

Comedian-commentator delivers laughs

Mo Rocca hit the Bresnan Arena stage Monday night smiling in a bright red bowling shirt, lime green pants and blue suede shoes. And believe it or not, the act outshone the outfit.

By Robb Murray Free Press Staff Writer [published in The Free Press, Mankato, MN 4/12/2005]

MANKATO — Mo Rocca hit the Bresnan Arena stage Monday night smiling in a bright red bowling shirt, lime green pants and blue suede shoes. And believe it or not, the act outshone the outfit.

In front of him sat more than 2,500 students, faculty, staff and community members who came for laughs. Rocca - the guy who outpolled some of the biggest names in literature, a popular documentarian and a legendary hockey goalie - delivered.

Over the course of an hour, Rocca told stories, clicked through a Powerpoint presentation and played two video clips from his comedy and "journalism" career that brought the house down.

His talk was all over the map, touching on politics, current events, the death of the Pope, presidential burial places, old-school rap star Flava Flav's affinity for clocks and relationships with sea turtles.

Rocca's talk hit the ground running with the line that he didn't think he'd be doing his job if he didn't end the night with at least two fatwas out against him (a nod to author Salman Rushdie, who was on the list of potential speakers that fell to Rocca's popularity.)

From there it took off quickly and with a laser-sharp wit. Perhaps it's best to race through some of it here, as Rocca did.

On Minnesota ...

"Gophers, ice fishing, Lutherans and Post-Its. I love it ... I tease because I love the loon. I love the pink and white Lady Slipper."

On who could be the next Pope ...

Tom DeLay? "Scandal will eliminate Pope Tom."

Michael Jackson? "We've never had a mocha-latte-colored Pope before."

Jesse Ventura? "I think it would be great to have a pirate pope," he said, a giant picture of an oddly coifed Ventura on the big screen behind him.

On the Bush twins ...

"The Bush daughters are total porn stars. What they say is totally detached from the way they say it."

On his status as a fake reporter ...

"A fake reporter knows about as much as a real reporter these days."

He also gave a short history of his career, including the early days when he simultaneously wrote scripts for the "Wishbone" children's television show and consulted for a men's magazine called Perfect 10, which apparently only features images of women who have not surgically altered their bodies.

"Kids TV by day, soft core porn by night," he said of that stage in his career. "Yada yada yada, I was bored."

Eventually he landed the gig that made him famous: working as a correspondent for Comedy Central's "The Daily Show." During the 2000 elections, "The Daily Show," covered the country's major races, and that was before the show's popularity exploded.

A clip from that show provided the night's defining moment. It showed Rocca and several other reporters interviewing a man outside a political event. At first the humor is easy to miss as the man answers questions politely.

Eventually it becomes clear that Rocca is insistently shoving his microphone so far into the man's face that his head gets gradually slanted to the right. And that's funny. But the absurdity of it takes over when you realized the man continues to speak - at length - with a microphone contorting his face.

"It makes (the MTV show) 'Jackass' look like Masterpiece Theatre," Rocca said of the clip.

Rocca also took questions: Did people know they were being messed with? (At first no, eventually yes.) Favorite cereal? (Frosted Mini-Wheats, not too soggy.) How did his new show on the Animal Planet network come about? (He apparently just loves animals, and the folks at Animal Planet came to him.)

Students say it was worth their time and student fees.

"I thought he was funny," said freshman Kate Maland, who'd never heard of Rocca before and came only because her instructor suggested it. "He kept me entertained."

And Chad Berkenes, while he seemed surprised at the cost of bringing Rocca to campus, still believed it was worth the \$20,000.

"I thought it was a great presentation. He knows how to please a crowd," he said. "I think it's worth it. I pay student fees and I believe it was worth it."