

MUMP AND SMOOT

**SOMETHING
REVIEWS**

VANCOUVER FRINGE FESTIVAL
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**FRINGE
FESTIVAL**

The Vancouver Sun, Saturday, September 9, 1989 . ★★ ★



SEND IN THE CLOWNS: Mump and Smoot have deadly sense of humor, but not for the kiddies

Clowns from hell offer something wild and new

If you believe the Fringe Festival exists to offer something wild and new, you've got to see Mump and Smoot.

These two clowns from hell (or thereabouts) turn just about every bozo cliché on its head before adding skits no mainstream rubber-nose would touch.

Their show is understandably listed as performance art/dance. Mump and Smoot tend to run

around and throw things, and speak a gibberish all their own. But the characters are the highlights.

Suave and self-important Mump and his Hardy-esque sidekick Smoot will draw you in to the point where you end up chanting to raise the dead. That's after the duo defiles a corpse, hunts for treasure and eats dinner. Yes, eats dinner.

The make-up and costumes are wonderful and

carefully thought out.

Mump and Smoot will make you laugh, take sides and do silly things. They'll also send you smiling out of the theatre and all the way down the block.

(MUMP & SMOOT: SOMETHING. at Heritage Hall, 3102 Main. Sept 9, 10, 11 at 2:30 p.m. and Sept. 14 - 16 at 11:15 p.m.)

— LISA TAYLOR

Metropolitan

Saturday, June 11, 1994

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The Dallas Morning News

THEATER REVIEW

'Something' is something else

Mump and Smoot goose low humor to new heights

By Jerome Weeks

Theater Critic of The Dallas Morning News

Mump and Smoot are the Ren and Stimpy of clowns — if Ren and Stimpy prattled in high-pitched gibberish, worshiped a god named Umno and enjoyed playing baseball with severed body parts.

In short, they present a hilarious brand of clown theater. In them, the savage congeals with the playfully childlike to produce a lot of squishy-splattery-funny stuff, the glop of comedy. The two Canadian performers, Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot), accompanied by their glowering assisant, Thug (Rick Kunst), opened the second annual Big D Festival of the Unexpected at the Dallas Theater Center Friday with their show, *Something*.

Of the pair, Mump is the slightly more refined, affecting a thin facade of worried dignity. Smoot is the perennial, put-upon younger sibling, either loudly aggrieved or gleefully maniacal. Debuting in Toronto in 1988, Mump and Smoot eventually put together three of their earliest set pieces to create *Something*. The show finds the duo confronting a forbidding waiter in a restaurant, then bewailing the death of a fellow clown and finally playing doctor



BACK TO BASICS: John Turner (left) as Smoot and Michael Kennard as Mump bring their maniacal *Something* to Dallas.

with slashed-artery and flung-body-fluid results.

Contemporary clowns such as the Kipper Kids or the Blue Man Group often regress through the satiric-anarchic to that primitive point where clowning has not yet climbed out of diapers and food fights. Here, in comparison, Mump and Smoot have not abandoned — or devel-

oped beyond — the classic building blocks of simple vaudeville-clown routines.

What distinguishes their clowning, however — other than their synthetic-rubber, idiot-children-from-outer-space characters — is a willingness to play with the macabre, to address death and pain with a spritz and a pratfall. We may take delight in their worshipful dependence on Umno, but Mump and Smoot's clowning has a brutal, Beckett-like reductiveness to it. All of religion becomes a matter of frightened children muttering nonsense and hoping for the best.

As evidenced Friday, Mr. Kennard and Mr. Turner are also agile improvisers. Although much of their squealing sing-song sounds like a senile French teacher on helium, there are identifiable English references, such as "doggy bag," "just a little sip on weekends" and, when a particular wine glass did not function as hoped, "cheap prop."

Mump and Smoot are abusive toward audience members. They set bad examples for the children and Martians among us. One devoutly hopes that they may be the first performers to return, soon, to the Big D Festival.

■ PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Mump and Smoot in *Something*, presented as part of the Big D Festival of the Unexpected at the Dallas Theater Center, 3636 Turtle Creek, through June 12. 8:30 p.m. Saturday, 9:45 p.m. Sunday. Tickets \$5, \$10 for festival pass. Reservations recommended. Call 522-TIXX.

