

Mump and Smoot's Cracked runs the emotional gamut

By Colin Thomas, Georgia Straight, Vancouver

By John Turner and Michael Kennard. Directed by Karen Hines. Produced by Mump and Smoot. At the Cultch Historic Theatre on Wednesday, May 26. Continues until June 5

Mump and Smoot bill themselves as clowns of horror, but they are also clowns of pathos. I couldn't believe how moved I was during their latest offering, *Cracked*, trembling on the brink of tears when I wasn't howling with laughter. And I realized that I have got to be nicer to my puppy.

In *Cracked*, Smoot makes an unfortunate dietary choice and themes of mortality ensue. There's lots of blood. There are severed limbs. And one of the most excellent moments in the show comes with the crack of a breaking bone. The way that Michael Kennard (Mump) and John Turner (Smoot) play is so fucking unleashed, so unafraid of the dark, that it's liberating. And that fearlessness leads to an exhilarating sense of being alive in the moment; there were several technical glitches on opening night but Kennard and Turner just ran with them, making them part of the performance.

Clowns are all about power or the lack of it. Kennard's Mump is the boss, the parent, the dog owner. And Turner's Smoot is the lackey, the toddler, the puppy.

Turner is one of the most charismatic performers you will ever see. With two stubby little red horns sticking out of his forehead, Smoot is pure id, bloodthirsty when he's hunting for rodents with his club, terrified of touching Mump's chair, shamelessly manipulative when he sees the opportunity. Smoot becomes disabled during *Cracked*, and he milks his misfortune as if he were on a telethon. But like a kid asking for her 18th glass of water at night or a puppy who wants to play when you're writing a review, Smoot just wants to be loved, and you can't help but say yes. Turner's physicality is so vivid it's like every cell in his body is on fire.

Kennard's more cynical, contained Mump makes an excellent foil. And both performers are strong improvisers, even though they're speaking gibberish, with the occasional bit of English thrown in: "I'm waiting for your cue, Smoot."

Cracked sags a bit in the middle, and there are two scenes involving a pair of "surprise" characters, which feels a bit redundant. But the production values are fantastic. The flavours in Greg Morrison's richly textured score include horror movie, pastoral, Balinese, and bicycle chain. Cory Sincennes's lighting transforms the theatre into an otherworldly grotto.

Be prepared: if you go see *Cracked*, it won't always make immediate sense. But confusion is part of the pleasure. Go with it.