

The magazine from ACTRA Toronto

# performers

Volume 16 • Issue 2 • Summer 2007

## Lorne Cardinal

a rising star comes into his own

### INSIDE:

Acting teachers and  
their invaluable lessons pg. 4

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# President's Message



## SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES

Here we are then. All grown up. Our first strike behind us. A messy, unlooked-for and unnecessary struggle for survival, well fought and hard won – or it would be, if we could just get the CFTPA chief negotiator to give up his efforts to gain in the editing process what he failed to win at the table. It is dispiriting to watch someone try to wriggle out of deal points to which he signed his name. This negotiator's inability to actually close the deal is frustrating, to say the least.

Of course we will win this fight, too, in the end. Because we know who we are now. And we know what we are worth. As **Wendy Crewson** put it, "We have found our confidence."

In the last three months, we have put down our picket signs, picked up our tools and turned again to our work. The first quarter looks like it will be redeemed by a strong summer season. A second major studio development is being planned for Toronto. *The Hulk* is in town with his welcome greenback. In short, the cave-or-die fearmongering has evaporated and the big lie that only concessionary bargaining can protect work opportunities is exposed as the empty, two-for-flinching, bully's prattle that it is. People who are serious about making good television and movies hire good people to make them and pay them fair wages for doing so. End of story.

Meanwhile your council has quietly launched one of the largest and most visionary undertakings in our union's history. This May, we submitted a licence application to open an ACTRA Toronto credit union, a financial institution to serve the needs of the performers who are its founding members and owners. You can read about it in this issue.

At Queen's Park, we loudly cheered the McGuinty government for honouring its promise to increase the Ontario tax incentives for film and television production because that initiative was good for the provincial economy, our industry and performers.

Now we are booing the Liberals for failing to deliver on their promise to introduce meaningful Status of the Artist legislation in Ontario. Months of consultation, countless interventions by artists, artists' organizations and unions, an advisory committee that listened carefully and recommended concrete action and what do we get? A weekend in June to 'Celebrate the Artist.' Yay.

There's a billion dollars available to build and renovate arts infrastructure in Toronto, but the artists themselves that fuel these economic and cultural furnaces are given a 'celebration weekend.' The Ontario Culture Minister, **Caroline Di Cocco**, is unhappy with us because we are not dancing in the streets.

A segment of the population that has a better-than-average education, a much lower-than-average wage, works odd hours in tenuous working conditions, enjoys few legal protections, has little access to retraining or career transition programs, receives no unemployment insurance, has few opportunities to save and generally retires in poverty wants more than a weekend celebration, Minister.

The UNESCO initiative that launched Status of the Artist is more than 25 years old. The studies have been done. The reviews are in. Read your own sub-committee's recommendations. It's tough to be an artist. Labour law and the tax system do not treat artists fairly. This needs to be fixed. Read more about Status of the Artist in this issue.

And while we're at it, what about the gang in Ottawa, disastrously adlibbing their way through Afghanistan, improvising foreign policy, rapt in fevered dreams of 'deep integration' with the United States while ignoring issues of Canadian cultural identity? Where's **Mavor Moore** when we need him, to say, "I've got nothing against national defence. I just want us to have something to defend."

It's up to us now. This November, we'll be in Ottawa again making some noise and letting the politicians know what's on our minds. **Let's go.**

In solidarity,

**Karl Pruner**  
President  
ACTRA Toronto Performers

"There's a billion dollars available to build and renovate arts infrastructure in Toronto, but the artists themselves that fuel these economic and cultural furnaces are given a 'celebration weekend'."

Karl Pruner at February's members' conference.  
Photo: Jag Gundu



# performers

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### JOIN THE TEAM

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On the cover:  
**Lorne Cardinal**  
at his home on the  
Six Nations Reserve.  
Photographed by Jag Gundu.

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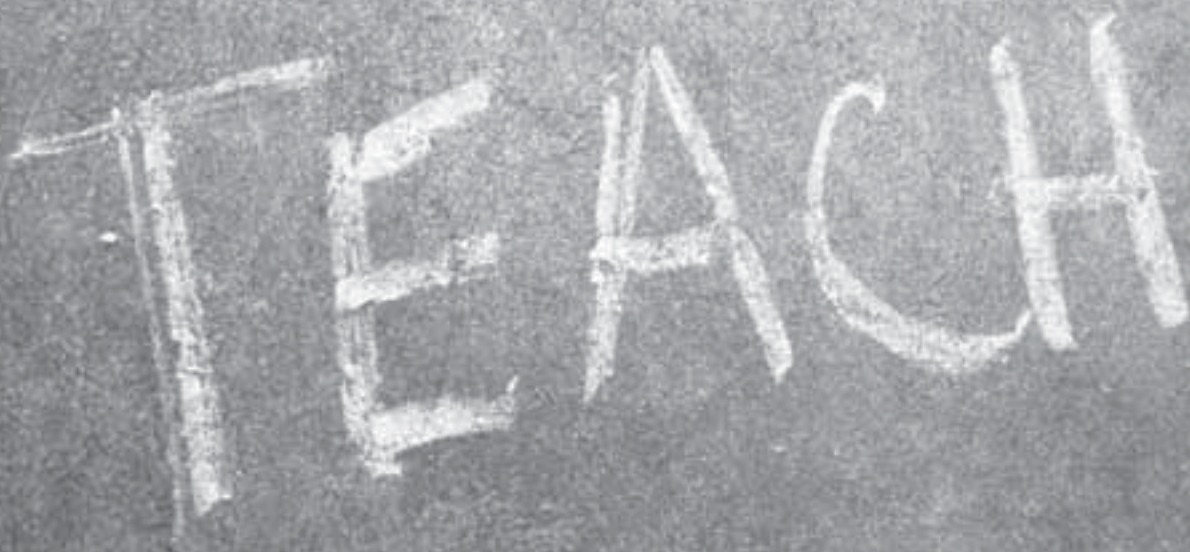
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TEACH

# A Tale of Two Teachers

Acting teachers and their invaluable lessons

by **Chris Owens**

Here's one: I'm standing in the wings preparing to step on stage and I haven't got a clue what I'm doing. Welcome to the actor's nightmare. I turn to my scene partner. Her eyes are as wide as manhole covers. Poor thing. I've done nothing but harass her all week. Line rehearsal after line rehearsal. Despite all my best efforts I could not help us. I could not shed any light on what the playwright is trying to say. The characters and their motivations are a complete mystery to me. We're doomed. The lights come up.

**Let the pain begin.**

Ten minutes later, my partner and I sit on the lip of the stage at the Annex Theatre staring out at an audience of our peers. We're both in shock. The scene we didn't understand went surprisingly well. How did that happen?



Acting teacher Michael Shurtleff.

“Michael pushed us to explore our fantasy lives. ‘We are all motivated by our dreams. It’s what we wish would happen that makes us do everything we do.’”

Our teacher ambles down the aisle to join us. “Congratulations. Good work. Now, I gave you this scene for a specific reason. What did you learn?” I sit dumbfounded. He turns to me, “You don’t have to know everything. You listened to each other and the relationship took over.”

This is one of many lessons I learned from **Michael Shurtleff**. Lessons that have stayed with me for almost half a lifetime. Each scene he handed out presented a different challenge. Sometimes I would rise to the occasion and other times I would fail miserably. But, of course, I always came away richer for having tried. As a teacher, Michael insisted on courage. He demanded I challenge myself. The actor’s life is not for the faint of heart. Michael was a renowned casting agent (original Broadway productions of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Pippin*, and *Chicago*), and a playwright. But what originally brought him to my attention was his book, *Audition*. I remember pulling it off the shelf one rainy day and reading it cover to cover. The 12 guideposts presented in the book are not a method, but questions that lead

an actor to his or her own unique answers. My dog-eared, highlighted paperback copy of *Audition* is more than 20 years old and it is still the acting book I reference most frequently.

For years, Michael held scene study workshops. They were wonderful things. There could be as many as 60 actors in the room and two by two they would perform rehearsed scenes then sit with Michael and talk about them. He encouraged everyone in the room to actively formulate constructive criticism. “You will tell them what was brilliant and then you will say, ‘I would add...’” We might sit through 10 full-out rehearsed scenes in a day, complete with comments and analysis. It was exhausting and invigorating. An acting boot camp. My notebook was filled with words I’d caught during the afternoon: “The process of trying to reach an emotional decision is always more dramatic than the achievement of it.” “Don’t play the end until you get there.” “Without humour I wouldn’t hire you in a million years!”

The emphasis in his teaching was on learning to use yourself. But, not just

your everyday real self. Michael pushed us to explore our fantasy lives. “We are all motivated by our dreams. It’s what we wish would happen that makes us do everything we do.”

Toward that end, we were encouraged to take risks in our scenes and to find as many ways as possible to get what we were fighting for. This made for some very inventive acting. Michael would pump us up. “You’ve got to think of yourself as a troupe of clowns. Get up there and make an ass of yourself. Stop taking yourself so seriously.” When the work was good, there was an excitement in the room. A buzz. We fed off that energy each time we stepped on stage. We were always trying to raise the bar. It was thrilling to be part of it.

Michael had a great sense of humour. A keen, observant eye. A caustic wit. He loved actors and he was passionate about the actor’s craft. He made me re-evaluate all those useless limitations I imposed on myself. The lessons he taught me are part of my actor’s psyche and to this day I draw on them whenever I work.



Drawing of Michael Shurtleff's acting class by John Coburn.

When I was a teenager, before I had been introduced to *Audition*, I read **Uta Hagen's**, *Respect for Acting*. I was so moved by it that when summer came around I decided to go to New York to study at the studio she ran with her husband, **Herbert Berghof**: HB Studio. It was my first time in the Big Apple. I took a Greyhound bus and stayed at the YMCA. I would walk down to the Village for my classes at the HB.

There was a nominal fee (I think it was \$2) to audit classes, so I spent the better part of a week doing just that, wandering up and down the stairs, watching class after class. I figured at some point I would find what I was looking for.

**Scene:** A hot Manhattan afternoon. Tucked away in the studio's basement theatre space are 20 students and two oscillating fans. To one side of the actors' playing area, a woman in her late 50s sits behind a wooden desk

wearing large dark sunglasses and powdering her nose. Her name is **Elizabeth Dillon**. On the desk in front of her is a package of cigarettes, a can of Coke, a tube of dark red lipstick and a stack of well-travelled plays bound by elastic bands.

Two actors, a man and woman in their 30s, take the stage. The man pulls back a curtain at the rear of the space revealing a collection of furniture on casters. He wheels out a kitchen table, a couple of chairs and a sink. The woman sits at the table and starts to peel a bag of potatoes. The man goes to the sink, lathers his face and begins to shave. The actors appear completely relaxed and unselfconscious. When they speak to each other, their connection is so unforced and real it's as if we are witnessing a married couple share a private moment. It's captivating to watch.

After the scene, the actors sit in front of Elizabeth ready to take notes.

