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THE BATTALION

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## Clone High USA

MTV aires new show that features clones of historical figures

By Howard Cohen  
KRT CAMPUS

MTV premiered "Clone High USA" at 10:30 p.m. Monday and it's so 2003. We're talking a cartoon comedy starring contemporary clones of historical figures in the midst of high school and hormones. And it stars Honest Abe who is as much Linkin Park as President Lincoln and counts among his classmates Joan of Arc, John F. Kennedy, Cleopatra and Mahatma Gandhi.

No, the Raelians had absolutely nothing to do with this resurrection. However, South Florida, home of many wacky things, did. Co-creator Phil Lord, who concocted the show with creative partner Christopher Miller, is a 27-year-old artist who grew up in Coconut Grove, went to Ransom Everglades High School and initially honed his craft—sometimes surreptitiously—at Coconut Grove Elementary.

"At our school, our reading group ran out of books for us to read. We'd gone through all the readers our teacher (had for) us. So I was drawing comics. EVENTUALLY, it became a school sanctioned activity," Lord said, recalling the name of his first fictional comic book company, Violence Comics, and its flagship character, Captain Sisymfyll.

That's short for "Captain Sure I'll Solve Your Mystery For You Little Lady." Not surprisingly, the Captain did not make the transition to MTV.

But Lord, who now makes his home in Los Angeles, has, and he said becoming a cartoonist for a living just made sense. "It's amazing how really young kids are about as creative as adults are. I don't know if I'm better now than I was then, I just didn't learn to do anything else," he said. "Most people learn to do other things well and develop other careers."

John Miller, MTV's executive vice president of series development and animation, is happy Lord didn't go into business, like dad William Lord, or psychology, like mom Carmen Betancourt Lord. The guy suits MTV perfectly, Miller said.

"One, the show is brilliantly clever. And two, it's created by two of the youngest writers in Hollywood. They are so of the demographic," he said. "It would have been crazy not to be in business with these guys."

Carmen Betancourt Lord and fellow Dartmouth grad John Miller, 26, (no relation to the MTV executive) spawned the idea for "Clone High USA" not long after leaving college and landing a development deal with Disney to create Saturday morning cartoons.



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

But the pair's sensibilities then, and on "Clone High," were not exactly suitable for early weekend viewing. "We're not above a boob joke," Lord teases.

Lord and Miller were soon hired by Disney's more PG-13 arm, Touchstone, to create prime-time programming. The pair wrote for The WB's "Zoe" and NBC's "Go Fish." While working

for Touchstone, the twosome hatched the idea for "Clone High USA" and the MTV bit.

"I knew that (Disney) wasn't his type because he was so astute. I don't think he could be as conformist as I see Disney," recalls Ransom Everglades social studies teacher Alexandra Novitski. Novitski worked briefly with Lord at Ransom's Summer Bridge Miami arts program in the mid-'90s.

"He's very witty and bright and always had a twinkle in his eye," she remembers. "He could inspire those young students."

Lord said his experiences at Ransom color much of the show's first 13 episodes.

"I was so like Abe—clumsy. The big difference is that (the show's) Abe had a tremendous growth spurt between his sophomore and junior years and Chris and I were both shrimps. I could fit into a locker in my high school years. There are locker room scenes written into the show straight from the Ransom school," he said. His mother feels he "deflected a lot through his humor," and describes him as always exhibiting a visual flair. "He had an unusual way of looking at things," she said.

The show's flirtations with puerile humor don't bother her. "I think it's perhaps a little racy at times, but it doesn't offend me," she explains. "I'm a psychologist. I'm used to all sorts of things."

MTV could score points with "Clone High USA," programmer Miller feels, not because the Raelians have given clones a high profile these days, but because, "the show is relatable to our viewers. It's about them, but them as historical figures. These characters have to deal with the rigors of high school but also the pressure of living up to the clone mothers and fathers."

The network's most popular program currently is the outrageous reality series "The Osbournes," starring heavy metal star Ozzy Osbourne and his amusingly foul-mouthed family. To lure viewers to the new show and hit its targeted 18-24 demographic, celebrity voice-over talent is being tapped heavily.

Regulars include "Saturday Night Live's" Will Forte as Abe and Nicole Sullivan of "Mad TV" as Joan of Arc. Lord and Miller are the voices of Principal Cinnamon J. Scudworth and JFK, respectively. Michael J. Fox will make his return to television—or his voice will, anyway—as Gandhi's talking kidney. Marilyn Manson appears next week. Teen favorites Jack Black and Tom Green as well as pop singer Mandy Moore all have upcoming guest shots. Luke Perry, of "Beverly Hills 90210" fame, will play Ponce de Leon in an upcoming episode.

"There's another Florida thing, I grew up reading about Ponce de Leon," Lord says. "What's cool is that Luke is basically playing his ('90210') Dylan McKay character with the leather jacket but also with purple conquistador pants."

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