

Road to adulthood



Justin Peroff, left, Noam T.C.S. Lior, Sarah Polley and Marc Cohen star in CBC's six-part drama series *Straight Up*.

RAVERS, SKATERS, hip hoppers, grungers, post-grungers, gothics and metal heads ... 23 skiddoo, sonny, teen-dom is a complicated affair these days.

Not so long ago, high school was easy: jocks, nerds, a couple of druggies and the rest of us.

Now you must need a school floor plan to find your kind. Can you be a hip-hop nerd? Or a grungy jock?

With all these extra teen classifications and the haunting spectre of Generation X (or maybe that should be Gen Y), contemplating a TV drama about teens should frighten an adult TV producer as much as fading pictures of themselves in the *Saturday Night Fever* disco fashions of their own graduations.

Not the producing team of **Adrienne Mitchell** and **Janis Lundman**, who traces her own teen days as one of the average kids to Calgary's own Henry Wise Wood high school.

Mitchell and Lundman try to go where the makers of *My So-Called Life* (Gen Y) and *Liberty Street* (Gen X) failed with *Straight Up*, a new, six-part drama series about teens.

And the team behind the acclaimed documentaries *Talk 16* and *Talk 19* is promising a gritty, bold, street-smart show that is going to

**By NEAL WATSON
Calgary Sun**

shake people up, according to Mitchell.

"It is not *Avonlea*," she said, it's "more real than *My So-Called Life*" and not anywhere near the 90210 zip code.

Some young people, she says, are "tired of seeing 90210 because it doesn't represent who they are. It gives them a false sense of hope."

Forgivable hype from proud producers, perhaps, but this is a dangerous minefield.

Lundman and Mitchell are intent on delivering an authentic show, but young viewers tend to insist a show like this is the real deal or they turn off very fast — and you are dealing with an age group in which authentic changes often.

"We tried to tell the stories as we heard them — from their perspective and without the stench of adult judgments," said Mitchell.

While Lundman says the *Talk* documentaries and *Straight Up* are "two pretty separate things," you have to believe the experience of chronicling the lives of young people sharpened their ears. But Lundman says they were simply not able to satisfy their storytelling

appetites with the documentary format.

Set in such credible teen locales as fast-food shops, video arcades and the mall, *Straight Up* (it means no B.S. in teen jargon) features a cast of young actors, most of whom have never been in front of the camera.

(The only well-known actor is former *Avonlea* star Sarah Polley, who plays a 'goth girl'.)

"We are telling true stories," says Lundman, meaning the stories she hopes to tell on *Straight Up* reflect what is going on in the lives of teenagers.

Even if they are good listeners, neither Lundman nor Mitchell are teenagers, and they relied on the services of a teen consultant as well as their young actors, who were encouraged to improvise, for guidance on what rings true in the lives of young people.

Test screenings, according to Mitchell, indicate the show is "hitting a chord."

Teenagers have told her "it's fresh." That means it's good if your frame of reference is cool or groovy.

Time will tell if the *Straight Up* team can continue to talk the talk.

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Straight Up debuts tomorrow at 9:30 p.m. on (6), (9) and (16).

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