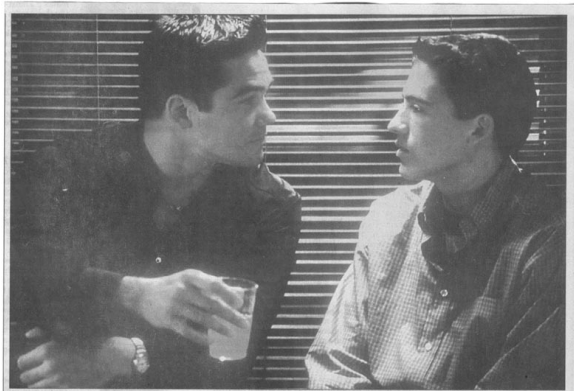


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Dean Cain, left, as Cole, with Andrew Keegan as Kevin: Sitcom style brought to the big screen.

## The subtext comes out

FILM REVIEW  
*The Broken Hearts Club*

BY STEPHEN COLE

There is an established school of thought that says all our best sitcoms, from *Proser to Friends* to *Ser and the City*, are heterosexual burlesques of gay relationships. Occasionally, one of these series will let a slip show, such as the scene a few seasons ago in *Friends* when Ross and Joey are riding in a cop car, doing research for an acting job, and one *Friend* becomes upset because

the other gets to sit up front with the officer. "How come you get to be partner?" he hisses.

"How come when you say 'partner', it sounds like you're talking about sex, not police work?" is his pull-whip-smart comeback.

If nothing else, *The Broken Hearts Club*, which features players from both *Proser* (John Mahoney) and *Ser and the City* (Ben Weber), is notable for bringing the modern sitcom, with its blurred ping-pong wisecracking, to the wide screen in the original homosexual form.

The film, which has been written and directed by 27-year-old Greg Berlanti (co-executive producer of *Dawson's Creek*), is the

story of a group of West Hollywood gays who regularly get together to quip and kvetch in the two or three hangouts where everybody knows their name, usually one of the groups' living rooms or a favourite bar or coffee shop.

*The Broken Hearts Club* begins with four of the guys sitting around a café table, playing "who can act straight the longest," summoning baritone voices to yak about the basketball Lakers and ordering up "double-stroed mocha" coffees.

An obvious difference between Berlanti's film and most sitcoms becomes apparent a few scenes later when the steady supply of dating zingers — "lisen sports-wear is casual, sex isn't casual!" — gives way to a reflective, frequently depressed look on gay life in Hollywood, which the sullen, avowedly chaste lead character, Dennis (Timothy Olyphant, *Go, Scream 2*) characterizes as "a bunch of 10s looking for an 11."

Dennis's actor-slut roommate, an 11 himself (Dean Cain, *Superman on TV's Lois & Clark*), is

more than eager to play the devil's advocate for 12 Lay's thriving gay dating scene. Which becomes a problem when an innocent young gay (Andrew Keegan, *Purity of Five*) wanders into the group's path in search of a man and mentor.

For its first half, *The Broken Hearts Club* mostly lives up to its promise of providing a slight, modestly entertaining, gay romantic comedy, although the film occasionally succumbs to the cinematically dead TV sitcom strategy of having four characters in chairs or stools, chit-chatting away at each other. But the film comes up empty when it makes a late grab for our tear ducts, offering up an emergency room OD and a funeral, complete with an uplifting quote from the classics that would seem an outright steal from *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

Berlanti's feature film debut can nevertheless be recommended to those who like their sitcoms straight — in an unadulterated, decidedly un-straight context.

★★½  
National Post

[Transcription anglaise/ English transcription](#)

[Traduction française/ French translation](#)

The subtext comes out

## FILM REVIEW

### The Broken Hearts Club

BY STEPHEN COLE

There is an established school of thoughts that says all our best sitcoms, from "*Frasier*" to "*Friends*", to "*Sex and the City*", are heterosexual burlesques of gay relationships. Occasionally, one of these series will let a slip show, such as the scene a few seasons ago in "*Friends*" when Ross and Joey are riding in a cop car, doing research for an acting job, and one *Friend* becomes upset because the other gets to sit up front with the officer. "How come you get to be partner?" he hisses.

"How come when you say 'partner', it sounds like you're talking about sex, not police work?" is his pal's whip-smart comeback. If nothing else, "*The Broken Hearts Club*", which features players from both *Frasier* (John Mahoney) and "*Sex in the City*" (Ben Weber), is notable for bringing the modern sitcom, with its blurred ping-pong wise-cracking, to the wide screen in the original homosexual form. The film, which has been written and directed by 27-year-old Greg Berlanti (co-executive producer of "*Dawson's Creek*" ), is the story of a group of West Hollywood gays who regularly get together to quip and kvetch in the two or three hangouts where everybody knows their names, usually one of the groups' living rooms or a favorite bar or coffee shop. "*The Broken Hearts Club*" begins with four of the guys sitting around a coffee table, playing "who can act straight the longest," summoning baritone voices to yak about the basketball Lakers and ordering up "double-steroid mocha" coffees.

