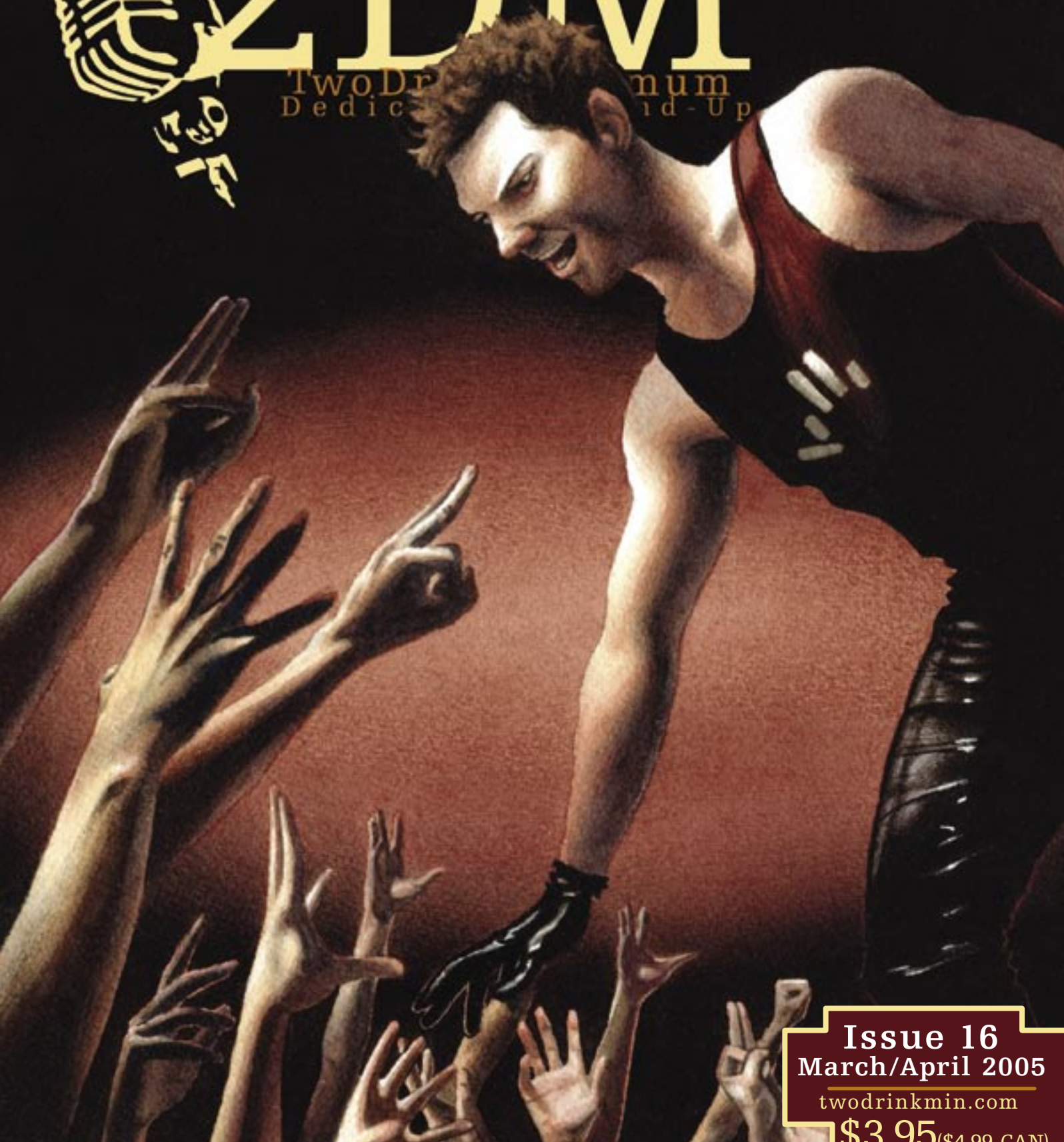




2DM

Two Drink Minimum
Dedicated Mid-Up



Issue 16
March/April 2005

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**Rockstars of Comedy \ NY Comedians Coalition
Remembering Johnny \ Masters of Merch**



Comedian Ryan Riess, 2DM Publicity Director Ryan McCormick and Colin Quinn



Editorial Director Julie Seabaugh and Colin Quinn



Rich Vos



Colin Quinn



The Lendgarry Joe Franklin



Rich Vos



2DM Columnist Jim Mendrinos



Leighann Lord



Host Mike Siscoe



Steve Hofstetter



Jamie Kahnis

On Jan. 26, *Two Drink Minimum* celebrated its print launch with a show at New York City's Laugh Lounge. The comedic marathon included sets from 2DM Columnist Jim Mendrinos, Steve Hofstetter, Leighann Lord and Colin Quinn, who spent his set skewering the likes of Greg Giraldo, Jim Norton, Patrice O'Neal and even fellow performer Rich Vos, who purchased a brand-new Prada shirt as well as a pair of jeans off of eBay especially for the occasion.

Photos by Allison Breen

C O N T E N T S



Spotlight on...

14. Rockstars of Comedy

Throw your Super Fingers in the air and wave 'em like you just don't care as *Two Drink Minimum* gets its mosh on with the current crop of rockin' comics.

22. Birth of a Salesman

Tenacity? Check. Talent? Perhaps. But a gimmicky t-shirt? No performer worth their custom message board should hit the road without one.

30. The New York Comedians Coalition

Money. Stage time. Comics. Owners. A-Listers. Barkers. Questions. Answers. The definitive exploration of the divisive issues at the historic undertaking's center.

Cover illustration by Edgar Sanchez



C O N T E N T S

4. Heckles

YAAAY!!! *Two Drink Minimum* has got mail!!! Devoted readers – not to mention a few apathetic ones – respond with feedback on our previous issues.



5. Parting Shots

For three decades, Johnny Carson took unknown comedians and turned them into stars. Though he's no longer "Heeere," he will never be forgotten.

6. Opening Lines

News on Jamie Foxx, Todd Lynn, George Carlin, Laurie Kilmartin, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, Gallagher, *Eating It*, *Chappelle's Show* and more.



11. Lineup

Here's what's coming up and going down in the world of comedy these next two months, all packaged in one easy-to-use, calendarial form!

12. Riffing with...

Former lawyer and chronic sitcom developer Greg Giraldo sends shout-outs to Colin Quinn, Geraldo Rivera and his homeboy Jesus.



34. Double Takes

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40. The Joel Sinclair Show

Two comics by Carlos Ruiz chronicle the life of Joel Sinclair, L.A.'s hottest sit-down standup.

42. Monologue

Columnist Jim Mendrinos remembers the sitcom greats, plus he gets all Dr. Phil on our asses to answer questions about relationships and realizing personal potentials.



44. Closer

Jim Carrey and Jamie Foxx are latecomers: Carol Burnett was one of the first to explore comedy vs. drama. An illustration by Paul Rubison.

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HECKLES

I picked up a copy of your magazine at the Cellar last night! Congratulations – it looks great! The article about the Arab Comedy Festival is great as well. Thanks so much for covering it; we are sincerely honored to be included in the magazine. We will update our press clippings on our comedy fest website to include it.

Best wishes for even more success.

Dean Obeidallah

I saw the magazine for the first time last night and I must say I was impressed; it really looks good.

Congrats.

Ben Bailey

I remember when you were just a little *Uproar*, and now you're a big *Two Drink Minimum* going to print.

Congrats and good luck.

Bobby Mitchell

My name is Matt Welch, amateur comedian. And when I say “amateur comedian,” dude, I ain’t lying. Last show I did, the only applause I got was when I left the stage. So yeah, I just wanted to say that I think your magazine, *Two Drink Minimum*, is a really good idea. I think it rocks that you want to help all up-and-coming comics!

Keep on rocking! Oh, and I was so glad to hear that my hero Richard Pryor was voted the best stand-up comic ever [Comedy Central’s 100 *Greatest Standups of All Time*]; he completely deserves it!!!

Matt Welch

England



I received my magazine yesterday. It is really glossy and pretty. Maybe that is not the correct word; how about “eye-catching?” I haven’t had time to really read it yet. Actually, it will probably be in my travel bag next week when we go to Mississippi for a [hot] rod run. That is when I do all my journal and magazine reading when I can’t keep up, which has been the *modus operandi* lately.

I love seeing your name at the top of the personnel column. I am very proud of you.

Who is this Rich Vos who uses the F-word three times in a two-sentence tirade? Do all these people talk like that? Are their brains so small they can’t be funny without those kinds of words? And that is my tirade for the day!

Anyway, congratulations on your launch. I hope you are a huge success.

Editorial Director Julie Seabaugh’s Aunt Jane

Two Drink Minimum welcomes feedback from our readers. Please send all comments to editor@twodrinkmin.com with the subject line “Heckles,” or write to: Julie Seabaugh, Editorial Director
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Include your name, e-mail address, city and state. Messages may be edited for clarity.

PARTING SHOT: JOHNNY CARSON



Illustration by Paul Rubison

The comedy world lost its patriarch when former *Tonight Show* host Johnny Carson passed away at his California home on Jan. 23 due to complications from emphysema. He was 79.

Carson, who retired in 1992, spent his last few years in relative seclusion, a stark contrast to the time he spent behind the *Tonight Show* desk as possibly the most-recognized man on television.

Much has been written about his humble start, roots in magic and pioneering efforts during the early days of television. There are also volumes on the common-man image that made everyone who sat on his couch comfortable. What must also be talked about is the fact that for three decades in television, the gold standard of success for a stand-up comic was doing well on Carson’s stage.

Carson was generous when it came to comedians. He could take an unknown such as Freddie Prinze, Steve Martin or David Letterman, and just by flashing an “Okay” sign or making a “Funny stuff” comment at the end of the set, he could – and did – anoint that performer into the fraternity of great comedians: Carson Comics.

What was ultimately revealed when Carson had a comic on was the joy he experienced when seeing someone who was funny. He didn’t engage in one-upmanship, although he had the ability and skill to do so if he wanted. Instead, he would set it up so a comic could knock it out of the park. The result was a career-making vehicle that has never been replicated on television. One good spot on Carson, and a star was born.

Carson’s cool delivery and pointed sense of humor were throwbacks to his idol, Jack Benny. He could get laughs with the simplest look on his very expressive face. He was and is the driving force in American comedy, and his contributions will reverberate for many years to come.

- Jim Mendrinos

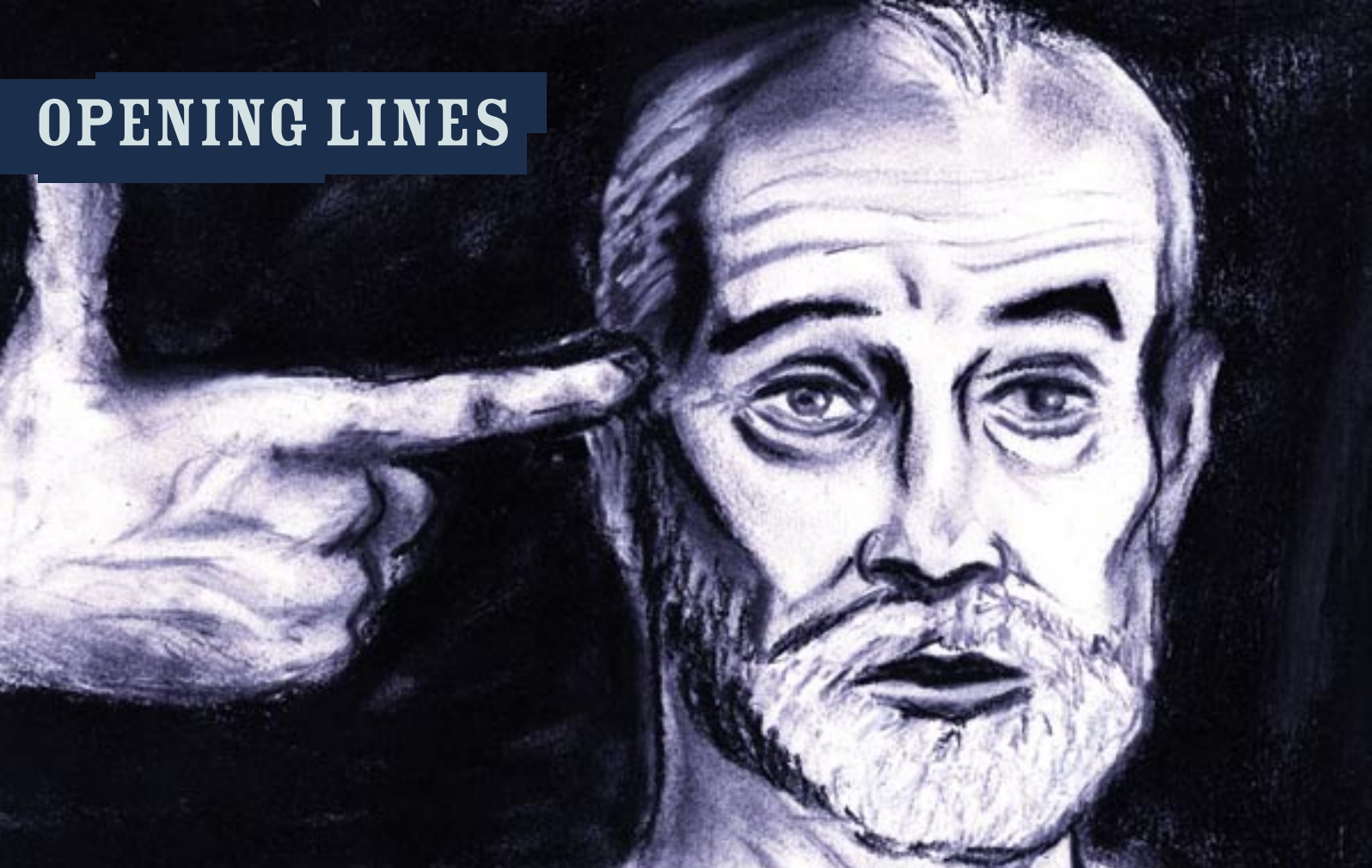


Illustration by Carlos Ruiz

GEORGE CARLIN: REHABILITATED MAN

George Carlin, 67, has been known to shock audiences with his blue material, but a Dec. 28 announcement that he was entering a rehabilitation facility due to an alcohol and drug problem failed to have a punchline. “I’m going into rehab because I use too much wine and Vicodin,” Carlin said in a statement. “No one told me I needed this; I recognized the problem and took the step myself.”

The news came only weeks after the legendary comedian abruptly ended a four-year run at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas. “The firing at MGM was completely unrelated,” says Carlin spokesperson Jeff Abraham. “Carlin was fired from there because, in his own words, he was ‘too dark.’”

