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views: Queer as Folk: Reflections in a Funhouse Mirror

“It’s not meant to reflect all of gay society.”
“It” is Showtime

Network’s *Queer as Folk*, and that’s what the program’s producers caution viewers after the final credits are run with each episode.

The cable network that prides itself in having “no limits” launched a massive public relations campaign to lesbians and gays to hype the *QAF* series premiere last year.

Showtime/*QAF* sponsored some twenty “VIP Coming Out” parties, ostensibly organized to support gay causes, in major TV market areas last year. And, several mass direct-mailings said by Showtime to be “targeted to the gay/lesbian market” touted the new show as one which “offers a compelling, realistic, graphic depiction” of lesbians and gays in the U.S.

A compelling, realistic and graphic depiction of all or some lesbians and gays in the U.S.? Perhaps the British know.

Queer as Folk’s progenitor is a British miniseries

A compelling, realistic and graphic depiction of all or some lesbians and gays in the U.S.?

that was relatively well received on England’s Channel 4. Aside from the American-British dialect differences, the British and the American *QAF* are essentially the same – except that the American version has a 17-year-old Justin (versus a British 15-year-old version), and the Brits’ venue is Manchester; the Americans find themselves in, of all places, Pittsburgh.

In one of at least three *QAF* mass-mailings, Showtime indicated that when the program first aired in Britain, it “initially stunned the audience with its unflinching portrait of an aspect of gay life,” implying that the U.S. version would offer an equally unflinching portrait of the lives of typical gay and les-

**kevin
thomas
althouse**

bian Americans.

But some viewers do not think that the Americanized version of *QAF* has fulfilled Showtime’s promise.

Burlingtonian Justin Bullard said that *QAF* writers should consider more “down to earth” situations that “average gay folks can relate to.”

“What do [we] do in Vermont when there are only two gay bars in the entire state?” Bullard asked. “Not all gay people live [in] the city.”

Fellow Vermonter Joel Nichols, quick to mention that he once met Peter Paige (*QAF*’s Emmett), added that he isn’t particularly empathetic to the Pittsburgh big-city gay life

acter, then a 29-year-old advertising executive, raised more than a few eyebrows last year when geeky accountant character ‘Ted’ awakened from a drug-induced coma to find the narcissistic sexual gymnast in a nude embrace with a young doctor – tucked away in an adjacent hospital bed.

Bullard said scenes including the sexually promiscuous, drug-using Kinney, played by Gale Harold, are fair representations of the activities of some gay men.

“There are always folks (like Brian) in real life,” Bullard said. “We shouldn’t portray them because they show an attitude that’s not hunky-dory. [Consider] how many straight people fuck too much with too many people without using rubbers, [who] never commit, drink and do too many drugs. We’re just people and some of us have hang ups.”

Nichols agrees.

“Gays are people, too, so some are going to be assholes,” Nichols said. “I praise *QAF* for showing a side of gay life – the sexual side – in a way that other media outlets do not.”

Although *QAF* producers take pains to indicate that the series is not intended to represent all aspects of gay life and gay people, some argue that there are issues that need future attention.

“It would be nice if there were more real looking (fat) people, instead of just perfect ones,” Nichols said. Spirituality should be addressed in future *QAF* episodes, another viewer argued.

“I do wish [they] could show other aspects ... like the more spiritually-inclined gay guy,” Bullard said, “who’s a little more conscious of his actions, but still likes to get laid.”

Queer as Folk was nominated late last year as an outstanding drama series by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation for their 13th annual media awards, scheduled to begin in New York City on April 4, and to end in San Francisco on June 1.

The other GLAAD nominees for Outstanding Drama Series are UPN’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, CBS’s *The Education of Max Bickford*, NBC’s *ER*, and *Six Feet Under*, an HBO creation. ▼

depicted in *QAF*.

“The characters tend to seem real enough,” Nichols said. “But their activities and lives aren’t wholly typical of the Burlington scene.”

Metropolitan locations aside, the semi-censored, semi-explicit sex scenes serve to separate this series from any other, at least according to *QAF*’s producer.

Tony Jonas last year warned that the series would raise a few eyebrows because some of the sex scenes are something that most viewers haven’t seen – on television. Producer Jonas said that *QAF* is “frank and honest and unapologetic – something that will be shocking, but shockingly good.”

The Brian Kinney char-