

## **The Kingston Whig-Standard**

by Marc Givens

I was a stand-up comedian once. Once.

When I was eleven, a small community agency in my neighborhood volunteered to stage an "afternoon of entertainment" for a local retirement home. Many brilliant children with staggering talent and potential - such as myself - were recruited for this escapade. My assignment was a comedy routine. In the most revered tradition of such towering giants as Milton Berle and Jackie Gleason, I developed my material over long, painstaking hours of rehearsal and preparation. That is to say, I stole it - from a great, somewhat under-rated comedian, to whose heights of creativity and erudition I gleefully aspired: Redd Foxx. (It helped that his was the only comedy album my parents owned.)

If you know Mr. Foxx's material you know, of course, that its performance requires a certain amount of, shall we say, life experience - an amount usually absent from the lives of eleven-year-olds (on this planet, anyway). Which meant that despite my reams of twinkling talent, my copious charm, and my inherent ability to inspire laughter in virtually everyone who so much as looks at me, my premier performance did not meet with overwhelming enthusiasm. That is to say, I bombed.

The moral of the story is that great talent often goes inadequately recognized. Yet another brilliant person, who should be as angry about this fact as I am, had the generosity to bless this city with his presence at the Grand Theatre on Sunday night.

The man's name is Lorne Elliott, and if he is not regarded as great now, he soon will be. To all of us who dread the coming of Ace Ventura XXVII: As Dumb as I Wanna Be, Elliott should stand out as a messiah - he is keenly witty, wickedly funny and uniquely Canadian in the most intelligent and laudable of ways. He integrates physical, musical and stand-up comedy so adroitly, and with such ingenious and insightful instinct, that any odd moment not occupied with laughter at his words will likely be spent marvelling at his talent.

With just a few props - his clothes, his guitar and most notably, his hair - Elliott provided a lucky 200 Kingstonians with an hour-and-a half of hilarity. Sometimes cute, sometimes caustic, his brand of humor falls somewhere within an unlikely comic triad framed by Bill Cosby, Dave Broadfoot and Robin Williams. He is rehearsed enough to be precise, spontaneous enough to be fresh, and nervous enough to be real. He is everything a great entertainer should be.

Except, of course, a household name. He is by no stretch of the imagination unsuccessful: his resume is long and formidable. He has opened for Rodney Dangerfield and for Jay Leno; he is a fixture at Montreal's Just For Laughs Festival; he has 17 years of professional stage experience, nationally and inter nationally, in English and in French. He is an accomplished musician and a clever songwriter; he is an award-winning

playwright and a splendid comedian, whose humour runs the gamut from the whimsical to the smartly scathing. So why no multi-million dollar deals?

One reason may be his Canadian content. From his rubber-booted mishaps in the sugarbush, to his crash course (so to speak) in sailing and Cape Breton's weather, to his geographically challenged alternative to our current national anthem, Elliott's act is truly Canadian through and through. And, as we all know, the land of million-dollar deals rarely looks beyond its own doorstep. (isn't it ironic... ?)

Another reason may be that he's too gosh-darned nice. Though an occasional foulity does wend its way across his lips, the f-word is nowhere to be found; the most frequently used epithet is "jeezily" - a new one in my books, and one that I think is a whole lot funnier (at least when he uses it). Another nice thing about Elliott, calculated as it may be, is the trouble he takes - even with a town as small as Kingston to make up a few jokes about us and us alone. (I'd tell them to you, but then he couldn't use them again if he comes back.)

But I suspect that the real reason that Jim Carrey is not yet washing Lorne Elliott's car is that the world has not yet caught up to his brilliance. The best way I can think of to correct this global oversight is for the general public to pack his shows night after night, week after week, until the deal-making powers-that-be take their heads out of the sand long enough to smell all the money he'll make them. And to such action I exhort you, should he come this way again.

Don't do it for me. Don't even do it for Lorne. Do it for yourselves. If you don't know how to laugh when you walk in, you certainly will by the time you leave. And if, like most people, you arrive with a sense of humor, you may find yourself surprised to depart with a sense of awe. Now, that's entertainment.