

"I was in New York doing a film...and actually a mutual friend of hers and mine said she wanted to meet me. For a few days we went through various scenarios of how we were going to meet...she wasn't feeling well but wanted to talk to me on the phone so we talked on the phone and a call was arranged and she told me it was great and that I would be a star and talked to me about my big face, big mouth—anyway, I had the right size face apparently."

Charbonneau too had a famous fan; lesbian supermodel Gia was said to have found herself reflected in Cay's portrayal.

With one of the most erotic lesbian love scenes ever filmed still to this day, it's no surprise that lesbians like Garbo and Gia were huge fans. What may shock some, though, is that Charbonneau was pregnant during the filming of those very intimate scenes.

"You know the good ol' white jumpsuit? Well when you first see us walking along Pyramid Lake, my gut is like flat as a board. Then when we get to the house, I've got this little paunch because...I was almost three months pregnant. But actually when we, did do the love scene, I was definitely, definitely protective of my body."

Today *Desert Hearts* is still the highest-grossing lesbian film, 20 years after it was released, a fact that both reassures and disappoints the actors.

"It's kind of wonderful but kind of terrible also," says Shaver. "I mean *The L word* has been an interesting piece of mainstream, well, more or less mainstream entertainment with lots of lesbian love stories and heartbreaks and all kinds of life as life happens. But really, it's odd that in North American cinema that it is still the highest

grossing. You'd think that someone would come out and do it bigger, you know?"

Perhaps that's the legacy of being a bit ahead of its time, but for Deitch, Shaver and Charbonneau, *Desert Hearts* will always be a pivotal part of their personal history, and a huge contribution to American cinema. Today Charbonneau can still be found on any number of TV reruns like *Law & Order* thanks in part to her stint in LA after *Desert Hearts* wrapped ("I lost a part of myself out there," she says of not finding a good mix in Hollywood). Today she teaches acting to students in upstate New York and is taking on film roles again (up next: *100 Feet*, a thriller with Famke Janssen). Shaver's die-hard fans (colleagues at one of her theater groups called them "stage show Joanies") can catch her onscreen in *Numb* this year, or wait for her upcoming film—an adaptation of her sister Mary's memoir, *The Naked Nun*, about going into a convent as a 17-year old virgin and emerging 10 years later in 1967's sex, drugs and rock and roll world.

Both women still seem like quiet activists, still. Charbonneau speaks of the "unbelievable" gift she's been given with *Desert Hearts* and the women who open up to her. "That's something I definitely do not take lightly. I feel that way with this whole country right now, it's like with anything there's an enormous responsibility that comes with many things, with wealth and exposure and just be careful with how you use it, don't abuse it."

Shaver concurs that *Desert Hearts* confirmed what she already knew: "That love is. And love is when you find it. And love is the truth, and the thing that is most important. It is our essential nourishment. And I'm just hoping that on a human wide level we get over the idea that violence is somehow the way to solve problems. But that's a whole other story."

Shaver in *Numb*

compartmentalizes. ... I can only think of one thing at a time, you know?

**Yeah. Have you ever had a chance to play a lesbian character?**

I actually did. ... I played Claire and, as we find out, Jenny, who were twins, and I had a love scene with Elizabeth Keener ... in Liz Lachman's [2005] short *Getting to Know You*. I've not done it for prime time or anything.

**Do you feel like there are times when you are kind of typecast or given roles that play into Latina stereotypes?**

Yeah, you know, the thing is that I've gotten kind of sick of it, actually. It's just been recently that I realized, "Oh no, it's another weepy woman who's speaking about the death of her husband. Oh, she happens to be Spanish. And they happen to want me to speak in an accent. How original!" You know? Just recently. I used to answer no to that question, to be honest with you, but now it's like, come on, guys. Come on. I did it and I've done it, and it's like, you know, there was a certain part of my career where it was OK, but I really have no interest in those roles anymore, you know? There's a certain sort of idea of acting is acting and you get the job when you can get it and it's like, well, there's a certain point in your career where you're like, "I've done that a million times and if I keep doing it, it will only add to the fact that I'm being typecast." ... Like the weepy girl again [*with Spanish accent*]: "My husband, [*pretends to weep*], it is not his fault!"

**Are you an *L Word* fan at all?**

Oh, I love *The L Word*!

**We had Papi, Janina Gavankar, on our cover recently. She plays a Latina character but she's actually mixed-race Indian. It's the second time that the show has cast someone who is not Latina in a Latina role. How do you feel about casting decisions like that?**

It's annoying. What that shows me is that the people who are responsible for that show do not know how to represent that character. It's elusive, because it leads me to believe that either that they're really, really ignorant or they're really sort of imposing their idea of what someone should look like, and I think it's a really horrible thing to do to the ... Latin community. We don't look like that. None of us do. I don't know if it's done out of laziness. I don't know how their decisions are made. Because let me tell you, that there are a handful of actresses, many of them who are very good friends of mine, who could do that part just as well, or blow them *more* out of the water. You know? I mean, I love the show, I love the creators. ... I mean, the question was simply stated to me what I thought about [the casting deci-



Bonilla should be on a pedestal

sion]. And that's what I think.

