

# PLAYBACK

## APTN's Blackstone drama raises curtain on third season

September 25, 2013 by Etan Vlessing

For a Canadian drama where it can get pretty dire for storylines and characters on screen, you can hear palpable relief in Blackstone creator Ron E. Scott's voice.

"It's always nerve-wracking, and just so much happens so fast," Scott told Playback before he takes to the stage Wednesday night at the Alberta Art Gallery in Edmonton to introduce a third season preview of his APTN drama.

Battling pressure is not new for the Gemini-award winning Blackstone cast and crew.

The ambitious ensemble drama in the tradition of *The Wire* or *The Sopranos* offers viewers an unflinching and relentless window on the unfairness of life on the rez.

But cobbling together financing from broadcasters and funds to keep Blackstone on air has also taught Scott a painstaking lesson about how to weather the adversity of Canadian TV.

And like a team captain who's ended a scoring drought, Scott is breathing just a little easier as the little Canadian drama that can get to a third season, and even dares to look forward to a fourth.

"The show, the series, the season, it's coming together right now," he said.

Any TV drama is more than its rookie season, and the long arc of Blackstone is throwing up multiple storylines about First Nation reservation corruption, addiction and poverty as it unveils a third season on APTN this fall.

Blackstone reserve chief Andy Fraser, played by Eric Schweig, is coming unhinged as an investigation into the murder of a dancer in a strip club closes in around him.

And Gail Stoney, played by Michelle Thrush, who won a Gemini for her star-turn in Blackstone, continues to struggle with sobriety, while Leona Stoney, played by Carmen Moore, is also dealing with life after serving as the reservation chief.

But both members of the Stoney clan find in the third season a sense of elusive healing and humanity when they adopt and attempt to raise a child.

Now that the Rogers Documentary and Cable Network Fund has given equity dollars to the fourth season of Blackstone, Scott can look beyond tonight's glitzy premiere and yet another financing hurdle to getting back to shaping storylines and characters for the homegrown drama.

"It's always interesting. There has been some things that are big hurdles that we've already overcome," he explained.



Scott is also on the verge of a U.S. TV deal for Blackstone, now that PPI Releasing, the Los Angeles-based distributor, is negotiating with American channels after a third season got the Canadian drama to 23 episodes.

"There are two situations that are in play right now," Scott said, as it appears at long last that the Canadian TV game is finally moving to advantage for Blackstone, rather than against it.

Edmonton's Prairie Dog Film + Television produces Blackstone, with Jesse Szymanski as producer and Damon Vignale as producer and writer.

Blackstone also airs in New Zealand on Maori Television.