

MUMP AND SMOOT

ARTICLES

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Clowning in Canada

edited by Julia Lane and Linda Mancini



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In the Company of Mump & Smoot and Pochsy

A Conversation between Karen Hines,
Michael Kennard, and John Turner

Introduction/background context

Michael Kennard and John Turner met in 1986 in Second City workshops. They discovered their powerful connection during these early days, especially when immersed in gibberish exercises, wherein the seeds of Mump & Smoot's Ummonian tongue were sown. It was also in Second City workshops that they met and began working with Karen Hines, who brought to the mix her own passion for dark comedy and for the horror genre.

Hines was herself a performer at the time—her “poisonous pixie” Pochsy was in the works—but she also discovered a capacity for “ordering the chaos” the clowns so wildly offered up, an

obsession with helping them toward precision in performance so that what Kennard and Turner discovered in the throes of improv or rehearsal or in front of a crowd might be captured and artfully recreated without ever seeming to be repeated. Hines has gone on to direct all of Mump & Smoot's shows to date and is integral from the developmental phase through to full production.

On Friday, 13 May 1988, Mump & Smoot were born in their first show, *Jump the Gun*, at the Theatre Centre in Toronto. It was twelve minutes long, the crowd went wild, and everyone there that night knew something amazing had been birthed.

Kennard and Turner's shared fascinations with horror and mortal fear, magic (theatrical and natural), risky spiritual investigations, dream as a logic base, and the dark aspects of love (among many other fascinations) resulted in the creation of two clowns of horror with the joint credo, “Enjoy the process of living.” These clowns reside on the planet Ummo, worship their clown god Ummo, and speak their own language—Ummonian.

Apart from numerous short sketches, their primary repertoire includes eight full-length shows, *Something* (1989), *Caged* (1990), *Ferno* (1992), *Tense* (1997), *Something Else* (1998), *Flux* (2002), *Cracked* (2012), and *Anything* (2014). Over the years the press has called Mump & Smoot, among other things, “[n]ational treasures” (*Edmonton Sun*), “two of Canada's finest clowns” (*The Globe and Mail*), “post-apocalyptic Smother's Brothers” (*Edmonton Journal*), “a Martian Abbott and Costello” (*Now Magazine*), “Beckett meets the Road Warrior” (*the Village Voice*), and “an eccentric brew of Grand Guignol and New Vaudeville” (*New York Newsday*)” (Mump & Smoot press package).

Karen Hines's director's notes from the show *Cracked* sum up the energy of Mump & Smoot, as well as the unique dynamic of their collaboration:

It was the 1980's. Blondie, Devo and young David Lynch were my heroes. I was still a student, and inexplicably drawn to these two beautiful freaks, Kennard and Turner. We shared certain fascinations: with horror, with comedy and visceral performance—not necessarily in that order. In those early days, the directing I did was just kind of helping out, and being the ‘third eye,’ which I did dressed in stilettos and a gun belt—I wasn't trying to be sassy; it just seemed the appropriate attire when I had to set props or explosions in front of the audience, or usher people to their seats in our skanky early venues . . . when I was so pleased to know there would always be blood.



Mump & Smoot (John Turner and Michael Kennard).
Photo by Gary Mulcahey, mulcahey.com

Back in those days, none of us had a clue where this was headed. We were just driving on some fun-filled road trip. These two were clearly light, and possessed by something I couldn't help watching, to the point where I became obsessed by a need to help them order the chaos, so other people could see every facet of what it was—this thing that was clearly, even then, the real deal. I was inspired by them when they made their first bold moves, unlike anything anyone had seen, and I've been inspired by them for 32 years. I know a lot more now, about the mechanics of production and what actual rehearsals can yield ... but at the core of it all is still so much blood, so much chaos and so many laughs. I believe it's all poetry in motion. I know for sure I've seen more Mump & Smoot shows than anyone alive. I'm waiting to get bored so I can be released at last from this exquisite compulsion. (7)

I became obsessed by a need to help them order the chaos, so other people could see every facet of what it was

In 1997, Michael, John, and Karen opened their own studio, the SPACE (Studio for Physical and Clown Exploration), which was open until 2005. In the SPACE, they taught and directed clown and created and rehearsed their shows.

Mump & Smoot's critical acclaim and popularity grew through consistently sold-out houses in the fringe festivals across Canada, which have led them to enjoy successful runs in Toronto and at numerous North American regional theatres. These include the Canadian Stage Company in Toronto (Dora Awards—Best Production, Best Director, nominated for Best New Play and Lighting Design; Canadian Comedy Award, Best Performers), Yale Repertory Theatre (Associate Artists, 1994–2001), the American Repertory Theatre in Boston (Boston Theatre Award for Outstanding Small Visiting Company), off-Broadway at the Astor Place Theatre in New York, the La Jolla Playhouse in California (Drama-Logue Award for best actors), the Dallas Theatre Centre, the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary, the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, the Globe Theatre in Regina, and the World Stage Festival in Toronto. They also had the unique opportunity to perform at two festivals in Israel and teach a clown workshop at the University of Tel Aviv to a class made up of both Palestinians and Israelis.

A few years after the inaugural Mump & Smoot shows, Hines's company, Pochsy Productions, was founded to produce *Pochsy's Lips*, which premiered to three audience members at the Orlando Fringe, then went on to tour to sold-out houses across Canada and America, including venues such as One Yellow Rabbit and the Dallas Theatre Centre, but also branching out to more script-oriented venues such as the Actors' Theatre of Louisville, Factory Theatre, and Joe's Pub (Public Theatre, New York City). It also toured to Germany in 2010.

The Pochsy Plays (*Pochsy's Lips*, *Oh Baby*, and *Citizen Pochsy*), created with the collaboration of Hines's mentor, Sandra Balcovske, and her composer, Greg Morrison, are a more literary expression of the clown work: after studying with Philippe Gaulier, Hines purposefully combined aspects of Gaulier's bouffon and

Pochinko's "personal clown" together to create what she called "the personal bouffon," then "Neo Bouffon." Her dark comedies combine magic realism with satire and horror to skewer consumer culture, narcissism, and the dangerous obsessions of a market-driven world. 'Pochsy' is an anagram for 'Psycho.'

Hines's early work was described as "like reading a Japanese haiku and a nihilist treatise all at the same time" (*Eye Weekly*) and as 'Greek tragedy by Betty Boop' (*Montreal Gazette*). Pochsy has been described as 'a disease you want to get in the hopes that it will purge something bigger' (*Georgia Straight*) and a 'walking, singing dancing embodiment of designer nihilism' (*Now Magazine*) ("Press Quotes").

While Hines followed Mump & Smoot's suit with hyper-live performances and audience interaction (she won the Dora Award for her performance of *Oh, Baby*), *The Pochsy Plays* have also garnered multiple literary awards and nominations. Published by Coach House Books, they were a finalist for the Governor General's Award for Drama, as well as receiving multiple Dora and Chalmers nominations and Writers Guild Awards. Hines's plays have been studied in numerous university courses, including Nick Mount's Literature for Our Times (University of Toronto), and they have been adapted as short films that have screened on six continents.



(l-r): John Turner, Karen Hines, and Michael Kennard.
Photo by Ian Jackson, Epic Photography



Pochsy (Karen Hines) in *Pochsy's Lips*.
Photo by Gary Mulcahey, mulcahey.com

Turner and Kennard were involved in every one of Hines's productions: Turner co-directing the short films and *Citizen Pochsy*, Kennard operating as performance coach for the earliest plays and soon directing her newest.

What about the dynamic of your trio works so well?

Michael: We're friends, first and foremost.

Karen: Respect.

John: Love and humour.

Karen: Humour's huge.

John: Shared passion.

Michael: Mischief, play.

[T]he average lifespan of a comedic duo is ten years, and we're over thirty now.

John: We all work so hard at all of it. The diligence, the dedication.

Karen: We never fight.

Michael: Ya.

(All laugh.)

Karen: Actually we fight a lot. We don't fight that much these days.

John: We butt heads.

Karen: We're all very different from each other and cover different territory.

Michael: We challenge each other.

Karen: And we work it out. We push through.

John: No matter how much we're butting heads, we always have hope and faith that we're going to come out okay. And it's just a matter of time and effort and process to get to there.

Karen: It's like we took vows that we didn't take.

John: The other thing that keeps us going as collaborating artists is, no matter what else is going on, we know we're always going to show up. And I think that is a testament to our longevity. Mike told me once that the average lifespan of a comedic duo is ten years, and we're over thirty now.

Karen: As the director of *Mump & Smoot*, I enjoy watching them so much. I find pleasure in what they do. I still can't see Mike and John under the makeup. I can honestly say that there's no one I would rather watch onstage than you two.

John: And we have great pleasure in watching Pochsy and seeing your process and the stuff you write about.

Michael: We're also good at knowing when we have to take a break from each other or from the work. And not being disheartened or ...

Karen: Worried.

Michael: ... that it's not going to come back.

Karen: Caring enough not to care.

Michael: And we all agree that as soon as it's not fun anymore, we won't do it. So having that as a sort of a balancing thing, we know when we have to take a break. And we know when we have to have fun.

Can you tell us about your teachers? Who have you all studied with that made a big impression on you and your work?

Michael: Well, everything Richard Pochinko taught us has informed everything we have done. Not that we cling to it. We expand on it.

Karen: He taught us about the connection with the audience that you can achieve by simply listening to them, hearing them, and feeling their breath.

John: He taught us that a clown can do anything. And how to find your basic original and creative impulses even before adopting any technique.

Karen: I would say something that also resonated with me was his notion of the glass jars.

Michael: It came from —

John: One of Richard's visions.

Michael: Dream. It was a dream. Dream. Vision. Same thing.

John: He had a dream that he and Ian Wallace were flying over the earth in a spaceship, and they saw all these people that were waving at them. And Richard said, "Oh, look, they're waving! We should go down closer." So, Ian guided the ship down

closer to the earth. When they got closer, they realized that the people weren't waving at them. They were trying to break out of their glass jars. And so Richard decided upon waking up that that was their mission.

Michael: Goal.

John: Their goal. It's to help break people out of their creative prisons.

Subversiveness made the sweetness of the clown more palatable for me

Karen: And it was effective, and I would say that doing the workshop broke me out of my glass jar. I had not met with any success as a performer previous to that, and then I began to meet with success as a comedienne—not just as a clown, but as an actor comedian.

Michael: Gaulier was a huge influence on us in terms of physical comedy. He was about learning how to be grotesque and big, without being inhibited.

Karen: Gaulier, who pointed us more purposefully to parody, satire, thoughtful application of the grotesque.

John: Also about being subversive and finding a way to get away with it. In a creative sense.

Karen: I would add that Gaulier's work also allows for delicacy—through parody, through empathy (as he says, the bouffons come to tell us all aspects of humanity belong to everyone). I resist the 'big' and the 'grotesque' in my own performances and writing, and in my teaching. I look for soft and stealthy ways to 'sneak the truth.' Gaulier changed my life. I was not performing as a clown prior to studying with Gaulier even though I had studied with Pochinko. Subversiveness made the sweetness of the clown more palatable for me, and I was able to perform better with that dark component, that stiletto's edge.

John: Fiona Griffiths for movement, impulse.

Clowns are often quite beautifully tragic.

Michael: Ian Wallace.

John: John Townsen for physical comedy.

Karen: David Smukler.

John: Awesome voice teacher, coach, mentor.

Karen: Carol Rosenfeld, for acting, whose work I have applied in my performing and directing. Stella Adler, who taught script interpretation, so writing.

Michael: All our improv teachers: Bruce Hunter, Allan Guttman –

John: Deb Kimmert, Sandra Balcovske –

Michael: The list goes on.

Karen: A lot of teachers.

Michael: I just want to add that all our fellow performers and friends have also been influential.



Pochsy (Karen Hines) in *Citizen Pochsy: Head Movements of a Long-Haired Girl*.

Photo by Gary Mulcahey, mulcahey.com

Are there dynamics that arise when you, yourselves, are teaching this work that are challenging for you and that you want to push back on or set the record straight around?

Karen: When I teach bouffon, I push back on the impulse students have toward being grotesque without the balancing forces of beauty, charm, intellect, clarity of purpose. It's very easy to get up on stage and be gross and adopt an affliction. I strongly believe that there must be a personal connection to whatever affliction one adopts when one is performing bouffon. And that came from having studied the personal clown with Pochinko.

John: Another thing we push back against in both clown and bouffon is that it has to be funny. Humour definitely is a technique and a helpful method to go to explore the dark. But it doesn't have to be funny all the time. Clowns are often quite beautifully tragic.

Karen: And often there will be laughter in those situations because of the fact that the audience undergoes a kind of release that comes out in the form of laughter as a response, but it is not because something is necessarily funny-haha.

Michael: Those dynamics always arise in teaching. For example, there might be a time when you push back on something with a student, and then they push back with their point of view, and you think, "Oh! Okay, maybe that *could* work." There's no definitive yay or nay. And we pushed back on some of the



Mump & Smoot (Michael Kennard and John Turner) in *Something Else*. Photo by Gary Mulcahey, mulcahey.com

things that we were taught. And that's what led us to finding a new way.

Karen: Truly, for me—I had no idea what to do until I fused two things that weren't meant to be going together, or I was told couldn't go together.... Also I would say that something that we did push back on that's sort of important because we all did it—we had preconceptions when we started the work. And it was our teachers—I'll focus on Richard Pochinko and Philippe Gaulier especially—who broke us out of our preconceptions, Richard in the gentlest way possible, Philippe Gaulier in the hardest way possible. And even though we ended up pushing back against both of them in what we wound up creating, they broke us into the space where we could do that, by getting into the purity of their form. And we always go back to that. When you have a student who pushes back on you, if it takes you deep down into the purest intent of the work, then you will agree with them.

Why is continuing to teach this work important?

Karen: We all believe that those misconceptions we mentioned above are problematic when the work winds up onstage, and that we can help.

John: This is a wonderful gift in our lives that helped us express ourselves and has led to some success as creative people. The systems continue to help us, and we continue to grow in them, and it's a natural thing to want to take that out into the world and offer it to others.

Michael: It's important that the clown work continue as it's been passed on for generations.

And I'd say that it's our duty and our purpose as human beings to pass on what we learn.

Karen: ... as elders, now.

(All laugh.)

So, tell us about what's coming up for you in the future.

Michael: John?

