

MUMP AND SMOOT

**CRACKED
REVIEWS**

<http://www.avenuecalgary.com/blogs/post/mump-and-smoot-i-was-wrong>

Mump and Smoot - I was wrong.

Posted: May 9 2011 14:42

By Wil Knoll in Stage Craft

I told people to go see this show in the last weekend post. I highlighted the violence. I highlighted the delight I felt when watching as these two clowns of cruelty brought bloody ends to each other in skit after skit. I made the violence one of the leading reasons why Mump and Smoot is a must see.

I was so wrong.

I need to be clear. Mump and Smoot is a must see. Anyone who says "But I hate clowns" needs to see this show. The Birthday party clowns and images of Pennywise from IT are a pale shade of talent and culture compared to the truly skilled talent that you see on stage in Cracked. Clowning has a rich and vibrant history that is often forgotten when pop culture constantly plays out the generic clown with baggy pants and floppy shoes. Clowning is hard, and challenges the performer to be amazingly communicative about their internal state without the use of words. There are archetypes of characters, each class with their own name and traditional costume. There are plots, platforms, best practices, and years of schooling ahead for people truly committed to the craft. Consider Cirque Du Soleil for a half second. And then go buy your tickets to Mump and Smoot.

The reason that I'm wrong is that the violence isn't the reason to see this show at all. It's a tiny part of the narrative, a plot device that only helps the motor tick over. The momentum of the show is a narrative about two... Friends? Brothers? Care giver and Care receiver?

Everyone I spoke with after the show felt the same thing, but named it differently. My date asked if Mump was Smoot's male mother. To me Mump was a reluctant friend and brother. But the story was the same. It's love. Not necessarily romantic or amorous, just love. Mump and Smoot are surprisingly tender and heartfelt. Over the course of the show we see coarse layers peel away to reveal a very simple affection and care between two people. The arc of the play is marked in the shift of characters immediate response to each other that starts with sharp threats and complaints. It ends with tight lipped smiles and a hand on an shoulder facing a sad inescapable truth.

There is some violence, and it receives laughter willingly from the audience. There is some cruelty, and a little gore, but this far more refined than the show I watched in Edmonton ten years ago. The main draw is the story telling. The relationship between Mump and Smoot is told so clearly through gesture, gibberish, and just a few english statements. There are statements about status, power, privilege, intelligence... Volumes about the relationship are conveyed. It's recognizable on sight with all of it's many layers without needing a plot synopsis or a map. It's simple, it's clear, and it's one of the hardest and easiest things to do right if you know what you're doing.

Tell one simple story, and tell it well.

Take the friend who hates clowns. Take the friends that hate the theatre. Take anyone who's looking for something different to do and bored with the usual drinks at a pub every night in Calgary. What Mump and Smoot do is universal and can speak to anyone in any language

The tradition of clowning deserves fresh public ambassadors and I nominate Mump and Smoot for the role. Just don't show up late for their show unless your willing to be beaten (literally) into one of the best running jokes they have.

PS. The performance of Pennywise by Tim Curry is pretty solid (I mean, for a child killing clown, yeah). I'm just trying to say that if all people associate clowning with is one Stephen King movie and quiet puffy pant ballon animal twisters as clowns then clowinging is getting a bad rap.

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Clowns of controlled chaos

Mump and Smoot reunite for another bloody adventure

BY LIZ NICHOLLS, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM OCTOBER 7, 2010



Smoot (John Turner), left, and Mump (Michael Kennard) ask the big questions in Mump and Smoot Cracked
Photograph by: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography, Edmonton Journal

THEATRE PREVIEW

MUMP AND SMOOT CRACKED

Theatre: Theatre Network at the Roxy, 10708 124th St.

Created and performed by: Michael Kennard and John Turner

Running: Tonight through Oct. 24

Tickets: 780-453-2440 or theatrenetwork.ca

So I'm with a couple of clowns in a diner. ... No, really. And, as usual, we're discussing death.

This time Mump and Smoot -- or rather their affable, English-speaking alter egos Michael Kennard and John Turner -- are calling it "mortality and transformation" in honour of their first new adventure into the unknown in nine long years. Mump and Smoot Cracked gets its Edmonton premiere tonight at Theatre Network.

Still, pass the ketchup, it's not like the self-styled "clowns of horror" from the planet Ummono are politically prim, or squeamish. For nearly 25 years, the macabre pair has travelled the country and beyond, leaving a trail of gore and severed limbs. It's been a veritable spree of dismemberment, disembowelment, cannibalism, treachery, torture and betrayal unprecedented in Canadian theatre. And all the while sporting red noses and chattering away in Ummonese, a foreign language for which Edmonton audiences have always had a strange affinity.

The clown existentialists grin apologetically. "We found we had resistance to dying in the new show," grins Kennard, who plays Mump, the taller, cooler, more aloof one, the one in charge. Turner's Smoot, the giddier, more malleable, more guileless one, did offer to die. They're momentarily bemused by this. Then they remember their history together. "In Mump and Smoot in Something Else, we died in every scene," laughs Turner. "We killed each other in the cooking show," says Kennard. "You died in the war," says Turner. "Mump killed Smoot, chopped him up, in the magic scene," says Kennard.

In Mump and Smoot in Something, Mump and Smoot were so enthusiastically grief-stricken at a funeral that body parts exited pell-mell off the deceased. Dr. Mump applied the reflex hammer so vigorously that Smoot's leg flew off, and his insides came out like spaghetti. Mump and Smoot in Ferno, a disastrous air voyage into the Great Beyond, had our two travelling companions trying to beat each other to death -- until they realized that they're already dead.

