

MICHAEL KENNARD

DIRECTING
REVIEWS



FRINGE REVIEW: Lauren Brady of @interwebbed a huge talent

A technically adroit production, at once simple and highly sophisticated and the first at the Fringe to have its own app — a surprisingly charming touch

Author of the article:

[Liane Faulder](#)

Published Aug 21, 2023 • Last updated Aug 24, 2023 • 1 minute read

Join the conversation



Lauren Brady stars in @interwebbed at the 2023 EdmontonInternational Fringe Festival. PHOTO BY JOEL SIMS /Supplied

Article content

@interWEBBED

Stage 29, The Roxy (10708 124 St.)

5 Stars out of 5

In the beginning, @interWEBBED looked like a sad play.

“Why me? Why me?” says the main character, her back to the audience, tears shaking her shoulders and choking her voice.

But don’t despair. After our hero puts her loneliness out to the universe, a large parcel lands on her doorstep. It’s something to do with the internet, and after agreeing to a long list of terms and conditions, she discovers a world of love (and emojis) awaits.

The solo performer and writer of @interWEBBED is Lauren Brady. She’s clearly a huge talent — a dancer who is also a clown. But don’t let the red nose frighten you. Funny and approachable, Brady forms an instant connection with the audience.

Directed by Michael Kennard of Mump and Smoot fame, @interWEBBED is a technically adroit production, at once simple and highly sophisticated. Don’t forget to bring your device to the hour-long show; @interWEBBED is the first Fringe play I’ve even been to that has its own app — a surprisingly charming touch.

Find more reviews of the 2023 Edmonton International Fringe Festival in the Arts section at [EdmontonJournal.com](https://www.edmontonjournal.com).

Clowning Around with Lauren Brady

Lauren Brady's clown show, @interWEBBED, explores horrifying evolutions in the digital age.

BY LIAM NEWBIGGING | APRIL 27, 2023



photo courtesy Katie Cutting

This week, Backstage Theatre workshops a new show involving sci-fi, clowns and horror. Is it like Stephen King's *It* in space? Not exactly. More like a plunge into the existential terror and excitement of the digital age. Lauren Brady's first solo act, @interWEBBED, is something out of Marshall McLuhan's nightmares but also demonstrates everything Brady has learned about herself, her art and playing the fool.

Not many would refer to the University of Alberta as a clown college, but for Brady, it actually was. The school's BFA acting program was where she was first introduced to the primordial art of clown through a Canadian style called Pochinko Mask. Admittedly, my knowledge of clowns starts and ends with Robin Williams in a lab coat and red nose wandering around a hospital. But Lauren Brady is no Patch Adams, for her clown is less about therapy and more about expression.

She found a calling in this art's masks, movement and emotion. "I had this epiphany of 'I think this is my thing!'" says Brady. "In my entire life, I never had something that made sense before." But since COVID-19 disrupted her graduating year, life has been a bit of a circus act of repetitive doors slammed in her face. First came the restrictions, which moved many in-person classes online and significantly reduced the experience. Then, the studio performances, the capstone project for acting students in their senior year, had to be reworked to fit within COVID-19 health regulations. The result was an empty audience of a couple of drama faculty and a visceral experience for the young actors. "It's a different type of heartache that I never thought I would ever experience," Brady says. "You're so excited to show the world, and then the world isn't there."

Upon graduation, Brady received funding to pursue clown performance with an esteemed guild of veteran fools called the Clown Farm. But then, like a reoccurring joke that wasn't getting any funnier, another door slammed into Brady's red-nosed aspirations. In the wake of the pandemic, the Clown Farm closed down. And Brady was left with a heap of clown-specific funding and needed a new outlet before it went to waste.

Instead of letting the funding dry up, Brady got to work and began learning how to put on her own clown show. She worked with her U of A clown instructor, Mike Kennard, and dove into the world of writing and producing an act that could be workshopped, performed and sold — a process Brady didn't get to learn while in clown college.

The result of this endeavour is a unique show, even in the context of Edmonton's fringe theatre scene. Brady is not just bringing a clown show — she is bringing a high production, multimedia, interactive experience that even includes a smartphone app the audience can play. And this week's viewing is just step one. A clown show depends on audience interaction, so the show must be workshopped before it can take its final form.

While Brady plans on taking this show to Ottawa Fringe Festival and then back to Edmonton for our August Fringe, the most exciting thing for her is sharing what she's created with the world. "I think because my first couple big shows were to no one, I'm just so excited that these will be to someone. I'm just excited to share something."

Make sure to check out [Lauren Brady's @interWEBBED on April 26-29.](#)

No clowning around, Globe's 'Christmas Carol' works

By NICK MILJOKAS

L-P Entertainment Writer

I wonder what Charles Dickens would make of all this.

Not that it matters, of course. He has been safely dead for more than a hundred years. Dead as a doornail, you might say.

He does live on through his work, however.

Dickens was prolific, and his literary legacy includes a story that continues to enjoy a tremendous popularity, albeit a seasonal one.

As a Yuletide staple, *A Christmas Carol* has been entertaining and inspiring audiences for more than a century, not only in print form but also on stage and screen.

The Globe Theatre production. I suspect, would have gone over well with its creator.

For one thing, although he made his fame and fortune with short stories and serialized novels, Dickens's first love was the theatre. There is also the fact that he was a master of melodrama, and his material was often a mixture of the comic and the tragic, of laughter and tears.

In that respect, the Globe's artistic director, Ruth Smithle, made a very wise choice indeed when she decided to put the annual holiday show in the hands of one Michael Kennard, a director with extensive training and experience in clowning.

Earlier this week, Kennard mentioned, almost in passing, but with a definite air of concern, that he hasn't seen all that many successful clown plays in his time. As it turns out, he needn't have worried about this one.

Review

'A Christmas Carol'
Globe Theatre
Through Dec. 22

It works.

It works splendidly; in fact,

The Globe's production of *A Christmas Carol* deserves the strongest possible endorsement. It is a veritable feast, in every theatrical sense of the word.

Building on the adaptation by Blake Heathcote and Lezlie Faith Wade, Kennard has staged a spectacular production that is truly a credit to its designers, technicians and performers.

The clowning element is apparent in each of those key areas. Indeed, it is the tie that binds them. At no time, however, does the clowning usurp the more traditional elements of character, plot and theme. Kennard has his priorities straight. The focus remains clearly on the story.

And what a marvellous story it is.

Told, in the Heathcote-Wade adaptation, from Scrooge's own perspective, this timeless tale of greed and redemption is wonderfully acted by Dana Andersen, as the miserable miser who emerges from the darkness and comes to see the light by exorcising the demons that haunt him, and by Susanna Hammett and Nick Longo in a variety of supporting roles.

These three actors are capably and selflessly assisted by two puppeteers.

Krista Solheim and Floyd Favel Starr.

Actors and puppeteers work together in a larger-than-life production that also features some dazzling special effects, not to mention the set, lighting and costumes designed by John Fairwell in collaboration with Peter Fieid, and, of course, a soundscape composed and arranged by Darrin Hagen.

In consultation with their director, the designers concluded, thank goodness, that clown noses for the actors would be going too far. In most every other respect, however, the clown look is there, from the face paint to the

colour and cut of the costumes.

The lighting and set convey a sense of time and place. London in the Victorian age, a twilight world of shadows, where it is often difficult to distinguish between sleep and wakefulness, dreams and reality.

There is a creepy wax-candle spookiness to the play that completes the effect, and fits nicely with Hagen's soundscape, which uses assorted Christmas carols to evoke the church bells and chimes we have come to associate with Dickens in general and this story in particular.

Since the Globe production is done as a clown play, the actors are afforded a considerable freedom in terms of their deviation from the written text. Improvisation is not only permitted; it is encouraged. This is true of Andersen, especially, but also applies to Hammett and Longo.

Purists may scoff, but when this approach is accompanied by a respect for the script, when licence is tempered with judgement, the result is an interactive and extremely audience-friendly show.

This one is an awful lot of fun.



What's On

C1

Thursday
December 9, 1999

What's Up, What's In, What's On in Regina Entertainment

Clowns try Dickens classic

By NICK MILLOCKAS
L-P Entertainment Writer

Michael Kennard was ecstatic to learn that artistic director Ruth Smillie had scheduled some eight previews before opening night of the Globe Theatre's production of *A Christmas Carol*.

As director of what is euphemistically referred to as the annual family show, Kennard was able to use these performances to his full advantage and it was especially significant in this particular case because the company is presenting the piece as clown-based theatre.

"If a clown is in the woods, is he a clown?" Kennard says. "The answer is: He is not. To be a clown, you need an audience. That's why the preview performances were important to me."

Reactions from the audience were an integral part of the development of this project, which is, more specifically, the Blake Heathcote and Leslie Wade adaptation of the classic Charles Dickens story.

"What is distinctive about this production, at least in my opinion, is that it is very organic," Kennard explains. "The clown is honest about everything. The way of the clown is to be open to anything."

The word 'philosophy' may be too strong a term, but honesty and openness was certainly Kennard's directorial approach to this project and it is reflected (or so he hopes) in his working relationships with both the designers and the performers in—clown-actors whom he addresses as clactors for short.

