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Debate? Patterson don't need no stinkin' debates!

By: Brad Oswald

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Steve Patterson has the rare luxury of focusing solely on his standup-comedy act this week in Winnipeg.

COMEDY FEST PREVIEW

Rumor's Comedy Club Series

Headliner: Steve Patterson

Saturday at 7:45 p.m.

Rumor's Comedy Club

Well, there's certainly no debating this point: not having to host tapings of the CBC Radio show with which he's most identified will allow Steve Patterson the rare luxury of focusing solely on his standup-comedy act.

"It's going to be weird, for sure," he said. "I'll probably show up at the (MTC) Warehouse, anyway, and wonder why there aren't podiums set up. It's sort of become our *de-facto* home in Winnipeg.

"It will be strange, but I'm happy to be going there to do a couple of other things; I'll still see the people I usually see on *The Debaters*, but I'll get to enjoy myself a bit more. It's usually a bit tough for me -- we do two really long days, so I have to kind of behave myself on the nights before. But this time I don't, so watch out."

In the absence of his usual marathon *Debaters* sessions during the local fest, Patterson will contribute straight-ahead standup silliness to three events this week -- Friday's early-evening Misfortune Tellers gala at the Pantages Playhouse Theatre, Saturday's early show at Rumor's Comedy Club, and Sunday's fest-closing The Dark Roast: Al Rae on a Spit at Kum Koon Gardens, where he'll serve as host and roastmaster.

"I'm looking forward to the (comedy) club show, because I don't get to do them that often any more," he said last week from Vancouver, during a break from *The Debaters*' frantic production schedule. "It'll give me a chance to get some of the edge back; it'll be nice to be in a club where I can really do whatever I want and let anything slip and the crowd with go with me.

"Some of the people who've only heard me on *The Debaters* on CBC don't even know that I do standup comedy, which is weird, because that's how I got the gig. I like seeing the surprise on people's faces about 40 minutes into an hour-long set when they're thinking, 'Wow, he's got a lot of material; why didn't they talk about this on the radio?'"

Tickets: \$15

The festival's on-again-off-again relationship with the city's marquee comedy club is back on, with Rumor's showcasing fest talent in a handful of special one-nighters. In addition to

Patterson's gig on Saturday, the Rumor's Comedy Club Series also includes Maureen Langan (Thursday at 7:45 p.m.), Darryl Lenox (Friday at 7:45 p.m.), Jimmy Tingle (Friday at 10:30 p.m.) and Ryan Belleville (Saturday at 10:30 p.m.).

The Debaters' radio tapings were left off the schedule of this year's Winnipeg Comedy Festival because the long-awaited TV spinoff of the series just finished shooting its first set of episodes last week in Vancouver.

When asked to assess the popular dueling-comics format's transition from radio to TV, Patterson couldn't resist jumping on the obvious joke.

"There have been a few challenges -- first of all, we've had to find better-looking comedians," he said. "Most of them have what you'd call 'radio good looks.' It's been a challenge finding a steady flow of TV-appropriate comedians. I mean, the girls do a wonderful job in makeup, but this is (shot in) high-def. I'm not going to lie to you; we're running out of options."

Patterson says he's particularly looking forward to acting as host and resident skewer-steerer at Sunday's roast of festival artistic director Al Rae.

"He's got the thickest skin of anyone I know," he said. "Whenever we have him on *The Debaters*, he's immediately the villain -- he loves baiting the audience, and is a master at it. There's nothing you can say to Al that he's going to take personally. Everyone who's on the roast really loves and respects Al, which will just open it up to anything."

As it turns out, however, with Patterson in charge of the Rae-roasting festivities, a thick skin might be exactly what's required.

"One little tidbit, and I'd love you to print this: I know for a fact that Al's wife likes my comedy more than she likes his," he laughed. "I constantly, constantly remind him of that, and it will certainly be an opener at the roast. And if I can get his wife involved in this, I will absolutely do that, too."

You can sample Steve Patterson's comedy at his website, www.stevепatterson.ca, or follow him on Twitter @patterballs.

brad.oswald@freepress.mb.ca

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