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CAMPING WITH CHRIS AND JOHN

By Shawn Hitchins

During the first snowfall of the winter season I find myself sliding across town to meet with John Simpson and Chris Carter from the hit gay-reality show, *Chris and John to the Rescue*. Entering the production office of John Simpson Inc, I realize that Simpson, like the weather, is in transition. His onebedroom apartment, from which he produces the show, is half filled with packing boxes.

We manoeuvre through a hallway of boxes into a living room filled with more boxes. The furniture is dismantled except for an enviable iMac that sits in the corner. While we wait for his co-star Chris Carter to arrive, Simpson and I banter. Simpson is mid-anecdote when Carter enters silently, his demeanour a sharp contrast with Simpson's exuberance. Carter has just endured a typical rage-inducing Toronto streetcar ride.

"Well dears, who wants a drink? I know I do," asks Simpson breaking the ice.


With Carter's entrance comes a farce more akin to their show. The first topic of discussion is how Simpson's toilet got clogged by a bottle of hair product and how it is less expensive to have Simpson's fiancée buy and install a new toilet than to have a plumber make a service call.

I can see suggestions of their onscreen personalities in their mannerisms and rapport, but Chris and John are definitely applied characters. "Chris and John are severe exaggerations of our personalities," explains Carter. "A lot has bled in from television." Their characters have a distinct speech pattern, pregnant with sometimes verbatim pop-culture references. Their southern drawl is a direct reference to Mary Cherry, a character from the TV show *Popular*. Their liberal use of the endearment "dear" is a direct reference to Ms. Cleo, the television psychic.


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Each episode of their show, now in its third season, pins the two outrageous personalities against a so-called real person who is in need of rescuing. Carter and Simpson source their subjects through casting calls and online postings. They prefer to use Americans because, according to them, Americans have more “exuberant personalities,” which makes for better television. “Americans are reality- and fame- hungry,” says Simpson. “It’s hard to shoot in Canada. We approached several gay organizations and were turned down. Canadians really protect their privacy.”

The two describe themselves as work addicts.

“I don’t have much of a social life outside of work,” says Simpson.

“I have no social life,” responds Carter. Considering their ages — Carter is 23 Simpson is 25 — the two bring a lot of experience to the table. Simpson, who freelances as a producer for the Slice Network, handles the production aspects. Carter, who freelances as a writer, handles the creative. They package the show as a team but Simpson is clearly the boss.

“I never imagined I’d be producing out of my living room,” he says. “I was hoping for something a bit more glamorous.”

A hectic shooting schedule keeps the two juggling multiple roles. “Our days are pretty intense. A short day is 18 hours, it also includes eating if the crew complains,” laughs Simpson. The understaffed crew of eight includes the idiosyncratic character Brian Doyle who is always referred to by his full name. Brian Doyle is not only a production assistant on the show but also a series regular.

“I was in a bar in Hamilton and Brian Doyle came over and introduced himself,” laughs Carter. “Without any knowledge of me working in television, he explained that he wanted to be a star. Brian Doyle *really* wants to be on TV so we gave him the opportunity.”

Carter and Simpson describe their fan base as “people in the middle of nowhere.” He hopes the show is an outlet for queers in rural communities. But the pair are reluctant to be seen as role models. “I don’t know if we are really heroes,” says Simpson.

“We get a few earnest emails from people who are more affected by our show,” says Carter. They exchange messages with fans over Facebook. One fan in particular, a teenage boy in Alberta, watches the show with his mother. “We write, ‘How’s school going?’ And he’ll write, ‘It’s okay. There’s a couple of jerks.’ And we all know what that means,” says Carter.

“I never thought I’d be dealing with people that age,” adds Simpson. “I thought I’d be dealing with older men. Forty plus is OUTtv’s demographic.”

A week later, I meet Chris at a trendy Portuguese coffee bar. He sits in the back, relaxed, sipping a coffee. Stripped of his sidekick, a dry self-effacing humour surfaces and he appears introspective about his work so far.

