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# Standard-Examiner

## Making climbing films, but not appreciating them

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

By Bryce Petersen Jr.  
Standard-Examiner staff

Timmy O'Neill, a 35-year-old climber who makes his living in climbing films, hates climbing films.

"I don't buy into that mentality that some climbers have: 'I'm so bad-ass, I climb rock.' Nobody even knows about rock-climbing here," O'Neill said last week from his Boulder, Colo., home. "And for good reason. It's boring."

Typical climbing films are "50-minute or 90-minute sleeping pills." Slide shows? "Death by slides ... Please give me a sky burial."

So in "Parallelojams," a 40-minute segment of Peter Mortimer's "Return2Sender," which is playing at the Tower Theater in Salt Lake City tonight at 7, O'Neill mocks other climbers. Laughs at himself. And, oh yeah, climbs cracks and tightropes 1,000 feet high between two towers in the Indian Creek area, near Moab.

O'Neill, who will be at the Tower Theater for tonight's showing, first made a name for himself with record-fast ascents around the world, including a two-hour ascent of the Nose on Yosemite's El Capitan. Now, he is known as much for his irreverent comedy as for his climbing.

When he's not climbing in the Pabst Brewery for a Discovery Channel series -- "Forbidden Zone," which is "cool, I like it, but it's not irreverent enough for me" -- or biking around Boulder, O'Neill is often watching comedians like his current favorite, Pablo Francisco. He traces his antics back to his Philadelphia childhood.

"I was one of seven kids. You had to make a stir to get fed in my house," O'Neill said.

O'Neill has been known to delight in near-death experiences. He had one on a recent trip to Mexico,

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### IF YOU GO

\* **WHAT:** 'Return2Sender,' a Peter Mortimer climbing film

\* **WHO:** Timmy O'Neill, co-producer and climber in the film, hosts the showing

\* **WHEN:** 7 p.m. today

\* **WHERE:** Tower Theater, 876 E. 900 S., Salt Lake City

\* **COST:** \$10

\* **INFO:**  
[www.return2sendermovie.com](http://www.return2sendermovie.com)

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when the crew was returning from filming for an Outdoor Life Network series "Ultimate Playground." The driver lost control, abandoning the narrow road for a steep embankment. The car rolled several times before coming to a stop. O'Neill peeked out the window to see little flower-covered crosses, a roadside memorial to others who had passed this way before.

"I thought for sure I was dead. ... And we didn't get it on tape. It's a bummer," he said.

But he still wears a leash when he's "slack-lining" -- tightroping a 1-inch-wide strap -- "because I value my life," he said. On that windy day in Indian Creek, he did fall during filming and had to climb hand-over-hand back to the line.

"If it was totally easy and anybody could do it, it would be like selling stuff on eBay. It would be really popular," O'Neill said.

But it's not really popular. And that's why O'Neill focuses on the human aspect in his shows. During the day before the Boulder showing of "Return2Sender," O'Neill saw a kid with a yo-yo rolling around on wheeled sneakers. That night, he brought the boy on stage to perform.

"He was a celebrity. He did this wheelie yo-yo trick and it got the biggest laughs of the night," O'Neill said.

"There's not really much that separates us. ... I buy a handshake, a smile, sharing a meal, dancing. I really celebrate humanity," he said.

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