

# Joe's Convenience has laughs in store

## ► comedy

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**JOKE-A-GOGO**, featuring **JOE'S CONVENIENCE**, **WENDY HOPKINS**, **FRANK VAN KEEKEN** and **AL RAE**, at the Rivoli (334 Queen West), March 14 at 9 pm. \$5. 596-1908.

By **DARYL JUNG**

**A**s a longtime force on the local live comedy scene, actor, writer and broadcaster Simon Fraser has always had the itch to elevate sketch comedy to levels no one has even thought of.

His former troupe, Delaware Watergap, broke some ground and won some friends on Queen West, but he always felt constrained — if not thwarted — by traditional sketch axioms, envisioning instead a far-reaching, fantastical fusion of sketch and sensory bombardment.

In pursuit of that dream, he's teamed up with comic actor Ben Brooks and crystalized his out-of-

## comedy

Complete Toronto comedy listings, page 86

body solo experiences on the wild and whimsical fringe circuit to form Joe's Convenience — sort of a corner store that offers everything you need for one-stop comedy shopping.

"I've performed and seen so much traditional sketch style that it's become really boring," says Fraser prior to Monday's Jokes-A-GoGo gig at the Rivoli.

### Refreshing slant

For the occasion, the freaky Frank Van Keeken — last seen as a disembodied head on the dinner table, ranting at David Suzuki and Jaymz Bee on Ralph Benmergui's hilarious Christmas show — the multi-talented Wendy Hopkins, the unfathomable Al Rae and, with luck, Ed the Sock jump on the no-stone-unturned bandwagon.

"You can anticipate everything that's going to happen. There's no new slant to it at all. So by playing around with the format we're taking a definite risk. It's something that neither Ben nor myself have



**Simon Fraser explodes conventions of sketch.**

ever done to any extreme, so naturally it's really refreshing for us as well as the fans."

Call it multidisciplinary, but what the Joe's boys pull off is a fundamental fiddling with the overall presentation of sketch comedy. They don't just *employ* songs, slide shows, film, soundscapes and puppets. They bend and twist any available medium into what they hope is a high-flying, original hybrid — indeed, a "new wave" of sketch.

"Nobody's seen this kind of thing before, I don't believe," Fraser assures. "It's so unique, and very diverse. Jokes these days are a dime a dozen. As long as you can tell jokes you can make the audience laugh. But where do you go from there? That's a tough question, and all I can say is we're taking it to the next step." ●