

physical comedian, so I found that difficult, it takes a lot of wit and timing to pull it off right."

But Belushi, who always loves a new challenge, was also quick to pick up on the advantages of stardom. "There's much more to consider than there is when you're doing a supporting role," he says, "and I find that very rewarding. You have much more say on where you want the character to go, and ultimately, then, the direction of the movie. And if they cut three scenes out of the picture, it'll probably even help. You're much more vulnerable at the hands of an editor in a supporting role; cutting three scenes can blow the whole arc of the character."

"And you get the women," he adds enthusiastically. "I sleep with three women in *Real Men*. That's a 300% improvement over *About Last Night*."



Belushi and co-star John Ritter find themselves in some tight fixes. "It's real absurdist comedy."

Okay, so maybe he isn't exactly Phil Donahue yet. In real life, Belushi doesn't do badly for a guy from the Wrong Side of Chicago; he's a good father (he plays benefits for his son Robert's school), he's crazy in love with his girlfriend of 2½ years, actress Marjorie Bransfield ("Oh man, she's the dream of my life!"), and he's one socially concerned individual, highly committed to preserving the future of America's sense of humor (Belushi teaches comedy improv workshops on the college lecture circuit). Besides, he's a genuinely nice guy; the street-smart gruffness of his immigrant-son upbringing translates into an open, in-your-face friendliness with the ease of a handshake.

Belushi began acting by accident; when he neglected to prepare a lecture he had to deliver in a high school speech class, Belushi improvised an anti-war hippie tirade. The teacher gave him a D on the assignment but was impressed enough with his performance to cast him in a school play. Soon after that, Belushi's older brother John—who

was starring on *Saturday Night Live*—took Jim to his old stomping grounds, Chicago's renowned improvisational comedy theater, Second City. "I was blown away," the younger Belushi recalls. "It just looked like so much fun. My goal was to go there within the next six years, which I did."

Belushi honed his comedic skills beside such other noteworthy Second City alums as *Cheers*' Shelley Long and George Wendt. He quickly moved on to the television series *Working Stiffs* and *Who's Watching the Kids* and became a semi-regular on *Laverne and Shirley*. After John's meteoric movie career ended with his tragic death, Jim joined the *Saturday Night Live* repertory company, where he took his share of kid-brother ribbing.

"Every time I'd lift my eyebrow [one of John's favorite techniques], they'd accuse me of doing John. I'd say, 'He willed it to me, man!' Let's face it, he blew it for me. I could never be seen with a sword in my hand," Jim says, referring to his brother's legendary samurai routines. "If I asked for a cheeseburger, I was dead! He took all those gags from me, man! I made 'em up when we were kids."

In a more serious vein, Jim admits John was a major creative influence, if not much of a teacher. "John stayed completely away from any of that, 'I'm your big brother, and I'm telling you to do this' crap. I used to get mad, because he'd never give me advice or help me out. But in reality, it was harder for him to be like that. He made me do it on my own, make mistakes by myself and answer my own questions."

Some of the answers Jim found weren't very funny. Although he got a lot of his stage training at Second City, he's hit the boards in a variety of dramatic plays, among them David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (from which *About Last Night* was adapted), Brecht's *Bal* and Sam Shepard's *True West*. Belushi's movie debut was in Michael (Miami Vice) Mann's far-from-humorous crime caper, *Thief*, and his appearances in such comedies as *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Trading Places* and *Jumpin' Jack Flash* have more-often-than-not been as threatening tough guys, not jokesters.

His next starring role will be a straight dramatic one—a troubled high school administrator in *The Principal*. Belushi explains the differences between comic and dramatic acting: "Drama feels much easier. The scenes are about certain emotions or wants, and each one has a moment that you have to achieve. Whether the words are said exactly the way they're written doesn't really matter as long as you get the point across."



Belushi as "the greatest CIA agent ever": "I sleep with three women in *Real Men*. That's a 300% improvement over *About Last Night*."

That emotion is what counts.

"In comedy, especially in something like *Real Men*, it is very important to get the words precise, the rhythms technically correct; a certain spin has to be given to a line so it will pop a laugh. It's much more of a technician's approach."

Little wonder that a sensitive guy like Jim Belushi prefers just getting in touch with his feelings. Laughing, he concedes that, in the best of all possible worlds, he'll be starring in both comedies and more serious films for a long time to come. "I'm a Gemini," he says, "so I've got to keep two sides going." ★

*Bob Strauss spends many hours in dark theaters, emerging only when the moon is full.*