



Facts and Fancy from the CCHOF

Contents Volume 1 issue 1Dec 31 2021

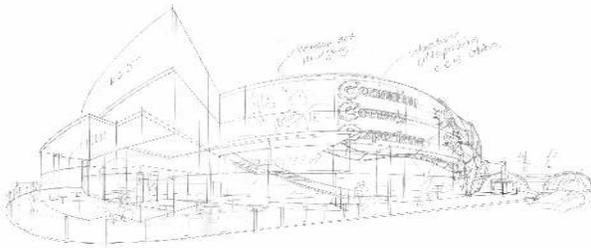
“IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME,” W.P. KINSELLA

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Founders message- “Integrity”

Well, we did it. We actually got a virtual Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame started. Thanks for visiting us and getting involved. There is so much to do, but we want to do it right. That is why the Board of Directors and our first fully formed committee have been working so hard on setting criteria for nominations and inductions. In this first tissue we want to make it clear that we have a plan to get to bricks and mortar, but we know we have to have a strong foundation (pun intended).



Integrity is our goal. That is why we have the board and the nomination committee working hard to set a blueprint of integrity for the future. That means inclusion and listening to many voices, old and young. So please share your thoughts with us through our social media pages or write to us at info@canadiancomedyhall.com

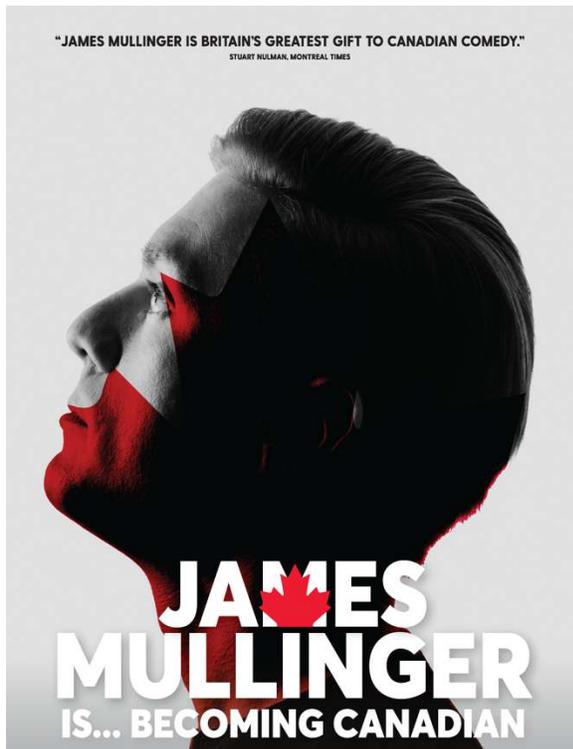
We want the history of Canadian Comedy to tell a story, to educate, to amuse. We welcome your input. Do you have any favourite Canadian comedy stories or thoughts? Send us a short video for posting. Please enjoy the first edition and welcome to the Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame.



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From British Comedian to Canadian Comedian
An essay by James Mullinger



I left London, England and moved to Canada on 14th February in 2014 and finally became a Canadian citizen in December 2021. It gives me immense pride to finally be able to call myself a Canadian comedian. I am aware of both the importance of that title, and of what it takes to maintain it.

Canada is arguably the world's funniest country. Despite being so sparsely populated (it is 40 times the size of the UK but with just more than half the number of people), it churns out more comedy talent than anywhere

else. In fact Canada is one big joke, both on-screen with Catherine O'Hara, Tommy Chong, Dan Aykroyd, Jim Carrey and Seth Rogen to behind the scenes with Lorne Michaels, creator and producer of Saturday Night Live.

Just what are you putting into the maple syrup?

I had been a comedian for eight years in the UK (four as an open spot, four as a semi-pro), when I moved to Canada so now more than half of my career has been spent working in Canada.

This is what I have learned.

It is tough being a comedian in Canada. You will never be a big star in this country. We all know we aren't going to be rich or famous. But that's kind of nice, because it's not as ruthless here as it is in other comedy hubs. We do comedy because we love it, not to chase riches (because we know there won't be any). The national newspapers in Canada will never write about Canadian comedians (unless they go to America), and the government won't even recognize it as an art form.



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The comedy scenes are very different in England and America. There isn't a star system here - which is both a good and a bad thing. The good news is that the biggest and best comedy festivals in the world are here. The biggest comedy club chain in the world is here. And stand-up comedy has been a regular fixture on primetime TV here for much longer than it has been in England.

But like I say, there's no star system in Canada to make comedians or actors properly successful in their homeland. The upside of that is that no-one gets into comedy for the money here. Or for the fame. There aren't dozens of panel shows on TV like there are in England, which turn club comics into theatre and arena comics. No one is getting rich. As a result, the only people doing comedy in Canada are people who really love comedy. This creates a truly beautiful atmosphere in club dressing rooms. And that is what I have missed most these past two years – hanging out with other comics in green rooms and shitty accommodations.

