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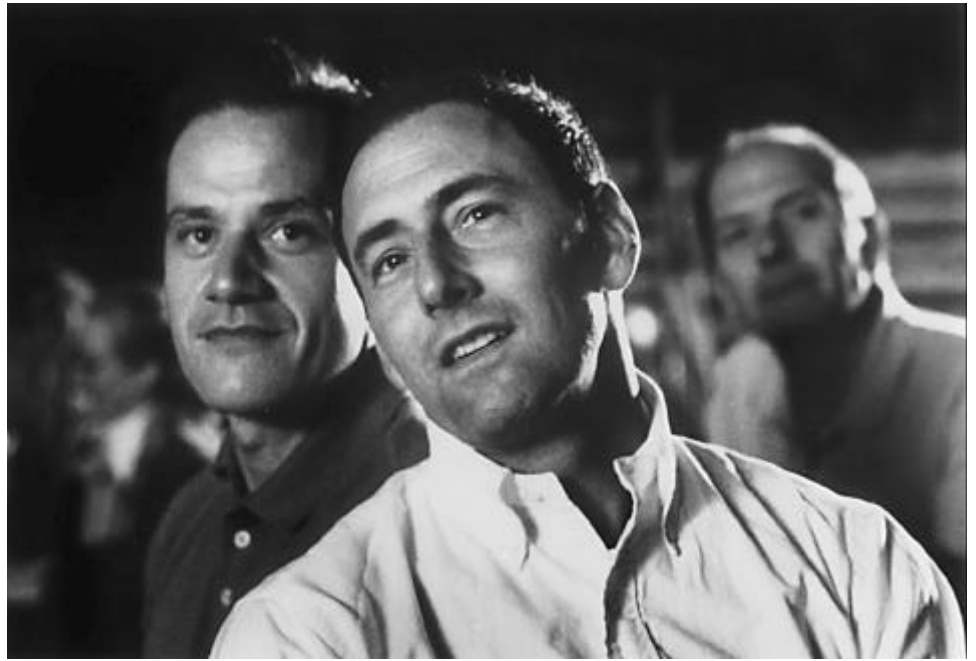
## Screening Room

By KEVIN THOMAS  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

**O**utfest 2000, the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, continues tonight with the accomplished heart-tugger "Big Eden" (Directors Guild theater 1, 9:45 p.m.) by first-time writer-director Thomas Bezucha. This irresistible, serious romantic comedy tackles two dilemmas with honesty and compassion: that of the gay man with an unrequited love for a straight man, and a gay man too shy and inarticulate to declare his love for another gay man.

Arye Gross stars as Henry, a successful New York painter who returns to his small Montana hometown to care for his ailing grandfather (George Coe). He is confronted unexpectedly with the return of Dean (Tim DeKay), the love of his life, recovering from a divorce. Henry is so preoccupied with his unspoken infatuation with the handsome Dean that he fails to notice that even handsomer Pike (Eric Schweig), a monosyllabic Native American, is falling for him.

Bezucha imagines with humor and affection a community so perceptive, caring and enlightened that it's capable of collectively nudging everyone in the right direction. Bezucha also suggests that a man like Henry, not conventionally handsome, might still be attractive to others, and that a straight man can love a gay man while not being sexually attracted to him. These notions are not so self-evident as they might seem, especially in gay films. "Big Eden," with its wonderful ensemble cast, is a fine example of the cinema of possibilities.



Tim DeKay, left is the object of Arye Gross' secret longing in Thomas Bezucha's romantic comedy "Big Eden."

## An Exploration of the Heart Land

Romantic paths take many twists and turns in the honest offerings at Outfest 2000, the gay and lesbian film festival that runs through Monday