

Reviews

THE SHOOTING PARTY

Maverick Television
Channel 4, 8.45 a.m. Sundays in
April, May & June

I hate reality telly.

I don't see the point in shows like *America's Next Top Model* where a bunch of beautiful women have their self-esteem destroyed by a vitriolic panel. I don't understand why people who can't sing, cry when Louis Walsh tells them they can't sing. This is the man who gave us Boyzone. He knows a bad singer when he hears one.

And as for *Big Brother*, just the words Davina McCall make me want to vomit, strip naked, smear myself with my own excrement, and run through the streets taking scalps at random with a potato peeler.

So imagine my enthusiasm when watching Channel 4's new show *The Shooting Party*, which takes a disparate group of deaf and disabled people and moulds them into a filmmaking team, giving each of them the opportunity to make a 2-minute film which will be shown on Channel 4. They've hit on the wizard wheeze of turning it into a reality show by following the participants through every part of the filmmaking process, allowing the audience to get to know them as people. Not just as the disabled stereotypes they so obviously are. And it's not going to be just another modern-day freak show, honest! 'Cause, like, even if the majority of the guys chosen look like they've been found on the sea bed, the girls are all, well, eye-candy.

The format is simple. The filmmakers pitch their idea to a tough team of grizzled industry pros. Well, Ash Atalla (produced *The Office*), a doe-eyed Channel 4 commissioning editor being really, really, super supportive, and some scarf who gave humanity *Skins* and says 'Mmm,' a lot. So immediately you can tell Channel 4 are setting the quality bar high. I mean, the scarf who thought up *Skins* doesn't just work on any old crap. Unless that crap is

dripping with young flesh. We then follow the participants as they're split into groups and help each other make their films. I've only just seen the first episode and I want to take a power drill to my own skull and let some darkness out.

So far we've had '... The ... Most ... Boring ... Film student ... In the World ...' who wants to make a 2-minute film about an old man dying in a hospital bed, flashing back to his past. The panel were unimpressed, the scarf even commenting sagely, 'Mmm, yeah, I've just seen so many short films about people having flashbacks on their deathbeds.' That'll be because every film student of the last 50 years has made that film. That film gets made again and again because film students are desperate to make something meaningful. And if you're 22, DEATH = MEANINGFUL. The panel didn't like his idea but Boring Guy is in because he has a comedy-value Mam given to pronouncements like 'It could be worse son, you could be a "cabbage" in a chair. All that's wrong with you is a gammy arm and a gammy leg.' Comedy Mams are great telly.

Then there was the Nice, Bumbling Guy with the stutter. The panel weren't too sure what his idea was. Probably because he wasn't too sure himself. But he's in because he reminded the panel of Louis Theroux. Everyone loves Louis. Except me. Also stutterers are great telly. They're funny and they make you root for the stutterer. If only Nice, Bumbling Guy had an idea he could win.

Which brings me to the lovely Nikki; a perky, bubbly, blonde wheelchair user with a winning smile and a tight top. Nikki's gonna make a zombie movie in her local shopping centre. With disabled zombies chasing her in her scooter. Hell, even I want to see her film. So the lovely Nikki's in. Eye candy with an idea. Great telly.

The candidate I'd most like to take a potato peeler to though is the stereotypical Mr Uppity. You know the type. Absolutely no filmmaking experience. A creative writing student

who's been working on his novel for 'a couple of years.' 'It's about a bunch of students at a residential college for disabled people ... like Hollyoaks. But with dribble.' I always thought Hollyoaks was Hollyoaks with dribble. Admittedly, I'm the one dribbling. Interviewed at home, he confidently gloated 'I've got it in the bag', which he obviously did being the most disabled candidate on the show so far and because frankly, despite his lack of an idea or experience, Channel 4 were probably bricking it that if they turned them down he'd sue under the DDA.

And this is why I hate reality telly so much I'm drowning in my own vitriol. Reality telly's not reality. It's constructed, manipulated, edited, twisted. Reality telly is artifice.

Boring Guy is probably quite a decent fella, the kinda guy you'd go for a pint with. But Channel 4 have decided they need a boring film geek and too bad son, you're it and they're editing the show accordingly. Away from the cameras, Nice, Bumbling Guy may torture kittens and bunnies while chanting 'Hello darkness my old friend ...' over and over in a twisted Simon & Garfunkel mantra of evil. But Channel 4 have decided they need a stuttering Louis Theroux. I may even have been overly harsh on stereotypical Mr Uppity. He may be a sensitive, genuinely talented writer and filmmaker who'll give us a life-changing 2 minutes of cinematic genius. He's spent the last couple of years writing 'Hollyoaks: The Novel' though, so I doubt it.

The biggest problem with *The Shooting Party* however, is it's such a step back. Last year, Channel 4 and Maverick collaborated on *New Shoots*, a series of 25-minute documentaries made by 12 debut disabled directors. They were all watchable. Some were even good. But despite the fact the *New Shoots* films were successful and a real progressive chance for disabled directors to show what they can do, Channel 4 decided they're not trusting them with a full 25 minutes each again. This year they get 2 minutes. And

the rest of the show is the plucky underdog story of how these losers overcome their disabilities and differences and bond, working together to fulfil their dreams. The 'sheep' out there in TV land love a plucky underdog story. Look at *Rocky*. Look at *The Muppet Movie*. Look at *My Left Foot*. And the public love reality shows. Let's give 'em a reality show full of disabled people. They'll lap it up.

Except we won't. *The Shooting Party* lacks that one vital ingredient necessary for a reality show. There's no undercurrent of sneering nastiness. Just the cloying, sickly sweet taste of condescension. Where's the fun in that?

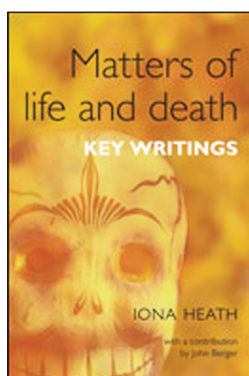
David Watson

Since writing, David has seen Boring Guy's film. God, it was boring!

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MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH: KEY WRITINGS IONA HEATH

Radcliffe Publishing, 2008
PB, 126 pages, £17.95, 1846190967



These essays, from the prickier of British medical establishment conscience, are thought-provoking and controversial. There is pleasure in their literary accompaniments: poems and philosophical musings, interspersed with granite logic, beautifully simply written. I learned new ideas: the important things

in helping people die are finding meaning in their lives, acting as a witness, and being the familiar of death. If this sounds nonsense to you, read the book. The important things are continuity, touch, perhaps even allowing pain to be experienced, continuity of care, but more; continuity of the dead with the living, encouraging the evocation of memories, talking even when the patient is too exhausted to reciprocate. There's no talk of 'spirit'; this is neither religious nor sentimental. General practice care for the dying is our quintessence.

Greater context comes from the earlier writings from 1995, dated as they are (referring to Thatcher rather than Blair, now both history). We will forgive the overly British focus and some repetition because such important things of general practice are being lost. These writings show us how we let them slip out of our grasp, and we should be ashamed.

Chris Del Mar

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