

A liberated foot is a liberated mind

The Live Theatre Trio, *Sensible Footwear*, were in Halifax recently performing in a benefit for the Dalhousie Women's Centre. CKDU-FM's Brenda Barnes and the Gazette's Connie Clarke had a chance to speak with them before their show. The following is an excerpt from that interview:

Connie Clarke: *Whose idea was Sensible Footwear?*

Wendy Vouden: Sensible Footwear began over ten years ago now and it came out of a community based project in North London where we were all living at the time, we were all unemployed. We got together and did a few shows and it grew out of that really, we didn't set out to make it our career, it just happened.

Brenda Barnes: *Why the name Sensible Footwear?*

Alison Field: A liberated foot is a liberated mind. We didn't actually think of that until many years later. For years women have been encouraged or forced into shoes that are pointy and tight and uncomfortable. Looking around here, (laughter) which is not very good for the radio, but looking around here, the five women here are all wearing very comfy, very sensible footwear, which means that they can compete on an equal footing with men.

Brenda: *Connie and I wore our Doc Martens today in honor of your arrival. We've heard the selection of Doc Martens overseas, over the pond, is a little better than it is here, there's a bigger colour selection, is that true?*

Alex Dallas: Oh, yes you can get them in all sorts of primary colours.

You can get them in patent colours and you can get them in totally see-through. We were actually sponsored by Doctor Martens to do our new show and they gave us a pair of 'twelve-hole' Docs each. So we're very trendy. But actually they're much cheaper at home.

Wendy: They seem to be quite expensive here in Canada, depending on where you buy them and what city you're in, but at home they're much, much cheaper and old men have been wearing them to work for years. It's only very recently, that they have started to become fashion footwear, that the prices have gone up.

Alison: I am quite tempted the next time I go back to Blighty, as I sometimes call Britain, to bring back a whole load of them in my luggage in various sizes but whether I'd get stopped, and nabbed at customs I don't know, but it would be tempting.

Connie: *'Comedic Feminist Terrorists', that was in your press material. Are you trying to reclaim feminist, reclaim terrorist, what's the meaning of that title?*

Alex: The meaning of that title is that it's a jolly good quote that was written about us by a critic and we've never known how to describe ourselves. For years and years and years, we've never known how to succinctly put what we do into a sentence. What we actually do are comedy sketches and songs—all from a feminist point of view, and a woman's point of view and they make points and they are very, very funny. So when we were called 'comedic feminist terrorists' we were incredibly flattered and thought, ooh, that's really exciting! We're comedic, yes,

we're feminist yes, and terrorist to the point that we're provocative, we hope. The aim of our show is to entertain first and foremost, but secondly to make people occasionally squirm and go 'oh', and that doesn't matter if you're female or male.

Connie: *Let's talk about your audience response. When you were here in Halifax in June, what was your impression?*

Wendy: We had a wonderful time. We were very impressed by how many women turned out, how many people turned out. Obviously it's difficult if you're coming to a city you've

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never been to before. You have no idea if twenty people are going to come or two hundred, or three hundred people. So to come to a place where we'd never made any prior inroads was really quite exciting.

Brenda: *Do you think that couching hard issues, hard women's issues in comedy makes it more palatable to an audience or is that something you take into consideration? Are you primarily looking at a women's audience or are you trying to expand your audience beyond that?*

Alison: I think it's important not to ghettoize yourself. We play to a lot of older people, yet we play to quite a lot of teenagers as well. If sixteen year olds can see sixty year olds laughing at stuff that they think is obscene and they would get told off for saying, then that's really good 'cause that stops them from being so ageist, stops us from being so ageist as well.

Alex: Our show 'Sensible Footwear Make Out', is very much how to survive in the world as a woman from all sorts of experiences. It's not overtly political. You won't be able to sit around analyzing it afterwards. 'Were they politically correct about this?'. It's just very funny. It's about things like housework and how to survive going to the dentist, what happens when you've lost the condom. It's all sorts of universal situations but it's always from our point of view. The feminism is always there. But it's not like hitting you over the head with a hammer going 'we are so downtrodden and oppressed'. It's funny and uplifting (laughter).

Wendy: Obviously talking to other women you know that you have things in common, but often a woman's experience is still hidden. Things are changing but they're changing very gradually, very slowly. So what we like often about looking out and seeing an audience laughing is that you can see people nudging each other and saying 'yes I do that' and 'yes you do that don't you?'. And people are picking up on things that are universal experiences. Those experiences are not given a voice and so we feel that we give them a focus.

Connie: *Going back to audience response, when I saw your show in Toronto the crowd loved you, they were really laughing. But there was a small number of people that seemed to want to cause a scene and they got up and stormed out. Can you give me another*

example of an interesting response you've received from an audience?

Alison: "I think that no two audiences are ever the same and sometimes people do leave I suppose. The worst response is when some people obviously hate it but can't express that in any way just look at their feet as if they were the most interesting thing they've ever seen for an hour or so and then leave, silently, and obviously quite bad temperedly. And sometimes you hear things reported that people have said. How it's full of small dick jokes, or it's man hating or whatever it is and we sit there and try to count the small dick jokes and think are there very many of these? It's quite interesting to see that if people have negative preconceptions that they bring with them, that they will find evidence for that. You can't ever really know what an audience will do. Often a quiet audience is quite an appreciative audience. A quiet audience is really concentrating and really enjoying it and will make that very obvious at the end. Although generally Canadian audiences are quite giving throughout the show.

Connie: *You've been on tour since April and you've finally settled down, sort of. Where are you now and how's that feel?*

Alex: It feels wonderful and we're in Toronto. (laughter) And we like it there very much.

Wendy: It's brilliant! We've slept in our own beds or in the same bed for six consecutive nights now. Which is a big thrill.

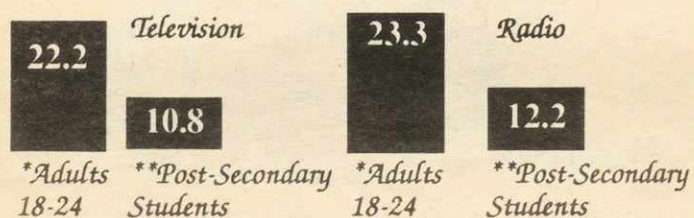
Connie: *You now have an agent, Fleming and Tamulevich, how has that changed the way you do things now?*

Wendy: We very much want to expand our work in Canada. We've worked on the fringe festival circuit for the last four years. And we need to start breaking out of that. It's been very good at establishing us in various cities across the country but we now need to expand on that start that we've made. At home we've managed ourselves and administrated ourselves for the last ten years. It's very difficult coming (to a different country) you don't have the contacts, the whole system works differently, so I mean really, I think that would be an almost impossible task to do on our own. And so this year, when we came, it was one of our aims to secure an agent. And we did."

Connie: *Congratulations! (laughter) I heard that you wanted to give up fringe festivals. What is your ideal gig then, what are you looking for?*

Alex: Dalhousie University is our ideal gig, staying at the Hilton Hotel (laughter). When he said the 'Halifax Hilton' I wasn't sure to believe him or whether we were going to a little B&B. (laughter)

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