

**A Conversation with Bruce Arntson of The Doyle & Debbie Show  
by Frank Goodman (Puremusic.com, 2/2008)**

Nashville has been incubating a 2-person musical comedy show called *The Doyle and Debbie Show* that's threatening to become something much bigger soon. It's the brainchild of Bruce Arntson, a great musician and songwriter, screenplay and TV writer, film scorer (along with his cohort Kirby Shelstad) of the Ernest movies and the Emmy Award winning TV show that also featured the late Jim Varney, *Hey Vern, It's Ernest*.

*The Doyle and Debbie Show* ran solid for over a year at The Bongo Theater Upstairs, a small black box theater above a popular coffee house. Now it's moved for the last few months to the legendary Station Inn, Nashville's classic Bluegrass room, where they will soon move from one to two nights a week. Hey, this just isn't that big a town, so this revue is really popular to still be packing them in, when it will be two years in June.

The show concerns a fading Country star, somewhere between a has been and a nearly was. He's trying to stage a comeback, and has found his latest and third Debbie at a VFW hall, singing her heart out. The songs are sheer comic genius, the acting spot on. They just tore it up on *Conan*, and are headed for HBO, with a little luck. The writer's strike is over, D&D are a new hot ticket, and they got a show to pitch to cable that goes beyond but includes the genius of this long running show in Nashville.

Arntson is a fascinating character who's done a long list of musical and film oriented works, and is headed for a long-deserved stardom. The way he plays Doyle Mayfield is insanely good. His partner Jenny Littleton has been a major player in the theater scene here and is a breakaway singer to boot, having grown up Country and steeped in all the female greats. Her deadpan delivery is side-splitting funny, and her body language has 'em hollering in the aisles. This is a hit that's just now beginning to spread, and one that will be around for years to come. You must buy the CD, there's not a bad song on it, and check out their website so you can catch up on videos (go to youtube, too) and the rest of the story. But now, here's a scintillating conversation with one of Nashville's hippest hottest properties of the moment, Bruce Arntson.

**Puremusic:** I just saw *The Doyle and Debbie Show* for the second time the other night, at The Station Inn. It's incredible. It was way better the second time. Not only were you guys further along on the show, but I think it just takes a couple of times for the genius of the songs to really sink in.

**Bruce Arntson:** [laughs] Well, I hope so. I mean, we do have a lot of repeat offenders, as we call them--

**PM:** [laughs]

**BA:** --and I think it is just that in spite of ourselves those silly characters have more depth than you think at first blush. And I think that's probably what keeps it interesting enough for people to come back multiple times.

**PM:** I think that that's very true, that the characters, comic though they be, have great depth, and in fact some of the things--some of the story lines in the songs and on stage seem to archetypal, sometimes Shakespearean. It's unbelievable.

**BA:** [laughs] Yeah, it is surprising to me, too, because obviously my main intent was to elicit laughs. So it's fun that people keep finding more things in it all the time.

**PM:** In fact, I talk to people, as you infer, all the time, who've seen it seven, eight times.

**BA:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** Is that common among the diehard fans?

**BA:** Yeah, it really is. There are a lot of fans that have seen it in double digits. It has sort of this *Rocky Horror* cultish aspect to it that I think a lot of people like to keep coming back with new friends. Then they end up watching their friends faces more than they do the show after they've been there a few times. It's like, "I can't believe this shit," that kind of thing.

**PM:** It's incredible. So when did the idea for the show first occur to you, and how long is this hit in the making?

**BA:** Well, I wrote it--it took me a year to write, and we will have been performing it two years this June.

**PM:** Wow.

**BA:** So that previous year, then, three years ago, I wrote the bulk of it. I had a handful of those faux silly country songs before I started that I'd had like 10, 15 years in some cases.

**PM:** Yeah, because when I just look at the guitar players on the record, Chris Luezing, Steve Gibson and Larry Chaney, that tells me that some of these tracks were cut some time ago. Is that not true?

**BA:** Exactly. Yeah.

**PM:** Because they were all in their Nashville heyday, pardon the expression, in the early '90s, or so it seemed to me.

