

# Hollywood North: Actor/producer John Cassini keeps B.C. scene buzzing

BY MARK LEIREN-YOUNG, SPECIAL TO THE SUN MARCH 21, 2013



Busy Vancouver actor John Cassini is also a hardworking champion of the B.C. film industry.

**Photograph by:** A&E, PROVINCE

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For the last few months John Cassini has been one of B.C.'s most visible advocates for increased provincial support for the film industry — but if the local industry was as busy as the popular actor, Vancouver wouldn't just regain its title as “Hollywood North,” Hollywood might be renamed “Vancouver South.”

Cassini's been one of the city's most in-demand actors since moving to Vancouver nine years ago for a starring role in the hit comedy, *Robson Arms* — which led to roles on *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Intelligence*. But his current dance card is so busy *The Sun* had to connect with him after he put his kids to bed.

Cassini's currently shooting recurring roles in two major western Canadian TV shows (*Continuum* and *Blackstone*). Hit *'n Strum*, the award-winning indie feature he produced, is about to kick off its third week at the Fifth Avenue Cinemas. And on March 29 his latest film, *The Resurrection of Tony Gitone*,

receives its world premiere in Toronto.

Cassini told *The Sun* he can't reveal much about his guest-starring role in *Continuum* beyond, "I'm not what society would deem a 'good guy' and we'll leave it at that."

Says Cassini, "I'm thrilled I was invited by (series creator and showrunner) Simon Barry to come and play in this world that he has created. He's a huge talent and even a better person so his success makes anyone who knows him very happy. And their cast is kicking ass." The second season kicks off on Showcase April 21.

He's also thrilled about his recurring role as a detective in APTN's acclaimed series *Blackstone*, a gritty drama about life on a reserve. It's a show Cassini's been a fan of since its debut two seasons ago. "I have been talking to anyone who would listen about how I thought that this was some of the best Canadian television, some of the best television anywhere for that matter. The authenticity, the performances, the writing and directing are astounding." Cassini started shooting that project in Edmonton this week.

At the end of the month a film he describes as a "passion project" debuts in Toronto. It's a drama about Italian-Canadians from Toronto meeting up for a reunion that goes wrong, especially for Cassini's character, who discovers his wife is having an affair. Although Cassini is a proud and passionate Vancouverite and a tireless advocate for the local industry, he grew up in downtown Toronto just a few miles away from where *The Resurrection of Tony Gitone* was shot. The film was directed by his friend Jerry Ciccoritti (*Boy Meets Girl*) and features some of the country's best known Italian-Canadian actors. "We all wanted in on it because we related to it," says Cassini. "It was refreshing to be very unapologetically Italian in this movie. Many of us spoke the dialects we grew up with from the different regions in Italy."

Cassini admits it was appealing to shoot a movie in his old neighbourhood. "I was the only one in the cast who was flown in. They all give me a hard time — quite frankly they can't understand why I live in Vancouver, but Vancouver is my adopted home. I love it here. It feeds my hippie side. My kids were born here."

He's also fighting to stay here and was one of the first members of the B.C. film community to help put a human face on the issues challenging the local industry for the *We Create BC* campaign. "It's really a fight to educate the masses about how economically beneficial this industry is and to keep an eye on the future of the arts in general. I think there has been a lot of misrepresentation that has happened over the years about what this industry gives back and hopefully we are starting to correct that."

Cassini's also doing his best to give back to the local biz by training the next generation of actors. About ten months ago he and Vancouver actress-director-teacher Kate Twa formed the *Railtown Actor's Studio*. "Working with the students there is always so damn inspiring. After all this time I haven't

lost my love for the craft at all and some nights I leave Railtown just bouncing off the walls with how much more is possible. This thing we do never gets old if you're in it for the work."

... Railtown Meth Movie Debuts ... Kate Twa, who co-founded the studio with Cassini, is celebrating the recent Super Channel debut of *Gods of Youth*, a film about the dangers of crystal meth, which she directed and which features Railtown students. "The subject of crystal meth came up in a Young Adult Scene Study class I was teaching. As we started digging for information, the story unfolded and we started filming. There was no stopping it," Twa told *The Sun*. The film also features veteran Vancouver actors like Lynda Boyd (*Republic of Doyle*), Grace Park (*Hawaii Five O*) and Tahmoh Penikett (*Battlestar Galactica*). "*Gods of Youth* is a unique film inspired by a series of true stories," says Twa. "The remarkable performances — much of the dialogue is improvised — is a testament to the compelling talent Vancouver has to offer."

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