

Happy Happy Joy Joy Redux

With *Ren and Stimpy: The Lost Episodes*, creator John Kricfalusi writes a happy ending.

by MIKE WINDER

THE CARTOON misadventures of Ren Höek—an asthma-bound Chihuahua in desperate need of anger management—and his loving idiot-savant feline partner, Stimpson J. Cat, first appeared on Nickelodeon 15 years ago. With its highly stylized animation, intense sequences of unraveling

quality of the episodes plummeted, fans disappeared, and *Ren and Stimpy's* feeding tubes were removed after three additional uninspired seasons.

Bust out those lawn cigars, because John K. is back with *Ren and Stimpy: The Lost Episodes*. With this DVD of cartoons produced specifically for Spike TV's short-lived *Ren and Stimpy: Adult*

at the original first two seasons, it's difficult to believe some of the *Ren and Stimpy* gags actually aired on a children's network. On Sunday morning no less. In "Ren's Toothache," after losing all his teeth, Ren uses a tweezer to yank out his nerve endings. In "Rubber Nipple Salesmen," Ren and Stimpy go door-to-door hawking—you guessed it—rubber nipples, and some most unconventional uses for the product. In the climactic scene of "Sven Höek," a

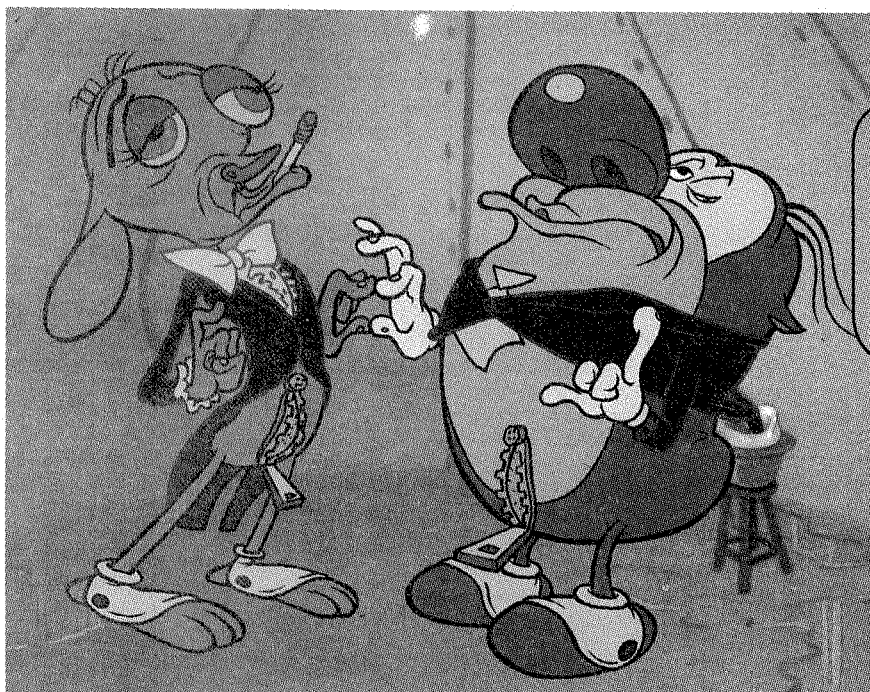
chodramatic monologues, where Ren, voiced by Kricfalusi himself, would descend into insanity. "I grew up with psychodrama in my household, so I studied that everyday," laughs Kricfalusi. He also credits the strong performances in film noir movies as inspiration for these scenes, and singles out one actor as a particularly captivating subject. "Kirk Douglas is full of amazingly original gestures, expressions, and poses," says Kricfalusi. "You could aim

Ren and Stimpy episode, whether it's from the original first two years or from *The Lost Episodes*, never followed any formula, so there are always surprises," says Kricfalusi. Boy, are there ever.

At a recent American Cinematheque tribute to Kricfalusi at the Aero Theatre in Santa Monica, a screening of the never-broadcast "Naked Beach Frenzy," which appears on *The Lost Episodes*, drew a particularly strong reaction from the crowd. In the cartoon, Ren's attempt to be rescued by well-endowed female lifeguards is thwarted by the world's manliest man—a hairy, grotesque hulking lifeguard whose genitalia clack together like pool balls when he runs. "I always show that one as the first cartoon of the night [at retrospectives]," Kricfalusi says, "Because it always brings the house down. Everybody starts screaming."

Another of the DVD's never-broadcast clips that resonated with the festival's audience was "Stimpy's Pregnant." A true stand-out with its outrageous animation, the cartoon is a rebirth-of-sorts of scatological humor. Keep your eyes peeled for Ren's instinctual reaction when he discovers his partner's pregnancy—an incredibly dark image that drew a mix of repulsion and laughter from the crowd. "It's only on for about four frames," says Kricfalusi, "I knew I was going to get shit for a scene like that, so I said I'm going to do it so fast that it's only going to have enough time for a huge gasp from the audience. Then I'll be on to something else, and they'll forget about it. Only later, when they're walking home, they'll say, 'Wait a second! I saw something really hideous in there.'" **LAA**

Ren and Stimpy: The Lost Episodes is available on DVD on July 18, 2006 from Paramount Home Entertainment. \$26.99.



