

MUMP AND SMOOT

**CAGED
REVIEWS**

SUNDAY ●
75 cents ★
75 cents minimum outside Lower Mainland

Province

VIEW

'Caged'
savage,
brilliant
theatre

By Max Wyman
Arts Critic

No one is going to be able to see every one of the 100-plus shows at this year's Fringe Festival — it's a physical impossibility. But any best-of-Fringe choice is going to be incomplete without Mump and Smoot in Caged . . . with Wog.

I can't remember any show in Vancouver in the past year with the shuddersome emotional impact and deep laughter-out-of-pain comic power of this one.

These people are clowns, but don't take your kids anywhere near them. What they give you is the black stuff of nightmare . . . starting with the cramped cage in which innocent, dog-primal Smoot is confined by the wicked archetype of evil and cruelty, Wog.

This is savage, brilliant theatre that taps into our most recessed guilts and fears. Evil's command over innocence, tyranny, betrayal — the big themes of tragedy — are reduced to elemental essence and played out in comic crayon colors.

Theatre of despair, theatre of the absurd, theatre of cruelty, black comedy . . . stir up Beckett, Artaud, Monty Python and the great clown Grock, color it acid rainbow and you get the beginnings of this enormously disquieting, spectacularly funny show.

These people have the gift of the great clowns — they show us the shabby, unvarnished truths about ourselves . . . and let us laugh at them.

At Heritage Hall, Sept. 11-13, 8:45 p.m.

●

BROADWAY / OFF BROADWAY

ENTERTAINMENT

THEATER REVIEW

A Twisted Track for A Mystic Trio

MUMP & SMOOT IN "CAGED" ... WITH WOG. Written and created by Michael Kennard and John Turner. Directed by Karen Hines. Lighting designed by Michel Charbonneau. Art director John Dawson. Music and sound by David Hines. With Kennard, Turner and Debbie Tidy. Astor Place Theater, 434 Lafayette St., Manhattan.

By Jan Stuart
STAFF WRITER

CONFESSION. WE DREADED this show for two weeks before going, mostly because we couldn't get the damn title down. Mutt & Jeff Engaged With a Wok. Mumps & Measles in a Cage with Chickenpox. Surf & Turf in Sage with White Wine. Humpty Dumpty Sat on a Wall.

Then there was this business of the tag line. Clowns of Horror, it called itself. Oh dear, we thought, we've barely recovered from Dick and Spiro Up a Creek With Watergate.

Well, mea culpa, my fine Mump & Smoot. Mea maxima gaucheness. These Canadian fools are not to be dreaded, but awaited, indulged and savored. "Mump & Smoot in 'Caged'. . . with Wog" (by George, we've got it!) is an unexpected answer to a burnt-out theatergoer's prayers.

The feeling of dread actually speaks very much to the heart of this mystic and oddly endearing entertainment. Fear and dread hang over Mump and Smoot, two naifs imprisoned by a malevolent sorceress named Wog. The pair are subject to her medieval cruelties, which involve slowly draining her captors' blood till they are reduced to dead and very shrunken heads.

Wog (impersonated with ferocious hauteur by Debbie Tidy) is a mythic analog for all the power abusers who have ever bled our spirits: the punitive schoolteacher, the demon parent, the ungrateful boss, the unswerving dictator. Mump and Smoot are the latest wrinkle on the existential fall guy, the Everyman buddy-buddies alone at the edge of the world. With their horned caps, bulbous noses and pancake eye masks, however, they are closer to big-tent Laurel and Hardys than new-age Vladimir and Estragons.

Smoot (John Turner) is the simpleton, the well-meaning but hopelessly malleable child-man who is quite easily drawn into Wog's lair. Mump (Michael Kennard) is the strategist, forever exasperated by his chum's naivete but touchingly devoted, nonetheless. And a bit of a meathead as well. Indeed, if there are any tortures to match Wog's barbarities, it is the absurd pretzel-shaped obstacle course Mump and Smoot lay out for themselves to attain the freedom that is within easy reach.

This is an escape story, pure and simple. Or rather,



Mump and Smoot, fools subject to the cruelties of Wog

ostensibly simple. "Caged" tracks the twisted, Rube Goldberg-ian path that people often take to get from points A to B. Much of its goofball charm derives from the ways in which the pair get the audience to collude in their convoluted plans. Then there is their squealing vocabulary. Mump and Smoot converse in a gibberish that is slightly to the left of English, close enough so that we know what they're saying and far enough so that we are reminded of just how random and weird language can be.

