



Little Mosque on the Prairie

Press Kit

*"Muslims around the world are
known for their sense of humor*

- The Imam

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“What’s the charge... flying while Muslim?”
–The Imam



SYNOPSIS

LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE is a new comedy from CBC Television about a small Muslim community in the prairie town of Mercy, many of whose residents are wary of their new, more “exotic” neighbors. The series takes an unabashedly funny look at the congregation of a rural mosque and their attempt to live in harmony with the often skeptical, even down right suspicious, residents of their little prairie town. The sitcom reveals that, although different, we are all surprisingly similar when it comes to family, love, the generation gap and our attempts to balance our secular and religious lives.

BROADCAST DETAILS

LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE premieres on Tuesday, January 9 at 8:30 p.m. on CBC Television following *The Rick Mercer Report*. An encore presentation will air on Wednesday, January 10 at 8 p.m. Beginning Monday, January 15, the much-anticipated series moves to its regular Monday night timeslot at 9 p.m. and Wednesdays at 8 p.m.



Desperate Housewives?! Why should they be desperate when they're only performing their natural womanly duties?"

- The Extremist

CREATED BY ZARQA NAWAZ

Born in Liverpool, raised in Toronto and now living in Regina, Zarqa Nawaz draws on the experiences in her own life to create Little Mosque on the Prairie. “The best rule in comedy is to write what you know. The more serious the issue, the more fun I try to have with it”. A freelance writer, broadcaster and filmmaker, Zarqa wrote and produced short films that riffed on terrorism, burqas, and fatwas. A practicing Muslim and mother of four small children, Zarqa grew up going to a mosque and was married in a mosque. When she moved to Regina ten years ago, she joined a smaller congregation where the relationships between the congregants were more intimate than in the big city. And that was the inspiration for Little Mosque on the Prairie – a series that explores the dynamics of Muslim and non-Muslim relationships with a comedic twist.

“We’re going to open a mosque in your parish hall. Will you tell Jesus, or shall I?”
–The Contractor

EPISODE LOGLINES

EPISODE 1:

A small prairie Muslim community butts heads with locals when their new spiritual leader arrives.

EPISODE 2:

A battle of the sexes erupts when Baber decides to put up a barrier between the men and the women in the new mosque.

EPISODE 3:

An open house meant to build bridges leads to unexpected consequences for both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

EPISODE 4:

Rayyan and her mother end up on opposite sides of the fence over co-ed swimming in the local pool.

EPISODE 5:

A new white convert at the Mosque causes problems for the community.

EPISODE 6:

Yasir’s overbearing mother visiting from Lebanon, wants him to try something new – a second wife.

EPISODE 7:

A local fireman proves too hot to handle when Rayyan considers dating.

EPISODE 8:

The Muslim community steps in to help when Mercy Anglican faces financial ruin.

“You can’t drink? I’d pray five times a day too.”

–The Local

Q & A with Zarqa

How would you describe Little Mosque on the Prairie?

“Little Mosque On The Prairie is a sitcom and not a political satire. I want people to find the hilarity in the show and recognize the similar issues that appear in all our lives. It’s important to normalize the community within the greater community so as not to be seen as the ‘other’ but to recognize that we all have universal themes which exist in all communities. I simply want people to laugh with Muslims like they would laugh at anyone else and feel comfortable doing so.”

Tensions between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds remain high, is this the right time for a show like Little Mosque on the Prairie?

“Absolutely, since 9/11, what we see on the news nearly every day portrays Muslims in terms of conflict. It tends to create a one dimensional perception of a very diverse community. The reality for 99% of us, regardless of our religion, culture or race, is that we spend a lot of time and energy getting along with and trying to understand our families, our friends, our communities and our society. Along the way we do and say things that are very, very funny. The humor in Little Mosque is found in these things, which people in every part of the world can relate to. We all know schemers like Yasir. Every community has a Baber character that’s caught between his contemporary teenaged daughter and his love for all things traditional. Laughter, like our cast of characters, is universal.”

Is this a Muslim show for Muslims?

