

most bizarre clowns

Mump and Smoot with Wog in the middle.



André Sourougon

by Mikel Koven

Something is coming to the Factory Theatre Studio Cafe. Opening November 15, Mump and Smoot... with Wog are performing in their new review called *Something*. But who, or what, is Mump and Smoot... with Wog?

Excalibur tried to find out by interviewing Mump Smoot and Wog in their studio/office/apartment which was decorated appropriately with an odd assortment of clown and *commedia del arte* paraphernalia.

Excal: Who are Mump, Smoot and Wog?

John Turner (sometimes known as Smoot): They are our clowns. We all studied with Richard Pocchinko at the Theatre Resource Centre and got together over the past two years. We did a baby clown workshop with Pocchinko... [where] we studied a cross

between European clowning and North American Indian clowning. The European clowning is pretty straightforward, the part of clowning that comes from the North American Indian is mask work. We created six masks for ourselves and, from our mask work, we created our makeup and costumes. Richard's idea was to create a Canadian clown, which was a combination of the two.

The baby clown workshop is basically clowning as a form of self discovery, which every actor should go through. It is a style of working, not necessarily just to become a clown. A lot of performers, and a lot of other artists, often do the baby clown workshop.

In our workshop, there were 16 of us and only four or five of us were performers. Through a long and involved process (we) discovered (our) clown. The six masks are the culmination

of the process. After the baby clown workshop, Mike and I were offered a 20 minute spot in the "Ground Up" festival in Toronto, a year and a half ago. We went through the process of finding our makeup and costumes, and our characters, Mump and Smoot, and put on a show. Last January we started working with Deb as a part of Mump and Smoot. She's Wog. And you end up with a balance.

The whole thing is about play. There is always a great deal of love involved, and fun, even though we do a lot of horror in our show. People often come and expect to see *Friday the 13th* done with red noses, which is essentially what we do. People go away wondering where the horror was, because they've sat there laughing through some pretty disgusting things and they don't associate it with horror anymore.

Debbi Tidy (occasionally referred to as Wog): The humour comes

from enjoying the horror.

Excal: The man-on-the-street idea of clowning is benign, harmless entertainment. You rip off heads. Why? You've been described as a combination of Laurel and Hardy and David Cronenberg.

J.T.: That's funny. We've always had trouble describing what we do. Only a North American audience sees a guy in oversized shoes running around on a little red firetruck making balloon animals at birthday parties. That is the slapsticky, circus clown image. It is a cliché. Clowning has existed in every culture since the beginning of Man. Clowning, is more a way of working, an emotional connection. You can do just about anything as a clown. You don't have to make balloon animals. In fact I can't make balloon animals. They always break.

It is a theatrical piece, sketch comedy, done in a theatrical way. We do use traditional full makeup, which most don't. There is a lot of clowning going on in theatre in Toronto; Theatre Columbus, Dean/Gilmour are all clown-based theatre companies. They've done a lot of clown work, but they don't wear noses or makeup. We've gone back to the more traditional full makeup, costume and red noses, but our subject matter is not (traditional).

D.T.: We've basically taken the training and incorporated it into our own style.

Excal: The whole process sounds cathartic.

Michael Kennard (also known as Mump): It is really that we're dealing with peoples fears.

J.T.: When I hear "cathartic,"... yes we release a great deal of it. But instead of getting rid of the fear, it is more enjoying it. Fears generally tend to be crippling; you put them down, hide them and then you operate on a less than 100 per cent level. You're denying a great deal of yourself. The way we approach it is to enjoy the process of living... Clowning is a big word. We've gone into ourselves and found a way of working with 'the self'. We, in fact, are clowns who are just Deb, John and Mike onstage.

Excal: Wog, all of the press material and photographs are Mump and Smoot. Where's Wog? You are listed as "with Wog" yet you're very much a part of this group, and your still referred to as a "with."

D.T.: These guys developed Mump and Smoot. I came in January. I came and did a scene with them. We hit off, I was accepted

M.K.: Technically, the reason we don't have her in the shot is we didn't have the money to get her a new costume. We didn't want a new shot until we had the new costume.

D.T.: And, it sounds better: "Mump and Smoot, with Wog" as opposed to "Mump and Smoot and Wog."

by Mikel Koven

Shakespearean plays have a fascinating character hierarchy of leads, supporting leads and incidentals, or 'spear carriers.' Usually, the leads are powerful — the Oliviers and the Scofields — while the supporting actors are marvellously comic. The incidentals, however, are merely incidental; simply filling space. Theatre York's production of *Othello*, is quite standard in this sense.

The production is big, yet remains intimate; and the performances are powerful, yet retain their human qualities. Although the production is heavily burdened by some pacing problems, the results are noble.

Immediately, the set is imposing with its three large pillars of artificial marble. Jungle gyms are imposing structures for three year olds until they start to play. Likewise, the set is a marvellously large playground when the actors fill it with their laughing, weeping and sword fighting.

The biggest visual problem is the smoke machine which wheezes like an ancient asthmatic. The sound is too loud, and is often heard over

the actors. Also, the smoke alienates the audience, as we watch it float around and listen to the machine wheeze rather than watch the appropriate actions. This distraction is one of the major problems of pace.

Do not be fooled by the title, the play should have been called *Iago*, for it is Todd Hammond's performance that holds the audience captive. He is the perfect foil for Michael Edwards' Othello. Edwards is okay when Othello is feeling amiable and nice, but when Othello must assert his authority, or when he goes insane, Edwards comes alive. Ranting, raving, spitting and seizing seem to be Edwards' strong suits. But he does not go overboard. On the contrary, he restrains these emotions and allows them to become real, or at least believable. They are intense and powerful, fully holding the audience without looking at the time.

Problems always exist in trying to mount a Shakespearean play. There is the potential for real human beings in these 400-year-old roles and, as most of the actors demonstrated, it is quite possible to resurrect them. Why, then, do Joseph Kilmartin as Roderigo and Timothy Somerville as

Brabantio, insist on superficial character development? As the run goes on, I hope that Kilmartin will be less whiny and Somerville will not scream as much.

What kills the show is the loss of pace in Acts I and V. Act V, one of the most important spots in the play, is deadly. Both Acts lose the audience with overcrowding on stage, annoying smoke effects and nervous actors, particularly in Act I, and the "lets get this over with" attitude in Act V. Only experience with the show will correct the latter point; and only trashing the smogmaker will allow our eyes to clear.

As for the overcrowding, everything does seem natural. Everyone knows where to go. However, having so many people on stage at once, screws up the intimacy prevalent in the other scenes. Specific eye contact is never made among the actors, and the whole scene flounders.

Shakespeare is tough to do for seasoned professionals worrying about their equity cards at Stratford and for graduate students trying to find new life in an old play. All things considered, *Othello* pulls off all that it set out to do. Tickets are cheap, the show is not. *Othello* runs until Friday at Burton Auditorium.

Othello

