

Andrew Clark: Today is one of those days that reminds me that I really have quite an incredibly fun and exciting and wonderful job. We have had the pleasure of Mr. Bruce McCulloch, one more round of applause (*applause*). (*to Bruce McCulloch*) It's invigorating to watch students who've stared blankly at me for like a year and a half listen to every single word you say. (*laughter*)

Bruce McCulloch: I saw a few of them on their phones! (*laughter*)

AC: And now we get to finish off with a Friday version of what we call Primetime, which is probably one of the worst titles for a Q&A session ever, but it's working out.

BM: How about "Q&A Session"?

AC: That's a good one. It's reductivist. And of course, we were sort of talking in the car that having you coming down would be like getting one of the Pythons to come down to see you at Loose Moose when you were starting out.

BM: Well, stop!

AC: Well, you were part of a troupe that really changed sketch comedy, and yet you've been extremely active as a director, writer, and it was great watching your workshop today, because to see you operating as a performer, a director, a writer, it's quite an incredible skill set. I'm gonna ask you the proverbial question that gets thrown out, and then we'll open it up...

BM: I'm not *technically* gay (*laughter*), although a man does get lonely. (*laughter*)

AC: Given the right set of circumstances. That's true of all of us. (*laughter*)

BM: Thank you, good night!

AC: Did you always dream of comedy? Were you a comedy nerd growing up? You were born in Edmonton. You were like a jock in high school. You were a competitive swimmer.

BM: I was a competitive weightlifter, actually.

AC: Really?

BM: They called me "Power Jerk". *(laughter)* Because I also was one, by the way. No, I think when I was young, I hope and I think I relate to a lot of you people here. It's weird, I met a comedy troupe, The Birthday Boys, who are gonna have a show on IFC, and all seven of them are nice, and all of them have really nice families, and they're really nice to each other, and that was never my experience. *(laughter)* With The Kids in the Hall, we all came from different broken homes, or broken homes that people stayed in, and I think that as a young person, and right up until I went to college, I had no idea what I was gonna do. I had a sense that I was a punk, that I wasn't like anybody else, and that I wanted to find a place for myself. First, I found it in rock music, just listening to it. I just knew I was gonna do something, because I had all these weird ideas, and it became comedy. But I had no plan. I wasn't... *Saturday Night Live*, I didn't care. I liked Woody Allen, I think because he's a writer, and he had absurd ideas. I'm always interested when someone has an idea I've never heard of before, which I think is the path my brain went on. But I wasn't a fan of comedy, really.

AC: One of the things that I think is difficult for people who are younger to necessarily relate to for those pre-internet (years) was the sense of, even in a large city, even in Edmonton or Ottawa or whatever, this thing of isolation, where you had to wait for things to arrive, or wait for an album to arrive, or if a show was on, you had to sit down and watch it right then or it was over. Were there groups, musical groups, that you were into, waiting for that album?

BM: We would go up to where the Jubilee was and just wait for a poster to come up. One day I remember T Rex was coming and I almost shit my pants (*laughter*). I think there was a certain kind of isolation when I grew up in Calgary. A *New Yorker* would be like a porn magazine. (*laughter*) It's great that the world's now connected through the internet, and we realize that all the people who don't think like all those other people, that there are a lot of us, and we can communicate our ideas more readily now than we could before, for sure.

AC: Now you went to college in Calgary?

BM: Yes, unsuccessfully. I took Business the first year, and my girlfriend at the time said we got 100% between us, in Business. (*laughter*) And I said, "What did you get, dear?" And she said, "80%". So I got 20. But then I took Journalism, and that was really great for me, because I felt like following a story, we didn't get that far into the writing today, but to have my journalism teacher, Pat Preston go, "That's interesting, *why?*" you get these little kernels as you go, but that's what I learned from a year of journalism, "Why is that interesting? Why should they care about that?" So I took Journalism, but at that time I found comedy, which was improv comedy.

AC: So how did you hear about Loose Moose? Did you just go right down and try to participate?

BM: I saw a flyer. I was an odd duck at the time, and I remember wearing, and I was a punk too, and I'd wear two neckties, and nurse's shoes. I remember one time I just wore a pot on my head, walking down the street (*laughter*), because I'd just gone to a thrift shop, and I was like, "Fuck you, I'm gonna wear a pot." (*laughter*) And then when I started in comedy, I didn't care about my clothes anymore, and I realized that all of that stuff I was thinking about, like not fitting in, was because I didn't have a place. I didn't have a place for my ideas, and my anger, and all that other stuff. But when I found comedy, I didn't care how I dressed anymore.

AC: And you were actually taught by Keith Johnstone.

BM: Yeah. He was wonderful. We had this sort of snobby thing at the time too, which was, "If you learn to act, you're not gonna be funny, and if you listen to someone, that's not cool." But he was really smart in the fact, and I like it more than with the UCB school, and sorry Bruce, but even the Second City thing, that he was all about, and this is an exercise we tried to do today, which is, "Be boring onstage. Don't try to be interesting." And of course, we have to be fascinating to succeed in some way. But I learned a lot from him. One thing we were talking about today was, you don't know where you're going. Which is the beauty of this thing. You're just starting a scene, and you don't know where you're going. So he gave us a space in which, first to improvise, and then to write some material.

AC: Was it around this time that you met Mark McKinney?

BM: Yeah. The first time I met him, we had a fight. We were doing something special at the theater, and he had a piano tuner guy there, and he kept tuning the piano forever, and I was like, "How fucking long is this gonna take? I have a sketch coming up, you know!" And that was our friendship for twenty-five years. *(laughter)*

AC: And despite the acrimony, did you guys start working together right away?

BM: Yeah, I think we liked each other. It was sort of like, and even now with all of "my guys" ... actually, the Kids are getting together in a couple of weeks to write some stuff, and we had a conference call, and it was like, "So we're gonna write some stuff. Anybody got anything? Whaddya got, whaddya got, whaddya got?" "I got one thing..." So it's like we got a little drugs or something. But there's something about, "Whaddya got? Oh, OK, you got something? Oh, that's pretty good." We're all great friends now, but I think our ideas are what brought us together.

AC: And you moved to Toronto how long after doing Loose Moose?

BM: Well, we got really lucky, which was sort of a curse and a blessing. We got fairly successful fairly quickly, I think because there was a vacuum in Toronto. We started selling out a 250-seat theater within four months of writing weird sketches, so we became the big thing in Calgary.

AC: And that was The Audience.

BM: Yes, we were called The Audience. We did "late-night comedy." Because I'm kind of a little horse, I said, "We have to move to Toronto! Now!" It's like, "Really, now? We're just starting to get successful." Mark said, "Well, I think we should stay

here for a couple years and do exploratory trips to both Vancouver and Toronto, and then decide." And I said, "I'm moving in two months." *(laughter)* So I moved, and then we all moved.

AC: So that was you, Mark...I'm blanking...

BM: Garry Campbell...

