

# Brooklyn Shore?

## Reality TV Targets Brooklyn Beaches

By Jess Goodwin

Despite its arguable inanity, MTV's "Jersey Shore," a reality show based around a pack of "guidos" and "guidettes" living, working and partying together at the titular vacation spot, is a big part of a revolution in reality TV. Though in many ways like the network's "Real World" — strangers are thrown together to co-inhabit a house and, naturally, drama ensues — "Jersey Shore" thrives on its lack of diversity. There are personality discrepancies among the young cast, but they are, for the most part, the same kind of person. They all love to tan, dance, fight and fill up on hearty servings of Italian food.

And people love them.

Why people love them is up for debate, but they can't get enough of the young "Jersey Shore"-eans. Perhaps it's the car crash effect — it's impossible to look away from such a disaster, let alone a whole posse of disasters — or, perhaps it's the fact that, whether they mean to be or not, Snooki and crew are kind of hilarious. Some probably genuinely find these kids appealing because they can relate to them, while others simply love to hate them. Many have denounced the show, accusing it of furthering negative stereotypes about not only Italian-Americans, but New Jerseyans as well.

However it's perceived, "Jersey Shore" is a mark of a current trend in reality TV: people of questionable intelligence making questionable decisions. Shows like "Jersey Shore," "16 and Pregnant," and its spinoff "Teen Mom" all deal with people who, at least when portrayed with MTV's filter, may seem kind of... dumb. Because of the things they say and do, they're left open to be judged, wrongly or otherwise, by their audience.

Some people find no joy in watching the dimwitted exploited (though, again it's debatable that the cast of "Jersey Shore" are really as idiotic as they come off — they may very well be smart enough to manipulate the way people perceive them), but those who do made "Jersey Shore" one of the highest-rated original cable shows during its run. It then comes as no surprise, after such success, that various copycat-endeavors are popping up — including a couple set in our very own borough.

### A Shore of Our Own

Back in February, news broke of a casting call for "Brighton Beach," virtually a Russian-American version of "Jersey Shore." On a Saturday night in early March, dozens of young hopefuls gathered at Passion, a Russian dance club. The casters apparently hadn't found everyone they were looking for though, because later in the month they appealed to candidates using Twitter and Facebook, asking them to send in audition videos using pre-selected questions on the show's web site. By the end of April they'd extended the submission deadline to May 7. A girl on Facebook posted in one of the show's page's forums, "DO YOU HAVE A NETWORK. A PRODUCTION

TEAM. Anything that would indicate that this is actually, you know, happening, outside of Mike Rozz's bedroom." (She's referring to another member of the discussion board.)

In an interview with the blog *Sheepshead*

*Bites* back in February, one of the show's producers, Elina Miller, revealed that she and her co-creators, Alina Dizik and Christine Mahin, were "in talks with cable networks to air the show," but that everything was "contingent on casting." The producers could not be reached at press time, but as of this past Saturday, the show's Facebook page wrote, "getting a show on TV is a long and tedious process... we're working on it," in response to one fan's question about whether the program was still happening.

Several weeks ago, a casting call similar to that for "Brighton Beach" popped up. "Brooklyn Beach Club" posted an ad on its web site, looking for "Bensonhurst Divas" and "Coney Island Dons" to take part in "this summer's newest and sexiest TV show." Asking that its applicants be Italian-American (or at least "live and love the Italian-American lifestyle") and "appear" to be between the ages of 21 and 30, amongst other things, the show's creators also request they answer such questions as what a typical day for them is, why they know they're sexy and what their perfect date would be like.

The open audition took place Saturday at the Sea Gate Beach Club on Surf Avenue, from 1 to 6:30 p.m. The call asked that "hot hunks and gorgeous gals" come with "BFFs ... boys ... girls ... boyfriends ... girlfriends and ... ex's," bring their finest beachwear, and be prepared to wait because the "turnout is expected to be huge."

### Brooklyn's Finest

The turnout rounded out to about 60 by the end of the evening. After waiting by the pool for a bit, goofing around and talking with one of the crew's cameramen, the applicants were taken into a side room of Sea Gate one-by-one (or two-by-two in some cases) to do a 15 to 20-minute on-camera interview with the show's producers and several club employees. Each applicant was asked to state his or her name, where they're from and where they live now, and to describe him or herself. The producers asked them why they should be chosen, as well as their policies on "hooking up."

