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Friday, Feb. 18, 2011

Comedy alive in Myrtle Beach Area

By Steve Palisin - spalisin@thesunnews.com



Comedian Tanner Inman of Atlanta imitates the actions of a cat during his performance Saturday night in Garden City Beach.



Who | Carolina Improv Company

What | "Whose Beach Is It Anyway?"

When | 7:30 p.m. today, Feb. 25-26; and March 4-5, 11, 18-19 and 25-26

Where | Uptown, inside Myrtle Beach Mall, close to Bass Pro Shops, U.S. 17 and S.C. 22, near Briarcliffe Acres

How much | \$10 ages 12 and older, \$8 ages 4-11

More info | 272-4242; www.uptownmb.com or www.carolinainprov.com

Also |

With "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" by Wham blaring on the speakers, Chris Franjola from the E "Chelsea Lately" show danced and wiggled onto the stage for the first of two shows Saturday night at Stand-Up Carolina Comedy Club in Garden City Beach.

After the headline act finished recounting his coming of age in the 1980s, the writer-comedian brought up the shock of flying from Los Angeles for four weekend shows only to shiver amid 35-degree temperatures in Myrtle Beach.

"Shouldn't 'Beach' be taken out of the title?" Franjola asked, eliciting laughter from a packed club in which almost every one of the tables was filled.

Stand-Up Carolina, along with the Carolina Improv Company, at Uptown in Myrtle Beach Mall, and Comedy Cabana, in Myrtle Beach's Restaurant Row, make up a trio of comedy entertainment venues on the Grand Strand. Even in the middle of winter - never mind that woodchuck weather-prognosticators such as Punxsutawney Phil, General Beauregard Lee of Georgia and Ohio's' Buckeye Chuck all agreed Feb. 2 on an early end to wintry weather - the laughs never cool off.

Jeff Martin and fellow comedian Todd Yohn opened Stand-Up Carolina in May.

"Comedy is a fun business," Martin said, seeing its role, especially during harder economic times, when tourism slows down for winter.

"I really think it's almost like a second coming of comedy right now. ... People flock to comedy clubs because it gives you such a good way to escape for a few hours. You just laugh and let it out. People leaving after a show will say, 'I needed that.' It really changes your whole mood."

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"Laughing Leprechauns," 7:30 p.m. March 17; \$10 ages 12 and older, \$8 ages 4-11

Classes for youth and adults in six weekly sessions, such as these three for adults: Improv 101, 7-9 p.m. Tuesdays starting April 5; Improv 201, 7-9 p. m. Wednesdays starting March 23; and Stand-Up Comedy 101, with Jeff Martin of Stand-Up Carolina Comedy Club, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays starting April 2.

Where | Comedy Cabana, 9588 N. Kings Highway, Myrtle Beach, just north of the U.S. 17 Bypass and U.S. 17 Business junction

Who and when |

Dale Jones at 8 and 10:15 p.m. today and Saturday, with Jodi White and Cooter Douglas

Basile at 8 p.m. Wednesday-Feb. 26 and 10:15 p.m. Feb. 25-26

How much | \$15 each show

More info | 449-4242 or www.comedycabana.com

Also |

Jackie "The Joke Man" Martling, 8 p.m. March 3-5 and 10:15 p.m. March 4-5; \$22 advance/\$25 day of show

Richie Minervini, 8 p.m. March 8-12 and 10:15 p.m. March 11-12; \$15

Gary Conrad, 8 p.m. March 15-19 and 10:15 p.m. March 18-19; \$15

Eric Grady, 8 p.m. March 22-23; \$15

Where | Stand Up Carolina Comedy Club, 3140-D U.S. 17 Business, Garden City Beach, north of Inlet Square, by Gershon's NY Deli

Who and when |

MG Gaskin, with special guest Eric Counts, 8 and 10 p.m. today and Saturday

The Saints & Sinners Comedy Tour, starring Matthew Lumpkin and Patrick Jolle - 8 p.m. Wednesday-Feb. 26, and 10 p.m. Feb. 25-26

How much | \$15

More info | 651-7819 or standupcarolina.com

Also |

Shaun Jones, 8 p.m. March 2-5 and 10 p.m. March 4-5; \$15

Andy Hendrickson, 8 p.m. March 9-12 and 10 p.m. March 11-12; \$15

Matt Davis with special guest Steve "Shortbus" Krause, 8 p.m. March 16-19 and 10 p.m. March 18-19; \$15

Tom Green, 8 and 10:15 p.m. March 20; \$25

Martin said the overall cost of a comedy night out compares with seeing a movie, with food and beverages added in the mix.

"We just want to make this whole experience like a whole event," he said, explaining how the whole Stand-Up Carolina crew, including the wait staff, makes a difference for each customer. "We tell them, 'You're the first person they see. You're part of the show.'"

Martin said he and Yohn were thrilled to have welcomed Gallagher, Tommy Davidson and Pauly Shore. Club officials keep different age groups in mind and will book family-fare comedians, too. They all have helped Stand-Up Carolina build its profile among concert promoters.

Martin said Bobcat Goldthwait is set for June 30 through July 2.

