

PODCASTING

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If you've spent any time tuned into the mainstream media lately, you might have noticed a trend: they're all talking about blogs. They're really proud of themselves too. 'Blogs!' they seem to say, 'They're fresh! They're hot!' And of course, the assumption is that by tapping into them, big media becomes fresh and hot by association. And that would be true. If it were 1998.

It's 2006, however, and blogging isn't exactly brand spankin'. Podcasting, by comparison, is. Like blogging, it enables so-called regular folk to broadcast their ideas to the world, only this time using audio files instead of angsty text. Think of it like HAM radio for the 21st Century, just a tad less geeky.

As far as cultural phenomenons go, this seems important. In an effort to understand the growing trend, *ION* chatted with two Toronto-based podcasters – Matthew C. Brown (we'll call him MCB) and Matthew Price (MP) - who've been on the bandwagon since the almost-beginning. Their co-hosted podcast is called MAMO! (The tag line reads "Matt and Matt talk about movies and popular culture." Get it?) It's a little like NPR, a little like CBC, and, though they don't think so, a little like *Pump Up The Volume*. Here, a little of their wisdom:

ION: So MCB, when we first talked you said that as of about a year ago, you didn't even know what podcasting was. Now you're hosting two different shows. [The second is for blogTO.] How'd that happen?

MCB: I'll let Matthew cover the story of MAMOs origins, because it was really his baby ... As for moviesTO (available at www.blogto.com), Fresh Daily was looking for podcasters and heard MAMO and liked it ... now I have no free time whatsoever.

MP: MAMO started last June, because I just felt like the kinds of conversations I was having about movies and the movie business were inherently more interesting than what I was hearing in the mainstream press and on TV. Also, I felt like there were a lot of "truths" just accepted by the business that have no factual basis ... I sent an email out to my friends to see who was into it. Matt gave it an instant yes and we launched about two weeks later. Then iTunes hit and ka-BOOM, people I didn't even know were listening and liking.

"Truths?" Explain.

MP: Oh, there are all kinds. There has always been an inherently flawed logic in how executives interpret box office results, for instance. The best example is Demi Moore. She was in several high grossing movies in the early '90s, culminating with *A Few Good Men*. She had nothing much to do with their success, but her agents made a play for her to take the credit. And she managed to take a huge salary for her next picture, *Striptease*. Nobody stopped to say, "Wait a minute, Demi Moore had fuck all to do with the success of these films."

Ahh. Striptease. The hair. The rock-hard breasts. Those were the days. So MCB, why'd you say yes right away?

MCB: Because Matthew has a weird Svengali-like hold over me. He's a dynamic man with good ideas, and I'm the sort of fellow who's willing to throw his hat into the ring for an experience if it sounds interesting. Plus, he gives great

backrubs.

I don't want to know. So, is the downside of podcasting the same as the downside of blogging? Any idiot with a voice can do it?

MCB: It's certainly the same as the downside of blogging, but there's the same upside as well: generally, if your content is crappy, people will stop paying attention to it. There are a million bad blogs out there that nobody reads, and about as many bad podcasts that nobody listens to. Actually, I rarely hear podcasts that I like. I hear a lot of podcasts with nasally-voiced 20-something males broadcasting out of their parents' basements about the virtues of their comic book collections... not that I should necessarily throw stones in that regard. But at least I have a deep voice.

So what are you guys doing differently? What makes MAMO better than the big boys?

MP: I don't think we're better, but I do think that we're inherently more honest because we don't depend on access to the machine ... We're just giving our unvarnished opinions. Plus I think we manage to walk the fine line between total geekery and mainstream appreciation. Neither one of us would try to be "too cool" to actually enjoy something no matter how mainstream or how out there



the thing may be.

MCB: That's true, and it's something that we come up against a lot. We wear our hearts unabashedly on our sleeves. We both sobbed like little girls with skinned knees when King Kong fell off the Empire State Building. If something is good, we don't give a fuck if it's from Hollywood or Iran.

MP: I just want to add two things: One is that we seem to be one of the only podcasts recording in public space, which I think makes us much more creative and immediate than a "studio isolated" show. And the other is that I truly believe that we are exploring a topic no one else is addressing right now.

How popular is MAMO? And MCB, how popular is moviesTO?

MP: *MAMO* is enormously popular. We are literally mobbed everywhere we go by groupies who... Oh crap, dreaming again. In actual fact, we probably average about 200 downloads a week, and it seems to hold steady at that level.

MCB: *moviesTO* pulls down about 2000 listeners a week, or so my producer tells me.

Are you making any money at it?

MP: No, we're not making any money. But we're not against it as a concept.

Anything else you'd add about the phenomenon that is either funny and/or interesting?

MP: I'm not just gonna be funny and interesting for free. That's what the podcast is for.

Final question/comment. Be honest: This is all inspired by Christian Slater circa 1990, is it not?

MP: I prefer to feel inspired by Wallace Shawn and Andre Gregory, but whatever you have to tell yourself.

MCB: HA! Never made that connection myself. *Happy Harry Hard-On* is the godfather of the entire podcasting industry.

I'm lost... how embarrassing. Let's wrap it up. Do you think working together creates a better show than either of you could produce on your own?

MCB: Definitely. My solo podcast sucks by comparison.

MP: You should see my solo podcast. It's so bad, I'm not even doing it.

Matthew C. Brown is a filmmaker and film critic and serves as the technical director for Toronto's One Minute Film & Video Festival (www.minutefilmfest.com).

Matthew Price is an occasional film writer. In his normal life, he manages a Toronto video store and plans a film curriculum for his six year old son, Max.

The MAMOCast is available at <http://mamocast.blogspot.com>.