AC: Garry Campbell...

BM: Norm Hiscock...

AC: Norm Hiscock...

BM: Frank Van Keeken.

AC: Yep. And then you meet the rest of what will be the rest of The Kids in the Hall at Theatresports. Just quickly, most people here have probably read about this, but how did you guys form that troupe, exactly?

BM: Well, we were from Theatresports, so it was supposed to be like, "You're not gonna like them, because they're like you." And we met them, and we *were* like them. It's also to say that, as you are gonna be the part of your own scene, in many ways, there were five of us, but there were thirty of us. There were other great people, I'll include Bruce Pirrie in that. There were a lot of great people there, but we were the guys who just kept working together, and it took a long time. So it wasn't like, "We're together, man!" We just looked up, and all the women went away, because there was no money, and we were just losers, like, "You wanna split a

sandwich?" "Sure, got any money?" *(laughter)* The dust cleared, and it was the five of us still there.

AC: And you had that regular night on Monday night at the Rivoli, and you did that for about two years, right?

BM: Maybe not even that long. But you know, there's a certain time in your life, and you're perhaps in one right now, where a year seems like ten years now. But we failed, and then we succeeded, but that's the important part to know, children, that we failed miserably, week after week after week. Being young, of course, you have the arrogance, which you need. You need both arrogance and humility to succeed. Probably more arrogance until you're in your thirties. But we'd been successful in Calgary, so I thought, "Well, we'll just come to Toronto and open a theater, and everyone's gonna come and think we're really cool." And it didn't happen. And it was good for us. I think it sort of toughened who we were, and who we were as a group. Even today, although we've had more ups than downs or whatever with the Kids, every time we fail, we're closer together. When we succeed, there are lots of people, and lots of offers, but when we fail, it's just five losers in a dressing room. *(laughter)* So that's our thing.

AC: So you remember those empty theaters. Do you remember one particular show that sticks in your mind?

BM: We rented the Poor Alex Theatre, is it still there? We just rented it, and the guy said, "It's like \$400 a night." "Yeah, sure." And it's like, "Why are you paying \$400 a night for the Poor Alex Theater?" They didn't even put the lights on for us. We had a

sketch where we were kind of a predecessor to Oprah, where under your seat there was a jelly doughnut, and it was supposed to be some weird thing, and we really bombed, and we just got pelted with jelly doughnuts. *(laughter)* And then we succeeded.

AC: In terms of the writing, it sounds like you guys would pair off and write different stuff. Did you always have your own style? A lot of the monologues are yours, and you now write a lot on your own. Did you function almost more as a writer/director than as a performer in the Kids?

BM: I kind of did. If I thought I had a dream when I was like sixteen, it would be that I was gonna be writing for *National Lampoon*, because there were those weird, silly stories and weird jokes. "I am an isosceles triangle. What should I do?" *(laughter)* "Well, you should find a woman." Just weird stuff. And I think for me, I've always been about my ideas. I'd walk around with a tartan book and write down my stuff, and write down lines, and not be afraid to repeat myself, and not be afraid to write crappy stuff. Yeah, I've always been interested in my ideas.

AC: Did you always want to direct? You've directed a lot of different movies...

BM: I never really wanted to perform or direct, but I have an arrogance where, if I give someone a line and it works, there's more joy there to me than if I say that line. I'm not a really comfortable performer, so I've always like to work with Mark McKinney and give him the good stuff because he's amazing, and I just kind of watch it work. We're talking a lot today about stage picture, and what's the music of the scene, and who goes there, and is there lighting, I've always thought in that way.

Kevin and Dave would end a sketch, and they'd go, "God, that was great," and I'd go, "Why were those extras smiling so much? Those extras weren't supposed to be smiling, they're supposed to be grim!" So I've always seen the big picture, probably to the detriment of my own performance, at times.

AC: We'll start with a question from the audience. Anyone have one?

Audience member: How did taking Business affect The Kids in the Hall's portrayal of businessmen and even big corporations in your sketches?

BM: Well, I think it did, because it was there when we realized that business is stupid. And of course, it isn't. I love business now. I love talking about the deal I'm making or whatever. But I think it was a direct outcropping of that, which was, "I failed in business, so you will pay." (*laughter*) But of course, we are punks at heart, which (sets us against) corporations and money and whoever that was. Because I think there was a time, and you're not one generation, you're a bunch of generations and a bunch of people, but there was a time growing up where it was like, maybe you could just go into business and get a good job and things were fine. And I think now, we don't know where to go to succeed, in a way. So in a lot of ways, people are taking to the arts, because they're gonna fulfill the thing they really want, and that can succeed as much. But there was a time when, it's like a guy going working in the coalmines, you'd go be a businessman. Or that's what I thought. It probably wasn't true, but that's what I thought.

AC: There were certain targets, certainly, for The Kids in the Hall, like businessmen, fathers (*laughter*), other authority figures. Was that something that was just that

group, or is that also something that's common for you as a writer, in terms of what you like to write about?

BM: I don't write about my family so much. There are a couple of things in this show I'm doing about my dad, but you process your own life through writing, and then maybe sometimes tangentially, if you write some surreal thing, it's not really about your life, but I think everybody writes about their lives, and The Kids had a really similar experience of disappointing families, of people who try to do their best, but often drank, or were often cruel or withholding, and I think it was fun to do that, and it was important for us to do that, and of course later we were doing things about breaking up with our girlfriends, or sleeping together too fast, and on our last tour I did a scene about meeting a baby and hating it, because I'm older now and I have kids. *(laughter)* Scott writes directly from what's going on with him. With me, it sort of reverberates...

AC: There's sort of a debate now with, on the one hand, Louis C.K. being very autobiographical and having a lot of success with that, and then there was the Jerry Seinfeld article where he was talking about, "I'm funny *about* stuff." So his entire artistic personality was that he could be funny about other things. So where do you fall on that spectrum as a writer?

BM: I think I sort of obfuscate my life in my work. I use it as a springboard. My dog died, and we had a grim story about having to tell my kids why we went to see her and didn't come home with her. It turned into a story that they made me dress as her at Halloween, as my dead dog. And parts of it are true, the points are true, but

the whole thing isn't true. I think for you young writers, don't feel like the *Ten Thousand Pieces*, what's his name...

AC: Ten thousand hours?

BM: No, the... you don't have to write autobiographically...

AC: Oh, you mean *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey.

BM: It doesn't matter if it really happened or it didn't happen. If it's interesting to you and it kind of happened, if it happened to your friend, your girlfriend, someone you know, and you think about it, you can read a little thing or see a person, you're gonna write what you want to write, and I think most people want to write about themselves in some way. I'm never in the camp of, "You've gotta write about yourself, and if you're talking about yourself, it has to be true."

AC: There are some people who are comfortable doing that, but it requires really opening up all sorts of things, and letting people into your life, and I just don't know that that's for every comedian. It seems to be in vogue a little bit.

BM: I believe in going anywhere, but we all have our own places we stop.

