

ARTS & LIFE

BREAKING NEWS AT THESTARPHOENIX.COM

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MIME OUT LOUD

Performer doesn't need words to get young audience going

CAM FULLER
THE STARPHOENIX

He's entertained the fans of B.B. King and The Kinks but for a really discerning audience, Trent Arterberry knows where to go — kids.

"They love exaggerated expression," the Sooke, B.C.-based mime says. "They love the illusions. They love to be amazed, and I think the non-verbal aspect of it is appealing to them."

Arterberry performs Friday and Saturday at the PotashCorp Children's Festival of Saskatchewan. His unique career started by chance. He saw a mime perform at a junior college and was intrigued. At home in front of the mirror, he taught himself to lean "and it looked pretty darn good."

In his 20s at the time and just starting pre-med, the California-born performer gave in to his performing instincts.

"It was like I wanted to be an artist and didn't know it. I stumbled into the mime thing and something clicked for me."

Soon after, almost on impulse, he threw everything into the back of a VW van and headed for Boston where he worked for 25 years. The music connection happened when a band made up of some friends of friends put him on their album cover; Arterberry was soon opening at concerts. He'd wade through the crowd as a robot, with flashy lights and sound, and then take the stage and do some comic mime bits.

"It was unusual enough and arresting

enough that it was totally unexpected. People would be shocked, then they were laughing. It was really pretty cool."

He was stunned when Ray Davies of the Kinks came backstage and told him he liked the show.

"It was a very brief interaction but I thought it was pretty cool."

Arterberry, who's lived in Sooke for almost 20 years, started with traditional whiteface mime and took workshops from the world-famous Marcel Marceau. Marceau was an inspiration. On one memorable day, Marceau, who was in his 70s at the time, taught a full day and then performed a two-hour show that night.

"I couldn't believe it. He loved it. He lived and breathed it, he really did."

Arterberry's act has evolved from pure mime to include characters like Mr. Bigg, a little guy who overcomes bullying with his amazing dance moves and becomes the school hero.

"He's kind of a metaphor for a little guy with a big heart," says Arterberry.

Mr. Bigg closes the show. Roboman opens it. In the middle, there's lots of audience participation.

"I have one very funny routine where I get a volunteer on stage and I have a mime duel with them which, of course, the volunteer wins."

With 42 years of experience, Arterberry knows what works.

"In the first 30 seconds, you've got to get a laugh," he says.

It's safe to say he has kids figured out. "They love broad humour. I don't have a lot of broad humour, but if you shake your butt, they laugh their heads off."



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OTHER SHOWS

- The Little Prince. Based on the Antoine de Saint-Exupery novel, featuring puppetry and original music by Monster Theatre.

- Two shows Friday and Saturday.

- Will Stroet and his Backyard Band. Inspiring music and singalongs by the star of Will's Jams on CBC for Kids.

- Two shows Friday, one show Saturday and Sunday.

- Flyin' Bob. Juggler and "highly skilled goofball."

- Two shows Sunday.

- Wide Open Puppet Theatre. Six Robert Munch classics. Shows Saturday and Sunday.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Site activities: LEGO, fossils, story tent, face painting, co-operative games and more.

Sunset Party on Saturday evening, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. After the structured activities close, free access to the site for face painting, food trucks and free shows.

FESTIVAL AT A GLANCE

WHEN: Friday to Sunday

WHERE: Kinsmen Park

TICKETS: Site activities \$7. Mainstage shows \$12.50 (includes site pass)

BOX OFFICE: Bessborough lobby through Friday, tent on site Friday to Sunday.