

By George, who'd be Julia!



BY MARTIN JACKSON

GEORGE ROBERTS, the trawler-man's son from Fleetwood, has had to spend a year in 'drag' as Julia before the NHS will permit him a sex-change operation.

Even then he will not be a woman, only a mutilated man. Legally forbidden to marry, biologically incapable of having a baby.

It has been impossible to follow this week's extraordinary trilogy A Change Of Sex (BBC 2) without being moved to pity or horror. Much of the time, both. Horror at the agonies George-Julia is putting himself through, pity that he is driven by the need to do it at all.

Last night's film began as George sets off into a new life as Julia, hair permed, eyes mascaraed—'A woman has to look her best'—and into a mess of problems, losing both her job and her home.

But there is a spirited bravado about Julia (is she brave or just brazen?), who is soon in her flat and a new job as a waitress in a gay disco.

I couldn't go into a straight bar and be

chatted up by a guy because he would want me for one thing. I have now found a man who doesn't want me for my body.'

Julia's friend Amer is 'straight' but he too has an identity problem. An Iraqi with an Iranian passport!

Deflated

Hand in hand they are off to an idyllic weekend in Brighton. David Pearson filmed them romantically by the seaside. Moody, natural light photography. A sequence totally out of tune with the rest of the programme.

Meanwhile, Julia's problems are not yet

over. Every couple of months she has to parade before the NHS psychiatrist who will eventually decide on the sex change operation. He is a forbidding, unsympathetic figure, heard but never actually seen on the film.

'I don't like people who step out of line,' he complains as if they are not the very people who needed his care. 'I find it irritating. I do not think you have conducted yourself particularly tactfully.' If nothing else, he deflated Julia and her new 40B bust.

Tonight, we have the sex change operation. I must warn you it is filmed in graphic detail. I am not sure about the series. It has veered

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The same applies in triplicate to A Change of Sex (BBC2), in which George Roberts set out to become Julia Grant. George was seen at work, in clothes shops, and at various interviews, and of course nobody he met wanted to look like a bigot in front of the cameras. So it was not until well on into the second programme that George was seen coming up against something that really sounded like the harshness of life, and oddly enough he got it from the very doctor who was supposed to be helping him. Deeply peeved — professionally peeved—by the fact that George/Julia had impatiently gone off to have a bit of private plastic surgery done in Hove, this psychiatrist, from off-screen, gave Julia a most unpleasant earful about medical ethics. Doctors are at their ungainliest when standing on ceremony and this one was self-righteous as well. A cuff round the ear from Julia's handbag would not have come amiss. More sympathetic authorities were located in episode three, and the unwanted bits of Julia pruned away. What chiefly came out of the story was the tolerance of her family. People who have already suffered much find it easy to understand when someone takes drastic measures in the cause of simple happiness.

THE BBC programme A Change of Sex on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of last week was a remarkable affair.

Remarkable for the amount of screen time devoted to it.

I didn't like it and yet I saw every minute of it. I guess I was curious. I found it offensive and pathetic at the same time.

It puzzled me. Why was it made? It wasn't instructive and it certainly wasn't entertainment.

I also cannot understand what prompted George Roberts to submit himself to this massive public exposure and all the derogatory comments it is bound to create.

George, or Julia, seemed a nice enough person, certainly not a blatant exhibitionist. I found the whole thing very sad and I had enormous sympathy for him while disapproving of what he was doing.

No matter what bits were taken off or added on he is still by nature a male.

The really discordant note came from psychiatrist Dr. John Randell. I found him rude and arrogant.

He acted like a minor God. He appeared offensive and if I had a patient of a man

dangerously close to voyeurism and I wonder if the BBC have really done George any favours subsidising his metamorphosis to Julia.

LONDON EVENING NEWS (RICHARD AFTON)

Making too much of sex-change George...

like this I would have told him with a few short sharp words what to do with his opinion.

In stark contrast, the surgeon who did the breast implants was kindness itself.

The final operation in Friday's episode was gruesome in its gory detail and my son

and wife couldn't take it.

I am still unconvinced that there was any reason for putting this programme on for three days. Apart from sensationalism and possibly because it was a cheap way of filling three hours of programming.