John: Well, last September Mump & Smoot headlined the Calgary and Edmonton Clown Festivals with our very first touring show *Something*, and we are now in the early stages of creation for a new Mump & Smoot offering. The three of us are working on a book that will document all our days, early and recent, and describe the creation processes for Pochsy and Mump & Smoot. Of course, we will all continue to collaborate. Karen?

Karen: I've been continuing to develop plays that draw on clown and bouffon. I've just wound up a tour of my solo show *Crawlspace*, which went from Videofag and Soulpepper to micro-theatres cross-country, and I've been directing freelance and working on a couple of play commissions for other theatres—all of them draw, in some way, on the principles of clown, bouffon and horror. *All the Little Animals I Have Eaten* is being presented by Nightwood and Crow's in Toronto, and *Crawlspace* is being adapted as a feature—so I'm devising fresh ways of making micro-horror on film.

John: Mike?

Michael: I am an associate professor in the Drama Department at the University of Alberta. My next project is working as Bouffon Coach on Theatre Network's presentation of Colleen Murphy's *The Theatre for the Destitute Present: Titus Bouffonius* (an adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*). I am also working on a new solo clown/mask show called *Curtains*.

Michael: John, what about your farm?

John: Oh yes. I run the Manitoulin Conservatory for Creation and Performance (where all three of us teach during the summer months) on my farm. I've also been working with award-winning contemporary dancer Jennifer Dallas on a clown/dance fusion. I am currently teaching at Laurentian University and also in the process of creating a solo show.

[W]e're big believers that you have to do more than just clown training.

Finally, what advice would you give to up-and-coming future clowns?

Michael: Something we talk about a lot is that too many clowns think that they can just study clown and be good at clown. And we're big believers that you have to do more than just clown training.

John: Any physical work from martial arts to yoga to movement improv to physical theatre work ...

Karen: Script interpretation, scene study, singing, voice.

Michael: We all continue to do workshops.

Karen: Yup.

John: Never stop developing. We always encourage our students to study with teachers other than us because there are so many different perspectives out there.

Michael: And you have to be an explorer. Students will come up and give me an idea and say, "Do you think that'll work?" And my response is always, "Well, I can't tell you that until you put it up. So, take a leap and put it up, and then we'll talk."

John: Explore, explore, try anything and find out.

Karen: ... and craft it from there. We were all so bad when we started. Gaulier kicked us off the stage constantly. So it's not about being good. It's about why are you there. What are you doing with it. Be clear in your intention. The work has to be used for good.

Michael: And be willing to fail, horribly. The biggest thing that we got from Richard is that you do the work, you do all the training, and then you got to make it your own.

Karen: And react *against* the training once you've got it. It's a powerful element toward individuation and individual expression.

Michael: And it's what moves the art form forward.

All: Ummm ...

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About the Companies

Mump & Smoot company mandate: As a company we were drawn together and continue to work together because of shared principles and artistic ideals. These principles and ideals are strongly rooted in our training with the late Richard Pochinko. Our mandate is "to contribute to Canadian Clown Theatre and through our creative explorations expand its current parameters (... to boldly go where no clown has gone before ...)." For more information: mumpandsmoot.com or [facebook.com/mumpandsmoot](https://www.facebook.com/mumpandsmoot).

Keep Frozen: Pochsy Productions presents the award-winning stage and screen works of writer, director, and cult comedienne Karen Hines (a.k.a. Pochsy). Hines's trans-genre black comedies have travelled the globe, winning her a loyal following and international critical acclaim. From Dawson to Boston, Louisville to Kuala Lumpur, Pochsy's toxic musings on modern life have charmed and horrified her audiences and cemented her reputation as "*one of the gems of Canadian theatre*" (*Toronto Star*). For more information: keepfrozen.org.

Karen, Michael, and John all teach in the summer program at the Manitoulin Conservatory for Creation and Performance. For more information: manitoulinconservatory.com or [facebook.com/ManitoulinConservatory](https://www.facebook.com/ManitoulinConservatory).

WHAT'S ON

Thursday, January 14, 1999 Section J

The tough business of clowning

THE TORONTO STAR Thursday, January 14, 1999

Mump & Smoot live by clowns' laws

Pair return to the stage with a new show drawn from their genre's traditions

BY SUSAN WALKER
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

It's when the lights go down, not up, that you can expect Mump and Smoot to take you into their world.

They seem to burst from the walls or the floors, coming up on you from behind, scampering into the auditorium squealing weird gibberish and affectionately hurling themselves at their new friends.

Installed in a traditional theatre space where they can really work — similar to the Factory mainstage, where they've often performed — the diabolical clown duo of Michael Kenard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot) open *Mump & Smoot In Something Else With Zug* tonight at the Canadian Stage's Berkeley St. venue.

Like a couple of kids who've been cooking up something in the attic and come down to join the adults, Mump and Smoot involve their audiences from the first beat of their insinuating comedy.

That's what theatre clowns do. In fact, making the audience feel safe is one of the Clown Rules.

The sacred commandments are so ingrained in these 10-year vets of the theatre festival circuit that they have become part of Mump & Smoot's everyday speech.

And now Toronto's main stages have expanded to encompass the fringe, where Mump & Smoot reached stardom. So maybe it's time everybody learned a few of the clown basics.



MUMP & SMOOT: The diabolical duo open new show *Mump & Smoot In Something Else With Zug* tonight at the Canadian Stage.

The rules of a clown

- Up And Out (direct your energy toward the audience)
- Get Yourself Off
- Rule Of Three (as in beginning, middle and end—the universal rule of comedy)
- Be Honest
- Have Fun
- More, More, More (if some-thing's working, do more)
- Take Us Into Your World And Bring Us Back With A New Awareness
- Make Contact
- Present Yourself
- Ride The Wave
- Physicalize
- Be Zany
- Listen To Us
- Listen To Yourself
- Impulse Six (be at the top of the emotional intensity scale)
- Surprise Us
- Surprise Yourself
- Follow The Impulse
- Drop The Script—You Can Always Go Back To It
- Know When To Leave
- Keep The Audience Safe
- Keep The Conversation Going
- Breath
- Go For The Unknown
- Play With Rhythm
- Trust
- Believe

"You're the Joey," he told Kennard. And, turning to Turner, "you're the Auguste."

"I was upset because I had to go from wearing the cool, torn jeans to big, baggy red shorts," says Turner, joking. "But I knew the truth of it the minute he spoke."

But the Rule of Three dictates that every clown contains within him an Auguste, a Joey and a Ringmaster. So occasionally, Smoot, with a slight pout on his face, might be sparked to turn on Mump, mischievously undermining his authority, only to have his Joey come down on him with renewed vigour.

TAKE US INTO YOUR WORLD AND BRING US BACK WITH A NEW AWARENESS: Pochinko's spiritually based teachings emphasized rigour, and breaking the clown rules only once you'd learned them and practised them thoroughly.

Take "Keep The Audience Safe." Kennard remembers workshops where they'd go way beyond the safety point, not only battering down the fourth wall but getting right in the faces of their viewers. They'd learn from that, and stop short of the safety mark next time.

"It's not audience participation, it's audience interaction," says Turner. "It's not how you take some poor guy on stage and make him do stuff. We like to think we are bringing them into our world," says Turner.

HAVE FUN: "It's fun," says Kennard, a tall brown-eyed, relaxed individual with nothing but a clown T-shirt to give away his profession.

Shorter and more extroverted, Turner's actually more like the Joey in real life, taking over the conversation despite himself.

"Yeah," he says, "if it's not fun... " "We're outta here," Kennard concludes.

stage lives. In July, 1997, they premiered *Tense (Mump And Smoot In Tense)* during the Fringe of Toronto theatre festival. Later, the show brought to a halt by injuries that caused them to cancel a two-month tour, and the two decided to sit down, retrench and take a look at where they were going.

By then, Kennard and Turner were running *The Space* on Dupont St., a facility they opened in early 1997 that offered rehearsal space, a small theatre, offices and a lounge that became the base for a growing enterprise.

From a company of two members, then three, they've grown to five, including musician Greg Morrison, known as Fingers, and Zug's assistant and manager of *The Space*, Scott Macdonald.

As part of their recovery and rebirth, Kennard and Turner, prompted by movement coach Fiona Griffiths, have scheduled regular physical activities for the whole company at a sports clinic.

Other permanent members of the M&S gang are director Karen Hines, associate director and Kennard's Guelph University teacher Jim Warren, set designer Campbell Manning, costume creator Heather MacCrimon, lighting designer Michel Charbonneau and sundry full- or part-time employees.

'I was upset because I had to go from cool, torn jeans to big, baggy red shorts'

"On dinner break the other day, we saw a list of all the people in the organization," says Turner. "It was, 'Look what's happened... we've created a monster.'"

In the shifting of gears that brought them to *Something Else*, the two performers closed a circle that began in

THE RULE OF THREE: Every element of a clown show obeys this law. There are three basic archetypes: a domineering, manipulative Joey (Mump); a simpering dupe called an Auguste (Smoot); and a sinister overlord, or Ringmaster (Zug). Since '92, when he debuted in *Ferno*, comic actor Rick Kunstl has played this role. He's back, larger than death in a new version of *Something Else*, improved and slightly rejigged since its run at the World Stage Festival last April.

Gathered at a table in their office, Turner and Kennard are a youthful-looking 42 and 39, neatly groomed in jeans and T-shirts.

About a year ago, retiring to a secret room in their headquarters at Dupont and Bathurst, they began writing *Something Else*.

"It happens organically. We decide it's time for a new show. We think about where Mump and Smoot are at; we bounce around all over the place from heavy themes, to philosophical stuff, to what's a cool effect."

First comes the title, then the individual vignettes, then the show's through-line.

The story line in *Something Else* has Mump and Smoot arriving at a time for personal change. They travel to a temple, carrying the Sacred Cone of Umo (Umo being the invisible Higher Being who governs their destiny).

Nothing happens at the temple. Mump and Smoot are ticked off at Umo. Petulantly, the Being sends them a genie (Zug), who offers them anything they want. The vignettes that follow are a comic demonstration of the old "be careful what you wish for" adage.

FOLLOW THE IMPULSE: The gestation of the new show parallels the two actors' off-

their middle-class homes in Leaside and Etobicoke.

DROP THE SCRIPT—YOU CAN ALWAYS GO BACK TO IT: Kennard grew up in an extremely comfortable enclave of Etobicoke, where trees overhang meandering streets and property owners were not permitted to raise fences.

Life in the community was great, says Kennard, who left home at 16, but hung around doing nothing in particular until 22 when he entered Guelph's theatre program. There Warren and teacher Adrian Pecknold encouraged him to believe he might become a performer. Later, at a Second City workshop, he met Turner. Along with Hines, they enlisted in Richard Pochinko's intense clown course.

Turner was raised in similar circumstances in Leaside and Forest Hill, and was then sent to Upper Canada College for high school. He says he's the only member of his family who

doesn't have two degrees. Bartending and doing other odd jobs after graduation, he found he survived with comedy. Much later, playing in a bar band, he found he loved the stage.

He laughs now to think how he outflanked his family's wishes that he attend university. "It was kind of nice to go home and tell how we taught at Yale," he says.

Offering workshops to theatre graduate students and teaching at The Space are among the ways the clowns demonstrate the legacy of a middle-class upbringing when they are out of costume (not to say they're tending toward un-clownlike conventionality, but both have live-in partners, and Turner will marry this year).

LISTEN TO YOURSELF: Mump and Smoot were born in Pochinko's workshop and christened by Pochinko himself.

They came to him in costume, ready to perform their first piece and he gave them their roles on the spot.

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Clowns in Canada revive a centuries-old art

• From Page A1

Toronto clowns Mump and Smoot sell out their cross-country tours and just finished a hit run in New York. Clown acts are taking over fringe theatre festivals. Some are attracting that hallmark of the mainstream, corporate sponsorship. So strong is the resurgence that the Canada Council, the federal government's arts-financing body, has commissioned a study of Canadian clowning.

"I would say it's a phenomenon," says Alan Fliewold, professor of drama at the University of Guelph and an editor of Canadian Theatre Review. "I think we've only seen the beginning of it."

CHERYL Cashman — small and anxious, sipping iced tea in a Toronto cafe — looks about as little like a clown as you could imagine. But 10 years ago, when clowning was turning down offers to take her hit one-woman show to New York and Los Angeles. She's been searching for the same success ever since.

She's deep into an analysis of the difference between male and female clowns. (Women use more psychological men props gadgets.) All of a sudden, she pops into a character from a show she put on in June.

Her earnest face becomes rubber. Twisting into a goofy self-parody. Her evenly modulated voice breaks into a nutty patter. She becomes Mrs. Pudge, a fat housewife with agoraphobia (fear of open spaces) whose husband foals around.

Mrs. Pudge's sexual thrills come from hot flashes. Her most significant relationships are with her electric appliances. But when the hollandaise sauce curdles for the third time, she breaks loose from her pudginess, assumes a black-leather-clad, Madonna-like body, and marches down to the Eaton Centre to spit on a Girl Guide.

When Mrs. Pudge gets her laugh, she becomes Cheryl Cashman again. Without the faintest touch of humor, she intones: "I believe clowning can save the world."

It's not every era that has need of clowns, notes Dean Glimour, one of the founders of Theatre Smith-Glimour. But this one seems to. The reasons are complex, ill-understood, and the subject of impassioned theory-making in clown circles.

For some, the attraction to clowns betrays a modern spiritual quest. "There's a God-shaped vacancy in our lives, like a big piece of the puzzle is missing," says Don Ritter, who helped found the Montreal clown company Klansnada. He believes clowns offer spiritual ease by reaffirming the value of the spectator's human qualities.

For James Keyton, political unease is driving the renaissance. He cites the unpopularity of the goods and services tax and the gut-wrenching debate over Quebec's place in Canada. "The wall is getting ready to fall down," he says. "People are searching for some release."

One thing clowns agree on is that the appeal of their particular brand of humour is age-old, although it is often marketed as new and improved.

Kim Selody, artistic director of New Play Centre in Vancouver and the Canada Council's catalogue of clowns, says his research shows most clown acts have changed little over the past few hundred years. The jokes are simply updated.

