

The Yellow Brick Blog

May 2023

LGBT+ Representation in Film

Introduction

Even since the inception of the film industry almost 150 years ago, LGBT+ characters and themes have been present in various different states.

Due to heavy censorship and fluctuating degrees of prejudice over the years, out-right onscreen representation was often portrayed negatively or for the sake of comedy. Even in modern-day media, there are numerous examples of characters being extremely coded.

When the Hays Code was first introduced to Hollywood in 1930, LGBT+ represented was limited to queer-coded villains (something that can still be seen in many of Disney's original works today) – often featuring in more tragic stories.

Although, technically, the code never cited a specific ban on homosexuality in film, the law stated that movies must not “lower the moral standards of those who see [them]” which, at the time, would have encompassed being LGBT+.

In 1968, the 'Code was lifted and the role of LGBT+ characters in film changed again with the take-off of the cult classic, The Rocky Horror Show. And it continued changing and evolving along with the public's opinions and understanding of the LGBT+ community, all the way up until the modern era.

Scroll on down to page 2, where we discuss 6 key moments in LGBT+ representation in film!

LGBT+ Terms Explained

Deadname

A previous name belonging to a person who identifying as transgender, which they no longer use and may feel uncomfortable being referred to by. A deadname is most commonly the person's birth name, but not always.

Agender

Referring to anyone who feels a lack of identity with any gender (genderless). Can sometimes be counted under the 'nonbinary' umbrella term, however this is subjective to the user.

6 Key Moments

6 Moments in the History of LGBT+ Representation in Film:

I : 1894 The 'Dickenson Experimental Sound Film' (also known as 'The Gay Brothers') short film airs showing two men dancing together and "shocking audiences with its subversion of conventional male behaviour" (according to film critic Parker Tyler).

II : 1919 The German film, 'Anders als die Anderen', advocates for LGBT+ acceptance – one of the oldest surviving films with a gay protagonist following a violinist who takes his life back after being blackmailed for his sexuality. The movie ends with an appeal for gay tolerance.

III : 1927 The silent war film 'Wings' was both the first movie to win Best Picture at the Academy Awards and depicts one of the earliest on-screen same-sex kisses in which a young soldier kisses his dying friend on the mouth.

IV : 1975 Queer camp (a form of self-expression often used by the LGBT+ community in response to a heteronormative society) reaches its peak with the musical of 'The Rocky Horror Show' wherein two newlyweds seek help from a creepy castle when their car breaks down. The following plot has been described as a "romp of murder, cannibalism, and bisexuality."

V : 1982 Gay screenwriter, Barry Sandler, writes a script focusing on a married man who realises he's gay and falls in love. The film eventually turned into 1982's 'Making Love' and aimed to create more gay role models and make up for the many negative gay stereotypes of the past decade.

VI : 1995 Based on Vito Russo's book by the same title, 'The Celluloid Closet' brings together queer film historians, creatives, and their peers to chronicle the history of LGBT+ visibility in film.

Reviews & Recommendations

Gay Britannia

Gay Britannia is the umbrella title for a season of TV and radio broadcasts launched by the BBC in 2017. The series of programs marked 50 years since the Sexual Offences Act (1967), which partially decriminalised homosexual acts that took place in private between males over the age of 21.

The season featured across several of the BBC's channels, featuring "bold and provocative stories that celebrate the LGBTQ community as well as challenging existing preconceptions and prejudices."

Gay Britannia also sought to "cast a fresh light" on the history of the LGBT+ community in Britain, as well as getting watchers and listeners to ask themselves what it means to be gay today.

Interested and want to take a look? Check out Gay Britannia on the BBC's website.

"They Both Die at the End" Adam Silvera" – 14+

A sci-fi novel following teenage boys, Mateo and Rufus, when they learn that they have 24 hours left to live in a society marked by a technology known as Death-Cast.

When the boys discover each other through an app, they decide to spend their final hours together: saying goodbye to loved ones, seeking new experiences, and falling in love.

"Good Omens" TV Edition – 13+

If you enjoyed the book by Terry Pratchett (which we've previously recommended), check out the TV show!

Starring David Tennant (Crowley) and Michael Sheen (Aziraphale), the show follows a wayward demon and a conflicted angel – adversaries (read: friends) all the way from Eden – who have both been living on Earth in an attempt to steer the moral course of humanity.

However, when the date for the Apocalypse is announced, their chaotic interactions and persisting fondness for the planet they've made their home over the last 6000 years leaves them both with a difficult set of decisions to make.