



Engaging in equal-opportunity laughs for fun and profit

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Michael Lifshitz has been physically disabled since birth. The medical name for his condition is multiple congenital musculo-skeletal abnormalities. "That's a mouthful," Lifshitz says, so he has an easier description for his disability, one he thinks everyone can relate to: "Slightly f@#\$%-ed up!"

He goes to great lengths to emphasize, however, that he said "slightly." Although his birth defect has necessitated an artificial leg, which, in turn, has necessitated a wheelchair for long hauls and a cane for short hauls, it hasn't impeded Lifshitz, 31, on many other levels. He is a chartered accountant. He got his master's in business administration last November. He is a financial adviser for the Investors Group. He ran for city council in Cote St. Luc a few years ago, but lost.

And, oh yeah, Lifshitz is also a comedian by night. And this evening, he hosts and performs in his second annual Laughter Is the Best Medicine Comedy Benefit at the Bernard Lang Civic Centre in Cote St. Luc. Proceeds go to his father's Norman Lifshitz Memorial Fund to support the department of pharmacology and therapeutics at McGill University. Also on the bill will be another disabled comic, Alan Shain, as well as Phil Shuchat, Kristoff Bonaparte, Kevin Gasior, Peter Radomski, Andrew Searles and Deanne Smith.

As the show's title implies, Lifshitz deals with his disability by poking fun at it. "People seem surprised that someone with a disability would want to do comedy. Why? Maybe the body isn't in top form, but that doesn't affect the mind." Or funny bone.

Then again, Lifshitz points out that people are surprised he works altogether. "Hey, I'm a finance guy. We don't do calculations with our feet - not these days, anyway," he muses.

He does concede, though, that his condition is great fodder for his act. "I was in Toronto a few weeks ago. They asked me to take off my shoes at airport security. What was the point? Considering I can't reach my shoes, I don't know what kind of terrorist threat I could possibly pose."

While Lifshitz likes to laugh at his own foibles, he prefers to focus more on other people's attitudes toward the disabled. "When people hear how stupid it sounds that the disabled can't do regular work or comedy, I think they get the point and, hopefully, I shatter that stereotype," says Lifshitz, who credits comics Chris "Crazy Legs" Fonseca and Shain (both suffering from cerebral palsy) with inspiring him.

"Nothing works better than the power of humour to dispel myths. Plus, I do get away with material the able-bodied could never do without incurring the wrath of the audience. It's nice on occasion to turn your disadvantage into an advantage."

The second Laughter Is the Best Medicine Comedy Benefit takes place tonight at 8 at the Harold Greenspon Auditorium of the Bernard Lang Civic Centre, 5801 Cavendish Blvd. Tickets cost \$15 at the door. For more info, call 514-569-2605.

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There are at least five women out there who feel that the best way to dispel myths about women - and even men - is through laughter. The women are five of the funniest in Canada: Jayne Eastwood, Robin Duke, Debra McGrath, Kathryn Greenwood and Teresa Pavlinek. You may know them better as Women Fully Clothed, the ensemble that played to packed houses at last summer's Just for Laughs comedy fest.

The behind-the-scenes documentary, Women Fully Clothed: All Dressed Up and Places to Go, is being broadcast tonight at 9 as part of CBC-TV's Opening Night series - just in time for International Women's Day.

The doc provides fascinating and funny insights into everything from the agony of touring and counting carbs to the ecstasy of not counting carbs and bonding and making others, as well as themselves, laugh.

Hard as it may be for some to fathom, Duke accurately notes that there really is a huge market out there for women who want to laugh. Here's the proof.

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