



Wonderland: Boy

Cheerleaders, BBC2 (Pic: Quark)

There were times in **Wonderland: Boy Cheerleaders (BBC2)** when Glee turned pretty Glum. Deciding that a bunch of boys from a rough estate in Leeds bouncing around with pompoms was not enough of a story in itself, director James Newton went looking for a deeper meaning beneath the razzmatazz. Absent dads and aspirations bubbled away beneath the beats: could dance enable these lads to overcome their troubled backgrounds?

Add in to the mix a sub-plot about nine-year old Harvey's dreams of becoming the next Billy Elliot and you had all the ingredients for an old-school tearjerker. Except the boys themselves, despite the odd scrape at school, were almost defiantly non-messed up. They danced for the fun of it, skipping lightly over schoolyard taunts of 'camp' and 'gay' and 'poof'. Most of them played footie and rugby as well: the whole boys don't dance thing is an old story, they're all over Britain's Got Talent like a rash.

Still, they did their best to play the angst angle, Harvey talking wistfully about the dad he no longer saw. 'If he comes to see me dance, I'll be chuffed to bits but I'm not really expecting him.' But it felt pasted on, a storyline prompted by preconceived notions about struggling kids from single parent families. Much more fun – and more to the point – was watching head coach Ian Rodley and his amazing hair do a priceless line in mock exasperation as he whipped his boys, the DAZL Diamonds, into shape for the UK Cheerleading Championships. There, they were taking the girls on at their own game.

The dance nerd in me feels compelled to point out that cheerleading was an all-male preserve in the US until 1923, so the Leeds boys were in fact paying homage to history. But facts were not what Boy Cheerleaders was about: in its own way, Newton's film was every bit as manipulative as an edition of The X Factor, our emotions twisted this way and that by faking drama where none really existed. Will Elliott master the worm? Will tough mum Keeley ban misbehaving son Harvey from dancing? The story didn't need those distractions. There was enough joy in the dance, in Ian's banter with the kids – 'we've got to learn to spell swapshop with our poms' – to more than carry the show.

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