



"Paul's Butt"

Underground TV

By MATTHEW FARR



Joe Winston

When you first see "This Week in Joe's Basement", you think of "Wayne's World" from "Saturday Night Live." Then you say, no, this is more like that guy on Letterman, Chris Elliott, who does all that stupid stuff that's supposed to be funny. But if you watch it, you'll realize some of the things being presented here are dead serious, and what Joe Winston and his cohorts are doing is airing the stories too delicate and distasteful for the six o'clock news—in their own idiosyncratic and sometimes idiotic way.

Each show—on cable channels 19 and 51, on Mondays at

11:30pm—starts out with Joe, in his basement, munching snack foods noisily and presenting the viewer with his bare feet, which fortunately look fairly clean. He generally reads some viewer mail, responds to it, sometimes rudely, then proceeds to the main topic of the week.

Last year, their episode "Sledgehammer Diplomacy" won a "Gold CAN" from Chicago's Access CANFest, simply by going out and asking black and white people what they thought of each other. More recently, Joe visited a north suburban and a south suburban mall to ask teenagers why they were there, what they looked for in the opposite sex, and what they thought of war in the Persian Gulf. The answers were scary, proof that reality is an individual matter of choice.

Winston, 24, says, "Joe's Basement" started out as a gag, like, we're doing a tv show but we're not serious about it." After an initial 5 or 6 episodes, which he calls the "Fuck the Viewer" phase, Winston and his helpers started putting more work into the shows. "We sort of express whatever we're feeling at the time," says Winston. "It's a great freedom, actually, not to be limited to anything except our meager budgets, and our imagination and time constraints."

Some shows are bizarre. For instance, a recent episode featured a video date,

in which two television sets, one displaying a man and the other a woman, went on a date that included dinner, drinks, a walk, and then back to his apartment for sex. Another featured a "butt-creature" which recited Shakespeare. One oddly fascinating segment showed the red fuzzed-out image of a man as he talked about having sex with a rich old lady for money.

These are interspersed with strange bits of song and video schlock, which either are annoying or approach art. One particular eerie moment came when John Harriman, upside down and with his



"Inner Conflict"

voice slowed down, told about meeting a policeman in his professor's office. It's pure video poetry. However, the "Mole," an upside-down close-up of Paul Pomerleau's bearded face with some paper eyes stuck on, is pretty much a lame gross-out (although Winston claims viewer response has dubbed it one of the most consistently appealing parts of the show).

"This Week in Joe's Basement" takes a little getting used to, and the episodes vary widely, but the show is worth watching simply because it dares to be thoughtful, as well as weird.



"The Mole"