

The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2007

Rock Bottom

Opens today in Manhattan.
Directed by Jay Corcoran
Not rated; 75 minutes

"You always miss it: that world and that escape, that kind of sex," observes Peter Staley in Jay Corcoran's riveting, X-ray-acute documentary "Rock Bottom." Mr. Staley, an articulate, gay, H.I.V.-positive recovering methamphetamine user, has gained notice in recent years for showering the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan with posters bluntly connecting the popularity of crystal meth with rising rates of H.I.V. infection.

"Rock Bottom," filmed over two and a half years in digital video, is a ground-level examination of the crystal meth epidemic in gay New York. It follows seven men struggling with addiction, showing them high and sober. One dies of complications from drug use and diabetes. The difference in appearance between those under the drug's influence and the same men after a few months of sobriety is startling. Tweakers, as meth users are called, are cadaverous, pallid creatures with bad skin and phosphorescent eyes who chatter as if possessed; sober, the same men appear

calm, healthy and optimistic.

Although experts are consulted, "Rock Bottom" is not a finger-wagging jeremiad. A graphic study of sex and drug addiction, it goes way beyond the pieties of the recovery and therapy movements to confront deeper questions about the pursuit of sensation.

The bravado that a jolt of speed gives to men with shaky self-esteem in a still homophobic culture is an element of its appeal. But as men describe the intensified and prolonged pleasure of sex with meth, you realize that it belongs to the same category of sensation-seeking as race-car driving, skydiving and gambling.

A craving for delirious excitement may be hard-wired into the male psyche, and danger is an element of whatever segment of the competitive segment of gay men with steroids in their veins, in some players, is worth any risk, even



THE WEEK MOVIES

ROCK BOTTOM

Crystal-meth abuse gets a gritty and frank exposé in Jay Corcoran's hourlong documentary, which tracks several gay New Yorkers over two years. The cycle of experimentation, addiction, recovery, and relapse will be familiar to anyone who has read journalistic accounts of the drug's dangers, but the unvarnished and explicit personal testimonies give this film a visceral impact. (Logan Hill) (1 hr. 1 min.; NR)



www.tvguide.com

Rock Bottom [2007, Movie]

Year: 2007

Rated NR

TV Guide Rating: ★★★★★



NEW YORK PRESS FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 6, 2007 VOLUME 20, NUMBER 9

ROCK BOTTOM

Directed by Jay Corcoran

An extremely revealing doc about the effects of crystal meth addiction on a group of gay NYC men, the film doesn't shy away from the the repulsion as well as the glamorous attraction of the drug (including porn stars and average Joes). From the first scene in a bath house in the East Village to the heartbreaking scene in a hospital when a man has hit "rock bottom" and nearly died, it's rare that both sides of addiction—hideous and exciting—can be shown with such empathy. By the end, one may wish for more about the root of the problem of why so many have turned to a drug, but in the short term this is an amazing look at the travesty the drug is wreaking on a population still reeling from the AIDS crisis. (Jerry Portwood)

FILM
Required Viewing for Gay Men: 'Rock Bottom' Crystal meth documentary follows 7 local addicts
By CHRISTOPHER



Film

Time Out New York / Issue 596: March 1-7, 2007

Review

Rock Bottom: Gay Men and Meth

★★★

Dir. Jay Corcoran. 2006. N/R. 61mins. Documentary.

"I remember the days when the bathhouses used to be fun and weren't filled with people whacked-out on crystal," rails one indignant drag queen in Jay Corcoran's alarming, if too lean, doc. Seven men in various stages of addiction or recovery from tina recall losing jobs, punching boyfriends and bingeing on barebacking, while mental-health professionals attempt to elucidate the reasons behind such self-destructive behavior. If silence = meth, as posters in Chelsea remind us, then Corcoran's film at least serves as an ice breaker. (Opens Fri; [Quad.](#)) — Melissa Anderson



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FRIDAY MARCH 09, 2007

Rock Bottom: Gay Men and Meth

(Documentary)

By **RONNIE SCHEIB**

An Outcast Films release of a Wringing Hands Films production in association with Lovett Productions and WEILD Films, LLC. Produced by Colin A. Weil, Jay Corcoran. Executive Producer, Joseph Lovett. Directed by Jay Corcoran.

Hourlong, down-and-dirty DV-shot docu "Rock Bottom" follows seven gay men in New York City over a two-year period as they struggle with crystal meth addiction, responsible for an alarming spike in the spread of HIV. Helmer Jay Corcoran examines the growing "crystal sex" phenomenon where it breeds -- in the bathhouses, locker rooms, porn sets and bedrooms of those for whom sex is inseparable from meth use. Improbably opening theatrically at Gotham's Quad Cinema, this remarkably candid, X-ratable cautionary tale is amassing some positive critical buzz on its way to more video-friendly venues.