According to an account in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, Carlin’s bit about “moronic Vegas tourists,” in which he said, “People who go to Las Vegas; you’ve got to question their [bleeping] intellect,” touched off a bitter exchange with members of the audience, including one woman who shouted, “Stop degrading us!”

No stranger to controversy, Carlin rose to stardom in 1973 with his infamous “Seven Dirty Words” monologue, which resulted in regulatory battles leading all the way to the Supreme Court. Most recently, his book *When Will Jesus Bring the Pork Chops?* was banned from Wal-Mart shelves.

Although he has acknowledged battling cocaine addiction in the 1980s, Carlin has never been treated in a professional facility. “I’ve never been in rehab before and I know it isn’t easy, but I’m highly motivated and will do whatever’s needed,” he said. “My levels of use are nowhere near the worst you hear about these days; I could easily have continued functioning at a good level ... for awhile. But my use would have progressed, I would have been in deeper trouble, and I didn’t want to tolerate that.”

- Don Sill

ON A (HONOR) ROLL:

Oscar favorite Jamie Foxx won his first Golden Globe, for Best Actor in a Musical or Comedy, for his portrayal of musical legend Ray Charles in the biopic *Ray*. He was also nominated for Best Supporting Actor for *Collateral* and Best Actor in a TV Movie or Miniseries for *Redemption*. Robin Williams received the Cecil B. DeMille Award for Outstanding Contribution to Entertainment at the same ceremony.

The cast of *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart’s bestseller, *America (the Book): A Citizen’s Guide to Democracy Inaction* was named Book of the Year by Publishers Weekly. The history “textbook” was also the best-selling new book of last year at Barnes & Noble stores. Additionally, the Comedy Central program will receive the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation’s 2005 Special Recognition Award. The GLAAD Media Awards ceremonies will be held March 28 in New York, April 30 in Los Angeles and June 11 in San Francisco. Comedy Central’s *The Graham Norton Effect*’s “Alan Cumming” is nominated for Outstanding Talk Show Episode.

The “people” have spoken and voted for their favorite stars at the 31st Annual People’s Choice Awards. Winners include Ellen DeGeneres for Favorite Funny Female Star and Favorite Daytime Talk-Show Host, Eddie Murphy (“Donkey” in *Shrek 2*) for Favorite Animated Movie Star and Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore for Favorite On-Screen Chemistry in *50 First Dates*.

Eating It, New York City’s renowned, free-form science experiment, recently moved to the midtown Zipper Theater after its previous venue, Luna Lounge, lost its longtime battle against developers. Among those on the bill for Feb. 28’s reopening-night performance are Todd Barry, Lewis Black, Demetri Martin, Greg Giraldo and *SNL*’s Fred Armisen. Produced by Naomi Steinberg and Jeff Singer, the monthly show recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Joe Recca became the second winner of BET’s *Coming to the Stage*, beating Lil Duvall and Cory Fernandez in the season finale. Duvall appeared to be the front-runner, but he may have ruffled judges including Kim Coles and Pryor collaborator Paul Mooney with the comment, “If Pryor is the King, I’m the future.”

Laurie Kilmartin won Outstanding Female Standup and Patrice O’Neal received Outstanding Male Standup at the 2005 Nightlife Awards, held Jan. 31 in New York City.

After a holiday-sales boost, the first three seasons of *Seinfeld* became the highest-selling TV series DVD of all time with four million units sold, beating out *Chappelle’s Show: Season One Uncensored*, which took the honors from *The Simpsons: The Complete First Season* last year.

Bernie Mac (*The Bernie Mac Show*) and the cast of *Everybody Loves Raymond* were honored for outstanding achievement in family entertainment at the Sixth Annual Family Television Awards, held Dec. 1 in Beverly Hills.



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COMEDY DEALS:

HBO has greenlit an untitled comedy pilot starring comedian Louis C.K. that centers on a middle-class couple with a kid. The Emmy-winning writer/director will write and executive produce the pilot. • D.L. Hughley is in talks with Comedy Central to host a late-night show. • Debi Gutierrez will star in a comedy series on Lifetime, which centers on her real-life experiences raising three children with her husband and ex-husband. • Eddie Izzard has signed on to star in a comedy pilot about an Irish family for FX.

Robin Williams will star and lend his voice to the CGI characters in the comedy *The Krazees*. • Cedric the Entertainer will join John Cleese in the voice cast of a remake of the animated *Charlotte's Web*. • Tim Allen and Wanda Sykes have signed on to star in the comedy *In the Pink*, which centers on door-to-door cosmetic sales. • Kevin Nealon will star in the Showtime comedy series *Weeds*. The series received a 10-episode commitment and is scheduled to premiere mid-2005.

Nick Swardson has sold the sports-comedy script *Bench Warmers*, starring Rob Schneider and David Spade, to Revolution Studios. Adam Sandler's Happy Madison company will produce. • ABC ordered four additional episodes of the Damon Wayans' sitcom, *My Wife and Kids*, bringing its current season's total to 26. The show is the third most-watched sitcom on ABC, averaging 8.62 million viewers.

New York's WBLS has tapped Paul Mooney to join its radio morning crew. The legendary comedian will share the mic with Ann Trip, Mark Jordan and SNL vet Ellen Cleghorne. • Craig Ferguson has replaced Craig Kilborn as host of CBS's *The Late Late Show*. The final four candidates for the late-night gig included comedians Michael Ian Black, Damien Fahey and D.L. Hughley.

Warner Books has inked a deal with Billy Crystal to publish *700 Sundays*, a book based on his hit Broadway play of the same name. • In addition to gearing up for a second season of *Rescue Me*, Denis Leary is penning *Kiss My Irish Ass* for Viking Penguin. Early Ass press promises rants on sports, pop culture, hypocrisy and growing up Catholic.

Carlos Mencia will star in an as-yet-untitled, half-hour series for Comedy Central. The show's first 10 episodes will debut sometime this summer.

LOSING THE CROWD:

New York's WQHT has indefinitely suspended its morning crew and comedian Todd Lynn over a parody song that made light of the tsunamis that killed over 283,000 people in South Asia. • Executives at E! Entertainment apologized to TV viewers after "D-List" comedian Kathy Griffin made an offensive comment about child star Dakota Fanning on the red carpet at the Golden Globes. She joked about the 10-year-old actress checking into a rehab center for drugs and alcohol. • Police are investigating a fondling allegation against Bill Cosby that accuses him of engaging in sexual misconduct with a woman at his Philadelphia home a year ago. • Watermelon smasher and alleged 100th Greatest Standup of All Time Gallagher lashed out on the comedy industry on Jan. 9. His targets included David Letterman, Jay Leno, Robin Williams, Jim Carrey and former comedians Tom Hanks and Michael Keaton.

ENCORE:

Comedy Central has postponed the third season premiere of *Chappelle's Show*. Originally scheduled for Feb. 16, the network pushed back the show to allow star Dave Chappelle time to recuperate from pneumonia. The DVD release of *Chappelle's Show: Season 2 Uncensored* was delayed from its original Feb. 8 date as well. Its new in-store date is May 24.

Al Franken and Janeane Garofalo's Air America extended its talk-radio reach to Washington, D.C., Detroit and Cincinnati on Jan. 20, bringing its total number of markets to 45.

Chris Rock and Jerry Seinfeld have already spearheaded a push for HBO to air old footage of live Rodney Dangerfield performances for a new generation of viewers. Now the pair's influence has encouraged the network to greenlight a documentary on the history of stand-up comedy, featuring material from such talents as Dangerfield, George Carlin, Roseanne, Steven Wright, Eddie Murphy, Robert Klein, Richard Pryor, Whoopi Goldberg and Robin Williams.

SILVER SCREEN STANDUPS: SPRING

Cedric the Entertainer assists Tommy Lee Jones in the comedy *Man of the House*. Mr. the Entertainer also co-stars in *Be Cool* with John Travolta, Uma Thurman, Harvey Keitel and Danny DeVito. • Drew Carey, Robin Williams, Jamie Kennedy, Conan O'Brien, D.L. Hughley and Harland Williams lend their voices to the animated movie *Robots*. • Kevin Pollack stars opposite Bruce Willis in the thriller *Hostage*. • John DiResta reprises his role in *Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous*, starring Sandra Bullock. • Bernie Mac stars opposite Ashton Kutcher in the romantic comedy *Guess Who*. • Martin Lawrence leaps back in *Rebound*. • Will Ferrell nebbishes it up in *Melinda and Melinda*, the latest directorial effort from Woody Allen. • Adele Givens and Lil JJ cut up in *Beauty Shop*. • Lenny Clarke heats up in the Farrelly Brothers comedy *Fever Pitch*, starring Drew Barrymore, Jimmy Fallon and the Boston Red Sox World Series Victory. • Jay Mohr joins Anthony Anderson in *King's Ransom*. • J. Anthony Brown and Bruce Bruce help save the world in XXX: *State of the Union*. • It's Remake Central, as recent American Cinematheque Tribute honoree Steve Martin pratfalls into Inspector Clouseau in *The Pink Panther*, while Adam Sandler and Chris Rock team up for *The Longest Yard*.

OPENING LINES

IT'S LIKE THE TELEPHONE GAME ... FOR DEGENERATES

Finally, a film for comedians by comedians. The premise: Take one joke, tell it 100 different times by 100 different comedians and voila, *The Aristocrats*.

Having premiered at January's Sundance Film Festival, the documentary's original 100-plus hours of film were shot over a four-year period by co-executive producers Penn Jillette (of Penn & Teller) and Paul Provenza, who also directed. It features such big names as Whoopi Goldberg, George Carlin, Drew Carey, Chris Rock, Phyllis Diller, the Smothers Brothers, Gilbert Gottfried and Adam Sandler, all of whom appear in the documentary for free.

Sounds innocuous enough at first, but remember, this is a film for comedians by comedians. A bit of scandal comes standard.

The centerpiece joke in question dates back to Vaudeville and is actually more of an anecdote about a family meeting with a showbiz agent, during which time the family members demonstrate their act. What follows is each individual comedian's attempt to paint the most vulgar, taboo-breaking picture imaginable. After the agent recovers, he asks the family the name of their act and they respond with the punchline: "The Aristocrats."

Even before *The Aristocrats* was picked up by distributor THINKFilm, producers were confident that word of mouth would help sell the movie. In fact, a *South Park* version of the joke, written by creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, has been widely circulated on the Internet and is, according to Jillette, tame compared to other version rendered on the documentary. - Emily Epstein



OPENING LINES



SLAVA'S SNOWSHOW
UNION SQUARE THEATRE, NYC
DEC. 16, 2004

Text and photos by Jim Mendrinos

Clowning and soccer have a very unique parallel. Throughout most of the world, soccer is the most popular sport. Here in America, it is an also-ran. Throughout most of the world, clowning is the standard-bearer for comedy entertainment; in America, not so much. In fact, clowns are little more than a Big-Top, floppy-shoe, 60-to-a-Volkswagen, red-nose, squirting-flower stereotype to most Americans. Even such popular American clowns as Buster Keaton, Red Skelton, Bill Irwin and Harpo Marx were popular *despite* their clowning, not because of it.

Slava's Snowshow is a classic clowning extravaganza, filled with the mimicry, mime and poignant comedy that are synonymous with international clowning. Its rotating cast delivers a mix of such classic tricks as the Leaning Table and Shadow Walker in addition to such new visions as a wondrous and other-worldly balloon sequence.

Highlights include a dramatic blizzard sequence, during which the audience itself enters the show by surviving massive wind, blinding light and a constant barrage of indoor snow. Then there is the classic Coat Rack piece, in which a simple wooden coat rack, an overcoat,

a hat and a performer enact an entire relationship filled with both exquisite joy and profound sorrow.

The two best moments, however, are the intermission and finale of the production. During intermission, the cast interacts with audience members, chasing children, snatching up women and walking on the heads and shoulders of orchestra-seated patrons. After the blizzard scene ends and bows are taken, the cast remains on stage, tossing those other-worldly balloons to audience members, who then bat them around with the actors and with each other. This is one of the most wonderful aspects of the show; no matter your age, at some point during its duration, you are 7 years old again.

Creator Slava Polunin is arguably the greatest clown of all time, and producers David J. Foster and Ross Mollison have had their hands in everything from *Stomp* to *Puppetry of the Penis*. The set is magnificently simple, and the music, lighting and costumes are consistently perfect. Not least of all, the intimate Off-Broadway location fosters covert laughter.

To witness the exquisite art form of clowning in all its glory, and to see what the rest of the world is laughing at, don't miss *Slava's Snowshow*. snowshowusa.com



LINEUP

March

4 Margaret Cho's Assassin Tour starts slaying 'em at the Hard Rock Orlando. Hey Margaret's publicists, look at how shiny and printy *Two Drink Minimum* is now! What are the chances you'll finally return our phone calls?

15 The escalator was patented today in 1892. The first model promptly broke down later that afternoon, but as Mitch Hedberg would say, "You would never see an 'Escalator Temporarily Out of Order' sign, just 'Escalator temporarily stairs. Sorry for the convenience.'"



17 Not only is it St. Patrick's Day, but it's also National Irish-American History Month. To Colin Quinn, Denis Leary, the good half of Steve Byrne, and all your other gobshites arsewaysing up our stages, *2DM* pisses up in your honor.

20 *The Comedy Central Roast of Jeff Foxworthy* debuts tonight. Whaddya wanna bet that a parking lot, a pickup bed, a lawn chair and a Coleman grill are somehow involved?

27 Yes, it's Easter. But far more importantly, it's the seventh anniversary of the day Viagra was approved by the USDA, thus paving the way for a joke or two on the effects of the Little Blue Pill that Could.

29 Larry the Cable Guy's *The Right to BARE Arms* CD is due out today. There's got to be a joke in here somewhere about the Cable Dude's *BARE Arms* providing too much Blue Collar, er, over-exposure...



3 Eddie Murphy: Comedian/actor. Born: Brooklyn, 1961. Career death: *The Adventures of Pluto Nash*, 2002.

Happy National Humor Month! Also, happy National Anxiety Month, National Alcohol-Awareness Month and National STD-Awareness Month! What, a correlation? Surely you jest!

1 Lewis Black's *Nothing's Sacred* hits bookstore shelves today. *2DM's* suggestion for a surefire marketing gimmick? Publisher Simon Spotlight Entertainment includes a free prescription for Norvasc with every audio-book version sold.

5 Hong Kong and Taiwan celebrate Ching Ming today by tidying up the graves of those whose time on this earth has passed. After paying your respects to Great Aunt Gertrude, don't forget to stop by the Michael Jackson Bits tombstone. It's right next to the Martha Stewart Monologue mausoleum.

