

Steve Patterson takes Debaters to TV

BY BILL BROWNSTEIN, THE GAZETTE SEPTEMBER 14, 2011 10:03 AM



Once confined to CBC One radio, The Debaters, hosted by Steve Patterson is on the 2011 fall TV schedule, starting Sept. 14, 2011.

Photograph by: Courtesy of CBC

MONTREAL - It's a debate that has preoccupied and divided many, but one that has rarely been addressed in a public forum. Of course, we're talking about the all-important issue of showers vs. baths.

At long last, though, it will come to the forefront on the tube. As will such other hot-button subjects as "urban chickens" and "adult children living at home." Welcome to The Debaters, making its full-season premiere Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. on CBC TV.

Part rant and part chuckles competition, each 30-minute episode features two lively debates between two comics going jaw-to-jaw with one another. And this being Canada, the audience democratically decides the winning wit.

Hosted by Toronto-turned-Montreal-turned-Toronto comic Steve Patterson and directed by Emmy award-winner Brian Roberts (Everybody Loves Raymond), The Debaters is also an unlikely, though splendid, showcase of Canadian talent. Among those who will be getting wrapped up in issues ranging from bilingualism to biking, David Suzuki to Scientology, are Scott Thompson, Mike Wilmot, Derek Edwards, Elvira Kurt, Debra DiGiovanni and Sean Cullen.

The Debaters began as a CBC One radio show, which continues to air weekly to an appreciative,

inquisitive and perhaps wacky audience of 500,000. It is following the road taken by the Royal Canadian Air Farce, which also began on the radio before hitting the tube.

"I don't want to draw too many parallels to Air Farce, but it would be sweet to enjoy that kind of success on TV," says Patterson, who has also hosted the radio version of the show since 2007.

With little fanfare, some Canadian viewers got a sneak peek of The Debaters in the spring. "Some episodes were sprinkled around to cover the unfortunate circumstance of not enough Canadian NHL teams in the playoffs," Patterson notes. "This way they had something to show in Eastern time slots and we got some accidental viewership prior to Hockey Night in Canada."

Regardless, the comics are grateful for the opportunity to discourse on an array of subjects they tend to avoid in their stand-up acts, and to demonstrate their range.

"It's a new muscle for comics to flex," Patterson says. "We take on serious subjects, but we just hope to match the funny with the facts. I don't think anyone wants us to lecture to them, and we don't."

The CBC is committed to airing 13 episodes this season, although 26 have already been shot. Each 13-episode chunk was shot in just a week in Vancouver.

"The good news is that it frees me up to do other work," Patterson says. "The bad news is that for continuity purposes I have to wear the same suit in each episode. And let's just say that suit gets pretty gamy at the end."

Patterson plans to donate that suit somewhere in the interests of science and comedy. He insists he won't be sporting the same duds when he takes to the road next month as host of the British edition of the Just for Laughs Canadian Comedy Tour. The road show begins in St. John's on Oct. 24 and wraps in Victoria on Nov. 20. While it covers much of the country, it will not be making a pit stop in Montreal.

Nor will Patterson be making too many stops here. The Toronto-born comic was heralded in these parts for bolting Hogtown and settling down here for the love of a woman. But he recently returned to Toronto with his bride.

"I'm only renting in Toronto," Patterson protests. "And if I can make something work in Montreal for me, I'm not discounting moving back. My heart is in Montreal and my love for the Habs is unabated. I pledge not to see a Leafs game in Toronto – unless they play the Habs."

"But I was spending 70 per cent of my time in Toronto. It made no sense. It's been a real adjustment for me moving, so you can imagine how it has been for my Québécois wife. As a matter of fact, she went out to get some milk earlier and it's been quite a while. So she may be on a train heading to Montreal as we speak."

Montreal was the scene of Patterson's finest comedy moment, during the 2010 Just for Laughs fest. He killed at a gala with, among other things, an impression of Irish President O'Bama. So much so that host Steve Martin cracked: "If I had known he was going to be that good, I would have cancelled him."

It was the performance of Patterson's career, cementing his status as one of this country's sharpest

wits.

Since leaving a gig as a copywriter in the mid-1990s – he was given the boot for writing an ad for an amusement park that was “too amusing” – Patterson has toured the planet and has brought much-needed mirth to Ireland, Australia, the U.S., the U.K. and the United Arab Emirates. In this land, he has received three Canadian Comedy Award nominations as best male stand-up – and if there’s any justice, he’ll soon earn that honour.

Not that an award will change him. Being a comic in Canada means one must keep one’s ego in check. Patterson is fully aware. He recalls visiting his high-school guidance counsellor just after he had learned he was going to host *The Debaters* on TV.

“He had predicted that I would never amount to anything,” Patterson says. “So I told him I was about to be a CBC-TV star. To which he responded: ‘So, we’ll call it a draw.’ ”

The Debaters makes its season debut Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. on CBC Television.

Gone but not ungrateful: [Click here](#) to read Steve Patterson's farewell love letter to Montreal.

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