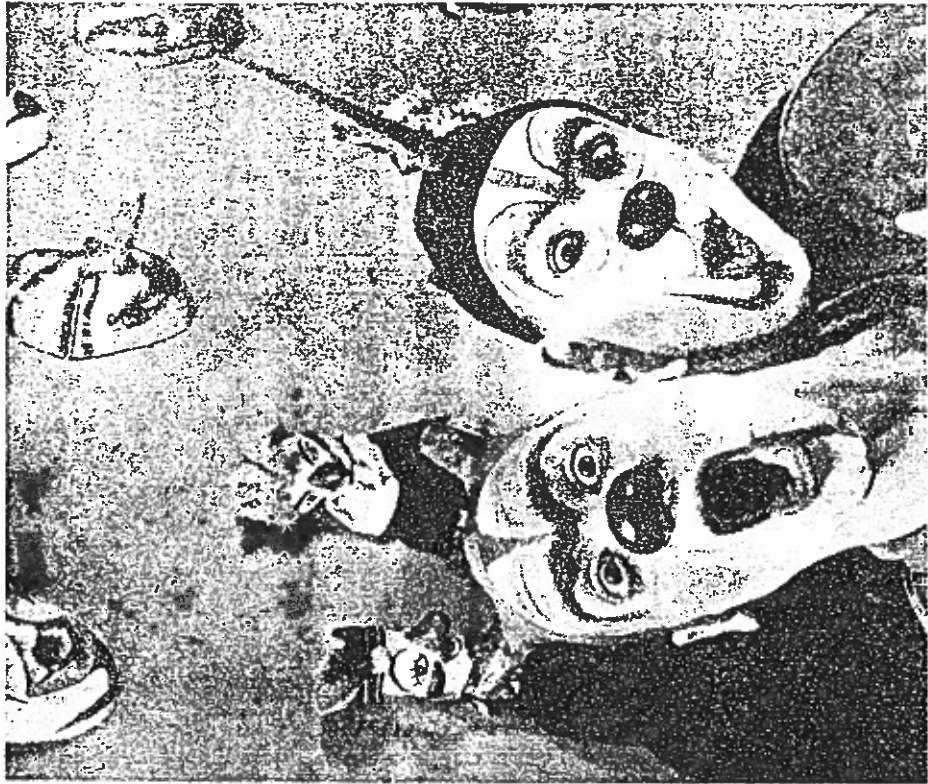
In fact, some clowns admit to taking notes at old Buster Keaton and Charles Chaplin flicks. They talk about the legacies of Shakespeare, Chekhov, Beckett and Joyce.

They claim noble antecedents: the European court fool, permitted to speak the truth about politics when others couldn't, the Latin American jester whose job, sacred as well as profane, was to parody the priest; the North American native trickster who challenged authority and pointed up folly.

Many of Canada's best clowns went to clown school in France to soak up the European tradition. Others studied with great Czech or Polish clowns, or apprenticed with Canadians who embraced the continental style.

But high-minded though they may be, today's clowns never forget the alpha and omega of their art: you gotta keep 'em laughing. The crude Dean Glimour and Michele Smith, of Theatre Smith-Glimour, shun plays that offer useful homilies but no fun. "A clown hears the gods, but he doesn't understand," Mr. Glimour says. "And he hears the devil, but he doesn't understand. So he makes a joke for fun."

MUMP and SMOOT — cult heroes to many fans — speak of clowning as they would a calling.



Clowns John Turner, left — known professionally as Smoot — and Mike Kennard — a.k.a. Mump — show the special makeup and some of the props required by a trade they take very seriously. (THIS IS VITAL: The table and Mump for beer and beans.)

Profound. Maybe too profound. Smoot calls up the next day to clarify. He and Mump are just a couple of Canadian fools who have fun on stage, he declares. "I would hate to offer answers. And Smoot can't resist a final thought: "When the world is reduced to two warring tribes after the apocalypse, we'll still have jobs. After all, how serious can you get about being funny?"

COVER STORY

Laughing to keep from crying

The ancient art of clowning thrives in turbulent times

BY ALANNA MITCHELL
 Social Trends Reporter

IT'S Day 1 of rehearsals in a stuffy Toronto church basement and six clowns are hard at work. No fringed wigs or floppy shoes here, and not a lot of laughter either. Instead, frowning earnestly at one another across a hodgepodge of tables, they've launched into a discussion of whether fairies have souls.

It gets better. If fairies have souls, do angels too? And isn't the play at hand — an 18th-century Italian piece about a fairy who wants to become human — really about social segregation?

Such is the substance of clowning as practiced by Toronto's Theatre Smith-Glimour — one of several Canadian clown companies in the midst of a profound renaissance of this centuries-old art.

For these troupes, clowning is serious business. They perform on artistically correct stages, not under the big top. They shun the monologues of stand-up comedy, preferring to converse with people in the audience and draw them into the performance. They aim at conquering the hearts and minds of adults, not coaxing laughs out of children.

Their art is rooted not in the Ringling Brothers but in a European tradition that sows sedition as well as solace, and lards its jokes with larger truths.

And as they rediscover the history of clowning, their audiences are showing fresh interest — not only in the humour, but also in the unsettling messages that clowns have been delivering for centuries.

"Clowns always come out of the closet when the world is going to shit," says James Keyton, a professional clown who has toured with Montreal's Cirque du Soleil. "The idea is to have the people laughing so hard their stomachs are hurting — and two days later, their stomachs hurt from what they saw."

Theatre people say Canada and other countries are in the midst of the biggest clowning revival since the turn of the century. They point to the success of Cirque du Soleil, which draws huge audiences in North America and Europe and just signed a \$54-million deal to tour Japan next year.

Expect Mump and Smoot to show some gumption

BY LIZ NICHOLLS, EDMONTON JOURNAL MAY 11, 2010 11:49 AM



Mump and Smoot (Michael Kennard and John Turner).

Photograph by: Supplied, edmontonjournal.com

Be the first on your block to brush up your Ummonian.

That's the language of Mump and Smoot from the planet Ummo, the country's brilliant "clowns of horror" who chatter away in an evolved gibberish you're always just on the verge of understanding. They've been around through nightmare expeditions to the netherworld and back. They've left a trail of gore, torture, dismemberment and cannibalism across stages of the country, conversing in Ummonian all the while.

And now Mump and Smoot (a. k.a. Michael Kennard and John Turner) are back -- with their first new show in nine years. Mump & Smoot Cracked is, at the moment, a work in progress. Kennard and Turner are workshoping it for a week, under the direction of Karen Hines, at Theatre Network. Then, from Thursday to Saturday this week, there is a workshop presentation at the Roxy -- for the morbidly curious -- before the show goes to Vancouver, and then to the Magnetic North Theatre Festival, this year in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., in June.

And, though Theatre Network hasn't announced its 2010-11 lineup yet, Mump & Smoot Cracked is the official season opener. Apparently, we'll see Mump and Smoot actually challenge their mysterious god Ummo, who seems hell-bent on annihilating their friendship, and maybe even them.

Edmonton has always been one of Mump and Smoot's favourite places. Is it our love of impending chaos? Our violent proclivities? It's partly because they first made it big at our Fringe and partly because Kennard is, for eight months of the year, Prof. Mump, a drama professor at the University of Alberta. To review, Mump is the graver, bossier, cooler, more slow-burn one; Smoot is the more volatile, excitable and guileless one.

Tickets for the workshop presentation are available at the theatre, 780-453-2440. Then, in July, Theatre Network season subscriptions go on sale.

- Northern Light Theatre turns 35 next season -- still homeless with the closing of the Third Space as a performance venue. But this adventurous, surprising company has announced a new, bigger birthday lineup for 2010-11, and that speaks to escalating successes with audiences under Trevor Schmidt's artistic directorship.

Gone is Urban Tales, NLT's annual Halloween excursion. Instead, there'll be a fourth official production. If the current season has tickled us with its combination of the heartfelt and the high-spirited -- witness the fresh, young performances of Victoria Martin: Math Teen Queen and Speech and Debate -- next season seems to indicate darker provocations, to say the least.

First, it's Jailbait, a coming-of-age drama that explores the queasiest of subjects: grown men and underage teenage girls. At the centre of Deirdre O'Connor's play, which premiered last year off-Broadway, we meet two 15-year-olds who goad each other into playing grown-up. They escalate from flirtation to picking up two 30-something men in the club where they're posing as college coeds.

Sean Graney's *The Fourth Graders Present an Unnamed Love-Suicide*, which replaces *Urban Tales*, is the only NLT show of the season not to occupy the Varscona stage. Instead, it'll be at Studio B, a white-walled rehearsal room in the TransAlta Arts Barns that looks and feels like a classroom. And that's precisely to the point, since the eerie premise of this 2007 American play is that it's the last thing a fourth-grader named Johnny wrote before he killed himself. In a homage to Johnny's death, his classmates put on his play.

Schmidt's season includes two new Canadian plays.

One, *Meat Puppet*, is by Edmonton's Leif Oleson-Cormack, a co-production with Shadow Theatre. It's inspired by the NBC show *To Catch a Predator*, based on hidden camera investigations, with decoys designed to lure potential sexual predators to meetings with the underaged.

The other, *Pervert*, is by star Calgary playwright Stephen Massicotte. It's set in a porno shop.

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Blessed friends

Comedy duo Mump & Smoot keep the magic alive with help of audience and each other

Books, films and TV specials have all chronicled the not-so-funny relationships of comedy duos such as Abbott and Costello, Laurel and Hardy and Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

They may have seemed best friends on screen, but once the cameras stopped rolling it was another story altogether.

John Turner and Michael Kennard and their alter egos, Mump and Smoot, have been creative partners for more than 20 years and their newest creation *Mump & Smoot Cracked* is currently playing at Alberta Theatre Projects.

"We've heard that the average life-span of a comedy duo is about 10 years. We were best friends when we started out at Second City together and we are still the best of best friends."

"We don't live in each other's pockets, but we are friends even when we are miles apart," says Turner, who lives in Ontario, while Kennard still has a property



Keith Hobson@sunmedia.ca

near Turner in Ontario, but now lives in Edmonton.

"When we start working on a new show, we meet up at Michael's place because it allows us to get away from too many distractions. The nearest bar isn't in walking distance."

There is a third member of the Mump & Smoot team and that's Karen Hines who directs all the shows and she now lives in Calgary.

"Michael and Karen and I met at Second City. We formed a little creative family that con-

tinues to work at being a good little family.

"The great thing is that the three of us really do enjoy hanging out together. We like each other's company."

"We started out only doing what we liked to do, and that hasn't changed, except that we have all grown creative as a result of this friendship and this creative partnership."

They began working on *Cracked* three years ago and did an intensive workshop on the show in Banff last year.

Turner insists there is a very

important fourth component to the development of their shows.

"Our audiences are just as much a creative partner as Michael, Karen and I."

They note that while the scenarios they've created, but the actual show is never the same from performance to performance because of the energy we receive from the audience.

"For us, each show is an emotional roller coaster ride. They are very exhausting

and then you add to that the response and emotional feedback we get from the audience and it becomes a rush."

"Specific audiences can really jazz us up. Our shows embrace the liveness of the stage. We live our shows. The

really are alive."

"If it wasn't a different show and a different experience every night, we wouldn't keep doing this."

Mump & Smoot Cracked runs in the Martha Cocher Theatre until May 15.

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THEATRE NEWS / *A Newsday reviewer called the New York performance by the Clowns of Horror 'an unexpected answer to a burnt-out theatregoer's prayers'; the Canadian producers are getting interesting nibbles*

The grisly magnetism of Mump and Smoot

BY H. J. KIRCHHOFF
Arts Reporter

FEW Canadian theatrical productions achieve success in New York, but to the very short list of those that do, you can now add *Mump & Smoot in Caged . . . with Wog*, the creation of Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot), the so-called "Clowns of Horror."

Caged was originally staged in 1990 at the Toronto Fringe Festival, and on the strength of its success was sent on a cross-Canada tour by Toronto producers Mark and Angela Terry. The Terrys called New York producer Arthur Cantor, who saw the show in Toronto and arranged to bring it to Greenwich Village's Astor Place Theatre, where it opened May 29 and ran until last June 9.

The New York reviews for the show — in which Mump and Smoot are captured and caged by the evil sorceress Wog (Debbie Tidy), who tortures them and extracts their blood between their oh-so-clumsy escape attempts — were mixed, but generally positive. The reviewer for *Newsday* called the show "an unexpected answer to a burnt-out theatregoer's prayers," and added that Kennard and Turner "convey the squeamish innocence of two kids acting out the sort of grisly scenario that only children can invent. They are magnetic punchinellos, maintaining an equally facile grip on pathos and slapstick."

The Village Voice reviewer called

the show "Beckett meets the Road Warrior," and said Kennard and Turner "are physically skillful and visually imaginative." The *New York Times*' Mel Gussow was less charmed, calling the show "petit Guignol with diminishing comic returns . . . a heavy-handed chamber of horrors in which masochism is matched by sadism."

Terry said the audiences for the first couple of days were older, but as word of mouth spread the Clowns of Horror found their proper audience — "younger, mostly university students," those willing to get into the spirit of the interactive piece, in which Mump and Smoot involve the audience in their silly, futile attempts to escape Wog's evil clutches.

"The audiences in New York were very involved in the show," Terry said. "Much more than in Toronto." Terry said the show's New York success has sparked inquiries from theatres in San Francisco and London (as well as nibbles from HBO and NBC), and that Cantor has been showing a video of the show to producers in other major U.S. cities hoping to drum up enough interest for a tour in the United States. He emphasized that nothing has been signed yet, but said it was encouraging to have theatres approaching the producers to make inquiries.

ENTERTAINMENT

Victoria, British Columbia, 132nd year, No. 278

By Adrian Chamberlain
Times-Colonist staff

MUMP AND Smoot approach the prone corpse of a loved one. Initially reverent, these garishly made-up clowns with horns (Mump has a long green one, Smoot has two little red ones) soon commence diddling with the body.

And diddling Mump-and-Smoot style means staging a baseball game using the head of the deceased for a ball, and a severed arm for a bat.

This is clowning? Whatever happened to those care-free circus guys with the red noses? Those fun-loving folk whose most demented act was to pour water down each other's outsized trousers?

Mump and Smoot, who are appearing at Victoria's Fringe theatre festival, are *horror clowns*, explained 30-year-old Michael Kennard, who plays Mump.

"One of the mottos we use for our mandate is: 'To go where no clown's gone before,'" he said.

The wake skit was performed at last year's Fringe as part of Mump and Smoot's show *Something*. Its dark sense of macabre and absurdity is typical of what makes the self-proclaimed "clowns of horror" different — possibly even unique — in the world of professional clowning.

