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TV series shot in Victoria gives female comics a boost

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Executive producer Kirsten Van Ritzen is behind *She Kills Me*, a women's comedy festival that will be televised on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. Photograph by: Handout

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ONSTAGE

She Kills Me

Where: Metro Studio

When: Feb. 13 to 17, performances 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$20 at ticketrocket.org, (250) 590-6291

With Tiny Fey, Amy Poehler and Kristen Wiig having become household names, the playing field for female comics seems more levelled.

Nonetheless, comedy is still a male-dominated field. With her new television show, *She Kills Me*, Victoria actor Kirsten Van Ritzen hopes to help change all that.

The upcoming 13-episode series, to be taped next week over five nights in front of live audiences at Metro Studio, will showcase more than two dozen female comics. One third of the performers — including Carolyn Mark, Miss Rosie Bitts and Van Ritzen herself — are local. All hail from Western Canada.

The show, produced by Victoria's Less Bland Productions, is slated to air nationally on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) in the 2013-14 season. Each episode is to feature one aboriginal and one non-aboriginal performer.

"I'm excited," said Van Ritzen, the show's host and executive producer. "I don't think anything like this has ever been done in Victoria before."

Van Ritzen selected the comedians, mostly up-and-comers in the field. They'll offer a variety of comedy styles, running from

stand-up to burlesque, clowning, story-telling and character-based performance.

Six or seven comics will perform nightly at the Metro. The same lineup will offer two shows each evening, giving both performers and producers a better chance at getting usable material.

“You never know, an ambulance may go by the Metro, and then our sound guy goes, ‘Oh no, we lost a joke,’ ” Van Ritzen said.

Van Ritzen, who’s also a writer and director, is known locally for appearing in the Sin City improvised comedy series and acting in the Victoria Theatre Guild’s production of That Face. She’s also taught a course on stand-up comedy. Her husband, Ian Ferguson, will direct and co-produce She Kills Me with Leslie D. Bland.

“It’s one of those ideas, when Kirsten first came up with, it was like, ‘Why has someone not done this before?’ ” Ferguson said. “It’s a chance to showcase these really talented, amazing performers — all female, aboriginal/non-aboriginal — who would not normally get this opportunity.”

Van Ritzen says the world of stand-up comedy continues to be a “macho guy’s world.” Much of the comedy performed in nightclubs tends to be edgy. And some people become uncomfortable when women delve into this raunchier style.

“They’ll watch a guy tell dirty jokes. And sometimes a woman comes out, and we’re like, ‘Oh, we don’t want to watch her tell jokes about her period.’ ”

Ferguson notes while many male comics have scored fame after burning up the big-city club circuit, it’s a less common path for females.

“But some of the women doing this show should have had a comedy special or a national TV special years ago,” he said.

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