

LANCE LOUD

b. June 26, 1951

d. December 22, 2001

FIRST OUT REALITY STAR

“It was a pleasure to be a gay eyesore.”

His appearance as a groundbreaking out gay man in the 1973 PBS documentary series about his family made him a celebrity.

Alanson Russell “Lance” Loud was a television celebrity, a rock singer and a writer. His participation in the groundbreaking 1973 PBS documentary series, “An American Family,” made him the first out gay reality TV star — before the genre had a name and before openly gay men appeared on air.

Loud was born in 1951 and grew up with his four siblings in Santa Barbara, California. As a child, he envisioned himself as an artist and a rebel. At age 13, he wrote a letter to his idol, Andy Warhol. To everyone’s surprise, Warhol wrote back, beginning a lifelong correspondence with Loud. Warhol’s outrageousness influenced Loud’s own persona.

Loud entered the public eye as the eldest child of an upper-middle-class California family whose everyday lives were chronicled, cinema-verité style, in an experimental PBS series, “An American Family.” The 12-part documentary ran from January through March 1973 and drew 10 million viewers.

Now considered the first reality show on U.S. television, “An American Family” garnered harsh criticism and considerable praise for challenging the conventional depiction of “normal” family life. Loud’s parents argued about divorce and Lance came out to them at a time when homosexuality was largely concealed and entirely absent from primetime TV. Reviled by the media, Loud, with his bold conviction to live life on his own terms, captivated audiences. He quickly became an inspiration and a hero to legions of young people — both gay and straight — nationwide.

During the show’s filming, Loud moved to New York City to resurrect a new wave band he founded in Santa Barbara with a female friend. Fronted by Loud, the Mumps cultivated a loyal following, regularly selling out at popular clubs like CBGB and Max’s Kansas City. They were often billed with soon-to-be-famous artists like the Ramones, the Talking Heads and Blondie. In 1980, after failing to find a record label, the Mumps disbanded.

Loud moved back to California and launched a new career as a music and pop-culture writer. Over the next two decades, he contributed to a variety of magazines, including Interview, Details and Vanity Fair. He also wrote a regular column for The Advocate about his life as a gay celebrity.

Loud struggled with drug abuse and died of liver failure at age 50 from hepatitis C and HIV co-infection. Major media outlets, including The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times and PBS published obituaries and tributes. TIME magazine remembered him famously remarking, “Television ate my family.”



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