

## **Rick Mercer**

Canadian actor and writer

**Rick Mercer**, byname of **Richard Vincent Mercer**, (born October 17, 1969, St. John's, Newfoundland [now Newfoundland and Labrador], Canada), Canadian satirist, comedian, actor, and writer whose insightful lampooning of Canadian politics made him a national icon.

Mercer grew up in an exurb of [St. John's](#) in a middle-class family that loved to discuss politics. While in [high school](#) (which he departed one credit short of graduation), he wrote and performed in an award-winning one-act play and cofounded Corey and Wade's Playhouse, a [theatre](#) troupe that performed around St. John's. In 1990 he won praise for *Show Me the Button, I'll Push It (or, Charles Lynch Must Die)*, the one-person show he first presented as an angry young man of 21. After touring with it and, later, another one-man show, *I've Killed Before, I'll Kill Again*, in 1993 Mercer began an eight-season run on the [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation](#) (CBC) in *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, an inventive sketch-comedy-based television show he created with several fellow Newfoundlanders.

Among Mercer's memorable contributions to the show was an online petition (signed by about a million Canadians) to compel [Canadian Alliance](#) leader [Stockwell Day](#) to change his name to Doris. On *This Hour*, Mercer also introduced the recurring feature "Talking to Americans," interviews that hilariously revealed U.S. ignorance of Canada—including an ambush of then presidential candidate [George W. Bush](#), who accepted the endorsement of fictitious Canadian Prime Minister Jean Poutine. In 2001 an hour-long version of "Talking to Americans" gained the largest audience (2.7 million viewers) for a [comedy](#) special in CBC history.

In 1998 Mercer and his life partner, writer-producer Gerald Lunz, created *Made in Canada*, a [situation comedy](#) about the Canadian film and television industry, with Mercer as its ruthless protagonist. After that show's five-season run, Mercer and Lunz in 2004 introduced *Rick Mercer's Monday Report*, a comedic news-focused program that drew comparisons to American television's *The Daily Show*. Like that program's host, [Jon Stewart](#), Mercer was commended not only as a satirist but as a trustworthy news source. Mercer, however, was quick to define his role as that of an editorial cartoonist, except when performing his rant, the rapid-fire monologue he originated on *This Hour*. Many of those rants were collected in Mercer's best-selling book *Streeters* (1998), and later rants appeared in *The Rick Mercer Report: The Book* (2007)

In a typical rant on *The Rick Mercer Report* (renamed when it switched broadcast nights), for roughly two minutes the teleprompter-less Mercer would frenetically prowl

a graffiti-splattered alley in [Toronto](#), delivering heartfelt harangues to a backpedaling cameraman on everything from the state of the [Liberal Party](#) to [bullying](#). In 2011 his admonishment to young people to vote prompted “vote mobs” of college students celebrating the franchise and resulted in landmark levels of participation by younger voters in the federal election. *The Rick Mercer Report* also showed Mercer traveling the country, reveling in all manner of Canadiana, from moose tagging to witnessing the Arctic Winter Games. But politics remained his forte. Among his many offbeat encounters with politicians have been several famous interludes with prime ministers, including eating fast food with [Jean Chrétien](#), instructing [Paul Martin](#) in window insulation, and being read a bedtime story by [Stephen Harper](#).

In September 2017 Mercer announced that the next season of *The Rick Mercer Report* would be its last, saying, “I’ve always known that I had *the* best job in the country.” After 15 seasons and 277 episodes, he brought the series to an end in April 2018. Later that year he published *Final Report*, which collected previously unpublished rants from the last five years of his show along with some of the best rants from earlier years and included essays on the making of the program.

