

Peter Paige

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But Dorothy was only the beginning. Little did Paige know he had several more queer productions ahead.

In the fourth grade he wrote, directed and starred in *Grease: The College Years*, a clever spinoff of the hugely popular film. He continued to pursue acting, writing and directing as a teenager, performing in a number of school and



Paige and Randy Harrison, the only two openly gay cast members on *Queer as Folk*

community plays.

Paige later received a full scholarship to attend Boston University's prestigious School of Theatre Arts. He studied everything from David Mamet to William Shakespeare for 12 to 15 hours a day, developed his acting talents and graduated summa cum laude.

The struggling thespian then moved to New York, where he supported himself by running through a series of jobs at a hotel, a restaurant and an art gallery. He soon connected with a group of playwrights, directors and actors at

Playwright's Horizons, a theater where he workshopped dozens of new plays.

This is when Paige's next cross-country adventure began. He left the Big Apple and began performing at theaters throughout the United States.

In 1995 he arrived in Portland, where he worked for two years on the city's Equity stages. The versatile actor performed everything from the classics such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to edgy, contentious works by promising young playwrights.

Don Horn worked with Paige on *Party* and *First Couple* for triangle productions! He remembers being impressed upon seeing this new, fresh face.

"He was not averse to tackling things," Horn says. "I love that in an actor."

Paige's attitude was always, "Let's get the job done," Horn adds. "I really respected him for that."

Jon Kretzu also has fond memories of working with Paige. He directed the young actor in a production of Beth Henley's *Abundance* at Artists Repertory Theatre.

"We had a wonderful time working with him," Kretzu says. "He was just great in the role and lots of fun to work with and full of ideas. I'm not at all surprised that he's done very well in TV. I'm very proud of him."

Portland also is where Paige was discovered by his current manager, who immediately saw the actor's potential and brought him to Los Angeles. There he continued to generate his own work, collaborating on several projects such as *Twisted* and *Pantophobia*, performed at theaters around Los Angeles.

He soon was appearing all over the tube: on *Suddenly Susan*, *Veronica's Closet*, *Caroline in the City* and *Time of Your Life*. But it was his role on *Will & Grace* that garnered the most attention.

Paige appeared in the November 1999 episode where Jack and Rosario were forced to convince the Immigration and Naturalization Service that they truly were married. He played the government agent who turned out to be someone Jack once slept with.

The stream of roles eventually led the budding star to Showtime's *Queer as Folk*. He portrays Emmett Honeycutt, a beloved character who is a light confection, both sweet and fruity.

"Here's this nelly gay guy, this effeminate gay man who likes himself, who somehow along the way figured it out that he was OK," he told *Streetwork*. "What that affords him is this incredible way to look at the world—kind of like a kitten, where anything that's shiny and in front of him is exciting."

Emmett, who utters lines such as "I could be a real man if I wanted to," is the queen of all queens on *Queer as Folk*, especially compared to



Bob McGranahan and Paige co-starring in *First Couple* for triangle productions!



Scott Lowell and Paige, sitting pretty in a recent episode

"straight acting" Michael (Hal Sparks), conservative Ted (Scott Lowell) and sex-starved Brian (Gale Harold). Although those who worked with him here in Portland might beg to differ, Paige finds a lot of differences between him and his character.

"I am a lot more grounded than I think Emmett is," he told *Streetwork*. "And a fair amount more masculine, if I do say so myself."

Horn, however, says Paige is plenty flamboyant. Just a little more reserved.

"Peter has a heart of gold," Horn says. "He's one of those actors who will give you the shirt off his back. That's the parallel I see."

Paige also provides a distinctly queer flavor for a cast that, according to some fans, sorely needs it. He and Randy Harrison, who plays young Justin, are the only two openly gay actors on *Queer as Folk*.

Straight co-star Sparks pissed off a lot of viewers when he compared same-sex smooching to "kissing a dog." But Paige denies rumors of backstage squabbling.

"I adore Hal and think he's a wonderful person and talented actor," he told PlanetOut. "I am sure most of that is derived out of one comment he made that was taken out of context, which I've been asked to respond to, like, 900 times now. Any idea people have that Hal is homophobic is inaccurate."

And despite some criticism from gay men that *Queer as Folk* only portrays a small segment of the community, Paige passionately defends the show's importance. He's ever mindful of just how groundbreaking the series is.

"What I think the show portrays is flawed, human, fully sexualized gay people, which is something we've never seen before on television," he told *The Advocate*. "So hell yes, I think it's good for the community!" [E]

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