"Wonderful, wonderful. A good strong sense of 'organic physical life.'" (This is the phrase I would hear at every class.) "We knew so much about you before you'd uttered a word. Now then," she says with delight, "This is a play about secrets isn't it?" And she proceeds to tell the story of the play in such colourful detail and with such a great sense of curiosity that I want to get up and act both parts!

Later in the class, a young woman performs a monologue and I get the sense that something else is weighing on her mind, taking her in and out of the moment. When she is done, Elizabeth asks her how she felt. "Not very good. I have this one line that says I'm crying and, well, I was kind of preoccupied with getting there." "Ah," Elizabeth says gently, "That explains why you appeared to be walking in glue. Listen, my darlings, crying is a part of organic physical life. If you really need to cry, the body remembers. It remembers how to cry. It's



An auditions master class at one of ACTRA Toronto's members' conferences. Photo: Jag Gundu

“When she is done, the teacher asks her how she felt. ‘Not very good. I have this one line that says I’m crying and, well, I was kind of preoccupied with getting there.’”

simply a question of allowing your body to go there.” And without hesitation Elizabeth’s face changed and she began to cry. After a few moments she stopped and wiped away her tears. “You see? The body remembers. You don’t have to get caught up in it.” (I tucked this away and it has come in handy on a number of occasions.)

What I discovered in taking Elizabeth’s class was that she personally assigned all the scenes and scene partners, putting a great deal of thought into which direction each actor should go next. Her familiarity with the plays allowed us to talk about them in depth. Her worn copies were bookmarked with an untold number of elastic bands for easy access to particular passages at any given moment. I was introduced to the writings of **Frank D. Gilroy**, **Edward Albee**, **Paddy Chayefsky**. I saw New York cabbies transform themselves into **Willy Lomans** and **Stanley Kowalskis**. Every week I walked

away with a little something to add to my actor’s storehouse of knowledge.

Over the years, Elizabeth and I maintained an infrequent correspondence. Brief encouraging cards and notes were exchanged as we moved along in our lives. I still have them, each signed ‘To my Canadian friend.’

Michael and Elizabeth have both passed away but their work lives on through the many students they encouraged over the years. The experiences we shared are an important part of who I am. I can still see Michael hitting the dance floor after a long day of teaching and Elizabeth powdering her nose while espousing the virtues of ‘organic physical life.’

Teachers who are passionate about their work are a source of inspiration long after you leave their classroom.



**Chris Owens** is editor of *Performers Magazine*. He hopes you’ve had a few good teachers of your own. He plays hockey in Toronto.

# LORNE CARDINAL

A rising star speaks candidly about acting, fighting Native stereotypes, *Corner Gas* and getting active with ACTRA.

by Jani Lauzon

**Jani Lauzon:** *Can you talk about you, your background, your training?*

**Lorne Cardinal:** I'm from Sucker Creek, Alberta, a small reserve on the west end of Lesser Slave Lake. I started acting late in life, when I was about 24. I took my first acting class at Caribou College in Kamloops, B.C., to get easy credits (*we both laugh*). I was bit by the theatre bug during a one-act play by Robertson Davies called *Voice of the People*. I remember the night we opened. I saw the lights come up, then all I remember next were the lights going down, and in between was a blur. It was fantastic. I was a shy brown kid up until that point. After I finished that play I thought "Wow, this is what I meant to do."

**JL:** *When you lived in Sucker Creek, did you go to school on the reserve?*

**LC:** No, we were bused into the nearest town, which was High Prairie. There was the Indian school and the white school. My dad's a very smart man and he knew the differences in the education system, so he made sure that my brother and I always went to the white school. Usually, my brother and I were the only Indian kids in the school. We put up with a lot. And we moved a lot too. We were always the new kids. That's where my shyness came from. To fit in I had this comedy thing, I used to be the goofy kid, the class clown.

**JL:** *After you attended Caribou College, you went through the theatre program at the University of Alberta?*

**LC:** Yes, my professor at Caribou College, Dr. David Edwards, gave me the best advice, he said, "If you want to work in this business get training, because there are a lot of talented actors, but talent only takes you so far." I was in Vancouver working on a show using Pochinko clown training when I got the call that I had been accepted at U of A.

**JL:** *What was that experience like for you? There are not a lot of Aboriginal students who have gone through the U of A program.*

**LC:** I was the first. But I was so jazzed because of the clown stuff I had learned in Vancouver. I thought three years of that kind of training would be fantastic. I learned so many valuable things with clown training, how to be aware of the body, how to breathe, to follow your impulse. But U of A was an academic program, very technical, and very European. We did everything from Shakespeare to Brecht.

“I saw the lights come up, then all I remember next were the lights going down, and in between was a blur.”



Photo: Jag Gundu

## Lorne Cardinal

selected credits

### Film & Television

*Elijah*  
*Corner Gas*  
*Wapos Bay: The Series*  
2006 Host of the Aboriginal  
People's Choice Music Awards  
*RenegadePress.com*  
*Ice Bound*  
*Relic Hunter*  
*The Associates*  
*People's History of Canada*  
*Blackfly*  
*Wumpa's World*  
*Big Bear*  
*North of 60*  
*Jake and the Kid*

### Stage

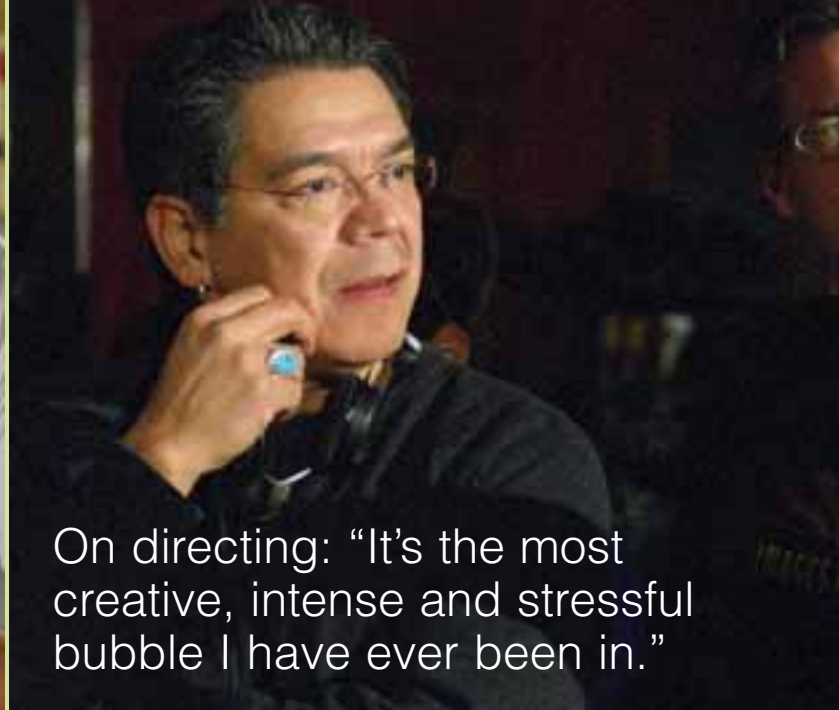
*High Life*  
*The Hobbit*  
*60 Below*  
*Romeo & Juliet*  
*Twelfth Night*

### Directing

*RenegadePress.com*  
*Moccasin Flats*  
*Thunderstruck*



Lorne Cardinal as Davis Quinton in *Corner Gas*. Photo courtesy CTV.



Lorne Cardinal as actor and director on the set of *Renegade Press*. Photo: Allan Feildel

On directing: “It’s the most creative, intense and stressful bubble I have ever been in.”

**JL:** But the classics have been performed by a variety of different artists successfully. You don’t always have to base the work in a European theatrical tradition.

**LC:** Yes, but the teachers at U of A at the time were all trained in a European fashion. They wanted us to do the work from a European perspective.

**JL:** So they weren’t teaching traditional Pow Wow dancing in that program?

**LC:** (laughs) No. We had three hours of ballet every morning.

**JL:** Do you dance at Pow Wows, as a traditional dancer?

**LC:** My brother and I used to dance at Pow Wows all the time, when we were kids.

**JL:** Can you talk about your lobbying efforts with ACTRA Toronto and why you got involved on that level?

**LC:** I have done a few things for ACTRA. Last year we lobbied for Status of the Artist at Queen’s Park. My main thing is protection for actors, all colours, all ages, protection of kids in the workplace, and looking after elder actors who helped put Canada on the map and yet don’t have affordable housing. I fight for those people. Also, I lent my *Corner Gas* caché to the recent bargaining and actors’ strike. One of the things that really stood out for me was access to the internet, because it’s such a new technology. They wanted it for free and there is money to be made. If there wasn’t money to be made, why would they want access to all our work for the previous 67 years plus everything in the future? I know a bad treaty when I hear one.

*We both laugh. Somehow laughter helps to balance the pain we have experienced as a result of the treaty system. It’s our difficult cultural history.*

**JL:** It’s great to have high-profile actors like you on the front lines of the strike. You had a series pending and yet you were willing to go on strike, even though your work was in jeopardy.

**LC:** As actors, we are still not where we should be. I don’t think Canadian actors should be paid 32% less than American actors who come into our country to work. I think it’s horrendous how Canadian actors get treated.

**JL:** A question I get asked a lot is, “Are you a Native actor or just an actor?” This is a complex issue for Aboriginal actors. Would you be willing to talk about your perspective?

**LC:** I was just starting University when *Dances With Wolves* came out. Great work by great actors, Tantoo (Cardinal), Auggie (Schellenberg), Jimmy (Herman), Wes Studi and all those cats, but at the same time it was the big name white guy saving the Indians. I had longer hair when I started, so I actually did a few of those leather and feather roles, our stories written by white writers. But at the same time, it was great to get the experience, meet some folks and get my name out there.

Now that I cut my hair I don’t even get auditions for Native roles anymore because producers are casting their version of what they want their Natives to look like. They are looking for a stereotype of what they think a beautiful Indian is. Our next battle is to get our stories done the way that they should be told.

**JL:** You play Native and non-Native specific roles. Having the opportunity to do both, what does that give you?

**LC:** Right now it gives me notoriety. I am a Native guy on mainstream, primetime TV in Canada. Wherever I go now I meet Native folks who say, “It’s so good to see a Native person up there, playing a cop.” The response is a bit overwhelming at times, but it gives young Aboriginal people hope and joy. I let them know that anything is possible. I



Lorne Cardinal near the Grand River on the Six Nations Reserve. Photo: Jag Gundu

think one of the hardest things that Aboriginal people struggle with is achieving success.

**JL:** *So what do you want to do next?*

**LC:** I have a couple of buddies in Winnipeg and we are forming a production company. Most Native films are either about 'leathers and feathers' or modern day. We want to make a film set in the depression era, the transition time between freedom and the reserve system. It's a story about two young Aboriginal guys who leave the reserve without permission, which was against the law at that time, and kill a cow so they can feed their family.

**JL:** *Will you be writing and directing the screenplay?*

**LC:** Yes. I love to direct. I've done a few episodes for two different series, *Renegade* and *Moccasin Flats*. It's the most creative, intense and stressful bubble I have ever been in. As a director you can't say, "I don't know." You have to be the one with a plan.

