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Ruby's Rap

by Ruby Comer
Benjamin Morgan

Ah, go blow it outta your giggy! I scream at my beau, Rudolph, ending a heated argument. I'm so tired of the drama. Other people's baggage—sheesh—who needs it? Who said we're on this earth to go two by two?! Like everything in life, one thing doesn't fit all. Give me the single life, boy. Why just ask Morgan....

In 2000, Benjamin Morgan (he goes by Morgan), then twenty-seven, wrote and directed the delightful documentary short, Meet Joe Gay, in which he explores his own life through dating and relationships. The film was his thesis for the USC School of Cinematic Arts, yet turned out to win rave reviews at film festivals and is presently featured on the DVD compilation, First Out. Several years ago, he was asked to be a part of The AMC Project: Gay Hollywood and he is summer director of the New York Film Academy where, among others, he's taught Spielberg's son. He participated in the AIDS marathon in Honolulu one year, and volunteers for the "HIV Stops With Me" campaign and also for Camp Laurel. Morgan's parents, who both recently died, are the subject of his current project, a book titled, Dear Mom and Dad. "It's been very therapeutic," he remarks, glad he was also able to document them in his film, Meet Joe Gay.

We join up at the Pasadena Playhouse to see the premiere of the musical, Sister Act. Afterward, we buy some tea and sit on the colonnade steps on this chilly evening.

Ruby Comer: Nearly seven years have passed since you explored the love arena. Did Prince Charming ever arrive at your doorstep?

Benjamin Morgan: No! [He answers in a lighthearted tone.] Since I made the film, the biggest difference is that I am less desperate now and less naive. I also learned that I was in love with the idea of having a boyfriend. With age comes more knowledge of who you are and what you want. I get slightly embarrassed when I look at the movie now.

No need to be. You were most charming and sincere. How has AIDS affected you?

I went to Stanford and was in San Francisco in the early nineties, so I felt it firsthand. I had a couple dozen friends who were HIV-positive and many of those died of AIDS. The experience inspired

[Archive]

me. In my junior year, I dropped out for a quarter and did an internship at the Names Project. It was amazing and I became interested in studying health policy. So in my senior year I did an honors thesis on AIDS public communication campaigns, evaluating them for effectiveness and making recommendations on how to make them better. I got a grant from Stanford to interview the different AIDS organizations around the country like APLA, GMHC, and STOP AIDS Project.

Very impressive and interesting, Morgan. What is going on with you now in the AIDS community?

Well, I just recently signed up for an AIDS ride for June. Friends have told me that it is a life-changing experience.

I've heard that also. I must sign up, but gee, how do I pedal with these red pumps?!

Come along and I'll help out! I must tell you—a good friend of mine, Tim Speece, died of AIDS in 1997. He used to love and laugh out loud [watching] Judge Judy. About a year later, Marci, another friend of mine from kindergarten, who was also Tim's friend, and I were watching Judge Judy. We looked at each other and being friends for so long we knew what each other was thinking: we need to go on Judge Judy as a tribute to Tim! So we made up a case and got on. All through the journey, we felt Tim was shepherding us. He would have thought it was a hoot!

Incredible. I thought all cases were real. How little I know. I should know better coming from Hollywood! Do you practice what you preach and use protection?

I do the majority of the time. I would be lying if I didn't say I slip up sometimes. And I just made a recommitment to myself to not do that anymore.

Thanks for your honesty, Morgan.

AIDS is one of the few causes that I've just been personally touched by, especially coming from Northern California. But it seems to be such a taboo topic here in L.A. When I moved here in the late nineties, some friends and I were waiting on line at Starbucks in West Hollywood. We were talking about a friend of ours who was sick. People around us—I swear to God—were so physically uncomfortable. It was like, you just don't talk about that, and that has been the case ever since I've lived here. It seems to be part of the L.A. culture, everything looks good and everything is fine. Now, what they will talk about is being a meth addict in recovery. They totally talk about that! But they won't talk about HIV and AIDS....

Ruby Comer is an independent journalist from the Midwest who is happy to call Hollywood her home away from home. Reach her by e-mail at MsRubyComer@aol.com.

