

= Homer 's Phobia =

" Homer 's Phobia " is the fifteenth episode of the eighth season of the American animated television series The Simpsons . It first aired on the Fox network in the United States on February 16 , 1997 . In the episode , Homer dissociates himself from new family friend John after discovering that John is gay . Homer fears that John will have a negative influence on his son Bart and decides to ensure Bart 's heterosexuality by taking him hunting .

It was the first episode written by Ron Hauge and was directed by Mike B. Anderson . George Meyer pitched " Bart the homo " as an initial idea for an episode while show runners Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein were planning an episode involving Lisa " discovering the joys of campy things " . Oakley and Weinstein combined the two ideas and they eventually became " Homer 's Phobia " . Fox censors originally found the episode unsuitable for broadcast because of its controversial subject matter , but this decision was reversed after a turnover in the Fox staff . Filmmaker John Waters guest @-@ starred , providing the voice of the new character , John .

" Homer 's Phobia " was the show 's first episode to revolve entirely around gay themes and received a positive critical response both for its humor and anti @-@ homophobia message . It won four awards , including an Emmy Award for Outstanding Animated Program ( For Programming One Hour or Less ) and a GLAAD Media Award for " Outstanding TV ? Individual Episode " .

= = Plot = =

Needing money to pay for a repair after Bart damages the gas line , the Simpson family visits " Cockamamie 's " , an offbeat collectibles shop , hoping that it will purchase one of the family 's heirlooms ( an " authentic " civil war doll which turns out to be a decorative liquor bottle ) . Homer meets John , the antiques dealer , who explains that much of the merchandise is there because of its camp value . Bart and Lisa take an instant liking to John , and Homer invites him to the Simpsons ' house to see the campy items that the family owns . The next morning , Homer tells Marge that he likes John and suggests they invite him and " his wife " over for a drink some time . Marge tries to hint repeatedly to an oblivious Homer that John is gay , and when she eventually can 't she tells him face to face and Homer is horrified . Homer 's attitude towards John changes completely , and he turns against him , refusing to join his tour of Springfield . The rest of the family joins John and has a good time , but Homer is upset with the family upon their return . The rest of the Simpson family continue to enjoy John 's company , especially Bart , who starts wearing Hawaiian shirts and dancing in a woman 's wig . This makes Homer uneasy , and he begins to fear Bart is gay .

Homer endeavors to make Bart more masculine by forcing him to look at a cigarette billboard featuring scantily clad women in hopes Bart will be attracted to girls , but instead Bart gets the urge to smoke " anything slim . " Homer then escorts him to see a steel mill to show Bart a manly environment ; however , much to his surprise and dismay , the entire workforce is gay , and during their breaks they turn the mill into " The Anvil " , a gay disco . A desperate Homer insists on taking Bart deer hunting with Moe and Barney . When they cannot find any deer , they decide instead to go to " Santa 's Village " and shoot the reindeer in the corral , despite a tearful Bart being reluctant to do so . This backfires when the reindeer attack them . John , with the help of Lisa and Marge , uses a Japanese Santa Claus robot to scare off the reindeer and save the hunting party . Homer accepts John , more or less , and tells Bart , who is still unaware of his father 's concerns , that any way he lives his life is fine with him . After Lisa informs Bart that Homer thinks he is gay , Bart is stunned . The episode ends with everyone driving off in John 's car .

Just before the end credits a dedication to the steelworkers of America is shown , reading " Keep reaching for that rainbow ! " .

= = Production = =

The original concept for the episode came from a few lines of show ideas written by George Meyer . One of them read " Bart the homo " , and Ron Hauge was selected to write the episode , with the

story stemming from that line . The idea of using filmmaker John Waters as a guest star had been around for a while . Many of the staff were fans of his work , and showrunners Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein had planned to use him in an episode called " Lisa and Camp " , which revolved around Lisa " discovering the joys of campy things " . Their idea was combined with Meyer 's and it became this episode . The episode was originally titled " Bart Goes to Camp " , but was renamed because the joke was too oblique . Mike B. Anderson directed the episode , telling The Gold Coast Bulletin : " When I read the script I was enthralled , not only because of the visual possibilities , but also because the story felt very solid . It was engaging and surprising and I really put heart into that episode . "

Waters accepted his invitation to be a guest star instantly , stating that if it was good enough for the actress Elizabeth Taylor , who appeared in the season four episodes " Lisa 's First Word " and " Krusty Gets Kancelled " , it was good enough for him . He joked , however , about a negative reaction if his character would be made to look like fitness personality Richard Simmons . John 's design was based largely on Waters ' own appearance ; for animation reasons , Waters moustache was changed from straight to curvy , so that it did not look like a mistake . As thanks for his performance , the show 's staff sent Waters an animation cel from the episode , which he now has hanging in his office .

According to Oakley , the Fox censor objected to " Homer 's Phobia " being aired . The normal procedure is for an episode 's script to be sent to the censor and then faxed back with a list of lines and words that should be substituted . However this episode came back with two pages of notes about almost every single line in the show . The censors stated that they did not like the use of the word " gay " , or the discussion of homosexuality at all , and closed with a paragraph which stated that " the topic and substance of this episode are unacceptable for broadcast " . Usually the censor notes are ignored as the offending lines and problems are dealt with after the episode has been animated . In this case the entire episode was deemed a problem , so it could not be solved in this way . The staff asked Waters if he thought the gay community would find the episode offensive . Homer 's use of the word " fag " to insult John was his only problem , so the writers changed it to " queer " . The censor problems ultimately came to nothing as when the episode came back from animation in South Korea , the then @-@ Fox president had just been fired and replaced , with the censors being replaced as well . The new censors sent back merely one line : " acceptable for broadcast " .