The last time we saw the two Ummonian questers in a new show, Mump and Smoot in Flux, which premiered at the Roxy Theatre in 2002, they were tempting fate, and testing the fault lines in their complex relationship, by wilderness camping. Ah, bucolic nature: a hellish chaos of gore. And that was before Boolawa, a mythical bear of limitless ferocity, materialized.

Nine years later, and a new quest. By the time the erstwhile Torontonians were ready to break the interplanetary barrier once more, three years ago, there'd been a lot of, er, blood under the bridge. Kennard was a drama prof at the University of Alberta and lived in Edmonton ("always Mump and Smoot's home away from home"). Turner had long since vacated Toronto for his "clown farm," a rustic spot on Manitoulin Island with a hay-propped sprung floor and a clientele of clownly hopefuls. Their longtime director Karen Hines, a brilliant clown herself, had relocated to Calgary.

They congregated at the clown farm, then at Kennard's Parry Sound cabin. "We jammed on where we were at," says Kennard.

"Where John and Mike were at, separately and together, where Mump was at, where Smoot was at, where they were at together ... every configuration," says Turner. "What we had at our disposal emotionally, physically, financially."

"We know the characters, after 25 years, so we start with meaning," says Kennard. "We look at where we want to take the characters." You'll never hear from Kennard and Turner annoying clown jargon about permitting your inner clown to spontaneously discover his world in front of the audience. They prefer old-fashioned theatrical terms like "discipline" and "skill." Turner grimaces, and grins. "We kind of believe in coming to the table with something prepared, like in advance! We kind of think we should pay attention to the rules of theatre, not to say we don't break them sometimes. We believe in not just being slaves to chaos. There's no freedom in that at all."

Chaos is something that just happens anyhow, sometimes. Kennard and Turner, who met at Second City workshops, would have to concede that. First there was Egg, a one-night stand involving a two-metre chicken wire/papier mache egg. Six months later, on a Friday the 13th in 1988, in a gore-spattered 20-minute piece called Jump the Gun, Mump stepped out of a fridge-sized box and Smoot was coaxed from a bag, the sole survivors of an apocalypse. Already, Mump was in charge and Smoot was resentful. Then the flash pots went off by accident, and two stage assistants ended up in the hospital for a month with serious burns.

Traumatized, Mump and Smoot stayed offstage for nearly a year. It was in Edmonton in '89 that they became national stars; we love death and destruction here.

"A lot has happened in the last nine years," says Kennard of the show about "mortality and transformation."

Some things don't change. It still takes 2-1/2 hours to don the makeup and the personas. "We're not "suddenly going to be speaking perfectly good English, wearing suits and being life-affirming." Turner is not suddenly going to be 6 foot 6 instead of 5 foot 8," he assures us. "But Mike and I are very different people than we were 20 years ago."

For one thing they're separated by time and Canadian geography. Turner can't Skype from his place. They scorn Facebook. These days they import their blood from the American cosmetic supplier Ben Nye, instead of making their own. Ben Nye's finest will get shed on the Roxy stage. "Oh, I'd say so!" grins Turner. Their stage manager Sherry Roher says all her knapsacks are bloodstained.

"It's a little more psychological horror, eh John?" says Kennard of Mump and Smoot Cracked, which premiered in Vancouver in May. "As opposed to graphic?"

But the dynamics of Mump and Smoot's relationship will be challenged, they promise, along with questions of spirituality. The clownly pair are believers, adherents of the god Ummo; they travel everywhere with an Ummo cone.

Moreover, we get to see Mump and Smoot, those inveterate adventurers, at home. We've been camping with them. Now we're invited back to their place.

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Theatre

Still cracking us up after all these years

Mump and Smoot bring down the house

Fiona Morrow

From Friday's Globe and Mail

Published on Thursday, May, 27, 2010 3:50PM EDT

Last updated on Thursday, May, 27, 2010 4:24PM EDT

Mump & Smoot: Cracked

Created by John Turner and Michael Kennard

Directed by Karen Hines

Starring John Turner and Michael Kennard

At The Cultch

in Vancouver on Wednesday

Imagine a space-age Laurel and Hardy with a splash of Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon and a twist (the macabre variety) of Penn and Teller, and you might conjure something close to the attitude of Mump and Smoot. Of course, you'd need to add in clown suits, face paint and Ummonian – the gibberish that passes for language on planet Ummo.

Mump (Michael Kennard) is the happy idiot to Smoot's (John Turner) haughty know-it-all. These are the odd couple of Ummo, sleeping next to each other in identical cocoon-like hammocks in a strange underworld affair where pulling a clanking chain brings on the day – and yanked again, the night. Their god is also named Ummo, and the pair are careful to genuflect before its idol – a green and red metallic cone – each time they pass by. Otherwise, their day is made up of mere survival – catching food and making 'sloop' – the blue liquid they drink.

With nonsense for a script (although the duo do slip into a fair bit of English along the way), the comedy is necessarily physical. Much hilarity, for example, comes from the simple act of catching and eating breakfast – a pair of rubber rats, beaten vigorously, shaken in a bucket of sloop, then swallowed whole.

But, like all good clown acts, scratch the greasepaint and a well of pathos bubbles up. Mump drinks from the wrong bottle of sloop and the more sinister fabric of life on Ummo takes over. Faced with his friend's gradual demise (helped along by a gruesomely funny amputation scene), Smoot's true colours show. To save Mump, he will try the unthinkable: defying the god Ummo, even in the face of the ever-growing blue egg that threatens their very existence. They love each other, this pair.