AC: When did you start working on the show you're doing tomorrow night, *Young Drunk Punk*?

BM: I've been writing pieces, and one of the things that we're talking about in terms of writing today is, one of the best things you can do, if you're writing sketches or you have to write a play, you're just writing stuff. When I start work in the morning,

unless I have something to write on, I just open a journal and start writing. "Do I have any ideas?" I'll write a line, it doesn't have to be good, and I'll rewrite it. And then I'll think of an image, and I'll go, "Ah, that's good." Any writing, of course, I think is good writing, because if it's shitty you can throw it away, and if it's good you can keep it. I just started writing a couple stories, weird reflective stories about my life, drinking martinis in the Hollywood hills, and having been a young drunk punk wrecking my mom's house on my 18th birthday and her having a heart attack. "Tequilafest," it was called. *(laughter)* There are certain little stories about that, and about having children late in life, that I'm too old to lift them and stuff. So I just start writing stories about my world. The show isn't written yet, OK? *(laughter)* But it's just things I've been working on, and I've done a couple records, so it's like, "Oh, I can use that piece."

AC: Another question? Yeah.

Audience member: I heard that you and Bill Burr might be working on something. Anything you can tell us about that?

BM: That was one of the saddest things. I don't know if you guys know...

AC: That was with Kevin Hart?

BM: Yes. I came on to direct and executive-produce a pilot with him and...does anybody here know Kevin Hart? *(applause)* It's funny because usually, the white people don't know Kevin Hart *(laughter)*, but if you're in L.A. with him, people stop their cars in the middle of the street and go, "Fuck, man, Kevin Hart, I love you!" He's

a cool little guy, if you don't know him. He's like five foot three. He's a sweet guy. And he's the biggest standup in America. He plays five-thousand-seat theaters, and he's got a knapsack full of money he carries around (*laughter*), because he goes clubbing with Nelly and stuff, and they do the tables and stuff. But he's a really sweet guy. And he was friends with this other standup named Bill Burr, from Boston, and I came on to executive-produce a pilot for them, about their friendship, for Comedy Central, that I think was too expensive, so it didn't happen. But we shot a pilot together, but that didn't happen.

Audience member: A fun experience...

BM: Oh, it was, but the hard thing is what I do now, and maybe it's the same for you, which is you get involved, but you don't get involved, and these guys are so sweet and so funny, and it's like, "Oh God, this is gonna be so great," and of course it was, "We're picking this up, it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen, don't take that other job, this is gonna happen for sure, this is really happening." And then it didn't happen. And that happens all the time.

AC: (*to audience*) Uh, yeah, back there.

Audience member: I was just wondering: going from TV and sketch and your transition into feature-length films, how did you go about doing that?

BM: It was hard. When The Kids in the Hall did a film, we didn't know how to do it. And I think part of the problem is, we don't know what a narrative is, because as a group, I think it's important, and I don't know if you guys are in sketch troupes or

what you do, but it's important what you can agree on. And The Kids in the Hall would always agree that this was funny or that was funny or Scott's thing is too long (*laughter*), or whatever, or that Bruce's thing was too weird and not funny enough. I think as a group of writers especially, we didn't understand what narrative even was. We were sort of talking about this before, but I don't even really know how to write a sketch. You do something, then something happens, and we talk a lot about endings, and bring back something from earlier, and that may work. But I think when it came to films, we had a really steep learning curve, and we just didn't know how to do it. I think five guys rowing the same boat didn't work too well. It was hard.

And then when I started writing films on my own...I believe in both things, and I sell a lot of pilots now to NBC or whatever, and they're talking about the act-enders, and it's gotta be thirty pages, not thirty-four. It is really good to think of story in terms of what happens next, and what the audience is gonna expect, and how do we spin that, and are you setting something up for the long haul. And so I had to kind of bifurcate my brain at some point in my career and go, "Well, that's funny, but is that a whole story? Is it a love story? What's the whole story?" So the long answer was that, but the short answer is that it was hard to learn that skill. And for me, you may find that yourselves too, you have an instinctive skill. I'm a great writer, but I'm not so comfortable onstage, or vice-versa. I really had to go, "Ugh, I have to apply myself to this skill of story." But I think I'm probably better for it.

AC: There was a lot of pressure on *Brain Candy*. At the time, if I remember, there'd been a string of Lorne Michaels-approved hits, like the Mike Myers films, and you even had the same producer, right? So that was a tough situation, but you went from *Brain Candy*, and how long after that did you do *Dog Park*, and then *Superstar*?

BM: I think it was two years later or a year later. I remember going to L.A. and having no plan, other than people told me I should go to L.A. for a little while, and I was in a really shitty little house, and the helicopters would go by all night, and my poodle at the time went crazy. And I started writing *Dog Park*. But I didn't know what I was doing. This is the thing I want to say, of the things I want to say to you young people: you may look at someone like me, and I'm not a huge success, but I'm a middle kind of success, and think that I have a plan, that we have a plan, that anybody has a plan, that anybody knows what they're doing next. Nobody knows what they're doing next.

I've sold a lot of shows, most of them don't go, some of them do, I've written movies, trying to get one going. It always feels the same. It's always like heartbreak, where if you've had your heart broken four times, the fourth time still hurts just as bad as the first time. *(laughter)* So take comfort in that fact. Nobody knows what to do. So in the same way, I just went, "I don't know what I'm doing. I'm gonna write *Dog Park*." And I probably wrote a couple other things that didn't get made.

AC: And how did you get *Dog Park* made? Did you find the right producer? Was that Susan Cavan?

BM: I had Susan Cavan, and I knew Luke Wilson, because I'd seen *Bottle Rocket*, which I thought was a great movie. He came over to my hotel, which was a really crappy hotel, and auditioned, and I looked down, and his armpits were sweating on his shirt all the way down to his elbow, and I said, "Wow, you better go now. You got the job." *(laughter)* So I just did that, and got Canadian financing. But it was hard. We were talking about *The Kids in the Hall* before, and everything I've ever done is hard. Everything I've done almost didn't happen. We had the financing and then it fell apart. And then we were gonna shoot, and we had to pay out of our pockets for two weeks, and then it came back together. The cautionary tale is, everything is hard. Of course, we don't want it to be hard, but it always is.

AC: *(to audience)* Any questions? Yep, Patrick.

Audience member: First of all, I want to say that if you ever need someone to play your bastard lovechild...*(laughter)*

BM: Absolutely. I thought my younger brother *(laughter)*, but perhaps I flatter myself.

Audience member: I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about your standup career, and if you had any advice for young standups.

BM: Well, standup is tough, isn't it? I started doing standup way back in Calgary when we did our show, and with all of our work, I had the benefit of not having seen anybody do standup. So I didn't have a path to follow, and I think the rules for standup are no different than the rules for sketch, or for writing a play or trying to

write a movie or anything. This sounds really corny, but follow your own path. There's so much expectation on standup having to be this certain thing, and it depends what form you're in, it's one of the hardest things to do. We think it's kind of a crappy art form in some ways, but in some ways it's the best art form in the world. So I think if you go on with the feeling that it's a really great art form, and not like, "OK, I gotta do jokes for you people, and where are you from," I think you'll do better.