**JL:** *Now you'll have to develop a fundraising plan.*

**LC:** Yes. Ideally what I would love to see is our stories told the way they should be. We need more Native producers, directors and writers. And we need our Native organizations more involved in helping artists get their projects done. It's too bad some of our political leaders underestimate the power of art. They jump at the chance for a photo-op, but are slow to do anything about supporting the arts in Canada. Especially for the young people, art gives them a voice and a chance to express themselves. Without funding for arts programs, you have a group of frustrated, unheard young people coming up.

**JL:** *As an actor, what would your choice role be?*

**LC:** I try to make sure every project I do is different from the last one. Right now I'm looking for a Shakespeare fix. *Richard III* or *Othello*.

**JL:** *Do you have any desire to move to the United States to work?*

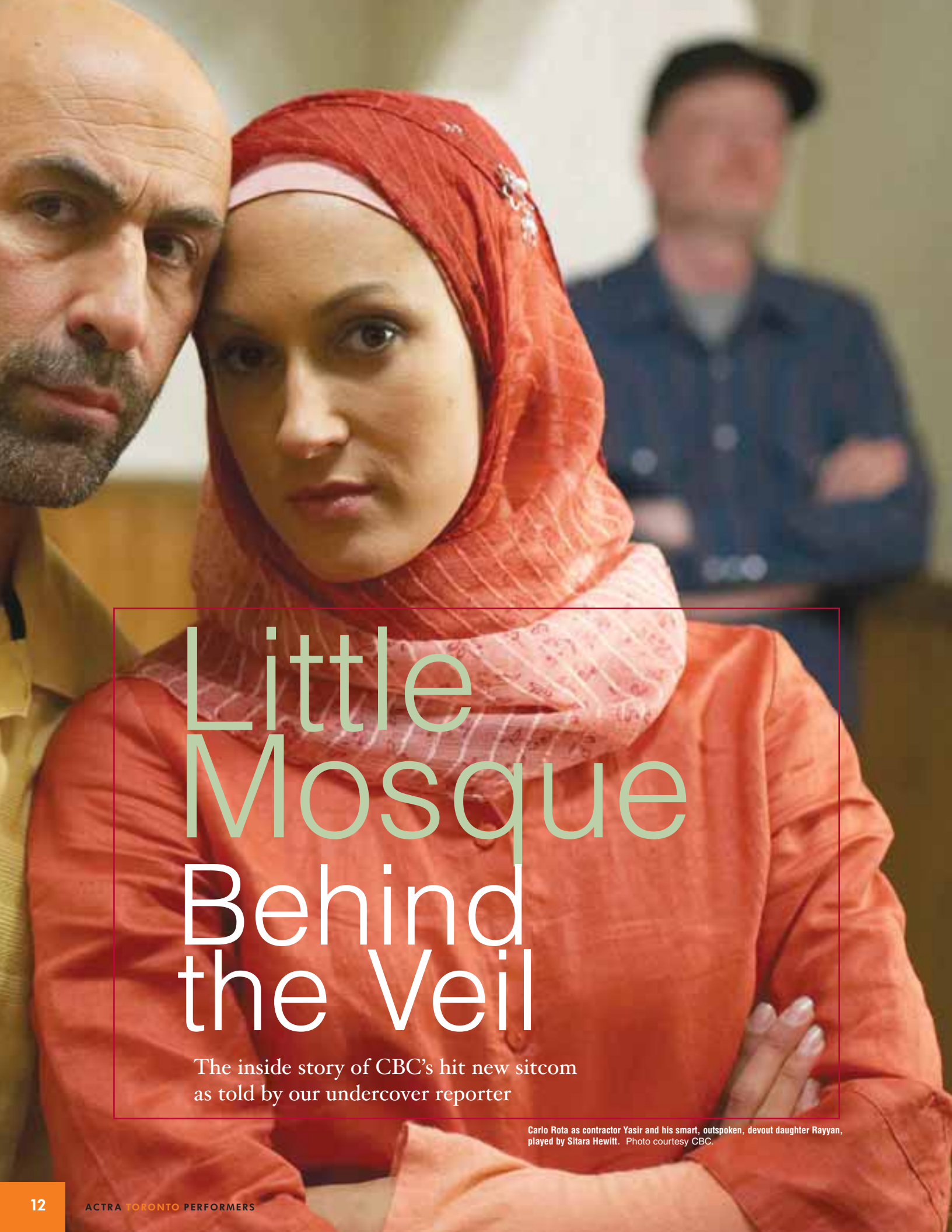
**LC:** I would never turn down work, but I like living in Canada. The last time I auditioned in the U.S. was for *Tom and Huck*. I was auditioning for Injun Joe and the director asked me if I had any questions. I told him I had a suggestion. I told him Injun Joe was a stereotype as far as I was concerned, the drunken Indian who threatens the white kids. There is a scene in the script where the white boys canoe out to the island where Injun Joe lives and see him sitting by the fire, all drunk up. I said, "How about if we give a reason for why Injun Joe drinks. He's a half-breed, he's not welcome in the white world, and not welcome in the Indian world, so maybe he's trying to remember a song someone taught him, with an old broken drum. Then you have a reason why he drinks, and the audience will know where his pain and anger comes from." The director looked at me and said, "Uh huh..." Needless to say, I didn't get that role.

**JL:** *You run an obvious risk by making those choices. Is that a risk you are willing to take?*

**LC:** That's a risk I feel I have to take. I'm not afraid to fight negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people. Otherwise it will just go on. If they want to perpetuate stereotypes I am the wrong guy to pick. If you want a three-dimensional character, and a great actor, I am the guy you want to hire for the role.



**Jani Lauzon** is a Dora-nominated actress, a Juno-nominated singer/songwriter and the creator of several children's television puppet characters. She won a Gemini Award for her role as Seeka in the series *Wumpa's World*, the first Métis puppeteer to garner the award. She is a co-founder of Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble (*The Scrubbing Project*). Television credits include *Destiny Ridge* and *Conspiracy of Silence*. She lives in Toronto with her partner Arthur Renwick and their most-amazing daughter Tara.



# Little Mosque Behind the Veil

The inside story of CBC's hit new sitcom  
as told by our undercover reporter

Carlo Rota as contractor Yasir and his smart, outspoken, devout daughter Rayyan,  
played by Sitara Hewitt. Photo courtesy CBC.

Before CBC's *Little Mosque on the Prairie* broke the record for a domestic series debut with 2.2 million viewers, there was a lot of buzz about the show, though most of it was hesitant. The show hadn't even aired yet and it was getting written up in *The New York Times* and talked about on the BBC. Could a comedy get away with putting Muslim characters in small-town Saskatchewan? Could the show be about relationships, rather than religion, as claimed by its creator, Zarqa Nawaz? Could it be funny? After its first season of eight episodes averaged more than a million viewers a week, CBC confirmed *Little Mosque* would be renewed for another season and that two writers had been lured away from CTV's *Corner Gas*. With its international sale to Canal+, the show will be seen in France this July. How could such a risky little show become a success? Toronto actor **Neil Crone** investigates.

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Call me 'Deep Sides'. Recently I was hired by a rival production company to infiltrate the cast of CBC's hit sit-com *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. My employer wanted answers. 'Why is this show such a hit?', 'What's the reason for its popularity?', 'Why are there never enough Nanaimo bars at lunch?'

And so, donning the perfect disguise, I joined the show. Blending in proved easier than expected. After all, if you're looking for a way to travel in complete anonymity, what could be better than becoming a Canadian actor?

The mastermind of the show, its originator, goes by the handle **Zarqa Nawaz**. Which, if you rearrange the letters, spells, not coincidentally, 'Raqaz Zanaw'... make of that what you will. Nawaz comes across as the self-effacing, affable, smart Muslim woman, but I noticed right off that the cast refer to her as "Zarqa the Creator." If that doesn't smack of Cult, I'll eat a meal penalty. She's also a bit of an enigma, a little like Nora Ephron in a Hijab. I will say that Zarqa has a knack for breaking down barriers with humour and kindness and hers was the first Muslim hand I ever shook that had a joy buzzer in it. But don't let the smile fool you. My first day on set she leaned over to me and whispered, "Screw up and I'll gut you like a fish." At least I think that's what she said. It was either that or, "Welcome to the show." The crew guys had a table-saw going and it was hard to hear.

The rest of the production team is equally inscrutable. I'm not sure what their game is exactly but everybody connected with this show has the bizarre habit of treating actors with... well... respect. It's eerie and not a little unsettling. It took me the better part of a month to stop ducking whenever an executive producer would raise a hand to wave hello to me. I was at a script read-through early on in the project and I almost passed a stone when who should walk in but **Anton 'The Shiv' Leo**. CBC's Comedy Creative Head. Mr. Big himself. I mean, this guy has canned more shows than Tony Danza. I thought we were all dead meat. But then, he sits down beside me and puts his hand out like he wants to make nice. Pretty soon we're laughing. He's funny. He's nice. If writer **Al Rae** hadn't poured rye in my water cup I think I might've passed out right there.

Thankfully, writers, wherever you find them, are always writers. I knew when I saw the LCBO container outside their office that there was still a shred of reality left on this show. I popped my head in one day with a couple of script suggestions for Al, **Rebecca Schechter** and **Dan Redican**. I'd gotten as far as, "Hey guys..." when an empty bottle of Thunderbird whizzed by my ear and the door was slammed in my face, followed by a muffled string of intensely creative profanity. I sighed contentedly. Somebody still remembered the good old days.

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"I'm not sure what their game is exactly but everybody connected with this show has the bizarre habit of treating actors with... well... respect. It's eerie and not a little unsettling."



Sitara Hewitt as Rayyan, Zaib Shaikh as the new Imam Amaar and Manoj Sood as the town's original Imam, Baber, argue about the partition that keeps men and women separated during prayers in the mosque. Photo courtesy CBC.

A week or so into filming it occurred to me that perhaps the key to this whole set-up was really the director. **Michael Kennedy** had been on board from the pilot and would steer this ship through all eight episodes. He might be the guy with the answers. I decided to suck up.

I sent an expensive bottle of wine to his trailer with a note saying, "We need to talk." Four hours later, after no response, I knocked on his door. I was standing there waiting when the door to the trailer next to Kennedy's burst open. A grinning **Carlo Rota** waved a wine bottle at me and beckoned me into his trailer. "We can talk inside mate! I made gnocchi."

I changed tactics, deciding to bide my time and watch Kennedy on set. My employer, a cagey old producer who longed for the days when salary disputes were settled by a game of Mumblepeg, had told me that regardless of how smoothly a show is running, sooner or later the pressures of time, script and money will make any director crack. So I waited, opting to nudge Kennedy's meltdown along a bit by continually blowing my lines and sputtering out improvised drivel. His response was immediate and astonishing. "Loved it! You're a lifesaver."

Kennedy was clearly psychotic. No one is that even-keeled. The man made **Ernie Coombs** look like Caligula. My answers would have to come from somewhere else. Meanwhile, I was trying to figure out a way to steal Rota's gnocchi recipe. Fantastic!

