

Stars add glitter to launch of new Vancouver TV station

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The Globe and Mail (1936-Current); Sep 23, 1997; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail

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ON THE AIR / *Joni Mitchell and Sarah McLachlan are among the guests on the debut of Vicki Gabereau's show on new outlet's jittery first morning.*

JONI Mitchell was there on tape. Sarah McLachlan was there in person. But the first voices heard on Vancouver's newest television station belonged, not to those internationally known singers, but to a children's choir.

Just before 6 a.m. yesterday, the children from Vancouver's Lord Nelson Elementary School sang *O Canada*, although thanks to a mix-up in the control room, home viewers heard only silence for the first few seconds. Then someone hit the audio

switch and VTV, Baton Broadcasting Systems' new Vancouver station and the city's first new television outlet in 21 years, was officially on the air. It wasn't a perfect morning — after the snafu with the choir, both the opening remarks of station manager Jon Festinger and the first few seconds of Vicki Gabereau's new show, *Gabereau Live!* were likewise swallowed up by audio gremlins — but for the 130 or so people who work at

VTV, it was a satisfying one.

"We lost a little of the prelaunch ceremony, but we were on the air at 6 a.m.," said Festinger, part of a team that worked the past four months to get the station on-air. "We fought hard to get to the starting line, to have the privilege of creating. And we made it. I'm bursting at the seams with amazement and excitement."

The station has actually been on-air and running promos since the

middle of last week and held a "soft launch" that included marathon showings of *Melrose Place* and *The Larry Sanders Show* over the weekend. Yesterday's launch, however, marked the beginning of the station's original programming, including its morning show, *Vancouver Breakfast*, its three daily newscasts and the network show, *Gabereau Live!*, which yesterday featured both a taped interview with Mitchell (who brought

along her daughter Kilauren Gibb) and a live interview with McLachlan (who brought along her dog Rex). This week will see the premiere of a number of local shows, including *Applause* (Thurs. 8 p.m.), an arts and entertainment magazine; a new comedy show from CBC Radio refugees *Double Exposure* (Sat., 7 p.m.) and *Mason Lee: On The Edge* (Sun., 11:30 a.m.), a political talk show hosted by former *Globe and Mail* columnist and author Robert Mason Lee.

The fate of the new station will not, of course, be decided in one morning, one week, or even one year. **Please see Station / D2**

Station will be a lab

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Over the next several years, VTV must become part of the city and shake loose viewers from Vancouver's other broadcast outlets.

In attempting to establish its identity, the station seems to have borrowed a page or two from Toronto's CITY-TV, one of the runners-up in the bid for the Vancouver licence. Like CITY, VTV has set up shop in a downtown heritage building — in VTV's case it's the old Vancouver Public Library — and offered the public an open window on its studios. Like CITY, the new station is self-consciously hip and slightly irreverent. The set for the station's morning show, *Vancouver Breakfast*, resembles a giant breakfast featuring a couch that looks like a stack of toast, yellow beanbag chairs that look like egg yolks and tables that looked like hash browns and strawberries. (Whether the lack of any meat in the breakfast is a concession to Vancouver vegetarians or a subtle comment on the content of the show remains to be seen.) It is a very different kind of station than CFTO, Baton's Toronto flagship or VTV's main rival in Vancouver, BCTV.

"This is an independent station. It's a different animal than our CTV affiliates," said Baton president and CEO Ivan Fecan. "And I think we're a less youth-oriented station than CITY. We've tried to take the best ideas from wherever they came and take them to the next generation. This is a made-in-Vancouver station."

He admits, however, that it will take time for the city to share that view of VTV. "I hope that in a year, people would have a hard time imagining Vancouver without this station," Fecan said. "It will probably take longer than that. And it will probably take even longer to reach some of our goals. We are No. 1 in news in every community that we have a station in; it will take us quite a while to even dream about being No. 1 in news here."

In the meantime, Fecan said, VTV will serve as a lab for Baton. "I think this station will be a place where we can try out different ways of doing things and learn lessons that we can apply to the rest of our stations," he said. "Knowing what we know about television, and having the right technology and the right tools, I think we can create the next generation television station here."