"It hasn't exactly been a snap, bringing this story to the stage, but the Heathcote-Wade adaptation makes it easier. Half the work has already been

preview

'A Christmas Carol'

tonight to Dec. 22

Globe Theatre

\$21.50, \$18, \$11.99

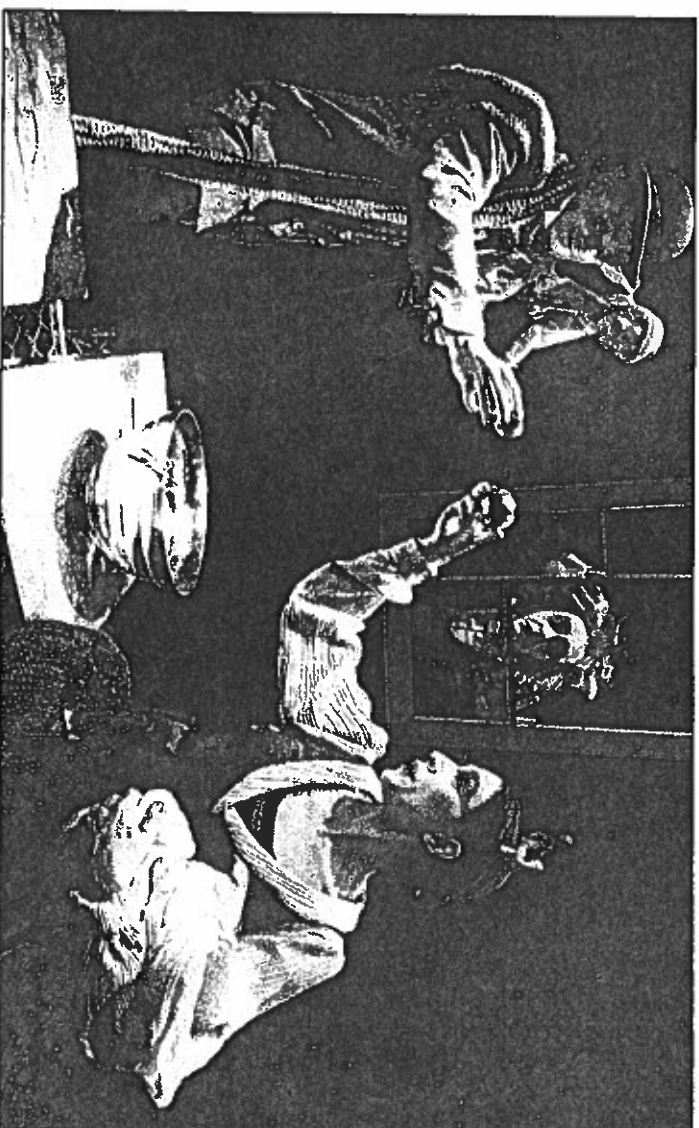
done," Kennard says. "What does make it a little more difficult, for me, anyway, is presenting it in (theatre in) the round. That's very challenging when you're dealing not only with human actors but also with puppets and special effects. Mind you, the entire thing is a challenge. I haven't seen too many successful clown plays."

Kennard's creative collaborators are the designers, John Farwell and Peter Field, composer Darrin Hagen, puppeteers Floyd Favel Starr and Krista Solheim, and actors Nick Longo, Susanna Hammett and Dana Andersen. Andersen is cast as Scrooge, and has drawn his character largely from the Alastair Sim portrayal in the 1951 film, arguably the definitive version of this timeless tale about greed and redemption.

"I think this story has become engraved in pop culture," says Andersen. He recalls that, as a child growing up in Edmonton, he found Sim's interpretation of Scrooge "quite scary and quite passionate and quite funny."

For Andersen, as for so many others who have come to love it, *A Christmas Carol* hasn't lost its appeal over the years.

"I think it touches everybody



Nick Longo (left), Dana Andersen (back) and Susanna Hammett in 'A Christmas Carol'

DON HEAL/The Leader Post

emotionally," he says. "At some point, a chord is touched."

Andersen is also delighted to be doing this adaptation as a clown play.

"What we have created here is a bizarre clown world, and as a clown-actor you feed off the audience. If somebody sneezes, you say, 'Bless you.' It becomes interactive," Andersen says. "It enhances the richness of the story, but then you have to get back to the story, so that you don't ruin the integrity

of the piece. There are priorities, after all."

Presumably, as a director with extensive training and experience in the fine art of clowning, Kennard can be counted upon to ensure that his cast and crew keep those priorities straight.

"One of the nice things about the so-called clown plays is that you will never see the same show twice," Kennard says. "We like to take liberties, but we have to do it in a responsible and

respectful way."

"The most important thing is the relationships between the characters," he adds.

"The story is next, and then comes all of the improvisational stuff with the clowns."

"If you look after those things, the message will take care of itself."

"I don't think the audience wants to be drilled. I think the audience wants to be thrilled."

D 6 Entertainment

T H E A T R E

Globe's treatment of 'The Hobbit' is sure to please

By NICK MILLOKAS
L-P Entertainment Writer

Globe Theatre's production of *The Hobbit* is sold out for the entire run. In fact, all of the tickets to this seasonal family show (every last one of them) were gone before opening night.

Those who do have tickets should consider themselves very fortunate indeed.

This production will not disappoint you.

It's a marvellous show and it serves as a reminder (not that another reminder was necessary) that the craft of theatre is limited only by the imagination of its practitioners.

With all due respect to the story itself (and this is, of course, a J.R.R. Tolkien masterpiece) it is not the tale as much as the telling that distinguishes the Globe production.

Watching *The Hobbit*, you will find yourself thinking not so much 'I wonder what will happen next?' as you will 'I wonder how they will make it happen?'

Review

'The Hobbit'
Globe Theatre
Through Dec. 23

And by 'they' we mean director Michael Kennard (he of the puppet-mask-clown approach to theatre) and the team of truly talented designers who collaborated with him on this production: Peter Field (set), Narda McCarroll (costumes), Melinda Sutton (lighting) and Allan Rae (sound).

It is the creativity of these unsung heroes that brings to life the Tolkien adventure that takes the title character, one Bilbo Baggins, "there and back again" in a mythological Middle Earth that is populated by such creatures as 'Dwarves and Elves, Trolls and Goblins and Spiders,' and (needless to say) the Hobbit and his primary nemeses, Gollum and Smaug.

Field, as usual, has given us a set that is both aesthetically pleasing and serviceable. The latter quality is particularly important in this case, because the action (following a plot that is episodic in nature) occurs during a journey that leads the Hobbit-led party of Dwarf mercenaries over mountains and through valleys, and even into and out of caves and subterranean bodies of water.

Whereas the set is impressive for its (relative) simplicity, McCarroll's costumes are praiseworthy for their diversity.

Middle Earth, after all, is inhabited by a wide range of creatures (a great many of them, monsters) and the costume designer has given all of them their own distinctive looks.

No less significant are the contributions of Sutton and Rae, as lighting and sound are central to not only delineating special effects but also establishing tone. The mood in *The Hobbit* is principally dark and ominous, and there is a steady rise and fall of tension that is produced by the foreshadowing of terrible things to come.

The stage adaptation by Kim Selody manages to condense a novel that runs 300-pages-plus into a play that takes slightly longer than two hours to perform in a way that does not sacrifice any of the central elements. To his credit, Selody's script retains all that is important in terms of plot, character and theme. (A familiarity with Tolkien is helpful, but this story is told in a way that it can be easily understood and appreciated even by those who have not read the book).

As was the case a year ago, when he directed (for the Globe) an adaptation of the Charles Dickens classic holiday piece *A Christmas Carol*, Kennard combines acting and puppetry to thrill the audience with monsters and beasts and things that go bump in the night. (In par-

ticular, theatre-goers on opening night responded most enthusiastically to the Trolls in the first act and to Smaug the Dragon in the second, but there were spontaneous outbursts of applause throughout the play.)

A cast of eight works tirelessly in its portrayal of the nearly two dozen characters in *The Hobbit*, and while they do appear in white face paint Tolkien purists can rest assured that the clowning is kept to a reasonable (and respectful) level and that the licence to improvise is not abused.

The truth of the matter is, Dana Andersen (as Bilbo) and his colleagues — Harvey Anderson, Susanna Hammett, Rosalie McDougall, Mark Meer, Christopher Sawchyn, Davina Stewart, and Giovanni Say — present *The Hobbit* in a way that enhances, not diminishes, the work of its creator.



LEADER-POST



Regina, Saskatchewan ■ Monday, December 3, 2001 ■ www.leaderpost.com

Wizard of Oz works its magic at Regina's Globe Theatre / A7

REVIEW

'Wizard' offers magical moments

The Wizard of Oz'
Globe Theatre

By **NICK MILLIKAS**
Leader-Post

Traditionally, this is the time of year when the Globe Theatre presents what has come to be known euphemistically-speaking as its holiday show, which is to say a light hearted piece that is deemed suitable for every member of the family regardless of age.

In recent years, artistic director Ruth Smillie has given us *A Christmas Carol*, *The Hobbit* and now *The Wizard of Oz*. They have all been successful productions, not only acclaimed for their artistic merits, but extremely popular at the box office in terms of attendance as well.

What these holiday shows have in common is that they manage to attract a good number of people who would not ordinarily be there, people who do not necessarily come out on a regular basis. As such, they afford the Globe a glorious opportunity to promote itself, to demonstrate the almost unlimited potential of live theatre and to celebrate the wonders of this truly collaborative art form.

Given the high quality of directors, performers, designers and technicians we have learned to expect from the Globe, the possibilities are infinite. We are reminded of this once again by the current production. *The Wizard of Oz* is virtually guaranteed to be another seasonal crowdpleaser.

For starters, there is the story itself. Adapted from the children's book by L. Frank Baum and immortalized first on the movie screen as a feature-length motion picture from MGM and subsequently on the stage by the Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Wizard of Oz* has most deservedly attained the lofty status of contemporary fairy tale.

Whether you happen to be a youngster who is just now discovering the charm and the magic of a classic story or an adult who has over the years experienced the thrill time and time again, the comforting and reassuring message of "Home Sweet Home" bears repeating. One never tires of this bottom-line moral. Nor does one ever grow bored with the adventures experienced vicariously along the way.

There is also the manner in which the story is told. No two versions are completely identical and in this case there is the added appeal of the clown technique as applied by Michael Kennard, who co-directs this production with the aforementioned Smillie.

