

Michael & Me...

MARK ACHBAR ON MICHAEL MOORE

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Michael Moore is a busy man. He was on his book tour for "Stupid White Men " and was coming to Vancouver, home of The Corporation's production team. To our amazement and delight, he agreed to an interview in the early afternoon before his evening performance at the 2500 seat Vogue Theatre downtown.

We set up the elaborate [Achbar-o-tron](#) and waited for Michael to arrive. There was much anticipation amongst the people who worked at our local filmmakers co-op, Cineworks, whose studio we'd rented for the day, and many requests to lurk in the shadows during the interview came in.

The appointed time came and went. No word from Michael or his minions. We had faith he'd arrive any minute. We snacked. We tweaked. Hours later, We began to wonder what had happened. Finally, my cell phone rang. Michael was running late (surprise!). Could we do the interview after his talk, he asked?

"Sure, No problem," I replied. What else could I say? We dismantled the camera set-up, and moved to the Vogue to tape his talk. We waited outside for his arrival alongside hundreds of people who couldn't get in to the sold-out show, while 2,500 people waited comfortably inside. Late again. Busy man. He saw me when his minivan pulled up, a good forty five minutes late, recognized me and winked. Everything would be okay.

True to form, Michael made time for everyone. First he did an impromptu speech on the sidewalk, making a cranky crowd laugh. He then did a solid 2 1/2 hours of the best political stand-up I'd ever seen. He showed the crowd a sneak-preview clip from "Bowling For Columbine", answered every audience question. Finally, he wrapped it up, signed every book, and talked to every person who waited in line after the show, until there was no one left but his wife and me. No wonder he was always late. It was now midnight, 13 hours after our scheduled interview. After a long day of travel and talk, it was not the time for a 90 minute interview.

He took a moment to confer with his wife, who looked at me suspiciously. A look that said: here's yet another person who wants something from my overworked husband. Thankfully, Michael said "The Corporation" was an important film, and that he would make time for it.

"Tomorrow at 10?"

"Perfect."

Luckily, the studio was available and we were set up and ready to go again when 10AM rolled around. Bagels ready. Water? Check. Happy Planet Juice? Present.

In preparation, I had re-viewed Michael's entire oeuvre. Well, everything but "Canadian Bacon". Once was enough. But I reveled in "Roger and Me", every episode of "TV Nation" and "The Awful Truth". The Big One. By the end of it, I decided he was deserving of some kind of lifetime achievement award. With the usual input from Jennifer and Joel I had prepared 40 questions.

We were ready. 10:15... 10:45... 11:00 rolled by. No sign of Michael. 11:30. We were starting to get worried. Finally, at noon, there was a knock on the studio door. But he wasn't alone. He had a guy in tow, dressed in plaid with a matching idiotic plaid hat on, and a video crew. It was none other than MuchMusic's Nardwar The Human Serviette. As Michael walked into the studio, so did Nardwar, with his camera rolling, haranguing him with an outstretched Microphone.

Michael quickly informed us that he had a plane to catch. He'd have to leave at 12:15 to make it. That would give us exactly 15 minutes for our 90 minute interview. "Maybe we should reschedule," he suggested. He had taken a seat, right there in front of my camera. "Not a chance," I thought. "Let's do what we can," I said.

Then our plaid-clad, uninvited studio guest, who by now was in the middle of our set, piped up, "can we just go in front of the blue screen for just, like, two seconds just to finish?" I calculated that this question, and the time it would take to answer it would reduce our time with Michael by fifteen seconds. This did not make me happy.

"Is it better to be rich or poor, Michael Moore? Is it better to be rich or poor?" was the plaintive Nardwar cry.

"Is it better to be alive or dead" was my deadpan retort.

With impressive force, Daniel Conrad, my cameraman that day, who looks more like a Rabbi than a bouncer, took it upon himself to single-handedly herd Mr. Serviette and his crew out of the studio, and slammed the door behind them. Michael, it seemed, felt that was too abrupt an end to his Much Music promo, got up out of the interview chair, left the studio, and went outside to have a tete-a-tete with the Nardwar. We rolled our eyes in the studio as the clock ticked. On Nardwar's camera in the alleyway, Michael Expressed mock dismay at our treatment of Nardwar. (Nardwar aired the whole incident nationally on MuchMusic; see below for complete transcript.)

Michael finally came back and sat himself down to resume our little chat. 12 minutes left. His driver, bless him, said he would just head out for a minute to pick something up, and when he returned, the interview would be over. I performed a [very] hasty triage on my 26 questions, thinking I had only 10, maybe 15 minutes max to get something useful on tape. But the light

wasn't right. There was some weird reflection in Michael's glasses. Daniel futzed. The clock ticked. I remained calm. On the outside, at least. We went with the set up, to my dismay, leaving Michael looking a little like he had one glass eye. We finally got rolling, and Michael was brilliant. His answers were to the point, thoughtful, and funny~of course. More than that, he had important insights into the nature of the modern business corporation, not to mention capitalism itself, succinctly and wittily put. He seemed almost telepathic in bringing together themes we wanted to address before the questions were even asked.

In the end, his driver, bless him again, was late by almost half an hour, giving us 38 minutes of tape with Michael Moore. No less than 36 of those minutes were pure gold, with several points, where we couldn't have said it better ourselves. So we didn't, and let him. Even gave Michael the last word in the film. Beneath that "regular guy" baseball cap exterior, Mr. Moore is a very smart man, and very funny. And media savvy. Which is why he'll probably win another Oscar this year. And partly why, with any luck, Bush won't win the election.

Nardwar's perspective:

Courtesy of: http://nardwuar.com/vs/michael_moore/

And where are we heading, Michael Moore? Well, I think I'm going to do an interview in front of a blue screen.

And what is this for? It's for a blue screen shot, I guess.

Go ahead and knock 'em dead, Michael Moore. All right. Thank you very much.

They enter the studio:

Oh, can we stick around, just get a few, couple of words after. I only have a few minutes right now. I've got to do this.

Okay, can we just go in front of the blue screen for just, like, two seconds just to finish?
Television Interview Crew Guy: No. You'll have to leave now.

Michael Moore, I wanted to show you. Look, I just brought this to show to your family.

[Nardwuar's getting both pushed and led out of the studio.]

Your family survival guide to terrorism. Television Interview Crew Guy: We're rolling. We're live. Okay. I guess I'm doing this show now.

Is it better to be rich or poor? Thanks a lot, guys.

Can we stick around, Michael? Or does this mean it's over? Nardwuar, this isn't my studio. I can't tell you.

Okay, can we at least go doot doola doot doo... Thanks so much, Michael Moore, and doot doola doot doo... Television Interview Crew Guy: You've got to go. C'mon.

Do doo la doot dooooooh.

Almost. Doot doola doot doo! Doot doot.

Thank you.

[Nardwuar gets manhandled. He's screaming as he's being led out of the building]

Is it better to be rich or poor, Michael Moore? [laughs in the background]

It is better to be rich or poor? Television Interview Crew Guy: Is it better to be alive or dead?

[still yelling as he gets pushed out of the building] Michael Moore, are you happy that Sammy Hagar is back together with David Lee Roth. [doors shut] Thanks Mike. Appreciate it. [to camera] There we have it. An encounter with Michael Moore in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

[A few minutes later Moore leaves his television interview for a second to specifically address Nardwuar in the parking lot outside]

Well, I was pushed out. But those were your people.

Wait a second. Let's just get a clarification here, Michael Moore. What happened here? You were just pushed out by Canadians, not me. I love you, man. Those were your people who pushed you out, violently. Did you see that?

Yes, I did. Your own Canadians did that. I'm appalled.

Thank you. Can I have a hug? Yeah.

[They hug.]

I'm so sorry. These were Canadian producers, Canadian TV people who did this to this man. I'm outraged by it and next time, stand up to 'em, man. You play hockey.

Didn't I stand up? No, no. You lost. They pushed you right out, man. You're the media. You're the truth.

Hey, remember I talked to you once before and you said that I was on crack? No, no, you are!

Nardwuar the Human Serviette. You are a national treasure, man.

Thank you. You remember the last time I talked to you, you said that I was on crack? Yes, I do remember you. Yes.

One last thing. I was really disappointed that you weren't there last night 'cause no trip to Vancouver is complete without talking to you, so I really appreciate you being here.

Well, thank you, Mr. Moore. We really appreciate that, too. Now I've got Canadians mad at me because I came out to hug you. [laughs]