

LOVE BEHIND BARS ON OZ • MATT DAMON'S DESERT AFFAIR

The Advocate

The national gay & lesbian newsmagazine

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ACTIVISTS

TWO BOYS,
ONE BIG
KISS, AND
CHRISTINA
AGUILERA

ADVOCATE
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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

WILL GETS A MAN

DAN FUTTERMAN SEDUCES
WILL & GRACE'S MOST ELIGIBLE BACHELOR—
IS IT LOVE AT LONG LAST?

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Boyfriend in Training

Five seasons in, everyone's itching to give *Will & Grace*'s Will Truman a steady boyfriend. Will Dan Futterman be the lucky guy? **By Michael Giltz**

Say a little prayer for actor Dan Futterman—he could be the one to ring the bell of the eternally single Will on *Will & Grace*. In a current three-episode arc titled “Fagmation,” the Emmy-winning NBC sitcom sends Will (Eric McCormack) on a blind date with Barry (Futterman), a shlubby cousin of Karen’s who is just coming out of the closet and in desperate need of a makeover. If the chemistry works, Futterman could become the boyfriend the show’s creators have promised for Will this season.

“We’ll see,” says the 35-year-old Futterman, laughing. “Keep your fingers crossed for me!” The paunchy Barry, sporting a Grizzly Adams beard, at first inspires Will’s pity—but certainly not his lust, Futterman reports. “He’s completely styleless,” says the actor, best known to gay audiences for playing the son of Nathan Lane and Robin Williams in *The Birdcage*, taking over the lead ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER ERICKSON FOR THE ADVOCATE
GROOMING BY AMANDA SHACKLETON FOR SMASHBOX AGENCY



(after Joe Mantello) of the Broadway run of *Angels in America*, and starring in the indie gay film *Urbania*. "I'd say in any venue Barry needs all the help he can get, but particularly in gay dating."

Will and Jack throw themselves into Barry's "gay training." "They take me to the gym; go through flash cards of gay icons; there's a dance sequence, and they take me to a gay bar," says Futterman. "Once my character has an Eliza Doolittle moment, Will sort of changes his mind and becomes incredibly interested in me, but I want to play the field."

Eric McCormack—who has won an Emmy for playing Will—has been hit on by Michael Douglas, has rejected Patrick Dempsey as a boyfriend because he wouldn't come out at work, and has even danced with Kevin Bacon. But Futterman might just be the one to stick.

"So far I love Futterman," says Mc-

good couple of dates," says Mutchnick, who now works day to day on *Good Morning, Miami*. "If there's a good reaction to the episodes and people respond, there's no reason why we wouldn't bring him back."

If that happens, the newly married Grace would be joined by a prime-time first—a gay male lead who is genuinely in love, on a major network. After decades of silly sidekicks, lonely neighbors, broken hearts, and gay "couples" who never do more than chastely hug, TV would finally give a gay man a truly happy ending. For fans and critics alike, it won't happen a moment too soon.

Marc Berman, who analyzes prime-time ratings for the industry magazine *MediaWeek*, speaks for many fans when he says, "All I can say about Will getting a boyfriend is, it's about time."

Washington Post TV critic Tom

have been pushed so far by cable channels that no one will raise an eyebrow if Will goes steady. Berman agrees: "It's not such a big deal anymore. Even when it premiered it wasn't such a big deal."

Indeed, while the cast and creators of the show were braced for controversy and backlash when it launched in 1998, *Will & Grace* has never sparked any meaningful controversy—just critical acclaim, Emmys, and top 10 ratings. Shales believes the same will hold true for Will finding a long-term boyfriend.

"I have a feeling that it would pass quietly," says Shales. "Perhaps more quietly than NBC would want. There's a certain marketability to these things. The audience would accept it. The outer fringes might be heard from—Jerry Falwell. But it just seems that nobody protests anything anymore on television."



Bring on the men

Before Futterman (near left), Eric McCormack's hunky male costars have included (right, this page) Patrick Dempsey and Jason Marsden as well as (opposite) Kevin Bacon, Michael Douglas, and, of course, Sean Hayes as Will's best girlfriend, Jack.



Cormack. "He's great, and I love that he's not George Clooney. I love that he's not hugely famous and *Access Hollywood* isn't reporting every day on if there's been a kiss for not. If Will's going to find love, I hope it's over time and that it's an actor who is great and multifaceted and not necessarily a big star. Dan's just perfect for it. He doesn't come in trying to make the line funny. He tries to make it real first, and so it's twice as funny."