In no way judgmental, Corcoran allows his subjects to explain, with varying degrees of self-knowledge and denial, the peculiar allure of crystal meth, particularly to those who are HIV-positive and are dealing with the fastidious maintenance, limitations and anxieties occasioned by the virus.

They describe the rush of empowerment and the liberation of libido that lets them enjoy sex without thought or precaution. The drug may also, as they ruefully admit, eventually make them incapable of sex, or take 9 hours to reach orgasm, or ignore the blatant signs of gonorrhea (described by one user in ghoulish detail), or even secretly glory in the spread of AIDS.

All of the subjects showcased here are or have been endeavoring to get clean. Corcoran catches up with each of them at varying stages of addiction, sobriety and backsliding. Since sex is a trigger for crystal meth addicts, of all the men interviewed, only a playwright who has been clean for five years has been able to reintegrate sex back into his sober life. In earlier stages, others are forced to radically alter their behavior or abstain entirely for a year in order to kick the habit.

The interviewees prove fascinating in their diversity; Corcoran maintains an intimacy and even suspense within the men's wry confessionals. Blessedly brief interviews with health-care professionals ring hollow by comparison.

Docu succeeds surprisingly well in illuminating the fearsome grip of crystal meth, which, in giving users a false feeling of invincibility, is undoing years of careful HIV control.

Tech credits are suitably primitive in this zero-budget DV-shot expose, though the docu's sound-quality is particularly rough in patches.

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Critics are raving about **ROCK BOTTOM**

Crystal Death

By: **GARY M. KRAMER**

Rock Bottom

Directed by Jay Corcoran

Distributed by Outcast Films

Opens Mar. 2 Quad Cinema

Gay City NEWS

"Rock Bottom" is a stunning and important documentary about the impact of crystal meth addiction on a handful of gay men in New York City. Filmmaker Jay Corcoran spent two years - from March 2004 to February 2006 - chronicling the lives of crystal meth users and, in many cases, their recovery. The stories he presents range from poignant to shocking, as various men reveal how the insidious drug took control of their minds and bodies in ways they never expected.

In a telephone interview, Corcoran, a New Yorker, claimed that he never used crystal meth himself, but he was motivated to make "Rock Bottom" because, "After everything we [as gay men] went through with AIDS in the '80s and '90s... why are certain gay men suddenly self-destructing? I wanted to make an explicitly gay male film that could look at the sexuality in a way most gay films shy away from. This is not prurient - it gets at the issues behind gay male sex and addresses them in a very sober way. I really wanted to do something this wrenching and truthful, living in America where the media shies away from everything raw and honest."

The filmmaker says he has been "traumatized" by the effect the drug was having on the gay community. What is more, crystal meth has spiked HIV rates, and while the film does not provide statistics - "because there are so few, and they are constantly changing," Corcoran explained - the linkages have been clearly documented. Because the drug creates such a euphoric high, and stimulates the sex drive, barebacking is much more common among users.

For Corcoran, the most important scene in "Rock Bottom" depicts one of these marathon sexual encounters. CJ, one user, is in bed with Gio while the cameras film them. But despite 13 hours naked together, neither man had achieved an orgasm in part because of the effects of the drug. The filmmaker's response to this was mixed. He was pleased to get the footage for the film, yet despite the fact that he has no interest in glamorizing crystal use, Corcoran came away depressed by the prosaic picture the scene paints.

"I was thinking it would be amazing sex, but it was the antithesis of that," he said. "How pathetic and unsexy. Watching these guys and talking with them for an hour... this was as far as I wanted to go. It hit me - this is a sad scene - people think they are connecting and they are not."

CJ offers other, horrifying revelations in the film - about wanting to infect others, and a story about ignoring

a case of gonorrhea, which made Corcoran flinch. But these proved critical moments in the film.

"I appreciated CJ's honesty," the documentarian said. "In the gay community, we censor ourselves. We have to start being responsible, by telling the truth, and it's not pretty. We've got to wake up."

Such painful truths are repeated throughout "Rock Bottom." Another subject, J., fuels his singing and porn career with the occasional use of crystal meth. J. is on a slippery slope, both with his boyfriend and his life, as viewers see how easily he became addicted to the drug.

"J. [has been] put on a pedestal, and he takes that as validation. It's so sad," Corcoran observed. "He's going to fall through the cracks if he doesn't get his shit together."

In contrast, Raymond, who has been HIV-positive for 20 years, is one of the film's success stories, a man who by the end of the documentary has been clean for several months. Corcoran praised Raymond for "being sober and doing great. It's pretty remarkable. Raymond trying to get sober and relapsing is very tender."

