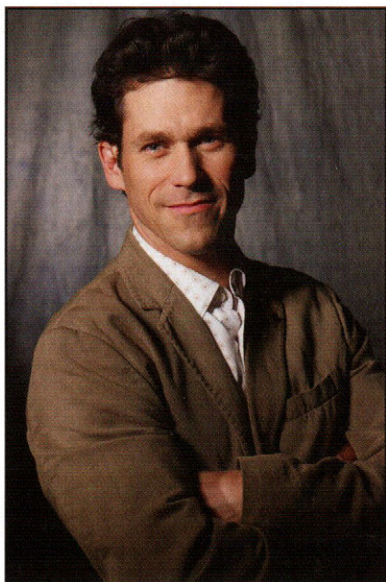


BY RICK MILLER



SECOND WITCH: I'll give thee wind.

FIRST WITCH: Thou'rt kind.

(Macbeth, Act I- sc. 3)

I have a problem with being funny. Equity approached me about writing this article to provide some 'funny' in their Green issue, a decidedly unfunny topic (although, technically, farts are also greenhouse gases). One might think I am funny.

My solo shows have been making people laugh for 15 years, I've performed in comedy festivals all over the world, and I'm the host of *Just for Laughs* on ABC (which you have probably watched other people watch on Air Canada flights). But the truth is that I am not inherently funny. I just do silly things onstage (like imitate *Simpsons* characters doing Shakespeare in *MacHomer*.)

Most comedians aren't inherently funny either. They're either good mimics or good salespeople. The mimics simply imitate other comedians who imitate other comedians who imitate the few comedians who are truly, inherently funny. The salespeople have a wiler skill: they know how to spin their product (themselves) to persuade their buyer (you) to give them what they want (laughter). Comedians want your laughter. You want to laugh. It's a win-win transaction.

That's why I do comedy – because people want to laugh. (Actually, I do comedy because it pays my mortgage, but hey... people still want to laugh.) Because laughter is good for you: it lowers your blood pressure, activates your immune system, triggers the release of endorphins, reduces stress hormones, relaxes the muscles, and perplexes the CBC. So if you have the ability to make people laugh, don't take it for granted. Use it. Abuse it, even. It's amazing what mileage you can get out of a stupid gag (see *MacHomer*, above).

MacHomer emerged at a time when I was pretending to be very serious. I was playing Murderer #2 in *Macbeth* and I had just finished writing an architectural thesis about Robert Lepage. But one thing led to another and soon I was making a living by being remarkably silly. And then, by a strange confluence of fates,

my silliness led me to collaborate with M. Lepage himself (who – contrary to popular belief – is one of the silliest people I have ever met.) He convinced me that comedy adds depth to tragedy, something all good dramatists understand (see Shakespeare, above).

Lipsynch is my latest Lepage project and it clocks in at nine hours. Seriously. (That's six *MacMortgages* – sorry – *MacHomers* back to back.) *Lipsynch* is a BIG play, with a BIG budget and BIG ideas. I share the stage with eight other actor/writers (and enough technicians to operate Ontario's four coal plants.) But honestly, as with my solo shows, the goal usually consists in making the audience laugh. The difference is that if the laughs don't come in *Lipsynch*, I have other people to blame.

This fall, I rotate between tours of *Lipsynch* and *MacHomer*. "From the sublime to the ridiculous," you might say. But you may be surprised to find out which play has the fart jokes in it...

Rick Miller is the creator/performer of the award-winning international hits MacHomer and Bigger Than Jesus (co-created with Daniel Brooks and Necessary Angel).

Ex Machina's Lipsynch premieres in London at the Barbican Theatre in September. In April 2009, the latest Miller/Brooks extravaganza HARDSELL will premiere at Toronto's Canadian Stage Theatre (Berkeley St). For all tour dates and show info, please visit www.rickmiller.ca or www.wyrdproductions.com.

