

Tempo

Chicago Tribune Friday, February 14, 1992

Tracing the route to cellar success

Mike Myers and Chicago's own Joe Winston discuss 'Wayne's World' as cable fable

Of all the cable-access TV hosts in Chicago, Joe Winston of "This Week in Joe's Basement" is perhaps the most famous—he even appeared on the "Today" show. So he seemed to be the perfect person to interview the country's most famous access host, Mike Myers, aka Wayne of the "Saturday Night Live" skit "Wayne's World," during Myers' recent publicity tour for the movie "Wayne's World," which opens Friday.

By Joe Winston

Joe—Mike, are you aware of the circumstances which bring us together today? There's a remarkable coincidence—

Mike—You do a cable-access show?

Joe—Yes. I've been doing a show called "This Week in Joe's Basement" since the summer of 1989, and "Wayne's World" started, I guess, in the spring of '89?

Mike—Yeah. Wow, that's weird.



Mike Myers (above left) and Dana Carvey of "Wayne's World"; Joe Winston (right) with Myers.



Tribune photo by John Bartley

"Wayne's World" packs wit and insight into an idiotic plot. Review in Friday.

Joe—So, there's a remarkable similarity between the title of my program and the content of your program.

Mike—Do you actually do it out of your

basement?

Joe—To an extent. The title itself is sort of a joke. Since public access is a volunteer effort, I've used the basement for many improvised sets, and I host every show from

See Wayne, pg. 3

Wayne

Continued from page 1

the basement, sitting in an easy chair.

Mike—That's funny.

Joe—So, for years, people have been telling me that "someone has been stealing your idea! There's this show on 'Saturday Night Live' called 'Wayne's World'..."

Mike—All right. Well, I never saw it ["Joe's Basement"]. It's one of those things where ideas are just in the air, I suppose, like [the movie] "18 Again" came out right before "Big."

Joe—So, about the "Wayne's World" movie, although it's obviously a fantasy, I do have one major complaint, about the main character's having an entire satellite-transmitting station in his front yard. Chicago Access Corp. offers no such facilities.

Mike—As I've said many times before, my poetic license is paid in full. If you have any doubts, go to the poets union and check to see that my dues are paid. ... Seriously, it looked funnier, so we did it that way.

Joe—I'm curious about what you know about the actual machinations of public-access cable, and how all of that works.

Mike—Well, friends of mine were "The Kids in the Hall," and they had a public-access show. I always wanted to have one, I just couldn't get around to filling out all the forms and stuff.

Joe (laughs)—There is a fair amount of bureaucracy involved.

Mike—Yeah. Well, that was the hard part of it.

Joe—This was in Toronto?

Mike—Yeah. We've had public access there as long as I can remember, Rogers Cable 10, and I got hired by Second City right out of Grade 13 [high school], and previous to that I did TV commercials growing up, so I never had that much time to just do something fun. But it's a great thing. I'd love to go on the "Robin Byrd Show."

Joe—Which is?

Mike—That's a cable-access show in Manhattan. Madonna's been on it a couple times. Sandra Bernhard goes on there a lot too. It would just be a fun thing to do.

Joe—Did you base "Wayne's World" on any particular public access show?

Mike—No.

Access is \$10 trying to be \$10 million. It's very much voice of the people and not slick. It's not production-values-driven TV.

Joe—It's certainly not. Do you think it offers a viable alternative to what's otherwise out there on regular television?

Mike—Oh, it's absolutely democracy in action. It's a given fact that TV is the most potent medium, you couldn't ask for a more powerful medium. And to have it be solely in control of private industry is undemocratic, and more than a little terrifying. Whoever came up with the idea of public access is a genius.

Joe—Yes.

Mike—I'm serious. It takes a tremendous amount of foresight to say to the cable companies, "Yes, we give you the cable rights, but you have to have this amount of programming and set aside these channels for public use."

