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# We need more time to laugh it up

**JUST FOR LAUGHS** Stretching out the festival dates would give comedy fans more of a chance to check out all the great performers

So many shows, so little time. On paper, the dates for the Just for Laughs festival this year are July 2 to July 25. In reality, the English portion of the festival ended last night.



Bryanna Bradley The Gazette

**This was an especially strong festival for local performers, including Steve Patterson, who killed at the Steve Martin show, prompting the host to deadpan: "If I had known he was going to be that good, I would have cancelled him."**

That's because the anglo component of the fest is pretty much shoehorned into just one week – July 12 to yesterday. And even yesterday, pickings were slim, apart from the closing All-Star gala at Théâtre St. Denis. That's insanity.

In the week prior to last, about the only anglo series available was the Nasty Show. And this week offers only a couple of add-on Dom Irrera shows at the Cabaret Juste pour Rire and Kim Noble Will Die at La Chapelle as well as Tap Dogs – which transcends language – at Théâtre Maisonneuve.

There have been 49 different English shows and 208 performances, featuring more than 200 artists, not to mention 20 events in the Just for Laughs Comedy Conference and 21 flicks in the Just for Laughs Film Festival.

According to the dispatches from the far corners of the comedy front in town, this was an exceptional crop of chuckles – Pamela Anderson notwithstanding.

But most of us were in no position to really judge. Even if you went without sustenance or sleep last week, the most you could have seen was about 20 shows. And there's the rub.

Apart from Pam and the Bong Brothers – Cheech and Chong – shows, I have few complaints about the comedy I have been fed. Hell, for the first time, I even came to appreciate a ventriloquist, Paul Zerdin. And I was totally blown away – as were so many others – by the brilliant and poignant John Leguizamo confessional *Klass Klown*, which will certainly be the toast of Broadway this fall.

Greg Giraldo did a grand job, slipping into the loafers of Bobby Slayton in helming the Nasty Show series.

Jim Jefferies left us, alternately, howling and cringing in his one-man show. The Young@Heart Chorus captivated all ages with their punk renderings.

Steve Martin lived up to all the expectations and then some as a gala host, bringing class and a banjo and a bunch of deadpan. Imagine that: A gala host with an actual act.

There's a message here to organizers: Don't bother spending the big shekles on hosts with an inverse proportion of talent to attitude. Instead, go with straight standup galas – like the All-Star affair. Like Lewis Black, who with his band of lovable acerbics slayed as anticipated. Even Brad Garrett, with an ego to match his massive 6-foot, 8-inch frame, surprised and even exceeded expectations as he morphed into Don Rickles for the opening gala: "I forgot Tiger Woods was Asian, until he tried to back out of that driveway."

Also in line for kudos are wits Jim Norton, Robert Kelly, Dom Irrera, Andy Kindler, Mike Wilmot, Derek Edwards, Tim Minchin, Tom Papa, Bill Burr, Jay Malone, Noel Fielding, Gerry Dee, Jarred Christmas, Mike Birbiglia and Rove McManus, who did a heck of a job getting himself out of trouble after forgetting his lines. Hometown boys Joey Elias and the Doo Wops held their own, and John Hastings, representing Montreal, won the Homegrown Comic Competition.

And what can we say about recently minted Montrealer Steve Patterson, who gave the performance of his career while up against the best in the business?

We'll let Steve Martin answer that one: "If I had known he was going to be that good, I would have cancelled him." High praise indeed. Patterson's depiction of an Irish President O'Bama is destined for the annals.

Unfortunately, there was once again a dearth of female comics, though Kathleen Madigan, Bonnie McFarlane and Whitney Cummings did do the sisterhood proud.

On the down side, I missed dozens of shows I wanted to check out. Where to begin? The one-man shows – as opposed to getting just seven minutes of them in a gala – of Bo Burnham, Bill Burr, Jamie Kilstein, Mike Birbiglia, Noel Fielding, Christopher Titus, John Pinette, JB Smoove, Jeffrey Ross, Harland Williams, Tim Key, Tom Wigglesworth, Jamie Kilstein, Tom Green and Aziz Ansari. Would have also missed Patrice O'Neal and Phil Nichol – had they shown up as billed.

Not finished yet: Wasn't able to make it to Kindler's State of the Industry Address or his Alternative Comedy Show, AMP'D: the Music Comedy Show, Upright Citizens Brigade, Britcom, O'Comics, Down Under, Comedy Night in Canada, Best of the Uptown Comics, Bubbling With Laughter, Best of the Fest, Childrens Hospital, The Debaters, The Ethnic Show, Homegrown Comic Competition, The Imponderables, New Faces of Comedy, The Masters, A Late Afternoon with Kevin Smith and, can't forget, The Drunk and on Drugs Happy Funtime Hour (not to be confused with Cheech and Chong). And, I'm not proud, but I didn't scope one of the flicks at the JFL filmfest.

Yikes. Seems like I failed to take in most of the fest.

That bites. But there is a solution.

Has it not occurred to anyone in the upper echelons of the Just for Laughs brain trust that more income could be generated and more comedy fans could be satiated by actually starting the English portion of the festival, with the French side, at the beginning of July and letting it go until the end of the month?

The renowned Edinburgh Festival Fringe – where many of the JFL comics head – offers giggles from Aug. 6 to 30. Even JFL founder and wannabe Montreal mayor Gilbert Rozon – why not go for a professional clown

instead of all the amateurs we've had mucking up the town – has proposed that a world-class city like ours should have a month of total festival merriment.

So, what about programming the film component of the festival in the first week, at the beginning of the month? And why not schedule the New Faces and Comedy Night in Canada during that opening week as well, so we could all get a glimpse of the up-and-comers?

In the second week, continue with the Nasty Show series. But give us O'Comics, Britcom and Down Under, as well as the Ethnic Show, Uptown Comics, Nasty Girls, The Masters and The Debaters.

Week 3 would focus on the galas as well as the comedy conferences. And Week 4 would be devoted to the one-man (and hopefully onewoman) shows. Plus, special events like Tap Dogs and Young@Heart could be sprinkled throughout.

Piece of cake, really.

As for the killer quip of the fest – and after little deliberation – the one that leaps to mind is this Greg Giraldo gem: "They say Internet sex is ruining marriages. I don't know about that, but it's certainly ruining my keyboard."



So much for high-tech.

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