rights Act and family structures in Nunavut, the documentary brings a vital piece to the puzzle of replacing shame with pride in the lives of LGBT individuals from all around the globe.

Review courtesy of Gay Essential

<http://gay-themed-films.com/film-review-two-soft-things-two-hard-things/>