

Real thing

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MYX

BRYAN, DON

Mississauga has its own 'dummy' man

By PAT ZAMPERIN

Professor Noseworthy and his friend Don Bryan have a weird and wonderful relationship.

"Yah", Noseworthy says, "he's weird and I'm wonderful".

The banter between the two is continuous. Bryan is the straight-man and Professor Noseworthy is a front-runner for Henny Youngman's replacement as king of the one-liners.

Their relationship is more than wonderful. It's also unique, featuring a curious blending of two distinct personalities.

Professor Noseworthy is a "dummy", more accurately, a vent figure.

His creator and sidekick is Mississaugan Don Bryan, Canada's only ventriloquist who hand-carves his own dolls.

The professor, originally christened the Colonel, was born 13 years ago in Vancouver, where Bryan lived until May of this year. During his lifetime Professor Noseworthy has undergone three changes in appearance, with accompanying character revisions.

The final product is a wizened little old man with a constantly perplexed facial expression complete with furrowed brow, antique spectacles perched on an over-sized nose, slightly balding dome, full-blown mustache, slightly crossed eyes and a personality which immediately endears him to audiences everywhere.

"I can go anywhere with the professor," Bryan says. "I can crash parties . . . he's a real good mouthpiece. If anyone has any inhibitions, the doll opens the door. He can't say anything wrong because people find him laughable and loveable."

Professor Noseworthy, in addition to being the life of the party, is a vote-getter. Last year he won the outstanding ventriloquist award for Bryan at the national ventriloquist convention in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. The Professor was judged "most creative character" during the event.

For Bryan, who considers himself a fairly serious type of person and certainly not a stand-up comic, Professor Noseworthy fulfills the role of an alter-ego. He addresses strangers in a restaurant, badgers his audience, picks on Bryan, and makes not-too-timid advances to pretty girls. "Hey," he remarks to Bryan as a young lady enters the room, "she's just my type of girl . . . breathing."

The Professor makes no bones about it; he's a revivalist of vaudevillian humor.

"Have you heard the one about the girl who goes to see a psychiatrist," he asks Bryan. "The psychiatrist tells her she's crazy, but she insists she wants a second opinion. 'Okay,' the psychiatrist says. 'You're ugly too!'"

Timing between the two is perfect and punch lines are delivered with split-second accuracy.

The material is slick, compiled carefully and lovingly Bryan says, from many different sources.

"Routines are developed over a period of years. I listen to other acts, build up a comedy file, exchange ideas with friends. My favorites are the one-liners; the Professor knows a lot of them."

Bryan admits he's had a lifetime in which to accumulate and perfect his one-liners and quick-witted repartee. The Mississauga resident first became interested in ventriloquism when he was eight years old.

A retired Vancouver ventriloquist and doll carver, Pop Steinman, noticed the youth's fascination with the craft and invited Bryan to visit his workshop.

"For about a year and a half I would go to Pop's every Sunday afternoon and just sit and watch him carve. I learned how to do voices from a book and by the time I was in grade eight I had enough confidence to enter a talent show. Since then I guess I've won every talent competition I've entered," the ventriloquist says.

Bryan's first professional engagement came in 1955 when he was paid \$15 for performing in a small community show.

Since then the entertainer has toured with a USO show throughout Europe, appeared on BBC television and radio and, upon his return to western Canada, starred with such acts as The Platters, Mills Brothers, Arty Johnson and David Steinberg.

During the last few years, as Professor Noseworthy surfaced among his characters as the most successful and entertaining for sophisticated crowds, Bryan found his schedule even more hectic.

In addition to working full-time in the architectural

designing field, Bryan appeared at a number of supper clubs, industrial trade shows and night clubs.

There were also several television shots including the national production of The Alan Hamel Show.

Bryan says, "I've tried a lot of things ventriloquists have never done before. For instance, for two years I did my act in a restaurant in Vancouver. While the parents went in one room to eat, I, along with my children's doll Barney, would keep the kids entertained. And I also appeared with the Professor at discoteques in the city. The Professor acted as the disc jockey and went into his act. The teenagers loved it."

Bryan's inventiveness didn't cease once he was transferred to Toronto.

Employed at Select Home Designs in Toronto as a design consultant, the ventriloquist has had several opportunities at his position to incorporate Professor Noseworthy into his job.

When Bryan attends meetings with the Housing and Urban Development Association of Canada (HUDAC) and gives a lecture on design, Professor Noseworthy is right beside him.

"After I've done my talk, the Professor does his thing. It goes over very well," Bryan says.

When the Toronto Association of HUDAC held a seminar workshop last month on metrification, Bryan was asked to chair the meeting with the Professor.