



BONE APPÉTIT Triumph works his magic on a French poodle

IN HIS THREE-YEAR TELEVISION career, Triumph the Insult Comic Dog has called Shannen Doherty “a hot bitch,” bragged to William Shatner that he read the actor’s sci-fi novels while being paper-trained, and told Tom Arnold that insulting him would be like “pooping on poop.” Such disses don’t make for typical chat-show fodder, especially when they’re coming from a \$10 hand puppet.

The creation of comedy writer Robert Smigel, Triumph is a correspondent for NBC’s *Late Night With Conan O’Brien*, where he berates celebrities, dogs, and—occasionally—celebrity dogs. His all-too-infrequent appearances, both in the studio and in remote segments, are punctuated with the generous use of the bon mot “...for me to poop on,” and often conclude with Triumph mounting his subjects.

“I started [my career] saying I was going to write satire,” says Smigel, 40, “and now I’ve happily devolved into puppet animals humping live animals.” Not that the humping hasn’t paid off: Triumph has amassed a cult following, with compilation tapes actively traded over the Internet, thanks in part to the breakthrough 1999 bit that saw him providing off-color commentary at the Westminster

Kennel Club Dog Show (he was thrown out for harassing a poodle). He returned to the event this year, only to be ejected again—despite being “disguised” as Ed Bradley, in a mustache, bushy wig, and glasses.

Smigel discovered Triumph while browsing in a Manhattan furniture store in the early ’90s (the shop inexplicably carried a small number of animal puppets). Though the *Saturday*

Hound For Glory



Fresh from burying his latest bone, Conan O’Brien’s studly correspondent TRIUMPH THE INSULT COMIC DOG gives us the straight poop. BY BRIAN M. RAFTERY

Night Live alum—he still contributes animated shorts like *The Ambiguously Gay Duo*—and occasional actor (*The Wedding Singer*) had developed an insult-puppet routine years earlier for his stand-up act, it wasn’t until he found the rubber “Yugoslavian mountain hound” that he decided to try his hand at it again. Adding a gold bow tie and cigar (“Triumph’s a class act,” Smigel notes), he then perfected the dog’s thick, guttural, totally hostile accent. “For years, dogs have been made out to sound like Huckleberry Hound or sad-sack basset hounds,” Smigel says. “Well, no—the fact is they’re Eastern European. That’s one of the reasons Triumph’s so popular—he actually sounds like a real dog.”

But the voice is perhaps the least surprising aspect of Triumph’s shtick, as some celebs have discovered. “Most of the guests have no idea what Triumph will say,” says Smigel. “Some of them, though—a guy like Tesh or Hasselhoff—are really willing to be pooped on. They understand that there’s a camp element to their popularity and they might as well run with it.”

Still, not every couch warmer can

take a ribbing. When Triumph boasted about his fake breasts—“Jennifer Love Hewitt, top these, baby!”—Smigel says he was forced to dub over the comment due to objections. In fact, sometimes he has to keep the pooch on a short leash. “[Triumph] wanted to tell Shatner that his hair looked like a Yorkie [that he] binged,” says Smigel, who was told by O’Brien no dice. Says *Late Night* head writer Jonathan Groff: “It’s smart and stupid. He’s enjoyable if you know the heritage of Borscht Belt comics, but he has the carnal, rude interest of a dog.”

Smigel has high hopes for his puppet protégé: an “album of really blue material” and a movie that would shed light on Triumph’s background (apparently, he was a Catskills comic thrown off *The Ed Sullivan Show* for—what else?—pooping on stage). To keep from getting too old too fast, though, Triumph will appear only three or four times each year, giving Smigel time for another dream project: “An Art Linkletter kind of show, with Triumph talking to kids.”

Brazen Puppets Say the Darndest Things? Sounds like a great idea—for me to poop on! ●●●