

It's a gerbil, a mountie, it's a C

What? Is it possible? A comedian celebrating his 25th year of show business—in Canada?

It's not only possible, it's already happened. David Broadfoot, who will presently enter his 26th year as entertainer, possesses all the attributes of a comedian on his way up the ladder of success. This may be a curious paradox, since he's already been everywhere and has already accomplished everything a successful and popular entertainer can do in the course of a lifetime.

He is described by Margaret Hogan of the Toronto Globe and Mail as "six feet and then some, a crinkly, homely—in the English sense of the word—well-used face, frizzy fair hair (once reddish) and a Fu Manchu moustache."

And though public indifference will still have people asking, "who?" when his name is mentioned, to the point where one might be tempted to move South, Broadfoot still refuses to pursue a career in the United States. But, more on that later.

Broadfoot appeared in Montreal early February assisted by Carol Robinson, Roger Abbott and Don Ferguson, to present a 2½ hour "David Broadfoot Comedy Special" revue, to Sir George Williams students as part of their Winter Carnival attractions.



With only five minutes remaining before show time, he looks about nervously, scanning the positions of the lights and the props. He is concerned. The technicians are not yet ready and he fears that "the crowd is getting restless. They've been standing out there since 7:30 and I think they've waited long enough." The mark of a dedicated performer.

His fears prove absolutely groundless. Less than five minutes after the show begins, all apprehensions are washed away under a flood of laughter and applause, which continues at full strength throughout the entire show. It is the most enthusiastic response I have ever witnessed from an audience. I've never seen or heard anything like it, anywhere.

Broadfoot walks on to sounds of cheering. "I don't believe it, another sitting ovation." "I have some good news and some bad news for you," he says. "Television personality Morris the Cat was run over by a truck today." The audience cheers. "And now the good news—Anita Bryant was holding him at the time of the accident."

"Over in India, Mrs. Ghandi is terribly concerned about the birth rate. Their birth control program has been a failure. She summons the Minister of Health in India, and says to him, 'Look, something must be done with this program. Just here in New Delhi, a woman becomes pregnant every three to four

hours." And the minister said, "Don't look at me, I'm from Calcutta."

The revue begins. It is a parody of television, of its game shows, talk-show hosts, commercials, news broadcasts, sports interviews, the occult quacks, and the soap operas.

"And now for Cannel One's most requested program; Sign Off (Beeeeeeeeeeep...)"

"Here is a bulletin, bulletin, bulletin. Massive flooding is now taking place along the shores of the Great Lakes. Many small towns have been washed away, and members of the International Union of Dike Builders are working overtime trying to save Thunder Bay, Windsor, and Hamilton. No reason is given for trying to save Hamilton."

In "Let's Make a Consequence", contestant Broadfoot ("I don't believe it! I don't believe it!"), wearing an ill-fitting gerbil costume held at the throat by a cute pink ribbon, is chosen by Master of Ceremonies Roger Abbott (who gapes at Broadfoot and says, "I don't believe it either,"), and informs him that he can win a prize only if he chooses the one glass out of three that contains Pepsi (the other two being Coca-Cola and strychnine).

Hockey star Bobby Clobber (Broadfoot) in interviewed by Channel One Sports Commentator Big Jim (Abbott), and at one point, in discussing a goalie's penalty call, Bobby says, "Well, Big Jim, I'd like to say that the goalie's action was reprehensillul—"

"You mean 'reprehensible,'" Abbott counters helpfully.

"I'd like to say that, Big Jim," answers Bobby Clobber.

Broadfoot was born in North Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1926. He was reared in a strict, religious home, and three of his sisters became Baptist missionaries. Why did he become a comic? "It seemed the logical thing to do."

He left school when he was 15 to work in a machine shop. When the World War II broke out he spent four years in the Merchant Marines. "I had seen a lot of misery during the war," said Broadfoot in an interview years ago, "and everybody seemed awfully serious. I thought that people should laugh more. I had seen some Broadway shows during my war leaves and I decided that maybe I could make people laugh if I went on that stage."

After the war was over, he returned to North Vancouver and began working in a clothing store. He also managed to associate with two amateur theatre groups. His first part came in 1947 when, working in a group known as the North Vancouver Community Players, he played a "L'il Abner-type role" in a one-act play called "The Truth About Clementine."

In 1952 he moved to Toronto. The CBC television network began broadcasting just at that time, and Broadfoot found himself participating in CBC's "The Big Revue" series, where he began and developed his most famous characterization: David J. Broadfoot, Leader of the New Apathetic Party and Honorable Member for Kicking Horse Pass. He toured Japan with the Canadian Army in 1953 and 1955, and it was in that year Broadfoot got his first big break.