Turner (the one in the green tights and spiffy yellow blouse) and Kennard (the one in the ripped violet T-shirt and red shorts) 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, with strong atmospheric assist from director Karen Hines, lighting designer Michel Charbonneau, set man John Dawson and composer David Hines.

I admire the insiders who were savvy enough to catch this eccentric brew of Grand Guignol and New Vaudeville during the low-priced previews. Whatever the tariff, Mump, Smoot and mean mama Wog are worth their weight in gold. Not fool's gold. The real thing. / II

Demonic duo

Mump and Smoot are clowns to delight Artaud

by Bill Marx

CAGED and FERNO, written and created by Michael Kennard and John Turner. Directed by Karen Hines. With Kennard, Turner, and Rick Kunst. Presented in repertory as part of the American Repertory Theatre's World Wide of Comedy series, at the Loeb Drama Center, through July 24.

Mump and Smoot are the John Wayne Gaceys of the clown world, vaudevillean sadists walking the thin red line between horror and hilarity. The creation of Canadian slapstickers Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot), the red-nosed clowns and their brilliant slash-and-crash antics echo Antonin Artaud and his Theater of Cruelty, Samuel Beckett, and Alfred Jarry (there's more than a little *Ubu* in Mump and Smoot's gross shenanigans), as well as cinematic comedy teams from Laurel and Hardy to Abbott and Costello.

Yet *Caged* and *Ferno* are more than the sum of Kennard and Turner's literary and popular influences. Like all original theater artists, the pair create a unique world on stage, in this case a hostile universe that teaches what Artaud insists is the theater's primal lesson: "We are not free. The heavens can still fall upon our heads." Mump and Smoot amend that a bit — in *Caged* and *Ferno*, the heavens are out for blood. And Mump and Smoot are a couple of babbling, bickering, blinkered plasma banks. Mump's the Abbott of the pair — a bossy know-it-all, a tall, ungainly stork-in-high-top sneakers who strokes a rod stick-

ing out of his forehead when he needs bright ideas. Smoot's the Costello, the eternal adolescent, a playful imp of a stooge (his red head sports a couple of pig ears) who whines and rebels against the commands of his irascible friend, whose schemes usually involve Smoot's risking life and limb. The pair are lovable comrades but also, when the going gets rough, competitors: Kennard and Turner make us care about the duo's survival without letting us forget that, when push comes to shove, each would sacrifice the other. Man can be as cruel as, if not crueller than, the universe. Revolving around captivity, pain, and regression, *Caged* and *Ferno* serve up thoroughly jaundiced jollies — they are black farces for the post-Hiroshima, post-Holocaust era.

Superb physical comedians (Turner's masculine/feminine Smoot is an energetic standout), Kennard and Turner communicate by way of a glibberish that combines English and French into a raucous collection of obscenities, slang, and one-liners delivered in a dazzling array of pitches — Turner shoots his voice up and down the spectrum like a virtuoso. Mump and Smoot also make expert use of the audience — spectators are employed as helpers or verbal punching bags. The clowns' imaginative marriage of speech and movement exemplifies Artaud's call for a theater filled with a "language of sounds, of cries, of lights, of onomatopoeia," for a production that turns the actors into "hieroglyphs." The manufactured speech, the clown make-up, and the cartoon action distance us from the violence; Mump and Smoot, like Beckett's tramps, are performing symbols, emblems of absurdity.

Apparently a different *lingo* means a different God — Mump and Smoot worship a deity called Ummo, who communicates



VAUDEVILLEAN SADISTS: they also echo Beckett, Jarry, and cinematic comedy teams from Laurel and Hardy to Abbott and Costello.

to them through a large, red-tipped cone that the clowns lug about with them. In *Caged*, Ummo, along with Smoot, is kidnapped by the vampiric Targon (Rick Kunst), who holds Smoot in a ring of stakes crowned with the shrunken heads of clowns. Periodically, Targon puts Smoot's arm in a diabolical contraption, bites the ends of his fingers, and drinks the blood. Mump comes to the rescue, and the two clowns struggle to escape, mixing classic gags (spotting a piece of rope outside of his prison, Smoot crawls out, gets it, and returns) with comically backfiring attempts at suicide, self-mutilation, and betrayal (weary of having his fingers sucked, Smoot sells Mump out). The speechless Targon is a totalitarian jailer whose barbarity provides a frightening background for Mump and Smoot's hilarious snits, stunts, and slow burns.