The performers are simply fabulous, beginning with Andrea Menard, who as Dorothy gives a totally convincing portrayal of an adolescent girl uprooted from reality and transported to the realm of the fantastic, and extending to Raul Tome (Scarecrow), Philip Warren Sarsons (Tinman) and Jovanni Sy (Cowardly Lion), whose performances are impressive in meeting both the verbal and physical demands.

Praise is likewise in order for the remainder of this electrifying cast, particularly Caroline Livingstone as the Wicked Witch and Kevin Rothery as the Wizard, but also the players who join them in bringing to life literally dozens of diverse characters that range from Munchkins to Flying Monkeys — namely, Christine MacInnis, Shannon Calcutt, Jayden Pfeiler and Rob Appleby.

Together these talented actors-singers-dancers guide us on the Yellow Brick Road journey from Kansas to the Land of Oz and back, a trek remembered for both its dramatic and suspenseful segments and its more sensitive and touching moments as well.

The overall effect is made complete by the soulful arrangements of music director Ya-wen V. Wang and by the imaginations and resourcefulness of designers Peter Field, Yvonne Sauriol and Erecia Hassell, whose sets, costumes and lighting provide the look, the sound and the feel that never cease to amaze and to create a sense of what this play is really all about.

A sense of wonder.

A sense of awe.

A sense of Oz.

WHAT'S ON

Leader-Post ■ Thursday, November 29, 2001 ■ Page D1

PREVIEW

Clowning around in ruby slippers

'The Wizard Of Oz'

Tonight — Dec. 23
Globe Theatre
\$25, \$21, \$11.99

By NICK MILIOKAS
Leader-Post

It would probably be an exaggeration to say that stage director Michael Kennard has never read a script he didn't like.

It does appear, however, that Kennard has never read a script that he didn't think could be presented in clown format.

Why, to the Globe Theatre alone, this graduate of the University of Guelph and driving force behind the clown duo Mump and Smoot has brought consecutive and wildly popular holiday-season productions of *A Christmas Carol*, *The Hobbit* and now *The Wizard of Oz*.

"As usual, the first question I asked myself is, Can it work in clown?" the personable Kennard says with a smile. "Does the script, does the show, lend itself to clown? This one certainly does.

"Then again, you're right," he hastens to add. "I do, in fact, believe that you can probably do anything in clown."

In order to do *The Wizard of Oz* in clown, specifically to recreate the journey from Kansas through Munchkinland to Emerald City, Kennard and his co-director, the Globe's artistic director Ruth Smillie, chose a script based on the feature film.

(The play was adapted from the film by John Kane for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The film itself was of course an adaptation of the L. Frank Baum story, truly a contemporary fairy tale.)

Along with those of Kennard and Smillie, this production requires contributions from Ya-wen Wang, the music director who has interpreted the original score written by Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg, as well as by Peter Field, Yvonne Sauriol and Erec Hassell, the designers responsible for set, costumes and lighting.

And, lest we forget the performers, this production relies on the collective talents of 10 actors who must portray (in total) more than 40 different characters!

"A lot of it has to do with the performers," Kennard says. "It is the performers, after all, who make it happen. In this case there's singing and dancing as well as acting and, of course, a bit of clown.

"It's a huge show, for all departments. It depends on bringing all of these various things together. Every extra level that you add makes the show that much more complex."

Although opening night is this evening, *The Wizard of Oz* has in fact been running for nearly two weeks. The cast has been doing preview performances, which have a decided ad-

vantage over rehearsals because they give the performers a chance to practise the clown technique before an audience.

"It helps immensely to explore the audience, to find out what you can and what you cannot do, to see what works and what doesn't work," Kennard says. "It's risky reaching out to the audience. It's risky making choices. It's risking taking directions that aren't in the script. What it's really all about is building trust."

The cast features Andrea Menard as Dorothy, with Paul Tome as Scarecrow, Philip Warren Sarsons as Tinman, and Giovanni Sy as Cowardly Lion.

Caroline Livingstone portrays the Wicked Witch of the West, with Christine MacInnis as the Good Witch of the North and Kevin Rothery as the Wizard.

Shannon Calcutt performs numerous supporting roles, as do University of Regina students Rob Appleby and Jayden Pfeifer.



PATRICK PETTIT/Leader-Post
The stars of The Wizard of Oz (from the left): Paul Tome (Scarecrow), Andrea Menard (Dorothy), Philip Warren Sarsons (Tin Man), Caroline Livingstone (Wicked Witch) and Jovanni Sy (Cowardly Lion).

Maximus laughter

COMEDY

Family Circus Maximus

Directed by Michael Kennard

Starring Paul Bates, Aurora Browne, Jennifer Goodhue, Sandy Jobin-Bevans,

Doug Morency, Carolyn Taylor

At the Second City Mainstage, Toronto

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL POSNER

For its 50th review, Toronto's Second City comedy troupe hired a new director — Michael Kennard, co-creator, performer and producer of the legendary Mump and Smoot clown duo. And right from the opening tableau of Family Circus Maximus, which premiered Thursday for an indefinite run, the salutary imprint of Kennard's training and influence is apparent.

The spotlight comes up on a performer on the floor in white overalls and black sweater, legs bent over her head in a contorted yoga-like position. One arm rises to become a neck, a hand opens to become a mouth and, presto, we have a swan. Kennard uses his swan only to advise patrons to silence cell-phones and pagers, but it's the kind of clever, more physical, more mimetic, more clown-like approach to the material that gives this show a fresher feel.

In one short, wordless sketch, for

example, we watch actor Sandy Jobin-Bevans pretend to swim slowly through a pool. His legs do not move. In comes Doug Morency, eager to demonstrate his superior aquatic skills, ripping through the water with the crawl, back and butterfly strokes. Then a nurse appears, gently lifting Jobin-Bevans into a wheelchair. Morency writhes in shame and agony.

There's something else about this show that's sharper, too: the pacing. In the past, the troupe has tended to run sketches just a shade too long, milking the good-humour cow beyond its ability to give. Kennard has tightened things up considerably and, while opening night may have lacked razor crispness in line delivery, these performances will only improve over time.

Kennard's achievement here is all the more impressive because he was missing Lee Smart, the troupe's star performer for five consecutive shows and its finest clown. Smart has graduated to more film and television work. Moreover, apart from seven-show veteran Morency, this six-member cast is relatively untried.

Two actors — Carolyn Taylor and Jobin-Bevans — were appearing in just their second revue. Two more, Aurora Browne and Jennifer Goodhue, were making their mainstage debut.

Goodhue's work was particularly striking.

With looks reminiscent of the young Andrea Martin, she's the

most clown-like of these performers, exploiting every weapon in the arsenal — body, face and voice — in the service of character. In one sketch, she returns to the church after an absence of 22 years, having even forgotten how to cross herself, seeking forgiveness from an angry God (Morency).

In another, she answers the question: What would happen if a legless but ever-perky Siamese twin (attached to the full-bodied Taylor) wanted to audition for the Pickering Wildcats cheerleading squad? In a third, she's Sister Beatrice, a midget nun determined not to let greedy developers acquire her orphanage. I suspect we'll be hearing a lot more from and about Goodhue in the future.

The targets of the show's satire don't break new ground — among them, religion, cloning, homosexual hockey players, gun control (Paul Bates does a nifty imitation of the gun-loving Charlton Heston) and the e-craze.

And on a few occasions, the blackout lines fail to deliver the requisite kick. But on the whole, this 50th review adds a new dimension to Second City's work. *Family Circus Maximus* may not exactly be family entertainment, but it is a *spectaculum* that is likely to induce multi *risus* (laughter) and *voluptas* (pleasure).

For an open-ended run at 56 Blue Jays Way, Toronto; call 416-343-0011.

On the side of nuns

THEATRE REVIEW

Family Circus Maximus
The Second City, Toronto

BY ROBERT CUSHMAN

Second City's 50th revue is, mercifully, its best in years. It makes some departures from recent tradition. There is more music in it than has been customary and a lot more physical comedy, or at least a lot better physical comedy. The show has been directed by noted clown Michael Kennard, who in another life is half of Mump and Smoot (I don't remember which half), and he has the cast tying themselves in some highly impressive knots.

The title, as usual, is arbitrary. *Family Circus Maximus* is not a circus, despite its gymnastics; it is not big, let alone maximal (the cast is the standard half-dozen); and it is not a family show, though I took my own with no ill-effects.

The show's overall satirical viewpoint is easily described: It doesn't have one. It does have a shape, sort of. It begins with a prologue, acrobatically mimed and economically spoken by a new and engaging performer named Aurora Browne in the persona of a swan. The entire cast then unite in a song — a good old-fashioned here-we-all-are-and-we-promise-to-be-funny opening number — and then comes the

first sketch, proper. It involves God, here seen putting the fear of Himself into a belated penitent who hasn't set knee in church for ages. ("Look what I did to Job. And I liked him.") He reappears in the show's concluding number, involving an altercation between nuns and property developers. He is on the side of the nuns, which in this day and age is reassuring, and this second manifestation is what I mean by shape; in the show's end is its beginning.

The Deity — bearded and bare-chested in appearance, raucous in delivery and Old Testament in temper — is played by Doug Morency, a Second City standby, who most of the time is fully clothed, tousled and smoothly self-deprecating. He reminds me of John Cusack.

Morency teams up with Paul Bates, the group's resident fair-haired boy, for the evening's funniest item, one in which they appear as the Williamson Playboys, a very old-folkie act who claim to have invented Cajun music and have the seniority to prove it, since one is a centenarian and the other is his father. ("Our music has gone public *do-main* and we ain't even dead.")

They also seem to have invented the infallible delaying routine rendered by younger troubadours as "I really mean it" or "without your trousers," but by these rugged pioneers as "I beg your pardon." That is: One will sing the last line of a song, the other will musically beg his pardon, and the first will re-

peat it, thus implanting the key phrase firmly in the public ear and boosting sales, whether of sheet music, records or T-shirts. Having told us of this device they go ahead and use it, this proving that confirming expectations can be even more devastating than confounding them. You don't believe me, you go along and hear.