Yukon Science Fiction Writer Jerome Stueart, the Yukon, and Science Fiction in Wild Places

Gross Heart: Much to Love about Mump and Smoot Leave a comment



(<http://www.mumpandsmoot.com>) Canadian clowns, Mump and Smoot (with Thug), were in Whitehorse tonight in a revival of their first show together, *Something*. I was led to believe it was going to be scary, or disturbing--but these were not scary clowns. While there are some grotesque moments, there's a charming show beneath the grossness. It stems from the deep friendship between characters Mump and Smoot, developed more than twenty years ago by John Turner and Micheal Kennard.

On stage, there is a sense that Mump, a bit rule-bound and dictatorial, is trying to be a mentor to Smoot, or a father-figure. Smoot, on the other hand, is young, innocent, full of whim, silly even, more uncontrollable--like a child. His voice even sounds a bit like Elmo from Sesame Street, though he can easily scowl at the audience and berate them just as much as Mump. But the two clowns cry together, miss each other, play together, and are true friends--even if they play doctor

and (unintentionally) hurt each other. It's not Laurel and Hardy I think of but Abbot and Costello. Or even George and Gracie.

Our audience was completely charmed by these two--and I laughed through the whole thing--there's really only a few moments that you can stop laughing. Sometimes you are laughing at what the clowns are doing to other members of the audience. The Audience serves as the fourth member of the show, and completely unpredictable. John and Mike, afterwards in the talkback, referred to what the Audience does at their shows, as "gifts." They don't know how the audience will react, but they take whatever the audience does and uses it in the show. This is why the show is different every night. Sure there are several "acts" they go through--but the audience determines paths they will take in the act.

Yes, there are some grotesque moments, but comedy and the grotesque have often gone together. Abbot and Costello meet Frankenstein comes to mind as comedy exploring inside Horror. We all still laugh--in fact fear makes us want to laugh all the more. Movies that play with death, or that use a dead body as a running gag, or that find humor in zombies (see Sean of the Dead). Saturday Night Live's spoof on Julia Child severing her own finger while doing a live cooking show--this is what they mean by grotesque, or

Whatever it is, Mump and Smoot make it funny

PAUL BLIMOV / blimov@vuweekly.com

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

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

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



REVUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SOMETHING, directed by Karen Hines. Featuring Mump, Smoot and Wog. Presented at the Factory Theatre Studio Cafe, Toronto, until Dec. 3.

Theatre traditionally has been forced to exaggerate its conventions for its audience. Rarely does the old adage of "less is more" apply.

However, Theatre of the Absurd broke ground in doing just that. It was met with mixed reviews: artists appreciated the subtle nuances, while audiences were reluctant to storm the box office.

A perfect compromise has been struck by the unique comedy trio of Mump, Smoot and Wog (Michael Kennard, John Turner and Debbie Tidy, respectively) by presenting this absurdist piece with universal appeal.

Mump and Smoot are on an expedition in search of "something". Along the way they encounter the mysterious and malicious Wog who provides a form of "tragic relief" by inflicting minor annoyances on the two comic travellers.

They manage to evade her playful wrath enough to engage in some of the most irresistible and contagious humour on stage today. Their pot-shots at restaurant manners, funeral

etiquette and the medical profession are both incisive and accurate.

This keen perception coupled with Mump and Smoot's refreshingly childish innocence make their humour not only funny, but sincere.

The fact that so much is conveyed so successfully with no set, minimal props and a script

of gibberish (with dashes of at least five languages) is proof that Theatre of the Absurd can be for the masses too.



Mump & Smoot a riot

Michael Kennard and John Turner mate the grotesque and collegial humor of Ren & Stimpy to the childish tantrums of Bert & Ernie.

The resulting hybrid is somewhat like Laurel & Hardy — except with grease paint, red noses and clown antics that would make Bozo faint.

Kennard and Turner call themselves Mump & Smoot, clowns from hell.

You'll call them terribly weird, terribly funny and a terrible thing to miss.

The Torontonians had 'em howling at the Globe Theatre on Thursday, the opening night of a four-show run there.

Mump & Smoot introduced themselves by becoming pigs at a quaint cafe.

After violating every conceivable rule of etiquette laid out by Emily Post, they turned a wake into a baseball game TSN would never broad-

'Clowns from hell' are weird but funny

Turner performed three skits that take adults (no kids, please) to *The Twilight Zone* of clowning.