13 Happy Blame Someone Else day. Or, as it's known in comedic circles, Happy Every Single Freaking Day of Your Life Day.

25 -May 1 Much to *2DM's* dismay, it's National TV Turn-Off Week. Seven whole days until the next *Celebrity Fit Club* fix? Well that's just cruel (though not nearly as cruel as VH1 airing footage of Ralphie May in a bathing suit).



29 -May 14 FunnyFest, a.k.a. "Calgary's Comedy Festival!," promises "16 nights of comedy with 100 performers at nine venues with over 10,000 punchlines and 25 comedy themes! It's Rare Comedy! It's Well-Done! Stand-up comedy so good, you better be sitting down!" Tickets available at funnyfest.com; exclamation points sold separately.

April

GREG GIRALDO

By Emily Epstein

Greg Giraldo is just your typical New York comedian. Raised in Queens by immigrant parents from Spain and Colombia, he graduated from Harvard Law School and went on to score his own sitcom after only three years in comedy. Now, nearly 10 years later, Giraldo is still busy. Not only was some of his routine recently set to music, becoming the No. 1 requested song on radio station 92.3 K-Rock for five weeks, but he's had multiple sitcom deals, and for a while there, he got paid to shoot the breeze with some of his closest friends on national television. Somewhere in the middle of all that, he managed to get married and have three sons.

Despite an early flight and a cold, Giraldo found the time to share some sarcasm. Between bouts of giving praise to Jesus, the comedian discussed how he got started, his worth compared to Bill Hicks and why comedians shouldn't have kids.

You were a practicing lawyer. What compelled you to give it up to become a comedian?

I barely remember making the decision to go to law school, but when I started comedy, it was like I'd been bitten by the bug. Then I realized what a "genius" I was, doing stand up at Gladys' [Comedy Room's] open mic, 37th in line. It seemed like a cool way to earn a living: standing in bars and making people laugh. This is sure more fun than getting up and waiting for the subway every day.

After working as a comedian for only three years, you were offered your own sitcom, *Common Law*. If you could do it all over again, is there anything you would have done differently?

I wish in some ways it didn't happen, because I wasn't ready. Then again, I don't think if only I'd been at the point I'm at now I would have been more ready, because it probably wouldn't have changed the outcome. That whole TV thing is a horseshit crapshoot anyway. Wow, that was a lot of animal references. You just have very little control over what happens in the long run.

The sitcom happened the same way it happens for everyone. It was your basic Montreal [Comedy Festival] seven-minute development deal, and I guess I had a compelling enough story that I could fool the people into

thinking there was something there. I had no idea what I was going to do when I graduated college, and I was like, "Fuck it, I'll go to law school and see what happens." The ironic thing is that the loans kicked in right when I got the sitcom check.

What have you learned about the network process?

I've had at least three network deals, and you take them knowing full well they may not pan out. The network process is to throw shit against the wall and see what sticks. They are clearly not developing as many pilots as they used to, and they will continue to look at standups because they are the funniest people. But even under the best of circumstances, comedy is the process of failing.

My first development deal, we shot the pilot and it went on the air and did nine episodes. Then the second development deal we only did a pilot, and two deals later I had an opportunity at NBC. We wrote the script and never even shot the pilot. Basically my career is regressing, and the next deal I bet I won't even get to write an outline.

New York's revered *Eating It* show is moving to the Zipper Theater. How will that change the show? What is your involvement with it?

I try to get involved with any show that's going to be moving up. I'm doing the first show that they're doing. I don't know how it's going to change. Moving from the Lower East Side may change the vibe, and I hope moving will help it, but people are weird.

Anybody in your family who passed down the funny bone? On what do you base your comedy?

I'm told I have an uncle in Spain who's the funniest guy in town, but nobody in my immediate family is hilarious. But I think most of my material comes thanks to Jesus.

I actually used to talk more about my father, but the problem with that autobiographical stuff is the older you get, and once you have kids, it feels like ancient history. It's hard not to sound like some "old daddy" comic. [The audience] won't accept certain types of comedy from people they think are taking care of children. Then again, there is something inherently wrong with comics having kids.

Which comedians did you admire when you started out?

I was never a huge stand-up fan before I started, but of course I liked the Pryors and Carlins. I was really into Monty Python and *Saturday Night Live*. For me, it's more people that became my contemporaries at

the time, like [Dave] Attell, Brian Regan and Colin Quinn. I was starting to do open mics, and the guys that were four or five years in were Kevin Brennan, Jon Stewart and Quinn. It was a pretty impressive generation of comics.

How did the song "Underwear Goes Inside Your Pants" come about?

It is actually the guys from the group Aqua, who did "Barbie Girl." I met them through some friends. I was told they were doing art projects and it would just be unrecognizable soundbites. I went to their hotel room, did some stuff that wasn't even really finished, and in the end, they released giant chunks of my material. They told me after they recorded it that they were going to do some Bill Hicks stuff, but I guess his material cost more than \$30 and a six-pack. I don't know why they chose me, but I'm sure Jesus had something to do with it.

Given what could have happened, I was relatively happy with it. It doesn't sound cheesy, but I kind of wish it had a different name. You never want to be part of something that people listen to over and over and want to crash their car into a telephone pole after hearing.

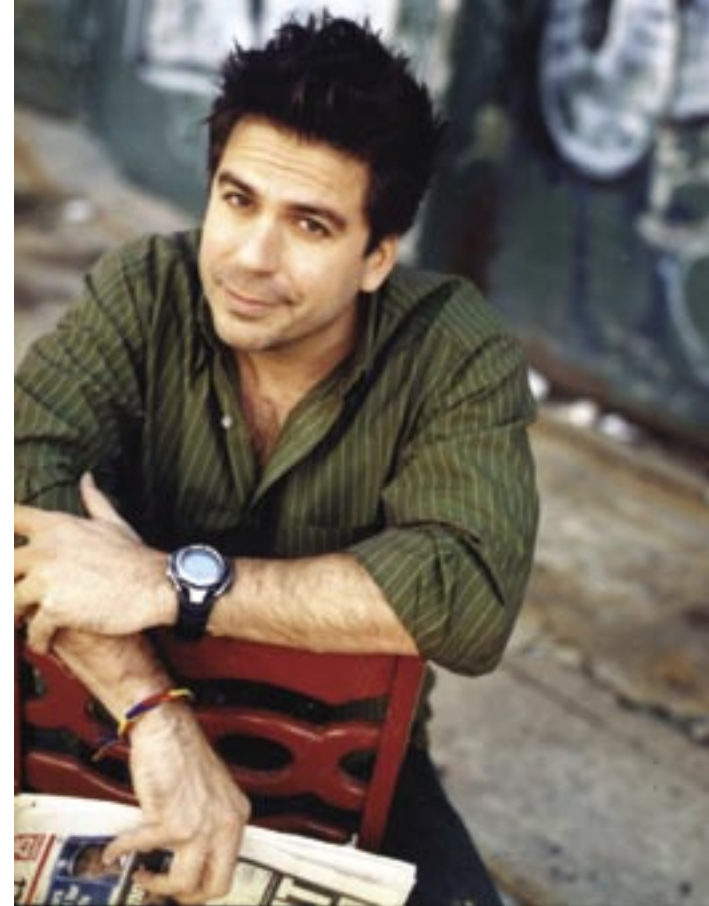
How was comedy changed as an industry since you started out?

It seems like now is the best possible time to do stand up, because the clubs are always filled. Comedy has a great reputation now. People in their early 20s don't remember comedy as a joke. In college, we would watch *Night at the Improv* to laugh at the hacky comics. I got a job working the door at Catch [a Rising Star] and people who would walk in for the irony would walk out blown away by how good the comedy actually was. I think if you're working as a comic now, the public doesn't come to the club expecting to heckle; they come there thinking it's going to be a pretty good show. Comedy has always been a tough gig. Even in those days, the Comedy Cellar never did four sold-out shows in a night like now; that's five times what it was during the boom in the 1980s.

You know, I got very lucky with that sitcom thing, but the first two years were an eternity. People always break my balls that [my success] was handed to me, but being a new comic sucks. You're just supposed to go into it knowing there are 50 people for every spot.

You had a regular spot on *Tough Crowd* with Colin Quinn. What was it like working with your friends?

It was the greatest thing that ever happened to my comedy. You're doing an open mic on national television with people that will destroy you for failing. You really have to think on your feet out there and be spontaneous. It builds a lot of confidence. And being around Colin in general is really inspirational. He has always been the Godfather of the Comedy Cellar.



You have different development deals in the works right now with Comedy Central. What are they?

There are two things in development. There's one about the entertainment business where the pilots have already been shot. David Spade sort of co-hosts and we have Rob Lowe and Randy Jackson, but we're working on that. Hugh Fink is the head writer on the show; he wrote for *SNL* and Drew Carey. It's like a counterpart to *The Daily Show*, but solely on the entertainment business. It was full steam ahead, and now they are holding it until the summer. The other is a deal to shoot pilots for a version of a show that would capture what worked on *Tough Crowd*, but that's no guarantee.

What is your favorite moment as a comedian?

I was just having this conversation with a newer comic. He was thrilled with some of the things he's accomplished in his career, and I was kind of jealous. There have been a lot of great moments on a lot of different levels. I can't boil it all down, but frankly it's getting the jokes to work. The great thing about this business is the best moments and the worst moments happen during the same set or at least in the same night.

Does it bother you when people mispronounce your name?

It doesn't bother me one way or the other, and people need to loosen up. It does bother me when people try to make a connection between me and Geraldo Rivera. **greggiraldo.com**



The Great Dane Rockstar of Comedy

By Brian Baumley

Photos by Seth Wenig

"I feel like Bon Jovi up here" Dane Cook yells to a sold-out theater packed with nearly 3000 screaming fans. From the sound of the place, you'd think that Metallica had crashed this upscale University of Connecticut venue to bring the ultimate rock show to a small college town. Instead, you look up and see only a comedian on stage with a microphone.

But this isn't just any comedian. This is Dane Cook, a stand-up comic with the uncanny ability to amplify a one-man performance to rock-show proportions. And tonight's spectacle, complete with the insane crowd response, will be repeated over the next couple of nights as the Dane Train makes its way up the East Coast, stopping for a few select performances before Cook embarks on the mother of all comedy tours: Tourgasm.

Cook has mastered the art of bringing comedy to unprecedented heights. In 2004, he was named *Rolling Stone's* Comic of the Year, headlined prestigious Carnegie Hall as part of the New York Comedy Festival and performed for a massive crowd of 50,000 people at the University of Florida's annual pep-rally-on-steroids, Gator Growl.

These achievements came courtesy of more than 14 years of grueling work on the stand-up circuit, a willingness to take risks, and most of all, an honest, "If it's funny, it's funny," approach to comedy. "When I was coming up in Boston, [comedian and long-time friend] Robert Kelly and I formed a tight group, and we would just constantly go for the laugh. Fart jokes, whatever; just get laughs," Cook says, lounging comfortably backstage in the University of Connecticut's cozy Jorgansen Theatre greenroom.

Cook's "anything goes" approach to comedy earned him his own *Comedy Central Presents* stand-up comedy special in 2000. "That half-hour special changed my life," he says, emphasizing each word. "After it aired, I felt an immediate swing in club performances and college performances. People really started noticing me."

The game plan going into the taping of the special was simple: Start a fire that's going to get people talking in order to get as much mileage out of the thing as possible. "I had this whole strategy in mind," he says. "I knew what I wanted to wear; what I wanted to do. I made this conscious decision to create something that would make people

take interest in me before the whole thing kind of faded away.

"Here's what's interesting. I didn't think I had a great show. Brian Regan and Judy Gold had already gone on that night, the audience was tired because it was getting late, and I was told that if I went past midnight, there would be a \$25,000 union fine, which happened. So there was this really weird energy in the room because I was a little pissed at the setup and it being so late. Everyone was mad about the fine and the people at Comedy Central didn't like the way I ended the show with that bit about giving the finger, so they wanted me to go back out and do a different ending, which I wouldn't do. It was just a really weird night."

With the cards stacked against him, Cook altered what he had planned to do on stage that evening: "The alien bit was something I came up with right there. I riffed that whole thing and it was honestly to wake up the fucking crowd. I started talking to the cameramen. I didn't have that planned out, it was just something I did because I was in a weird zone." When the night finally came to an end, Cook wasn't thrilled with his performance. "I went out and still gave it my all, but it felt like a 6 on a 1-to-10 scale," he says.

A growing legion of fans obviously disagreed, and Cook quickly began to attract a cult following of devoted Dane disciples. "When the special finally aired, it looked great because a lot more ended up coming out of it than the standard bullet-point set," he says. "I think people took notice because I made a decision not to be just another guy with a special on Comedy Central. I was willing to make an ass out of myself if it meant people would look at me for just a



15-year period, during which time he has personally witnessed his friend develop into the comedian he is today. “Dane is a phenomenon. He sees himself in certain places, certain ways and creates this aura about himself,” he says. “Everything Dane has is from him being funny and working hard. That’s why he has one of the most incredibly loyal fan bases I’ve ever seen.”

There is no place that this is more evident than at Cook’s college and university performances. Fans yell out bits they want him to perform and know some of his older material so well that Cook can stop mid-joke, point his microphone toward the crowd and listen as the entire audience completes whatever he is saying. Fans like these don’t grow on trees. They’re cultivated.

“I care about my fans,” Cook says, as if he were talking about his own family. “I’m not a comic that has a website with the static message that’s still there when you go back eight months later. I’m on my site every day interacting, adding the audio [and] creating new shit to keep feeding my fans with my comedy.”

“There’s a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff that Dane does that most comics don’t want to do,” says Kelly. “They don’t want to get on the Internet or instant message or create new stuff to enjoy. They don’t want to keep in touch with fans or do as many shows as he does. Dane has turned 100 fans into 1000 fans into 200,000 fans, and it keeps getting bigger. Then, aside from all that, he’s doing the movie thing, too.”

little bit longer.”

While no one is able to hone in on exactly what makes some people want to watch Cook more than other comedians, there are certain things that you notice right away. For one thing, Cook is extremely visual and naturally charismatic. Even during one-on-one conversation in a laid-back atmosphere, he leans forward, eyes popping to emphasize his words and hands flying in an effort to help you visualize whatever thought he’s conjured up at that particular moment.

And then there’s the way he speaks as if he’s become bored with using plain old English. Cook has quietly created his own language, or “Danegua” if you will, that adds yet another element to his comedy. For instance, when talking about somebody he wouldn’t hang out with, he says, “We would never go out and share a Bennigan’s Sampler.” He prefers to call a one-night stand an “Ons” and refers to masturbation as “investigating his crime scene.” Fans eat it up.