Joined by a silent ringmaster called Wog (Debbie Tidy in real life), Mump and Smoot (John Turner) have become the stars of Canada's fringe theatre circuit, earning rave reviews along the way.

In an alternative theatre atmosphere which attracts some pretty weird stuff, the Toronto-based trio have sliced out a niche by electrocuting each other, drinking each other's blood, torturing each other with toilet plungers . . . and other neat stuff.

Adding to the weirdness is the European-sounding gibberish Mump and Smoot utter onstage, with the occasional English word tossed in.

It may sound like something David Cronenberg and Stephen King may have concocted after a marathon evening of narcotics abuse. But Kennard says their act is the formally constructed child of European and North American clowning traditions.

Both Kennard and Turner are disciples of the late Richard Pochinko — a internationally known Canadian clown with whom they studied for two years.

Pochinko had made an intensive study of European clowning and West Coast Indian mask entertainment. He blended elements of both into his teachings.

According to Kennard, Pochinko had students discover their inner clown by donning six psychic "masks" — each representing a direction (north, south, east, west, up and down.) Disciples examined both childhood and adult experiences for each mask.

"Richard would say, you have your masks and you have yourself," says Kennard. "And the clown is somewhere in between."

With Mump, Kennard says he assumes the role of "Joey the Manipulator." Mump takes the leadership role, luring the hapless Smoot (known in technical

HORRORS! CLOWNING ON THE FRINGE

clown lingo as "the Auguste") from one disaster to the next.

The first official Mump and Smoot show took place May 13, 1988 at Toronto's Theatre Centre. Titled *Jump the Gun*, the 20-minute show portrayed Mump and Smoot's first meeting following a world war in which they are the sole survivors.

"I ended up stealing all of Smoot's things, and he revenged against me," said Kennard. "But I sort of came back to life at the end."

And Smoot's revenge?

"What he ended up doing was grabbing my hand and pulling me on to this electrified park bench. A flash pot went off and I disappeared," said Kennard, chuckling with pleasure.

The pair worried about how the audience would respond to the Clowns of Horror. Fortunately, the crowd loved the show. And after a couple more shows "we had an idea that something was going on."

But why horror clowns? Why not Clowns of the Absurd, or Clowns of Love, or even (to jump on the latest bandwagon) Clowns of the Environment?

Kennard says before he and Turner devised Mump and Smoot, they sat down to figure out their "personal credo."

"We found that that fear was . . . something that really interested us. So we just took the fear and became horror clowns."

They try to make the horror in the Mump and Smoot shows "safe" by avoiding gratuitous violence. In the wake scene, for example, the pair later express remorse for playing the grisly ball game, says Kennard.

But he admits horror has a fascination in an increasingly violent world.

"There are a lot of people doing horror stuff right now, and it's a reflection of society, unfortunately. I

guess when something's happening in society, people tend to go and see plays about that. When a war's happening, people go and see a lot of plays about war.

"We've actually had a lot of psychologists go and see our shows, and they say it's great therapy," said Kennard. Some have encouraged patients to attend.

Their Victoria offering is a new show called *Caged*. While Kennard is reluctant to say to much, he will admit that Wog — a wordless, mysterious character — has become more evil. And Smoot is imprisoned in a bamboo cage.

You'd think at least a few people would have left the theatre shrieking (or at least in disgust) during Mump and Smoot's forays into horror over the past two years. But Kennard says this isn't so . . . at least, as far as he knows.

"To be honest, I can't think of anybody," he said.

"We're had people walk out. But we don't know whether they've left . . . or gone to the washroom."

By Christopher Arnott

GRIN REAPERS

Canadian Clowns of Horror, Mump & Smoot jump and hoot at the Yale Rep

As Mump & Smoot, they take a fatal flight from the planet Umzno in a purgatorial wasteland. They glimpse the meaning of life, eat their own dismembered limbs, and ultimately connect with a higher spiritual power.

As Michael Kennard and John Turner, they just drove from Toronto, Canada to New Haven. They see their faces on posters all over town, eat dinner at the Royal India restaurant, and hang out with their director, Karen Hines.

Kennard (Mump), Turner (Smoot) and Hines are here for the longest stay they've yet had at a U.S. theater, since they had three weeks at New York's Astor Place theater (now home of the Blue Man Group) in 1991. There's the added challenge of appeasing a subscription-based audience, and the added prestige of having been made official Associate Artists of the Rep. As part of that position, they will be conducting seminars with Yale Drama School students.

The pair will be performing their two most recent full-length Mump & Smoot adventures, *Caged* and *Ferno*, at the Rep through April 9. An average Mump & Smoot performance, if that's not a contradiction in terms, consists of high con-

cepts like mortality and god, and low concepts like cannibalism and losing luggage. These clowns pull your leg so hard that you shouldn't be surprised if the limb rips off, spurts blood up your nose, dances a jig and then clubs you to death. Horror clowning isn't pretty, just terrifically amusing. Audiences literally shriek with glee.

MUMP & SMOOT IN ACADEMIA

The show deals in overt death imagery, psychological doubletalk, godless doomsaying, bleak self-parody, whiteface makeup, cackling socio-political commentary, manic depression, ceaseless unintelligible dialogue, existential paranoia, and hostile jabs at

many ways this is not your typical Yale Rep endeavor.

The Rep has hosted clowns and comedy acts before—notably Dario Fo, Bill Irwin and Paula Poundstone. But never for 25 performances at a clip. Mump & Smoot's last performance in the area was at the Yale University Theater last year, a one-nighter which didn't sell-out. Now the chirlish chuckleheads are charged with sustaining a three-week run.

The Rep has explored themes of religious yearning, travel through fantasy landscapes, and destiny-altering culture shock many times—in *On the Verge* and *The Baltimore Waltz*, for instance. But not in the guise of two horned extraterrestrials in suspended baggy shorts who can't stay dead without repeatedly slaying each other just to check. Until now.

The Rep—housed in that familiar renovated church building of previously non-Ummonian denomination, at the cor-

ner of York and Chapel streets—has hosted variations of previously-produced shows many times before (*Escape from Happiness*, for instance, was a co-production with CenterStage in Baltimore). But they have never booked into their main season a show that has already extensively toured North America.

MUMP & SMOOT IN CIPIENT

And, to be sure, Mump & Smoot have seldom enjoyed the amenities of a place like the Rep. "We never did previews before," Kennard says. "We never put on make-up before opening night. Never once did we get a cue-to-cue [technical rehearsal] at a fringe festival."

Kennard & Turner say of their career of Ummonian impersonation that "now it's our livelihood. Before, it was our death. We killed ourselves for four years. It ruined our lives. We borrowed a lot of money. What we've made over the past seven years probably averages out to 30 cents an hour. Let's see—*How dramatic can we make this?*"

Their act was honed from regular exposure to appreciative audiences at comedy-oriented clubs and theaters around Toronto, and particularly at various Canadian "fringe" festivals, where uncommon small-scale work like theirs is welcomed and encouraged. Despite the fringe benefits, the actual tradition of clown shows is as writ in Canada as in this country. The gradually growing popularity of Mump & Smoot was hard-fought, the result of constant self-produced tours, manic posterizing before a show. Their performances are in the grand tradition of Grimaldi and Grand Guignol and Grock, but Mump & Smoot behind the scenes resemble nothing so much as an amiable rock trio on tour, happy to be getting an extended gig as house band for a change.

"Because we're self-produced, that's pushed it faster," explains Kennard. "We know how to put bums on the seats. It's part of the job."

In Toronto they are a fiendish fixture. They even served as "celebrity phaser-bait" once for the Toronto-based Big City Improv theater's regular irreverent stagings of "Star Trek" TV scripts. They were dispersed of in the "Wrath of Khan" episode.

As for the wrath of clown, there isn't much. Turner, Kennard & Hines are basking in the attention of being the premier horror clowns in New Haven. They beam with excitement when they see one of their posters in the window of a picture-framing shop on York Street. Especially since they didn't have to put it there themselves.

MUMP & SMOOT IN CENDIARY

Jump the Gun, staged in May of 1988 and never revived, was a 20-minute sketch about Mump & Smoot meeting for the first time. "It was this post-apocalyptic thing. We had deliberately cho-

sen Friday the 13th for the first performance."

Then, while preparing the next performance, safety precautions were unintentionally circumvented by a well-meaning tech. A flash pot (the device commonly used for flaming explosions in theater and rock spectacles) went off in the faces of Hines and another backstage. Their faces were inches from the powder charge.

The explosion sealed their eyes shut, unnaturally receded their hairlines, burned off their eyebrows, dyed their skins black, peeled their faces, and put them in hospital for two weeks.

"I had just come off a tour where I'd set 200 flash pots," Hines recalls, who emerged from the tragedy without permanent injury. To see her now, as clean and fresh and youthful as she must appear in her own solo clown performances, is at odds with Turner's memories of her recovery: "You know those big puffy fish...?"

"We haven't used pyrotechnics since."

MUMP & SMOOT IN INITABLE

Turner and Kennard agree that the extent of advance preparation in their work is hard to judge. "You absorb a lot in your life. We don't do an awful lot of research. We just think 'What would be cool?'"

They have a droll intellectual streak, a light-hearted violent streak, defy expectations of taste and content, and are a comedy duo. Lazy critics and feature-writers have therefore short-handedly compared them to Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, Doctor Who, the Cookie Monster, Abbott & Costello, Laurel & Hardy, Monty Python, Mummenschanz, Jackie Gleason & Art Carney, *Twin Peaks*, *The Road Warrior*, David Cronenberg, and Stephen King.

They admit readily that they are big fans of Beckett, Cronenberg and King. The other references relate to them only vaguely.

In terms of specific moments in their act, however, they say they directly borrow from others' work only in matters of technique, such as "the tiniest aspect of special effects. Like, say, a particular aspect of a severed head."

MUMP & SMOOT STAGED WITH KAREN

"I don't have a very long attention span," says Karen Hines. "If you have to watch for longer than an *L.A. Law* episode, then you have to have spectacle."

As their director, Karen Hines is involved with Mump & Smoot starting with the earlier stages of script develop-



The point is rather Smoot: Mump & Smoot, in Rep... with "Caged" & "Ferno."

ment. "Everyone knows what the pacing should be," she says. And timewise, "an hour, hour-15, is a basic slot." "When we started *Ferno* we said that because it was going to be a touring show, it would fit in three suitcases. Well... as it turned out, we have four suitcases just onstage, with nothing in them."

Caged, one of the shows at the Rep, has seen some crucial character-related renovations recently. The show was originally titled *Caged...with Wog*, with Debbie Tidy as the evil Wog. She left the cast a year and a half ago, and the play was revised with Rick Kuust as the antagonist Tagon.

Clown" workshop, a program of his Theatre Resource Centre. At the center, they also connected with another influential teacher, Ian Wallace, and their movement coach Fiona Griffiths.

Pochinko's teaching style, they say, was founded on practicality and respect. "He suggested the big shorts we wear, for instance, but he never imposed anything on you at all. His approach to clowning was to set you up to do whatever you were hoping to do with a clown character. A send-you-out-the-door kind of thing."

Pochinko died in 1989.

He never saw a full-length Mump & Smoot performance.

JOHN DAWSON ART GRAPHIC

MUMP & SMOOT CAGED WITH HISTORICAL PARALLELS

"There's this 30 year gap where there hasn't been a lot of clowning. And critics, when they go to get their critic diplomas or whatever, they're not studying the history of clowning.

"But, on the other hand, if all they see is this dry tradition, then that's no good either. Part of the art of clowning is always keeping the audience entranced."

And the historical context can change. "The structures that are there can quite easily be broken," Kennard muses. "In Abbon & Costello, there's the fat guy and the skinny guy. But in Laurel & Hardy, you could say that's a reversal of the same pattern, with the skinny guy getting in trouble and the fat guy getting all stern and pompous." Kennard & Turner mention a current neo-Ummonian routine they're developing that messes with that very symmetry, using a "big goofy guy versus the slimy little guy."

Turner openly wonders, "So I should be the fat guy...?"

But unless you're comparing the size and shape of their horns, Mump & Smoot's onstage interplay is distinguished by their physical similarities rather than the differences.

Two sides of the same diseased brain, they cavort and connive with horrific abandon. They seem to share equivalent intelligences, temptations, and thresholds of pain.

The act was developed with an open mind. "Our mentor," Richard Pochinko of the Theatre Resource Centre in Toronto, "believed that you had within you the Joey, the Auguste, and the ringmaster character too."

"Is there anything you want to say about Richard Pochinko?," the trio is asked.

Kennard & Turner & Hines simultaneously erupt in mock sobs. As with Mump & Smoot, the presentation may be mocking but the impulse is based on a palpable emotion.

"He was our spiritual guide, our teacher." Mump & Smoot were developed in Pochinko's esteemed "Baby



mance. The one time he was able to attend was the night that flash pot exploded and the show was canceled.

"There was this benefit for his school, which, because he was so sick, became a benefit for him. We hadn't originally been invited to perform, but someone else had dropped out at the last minute." The only thing the pair had prepared at the time was a comic scene set at a funeral wake.

"It was a huge hit. Basically, we were tearing apart this giant clown. Very meaningful."

Meanwhile, Hines is interested to discover that both the books on comedy theory she's brought along on this trip have been written by Yale theater professors past (Joel Schechter, author of *Durov's Pig* and a former *Advocate* columnist) or present (Albert Bernel, *Comic Actors*). Her own solo clowning

act, which won't be seen at the Rep, emerges from the *Bouffon* tradition of clowning, though she says "It's very much a character piece, about being in the hospital and dying. It's very definitely a black comedy."

MUMP & SMOOT IN THE BLACK HOLE

Karen: I sit in the audience and get a feel of how the audience is responding. I like to see their eyes. I like to sit on the aisle. They say they always know where I'm sitting because they'll see this wave of laughter, and this other wave of laughter. And in the middle of it, there's this...

All: ...BLACK HOLE!

Turner: She'll laugh when we do something, or when we hit a magic space...

Kennard: You can say "Brilliant"...

Turner: The rest of the time she's a black hole.

Onstage, Kennard says, "It's an amazing feeling of control and encouragement. Ultimately, you feel that you can overcome anything."

Turner says "I used to play rugby, and I find theater to be just as exhausting."

"We want it to be like a roller coaster ride," he says. "We want it to peak, and then build up again..." and his compatriots chime in, reveling in the cliché—"like a wild roller coaster ride!"

