

Him of many faces

Tommy Davidson makes impressions at Dayton Funny Bone

BY JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN

Remember the T-1000

from "Terminator 2" and how it was made up of that mimetic alloy that allowed it to instantly transform into whomever it wanted? Tommy Davidson must be made of similar stuff, considering how completely he disappears into impressions, from Sylvester Stallone to Barack Obama. The versatile actor, who achieved stardom early in his career with *In Living Color*, started out as a standup comedian in Washington, D.C., before touring as the opening act for the likes of Patti LaBelle and Luther Vandross. The chameleon artist has taken his turn in many big screen hits, like Spike Lee's "Bamboozled," and can still be found on the small screen in roles such as Cream Corn on "Black Dynamite."

In anticipation of his upcoming shows at Dayton Funny Bone, Davidson took the time to talk to *Dayton City Paper*. The following are highlights from that conversation.

I know you had kind of a unique upbringing.

Tommy Davidson: Oh boy, I'm a black man, in America, who has a cowboy grandfather from Wyoming and a Native American chief grandfather from Mississippi. Black man in America with a cowboy and an Indian for grandparents. [laughs] I'm middle of the road, dude. And my brother, who is my best friend, a white male, died of AIDS, so I got that covered. My sister looks like Cindy Brady. I got the white female population of America in me, too. It's crazy.

How do you feel that the shape of your family has affected your relationship with your family and your children?

TD: It is probably a gift. My mom, she found me in a trashcan, long story short, and raised me with her family. They're white, and they're from Laramie, Wyoming. Her husband is from Colorado, so I was raised in Laramie, Wyoming, and Fort Collins, Colorado, since I was five, so I'd never even saw a black person. So I al-

ways thought that, when I was a little kid, I thought I was a "brown one." Now, let me explain this to you. When cats have kittens, you'll have a gray one, a spotted one, a brown one, a black one. So I thought, as a kid, whatever we are, I'm a brown one. I grew up on farms and on these huge ranches in Wyoming, so there was a lot of animals, so we always saw litters. A dog would have puppies, one would be black, one would be gray, one would be white, you know? So, I thought I was a brown one.

That's pretty brilliant logic for a kid.

TD: We moved into D.C. the week that Martin Luther King got shot. I was a little kid then, so I could recap it now, but I'll take you through a 5-year-old's eyes. So, we're driving into the city, where there's tear gas and sh-t's burning and there's soldiers everywhere. It's crazy, right? We finally get to the house where we're going to live. A couple of days and my brother and sister and I find out there's a pool down the street, so Mom says, "You can go to the pool." ... So we go to the pool, and all the black kids beat our ass and chased us home, calling us 'white crackers' ... I came home and I asked my mom, "First of all, why are they calling us 'white crackers'?" Because I like graham crackers. Why do they hate us because we like crackers? I don't like crackers. I like graham crackers." She was like, "Well, 'crackers' is what people who are your color call people that are our color when they don't like them." And I was like, "What color?" She was like, "Black." And I was like, "No, but I'm brown."

We got beat up so much, we moved. So when we moved, we moved to an all-white neighborhood, and all the white kids start-

ed kicking our ass and calling me "n--ger." They're calling my brother and sister "n--ger lover." And so I went to my mom, and I was like, what is a "n--ger"? "Baby, that's what people who are your color don't like people who are our color."

I never forget that day ... It was the saddest day of my life because I was like, "But, I'm a brown one." I think my life, my consciousness, our color was stamped into me at that age. But even at that age ... I thought that was the stupidest f--king shit I ever heard. I was confused like a motherf---er. The kittens play together. Like, they have so much fun. Or, like a box of puppies: they play together. They're not thinking, "You're spotted. You're gray. And I'm white." I thought these kind of things when I was a kid.

Upcoming you have "Frat Pack" and "Sharknado 4," which will be awesome in the way only a "Sharknado" movie can be. I was wondering what the movie experience is like for you as an artist?

TD: Unbelievable. You're thinking, "Eh, 'Sharknado,' a spoof movie. Just do this little movie, get it out the way. Do some publicity." But it was one of the best experiences I ever had. The director is so good, this company is so good, the crew is so good.

How is the movie experience different than television experience or standup?

TD: They're different skill sets. Movies are you hurry up and wait. You got to pack a lunch. TV is you better hurry up. And standup is you do whatever you want. So like, movies are like a surfboard. You can stand up on it once in a while; you got to wait for the right wave. TV is like a skateboard. You can ride it and ride it and ride it, but you have to keep constantly getting off of it. Standup is like a bike. You can pretty much pedal anywhere you want.

Tommy Davidson will perform at 7:30 p.m., Thursday-Saturday, April 14-17 with additional performances at 10 p.m. on April 15 and 16 at Dayton Funny Bone, 88 Plum St. in The Greene. For more information, please visit tommycat.net.



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