



The Kirby Public School choir, directed by Mr. Walters, sang O' Canada at the Peterborough Petes hockey game last Thursday.

John Thomson Photo



Basic Black

by Arthur Black

Lighten up!

We found it! We couldn't track down the Loch Ness monster, the British Columbia asquatch, Osama Bin Laden or the Frigidaire full of little green men in Roswell, New Mexico, but by cracky, we found Nucleus Accumbens.

That's the scientific name. We ordinary mortals know it better as 'the funny bone'. Turns out the mysterious something that makes people break into a grin is not a bone at all. Nucleus Accumbens is a region of the brain that has long been linked with happiness and drug-induced euphoria. Scientists at Stanford University have managed to glean new knowledge of that region through the use of sophisticated brain imaging techniques. The brains they imaged belonged to human subjects in a lab who got to look through a series of cartoons, some funny, some not.

Turns out that laughter is not just a one shot gag-reflex. A joke or a humorous situation is like a little Good Time Charlie, skipping through our brain and turning on the lights in a whole interlacing network

of darkened cranial suburbs. A shot of humour illuminates the language centers in our brain while it throws open the doors of perception and memory. The scientists also suspect it has a palliative effect on long-term stress levels.

So we've found the funny bone. If this was archaeology it would be like finding the left baby toenail of the first pterodactyl. Humour is an immensely mysterious beast. We all enjoy it; we know next to nothing about it.

Why are some jokes funny only to men and others only to women? What's the connection between jokes and health? Between humour and marital satisfaction? Why do the French think Jerry Lewis is a comic genius while the rest of the world thinks he's a repulsive idiot? Most of all, what is Canadian humour all about?

Don't laugh. It's a serious question that scientist Richard Wiseman is trying to answer. Doctor Wiseman is a Brit, and he's perplexed by the Canadian sense of humour. Consider: last year Doctor Wiseman and his colleagues

tracked down and isolated the funniest joke in the English language. Here it is: Two hunters are out in the woods when suddenly one of them falls to the ground. He doesn't seem to be breathing, the whites of his eyes are showing. Panicking, the other guy whips out his cellphone and calls emergency. "I'm in the bush! My friend is dead! What do I do?"

The operator says in a calm voice: "Okay now. Just take it easy. We can help you. First, let's make sure he's dead, okay?" There is silence, then a shot. Then the guy's voice comes back on the line and says: "Okay, now what?"

Doctor Wiseman and his colleagues tried that joke on people from all over the world and it came out number one - except among Canadians. Doctor Wiseman doesn't know what to make of that.

"It's possible you guys don't have much of a sense of humour, but that doesn't seem likely. The other possibility is that the joke isn't that great and the fact that you didn't find it funny shows you've got a sophisticated sense of humour."

Whatever, Doctor Wiseman is now embarked on a new experiment seeking the funniest joke in Canada (Stockwell Day? Mel Lastman? Your country needs you).

I think he should save himself the airfare and stick to Old Blighty. For me, and for millions around the world, British humour, from The Goon Show to Monty Python's Flying Circus to Billy Connolly, represent the gold standard when it comes to humour.

Particularly Monty Python. The Pythons saved my sanity in the seventies when they did their antic scramble across my TV screen. The Ministry of Silly Walks. The Dead Parrot. Hell's Grannies.

A magical time, and a time that is alas, passed. If I ever doubted that, a recent item in the news confirmed it for me. It told how John Cleese, the head loon of the Monty Python crew was awarded \$30,000 for 'pain and suffering' by a London court. Cleese had testified that he felt "bewildered and disoriented and to a certain extent scared" after a British newspaper said he was no longer funny.

Come on, John...where's your sense of humour?



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