

Mump & Smoot's new show

Mump & Smoot

in

FLUX

Show Description

Credits

Reviews

2002

ARTS NEWS & REVIEWS

Thursday, May 30, 2002 Page A30 ★



MUMP & SMOOT: Toronto's original outrageous horror clowns Michael Kennard and John Turner opened their new show, *Mump & Smoot In Flux*, last night at Berkeley Street Theatre.

Mump & Smoot still pack wallop

Mump & Smoot In Flux 416-368-3110

By Michael Kennard and John Turner. Directed by Karen Hines. At Berkeley Street Theatre, 26 Berkeley St. to June 23. ★ ★ ★ ★

BY SUSAN WALKER
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

If *Flux* is going to be the last mainstage show for Mump and Smoot, then they intend to go out with a bang and a whimper. There is plenty of bang — literally — and more than a few whimpers of grief or remorse in this show, not all of them from the snivelling Smoot.

Michael Kennard and John Turner have been leading parallel lives as Mump and Smoot on the planet Ummo since 1986, regaling audiences through six full-length shows with their unique brand of clown — part horror, part slapstick, part pathos, underscored with an element of truth.

If they're ready to hang up their running shoes and horned headwear, who can blame them?

Flux finds them in the Ummo wilderness. Paddling past the audience (and possibly paddling some members of the audience), Mump and Smoot enter from a side door, fixing the illusion of a lake at the edge of the stage. For the rest of the show, this will be the running gag, the fourth wall becoming a shoreline that is frequently crossed, always with the reminder that whoever makes the passage must appear to be swimming.

Mump and Smoot's last show, *Something Else*, which ran in the same theatre in 1999, was notable for some major props and special effects. With *Flux*, the pair go low-tech, but

with enough complications in the gear they bring on stage to guarantee a few extra laughs when something doesn't work as it's supposed to. After six shows, it finally dawns on you that screw-ups are welcome opportunities for comic improv. Twice in last night's performance, the action stopped — once when Mump misplaced a bloodpack — and then restarted, in live-action rewind.

The lengthy conversion of the canoe into a tent and the paddles into a spit over the fire mostly occupies Mump, while Smoot entertains the audience with camping and fishing stories told in Ummonian gibberish. It's not long before the blood begins to flow, as Smoot cuts his hand while scaling a fish. And then the scary stuff begins. The mythic Boolawa (Scott MacDonald), subject of a rousing Ummonian campsong, appears in the form of a huge brown bear. Never mind that he looks more like a giant Gila Monster with hair, Smoot, left alone while Mump seeks refuge from his constant "yapping," is terrified. By the third appearance of Boolawa — clowns always follow the rule of three — not only Mump, but some members of the audience have begun to believe in him.

As *Flux* descends into utter mayhem, Mump and Smoot descend into typical wrangling. Smoot's irrepressible enthusiasm dissolves into whining. Mump's exaggerated *savoir-faire* turns to anger as he stalks off stage, with shouts from the seats reminding him to swim.

One detects an extended note of sentimentality as Smoot sits alone, wondering if this is the end of their act. But no, they are reunited.

Long live Mump & Smoot.

C A N A D A ' S N A T I O N A L N E W S P A P E R

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Sun and cloud. Thun

FRINGE FESTIVAL / *If golf is your bag, step up to this sort-of love story. If not, try Shakti, the tantrum dancer, or Mump and Smoot, the clowns of horror.*

Mump and Smoot are back and as darkly funny as ever. Their personalities are unchanged — Mump (Michael Kennard) is the big bossy one in blue tights; Smoot (John Turner) is the small, whiny one in red shorts. Their language is still gibberish, with the odd word of English thrown in. But in their new show *Tense*, their tempers seem to be fraying. As they embark on a camping trip cum spiritual quest for their god Ummo, they are in a foul mood with each other, their complicated props, the audience (feeble participation) and the technician (slow on the cues).

The colourful tent and camping gear slow them down and the ending generates into chaos, but Mump and Smoot never leave character. And it is those grumpy characters, so human in their inability to rise above petty differences and small setbacks, that make any Mump and Smoot show a treat. This Fringe show is billed as part of the clowns' development process, so no doubt a smoother and less improvised version will raise its ghoulish face soon.

The Fringe continues at various locations in the Annex and on the University of Toronto campus until July 13. For tickets and a program call 534-5919.

What's On

EDITOR: Bob Remington, 429-5346

The Edmonton Journal

The Journal Tomorrow



Friday, August 15, 1997

THE HORROR CLOWNS ARE BACK!



