

Film

## Jeffrey at Batt

**A**T THE NEW YORK THEATER-DISTRICT CAFE where actor Bryan Batt and I sit chatting, several stage folk stop at our table to say hello. But none accosts him with the chant, "DAR-i-us, we all thought you were FAB-u-lous," as fans of Paul Rudnick's off-Broadway hit *Jeffrey* used to. Batt originated the role of Darius, the sweet but dumb chorus boy from *Cats* who wanted that refrain sung at his memorial. In the movie version of *Jeffrey* (Orion Classics), opening in August, Batt plays Darius again, this time paired with none other than *Star Trek's* Captain Picard, Patrick Stewart, as his on-screen lover.

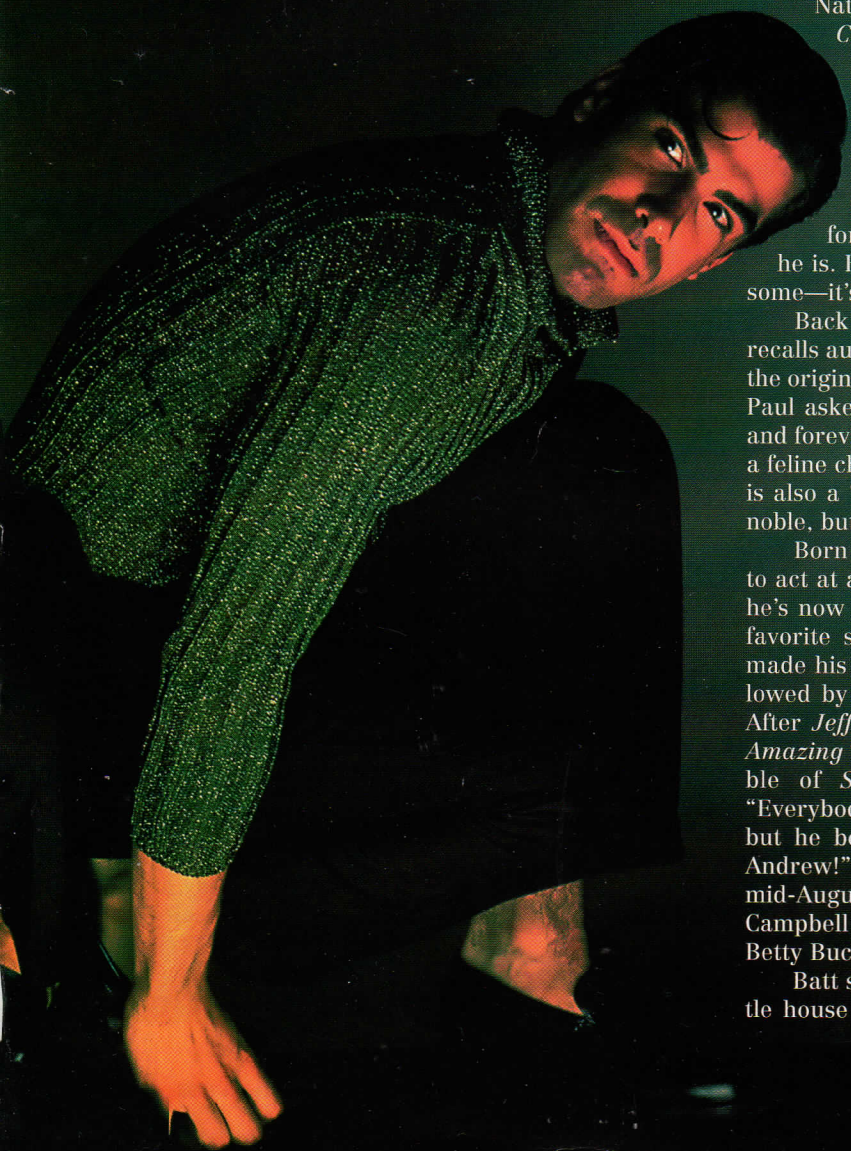
Batt is the only member of the New York stage ensemble to repeat his role for the film; the movie also stars *Wings'* Steven Weber as Jeffrey, a gay man who resolves to give up sex and then meets Mr. Right, and features brief appearances by Sigourney Weaver, Kathy Najimy, Olympia Dukakis, and Nathan Lane (recent star of Broadway's *Love! Valour! Compassion!*). "I was so sure they were going to get some up-and-coming Hollywood starlet to do my part," says Batt.

But according to Paul Rudnick, Batt was indispensable. "No one came near Bryan," the playwright and screenwriter tells me later. "People see how funny and how effortless his performance is, and they don't realize what a fine actor he is. He's a pretty smart guy, and he is amazingly handsome—it's quite a package."

Back in the café, the six-foot-one, dark-haired actor recalls auditioning to play the role of a *Grand Hotel* dancer in the original stage production of *Jeffrey*. "At my final callback, Paul asked me if I was really in *Cats*. I replied, 'Yeah, now and forever!' And he changed the part." Thus Darius became a feline chorus boy, which he remains in the film. But Darius is also a "vital human being," says Batt. "I think he is very noble, but he doesn't know it. That's the charm."