“I never anticipated being on television,” he says while rolling pieces of paper into tiny balls. “Watching yourself on TV you become very critical, it’s like having an unexpected baby. It brings you joy, changes your life, but it certainly wasn’t planned.” It’s an understandable reaction considering Carter is not only forging a persona but also juggling the responsibilities of producing a TV show.

Thankfully the duo share complementary natures. “While he sleeps, I edit,” laughs Carter. This collaborative effort between the two best friends seems to be key. “We bounce perspectives off each other. Having people around you gives one placement. Without someone around me I lose track of time. I’ll fall asleep for five minutes and wake up thinking it’s the next day.”

Carter doesn’t seem to suffer from delusions of grandeur. He has a healthy gauge of a career in television. “I keep my expectations comfortably low,” he says. In the future, Carter sees himself working behind the scenes on a bigger show but in the interim he jokes, “Probably I’ll be getting a job at Blockbuster, considering the economy. There is no stability in this business.”

But in a time of economic crisis Carter and Simpson, with hard work and dedication, are defying the odds. After two successful seasons on OUTtv, a recent acquisition by MTV’s LOGO will see distribution of their series to as many as 30 million subscribers in the United States, opening them up to a much wider audience and more criticism. The only things Carter is worried about these days are the “scathing comments on message boards.”

Five days later I meet Simpson at a bar in Toronto’s gay village. He worms around in his chair waiting for someone to take his drink order. After 10 minutes a waitress arrives and he stumbles to a decision. Finally settling on a Cape Codder, he apologizes. “I’m so indecisive.” But Simpson isn’t indecisive. In fact he is someone who knows exactly what he wants.

“I put a lot of pressure on myself to attain my career goals,” he admits. “I can’t remember the last time I was at a club outside of shooting the show.”

Simpson is a natural comedian with cutthroat timing. He prefers work behind the camera but he isn’t turning his back on celebrity. “If someone came up to me and said ‘Will you host *Entertainment Tonight?*’ certainly I would.”

As a kid he dabbled in acting in commercials. His big claim to fame is a role in the TV movie *Model Behavior* playing opposite Kathy Lee Gifford and Justin Timberlake. He graduated from Sheridan Media Arts program and interned at PrideVision creating interstitial episodes. At PrideVision he saw an opportunity to improve on the programming, the result is the Chris and John enterprise.

Simpson's passion is television. He is specifically interested in creating programming similar to *Dawson's Creek* and *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, programming that helped him through adolescence. From his career to his strict vegetarian diet, he makes purposeful choices that have a positive influence. "Everywhere you go you can find something good" is his mantra.

Chris and John portray a queer culture devoid of urban complexities and cynicism. The show is a counterpoint depiction of queer culture, a generational perspective resulting from a strengthening queer youth movement. The syrupy wholesome undertow occasionally snags the pacing and the comedic edge but it reflects its target audience.

"Different shows show different realities," says Simpson, sipping his third Cape Codder. "Life is supposed to be fun,"

The new season of *Chris and John to the Rescue, Summer Camp* takes place at Camp-eet, a gay campground in Soggy-tuck Michigan. Chris and John are back to rescue a crew of fallible but lovable characters on whom the duo gleefully flex a matured acerbic humour. Strong editing and well-crafted scenarios expose the personalities; the sophomoric stunts springboard unscripted one-liners, the result is laugh-out-loud comedy.

Having witnessed Carter and Simpson's natural and heightened personalities firsthand, I am their newest fan. Carter and Simpson foreshadow the next generation of queer television and filmmakers, a generation creating a forum in which to develop their skills before puncturing the mainstream entertainment industry.

What I appreciate most about the duo is their work ethic. Through the heavy workloads and sleepless nights, their motives remain clear.

"Well we certainly don't do the show for the money," they laugh. "We do it for the viewers."

