

Talented comic duo's hard work pays off

By ANDREW CLARK
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Two years ago journeyman comic Simon Fraser teamed up with aspiring sketch player Ben Brooks.

Neither had experienced much success. Fraser's work with the troupe Delaware Water Gap had never been widely applauded. Brooks was a virtual unknown. They settled down to honing their craft on the local scene, forcing themselves to write tons of new material. Each Joe's Convenience show featured approximately 70 per cent untried sketches, something which is unheard of in most sketch circles.

Last Monday night at the Rivoli the duo's hard work and talent paid off before a sold-out house that included industry hitters such as CBC vice-president

Ed Robinson, CBC Radio's Anton Leo, Yuk Yuk's impresario Mark Breslin and Broadway Video's Jeffrey Berman. Fraser and Brooks, both of whom are 25 years old, pulled off the best effort, titled Absolut Convenience, of their promising careers.

What really distinguishes Joe's Convenience from run of the mill sketch is their use of unorthodox scene structure. Brooks and Fraser spin conventional sketch on its head by creating false climaxes and then pushing past them.

The pair would bring a traditional sketch, for example, "Beautiful People," which featured a glamorous talk show host interviewing a hunchback about his beauty products, to a stereotypical conclusion. In this case the hunchback turned out

to be a handsome designer in disguise playing a practical joke. Instead of leaving the skit here, however, Joe's Convenience continued the action. The cameras were turned off and the show's host began to spew obscenities and fire her crew.

By flaunting hackneyed structure, Brooks and Fraser imbued their show with surprise, an essential but often overlooked comedic element. Consequently, they kept their audience laughing non-stop throughout their two-hour show.

They also showed a tremendous flair for bringing wild, surreal characters to life.

In one skit a camper turned into a moth and spent a few minutes extolling the virtues of his condition. In another, two hit men arrive at a bar to "deliv-

er a message," only to continuously forget it. There were two average guys who develop Superhero powers but decide not to help the needy because "We're not obsessed with saving the world." There was a visual gag about a man having an affair with a giraffe, and a dark version of Mr. Dress-up. All featured manic characters executed with spot-on timing by Brooks and Fraser.

The pair's best sketch was "Stark Raving Mad," which epitomized how far they've come and, if they continue to toil, how far they could go. The skit combined an unconventional structure, with outlandish characters all sewn together with punchy, well written jokes. In other words, Joe's Convenience had hit the equivalent of a comedic triple play.

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