

Season 4

Episode 401

October 1, 2003

Call Time: 6:00 pm

Wrap Time: 2:00 am

Set: Woody's Bar

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios, Mississauga.



It had been more than six months since my last work on *Queer as Folk* but the time seemed to fly by partly because of my normal life schedule and partly by being absorbed in watching the original broadcasts of QAF's third season on Showcase here in Canada. Now, the fourth season was about to begin filming and once again it was time to start anticipating what kind of things I would get to do on the show.

It wasn't long before my agent called to book me for a Babylon shoot. I was excited to do a Babylon scene since I still felt that Babylon was the pinnacle of working on *Queer as Folk*, short of doing one the "carnal" (nude) scenes for which I was never fortunate enough to have been asked to take part in.

One very important change had taken place during the summer hiatus between season three and four. During the conversation with my agent, I learned that Temple Street's secondary studio had been moved from Greystone Studios which was on the western side of Mississauga (and closer to Hamilton than Toronto) to a new studio not more than 15 minutes from Temple Street's home facility in Etobicoke.

This new studio, known usually as Dufferin Gate "B" Studio, was far easier to get to than Greystone so I was able to travel to the new location in 25 minutes instead of the 45 or more minutes it had taken the previous year. Before fourth season production began, all of the standing sets used at Greystone (the public areas like Babylon, Liberty Diner and Woody's) were struck and rebuilt at Dufferin Gate B. There was more room to spread out at DGS-B but it was still quite packed with sets and equipment and narrow corridors between the sets.

This day was the first shooting to be made at "B" Studio and since my call time was 6 pm for the Babylon filming, I guessed that other scenes were going to be shot during the day. Sure enough, when I arrive around 5:30 pm (I was almost always early) there were already quite a few background cast members who had been there since the morning, shooting a Woody's scene.

Usually a Babylon scene requires a large number of guys and there were already more than 60 there from the morning shoot. From what I was told, the plan had been to wrap the morning cast before the evening cast was going to show up. But in this business, no matter how carefully planned, nothing ever goes as planned.

So, the members of Anton Film Services, the company handling QAF's background casting, decided to move those of us doing the Babylon shoot to another location just down the street from the main background area. This was so that we could be properly processed and then brought back to the main area when the morning background cast had been wrapped.

So, we all trudged out in the dark and cold towards this empty hall about a block and half away and began our usual check-in process. By this season, some of the Anton staff recognized me and gave me a friendly hello. The usual routine was to give them your name and your agent and then they would tell you what you would be playing during the scene and be given the usually forms that needed to be signed (a non-disclosure agreement and a time sheet/release document).

It was during this process that I got the most pleasant shock of my life. For the only time in the 35 bookings I had with the show, I was actually pre-designated to do something special during the shoot (my other special background roles had been given to me long after check-in and were, to my mind, just the dumb luck of being in the right place at the right time). And oh what a special thing it was. For when I checked in, I was told, "Drew you're going to be dancing topless tonight!"

It took a few seconds for it to sink in and then I asked the question, "Are you sure that it's me that supposed to be topless?" And the answer was yes that's what it said on the call sheet.

Well, you know I just couldn't believe it. I knew then that because of my age and primarily my body type that I would never be booked for a carnal scene. And for a long time until my first Babylon scene in season three, I figured I'd never be able to do Babylon either. And yet, in only my second Babylon scene, they actually wanted me to dance topless.

Honestly, the kind of guys the show usually wanted topless were the big muscular buffed studs and the tall

thin hairless twinks that were the staples of the Babylon crowd. I'm a short stocky guy, of Russian and German peasant extraction, bulky and built like a small football player but not extremely muscular and not especially in the best shape. And, the most important reason I thought I would never get to do a topless scene was because I had a hairy chest.

But, for whatever reason (something I don't know to this day), they asked me to do the Babylon shoot topless. So for the next 45 minutes or so while everyone checked in, my head was in the clouds.

Eventually after everyone checked in, the Anton people at Dufferin Gate B contacted their counterparts to bring us back to "B" Studio so that we could begin our normal preparations for the evening's shoot.

Just as we got back, one of the 3rd ADs came into the background holding area and asked if there were any background members who hadn't been part of the earlier Woody's shoot. I immediately raised my hand and, along with about 14 others, were picked and sent immediately to wardrobe to ensure what we were wearing would be cleared. As I was wearing my trademarked brown and blue leather jacket and some dark cargo pants, I was quickly approved for the Woody's filming.

Within minutes the 15 of us were on the Woody's set and George Assimakopolous, back again for another year as our on-set 3rd AD, quickly placed us. I was positioned immediately behind a bar table where I noticed Peter Paige was going to be. I was given a prop beer and told to basically stay there during the whole shoot.

The scene to be shot, one I was not even scheduled to be in, was the scene where the Liberty crowd gives Brian a donation cheque for the Concerned Citizens for the Truth which, of course, everyone by now knew was just Brian himself and his way of killing Stockwell's election as mayor in season 3.

