



Melrose's Matt



Ellen



Will Truman



Big Gay Al

WHAT'S NEXT

IF THERE'S ANYTHING Bravo's Fab 5 have taught us, it's that big ratings can be as easy as pulling a familiar format out of the closet. Below, other shows that will put a *Queer* twist on hetero formulas. —Jennifer Armstrong

A MINUTE WITH STAN

HOOPER, Fox, Fall When Norm Macdonald's titular big-city news commentator moves to small-town Wisconsin, he encounters wacky rural folk and discovers that middle America has gay people too.

GAY HOLLYWOOD, AMC,

Aug. 11 This documentary follows a fab 5 of its own: two filmmakers, a writer, an actor, and a drag performer all looking for their big break.

IT'S ALL RELATIVE, ABC,

Fall A guy from a conservative Irish Catholic family gets engaged to a cultured Harvard gal with two dads.

MR. & MR. NASH, ABC,

2004 Alan Cumming stars as half of a gay couple who are interior designers by day, amateur sleuths by night in what's been dubbed a gay *Hart to Hart*.

AMERICAN PRIDE, in development Dvoskin and Fame exec producer Jeff Margolis scour the country for America's first openly gay country singer.

THE L WORD, Showtime, January When a writer and her boyfriend move to West Hollywood, they hang with the lesbian neighbors and their friends. Think *Queer as Folk*-with-girls meets *Melrose Place*.

WONDERFALLS, Fox, 2004

A woman discovers an ability to help others by following the urgings of talking inanimate objects. They have a lot to say about her family, including her overachieving lesbian sister.

lution. After riding the lesbian-chic wave into the mid-'90s and cresting with Ellen's coming out in 1997, she's been shoved back in the closet, longing for the days when Cindy Crawford shaved k.d. lang on the cover of *Vanity Fair*.)

At the moment, gaysploitation seems to be a product of reality television. There's no irony here: It's taken "real" TV to make gays seem, well, more real. The genre has promoted gaysploitation in subversive (the are-they-or-aren't-they designers on *Trading Spaces*) and not-so-subversive ways (pectorally blessed spouses Reichen and Chip on *The Amazing Race* are practically superheroes: One of them gets dragged through bull manure in India and still looks great.)

Indeed, the men of gaysploitation do pretty much everything better than you...except date. It's as if network and cable television executives have embraced the *homo* but conveniently left out the *sexual*. The reason that fashionista Carson can tell episode 3's straight guy, Tom, "If at any time today you want to make out with me, just let me know" is because no one thinks Tom will *actually* take him up on the offer. (And by the way, everybody knows Kyan, the hunky grooming guru, is the Fab 5 member most likely to get the straight guy to switch teams.)

The few attempts to give gays a TV sex life have been pitiful. Bravo's other homo-friendly summer entry, *Boy Meets Boy*, is a gay minstrel show (stick that one in your promos, Bravo). In this mess, a handful of straight guys don Abercrombie & Fitch clothing (apparently the straight man's blackface) and pretend they're

'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy' is TERRIFIC and groundbreaking because it upends a SAINTLY STEREOTYPE

gay to woo the unsuspecting bachelor. As GLAAD's entertainment media director Scott Seomin says: "We have not seen the straight, cruel equivalent of this. There weren't gay men [on *The Bachelorette*] for Trista to marry."

Scripted shows haven't done much better. *Will & Grace*'s Jack talks a good game, but has yet to land in bed with a real romantic interest. And *Queer as Folk*'s characters get into more sexual positions than the *Kama Sutra* envisioned, but the program is more a parody of gay life: Its portrayal of drug-dab-

bling whoretastic homos who do it on every street corner and fight hackneyed clichés feels like a gay version of 1996's blaxploitation spoof, *Don't Be a Menace to South Central While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood*.

So what comes after gaysploitation? There are a hundred different theories—I don't profess to know which one is right—but here's an idea: As gays continue to make more political progress (the Supreme Court has made the word *sodomy* appropriate for dinner-table conversation and the Massachusetts Supreme Court is readying to rule on gay marriage), TV will finally begin to show us some real portrayals of homosexuality in sitcoms and dramas. Right now, the closest scripted programming comes is *Six Feet Under*'s David and Keith, whose bickering and foibles make them seem less like gay superheroes and more like actual people.

"The middle ground needs to be filled in—from gay characters who are white, affluent, and two-dimensional to those who are more three-dimensional with romantic lives," Seomin says. "Where is the gay *Everybody Loves Raymond*?" Good point. In the meantime, that Romano guy needs some serious style help. Paging Carson! ■ (Additional reporting by Karyn L. Barr and Jennifer Armstrong)