## Source #2 - Rick Mercer

Richard Vincent Mercer, [OC](#), satirist, comedian, screenwriter, actor, humanitarian (born 17 Oct 1969 in St. John’s, NL). Rick Mercer has parlayed his acerbic wit and voracious interest in politics into a career as one Canada’s foremost political and social commentators. Described by *Maclean’s* magazine as “one of Canada’s most bankable television commodities,” he has combined his “mutually parasitic” relationship with politicians, his ability to connect with ordinary Canadians and a mischievous, court jester perspective to become the satirical conscience of English Canadian culture. An Officer of the [Order of Canada](#), he has also excelled as a humanitarian through his involvement with numerous charities. He has received ten honorary degrees, 18 [Gemini Awards](#), 12 [Canadian Screen Awards](#) and two [Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards](#), including one for lifetime achievement, among many other honours.

## Early Years and Career

Raised in a middle-class home in the [St. John’s](#) suburb of Middle Cove, Rick Mercer was president of his high school’s student council but, ironically, never graduated. The first performance piece he ever helped write — a one-act play called *The 20-Minute Psychiatric Workout* — won [Newfoundland’s](#) high school drama festival. Mercer and his colleagues formed their own theatre company called Corey and Wade’s Playhouse and performed original sketches in theatres in and around St John’s. When he was 18 and

working as a dishwasher, Mercer landed a gig doing comedic commentaries for [CBC Radio](#) by pitching a group of dining producers on the subject of making politics funnier.

His meteoric rise began in 1990 at age 21 with his one-man show, *Show Me the Button, I'll Push It*. A pointed, satirical commentary on Canadian life after the [Meech Lake Accord](#), the show premiered at the [National Arts Centre](#) in [Ottawa](#) before touring across the country. His second show, 1992's *I've Killed Before, I'll Kill Again*, was equally successful.

### **This Hour Has 22 Minutes**

In 1993, Mercer teamed with Greg Thomey and former [CODCO](#) members [Cathy Jones](#) and [Mary Walsh](#) for the inaugural season of the satirical CBC comedy show *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. During his eight seasons on the multiple-award-winning series, Mercer honed his genially confrontational style, primarily through his trademark rants in which he would speak directly to the camera about a current political issue while briskly walking through a heavily graffitied city alley.

### **Talking to Americans**

Mercer enjoyed his greatest popular success with *Talking to Americans*, in which he exposed the ignorance that many Americans have of Canada by asking people in the United States their opinion about things concerning Canada that were comically false. The concept began as a regular segment on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and was expanded into an hour-long special in 2001. It attracted international attention and 2.7 million viewers, making it the highest-rated comedy special in CBC history.

### **Made In Canada and Rick Mercer Report**

In 1998, Mercer compiled some of his better-known rants into the book *Streeters*, which reached number one on the [Globe and Mail's](#) national bestseller list. Also that year, he created, wrote and starred in his own sitcom, *Made In Canada*, a satire of the [Canadian film and television industry](#).

The popular series came to an end in 2003 and the following year Mercer debuted a new current affairs series, *Rick Mercer's Monday Report*. By the beginning of its third season, it was the highest-rated arts and entertainment show on CBC. In addition to satirical reporting of news and current affairs, the show features Mercer engaging in local activities in communities across the country. Following a move to Tuesday nights, its name was changed to *Rick Mercer Report*.

Another collection of Mercer's political monologues became *Rick Mercer Report: The Book* in 2007. In 2008, it was expanded as *Rick Mercer Report: The Paperback Book*. In 2012, a collection of his rants, articles and essays was published as *A Nation Worth Ranting About*.

In September 2017, prior to the premier of the 15th season of *Rick Mercer Report*, Mercer announced that the show would not be returning for another season after its completion in April 2018. "It's still the best job in the world," he told CBC News. "In many ways, I could do it forever. But things don't last forever and the shows that I respect the most, they wrap them up on their own terms, and that's exactly what I'm doing." The show's final season was still very popular, drawing an average of 831,000 viewers per episode. The 277th and final episode — a one-hour special featuring highlights from past seasons — aired on 10 April 2018 and drew 1.6 million viewers.

In 2018, *Rick Mercer Report* received the Academy Icon Award at the [Canadian Screen Awards](#) for its "exceptional, ongoing contribution to the media industry at home or abroad."