Joe—Yes, some brilliant legal minds were involved in the '60s. Actually, you should know that



"Wayne's World," with Mike Myers (left) and Dana Carvey, is "\$10 trying to be \$10 million," says Myers.

right now, the future of cable is fiber optics.

Mike—Yeah, and the phone companies will run TV through their fiber-optic lines.

Joe—Yeah, well, legislation that the FCC is proposing will eliminate public access altogether once the phone companies take over the cable franchises.

Mike—That's really silly. That's unfortunate.

Joe—So I'm pleased to see that you're with me on this democratization of television.

Mike—To say you couldn't get access to television ... is to say that you couldn't distribute leaflets on the corner. It's like disallowing photocopiers, as they do in the Soviet Union. It's un-American.

Joe—I can tell you something which is running through my mind, which is that Wayne is the

single most influential figure in people's perceptions of public-access cable and what people do.

Mike—Great.

Joe—And I am continually trying to live him down because I, too, originate from the basement, although I lack a satellite dish.

Mike—That's funny.

Joe—So this just comes from nowhere, just totally startles you?

Mike—Yeah, well anything startles me. The fact that any journalist would want to talk to me is bizarre in itself. You just try to do your best with what you think is funny, and if people like it, that's great.

Joe—So the character of Wayne came about through improvisation, on the stage [when you were with Second City]?

Mike—I was Wayne when I was between 12 and 15. So it's an ex-

tension of me and the people I hung out with.

Joe—What clicked in your mind as far as the public-access cable end of it? How central is it that Wayne is doing a public-access cable show?

Mike—Hopefully when I do the movie, and I do Wayne, it's fun. Fun is the staple of their lives. I've always hung out with people [for whom] the ability to make their own fun is an important thing. I love homemade stuff as opposed to store bought. The thing about "Wayne's World" is that it's \$10 trying to be \$10 million, and the gulf between those realities is what's fun about it. They are people who try to make their own fun.

Joe—Out of nothing, almost.

Mike—Just out of the ideal that fun is not necessarily something that is spoon-fed to you. Fun is where you make it. If you're in the suburbs and there's nothing going on, then you make fun. You know what I mean?

Joe—Yes, I do. Very much so.

Mike—Yes, so me and my friends could always sit in the basement and amuse ourselves for hours and hours. I was the sort of person, and still am, who can't watch TV silently. I can't. I have to go, "That reminds me of something," and be able to interact. At some point it's video wallpaper, and at other points, all attention is there. You know?

Joe—Sure.

Mike—It's ludicrous to go, "Shhh!" during a television movie. "Please, I want to see what happens." It should just be something that spurs you to talk.

Joe—Do you think the big boys could learn something from the little guys who are doing access?

Mike—I think they are already.

Toronto City TV is the most local television station I've seen. They've already co-opted it. And "America's Funniest Home Videos," "America's Funniest People" and all those shows where people send in videos, is a clear example that it strikes a chord, and the industry is trying to address that chord, I think.

Joe—So do you think this film is the apex of "Wayne's World," or will you continue it?

Mike—I don't know. I try to take things one step at a time. If I don't feel like writing more "Wayne's Worlds" I won't, and if I feel like it, I will. That's how I do everything on ["Saturday Night Live"]. That's the fun part about being on the show.

Joe—I note that you're not dressed as Wayne, for your PR thing.

Mike—That would be insane. I'm not Wayne, he's just a character I play on TV.

Joe—I'd like to ask you if you'd do a bit on "Joe's Basement."

Mike—Yeah, if I'm in town, sure. I'm gonna come back, 'cause I really had a good time in Chicago, and this two-day work-all-day-and-have-a-cold business is not the best way to see any city.

Joe—This week's show is about paranoia, so we thought it would be funny to have you sit in the easy chair, as I do, in my basement, and say "Good evening and welcome to Wayne's World."

Mike (laughs)—As if I'd stolen your idea.

Joe—Right. It should take about 20 seconds of your time, since we have simple lighting setups.

Mike—Great. All the better. I'll happily do that.

Joe—Well, thank you. I'd really appreciate that.