February 2007

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DVDs

Delectable Gay Shorts Now Available

By Gary Kramer

Published: February 1, 2007

Two compilations of gay male shorts *First Out* and *Available Men* are now out and available on DVD.

First Out is an anthology of five shorts that received festival play over the past decade. The collection opens with the cute comedy *Is One of You Eddie?* in which a quartet of gossipy West Hollywood hunks have their brunch interrupted by an attractive man who has his own agenda. Playing on gay male stereotypes, this short could have been developed more, but it is amusing enough.



Sissy French Fry (above) and Eddie

Different, set in a high school where gay is the norm—and straight is taboo—is not that much different from the variations on this same theme that have been seen on TV (Ellen DeGeneres' sitcom did an episode like this) and in films like *(Almost) Normal* traversed the same high school territory). *Different* is not bad, it is just not distinguished.

The Neighborly Thing is the odd man out, a stylishly filmed thriller about a punk couple housesitting for a friend being visited by a neighbor. While the queer content is subtle, the story takes an unexpected twist. Unlike the rest of the films in *First Out*, however, this one does not deal with gay dating.

Meet Joe Gay is the strongest of the bunch, a comic documentary about a handsome 27-year-old gay man (Ben Morgan) who examines why he can't find Prince Charming. Interviewing his ex, his friends, his parents, and couples young and old, Ben slowly learns that being a diehard romantic does not necessarily mean you won't find love. The film has some fun at Ben's expense—his mother embarrasses him, the crew films his extensive grooming activities—and what results is an appealing, poignant short depicting the insecurities of many gay men.

The last film in *First Out* is *A Good Son*, in which a high school teen is approached by an attractive, questioning stranger, who seems intent on seducing him. While there is some nice sexual tension between the two guys, the film ends on a dramatic note that resonates.

There are some absolute gems on the shorts program *Available Men*, perhaps the best being the droll entry "Hello, Thanks," about a gay guy's experience with personal ads. (On DVD, viewers can pause to read all of the hilarious deadpan ad text).

Dating is also a big theme in this collection, but the documentary entry Irene Williams: Queen of Lincoln Road seems woefully out of place. A loving tribute to a South Beach senior who makes her own clothes and hats, this short belongs in another collection altogether.

Also falling short, but at least worthy of inclusion is the title comedy that parallels getting a film deal in Hollywood to going on a gay date. Writer/director David Dean Bottrell's film is a mildly funny if obvious mix of double entendres and mistaken identities. Despite the welcome presence of gay actor Jack Plotnick Available Men (the short) could have been cleverer.

Likewise, the animated cowboy romance Tumbleweed Town is too long even at eight minutes. Told with plastic figures, and toy cars, this is a cute concept stretched out s-l-o-w-l-y. The emotions are as artificial as the characters.

In contrast, Todd Downing's The Underminer is way too short. Based on gay writer/actor/performance artist Mike Albo's book, and featuring Albo in a dual role, this sharp satire about "the best friend who casually destroys your life" demands to be expanded to feature length.

Dave O'Brien's terrific short Straight Boys, also deserves to make a full-length feature film based on the talent he shows in his heartfelt romance. In this film, Ben (Damian Pelliccione) harbors a crush on his hunky but straight roommate Morgan (Nick Bartzen). Sweet, not saccharine, Straight Boys is played with the utmost grace.

Also terrific is the DVD's final entry, the winning Sissy Frenchfry a comedy about a queer, cheerful teenager who should be annoying, but—like its tres gay hero—it is quite infectious.

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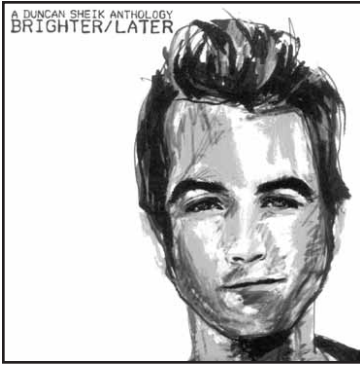
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DVDs

Agnes and His Brothers (First Run Features)

Rating: ▼▼▼▼

A fascinating study in dysfunctional psychology writer/director Oskar Roehler's *Agnes and His Brothers* follows three siblings as their lives slowly unravel around them. Unable to find true love Hans-Jörg (Moritz Bleibtreu) hides his sexual addiction behind a meek, librarian persona, while oldest brother, Werner (Herbert Knaup), instigates fights with his distant and critical wife just to feel some spark of emotion between them. And Agnes (Martin Weiss), the most mysterious of all, must learn to reconcile her past as a man with her new life as a woman. Though they've traveled very different personal paths each can trace their current problems to an eccentric father, and absent mothers, who caused many damaging scars.

