

Showbiz

CBC drama series *Straight Up* takes a look at teen angst, '90s style

High school confidential

It may be on the CBC, but *Straight Up* is not your parents' TV series.

Shot around familiar downtown Toronto locales, the six-episode teen drama is created and produced by Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell, who previously provided insight into adolescent girls in their films *Talk 16* and its sequel *Talk 19*. Its first half-hour airs tonight at 9:30.

Unconventionally structured, it's more of an anthology than a traditional ensemble. Some of its characters appear to attend the same high school or hang at the same fast food spot, but their lives don't really intersect. When they do, it can be as glancing as passing each other on the street.

Time shifts too, looping back on itself to reconsider an event from another perspective or as it affected a different person. For instance, episode six revisits an incident thought over and done with in episode one.

Distinctive look

Director Jerry Ciccoritti and cinematographer Barry Stone have given the series a distinctive look, combining herky-jerky freeze frames, extreme close-ups, slo-mo, speed-ups, odd angles, quick cuts and off-beat perspectives. After a while, it has the technically overheated, overloaded feel of a film school project in love with its own affectations.

Despite its cosmetic overcoating, *Straight Up* adopts a realistic, sometimes even real time approach in its storytelling. Results range from bold to just plain boring. Give us enough of a basketball game to catch its feel and flavor, but spare us endless minutes of



Claire BICKLEY
TELEVISION

SARAH POLLEY ...
Makes an appearance on the new CBC TV series *Straight Up*.

sitting around with babysitting boys drinking beer.

Obviously prepared to push the limits, tonight's first episode, *Jam*, features a couple of extremely raw remarks about oral sex, and a masturbation scene. Focus is on the deteriorating relationship of teen

lovers Marcia and Tony (Robin Bruie and Tomas Chovanec, rookie actors, as are most in the cast). They're in bed. He's sweaty. She's bored. They're in the car. No improvement. Turns out she can't achieve orgasm with Tony, but, as is made clear, she has no problem by herself.

Authentically depicting the dying, sniping days of romance, *Jam* takes a credibility cut near its close when the young bickers don't notice an armed robbery going on right next to them. Maybe

it's meant to imply that teens are just used to that sort of thing. Maybe *Straight Up* should calm down.

Next week's *Dead Babies* takes its title from the macabre poetry of Rory (Justin Peroff), who likes to freak out his friends by stating a fantasy to kill the children he babysits.

Uncertain future

Rory's apparent weirdness has won him the affection, or at least the curiosity, of Lily, a vampire-ish goth girl with jet-dyed hair and lips to match played by — surprise — *Road To Avonlea*'s sweet Sarah Polley.

If *Jam* and *Dead Babies* are among the show's best episodes — and since they were among the three sent out for review, assume they are — *Straight Up* isn't likely to return this fall. But then there's

Seige, the sixth episode, which is strikingly better than what came before. When's the last time you saw a TV half-hour about black characters that wasn't a sitcom? No laughs in this fantastically effective short film about Dennis (Merwin Mondesir), a self-styled menace. In his gangsta clothes and his cheap chippiness on the basketball court, he's boxed himself in with his attitude. His friends are wearying of it. Deep down, so is he. But it takes an escalating cat and mouse game with the cops to make him realize its ramifications.

A caveat, of course, to all of the above is that *Straight Up* is obviously not made for anyone as ancient as the fresh end of their third decade. Funny though, this nagging feeling that I have, that a lot of teens may feel similarly divorced from this picture of their so-called lives.