

In search of the real Judy Tenuta

By Peggy Auino
staff writer

Judy Tenuta's stage persona has an air of superiority, to put it mildly. Give her a topic, she'll tell you why she has little use for it.

Men?

"You should be able to ride and brand your love pig," she states matter-of-factly.

And what happens after a woman?

"He flops himself in front of the TV waiting for the Super Bowl. The only way you can get his attention is to eat until you look like a stadium."

Then there's the Catholic church, another staple in Tenuta's routine. An alumna of "St. Francis of the Talking Mules," she said grade school was "like Catholic boot camp."

OK, OK, you get the idea. But what is Tenuta — who will appear at Chaplin's East in Fraser May 17 through 20 — really like?

After a 30-minute telephone interview, it can be said that Judy Tenuta, at least when dealing with the media, is almost the same on stage as she is off. The jokes come nonstop, and one wonders where she finds time to inhale.

The only difference during a one-to-one encounter and a stand-up routine is that she doesn't insult an interviewer. (During her show, she's apt to yell at a man in the audience: "You make me want to get my tubes tied.")

Friendly as Tenuta is off stage, it's still difficult to get a straight answer out of her.

"I'M SORTING my socks," she said over the phone from her Chicago home. That might sound plausible enough until she adds: "I cleared off my bed and found Jimmy Hoffa."

So the autobiographical sketch she drew — in a voice without the racy quality she uses during performances — probably should be taken with a grain of salt.

She has a sister and six brothers, who have names like Bono and Bingo, and are the product of an Italian/Polish marriage. Her mother forced her to go to Mass every day, and though the Tenutas were on a tight budget, sometimes a priest would be invited to dinner.

"My mother would buy these special, really neat things like food, something that was foreign to us," she said. "We got to have Father Paddy O'Furniture's leftovers."

Her mother got complaints from Catholics about a routine some might call blasphemous?

"No, never once," she said, sounding serious this time. "None of that is malicious. I'm just commenting on it."

clarification

In a story appearing in Street Scene May 8, comedian "Downtown" Tony Brown was identified as having a small interest in Bea's Comedy Kitchen in Detroit. Brown does not have a financial interest in the establishment, owned by Beatrice Evans.

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Judy Tenuta has invented her own religion — Judaism — and requires of her followers adulation and offerings of canned goods.

But she can't resist adding: "An insult from me is like a blessing from Mother Teresa."

Tenuta, you see, invented her own religion — Judaism — sometime during the dozen years she's been doing stand-up comedy. She requires of her followers adulation and offerings of canned goods.

Another staple of Tenuta's schtick is her accordian. It has been reported elsewhere that she started taking accordian lessons as a child. That's not how Tenuta tells it now.

"IT WAS actually my mother's JUD," she said. "I came out playing it." She said. Now she uses the accordian "as an instrument of love and submission."

Now would she seriously discuss her age, which others have put at 35.

"I'm a Goddess so I'm not bound

by mortal time," Tenuta said, but she does admit to using "Ernest Borgnine Beauty Cream" to keep up her youthful looks.

Tenuta has never been married ("The Goddess does not belong to anyone"), but she doesn't let that fact stop her from offering tips on the best way to make a good joke.

Her advice for husbands and young women: "Act like a petite flower and virginite, but let everyone know you'll mate with the first Shiner in a Saab."

That Chaplin's East show will not be Tenuta's first visit to the Detroit area. When she was here about 10 years ago, one of the few things she knew about the Motor City was that people set fires at Halloween.

"I thought maybe you were trying to impersonate hell," Tenuta said.

Then she had a suggestion, which involved the other thing she knew about Detroit.

"Maybe you can combine that with the auto production. Why don't they set Lee Iacocca on fire? Put an apple in his mouth."

Judy Tenuta will appear Wednesday through Saturday, May 17-20, at Chaplin's East, 34244 Greenback, Fraser. For reservations, call 792-1902.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here are some listings of comedy clubs in our area. To let us know who is appearing at your club, send the information to: Comedy Listings, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

• BEA'S COMEDY

Jo Nippote, Tim Butterfield and "Downtown" Tony Brown will perform Friday-Saturday, May 19-20, at Bea's Comedy Kitchen, 541 Larned, Detroit. Showtimes are 8:30 p.m. and 11 p.m. There also is a new comedy show at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays. For information, call 981-2301.

