

Is local comedy destined for the gutter?



It's hard to be funny in Eugene. While well-known local comedians (yes, there are well-known local comedians) must reckon with unusually discriminating audiences, newcomer humorists are discovering that breaking onto the comedy scene is like an elephant trying to get into a pair of Danskins.

Two comedy yearlings, Dan McCoy and Keith Woodrang, are members of a Eugene humor duet. Woodrang says he started doing amateur comedy after encouraged by some of his friends at parties. And that's when it got tough.

Story by Kim Carlson and Doug Nash

"Comedy as an amateur is rough," he says. He adds that club managers aren't nearly as flexible here as they are in say, Portland or California. "If you bomb they won't ask you back."

McCoy agrees that comedy as an amateur is not all fun and games. "At work I'm a real joker. But on stage people say 'yeah you're real funny.' Audiences are hostile," he says.

Woodrang blames audience hostility on lack of local comic visibility. "They haven't been exposed to comedy very much," he says. Drama and music seem to monopolize local entertainment, he insists. "Bands are great but there's more to life."

Relatively few nightclubs in Eugene feature comedy on a regular basis. Even the bad bands

are not funny. McCoy is discouraged about the small number of local places to perform comedy. "There's no place to do it," he says. "The Hult Center is too big; the bars are too rowdy. People can't just go see comedy."

According to Woodrang, drugs and sports are big laugh-getters in Eugene. "We deal with drugs in our act and that's what's gotten the most laughs," he says.

Woodrang writes most of the "Dan and Keith" material. The routine depicts McCoy as a "staunch intellectual" and Woodrang as a "laid-back hippie type." For jokes the two poke fun at each other's lifestyles. "The audience can identify with us," says Woodrang.

But getting locked into a stereotype may not be the great blessing it at first appears to be. "We want to get out of the characters and into just the comedy team-type thing," Woodrang says.

Good luck. Even the best of comedy teams are bankrolling laughs on characterization.

For the past few years, "On the Edge," a seven-member comedy troupe, has been selling out performance after local performance by adhering to a cabaret-type humor based on lifestyles, issues and characterizations quickly familiar to the Eugene audience. Hippies, health food, jogging and environmental issues are among the big crowd pleasers.

"Generally, in Eugene, everyone likes locally oriented humor," says Cheyney Ryan, a University philosophy professor who writes some of the songs and acts for the group. "You just mention Saturday Market and everybody starts laughing."

It doesn't take the comedian long to discover which jokes bring down the house and which

jokes bring up the dinner. In Eugene, at least, those who stick to an overly political gag-line should not expect to come off welfare any time in the near future.

"When we did things about Nicaragua, it went over 75 percent of their heads. That may sound kind of condescending," says Janet MacIntyre, another "On the Edge" writer and player. "You use a four-letter word, though, and they're right back with you."

If there's a trend in comedy — and there most probably is — it may very well be that, in terms of language, humor is floating in the gutter. People like to be talked dirty to. Examples abound: Listen for 30 seconds to those two perennial toilet-mouths, Joan Rivers and Richard Pryor, the queen and king of verbal feces. Or tune in to Saturday Night Live, comedy's televised sewage disposal site.

Or, for that matter, monitor the audience response to a local comedy act.

"We get a certain number of doctors and businessman-types," Ryan says of the group's Brass Rail performances. "They're the kind of people who come wearing suits and ties and are almost entirely interested in cheap sex jokes. They're the most depressing people to play to."

"Comedy's gotten a lot more liberal," explains Woodrang. "They play around with fire more than they used to. Pryor and Rivers — they're vulgar, but they're good at it."

Vulgarity — what we say — gets laughs. Drugs — what we take — gets laughs. Lifestyle — what we do — gets laughs. It's a funny world we live in. Just ask the comedians. That is, if you can find them or are quick enough to get in and see them.

CAT'S MEOW JAZZ & BLUES CORNER



JAZZ & BLUES, REGGAE & Gospel RECORDS

Books, Tapes & COLLECTOR'S ACCESSORIES

In the Fifth Pearl Building
Fifth & Pearl • EUGENE
686-8742

"AT LAST, A STORE FOR THE TRUE COLLECTOR."

What's black & white & read at holiday time? NOEL NOTES

in Emerald classifieds. 15 words for the season's greeting for \$1.50 if placed by 1 p.m. Dec. 9 at UO Bookstore, EMU Main Desk, ODE office, 300 EMU. COMING DEC. 12!

