

Interview: Co-Executive Producer Cindy Caponera of 'Ground Floor'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 9, 2014 - 11:07am

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CHICAGO – December 9th is the 2014 second season premiere of “Ground Floor,” the TBS workplace comedy featuring John C. McGinley (“Scrubs”), plus Skylar Astin and Briga Heelan (seen in the film “Pitch Perfect”). Chicago native Cindy Caponera is a writer and co-executive producer on the show.

In a variation on the “Slobs versus the Snobs” scenario, “Ground Floor” is set in a financial company that features a romance between an occupant of the upper floors – where the master-of-the-universe financial consultants hold court – and a worker on the “ground floor,” where the operations and maintenance crew resides. A big part of the hilarity is provided by John C. McGinley, playing a mentor character as in “Scrubs,” but in a softer and gently funny way. The chemistry between the featured couple, portrayed by Astin and Heelan, provides the conflict between the two parts of the company.



The Second Season of 'Ground Floor' Premieres December 9th, 2014, on TBS

Photo credit: TBS

Cindy Caponera was born on the Southside of Chicago in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. She honed her comedy with two stints in at “The Second City” here, and began her television writing career with the early Comedy Central series, “Exit 57.” She landed a writing gig on “Saturday Night Live” in 1995, and after three seasons on that show, has worked since as a freelance TV writer. Her credits includes “Norm,”

“My Boys,” “Sherri,” plus Showtime’s “Shameless” and “Nurse Jackie.” Earlier in 2014, she took a position as co-executive producer on “Ground Floor,” and published her collection of essays, “I Triggered Her Bully,” now available both in an online and print version, after being named a Kindle Top Rated Humor Book.

HollywoodChicago.com [talked to Cindy Caponera earlier this year](#), [21] and caught up to her as the second season of “Ground Floor” is about to begin.

HollywoodChicago.com: A sitcom’s second season is a time when it came come into its own, with a more relaxed style because the origin story is done. What can viewers of ‘Ground Floor’ expect for Season Two that will progress the characters and story?

Cindy Caponera: First, we have a new character named Lindsay, portrayed by Emily Heller, who works upstairs in the executive floor. She winds up being an integral part of our ensemble, portraying a kind of nerdy smart girl. The two relationships on the show, the one between Brody and Mansfield [Astin and McGinley] – which is more father and son – plus the romance of Brody and Jenny [Heelan], will be explored much deeper.

HollywoodChicago.com: How can viewers catch up with the situations on the show?

Caponera: TBS has made the [whole first season online](#) [22] until December 10th. When I was hired onto the show, and caught up with it, I found it hilarious. You know John C. McGinley from ‘Scrubs,’ you know Skylar Astin from ‘Pitch Perfect’ and you know comedian Rory Scovel, along with Rene Gube and James Earl. Those are all great performers who are all on our show, and Briga Heelan [Jennifer] is one of the most talented young women I’ve come across in a long time. Her and Skylar have a video out right now singing “Baby It’s Cold Outside,” and she’s so funny.

HollywoodChicago.com: ‘Ground Floor’ has a terrific young cast, and the great ‘Scrubs’ veteran John C. McGinley, performing a similar but softer role on the show. How much easier is it to write for an established character type like McGinley than characters that are not as defined?

Caponera: That character in any sitcom is fun to write for because they’re mythical. Once you establish the myth, the jokes become funny. On the ‘Norm’ show, we used to do that for the Max Wright character. You can put things on them because they can hold it all.

HollywoodChicago.com: At what point were you brought into the show’s production staff, and what does a person who comes in after a show starts have to learn about it, for example what source materials besides the shows themselves to you use to get up to speed?

Caponera: Really, it’s about reading the scripts and watching the show. When I was brought on, they also brought on two new staff writers. I had a bit of a learning curve, but one of the first things I did was just support the female characters on the show – just to make sure they are super dimensional.

HollywoodChicago.com: This is a workplace ensemble comedy, with strong ‘Slobs versus Snobs’ appeal. How does your life background help to inform what you contribute to this theme?