**BA:** Uh-huh, yep, that's right. And all of those guys were buddies--Josh Leo as well is another one that has mainly just been producing for quite a while now. But yeah, they were all--I had a band in the '80s, an R & B band that also had a very comic theatrical bent, but it was more straight ahead R & B-ish.

**PM:** And what was that called?

**BA:** It was called Bruce Arntson and His New Shoes. And Josh Leo was my guitar player, Michael Rhodes was my bass player.

**PM:** Wow. He's a good friend of mine, yeah.

**BA:** Yeah. So I had a bunch of stellar players. So I had faux country duo in that mix, that we did two, three songs during the course of the night. And I would do a lot of songs through character point of view, to the point of wearing wigs and things. [laughs]

**PM:** Wow.

**BA:** And so those guys were my players. Back around that time, I was also writing screenplays and scoring films. And with a writing partner we'd developed a screenplay based on an old country duet, an old country duo called Bill and Co. And we actually had a development deal at Paramount Pictures for like three years before they finally wised up and kicked us outta there.

[laughter]

**BA:** So there was the seed of *Doyle & Debbie* way back then. But it was a really fully realized thing, and the characters were--I mean, I was younger then, and so it was just a different spin on it. Now I can play this over-the-hill guy with a little more believability.

[laughter]

**BA:** And my old partner, Jackie Welch, is black, and we did lots of comedic things over the years. We did improv and sketch comedy back before then, back in the early '80s.

**PM:** And what's become of Jackie Welch?

**BA:** I think she's working for like an internet firm--they develop training films and do some commercial work and industrial purposed stuff. And so she's just really a jack-of-all-trades, because she writes and directs and does voice-overs.

**PM:** Just a super talented person, yeah.

**BA:** Yeah, she really is. But a few years ago I thought I wanted to write a full-on piece based on our old characters. And so I worked on her for about two years, and she kept putting me off and putting me off, and finally says, "No, I really don't want to do that anymore."

**PM:** Yeah, "You do it."

**BA:** Yeah. So at that point I had already done--we had done, about 10 years ago, an independent low-budget film here called *Existo*, and--

**PM:** Oh, you were part of *Existo*.

**BA:** Yeah, I was *Existo*.

**PM:** You are *Existo*.

**BA:** Yeah.

**PM:** Oh, that's amazing. I've never seen that, though I'd heard lots about it. Now I've got to see that.

**BA:** [laughs] Well, during the course of that one and when we were casting it, my ex-wife, Denise Hicks, who is the artistic director of Nashville Shakespeare, I asked her, "Who do you see as a young comedic ingénue?" And she recommended that I audition Jenny Littleton. And that's how I met Jenny.

**PM:** She's unbelievable, holy jeez.

**BA:** She's amazing. And at that time, everything she did just made me die laughing because she did it with such sincerity, which is of course what makes comedy funny, when there's no winking involved, it's just dead serious. And so she had this way--she was like a young Madeline Kahn. And I thought someday I'm going to figure out a way to use that gal. So she was the only person I talked to about doing *Doyle & Debbie*.

**PM:** Now, was she a serious singer yet?

**BA:** No. I had no idea she could sing like that. That was pure fluke. All I knew is that she was a great comedic actor. And she did sing a song in *Existo*, but it was kind of a novelty.

**PM:** Oh, so she was in *Existo* as well.

**BA:** Yeah, exactly. That's how I met her, was when I cast her on the scene--I mean, I auditioned her. So she had a major role in *Existo*.

**PM:** Okay. We'll have a link to *Existo* in the interview, too, so we help create interest in that project again. [<http://www.existo.com>]

**BA:** Cool. I think there are probably--I mean, every now and then-- just like you, a lot of people make the connection way down the road, "Oh, you were that guy." So that is kind of fun. But Jenny, I just had her sing some of those old--like the handful of songs I had written for Jackie just to see if the keys would even work, let alone if she could pull them off. And it turned out that she had done *Always Patsy Cline*-- she had done two or three of those bio musicals that were at the Ryman and around where she played Tammy Wynette and different people. And she can just--I didn't know, but she could ace all of those styles, frighteningly accurately.