Replacing Rod Serling's chillingly calm bass is a gibberish called Umonian. Imagine the sounds Saturday-morning cartoon characters would make on a sugar high. Then triple it.

There's no denying Mump & Smoot are different.

There's also no denying that since these two wackos combined talents (swapped prescriptions?) in 1987, they have been huge hits at fringe theatre festivals across the continent.

What makes Mump & Smoot tick is a clowning style that's both absurd and primal. Their comedy aims for the emotional jugular — and hits a bull's eye every time despite work-



Bernard Pilon
at the

THEATRE

Mump & Smoot
Globe Theatre
through Sunday

cast. Then, just to prove they weren't crazy (yeah, right), M&S paid a visit to the doctor for a spoof on the yearly physical — complete with amputation, operation, imagination.

For 75 minutes, Kennard and

ing with subject matters that should otherwise be tasteless.

Leading the lowbrow charge is Turner's two-horned Smoot. He's the foil to Kennard's autocratic straight man, Mump.

Turner's rubber face shifts from giddy delight to wounded anger with lightning speed. He treads timidly, pigeon-toed, around the stage until Kennard's manipulative character creates another situation guaranteed to end in disaster.

M&S are at their best when ad-libbing with the audience. Patrons should be prepared to be vocal and participate in the silliness — not to mention a possible game of waste-can basketball.

Go with Mump & Smoot to the planet Ummo. It's an odd place to visit, but the trip is a laugh riot.

THEATRE PREVIEW • HORROR CLOWNS • BY SCOTT LINGLEY | 59 | words

There's Something Happening Here

MUMP & SMOOT BRING THEIR VERY FIRST COLLABORATION BACK TO EDMONTON, AND IT'S JUST AS TWISTED AS EVER

MUMP & SMOOT IN "SOMETHING"

Directed by Karen Hines. Written and performed by Michael Kennard and John Turner. Feb 7-17, TransAlta Arts Barns (10330-84 Ave). Tickets available from the Arts Barns box office (409-1910).

What makes a grown man want to put on tights and a red nose and cavort around stages across Canada speaking nonstop gibberish? In the guise of Mump, Michael Kennard has been doing just that for the better part of two decades with partner-in-clowning John Turner (aka Smoot). He's not sure how he ended up in the professional clowning racket, but he has some theories...

"Here's the weird thing," Kennard says. "My dad was a doctor and John's dad was a doctor. Mine was a prosthetics specialist and John's was a criminal psychologist. So if you fuse those two together, you sort of get Mump and Smoot."

This insight may not conclusively settle the nature vs. nurture question, but it does explain a lot about Kennard and Turner's twisted stage incarnations and the grotesque antics they began devising 20 years



"An Arrogant Asshole... But With Heart" | Mump & Smoot commit unrepeatable clownish carnage, and we love them for it. PHOTO BY VAN JACKSON/EPIC PHOTOGRAPHY

recalls, "so we'd only done three shows, then we drove out to Edmonton. I remember John and I sitting in the Volkswagen van getting ready for our show and going, 'What are those people all lined up for? Someone told us it was for us and we were like, 'How? Why?' And it's been great ever since."

Kennard and Turner never planned on remounting *Something*, but then again, they never planned on putting their malevolent alter egos aside for so long either. "Basically," Kennard says, "six years ago, we were both a bit tired of the touring and wanted to explore some other stuff personally. It's not that we wanted to retire—John and I have always said at 80 we'd still be doing the show in wheelchairs—but we needed a break from it and we said whenever it feels right again, we'll do it again."

The impetus came in the form of an invitation from Fringe Theatre Adventures for Mump & Smoot to revisit their first show in Edmonton. The offer coincided with Kennard's joining the University of Alberta's Department of Drama, which made the decision easy. *Something* reteams Kennard and Turner with perennial director Karen Hines (an acclaimed performer in her own right, thanks to her darkly funny *Pochsy* shows)

and is deliberately quite similar to the original production.

"We're working at changing a few little things," Kennard says, "but we don't want to change the integrity at the heart of the show and what it is. 'John and I may be a bit slower'—here he lets out a hearty laugh—"but not *that* much slower."

