

Alcohol, dead animals and the art of extreme comedy

Canada's Tom Green Show poised to capture American audience

BY PAUL MALONEY

You may have heard people talking about something weird on TV — something involving a decomposing raccoon or scuba gear. You probably smiled and thought to yourself: "What the hell are they talking about?" Well, it's time you were let in on a little secret: *The Tom Green Show* is the funniest show on TV — in both Canada and the US.

The Tom Green Show is the new word-of-mouth phenomenon on the Canadian television landscape (and no, it has nothing to do with another Canadian comedy staple, *The Red Green Show*.) Truth be told, *The Tom Green Show* is not that new. It is already in its second season on cable TV and has been airing in Ottawa (where the show was based) since 1995.

Green began his career in entertainment as a member of the short-lived Canadian rap group Organized Rhyme, who were signed to a record label after they opened for the Dream Warriors in Halifax. Green's focus now, however, is on comedy.

The format of *The Tom Green Show* is relatively simple. Armed with only a small camera, a microphone, and a perverse imagination, Green descends on the

streets of Canada to lay waste to good taste.

Some of his past stunts include humping a dead moose, sucking milk directly from a cow's udder and hijacking a children's soccer game. It may not sound like much, but the results of his antics are often side-splittingly funny.

What is so convincingly hilarious about the show is that while watching you realize these guys are genuine and that they're having a blast. Joining Tom in studio segments is his sidekick and pal, Glenn Humplick, whom I had the pleasure of speaking to.

Glenn is the straight man to Tom, and so he is often the victim

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of humiliating and disgusting guerilla comedy. On one episode Tom poured urine samples on his buddy and in another he stuck his fingers down his throat in an effort to make him throw up. It worked.

Humplick doesn't mind, though, and insists that it's all in good fun.

"I know something is going to happen," he says, "but not how extreme."

Extreme is a word that has come to characterize the show. There are no rules and nothing is sacred. Recurring elements in the show are the use of dead animals and alcohol, sometimes together.

According to Humplick, "Dead animals are funny." The truth is, dead animals are not as funny as people's reactions to dead animals and that is the secret to the show's success. The humour is all original, and virtually none of it is staged.

In one particular segment, Tom drinks himself into a stupor and pukes all over his bathroom. Of

course it's all caught on tape. Later, he ventures into the street to interact with the locals. Hilarity ensues.

When I asked if Tom was really drunk, Glenn answered unapologetically, "Oh God, was he ever! He drank a whole 26-ouncer of rum." Now that's *extreme* comedy.

Another secret to the show's success is that it is hilarious to see someone else get pissed off — really pissed off. While most of Green's comedy bits are good-natured, some people fail to see the humour, especially when they are the butt of the joke.

To my surprise Green has not gotten into much trouble with those



HA HA HEAVE: Comedy that defies good taste.

he offends. According to Glenn, Tom has been kicked out of many places, even banned from one shopping centre, but he has never been in serious trouble.

"Tom has a way of talking himself out of it," says Glenn. He went on to say, however, that one day he expects that Tom will get a good "pounding" and he hopes to be there with a camera to record the event.

Extreme and offensive comedy is hot right now. Look at the popularity of shows like *South Park*, and movies like *There's Something About Mary*. People are willing to laugh at almost anything, even things once considered taboo — like humping a dead moose.

The Tom Green Show, capitalizing on the popularity of other gross-out hits, is carving a niche for itself on the Canadian scene. And now, with Canada already in the palms of their hands, Green, Humplick and friends are setting out on their most daring

adventure yet: conquering MTV.

Monday, Jan. 25 marked the first of ten episodes that will air on the American cable powerhouse. Whether or not Americans buy into Green's outrageous humour remains to be seen. In the meantime, Humplick is just happy and amazed to be where they are.

While it all may seem surreal for the boys from Ottawa, it's a breath of fresh air for television comedy. To capture the youth market, shows have to keep pushing the envelope, and nobody pushes better than Tom Green.

The good news for Canadians is that there are no plans at this time to stop airing the show in Canada, even if the show does take off in the States, which it most likely will. One thing that Humplick did make clear was that Tom and crew are very happy doing their show on the Comedy Network, and will continue to do so if things don't go well down south.

The Tom Green Show airs Friday nights at 12pm on The Comedy Network. If you don't get The Comedy Network, make friends with someone who does. Trust me, it's worth it.

Roach Motel opens doors in Halifax

BY AVI LAMBERT

In a cab travelling through Montreal trying to get to Rue St. Laurent, lead singer Julien Fuego of the Roach Motel had a chance to talk to me.

Fuego and his band are in the middle of a 10-night Eastern Canadian tour to promote their newly re-released album *Free Fooze and Bood*.

For the last year the Roach Motel has been playing small town gigs across the country to build a national fan base. Their distribution company, Page, phoned the band a year ago to say they really liked their music, but couldn't talk business until the band had national appeal, hence the eastern swing.

Fuego says the Motel is "really looking forward to [coming East]." He read an article in *Vice* magazine describing Halifax as a hotbed for hiphop, a style he's

influenced by, and he wants to check out the scene.

The Roach Motel's sound is like an abstract mix somewhere between Sublime, G. Love and Ben Harper. Fuego says the record is a lot more subdued than their live shows, which he says "are kickin'".

Fuego said his music tries to send a positive message, unlike the sometimes negative feelings associated with hiphop. He says his music sends the message that you should elevate yourself and change your situation if it's not right. To this end, Fuego calls his music elevation music. Not to be confused with elevator music.

The band features the relatively common recipe of beats, bass, keyboards and guitar, with the tasteful addition of turntables.

Originally from Toronto, Roach Motel has a colourful stage history. Their name comes from a bunch of nights in the basement of a downtown bar. The story goes that the DJ booth was part of the stage. During their 10-night stay they had a variety of guests that came to jam with them every night — folkies, DJs, rappers, the whole lot. As Fuego says, "different guests spend the night".

The guest thing became a feature of the band, and helped create the name Roach Motel.

The Motel should be hoppin' and the bugs should be buggin' this Friday and Saturday night. Stinkin' Rich is supposed to open for the Motel at the Marquee Saturday. When asked if a jam with Stinkin' was possible, Fuego sounded positive.

I'll see you down at the Roach Motel.



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