In a very real way, McCormack and Futterman are testing their compatibility just as Will and Barry are. Is the chemistry right? Could this be Mr. Right? Creator Max Mutchnick is hopeful. "They've had a

Shales is one who thinks Will has been too lonely for too long. "He doesn't practice and he doesn't preach," says Shales. "He just is. The gay characters like pretty things and have a flair for decorating and all those other clichés. But they don't have sex. Or at least they don't have sex with someone they love."

But while queer fans of the show have been tapping their toes impatiently waiting for Will to get a steady beau, is Middle America ready to see him cuddle up to a lover? Stephen Tropiano, author of *The Prime Time Closet*, thinks so. "I think the issue is ho-hum," says Tropiano, who adds that the boundaries of what's acceptable

However ready the public is to make this leap, Tropiano believes Will won't have the same freedom as Grace. "I still have questions whether the network is going to allow them to do what they do with heterosexual characters on situation comedies," says Tropiano. "For example, I remember a scene where Grace is in bed with a boyfriend. I really question whether they would allow a scene where Will is in bed with his boyfriend."

The questions about whether they kiss, will be seen in bed, and so on miss the point as far as McCormack is concerned. "Will dating doesn't do anything for me," says McCormack. "Will falling in love is interesting. We've had lots of episodes where Will dates. It's either funny, or it doesn't work out, or the guy's too short, or he's Michael Douglas, or whatever. But we established Will as a one-man man, as opposed to Jack, and we have to make sure that that man's

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to stay on as
Will's boyfriend on
Will & Grace?

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the right guy. And not just the actor but the character. I don't know exactly if this story line will lead to the ultimate thing. But I do know that Will will probably find himself falling in love."

That emphasis on true love—as opposed to showing Will getting busy—is fine by Tristan Taormino, the author and syndicated Pucker Up sex advice columnist. "I'm more interested in seeing some healthy levels of affection and honest relating between the two of them than seeing Will's naked ass," says Taormino. "I can see lots of naked ass on HBO and Showtime. Besides, I think we need to put it into context. I'm not one of those people who think *Will & Grace* is bad because they haven't gone far

new person, it's a big deal. It's always going to be a big deal."

Mutchnick insists it was never a reluctant NBC or fear of audience reaction or even fear about upsetting the balance of a hit ensemble that has kept Will single for so long. They simply haven't found the right guy.

"Every single year that we've done this show, we've gone into the year talking about what kind of relationship can we put Will in," says Mutchnick. "What would be good? What would be fun? What would be interesting for the actor and the character? Every year. But it's really hard to find an actor who can hold his own with Eric McCormack and play a gay character with the integrity he plays it with. So many actors just come in and indicate it in a way that real gay people don't usually do—unless they're silly queens. We've tried. But ac-

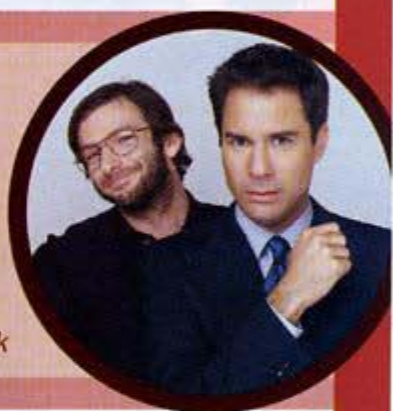
hear that Will made out with a guy in a doorway. They want to hear that he fell for someone."

Taormino thinks Will is ready. "I think that he has to take it one step at a time," says Taormino when asked what advice she'd give to the lovelorn Will. "I think he has all the skills to make a good relationship, which he's demonstrated through his friendships. He just needs to take all those skills and kick it up a notch."

Mediaweek's Berman thinks the show needs to take the risk that introducing another main character will mean. "This show certainly pushed the envelope," says Berman. "But the comedy's become very clichéd. It's not as cutting-edge as it was, and they need to explore new territory. *Ellen* broke down a lot of barriers. So by giving him a boyfriend, hallelujah! Go for it. Show

"Nobody wants to hear that Will made out with a guy in a doorway. They want to hear that he fell for someone."

—Eric McCormack



enough. The truth is, they've made huge strides, because

they are on a major network. Do you remember on *Melrose Place* how the gay guy had a boyfriend and all we got to see was this one hug? And it was really awkward and the antithesis of sexy. It was just awful! So I think, little baby steps. I think it's a big deal to give him a boyfriend."

Indeed, it's easy to take the show's mere existence for granted. It is still the first and only successful prime-time show with a lead gay male character. "I very much appreciate that you realize that," says Mutchnick. "I don't think people fully appreciate what an accomplishment it's been to keep him on the air and at the center of this show for as long as we have. Gay aside, when you involve anyone at the center of a show with a

tors get very weird in the part. There's a lot of men on the cutting-room floor."