The only elements left were the cast and the crew. I decided to start with the latter. Cunningly ingratiating myself by vociferously running down members of the 'other' union, I soon wangled a rare invitation to 'The Grip Stand' a highly secretive and little-known after-hours club frequented by techies and lens-jockeys of all stripes. Fooled by my black t-shirt, fake tattoo and ponytail, the bouncer, a huge boom operator named 'Shadow Jack' let me in without incident. I found the *Little Mosque* guys at a smoke-shrouded table in the corner. No one actually had a cigarette going, I

noticed, but out of the corner of my eye I saw a guy pouring oil into a fog machine. They welcomed me with wary but incredibly well-lit smiles. Edging past a styrofoam bounce board, I sat down and cut to the chase, attempting to flush out the malcontents with a little incendiary chatter. "Boy this *Little Mosque* project is a dog, huh? You guys ever work with so many stiffs?"

I don't really remember what happened after that. I woke up with a sore jaw and a black eye, naked and completely alligator-clipped to a billboard on the Don Valley Parkway. Perhaps I would have better luck with the cast.

I confess I was a little nervous around the actors. I'd been thrown into this project with little advance notice and the only dramatic training I'd received was a copy of William Shatner's *Pause Your Way To Stardom* and a screening of *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken*. I was certain at least one of the cast would spot me for the charlatan I was. But no. Like everyone else connected with this show, the cast, to a person, was only welcoming, friendly and remarkably generous. I smelled a rat immediately. Nobody is that nice unless they've something to hide. I made a decision to work them one at a time, play them off each other and see what dirt floated to the surface.

Once again, however, no dice. I was thwarted at every turn. **Derek McGrath** made me laugh so hard every time he opened his mouth, I couldn't breathe. **Zaib Shaikh**, sadly, is every bit as pleasant as he is good-looking. **Manoj Sood** would give you the Salwar Kameez off his back. I, as well as every other male within a 15-block radius of the set, fell irretrievably in love with **Sitara Hewitt** and I could only mumble something that sounded idiotically like "Mufflayven" whenever she smiled at me or said "Good morning." And try as I might, I could never manage to separate **Debra McGrath** and **Sheila McCarthy**, nor, I'm sure, would I be able to get a word in edgewise if I was able to. I did manage to spend some time talking with actor **Boyd Banks**, but it very quickly became apparent that his



The cast of *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (from left to right) Arlene Duncan (Fatima), Zaib Shaikh (Amaar), Sheila McCarthy (Sarah), Carlo Rota (Yasir), Sitara Hewitt (Rayyan), Manoj Sood (Baber) and Debra McGrath as Mayor Popowicz. Photo courtesy CBC. Photo: Sophie Giraud

people are not from this planet. Finally, I thought I caught a break when I heard Carlo Rota screaming Muslim obscenities at **Arlene Duncan** inside his trailer. He was on an absolute jag and she was giving back as good as she got. 'Aha!' thought I, 'finally the dark underbelly of *Little Mosque* shows itself.' Rancour. Bigotry. Egos clashing like broadswords. This is more like it. But then, my heart sank as it became apparent that Arlene was only helping Carlo run lines for *24*, his 'other' show.

In the end, I had nothing. And I would get nothing, I realized, because I was looking for something that was not there. *Little Mosque's* secret, I would have to report to my disgruntled superiors, lies not in any one item that can be labelled or quantified and copied, but in the whole package. This is what you get when you have happy people working together on something they love. When you have real and ongoing collaboration, from the writers' laptops to the production offices to the set floor. When you have kindness and caring and mutual respect. When you have an executive producer aptly named **Mary Darling**. When you have a director who begins each day not by barking out hurried commands but by gathering the crew and cast and calmly stating "Okay everybody, let's all have a wonderful day together." Salaam.



Photo courtesy CBC. Still Photo Collection. Photo: Sophie Giraud

**Neil Crone** is an actor, improviser and writer who has performed in dozens of television and radio commercials, TV shows and is the voice of numerous cartoon characters every Saturday morning. A *Second City Mainstage* alumnus, Neil has been performing improvised and sketch comedy for more than 20 years. He appeared in Ken Finkleman's *At The Hotel* and will continue investigating the secret of success behind *Little Mosque on the Prairie* during his second season as shock-jock Fred Tupper.

*Little Mosque on the Prairie* is about a small Muslim community in Mercy, Saskatchewan. The residents are wary of their new, 'exotic' neighbours. The mosque congregation attempts to live in harmony with the skeptical, suspicious residents of their prairie town. Shot in Regina and Toronto, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* stars a number of ACTRA Toronto members.

### Zaib Shaikh – the Imam

Amaar is a Toronto lawyer who had an epiphany, left his law practice and moved West to become the spiritual leader of Mercy's small Muslim community.

### Carlo Rota – the contractor

Yasir is the de facto head of the Muslim community and a contractor who runs his construction business out of the local mosque and tries really, really hard not to be greedy.

### Sheila McCarthy – the PR flack

Sarah, who converted to Muslim when she married Yasir, is the PR flack for the mayor and is more devout than her husband, though less-so than her daughter.

### Sitara Hewitt – the feminist

Rayyan is Yasir and Sarah's smart 25-year-old headscarf-wearing, Muslim, feminist doctor who is more devout than her parents and prays she's adopted.

### Arlene Duncan – the Conservative

Fatima is a Nigerian-Canadian Muslim with conservative views who owns Fatima's Diner and serves the best BLT in Mercy.

### Derek McGrath – the Reverend

Reverend Magee is the Anglican Minister who rents out his parish hall to the Muslim community because it's good for religious understanding and helps with the heating bills.

### Debra McGrath – the Mayor

Mercy mayor Ann Popowicz welcomes the growing Muslim population as long as they vote for her.

### Neil Crone – the shock jock

Fred Tupper is the radio host of *Wake Up People*, a talk-show that fuels suspicions about Mercy's growing Muslim community.

### Boyd Banks – the local townie

Joe Peterson is a redneck xenophobe.

# ACTRA Toronto's Entertainment Credit Union

Our 400-page credit union licence application is in

**by Brian Topp**



“Our new credit union – also non-profit, arm’s-length, member-owned and member-governed – will add to the financial services you can get access to through your union card.”

## Big things happen in the ACTRA Toronto boardroom from time to time, and something notably big happened there the first week of May.

ACTRA Toronto President **Karl Pruner** and his colleagues on the Credit Union Working Group signed our application for a credit union licence.

If the Government of Ontario chooses to give us that licence, we will be a relatively few steps away from launching a new financial institution that specializes in providing financial services to freelance performers and members of their families – people like you.

In this article, I’m going to briefly review what a credit union is, what we’ve been up to on this project since last year, what was in that application and what will hopefully happen next.

A credit union is a member-owned financial institution, similar in its legal relationship with ACTRA as ACTRA Fraternal.

Fraternal provides retirement and insurance benefits to ACTRA members.

Our new credit union – also non-profit, arm’s-length, member-owned and member-governed – will add to the financial services you can get access to through your union card. Mortgages, lines of credit, savings products, financial advice, credit cards, brokerage services, etc.

AFTRA-SAG Federal Credit Union ([www.aftrasagfcu.com](http://www.aftrasagfcu.com)) has been providing financial services like these to members of our sister unions in the United States for more than 40 years.

ACTRA Toronto member **Peter Keleghan** (a leading member of our Credit Union Working Group) was the guy who walked into President Pruner’s office about two years ago to ask why we didn’t have something similar here, and to suggest that it’s high time we did.

Hmm. “Good idea,” we thought.

In February, 2006, ACTRA Toronto Council approved an operating plan for the year that set up a working group to investigate the idea. We hired some consultants to help us with this work, conducted a detailed marketing survey of members and developed a business case that persuaded us this project is financially viable.

Members of the working group worked their way through some 1,000 pages of training material (and periodic online tests) to get themselves up-to-speed on credit union governance, lingo, and priorities.

An executive search firm was hired this spring to get going on the two- to three-month process of hiring a CEO for the new credit union.

And we settled down to the work of preparing a licence application. That was a big job and an interesting one, since it involved drilling into some pretty fine detail about what this credit union is really all about, who it’s for and how it’s going to work.

### What’s it all about?

It’s all about providing welcoming, “we get you,” non-profit financial services to freelance entertainment professionals and their families.

### Who is it for?

It’s for ACTRA members, their families, and their colleagues at work. In other words, we’re going to create a “bond” (the list of people eligible to join) that includes all ACTRA members living in Ontario, their families and many of the other people who work in the Ontario film and television industry, to make sure the membership base is wide enough to guarantee the credit union’s viability and stability.

### How is it going to work?

It will be a well-managed, conservative, prudent financial cooperative that knows who it’s working for – freelance entertainment professionals. The licence application gave



“We’re aiming to launch in the last quarter of 2007, this fall, provided we pass muster with the regulator and hit our other targets.”

us the opportunity to map all of this out. We developed a covering letter spelling out the basic idea for the new outfit. We also developed (take a deep breath): a Background, Chronology and Rationale document, a business plan, a Tactical Plan Calendar, financial projections with a detailed commentary, a policy manual detailing the duties and obligations of directors, a policy manual setting out roles and responsibilities within corporate governance including the key role of the CEO, a Capital Management Policy, an Operational Risk Management Policy, a Market Risk Management Policy, a Structural Risk Management Policy, a Liquidity Risk Management Policy, articles of incorporation, by-laws and... the big one... a Credit Risk Management Policy. That last one being the heart and soul of this project – the rules and regulations under which the credit union will assess and lend to its members... people like you.

Six months’ work. All bundled up into a thick three-ring binder with more than 400 pages of detailed blueprint of how the credit union will work.

The government regulators who are accessing this application will be left in no doubt about what we have in mind, and how we propose to carry it out.

### So now what?

The application is before the regulators. We’ll see if they like it, what they want changed and whether or not we can

look forward to a reasonably timely review and application process. They will be taking a careful look at what we’re proposing here. Basically, we’re applying for a bank charter. Those aren’t handed out casually.

In the meantime we will be completing our executive search, and turning our minds to the physical set-up of the credit union staff (who will be housed at 625 Church Street in Toronto) and the credit union’s marketing and branding strategy.

We’re aiming to launch in the last quarter of 2007, this fall, provided we pass muster with the regulator and hit our other targets. We’re going to call the thing the ACTRA Toronto Entertainment Credit Union.

So far, in summary, it’s coming together pretty well and pretty much on schedule.

As President Pruner likes to say, “contracts come and go every three years, but this credit union may be with our members for 50 to 100 years.”

Let’s hope so. And we hope our friends in the Government of Ontario think so too.

**Brian Topp is Executive Director of ACTRA Toronto Performers.**



Credit Union Working Group members proudly signing ACTRA Toronto's application for a credit union.  
(L to r): John Nelles, Heather Allin, David Macniven, Karl Pruner, Peter Keleghan, Lyn Mason Green, Wayne Robson, Austin Schatz, Stephen Graham Simpson.