Eight years may have passed since Kennard and Turner's last outing as Mump and Smoot, but on Wednesday – the world premiere of *Cracked* – they didn't miss a beat reinhabiting their creations. Taking on any hapless audience member who uttered a gasp, sigh or any other slightly too loud exclamation, the pair seemed entirely at home in their fictional abode. (Be careful if you take an aisle seat – they are quite liberal with the use of their rubber clubs.)

They manage to balance the belly laughs with the more poignant moments – even combining both in a pitch perfect ukelele-playing scene – but there is some unevenness in the plot. The last third of the show has to work too hard to maintain its own logic, with an excellent nightmarish sequence trumping a far weaker ending, despite the best efforts of puppeteers Zu-Ma: Talent to Amuz. And, although the bursts of English make life easier on the audience, they become so plentiful as the show progresses, they threaten to undermine the artistic ambition of the project.

Not that the audience on Wednesday night cared: They hooted and hollered and stamped their feet and welcomed Mump and Smoot back to the stage with open arms.

Mump and Smoot: Cracked runs in Vancouver until June 5 (www.thecultch.com). It plays at Magnetic North in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., from June 9-13 (magneticnorthfestival.ca), and at Theatre Network in Edmonton in October (attheroxy.com).

Mump and Smoot in Cracked

8 p.m., to June 5

Vancouver East Cultural Centre, 1895 Venables

VANCOUVER – Mump and Smoot haven't made mayhem in eight years, and it shows. Cracked is a new show by the killer clowns but, in simply resurrecting all their familiar — and admittedly still funny — bits of shtick, the duo doesn't travel far from some well-tilled turf.

They live on Ummo and worship an evil god of the same name. Speaking something close enough to English to be recognizable (Michael Kennard and John Turner, Mump and Smoot respectively, met in a Second City comedy workshop gibberish class), they live in a cave and beat rats to death for dinner.

We've come to expect a bloodbath to flow at every show, but much of the gore is gone as Kennard and Turner turn more philosophical. Cracked is about a serious mistake Smoot makes, and its disastrous results do indeed include a loss-of-limb twist, but much of the smoke-filled 80-minute production is thick with a contemplative dissection of the meaning of death.

There's no lack of fun to be found in the meticulous detail of this piece. Smoot's sweet stupidity is still laugh-out-loud funny, and grumpy Mump's intense dislike of audience members who fail to either shut up or obey his dictates is still a cranky catalyst for the schadenfreude fun of witnessing humiliation rain down upon others.

Technical glitches are always a treat with this team, as it adapts well to whatever happens on stage. Woe to the technician who bungled a bat in the belfry on opening night — Mump's mad blinking is just the start of a mounting rage.

The stage design is filled with elements of a subterranean world, but an odd lighting design by Cory Sincennes tends to shout out its effects in unsubtle ways. Thankfully, longtime collaborator Greg Morrison's music offers its usual powerfully effective sense of menace.

The kind of clowning they created with master craftsman Richard Pochinko gave Kennard and Turner a rich pool to draw from. Whether it's the bouffon style of attacking the audience or a first-nations flavouring of the malicious trickster who spits in Ummo's eye, Mump and Smoot remain a unique not-for-kids creation.

If the recurring motif of rebirth (watch out for the baby peel!) in Cracked is to be taken as symbolic of a renewed energy in this 22-year-old partnership, then we can look forward to further explorations beyond the blood and guts. What Mump and Smoot must remember, however, is that goofy Grand Guignol gore is what got them where they are.

Sun Theatre Critic

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Cracked: not just for adults

Sean Tyson

Plank Magazine

June 1st, 2010

Is there a Mump without Smoot? This and more philosophical questions hide among the crevices of *Cracked* the final show in the Cultch's 2009/10 season.

Welcome to Ummo. A world like our own, inhabited by creatures like us in many ways. Survival is an occupation, spiritual beliefs hold sway in the structure of everyday life in turn balanced by the great equivocator: Death. It is a world that supplies everything to the vigilant Ummonian, the cycle of life exists, actions have consequence.

I could go on and on about how deft John Turner and Michael Kennard are at riding the roller-coasters that are their performances, how small technical snags get mined for gold, how the audience must expect to be the 3rd performer and no one is safe. However, if you've ever been to a Mump & Smoot show then you know all this, and if you haven't, then that is part of the treat. What I'd prefer to look at is the amazing way in which a message woven through this Ummonian tapestry is so relevant to lives in our world.

Mump takes pains to educate Smoot on the importance of knowing the difference between a liquid that refreshes and nourishes, versus the one that will kill him. Lovably innocent Smoot understands, but will still get it wrong. Here will begin the 'end' as now the otherworldly duo must reveal their love for, dependency on and eternal connections to each other. Each character peels back their layers to show how they deal with the situation; Smoot eventually accepting and using the moment to get as much comfort as he can before the eventual, Mump railing against his beliefs, the forces of Ummonian nature and seeking anyway he can to save the life of his companion. The bond of love we witness is nothing short of Shakespearean in its exegesis, and though the story may be fraught with heavy themes, the world of Mump & Smoot allows us a safe distance to feel on a level below the play of comedy.

