

# *ftf: female to femme*

A FILM BY ELIZABETH STARK & KAMI CHISHOLM

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## **BASICS**

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*FtF: Female to Femme* is directed and executive produced by **Kami Chisholm & Elizabeth Stark**. Chisholm and Stark previously co-directed the short documentary "A Conversation with Elizabeth's Father," which premiered at the San Francisco Lesbian & Gay Film Festival in 2004. Stark is the author of *Shy Girl* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999). Chisholm currently teaches media and women's studies at San Francisco State University and has directed many short films. *FtF* is produced by **Vivian Giourousis**. It features interviews with actress **Guinevere Turner** (*Go Fish*, *American Psycho*, *L Word*), writer/activist **Jewelle Gomez** (*The Gilda Stories*), and musicians **Bitch** (Bitch & Animal) and **Leslie Mah** (Tribe 8).

## **SYNOPSIS**

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Imagine a world in which the journey toward femme was understood to be as radical as journeys to claim and inhabit other queer bodies. Envisioning more than it documents, *FtF: Female to Femme* celebrates dyke femme identities, combining farce and seduction with analysis and personal history. For years, femmes have forged community and created space for themselves out of edgy performance and authentic parody. *FtF* recognizes these strategies and builds them into an unforgettable sexy, funny and moving film.

Bursts of queer burlesque amplify the idea of a femme drag. A satire of a femme transition support group uses humor to disarm viewers (as it did its participants), finally stripping away layers of performance to arrive at a raw recognizability of specifically femme tactics. Interviews feature a host of fabulous femmes, including actress/ writer Guinevere Turner, novelist/activist Jewelle Gomez, poet Meliza Bañales, rock stars Leslie Mah (**Tribe8**) and Bitch (**Bitch & Animal**), professors, activists, artists and dancers. The filmmakers ask these brilliant thinkers and performers to use the language of gender transition to talk about femme identity, opening up new possibilities for understanding femininity while reinforcing connections among gender warriors around the world.

A wildly original extravaganza, *FtF: Female to Femme* presents a saucy, indelible portrait of a people and a politics central to the gender revolution.

## OFFICIAL SELECTION

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- The British Film Institute (BFI) London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
- Frameline30: The San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival
- aGLIFF: The 19th Annual Austin Gay & Lesbian International Film Festival
- Reeling: The Chicago Lesbian and Gay International Film Festival
- Lesbian Looks Film Series, Univ. of Arizona, Tuscon, AZ

## DIRECTOR/PRODUCER BIOS

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**Kami Chisholm** is a doctoral candidate in History of Consciousness at UC Santa Cruz and a graduate of Loyola Marymount's Film Production department. *FtF: Female to Femme*, Chisholm's first co-directed feature documentary, premiered in June 2006 at Frameline30: The San Francisco International LGBT Festival. Chisholm is also the director of "Seven Questions about Desire," an experimental erotic documentary that debuted at the 2006 Philadelphia International Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, and the co-directed "Sigmund Freud: Professional Psychoanalyst," which has screened at dozens of queer film festivals worldwide. Currently, Chisholm teaches feminist/queer/race theory, sexuality studies, and visual culture at California College of the Arts and San Francisco State University. In addition, she is producing the upcoming short film "Godspeed" (co-directed by Lynn Breedlove and Jen Gilomen).

**Vivian Giourousis** is a San Francisco based filmmaker and producer dedicated to creating and supporting works that explore the farthest reaching edge of creativity and social momentum.

**Elizabeth Stark** is the author of the novel *Shy Girl*, published (by Farrar, Straus & Giroux) in 1999, in paperback from Seal Press in 2000, and in German from Orlanda Press in 2003. It was a national bestseller on the Lambda Book Report list and at A Different Light, and a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award and the Ferro-Grumely Award. Elizabeth completed her MFA at Columbia University in 1996. She worked as a reader and editor at *The Paris Review*, has read, performed and taught in New York City, San Francisco, and points between, and is currently finishing her second novel. In 2006-2007, she will be a Visiting Professor in Creative Writing at UC Santa Cruz.

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

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*FtF: Female to Femme* is a documentary that explores femme dyke identity as a radical gender practice and embodiment. Since the "invention" of homosexuality and the invert in the late 1800s in the field of sexology, the exemplary homosexual/gay/queer figure has been one who embodies some sort of gender crossing, most especially the masculine woman and the feminine man. This primary conception of homosexuality

persists to this day, rendering largely invisible those whose gender identities are not visibly different from their perceived natural sex.

