



It's no laughing matter

Conan's online talk show is a serious departure from his late-night schtick

He is the son of a physician/professor and an attorney. He was the valedictorian of his high school class. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University with a degree in American history. What would you expect a man with these credentials would do for a living?

Would it be hosting a serious, no frills talk show featuring deep, uninterrupted conversations with Pulitzer Prize-winning authors? Or would it be hosting a goofy, comedic talk show where he dances like a puppet, flirts with starlets and argues with a Ted Turner impersonator who rides a stuffed buffalo?

For Conan O'Brien it's both. "**Serious Jibber-Jabber**" is a feature on Mr. O'Brien's website (teamcoco.com/serious) where he gets to use his noggin more than his funny bone.

In his late-night talk show, "Conan," he does an opening monologue and a few skits, then squeezes in mostly pop-culture guests for a few minutes of jokes and self-promotion between commercials. Mr. O'Brien is usually funnier and more entertaining than the numerous other talk show hosts who follow similar formulas.

In "Serious Jibber-Jabber," we see a side of him that is only occasionally glimpsed in his late-night show. Sitting at a table in a darkened studio, a la Charlie Rose, Mr. O'Brien engages in a lengthy, insightful discussion with an intelligent, interesting guest.

Off to a good start

In the pilot episode, which began airing last month, he interviews Edmund Morris, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author of biographies of American presidents. Mr. O'Brien still employs his Irish wit at times during the interview, but mostly he asks serious questions and makes intelligent observations.

The conversation goes on for more than 45 minutes, but it doesn't feel like a long time when you watch it. Both host and guest contribute to the discussion to create an entertaining and educational experience.

Mr. O'Brien reveals his knowledge of presidential history and his insight into our leaders' personalities. He even enlightens the author a few times, who is an expert on the subject.

While Mr. O'Brien is no stranger to interviewing people, this is a different format than he usually employs. He doesn't have Andy Richter, his late-night sidekick, to back him up. He also doesn't have a live audience to play to, or a band to interact with. It's just him and his guest, one on one across the table from each other.

He handles the format well, but he doesn't appear as comfortable as he does on his regular gig. Of course, he's only done one episode, so he'll no doubt settle in over time.

The premier of "Serious Jibber-Jabber" was well done and worth watching. It will be interesting to see how it evolves and who the guests will be.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.



KEVIN O'NEILL

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