One enhancement *Something's* 21st century audiences will get to enjoy is the addition of a live music soundtrack provided by Edmonton's own Darrin Hagen, whom Kennard and Turner befriended backstage at Fringe Midnight Madness shows and the Winnipeg Comedy Festival. "We've enjoyed working with Darrin and we thought it would be a great change to have live music as opposed to recorded music," Kennard says. "We want him to be present onstage because we'd like to interact with him."

Anyone familiar with the clowns' ghastly hijinks and Hagen's distinctive comedic talents can let their imaginations run wild at that thought. But for those who have never met Mump, Kennard offers a concise description of his grease-painted doppelgänger.

"'Arrogant asshole,'" he laughs. "But an arrogant asshole with some kind of heart."

There's *Something* about Mump and Smoot

PAUL BENDON / Minor@vancouverweekly.com

Like the way I eat my yogurt?" Michael Kennard jokingly prods during our lunchtime interview, consuming the tiny serving of dairy without use of a spoon. It's a curious way for a grown man to eat lunch, and in a way, it's telling—he happens to be one of Canada's most revered clowns.

Although Kennard's currently teaching in the U of A's drama department, he's soon to revisit his fringe-trotting glory days with cohort John Turner. The pair—who, as clowns Mump and Smoot, live on planet Ummo, bow to the god Ummo and speak Ummontian—are taking to the stage for the first time in six years to present their first-ever fringe hit, *Something*, to a new generation of audiences.

"At the beginning of that six-year [gap] we'd been touring a lot, and we needed a break from touring, from the characters and from each other; we both had other things we wanted to do," Kennard explains. "So [we said], 'Let's just stop doing it for a while, and when we start getting the urge again, we'll do it [again].'"

"Over those six years we still worked together on different projects," he adds. "So the company never disappeared, Mump and Smoot just took a nap."

PREVIEW MUMP AND SMOOT IN SOMETHING

THUR. FEB. 7 - SUN. FEB. 17 (8 PM)
DIRECTED BY KAREN HINES
STARRING MICHAEL KENNARD, JOHN TURNER,
CHRISTEL BARTLESE
TRANS ALIA ARTS BARRIS (10630 - 94 AVENUE)
\$15 - \$23 (AGES 18+)

MUMP AND SMOOT'S bumbling beginnings stretch back a full two decades, when Kennard and Turner together took a clowning class taught by renowned clown trainer Richard Pochinko. Upon his urgings, they collaborated together a 20-minute show called *Jump the Gun*, the first step in a career that not only includes seven full-length shows but has seen them perform internationally to wild acclaim, teach all over the country and gather a tidy pile of awards for their efforts. But writing the material for two "horror clowns" hasn't gotten easier with age; it's just gotten more engrossing, with work beginning on shows years before any audience gets a peek.

"It's a long process; if you were to look at the placement of the shows, the first couple came close together, but then you'd see that there's two or three years between each [later] show," Kennard says, uncoiling the



plastic wrap around his sandwich and sizing it up while he finishes his answer. "When we were doing the Fringes way back, we never felt that we had a new show until we'd done at least 50 or 100 [performances]. Then you've made all the discoveries, and you've done all the tweaking."

Kennard and Turner were asked specifically by the Fringe to bring back their original show, and for them, it

was about time to resurrect their clownish duo—"John and I had just started talking about creating a new show, so we thought we'd use this as a springboard," he admits—and despite the lengthy time since they last performed *Something* Kennard seems unconcerned about dusting off his old material. After embodying Mump for so many shows, little, if anything, could phase him.

"[Redoing *Something*] should be ... I won't say easy—we've had to do all the producing, and revamping material and stuff—but if we're trusting, [the characters] will just come back easily," he says. "I mean, we've done that show over 500 times, so we know what it's about. It'll probably be on the fourth night in the run and something will happen and we'll go, 'Ahh, that's what we did there.'" ▼

Sunday Review

Mump and Smoot are something else

By COLIN MACLEAN
Staff Writer

Once again, Mump and Smoot take us on a quest.

Like Sir Lancelot or Faust, these two cheerfully gruesome clowns dare the powers of an infinite being (in this case the Great God Ummo) and must experience a voyage of self-discovery before they are allowed to find peace.

In this epic element that lifts their journey from a collection of (very funny) skits to the status of classic theatre. They may fill the stage with blood, viscera and splatter but their full-length clown performance is anchored in the stuff of myth.