Also in the ring are Carolyn Taylor, a strapping female, and Jennifer Goodhue, a diminutive one, who makes an especially effective entrance as a midget Mother Superior, apparently propelled by a sub-habitual go-cart (i.e., a go-cart concealed beneath her habit). She also sings, rousing, and I recommend her interpretation to the Stratford Festival, currently preparing *The Sound of Music*, since I feel it might add a valuable new dimension to *Climb Ev'ry Mountain*.

The large and small ladies combine, literally, to play a pair of Siamese twins trying out for a job (I repeat, a job) as a cheerleader, not unlike — very much not unlike — the old Peter Cook-Dudley Moore sketch about a one-legged man who turned up at an audition for the role of Tarzan of the Apes, and was politely discouraged. The aspirants here are also discouraged, though not politely. We have moved on, in the general direction of cruelty. It is suggested to the big sister that she might gain the prize by having her companion surgically removed. You expect me, she asks, to kill my sister in order to become a cheerleader? Well yes, shrugs the person in charge, actually we do. One sibling reacts with aggressive disbelief, the other with the stoical self-abnegation of a floppy doll anticipating consignment to the attic.

I also feel benevolent toward a number about a neurotic young man whose father is both his fixation and his analyst, not so much for the spoken material as for a sequence in which the two of them, recalling childhood seesaw moments, lock arms and legs and rock.

Sandy Jobin-Bevans is the remaining member of the cast and he's good, too, though I can't think of anything in particular to say about him; this probably means he's the straight man. For the first time in ages, I felt sufficiently amused and impressed by the rehearsed part of a Second City revue to stick around for the post-show improvs. Some of these felt like set routines, easily adapted to the audience's nightly suggestions (which probably don't vary much themselves) but they were fun anyway. You beg my pardon? Go on and beg.

■ Until they drop. Box office: (416) 343-0011.

National Post



KOS WAYMEN

The Williamson Playboys, the "inventors" of Cajun: From left, Doug Morency, Sandy Jobin-Bevans and Paul Bates.

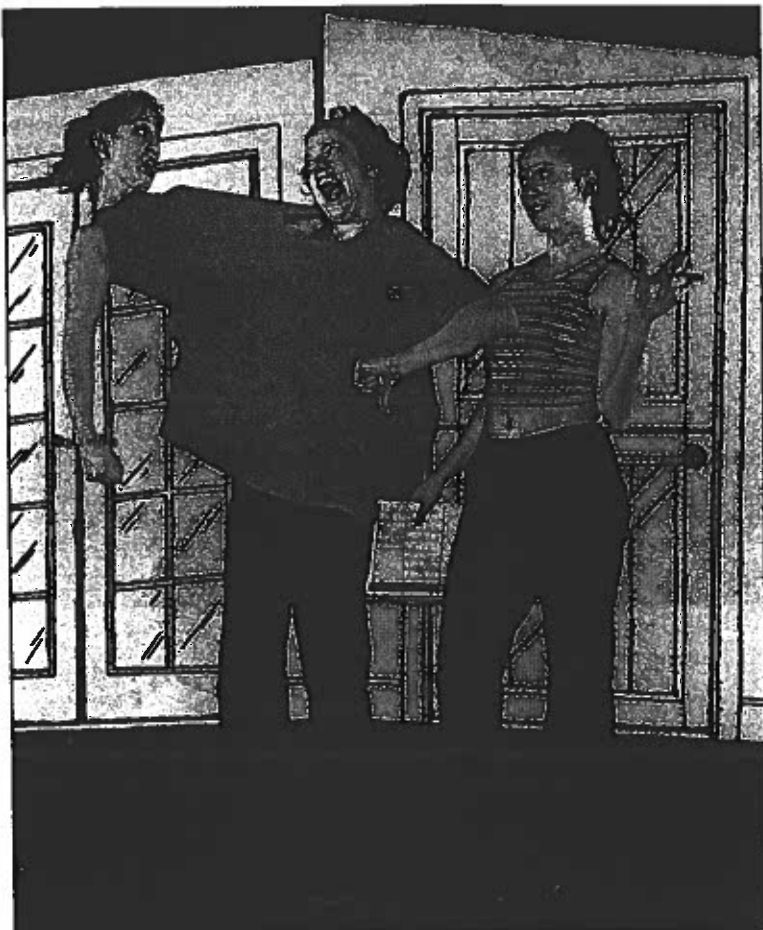
ONSTAGE**FAMILY CIRCUS MAXIMUS**

Featuring Paul Bates, Aurora Browne, Jennifer Goodhue, Sandy Jobin-Bevans, Doug Morency, Carolyn Taylor. Directed by Michael Kennard. Indefinite run. Mon-Thu, 8pm; Fri-Sat, 8 & 10:30pm. \$12.84-\$26.75. Second City, 56 Blue Jays Way. 343-0011. ★★★★★
 Second City's 50th revue, *Family Circus Maximus*, is a return to the theatre's roots. It is a fast-paced show stuffed with plenty of physical comedy and character work. Rather than a scathing bout of political satire, it is a poke at human nature. Director Michael Kennard and his young cast have obviously set out to craft a piece anchored in sound performance fundamentals, and they succeed. *Family Circus Maximus* is Second City's most inventive and funniest revue in the last two years.

It features neophyte mainstage players Aurora Browne and Jennifer Goodhue, as well as veterans Paul Bates, Sandy Jobin-Bevans, Doug Morency and Carolyn Taylor. Browne is the find of the show, a versatile and confident performer with a lovely sense of timing. Goodhue brings a manic energy to her sketches, and is especially hilarious as one half of Siamese twins trying to become cheerleaders and as a three-foot-tall nun.

Morency and Bates have a turn as the ancient Cajun musical duo the "Williams Playboys," a pop-and-son team in their mid-hundreds who perform such ditties as "We Long to Die." Morency has fun playing a jaded God who longs for the Old Testament and boasts he is "omni-clever." Taylor and Jobin-Bevans anchor their

Circus Maximus hilarious



Jennifer Goodhue (left), Carolyn Taylor and Aurora Browne in *Family Circus Maximus*

sketches with rock-solid turns as yuppie developers, a man who visits his own grave and a woman who becomes sexually aroused when her car gets filled with gas.

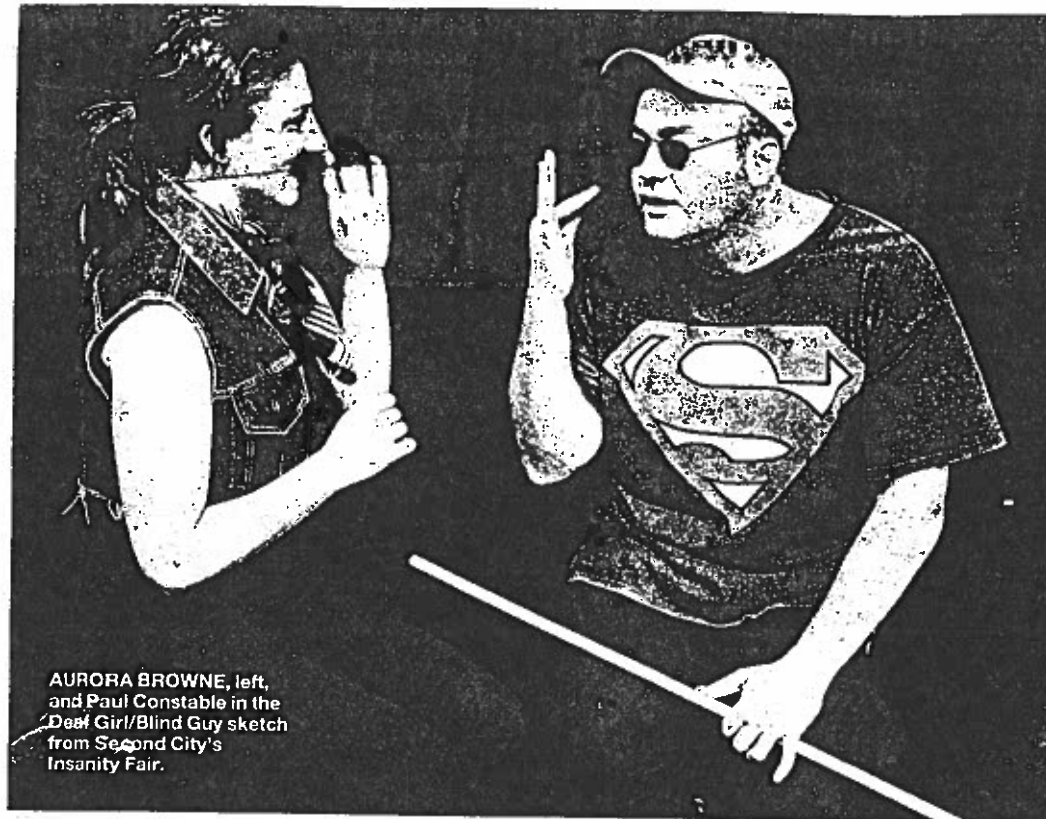
Family Circus Maximus does suffer from a few "magic endings," where a sketch is trucking along nicely and then is resolved by a finish that plays like a cop-out. The Siamese twin cheerleader bit, for example, concludes with a shouting match. Such lazy flourishes can leave the audience feeling cheated.

Still, it's an entirely remediable failing. Producer Steve Morel has gathered himself a talented cast, and six months of working together will forge a cohesive unit. Then, perhaps, they will be able to marry their physical work with some insightful satire, and Second City may have its best revue in 10 years.

In the meantime, *Family Circus Maximus* will slay audiences. One more small complaint: despite the suggestive title, there's no *Gladiator* parody forthcoming. But hey. Non datur ad Musas currere lata via. "There is no royal road to the arts." —ANDREW CLARK



ESSENTIAL TORONTO ▶ APRIL 12, 2001



AURORA BROWNE, left, and Paul Constable in the *Deaf Girl/Blind Guy* sketch from Second City's *Insanity Fair*.

