

Whether you're part of the "Here comes Santa Claus" crowd or you lean more toward "Bah, humbug," 'tis the season to head to the multiplex for those A-list movies we adore. Gay content is slim this year, but *The Advocate* has combed the holiday blockbusters and indies for queer sensibility, behind-the-scenes talents—and our favorite eye candy

## s p o t l i g h t

# Big fish in the Hollywood pond

Oscar-winning producers Dan Jinks and Bruce Cohen have netted a holiday must-see with Tim Burton's latest fantasia  
By Michael Giltz

In *Big Fish*—the latest movie from out producers Bruce Cohen and Dan Jinks—Ewan McGregor stars as Edward Bloom, a charming young man who exists in a fantasy-tinged world where he can befriend any animal, tame giants, tell great jokes, woo the woman he loves away from her fiancé, and generally glide from success to success. Cohen and Jinks are enjoying careers almost as charmed as Bloom's life. Their first credit as producers was the Oscar-winning blockbuster *American Beauty*.

"I think we all knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience," says Cohen of that Cinderella-story triumph. "We all knew this doesn't happen all the time." Now they're following this summer's Rock Hudson–Doris Day send-up *Down With Love* (which might very well snag Oscar nominations for its clever production design and costumes) with another Oscar hopeful, *Big Fish*—perhaps director Tim Burton's most imaginatively sweeping movie since *Edward Scissorhands*—which opens Christmas Day in limited release before going nationwide in January.

It's a bit of magic realism dipped in Americana, thanks to a cult novel by Daniel Wallace that was adapted by gay screenwriter John August (*Go*). The film also stars Albert Finney playing Bloom as an old man, Jessica Lange as his wife, and Billy Crudup as his son.

For Cohen and Jinks, working with talented people on smart, adventurous projects has been a career hallmark from the very beginning. Jinks began in New York theater—his first job after graduating from New York University was on an early workshop of the musical *Jelly's Last Jam*. Cohen was mentored by, among others, Steven Spielberg: His first internship was on the legendary TV show *Hill Street Blues*; his second, *The Color Purple*.

Cohen, a Yale graduate, is a longtime political activist, so it was fitting that the two friends would serve on the steering committee for *Out There*, a Hollywood group focused on gay and lesbian issues that Cohen helped form with ►

Magic-realism Americana in *Big Fish*

THE ADVOCATE

# Gay guide to holiday movies



From left: Alison Lohman and McGregor as *Big Fish*'s young lovers; Cohen and Jinks

top Disney executive Nina Jacobson.

August has known the two for a few years—well enough to entrust *Big Fish* to their care. "I was in a weird situation in that I had a project at a studio [Columbia Pictures] that didn't have producers," recalls August. "I had one shot to get producers. I felt I could trust them and that they had good taste. With *American Beauty*, they had just made a very difficult comedy-drama for a major studio. And that's what *Big Fish* was going to be, even though the scale of *Big Fish* was a lot different."

Jinks has been out since his days in the theater (where, he notes laughingly, everyone was gay), though appearing in *Out* magazine for a story on *Out* There was still a big step. Cohen began to come out professionally when Spielberg offered him a job on *The Flintstones* in 1992, and Cohen felt he needed to make clear who he was before accepting it. "He was completely wonderful and said, 'Why would you think I'd care?'" says Cohen. They dismiss the idea of a "gay mafia" but agree there is an advantage to being queer in Tinseltown.

"I do find that gay people are always very open and accepting of meeting other gay people," says Jinks. "We will go to parties where there will be heads of studios and top writers and top directors and top producers who are gay, and they'll be mixing with somebody who is

an assistant or just out of college or a creative executive. The [straight] heads of studios won't mix with the assistants in the same way."

Just finding gay people while filming *Big Fish* in Alabama was a challenge, although happily, Cohen notes, the gay people found them. "They brought us into a

world of their friends that was a very progressive, racially mixed, mixed-by-sexual-orientation group of people," says Cohen. "It was as nice and fun and interesting a crowd as you'd find anywhere. Now, that's not the norm, but there are pockets everywhere. I was the only gay Jew I could find in Montgomery, Ala. I found other gays and other Jews, and I was looking for another gay Jew, but I never did find one."

It's hard to find other producers who've enjoyed such distinguished success right out of the box. They don't dwell in the past, but *American Beauty* did change their priorities: Both insist they pulled back from some more commercial, less interesting projects to focus on the movies that really excite them.

One project in development, *The Rivals*, is about the bitter competition between the legendary stage actresses Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse. Another, *The Forgotten*, has just started filming in New York starring Cohen's high school buddy Julianne Moore—so the two Los Angeles-based men are in New York for a while.

The unattached Jinks is staying in the loft of his friend Kevin Williamson (*Dawson's Creek*), while Cohen is renting an apartment "at the corner of Bleecker and Christopher, which is the most fantastic street in the world." Of course, it doesn't hurt that he has found a boyfriend, says Cohen, "adding to the list of things I love about New York." ■



Matthew McGrory (as Karl the Giant) meets McGregor.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES HARRIS; STYLING BY JANE ROBERTS