



Cast of House Gang at the SBS launch

Exposing Mass Culture to Disability Issues

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For Belinda, Robert, and Trev, their group home is their place for independence and their opportunity to grow. Guarded, poked at, prodded and supported by dike-on-a-bike social educator Jack, their lives are blown apart when Mike and his Summer Bay daughter Chloe move in, homeless after his bankruptcy, to take advantage of the house that is Chloe's inheritance. In six episodes we explore every complication in the lives of the six characters - three of whom have developmental disabilities (which do nothing to constrain their delight in the roles they are playing).

This is a ground breaking comedy series with a sting in its tale, its stylised presentation offers a parody of reality, using this device to provide the setting for sharp engagements with social prejudices. The audience is offered an insight to the diversity of human experience, where hilarity, joy anxiety and fulfilment occur. It is surprising, shocking at times, close to the bone, leaving you to ponder on the dynamics of interpersonal relations. Chloe: Oh, Gross, Spasos kissing. How

embarrassing!

Trev: Rule No 1, no calling us names.

(Chloe signs the list of rules which will allow her to stay in the house)

Trev: Yesss!!! (with clenched fist in the air)

We are taken to the heart of human emotions, the raw reality of sexualities and people living together in a world where the outside finds them freakish, but where the outside world itself is just weird, or normal.

The set is high camp, vivid colours – boys are blue, girls are pink, the dining room has an enormous palm filled beach scene mural. As we move through the house we encounter its full retro delights, perhaps the last place we expect people with disabilities to live, caught between King St, Newtown and Dinosaur Design. The house offers a metaphor for values of the past but skewed through a contemporary paintbox – some of the values which the residents share, others which they are trying to escape. It is a world in which nothing should be taken for what it first appears to

be – and everyone has their strengths and their vulnerabilities.

The series operates at a number of levels – on the surface, a Home Away for the others, where stylised characters play out accessible themes to undermine prejudices in the wider audience. Chloe, the Home and Away teenage clone, plays the part of the uninformed and prejudiced wider society (or at least the target audience for the series). But below this surface, there exists a clever dialogue for those who are part of the disability game – those working in group homes, the friends and relatives of people with disabilities, the advocates, the welfare and disability services bureaucrats, and most interestingly, people with disabilities themselves.

Chloe to Belinda: Where are you off to, one of your social evenings, a group outing to Hungry Jack's?
There is another audience that will also be able to

gain a great deal from the series – students and trainees whose future professional lives will involve them in working with people with disabilities. They will find the issues, the ethics and orientations presented in the six episodes extremely valuable in helping them reality check the more sterilised material in the textbooks and lecture notes.

The first episode is perhaps slow to start, and we remain to be convinced that Mike's extraordinary good humour and immediate rapport is for real. However, as the characters settle down and the script gains some depth in later episodes, the complexities become more interesting and believable, the humour more explosive and the difficulties more immediately challenging.

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Film Australia Study Guide available from Michelle Day on:
Ph: (02) 9413 8734 or Fax: (02) 9416 9401
<http://www.filmaust.com.au>.

VIDEO MAKING PROJECT AT ROZELLE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

A video making project will be run by Rozelle Neighbourhood Centre this year. It will involve performances and musicians with intellectual disabilities.

Last year the Leisure Options Program at the Centre received money from the Writers Centre to run a script writing project and a group devised script was developed.

The Australia Council, through the Community Cultural Development Fund, has provided funding to develop this script and produce a video. Susan Collings, the Video Project Coordinator, said 'We will be working with a group of dancers, musicians and actors with intellectual disabilities in a series of focused workshops. These performers will have the chance to develop their creative skills and be involved in making a video which promotes their abilities rather than their disabilities. This kind of endeavour benefits the whole community and challenges the stereotypes that too often hamper people with intellectual disabilities.'

Students of the Leisure Options evening classes in music, movement and drama, as well as those

involved in the 1996 script writing group, will be eligible to attend the workshops.

A total of eleven workshops will run between March and July. Experienced tutors and film makers will be involved in this process, with the emphasis on enhancing the performance skills of the students as well as by working towards creating a lasting document of the process, a 20 - 30 minute video. For most of the participants, this will represent a rare opportunity to enhance their creative potential and gain important skills and experience.

The Leisure Options Program is seeking volunteers who are willing to give up some Saturdays to support the performers and musicians in the workshops. Perhaps people who'd like to learn about video-making might be particularly interested.

*For more information about the project contact:
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