

EMPIRE RESET

After epic Season 3 finale,
Scott Stinson visits Boardwalk
Empire's new home. *Page B5*



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OFF THE TOP REGINA GOES MEATLESS FOR MCCARTNEY

A whole lot of burly stage hands at Regina's Mosaic Stadium were on a strict diet this week, thanks to Paul McCartney. The former Beatle and rock legend, pictured, played an outdoor show at the stadium Wednesday night. McCartney has long been known as a staunch vegan and a vehement supporter of animal rights. As part of the deal to bring McCartney to Regina, everyone working on the staging for the show got a taste of how he lives. Evraz Place vice-president Neil Donnelly says that meant the workers were being served vegetarian meals. "I think the bigger you get the more you want things done your way," Donnelly said. He added that the workers enjoyed the meals. "Obviously there's a few jokes flying around about people ordering pizza." McCartney played Winnipeg on Monday night and his Regina show is his last until November. *The Canadian Press*





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THE FULL BORE '20S

After a spectacular climax leaving behind a big pile of bodies, Boardwalk Empire gets a chance to start over again in Season 4



Director and executive producer Tim Van Patten with the cast on the new set of Boardwalk Empire's The Onyx Club.



SCOTT STINSON
on television

NEW YORK • The small, circular tables at The Onyx Club are covered in gold linens and topped with a small candle lantern in the centre. On the one at which I am sitting, there's a small burn mark in the tablecloth, doubtless left by a cigarette.

Patrons can still smoke in The Onyx. In here, it's the 1920s. Though the cigarette burn was likely an accident, one can imagine the set designers of *Boardwalk Empire* doing it on purpose. Everywhere around the lush nightclub, which is housed in a Brooklyn studio and which serves as one of the primary sets for the upcoming season of the HBO series, there are fine details that are emblematic of the Prohibition era. A vintage matchbox on a table. Sheet music — for an old blues number, *Eagle Rock Me, Papa* — in a period-appropriate size and script. (Larger-print versions of the music are tucked inside the vintage ones so the band doesn't have to squint during filming.) Plush patterned curtains, an intricately designed floor. When the producers of *Boardwalk Empire* set about creating the sandbox for Season 4 — most of the major set pieces having not survived Season 3, both in the imaginary and real-world sense — they didn't cut corners. It's an attitude of which

Nucky Thompson, the nattily attired gangster who carries a pistol in one hand and a fat billfold in the other, would be proud.

Two factors led to the decision to start fresh in Season 4. The first wasn't very flashy: The lease expired on the property that was used for the expansive Atlantic City boardwalk set built before the series began filming. The second was the result of the wild denouement of Season 3. With bodies strewn about more or less everywhere and buildings levelled, the producers had, to put it in a glass-half-full sense, some creative opportunities.

'How are we going to do this? Maybe we'll have to kill 80 people'

Howard Korder, a writer and executive producer on the series, sitting at a table in The Onyx, doesn't romanticize the decision to pile up the bodies at the end of Season 3.

"We were stuck with a lot of storylines we had to wrap up," he says. There were challenges, he recalls thinking, "How are we going to do this? Maybe we'll have to kill 80 people."

He smiles here, in jest, but the end result wasn't far off.

Tim Van Patten, the Emmy-award winning director and executive producer, says the violence was part of the deal with a show like this.

"Among the many things *Boardwalk Empire* is, is a gangster show," he says. The audience, having watched an entire season build toward a confrontation between

Nucky (Steve Buscemi) and New York mobster Gyp Rosetti (Bobby Cannavale), wouldn't be placated by some kind of side-door exit. There needed to be fireworks. "People expect that," Van Patten says. "You really owe it to the audience to pay that off." And so, bang bang. "I don't say this pejoratively," Van Patten explains, "but it was full

bore, brightly coloured pulp."

And it was spectacular. A climax that ran for almost the full length of the final episode, it left viewers uncertain who would survive until the credits appeared. It's still a little unclear who will return.

Three seasons in, with Nucky having fully dispensed with the charade of trying to keep his hands clean — they were always dirty in a figurative sense but for a while he managed to not get blood under his fingernails — and it was time for a war to arrive on his turf, Van Patten says. "Him having to go somewhere isn't nearly as compelling." Those who threaten him "have to come to his doorstep."

The director says he drew on all kinds of old influences, from Sam Peckinpah to Sergio Leone, when putting together the final shootouts.

This being an HBO series, there were a number of mortal wounds. Van Patten jokes that once you make the credit sequence on an HBO drama, your days are numbered. He tells the story of when

Robert Clohessy, who played Ward Boss Neary in the first season of *Boardwalk*, received a call from showrunner Terence Winter. "I guess I'm dead," was Clohessy's immediate response.

But with the character closet somewhat thinned out now, it helps with the theme of new beginnings. Season 4 sees Nucky in semi-hiding,

the unseen partner in new Atlantic City ventures, including The Onyx Club, which is to be run by the man who helped bail him out of last season's troubles, Chalky White (Michael K. Williams).

"In some ways, this is our new boardwalk," Van Patten says, gesturing around the nightclub. Up above, looking down over the dance floor, is the office where Nucky and Chalky will spend a lot of time.

The Onyx, kind of a sister establishment to New York's Cotton Club, provides a setting from which issues of race and segregation can be explored in the coming season.

"It has black performers and black staff, but they can't be in the club as customers," Korder says. "A lot of the story this season is about the north side" — the black part of Atlantic City in the Prohibition era.

The writers modelled some of the story on race-related controversies that flared up in the region in 1923, Korder says. But not all of it.

"We use the truth when it suits us," he says.

Other times, they use the guns.

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Season 3 of *Boardwalk Empire* is released on DVD on Aug. 20. Season 4 premieres on Sept. 8 on HBO Canada.