

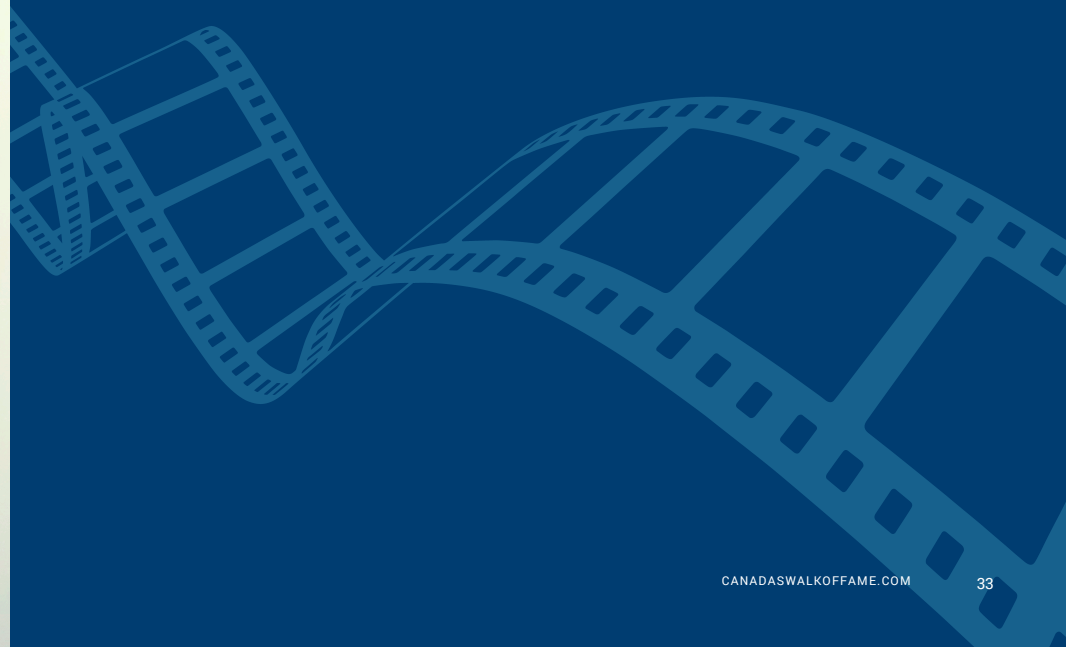


2019 Canada's Walk of Fame Inductee  
**WILL ARNETT**  
Arts and Entertainment

# Master of Surprise

How a hard-working actor found success by staying true to what he wanted to do

*by Suzanne Alyssa Andrew*



Will Arnett is a prolific film, television and voice actor, a writer, producer and comedian who fully commits to every role with quick wit and razor-sharp intensity. Although he's now widely known, respected and a frequent award nominee and winner (he's a five-time Emmy Award nominee for outstanding comedy acting and won an Annie award for achievement in voice acting), his road to success took patience and dedication to his craft.

Arnett grew up in Toronto, where he enjoyed what he describes as a "standard Canadian" upbringing. He spent summers with family in Winnipeg and Lake of the Woods in northwestern Ontario, and along the way he became a fervent hockey and sports fan. And then, in 1990, when he was 20, after dropping out of Concordia University, he moved to New York City to pursue his dream of becoming an actor.

He studied at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute, landed roles in plays and independent film and television productions, lent his iconic resonant voice to commercials and other voice acting projects, and appeared in pilot after pilot, guest role after guest role (on everything from *Sex and the City* to *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*). He was happy working as an actor, but it was a hustle.

**"Success to me was doing what I wanted to do. It wasn't the cash and prizes. Once I was happy doing what I wanted to do I was already winning."**

"Probably, if I'd had something else to fall back on, who knows if I would have packed it all in, but I spent years toiling away, trying to get jobs, bigger roles and better parts," he says. "I didn't know exactly how everything was going to go, but I knew that I was doing what I wanted to do and I understood at a young age that was the answer. Success to me was doing what I wanted to do. It wasn't the cash and prizes. Once I was happy doing what I wanted to do I was already winning."

In 2003 he finally landed the perfect role, as Gob Bluth on comedy series *Arrested Development*. "I didn't look at it at the time as this was my big break. It felt right, like a great thing to be part of," he recalls. "They wanted me to audition for it and I flew out to California and my life changed forever."

The shift wasn't instant. Although the show was a critical success, it took time for it to catch on with audiences, and the initial run lasted only three seasons. Yet Arnett says looking back at the big picture, that was the role that made a difference: "Once the show was finished, definitely doors had been opened and opportunities started to appear," he says. "There are often still obstacles, I just get fewer obstacles now, and for the most part I get to do the stuff I want to do."

One thing that makes Arnett so memorable is the complex roles he's drawn to: "I'm often attracted to characters who are at some kind of emotional or spiritual crossroads where their feelings are at odds with each other," he says. Audiences respond positively to that tension because it's both relatable and surprising. It's most notable in his roles on *Arrested Development* and *Flaked* (the Netflix series he wrote, produced and starred in), as well as the voices of Batman in the Lego movies and Bojack Horseman on the critically-acclaimed animated series of the same name.

The element of surprise is something he learned early on makes people laugh the most: "Getting that initial reaction where you really catch them, that to me is really satisfying," he says. "I've always sought that out, whether it was with friends, or when I was younger with parents or teachers. I love that immediate element of surprise. It's the most important thing to comedy."

Arnett has two young boys and along with sharing laughs, he's also passing along his grandfather's best advice to a new generation: You always get back what you give to the world. "I always put out there what I wanted to do," he says. "I stayed true and went looking for the things I want in life instead of just noticing what I thought I didn't have."

Arnett remains fond of and connected to his hometown and jokes that Canadians have to own our patriotism: "We can be more confident about the fact that we're Canadian. Just assert it! Because Canadians are so favourably looked upon in the rest of the world. Any time I tell people I'm Canadian, my experience has been you get a smile, and they're happy to help."

He's also quick to express how awed he is to be inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame: "After moving to New York with nothing, to be able to come back for this is tremendous. To be honoured for being a Canadian performer means a lot."

