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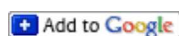
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## Colin Quinn: Long Story Short (Blu-ray)

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Review by [Jason Bailey](#) | posted January 2, 2012 | [E-mail the Author](#)

## THE SPECIAL:

Colin Quinn: *Long Story Short* is funny and smart--borderline brilliant, even--and no one is more surprised than this viewer. For a good couple of decades, Quinn seemed a lesser talent who'd peaked with MTV's *Remote Control*; his stint as anchor of *SNL*'s "Weekend Update" was painfully laugh-free, and his Comedy Central series *Tough Crowd with Colin Quinn* was an awkward and ugly attempt to replicate *Politically Incorrect*. But then came the Jerry Seinfeld documentary *Comedian*, with Quinn appearing both in the film and on Seinfeld's DVD audio commentary track, and he did something he hadn't done in years: he made me laugh. Working with Seinfeld, he was sharper and funnier; he brought his A-game. Now comes this HBO recording of his Broadway show--directed by Seinfeld. He appears to have found his ideal collaborator.

Developed by the pair for an off-Broadway run that moved uptown, *Long Story Short* aims to present what amounts to the history of the world in 75 minutes. Assisted by animations and illustrations on a big screen, Quinn is up for the challenge; after all, our history is repetitious, with "the same stories in the Old Testament as the *New York Post*." Zipping from the Cro-Magnons to the Greeks to the Romans to the Catholics to the Incas to the Mayans, from India to the British Empire to imperialism to Red China, and finally landing on America ("the bouillabaisse of the fallen empires"), Quinn's M.O. is to start with broad concepts and then narrow them into specific--and often contemporary--incidents and ideas. Tribal behavior is illustrated by a cluster at an ATM line. Relations between Muslim countries and Israel are compared to a boyfriend who can't stop talking about his ex. Plato's "cave theory" is analogous to economic summits in Switzerland. And so on.

Quinn's delivery is as gruff as ever, but this is the most polished and thoughtful material he's done; it's the same kind of sudden comic surge delivered in Chris Rock's *Bring the Pain* special, another HBO showcase for a comic whose time on *SNL* only hinted at his actual potential. He makes a particular specialty of imagined conversations, such as an uncomfortable backstage encounter between Oedipus and Sophocles ("That's a compilation of a lot of people I know!" the tragedian insists), or an argument between Marx and Engels over the term "Marxism."

That unexpected introduction of modern mores and 21st century thinking into historical events is a comedic gift that keeps on giving, as when he



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brands the Romans, the world's first skilled laborers, as "proud union, Local XVII," or responds to Socrates's famous line "I know now that I know nothing" thus: "Kind of a dick move, right?" He's also got a firm sense of silliness, with his bits on the existentialism of cows or explication of how the Brits ruled the world with the weapon of contempt, and he's not too closely constrained by the format; there's room in the "history of the world" construct for a very funny extended riff on "the white teacher who saves the black kids" movies.

But the show's historical framework is ultimately a strong clothesline, and gives us the two strongest moments: a genuinely brilliant bit about the gulf between the theoretical and pragmatic divergences of fascism and democracy, and the masterful closing sequence, in which Quinn summarizes the current testiness between governments with the line "Right now, the world has the atmosphere of a bar at 3:30 in the morning," and then proceeds to equate the Iraq war to a woozy late-night parking lot altercation. It doesn't sound like it should work, or even make sense, but it somehow does. Quinn surprises you with his wit and insight there--and throughout the entirety of this excellent performance.

**THE BLU-RAY:****Video & Audio:**

The MPEG-4 AVC-encoded video presentation doesn't much of a job to do, but it does it well; this is a clean, attractive image, capturing the deep colors of Quinn's black-and-blue ensemble, as well as the inky blacks of the stage shadows. Detail work is sharp as well. Disappointingly, we only get a 2.0 LPCM audio track--this viewer always prefers a full surround option, for proper immersion in the "audience," though the audio is always clear and the audience reactions are well-mixed.

**Extras:**

Quinn and Seinfeld's **Audio Commentary** is just plain terrific. The pair riff well off of each other, joking about the commentary itself (Quinn's guess as to who's watching: "Half of them can't sleep, half of them are trying to get their money's worth"), going off on detours, and talking (just a bit) about the show itself. It drags in spots (Seinfeld, on a projected painting: "Look at that guy on that horse"), and the pair occasionally stop to just listen and chuckle, but the track is full of laughs and a lot of fun.

The next feature is rather underbilled as "**Behind the Scenes Footage**" (17:29). It starts out that way, with some rough (but fascinating) footage of Quinn and Seinfeld in rehearsal. But it also includes several minutes of interviews with both men, with good bites from each. It's all left in something of an unedited form (you wonder why someone didn't just take an afternoon and work it into a proper featurette), but it's worth a look.

Finally, we get a brief bit of "**Press Event Footage**" (3:33), with Anderson Cooper interviewing Quinn and Seinfeld about the show and its move to Broadway.

**FINAL THOUGHTS:**

*Colin Quinn: Long Story Short* has its share of misfires; a bit about the promiscuity of a teasing France never really finds its footing, and the clever chunk explaining the fall of the Roman Empire via a *Goodfellas* voice-over is sunk by Quinn's rotten Ray Liotta impression (his Tony Bennett is pretty good, though). The duds are few and far between though; for most of its compact running time, *Long Story Short* is a quick-witted, well-written, uproariously funny treat that has caused this writer serious reconsideration of its star.

*Jason lives with his wife Rebekah and their two cats in New York and holds an MA in Cultural Reporting and Criticism from NYU. He is also film editor for [Flavorwire](#) and is a contributor to the Atlantic, the Maddow Blog, and the Village Voice. He blogs at [Fourth Row Center](#) and is yet another critic with a [Twitter feed](#).*

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