The pair go on vacation in *Ferno*, but Mump decides to fly the plane, ends up crashing it, and the two, rather than per-

forming the limbo, as planned, are in limbo. Or maybe it's hell. Wherever they are, Ummo can't (or won't) help them, and the guys can't kill each other because clubs and knives don't work as they should. *Ferno* is brilliant, a miniature epic that roars in an hour and 15 minutes, from death to resurrection.

But Mump and Smoot's elemental humor may defy description. I told a friend about my favorite part of *Ferno* — after the crash, Mump and Smoot discover that each is missing a limb, and that kicks off a series of hilariously macabre bits (Smoot spits on his leg in an effort to glue it back on) culminating in the starved clowns fighting over, and then nibbling on, each other's severed limbs. My listener didn't think cannibalism had much yuk appeal. But by Ummo, it does in the remarkable pantomimic hands — and mouths — of Turner and Kennard. Mump and Smoot may be stuck in *Ferno*, but those who like their buffoonery dark and delicious will be in heaven. □

Friday, June 7, 1991

THEATER *By David Berreby*

Clowning Takes on a Horrific Humor

Mump and Smoot in 'Caged' With Wog

DIRECTOR: Karen Hines

CAST: Michael Kennard, John Turner and Debbie Tidy

WHERE: Astor Place Theatre, 424 Lafayette St. Telephone: (212) 496-5710.

NO LONGER confined to the same old routines under the Big Top, clowning nowadays is enjoying a renaissance. "New vaudevillians" like Bill Irwin and ex-street performers like the Cirque du Soleil's David Shiner are using clown tradition to create shows that are more surprising, more witty and more serious — more, in short, like theater — than Barnum and Bailey's standard issue.

Part of the same wave are two enormously talented Canadians, Michael Kennard and John Turner, whose *Mump and Smoot* at the Astor Place Theater combines the slapstick, costumes and precise dance-like movements of clowning with horror-movie camp and symbolist drama.

Mump (Michael Kennard) and *Smoot* (John Turner) get stuck in a cage by a very nasty bloodsucker named *Wog* (silently but fiercely played by Debbie Tidy). As is traditional for clowns, the two go through a long series of very funny, bumbling Rube Goldberg machinations to go a very short distance. But there's more to their plight than physical comedy.

Messrs. Kennard and Turner are all-out emotional actors, too; their characters know real pain and betrayal. The show's a roller-coaster, whipping the audience from laughs to poignant moments, keeping you off-balance.

The emotional immediacy — so often missing from theatrical experiments — is all the more remarkable given that childlike *Mump* and his nobler pal *Smoot* speak in the language you hear when two people are talking but you can't make out what they're saying. You know exactly what's going on from the intonation, but you can't make out too many words.

As abstract as the pair's language is the dream landscape they live in — a huge cage, a Grand Guignol torture device, and a large decorated cone that the clowns worship even though *Wog* feeds it their blood.

Their timeless, placeless dilemma gives *Mump* and *Smoot* an Everyman quality, a universality that's part Chaplin and part *Waiting for Godot*. In that light, clown technique's way of going backwards even as you try as hard as you can to go forward becomes a metaphor for all the stupidities and self-defeating struggles of trapped people everywhere. This is a fine, poetic and funny piece of theater.



John Turner, Debbie Tidy and Michael Kennard.

BACK STAGE

JUNE 21, 1991

MUMP AND SMOOT IN "CAGED" ... WITH WOG REVIEWED BY
MURIEL BROADMAN

To paraphrase a well-known TV commercial, with a name like that it's got to be good. And it is.

One has a right to expect an "adult clown" show to be funny, and Mump and Smoot—Canadians Michael Kennard and John Turner, respectively—give us in 70 minutes all we're entitled to and more.

The storyline is open to a number of interpretations. One reading could be that the two hapless heroes are captured and tortured by Wog (Debbie Tidy, also Canadian), an evil sorceress/priestess/vampire/your own private bump-er in the night. Or they could be innocent scapegoats/heretics/dinners/personifications of your own terrors, helpless before her witchcraft or sacerdotal omnipotence. Even when they discover that they have the physical ability to escape the cage in which Wog has imprisoned them, either they lack the wit to flee or they fear the futility of any attempts made by other than ritual means.