Chris and John to the Rescue *airs Tuesdays at 2pm on OUTtv, the first two seasons are available on DVD. Pink Triangle Press, which publishes fab, owns a minority stake in OUTtv.*

Shawn Hitchins is planning an exciting '09. Log on to shawnhitchins.com or find him on Facebook for up to date information on appearances and shows.

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From exorcisms to matchmaking, reality-TV duo Chris and John (try to) save our state

By Chris Azzopardi

Originally printed 09/04/2008 (Issue 1636 - Between The Lines News)

Campers passing a silver, vintage trailer dressed in tacky decorations - those pink flamingos are really something - can't help but stare. Situated among other RVs, this one is ueber-special: It's the loaned home to Chris Carter and John Simpson, the duo "rescuing" Michigan for the third season of their, well, campy help-a-gay show, "Chris & John to the Rescue!"

"I've got people who wanna buy it from me now," says Sally Howard, co-owner of Saugatuck's Campit Gay & Lesbian Outdoor Resort, where the team's staying while shooting scenes for the five-episode series. "I'll be renting it next year on a full-year lease. And they're leaving most of the decorations, so I'm gonna rent it as the 'Chris and John Decorated Trailer.'"

Wrapping on Aug. 29 with some random fill, the previous couple of weeks resulted in the Super-Gays rescuing a woman from her distressing burrito dilemma, trying to find a camping soul mate for a local dude - and tidying up The Dunes Resort. For last season's Provincetown, Mass. setting, Carter and Simpson were spoiled with luxurious perks. But being in what Carter calls a "jewel" of the Midwest has proved more rewarding - even without living the Paris Hilton lifestyle.

"We're in the middle of nowhere," he says, "I have no idea what's going on in the rest of the world right now. We have no TV. No access to anything. It's so isolated, which looks great on camera, but we definitely agree that this is like the best year ever."

The 20-something guys contacted Howard in the spring, pitching her the idea of filming at the resort, along with other camping digs. But to save production dollars, they completely ditched the concept of using multiple locations and decided to solely utilize Campit and surrounding areas, including parts of Chicago, as the show's setting.

"We've got people in crowd scenes. We've got people who got speaking lines," Howard says, "just because when they got here, Chris and John said, 'Hey, come over here. You need to be on camera.'"

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The end result? "The people we rescued this year are by far the best we've ever had. They're totally like exuberant-American types. Which we love."

Like Debbie Black.

Howard says the guys just couldn't resist her (Carter calls her "over-the-top"), and describes the Chicago native as someone who's "got more personality than three people combined." We soon find out: That's no exaggeration.

The chirpy professor stumbled upon her second on-screen stint - the first being on short-running "The Queen Latifah Show" (her "claim to fame," she says), where she donated three feet of hair to a young girl - while vacationing at the resort with her wife of 22 years. She gushed over the gig and the guys, who helped rid a lurking spirit in her home: "The most creepiest of all is every time I have this feeling of being in the house, I can't keep down burritos - and burritos are my favorite food," she says.

In swoops the paranormal expert, a local psychic and the rescuing duo, which ends with an exorcism on the final night. Scoring the part was purely serendipitous, as Black scooted past the Avion trailer thinking they were - because of a hole dug in the ground, planted trees and a mailbox - setting up for a fab party.

"By nature I'm really nosy," she says, "and I'm always into a good time."

No shindig ever brewed, but when Black inquired at the resort's front desk, discovering a reality series was being shot on the same campground she was vacationing at, she hurried to the trailer with a "fabulous piece of stationery" inscribed with: "Welcome to the gayborhood. My name is Debbie Black. I'm practically famous in my college where I work. I've been on 'The Queen Latifah Show' before. I'm sure you need to meet me."