Caponera: Well, obviously I identify more with the ‘ground floor’ people. I did work in the parts department for Schiller and Houghton Elevator in Chicago. [laughs] In one of the episodes Mansfield offers Jenny a scholarship to go back to college. When the idea came up at the table read [first script reading] I threw my arms in the air in celebration. The idea that someone that rich would pay for somebody’s college actually made me teary-eyed.

HollywoodChicago.com: The show has a laugh track, which is not being used as much anymore. What is the decision today behind laugh track or no laugh track on series comedies today?

Caponera: I believe it is almost entirely the live studio audience but I’m sure it’s somewhat mixed. Our audiences are great - very enthusiastic – so much so that sometimes we actually have to mix the laughs down. My general feeling is that the laugh track is a dance of sort, to cue the jokes, especially since our series is a multi-camera [shot live and in sequence, on set with multiple cameras]. We have the stuff, and the response has been great. We did do some shoots last season without an audience, and they brought in some “professional laughers” because it helps in feedback and pacing the show.



Cindy Caponera, Co-Executive Producer of ‘Ground Floor’

Photo credit: Cindy Caponera

HollywoodChicago.com: There are some pretty big TV names attached to the show, like Bill Lawrence of ‘Scrubs.’ In creative decisions for shows like ‘Ground Floor,’ what is the hierarchy in the show’s executive staff in regard to those decisions?

Caponera: We have a show runner named Jeff Astrof, who by the way is the funniest man I’ve worked for in a really long time. He and Bill made all the major decisions, Jeff made them first and kept Bill into the loop, with input from the executive staff. I want to give a shout-out to just a great production staff, writing team and cast.

HollywoodChicago.com: We first met you here in the middle of the year, as you promoted your new book ‘I Triggered Her Bully.’ What is the status of how the book is performing, and are there plans for another one?

Caponera: The book is doing very well, as I still get my royalty checks from Amazon. [laughs] Since work on the show was so intense, I’m just getting back to the book, doing readings and going back to my social media. I have an idea for a new book, originally entitled ‘Vehicles for Butter,’ because it was going to talk about women and food, but recently I talked to my brother Bill, and I may entitle it, ‘I Forgot to Ask How You Are.’ [laughs] Also what I’d like to do next is adapt my 1989 one woman show about the Chicago fire strike into a full length play. I actually workshopped this play in the 1990s, and I’d like to get it done.

HollywoodChicago.com: On the cusp of the 40th anniversary of ‘Saturday Night Live,’ and since you were part of that ride, what is your opinion on the current state of the show, and is it a format that has actually outlived its appeal?

Caponera: No, I don’t believe so. ‘SNL’ is like mashed potatoes and gravy. When it’s good it’s really good, and when it’s not it’s still kind of good. I have a lot of compassion for sketch work, and I understand the process. I know the rug can be pulled out at any time, and I understand the rewrites, the changing of concepts and just plain bad execution. I can relate. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What is your fondest Chicago Christmas memory, and do you actually miss any elements of the Chicago winter?

Caponera: Believe it or not, I do miss some elements of the weather. That first fresh snow, when it’s not so cold, and you’re walking in it. I liked walking fast in the winter, running from house to house, drinking warm coffee and wearing big sweaters.

HollywoodChicago.com: It gets old real fast, though.

Caponera: Yeah I know. I just want people to come and visit me because I miss them so much. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Well, how about a Christmas memory?

Caponera: My mother’s dad, ‘Jumping’ Red Cassidy, was a singer in Chicago. He sang at all the political rallies, and recorded seven records. My grandmother and he were married on Christmas Day, and at their 50th Wedding Anniversary – which was before the holiday – he sang a song to my grandmother, then dropped dead. The song he sang to her was ‘Because of You.’ [laughs] I was in high school at the time, and he just had open heart surgery. He sang the last note, and then expired.

HollywoodChicago.com: And you wonder why you became a comedian.

Caponera: [Laughs]

The second season of “Ground Floor” premieres on Tuesday, December 9th, 2014, at 10pm ET/9pm CT on the TBS Network. See local listings for channel locations. To access the book “I Triggered Her Bully,” by Cindy Caponera, [click here](#). [23]



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