Although the series revolves around a mosque, I never intended for **Little Mosque On The Prairie** to be a show about Muslims for a Muslim audience. As the series encompasses universal themes where the main characters happen to be Muslim. I think that people will identify with the characters and storylines represented in our series regardless of what faith community they come from – the dogma and ritual may be different but I believe that viewers will see of bit of themselves or people they know represented in our characters.”

What do you hope to accomplish with this series?

“There is a lot of misunderstanding about Islam, and its followers. Through the comedy of **Little Mosque On The Prairie**, I hope a little light can be shed.”



“I don’t think the prophet had a telescope from Cosco.”

–The Feminist

CAST BIOS

SHEILA MCCARTHY (Sarah) is an accomplished Canadian screen and stage actor. She has many television credits to her name including *Roxana*, *Missing*, *Wonderland*, *Road To Avonlea*, *Street Legal*, *Emily Of New Moon* for which she received a Gemini nomination for Best Actress in a Guest Starring Role in a Series and *Dudley The Dragon* which garnered her a Gemini nomination for Best Lead Actress in a Series. She has also appeared in many feature films such as *Being Julia*, *Confessions Of A Teenage Drama Queen*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Lotus Eaters* for which she won a Genie Award for best actress and *I’ve Heard The Mermaids Singing* for which she won a Genie Award for Best Actress in a Feature. Sheila’s stage credits include *Guys and Dolls*, *Three Penny Opera* and *Peter Pan*. She won the Dora Mavor Moor Award for her roles in *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Really Rosie*.

CARLO ROTA (Yasir) was born in London, England and is no stranger to the film and television business. Best known today for his starring role on 24, He has a long list of television credits to his name including, *At The Hotel*, *Queer As Folk*, *Relic Hunter*, *La Femme Nikita*, *PSI Factor: Chronicles of the Paranormal* and *Traders*. His television movie credits include *Rough Air: Danger on Flight 534*, *Doc*, *A Colder Kind of Death*, *Recipe for Murder* and *Anne of Green Gables: The Continuing Story*. Carlo has also appeared in many feature films such as *Cake*, *Horsie’s Retreat*, *Countdown*, *Global Heresy*, *On Their Knees*, *Mission To Mars*, *Passengers* and *The Boondock Saints*.

ZAIB SHAIKH (Amaar) is an accomplished stage and screen actor. Film and television credits to his name include *Da Vinci’s City Hall*, *Deadzone*, *Metropia*, *The Call*, *Doc*, *Shepard*, *Chaos/Control*, *Waiting for Godot* and *She Stops To Conquer*. Zaib also has many theatre credits including *Helen’s Necklace*, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *A Perfect Ganesh*, *The Wind and the Willows*, *Night of the Iguana*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Julius Ceasar* and *A Man for All Seasons*.

SITARA HEWITT (Rayyan) is of Welsh and Pakistani descent and is based out of Toronto, Canada. A former classically trained dancer, Sitara has worked in many facets of the entertainment industry, as a dancer, host, model and actor. She can currently be seen on the Comedy Network as co-host of the hit game show *You BET Your Ass*. She was also the host of TSN’s *Playstation Loft* and Sportnet’s *Playtime*. Hewitt’s theatre credits include playing Tina in *Tony n Tina’s Wedding* at the Second City and *Mona Darling* where she played Mona. Her fluency in Hindi and Urdu has led to several South Asian roles, most notably in the Bollywood comedy *The Lookalike* by Arun Barhali.

CAST BIOS

DEBRA McGRATH (Mayor Popowicz) has many television, feature film and stage credits to her name. She has appeared in such television shows as *This Is Wonderland*, *Burnt Toast*, *Getting Along Famously*, *Paradise Falls*, *Wind At My Back*, *Due South*, *Robocop* and *Street Legal*. Her feature film credits include *Expecting*, *The Real Blonde*, *Termini Station* and *One Magic Christmas*. Debra is also an accomplished stage actor who has appeared in many theatre productions including *Dysfunctional Family*, *Andy Warhol – Your 15 Minutes Are Up* and *It Came From Chicago*. *Waiting For John Doe*, *No Man Is A Centre Island* and *I've Got A Sequel, Part 2* were all nominated for Dora Mavor Moore Awards.

