



SHE'S THE MAYOR

March 4, 2011 by [whatsoninancouver](#)

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Iris Peters is the living embodiment of the old saying that some people have greatness thrust upon them. Well, if not greatness, at least uncommon goodness.

Iris is the lead character in “She’s the Mayor,” debuting Friday, March 4, on Vision Television. Played by Janet Laine-Green, Iris is a retired school principal with enough edge still on her voice and her mind to make any former schoolchild cringe.

She’s divorced and retired, and as Green says, “all she wants to do is take care of her garden.” Then she joins a protest against a development plan backed by a crooked city council and finds herself running for mayor. She wins the contest when the incumbent is arrested for trafficking drugs and adult diapers and has to learn how to run a small city.

Green says she was attracted to Iris because she stood out from the types of roles she was being offered: “doctors, lawyers, strong women.”

“For this woman, there’s a sense of discovery. She didn’t just fall into a job. She fell into an entirely different life. Everything she knew before — her role as an elementary schoolteacher, as a

parent and as a wife — have all been transfigured and transformed by this thing of becoming the mayor.

“She’s a strong woman, but she’s lost. She doesn’t know what she’s doing in this new world. Her husband has left her for her best friend. Everything is upside down. So, for me it was like, ‘Let’s go.’ ”

The show is an anomaly on so many levels it’s hard to know where to start. As writer Paul Bellini says, it’s a series on a small network with CBC-level production values. “I like to think it will do for them what ‘Mad Men’ did for AMC,” he says, “which is to take a network and completely reconfigure it in the public’s mind.

“You think of Vision TV, you think of ‘Harpur’s Heaven and Hell,’ and I think with this the network really wanted to try something new.”

The show was co-created by director Sudz Sutherland — known for the theatrical romantic comedy “Love, Sex & Eating the Bones” and such serious TV drama as “Doomstown” and

“Guns” — and his wife, producer-writer Jennifer Holness, with documentary filmmaker Min Sook Lee.

Its lead character is a 64-year-old woman who is not a cranky-cute crone, an evil mother-in-law or a comically domineering mom.

Rather, Iris is something of a standard-bearer for the boomer generation — or as Vision’s parent company has branded them, the Zoomers.

“The whole emphasis is that aging is not the nightmare it used to be,” Bellini says. “I guess this show’s message is that there are second acts in life.”

“She’s the Mayor” started life as a gleam in Lee’s eye when she was making a documentary about Toronto’s last municipal election, says Bellini, who has worked on such Canadian comedy series as “Kids in the Hall” and “22 Minutes.” “It contains the famous footage of (mayoral candidate) Rob Ford freaking out on a Globe and Mail writer. So we realized how nutty municipal politics can be. That was kind of the starting point: ‘Let’s do something about municipal politics.’ ”

The cast includes Colin Mochrie, Scott Wentworth, Joseph Motiki and Tonya Lee Williams. Green, meanwhile, is a TV veteran who has been a regular on such series as “Seeing Things,” “The Beachcombers,” “Earth: Final Conflict,” “Traders” and “MVP” and has guest starred on scores of others.

She also acts for the stage, produces and directs, runs her own production company, and teaches acting.

“When I found out she was playing the mom on the show, I was very excited,” says Paul Constable, who plays Iris’ live-in adult son, Stanley.

“When I was a kid, I used to watch ‘Seeing Things,’ and she was like the hot blonde on CBC Television. So I had a little crush on her.”

As Bellini says, Constable’s character is a “political liability, like Roger Clinton or Billy Carter. “The guy who is always going to be in the right place at the wrong time.”

Or as Constable puts it: “He could afford to have his own place, but he still lives at home with his video games. He never grew up from 16 — and she never let him get beyond that.

“I don’t think it’s healthy. It might make for good television, but it’s not a healthy relationship.” It wasn’t always easy to shake the mother-son thing off-screen, he adds.

“Janet is this very proper-looking, beautiful woman, but every now and then she would do these jokes. (I think I bring out the dirty side of people.) “Then I’d feel like a bad son: ‘Oh, my God! I got my mom to make a dirty joke.’ ”

As for finding the right tone to play a mother figure and a crusading former school principal, Green says, “I’ve taught a lot, so I’m used to being listened to.”