

Glorious and free, hilarious for thee

Canadian history lesson a blast
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By Kevin Prokosh

OH Canada!

Monster Theatre makes history with this show, chronicling our home and native land's past with a comic re-writing that is refreshingly irreverent and irresistible.

Teen audiences laugh and learn as the popular fringe-festival act from Vancouver takes an amazing one-hour race through 5,000 years.



The songs (including Stompin Tom's *Bud the Spud*) and brief sketches that make up *The Canada Show* are not the stuff of history class, but will likely enjoy a longer shelf-life in kids' memories than the humdrum facts.

The arrival of Italian explorer John Cabot in North America in 1497 is presented as a Cabot and Costello skit in which they speak at cross-purposes about new found land. *Star Trek*'s James T. Kirk introduces Samuel de Champlain with "Captain's log, Star date 1610." The First World War is re-played through interpretive dance while a hockey game is made to symbolize the two sides in the 1970 FLQ Crisis.

Monster veterans Ryan Gladstone and Bruce Horak are back again after staging *Jesus Christ: The Lost Years* at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival this past summer. They wrote their up-with-history show six years ago, but wanted to add some aboriginal content for the local revival presented by Manitoba Theatre For Young People today and Saturday.

Canadian Idol finalist and Alberta native Sheldon Elter has been brought in. His primary role is to constantly remind Gladstone, representing the French in a Montreal Canadiens hockey jersey, and Horak, the English in Toronto Maple Leafs blue, of the aboriginal perspective when the two solitudes set to bickering.

In its bid for political correctness, *The Canada Show* also pays homage to female historical stars such as Nellie McClung, while offering a shout-out to the likes of Hayley Wickenheiser, Sheila Copps, Pamela Anderson, Michèle Jean and the next Governor General, Avril Lavigne.

The comic highlight is the re-telling of the Conscription Crisis as a version of *A Christmas Carol*. Canuck hosers Doug and Bob McKenzie are the ghosts of Conscriptions future and introduce the puppet Tiny Tim Horton, who gets his Timbits blown off in the Second World War. It's priceless.

As is characteristic of a fringe touring show, the production values are low-tech, but the vibe is certainly high-spirited. The affable trio perform in front of a large map of Canada and the only piece of furniture is a large tickle trunk painted brightly with the Canadian maple leaf. By the end of the show, the stage is strewn with the hats that brought Canada's greatest characters to life.

The Canada Show has already played to many Winnipeg teens. After its brief public run this weekend, it heads out on a provincial tour to an estimated 21,000 students who will learn that the Newfie joke is our greatest invention.