

It's a Queer Year After All

The most powerful thing on the airwaves in 2001 was a grisly new reality show that was too real to be comprehended. From those first images on the morning of September 11, *Attack on America* riveted the attention of a nation, and confirmed the power of television.

Like the rest of the country, the entertainment industry was affected by the attacks. Plotlines on TV shows were scrapped and movies were pulled from production because suddenly they rang too true. The entertainment community responded with a telethon, gathering an unprecedented amount of talent in undisclosed locations to pay tribute to American heroes and raise millions of dollars for the relief effort.

But the country was encouraged to get back to normal, and that meant going back to being entertained. Here are some of the more memorable moments in entertainment in 2001.

Television: So, How Many Guys Will Brian Do This Week?

Aside from the news coverage that dominated television for the past few months, when all is said in done, 2001 was the year of *Queer as Folk*. The Showtime drama debuted in December 2000 to plenty of controversy and enjoyed massive press and constant debate throughout its first season to become Showtime's highest rated drama. Fans of the show reveled in the soapy drama and constant sex. Detractors said it was a poor representation of the gay community. Maybe you love it, maybe you hate it, but either way, everybody's got an opinion on *QAF*.



Queer as Folk

Ellen Degeneres hit the airwaves with a brand new show playing a lesbian who settles down in her home town. The show has done well enough for CBS to order new shows. Degeneres also hosted the Emmy's, which was rescheduled three times due to the horrific world events.

All My Children became the first soap opera to feature a major gay character. Eden Riegel plays Bianca, lesbian daughter of diva Erica Kane, played by Susan Lucci. And recently, *AMC* featured actor and playwright Charles Busch in drag, not playing a drag queen, but just playing a woman.

Other highlights: HBO's *Six Feet Under* featured an interracial gay relationship; *ER*'s had one of its characters, Dr. Kerry Weaver, played by Laura Innes, enter into a lesbian relationship; *The Education of Max Bickford* featured the first regular transexual character, played by Helen Shaver; *Batman's* Adam West and *Barney Miller's* Max Gail played a gay couple on *The Drew Carey Show*; Denise Richards and Heather Locklear locked lips on *Spin City*; Brooke Shields played a lesbian in the Lifetime movie *What Makes a Family*, which spotlighted parental rights; Kim Cattrall's Samantha got down with a sexy

lesbian played by Sonia Braga on *Sex and the City*, and ABC's *Nightline* announced a five part series on gay life in America with the controversial title, *A Matter of Choice*?

Most Memorable TV Moment:

Jerry Falwell opened mouth and inserted foot with hateful comments about gays, lesbians, women, the ACLU and just about any other group ol' Jer dislikes. The comments backfired, and Falwell's comments served as the catalyst to galvanize support for the gay community.

Music: Summer of Melissa

Rocker Melissa Etheridge proved that she was doing just fine, thank you, after her surprising and highly publicized breakup with 10 year partner Julie (I'm not gay) Cypher. Etheridge hit the road with a tour to promote her new CD, *Skin*, and her new book, *The Truth Is...My Life in Love and Music*. She also turned 40, and marked the occasion with a hot new Camaro and a hotter young girlfriend, Tammy Lynn Michaels from the now defunct TV show, *Popular*.

Other highlights: Madonna and Janet Jackson both brought their shows to town and played to packed houses, Elton John announced that his new CD would be his last (uh huh), and openly gay singer songwriter Rufus Wainwright made waves with his new CD *Poses*. Locally, the Gay Men's Chorus premiered a specially commissioned Hanukah composition, titled *Eight Candles* at its holiday concert, at which they sang with the Lambda Chorale. **Best Music Non-Event:** Wotapalava, billed as a tour of gay and gay friendly acts, was supposed to embark on a summer tour. The tour was scrapped however, after only 600 or so tickets were sold in Miami, the first city on the tour. Promoters blamed the poor ticket sales on Sinead O'Connor, who pulled out of the tour. Gee, does Sinead really have that many fans in South Florida?