**PM:** And isn't she kind of country anyway?

**BA:** She is definitely. She grew up in Clarksville. She is a country girl, absolutely.

**PM:** Yeah, because my actor friend Jennifer Jewell says, "Oh, she's country, born and bred."

**BA:** [laughs] Yeah, she is. And she's married to a bass player who plays with major country acts, and he was with Joe Nichols for a long time. And so she genuinely listens to that stuff that we're doing. She knew all of these old country duets. She knew more about most of those old singers than I did. And a few years back I had been writer/producer on a handful of country biographies for a show on CMT.

**PM:** What was the show called?

**BA:** It was called *Inside Fame*. It was basically *Behind the Music* for country.

**PM:** "Behind the country music," right.

**BA:** Yeah, exactly. I mean, they just ripped the template off from *Behind the Music*. And so of course in a low-budget affair like that, you do all of your own research, and so I was pouring over all of this old Opry and *Pop Goes the Country*, and the *Porter Wagoner Show* and the *Wilburn Brothers Show*, all of this old footage. And that was kind of the genesis of *Doyle & Debbie*. And I started going to the Country Music Hall of Fame archives and listening to some of those old Opry shows, and just getting that language in my head that they use that kind of stilted country showbiz thing that is unique to itself. There is nothing--because ordinarily Vaudeville and all those old showbiz traditions had a real slick professionalism to them. And the Opry never had that. [laughs]

**PM:** It was all down home in comparison.

**BA:** It always had this odd amateurishness to it, which was very endearing, I mean, very appealing. And so, between the luck of having Jenny and then the luck of finding myself in the midst of all those archives, that kind of kicked it off for me.

**PM:** And I see that the record was recorded and co-produced by your drummer and longtime cohort, one of the really unique Nashville cats, Kirby Shelstad.

**BA:** Yeah, he's my best friend.

**PM:** Really?

**BA:** Yeah, we grew up in Minnesota together before we came here.

**PM:** Amazing!

**BA:** Yeah.

**PM:** Minnesota.

**BA:** Yeah.

**PM:** He's a very multifaceted person and musician.

**BA:** Oh, he's incredible, absolutely. Everything I've ever done has been either with or filtered through Kirby musically, absolutely. He's been there from the start.

**PM:** His girlfriend Sandy is an old friend of mine, as well.

**BA:** Oh, okay.

**PM:** And they're just really amazing people. And I've seen him play with the group Otto as well. And wow, that's an amazing group. Have you seen that?

**BA:** I have. It's great. Anything Jim Hoke does is amazing.

**PM:** Right, exactly.

**BA:** Yeah. But Kirby fits into all genres. He loves all genres, as do I, and that's another reason why we get along so well is because we just don't discriminate from one thing to the next.

**PM:** And people who aren't from there don't understand the way Minnesotans are tied.

**BA:** Yes.

**PM:** There's a real bond there.

**BA:** That's probably true, yeah.

**PM:** I know my singer songwriter friends Sally Barris and Kami Lyle used to talk about that, too, and they would get together and talk like the people in *Fargo* do. [laughter]

**BA:** There's a Minnesota Mafia here, that's what we call them, that even though we don't necessarily hang together or have a breakfast club, we have a secret handshake.

**PM:** [laughs] Are there any other members I might not be aware of that come to mind?

**BA:** Well, yeah, Michael Johnson, "Bluer Than Blue," yeah.

**PM:** Yeah, wow. [One of the greats, simply.]

**BA:** He's a classic Minnesotan, he's just a sweetheart of a guy.

**PM:** He's a great cat.

**BA:** And John Vezner. [Another great songwriter, and the husband of Kathy Mattea.]

**PM:** Really? Vezner, too, wow.

**BA:** Mike Klute. [Among other successes, the producer of Diamond Rio.]

**PM:** I know him, yeah, sure.

**BA:** He's actually a Fargo, North Dakota boy, but it's all the same, basically.

**PM:** Right. Holy jeez, that's interesting stuff. I love all the pockets of Nashville, the regional pockets, like the North Carolina people and as you say, the Minnesotans. It's really amazing, you can know this town by those pockets from whence people came.

**BA:** Yes, there's a Texas contingency, they all know each other and hang together: Gary Nicholson, Delbert McClinton and Rodney Crowell, and that whole gang. [And many more, in this town.]

