

Interview with Kooky!

Contributed by Da Real Kooky

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I've recently interviewed the Kooky von Koopa voice actor, Michael Williams-Stark. The interview was handled via phone and was quite the rewarding experience for me. Granted, what you'll read here isn't everything we talked about, but it's what was for the interview.

Michael himself was born with a facial disfiguration which made growing up tough for him, but through his charity, Making Faces, he helps children born with the same differences overcome the troubles they face. Be sure to check out Michael's charity website, <http://www.makingfaces.ca>

Michael started out doing Improv and eventually got into voice acting, one of his major gigs being the Super Mario Bros. 3 cartoon. On with the interview!

Kooks: Let me just say it is a pleasure to be able to talk with you and do this interview. I deeply thank you for participating in this interview.

Michael: Thank you. It is a pleasure to be interviewed.

Kooks: I, being a long-time fan, consider this to be an amazing chance of a lifetime!

Michael:
Well, it's interesting you think that way. When you do cartoon voices, you go and do the voice and forget all about it. It really surprises me that they live on after that.

Kooks: So, tell me just a little summary of your early life, if you wish.

Michael:
As a baby, I was born with a cleft lip and palate, so I was facially disfigured and vocally distorted. These weren't conducive to me becoming an actor. I fell in love with comedy at an early age and I ended up pursuing my dreams. I was born in New Westminster, British Columbia, and, as some of you grew up with the Super Mario Brothers cartoons, I grew up with Popeye and Warner brothers.

Kooks: Alright. How did you first get in to Improv?

Michael:

I was always really interested in comedy. But, it started as a kid: pretending. When I was in grade 7 in 1968, I did some Improv sketches in school. I just naturally gravitated to it.

Kooks: What were some memorable gigs you had during your career?

Michael:

My most memorable gig was when I was in college: It was a program for graduating psychiatrists. We were asked to portray a mental illness. I choose sociopath. I researched their behaviors and on the day I had to perform, they had these graduating psychiatrists, with four or five people hoping to earn their degree… What they had to do was to diagnose whether or not we were acting or really had disabilities. They were very nervous, as they were being graded. At the end of my performance, 4 diagnosed me as a sociopath, one as a psychopath, and none as an actor.

Another important gig was actually the Super Mario Bros. 3 cartoon. To actually go out and audition out in Toronto with all the other voice actors... it was very memorable. I got my ACTRA (<http://www.actra.ca>) union card for going ‘You meddling Mario Brothers!’

Kooks: Do you still do Voice Acting work? If not, do you plan to?

Michael:

I DO on occasion. My agents bug me to go out and do work, but I'm really involved in Making Faces. The last real big gig I did was Noddy, I did six of the main characters. Other than that, I was a bad guy on Onimusha for Playstation 2.

Kooks: What was your biggest inspiration during your career?

Michael:

What did inspire me as a kid was the Beatles. That whole renaissance/British invasion influenced me. The 60s British pop influenced me. As far as comedy goes, the great comedians of the 60s really influenced me.

Kooks: Anything you've found rewarding about voice acting?

Michael: What I find rewarding is how my characters have a life beyond their TV shows.

Kooks: Tell us about 'Making Faces'.

Michael: You can visit us at <http://www.makingfaces.ca>
For the most part, I use improv comedy to build life skills and self esteem in children who are facially disfigured. So I guess I'd call it 'Drama Therapy'. What I realize, to do an Improv Sketch, you need to make eye-contact and use your voice. For those born with facial differences, their voices are distorted and it's hard to make eye contact. It's a difficult way to grow up. I decided, a fun way to work on these skills is Improv. So I started teaching classes and studied at sick children's hospitals in Toronto for a few years. They did really well, one got accepted into Theatre School. We were getting real results. I do my voice work, but charity is my main love.

Kooks: What's the most rewarding aspect of Making Faces?

Michael:
Just that, it not only heals me to a degree, but it's just so... I get to actually help change lives, help children feel good about who they are. As I said, one of my students was accepted into Theatre School, one did a Valedictorian Speech. Just little things are the biggest rewards. Giving kids the courage and self esteem to chase down their dreams.

Kooks: Has Making Faces had any strong attention from the media for its inspiring work?

Michael:
As a matter of fact, the CBC National is going to do a documentary on

it. We're having our First Benefit on Nov. 16, 2006. Every year, Making Faces will have a comedy concert (Air Farce, etc.). Sheila Rogers interviewed me on CBC Radio, and some stuff on the side. We always got to spread the word. We got to keep our names out there. It's a lot of work. I've even got contacted by the producers of Oprah.

Kooks: If I see you on Oprah, I'll spaz!

Michael: If I see myself on Oprah, I'll spaz.

Kooks:
How did any negative attention you received as a child due to your visual differences inspire any of the kids you work with that anything can be accomplished if they really try their fullest?

Michael:
It makes me 'legitimate' in their eyes. I can connect with them, and they connect with me. It inspires them to get on with their dreams like I have. I expect a lot out of them, they're a very creative little group.

Kooks: Have you had any regrets in anything you've done?

Michael:

No, of course not. I feel very lucky doing all I've gotten to do and what I have to do. My only regret is that we don't live longer. I'm lucky in a sense for how I was as a child: It inspired Making Faces. No regrets at all, I feel very lucky.

Kooks: So... What are you plans for the future?

Michael:

Making Faces is my plan for the future. Hopefully, the comedy event we started will become bigger and bigger. I hope to make Making Faces worldwide.

Kooks: Anything in closing you'd like to add?

Michael:

Just thanks to you and the Koopatorivm. It means a lot that people out there still get a kick out of Kooky. Just, thanks so much for enjoying what I've done, it was a lot of fun for me. Visit me at Makingfaces.ca any time you like!

Kooks: Again, thank you so much for taking

the time to talk with me and do this interview, Michael. You're a great inspiration to, not just Canadians, but people from all walks of life. I say this on behalf of the fan base, we wish you all the luck in the world with Making Faces and I hope that your success continues to grow.

-Little
snipit Michael added midway through that didn't tie in with the interview but he wanted me to mention.-

Michael:
For those interested in how voice work is done for cartoons… When I did my first episode (Super Mario Bros. 3), I was brought in with everyone. And we did the first episode together. It was really neat. Harvey Atkin, as King Koopa, was a long time Canadian actor, it was neat to meet these people. Every episode, I'd end by myself. It was always ME by myself at the end. I always envisioned people doing episodes with everyone. They do it in sequence. Every now and then, they'd have me and James Rankin (Cheatsy Koopa), since we were in many episodes together. But mainly, it was me myself.