Wog has little more to do than stalk grimly, torment her captives, and appear beautifully sinister with her clown-white, Vampira face. Mump and Smoot, however, with their white faces and red noses, always risibly vulnerable, have set themselves a strenuous program in which no effort is too much.

Communication between Mump and Smoot, and between the clowns and the audience, is carried on partly in mime and partly in a stream of almost-nonsense syllables. Vocal inflections and an occasional recognizable sound make hilariously clear whatever we need to know. The way the two use audience participation could be a lesson for other performers.

David Hines's spooky music and sound effects did much to enhance the feeling of power against which the two heroes struggled futilely until they could turn the tables on Wog—permanently?.

The producers warn that this show is not for children. What with blood being sucked from the captives' fingers, an onstage decapitation, and a headless body functioning with murderous competence, they have a point. But in light of how many kids relish this sort of thing, perhaps they are being overly cautious.

Kennard and Turner wrote and created the production. Karen Hines directed. Michael Charbonneau is credited with the lighting, which makes the stage—bare except for the stylized cage and a couple of small set pieces—creepy, creepy.

If I had reservations about anything, they were that the action in the beginning could start a bit sooner and that the tempo of the strobe in the climactic battle scene should be picked up.

Mump and Smoot are a splendid antidote to the summer doldrums.

*"Mump & Smoot in
"Caged"...with Wog,
presented by Arthur Cantor
and Hollywood Canada
Productions, Inc., at the
Astor Place Theatre, 434
Lafayette St., May 29-June
9.*

The Region / British Columbia Vancouver



The Vancouver Sun, Friday, September 7, 1990 ★★★

ENTERTAINMENT

By LLOYD DYKK

ON ALMOST every street corner within a 10-block area of Mount Pleasant, you see these three-metre-high square-built purple sentinels, plastered solid with posters advertising shows in the Vancouver Fringe Festival.

They're hoardings, but with personality. Designed by Ken Macdonald, they're take-offs on the old gaslight architecture of the area, with cornices echoing the caps of the surrounding old stone and brick buildings. The columns' stateliness (jazzily balanced by a painted trim of fake cow-hide) suggests a quality of establishment about the Fringe, and since this is the sixth busy year for the alternative theatre festival, it would be hard to quibble.

People were even lined up an hour early outside Heritage Hall on Thursday to catch the 4 p.m. performance of Mump and Smoot, one of 50 shows a day in the 11-day event.

Mump and Smoot, from Toronto, scream Fringe-quality. They're clowns, but clowns of horror. You'd be advised not to take your children to see them because the show, called Caged with Wog, seems dredged from primal nightmare.

Imagine that the Godot that Vladimir and Estragon were waiting for had arrived and turned out to be the devil. The spookiest thing about the show is its repetitions. Mump, the manipulating clown, and Smoot, the sweet, funny, submissive one, are prisoners of a routine torturer. Regularly, the black-

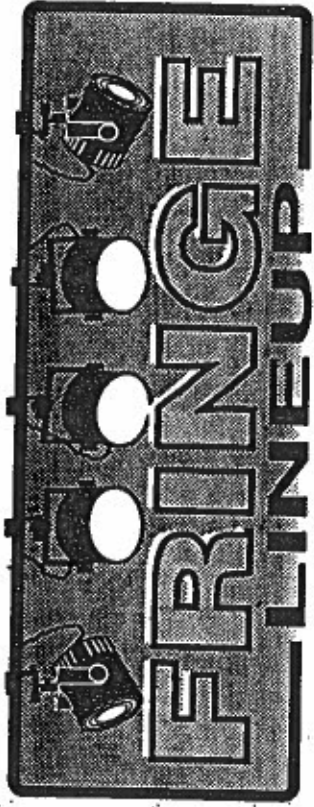
clad Wog arrives with her apparatus, pulls Smoot's arm through the bars and on to her rack, stretches it three times its length, and then draws blood with which she anoints her mysterious shrine.

She withdraws and the dithering, hysterical clowns, chattering in a gibberish language that becomes oddly comprehensible to us, are left to try and re-plot their escapes anew. But always, Wog returns.

Escape, it seems, would not really be all that difficult. But Mump and Smoot are creatures of habit. Or maybe there's something about freedom that frightens them even more than their captivity, which may be hellish but still something they know. The play, if you can call it that, is very close to the heart of the absurdist playwrights.

