

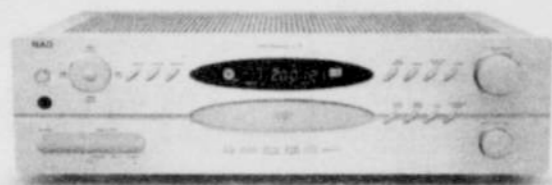


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## TELEVISION

### It's all relative

DVDs focus on the funky families

#### Wonderfalls: The Complete Series

One of the quirkiest shows on television for quite some time, *Wonderfalls* had only four episodes to prove itself before Fox gave it the ax in early 2004. But fan and critical reaction was strong, leading to a DVD release of all 13 episodes, including the nine that never aired.

A slacker named Jaye (Caroline Dhavernas) works at a Niagara Falls gift shop when not avoiding her successful and overachieving family: Republican surgeon Dad (William Sadler), novelist Mom (Diana Scarwid), secretly lesbian lawyer

sister (Katie Finneran) and multiple-Ph.D. brother (Lee Pace). Jaye is just trying to enjoy life with her best friend (Traci Thoms) and to romance a cute bartender (Tryon Leitsio)...except that things are talking to her.

A wax lion, a wind-up penguin and a fish mounted on the wall are just a few of the inanimate objects that only she can hear. And they're telling her to do things—things that affect other people's lives in a positive way if she does them right, and her life in a negative way if she does them wrong or avoids her unwanted responsibility.

Created by openly gay writer Bryan Fuller, *Wonderfalls* mixes some scathingly funny politics and sexual sub-

text into its plots. One storyline has the lesbian sister breaking up with her bisexual girlfriend colliding with a birdnapping plot; potshots at Republicans are common. Dhavernas is an astonishingly gifted actress whose Gen Y personality is spot-on. She's clearly going places.

The set also includes six commentary tracks, a documentary, a music video and more. For those who might like to see what kind of show would result if you combined the eccentricity of *Twin Peaks* with the knowing antics of *Malcolm in the Middle*, the funny, strange and sometimes touching *Wonderfalls* is the answer.

—Andy Mangels

#### The Brady Bunch: The Complete First Season

Here's the story...of a sitcom that has aged quite nicely.

It's easy to mock *The Brady Bunch* for its wholesome approach to family fluff like missing dolls and lockets.

But when the sitcom is placed in pop cultural context, it was downright revolutionary: a mixed household reflecting changing family dynamics in the United States, a couple who actually slept in the same bed together...and television's first divorcée? While the pilot directly addressed the death of Mike Brady's (Robert Reed) first spouse, we never learn what became of the mysterious Mr. Martin. Was he a deadbeat dad who abandoned Carol (Florence Henderson) and their three young girls? Did she escape from an abusive situation? Or did she kidnap the children, change their names and start life anew? Inquiring minds what to know!

Regardless, *Bunch* creator Sherwood Schwartz knew what he was doing. Like his previous hit, *Gilligan's Island*, he assembled likable yet predictable stereotypes guaranteed to connect with

viewers: charismatic older sibs Greg (Barry Williams) and Marcia (Maureen McCormick), insecure middle children Peter (Christopher Knight) and Jan (Eve Plumb) and precocious youngsters Bobby (Mike Lookinland) and Cindy (Susan Olsen).

Each episode brings a new calamity to the family: Marcia hates her new braces! Jan is allergic to the dog! Cindy can invite only one parent to the school play! It's all neatly resolved by the epilogue, which traditionally contains a gag along the lines of "Oh, dear, here we go again!"

Queers can especially appreciate the family's outdated yet familiar battles-of-the-sexes involving who gets to use the backyard clubhouse, which family doctor to call and how to spend those damn trading stamps. We also love ambiguously gay housekeeper Alice (Ann B. Davis), always reliable for some sad-sack comic relief. (Sure, she

messed around with Sam the butcher here and there, but c'mon, it's not like she could come out in 1969 suburbia.)

The real superstar of the show, however, is Reed—a classically trained thespian whose sharp comic timing made Mike Brady one of television's most beloved patriarchs, despite the fact that he was portrayed by a closeted homosexual. The actor died of AIDS in 1992.

The set also includes commentary tracks from Schwartz, Williams, Knight and Olsen along with the featurette "Coming Together Under One Roof."

—Jim Radosta



Gay actor Robert Reed portrayed the man of the house in *The Brady Bunch*.



The *Wonderfalls* clan included a semi-closeted lesbian lawyer (Katie Finneran, third from right).