But it's tough. I did standup three years ago with Janeane Garofalo at the Improv in Irvine, because she just asked me, "Do you want to co-headline with me?" "Yeah, that sounds fun, co-headline!" So we went out to Irvine, in Orange County, and I didn't like it. I've spent my whole career hoping to perform for people who knew me, and some people knew me, but a lot of other people were there, it was like their fiftieth birthday, and they had big hats on and stuff. So it's a tough slog, but what I love about standup is that it's *The Old Man and the Sea*. It's a man holding a fish and trying to hold the stage. So think of it as being a brave art form. And by the way, bombing is beautiful. I was doing standup the other night at this place in L.A., and it's like, "Oh, there's the lull." Everyone's afraid of the lull, but I like the lull. And also, if you've ever *really* bombed, it's beautiful. *(laughter)* It's fucking beautiful. And you walk out kind of cleansed. So once that happens *(laughter)*, how bad can the next gig be?

AC: Did you always feel that way, or did that happen? I think for a lot of younger comedians, they're petrified of bombing.

BM: But even all of us doing stage work today, even me with having to do stuff, we're all scared all the time, which is the great secret, right? So only if we fail do we learn, and you just have to ask, why are you there? Is this something you want to try? Do you feel like doing it? If you're there for the right reasons...I've certainly failed as much as I've succeeded, without question.

AC: *(to audience)* Joel.

Audience member: I actually recall seeing you a number of years ago...

BM: Bombing several times. *(laughter)*

Audience member: No, you had a character that would bomb on purpose, as I recall. Was that part of that whole thing? How was that useful for you?

BM: That was useful in the part of myself where, it's about them, but it's also about you, as you're exploring and trying to figure out who you are. I used to do this character, it seems sort of hackneyed now, where I had a really bad wig, and I'd go out and I'd be really successful, and then I'd start to fail, and then I'd start to cry. *(laughter)* And I'd start to forget who I was. And I'd have my manager come onstage, and I'd say, "I fuckin' shit my pants!" *(laughter)* And it would go so far down, and the fun of it was, and I only did it like five or six times, but the fun of it was that I'd succeed, and then I would fail so miserably, and I had that map for myself, so why did I need a safety net? If I failed, then I succeeded, because that's the plan I'd set up for myself. But there's something about that, and I still will get up and be cottonmouthed or something, but when I started doing Theatresports, I would be

shaking in my army pants for a week, like, “Am I gonna be funny this week?” And then I’d think about it for two days after, like, “I should have entered later and I said the wrong thing.” But it’s good, it’s good to do all that stuff and fail, because then you’ll get there somehow.

AC: *(to audience)* I was just wondering if you had any advice or tips for a sketch troupe to stand out from the rest.

BM: Well, some of the things I was talking about today: I would say keep thinking about your visuality. Every show I’m ever sent, or script, I go, “What’s the music of that show?” And I don’t mean are you literally playing rock music or whatever. So what is the vibe of who you guys are, is one thing. What is your look? If you were on film, what would your look be? And the other thing is, I think the more, and this is more about staying together as a troupe, the more you guys can make each other look good, it’s really corny, but the more you can help each other out onstage, you can stand out. I referenced The Birthday Boys, who are a very funny troupe, if you beat up the material and not each other, you can do really well. That’s not really about standing out, that’s just about working together. And do it all the time.

Perform as much as you can.

AC: *(to audience)* Yes.

Audience member: Do you have a favorite character from your time with The Kids in the Hall?

BM: I like when Kevin did this guy who goes, "Will do." It's Kevin passive-aggressively saying, "Yes, I'll do that." He owes someone something, he says, "Yes, I'll get it to you tomorrow. I won't even do just that, I'll also bring you an autographed picture of Bell Biv Devoe." So of myself, I don't know. I see the other guys, they're all really talented, and then I see a little guy with his arms flapping around, with a big fuckin' TV head. *(laughter)* So I don't know.

AC: *(to audience)* Another question? Yeah.

Audience member: Did you ever feel like giving up at all? *(laughter)*

BM: You know what's funny? Truthfully, about five years ago, Mark McKinney phoned me and said, "Ugh, I just feel like fuckin' retiring." And I thought, "That's so sad." And then about a year and a half later, I thought, "Oh fuck, I just feel like retiring." *(laughter)* I've failed a lot. I've written like six pilots for networks that have been filmed and not picked up, so that's fail money. I fail a lot. So it's the resilience that is the important thing. And I think to allow yourself, when you fail, to get back up and go, "What was the lesson I learned from that?", but to always get back up. Because I'm a writer, I think I always have another idea coming, and there's always something to do, and I don't know if you consider yourself a writer first or not, but that's...And again, another secret is that we all sort of don't know what we're doing, and we all sometimes feel like giving up. And listen, I know people from the biggest comedy stars in the world to people just starting out who are super hot, and they all feel scared, and confident sometimes, and not confident other times, and don't know

who to listen to, and had two great movies but can they have a third one, so everyone is that way all the time. It will never change.

Audience member: Do you have any interesting or funny stories...

BM: No funny stories.

Audience member: ...about Lorne Michaels at all?

BM: Many, actually. He's actually a really wise guy. What he did for us, though, because we were young punks in a way, and he sort of got out of the way of us...it's just a moment, and it wasn't even a story, and this is how high you can go and how low you can go. I remember my first day at *Saturday Night Live*, I met both Timothy Leary and Madonna, the first day. The funny part was, Lorne brought us in, because we're cute little guys from Canada, and he's from Canada, he goes, "You know Bruce? Do you know Madonna?" *(laughter)* "Um, I don't know, I thought we had sex in the 80's, but no, I don't know Madonna." That wasn't really a story...

AC: He didn't want to assume.

BM: Yes, of course.

AC: In a way, that job could've been the end of The Kids in the Hall, if you guys hadn't necessarily enjoyed it, or...

BM: Well, that's the other thing in terms of what the landscape is. We came, and we were scouted by *Saturday Night Live*, and it really (created) friction in this group. It was, "Do we go? Do we not go?" And, this is the cautionary tale, I had all of my

sketches written out that I'd written. And so when *Saturday Night Live* came and they asked, "Who's the writer?" people kind of went, "Well, let's not tell them who's the writer," and it's like, "I'm not the performer, guys, come on, I'm the writer." And I had them. I had my stuff ready when opportunity called. But it ended up that Mark and I went and became writers for *Saturday Night Live*, and our group almost broke up, and for me, I thought, "Oh, Kids in the Hall are OK, but there's gonna be all these great and amazing minds at *Saturday Night Live*." And I learned the lesson then, that I've learned over and over several times, which is, dance with the girl you brought, or the people around you are better than you think. And for me, I realized that The Kids in the Hall were my tribe. And so we had the tension of, do we keep going to *Saturday Night Live*? And then of course Lorne asked us to do a show, and we ended up doing that.