Photo: Kim Hume

## February conference highlights: two new workshop formats introduced

ACTRA Toronto's Winter member conference took place on February 23, 2007, on the same day as our glittering ACTRA Awards. Offerings included two new formats: the **Breakfast with...** panel that featured **Kenneth Welsh** interviewed by **Wayne Robson**, recorded for our archives project, and a course called **Idea to Screen** in our new all-day stream. Here are notes and tips from some of the other workshops.

### Whose shot is it anyway?

Script supervisor and actor **Daniela Saioni**, camera operator **Roger Findlay** and sound recordist **David Lean** led an interactive session with audience participants. Actor **Nicky Guadagni** moderated the discussion.

These three set vets provided a host of tips for actors to help ensure their performances are the best technically, while understanding how to deliver performances that assist the crew members in their jobs, all of which leads to capturing the actors' best work.

As a script supervisor-turned-actor, Daniela has experience both in front of and behind the camera. "Learn how to work the frame," she advised. "Learn how the crew cheats with a camera, so you can make the most of it."

Roger is a camera operator and taught the class the terms for different shots that reflect how much of your body the camera is capturing. This helps the actor know how large or subtle their movements should be. The first thing the cameraperson does is blocking. The cinematographer and camera operator or director will be involved in deciding the blocking, but the actor can collaborate in this too. Often the operator will begin by shooting very wide and then move in closer and closer – the performances need to be consistent over these shooting ranges.

Daniela emphasized, "Match your actions from take to take," which is why it's a good idea to have thought about blocking before getting to set. "Having a purpose for every movement helps you match them, and gets your performance to edit smoothly into the film."

David advised not to step on lines of other actors. "If you have dialogue between two actors, make sure there's an air gap to give the editor room to cut. When the director says 'action,' give it a beat before you start. The director's shout might have an echo and the editor will need that gap to cut."

Know about depth of focus – the wider the lens, the greater the depth of field, and more of the shot is in focus. A longer lens tends to isolate the focus. In blocking, focus becomes important and your movements must be consistent. Daniela said that with a narrow depth of field, the focus can be isolated to a matter of inches. So, for instance leaning your head forward in one take and not another can mean one of those takes is out of focus.

#### It's okay to ask:

- Ask the camera operator or focus puller "Who's the shot?"
- Ask the sound person "Can we overlap?"
- If you're going to be loud, let the sound person know so they can adjust your levels.

### Auditions 201 with David Gale

The audition favourite got interactive with a number of ACTRA members 'auditioning' before the panel, receiving feedback, and retaking the audition. **Wayne Robson**, **Rick Howland**, **Cayle Chernin** and **Jennifer Podemski** each coached one performer in their audition. The audience witnessed actors incorporate notes into their work and improve their performances.

#### Audition tips

- if you get notes, they want to see you incorporate them into your next attempt
- if you have to check your sides, do so and make it natural
- if you've broken the moment, ask to start again
- it's okay to ask "What's the shot like? Is it full body? Head-and-shoulders?"
- channel nervous energy so it doesn't show
- make a choice and also figure out the opposite of that choice and rehearse both
- props are a distraction
- visualize your actions
- keep up the pace – don't drag the scene out
- eye contact is key – the story is in your eyes
- stay as close to the camera as possible with your gaze

### Panel discussion with our ACTRA Award voice nominees

Voice tips from nominees for our newest ACTRA Award category – voice: **Ellen-Ray Hennessy**, **Ron Rubin**, **Tajja Isen**, and **Adrian Truss** in a session with **Debra Toffan**, **Jessie Thomson** and moderator **Tracey Hoyt**.

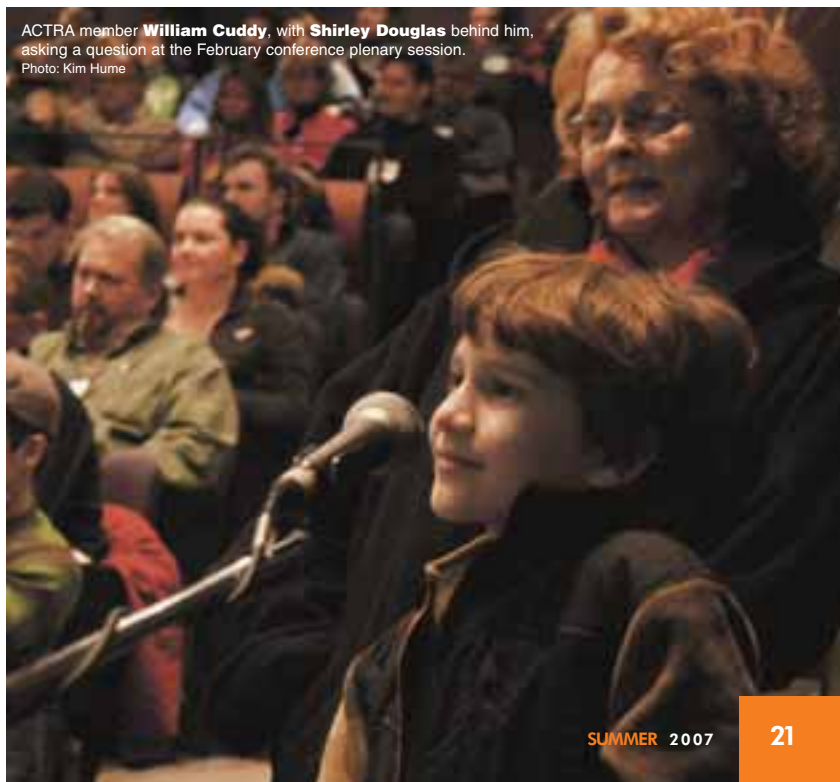
- before performing or auditioning, warm up your voice
- get the sides early or go in early to prepare
- be flexible and have alternate reads ready to go
- use your sense of playfulness and humour
- it's not just about the words – act between the lines
- make sure you can repeat that voice from the audition
- pick something that you can use as a reference – a laugh, a sound, a catch phrase
- practice everyday
- have fun!



Top Row (l to r): **Kenneth Welsh** at the **Breakfast With...** session at ACTRA Toronto's February members' conference. • **Debra Toffan** with ACTRA Award voice nominees **Ron Rubin**, **Tajja Isen**, **Ellen-Ray Henessy**, joined by **Jessie Thomson** and moderator **Tracey Hoyt**. Second Row (l to r): **Michael Kennedy**, director of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, led a master class on directing. • Host **Pete Smith** with **Rick Green** and **Diane Flacks** in the morning session of ACTRA Toronto's first all-day stream workshop: **Idea to Screen**, held in February. All Photos: Jag Gundu

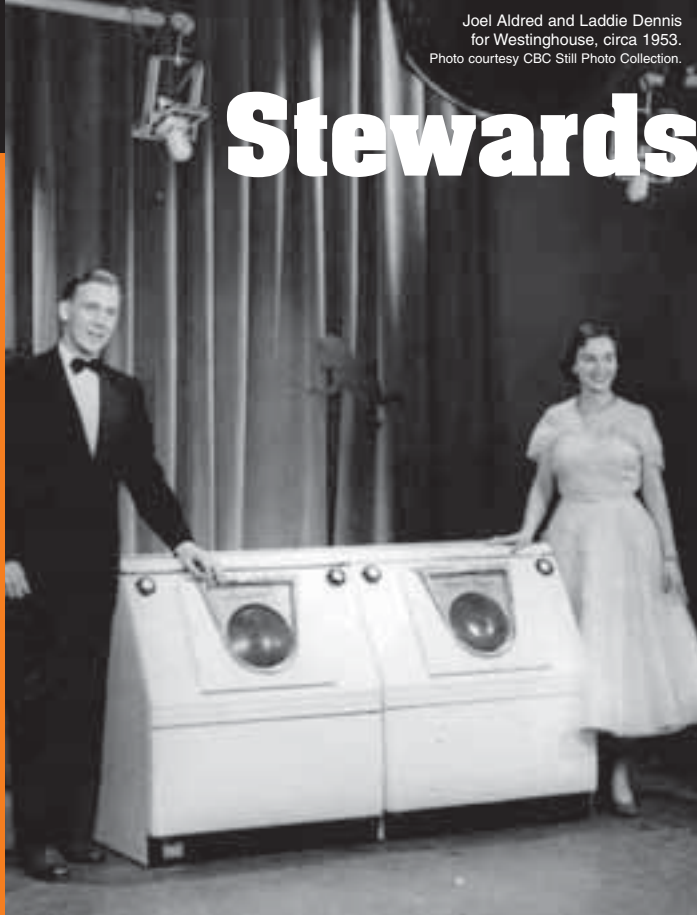
## June Members' Conference

The June 2007 conference at Victoria College at University of Toronto included another early-bird breakfast interview of an accomplished performer – this time, **Maury Chaykin** – filmed for our treasured archives, a panel discussion on commercial voice work and two all-day streams, including **Actors' Boot Camp**, that took participants from vocal and movement warm-ups in the morning to scene work and “a few on their feet” in the afternoon. The second all-day stream, **Up Front With Background**, offered a panel and Q&A session in the morning and an actual mock taping of a background scene in the afternoon. **Act Your Age** provided improv for commercials for older actors including a Master Class. The casting session focused on commercial casting with both casting directors and performers delving into the casting process. Other offerings included **Falling Into Stunts** and **Women in the Biz**. Toronto Film Studios' President **Ken Ferguson** spoke about FilmPort and an upswing in Toronto's film fortunes in a keynote speech during the plenary session.



ACTRA member **William Cuddy**, with **Shirley Douglas** behind him, asking a question at the February conference plenary session. Photo: Kim Hume

# Stewards At Work



## Industrials: second product is a second contract

Recently two ACTRA members were working on an industrial when near the end of the day the producer brought forward another script that concerned another product. The performers were not offered a second contract. The performers contacted ACTRA to inform the steward of what had taken place. The performers wanted to know if this was a second program that required another contract.

The steward contacted the producer and obtained the scripts. This was indeed another program that required another contract. Discussions with the performers and the producer determined that the first program was not an industrial as the product was to be sold to the public. This meant the declared use changed and use fees would be added on.

The performers then received two contracts and additional monies.

## When in doubt, call the Steward

A performer was engaged as a principal performer to work for two days on a television pilot. On the second day the performer was fitted with a harness and hoisted upside down inside an overturned car. As this performer was new and inexperienced, he did not know the on-set procedure for such a situation. However, he immediately contacted the ACTRA Steward of the production who arranged for an additional contract as a stunt performer with the appropriate fees.

When you are faced with an unfamiliar situation, contact the ACTRA Steward for the production as soon as possible.

## Watch Your Mailbox! ACTRA Toronto Member Conferences

**learn • network • connect • act**

ACTRA Toronto's Members' Conferences are free to ACTRA Toronto members who register. Conferences are held three times a year at Victoria College, University of Toronto. Conference notices are mailed to all members in advance with online registration available at [www.actratoronto.com](http://www.actratoronto.com) about three weeks before each conference.