**PM:** I hear that you and Kirby used to do some soundtrack stuff together. Since I'm scoring this cartoon with our mutual friend Dan Spomer at the moment [my engineer, Bruce's live sound person] I'd be interested in hearing about any of that. What are your soundtrack days about?

**BA:** Well, it started with the Ernest franchise.

**PM:** Wow.

**BA:** And they got a CBS Saturday morning show back during the time of *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*. And so I was brought on as a writer.

**PM:** A comedy writer.

**BA:** Yeah. And then they asked me--one of the directors was my other really close friend, Coke Sams. He's got a film and video company that's been around a long time called Ruckus Films. Each show had a theme, and he asked if I would write a little song for it. And I was also in the ensemble cast, which did multiple characters, recurring characters. And he asked if I would write a little song for each segment that was appropriate for the theme. The show was called *Hey, Vern, it's Ernest*. It was on CBS.

Actually, I'm pretty proud of that show. It was an Emmy Award winning show, even though we only got to do one season. It was really good--which I can't say about much of the Ernest stuff that I worked on. But that actually turned out really well. By virtue of having done the songs, then they asked if I would score it. I knew there wasn't a hell of a lot involved with that. It's kind of like scoring little cartoons--I mean single instruments, like a marimba or something at a time. It wasn't anything elaborate or orchestrated.

So I said, "Sure." And so Kirby and I, that was our first experience with video sync. And then by that time Disney was franchising their movies, and so now their budgets were big, and they asked if I could score a feature film, and I lied and said, "Yes." And then Kirby and I just dove in to learn this. We bought a bunch of equipment and worked with an engineer, Rick Shurmer, who was our sync master. Because in those days it was a very persnickety thing. It's gotten way easier now.

**PM:** Right. I can't imagine how they were syncing to video in those days on kind of the smaller level.

**BA:** It was a nightmare, and it was a constant hassle. But nonetheless we started scoring. And then these were for like 60-piece orchestral scores.

**PM:** Holy shit!

**BA:** 45 minutes of orchestral music. [laughs]

**PM:** Had you ever done anything resembling that?

**BA:** It was a really quick and fun learning experience. I mean, we had lots of pressure, there were time constraints because in post production they have the sound stage scheduled out in Berkeley or L.A., wherever, it has to be there on this date, and the edit keeps moving closer and closer towards you, but the date for the sound stage doesn't move away from you. So you get crunched in there probably more than anybody. And this is a common complaint of film composers, but that's why they pay them so much money, too, if you can compose really quickly. So we did a handful of those orchestral

scores and got a little better at it each time. And in the meantime, Kirby started scoring documentaries and things. And then I quit pursuing it. I pursued it for a while after the Ernest franchise died. But really what I found out was that I'd have to basically move out to L.A. if I really wanted to keep doing big scores, because every time I would try to get an agent, that's what they would say, "Well, get out here."

**PM:** "You got to be here," right. Just like Nashville. You got to be here.

**BA:** Yeah, exactly. You don't pitch country songs from anywhere else. And I had a son here, and blah, blah, blah, all kinds of attachments and friends, and I just didn't want to do that. So I sort of switched gears and started writing scripts and screenplays. But yeah, Kirby and I had a ball and made a ton of money. And we still get foreign residuals off of Ernest every year.

**PM:** Unbelievable.

**BA:** Yeah, it was really fun.

**PM:** So yeah, some other time I'd love to hear more about your screen writing adventures and all that. I mean, there are so many things you've done, I mean, who knew?

I know that Doyle & Debbie were on Conan recently. I was watching, but fell asleep, damn it, and woke up when you were waving goodnight from the couch.

[laughter]

**PM:** How did the show go?

**BA:** It went great. I'll send you a link of our portion.

**PM:** Oh, fantastic.

**BA:** There are several places on the internet that show Conan episodes, but I found one that will just have our little segment. But yeah, it went great. I tried to come up with a representative pastiche of *Doyle & Debbie*, rather than just sing a song or two. And so there's a little bit of shtick, and you kind of get the sense of the characters as much as you can in five, six minutes. But it was great. They treated us wonderfully.