Despite all the speculation regarding exactly what makes Cook so mesmerizing on stage, Kelly nails it on the head. “He’s fucking Dane Cook; he’s psychotic,” he says, laughing in front of New York’s famous Comedy Cellar on a late Tuesday night. Kelly’s unique perspective on Cook has been crafted over a



Cook’s growing interest in the movie business is not a new one. He has self-produced and starred in his own independent films including *Spiral* and *8 Guys*, and he continues to shop around his script for the action flick *Thieves’ Fortune*. Then there are the much smaller roles he’s taken in such bigger Hollywood films as *Torque*, *Stuck On You* and *Mr. 3000*, where he played a biker, police officer and voice of a sausage-shaped mascot, respectively.

“I’m really interested in film because it differs so much from stand up,” Cook says. “You’re taking a director’s idea and character. And it’s not me; it’s not my point of view. It’s someone else’s.” He continues, “I’m taking these smaller roles to build up my confidence and get my feet wet.”

Cook is getting acclimated now so he’ll be ready when a big opportunity comes along, when “Someone finally pulls the trigger and says, ‘Dane, you’re gonna be the lead; this one’s all you.’ I’ve been on the set and know how things work. I’m definitely not wanting to run in there and act like I know what I’m doing just because I do stand up.”

What Cook seems especially excited about right now is his deal with Sony. In 2004, he created a television pilot with the company and pitched it to UPN. The aptly titled *Cooked* was, at first, well-received by the network. But then the entertainment industry went insane.

“Janet Jackson’s titty popped out, and all of a sudden people started getting nervous about what we were doing,” says Cook, still in disbelief. “They wanted to water it down to the point where it wasn’t the same show anymore. They added a love interest because they wanted to target females. I wanted to flip cashews off my cock and dress my pet monkey in armor. It didn’t work out.”

Despite the creative differences Cook had with UPN, Sony is still interested in keeping *Cooked* on the stove. “We’re re-shooting, re-casting and working with a great writer,” he says. “And this time we’re pitching non-standard networks like HBO.” Judging by the content of the revamped *Cooked*, that’s probably not a bad idea. The opening scene of the first episode features a contest between Cook and his buddy to see who can use the word “fuck” the most effectively.

Even with all of these ongoing projects vying for his attention, Cook’s main passion is still stand up. “I love comedy,” he enthuses. “Comedy will always be my tank that I blow shit up with. That’s all I want to do every



year, is just destroy shit with my comedy.”

It’s about 7 p.m. L.A. time and Cook is driving home from the latest editing session for his forthcoming CD/DVD, *Retaliation*. “The CD sounds great, man. I wish I could put it out right now,” he says over the phone. Due out in early summer on Comedy Central Records, *Retaliation* is Cook’s opportunity to show fans who haven’t been coming to his performances what he’s been up to since his first album, *Harmful If Swallowed*.

“I want to show people that only know me from my last CD that I’m four years better. I’m a different comic now,” he explains. “I’m calling it *Retaliation* because it’s like I’m fighting everybody and want to show people that I’m here to stay. All those naysayers who think *Harmful* was it are in for a rude awakening.”

Released in 2003, *Harmful If Swallowed* has become one of the best-selling stand-up comedy CD/DVDs in the country, as well as Comedy Central Records’ best-



selling release ever. “Harmful has done fantastic,” says Jack Vaughn, head of Comedy Central Records. “Dane went way out of the park with that album. It’s sold more than 200,000 copies, which is like double platinum for spoken-word albums.”

Vaughn attributes Cook’s success to his hard work and dedication to the art of comedy. “The success is amazing, and it’s a testament to what kind of comic he is,” he says. “He’s been able to sell those numbers with minimal television exposure, and it’s because he has a rabid, rabid fan base.” Because of *Harmful If Swallowed*’s success, Comedy Central Records plans to do a huge marketing push around *Retaliation*. “It’ll be the biggest thing we’ve ever done at the label, and everyone is behind it 100 percent,” promises Vaughn.

Cook will also have an opportunity to do a huge push for *Retaliation* when he takes fellow comics Kelly, relative newcomer Jay Davis and *Last Comic Standing*’s Gary Gulman on the road in April for Tourgasm. “We’re doing 20 shows in 30 days across the United States,” says Cook. “And we’re filming the whole thing to make a documentary that follows the entire experience.”

The Tourgasm documentary, which should be available by the end of 2005, is Cook’s answer to Jerry Seinfeld’s *Comedian*. “When I saw Jerry’s movie, I thought to myself, ‘This is great, but where are the comics on the road? Where are the stories? Where are the real hard times?’ I’m hoping I’ll be able to show that side of stand up,” he says. “Me, Gary, Robert and Jay are all at different points in our careers, and I’m going to show all these really unique perspectives.”

Kelly anticipates an unpredictable experience: “You’re playing for 2000-5000 people every night and the energy is insane, but no one ever gets to see what happens after the show. You put the four of us together on a bus for a month, and you get a bunch of egomaniac, inferiority complex, insecure, lonely, psychotic superstars. There’s gonna be fights, pranks and just a lot of hilarious and retarded shit.”

Though Cook has yet to embark on Tourgasm, he’s already thinking of ways to improve it for next year and beyond. “If this thing catches on, I want to make it even bigger for next year,” he says enthusiastically. “I’d love to turn Tourgasm into a traveling comedy show, kind of like what Lollapalooza does for music. I want to give comics everywhere an opportunity to be part of something that’s

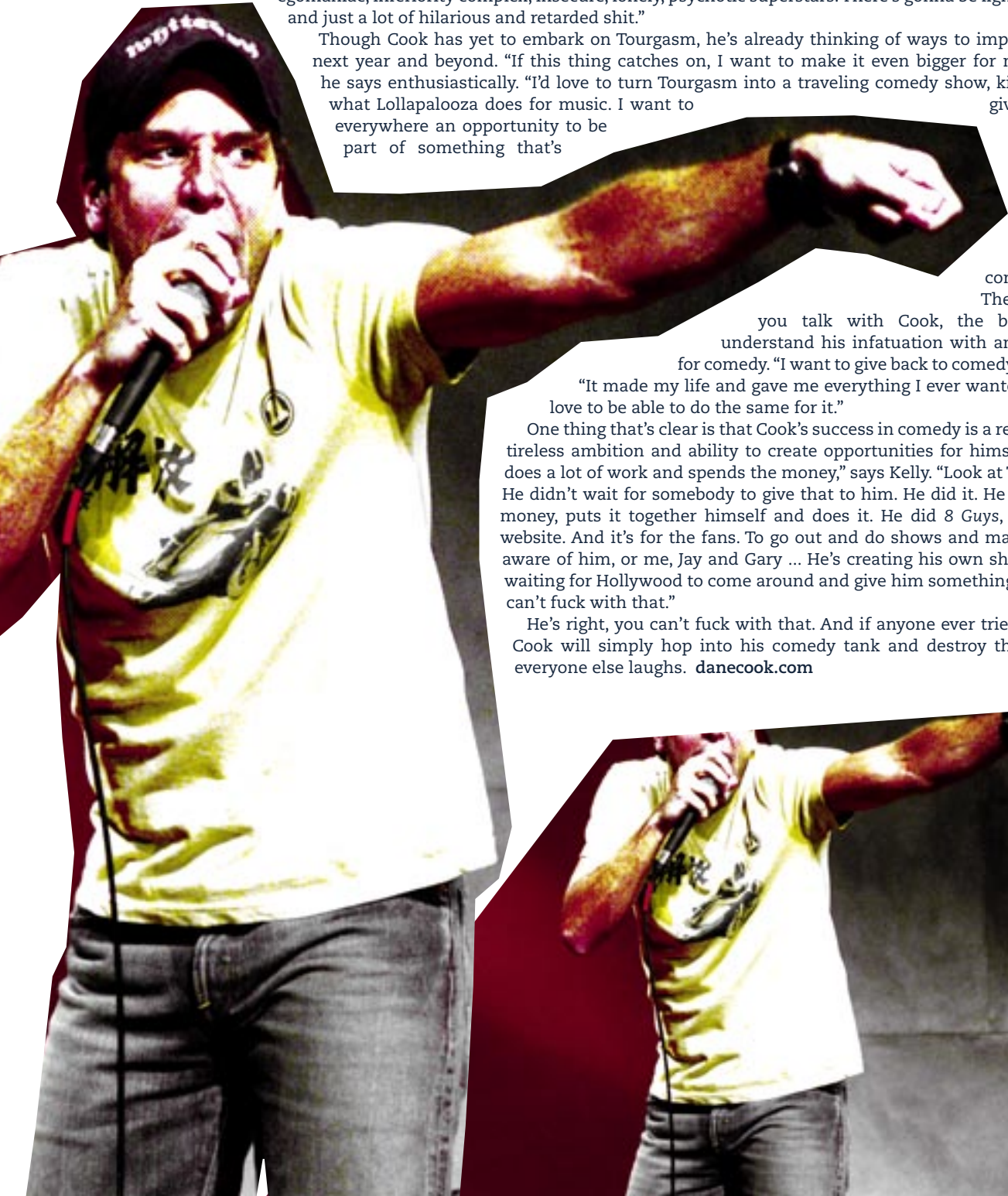
huge, lucrative and all in the name of comedy.”

The longer you talk with Cook, the better you understand his infatuation with and respect for comedy. “I want to give back to comedy,” he says.

“It made my life and gave me everything I ever wanted, and I’d love to be able to do the same for it.”

One thing that’s clear is that Cook’s success in comedy is a result of his tireless ambition and ability to create opportunities for himself. “Dane does a lot of work and spends the money,” says Kelly. “Look at Tourgasm. He didn’t wait for somebody to give that to him. He did it. He raises the money, puts it together himself and does it. He did 8 Guys, *Spiral*, his website. And it’s for the fans. To go out and do shows and make people aware of him, or me, Jay and Gary ... He’s creating his own shit and not waiting for Hollywood to come around and give him something. And you can’t fuck with that.”

He’s right, you can’t fuck with that. And if anyone ever tries to, Dane Cook will simply hop into his comedy tank and destroy them while everyone else laughs. danecook.com



Rockin'est Host

Incontinence is making a roaring comeback at any New York comedy venue featuring “The” Greg Wilson, a performer who ravages the stage like a Tasmanian devil and unites audiences into clusterfucks of laughter.

Wilson’s explosive energy and quick wit, not to mention the theatrically wavy hair, make him an on-stage natural, and differentiating him from your typical comedian is easier than Tara Reid after two drinks. There’s no set routine, no premeditated opening or closing joke and no chance an audience will hear Wilson recant the same verbatim observations twice. This gentleman insists that recipients of his oft-scatological puns have a unique, one-of-a-kind experience.

“I will take every opportunity to improvise,” says Wilson. “It’s much more electrifying for the audience because they’re aware that it’s a moment that exists only for them.”

In January, Wilson moved his *Standup Smackdown* show, in which six comedians pair off against each other and winners are chosen by the audience, from the downtown Laugh Lounge to the midtown Laugh Factory. Wilson begins each evening in a sleeveless tux and gets the crowd fired up like a roomful of kids with ADD. Each competitor then gets escorted to the “arena” by a ridiculously hot member of the opposite sex, where they eventually duke it out like Ali and Frazier. It’s a raucous environment that even Axl Rose could call home. – Ryan McCormick thegregwilson.com



Rockin'est Venue

It’s one of those well-lit places not quite familiar to the mainstream, yet one where hip, young, multi-cultural groups of friends flock to on a weekly basis. To them, New York City’s Village Ma is a comfort zone where they can grab a few beers and laugh. But the comedy world knows it as Sal’s Comedy Hole, a year-old venue where both stars and upcoming performers let it all hang out.

“We have eight shows a week,” says manager Sal Froio, whose own one-man *Sex, No Lies and Big Wheel* hour recently completed a three-month run and will soon be available on DVD. “On Thursday there’s a 10 p.m., 11:30 p.m. and 1 a.m. show. On Tuesday, we have a Laugh Off, where the audience picks the funniest comedian of the night. That individual gets \$100 and a weekend spot.”

Nightly shows also run Friday through Sunday, and with comfortable couches and such comedians as Sue Costello, Rick Shapiro and Mike Britt taking the stage, it’s not shocking that the average patron sticks around for two or three hours. A noted hangout for comics, Comedy Hole buzz is at all-time high, and in order to meet the growing demand of customers and comedians, Froio will be adding more shows in the months to come. – RM salscomedyhole.com



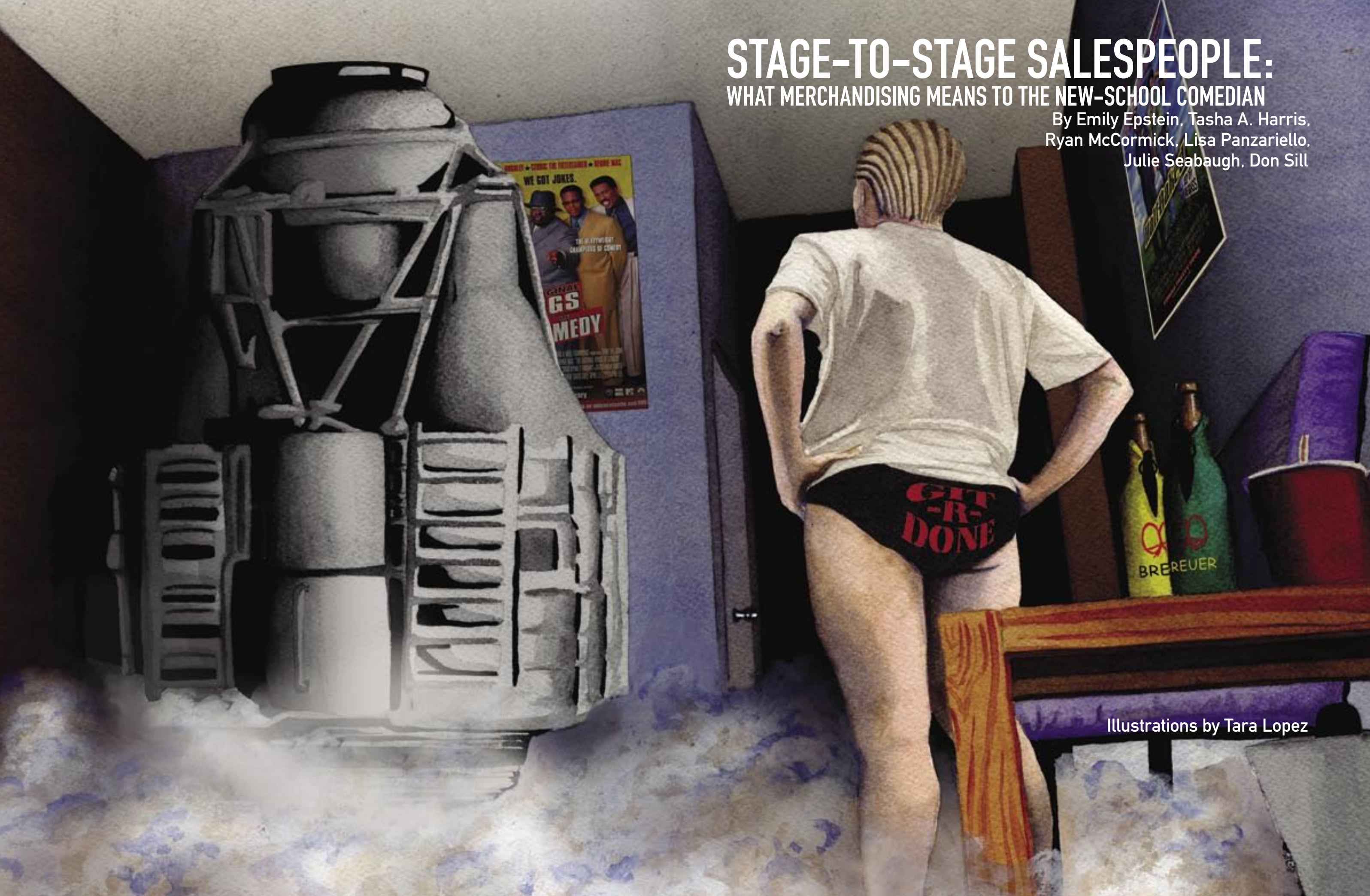
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STAGE-TO-STAGE SALESPEOPLE:

