

Brent Butt
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Brent Butt salutes noir mysteries with 'No Clue'

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Saskatchewan TV comic Brent Butt goes noir with genre-bending big screen thriller 'No Clue'.

File / Global News

TORONTO – Brent Butt parlayed his veteran standup career into a massive TV hit with the sitcom *Corner Gas*.

The next step, reasons the self-deprecating comedian, is to become a bona fide matinee idol with his debut feature, *No Clue*.

“Makes sense, why not? Somebody’s got to be a movie star,” Butt said in a recent interview.

“Why does it always gotta be tall dishy people? Why just the gorgeous people? That’s what I say.”

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Of course, Butt isn’t totally joking. He does have high hopes for his first stab at moviemaking – a comic thriller about a bumbling accidental detective who is drawn into a complicated murder case.

He wrote, produced and stars in *No Clue* and says getting to make the quirky tribute to hard-boiled detective flicks of yore was a longstanding dream come true.

“I’ve always wanted to make a movie, since I was a little kid going to the theatre,” says Butt, who took inspiration from classic whodunits including *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*.

“I’ve always been drawn to show business, that’s why I first started doing stand-up. The first time I saw a guy doing stand-up comedy I said, ‘I want to do that.’ And I love TV and I love movies so making a movie was always kind of on my list of things that I wanted to at least attempt to do.”

Butt plays mild-mannered salesman Leo Falloon, whose life is turned upside down when a gorgeous woman appears at his office begging him to help track down her missing brother.

Immediately smitten, and subsequently hooked by her sob story, Leo agrees to take the case even when it becomes apparent she’s mistaken his digs for the private eye office across the hall.

Amy Smart (*The Butterfly Effect*) plays the dishy dame, who may not be as forthcoming or vulnerable as she appears, while David Koechner (*Anchorman: The Legend Continues*) appears as Leo’s best friend Ernie.

Although it’s a comedy, Butt says he was also set on crafting a truly dark murder mystery.

“I wanted to make a movie that felt like it was a realistic murder mystery, it was a real, dark, gritty thriller. And then it happens to be funny because the main character says funny things because he’s in over his head,” he says.

“When we talked to everybody early on we said, ‘Forget that this is a comedy, we’re not making a comedy. As far as you’re concerned we’re making a dark, realistic, gritty thriller.’ ... The result was what I’d hoped to achieve, I think we nailed it.”

The melding of the two genres also allowed Butt to stretch his acting chops, but not by much, he admits. He notes that Leo does share more than a few traits with his mild-mannered *Corner Gas* hero Brent Leroy and the ill-equipped life coach Stan Dirko he played on *Hiccups*.

“I always say I kind of act like Bob Hope – it doesn’t matter if he’s a pirate or a cowboy, you’re going to get that guy,” he says.

“When I played Brent Leroy and I played Stan Dirko, you know they’re different characters but there’s an element of sameness in that they’re commenting on crazy situations. So to that degree, that character is in Leo as well. The difference is that it’s in situations where there’s real danger and real gravity. I’ve never played a character who was actually fighting for his life or actually trying to help somebody from being murdered.”

The film was largely shot in Vancouver, where the Saskatchewan-bred Butt has lived for more than 20 years.

The shoot even included stunts, Butt proudly notes. In the climactic showdown, Butt had to jump from a moving boat into November waters, all the while navigating rotating propellers.

“That was intimidating but exhilarating. I’m not a really adventuresome guy,” he notes.

“In my life I’m not a thrill-seeker. I’m more of a snack-seeker. So to get to do something like that gets the blood pumping and it was fun for me.”

Even a recent *Corner Gas* anniversary earned barely a hoot-and-holler from Butt, he admits.

It’s been 10 years since the sitcom debuted, becoming an instant hit with its homespun look at life in the fictional Prairie town of Dog River, Sask.

Butt says he was well aware of the milestone but didn’t do much to mark the day *Corner Gas* debuted Jan. 22, 2004, other than release a shoutout on Twitter.



“I had marked it on my calendar, probably two years before. Every day when I looked at my calendar I knew that one day I would run into it,” he says, adding he nevertheless made no plans to celebrate the day.

The series ended its six-year run with a record-breaking 3.02 million viewers.

Still, Butt notes it hasn’t been the money-making blockbuster one might think.

Corner Gas is so successful that one day it might pay for itself. That’s the reality of the market,” he shrugs.

And although he has more ideas for big-screen feature films, he’s angling for a way to return to TV.

Now that he’s whet his appetite for more challenging (quasi) dramatic fare, he’s keen to tackle new frontiers on the small screen.

“I don’t want to keep going back over the same tracks,” he says.

“I like to creatively explore – explore projects, explore relationships. To me that’s what it’s all about, to see what’s out there that you haven’t encountered yet. That’s the fun (part) to me.”

No Clue opens Friday.

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