**PM:** Wow. So what's it like when you do that show, when you do Conan? In your case, for instance, did you talk with him before or after at all? Is it like that?

**BA:** No, we didn't. I didn't meet him until he came over and shook our hands during the show. But beforehand they did have a rehearsal. And it's primarily for the cameras to find out what we're doing so they know what they're going to do. And so we got to run it a couple of times, which got a lot of the butterflies out. And they treat you really--I mean, they're all very aware of the pressure that particularly people who haven't been on the

show before must be feeling, and so they're very sensitive. And the place itself, it's the old NBC Studios. It's been there for--30 Rockefeller Plaza, it's been there forever. And so it has this well-worn, as welcoming of a vibe as you can get from an institution like that. It's not pristine glass and steel and intimidating. So that part is good. And then just everybody is just geared up to help you and make you feel comfortable. So yeah. We were scared shitless, nonetheless, but it still was as much fun as they could make it. And now it seems like they will be asking us back in a while, so now next time we'll hopefully be able to go tit-for-tat with him a little bit and sit on the couch a little longer.

**PM:** Wow. And during that same weekend didn't you also do some kind of a big gig at BB Kings in the city for booking agents and industry types and such?

**BA:** Yep, we did. And that's just now starting to bear some fruit.

**PM:** Wow.

**BA:** Because we've not made very many trips-- we've only been out of Nashville twice.

**PM:** It's amazing.

**BA:** The New York thing was one of them. So it's still going to be a trick for our agency to--we work with Bobby Cudd at Paradigm.

**PM:** One of my favorite Nashville people. He's a great dude.

**BA:** Yeah, he absolutely is.

**PM:** He's always handling whoever is really cool and cutting edge, right at that moment, Bobby Cudd has always got them.

**BA:** Yep, I know it. Lyle Lovett, and--

**PM:** Yeah. Robinella, whoever it is at the moment, he's on the case.

**BA:** Yeah, he is. And he's just a sweetheart of a guy, and just so disarmingly honest for anybody, let alone an agent, that it's really hard to believe. [laughs]

**PM:** So are industry types across the board flipping out about the show? Is everybody who sees it going, "Well, that's a hit"?

**BA:** Well, not quite that way. Would that it were that way... They all seem to really like it as their own personal little show. If you want insider stuff, it's there for you. I feel like you don't have to know anything about country to find it funny, but nonetheless there are a lot of insider musical jokes and things that songwriters and record producers find fun and personally titillating for themselves. But--

**PM:** Do some people think it's too inside?

**BA:** No. Well, actually, when we first put it up it was more inside. And a couple of people whose opinions I trusted gave me some really good advice about where it got to be too inside. And so I reeled it in considerably since then. No, people don't--I think Music Row and the entertainment biz here has really whole heartedly embraced it, and that's been really fun. And they are as much of repeaters as anybody. And a lot of artists--Rodney Crowell and Delbert McClinton and Gary Nicholson--a lot of folks, they come back and back and back with their buddies. And Brenda Lee was there last Tuesday night.

**PM:** Oh, yeah, that's right, the night I was there Brenda Lee was there. I heard that later.

**BA:** Yeah, Bobby Cudd brought her. [laughs]

**PM:** Now, has Jim Lauderdale or Marty Stuart seen this show yet?

**BA:** No. Actually Jenny Littleton has done shows with Jim Lauderdale, and they're still good friends. He just has not had a Tuesday night open one week.

**PM:** Because he's going to freak out.

**BA:** [laughs] I can't wait for him to see it--and actually Marty Stuart, too, who I don't know at all, but I can imagine--

**PM:** He's a real prince. He'd love it, too.

**BA:** Yeah, that's the way it seems. Yeah, I'd love to meet him under those circumstances.

**PM:** Wow. So after being a working musician all your life and doing all the things it takes to stay afloat, it must be amazing to, at this point, have what looks like a hit on your hands, right?

**BA:** Yeah, it is. It's really fun. Years ago I would have done something like this and I would have done it for a while and said, "Well, I've done that," and moved on. And now being older and wiser, I really do have an appreciation of what a gift this whole situation is. And honestly, it sounds silly, but it's the most fun I've ever had on stage. And Jenny is just a dream partner. And so just performing in general you appreciate when you have a situation like this how much fun--you need to really enjoy this while you can.

