

# Al Simmons Has the Soul of a Vaudevillian

## THE BEGINNING

It's as if he was genetically engineered for comedy. From his distant Romanian and Scottish ancestors Al has inherited a quick wit, lanky legs, large flipper-like feet and a rubber face. His father, a charismatic magazine salesman and would-be performer, spent many hours telling tall tales and re-enacting old vaudeville routines in their living room. He taught his offspring how to make hats out of pillows, build forts out of furniture, and find humour in the ordinary. At his father's knee, Al learned



Dad

classic baggy-pants comedy routines, replete with silly walks and funny faces. Al's Mom taught the budding young vaudevillian the genteel art of punning, and he quickly learned how to turn homonyms into hilarity. She handed down silly songs and magic tricks that she had learned from her mother. Both parents encouraged Al to dream his dreams and follow his heart.



Shy Guy

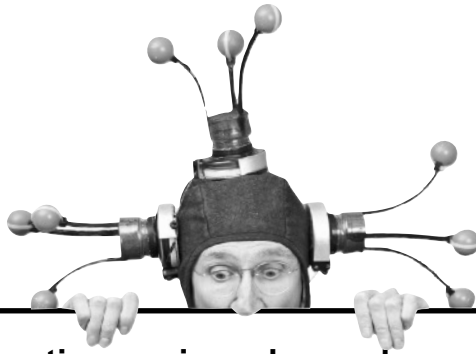
He became known as the *shy guy* in the neighbourhood who didn't say much, but when he did it was usually funny. His extended family was made up of punsters, pranksters and eccentrics, including Al's Uncle Nick, who toured Eastern Canada as Steamboat Harris, best known for playing a ukulele made out of a toilet seat!

Al worked as a gas jockey, steelworker and clerk before his heart steered him towards his true calling: the world of entertainment. He began by performing in amateur shows and volunteering his services for benefit concerts. He soon formed a comedy/rock band called *Out to Lunch*, then a comedy/folk band, *Kornstock*, before venturing out on his own again as *The Human Juke Box*: "two bits a laff." He ran for office as a federal candidate for the Rhino Party, promising to raise all of the desks in the House of Commons so that more deals could be done under the table. The subsequent notoriety landed him the starring roles in two TV series, CTV's "All for Fun", and CBC's "Fabulous Festival", both written by Al.



Al & Mom

## THE SHOW



**Al Simmons is a creative genius whose charm and humanity have won over a legion of fans at theaters and festivals around the world. His highly original performances of profound wackiness and array of off-the-wall inventions take the arts of Music and Comedy to unparalleled heights of hilarity.**

His act, at once frenetic and engagingly simple, is a tour-de-force of ingenious and charming silliness. The popular Manitoba-based performer has been in the entertainment business since 1970 and is likely Canada's most versatile comedian; instantly morphing from Scotsman to Eye Doctor and Parisian bon vivant to Rock Star. To top it off he has an amazing voice; one moment he is crooning a ballad the next he is belting out the blues.



Physical comedy, slapstick and general mayhem reign and the audience quickly realizes that they can't just watch this show passively. They are taught to gasp in amazement, shriek with terror, hiss, boo, call out all sorts of lead-ins and punch lines and sing along robustly to the anti-audience-participation-anthem: "Don't Make Me Sing Along!"



His concerts are full of bizarre gadgets, wild costumes, unique songs, crazy vaudeville-inspired routines and, of course, bad puns. The tails on his tuxedo flip

and flop, his vest transforms into a kilt, an eye chart becomes a song and springy doorstoppers become musical instruments. With his collection of homemade mechanical hats and inspired musical contraptions it's no wonder he has been called "The Thomas Edison of entertainers."



## THE SHOW (CONTINUED)



*Spin-dry Socks*

Al's creations include automated headgear, one of which looks like nothing more than a soup pot, until it springs open to display the entire contents of a kitchen drawer. He sports hats that erupt in flags, or spin-dry socks, and there's one that appears to be designed to attract alien life forms. As part of the audience you feel as if you're at a loopy fisherman's 'show-and-tell' with a screwball school of rubber fish—one squirts water until it becomes a fish out of water and once you've seen a fish emitting puffs of smoke, it's hard to take the words "smoked salmon" at face value.

His pièce de résistance is his rendition of the entire 1812 Overture, including the church bell, fireworks and cannon parts, on his Upright, Bb, 4-Bell, 12-Valve, Baritone Simbonium. He built the contraption himself by soldering together a miniature tuba, three trumpets and all manner of bells and whistles. Al manages to play the melody while the thing spews fountains of water, confetti and puffs of smoke and erupts in golf balls, balloons, flags and flowers.



*Simbonium*

At the end of the show he has been known to ride off into the sunset astride Ol' Spoke, a horse-cycle with off-center wheels, blinking eyes, twirling tail, nodding head, bucking behind, and coconuts that clip-clop as he cycles.



*Horse-cycle*

After the show, Al spends as long as it takes to sign autographs for any waiting fans.

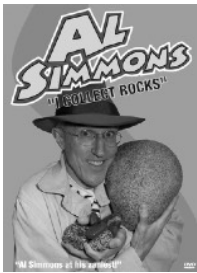
## THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Al has won a Juno Award (The Canadian equivalent to a Grammy), he's a Member of the Order of Manitoba, a Paul Harris Fellow, and an Honourary Air Marshall. He was presented with The Golden Baton for Artistic Achievement by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. He was a gold medal winner at the 2005 World

Championship Zucchini Race, and a restaurant in his hometown named a hotdog after him. He has put out three CDs: *Something's Fishy at Camp Wiganishie*, *Celery Stalks at Midnight*, and *The*

*Truck I Bought From Moe*, all of which won Parents' Choice honors and were nominated for Juno awards. *Celery Stalks*, Al's brilliant ode to Vaudeville, won the 1995 Juno Award for Best Children's Album. He is an author; "Counting Feathers," his illustrated children's book, was short-listed for the McNally-Robinson Book of the Year in 1997. He received a coveted Cable Ace Award nomination for his music video "I Collect Rocks," which is also the title track of his DVD that contains 6 of his wacky music videos and features his Horse-cycle "Ol' Spoke".



## HOME SWEET HOME

Al and his wife Barbara have been married since 1976 and live in harmony and pandemonium near the small Manitoba town of Anola, on a 15-acre ranch with two head of cat. They have three sons, Karl, Will, and Brad, and five granddaughters, Ashley, Kaitlin, Marley, Clover and Penny. Their home, built around two train cars, is

equipped with a fire-pole that connects an upstairs shop with a main-floor playroom lined with mattresses and filled with pillows. Their yard is flowered with zip lines, Tarzan ropes, slides and swings, and bountiful, fruit and vegetable gardens. There's an old bus seat perched on the roof, creating an observation deck under the soothing prairie skies. Yes, the lineage, the lore, and the legends of vaudeville are nourished, and flourish, here on the Simmons' ranch, where always is heard a hilarious word, and the loon and the ludicrous roam.



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