

# beyond Q

## From news to sitcoms, out gays & lesbians all over British TV By Michael Giltz

**W**hen BBC TV personality Christopher Price was offered a plum two-year contract for a reported £250,000, it made national news in the United Kingdom. The 34-year-old is the host of *Liquid News*, a sort of *Entertainment Weekly* for the telly that airs on the satellite channel BBC Choice. Price's show airs nightly at 7 o'clock, and if that channel is relaunched as BBC3, he'll be the signature face.

What didn't cause a stir was the fact that Price is gay. If *Queer as Folk* showed the United Kingdom leading the way in fictional shows, the next trend in television may be openly gay people being more forthright in every other area of TV. If Great Britain is any indication, queers won't just be popping up as guests on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*—they'll be hosting the show.

"My sexuality has never entered," says Price, who got his break as a newsreader. "You don't say, 'Those Bosnian soldiers are looking mighty fine in their fatigues.'" Mind you, Price didn't work out on the CNN-like competitor because higher-ups said he was "too camp." "I wasn't wearing a feather boa or anything," he says.

But at least Price got a chance to live his childhood dream. "I always wanted to be a newsreader. Ever since I was a little child, I wanted to be a newsreader in some kind of sad, sick way. I used to practice in front of the TV."

While 2001 may have been the year that the United States finally embraced

*Queer as Folk*, television in the United Kingdom seems to be running a full decade or so ahead of that in the former colonies. QAF creator Russell T. Davies tweaked gay sensibilities again this year with his latest series, *Bob & Rose*. The ITV show features a frumpy gay man falling in love...with a woman. The subject matter alone raised eyebrows, just as QAF did with its frank depiction of sex and drugs.

The pansexual series *Metrosexuality* pushed TV's limits even further; comic Rhona Cameron played the first lesbian sitcom hero to come out before the show began; and now the handsome, mostly single lads on the witty newsmagazine *That Gay Show* dive into the world of young gay men with a gusto that makes its precursor—*Gaytime TV*—look like religious programming.

*That Gay Show* airs features on fun gay spots at cities around the world, explores jack-off clubs in America, and commissions quickie *South Park*-style animated shorts on topics such as attempts throughout history to "cure" homosexuality. "I think it's best if you know exactly who you're aiming it for," says host Kristian Digby, a savvy 24-year-old who disagrees with critics who say the show should be more inclusive. "Don't water it down and do a token five minutes for lesbian mothers or drag queens. This show is for normal lads who are gay and in their 20s and that's it. I can't see what the problem is." His cohosts include American comic Scott Capurro



THAT GAY SHOW CAST: PRICE; COURTESY BBC CHOICE

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are making their mark



From top: Men of *Metrosexuality*; the 20-something cast of *That Gay Show*; Christopher Price of *Liquid News*; and the cast of *Bob & Rose*



(who films the naughtiest bits), actor Tom Ashton (who played the gay member of a boy band in a West End musical), actor Jonathon Natynczyk (from the U.K. *Queer as Folk*), and Robbie Robertson.

Digby, ironically, got his break hosting two religious programs. "I'm not religious in the slightest," he admits. "I think they just found it funny that my name was Kristian and they got me to work on a religious show." He sees *That Gay Show* as ground-

breaking because it offers no apologies. "I think TV executives are very nervous about doing anything gay," says Digby. "But I think they've been really surprised that no one—as far as they know—has actually complained about the series. After *Queer as Folk*, it's not that shocking."

Rikki Beadle Blair, writer of the film *Stonewall*, loves to stretch boundaries. His recent series *Metrosexuality* seemed to air later and later at night as the episodes got more racy, including one phone sex conversation that "had the network's hair on end," recalls a laughing Blair (who wrote, directed, and starred in the show for Channel 4). "We're having phone sex and it gets really hot. Meanwhile, my son and his best friend are masturbating in bed together, trying not to let the other person know. And across town our teenage lesbians are fashioning their own dental dams."

If you still doubt that British television is ahead of TV in the States, consider: Anna Nolan, a lesbian former nun who shot to prominence on the U.K. *Big Brother*, has developed a documentary series. The BBC's Price has been working on pilots for a game show (including one with the cre-

ators of *The Weakest Link*) and other programs. Lily Savage is a foul-mouthed drag queen who stars on shows for ITV. And Graham Norton—whose show, *So Graham Norton*, can now be seen in the States on BBC America—keeps getting more popular as the unofficial face of Channel 4.

"If you want to make independent films, America is a much better place," says Blair, who helped script Boy George's biopic. But for television, he says, the United Kingdom is the place: "There are a lot of gay people on [our] TV. *Queer as Folk* is something that had to happen here, not in America."

"It's wonderful we can have someone like Lily Savage," says Price, "a prime-time commercial TV drag act on Saturday night. Lily's kind of a vulgar comedian, and there she is at 7:30 on ITV doing a game show. I think it's amazing that this country can accept that. For the love of ABC, I can't quite see them doing something like that." ■

*Giltz also writes for the New York Post and Entertainment Weekly.*

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