

Life

Column Go Canadian with your next book **C3** | Heloise Wipe, rinse, save the planet? **C11**

Sugar Sammy speaks your language

KEN KELLEY
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Did you hear the joke about the multilingual Indian comic who had francophones in Quebec up in arms over English-only advertisements in their province?

Except it's no joke. It was a deliberate attempt to stir the linguistic debate by Quebec comedian Sugar Sammy.

Born Samir Khullar to parents who immigrated to Montreal from India, Khullar is fluent in English, French, Hindi and Punjabi. He says that early in his life he saw how being multilingual could give him an advantage for getting ahead as well as setting him apart from his peers.

"It is a natural part of my act to talk about these language tensions we see. I've seen how that tension can divide people, but rather than multilingualism being seen as a disadvantage among a small section of the population, I would rather talk about how it can be such a great advantage to have."

Khullar performs a French-language show at Moncton's Capitol Theatre on Tuesday night.

But late last year, to promote a series of shows that he was staging in his home province, the comedian took out a series of advertisements in subway stations throughout Montreal.

The ads featured a picture of the comedian alongside text that said, "For Christmas, I'd Like A Complaint From The Office De La Langue Francaise," referring to the Quebec government watchdog responsible for enforcing French as the official language in that province. That watchdog is also responsible for ensuring that any public-facing ads or signage, like those Khullar took out, prominently feature French over any other language.

Khullar knew the ads would draw complaints, and it took less than 48 hours before he had a directive to modify them.

He did. The former English section of the ads replaced with text that read, "Pour Noel, j'ai eu une plainte de l'Office De La Langue Francaise," which translates to "For Christmas, I received a



Comedian Sugar Sammy will perform in Moncton at the Capitol Theatre on Tuesday, Sept. 29. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Show facts

- WHAT: Sugar Sammy
- WHEN: Tuesday, Sept. 29, 7:30 p.m.
- WHERE: Capitol Theatre, 811 Main St., Moncton
- TICKETS: \$49 plus service charges. Advance tickets are available at the Capitol Theatre Box Office, by phone at 506-856-4379 and online at capitol.nb.ca.

complaint from the Office De La Langue Francaise."

Some would argue that Khullar's advertisements were a stroke of marketing

brilliance, but not everyone appreciated his humour. About two weeks later, prior to a performance in Sherbrooke, the comedian received a death threat that necessitated a police presence of a dozen officers before and during the show. Police escorted Khullar out of town at the end of the night.

"The ads wouldn't have worked had we not gotten a language complaint," Khullar tells *The Times & Transcript*. "That was definitely the angle behind the ads. We were more interested to see how long it would take for the system to work, which, to its credit, ended up working pretty quickly."

While he says the advertising

campaign served as an interesting sociological experiment, he also acknowledges that those who would raise a stink over the ads do not represent the majority of the Quebec population.

"I'm a firm believer that we should be promoting the use of multiple languages," Khullar says. "I would rather promote the French language in a way that is going to encourage people to want to learn it and spend the time speaking and writing it. If you try to get people on board with using a specific language under a cloud of tension or in a protectionist kind of way, it is going

PLEASE SEE → COMEDY, C2

SAY GOODBYE TO CSI



Tune in tonight Kevin McDonough

The new television season comes with a feeling both borrowed and blue. There are entirely too many movie franchises rebooted and TV series remade to feel entirely fresh. And the 2015-16 season will bring an end to two shows that have all but defined television in this young century.

American Idol will take its valdictory lap next spring. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (10 p.m., CBS) will wrap up Sunday with a two-hour episode.

Debuting in October 2000, *CSI* was a top-10 show in its very first season and remained one for the next 10 years, with seven of those spent in the top five. Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, *CSI* upped the level of production values for TV procedural dramas. Set in the neon pinball arcade of nighttime Las Vegas, its crime scenes were slicker, its laboratories beyond the budget of any law enforcement agency and its explosions louder. It also introduced a fascination for mortuary science, popular morbidity and gross-out realism that permeates popular culture to this day.

Like most good cop shows, its stars were not Hollywood-gorgeous. William Petersen's Gil Grissom had the looks and complications of a character actor. Marg Helgenberger's Catherine Willow had a good, long run on *CSI*

Quebec comedian Sugar Sammy speaks your language

COMEDY → C1

to ultimately turn people off. I'm a big believer in wanting to make sure the French language shines, but I also think it shouldn't necessarily be done at the expense of trying to make people forget other languages."

Khullar has sold more than 300,000 tickets to shows in Canada and India alone, and has performed in more than 30 countries around the world.

In May 2013, Sugar Sammy became the first English comedian to post wins at Quebec's prestigious Olivier comedy awards, winning top prizes for Comedian of the Year as well as for Best Show. He is the first artist chosen by Comedy Central India to tour their country, visiting Mumbai, Bangalore and Delhi in March 2013 with his English/Hindi/Punjabi comedy show.

Not bad for a guy who admits he had few ambitions when he was growing up.

"It was between being a hockey player and being a comedian. I began pursuing comedy and hosting talent shows as a CEGEP student. At university, I took classes to learn about the business and marketing and that side of things. I've been at comedy for 20 years now, and on a full-time basis since 2004. I feel quite fortunate," Khullar says.

Khullar says he takes immense joy and pride in performing for French audiences outside of Quebec and France.

"I love having the opportunity to perform in multiple languages, but it always feels good to reach out to French communities throughout Canada. I always feel a great sense of appreciation from the audience."

Ken Kelley
musicnerd.ca

A Moncton-based writer and music fanatic, Ken Kelley is also the author of entertainment blog musicnerd.ca.