### **Other Activities**

Mercer placed 50th in the Greatest Canadian contest held by the CBC in 2004 and is a popular host for awards shows and series; he has hosted the [Gemini Awards](#), [Juno Awards](#), Canadian Country Music Awards, [East Coast Music Awards](#) and CBC's annual [Canada Day](#) event on [Parliament Hill](#). He won a [Canadian Screen Award](#) for hosting the CBC's Canada Day special in 2017, *Canada Day 150! From Coast to Coast to Coast*. He has also brought his unique wit to TV specials such as CBC's *The Next Great Prime Minister*, the history program *It Seems Like Yesterday* and CBC's New Year's Eve 2016 special, *Canada's New Year's Eve: Countdown to 2017*.

Mercer's 2003 visit to Canadian soldiers in [Afghanistan](#) became the Gemini-nominated Christmas special *Rick Mercer's Christmas in Kabul*. He has appeared as an actor in such Canadian films and television series as *Bon Cop Bad Cop* (2006) and *Republic of Doyle* (2014), and was credited with inspiring many young adults to vote in the 2011 federal election. In response to the epidemic of suicides among [gay and lesbian](#) youth in Canada, Mercer spoke out strongly against bullying in schools, participating in the "It Gets Better" video campaign and calling on [LGBTQ](#) adults in public life, such as himself, to be open about their personal lifestyles in order to provide young people with respected gay role models.

## Personal Life

Rick Mercer has been in a relationship with Gerald Lunz, a television writer and producer, since 1990. Lunz was a writer on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* from 1996 to 1998, a writer, co-creator and executive producer on *Made In Canada*, and executive producer and co-creator of *Rick Mercer Report*.

## Charitable Involvement

Mercer has been heavily involved with charities throughout his career. He donated the \$15,000 cash prize from his Governor General's Award to LSPU Hall, a St. John's theatre where he got his start. He donated his earnings as spokesperson for the [Government of Canada's](#) "one-tonne challenge" to Toronto's Casey House, a hospice for people with [HIV](#), and co-founded with Belinda Stronach the Spread the Net Campaign, which has raised more than \$1 million to help prevent malaria in Africa. He is active with Walk for Life, a fundraiser for HIV and AIDS patients, and lends his talents to environmental causes such as energy conservation. He is outspoken in his support of the men and women of the [Canadian Armed Forces](#) and was named honorary colonel of the Nova Scotia-based 423 Maritime Helicopter Squadron. He also serves on the board of [Historica Canada](#), which produces the *Heritage Minutes* and publishes this encyclopedia.

## Honours

Mercer has received numerous honours for his work as a comedian, actor and writer, including the 1993 Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council's Artist of the Year Award, the 2003 Banff Television Festival's Sir Peter Ustinov Award, and a 2004 [Governor General's Performing Arts Award](#). In 2012, he was given [ACTRA](#) Toronto's Award of Excellence in recognition of "an exceptional body of work and a commitment to advocacy on behalf of all performers." In 2016, he received ACTRA's John Drainie Award for his "unique approach to raising awareness of Canadian politics and current affairs." In 2019, he received a Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement.

He has also received many honours in recognition of his humanitarian and charitable work, including the King Clancy Award from the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons, the Stanley Knowles Humanitarian Award from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, and the Woodrow Wilson Award for Public Service from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. He has also received the Rick Hansen Award of Excellence from the March of Dimes and been

inducted into the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons' Hall of Fame for his continued work on behalf of people with disabilities..

