

Rapid Fire Theatre sports severe improv

interview by Ron Kuipers

It's four o'clock Tuesday afternoon. I'm mega-stressed. I have nothing for my break page. But somehow these things always work themselves out, and today is no exception. Suddenly, five hipsters breeze into the office. They're here to do an interview that I had scheduled and then temporarily forgot about. But they couldn't have come at a better time.

I'm talking about *Rapid Fire Theatre's* Theatre Sports crew. And in the true spirit of the Theatre Sports ethic, I did an improv interview.

I mean, one of the guys, Ben McCaffery, doesn't even have my name right yet. I flip in the tape, press play/record and tell them to start talking. "Don, I love you," Ben quips, "Oh sorry. Ron. I love you too, Ron."

Five in total, six including me, squeezed into the cozy confines of *The Gateway* quiet room to expound and ponder the deeper mysteries of life. Stage manager Karen Visser and VP in charge of programming Lisa Ward joined "severe improvisers" Ben McCaffery, Gary Nugent, and Andrew Kenny.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Theatre Sports, here's the lowdown: Theatre Sports is an evening of improvisational scenes based on audience suggestions. You got these hilarious kinda acting dudes who split themselves up into teams and "compete" against each other. They get judged on a point system, and the team with the most points at the end of the manic evening wins (duh-uh). These crazy cats just come up with this stuff on the spur of the moment. It's spontaneous, riddled with risk, and always good for a few million laughs.

The group has just come off a highly successful stint at Edmonton's *Fringe Festival*. They managed to independently organize an international Theatre Sports tournament with teams from San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, Halifax, Washington D.C. "and us! And we won! Hahhh! And we deserved it too!"

"It was a real high. It was a real accomplishment for us to pull this off," Karen explains. Lisa adds, "We gained a great

reputation in the Theatre Sports world." The different troupes around the globe communicate via newsletters and the like, but this is still in the embryonic stages. "We're only a year old," says Lisa "Yah. We're still playing at the water table," Gary adds, whatever that means.

"So do you guys ever fuck up?" I query. "Yah. All the time" is the in-unison response. But do they ever get caught? "Sure," Ben explains, "Like I'll be talking and... and... and... and..."

"He'll forget what he's going to say," Gary finishes.

"Failure is a big part of it," Ben explains, "And that's what the audience appreciates, I think. There's a high level of risk because they realize at any minute you can just fall on your face." "If it was consistent it would be boring," Gary adds. They maintain, however (and I can verify this), that they are consistently more funny than not. "If we weren't, we wouldn't have a show."

I ask them how they can think so fast when they perform their skits. I am attacked. "They're scenes," Karen retorts, "Do not use that word." "Cubs. Cubs do skits," Andrew adds.

"A lot of it [the fast thinking] comes with them having played together for so long," explains Karen, "They've been playing together for years. They know how the other person plays."

Understandably then, a lot of stuff goes on that the audience doesn't see. They play tricks on each other and try to screw each other up. "There's that competitive aspect too," Andrew explains, "that's kind of the aim in some of the games we do, trying to screw each other up. There's nothing mean about it." Karen explains that "it's an added element of risk." They describe the competition as merely a framework, reason, premise, or whatever for the whole evening.

At this point, I am interrupted by a question. "Didn't we once get reviewed by you... these guys? What did they call us again?" I'll be darned if I have a clue. No matter, they answer their own questions too. "We were once called 'a bunch of extroverts prancing



Ron Kuipers

Theatre Sports dudes Andrew Kenny, Gary Nugent, Ben McCaffery, Lisa Ward and Karen Visser.

around on stage.' Which... is kinda true." "Sometimes you just go way over the top and you even forget about the audience," Andrew says, "then we're doing it for ourselves, and that's bad. It's called whacking off on stage." "Sometimes there's nights when you pull your goalie all night on stage," Gary adds.

"We've done bad stuff and we've done really good stuff — from true art to utterly tasteless shit." Sounds good to me. "When you see something brilliant happen on stage,"

Ben explains, "you know that that is the only time you'll ever see it, and you are witness to the only occurrence of that moment of brilliance ever. And that's something really cool about Theatre Sports. It won't happen again, and you were there."

So if you want to check out Theatre Sports, they play every Friday evening at 10:30 p.m. at the Phoenix Theatre downtown starting with a sneak preview this weekend. The theatre is located at 9638-101A Ave.

CJSR nets new PD

interview by Ron Kuipers

FM 88 CJSR has hired Richard Thornley as their new program director. He fills the position recently vacated by Ian Istvanffy, who has become CJSR's new station manager.

The program director's job involves several duties. Basically, he is the person in charge of everything that emits from the station over the airwaves. Many tasks are included under this broad definition. These include training new DJs, scheduling various programs, generating new programming ideas, and generally making sure that life around the station is running smoothly.

"I make sure that people are doing what they say they are going to be doing," Thornley

"...we have a really amazing amount of variety on the station"

explains, "If someone is supposed to do an eclectic show, I make sure that they're playing eclectic music."

It would appear that Thornley has to listen to the station continually in order to keep tabs on all that is going on, but that isn't necessarily the case. "Coming into the job brand new, I haven't heard everything that has gone on the radio," Thornley says, "So right now I'm trying to catch up and listen to everybody." He adds, however, that once he becomes familiar with all the programs he definitely won't have to listen to the station all the time. "But you never know when I'm going to be listening," he adds laughingly.

