

**a**t 18, Marina Filatow considers herself pretty lucky. Not long ago, she was ready to drop out of high school (her attendance was poor, anyway), adopt a party lifestyle and never look back. Now, not only does she attend Oasis Alternative Secondary School in Toronto, but she also landed a prime job as a teen consultant for the new CBC series, *Straight Up* – a show which revolves solely around the lives of teenagers and promises to deliver the highs and lows of their lives in an open, honest manner.

Filatow, who lives on campus at York University with her student mother, says her teacher at Oasis hooked her up with the interview for the job on the bold new series. "It was a little scary at first," she says, reflecting on the interview process. "But I became more relaxed when they asked me to answer their questions honestly." Two interviews later, Filatow had been hired for the job and was even asked to try out for the role of Yasmin, a girl who likes talking dirty.

"I was pretty uncomfortable reading for the part," she says. "But I thought, what the hell? At least I already had the teen consultant job." Needless to say, Filatow did not get the part of Yasmin, but is content with her current involvement on the show. "It's really cool to be able to provide adults who are working on the series with input about music, wardrobe and dialogue," she says. "It's really nice when they take my suggestions into consideration and realize that I have something valid to contribute."

Even the show's title was Filatow's suggestion. After polling several teens, Filatow eventually came up with the title *Straight Up* because, she says, "that's exactly what being a teenager is all about." But like all paying jobs, Filatow has some difficult stresses to deal with as well. "My biggest challenge is being the right person for the job and providing the right input," she says. "I mean, I'm supposed to be the expert, but how do I know that I'm an expert on what it's like to be a teenager?"

While she enjoys all aspects of her job tremendously, this 18-year-old takes her position very seriously. "When I suggested the title *Straight Up*, some of the alternative kids were upset because it's more of a hip-hop term," she says. "So another challenge is to be what everyone wants and expects."

As for the show itself, Filatow promises that it will hold every teenager's interest.

"The basic buzz is that the show's about real things that happen to real people," she says. "It's filmed documentary-style. It's about sexing in the back seat of a car, or smoking a



Sarah Polley stars as Lily in the episode entitled *Dead Babies*. It's a long road from *Avonlea*.

PHOTO BY CHRIS WAHL



As Dennis, Merwin Mondesir makes his way through a throng of cops in the episode, *Manace*.

PHOTO BY CHRIS WAHL

closer to herself than any she's played before, including the innocent Sara Stanley on *Avonlea*. Mitchell and Lundman say that Lily is only one example of the spectrum of teens that are portrayed on the series. The producers have also incorporated stories about jocks, grungers, hip-hoppers and metal-heads, making teen consultant Filatow's job not only necessary, but also very significant.

"We didn't want to lose touch with the teenage perspective on things, so it's important to have Marina there to continually ground us," says Mitchell. "Having an adolescent on board gives us some of the reality and authenticity that's out there." As for Filatow, she's certainly not complaining. After all, she's got nowhere to go but "Straight Up." **vv**

**An 18-year-old  
Torontonion tells the  
CBC how to talk to teens.  
And they pay  
her for the advice.**

# the straight goods by Anastasia Silva