Anthony "Jose" Melis, 23, a hairdresser from Sunset Park, admits he can be somewhat shy, but doesn't deny that he likes to be the center of attention (his bubblegum pink swim trunks can attest to that). He is openly gay, but claims that that doesn't stop the ladies from looking his way.

Those who are chosen for the cast will become members of the Beach Club. Some might work at the club, or get involved with activities the club sponsors each summer. If any problems do come up, they'll have to report to the club's council for possible disciplinary action.

"It won't just be about how they take to the community," said producer Isaac Bolden. "It's also about how the community takes to them."

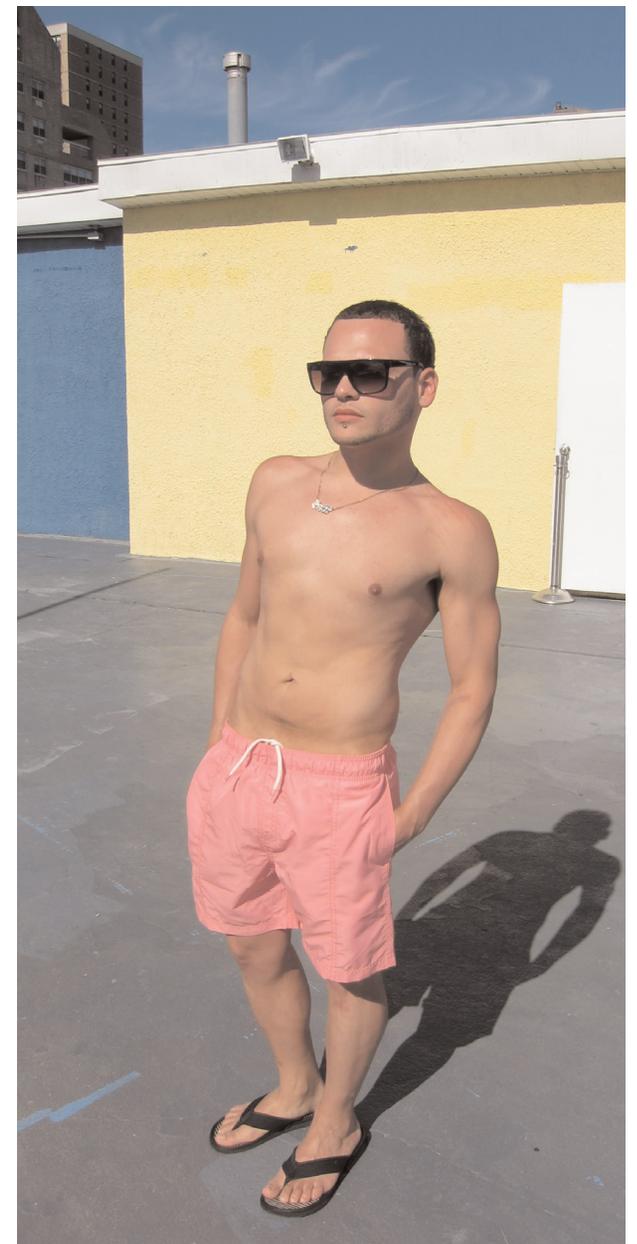
Bolden and his co-producer Joy Huang, reported that a major network is involved (legally they are bound not to divulge which one) and that everything hinges on finding the right group of kids. The idea for the show was presented to them by another producer about a month ago, and they've taken every step necessary to make the process move as quickly and smoothly as possible.

"We have to be cast by Memorial Day," said Bolden, citing the sense of immediacy circling the project. "It's practically summer now, so we've gotta get everything together in time to shoot by the time it actually starts."

"We've gotten a good 100-plus responses," added Huang, referring to online applications she and Bolden received prior to the casting call.

Bolden and Huang are familiar with the "Jersey Shore" comparisons, to which they respond, "The difference is that this isn't going to be a train wreck. There'll be drama, no doubt, but it's more about people having a great time."

Not a train wreck? Where's the fun in that?



Anthony "Jose" Melis

JESS GOODWIN