

# Castle from page E1

developing his idea. Local media personalities helped him promote those first comedy nights in the basement of the restaurant where he worked — The Meeting Place.

Featured local comics included Bill Thomas, Leo DuFour, and Dave Coulter. In those early days, Tim Allen was his opening act when Ridley started Open Mike Night in February of 1979.

"Leo auditioned for me over the phone," said Ridley. "I didn't know what I was looking for. Tim (Allen) approached it as a job. He was very professional and wore a suit when he performed."

Ridley's comedy nights took off right away, and pretty soon he was searching for a bigger place. His present location, the old press room for the Royal Oak Tribune, located just around the corner, is his seventh venue.

"I can't complain," said Ridley. "We've had well over a million customers, and a billion laughs." He's a little concerned about the future. There are fewer clubs now than there were when comedy clubs were at their peak 1985-1990. Metro Detroit has more

comedy clubs than anyone else — 13 within 45 minutes of each other.

"You're seeing everything you would see on TV," he said. "People come back to the club hoping to see the next Drew Carey."

When he started in this business, no one ever thought a stand-up comedian would get their own show. Now it's pretty common.

In fact, Mike Bonner, a stand-up comedian from Detroit, was recently picked to be one of 25 performers for the 1999 U.S. Comedy Arts Festival, March 4-7 in Aspen, Colo. The festival will be taped for HBO and aired later this year.

"This could be Mike's big break," said David Gladstone of Off N-Running Mgt. in Los Angeles. "Every television producer in the industry is there looking for next year's sitcom star."

Bonner is co-managing by Ridley and described as a "hip Bill Cosby."

There will always be new talent, and Bonner could be one of stars of tomorrow. For a comedian, staying fresh is a challenge.

Ridley can spot comedians who steal from others. He collects comedy albums and knows all the routines.

"A lot of times you have to tell a comedian, 'no,'" said Ridley. "We have a very high bar."

Local comedienne Alyce Faye of Farmington has performed at the club, and still smiles at the memory of Ridley, telling her "nice job."

"He doesn't hand out compliments freely," she said. "It's a crawl, walk, run, process. You have to pay your dues."

Faye is working with Ridley on his newest venture — Everashed Productions. "It's the name of the street I grew up on in Walled Lake," said Ridley. "I get a lot of calls from comedians, and people looking to hire comedians. We want to promote laughter throughout the country."

Ridley and Faye say they can work with "whatever the budget allows." Believing laughter is the best medicine, they would also like to bring humor to hospitals, and present seminars.

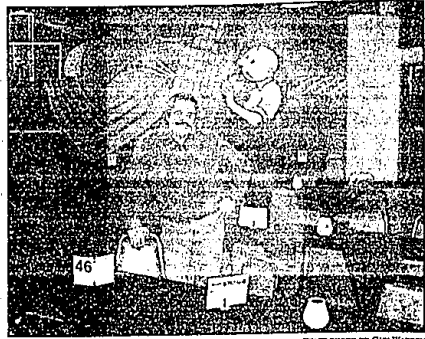
Faye is helping Ridley promote and market Everashed Produc-

tions. "There's so much stress and tension in the workplace," she said. "We had a chuckle buffet for St. Valentine's Day, and can do stressbuster seminars."

Ridley is also opening another club with a partner, Mark Curtis in Chicago — The Black Orchid Showroom & Lounge. It will offer music and comedy, and is located in the same building as Second City. A tentative April opening is scheduled.

This will be a big year for Ridley. Besides celebrating the 20th anniversary of his club, he's getting married, and signed a new 10 year lease for Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle.

"He's considered an A room in the business," said Faye. "His club is a class act."



Lots of laughs: Mark Ridley in the main seating area of Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle in Royal Oak. The club celebrated its 20th anniversary on Jan. 4.

# Music from page E1

his said in a bright booming voice that matches his playing style. "She went to a record store and ran into just the right record sales person. She decided that if I was going to be a jazz trumpet player I had to study classical music. But she said to the clerk, 'I want you to give me every record you have from the best American jazz trumpet players.'"

She brought home records by Bix Biederbecke, Louis Armstrong, Harry James, Roy Eldridge, Rex Stewart of the Duke Ellington Orchestra and early Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie.

"It was a great record collection. My brother has it now," Ferguson said. His brother, Percy, was also a musician, who started a jazz band that featured Maynard and another prominent Canadian jazz master, pianist Oscar Peterson.

At 16, Maynard Ferguson took over leadership of the band, while continuing his classical studies at the French Conservatory of Music. It was with this young band that he developed his ability to play at the sonic bending high range for which he is world famous.

His hand opened for the top American bands that came to play — Charlie Barnet, Jimmy Dorsey and Stan Kenton. From 1960 to 1963 Ferguson established himself with his high register playing as the leader of Kenton's brass section.

Sometimes critics have praised Ferguson's technique while attacking his improvising skills or questioning his moves into popular music — including the megahit version of "Gonna Fly Now" (the theme from "Rocky").

"I've had such a happy career, I have to leave that to others," Ferguson said. "I have that control at the upper register and the stamina. I'm 71 years of age and still have it. It was a trademark. It doesn't bother me at all."

Ferguson tells young players they have to prepare for performing the way athletes prepare. He said that's why he's still able to reach the stratosphere.

"I'm careful of my health as I get older," he said. "It's an athletic thing. As you get older, when you want to get back in shape, at 70 it's like being a 37-year-old National Football guy who has to come back to camp early to get ready."

He said he's impressed with young musicians who can play at a wide range. In the old days, he said, a band would have a "screach" trumpet player who came in just to handle the high notes. Today, young trumpet players are able to move up and down the scale with versatility. He also credits music education for the fact that almost all musicians today can read music and improvise.

The Big Top Nouveau Band will be playing music from their new Concord album, "Brass Attitude," and other Ferguson favorites. The band is planning tours of Japan and Europe, the Blue Note in New York City, House of Blues in Los Angeles and numerous college dates across the country.

Ferguson is also producing records for French pianist Christian Jacob and composer, arranger, trombonist Tom Garling.

And don't even mention retirement.

"As long as I'm healthy and feel good, this is what I love to do," he said.

# Groups present special film shows

Mark your calendars, here are some film events taking place in your neighborhood:

■ **Yiddish Film Series** — in the Jimmy Prentice Morris Building, Jewish Community Center, 16110 W. 10 Mile Road, Oak Park, continues its Yiddish Film Series with the movie "Sing

Along with Israel," 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 7 and 12:45 p.m. Monday, Feb. 8. There is no charge, call (248) 967-4030 for information.

■ **"Home of the Brave"** — film starring James Edwards, Lloyd Bridges and Steve Brodie, will be shown 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 19 at the Southfield Centre for the

Arts, 24350 Southfield Road. The 1949 film was one of the first U.S. films to deal with racism, and is being shown as part of the Southfield Classic Cinema Series.

Tickets are \$3 per person, and include light refreshments. Call (248) 424-9022 for more information or tickets.

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