MANOJ SOOD (Baber) was born in Mombassa, Kenya but grew up in Western Canada. He has been working steadily for the past 12 years and has appeared in more than 40 television and feature film productions. Television credits to his name include *Da Vinci's Inquest*, *The Dead Zone*, *Romeo!*, *Dead Like Me*, *Godiva's* and *Robson Arms*, to name a few. Manoj has also appeared in feature films such as *American Meltdown*, *Rat Race*, *Romeo Must Die* and *Fetching Cody*.

ARLENE DUNCAN (Fatima) is a multi-talented actor who works in television, film theatre and radio. Some of the many television and film credits to her name include *Puppets Who Kill*, *Regenesis*, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *This Is Wonderland*, *Queer As Folk*, *Get Rich Or Die Tryin*, *The Music Man*, *Leap Years* and *Soul Food*. She has also appeared in many theatre productions including *Jacob Two-Two*, *The Nutmeg Princess*, *The Evolution of Jazz*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Ragtime* and *Tommy*. Her selected radio credits include *Eastcoasting*, *The Mystery Project: "The Old Guy"*, *The Good Canadian*, *Force Of Circumstance* and *Morningside*.

DEREK McGRATH (Reverend Magee) is an accomplished screen and stage actor. His long list of television credits include *This Is Wonderland*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, *Ellen*, *The Red Green Show*, *Married With Children*, *Cheers*, *Street Legal*, *Dallas*, *Family Matters* and *Newhart*, to name a few. He also has many film credits to his name including *Charlie Bartlett*, *Full Of It*, *Stuart Bliss*, *Chameleon*, *She's Out Of Control*, *Police Academy IV*, *Mr.Mom* and *Nothing Personal*. In addition, Derek has performed in numerous stage productions for Second City and The Shaw Festival Theatre.

NEIL CRONE (Fred) is an actor and writer who has performed in dozens of TV shows, television and radio commercials, and is the voice of numerous cartoon characters every Saturday morning, including YTV's new hit series *Erky-Perky*. His most recent feature film roles include *Stir of Echoes 2 – The Dead Speak*, *Homie Spumoni* and the recently released *Hollywoodland*. A Second City Mainstage alumnus, Neil has been performing improvised and sketch comedy for over twenty years. When Neil isn't acting, he is busy writing; as an award-winning weekly humor columnist and blogger for Metroland papers or as the author of stories in verse for "*Big and Little Kids*". His first children's book, "*I Am Dead at Recess*", is currently published on the Internet.

“The truth? I can work with the truth. But only as a last resort.”

–The Mayor

THE TEAM

There are many people involved in putting this show into production including first and foremost series creator, Zarqa Nawaz. The executive producers are Mary Darling and Clark Donnelly . Michael Snook and Susan Flanders-Alexander are the series’ producers. The writing team is Rebecca Schechter, Alan Rae, Jackie May, Susan Flanders-Alexander, Dan Redican and series creator, Zarqa Nawaz. The series is directed by the highly acclaimed and award winning Michael Kennedy..

Zarqa Nawaz approached Mary Darling and Clark Donnelly of WestWind Pictures about a comedic series, which mined the comedy of misunderstandings between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Darling and Donnelly were immediately attracted to the idea. Nawaz felt a trust in working with WestWind Pictures. “I wanted to work with Mary and Clark because I felt they understood the show’s concept and that I could trust them with the story. We all decided the goal was to make the show as funny as possible without offending sensibilities,” says Nawaz. “I wanted to tackle issues like sexism and extremism and I knew that Mary and Clark could develop the show while still staying true to the underlying messages delivered through comedy.”

Michael Snook, of WestWind’s Regina office, worked alongside Zarqa to refine the concept further and pitched it to CBC. At the point that CBC became interested, WestWind’s development team, spearheaded by Snook and Susan Flanders-Alexander, spent the next two and a half years collaborating closely with Anton Leo, Creative Head of Comedy for CBC, developing scripts, pulling people in and getting the characters honed.