But I think the takeaway for you guys is, it's what Gord Downie says, "Make your friends when you are young." I thought for a long time that my peers were my competitors, and they're not. They're my friends. So you people, and all the people you know in all the comedy troupes, and all the guys who are starting out, you guys are gonna be friends. Some of you will fall off, and some of you will go away and come back. Bruce Pirrie, I've been looking at his face for twenty-five years. I'm up, I'm down, he's up, you know. These are your peeps, and so I found my peeps in The Kids in the Hall, and you guys will find your writer for your hand thing. And even now in L.A., for me, it's about finding your people. They're you guys, essentially.

AC: *(to audience)* Yeah, Sara.

Audience member: I was just wondering: you were talking before about writing solo versus writing in a group, and I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the process. How is it different when you're writing just by yourself versus with a group of people?

BM: Writing with a group of people is very intimate. It's almost like kissing or having sex with someone, where you have to be connected to what's interesting to them too. The good thing about writing in a group—and it's also terrible, because everybody has to pay attention or whatever—is that if you're in a group, the best idea wins, which is one of the things that's really important, and what was important in succeeding for *The Kids in the Hall*, was how much we could beat up each other's ideas. I've worked in writers' rooms, I had a show on ABC for a little bit called *Carpoolers* where we had seventeen guys in the room, and they're all trying to beat each other's joke. I think the important thing with working with someone else is (to) ask them what they think, ask them, let them surprise you, let them make you look good. Maybe it's because I came from improv, but all writing is improv. People say, "Where did that idea come from?" "I don't know, it just fell into my head." So you're in a room, and of course the modern room in Hollywood now is you're supposed to have your pitches figured out to pitch your show runner, but all the best writing is like, "OK, two guys go to a bank, um, what are they trying to hold up the bank with..."

Audience member: Pineapples!

BM: Pineapples, one guy's brought pineapples, one guy's brought potatoes. Do we like that, or do we like something else?" So you don't know. You have so little. It's just a different thing, writing alone and writing in groups. When I first wrote for *Saturday Night Live*, it was sort of funny, because there were a lot of *Harvard Lampoon* guys who wanted to be slavish to a concept, like "This is the 1700's, and they're gonna talk like pirates." But I came from performance, so I was like, "Well, what's gonna be funny about that?" That's why someone like Scott Thompson is so amazing. He figures out what he wants to perform, and then we figure out a sketch for it. So I think writing with other people can be good if you're gonna let go of your idea.

AC: *(to audience)* Right there.

Audience member: What role...

BM: If any...

Audience member: If at all..

BM: Should the church and state... *(laughter)*

Audience member: I was actually gonna talk about religion. What role, if at all, did religion or the possibility of a creator play in your career? *(laughter)*

BM: Well, this is what all us atheist cowards always say, which is, "I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual."

Audience member: So you believe in a creator? *(laughter)*

BM: I don't know. Ask me on my deathbed, next week. *(laughter)* I'm not sure. I'm a humanist, and I believe in the human spirit. *(pause)* Rock on, human spirit!

AC: *(to audience)* Danny, let's see if you can...do something. *(laughter)*

Audience member: You mentioned the show *Carpoolers*, which is an underrated gem, I think...

BM: That's what I keep telling people. *(laughter)*

Audience member: I was just wondering if you could talk a bit about how that came to be, and do you think that having a sketch background was sort of integral to making the jump to sitcoms, or is that separate?

BM: It's perhaps separate, but I think that as a writer, it's really important to know what people are playing in a scene. Even today, I didn't have that much comment on the scripts because scripts are words, but I think if you've been onstage, and you've been on sets and things, directing things, you know that the funniest thing often isn't the line, it's often a guy opening the door and going, "What? Again?" On the page that doesn't seem very funny. And that, without question, is why it's good to be where you guys are, in a way, although perhaps you'd want to be where I am, which is that you're making stuff. I think the way Hollywood is, and I don't know so much about Canadian showbiz, I've also written some scripts or rewrites for studios, and not for me, but they've spent millions of dollars on these things, and they've never sat down and fucking read them together. Even now, I just wrote a thing for CBS that didn't happen, and we never sat down and read it. We never had the comedy conversation

on the script. People just gave notes, and we got on the speakerphone, and then they said their crazy notes, and I got on the phone with my manager and said, “Those are crazy notes.”

So I think, because I think of how things will get made, what’s funny about a scene, what people are playing, I think that’s helped me in some of my work. But maybe not. There are some shows that you read and they get picked up, and you go, “Wow, it’s kind of pithy, but there’s nothing happening,” and then they shoot it, and it wasn’t as funny as the script, because those are all jokes, but there’s no inner life to it.

Audience member: Do you prefer writing TV shows or movies?

BM: I sort of like TV. They’re just different beasts, and every TV show is different from another TV show, and something you’re gonna write for CBC is different than something you’re gonna write for Spike. Features are really hard. It’s like a day job. I wrote one not too long ago that I’m trying to get going, but you gotta show up every day, and you gotta get the cards up, and you gotta write the stuff, and you gotta make every scene interesting. It’s a slog. But I think 22-minute TV is pretty interesting, or can be, if it doesn’t try too hard. But there’s a lot of good story that happens in that.

AC: Have you ever been tempted to do more long-form prose, like a memoir or a novel?

BM: Yeah, I'm actually trying to write a book now, based on this show I'm doing on Monday called *Young Drunk Punk*, which is just stories and things. I was super moved by both *Just Kids*, the Patti Smith memoir, and the Bob Dylan...anybody read the Bob Dylan memoir? It just took three points in his life, and it's you guys, and it was me, it was like a guy walking around trying to figure out his ethic in Minnesota, and he knew he was gonna do something, and he got a guitar, and he didn't know, and he looked at it for a few weeks. So I'm kind of interested to write something, because I'm really interested in how we become who we are, and how all the outsiders make their way in the world. So I may in fact write something.

AC: Do you think that has anything to do with having kids?

BM: Possibly, possibly. I look at my little young son, and if I had had a happy childhood, I could've been him. *(laughter)* I don't go to comedy shows, but I've started to do it a little bit, and I'm inspired by the generation behind me, that all of these people are doing this. So I feel maybe old enough, now that I'm not the young Bruce McCulloch anymore, that I have real interest in you guys.

Audience member: "Salty Ham" or "Ham of Truth"?

BM: I think "Salty Ham," and here's why. In "Salty Ham," both Scott and I are formidable. And "Ham of Truth" is the sort of sketch we were talking about today, which is the guy in the center's gonna be funny, and then the people around him should be too, and I'm gonna play some rock music. So in the other one, and Scott was saying he may come and do something at my show on Monday, he was like, "Can

we do 'Salty Ham'?" I said, "Dude, I can do 'Salty Ham...'" "Can we tour and do a best-of?" "Dude, I can do 'Salty Ham' every night for the rest of my life." I love it.

