

Cracked: not just for adults

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Is there a Mump without Smoot? This and more philosophical questions hide among the crevices of *Cracked* the final show in the [Cultch](#)'s 2009/10 season.

Welcome to Ummo. A world like our own, inhabited by creatures like us in many ways. Survival is an occupation, spiritual beliefs hold sway in the structure of everyday life in turn balanced by the great equivocator: Death. It is a world that supplies everything to the vigilant Ummonian, the cycle of life exists, actions have consequence.

I could go on and on about how deft John Turner and Michael Kennard are at riding the roller-coasters that are their performances, how small technical snags get mined for gold, how the audience must expect to be the 3rd performer and no one is safe. However, if you've ever been to a Mump & Smoot show then you know all this, and if you haven't, then that is part of the treat. What I'd prefer to look at is the amazing way in which a message woven through this Ummonian tapestry is so relevant to lives in our world.

Mump takes pains to educate Smoot on the importance of knowing the difference between a liquid that refreshes and nourishes, versus the one that will kill him. Lovably innocent Smoot understands, but will still get it wrong. Here will begin the 'end' as now the otherworldly duo must reveal their love for, dependency on and eternal connections to each other. Each character peels back their layers to show how they deal with the situation; Smoot eventually accepting and using the moment to get as much comfort as he can before the eventual, Mump railing against his beliefs, the forces of Ummonian nature and seeking anyway he can to save the life of his companion. The bond of love we witness is nothing short of Shakespearean in its exegesis, and though the story may be fraught with heavy themes, the world of Mump & Smoot allows us a safe distance to feel on a level below the play of comedy.

The struggle against the unknown of Death has captivated our imagination since the beginning of time. We continually seek ways to “answer the unanswerable” in order to mollify our fears. As adults we have already spent a great deal of time grappling with this issue and of course it’s always fun to watch a couple of clowns expound upon it, but I feel there is another, growing section of our society that needs these stories told to them in ways that invite them in and don’t beat them over the head with a proverbial stick. There are others that need to know it’s okay to love your friend so much that you would put their well being ahead of your own comfort. That even though our beliefs and ideals might be tested, our love for each other is all that really matters at the end of the day. That no matter what the odds of survival it’s okay to find a moment of humour or cherish a remembrance of a loved one. Sure, not all the adults in attendance will get this deep, but I think there are others actively searching for these stories in a world bent on high-school musicals and ‘star’-driven reality shows.

I’m speaking here of the youth. Judging by the news, they’re not as innocent as we’d like to think and probably on par with how young we were when Mump & Smoot first carved their way upon the scene. Perhaps it’s time to share the wonderful weirdness of these two with a generation that would benefit from these stories in more ways than one. As my lovely date commented, her precocious 9 year-old self would have “loved it!” more than she did now. Perhaps that means 15 year-old boys could learn a lesson or two. Perhaps these horror clowns aren’t just for adults anymore. Perhaps I’ve read too much into a hilarious evening with two of Canada’s best performers.

Cracked runs through June 5th at [The Cultch](#) in Vancouver; at [Magnetic North](#) in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., June 9 to 13; and opens the 2010 season at [Theatre Network](#) in Edmonton in October. You can also find more about them [here](#).