**Which project are you most proud of throughout the course of your career?**

I would say one of the most wonderful roles that I've actually played was one of the roles that I originated, which was the role of Teresa Morales on *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. It was a series regular role that was written, and it was written so beautifully. I liked what it did. It was the exact opposite of what *The L Word* did. [The creators] were very brave. ... The show in and of itself, you know, it was a fictional show, but they took a lot of their story ideas from actual ideas [and] events in history and the way they fictionalized certain events but they really stayed true to the people and the pride. And I just love what ... the creator of the show, Beth Sullivan, let me do to represent my people. I learned about my people, where we came from, and it instilled me with such a pride and confidence in being a Mexican-American woman. It was such a joy because this character ... she stood up to the lead of the show, who was, of course, a white woman, and the *head* white woman. And at the same time, [my character] got to have a love interest; she got to have feelings. It was a really, really nice thing to play. It wasn't a stereotype, it was more of a representation. I really, really enjoyed it.

**You've worked both in live theater and TV.**

**Which do you prefer?**

Television was the medium that I grew up in and I really love television. I love the whole aspect of excellence in the field of television. I'm the kind of actor where I would really rather have an Emmy, really, than have an Oscar. I sound sort of like "[gasp] How dare you?" You know? But no, I mean, listen, I was a kid who grew up poor, man. We didn't have money for movies but we had a television.

**So you reach a wider range of people in a way, working in TV?**

Right, and you know I really started digging television during the time [of] *Hill Street Blues*, *Remington Steele*. That's when writing was really, really good. All of a sudden this television thing for me, it started really getting my attention. And *Moonlighting* ... I thought that was one of the most amazingly funniest, wittiest shows, you know? Glenn Gordon Caron, the creator of that show is now doing *Medium*. Just love that. I'd like to work with him too, come to think of it. Oh, you know what I want to be on, too? I want to be on *Heroes*!

**Oh yeah?**

Wouldn't that be great to be a superhero? I would love that. Maybe I'd run superfast or something. ■

time to play in literal playgrounds: An infantilizing montage finds Denise (Elizabeth Plumb) and Adria (Alisa Courtney) caressing as they romp on carousels, race down slides in gunny sacks and tee off at a miniature golf game. This film is patronizing for our time, but beneath pulp, it's quite radical as it documents the gay-friendlier side of '70s Los Angeles. Denise declares, after observing two women holding hands in a Sunset Blvd. café, "No matter who's in love, and no matter what person they're in love with, it's good. ... It's beautiful!" Viewers are invited to dig the scenes at the hip cafés, swinging underground parties and psychedelic be-ins of a bohemian Los Angeles festooned with love beads. The film's ambiguous ending also features a rapprochement between the two women that doesn't end six feet under. In fact, they walk off-screen into the bright outside sun, together. In the end, it's still just the two of them. ([wolfevideo.com](http://wolfevideo.com))

**That Tender Touch (Wolfe Video)**

The mid-'60s saw the rise of the lesbian pulp novel. By 1965, girl-on-girl love was by far the most popular theme of an \$18 million sex-paperback industry. Director Russell Vincent's 1969 feature, *That Tender Touch*, was part of this trend toward sensationalizing lesbian relationships and sex on the silver screen in low-budget movies. Like the pulp novels, lesbian sexploitation films were manufactured mostly for male consumption, but also found an underground lesbian audience. Restored from a slightly damaged 35mm print, this perfect example's small green lines and glitches dapple the film unobtrusively and only add to the cinephilia effect, even if you're watching on DVD.

Playboy bunny Sue Bernard (*Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*) stars as Terry, a pigtailed young woman with urges for her sophisticated roommate that finally burst forth in the breathy exclamation: "Marsha, darling! I need you. I want you!" Her desire gets fully reciprocated in a steamy, defrocked embrace, and the two actually live happily as lovers for a while. That is, until vacationing photographer Ken seduces Terry into a hetero marriage, leaving Marsha devastated. The majority of the film centers on Marsha's visit to the newlyweds, which leads Terry back into temptation. Terry's mouth may protest, but her body always somehow doesn't. Meanwhile, all of the women in the house, including the maid, the next-door neighbor and her daughter, want to get into Marsha's pants. It's a hot premise, but all of the pulp stereotypes get overplayed. Lesbianism is depicted as either a temporary refuge for rape victims, widows and unhappy housewives, or a disease from which one cannot emerge unscathed. This film's saucy despicableness, however, is part of what makes it so irresistible to enjoy, now, as camp. ([wolfevideo.com](http://wolfevideo.com)) ■

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