AC: *(to audience)* Cass.

Audience member: You were talking earlier about never throwing out an idea, and reaching back years and pulling things out and going, "Oh, I can use that." Is there an idea or a torch you've been bearing forever that you just cannot find a place for?

BM: I have a character of a really slutty blind girl. *(laughter)* She wakes up, and she's like reaching around to find her clothes, and she's like, "Oh fuck, I did it again."

(laughter) I have hundreds of them. I remember Frank Van Keeken, when I was like 24, he said, "How many times are you gonna mention fuckin' toast in a scene? Don't you have any other ideas?" *(laughter)* So I have some things I'm obsessed with and some things that won't go away. I have a writing assistant, thankfully, so I have someone to hear my madness, and she goes, "Uh, that again?" So I have things I keep coming at, but don't quite fit in or something.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about *Superstar*, making *Superstar*? I watched that again in advance for this, and it's a really funny and extremely well-made movie that could've gone bad many different ways, considering that it was meant to be a hit, coming out of a *Saturday Night Live* character, with really talented Molly Shannon and Will Ferrell. How did you shepherd that whole project?

BM: It was really a shitstorm *(laughter)*, and I think...it's interesting, and that's why I'm excited to talk to young people, in a way. I remember not knowing how to do

anything, and nobody told me. I remember once Dave Thomas pulled me aside and gave me a talk about how to do things. I didn't know how to do anything. So I was still a punk. I kind of fought people. I'd phone the head of Paramount, and he'd be on a plane, and I'd say, "We have to pay Elaine Hendrix \$200,000 or this fuckin' movie's gonna fail," because Lorne told me to go that or whatever. *(laughter)* It was a weird one. It was one of those things, and when I'm lucky enough, when *we're* lucky enough to get offered something, it's either "I have to do it" or "I don't really want to do it, but I'm gonna do it." And with that one, it was like, "I think only I can do this movie."

And there were so many challenges. We had like five weeks prep, and Molly Shannon hurt herself, because I'd been a big fan of Tom Green, and was watching his cable show in Ottawa, and I phone him and said, "Can you come and be in this movie? I don't know what the role's gonna be, but I'll get you ten days." And he flew back, and the first take on the first day, he fucking hurts Molly Shannon in an improv. She's doing a scene, and he fuckin' "Ugh," and Molly Shannon—she can be a bit of a baby—and she's like, "Oh, my ribs, my ribs!" And I didn't know what I was doing, of course, and right before we roll, she says to everybody, "You guys really go for it, OK? Let's really fuckin' go for it." So Tom goes for it and hurts her ribs. It was a lot of that stuff. I think sometimes the first time you're in an experience, it's like trying to stand up on a surfboard, or stand up on a wave, you just don't know what you're doing. I didn't know what I was doing.

AC: Knowing your work, I felt like even the opening sequence had your imprint on it.

BM: Yeah, I guess. That was the first time, probably, where everybody was coming at me. I didn't realize. Because with Kids in the Hall, we just do whatever we want, kind of, and it's like, it can't be more than five minutes, or whatever. But with that, it's like everybody's going, "Can you lose two frames? Can you lose four frames? That music's killing us." So it was the first time I went through that process of going to Wayne, New Jersey, with a bunch of people who hate you and start screaming "Fag" at the screen and stuff, and getting test scores. But the interesting thing was, places where there were (supposed to be) laughs, there were always laughs. So you learn sort of the chemistry of creating something. But no, that was a wild one.

AC: *(to audience)* Yep.

Audience member: One more question about *Superstar*. I was watching it a couple of days ago as well, and always in the scene, there was a green BMW always passing by, and always on the driver's (side). What was the reason for that?

BM: We thought it would be funny if the only cars were green BMW's. *(laughter)*

Audience member: Beetles!

BM: Beetles. And we had more in the early screenings, and then people started to go, "Wha?" So we wanted just enough that people like you would notice. *(laughter)* And other people wouldn't notice. The first football uniforms I made, I thought it was funny that Will Ferrell had a bright pink football uniform, and that was the first thing where it'd be, "Why are you doing that?" We'd get a call from Paramount or something, "Why are you doing that?"

Audience member: Being really busy with stuff, do you get a lot of sleep? *(laughter)*

I was just wondering.

BM: I don't, actually. When I was doing *Carpoolers*, I was confused, because it's like running a big machine, it's so hard. We're doing thirteen episodes, and it's terrible, because you have to be somewhere and somewhere else, and you have to write episodes, and an outline, and they give you notes on the outline, and you go to script, and they give you notes on the script, and they give you notes on the cut you made. I phoned Greg Garcia, who did *My Name is Earl*, and I said, "Hi, it's Bruce McCulloch, uh, I'm doing a show." And I asked him what his secret was, and he said, "I get up at four in the morning." And I laughed, and then I found myself getting up at four in the morning. So I'm a motherfucker. *(laughter)* Probably to a fault, in a sense, but I get up at four, usually when I have to write something and work for several hours.

Audience member: Do you drink coffee? *(laughter)*

AC: We're really inside now.

BM: You're really inside the man.

AC: So I think we can say at least tea. *(to audience)* Right there.

Audience member: So when you're writing screenplays, do you follow a paradigm, like Syd Field or Blake Snyder?

BM: I think you should. The last thing I wrote was called *Comeback Season*. It had Ray Liotta, and it wasn't a super-comedy. Glenne Headly (was in it). I had just written a couple things for studios, and I was like, "I don't care about your three-act

structure, man! I'm just gonna write, like people used to do in the old days!" And I found I wasn't really taking care of the three acts, in a sense. I always paid for it in the editing room. The first act didn't turn fast enough, and the second act break wasn't muscular enough. But I do believe, not in all the math of those things, because I think there's a false confidence in the math of some of those things, but I do believe in the three-act structure, pretty much, and of course with the great concept, which doesn't have to happen in sketch, but what happens next, an interest in what happens next. As we also say, at my house with my writing assistant, "No character beats." No scenes that are just a piece of character. Put your character stuff within the rest of your scene. Something still has to happen. If you watch a great film like *Sideways* or something like that, you think, "Wow, what a little film." And you watch that now, and you go, "Wow, story, story, story," and they fill it in. So that's my (view on) character.

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, Mike.

Audience member: I know that you do mostly writing, but you still do acting here and there. How do you choose your acting roles? Recently you were on *Workaholics*...

BM: Every so often, I do the odd little thing, only when they ask me.

Audience member: So they asked you to be on that show?