Presented in original German with English subtitles *Agnes and His Brothers* is now on DVD from First Run Features (www.firstrun-features.com).

Female Misbehavior (First Run Features)

Rating: ▼▼▼▼½

A riveting collection of works from German filmmaker Monika Treut (*Virgin Machine*) *Female Misbehavior* introduces viewers to women daring to live their lives outside societal norms. The first of four shorts, *Annie*, probes into the persona of the infamous porn star/performance artist Annie Sprinkle, while *Dr. Paglia* allows noted author Camille Paglia a plat-

form from which to express her fascinating—if controversial—viewpoints on feminism, sexual stereotypes and other sensitive subject matter. And where *Bondage* offers insight into the world of BDSM fetish play, *Max* reveals a transsexual's journey toward becoming a fully masculine individual. The focal point of *Female Misbehavior*, *Didn't do it for Love* tells the fascinating story of Eva Norvind (aka Ava Taurel), a Norwegian-born woman who found success as a screen actress in Mexico before becoming one of New York City's preeminent dominatrix.

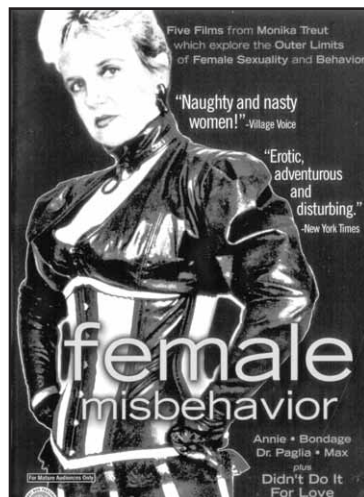
Special features for *Female Misbehavior* include an interview with Monika Treut and an Eva Norvind photo gallery. For more information, or to order a copy direct, log on to www.firstrunfeatures.com.

Little Miss Sunshine

(Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment)

Rating: ▼▼▼▼

Family dysfunction takes a road trip in *Little Miss Sunshine* the hilariously off-beat and brutally honest dark comedy co-directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris. Devoted parents Richard and Sheryl (Greg Kinnear and Toni Collette) would do anything to see their daughter Olive (Abigail Breslin) compete in a child beauty pageant; regardless of the obstacles life throws their way or how miserable it makes their anti-social son Dwayne (Paul Dano). Add a clinically depressed uncle (Steve Carell) and trouble-making grandfather (Alan Arkin) into the mix and this is one recipe for disaster that's utterly irresistible to watch.



Special features for *Little Miss Sunshine*, now on DVD from Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment (www.fox-home.com), include: four alternate endings, audio commentaries and a music video for "Till the End of Time" by DeVotchka.

Harajuku Lovers Live (Interscope Records)

Rating: ▼▼▼▼

Grammy-winner Gwen Stefani basks in the spotlight of her hometown crowd on *Harajuku Lovers Live*, the spectacular new DVD from her first-ever solo concert tour. Working the stage for her Anaheim fans, the former No Doubt fronter puts on an energetic show, performing her multi-million-selling debut album, *Love.Angel.Music.Baby*, in its entirety plus two songs taken from her latest release *The Sweet Escape* ("Wind it Up," "Orange County Girl"). Program highlights include stellar versions of "Rich Girl," "Long Way to Go" and "Hollaback Girl" complete with marching drum corps.

Bonus material for *Harajuku Lovers Live*, now in stores from Interscope Records (www.interscope.com), includes a "Countdown to Tour Documentary," photo gallery and "The Real Thing Camera Remix." For more information, or to order a copy direct, log on to www.gwenstefani.com or visit www.harajukulovers.com.