...when your hand suddenly gets caught in the gears.

Caged plays March 24, 25, 29 & 30 and April 2, 4 & 8 at 8 p.m., with matinees March 26 & 30 and April 9 at 2 p.m. Mump & Smoot are in *Ferno* on March 26, 28 & 31 and April 1, 5, 6, 7 & 9 at 8 p.m., with matinees April 2 & 7 at 2 p.m. Rep subscribers get tickets to one of the shows as part of their subscription, and discount prices

should they want to see the other. Call 432-1234 for tickets and information.

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ARTS

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SECTION

ALIEN INTELLIGENCE



Photo manipulation by Barbara Kagan/Register

Nightmarish clowns Mump & Smoot have fled planet Ummo and blasted down at Yale Rep. But under that fiendish makeup are two smart Canadians with creative fire, artistic principles and — gasp! — sweet personalities.

By Mary Colurso
 Register Arts Editor



NCE you've seen Michael Kennard greedily munching on John Turner's severed leg, the idea of dinner with Mump & Smoot holds a ghouliah kind of charm.

After all, what's the worst that could happen in a public place with Toronto's two outrageous clowns of horror? Would Kennard (who plays bossy, exasperated Mump) and Turner (jittery, impish Smoot) end up torturing each other with the dessert forks?

Might they decapitate an infant and flip its head to the coat-check girl? Take the wine steward hostage with a toilet plunger?

Such things have happened, to be sure, during their screamingly funny performances of shows titled "Ferno," "Caged," "Something," "Egg" and "Bis & Pieces."

Area audiences first got a taste of Mump & Smoot's infernal brand of comedy May 14 at Yale's University Theatre, when the duo sprayed enough fake blood on stage to keep the Red Cross in business for a week.

Now these terror-mongers are back for a gleeful three-week run at Yale Repertory Theatre, presenting "Ferno" and "Caged" in repertory through April 9. Previews last until Wednesday; opening night is Thursday.

So why quake at the prospect of a little restaurant conversation? True, Mump & Smoot communicate through a rapid-fire gibberish that seems to combine a zillion earthy languages and a couple of extraterrestrial ones.

But like most clever clowns, they're ultra-expressive with their rubbery faces and Gumby-like bodies. And a well-placed English word or phrase usually slams home their meaning.

Still... it's natural to wonder how closely Kennard and Turner mirror their savage/silly alter egos. They've been transforming into Mump & Smoot for almost six years, and that's gotta warp a person *somehow*.

Don't think for a minute that we believe Rick Kunst, an American actor in their troupe who insists M & S are "funny and friendly and easy to be around." Or

THEATER

IF YOU GO

Event: Mump & Smoot in "Ferno" and "Caged"
 Time: Two shows performed in repertory through April 9: 8 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. March 30 and April 7
 Place: Yale Repertory Theatre, York and Chapel streets, New Haven
 Tickets: \$10 to \$28
 Info: 432-1234

Fiona Griffiths, the Canadian movement coach who describes her pupils as "honest, emotional" and devoted to extremely demanding work.

No, the very essence of Mump & Smoot radiates a mutant hybrid of Gomer Pyle and John Wayne Gacy. Jerry Lewis and Hannibal Lecter. Norman Bates and Roger Rabbit.

"This type of clowning has nothing to do with a guy on the street corner selling balloons," Griffiths says. "Their exploration of the horrific — those extremes of sadness and fear — goes very deep. As time goes by, it simply gets richer."

Take a big gulp, then, and prepare your psyche to be ripped asunder. Supping with Mump & Smoot must mean four waiters will eventually be carrying you out in a straitjacket.

Right?

Oh, so wrong.

Within five minutes on a recent Sunday evening at Bagdon's, it's obvious that off-duty horror clowns corner the market on that politeness-and-consideration stuff. Drop your pen; they pick it up. Make a joke that's borderline funny; they hoot so loudly it echoes off the ceiling.

Best of all, Kennard, 34, and Turner, 37, bring along their director, 30-year-old Karen Hines. Turns out the pair has plenty of respect for an outspoken feminist who's become an important, late-stage member of the team.

"I'm the one who has to keep both feet on the ground so they can

Please see Clowns, Page E

Clowns: Duo slyly explodes red-nose genre

Continued from Page E1

take flight," Hines says. "I don't impose a vision on them, but I help them realize what they envision."

Of course, she occasionally has to chide Turner for rips in his baggy costume that expose one nipple. But we're talking serious art here, folks — even if it hides under a sly layer of neon greasepaint.

Shorn of their red noses, Kennard and Turner speak with passionate conviction about the underpinnings of clowning. They explain the philosophy of their late mentor, clown master Richard Pochinko of Toronto's Theatre Resource Centre.

They discuss ways to punch holes in the fourth wall, an invisible barrier between active performer and passive spectator. And they recite snippets of a shared credo that helped Mump & Smoot to grow from tentative embryo to rampaging hobgoblin.

"We're interested in magic, spiritualism, fear, personal values and dreaming," Turner says. "The biggest thing for us as clowns is fear — but fear that involves huge mental, psychological and religious dimensions."

Perhaps that's why Mump & Smoot worship a mysterious diety known as Ummo, which manifests itself through a sacred cone in at least two of their twisted adventures.

To the uninitiated, Ummo looks like a cross between a lava lamp and a space heater, but it's actually a transcendent force that spells life or death when our heroes' plane crashes ("Ferno") or an evil wizard tries to suck energy from Smoot ("Caged").

"As a clown, you're always going to make fun of the people in power," Turner says. "That means the politicians, the priests and the people who bow down to them."

Not to mention the fact that "Ummo" sounds pretty cool when Mump & Smoot get 500 theatregoers chanting it in unison. Ummo, by the way, also is the name of the horror clowns' home planet — where the official language is Ummonian.

If you hear someone crowing "Ooooooh, YAAH!" on Chapel Street this month, he or she has probably picked up Smoot's delighted Ummonian battle cry at the Rep. It's a common side effect of the audience-participation stunts Kennard and Turner wiggle into every performance.

Their improvisational antics range from dippy (bumming food



Gary Mulcahey

Are we hysterical yet? Mump & Smoot (Michael Kennard, right, and John Turner) match wits with a plasma-guzzling sorcerer in "Caged."

The clowns were named associate artists at Yale Rep in 1993.

from the front rows when Smoot's stomach growls) to mock dangerous (offering spectators a dagger to test Mump's theory that he's deceased).

"A lady once grabbed the knife from me and started chasing Smoot around," Kennard recalls. "Another time, there was about two minutes left and this girl tried to leave or go to the washroom. We made her sit on the stage until the end of the show."

Turner cautions potential ticket holders that widened eyes and trembling hands will likewise make them immediate targets for Mump & Smoot's dastardly

teasing.

"Do not look scared," he warns with a grin. "We'll go for you, no matter where you're sitting in the house. Half of the people we pick have said or done something to provoke us. The other half have done *nothing*."

Feel like crawling beneath your seat? A group of children at Toronto's Factory Theatre went to even greater extremes, pecking at Mump & Smoot's escapades while huddled under a table.

Yet rest assured that as trained Pochinko clowns (and all-around mensches), Kennard and Turner specialize in making viewers groan and giggle at the same time.

"If the audience doesn't feel safe, we're not doing our job," Kennard says. "When we approach someone and see them freaking out, naturally we pull back ...

"Just don't bring a cellular phone — or your beeper — to the show. If it goes off, you're toast."

Flotsam & jetsam

Canadian horror clowns Mump & Smoot have been gaining American fans since 1991, when "Caged" captivated audiences at New York's Astor Place Theatre.

For those who'd like to be the first on their blocks spouting Mump & Smoot trivia, we offer the following facts:

■ Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot) have performed blackly comic shows at "fringe festivals" throughout Canada. They've also made mayhem in Orlando, Fla.; Baltimore; and Israel.

■ In European clowning schools, Mump & Smoot's relationship would be classified as Mump the manipulator (known as a joey) and Smoot the victim (or auguste). However, Kennard and Turner's mentor, Richard Pochinko, believed clowns should combine both traits.

■ Rick Kunst, 34, who plays the wicked sorcerer Tagon in "Caged," took over that role two years ago from former Mump & Smoot colleague Debbie Tidy. Tidy's character was called Wog. Kunst says he used to get stomachaches from the tension of portraying Tagon as "primal evil."

■ Mump & Smoot's director, Karen Hines, doesn't climb on stage with Kennard and Turner. But she has created a female clown called Pochsy. She stars in two shows: "Pochsy's Lips" and "Oh, baby."

■ Common wisdom has it there's nothing a clown can't do, but you won't see Mump & Smoot getting involved in sex. "They're not sexual creatures," Kennard explains. "They're more fundamental than that."

■ Kennard and Turner also squash speculation that the Mump & Smoot characters are gay lovers. "But the bottom line is love," Turner says. "They're inseparable; they can't live without each other. Some people have said they make up one person between them."

■ Kennard and Turner are writing a feature film that sends Mump & Smoot on a quest. They're mum on the details, but reveal they've completed a couple of drafts of the script.

■ The duo has experimented with two alternate clown characters — Jick & Udo. "It's a complete switch," Turner says. "I'm in a tuxedo, wear a fedora and carry a cane. Mike's this big goof."

■ When Hines, Kennard and Turner recently saw "As You Like It" at Yale Repertory Theatre, their improvisation instincts kicked in. As sirens screeched outside, three heads in the audience popped up.

"We were sitting there going, 'Use it, use it! Shakespeare won't mind!'" Kennard says. "But none of the actors acknowledged it."

— Mary Colurso



Mump + Smoot

Imagine clowns
on amphetamines.
Monty Python with
a spiritual aspect.
A trip to hell and
back that inspires
screams of laughter.
Twin Peaks with
funny noses.
Manic depressives
in makeup.

by Karen Bell

They dress like clowns. They interact with the audience and improvise when they feel like it. They speak Ummo, a language of gibberish which you instantly understand because they are masters of communication. They are outrageous. They are Mump + Smoot, a clown duo who have been working the fringe festivals of North America to wild receptions from their audiences.

Their current show, *Mump + Smoot in Ferno*, is not new; they've been performing it since its debut in April of '92 at the Orlando Fringe Festival, but it remains fresh and inspired. It is, in short, a real howl. The plot, what there is of it, is just a barebones excuse to explore the twisted human psyche. Fear of flying, fear of death, religion, loneliness, friendship, it's all in there.

The men behind the makeup are Torontonians Michael Kennard (Mump) + S. The show played in Calgary, Nelson, B.C., Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria and Toronto. *Something* has since returned to horrify audiences again several times.

Another show, *Caged* played the Fringe Festival circuit across the country in 1990. *Caged* then played a three week run at the Poor Alex in Toronto, where it was seen by Arthur Cantor, a New York producer. In 1991, negotiations eventually led to a very successful three

and John Turner (Smoot). Kennard, 33, has been acting since he was twelve, quitting high school at sixteen and leaving home. In 1982 he went back to school and earned a BA in drama from the University of Guelph.

Turner, now 36, attended university, but never was inspired to finish; after working at many jobs through his twenties, he got interested in acting. The two met in 1987 while taking Second City improv workshops in Toronto. It was in these workshops that Mike and John began experimenting with gibberish. They note that it is a tradition in clowning to play with language - Cirque de Soleil makes use of this idea as well.

Later they enrolled in Richard Pochinko's acclaimed "Baby Clown" Workshop. The workshop explored AmerIndian mask work - each mask was a direction which led to exploration of the inner self and its normalcies and extremities. Pochinko also placed emphasis on the European clowning tradition which involves a joey (manipulator) and an auguste (victim). Pochinko, who has since passed away, actually took this a step further because he believed that there is a joey and an auguste in each of us. Pochinko devised his combination of AmerIndian and European traditions, mixed it with a bit of American-style slapstick and called it Canadian clowning.

Kennard and Turner actually studied with Pochinko for a year and a half at Toronto's Theatre Resource Centre, as well as doing work on movement with Fiona Griffiths and creative clowning with Ian Wallace. They credit Griffiths with making them more aware of their bodies. "Our spontaneity is greatly enhanced by our work with Fiona," says Turner. "She can really pinpoint when we're having a problem."

week Off-Broadway run of *Caged* at the Astor Place Theater.

In 1991, Canada Council and Toronto Theatre Alliance travel grants allowed Michael, John, Karen Hines and Debbie Tidy to study Bouffon in Paris with Philippe Gaulier, a remarkable teacher, according to Turner. Here they delved deeper into the elements of bitterness, horror and the grotesque which are inherent in Bouffon, and which now tinge their work.

It was after the Pochinko Baby Clown workshop that Mump and Smoot were born. Their first show was called *Jump the Gun*, and was performed at From the Ground Up Festival in May of '88. Mump + Smoot followed this with more productions including *Egg* (with Nick John), *The Wake*, *The Cafe* and *A Starry Night*. *Bits and Pieces* was performed at several Toronto nightclubs. *The Dentist* won first place for the region in the Crystal Comedy Quest.

Following European comedy tradition, Mump is the manipulator or joey, and Smoot is the auguste (victim). They are an inseparable team onstage, as they share their fears, dreams and spiritualism. The darkness of the human soul is much in evidence, as is the beauty of the human spirit; even while the audience is busy laughing at their crazy antics, there's much to think about. Horror and humour combine to aptly illustrate the human condition.

In the Second City workshops, Kennard and Turner had met Karen Hines, a performer who also studied with Pochinko. Because of her directing skills and her affinity for the Mump and Smoot style she began to direct their shows. (Hines appeared this winter in her own solo show, entitled *Pochy's Lips* at Toronto's Poor Alex Theatre.)

In July of 1989 Kennard and Turner received a Canada Council Explorations grant which enabled them to create and tour a full-length Mump + Smoot play. The result was *Something* with collaborator Debbie Tidy. The show featured Tidy as Wog, the twisted Ringmaster who was the nemesis of M

Right, Smoot (John Turner)
Far right, Mump (Michael Kennard)

Mump + Smoot have just completed work on their first film, a short entitled *The Princess Who Wouldn't Smile*. Produced by David Johnston and directed by Paul Quarrington, Karen Hines played the Princess. M + S are currently working on a full-length screenplay.

