

STREET CRACKS

Rita: Comedy's best laugh

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

For Rita Rudner, voted the 1990 Best Female Stand Up Comedienne, performing is like having someone over for dinner — "There's communication and some pleasant talk about things you care about."

Not to mention a few laughs. As for her recent appearance in Las Vegas, Rudner loves Nevada's fun city — "It's very hot, very nice and I like seeing my name up on a big marquee, and feeling the excitement of the audiences."

As for her life with husband Martin Bergman, an English comedy producer, they're "a pretty funny family" — "We know lots of Hollywood types," said Rudner, who admits she wasn't quite prepared for an unexpected visit to her dressing room by Debbie Reynolds recently. "She came backstage and we really clicked. Debbie decided the next night we would have a party in my dressing room and she arranged the whole thing."

A hot talent with a cool, subdued delivery, the comedienne is a native of Miami who left home and family at age 15 to pursue a career on Broadway as a dancer.

"I WAS SUCH a headstrong kid, I just never gave my parents an option," she said. "I had graduated from high school so I just left. And I've been in show business ever since."

Rudner said her parents, knowing her, told her to go try her luck and they'd back her up. "Now they watch on television and are proud. Dancers are different," she said. "We start very young and we're very determined. I was only five when I began dancing."

Rudner worked Broadway for 10 years, loving every experience, such as appearing in the original productions of "Mack and Mabel" with Robert Preston and Bernadette Peters, appearing in Stephen Sondheim's "Follies" and playing a featured role in the musical "Annie."

"I had all kinds of parts, but the longer I worked the more I realized that it's hard to get work on the Broadway stage and it pays very little."

One night in 1980 after completing her "Annie" role, she snuck into a New York comedy club and tried her hand at stand-up. Rudner hasn't looked back since.



Rita Rudner went from dancing on Broadway to the stage for stand-up comedy.

"I REALIZED George Burns was still making movies and Gene Kelly hadn't worked in along time," she said and began to develop a style based on finesse and soft talk but with a kick.

Her well written material, poised sophistication have earned her in winning top comedy awards and accolades for her first solo hour-long special for HBO "Rita: u. He MILD," voted best comedy special in the Cable Guide's reader's poll, and two hour-long specials that showcased her versatility.

After I turned to comedy, I kept on working very hard every day," she said. "I write all my own stuff, but from the beginning I studied comedy from books in the library, from comedy albums and watching other comics and people."

Her comedy heroes include Woody Allen and Jack Benny, her personal all-time favorite. "I admire comedians who take the profession to the next step, such as directing or producing," she said.

Rudner works hard at writing something new every day for her act and she is presently working on a

book of comedic essays, titled "I Wrote a Book."

"I TRY THINGS all the time and think about my work most of the time," she said. She and her husband live on the west coast.

"I met him pretty late, when I was age 30, but it worked out even though he lived in Australia," she said.

She has learned to love Australia where "it's less hectic and there are fewer people," she explained.

Since she left dancing, Rudner said she's not quite in the shape she was when she was on Broadway though she bikes and does stretches. "Sometimes we play tennis, too," she said. "But I'm not good enough to win a headband."

Busy every moment, the woman who never came close to registering for college classes works on her book and is close to getting a movie script produced. She also is preparing a one-woman show and contemplates the writing of more scripts.

Rita Rudner will appear Tuesday, July 23, at MainStreet Comedy Showcase, 314 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Show times are 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. For information, call 996-9080.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here are listings of some comedy clubs in the area. To let us know who is appearing at your club, send the information to: Comedy Listings, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36261 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

• JAY LENO

Jay Leno will appear Wednesday, July 24, at Pine Knob, Sasabaw Road and I-75, Clarkston. For information, call 377-8200.

• GEORGE CARLIN

George Carlin will appear with guests, America, Thursday, July 25, at Pine Knob, Sasabaw Road and I-75, Clarkston. For information, call 377-8200.

• CHAPLIN'S WEST

Jenny Jones will appear Wednesday, July 24, at Chaplin's West, 16890 Telegraph Road, one block south of Six Mile, Detroit. Admission is \$12. For information, call 533-8866.

• COMEDY CASTLE

Glen Allen will appear with Jim Beatty Tuesday-Saturday, July 23-27, and Jim Carrey will appear for a special engagement Sunday, July 28, at the Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth, Royal Oak. Show time is 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 542-9900.

• JOEY'S ALLEN PARK

Steve Mitchell will perform Wednesday-Saturday, July 24-27, at Joey's Comedy Club and Sports Emporium, 15246 Southfield Road, Allen Park. Show times are 9 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 10:45 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 382-7041.

• BEA'S COMEDY CLUB

Deanna Tury Brown will appear with Mark Sill and Benny Archer will perform Friday-Saturday, July 26-27, at Bea's Comedy Club, 541 Larned, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. For information, call 961-2581.

• MAINSTREET

Kirkland Teeple will appear Friday-Saturday, July 26-27, 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. For information, call 996-9080.



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