STREET CRACKS

Vic Dunlop finds there's life after 'Make Me Laugh'

By Bob Sadler
special writer

Before the comedy explosion in this country, there were few television shows featuring stand-up comedy on a regular basis — the ultimate, of course, being "The Tonight Show."

That was the age before David Letterman, Arsenio Hall, HBO, Showtime and others were shows that performers in the clubs aspired to perform.

And then there was "Make Me Laugh" — a show that was truly ahead of its time.

Remember?

A game show where contestants could win fabulous cash and prizes if they could only keep from cracking a smile and laughing aloud. That premise brought out the best in a strong cast of comedians, whose job it was to keep the booty out of the contestants' hands.

Among the resident comics on the show, which ran in first-run syndication for three seasons — 1979-1981 — were standouts like Gallagher, Howie Mandel, Bruce Baum, Bill Kirchenbauer and Vic Dunlop.

Dunlop has kept busy in the years since "Make Me Laugh." He still spends about 30 weeks of the year on the national club circuit, which was only in its infancy at the time of the show's run.

"We (the stable of comics on 'Make Me Laugh') actually helped create that circuit," Dunlop said in a recent interview from his home in Los Angeles.

The big, boisterous Dunlop has also made appearances in five feature films, including "Meatballs 2."

"THE FILM STUNK, but I was great in it," Dunlop said with a chuckle.

His current television credits include a "Showtime Comedy All-Stars" special with Detroit's own Tim Allen, Arts & Entertainment's "An Evening at the Improv," and regular appearances on the now-defunct game show "Win, Lose or Draw."

A significant portion of Dunlop's time these days is devoted to his video production company, appropriately titled VDTV.

"I'm contagious," Dunlop said.

Headquartered in Burbank, Dunlop and a staff of about eight writers and technical people work on various projects, including a new line of video comedy greeting cards.

"For a good gag greeting card today, you're likely to pay $3-4," Dunlop explained. "For a few more bucks, you can get them a gift."

These "cards" are three-five-minute videotapes and feature Dunlop in various vignettes. He's dressed as a nurse for the "Get Well" card and Cupid in the "Love" card.

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At this time, there are about a dozen video cards, and Dunlop handles his own distribution, making deals with outlets in the town he plays in and selling them after performances.

EVENTUALLY, IF the idea takes off, he would like to cut a distribution deal with Hallmark or another major greeting card company, while maintaining control over the creation and production of future video cards.

While Dunlop claims to have grown up as a person (he has been married for seven years and has inherited two children from the marriage), he still can be a crazy man on stage.

And he promises originality and zaniness for his holiday appearance in Detroit, which includes special New Year's Eve shows.

"I'm going to moon the old and bring in the new."

Vic Dunlop appears Wednesday, Dec. 26, through Monday, Dec. 31, at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth St., Royal Oak. For reservations and information, call 542-9900.

Vic Dunlop started out his career making people laugh so that the money stayed in the bank on "Make Me Lauhg." Now, he's doing it with his own production company, VDTV.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here are listings of some comedy clubs in our area. To let us know who is appearing at your club, send the information to: Comedy Listings, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

● MAINSTREET

Judy Tenuta will perform Friday-Saturday, Dec. 28-29, at MainStreet Comedy Showcase, 314 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and 7, 9 and 11 p.m. Saturday. Also, Heywood Banks will perform New Year's Eve Monday, Dec. 31. For information, call 996-9080.

● BEA'S COMEDY KITCHEN

Downtown Tony Brown will perform along with Skeeter Murray, Mary Welch and Danny Gray Friday-Saturday, Dec. 28-29, at Bea's Comedy Kitchen, 541 Larned, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. All four comedians will perform New Year's Eve Monday, Dec. 24. Show time is 9:30 p.m. Cost is $35 a couple. For information, call 961-2581.

● COMEDY CASTLE

Vic Dunlop will perform Tuesday-Saturday, Dec. 26-29, at the Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth, Royal Oak. Show time is 7 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Dunlop will also headline a special New Year's Eve show Monday, Dec. 31. For reservations, call 542-9900.

● JOEY'S LIVONIA

Leo Dufour will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 26-29, at Joey's Comedy Club, Plymouth Road between Wayne and Levan roads, Livonia. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. Dufour will headline a special show New Year's Eve Monday, Dec. 31. For information, call 261-0555.

● JOEY'S ALLEN PARK

Hobson will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 26-29, at Joey's Comedy Club and Sports Emporium, 15246 Southfield Road, Allen Park. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Hobson will headline a special show New Year's Eve Monday, Dec. 31. For information, call 382-7041.

● JOEY'S AT THE ROXY

Jef Brannan will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 26-29, at Joey's Comedy Club at the Roxy, 11175 Haggerty Road, Belleville. For information, call 699-1829. Brannan will headline a special show New Year's Eve Monday, Dec. 31.

● MISS KITTY'S

Ken Evans will perform along with Nick Paredes Thursday-Saturday, Dec. 27-29, at Miss Kitty's Comedy Club, Long Branch Restaurant, 595 N. Lapeer Road, Oxford. Show times are 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Evans will also headline a special New Year's Eve show. For information, call 628-6500.

● LOONEY BIN

Jill Washburn will perform along with Kirk Noland and Ken Brown Friday-Monday, Dec. 28-31, at the Wolverine and Looney Bin Restaurant and Comedy Club, 1655 Glengary, Walled Lake. Show times are 9 p.m. Friday and 8 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. Wednesday and Thursday shows are free. For more information, call 669-9374.

● DUFFY'S

Bob Posch Comedy Show will perform at 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays at Duffy's, 8635 Cooley Lake Road, Union Lake. Admission is $7. For information, call 363-9469.

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