An obvious difference between Berlanti's film and most sitcoms becomes apparent a few scenes later when the steadily supply of dating singers -- "linen sportswear is casual, sex isn't casual!" -- gives way to reflective, frequently depressed look on gay life in Hollywood, which the sullen, Dennis (Timothy Olyphant, "*Go*", "*Scream 2*") characterizes as "a bunch of 10s looking for an 11."

Dennis's actor-slut roommate, an 11 himself (Dean Cain, Superman on TV's "*L*  
*ois & Clark*"

), is more than eager to play the devil's advocate for El Lay's thriving gay dating scene. Which becomes a problem when an innocent young gay (Andrew Keegan, "*Party of Five*") wanders into the group's path in the search of a man and mentor.

For it's first half, "*The Broken Hearts Club*" mostly lives up to its promise of providing a slight, modestly entertaining, gay romantic comedy, although the film occasionally succumbs to the cinematically dead TV sitcom strategy of having four characters in chairs or stools, chit-chatting away at each other. But the film comes to an empty when it makes a late grab for our tear ducts, offering an emergency room OD and a funeral, complete with an uplifting quote from the classic that would seem an outright steal from "

*Four Weddings and A Funeral*".

Berlanti's feature film debut can nevertheless be recommended to those who like their sitcoms straight - in an unadulterated, decidedly

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-straight context.

Two stars and a half.

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*Quand ils s'affichent*

## **CRITIQUE DE FILM**

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*The Broken Hearts Club*

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PAR STEPHEN COLE

(TRADUIT PAR CHANTAL MARTINEAU)

(Note : Ceci est une traduction libre, les termes et vraies citations de *Friends* et cie n'ont pas été respectés)

Il y a une philosophie qui dit que toutes nos meilleures comédies, de "Frasier" à "Friends" en passant par Sex and the City, sont des exagérations hétérosexuelles des relations amoureuses gaies. Occasionnellement, une de ces séries laissera un de ses épisodes glisser, comme la scène datant de quelques années dans "Friends" où Ross et Joey se promènent en auto-patrouille, faisant de la recherche pour un rôle, et un de ces "amis" devient angoissé parce que l'autre peut s'asseoir sur le banc avant, avant le policier. "Comment se fait-il que tu peux devenir son partenaire ?" demande-t-il sur un ton hérissé. "Comment se fait-il que quand tu dis 'partenaire', ça sonne comme l'on parlait de sexe et non pas du boulot de policier ?" est la réponse tranchante de son copain.

Si ce n'est rien d'autre, "The Broken Hearts Club", qui met en vedette des acteurs des séries "Frasier" (John Mahoney) et "Sex in the City" (Ben Weber), son fait le plus notable est de valoriser la sitcom moderne, avec ses tirades franches, drôles et tranchantes, au grand écran dans sa forme unique et homosexuelle. Le film, qui a été écrit et dirigé par Greg Berlanti, 27 ans, (co-producteur exécutif de "Dawson"), est l'histoire d'un groupe de jeunes hommes gais vivant à West Hollywood qui se rencontrent régulièrement pour railler et bavasser dans deux ou trois endroits où tout le monde les connaît, c'est habituellement dans le salon de l'un d'eux ou encore dans un de leurs bars ou cafés favoris. La première scène de "The Broken Hearts Club" débute avec un groupe de quatre hommes assis autour d'une table à café, jouant à "qui peut se comporter de la manière hétéro le plus longtemps," parlant en baritons pour discuter du basket des Lakers et commander des cafés avec "une double dose de stéroïdes".

La grande différence entre le film de Berlanti et la plupart des sitcoms devient plus apparente quelques scènes plus loin quand le groupe cherche l'âme soeur -- "les vêtements de sport sont désinvoltes, mais pas le sexe !" -- met l'accent sur une vision pensive et dépressive sur la vie gaie à Hollywood, vue par un Dennis renfrogné, (Timothy Olyphant, "Go", "Scream 2") qui voit son groupe comme "une bande de zoufs cherchant l'âme soeur." Le coloc de Dennis, une vraie pute, un as de pique lui-même (Dean Cain, le Superman de la série "Lois & Clark"), est plus qu' impatient de faire l'avocat du diable, en étant celui qui compte le plus de conquêtes à son actif. Ce qui devient un problème quand un jeune homosexuel innocent (Andrew Keegan, "Party of Five") atterrit dans le groupe, se cherchant un copain et un guide spirituel.

Pendant la première moitié du film, "The Broken Hearts Club" est à la hauteur de nos

*espérances, en donnant une légère comédie gaie, avec un divertissement assez léger, même si le film tombe parfois dans la sitcom où il ne se passe rien, où sont disposés quatre personnages qui sont assis sur des chaises ou des bancs, se parlant de la pluie et du beau temps. Mais le film se dégonfle quand il fait une dernière tentative pour faire monter nos larmes, offrant une scène de salle opératoire et ensuite des funérailles complètes, avec une phrase apaisante venant d'un classique que l'on pourrait considérer comme un plagiat direct du film "Quatre mariages et un enterrement". Le tout premier long-métrage de Berlanti peut à tout le moins être recommandable, pour ceux qui aiment savourer leurs comédies d'une manière conventionnelle - dans un contexte non-adultère et définitivement peu commun. Deux étoiles et demie.*