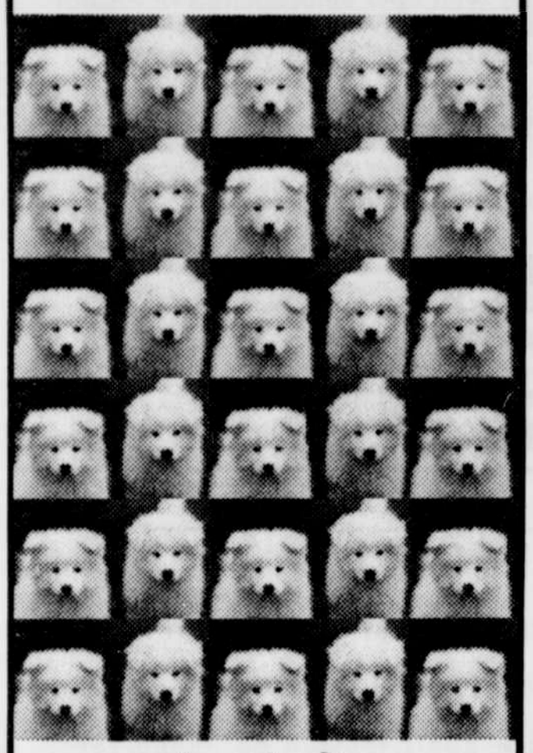
30 HELENS AGREE



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LESBIAN FORUM
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Frann, 222-7160
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6:30 pm, Thursday, Jan. 19
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PHOTO BY ANTON CORBIJN

(From left) Mike Mills, Peter Buck, Michael Stipe, and Bill Berry of R.E.M.

R.E.M.: Really Empty Minded?

Yes, R.E.M.'s music is extraordinary. And yes, the musical group has been at the cutting edge of the artistic adventure. However, R.E.M.'s lead singer—Michael Stipe—seems to be the epitome of empty-mindedness on the subject of sexual orientation (especially his own!). When asked about his own sexual orientation, Stipe told an MTV interviewer: "I just don't think it's anyone's business what I do with my dick, unless they're sitting in my lap." During a CNN interview, Stipe again evaded questions about sexual orientation saying only that he is "sexually ambiguous."

Asking someone if he is gay is *not* the same as asking him to provide a biographical history of his penis. And if being gay is neither evil nor vile, then why can't we talk about it?

While Stipe's decision to treat sexual orientation as "unspeakable" is absolutely homophobic, the very fact that he was asked about it also reflects a unique media bias. Reporters often presume that everyone is heterosexual, and seldom think to ask "Are you straight?" in order to confirm the heterosexuality of their interviewees.

Comments may be directed to Michael Stipe, R.E.M., PO Box 8032, Athens, GA 30603.

Media briefs

Calling All Homosexuals

"If you are an AT&T customer, you are helping to promote homosexuality in America." So says a full-page ad produced for members of the American Family Association.

"It's true," the ad continues, "The nation's largest telecommunications company is committed to using their resources to convince America that homosexuality is a normal alternative lifestyle. AT&T has a history of promoting homosexuality."

The AFA details that "history," which includes AT&T's support for the Gay Games, an event "designed to reshape America's traditional moral values"; an AT&T marketing campaign aimed at lesbian and gay customers, "a mail campaign which comes in a lavender envelope [with] a letter from AT&T's homosexual employee group"; the company's sponsorship of the "homosexual musical" *Falsettos*; and AT&T's use of the Brian McNaught video *On Being Gay*, which "indoctrinates their employees to accept homosexuality."

The ad concludes: "American Family Association is offering its supporters the opportunity to quit doing business with AT&T and switch to a long distance carrier with a distinctively Christian difference, Lifeline. With one toll-free phone call, not only have you taken business away from AT&T, but you are making a stand for morality in America.... Lifeline is a major long distance carrier like AT&T, MCI, Sprint, etc., except, like you and me, Lifeline is committed to family values and decency."

Appropriate comments can be directed to any or all of the following: Lifeline 1-800-800-7550; Donald E. Wildmon, American Family Association, PO Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803; or AT&T Media Relations, 295 N Maple Ave., Basking Ridge, NJ 07920, (908) 221-5017.

Family Values

The Nov. 21 episode of *Melrose Place* featured a holiday story line that struck a blow for *real* family values. In that episode, gay character Matt intends to bring boyfriend Jeffrey to Thanksgiving dinner at the home of Matt's parents. The parents—while pleading their false "understanding" and "acceptance"—tell Matt that they would like him to keep the gay relationship in the closet for the dinner's duration (we wouldn't want grandpa choking on a turkey leg, would we?). To his credit—and that of the *Melrose* writers—Matt refuses. When his mother asks him what she should say to the family when they wonder where Matt is on Thanksgiving, he replies: "Tell them I'm having dinner with my lover."

Though *Melrose Place* has been faulted for Matt's relatively one-dimensional character, such an effort still outpaces much of what mainstream television has to offer on the subject of homosexuality.

Send comments to Aaron Spelling, Darren Star, and E. Duke Vincent, executive producers, Melrose Place, *Spelling Enterprises, 5700 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036.*

Time Out

The Oct. 10 issue of *Time* magazine featured a cover story on openly gay dancer-choreographer Bill T. Jones. The 10-page feature also highlighted the phenomenal growth of African American artistic and cultural movements.

The article on Jones explored his unique style, his varied artistic influences, the ways in which his sexual orientation and HIV-positive status influence his art, and his relationship with longtime lover and collaborator Arnie Zane, who died of AIDS in 1988.

While *Time* has certainly let the lesbian, gay and bisexual community down in the past, send the magazine a supportive letter and ask that it publish more articles concerning the diverse artistic and creative accomplishments of our community.

Write: Jason McManus, editor-in-chief, Time *magazine, Time-Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020; or fax your letters to (212) 522-0601.*

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