The Normal Heart

May 1, 1998 By Dick Scanlan

Larry Kramer
Alchemy Theater Company
Simon & Schuster Audio
Plume Paperbacks

The Normal Heart is the *Titanic* of AIDS plays -- *Titanic* the movie, not the ship. In fact, in a recent Off-Broadway revival at the Alchemy Theater Company, Larry Kramer's thinly veiled autobiographical drama proved that it still floats, despite the enormous medical, political and cultural shifts in the 13 years since its original production. Even Kramer's long political rants are gripping; the deaths that resulted from the government's (and, yes, *The New York Times*') cold-blooded AIDS denial remain shockingly tragic.

Kramer and *Titanic* writer-director James Cameron take a similar dramatic approach: Put a love affair in the middle of a disaster. Indeed, the relationship between Ned (a.k.a. Kramer) and Felix, a fashion reporter for the *Times*, is among Kramer's most playful, sexy and tender writing. Equally interesting is the depiction of the infighting that characterized the founding of Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC). The characters argue incessantly over whether change is best achieved through working within the system or attacking it from the outside. In light of GMHC's startling recent endorsement of HIV reporting after years of staunch opposition, it is clear that the inside/out argument has yet to be resolved.

The Off-Broadway production -- which featured perfectly pitched performances by Scott Galbraith as Felix and Kate Levy as an early AIDS doc -- won critical acclaim, ironically from the *Times*. But don't worry if you missed it: The all-star recording of a 1993 benefit performance (with an introduction by Barbra Streisand) is splendid. If you've never listened to a play on a CD before, this is the one to start with: Stockard Channing, Eric Bogosian, Harry Hamlin, Kevin Bacon and a dynamite David Drake wring every laugh and tear out of Kramer's play.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/normal-heart-11886-4478