

Come find anything and everything at *Dépflies*' dépanneur

CBC's ComedyCoup is on a mission to find your next favourite Canadian comedy show
by Frederic T. Muckle & Chris Aitkens

From the '90s sitcoms like *Seinfeld* and *Friends* to the 2000s kittens and babies web-video trend, comedy seems to need to reinvent itself every now and then to keep the demanding crowds laughing. ComedyCoup, an ongoing CBC project, is currently looking for a new Canadian comedy show that will make the country's audiences chuckle in a half-hour special for CBC prime time, from sea to sea.

Dépflies, a live performance turned into a television show, takes a look at a heterogeneous crowd gathering in a Saint-Henri *dépanneur*. The show is presently one of the public's favourites, according to the votes on the ComedyCoup website and its spot in the top 15 projects of ComedyCoup. *The Concordian* spoke to Alain Mercieca, the writer of *Dépflies*, and Anton Golikov, one of the actor, to discuss the Montreal-based bilingual comedy project.

The Concordian (C): How did you come up with the concept for *Dépflies*?

Alain Mercieca (AM): *Dépflies* was concocted in the dark winter of 2011 while I was living in Saint-Henri and fell in love with the neighbourhood, and felt the burning desire to write a new comedy that brought community, subculture, bilingualism and punk rock insanity to life on stage. *Déps (dépanneurs)* are the perfect platform for anything to happen, so it was really fun to write about.

C: How would you describe your group's general philosophy in relation to entertainment and the world surrounding it?

AM: We are a very passionate group. We love making art that is honest, free and void of all pretentiousness. It's hard to pin us down because we vary so much in tastes, but we definitely love the idea of bringing art and comedy together—not going just for the joke, but grabbing for the heartstrings also. The new generation in Canada needs something to love other than YouTube and iPhones.

C: Could you describe the team behind the camera?

Anton Golikov (AG): Some of the finest people in an ever-expanding family. A growing beast of super-talented graphic designers, cinematographers and filmmakers. The professionalism that attached itself to the project is matched only by the talent of the underground cast and artists behind the live show. Robert Quinn, PierreLuc Boucher, Danny Belair are the ones making it so darn beautiful.

C: Why did you decide to do a bilingual show instead of using an easier unilingual formula?

AM: To document the reality of Montreal. Giving an honest "slice of life" instead of trying to do something for American audiences, or pandering to one side. There are no sides in the great tumult of life, at a deep philosophical level. Also, funnily enough, almost everyone involved is in a bilingual relationship. That's just a coincidence, and fate!

C: Even if Canada recognizes two official languages, the fact is that the majority of Canada's population is not bilingual. Figures from the 2011 Statistics Canada Census show that about 18 per cent of the population actually speaks both French and English.

Do you think that this bilingual aspect could affect the public's perception of *Dépflies* in a negative or positive way? And how so?

AM: *Dépflies*, the live show, has worked for people who speak only English, only French and people who speak neither. We try to build characters that resonate at a deep level, beyond language. And for us, language is something to love, to be open about, no matter what level you are at.

My five-year-old son loves *Dépflies* and he doesn't get any of the references. For some, it may be challenging, I realize, but to them I say: give it a chance. The Québécois accent, just like the hoser B.C. punk accent, is beautiful and adds to the colour of this country and the world. Let's embrace them and show the world how they live and breathe together in places like Montreal.

C: Your character hasn't been fully revealed yet. What kind of character has been written for you? Will they be English or Bilingual?

AG: My character's a bilingual regular. Typical of St-Henri, he is also a bit "street" and trashy. Denizen of the trailer-park side of the hood. Throughout the series, I've played a punk prophet who got his leg chopped off by a train near the Fatal lofts, a treasure hoarding priest, a hardline anglo from the west island, a militant SPVM commando bike cop, a handsome media man, the custodian of Quebec's national archives, and a Russian in a tracksuit (a bit of method acting on that last one.)

C: How does *Dépflies* relate to Montreal and its distinct cultural personality?

AM: Well, as a Montreal-ophile, I love every niche culture in this city, and am totally obsessed with all of them. I once said "every city is a country" and Montreal is exactly that. Every week I learn about a new subculture, a new loft to go to, a new character in the streets, a new story of great tragedy, or a new neighbourhood full of folkloric charm.

Dépflies uses a Montreal staple, the *dépanneur*, as the springboard into the personality of the great city, exploring them with an honest and loving touch.

CBC's ComedyCoup is still running and will continue until a project gets financed with \$500,000 to create a half-hour special for CBC prime time. The remaining comedy projects will participate in the coming weeks' challenges to gather votes and boost social media presence. As described on the website, ComedyCoup is meant to accelerate the discovery, creation and promotion of new talent and projects.

This Q&A is the result of two separate interviews and has been edited for purposes of length and clarity.

For more information on ComedyCoup and *Dépflies*, visit comedycoup.cbc.ca.



Dépflies is about the eventful moments taking place in an anonymous Montreal dépanneur in the Saint-Henri neighbourhood – *Dépflies* is currently one of the final 15 projects retained on ComedyCoup