I am sometimes asked what my aspirations are, as if people expect me to say that I want to be in movies or do TV. But really, I just want to maintain where I am at. This is hard enough - specially right now. My dream in life as a child was to become a stand-up comedian and to feed and house my

family from that job. The fact that I now do that (just about) is the greatest thing, and I just want everything to carry on exactly as it is now. I'm not chasing anything other than the telling of jokes onstage (or even virtually). It's all good as long as I am making people laugh and earning from doing so.

I have always been fascinated by stand-up comedy and was aware of Canada's incredible comedy pedigree at a very young age. I grew up listening to Just For Laughs tapes and watching John Candy, Jim Carrey, Mike Myers, Tommy Chong, Catherine O'Hara, Rick Moranis and Dan Aykroyd videos and studied their artistry. I loved them and watched them over and over, laughed like a drain and wondered how these people could be so skilled at making millions laugh when I was too shy to talk to another kid in my class.

In my early twenties I first started thinking about doing stand up and began to really hate myself for not trying. One night, on New Year Eve, 2004, I was on holiday in Saint John, New Brunswick with my wife visiting her family and we sat watching a dinner theatre production.

These performers had us all laughing and dancing and singing. I was half entertained, and half overcome with profound jealousy that these performers were living out their



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dreams. No matter what they did during the day or what their home lives were like, at night they were stars. They were actually doing it. I was jealous and angry with myself for not even trying. So, I made a pact that night that 2005 would be the year I tried stand-up comedy. It still took me five months but in May that year I finally found the confidence to do it and did my first open spot in the basement of a Caribbean bar in East London. Then I hit the open mic circuit and gigged every night for four years, dying on my arse, racking up huge debts in travel while doing a fairly high stress and high-pressure day job. Eventually, my night job paid off in soggy, crumpled five-pound notes.

And that's what the movie about my early years in comedy *The Comedian's Guide To Survival* is about – those years when you have a day job and are performing on stage every night. It's a brutal grind but gradually you get better at it. The film is available to watch free on YouTube here <https://youtu.be/X4BnFpcBsOc>. It features a who's who of Canadian comedy titans including Mike Ward, Derek Seguin, Pete Zedlacher and Mike Wilmot. Shooting much of this film would have been impossible on such a small budget without the kind help of Brent and Bruce at Just For Laughs who let us film some of the higher concept scenes at the festival.

It is now well-reported – amongst the comedy community at least – that Canada is one of the few countries in the world that doesn't recognise comedy as an artform. And this is reflected by the (government funded) national media. It is one of the only performing arts that is not considered art. Storytelling is. One-person shows are. A monologue is a piece of art. But stand-up comedy is not. Essentially, they are saying that it is only art if no one is laughing. And no one can quite figure out why there is this aversion to recognizing stand up as an art form. Comedy brings in more revenue for towns and cities than many other artforms. Having worked in numerous different artistic fields, I know the work and endless hours that go into crafting a perfect stand-up set to perform to 850 people in a beautiful theatre. In an age of CGI and IMAX, it takes a lot to build something that can captivate and entertain and inspire and enliven an audience for 100 minutes when just one person is alone on stage with nothing but a microphone in their hand.





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I once attempted to apply for a one person show grant but was told that I would not be considered because stand-up comedy was not theatre, nor storytelling, nor a one-person show. This is, of course, ludicrous because it is all of those things and so much more. The issue was that at the end of a story, the audience laughed. If they didn't, it could be considered storytelling. Essentially, they are saying that it is only art if no one is enjoying it...

I still read British newspapers daily, mainly because – quite bizarrely - it is often the best way to learn about what is happening in Canada. Last week, I thoroughly enjoyed all of the quality broadsheet newspapers' coverage of the best performing arts productions of the year. Dance. Theatre. Opera. Ballet. And yes... stand-up comedy.

Beside me as I type this are the two big Canadian national newspapers' annual arts round up. They highlight the year's very best. Dance. Theatre. Literature. Not a single mention of comedy anywhere. And there never is. I am genuinely perplexed why this creatively booming segment of Canadian arts and culture is so consistently ignored in this way. Obviously these past two years have been different, but a lot of comedians have been doing increasingly inventive shows, as well as traditional

theatre and club shows. But as usual, there is no mention of this in any of the national media. Thankfully this is not mirrored by local media. Respected journalists such as Glenn Sumi in Toronto and Bill Brownstein and Stuart Nulman in Montreal have always been great champions of the incredible stand-up comedy this country offers.

And to be honest, the lack of a star system here may be depressing, but I have always tried to find the positives in life. And the reality is this: Canada might be the least financially rewarding place to do comedy, but you will work with the hardest working, funniest and kindest comedians.