Ed Kaiser, *The Journal*

Mump (Mike Kennard, left) and an upside-down Smoot (John Turner), a pair of perennial Fringe faves, appear in *Tense*, on Stage 3

Tense times truly hilarious

MUMP & SMOOT IN 'TENSE'

(Stage 3 — Arts Barns North)
★★★★ of five

“You know, everything else is downhill from here.” The regretful remark came from the woman next to me, settling into her seat for the debut performance of Mump and Smoot’s latest comedic foray into some highly twisted nightmares.

The meaning was clear. These nattering, nihilistic clowns of horror have been perennial hot tickets at The Fringe for very good reason. Absolutely original, reflexively creative, they engage even when they’re stumbling through an opening night minefield of staging and sound gaffes.

You can’t keep a good horror clown down. Folly and fumble are mere ingredients for spontaneous hilarity.

In *Tense*, Mump & Smoot (aka John Turner and Michael Kennard) embark on an apocalyptic camping

trip through their native Ummonian wilderness, a quest in search of fire, fish and their god UMMO. There are arcane rituals, a fearsome “Golliva” with Ginsu teeth and some minor blood-letting, although the traditional Mump and Smoot gore is decidedly soft-pedalled in this still-emerging production.

“You will see new material, some of which will be ditched by tomorrow, as well as accidents (which we refer to as “gifts from the gods”) that will be incorporated forever,” director Karen Hines advises in notes circulated at Friday’s sold-out house.

The material and gifts served up by sweet submissive Smoot and grave and grumpy Mump, chattering in their oddly comprehensible gibberish, won the house over early and doubtless will continue to for the length of their run.

“The best one, the very first play,” my seatmate predicted.

She may be right.

— Richard Helm



Clowns conquer

MUMP & SMOOT IN FLUX written
by Michael Kennard and John

Turner, directed by Karen Hines, with Kennard, Turner and Scott Macdonald. Presented by Mump & Smoot at Berkeley Street Theatre (26 Berkeley). Runs to June 23, Wednesday-Sunday 8 pm. \$20-\$30. 416-368-3110. Rating: MNNN

GO SEE MUMP & SMOOT IN FLUX AND camping will never be the same again.

The demonic duo from the planet Ummo send up every "great outdoors" cliché in the book, and add a few frighteningly funny chapters of their own.

Entering from a side door in a hilariously lifelike boat, the horror clowns disembark onstage, attempt to set up a tent and then discover one problem after another – from a lack of a lighter (cue audience participation and one of the most surprising gags in the show) to the annoying reappearance of a vicious bear named, in their particular brand of gibberish, Boolawa (Scott Macdonald).

Working with a simpler set than their last show, the clowns have carved out an archetypal tale of survival among the elements. Of course, as with all their works, the story is made funnier and emotionally richer by the character interactions, the annoyingly chatty and childlike Smoot (John Turner) constantly testing the limits of the bossy and seemingly dominant Mump (Michael Kennard).

Karen Hines's direction ensures that every bump in the night is felt, and Greg Morrison's soundscape – including a catchy song about the dreaded Boolawa – is as much fun as the performances.

Turner and Kennard are such deft improvisers that technical problems – and there were a couple on opening night – only mean opportunities for bigger, unexpected laughs.

This is the clown duo's first show in nearly four years, and their appearances are always reassuring and (dare I say it?) therapeutic. Mump's ambivalent sighs and Smoot's high-pitched pleas and occasional growls speak directly to our primal fears and joys.

Praise be to Ummo: the clowns are back in town. **GS**

A gruesome campout with the clowns from hell

Macabre duo scare
up good, gory fun
in wilderness foray

LIZ NICHOLLS
Journal Theatre Writer
EDMONTON

In one of the great entrances of the year, Mump and Smoot arrive onstage through a darkened Theatre Network, by canoe.

The sound of rippling water, the flash of paddles in the moonlight, the cry of the loon, the whispered Ummonian floating in the night air. ... Yes, the "horror clowns" from the planet Ummo have ventured once more unto the wilderness — in search of spiritual renewal? inspiration? a really big fish? The thing about camping holidays (and holy communion with nature generally) that makes a Mump and Smoot expedition into the Great Outdoors such a delicious idea is the potential for turning tranquillity into hell, on a dime. One mosquito in the tent, one Bic left at home, one grizzly bear with enormous teeth ... and, damn, the moment is lost.

The macabre duo, who speak Ummonian, a gibberish language that has hilarious sporadic affinities with English, have bonded with nature before (*Mump And Smoot In Tense*, 1997). This new show, premiering in the Theatre Network season, has a different flavour from that gore-splattered declension into chaos and hostility.