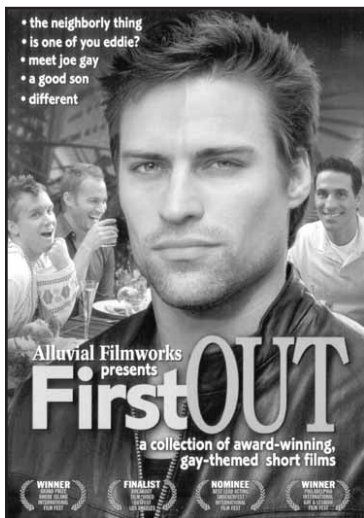
First Out

(Alluvial Filmworks)

Rating: ▼▼▼½

An hour-long collection of five, award-winning gay-themed





shorts, *First Out* offers a little something for every cinematic taste, from comedy to drama, thriller to documentary. Among the best entries the attention-getting *Different*, presents an alternate reality in which being queer is normal and heterosexuals are the outcasts; a fantasy left, unfortunately, under explored. Equally praiseworthy is *Meet Joe Gay*, a first-hand look at one man's struggle to cope with his own inability to meet Mr. Right in the West Hollywood meat market. But even more than his particular relationship troubles what Benjamin Morgan's story reveals are the all-too common pitfalls of a modern youth-obsessed culture placing more emphasis on outward appearance over true character.

Look for *First Out* coming to DVD Tuesday, January 2 from Alluvial Filmworks, a division of Village Lighthouse, Inc. (www.villagelighthouse.com).

Queer TV
Lesbian Sex and Sexuality/Trapped/Hustler White
 (here!)

What do lesbians do in bed? Find out next January with "Porn Today: Pushing the Limits" and "For Your Pleasure: Erotic Dancers," the first two episodes of here!'s hot new series *Lesbian Sex and Sexuality*. Each half hour episode explores different facets of all-female intimacy, from boldly accurate representation of lesbian sex on film to profiles of women who perform for the pleasures of others.

Also premiering in January, Alexandra Paul stars in the here!



original film *Trapped*, an action-packed thriller filled with twists and surprises. When internet security expert Samantha Reed (Paul) is mysteriously abducted she has no idea who has kidnapped her or why. But in order to save her daughter's life—and escape alive as well—she'll have to choose between assisting a sinister killer or stopping his evil plan before it's too late.

Set on and around L.A.'s Santa Monica Boulevard, *Hustler White* stars model/actor Tony Ward and writer/director Bruce LaBruce as rent boy Monti Ward and Jurgen Anger, a peculiar writer conducting research for a book about hustling; and when the mismatched pair meet it's love at first cruise. Scenes of soft-core pornography are interlaced throughout the story as Monti and his fellow hustlers go about their usual business. And as the chase—and sex—continues the audience is treated to a lesson in the history and geography of cruising in Hollywood.

Watch for *Lesbian Sex and Sexuality*, *Trapped* and *Hustler White* airing throughout January, 2007 on here! and log on to www.heretv.com for more programming information.

In Theaters
Dreamgirls
 (Paramount)
 Rating: ★★★★★

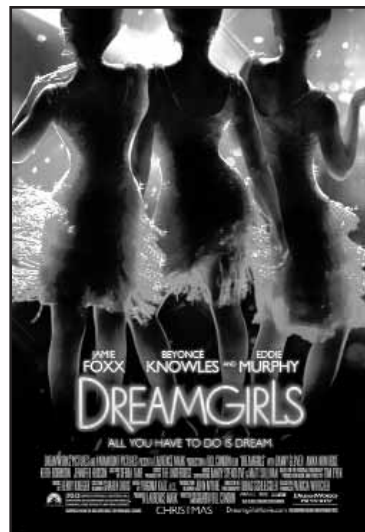
Jennifer Hudson is Effie White in the dazzling, big screen adaptation of *Dreamgirls*, written and directed by Bill Condon (*Gods and Monsters*, *Kinsey*). From the moment she appears on screen Hudson owns the film, embodying