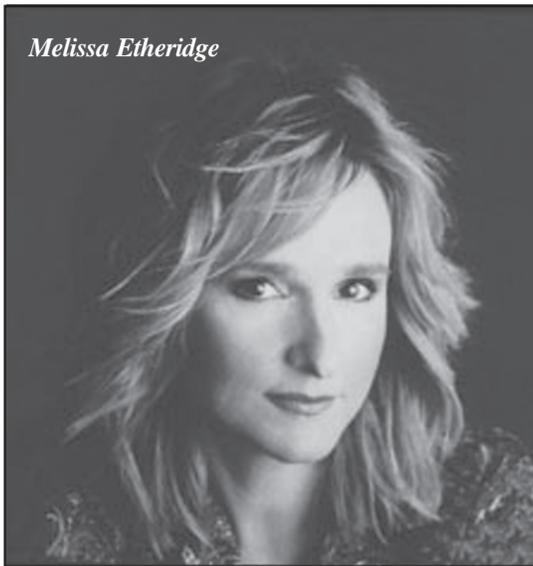
Theatre: Keep It Gay

Nationally, the theatre story of the year was *The Producers*.

The musical, written by Mel Brooks and based on his own movie, revived Broadway and won a record 12 Tony Awards. The show features openly gay actor Nathan Lane, who won a Tony for his performance, Gary Beach, who also won, as well as gay characters and the song, *Keep It Gay*.

Locally, South Florida was not lacking gay themed theatre. The 5th Annual Lesbian and Gay Play Fest premiered *Holy What?* and then staged the popular plays, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* and *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told* at the GLCC. Director and star Dan Kelley made his own dream come true with a production of *Falsettoland*, which played in Wilton Manor's refurbished 26th Street Theatre. *Thief River*, a new play by Lee Blessing, played in Manalpan. The Miami Shores Performing Arts Theatre opened with its inaugural production, *Pageant*, a beauty contest send-up which featured an all-male cast.

Bea Arthur wowed audiences with her one woman show, *...And Then There's Bea*. Arthur also wowed fans who packed Cathode Ray when she made an after-show appearance to sign autographs and belt out a few show tunes. Margaret Cho kicked off her new tour,



Melissa Etheridge

Notorious CHO, in Miami and made opening night a fundraising opportunity for several Miami-Dade Human Rights and AIDS organizations. **Best Theatre Moment:** Mel Brooks accepting an award for *The Producers*, holding a black comb under his nose and thanking Hitler for being such a funny guy onstage.

Movies: Film Fans Feast on Film Fests

The Miami Gay and Lesbian Film Festival grew rapidly this year, doubling in size and attracting big name stars. Over 11,000 tickets were sold for the 10-day March-April event at the Colony Theatre in South Beach. The festival offered many premieres and gave movie lovers an opportunity to see features and shorts which might not get distributed in regular local theatres. *Big Eden*, a charming story about a gay artist who returns to his home town in Montana received the award for Best Fiction Feature. The festival also treated audiences to a special screening of *A Florida Enchantment*, a silent film shot in Florida which featured cross-dressing. The film was presented with live piano accompaniment. In November, the Festival also expanded its staff, adding the new year round positions of Program Director, Administrative Director and Festival Coordinator.

The Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival held its place as the largest film festival in the world. The nearly four-week long festival in October and November drew huge, sold-out crowds, including a packed house for *The Fluffer*, a film sponsored by *The Express*. The opening night gala allowed partygoers to get a look at the Florida Studios, a 150,000 square foot space, which is being renovated to become a full-service production facility, the first of its kind in South Florida.

The Gateway Theatre in Fort Lauderdale continued to be the place for independent, gay and lesbian films, so much so that it could be renamed the Gayway. Some of the more memorable gay films which played South Florida were *All Over the Guy*, *Before Night Falls*, which earned its star Javier Bardem an Oscar nomination, the uproarious *Sordid Lives*, *The Closet*, *The Adventures of Felix, Nico and Dani*, *Boys to Men* and *Lost and Delirious*.