Born and raised in New Orleans, Batt came to New York to act at age 23. Ten years and countless curtain calls later, he's now using his Broadway smarts to produce one of his favorite shows, *Forever Plaid*, back in his hometown. He made his Broadway debut in 1985 in *Starlight Express*, followed by a stint as Che in a tour of *Evita*, and then *Cats*. After *Jeffrey*, he returned to Broadway in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and he's now in the ensemble of *Sunset Boulevard*. Spot a trend? Batt grins. "Everybody likes to give Andrew Lloyd Webber a hard time, but he bought my apartment, so keep turning them out, Andrew!" Still on his Lloyd Webber streak, for two weeks in mid-August Batt will take over for the vacationing Alan Campbell in *Sunset's* lead male role, Joe Gillis, pet stud to Betty Buckley's Norma Desmond.

Batt says he's working toward his "small dream of a little house in the country." But he won't say if he wants to



STYLING BY SHAWN WARDLE, GROOMING BY EVERARDO REGINE NY. FOR FASHION INFORMATION SEE PAGE 132



# Kathy Najimy

**D** ID YOU HEAR THE ONE ABOUT THE NUN, the witch, and the AIDS activist? I forgot the joke, but the punch line is Kathy Najimy, the witty, politically progressive comedian and actress, co-star of *Sister Act* and *Hocus Pocus*.

In our "Straight" issue last month, *OUT* labeled the voluptuous Kathy a "straight who can pass" (for gay). "Probably because I French-kiss women in public," laughs the actress, who lives with her boyfriend. But what has really earned Kathy her honorary homo status is her enthusiastic role as a campaigner for gay and lesbian rights and AIDS, which may be why she agreed to a cameo in the new gay-themed film *Jeffrey*, playing the disciple to a charismatic metaphysical speaker (Sigourney Weaver).

"When I write my own material," she tells me, "I have a lot of issues that deal with basic human rights—women's self-esteem, choice, gay and lesbian rights. And I think when you have a brain in your head, you're co-opted by the groups that you fight for." Us gays like Kathy 'cause she's got some smarts.

From childhood belly dancing, Kathy went on to drama studies at college and a six-year stint as a long-distance operator before she met Mo Gaffney and collaborated on *The Kathy and Mo Show*, an ever-evolving feminist character comedy that would propel both their careers for the next decade.

"The show afforded us a chance to mix performing with a strong point of view," says Kathy. "The entire women's movement paved the way for what we had to say, to be listened to and accepted." Right on, sister.

Commuting from New York to L.A. for her budding film career, Kathy landed parts in *The Fisher King*, *Soapdish*, and finally both blockbuster *Sister Act* movies with Whoopi Goldberg, an old pal from San Diego theater days. Although grateful, Kathy takes her film success in stride. "I'm from the school of thought that your dreams aren't just dreams," she tells me. "They're meant to come true and for you to do the work to make them come true."

In the works for the future is an HBO special with Gaffney, a pilot for NBC, and a one-woman stage show called *My Body Is Not My Instrument*, a reference to the actorspeak that permeates her L.A. environs.

Living in California has also included a dramatic weight loss over the past three years, a change she doesn't gloat about, seeing fat as, yes, a feminist issue. "I think it's keeping women so obsessed about how they look that keeps us from running the world," she says. She's right—if our male rulers had to obey such a rigid beauty regime they'd never find the time for corporate raiding and waging war. Hmm, maybe that's not such a bad idea.

Kathy's final words: "I'm just a girl from San Diego who grew up in not a rich family, with not a Barbie body and long blonde hair. And I've been able to work with Bette Midler, meet Bill Clinton, and do projects with people that I admire, and that's not due to anything but the role of the dice, and perseverance, and the belief that it's not out of the question."

—LINDA SIMPSON



JEFFREY'S GIRL: Najimy and furry friend.

RICHARD REINSDORF

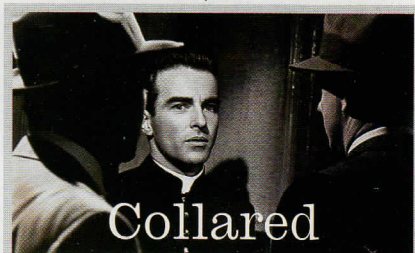
Linda Simpson is host of the national cable TV show Party Talk.

## "Ask me out on a date."

share his nest with a woman or a man, claiming that revelation would inhibit the illusion he creates on stage. "When people see the movie, I want them to think of Darius as this wonderful gay man. If they see me as Joe in *Sunset*, it will be a very heterosexual man." Then he flashes that disarming Darius smile. "If people want to know about my private life, they are going to have to ask me out on a date and buy me dinner."

—GERARD RAYMOND

Gerard Raymond's work has appeared in Harper's Bazaar, The Village Voice, and The Washington Post.



Collared

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

**T**HE TROUBLED CLERIC in Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953)—with subtle homo vibe provided by troubled gay man Montgomery Clift (above)—was a saint compared with this year's procession of gay priests on film, who range from the sinister to the ridiculous:

- **EVIL INCARNATE:** *The Boys of St. Vincent* (cable TV's A&E, January 1995). Henry Czerny leads a band of craven pederast priests who bedhop at a boys' school in Canada. A boon for homophobic conspiracy theorists everywhere.
- **CONFUSED CONFESSOR:** *Priest* (Miramax, March 1995). The deep pools of Linus Roache's eyes swirl with angst as he performs sacraments by day, sacrilege by night. Cheerleading for both religion and sexual self-determination, the movie raises issues, eyebrows—and Catholic hackles.
- **MADCAP HEDONIST:** *Jeffrey* (Orion Classics, August 1995). Nathan Lane grabs Steven Weber's butt, recites a catechism on musical comedy, and equates spiritual joy with an air-filled balloon. Full circle from Clift's cleric: The confessional as Streisand listening booth. — BRUCE C. STEELE