## Awards

### Gemini Awards

- Best Performance (Individual or Ensemble) in a Comedy Program or Series (*This Hours has 22 Minutes*) (1995, 1996, 1997)
- Best Writing in a Comedy or Variety Program or Series (*This Hours has 22 Minutes*) (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000)
- Best Performance in a Pre-School Program or Series (*The Adventures of Dudley the Dragon*, "The Last Dudley") (1998)
- Best Performance in a Comedy Program or Series (*This Hours has 22 Minutes*) (1999, 2000)
- Best Ensemble Performance in a Comedy Program or Series (*Made In Canada*) (2001, 2004)
- Best Writing in a Comedy or Variety Program or Series (*Made In Canada*) (2002, 2004)
- Best Comedy Program or Series (*Rick Mercer Report*) (2009, 2011)

### Canadian Screen Awards

- Best Music, Variety, Sketch Comedy or Talk Program or Series (*Rick Mercer Report*) (2013)
- Best Performance (Individual or Ensemble) in a Variety or Sketch Comedy Program or Series (*Rick Mercer Report*) (2013, 2014, 2015)
- Best Writing in a Variety or Sketch Comedy Program or Series (*Rick Mercer Report*) (2013, 2015, 2016)
- Best Variety or Sketch Comedy Program or Series (*Rick Mercer Report*) (2014, 2015, 2016)
- Best Host in a Live Program or Series (*Canada Day 150! From Coast to Coast to Coast*) (2018)
- Academy Icon Award (*Rick Mercer Report*) (2018)

### Canadian Comedy Awards

- Pretty Funny Male Performance (*Made In Canada*) (2000)
- Pretty Funny Writing (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*) (2000)
- Pretty Funny Writing, Special or Episode (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*) (2000)



- Pretty Funny Writing, Series (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*) (2001)
- Pretty Funny Male Performance (*Made In Canada*) (2002)
- Pretty Funny Writing, Series (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*) (2002)
- Pretty Funny Writing (*Made In Canada*) (2003)
- Writers Guild of Canada Awards
- WGC Award (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*) (1997)
- WGC Award (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, “New Year’s Eve Special”) (1999)
- WGC Award (*Made In Canada*, “Damacles: What A Doll”) (2001)

## Others

- Artist of the Year Award, Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council (1993)
- Sir Peter Ustinov Award, Banff Television Festival (2003)
- National Arts Centre Award, [Governor General's Performing Arts Awards](#) (2004)
- Award of Excellence, [ACTRA](#) Toronto (2012)
- Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal (2012)
- King Clancy Award, Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (2012)
- Woodrow Wilson Award for Public Service, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (2013)
- Comedy Icon Lifetime Achievement Award, Cracking Up the Capital Comedy Festival (2014)
- Officer, [Order of Canada](#) (2014)
- Rick Hansen Award of Excellence, March of Dimes (2014)
- Hall of Fame Inductee, Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (2015)
- Stanley Knowles Humanitarian Award, Ontario Public Service Employees Union (2015)
- John Drainie Award, ACTRA (2016)
- Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award - Broadcasting, Governor General's Performing Arts Awards (2019)

## Honorary Degrees

- Doctor of Letters, [Laurentian University](#) (2002)
- Doctor of Letters, [Memorial University of Newfoundland](#) (2005)
- Doctor of Laws, [Brock University](#) (2009)
- Doctor of Letters, [McMaster University](#) (2010)
- Doctor of Civil Law, [Bishop’s University](#) (2010)
- Doctor of Letters, [University of British Columbia](#) (2010)
- Honorary Doctorate, [University of Guelph](#) (2012)

- Doctor of Laws, Royal Military Academy (2014)
- Doctor of Laws, [University of Western Ontario](#) (2014)
- Doctor of Laws, [York University](#) (2014)

### **Source #3 - Rick Mercer-Comedian, Author, Philanthropist**

Rick Mercer has won 25 Gemini Awards for his work in television, authored two best-seller books, and has received numerous awards from an eclectic group of organizations; including Officer of the Order of Canada in June 2014; and Honorary Colonel of the 423 Marine Helicopter Squadron based in Shearwater, Nova Scotia. He has entertained Canadian troops in Afghanistan, and donates time and money to several charities.

