

DerRic Starlight

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“Shooting for the stars”

Children’s entertainer encourages kids to follow their dreams



Comedic puppeteer DerRic Starlight performs his routine at Sexsmith Secondary school on Tuesday. He will be in Grande Prairie this week. Photo: and Story Crystal Rhyno

Herald-Tribune staff

Listen closely if you want to hear the voice of DerRic Starlight. It just might surprise you.

For a performer who can mimic more than 300 voices while making a living as a comedic puppeteer, he is unexpectedly shy and poised. But a slight twinkle in his eye suggests otherwise.

“I love making people laugh,” said Starlight, who is performing his puppet routine for elementary and secondary schools in the Peace Country this week.

“When I go to the schools I try to attack bullying. Everybody has been bullied in their lives, especially kids. It gets so bad there are suicide attempts. With my program using puppets, I try to motivate the kids.”

Starlight said he battled his own abuse and bullying on a school bus nearly every day from kindergarten to Grade 5.

On Tuesday, he told Sexsmith Secondary school students, as part of his DerRic Starlight Tour, to stick to their dreams and never to give into bullies.

“I developed the mentality, ‘I will show you what I can do when I get older,’ ” said the Edmonton-based father of two.

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Those kids who picked on him on the bus? Starlight has got the last laugh. He often entertains at their kids’ birthday parties.

Starlight, 29, is from the Tsuu T’ina Nation, west of Calgary. Making people laugh and performing always came natural to him. He received a Kermit the Frog toy for Christmas one year, and the present sparked his love of puppeteering. His family encouraged him to act for them during holidays and gatherings.

When Jim Henson, the creator of The Muppets, died in 1990, Starlight began learning to mimic the voices of The Muppets and the Sesame Street characters. This stemmed from a fear no one would continue to do the voices of the beloved characters. He quickly learned the voices, and began to think of a future in the arts.

Since then Starlight has appeared on various programs on several TV networks, including doing voice-overs in the 2005 Muppets’ Wizard of Oz movie.

Just this year Starlight received Canada’s highest honour for an entertainer. Along with the cast of Wapos Bay, Starlight received the Gemini for the Best Individual or Ensemble Performance in an Animated Program or Series.

“I played five characters on there,” said Starlight. “I came home (and) there was a letter in the mail that I got a nomination for a Gemini Award. I have never won anything in my life.”

Winning the award was an emotional moment.

“I never thought I would ever get it,” said Starlight. “I did know I would have my show one day and doing performances, but not the Gemini.”

For his kids’ shows, Starlight performs crowd favourites such as Elmo and Cookie Monster, but he has also developed more than 20 of his own original characters including Granny, inspired by his grandmother, Chief the Warrior and Band Councillor Willy.

And yes, Starlight said, it is hard work being funny.

Wrestling, his other love, is just another form of entertainment.

“I am a wrestler myself and I promote professional wrestling,” said Starlight, noting his first book, *Wrestle with Puppets*, is due out next year.

“Wrestlers are like puppets – you tell them what to do. They are characters.”

Starlight ends each show with words of wisdom from his oldest and dearest puppet.

“Granny, at the end of every show says, if you have a dream follow it and one day it will come true.”

