

Getting Around

By ETHEL SIMMONS

When newspaper advertising salesman Ron Kruman turned 31, he figured it was now or never to go for his dream: To become a stand-up comic.

Kruman, a resident of Clawson, looks more like the professional his parents wanted him to become (the student in college to be a speech therapist) than a zany comedian.

But Kruman has always done impressions, recording funny voices on tape with his friends when he was a kid. "My Felix the Cat routine has always been a trademark among my friends," he said.

The bearded young comic does all the voices from the "Felix the Cat" animated cartoon, including the squeaky-voiced Felix.

LAST FRIDAY night at the Comedy Castle, a new showcase for comics at the Meeting Place in Orchard Lake, Kruman stood up before a live microphone and audience for the first time.

The Comedy Castle is similar to the Comedy Store in Los Angeles, a place where comedians of all ages can try out their material for an audience. The comics aren't paid.

"It was a real learning experience,"

Kruman recalled. "I was the last act of the evening. I went on at 12:30."

Kruman said he had an idea of what he wanted to do but did not prepare a routine. "I taped the show and have been listening to it objectively, as I would a comedy record," he said.

Kruman has been invited to come back this Friday night to perform, and he already can talk about "my act" and how he wants to improve it.

"I WILL NEVER let the audience hear my regular voice again," he explained. Kruman said there's an energy that comes to you from an audience, and that he could feel this energy (and hear the laughs) when the audience was with him.

Whenever he returned to his own voice, he could feel himself losing the audience.

Kruman is definitely handsome, with thick brown hair, well-trimmed beard and pleasant brown eyes. He describes his personality as good-natured.

ON STAGE, he comes out in a ski jacket and cap, and the usual firm voice becomes that of an Eastern European immigrant. His face scrunches up unattractively.

Comedian faces his first audience

Kruman is Jewish, and he says he doesn't do Jewish humor. But his immigrant's accent is actually taken from that of his best friend's father, a Russian Jew.

"I HAVE TO change my image on stage," Kruman said. "When they introduce Ron Kruman, he's going to look like I just got off the boat."

For his first stand-up routine, the comic's 20 minutes included not only the immigrant and Felix the Cat but also James Mason giving a synopsis of the movie "Journey to the Center of the Earth."

"That's where my acting experience shows," he said of the James Mason impression.

Kruman has performed in community theater, especially the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford and has played heavy drama, such as Nick, the biology professor, in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

For his new lifestyle as a stand-up comic at night, Kruman was considering shaving his beard "because I make great faces." But he decided to keep the beard and utilize it for his immigrant characterization.

WHATEVER IMPRESSION he's doing, "I don't know what's going to come out of my head," Kruman said. "That character speaks to me."

On opening night, he was the only impressionist among other comedians who did monologues. What makes him unique, Kruman believes, "is my ability to jump from one voice to another quickly."

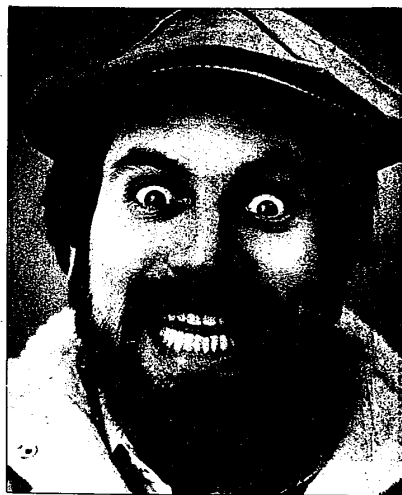
He looks forward to developing a wider, crazier stage presence.

"I'm a really big fan of Steve Martin. I would like to be the Steve Martin of Impressionists, where people say, 'This guy is absolutely crazy.'"

Kruman got his first break as a comedian when a friend called Dick Purtan and told the CKLW radio personality that Kruman did a great Felix the Cat voice. Purtan put Kruman on the air and has subsequently done about 10 tapes with him for the radio show.

"I couldn't say enough nice things about Dick Purtan," Kruman reported. "He gave me a lot of confidence."

The Comedy Castle also won praise. "This is a terrific thing for people who have not performed before. Everybody needs feedback."



Ron Kruman's immigrant is the voice he will use on stage to introduce all his characters. (Staff photo by Stephen Cantrell)

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