

Puppet Nation ZA aired this weekend

The new show, Puppet Nation ZA, aired on 9 November 2013 on StarOne, StarSat's flagship channel. It will air every Saturday night at 9pm and rebroadcast on Sunday night at 8.30pm. It will also be available online and distributed internationally on the Apple iTunes stores.



The new brand of the ZA News programme that began in 2009, reflects the producers' ambition to take the multi-award winning satirical puppet show to new heights in South Africa and to turn the programme into a global brand.

eNCA firebrand political analyst Justice Malala will host the show, alongside fire-hot Debora Patta, seconded at the Puppet Nation News desk by veteran anchor and toupee happy Riaan Cruywagen.

The season premiere episode brings President Jacob Zuma in the hot seat as Justice Malala attempts to get answers over the Nkandla enquiry. Debora Patta gives Oscar Pistorius the third degree whilst Juju and the Economic Freedom Fungi make their debut and Helen Zille teaches art DA style, alongside appearances by Barack Obama, Thuli Madonsela, Die Antwoord and Donald Trump.

International interest

When TopTV went into business rescue, the producers, Tom Eaton, Ben Trovato, Donovan Graham, Gretch van der Byl and Thierry Cassuto thought this would be the end of their show since it had been the only broadcaster in South Africa brave enough to air the satirical puppet show.

Executive producer Cassuto and his team decided not to give up and spent their last few Rands on a pilot they would take to the biggest TV market in the world to show the Americans what a little studio on the foothills of Table Mountain at a bottom of Africa could do.

"I flew to New York and LA in April, met with agents, writers and voice artists, showed them stills of our puppets and clips featuring US characters and they were blown away. What they found the hardest to believe was that we could produce a whole season for an amount that could hardly buy a single episode in the US," says Cassuto.

Production

South African writers led by head writer Tom Eaton and voice artists featuring Nik Rabinowitz teamed up with US counterparts and put a script and soundtrack together, which was then filmed at Both Worlds' Bo Kaap based studios. The resulting 'sizzle reel' was shown to a selection of talent agencies in New York and Los Angeles, leading to Puppet Nation USA eventually being signed up by one of the top Hollywood agents and currently being groomed for presentation to major networks and cable channels.

When asked when American viewers could expect to see Puppet Nation in the US, Cassuto says, "Our puppets are holding their fat latex thumbs, especially Barack and Michele Obama, Bill Clinton, Donald Trump, Sarah Palin and Mitt Romney. Although for these last three, we would probably prefer to keep them in their boxes or feature them in the remake of the Lost series."

Across Africa

Whilst Cassuto was pitching in the US, Top TV's rescuers, Beijing based StarTimes, approached Both Worlds to offer a long term agreement that would keep the triple SAFTA winner satirical programme on the soon to be re-launched platform.

"When I first met with Pang Xin Xing, the chairman of StarTimes, not only was I surprised that he knew of the show, but most importantly that he wanted to make sure it stayed on for many years as one of its anchor programmes. This means the satirical puppet show will eventually be available across Africa via the many digital and terrestrial channels owned by the StarTimes group," concludes Cassuto.

For more information, go to www.zanews.co.za.

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