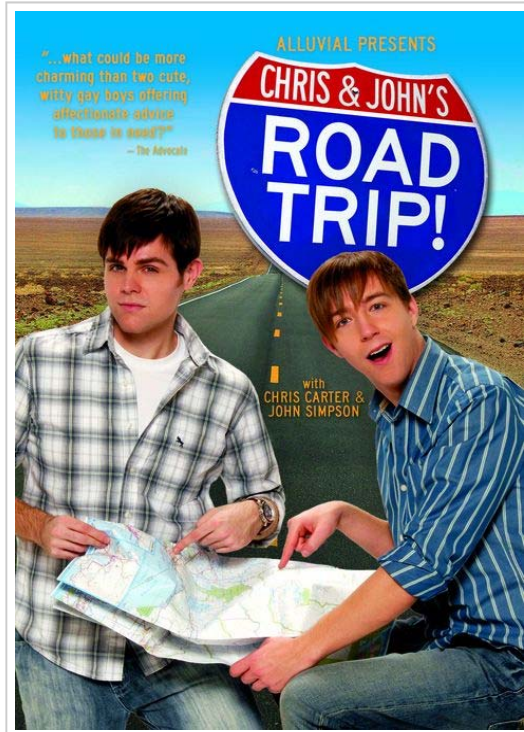


# The Movie Rambler

Sunday, June 14, 2009

## DVD Review: CHRIS & JOHN'S ROAD TRIP!



### THE FLICK

Chris Carter and John Simpson at first appear to be gay male versions of Nicole Ritchie and Paris Hilton. In this series of six episodes, they travel to different locations within Canada (and Erie, Pennsylvania) to meet people, attend events and, sometimes, perform charitable acts. Then again, the duo also destroys flowers for a wedding, steals beer and food at a campground and

become a bit raunchy when dancing as go-go boys.

These two Canadian guys started doing interstitial work for OUTtv, interviewing people on the street for broadcast between programs or to shore up running time when a program didn't fill a time slot. They followed *The Chris & John Show* (the interstitial series) with this series, one season of *Chris & John's Road Trip!* (Some sources indicate there is a mythic seventh episode to the series which is not included here; however, "Sights Unseen" may be the 22 minutes of deleted scenes contained in the bonus material.)

*Road Trip!* is a bit odd in that the stars of the show pass up very obvious jokes and double entendres for some reason which is never defined. For instance, they don't even so much as raise an eyebrow when various campground denizens talk about pitching a tent, yet when a potential date for Chris talks about wanting to taste his love juice,

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the comment is left in with no edit for content or taste (no pun intended). It's not as if they aren't capable of making these remarks or the audience isn't thinking them at the same time.

There's another...not odd, but noticeable...aspect to the show. While both John and Chris are gay, almost all the people they come into contact with are gay and the show is geared to a gay audience, their sexuality doesn't define who they are. Perhaps in the more sexually repressed America, there is an expectation that every third word out of a gay man's mouth is about sex. Springing off of this, it is refreshing to see people for whom being gay is simply one part of who they are, not to mention a country that doesn't bat an eye when two women get married. We're told in the one of the commentaries some issues did arise in certain locations, though they're not shown on camera. The world Chris and John inhabit is about as gay-friendly as anyone can ask for in 2005 (that's when the season was shot.)

Despite their flamboyance and each situation being "out there," all six episodes have a very large heart to them, something I doubt *The Simple Life* ever achieved. In the first episode, the boys try to match up a professional skater with his soul mate at the Erie Pride Picnic. Not because they want to interfere with someone else's life, but because they care about people being happy while having a bit of fun. It's a common theme through the entire season. Every episode finds the pair helping someone they meet out in some way.

They campaign for drag queens at a gay campground. Chris admirably steps away from two men who are supposed to be his dates when there is a spark between them. Even the adventure at Toronto Trek-a *Star Trek* convention-crowns one fan Chris and John's Trekkiest Trekkie, an award the recipient is positively stoked to have. Their empathy and warmth toward one another and the people they meet is one of their more endearing qualities. At times, they don't take tasks completely seriously, which can become irksome after a while. And it's also peculiar we don't get to really know who these people are beyond brief soundbites.

