

# YUKKING IT UP

COMEDY IN THE '90S LACKS 'A PATRON SAINT,'  
YUK YUK'S FOUNDER MARK BRESLIN SAYS

By Joel Rubinoff Record staff

Mark Breslin is in a philosophical mood.

At home in Toronto recovering from a bladder operation that turned out more complex than expected, the Yuk Yuk's founder is equating his own well being with the state of the comedy empire he built from scratch nearly 20 years ago.

"I'm a delicate flower, Joel," confides the smart-aleck quipster, promoting, from his bedside, the chain's newest opening, at the Howard Johnson Meeting & Convention Centre in Kitchener. The club, located at 1333 Weber St. E., opens Thursday night with comics Jeremy Hotz, Shannon Laverty and Rob Ross.

"I can take anything emotionally, but



Hotz

when it comes to the physical world, I'm a total wimp."

And so he's in bed, biding his time, making his calls, waiting for the ziet-gist of good health to smile upon him once again.

Ironically, or perhaps not, Yuk Yuk's itself — and the comedians who feed it — is also in one of its periods of "retrenchment" after years of almost constant expansion.

"They say the comedy business is kind of at a plateau right now," notes Breslin, who, after an unsuccessful foray into network TV three years back, has focused his energy booking Yuk Yuk's comics for conventions and other out-of-club functions.

"And it's certainly true that I can't think of many cities we haven't opened up in. Comedy clubs are oversubscribed financially in the States and Canada . . . there's probably no room for any more."

What's more he says, since the death of the kinetic Sam Kinison — who sparked comedy out of its mid-'80s torpor with one caustic yelp — comedy has lacked a strong voice, a patron saint.

"You need some people to come and shake it up a bit," says Breslin, whose soon-to-be released memoirs are entitled *I'd Rather Have Fun Than Be Happy*.

"It's all cyclical. Remember how pop music somewhere in the mid-'70s had kind of a softness to it? And you needed punk to come along and kick out the jams. And even if you weren't a punk, it influenced everybody else. And I'm hoping those punks come along soon in the comedy scene."

With the current government obsession with downsizing and cutbacks,

some would argue it can only be a matter of time.

"My fear is they'll be so angry they won't even find solace in comedy," says Breslin soberly. "A certain amount of anger is good. Too much anger . . . it paralyzes you."

Which is why a performer like Jeremy Hotz — a Yuk Yuk's veteran who recently signed a TV development deal with Disney — seems poised for the big time.

"Because everyone else is going with that 'feel-good' thing where they're going 'Hey, everything's fine,'" says the Toronto-based comic, whose not quite mad-as-hell everyman has hit a responsive chord with disaffected mid-'90s audiences.

"I think my success is that I'm the other guy. And there's just really nobody else doing it."

## Developing style

"I think comics now are trying to gear their act toward television. I don't think they want to bring a character in that is a little volatile. It harms their chances of getting on TV in America. Whereas in Canada it's a better situation. Canada is all about developing your own unique style, your own unique delivery and it's, I guess, far enough away from what everyone else is doing."

And so he has, at last, succeeded in honing the character he's been nudging and prodding into shape for 11 years on the Yuk Yuk's circuit.

"There was always a bit of sarcasm in my act," notes the 32-year-old South African native, a former writer and performer on *The Jon Stewart Show*. "And now it's just all very sarcastic, a very grim outlook."



Mark Breslin opes his latest Yuk Yuk's comedy club Thursday at the Howard Johnson Meeting and Convention Centre in Kitchener.

Not too grim, he's quick to point out. "Sam (Kinison) was more about the yelling. This character comes more from within. Sam was a big guy and he was in your face. His is a small guy and he's in your face."

"He sort of moves between very quiet insecurity and bursts of anger. It's not annoying — it's more inward. He's still a quiet guy, but a quiet guy getting really upset over the tiniest things."

Among his favorite targets: "Little tin teapots used in restaurants. 'Nobody knows how to use them,'" laughs Hotz.

"And every time you pick 'em up you burn your hand or when you try and pour 'em the top comes off and you

spill it all over the table."

□ The limitations of high school French. "They went and changed the national anthem and made it half English and half French, and I wasn't in school so nobody taught me the words and now I don't know the national anthem of the country I live in."

□ The coming of spring: "Everything's gonna smell like poo."

He pauses reflectively. "I think we've all felt that just total pent up anger for something that we're really sick and tired of. This guy actually yells about it."

He laughs into the phone. "I'll often hear from stage someone go 'He's right!' And then I think in my head, 'Oh God, it's just an act, relax.'"