



FEATURED, THE ROMEO SECTION

ANDREW AIRLIE IS THE INDIANA JONES OF CANADIAN SPIES IN THE ROMEO SECTION

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If a show was shot in Vancouver, there's a strong chance Andrew Airlie has appeared in it. The Glasgow-born, Toronto-educated, Vancouver-resident Airlie has starred in *Reaper*, *Defying Gravity*, *Cedar Cove*, *The Killing*, and Chris Haddock's *Intelligence*, among many others. And he'll always also be orange guy from the *House* pilot to me.

His starring role in Haddock's CBC homecoming, the Vancouver-set spy drama *The Romeo Section*, feels like watching an actor at home in his setting as well as in his character Wolfgang McGee's rumpled linen suit. I talked with Airlie on location during the last day of filming the first episode, at the beautiful St. Andrew's-Wesley United Church downtown. He revealed we had our own spy-like connection: he'd learned of a potential new Haddock show on CBC from an anonymous tip I'd shared on the *TV, eh?* Twitter account.

"The next day I bumped into Chris on the beach walking our dogs and said 'I hear you're coming back to CBC.' He asked 'where'd you'd hear that?' so I said 'I have my sources.' He said 'no, seriously, where'd you hear that?' I said I read it on *TV, eh?* and he asked me to keep it under my hat because it wasn't official yet."

My set visit was embargoed so it's only now I can reveal my own secret: I got a sneak peek of the scene in Wednesday's premiere where Wolfgang strides wordlessly down the aisle of the church, a woman cleaning in the

foreground. Spoiler alert.

Airlie did spill a few more details of the intricately serialized show. My take is that McGee is like the Indiana Jones of Canadian spies, minus the running from boulders – professor by day, independent intelligence contractor by other parts of the day.

“He was an operative in the Canadian intelligence community earlier in his career, but now he’s officially off the books. The value and the problem for the government there is they’ve got deniability if I mess up – it means I’m going to be wearing it – but it also means I have no accountability to them.”



The first episode doesn’t spell things out for the audience, but the premise of the show is promoted as McGee managing “Romeo and Juliet spies” — informants engaged in intimate relations with intelligence targets.

“There are a few different worlds set up in the first episode,” Airlie explained.

“You can see this first episode is setting the table for what’s going on in these worlds, and it looks like this guy Wolfgang is going to navigate through most of them but you’re not sure how, and it’s going to be interesting to see what exactly is he doing.”

“You should assume that anyone could be lying at any moment. So in this world, who do you trust and how much do you trust them?” Airlie added.

“Wolfgang especially is attuned to that. He’ll say and do what’s necessary to achieve his objectives. There’s a lot of lying going on.”

Creator Haddock echoed that sentiment. “Thematically, what lies underneath it all is the duplicity of the human animal and society at large, nations at large. It’s the fronts everybody puts up, the false selves and the false organizations. Everybody’s lying. People find that delightful, somehow.”

The Vancouver on display in *The Romeo Section* so far looks beautiful, with fewer gritty corners than *Intelligence*, more gleaming buildings and scenic backdrops, but there’s a similar underbelly slowly being revealed in the spy drama.

Airlie sees an importance in the show’s unabashedly Vancouver setting. “I think it’s a shame there hasn’t been more of an aspiration to set Canadian series definably in Canada,” he said. “19-2 is doing a tremendous job of that right now, and I’m proud to be part of something that’s Canadian set and

particularly Vancouver set.”

The scenes filmed in the church involve a storyline in the first episode about a foreign national seeking sanctuary in Canada. “Our lead is asked by his contact in CSIS to check the guy’s background to see if he’s really who he says he is,” explained Haddock. “Is he worthwhile developing as an intelligence asset or is it more worthwhile to send him back to where he came from, or to the US? We get to discuss the theme of sanctuary, which is a worldwide theme right now with the forced immigration of peoples.”

Airlie is a writer himself, occasionally co-writing with *Sliding Doors* writer/director Peter Howitt, and the team has even met with Haddock for writing advice. “He’s very generous — he supports newbies and those of us who have been doing it for a while,” said Airlie. “I can’t speak highly enough of him.”

He was contracted to *Reaper* when *Intelligence* was filming its second season and says he was “gutted” not to continue with that Haddock series to the end. “I’ve been stopped more about *Intelligence* more than anything else I’ve done — well, up until *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It’s remarkable how many people have stopped me about *Intelligence* relative to all the other stuff I’ve done that was bigger and better promoted. Canadians really connected to that show.”

Airlie is gracious about my continued association of him with *House*, too, despite it being a one-shot guest appearance. “I could tell when they were making that pilot it was going to go big,” he said. “The writing was extraordinary, and Hugh (Laurie) was great, as was Lisa (Edelstein).”

Coincidentally, Airlie’s son has acted with both Laurie, in scenes that were cut from *Tomorrowland*, and Edelstein, with a recurring role in her *Girlfriend’s Guide to Divorce*.

The Romeo Section showcases Airlie’s talents far more than that memorable but brief role, however. Both Airlie and Haddock have confidence that CBC audiences will gravitate toward it, and CBC has given them every reason to believe the broadcaster has confidence in the show. Haddock mentioned the stillness of the camera as a stylistic choice allowing a focus on “the characters and the looks between them and the things left unsaid.” Airlie thinks the series succeeds at being simply “a good story well told.”

“We’re not doing a series to compete with Marvel and DC. God love ‘em and if you’re looking for that kind of entertainment they’re well done and they’re

on every other night of the week, so you'll have no problem finding them," Airlie added. "But that's not what we're making. I think we're making a series for an audience that's underserved on network TV."
The Romeo Section airs Wednesdays on CBC.



Diane Wild

Diane is the founder of *TV, eh?* She loves books, movies, TV, science, space, traveling, theatre, art, cats, and drinking multiple beverages at the same time.