The struggle against the unknown of Death has captivated our imagination since the beginning of time. We continually seek ways to “answer the unanswerable” in order to mollify our fears. As adults we have already spent a great deal of time grappling with this issue and of course it’s always fun to watch a couple of clowns expound upon it, but I feel there is another, growing section of our society that needs these stories told to them in ways that invite them in and don’t beat them over the head with a proverbial stick. There are others that need to know it’s okay to love your friend so much that you would put their well being ahead of your own comfort. That even though our beliefs and ideals might be tested, our love for each other is all that really matters at the end of the day. That no matter what the odds of survival it’s okay to find a moment of humour or cherish a remembrance of a loved one. Sure, not all the adults in attendance will get this deep, but I think there are others actively searching for these stories in a world bent on high-school musicals and ‘star’-driven reality shows.

I’m speaking here of the youth. Judging by the news, they’re not as innocent as we’d like to think and probably on par with how young we were when Mump & Smoot first carved their way upon the scene. Perhaps it’s time to share the wonderful weirdness of these two with a generation that would benefit from these stories in more ways than one. As my lovely date commented, her precocious 9 year-old self would have “loved it!” more than she did now. Perhaps that means 15 year-old boys could learn a lesson or two. Perhaps these horror clowns aren’t just for adults anymore. Perhaps I’ve read too much into a hilarious evening with two of Canada’s best performers.

Cracked runs through June 5th at [The Cultch](#) in Vancouver; at [Magnetic North](#) in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., June 9 to 13; and opens the 2010 season at [Theatre Network](#) in Edmonton in October. You can also find more about them [here](#).

**MUMP & SMOOT'S *CRACKED* written and performed by
John Turner and Michael Kennard**

Dates and Venue 26 – 29 May & 1 - 5 June, 2010 at 8pm |
The Cultch's Historic Theatre, Venables St, Vancouver

Direction Karen Hines **Music** Greg Morrison **Set & Lighting**
Cory Sincennes

Reviewer John Jane, Review Vancouver

Even now, I still feel mildly embarrassed when revealing my early childhood tussle with coulrophobia (creeped out by clowns). Since the age of ten - aside from a slight relapse when I saw Tim Curry's taunting portrayal of Stephen King's evil clown, Pennywise – I've taken a more considered approach to even the most hideous of professional buffoons – *until now*.

Michael Kennard as the belligerent, bossy Mump and John Turner as the more volatile and puerile Smoot offer a unique brand of clowning that you would not see at Barnum and Bailey. Mump and Smoot are a pair of comically grotesque, rather than scary clowns who live together as buddies (or perhaps brothers, or even lovers – no one is quite sure which) in a dark, dank cave on planet Ummo feeding on rats, bats and anything else that invades their abode.

In their latest incarnation, *Cracked*, that only a few weeks earlier was still a work in progress (and might still be), they face up to existentialism, death and defying the wrath of their god Ummo, who seems determined to expunge their relationship. They speak Ummonian, a kind of gibberish language with just enough English infusion, to allow audiences to understand roughly what is going on.

It's easy to see how Mump and Smoot have garnered such a cult following. Their conjoined performance is part slapstick, part pathos and part dread - I cringed during the scene where Mump amputates Smoot's leg with a box-cutter and a handsaw, even though it was really a crudely performed parlour trick. Through precise timing and masterful mime Kennard and Turner navigate the grotesque, blending vulgarity with vulnerability and mixing antipathy with poignancy.

Cory Sincennes' elaborate otherworldly set complete with stalactites and Mump's alchemy cart certainly elicits what could be perceived as an

organic Ummonian habitat while Greg Morrison's score provides the additional atmosphere.

Cracked is the final production of the Cultch's current season. It's everything you may want in comic theatre - except a cure for coulrophobia.

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Hicks on Six review: Mump & Smoot in Cracked: Theatre Network until Oct. 24

By GRAHAM.HICKS

Last Updated: October 12, 2010 7:30pm

Hicks on Six review

Mump & Smoot, in Cracked
Theatre Network, Live at the Roxy Theatre
10708 124 St.
Edmonton

Trouble with Mump and Smoot is you don't know where to begin.

Am I writing for Mump and Smoot fans, who have seen this brilliant clown duo four or five times, are completely acquainted with the planet Ummo and their parallel universe?

Or am I writing for those who don't have a clue about Mump and Smooth, other than they are bizarre clowns.

OK, we'll start at the beginning. If you're a Mump & Smoot fan, skip over this part for the next 400 or 500 words.

Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot) stumbled upon Mump and Smoot sometime in the late '80s, when they were in various acting/comedy workshops as professional mimes/clowns/actors and as teachers of the same.

The act that was born was of two surreal, cartoon-like characters, Mump & Smoot, who live on the planet Ummo, and seem to be the only "people" on the planet. They are linked together through time, fighting, laughing, yelling, having adventures together, and never ceasing to worship their God Ummo.

They are locked into characters – Smoot with the unicorn horn is the dominating boss, forever scolding and yelling at Mump, but once in a while revealing a more sentimental side. Mump with the two devil's horns is sweet and innocent and humorous and forever handling Smoot's criticisms without too much trouble.

Dressed in outlandish clown-like costumes, they usually seem to be camping in swamp-like surroundings. Their idea of food is carnivore-like, chewing on tasty rats, or hunting for a pidouee critter.

And they always – and this is what makes them clowns only for 12-year-old and up – seem to be stabbing themselves or something, have reams of blood, are dismembering limbs with entrails dripping out!

Like all great clowns, they are also in the realm of exploring emotion – of fear, sentimental love, reverence, anger – almost always their shows (they are not prolific, over 22 years, they have written seven original Mump and Smoot scripts) are built on some grand disagreement between the two of them, with terrible (but funny) things happening during the conflict, to have some resolution by the curtain. And somewhere along the line Ummo is rumbling or showing up in various guises, usually symbolic.