WHAT MERCHANDISING MEANS TO THE NEW-SCHOOL COMEDIAN

By Emily Epstein, Tasha A. Harris,
Ryan McCormick, Lisa Panzariello,
Julie Seabaugh, Don Sill



Illustrations by Tara Lopez

These days it takes more than snappy punchlines and witty premises to make it as a stand-up comedian. To cut costs, many do their own booking and manage their own money. And in addition to constructing a hilarious set, a professional funnyperson must now have his/her own website, CD and supporting line of merchandise just to survive. So forget the jokes; how much for the t-shirt?

Turning a profit by selling personalized merchandise is the latest addition to a comedian’s DIY program. In some instances, comedic entrepreneurs may even earn more money selling than performing. But merchandise sales can be rewarding beyond the dollar sign; merchandise ultimately helps the comic earn a fan following. “It starts a relationship with your fans, especially a CD, because they can share it with others,” says comedian Greg Behrendt. “It’s just the best way to get the word out.” And what comic doesn’t want to get the word out and become more successful? Forget running off stage and shunning the spotlight until the next show. Now comedians can often be found meeting patrons and doing a little wheeling and dealing before the night concludes.

“I do enjoy it,” says Behrendt, who estimates that selling merchandise has helped increase his fanbase tenfold. “I like meeting people after shows. If I’m lucky enough to have fans, I want to meet and thank them.”

“I think [greeting audience members] is great for building an audience,” comedian Jim Gaffigan says. “It’s also a nice way of saying thanks for coming to the show. Sometimes it’s awkward, but no more awkward than riding the subway in New York City.”

Says Paul Bond, who writes, records and produces comedic music CDs, “I love selling and signing my own CDs because it puts a personal touch to the whole transaction, and I love to get feedback from the audience.”

In it for fun, fans or money, comedians are selling everything: t-shirts, hats, DVDs, CDs, underwear,

bumper stickers, buttons and a lot more. “I’m thinking about having a coffee mug that reads, ‘Please Don’t Let Me Run Into Any Pre-Tards Today,’ with my mug on the mug,” Bond says. “I’d sell [them] on my website so I wouldn’t have to travel with them. It will also be a way of getting people to visit my website. You always have to think of ways to gain traffic.”

Yes, the mighty website. Most feature a biography, a few MP3 clips of jokes, an appearance schedule and, of course, the merchandise page.

“My wife set up my Café Press account,” Gaffigan says. “A guy sent me some images and I uploaded them. Boom! I had merch. Café Press makes/handles/ships my merch, and it is only available online. With Café Press I don’t have to worry about whether I have enough or too much of anything. Café Press makes most of the money, really. I make, on average, \$3 per product sold. All profits from manatee products are given to the Save the Manatee Foundation.

“Honestly, I’m surprised any of my merch ever sells,” the modest Gaffigan continues. “I really think the merch is bought by people who enjoy a joke of mine and buy it as a joke for a friend who might also like a joke of mine.”

Overall, what has evolved out of the need to make ends meet is a type of traveling salesperson, one who goes stage to stage doing a demonstration (the act) and selling products afterward. Although many comics might downplay the sale of merchandise as a formality, the fact is that comics have always been selling something: themselves. These days, there’s just an extra step. “Great show [equals] lots of CDs sold is usually how it works,” Behrendt says.

So that’s my time. You’ve been a great audience. Be sure to tip your waitress, check out my website, and don’t forget that you can buy my CD at the door. Good night! [DS]



While most stand-up comedy merchandise is pretty run-of-the-mill, some comics do tend to be more, ahem, *creative* than others. “I sold panties and they tanked,” says Greg Behrendt. “I sold punk rock pins and sold out.” Tankers or best sellers, here are some of the more creative comedic products out there.

Judah Friedlander: Spaceship

Why settle for CDs, t-shirts and coffee mugs when you can take home a fully-functional spacecraft designed by the comedian himself? Not only is it equipped with seating for nine and guaranteed to make its owner both cool and popular, but it is reasonably priced at \$10 million (including shipping).

Prefer artificial life to intergalactic travel? Advertised as “great for laying around the house,” yet “bad for cleaning up and other chores,” consider a Judah-Bot for your loved one. Think about it; you can have your very own World Champion at your beckoned call. In the mood for some stand up but can’t make it to the club? Need a drinking buddy, but all your friends are in AA? Want to satisfy your illicit sexual urges? Judah-Bot is there. Just beware, people often mistake a Judah-Bot for the real thing. [DS] [judahfriedlander.com](#)

Larry the Cable Guy: Ladies Thong Underwear

Blue Collar Comedy star Bill Engvall believes that “Those who want to wear a thong should have to go through an application process.” But if you are a fan of Engvall’s buddy, Larry the Cable Guy, you can skip the application process and visit Larry’s Flea Market to browse the sexiest ladies’ thong underwear South of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The “Git-R-Done” thongs come in America’s traditional colors: white, black, red and blue. Sizes range from “small” to “yur ass is 2 big.” Ladies can even match their lovely buttwear to Larry’s black Confederate t-shirt to keep the sparks flickering in the old double-wide trailer. The comedian’s thongs are reasonably priced at \$14.99 and are just about as fun as those “eating britches” at Victoria’s Secret. [TH] [larrythecableguy.com](#)

Jim Breuer: “Wet Suit” Beverage Holders

Is your beer naked? Tired of dressing up your old G.I. Joe dolls and need a new challenge? Jim Breuer now allows you to keep your bottle cold while adding an aquatic touch to its wardrobe with the beverage scuba suit, compete with a zipper and Breuer’s logo.

The merchandise seems a fitting example of Breuer’s own style of dressed-down, hard-living, rock ‘n’ roll comedy. With such heavy-metal favorites as “Party in the Stomach,” and his mantra of “You laugh hard; you rock harder,” a little something to keep the “Breu” cold during those long hours of partying is the perfect accessory. And what better place to use this merchandise than tailgating in the parking lot before Jim Breuer’s Heavy Metal Comedy Tour? [EE] [jimbreuer.com](#)

Steve Harvey: Table Classics Dominoes

You don’t have to star in Snoop Dogg’s music videos to slap bones in style.

Elegant, authentic and pimped-out with a splash of bling, these scratch-resistant Table Classics dominoes are made of T6 aluminum and engraved with Harvey’s signature. The dominoes are perfect for everyone, from the Über-player/playa who enjoys investing in 22-inch rims to the corncob-pipe smoker rarin’ to slap Harvey’s \$100 pieces on a wobbly three-legged endtable from Larry’s Flea Market.

These high-quality dominoes are available in five shades: platinum, jet black, ruby red, money green and sapphire blue, which is allegedly a sold-out favorite with the Crips. Harvey’s trademark matching suit and hat are sold separately. [TH] [steveharvey.com](#)



Vic Dunlop: Eyeballs

The late Rodney Dangerfield was known for his protruding eyeballs and even more protruding sense of humor. Similarly there is Vic Dunlop, of whom laugh.com says, “His talent and drive are as endless as his creativity.” “Creativity” is correct, because with a purchase of his CD, *Hot Buttered Eyeballs*, one receives a pair of complimentary eyeballs. It’s not as sick as it sounds; it’s actually something for both the kiddies and adults to enjoy.

The eyes in question are overly exaggerated with red-painted veins that create a “bloodshoot” illusion, plus a small hole where the wearer’s iris peeks through. If there are any curiosities about how they look on someone, the answer is the cover of *Hot Buttered Eyeballs*, where Dunlop is shown donning the free – and only slightly disturbing – gift. [LP] vicdunlop.com

Charlie Viracola: Hemp Necklaces

The famous Planet Charlie hempwear originated when Viracola’s girlfriend at the time gave him one as a present and suggested he sell them at shows. Fans caught on quickly, and now Viracola sells them as fast as she can make them.

“The people that dig me and the whole Planet Charlie thing dig hemp products because they’re cleaner and more environmentally friendly,” says Viracola.

Whether fans wear the necklaces because they support Viracola or just legalization, other items that defy social norms, such as the Planet Charlie passports Viracola gives away with other item purchases, are also available.

“I encourage people to use their passports when they get into trouble in everyday life, like when they get pulled over by the cops,” says Viracola. “They can say, ‘Well I’m a citizen of Planet Charlie, and that’s okay.’ To my knowledge no other comic has passports available.” [RM] planetcharlie.com

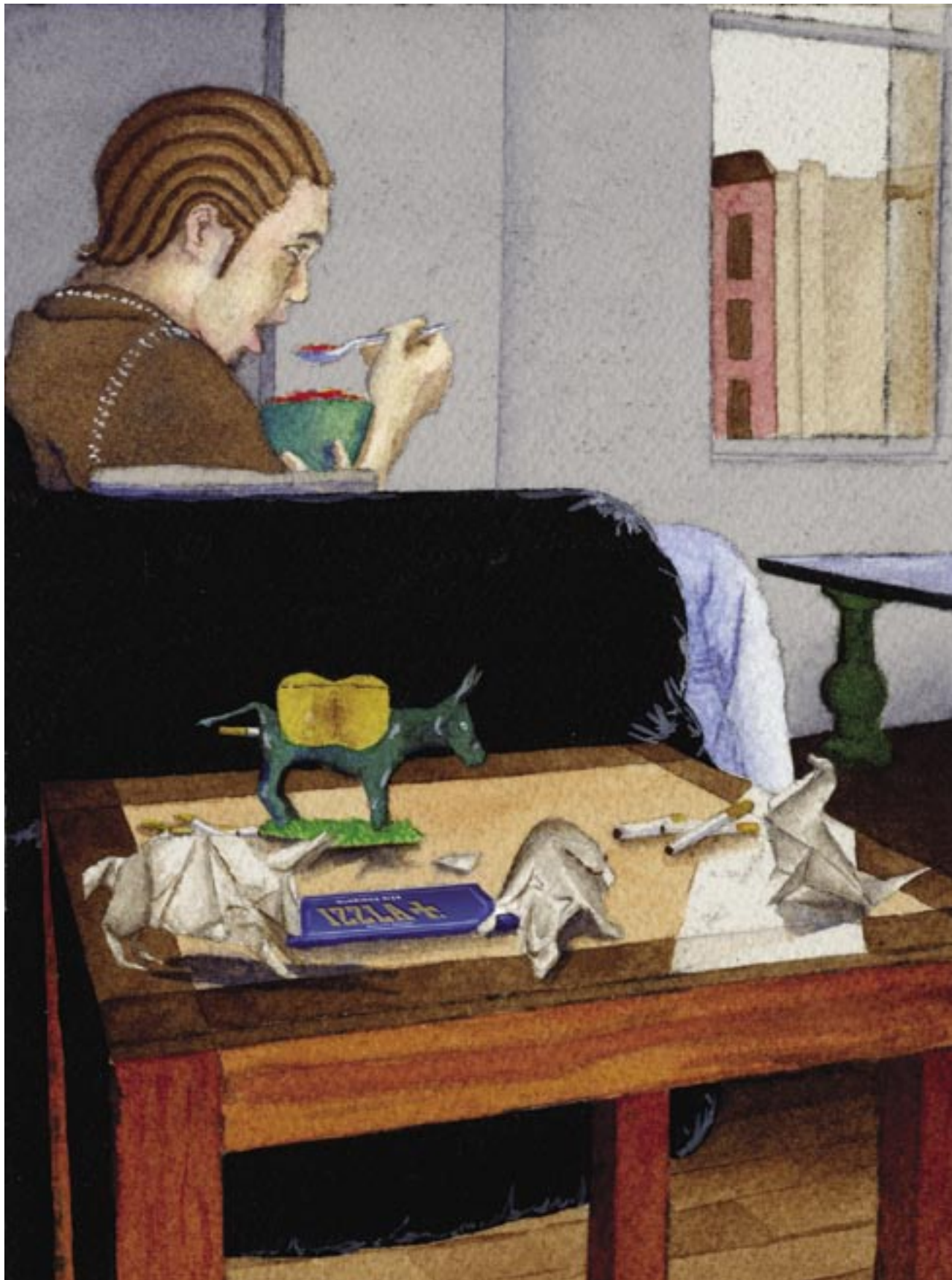


Mitch Hedberg: Cinnamon-Roll Incense

“I wish they would sell cinnamon-roll incense,” goes the Mitch Hedberg bit. “After all, I’d rather light a stick and have my roommate wake up with false hopes.”

So in addition to t-shirts, CDs and Christmas ornaments adorned with Hedberg’s long-haired likeness, you can get your very own cinnamon-roll incense. Indeed, it’s perfect for convincing any poor sap that you’ve been baking cinnamon rolls all day in your free time.

Sure, it’s a brilliant idea, but how much does it cost? As Hedberg might say, “This product that was on TV was available for four easy payments of \$19.95. I would like a product that was available for three easy payments and one complicated payment. We can’t tell you which payment it is, but one of these payments is going to be hard.” Don’t worry, this one’s only one easy payment of \$6. [EE] mitchhedberg.net



Ellen DeGeneres: Smoking Donkey

Ellen DeGeneres' daytime-talk show is fun for all ages. Toddlers dance in front of their television sets, and adults ranging from liberal to conservative can agree that her humor is clean yet honest. But never one for political-correctness, DeGeneres makes it known on-air that she is a smoker, and what better way to promote her habit than with this conversation piece?

