Caitlin Johnson
Professor Muller
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Crazy World

In 1982, Blake Edwards came out with *Victor/Victoria* a romantic comedy with a legendary cast including Julie Andrews, James Garner, Robert Preston, and Lesley Ann Warren. Julie Andrews plays Victoria Grant, a soprano soloist at the end of her rope, who is convinced by Carol Todd or “Toddy” (Preston) to pull off a ridiculous scheme: to become Victor, a female impersonator. The plan goes perfectly until Victoria falls for King Marchand (Garner). As Victor, she enjoys the freedoms and privileges of being a man but misses the romance and delicacy of being a woman. Victoria is introduced to the issue of “gay” while she struggles to live up her beautiful lie. Since *Victor/Victoria*, similar movies have come out to address “gay,” but Blake Edwards was the first to take a serious issue and address it through comedy.

*Victor/Victoria* is a brilliant portrayal of the struggles of “gay” versus “straight” and women versus men, telling viewers what they need to hear through laughter and music.

Victoria Grant has a beautiful voice but is not taken seriously by her potential male employers. Toddy is a “gay” performer struggling in a “straight” community. The two meet and become instant friends, and Toddy is soon struck with a risky epiphany. He proposes that Victoria become Victor, a female impersonating singing sensation and pose as his lover for cover-up. Horrified, Victoria says that it would never work, that “they’ll know he’s a phony.” Toddy replies with a mischievous smile and says, “That’s right. They’ll know he’s a phony.”
Toddy’s plan works perfectly. People do not really know what to think of Victor, but they know he is a beautiful performer, and they love him. The only exception is the American theater financier and gangster, King Marchand, who is mesmerized by Victoria during her first performance and refuses to accept that he fell for a man - not to mention his girlfriend, Norma (Warren), who does not like to share the spotlight or King’s affection. Trouble arises when Victoria also falls for King Marchand - she is faced with the dilemma of having to choose to be a man or a woman. She enjoys being a man because she is taken seriously and can say and do as she pleases without being looked down upon. On the other hand, she tires of living a lie, and she longs to have an honest, intimate relationship with King Marchand. She also gets a taste of the lives “gay” men have to face: being looked at as “freaks” and having the label of “gay” or “queer” be a negative one. In the end, Victoria chooses to become a woman once again, but not before giving Toddy one last thrill. In Victor’s last performance, Toddy poses as Victor and has a good time making a fool of himself while Victoria watches among the audience with King Marchand.

In Victor/Victoria, we are introduced to the delicate world of “gay.” In the setting, entertainment is key above all else, so the gay community feels at home in the theater. Outside of the theater though, “straight” men dominate, and everyone else is subject to their demands and rejections. This is a realistic depiction of life in a city like Paris (in the past or present). Despite the fact that people like to say the world is open-minded toward “gay,” discrimination and even fear of it is still blatantly present. In Victor/Victoria, the main character steps up on the social ladder by becoming a man, and because she pretends to be a “gay” man, she is adored by some
and ridiculed by others. The film addresses these issues not only through humor and song but through the language the characters use.

Norma says to Toddy, “You really are... queer?” and Toddy laughs and says with a charming smile, “Oh, we prefer gay.” In this sense, “gay” is used in a positive manner. Homosexuals are clearly content to be who they are and label themselves as “gay” meaning “happy.” “Queer,” on the other hand, means “strange” or “abnormal” and gives homosexuals a negative label, which they do not like. Why then do people today use phrases like, “This is so gay!” to complain about something they do not like? Rather than associating the word with happiness, they associate it with homosexuality, something they view negatively. The word “straight” also gives “gay” a negative connotation. Something that is not straight is crooked, out of the ordinary, flawed.

Does that make “gay” men flawed?

Another example is the title “gay” performers are referred to as: “drag queen.” The movie *Connie and Carla* - inspired by *Victor/Victoria* - came out in 2004, the writer and star of which is Nia Vardelos. Connie (Vardalos) and Carla (Toni Collett), like Julie Andrew’s Victoria, are aspiring actresses in a male dominated world. They too are not taken seriously, and Connie comes up with the crazy idea to disguise as “drag queens” at a club in Los Angeles. One of the other “queens” at the club explains that the term “drag” is Shakespearian. “He’d write so-and-so enters, and in the margins he’d put the initials d. r. a. g.: so-and-so enters dressed as girl.” Men dressing as women to put on stage performances is not a knew concept. In the era of the Greeks, only men could perform on stage despite the fact that many roles called for women. During the Baroque Era, young men were often castrated so they would maintain their high pitched voices and be able to perform in the opera as female characters. So why are “drag queens” today
viewed as “freaks?” People do not like what they do not understand, in fact it scares them, and people do not understand why some gay men like to dress as women. In trying to explain the concept to one of the “queen’s” straight brother, she said, “It’s like dressing how you feel inside... and I haven’t known your brother for very long, but I think he’s happy.” The word “queen,” like “gay,” is meant to be a positive description of the person: everyone likes to feel important, royal, and looked up to, and men in “drag” are no different.

The movies *Victor/Victoria* and *Connie and Carla* shed light on a touchy subject through music and humor, making it easier to face and accept. The story lines are clever and entertaining, and the underlying themes are touching and motivational. Both movies address the difficult lives of homosexuals, and both movies encouraged the strength in that group as well as strength in women. This promotion is made clear through the songs in each of the movies, all of which are inspirational toward women or anyone striving for honest, unbiased love free from discrimination. One example is Julie Andrew’s solo “Crazy Love.” The list of songs sung by Vardalos and Collett also has a lot to say: “Maybe This Time” from *Cabaret*, “What I Did For Love” from *A Chorus Line*, “Don’t Rain On My Parade” from *Funny Girl*, etc.

Overall, *Victor/Victoria* and *Connie and Carla* are must-see movies. The music is entertaining and classic but not cliche, and the interactions between characters are hilarious and quirky but not corny. The issues addressed are serious but have no negative effect on the plot (the movies do not become dry, boring, or preachy). Both movies were well filmed with talented casts. In the end, the viewer is both touched and inspired, enlightened and entertained. Without a doubt, these are movies anyone would enjoy - male or female, young or old, “gay” or “straight.”