

Brit wit elevates Laughs tour

Cultural gap cuts both ways as sophisticated comedy crosses pond

BY JASON SPENCER, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM NOVEMBER 10, 2011



Canadian comedian Steve Patterson

EDMONTON - The British are coming! The British are coming! For the 11th edition of the Just for Laughs Comedy tour, that is. The annual event returns this year with its first British edition, with Canadian comedian Steve Patterson accompanied by a gaggle of U.K. comics, as they play 19 cities across the country, including a stop at Edmonton's Winspear Centre on Sunday.

"I think they felt too guilty about giving it all to the British, so they had to fit an Irish-Canadian in there," says Patterson, who is best known for hosting CBC's *The Debaters*.

"I'm a little bit nervous about touring with a group of British comedians all across the country. (I hope) they aren't always angry, as they are in the soccer photos."

Facetiousness aside, Patterson acknowledges the sophisticated brand of comedy that will arrive from across the pond. "They're definitely wordsmiths," the Toronto native says. "The British comics, just by the culture over there, are usually very politically aware and up on their current events. ... There are so many different panel shows, where they bring comedians on with politicians and experts to give their perspective."

The tour, which runs until Nov. 20 in Victoria, features Terry Alderton, Matt Kirshen, Stephen K. Amos, Hal Cruttenden, Sean Meo and opening act *Abandoman*, an improvisational hip-hop group described as

“Flight of the Conchords meets 8 Mile.”

Patterson is aware some British cultural references may come across the wrong way. “They would think of ‘tramp’ as a homeless person, and I’ll have to explain (to the audience) that it means something different over there.”

But the cultural gap works both ways. Patterson recalls one incident when he was on tour in Manchester when an inebriated heckler could dish it out, but couldn’t take it.

“He came at me like a little bulldog,” he says. Security ended up throwing the patron out, “but the guy waited outside for me all night, and eventually, the guys from the club had to send him off or call the cops.

“They’re great, savvy audiences over there, but if they don’t like something, they really don’t like it,” he adds.

“The kind of stuff you can put a heckler down with, maybe in North America, won’t suffice over there.”

The crowds in Canada, however, are a “little bit more willing to laugh at themselves. ... We can be self-deprecating,” Patterson says.

As a Canadian comic performing in the U.K., Patterson found that, if he “made fun of something British,” some audience members would respond with, “Who are you to make fun of that?” Whereas in Canada, audiences are more likely to say, “It’s a joke. I get it.”

Comedy Preview

Title: Just for Laughs

Starring: Steve Patterson, Matt Kirshen, Stephen K. Amos, Sean Meo, Terry Alderton

When: 7 p.m. Sunday

Where: Winspear Centre

Tickets: \$37.50 to \$54.50 plus surcharges at the Winspear box office

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