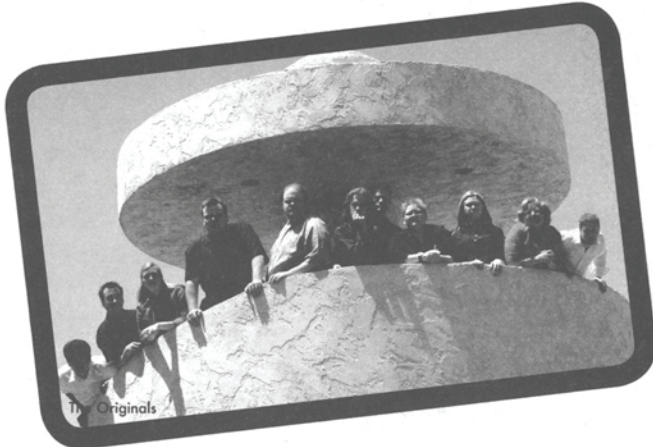


**FUNNY,
VERY
FUNNY**

**PHOENIX'S
BURGEONING
COMEDY
SCENE** By Amy L. Young



Rounding out the festival performers are Apollo 12, Bare, Barren Mind, Cog, ColdTowne Heroes, Great Adventure, The Group, The Hook, The JesterZ, JoKyr and Jesster, Men in Shirts, The Neutrino Project, New Kevin, Nite Terrors and The Reminders. The Cold-Towne Heroes are a team from New Orleans who were performing weekly at one of the city's premier theater venues until the hurricane left them displaced. They moved to Dallas but used the experience as a catalyst to take their show on the road. The group will also make their Chicago debut this year, with a theme show entitled "Hurricanes are Funny," proving once again that catharsis and humor can go hand in hand.

Though they won't be performing at the improv festival, Modest Proposal is Ron Babcock and Ryan McKee and their act, which blends sketch comedy, stand-up and video and has been wowing the crowd at Paper Heart, where they do a monthly event.

Whether it's poking at each other, themselves or hitting on some universal human tangent, their show is fast, daring and exceptionally funny. These gentlemen are razor sharp and just as quick, you'll find your eyes volleying back and forth like it's the U.S. Open.

Ron and Ryan met in the Fall of 1999 on a study abroad program called Semester at Sea.

Looking to kill some time, they both happened to join an improv troupe called Mandatory Safe Meeting. After the SAS program was over, Ron went home to Scranton, PA

and Ryan to Arizona and didn't really keep in close contact. Ron pursued some stand-up and Ryan did a lot of writing. When Ryan emailed Ron and asked him if he wanted to start a comedy magazine, Ron took that as an invite and moved to Tempe. After covering stand-up comedy in the magazine, they decided to, as Ron says, "change the tampon and give it a try." After working and gathering support from friends and family, the guys were given a regular Sunday night at the Rio Salado Brewing Company, where they sometimes had to compete with "the game" but were able to hone their skills and also be close enough to drown their sorrows if the night wasn't so good, or celebrate if it was great. Dan Mer, from the Tempe Improv comedy club saw them and gave them an opening slot for Patton Oswalt from King of Queens. They went on to help Oswalt produce a show the next year that gave them the opportunity to perform for over 2,000 people.

Last year the two moved to Los Angeles where, says Ron, "comedy is all we do." If they aren't performing, they're taking time to experience L.A. life and find the humor in it to create more great material. Though they're not sleeping much, they are making the most out of every second of their endeavors. They make the time each month to return home for a show, so go and see them and get their early, because they're really packing 'em in. ■

Phoenix Improv Festival:
www.phoeniximprov.com/bif
Galapagos:
www.myspace.com/galapagos
The Originals:
www.theoriginalsimprov.com
Modest Proposal:
www.mpire.com



Phoenix is funny. Really, like slapping the knee, belly-laughing, spitting water through the nose, funny. Our city, growing by giant leaps and bounds both in volume and cultural activity, is home to an improvisational comedy scene that is performing regularly, networking nationally and garnering a hefty dose of recognition. And oh yeah, it's made up of a bunch of extremely funny and sharp men and women who are working hard to take both the shortform and longform improv styles to new heights. Many of them will be showcased in the upcoming, Phoenix Improv Festival, an annual event put on by local performers and artists as part of an ongoing effort to promote improvisational theatre as an art form in Phoenix. It takes place from April 19 - 23.

In case you're not a walking encyclopedia of comedy knowledge, shortform improv consists of short, unrelated-scenes usually driven by an audience suggestion with a pre-determined game, structure or idea. In longform, audiences are often asked for one or more suggestions or inputs which drive the narrative of the performance.

Galapagos, formed in 2003, is a local troupe made up of extremely sharp and witty guys and one gal, who utilize the longform style and can seamlessly spend an hour making you laugh and taking you in different directions, all while maintaining a subtle thread through the performance. Some of their members, including Bill Binder and Jose Gonzales, evolved from the Barrow Gang, a seminal Phoenix improv group. Binder and a former member helped generate the first festival in 2002, and each year it continues to grow, showcasing local acts and bringing in some of the best national improv talent working today. It also brings together the local groups to organize and promote the event while further perpetuating support and open communication between the area troupes. Gonzales notes that the excitement of the event is twofold, "Not only do we, the performers, get to meet, watch and network with great peers from all over, but so do the audience members, and that's a really exciting thing to have here in Phoenix."

For Galapagos, the event not only marks another year of a killer festival. This year they

were selected to appear, the week after the Phoenix event, at the Chicago Improv Festival, which is the big daddy of fests in the improv world. If you see them, give them a kudos 'cause that's a giant score. In fact, a few of the acts on the PIF roster are also going to be performing in Chicago.

Another local troupe, The Originals, are also on the festival's bill. Practitioners of mediumform, the group is about to celebrate it's one year anniversary. Matt Rosin, who founded the group started in improv in 1993 and has done close to one thousand live shows, basically took his life savings and began the group. He partnered with Tom Schaeffer, who produces, while Rosin directs. And his direction is ace—he's brought together a team of over twenty performers who exude hilarity and display it on command. Working heavily with audience suggestion, the Originals don't miss a beat in jumping right into a scenario based on a one word holler from the crowd. Like Galapagos, the Originals also offer classes for those that interested in learning the improv skills.