Christianity didn't survive 2000 years by being charitable.”

–The Reverend

PRODUCTION BIOS

ZARQA NAWAZ (creator/consulting producer/writer), born in Liverpool and raised in Toronto, she had a Bachelor of Science degree from U of T in her hands when she realized that medical schools had screening committees to keep people like her out of the health care system. Unfazed, she coolly switched career plans and received a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Journalism from Ryerson in 1992.

Nawaz worked as a freelance writer/broadcaster with CBC radio, and in various capacities with CBC *Newsworld*, CTV's *Canada AM*, and CBC's *The National*. She was an associate producer with a number of CBC radio programs including *Morningside* and her radio documentary *The Changing Rituals of Death* won first prize in the Radio Long Documentary category and the Chairman's Award in Radio Production at the Ontario Telefest Awards.

Bored with journalism, Nawaz took a summer film workshop at the Ontario College for Art and made *BBQ Muslims*, a short film that premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 1996. Her next short film, *Death Threat* also premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 1998. Other short film credits include *Fred's Burqa* and *Random Check*. In 2005, Nawaz's documentary entitled *Me and the Mosque*, a co-production with the National Film Board and the CBC, was broadcast on CBC's Rough Cuts. She has recently finished a feature-length screenplay entitled *Real Terrorists Don't Belly*.

CLARK DONNELLY (executive producer) co-founded WestWind Pictures in 1989, leaving a post as vice-president of Regina's CKCK Television where he had worked for fifteen years. The company began by producing high-end, 16mm and 35mm commercial work, but quickly moved into series and documentary production. Clark has been intimately involved in the creative and overall development and production of most of their subsequent work.

Clark has many television credits to his name. This includes *What on Earth* for the CBC network, *Family and Friends* for the LIFE Network, *This Small Space* and *Love by Design* which both play on HGTV in the U.S. and Canada and *Designer Guys* which has sold to over thirty countries. Clark's company has also produced *English Teachers* for the LIFE Network, *Wild Lives* and *Time & Place* for Discovery Canada, *@ Wood River Hall* for Vision TV, *Shot in the Face* for Movie Central and TMN and the award-winning variety special *Youkali Hotel* for the CBC. In addition, Clark has written, produced or executive-produced a string of documentaries on topics ranging from art and religion to children and divorce. He is currently expanding the company into series and long-form drama production.

MARY DARLING (executive producer) comes from a stellar career in management and marketing with several large companies in the U.S. including Pillsbury in Minneapolis and Lewis Gilman and Kynett in Philadelphia. Since joining WestWind Pictures in 1999, she has helped WestWind evolve from a minor to a major player in Canada's film and television industry (and has had a GREAT time doing so). Mary conceived of WestWind's hit design show, *Designer Guys*, and its subsequent relaunch with new hosts. As well as providing overall management, creative and executive producer services to WestWind Pictures proper, Mary heads up WestWind Releasing which develops and distributes most of WestWind properties and Darling Media which handles ancillary development. Most important in Mary's life is children. She loves them and has six of her own.

MICHAEL SNOOK (producer) is an executive producer, producer and writer, with nearly four decades of experience in film and television, radio, print and the music industry. For the past fourteen years, he has focused on film and television, and has extensive credits in non-fiction production such as *Designer Guys*, *What On Earth*, *Family And Friends*, *This Small Space* and *Wild Lives*, to name a few. His performance and dramatic productions include *Shot In The Face*, *Velvet Devil*, *Youkali Hotel* and *@ Wood River Hall*.

Before pursuing a career in independent film and television, Snook worked as an independent music producer, studio musician, arranger, and freelance music consultant for CBC Radio. Snook is an active member of the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association. He is currently an executive producer and producer with WestWind Pictures, based in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

SUSAN FLANDERS-ALEXANDER (producer) is a producer of the comedy series *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, for CBC. As a producer with WestWind Pictures, she has been involved in development of the series for nearly 3 years with Zarqa Nawaz, and has also written for the series. Susan serves as Supervising Producer on a number of WestWind lifestyle series, including *Designer Guys* and *The Style Department*.

