

Humour in the mundane

By Catherine Whitnall

The Lindsay Daily Post

Wednesday, November 16, 2005

When it comes to the trials and tribulations of everyday life, most of us just shake our heads and be resigned to acceptance under duress.

Derek Edwards has, instead, created a successful and celebrated career out of it.

The Timmins native hits the Academy Theatre for Performing Arts Saturday, Nov. 26 with his newly developed, side-splitting show, *Sleepless in Gogama*, named for his lack of shut-eye courtesy of the idling helicopter waiting for a government minister.

His award-winning rural humour has made him a hot property in Canada and there is a very good reason why. Edwards has long identified himself with the ordinary working guy. His comedic gift is making the ordinary extraordinary, creating enchanting tales based on everyday subjects and delivering them with what's described as a polished style and impeccable timing.

Possessing the ability to turn every experiential frown upside down, Edwards never runs out of fodder.

For example, a week ago Edwards said he decided to head to the cottage to get caught up on a few things and conduct media interviews. Unfortunately, Mother Nature had other plans and high winds resulted in a temporary loss of hydro. Most people would have lost it, but Edwards simply rolled with the punches, found a telephone booth and started dialing.

"We all see or hear those things that makes us shake our heads," said Edwards, concurring his recent turn of events might become a bit in his act and pointing out the horse in the nearby field seems to be warming up to his presence. "It's usually just everyday things. . . but comics don't work, so they have all day to dwell on it and turn it around."

Edwards has amassed an impressive string of credits. In 1995, he was the winner of the Vail National Comedy Invitational in Colorado then stole the show at the Molson Canadian Comedy Festival in Toronto the following year.

In 1997, Edwards knocked 'em dead at the Just For Laughs Comedy Festival in Montreal - he's performed at the festival a whopping nine times - and has accumulated countless television credits including *The New Red Green Show*, *Open Mike* with Mike Bullard, *A&E's Comedy on the Road*, *CBC's Comics!* and the Comedy Network's *Laugh-a-Thon* and *Comedy Now*.

Although Edwards said he has "been through" Lindsay on a number of occasions - many moons ago he

had a long-running one-nighter at the Oyster Hut in Peterborough - he's glad to finally be stopping this time around.

"It's all very exciting," he said of his current tour which includes stops in Cornwall, Kingston, London, Guelph, Belleville, Orillia and Ottawa.

"It's great to be in a larger venue but I think the smaller shows offer more latitude. You can really get intimate with the audience and commiserate about the same things."

Edwards also said the tour is an excellent opportunity to bring the same glitz and glamour of the festival shows to mainstream audiences.

"I'm honoured to have been to (Just For Laughs) so many times, but when the show tours, it never makes it to the smaller communities," he said, noting the festival is, however, a foot in the door. "Once people know who you are and get your perspective, it's easier to get rolling along."

Despite the "overwhelming compulsion," Edwards said there are days when he wonders what he's doing - usually when the mortgage is due and there's only a bottle of ketchup and package of bologna in the refrigerator.

"But the ups are usually much higher than the downs," he added. "It's such an incredible career. I've had the chance to do so many things, meet so many people and travel. And it's something that I truly love doing, so it doesn't even feel like work."

The only problem, he noted, is that he spends way too much time away from his wife of 17 years, Dawn.

"I'm on the road a lot and I miss her terribly," he said, adding they are both on the same wavelength when it comes to their sense of humour, which is a bonus. "She laughs at all the same things I do and we have a lot of fun together."

Edwards has quite a few ideas simmering on the back burner, and would like to embark on some collaborations and writing projects in the future. One of these has piqued the interest of the CBC - albeit the strike quashed talks. Edwards would like to see a return to the radio comedy - a throw back to the theatre of the mind - with a tongue-in-cheek approach to the radio plays of yesterday.

In the meantime, Edwards looks forward to connecting with live audiences and sharing his musings on everything from driving in Toronto to mad cow.

Edwards takes the stage at 8 p.m.

