

# Queerstralia



A landmark series uncovering hidden histories

**AWARD-WINNING COMEDIAN  
ZOË COOMBS MARR UNCOVERS HIDDEN  
LGBTQIA+ HISTORIES IN THE LANDMARK  
DOCUMENTARY SERIES, *QUEERSTRALIA***

Award-winning comedian Zoë Coombs Marr uncovers hidden LGBTQIA+ histories in the landmark documentary series, *Queerstralia*.

Across three episodes, the series wipes away the straightwashing and peers into the untold and frankly fascinating Queer history of Australia. Zoë uncovers gay diggers, lesbian convict gangs and trans pioneers, cross dressing bushrangers, legendary drag acts and the modern-day heroes who have fought for change and acceptance. There are stories of protest and persecution, of love and despair and of adaptability and resilience.

The impact of colonisation on First Nations sexualities is explored, and the series documents how hard life can be when you are criminalised and pathologised just for being your authentic self. Ultimately, it shows how far the country has come and how far it has to go.

As a series and a process, *Queerstralia* is queer in its DNA: a queer story, told in a queer way, by a majority queer team, filmed in queer spaces. Throughout the series, queer people of all stripes join Zoë to explore significant moments of their lives and their shared history.

**HD 3 x 60'**  
**Guesswork Television**

# EPISODE SYNOPSES

## EPISODE 1 THE LAW AKA 'BE GAY, DO CRIME'

Queer people have long been defined by their relationship with 'the law'. Outlawed, persecuted, driven underground, for centuries they were criminalised from birth. Adding insult to that injury, historical records of their existence are mostly to be found in court documents and newspaper reports of crime.

This rollercoaster of an episode follows the path from Henry VIII's Buggery Act of 1533 through to Tasmania's decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1997 and more recent Queer brushes with legislation, from marriage equality to trans rights. It finds evidence of gay couples in the early penal colony, lesbian 'flash mobs' in 19th century prisons and the phenomenon of 'passing women', people who chose to live as the opposite gender in a world that did not yet understand what it was to be trans.

Episode one examines 20th century police crackdowns on the LGBTQIA+ community, and documents the liberation movement that blossomed in the wake of that brutality – as well as the wave of hate crimes that followed. It also looks at the rise of Queer spaces and beats, Mardi Gras and the long road to law reform.



## EPISODE SYNOPSIS

### EPISODE 2 GENDER IDENTITY AKA 'THIS TIME IT'S PERSONAL'

This episode documents the ways that members of the LGBTQIA+ community have had their identities defined and shaped, at first by others, increasingly by themselves.

Australia has a complicated relationship with gender. On the one hand, the country is hyper masculine. It celebrates icons of manliness, from the ANZACs to sporting heroes to sweaty, calloused, hard-working men in beer ads. On the other hand, it's obsessed with crossdressing and gender bending, from Edna Everage to Aunty Jack to Les Girls to Priscilla.

In this episode, Zoë examines the ways in which queer people have challenged and shaped notions of gender and identity and looks at the LGBTQIA+ community in the defence forces

and in sport. It celebrates those who have challenged how we see ourselves, from Edward DeLacy Evans, Australia's first documented trans person, to Tony Briffa, the world's first out Intersex mayor. It examines the ways that queer bodies have been defined by medicine, from aversion therapies to the never-ending search for the "gay gene". It also discovers the origins of queer language.

If you're looking for the episode that tells you how to spot a queer at 100 paces (and how to do the secret handshake), this is the one for you.

# EPISODE SYNOPSIS

## EPISODE 3 COMMUNITY AND BELONGING AKA 'TOGETHER WE'LL SHOW THE WORLD'

As the 20th century closed, Australia presented itself as strong, prosperous, confident, egalitarian and reconciled nation – but not everyone was welcome in the picture.

This episode looks at how queer people jostled for space and representation, eventually finding their own place within society. It documents the ways that communities coalesced during the AIDS era, coming together to support each other. It covers the various experiences and challenges of multicultural queerness and includes histories of coming out and same sex marriage, charting

the evolution of acceptance. It spends up big with the pink dollar, floats through four-and-a-half decades of the Mardi Gras, and takes the viewer on a journey through on screen queer representation in film and television.

This final episode in the series explores 21st century issues around Safe Schools, trans kids and the rise of the queer family, and considers what it is to be queer in this day and age.



## MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



★★★★

“A robust, and nicely irreverent, telling of Australia’s queer history... compelling”

– **The Sydney Morning Herald**

‘A sprawling and, frankly, magnificent puzzle’

– **The Guardian**

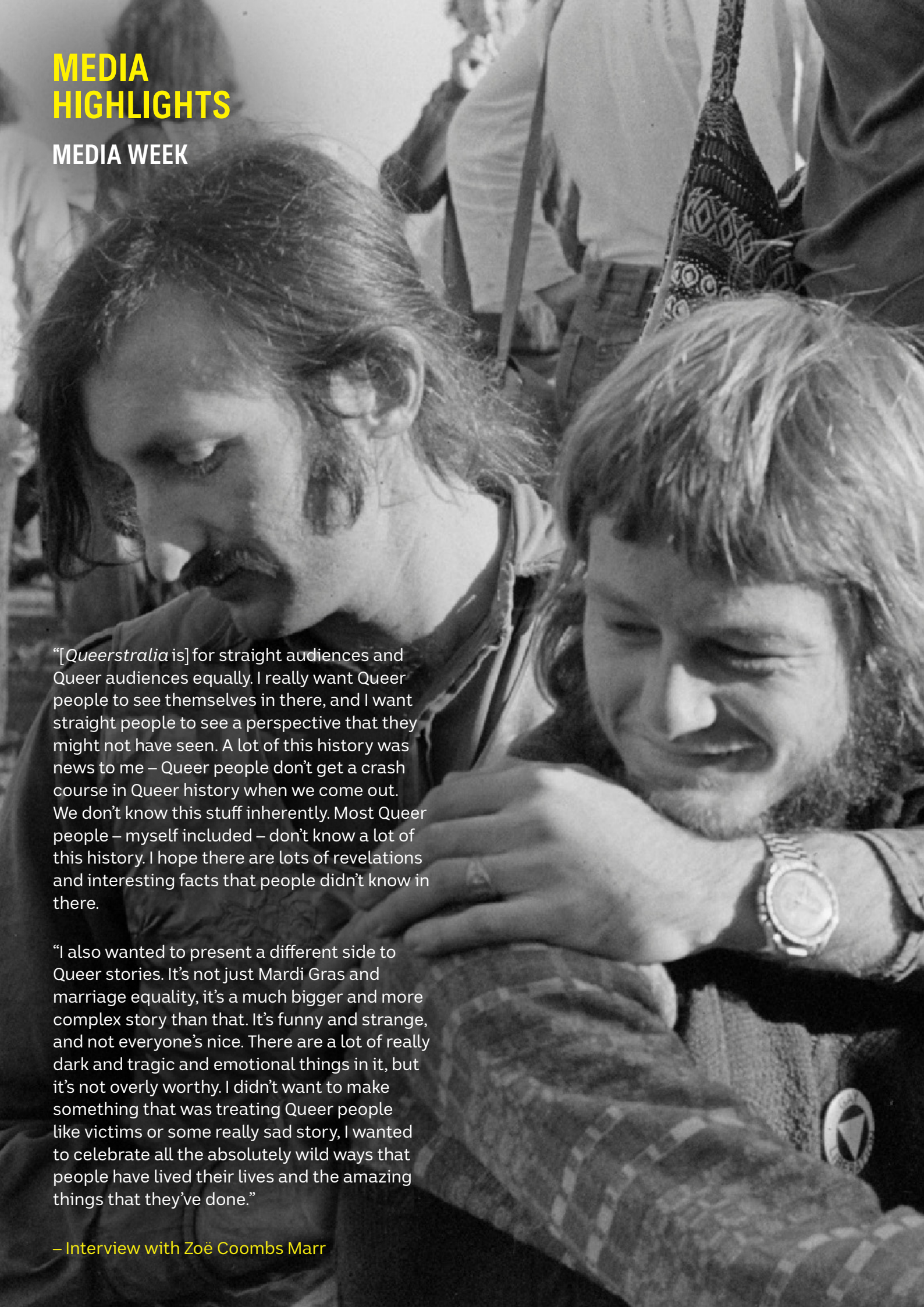
★★★★

“Coombs Marr is to be congratulated for taking on the scale of this and bringing it to the fore”

– **TV Tonight**

# MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

## MEDIA WEEK



“[*Queerstralia* is] for straight audiences and Queer audiences equally. I really want Queer people to see themselves in there, and I want straight people to see a perspective that they might not have seen. A lot of this history was news to me – Queer people don’t get a crash course in Queer history when we come out. We don’t know this stuff inherently. Most Queer people – myself included – don’t know a lot of this history. I hope there are lots of revelations and interesting facts that people didn’t know in there.