Recycle this paper
Recycle this paper
Recycle this paper

Commentary

Being funny is no laughing matter

Jonathan Siegle was last year's Emerald Entertainment editor. He was also known on campus for his daily rushing around, his cutting up in class and his sparkling Illinois wit. We appreciate his contribution to this year's comedy issue, one that may only fizzle and pop.

George Carlin put it plainly: "That's my job, thinking up goofy shit."

That's what comedy is — goofy shit. Those with minds quick enough, make it up. The rest go along for the ride. Laughing.

How to blow your nose on a cat: Grab the cat with thumb and first finger of each hand. Grip the little beastie firmly behind the front legs with right hand and in front of the back legs with the left. Hold tightly but gently.

Turn the cat over. With both hands spread the cat's legs apart. Now calmly, so not to frighten it, blow your nose into the soft fur of the belly.

Do not rub your face back and forth. You'll get little cat hairs up your nose, which will make you sneeze. That'll upset the cat and probably get you scratched.

Soon it will bathe itself, and no one will be the wiser.

Comedy, as Steve Martin says, is not pretty. It is also extremely hard work. How often has it been said, "Gee, you're funny, you ought to be a comedian.?"

Forget it. It's granite out there. Like empty Tabasco Sauce bottles, there are no old comedians.

Bill Cosby is mugging and hawking Coke. Carlin's still wheezing through the seven dirty words bit after his second heart attack. Martin's making grody movies and pretending to be serious.

Funny people shine only briefly. The level can't be sustained. Flame-out city.

As for jokes, they come and go. They make rounds. Fad jokes especially. When I was in high school it was Tom Swifties.

I see now that Helen Keller jokes are coming back.

Take a peek at the humor shelves in used book stores. Elephant jokes. Polish jokes. Playboy party jokes. Tasteless jokes.

Gag. Jokes and humor are not synonymous. Humor requires a sense of the world, albeit slightly warped. It relies on the build-up, the

development, the drawing in of the unsuspecting audience.

Telling a joke is just quick pop and fizz. Being funny, now that's the Fourth of July.

Years ago I taught school in upstate New York. We had a very fastidious math teacher who was always butting in. You know, the sort who corrects your pronunciation without being asked.

One day I went into the men's room to wee. But first I had to wash the chalk dust from my hands. Face it, it is uncool to walk around a high school with chalk dust on your fly.

The very fastidious math teacher was in the lav with me. He scrutinized me washwee and as I set to the zipper he could stand it no longer.

"Mr. Siegle," he said to me. (Imagine, a man old enough to be my father calling me "Mr.") "Mr. Siegle," he says, "it is customary only to wash one's hands after urinating."

That was his kind of word, "urinating." "Now Herbie," I says to him, "you know as well as I that in our religion it is customary to wash one's hands before handling a sacred object."

I guess you had to be there.

Jonathan Siegle

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
DEJOLA'S 683-1311 FIFTH STREET PUBLIC MARKET — EUGENE — CALENDAR OF GOOD TIMES!!! November							
20 Spaghetti Coupon Special in the restaurant BEER BARGAINS in the saloon	21 With each business card you receive 50¢ beer & wine, \$1 well drinks, \$1 off all other cocktails 7 p.m. to closing Business Card Night	22 Shots of Gold \$1.00 Free Chips & Salsa 7 p.m. to closing Hot Shot Tuesday	23 Half price draft beer Half price house wine Half price Long Islands \$1.00 well drinks 7 p.m. to closing OVER THE HUMP PARTY	24 Dejola's EMPLOYEE VACATION Happy Thanksgiving!	18 Friday at Five MUSIC Mike & Mike & Dan 9-1	19 Oregon vs. Oregon State Civil War Celebration MUSIC Mike & Mike & Dan 9-1	
27 Spaghetti Coupon Special in the restaurant BEER BARGAINS in the saloon	28 With each business card you receive 50¢ beer & wine, \$1 well drinks, \$1 off all other cocktails 7 p.m. to closing Business Card Night	29 "Stripes" Night • Movie: "Stripes" • Stripes attire requested • Drink Specials 7 p.m. to closing	30 Half price draft beer Half price house wine Half price Long Islands \$1.00 well drinks 7 p.m. to closing OVER THE HUMP PARTY	25 Friday at Five MUSIC Mapenzi 9-1			26 Enjoy Fine Dining at Dejola's MUSIC Mapenzi 9-1
Happy Hour Weekdays 4:00 - 7:00 p.m. Free Hors d'oeuvres 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.							