Mump (Michael Kennard) is the long one with the slow burn and single unicorn horn. Smoot (John Turner) is his stunted sidekick with the goat's horns and short fuse. They create a world that runs by strict rules but within those rules, there is barely controlled anarchy.

Something Else begins in the

dark. We first hear the sound of Ummonian, the pair's own peculiar band of gibberish, in the distance. Don't worry

about the language, in about 10 minutes you will, strangely enough, begin to understand everything they are saying.

The boys are in search of Ummo. When the Great God doesn't answer their prayer immediately, they unleash the evil genie Zug (Christian Laurin), a frightening apparition. He grants them access to their innermost desires which they hilariously pursue, only to learn, as all heroes do, that all your excesses and sins become part of your life and return to haunt you.

So, the two transport us into a series of outrageously funny but often unsettling adventures.

Mump becomes a magician but, although some of his illusions are impressive, he can't get it quite right. When he summons the rabbit out of the hat, one of the hapless bunny's legs is torn off. Smoot is a chef and prepares a particularly odious dish called Patooie, which features a small green lizard-like creature the two cook up for some poor schmuck from the audience. When the lizard won't die, they chop the arm off the puppeteer below the stage. The two

become soldiers and, at one point, Mump declares war on the audience and we end up throwing balls at each other. In a particularly effective bit of theatre, the two blast off into space where they float in slow motion amongst the stars.

M and S get a lot of help, first from the audience, which they play like Clapton plays the guitar.

Zug is a fearsome creation and Greg Morrison, looking like some alien whose body hasn't quite been assembled correctly, provides a splendidly infernal score and soundscape.

Mump and Smoot are unique. There is no other experience in this country that can compare to their ability to create and inhabit a brilliantly conceived world - a twisted circle of hell that will often leave you helpless with laughter.

Mump and Smoot in Something Else is produced by Theatre Network at the Roxy. The performance runs until Feb. 20.

MUMP AND SMOOT IN SOMETHING ELSE - 4 SUNS (out of 5)

(Click the button to see area reports for the CBC Edmonton News.)



File photo
Mump and Smoot are at the Roxy until Feb. 20.

FRINGE

YOU

THE EDMONTON JOURNAL, Thursday, August 24, 1989

Mump and Smoot in Something with Wog (Stage 6)
If you see no other show at The Fringe, see this.

Mump and Smoot, two "horror clowns," walk into the room with flashlights and a treasure map, bewildered by their surroundings and easily startled by anything that moves — and several things that don't. They are looking for something, but what it is we're not sure. Mump and Smoot don't speak English, you see, communicating instead by using their own language, which sounds like a cross between Sanskrit and gibberish. Out of this incomprehensible gobbledeegook emerges a completely original play that is easily the best thing I've seen so far at The Fringe.

Mump and Smoot's treasure hunt gets sidetracked by an Alice in Wonderland-type journey in which they are placed into a variety of situations by the expressionless Wog, a perfect villainess with a pasty white face who looks like something out of Night of the Living Dead. Instead of a rabbit hole, a black obelisk leads Mump and Smoot into Wog's netherworld, where they: 1) are treated to dinner at a cafe where Wog is the waitress, 2) attend the funeral of a dead clown they obviously know, and 3) become doctor and patient (with, Oh no! Wog as the nurse!) when Smoot becomes ill.

Despite the indecipherable dia-

logue, the clowns' distinct personalities are evident. Mump (the one with the unicorn-like spike sticking out of his head), is the dominant, more refined of the two. Smoot (the one with the red horns) plays, well, the clown.

This is fine theatrical comedy in which even the change of sets is done as drama, with Wog as stage manager alongside a black-robed monk. Thank you Michael Kennard (Mump), John Turner (Smoot) and Debbie Tidy (Wog) for a truly unique show.

—Bob Remington

BOB REMINGTON:

I liked Mump and Smoot (Stage 6) so much I went back the next night and dragged other people with me.

These two wonderful "clowns of horror" speak their own language (gibberish), yet somehow you understand every word they say. They are a little bit Laurel and Hardy, a little bit David Cronenberg, and their show is an inventive program that for me was the find of the Fringe.

Mump and Smoot are accompanied by the silent, mysterious Wog, the Garbo of horror. She changes sets and acts as villainess, remaining in character even through two curtain calls and standing ovation. You won't go wrong with this one.

