

New stand-up comics learn funny business

By PATRICIA LACROIX

Hey, did you hear the one about the stand-up comedians and magicians performing Monday nights in Rochester's Pecker's Place and other Detroit-area small bars?

They are filling the needs of the small bar owners by increasing business on slow nights, but look again, they are also filling their two main needs.

The need to get exposure in the comedy world and the need to practice their routine until it is letter perfect in every detail but still "looks so easy."

No punch line there. The Troupe of Comedians and Magicians, a division of the Southfield-based entertainment company of Reem Communications, is making regular Monday night appearances at Pecker's, near the intersection of Walton and Livernois.

Other nights of the week are spent at other Detroit-area bar-restaurants: trying to make a name for themselves, trying to gain recognition in the comedy world.

"I'm going to try out some new material on you tonight," says comedy success-story hopeful Phil D'Aoust, pulling a square of blue plaid vinyl out of a prop box. "I've got all the straight lines down on this material."

BEFORE BECOMING a comedian, the sole method by which he makes his living now, D'Aoust was an art student in college and has also worked as a chimney sweep.

Now, he said he spends all of his time watching old comedy movies and listening to old comedians in an effort to try to pick out what made them so successful. If it was good enough for them, after all, maybe it'll work again, he said.

Dave Cowlier, the youngest member of the comedy troupe at 19 years old, still holds on to the back-up support of a full-time job as a mechanical engineer for a drafting company.

"You have to protect yourself, you have to have something to fall back on," he said. Considering that the comedians don't get paid for their appearances, this back up support is very important.

But members of the troupe all agreed that Cowlier is the one member that shows the most promise and potential of making it big in the comedy world.

"He is a genius," said troupe talent coordinator Joe Kesner.

"Hi, I am Mark's cousin Dork from Ark. I have been visiting the planet Earth and I have noticed that you humans do everything backwards, just like Mark tells me. For example, instead of sneezing at

people, we sneeze to ourselves," Cowlier performs. "You go 'at-choo,' we go 'at-me.'"

Cowlier said he was always considered the class clown while in school. He particularly remembers high school days when he imitated the teachers at his Harper Woods High School to the delight of his fellow students.

FROM THERE, he went on to a short career at a local FM radio station. One of the things that he would really like to try, he said, is street comedy in downtown Detroit.

"When the weather gets warmer, that is something that sounds so exciting to me. Robin Williams (from the television show Mork and Mindy) got his start doing street comedy. He would pass the hat around after the performance and he'd collect about \$75," Cowlier said. Money may seem an elusive thing to the members of the troupe, since they are not paid for their efforts on stage through Reem Communications. A \$2 cover charge assessed to each person entering the business establishment for the evening is used to cover business expenses for Reem Communications.

"WE LOOK AT ourselves as steering them in the direction of paying jobs," Kesner said. The comedy business really boomed about eight weeks

ago, and he and his partner, Mike Schwartz, saw the trend as a business opportunity.

Bars are usually slow during the week, and the establishments they approached, he said, saw an opportunity to "make a sure buck and sell some booze." The combination of the two attitudes has resulted in the kinds of shows now being staged at Pecker's.

Since some establishments only con-

sider the monetary aspects of the venture, the owners of the bars sometimes are not sensitive to the egos of the comedians, however, Kesner said. This has caused some tension within the group.

"It is a frustration to the comedians," Schwartz said. "They want to be great, they think they are great. But the comedy business is a tough one to break into. They (the comedians) have

to realize this. They have to get street-wise."

Breaking into the business may seem especially tough when the audience doesn't laugh.

What happens when they don't?

"I'm heading out to California. Soon, although I don't know exactly when," said one of the comedians. "You'll be hearing about me, I'm not worried about that at all."



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