

YTV rides the youth musical wave

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Is it any wonder that Canada's first mainstream musical on film is a Canadian nod to the tween *High School Musical* phenomenon?

YTV's *King of the Camp* takes place during that very Canadian coming-of-age ritual: summer camp. It pits the snobby counsellors (rich city kids) against the feisty maintenance staff (local townies), and never the twain shall meet. At least, not until the new kitchen boy (played by Justin Stadnyk) falls for Cindy (Ashley Carter), one of the cuter camp leaders. But before things can fall into place, there are seven song and dance numbers and two ballads to watch.

Musicals "happen to be a hip genre right now," says Jocelyn Hamilton, vice-president of content at Corus Kids, who adds that this is YTV's first original movie. "We're trying to be relevant at all times to what our audience is looking for."

Since *HSM* took off in early 2006, followed by *HSM 2* last summer, and now intense speculation over the feature-film end to the trilogy, YTV's young-adult audience has been hooked on the musical. Much of the \$118-million (U.S.) box-office success of last year's *Hairspray* can be pegged to the already primed young audience, and its parents.



King of the Camp broadens out from the universal themes of forbidden love, with a strong anti-bullying storyline. (YTV)



Gillian Helfield, course director of film studies at Toronto's York University, says she had never heard of a mainstream Canadian musical before *King of the Camp*.

Canadian musicals on film have almost always been relatively obscure, art-house fare like Guy Maddin's *The Saddest Music in the World* or John Greyson's *Zero Patience* and *The Making of Monsters*. Musicals, she says, are a Hollywood thing. "It's all about the cast coming together and putting aside their differences to be part of a whole, and that's not really a Canadian theme. We have man against the environment, man against nature, discovering himself and his identity.

"Musical is not really our genre, our genre is documentary and these quirky little films like *Highway 61*."

King of the Camp producer and director Jeff Deverett hopes that's about to change. He's a long-time fan of the genre, with stacks of Broadway soundtracks he plays in his car. "Musicals make for great family fare," he says, adding that *King of the Camp* broadens out from the universal themes of forbidden love and righting the wrongs of social status, with a strong anti-bullying storyline – and cool wakeboarding scenes.

The movie was filmed last August at Camp Wahanowin in Orillia, Ont., while it was still open. "I underestimated how challenging that would be shooting in an operational summer camp," he recalls. "The upside is you get these big huge shots with campers in the background. The downside is you have to manage all these kids and they're not used to doing this type of thing."

Stadnyk, who plays the upstart kitchen boy and is now performing at the Shaw festival in *Wonderful Town* and *A Little Night Music*, remembers that long, "crazy" day.

"For the first two takes they're really into it, and then for the next eight to 10 the room was getting hot and [the kids] didn't want to be there, they wanted to be in the water swimming."

The hard work and patience paid off – that number is one of the film's best. Another camper-filled scene shows the kids and pros kicking up their flip-flops in a big number on the shores of Lake Couchiching.

But when the singing and the dancing and the wakeboarding stop, and the acting begins, the dialogue is rife with teenage lingo.

The first, earnest line of the movie (That was sick dude!) could almost be a parody. Apparently, that's a sign the viewer is, like, too old.

"Sometimes it's hard for us as adults to realize that kids are okay with that [kind of jargon]. ... To them it's not that goofy," insists YTV's Hamilton.

Maybe he's right – over the past two months, *King of the Camp* played to roughly 50 middle schools across Ontario in order to gauge audience reaction and build buzz.

"Lots of kids could get up and sing the last song *Friends Forever* on their way out of the auditorium," says Hamilton. "That's really exciting to see."

King of the Camp premieres tomorrow at 6 p.m. on YTV (check local listings).

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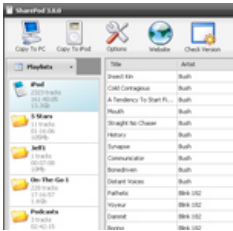
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