

Features

A talk with a Kid in The Hall



Scott Thompson (right) with Mark McKinney, one of the other Kids. The troupe also features the talents of Bruce McCullough, Kevin McDonald and David Foley.

by Howard Kaman

"You don't want me to slander York?" questioned Kid In The Hall Scott Thompson, as I deliberately changed the subject from his grades to his groundbreaking new CBC comedy series.

His response was a complete surprise, coming from a man who has risen to success so quickly. After being turfed from York's drama department in 1981 due to his "disruptive behaviour," Thompson went on to finish his fine arts degree with academic courses. He graduated with a BFA in 1982 and, in 1984, he hooked up with an obscure four man comedy troupe called the Kids In The Hall. Once Lorne Michaels, of *Saturday Night Live* fame, caught a glimpse of their irreverent style at a Toronto night club, he knew he had the makings of an overnight success. And so, the American HBO series was born, which (with a little pruning for content) became a brand new series for the CBC.

The first time Thompson saw the Kids, back in '84, "They were really raw," he said. "Most of it was improvised, and things went on forever, but they were just incredibly funny. They were really anarchic and I loved that spirit. It was almost a revelation, like, 'This is what I've been looking for.'"

Thompson had been looking for two years. Having been interested in comedy from the start, he doesn't feel he fit into York's drama programme, because he "wasn't willing to accept their philosophy *carte blanche*." In fact, according to Thompson, comedy was not an accepted art form within the faculty of fine arts. "It just never got any respect," he said, explaining that even for his earliest performances, he received little credit from his professors.

"I gingerly attempted stand-up while I was at York," he said, "and I never had a teacher ever come see me perform. They never came to any of the cabarets I was in, or the ones we mounted. What was really important was what we'd done in class. You know, your Shakespearean bits or your Brechtian bits. They just didn't seem to think that youthful high spirits were a good thing. I really rebelled and I didn't feel like I wanted to be made over into what they thought an actor was, plus I had aspira-

tions to write and do comedy; those things weren't really addressed."

So, he went head first into comedy. While a member of TheatreSports, an improvisational group at Harbourfront, he linked up with the Kids, and quickly caught on. Using the group as a springboard for his imagination, Thompson has been able to achieve most of his goals. "The Kids in the Hall allows me to do pretty well what I want," he explained, "but there are still avenues that I can't really do with the Kids yet, and probably won't."

Yet the show has enabled Thompson to do quite a bit. It has caused a furore over its controversial content and casual attitudes about issues such as homosexuality. Skits like "Running Faggot" deviate from the usually conservative norm on the CBC.

He admits the group is unusual. "We always felt like we were like . . . kinda freaks, you know, in comedy," he said. "In a way, it's kind of a freedom when you feel like you're a freak because you don't really feel like you have anyone to impress. I was quite used to that at York."

"To get back to . . . my slander," he continued, "there were some teachers that did seem to like me, and like what I did. Yet, at that point, as well, I wasn't very good. To be honest, I really was a terrible actor. I discovered when I stopped trying to be serious as an actor, that I could act. When I allowed myself to be funny, and allowed myself to do characters, I realized that I could act. And really, at York, I didn't think I could; I just knew that I was really loud. There, [comedy] was definitely the poor man's theatre."

But, to be honest, he explained, he "never really liked theatre." He didn't appreciate it at York and has only considered dramatic work recently for himself. Explaining his fascination for film and video, as well as his lack of technical expertise while at York, he described the area of drama he is now interested in pursuing.

"Porn. One of my ambitions is to be one of the first popular performers to sport an erection in a major film. I think it's important for men to do that; I've already put me erect nipples out there for the world to see."

Seriously, though, he said that he would like to make

1492: Discovery or Invasion?

by Dina Lebo

In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the shores of America. October 12, 1992 marks the 500th anniversary of the white man's arrival in what was called the New World. All over the world, special committees have been established to prepare for this historic milestone which has been named "Discovery of America."

Spain will be hosting the Summer Olympics and an International World's Fair which will unite major nations from around the world including a \$40 million Canadian Pavilion. Even the Vatican has been preparing for the activities with its own celebration entitled "500 years of Christianity in the Western Hemisphere."

For the indigenous people of the Americas and the America's African ancestors, however, this anniversary is not a cause for celebration and they have no interest in celebrating this historic occasion in quite the same fashion. For native people, the last 500 years mark "500 years of Resistance and Survival" and they are determined to rise again and inform the world of their success.

According to Professor Noam Chomsky, the indigenous people were slaughtered, decimated and dispersed during the course of one of the greatest exercises in genocide in human history. In his 1984 book, *The Manufacture of Consent*, he estimates that approximately 80 million natives were living in Latin America when Columbus landed, with 12 to 15 million more in North America. By 1650, about 95 percent of this population had been wiped out and by the time the continental borders of the USA had been established, only some 200,000 members of the indigenous population were left. Soon, these people were herded up and put on reservations.

Elizabeth Thunder, of the Assembly of First Nations, aptly stated the native's point of view, "Our message for 1992 is clear and simple," she said. "For the First Nations to celebrate the near destruction of our culture and identity would be insane. The concepts we associate with Columbus' voyage are invasion, conquest, colonization, assimilation and genocide."

She continued, explaining that, "Although nations are

built through wars and conquest, the European visitors of the last quincentenary were welcomed by the aboriginal peoples. They flourished with our assistance and today many life sustaining elements used by the indigenous peoples are still in evidence. The discovery of



the Americas could have been a celebration of the mutual joining of two worlds which live in harmony, but the history of the native people over the last 500 years does not even come close to that.

"How can you discover a place," she asked, "if when you arrive there are other people watching you from the shore? Nations of aboriginal people inhabited these lands long before the arrival of the Europeans and this must be acknowledged. If we are to lose our cultural identity here in our own homeland, there would be no place to go to regain it. Nothing was discovered, it was conquered," Thunder said.

In 1986, a call went out from Columbia's National Indigenous Peoples Organization to native groups all

over the Americas, to take up the banner for an international "counter-campaign." They have done so, and want to make sure their view of history can compete with the traditional European versions.

In Canada, the campaign is being called "1992: When the Condor Meets the Eagle." The condor is the South American equivalent of the North American eagle and is symbolic of the united indigenous people from the Americas. It celebrates their identity and survival, and is at the heart of their celebrations.

Over the next three years, native artists, educators and cultural workers will be organizing international projects of cultural and artistic exchanges. The campaign will culminate in October 1992, with a month-long festival which will include music, visual arts, dance, writing, video, theatre and solidarity events as well as conferences, speakers and presentations by indigenous leaders and the black communities from both hemispheres.

According to Jerome Barthelette of the National Friendship Centres, "We're celebrating the fact that, despite 500 years of resistance and survival, never again will we be brought to the brink of extinction as a people." The Toranah Support Group is the Toronto branch of this movement and they have put out a call to all persons who would like to participate and get involved in this campaign.

Different people will commemorate this historic anniversary in different ways. For some, it will be a celebration, for others, a cause for continued resistance. The conflicts between the races are rooted in the morality of European expansion, the competition for territory and resources, colonization, settlement and conquest. Despite these conflicts, this 500th anniversary could be an occasion for genuine human rights advocates to call for a proper accounting, a righting of wrongs and for a standard of law, ethics and honour in dealing with the demands of First Nations.

Says Lennox Farrel, vice-chairperson of the Carribean Cultural Committee, "The anniversary can accomplish what Christopher Columbus failed to do; that is to bring together, in harmony, a universal attitude that respects and accepts the essential humanity of all people, regardless of cultural and racial diversity."