Alluding to his lack of scholastic success, Rick said; “I was really good at extra-curricular activities at school, especially the Theatre Club. When I was in high school, I was drawn to the drama club. I signed up for back stage work – but the teacher had other ideas. She said told me to write and perform in the play, saying: ‘You should write it because you never shut up...’ As I was writing the play, I began thinking that I would like to act in it as well. It was about a punk band – completely different from what the other schools were doing. Well, wouldn’t you know? We went and won the Provincial Drama Festival Competition!”

“We decided to put the show on at LSPU Hall in St. John’s. I contacted the theatre and they told me that it was an 80/20 split from the ticket revenues. Well, I wasn’t going to let them push me around – and told them it was 50/50 or nothing! They calmly explained that we would get the 80%. Some negotiator I was...” It was a huge success, and we became like rock stars. We even had rock bands that would come and play before the performance.”

“There was an appetite for programming like this in Newfoundland at that time. The biggest show on TV was Wonderful Grand Band. They had political satire and comedy as well as music. So we were a performing a live show in that genre.”

Rick was off and running – and he left high school before graduation to pursue his career in theatre and then to television. “It was like the proverbial light bulb went off in my head! This is what I was meant to do.”



“I wrote a one-man show. Meech Lake was in the news, and the national media was being very hard on (then Premier) Clyde Wells. Charles Lynch was particularly hard on Premier Wells and Newfoundland in general. The show was called Show Me The Button, I’ll Push It or Charles Lynch Must Die. The National Arts Centre in Ottawa sponsored the show. Because it was so topical, I was invited to appear on Midday and debate Charles Lynch on air.” The show itself became a news item and ticket sales went through the roof.

“As it happened, there was another show booked in Toronto’s Factory Theatre, Vancouver, Calgary, and Ottawa for a month in each city. That show didn’t work out, and all these theatres had a hole to fill. So they asked me to fill the open weeks. Wasn’t a hard question to answer... I did that show for a year!” Continuing, Rick adds; “How could you ever predict all those elements coming together?”

“George Anthony said that I should be on CBC. I auditioned for a show that also included Mary Walsh, Cathy Jones and Greg Tomey. We did six episodes of that show, and This Hour Has 22 Minutes is now into its 22nd year. I did it for eight years, and a popular part of the show was my two-minute rant.” Rick’s 1998 book *Streeters* was a compilation of his 22 Minutes rants, and it was a national best seller.

A hugely popular feature on the show was the Talking To Americans segment. Rick would travel to US cities and do man-in-the-street interviews, asking Americans for their opinion on Canadian politics, weather and other issues. Not surprisingly, it revealed an enormous ignorance of Canada by our neighbours to the south. Rick gained access to high ranking US political figures, including then-presidential candidate George Bush; who responded to questions about Canadian Prime Minister Jean Poutine. Americans responded favourably when asked if Canada should switch from our 20 hour per day clock to the American 24 hour per day clock. It was all in good fun, and so popular that CBC co-produced a special with Rick that attracted 2.7 million viewers, the highest rated television special in Canadian broadcast history.

“22 Minutes was a great job – but it wasn’t my show. I wanted to control the show, and I’ve been very fortunate to control my own career.” At the end of the 2000-2001 season; Rick announced his departure from the show.

From 1998 to 2003 Rick also created and co-produced *Made In Canada*, a sitcom spoof about the Canadian television business. His character is a conniving and back-stabbing person who will do anything to get ahead in the company, including having his brother-in-law fired so that he could then take over his job. The show, filmed economically with a single camera has been syndicated as *The Industry* in The United States, France, Australia and Latin America.

Following a Christmas visit to entertain Canadian troops in December 2003, Rick Mercer's Monday Report debuted in January 2004. The show followed a political satire format similar to 22 Minutes and The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

A unique component is the segment when Rick visits Canadian towns to participate in local events, doing everything from swimming with dogs, experiencing zero gravity, riding with the Coast Guard and then going out with a lobster fisherman. "I only go someplace to celebrate the local people we're working with. My job is to help people relax so that they can shine. I have to establish that trust factor to help people be comfortable and to just be themselves. I'm the guy who's doing his best to participate along with our program guests."