It's rich with implications and also very funny in a way that's difficult to describe. John Turner, as Smoot, is a fabulous clown — a complete charmer. That it seems his show is no slight, however, to the talents of Michael Kennard as Mump and Debbie Tidy as Wog.

(MUMP AND SMOOT IN CAGED WITH WOG, Heritage Hall, Sept. 7 & 8 at 4 p.m.; Sept. 11, 12 & 13 at 8:45 p.m.)



Friday, August 3, 1990 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Star-Phoenix

Mump and Smoot a must-see

By James Parker
of the Star-Phoenix

Just how much treachery and terror can one Ummo take?

It's a question Mump and Smoot, two rather animated members of that species, ask themselves as they do battle with the villainous Wog, a ghostly, bloodsucking, high-priestless of evil.

Or at least they seem to ask themselves that question, once or twice anyway.

One can never be sure, since they speak a language last heard on a Doctor Who episode, sort of a hybrid of pig Latin and Vulcan.

Thankfully, language isn't a barrier in this zany, absurd and rewarding play, entitled Mump and Smoot in "Caged" with Wog.

Created and written by Toronto actors Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot), this Fringe offering combines elements of the Bowery Boys, Star

distraught but not completely defeated creatures endeavor to exorcise themselves from the grasp of Wog.

And this isn't easy, since she's a mean witch blessed with the one quality they lack — intelligence.

It all sounds pretty ridiculous, and it is. Good, nutty fun, a wingding of a time, involving deceit, torture and religion. And it all hinges on the physical talent of Kennard and Turner, who lend their characters wonderfully expressive faces, neat gestures and the right voices (Turner sounds an awful lot like a stressed out Cookie Monster).

The three actors interacted with the audience during the performance, bantering back and forth and recruited one young woman to hold their sacred book.

The audience responded by hissing at Wog and giving advice to the craven Smoot, who doesn't exactly exemplify loyalty.

A good time was had by all, as the standing ovation attested. Mump and Smoot is a must-see.

FRINGE ON BROADWAY

Trek, Dracula and almost any buddy movie you can name, creating a yuckfest of the first order.

After a somewhat pyrotechnical opening, Thursday night — a strobe sitting in for lightning — an imprisoned Smoot appears on stage.

Wearing maroon, diaper-like sweat pants held up by red suspenders, red hightops, red and white makeup and two little horns on a bathing cap, Smoot looks like a cross between Bozo and Beelzebub.

Unfortunately, he possesses the emotional moxy of the clown. Smoot's a blubbering fool, kept in the cage by Wog, a fiend thirsting for his blood.

But there's hope.

Suddenly Smoot hears a gazoo. It's Mump, the brains of the duo, making contact.

And soon he appears, clad in green spandex, blue high cuts, black tails and a navy-blue bathing cap with point.

After a tearful reunion — intense Ummo bonding — the two

T H E G L O B E A N D M A I L
THE ARTS

Monday, August 27, 1990

BY LIAM LACEY
The Globe and Mail

The scariest show at the Edmonton Fringe may be a clown act from Toronto titled *Mump and Smoot in "Caged" with Wog*. Like the mime troupe Mummenschantz, Mump and Smoot have created a clown style that goes beyond slapstick into art; unlike Mummenschantz, they are not nice.

Smoot is the Stan Laurel to Mump's Oliver Hardy — a likeable innocent, who makes a lot of mistakes. At the play's beginning, he is held in a bamboo cage by a stone-faced witch (Debbie Tidy) who tortures him with a toilet plunger and arm stretching device, and then drinks his blood. Often, Mump, reading from his magic book, contrives a voodoo scheme to kill her, which backfires, and both end up in the cage.

By the play's end, I would have gladly opted for the more pastoral charms of David Cronenberg or Stephen King. What's next? Mump and Smoot in Dante's Inferno?

**MUMP AND SMOOT IN
CAGED WITH WOG (Stage 3) —**

One of the hits of last year's Fringe, Toronto's Mump and Smoot are back with more deranged comedy and inspired clowning.

The comic jibberish of Mump and Smoot is always easy to understand — and always very funny. Occasionally a word of English is thrown in to hilarious effect. Besides their deranged comedy, Mump and Smoot, Michael Kennard and John Turner, are fine physical comedians.

It's all a little strange, but worth it to become familiar with the ways of Mump and Smoot.***½ —
Neal Watson.

ON THE FRINGE



The Edmonton Sun, Thursday, August 23, 1990

The Edmonton Sun, Thursday, August 23, 1990