Plus, again as great clowns, they can go off script in an instance to horse around with (or berate depending on the context) the audience. Some of their funniest moments have been improvised as they dashed around the audience, bashing fans with styrofoam bats.

Last but not least, Mump and Smooth don't speak English but Ummo, the most brilliant gibberish that is perhaps some variation on pig latin. Somehow, through their body language, tone, and occasional English phrase (usually the punch line) you can follow the language perfectly.

Most interesting is Kennard, Turner and long time director Karen Hines decision to keep Mump & Smooth as a part-time gig. You'd have to think they've been approached by TV/film/video game producers – the duo are so original and inspired that one is surprised they haven't at least made a TV series.

But no, both prefer, it seems, to have quite independent careers, to get together every few years to do Mump and Smooth live theatres shows and tours, then on they go to other separate interests, especially since both are drama teachers and academics.

Does Cracked mark the end of the line for Mump & Smoot? We won't reveal any plot details, but the ending, complete with puppet-sized mumps and smoots, could be taken as a finale to the characters.

Along the way, through the hilarity and pathos, is revealed Mump and Smoot's deep (non-sexual, nothing about Mump and Smoot is sexual in any earthy sense) love for each other. They are like the closest of brothers, and when an aspect of actually losing each other occurs, deep sentiment rules the day.

Won't say anything more about the plot of Cracked, lest we give too much away. Rest assured it is another Mump and Smooth classic, and I hope, for all the Edmontonians who discover Mump and Smoot during this run at Theatre Network for the first time, that there will be many more episodes of Mump and Smoot to come.

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Cracked up clowns

Mump & Smoot
bring their latest
antics to the city

CADENCE MANDYBURA

Dismemberment, blood and laughs — these clowns are not for kids.

Mump & Smoot have been entertaining and horrifying Canadian audiences since 1988, and while some diehard fans will remember their previous tours through Alberta, it's been almost a decade since they've brought a full production to Calgary. With *Cracked*, they're back. And they're pumped.

"There was a lot of discussion of whether it would be Mump & Smoot or Smoot & Mump," says performer John Turner (a.k.a. Smoot), explaining the final stage of the four-hour, rum-fuelled naming process for the two-man horror clown team (the other being Michael Kennard). The idea was to choose evocative nonsense sounds, because gibberish is the official language of the play and parley of their performances — a language called "Ummonian," from planet Ummo.

But don't worry. Mump & Smoot have learned one or two English words along the way, so you shouldn't have trouble keeping up despite the language barrier.

"It feels fantastic," says Turner of working with ATP. "Alberta has been a home away from home for us." And it's now home to both Kennard and director Karen Hines.

"I'm so excited to be back in this space," Turner adds.

Hines, the now Calgary-based director, has been with Mump & Smoot since the beginning. While ideas for new shows originate from Turner and Kennard, Hines offers a guiding hand early in the development process.

"Their ideas are like partially boiled eggs; I help them boil them the rest of the way," she says, in a particularly apt metaphor.

So what's boiling inside *Cracked*? It's a bit hard to say.

"*Cracked* is a full story," explains Hines, "and it takes place in Mump & Smoot's home, which is a bit



It's probably a good idea to leave the kids at home for this clown show.

THEATRE PREVIEW

MUMP & SMOOT CRACKED

April 26 to May 15
Alberta Theatre Projects
Martha Cohen Theatre,
Epcor Centre

relationship... sort of a day in the life... and then something happens."

This vagueness shouldn't keep anyone away, as a synopsis would probably diminish what Mump & Smoot are all about — entertainment, with a strong improvisatory edge.

"There is no fourth wall," says Hines. "The shows are the same, but different things happen at each performance — someone sneezes, a cellphone goes off — and they will incorporate it into the show." Ummonian, too, is a living, breathing presence onstage.

"For the most part it's improvised," says Turner. "Certain objects are

same, and there's periodic English."

What about that audience advisory that the clowns are "not for children"?

"There are some hard-core moments," says Hines. "There's always blood. Often dismemberment."

She underscores, however, that despite the occasional violence of action and mood, that violence is never directed towards the audience, and she believes certain kids could probably handle it. After all, Mump & Smoot are horror clowns.

"We attack the art of clowns with the idea that we can be or do anything. It's doesn't always have to be funny, or happy. It'll be a roller-coaster ride, and we hope to take audiences to places they might not otherwise go," Turner says.

"We have the humblest of ambitions — to entertain."

Add a lot of laughs, a little blood and two unforgettable characters — it just might be the perfect recipe.

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fast forward

Clowns of horror get Cracked

STEPHEN HUNT
CALGARY HERALD

What do you call a clown show for people who hate clowns?

A clown of horror. Either that or Mump and Smoot.

They're the two clowns on display in Cracked.

PREVIEW — a show that features the pair of clowns, played by Mike Kennard and John Turner, inhabiting their very own planet — Ummonium — and speaking through May 15 and 16. Tickets: 403-294-7402

in a language you invented, called Ummo. (And you thought One Yellow Rabbit doing dialogue in Japanese was a challenge!)

Question: what's a clown of horror, anyway? Cracked director Karen Hines has been working with the duo for 23 years now, and shares their passionate anti-clowndom.

"When Mike and John decided they wanted to try their hand at clowning," Hines says, "and why I was able to relate to them, was that they didn't want to clown in any obvious sense of the word or recognizable way that they'd seen done before."

