

He's Ruff

But style of humor is smooth

Comedy to Keith Ruff is all about heroes, people he grew up watching on television and in the movies.

The Detroit native recalls with glee as a kid sitting in front of the TV and seeing the gut-busting antics of Tim Conway on "The Carol Burnett Show" or the hilarious routines of Geraldine on "The Flip Wilson Show." He runs down a list of names including Richard Pryor and George Carlin, whom he considers comedic geniuses.

This is a guy whose face even lights up talking about how he went to Pine Knob two years ago to see Jackie Mason, only to have the show canceled by rain.

"I wish I could sit down and meet someone like Richard Pryor," Ruff said. "I would like to ask him questions like, 'who's your favorite basketball team?'"

Hero worship is one thing. Taking up what they do for a living is quite another.

Three years ago, the 1975 graduate of Detroit Western was laid off from his job as a salesman at a retail furniture outlet and turned to a life of stand-up. So far, so good.

Ruff is making the rounds in Midwest comedy clubs and picking up new devotees along the way. And like those whom he idolizes, he's found out one thing about the business: Comedy is rough (as in Ruff).

THE SLOGAN has become his motto. But, in Ruff's case, it bears more than a grain of truth.

"Comedy is rough when you drive five or six hours in the snow to get to your gig," Ruff said. "Comedy is

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Keith Ruff
comedian

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Ruff keeps a busy itinerary on the comedy club circuit. Chances are he'll be seen enroute one night and headlining the next.

Whatever the slot, Ruff draws from personal experiences in his act. Things like breaking up with his girlfriend or growing up in a family as the youngest of five brothers are crafted into comedic routines. ("Instead of saying 'dinner's ready,' my mother chucked up a white line and used a starting pistol.")

Family pets also find their way into Ruff's act, including a bit on pit

bulls in prisons he used to raise bouviers.

"My comedy is me for 33 years," said Ruff, 33. "My comedy is everything I wanted to say in a joking way since I was 8."

But Ruff waited until he was 30 to do stand-up professionally. During the day, Ruff worked with another local comedian, Mike Bonner, at the furniture store. Bonner urged Ruff to try his humor onstage.

Ruff's debut came at the Comic Cafe where he did a five-minute bit. The audience was less than hospitable.

"They were throwing eggs and tomatoes at me," Ruff said. "By the time I left the stage, I had a helluva salad."

ACTUALLY, his bombing served as a catalyst. Ruff became more determined to succeed, working on his stage presence and timing.

Today, Ruff is a veteran. He has no regrets turning from the security of a full-time job to pursue a lifelong dream.

Ruff definitely has stars in his eyes. On an autographed publicity photo, he writes "see you in L.A.," obviously setting his sights beyond the local club scene.

In the meantime, he's content to play to a hometown audience. Ruff appears often at the three Chaplin's clubs as an opening act. Last week, he headlined at Chaplin's in Plymouth.

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Comedian Keith Ruff draws from personal experience growing up in Detroit.

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, 30261 Schoeder Road, Livonia 48150.

● CHAPLIN'S EAST

Joe Vega will appear Tuesday-Saturday, March 26-30, at Chaplin's East, 34244 Groesbeck, Fraser. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday

and Saturday. For reservations, call 792-1902.

● CHAPLIN'S WEST

Tim O'Rourke will appear with Steve Iott and Ken Brown Tuesday through Saturday, March 26-30, at Chaplin's West, 16890 Telegraph, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 533-8866.

● CHAPLIN'S PLYMOUTH

Dan Dillon will appear with Karl

Anthony will appear Wednesday through Saturday, March 27-30, at Chaplin's Plymouth, 14707 Northville, Plymouth. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 454-4680.

● MAINSTREET

Elayne Bousler will appear Wednesday and Thursday, March 27-28, and Bert Challis perform Friday, Saturday, March 29-30, at Main

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• Spring Rolls
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• Desserts
• Play & Eat Show
• Brined Spit-roast Turkey
• Stuffed Potatoes
• Spring Rolls
• Fruit Salad
• Desserts

Call 827-1352 for reservations or for more information

The Radisson Plaza Hotel at Town Center is a full-service hotel with 150 guest rooms, a restaurant, a bar, a fitness center, and a business center. It is located in the heart of Southfield, Michigan, just off I-75 and I-96.

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QUIZ: In which film did Judd Nelson play a rebel high school student stuck in Saturday detention?
A) St. Elmo's Fire B) The Breakfast Club C) From the Hip

ENTRY FORM:

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Answer _____

Send this form to: Showcase Film Quiz, The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30261 Schoeder Rd., Livonia, MI 48150. The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and Showcase Cinemas are not responsible for the return of a mailing. Please use only one form per household. This offer is valid only for the time period indicated.

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