every ounce of fire, passion and vulnerability required for the part of a soulful singer pushed out of the spotlight for her more "photogenic" friend. Comedic genius Eddie Murphy also shines bright as the tortured James "Thunder" Early, displaying fine dramatic skills too often overlooked. In her film debut Tony winner Anika Noni Rose (*Caroline, or Change*) makes the most of her marginal part as the third "Dream" Lorrell Robinson as does screen legend Danny Glover. In fact the only disappointing aspect of the film (apart from some of the unnecessary, non-original music) comes courtesy of the pair most highly publicized—Jamie Foxx and Beyoncé Knowles—who prove far from irreplaceable as the conniving manager, Curtis, and his easily manipulated ingénue, Deena. But if for no other reasons than the performances of Jennifer Hudson and Eddie Murphy *Dreamgirls* will undoubtedly be considered a classic for years to come.

Rated PG-13 for language, some sexuality and drug content *Dreamgirls* opens nationwide December 25. For more information visit the official site at www.DreamgirlsMovie.com.

I also recommend the deluxe 2-disc *Dreamgirls* soundtrack featuring four bonus tracks including the cut number "Effie, Sing My Song," remixes of "One Night Only" and "And I Am Telling You" and composer's demo of "Patience." ▼

More of Shawn's reviews and recommendations are available online at www.QMediaReviews.com.



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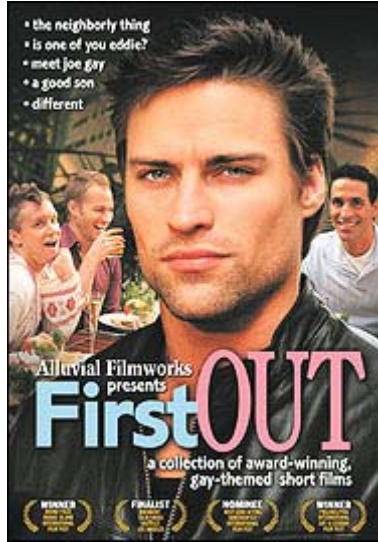
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PRODUCT INFORMATION:

(1998-2006, 65 min)

Country: [US](#)

Studio: [Alluvial Filmworks](#)

Cast: [Ben Hogestyn](#), [Benjamin Morgan](#), [Emily Stiles](#), [Michael Simon](#), [Robbie Laughlin](#), [Samantha Light](#)

Our Rating: ★★ ★

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SYNOPSIS

Here is a collection of five gay short films from Alluvial Filmworks, their first. Entertaining, leaning towards the lightweight, this grouping of shorts will make a nice addition to your DVD collection.

REVIEW

Different -- Justin has a secret, he's straight. In the parallel universe of Liberty High School gay is the norm and Homecoming is only days away. Not only is this film quite well done, it stars the amazing Emily Brooke-Hands (*Eating Out*). While the plot sounds a like lot *Almost Normal*, it's still a fresh take on homophobia, and quite entertaining. And unlike *Almost Normal* these actors could pass for high school students.

A Good Son -- Like all good short films the plot is simple; there's no fuss, no muss. A young guy is at a swim meet with his family, bored in the bleachers. Another cute boy suggests they vanish for a minute and get to know each other. On the roof they share a bowl of pot and the aggressive boy kisses the other. Not rejected, they go back down to the swim meet, maybe exchanging numbers. The blurb on the box says that their lives are changed. We wouldn't go that far, but it's a cute film.

Is One of You Eddie? -- Four stereotypical West Hollywood gay men have brunch in their backyard. There's fresh fruit, smoked trout and plenty of attitude. When the upstairs neighbor Eddie wanders through the year, they treat him rudely because he's not like them. Don't worry, they live and learn.

Meet Joe Gay -- In this documentary, 27-year-old gay filmmaker Benjamin Morgan attempts to understand why he's single and what it takes to maintain a successful relationship. What he fails to see is the elephant in the room, he's so self-absorbed, no one else is as interesting as he is.

The Neighborly Thing -- This is a chilling tale of a gay man's overzealous obsession with his upstairs neighbor. When he encounters a young street couple inhabiting his neighbor's house, his territory is threatened and he intrudes on their privacy. Very creepy indeed.

