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YOUNG DRUNK PUNK BRUCE MCCULLOCH GROWS UP

OCTOBER 6, 2015 | DIANE WILD

A red banner for AMI TV. On the left, there is a small image of two people in wheelchairs on an ice rink. To the right of the image, the text reads: "Health & Wellness with Canadian Paralympians and Athletes Mind Set Go - Thursdays on AMI-tv" followed by the AMI logo (the letters 'A', 'M', and 'I' in separate white boxes on a red background).

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Bruce McCulloch is an accidental marketing genius. His stage show *Young Drunk Punk* was touring the country while he promoted the book it spawned, *Let's Start a Riot: How A Young Drunk Punk Became a Hollywood Dad*, and the TV series it inspired, *Young Drunk Punk*, which aired on City in the spring and is rerunning on CBC this fall.

"They're very different but it's the same kind of comedic and emotional material," says McCulloch, whose last TV production was the Kids in the Hall mini-series *Death Comes to Town* for CBC. "People trying to find their place in the world, a young guy who doesn't fucking know anything and thinks he knows everything."

Young Drunk Punk the TV series stars Tim Carlson and Atticus Mitchell as teenagers Ian and Shinky in 1980s Calgary, "somewhere in the lost years between high school and 'what's next.'"

McCulloch calls it "more comedically and thematically autobiographical than literal," but the series does film in the townhouse community he grew up in. "Literally the same place. So where I walked around having gobbled acid as a 15 year old we're now shooting."

Adding to the surreality is that McCulloch and his real-life wife Tracy Ryan play Ian's parents. No nepotism there though: "Oh yeah, of course I auditioned her," he says. "I auditioned her once for *Superstar* and she didn't get the part. I'm a tough mofo."

He didn't write a part for himself, either, and it's probably fair to say he didn't audition for it. "I never act unless someone asks me to, I never audition. I don't think of myself as an actor first. Even when I wrote this it didn't occur to me to play this character. Other people were saying 'you're the dad, right?'"

While the stage show and book delve into some poignant territory amid the laughs, he describes the series humour as mostly silly. In the pilot, the boys are chased after trying to steal a stereo from a crowded party. But he's also aiming for likeable and maybe more importantly, relatable characters.

"We're all lost. Even the people who seem like they're not are lost. The guidance counsellor is lost. You just keep going forward," he says. "At 50 I feel like a punk maybe even more than I did then. I feel like I'm different from everyone else. Yes, but we all are. The guys in the TV show are years away from understanding that."

McCulloch found his band of fellow outsiders in the other members of Kids in the Hall, a bond that continues 30-something years later. They've done shows this year in Toronto and the United States and McCulloch says they plan to work together again when the stars and schedules align. But he's not yet looking for the next big thing, any more than he did back in the early days of his career.

"I thought I'd like to make a living writing, and figured we should get on TV. But I had no plan, I just wanted to make stuff," he says. "My own personal journey in this world is to enjoy what I'm doing and not be on the next thing."

The current thing is working within the big machine that is television production, adjusting as he goes to capitalize on what the actors bring to the part and what material lands the way he wanted it to. In the editing room in Toronto, McCulloch says he can now start to wonder about *Young Drunk Punk* "is this the coolest show ever or is it just really weird?"

"We have a lot of Canadian shows trying to be like American shows, to look like, talk like American shows. I have pride in this being Calgary in 1980s. We talk about the Flames and Oilmen. I thought *Less Than Kind* was wonderful for much the same reason – it felt like I was there."

Does he worry about the show's reception, given the scrutiny Canadian comedies are under lately?

"Never hope or you'll get your heart broken," he says before adding "I feel pressure with everything I do."

"We don't do many TV shows here, so I want this to do well for me but for the young actors, the executives, the fans, for everyone who wants to do TV shows." He pauses. "Thanks, you've just heightened my sense of failure and doom."

The first season of Young Drunk Punk re-airs on CBC starting Tuesday, October 6.

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Diane is the founder of *TV, eh?* She loves books, movies, TV, science, space, traveling, theatre, art, cats, and drinking multiple beverages at the same time.

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