While doing his "Honorable Member" monologue at the Canadian National Exhibition in August 1955, Ed Sullivan, the Master of Ceremonies, saw it, and two months later invited him to New York to repeat his performance on the Ed Sullivan Show.

He might have stayed in New York, but despite many lucrative offers, Broadfoot refuses to pursue a career in the United States. His experience at Number One, Fifth Avenue, in New York, a prestigious nightclub where many of the young, creative talent work towards their first big break, was not a pleasant one: "I lived in New York for seven months... doing nightclub revue work, and I've never been so lonely." In an interview with the Toronto Star, he was more explicit: "What I hate doing is working the big nightclubs. I used to do it at \$1,000 a week, but it's a killing experience that drove me to heavy drinking."

"A comedian in a big club is like a hired irritant, making jokes through a fog of liquor and smoke. People come there to get smashed, make a pass at the girl they've picked up, or to chit-chat about office gossip. And a comic is regarded as a pest whose jokes interrupt and annoy them."

Margaret Hogan of the Toronto Globe and Mail adds this thought, in an interview with Broadfoot in 1974: "It's a terrifying thought starting up again, lonely in Los Angeles."

What, then, does Broadfoot have to say about Canada? A random sampling of remarks made over the years indicates:

"I'm a nationalist; I've come to terms with myself and my roots. I understand the rhythms of this crazy, wonderful country of ours."

"I hate to hear Canadians talk about the similarity of the United States and Canada. There's a vast difference in the people, the cultures, and above all, the freedom of thought."

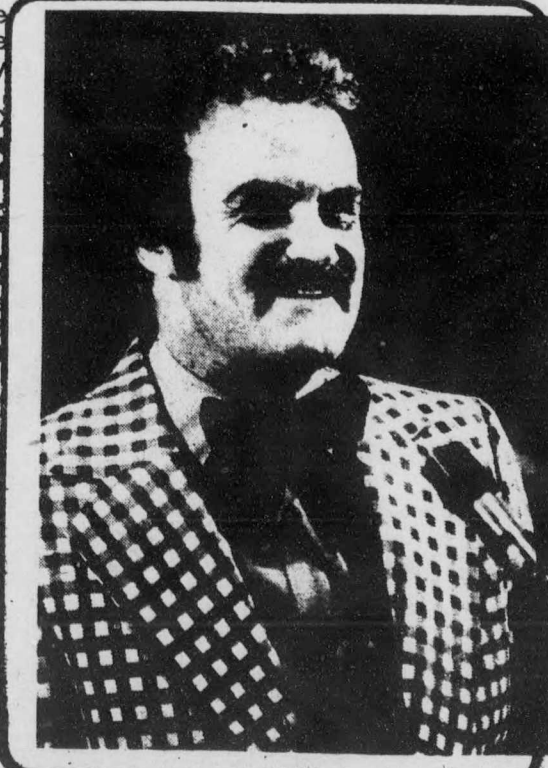
"They don't need me in the U.S.; they've got hundreds of Canadians there."

"(They) must be good; otherwise the... colonies working in Hollywood, New York and London wouldn't be so huge."

"Why do Canadians have to think that everything they see elsewhere is great but if it's Canadian it's no good?"

"I don't know if we can ever make up for the negativism that has existed here. All we've ever needed is the philosophy of building."

He has probably starred in nearly 40 revues since his career began. The most famous of these is "Spring Thaw", which ran from 1948



until 1969. Broadfoot joined the revue in 1952, and stayed with them for about nine seasons. In 1966, producer of Spring Thaw, sold the show to Robert Johnson, who lost \$90,000 on it before it closed forever.

Several of his revues read like a patchwork of names: "Poise 'n Ivy", "Well Rehearsed Ad-Libs", "The Canada Goose Revue", "Off Limits", "Squeeze" and "Clap Hands" are some examples. In 1964 he performed at Canada's first royal variety revue in Charlottetown, in which the guests of honor were none other than Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip.

In 1966, when Spring Thaw's management changed hands, Broadfoot left the cast and moved to Montreal to open the "Katimavik Revue", in preparation for Expo '67. He didn't know it then, but he was to spend the next six years here. Jack Kapica of the Montreal Gazette reported him discussing that move: "I came here first in 1966 to discuss the Katimavik revue with Wayne and Shuster, Gratien Gelinas and a few others... When I came, I knew nobody, and had no place to stay. A friend in Toronto suggested I look up a friend of his... who could perhaps find me a place to live. She later became my wife."

Broadfoot has appeared in movies, too. His first film was a short feature for the Ontario government in 1967. He appeared in "Quelques Arpents de Neige" (or, A Few Acres of Snow) with Jean Duceppe for Denis Heroux's Cine Video Company; in "Tiens-toi Bien Après Les Oreilles à Papa", a film that grossed \$400,000 in its first month in the theatres; and

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