**PM:** Right.

**BA:** And so that's the main thing. We both really feel like we've got something that we can ride for a long way and it could take us to a lot of new places. But by the same token we both feel like it's going to be a really fun ride no matter where it goes.

**PM:** Right. Jenny seems like a really solid person, a really solid partner.

**BA:** It's unreal. She really doesn't have a diva bone in her body.

**PM:** That's amazing. It's so rare.

**BA:** Yeah, yeah. It is. She's just a gem. And her comic instincts--well, actor, too. Go see her in any--she's going to do John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt* at Tennessee Rep in March. And jeez, I mean, she's just incredible. And she doesn't have to be country. She can be British, she can be 80 years old. She's an amazing actor.

**PM:** Oh, I got to get up with that, and I got to see that play, too.

**BA:** Yeah.

**PM:** And her body language is hilarious. I'm glad I was sitting back by the elevated sound booth, because I just had to keep standing up to make sure I could see every part of her that I could. And I might have stood up if I was in the middle of the room, I think, because it's like, no, no, no. I got to see how her knees are knocking right now, or I got to see if her feet are moving.

**BA:** Oh, I know. She's so thorough, so in the moment. She is just hilarious to me.

**PM:** Although it's very hard to pick favorites among the many great songs, the outrageous nature of "I Ain't No Homo," really kills me.

[laughter]

**PM:** I keep singing that one today. How did that song come about. Do you recall?

**BA:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**BA:** I don't know how interesting it is. But I do know that--I've got an old roommate who actually lived with us when I was still married to Denise, and we had my son, who is now 17 years old. And he lived in the upstairs apartment of our house on Cedar Lane. And I mean, we'd been friends forever. So he was a longtime good friend, and now he was helping raise our son. And in fact, our son used to think that every kid had a mom, a dad, and a Ned in the house.

[laughter]

**BA:** And so he and I were driving along before they had the roundabout at the end of Music Row.

**PM:** Before the naked people, yep. [At the roundabout on Demonbreun Ave. in Nashville, there stands a very controversial classical type sculpture that includes semi-clad figures.]

**BA:** Yeah, exactly. We were driving by--do you remember when the Hank Williams house--

**PM:** Sure.

**BA:** That nothing little ranch house was relocated there?

**PM:** Absolutely. Gherm Row.

**BA:** Okay. So somebody was cooking barbecue out on what would have been the driveway.

[laughter]

**BA:** And there were a bunch of, you know, good ol' boys, fairly redneck looking good ol' boys, but very friendly, out doing barbecue and drinking beer. And there was obviously going to be some music happening there. And of course there was a stoplight right there. So I was stopped in my van, and my gay friend Ned was sitting in the passenger side. And this was a beautiful summer afternoon. And one of the guys yelled, "Hey, y'all want to come here and hear some music and eat some barbecue?" And Ned says, "No, thanks. He's a vegetarian and I'm a homosexual."

[laughter]

**BA:** But anyway, it just got to be an inside joke for Ned and me whenever we would see a handsome man he'd say something about how good looking he was. And I'd say, "Well, I ain't no homo, but I'll tell you what..."

[laughter]

**BA:** And so that got to be a little catch phrase along with, "He's a vegetarian and I'm a homosexual." And so that's where it came from, basically, was through those little incidents. And then I've got a lot of gay friends who I knew--who I needed to write a song just for them. And for a lot of gay men, it seems to be a cliché that they figure that the vast majority of men are actually gay and in denial.

**PM:** Yeah, right. Everybody is bisexual according to any bisexual.

**BA:** Exactly. And so it's sort of in that spirit, too. And I don't know, and then beyond that it's just a fun little jumping off point for some silliness.

**PM:** It's just really, really funny. So what are the 2008 plans for *The Doyle & Debbie Show*? Have I heard rumblings, for instance, about a possible HBO interest?