And they *have* tried: Will isn't the wallflower viewers sometimes imagine. "In the history of the show," says Mutchnick, "Will has kissed more men than Jack. Will has kissed guys goodbye on the show; Jack never has. And Will and Jack kissed on an episode recently, though I haven't seen the cut of that [so it may not end up in the show]."

McCormack agrees: "The thing that frustrates me is that the date episodes never seem to count. I've kissed people. I've talked to [Jack] about guys I've made out with. These things never seem to register. People say, 'Will never gets anything.' I say, 'Do you ever watch the show?' 'I watch every episode.' 'Well, I can name 10 in the last 15 episodes where he makes some reference to something.' I think it doesn't count because he's not Jack. Nobody wants to

them in bed together. Who cares?"

McCormack just wants it to be romantic. "I think it's less about a big kiss or a gay wedding or something that's so stunt-y than it is about a character expressing real love to another man on national television," says McCormack. "That would be just great—because it would be true."

Mutchnick hopes Futterman proves to be the one. "I always want it to work out," says Mutchnick. "Just like in my life. I usually give boyfriends a 13-episode commitment, and they usually don't make it past sweeps. I give my boyfriends a little more time than [NBC president] Jeff Zucker gives his episodes. But I'm more patient. I don't have as many people to please." ■

Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.

Gay-acting straight man

With *Angels in America*, *Urbania*, and now *Will & Grace*, playing gay just comes naturally to Dan Futterman **by Michael Giltz**

Advocate: I want to make sure we have your whole gay career here. You've got your side career, your gay-for-pay career—

Futterman: That's not the side—that's the bulk of my real career!

That's right. What was the first gay role?

I think it was in a play called *The Raft of the Medusa*, which was a short-lived play at the Minetta Lane Theatre [in New York City]. I played—improbable as it may sound—a gay Hasidic Jew who was coming out and, you know, shedding his yarmulke and beard. Not my finest acting moment!

After that was *Angels in America*. I took over for Joe Mantello on Broadway. That may have been my best job to date, because it was one of those unusual times when you can sort of marry your artistic life and your political life. Our cast started during gay pride week, and it was such an incredibly warm response from people who were just so eager to be at the play.

So what was your next gay landmark?

I guess on TV—this [role on *Will & Grace*] is the first gay part on TV, although there was a running joke about my character on *Judging Amy* always being mistaken for being gay.

Wasn't there the character on *Sex and the City*?

Oh, yeah, that's right. The gay straight guy. I mean, the question [of the episode] was whether he was a gay straight man or a straight gay man. And if you think about it enough, there is a difference. Then I guess the movie *Urbania* was next.

It doesn't get gayer than *Urbania*.

[Laughs] No, it doesn't. That was the tag line for the movie: "It doesn't get gayer than that." I'm still good friends with Jon Shear, the writer-director. I've watched it a couple times, and I'm moved by it.

Did you kiss anyone, or were there any sex scenes?

Yeah, there was a little bit of gay action in that one. Matt Keeslar was Charlie's lover. [Charlie was Futterman's character.] Nothing incredibly graphic, but quick kisses. And then there was a much more graphic scene with Gabriel Olds, who played a soap opera guy whom Charlie picks up on the street.

Did you tell your folks, "OK, here comes *Urbania*"?

They're fine. We actually have a family with...I don't know if it's a higher percentage than most, maybe a more out percentage than most of gay couples, and it's just completely not a big deal in my extended family. My cousin and his longtime boyfriend and my other cousin and her longtime—"girlfriend" seems crazy to say.

Partner.

Yeah. And their kid; they have a kid together. And there were out people in my high school—both girls and boys.

I'm sure you've been on the street and people assumed you were gay.

Right, which is fine. I don't know if there's ever any resentment among gay actors of, Well, why do they have a straight actor playing that part? I think that was my impression

during *Angels in America*. There was a general if unstated—"rule" is sort of a strong word, but for that original cast, it was important to have people who were openly gay because it was politically such a strong gay statement.

Did you feel anybody was annoyed when they found out you were straight and playing in *Angels*?

I didn't have that experience directly, no. It was definitely an issue, more of a hot issue doing that play, for obvious reasons. And I was asked directly a number of times during that play—more than I ever had been.

By the press?

By people who'd come up afterward and talk to you. Sometimes by press. And at the time I decided, *You know what? The truth is, I'm not involved with anybody right now, so it's not like I'm hiding a relationship*, and I didn't answer it.

