

## ON STAGE

## Comedy's broken social scene

## Introducing the queer comedy troupe that really wants to be Canada's first

Scott Dagostino

**A**FTER AN INAUGURAL SHOW at this summer's Pride, the Queer Comedy Collective is back and ready to take on the Toronto Sketch Comedy Festival.

They are billing themselves as "Canada's first and only queer sketch troupe," while still debating if that's precisely true.

"We Googled it!" insists Susan Fischer, a Fringe theatre veteran beloved for her boozy Evelyn Reese character.

Meanwhile, actor/comedian Robert Keller notes that Vancouver's Bob Loblaw Queer Comedy Troupe started back in 2004 but is now an improv group called The Bobbers.

What about Toronto queer sketch duo Glyph?

"Well, no one has sued us yet; that's

the bottom line," says Lindy Zucker, star of the web series *BJ Fletcher: Private Eye*. "If the Bobs read this article and challenge us, the gauntlet is down," laughs Keller. Fischer deadpans, "Yes, queer Canadian sketch troupes have so much money to sue each other."

If not the first, however, QCC promises it will be the best. The team of Fischer, Keller and Zucker is completed by Canadian Comedy Award nominee Darryl Dinn and Scandelles choreographer Andrya Duff.

Each performer has seen success on their own, but joining forces has allowed them room and safety to branch out.

"It was time to expand my repertoire," says Fischer. "I needed that challenge."

Keller says he's enjoyed the chance to play straight characters, "even though my mom said, 'Really? You?'"

It was Duff, a trained dancer, who took the biggest leap. "I was apprehensive at first," she says. "I've never done comedy... I felt like a fish out of water, but they're such a great group to work with."

Both Duff and Dinn were urged to audition for the troupe last December by cabaret performer Shawn Hitchins,



The Queer Comedy Collective wears their queer title with pride.

who worked with fellow B-Girlz Mark Peacock and Michael Boyuk to launch QCC. With comics Alan Kliffer and Dawn Whitwell also helping out in the early stages, there's been as much talent backstage as on. The group seems less like the Super Friends and more like the massive, mutating membership of the band Broken Social Scene.

"We're all sort of six degrees of separation," says Fischer, crediting director Peacock with the initial "brilliant, simple idea" of an all-queer Second City show. Less simple, however, was getting these five disparate performers to jell.

"It took a while for everyone to figure out what everyone could do," Zucker says.

"At first, we were too collective," says Dinn. "We were obsessively discussing every joke. I don't think comedy by committee will ever be good."

"We were a bit shy and tentative," says Fischer, "wondering how to express ourselves without hurting anyone's feelings." She laughs at how, in one of the first meetings, "Darryl turned to us and asked, 'How do dental dams work?' Lindy and I barely knew each other, but we instantly joined in, turning that into the sketch 'Asking Lesbians.'"

The team seems to have happily settled on a tone of dark absurdity, combining influences as diverse as Monty Python and playwright Judith Thompson. One sketch about the history of cunnilingus is cheerfully deranged, while another asks, What if Newfoundland had a Jersey Shore?

As director, Peacock has enjoyed shepherding the group. In one rehearsal, he tells Keller a nelly character needs to walk "more mincey-precious, like someone's tickling your asshole," words that have doubtless never been spoken at Second City.

Fischer says the group wears its "queer" title happily. Keller says, "I've actually had several people say to me, 'Oh, do you really want to make

## Two kids, one hall

Last year's Toronto Sketch Comedy Festival brought Sassy Gay Friend to Toronto. This year, from Nov 8 to 13, more than 40 troupes from across North America will cram into three Toronto venues.

Scott Thompson and Kevin McDonald, two-fifths of the Kids in the Hall, are headlining this year. Will their show be a lean, stripped-down version of Canada's most brilliant sketch comedy troupe? Or are Thompson and McDonald finally rid of all that deadwood and ready to soar to greater heights? Find out at the Lower Ossington Theatre, Nov 10 at 8pm.

"queer" your thing?" But I'm not gonna pretend to be something I'm not." Unless, of course, he's doing his killer Céline Dion impression, beloved by most everyone who's seen it.

"I don't want to be a niche performer," Dinn says, "but so many people are vying for attention during Sketch Fest that being an out, queer troupe certainly doesn't hurt." Regardless of sexuality, "people are funny," says Fischer. Keller brings up the TV series *The L Word* as an example of a show "not designed for anyone like me but an intriguing show I enjoyed. That's what we're trying to do: create a show that is funny for —"

"— horny straight men," interrupts Zucker. The room erupts with laughter. The team is ready to go.



## the deets

## QUEER COMEDY COLLECTIVE

Toronto Sketch Comedy Festival  
Wed, Nov 9, 10pm  
Lower Ossington Theatre  
100A Ossington Ave  
torontosketchnest.com