The opening of the scene was shot behind Darren, the drag Queen, as he sings out to the crowd and this is where you can find me on the right hand side of the screen. I'm off camera for the remainder of the scene including when Lindsay gives Brian the donation cheque.

However, it was during the filming of this scene that the one and only true blooper that I personally observed during my four years with QAF took place. And sadly, the cameras weren't rolling when it happened so you won't ever see it in the fourth season blooper reel.

We were doing rehearsals for the scene and the crew had just brought in some prop beers and drinks for the main cast (the background cast got their drinks before

they entered the set). At the table where Peter was, they had set down a prop glass of beer. From what I could see since I was just about 10 feet away, Peter either didn't realize the beer glass was there or misjudged where it had been placed. As he sat down on his chair to assume his first position, he accidentally knocked over the glass spilling beer all over the table.

Peter was naturally embarrassed over this calamity and immediately apologized to everyone within earshot. Then, under his breath but loud enough that I heard it, he mumbled, in jest, "I am so fired." Of course that was not going to happen. Accidents are inevitable when doing a complicated scene in a small space so the crew quickly swept in, cleaned up the beer and gave Peter a new glass.

Before long, we began to be repositioned for another rehearsal. Just before we started though, Peter must have decided to lighten the atmosphere a bit. Without warning, he rose to his feet, again apologized for spilling the beer and then announced, "Well it's been really great working with all of you these past few years. So good-bye and good luck." He immediately turned around and, mockingly, began to leave the set.

That in itself silenced the set but then the real fun came. Absolutely in complete unison, both Thea and Michelle immediately broke into a chorus of the old Carol Burnett song, "We're so glad we've had this time together, just to have a laugh, or sing a song, seems we just get started and before you know it, comes the time we have to say, 'So long.'" And that brought the set down in howls of laughter and a big hug to both Thea and Michelle from Peter. Even those of us in the background loved the blooper. It took several minutes for everyone to compose themselves and then we went on and finished the scene.



Meanwhile, once that scene was done, I had to hurry back to holding so that I could be made up for my topless Babylon scene, you know, the one I had actually been booked for. Wardrobe decided I could continue to wear the cargo pants since I hadn't really been seen in the Woody's shoot except from a distance. Of course, I took off my coat and top and went around topless until the end of the Babylon filming.

For hair and makeup, the topless guys usually got made up specially and it was no different for me this night. My entire upper body was covered with glitter gel and my hair was gelled and spiked. I had to wear this for at least an hour before we went to set at about 10 pm. Once we got to Babylon, I did my usual look around to remind myself where I was and that I needed to uphold the honour of being in the Babylon set.

Initially, 3rd AD George positioned me with the other topless guys in front of the Babylon bar where Brian and Justin were getting their drinks just before going into the backroom. After we did one rehearsal take, George moved me to the entrance to the backroom just under one set of stairs the led to the Babylon catwalk. This is where I was for the rest of the shoot.

Once again, during most of the period in between takes, I got to stand relatively close to Randy Harrison, often near his personal space. I always seemed to be positioned close to Randy for some reason and I will never know or understand why this seemed to happen a lot over the four years. But, it was close enough to hear the dialogue and the camera certainly passed right by me when Brian and Justin go into the back room.

We must have done about 10 takes of this before we wrapped the shoot. One of the most important things about being a topless dancer at Babylon is that you always have to look like you've been dancing your ass off. And you always have to look slightly sweaty. So, between takes, the crew would come around to each of the topless dancers, myself included, and spray water on our chests and backs. Man, that was sometimes cold but I knew it was all for a good cause so I didn't let it bother me.

During each take, I gave it my all dancing up a storm just in case I did get on camera and also because I absolutely LOVED the idea that here I was on the set of Queer as Folk and I was wearing LESS clothing than either Brian or Justin was wearing. I really got off on that idea, especially since it was the closest I would ever get to performing in any nude or semi-nude scene.

It took about 3 hours to finish the scene since, as you may recall, there was a considerable portion of it that takes place in the backroom area after Brian and Justin leave the dance floor. But, I was completely energized when we finally wrapped at 2:00 am. Another very happy and rewarding day on the set of my all time favourite show.

The only thing I was disappointed about the scene didn't become apparent to me until the episode was broadcast months later. Because of where I had been positioned, the dancers near the staircase, myself included, were strobed out of visibility by the high intensity lights that

were reflecting off the camera's lens as it followed Brian and Justin into the backroom. As the camera had been set up only to ensure the two main characters would be filmed properly, everything on the periphery was sacrificed.