You put yourself in the straight closet.

Yeah, kind of, because it just seemed wrong to me to be doing the play and—

Saying, "Straight, straight, straight."

Yeah, exactly. And I felt more comfortable at the time just avoiding the question. It wasn't a brave thing to do. I'm not particularly famous now, and I certainly wasn't then, so it's not like there was anything at stake. But it just felt to me kind of wrong to be playing that card, for both kind of political reasons and also artistically. ■

So happy together

For gay and lesbian characters, finding love and a happy ending is a fairly recent phenomenon. Here are some of our favorites **By Michael Giltz**

Being queer in the movies, on TV, and in plays doesn't mean misery and woe anymore. Witness these happy gay milestones—the pop-culture events in which the boy gets the boy, the girl gets the girl, and no one has to die at the end.

Here's a subjective look at some of the landmark moments when the audience didn't have to squint to catch the pink tinge and the characters didn't apologize.

TELEVISION

BOYS Cable networks like HBO and Showtime have made unapologetic queer love stories much more commonplace in recent years, whether it's David Fisher reuniting with Keith on *Six Feet Under* or *Queer as Folk*'s Michael and Ben working out their HIV issues. For our happy landmark, though, we'll take the brief moment in 1989 on *thirtysomething* when two gay men were first seen in bed on network television. Finally, after decades of foreplay, a gay man on TV scored.

GIRLS Yes, that much-hyped lesbian wedding on *Friends* garnered lots of attention, but for unapologetic queerness, we remember *Roseanne*—Sandra

Bernhard dated Morgan Fairchild; Mariel Hemingway kissed Roseanne and said, "Next time, let's leave the wives at home"; and Roseanne's mother ultimately realized she liked looking at *Playboy* a lot more than the other moms did.

Honorable mention for both sexes goes to *Northern Exposure*, which was queer from the very beginning (one of its first episodes covered Walt Whitman), featured a gay marriage, and even did a flashback episode in which the town was founded by two pioneering lesbians. Too bad one of them had to die tragically.



Video valentines

Same-sex TV pairs we love include

- A** *Northern Exposure*'s town founders,
- B** *Roseanne*'s odd couple, and
- C** *Six Feet Under*'s Keith and David.

NORTHERN EXPOSURE: PHOTOFEST; SIX FEET UNDER: HBO

THEATER

BOYS Harvey Fierstein's landmark Broadway smash *Torch Song Trilogy* showed drag queen Arnold Beckoff searching for true love, surviving the sudden loss of a lover, and creating his own alternative family. Sure, it was a mainstream hit, but this was a queer show speaking to a queer audience. If straight people wanted to attend, they could—but they'd better sit in the back and keep quiet.

GIRLS Unlike gay plays, substantial dramas with lesbian-lover protagonists are still far too much of a novelty in the mainstream theater. Rides into the sunset are certain-

ly few and far between for women on Broadway. Female playwrights have always done bold work, and one can point to substantial shows like Jane Chambers's *A Late Snow* from 1974 (a distaff but far less bitchy *Boys in the Band*), her *Last Summer at Blue Fish Cove* from 1976 (lesbian romance with a bittersweet twist), or Cheryl Moch's 1985 play *Cinderella, The Real True Story* (in which the title character and the princess realize they don't need a prince at all). Even as recent a show as David Mamet's *Boston Marriage* stands out as an all-too-rare example of lesbian theater.

As for that landmark lesbian theatrical show that puts its stamp on popular culture? It's apparently a happy event we still have to look forward to.



Stage and screen sweeties

Lovestruck lads and ladies were featured in **D** *My Beautiful Laundrette*, **E** *Beautiful Thing*, **F** *Boston Marriage*, and **G** *Maurice*.

MOVIES

BOYS We all remember, of course, the many wonderful queer movie romances of the '80s and '90s. Our mates across the pond gave us the swoony romanticism of *Beautiful Thing*, the cross-cultural snogging of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and the class-differences-be-damned climax of *Maurice*, where aristo and servant go off into the sunset holding hands.

But nothing beats the midnight-movie staple *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* for stirring up memories about

the first time some felt free to be themselves in public.

Sure, Tim Curry died at the end of this 1975 horror-comedy—but he came back for the big musical finale! With audience members cross-dressing and getting up on the stage to act out dances, queers weren't just accepted—we were the stars!

GIRLS The independent film boom of the last decade or so meant that more lesbian movies were being made and, more

important, seen. Films like *Go Fish*, *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*, and *It's in the Water* brought satisfying girl-girl love stories to multiplexes everywhere.