Part of how they mitigated the pressure they felt clowning was to insert horror," she adds, "which is something they both shared a love for — and again, I did too. We

but at the same time honouring it, because some of the very visceral components of clowning are similar to horror — there's just the absolute immediacy of it, in the best of all possible worlds anyways."

The show got its genesis about three years back when, after taking a break from touring, Kennard travelled to Turner's farm in southern Ontario.

"One of the things that we do," Kennard says, "is look at where John and I are at, where Mump and Smoot are at as a company, as a friendship, as a business, as the characters and we sort of start looking at where they're at, then slowly come down to what the main message is going to be, or what the main theme is going to be. And then we start bashing ideas around on that theme or idea."

And while they don't write in Ummo, they do create a script — or as Kennard describes it, a beat treatment, that describes each character's actions and emotional state throughout the course of a show.

Cracked got its title through a bit of serendipitous happenstance when the trio travelled to the Banff Centre to work on the show.

"The first night we got there," Kennard says, "we were bashing our way around for titles. Karen had gone upstairs and hit a light switch and the frame around the light switch cracked. All we hear from upstairs is, it's cracked! And she comes running down and we go, what's cracked? And she went (says) the light switch cracked! It's cracked! That's the title!"



Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald
Michael Kennard and John Turner perform as Mump and Smoot in Cracked. Known as the clowns of horror, the pair bring their show to the Alberta Theatre Projects stage until May 15.



Check out a video of Mump and Smoot at Calgaryherald.com

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Michael Kennard and John Turner are Mump and Smoot, two horror clowns whose show delivers emotional punch.

Horror clowns travel down very dark road

STEPHEN HUNT
CALGARY HERALD

Cracked, the new show by Mump and Smoot, is an instant Ummonian classic.

Of course, the only plays performed in Ummonian, the duo's own invented language, are every other Mump and Smoot show ever written, so it's what you might call a niche market.

I haven't been to a Mump and Smoot show before, so

REVIEW

Mump & Smoot's Cracked
At Alberta Theatre Projects

through May 15

Tickets: atlive.com or
403-294-7402

★★★ out of five

I was forced to jump right into the middle of their world with Cracked, the duo's seventh Mump and Smoot show.

It turned out to be an easy, fun and enjoyable

experience — if clown horror floats your boat — as a night at a circus thrown by a pair of clowns (Mike Kennard and John Turner) and an innovative director (Karen Hines) who create a show that's a cross between Fellini, Buster Keaton and a David Lynch movie.

When we meet up with them, it's middle-aged days for the duo on planet Ummonian.

SEE CRACKED, PAGE D4

"Your childr

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Era SWENE CALGA

CRACKED: Clown show with a wallop

FROM DI

Despite the fact that they live on somewhat eerie, hallucinatory planet (beautifully designed and lit by Cory Sincennes) that evokes, if anything, a kind of toxic waste daydream, there are also little landmarks of comfort here and there, spotted between an odd laboratory of concoctions, and a small altar where each clown takes turns paying his respects to the god known as Ummo.

Mump (Turner) and Smoot (Kennard) have an easy familiarity with one another, even if Smoot doesn't act his age very

much — he's an emotionally arrested clown of horror who approaches life with childlike wonder, which makes him both eminently lovable and vulnerably bad choices.

If you've ever been to a Mump and Smoot show, you're well aware that their world is quite unlike other clown universes, where there may be mayhem aplenty, but, in the end, no one gets hurt.

In Mump and Smoot's moral universe, bad choices lead to horrible things happening to some of the sweetest clowns of horror you've ever had the pleasure of meeting.

If that stretching of the boundaries diminishes the comedy a little, it also creates a clown show with a little more emotional wallop than usual.

Cracked, which starts out whimsical and playful and comfy, ends up taking us all the way to the end of its very dark road.

Kennard and Turner are a pair of effortlessly engaging, relaxed clowns of horror.

They managed to turn a couple who arrived five minutes late into a funny sidebar that made all of us in the crowd feel as if we were being invited to pull up a lawnchair to share a drink on their little slice of Ummonian heaven. (Just be

careful what you drink!) It's all staged beautifully by director Hines, who, aided by both Sincennes' wondrous set and Grant Morrison's haunting, evocative score, transforms Martha Cohen theatre into something hauntingly, peculiarly original.

I don't know what dreaming about clowns means, but some Calgary dream analyst could probably make a few bucks over the next few weeks, because I'm sure a lot of local theatregoers will be waking up to find Mump and Smoot have invaded theirs.

SHUNT@CALGARYHERALD.COM
TWITTER.COM/HALFSTEP

Mump and Smoot's Cracked runs the emotional gamut

By Colin Thomas, Georgia Straight, Vancouver

By John Turner and Michael Kennard. Directed by Karen Hines. Produced by Mump and Smoot. At the Cultch Historic Theatre on Wednesday, May 26. Continues until June 5

Mump and Smoot bill themselves as clowns of horror, but they are also clowns of pathos. I couldn't believe how moved I was during their latest offering, *Cracked*, trembling on the brink of tears when I wasn't howling with laughter. And I realized that I have got to be nicer to my puppy.

In *Cracked*, Smoot makes an unfortunate dietary choice and themes of mortality ensue. There's lots of blood. There are severed limbs. And one of the most excellent moments in the show comes with the crack of a breaking bone. The way that Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot) play is so fucking unleashed, so unafraid of the dark, that it's liberating. And that fearlessness leads to an exhilarating sense of being alive in the moment; there were several technical glitches on opening night but Kennard and Turner just ran with them, making them part of the performance.