**BA:** Last fall we shot a little 12-minute trailer to indicate what a pilot might be like in the world of Doyle & Debbie. And so in essence I was looking at it very much like *The Larry Sanders Show*, where a little--

**PM:** Oh, a show inside a show.

**BA:** Exactly. So we had a little show called *Nashville After Hours*, which was based on the *Ralph Emery Show* on TNN, where Debbie and I were the hosts. And then all of that backstage kind of hand-held verite--

**PM:** Right, hillbilly verite.

**BA:** Yeah. Of all of the goings-on back there, and all the soap opera southern Gothic intrigue that unfolds in their lives. So we shot this little thing to indicate that and put a little pitch package together. I've got management in New York and then Paradigm, Bobby Cudd's company is very present in New York and Los Angeles. They were going to help us with the pitch. Then right about the time we were ready the Writers Guild went on strike. So that's the long answer to, basically, yes, we've got a TV show we're dying to pitch, and our dream place would be HBO, but there's a lot of places it would work. But we're stuck until the strike is over. [Which has since occurred.]

**PM:** And once the strike ends, I mean, isn't there going to be a big glut of stuff to like happen before anybody can get their project on the table, too. Isn't there a whole rubber band effect to a strike like that ending?

**BA:** Yeah. It's hard to say what's going to happen. There are a lot of things shifting in TV that have nothing to do with the strike, and that are exacerbated by the strike.

**PM:** Right.

**BA:** One thing is that pilots are so expensive to shoot, like three to 10 million dollars for your average pilot.

**PM:** Holy jeez.

**BA:** And the networks generally produce like a dozen or more pilots a year, and then out of those maybe three or four actually become shows. And that's just a huge investment for them. And so they're starting to order up shows instead, where they like order six, eight shows instead of a pilot and just hope for the best, because it's too damn expensive.

**PM:** Right. That makes a lot more sense, especially if you farm out a reasonable budget these days with indie production and so forth the way it is, you might get six or eight shows for what you used to get a pilot for.

**BA:** Well, absolutely, because you can amortize your set and everything else. It's that first time in just is what kills you. So yeah, that's absolutely right. So there are lots of different things that could work for us and could work against us. And still, it's such a crap shoot. But one thing is in our favor is we've got these characters that we've now tested and proven for a couple of years, and that goes a long way. In the same way that you would take a standup artist who's got a really great shtick that would translate to a half-hour television show, and they've been out on the road honing it, so you know that they can come with the goods when the cameras are on.

**PM:** Exactly. Come on, it's a no-brainer, this guy is kicking ass on the road all year long, right.

**BA:** Yeah. So hopefully some of those things will work in our favor, and we'll get to do something with Doyle & Debbie on TV.

**PM:** Well, what about the other side of the coin? Are there plans for touring in the works as well?

**BA:** We are trying to do that right now. I mean, even when you do the showcase in New York, and you get some folks representing performing arts centers out in the hinterlands who love you, but then it's just a matter of how adventurous are they? How good a salesman are they to sell this to their subscriber base or whatever?

**PM:** Yeah, their constituency, right.

**BA:** Because nobody is going to know who we are, obviously. You can tell them that we were on Conan, then, whoop-ti-doo. But still, until--it's really like going out with an indie band on the road. If I were 25 it would be a no-brainer, we'd all hop in the van and go. But now everybody has got house notes and kids and stuff. So it's a little harder to make inroads into other markets. But that's Bobby Cudd's job, and he's working hard at it. So we'll figure that out.

**PM:** Right. And so I guess it's TV that fuels the PR, that fills the venues on the roads, and so you just got to get those two things working together, and it sounds easy, and it's not at all.

**BA:** Yeah. But obviously a TV show would change everything, and everybody, all of a sudden; they know who you are, and you're legitimized. You must be good because you're on TV, kind of thing.

[laughter]

**PM:** Yeah. Well, I certainly have become one of the great believers in the show. And I think that the legs that this show and that this act has are the best of legs, and that it's just really begun to be the hit that it's going to become.

**BA:** Oh, thanks, Frank.

**PM:** I think it's going to become literally an institution in the next five, ten years. And it couldn't happen to what seems to be a nicer guy.

**BA:** [laughs] Well, I appreciate it.

**PM:** So thank you so much for spending some time today, Bruce. And I look forward to sitting down sometime over a cup of coffee and hearing about the screenplay side of things, and a little more of your film scoring.

**BA:** I'd love it.