“I also wanted to present a different side to Queer stories. It’s not just Mardi Gras and marriage equality, it’s a much bigger and more complex story than that. It’s funny and strange, and not everyone’s nice. There are a lot of really dark and tragic and emotional things in it, but it’s not overly worthy. I didn’t want to make something that was treating Queer people like victims or some really sad story, I wanted to celebrate all the absolutely wild ways that people have lived their lives and the amazing things that they’ve done.”

– Interview with Zoë Coombs Marr

# TWITTER HIGHLIGHTS

Queerstralia is required viewing. An incredible documentary series about our queer elders, history and family here in so-called-Australia. Feeling incredibly proud and grateful for those who paved the way

**@AlexLahey**

So beautifully shot and told. Round of applause #Queerstralia

**@annabelcrabb**

Such a sprawling, important history already being uncovered in #Queerstralia. Revealing, at times funny and heartbreaking.

**@GavinCoote**

Blown away at how much creativity and inventiveness #queerstralia packs into its first episode. More comedians should make docos please.

**@jaredzammit**

#Queerstralia is outstanding. Congratulations to @zoecoombsmarr and everyone involved in an incredibly moving, hilarious, and important show.

**@GordiMusic**

Omg 10 min in and #queerstralia is already a masterpiece.

**@MarcFennell**

#Queerstralia is fabulous and informative. This show is so timely and very needed... As a straight mum of a gay child, this kind of program helps me to support her community as an ally and champion. Knowledge is power.

**@thepollstar**





# ZOË COOMBS MARR

## BIOGRAPHY

Zoë Coombs Marr is a performer, writer, artist and comedian. She grew up in Grafton, regional Australia, where she and her best friend staged a musical instead of going to schoolies week. Zoë has performed stand-up comedy extensively in Australia, London, Edinburgh and New York. Her solo show, *Trigger Warning*, won the Melbourne Comedy Festival Award. It was also nominated for Best Show at the 2016 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the 2017 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Drama.

From 2013, Zoë was known in comedy circles for her alter ego Dave, a retrograde male comedian with a neck beard. Zoë retired Dave in 2016 after *Trigger Warning*, but brought him back in 2022 for her latest show, *The Opener*, positing that he had been in a coma for six years and was now having to deal with the tide of history turning against his old school material, having missed events such as #MeToo. (Side note: In 2016, Zoë /Dave may also have married comedian Rhys Nicholson as a Marriage Equality protest).

In 2020, Zoë appeared as herself (sans neck beard) in *Bossy Bottom*, filmed for an Amazon Prime Video special. 2021 saw the arrival of her Agony! Misery! show. She co-hosted Mardi Gras for SBS from 2019-2021, and created amazing iso work for Lockdown Comedy Festival (Stan) and Melbourne Fringe's VCR Fest in 2020. Zoë has appeared as a regular on *The Weekly* with Charlie Pickering, and as a guest on *Spicks & Specks*.



# KEY INTERVIEWEES



## FADIA ABBOUD

Fadia co-founded Club Arak in 2002, a queer Arab dance party, to fill a gap in the LGBTQIA+ dance community and give Arab queers a place to dance to songs they'd only hear at family parties and weddings, or places where it may not be safe to be gay. Fadia is also a filmmaker, and was the co-director of the Arab Film Festival Australia between 2007 and 2017.

## DENNIS ALTMAN

In 1971, Dennis published *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, which forged a new language of homosexual politics. It is considered to have shaped gay liberation movements in the English-speaking world. His "Gay is good" proclamation at Sydney University in 1972 is said to have marked the beginning of Gay Liberation in Australia.

## TONY AYERS

Tony is one of Australia's most prolific filmmakers who has contributed considerably to queer storytelling in Australia including *Cut Snake*, *Barracuda* and *The Family Law*. In his earlier works, such as *Double Trouble*, *Sadness* and *China Dolls*, Tony explores the themes and intersectionalities between race, identity and queerness.