Clowns are all about power or the lack of it. Kennard's Mump is the boss, the parent, the dog owner. And Turner's Smoot is the lackey, the toddler, the puppy.

Turner is one of the most charismatic performers you will ever see. With two stubby little red horns sticking out of his forehead, Smoot is pure id, bloodthirsty when he's hunting for rodents with his club, terrified of touching Mump's chair, shamelessly manipulative when he sees the opportunity. Smoot becomes disabled during *Cracked*, and he milks his misfortune as if he were on a telethon. But like a kid asking for her 18th glass of water at night or a puppy who wants to play when you're writing a review, Smoot just wants to be loved, and you can't help but say yes. Turner's physicality is so vivid it's like every cell in his body is on fire.

Kennard's more cynical, contained Mump makes an excellent foil. And both performers are strong improvisers, even though they're speaking gibberish, with the occasional bit of English thrown in: "I'm waiting for your cue, Smoot."

Cracked sags a bit in the middle, and there are two scenes involving a pair of "surprise" characters, which feels a bit redundant. But the production values are fantastic. The flavours in Greg Morrison's richly textured score include horror movie, pastoral, Balinese, and bicycle chain. Cory Sincennes's lighting transforms the theatre into an otherworldly grotto.

Be prepared: if you go see *Cracked*, it won't always make immediate sense. But confusion is part of the pleasure. Go with it.

Mump and Smoot more than just clowning around

by [Jenna Shummoogum](#) · [0 comments](#)



Mump and Smoot take clowning around to a whole new level in *Cracked*, the newest play at Alberta Theatre Projects. Bringing back their own brand of horror clowning, Mump and Smoot (Micheal Kennard and John Turner) are back after nearly a decade since their last play *Flux*.

Taking place in their own home on planet Ummo, where they worship their God Ummo and speak in Ummonian, Mump and Smoot are giving the audience a peek into their lives together. The play opens to the world of Ummo, a place of multicolor and fluorescence. A fur chair stands in the corner and crinkly fabric adorns the ceiling.

Mump and Smoot emerge from their sleeping cocoons and begin their day. It is clear that Smoot is energetic and impatient and his child-like movements suggests that he is younger than Mump. Mump is neurotic and organized and the provider within his relationship with Smoot.

Cracked is full of surprises. It delves into deep topics and Mump and Smoot cover a vast array of emotions within a language of gibberish, though understandable gibberish. It is scripted and improvised simultaneously, with the clowns responding to audience members and cracking jokes with them. Audience members are advised not to arrive late as it will be a performance they won't forget. *Cracked* offers a unique blend of humour and horror that enables the viewer to go through moments of laughter, disgust and sorrow. Clowning around has never been this fun, or this horrifying.

even horror. Mump and Smoot really don't go beyond that barrier towards horror. There is nothing so realistic that it makes you gag. Thug, played by Candice, is perhaps the scariest of the three, and she doesn't say a thing—which is why she's kinda scary. She's completely unpredictable.

However, they take some roads in other directions that I don't recall seeing in other clown shows, or comedic duos: Clowns with spirituality. Mump and Smoot have a home world of Ummo, speak Ummonian, and worship Ummo, their god. They have a strong belief—and in this they speak about belief and spirituality in society. Mump and Smoot are believers, and I like the way they reflect on spirituality.

I like the way they reflect on love and friendship too—how these clowns care about each other—even if they do it grossly. They are friends together in a nightmare—and their world is weirder than ours, but their care is authentic and real. If these had been horrific clowns we could not have bonded so well with them. We cared about them. We tried to save Smoot from his own curiosity, calling out to him from the audience—yes, you get so bonded with the clowns that you are calling out from the audience as naturally as you would call out to your friends; we chastised Mump for his treatment of Smoot, and he snickered at us from the stage. We worked together as an audience to be part of this wonderful show. I loved being a part of this show, and I think you will too.

“Mump and Smoot are the latest wrinkle on the existential fall-guy, the Everymen 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 Hardy than new-age Vladimir and Estragons...” – *New York Newsday*

Edmonton Sun called Mump and Smoot a “national treasure.” And I think they're right.

They are in Whitehorse for two more nights—I urge you to not let this one get by. You'll have a great time in the audience. For its use of blood, children will not understand what's going on, but teens will LOVE it. Teens get in for \$5. Adults are loving being a part of the show. It's a great uplifting night out with friends or partners. This show definitely has a heart, and if you wait for it, they might show it to you, even if it is a bit wet and dripping.

Posted September 29, 2011 by [jstueart](#) in [theatre](#), [whitehorse](#), [Yukon](#)

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Cracked runs at Alberta Theatre Projects until May 15th. Tickets are available at the door or online at atplive.com

<http://www.getdown.ca/2011/05/02/mump-and-smoot-more-than-just-clowning-around/>

Theatre

Creepy clowns kick off festival

Magnetic North opens with a bang

By Joel Rubinoff

From: Waterloo Region Record

Published on Friday, June 11, 2010

Mump & Smoot: Cracked

Created by John Turner and Michael Kennard

Directed by Karen Hines

Starring John Turner and Michael Kennard

At Theatre of the Arts, University of Waterloo

Who would have thought clowns could be so terrifying?

That's the unofficial tag line of *Mump & Smoot Cracked*, the ambitious opening night kickoff of the prestigious Magnetic North Theatre Festival.