"He's a ridiculously good comedian," Martin said. "We're lucky to get him. Last year, if I had tried to get Bobcat Goldthwait, they would have laughed at me."

Martin, who said he first performed while at Comedy Cabana, appreciates how different comedy styles complement each other.

Next week, Stand-Up Carolina will welcome the Carolina Improv Company to begin teaching Improv 101 there for weekly classes. Then in April, Martin and Yohn will teach Stand-Up Comedy 101 in Carolina Improv's hall.

Carolina Improv Company

Inspired by the success of Chicago's Second City and the former ABC show "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" Gina Trimarco founded Carolina Improv in 2008, and the troupe moved into Uptown last year.

Directing its shows and classes, Trimarco envisions other ways of branching out and expanding comedy, especially to area residents who want to cue up their creativity. She said she already has signed up for Stand-Up Carolina's class.

Cross-marketing by both clubs targets tourists as well as locals.

Last Friday, Carolina Improv's Valentine's-theme show was sold out, and Trimarco said many audience members had driven 25 miles from Murrells Inlet.

Thinking about what makes improv stand in its own

right, Trimarco said the excitement shared by crowds and performers centers on the unknown, and the possibility of failure, but coping with a challenge.

"So many different emotions get charged up in improv," she said. "When it's brilliant, it's brilliant. When it's not so brilliant, it still makes people laugh, because they're laughing at you trying to do it."

Trimarco summed up the motivation to engage in improv: "It's like solving a puzzle," she said. "It's an intellectual challenge."

She credits many TV comedy shows such as "SCTV" and "Saturday Night Live" as the foundation of improv.



"A 25-minute sitcom is based on different exercises we do in improv to create," Trimarco said. "You take an idea, any kind of crazy idea out there, for a scripted show. We could sit down, and I could tell you what skit they wrote was based on improv exercises."

Trimarco said Carolina Improv will continue to widen its breadth of classes and diversify its shows.

Another partnership the company has formed involves The Meeting Institute of Myrtle Beach, to give workshops combining improv and employee training for leadership, customer service and communications, and coping with situations.

Trimarco said such skills have real-life applications in myriad ways and that she sees "so many business people" taking improv classes.

"You use it in life, as opposed to on stage," she said. "Really, isn't a life a stage every day?"

Returning to entertainment topics, Trimarco said holidays such as St. Patrick's Day provide great fodder for special events. "Laughing Leprechauns" will return March 17.

"Last year, it was standing room only," she said, remembering a dating game and fun with Irish brogues.

As the year rolls on, Trimarco wants to see Carolina Improv's ensemble spin off some smaller groups, such as more all-men's and all-women's acts, engaging in theater sports, with three players against three, with team captains chosen from the audience, and the crowd voting on the winners.

She called that fare short-form improv, versus the long form, which encompasses a crew going 25 straight minutes, covering eight scenes.

Another exercise without limits: "Characters," built on questions from the audience to a "panel of experts" on stage, but they have to give their answers as an iconic character. On Saturday night, voices and mannerisms of Forrest Gump and Arnold Schwarzenegger came to life.

Comedy Cabana

Lindsay Murphy, general manager of Comedy Cabana, which opened in February 1996, said she sees how one person's show changes by night, even between shows on one evening.

"Every show is still different," she said, when its headliners, who each have major TV credits, play for several straight dates.

Murphy said Comedy Cabana sees more of a local crowd during winter, but come summer, when it's open seven nights a week, tourists swell the ranks.

She said when she joined the staff seven years ago, the group of comedians seemed more select, but the public has only grown more aware of comedy, thanks to shows such as "Chelsea Lately," the Comedy Central cable channel, and NBC's "Last Comic Standing."

She's glad to have such long-established comedians such as Jimmie "J.J." Walker, Gary Valentine, hypnotist Gary Conrad, Josh Blue and Tommy Wilson - the latter three all in March - pay annual stops to Comedy Cabana.

"A lot of these people like coming to the beach area," Murphy said.

She also brought up how the method of booking guests has changed and improved with advances in technology, to aspiring comedians' benefit, too. Promoting with mailings and VHS tapes has given way to Internet exposure on sites such as YouTube.

"It's so much easier for new guys to break into it," she said. "It's widened who we can find, and we're not limited. In two seconds, I can look somebody up and watch them. It's quicker and more efficient, and we can scout through possibilities."

Murphy said audiences change more with time of year than by day of the week.

"This time of year, we see older crowds," she said. "In spring, you get more of your younger families, and for spring break with college students. Summertime, it's a little bit of everything."

Murphy said "hands down" Lewis Black causes the most sensation with every visit.

"There is so much energy," she said. "People will pay to stand in the back and watch him."

Murphy appreciates the long hours comedians spending writing and honing their material, which they share during rigorous travels. She stands by the mantra, "Laughter is good for the heart."

With a background in music and theater, Murphy remains content booking and admiring all the talent coming through Comedy Cabana every week.

"There is no way you'd get me to do stand-up," she said. "To get up and make 180 people laugh for an hour would be exhausting."

She also quoted Scott Angrave, who did two special evenings of "Love & Laughter" Valentine's Day shows last weekend: "In an hour, we talk more than most people do in a whole day."

Contact STEVE PALISIN at 444-1764.

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