The Smoking Donkey is seven-and-a-half inches long, five inches tall and could very well be mistaken for a child's toy. But this toy for adults holds 25 cigarettes in a storage pack; simply press the donkey's ears downward and – *voila!* – a cigarette shoots out of the ass (no pun intended). A fun way for teenagers to guiltily pass their parents' pilfered cigarettes back to them, the Smoking Donkey also comes packaged in gift sets alongside boxer shorts, mugs or Smoking Elephants. [LP] ellenshop.com

Eddie Izzard: Izzla Rolling Papers

Say goodbye to Cheech and Chong's Big Bamboos and hello to a navy-blue box of "Izzla Glorious Sized Rizzla Papers."

These "fine weight" rolling papers are making a welcome comeback after last being sold five years ago (According to Izzard's site, the final original pack sold for over 15 pounds on eBay.). Izzard is selling them again due to high demand, and every \$9 purchase includes a free Christmas card featuring a picture of Mr. *Glorious* himself, dripping in seasonal red, complete with a caption reading "Merry Chrizzmas."

Though the holidays are now over, there is no harm in displaying the card over the mantle for the rest of 2005, and while enjoying the vibrant scenery, enjoying a homemade "cigarette" as well. Or if you're not down with the doobage, then why not keep it as an heirloom of sorts, to "pass on" from one comedic generation to another. [LP] eddieizzard.com

T-Shirt Sloganry Done Right

- Jim Norton:** I Slept with Jim Norton and All I Got was This Lousy Virus
- Margaret Cho:** Assmaster
- George Carlin:** Simon Says ... Go Fuck Yourself
- John Witherspoon:** Hoes Gotta Eat Too
- Ron White:** I had the right to remain silent, I just didn't have the ability!
- Stephen Lynch:** Made Me Special Too [preceded by a picture of a brick]
- Richard Pryor:** Fuck You, Motherfucker

Phyllis Diller: Chili

Comedian, actress, author, painter, piano soloist and philanthropist Phyllis Diller may very well have led the charge of the Weird Merch Brigade around the time she first developed her line of La Vie beauty products as well as Phyllis Diller Creations jewelry. Neither endeavor, however, was quite as experimental as her patented brand of chili, Phyllis Diller's Original Recipe.

Though her concoction has long disappeared from store shelves, its memory lives on. As Diller told *Tastes Like Chicken* magazine in 2002, "It ain't Coke! You can drink 10 Cokes a day, and that's the way to make money; making something people use a lot of. I'll give you a perfect example: The guy that was handling the chili for me was also handling dog food for Dick Van Patten. The dog food is still going and making money! You have two dogs that eat four cans of that a day, and here I am with my one can of chili." [JS]

STAND-UP REVOLUTION THIS ISN'T "NORMA RAE" WITH DICK JOKES

by Michael Balla and Julie Seabaugh

With the war raging on in Iraq and Social Security on the brink of extinction, now is a time of great change, conflict and uncertainty in the world. So why should the fate of the world's most uncensored commentators, stand-up comedians, be any different?

The winds of change have recently blown in the face of the New York comedy scene as comics have united to form the New York Comedians Coalition. Created this past December by founders Russ Meneve and Ted Alexandro, the organization is 300-plus members strong, all of which have banded together to address long-overdue issues. At the top of the agenda? You guessed it: higher pay.

The comedian bargaining collective is not a new concept, dating as far back as the late teens. "Starting in the Vaudville days, they formed what eventually became AGVA, the American Guild of Variety Artists," says Jim Mendrinos. "Then in the late '70s they tried to unionize out in L.A. simply to get the Comedy Store to pay something, anything, during the weeknight and weekend spots. The most successful attempt was in 1983, when the Professional Comedians Association formed in New York City. For about a four-year period they managed to raise pricing in some of the rooms and get us a collective health-care system." AGVA has since evolved to service such performers as clowns and jugglers, while the PCA eventually became too bottom-heavy as newer talents joined and organized but bigger-name comedians grew disinterested as they moved on to headlining and sitcom work.

Additional forces were at work back in the PCA days of the early '80s, when New York comedians were getting paid \$35 per weekend spot. Around that time, a young comedian from Boston named Eddie Brill was looking for a place where friends and fellow comedians such as Mario Cantone and Susie Essman could perform without having to deal with the strong cliques that seemed to dominate the scene at that time. Brill eventually opened a club called the Paper Moon. "It was a lousy comedy club with a few seats, and I could afford to pay these people more," he recounts. "In 1985 when I started getting on my feet, I upped the pay to \$50 a set, so all the comics were excited to come work for me."

This was a decent boost for comedians at the time, but it also landed Brill in hot water with some of the clubs. "There was a time when I ran my comedy club where I was treated very poorly because I raised my fees to \$50," Brill says. "The Improv screwed me over so badly. They made me go through hoops to try to audition, and when I finally did, I was treated really, really poorly. I'll never forget it for the rest of my life." Familiar with the risks involved, Brill remains positive about

the current push for change: "Now Russ Meneve and Ted Alexandro have put their necks on the line, and I want to be supportive of them."

Which brings us back to 2005, where the cost of living has increased dramatically. Road work and corporate gigs aside, comedians say they are receiving the same pay per average 20-minute set that they did decades ago. "It's 20 years this has gone on for," says Meneve. "We're not going to cure it in a day."

Why has it taken so long for comics to step forward and demand their fair share? "When [you're] getting up, you're used to working for free, and any stage time you get, you're just grateful for it," says Alexandro. "And as that progresses to paid spots, that's just gravy." Unfortunately, this leaves comics at the mercy of club owners in deciding their pay. "That's what the clubs have counted on," Alexandro explains. "Our desperation for stage time and the fact that all of us, more or

less, are replaceable."

Not so, says Al Martin, owner of the New York Improv, New York Comedy Club and partial owner of the Boston Comedy Club. "The Coalition says that since 1985 there haven't been any pay increases. My club personally has been giving increases since 1991 to the present. We've gone from \$30 a set to the current \$60 a set over that period of time. Our last increase was two years ago, when all the clubs raised it from \$50 to \$60."

Alexandro did petition clubs for a pay raise in 2002. "That was less organized," he says. "It was more just an informal letter that I wrote and got 85 comics to sign. We got a \$10 raise; at Gotham [Comedy Club] it was a \$15 raise. This time around Russ initiated things and contacted me, and we just explored what the sentiment was amongst comics. There was a lot of frustration, and it kind of progressed from there. It took on a life of its own."

On Nov. 30, more than 150 comedians first came together at the Writers Guild of America offices in New York City. There was talk of becoming Associate Writers Guild members in an effort to better organize, and there were arguments about letting the Actors Equity Association represent them. There was a lot of shouting, but there was

"AS A COMMUNITY,
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"THIS IS A VERY
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one overall consensus: It was time for comedians to develop one voice and do whatever was necessary to see the current balance of power shift.

Even more were back to share chairs, sit cross-legged in the aisles and spill out of the two doorways of the AFTRA offices as Alexandro and Meneve brought the second meeting to a state of relative order on Dec. 7. The goals this time around: decide on standard weeknight, weekend, emcee, holiday and New Year's Eve pay rates to be officially requested via overnight letter to all the clubs the next day and collect signatures, home addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of comedians who would officially form the New York Comedians Coalition.

"In processing all of the feedback and information we've received over the past couple of days, we feel organizing as an independent association amongst ourselves, along with legal representation, is out best option for success," Alexandro and Meneve had said in a Dec. 3 e-mail. "Furthermore, it is something the vast majority feels is acceptable, in contrast to unionizing, where it appears the vast majority is in dissension."

On Dec. 22, the first official press release went out, and *The New York Times* ran with the story, which was picked up by the Reuters news service. By that time, Gotham and the Comedy Cellar had both agreed to raise weekend rates to \$75 per spot, with the former promising to meet with the Coalition after the New Year to continue additional talks.

"It's very difficult to run a business here in New York," says Gotham owner Chris Mazzilli. "I could get the same space I have here in Long Island for about a third of the price. Insurance is more expensive. Even to pay your staff is more expensive here in New York City, and if you look at showcase clubs in Los Angeles, which pay about \$25 bucks in a weekend, we're still significantly higher than them. That being said, I understand the comedians' point, and I want them to be happy when they work here."

There were, however, also a handful of club owners being labeled "egregious offenders" by Coalition co-chair Buddy Bolton for canceling numerous scheduled meetings and refusing to discuss compromises with the Coalition. According to Alexandro, Martin blamed poor business at his clubs on the inclement weather and offered to "maybe renegotiate after the snow

season." Stand-Up NY and Dangerfield's representatives allegedly cited similar reasons for not agreeing to a pay raise, which left the Coalition at a crossroads.

"I was the first club owner to actually meet with them," counters Martin. "I called up Ted Alexandro and I said, 'I'm hearing about this; I'd like to discuss it with you.'"

"My position has been that the Improv and the NYCC and the Boston Comedy Club have been competitive in what we have paid these comedians. The proof of this is that these comedians are working in my clubs currently. I spoke to Ted Alexandro the other day and I said very clearly that we have no problem continuing to be competitive. So if you tell me that the clubs are paying, we will be competitive with that.

"What I took issue with is that they wanted to tell me how many comics I should have on a show and what I should pay my emcee spots. What I have traditionally done almost from the very beginning is to use the emcee spots and some less-time guest spots, and I've given them to the younger, newer comedians that have developed at my clubs, people who want an opportunity to get on a stage. And my argument is if I was to go along with the Coalition's request of paying every comic the same amount of money, I would no longer be able to employ these kinds of comedians on the show. I'm faced with a choice of paying someone \$75 who's just started out in the business or paying someone who's got national credits and been in the business 20 years. Obviously I'm going to spend my money on that headlining comic. So the ones who will get squeezed out in the end will be the comics who are just starting to emerge on the scene."

On Jan. 25, a committee of 20 Coalition members and four professional AFTRA negotiators met at the Friars' Club with the majority of club owners. "It quickly got heated," says Laugh Lounge NYC owner Delilah Ramos, whose downtown venue is the newest club kid on the block. "It is a positive thing that we're all acknowledging that comics need to be compensated more fairly, but the big question is, 'How are they arriving at these numbers?' It should be an issue of parity, because, for example, clubs like the Comedy Cellar own the building and their profit of revenue is their restaurant [The Olive Tree Café], as opposed to somewhere like Gotham or me, where the sale of drinks has to subsidize the talent and everything else.

"All the comedy clubs have different identities and are in different positions. And what impact will it have on

stage time? If you tell all the clubs they have to spend more money on shows, the instinct is to book less comics. I think this is a very divisive and complex issue."

The main objective of the Coalition's Feb. 1 meeting was to vote to authorize board members to deliver an ultimatum to Martin. Of course they weren't actually using the dreaded S-word because the Coalition is technically not a Union, and of course such a "work-stoppage action" was only a last resort, one that would only be implemented after more phone calls from AFTRA negotiators, a media campaign and sought striking permits from relevant police precincts. A sickout/ "No avails" movement was also to be implemented immediately. As Bolton pointed out, "We want to do everything possible to avoid a protest."

But if negotiation talks could not come together quickly, the Improv S-word was to commence on Feb. 11, giant inflatable rat and all. If there was still no reaction, demonstrations would spread to other allegedly uncooperative clubs Dangerfield's, Stand-Up NY, and Martin's New York Comedy Club.

"We're demonstrating that we're professionals, we're in it for the long haul, we're not hot-headed, and we're respectful for the profession, the clubs and one another," Alexandro says. "But we're also steadfast in our pursuit of a fairer wage. Being professional and being amicable does not mean that we're going to back down."

"The point we're trying to get across here is that any of the public that wants to go see comedy should visit the New York Comedians Coalition website," says Meneve. "Posted on there are the clubs that are respecting comics and supporting them and paying them. And they will have the A-List talent at those clubs."

Also at the Feb. 1 meeting, there were talks of setting up a work-stoppage fund to help offset lower-level comedians' possible loss of income and promoting alternative-venue, Coalition-approved shows, as well as a unilateral recognition that since all clubs could not afford to pay the same rates across the board, each club's case would be evaluated individually from now on. A *CBS Market Watch* cameraman then showed up in time to witness the final 15 minutes of the two-hour meeting erupt in shouted arguments and one tearful walkout. But at the end of the meeting, those gathered almost unanimously authorized

a protest.

The vote worked.

Dangerfield's came forward and was subsequently removed from the "Bad List" on Feb. 4, and after a Q&A gathering was held at Parkside Lounge the evening of Feb. 8 to address the concerns of unsure and conflicted newer comics, a final meeting was held at AFTRA's Madison Avenue offices on Feb. 10.

Though a good chunk of the city's A-Listers were halfway across the country at the U.S. Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen, the seats were still full. And those in

the seats produced round after round of applause, since all remaining club owners had subsequently taken part in positive, "good faith" talks as of Feb. 8. They hadn't necessarily agreed to the rates originally requested of them, but they had been willing to compromise.

"This is the culmination of a lot of work, a lot of discussion," said Alexandro. "This is an exciting day. We successfully avoided any kind of protest action. It's a day to rejoice in our collective strength."

After producing a number of pay-raise-

data transparencies, the contents of which the Coalition board requested not to be made available to the public, future goals were outlined, including the setting of periodic meetings, incrementally increasing pay rates further over time, forming a larger official board, determining how local "alternative" clubs and comics would be affected, cleaning up the barker/bringer circuit, addressing concerns about health care and assigning more value to emcee spots.

With the aid of AFTRA negotiators and clear communication, a large goal has been accomplished. Though a new chapter in the history of comedy is being written, it's too early to know exactly what will happen next. And that's fine. "For the next couple of months, let's bask in a victory," says Alexandro. "It's okay to have some disappointment; we all feel that way. But as a community, we have a lot to celebrate."

For updates, visit the New York Comedians Coalition website at nycomedianscoalition.com.

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"IT'S 20 YEARS THIS HAS
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RODNEY DANGERFIELD NO RESPECT.

"I'm okay now, but last week I was in rough shape," said the late, great Rodney Dangerfield, who with a fidget and a yank on his trademark red tie continued, "My wife phoned me the other day and said, 'Come on over; there's nobody home.' I went over. Nobody was home."

There's no doubt that Dangerfield's one-liners are still as funny today as they were 20 years ago, and that the man who claimed to get no respect made a generation laugh and inspired others to do the same.