Following the dating disaster in Episode 5, a comment is made that Chris can't find a date for himself, so how could John do so in a strange place. Neither of them bothers to follow up on that train of thought. Why is it so hard for Chris to attract someone? What qualities is it he's looking for? None of the installments delve deep enough into their subject matter; instead, every show ends with a sequence of the boys dancing in a bar of some kind.

That's really the only negative to the series once you get past how Chris and John behave. Occasionally embarrassing

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and usually immature, it's impossible not to think they have two different personalities: one they use in front of the camera and the other in real life. It's hard to wish they dropped their stage faces and be completely honest from moment one. Still, their form of fun doesn't rely on whoring around or drug use, both things the gay community is "known" for. The worst they do is drink. That's a vice people of all sexualities share, so I won't hold it against them.

### THE LOOK

Each episode is presented in a windowboxed format, meaning the picture is bordered on every side by black bars. According to the commentary tracks, this season was shot very quickly and with a small budget, both of which explain the usually grainy and not-quite-perfect look on the episodes. There's a layer of grain across every scene, more pronounced when the duo are in a dark environment or indoors. The image is a bit soft at times, with blacks coming off as with no depth. This hue is more a gray than black, considering the grain. Part of the appeal of *Road Trip!* is that the series is supposed to look as though it were thrown together and off the cuff. In that respect, at least, the transfer holds up.

### THE SOUND

It comes as a mild shock the English 2.0 mix turns out as well as it does, considering the video. In fact, the soundtrack turns out to be well rendered most of the time, with only a small handful of minor distortions or hissing. Most of those, oddly enough, come in the first episode while various participants are being interviewed. The soundtrack tends to overcome the dialogue in a couple of places; the missed pieces don't detract from the experience. With the same caveats that applied in the video portion (low budget, quick shooting), this is an entirely acceptable presentation of the material. No subtitles are included.

### THE STUFF

The three [audio commentaries](#) with Chris and John (cinematographer Michael Kaminski joins on Episode 5) are surprisingly as entertaining-if not more so-than the episodes themselves. Both guys tend to rein themselves in just a bit, as if the dopey ditzes they play are just stage personalities. There are still a good amount of "hons" and "dears," yet a wealth of behind the scenes information is included as well. For instance, Episode 6 became a test run of their next series, *Chris & John to the Rescue*, while John's boyfriend Justin is mentioned numerous times and pointed out when he appears on camera. There's the 22-hour shooting day involved in Episode 5, Tim being the default soul mate in the pilot and some color correcting that was done during the wedding ceremony in the finale. Both


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- 2/21/09: [Frost/Nixon](#)
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- 2/27/09: [Epitaph](#) (DVD)
- 2/27/09: [Mighty B, The: We Got The Bee](#) (DVD)

are strikingly articulate and informed about all aspects of the production, playing off one another in a less grating, more mature way than in the episodes themselves.

Twenty-two minutes worth of deleted scenes span five different side-trips the boys took and never made it to air. Folsom Fair North (a leather festival originating in San Francisco with the North version in Toronto), a live performance from The Joys (they sing the theme song), footage of the guys at Toronto Pride constantly missing one another, the Ottawa Pride pancake breakfast (and the journey actually finding the location) and learning about sailing in Kingston all make the cut. John interviews The Joys for a touch under five minutes for OUTtv, where the show airs in Canada.

The boys hosted Queer Fright Night Marathon for the network back in 2005 (based on the next new episode of the show airing on Monday, November 7). Here, they introduce various films while exploring a haunted house or assisting in ghoulish make-overs. Running for 17:36, the action tends to go on just a bit too long, but it is an extra which normally doesn't make it to disc and it's nice to see a unique bonus feature on the disc. Last up are a series of trailers for other *Chris & John* product as well as for the following Alluvial titles: *Cruel & Unusual*, *House of Venus* (Seasons 1 and 2), *First Out* (1-3 and International), *Fake ID*, *Girls' View* (1 and 2), and *Laughing Matters...More!* Outside of the latter trailers, there is a play all option for the extras as well as for the episodes themselves.

Posted by TMR at 6:54 PM 

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