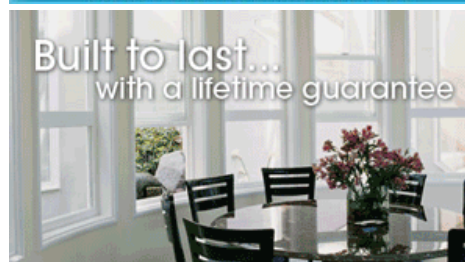
The note was left with some flamingos as a gift, and Black now has a second credit to her name. And the luck didn't end with her. Adam J. Martin got wind of it, too.

"I've never owned a television, and I've never seen a reality show," admits Martin, 25, who was there facilitating a young gay men's group. "It was a huge exercise in letting go of control and, at the same time, just putting myself out there publicly and feeling more wholly a part of my generation."

And watching as four guys fought - by overcoming obstacles like sitting in an outhouse for 10 minutes or drinking a camp-food concoction - to become Martin's "camping soul mate." Silly and severely self-deprecating, the Kalamazoo native's first time on film, which was shot over a day and a half, wasn't nearly as bad as someone who's got zippo knowledge of reality TV could've been. And the final outcome?

Well, he's only slightly worried: "I have no control of the output. Like, I don't know if they're gonna represent me in this light or that light. It was a way of really letting go of any sense of direction on my part. And it was very freeing."

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locally on here!), we might be waiting a while before we know whether Martin walked away with a camping "friend" - or if Black can go back to eating burritos - but we can find comfort in Carter's positive words about our state: "I don't think it's hopeless at all. In terms of rescuing people, there's been a few doozies - people who just really need help - but otherwise, other than that, they pretty much got it all together."

Chris Azzopardi is the entertainment editor of Between The Lines. To contact him, send an e-mail to chris@pridesource.com.

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DEFAULT

Gay Canadian Duo Chris & John Head to P-Town in Season 2 DVD

by Kilian Melloy
EDGE Contributor
Tuesday Aug 26, 2008



Chris & John head to Provincetown in Season 2
(Source: Alluvial Films)

Comic Canadian gay best friends Chris & John head to Provincetown in the DVD release of the second season of the hit reality show.

Although the two, being Canadian, don't need (like many Americans) to travel to Massachusetts to claim their civil rights, **Chris & John to the Rescue: Provincetown!** sees the duo fetch up on the cape to work their magic, smoothing sticky situations and setting the culture... well, if not straight, then fabulously to rights.

The press release promises that the "hysterical second season includes Chris and John involved in merrily mishaps and adventures, such as

finding a 'fag' for a hag, babysitting for a gay married couple, assisting with a lesbian marriage proposal and a drag queen makeover extravaganza!"

The witty show premiered in 2005 as a series of 5-minute minisodes; now, Chris & John are a hit on Canadian cable channel OUTtv.

The season two DVD set offers all five half-hour episodes, plus bonus features galore: deleted scenes, audio commentary, featurettes, interviews, and a glimpse at what lies ahead for the duo in Season Three.

Chris & John to the Rescue! has reached American TV screen by way of here! Networks, with a premiere on the U.S. GLBT cable channel last spring.

The show has been compared to *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, as well as to *The Simple Life* with Paris and Nicole. Says co-star John Simpson, "[at first,] it was basically just us doing what we did as kids, but with a better camera and in front of a national audience."

Chris Carter, the duo's other half, came to realize that, "people needed our help desperately," and the show has only gained comic momentum from there.

Chris & John to the Rescue's second season DVD clocks in at 120 minutes, and reaches stores on Oct. 14 with a suggested retail price of \$19.98; pre-ordering is now available at 10percent.com and Amazon.com.

An [online](#) outlet for the two is also available, featuring episode guides, a music guide, podcasts, and other features.

Kilian Melloy reviews media, conducts interviews, and writes commentary for EDGEBoston, where he also serves as Assistant Arts Editor.

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October 09, 2007

Queer Eye by Canadian Guys

Canada's OUT TV is set to launch two new style gurus with *Chris & John to the Rescue*.

