

# ARTS & CULTURE

## A 'Crescendo' of laughter at the Village Green

By SOPHIA EDELBLUTE

The sky grows pink and the Eugene Comedy Crescendo (ECC) is filling the Village Green with laughter. Over the sound of a trickling fountain and occasional chatter of nearly 40 people in attendance, a variety of comics tell jokes.

Spectators listen and laugh and enjoy their evening meal while each comic displays their unique humor and interesting life stories.

Jen Jay, who started standup six months before COVID-19 hit, jokes about her "childhood lingerie," which she assures the audience was in no way inappropriate, despite how it sounds. Her normal clothes were lacy "booty shorts" and she was perfectly happy to help build fences and ride her dirt bike in them all the same, she recounted.

She's now experiencing what might be her biggest audience yet thanks to an opportunity provided by James Blame, who runs Eugene Comedy Crescendo.

"We give a lot of comics that are trying to become headliners an opportunity to do this format and that's how they build their comedy up to perform in a headlining situation,"

Blame says. "If they have the skills, we give them the time and help them build towards their goal."

This is ECC's first summer booking shows, and their Village Green act on June 19 was completely sold out.

Blame wants to fill the gap between big headliners and free open mics. He saw a need for ECC because "there's no shows for feature comics to go perform and work their way up."

The company specializes in presenting three "feature comics" rather than just one headliner so people at the shows can leave feeling like they've heard a variety of humors, and to provide comics a chance to achieve their goals.

James Manning III, who performed standup in the show and a couple of his own songs at intermission, started comedy about three years ago. He enjoys working with Blame. "He puts up people who need that chance to get some stage time and that's why I'm super grateful to him for putting this on," says Manning.

Terry Geil, Penny Glass and Dash Thompson have all been doing standup for a while and have similar opinions about doing shows whenever they can.

Geil used to book

monthly showcases up in Lebanon, Oregon, near Brownsville where he grew up. He had Blame in his show a couple of times and Blame offered to return the favor once ECC was up and running. "It's a pretty close-knit community with the Eugene comedy scene," says Geil.

"I've seen James around," Glass says, "and anytime anybody offers and actual show, it's way more fun than doing an open mic."

Glass started in 2012, "wrote a whole set, memorized the whole thing and then got up there and bombed, like so bad. It was so embarrassing," she says. But that didn't stop her and she loves doing comedy shows. "Just to have people hear you and pay attention... it makes a world of difference [from open mic]."

Thompson was always interested in comedy, he says, but never really got into it until, when he was going through a rough time mentally, a friend encouraged him to embrace the spotlight.

"I went to my little comedy club and did an open mic and a bunch of people came out to see me and it went really well, luckily," Thompson says, "and then the next mic went well and then eventually my friends



SOPHIA EDELBLUTE/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

From left: James Blame, Jen Jay, Terry Geil, James Manning III, Penny Glass. Front: Dash Thompson. Blame, owner of Eugene Comedy Crescendo, provides a platform to feature comics who want to become headliners.

stopped coming and that's when the real standup happened."

It became a little more difficult without all the support his friends lent him "but I fell in love," he says. "I fell in love with the feeling of doing that."

Now he joins any show he can. "I just do shows whenever James asks me. I just kind of hop on whenever I can," Thompson

says.

As the sun finally dips below the horizon and the night of comedy at the Village Green comes to a close, Blame thanks everyone for coming and the crowd disperses.

The comics come to-

gether to say farewell to one another and be paid for their time. They're soon out the door, eager for the next show.

"Once you do it and you get a few laughs, you're addicted," says Jay.

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