Multiple personalities

Second City's latest revue *Insanity Fair* has something for everyone

By JIM SLOTEK
Toronto Sun

First, the glass-half-full verdict on *Insanity Fair*, the new Second City Mainstage show: It features an extremely funny and talented young cast and it has something for everybody.

Of course, another way of saying the same thing is that Second City seeks direction, and throws everything against the wall in its new show. Not everything sticks, but a lot does.

Do you miss the old school satire of the Old Firehall days or the jaundiced social cynicism of shows like *Pinata Full Of Bees*? There are trace elements in *Insanity Fair*. In one stellar sketch at Wednesday's opener, Carolyn Taylor and Aurora Browne star as the jacked-up hosts of a manic "infomercial" for two-tier health care, presented like a pyramid scheme.

The sketch is wonderfully constructed, awash in acid and sarcasm, and sold with conviction by two actresses at the top of their game. It would fit into any of the company's best revues.

Are you a fan of the Harold, the improv-based conceit of tying seemingly random sketches together into a story? They do that, with the ongoing story of a Mary Catherine-esque nerd-girl named Patricia Flintstone (Taylor) preyed on by a bully (Jennifer Goodhue).

Do you have ADD? *Insanity Fair*

leans heavily on quick-hit sketches that go bom-bom-bom-punchline-dark in less than a minute (I've always imagined a guy falling off a tricycle at the end of these, as on *Rowan And Martin's Laugh-In*). Always a Second City fallback, there were so many in the first act, I thought I was watching Short Attention Span Theatre.

There may be a head office directive saying that Second City is too staid, else why would there be not one but TWO songs with "f—" in the title? There's *You F—ed It Up*, a song cheerfully sung by a grade-school kid (ex YTV host Pat Kelly) about the degraded world he's inheriting ("It's you I have to thank, 'cause my water's in a bottle and my air is in a tank"), and *Daddy, F— You*, sung by a put-upon teenage girl (Browne) whose dad (Kelly) undercuts her every accomplishment. They're not bad songs, but two f— numbers seems about one too many.

Oh yeah, there are two puppet sketches. Puppets are funny.

And as if begging kids to come to Second City, there's a long, shrieking "Greek play" where the joke is that the characters have venereal diseases for names. What grade are we in?

But when the material stoops to cheap laughs, the current cast is talented enough to stay above it. This revue is doubly notable in that it's been pared down to a five-person cast and it's mainly female for the first time (Kelly and Paul Constable are the minority Y-chromosomes).

These are three very good actresses. Goodhue in particular has achieved rubber-faced transcendence in this troupe. In an Inuit sketch, she plays a baby seal with such hilarious verisimilitude, it recalls Melody Johnson's "jealous cat" performance of a few seasons back (if you saw it, you know the kind of homerun we're talking about). And Browne, whose powerful voice sells the *Daddy* song, has some great moments too — most notably haunting up a storm as the ghost of a dead child in a sketch about a senior (Goodhue) headed for the old folks home.

It's directed with manic energy and maximum volume by Michael Kennard of Mump & Smoot (one sketch, about a family of French Canadian stereotypes even plays like M&S).

All in all, a decent launch point for whatever Second City decides it wants to be.

★★★★ 1/2
out of 5

'Insanity Fair to good'
— JIM SLOTEK, SUN

Insanity Fair

Director: Michael Kennard
Stars: The ensemble

THE TORONTO
STAR
2nd Class Mail Reg. No. 3291

NOVEMBER 8, 2002

Laugh if you dare

Second City blurs the line between absurd, atrocious in revue

by Catey Sullivan
Arts Editor

The formulas for comedy, so the old saw goes, is tragedy plus time, but time was a luxury Second City didn't have when it opened its mainstage revue last week.

In the wake of the tragedies of Sept. 11, the famed comedy showcase that bases its brand of irreverent, slicing humor on news of the day was forced to work with one hand tied behind its back.

The biggest story of the century, the one, crushing issue bearing down on the collective minds of every single sentient person in the audience, was off limits.

Initially slated for opening September 12, The Second City postponed the premiere of "Embryos on Ice! or Fetus, Don't Fail Me Now" for a week.

It was an unprecedented move for the troupe that went on as scheduled in the wake of both the John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations.

When the show finally went up Sept. 19, the presence of the 300 pound gorilla in the room was palpable — laughter at a time like this can seem at best insensitive and at worst monstrous.

But there is another old saw that claims laughter is the best medicine,

and that was a hackneyed cliché that also proved true opening night of Second City's "Embryos on Ice!"

As its title implies, the revue has a thru-line of commentary on the genetic absurdities possible in a world where one can make babies in a petrie dish, freeze them, and defrost as needed. (Could Mendel have even dreamed this was where we were headed back when he began fiddling around with pea hybrids in the 1820's?)

In one skit, a pair of soon-to-be parents visit the sinister sounding Genetics, a place where couples can customize their baby at a virtual salad bar of options.

As one might expect, the parents begin squabbling over their choices. The child, does not, shall we say, turn out optimally.

So is it illustrated with ripping cleverness just why the nuts and bolts of creation are best left to God. (In a riff on the same theme, parents order pets from a place called Pettingzoo.com. The results are not good, but ensemble Martin Garcia's portrayal of a flamingo is without peer.)

Directed and conceived by the ensemble cast working with clown artist Michael Kennard, Second City director Jeff Richmond and Second City Artistic associate Mick Napier, "Embryos on Ice" tackles a rash of topics that, until now, have been considered off-limits for comedy.

The results are both funny and shocking as all get-out.

As news, school shootings and lynchings are despicable acts committed by deviant members of a deeply, deeply flawed species.

But in satire, even the most unspeakable events can (eventually) be used to focus a laser beam on the horrible follies that society cultivates and individuals commit.

Second City is known for blurring the line, the audience is forced out of a

comedic safety zone — you can't be certain whether it is correct to laugh, cry or be outraged at the foolishness of the events and personalities parading across the stage. My vote goes for all three. Yeesh. What a piece of work is man.

ARTS & LIFE

NATIONAL POST, MONDAY,

NOVEMBER 18, 2001

LIGHT, SPRITE AND DYNAMITE

THEATRE REVIEW

Insanity Fair
Second City

BY ROBERT CUSHMAN

The new Second City revue may be the leanest show the company has ever done. There is a fortuitous reason for this; one of the intended cast of six quit late in rehearsal, and some material went with him. With no disrespect to the missing person, what we are left with is very satisfactory. Ninety minutes including intermission may seem like minimal playing-time, but at least nobody gets bored. And a cast of five somehow seems more manageable, and friendlier.

This is the most political Second City show I remember, and also the most musical, though they seem not quite to trust themselves in either mode. Pat Kelly, a fresh-faced newcomer who can suddenly go sinister, kicks off as a short-trousered troubadour whose earnest serenade to the beauty of nature abruptly changes into an environmental diatribe arraigning, from the sound of it, everybody in the world over the age of 10.

Later he plays a Mephistophelean waiter at the top of the CN Tower, attending on two couples, both of whose conversations hover tantalizingly on the brink of full-scale explosion. "Revolve!" he commands periodically, and so — lacking the resources of a fully-mechanized stage — they do. They pick up their chairs and walk. Finally, they break into song. I would have liked both sketch and song to go on longer.

Paul Constable, whose hair is a forest, supplies some kind of connecting thread as a vice-principal dealing, over the course of three scenes with a somewhat specialized case of bullying. (The victim is singing *Silent Night* with the school glee club and finds, when she gets to the words "round yon virgin," that all the other voices have dropped out.) This brings back Kelly, who is nothing if not versatile, as the bully's father, the vice-president of a corporation, who informs the cowering pedagogue that he is a disgrace to the concept of vice. (Or something along those lines.)

Among the three ladies Jennifer Goodhue stands, or crouches, out as a high-velocity scuttler. She covers a wide age range, but is at her best as a senior who is both tyrannical and tyrannized, and who careens across the acting-area in and out of a mechanized wheelchair. She also careens behind the acting area, but in full view, since the production (by Michael Kennard of Mump and Sr.) makes excellent use of a scrim.

Carolyn Taylor and Aurora Browne share a surprisingly savage sketch — by recent Second City standards, anyway — in which they try to sell private health care using the techniques of the most blatant TV interview shows: The kind in which host converses with guest by asking rhetorical questions that seem to emerge from her mouth in large capital letters. My favourite bit, though, is a TV newscast, crammed with disasters, and with a heart-broken head-bashing puppet providing assistance "for the emotionally impaired."

They haven't come out with any good jokes about terrorism but are aware of it, and of the nervous, apocalyptic mood it induces. It's even there in a throwaway line in the opening scene. Good punchlines seem hard to come by, but the ancients probably had the same problem. Which reminds me: The Second Citizens aren't the first to notice the similarities between the names of Greek gods and those of sexually-transmitted diseases, so they should not act as if they are. That, though, is about the only item that outstays its welcome. This is a sprightly show.

■ Box office: 416-343-0011

National Post
rcushman@lycos.com

Fair showing

INSANITY FAIR written and performed by Aurora Browne, Paul Constable, Jennifer Goodhue, Pat Kelly and Carolyn Taylor, directed by Michael Kennard. Second City (56 Blue Jays Way). Indefinite run, Monday-Friday 8 pm, Saturday 8 and 10:30 pm. \$19-\$25. 416-343-0011. Rating: **NNN**

VENGEANCE IS THEIRS, AND THEY'RE gonna make you laugh till it hurts.

Inspired by American-style aggression, **Second City's** latest revue, **Insanity Fair**, is all about getting back big-time, Dubya-style and otherwise.

