

Stars may be mock but drama is for real

Alex Strachan



Mockstars is no sham glam — it's the real deal.

As documentary, this Vancouver-produced backstage pass inside the lives of pop-star impersonators is one slick-looking flick, thanks to the keen eye and sound ear of Vancouver producers Erin Mussolum and Michelle Welygan and Montreal director Irene Angelico, whose incisive account of the cola wars, *The Cola Conquest*, won a prestigious Hot Docs award last year for documentary series. Mussolum and Welygan supplied the drive for *Mockstars*, Angelico provided the direction and executive-producers Arvi Liimatainen, a co-producer of *Da Vinci's Inquest*, and Jayme Pfahl, the B.C. producer of *No Boundaries*, helped come up with the scratch.

But they aren't the stars. Nosiree, Bob, the stars — and the reason to watch — are the mock stars themselves, from Neil Diamond-look-alike Nearly Neil, who brings down the house with a latter-day rendition of *Sweet Caroline*, to Shania Twain's twin, nicknamed Shania Twin. We catch glimpses of them in performance, on stage and off, and a couple of them — the KISS tribute band Hotter Than Hell and Bobby Bruce, who leads a double (or is that triple?) life as Diamond-lookalike Nearly Neil — appear to be near brilliant. We see the mock stars backstage, where we get a sense of the blood, sweat and tears that goes into nailing down a spot-on impersonation. And we see them at home, surrounded by friends and family, where they reveal their innermost insecurities (a rough childhood and rootless

adolescence are recurring themes) and personal ambitions (most admit they would rather be known for their own music, while some are only too happy to play the fame game).

One of *Mockstars'* biggest questions is settled early: It doesn't matter whether you approve of tribute bands or not; as a documentary, *Mockstars* is ceaselessly fascinating, and leaves any value judgments that need to be made to the viewer.

Besides, the stories behind the mock music are often as wacky and surreal as the acts themselves: Bruce (Nearly Neil) was "discovered" at a karaoke contest by an Elvis impersonator, while Donna Huber (Shania Twin) was convinced to impersonate Twain after hearing one too many of those facetious "Oh-you-look-so-much-like-her" comments in the bakery where she worked. (And all you kids out there who scoff that never the Twain(s) shall meet, think again. The real Shania meets the mock Shania about an hour into *Mockstars*, and ego and alter ego hit it off right off the bat: For all intensive purposes, they appear to be 'n sync, as it were.)

Dave Battah (Frod Stewart) doesn't have it so easy; at Rod Stewart's Vancouver concert, the aging rocker refuses to see him, though we never actually see the snub on camera. (Perhaps Sir Rodney was having a bad day. And an aging rocker on a bad day is not a sight you want to see — just check out *The Osbournes* if you doubt that.) Battah needn't beat himself up over it, however. In one of *Mockstars'* most telling moments, Battah travels to Bosnia to entertain Canadian peacekeepers with his Stewart impersonation, and in one war-torn village he hands out presents to local children. They don't know who Rod Stewart is and they could care less: They're just thrilled to see an outsider and a cool guy, and they squeal with joy at their gifts. On that day, no doubt, it was a lot of fun simply being Dave Battah.

Other rockers are more generous in spirit: KISS front men Gene Simmons

and Paul Stanley have given Hotter Than Hell's Benny Doro pointers for 12 years, right down to the number of rhinestones on his hotter-than-hell tights, and Doro's KISS act is a scream to look at.

It's hard, too, not to wince at the gravity-defying gyrations of David Lee Roth-doppelgänger and Van Halen tribute artist John Vander, who hurls himself into a Van Halen-esque leg-split with such force that it's a marvel he ever struggles to his feet again. (I don't know who the sponsors are for tonight's program but this is a no-brainer for a pain reliever.) In a film filled with funny images, one of the funnier — and more revealing — moments comes when family man Keith Baker, doing a spot-on impersonation of Tom Jones, suffers a rear-end accident in his black leather pants in mid-Paul Anka ("Whoa, whoa, whoa, she's a laydee — whoa!"). Roadies rush the stage with electrician's tape to repair the damage; the fans think it's part of the act and howl in appreciation. It's all Baker can do not to break up, but that would spoil the illusion. So he soldiers on gamely, as though nothing has happened, while the roadies flail at his nether regions with duct tape. Sometimes, a man's just gotta do what a man's gotta do.

Mockstars premieres tonight on *Bravo!* at 6 p.m.

CHANNEL SURFING

Roswell

8-9 p.m. (ckvu 13), 9-10 p.m. (KSTW-UPN)

Series finale. Liz has a premonition that may spell the end of Max, Isabel and Michael. She saw last week's ratings.



Bobby Bruce performs as Nearly Neil.

Popstars: Boy Meets Girl

8:30-9 p.m. (Global BC)

The group records an album. But then you already knew that.

Frasier

9-9:30 p.m. (Global BC, KING-NBC)

Frasier agrees to pose as Roz's boyfriend at her family reunion. Then wonders why they keep staring at him.

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9-10 p.m. (KCPQ-Fox), 10-11 p.m. (CH Victoria)

Investigators identify the mole in the CTU. I've said all along that it's Nina. Given my record of late, that means it could be just about anyone else.

Law & Order: SVU

10-11 p.m. (BC CTV)

Benson and Stabler suspect a fellow officer in a series of murders. And you know this show: If they suspect someone, that means he must be guilty.

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