BM: Yeah. And I just did *Arrested Development* *(applause)*. Yeah, Will Arnett's a pretty funny guy. He was doing some improvs that were pretty good. And the

creator of (the show), because I don't act, he said, "Wow, I didn't think you'd do this." I was like, "Really? Why did you ask me?" You know, I'm really strong. I can go pitch a room full of executives on why my show is good, or why my film is good, or whatever, or take criticism after a screening, but I cannot sit in a waiting room opposite Bruce Pirrie, hoping to get a role (*laughter*)...Oh, I got a spit take! I'm not that interested in acting, so if somebody asks me to do something, then it's usually OK. It hasn't always worked out, but I'm interested to perform with The Kids in the Hall, I'm interested in things with friends, but I'm not so much an actor.

AC: Do you have a moment meeting someone that you really admire as a comedian, another comedian? I think that...who was it that you put your fingers in, Adam's mouth? He'll never brush his teeth again.

BM: Didn't brush them the first time!

AC: Do you have that feeling of meeting somebody that you really respected? And hopefully they didn't disappoint you or do something horrible.

BM: No, not really. It's more like, "Oh my god, Lou Reed's here! I can't even look at him!" Or Andy from The Skydiggers. (*laughter*) I think if I met, I guess Phyllis Diller's dead, isn't she? I remember meeting Joan Rivers, like, "Wow, that's Joan Rivers!" I respect that, but it's just a person.

Audience member: Ever since you started your writing career, how have you grown from writing sketches to TV shows?

BM: Well, it's just a different pursuit. It's so funny: people love sketch writers, and then they sort of go, "Ugh, that's a bit sketchy." It's just the two things. A sketch is "What's the interesting thing that can happen," and there's got to be a funny character at the center of it, and then the longer stuff is story. But I've worked really hard at story. It didn't come naturally. Thinking of crazy non-sequiturs, I can do that all day. I think, when it comes to certain kinds of writing, you have to think, "What am I not so good at," and apply yourself to that thing, which is what I've done, I think.

AC: *(to audience)* One more question? Yeah.

Audience member: When you're writing on your own, how much do you bounce ideas off of other people, or do you just form the idea completely and then bounce it off someone?

BM: Well, I believe in the way Walt Disney used to do it. He used to tell the story. He used to tell it over and over. He'd bring in somebody, he'd tell them the story. And every time he told them the story, he'd add a detail, because it would come up. So if you tell someone, "I'm working on a thing," you go, "Yeah, and maybe this." And in that, I think telling people the story, they're interested, and you surprise yourself by coming up with stuff. So I believe in telling people my stuff, but you can bore your lovers very quickly by doing that. Your friends, unless you're in a really collaborative situation, they go, "Why am I helping you with your thing?" But I think it's really good.

AC: Do you have someone who you really trust with, say, a draft? Some people are very possessive. They don't like to give out their work. You have an assistant, but is there anyone you turn to once you're done a first draft and say, "Give this a read"?

BM: My American manager, David Miner, who does *30 Rock* and *Parks and Rec*, he's pretty smart about stuff. When you're in a comedy troupe, somebody says, "Maybe that's not my favorite character," or something, but when you work, especially in the States but even in Canada, when I've done the odd thing, your thing takes body blows all the time. So I think you have to really understand that there's an idea that you need to be protective of, but you actually need to be open to a certain amount of criticism, and at least half of it is bad, maybe more, but some of it is good, and if you take the ego out of it, like, "I just wrote this pilot, it's not *me*," then you can listen to the odd thing. But no one knows, really.

Audience member: When you were first starting with The Kids in the Hall, because of the fact that a lot of the ideas and sketches were so left-field, would you find you guys bombed a lot at first, and a lot of people maybe wouldn't get the sketches and jokes and stuff?

BM: Yeah, we certainly did. Especially onstage, when you're doing short things, they call them "blackouts." I know Second City lives on them. We could never write a blackout to save our souls. I remember I wrote one called "Pile of People," where someone on-mic goes, "Wonder what a pile of people looks like?" Lights come up, and there'd be five people in a pile, and then the lights go down. *(laughter)* And it was like, "Well, that didn't work too well." *(laughter)* But we had whole nights that

were terrible. But you have to try something a few times to know if it works or doesn't work. In general, we're all smart creatures, and we all want to learn, so the things that kind of work, we're gonna be attracted to. It's like when we're making a setlist. The weird solo scene you did, you loved at the time, just kind of falls off somehow, and the things you have to do stay on. No, we've bombed a lot, and sketches have bombed for sure.

AC: Do you adhere to that adage where that line that you really, really love is generally the one that you gotta take out?

BM: I do buy into that. The monologue you write that makes Luke Wilson want to do the thing, you're gonna cut out of it, because you don't need it anymore. It's what Keith Johnstone said. I said earlier that ideas are shit, and I think lines can be that way. One of the things I try to do, because for a while I thought I was a really good writer, so I'd try to write really good, and now I'm trying to take away writing. If that feels like a monologue, if that's a poetic piece...I'll watch a movie and go, "Ehh, writing, ehh, writing, ehhh, writing." When we finish a script, we always go, "What can we take out?" And then the other rule I have, it was more mine, and sometimes we'd break it, probably break it constantly, is that we don't list jokes. If one joke works, we have to do three jokes? We don't list jokes, which is sort of what modern sitcoms are. If that riff's going, they keep going. Why not just do a great joke and move on? We're all gentlemen here. *(laughter)*

Audience member: I was just wondering, have you ever had, when you guys all got together and you had a sketch that you all really liked and it went really well when

you read it together, and it went onstage and it did awful, but you still wonder why that sketch didn't work? *(laughter)*

BM: No, it didn't. *(laughter)* But at a certain point, we had a little cultural power. There was a thing I always loved that we did (where we'd sing) "Ah oomba, ah oomba," and we'd just do this weird dance, and then Mark would do a little, "I catch a fish, I eat a fish, I like it!" *(laughter)* "Ah oomba..." and we'd dance and stuff. And it's like, what is that? *(laughter)* But we loved it, and we just kept doing it. *(laughter)* And it worked. Actually, one of the things I wrote, and sometimes I'll say, "If you don't like it, I won't do it," but sometimes I'm fearless. "Thirty Helens Agree," which is a sort of conceptual thing I wrote *(applause)*, and I actually wrote that first for a promo when I was at *Saturday Night Live*, and I remember George Meyer, the guy who worked on *The Simpsons*, going, "What the fuck is that?" *(laughter)* And I go, "It's a promo for *Saturday Night Live*. Thirty Helens agree that *Saturday Night Live* is fairly funny." *(laughter)* I thought that was great. And I just kept coming. Boom. Boom. "Thirty Helens Agree." Boom. Boom.

As I get older and more elegant, I don't do that so much, but when we did *Death Comes to Town*, our last little miniseries, I had a character named Rampop who only saw butterflies, and didn't speak, and we couldn't cast anybody, and it wasn't working. And everybody kept saying, "But we're cutting Rampop, aren't we?" "Oh yeah, we're talking about it, we're having a lot of conversations about it." And I wasn't cutting Rampop. *(laughter)* So every so often, as Kenny says, you gotta know

when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em. But every so often, just because the audience isn't laughing, does that mean it's failing? No, maybe not.