So, as you can see from the still frame, enlarged and cropped to better show where I was in the shot, you can sort of see me immediately to the left of Justin. I am definitely topless but kind of a fuzzy blur as well. That's show biz as they say...but by now I was getting used to having some of my performances cut from the final edits of the episodes. It's nothing personal, every actor experiences it. That's why we are referred to as "Background" actors. We're there only when it makes sense to be there to lend realism to the scene. And we help the main cast remain in character. So, I figured I had done my job and looked forward to my next shoot.

Episode 403

October 22, 2003

Call Time: 10:30 am

Wrap Time: 4:00 pm

Set: Liberty Diner

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios, Mississauga.



This shoot was a single scene involving Debbie, Michael, Ben and Emmett and occurred during the period where Ted had gotten a job as a singing opera waiter at a local Pittsburgh restaurant. Debbie in particular was perplexed when she had been told that her brother Vic and his boyfriend Rodney had been somewhere other than where Vic told Debbie they would be.

I was fortunate enough to have a cross during the scene and, as the frame shows, I was on camera behind Sharon and Robert. The premise of my part of the scene was that I was with a group of four seated at a table to the right of the restaurant. We were all supposed to get up and leave as the scene progressed. Somehow, in the take that was used for the episode, I was a little ahead of the others at our table so it looks like I was leaving alone.

As you can see, I was wearing my trademarked brown and blue leather jacket which is the wardrobe item I probably wore more often than any other when I ap-

peared on camera. It's a jacket I bought at a Wal-Mart in Scarborough, Ontario and was originally intended to be my fall and winter outer coat. I never thought it would get as much exposure on television as it eventually did.

Episode 405
November 14, 2003

Call Time: 2:00 pm

Wrap Time: 2:30 am

Set: Babylon

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios, Mississauga.



This was an evening Babylon shoot and the first time I had seen something new that had been added to the set, an outer coat room. And this is where I found myself for almost the entire night of filming except for the last couple of hours we were on set.

Since only a short portion of the shoot took place in the coat room area, I was not on camera. Most of the two scenes that included members of the main cast took place inside the dance floor area. These scenes took hours and hours to complete since they were rather long ones (Michael, Ben and Brian in one scene and Michael and Ben in the other discussing Ben's new book).

The final shots of the evening however were quite incredible and also were the first I had ever been a part of where no members of the main cast were present. The shots involved the filming of a Roman Slave Dance scene and included two very talented dancers dressed as Roman slaves performing a mock fight in front of a Roman princess (played by noted Toronto drag queen Sofonda) and her gladiator guards.

The scene was shot in two parts. The first portions were shot before we broke for lunch and, as I was still in the coat room area, I did not directly observe what was happening. Following lunch, filming resumed and I was repositioned to the side of the set where the dancers were performing their act. It was here that I got an up close look at the amazing moves they were making.

The dance was quite extensive and very physical for both of the performers and, unfortunately, the finished

episode omitted a great deal of the footage that was shot of the dancers. Both were real troupers in having to do the scene over and over. It was so physical and intricate that it couldn't all be filmed in one take. So instead, many takes were made, each one filming a different portion of the dance. It took a lot of positioning and concentration to ensure that filming began at exactly the right spot for each take.

Since no dialogue was being recorded (as no members of the main cast were present), the DJ was able to play the scene's music throughout filming which was a unique experience in itself. But, of course, this presented its own issues because the directors had to consult with the dancers and the DJ to ensure that the DJ cued the music to match the exact pickup point for each take. Sometimes, this process would take several minutes while the DJ found the correct music cue.

Every take was so unique and we were all spellbound by the sheer power and fluidity of the two dancers. We actually gave them a round of applause after each take since their performances were continually breathtaking.

Ultimately, less than half the film made of the Slave Dance actually made it into the episode and all of the footage that was used was made before the lunch break. So, since I was still in the coat room area at that point, I was not seen when the cameras panned over to the crowd next to the stage. But, of course, that was likely the best material of what was filmed and naturally the production would use only the best takes.

I really wish that QAF fans could have been at Babylon that night to see the full performance of the Roman Slave Dance. It was one of the most electric moments I ever experienced during the filming of a QAF episode.

Episode 406
November 28, 2003
Call Time: 2:30 pm
Wrap Time: 10:00 pm
Set: Babylon

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios, Mississauga.



This was another evening Babylon shoot and the second of the two consecutive Babylon scenes I was involved with. This time, I was on the dance floor but the filming was taking place in the lounge area of the coat room.

This is the scene where Brian and Justin challenge each other to conquer "fresh meat" as they call it. As we eventually learn, Brian wins the contest but at the expense of finding out he has cancer as the "fresh meat" turns out to be a doctor.

In this scene, I was allowed to wear my Catcher shirt, the shirt I so very much wanted to be on camera. At the time of filming, I figured that because we were on the dance floor behind the screen where Gale and Randy were sitting for the scene, I wouldn't be visible at all.

Initially, a few takes were done with me positioned close to the window where Gale and Randy were. However, I was eventually asked to vacate that spot and moved far back into the crowd where I didn't think I was going to be visible. That seemed to be confirmed when I saw the Canadian broadcast of the episode on Showcase.