The film adaptation of the off-Broadway smash, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, was also a big hit. John Cameron Mitchell recreated his role as Hedwig, a German singer-songwriter and victim of a botched sex-change operation in a film destined to attain midnight-

movie cult status.

But they can't all be little gems, as evidenced in the strange, out-of-sequence *Come Undone* and the outright bad *Monkey's Mask*.

And in the **Best I Thought She Had Better Taste Than That Moment**, openly bisexual Angelina Jolie, fresh from her hit *Tomb Raider*, saw her other movie of the year, the super-steamy *Original Sin*, blasted by critics. When wags accused her of having sex with *Sin* costar, Antonio Banderas, Jolie coolly replied that she'd much rather sleep with his wife, Melanie Griffith.

Celebrities: Beam Me Up Scotty, I'm Outta Here

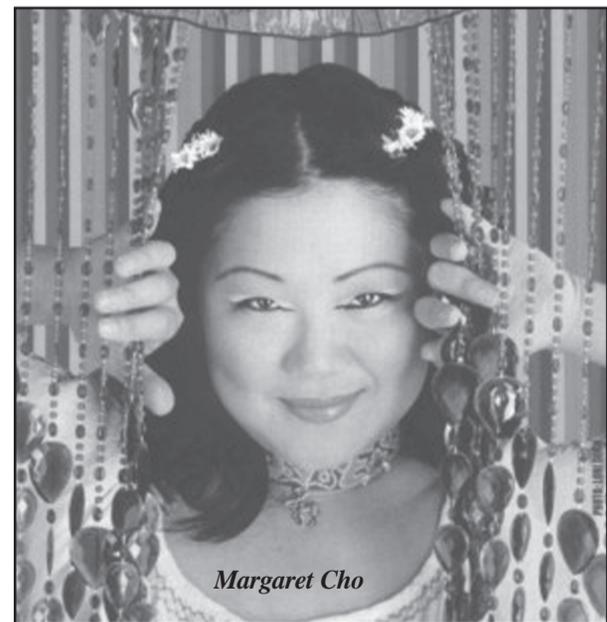
What would a year be without some really good celebrity fodder?

Tom Cruise filed for divorce from Nicole Kidman, one month shy of their 10th anniversary. Kidman was initially devastated, but came out on top. Her movies, *Moulin Rouge* and *The Others*, were smash hits and garnered her Golden Globe nominations. And, she says, she can wear heels again. In the middle of divorce, Cruise sued a gay porn star who allegedly had an affair with Cruise and a magazine publisher who allegedly claimed to have a videotape of Cruise with another man. Cruise's I'm-Not-Gay-Not-That-There's-Anything-Wrong-With-It lawsuits were finally settled out of court.

Ally McBeal star Portia de Rossi was seen doing some hot and heavy canoodling with singer-songwriter, Francesca Gregorini, stepdaughter of Ringo Starr. The blonde siren has not commented on her alleged affair, but isn't doing much to hide it either.

A short time after announcing she's a lesbian, the always perplexing Sinead O'Connor married a (gasp) male journalist.

And in the **You Just Can't Make This Stuff Up Moment:** The celebrity story to take the cake last year, or any other year, for that matter, came courtesy of Anne Heche. Heche went on *20/20* and explained to Barbara Walters that her bizarre behavior of the previous year was the result of another personality, Celestia, and that she heard voices telling that she was to meet a spaceship. Celestia, according to Heche, was the



Margaret Cho

reincarnation of God, spoke in a different language, had special powers and was from another planet. Heche detailed her life (and Celestia's life) in her autobiography, the aptly titled, *Call Me Crazy*. And then, just when you thought that it couldn't get any weirder, Heche flew off the handle when, during an interview with *The Advocate*, she was asked if new husband Coley Laffoon had ever had a same-sex experience. Isn't what's good for the goose good for the gander?