—B.R.

HELEN METELLA:

I found myself plotting wickedly gruesome ways to seek revenge during six of the 12 plays I saw.

To avoid bringing a murder rap down around your ears, steer clear of these not-yet-ready-for-a-paying-customer clunkers: Perhaps a Bit of Pate, The Powers of Disbelief, Paper Dragons and Dora Alice Falls To Grace.

Lucky for you, Four No Trump and I Love No Name have already closed.

My favorite shows were Mump and Smoot (which I happily paid for) and Black Comedy, White Liars, which has unfortunately completed its run.



Mump, left and Smoot provide fine theatrical comedy

► pickof the fringe

NOW AUGUST 10-23, 1989



Horror clowns John Turner (left) and Michael Kennard bring splendid performances and a unique language to the nightmarish but hilarious adventures that lift Something out of the ordinary.

SOMETHING, created and performed by John Turner and Michael Kennard, directed by Karen Hines. Palmerston Theatre. \$5. Rating: NNN

Mump (Michael Kennard) and Smoot (John Turner) have been described as "two clowns of horror who delight in a nightmarish world," but they really seem more like a Martian Abbott and Costello with painted faces. Mump is the straight man, leading the way through various adventures with his trusty flashlight, and Smoot the goofy and easily scared funnyman. What lifts their show *Something* above the ordinary, however, are the performances of both men, especially their facility with their chosen language — a mixture of gibberish, French, fractured or rapid-fire English and god knows what else — which they use throughout the play, and which becomes more or less understandable.

Mump and Smoot's journey takes them to a snooty restaurant, a funeral home and, in their best sequence, a hospital, where Smoot is operated upon with horrible and hilarious consequences. This humour is horror only because the body's processes and weaknesses are frightening.

— MD ●

Something Lovable and Grotesque

By Bernadette DeSantis

Brace yourselves. Mump and Smoot, those lovable "clowns of horror" have returned to Toronto with a vengeance named Wog and a twisted comedy called *Something that's going to make you die—laughing*.

Mump and Smoot are Toronto clown duo Michael Kennard and John Turner. The more sophisticated Mump is the domineering partner, lighting the path for the wayward Smoot, forever chastising his apologetic playmate for his ineptitude. Clown class buddy Debbie Tidy is Wog, the personification of Mump and Smoot's scariest nightmares. Their act is the *Twilight Zone* version of some of the best-loved comedy classics from Laurel and Hardy to Monty Python. It's ghastly, it's gruesome, and it's great. It's improv comedy at its best.

Something is a series of theatrical sketches loosely connected by Mump and Smoot's curious search for "something". This mysterious treasure hunt draws the frightened duo out from the dark theatre and propels them through a stomach-turning spaghetti dinner at a snobbish cafe, a sportive social call with the remains of a departed clown friend, and a bloody romp through the doctor's office. Mump and Smoot will do

anything for an ooh or a yuk from the audience. Mump doesn't even wince when he accidentally pulls his patient's right leg out of his socket—tendons dangling and all—during a routine examination, leaving the dismembered Smoot to hop about on one leg begging for the return of the other.

While all the sketches are equally demented, my favourite scene is *The Wake*. Mump and Smoot approach the coffin of their dead clown friend crying and wailing and clinging to each other in a heartwarming display of genuine grief. But you can't help laughing at them because they look totally ridiculous in those one- and two-horned spandex bathing caps they wear on their heads. By this time, the audience has gotten used to that incomprehensible gibberish they speak, so the focus shifts to watching their gestures.

They both move in for a last goodbye. Smoot tries to copy Mump's gesture of a remorseful handshake, but the clumsy Smoot winds up tearing the dead clown's arm out of its socket. His own horror lasts just long enough to get himself a reprimand from Mump.

But before he puts the sinuous arm back in its socket, the incorrigible Smoot decides to have a little fun. The arm instantly becomes a baton, back-scratcher, even a baseball bat. Mump just can't resist getting in on the fun and the two

sorrowful mourners wind up in a gruesome game of baseball with guess-what-part-of-the-body as a ball.

