

MINING FOR GOLD

TIMMINS' COMIC A HIT WITH SMALL-TOWN HUMOUR Thursday, December 1, 2005

BY DENIS ARMSTRONG, OTTAWA SUN

Comedian Derek Edwards is tired of being asked about that other famous person from Timmins.

"It's like being the second-best-known person from Bethlehem," says Edwards from his new cottage getaway north of Kingston. "I'm screwed, nobody remembers Duncan of Nazareth."

But Edwards isn't looking for sympathy. Coming from small town Northern Ontario is his source material. In his comic universe, one of the more reliable characters is the dumb Canadian. Oddballs and idiots such as Charlie Farquarson, and Dave Broadfoot's Cpl. Renfrew, who are so far out of step with the times they inadvertently become our sharpest critics.

'THEY GET ME'

"The things you find odd, out of step, they're the hammer and nails in the comedy toolbox," he says. "Coming from Timmins, I find lots funny."

But in his new live show Sleepless in Gogama, which rolls into CentrepoinTE Theatre on Wednesday, Edwards proves you can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy.

"I find the small-town angle works in every city in Canada. You tell tales of growing up in any small town and everyone gets it. Half the people who live in Toronto grew up in Cochrane or Wawa, and they all hang out together. The other half are from Newfoundland. They get me."

The 48-year-old has come a long way in a relatively short period of time, moving from playing truck stops and Legion halls to regular appearances on CTV's Comedy Now and the Just For Laughs show. He's also appeared on CBC's Sleeping with the Elephant and CBC-Radio's Madly Off in All Directions.

"CBC's mandate is to remind Canadians that they're in Canada," he jokes.

Last year was particularly good for Edwards. He was a four-time nominee for best standup at the 2005 Canadian Comedy Awards.

Not surprising for this workhorse who tours seems to be everywhere.

Take Gogama, for instance, a town of 600 about three hours north of Timmins.

"I played there in the only place available, a restaurant," he says giggling. "But what they forgot to tell

me was everyone spoke French, but it had been such a long time since they saw live entertainment they stayed for my whole set even though they couldn't understand a word.

"I haven't done a political joke for so long because it's so hard to get audiences interested in politics," he adds. "The only political joke I had before that was I would go on stage and thank everyone and I'd like to particularly thank (Ontario Premier) Dalton McGuinty for being here for emotional support. Then, I'd look at the front row, get upset and yell 'Ah, man, he promised!' "

Tickets are \$30 at the box-office.