It's there in a continuing bit about a nerdy high-schooler (**Carolyn Taylor**) who wants payback from her bullies, and in a funny piece about a young piano-playing daughter (**Aurora Browne**) who defies her critical father (newcomer **Pat Kelly**, one of SC's brightest discoveries) by sweetly sing-

ing, "Fuck you."

The first Second City revue ever to feature more women in its cast than men, the show, directed by **Mike Kennard**, feels like a transition piece — something to whet our appetites for what's to come later.

There are moments of brilliance, including shots at news anchors and one zinger with **Jennifer Goodhue** as a seal. There's some savage satire, like a health-care scene styled after a tacky self-help seminar. There's also a good sense of theatricality in pieces like act one's musical closer, a savvy look at quick-fix solutions and consumerism.

Some sketches, such as one between a blind man (**Paul Constable**) and a deaf woman (Browne), don't get huge laughs but work because the people are drawn with care and affection.

Others miss or drone on. A silly look at sexually transmitted diseases styled after a Greek myth wears out its welcome, and a bit about a French singer looking to spread his seed shouldn't have made the cut.

The cast is smaller than I've ever seen it, but there's not a weak link. **GS**



The war of the clowns

From the performers behind Mump + Smoot comes a clown play of epic proportions.

In *The Hollow*, a clown play of epic proportions, the classic tale of warring countries is elevated to the highest order. For 50 years the Bouffon children of the devil—the Rubiccannos—have been battling the Clown children of god—the Lebarians—for a secret cave known as The Hollow.

While the royal matriarchs struggle for peace and unity, their families, kingdoms and countries are torn apart by greed and grudges. Who better than Clowns to explain the absurdity of war?

The Bouffon uses physicality to parody. Joey and Auguste Clowns use hierarchy to explore all sides of the ego. *The Hollow* is a dark comedic tale that brings together two styles of physical theatre in a single story.

Michael Kennard is one half of Canada's famous clown duo Mump + Smoot, along with John Turner.

Mump + Smoot have created, performed and toured their own brand of horror humour across Canada and the United States. While performing in Israel they taught a clown workshop at the University of Tel Aviv made

up of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Kennard has also directed several physical-based shows including *Fou*, *Penitentiary of Love*, *Waiting*, and *Mamakin* in Toronto; *A Christmas Carol*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Wizard of Oz* at The Globe Theatre in Regina and at both Second City locations in Toronto and Chicago. *The Hollow* is Kennard's debut as a

solo creator, director and producer.

The Hollow is running now through Apr 9 at the Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs at 26 Berkeley St.

Ticket prices range from \$15 to \$30, with a pay-what-you-can Monday show.

For more information call the box office at 416-368-3110.



While performing in Israel, Michael Kennard and John Turner taught a clown workshop made up of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Clown, What Is It Good For? Absolutely Everything!

A few years back when *Mump & Smoot* brainchildren **Michael Kennard** and **John Turner** announced they were packing it in as hell clowns, I couldn't help but fear that an unnecessary artistic void would descend upon the city.

This wasn't the case as a number of clown creations quickly suited up to take their place.

Michael Kennard is back with *The Hollow* and as expected his partner in clown crime **John Turner** has rolled up his sleeves to polish a final product steeped with howling hilarity and gasping horror.

In essence, *The Hollow* is a study of the emotional impact of lingering war. Told through two warring tribes- *The Lebarians* and *The Rabiccanos*-the play embraces superb physical theatre, near genius improv, and some of the freshest wit to unfold on a Toronto stage all season.

One part **Rocky Horror Picture Show**, two parts early **Saturday Night Live** stand-up, the cast of 15 come out swinging fast and furious to give fair warning what's to come. Shades of violence spiked with overt sexuality, the play has all the trimmings of good adult fun!

While **Natalie Breton** as *Queen Andmoth* has a handful of genuinely golden moments, there's not enough praise to go around for **Christian Laurin** and **Christel Bartelse** as dueling grandchildren *Draziw* and *Tifulbleau* respectively. These two contribute to the clowncophony splendidly and leave you smiling with each twist and turn.

And what a talented ensemble! Supporting actors in every role shine like the North star despite only dabbling with smaller parts. They're the glue that holds the production together.

Not one of the nine songs will earn a Dora nomination in the Best Musical category but that's not remotely the point. Lyrically good-humored and musically blissful, it's all about joyful fluff not award winning artistry. The finale, *'It's A Screwed Up World,'* puts the play in context and sends theatergoers out of the venue bopping their heads.

Where the creators and contributors run into problems is by cramming too many ideas into the offering. Far from a lightly layered play, *The Hollow* has the potential to run into epic status due to the amount of material that just couldn't be dropped from the script. Still worth every moment of the ride. Even twice.

Review by Steven Berketo

A clowncophony of near epic proportions, review Steven Berketo says *The Hollow* is worth every moment of the ride.

You can stop sending in the clowns now



Michael Kennard, himself part of a clown act well known in these parts, is surrounded by some rather scary types from his theatrical production *The Hollow* at the Berkeley St. Theatre.

One half of famous clown duo gets semi-serious with new play

PAUL HUTCHINGS
TOWN CRIER

While visiting Israel, Michael Kennard taught a clown workshop that included both Israeli and Palestinian participants. It demonstrated to Kennard the power that his beloved art form can have over anyone, regardless of the circumstances.

Kennard is one-half of the Canadian clown duo Mump and Smoot (he's Mump), and is currently directing the play *The Hollow*, a clown production now playing at the Berkeley St. Theatre. He loves directing, but says performing holds a special

ball game, but in this case, there are similarities," he said. "It's all clown, so there is a certain language there that is familiar to me. And this is a different kind of energy because I'm looking after the cast and the show, and creating lights and sounds, all those different elements."

Kennard started acting when he was 12, but didn't see himself as a clown — in fact, it wasn't until he was in university that he started putting on the makeup. He studied under Canadian clowning innovator Richard Pochinko, before his death in 1989.

In *The Hollow*, described as "a

ing) are used to tell the classic tale of warring countries. For 50 years the Bouffon children of the devil — the Rabiccannos — have been battling the Clown children of god — the Lebarians — for a secret cave known as the Hollow. While the royal matriarchs struggle for peace and unity, their families, kingdoms and countries are torn apart by greed and grudges. Who better than clowns to explain the absurdity of war?

Being a clown is hard work, but the good clowns make it look easy, Kennard said, adding just because someone can act doesn't mean they can clown, but they need those skills

[Home](#) [About](#) [Reviews](#) [News/Shows](#) [Our History](#) [Contact Us](#) [Links](#)

The Hollow

Created and Directed by Michael Kennard

March 16 – April 9, 2005 Berkeley Street Theatre - Toronto

Clown-centric Anti-War Allegory Entertains and Provokes with an Exceptional Cast, Direction and Concept!



L-R: Front: Christina Sicoli, Stephanie Lalor and Aron DeCasmaker. Back: Bruce Horak, Jason Thompson, Suzette Araujo and Jessica Barrera.

Let's face it, clowns can be scary. Who can forget Tim Curry's chilling portrayal of Pennywise the Clown in the TV mini-series of Stephen King's It. I can still recall the terror struck into my young four-year-old heart by the seemingly gentle and silent Clarabelle the Clown at a taping of the long-running Howdy Doody Show. I was later to find out that the saxophone player and vocalist who portrayed Clarabelle was in reality the leader of the even-more-terrifying All American Big Band. So, where clowns are concerned, a good rule of thumb might be — things are rarely what they seem.

Created and directed by the innovative Michael Kennard, *The Hollow* is a clever piece of musical theatre, acted, sung and danced by an ensemble of 15 clowns. The plot is a deceptively simple anti-war allegory, that disarms the audience by poking away at the fourth wall dimension and utilizing the 'Clown' motif to explore a myriad of issues, including racism, nationalism, sexism, the murder and mayhem associated with war, and the struggle for power and control.

In the central roles are a group of phenomenal actors, who in spite of limited facial mobility (due to the clown make-ups), convey a range of emotional states, while remaining believable. No easy task, and a credit to not only the skill of the individual actors, but a finely tuned conceptual over-view on the part of the Director and Creator, Michael Kennard.

Our guide throughout the play is Loof Ka, played beautifully by Michaela Washburn. She's costumed as a classic court jester, or fool (and she's anything but!). The fool character can be traced back to the earliest modes of theatre, and has an even deeper meaning in various arcane texts (including *The Tarot*), of 'The Fool' or the number "0" as a state of innocence and one-ness with a divine being. Loof Ka introduces the action, and gives the text an element of cohesion.

The Hollow is a classic tale of warring countries. Two Kingdoms, The Rabbicannos (known as the Children of the Devil), and The Lebarians (The Children of God) for half a century have been battling for a secret cave known as 'The Hollow' — a space brilliantly created out of burlap by Set Designer Campbell Manning.

There are seven central characters, the medicine-addicted Queen Andmoth (played by the delightful Natalie Breton, as a charmingly befuddled Royal Matriarch); Draziv, the Queen's grandson — deftly played by Christian Laurin as a sort of morally bereft Jeremy Irons (especially in his smoking jacket); Tifubeau — The Queen's Granddaughter, heir to the throne, and all around bubblehead. Christel Bartelse deftly walks that fine line between exaggerated clown behaviours and realism of character —

Ads by Google

Performance Contract Fairs
Make contracts for performing acts, musicians, dj's, bands, comedy, etc
[Visit Performance Contract Fairs](#)

Lladro Figurines Online
Authorized dealer. New Lladro items Shop & Save - Free Ship Worldwide!
[www.BuyLladro.com](#)

Clown costumes at Clicket
Large selection of what you need to Clown Around. Fast Shipping
[www.clicket.com](#)

Clown costumes
Shop for Clown costumes on SHOP.COM Find Exceptional Value Every Day!
[SHOP.COM](#)

and she does it all with an alarming overbite, an unruly purple wig and a make-up that obscures anything short of the biggest facial gesticulations. Erin Bouvy as Nat is a head servant who is very reminiscent of Mary Wickes, or perhaps Martha Raye. The warmth of her character is palpable, and she establishes a rapport with the audience from her first moment onstage. Nat's sidekick, Tat, is silent, but deadly. Mark Andrada's sad clown never loses his dignity, not unlike a latter-day Emmett Kelly. The General, Ramie is as corrupt and addicted to violence as one might expect. When he's not torturing the prisoners in the dungeon, he's conspiring with Draziv to put him on the throne. Christopher Sawchyn is brilliant in a difficult role, and his red clown nose doesn't prevent him from being threatening and repulsive. Stevie Johnston, as the soldier Yarm, uses his actor's body to convey the military mind-set in the extreme — creating a sort of hyper-goose step.

