



Edinburgh film

Chain Camera

Edinburgh film festival

Rating ****

Special report: the Edinburgh festival 2001



Tom Service

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In August 1999 a team of film-makers gave 10 students at LA's John Marshall high school video cameras with which to document their lives. After a week of filming whatever they chose, the students gave the cameras to another 10 of their school mates. And so it went on for a year, until some 500 students had recorded over 700 hours of footage, from which 16 individuals were chosen to provide the film's narrative threads. The result is an astonishing, intense and funny documentary, and a genuine insight into the much depicted but rarely probed world of American high school pupils.

Compiled and chosen by Kirby Dick, director of *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*, *Chain Camera* bursts with youthful optimism and dazzling personalities. Anyone who thinks that kids have it easy these days should check out troubled clown, Jesse, or Silva, who talks about her mother's depression with a candour most adults lack. Then there is 17-year-old Cinnamon, who is openly gay at school and meets prejudice every day. Challenging it with fortitude and conviction, she is a mesmerising screen presence, both naive and wise beyond her years.

Much is made of the unvarnished nature of the footage: no adults were involved in the filming, and no areas were off limits for the students. There is a sense of privilege that comes with watching this film, though the editing, and the selection of these sparky 16 individuals, is as insidious as any other directorial involvement. But rather than just feeling that Cinnamon has been cynically included because she is a lesbian (which,