

STEP INTO MY PARLOUR



By Shaun Proulx

SHAUN PROULX TALKS TO SCOTT THOMPSON

He's back and he ain't so pissed-off anymore. That's what I discovered over coffee one afternoon last month with the inimitable **Scott Thompson**. The outspoken and unafraid comedian is now firmly settled back here in the city where it all started after achieving admirable success during seven years in La-La Land, most notably in his three years as a cast member of one of the greatest sitcoms ever produced, *The Larry Sanders Show*.

But as an old friend pointed out to him a while back - and what many fans and followers couldn't help but notice either - was that Thompson just didn't seem happy. Despite his hard-to-achieve L.A. accomplishments, and despite the continuing insane popularity of *Kids in the Hall*, especially Thompson's outrageous creation, Buddy Cole, it seemed his focus was more on what was wrong for him over what was right.



Thompson has changed. Not that he doesn't still have his bones to pick, but over the course of our chat I got the distinct impression he'll pick at a bone and move on, rather than strip it raw like a vulture. If he has something to say he'll still say it, but without allowing it to become a ball and chain.

Thompson shared with me how he let all that anger go, plus we discussed the curse of Canada, why he left Hollywood, what he learnt there, and smacking Margaret Atwood in public with a big cock.



You've said goodbye to L.A. Is that goodbye for now or goodbye for good?



For now.



Is Canada a better place for you?



Yeah.



Why?



I think I have real career here. I *work*. I've been working like crazy this year. I think Canada is generally more accepting of me. The problem is that it's very hard to get to the next level in Canada because they don't have the next level. It doesn't really exist. And Canada 's not really the greatest at rewarding success. It's funny; Don Cherry said something really interesting today in an interview. He talked about how because of the socialist philosophy that underpins so much of the Canadian experience, it's dedicated to making the strong weak, rather than the weak strong. And I thought that was profound. And I agree with that.



I always think of the word *celebrity* - as in *celebrate* - and feel Canadians have this awful thing against celebrating themselves.



Terribly, yeah. They are terrified of people sticking out, and they don't really reward excellence. They have this belief that everything is equal, and that's not really right. Equality is so wrong! (*Cracks up.*) It's such an outdated concept!



Go back to what you said about Canada being more accepting of you.



It's because people are so bred to be tolerant here. It doesn't necessarily mean they embrace you ... but look; I hosted the Canadian Comedy Awards this weekend, that wouldn't happen in America. I was there for seven years and I kept expecting that it would happen for me. But I realize that they were at least ten years behind Canada socially, twenty years ahead in terms of show business, and actually having a real show business, which is what I would like to see in this country. I just thought: I'm tired of banging my head against a wall. I need to work. You only have so much time and I have to work.



I interviewed Elvira Kurt when she came back to Canada and I remember her saying that you go there knowing who you are and ready to knock the doors down – only to find out there are so many people just like you ready to do the same thing. Did you feel that?



Yeah! And I didn't understand that I'd have to start all over again. But I did. Regardless of what I had. I had *Kids in the Hall* behind me, I had three years of Larry Sanders down there and I still had to (start again). And I also realized that I'd been stereotyped as the gay guy, and that's what I would remain. And I did not want to be the gay guy.



Why aren't Hollywood gays playing gays, as opposed to Greg Kinnear and Tom Hanks?



Can you name an actual star who is openly gay? There's not one. For all you know, there have been gays playing gays. But you can't be openly gay and play gay. Like me. I can't. I've been up for all those parts. I was very close to *As Good As It Gets* and I lost to Greg Kinnear. I lost everything. *Jeffery*, *To Wong Foo*, all these things, over and over, *Will & Grace* ... I don't regret my choices, I don't regret being out, but I do understand how it really does curtail your career.



And didn't you ever think: given where I'm at and all the success I've achieved, I deserve to be at a certain level and not continually starting from scratch?



Yeah, partly. You just think: jeez, Martin Short didn't have this, or Catherine O'Hara or Eugene Levy. But I realized that's the way life is. Things change, but they change very slowly.



What did Hollywood teach you?



I learned an awful lot. I learned that in order to be an entertainment business there has to be a business. And I learned that one of the things Canadians just drop the ball on always is publicity. This country is woefully lacking that way.




We don't celebrate, we don't say: 'Look what we've got.'



Yes. You make great things you shouldn't be embarrassed to say it's great. If you believe in something you shouldn't have this belief of 'I won't say it's great because I don't want to offend somebody who's not so great.' Well you know what? Too bad. Show business, art of any kind, is the least fair of any discipline. And that's the way it should be. And then people will learn very quickly that they shouldn't be in the business and they'll drop out. It's like the self esteem epidemic we have today. Kids today have too much self esteem. It's like: 'Oh, honey, I know you didn't do that right, but good for trying.' Not always, sometimes it's good to win.




That's the whole political correctness crap we've been marinating in.




In Canada the establishment is very politically correct. And very female. America is a male and Canada is a female. And because of that we try and make everything fair for everyone. And in this business it's self defeating. If you think you're the best, don't lie and pretend you're not.




Especially given that life is short.



Yes! And if you work your ass off – you deserve something. And people who don't work their ass off? They shouldn't get as much.



Nor should they be upset when others do.