However, as I always recorded each episode to preserve the Canadian edition of the series, since only the U.S. editions made the commercial DVDs, I went back to the recording and slowed it down. And, unbelievably, for a few seconds, one of the takes where I was close to the screen was used.

You can see me for about two seconds dancing in my Catcher shirt with a prop bottle of beer before the scene switches to close ups of Brian and Justin. It was the closest that I ever came to being clearly seen in the shirt but it was still a thrill for me. It meant so much to me to be seen on camera in my Catcher shirt considering how important an icon it was and still is for me.

Episode 408
December 18, 2003

Call Time: 9:30 am

Wrap Time: 8:00 pm

Set: Liberty Diner

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios, Mississauga.



The day we filmed this scene was right before the production was scheduled to break for three weeks during the Christmas and New Years holidays. Maybe because of the anticipation of the break, I found the atmosphere on set to be somewhat less tense and looser than was usually the case. I don't mean to imply things were less professional, but you could tell everyone wanted to have fun since vacation was just around the corner. Having said that, the scene that we were preparing to film was going to be quite intense emotionally and very cathartic for Sharon's character Debbie.

When my agent called me the day before, he told me that we were going to film a Liberty Diner scene and that the call time was 9:00 am. Simple enough, so after I woke up on the day of the shoot I just prepared my usual wardrobe for the Diner and off to Dufferin Gate B Studio I went.

Sign-in, wardrobe, hair and make-up clearance were as usual and at about noon we were brought to the Diner set. I found the good fortune to have been placed right at the Diner's bar stool area rather than in my usual spot in one of the booths. It was while we were setting up that I noticed that I would be very close to the main action of the scene, part of which was to take place in the kitchen pick up area where the Diner waitresses collected finished meals to serve to the patrons.

The episode's director was Bruce McDonald who is a well known Canadian independent film director and had several QAF episodes to his credit. In fact, he was the main director for the very first episode I was involved in (episode 206) way back in the second season. Surprisingly though, today's shoot was the first time I was going to work for him since that first filming in 2001. I personally think Bruce McDonald is a wonderful director and quite a gregarious and friendly man who has a very hands-on directorial style.

As the Diner set was prepared for rehearsal, and the background cast was set in place by 3rd AD George, we were given final notice and then began our first rehearsal of the scene. As I've mentioned a few times, the background cast is not normally told anything more than some basic information about the scene itself. We certainly aren't told how the scene fits into the episode or where it will appear within the episode. We are told only the information we need to know to make the scene work for the main cast. Since most in the background cast were not fans of the show (many had never even seen one episode), there were things that would happen in scenes we did that only I and a few others, as huge fans of the show, would pick up on.

The first thing I noticed about today's scene, as we ran through the first rehearsal, was that Debbie was quite unorganized and not her usual happy-go-lucky self. I

remember hearing Sharon speaking the dialogue line "It's my first day back." In this early part of the scene Debbie is getting all of the orders wrong. I am sitting up front at the counter next to the kitchen window and I can clearly hear what is happening even as I am drinking coffee which is what my role was for this portion of the scene.

Then Emmett comes into the Diner and he and Debbie engage in some usual banter and chit-chat and Emmett offers to take Debbie out to dinner. At this point, she tells Emmett that she has taken a second shift for the day to which Emmett is quite shocked and dismayed. Then, Mr. Pea Soup chimes in, momentarily distracting Debbie and Emmett's conversation, which prompts one of Emmett's patented witty responses (I'm sure you remember that both Mr. Pea Soup's remark and Emmett's retort are foul-mouthed enough to be unprintable here).

At the middle part of the scene, third AD George gave me a cue to do a quick cross to the back of the Diner, pick up a Pittsburgh Out magazine and return to the counter to read it while I drank my coffee. This I did dutifully without incident.

Then something happened as part of the scene, something totally out of the blue which, for me, was truly a bombshell. A character named Harold approaches Debbie and introduces himself as a friend of Vic's and says to Debbie, "I want to tell you how truly sorry I am about his passing."

HIS PASSING? I was right next to both actors when that line was spoken so I knew I couldn't have misheard it. I was absolutely dumbfounded. It could have meant only one thing....that between my previous filming on the show and this scene, Vic had died in the storyline.

I couldn't believe it. I had heard rumours during earlier shoots that Vic was going to have a relapse of his AIDS (which as we now know was not actually why he died) but I had heard nothing about Vic being written out of the series by dying.

Now you have to understand that as a fan of the show first, I had vested a great deal of emotion in these characters, as any true fan would. Further, having the privilege of working on the show and having a minor role in QAF's Liberty Avenue gave me a real sense of belonging to the whole "family." So after what I had just heard, even though my head told me that it was only a staged scene from a TV series and not real, my heart refused to believe that.

