

Hobson: His forte is magic

By Loraine McClish  
staff writer

**H**OBSON HAS BEEN mixing the business of his magic-comedy act and the pleasure of visiting the folks back home all month.

Last week he was bewildering the audiences with his sleight of hand in Windsor's Comedy Korner. This week he'll be stupefying the crowds in Allen Park's Joey's, and then he'll repeat the process next week in Livonia's Joey's.

"It's more than a magic show, it's more than a comedy show," Hobson said. "Sleight of hand is my forte, no question about that. But sometimes the magic acts are particularly the illusions are very intense."

"And no matter how good they are they can get too intense. They can even get boring so you've got to break it up with some comedy."

Hobson describes his comedy as



**HOBSON**  
Hobson's forte is sleight of hand, which he mixes with comedy that's "off-the-wall, tongue in cheek."

"off-the-wall, tongue in cheek." It is, he said, "a little sarcastic sometimes. And sometimes out-and-out crazy like my fire eating card tricks."

"It's hard to explain; I guess you have to see it," he said.

**HOBSON GREW** up as Jeff Hobson on Detroit's northeast side where he became fascinated with magic at the age of seven. By the age of 12 he was winning competitions and racking up quite a number of them for the next few years.

Then, all of his after-school time

while attending Lutheran High School East in Harper Woods, was spent either honing his trade or performing, "mostly performing," he said.

The year 1990 marks his 10th year as a professional.

In the meantime he has performed for most of the Fortune 500 companies, a host of conventions and has been the opening act for Roy Clark, Lee Granwood, Barbara Mandrell, Steve Allen and Phyllis Diller.

He is a frequent performer in Las Vegas, Reno, Tahoe and on cruise ships, and all of his shows include audience participation.

In January he moved to Los Angeles because there were more opportunities for him there — where he is known as simply Hobson.

"It's only in Detroit where they still call me Jeff and you can call me Jeff," he said.

The most important facet in his career was being asked to appear on Show Time Comedy Club Network. The segment he's in will air April 27. This is the biggie," he said. "This is his major stuff. Watch it."

Hobson will perform Wednesday through Saturday, April 18-21, at Joey's Comedy Club and Sports Emporium, Southfield Road, Allen Park. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 382-7041.

Comics try for laughs

By Bob Sadler  
special writer

If Detroit is any indication, the national comedy boom is showing no signs of decline.

Ninety people who aspire to the comedic big time showed up at Chaplin's East April 5 for the chance to be in the annual Johnnie Walker National Comedy Search. The sole survivor of the day's competition would receive a \$1,000 check and a trip for two to the finals in Los Angeles.

The Detroit turn-out is quite an increase from last year when 55 took to the stage at Chaplin's.

"The amount of people who showed up is indicative of the comedy boom here in Detroit," said John Yoder, owner of Funny Business comedy club in Kalamazoo and a booking agent for more than 2,000 comics. "It's doubled in size in the last few years."

"Detroit is really going to be a source of a lot of creative comedy now for the whole country. There's a lot of good talent here that needs to be seen."

Two comics with local connections who were looking to be seen that day were Lowell Sanders and Norm Stulz. Both survived the day's auditions, a difficult, pressure-packed two-minute set and found themselves in the evening's finals.

"I did a 6½-minute bit in two minutes," said Stulz who lives in Holly with his family. "It's difficult, but I'm getting better at it."

IN THE TIME before the finals, the comics sat in the lounge and pondered their best eight-minute routines. One was pacing nervously. Sanders was nowhere to be found, arriving late and learning upon his arrival that he would be the first comic to perform — the graveyard shift. The rest of the comics appeared pretty loose, sitting around



**Lowell Sanders hoped to move up to top spot in the Johnnie Walker comedy competition this year after finishing second last year, but lost out to funny men from Chicago.**

trading "war" stories.

Stulz was gabbing with a fellow competitor, his friend Rocky LaPorte. Born in Brooklyn and now living in Chicago, LaPorte is a comedic "Italian Stallion," complete with the deadpan look and the thick Italian accent.

Despite being in comedy only a few years, LaPorte already has appearances on "The Pat Sajak Show," "Comic Strip Live" and "Evening at the Improv" under his belt. He was at Chaplin's for the same event last year, making the evening finals but not placing the top two.

"People have called me a clean Andrew Dice Clay, but I don't like being compared to him," LaPorte said. "I think he's very raunchy."

Stulz and LaPorte talk about their earlier auditions like two soldiers back from a tour on the front lines.