-- *Scott Cranin*

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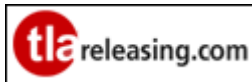


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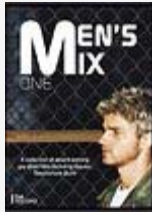
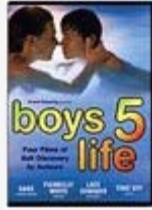
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<p>AmosL Wandering Jewboy</p>  <p>Joined: 06 Jun 2006 Posts: 171 Location: Little Rock</p>	<p> Posted: Mon Nov 13, 2006 11:19 pm Post subject: "FIRST OUT"--A COLLECTION OF SHORT FILMS </p> <p>"FIRST OUT: A Collection of Award Winning Gay-Themed Short Films"</p> <p>Amos Lassen and Cinema Pride</p> <p>Alluvial Filmworks has always been one of the leading manufacturers, distributors, and retailer of gay and lesbian film and when they do release something is a guaranteed pleaser. With "First Out", Alluvial has again proven that they have first quality work. I have never really been a fan of short films, but this collection kept in my seat and watching carefully. Each of the five films on the DVD is amazing and the five of them together is amazing times five. Alluvial has done itself proud with this DVD due to be released January 2, 2007. If you have access to pre-order this disc, do not hesitate. It is a treasure.</p> <p>The only unifying theme that the five films have is that they are all gay. Each is a separate entity and I am so grateful that we now have the chance to have all of them together. Of course I do have my favorite but I am not saying which one. Those of you know me will surely guess correctly which one it is. Maybe we should have a contest to see if you can determine which it is. Let's take a look at the collection.</p> <p>"Different" is a comedy which takes place in a high school where the norm is being gay and the straight guy stands out like a sore thumb. Justin, the sole straight student, has to keep the fact that he is straight secret from the other students and the faculty. When the captain of the football team invites him to be his date to the Homecoming Dance, Justin finds himself in a quandary. He has a crush on one of the girls at school but he knows he has to conform to the rest of the student body to be accepted. The ending is a surprise and to tell you what happens would spoil the joy you will have when you see the flick. It is enough to say that the tables are turned in this movie and in this biting satire on romantic comedies as well as of the predicament of gay and lesbian high school students. It is subversive in its nature and exposes intolerance through hilarity.</p> <p>"A Good Son" is a drama that examines a chance meeting between a junior and a senior in high school. This encounter brings about a pivotal point in the life of one of the guys. He is forced to</p>

realize who he is and then deal with it. The film closes in the midst of an emotional moment in which the guy must come to terms with his opposing emotions

"Meet Joe Gay" is a biographical look at a young filmmaker. He has never really been in love and has never had a relationship that lasted longer than three months. His failure in making a gay romantic comedy based upon a fairy tale leads him to do a bit of introspection and we watch as he deals with his issues. Here we have a multimedia documentary in which the single life is explored as well as the nature and purpose of gay relationships. Benjamin Morgan, the subject of the film interviews his ex-boyfriend, two gay couples (one together 41 years and the other who are teenagers who have begun together for four months). As this exploration takes place, random scenes of the gay fairy tale are interspersed into the director's search for love.

"Is One of You Eddie?" takes place on the patio of the host of a mid-morning brunch. Four good looking gay men misjudge their somewhat bearish neighbor, Eddie, a bearish masseuse. When suddenly, a great looking guy drops by for a massage, the four express curiosity and the looker relates how great the massage was, Eddie is looked at with different eyes as they stand with mouths agape as the hunk relates how sensual and erotic the massage had been. Surely because of the details provided by macho man, their relationship with their neighbor will change. Or will it?

Last, but certainly not least, is a dark drama about one guy's zealous admiration for his neighbor, "The Neighborly Thing". When the admirer finds a street couple in his neighbor's house, he feels his territory has been violated and he busts in on them, never anticipating what the outcome will be.

This is a collection that you will not want to miss. I am going to try to get it for "Cinema Pride" and if I am successful this is a screening that you will definitely want to attend. (That was a shameless plug).

Amos Lassen
what's new?

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