In the past 10 years, a spate of films have documented the experiences, identities, perspectives, and lives of butches, bois, trans, and other masculine identified (but female born) persons. To our knowledge, there have been no feature length documentaries that explore issues of gender, sex, and sexuality in the lives of persons who are not seen to be crossing over in their gender/sex identities. In this way, *FtF* is a film that has been envisioned to do more than give voice to “femme” as a queer identity and expression (though hopefully it succeeds in doing this as well). It challenges popular and queer subcultural assumptions about gender, femininity, and identity. It is a radical femme, feminist, queer response to notions of gender normativity and essentialism that run not only through mainstream heterosexual culture but also through our own queer/trans subcultures.

As filmmakers, we conceived of this project initially as one that challenges the predominant dual gender system. As the title of our film, *FtF*, is meant to suggest, people can be born female and enter into a journey to live as another gender expression entirely: femme. We consider this project to be one in alliance with other people crossing genders. It is also a feminist project that acknowledges that people seen as women are attacked as often for occupying a space of femininity as for “violating” that space. In other words, people are attacked for being seen to be moving in and out of the category of “women,” but people are also attacked for being “women.” It has long been a goal of ours to foster coalition based on opposition to the hatred of femininity (which makes femininity a triple trap: you are not supposed to leave it, enter it or exist within it). Our film denaturalizes femininity and pushes for an understanding of femininity as multiple rather than singular, constructed rather than natural, and as being as potentially radical on someone “born female” as masculinity.

These are the theoretical underpinnings of the film. The film itself is a colorful, sexy, funny and moving presentation of a host of fabulous femmes, including actress/writer Guinivere Turner, writer/activist Jewelle Gomez, rock stars Leslie Mah and Bitch, professors, activists, artists and dancers. *FtF: Female to Femme* makes use of parody and costuming much the way femme does: to get a deeper, politicized understanding of ourselves in the world.

## CAST AND CREDITS

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### **Directors and Executive Producers**

Kami Chisholm & Elizabeth Stark

### **Producer**

Vivian Giourousis

**FEATURED FEMMES**

Bitch  
Meliza Bañales  
eugénie belle  
Veronica C. Combs (honorary femme)  
Crème Fresh  
Fannie Fuller  
Jewelle Gomez  
Margaret Hitchcock  
Sugar L'Amour  
Leslie Mah

Toni Parks  
Celestina Pearl  
Masha Raskolnikov  
Jessica Robinson  
Elizabeth Stark  
Starr 69  
Jukie Sunshine  
Guinevere Turner  
Rebecca Weiner  
Dominique Zeltzman

**PERFORMANCES BY**

**BIG BURLESQUE**  
Sugar L'Amour  
Ladymonster  
Jukie Sunshine

**BURLESQUE-ESQUE**  
Crème Fresh  
Jane Fondue  
Starr 69

**THE DIAMOND DAGGERS**  
Silva Bulette  
Chloe Camikaze  
Fannie Fuller  
Cherry Lix  
Vidalia Paradise  
Pinky Swear

**HARLEM SHAKE**  
Alotta Boutté  
Simone de la Ghetto  
Leetha Hips  
Missy Marmalade

**FEMMES IN OPENING SEQUENCE**

Daisy Rose Anderson  
Sarai Coutin

**CONCEPT BY**  
Elizabeth Stark

**CAMERA**  
Kami Chisholm

**SOUND MIXER**  
Sinisa Kukic

**EDITORS**  
Kami Chisholm

Vivian Giourousis  
Elizabeth Stark

**additional crew**

Daisy Rose Anderson  
Shani Heckman

**Archival footage supplied by**  
the Internet Moving Images Archive  
(at archive.org)

**HARLEM SHAKE FOOTAGE**  
courtesy of Veronica C. Combs  
and  
Simone de la Ghetto/Harlem Shake

**MUSIC**

"Circus Fish"  
written & performed by Vermillion Lies  
BMI Records

"White Picket"  
written & performed by Vermillion Lies  
BMI Records

"Slave to the Blues"  
performed by Ma Rainey

"Estrofemmmme"  
written & performed by Tribe 8  
courtesy of Tribe 8

**THANK YOU**

Daisy Rose Anderson  
Artists Television Access (ATA)  
Danielle Blum  
Drake Cameron  
Counterpulse  
Elizabeth's family  
Jen Gilomen  
Thea Hillman  
Krisana Hodges

Wendy Levy  
Cherry Lix  
Kendra Lubalin  
Leslie Mah  
Barbara McBane  
Cassandra Millspaugh  
Jennifer Morris  
Tribe 8

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