

BIG LAUGH COMEDY FESTIVAL PRESENTS **KICKSTART** 2006

Do you have a clown in your class who has students in stitches and every teacher pulling their hair out?

Do you wish these students would spend more time clowning around outside the classroom?

Riverside Theatres and The Big Laugh Comedy Festival are pleased to announce the second **KICKSTART CLASS CLOWNS** Comedy Competition for High School students, as part of the 2006 Big Laugh Comedy Festival at Riverside Theatres.

The competition welcomes students from years 9 – 12 to display their forte for funnies, hosted by a celebrity guest and judged by comic industry experts, with a huge showcase of prizes up for grabs.

Kickstarting The Classroom: Kickstart supports English and Drama teachers by providing exciting performance based outcomes to studies of the comedic arts, in conjunction with your syllabus requirements.

KICKSTARTING OPPORTUNITIES TO

GROW Encouraging the development of comedy writing and performance skills in creating original comedy.

SHINE Provide your budding talent with exposure to recognition from industry talent scouts.

LEARN Students workshop their pieces with a professional, practising comedian.

STAR Students perform in a real, LIVE, public, showcase performance in the Big Laugh Comedy Festival. They could even go on to be crowned Cleverest Class Clown at the Class Clowns National Final at Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

KICKSTART YOUR CLASS CLOWNS **A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO HARNESSING THE HILARIOUS**

Rules for the Ridiculous. Notes on the Nonsensical. Handbook for Hilarity. Learning the Ludicrous. Schooling guide to Silliness. A Course Book in Clowning. Coaching Comedy. Funnies for Dummies. Honing Humour. Teaching Rib Tickling.

Inside this guide you will find everything you need to know to become a Guru of the guffaw, Lord of the laugh, Commander of the chuckle.

- Comedy Defined
- Kickstart Ground Rules
- Forms of Comedy
- Comedy Examples
- And one fairly lame library joke... enjoy!!!

Comedy

Comedy originally referred to the use of humor in the form of theater, where it simply referred to a play with a happy ending, in contrast to a tragedy.

Mel Brooks on comedy and tragedy: "Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall down an elevator shaft and you die."

The adjective "comic", strictly means that which relates to comedy, is in modern usage generally confined to the sense of "laughter-provoking": "the comic", being an incident or remark which provokes spontaneous laughter without a special mental effort.

COMEDY FORMS - COMEDY IN ALL IT'S GLORY!

Stand-up comedy

A stand-up comedian or stand-up comic is someone that performs comedy in an informal way, talking to the audience in a conversational manner.

The comic usually recites a fast paced succession of amusing stories, short jokes (called bits) and one-liners, typically called a monologue, routine or act.

On TV program *Seinfeld*, Jerry Seinfeld did a bit about a survey that had been conducted, in which Americans said that their number one fear was public speaking, and that the fear of death was number five. He said,
"...that would mean that at a funeral, people are five times more likely to want to be in the casket than giving the eulogy."

Seinfeld's comments relate to his own trade of stand up comedy, considered by many performers of all genres to be the hardest type of performance to execute.

Stand-up is the single comedic art form that is openly devoted to getting and receiving laughs from an audience.

TIPS FOR STAND UP COMEDY

Writing: Write fast and write long. If you're aiming at a polished 3 minutes, quickly slap down an original draft of 6-8 minutes.

Then start trying it out as often as you can, on your friends, your enemies, your family, total strangers; refining and paring it down as you go. Remember, many stand up comedians are highly opinionated people. These opinions may be right or they may be (and often are) totally off the planet but they are strongly held. Be fearless.

Pick a theme/subject and get stuck into it. These opinions will also define your on stage persona, or character.

Even in three minutes you need to be aware of the law of diminishing returns.

LAUGHS v TIME

Structure your material so it builds and builds and finish it off with a killer punchline.

The trick in performing stand up is to strike the right level of pace and energy; leaving enough space at the end of a gag for the material to "breathe" and hitting the next line with the right amount of energy.

Comic Yarn Telling

Comic storytelling is an ancestor of modern stand up, and Billy Connolly is perhaps the greatest modern example of this type of rambling, discursive style of performance. He talks about himself, who he is, where he's been, what he thinks and how he reacts to the world around him. Yet he does not tell jokes in the conventional way. At the end of a concert the audience can be convulsed with laughter but few can remember a specific "funny" line.

There is also a great Aussie tradition in yarn spinning, particularly in the bush. Tall tales about anything from giant mozzies to cow riding horseman. They can be first person or third person narratives, they can be set anywhere and anytime. They usually involve a degree of whimsy.

Your imagination may be set on a one way course to comedy fiction, or you may have a collection of true [or true-ish] stories to rival Billy Connolly's. This style of performance is based on stories that are crafted into comic like routines.

Sketch Comedy

A sketch is a short comedy scene, commonly between one and ten minutes long, performed by a group of comedic actors, acting out definite characters located in a recognisable time and place, that is, a narrative.

Think Monty Python, Saturday Night Live, the Comedy Company, Full Frontal, Fast Forward, SkitHOUSE or Comedy Inc, and you're on the right track.

If you've seen *Wayne's World*, *Zoolander*, or *The Blues Brothers*, you've seen the movie length versions of successful recurring character sketches from the US TV program Saturday Night Live (SNL).

Character behaviours may be natural or highly exaggerated (archetypes are a staple of sketch comedy). It's the situation the characters find themselves in that is of utmost importance.

