

# THE PRINCE GEORGE CITIZEN

## **Making the cut**

Frank PEEBLES / Prince George Citizen

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CBC Television has turned sit-coms into a sport.

Since early October, the CBC ComedyCoup Competition has called on Canada to bring out the funny. The national public network offered a competition for the best ideas for a half-hour comedy series and the grand prize was, the winner would get to actually make that series and air it for Canada.

The original call for entries brought out hundreds of applicants. That was whittled down to about 100 and now they are in the phase where the final 50 are chosen. That choice is largely made by people who vote for their favourites on the ComedyCoup website.

Two from Prince George are in the running. Welcome to Tulip is the proposed show by Giovanni Mocibob. Geoff and the Ninja is the proposed show by Jon Chuby.

"I've always got ideas like this, a lot of people do, but you never have a chance to submit it to anyone, so by CBC deciding to throw that invitation open to everyone, we thought this was a chance to pitch a story that we just couldn't pass up," said Mocibob.

He enlisted his wife Holly - both of them actors with long histories on the stage - and they wrote up one of the things they knew best. Tulip is a fictional overlay of the very real town of Rosebud, Alta., where they both lived and worked.

Rosebud's only industry is live theatre - teaching it to aspiring actors and presenting it to bus tours of tourists passing between Drumheller and Calgary.

The town dynamics were screaming out to be a comedy show, said Mocibob who caught the theatre bug doing Judy Russell productions like A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum, Cabaret and Jesus Christ, Superstar.

Chuby enlisted longtime filmmaker friends Jeremy Abbott and Dan Stark to join his team fleshing out the story of a straight-laced homeowner who was forced by desperation to rent out a room. His tenant turned out to be a professional ninja.

"Geoff and the Ninja was an idea Jeremy and I came up with six or seven years ago as a web miniseries, but all our work and school obligations just made it impossible," said Chuby. "When this chance came up, we found out only four days before it was due, but the idea was already well formed, so Jeremy flew up to P.G., we wrote all night, and got it in with about three hours to spare."

Chuby resides in Prince George, as does Stark fresh off his UNBC marketing degree graduation, but Abbott still resides in Vancouver where he and Chuby first migrated to work on their film dreams. Along the way Chuby became a physiotherapist and got a position with Phoenix Physiotherapy back in his hometown. Abbott now works in the film editing profession.

Macibob is living in the Lower Mainland but currently performing on Vancouver Island in the Theatre Chemainus production of Over the River and Through the Woods. The contest demands weekly missions be accomplished, a surprise task given out each Monday, so he has to juggle ferries and performances to accomplish that, while the Chuby team has to work apart or arrange costly flights.

Both are thriving on the process, however.

"It is easier to film in Prince George than in Vancouver," Chuby observed. "Here you have access to more set areas, more people are willing to help you out with your needs, and I see a little film industry starting to develop here. There are all kinds of collaborations going on in Prince George. It's a fun time to be an up-and-coming filmmaker in this area."

Macibob is more interested in the writing and acting elements and also sees this contest as a brilliant CBC move to draw that kind of talent out, from coast to coast, on uniquely Canadian stories. He has never felt comfortable with so much American content filling up Canadian airwaves when quality stories and heaps of humour are readily available inside the hearts and minds of Canadians.

"It's genius by CBC to do it this way," Macibob said. "ComedyCoup is a butt-load of work. We don't just hand in an essay about what our show would be. With all the weekly missions, we are essentially developing the show to be production-ready. It fosters this kind of talent. No matter what happens, these ideas are being developed. Maybe only one will get the prime time slot, but all these other projects can still become something."

CBC knew Canada was a hotbed for creativity and humour. The list of shows made in Canada that tickle the funnybone is long and legendary: SCTV, Kids In the Hall, Red Green, Wayne and Shuster, Mosquito Lake, Blackfly, Due South, Road Hockey Rumble, and most recently Corner Gas, Mr. D and The Trailer Park Boys.

If you look further into all the writers, actors and crew people Canada has produced in the

comedy genre, it gets downright ridiculous.

So the network made it clear, the contest might produce more than one great idea that wins full production options.

According to the terms of ComedyCoup, the CBC reserves the right - and perhaps might even be hoping - to option several of the contestant projects. They might also be insulating themselves from runners-up making it to the threshold of production and watch it walk across the street to some other network.

"It's an accelerator program as much as it is a contest," Chuby said. "It is developing the Canadian comedy muscle, through people like me who have the desire and I think we have the talent, but we don't have that reason for really going after it. Now we do."

To vote for either or both of these projects, and get them through to the next round of the contest, before the end of Sunday go to the ComedyCoup website and fill out the sign-up sheet to ensure you aren't robo software attempting to job the voting system.

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