

The quintessential nice guy

by Kim Yu

Being a stand-up comic at Yuk Yuk's, Canadian bureau chief of *The Hollywood Reporter*, entertainment editor at radio station CHFI, an actor and an aspiring songwriter, Michael Elliot Rechtshaffen exudes a certain charisma, a boyish charm mingled with a self-deprecating wit that is quite endearing. Yet, he claims he is still trying to find his niche.

"Usually, when you hit my age," he said, as we sat down for our interview, "you should really have an idea of what you want to do, and where you're headed. I know I feel that everything I've done

them, and still hopes to talk to such legends as Lauren Bacall and Jimmy Stewart.

His self-reliance and motivation developed at a very early age.

"I just figured you essentially have one shot at it," he said. "You just have to push yourself."

Although Rechtshaffen believes he's been independent all his life, he will concede to his childhood inspiration. "*I Love Lucy* and *Captain Kangaroo* were the two TV shows that had the profoundest effect on me," he explained. "*Captain Kangaroo* always had a real dry kind of wit, and I



York grad Michael Rechtshaffen is a man of many talents. He is a comedian, writer, editor and broadcaster, all at the same time.

today — the radio, the writing, the stand-up — is all headed toward a common goal. I can't say what it is yet. I just feel confident it's going in the right direction."

The sparkle of his blue eyes perfectly complemented his hearty laugh as he recalled his old graduation photo. Eight years ago he graduated with a BFA in film/video from York. Yet, he does not believe it played a pivotal role on his road to success.

"For my needs, if I were to do it all over again," Rechtshaffen explained, "I probably wouldn't have gone, because fortunately, I could always write, and it was a matter of plugging it into the journalism style." He believes "there is nothing like hands-on experience."

That is not to say he was lazy in his pursuit of higher education, nor does he harbour any animosity towards his old alma mater. "I think, in retrospect, what York did and how it affected my life is that it taught me to laugh at the foibles of winter. You develop this laugh or freeze attitude . . ."

Even though his sense of humour is evident throughout the entire interview, it took him six years before he decided to plunge into stand-up comedy. "I made a New Year's resolution," he explained. "By March I was going to face one of my two greatest fears in life — one was stand-up and the other was skydiving. Needless to say, he was "delighted it was stand-up."

Presently an emcee, Rechtshaffen muddles on occasion. His next step, inevitably, will be featuring.

It is fairly obvious that he is somewhat of a kid at heart. Although he recently moved, his collection of PEZ containers already has a prominent location in his home. Also on display is a vast array of Looney Tune figures.

"The older I get, the more immature I think I become," he explained with a laugh. "You learn the value of PEZ . . . and a good shoe phone."

His attitudes are also reflected in his video library, which holds such classics as *The Big Sleep*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*. It seems almost odious to find *Psycho*, *Nightmare on Elm Street* and the like in this most un-macabre collection. He also includes Hitchcock's *Rear Window* and *Shadow of a Doubt* among his favourites.

"I guess I subconsciously look up to Alfred Hitchcock, Groucho Marx [and] Humphrey Bogart," Rechtshaffen explained, saying that he would have liked the opportunity to interview

felt he was always making jokes that the kids, he knew, wouldn't get, but the adults would. He would always give these asides." He also loves cartoons and it does not seem surprising.

Yet, Rechtshaffen's busy schedule does not allow him the luxury of frequently viewing his favourites. In fact, he is preparing to embark on another trip, yet another assignment for *The Hollywood Reporter*. Does his hectic life run him down? It doesn't seem to, as he packs his bags for Jamaica, where he is going to cover the filming of new Canadian movie.

Indeed, he seems quite content, and when asked to describe himself, he commented, "I'm usually a happy guy, but I can really get into moods. On the exterior, people who don't know me well think I'm always happy. [But] friends, [the] people who do know me, know I want to complain. I'm really a private person."

Among his co-workers, he has the reputation of being the quintessential nice guy. He says this causes problems because ". . . even when I do complain, they won't take it seriously." "I don't think I'm that nice a guy, to tell you the truth," he said, "[but] getting angry really takes a lot of energy out of me. I'd rather get along with somebody than hate him."

It is hard to imagine anyone annoying him that much. Aside from obsessive fans that stalk him when he is on the road, Rechtshaffen appears to be very content. This happiness seems to live off the fact that he never gets bored.

In fact, he thrives on not having enough time in his life. He enjoys being busy. Yet it is this drive to succeed and his easygoing manner that makes him appear almost paradoxical. It is ironic that he is even still residing in Toronto. He does not plan on making the "big move," but said he would like to consider "doing the Los Angeles, New York, Toronto triangle."

Certainly, big things can be expected from Rechtshaffen. As he explained, "I love making people laugh, and I love getting attention. It's great."

"In writing, people are reading your stuff with your byline on it," he said. "It's a captive audience. When you do stand-up, they're all sitting there. When both work, it's like the greatest ego boost in the world. You can never hear enough [of] 'I'm a big fan of yours,' [and] you go 'Aw well . . .'"

As his blushing face almost matches the shade of his red hair, Rechtshaffen smiles.

