

New show plumbs Toronto politics for comic relief

Published On Sun Apr 25 2010
San Grewal
Staff Reporter, The Toronto Star

To wary citizens they are loose, crude and loud. To comic writers, the cast of characters starring in Toronto's wild political scene is pure gold.

So fret not if you're anxious about your daily comedic fix after George, Giorgio and Rob end their slapstick at the polls this fall, their bombast will be captured for your viewing pleasure on the small screen.

She's The Mayor is a new sitcom inspired by Toronto city politics. It's the brainchild of Toronto documentary filmmaker Min Sook Lee, who was given behind-closed-door access at city hall for almost two years while shooting her 2005 film *Hogtown: The Politics of Policing*.

What she left on the editing room floor, and witnessed behind the scenes while watching outsized characters make sure each other didn't get what they wanted, was too funny to let go.

"Basically, it was a lot of buffoonery and grandstanding," Lee says. "Ford and Mammoliti take up a lot of air in a room. They were in many ways inspiration for one of our councillors in the show."

The setting for the show, which is currently being shot at a Downsview studio and expected to air on Moses Znaimer's Vision TV in early 2011, is Fairfax, a hard-hit industrial city (think Hamilton or Windsor) that could be anywhere in North America. One episode Lee details revolves around the show's star, a no-nonsense recent divorcee who stumbles into the mayor's seat on a dare after retiring as a small-town principal.

Lee says the plot line was inspired by Rob Ford.

"Iris (the mayor's name) holds a news conference to apologize for an offensive comment, but ends up making even more offensive comments."

Lee, who grew up in and around the Annex, partnered with local TV and film directors Jennifer Holness and Sudz Sutherland to develop the show's comic touch, described by the co-creators as a dialogue-driven sitcom in the style of old British comedies, such as *Fawlty Towers*. It's been picked up for at least one year.

The cast will get instant audience recognition thanks to roles played by funny man Colin Mochrie and *Young And Restless* star Tonya Lee Williams, who the creators say was a comedic actor before she made it big with the soap opera.

As for the decision to focus on a female mayor, it speaks to Lee's disenchantment with municipal politics. "It's an old boys network. It makes for great comedy, tragic comedy. Re-

imagining it, wouldn't it be great if a woman was in power? The idea presented all kinds of new possibilities for the show."

And in a way, allowed the creators to avoid the overly-embarrassing testosterone displays Lee witnessed during her days at city hall. One of the most memorable scenes in *Hogtown* is an exchange in the council chamber between Ford and a member of the media who suggested the councillor had misrepresented facts when answering a question.

"Why did you just call him a fat f—k," Mammoliti suddenly jumps in, accusing the journalist. "You called me a fat f—k, you did, you just did," Ford says, before the two chase after the journalist trying to make his escape through a nearby elevator, which Ford blocks as the scribe bolts down the hall.

"You just can't write that stuff," Sutherland says. Lee concurs. "He's (Ford) the gift that keeps on giving."