



DNA: Your character in *A Place To Call Home*, Dr Henry Fox is in a gay relationship. Do things ever get hot and heavy in a *Queer As Folk* way?

Tim Draxl: A *Queer As Folk* way?

Do they have sex?

[Laughing] To put it bluntly, yes. The relationship was solidified by the end of season three when it became physical. That continues, not on-screen, but it's certainly a real relationship between two men. There's a huge development in the relationship between Henry and James this season. It's really lovely but there are obstacles along the way. There's a turning point where Henry gets into trouble!

Gay relationships on screen are more mainstream now.

Yes, but I think the show's creator, Bevan Lee was specific that the relationship between James and Henry would not be one based on sex. He's not shying away from making a statement but the focal point is about them having a relationship. The fact that they're two men is kind of secondary.

Did you and David Berry, who plays James, work closely on creating that relationship?

We had many coffees to discuss how to portray these characters and how we wanted the relationship to appear on camera. We wanted chemistry between the two, and to make it as real as possible. They are, essentially, two men who are in love with each other at a time when it wasn't acceptable, socially or legally.

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For a gay man in the 1950s the stakes were high. To be exposed as a homosexual would be detrimental, with jail time... It would absolutely destroy him.

That's an important part of the gay storyline that the show tackles.

For a gay man in the 1950s the stakes were so high, especially for a character like Henry who is a very well regarded Sydney surgeon. For him to be exposed as a homosexual would be detrimental, with jail time, and he'd lose his license. It would absolutely destroy him. Bevan gave us some great reference points including the story of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu who went through several court hearings in London. He was a member of the realm but was jailed for his homosexuality. It's kind of used in our storyline and referred to by Henry when things start to get a bit rocky.

How does Henry feel, privately, about being homosexual?

Henry is very comfortable with his sexuality, and is even asked to instill that confidence onto James by his family. But it swings around where he becomes the student and is learning how to navigate his way around a world where his kind are not accepted.

Have you heard the comparisons between *A Place To Call Home* and *Dynasty*? They both have wealthy people living in a mansion with a scheming matriarch, a good girl, and a gay son.

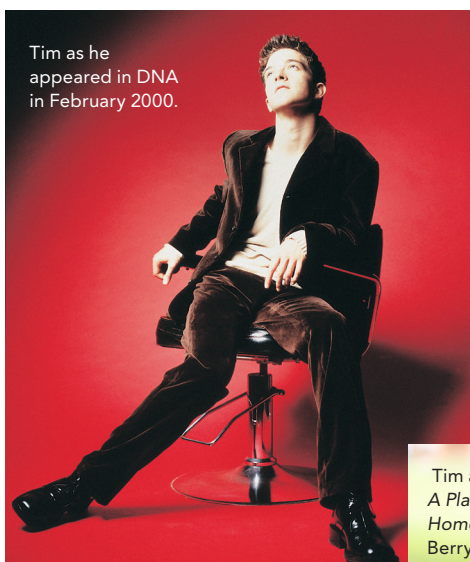
No, I've heard the comparison to *Downton Abbey*, but not *Dynasty*. I've never seen *Dynasty* but many years ago I worked on the behind-the-scenes telefilm, *Dynasty: The Making Of A Guilty Pleasure*. That was great fun, and I played a young studio executive named Joe.

Do you think the days of gay actors having to staying closeted have passed?

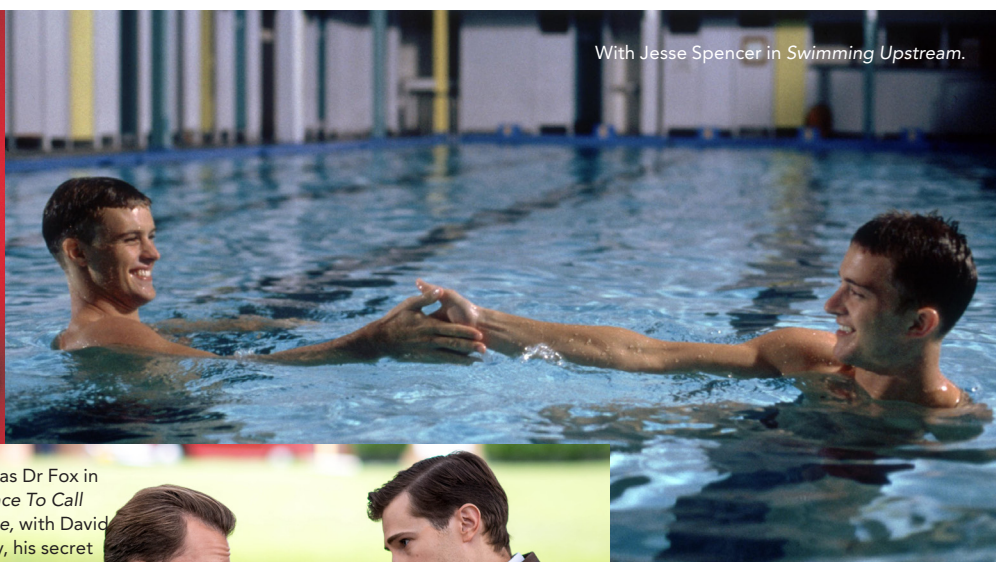
Absolutely. I think being gay now, as an actor, is almost a positive. I guess because it's so topical these days and to be gay is, in a way, so celebrated. In our industry the stigmas have slowly been broken down and there are more and more gay actors playing all kinds of roles. It's got a lot to do with not making a big fuss, and just accepting whether we are gay, straight, bi, transgender or whatever. My idea of a perfect world is where those labels are abandoned.