After a big show at Yale in May, Mump + Smoot are heading for the Fringe circuit this year, where they will be touring in *Ferno*. §



COMEDY

Death, torture - Mump and Smoot are just playing

[Marsha Lederman](#)

Vancouver — The Globe and Mail

Published Wednesday, May. 26 2010, 12:00 AM EDT

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It's been eight years since Mump & Smoot's last adventure on Ummo, the parallel universe they inhabit, leaving their devoted following fearing that the gibberish-speaking, award-winning, not-for-children clown act had hung up its horned caps for good. But Mump & Smoot return to the stage this week, with the world premiere of a show that may be their darkest, and most personal, yet.

Mump & Smoot [<http://www.mumpandsmoot.com/>] are Michael Kennard and John Turner, performers who met at Second City in Toronto back in 1986 and shortly thereafter created the act that would make them if not famous, then at least revered in clowning and theatre circles. By 1992, they were Mump & Smooting full time, giving up their day jobs as caterers and birthday-party clowns and travelling around the world.

Their act is very funny, very physical and very sophisticated. They may speak Ummonian, their signature English-infused gibberish, but there is never any question about what is going on. Mump is the bossy one with the gruff voice; Smoot is the excitable, childlike imp. Whether they're camping, flying a plane or dining in an Italian café, they draw audiences into their off-kilter, sometimes scary, world. This is not the circus. This is theatre.

We're squirting blood all over the place. We do decapitations and amputations and there's torture. We play, but because one plays does not mean one's being a child.

When they performed their most recent production, *Flux*, in 2002, it was widely reported that it would be their final show. But Kennard and Turner say that was never their intention. "We just needed a break from it," says Kennard. "We were tired of touring all the time."

The last eight years have seen big changes for the duo. Turner got married and moved to Manitoulin Island in northern Ontario, where he runs what he calls the Clown Farm. Kennard

took a job teaching clown with the University of Alberta, and now lives in Edmonton. It's a far cry from the days when they both lived in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood, blocks from each other - performing, running a business and hanging out together.

"In the first 10 years of the gig, we were 24/7 Mump & Smoot," says Kennard. "It [was] like a marriage. And part of our hiatus was: Can we explore our own lives for five minutes? Who we are any more outside of this duo? So there's no question that we refreshed ourselves as individuals."

Finally, about three years ago, they felt ready to take another stab at Mump & Smoot. After putting in grant applications and doing some other preliminary work, they got together in Banff, Alta., with director Karen Hines and composer Greg Morrison. As they always do in creating a new show, they explored the issues affecting them in their own lives. This time around, they went to some fairly dark places.

"One of the things that sort of came up a fair amount was death and our relationship to death and what does that mean," says Kennard. "And renewal - which is really probably the bigger one other than death."

"And transformation," adds Turner. (They finish each other's sentences often - yes, just like a married couple.)

Why all the death talk? "We've reached that stage in life where more and more people seem to be moving on," says Turner, 54. "We're no spring chickens any more. We've each had our own health issues." (Kennard is 50.)

The pair now collaborates long-distance through frequent phone calls, and by spending vacation time together, often working outdoors. Earlier this month, they workshopped the new show in Edmonton. "To crawl back into Mump & Smoot is a pretty nice skin to fit on," says Turner.

In *Cracked*, Mump & Smoot challenge their god Ummo, who appears to be hell-bent on annihilating their relationship and ultimately their very existence. For the first time, the story is set in their home.

The promotional material advises that *Cracked* is "Not for Children!" - a warning Kennard and Turner had to fight to keep. They understand that producers want to sell as many tickets as possible, but the duo says the show is meant for an adult audience. "We're squirting blood all over the place. We do decapitations and amputations and there's torture," says Turner. "We play, but because one plays does not mean one's being a child."

As clowns, they also have to fight the creepiness factor people often associate with their craft. "We've had a lot of people come to our shows [who] are scared of clowns or hate clowns," says Kennard. "And we've somehow managed to change their opinion."

LEFT: SMOOT (JOHN TURNER) RIGHT: MUMP (MIKE KENNARD)



FLIP PUBLICITY & PROMOTIONS

off-stage to argue with them in Ummonian, or to ask them to hold a prop. Audience members who play along blithely are thanked appropriately, but those who fumble about or get all flustered invoke the wrath of Mump and Smoot.

"The audience is the most important thing," says Turner. "It's almost more important than us! The whole energy of the per-

formance is geared to a certain degree by how the audience reacts, and we will pick up on that," chimes in Kennard.

The pair have started work on a new show, tentatively titled *Tense*. "It's still in its embryonic stages," says Turner, but he will say that it has to do with "Mump and Smoot going on a quest." They will be spending sometime teaching in Michigan State, and then it's off

to the Edmonton Fringe Festival's 14th anniversary Alumni Theatre.

What's ahead for Mump and Smoot? Well, their official mandate states that the clown duo wants to go "where no clown has gone before. We want to keep pushing the envelope," says Turner. In a mock creepy voice, he adds, "To explore the dark recesses of the shabby human mind." •

Mump and Smoot have painted faces and red noses but they are no ordinary clowns—meet the self-proclaimed “clowns of horror.”

Clowns of horror? Isn't that a bit of an oxymoron? Sure, says John Turner, a.k.a. Smoot, but then, “Comedy and horror have always gone together.” Turner and partner Mike Kennard (Mump) have taken this concept to a whole new level as their alter-egos Mump and Smoot.

The popular clowning duo has been on the road touring their repertoire of three shows since 1990, a journey which has seen them perform at a dizzying array of venues across Canada, the United States, and a few other countries along the way.

This success has kept Mump and Smoot away from home town Toronto—their last Toronto performance was at the World Stage Festival in April 1994. So when Kennard and Turner finally found themselves at home in Toronto at the end of 1995, they decided to complete a cycle by “retiring” their three shows by reprising them in successive weeks at the Factory Theatre.

Kennard and Turner explain that the three shows have each gone through an “evolutionary” process over the years, and this final hometown run was a way to

close the door on these shows and move on to the writing and creating of a new show. As well, friends and family wanted a chance to catch up on the old shows one final time.

“It's a real family feeling. It's like homecoming.”

Hometown supporters echoed this sentiment at the Factory Theater—fans turned out in full force to see these horrific howlers, many returning each week to see the next show. The last week of December saw *Something* hit the boards at Factory; the show, comprised of three individual scenes—“The Care”, “The Wake” and “The Doctor”—is classic Mump and Smoot: highly theatrical, very structured, all the while relying on sheer improvisational mastery and physical gags.

Mump and Smoot rang in the new year with *Caged*, a work that developed after Turner and Kennard began feeling trapped by their first show, eager to try something else. “We liked the image of a cage on stage,” says Kennard. And indeed, the spectacle of

a massive cage on a relatively bare stage is something that has to be seen to be believed (then again, that would apply to the entire Mump and Smoot experience). *Caged* perhaps best showcases the relationship between

find themselves in an eerie underworld. Death and life after death are explored as the two squabble, investigate their surroundings, and...eat their own limbs (don't ask). The Los Angeles Times summed it up best: “*Ferno* makes you not only laugh, but also contemplate the marvelous complexities of existence.”

Rather heavy stuff for clowns to be tackling, but Mump and Smoot break the traditional stereotype. “Clowning is an art form,” says Kennard. “There's been a big resurgence going on for the last ten years” in the world of clowning, points out Turner, citing Montreal world-renowned Cirque du Soleil and other such modern troupes.

Kennard and Turner, who met in 1987 at Second City workshops, realized that they worked well together, especially when doing gibberish and improvisational exercises. They enrolled in a clowning course taught by acclaimed instructor Richard Pochinko. “He was a genius, visionary-type guy,” Turner says reverentially. Pochinko came to be Kennard and Turner's mentor, urging them to perform in public what they were learning in the course.

“We didn't set out to be clowns or anything,” says Kennard, “it just sorta happened.”

A turning point in the development of Mump and Smoot came when they were asked to step in as a last-minute replacement to perform at a benefit for Pochinko's Theatre Resource Centre at the Ryerson Theatre in 1989. They performed “The Wake”, which would later appear as one of the scenes in *Something*. The benefit was tinged with a dark overtone, as most of the performers and audience members who were close to Pochinko knew that he was dying. Pochinko passed away four days later.

“To a certain degree, that really set the tone for Mump and Smoot”, says Kennard. “Doing ‘The Wake’ at a benefit for someone who's dying—that's a little bit on the edge, isn't it. We were scared out of our minds!” adds Turner.

All the dialogue is improvised on the spot during performance which keeps the shows fresh and different each time. The clowns don't speak any recognizable earthly language—they speak a blend of gibberish known as Ummonian. Many audience members are astonished when one of the clowns stomps

Clowning Around:

Mump & Smoot

Push the Envelope

by Tabassum Siddiqui

Mump and Smoot—in clown hierarchy, Mump is known as the Joey (the manipulator) and Smoot is the Agoste (victim).

In *Caged*, Smoot is taken prisoner by an evil entity known as Tagon (played by Mump and Smoot collaborator Rick Kunst during the Factory run) and is subjected to torture until Mump arrives on the scene to scheme to free his pal. As each plan proves more disastrous than the last, and poor Smoot remains a captive, the clowns' friendship is tested. Finally Smoot, the perennial victim, can stand no more and sells out his friend Mump to the evil Tagon. In the end the pair team up to defeat Tagon and escape. *Caged* is a slightly twisted take on anything you'd see in the “conventional” theatre, mixing humor, pathos, and such themes as separation, betrayal and reconciliation.

In *Ferno*, the final play in their successful run at the Factory, Mump and Smoot decide to fly a plane themselves after speed reading a flying manual. They inevitably crash and

COVER STORY
Laughing to keep from crying
—
The ancient art of clowning thrives in turbulent times

BY ALANNA MITCHELL
Social Trends Reporter

THE DAY I of rehearsal in a snuffy Toronto church basement, and six clowns are hard at work. No frilly wigs or floppy shoes here, and not a lot of laughter either. Instead, frowning earnestly at one another across a horseshoe of tables, they've launched into a discussion of whether fairness have souls.

It gets better. If fairness have souls, do angels too? And isn't the play at hand — an 18th-century Italian piece about a fairy who wants to become human — really about racial segregation? Such is the substance of Clowning as practiced by Toronto's Theatre Smith-Gilmour — one of several Canadian clown companies in the midst of a profound renaissance of this centuries-old art.

For these troupes, clowning is serious business. They perform on artistically correct stages, not under the big top. They shun the monologues of stand-up comedy, preferring to converse with people in the audience and draw them into the performance. They aim at conquering the hearts and minds of adults, not coaxing laughs out of children.

Their art is rooted not in the Ringling Brothers but in a European tradition that sows seed as well as solace, and lands its jokes with larger truths. And as they rediscover the history of clowning, their audiences are showing fresh interest — not only in the humour, but also in the unsettling messages that clowns have been delivering for centuries.

"Clowns always come out of the closet when the world is going to shit," says James Keaton, a professional clown who has toured with Montreal's Cirque du Soleil. "The idea is to have the people laughing so hard their stomachs are hurting — and two days later, their stomachs hurt from what they saw."

Theatre people say Canada and other countries are in the midst of the biggest clowning revival since the success of the Cirque du Soleil, which draws huge audiences in North America and Europe and just signed a \$34-million deal to tour Japan next year.

CANADIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

261 **Clown**

Toronto, Monday, October 14, 1991

30 CENTS GST included in price

Clowns in Canada revive a centuries-old art

• From Page A1

Toronto clowns Mump and Smoot sell out their cross-country tours and just finished a hit run in New York. Clown acts are taking over fringe theatre festivals. Some are attracting that hallmark of the mainstream, corporate sponsorship. So strong is the resurgence that the Canada Council, the federal government's arts-financing body, has commissioned a study of Canadian clowning.

"I would say it's a phenomenon," says Alan Fierwood, professor of drama at the University of Guelph and an editor of Canadian Theatre Review. "I think we've only seen the beginning of it."

CHERYL Gashman — small and anxious, slipping food ice in a Toronto café — looks about as little like a clown as you could imagine. But 10 years ago, when clowning was downright unfashionable, she was turning down offers to take her hit one-woman show to New York and Los Angeles. She's been searching for the same success ever since.

She's deep into an analysis of the difference between male and female clowns. (Women use more psychology; men prefer gadgets.) All of a sudden, she pops into a character from a show she put on in June. Her earnest face becomes rubber, twisting into a goofy self-parody. Her evenly modulated voice breaks into a nutty patter. She becomes Mrs. Pudge, a fat housewife with agonophobia (fear of open spaces) whose husband foos ground.

Mrs. Pudge's sexual thrills come from hot flashes. Her most significant relationships are with her electric appliances. But when the hotblow-dryer sauce curdles for the third time, she breaks loose from her cliché. Madonna-like body, and matches down to the Eaton Centre to spit on a Girl Guide.

When Mrs. Pudge gets her laugh, she becomes Cheryl Gashman again. Without the faintest touch of humour, she intones: "I believe clowning can save the world."

TF's not every era that has need of clowns, notes Dean Gilmore, one of the founders of Theatre Smith-Gilmour. But, this one seems to. "The reasons are complex, ill-understood, and the subject of impassioned theory-making in clown circles."

For some, the attraction to clowns betrays a modern spiritual quest. "There's a God-shaped vacancy in our lives, like a big piece of the puzzle is missing," says Don Ricker, who helped found the Montreal clown company Klansnada. He believes clowns offer spiritual ease by reaffirming the value of the spectator's human qualities.

For James Keaton, political unease is driving the renaissance. He cites the unpopularity of the goods and services tax and the gut-wrenching debate over Quebec's place in Canada. "The wall is getting ready to fall down," he says. "People are searching for some release."

One thing clowns agree on is that the appeal of their particular brand of humour is age-old, although it is often marketed as new and improved.

Kim Sedoy, artistic director of New Play Centre in Vancouver and the Canada Council's catalogue of clown sets, says his research shows most clown acts have changed little over the past few hundred years. The jokes are simply updated.

