

Money Can't Buy You Laughs [1]

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With the future of healthcare looming ominously over every presidential debate, it is with sheer hopefulness that one mutters the idiom “laughter is the best medicine.” For students graduating this summer and leaving the warm embrace of their insurance policies, laughter and liquor may be the only two medicines available. Luckily, the ACME Comedy Company in Minneapolis serves up plenty of both – and every Monday at open mic night, the laughs come free.

While some open mic nights may be as painful as a trip to the dentist, ACME's format allows only three minutes to all newcomers. This means more comedians, more laughs, and less awkward silences. The lineup is also organized so that first-timers perform at the beginning, leaving the more experienced comedians for the end. With a never-ending supply of wannabe comics and a lengthy list of reoccurring acts, the night is filled with both unexpected laughs and the well-rehearsed performances of more experienced comedians.

Though there are dozens of comedians who perform on a given Monday night, stage time at ACME is still difficult to obtain.

“It's really competitive,” said Andy Erikson. Erikson is a junior at the University of Minnesota, and first performed at open mic night on August 27th, 2007. Like all first timers, she was guaranteed a spot on stage the moment she signed up. Unlike most, however, her act was good enough to land her a spot in the following week's show.

“I was so nervous,” she said. “Everyone said I was really awkward, but they all thought it was a character.”

Erikson's done the open mic night at ACME every week since. Over the last nine

months, Erikson says her comedy has turned into “a part time job,” filling 6 nights of her week. She performs at many different venues across the Twin Cities area, including Grumpy’s Bar and Grill, Brave New Workshop, and at the Melrose apartment complex on campus every Thursday.

While Erikson is now an expected act at open mic night, she is also one of the youngest comics performing. Comedians with more experience take the stage later in the evening, and are given a timeslot longer than three minutes.

Steffen Steffen started at ACME’s open mic night five and a half years ago. Before ever setting foot on stage as a comic, he had already been involved in other forms of show business – acting and doing radio in the 80s. After seeing some of his fellow cast members perform comedy, Steffen thought that it was something he should try. Like Erikson, Steffen impressed the crowd enough to perform again.

“I’ve always been a writer, and I’ve always been a performer,” he said. “The reason I love stand-up is because it allows me to do both.”

Though he hasn’t yet quit his day job, by networking and gaining experience with other comedians through ACME, Steffen was able to take his routine on the road.

“It’s fun going to new places, it’s fun going to different venues. I’m having a blast,” he said. “Unfortunately, the comedy scene here just isn’t big enough to make a living off of.”

Steffen adds that he’s planning to move to New York City next year.

“It’s not that I think I’m going to make it big or anything, I just want to live there before I’m too old to enjoy it,” he said. “And in a new city it’s like starting over. New open mic nights, new people to impress. It’s very exciting.”

With Steffen’s career looking ahead, and Erikson’s just beginning, it may be hard to believe that all this started from a little club in the Warehouse District of Minneapolis. Erikson and Steffen aren’t ACME’s the only success stories – it seems that all it takes is a little guts and creativity to get started as a comic.

When separately asked what advice they’d give to any aspiring comedian, both

Erikson and Steffen said the exact same thing: “Write, write, write. Stage time, stage time, stage time.” Erikson said she recommends carrying a notebook and pen everywhere, and Steffen said the greatest way to get a feel for comedy is to attend open mic nights.

So how does one become involved in an ACME open mic night? It is as easy as arriving a couple of hours before the show starts and signing up. People completely new to ACME are ensured a spot, but returning comics are only allowed on stage based upon prior performances, so it is important to come prepared.

“You just gotta do it,” said Erikson. “You gotta go up there and and get your first set done. After that, you’ll be addicted.”

ACME Open Mic Night is held at the ACME Comedy Company every Monday night at 8:00pm. If you’re interested in performing, arrive between six and seven to sign up.

1. <http://www.wakemag.org/sound-vision/money-cant-buy-you-laughs/>
2. <http://www.wakemag.org/author/joetting/>