Do you regard *Swimming Upstream* (2003) as the breakthrough acting moment for you?

That was certainly my real breakthrough, but it's been a very-up-and-down rollercoaster ride.



Tim as he appeared in DNA in February 2000.



With Jesse Spencer in *Swimming Upstream*.



Tim as Dr Fox in *A Place To Call Home*, with David Berry, his secret partner.

Back then I was 19, and had this naïve mentality, thinking, “I’ve made it now, this is my big break” but it ebbs and flows and you keep plodding along and taking the roles that are offered and that interest you.

A Few Best Men (2011) looked like it would’ve been great fun to work on.

That was probably the most fun I’ve ever had on set. But it came at a time in my life... I was going through a considerable depression. I think that’s one of the reasons director Stephan Elliott put me in that role. I think he saw that he could use something for the character, who is also very depressed. In some ways, when I look back on that role, I wish I could have another go at it because when you’re depressed it hinders you creatively and really stunts your inspiration. There were so many choices in that scrip that I missed out on because I was so clouded.

Do you think there was a cause to that depression?

I’d been in LA for five years and lived through the writers’ strike. There had been no work and it was the first time I’d had to get a day job in LA. It was a hard time, but that film really helped me get out of a rut.

What, then, made the film so much fun to work on?

It was never ending with Kris Marshall (*Death In Paradise*) and Kevin Bishop (*Benidorm*). Both are comedians and there was this wonderful rivalry between them, like who could top the other in being more outrageous. I remember one particularly drunken night we were filming up in Katoomba and all ended up down at the Three Sisters in the early hours drinking and worrying we’d get caught!

Not a place to be crawling around drunk!

[Laughing] No, but we were invincible! I also broke a tooth on that set and I made out with an 80-year-old woman!

What the...?

There’s a very quick moment in the film where I’m drunk and make-out with one of the guests, but the original script was different. The night before the shoot, Stef called me at 2am saying, “Drax, I’ve got a great idea! How do you feel about making out with an 80-year-old woman?” I was like, “If you think it’s going to be funny, then by all means.” The next day this beautiful 80-year-old from Katoomba was there, beaming. That also happened to be the day my mother visited the set.

You played Ian Meldrum’s lover in the mini-series Molly. How did you prepare for that?

Gee, I had a very gay last year! I played Molly’s lover, Dr Henry Fox and I played Jason Langley’s husband in the play *Mothers And Sons*. I found out about the *Molly* role while I was in Bali and didn’t get to do a lot of prep for it, but it was one that didn’t require too much. It was based on a real person but by the time I came to the set the character’s name had been changed for legal reasons.

Any chance of a new album?

I was just sitting at the Hydro Majestic at Katoomba thinking about recording again. I’m still touring with the Chet Baker show, which

we are doing at the Auckland Festival at the end of this month. That show started in 2010 and has been evolving ever since. It’s great because it gives me an opportunity to sing when I’m otherwise acting.

What sort of music is inspiring you at the moment?

Flamenco. I had three weeks off filming so I went to Portugal. Wherever I am I like to listen to local music. I’d heard flamenco before but until you hear it live... the percussion in the music is just unbelievable

Who is your diva?

I like the old standards like Nina Simone and Ella Fitzgerald. I wouldn’t call myself a huge Beyoncé fan but the song *Daddy Lessons* is right up there. There’s a line, “playing black jack, listening to vinyl and riding motorbikes”.

Who are the big influences on your career?

Working with Geoffrey Rush on *Swimming Upstream* was incredible, and I’d also say the American composer Peter Matz. I worked with them both at the beginning of my career. Geoffrey is such a focused and dedicated actor, but he also has fun. He has a very contagious love of the art of acting. You hear a lot of stories about difficult actors, but Geoffrey is the complete antithesis of that. Peter Matz, sadly, passed away just after I’d done my second album, which he conducted. He taught me to listen to and trust my instincts.

Back in 2000 you played Rolf in *The Sound Of Music*, and you’re actually Austrian!

That was certainly a talking point and the publicity department loved the fact that I was 17 going on 18 – and Austrian!

MORE: *A Place To Call Home* screens on Foxtel’s Showcase.