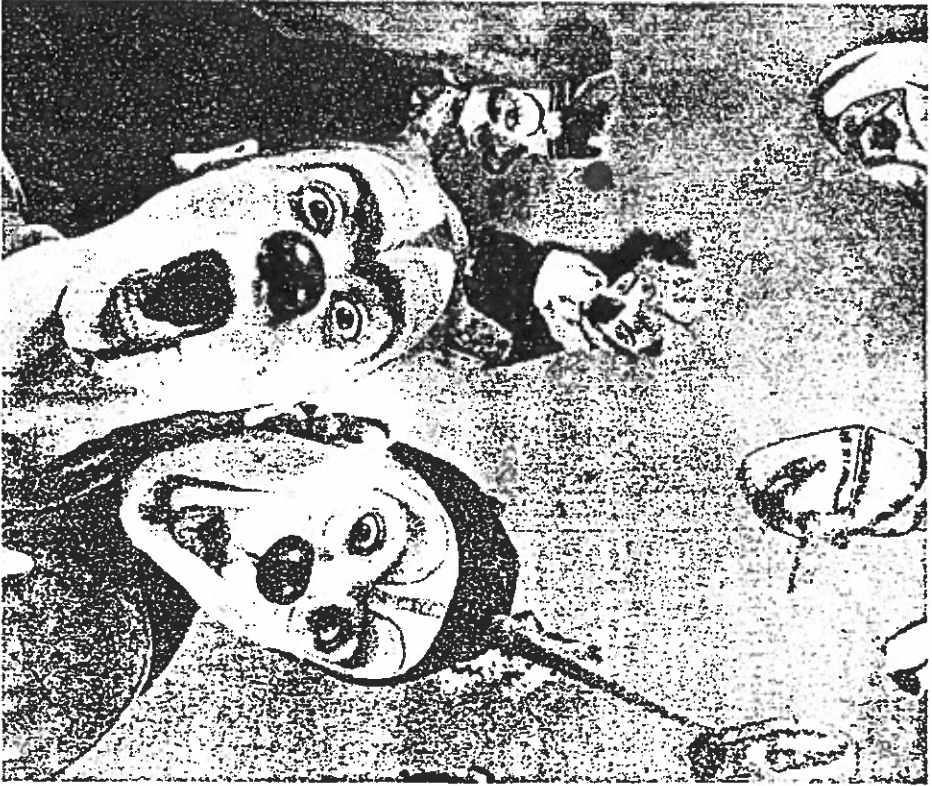
In fact, some clowns admit to taking notes at old Buster Keaton and Charles Chaplin flicks. They talk about the legends of Shakespeare, Chekhov, Beckett and Joyce.

They claim noble antecedents: the European court fool, permitted to speak the truth about politics when others couldn't; the Latin American jester whose job, sacred as well as profane, was to parody the priest; the North American native trickster who challenged authority and pointed up folly.

Many of Canada's best clowns went to clown school in France to soak up the European tradition. Others studied with great Czech or Polish clowns, or apprenticed with Canadians who embraced the continental style.

But high-minded though they may be, today's clowns never forget the alpha and omega of their art: you gotta keep em laughing. The erudite Dean Gilmore and Michele Smith, of Theatre Smith-Gilmour, shun plays that offer useful homilies but no fun. "A clown hasn't learned, but he doesn't understand," Mr. Gilmore says. "And he hears the devil makes a joke for man."

MUMP and Smoot — cult heroes to many fans — speak of clowning as they would a calling.



Clowns John Turner, left — known professionally as Smoot — and Mump — a.k.a. Mump — show the special makeup and some of the props required by a trade they take very seriously. *Johns M. Smith/The Globe and Mail*

Mump (Michael Kernard) says he would have been a clown even if he had been born in another era. Smoot (John Turner) talks passionately about why clowns are needed these days — war, "disgusting politicians," falsehood, deception, screwed-up sexuality. During an intense two-hour lunch, they speak earnestly of their for better and bears. "Professional Maybe" too profound, Smoot calls on the next day to clarify. He and Mump are just a couple of Canadian fools who have fun on stage, he declares. "I would hate to start sounding like an expert on clowning and society. We really don't think about this stuff." After all, how serious can you get about being funny?

wright and director Paul Thompson and his Theatre Passe Muraille to create *Far As the Eye Can See*, a recent-history play, about the Dodds-Round Hill epic.

the names and to the people of the area, but also Peter Loughheed himself and "the regal dead" — Crowfoot, Princess Louise and William Aberhart.
See BABIAK / D2

WHEN CLOWNS GO BAD

THEATRE PREVIEW

Mump And Smoot in Something

Theatre: Fringe Theatre Adventures

Starring: Michael Kennard, John Turner

Where: TransAlta Arts Barns

Running: Tonight through Feb. 17

Tickets and info: 409-1910

Warning: Not suitable for children

LIZ NICHOLLS

Journal Theatre Writer

EDMONTON

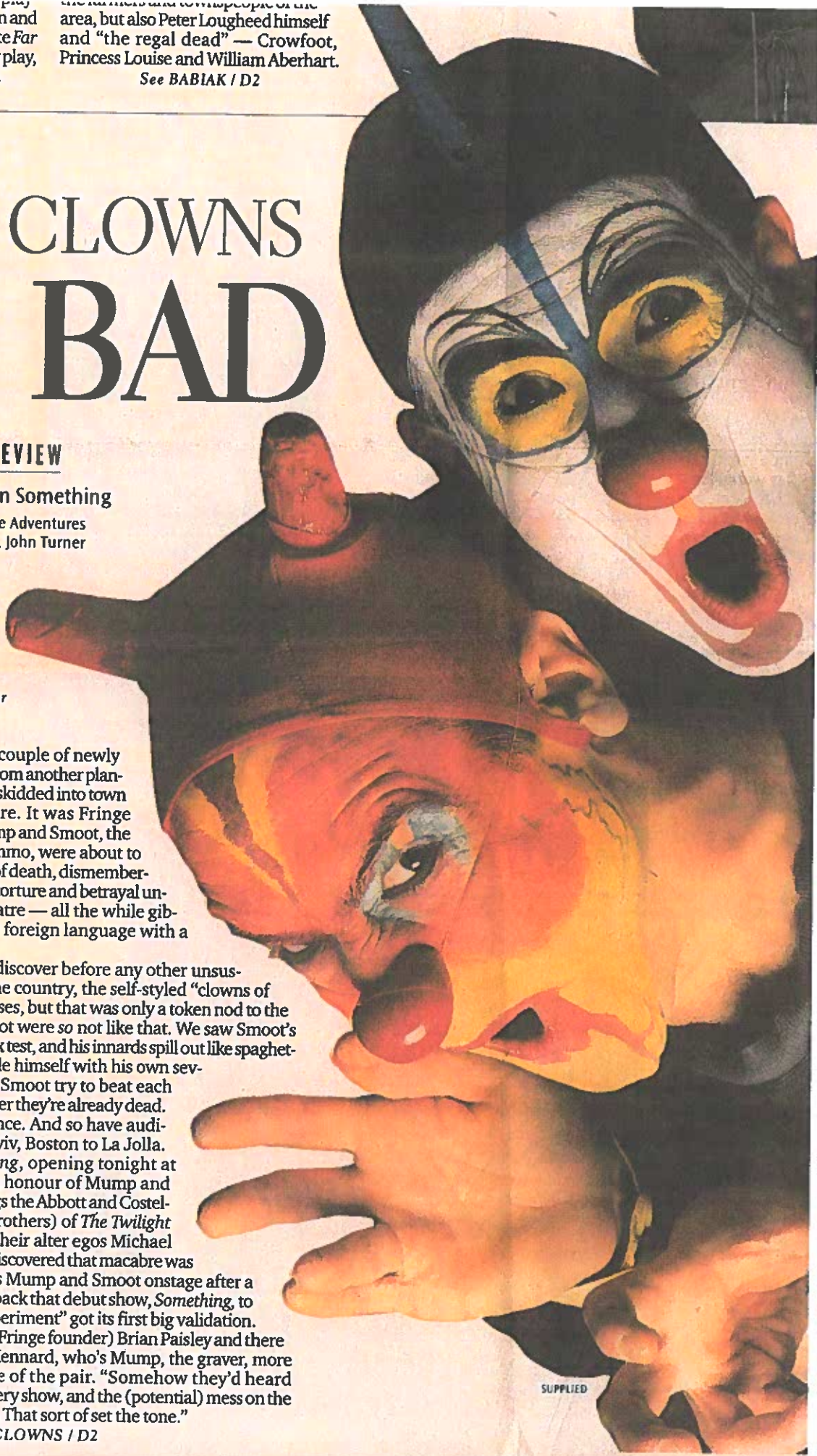
2 decades ago, a couple of newly minted clowns from another planet (via Toronto) skidded into town on a slick of gore. It was Fringe time, 1989. Mump and Smoot, the arrivals from Ummo, were about to launch a melee of death, dismemberment, cannibalism, treachery, torture and betrayal unprecedented in Canadian theatre — all the while gibbering away in Ummonese, a foreign language with a strange affinity to English.

As Edmonton was about to discover before any other unsuspecting civic populations in the country, the self-styled "clowns of horror" might have had red noses, but that was only a token nod to the brotherhood. Mump and Smoot were so not like that. We saw Smoot's leg fly off during a doctor's reflex test, and his innards spill out like spaghetti. We saw Mump try to strangle himself with his own severed arm. We saw Mump and Smoot try to beat each other to death — till they discover they're already dead.

We've been laughing ever since. And so have audiences from New York to Tel Aviv, Boston to La Jolla. *Mump And Smoot in Something*, opening tonight at Fringe Theatre Adventures in honour of Mump and Smoot's 20th anniversary, brings the Abbott and Costello (or possibly the Smothers Brothers) of *The Twilight Zone* back to the place where their alter egos Michael Kennard and John Turner first discovered that macabre was a go in clown circles. It reunites Mump and Smoot onstage after a six-year absence. And it brings back that debut show, *Something*, to the place where the "clown experiment" got its first big validation.

"Our first day on site, we met (Fringe founder) Brian Paisley and there was all this kerfuffle," laughs Kennard, who's Mump, the graver, more pompous, more manipulative of the pair. "Somehow they'd heard about using a gallon of blood every show, and the (potential) mess on the carpets, and they were freaked. That sort of set the tone."

See CLOWNS / D2



SUPPLIED



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Mump and Smoot return with *Something* playing at the TransAlta Arts Barn until Feb. 17.

Send in the clowns

COLIN MACLEAN
Special to Sun Media

Back in 1989 two unknown performers, Michael Kennard and John Turner, arrived in Edmonton to appear at the Fringe Festival.

They were on the festival circuit living in a Volkswagen van in a Whitemud campground. Three days later, in their clownish alter egos of Mump and Smoot, they were the talk of the Fringe and a long and distinguished career was born.

"It was so bizarre for us," says Kennard, who is Mump (the grave one with the long unicorn horn). "We stood there marvelling at the long lineups and someone said they were for us. It was only the fourth time we ever did the show."

Chimes in Turner (who is Smoot - the loose cannon with two horns), "Edmonton electrified us. One moment we were two guys messing around in a garage, building some stuff and trying out some jokes, and all of a sudden there was press everywhere, people lined up around the block."

Kennard picks up (the two have a habit of finishing off each other's thoughts and sentences - the result of being together for two decades), "If it hadn't worked here - if we had five people at the show - we might not have been doing this."

Still crazy after all these years

Out of the Edmonton experience has come a stellar career. They have performed all over the country. Played off-Broadway. They were artists-in-residence in the Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven and entertained audiences in Israel.

Their shelves are filled with awards from everywhere.

And now, after a wait of six years, Mump and Smoot, the clowns of horror, have returned to where it all began with the show that set off the original buzz.

They open their show *Something* tonight in the TransAlta Arts Barns as part of the season for Fringe Theatre Adventures.

Turner and Kennard have established a remarkable world for Mump and Smoot. The duo reside on the planet Umno, worship their clown god Umno and speak their own brand of gibberish - Ummonian.

The thing that has always amazed me about the duo is that it takes maybe five minutes for audiences to believe in their outlandish world. They establish the perimeters of Umno and never deviate.

Even their conversation, which starts off as gabble and jargon, begins to make a kind of wonky sense and you end the evening com-

pletely attuned. For a short period of time, you too have become an inhabitant of Umno.

Kennard's Mump plays the stern parent and guide who tries to keep some control over Turner's Smoot - the irrepressible and chatty child.

It took a long time to reach the top with years of training. The two met in 1986 in Toronto's Second City workshops and established an immediate bond. They worked with another clown, Karen Hines (known to Fringe audiences as the walf-like clown at the end of the world, Pochsy), and in workshops with famed clown guru Richard Pochinko - among many others.

A clown of another colour

In the way that many of these things unfold, all their preliminary work didn't exactly turn out the way they thought. When it came time to unveil his comic persona to Pochinko, Turner decided he was going to be the biker clown.

"I came in torn black jeans and black T-shirt. Shades. Richard said, 'You know, I see you in baggy red shorts. I looked at Mike for support and he just turned away. I was crushed.'"

The relationship between the two has maintained despite exhausting road commitments.

"By the end of the summer, we've had a great time but we're pretty wiped," says Turner. "We really don't need to see each other for a few weeks."

"Yeah, I read somewhere," says Kennard, "that the average length of time for any comedy duo is about 10 years. But we work at it. That's why you haven't been to Umno for six years."

Kennard has become an Edmonton resident, teaching drama at the University of Alberta while, during the summers, Turner holds a highly regarded "clown farm," a school in a converted barn on the property he owns on Manitoulin Island in Ontario.

One of the reasons the show works so well is that it is in an unending state of flux. The two spend hours after a show discussing what worked and what didn't.

"The payoff comes when you hold the audience and it rocks. We're having a good time. They're having a good time and you are at one with the universe. It's a wonderful experience," says Turner.

"Yeah, serious enlightenment," agrees Kennard.

With the occasional severed limb and spurring blood, Mump and Smoot are not the benign clowns of your youth. Their performance is not for kids.

Something with Mump and Smoot opens tonight and runs through Feb. 17 at the TransAlta Arts Barns in Old Strathcona, 10330 94 Ave.

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NEWS STAIRUP as a therapeutic art

THEA

ued from D1

Rhea moved to New York where she studied performance and quickly went professional — a Korean-Jewish Queens — was not ex-norment. She recalled her performance the saliva left my body unable to swallow for a moment. The occasional flashbacks when, on the way to her boyfriend talk-show on Fifth Avenue. They were on their way to it. "It was my evening of

hen, things have more or the comic, who has to juggle her burgeoning with successful projects television. In addition to *Sabrina*, Rhea was of the weight loss re-*Biggest Loser*, and re-Donnell on her syndi-

cated talk show, renamed *The Caroline Rhea Show*.