Audience member: So you've written jokes, and you've written sketches, and TV episodes, and films. As a writer, writing in so many different formats, what do you think is the common thing through writing all of them? What's the kernel of writing that is not absent from any of these (formats)?

BM: That's a great question. I think it's about people that interest me, or weird things that interest me. So it doesn't matter if it's a nudist hospital—what a great concept—that's an idea that interests me. Or two people who've been married, and find out something weird about each other, and that could be a film. So it's whatever actually interests me, and it's usually the weird intersection of people, how friggged up we all are, how we all get in our own way, how we all get ourselves in trouble, work against our own interests, and sort of figure it out and fail. That's what I'm always moving toward, and then I love weird ideas too.

Audience member: Are you a custodian of these characters?

BM: I've never been one of those writers, and I don't even trust it, where they go, "I have a Western idea, and it starts like this, and the protagonist does this, and then his brother turns out to be the thing." I just start writing notes, because I think once ego gets involved in writing, something shuts down. At some point in my life, I decided I was a really good writer. Terrible actor, but I'm a really good writer. So if something doesn't work, it's not my fault, it's that idea's fault. And working with Mark McKinney, he's a great writer, but he doesn't know it. So he wants to go have

dinner somewhere, and we won't talk about stuff, but maybe an idea will come up, but I think I'm a good writer, so I like to write. So if you decide that, then you can take the ego out of whether something's working or not. So you're never gonna know what a thing is gonna be until you start working on it.

So I like to, and I would tell young writers this too, to kind of trick yourself. This doesn't have to be good, this doesn't have to be a feature film, this doesn't have to be a whole sketch, it's an idea. I would say to my assistant, "Let's write some notes." Which means we're gonna start (asking), "Oh, is there any idea on that theme? Oh, what would that person do? Who is Frank B?" Even with *Death Comes to Town*, it's like, "Oh, Death comes to town and gets off a bus, that's a great start. Who's gonna be in that town?" And so you just kind of add to it, and before you know it, you have a shape to it, and you go, "Oh, that's gonna be the first scene, isn't it?" So I think you trick yourself, and it keeps spinning until all the stuff comes off and a gravity comes to it. I often, when I'm writing features, and I haven't written as many as TV shows, I kind of go, "OK, what are the ten scenes we need to tell this story? We have fifty. What are the ten?" And then you just take those and look at those and go, "OK, let's make that stuff earn its way back in."

It's a fallacy to think that something comes formed. I think you keep forming it and working it and throwing stuff out. When I did *Dog Park*, I was staring up at the editing room going, "That scene's exactly like that scene. Why did I shoot that scene? It's exactly like that scene, except they're wearing different clothes." And then you just take it out, and there's \$50,000 down the drain, and it's like, "OK, I just didn't

know what I was doing.” So you just keep working the thing. This is the thing, and I sell TV shows all the time, and they ask, “What’s this character gonna be like?” And it’s like, I don’t really know until I write him. And I think we don’t really know what we’re gonna write until we write it, so let’s not worry about it. Let’s just write, and at a certain point it’ll form itself, if that makes sense.

AC: *(to audience)* Time for a couple more questions. Vallicity.

Audience member: As a performer and a writer, everyone’s gonna have an opinion of what you do, and a lot of people will love you, but then there are people who hate you, and especially in this day and age with the internet giving people such access to put their opinions out there, do you ever find that you’re buried under the weight of negative opinions, and how do you deal with that if it happens?

BM: Every rave I ever got, I also got a pan on the same night. That’s just the way it is. It’s so weird. It’s like, people live-tweeting shows, it’s way different now. But that’s just part of all of it. You have to be tough in every way, I think.

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, yeah.

Audience member: From what you were saying before, it sounds like those tricks are ways to motivate you, and not make you feel like perfection is what you need to achieve when you start writing. And I just wondered: what do you feel about procrastination? As a writer, I procrastinate so hard, and I love writing, but...

BM: But your procrastination is about your fear of writing, or your fear of failure, of course.

Audience member: That's exactly what it is, and I just wondered...

BM: I say, and tell yourself this: all writing is good writing. It's seldom that you write something and it's so shitty that you can't write it again in a better form. So I think you just write. You write something. And just say, "I'm a hero. I'm a hero for writing this." And it doesn't have to be perfect, and you don't have to know where it's going, it doesn't have to have shape. Maybe it has shape, but... I've had problems where it's like, "How do I fix this problem," but tell yourself you're a good writer, and write something. And if it doesn't work, it's not your fault.

AC: *(to audience)* Right there at the back.

Audience member: All comedians and writers have that period of time, that two, three, four years where they're destitute, and they're not getting paid to do what they do. How long was that for *The Kids in the Hall*?

BM: Well, it was hard. I actually hurt my back before we moved out, so I was on compensation for a while. *(laughter)* My checks would get sent to Calgary, and they'd send them here. It's tough. I remember I was teaching *Theatresports*, and getting fifteen dollars a week at one point. That was all the money I had. So we were broke for a long time. I did temp work, worked in some office thing, where a woman showed me how to count things. She'd say, "Here you gotta count by tens," and she'd count. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. OK, that's ten, and another ten." *(laughter)* I'm serious. Phoenix Insurance. So tell yourself it's OK to be broke. It doesn't matter if you don't have money, it doesn't matter if you have to get

a job. But we were broke for a long time, and I think Scott is still stealing money off my floor. *(laughter)*

AC: *(to audience)* Tom?

Audience member: You mentioned a bunch of times that you were kind of a writer first, performer second. Did you ever find it, when you were writing for Kids in the Hall, more stressful writing a part you knew you'd be playing?

BM: That I *would* be playing?

Audience member: Yeah, if you knew you'd be playing it...

BM: No, not stressful. I think a lot of sketch stuff is, the person who starts to write it gets to own it. We sometimes, like on *Death Comes to Town*, we wrote it, and Scott could play that part, and Kevin ended up playing that part, or whatever. But I don't get more stress doing it. I think it's always good to picture someone, right? Even now, when I'm writing something, (I think) "Is it Luke Wilson doing it? Or is it a Jerry O'Connell type?" I think you have to imagine someone in your head. But no, of the stresses, me playing something, that wasn't really one of them.

AC: *(to audience)* Last question. Jake. Oh, Liron. *(laughter)*

Audience member: What qualities do you look for when you're gathering a sketch group? When you were putting together The Kids in the Hall, for instance, what'd you guys find was the underlying theme?

BM: Well, we didn't look, it's just that Scott came. We couldn't get rid of him.

(laughter) If you're looking at people to pick, and it's Kevin McDonald's quote: soul.

That's the thing you always look for. I was thinking of doing something at one point, and somebody said, "Does that thing have soul?" And it's like, "No. I wish it did." But it's soul. I want to say hard work, because I'm a work pig, but not everyone who's amazing works really hard. But soul.

AC: OK, well, this has been terrific. *(applause)*