The Rabbicano prisoners, (who are always objectified as the de-humanizing 'them') are played by seven exquisite performers, their costumes incredible distortions of body parts and missing body parts. They wear gray rags, and their make-up reflects illness, poverty and starvation. The prisoners are alternately, thrown in the dungeon, hauled out of the dungeon, starved, forced to perform musical numbers and tortured. There are also some sexual overtones that one might associate with captivity, including a phallus the size of a loaf of "Wonder Bread" attached to the crotch of one of the prisoners, and used on the other prisoners with little discrimination. Also, next to the Leberian royal throne (and for use only by the person sitting on it), is a large glowing orb, startlingly similar to 'The Orgasmatron' from Woody Allen's *Sleeper*. It seems to be used in conjunction with an interesting prayer motif. Throughout the play, there are definite religious overtones — particularly with the prayer mannerisms of The Lebarians — who seem like a sun worshipping cult, who favour a massive group orgasm. Did I mention that although there are clowns involved — this is definitely a play for grown-ups!!

In the third Act, things take a dark turn. The two factions literally change places. The talented Natalie Breton returns in a second role as Queen Rabicciano — the leader of the Children of the Devil. She is eminently disturbing as the multiple-amputee Queen, rolled onstage by her deformed soldiers in a bizarre conveyance, part shopping cart, part podium. Throughout the play, audience members are encouraged to interact with the performers, and in the third act, a hapless audience member is actually thrown into the dungeon. As a Yankee (and a New Yorker on top of that!), I love to see Canadians let fly in other places besides the hockey rink, and the floor of the Parliament.

A slight criticism of the *The Hollow* involves the musical accompaniment. I am unsure if we were hearing produced accompaniment tracks, or if there was a rhythm section, or lone pianist behind the curtain. Although music and soundscape Director Michael Barber did an excellent job, I would personally love to see a circus style band of live musicians actually onstage with the performers, or at the very least, some more fully-realized arrangements of the (largely public domain) score.

We welcome your comments and feedback

Report by Lesley Mitchell-Clarke

lesmitch@sympatico.ca

for The Live Music Report

reporters@thelivemusicreport.com

Photograph by Gary Mulcahey

[Home](#) | [Concepts](#) | [Events](#) | [Interviews](#) | [Shows/Theatre](#) | [Photo Archives](#) | [CD & DVD Reports](#) | [Contact](#) | [Links](#)

Please contact us to secure permission for use of any material found on this website.
© The Live Music Report 2005

Fringe clown theatre is a Bozo-free zone

Fringe Festival

SUSAN WALKER
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

There's a whole lot of clowning around at this year's Fringe Festival — good, bad, ugly and sometimes all three at once.

Rutabagan in "Down Town" (★★★★) would be in the latter category. Foul-mouthed, cigarette-smoking, rum-swilling, overtly sexual Rutabagan (Christian Laurin) is a fixture on the Toronto scene. His newest show, directed by Michael Kennard of *Mump And Smoot*, finds him as ball-scratchingly disgusting as ever. His depiction of life as a homeless busker contains some painful truths, as well as painful jokes.

In a red, fur-trimmed suit resembling a soiled set of long underwear, toeless shoes and pointy cap, Rutabagan is a scary clown, a lech who will always accuse a hapless female in the audience of staring at his behind.

He's a musician with a 10-centimetre trumpet he calls "my true pet." "*Down Town*" is a show within a show in which Rutabagan plays a character within a character when he dresses in drag and does a hideous Marlene Dietrich. He talks to and remonstrates with himself in a mirror attached to a modified shopping cart.

The unexpected jazz trumpet solo, in which Rutabagan makes the sounds of a trumpet, is the capper to this bittersweet show. The next performance is at 8 p.m. tonight in The Space.

Kennard also directs *Stuck* (★★★★), created and performed by Christel Bartelse and Christina Sicoli. These two can sing and dance and do stand-up as well as clown. *Stuck* employs all their talents in a series of skits they perform as The Burnt Marshmallows in front of a giant spider web stretched across the stage.

As chirpy Heather Melville and Valerie Meecham, the duo



Christel Bartelse, left and Christina Sicoli are a duo who can sing and dance and do comedy in the Fringe Festival play *Stuck*.

does an aerobically animated seminar on "Being in the Now," only a few degrees off the actual antics of motivational speakers.

As two lovestruck puppets, they cut their strings to meet and collapse in a heap. They also do a hilarious tap-dancing skit about road rage. Costumed as two dirty-minded old guys with red beaks for noses, Bartelse and Sicoli conduct the "Deep in Debt" game show as midgets in bowlers and suits. It's all the funnier when one of them has to have her shoulder re-inserted in the armhole of her jacket. *Stuck* is performed again at The Space at 9:30 p.m. tonight.

Wigged out

Helen Donnelly's charming yet modest solo clown show Posey's Wig holds up nicely By JON KAPLAN

POSEY'S WIG written and performed by Helen Donnelly, directed by Michael Kennard. Presented by Donnelly at Alchemy Theatre (133 Tecumseth). Runs to May 15, Thursday-Saturday 8 pm, matinee Sunday 2 pm, \$15, stu/srs \$12, Sunday pwyc. 416-536-4323. Rating: **NNN**

IF YOU MISTREAT THOSE WHO WORK for you, beware — their thoughts might be on revenge rather than quitting.

That's the lesson of *Posey's Wig*, but don't expect a nasty or a high-toned tale. Instead, a gentle charm runs through writer/performer Helen Donnelly's show, which claims to be the first clown gibberish musical.

Set onstage and off in a turn-of-the-century opera house, it deals with the self-impressed operetta star Miss Posey and Mildred, her downtrodden but playful maid, who yearns to be in the spotlight. The key to that success turns out to be a secret that Miss Posey has kept from her underling.

Playing both characters, Donnelly

uses a high-pitched voice for Mildred and a lower register for her liquor-loving employer, who can swoop through an octave's range in the space of a single word. Quick costume changes, behind-the-curtains action and some tongue-in-cheek vocal tricks keep us aware of both characters.

The women's actions and intentions are easy to follow despite the invented language, and the songs (music by Matthew Reid, except for a Puccini aria with new text) give further emotional insights into the pair.

With Donnelly, we're in the hands of a rubber-limbed and -faced clown who knows her stuff — how long to milk a moment, how to touch her viewers' feelings and how to play off that audience, even build on its laughs.

The result, deftly directed by Michael Kennard, is a Cinderella tale with a touch of *The Wizard Of Oz* thrown in. By the end of an entertaining hour, *Posey's Wig* fits Donnelly very well.



jonkap@nowtoronto.com



Helen Donnelly's two-character gibberish musical includes a starstruck maid.



Suzette Araujo as diva clown Chandeirva

CHANDELEIRVA ★★★★★

Written and performed by Suzette Araujo.

Directed by Mike Kennard. July 8, 12:30pm; July 9, 2pm; July 10, 6pm.

Suzette Araujo presents a one-woman musical that proves clowning has assumed drag's title as edgiest theatrical form. The life of a diva clown sounds like a dangerous idea, but sharp direction — drawing on equal parts Vaudeville and Vegas — along with Araujo's vocal talents pull it together into a delightful and moving grotesquery. The character of Chandeirva, with her booze and boas, manages to fart her way into our hearts while telling a story of parental abandonment and failed romance. If there's an award for the most moving duet with an inflatable doll since *Airplane!* this clown wins it hands down. **BJD**

Alphonse

a one-man wonder

Late Review

BY SUSAN WALKER
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

If you have children, bring them to *Alphonse* (★★★★). And if don't have children take yourself to *Alphonse*, Alon Nashman's self-directed, one-man, one-hour Fringe wonder in the Bloor JCC courtyard. Nashman (*Howl*, *The Song* and *Easy Lenny Lazmon*) performs close to a dozen characters in this splendidly rambling story told in a playground.

Forget reality-based TV and give in to the imaginary flights Nashman takes us on in Wajdi Mouawad's tale of a boy who lives on — and in — stories. A popcorn downpour, a costume change in a nylon tube, the scaling of a wall and Nashman's many comic improvisational touches make *Alphonse* a sure candidate for the main stage. The vocabulary is a little beyond preschoolers and primary kids, but they are attentive enough to be coaxed through the fourth wall like children following the Pied Piper. Next show is tonight at 7:30.

A&E

LIFE

Snow fun is outlawed by overprotective educators. E7

E SECTION » TORONTO STAR « MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2004 ★ thestar.com

Old script tells fresh story

Review

New Canadian Kid

★★★★

By Dennis Foon. Directed by Leah Cherniak. Until Mar. 7 at Lorraine Kimsa Theatre For Young People, 165 Front St. E. 416-862-2222

RICHARD OUZOUNIAN
THEATRE CRITIC

Let's start your Monday morning with the cheerful news that *New Canadian Kid* is easily the best show at the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre For Young People in the past five years.

To begin with the most important factor, the script by Dennis Foon is every bit as pertinent as it was when he first wrote it in 1981. It's a story of how a young man from a foreign country and his family face the task of starting a new life in Canada.

