

# Keeping the Real Love Story Afloat: "Titanic" as a Butch-Femme Love Affair

BY RACHEL LURIE

film

By the time you read this, 'Titanic' will most likely have swept the Academy Awards, probably even bringing home the big one for Best Picture. Normally I'd just shake my head in disagreement, wondering why the selection body is so unable to steer an unpredictable course around huge blockbusters. But I've found a strange comfort in the film's success, because to me, the biggest hit of our generation is essentially a butch-femme love story. Its mega-hit status helps bring to light the outlaw romantic chemistry which has shaped my lesbian life.

With the movie's initial success, I was amazed at how the world was embracing little Leonardo DiCaprio as a romantic lead. I mean, he's just a kid who can't deliver his lines, what did people see in him? I don't know if it was intentional casting or not, but his boyish good looks and lack of any secondary sex characteristics are only the first clues that we were supposed to love him for his lad-ness. The sensitive, artistic, athletic and worldly-yet-innocent Jack Dawson is standing with arms outstretched on the bow of that boat as a quintessential Butch.

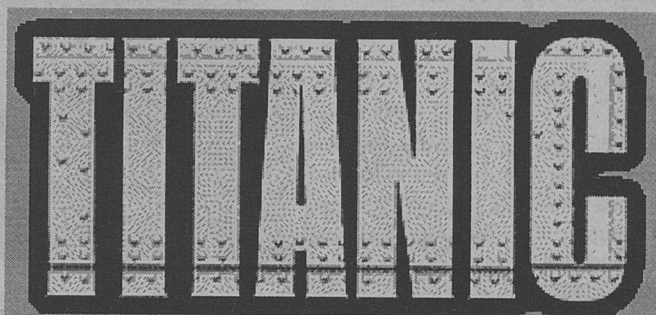
It's a butch coming-of-age ritual to sweep a straight woman off her feet. There's a magic to that mixing of masculinity and femininity, getting the formula just right, and it's a ratio that rarely if ever gets fulfilled by biological men. The boyishly handsome artist Jack Dawson is a gender queer who has that particular mixture of confidence and vulnerability; of sensitivity and rebelliousness, of not belonging anywhere (especially the home he ran away from in the country's midwest), but still being able

to catch the eye of the hottest babe on the ship.

But alas, it can't be for keeps. Who knows what would have happened if the ship never sank and the couple got to go on fighting for

about desire, we can't ignore the heat our two lovers generate. The discretely fashioned sex scene, where our heroine Rose presses her hand against that steamy car window, is about her pleasure, not his. This orgasm is a long way from the traditional cinematic codes of rockets blasting off a launch pad or a train chugging through a tunnel, and a long way from the traditional male-centeredness of these clichés. Jack even trembles in Rose's arms when they make love—confident enough to bring her pleasure but also vulnerable enough to shake with fear and be comforted by her.

We also know that this is a butch-femme love story because of




their rightful place in the world. But the wild success of the movie proves that the butch-femme subtext is appealing even to people who don't know that is what you call it. To the folks who are returning to see this movie again and again, here's a guy who shows the girl a love and passion she's never even known to dream about. He gives her permission to be a stronger woman, helps empower her to be true to her own inner strengths. Makes the world a safer place for her. In turn, he gets much of the same, and from someone even more beautiful than he is. This is no ordinary romance. Folks are filling the movie theaters to see a love story that captures the fleeting moment in time when we attain the unattainable, which of course slips away from us in the end. But the memory of that love keeps burning, and we know it's right even if the world tells us every day that it's wrong. And that's unmistakably butch-femme.

Because butch-femme is also

the premise of secrecy: that for more than 70 years, the surviving Rose told no one of her precious boy lover, with the perfect hair, perfect teeth, and perfect touch. She never revealed that there had been someone who brought her to a place she was definitely forbidden from, but her desire and determined sense of who she really was drew her there anyway. And then it slipped away in that computerized doomsday night because, as transformative as that innocent love may be, forbidden love is ultimately and tragically lost.

At least in Hollywood. In real life, we're fighting like hell to make the transgressive love the one that works. Magically. Forever. Right.

The writer is hoping that the Best Picture award will go to this year's movie that really captures how men deal with their vulnerability in times of adversity: *The Full Monty*.