Dangerfield's *No Respect: The Ultimate Collection* is a three-DVD set featuring more than eight hours of his work, including two HBO and three ABC specials, a few Miller Lite commercials, a classic "This Is Your Life" segment and much more. Composed of Dangerfield poking fun at his own failings, constant lack of respect, hapless relationships and bittersweet life experiences, it gathers some of his funniest work.

"I get no respect," Dangerfield says. "One day as I came home early from work, I saw a guy jogging naked. I said to the guy, 'Hey buddy, why are you doing that?' He said, 'Because you came home early.'"

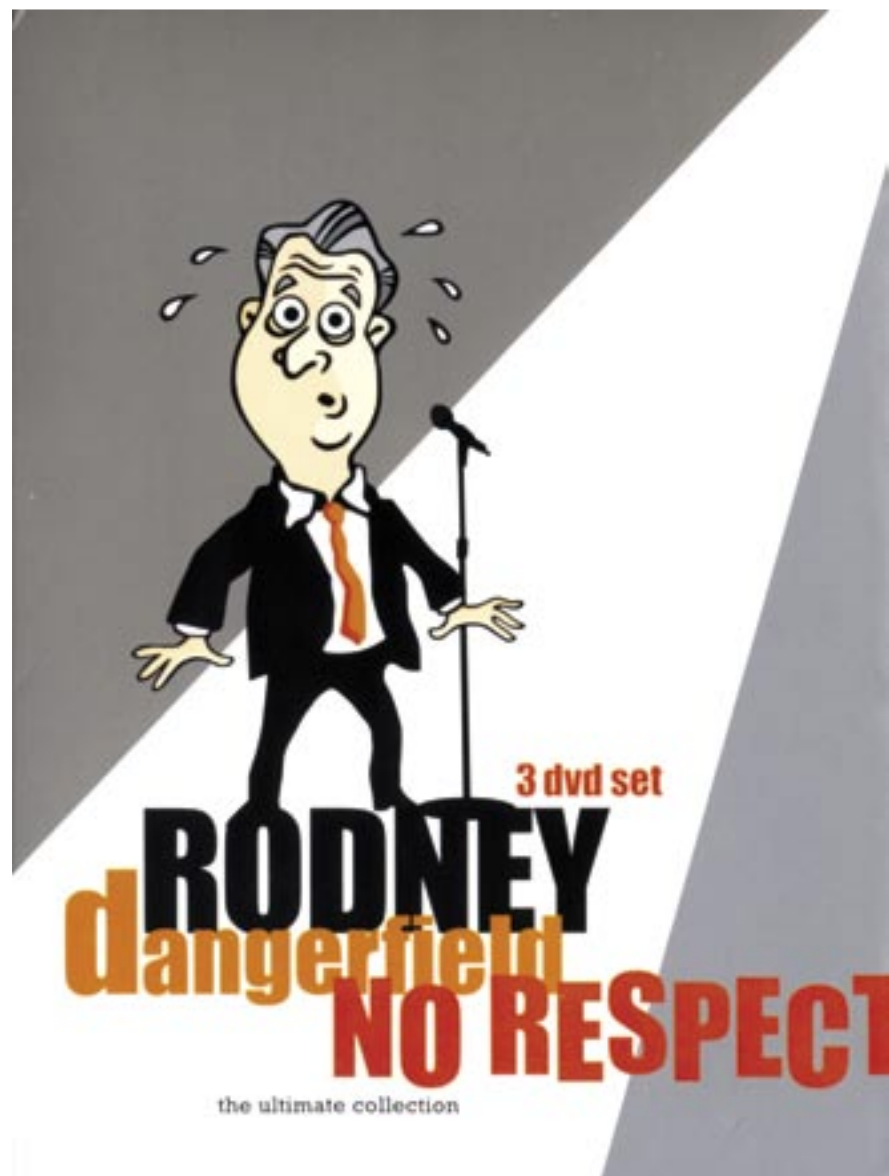
Also featured in this collection (and released for the first time) is a segment called "Rodney's Act," recorded live at Bally's in 1988. Irreverent and

uncensored, it shows the aged Dangerfield in all his glory, rocking the Las Vegas stage with a barrage of classic one-liners and a few curveballs. "I'm at the age where food has taken the place of sex in my life," he harrumphs. "In fact, I've just had a mirror put over my kitchen table ... I'm old, I tell ya. I'm taking Viagra and drinking prune juice. I don't know if I'm coming or going."

Dangerfield was at his very

best in front of a live audience, and "Rodney's Act" demonstrates this perfectly as he goes virtually nonstop for 50 minutes. "It was like a need. I had to work. I had to tell jokes," attests a quote from Dangerfield on the DVD case. "It was like a fix. I had the habit."

His habit was surely as addictive as this collection, a must-have for Dangerfield enthusiasts and a fantastic send-off for the late comedic legend. - Don Sill



ANT FOLLOW MY ASS/CD

That's right, fellas. Ant is out, about and wants you right behind him.

Follow My Ass features the flamboyant and irreverent actor/stand-up comic discussing the topics that made him famous: homophobia, gay bashing and gay marriage. And don't forget the *very* Carlin-esque bit on how gays invented boxing: "Think about it. It's two topless men in silk shorts fighting over a belt and a purse."

Ant is so gay that his family roots literally spring from the Greek city of Lesbos (pronounced Lesbos), and he can even put a lisp in the word *cracker*. His stand up has made him a hero in the gay community and brought him mainstream success, including a two-season run on *Last Comic*



Standing.

"I just had an audition, and I didn't get the part because they said I wasn't gay enough," Ant says. "It's too bad 'cause it was for a new show on Bravo called *Leave It; It's Beaver*."

Overall, there are no surprises on this CD. If you watched Ant on *LCS*, you've probably heard all the bits before. But by talking openly about his lifestyle, Ant makes people laugh and proves that regardless of sexual preference, we're not that different after all. - Don Sill



BEN BAILEY BEN BAILEY BLVD./CD

Ben Bailey steps onto the stage of Hartford, CT's City Steam Brewery to record his new CD and is met by a drunken heckler who yells out the innocuous warning: "Watch your head!" Bailey deftly turns the comment into a riff at the heckler's expense, keenly inserting humor into the situation and allowing the audience to serve as a key component in the joke's development.

Bailey has always shown an adept talent for observational humor, possessing the ability to turn the most mundane activity into an amusing commentary on the absurdities of life. On the subject of a botched job application: "They give you that application, and you accidentally put your name in the wrong box. You already didn't get the job ...

'So your name is Ben Bailey?'

'Yes.' 'And you live at 365 Ben Bailey Blvd.?' 'Yes sir, I do. Lived there my whole life. But don't try to send me mail there. I've put my mailing address in the comments box.'"

His delivery, timing and unique inflection have proven to leave any crowd in hysterics. Whether a comedy aficionado or a person who simply appreciates a hearty laugh

courtesy of a tall drink of water who has mastered the art of the eyebrow arch, this CD is a must-have. - Mike Cotayo

ARJ BARKER, DOUG BENSON, TONY CAMIN
THE MARIJUANA-LOGUES / CD

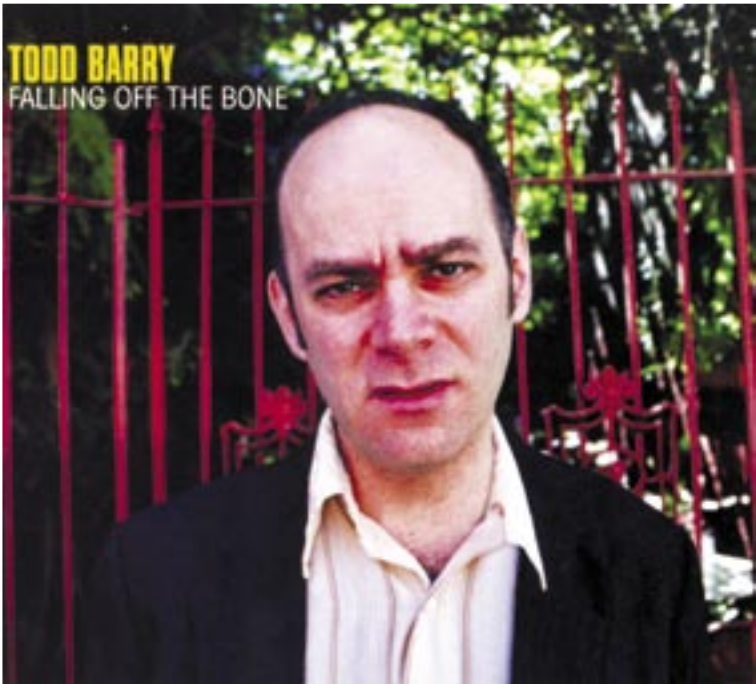
"We're excited about marijuana," says comedian Doug Benson in the opening monologue of *The Marijuana-Logues* live CD recording. "Marijuana pleases us, and as the title of this show suggests, we're here to talk about marijuana."

Yes, Comedy Central Records' *The Marijuana-Logues* extensively covers the infamous plant by revealing everything you ever wanted to know about marijuana but were too stoned to ask.

Cleverly written and brilliantly delivered by Benson, Arj Barker and Tony Camin (who claim 43 years of marijuana experience among the three of them), the album presents tracks such as "Legalizing Pot," "Anti-Pot Ads," "Don't Smoke and Drive," "If Pot Could Talk," "Wake and Bake" and "Legend of 4:20." Sure, it covers a lot. But as the Monologuers say, once you get marijuana smokers talking, they never shut up.

"I think marijuana should be legalized because regular cigarettes that you can buy in any store are worse for you," Benson says. "Every pack has a warning right there on the side. When you buy pot, it's always in a clear plastic bag with no warning whatsoever."

Clearly this is a fantastic and funny CD. Now excuse me while I go find myself a bag of Doritos.
- Don Sill



TODD BARRY
FALLING OFF THE BONE /CD/DVD

As Todd Barry has shown a great willingness to tear apart dumb reviews of himself on his latest CD, the goal of this review is to not say anything extraordinarily dumb. Here goes nothing.

Barry's delivery — which is, uh, soothing — is a welcome change from hyperkinetic comics who attempt to derive more humor from their whack-tastic antics than their jokes. Barry stands on his material, which is intelligent, sophisticated and funny as hell. He draws on the bizarre things that happen both to and

around him and weaves them into a magnificent tapestry of dour sarcasm worthy of adorning the halls of your local Afghan warlord. For example, take a conversation he had with an acquaintance immediately after 9/11: "He comes within a foot of me, he looks up, and he goes, 'The new Mercury Rev album is out.' Are you sure about that? Because I just watched the news and I didn't fuckin' see that."

Included with *Falling Off the Bone* is a DVD of Barry's 1999 *Comedy Central Presents* half-hour special and a "documentary" about the creation of the CD. The documentary is mostly hand-shot footage of Barry screwing around in the studio or wandering around New York conversing with seemingly insincere fans. It's no Wilco's *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart*, but it has several similarly soothing moments. - Brian Cook

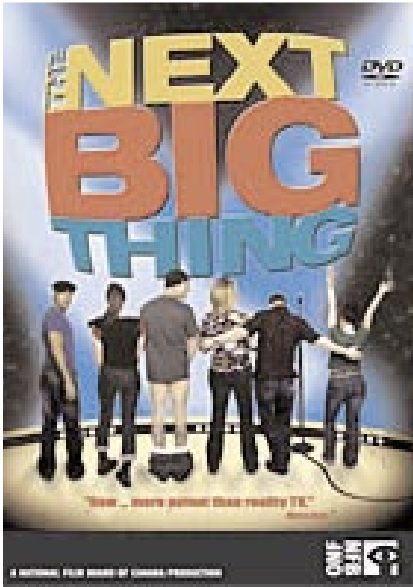
MURRAY BATTLE, DIRECTOR
THE NEXT BIG THING /DVD

The Next Big Thing follows six established Toronto-based comedians (Laurie Elliott, Shaun Majumder, Dave Martin, Nikki Payne, Jason Rouse and Kristeen Von Hagen) for 18 months as they attempt to achieve their next career goals. The story is told in three "episodes" that begin in Toronto, move on to Montreal's Just for Laughs festival and end, for a lucky few, in Los Angeles.

There's everything you'd expect in a stand-up documentary: the small victories, the bombings and the moments of self-doubt. But what makes the film great is its access. The cameras caught greenroom handshakes at Just For Laughs, sat in on a Fox network meeting and went backstage at a pilot taping.

Plenty of incidental scenes are left in to provide a true glimpse of what the six comics went through. The exhaustion brought on by boozing and schmoozing at Just For Laughs isn't crucial to the story, but such experiences are illustrated so well that the film's three-hour length is justified.

Although some moments will be of greater interest to people familiar with the Canadian stand-up community, anyone fascinated with the industry will eat this up. *The Next Big Thing* is available on DVD only through nfb.ca/thenextbigthing.
- Sharilyn Johnson



JIM GAFFIGAN
DOING MY TIME/CD/DVD

Jim Gaffigan has certainly done his time. He has been on countless TV shows, in dozens of movies, appeared on *The Late Show with David Letterman* on 10 separate occasions, and now he has released his third CD. On *Doing My Time*, Gaffigan says he gets his looks from his father, who is Swedish, and his mother, who is a polar bear: "I am bald, blind and pale. I'm a gigantic recessive gene. I wouldn't be surprised if I woke up tomorrow with a tail." And he's not the only one who has been chal-

lenged by nature. "It doesn't look like God tried very hard on the manatee," Gaffigan says. "All right - blob of shit, flip-flops. Oh hell, let's go with a goat-ee."

His marriage and recent foray into fatherhood have given Gaffigan even more material. "My wife has gotten very lazy, or as she describes it, 'pregnant,'" he says. "It doesn't mean you can't move those cinder blocks."

Gaffigan's hypotheses on life seem



plausible, and his humor is never mean-spirited. When the voice of his timid alter ego comments on his jokes, it feels like he's not only on stage, but also in the audience. With a DVD of his Comedy Central specials included, *Doing My Time* is so past due, it's criminal. - Emily Epstein

BOBBY MITCHELL
RADIOPLAY/CD

Las Vegas Comedy Festival winner Bobby Mitchell can typically be found on stage, strumming an acoustic guitar and sorrowfully bidding adieu to his beloved porn collection.