They go through all the expected pitfalls — failure to communicate, homesickness, racism — but finally come out the other end on their way to being "new Canadians."

There could have been preaching, or maudlin, or tediously obvious. Instead, Foon has made it deftly and wittily entertaining, by the use of one brilliant theatrical device.

Our young immigrant, Nick, is from an unnamed place called "Homeland," but he and his mother speak English. The Canadians (Mug and Mench), talk in a kind of polyglot gobbledygook from which certain identifiable words appear. With a single stroke, Foon lets us comprehend exactly how Nick feels, because we're in the same boat.

It creates a nice theatrical tension as Nick tries to learn how to play baseball and hockey (where we're ahead of him), while failing to understand the people explaining the rules to him (where we're all on the same page.)

Foon's work is especially skilled when it takes us into the darker areas. There's one word "sgak," which we first hear muttered, then shouted and finally written in letters two feet high on the wall. It's the hateful racial epithet applied to Homelander and we feel its sting gradually,

just like Nick and his mother do.

The excellence of the script is the rock on which this smart show is built, but director Leah Cherniak, her design team and her cast deserve equal credit.

To begin with, the conventional picture-frame proscenium of the theatre has been replaced by a thrust stage, where the audience sits on three sides. Not only does it allow Cherniak a fresh perspective and a pleasing fluidity of staging, but it sends out a subliminal message that elephantine physical production is no longer the order of the day here, which is a welcome relief.

That's not to imply the show isn't pleasing to look at. Victoria Wallace has made fine and inventive use of the space, Andrea Lundy, as usual, has lit it superbly and the sound/music design of Todd Charlton and Kirk Elliott is right in synch.

Everything is ready for the Grade A work of the cast. Richard Harte is truly touching as young Nick, without ever dipping into syrupy self-pity. Laurel Paetz is rock-solid as his beleaguered Mother and Sean Baek has a nice double-edged thing going — cutting and cunning — as the bully, Mug.

Best of all is Claire Calnan as Mench, the girl who befriends Nick. From the second she bursts onto the stage, singing a gibberish version of "Sk8er Boi," you know you're in the presence of someone special. She comes at everything just slightly off-centre and that makes her especially intriguing.

Playing a coltish tomboy on the cusp on young womanhood is the kind of assignment that would lead many young actors into a bad case of the cutes. Not Calnan. She plays it straight and true; the end result is perfect.

Kudos to director Cherniak for keeping everything moving in such an interesting fashion, as well as guiding her cast to uniformly truthful performances.

And to author Foon, the biggest thank you of all. At 23, *New Canadian Kid* may be too old to be considered a kid anymore, but it's still one of the newest and freshest shows this season.

Things are definitely looking up on Front St.



Claire Calnan, left, plays Mench, who befriends an immigrant boy Nick, played by Richard Harte in Dennis Foon's brilliantly written 23-year-old play *New Canadian Kid*. The show deftly places the audience in the shoes of an immigrant without being maudlin, or tediously obvious.



DR.
Bert
Says:
Hello!

ROTA
LOVES
THE
SPACE!!
28/10/11

Local directors take a chance with Beckett

Nine short plays tackle life's big questions

LIZ NICHOLLS
Journal Theatre Writer

EDMONTON

"Nothing to be done." Funny, and revealing, that these are the first words of the single most important play of the 20th century. It's a disclaimer, arguably the most audacious in modern theatre, and it's an insight.

And it's backed up in the two acts of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* that follow, where we meet two vagabonds who wait, and wait, and wait for a mysterious authority to show up and give meaning to ... waiting.

They amuse themselves (and us), bickering, singing, juggling and making jokes to pass the time. But then, as one of them points out, it would have passed anyway. As the actor Vivien Merchant pointed out, dryly, "in *Waiting for Godot*, nothing happens. Twice."

Enigmatic, minimalist, profoundly imbued with a sense of cosmic stalemate: Beckett is the playwright who stars in the evening brought to us Thursday by Surreal SoReal Theatre.

THEATRE PREVIEW

Beckett's Shorts

Theatre: Surreal SoReal

Directed by: Nine Edmonton directors

Starring: Belinda Cornish, Vanessa Sabourin, Brian Dooley, Michael Peng, Jon Lachlan Stewart, Vincent Forcier, Amy Keating, Nikolai Witschl, Michael Long

Where: Varscona Theatre, 10329 83rd Ave.

Running: Thursday through Dec. 11

Tickets: Tix on the Square (780-420-1757), tixonthesquare.ca or at the door

atre. But you won't be waiting for *Godot*.

Instead, this indie-minded bunch of experimenters has assembled a collection of nine of Beckett's short plays, ranging in obscurity and length from his 30-second wordless *Brach* to his 45-minute *Krapp's Last Tape*. And they've lured nine of the city's top directors to figure out how to make them work onstage.

The attraction for such directors as



Jon Lachlan Stewart performs in *Act Without Words 1*. "No one ever does Beckett," he says. "He's considered too risky."

Sandra Nicholls and Michael Kennard (a.k.a. Mump of Mump and Smoot) isn't money, to say the least. "Strictly shoestring," says Surreal SoReal's Jon Lachlan Stewart of "our most ambitious project to date. ... No company with money will touch these plays. We don't stand to make anything!"

The lure is the siren call of the rare. "No one ever does Beckett," says Lachlan Stewart. "He's considered the father of modern theatre, the playwright who totally challenged dramatic convention, minimalist in staging, economical in text. But no one ever does him. Even *Godot*. He's considered too risky."

In fact, last year's New York produc-

"I feel we get to crack some of his plays open for people, and give them a big experience, surprise them. ..."

Jon Lachlan Stewart

tion of *Godot*, starring Nathan Lane and Bill Irwin, was the first return to Broadway of Beckett's most famous, studied and celebrated play in more than half a century.

To say the least, you won't be seeing *Act Without Words 1* or *If Anywhere* else this season. Ditto *Play*

or *Catastrophe*. "A lot of Beckett's work stands as experience rather than literal narrative," says Lachlan Stewart. "I feel we get to crack some of his plays open for people, and give them a big experience, surprise them — with the physical comedy, with word games, with the fact that Beckett's plays are *plays*, games."

What Where is a meditation, of sorts, on interrogation and torture. There are four characters (Bim, Bem, Bim, Bom) in identical long, grey gowns with identical long, grey hair, as per Beckett's diagrams and stage directions, plus one Voice (V).

See BECKETT / D2

Heartbreak and hilarity

Unlikely clown duo scores a sleeper hit in *Vice Versa*

LIZ NICHOLLS
Journal Theatre Writer
EDMONTON

Brace yourself: The red-nosed brigade isn't universally beloved.

Take Adam Cope, half of the cast of the original clown two-hander *Vice Versa*, which he created with Elliott James. The Calgary-born, Edmonton-trained actor wouldn't have struck anyone, including himself, as prime clown material. "There are a lot of bad clowns out there," he sighs. "Clowns are all about honesty, and there's nothing worse than pretending to be honest. ... I'm personally afraid of clowns."

So, right from the start there was a wilfully counterintuitive streak running through *Vice Versa*, which opens Thursday at Theatre Arts Community Outreach. We meet Tonk (Cope) and Foxby (James), a father-son clown duo who are up against it. Not only does their wife/mother die, but their house burns down. Their task at hand is to scatter her ashes in her favourite place. But there are other domestic issues at play.

Cope and James, theatre school classmates and acting grads from the University of Alberta, were drawn to collaborate by "our shared sense of humour," says the former. There's a certain random streak in Cope's path into theatre, as he describes it: "I was into high school sports, football" until he got sidelined by injury and "started hanging around with

theatre kids — mainly because that had the same team atmosphere." It didn't hurt that the drama teacher had a certain real-world vibe that was on Cope's frequency: "he'd been a bricklayer, a tough guy."

At the University of Lethbridge, where Cope repaired to become a drama teacher himself, "I was more into the atmosphere than the performance part of theatre," he laughs. "I was looking to hang out with people who were fun."

When Vanessa Porteous (now the artistic director of Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary) cast him in a lead role in *Mad Boy Chronicle*, a pirate version of *Hamlet* — after a history of playing *Man 1* and *Spear Carrier 2*, as he puts it — "that was when I really fell in love with theatre. I was hooked."

At the U of A, Cope and James acquired an unusual, and demanding, clown mentor: Mump, a.k.a. Michael Kennard, half of the starry horror clown duo Mump and Smoot

THEATRE PREVIEW

Vice Versa

Theatre: Punctuate! Theatre
Created and performed by:

Adam Cope and Elliott James
Where: Theatre Arts Community Outreach, 10005 80th Ave.

Running: Thursday through Monday
Tickets: at the door

and now also a drama prof. They weren't eager participants, Cope confesses.

"It just didn't seem like my type of theatre; I really found it challenging. Why can I not get this, I wondered. It looks so simple!" The pair made a startling discovery about heartbreak and hilarity: "If you take a very honest bite into the comedy, the tragedy happens in a cathartic way."

"We started with the father/son dynamic," Cope says, of a classic master/servant scenario that has infiltrated clown shows from the Middle Ages through Abbott and Costello. "At first the death of the mother was just a catalyst. But within weeks of working on the show, people in each of our lives died." That's when *Vice Versa* changed its colours, in a fundamental, and emotional way. "And we discovered that our play was really about how people grieve. Very cathartic and personal."

Vice Versa went to the U of A's Stage Lab Festival, then interPLAY in Fort McMurray, then the 2011 Fringe, and more recently the Motel Space at Calgary's Epcor Centre. It turned out to be exactly the kind of dark surprise, hilarity plus emotional impact, that makes a sleeper hit. Cope, soon to be seen as "the muscle" in the Citadel's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, couldn't be more thrilled to don the scarlet nose.

liznicolls@edmontonjournal.com
stagestruck.edmontonjournal.com/blogs



Adam Cope and Elliott James say *Vice Versa* is about how people grieve.