You might be wondering why, after all these violent grotesqueries, I call Mump and Smoot "lovable." The answer lies in the impeccable performance of Kennard and Turner, who convince us that Mump and Smoot are clowns first, before they are monsters. If Mump victimizes his gullible playmate for a few kicks, all Smoot has to do is turn his sad clown eyes on the audience to win some sympathy for his cause. Besides, it becomes obvious that neither one of them is very wicked, they just delight in playing gruesome games.

But Wog, the silent villainess, has enough malicious intent brewing behind those stern eyes of hers to do all three of them in. She is the one who casts an evil spell over Mump which forces him to operate on Smoot with a pizza cutter. (Fortunately, Smoot's wounds are nothing that a handy staple gun won't fix.) Wog is a deadly serious authority figure, and Tidy's performance is completely consistent with this characterization.

If you see one show this semester, see this one. I guarantee you'll walk out grinning from ear to ear. Warning: You may not sleep at night!



Mump and Smoot, or Smoot and Mump, in *Something at the Factory* Theatre Studio Cafe, 125 Bathurst St, from Nov. 15 through Dec. 3. Not shown: Wog. Check this out, dismemberment fans!

Clown pair thrive beyond the fringe

Mump & Smoot in "Something" 504-9971

Created and performed by Mike Kennard and John Turner, directed by Karen Hines. Set design by Campbell Manning, lighting by Michel Charbonneau, music by David Hines. To Jan. 8 at Factory Theatre, 125 Bathurst St. (at Adelaide).

By SUSAN WALKER
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

First-night jinxes did nothing to dispel the hilarity of Mump & Smoot, performing their 1988 hit *Something* at Factory Theatre's main stage.

After all these years, you'd think, nothing could go wrong. But halfway through the last skit, "The Doctor," it did. Mump (Michael Kennard), about to commit surgery on Smoot (John Turner), reached for a paddle that wasn't there.

So well did they enact the ensuing chaos as Mump raced backstage, leaving Smoot ("I'm dying out here") to fill the gap, that it seemed an intentional spoof on stage nightmares.

These two clowns, wedded since meeting at a Second City workshop in 1987, have so perfected their characters, they might as well be Siamese Smothers Brothers. Speaking a wonderfully expressive gibberish, they made their appearance as latecomers to the theatre, bearing flashlights and pushing aside the patrons' knees as they made their way toward the stage in excited whispers.

Dialodging two actual ticketholders, they kept up the spectator schtick until the lure of an empty stage prompted Smoot run up for a brief clownish turn. Seguing neatly into "The Cafe," they took their places on stage for an extended version of *Something* directed by Karen Hines.

The first of three productions about

to be retired by M&S, *Something* will be followed by remounts of *Caged*, first performed at the Fringe of Toronto in 1990, and *Ferno*, first staged in 1992.

This two-man festival of physical humor (actually three, with player Rick Kunst, a silent stage presence and prop handler alternately called "Thug" and "Tagon") surprises more in its execution than its gags.

A disengaged viewer could say it had all been done before, which it has, even before Mump & Smoot. But that's exactly the point. The nuances they've added to their characters — the tall, manipulative scold and the short, needy wimp — make for theatre that's definitely beyond the fringe.

Just when you thought they'd done everything funny that could be done with a plate of spaghetti . . .

Created for the small stages and spare budgets of fringe festivals, *Something* gained some 20 minutes or more in the current production. Sometimes gags wore a little thin after too many minutes. But just when you thought they'd done everything funny that could be done with a plate of spaghetti, it turns up again as the byproduct of abdominal surgery.

The gory bits, especially a baseball game played with a clown head and detachable arm in "The Wake," are part of the reason Mump & Smoot are not recommended watching for children under 10. Still, such cartoon violence has always been the stuff of clowning, either the circus variety, or the more traditional form studied by



IN SYNCH: John Turner and Mike Kennard are perfectly choreographed together.

Kennard and Turner.

What's fascinating about these two is their fluidly choreographed routines and their way with a gesture, both visual and vocal. The comic language "Ummonian," pronounced in a gargy high-pitched squeak or a low growl, is so well intonated, that it's only when an English phrase slips in that you realize these two bizzaros in funny headgear have mimicked their way through an entire dialogue.

Mump's bullying extends to the audience, frequently pulled into the action without mercy, as when Kennard was unable to throw a plastic bat into a pail, and challenged an onlooker to do better.

Just you try it, he mimed. He's right; this kind of slapstick only looks as easy as rolling off a stage.