

PEOPLE

Turning a new Paige

Queer as Folk star returns to Portland to direct new movie

BY MICHAEL E BARRETT



Peter Paige set his new movie *Donut Hole* in Portland

It has been almost eight years since *Queer as Folk*'s Peter Paige called Portland home, but for a few weeks in May and June, he was back directing and starring in a gay-themed movie, which he also wrote.

Donut Hole, about prejudice and misperception regarding a gay man's benevolent affection for children, co-stars out bi actress Kathy Najimy of *Veronica's Closet* and *Sister Act* fame (who offers a big on-set hi-there-and-hello from Sister Mary Patrick!). Paige stars as a gay artist who's left with a big emotional gap in his life after his cherished godson moves overseas with his family. His attempts to fill that gap raise suspicions among neighbors when his proximity to their children clashes with their discovery of his sexuality.

Most of us know Paige as the nelly Emmett on *Queer as Folk*. Prior to achieving stardom, however, the gay actor graced some of Portland's stages, including those of Portland Repertory Theater, triangle productions! and Artists Repertory Theatre.

In person, Paige exhibits a refreshing honesty and richness of character. *Donut Hole* is clearly driven by a desire to confront issues of prejudice. The topic, combined with a deep admiration of Paige, inspired gay co-producer Christopher Racster of Archer Productions to add his talents to the project.

The movie, comments Racster, "takes a very tough subject and deals with it brilliantly. It's timely, it's important, it takes another look at cultural stereotypes and the stigmas that gays and lesbians face in our society and the judgments and perceptions that they face, and treats it with dignity."

The film is expected to be released next summer; in the meantime, Paige starts filming *QAF*'s fifth season this fall. Rumor has it that, when his schedule clears up, he also might be starring on triangle's stage once again.

On a recent visit to the set of *Donut Hole*, I chatted with Paige about the inspiration for this new venture.

Michael E Barrett: Tell me about the movie.

Peter Paige: *Donut Hole* is a melancholy comedy—or a melancomedy, as I like to call it.

It's about obsession and loss of perspective and the roles we assign one another. It's a comedy about the culture of suspicion we live in.

MEB: How much of Peter Paige will we see in your character—or is he based on someone else?

PP: There are parts of him based on me. I fortunately have much better social skills...and sense of the world than he! But it's half me, half other people I have known and maybe...an imaginary person that just sort of crawled into my head one day.

MEB: You lived and worked in Portland in 1995 and '96. What brought you here?

PP: I had been in New York for a while, and things weren't going quite as I wanted them to, so a woman I had gone to acting school with came out here with me, and we were going to try to start a theater company together. That didn't work out, [but] I got an audition at Portland Rep, got the job and did the young playwrights festival there and met a bunch of directors from that and ended up with two years worth of work. It was really one of the best things I ever did.

MEB: You're a working actor, so why writing and directing now?

PP: I have been doing that in some form all my life, so it's not an entirely new thing. It seems like a natural extension of the love and the belief I have in the power of storytelling.

MEB: I have to ask you about *Queer as Folk* or I'll lose my credentials as a gay writer. Emmett is usually described as flamboyant or a queen, but there's obviously more to him than that. How do you see the character evolving in the current season?

PP: You know, Emmett's growing up. He's been through a lot and continues to grow and change. One of the things I'm most proud of in my entire life is the journey that we've put Emmett on. We took this guy who was designed to be a flamboyant queen, cracking jokes from the sidelines, and made him this really full, rich, complicated person with real needs. ☐



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