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## Tall Poppy Interview: Richard Ryder, Comedian

When comedian Richard Ryder ("Dick!" he loudly tells his audience) gets on stage to do a set, he does so with a commanding presence: tall, bald, goatee, eyes like lasers. He's looks like a biker ready to take down the bar. Until he opens his mouth. When he speaks, Richard speeds through whatever comes out of his head in a voice that makes fag hags stand up and take notice. He's the guy your girlfriend wants at her side at an H&M year-end sale. He's whip-crack smart and punctuates his sentences with girlish, infectious giggles. Not something you'd expect from an intimidating 6'4" bear of a man.



He's also working very hard to bring comedy to Parliament Street. Every Thursday night Richard hosts [The Upstairs Show at Big Momma's Boy](#) (554 Parliament St), showcasing heavies like Elvira Kurt et al. and new, up and coming acts in shorter sets.

Torontoist caught his act at The Point Trailer Resort (an exclusively gay campsite near Port Dover, Ontario) a few weeks back and he killed. In front of a packed house of gay trailer trash, it was kill or be killed, but Richard held his own with a magical rendition of Kabbalah (sung to the tune of Madonna's Vogue) and his "history of Cher" with visual aids.

Now you, gentle readers, can familiarize yourself with the hardest working homo humourist in Toronto...

**"Dick Ryder"? What was your mother thinking? Was she breeding you for a life on stage? Or porn?**

God, I hope she wasn't planning on my going into porn because I'm not near hot enough for that! Actually my mom didn't want to call me Richard but it was my fathers name and he wanted me named after him. My mom compromised by leaving him shortly there

after. By then it was too late to change it, do you know how expensive it is to have your name changed? It ain't cheap!

**When I saw you at The Point Trailer Resort, you aired a clip from Street Dick. Are you developing that into a TV show? How is that going?**

Street Dick is the brain child of myself and my boyfriend Glenn Parsons. The name was his idea. Basically it's just me and a mic interviewing people on the street. We do want to develop it into a TV show or, at best, a segment on an existing show. As it stands, we're going to film a few more segments like Halloween on Church Street and The Toronto Film Festival. Hopefully the TV Gods will like it as much as we do!

**By the way, what is it like to perform for a group of gay trailer park men? How does it differ from a Toronto audience?**

Performing for a gay audience is way different than a straight one, trailer park or no. Straight people need to be eased into some of the topics of discussion and have one or two things explained to them before they get the joke. And let's face it, where a gay comic is concerned, a straight audience is the joke! The funny thing is that gay people are still raised by straight people in a straight community but straight people don't cross too many lines in their average day so you need to be patient with them. I always find a gay audience to be intelligent, current and always happy with a good old musical number. The one main difference at The Point is that most of the audience is drunk and in some cases naked.

**Do you think stand up is dead in Toronto? Are crowds more likely to see the faster, less intimate comedy of improv or sketch comedy in this day of instant gratification?**

After touring around southern Ontario and New York State, it is plain to see that Stand Up is not dead in Toronto, Quite the opposite although you wouldn't know it from the 'Club' presence in the GTA. If you want to go to comedy club, your choice is Yuk Yuk's or The Laugh Resort. That said, there are a lot of venues that feature a weekly night of comedy where you can see newbies and pros alike, usually for free. Pick up a Now Magazine and you'll see over 20 weekly venues that boast the best of the best and the newest of the new. It's a good time for stand-up in Toronto!

**The Upstairs Comedy Night at Big Momma's Boy: describe in 25 words or less (or more, if you like).**

The Upstairs Show is a showcase room offering longer set times to fewer but more experienced comics like Elvira Kurt, Scott Thompson and Carla Collins. We're almost a year old and are still experiencing standing room only crowds.

**Finish this sentence: "Elvira Kurt once touched my..."**

Elvira Kurt once touched my ... heart (I know, gag! but it's true!). She is as generous sitting in an audience as she is performing on a stage.

**Here's a throwaway question: What was the worst moment on stage for you? The best?**

The worst moment for me on stage was when I did a bar show in Montreal. I'd been on the road all day, arrived in town late and literally had to go straight on stage. It's not like I got booed or anything but I could feel the audience loosing interest and I was way too tired to do anything about it. Hey, I'm still here so it couldn't be that bad.

The best moment on stage? God, that's harder because no matter how well I do I'm always dissecting it and picking at the parts I could've done better. One of my favorite times was driving (again) to Montreal. I had a terrible accident along the way that totaled my rental car. While I was waiting for the tow truck (and replacement car) I wrote a joke about the experience which I did later that night on stage. It went over so well that I still use it in my act.

**You reference Carla Collins a few times on your site and act. What's the obsession?**

Carla Collins is my very good friend. We met on the set of some crappy Canadian movie years ago and we've been friends ever since. When she was doing the Mix 99.9's morning show here in Toronto, she brought me in to do on air commentaries about reality TV and award shows. She's the hardest working woman in Canadian entertainment and is currently in L.A. touring her new one woman show, The Visionary Position. Once on the air Carla said that 4 out of 5 drag queens prefer her. I told her that 4 out of 5 drag queens WERE her.

**Anything else up and coming we should be watching out for?**

Glenn and I are writing, filming and producing our own projects. We're hoping to submit them to film festivals such as The Toronto Film Festival and the Out Film Festival. As for me, I'm hoping to develop my standup act and tour it in the States, England and eventually Australia.

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