Susan was nominated for a Gemini Award for her role as Supervising Producer on the CBC series *Drop The Beat*. She was Creative Producer on the CTV/Discovery series *Exhibit A*, and has been actively involved in film and television production for sixteen years, learning her craft in various development and production roles on Canadian dramatic series, including the Global dramatic series *Traders*, and the CBC dramatic series *Street Legal*, *Side Effects*, and *Riverdale*. Susan is a graduate of the Canadian Film Centre's Producers Program.

MICHAEL KENNEDY (director) is an award-winning, genre-jumping director with a reputation for creating stylish films that achieve both critical and commercial success. He has directed 115 television episodes including *North South*, *My Life and a Movie*, *Mental Block*, *Listen Missie*, *Screech Owls*, *Blackfly* (after pilot), *P.R.*, *Taking The Falls*, and *Jets*. His MOW, short and feature film credits include *Broken Lullaby*, *One Man Out*, *Caribe*, *Calculated Risk*, *Joe's Wedding*, an award-winning romantic-comedy feature which was selected for many international film festivals and *Terriers*, one of 25 short films he directed for Kids In The Hall, which garnered him a Best Director award at the Canadian Music Video Awards. His writing credits include several theatrical feature scripts, including three of the features he directed.

Other honors include a Best Director Gemini nomination; 3 wins from 7 nominations for Best Director at the Canadian Comedy Awards; 2 Directors Guild of Canada Awards and a nomination for a Directors Guild of America Award.

“If we don’t stop them soon, we’ll all be speaking Muslim.”

—The Shock Jock

ADDITIONAL WRITER BIOS

REBECCA SCHECHTER (writer/creative producer) began her career in the media as a researcher and broadcast journalist, working on documentaries and current affairs programming for CBC Radio, CBC Television, TVOntario, and a variety of independent producers. Her screenwriting career took off in 1987 with the theatrical release of *Taking Care*, which led to writing for series television. She has written and story-edited for many high-profile Canadian drama series, including *Street Legal*, *E.N.G.*, *North Of 60*, *Side Effects*, *Blue Murder* and *Riverdale*, for which she also served as Creative Producer for Seasons 2 and 3. Her script, "Sisters of Mercy" for *North Of 60*, won the 1994 Gemini Award for Best Writing in a Dramatic Series. Other writing credits include *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *Wind At My Back: Christmas Special*, *Exhibit A* and *72 Hours*. She was the executive story consultant for *Caitlin’s Way* and is currently working on *Trust*, a feature film/movie-of-the-week.

AL RAE (writer/story editor) is a Winnipeg stand up comic and comedy writer. Prior to *Little Mosque On The Prairie*, Al was a writer on the sitcoms *Blackfly* and *Big Sound*. He has written two shows for theatre; *How Do You Know When You’re Done* and *Unscheduled Stop*, which received a Perrier Award Nomination at the 1989 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Al has appeared on *COMICS*, *Open Mike with Mike Bullard*, a one hour *Comedy Now* special and was the host of the CBC Television comedy special *In Search of Prairie Punchlines*. He has hosted two comedy information shows for CBC Radio, *That’s Capital* about finance and *Spin Off*, a highly popular election satire show. His eight part comedy drama series *Monsoon House* with Russell Peters aired on CBC Radio in the fall of 2006. As a comic, he has opened for The Beach Boys, Kids in the Hall, The Waterboys, The Smothers Brothers, among others. He has performed with The Chieftains, Bob Newhart, and barely survived a brief road tour with the late Sam Kinison. He is the winner of the Just for Laughs National Homegrown Comic Competition 2000 and is currently the Artistic Director of the CBC Winnipeg Comedy Festival.

DAN REDICAN (Creative Consultant), one of the founding members of the Frantics Comedy Troupe, has been nominated for numerous Gemini awards. He was Supervising Producer for the Kids in the hall. He wrote and produced many shows for MTV including the Jenny McCarthy show and Lyricist Lounge. He won a Canadian Comedy Award for directing The Frantics Reunion special. Most recently he has written, story edited and starred in the acclaimed Comedy Network series, Puppets who Kill.

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