

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



(DQ)

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Their specialty is good clean fun

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

GREG HALL AND Robin Brant describe the comedy revues they put together for their ensemble, the Early Monday Morning Show, as good, clean, stupid, silly humor.

Their shows combining skits, commercials and a bit of music, as well as spotlight solo segments, have been compared to Carol Burnett and Second City productions — corny, sprinkled with slapstick and featuring absurd characters, but essentially clean.

Hall remembers when a member of their audience said he loved the show and only later realized that the group didn't do anything dirty. Hall calls that "a cool compliment."

A favorite skit, "Let's Spawn," takes off on "The Dating Game" and uses members of the audience as the bachelors or the bachelorettes. Lusty double entendre often enlivens comments in the improvisational skit, but Brant says the ensemble "tries to bring back comedy the way it was before the onslaught of the 'F' word and the public gropings" that often are staple fare for nightclub comedy acts.

"WE ALSO TRY to stay away from political humor," Hall says. Brant adds, "That stuff gets dated fast. We go for ageless comedy."

The Early Monday Morning Show will do a two-hour benefit performance at 6 p.m. Easter Sunday at the Attic to help the downtown theater resolve its financial problems. The company is booked at Joey's Comedy and Sports Emporium in Allen Park on Wednesday-Saturday, May 23-26, and at Joey's Comedy Club in Livonia on Wednesday-Saturday, July 18-21.

The group was featured on the cable TV show "Spotlight on Comedy" last spring, performed at the Uptate Theatre in Redford in January and put on a show liberally laced with humor at the Edison Boat Club on St. Patrick's Day.

Corporate bookings dot the group's calendar, with many of the dates return engagements. The comedy ensemble has just begun filming the pilot of a local weekly TV show.

The Early Monday Morning Show ensemble consists of 10 comedians — six men and four women — young entertainers, who are nearly all in their 20s. Only five perform for any given show. Hall and Brant, as the group's founders and principal writers, perform with every show and rotate other players, depending on the booking, Hall says. "Some in

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the group are better in a club setting, others in a theater, some at improvisation."

HALL WRITES 80 percent of the scripts. In fact, he stockpiles material, some destined for ensemble shows, and some, like the scripts for a dozen movies he has written, he hopes to introduce someday when he has become a "known" entertainer.

His movie scripts run the gamut from "silly cornball comedy and superhero fantasy to heavy drama." Brant says many of Hall's scripts for the ensemble begin as skeletons, and everybody adds to it, improvising dialogue and polishing the timing.

The pair say the two of them work well together, in part because Brant specializes in slapstick and loud, rowdy comedy and Hall sits back and delivers the witty line.

Where do they get their ideas? From life experience, they agree, and launch into a story about how the three old men, their favorite characters, came to be. One day Hall and Brant played hooky from work and hung out in a bar featuring 33-cent draft beers. "There was nobody under the age of 50 in the place," Brant recalls. They listened to the old fellows happily make conversation with a few words and phrases that said nothing much, but everything necessary. The old men whiffing away the afternoon over a few beers kept conversations afloat with stock comments like "Yep," "Nope," "Not like in the old days." "Don't make 'em like they used to."

HALL AND BRANT went home and created three outrageous old codgers who have become regulars in the ensemble's collection of loony characters audiences love. Hall and Brant also play a pair of loutish country boys known as the Phlem Brothers. Hall says, "They're the most asinine, stupid country people, and they solve the great unsolved mysteries like What Is Big Foot? Who Shot Kennedy? and Is Elvis Dead?"

Greg Hall is a big, easy guy with a beard. He often sports a Seattle Sea Hawks cap on his head and slapdash clothes that unconventionally com-

bine bold patterns and Walt Disney colors. He describes himself as "looking like a bear" — a nice bear as in Smokey guy."

By day, he works for a market research company finding out people's reactions to products proposed for the car industry. The research company was looking for interviewers, and when Hall said he had been a talk show host and worked on cable television, he got the job because they figured he could talk well with people.

Hall grew up in Maryland and he says he was "shy and introverted in grade school." He remembers the day he gave an oral presentation and discovered his aptitude for comedy. The assignment called for partners. "I didn't have a partner," he says, "so I brought my sister's hideous, raty-haired baby doll to be my co-anchor. I became kind of popular after that. Everybody said, 'Hey, you're a funny guy.'"

From his grade school smash debut as a rookie comedian, he honed his talents by watching the masters. "I grew up in the 'Saturday Night Live' generation," he says, and explains he can watch Bill Murray movies over and over and over. "Jonathan Winters is a master of improvisation, he adds, but says his own style "leans toward the witty dialogue of Groucho Marx."

DURING HIGH SCHOOL he started a comedy group called none other than the Early Monday Morning Show because its first steady booking was Sunday nights and the group's members used to joke that they performed early Monday mornings. He brought the offbeat name with him nearly five years ago when his family moved to Troy, where his father still lives.

Hall says of himself, "I'm just a mutant, the lunatic son in a family of very conservative nine to five types" — except for his grandmother. The gene with the devilish sense of humor must skip generations because Hall says, "Some of my best stuff comes from my grandmother."

Brant, on the other hand, describes his whole family as "a tad left of center. When you go to the house, you never know what to



In Three Old Men skit (above) are Andy Jentzen (left), Greg Hall and Robin Brant of the Early Monday Morning Show ensemble. Hall and Brant (below) appear in a skit as the Phlem Brothers.

expect." Brant, who lives in Troy, met Hall when they were working at the same club. A commercial artist by day, Brant designed the Bad Boys logo and creates all the Pistons T-shirt art. He often wears sweatshirts blazing with his own designs. Brant says of his initiation into comedy, "I remember joking my way out of a lot of fights, like a Spiderman character, so I wouldn't get my face beat in." His sense of humor got him into as much trouble as it got him out of.

"I got into trouble doing improvisations of the high school teachers," he says of his years at Notre Dame High School. "In fact, I got into trouble so often they put me on the P.A. making announcements so they knew where I was at all times."

THAT LED TO doing voices on the radio for Jim Harper and Dick Puritan. He played sports for a while until, "Everybody in football grew except me." During high school he took every art class available and per-

Please turn to Page 9



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