It was difficult for the filmmaker to watch his subjects suffering, but he needed to do that work in order to give audiences a true sense of how the drug affects people. As much as he wanted to step in and save these men, he had to wait for them to be ready to quit crystal meth.

"I was angry that so many of us are suffering so much," Corcoran admitted.

"The sad thing was that each guy had such a poor self-image.

A lot of it was about being gay. For each one, it's the narcissism, and validation. The drug helps us forget that we're old or HIV-positive and everyone thinks they are cocks of the walk and having the best sex/time of their lives."

And while there is this need for validation, Corcoran also recognizes that the cry for attention is also a cry for help.

"Rock Bottom" is inspiring not only because it shows the perils of crystal meth, but it also allows the brave storytellers a chance to express themselves and find a way of coping with their own addiction.

"They wanted help, to stop," Corcoran concluded.

"Having me come ask them how they are doing and what they are doing, it got them to think about why they are doing this, and helped them in their process, to come to terms with why they do what they do, and to see their own growth.

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FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 2007

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FILM

Required Viewing for Gay Men: 'Rock Bottom'

Crystal meth documentary follows 7 local addicts

By [CHRISTOPHER WALLENBERG](#)

Friday, March 09, 2007

For anyone who came of age in the 1980s, First Lady Nancy Reagan's reductive, self-righteous rallying cry "Just Say No to Drugs" has been burned into our brains for all eternity. The ubiquitous catch phrase became a cliché and then a cultural punch line. But simplistic slogans and shrill anti-drug crusades such as "Just Say No" can never make people truly understand the disastrous effects that drug abuse can have on a user's life—and the truly slippery nature of the slope to addiction.

Much more effective are first-hand accounts of struggles with drug abuse that populate a documentary such as Jay Corcoran's crystal meth expose "Rock Bottom," which should be mandatory viewing for all gay men. The film is a chilling, realistic, non-preachy warning about the effects of meth addiction on the gay community. Since 2004, crystal meth, aka Tina, has been blamed for increasing the HIV infection rates among urban-dwelling gay men and for fueling an underground culture of bareback parties, drug-induced Internet hookups and risky sexual behavior. Meth gives users of a high-voltage jolt of energy, a feeling of invincibility and makes them horny as hell—of course, actually getting off is another matter.

Following seven New York City gay men as they struggle with meth addiction during the course of two years, "Rock Bottom" is raw and unsettling in its depiction of the insidiousness of the drug into the addict's life.

It's also unflinchingly intimate at times, as it gets up-close-and-personal with the seven addicts—who talk frankly about their fears, their dreams, their guilt, their depression, and the illusions and self-denials that they create to convince themselves that they're OK.

"You fool yourself into thinking that you can control it. Especially with this drug, you have to have reached such a rock bottom, that your only alternative is dying," says a bleary-eyed Raymond as he lays in a hospital bed, hooked up to an IV, thanks to a staff infection he got as a result of injecting drugs.

One of the great virtues of the film is its lack of a sanctimonious, finger-wagging tone. Instead, it shows the realities of drug addiction—the denial, the anger, the



Singer and porn star J., one of the candid addicts in 'Rock Bottom.' Photo: Outcast Films.



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resignation, and the acceptance—and depicts its addicts as human beings, warts and all. It isn't pious or hectoring in its warnings, and it doesn't try to hide how rapturous the addicts become when recalling the euphoric good times and intense sexual pleasures they derived from doing meth.

The film also addresses the "fear fatigue" of contracting HIV that has settled in among gay men; the enormous difficulties of real recovery; the slippery slope that the addicts face; and the reasons that gay men, in particular, have become so intensely drawn to the drug.

"These are men who have a difficult time in social situations. They have a difficult time relating to other people. So the drug makes them feel uninhibited," remarks Perry Halkitis, a professor of psychology at NYU. "People have labeled this the most ideal drug for gay men—because their identity is built around their sexuality, in part. Also, gay men as a group experience loneliness and depression at higher levels than the general population—which attracts them to this drug and masks those feelings."

Mark, an up-and-coming playwright and actor who celebrated five years of sobriety, talks in "Rock Bottom" of the depths to which the drug took him. He recalls doing meth with his "last long-term fuck buddy." The guy smoked cigarettes and chatted away uncontrollably, while Mark lay strung out on the bed trying to get himself off. "It was like the perfect paradigm for people unable to connect and unwilling to try to really connect—both of us in our own little hells, but pretending to be together."

Although "Rock Bottom" may not bring anything new or groundbreaking to the discussion of the meth addiction crisis that has festered in the gay community, the film is still a powerful, painful and even harrowing account of the fear, self-hatred, guilt and depression that haunts the modern gay male psyche.

"Rock Bottom" is now playing at the Quad Cinema in New York.

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