

Hey, Joe:

*Whatcha doin' with that camera
in your hand?*

When Joe Winston saw his show mentioned in a City Paper article about Philadelphia's lack of public access, he decided to actually send a copy of "This Week in Joe's Basement" for our review (see Letters, City Paper, 9/29/90).

Winston is the star of the show. The first thing you see is a wall full of photographs panned over very quickly. Then, the pink-white, slightly shiny bottoms of Joe's feet appear on screen. He's reclining in an easy chair, and the camera catches his need-a-shave face from between his bare toes.

He introduces the show while vigorously stuffing his mouth with pretzels, tearing the sides of the cellophane bag in the rush to get food in his mouth.

"Hi. I'm Joe. And this is my basement," he says. He's wearing an old T-shirt sporting the name of a local Chicago restaurant in loud white cursive across the front. His hair is a little messed up. And jeez, is he cute.

This episode, he explains, will function as a sort of explanation of Joe's world, and will include an edited version of the very first show, which embodied his prior "we don't give a fuck about the viewer" attitude (yes, you can curse on public access) when he figured no one was watching. He was also, in that first episode, exploring structural cinema (e.g., Andy Warhol's 25-hour epic about the Empire State Building).

But more about that later.

So Joe goes through a spiel about the trappings of his show: how things like his feet, the pretzels, his T-shirt, his unshaven face, his hair and his attitude are all integral elements. During this segment, little ten-second film pieces pop up, illustrating his point. When he says "...a penchant for self-reference," a woman looking at a TV image of herself appears, asking, "What about me? Me?" while the TV image is also asking the same questions. Then she says, "Where are my cigarettes?" and the show goes back to Joe. A number of these out-of-control video blips appear during Joe's monologue.

And then Joe decides it's time to explain the opening sequence, in which so many photographs pass by the viewer that it's impossible to register all of them.

Joe gets up from his chair and begins to rummage around his basement, ostensibly looking for the list of photos. He finds an old bag of Oreos and eats a few. A half-eaten doughnut falls from a table; Joe takes a bite. He leads us to the TV set, where he runs a video of the opening sequence, identifying each photo so quickly that his words blur together. It's better than Letterman.

And then onto the edited version of that first show. It is Joe's intention, in this episode, to show himself doing next to nothing for 24 minutes. He sets a darkroom timer, located next to him at his kitchen table, and proceeds to consume four beers, eat a bagel with jelly, read the Chicago Tribune, fall asleep for a minute, and — having drunk four real beers in real time — get shitfaced plastered. Right on television. Then, for the grand finale, his roommate presses a pie into Joe's trying-to-keep-a-straight face.

No Wayne's World here. Joe Winston is a really funny guy.

—S.S.