**Saturday, October 20, 2007**  
**February 2008**  
**June 2008**

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# Status of Ontario's Artists Act Not Much to Celebrate

Artists still waiting for basic protections  
by **Heather Allin**

It was a year ago that ACTRA members, supported by our strategic alliance partners the United Steelworkers, visited Queen's Park to impress on our MPPs the value of **Status of the Artist** legislation. We reminded the Liberals of the promise they had made in their campaign four years ago to enact Status of the Artist legislation – legislation that's been 25 years in the making since the UNESCO report and its recommendations.

UNESCO recognized that despite the immense social and economic value artists provide to society, they are among the lowest-paid workers without many of the basic protections and benefits enjoyed by other workers. Their recommendations might finally allow artists to be treated as fairly as other workers.

Our meetings at Queen's Park followed submissions and consultations with the Status of the Artist Sub-Committee established by the Ontario Culture Minister's Advisory Council for Arts and Culture. We waited anxiously for the promised legislation as time ran down on the government's mandate. We called Minister **Caroline Di Cocco's** office. Individual members spoke to their MPPs as we tried to find out what was happening.

Just before Christmas 2006, the Sub-Committee's Report was quietly released. It was a good report that recommended many of ACTRA's suggestions.

Again, we waited. We held a news conference with the Ontario Federation of Labour and other artists' organizations. We met with the Minister of Culture. We supported MPP **Cheri DiNovo's** Private Members' Bill to protect child performers hoping it might provoke the government to act.

Finally, the *Status of Ontario's Artists Act* was introduced to the legislature this spring. Unfortunately, it was a lame version of what artists in Ontario had asked for and expected. Hidden quietly within the extensive Budget Bill, the *Act* contains only one commitment – to establish a "Celebrate the Artist Weekend." (It was the first weekend in June, by the way).

The *Act* mentions other items, but the government only undertakes to address them "as far as it considers it reasonable and appropriate to do so." This is an affront to Ontario artists.

Four years of promises. Two years of study by the Minister's own committee. Two years of working with cultural groups, guilds and unions through the Ontario Federation of Labour Arts and Labour Sub-Committee. All for one weekend in June!

In April, **Wendy Crewson, Sonja Smits** and **Tonya Lee Williams** joined our President **Karl Pruner**, at a news conference to express our deep disappointment in what had been presented as the *Status of Ontario's Artists Act*. A week later Karl appeared before the legislative committee considering the Bill to again ask that amendments be made to, "Make this an *Act* that the government and artists alike can truly celebrate."

Amendments to strengthen the Bill and make it meaningful were proposed by **Michael Prue**, the MPP for Beaches-East York, but they were defeated by the Liberal government members of the committee. Now, as we go to press, this meaningless *Act* has been passed and will become law. Am I angry? You bet! And so should you be. So what can we do?

We can take this broken promise and hold them accountable. There is an election coming in October. We can make them answerable at each and every appearance. We can, and will, make it an agenda item for every candidate running. Let's continue to fight for actions that will truly improve the socio-economic status of artists. Artists vote, artists' families vote, supporters of the arts vote. Let's make those votes count.



**Heather Allin** is Vice-President, External, of ACTRA Toronto. She is currently in rehearsals for the one-woman show, *Lying on the Escarpment*, for this year's Toronto Fringe Festival. A working actor, a visual artist, an advocate for Canadian drama and a staunch supporter of developing our film and television industry, she is a vocal advocate for Status of the Artist legislation in Ontario.

**Tonya Lee Williams, Sonja Smits, Wendy Crewson** and **Karl Pruner** at an ACTRA Toronto news conference at Queen's Park in April calling for amendments to the Liberals' empty *Status of Ontario Artists Act*. Photo: Jag Gundu



# Members' News

ACTRA Toronto members **Marium Carvell** (member) and **Paul Constable** (alternate) served on ACTRA's National Commercial Agreement bargaining committee. Photo: Kim Hume



Tamara Podemski



## National Commercial Agreement renewed for one year

ACTRA and the commercial producers' associations have agreed to a one-year extension of the current National Commercial Agreement (NCA), with a 3% increase in all rates, and a 1% increase into insurance contributions. The NCA covers television and radio commercials and is negotiated between ACTRA and the Institute of Communications and Advertising (ICA) and the Association of Canadian Advertisers (ACA). ACTRA and the ICA/ACA also agreed to continue 'without prejudice' discussions on a number of key issues. The referendum on the new agreement was mailed to those eligible to vote on the agreement. If ratified, the deal comes into effect on July 1, 2007.

## Tamara Podemski wins acting prize at Sundance

ACTRA Toronto member **Tamara Podemski** is the first Canadian actor to win an acting prize at the Sundance Film Festival. She won the Special Jury Prize for Acting for "a fully realized physical and emotional turn" for her role as Miri Smallhill in the U.S. feature *Four Sheets To The Wind*. *Four Sheets* is still on the festival circuit. Tamara is also a singer, songwriter and dancer. In 2006, she won two Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards for her album *Tamara*. She was recently recognized at the 2007 ReelWorld Film Festival with a Trailblazer Award.

## Colm Feore honoured with Award of Distinction at Banff

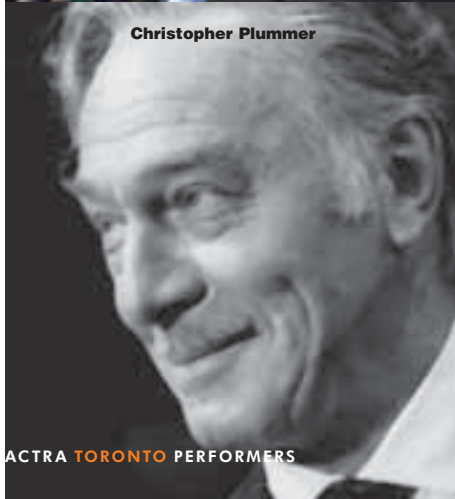
ACTRA Toronto member, Screen Actors Guild and Gemini Award-winner **Colm Feore** receives his 2007 NBC Universal Canada Award of Distinction at a Banff World Television Festival luncheon in Banff, Alberta, in June. Award of Distinction honours the accomplishments of an artist in the Canadian entertainment industry. In 2006, it went to Academy Award®-winning *Crash* writer and director Paul Haggis. His was the inaugural. Colm is taking part in the BWTVF's "In Conversation" Speaker Series during which Kevin Tierney, producer of one of the highest-grossing Canadian films of all time, *Bon Cop Bad Cop*, will interview the Stratford, Ontario resident. Coincidentally, it co-starred the interviewee. According to Festival CEO **Robert Montgomery**, "Colm has become a Canadian icon." He is one of the most-recognized faces in Canadian film and TV, and possesses a distinguished portfolio of work, which includes the Academy Award-winner, *Chicago*, and Genie Award-winner *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*.

— Larry Robertson



Colm Feore

Christopher Plummer



## Christopher Plummer becomes second-most Tony-nominated actor

When the Tony Award nominations were announced in May, ACTRA Toronto member **Christopher Plummer** earned his seventh Tony nomination and became the second-most Tony-nominated actor in Broadway history, after **Jason Robards**, who had eight nominations, one of them a win. The nomination is for his role as lawyer Henry Drummond in *Inherit the Wind*. He's in talks with Stratford and hopes to be in the Stratford season next year. The Tony Awards were handed out on June 10.

# Members' News

## Billy Merasty stars as Elijah Harper

Toronto's acclaimed actor and playwright **Billy Merasty** stars as Elijah Harper in *Elijah* (CTV, Anagram Pictures and Eagle Vision), whose life story was filmed last fall around Winnipeg. Harper, one of the earliest First Nations people to enter Canadian politics, went on to become one of the most inspiring leaders in Canada's First Nations community when he opposed the Meech Lake Accord. Manitoba-born (Brochet) Billy says he was born to play Harper. He was raised at a time when Aboriginals were made to feel unwelcome in their own country. The ninth child in a family of 14 said, "Portraying this incredible man... has been a life-changing experience for me." CTV has yet to announce the air date for *Elijah*.

— Larry Robertson

## Strong box office for Sarah Polley's *Away From Her*

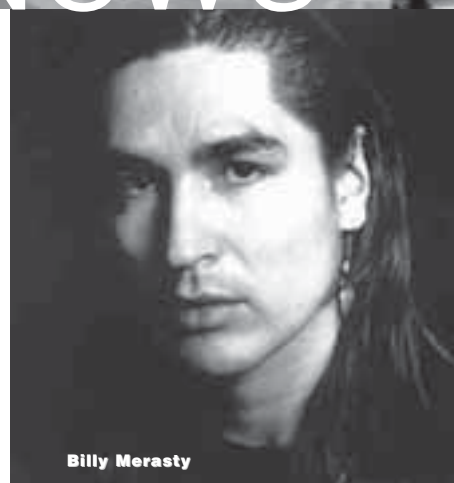
**Sarah Polley's** feature film directorial debut, *Away From Her*, starring **Gordon Pinsent** and **Julie Christie**, had its Canadian release in May to strong audiences. The film, which is getting early Oscar buzz for both of their performances, earned almost \$63,000 on nine screens, and placed second to *Spider-Man* its first weekend out. It continues its hold of the top spot for Canadian releases. At press time, the film, still showing on 38 screens in Canada, had just reached the \$1 million box office milestone, the first Canadian film to cross that mark this year.

## Two co-op films screened at ACTRA conference

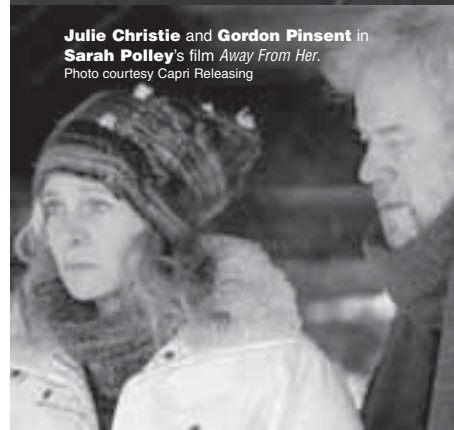
This year, six co-op films by ACTRA members were entered in *Less Cut, More Action Take 2*, ACTRA Toronto's Co-Op Film Challenge. The challenge called on ACTRA Toronto members to make a film under the Co-op Agreement about the need for supportive cultural policies to nurture our industry. Two co-op films from the challenge screened at ACTRA Toronto's February members' conference: *Hinterland What's What*, by **Leo Petrus**, **Peter Keleghan** and **Gordon Pinsent**, and *Shoestring*, by **Pat Lewis** and **Dominique Naipaul**. Both films are posted on our website. [www.actratoronto.com/home/Co-OpChallenge\\_06.htm](http://www.actratoronto.com/home/Co-OpChallenge_06.htm)

## A Night For Ned

On Sunday June 24, a fundraising tribute was held at Theatre Passe Muraille for highly respected theatre artist, drama instructor and vocal coach **Ned Vukovic** who is living and struggling with ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. It was a blowout affair of food and variety with well wishes and stories from stars and friends alike including **Laska Sawade**, **Stephanie Martin** and **Jack Nichol森**. June is ALS Awareness Month in Canada. If you'd like to make a donation in direct support of Ned you can still contribute at any CIBC branch to account #0630-78-71937. — David Sparrow



Billy Merasty



Julie Christie and Gordon Pinsent in Sarah Polley's film *Away From Her*. Photo courtesy Capri Releasing



Screenshot from the ACTRA Co-op film *Hinterland What's What*



Ned Vukovic

# Members' News



## Vote now: Canadian Comedy Awards

Once final nominations for the Canadian Comedy Awards are announced in June, online voting begins. All ACTRA members are encouraged to participate in voting for the Canadian Comedy Awards. The top five nominees in each category will be invited to the eighth annual Canadian Comedy Awards and Festival, October 10-13, 2007, in London, Ontario. Find your funny bone and vote for your funny favourites at their website, [www.canadiancomedyawards.ca](http://www.canadiancomedyawards.ca).



