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television

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God save the queens in *Little Britain*

by Gary Morris

**Little Britain:
The Complete First Series**

BBC Warner

If you're not familiar with the catchphrases "You see, I'm a LAY-DEE" (screamed by a rouged-up, sausage-curved tranny in Victorian pinafore) or "I'm the only gay in the village!" (petulantly spoken by a tubby queen in red rubber hot pants), it's probably only because you don't live in England.

These are two of the popular taglines from *Little Britain*, a delightfully un-PC sketch comedy show that's become a hit over there since debuting in 2003 but remains little known here. It's as good as any of the beloved British import comedies, but with a much hipper—in fact screamingly queer—edge than most. The first season of eight episodes is available on DVD with a slew of extras, including deleted scenes and interviews with creators and stars Matt Lucas and David Walliams.

Lucas, who's queer, and Walliams play the girls and boys of this parallel-universe England to comic perfection. Emily Howard (Walliams), a very unconvincing transvestite, terrorizes incredulous locals with her vain attempts to put herself over as a Victorian "LAY-DEE." Daffyd Thomas (Lucas), a delusional queen in PVC fetish drag, jealously guards his status as "the only gay in the village" even when competing queens arrive to challenge him. Other memorable characters include slutty teen Vicky Pollard and nasty FatFighters group leader Marjorie Dawson (both Lucas), along with mental patient Anne and government aide Sebastian (both Walliams), who doesn't hide his lust for the prime minister.

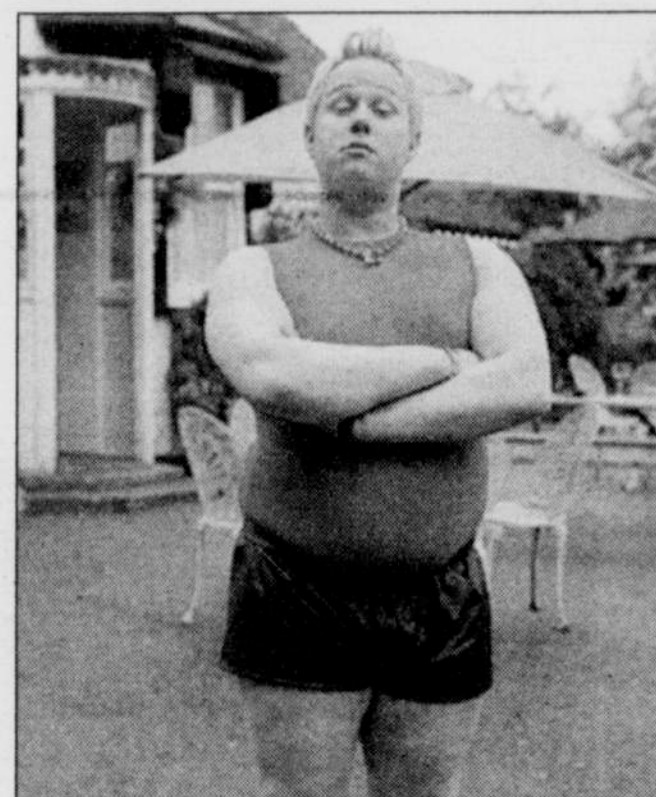
Little Britain has been sold as a kind of gallery of grotesques, and it's true that the characters are wildly exaggerated types who play off against a background of homely British locales. But their creators' obvious affection for them shines through the absurdities to show an unexpected humanity. It doesn't hurt that the actors also have wonderfully versatile voices, particularly Walliams' high-pitched shrieks as Emily and Lucas' obnoxious teen-girl babble as Vicky.

Not all the characters are drag or queer, and not every sketch hits the mark. But the ones that do are among the best in contemporary comedy, with Lucas and Walliams capturing these uniquely campy creations in a few sharp strokes.

**The Golden Girls:
The Complete
Second Season**

Touchstone/Disney

Different hairstyles and fashions and the occasional new wrinkle notwithstanding, *The Golden Girls* was remarkably consistent throughout its run from 1985 to 1992. This three-disc DVD set shows why the



Little Britain character Daffyd Thomas jealously guards his status as "the only gay in the village."

show was such a hit commercially and critically, featuring consummate actors and comedians doing probably the best work of their careers.

There are many highlights in these 26 episodes. "The Actor" hilariously sends up dinner theater when a minor star comes to town for a production and manages to sleep with each of the girls without the others knowing. Dorothy (Bea Arthur) makes a memorable substitute sheriff. In "Ladies of the Evening," the girls are improbably jailed as prostitutes on their way to see Burt Reynolds (who appears briefly). Rose (Betty White) has a great "St. Olaf" monologue as she bemoans losing the title of "Butter Queen" because of "churn tampering!" Two of the campiest episodes, "The Sisters" and "Long Day's Journey into Marinara," have warring sisters Sophia (Estelle Getty) and Angela (Nancy Walker) slinging the dish. Sophia: "You're a back-stabbing Judas in sensible shoes!" Angela: "You're a two-lira tramp with cheap bridgework!" Sophia's a tough old bird who finally meets her match in Angela.

In the Emmy-winning episode "Isn't It Romantic," Dorothy's old schoolmate Jean (Lois Nettleton) comes to visit. A lesbian still in mourning for her late partner, she falls in love with Rose. The show explores homophobia and the closet with humor and sensitivity. In a brilliantly funny sequence, Blanche (Rue McClanahan) becomes

unhinged upon learning of Jean's interest in Rose, but not for the reason you'd expect: "To think that Jean would prefer Rose over me? That's ridiculous! Who would you pick, Dorothy? Who?"

BEA ARTHUR performs 7:30 p.m. Jan. 21 at Elsinore Theatre, 170 High St. S.E. in Salem. Tickets are \$30-\$60 from TicketsWest.

GARY MORRIS edits and publishes Bright Lights Film Journal, located online at www.brightlightsfilm.com.

