

TELEVISION

Lights, camera, action for teens at Napa Valley TV



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When Maija Starr, Sofia Pastrama and Kimi Meigs put down their school books, the three R's give way to lights, camera and action.

Their playground is a green half-octagon stage at Napa Valley TV, where the teenage friends produce their variety show "Slapdash." For the high schoolers, as well as other teenagers pitching in at the public-access program, the studio is a welcome release for their creative and comic juices — and

for one, it also could be the first step in her life's work.

"It was about learning it's not as difficult as you would think to start a TV show, that it's completely possible," said Sofia, 14, on Friday as she and her "Slapdash" partners Maija and Kimi arrived at the Pueblo Avenue studio.

The three would spend three hours with a Vintage High student, William Poyser, recording a sketch segment called "Inapro-pro" that would spin and split common words into snappy, vaguely naughty put-downs. A performance and interview with the local band And That's the News — and an interview with a local merchant yet to be chosen — will fill out the next monthly episode, set to air on local cable TV on June 7.

"The idea was to make it fun and not one of those simple shows where they just tell you what's going on," said Kimi, a 15-year-old student at New Technology High and the program's manager. "We have opportunities for other people and other kids that want to try it out. We want people to submit videos and give us ideas on how to make the show more exciting for them."

The program's hosts welcome "everyone we know that has something interesting to offer," said the 15-year-old Maija, a Vintage High student and the show's main writer. "There's no criterion except (for) every live episode there's a musical guest. It's always fun. Whether we end up getting footage out of it or not, we always have fun."

'Que Pasa Napa'

"Quiet on the set!" Sofia yelled as she counted down five seconds with her fingers. Then the camera began capturing take after take, each variation on the gag given a few seconds to coax laughs or fall as flat as a wet rag.

"I'm gonna crystal your geyser!" William declared mock-menacingly. "Only if it's fresh spring water," Kimi shot back in a too-cool-for-school tone.

"I'm gonna Aero your Postale," William answered, before Maija sank to the floor with a sudden

fit of giggles, snuffing out the gag.

While the “Slapdash” trio performs in front of the cameras, other teens come to Napa Valley TV to learn the craft on the other side of the screen, by working cameras, audio mixers and video switchers.

“Since I was a little girl I’ve loved anything with cameras and TV,” said Maria Alcantar, 15, a technical assistant on the Spanish-English program “Que Pasa Napa” that Napa Valley TV airs Friday afternoons. But after a teacher suggested volunteering at the TV station, Maria instead found herself getting an education in the nuts and bolts of airing a show, and taking to the work quickly.

“In the first couple of months, I’ve gotten the cameras and (mixing) boards down — or at least you fake it till you make it!” she said. “I was shy the first three days, but if we make mistakes, it’s just part of life.”

Hours before Friday’s edition of “Que Pasa Napa,” Maria unexpectedly got her chance to move in front of the camera. After the day’s scheduled guest canceled her appearance after going into labor, Mari Martinez, the show host, overhauled her script in an hour and a half — and picked as her replacement guests Maria and Fernando Cortes, her two assistants, along with Maija and Sofia, who had arrived early for their own shoot

“The most important lesson I’ve got out of this is to do what you want, because you don’t always have the opportunity to,” she said.

Life lessons

A studio visitor can see teens trying out jokes or switching among the set’s three cameras, but the road for young broadcasting hopefuls in Napa often begins with a summer “boot camp” Napa Valley TV began three years ago, according to Executive Director James Raymond. Maija and Sofia became friends as classmates at the broadcast training class in 2011, before they created “Slapdash.” They each have a Napa Valley TV membership at \$30 a year, enabling them to use the station’s studio and equipment.

“I tell people the saying, ‘You plan your shoot and then you shoot your plan,’” Raymond said. “This teaches people to properly prepare things in life; it goes for anything in life. It gives you a skill set on working with people, how to market, how to be efficient.”

A year into their youthful experiment, the “Slapdash” creators freely admitted the many hours they needed away from the cameras — to round up musicians and interview subjects, promote the show on social media, and to prepare a YouTube channel they hope will widen their audience beyond the county.

“It’s simple to start a show, but it’s definitely not simple to run a successful show,” Sofia said during a break in the shooting. “It’s definitely a lot of work to keep it going, but I feel we’ve been pretty successful for the past year.

“Before we started the TV show, I never thought of filming, never gave it much thought. Now this is what I’m putting the most focus into. I’d love to be director, editor, filmmaker, TV producer, something in the business. It’s an incredible experience, what we’re learning, not only about production but running business: having your logo, getting out fliers, promotion, working with

other people.”

“It’s a commitment,” Maija said, “but it’s really worth it.”

Napa Valley TV

- Napa Valley TV broadcasts on Channels 27 and 28 on Comcast cable television in Napa, and U-Verse Channel 99.
- <http://www.napavalleytv.org/>