When I was on *Queer as Folk*, I felt like a living Liberty Avenue character and that I really knew Debbie and the rest of the characters as real people. In my heart, Vic was a real person. So when I heard he had died in the story,

it sent me into a major shock. I don't mind telling you that before the rehearsal was over, I shed a few small tears although, as a professional, I maintained my composure throughout and gave the crew no reason to know that I had lost it inside. But for the remainder of the shoot, I went through my own internal mourning while maintaining an emotionless exterior for the cameras.

I know it may sound corny, but I so believed in the characters that I really felt the pain of Vic's death, like a real person had passed away. It was made all the more difficult because I had no knowledge at that time of when and how Vic had passed away. Only after seeing the full run of the fourth season did I finally learn that Vic had passed away two episodes prior to this one and that this scene in episode 408 was one of the last to deal directly with it.

My own real grief aside, as you may remember, the encounter with Harold gets to Debbie as well and she is eventually overcome with grief and drops her tray right next to me. Emmett comforts her and has her sit down on the stool right next to me. As the consummate professional that she is, Sharon was able to emote the perfect amount of grief and pathos take after take. This was even more amazing when you realize that after each take, the crew had to clean up the floor where Debbie's tray had crashed before we could film the next take and this took several minutes to complete each time.

We spent pretty much the entire day on this one shoot because of the set up time involved and the sheer emotions that were needed to make the scene believable. I have a great deal of respect and admire an actor like Sharon Gless who can conjure up these real-life emotions at the command of "action." More difficult is how to turn them off after the director yells "cut." Certainly the several minutes needed to reset the scene were helpful but it was definitely one of the most intense scenes I was ever a part of during my time on the show and a remarkable tour-de-force by Sharon for making it so believable.

There are a couple of spots where you can see me in the scene, once when I am returning from my cross to get the magazine and more noticeably at the end of the scene when Debbie sits down next to me. Once again I am wearing the familiar brown and blue leather jacket that seemed to become my trademark on the show. It certainly was nice to see myself again in such a pivotal scene.

Finally, returning to the subject of Bruce McDonald, I mentioned that he tended to be much more hands on than most of the other QAF directors. He would often come out to the set from his off-set station in between takes. During an extended break between takes when the cameras were being slightly repositioned, he came

out to the set and since I was one of the first people he spotted he said hello to me. I replied and told him that I was a big fan of his work on *Queer as Folk* and that I had seen all of the episodes he had directed. He seemed to be pleased by that.

Then, I happened to mention to him that he had been the director for the first episode I ever did for the show, episode 206, and mentioned I had done scenes at Woody's and on location at the then exterior of Liberty Diner. His next response floored me. He looked me in the eye and said, "Yes I remember." Wow, that hit me like a ton of bricks. Here was someone who was very important in the Canadian film industry, and all I had done for him was two minor secondary scenes more than two years previous, and only as a member of the background cast, and he was telling me that he remembered me. I couldn't have been more flattered and told him something to that effect. I remember we made some more small talk and then I thanked him for his time and understood he had other things he had to do.

So, all in all, it was another memorable day for me. I got to meet an episode director for the only time in my involvement with the series. And I had learned that a favourite "uncle" had passed away. My own range of emotions see-sawed back and forth from being shocked and sad at Vic's death to the pleasure of meeting Bruce McDonald and finding out he remembered me. This one day of filming affected me for days after so it was a good thing the Holidays were coming up to give me a chance to recover emotionally from it all.

Episode 410

February 3, 2004

Call Time: 11:45 am

Wrap Time: 4:30 pm

Set: Liberty Diner

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios, Mississauga.



This was another Liberty Diner scene and took place following the introduction of Matt Battaglia as Pittsburgh Ironmen (we all know it was really the Steelers)



quarterback Drew Boyd and the beginning of his sexual relationship with Emmett. Ted was looking for a model for Brown Athletic, a company being represented by Brian's ad agency Kinetic. Brian wanted an athlete to model Brown's line of underwear and charged Ted with getting one. Ted, not knowing that much about sports was pouring over sports magazines to try and find an athlete he might be able to contact.

Emmett walked into the Diner and promptly suggested Drew Boyd. He then proceeded to rattle off a series of statistics about Drew that Ted could not believe he heard coming out of Emmett's mouth. Of course, you and I know why Emmett knew so much about Drew but during this scene he was not letting on to Ted that he knew Drew rather more personally than just a photo in a sports magazine.

I am visible in the back of the Diner set for a second or two as Emmett walks in and sits down beside Ted. By this time, I had been placed at this same back table booth so many times over the years that I almost felt like it was my own personal table. I'm not sure why I kept ending up at this table but when the AD said sit there, you know I just did it without question.

Oh, and there's one other thing. There is no truth to any rumour that Drew Boyd was named after me *<very evil grin>*. I really wish that were true but in all seriousness the real reason I believe the quarterback role was given my name was because in real life in 2003, the NFL had three starting quarterbacks named Drew and I suppose the producers and writers liked the name.

