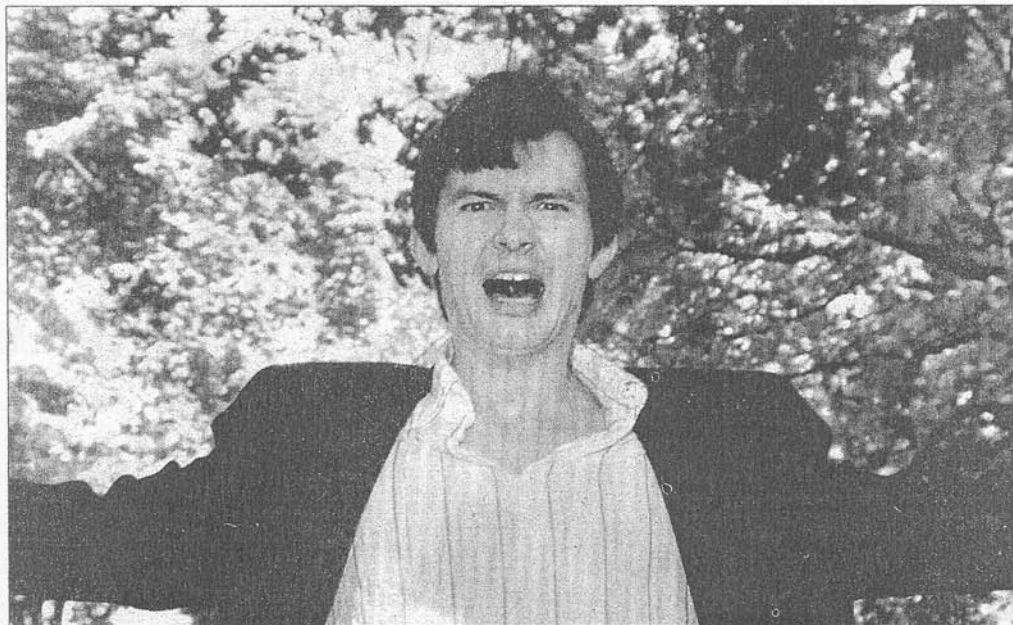


Small Screen



KATE LEBLANC/TORONTO STAR

Roman Danylo, star of *Comedy Inc.*, hails from Calgary, lives in Vancouver and commutes to T.O. to shoot the series.

How Roman conquers



Rita Zekas
Star Gazing

If dying is easy and comedy is hard, then stand-up must be murder.

Imagine bombing in front of a highly critical and vocal audience of hecklers. Worse still — what if they are funnier than you?

Stand-ups are really brave. There must be some kind of an equivalent of a Purple Heart for them. Could be it's just getting a steady gig, like **Roman Danylo**, lead in the series *Comedy Inc.*, a sketch comedy show taped in front of an audience that airs on CTV and the Comedy Network here and has just been picked up by Spike TV in the U.S.

"Now we can bump up our prices," Danylo jokes. "We kind of had a slow start, or, as they call it now, a 'soft' start."

They are in the process of shooting the third season. "We are rehearsing and playing around," he says. "It feels like summer camp."

"*Comedy Inc.*, if you are flipping through the channels, is like *MadTV* and *SNL*. There are seven main cast members and two writers who sometimes act but we all write. I am the quarterback and (producer) **Sandra Faire** is the coach. The office staff is our cheerleaders with floppy skirts."

Danylo swears they won't change the show for the American broadcaster.

"We do the show for us," he insists. "And we have sketches that poke fun at Americans. It's the same audience we have for stand-up and at *Second City*. Our mandate is people our age — we're 30s to late 30s and they get our references. We have retro references to the

'80s like **William Shatner**, **MC Hammer** and **Bill Cosby**, and we know **Lucille Ball** in reruns from when we were kids. They are icons and fun to bring to the table."

Danylo, who is of Ukrainian/German origin, hails from Calgary but resides in Vancouver and commutes to shoot here. "I carpool with 300 other people in a plane," he cracks. "I've always come out to do stand-up here but I never moved here."

He grew up watching *Second City* and *Saturday Night Live*. "I found it very soothing to watch *SNL* when my parents went out dancing on Saturday nights," he recalls. "I fell asleep to it. It was soothing; it was my lullaby."

The next day, Danylo would re-enact the show to friends. He did plays in school but wouldn't say he was a funny kid per se. "I had really funny friends," he explains. "I tried hard to make my friends laugh. I only tried to make them laugh in class if it was a good room with sightlines. Science class was drained of energy and before lunch so it was no way — everyone was way too groggy."

His math teacher periodically indulged him cracking wise in class. He was good in math; he got in the low 90s.

"I'm in the wrong profession; I should be working in a lab," Danylo claims.

SNL's **Martin Short** was an influence.

"I dressed up as Ed Grimley (one of Short's characters) for Halloween. Martin Short tours and does a live show where he picks up sketch comedians from time to time. I did a show with him in Vancouver and didn't realize until then that he was such a huge influence. I figured I'd better step it up."

Danylo was picked up by the prestigious Brillstein-Grey agency in L.A. and was there being pitched for sitcom pilots in the spring. He has appeared on TV in his own one-hour special *Comedy Now!*, *CBC's Comics*, *UPN's Off Limits*, *NBC's Late Friday* and *The Phil Fuller Show*, a pilot from **David Steinberg**.

His theatre credits include a production of *Liaisons Dangereuses* in Calgary.

"I killed **Colm Feore** in a play in Theatre Calgary," he adds. "Traditional theatre after awhile is too much work for a three-figure salary. It is a unique torture — the same thing over and over again. How do you keep it fresh? In stand-up, if you get tired, you can leave and you won't screw anyone else."

Danylo's film credits include *Duets* and *Happy Birthday*. In *Duets*, he played a clerk and had a scene with **Paul Giamatti**. "At that time, he wasn't really well known," he says. "It was, 'Wow, he's really acting up a storm.'"

Danylo is not in the comedy biz for the fame or the bucks. It's the yuks.

"You start doing comedy because you want attention," he allows. "When you get older, you do it because it's a good job. I'm 35; I started improv when I was 18. I should be way better!"

He admits to being obsessive-compulsive though not as compulsive as **Tony Shalhoub** in *Monk* or **Jack Nicholson** in *As Good as It Gets*.

"During the writing process of a show, I'll write a script and then I'll think of a word and I'll change it. Or I should have put a comma instead of a period and I'll go and get it out of the file."

That said, his stand-up is loose.

"It's more observational stuff, close to *Seinfeld*-type material," he explains.

He won a Leo Award performing in *Western Alienation Comedy Hour* and is a veteran of the Aspen Comedy Festival and *Just for Laughs* in Montreal.

"They have oxygen at the side of the stage for the comics at Aspen (because of the altitude)," he recalls. "When you do a tight five- to seven-minute set, you pace it out and plan where you have your breaks. Suddenly, three minutes into the set, it breaks up your timing because you want to get off and breathe. It's a light-headed weird state."

"In comedy, there is always a victim — even if the victim is yourself."

And sometimes you get to kill.