

Metro Workology exclusive: Backstage Pass

In the coming weeks Metro's Workology section will be focusing on the part of the entertainment industry that you DON'T see. Backstage Pass will focus on the careers behind the camera and the curtain. So be sure to read Workology and metronews.ca/work every day.

Workology

Private Toronto college shut down

The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities has suspended registration of Bond College of Business & Technology, a Toronto-based private career college, for failing to comply with the province's Corporations Tax Act. The school did not maintain its registration as a corporation with the government. No students were enrolled at the college at the time of its closure.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

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From small to big

T.O.'s Grog's Creature Shop brings passion to puppets

Backstage Pass

RAFAEL BRUSILOV
for Metro Canada

Playing with puppets is serious business for Jason Hopley and Jamie Shannon, co-founders of The Grog's Creature Shop in Toronto.

The two passionate artists have done projects for heavyweights like Disney, Nickelodeon, Teletoon and the CBC and have set their sights on feature films next. Their pre-school series Nanalan, which runs on the CBC and PBS networks, won a Gemini Award and their newest series Big & Small is already a fresh hit on Treehouse TV.

Hopley believes the popularity of The Grog's distinctive characters comes from the humanity they try to infuse into the puppets. "We try to make things real — we're not going for that saccharine quality. We strive to bring a real humanness to the characters," Hopley said.

Best friends since they attended the Claude Watson School for the Arts in Toronto's Willowdale neighbourhood, Hopley and



Jason Hopley in The Grog's Creature Shop in Toronto.

PHOTOS: RAFAEL BRUSILOV/FOR METRO CANADA

Shannon embody a fairytale story of two self-taught artists who have found success creating, writing and producing all their own work.

After leaving school, Hopley and Shannon spent two years at YTV, starting in 1993, creating dozens of puppet characters and performing live three-minute short bits while building up their skills on the fly.

"We just learned from doing, on live TV. It was the best learning ground," Shannon said.

The whirlwind years at YTV were instrumental in developing Hopley and

Big & Small by The Grog's airs on Mondays on Treehouse TV.

Shannon's skills since they had no formal training and Hopley is still amazed at the level of responsibility and creativity YTV allowed them to have.

"We were just two 19-year-old guys doing improv live-to-air across Canada — I still can't believe it," Hopley said.

Wanting to do their own thing, Hopley and Shannon left YTV to start The Grog's, spending the first few years developing characters, building puppets and trying to break out professionally.

At the start they had to scrounge cash together for glue, felt and other materials while building puppets in an ex-girlfriend's mom's basement. Hopley admits they even nabbed a thrown-

away foam mattress or two for spare parts.

"We were broke. A lot," Hopley said.

Nowadays each puppet their studio creates costs no less than \$2,000 to produce and budgets for their projects can run in the millions.

Nurturing each other's artistic vision and being honest with each other are both big parts of why the creative partnership works and being best friends for almost three decades also helps.

Hopley admits living his creative dreams every day is a highly satisfying career.

"I wake up every morning and play with toys. If I died tomorrow, I'd pretty much be a happy man," Hopley joked.



For more of the Backstage Pass exclusive series check Workology frequently or stop by: metronews.ca/work

Workology in brief

EXES UP FOR CHANGE A study conducted by the Association of Executive Research Consultants in New York, has found that 75 per cent of currently employed executives would consider changing jobs if the opportunity arose. According to the international study, in which five per cent of respondents were Canadian, 74 per cent of the 1,518 executives surveyed cited poor company values as the catalyst for this sentiment, while 64 per cent said it also came down to lack of career development in their current job. Just over half of the respondents said they face a significant increase in competition for executive level positions from five years ago.

H1N1 FLU According to The Toronto Star, Canadian employers are quietly stockpiling emergency supplies of antiviral drugs in an effort to protect employees from potential pandemics like the H1N1 flu, which has affected 60,000 people around the world so far. At the recent World Conference on Disaster Management, held in Toronto, corporate risk managers were told that antiviral drugs are the most effective way to reduce absenteeism during a pandemic.

HEATHER BUCHAN/
FOR METRO CANADA

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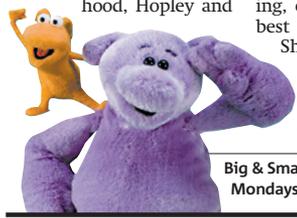
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