As one of the many hundreds of background actors on the series, it would have been virtually impossible for any of the writing staff to have known about me or my story about why I was working on the show, at least when the Drew character was originally created. I have since had the pleasure of meeting one of the main writers, Shawn Postoff, and mentioning to him that the quarterback character's name was the same as mine. But every so often, in fantasy, it IS nice to think that Mr. Boyd and I are namesakes.

Episode 412

February 25, 2004

Call Time: 8:15 am

Wrap Time: 10:45 pm

Set 1: Liberty Diner

Set 2: Babylon

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios, Mississauga.



Today was one of those really rare experiences where I was pre-booked for two scenes and knew this before travelling to the studio. While this guaranteed a long day of shooting, I always loved every chance to work two scenes in one day since every scene provided me with a unique experience and more chances to observe the way a TV series was filmed.

For today, we were going to shoot a quick Liberty Diner scene followed by a Babylon shoot. Since Babylon always required a large number of background cast, the show often booked the Babylon cast just for that scene alone. So I was glad that they wanted me to work in both scenes.

I knew that it was going to be a long day when my agent told me that the call time was 8:15 am which was rather early for a studio session. Since I was involved with all of the filming for that day, I wasn't wrapped until 10:45 pm that night, making this one of the longest shooting days I experienced doing QAF.

The Liberty Diner scene ran for about 2 minutes and 36 seconds in its final edited form so it was actually one of the longest scenes I was ever a part of. That's the main reason we began filming at around 10:45 am and didn't finish the scene until late afternoon.

It was a very complex scene that begins with Ted and Justin confronting Brian about his cancer medications which Brian does not particularly appreciate. The remainder of the scene has Debbie offering her usual sage advice to Brian about how to handle the situation.

My part in the scene was to enter the Diner with a group of people at the beginning of the take, walk through the back of the set and sit down at the table right behind

where Gale was sitting at the counter. You can see me twice during the scene. The first time, you can see me briefly at the beginning when I walk into the Diner and later, a quick background shot of me sitting down during one of Gale's close-ups.

After such a long shoot, it was amazing I had the energy to continue with the Babylon scene we were going to do that evening. But, in view of how it turned out, I am so glad they asked me to stay because both the scene itself and the night of filming were personally magical.

On the surface, it was to be a typical Babylon shoot. By this time I had done a few of them and knew what to expect. Be positioned on the dance floor, start dancing to the music, continue when the music was cut off and remain dancing until the scene was cut.

Little did I know before we started what an amazing night it was going to be. At the time we filmed the scene, I had heard rumours that a football character had been introduced into the story line and that he was going to be straight on the outside but with the heart of a gay man beating inside of him.

As we were being set up for the scene, George our 3rd AD told us what the scene was all about. This was going to be Emmett daydreaming about what it would be like to bring his new football quarterback boyfriend to Babylon for the first time. George explained that the quarterback played for Pittsburgh's NFL team and was a hero to the city's sports fans. Even the guys at Babylon would know who he was.



Then, the next thing George told us put a real smile on my face. He said the quarterback's name was Drew Boyd. I couldn't believe it, a character on *Queer as Folk* with my own name (I didn't know the quarterback was going to be named "Drew" when I did the scene in episode 410).

As Drew Boyd was supposed to be such a sports hero, George told us that we should all be surprised and shocked when he and Emmett walked into Babylon hand-in-hand. After entering the main Babylon area, Emmett and Drew would stop by the rest of the QAF

gang so that Emmett could introduce Drew to Brian, Michael, Ben, Justin and Ted and then proceed to the centre of the dance floor to dance together for an extended series of shots.

After George explained the scene, he and his assistants started positioning the 200 or so of us around the dance floor. Originally I was placed very near when Emmett and Drew were to walk into the dance area near the QAF gang. But after one rehearsal take, I was moved over to the centre of the dance floor together with about five other much younger guys. Initially I was a bit disappointed because I thought I was being moved out of the shot. That was until I spotted the tape marking on the floor of the set.

By now I knew that when there was a tape mark on the floor of a set, it meant that one or more of the main cast was to be located on that spot. So remembering this, I had some hope that I might actually get into the shot. And, since this was Babylon, I thought maybe I would get to dance with Emmett and Drew. And, that's exactly what happened.

The first amazing thing was when the actor playing Drew was brought out for the first rehearsal. As we all know now, it was Matt Battaglia. Matt is an extremely handsome man and is actually a former NFL middle linebacker who suffered a knee injury that ended his football career. That's when he decided to go into acting. Among his credits were the starring roles in two of the four Universal Soldier films.

Matt is straight but according to reports he accepted the role on QAF to try to cultivate a new audience for his work. He is also a very spiritual man according to his website so it was interesting that he was brave enough to accept the role on Queer as Folk.

