

## ARTS

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Rumour has it...

## Anything for a Chuckle

Three comics lovers, including one NACO musician, go for the laughs with a new book of cartoons, writes **NICK MILIOKAS**.

It's been four decades since the comic-mad Boychuk brothers, self-described class clowns, were growing up in Regina.

Brian is now a violinist with the National Arts Centre Orchestra, and Ron makes his living in retail grocery management back home in Regina. What hasn't changed is that they both still turn to the comic pages of the newspaper first.

And today, the brothers, along with Ottawa artist Ronnie Martin, launch a book of their own comic creations, called *On the Road*. The trio, who call themselves the Chuckle Bros, already have their quirky single-frame comics published in a community newspaper and in the NAC Orchestra's newsletter. Now they're shouldering their way onto retail bookshelves.

*On the Road* will be sold at the NAC box office and in independent book stores. There's an undeniable irony in the title, in that they hope the comic is on the road to syndication.

Their journey started when Brian and Ron, now 48 and 44 years old, respectively, were growing up in Regina.

"I've always had a passion for cartoons," says Brian. "Ron's like that, too." The Boychuk boys were faithful followers of *Peanuts*, written by Charles Schulz, and later of Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes*.



BRYAN SCHLOSSER, THE REGINA LEADER-POST

**Ron, left, and Brian Boychuk have been comics fans since their youth in Regina, and have finally published, with colleague Ronnie Martin, the first book of their quirky, bizarre single-frame cartoons. Brian is a violinist with the NAC Orchestra in Ottawa.**

They were later reeled in by Jim Unger, creator of *Herman*, and in the 1990s by Gary Larson and *The Far Side*.

Indeed, it was Larson's premature retirement in the mid-'90s that inspired the Boychuk brothers to create the Chuckle Bros. Imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, the Chuckle Bros. panels closely resemble Larson's work, to the extent that they could be christened Son

of Far Side.

"Not that we're comparing ourselves to Gary Larson," Brian says, "but our stuff is based on Gary Larson, with a distinctive style and look that is our own. We like to think of it as maniacally bizarre, yet really charming, humour."

The Boychuks have a preference for panels over strips, partly because "panels take a lot more time to read," as Brian points out, but mostly be-

cause they have a soft spot for punchlines and a talent for writing them, or so they've been told.

"This might be true and it might not," Brian says, "but it seems to me that panels might be a harder sell. Or maybe we were attracted to the immediacy of a single panel, I don't know. Single panels tend to be more slapstick, and slapstick suits our personalities."

The Boychuks, who have

been close since their youth, formed a creative partnership two years ago. Geography has not been an obstacle. They stay in touch through daily telephone calls, and it was over the phone that the Chuckle Bros. project was launched with an exchange of ideas when Brian and his family were vacationing in the Maritimes and Ron was at home in Regina.

"It's like a lightbulb went on," Ron says. "We had 20

cartoons the first night and I believe close to 120 by the end of the week."

Still, ideas are one thing, and drawings are quite another. The Boychuks readily admit that "we cannot draw to save our lives."

That's where Martin, a transplanted Pennsylvanian who owns and operates a design company in Ottawa, comes into the picture.

He takes the words and turns them into pictures. Martin has some creative latitude, apparently, but "not much," the Boychuks explain, speaking together and with conspiratorial but good-natured smiles.

"It's fun watching our words turn into pictures, but that's Ronnie's responsibility," Ron says.

"Our job is to supply the ideas, and the key to the whole thing is bouncing ideas off each other until they're do-able."

The next step, and it's a critical one, is to have the cartoon syndicated. The Chuckle Bros. have been rejected by five major syndication services in the United States.

But they have received encouragement from Canadian Lynn Johnston, creator of the comic strip *For Better or For Worse*.

She spoke to Ron by telephone after they had sent samples of their work to her. "We talked for about an hour!" he says. "She said, 'Your cartoons are definitely worthy.'"

Johnston also suggested doing a self-published book.

*On the Road* will be launched at a reception with the authors today at the NAC Fourth Stage, from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

THE REGINA LEADER POST