

George just talks about himself

By Bob Sadler
special writer

The last time Melvin George paid a visit to Detroit, he came to visit his uncle. And his luggage was stolen.

So George has a warning for anyone interested in coming to his comedy show.

"I'll be watching what everybody's wearing."

But seriously, Melvin George is certainly not your typical funnyman.

Leaving his hometown of Boston in 1975 for greener showbiz opportunities in New York, he soon became a regular at Catch A Rising Star and The Improvisational while earning a degree in theater at State University of New York (SUNY).

Applying his skills as an actor and director, George was a member of The Kitchen Table Comedy Team (with Robert "Hollywood Shuffle" Townsend) for three years. That group made an appearance at Carnegie Hall.

In 1981, George decided to test the solo waters of stand-up work. A big break came his way — opening three Pat LaBelle shows in front of 8,000 people at King's Dominion amusement park in Virginia.

"The first show was horrendous," George said. "I just couldn't grasp 8,000 people in my head."

GEORGE TURNED it around for the ensuing shows, and eventually landed opening slots for Chaka Khan, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Roberta Flack, The Commodores, The Four Tops and The Temptations.

The style of comedy George embraces is a hybrid of his influences — Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor, Dick Gregory, Bob Newhart and George Carlin.

"I talk about myself," he said. "If it happened to me that day, it'll probably be on stage that night. I can't sit down and write jokes. I have to live them."

Another unique aspect to George's humor is his use of body movement to manipulate a punchline or routine.

"I'm 6-feet, 2-inches. It's tough for me to stand still," he said. "So, I sometimes like to explain my jokes with a little physical action."

Beyond the superficial aspect of comedy, however, George seeks something more out of every performance — to truly reach his audience.

"I'd like to believe that the style of humor I do is the kind that makes a difference in people's lives," George said. "I once had a woman come up to me after a show and tell me she had a few weeks left to live. But while watching my show, she felt like she had no problems and could just laugh. I have a desire to share in people's happiness."

WHEN NOT on the comedy circuit, George is a devoted family man, living on Long Island with his wife, 17-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son. They are both sources of inspiration and perspiration.

"When I'm on the road, I look forward to coming home. Then when



Melvin George's style of comedy is a hybrid of his influences — Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor, Dick Gregory, Bob Newhart and George Carlin.

I'm at home, I look forward to leaving," he said. "I had (career) plans for myself in 1985, but then my son was born, and I realized that all my plans and desires were secondary. "Comedy is just what I've been able to do for a living, and I'm making the most of it. So I want to keep doing it and support my family."

George still does wish for fame, but not the kind of notoriety reached by friends like Robert Townsend. The fame he seeks is of a more paradoxical nature. "I want everyone to know me and to leave me alone when I walk down the street. I like the attention, but I also like being anonymous."

Melvin George will appear Wednesday through Saturday at Joey's Comedy Club, Plymouth Road, east of Levan Road, Livonia. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, with an additional 10:30 p.m. show on Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 261-0555.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here are some listings of comedy clubs in our area. To let us know who is appearing at your club, send us the information: Comedy Listings, Observer & Eccentric, 35231 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

• CHAPLIN'S EAST

Klaus Myers will appear Wednesday through Saturday, March 15-18, at Chaplin's East, 34244 Groesbeck, 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 WEST

Mick Louis Lazloek will perform on Tuesday through Saturday, March 14-18, at Chaplin's West, 16890 Telegraph Road, south of Six Mile, Detroit. For information, call 533-8866.

• COMEDY SPORTZ

Comedy Sportz 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.

• JOEY'S

Melvin George will perform Wednesday through Saturday, March 15-18, at Joey's Comedy Club, 36071 Plymouth, west of Wayne Road, Livonia. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and at 8 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Thursday is no smoking night. For information, call 261-0555.



Whoopi Goldberg will perform at the Fox Theater in Detroit Monday, March 27.

• COMEDY CASTLE

Tom McTigue will appear Tuesday through Saturday, March 14-18, at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle, 2593 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.

• WHOOP! GOLDBERG

Whoopi Goldberg will perform at 8 p.m. Monday, March 27, at the Fox Theater in Detroit. Tickets are \$22.50. For information, call 567-6000.

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