So here I was, in the middle of Babylon, always in awe, remembering the many fans who would give anything to be where I was at that moment and also trying to discreetly catch glimpses of Matt while still maintaining a professional demeanour. I always tried to respect my position as a background actor and give the main cast and guests the respect they deserved. I got my glimpses as I am only human but it was not at his expense. I knew very well that as a straight man, Matt would not appreciate the attention any gay man would want to give him, especially while we were in a working environment.

As we ran through the second rehearsal it became apparent that I was going to be in the scene. For when Peter and Matt left the others, they proceeded to the area where I and the other five background guys were and danced together for the remainder of the scene. We formed a circle around them as they danced and made them feel like they were in a real club.



We did many takes of this and it was just incredible to watch the two of them dance together and also to be part of the dancing ring around them. At one point, the director positioned a cameraman in the middle of our ring and filmed us by turning around and around, first slowly and then sped up, showing each of us dancing. Those shots were only partially used in the scene with only the fastest parts filmed near the end of the sequence making it into the final edit. The director even had the shots sped up even further in post production so that you can't make out any one dancer (including me).

But, throughout the finished scene, I am clearly visible several times dancing with Peter and Matt. As you can see from the still shot, I am in a black tank top with red trim. That tank top, by the way, now resides in the United Kingdom in the home of a British fan who bought the shirt during the auction held at the 2005 Queer as Fans Convention.

All the dancing takes were so much fun to do. And, in between one take, Peter caught my eye as I was kind of looking at him and admiring the wardrobe he was wearing. Although he didn't say a word, he flashed a big smile at me and gave me a wink to which I gave him back a huge grin. I was full of electricity at that point.

And, because of that moment, I got up enough courage to do one other thing. Several months before this day's shoot I had learned something surprising. I found out that Hal Sparks and I had gone to the same high school, albeit 15 years apart. That came out when Hal hosted a high school reunion show (the name of which I don't remember) on US television and it was mentioned that he went to New Trier High School in the north suburbs of Chicago. I had gone to New Trier for two years in the early 70s and once I had learned that Hal and I had this thing in common, I really hoped that some day I would be able to tell him that.

So, during a break in one of the later takes, I summoned the courage to go over to him and introduce myself and mention that I had wanted to tell him that I had also gone to New Trier High School. He was amazed by this fact. He said how small a world it was and would never have suspected that being so far from his home in Chi-

icago he would meet someone who had gone to his high school. We even went through a formal introduction as he said, "Hi, I'm Hal" to which I replied, "Hi, I'm Drew" and we shook hands. We talked a bit about New Trier and I mentioned, as I always did to any of the QAF cast I got to talk to, that I was thankful for being on his show and that I thought he made his character come alive.

It was a quick five minute or so conversation and then, as we going to begin filming again, I thanked him for his time and returned to my first position. I really didn't know how much of an impression I had made on him but as it turned out I did make quite an impression. I have a good friend in Chicago who is a DJ and did some music work for the show. When he attended the fourth season Chicago premiere a few weeks later, he met Hal and mentioned he had a good friend who was a background actor on the show. When my friend mentioned my name, Hal replied that he remembered me because I was the one who had gone to New Trier.

My Chicago friend later told me he had seen Hal again in late December 2005 and Hal mentioned that he remembered my friend from the fourth season premiere. And then he said, "Don't you have a friend who worked background on the show who went to New Trier?" I am still amazed that Hal still remembers me even now.

After that we did a couple of more takes and then the long day was over and we were wrapped. Another night to practically fly home on emotion and a night to cherish forever since, as it turned out, of all the Babylon scenes I did for the series over the years, this night's shoot was the one and only time I was clearly on-camera dancing at QAF's famed dance club. You can see me dancing with Peter and Matt and some fellow background actors throughout the second half of the scene.

And there is one last thing that I am most proud of. First, look at the above still shot closely. When you do, remember that my fellow background dancers were all in their twenties, Peter was 36 when this shoot was done and Matt was 38. And then look at me and know that I was 48 at the time. Not bad for an old baby boomer eh?

Episode 413

March 15, 2004

Call Time: 7:00 am

Wrap Time: 9:30 pm

Set 1: Liberty Ride Send-off

Set 2: Church Street sidewalk near Moosie's Bar

Location: Church Street, Toronto.



Today's filming turned out to be my last one for season four of *Queer as Folk* and, strangely enough, the only location shoot I did during the entire season. Everything else I had filmed up until this day was at Dufferin Gate Studios "B" studio in Mississauga.

There were two scenes filmed this day and the magic of television was never more apparent than what we were going to film. Both scenes were to be filmed on Church Street in Toronto's Gay Village and even though they were filmed no more than a few hundred feet apart from each other, in the actual episode there was a distance of over 600 kilometres (375 miles) in the locations of the two scenes.