"It's crazy," LaPorte said. "Comics (the audience for the auditions) aren't the easiest people in the world to make laugh."

Stulz agreed.

"MOSTLY, THEY just nod," he said. "If you've got a bunch of com-

ics nodding, you're killing them."

Finally, it's time. Bud Friedman, founder of The Improvisation chain of comedy clubs, takes the stage to get the show off the ground. Friedman is the most notable of the judges for the finals, which also included his wife, John Yoder, a talent coordinator for "Star Search," a Lansing club owner and a couple of local radio personalities.

Sanders, who placed second in the Detroit finals last year, got introduced. He talks about the difference between living in his native Detroit and his new home, Los Angeles. Mentioning his previous membership in the UAW, he gets laughs with "UAW here today means you ain't working."

All in all, the consistently funny set Sanders delivered was made even better by the fact that he faced the crowd first.

Three luckster comics come and go and now, it's time for LaPorte.

"I grew up in a tough neighborhood... Cambodia," he said to open his set. Looking at home, wearing a denim jacket, blue jeans and New York Yankees T-shirt, LaPorte works the crowd well through his observation on drive-in theaters, Detroit pigeons ("They're so big, they look like pigs with wings"), first dates and growing up in Catholic schools.

**STULZ CAME** out in the seventh slot, talking like a machine gun. His reputation as "Michigan's premiere storyteller" was earned under much more relaxed circumstances. His set is primarily geared around the subjects of marriage, sex and growing up with sisters, particularly his older sister Linda.

"I thought she had a speech impediment for 14 years. She could only say three words, 'Norman did it.'"

After all 10 comics completed their sets, the judges tabulated the points while Tony Hayes, last year's Johnnie Walker Detroit winner, performed.

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, Newsprinters, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.**

● **Chaplin's East**  
Paula Poundstone along with Peter Berman and Steve Mitchell will perform Wednesday-Saturday, April 18-21, at Chaplin's East, 3424 Groesbeck, Fraser. Show times are 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 792-1802.

● **Chaplin's West**  
Amazing Jonathan, along with Tommy Cunn and Mario Sciorino, will perform Tuesday-Saturday, April 10-14, at Chaplin's West, 16890 Telegraph, south of Six Mile, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 533-8866.

● **Chaplin's Plymouth**  
Tim Rowland will perform Wednesday-Saturday, April 18-21, at Chaplin's Plymouth in the Radisson, 14707 Northville Road, Plymouth. Showtimes are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 454-6880.

● **Comedy Castle**  
Frankie Pace will perform with Tim Lilly Tuesday-Saturday, April 17-21, at the Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth, Royal Oak. Show times 8 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and 8 and 10:45 p.m. Friday-Saturday. For reservations, call 542-9900.

● **Joey's Allen Park**  
Hobson will perform Wednesday.

Saturday, April 18-21, at Joey's Comedy Club and Sports Emporium, Southfield Road, Allen Park. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 382-7041.

● **Joey's Livonia**  
Gary Hardwick will perform Wednesday-Saturday, April 18-21, at Joey's Comedy Club, 38071 Plymouth Road, east of Levan, Livonia. Show times are 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. For reservations, call 261-8555.

● **Holly Hotel**  
Jeanette Barber Thursday-Saturday, April 12-14, at Holly Hotel, 110 Battle Alley, Holly. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Thursday and 8:30 (no smoking show Friday only) and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 634-1891.

● **Miss Kitty's**  
Charlie Wiener will perform with John Dacosse Thursday-Saturday, April 19-21, at Miss Kitty's Comedy Club, Long Branch Restaurant, 595 N. Lapeer Road, Oxford. Show times

are 8 p.m. Thursday, 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 628-6500.

● **Looney Bin**  
Tony Hayes will perform with Danny Gray and Elliot Brandt Thursday and Saturday, April 19-21, at the Wolverine and Looney Bin Restaurant and Comedy Club, 1655 Gengary, Walled Lake. Show times are 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday, and 8 and 10:15 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call 669-9374.

● **Bea's Comedy Kitchen**  
Skeeter Murray, Downtown Tony Brown and Steve Bell will perform Friday and Saturday, April 20-21, at Bea's Comedy Kitchen, 541 Larned, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. For information, call 861-2581.

● **Mainstreet**  
John Rigg will perform Friday-Saturday, April 20-21, at Mainstreet Comedy Showcases, 314 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and 7, 9 and 11 p.m. Saturday. For information, call 996-9800.

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