

Canadian humour



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Canadian humour is an essential component of the 'Canadian Identity' which is usually both in French and English. Canadian oral humour consists of much more than stand-up comedy (Stebbins 32). Even if these traditions are very different and distinctive, there are said to be common ideas relating to the political situation and shared history of Canadians. According to Stebbins, prominent examples of the latter include Spring Thaw and the Frantics.

The Quebecois enjoyed the 1940s radio sketches with the puppet Fridolin in the Fridolinades, and from the 1960s to the present there were the satirical French songs of Robert Charlebois and Michel Rivard. According to Stebbins: Such manifestations of oral humour, taken together with written forms - novels, poems, plays - have raised two recurrent questions: Is there a distinct Canadian Humour? And are Canadians especially funny people?

On these issues there is considerable but little scientific evidence that can be brought to bear. Given Canada's historical ties to Britain, it is not surprising that music hall, the British equivalent of vaudeville, found frequent outlets in this country. For the same reason Anglophone Canadians have been receptive to the British Literary nonsense tradition that runs from Lewis Carroll to *Beyond the fringe* (Stebbins 33).

In mass culture, that is American popular culture, Canadian comedians have achieved unparalleled success and recognition. The continuous exodus of comics to Hollywood, such as John Candy, Martin Short, Dave Thomas, and Scott Thomson, who cut their comic teeth in Canada on such homegrown television programs as SCTV and *Kids in the Hall*, have led Canadians to

believe that they may have a superior sense of humour, one that gives them a comic edge south of the forty-ninth parallel (Petty 51).

Comedians and cultural Critics alike have suggested that this kind of success is based on the duality of their colonial experience and imagination in English Canada; Canada's is a broad, sophisticated perspective that internalizes the British tradition of absurdist humour, while at the same time absorbing American comic traditions from a thoughtful, often parodic, distance (Petty 51).

According to Petty, if Canadian comics abroad have an amazing double-sightedness, Canada at home also has an outstanding repertoire of humour, which currently functions in multitude of communities and finds comic, ironic, satiric, and parodic expression in a variety of genres. Apart from the question of a distinct Canadian humour, Canada, since 1950s, has certainly contributed to the international comedy scene, and not in the way implied by emcee John Candy at the 1988 festival *Juste pour rire* when he quipped, "Anywhere in the world all you have to say is 'Canada' and people laugh (Stebbins 33).

More profoundly, Canada's contribution has been performing sketch comedy and writing and producing comedy for sketches and shows. Such contributions to national and international entertainment are not made overnight, polished acts are the product of consistent, often intense daily effort over a period of many years (Stebbins 34). It is the evolving complexity of Canadian humour that signified by the country's growing articulation of minority voices (Petty 53).