

# The First *Saturday Night Live* Movie: Robert Delford Brown is “Jo Jo, The Human Hot Plate” in Michael O’Donahue’s *Mr. Mike’s Mondo Video*

In the 1979 feature film, *Mr. Mike’s Mondo Video*, a cult classic directed by Michael O’Donoghue, Robert Delford Brown was cast in a vignette performance as “Jo Jo, The Human Hot Plate.”

Correctly billed at the time as “the TV show that can’t be shown on TV”, the largely unknown *Mr. Mike’s Mondo Video* was the very first (and without a doubt the most original) film to ever come out of the *Saturday Night Live* franchise. Brown’s hilarious performance for his late friend Michael O’Donoghue as the spaghetti-clutching “Jo Jo” was a brief, bizarre interlude within the brief, bizarre and legendary landscape of *Mondo Video*. A young Lorne Michaels was executive producer while the brilliant “Mr. Mike” O’Donoghue produced and directed this project that only he could have envisioned. After all, it was O’Donahue who created the first skit to ever appear on SNL, one that has lived in infamy: “I would like to feed your fingertips to the wolverines,” was the signature line he invented to launch the 30-plus year run of the series in a bit for him and John Belushi, on October 11th, 1975.

It was kindred spirit O’Donoghue that personally asked Brown to appear when it was time



*Michael O’Donahue (1940-1994) was one of the most important writing and creative forces behind the original Saturday Night Live. He was also a friend of Robert Delford Brown and a saint in his First National Church of the Exquisite Panic, Inc.*



to make the first-ever film spin off of the program that has now spawned dozens, each one more inane than the next. But *Mondo Video* was different—real art made on a network TV budget. It was a spoof of the controversial 1962 documentary *Mondo Cane*, a cult film by Gualtiero Jacopetti which showed people doing odd stunts from around the world (including Nouveau Realiste Yves Klein painting in blue with nude women as “brushes” on a giant canvas in one of his “Anthropometries” works.)

But Robert Delford Brown’s performance as “Jojo” in the *Mondo Cane* send-up was twice as arty and absurdly masterful in its simplicity. Brown stands subtly writhing, bare-chested in a pair of briefs, with a pile of canned spaghetti overflowing from his carefully cupped hands.

The film showcased other curious performers in other equally demented mutations masquerading as short art films, including “Thomas Alva Edison’s Elephant Electrocution,” “Christmas on Other Planets,” “The Church of the Jack Lord,” “Laser Bra 2000,” and “Nazi Oven Mitts.”

Originally intended to be a one-shot summer replacement for *Saturday Night Live*, the film’s disorienting 75 minutes of *Mr. Mike* were never aired due to its offbeat, dark humor. The parody

by O'Donoghue of a 17 year-old cult classic not many had seen in the first place ran into resistance from NBC censors and the special was rejected for air by then NBC-president Fred Silverman. and instead, received very limited theatrical distribution by New Line Cinema.

Nevertheless, the film had everything it needed, including Delford Brown, to go on to rarity heaven. The cast included most of the SNL originals, Not Yet Ready for the Local Multiplex: Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd (as the *Church of the Jack Lord* priest), Jane Curtin, Laraine Newman, and Gilda Radner. Also featured are avant opera singer Klaus Nomi, actresses Margot Kidder, Carrie Fisher, Teri Garr, and Blondie's Deborah Harry (In a funny piece called "Beautiful Women Love Disgusting Men" she states "It's cute when guys miss the toilet seat.") There is also a comedic turn by Judy Jacklin, who was married to Belushi from New Years Eve, 1976 until John's death on March 5, 1982.

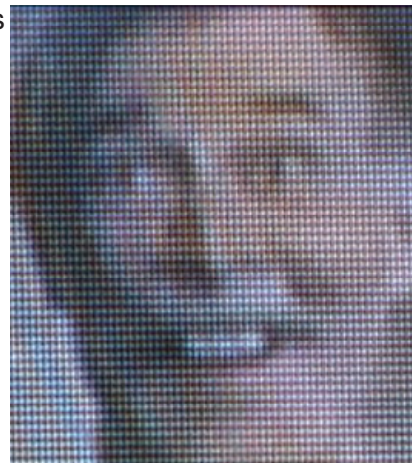
An impressive musical menu in the film includes Paul Shaffer, now of *Late Night with David Letterman*, who wrote original music and appears as the *Jack Lord* organist, RootBoy Slim and the Sex Change Band ("Boogie Til You Puke") and the American debut of Sid Vicious' now infamous performance of "My Way," well before it appeared in "The Great Rock and Roll Swindle." Sadly, the video re-packaging of *Mr. Mike's Mondo Video* is now missing Vicious' audio. Scrolling titles explain that Paul Anka, who wrote "My Way," refused to give rights to the performance. A pity, indeed, but for my money, the standout, in addition to Brown's appearance as the frenetic Jojo, is an amazingly schmaltzy theme song delivered in a deadpan rendition by Sinatra wannabe Julius LaRosa.

In the film, O'Donahue, as Mr. Mike says, "Good evening. I'm Mr. Mike, inviting you to come with me into a world where the bizarre is commonplace and the commonplace bizarre. It is an odyssey of aggressive weirdness. Whatever



raw, savage acts man's hellish brain can conceive, our cameras are these, scouring the globe, seeking out the cheap thrills, the pointless perversities, the shabby secrets, the grotesque, the pathetic..."

Watching Brown as "Jojo" cradling his warm spaghetti and presumably heating it up in the time it takes to say "Stay Tuned for Performance Art" is worth the price of admission if you don't blink. And this assuming, of course, you can find this rare, important and fascinating cult classic at your local video store. **-Mark Bloch**



*Robert Delford Brown as Jo Jo. His friend, O'Donahue, who once said, "Making people laugh is the lowest form of comedy" suffered from migraines and died of a cerebral hemorrhage.*

