

## “A Mesmerizing Eye-Opener”

The entire Civil Rights Movement has been conveniently distilled in the public consciousness into two figures, Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Nancy Kates' and Bennett Singer's splendid documentary does the great service of pulling a third figure from the shadows—the philosopher, strategist and organizer Bayard Rustin, whose defining accomplishment (among many, it should be noted) was planning and supervising the vast logistics surrounding the landmark March on Washington in 1963.

Prior to Kates' and Singer's film, I had never so much as heard Rustin's name—he died in 1987—and I doubt I'm the only person in that category. How could such a remarkable and commanding individual be so unknown to the general public? For the simple reason that Rustin was gay, which made him susceptible to exposure by J. Edgar Hoover's racist FBI and, before Stonewall and *The Boys in the Band*, a potential focal point for unwanted public opposition to the Civil Rights Movement.

For those who believe that individuals were only expunged from history in the former Soviet Union, *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* is a mesmerizing eye-opener. But the film goes beyond rescuing and “rehabilitating” its subject to inspiring audiences to carry on Rustin's world-wide crusade against injustice, discrimination and poverty. Because the fight for freedom and equal rights is taking place somewhere around the globe at any given moment, the documentary plays like a front-line report in an ongoing struggle rather than a relic of some excavated past.

From a filmmaking standpoint, there's a specific element that provides a poignancy and delicacy lacking in the great majority of historical docs. In their research of interviews and source material containing Rustin's voice, the filmmakers found three albums he recorded of traditional spirituals and work songs. By weaving these soulful tunes into the narrative, Kates and Singer came up with an artful way to maximize Rustin's presence without over-relying on recorded interviews. Equally important, the purity and vulnerability of his singing voice guides the film onto a whole other plane.

—Michael Fox, *San Francisco Film Society Review*, July 28, 2010 • [www.sf360.org/Articles/In-Depth/?pageid=12939](http://www.sf360.org/Articles/In-Depth/?pageid=12939)

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