Thornley is not new to this line of work either. Besides being a DJ at CJSR for just

over a year now, he also served as program director for CHSR, the campus radio station at the University of New Brunswick. The main difference between the two jobs is that he is now full-time staff at CJSR, while he worked only part-time for CHSR.

Thornley doesn't see himself making too many drastic changes to the way the program director's duties have been performed in the past. "Ian Istvanffy had a hands off policy — unless people really stepped out of line," Thornley explains, "he had already decided that certain people were right for radio... and I'm going to try to continue to be like that. Obviously, I have my own way of doing things, which will be different than Ian's, but philosophically we're the same I think."

It's also nice that Thornley has a former program director working with him to serve as an advisor — a situation comparable to *The Gateway* having a former production manager as editor-in-chief. "I intend to consult with Ian when I have to make radical changes to the schedule or matters of policy," he says, but is quick to add that "for general day-to-day stuff, I run my own ship."

As a representative of the station, Thornley also wants to improve the station's already-improving public image. "On campus, a lot of people think that we are just a bunch of punks and misfits," he says, "but we have a really amazing amount of variety on the station. It's not the kind of station you can just turn on any time of the day and you're going to hear the same kind of music. But it is the kind of station that, if you listen to it and check our program guide printed in the *Airtight* portion of *The Gateway*, you can just tune into the shows that you know you are going to like. There's something there for everybody."

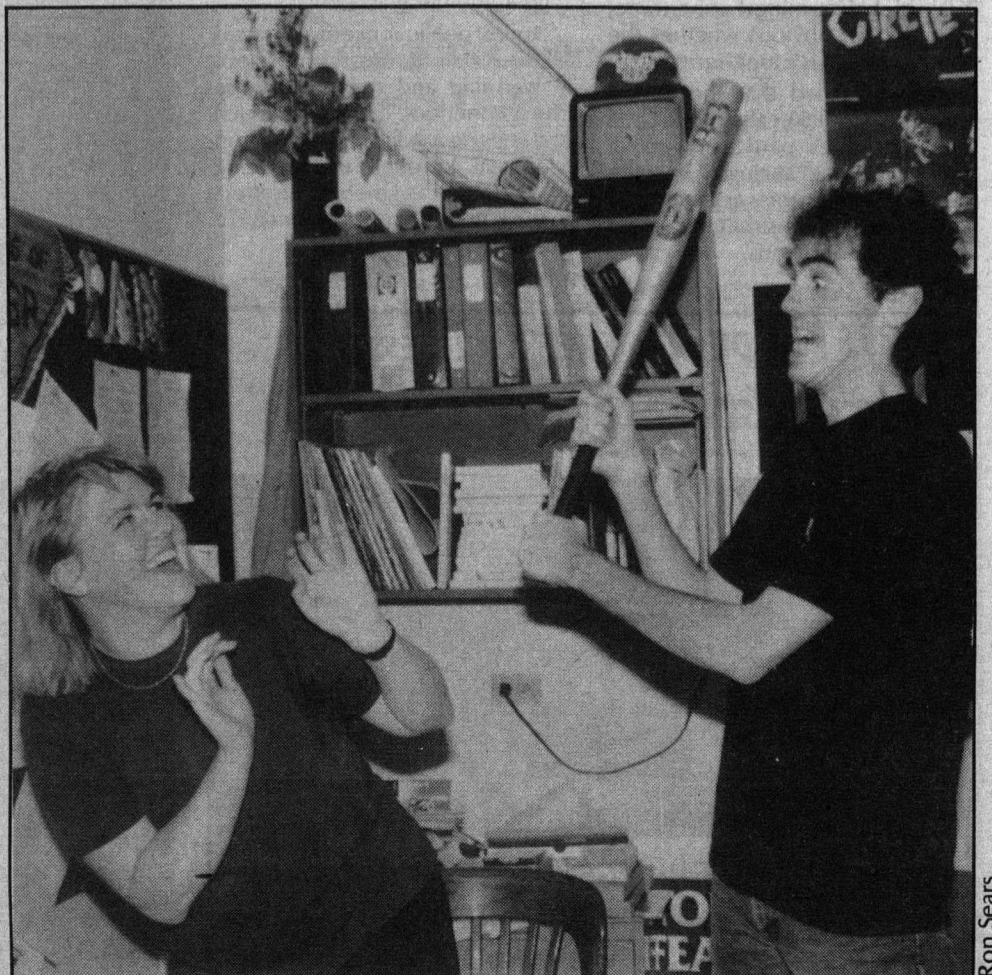
Aside from his daily duties, there are several other things going on at the station that Thornley sees himself involved in. First, CJSR will be having a fund drive starting November 1st to raise money for a new 500-watt transmitter. This new transmitter would

increase the station's power more than ten-fold, boosting it from its present output of a paltry 45 watts. Thornley sees this acquisition as a must if the station is to grow. "It would mean more in terms of advertising money and listeners. We have to get it."

He is also directly involved with CJSR's ongoing boycott of Polygram Records. Thornley hopes to step-up the pressure. "We

have written a cover letter to a lot of other media outlets in the city — *The Sun*, *The Journal* and *CBC* — informing them of the boycott in the hope that they will express a certain solidarity like you guys did."

It looks like a busy term ahead for CJSR's new program director. But he is definitely not short of enthusiasm and energy for the job.



Ron Seats

CJSR's new program director, Richard Thornley, wastes no time when disciplining his DJs. Rockin' receptionist and DJ Christine Chomiak is his first victim.