With his new comedy-concept album *RadioPlay*, Mitchell makes a leap onto the airwaves, or at least the fictional airwaves reproduced in a recording studio. The concept is simple: Imagine seeking and scanning your way across the radio dial. Now imagine that the tracks you come across – not to mention commercials for Tushy Puff toilet paper and the weight-loss expertise of Skinny Bobalones –



are all spoofastically funny. Mitchell provides all voices and the majority of the instrumentation, an impressive feat considering the ease at which he moves from the country-western “Wayward Teenage Girl” to Irish singalong “Margaret O’Leary” to R&B masterpiece “Fat Girl” to

the talk-radio host of WBOR, whose voice “will help you slip into a coma.” And let’s not overlook the original Broadway cast recording of “Strip Club,” in which an optimistic go-getter envisions things being run differently, promising that “We’ll rise to the occasion / We’re

gonna stand tall / And there will be free panties for all / (Free panties...FOR ALL!).”

Sure, the songs may be bit goofy, but the overall album is original and ground-breaking. Here’s hoping the optimistic go-getter’s strip club goes over even half as well. - Julie Seabaugh



Rockstar from pg. 21

Rockin’est Artwork

Arj Barker takes a bit more pride in drawing attention to his shows than other comedians. In a business where self-promotion is crucial, he stands out by using a tactic usually reserved for indie rock bands: kick-ass posters.

Barker’s posters are a stew of vibrant colors and visual wit, and each highlights a particular event, such as his headlining performance at San Francisco’s Punch Line Comedy Club or his upcoming one-man show, *Vigo No Amigo*, that stands apart from his regular road gigs.

Barker made the first poster in his series of nearly 200 himself but enlisted his friend Reuben Raffael to create a more polished final product soon after. “I’ve been making posters and propaganda with and of Arj since the Xerox days of high school,” the artist/designer says. “We have this system where designers design and comedians do comedy,” Barker adds. “It doesn’t really work out when the comedians do the designing.”

Each poster is born when Barker gives Raffael an image, information about the upcoming show and a recommended “vibe.” The overall layout and details of each piece are at the mercy of their designer, however, and Barker’s trust in his associate has been rewarded time after time.

The artwork is as intriguing as it is eye-catching, and comic-style illustrations often fuse with a goofy photo of Barker to create an amusing and imaginative advertisement. Each is a work of pop art that elevates the presentation of an already dynamic stand-up comedian. Rather than the same static black-and-white headshot poster, Barker announces gigs with promos that earn praise from club owners and audience members alike. The posters have now become part of the hipster comic’s professional persona, and he has grown to view them as an important responsibility. “If I don’t make one myself, then the people make one for me, and it can usually turn out pretty lame,” Barker says.

As Barker’s star has steadily risen, so has that of Raffael and his company, Zoltron Productions. Zoltron maintains a staff of seven and has expanded into album art and website design for major musical clients such as Primus and the Bonnaroo festival.

For Barker, the road will bring more festivals, more big-city shows and more of Zoltron’s adaptable designs, fitting complements to a particularly efficient comedian. “When you have one good poster you can use it for different festivals; you can send it out for press,” says Barker. “They’re just a big help.” – Conor Hogan arjbarker.com

Additional Comics Who Rock a Mic
Like a Vandal

Laurie Kilmartin
Doug Stanhope
Wanda Sykes
Sarah Silverman
Lewis Black
Christopher Titus
Jim Breuer

Comics Most Likely to Rock
Bookstores and Coffee Shops

Eugene Mirman
Stephen Lynch
Demetri Martin
Jessi Klein
Mike Birbiglia
Marc Maron

Comedic Lounge Rockers

Judy Tenuta
Kevin Downey, Jr.
Neil Hamburger
Richard Belzer
Rita Rudner
Jim David

Elder Statesmen of Comedic
Rocking

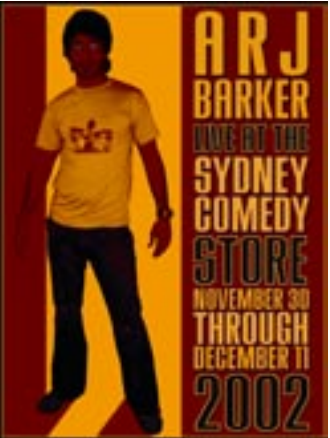
Dave Chappelle
George Carlin
Eddie Murphy
Chris Rock
Andrew “Dice” Clay
Richard Pryor
Steve Martin

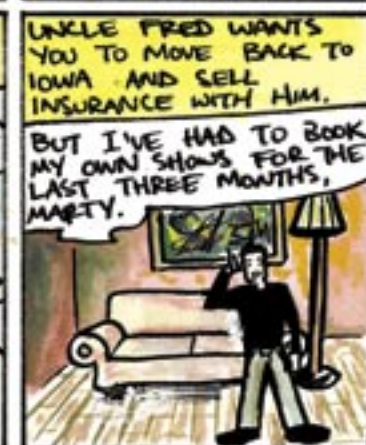
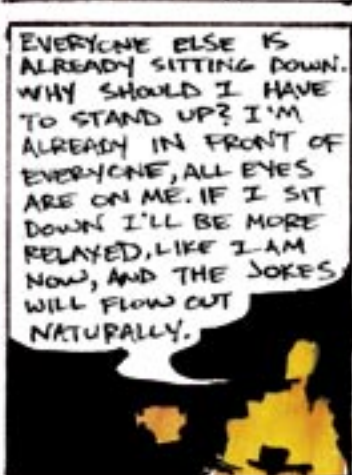
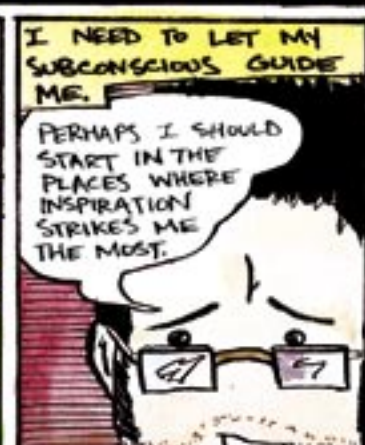
Comics Who Rock From Beyond
the Grave

Lenny Bruce
Bill Hicks
Sam Kinison
Rodney Dangerfield
John Candy

Comics Who Don’t Care for
Rocking, Thank You Very Much

Steven Wright
Bill Cosby
Jim Gaffigan
Dave Attell
Todd Barry
David Cross
Greer Barnes





THE HISTORY OF COMEDY: COMICS AND SITCOMS

By Jim Mendrinos



A sitcom is the Holy Grail for stand-up comedians. We chase it because it will pull us out of the comedy-club dungeons and give us the elite status we deserve. Or so we believe.

In truth, comics do receive more than their fair share of sitcom projects, and networks roll out a slate of comic-driven shows every year. Unfortunately, most don't make it past season two.

Still, comics are tempted by the sitcom carrot. We keep an eye on the elusive prize of network stardom and a chance at small-screen gold. After all, the majority of successful sitcoms featured standups, didn't they?

Actually, no. In the history of television, the elite sitcoms – the No. 1 shows, the syndication monsters – have featured more actors than comics. It sounds heretical, but out of the great sitcoms we grew up with and the ones we currently create, there are only about 35 that have had comics at their centers. As funny as shows such as *Family Ties* (Marc Price), *Mary Hartman* (Martin Mull), *Soap* (Billy Crystal), *Barney Miller* (Ron Carey and Steve Landesberg), *Just Shoot Me* (David Spade) or even *F-Troop* (Larry Storch) were, the fact remains that these comics were cast in supporting roles.

But we want to be stars. We see *The Abbot & Costello Show*, *Amos & Andy*, *The Jack Benny Show*, *Make Room For Daddy* (Danny Thomas), *Good Times* (Jimmy Walker), *Mork & Mindy* (Robin Williams and Jonathan Winters), *Newhart* (Bob Newhart), *Anything But Love* (Richard Lewis), *It's Garry Shandling's Show*, *Night Court* (Harry Anderson and Marsha Warfield), *Mad About You* (Paul Reiser), *Grace Under Fire* (Brett Butler), *Home Improvement* (Tim Allen), *Ellen* (Ellen DeGeneres), *The Larry Sanders Show* (Garry Shandling again), *The Drew Carey Show*, *The King of Queens* (Kevin James), *Hanging with Mr. Cooper* (Mark Curry), *Malcolm & Eddie* (Eddie Griffin), *The George Lopez Show*, *The Bernie Mac Show* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (Larry David, Jeff Garlin and company), and we want sitcom immortality.

There are even brighter standouts within this group of star vehicles. The following sitcoms showed just how strong and wonderful the marriage between two wholly American art forms (stand up and sitcom) can be:

The Andy Griffith Show (1960-1968) A spinoff of *Make Room for Daddy*, it revolved around the country-comedy stylings of Andy Griffith and was probably the first sitcom since *Abbot & Costello* to use a comic's act as inspiration for bits within the show.

The Bob Newhart Show (1972-1978) The second series with this title (there was a short-lived sketch show with the same name), this one used Newhart's dry, nearly deadpan wit to toss barbs at contemporary culture. It also featured something very rare for television at that time: a married couple with no kids.

The George Burns & Gracie Allen Show (1950-1958) There is no doubt that America was well acquainted with this couple before the two ever reached the TV screen. Both were headliners for

more than 25 years, reaching back to the heyday of Vaudeville. However, instead of lobbing tired bits at the camera, they created a show that was ahead of its time. Burns even talked directly to the camera, which was outrageous for 1950s television.

Chico and the Man (1974-1978) This show didn't have a long run, but only because of the tragic demise of its troubled star, Freddie Prinze. While it aired, it showed the timelessness of friendship, rewrote the popular concept of the paternal relationship and served as a beacon for Latinos in television.

The Cosby Show (1984-1992) Right about the time that the sitcom seemed dead, Bill Cosby single-handedly resurrected it. His show featured an upscale African-American family and focused on parent-child relationships. As television got grittier, this show retained its softness. It may be the best-crafted sitcom ever.

Everybody Loves Raymond (1996-2005) Another family sitcom, but this time the relationships aren't quite as nice. *Raymond* centers around the stage persona of Ray Romano, a man caught in the eye of the storm that is his less-than-perfect family. Despite the current sitcom trend of utilizing single cameras and offbeat characters, *Raymond* models itself after classic sitcom constructs and thrives in a dwindling comedy market.

Get Smart (1965-1970) Don Adams played Maxwell Smart, Agent 86, for 138 episodes. This show was an irreverent spoof on Cold War spies, and Adams maintained the right combination of smug confidence and absolute ineptness. Though not written around Adams' act, Smart capitalized on the double talk and backtracking he incorporated into his early TV stand-up spots.

The Honeymooners (1952-1957) Jackie Gleason's sitcom masterpiece so defines him that we sometimes forget how

great a comedian he was. Discovered on a nightclub stage and brought to the DuMont network (one of the original four TV networks), Gleason created a sketch show that eventually gave birth to the most beloved quartet of characters in TV history. To this day, it ranks behind only *I Love Lucy* as the most-watched sitcom of all time.

The Phil Silvers Show (1955-1959) You probably know this show by one of its other two names: *You'll Never Get Rich* (the original series title) or *Sgt. Bilko* (what fans called it). Silvers broke into showbiz the hard way, as a comic for Minsky's Burlesque. And true to his upbringing, he kept the comedy on Bilko relentless and unyieldingly funny. The show arrived in the sanitized '50s, when characters were pure and wholesome. Bilko was neither. Instead, he was the first comedic con artist on television.

Roseanne (1988-1997) Love it or hate it, Roseanne's blue-collar sitcom spoke to the segment of society that had too many kids, too many bills and too many worries. This anti-Cosby made desperation and poverty actually seem funny.

Sanford & Son (1972-1977) To anyone who had seen the bawdy nightclub act of Redd Foxx, the idea of him being on television seemed unreal. Foxx used elements of his stand up to flesh out the needy yet abrasive Fred Sanford and surrounded himself with such comics as Slappy White, LaWanda Paige, Pat Morita (who performed under the name "The Hip Nip") and Skillet & Leroy. Foxx also stocked the writers' room with Richard Pryor, Paul Mooney and Garry Shandling.

Seinfeld (1990-1998) The most popular sitcom of the past 20 years, this show pushed the stylistic envelope. Sitcoms typically had a few short scenes, but *Seinfeld* mastered quick takes, often piling more than 20 locations into an episode. The show also explored the darker side of friendship and packed more bite than was normally found in Jerry Seinfeld's stand up. Another show that used comics well, it paired Seinfeld with L.A. comedian Michael Richards, featured more than 50 guest turns by comics and aired episodes written by half a dozen standups. And of course Larry David was the show's co-creator.

Welcome Back, Kotter (1975-1979) Though not as successful as some of the other shows written around its star's stand up, *Kotter* was a powerhouse in its time slot and helped open the floodgates for modern sitcoms starring comics by proving that a contemporary comedian (Gabe Kaplan) could deliver good Nielsen ratings.

These sitcoms are a hodgepodge of styles and subjects, but they are united by the fact that they lived and died by the power of the standup at the center of the ensemble. That's why when comics watch them, dreams of sitcom success are born. After all, we all want to be Seinfeld, but nobody really wants to be a.k.a. Pablo.

ASK JIM

Has any comedian in the entire history of the profession managed to maintain a healthy relationship while working every night and in every city? I'm thinking probably not.

Many comics have long-term, stable relationships even though they have busy tour schedules. It is no different than any other lifestyle. You have to start with someone who understands the world you live in and then take pains to nurture that relationship. Bob Hope, Jack Benny and Milton Berle, for example, all had decades-long marriages. Overall, the image of the lonely comic shuffling from bad relationship to bad relationship is more of a fear than a fact.

I've been emceeing for a while, and I want to make the move up to feature. I asked the clubs I'm working, and a few said no. Am I doing something wrong?

Without seeing your act, it's hard to tell. For the most part, moving up is difficult for a lot of reasons, not least of which is that a club wants to keep good talent in lower-paying positions for as long as possible. As long as club managers know you're going to accept the work, they're going to keep you in the lower spot. You might have to bite the bullet and decline to emcee for them to take you seriously as a feature. Saying no is the only power you have in that situation. Don't be afraid to use it.

Sometimes after I've been doing a joke awhile it stops doing well. Why is that?

The joke could be too dated or have a logic that no longer fits with your performance. As we grow as comics, we evolve as performers. Some material doesn't evolve with us, and then you have to set it free.

There's also the possibility that your performance of it has gotten sloppy. Hopefully you record your sets. If you do, take out an old one where the bit worked. Transcribe the bit word for word. Don't leave out a single added word, sound (um, er, jeez) or whatever else you added vocally. Now complete the same transcription process for a set where the bit didn't do well. If the wording is even slightly off, that could be the problem.

Ask Jim a question, suggest a Monologue topic and more at www.jim-mendrinos.com.

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When someone who is known for being comedic does something straight, it's always "a big breakthrough" or a "radical departure." Why is it no one ever says that if a straight actor does comedy? Are they presuming comedy is easier?

-Carol Burnett

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