Mump (Michael Kennard), the taller, graver one, the one in charge, seems sadder somehow, troubled perhaps. He needs this vacation. Smoot (John Turner), more excitable, more guileless, more easily squelched than his confrere, seems almost relieved to be away from whatever passes for daily routine on Ummo. Being Smoot he can't resist trying more and more loon calls, ecstatic at being bilingual when the loon answers. But Mump's inevitable Shhhh seems milder than usual, or Smoot anticipates it sooner. The same watchfulness inhabits the moment when Smoot with sinking heart realizes the lighter isn't in his backpack, and Mump, suddenly weary if not exactly conciliatory, grits his teeth, say it's OK and sets about finding one in the audience.

As they set up the tent, gregar-



SUPPLIED IAN JACKSON

Smoot, left, and his clown cohort Mump get cosy with nature.

THEATRE REVIEW

Mump And Smoot In Flux

★★★★

Theatre: Theatre Network at the Roxy

Directed by: Karen Hines

Starring: Michael Kennard, John Turner

Running: through March 10

Tickets and info: 453-2440

ious Smoot chatters away to the audience in top-speed Ummonian, confidentially recounting past camping disasters. And Mump's normal edge of eyerolling exasperation is weirdly tempered by a look that hints at a certain "listen to yourself, Mump" fatigue with his role of being the doer, the arranger.

There is something to be resolved here: Mump and Smoot, who have been to hell and back together, with hold-overs in purgatory, these last dozen years, are in *Flux*. Their new show, directed by longtime associate Karen Hines, is framed by a quest that's more indefinable than usual, something you might want to call reassessment if you don't mind annoying people.

It sets the post-apocalyptic Smothers Brothers up in a gothic landscape full of manly activity, from building a campfire (think about Mump and Smoot playing with matches and shudder) to impaling a creature and roasting it on a spit. And fishing! Now, there's a relaxing pastime, with Smoot's glee at catching and clubbing one turning to horror at

the fact of death. They're enjoyably spooked by the woods, and instead of a campfire tale with a bogeyman, they share a dark vaudevillian ditty about Boolawa, the mythical bear who haunts the wilderness. In their musical theatre debut (music by Greg Morrison) Mump sounds a bit like Tom Waits.

There are solo philosophical ruminations. Smoot's delight in the beauty of the stars turns to the existential horror of being a small lone being called Smoot in a vast, empty and possibly meaningless universe. Mump has a crisis of faith, too; even his horn seems to be giving him a headache.

Typically they fall out over belief. Mump's irritable skepticism has to be readjusted when Boolawa actually shows up, and like every villain in a Mump and Smoot show, he's impressively huge and ferocious, not just some toy bear. Smoot actually rises to the occasion, which startles both clowns to no end. Yes, it's all good gory fun, calibrated to start small and mount, from the cut on the hand through decapitation and disembowlement, and an apology that is more momentous than either. The chemistry is winningly, and precisely, set forth in this delightful show.

And as usual, we get to join the fray, since part of the fun of any Mump and Smoot show is how quick Kennard and Turner are on their feet, and how playful they are about the whole theatrical illusion. A woman who left to have a pee will be regretting that last beer today, I should think, since she had to swim through the theatre.

ONSTAGE

Roughing it

Horror clowns triumph over the wilderness

MUMP & SMOOT IN FLUX

Until Mar. 10

Created and performed by Michael

Kennard and John Turner

Theatre Network

Roxy Theatre (10708-124 Street)

Tickets: (780) 453-2440

★★★ (out of five)

AS A KID, I WAS TOTALLY, WILDLY terrified of clowns, from their wide grease-paint grins down to the tips of their floppy shoes.

Not that I was alone. Loads of children are terrified of clowns, maybe because of a deep, dark subtext that's unexpectedly built into the persona. Something about



ADVENTURES IN RAINBOW COUNTRY meets Heart of Darkness as Mump and Smoot paddle into the depths of the camping psyche.

the form leads to an almost instinctual deconstruction of the darker side of the human condition. (Stephen King's evil demon clown in *It* or the hedonistic Krusty the Clown on *The Simpsons* jump immediately to mind).

Another case in point: the work of Michael Kennard and John Turner, the talented clown duo known (and wildly loved by Edmontonians) as Mump & Smoot, the self-proclaimed "clowns of horror" currently playing in their brand-new full-length show called *Flux*.

