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Hits for tots

Winnipeg- based Koba Entertainment transforms children's TV shows into stage spectacles

By: [Morley Walker](#)22/09/2009 1:00 AM | [Comments: 0](#)

Behind every successful man, the old joke goes, stands a surprised woman.

In the case of Winnipeg entertainment mogul Gilles Paquin, who was honoured with the Industry Builder award at last weekend's Western Canadian Music Awards, the woman is less surprised than resolute.

"I'm just determined to keep up with him," says Patti Caplette, Paquin's wife of 27 years, a former Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancer who has segued into film, TV and stage production.

"He runs pretty fast in a lot of directions."

Today Caplette serves as artistic director of Koba Entertainment, the theatrical arm of her spouse's multi-tentacled business, the Paquin Entertainment Group.

Since 2003, she has built Koba into one of the continent's leading producers of live children's entertainment.

Mostly adapted from kids' TV shows, they compete with the likes of Disney, *Sesame Street* and even the current flavour of the month, the Australian kiddie rock band the Wiggles.

"It's about finding a niche where we can fit in," Caplette says. "In this business, you're always looking for the next big thing."

Koba's second production based on the Nickelodeon cable TV series *The Backyardigans* is in the midst of a 34-city Canadian tour.

Titled *Sea Deep in Adventure*, the colourful eight-person show stops at the Centennial Concert Hall for two performances Sunday afternoon.

At the same time, Caplette is preparing for a remount of Koba's Franklin the Turtle production, *Franklin and the Adventures of the Courageous Knight*, which opens Oct. 14 in Montpellier, France.

Between then and Christmas, *Franklin* will visit 33 cities in France, Switzerland and Belgium, including a two-week stop in Paris at the 2,800-seat Grand Rex, where the show ran for a month in 2008.

The show will return home to Canada to tour this spring.

"Koba does excellent creative," says Mark Northwood, vice-president of worldwide licensing for Nelvana Enterprises, the Toronto-based children's animation house, which produces *The Backyardigans* TV series, among many others.

"They work well with all our partners. They're our go-to people for anything in a large-format show."

In late 2003, Paquin asked Caplette to produce Koba's stage version of *Big Comfy Couch* after the company acquired the rights to the former YTV show.

She had two weeks to get it on its feet. Since then she has written, directed and choreographed 29 productions of 10 different properties, all developed and built here. The shows have toured North America, France, South Korea, Lebanon, Barbados and the United Arab Emirates.

"It's fabulous that they've been able to do this from Winnipeg," says RWB artistic director André Lewis, who danced with Caplette in the 1970s and 1980s.

"She certainly has a sense of showbiz. She knows where the light is."

In 2007, according to the *Globe and Mail's Report on Business*, the company grossed more than \$2 million from performance and appearance fees and merchandising.

"The most exciting part is actualizing the concept from one medium to another," Caplette says.

"It's tremendous to see it come to life."

She writes the script, often with a writer from the TV show, collaborating with the TV producers who sign off on every detail.

She casts the productions from her stable of nearly 50 actors, singers, dancers and musicians. The sets and costumes are designed here in Winnipeg. She works closely with her technical director, Jackie Easton, whom she met at the RWB in the 1980s, and her managing director, Christine Corthey, who came to Paquin from HMV Music.

These shows, which take nine months and up to \$500,000 to create, receive no public subsidy, compared to, say, the critically acclaimed, not-for-profit productions of Manitoba Theatre for Young People.

"When you spend your own money, you think carefully about every dollar," says Caplette, who grew up in Surrey, B.C.

"On the other hand, when I want to spend extra on something I know will improve the show, I can do it more easily."

Paquin, 57, and Caplette, 55, make a formidable team. Besides Koba, Paquin Entertainment Group operates a management arm (Randy Bachman and Buffy Sainte-Marie are the star clients), an agency division (with a stable of 140 acts, it, too, won a WCMA on the weekend) and a corporate-event production business.

Paquin's son Julian from his first marriage runs the agency out of Toronto. Caplette and Paquin have a 22-year old-son, Justin, who's taking a business degree at the University of Manitoba, and a 17-year-old daughter, Tarina, a student in the RWB's professional division.

"Winnipeg should be very proud of Gilles' accomplishments," says Tom Worrall, the Toronto chief operating

officer of Ticketmaster Canada.

"He is one of the most entrepreneurial and smart people I've ever met in this business."

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Koba highlights

FRANKLIN THE TURTLE

Adapted from: Nickelodeon series.

Concept: Franklin is a growing young turtle.

Koba productions: Franklin the Turtle (Feb. 2004); Franklin at the Symphony (Nov. 2005); Franklin and the Courageous Knights (Sept. 2009).

CAILLOU

Adapted from: the Teletoon series.

Concept: A four-year-old bald kid is fascinated by the world around him.

Koba productions: Big Book Club (March 2004); Super Cirque (Dec. 2005); C'est Moi (May 2006); Joie du Lire (Sept. 2007).

LITTLE BEAR

Adapted from: Nickelodeon series.

Concept: A grizzly cub plays with his animal friends.

Koba productions: Enchanted Wood (July 2004); Country Fun (June 2008); Winter Tales (Jan. 2009).

THE BACKYARDIGANS

Adapted from: the Nick Jr. series.

Concept: Friends use imagination to transform their backyard.

Koba productions: Playdate (Feb. 2007); Quest for the Extraordinary Aliens (Jan. 2008); Backyardigans in Concert (Aug. 2008); Sea Deep in Adventure (Sept. 2009).

THE DOODLEBOPS


Adapted from: CBC series.

Concept: Members of a children's band teach kids life lessons.

Koba productions: Together Forever (Feb. 2009); Doodlebops in Concert (July 2009)

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