# Premiere of experimental queer film ‘Those Who Wait’



An unconventional yet thought-provoking film inspired by historical events dating back to two decades before the American Civil War makes its debut tonight at the Philadelphia Film Society Center. Titled "Those Who Wait," this first feature film by queer filmmakers Chani Bockwinkel and Ty Burdenski explores the capture and reinterpretation of a 19th-century apocalyptic prophecy and its eerie connection to contemporary existential contemplations.

In the 1840s, upstate New York farmer William Miller propagated a doomsday prophecy, asserting his interpretation of The Bible predicted the world's end between 1843 and 1844. This message resonated deeply with thousands, including many abolitionists deeply unsettled by the period’s tension. However, when the anticipated apocalypse did not occur, the event became known as "The Great Disappointment." Despite the unmet prophecy, the Millerite movement laid the groundwork for the Seventh Day Adventist Church, a conservative evangelical Christian denomination that upholds the belief in an imminent end.

Delving into this historical phenomenon, ‘Those Who Wait’ reimagines the Millerite origins through a unique queer lens. Despite the Seventh Day Adventist Church's stance against same-sex relationships, the film features a cast from West Philadelphia’s queer community, adorned in period-specific top hats and bonnets. The narrative, though not a traditional historical account, presents dramatized depictions of key figures: William Miller himself, Ellen White, William Foy – a Black minister and a Millerite prophet, and Elizabeth Harmon – White's skeptical twin sister.

Burdenski, who resides in East Lansdowne and grew up in a Seventh Day Adventist household, had always been curious about these prophetic tales. It was this curiosity combined with Bockwinkel’s interest in the intersections of theoretical frameworks and religious constructs that fueled the collaboration. Their friendship and creative partnership, which began in their twenties in the Bay Area, provided a strong foundation for a project seven years in the making.

The film deviates from traditional narratives to explore themes through visual and auditory experiences rather than dialogue. It leverages the power of slow shots and movements, depicting moments of hope, anticipation, and eventual disillusionment, analogous to the historical Millerite experience. The imagery of characters smelling flowers and gazing at sunrises creates a poignant juxtaposition against the theme of an anticipated end.

“Those Who Wait” is neither a documentary nor a straightforward narrative; its indefinability is part of its queerness, according to Bockwinkel. This queerness manifests through the reinterpretation of histories and the inclusion of underrepresented voices. The filmmakers’ empathy with the Millerites becomes apparent as they draw parallels between the cycles of hope and disappointment experienced by the historical figures and the modern examples seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement.