

# Comics blast off on Sonic free-for-all

Second City vets create some witty ads for fast-food chain



LEWIS LAZARE

llazare@suntimes.com



Molly Erdman and Brian Huskey share a Sweetheart Blast in this Sonic commercial.

The Second City improv troupe, which has called Old Town home for nearly 50 years, steadily turns out superb actors with impeccable comic timing and imaginations that allow them to nimbly improvise on almost any topic or within any given scenario.

Since 2003, the considerable skills of two Second City alums in particular — Pete Grosz and T.J. Jagadowski — have been on display in a series of television spots from the Barkley agency in Kansas City, Mo., for the Sonic fast-food chain.

The spots are not high concept. The agency doesn't even use directors during the shoots. Rather, the actors simply (oh, the virtues of simplicity!) sit in a car outside a Sonic drive-in and riff on whatever the Sonic menu item is that needs to be promoted. The end result in the latest round of eight Sonic commercials reaffirms a point we've made before: Good actors compel attention, even when the material doesn't always work.

And it doesn't always work in the the newest Sonic spots. It doesn't work at all in a commercial when Grosz and Jagadowski veer off into a bizarre discussion about the "friendship" between bacon and eggs, the core ingredients in a

Sonic breakfast burrito. It's the kind of weird talk to be expected from a couple of talented improv actors, but it's also likely to strike most consumers as farfetched, corny and forgettable.

Much better is a Sonic Island Fire Burger execution in which Jagadowski is going on about how he didn't realize the burger would be so spicy, while Grosz expresses amazement at that revelation, given

the burger's fiery name. The two actors go back and forth, until Jagadowski brings the banter to an amusing conclusion by remarking on his comic partner's annoyingly repetitive head movements.

Two additional talented improv artists, Molly Erdman (another Second City alum) and Brian Huskey, more recently joined the Sonic improv team of performers. They too provide some fun mo-

ments, especially in a spot touting the Sweetheart Blast beverage that addresses the couple's pending trip to pick out wallpaper — an excursion that promises some really brutal clashes between the two after having just consumed such a sweet Sonic treat. The improvised lines in this spot have real bite, and the delivery is as sharp as it gets.

Lew's view: B+