

Just for Laughs Chicago: Bob Odenkirk, Robert Smigel Are ‘Not Inappropriate’

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- [Bob Odenkirk](#) [2]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [3]
- [Interview](#) [4]
- [Just for Laughs](#) [5]
- [Mayne Stage](#) [6]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [7]
- [Players Workshop](#) [8]
- [Robert Smigel](#) [9]
- [Saturday Night Live](#) [10]
- [Second City](#) [11]
- [TBS](#) [12]
- [The Not Inappropriate Show](#) [13]

CHICAGO – The just-opened Mayne Stage on Chicago’s north side was the setting for “The Not Inappropriate Show,” featuring comedians Bob Odenkirk and Robert Smigel. Both are in town as part of the TBS network’s “Just for Laughs Chicago,” playing through Saturday, June 19th.

HollywoodChicago.com was there, and scored a brief interview with each of the funnymen, who met each other in Chicago in the 1980’s.



Bob Odenkirk of “Mr. Show” and “Breaking Bad”

Bob Odenkirk is the quirkily comic actor, best known for “Mr. Show with Bob and David,” on HBO in the 1990s. Born in Berwyn, IL, he formulated his comedy chops in Chicago with The Players Workshop and Second City. Breaking out with Robert Smigel and Conan O’Brien, Odenkirk did writing stints on “Saturday Night Live” and the Chris Elliott sitcom “Get a Life,” before performing on the seminal “The Ben Stiller Show.” Recently, he joined the cast of AMC’s “Breaking Bad,” playing corrupt lawyer Saul Goodman.

He anchored The Not Inappropriate Show, billed as suitable for kids, but not written for them...they just happen to be “not inappropriate.” Old friend Robert Smigel stopped by, and members of the Los Angeles troupe “The Groundlings” and the “Uptight Citizens Brigade” lent a hand.



The Cast of ‘The Not Inappropriate Show’ with Robert Smigel (with ventriloquist doll) and Bob Odenkirk (next to Smigel), Mayne Stage, Chicago, June 18, 2010.

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: Since this is ‘The Not Inappropriate Show,’ how has your comic sensibility changed since you began, what do you find funny now that you wouldn’t have found funny when you were younger?

Bob Odenkirk: I have a better appreciation for maybe where to ‘draw a line.’ I still like to do crazy stuff, but I’m more sensitive to the fact that you can actually go over the line. I would have said years ago, if you got a laugh, you didn’t go over the line. But I actually think that’s not true, it’s a personal thing, a personal line. I think I have more of a sense of what I care about, and why it matters in comedy.

HC: So you are pretty much an expert on the ‘Midwestern’ style of comedy...

BO: Well, that’s nice of you to say, I’m not sure everyone would agree. [laughs] I think the epitome of the Midwestern sensibility is Bill Murray, and Bill Murray’s comedic voice. Because to me, it’s a cynical voice, a bit sarcastic and not enamored of the world. It’s second or

third generation immigrant, blue collar, got its ass kicked around and is not too impressed with people and things.

HC: What Midwestern comedy works or doesn’t work in New York and Los Angeles, in your experience?

BO: I don’t think they reject the comedy, they do appreciate it there and sense that voice as funny. What they don’t necessarily go for is some of the subject matter. People live a little differently in the Midwest, family is more important and it’s more about the community. In New York and Los Angeles, career achievement is a little higher on the scale of what matters. When you present to them subjects that are softer, like relationship things, that tend to say ‘who would care about that?’ And I think, lots of people would.

HC: What was funny about your family growing up that had you and your brother Bill both going into the comedy business.

BO: Both my parents were very funny. My mother was very religious, Catholic, but she’s very sarcastic and very bottom line Midwestern funny. She makes jokes. And my father was a salesman, but he was a very funny guy, he could have been a comedy writer. It wasn’t something he ever thought about doing. When you’re growing up you just don’t assume you can do that.

HC: Did they get your stuff as you went through the various shows?

BO: They loved my stuff as a kid. They don’t like it as much now. [laughs] But my mom is coming to the show.

HC: Finally, what do you like about developing a character from the script of other people, like Saul on ‘Breaking Bad,’ as opposed to developing a character that you write?

BO: Well, it’s is very different. Playing Saul Goodman was very different than what I had done previously. I had to look at it differently and think about it differently. Basically I just kept studying the script and what Saul was saying, and what he might be thinking with what he was saying, what he was trying to achieve. By doing that over and over, I got a sense of who he was and what he wanted and why he was talking the way he was talking. And that told me who the character was.



Robert Smigel of SNL’s “TV Funhouse” and “Da Bears Super Fans”

Robert Smigel is a veteran comedy writer and performer who began in Chicago around the same time as Bob Odenkirk. After spending many years penning sketches for Saturday Night Live, Smigel did writing stints on “Late Night with Conan O’Brien” and the “Dana Carvey Show.” He’s best known for his amazing character Triumph the Insult Comic Dog and “TV Funhouse” on SNL.

HC: Can you remember the first time you and Bob Odenkirk did something, what was the circumstance?



Robert Smigel Backstage, June 18, 2010
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Robert Smigel: We were both students at ‘The Players Workshop’ in Chicago. We are old friends. We didn’t perform together, but were aware of each other’s shows, and I thought Bob was one of the funniest guys in Chicago.

HC: Regarding the June 19th show ‘Da Bears Movie Dat Wasn’t,’ what is the story behind that film script that wasn’t produced.

RS: Bob and I thought, since there were other Saturday Night Live movies being conceived, that the Super Fans – silly as they are – would work because they are based on real people. We thought there was a chance that we could flesh it out as a movie, and we came up with a very sweeping sports satire. Bob came up with the idea of having a prissy owner buy and take over the Chicago Bears and turn it into an exclusive club that would seat 200 people on couches and beanbag chairs, with a piano bar. I thought that would be a great way to satirize the corporation of sports, so we gave it a shot.

“Just for Laughs Chicago,” sponsored by the TBS Network, continues here through June 19th. “The Not Inappropriate Show,” featuring Bob Odenkirk, has two shows at 1pm and 4pm at the Mayne Stage 1328 W. Morse, Chicago. Robert Smigel’s “Da Bears Movie Dat Wasn’t,” featuring George Wendt and Mike Ditka, is at the Park West, 322 W. Armitage, Chicago.

[For more information and ticket details, click here.](#) [14]

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- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/bob-odenkirk>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/just-for-laughs>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mayne-stage>
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- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/robert-smigel>
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