

TV SHOW DEPICTS TEEN 'GAY' ROMANCE Mainstream, youth-oriented program breaks new ground

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Note from Pastor Kevin: I pray that you will take action to prevent the homosexual agenda from entering your home and the minds of your children. The enemy of our souls, Satan, is ever looking for new ways to sneak into our homes in sheep's clothing (the Nickelodeon channel) while fully intending to be a ravenous wolf. It is time for God's people to cut the cable!

A youth-oriented television drama with a growing U.S. following is breaking new ground this year with a major teen character who declares his homosexuality and "falls in love" with a male classmate.

The Canadian drama "DeGrassi: The Next Generation" - available to 22 million U.S. households on the Nickelodeon-owned cable channel Noggin - is acclaimed by homosexual-rights groups for boldly going where no program has gone before.

"When a gay teen character is introduced into a mainstream youth-oriented drama with a minimum of fanfare, you can be sure of one thing: You're not talking about U.S. television," commented the American homosexual magazine The Advocate in its Feb. 3 issue.



Actor Adamo Ruggiero
(Photo: DeGrassi: Next
Generation)

The show is broadcast in the U.S. on the N, a programming block on the Noggin channel aimed at pre-teens and teens. During the day, however, the same channel caters to programs for toddlers and elementary school children.

In an interview with The Advocate, actors Adamo Ruggiero, 17, and John Bregar, 18, said they believe the characters they play in the DeGrassi series are true-to-life.

Ruggiero's character, Marco, previously "came out of the closet" about his homosexuality, but this season he meets Dylan, played by Bregar, the openly homosexual brother of Marco's friend Paige. By the end of this season, according to head writer Aaron Martin, Marco

will have a boyfriend.

"I think, in general, coming out is less shocking [to today's youth], but you don't want to have the ignorance to say that everything is OK, because people are still homophobic," Ruggiero told the magazine.

Says Bregar: "People grow up now with the idea of coming out and stuff like that. It's not such a surprise when they do. Our generation is growing up seeing it happen. People are opinionated, but seriously," he says, laughing, "bigger things happen."

Both actors note the show has an urban setting, a downtown Toronto high school, which tends to be more tolerant of "diversity."

"I'm aware that there's a danger of making the coming-out experience seem too candy-coated on TV," Bregar told The Advocate. "You know, if someone is watching the show in some rural place and they decide to come out - well" He paused. "You know how people can be."

Ruggiero said his family supports his socially controversial role.

"My parents are definitely cool," he told the magazine. "They understand it. I come from an Italian family that is pretty traditional and hardheaded."

The show, in its third season, has been selected as a finalist for Outstanding Drama Series by the GLAAD Media Awards, presented by GLAAD, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

Other finalists for the group's award are FX network's "Nip/Tuck," ESPN's "Playmakers," Showtime's "Queer as Folk" and HBO's "Six Feet Under." The awards will be presented March 27 at the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles.

In an article in the Canadian homosexual publication Capital Xtra, the series head writer, Martin, said DeGrassi is different from other TV shows featuring homosexual characters for youth audiences, such as "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Dawson's Creek."

"Marco is not just the gay character. Marco is explored in terms of being a smart kid who is slowly coming to terms with and embracing the fact that he's gay," Martin said.

The writer said discovering sexuality and forming key relationships is as much a part of teenage life for "non-straight" kids as it is for heterosexual youth.

"It's part of Degrassi's mandate to explore everything," he said. "If it goes on in teen life, we'll put it on screen."

Capital Xtra said "bringing an openly homosexual character into the Degrassi fold is long overdue."

Co-creator and producer Linda Schuyler said she saw the program as the perfect opportunity to broach an issue she experienced firsthand when as a school teacher a colleague's son committed suicide "because he didn't know how to face the issue of coming out in high school."

"Linda told me her story, so I knew that the character was going to go in this direction when I joined the cast in the second season," Ruggiero said, according to Capital Xtra. "I didn't think that it was going to develop as much as it is in the season coming up right now, but I'm comfortable with it. At the end of the day, that's my job, and whatever it takes to do it properly, that's what I'm going to do."

"Naturally," Ruggiero said, "once Marco has gone through the bad, of course he's going to start to go out there to experience, experiment and try to put some order to his feelings."