

# Poking fun at sex, drugs, animals pays off for University comedian

By Layne Lakefish  
Encore Reporter

He likes one-liners and cute anecdotes — so do his audiences.

And the best thing about comedy audiences, he said, "is that they laugh" because "it's nice when they laugh."

After only two-and-a-half years behind the comedic microphone, John Finnigan, University rhetoric/communication major, has enough comedy experience under his belt to impressively fill his resume.

With TV experience, comedy contests (in which he has always made it to the finals), charity shows (in which he has raised \$6,000 for various charities), 40-50 Northwest region shows, numerous Midwest region shows and comedy club performances, no one would guess that it all started so recently.

"I was really sick of school in the fall of 1987 so I went back up to Portland and took the term off to ski," Finnigan explained. "Then my dad told me, 'Get a job' and I'd heard about an open mike, so I just started going down there every week."

"I guess you could say I just started to do 'the comedy thing': I liked it and I did it," he said. "It wasn't something that started when I was a kid, but I guess I was always the class clown."

After this first open mike experience, he decided to take the next year off, instead of just the term, and he spent his time making people laugh. His original skiing vacation ended up being the beginning of his career as a professional comedian.

"After about six months of open mike I started to make money, which is really rare, and I didn't have to bum off of my parents anymore," he said.

"But after about a year it started to get frustrating because I wasn't getting week long runs, I was just doing one-nighters, and I was making just enough money to just get by."

At that point, he packed his bags once again and headed back to Eugene to finish school. "I just decided I might as well go back to school and finish up because I only had a year left," he said. "Now I'm just finishing up slowly, very slowly."

He's been back at the University since last spring term, but he has decided not to do any local shows until he graduates.

He does, however, still plan comedy charity shows and participate in occasional contests, like Greek Comedy Night last month. Each of the 12 participating comedians had five to six minutes of mike time, and Finnigan came out the victor.

"I won a TV," he said.

Even though he's not up on club stages locally, he's still doing what he considers to be the essential comedic task.

"One of the most important things I think comedians need to do is write, write, write, write," he said.

"When I was up in Portland doing open mike shows, I saw all these people going up every week doing the exact same jokes and I said they're not doing anything new and they're not going anywhere," he explained.

After this realization, he decided, at that point, to have five new minutes of material for every show, and now he makes sure to always create new lines.

So, write, write, write he does — at least five new jokes a day. "I come up with a lot of my own stuff and sometimes it's just what others say," he said. "People are surprisingly funny without knowing it."

Sex gets a lot of laughs, he said, talking about favorite funny subjects. "Sex is the funniest thing of all, it really is, everything about it," he said. "It's like the universal language."

Drug jokes also rank near the top. "Most audiences are people between 20 and 40 years old, and they have all usually had experiences or at least been exposed," he said. "They can

relate."

Animal jokes and anecdotes also get a lot of laughs. "People seem to really like animal lines," he said.

In the two and a half years he's been writing and performing comedy, three other comedians have been his underlying inspirations: Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor and Jay Leno.

"Whenever I talk about comedy, these three names always come up," he said. "I like Bruce because of his fight for the freedom of speech, besides the fact that he's incredibly brilliant," Finnigan said.

"I like Bruce and Pryor because of their honesty — you listen to Pryor and you believe what he says," he explained. "It's unlike Eddie Murphy, because if you know where he's been and you know his background, you can't believe him."

And as for Jay Leno, "He's the nicest guy you'd ever meet," Finnigan said.

Yes, he did actually meet Leno, in a way that only a comedian would dare. "He was going to be at the Hult Center so I called him up, said that I was a reporter for the *Emerald*, which I wasn't, and set up an interview," explained Finnigan.

Once at the "interview," Finnigan told Leno the truth, and the two ended up talking about comedy. "He really was a nice guy — just like he is on TV," he said.

So much for his past — he's concentrating on his future now. He's off to Spokane's Eddy Murphy's club for spring break (Thursday through Sunday), and he's already booked spring term and summer shows.

As for the far off future, comedy leaves the picture. "I really want to write, produce and direct movies someday," he said. "Don't get me wrong, comedy is great and it's live and there are people who appreciate it on the spot, but there are so many bad movies out there today that I figure I've got to do something for the industry."

# ENCORE!

The Oregon Daily Emerald's Entertainment Guide



Courtesy photo

University student John Finnigan said he started "the comedy thing" just two years ago, when curiosity led him to an open mike competition in Portland.

"Now, comedy is a way for me to experience all of that, the acting, writing, producing and directing," he said.

What does he like best about being a comedian? "It's a fun way to earn money," he said.

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