For example, take an archetype character and place them in a situation - a hard case, tough as nails police officer. Put the archetype in a setting. A school library. Detective Holden fills in while the school librarian is away. You have the building blocks of a sketch – Detective Librarian Holden - returning your book late never meant so much trouble.

Sketch characters may be normal folk caught up in an abnormal situation and having to do extraordinary things to deal with it (*Friends*) or conversely they may be an abnormal character let loose in an otherwise sane world (*Legally Blonde*).

Locations where people meet in highly charged circumstances are a great place to start; a courtroom, outside the headmasters office, a dentist's waiting room, trapped in awith.....and only 3 minutes to go before.....?????

Impressionists

An impressionist is a performer whose act consists of giving the "impression" of being someone else by imitating the other person's voice and mannerisms.

Usually, the most "impressive" aspect of the performance is the vocal resemblance to the target — usually a politician or famous entertainer. Props are today considered old-fashioned and the voice is expected to carry the act.

Serving up a pretty neat Homer Simpson "d'oh" is great! But this does not constitute an impression. So you will need to build material and range for an "impressions" performance.

For great impressionists start with Charlie Chaplin...

Forms of Physical Comedy

Slapstick and Physical Comedy

Slapstick is a type of comedy involving exaggerated physical violence, such as a character being hit in the face with a frying pan or running full-speed into a wall.

The 'battacio' was a club-like object composed of two wooden slats which, when struck, produced a loud smacking noise; with little actual damage, used in early comedies. Translated as 'slapstick', this form of comedy is rampant today, in the work of Shakespeare, Three Stooges, Rowan Atkinson, and cartoons like Road Runner and Tom & Jerry.

The performance of slapstick comedy, based on exquisite timing and unerring calculation of execution, character reaction and audience laughter, is considered among the more difficult tasks facing a live performer.

When treated lightly and humorously, the long tradition of slapstick can prove very amusing in a modern context BUT use caution and extensive rehearsal.

Physical Hilarity

Aside from straight slapstick comedy, the hurling of custard pies, smashing objects and doing strange things with the human body have been a favourite of audiences everywhere since the days of the Coliseum. Whether it's the classic ballet parody performed in footie boots and tutus, or the three workmen with a plank, a saw and a bucket of paint routine, or the (seemingly) simple act of falling down; for the physically agile, such physical comedy is the ultimate comic rush.

Australia's own comedy sons, the Umbilical Brothers, are masters of using the human body to maximum comedy effect. See their DVD "Speedmouse" for examples.

Prop Comedy

A prop comic is a type of comedian who makes extensive use of humorous objects, or conventional objects used in humorous ways, as part of their comedy routine.

Puppetry, Magic, Ventriloquism are all forms of prop comedy, plus there's a whole lot more out there. So, for students who are fine tuned comics in the props department, develop a comic routine to leave the audience rolling in the aisles.

A rabbit out of a hat is not really comedy, for example, but a wandering hand placed into a magician's hat and emerging trapped by a rabbit trap, is more likely to get laughs, so think outside the square.

The international touring comic David Strassman is a good example of a hugely successful comedy puppeteer and ventriloquist. His comedy derives from the fact that his puppets never seem to want to do or say what he expects them to.

Comedy in Verse – Musical Comedy and Comic Poetry

For those with a gift for rhyme and metre, humour in poetry has always been an item!

*I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky;
I left my shoes and socks there - I wonder if they're dry?
- Spike Milligan*

Comic vocalists such as Spike Milligan, Victor Borge, Sophie Tucker and Spike Jones are past examples of this pungent form of wit.

*When I'm at the movies watching a love scene
And a lady's hat is blocking half the screen
I resolve not to shout, "Take off that hat!"
I'll remove it gently with a baseball bat.
This is my New Year's Resolution.
- Extract from Spike Jones' Happy New Year*

And these days, rap music seems to have a natural affinity with comedy, as Australia's all lady rap group demonstrate.

*"One afternoon when we were writing in my mum's lounge room
My mum busted in, it must've been about noon I said,
'Mum this is our space, this ain't no game.'
'We're tryin' a come up with a title, tryin' a come up with our name.'
She was cookin' in da kitchen, we were throwin' round words.
"Girls, chicks, woman, ladeez, birds."
Den mum said "Sista's", while cookin' our tea,
"And as you said before your names contain the word she"
She put the sis to the ta and the sha to the ee.
It was a very crucial moment in our herstory,
cooked up the perfect name for da Lady MC.
Served it on a plate "Eat up Sista She".*

For your own rap comedy centre stage moment, why not improvise and write lyrics over a pre recorded backing track, and you're on your way to your own rapcomedy.

The Ground Rules

*"In comedy, there are no rules!
Funny is funny is funny."
- BILLY CONNOLLY*

Ok, we'll listen to Billy, so let's just call them guidelines:

- 1/ It has to be funny!
This is not drama. We're looking for laughs, the more the better.
- 2/ It has to be original!
We're not looking for the best performance of the grave diggers' scene from Hamlet. Appropriating other peoples' material is a definite no no.
- 3/ It has to be concise!
It can be short and sweet, or short and sour, but it has to be short. So:
5 minutes max!!!
Groups are limited to 3 performers.
- 4/ It has to be stageable!
Whilst we can supply you with microphones and some basic lighting cues, all props need to be able to be "walked on" (and off).