GREGORY SCAFFIDI; HAIR BY SCOTT WILLIAMS. MAKEUP BY KELCEY FRY. STYLING BY RACHEL SAGE. COTTON PRIN PUBLIC ... BLUN FILOS ANGELES

TV OIA

Theories of *Relativity*

Or, how actress Lisa Edelstein learned to kiss a girl.

ACTRESS LISA EDELSTEIN IS taking nothing for granted. To research her role as Rhonda Roth—the lesbian sister on the new ABC Saturday night drama *Relativity* (from the producers of *My So-Called Life*)—Edelstein uses magazine articles, her friends' advice, and even the Internet to make certain that when Rhonda's with her girlfriend, it doesn't look like, "Oh, there are two straight girls trying to be lesbians."

While TV land awaits an openly lesbian actress in a lesbian role, Edelstein's no stranger to the queer world. In 1988, she wrote and performed in *Positive Me*, a stage musical at New York's La MaMa E.T.C. about the AIDS crisis. Her songs included "I Hate Condoms," "Stud Wrap," and "Where Is He, God?" about a boy and a girl both waiting for the right man. The show proved a success, and Edelstein performed bits of it for countless benefits during the next few years.

Still, the night before filming a scene where Rhonda and her partner Sylvie (Kathryn Morris) go to the movies with their families, Edelstein had a panic attack. "At 1:30 in the morning I realized I didn't know what it was like to have a public display of affection in a lesbian relationship," says the 26-year-old actress. So I called some lesbian friends of mine, but they were sleeping and wouldn't talk to me. I went on America Online, into the lesbian chat room, and I thought, 'Well, I'll just ask somebody here.' The most humiliating part of it was having to say, 'I'm an actress playing a lesbian'—it sounds so goofy. Some of the girls were snippy, but one woman was really cool and answered my questions."

Even goofier was a brief, flirty moment Edelstein and Morris filmed about what the two women would do after the movie. "Somebody said, 'Why don't you just ask Sylvie if she wants to get some pie or something.' I kept saying, 'Sylvie, you want to go eat some pie?'" Edelstein says drolly. "And then they said, 'Can you not say "eat some pie"? Because somehow it's coming across the wrong way.'"

Rhonda and Sylvie broke up in the second episode, but Edelstein is certain Rhonda won't become "the lonely lesbian." Maybe her confidence comes from having her bases covered: The actress also plays Patty, the wife of a writer on the CBS sitcom *Almost Perfect*, and provides the voice for Mercy Grave on the WB cartoon *Superman*. Rhonda's a lesbian and Patty is straight, so is there any chance that Mercy—villian Lex Luthor's "girlfriend/assistant/slave" is bisexual? Edelstein laughs. "You know," she says, "I wouldn't be surprised."—MICHAEL GILTZ

Michael Giltz also contributes to Entertainment Weekly *and* Blockbuster *magazine.*