The classy, aristocratic art of farting, with Ren and Stimpy.

psychodrama, and yes, plenty of booger and fart jokes, *Ren and Stimpy* launched a phenomenon, spawned many imitators and briefly made the world safe for what its maverick creator John Kricfalusi (aka John K.) calls "cartoon cartoons."

But, as they say in Mississippi, the hairball twice as hairy gets hwarfed twice as fast. After two short seasons and a public falling out with their creator, Nickelodeon took the cat and dog duo away from Kricfalusi and his Spüimco animation studio. The

Party Cartoon (a few episodes that were never aired during its 2003 run), Kricfalusi steers his creations into uncharted territories, and plays with ideas only hinted at in the original series. In other words, don't watch this one with your kids—*Spongebob Squarepants* it is not.

"You've got to remember that when the original *Ren and Stimpy* came out, the degree of edginess that it had, compared to what was on TV at that time, was vast," says the Canadian-born and L.A.-based Kricfalusi. Looking back

"There's no such thing as a writer-driven cartoon, there's only the non-artist-driven cartoon."

—JOHN KRICFALUSI

ballistic Ren learns the hard way why a board game is called "Don't Whiz on the Electric Fence."

More than just pushing the boundaries of good taste, *Ren and Stimpy* also flew in the face of convention by placing emphasis on exaggerated expressions and contortions of its characters. This is what cartoons do best as a medium, but rarely achieve in contemporary animation. Primetime animated shows like *Family Guy* and *South Park* may spark controversy and sell DVDs, but their focus on writing at the expense of quality animation is a sore spot for Kricfalusi. "There's no such thing as a writer-driven cartoon," says Kricfalusi. "There's only the non-artist-driven cartoon. The big misconception about animation is that if it's drawn poorly then it must be written well. And I say 'no.' It's written poorly and it's drawn poorly. [Cartoons] are a visual storytelling medium."

Another unique staple of *Ren and Stimpy* was its intense psy-

the camera at his foot and he'd find a way to act with his foot. He's that brilliant."

With its emphasis on exaggerated animation and strong performances, *Ren and Stimpy* was, in its own twisted way, very much a throwback to cartoons from the early '40s. Pay a visit to Kricfalusi's "All Kinds of Stuff" blog (<http://johnkstuff.blogspot.com>) and you'll see the passion and reverence he holds for the early Warner Brothers cartoons, as he dissects the work of directors Bob Clampett, Tex Avery, and Chuck Jones. "The old Looney Tunes are written well, directed well, drawn well and acted well," says Kricfalusi. "They have everything. There's nothing funnier than old Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Foghorn Leghorn cartoons. They have more jokes per minute than anything on TV today."

With this new DVD, fans of the original who never got to see *Ren and Stimpy: Adult Party Cartoon* may be in for a shock. "Every

DISPLAY CASE by Nadine Levyfield



OUTDOOR SCREWBALL COMEDY SCREENINGS

SUMMERTIME IS THE season of escapist cinema. It's when people flock to the movies to see some superhero in tights save the day, and as long as they can sit in an air-conditioned theater for two hours, it doesn't matter that they're watching a pretty crappy movie where the villain is a multi-tentacled menace or Kevin Spacey wearing a bald cap.

Of course, this phenomenon isn't a new one. It dates back to the golden age of film in the '30s and '40s, when everyone found relief from the war, the Depression or just the lack of videogames by getting lost in a movie. The main difference between the escapist films of then and now, however, is quality. Classic flicks became classics for a

reason—they were really good.

It was in this era that the screwball comedy originated, situational comedies with powerful characters, fast-paced dialogue and slapstick jokes. Screwballs had smart scripts, witty dialogue and talented actors; none of which relied on lame special effects or exaggerated publicity campaigns. Some classics from this genre include *It Happened One Night*, *Bringing Up Baby*, and *The Philadelphia Story*.

The humor in screwball comedies is refreshingly timeless, which is why the One Colorado courtyard of Old Town Pasadena has chosen to show them outdoors every Friday and Saturday night in July. While the faces of Clark Gable,

Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn illuminate the screen in the Pasadena courtyard, shoppers and families will be enjoying the trip down memory lane for free. And those watching the films can pick prime seats at one of the restaurants that border the courtyard, sit in the provided seats, or even bring their own chairs and picnic dinners.

The next films to be shown in the series are *My Man Godfrey*, *The Awful Truth*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *His Girl Friday*, *Ball of Fire* and *The Palm Beach Story*. The One Colorado area is a city block between Fair Oaks, Colorado Blvd., DeLacey, and Union St. All films are free to watch and begin at 8:30 p.m. More information available at www.onecolorado.com.