• CHAPLIN'S EAST

Judy Tenuta will appear Wednesday-Saturday, May 17-20, at Chaplin's East, 34244 Greenback, Fraser. Showtimes are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and 8:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 792-1902.

• CHAPLIN'S PLYMOUTH

Tony Hayes will appear Thursday-Saturday, May 18-20, at Chaplin's Plymouth in the Plymouth Hilton, 11707 Northville Road, Plymouth. For information, call 434-4680.

• CHAPLIN'S WEST

Crailo Shoemaker, with Tony Brown and Scott Wickmann, will appear Tuesday-Saturday, May 16-20, at Chaplin's West, 16390 Telegraph Road, south of Six Mile, Detroit. For information, call 533-8866. Shoemaker will be appearing in a special engagement Friday and Saturday. Tickets cost \$10 those nights.

• COMEDY SPORTZ

Comedy Sports at the Heidelberg will have improvisational comedy at 8:30 p.m. and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The club is at 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. Showtimes are 8:30 p.m. and 11 p.m. For reservations, call 995-8888.

• HOLLY HOTEL

Jerry Elliott, with Steve Bills and Jill Washburn, will perform Thursday-Saturday, May 18-20, in the 1891 Hotel Comedy Club of the Holly Hotel, 110 Battle Alley, Holly. Showtimes are 8:30 p.m. Thursday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

• RIDLEY'S COMEDY CASTLE
Wayne Cottrell will appear Tuesday-Saturday, May 16-19, at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle, 2523 Woodward, Berkley. Showtimes are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 8:30 p.m. and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 542-9900.



Readers want to know more about the "Name & Fortune" game show. Q. How many contestants are there? A. Each week the buzzers receive approximately 40,000-45,000 TV entries. From among these, 10 are randomly drawn to appear in the show. Q. What is the "Name & Fortune" show? At the end of each program, the six contestants for the next week are drawn from among these 200 entries.

Q. How are home partners selected to be paired with contestants? A. At the end of the show, six contestants for the following week's show, six more entries are drawn to become home partners. They are paired with contestants in the next week.

Q. Are home partners notified in advance? A. No, that is a major surprise element of the game, designed to heighten interest. Any player submitting a TV entry may hear his or her name announced as a home partner on the show.

Q. How much do home partners win? A. Each week, the home partner lucky enough to be paired with the contestant winning the \$40,000 top prize gets a \$500 reward.

Q. Are entries not drawn as contestants or home partners held for later weeks? A. No. After each week's drawings are completed, those entries are destroyed. A fresh list of entries for the next show include all those that have not been drawn.

Q. How much has been won on the "Name & Fortune" game show? A. Through the 14th show, ending April 29, the total amount won by contestants is \$1.5 million. In addition to the 14 awards of \$40,000 each, prizes included 15 new minivans, three cars, a stereo system, a stereo package, and 51 other cash awards. Total viewers won another \$7,000.

Q. What else does a contestant do on the show? A. All contestants enjoy a full day of contestants. After a get-acquainted continental breakfast at Detroit's Omni International Hotel, the contestants are driven to the studio by Service to the studios of WHBTV for a tour and taping of individual introductions to the show. They are also given a special luncheon in The Whitney Restaurant, returning to the studio to be interviewed by Lester, representation. A professional makeup session and a chance to meet the new hosts, Chuck Wadick and Diana Sandoval, are also part of the day.

Q. What is the "Ground Round"? A. The "Ground Round" is a game show segment designed to entertain and keep the audience interested. It is a game show in which contestants are asked questions about various topics. The host, Chuck Wadick, asks the questions, and the contestants answer. The host, Diana Sandoval, gives the answers to the questions, and the contestants guess the answers. The host, Chuck Wadick, gives the answers to the questions, and the contestants guess the answers.

Q. Who is the host of the "Ground Round"? A. The host of the "Ground Round" is Chuck Wadick.

Q. Who is the host of the "Name & Fortune" game show? A. The host of the "Name & Fortune" game show is Diana Sandoval.

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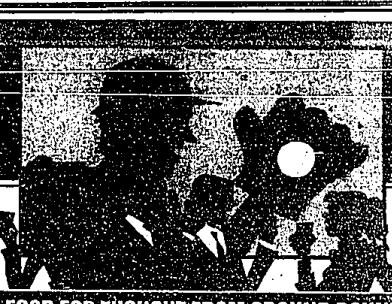
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the Ground Round

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