

Vermont Trash TV

Paul Olsen

A COUCH IN COLCHESTER -- Recently I spent a bit of time watching my share of so called "Trash TV." You know the television shows I'm talking about, today on Ricki Lake "I Didn't Love You When I Married You!", Oprah's "911 Horror Stories," Jerry Springer's "My Lover Is A Cheatin' Dog!" (I have a few guests to suggest for that show) and the father of trash TV, Phil Donahue with "Women over 40 Who Posed for Playboy."

Recognizing that this stuff can actually kill brain cells, I began thinking about shows, albeit with a few less brain cells, that Ricki Lake, Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue, Montel Williams, Jerry Springer, Sally Jesse Raphael, and Jenny Jones could do when visiting Vermont. So here's my list of Vermont Trash TV themes:

Is Champ Gay?

Lesbians Who Do Not Wear Flannel

Gay Men Who Haven't Had a Crush on WPTZ's John Daley

Is 135 Pearl Really a Dungeon?

Are "Single Lesbians" An Oxymoron?

State Senator Susan Sweetser says "Don't Get Mad, Get Even!"

Amber & Marguerite Confront Jenny Craig

Vermont Times Personal Ad Horror Stories

Lesbians Who Do Not Live In Hinesburg

Drag Tips With Cherie Tartt

Gay Men Who Have Had Second Dates

Political VGSA Members

"I Voted Against the Gay Rights Bill and I'm Gay!"

Vermont Lesbian Makeovers

Vermont Spiritual Leader Reveals What He Wears Under His Dress

Men Who Join Health Clubs Just to Cruise

Gay Men Surprised To Learn That Greg Louganis Is Gay

"Straight Acting" Gay Men

Inside Montpelier with VCLGR's Susan Aranoff

What Is A "Professional Gay White Male"?

Statehouse Decorating Tips with Lt. Governor Barbara Snelling

If you'd like to be a guest on any of these shows or would like ticket information call 1-800-VTTRASH. Remember to check your local listings and tune in to TV that is truly worth watching. ▼

LOOKING BOTH WAYS: A Bisexual Perspective

Queer Works on Film, Serves Director Coffee

Mike Rothbart

CUTTINGSVILLE -- This past month I've been working on an action/adventure movie called *Diamond Run*, filmed on location in scenic downtown Rutland. I'm a grip, which means I get to hear a carload of dumb puns about 'losing my grip.' Mostly I fetch objects I've never heard of before, such as the half-double scrim for a Mickey mole, or a twelve-by on a frame and an iced double cappuccino. To go. Pronto. So I run at full speed to the trailer, where I poke around for a few days amongst heaps of dusty metal clamps and looming camera assistants, then race back to the scene at terminal velocity. I normally arrive just in time to get told that I'm in the way and should move somewhere else. By the end of each day, I regret not opting to train for the marathon before commencing this job.

Except for the stressful work, barked commands, tension and long hours, the job is quite enjoyable. And I can't complain; I'm getting paid at least twice what I would earn by lounging all afternoon in a chaise beside the pool, darkening my complexion to melanoma brown. Twice nothing is still nada. Truth to tell, this film business has been exciting; helicopter chases, rolling a police car down the mountainside and numerous chances to step in semi-liquid cow dung.

As far as I know, I am the only queer on the set. Chances are there are others, but they're well hidden. The one woman with the "Ban Homophobia" sticker on the fender of her red 4X4 pickup quickly explained to me that she was "merely an activist." No one else even has limp wrists or dykey haircuts; my gaydar has been silent for weeks. The producer speaks often about his wife, the director has a crucifix hanging in his bedroom and I have decided not to come out. Nevertheless, I've kept up my usual queer behavior; the pink triangle button, the sensationalist sucking of an overripe banana. But no one in this self-absorbed movie milieu seems to have noticed. Being half-out but ignored gives me a strange feeling of getting looked through, like the smudge on the surface of a mirror. Perhaps they wonder about me in the back room. In this straight, stifled atmosphere, much to my chagrin, I've slipped back into referring to my girlfriend as my girlfriend. Ungendered pronouns just seem to cause confusion.

I don't really expect that my coming out here would cause great fervor, still, I've felt that I'm working and residing with these people too intimately and for too short a time to risk it. The cast and crew appear to have a tacit acceptance of homo- and bisexuality -- as long as it's not explicitly stated. This is a queer phenomenon that I've noticed before. In my previous job, there was a group of women who everyone assumed were lesbians. No one knew for sure, no one dared ask, and apparently no one harassed them for it. As long as they kept the subject taboo, others were content not to speak publicly about it. Yet from the perspective of my blatant outness, I resented them for not standing up beside me. Had they come out, there might have been a brouhaha, some antagonism, but I imagine the eventual result would have been greater understanding and acceptance.

I must admit I feel hypocritical writing about being out here, where I'm about as out as Superman. Here, where the queer jokes fly faster than the speed of film. These cracks aren't exactly homophobic. It they were, I'd make a stand -- come out in flames and risk burning. What I hear is more the type of humor that implies a mild discomfort and self-questioning: "How many dykes does it take to screw in a light bulb?" Three. One to change it and two to make the documentary. Plus all the humorous homoerotic posturing -- men wisecracking about checking out each other's penis size. I feel a bit left out; they don't realize that while they are joking about how long it is, I'm out there measuring. I fear they'd be offended if I pulled out my yardstick.

Through my presence on this film set, I've made sure that some queer characters are included in the movie. This is not an easy task to do without anyone else noticing. My largest coup de grace is in the opening scene of the film, a jewelry store robbery. Just before the heist, some extras walk past the front of the store. Watch for a young woman. The props department was told to have her carry a bag. I snagged my own turquoise and yellow backpack and volunteered it. Running through the crowd, I pinned my trusty pink triangle on to the side pocket. The negatives have not yet been developed, so we'll have to wait to see if it's visible.

In a couple of scenes, I play background extras. In one, I'm a crook getting booked down at the precinct station. I opted not to wear my gay garb in that scene. In another, I'm talking on a pay phone across the street, visible in the reflection of a store window. I'm wearing my "Faggot On Board" shirt. Of course, since I'm so brilliant, I was also wearing my knit sweater over the shirt. So much for that outing.

All this work has made me ponder how queers can be represented on film. A character can be shown having sex with a member of the same sex. Not likely in a family film. A character can be talked about as being queer. Again, unlikely unless it furthers the plot or the screenwriter or actor is queer. Or the character can be portrayed as gay; this usually requires the invoking of stereotypes which does little to further our rights or representations. If I ever direct a film, I think I will make ALL the characters queer, whether it makes sense or not. So there.

Excuse me, I hear my name being shouted across the set. I must go figure out how to broom out a baby on a pigeon plate. Pronto.

Mike Rothbart is a bisexual activist. He is currently inactive due to his sixteen hour days of unpaid labor fueled by a concoction of M&Ms, carbonated caffeine and adrenaline. The film Diamond Run will be shown theatrically in Rutland and Burlington this winter, and will then be released on video. ▼



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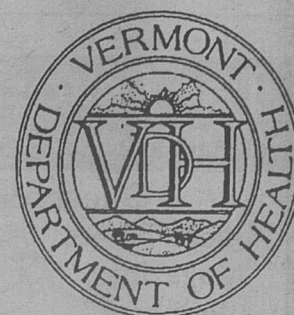
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