

Thursday, August 12, 2004

RYAN NYBURG  
BUDGET RACK

## Accessibility of media enhances substance

A few columns ago, I posed the question of why comedian Bob Hope was praised all to high heaven when he passed, while the death of comedian Bill Hicks was barely noted. The answer boiled down to a matter of popularity. Hope was a beloved figure while Hicks was a scabrous and bitter cynic who never reached a level beyond cult status in his lifetime. Hope was acceptable to the mainstream, despite his bland, white-bread comedy, while Hicks broke new ground with his vitriolic and intelligent social satire.

It's not fair that middle-of-the-road work should be exalted over brilliant comedy, but then again, life isn't fair. If it were, then, as a colleague of mine said, you would deserve every messed-up thing that has ever happened to you. But the idea of how a figure such as Hicks could even rise to what little prominence he reached is intriguing. To me, it opens up questions about how certain ideas rise in media, how different viewpoints become available and what is and is not given a chance in our culture.

Hicks was able to make it into prominence despite being an abrasive performer because stand-up comedy is an open medium. Anybody with the proper skills can be a stand-up comic and find an outlet for his or her work with little personal expense. Stand-up comedy is also one of the few media in which new and creative viewpoints are rewarded, given time and perseverance. There is no way to hide a lack of talent, though some have made valiant efforts (Carrot Top comes immediately and regrettably to mind).

Stand-up is currently in a static period as far as I can gauge. Suffering from declining returns, the industry behind it has rallied around safe bets. This is the problem that affects any medium when the audiences start shrinking and the money doesn't flow easily. Eventually, one of two things will happen: The tide will turn and stand-up will rise to prominence again, meaning risks will be easier to take, or the whole thing will disintegrate into dust, leaving the way open for someone else to come around and do it over again. Either way, someone will shake things up eventually.

If you look at any medium you'll find approximately the same patterns. The differences are in how open or closed the nature of the medium is. Each system has its own quirks. Television, for example, is by its nature the most firmly closed system. With a limited amount of space available (we're talking broadcast rather than cable or satellite here, though they're all owned by the same people) and a relatively high expense inherent in operating a station, home-grown local TV is hard to find. Public access is always available, but comparing the reach of that to network television is like comparing a garden hose to the Mississippi.

Cable and satellite opened things up a bit, but if you want to make it on television, you still have to play by the rules of the people already in the game. It also

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## TOP OF THE MORNING

Ann Dornfeld hosts  
"Morning Edition" for  
NPR at KLCC early  
Tuesday.  
Tim Bobosky  
Interim Photo Editor

## Air time

KLCC's Ann Dornfeld is a lifelong radio aficionado and hosts an NPR morning show

MICHAELA A. BOOTH  
FREELANCE REPORTER

Ann Dornfeld's love of radio developed at a young age. When she was six years old, she and her older brother would record television shows like Mister Rogers' Neighborhood and then insert their own commercials.

"We called our station K.I.D.S.," Dornfeld said. "We'd sign off by saying 'K.I.D.S. Seattle — That's our motto!'"

Twenty-one years later, in the National Public Radio studio radio station KLCC, she exudes the same youthful enthusiasm she had in her KIDS days. As the local host of NPR's Morning Edition, the morning news program, Dornfeld settled into

her seat in the cramped 10 foot by 20 foot studio lined with vinyl records from floor to ceiling Tuesday like it was her own personal happy place.

When Tom Krumm, the host of the music program Fresh Tracks, came into the studio just minutes before his 9 a.m. turn in the studio seat, Dornfeld and Krumm immediately began their on-air exchange to introduce his show. Smiling, Dornfeld swiveled her chair to face the studio control panel, pressed a button and began.

"Fresh tracks with Tom Krumm is coming up next," Dornfeld said. "How are you this morning, Tom?"