The lack of a star system here in explained perfectly by Rick Mercer in his new memoir *Talking To Canadians*, that also serves as a great guide to surviving this industry.

Mercer writes: "This weird reluctance to promote individual actors or performers is systemic in this country. It certainly makes show business in Canada unique.

Ever since that first one man show I have done everything to buck the trend. Not because of ego. I don't need to see my name in the title. I need it there because it builds a brand that helps sell the tickets."



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What we can do, and what I believe Tim and Kenny Robinson (himself a bona fide all-time great of Canadian comedy) are brilliantly trying to do here is honour our fellow comedians. Continue to produce work that might be ignored by the national media and “global” streaming networks, but self-release it directly to Canadian comedy fans.

When I posted a rant about this on social media a few years ago, there were lots of comments of support as well as a few people telling me to get used to it.

The funniest response came from the late great Mike MacDonald simply wrote in response to my angry rant:

“I wouldn’t open with it.”

He was used to the situation, resigned to it and continued to do what he always did: rip the roof off every night and give audiences the best show of their lives. That will be his legacy and let’s face it, it’s a pretty darn great one. As Canadian comedians, we won’t be leaving huge wills to our families, but we will hopefully leave legions of laughing audiences.

And we can also ensure that the life and work of greats like Mike MacDonald are never forgotten. Preserve the work of Mike and other true greats that we have tragically lost

this year: Candy Palmater, Matt Billon, Norm Macdonald and Andrew Albert. I feel grateful that I had the chance to express my love for their work to them when they were alive. And that is my life’s mission. Ensure that Canadian comedians know how much we love and appreciate them.

James Mullinger is touring his new show *Becoming Canadian* this year: www.jamesmullinger.com
James’ memoir *Brit Happens* is published on 10th May by Goose Lane Editions:

<http://gooselane.com/brithappens>

Watch James’ latest stand up special on Amazon Prime Video or on his YouTube channel:

<https://youtu.be/BMaS--LwROU>

Follow James on social media:

@jamesmullinger

Follow James on YouTube

@JamesMullingerComedian





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Newest Links

Please visit our You tube Channel and subscribe here's a few of our latest links!

Ryan Bellville Sheila McCarthy and Pat McKenna (from 2001 CCA's)
<https://youtu.be/OrsNz31hOC0>

Clowns of terror Mump and Smoot are presenters at 2001 CCA's
https://youtu.be/jouPLy7_4wA

Rich Little as Jack Nicholson
<https://youtu.be/O0UPXLoLpZ4>

Jayne Eastwood and Deb McGrath spoof background performers _ cameo by Frank McAnulty.
<https://youtu.be/5EL52etHekM>

Meet the Board Part One

Mladen Raikovic

Mladen is a successful entrepreneur and a leader in the Canadian advertising technology industry. He is currently the Head of Global Partnerships for Goggle Canada.



Why are you on the board?

“As a Canadian living in a world where we are inundated with media from the U.S, I have always taken exceptional pride in the role that Canadian comedy (entertainers/writers) has played on the world stage and here at home. Our history of comedy stretches far and our influence runs deep. With the Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame, we are creating a home to recognize the tremendous impact Canadians have had on the world of comedy (both at home and abroad). And there has never been a more important time to do it.”



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[Jim Slotek](#)

[Jim is a writer/critic and founder of the movie blog Original-Cin. He covered comedy for 30 years, and was nominated for a Gemini award for comedy writing. He currently writes for Zoomer and Canadian Music Week.](#)



[Why are you on the board?](#)

“Canadians are naturally funny.”

People have said it so often for so long that it’s taken as truth through sheer repetition.

But why are Canadians funny? Who are the comedians and comic performers who make that true? And who made them laugh?

Generations are connected by comedy, whether they know it or not. Fans today of CBC’s *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* may not know the title is a nod to the ‘60s’ *This Hour Has Seven Days*, perhaps the best, most creatively inspired comedy/news hybrid ever created.

They may know that Lorne Michaels is the creator of *Saturday Night Live*, but not that he once had his own show with a comedy partner, *The Hart & Lorne Terrific Hour*. Or that he absorbed comedy tips at the dinner table from

his future father-in-law Frank Shuster. There’s a good chance they don’t know Wayne & Shuster, even though there was a time when EVERYONE knew Wayne & Shuster.

The Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame is a monument to memory. You can’t properly “get” comedy today unless you understand where it came from. Yes, Canadians are naturally funny, and have been since at least 1912, when Stephen Leacock chronicled the town of Mariposa’s greatest maritime disaster, in which a ship sunk in four feet of water, allowing passengers to wade to shore.

Time erases. But the Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame remembers. I am on the board of the Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame to contribute my comedy memories and dig up as many “lost laughs” as I can.