The " gay steel mill " scene was written by Steve Tompkins . He first pitched that Homer and Bart would encounter longshoremen , but it was too much work to animate the lading of ships , so a steel mill was used instead . Tompkins also wrote a different third act for the episode , which was never produced . Instead of Homer , Bart , Barney and Moe going deer hunting and ending up at " Santa 's Village " they would go back to the steel mill . There , Homer would attempt to prove his heterosexuality by having a human tractor pulling contest with some of the steel mill workers . It was decided that it " didn 't really service the story " and was dropped .

= = Cultural references = =

The episode features numerous cultural references . The song " Gonna Make You Sweat ( Everybody Dance Now ) " by C + C Music Factory is played twice during the episode : first as the steel mill transforms into a disco , and second over the closing credits . Homer 's record collection includes music by The New Christy Minstrels and The Wedding of Lynda Bird Johnson , the albums Loony Luau and Ballad of the Green Berets by Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler . The song that John picks out and he and Homer dance to is " I Love the Nightlife " by Alicia Bridges , and the song that Bart dances to is " The Shoop Shoop Song ( It 's in His Kiss ) " by Betty Everett . When John is introduced there is a plastic pink flamingo lying in the background , a reference to John Waters 's film Pink Flamingos . Items in John 's store include several buttons endorsing political campaigns of Richard Nixon , Dan Quayle and Bob Dole as well as an issue of TV Guide owned by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis which features the title characters from the sitcom Laverne & Shirley on the cover . When John takes the Simpson family on a driving tour of Springfield 's shopping district , he points

out a store where he claims that the Mexican film actress Lupe Vélez bought the toilet she drowned in . This is a reference to the urban legend that Velez was found dead with her head in the toilet the night of her suicide in 1944 .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings and awards = = =

In its original American broadcast , " Homer 's Phobia " finished tied for 47th place in the weekly ratings for the week of February 10 ? 16 , 1997 with a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 7 . It was the fourth @- @ highest @- @ rated show on the Fox Network that week . The episode won the Emmy Award for Outstanding Animated Program ( For Programming One Hour or Less ) in 1997 . Mike Anderson won the Annie Award for Best Individual Achievement : Directing in a TV Production , and the WAC Award for Best Director for Primetime Series at the 1998 World Animation Celebration . Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation called it " a shining example of how to bring intelligent , fair and funny representations of our community onto television " and awarded it the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding TV ? Individual Episode . Several of the episode 's animation cels were selected for display at the Silver K Gallery in Melbourne , Australia in 2001 .

= = = Critical reviews and analysis = = =

" Homer 's Phobia " has been cited as a significant part of The Simpsons ' exploration of lesbian , gay , bisexual , and transgender ( LGBT ) themes . The series made several references to homosexuality before the episode aired . In the 1990 episode " Simpson and Delilah " , the character Karl ( voiced by Harvey Fierstein ) kisses Homer , while the recurring character Waylon Smithers is often shown to be in love with his boss , Montgomery Burns , initially suggestively and since then more overtly . However , " Homer 's Phobia " was the first episode to revolve entirely around homosexual themes . Two later episodes that explored LGBT issues were " Three Gays of the Condo " and " There 's Something About Marrying " .

When the episode aired , the production team received " very few " complaints about its content , with most of the response being positive . Alan Frutkin gave the episode a positive write @- @ up in the LGBT @- @ interest magazine The Advocate , calling it " vintage Simpsons . " Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood stated in their book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , that : " Only The Simpsons could do this so tongue @- @ in @- @ cheek that nobody could get in a tizzy about it . Very good indeed . " In the book Leaving Springfield , Matthew Henry praised the episode 's critiquing of " the most common misconception about homosexuality : namely that gayness is somehow contagious " , as well as its other themes . Catharine Lumby of the University of Sydney cited the episode as an example of good satire as it " managed to explore a lot of [ homosexual ] issues in quite a deep way [ ... ] without being overtly political " , which she claimed , along with the episode 's humor , made its anti @- @ homophobia message more successful than that of other gay @- @ themed shows like Queer as Folk . In his review of The Simpsons ? The Complete Eighth Season DVD , Todd Gilchrist said that " Homer 's Phobia " " certainly qualifies as one of the all @- @ time greatest episodes . "

It was placed fifth on Entertainment Weekly 's top 25 The Simpsons episode list . In 2003 , USA Today published a top 10 chosen by the webmaster of The Simpsons Archive , which had this episode listed in tenth place , and it was again placed tenth on AskMen.com 's " Top 10 : Simpsons Episodes " list . IGN.com ranked John Waters 's performance as the ninth @- @ best guest appearance in the show 's history , with TV Guide naming him the third @- @ best film related guest star . In a 2008 article , Entertainment Weekly named Waters as one of the 16 best Simpsons guest stars . John Patterson of The Guardian wrote that Waters ' appearance " felt to me like a summit meeting between the most influential pop @- @ culture figures of the last 25 years . "

In 2002 , Off the Telly writers Steve Williams and Ian Jones named " Homer 's Phobia " one of the

five worst episodes of The Simpsons , stating that it " leaves such a nasty taste in the mouth " , as Homer is " quite simply a bastard " throughout the course of the episode . The pair concluded by saying " this is a side of the show we 'd not seen before , nor particularly wanted to see . " In June 2003 , Igor Smykov sued the Russian television channel REN TV on claims that The Simpsons , along with Family Guy , were " morally degenerate and promoted drugs , violence and homosexuality . " As evidence , " Homer 's Phobia " was shown to the judge to prove that The Simpsons promoted homosexuality , and thus should not be aired again on the channel . The case was thrown out after one day .