

The Best of the West

BY DIANE WILD

Choosing the best TV show to come out of Western Canada in the last 30 years is almost as hard as figuring out whether Nick or Relic was my favourite beachcomber. I loved them for such different and opposing reasons.

And that is the obvious nostalgia winner if I'm going to make a choice. I spent more time with *The Beachcombers* as a kid than I did with most of my extended family. Though it was not the Canada I knew as a land-locked Edmontonian, I recognized how unusual it was to see my own country represented onscreen in something other than a *Hinterland Who's Who* segment. *The Beachcombers* aired for about 567 years, give or take, but I haven't seen it in decades, meaning it might not hold up as truly the best choice.

There's the "everyone else loved it" choice in *Corner Gas*. Hugely popular, hugely influential, it just wasn't my cup of joe. Canadian networks are still trying to replicate its success. A movie was enthusiastically crowdfunded and attracted a huge audience. The show is worthy to be someone's choice for best of the west – just not mine. Call me a jackass if you will, Oscar.

My "think outside CanCon" choice would be *The X-Files*, *The Vancouver Years*. I ignored the first couple of seasons thinking it was a reality show (seriously), then binge-watched it before binge-watching was cool – and had the nightmares to show for it. I bailed when the later seasons disintegrated into a pile

of convoluted conspiracy, but the mostly-monster-of-the-week seasons remain a favourite today. Except *Home*. I don't need those kind of nightmares again.

APTN's *Blackstone* would be my socially conscious choice. It's *The Wire* of Canada, equally relegated to a cult audience – which in Canada means a cult of a cult audience -- and equally willing to delve into complex socio-political issues surrounding a community. It's not as ponderous as that sentence made it sound, but it's not light viewing ei-

And then there's the right choice: SCTV. I can hear you now – does that really qualify as a Western Canadian show, when most seasons were produced in Ontario? As a born and bred Edmontonian, where you can take an SCTV shooting location walking tour, I can definitively say yes. Just as Gretzky will always be ours, so too will SCTV. Argue with me and I'll send Dave Semenko after you.

The series helped define Canada's sketch comedy identity in ways that are obvious even today. *Kids in the*

radio station using a tape recorder and our best attempt to capture some of the SCTV spirit. Those tapes didn't survive for long, but I don't think the SCTV writers would have been quaking in their boots at the competition.

It made household names out of people who are still household names 30 years later. Eugene Levy and Catherine O'Hara are still enough of a draw that CBC's *Schitt's Creek* premiered to 1.4 million viewers – a reflection of their star power that the series itself couldn't hold on to.

Andrea Martin came back to host the Canadian Screen Awards broadcast ceremony, forever Canadian to Canadians, though she's actually American by birth and citizenship. Martin Short, John Candy, Dave Thomas, Rick Moranis, Harold Ramis, Joe Flaherty – whether they were born here or not, this cast will always be our people.

And so many of the cast of this low-budget Canadian show became prominent figures in US entertainment – always a favoured trajectory for us approval-seeking Canucks. So when naming a best show of Western Canada – a fool's errand – what better than a show that unites east and west, north and south, and irreverently tells us all to take off, eh? ■

Diane Wild is the Vancouver-based founder of the *TV, eh?* website (www.tv-eh.com), covering news, reviews and interviews about Canadian television shows.

I spent more time with *The Beachcombers* as a kid than I did with most of my extended family.

ther and I find myself needing to be in the right frame of mind to settle in with a season. So picking it as the best of the lot would also be the pretentious, hypocritical choice.

A modern family-friendly choice would be the long-running Sunday stalwart *Heartland*, but while it reminds me of my younger days of obsessing over *Anne of Green Gables* and slightly less young days of looking in on *Road to Avonlea* for the Lucy Maud Montgomery completism, I'm not family-friendly enough as an adult to really enjoy it.

Hall, This Hour Has 22 Minutes, Rick Mercer, even this season's *Sunnyside* – does anyone working in sketch comedy not owe a debt to the shenanigans of the SCTV gang? How can I, someone who runs a website on Canadian content called "TV, eh?" not owe a debt to a series that gave us Bob and Doug and "eh?" and the ultimate mockery of Canadian content.

It helped define a sense of humour for at least a generation. My brother and I – not having a video recorder – would create our own

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