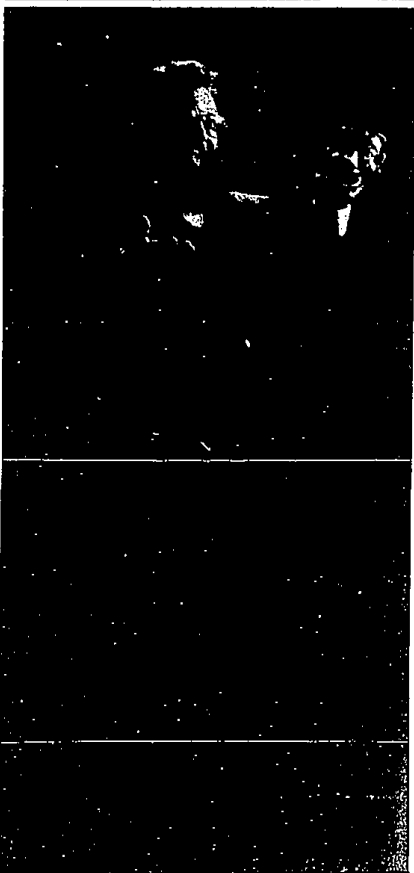


STREET CRACKS



AMEEN HOWRANI

Roundhouse Comedy College founder Jonathon Round, teacher and professional guide to some of Detroit's finest young comedians.

Class clowns: This college helps turn yuks to bucks

By Pat Schulte
staff writer

Question: Where do the best of the high school class clowns go when they graduate?

Answer: Some go to jail, some get serious and successful, some don't, some go into sales and some go to college.

"Dad, guess what? I'm going to college after all!"

"Great son, where did you decide to go?"

"Roundhouse Comedy College, Dad!"

"What?"

Yep. That's what happens to some of the Detroit areas' funniest class clowns, along with a wide variety of other quipsters who want to hone their comedic talents to a point of going on stage to make people laugh.

And, thanks to guys like Jonathon Round and his Roundhouse Comedy College (formerly Chaplin's Comedy College), students of laughter can learn everything from writing their own material to performing in front of an audience.

Roundhouse Comedy College is split into several different humor channels. Called "Smart Comedy" workshops, due to the scientific approach used, Round begins by helping students write their own material.

"WE START by helping students recognize and organize their resources," said Round, a hulking, bearded gentleman cast in the Santa Claus mold, who got his start in show business 20 years ago. "We don't just stamp out comedians here, we give people hints on understanding their resources and broadening their comic horizons."

Students at Roundhouse Comedy College are taught to steer away from the norm.

"Monology is out," said Round. In other words, the standing joke teller is a thing of the past. Audiences want innovation, which makes comedians like Gallagher and Steven Wright so popular.

At Roundhouse, not only will you find young hopefuls emulating the likes of Sam Kinison and Andrew Dice Clay, but you'll also find an engineer from General Motors or the vice president from Shearson, Lehman and Hutton trading laughs and techniques with Round and his stu-

'It's like learning to walk and talk again ... shaky at first, but once you get it down, you're on your way.'

— Jonathan Round

dents.

"The college did two things for me," said Ken Brown, an industrial engineer at General Motors, who at 28, has been touring the country for two years as a professional stand-up comic. "Jonathan's course gave me more knowledge on how to write material and it also gave me some valuable stage time."

"The first thing you learn is that this is no 'la-de-da' course," said Lenny Weiss who is with Shearson, Lehman and Hutton in Birmingham. He retired from stand-up comedy at the tender age of 37 after 25 shows.

"THIS COURSE is a lot like college, Jonathan talks, and talks, and talks, you take notes and notes and then you get to work on your routine in front of the class," Weiss said. "I still keep in touch with some of the people I met."

One of Weiss' contacts is Glida Hauser, who also graduated from the college with a degree in hardy-har-har.

"I probably wouldn't have done it if it wasn't for Jonathan's courses," said Hauser, a University of Michigan graduate from Southfield who's been working on the local open mike circuit for six months. "I was really chicken and even went as far as to say that I was finding out about the course for a friend, so they wouldn't think it was me."

After students have discovered what they're about, what their resources are, and ways that they can create material, they work on coming up with a 10-minute act. That's phase-two of the course, or, the performance bit.

"While learning to write material, the students develop a routine," said Round, who, after a stint with the "Second City" comedy troupe in Chicago, began teaching improvisational comedy in Detroit in 1980. "We then videotape their routine and later discuss delivery, material use, facial language and prop use."

THE COURSE costs \$240 and meets eight weeks, one night a week, for three hours.

"The class helps you with becoming more aware of daily things that may be funny, and Jonathan helps you translate that into material," said Brown.

Comedy student Jennie McNulty of Westland agrees and also points out that students aren't spoon-fed by Round.

"He'll give you a different twist to add to your material, guiding you along by asking you questions to get you to think," said McNulty, who has a degree in psychology and a master's degree in kinesiology from the University of Michigan. She's been touring across the states as a stand-up comic for four months.

Round believes that the ability to successfully perform on stage depends entirely on the person's confidence in the material they've developed.

"It's like learning to walk and talk again ... shaky at first, but once you get it down, you're on your way," said Round.

"In my first show, I went through these two killer sets," said McNulty. "The audience was way into it, and I looked down and saw my heart beating through my shirt ... very inspiring."

Not only does Round lend himself to building talent, he also sees to it that his students get a fair crack at local jobs which can lead to quite

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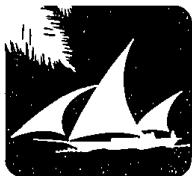
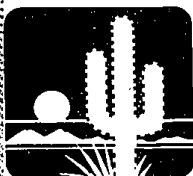
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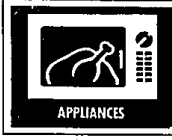
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