

# And now for something completely different:

# HEEBONICS

## Being Erica's creator juggles a career and motherhood

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Staff Reporter

When Canadian television writer Jana Sinyor was still in the struggling phase of her career and years away from creating the CBC drama *Being Erica*, she fainted after her first project, *Dark Oracle*, was finally greenlighted.

Sinyor's over-wrought reaction was perhaps understandable.

Having worked so hard to break into the industry, she was absolutely floored when YTV, the children's channel, accepted *Dark Oracle*, which follows the adventures of 15-year-old twins whose future is divined in a comic book.

"I had to be revived," she said, her eyes beaming as she recalled the embarrassing moment that set her on the road to success.

*Dark Oracle*, co-developed with Heather Conkie, ran from 2004 to 2006 and went on to win an Inter-

Nominated for 10 Gemini Awards after its debut year in 2009, *Being Erica* is now broadcast on the Soap Net cable network in the United States, as well as in Australia, Asia, Latin America and, she thinks, Israel.

To the best of her knowledge, the core audience consists mainly of women in their 20s and 30s. But teens and middle-aged viewers, some of whom are men, are also part of the demographics.

She believes that *Being Erica* has mass appeal because the average viewer can identify with the main character.

Now 33, Sinyor conceived *Being Erica* – which blends fantasy with reality – as a kids' program. But since CBC was in the market for something different, she was only too pleased to adjust the script.

As she put it, "I wanted to make the jump from teen to adult drama."

There was another reason for her interest in adapting *Being Erica*.

from these similarities, we're not alike at all."

Karpluk, who is of Ukrainian descent, was cast at the 11th hour.

"We saw many actors, but it was clear she was exactly who we were looking for. Erin has a talent for physical comedy, and she's just so appealing, attractive, funny and accessible."

But Karpluk had to be coached to be Jewish.

"She knew nothing about Jews, but she's been great," noted Sinyor, saying she had to learn how to properly pronounce a word like Yom Kippur.

Sinyor, who describes herself as a secular Jew, has embroidered Jewish motifs into the show.

"We've done episodes on circumcision, Yom Kippur and a bat mitzvah," she said.

To Sinyor, these forays into Judaism are "not forced" but natural. After all, Erica is supposed to be the daughter of a Reform rabbi.

She and her co-producer, Aaron Martin, whom she met on the set of *Degrassi* and who joined *Being Erica* after the pilot, have written several of the scripts.

But overall, she regards herself as its general manager, concerning herself with every aspect from casting and script development to wardrobe.

Currently, she and Martin are in the midst of developing season three of *Being Erica*.

"I'm optimistic it will go ahead," said Sinyor.

Curiously enough, she never even aspired to be a writer.

"Actually, I didn't have a plan," she admitted.

Taking religious studies at McGill University, she majored in the New Testament and took a course in rabbinics.

"I was already familiar with Judaism, but Christianity was foreign to me."

After her graduation in 1998, she toiled in a call centre for a year, but was miserable.

"I became very depressed."

In retrospect, this dead-end job was not entirely in vain. "Erica also worked in a call centre," she said.

One night, at 4 a.m., she compiled a life-changing list of her strengths, desires and weaknesses.

With this in hand, Sinyor took a screen writing course at Ryerson. While there, she whipped up a script for a short film.

Then she enrolled at the Canadian Film Centre, which offers advanced training in film, TV and new media.

"It was extremely useful, but I couldn't find a job after graduating."

So she began writing what would be *Dark Oracle*, her breakthrough show.

Sinyor has a busy life outside television. She and her husband, David Singer, an entrepreneur, have two children, Jada, 5, and Max, 3.

She has no trouble juggling a career and motherhood.

"I don't have a nine to five job. I have a lot of flexibility. So I'm at home when Jada and Max get back from school."

As for the future, she hopes that *Being Erica* will go from strength to strength, and that her next project will also appeal to an identical demographic. "I don't know what it will be, but it will be an adult drama," she said.



Erin Karpluk and Jana Sinyor

national Emmy for best children's and youth program. But after it was suddenly dropped, Sinyor moved on stoically and quickly.

"I was neither disappointed nor angry," she said in an interview the other morning at the Future Bakery and Cafe in mid-town Toronto. "*Dark Oracle* was a 'high-concept' show, which is hard to sustain."

Sinyor, who had previously freelanced as a writer for *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, bounced back by developing *Being Erica*, which is about a 30-something woman who discovers that her therapist can send her back in time and change her reality.

"I have a huge interest in magic and fantasy, and I like playing around with time travel."

Erica Strange, the central character, is portrayed by Erin Karpluk. To some degree, she is modeled after Sinyor, who was born in Ottawa, the daughter of Albert, an Egyptian-born medical equipment manufacturer, and Lynda, a teacher and computer programmer.

"You put bits and pieces of yourself and familiar experiences into a character," explained Sinyor, the co-executive producer. "Erica's my age, is Jewish like me and lives in Toronto. But aside