



More than a sketch

By Cameron Archer

Transitioning to screenwriting from a sketch comedy, improv and acting background, Ian MacIntyre's work currently appears on Family Channel and Netflix (*Degrassi: Next Class*), The Comedy Network (*The Beaverton*) and Teletoon (*Winston Steinburger and Sir Dudley Ding Dong*, *George of the Jungle*). MacIntyre remains active in the Toronto sketch/improv community as a member of sketch troupe Beggar's Canyon. The former Dartmouth, Nova Scotia native's upcoming work includes DHX Media's *Degrassi: Next Class* and *Inspector Gadget*, and 9 Story Entertainment's *The 3 Amigonauts*.

How does *The Beaverton*, based on the website of the same name, differ from more established news parodies, like *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and *The Rick Mercer Report*? What challenges exist in adapting a news satire website to television? Most Canadians have heard of *22 Minutes* and *RMR*? The real difference is, *22 Minutes* and *RMR* react to the week's news as it happens, whereas *The Beaverton* is written and shot months before it airs. This necessitates writing a lot more about trends and Canadian culture in general and is the hardest part about adapting the website. Online we can be pretty nimble, making jokes the same day or even hours

after Kevin O'Leary insults a kid's lemonade stand, or what have you.

How do you adapt your comedy for different audiences? Most of the shows you write for, such as *Inspector Gadget* and *Winston Steinburger*, are children's cartoons. The *Beaverton* aims for an adult audience familiar with *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* and *The Daily Show*.

Having done years of live — often unpaid — sketch comedy and improv helps to get in the headspace to write for kids. You learn that jokes are disposable, you've probably got a better joke in you, and often the dumbest thing you can think of is the best way to go. I believe this pontificating translates to writing for adults as well. It's important to write something for kids that still makes you laugh as an adult.

You studied theatre at the Dalhousie University Acting Program. What advantages exist in being a writer/performer, as opposed to the single-discipline approach?

Every writer should try performing at some point, even if it's just a class. It gives you much more appreciation for how weird and unnatural working off a script can be, particularly if you're on set. You quickly learn the value of concise, "non-writery" dialogue. Writing — and then performing

— your own comedy quickly dispels you of the notion that every joke you write on a page is automatically funny.

How did you become established in screenwriting? What should the aspiring screenwriter expect when transitioning from stage to screen?

I started doing sketch in Toronto after university, and eventually realized the writing part satisfied me more than acting. I met plenty of sketch folks who were working writers, and so many of them were generous with their time. I owe a lot to my friend and fellow sketch comedy goof Mike Kiss, who gave me invaluable advice, feedback, and even my first opportunity to pitch professionally. It was a fantastically bonkers cartoon called *Grojband*, about as ideal a first gig as one could hope for.

Going from acting to writing, it's most important to put in the time and produce solid samples, whereas in acting you're mainly trying to "get seen." In acting, you need an agent pretty much to get started, whereas in writing getting represented usually comes later. An acting background gives you advantages, like increased perspective on the entire industry and — hopefully — additional confidence when networking. Bombing onstage and realizing it won't kill you is a *great* way to get over the fear of pitching in a room. ■