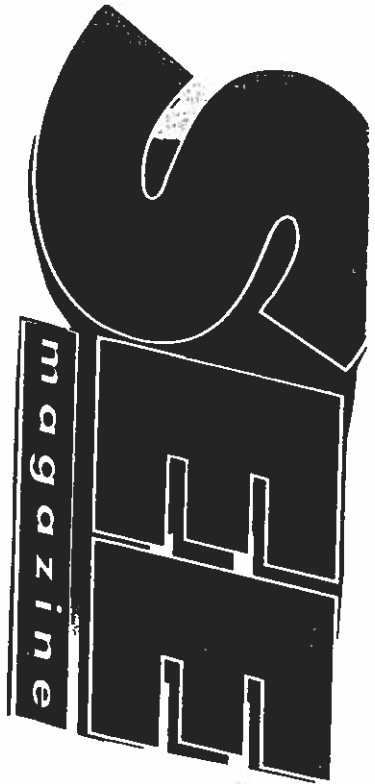
Embracing the sinister underpinnings of Bozo-dom, the accomplished acting team (a perennial Fringe favourite since the mid-'80s) in their latest romp riff off of the über-Canuck past-time of camping, taking a particularly perverse and blood-soaked swipe at what would seem to be a placid hobby.

Leave it up to this horned couple to turn the banalities of starting a fire, setting up a tent and fending off mosquitos into hilarious physical / prop comedy fare. (And that's even before the fearsome "boolawa" shows up.)

Needless to say, this is no Thoreau-esk Walden Pond sojourn. Almost the exact opposite: despite their desire for peace and quiet, the deeply frantic clown couple just can't stand any kind of stillness, and they sabotage the prospect of a restful forest visit whenever it threatens to emerge from the wilderness. Even Tucker's seemingly innocent attempt at taking a philosophical break and contemplating his relative insignificance in the face of a star-rich wilderness night — no mean feat going this deep, given that the duo work almost entirely in gibberish — leads to him having a scream-filled panic attack. What a fine theatrical jewel: think Campfire Girls meet Sartre.

What impresses the most is that how endlessly literate this comedy team is (especially given how accessible and basic their humour might be — Commedia del Arte meets Barnum and Bailey) and how layered their performances end up being. How many other troupes do you know who can

deftly and seamlessly parody a children's song crossed with musical theatre and opera styling — without benefit of recognizable text?



REVIEW

ALBERTA THEATRE PROJECTS PRESENTS MUMP & SMOOT IN FLUX, WRITTEN AND CREATED BY MICHAEL KENNARD AND JOHN TURNER, DIRECTED BY KAREN HINES, 7:30 P.M. TUESDAY THROUGH SATURDAY (SUNDAY MATINEES, 3 P.M.) THROUGH MARCH 24 AT THE MARTHA COHEN THEATRE. TICKETS/INFO: \$20 TO \$50, AVAILABLE THROUGH TICKET-MASTER (299-8888) OR AT THE ATP BOX OFFICE (294-7402). AUDIENCE ADVISORY: NOT SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN.

BOB CLARK
CALGARY HERALD

Forget Flux — Michael Kennard and John Turner should call their new show Mump & Smoot Go Camping.

From the moment they paddle into the Martha Cohen Theatre until they disappear into their tent more than an hour later — in the wake of a dubiously graphic encounter with a Boolawa — Kennard's Mump and Turner's Smoot offer an inimitably comic take on making do in the wild unknown.

Billed as "clowns of horror who delight in the chaos of a nightmarish world," Canada's pre-eminent, and perhaps only, existential clown duo seems to have mellowed since its last appearance for ATP in Something Else two years ago.

Gone, for example, is some of the satirical edge and

Camping

was never like this

grotesque anarchic nuttiness that characterized the earlier work. Instead, in Flux we find our two hapless wanderers from the planet Ummo learning to get along in the kind of co-operative outdoor venture that most of us know all too well.

The patented Ummonian gibberish that passes between the two as they busy themselves coping with the forces of nature is as intelligibly conveyed as ever, thanks to the pair's mastery of mime and vocal inflection.

Uttering the lion's share of the show's nonsense in his little-boy voice as he scoots and waddles around in his baggy red shorts, Turner's Smoot presented a lovable picture of arrested development. Kennard's Mump, the straight-man in a clown act reminiscent of famous comedy teams of the past, got some of the evening's biggest laughs either through working the audience or berating it (a request for a lighter and the

subsequent reminder to the person who volunteered it that he was moving through deep water was a particular favourite).

Through flawless timing and finely-calculated movement, Kennard and Turner showed once more how subtle and delightful the art of clowning can be.

The program notes somewhat portentously inform us that "Flux is a spiritually gothic horror clown play that deals with issues such as death, sadness, the environment, relationships, balance, fear and love."

That may all be true, but what really comes across is the fact that — in spite of a muddled and seemingly arbitrary ending — Flux is very funny and ingenious entertainment.

Its appeal lies in the fact that we can let ourselves go and feel like kids, laughing at its inspired silliness without feeling self-conscious about it.