Wooden Sticks Golf Club in Uxbridge, host of The Big Swing for The Actors' Fund on September 23.

## Actors' Fund Golf Tourney: Sept. 23

The Actors' Fund of Canada and Directors Guild of Canada-Ontario Present The Eleventh Annual Big Swing Golf Tournament in support of the Actors' Fund. The golf tournament that has become known as **The Big Swing** was just a friendly game among a few actors when it started 11 years ago. From its simple beginnings, the tournament has grown to be an annual event that brings out 144 players each year to some of the Toronto area's finest courses. The \$50,000 raised annually by the tournament helps to pay for the Fund's emergency financial aid program for entertainment industry workers and their families, demand for which has doubled over the past six years as Canada's entertainment industry has weathered some tough times. Sunday, September 23, 2007, Wooden Sticks Golf Club, Uxbridge. Tee-Off at 12:30 p.m. Tickets, \$165 per person. The tournament is played rain or shine. Player fees are non-refundable. Ticket price includes: 18 holes of golf, a power cart, banquet dinner and a magnificent prize table. Please register before September 7. For more information or to register for The Big Swing tournament call (416) 975-0304 or visit [www.actorsfund.ca/bigswing](http://www.actorsfund.ca/bigswing) and follow the links to register.



**Julie Stewart** helped make ACTRA's presentation to the CRTC on CTV's CHUM takeover.

## CRTC likely to approve CTV's CHUM takeover

The CRTC held three days of hearings in April-May into CTVglobemedia's \$1.4-billion takeover of CHUM Ltd. **Julie Stewart** assisted in presenting ACTRA's brief asking the CRTC to enforce its common ownership policy and not allow CTVglobemedia to keep City-TV stations in the five markets where CTV already operates. The day after ACTRA requested the CRTC impose a benefits package greater than the customary 10%, CTVglobemedia sweetened the pot and voluntarily increased its benefits proposal by \$27 million, in hopes of CRTC approval. CBC and the Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) opposed the deal. CEP is concerned about the impact of concentrated ownership in the media. "The approval of a deal like this will give other private broadcasters the feeling they can avoid commitments to Canadians and their culture," said **Peter Murdoch**, CEP's Media Vice-President. Approval of the takeover would be a significant departure from CRTC's policy of prohibiting a broadcaster from owning two stations in the same market. The CRTC has signalled it will likely approve the deal. The CRTC will hold hearings into its common ownership policy in the fall.

# Members' News

## Co-op film wins awards and nominations on festival circuit

ACTRA Toronto member **Alan Powell**'s short film, *El otro lado del pasillo* (*Across the Hall*), produced under ACTRA's Co-op agreement, won the best short award at Method Fest, a Los Angeles film festival, and earned two Golden Sheaf Award nominations at the Yorkton Short Film Festival in Saskatchewan, for best direction and best film (multicultural). The film was one of 12 finalists in the Los Angeles-based Indie Producers Short Film Contest. Festival screenings include Halifax's Atlantic Film Festival, the ReelWorld Film Festival, the NSI FilmExchange in Winnipeg, the Brilliant Light International Film Festival in Hollywood, the Declaration of Independence Film Festival, London, England, and the Regensburg Short Film Week in Germany, for which it was the only Canadian film selected. The NFB and Ontario Arts Council-funded short is an English-Spanish film starring Toronto members **Carlos Diaz** (*Rent-A-Goalie*) and **Laetitia Villetorte**.

## ACTRA members demonstrate for more Canadian shows on TV

Every year, Canada's private broadcasters go shopping in L.A., spending hundreds of millions of dollars on U.S. programming. Last year Canada's private networks spent \$479 million on foreign drama programming, and only \$70 million on Canadian dramas. After their recent L.A. spree in May, CTV and Global held big parties to show off their U.S. purchases to advertisers. ACTRA leafletted CTV's party and held a demo outside Global's Massey Hall event. Hundreds of ACTRA members and supporters turned up to help hand out leaflets. Private broadcasters use our public airwaves to make huge profits airing U.S. shows. While they fill their schedules with U.S. fare, Canadian culture pays the price. Canadians deserve more Canadian drama on primetime TV. ACTRA is asking for CRTC rules to compel private broadcasters to spend 7% of ad revenue on new Canadian dramas.

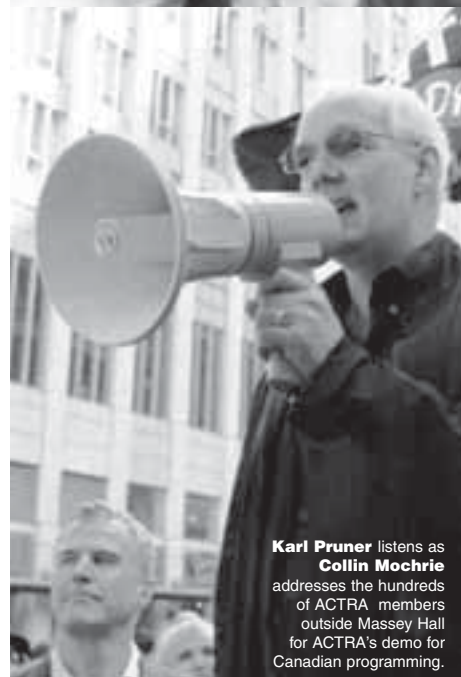
## Pinewood to build new film studio in Toronto's West End

U.K.'s Pinewood Studios Group, and Toronto-based Castlepoint Development Group announced they will build a new five-soundstage film studio in Toronto's West End, at Bloor St. W. and Lansdowne. Pinewood, Europe's largest film studio, partnered with Castlepoint in 2004 on an unsuccessful bid to build what is now FilmPort, under construction at Toronto's East End waterfront by Toronto Film Studios. Until now, Toronto has lacked purpose-built studio space, a key to attracting big-budget features. Quoted in *Playback*, Toronto Film Studios' **Ken Ferguson** welcomed the Pinewood announcement. "I think it's a fabulous thing for Toronto." (*Playback*, April 16, 2007) This development will make Toronto an even more attractive location for big Hollywood features, and Pinewood's European base and connections through director and part-owner **Ridley Scott** could also bring more European films to shoot in Toronto.

Studio	Space	Soundstages	Location	slated opening
Pinewood	100,000 sq. ft.	5	Bloor/Lansdowne	Fall 2008
FilmPort	260,000 sq. ft.	7	Don Roadway/ Commissioners	Spring 2008 (first occupancy Dec. 2007)



**Carlos Diaz**  
as Miguel  
in the Co-op film  
*Across the Hall*.



**Karl Pruner** listens as  
**Collin Mochrie**  
addresses the hundreds  
of ACTRA members  
outside Massey Hall  
for ACTRA's demo for  
Canadian programming.



ACTRA members  
rally for Canadian programming outside Massey Hall.

# Members' News



ACTRA Toronto member **Susan Coyne** with her Canadian Screenwriting Award for a drama series for her work writing *Slings & Arrows* with **Mark McKinney** and **Bob Martin**.  
Photo: Jamie Veeneman



**Leslie-Ann Coles**



**Rita Deverell**

## ACTRA members win Screenwriters' Awards

Seven ACTRA Toronto members were among the winners at the Canadian Screenwriting Awards in April: **Sarah Polley** (*Away From Her*), **Susan Coyne**, **Bob Martin** and **Mark McKinney** (*Slings & Arrows*) and **Andrew Moodie** (with **Greg Nelson**, **Adam Pettie** and **Jason Sherman** for the radio drama *Afghanistan*). **Sugith Varughese** received the Writers Block Award for service to the Writers Guild of Canada along with **Sondra Kelly**, and **Ilana Frank** received the Alex Barris Mentorship Award. Toronto members animated the show as hosts and presenters, including host **Gavin Crawford**, **Sheila McCarthy**, **Sitara Hewitt**, **Linda Kash** and **Don McKellar**.

## Do We Have Your Money?

Attention all performers who have earned royalties, residuals and use fees under an ACTRA agreement (film, TV, documentary or commercial production). Have you moved and not kept a current address with ACTRA? Are you holding on to an uncashed cheque from the ACTRA Performers' Rights Society (ACTRA PRS)? If you answered "Yes" to either of these questions, ACTRA PRS may be holding an unclaimed residual payment for you. For information, please visit the ACTRA PRS section of [www.actra.ca](http://www.actra.ca), or go to [www.actra.ca/actra/control/prs\\_payments](http://www.actra.ca/actra/control/prs_payments), to see a list of performer names under **ACTRA PRS NKA Payments** to see if your name or a performer you know is listed. If it is, contact ACTRA PRS at (416) 489-1311 or [prs@actra.ca](mailto:prs@actra.ca). We'd be happy to hear from you and arrange for payment!

## Coles, Deverell receive WIDC Alumnae Awards

**Leslie-Ann Coles** and **Rita Deverell** are the 2007 recipients of the Women in the Directors' Chair Alumnae Awards. Leslie-Ann received the Banff Fellowship, and Rita received the @Wallace Studios Award, which Leslie-Ann received in 2006. Both recipients were present at the Banff World Television Festival in June for the WIDC launch event. Leslie-Ann was in Banff pitching three original series, including *Wicked People*, which was a finalist at ACTRA Toronto's Pitch The Networks contest in 2006. Women in the Directors' Chair is an annual intensive workshop that takes mid-level women directors through all the components of a professional dramatic media production, from script to screen with senior mentors, professional actors and crews. Women ACTRA members considering transitioning to directing are encouraged to apply. Director applications are due by September 30. Acting ensemble applications (women and men) are due by October 30. [www.creativewomenworkshops.com](http://www.creativewomenworkshops.com)

## MORE NEWS

**More news and ACTRA Toronto Committee reports**  
at [www.actratoronto.com](http://www.actratoronto.com) [www.actra.ca](http://www.actra.ca)

**Update on Status of the Artist** [www.actratoronto.com/home/artistlaw2.htm](http://www.actratoronto.com/home/artistlaw2.htm)

**New IPA rates** [www.actratoronto.com/producers/IPA\\_2007Rates.pdf](http://www.actratoronto.com/producers/IPA_2007Rates.pdf)

**What's shooting in Toronto** [www.actratoronto.com/what/shooting.html](http://www.actratoronto.com/what/shooting.html)

**CRTC report proves Canada's broadcasting system is broken**  
[www.actra.ca/actra/control/press\\_news?id=10564](http://www.actra.ca/actra/control/press_news?id=10564)

**Canadian broadcasters gamble millions on U.S. programs**  
[www.actra.ca/actra/control/press\\_news?id=10570](http://www.actra.ca/actra/control/press_news?id=10570)

# ACTRA Toronto Council

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Visit the ACTRA Toronto website at [www.actratoronto.com](http://www.actratoronto.com)!

## IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM...ACTRA TORONTO STAFF IS HERE FOR YOU.

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**Dan Mackenzie** (Manager)

# In Memoriam

We share our sadness at the passing of our colleagues

Dave I. Palmer • Geri Wolfe-Barron • Jim Paulson

## June Callwood 1924-2007



**June Callwood** in 1978, when she was host of the CBC-Television show *In Touch*. Photo courtesy CBC Still Photo Collection.

Activist, broadcaster, author and journalist **June Callwood** passed away on April 14, 2007. A Life member of ACTRA, Ms. Callwood is remembered for her kindness and her fierce commitment to justice. Obituaries and tributes called her “Canada’s social conscience.” Her legacy will live on in the countless people she inspired and the many organizations she founded or helped establish to help others. **Sandra Martin’s** obituary in *The Globe and Mail* notes that “she helped establish 50 organizations – more than most people join in their lifetimes. The institutions range across the arts, human rights, civil liberties and social welfare.” She founded **Casey House Hospice** in 1988, providing care for persons infected and affected by

HIV/AIDS and named for Ms. Callwood’s son who died tragically at 20 in a motorcycle accident. She helped found **Nellie’s Hostel for Women**, a shelter for abused women, and **Jessie’s Centre for Teenagers**.

As host of the CBC-Television show *In Touch* (1975-1978), Ms. Callwood decided not to wear television makeup. In a CBC-TV interview with **Barbara McLeod** in 1978 posted on cbc.ca, she said, “It comes from a philosophy about trying to be truthful... not to deceive myself, and hopefully not to deceive other people.”

**R.H. Thomson** writes, “Even now the light from her eyes helps me, that fierce, mischievous compassion that burnt so bright. June was always one of the big trees in the land for me. She broke some of the winds of meanness and indifference in our world. Her going leaves a gap in the forest canopy. We must grow to fill it. I have a news photo of June pinned to the wall above my desk. Her eyes are smiling with light.”

A few years ago, **Wendy Crewson** met June briefly through **Shirley Douglas**, at a news conference on abortion rights. “I think June had been diagnosed with cancer just shortly before, but you’d never have known it. I offered Shirley a lift home but she said no, that June had a new sports car and she was going with her. It was spring: the first really warm day after a long winter and everyone was out revelling. I saw them whiz by in a shiny Miata with the top down, hair flying: a couple of great broads out for a spin.”

“I am missing a formal religion, but I am not without a theology, and my theology is that kindness is a divinity in motion,”

June Callwood, speaking at the first lecture in the **June Callwood Professorship in Social Justice** at Victoria College at the University of Toronto, 2005.

## David Norris-Elye 1950-2007



On March 8, 2007, at age 56, **David Leonard Towne Norris-Elye** passed away peacefully after a long seven-year battle with multiple myeloma (bone marrow

cancer). David, also known as the ‘John Denver of Saxophone’, had been an ACTRA member since 1986 and had done more than 600 shoots as a background performer and musician (playing saxophone and guitar) on film, television and commercials. David was also an accomplished composer and musician with more than 32 years in the music business. He was a saxophonist, guitarist, composer and producer and he was a member of such bands as The Stampeders, Long John Baldry, Down Child Blues Band, George Oliver and the Robert E. Lee Brigade. He was also a recording artist and worked on such albums as *Pukka Orchestra*, *Robert Priest & the Great Big Face*, *The Stampeders*, *Cano (Masque)*, *Trudy Artman* and many others. David produced and composed music for film, television and commercials including producing and engineering the music for the film *Love 40*, directed by **Margot Kidder**. As a saxophonist, David appeared in many television variety specials with such artists as **Cano**, **Dinah Christie**, **Tommy Chong** and The Stampeders. David could also talk “duck,” better than Donald himself. Dave was a wonderful friend and a courageous man who even through his long battle with cancer still managed to think of others. We will really miss you David (and your “duck” too).

**Marilyn Pytka**

# WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Marty Adams  
Ian Agard  
Chadwick Allen  
Rebecca Eleanor  
Applebaum  
Bill Bannon  
Zoe Belkin  
Brian Bisson  
Wayne Box  
Kyle Buchanan  
Jasmine Burns  
Alexa Burstein  
Brandon Burstein  
Steve Caley  
Lucas Casale  
Genevieve Cholette  
Michael Coady  
Jon Cor  
Eric Danelon  
Troy Dixon  
Ellie Ellwand  
Jennifer Finestone  
Fedele Fortino  
Chaesun Frizzle  
Mark Gibson  
Derek Gilroy  
Peter Gross  
Richard Hamilton  
Andrew Hinkson

Benjamin  
Hollingsworth  
Stephen Huszar  
Joshua Isen  
Stephen Kent  
Anna Kostan  
David Kynaston  
Gwendolyn Lewis  
Anders Lind  
Jessica Lloyd  
Jacqueline Macinnes  
Wood  
Craig Maguire  
Mona Matteo  
Jim E McNally  
Adrienne Merrell  
Dina Milani  
Berkley Miller  
Paul Mineo  
Curtis A Morgan  
Ashley Morris  
Sara Moyle  
James Neubauer  
Kim O'Gorman  
Neven Pajkic  
Victor Parracho  
Amish Patel  
Scott Paterson  
Troy Patterson

Ashley Ann Peters  
Sheldon Pitt  
Basil Rehan  
Maya Ritter  
Jonathan Robbins  
Natasha Roy  
Katherine Sanders  
Tasha Schumann  
Carter Siddall  
Andre Sills  
Joel Silverstone  
Shantay Slater  
Tyler Stevenson  
Craig Stickland  
Shawn Storer  
Logan Ten  
Kristian Truelsen  
Julian Vincent  
Jasmina Vucurovic  
Gill Wallace  
Patricia Welbourn  
Paul Wensley  
Samantha Somer  
Wilson  
John Wing Jr  
Leigh Wingfield  
Jonathan Winsby  
Steven Woodworth

## Announcements



It is with infinite joy, that **David Cormican** (CAEA, ACTRA) introduces to his family, friends and colleagues his beautiful baby girl, **Skylar Sophia Cormican**, born with a full head of hair (just like Daddy) in Toronto at St. Joseph's Hospital, on March 20, 2007.

ACTRA member **Adam Gaudreau** and wife **Iva** are proud to announce the birth of **Seth Gaudreau** on February 14, 2007, in Toronto.



# Relaxation achieved.



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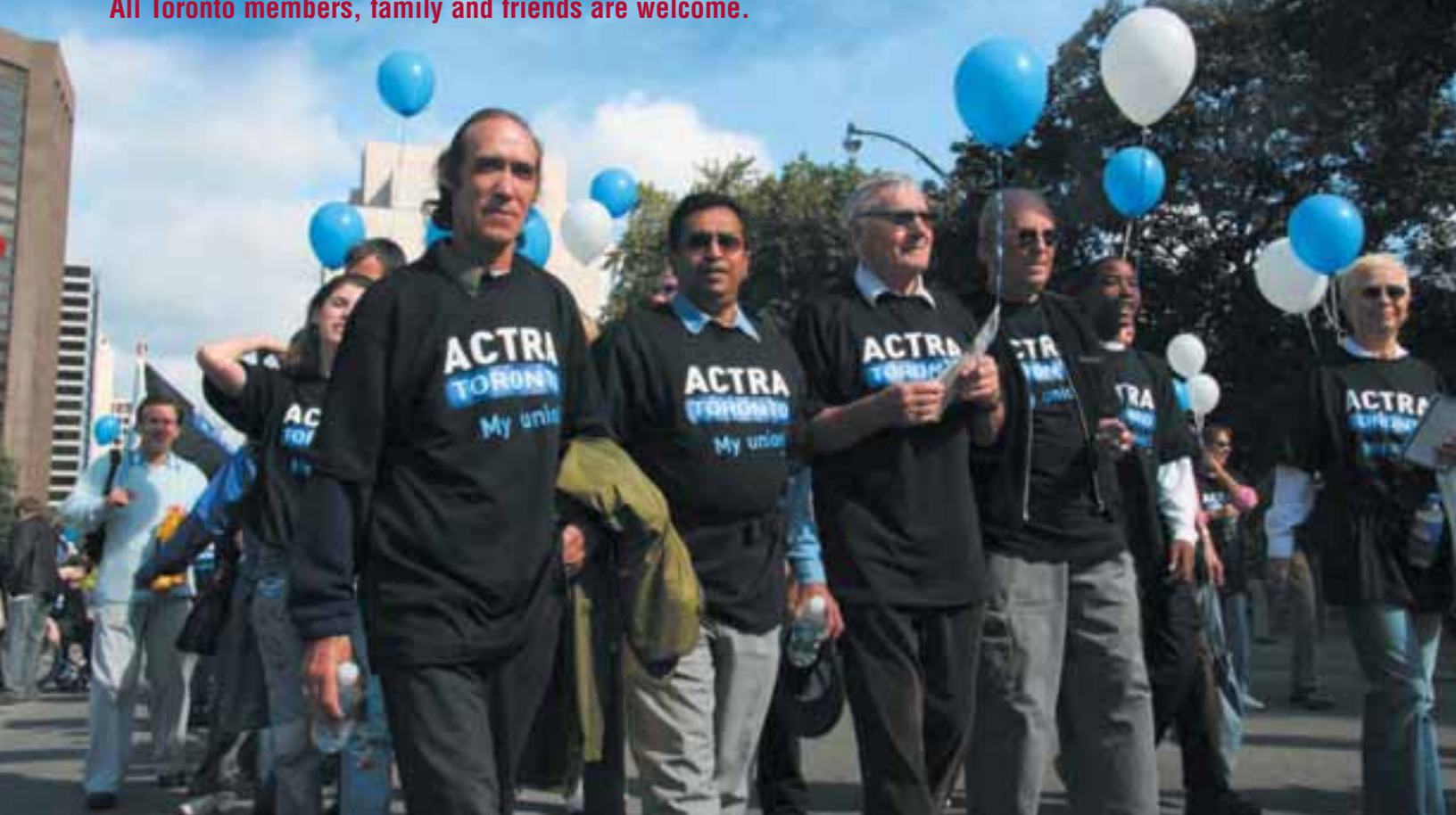
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# Labour Day Parade Monday, September 3

Join ACTRA Toronto members and march in the annual Labour Day parade on Monday, September 3, 2007. ACTRA Toronto is proud to join other Toronto-area unions in the annual parade celebrating the history and struggle of working people and the achievements of organized labour. Meet on University Avenue and Queen Street West. The parade marches west along Queen Street and south on Dufferin to the CNE. All those marching in the parade get into the Ex for free. For more info, check out [www.actratoronto.com](http://www.actratoronto.com) in August.

**All Toronto members, family and friends are welcome.**



**ACTRA Toronto Performers**  
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