

A Comic in Every Crowd

Comedy relief breathes new life into local clubs.

Roaring down the freeway in a '69 Cadillac Fleetwood, Dave Fulton notices a new under-the-hood sound over the din. Grinding metal coincides with an irregular thump that builds until Fulton is forced to turn up the stereo. The car's pink paint job is a subtle joke about the Caddy's \$87 price tag. In his mind he swears to quit using his grandmother's cat as an experimental lab for her unlabeled drugs if the car will make it to the town where Fulton is scheduled to appear as a stand-

up comic.

If it sounds a little strange, it should. This is the world of stand-up comedy where just about anything goes. Live comedy in the area is growing with shows at the Factory Restaurant & Edison's Bar in Springfield and at Stuart Anderson's Black Angus Restaurant in Eugene. For people who have seen comics only on television, a live performance can be a real experience.

"Most people don't know what to expect their first time,

but they love it," says Mark Nealy, manager at Black Angus. "People tend to come, tell some friends and come back...It's real addictive."

One might think a comedy club crowd would be in their early 20s, but Nealy says most customers are age 25 and older.

"You might expect a lot of college-age people, but it's a real mix," says Kim Luevano, the assistant manager at the Factory. She also sees many regulars and is surprised at the range of ages that attends.

In this high-tech world of video entertainment, why this trend toward the most basic pastime, storytelling...er, joketelling? "It's something to do rather than hit the bars and dance. Besides, I just like to laugh," Luevano answers.

"Life can get too intense. Watching a comedy show is like a pressure valve; I can take my mind off my studies and forget the real world," says Tom Hovie, a University student who viewed a show at the Black Angus.

It appears more and more people are using this "pressure valve" locally and nationally. The number of professional comedians in this country has tripled in the last couple of years, mainly because there are more comedy clubs.

The jokes don't seem to stop, even after the show is over. When asked about the perfect profession, Fulton says he would like to be the New York state lottery winner. Another comic, Gary Larsen, says sarcastically that he would like to work in a hospital emergency room.

All laughs aside, Idaho's Fulton chose the comedy profession over other ordinary, mundane jobs for convenience' sake. "The time off is great; I can get into my climbing, and I guess it's just the best drug in the world."



Photo by Shu-Shing Chen

Local comedian David Lichtenstein, self-described ex-hippie and future alcoholic, began performing in the Eugene/Springfield area seven years ago. Lichtenstein is seen here at the Factory.

"Hey, I got fired from everything else...Besides how many other jobs let you sleep until noon?" Larsen says.

Fulton had a similar experience. He was fired from McDonald's for throwing a party for Ronald McDonald, he says.

Larsen, who has appeared on Showtime, won the Seattle Laugh Off and enjoys bringing the audience into his act by rifling through wallets on stage and prying into the private lives of

couples in the audience. One young couple in the audience admitted to "living in sin" under the interrogation of Larsen.

Shows rarely last more than two hours. Luevano says this allows customers to come eat dinner at the Factory, stay for the acts and still have time to go almost anywhere else.

Both stages have seen some rising comedians. The Factory presented A. Whitney Brown, currently a writer and performer on Saturday Night Live; and Emo Phillips, who has made several appearances on the David Letterman Show. Ron Reed and Max Dolcelli each have stopped through the Black Angus before spots on Letterman.

Those interested in dishing out a little comedy are out of luck for now. Neither club features local or amateur acts yet, but Nealy and Luevano each hint it is a possibility. Luevano suggests that anyone interested should call her at the Factory.

If you want a shot of the "best medicine," shows at the Factory begin at 9 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. If you eat dinner before the show, the normal ticket price of \$5 is cut in half. KZEL's Laughline at the Black Angus starts at 9 p.m. on Tuesday nights with a \$4 cover charge.

— PETE MASON



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