Her voice was smooth, precise, low and noticeably changed from a slightly higher and faster conversational tone she used off the air

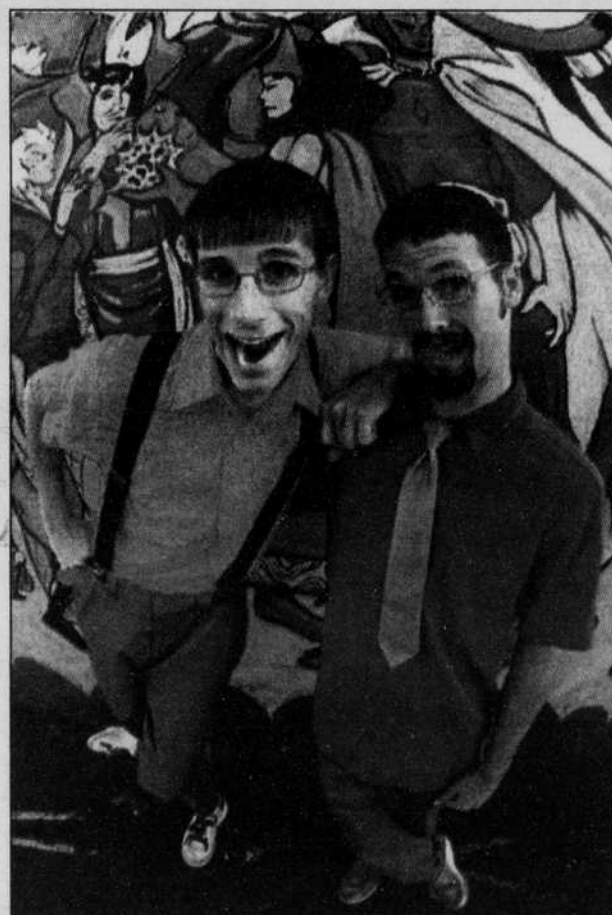
only moments earlier.

Dornfeld's enthusiasm for public radio doesn't cease with her on-air delivery. She is also passionate about attracting a younger demographic to become the next generation of radio listeners.

"You can only do so much to cater to a younger audience," Dornfeld said. "But you can produce stories that interest younger people."

Younger hosts can bring a cutting-edge approach to the production of news stories, she said. She cites an example of a story she wanted to report about the growth of an unusual singles Web site called Friendster that Dornfeld describes as a "self-promotional" Web site. When the Web site was becoming popular, she proposed the story to her boss

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Courtesy

The comedy juggling team Brothers From Different Mothers will appear at the Lane County Fair, which will be held Aug. 17-22.

## Lane County Fair offers new attractions

The fair stays loyal to its roots in agriculture but also offers some high-tech fun

SARA BRICKNER  
FREELANCE REPORTER

Kimberly Cook, a member of the Beta Alpha sorority, said her favorite part of the Lane County Fair is the food.

"It's only one time a year that you get to have corn on the cob and elephant ears," Cook said.

Every year, Kimberly Cook and her peers sell corn on the cob at the Lane County Fair in order to raise money for Beta Alpha, an international women's organization that is involved with numerous service projects. Cook has worked at the Beta Alpha corn booth for fifteen years. The fair was a lot smaller when Cook started working there, she said.

"It's grown a lot since I first joined. We didn't sell near as much corn as we do now," Cook said.

"The Lane County Fair is one of the biggest and best county fairs in the Northwest," said Lane County Fair Marketing Manager Carrie Matsushita. This year, six days of fair festivities will begin on August 17, including rides, shows, music, food

and family entertainment. Last year, more than 170,000 people attended the Lane County Fair. This year, fair organizers expect similar numbers.

Several new events await this year's patrons, including several modern attractions for gamers and technology gurus. The Race Play Motion Simulators NASCAR replica will offer NASCAR fans an opportunity to simulate driving on a real race track and will be located on the lawn in front of the Convention Center. Interactive Gaming Experience, or IGX, is a free, interactive video game exposition featuring 20 screens for gamers to sample new PC, Playstation 2, Xbox and GameCube games, or to enjoy old favorites.

"We offer a lot of attractions that would be appealing to an urban environment," said Matsushita. "We've seen fairs historically move in a direction where they're becoming much more urban."

Despite an emphasis on technology, agriculture is still a central part of the Lane County Fair.

"Emphasis on agriculture is key," said Matsushita. "We try to emphasize education for people who have never been on a farm or grown up in an agricultural setting."

Around 6 p.m., patrons will have a

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