## TONY BRIFFA

Tony is the world's first known intersex mayor. Born with male and female sex characteristics, she underwent surgery without her consent when she was seven years old. Tony has long campaigned to stop non-essential medical interventions modifying the sex characteristics of intersex children until they are old enough to give consent.

# KEY INTERVIEWEES

## RICKI COUGHLAN

Ricki became one of Australia's first public transgender athletes after she was outed in 1991 on the front page of *The Sunday Telegraph*. Ricki fronted up to Athletics NSW and Athletics Australia, who cleared her to continue competing domestically. She went on to be the first transgender athlete in Australia to be granted a place in open women's sport.

## BEV FRANCIS

Bev's sporting career has spanned several disciplines and multiple world championships, from bodybuilding and powerlifting to shot put, earning her the accolade of Strongest Woman in History. Bev was the first woman in the world to bench press more than 300 lb (140 kg), broke more than 40 world powerlifting records and was undefeated during her powerlifting career. She has challenged femininity and gender stereotypes.

## HANNAH GADSBY

Hannah is an Australian comedian, writer, documentarian and actor. Hannah grew up in Tasmania, and lived through the time when homosexuality was criminalised in the state. Hannah's Emmy award-winning *Nanette* – with its themes of sexism, homophobia and violence – had global resonance. In 2022, Hannah signed a deal with Netflix to showcase genderqueer voices from around the world in a stand-up comedy special.

## DEAN GILBERT

Dean is a Wiradjuri man and a Brotherboy Elder. He was one of the first loud and proud Brotherboys, and the first Indigenous transgender man to get married by law in Australia. Over the past decade, Brotherboy visibility has been on the rise thanks to people such as Dean.



## KEY INTERVIEWEES



### NAYUKA GORRIE

Nayuka is a Gunai/Kurnai, Gunditjmara, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta comedy television writer. Their writing centres on Black, feminist and queer politics. Nayuka's television writing includes *Get Krack!n*, co-writing and performing in *Black Comedy*, and the five-part children's series *Thalu*. They have contributed to the anthologies 'Growing Up Queer in Australia' and 'Animals Make Us Humans'.

### HAPPY HO

Happy was one of the founding members of Sydney Asian Lesbians which emerged in the early 1990s. She also co-directed the Asian Gay and Lesbian Pride movement with one of Australia's leading social photographers William Yang, hosting events such as the Mardi Gras Chinese New Year at the Chinese Gardens in Darling Harbour in the 1980-90s.

### CRYSTAL LOVE

Crystal is often referred to as the "mother" of Tiwi Island Sistergirls. She's a Lajamanu woman and is known as Darwin's first Indigenous female impersonator. Crystal has danced in the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony, toured the world raising awareness for issues such as HIV/AIDS and is the cofounder of Sisters and Brothers NT.

### STAN MUNRO

Stan was one of the original members of the legendary cabaret show *Les Girls*, which began in Sydney in 1963. The show was later brought to Melbourne in 1970, where Stan was the compère and the lead performer of the Melbourne *Les Girls* cast. He has toured in Beirut, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong.

# KEY INTERVIEWEES

## IAN ROBERTS

Ian is a former professional rugby league footballer who became Australia's first and only openly gay NRL player when he came out in 1994 while playing for the Manly Sea Eagles. During the marriage equality debate, Ian was successful in appealing to the NRL to throw its support behind the yes campaign.

## GEORGIE STONE OAM

Georgie's media appearances have brought much-needed awareness to the issues young trans and gender diverse people face today. At 10-years-old, she became the youngest Australian to receive hormone blockers, which led a high-profile campaign and a change in the law to allow young transgender people to access hormone treatment without having to go through the Family Court.

## MAGDA SZUBANSKI AO

Madga is one of Australia's most loved comedy icons, an actor and performer who came out on national television in 2012 in support of marriage equality in Australia, and campaigned tirelessly for that cause, playing a crucial role in securing the yes victory.

## ANTHONY BRANDON WONG

Anthony has been acting for over 40 years (*The Matrix Reloaded*, *The Family Law*), across film, TV and theatre. In the 1990s, he featured in Tony Ayers' *China Dolls*, and has been active in the HIV/AIDS community, starring in *Blood and Honour* produced by the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, which was one of the first Australian works in the theatre to deal with the epidemic.

