

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Thursday, October 8, 1987 O&E



Actor/comic Larry Peters puts on a few different faces for the photographer, during the interview. Peters has been studying



comedy at Chicago's Second City, where he appears in a show Tuesday nights called "It's a Wonderful Shelf-Life!" The actor



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

lives and works both in the Windy City and in the Motor City, where his parents reside in Beverly Hills.

Actor improvises with Second City

By Victor E. Swanson
special writer

IF YOU'VE BEEN to Chicago, you may have had time to enjoy an evening at Second City. The nationally famous comedy club has been the spawning ground for many well-known actors, such as Betty Thomas, Ann Elder, Bill Murray and John Candy. If you've been to Second City recently, you may have caught Larry Peters of Beverly Hills performing what he really enjoys — improvisational comedy.

Peters was exposed to improvisational comedy in Los Angeles in the early 1980s. "We went to see a show and it was an improv group," Peters said at his parents' home in Beverly Hills. "And I just looked up there and

saw those people and I said, 'That's exactly what I want to do.'

"That was just great — taking suggestions, thinking on your feet, creating stuff right on the spot and going with it."

"I consider myself an actor," Peters said earnestly.

He works as an actor in commercials, industrial films and sometimes movies, such as "The Rosary Murders." He has jobs and residences in the Detroit area and the Chicago area.

AT SECOND CITY, Peters is nearing the end of his studies in the five-step comedy training program, which began in August 1986 when he was lucky enough to be accepted into the program even though he missed his audition.

Now, he wants to become a member of one of two comedy troupes at Second City that tour the country, often appearing at colleges and universities.

In the training program, five classes or levels meet one night a week for three hours over an eight-week period. It takes about a year to complete the program. There's tuition but no formal accredited diploma.

"It has recently changed since when I started," said Peters. "The first class is basic improv, teaching you who, what and where, and how to make a scene — just some of the fundamental ingredients of a scene. The second class is on character work."

After the second level, students have another audition to see whether they may go on to level three or whether they should repeat a level or move on to something else.

"Level three, which is divided into two groups, is more focused on writing," Peters said. He gave examples of taking topics from everyday life and making funny comedy sketches. Level four is games.

Level five involves doing a show. "Sit down and write the material, rehearse it, and get up and do it in front of a paying audience," he said.

PETERS IS in level five and the show he is involved with is "It's a Wonderful Shelf-Life!" presented Tuesday evenings in the E.T.C. theater at Second City.

Something is happening every night at Second City. The two current shows performed by regular Second City comedy members are "Catch-27," on the main stage, and "Kukla, Fawn and Ollie," on the E.T.C. stage. Monday night is reserved for members of the two touring companies. A special program is

presented to children on Sunday.

"One of the things I certainly wanted to get out of it was to get into the comedy troupe," he said about the training program. "And that hasn't happened yet."

Besides taking classes during the week, Peters does what most actors do. "Once or twice a week you want to make the rounds, and that's to see your agents."

From time to time, he and friends get together to perform as an unnamed comedy troupe in Chicago. This summer, he had a leading role in Terrence McNally's "Ravenswood" at the Stage One Theatre.

In 1981, Peters received a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Michigan. In 1983, a master of fine arts degree from the California Institute of Arts.

He has performed on the stage in works by Shakespeare, Shaw and Chekov. He appeared in a video production of "Anthony and Cleopatra," with Lynn Redgrave and Timothy Dalton, and in the short film "Singing Birds," produced in the Detroit

area a few years ago by Kim Connelly and Michelle Poulik. "Singing Birds" is about two rival Lithuanian families in Detroit. Peters played the drunken owner of a speakeasy.

HE MAKES his living working in industrial films and in commercials such as for Art Van and Kellogg's. During the last two Christmas seasons, he was seen in a commercial for local malls, playing a man who brings a big Christmas list to Santa Claus' house.

"I just think I'm more 70 percent actor, 30 percent writer, right now. I would like to be able to write more. I respect it more than any other position in the arts."

Peters enjoys all sports. He also plays guitar and loves jazz. Really, though, "I'm just very quiet, low-energy, sort of philosophical. When I get to know somebody more, when I'm with my friends and I'm more comfortable, some nights I'm really funny, and all of a sudden this charming side comes out."

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