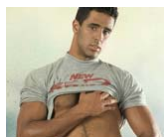
By Michael Diamond

Of all the wonderful things Canada has to offer -- Montreal, universal health care, Anne Murray -- what could be more charming than two cute, witty gay boys offering affectionate advice to those in need? Enter John Simpson and Chris Carter, hosts of *Chris & John to the Rescue*, a bubbly reality program currently seen on Canada's Out TV. The two come across as likable if unnervingly upbeat, the types that end every statement with an exclamation point! That relentless and bald-faced optimism may prove to be an asset when positioning themselves as life-changing fairy godmothers. Season 3 sees the boys coming to America, as they descend on the legendary gay resort destination of Provincetown, Mass., working their benevolent magic at this New England seaside getaway.



"Provincetown seemed like a great fit because it's this picturesque colonial village on Cape Cod with a very heavy gay presence," says Simpson. "And we love colonial villages in Cape Cod." Adds Carter, "There are a lot of people in P-Town who were in dire need of our unique services. I honestly think that if we didn't come to that town and help those people out that things would have gone downhill, fast. I'm talking John Carpenter's *Escape From New York* downhill. You'd be surprised about how effective our services can be."

The two twinks from up north (Simpson is 23, Carter, 22) met in the 1990s, when they were both studying drama and dance in Toronto. They quickly became best friends, and their simpatico comedy sensibility is evident in their on-screen chemistry. They tease and cajole their hapless rescue cases with a healthy dose of double entendre and the sort of



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guileless moxie that is the province of youth. Of the utmost importance is finding candidates willing to play along. "Choosing our 'rescue contributors,' as we like to call them, is a bit of a tricky process," explains Simpson. "People contact us, tell us what their problem is; we confer with one another and decide if it's the right thing to do. Sometimes we get a lot of obscure requests...for the record, just so everyone is clear, I am in a committed relationship, and Chris can't bend that way."

The dynamic duo sprinkle their magic pixie dust on a variety of rescue contributors in P-Town (a.k.a. Problemstown). Among them is "Deidre," a fag hag in need of a new fag. "She was looking for someone who would go to a Kathy Griffin show with her," the hosts explain, "who had a great sense of fashion, who could make a great sandwich and mix a great drink."

Next up were Tom and John, a gay married couple who utilized Simpson and Carter as baby-sitters for their pair of 5-year-old boys. "The first thing we tried was singing and dancing for them...that didn't work. We then tried to play dress-up...that didn't work either," Chris and John confess. And there was "John M.," an aspiring drag queen needing a total glamour makeover. "I found him his outfit," says Simpson, "and Chris wrote his song and did his choreography. But...we weren't really impressed with how each other did, and that sort of caused our first-ever on-camera fight." The results of the boys' handiwork were revealed during John's drag pageant debut, at the legendary P-Town night spot the Alibi.

Was it hard for this unambiguously gay duo to find willing participants south of the border? "People in America in general seem very scared of the term 'reality TV,'" explains Simpson, "thanks to any number of Fox shows. We had to be very careful about our wording so that people understood that we aren't like [the show] *Big Brother* and aren't going to pull out someone's worst enemy from around the corner at any given point in time. Other than that, most people and businesses [in P-Town] were just as supportive as they are here in Canada, perhaps even more so."

Stateside, the show's entire first two seasons will begin airing in January 2008 on Here TV. "This is our first foray into [what ostensibly can be called] reality TV...it is unlike any other piece of our programming," says Josh Rosenzweig, Here Networks' vice president, corporate communications. "We thought the show was fun and funny, and Chris and John are incredibly likable."

Makeovers, love connections, morale boosting -- all in a day's work for the self-described culture aficionados, and their summer adventures in P-Town proved especially gratifying for Chris and John. "We really did help out our five rescue candidates this season," Simpson asserts, "and they are better off in the world because of us."



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