

Northern Exposure

CANADIAN TELEVISION BRINGS HIP-HOP TO PRIME TIME

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, HIP-HOP HEADS have been bringin' drama to the screen, yet for the most part, it's been confined to the borders of the US. But this past February, *Drop the Beat*, a new urban-based dramatic television series, premiered over Canadian airwaves and changed everything. Revolving around a pair of friends

who, despite personality differences, come together to host a college radio show, the program introduces audiences to the northern country's hip-hop community. Michie Mee, a Toronto lyricist who co-stars in the show, explains why *Drop the Beat* is relevant. "It brings a Canadian reality," she says. "There's situations up here that I don't think people know about."

Although producers Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell admit to not being "experts" on hip-hop, they knew enough to incorporate elements of the culture (i.e., DJs and rappers) into the script. The first season features cameos from artists both local (Choclair and Maestro) and international (Rahzel and The High & Mighty). "It's a great showcase for our nation's musical talent," says lead actor Mervin Mondesir. "It's like watching one long

music video, but with an actual story line." For those living outside the range of *Drop the Beat's* broadcast frequency, there's still a way to check it out. Thanks to an accompanying Web site (www.dropthebeat.com) launched in conjunction with the series, viewers everywhere can log on to the show's virtual radio program. And as the first interactive television series, Microsoft WebTV subscribers can also peep it. "There's no commercial radio stations in [Canada]," adds Mee. "So this is an extremely important outlet for us."

—CELINE WONG