Absolutely. Yes. They go: why didn't I get anything? Well maybe you weren't as good. Sorry.




Are you tired of the word gay attached to your name?




Oh! Beyond tired. Way more than that.




The only time I remember reading anything about you where the fact you're gay didn't get a mention is when is when you whacked Margaret Atwood with a dildo at some CanLit function. You weren't the gay Scott Thompson in the press the next day, you were Scott Thompson: bastard.



Absolutely. It was wonderful. Because I came out of that thing and all of a sudden I became Norman Mailer or something. I came out rampantly male, heterosexual. A pig, really. A French-Canadian pig.




Attacking our hero, Margaret Atwood.



Yeah. And it's true. This big brutish, hairy, smelly, big-dicked French-Canadian. And it was like letting a wolverine loose in a pen full of chickens. It was an incredible thrill. Now in hindsight I probably shouldn't have done it. It probably was an error in my judgment. It really taught me a lot about how this country's run. When you think about it, this country is afraid of the cock. They are afraid of men. And look it: I may be a big fag, but I'm still a man. I guess it was maybe my subconscious reaction the castration of me? By going: you think I'm a fag? I may be a fag, but I'm a man. And Margaret Atwood is the queen and she is the total exemplar of what I'm talking about. Dry. Un-fun. Feminist to the extreme. Can we have some fun here? I'm like: you're fucking writers! Aren't writers supposed to be the people that go into the world and bring things back?




And do you remember that right after Margaret Atwood won some –




- humour award from Sweden ! And the truth is I don't even recall seeing Margaret Atwood there. I do remember banging Hilary Weston with my cock. I offered to pee on her too. (*With a thick French accent* :) Ahh, you want me to pee on you? Ahh, you are a great lady, eh? I guess you want to pee on me, too, eh? It was insane. The reaction! They dragged me off stage. Daniel Richler dragged me off stage. I thought: your daddy would not be proud of you. I guess part of why I did all that at a literary function was also my reaction to no one treating my Buddy Babylon novel like a real novel. That really ate at my craw for a long time. I just thought: this is a real book. This is a hilarious book. And how come you're not noticing it? Just because I'm on television and I'm a popular entertainer doesn't mean I'm stupid and doesn't mean I can't write.




Do you think this was more passive-aggressive resentment typical of our culture? You're loud, opinionated, obnoxious, gay –




I'm not even the right kind of gay.




No, you're not.



I don't go around telling people what sweater to wear. And that's what offends them.



And then you go to the States, achieve an amount of success that is impressive, but, when you go and publish this book –



-- and it was a Canadian book, and I thought: Jesus Christ, I know this book is hilarious. And it only got one review in the entire country. Quill & Quire. Now, please. And they called me racist, every word in the book.



How do you work through all this? Nobody has that thick a skin.




I do.




You've grown one, maybe.



But the CanLit night was my only genuine scandal. And everybody should have one.




You don't seem to have such a heightened image of being angry and obnoxious anymore. There's no rage coming from you in this conversation, you're speaking about these things but clearly you've let them go.




Not at all. I'm a different person. I'm way better. I was a very angry person for a long time, bordering on bitterness. And then I had a number of things happen in my life that made me sit back and realize it wasn't working. What I've learned is no one really cares how you got bitter.




They just care that you are, Blanche.



Exactly. I realized I'm having a great life. I have a great career and a great life. And so what have I got to complain about? And if things didn't work out exactly how I want it, so what? And ever since I realized I was wasting my time. I don't focus on what people say, any of that stuff.




Why didn't Bravo! pick up your reality TV series idea for Buddy Cole?



Because of *Queer Eye*. They didn't want to be known as a gay network. And HBO probably didn't pick it up because of Ali G – that's my theory – and Comedy Central didn't pick it up because of Graham Norton. I admire all of them and my show was definitely a cross between Ali G and Graham Norton.




What made you decide to host the upcoming reality series about same-sex weddings?



Because I decided to say 'yes' to everything. I thought: what's the big deal? Even if it's crap. It's not going to destroy me. And I need to get out of the house. And I need to meet someone. I've been in – I think – the greatest sketch troupe, I've been in a tremendously fantastic sitcom, *The Larry Sanders Show*, so why not try a reality series? I think I'd be good at it. This is one of the biggest social issues of our time, and I want to be part of it. It's a chance for me to inject myself back into the public eye, have my little say, and make my comments. The show in many ways is like a moving talk show for me. I just babble away, and I talk to people and I push their buttons and I do my job. And at the end we do good: there's a wedding. I've never been to a gay wedding and now I get to go to six!



You once said you didn't believe there was a truly altruistic person. Do you still believe that?



Oh. Did I say that? I don't believe that now. I think there are altruistic people.



You have changed, then.



One of my best friends moved to England just as I was getting famous. I've known him since grade nine, never bullshits me. And a few years ago he said: you've changed. You used to be really happy and fun all the time. And it was true. I realized I had to let that go. And I did and everything changed. I look better and feel healthier and stronger. Before I got caught up in being openly gay, and the anger and the rest of it, I just liked to be funny. But believe me, there's still tonnes of things that make me angry.



You just don't carry it around for six weeks.



(Laughs.) Five. Five, tops.