"A lot of our on-location segments come as a result of people sending in suggestions. Plus, everyone involved with the show keeps an ear out for an activity and location that is unique and entertaining."

Commenting about previous segments with political figures, including a tour of 24 Sussex Drive with then Prime Minister Paul Martin, Rick states that he doesn't have the same enjoyment about appearing with political figures; "One of the ways that the show has evolved is that I don't want to hang out with those people (politicians) anymore."

After two record-breaking seasons on Monday nights, The Rick Mercer Report was moved to Tuesday evenings. "It was clear that something had to be done..." quipped Rick – tongue firmly planted in his cheek...

"The moments I like best are going to a community and meeting some exceptional people. The show is unabashedly Canadian." In keeping with his pro-Canada stance, Rick is on the board of The Historica-Dominion Institute, an organization dedicated to the promotion and study of Canadian history, identity and citizenship.

Published in 1998, Rick's first book *Streeters*, was a collection of his most popular rants from 22 Minutes – and it was a best seller. *The Rick Mercer Report: The Book* was his second and it too was a collection of Rants from the first four seasons on The Rick Mercer report. It was another best seller and has been re-printed eight times. *A Nation Worth Ranting About* was published in 2008, and was yet again another best seller for the man who was born for television.

Rick is generous in his support of charitable organizations, and often invests his own money in addition to his celebrity to the organizations he supports. In fact, the citation for his Order of Canada induction notes "his ability to inspire and challenge Canadians through humour" and his work with charitable causes." He donated the fees he earned for appearing in ads to promote Harry Rosen men's stores to Toronto's Casey House, a hospice for people with HIV/AIDS. He is a patron of Hope Air, which provides free

non-emergency medical flights for people in financial need. He is part of the It Gets Better campaign which is a series of videos to help gay and lesbian youth overcome bullying. He donated the \$15,000 cash portion of his Governor General's Award Performing Arts Award to LSPU Hall, the St'Johns theatre where he got his start.

Along with Belinda Stronach, he is Co-Chair of Spread The Net, a UNICEF sanctioned organization dedicated to providing sleeping nets for children in Africa, to help prevent malaria spread by mosquito bites. It is now managed in Canada by Plan Canada, an NGO with a solid reputation. Since starting in 2008, Canadian high school and university students have raised more than \$1,200,000 for the Spread The Net campaign; generating over \$170,000 in 2014.

"The show has many talented writers, but I write The Rant myself. I write it on Thursday night for taping in the alleyway on Friday. Usually it comes fairly quickly, but occasionally it's a struggle and I end up sleeping on the couch in my office. I have to remember that we're a family show, and that we are primarily a comedy show. That said – I have two minutes to get something off my chest. "

"After Ottawa teenager Jamie Hubley committed suicide because he was bullied for being gay, I was personally angry. I believe that I have a responsibility to make a statement and take a position about how we need to support the gay and lesbian kids who are being bullied by their classmates. It's not acceptable. Jamie was one of 300 kids a year in Canada who take their own lives – that's 300 too many."

**Source #1****Title:** Rick Mercer Canadian Actor and Writer**Author:** Jeff Wallenfeldt**Date of Publication:** June 27th, 2011**Date of Retrieval:** October 15th, 2020**Name of Website:** Britannica**URL:** <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rick-Mercer>

**Source #2****Title:** Rick Mercer**Author:** Andrew MacIntosh**Date of Publication:** September 18th, 2012**Date of Retrieval:** October 15th, 2020**Name of Website:** The Canadian Encyclopedia**URL:** <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/rick-merc>**Source #3****Title:** Rick Mercer - Comedian, Author, Philanthropist**Author:** N/A**Date of Publication:** September 22nd, 2014**Date of Retrieval:** October 15th, 2020**Name of Website:** The Montrealer**URL:** <https://themontrealeronline.com/2014/09/rick-merc-comedian-author-philanthropist/>