However, most women think of *Desert Hearts* as that first landmark—the indie flick from 1985 may have had a qualified ending, but it was truly positive in the best sense of the word. Most important, Helen Shaver and Patricia Charbonneau had chemistry to spare. Straight audiences wouldn't realize how sexy sculpting was until 1990's *Ghost*. ■

Aflutter over Futterman

OK, you win. I have long been among those who resent it when you put a nongay person on the cover. But today, when I pulled my *Advocate* from its wrapping and saw the face of *Will & Grace*'s Dan Futterman ["Boyfriend in Training," February 18], I felt nothing but pleased. There seems to be such a gentle, compassionate soul residing within Dan, and he does seem to be making

character David just recently shared their first kiss, and it was an adorable thing to watch as they set the framework for a relationship. This show has been a godsend to me, realistically displaying both the awkwardness and the wonder of growing up. Any arguments that their relationship or the characters are not gay enough can't compete with the spark of hope and reassurance watching the kiss gave me.

Jason Stafford, Orlando, Fla.

sition with allies who are vital to the ultimate victory of the GLBT equality cause. But as we have made eminently clear, we are not devoting resources to antiwar activities. Our precious resources continue to be dedicated to our 30-year fight for GLBT freedom, justice, and equality. (2) NGLTF's actual work speaks the indisputable truth that we are not, as Sullivan speciously claims, irrelevant to GLBT people. In 2002 alone we were instrumental in defeating all but one of the anti-GLBT ballot measures that were voted on across the country and in passing nine antidiscrimination laws, one hate-crimes law, and one safe-schools law.

And oh, yeah, amid hundreds of public statements about GLBT equality issues, we issued one announcement about joining the Win Without War coalition.

Lorri L. Jean, executive director
NGLTF, Washington, D.C.

Sullivan criticizes NGLTF for publicly taking a position opposed to war on Iraq and suggests that its occasional inclusion of broader social justice issues is irrelevant. It is Sullivan who risks irrelevancy by insisting that gay organizations have no business weighing in on political debates with wide-ranging implications for gay and nongay folks alike.

Sullivan's politics of selfishness is tired. A single-minded focus on "What's in it for me?" threatens the very legitimacy of our movement and undermines opportunities for broad-based support. Moreover, the very arrogance, unilateralism, and imperialism that drives the Bush administration to war is the same holier-than-thou philosophy responsible for the most far-reaching attack on civil liberties since Joe McCarthy.

The hundreds of organizations that have taken positions opposed to Bush's war understand that the struggle to end discrimination against us is inexorably tied to the fight to eradicate the race, class, and ethnic divides that breed so much conflict and discontent in this country and worldwide. Sullivan is free to stand by himself. Many more of us understand and appreciate the ►

"The only explanation I have for the uniqueness of Dan is that he's a gay soul trapped in a hetero body."

—BARRY BARBEE, Washington Crossing, Pa.



a career out of playing gay men. His energy suggests a sensitivity that is unusual for a straight man. The flirty twinkle in his eyes and smirk on his lips give him the appearance of someone whose quiet, understated demeanor is really just an act and that at any moment he might break out in a "just Jack" sort of way. I believe him when he says he is straight. The only explanation I have for the uniqueness of Dan is that he is a gay soul trapped in a hetero body.

Barry Barbree, Washington Crossing, Pa.

First kiss

I loved your article "So Happy Together" [February 18]. Chronicling all the gay couples in the entertainment world was a great Valentine's Day pick-me-up. Watching actors, whatever their real-life orientation, bring truth to what is so true to us is exciting, rejuvenating, and necessary. However, I was upset by the omission of one particular couple that has recently developed in mainstream teen-targeted television. Kerr Smith's Jack on *Dawson's Creek* and the

Fightin' words

Reasonable people can disagree about whether national GLBT organizations should speak out on important issues that are not exclusively related to GLBT civil rights, like the impending war against Iraq [Last Word, February 18]. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has long believed that a "gay voice" in such national dialogue is important, that our community need not be limited to a GLBT-only sphere. After all, we're fighting for equality in society as a whole and not just to remain in a GLBT-only world.

What isn't reasonable is when Andrew Sullivan attempts to bolster his argument not by articulating a rationale for why GLBT organizations should be silent on issues like the war but by writing a scattered diatribe against NGLTF that promotes blatant falsehoods about what we are and what we do. Here are the facts: (1) NGLTF has joined a national coalition that is advocating alternatives to preemptive war against Iraq. We have taken a rhetorical po-