

# Entertainment

## TELEVISION

### It's sex galore on Straight Up

New teen drama pulls no punches on facts of life

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The cadaver that is the CBC-TV drama division just sat up and said hello.

The new dramatic series *Straight Up* (debuting 8:30 p.m. today in Calgary on ch. 6-9) is raw and risky affirmation that there's life in the old girl yet.

This is fine television, indeed; stylish yet dangerously authentic, so honest in its depiction of urban teen life in the '90s that it makes a show like *Beverly Hills, 90210*, with its pretty, vacant cast, seem positively alien by comparison.

"It's about sexing in the back seat of a car, looking for raves, getting busted by cops, guys driving around with pieces, goth girls and atheism. It's about the core of our being," says Marina Filatow, the series teen consultant.

In fact, it is.

#### FRANK SEXUALITY

The first chapter of this six-part series, titled *Jam*, is as frank and believable a portrayal of sexuality as you'll see on television. Marcia is frustrated with her boyfriend Tony, with whom she operates a sidewalk T-shirt stand in Toronto. He doesn't get what her needs are, sexually. When she tries to drop some clues, all she gets is his anger and insecurity.

"Every time it's what works for you," she says. "You know, you get yours but that's all I get. I get yours. I don't get mine. I don't get anything."

There is sex galore here, listless sex in bed to the beat of rap music, sex in the car; solitary sex, sex in the dialogue that doesn't shrink from the various colloquialisms. Watching this, mesmerized, one forms the notion that someone at the CBC has decided that if the embattled broadcaster is going down for the count, it's going down swinging haymakers.

#### GRAPHIC EDGINESS

Make no mistake, the graphic edginess of this series will be tough to take for some viewers. The characters here swear and drink and smoke dope just like real teenagers.

Producer/creators Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell say they're prepared for some audience backlash and they're certain to get it, particularly from Western Canada where this show is airing a little earlier than it should.

However, after watching three of the six episodes, I'm a believer. Somebody ought to buy Susan Morgan, creative head of TV dramatic series at CBC,

#### Some Straight Up Facts



SARAH POLLEY: A tortured goth girl

- **SUBJECT:** A gritty look at an eclectic mix of teenagers
- **CAST:** Most have never been in front of a camera, though Sarah Polley of *Road to Avonlea* fame stars as Lily
- **PRODUCERS:** Adrienne Mitchell and Janis Lundman, who made the teen documentaries *Talk 16* and its followup *Talk 19*
- **DIRECTOR:** Jerry Ciccoritti, a Gemini-Award winning director whose credits include *Due South*, *Lonesome Dove*, *ENG*, *North of 60* and feature film *Paris, France*
- **PRODUCED BY:** Alliance Communications and Back Alley Film Productions Ltd., in association with the CBC and with financial participation of Telefilm Canada and the newly created Cable Production Fund
- **QUOTE:** "Straight Up is not specifically about issues. For instance, you see kids at a party drinking but it's not about getting drunk. It's about trying to cope."  
— Co-producer Adrienne Mitchell.

Source: The Canadian Press

#### Preview

**STRAIGHT UP**, six-part CBC dramatic series debuting today at 8:30 p.m. on Ch. 6-9.

some champagne. *Straight Up* is a bold change of direction for an entertainment division that has so rarely lived up to its name in recent history.

Like *Kids*, film-maker Larry Clark's controversial and relentless foray into the world of New York teens, *Straight Up* pulses with a documentary-like realism.

The stories ring so true because they come from the source -- based on many of the stories that Lundman and Mitchell heard while hanging out with Toronto teens, interviewing them and videotaping them for their feature length documentary *Talk 16* in 1991 and short sequel *Talk 19*, in 1994.

"We sat down with them, individually and in groups, and just chatted. They told us about their lives, the stuff they deal with, their adventures, all

the boring, ugly and every things, and it formed the basis of the six episodes in the series," says Mitchell.

The characters drift seamlessly in and out of the six stories, set against an urban Toronto backdrop of fast food stops, video arcades, subway stations and record stores. There are remarkable performances here by the young ensemble cast, most of whom have never been in front of a camera before.

#### CRACKLING PORTRAYAL

Notable newcomers include Robin Brule as Marcia, Tomas Chovanec as Tony, and Justin Peroff as Rory. The last of the six episodes, involving black youths and their harassment by police, features a crackling, razor's-edge portrayal by Merwin Mondesir.

The cast includes only one seasoned professional, Sarah Polley of *Road to Avonlea* fame, who turns up as the tortured and airy goth girl Lily. (She looks amazingly like Wynonna Ryder's character in *Beetlejuice*.)

*Straight Up* is directed by Jerry Ciccoritti (*Due South*, *Net Worth*) and written by Andrew Rai Berzins.