Sited as Canada's premiere festival of cutting edge contemporary theatre, this beacon of cross-cultural pollination moves annually between cities and, this year, boasts 176 events over 11 days at venues around Kitchener and Waterloo.

And after one performance, one thing is clear: If these caustic comedy creations who joke in gibberish, ingest rubber mice in hilarious vaudevillian fashion and sever off limbs in grotesquely graphic detail are any indication, this isn't going to be a soothing festival of warmed-over Broadway claptrap.

Clowns from hell, they've been dubbed, and after 75 minutes of this Laurel and Hardy meets Jason from *Friday the 13th*, while *Waiting For Godot* excursion, you won't know whether to laugh, cry or simply admire the audacity of creators Michael Kennard and John Turner.

This, of course, is exactly the point, as these fearless culture warriors seduce you with nonsensical outpourings and *Three Stooges* shenanigans only to upend expectations with a surrealistic turn toward tragedy that involves a pair of scissors and what looks like, ulp, a primitive hacksaw.

Played out on a cartoonish set that includes a giant egg, oversized diaper hammocks and what appears to be a pre-historic barber chair, the show juxtaposes discordant elements in a way that is by turns humorously engaging and, once blood starts spurting, deliberately provocative.

The subtext, if I read my existential allusions correctly, is that life may seem frivolous on the surface, but when you peel beneath the surface, believe me, buster, it's bleepin' brutal.

Having said this, it's an uneasy balance, and personally, I left the theatre feeling more unsettled than enlightened.

But I may not be typical. Not having experienced these Canadian comedy mavericks during their 22-year career—including an extended hiatus for the past eight—I may be out of the loop when it comes to appreciating their pathos-spiked fringe humour (plus I'm not, admittedly, in any way "cool").

Certainly, the audience responded positively when Smoot, the squealing childish one, and Mump, the exasperated homicidal one, butted heads over the appropriate level of reverence for a giant mystic egg, debated whether to drink the colourful potions on their pre-industrial ice cream cart and, in a mesmerizing dream sequence, sashayed across the stage with near-balletic grace.

And the nervous titters during the act's more unsavoury moments—and "unsavoury" is a word I don't use lightly—indicated an audience willing to throw caution to the wind.

I won't bore you with plot details of this dark, demented fairy tale, which involves faith, mortality and religious doctrine on a parallel world called Ummo and, at times, seems like a fleshed-out version of TV satire *South Park*.

Suffice it to say these gibberish-spewing misfits make beautiful music together—literally, on twin ukuleles—and are capable of both great tenderness and jarring violence as their fog-drenched world tightens its metaphysical noose.

There's no actual dialogue, though their inscrutable outpourings do segue into recognizably English verbiage every now and then, but their performances are so note-perfect—and Karen Hines' direction so clear and uncluttered—you never feel in the dark about the emotions on display.

They also—and consider yourself warned—make a point of interacting with the audience.

It's a bravura act that will delight many with its outrageous subversion of a popular stereotype, but take heed: that "Not for children!" warning isn't there for promotional purposes.

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Mump and Smoot are national treasures

Last Updated: October 10, 2010 5:30pm

It's been nine years since our last trip to Ummo. Ummo? That's a disordered planet in a parallel universe ruled by a great and terrible god named Ummo. Its only inhabitants seem to be two clowns, Mump and Smoot, who speak in a gibberish known as Ummonian.

They also deal in squirting blood, eviscerations, amputations, pain, and a dollop or two of pathos. They address spirituality, our humanity, use some impressive magic and perform an amputation on stage. With a hacksaw. Gruesome, but funny.

These are not your parents' circus clowns and the show is not for children.

Two clowns that come at you squawking gibberish doesn't sound like much of an evening of entertainment but you will begin to laugh in the first 30 seconds and continue until the final moment.

Mump (Michael Kennard) and Smoot (John Turner) first burst upon Edmonton with their show Something at the Fringe back in 1989. They were the talk of the event and Edmonton's enthusiastic and ever growing audiences proved to them that they could abandon their day jobs and make a life out of a red nose and greasepaint.

Not only are the clowns masters of mime (and existential angst) but they have forged a quicksilver ability at timing and improvisational comedy, developed over 20 years on hundreds of stages all over the world.

Much of their effectiveness is based on how they draw the audience into their adventures. You hope something will go wrong because the two will abandon their narrative and create filigrees of funny off the top of their horned heads. One unfortunate patron dropped a plastic cup in the middle of their show on Saturday night and became the target of a barrage of comic abuse.

They may speak gibberish, but damed if between the body and facial movement and the vocal inflections you don't begin to understand most of what they are saying.

Cracked, currently running at the Roxy, is the darkest of their shows and is a contemplation on friendship and mortality. The bond that exists between the two is touching — even though they may be constantly yammering away at each other.

We know we are in Mump and Smoot country when the show begins with the two pounding the life out of a couple of mice which they then proceed to eat with the air of someone consuming caramelized duck at Wolfgang Puck's.

Mump, the one with the single unicorn horn, is the more cynical, grave and considered of the two, while Smoot is sweet, childlike and impetuous.

The plot has something to do with Smoot getting two potions mixed up — one is benign — the other poisonous. The story is slim enough and mostly a vehicle for the two to make us laugh. And, in this case, cause a quite considerable lump in your throat.

Mump and Smoot are national treasures. They were greeted by warm applause before they uttered a word of Ummo.

The devoted audience was not disappointed.

Four Suns out of five

Mump and Smoot Cracked, commissioned by Theatre Network and playing at the Roxy, runs through Oct 24.

— MACLEAN

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