## Dee Dee Bridgewater

Saturday, April 11 at 8 pm

Smoky torch ballads, funky hard blues, and intensely musical scat: Grammy Award-winning jazz vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater "electrifies the air" says *The Village Voice*. A frequent vocalist with Sonny Rollins, Thad Jones, Max Roach, and Dizzy Gillespie, Bridgewater also is a Tony Award-winning actress who starred in *The Wiz*. On an extremely rare U.S. tour, this American-born resident of Paris pays tribute to Ella Fitzgerald and other jazz greats with her powerful voice and enticing stage presence.

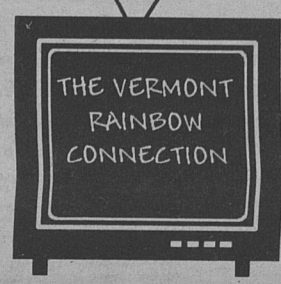
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### 19 SUNDAY

Pride Benefit Dinner/Buffer, \$10 at Jeff's Maine Seafood, 3-11pm. Performances by The Sisters LeMay and others. FMI call Jeff's at 524-6135.

Faery Circle at Chateau Kopstein in Huntington. Call 434 5653 for directions or other info.

Goddard Lavender Screen Series: 'Times of Harvey Milk' in the Clockhouse at 7 p.m. Screenings are free for everyone. This schedule is subject to change, so I'd recommend people call 802-454-8311x402 before coming out here.

### 20 MONDAY

"HIV/AIDS: A Community Update" Presented by the Franklin Grand Isle AIDS Task Force and a panel of community members to those in the community concerned about this devastating disease. Presenters include Cricket La Strada, VT

Cares; physicians who care for those with HIV; and community members affected by or living with HIV. 7 p.m.-8:30 p.m. Northwestern Medical Center, Conference Rm. 1, St. Albans. Free of charge. Call 524-1227. Dyke Talk \$ 2.00 donation Women's dinner. Topic: Love stories. Fight back office. Call Crow FMI 864 5595

GLITTER 'When Night is Falling' Camille, a classical mythology professor at a Christian college is engaged to Martin, a fellow theologian. However, when she meets Petra, a flamboyant and daring circus performer, she finds herself under Cupid's spell and falls deeply and magically in love. (Haven't seen it -sounds good though...) For details see April 6 listing.

### 21 TUESDAY

Middlebury College — Free Speak: readings about gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender unity and difference. MOQA and Earth Week featured speaker, Letta Neely, performs and reads. Gamut Room, Gifford Hall, 9:30 p.m.

### 22 WEDNESDAY

Middlebury College — Standing in the Trenches A talk by Letta Neely. Observations on class, race, gender, sexuality, ecology, and liberation in the United States, and advice on how to proceed. Chateau Grand Salon, 4:15 p.m.

### 24 FRIDAY

Middlebury College — ABFAB Nightclub with comedian Mug Wright (Boston), Yolanda and the Plastic Family (Burlington), Weird Sisters (Middlebury), and singer Katherine Quinn (Burlington). McCullough Students Center, 7:30-10 p.m. \$1 for non-Middlebury Students

Middlebury College — GENDER BENDER Dance Party. All house music by Dean Matt Longman. McCullough Students Center, 11 p.m.-3 a.m.

The Wizard of Oz presented by the Lyric Theater. April 24 - 26 and April 30 - May 3. 8 p.m. (Thurs., Fri., & Sat.), 1 p.m. (Sun.), 2 p.m. (Sat. 5/2 only). \$17, \$14, \$7.

### 25 SATURDAY

Stuffing for OITM at 10 a.m. Mountain Pride Media board meeting at 1 p.m.

### 26 SUNDAY

Film - 'Happy Together' 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., Dana Auditorium. Call 388-0750 for details.

Right to Privacy: Homosexuality & the Constitution panel Trinity College Mann Hall Auditorium 7 p.m.

Amelia's highway cleaning day. Meet at the Northern States Tire parking lot (off I 89, exit 17) 10:00 am. FMI Mary Lou 603-632-7480 or Mandy 603-632-7146.

Goddard Lavender Screen Series: 'The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert' in the Clockhouse at 7 p.m. Screenings are free for everyone. This schedule is subject to change, so I'd recommend people call 802-454-8311x402 before coming out here.

### 27 MONDAY

GLITTER 'The Sum of Us.' How is a guy ever supposed to find Mr. Right when his father won't stop trying to help? Boisterous widower Harry Mitchell and his easy-going gay son Jeff enjoy a comfortable life in suburbia. But there's trouble bubbling when Harry decides that it's time Jeff braved the journey toward true love — whether he's ready or not. (I liked the play - Steven) For details see April 6 listing.

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