On the silver screen, Rhea has acted alongside Jim Carrey in *Man on the Moon* (1999) and Jamie Lee Curtis and Tim Allen in *Christmas with the Kranks* (2004).

The 43-year-old just finished shooting *Sordid Lives*, Del Shore's new television series based on his eponymous 1999 indie. The TV comedy also stars Olivia Newton-John (*Grease*) and Rue McClanahan (*Golden Girls*).

"I've done my acting work, now I can go play," Rhea said. By play, she means standup, a performance art she calls therapeutic.

"There's some part of my brain, a muscle, that needs to be exercised," she said. "I have a ridiculously overwhelming intense desire to communicate with people."

Sometimes she gets carried away. "I'm the kind of celebrity where fans eventually say to me, 'I've gotta go,'" Rhea joked. "We just wanted a picture. Zip it."

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It's the guiding theme in province

ABIAK

ued from D1

ective are fair to is the *Eye Can See*. Mon-ood. Electricity is good. off your land is bad. En-rastation is bad. This is I think I'm spoiling it for play ends with Peter *eus ex machina*, being stage in a shiny coal Calgary Power's appli-

ian "What a politician!" If I'd been his age, had he's a chip off the old

zed See premiered in Ed-ered Gordon Tootoosis, and Eric Peterson, who r on *Corner Gas*.

proved proposal for a ip mine, power station 1 Dodds-Round Hill by ational, the Ontario n Fund and Epcor will han twice the number — about 300. It will ce kilometres of agricul-rit says it will use "clean " to reduce greenhouse he facility will take be. 5 cubic metres of wa- m the North Saskatch- newhere between a big city's worth.

agreed to a relocation tion agreement, but Round Hill Dodds Agri- tion Association don't isented. "That's a falla- Von Tettenborn, chair- ciation, in an interview usiness writer Gordon onth. "If I came to your nonton and said, 'I'm go- ur land and your house, u say?' cleanliness of coal tech- iged between 1976 and

Alberta Energy and Util- d private investigators, ney, to spy on landown- in Rimbey to discuss an algary power transmis- ping, Premier Ed Stel-



BY R. MACLEOD, THE JOURNAL, HILL
Rudy Wiebe

mach defended the board's actions. It should have been a scandal, but it wasn't. Political dissent, in the Alberta of 2008, doesn't have a folk or epic qual- ity. Raymond Prins, Tory MLA for Lacombe-Rimbey, isn't expecting much of a contest on March 3.

The same can be said about Dodds-Round Hill today. *Consent* is the guiding theme, not only in rural Alberta, but also around the province. Loughheed was forced to step in and reject Calgary Power's proposal because there was a sense of outrage against Calgary Power; a broad feeling that individual people had been ignored in the rush to develop and expand.

An updated *Far As the Eye Can See* would add an environmental element that wasn't a large part of the conversation in 1976, but the play would likely never be written in 2008. Not only because political theatre collectives have fallen out of favour, but also because there isn't much hope of a narrative arc today. The story would be static, with a few voices of protest rising, falling and comically fading. It would be little more than a sitcom, an episode of *Corner Gas*, perhaps, beginning and ending with the status quo. The actor playing Von Tettenborn would be a crank, a complainer, a silly traitor.

"It's exactly the same issue today," said Wiebe, in an interview about the play this week. "But I really can't imagine Ed Stelmach in that coal bucket."

thabiak@thejournal.canwest.com

Viloteau a stickler for separating styles

CONCERT PREVIEW

Thomas Viloteau

Presented by: Edmonton Classical Guitar Society

When: Friday at 8 p.m.

Where: Mullart Hall, Alberta College, 10050 Macdonald Dr.

Tickets: Tix on the Square, 420-1757, the Gramophone, Acoustic Music Shop, Avenue Guitars and at the door

TOM MURRAY
Special to The Journal
EDMONTON

Alberto Ginastera, Roland Dyens, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco — and Elliot Smith?

One of these things is not like the other, but for 23-year-old classical guitarist Thomas Viloteau, the late indie rocker Elliot Smith is just as huge an influence as those other worthy composers.

"As a classically trained guitarist, I don't believe in separation in music," Viloteau explains from Winnipeg, where the Parisian is preparing to teach a master class.

"That doesn't mean I believe in the crossover thing, though. I believe in style. I don't think mixing classical music and hard rock is a good idea, for example. I hate listening to some electric guitarists that play baroque music with distortion and rock phrasing."

Viloteau is considered one of the most talented classical guitar players of his generation, recently placing first in the



Thomas Viloteau

Salou and Segovia international competitions in Spain, as well as grabbing first prize in the 2006 Guitar Foundation of America International Solo Guitar Competition.

Add to that a few more top rankings in French and Italian competitions and it's understandable why there's such a buzz surrounding the young guitarist. Viloteau's continuing rise to prominence — which has seen him train under such luminaries as Dyens, Alvaro Pierri and Joan Puro — has also led to an appetite

WIN TICKETS

To win a pair of tickets to the Thomas Viloteau concert, e-mail your name and phone number(s) to tickets@thejournal.canwest.com by 4 p.m. today. No multiple entries.

for 20th-century music.

The program he has planned for Edmonton includes Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Capriccio diabolico*, Alexandre Tansman's *Cavatina* and his old teacher Dyens' jazz-flecked flamenco piece, *Triada*. But don't ever suggest that the final composition was picked out of an excess of reverence.

"I chose to play the Dyens piece because I like it a lot," he hastens to add. "He never mentioned I should play a piece of his."

His sideline as an Elliott Smith enthusiast has led Viloteau to compose his own music. Many of the songs you can find on Viloteau's MySpace site are meant as homage to Smith's self-titled album. Still, despite the fact that he enjoys having two very different styles to choose from, he's as strict about keeping them apart as he claims.

"No pop music in the program," he says firmly, "but I do sell two of my CDs on the tour, one with the folk songs that I wrote as well as the Naxos CD that I got to record after winning the GPA competition. I think I'm the first classical guitarist to do that."

On their longevity: 'Clowns just get slower and grumpier'

CLOWNS

Continued from D1

"We were sitting in the van outside Cosmo (Cosmopolitan Music Society, a regular Fringe venue), wondering what all the people were lining up for — and it was us!" grins Turner, a.k.a. Smoot, the more excitable, guileless and malleable one. "If it hadn't hit like it did here, who knows? Maybe we wouldn't be doing it at all."

"It was our first big blast," says Kennard, who remembers climbing to the top of the gazebo next to Walterdale, pasting Mump and Smoot cut-out faces on an improvised Fringe weather vane. "Something sold 125 tickets that first night. After that, all our shows have sold out completely, everywhere, ever since."

To save money, they camped at Rainbow Valley; one imagines their fellow campers swearing off the schnapps indefinitely at the sight. "When we took our makeup off, nobody at the Fringe knew who we were; it was so much fun," says Kennard. "We figured if everyone hated us, we'd just go to the bar, and laugh."

No wonder Kennard and Turner love Edmonton: We have a natural grasp of Ummonian. In fact, Kennard has actually moved here, to teach movement at the university. Turner has arrived from his farm on Manitoulin Island, a seven-hour drive from his native downtown Toronto — where he's a sort of urban refugee/Walt Wingfield figure, over-

turning tractors and teaching clown workshops in the rustic barn whose sprung floor is built on a metre of hay.

So, lunch with Mump and Smoot in Strathcona. They're remembering their own birth. Kennard and Turner (and their director Karen Hines, of Pochy fame) met at Second City improv workshops in the '80s, a study in contrasts even then. Kennard was a theatre school grad. Turner, whose only stage experience was being a ventriloquist's dummy in high school, was a bartender (cum science major, cum rig worker, cum frying pan salesman) who'd had a road-to-Damascus conversion to showbiz when he took slide guitar lessons, joined a pseudo punk band and appeared onstage in a "scum hotel" in Calgary.

The workshop instructor was wrong in a spectacular way. "Stop doing gibberish," she told them. "And what do you need a clown for?" When Kennard suggested a clown workshop with guru Richard Pochinki, Turner couldn't have been less eager. Fate, or possibly Ummo, intervened. And on Friday the 13th, 1988, Mump and Smoot appeared — the former from a refrigerator-sized box, the latter coaxed out of a bag — in a macabre 20-minute piece called *Jump the Gun*, which had them as sole survivors of an apocalypse. The stage, Kennard has said, "was a skating rink of gore."

Their signature makeup and costumes were in place. And so was the hierarchy that puts Mump in charge and

Smoot deeply resentful of his lower status. Turner sighs, and jokes. "I went in to the workshop to be the tough biker clown — black fedora, black jeans, torn T-shirt — and look what happened..." Kennard rolls his eyes. "Twenty years of whining."

There's been a lot of blood under the bridge since then, some of it Kennard's and Turner's. *Mump And Smoot in Tense*, their foray into the gruesome world of camping, was halted mid-tour when Kennard wrecked his back, and did nine months of physio. The stockier Turner, who played rugby through his 20s, has "shoulder issues," not least because of Smoot's defensive neck and chin-thrust posture. "Still, we've had a way longer life span than circus or hockey people. Clowns just get slower and grumpier."

They used to make (and occasionally shed) their own blood. Now they buy "the more expensive, prepackaged blood," says Turner. "It's not as sticky." And they don't camp anymore. Kennard, who's creating a one-man clown show called *Puzzle Me Red*, with Turner's input ("I get a royalty"), has bought a cute little house here.

Next summer, they'll alternate between Kennard's cottage near Barry Sound and Turner's "clown farm," and create a new show for the Ummonians. "Yes, we are actually outdoors guys." They'd love to premiere it here.

"Edmonton has always been our home away from home."

Inchalls@thejournal.canwest.com



Whatever it is, Mump and Smoot make it funny

PAUL BLINOV / blinov@vuweekly.com

I have to hand it to the couple who attempted to sneak out of the final minutes of *Something*; they were either blindly oblivious to the hour that had just preceded them, or were trying to see what the clowns would do to stop them. Either way, they hadn't gotten far before Mump and Smoot caught up with one of them—outside of the theatre—and dragged her back for the finish, belittling her in their half-gibberish for bailing just a few minutes early. She looked embarrassed, and was probably late for wherever she'd been trying to hurry off to, but the rest of us were delighted. It was the cherry clown-nose on top of one hell of a show.

Something is loosely divided into three vignettes—the Café, the Wake and the Doctor—but the clowns are more than content to drop everything and pounce on any audience reaction they can. When audience members laughed at Smoot (John Turner, the one in the red cap) for missing a throw, a particularly loud audience member was brought onstage to attempt for himself. Supplementary clown Pugg (Christel Bartelse) also took stone-faced delight in tormenting the front rows, Mump and Smoot themselves and anyone who happened to be close enough to feel the flick of her mop.

When *Something* wasn't being happily knocked off-course by the audience, the music—performed here by Edmonton drag legend Darrin Hagen—was almost as influential. The show was filled with classic baseball riffs, spooky Transylvanian transitions and sudden, emphasizing chords. Not even Hagen was safe from Mump and Smoot's playful



REVUE

UNTIL SUN, FEB 17 (8 PM)
**MUMP AND SMOOT
IN SOMETHING**

DIRECTED BY KAREN HINES
STARRING MICHAEL KENNARD, JOHN TURNER,
CHRISTEL BARTEISE
TRANSALTA ARTS BARN (10330-84 AVE)
\$15 - \$23

assaults, as a particular little splash of music caught the attention of Mump (Michael Kennard, the one in the blue hat), and Hagen found himself in a brief call-response game of chicken.

IT'S THIS ORGANIC FEEL that makes *Something* such an incredible show. There was never a fourth wall; the nonsensical Mump and Smoot uni-

verse encompasses the stage, the audience, the tech booth, backstage and anywhere else it needs to be, and while the sketches themselves are delightful, it's impossible to separate *Something* from each audience it's presented to.

This year marks Mump and Smoot's 20th anniversary, and it's been six years since the duo has appeared onstage. But the two Canadian "horror clowns" haven't lost any of their well-known charm, and this, their original fringe hit show *Something*, is more than just enjoyable—it's a must-see. Just be warned; if you're brave enough to sit in the first rows, they *will* use your laughter against you. To the delight of the rest of us. ♣

<http://www.avenuecalgary.com/blogs/post/the-weekend-mump-amp-smoot-and-the-international-film-race>

The weekend - Mump & Smoot and the International Film Race

Posted: Apr 29 2011 15:51

By Wil Knoll in Stage Craft

All I can say is Mump and Smoot.

I first bumped into these guys in a shitty little theatre in Edmonton about ten years ago, and I laughed my ass off the entire night. Mump and Smoot are the poster children of Theatre of the Grotesque and Theatre of Cruelty. Someone is almost always being dismembered or disembowelled in every scene to a chorus of laughter from the audience. These two clowns are malicious to each other, unrelenting in violence, with fake gore the punctuation to their gibberish dialogue.

I laughed at times out of sympathy, and at other times out of sheer enjoyment of either the creativity or flat out bluntness of the ways they hurt each other. It's like a weird Itchy and Scratchy live action show but far more funny. I'm not familiar with their current show CRACKED, and I haven't seen them since that tiny theatre in Edmonton, but I'm sure these details have not changed.

And the smartest thing about it is the gibberish. Mump and Smoot have developed their own language that has it's own set of rules and structures. But they are so committed to their script and know their meanings so well that they train the audience to understand it through emersion. I believe it's called Ummonon or something. If I remember correctly almost everything was Ummo. God, the planet, people...

There are a few other shows going up this weekend, but if you have the chance Mump and Smoot at ATP is they place to be. They are going to sell out houses, so get on the tickets NOW. Considering the subject matter, this may not be the best show to take your little ones to. Take you friend that's a grown up little one, and enjoy a few beverages along the way.

As for me?

At 8pm we will start our third year in FilmRacing International's 24 Hour Film Race. I can't say I'm nervous. Just anxious. These things can be marathons, with shooting going late into the night/early morning. This will be about my seventh creative race between the 10-Minute Play Festival, the 48 Hour Movie Making Challenge and FilmRacing International. I think I've found a bit of a niche. Content created on demand. Is it any good?

Well, check out our film from last year. I present to you "Normal", Winner of Best Film, Calgary Selection, FilmRacing International 24 Hour Film Race 2010.

Feel free to drop in on my twitter stream to catch updates as the night goes on.

And then a script workshop tomorrow morning at 11 for my next show. At some point I'll buy groceries and the laundry, I swear.
[View all of Wil Knoll's blog posts](#)