The first scene we filmed was the kick-off event to the Liberty Ride, a charity bicycle tour created to raise money for the Liberty Hospice. The Ride was set to start in Toronto and finish in Pittsburgh. I strongly suspect the purpose for having the Ride in the storyline was two fold.

First, I am sure the show's producers wanted to find some way to pay homage to the city that had hosted *Queer as Folk* since 2000. It's a fact of US television that Americans won't watch a series if it is set in a Canadian city. By 2004 though, almost everybody knew that while *QAF* was set in Pittsburgh, the show was really more about Toronto and fans knew that most of the story lines, other than the political ones, were far more likely to come true in Hogtown than in the Steel City.

At the time this episode was filmed, Showtime had not committed to a fifth season and so there was a real chance that episode 413 could have been the second to last show. The Liberty Ride seemed to be the perfect way the producers could honour Toronto by creating a few scenes that not only were shot in Toronto but were about Toronto.

The second reason for the Ride concerned same-sex marriage. This was an issue that had been close of the hearts of many of us connected to *Queer as Folk* for a number of years. And, during the life of the series, even as the United States was banning it in state after state, Canada, *QAF*'s host country, was doing just the opposite.

Beginning in Ontario, province after province was legalizing it until finally, in 2005, the Canadian Parliament passed a law legalizing same-sex marriage throughout the country (although as I write this, a Conservative Canadian government was elected in January 2006 and they have pledged to repeal the law -- thankfully they did not win a majority government in the election and it is likely their attempt will fail).

As we know, the Liberty Ride gave the Queer as Folk producers the chance to have Michael and Ben take advantage of Ontario's legalization and show them being legally married. It was a very powerful statement and a moving scene as well. And, most importantly, the event was the first of its kind in the history of North American television. Today, Toronto has become the world capital for same-sex marriage and an entire industry of same-sex wedding planners has sprung up (Emmett would truly have been one of the best if he were real and living here).

The kick-off scene to the Ride was shot on a gloomy cold winter day at a parking lot across the street from where the real Woody's is located on Church Street. The lot had been set up with tents and school buses and lots and lots of bicycle equipment. There was so much going on that it took almost all day to shoot the scene.

It started with a welcome from the Gay and Lesbian Centre directors (and that's where you can see me in the scene, the back of my head in my usual leather jacket), continues with the Liberty gang getting ready for the send off, buses leaving, Ted arriving late at the last moment and the big news, Detective Carl Horvath proposing to Debbie. After the initial shots of the scene were completed, I ended up on one of the secondary buses and did not appear again in the scene. But, during the rehearsal, I was able to observe the marriage proposal and that was quite moving. Yet another amazing story line I would have to keep secret for a few months.



Once we had done that scene, we broke for our hour-long lunch and then returned to the other side of the street where Woody's is located. For this scene, and for

the only time in the history of the series, Church Street was going to play itself. I had heard prior to this shoot that much of the dialogue for this scene was going to be quite an inside joke, with the characters amazed that Church Street was "so much like Liberty Avenue" and that's of course exactly how it was played.

With delicious irony, the Liberty gang arrives in Toronto the night before the Liberty Ride was to begin and Ted, using a guide book, was describing all of the things to do on Church Street. And, of course, the gang ended up at Woody's. Well.....not exactly. As we all know, it wasn't "Woody's" they were heading for, but a bar called "Moosie's" that looked a lot like Woody's.

During the lunch break, some of the crew had stayed behind to redecorate the outside of the real Woody's with "Moosie's" signs and also to change the SAILOR sign (Sailor is the bar that is adjacent to Woody's) to AILLO (although spelled wrong, I think the producers may have been trying to make a pun of the fact that Ailo looks like Allo which is French for hello, and since many Americans have the wrong stereotype that everyone in Canada speaks French, well....but then again it might simply have been a way to camouflage the Sailor sign which had been seen often enough in the "Liberty Avenue" scenes of Church Street).

Once we got on set and I saw the Moosie's sign, a thought suddenly hit me....I'd seen that sign before. Then I remembered that during one of the Liberty Diner shoots I had done in early February back at Studio B, I had seen the Moosie's sign hanging from one of the rafters of the studio. I had no idea at the time what the sign was for but it stuck in the back of my mind. Now that I saw the sign again I realized exactly what it was for.

The scene itself mostly involves the Liberty gang walking up the street until they get to Moosie's. My involvement in the scene is about half way through when there is a group shot of everyone. You can see the back of me duck around Robert Gant and disappear behind him. This was no mean task since the sidewalk was rather narrow and I had to not only duck around Robert to ensure I didn't bump into him but I also had to avoid the camera crew shooting the footage so as not to interfere with them.

We did about four or five takes of this before the remainder of the scene was set up to be filmed at the entrance to "Moosie's" at the foot of the Woody's staircase. Unfortunately, the director wanted fresh people to populate the entrance to Moosie's so those of us who had already participated in the scene were sent back to holding and shortly after were wrapped for the day, and in my case, for the season.